

Teaching in the Friends' Latin School of Philadelphia in the Eighteenth Century

THE TRAINING of youth in the “principles of true religion and vertue” was one of the primary concerns of Friends and of the overseers who ran their schools in Philadelphia during the eighteenth century. In order to achieve this goal properly, it was considered necessary to obtain teachers who themselves were Friends. Hence, important qualifications of a successful applicant for a teaching post in a Friends school were membership in the Society of Friends and favorable recommendations from dependable Friends. Knowledge of the subjects to be taught and ability to teach them were also important considerations, but these usually were listed after mention of the applicant’s religious qualifications.

Although there was no great difficulty in obtaining teachers in and around Philadelphia for most of the Friends schools, teachers for the Latin School were hard to come by and often had to be imported from England. Small committees of overseers were given the responsibility of trying to secure candidates through contacts with interested and reliable Friends in England. In 1719, overseers Anthony Morris, Isaac Norris, and James Logan were “appointed & Desired to write to such persons there [*England*] to procure a proper Person from Brittain or Ireland,” to fill the post of master of the School lately held by William Robins.¹ In August, 1734, the overseers corresponded with “a young man named Jonathan Binns,” who was “recommended as a Sober and Capable Person to instruct Friends Children at the Publick School,” offering him the post.² Nine months later, Binns replied, accepting the offer provided “he should recover

¹ Overseers Minutes, I, 5-6 (Jan. 2, 1719), William Penn Charter School Archives, Philadelphia. Unless otherwise stated, manuscripts cited are from this source.

² *Ibid.*, I, 21 (June 1, 1734).

a better State of Health.”³ The overseers wrote to him again, encouraging him to “embarque as soon as his Health and Convenience will permit.”⁴ Although Binns’ health apparently improved, he did not find it convenient to accept the post; thirteen months later, it was noted that he had taken another job, and the search for a master of the Latin School continued.⁵ At last efforts to procure a master from London were successful, for Leonard Snowden, a “Person of good Repute amongst Friends, & well approv’d for Literature,” accepted the position. He “took shipping” on June 13, 1737, arriving two months later to “Enter on his Service as soon as the School House can be fitted to receive him.”⁶ From the time the search for a teacher was begun until one arrived in the city ready to teach, three years and a month had elapsed. Luckily for the Latin School, the search did not always take that long.

For a number of years, John Fothergill and John Hunt were the English liaisons for good teaching prospects. In 1746, the overseers wrote them for a master with the following qualifications: “a Person of Reputation among Friends, skill’d in the Latin & Greek Languages & Capable of teaching the Same.”⁷ Robert Willan, who was considered to possess these attributes, arrived in Philadelphia eighteen months later.⁸ He took up his duties in 1745 and served for eight years.

Robert Proud, one of the most famous of the Latin School teachers, and in the eighteenth century the one with the longest tenure, was sent over from England in 1759. Fothergill recommended him “as a Person well qualify’d to instruct our Youth in divers Branches of Learning.”⁹ So began a Latin School teaching career which, with a hiatus during the Revolution, was to encompass a period of thirty years, after which Proud was to write the first history of Pennsylvania.

Although negotiations with England for masters were time consuming, they were, for the most part, rewarding. However, on at least one occasion a candidate on arriving in Philadelphia turned out to be

³ *Ibid.*, I, 21 (Mar. 29, 1735).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 23 (Apr. 23, 1736).

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 24 (June 22, 1737).

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 58 (Dec. 26, 1746).

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 64 (Jan. 16, 1748).

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 175 (Jan. 24, 1759).

inadequate for the post. In 1750, master Robert Willan examined David Beverage, the candidate sent from London for the post of usher (assistant) and reported to the overseers that he was "neither capable nor willing to undertake the Service for which he was intended." What was equally upsetting was "that He acknowledges himself incapable of performing the Duties of an Usher, and that . . . He was . . . very negligent or disingenuous in making the Agreement with John Mason. . . . The Overseers acquainted him they thought he ought to look out for some other Employment."¹⁰ This was doubly grievous, for not only had the overseers lost the candidate but also, perhaps, the ten guineas for his passage from London, which they promised to repay to Robert Willan, "unless he can persuade David to pay him which the Board is of Opinion He ought to do."¹¹ Whether David did is not recorded.

In spite of the scarcity of candidates, the overseers were particularly careful in their appointments, often taking teachers on a probationary basis. When Alexander Buller was employed in 1738, it was made clear that he was appointed "on trial of his abilities & conduct,"¹² and in their arrangements with Hunt and Fothergill in 1746 the overseers left no question that the master they hired for the Latin School would be on "sometime of Tryal."¹³

Although the overseers were anxious to protect themselves from poor teachers, they were also concerned about treating teachers with consideration. They agreed that should a master coming from England be found wanting, or decide not to continue, "he shall be entitled to one year's Salary certain & be at liberty either to Return or to undertake Some other Employment, if he may Choose."¹⁴ The three or six months notice often stipulated in the records when a teacher was hired worked both ways. When Charles Thomson¹⁵ was

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 84 (Sept. 8, 1750).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, I, 26 (Jan. 9, 1738).

