A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

OF UPPER DARBY TOWNSHIP

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The first settlement of European peoples made in Delaware County, and also in Pennsylvania, was that of the Swedes under John Printz of Fort Christina on Tinicum Island in the year 1642. A few miles further down the Delaware the Dutch established a settlement at Fort Nassau about two years later. A number of Quakers had emigrated from England prior to the coming of William Penn in 1682. It was these people that predominated about Chester and the land to the north. H. G. Ashmead, in his History of Delaware County (1884) says concerning Upper Darby, “Settled as it was by members of the Society of Friends, its early history lacks much in those sterling institutions which other localities, even in Delaware County, presented, but the rural population in Upper Darby, by thrifty and careful husbandry, soon made that section of the country very productive, and its inhabitants comparatively wealthy.”

Darby and Upper Darby formed but one township until 1747 when the two were divided by the authority of a township meeting for every purpose except the support of the poor. In 1786 a permanent division was effected with the present boundary lines confirmed by the Court.

Upper Darby originally contained 3,633 acres of improved land (about twelve square miles), and in the U. S. Census compiled in 1870 it was valued at $1,088,470. The area of the present Township has been somewhat reduced because of the formation of independent boroughs: Clifton Heights, Aldan, Yeadon, Lansdowne, East Lansdowne, and Millbourne. The early settlers of the Township holding, in many cases, deeds direct from William Penn, included the following people: John Kirk, John Hood, Samuel Sellers, William Garrett, Josiah Fearne, Robert Smith, William David, Robert Naylor, John Marshall, Richard Bonsall, Thomas Bradshaw, Samuel Bradshaw, Michael Blunston, Samuel Garrett, Edmund Cartledge, Adam Roads, Thomas Collier, Charles Lee, Ralph Lewis. Later residents of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries included the following names: Jonathan Evans, Nathan Garrett, Isaac Garrett, William Garrett, R. A. Given, W. Y. Hoopes, C. W. Kelley, D. B. Kelley, Thomas Kent, J. H. Levis, Samuel Levis, Oborn Levis, Levi Lukens, Abram Pennock, Robert Plumstead, Joseph Powell, John Sellers, Jesse Shore, James Shillingford, John and Hugh Whiteley, James Wolfenden, John Wolfenden, and Isaac Worrall.

Although the Friends predominated in the Township, a Methodist church was established at Pleasant Hill near the paper mills on the Darby Creek above Clifton. This was the church that was recently moved to the present site of the Broad Street Memorial Church of Drexel Hill. Another Methodist church was established at Clifton which at that time was a very busy industrial center. In 1830 James Robinson, a manufacturer then operating the factory now known as Clifton Mills, emigrated to Pennsylvania from England where he had been a lay preacher of the Swedenborgian Church. A Sunday school was organized in the old factory building at the mills now operated by Thomas Kent. Occasional services were also held in the Academy Building at Haddington, now West Philadelphia. From this movement a church organization was effected and a building constructed north of Marshall Road near Naylor’s run on ground donated by Fred and Edward Levis. The church was known as the New Jerusalem Church of Delaware County and exercised much influence in Upper Darby Township. In 1849 ground was donated for the St. Charles Borromeo Church by Charles Kelley of Kelleyville. In 1843 the church caught fire but the flames, fortunately, were extinguished before much damage was done. The church has since established a parochial school with a large enrollment of pupils drawn from Clifton Heights and the western part of Upper Darby. In 1872 the first services of the Protestant Episcopal Church were held in the public schoolhouse in what is now Clifton Heights. In 1878 the congregation had grown to a point where it was possible to build a church. Oborn

Levis donated several lots fronting on the Baltimore Turnpike, and on March 16, 1879 the debt incurred in the building on the church was entirely paid off. In 1880 a Sunday school and a parish building was constructed with the assistance of Thomas A. Scott, then president of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

During the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century, and in fact up until the present time, Upper Darby has been the center, because of its water power on Cobb’s Creek and Darby Creek, of many mill industries. The following are worthy of mention:

1. *The Upper Darby Mill* operated for many years by the Bonsall brothers and later by Edwin T. Garrett who changed the grist mill to a paper mill.

2. *Morris Trueman’s Paper Mills* located on the Darby Creek south of Kelleyville. They were formerly called Matthews Mills and in later times Beehive Mills. These mills in 1859 came into the possession of Samuel Levis who changed them into a cotton factory. In 1876 the mills were destroyed, but they were entirely rebuilt and cotton manufacturing was continued. In 1884 the buildings were again destroyed by fire and again rebuilt.

3. *The Kelleyville Mills* located on the Darby Creek operated successively by Asher Lobb, Bernard McCready, Dennis and Charles Kelley, George Campbell and Sellers Hoffman.

4. *The Modoc Mills* located on Darby Creek above the Kelleyville Mills. These were cotton mills operated by Daniel Sharkey and William Widbey.

5. *Garrett Mills* operated by William Garrett, Oborn Garrett, Thomas Garrett, and Samuel Garrett.

6. *Union Mills* also located on Darby Creek and conducted by Thomas and Samuel Garrett, John Mitchell, James Robinson, Charles Kelley and Thomas Kent.

7. *Rockburne Mills* located on the west side of Darby Creek and operated by Jonas Cowan and later by Thomas and John Kent.

8. *Clifton Mills*, paper mills located on Darby Creek and operated for many years by Oborn Levis and William Longstretch.

9. *Glenwood Mills* owned by the Levis Estate and used for many years as a paper mill. In 1862 the paper mill was torn down and a cotton and woolen factory established.

