



Historic QUAKERTOWN

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March 2021 Newsletter

It is finally March. There were days when it seemed like it would never get here. Spring is upon us. Unfortunately, so is the pandemic. It has changed every aspect of our lives for over a year now. We look forward to when it is ancient history and not a current event.

At the Quakertown Historical Society, we have been at work continuing our work in identifying the archives we have bot in storage and on display at the Burgess Foulke House, The Museum, and Liberty Hall. There is much yet to do but significant progress has been made. We can always use more helpers. Leave a message at the phone number above and we will be glad to include you.

As always, we really appreciate the support, both financially and in volunteerism, which we have received. We wish we could talk more about plans for the future, but the times are still somewhat uncertain. We're committed to create and maintain a place where the history of Quakertown Borough can be stored and, through tours and research, seen appreciated. Come join us!!! The following article was found in the archives and, for some, we hope it brings some memories and, for others, a glimpse at what started 150 years ago and no longer exists.

Early Quakertown Foundry/Stove Works

Unknown Author

The foundry in Quakertown was organized in 1865 by David H. Thomas and Lewis E. Roberts for the manufacture of stoves. Later the firm was known as Thomas Roberts Stevenson & Company.

They purchased the lot containing 88 perches in the area of 3rd and West Broad Streets.

In 1868 they became associated with a Philadelphia stone dealer, W. S. Stevenson & Company. The foundry covered an area of over three-quarters of an acre which seemed to provide ample space. However, the operation was successful, and they doubled their original capacity. A number of workmen found steady employment in pattern making, molding, casting, cleaning, drilling, and mounting.

There were many varieties of cooking stoves produced here but the most popular was "The Times." It was built to conserve fuel and was awarded the highest honor, a gold medal, at the exhibition at the Louisiana State Fair of 1873. Other units produced were parlor units - "The Morning Sun" and "The Starlight;" heating units such as the Phoenix Hot Blast Portable Furnace, which had an interesting arrangement of removeable grates for cleaning them of "clinkers;" stoves for the drawing room and steamships.

An additional 1 acre and 62 perches was sold by Joshua Foulke on July 14, 1868.

The Daily Intelligencer of November 2, 1880 carried the story of the foundry fire:

"Quakertown has been visited by a serious and very disastrous calamity. On Tuesday morning, about one o'clock, the alarm of fire was sounded, and it was quickly announced that the Quakertown Stove Works were on fire. So rapid was the progress of the flames that in a comparatively short time, the whole structure with its contents was in ruins. The morning was, fortunately, exceedingly calm and the air still; otherwise, neighboring buildings would have rapidly caught fire and the whole eastern portion of our town would have been laid in ashes. So improvident have our Borough authorities been that no appliance of any character has been provided for extinguishing fires - not even a bucket or ladder. The watchman at the foundry discovered the fire in the vicinity of the cupola before it had made much progress, but failing to subdue it, he blew the steam whistle to summon help. This, it seems, was either not heard or not understood, for help did not come.

Soon afterward, however, a portion of the club with the band, which had been attending the Republican meeting at Pleasant Hill, was returning home, and was attracted by the alarm and the blaze. The fire by this time was beyond control, for it had reached the dry, combustible material adjacent and the whole building was soon enveloped in flames. An old frame barn belonging to Samuel Kinsey, some fifty feet or more in the line of the current of air, caught fire from blazing fragments and was speedily consumed.

The bank building and Dentist Saylor's residence, just across the street from the stove works, were saved by constant application of water to the exposed and heated woodwork. The storage of an immense amount of wooden patterns and a carpenter shop with lumber etc. gave additional intensity to the conflagration. The loss sustained by the firm is estimated by the firm at something over \$150,000, embracing buildings, machinery, finished and unfinished work, with a large amount of valuable patterns, wood and metal. An insurance it is stated, will cover about \$55,000 of the loss. It has been deemed uncertain whether the establishment would be rebuilt in Quakertown, as encouraging offers had been made elsewhere by various parties at a time when complaint was made in reference to excessive freight charges, where greater facilities were afforded for transportation, etc.

In view of this, the same evening, a public meeting of the citizens of the town was called in the new hall, to take action in reference to encouraging the rebuilding of the works and retaining them here. The feeling in this direction was unanimous and near \$3,000 was promptly subscribed to further this object. With them who were present, it was a source of gratification to witness this alacrity and zeal with which various sums were subscribed in money, labor and material, and the laboring men depending upon their work's earnings, vied with those more favored with means to add their mite to the contribution.