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 58 (Dec. 26, 1746).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Thomson was a rare instance of a teacher who was not a Quaker. While master of the Latin School, he traveled to Easton for the Indian treaties, and served as clerk to the Indian Chief, Tedyuscung. He was adopted by the Delawares into their tribe in 1756, and called by them "man of truth." Later, he became the first secretary of the Continental Congress (1774), and served in that capacity with Congress for fifteen years.

appointed master in 1755, he and the overseers "mutually agreed that he shall Enter into the Service . . . for one Year Certain . . . & in Case of any dissatisfaction arising on either side, Six months Notice to be given before he shall be at Liberty to decline the Service, or we to discharge him."¹⁶ Overseers' consideration for teachers did not extend, however, to the granting of concessions that would be inconvenient. In 1756, usher William Johnson, having been offered a job in a school in Burlington, New Jersey, asked permission to leave "as soon as it may be agreeable to us to discharge him." The overseers would not let him go, remarking that it was not "prudent" because of the increase of pupils in the Latin School, "and other circumstances." Instead, they extended his job for "one Year certain," with the usual six month notice proviso.¹⁷

The function of an usher was to assist the master, and during much of the eighteenth century the overseers hired them for work in the Latin School. Whether the master was permitted an assistant depended in great part on the number of scholars enrolled. If the enrollment was large, the assistant lightened the master's teaching burden, and his stipend was paid, at least partially, by the tuition of the added pupils. Sometimes an usher was hired with the idea of expanding the School. Such was the case in 1750 when Robert Willan proposed hiring an usher "to enable him to take a greater Number of Scholars & to make the Service of the School more Extensive."¹⁸ But, more often, the master found himself with too many pupils, and requested relief. James Thompson explained his need for an assistant in a letter to the overseers:

The school contains at present 36 pupils. These are so badly classed that it is impossible for one man to bestow on them the necessary attention without detaining them much longer than the usual hours of teaching. About eight applicants for admission have been rejected. By admitting a few more & employing an assistant my labour would be considerably diminished & the improvement of the boys much increased. The tuition money of the supernumerary scholars would probably be nearly if not altogether sufficient to defray the additional expences, on such a change.¹⁹

¹⁶ Overseers Minutes, I, 133 (Sept. 27, 1755).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 139 (Feb. 26, 1756); I, 141 (Mar. 6, 1756).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 79 (Jan. 29, 1750).

¹⁹ James Thompson to S. Griffiths, Mar. 25, 1802, William Penn Charter School Archives.

Ushers' terms of service were for the most part short-lived, and the overseers were constantly on the lookout for likely young men who would make good teaching assistants. The records show that, in keeping with the custom of the time, certain promising young students were apprenticed to masters to learn teaching. Such indentures, or apprenticeships, served some parents as a means of getting their children started in a trade. Indentures for the humbler trades, and for artisans of various kinds, were far more frequent than were those for learning "the Art, Trade and Mystery of the Schoolmaster," but the fact that the rather standard form of apprentice agreement was generally used gives some indication of the status of teaching, at least at lower levels.²⁰ "The Indenture of Phineas Jenkins to learn the mystery of teaching," committed Jenkins in 1756 to an apprenticeship with the following provisions:

THIS INDENTURE Witnesseth, That Phineas Jenkins Son of Phineas Jenkins of Abington in the County of Philadelphia Hath put himself, and by these Presents, by and with the advice and consent of his said Father, doth voluntarily, and of his own free Will and Accord, put himself Apprentice to The Overseers of the Publick School Founded by Charter in the Town & County of Philadelphia—to learn the Art, Trade and Mystery of the Schoolmaster and after the Manner of an Apprentice to serve Two Years Nine Months & twenty-six days from the Day of the Date hereof.

During all which Term, the said Apprentice his said Masters faithfully shall serve, their Secrets keep, their lawful Commands everywhere readily obey. He shall do no Damage to his said Masters nor see it to be done by others, without letting or giving Notice thereof to his said Masters. He shall not waste his said Master's Goods, nor lend them unlawfully to any. He shall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony within the said Term. At Cards, Dice, or any other unlawful Game, He shall not play, whereby his Said Masters may have Damage. With his own Goods, nor the Goods of others, without Licence from his said Masters he shall neither buy nor sell. He shall not absent himself Day nor Night from his said Master's Service without their Leave: Nor Haunt Ale-houses, Taverns, or Play-houses; but in all things behave himself as a faithful Apprentice ought to do, during the said Term. And the said Masters shall use the utmost of his Endeavour to teach or cause to be taught or instructed the said Apprentice in the Trade or Mystery of a schoolmaster—and procure and provide for him sufficient Meat, Drink, Apparel. . . . Lodging and Washing, fitting for an

²⁰ Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1926), 108, 270.

Apprentice, during the said Term and shall likewise provide him with Books paper & all such other necessary things as He may want in the Course of his Learning, & shall likewise teach or cause him to be taught at his leisure hours, the Art of Navigation Surveying Dialling Geography Merchants' Accounts & the Latin Tongue so far as He shall incline to learn the same, & to pay for his dyet & boarding after the Expiration of the said term Six Monthly, if He shall spend Twelve Months at learning the Latin Tongue or Three Months dyet, if he spends but Six months.²¹

Another apprentice was Samuel Eldridge, who is described in the records as "a promising genius and may probably be in a few years well qualify'd to teach the Latin and Greek Languages &c and may soon be employ'd as an Usher."²² The overseers' prognosis was apparently accurate; in less than three years time, Samuel Eldridge had indeed become an usher, and was running the school in the absence of the master, Charles Thomson. Eldridge was commended in a most rewarding way by the overseers: "In consideration of Samuel Eldridge's Industry & that for some time past Charles Thomson's Marriage & other Engagements have frequently Prevented his attendance on his School & increas'd Samuel's Task more than was expected, agreed that the Treasurer should pay him seven Pounds as a Present, to encourage him in well doing."²³

On occasion, the overseers reported that they had made provision for training informally some of their pupils in the hope that eventually they might teach in Friends' schools. One such pupil was John Webster, who was described by master John Thompson as being "very industrious and attentive to his Studies."²⁴ Thompson reported to the overseers that Webster was most helpful to him in the management of the school, "but is so circumstanced that he cannot pay the expence of his Board and Lodging." The overseers allowed him twenty-five pounds "for the ensuing six months to enable him to proceed on his present studies and to encourage him to assist in such services in the School as the master may think him qualified to perform."²⁵ The next year, the records show that Webster was Thompson's usher, a position in which he continued until Thompson left the

²¹ "Indenture of Phineas Jenkins to learn the mystery of teaching," 1756.

