

## HENRY CLAY FRICK AND PITTSBURGH'S CHILDREN<sup>1</sup>

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THE NAME of Henry Clay Frick is one long to be remembered by many people in various parts of our country. He was one of that large group of Pittsburgh millionaires which included Henry Phipps, B. F. Jones, William Thaw, Andrew Carnegie, Charles Schwab, H. J. Heinz, and Andrew Mellon. Like many of these men, Mr. Frick spread his benefactions not only over his own city but also far and wide.

Several universities, many hospitals, and other institutions had their endowment funds greatly increased by the Pittsburgh industrialist. Certainly Princeton University will not forget Henry Clay Frick's princely gifts. He gave to his own city of Pittsburgh 151 acres of wooded land for a park and \$2,000,000 in trust for its maintenance. He gave to New York City his magnificent home at Number One, East Seventieth Street, with a priceless collection of art for a public gallery. With it, he gave a trust fund of \$15,000,000 "for encouraging and developing the study of fine arts." The Frick gift to New York is the best known and has won him wide acclaim, but his most important gift was to Pittsburgh (not the park) and it has been little known to the outside world. It is a story worth the telling.

By the opening of the twentieth century Mr. Frick had acquired many millions in the coke, coal, and steel industries and had already established many of his philanthropies. He determined, however, to find yet a better way to help his own city. (Although in later life he resided in New York he always retained his citizenship in Pittsburgh.) Why did he decide to work through the children? It is probable, that he "inherited the tendency" from his maternal grandfather whom he so greatly admired. That ancestor, Abraham Overholt, had worked untiringly to increase the educational privileges for the youth of the commonwealth. As a boy Henry Clay Frick had often heard of that successful struggle and as a man he probably wanted to emulate his grand-

<sup>1</sup> A condensation of this article has been published, under the title "A Unique Philanthropy," in *NEA Journal*, 35:31 (January, 1946).

father. By the summer of 1908, the advice of a renowned contemporary was added. While staying at his summer home at Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts, Mr. Frick was again mulling over the whole subject of benefactions to his city and finally asked the advice of a guest, Dr. Leon Gorodiche. This famous Russian specialist suggested that a foundation be established for the benefit of the children of Pittsburgh. His opinion seems to have been the decisive factor, for Frick determined to help his city by helping its children.

To that end, he asked Dr. John Brashear, the former millwright who had become the noted craftsman and scientist, for ideas and methods of procedure. A committee of seven representative men was formed with "Uncle John" Brashear as the chairman. The other members were: Judge John D. Shafer, Charles Reisfar, Jr., Charles F. Scott, W. Lucian Scaife, Judge Joseph Buffington, and Dr. George W. Gerwig. The last two are the only living members.

After much discussion this committee could not agree on a plan which would give the maximum benefit to the children. Nor could prominent people in the civic and educational fields help it make a decision. Finally in desperation and only after these leaders had failed, the committee decided to ask the advice of the Pittsburgh teachers of the public schools. Accordingly, a questionnaire was sent to each of the nineteen hundred teachers then in the system. It stated only that "a friend" of Pittsburgh wished to do something for the children of the city and would welcome suggestions to that end from the teachers. All suggestions were to be sent in before a certain early date.

It is rare to have the advice of teachers asked by administrators or civic leaders; it is rarer still to have that advice followed. So perhaps this letter seemed too visionary, too will-o'-the-wisp to the tired teacher near the end of the school year as she faced the concrete problems of the day; perhaps it seemed a way to aid somebody in getting a doctor's degree in education; perhaps the majority of the teachers were too careless to get a reply written before the dead line, or maybe, like the committee, they, too, could not decide what suggestion to offer. For whatever reason, only sixty-nine teachers replied. For this seeming lack of

interest and inability to respond unanimously they were chided by one member of the commission who said that "evidently the teachers of Pittsburgh were asleep at the switch," and that they had not enough interest in the matter to lead them "to invest a two-cent postage stamp."

