

Miss Mary M. Martin, Teacher Extraordinary:1847-1930

Ellen A. Brubaker

There is no other woman in Lancaster who deserves recognition for her civic achievements more than Miss Mary Martin, one of Dr. McCaskey's assistants in the Boy's High School—Aunt Mary, as the boys called her—a woman in those days chosen one of only three teachers for boys of that age.

Born February 6, 1847, in Lancaster, a graduate of Millersville State Teachers College, a co-ed school, she was a leader among her classmates and associates in the school societies.

She was principal of St. James' Parish School on Duke Street until 1880 when she left to go to Denver, Colorado, where she taught for several years in a church school until she was called back to Lancaster to teach in the Boys High School.

A student of human nature, she understood people and especially her boys, to whom she devoted her time and interest, and to whom she was always an inspiration. She had a strong personality, had many interests in life, and was an inspiration to all her friends, was an authority in literature, all nature studies, plant life, bird life, geology and astronomy.

I want to speak especially of her influence in the community. She lived in the days when women were not so civic-minded as now. As a teacher she was far superior to most teachers of that time, and was a leader among the broader-minded ones. Her wide knowledge and sound judgment made her an outstanding influence in the community, and she was referred to for advice in various matters by professional men.

When the **Saturday Evening Post** wanted some one to write on the Lancaster County Dutch and Plain people here, they asked Mr. W. U. Hensel who referred them to Miss Mary Martin. She recommended Helen Reimensnyder (Martin) who had already written several sketches on these people. And so "Tillie, The Mennonite Maid" was published. Helen R. Martin always gave her manuscripts to Miss Mary to read and criticize before publishing. Mr. Hensel also asked her advice on the matter of books for a public library.

One of Miss Martin's special interests was the kindergarten. She had no room for one in her small school of only two rooms in the Parish Building, but there was a private kindergarten opened in 1877 in the First Reformed Sunday School rooms by two sisters from out of town, the Misses Annie and Lillie Gleim. Miss Martin was very intimate with them and greatly interested in their work. In later years when the city teachers held a Teachers Institute for one week annually, she suggested they give the last afternoon to interesting the parents of the community in the schools. And these afternoons were continued as long as the yearly institutes were held.

She had charge of these meetings, and at the first one, with the intention of interesting the community especially in free kindergartens, she invited personally, many mothers to be present. Among whom were Dr. McCaskey's wife, Mrs. Pyott, Mrs. Thomas Cochran, wife of the editor of the Lancaster Examiner, Mrs. A. K. Spurrier, Mrs. Schiedt, wife of Dr. Schiedt of Franklin and Marshall, Mrs. Eberman, wife of the Moravian Minister, who had sponsored a free kindergarten in connection with their church for a while, Mrs. W. W. Griest, wife of Congressman Griest, and Mrs. Charles Rengier, whom she asked to address the meeting with the express purpose of getting the parents interested in the schools and especially of establishing free public kindergartens.

The Parent-Teacher Association and the Free Kindergarten Association were the direct outcome of this meeting. Mrs. Rengier was chosen as the speaker because her mother, Mrs. Kramph, had been greatly interested in the Children's Home. She lived in her own little house on the grounds so that she might devote her time to the cause, and she held a kindergarten there for the younger ones whom she taught herself. For many years Mrs. Rengier was the president of the Kindergarten Association which was the result of this meeting, and later Mrs. J. W. Eckenrode was president for a number of years.

The object of the Association was not kindergartens for charity, but for the purpose of establishing them in the public school system. Like the public school itself, years before, the cause met with many objections from narrow-minded people, and partly on account of the expense. At that time most teachers were narrow-minded, with only a High School education, and they were prejudiced against the so-called freedom and play of the kindergarten, and against private schools which they confused with kindergartens.

The policy of the Kindergarten Association was to make the kindergartens an object lesson for the purpose of educating the parents, teachers, and public in general, by sending the children well prepared into the first grade. And gradually people began to realize that their experience in the kindergarten overcame backwardness, interested them in work, and made them like school and respond more quickly when they reached the first grade.

