

THE PRESBYTERIAN SABBATH-SCHOOL SOCIETY

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

IN Vol. XXXIII, pp. 175-188, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society, appears an article entitled "The Sunday-School Society," which describes briefly the origin of the Sunday-school movement in Lancaster.

In the summer of 1816, a number of ladies in the borough of Lancaster organized a Union Sunday-school society, which gave excellent service and continued its usefulness for about six years. Being non-denominational in character, it was attended by children from the several churches.

On Sunday, May 27th, 1821, a Sunday school was organized in Saint James's parish,¹ Lancaster, by the associate rector, the Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg. This was the first parochial Sunday school in Lancaster, and its initiation dealt a severe blow to the Union society, as in quick succession schools were established in other congregations.²

In July, 1821, shortly after the formation of the school in Saint James's parish, the Presbyterian Sabbath-school society was organized in Lancaster, under the direction of the Rev. William Ashmead, pastor of the First Presbyterian church. A constitution and by-laws were adopted, and the following officers elected: Directors, William Kirkpatrick, John Whiteside, George Bryan and William Buck; directresses, Mrs. Frazer, Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Bryan, Mrs. Ashmead, Mrs. Reigart and Mrs. Buck; secretary, Charlotte H. Moderwell; treasurer, William Kirkpatrick.

¹ An article entitled, "The Female Sunday-School Society of Saint James's church, Lancaster," was published in Vol. XXXI, pp. 134-139 of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society.

² The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser of Saturday, August 25th, 1821, stated that there were four Sunday schools connected with the several local denominations, in addition to the Union school conducted in Lancaster at that time.

The school met for the first time on July 16th,³ 1821, and was opened with devotional exercises, conducted by the Rev. Mr. Ashmead. In 1823, a new constitution and by-laws were adopted and the title and number of officers were changed to one president, two directors, three directresses, a secretary and a treasurer. It is regrettable that we do not have the names of these officers. The *Intelligencer and Journal* of Tuesday, May 31st, 1842, in which this information was contained, stated that from the reorganization in 1823, no regular records of the society's proceedings appear to have been preserved.

The superintendent and directress of this Presbyterian school made the following report—condensed from the Sunday-school minutes and from reports of the teachers submitted to a meeting of the society held on Tuesday, April 5th, 1842:

“The number of scholars now on the roll is, males 76, females, 122, total 198. The average attendance is about 150. From the reports of many of our teachers, we learn that the advancement of the children is encouraging, and leads to the hope that our labors in the Sunday-school enterprise have not been without success. We learn, also, that the attention of the children, generally, meets the approbation of their teachers. It is but proper to say that the attendance at school of some of the classes has been very punctual; whilst in other classes, the irregular attendance of the children is to be regretted. We, however, take encouragement from the fact that the school is greatly improved in numbers, discipline and better attention. In many instances, the recitations and attention to other exercises evince a great interest in the studies; and we are flattered with the hope that some good has grown out of our efforts. We extract from the written report of one of the teachers the following:

“‘An unusual degree of seriousness and attention has prevailed throughout my class for some time. Even the younger members seem to feel the solemnity that prevails, and manifest, by their attention, an interest in their studies.’ It will be remembered that

³ The report which appeared in the *Intelligencer and Journal* of Tuesday, May 31st, 1842, states that the school was opened on July 16th, 1821. The 16th occurred on Monday. This may be a typographical error, as one would naturally assume that its first session would be held on Sunday, July 15th, rather than Monday 16th.

at the time of the reclassification of the school on Sunday, January 23rd, 1842, we numbered 102 scholars, since which period we have nearly doubled. We have, therefore, great cause to lift up our hands and rejoice; and that our efforts may not be in vain, let us persevere in the glorious cause until our school shall be a 'city set upon a hill.' Confiding in the promises of Him who has said, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall appear after many days; and again 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand,' let us go on with renewed efforts. Thus our report is respectfully submitted."

On Tuesday, January 4th, 1842, the Presbyterian Sabbath school was reorganized. Officers were elected, and a new constitution and by-laws were adopted.

The Intelligencer and Journal of Tuesday, May 31st, 1842, stated:

"There now remains to show what has been, and now is, the condition of the Sunday school; but as the present officers have not long been in connection with the institution, and as there are no regular minutes of the school to be found, the report must be made in part from recollection and in part from the present record of the Sunday-school minutes. Previous to the present organization of the school, it was, for a long time, in a very depressed condition, and particularly so immediately before the adoption of the present constitution. It is not necessary to inquire into the immediate causes of the former lamentable condition of the school but merely to say that want of harmony and proper efforts and means were the main causes. At the period when the present officers were chosen to preside over the school, it contained about 65 scholars and ten teachers. The exercises were inefficiently conducted, and many of the children were beyond control. Added to which, the school suffered for want of a proper library. These evils, we are happy to say, are now corrected and the school is conducted in harmony, peace and comparative quietness. The children, generally, are attentive to their lessons and to the precepts taught. Our teachers are earnestly interested in the success of the school, and, generally, are efficient. Instead of our former almost useless library, we have been enabled, through the liberality of the members of our congregation, to procure one containing 530

volumes, from which the children each Sabbath are furnished with a book. The school now numbers 216 scholars and 28 teachers; and from the efficiency of and the great interest manifested by the teachers, it is to be presumed that the number of scholars and the prosperity of the school will not deteriorate but rather advance. Since the new arrangement, there have been from Sabbath to Sabbath accessions to the school, — not one Sabbath having passed without admissions.”

TOWN MEETINGS TO CONSIDER REMOVAL OF STATE CAPITAL TO LANCASTER

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

ON Wednesday, January 24th, 1796, the citizens of Lancaster assembled in a town meeting to take into consideration the advantages and disadvantages that might result to our borough and county by the removal of the State government to this place. It was the unanimous judgment that such a removal would be of great benefit. A committee, of which the burgesses and commissioners were members, was appointed to draft a letter of instruction, expressing the sense of the meeting to the representatives from this county.

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, January 29th, 1796, contained a copy of the letter, which was as follows:

“To the Representatives of the County of Lancaster, in the Senate and House of Representatives of Pennsylvania.

“Gentlemen:

“Having understood that [the members of] the Legislature of this Commonwealth are now earnestly engaged in the consideration of the expediency of changing their future residence from the city of Philadelphia to some fit place in the interior country, the inhabitants of this borough, — from a reasonable consciousness that this place may be fixed upon for their future residence, from the many superior accommodations and conveniences it affords, — have this day assembled, in a large and respectable town meeting convened for the purpose, to take into consideration that highly probable event. And, in order to express their unanimous and unequivocal sentiments upon the subject, have appointed us as a committee to inform you of the result.

“We, therefore, in the discharge of that trust, take the liberty to solicit your unremitted exertions to accomplish this desirable measure; and on the part of the inhabitants, as far as we have authority, we assure you that no