²² Overseers Minutes, I, 139 (Feb. 26, 1736).

²³ *Ibid.*, I, 175 (Jan. 24, 1759).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 29 (Oct. 28, 1773).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Latin School in about 1779. Every year Webster's salary was increased, partly in tribute to his ability, and partly because living expenses had risen drastically during the Revolutionary War.²⁶ By 1778, Webster's salary was £100, substantial remuneration for an usher. The minutes note that this sum was allowed him because of "the present very high price of the necessities of life," and because the overseers wanted to encourage him, "he being attentive to the Duties of his Station."²⁷ That the overseers were encouraging Webster was not lost on the students, for they noted in their journal that "it is currently reported that John Thompson Esqu. has resigned his Command in New Latonia [*the Latin School*] & that John Webster (his late Deputy) has petitioned to succeed him."²⁸ The facts of the matter are not known. But two weeks later, the student writers put a final note to their earlier comment: "The Report that was sometime since circulated of Mr. Webster's having been appointed to fill the Place of Mr. Thompson & of his having opened School in Consequence thereof appears to have been without any Foundation."²⁹

Although the records do not mention by name other students who followed Webster's path, his course was not unique, as can be seen by a report that "several lads have been freely instructed so as to qualify them to become Teachers, and some such are now employed by friends as School Masters."³⁰ The overseers were not only interested in persuading likely prospects to prepare themselves for teaching, but also, on at least one occasion, tried to persuade a young usher to remain a teacher. They failed in their efforts but not before they "laid before him the disadvantages to which he might be liable by accepting the offers made him, and . . . uniting in the same judgment gave Isaac advice as the case appeared to require."³¹ Decreases in enrollment sometimes required the release of an usher for financial reasons. In 1765, the overseers reported that "the number of Scholars now in the Latin School does not answer the Expence of maintaining an Usher; it is agreed as soon as James [Dickinson] can find Employ-

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 36-37 (Oct. 27, 1774); II, 60 (Oct. 24, 1776); II, 66 (Mar. 27, 1777).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 77 (Feb. 26, 1778).

²⁸ "Students Gazette," July 8, 1778, Norris of Fairhill Manuscripts, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 22, 1778.

³⁰ Overseers Minutes, II, 98 (July 12, 1779).

³¹ *Ibid.*, II, 149 (May 30, 1782).

ment in another Place he may be discharged, which the Committee is to acquaint him."³² James was apparently resourceful; the minutes report that he soon left for a new job.

Sometimes masters gave up teaching to enter other fields. In 1760, Charles Thomson "having lately married declines the Business of School Keeping to follow Merchandize."³³ Occasionally, ill health was a reason given for resignations. Joseph King decided in 1755 that being an usher did "not suit his Health nor Inclination," and submitted his required six months notice.³⁴ Actual firings of masters or ushers for lack of competence appear to have been rare. One such discharge occurred in 1777 when Edward Miles, usher in the Latin School, was released, apparently without notice. The minutes are brief and do not mention the reason for his discharge: "One of the Committee appointed to speak to Edward Miles informs the board that it appeared expedient to discharge him, and that in pursuance thereof the treasurer hath paid him his wages."³⁵

Salaries of masters and mistresses in the various Friends' schools were comparable to those paid other teachers in Philadelphia during the same period.³⁶ Mistresses received salaries far lower than masters, while masters in the Negro and English Schools, experienced as many of them were, did not command salaries as high as those paid to teachers in the Latin School.³⁷ Throughout the century, the latter were favored in remuneration.

Matters such as this are relative, however, and it is apparent that teaching, even in the Latin School, was hard work for little pecuniary reward. In 1702, master John Cadwalader advised the meeting that "his Salery is too little and that he cannot maintain his family therewith."³⁸ The Meeting must have thought there was merit in his complaint, for his pay was increased to £50 "this Ensuing year," with the promise of further consideration, "if that be too little."³⁹ Several

³² *Ibid.*, I, 284 (Jan. 24, 1765).

³³ *Ibid.*, I, 193 (Feb. 5, 1760).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 131 (June 26, 1755).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 69 (Apr. 24, 1777).

³⁶ Thomas Woody, *Early Quaker Education in Pennsylvania* (New York, 1920), 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Minutes Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Quaker Archives, 304 Arch Street, Philadelphia, 159 (Jan. 27, 1702).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

decades later, the overseers agreed to the request of master Alex Buller that he hire an usher at £50 to help him in teaching the Latin School boys. Buller's request was as follows: "If the Trustees think proper to enable me to take up a good Usher by allowing me fifty pounds a year, I propose to teach any number of poor Boys, not exceeding fifteen, any Branch or Branches of Learning that the Trustees will please to direct. Considering the great fatigue, and constant Application absolutely necessary, Faithfully to discharge such a trust, tis hoped the sum proposed will be tho't very reasonable."⁴⁰

Sometimes other inducements were offered the master in addition to salary. George Keith,⁴¹ the first master of the Latin School, was given his pay and "a house for his family to live in, a school-house provided, and the profits of the school beside, for one year." Keith's salary, had he remained beyond the first year, was to have been increased to £120, more than one and a half times his beginning salary, an exceedingly generous increase.⁴²

Throughout the years, there was considerable fluctuation in salaries. These variations depended, among other factors, upon the financial state of the schools, the number of pupils, the success of the overseers in securing subscriptions, and the economy of the times themselves. While, in 1746, a master to be recruited from England was to receive a salary of £150, in 1760 the new teacher similarly being sought was to be offered "a Salary not to exceed £100 per year."⁴³ Generally, the overseers were responsive to requests by masters for salary increases. Charles Thomson in 1757 received a considerable increase. He had proposed to the overseers that a higher salary seemed fair "as his labour and trouble is increased by the additional number of Scholars and his having undertaken to instruct them in some Branches of Learning not at first proposed to him."