There are always some people who can not, and do not wish to be convinced of anything against their own interest, and although many of the School Board became friends of the kindergartens, politics kept them from becoming a part of the school system for many years. However they



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were given a spare room in various school buildings, from time to time, only to be moved when the room was needed for the grades. This was to their advantage, because every time they were moved into a new section of the town they made new friends, and those left behind missed the kindergartens that were taken away. The association was gradually able to support three kindergartens with from fifty to seventy children in each, as they divided the number and held two sessions a day.

Miss Martin was always optimistic. She knew it was only a matter of time, and it was this and her enthusiasm which encouraged the members of the Association who had perfect confidence in her ability and good judgment.

Finally there was an upheaval in town, and through the coalition movement the dirty politics were cleared out, and the whole school system renovated. New schools were gradually built, and a broader curriculum provided for. It took some time, for there was much to be done. But the new Superintendent, Dr. Gress, and our new Supervisor, Miss Mary Skillen, who were brought here free of politics, were up to date in their methods, and as soon as possible the kindergartens were taken over. In the new buildings rooms were especially adapted for the kindergartens. They became a part of the school system, and new ones were opened as fast as a vacant room could be found. Now there are twelve in Lancaster, and also in many of the adjoining townships.

Many young men had Miss Martin to thank for the influence in their after lives, of her interest, and inspiration, good judgment, common sense, and broad-mindedness in her teaching. But thousands of men and women today, have her to thank for the opportunity to have kindergarten training, which they never would have had if it had not been for her efforts in starting them, and her optimism and persistence in keeping them going all those years, well established, ready to hand over to the School Board when the time was ripe for them to be taken.

One could not write of Miss Mary Martin without giving the history of the kindergartens in Lancaster, because it was HER achievement. The Parent-Teacher Association also was one of her achievements. The kindergartners were expected to keep in touch with all parents by making calls—many times one hundred were made in a year—and to encourage the parents and the public to visit the daily sessions. Dr. Roland, who was on the School Board, was opposed to sending children to school until they were seven years old. He was Claribel Schaeffer's physician and they had argued the subject many times. Finally she persuaded him to visit her kindergarten in the Ann Street School. He spent the whole morning there and was entirely won over, and after that was one of their best friends and did all he could to forward the movement. The kindergarteners also held meetings and entertainments and exhibits to show their aim and accomplishments. They also gave affairs to raise money, and the parents were always interested and generous in their support. In one case the principal of the school where Margaret Hartman taught, decided that if the little kindergarten could get such good support, the whole school might do even better, and so she took over for their benefit, and thus started the first school festivals which are so popular now.

It is interesting to note that three of the members of the School Board now, were former pupils of the first kindergarten in the James Street School. Two of them have been president of the Board, and one still is holding the office.

Miss Martin died on Feb. 6, 1930, the year the kindergartens were taken into the school system.

Tribute written by Dr. George F. Mull for the Friendship Calendar.

Dear Miss Martin:

March 21, 1906.

Life, Life, Life,—that is the watchword of this day, which we call the beginning of spring—

Oh, the joy of life.

How much you have done to extend its blessed sway.

May you live, love long, in health and strength, a teacher, whose service already done, great beyond measure, is the augury of better things still to be done and more highly to be prized.

May you never lose your faith in the capacity of human nature, even boy nature, for infinite enrichment in power of mind and beauty of soul.

[Compiled by Ellen A. Brubaker to read at a meeting of the Quota Club in the fall of 1946—and who taught for 20 years in the James St. Kindergarten, later in the first public school room in Wickersham building.]

