

Ellen A. Brubaker, Pioneer Free Kindergartner

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Early Kindergarten Efforts

Dr. Samuel Bowman, Rector of the St. James Episcopal Church (1827-1861) was first to establish infant schools, one conducted in Franklin Academy. Teaching was mostly that of morals and religion, quite different from that in later kindergartens. The schools, though, were organized in very much the same manner as those of the early part of this century—by the city women for the benefit of children less than five years old.¹

Francis R. Shunk, Governor of Pennsylvania 1845-1848, expressed the opinion that "When the Pennsylvania system becomes fully matured it will embrace infant and superior schools".²

In 1877 Dr. Emanuel Greenwald proposed to establish a kindergarten at Trinity Church School.³

Perhaps the first and best private kindergarten in Lancaster was begun when the western room of the First Reformed Church Sunday School was rented to the Misses Gleim in 1877.⁴ Miss Lillie Gleim and her sister Annie came from Lebanon, Pa. to establish their school.⁵ Miss Mary Martin was quite friendly with them and admired their work even though, as principal of the St. James Parish School, she had no room to establish one. Her hopes for a free school of this kind in Lancaster spurred her efforts to interest the community⁶ after she had gone to Denver, Colorado, to teach and then returned to be with the Lancaster City Boys' High School as second assistant principal.⁷

Mrs. S. M. Kramph, President of the Board of Managers of the Home for Friendless Children and mother of Mrs. Charles Rengier, (first President of the Free Kindergarten Association of Lancaster) had lived in her own small house on the grounds of the Home so as to be on the spot to teach a kindergarten there.⁸

Mrs. Clarence Eberman, wife of the Moravian minister, had at one time sponsored a free kindergarten in that church.⁹

After the Free Kindergarten Association of Lancaster County was formed in 1897 at the instigation of Miss Martin,¹⁰ the Iris Club was the first civic organization to offer its endorsement.¹¹ The club continued it among its major interests for many years.¹² On Civic Day, 1915, at a Saturday afternoon meeting, Miss Norma Schiedt

read a paper "Educational Value of the Public Kindergarten", asserting that there were two thousand children of kindergarten age in the city with accommodations for just one hundred and forty-seven.

However, at the turn of the century there was much objection to kindergartens by the public as well as other teachers who were against "freedom and play" and who confused the Association's policy with that of some of the former private schools.

The Kindergarten Association worked towards its goals under the direction of its first president, Mrs. Charles Rengier, and later for ten years with Mrs. J. W. Eckenrode as president.

Mrs. Eckenrode, a vice-president of the Iris Club and president of the "in-gathering", (Needlework Guild), for twenty-five years, was a fervent crusader. Harold J. Eckenrode recalls, "Mother fought tooth and nail for her kindergartens. She made speeches, held rummage sales and put on plays at the Fulton Opera House".

He further says, "I was with her when she spoke to the City School Board at the Old Boys High School on W. Orange St. She told it that I had been at the head of my class for twenty-two consecutive months and that that certainly proved kindergarten hadn't harmed me."

Mrs. Eckenrode was fulfilling one of the policies of the Association—to present an object lesson in order to educate parents, teachers, and educators and the public in sending children well prepared into the first grade.

Ellen Brubaker, the first teacher hired by the Free Kindergarten Association, was on the front line of battle demonstrating this policy.¹³ Eventually the public began to realize that kindergarten overcame the children's "backwardness", interested them in school and made them respond more quickly in first grade.

The city school system became sympathetic but its policies allowed it only to donate a spare room from time to time. But, as Miss Brubaker remarked, "This was to their (the kindergarten's) advantage, because every time they were moved into a new section of town they made new friends, and those left behind missed the kindergartens that were taken away".¹⁴ Gradually three schools were supported with fifty to seventy children each day.

In 1904 William Riddle affirmed "If the signs of the time are indications of coming events, they are at present to be seen and felt in the activity displayed by the Y.W.C.A., Clio, Iris Club and the Kindergarten Association, each in its respective sphere engaged in the solution of the great problem of education. He further added, "Kindergarten training is considered so essential at the present day as the foundation of a good common school education".¹⁵

In 1924-1925 the graduate school of education of Harvard University wrote, of making a survey of the Lancaster City School District, "There are no kindergartens at present in the public schools



Ellen A. Brubaker
22 February 1870 — 26 December 1954

of Lancaster. Such as are under private auspices—with present limitations in the elementary school plant it is doubtful wisdom to attempt to take over the kindergartens now. As new buildings are erected, however, a kindergarten room should be included in each building. Gradually then, the kindergarten may be an integral part of the public school system".¹⁶