Now what were the various suggestions of those "famous sixty-nine" apostles of uplifting ideas? The writer has talked with several of those who are still living. One suggested a sabbatical year for teachers to study; another, who had gone to Columbia the previous summer, suggested that summer school be brought to teachers without charge and that they be given free lectures by noted leaders during the year; a third asked that a teacher be sent to school a semester or a year if she promised to teach a certain number of years thereafter. In one school, little Spring Hill Grade School, the eight members of the faculty unanimously agreed, and signed one letter asking that teachers be sent to summer school.

Were the teachers selfish to ask only for themselves? One must remember that at that time the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ranked among the lowest in education among the forty-eight states rather than among the highest as at present and, although many other factors entered in, that these rankings were based largely on the amount of education the teachers had. At that time it was almost unheard of for an experienced grade teacher, who seldom earned more than sixty-five dollars a month, to have a college education. All these similar suggestions for aid in furthering the teachers' education were not, therefore, from selfish motives but from an earnest desire to cure education's basic trouble—poorly trained teachers.

The Spring Hill letter signed by the whole faculty doubtless influenced the decision of the committee. Sometime later invitations were received by the sixty-nine who had answered the questionnaire inviting them to a lunch at the famous Hotel Schenley. After enjoying delicious squab and French pastries, the teachers, consumed with curiosity, heard that a "friend of the Pittsburgh schools" had given a quarter of a million dollars, the interest of which was to be used to send teachers to summer school. Moreover, the money was available immediately and each

of the sixty-nine teachers present was to be given enough that summer of 1909 to pay two-thirds (wise decision) of her total expenses at the school of her choice. The amazed teachers sat dumb-founded! Who was the "friend"? No one knew, and the members of the committee, or Educational Fund Commission as it was now called, said the donor wished to remain anonymous. Dr. Brashear, who presided at the luncheon, gave a few instructions to the group: they were to see what "wide-awake teachers in other parts of the country were doing," to acquire more knowledge, to have some social activities, not to work too hard, and to hand in a written report of the summer to the commission upon their return. Then the teachers, almost intoxicated with pleasurable surprise, went home to decide what school to attend and to wait for "those beautiful checks."

The chagrined 1,831 teachers who had not responded to the questionnaire irately demanded why they were not given the same advantage, but no pleading nor "political pull" could help them that year.

Thus in a very large way began a unique philanthropy which has grown to be an astounding project with many ramifications and some by-products. Like Franklin's gift it was to be passed on to others. Today, thirty-six years after the plan went into effect, its results are tremendous. Each autumn the teachers returning from various types of educational institutions, from various states in the Union, and from abroad bring the best ideas gleaned from the finest minds. Pittsburgh may not have the best schools in our country but, due to these scholarships, it should have. "Born of the generosity of a millionaire, the kindliness of a mill-right," and, may we add, the knowledge or should we say the yearning for knowledge of the classroom teacher, the idea of teacher scholarships has enlarged the thinking of a whole city and of untold thousands who for a time sojourned in it.

After several years' trial, Mr. Frick was so convinced that teacher scholarships were the best way for aiding the children of Pittsburgh that in his will, written in 1915, he left one-tenth of his entire residuary estate, or nearly three million dollars, for that purpose. Since his death in 1919, therefore, the committee has become the Henry Clay Frick

Educational Commission and has greatly enlarged the scope of its work. Mr. Frick's daughter, Miss Helen C. Frick, is a member of the commission and Dr. George Gerwig, one of the original committee, has been the guiding hand since the death of Dr. John Brashear.

To date about ten thousand scholarships have been used by almost five thousand teachers. Since every Pittsburgh teacher who wanted one, has by now had more than one, the commission has offered scholarships to a limited number of teachers of Allegheny County of which Pittsburgh is the county seat. Then, too, any teacher desiring an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the services of the social agencies available in the county can have a completely free, three-week course pertaining to the work of these agencies at the Pennsylvania College for Women in Pittsburgh. Sixteen hundred teachers have taken advantage of that type of scholarship.

