



Quaker Hill Quill

Quaker Hill Historic Preservation Foundation
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Wilmington Monthly Meeting: Educating the Young of late 18th - early 19th Century Wilmington

by Terence Maguire

"..which promises lasting advantages..."

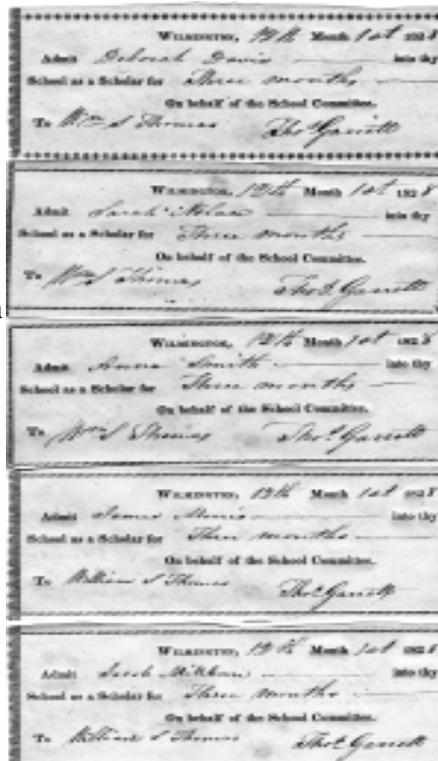
In the early 1990s, alumni, teachers, and administrators of Friends School were preparing to celebrate the school's 250th year in 1998. Much research took place throughout the school's archives and elsewhere. Two of the most valued finds were documents concerning what was called the "School Fund" and a large number of what we called payment vouchers. (We simply don't know what they were called by the School Committee-the original name for what is now the Board of Trustees).

The School Fund was something like a tuition endowment fund raised to provide schooling for Quaker children and also poor children "not under the immediate care of any society." One must remember that public education did not exist in Delaware until 1829; even then, according to Judge Willard Hall, considered the founder of Delaware public education, "the schools of the state were *free for every white child to attend...*" [*italics mine; Lyman P. Powell, History of Education in Delaware. Washington, DC; Bureau of Education Circular of Information # 3; 1893. p. 144*]

The School Fund grew considerably from many donations in the late 18th and early 19th C. The earliest we know of is a bequest from Benjamin Ferris, grandfather of the historian, from 1778, (shown here). A three-page report of the School Committee, on 1st mo 10th 1795, entitled "state of School Funds Donations," indicated that the fund had attained £ 215 and had recently received additional donations for "poor children not members" to the amount of £ 350. It ended with this eloquent plea:

The Committee being convinced that an Increase of the Fund will be singularly advantageous to the Poor, whose Children without some such friendly Aid, must remain without the necessary School education, desire that it may be so

impressed on the minds of Friends--that those who have not already, may be induced to contribute to the support of the Institution, which promises lasting advantages to those, who have no other means for this advantage than a dependence upon those whom Providence has blessed with the good things of life.



Some payment vouchers for various students, dating to 1828.

This statement was signed by William Poole, later father-in-law of industrialist Joseph Bancroft. Two already "so impressed" were Mary and John Dickinson, the Revolutionary War moderate who was later "President" of Delaware and a member of WMM. They had donated £200 of that £ 350 "with a view to facilitate the education of poor children."

Found among the School Committee minutes, bills, and vouchers was a large parchment from 1793 with faded ink called the "The Plan," essentially detailing a fund-raising pledge drive. Below a statement of purpose are names listed in several columns, pledging sums of money by certain dates. The largest pledges were from the wealthy Brandywine millers Samuel Canby and Joseph Tatnall, £ 20 apiece.

This Fund was put to its intended use. Many of the payment vouchers express variations on this phrasing: "for

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Educating Wilmington's Young

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tuition of Poor Children." Another Committee report, signed by Cyrus Newlin on 2nd mo 6th 1811 concludes "that the Interest arising from the funds have been applied to the education of poor children not of our society."

In addition to payments for specific students, Wilmington Monthly Meeting helped the educationally disadvantaged in some other ways. On 11th mo 15th 1813, the Committee made out the last of three payment vouchers to an organization. The statement read as follows:

Please to pay to the treasurer of the 'Wilmington association for promoting the education of people of colour,' twenty five dollars out of the funds for the monthly meeting, it being the remaining half of fifty Dollars granted to said association by the school committee.