At last, after thirty-three years of struggle on the part of the Association, there was joy in kindergarten circles for Miss Ellen Brubaker moved into the new Wickersham School as a public school kindergarten teacher and the work of the organization was completed.¹⁷

Her Family

Mrs. H. W. Heyberger, nee Marjorie Smith and niece of our subject, says that her "Aunt Nell" was proud of both her mother's New England and her father's Lancaster County background. Ellen was "family correspondent" and kept her scattered brothers and sisters and their children up on the family doings. Packages of her handwork gifts as well as letters flowed to them, especially to the babies and small children.

She compiled the section on her immediate family for her mother's lineage record, *Lewis Allen and His Descendants from 1699-1954*.

Her mother, Mary Elizabeth Tucker, was born March 14, 1851 in New London, Conn. On April 29, 1869 in Cambridge, Indiana, she married Henry Clay Brubaker of Lancaster, Pa. Judge Brubaker was born March 6, 1843, became a lawyer and later was elected District Judge of Lancaster County.

Her mother died September 21, 1892 in Lancaster and is buried, as is the Judge, in Lancaster Cemetery. She was survived by her husband and nine children: Ellen Allen the oldest, George Stuart Wylie, Henry Clay III, Mary Tucker, Elizabeth Allen, James Frederick, William Mercer and Lewis Allen.¹⁸

Ellen Allen Brubaker was born February 22, 1870 in Lancaster and baptized by the Rev. Dr. E. S. Watson, Rector of St. James Episcopal Church. She was twenty when her mother died, and being the oldest, took charge of the household and her baby brother Allen, two years old.

When Judge Brubaker married his wife's first cousin, Eleanor Allen Mercer,¹⁹ Ellen went to Boston and took kindergarten instruction, afterwards opening a private kindergarten in Lancaster. Subsequently she taught for the Free Kindergarten Association of Lancaster County and then was named head kindergarten teacher of the Lancaster City School System. She retired in 1940, with ten years' service with the latter. Those ten years were the happiest of her life.²⁰

Her baby brother, Allen Brubaker, was nine years old when his father, the Judge, passed away March 29, 1899 and his step-

mother moved to California, so Ellen devoted herself to Allen and "brought him up until he had finished his first year of college". He became an architect in Maplewood, N. J.

Always wishing to own a home of her own, in her later years she invested in one on James St. only to lose it. Determined to teach after her retirement from city schools, she applied for and received an appointment in a mountain school for the underprivileged in North Carolina. Mrs. Heyberger tells of the cottages there which housed children who were orphans or those who could not come from over the mountains daily.

After a few months Miss Ellen, with great disappointment, resigned for she could not climb the steep mountain paths in the deep winter snow. Back in Lancaster she lived with her friend Miss Marion Hiester for several years after which she was a guest at the Anne C. Witmer Home at 812 Columbia Ave. for seven years. She died December 26, 1954 and was cremated and buried in Lancaster Cemetery near the Tucker tombstone, that of her mother's parents.

Her Personality and Interests

Miss Brubaker was a tall, patrician-looking person as I recall. Her brownish hair was parted in the middle and pulled back into a low bun as was the fashion at the beginning of the century. She, of course, wore the inevitable shirtwaists and skirts with a white apron.

She was exceedingly charming, and as one acquaintance remarked, "One was immediately aware of her lovely teeth and expressive eyes". Another said, "I knew her in her later years, but she must have been a beautiful woman."

Mrs. William S. Kinzer of Paradise, the former Frances Lampe of W. Lemon St., was fortunate to have had "Miss Nellie B." board at her house for several years. "How tall she was," remembers Mrs. Kinzer, "but what a charming way she had of getting down to our level both literally and figuratively! She was truly a dedicated teacher and loved each one of her class."

Miss Lucille Brackbill calls her "handsome, brave and charming". Her nephew, H. Persifor Smith, Jr. writes,²¹ "She was a respected woman as well as a fine person." However there was a time when she became annoyed with her family—when they teased her by reminding her of their grandfather's (Lawyer George Brubaker, political leader of the Republican Party in Lancaster County) vote-getting methods.

Her first love was her children, of course, but she adored all music and all of nature, especially birds. A member of St. James Episcopal Church all her life, she also taught Sunday School there for many years.²² She was an ardent member of the Quota Club, and according to Miss Miriam Stephens, "A charter member, President, and at the last an Honorary Member".