A committee of seven was appointed to solicit contributions by canvassing the town. It is thought that \$7,000 to \$10,000 will easily be raised. To lose the Quakertown Stove Works would be losing employment for 130 or more working men, representing not less than 500 inhabitants, and thereby a depreciation of real estate in the town of at least 20 percent. Present advices give encouragement to say that the Quakertown Stove Works of Thomas, Roberts, Stevenson & Company will, phoenix-like, rise from its ashes, and the business be carried on with increased energy and capacity."

In 1903, Roberts, Winner, and Francis Cavanaugh expanded and purchased land on July 9, 1903 from the heirs of Martha Kinsey. The property was a lot containing 2 acres and 99 perches on the north side of West Broad Street, next to the west line of the North Pennsylvania Railroad, and adjoining the alley leading to 3rd Street.

Later, the Roberts family bought up the share of William Winner and the business was controlled by the Roberts families and Francis Cavanaugh. In 1917, the survivors of the Roberts, Winner and Company turned over their holdings to the Quakertown Stove Works,

ENTER TO LEARN: A History of Quakertown Elementary School

By Dr. Robert L. Leight

2010

"It is, Sir, . . . a small [school]. An yet there are those who love it." Daniel Webster, in defense of Dartmouth College before the Supreme Court, 1818.

"Enter to Learn; Leave to Serve." These words were chiseled into the stone portal above the entrance doors of a brown brick building located on Seventh Street near Park Avenue. Thousands of students and educators have passed through those doors in a building beloved by generations of students.

For more than ninety years the schoolhouse has served students from the Quakertown community, first as a junior-senior high school, then as a junior high school, and for the past 42 years as Quakertown Elementary School.

Its present use is unique within the school district, for it is the only neighborhood school. As a true neighborhood school, QE presents special advantages for those students from the immediate community to "enter to learn".

BEGINNINGS: THE 1920S

Quakertown borough's high school programs go back to the 1880s. By 1920 the high school was conducted in a red brick building facing Sixth Street between Juniper Street and Park Avenue. Another red brick building on the same campus served Quakertown elementary students from the central part of town.

The high school building was not adequate for the student enrollment. It was crowded due to the increase in high school education during the “Roaring Twenties”. Students from the neighboring communities were entitled to attend the borough’s high school, and they came in large numbers.

But the high school curriculum was limited. The academic courses were excellent, but only a minority of students went on to higher education. Other than some courses in business there were no career-related courses.

Quakertown School District had a visionary Supervising Principal, Joseph Neidig. He saw the need for a modern high school building. Under his leadership, the school board commissioned a survey of the borough by the state Department of Public Instruction. The surveys analyzed the state of the school buildings within the borough and made recommendations for improvement. The survey also included the number and kinds of commercial and manufacturing establishments in the borough.

The key recommendation was for the construction of a modern junior-senior high school to serve grades seven to twelve. In October 1927, the school board voted to build a new school.

A bond issue of \$150,000 was needed. At that time, an affirmative vote in a public referendum was needed to approve the loan of that much money. In order to publicize the importance of a new high school to the community, the school board sponsored a parade by students and friends on November 7, 1927. The vote at the General Election the next day was positive. (The Quakertown Historical Society has motion pictures of the parade.)

It was fortunate that the taxpayers chose to build the new school. Soon after it opened in 1929 the stock market crashed on “Black Thursday”, October 24, 1929. The greatest depression in the history of the nation continued during the decade of the 1930s. Virtually no new school buildings were constructed during the 1930s or the war years of the 1940s.

THE JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING

The new schoolhouse was considered among the best school buildings in Bucks County. It was two stories. The first floor had ten classrooms and administrative offices. A distinctive feature was the large auditorium/gymnasium. The auditorium was theatre style with a capacity of perhaps 500 seats. A set of wooden doors between the auditorium and the gym could be opened when there was an overflow for programs. Only gym shoes or stocking feet were permitted on the gym floor.

The second floor included the library, a home economics suite, three science laboratories and six classrooms. There was an entrance to the balcony over the gym which provided seating for the audience for athletic events. During the hour-long lunch period high school students who brought their lunches ate while seated on bleachers.

The building was solidly constructed. During the 1980s, Michael Beutrin, then facilities director, told me that QE was the best built school in the school district. And this was about fifty years after it was constructed!

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Seventh and eighth grade students from the borough had homerooms in the junior-senior high school building. They were joined by students from other municipalities in the ninth grade. Ninth grade students chose a specific program of studies. By 1946, when I entered the school, there were the following choices: Academic, Commercial, Vocational Agriculture, Vocational Drafting, Vocational Home Economics, Vocational Metalworking, and Vocational Woodworking. The home economics labs were in the high school building. The commercial and vocational programs had shops in the Central Building. The school district operated a farm on California Road. Ag students were bused there for half day practical sessions. As far as I know, QHS was the only high school in the state to operate its own farm.