Earlier payments of \$12.50 had been made out on New Year's Day, 1813, and March 2. \$50.00 may seem a small commitment, but not perhaps in those times. For many years, according to Committee bills, a day's pay in the early 19th C for a carpenter or mason was \$1.12. \$50.00 was the equivalent of three months' education for 20-22 students.

Of considerably greater significance was \$500 left by Jacob Broom (not a Quaker) to the Meeting, "for the use of the school for the instruction of Blacks..." In 1819, that \$500 was transferred to the "African School Society," for which WMM had other support.

Payment Vouchers

What were the vouchers? They were at first simply pieces of papers written by members of the School Committee. In 1812 the Committee began to use preprinted forms that looked like tiny checks. Upon applying to the School Committee, a parent received the voucher and presented it to the teacher for admission of her/his child. The child was admitted, and the teacher redeemed the voucher at the meeting house. All told, over 2200 payment vouchers were distributed from 1808-1842.

The rate in 1808 was \$2.50/quarter. For periods of time greater or lesser, the amount was proportional. The longest period of schooling indicated was a year; the briefest was for ten days. In 1824 the price actually dropped to \$2.25. Remarkably, it stayed at that lower level for the next eighteen years. These voucher forms came five to a sheet and were often filled out

that way, folded up, and stored. Periodically, they were bound together by string; with strips of papers cut into half-inch bands, the ends of which were then sealed with wax; or in bundles of plain wrapping paper, several hundreds at a time.

These payment vouchers were found crammed in an old 19th C box for letter storage. In one instance, as a packet of the vouchers was opened, sand fell out. Sand was used back then to dry the ink, so the packet had apparently remained unopened since it was sealed in June, 1812, as Napoleon was invading Russia.

The vouchers were signed by many individuals, but the most common signatories were Joseph Grubb, Edward Gilpin, Jacob

Alrichs, Isaac Starr, Eli Mendinhall, Ziba Ferris (brother of Benjamin), Thomas Garrett (the famous abolitionist), James Baynes, and Edward Grubb. The earliest was from 11th mo 15th 1808; the last was on December, 1842. On the back of the voucher the teacher acknowledged receipt, as witnessed by Treasurer Evan Lewis or later David Smyth. Though we have no vouchers for such payments, a School Fund account book at Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore, 1778-1900, shows that teachers received payments in the late 18th C. and for some years after 1842.

The vouchers were not all for "schollars" attending the school opposite the meeting house. Other teachers at different locations honored the payment vouchers. Perhaps the most interesting instance was that of William S. Thomas. He was listed in Wilmington Directories as a "colored" teacher, who had a school on West Street. He received nearly 400 vouchers over the course of 23 years. That school, supported by Wilmington Monthly Meeting, was perhaps the only place an African-American child of Delaware could attend school until after the Civil War. Shown here are some payment vouchers signed by Thomas Garrett to William Thomas, in early 1828.

True to the intentions of the elder Benjamin Ferris and the other contributors to the School Fund, the School Committee of Wilmington Monthly Meeting was providing funding "for schooling poor children, either White or Black."

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



This 1845 engraving by Benjamin Ferris is captioned, "Friends' first meeting house, and the first place built for Divine worship in the City of Wilmington after it was laid out for a town. This house is yet standing, but the Balcony or porch house has been removed some sixty years." (Image courtesy of Wilmington Friends School)

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Upcoming Quaker Hill Events

QH Historical Interpreters' Tour

Learn about Elizabeth Shipley's prophetic dream, George Washington's presence on Quaker Hill, and Thomas Garrett's adventures with the Underground Railroad on Quaker Hill! Come to a tour with costumed interpreters, beginning at the Wilmington Friends Meeting House, 401 N. West St., Wilm., DE 19801 on Saturday, 5/10/14, at 2:00 p.m.! For more information, call (302) 299-5600.

Quaker Hill Annual Picnic

Enjoy good food and spending time with your neighbors at the annual picnic sponsored by Quaker Hill Historic Preservation Foundation and Quaker Hill Neighborhood Association on Wednesday, 6/25/14, at 6:00 p.m. at Wilmington Friends Meeting, 401 N. West St., Wilm., DE 19801. Awards will be given to Loretta Walsh, Deborah Martin and PAG, Inc.

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! 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.