Miss Ellen played the piano beautifully we children thought, especially the marching music. Miss Hiester tells that in the earlier

days she had a few piano pupils and gave small recitals in her classroom.

Miss Brackbill declares she was ingenious about making things with her hands. Even at the last when a guest at Anne Witmer Home she made favors for holiday trays and Quota Club Affairs. In her room there was a large clutter of boxes containing her many "treasures" and materials for making crocheted or knitted stuffed dolls with painted faces, for covering coat hangers and fashioning soft balls.

Balls for children of kindergarten age were large and bright but those for infants were in pastel rainbow colors. Some were sold to friends but many were given to the babies in her sisters' and brothers' families.

Miss Hiester recalls that arthritis slowed her down gradually but she cheerfully would remark, "I'm so thankful it's my legs and not my hands." Many times the writer would greet her as she painfully boarded the downtown bus and gratefully eased into the side seat behind the driver. What errand was worth such great effort?

In her later teaching years, weary from the day's work, she would leave her schoolroom and go directly to the motion pictures which she enjoyed so much and which relaxed her completely. Perhaps her last errands downtown included the movies and buying more handwork materials.

Finding Schoolrooms, Pupils

The first schoolroom of the Free Kindergarten Association was located at 400 E. King St., in a room rented from the Stranger Mission.²³ Then the Lancaster City School Board donated a classroom in the James St. School where Miss Brubaker was to teach for twenty years. As city classrooms were needed she was moved around to a room on Mulberry St., the Emmanuel Lutheran Church and to a private home in the six hundred block of W. Chestnut St. on the south side near Nevin.

Mrs. Thomas Reeder tells of going to the Emmanuel Church site in 1920 and of her brother continuing there in 1923. Mrs. Charles Cook, now of Wollongong, Australia, remembers the "long, cold, dark alleyway between houses" that she had to travel to get to the backdoor entrance of the W. Chestnut St. "classroom" in 1928-1929.

As has been stated, in 1930 the Free Kindergarten schools (and another on S. Duke St. sponsored by the Lancaster Junior League for several years) were incorporated into the city school district.

Mrs. Merle Burkhart, nee Dorothy Behrens, the daughter of Henry Behrens of 440 Nevin St., remembers the day in 1899 when Miss Brubaker knocked on their door and talked to her mother about the James St. kindergarten. Pupils were needed for the school and she enthusiastically told Mrs. Behrens of the program.

"Mother thought four years old was pretty young to start school," says Mrs. Burkhart. "Besides, this was a new thing and it mightn't be good for me. But mother was persuaded and I completed two years there and at the end of my first year my sister enrolled."

Mrs. Burkhart remembers how her mother dressed her for kindergarten. The dresses were dark, woolen in winter, covered with white washable pinafores to protect them. The little girls doted on the pinafores which were edged with ruffles or wide lace on the sleeveless armholes. Girls and boys alike carried small baskets each day, often those left by the "Easter Bunny", for at mid-morning they were allowed to eat the apple, pretzels or crackers it contained.

Some Things She Taught

The writer recently found, in Barr-Hurst Book Shop's old book section, a 1913 volume titled *The Kindergarten* containing reports of the Committee of Nineteen. This committee's function, according to Miss Lucy Wheelock, the chairman, was to let educators and the general public know what the "kindergarten is and what the modern kindergarten does." She seemed to think "A restatement of Froebelian principles seemed to be necessary in the light of recent contributions of biology, sociology and modern sociology to the science of education".

The flyleaf of the book contains the written-in name of Norma Ruth Schiedt (of the Iris Club paper) and one of the early Free Kindergarten Association teachers.

The column lists six great educational values: religion, ethics, language, the industries and fine arts, mathematics and science. It reads, "Self-activity is the principle of psychology and therefore should be consciously accepted as a principle of education".²⁴

In the chapter on the Genetic-Developing Method we find—"the aim of the kindergarten is to induce children to do the kind of deeds from which will follow educative results". Froebelian Law is discussed quite eruditely but often there is a simple statement such as "we further hold that by accenting plays pointing towards the values of life the kindergarten breaks a pathway through the jungles of human life".

