

THE FEMALE SUNDAY-SCHOOL SOCIETY OF SAINT JAMES'S
CHURCH, LANCASTER

William Frederic Worner

Mr. William A. B. Halbach, a member of one of Lancaster's oldest families, has kindly presented to the Lancaster County Historical Society a pamphlet, 4 by 5 inches in size, that contains much of local interest. The title-page of this paper-bound booklet, which has survived the wreck of time for more than one hundred years, is as follows:

"First
Annual Report
of the
Female Sunday-School Society of St.
James's Church, Lancaster.
(Read at the Annual Meeting, May 27th, 1822.)
Together with
The Constitution
of the Society,
Subscribers' Names, &c.

John Reynolds, Pr. West King-Street, Lancaster."

In the introductory, which is printed on pages 2 to 8 inclusive, Mrs. Dorothy Brien and Mrs. Ann Hopkins, the directresses, state that at that time (1822) the nature and objects of Sunday-school instruction were so generally understood by the public that it was not necessary to explain the views of the Female Sunday-school society of Saint James's Protestant Episcopal church on this subject. Nor was it considered necessary, in this its first annual report, to "vindicate the system, or show the claims which it possesses on Christian Patronage." To Robert Raikes, "a zealous layman of the Church of England," these good women, in their report, give the credit for establishing the first Sunday school, at Gloucester, England. Whether or not Raikes is justly entitled to this honor, I do not know. It has been claimed, and possibly with truth, that a Sunday school was conducted by the monks of the Cloister at Ephrata, Lancaster county, Pa., as early as 1739,—forty-one years before the printer at Gloucester, England, gathered the waifs of his town into a similar school.

It is also stated in the report, that prior to the establishment of the Saint James's school, the children of Lancaster attended a Union (Sunday) school. The Saint James's Female Sunday-school society was the first to separate from the Union school, although it was acknowledged that the Union school did a good work in Lancaster and was a credit to the devoted women who had conducted it through several years of difficulties and trials.

Another reason given for separating from the Union school was "that more good would be done, and the end in view more effectually accomplished, by attaching schools to the respective churches. The children are thus under the eye of their own pastors, they are taught their respective catechisms and accustomed to attend particular places of worship; evident advantages, which could never have been attained under the former arrangement. The result has afforded us very peculiar satisfaction."

It is evident that shortly after the Saint James's Female Sunday-school society was established, other churches withdrew from the Union school and started schools in their own congregations. In the report, it is stated that "In the several schools now in Lancaster, probably double the number of children are instructed, by more than triple the number of teachers, than attend the Union school."

In reviewing the work of the Female Sunday-school society of Saint James's church for the first year, the officers, at the first annual meeting, held on Monday, May 27th, 1822, reported, in substance, the following:

The school was opened on Sunday, the 27th of May, 1821, with about 50 scholars in attendance, which number gradually increased to 150. The children were not as punctual or as regular in their attendance as the teachers and officers desired, but, generally, there were as many present as could conveniently be accommodated.

During the first year, forty children committed the Church catechism to memory. Portions of the Scriptures and Church hymns were recited every Sunday by almost all who could read. Some, when they entered the school, were unable to read. They were taught the alphabet, and by the end of the first year, were able to read in the Testament.

The teachers of the school were unremitting in their efforts to have the children of the parish attend the services of public worship on the Lord's Day, and committees were appointed for that purpose. Each Sunday they conducted the children to church, and sat with them during divine service. During the first year, twenty pupils earned prayer books, and this enabled them to participate in the public services.

Attached to the school was a library. The books were presented by members of the congregation. The library was used as an additional reward to stimulate the industry of the learners.

Of the "Rules of the School," of which there are seven, two are of special interest. Section 1, of Rule 3, demands that "Each teacher must have her class enrolled, and visit every member of it at least once a month. It shall also be her indispensable duty to visit those of her scholars who are absent one Sunday, and report, in writing, to the presiding Directress, on the succeeding Sunday, the reasons assigned for absence." It is a pity that this most commendable custom is no longer followed in a majority of our schools.

