

GROWING PAINS: QUAKER BENEVOLENCE AND SCHOOL EXPANSION  
IN PHILADELPHIA'S EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE, 1730-1780

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by  
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To my mother, Carroll Scribner,  
whose love and support  
have made this work possible.

## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the dynamics of Quaker school expansion in Philadelphia during the eighteenth century. The author argues that both administrators and teachers approached education as a competitive market, which influenced their decisions about hiring, student enrollment, and curriculum. However, Quaker ideas about benevolence also influenced and complicated their understanding of the educational marketplace.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In 1771, Jonathan Willis ran out of options. After operating his own school in Philadelphia for seven years, he could not find enough students to meet expenses. Like many other entrepreneurial teachers during the eighteenth-century, Willis taught students on a pay-as-you-go basis, stringing together extra income with odd jobs whenever demand for his teaching dwindled. In an attempt to save his livelihood, he petitioned the Board of Overseers of the William Penn Charter School for aid: “Dear Friends I send [this] to Beg the favour of you, to let me have some of your free scholars; for I find that the incomes of my school and all other business I can employ myself with will not pay the rent...I have had several poor sorts of children to teach till they were 7 years old and then they were taken away and sent to your free schools.”<sup>1</sup>

Willis’ petition complicates the history of education in eighteenth-century Philadelphia in two ways. First, Willis characterized the Overseers’ actions purely in economic terms, not as guided by religious benevolence. As a Quaker teacher in the market for “poorer sorts” of paying students, Willis saw the charity of Quaker schools as

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Willis to Overseers, October 19, 1771. William Penn Charter School Archives, Collection #1115, Haverford College Special Collections, Haverford, Pa. Subsequent citations from the William Penn Charter School Archives are abbreviated “WPCS Archives.” Thomas Slaughter has also noted that historians’ difficulties quantifying and understanding the patchwork systems of education in eighteenth-century colonial British America stem, in part, from the ways teachers and their contemporaries understood their own positions. Slaughter argued, for example, that John Woolman’s experience as a school master is hard to separate from his other business ventures, but that the obscurity of the experience actually points historians toward a significant realization about how educators conceptualized their work and its value: “It made sense to keep the school accounts in the general books because the transactions intertwined with Woolman’s other business.” Thomas Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 272.

direct competition. Second, he described the Overseers' influential position within a broader market. The Overseers took students away from independent teachers, but could also redistribute revenue by moving students back to well-regarded teachers in a loose "farming out" system. Jonathan Willis' petition allows us to reconsider Philadelphia's Quaker schools in the context of historians' recent attempts to explain the dynamics of colonial education.<sup>2</sup>

Eighteenth-century Philadelphia offers historians a unique opportunity to explore the educational marketplace. Philadelphia's economic and religious diversity gave consumers more educational choice than any other American city during the period, as church schools, venture schools, and academies sprang up in great numbers.<sup>3</sup> Historian Nancy Beadie has argued for the importance of academies that put "competitive pressure" on both church schools and entrepreneurial teachers by "bringing the kinds of instruction offered by Latin grammar schools and English venture schools together in one place." While Beadie examined academies' development in a market context, she

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<sup>2</sup> William J. Reese and John L. Rury, "Epilogue: New Directions in the History of Education," in *Rethinking the History of American Education*, eds. William J. Reese and John L. Rury (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 282-283. Nancy Beadie, Kim Tolley, and Margaret Nash have all argued that as the eighteenth century progressed, venture schools and church schools faced increased competition from academies, but they each look forward into the market dynamics of the early nineteenth century, rather than attempting to recover the market's early-eighteenth-century antecedents. See Nancy Beadie, *Education and the Creation of Capital in the Early American Republic*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 192; Kim Tolley, "Mapping the Landscape of Higher Schooling, 1727-1850," in *Chartered Schools: Two Hundred Years of Independent Academies in the United States, 1727-1925*, eds. Nancy Beadie and Kim Tolley (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 19-44; Margaret A. Nash, "'A Triumph of Reason': Female Education in Academies in the New Republic," in *Chartered Schools*, 65.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4-5. For a discussion of venture schools in colonial Boston, see William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

sidestepped an examination of the effects on church schools. Sketching the position of Quaker schools in response to increased competition augments her portrait of the educational marketplace in colonial America.