A chapter on the "Kindergarten Program" with its sand tables, balls, beads, fruit and bird games, paper chains and outdoor excursions brings to mind Miss Brubaker's kindergarten at James St. School. In 1908 the classroom was dominated by the grand piano which one faced on entering. Underneath it (a cozy cave) was an array of dolls' beds and cradles. One doll intrigued me especially—a rag one, actually two in one, who when upended and skirt pulled down became a white or a colored baby as one wished. My own best dolls were taken to visit, one named for Virginia Straub, another "Kitty" for another classmate. Both these girls had beautiful brown curls quite in contrast to my carrotish blonde straight hair. "Virginia" and "Kitty" were much the envy of my friends for their hats were marvelous creations (I still have a crownless one) made

by Aunt Nan, apprentice to the Strauss girls at their millinery shop on W. King St. Not only that, their cloaks and dresses, made too by Aunt Nan, were fashioned from the finest, (mostly gray and purple silk and satin) casket lining samples that had come to F. F. Groff the undertaker, my father's employer.

At the opposite end of the kindergarten room, arranged as three sides of a square, were the work tables in sections pushed together and each seating several children. Their surfaces were a mottled light brown, perhaps topped with oilcloth for easy cleaning. Our chairs had slatted and rounded backs.

I especially loved the doll play and the singing games such as "Oats, peas, beans and barley grow", "Drop the handkerchief" and "In and out the window". I was frustrated with the handwork and remember the only unhappy times as those when I struggled making woven paper mats and baskets, though my paper chains were quite successful.

Miss Margaret R. Marsh, a kindergarten teacher in the Marblehead, Mass. schools for more than thirty-five years, tells of a reason she loved Miss Brubaker—"she made the little boys put the little girls' rubbers on".

Mrs. Mabel Musser Wike tells of a "hobbledyhoy dance" she learned there in 1900. A handholding ring was formed and the children danced around to the piano music. The dance included stopping, putting one's right leg on the floor over the person's on the left and then all sitting on their "hunkers". Must have been fun!

There are memories of Miss Brubaker's taking her children on nature walks, and in later years of a classroom science museum. I recall our "Decoration Day" walk from James St. School to the Lancaster Cemetery, to place the flowers we'd brought on the graves of Civil War veterans.

Mrs. Burkhart never has forgotten the walk her class took to her grandfather's carpenter shop (Wohlsen's Planing Mill in later years) at Charlotte and W. Lemon Sts. She was so proud to help her class sing a song with gestures they'd learned especially for the occasion.

See the busy carpenter
How he works away
Standing at his workbench
He spends a busy day.
He hammers and he saws
And chisels and he bores
And rap, rap, rap, the nails he taps. (repeat)

I remember that Miss Brubaker used pictures a great deal. My favorite was that of a peasant mother in a doorway of a simple home, her children feeding birds before her, a babe in her arms.

We were quite patriotic with George Washington and Abraham



Miss Ellen Brubaker with her class of kindergarten children, thought to be in the 1920s, near the Wickersham School.

Lincoln on the wall, and of course, the flag. We sang, "My Country 'Tis of Thee" loud and strong but liked better:

I know three little sisters
I think you know them too.
For one is red and one is white
And the other one is blue.

Chorus:

Hurrah for the three little sisters!
Hurrah for the red, white and blue!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!
Hurrah for the red white and blue!

At each "Hurrah!" our arms waved with gusto. Years later, as librarian at Edward Hand Junior High School we did a book skit including that tune, words fitting the occasion of Book Week.

Who could remember, know or realize all that any of our teachers taught us? We do realize, however, that Ellen Brubaker was dedicated to helping us and loved us in the helping.

Pleasurable Duties—Extra-Curricular

Miss Brubaker's kindergarten activities were not confined to the classroom by any means. She kept in close touch with the parents of her pupils by making calls at their homes—many times one

hundred were made in a year—to encourage the parents and the public to visit the daily sessions.²⁵

All through the years she helped the Association to put on affairs to support the school. There were rummage sales, festivals, (school festivals were the outgrowth of this) and later plays were given in the Fulton Opera House. Annual contributions were solicited from the public.

Two locations of the rummage sales were N. Prince St. between W. Orange St. and the alley near the Arcade Markets, and the other in a store opposite the Y.M.C.A. on W. Orange St. The latter was vacated by Miller's Drug Store and is now Barr-Hurst Book Shop.

When Mrs. John W. Eckenrode was president of the Board of the Free Kindergarten Association she would hire a New York professional to organize local talent and put on a benefit show. Miss Mildred L. Pontz gave this recorder a program of such a show at the Fulton titled "The Runaway Girl". Miss Pontz was cast as a "market girl" and the writer as a "flower girl". It was sponsored by the Lancaster Operatic Society for the benefit of the kindergartens on April 11th and 12th, 1921. George Erisman furnished the costumes and Armstrong Cork "Works", Kirk Johnson & Co. and Reilly Bros. and Raub extended "other courtesies". Officers of the Association at the time were Dr. M. J. Snook, President; M. C. (Minnie) Thompson, Secretary; and W. F. Ziegler, Treasurer.