EXTRACTS FROM THE JUBILEE NUMBER OF THE HIGH SCHOOL NEWS OF 1906

From Page 71 — Speaking in retrospect of the different teachers of the Boys' High—Dr. McCaskey says: — “Then we have had Miss Mary Martin with us these 20 years — our Lady Bountiful, the Good Angel of the school. It was a bright day in the calendar when she came in to live with you and talk with you and influence you to broaden thought and better things year after year.”

From Page 111 — Our library in the Boys' High School contains about 350 volumes in history and biography, poetry and fiction, nature, science, travel, etc. About half the books were bought by the School Board, as selected and applied for from time to time by Miss Mary Martin, at whose suggestion the library was started some years ago. The remainder have been contributed by the teachers and pupils—Many of the boys have the habit of reading well fixed, so they think and talk intelligently of books in which they are interested. Fiction and adventure are preferred as is natural and to be expected, but much other reading is done of the more solid sort. The great thing is to encourage familiarity with good books, pure literature, and the habit of handling books, reading them, looking for them, enjoying them. The warm, personal interest which Miss Martin has felt in the library, and the personal care she has given it, have kept it in good condition and constantly increasing in desirable books that the boys find pleasure in reading. Her advice to the boys as to what they shall read has been of great value to them, because of her wide acquaintance with books and literature and the confidence which they have in her good judgment and helpful purpose.

From Page 23 — From the report of the Alumnae Association—

A resolution was adopted favoring the introduction of Kindergartens into our system, and notifying the School Board of such action. A small

appropriation to the Kindergarten Association has been made yearly since that time.

From Page 13 — By one of her boys, Howard W. Hersh—

We have all enjoyed the life of Miss Martin's class-room, to all of us so much like that of a good home, where loving kindness, right purpose, and high character pervade the place like an atmosphere. What a helpful, stimulating influence she has been to hundreds of boys! For more than 20 years they have thronged her class room before school in the morning at the noon recess, and often after school hours in the evening. The place has had perennial attractions for us because of its pleasant associations thru her fine personality. She was always a very welcome presence. We boys were glad to see her come, glad to be near her, to see her work, to hear her talk in answer to inquiries, in criticism, or in suggestions. For while she ruled a queen in her little realm, she was also a wise elder sister who wanted us to do good, and to be good, which after all is the only great outcome of any human life. And she a little mite of a woman that Carl Groff could have found room for in his capacious pocket! Ah, boys! it isn't always size that counts; it's the timber you're made of, and Miss Mary Martin is the staunchest oak; the best bird's-eye maple, or the finest satin-wood that ever grew upon the hills—She sternly forbade that we should put any sketch of her into our Jubilee Number of the High School News. And we have the habit of obeying her orders. But I must say this of her, and I will say it—It is simply a word of respect and affection that speaks itself. Her picture got into the pages of the News before we had our orders, and we were glad of it, and every good fellow who has known her as a teacher will be greatly pleased to find it there. It is a picture that the boys all wanted, and was taken about the time she came into the High School. She would never let us give her any formal gifts at any time, though she was always helping us gladly with gifts for other teachers on fitting occasions. With her it has always been, "All for others, little for herself." And that unselfish, helpful, spirit is the secret of the admiration and love which her pupils and friends have for her. She would take, often with delight, a wild flower or a rose, or some trifle that came on the moment. Such things came to her bounteously, like her own benefactions, and this brief word is but a wild flower or a rose laid once more upon her desk behind which we shall see her never again, save in the light of blessed memories.

Her class has its re-union today at the Millersville State Normal School and she is the class historian—It was an unusual class and she was one of its leading members. There will be no one more gladly welcomed there today than herself. Dr. Wickersham used to say of her that she was one of the best teachers in Pennsylvania, and he knew whereof he spoke. She was for some years principal of the Model School at the Shippensburg State Normal School, then for a time in Denver, Colorado. The State Superintendent of California wanted her to accept a position in their State Normal School with offer of a large salary, where she would probably have become one of the leading teachers of the country. But she preferred to come back to Lancaster, and so it happens that the Boys' High School has had her invaluable service these many years at a nominal salary.