Rule 5 throws a most interesting side-light upon the early days of the school. It is, in full, as follows:

"The scholars shall be rewarded according to the following table:

"For reciting 5 verses in the Bible,.....	1	Blue Ticket.
" do do do do of a Hymn,.....	1	do do
"One page of Catechism,.....	1	do do
"Being present at the opening of the school.....	1	do do
"Good behavior during divine service,.....	1	do do
"Misbehavior in church shall forfeit.....	2	Blue Tickets
"Absence from school,.....	2	do do
"Leaving seat without permission.....	1	do do
"Leaving books at home,.....	2	do do

"N. B. Ten blue tickets are equal to one red ticket. One red ticket is equal in value to one cent—and any number may be redeemed by a premium of proportionable value."

The congregation of Saint James's church encouraged the efforts of its noble women by contributing liberally to the erection of a frame building for the use of the Female Sunday-school society. In the old vestry book, under date of March 24th, 1821, appears the following: "The School-House contemplated to be built shall be located on the north side of the lot (commonly called the parsonage lot) fronting on Duke Street and adjoining the House now occupied by Philip Benedict. The building is to be framed & weather boarded 20 by 28 feet, two stories."

This building, which occupied the site of the present parish house, was completed and used during the first years of the school's existence, and afforded a convenient meeting place for the school and the society. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire, early on the morning of Sunday, March 19th,

1843. The loss was a total one, there being no insurance on the building. The Examiner & Herald of Wednesday, March 29th, 1843, in referring to the destruction of the building, states:

"The congregation of Saint James's church, and especially the ladies, to whom the building belonged, return their grateful acknowledgments to the fire engine and hose companies, and to the citizens generally, for the prompt and vigorous efforts to save their Sunday-school house, from the fire of the 19th inst. All that was possible was done; and far more was saved than could have been hoped for, considering the almost impassable state of the streets, and the dead hour of night at which the fire occurred."

The officers of the school also acted as a charitable agency in dispensing a large portion of the alms collected at the Holy Communion. In doing this, they complied with article 2, of their constitution, published on page 11 of the booklet, which stated: "The object of the Society shall be religious instruction of children, and the relief of poor members of the Episcopal Church." In order that none of the poor of the congregation might be overlooked, the parish was divided into districts, and a committee was appointed to each. These committees made every effort to dispense their charity in a judicious manner; and in discharging their duty, they afforded relief to a number of distressed families.

The officers of the school were: President (Ex officio), Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg; Directress, Mrs. Dorothy Brien; Vice-Directress, Mrs. Ann Hopkins; Secretary, Miss Letitia Montgomery; Treasurer, Miss Grace P. Hubley.

Mrs. Dorothy Brien, directress of the school, was a daughter of General Edward Hand, friend and companion-in-arms of General George Washington. She was born in Lancaster, November 26th, 1777; married Edward Brien, of the Martic Iron works, September 17th, 1805; died August 21st, 1862, and was buried in Saint James's Episcopal churchyard.

Mrs. Ann Hopkins, vice-directress, was the daughter of Adam and Mary Wager Reigart. She was born July 4th, 1795; married George Ross Hopkins, December 27th, 1814; died January 4th, 1826 at the early age of 31; and is buried in Saint James's graveyard, near the chancel of the church she loved so well.

The teachers of the school were:

Misses Margaret Yeates, M. Hand, M. R. Hubley, Harriet R. Clarkson, Lydia Clarkson, Henrietta Reigart, Susan Reigart, Letitia Montgomery, Lavinia Montgomery, R. Jordan, Sidney Boyd, Harriet Old, Hetty R. Barton, H. Barton, E. Durell, E. Atlee, S. Smith, W. Smith,—Derridinger, A. Hubley, Ann Hopkins, S. Brien and C. Musser.

The treasurer, Miss Grace P. Hubley, acknowledged a donation of \$5.00 from Miss Margaret Yeates. Four anonymous donations for the work of the school, in sums of \$30.00, \$25.00, \$10.00 and \$3.00, were also acknowledged.

Article 12, of the constitution of the society, published on page 13 of the report, required that "each member shall annually contribute to the treasury 50 cents, to be paid at the annual meeting."