10. *Tuscarora Mill* located on the Darby Creek near the present bridge at State Road and used for many years as a paper mill. Also operated by Samuel Levis and later by William Levis. The property was later by William Levis. The property was later purchased by George Burnley who operated the mills from 1865 for a short time when Samuel Levis leased them and continued to operate them until 1870. The mills have been idle since 1882.

The mills on Cobb’s Creek included the following:

1. *Bonsall’s Saw Mill* on the present grounds of the Fernwood cemetery.

2. *Sellers’ Locomotive Works* (1831).

3. *Sellers’ Saw Mill* on Naylor’s Run.

4. *Millbank Grist Mill* on Naylor’s Run.

5. *Levis’ Blade Mill* near the Millbank Mill.

6*. Powell’s Saw Mills* on Naylor’s Run above Garrettford Road.

7. *Cardingrton Mills* located on Cobb’s Creek above the mouth of Naylor’s Run. A cotton mill was operated here by Nathan and David Sellers and was the first cotton mill of which we have record I the County. It became a cotton mill early in the nineteenth century and was destroyed by fire in 1815. In 1857 this mill was rented to Wolfenden-Shore Company who placed machinery in the mills of manufacturing woolen yarn. Between the years 1860 and 1870 the property was enlarged by the addition of several other mills. These mills are still in operation and present employment for many residents of the Cardington section. Marshall’s Mill on Cobb’s Creek above Naylor’s Run operated first as a saw mill, but later as a fulling and grist mill. Millbourne Mills erected and operated by Samuel Sellers. These mills were the first used as twisting mills for the weaving of wire cloth and Dutch fans. In 1814 John Sellers erected the grist mill which was used for many years for many years for a variety of purposes, chief among which was the grinding of wheat, corn, buckwheat and oats. In 1825 it was estimated that 12,000 bushels of merchant wheat was manufactured in these mills. They were recently sold and razed to the ground. They are located on the site of the present Sears, Roebuck and Company Plant at Millbourne.

8. *Keystone Paper Mill* located on Cobb’s Creek north of the Millbourne Mills. Burned to the ground several times rebuilt. These mills were used until 1923. The ground has since been sold to the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company and forms a part of their property at 69th and Market Streets.

FIRST SCHOOL IN 1779 – The first official record of land being set apart for school purposes in the Township is in a deed inn 1779 granted to John Sellers, Benjamin Barnum and Oliver Garrett as trustees. The grant was twenty-four perches in extent and cost ten pounds. On this lot which is, without doubt, a part of the present high school tract, a school building was constructed and remained under the charge of the trustees named in the deed, or their successors, until 1825 when school trustees were elected in Upper Darby Township. It is thought that the care of this school rested with the trustees elected by the citizens of the Township who at this time were Oborn Levis, Thomas Sellers, and John Sellers, Jr. In 1834 the public school law was enacted by the state and in 1835-36 it is a matter of record that the Township received in State appropriations the sum of $404.14 for the maintenance of its public schools.

In 1833 a lot was donated by Coleman Sellers to a board of trustees for the purpose of establishing a school near the grist mill of William Watkin. O this lot the Union School was built. It was used until 1836 as a private school when it was transferred to the use of the directors of the public schools of the Township. The Union School, located on the north side of Marshall Road near the home of James Wolfenden, was used for public school purposes until the year 1894 when the brick building on Harrison Avenue was constructed. The Union School building continued to serve as a place of meeting for a Sunday school conducted for many years by Peter Bloom tollgate keeper at Garrett Road and West Chester Pike. It has since become the Union Sunday School of Cardington. He was assisted in his work by Thomas Powers who later built Powers Hall. During recent years the building has served as a club house for a number of people in the Cardington region. It was not until the past year that it was torn down to make way for building developments.

That part of Upper Darby which is now Clifton Heights was cared for by a school located on the Springfield Road west of Clifton on land owned by Oborn Levis. This building was used until 1871 when a lot was purchased from Dr. Bartleson and a two-story brick building constructed at a cost of $5,785. The old building and lot was conveyed to Oborn Levis in 1871 for $1,000.

The Central School which stood at the intersection of School Lane and Burmont Road in Drexel Hill was built in 1837 on a lot containing 72 square perches. The land was procured from Thomas Garrett. This school was maintained until 1960 when a new building was built on the same lot at a cost of $3,375. This building continued to be used until the Garrettford School was constructed in 1909. The building and property was sold at pubic sale to Contey. The second story of the latter building, known as the Central School, was never used for school purposes, but as in many other cases, it was used for church and Sunday school purposes by the Episcopalians.

In 1851 the School Board purchased from Charles Kelley at Kelleyville 137 square perches of land on which a schoolhouse was built and used until 1871, at which time the school and lot were sold to Dennis and Edward Kelley for $1,330.

In 1873 the residents of Pattonville, now Fernwood petitioned the School Board to establish a school at that place. The Methodist Church was rented until 1875 when a two-story brick schoolhouse was constructed at a cost of $3,720. To this building an addition was constructed in 1914. In 1923 this property was sold and a new building constructed on Baltimore Avenue.

In 1880 a school building was constructed at Oakview to accommodate the people in the mill district of the Darby Creek. This building and the ground on which it was constructed is still owned by the school district. The original building, with the ground, cost the Board $4,300. In 1910, when the Garrettford School was completed, this school was closed and the pupils transferred to Garrettford.

About the year 1888 the School Board procured, at Keystone Avenue and West Chester Pike, a tract of land deeded by Casper S. Garrett. The brick building which is now used for janitors’ quarters was completed at a cost of $6,000.

About the year 1890 we therefore find six schools under six teachers in operation in the Township as follows: East School, Central School, Cardington School, Fernwood School, Keystone School and Oak View School.