A View From the Hill

from the Editor

Not a lot to say this time, which is fortunate, because we are so chock-a-block full of articles that there isn't any space to say it, even if I had the time. There is, however, just enough time and space to say thanks to our contributors this time, Terence Maguire, Patricia Lewis and Dr. Jane Calvert, and thanks also, as always, to Mary Starkweather-White, who is the spark plug who makes sure this publication happens every quarter, like clockwork. Hope you enjoy. j.b.

John Dickinson: America's First Political Hero

by Jane Calvert, Ph.D.

The people of Delaware have a natural appreciation for Founding Father John Dickinson because he was one of their own. He considered himself a "man of Kent, tho not born there." Yet even Delawareans are largely unaware of the extraordinary fame and influence that Dickinson commanded among his contemporaries. In the years before independence, he was America's first political hero, an international figure, and leader of the resistance to Britain. No one, neither Benjamin Franklin nor George Washington, rivaled his renown. His international reputation as a talented political author took root during provincial controversies in 1764, and he soon garnered recognition around the colonies as an advocate for American liberties against the 1765 Stamp Act. But it was with his Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania in 1767-68 that his celebrity was made. Where Americans had stood firm against the Stamp Act, they showed no such resolve against the Townshend Duties. Dickinson's letters burst their complacency and demanded action. He clearly and eloquently described the unconstitutionality of the acts, addressing himself in particular to those without the education or leisure to understand the issues on their own.

Dickinson's addresses to the ordinary people were unusual in an era when the "upper sorts"—those with money, social ties, and political power—did not believe the "lower sorts"—the laboring people without education—should have any direct voice in politics. Yet repeatedly, throughout his forty-year career, Dickinson insisted that "what concerns all should be considered by all." Though not a Quaker, it was his Quakerly regard for the individual that moved him. He thus exerted himself to explain the most important and complicated matters to the American people, including imperial taxation policy, British constitutional authority, the Federal Constitution, foreign relations, theology, and science education. And he

likewise urged them to add their voices to the public debate.

And they did. Not only did his countrymen enthusiastically debate the issues he raised, they created in him the first American political celebrity, an icon for the American cause. He was the subject of pamphlets, newspaper articles, poems, and tributes. Americans drank toasts to the "patriotic" and "ingenious" Farmer and sang his "Liberty Song," the nation's first patriotic song. They carved statues of him out of wood and wax. They named their most valuable possessions after him—ships, taverns, and even a stud horse. He was called the American Cicero, and admired by philosophers in France and statesmen in England. Until 1775, Americans would hardly make a move against Britain without his approval.

If Dickinson's Quakerly principles contributed to his celebrity, they also caused his fall from favor. Believing the conflict with Britain could best be resolved through peaceful means, he refused to sign the Declaration of Independence. But, in keeping with the Quaker

belief in the importance of union, he continued to support the American cause in myriad ways, from serving in the militia, to crafting the U.S. Constitution, and he set an example of American values unique among the Founders by advocating abolition, the rights of women, the welfare of prisoners, and education for all. Early Americans may not have been ready for Dickinson's example and words of wisdom. Are we ready today?

*Jane E. Calvert is associate professor of history at the University of Kentucky and director and chief editor of the John Dickinson Writings Project (<http://www.uky.edu/DickinsonWritingsProject/>). She is author of *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).*



In addition to his local concerns and generosity (as outlined in the preceding article), John Dickinson was renowned far and wide for his broader interests and achievements. (Image courtesy of Wilmington Friends School)



Harriet Tubman: "Without God, I Could Do Nothing!"

by Patricia Lewis

*Without a doubt, He is my Savior
My strength along life waves
In deep waters, He is my anchor
Through faith, He'll keep me always*

*Without God I could nothing
Without Him my life would fail
Without God life would be rugged
Like a ship without a sail*

Lyrics by B. Brown

In 1854, Harriet Tubman (maiden surname "Ross") was staying in Philadelphia, earning money to travel back to her old neighborhood on the Eastern Shore of Maryland — "the land of Egypt," as she called it. In the North, she was planting the seeds of liberation to retrieve her brothers, Robert, Henry and Ben Ross, Jr. and her sister, Rachel from slavery.

In June near at camp meeting time, she had an interview with her three brothers and her sister. But the brothers refused to leave at that time and Rachel refused to leave without her children, though their feelings soon changed. Henry later said in an interview in the North, "After she had gone away, our hearts mourned that we didn't go with her."