⁴⁰ Alex Buller to overseers, Feb. 5, 1739.

⁴¹ A convert to Quakerism, Keith was a man of commanding intellectual ability, had been connected with Barclay in the preparation of the *Apology*, and had traveled with Fox and Penn in Europe. Arriving in New Jersey in 1684, he did important work as Surveyor-General in running the boundary line between East and West Jersey. In 1693, he published *Exhortation against buying Negroes*, one of the earliest tracts against slavery. Returning to England after bitter disagreement with Friends, he became an Episcopalian.

⁴² Robert Proud, *The History of Pennsylvania in North America* (Philadelphia, 1797-1798), I, 345.

⁴³ Overseers Minutes, I, 192 (Jan. 31, 1760).

The overseers stated that they were "well satisfy'd with his Services & desirous of encouraging him to persevere in the discharge of his Duty with faithfulness and industry," and authorized an increase from £150 to £200 per year.⁴⁴ Five years later, William Fentham, usher to Robert Proud, received a raise from £80 to £100 because his present salary "is insufficient to support his family." Since the increase was not to be effective until five months later, William, in dire financial straits, borrowed £30 from the overseers to tide him over, the loan "to be repaid out of his next years Salary in quarterly Payments of £7.10 . . . each."⁴⁵

Robert Proud was so distressed about his failure to receive an increase when expenses and costs had mounted that he wrote a fervent letter to the overseers in 1782, declaring that he would assume he was dismissed if his request was not heeded:

That he [*Proud*] thinks it something strange, that the Board . . . could possibly avoid taking Notice of his present situation, in a Manner similar to that, which he proposes to them; seeing they are not unacquainted with the continued Change of Times & Things, & have themselves so long been obliged, for these years past, to advance, at least, Double Prices for Work Done, of everything, not only about the School itself, but also in all other Plans, where they have had Business performed, *except to the Master of that School alone*; & that, notwithstanding they have now been receiving an Advance of £20 per An. from every Scholar in the said School, for several years; *which makes an Addition of above £30 per An. to their annual Income*, yet the said Master receives not one Farthing Advance; & that, in this Respect, they must necessarily know, *there is not a Case Similar to his in Philadelphia*.⁴⁶

Fortunately for the Latin School, Proud was granted an increase and continued teaching for eight years. Although he had asked for a raise of £50, adding that it ought to be four times that, "in proportion to the Rise of all other Wages, & the Advanced Prices of everything of the Necessaries & Conveniences of Life,"⁴⁷ he was willing to settle for less. The minutes of the next meeting of the overseers record that "it is agreed to allow him in addition to his former salary of £200 a

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 154 (Mar. 23, 1757).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 249 (July 29, 1762); I, 251 (Sept. 21, 1762).

⁴⁶ Robert Proud to overseers, Dec. 8, 1782.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

year, the sum of £33.6.8 a year for three years which will end in the 4 mo. next, and for the succeeding year from that Time, his Salary to be two hundred and fifty Pounds.”⁴⁸

In 1796, Jared Mansfield wrote the overseers an earnest letter, explaining his increased expenses and questioning the fairness of paying married teachers more than single ones:

When proposals were first made to me . . . to undertake the charge of a grammar school in Philadelphia, two conditions . . . appeared most worthy of notice & were the grounds of my resolution at that time.

First—board and washing would not exceed £75 currency per annum.

The other, that at the conclusion of the year, if the person should be found agreeable to the Friends the salary would be raised—& that . . . would be added to the proposed £250 if he should have a family.

Delicacy hath hitherto restrained me from making any observations on either of the above mentioned points. I would now beg leave to observe, that my expences for board & washing have much exceeded the sum of £75 & they are all the while rapidly advancing & even this advanced price does not enable me to live as I would wish.

With respect to the other point, it is obvious that were I to serve another year without any greater compensation . . . I should labour under the imputation of not having fulfilled my duty, at least to the satisfaction of the board of Trustees, which would be a circumstance too poignant for my feelings to endure. My friends too at home would know these conditions would naturally suspect that during my residence in this city, some extraordinary delinquency had taken place on my part. This, Gentlemen, is a point of honor I cannot easily surmount, neither can I see any reason why a man is not entitled to the same compensation for his service while in a single, as in a married state. The [extra money] allowed to the married man, can be considered in no other light than as a bounty on matrimony, not as a recompence for services, unless it can be proved that the person married has necessarily more industry, learning & genius.⁴⁹

His plea resulted in a raise, granted, according to the overseers, because of “the present reduced value of Money.”⁵⁰ Mollified, Mansfield stayed on as master of the Latin School for two and a half years more.

While the records show that certain salaries were increased for various reasons, they also show that some masters continued to re-

⁴⁸ Overseers Minutes, II, 160 (Jan. 30, 1783).

⁴⁹ Jared Mansfield to overseers, Apr. 23, 1796.

⁵⁰ Overseers Minutes, III, 73 (Apr. 28, 1796).

ceive the same amounts year after year. Anthony Benezet,⁵¹ hired in 1742 at £50 "to teach Writing, Arithmetik, Acco.ts & the French Language" to children in the Latin School was earning the same salary nine years later.⁵² It would appear that some increases came as a result of requests, and that those masters who did not ask for more did not receive higher pay. Requests were not always granted. Miles Merwin, who had taught for a year, sought an increase in 1791, but "the Board being united in Opinion that the present Salary is equal to the Qualifications of the Teacher," denied his request. Although the overseers suggested that he "think himself at Liberty to resign," Merwin agreed to continue for six months more at his salary of £150. Apparently, the overseers were later not able to find an appropriate successor for Merwin, and had to ask him to continue in the post: when "our present Contract with him will expire," his salary would be increased to £200 "if on Examination he shall be found so to have improved since his Undertaking the Charge of the School as to make such an Augmentation of his Salary proper."⁵³