The career-based programs described above were a major advantage to students enrolled in QHS. I believe that only high schools of the size of Allentown or Bethlehem could offer programs this diverse at that time.

The academic program was also extensive. Academic (College Preparatory) students had three languages available: Latin, French, and German. Math courses included algebra, geometry and trigonometry, Science courses included general science, biology, chemistry, and physics. All students took civics in the ninth

grade, American history in the tenth grade, and Problems of Democracy in the twelfth grade. There was an elective in European history for Academic students. All students had four years of English. Other courses included guidance in the ninth grade, physical education, general music, and art.

EXTRA CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

For a small high school there were many extra-curricular activities. QHS competed in varsity sports in the Bux-Mont League in field hockey, basketball, and softball for females. Males had varsity football, cross country, basketball, baseball and track and field. Field hockey and softball were played on a regulation size field near Park Avenue. Alumni Field was the site for football, baseball, and track and field.

Each vocational program had its own career linked club, such as the Commercial Club, Future Craftsmen of America, Future Homemakers of America, and Future Farmers of America. There was a specific period once a week devoted to clubs. Other activities include dramatics (a Junior Play in the spring and a Senior Play in the fall), music, including a mixed chorus, band, and orchestra, including strings. A debate club took students to other schools in the Bucks and Montgomery area.

Publications were a very important part of the extra-curricular activities. "Quaker Challenge" was a journal featuring student reports, essays, and fiction. The students in the Commercial curriculum did the technical work in preparing the magazine, which appeared four times a year. It won numerous awards for the overall quality of the journal. An opportunity for journalism was found in the "QHS News", in which students wrote news articles which were published each week in the local newspaper, the "Free Press". A third publication was the yearbook, the "Recall", which provided photos and articles about the four years from the Freshman to the Senior year.

WASHINGTON TRIP

An activity which brought the students together in the senior year was the Washington trip. The class treasury had saved money to pay for all of the students to spend several days in Washington, D. C. during the late Spring. Class members boarded luxury buses which took them and their chaperones to the nation's capital. The Seniors were checked into a major hotel in the city and toured monuments and museums. They spent one day at the home of George Washington, where a panoramic photo of the class was taken on the lawn of Mount Vernon. The member of Congress who represented Quakertown was a guest for dinner one evening.

The trip was a lesson in contemporary social studies as well. One of the class members was an African-American, and she was not permitted to stay in the same hotel as the rest of the class in segregated Washington, D. C. She had to stay in another hotel. The topic of segregation was discussed in a Problems of Democracy class when we returned. The Black student was a member of the class in which the discussion took place.

ALUMNI FIELD

The school board had purchased a large lot between Seventh and Eighth streets and Park Avenue in 1926 for use as an athletic field. Provisions were made for spectators in 1935 when bleachers were moved to the field.

As drainage on the field was poor, there were improvements made possible by Depression era New Deal projects. The Works Progress Administration provided cinders for drainage under the football field and for a quarter mile track. By 1946 the field had an arbor vitae fence around the playing field which included a basketball court, baseball diamond, jumping pits and a football gridiron, all surrounded by the quarter-mile track.

In 1930 the football field was named "Alumni Field" to honor QHS graduates who had lost their lives during the First World War. Lights were installed for night football in 1946 as a memorial to QHS students who had died in the Second World War. Alumni Field was the first football stadium to have lights in the Bux-Mont League. The lights were purchased from donations as a "Memorial of Light".

QUAKERTOWN COMMUNITY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

When a new school term began in September 1956, the schoolhouse on Seventh Street had a new name and a new mission. A new high school on the other side of Park Avenue was ready for students from grades of ten to twelve, leaving the older schoolhouse to educate the children from the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. In deference to the negotiations were going on between the six school boards the Seventh Street school was renamed "Quakertown Community Junior High School".

The junior high school had the leadership of the first two female secondary school principals in the school district. Zena Platoff Ahlum was the principal. She had been a commercial teacher and assistant

principal in the high school. Mary Biehn Schwer, a language arts teacher, was the assistant principal. Both were graduates of QHS.

Crowded classrooms were the norm during the period until 1968, when the new Quakertown Community Junior High School opened on site at the intersection of Ninth and Main streets (the present Sixth Grade Center).

QUAKERTOWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, 1968-

The school building on Seventh Street was converted into an elementary school, serving kindergarten through sixth grades. It was named "Quakertown Elementary". In the early 1980s, when QCSD adopted the middle school model, the sixth grade was moved out of elementary buildings.

Modifications were made to classroom spaces. The floor of the auditorium was leveled, and the auditorium became a cafeteria and multi-purpose room. A wing was added to the back of the building.

The playing fields where the girls' softball and field hockey teams had played became playgrounds for QE students.