We must now notice some of the other methods of reaching the same objective which the Frick commission has undertaken. During the period when Pittsburgh felt the influx of immigration from southeastern Europe the commission gave free Americanization courses for teachers, so that they might know the best methods for making "a new American" out of the former Slav or Italian. While the depression spread a black pall over the hearts of Pittsburghers (and at the same time cleared the smoke from its hills) the commission was again alert for new effort. Since most of these new citizens and many of the older ones were out of work, few courses or scholarships of any kind were given; instead a special appropriation of \$50,000 was set aside for school lunches for undernourished children. The commission has also sent certain teachers to educational conferences, brought lecturers to address them, aided vocational bureaus, and purchased books for school libraries.

Next to the original and main teacher scholarship idea, the one project which has perhaps done the most good and has been the most appreciated is that of speakers for the high school assemblies. Nearly two million boys and girls at the most impressionable ages have listened to outstanding artists, scientists, and humanitarians while they presented their high ideals in attractive and understandable forms.

The roster of these speakers has been very impressive: for example, Henry Turner Bailey and Branson De Cou, C. E. Jones and Paul Siple, Angelo Patri and George E. Vincent. Often a student has groaned when he heard he must go to assembly to hear a speaker. He had wanted to study for a test! Yet quite likely he later sat open-mouthed drinking in the inspiring message. Written comments of the students about the lectures are usually very appreciative. One student, however, candidly wrote: "In general the lecture was too deep for me, or rather I was too shallow for the lecture."

The most important by-product of the teacher scholarship plan is one which uses the same objective which Mr. Frick had—the improvement of the children. In the autumn of 1909 groups from the first summer school sessions held social gatherings, and finally the whole group of sixty-nine held a meeting, determined to form a club that would function as continuously as the Frick Fund. Naturally the teachers wished to name the club after their benefactor, but he was still unknown. Then they wanted to name it for Dr. John Brashear who was giving his time and thought to the scholarship plan. That honor he would not accept, but he did say that the club might be named for "the dearest woman in the world"; so the recipients of Frick scholarships formed the Phoebe Brashear Club. Several years later when the identity of the donor leaked out, Mr. Frick forbade the changing of the name of the organization. Thus the honor went to a friend's wife rather than to the donor!

Practically all who have received scholarships have joined the club. Through dues, contributions, and benefit bridge parties the amount of money obtained is considerable. From the beginning the club decided to help high school students to attend college and even in some cases to help them continue in high school or trade school. For the first ten years the money given was an outright gift; then the policy was changed to a loan. In this way the revolving sum increases yearly.

During the last four years about \$5,500 was lent and about \$4,000 was repaid on former loans. Even boys in the service are repaying in

small sums. In a few cases the recipient not only pays in full but adds a gift.

In December, 1938, the club bought a house in one of the poorer districts of the city and started the Martha C. Hoyt Settlement House, named after the efficient and very human secretary of Dr. Brashear. After his death, Miss Hoyt was secretary for the commission for many years and aided the teachers in every effort. The settlement project is dear to the members' hearts and has greatly benefited the neighborhood.

Thus the Phoebe Brashear Club, a by-product of the teacher scholarships, continues the donor's plan of aiding the children of Mr. Frick's home city. It has been described as "the Tenth Legion of the educational forces of Pittsburgh."

This, then, is the story in outline of the greatest philanthropy of Mr. Frick. But an outline is a mere skeleton. One should know the summer experiences of Jane Monroe or of John Doe to understand how a teacher's horizon has been enlarged by a Frick scholarship. Each year hundreds of Pittsburgh teachers have returned to school in the autumn with a broadened outlook and a deeper consecration. Teachers and students should revere the memory of Henry Clay Frick.