When the number of scholars was small, one way to keep the school open was to reduce the master's salary. In such a situation, master Enos Bronson was asked to accept a reduction of £100 from his £300 stipend. Bronson agreed and the school was continued with only ten pupils.⁵⁴

Masters charged their pupils for fuel, for pens and ink, and, particularly during the Revolutionary period, for entrance fees. The overseers, in commenting on Robert Proud's report on the Latin School in 1784, noted that he charged six pounds a year per pupil, "for which he accounts to the Overseers, and has for about a year past received one guinea at the entrance of each Scholar for his own use; and charges five Shillings each for Fuel."⁵⁵ Two years later, the

⁵¹ Anthony Benezet, an overseer in Friends' schools for two years and a teacher in them for forty, was a well-loved Philadelphian, humanitarian, and abolitionist. He worked actively to help the plight of the Acadians, and wrote tracts against slavery which he sent to influential people here and abroad in an effort to enlist their help and support. He wrote at length on educational matters and opened and ran the school for Negroes. Benezet willed his library to the Friends for their schools, and his modest estate to sustain a school for Negroes.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I, 33 (Nov. 31, 1742); I, 87 (Jan. 28, 1751).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, II, 429 (June 2, 1791); II, 430 (June 23, 1791); II, 432 (Aug. 4, 1791).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 143 (Apr. 10, 1800).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 190 (Jan. 7, 1784).

overseers, worried about the varying charges made by masters in the different schools, and about the entrance fees with which masters were augmenting their salaries, specified what the charges should be. Cautioning masters not to "exceed the Sums hereafter Specified," they ended their directive with a statement that must have caused considerable disappointment: "no Entrance fee shall be taken by any of the Teachers."⁵⁶ The ruling apparently did not bring about the expected results for, two months later, the overseers made the following pronouncement:

Some of the Masters recieve large Perquisites as Entrance Fees tho' their quarterly Rate for teaching is not scanty. We think this Practice should be abolished.

Five shillings each Scholar, and sometimes more, is Charged by the Teachers for Winters Firing, whereby an additional Perquisite is pocketed by some of them to the undue Increase of the Expence of Schooling Children; this should be limitted, if not to three shillings & ninepence. . . .⁵⁷

In support of their position, the overseers pointed to the depressed state of "business in general [which] is reduced to a very low Ebb, money become scarce, House Rent and every real convenience of Life greatly reduced in Price," and contrasted it with conditions before the Revolutionary War when "a temporary Briskness of Trade took place, so as to occasion a free & plentiful Circulation of Money. . . ."⁵⁸

Despite the financial vicissitudes of teaching, a large number of the Latin School masters and ushers continued at their tasks with zeal and conscientiousness. Perhaps some of them felt as Anthony Benezet did when, after teaching for more than forty years, he described a new responsibility he had undertaken, as "teacher of the Black Children & others of that people," as "an employment which tho' not attended with so great pecuniary advantages as others might be, yet affords me much satisfaction, I know no station of life I should prefere before it."⁵⁹

The responsibilities of the masters were expected to extend well beyond teaching. They were also to see that their scholars attended

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 308-309 (July 12, 1786).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 310-311 (Sept. 7, 1786).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Anthony Benezet to Benjamin Franklin, Mar. 5, 1783, Letters to Dr. Franklin, American Philosophical Society.

meeting on Thursdays and Sundays, and were to accompany them and to keep order.⁶⁰ Respite from this chore was sometimes sought, as can be seen in a somewhat plaintive letter from Alex Seaton in 1761, asking to be excused from further attendance at meetings with his pupils: "And also as I have diligently attended the Scholars from y.e. School House to Week-Day Meetings, and have sat with them in Meetings on first Days as well as on Week-Days, ever since y.e. board has been pleased to employ me, being now advanced in Years and the same becoming more and more burthensome to my Mind, I request I may be excused from sitting in the Gallary with them on first Days any longer."⁶¹ That not all masters were assiduous in this duty was pointed out in a subsequent letter of Seaton's: "Yet as we understand that Thomas Kite is appointed to attend on all other Meetings and Committees . . . which he is paid for, altho', he seldom doth it, leaving it almost entirely upon me and my Usher, and George Smith and Moles Patterson object against it as doing another Mans Business for which he is paid."⁶²

Masters were expected to arrive at the schoolhouse early, "before the School hours, by which means an orderly behaviour will become familiar & in time Habitual to their Scholars,"⁶³ and to see that their pupils read the Bible daily.⁶⁴ During the last several decades of the eighteenth century, the overseers worried about what seemed to them to be an increasing departure of masters and scholars from Quaker ways. The rules and advice to teachers during this period particularly urged a return to the plain style in language: "The variety of Style in our Language being much increased, and too much attention being paid to that which is merely ornamental, we think it our Duty to recommend to you, to teach the Children, as much as possible, what may, with Propriety, be called a plain Style. This will necessarily include the attention to the plain Language. . . ."⁶⁵ It may have been this same concern for "that which is merely ornamental" which occasioned the following observation in a student journal in

⁶⁰ Minutes Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, 259 (Mar. 27, 1709); Overseers Minutes, I, 27 (Jan. 29, 1739); II, 190 (Jan. 7, 1784).

⁶¹ Alex Seaton to overseers, Jan. 30, 1761.

⁶² Alex Seaton to overseers, Mar. 26, 1761.

⁶³ Overseers Minutes, I, 103 (Apr. 26, 1753).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; see also III, 68 (Feb. 11, 1796).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 69 (Feb. 11, 1796); Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House* (Chapel Hill, 1948), 239.