That many of the good people of Saint James's parish complied with this request, is evident from the following list of those who contributed this amount for the year 1821-22. In this list may be found the names of some of the best families in old Lancaster, descendants of which live in the town to-day and attend Saint James's church:

Dorothy Brien, Ann Hopkins, Mrs. Sarah Burd Yeates, Margaret Yeates, E. Yeates, Sarah Bethel, M. Hand, M. R. Hubley, Mary F. Jenkins, Grace P. Hubley, Harriet R. Clarkson, Lydia Clarkson, Henrietta Reigart, Susan Reigart, P. W. Reigart, G. H. Whitaker, Letitia Montgomery, Lavinia Montgomery, Delia Montgomery, R. Jordan, Sidney Boyd, Jane Coleman, Sarah

Coleman, Ann Eaton, Mary Graeff, Catharine Barton, Hetty R. Barton, Marian Mulford, Harriet Old, Ann Hopkins, Jane Slaymaker, Eliza Ross, Carolina Orick, E. Moore, E. Durell, E. Duchman, E. Atlee, S. Franklin, Wilhelmina Smith, Sarah Smith, Mary Smith, Eliza M. Rogers, Mary Ellmaker and Miss Derriding.

The Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg, associate rector of Saint James's church at the time the Female Sunday-school society was organized, was born in Philadelphia, September 16th, 1796. He belonged to the famous Muhlenberg family, prominent members of the Lutheran Church in America, and was baptized by the Rev. Just Henry Christian Helmuth. Dr. Helmuth was pastor of Trinity Lutheran church, Lancaster, from 1769 to 1779. Upon resigning the charge in Lancaster, he moved to Philadelphia, where he served as pastor of the Lutheran congregation of Saint Michael's and Zion. Little did Dr. Helmuth dream, when he baptized young Muhlenberg, that the boy was destined to do a great work for the cause of education in Lancaster, the town in which Dr. Helmuth had labored for ten years; and to originate the plan of establishing a Sunday school in his own parish, subsequently followed by the other congregations.

On Sunday, September 18th, 1817, Mr. Muhlenberg was admitted to the diaconate by Bishop William White, in Saint Peter's Episcopal church, Philadelphia. As an assistant to Bishop White, he was present at the consecration of Saint James's church, Lancaster, on Sunday, October 15th, 1820. On the afternoon of that day he preached. His sermon gave so much satisfaction that he was invited to become assistant to the Rev. Joseph Clarkson, rector of Saint James's. The following Sunday, October 22nd, 1820, he was advanced to the priesthood by Bishop White, in Christ church, Philadelphia. Anne Ayers, biographer of Muhlenberg, states (page 55) that shortly after his admission to the priesthood, he visited Lancaster to assist in the consecration of the new church building, but in this Miss Ayres was mistaken, for he was still in deacon's orders when the ceremony of consecration was performed.

On December 2nd, 1820, the Rev. Mr. Muhlenberg, then in his twenty-fourth year, entered upon the cure of Saint James's, Lancaster. On Christmas Day, following, there were but fifteen communicants. Anne Ayres states: "The parish had fallen into decay through having service but once in every four Sundays, and this by a rather superannuated clergyman." This statement is not altogether correct, in view of the fact that the rector, the Rev. Joseph Clarkson, was but 54 years of age at the time Mr. Muhlenberg assumed the office of associate rector. Mr. Clarkson, according to Rev. Wilson Waters, in his historical sketch of Saint James's parish, had been ministering in Pequea, Leacock, Caernarvon and Lancaster.

Soon after his coming to Lancaster, Mr. Muhlenberg wrote: "The apathy on the subject of education which prevails in this place is fearful. I hope a better day is dawning. Happy shall I be if I am at all instrumental in its progress."