Some Friends

It would, of course, be impossible to list the friends of Ellen Allen Brubaker. One of her dearest was the aforementioned Mary Martin, her former teacher and colleague.²⁶ Her admiration for Miss Martin motivated the compilation, in 1947, of a paper about her which was read before the local Quota Club at the meeting annually devoted to the achievement of Lancaster County women. It told, among other things, of Miss Martin's fight for public school kindergartens. The same paper was reprinted not long ago by the Lancaster County Historical Society in its *Journal*.²⁷

In later years Miss Mary Skillen, Supervisor of Elementary Education in the city school system, was a close friend who also worked towards and succeeded in making the kindergarten a part of the system.

Miss Miriam Stephens remembers Miss Brubaker with fondness as a co-member of the Quota Club, as does Miss Brackbill. Miss Judy Light, a retired kindergarten teacher, now of Lebanon was close to her.

Early kindergarten teachers who came under her influence and guidance were Claribelle Williamson, nee Schaeffer and Margaret Lentz, nee Hartman.

Included here, of course, is the aforementioned Norma Schiedt, daughter of Dr. Richard C. Schiedt of Franklin and Marshall College. Miss Schiedt began teaching in 1916, with twenty-five pupils, on

St. Duke St. at the St. Stephen Lutheran Church. She later married Miss Brubaker's nephew, H. Persifor Smith, Jr.²⁸

Add to these many more colleagues and workers for the cause, her admiring club and church co-workers, her Sunday School and kindergarten pupils—and the inability to assess her influence on people and their feelings for her is obvious.

Of special satisfaction to her were those pupils who later were interested in education. She writes, "It is interesting to note that three members of the School Board now, were former pupils of the first kindergarten in the James St. School. Two of them have been president of the Board and one still is holding the office."²⁹

There is a very poignant sentence which ends the account of herself in the family genealogy. It is, "She never married". Even so, she must have had two thousand or more children whom she tenderly taught when they first left the shelter of their homes and who loved her as a second mother.

NOTES

- ¹Riddle, William, *One Hundred and Fifty Years of School History*, Lancaster, Riddle, 1905, p. 128.
- ²*Ibid.*, p. 372.
- ³Whittaker, John E., *Trinity Lutheran Church*, Lancaster: Wickersham, 1905, p. 38.
- ⁴Kieffer, Elizabeth C., *Annals of First Reformed Church*, Lancaster: First United Church of Christ, 1961, p. 57.
- ⁵Clare, I. S., *Brief History of Lancaster County*, Lancaster: Argus, 1892, p. 217.
- ⁶Brubaker, Ellen A., "Miss Mary M. Martin, Teacher Extraordinary: 1887-1930" in *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society*, Vol. 68, No. 3, 1964, p. 116.
- ⁷"Lancaster Marks Anniversary of Aunt Mary" in *Sunday News*, Feb. 2, 1947.
- ⁸Brubaker, p. 115.
- ⁹*Sunday News*, Feb. 2, 1947.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹¹"Iris Club Marks 60th Anniversary" in *New Era*, May 18, 1955.
- ¹²"Iris Club" in *Intelligencer Journal 200th Anniversary Edition*, p. 13.
- ¹³Phinney-Tuttle, Mary Allen, *Lewis Allen and His Descendants from 1699 to 1954*, Rutland: 1954, p. 96.
- ¹⁴Brubaker, p. 17.
- ¹⁵Riddle, p. 136.
- ¹⁶Graduate School of Education of Harvard University, *Report of a Survey on Certain Aspects of the Lancaster Pennsylvania City School District, 1924-1925*.
- ¹⁷Phinney-Tuttle, p. 96.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ¹⁹Smith, H. Persifor, Jr., *Brubakers of Earl Township*, p. 1 of #2.
- ²⁰Phinney-Tuttle, p. 96.
- ²¹Smith, p. 1 of #2.
- ²²Phinney-Tuttle, p. 96.
- ²³*Sunday News*, Feb. 2, 1947.
- ²⁴International Kindergarten Union, *The Kindergarten*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1913, p. 39.
- ²⁵Brubaker, p. 118.
- ²⁶*Sunday News*, Feb. 2, 1947.
- ²⁷Brubaker, p. 115.
- ²⁸Phinney-Tuttle, p. 102.
- ²⁹Brubaker, p. 118.