1778: "from a certain Expression which lately drop'd from one of the Overseers we have the greatest Reason to beleive that Mr. Webster's gay Appearance is rather disagreeable."⁶⁶

From time to time, the overseers drew up formal directives for the masters. Included among the "instructions for the Latin and English Masters & Mistresses of the Publick School in Philadelphia," in 1748, were reminders about the manners and morals of their pupils as well as of the skills to be expected of the scholars in analyzing Latin and learning English grammar better.⁶⁷ The directives sometimes stemmed from dissatisfaction with what the overseers' committees had observed in their visits to the schools, and a determination to correct these shortcomings. Exhortations about the maintenance of discipline were usually included in the directives, and suggestions as to how it could be improved varied widely as did also the explanations for its lack. An overseer's report in 1798 blamed teachers who enrolled larger numbers of pupils than they could effectively teach and control: "The teachers generally take a much larger number than they can do justice to in bringing them forward in learning and, what is, perhaps, of greater importance, maintaining that Stillness, Sobriety and Industry in the Schools, wherein Children cannot be too early initiated and which may be of essential advantage to them during the remaining Course of their Lives."⁶⁸ The solutions offered for the improvement of the situation included reducing the number of pupils in the schools, and confining the schools "primarily to those of our religious Society."⁶⁹ In an effort to enlist the help of both teachers and students in improving manners and morals, the overseers in 1796 provided instructions for both. Pupils were reminded that, not only should they observe the rules but also that "*the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom.*" With this admonition borne in mind, the overseers believed that "much Advice will be unnecessary, and without it, none will be effectual."⁷⁰ The masters were advised that "the strongest of all Ties is that of Love," which "will make the Use of the Rod in a good degree unnecessary, and will in-

⁶⁶ "Students Gazette," June 17, 1778, Norris of Fairhill Manuscripts.

⁶⁷ Overseers Minutes, I, 104-105 (Apr. 26, 1753).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 111 (June 7, 1798).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ "Advice to the Scholars" (Feb. 11, 1796).

duce the Children to love and respect rather than to fear you.”⁷¹ In the event that love should fail, however, there were listed detailed and practical rules to be used by teachers in the preservation of order, including a quiet period before daily dismissal: “The absolute Necessity of Stillness in School Hours need hardly be pointed out; it must strike you in the most forcible manner from Reason and Experience; and we believe it will much conduce to good Order, if a Short Time is spent in Silence just before the Dismission of the Scholars.”⁷² If other methods of discipline failed, the overseers stood ready to help the masters “with stubborn and refractory Scholars. . . .”⁷³ There were, indeed, occasions when masters took advantage of the offers of help and advice from the overseers. In 1783, a master deplored “the too general Depravity of the Youth in this City,” which affected the children of Friends; he sought the advice and assistance of the overseers in enforcing the rules and regulations.⁷⁴

In addition to matters of a spiritual and moral nature, masters were expected to cope with various temporal matters. There were instructions that they see to it that “the Walls of the School Room . . . be whitewashed two or three Times a Year, and the Floors, Desks & Benches often washed.”⁷⁵ Building maintenance was another responsibility. Anthony Benezet requested a new window in the school-house, “which at present is Subject for want of one to the inconveniences of great heat in Summer & of being too dark in winter.”⁷⁶ Shortly thereafter he found it necessary “to have an alley open’d from the back of the School House lott to the Second Street thro’ the Meeting house yard,” and at the same time reported that the fence and gate to the yard needed fixing, “if the meeting is willing to allow it.”⁷⁷ Robert Proud noted the “Unfitness of W. Waring’s Room [*for the Mathematical School*] for the Use intended, by Reason of it’s Smalness . . . & it’s not being properly furnished. . . . The Windows are much out of order. . . . There is no proper Place to keep

⁷¹ Overseers Minutes, III, 68 (Feb. 11, 1796).

⁷² *Ibid.*, III, 68–69.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 193 (Dec. 23, 1783).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 68 (Feb. 11, 1796).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 39 (Apr. 28, 1744).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 40 (Aug. 25, 1744).

Instruments &c.”⁷⁸ James Thompson was so overwhelmed with the many obstacles that interfered with his teaching in the Latin School that he fired off a plaintive letter to the overseers reporting his frustration.

Gentlemen

Conceiving that I have cause to complain of the Scholars belonging to your Mathematical School, I think proper to address you. . . .

Last winter, with the consent of Mr. Craig [*teacher of the Mathematical School*] & myself, the Scholars of the Mathematical School were admitted to a common use of the Yard & Privy, which before had been appropriated to the Scholars of the Latin School alone. A few weeks since, finding it impracticable to teach for the noise about my door & windows, I locked the middle door & thus excluded the Scholars of the Mathematical School from the Yard. In a short time the lock was broken, torn off, & thrown away. Since that time they have been more troublesome than before. That School is dismissed earlier than mine. Immediately after dismissal the boys collect in the Yard for play in express violation of one of your own Rules which requires of the Scholars “a direct returning from School to their different homes.” They also refuse to leave the place at my request, disobeying another of your rules in which “Respect to School-masters” is enjoined. As this interruption uniformly happens during the reading of the holy Scriptures in my School it is a particular grievance.

The privy has likewise been rendered quite useless, by the destruction of its door and other abuses. . . .⁷⁹

Caring for the school library was one of Anthony Benezet’s obligations for some years. Finally, at his request, the overseers excused him from this chore and assigned it to John Wilson, who was “willing to undertake that Service.”⁸⁰ William Waring, by virtue of his skill as a glass blower, added the making of glass tubes to his teaching duties: “As these [*three dozen glass tubes of different sizes*] are to be sent blown into various Forms for divers Purposes, are so liable to Accidents, and the Price not great, the above Number will, perhaps be quite little enough. I can bend, & blow them into Bulbs, &c. myself.”⁸¹ Master Alex Seaton lent his own stove to the school, and then advised the overseers that he was going to take it home: “And having made use

⁷⁸ Robert Proud to overseers, May 20, 1786.

⁷⁹ James Thompson to overseers, Jan. 1, 1803.

⁸⁰ Overseers Minutes, I, 88 (Feb. 24, 1751).