It is generally understood that Mr. Muhlenberg, when stationed in Lancaster, was responsible for the separation from the Union school. Anne Ayres states: "He was not without his troubles in making the working of his church more efficient, but his energy and perseverance overcame them all. His earliest step was to form a Sunday school of his own, naturally regarding that as a very important part of a pastor's charge. He immediately brought about the erection of a house for the purpose, and some who had been his warm friends took offence at this, thinking the measure precipitate. They were hard to move from their old, sleepy ways. As soon as the Episcopal school-house was opened, those teachers who were members of Saint James's of course withdrew from the Union to teach in their own Sunday school. Their withdrawal was another offence. It was looked upon as a sectarian measure and of aristocratic character, the comparatively few Epis-

copalians of Lancaster being of the upper classes. But the school was quickly filled with children who flocked to it from all quarters, and particularly from the Lutheran church, where, as yet, there was no English Sunday school. It soon numbered a hundred children in each division, i. e., of boys and girls severally, with a body of excellent teachers, and continued a very flourishing school throughout Mr. Muhlenberg's incumbency."

The Rev. Wilson Waters states: "One of his scholars was a bright little Irish boy, John Barrett Kerfoot. He afterwards became President of Trinity College [Hartford, Conn.] and was the founder and first Bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Dr. Muhlenberg appointed young Kerfoot to make the address of welcome to Lafayette when he visited Lancaster [July 28th 1825]. Dr. Kerfoot became one of the great bishops and teachers of the Church. His work in preserving the unity of the Church at the close of the Civil War cannot be estimated too highly. He was a man of wide scholarship and saintly life. It is interesting to note that the uplifting influences surrounding his early years were all associated with Saint James's parish."

The Sarah Coleman mentioned in the list of contributors to the Female Sunday-school society, was the daughter of Robert Coleman, one of the most prominent members of the church. (The family resided on East King street, in a house that stood on the site of M. T. Garvin's department store.) The young associate rector of Saint James's church, Mr. Muhlenberg, is said to have been her lover. She was noted for her beauty of person and character.

During Mr. Muhlenberg's rectorate an evening service was instituted. It is quite probable that before his coming to Lancaster, services were held in Saint James's church on Sunday mornings only. Mr. Muhlenberg, being a young clergyman of progressive ideas, felt that an evening service was quite in keeping with the times. In establishing this service, he incurred the displeasure of Robert Coleman, father of the woman who might have become his wife. After reviewing the advantages he would be likely to gain by some concessions in this particular, he wrote:

"But for no earthly consideration, whatever, not even the attainment of the dear object of my heart, will I sacrifice what I believe to be the interests of my church. O Lord, help me!"

Sarah Coleman died November 1st, 1825, in her twenty-fourth year. Mr. Muhlenberg never married. Anne Ayers states: "Most lives have their romance, and the one before us was not an exception. Both the light and the shadow of that romance fell upon the years of earnest work spent in Lancaster; and when Mr. Muhlenberg gave up his charge there, he left behind him the grave of his earthly hopes."

The first version of his famous hymn, "I would not live away," although composed before the great sorrow of his life came, yet voices a certain vein of melancholy, not untinged, perhaps, by some forecasting shadows of that sorrow—the heart cry of a noble soul that made the words of Job his own. It is popularly believed to have been composed under the loss referred to; but this, Anne Ayres states, is a mistake. Muhlenberg wrote: "The legend that it was written upon an occasion of private grief, is a fiction." Augusta M. Longacre, in "Forges and Furnaces in the Province of Pennsylvania," states, one cannot say how truly, that Mr. Muhlenberg threw into Sarah Coleman's grave her engagement ring and a rough draft of the hymn he had just written, "I would not live away."

This romance was no doubt one reason for his leaving Lancaster, which, he said, was a sad place for him to visit. When he did return, the first and last place to which he turned his steps was to a grave in Saint James's churchyard. He never visited it without taking a spray of the sweet brier that grew there. Truly, the hymn shadows forth the tragedy of a love that was faithful unto death.

Early in the summer of 1826, he tendered his resignation as associate rector of Saint James's parish. It was not, at first, accepted, the vestry requesting him to reconsider it. This he declined to do, and took leave about the middle of July. After leaving Lancaster, he went to Flushing, L. I., where he established Saint Paul's college. He then went to New York, where his fine ability had larger scope in the Church of the Holy Communion, Saint Luke's hospital, Saint Johnland, L. I., and other helpful works, with which his name is inseparably connected.

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