The flight northward from Dorchester County to Caroline County on Christmas Day, December 25, 1854 possibly originated in the Cambridge-Bucktown area (further research, it is hoped, will discover the geographic location where the three brothers were then likely working). Tubman felt within her spirit that her brothers were in impending danger. So she brought them North to one of the stations in Wilmington, Delaware. Alerted by the dog belonging to the stationmaster they sought, they arrived at Thomas Garrett's office on December 29, 1854. This trip may have been the first time that Harriet Tubman met Thomas Garrett. She would return to visit Garrett at least more six times before the Civil War began. From the time of her first meeting with him, she knew that she could always count on him to supply her with shoes, money, and transportation expenses on her missions of mercy. Most of the times when she visited Garrett, she would say to him that God sent her to him.

Harriet Tubman was born in 1822 as Araminta Ross, a slave, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. When she successfully escaped from slavery in the fall of 1849, she told God that she would hold firmly onto His everlasting arms if He would just see her through, if He would guide and help her to rescue her family and make a home for them in the North. Family was extremely important to her. If she was free, her mother, father, sister, and brothers should also be free.

Harriet Tubman was uneducated but by no means was she ignorant. Her trips to the South would not have been successful if she did not have a regular route and her own trusted network of people. She witnessed the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the slaveholders' religion as it related to oppression, racial discrimination, dehumanization, and the physical and psychological mistreatment that her family and other African Americans in Maryland suffered during the slavery era.

Her life in Maryland was like the life of most enslaved black women of the 19th century, in sharp contrast with life of many white women during that time. Not only did she work as a field hand for many years, but she also chopped cordwood, hauled and unloaded the wood, and drove oxen. This type of physical work helped develop her muscles because she was doing a man's work. In her twenties, one of her temporary masters would sometimes put her on display to show off her strength.

Like the famous Sojourner Truth allegedly once said, Tubman may also have said to herself, "Ain't I a woman, too?" Harriet recalled the times when her owners, Edward Brodess and later his widow, Eliza, hired out her and her family to cruel and abusive masters. She especially remembered the hypocrisy of the "Christian" religion of one of her temporary masters. When she was invited into family prayer, out of defiance, she refused to sit with them. She preferred to be by herself, and to pray by herself. As she said, "I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight and that's what I've always prayed for ever since." You see, she was brought up by parents who had a strong faith in God.

Her faith in God differed from the slaveholder's religion. It gave her consolation, the spirit of resistance, and the confidence that if she trusted in the Lord He would make a way for her to return to 'the land of Egypt' to rescue her brothers, sister, parents, and others who would dare to strike out for freedom.

Harriet Tubman said in an interview in 1863 that she believed that she had inherited a spiritual gift of foresight from her father who could always predict the weather and had predicted the coming of the Mexican War. Tubman also mentioned that one of her parents' religious practices was fasting on Fridays and Sundays. When she was operating her Underground Railroad, conducting slaves to the North, she always knew when she was in danger because of the fluttering of her heart, and she would sing Methodist hymns to signal to her passengers when it was safe or unsafe for them to come from their hiding place. Tubman's faith was so unwavering that she never knew a time when she didn't trust in God. She seemed to feel a Divine Presence near at

Tubman

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all times, and she talked to Him as if she were talking to a friend. Praying was not just a daily ritual with her. She knew that when she needed Him, she felt that God answered her prayers.

Her belief in God was so strong and absolute that Thomas Garrett wrote in a letter in June 1868 to Sarah Bradford, Harriet Tubman's biographer, "I have never met with any person, of any color, who had more confidence in the voice of God, as spoken directly to her soul. She frequently told me that she talked with God and He talked with her every day of her life and she has declared to me that she felt no fear of being arrested by her former master or any other person when in his immediate neighborhood...she never ventured only where God sent her, and her faith in a Supreme Power was truly great."

Sarah Bradford once asked Tubman how was she able to accomplish what she did. Harriet Tubman answered. "Why, don't I tell you Missus, twasn't me. Twas de Lord! I tole Him, 'I trust to You, I don't know where to go or what to do but I expect You to lead me,' and He always did."

Patricia Lewis is co-coordinator of the Harriet Tubman/Community History Interpretive Project and a QHHPF board member.



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