⁸¹ William Waring to overseers, May 12, 1786

of my own Stove in this School these seven years past, I think it necessary (firewood being dear) to have it set up at Home, hoping as it has saved a considerable Expence in Firewood the Board will provide another."⁸²

In one instance, a teacher from another Friends school was paid to sweep the Latin School and to take care of it. In 1791, Jeremiah Paul received "Three pounds for Sweeping and Taking care of the School Room Employed by the Latin Teachers & Scholars one year. . . ."⁸³ For the most part, however, taking care of the school-room was probably the lot of the usher. William Dickinson, usher to John Todd in 1764, signed an agreement that included the following responsibilities:

in the Morning William Open School in Seasonable time make Fires & That he endeavor to Suppress the Noise and Rude behaviour of the Scholars in and about the School House from Twelve OClock to two. That at breaking up School in the Afternoon He do shut the Doors and Windows. That he Walk to Meeting with the Scholars on Week Days, & sit in the great Meeting House Gallery with them on first Days both forenoon & afternoon. That he attend on the Overseers of the School at their Meetings in the School House, light candles, & make Fires for them, seeing the Fires extinguished carefully when they are gone.⁸⁴

The masters were expected to confer with overseers' visitation committees, which visited the schools at monthly or quarterly intervals.⁸⁵ They were also expected to submit reports on various phases of their schools' activities. In 1764, the overseers directed that teachers compile rolls of the students which they were to call every day, and to list those pupils who were absent: "Most of the Schools having been visited last Week . . . it is now agreed that hereafter the Masters and Mistresses of the several Schools shall keep regular catalogues of all their Scholars in Columns to be called over at every Meet.g of the School, and Notes made thereon of such as are absent, and that they shall deliver these Catalogues to the Committees at the Time they visit the Schools for their Inspection. . . ."⁸⁶

⁸² Alex Seaton to overseers, July 30, 1761.

⁸³ Account Book (April, 1789 to November, 1795).

⁸⁴ William Dickinson's agreement with John Todd (Apr. 16, 1764).

⁸⁵ Overseers Minutes, I, 77 (Nov. 25, 1749); II, 450 (Aug. 30, 1792).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 283 (Dec. 27, 1764); see also III, 62-63 (Dec. 10, 1795).

Report cards for the "Charity Scholars" were requested of the masters in 1796, "with occasional Remarks concerning their Attendance, Improvement & general Conduct."⁸⁷

Although the overseers, for the most part, decided upon and bought the books to be used in the schools, the masters sometimes made recommendations for books and equipment, and for means of improving instruction. In 1781, Robert Proud recommended that provision be made "in the roof [*of the school building*] for Astronomical observations to encourage his Schollars in mathematical learning." The overseers agreed, "provided they can be accomplished without much additional expence."⁸⁸

In 1769, John Wilson felt so strongly about the inappropriateness of Latin study for the boys in the Latin School that he tendered his resignation to the overseers in a long letter vividly explaining his position.⁸⁹ His arguments against the teaching of Latin pointed to the early ages at which boys must leave school, the fact that most of them "are intended . . . for merchantile or mechanick Employments," and the long years devoted to the study of Latin prevented them from studying their own language and cyphering. By the time the boys completed their apprenticeships, he observed, they have "totally forgot their Latin," and are "unable to cash up a Bill of Parcells or answer the most common Questions in arithmetick." A boy went from school "unable to express himself with any tolerable justness or propriety and an utter Stranger to the nature and construction of his Mother Tongue." Wilson conceded that Latin might indeed be an important study for boys of "extraordinary Capacities," and for those preparing to be "Doctors and Lawyers Criticks and Commentators," and chided the overseers for their lenient admissions policy to the Latin School. "You use Care and Caution in admitting poor children to learn to read English which ought to be taught to all," he wrote, "but little or none in admitting Latin Scholars which is a Science that none ought to learn but Boys

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 68 (Feb. 11, 1796).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 139 (Sept. 19, 1781).

⁸⁹ John Wilson to overseers, Dec. 28, 1769. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, several of Wilson's contemporaries wrote against the emphasis on Latin in schools of the time, protesting on moral and religious grounds, and on practical grounds of making the best use of the few years available for schooling. Among such writers were Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Rush, and Benjamin Franklin.

of Capacity. . . ." One of his most powerful arguments was that the study of Latin violated Quaker teachings by "debauching their offspring with the rubbish of Paganism."

Is it not surprizing? is it not Monstrous? that Christian Children intended to believe and relish the Truths of the Gospel should have their early and most retentive years imbued with the shocking Legends and abominable Romances of the worst of Heathens should be obliged to be Pimps of the detestable Lusts of Jupiter & Mars attend the thefts & Villainy of Mercury or follow Aeneas on his Murdering Progress while the Actions and Sufferings of the great and worthy Propagators of our Holy Religion that Succeeded the Apostles are totally hid from their Eyes. Is Bacchus preferable to Ignatius, Apollo to Origin or will Helena and Clytemnestra yield an affecting Instruction or warm our Hearts with the Love of Virtue like the Virgin Martyrs & Heroines of Christian Story.⁹⁰

Among the memoranda Robert Proud sent to the overseers on matters he deemed of importance to the Latin School was one advising that the school's "Collection of Books," after twenty-five years of use needed repairs, replacement and supplementing:

. . . by constant Use & Length of Time many of the said Books are become so much Defaced, worn out, or useless, that the Intention of the said Collection is not now so well answered as could be Desired. . . . That he desires to propose to the Consideration of the Board whether, at this Time, it may be proper not only to support what was long ago so prudently begun of this Nature, but also to improve the same, by a Renewal of such of these Books as want it, & by proper addition of such others as may be thought necessary & useful; not only among the Classics, in the first Place, but also in modern History, Mathematics & the most useful Parts of Philosophy, in the Gr. Lat. . . . & Eng. Languages; with suitable Maps, for Geography, Instruments in the Mathematics & other apparatus for some Parts of Philosophy; such as are best adapted for the Instruction & Improvement of youth in the most necessary & useful Branches of Science. . . .⁹¹

Proud estimated that it would take between two and three hundred pounds "for this laudable purpose." So that there would be no question about the ownership of the books, Proud asked for "a Number of the Stamps of the School Arms to be inserted in the printed Books belonging to the School."⁹²

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Robert Proud to overseers, Jan. 25, 1786.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Several textbooks adopted by the overseers for use in Friends' schools were written by masters. In 1778, the overseers bought, for the "Schools in Town and Country," 100 copies of the spelling books and 300 copies of the primer which had been written by Anthony Benezet. Benezet's publishing venture was apparently most successful, for in 1782 he prepared a second edition of the *Pennsylvania Spelling Book*, revising and enlarging the original version to 168 pages.⁹³ Having collaborated on an arithmetic book, thirteen masters in 1789 wrote a joint letter to the overseers telling of their effort. The contents of their work were written with "that plainness of Style, which ought to be observ'd by Members of our religious Society": the *Treatise on Arithmetic* was said to be "well adapted to the Trade & Commerce of America," and the masters hoped the overseers would give it their "approbation" and would encourage the printing of the work.⁹⁴ The book was duly published and favorably received, and in 1792, the overseers authorized the purchase "at our Expence any Number not exceeding two Dozen of that lately published by the Teachers of this City and to distribute them amongst the Schools under our Care."⁹⁵

Masters were expected to confer with overseers about important school matters and had little autonomy of their own. In 1737, the master of the Latin School was ordered "not to admit any Scholars without the direction of two or more of the Friends."⁹⁶ Students could be expelled only "by order of the Overseers."⁹⁷ In 1791, the teachers, taking matters into their own hands, decided on their vacation times "without consulting the Board, for a longer Time than was convenient." This independence was not to be tolerated and a cryptic comment in the records indicated future procedure: "it is desired that the Masters may be informed that the Overseers expect to be consulted on future Occasions of this Nature."⁹⁸ The following summer, the overseers, relenting somewhat, told the masters that they "may chuse at what Time to give the scholars a Vacation not to ex-

⁹³ George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia, 1937), 56.

⁹⁴ John Todd, William Waring, Joseph Clark, Mord. Churchman, *et al.* to overseers, Apr. 18, 1789.

⁹⁵ Overseers Minutes, II, 447 (Apr. 26, 1792).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 25 (Sept. 7, 1737).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 63 (Dec. 10, 1795).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 433 (Aug. 25, 1791).

ceed two weeks in the next Seventh or eighth month.”⁹⁹ Even pupils who received prizes or premiums, although initially selected by the master of the Latin School, had to be approved by “the Committee who visit the Schools.”¹⁰⁰ The boys themselves were not unaware that the overseers represented the final authority, even though their master had a hand in some decisions. In 1777, a student journalist, his vocabulary no doubt affected by the general spirit of the Revolution, reported that “on Saturday the 27th of September the Right Honorable John Thompson Esqr Govenor of Latonia Commander in Chief of the Forces there unto belonging & Lord High Admiral of the same [*master of the Latin School*] was most graciously pleased by & with the Consent of the Honorable the Overseers of the said State to grant the following Week as a Holiday on account of the Friends Yearly Meeting which was held that week.”¹⁰¹

During the period of the Revolutionary War, the masters in the Friends schools experienced, as did the populace as a whole, the hardships of the times. In addition, they were harassed by the Test Laws, oaths of allegiance to the new government which were required. Acceptance of them would have been in direct violation of Friends' moral and religious convictions. In October, 1779, the overseers called a special meeting to consider this matter, and agreed to try to prevail on teachers not to relinquish either their faith or their schools, and to point out “the disadvantages ensuing from their withdrawing from [the schools], and to excite them to stability of conduct consistent with our religious profession on this occasion.”¹⁰² At the end of the month, however, the Latin and Mathematical Schools were discontinued because the masters, John Thompson and John Todd, had “apprehensions of being prosecuted on the late act of Assembly.”¹⁰³ The next month, November, 1779, the overseers sent a memorial to the Pennsylvania Assembly protesting the Test Laws requiring oaths of allegiance by teachers.¹⁰⁴ John Todd reopened his school one month after its close, but John Thompson, who had been

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 449 (June 26, 1792).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 150 (Dec. 30, 1756).

¹⁰¹ “Students Gazette,” Oct. 9, 1777, Norris of Fairhill Manuscripts.

¹⁰² Overseers Minutes, II, 104 (Oct. 12, 1779).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, II, 105 (Oct. 28, 1779).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 107–111 (Nov. 25, 1779).

teacher of the Latin School for nine years, told the overseers that he did "not incline again to enter on the employment."¹⁰⁵ The Latin School remained closed until Robert Proud reopened it several months later.

Although being a teacher in the Latin School in the eighteenth century entailed many obligations and restraints, faith and optimism in the educational process and a friendly regard of overseers and masters for each other are evident. This was best reflected in a letter of resignation from Jared Mansfield in 1798. Having completed four years as master of the Latin School, he wrote to the overseers that at the time of his departure he would have met such obligations which "will then expire; there is one species of them however founded on gratitude, which I consider as eternal; & which caused me to acknowledge the many kindness & favors I have received from individuals as well as the board collectively. . . . It is my wish that you may procure a master whose mind & body are more capable of enduring this arduous business & whose qualifications may enable him to compleat the education of the amiable youth. . . ." And lest it be thought that Mansfield was too humble about his own accomplishments as a teacher, he concluded his comments about "the amiable youth" by remarking that he had succeeded in removing "the difficulties . . . in most of them. . . ."¹⁰⁶

Ohio State University

JEAN S. STRAUB

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 112 (Dec. 30, 1779); II, 115 (Jan. 27, 1780).

¹⁰⁶ Jared Mansfield to overseers, Dec. 27, 1798.