Scholars have traditionally approached Quaker education as an offshoot of the Friends' various charitable endeavors, but viewing Friends' schools in a market context complicates the story.<sup>4</sup> The expansion and secularization of Quaker schools took place during a period of tumultuous change for Quakers in Philadelphia. While school Overseers and teachers made decisions with the wider market in mind, internal debates about Friends' civic and moral responsibilities to non-Quakers also shaped their conceptions of education. During the mid-eighteenth century, Friends argued amongst themselves about how to define the boundaries between Quakerism and the "spirit of the world" that seemed to be closing in on their communities in all sorts of new ways. Recently, historians have begun pointing to the influences of the emerging colonial market economy as a way to understand the decades of rancor among Quakers in

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<sup>4</sup> Many historians have studied the moral ambiguities and contradictions Quakers encountered in their movement toward abolitionism. Quaker education usually plays some role in narratives of Quakers' conceptions of race and involvement with abolitionism because Anthony Benezet, a teacher at the William Penn Charter School, chose to open a school for African-Americans. However, few scholars have addressed Friends' debates about poor Quakers and non-Quakers in an educational context. Institutional histories of the William Penn Charter School reference the moral ambiguities confronting the Overseers during this period, but do not examine the relationships between school expansion, religious purification, and the Friends' withdrawal from public life. See Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the Africans' School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 4 (Oct., 1975): 399-421; Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Jean Straub, "Quaker School Life in Philadelphia before 1800," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 89, no. 4 (Oct., 1965): 447-458; Jean Straub, "Teaching in the Friends' Latin School of Philadelphia in the Eighteenth Century," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91, no. 4 (Oct., 1967): 434-456.

Philadelphia that began during the 1730s. In particular, changing understandings of “luxury,” “vice,” and the proper relationship between Friends and their non-Quaker neighbors played on the minds of Quaker leaders. As a result, historical examinations of Quakers’ philanthropic efforts during the eighteenth century—and in particular, how Quakers interpreted the significance of those efforts—must be informed by the Friends’ incorporation of market thinking. Ross Martinie Eiler argued, for example, that between 1737 and 1798 the “new realities and values of emergent market capitalism generated [Quaker] reformers’ concern about luxury and material vice. What rattled the reformers...[was] a redefinition of luxury in the world around them.” Changing definitions of luxury in the new market economy and the philanthropic responsibilities of Quaker leaders proved especially problematic in an area that connected theology, profit, and social responsibility: the administration and expansion of Friends’ Schools.<sup>5</sup>

Historians Sydney James and William Kashatus have each contributed to our understanding of Quakers’ philanthropic activities during the eighteenth century by examining how the Quakers interpreted their own personal, economic, and institutional relationships.<sup>6</sup> This essay argues that teachers and administrators interpreted Quaker school expansion during the mid-eighteenth century in terms increasingly informed by market values, but that Philadelphia Friends were ambivalent about the implications of market growth in education.<sup>7</sup> For both teachers and administrators, the moral ambiguities

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<sup>5</sup> Ross E. Martinie Eiler, “Luxury, Capitalism, and the Quaker Reformation, 1737-1798,” *Quaker History* 97 (Spring 2008): 11-31.

<sup>6</sup> Sydney James, *A People Among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Kashatus recognized that humanitarianism became a tool of class formation and social control during the market revolution, but also argued persuasively that Quaker benevolence did not neatly fit into that narrative. First, Quaker philanthropy grew through

of balancing benevolence and profit raised serious questions about the goals of Quaker education, but their conflicts also demonstrated that Quaker schools maintained significant connections to the wider market for education. During a period generally described in terms of Quaker spiritual “purification” and “withdrawal” from public life, disagreements between the Overseers and teachers demonstrated attempts by both groups to maintain—and even expand—their positions in a marketplace increasingly defined by secular values and economic gain.<sup>8</sup>

Non-Quakers in Philadelphia turned education into a battleground during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Beginning in 1743, Benjamin Franklin led a secular educational reform movement that glorified utility and the importance of the middling sorts.<sup>9</sup> David Waldstreicher has argued that Franklin “sought to overcome Pennsylvania’s religious and ethnic provincialism by founding an academy that... might lure young men from as far away as the West Indies.”<sup>10</sup> While Franklin may have seen his educational endeavors as a means of transforming Philadelphia from a provincial backwater into a cosmopolitan hub of intellectual activity, his line of thinking posed a threat to traditional Quaker notions of education because he argued for the virtues of an

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a process of “class formation in a nascent market culture” in the mid-eighteenth century, but Quakers did not act or interpret their actions only through the “narrowly defined medium of class interest.” This essay explores the tension in the interplay between economic interest and charitable benevolence in the minds of the Overseers and teachers. See William Kashatus, *A Virtuous Education: Penn’s Vision for Philadelphia Schools* (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill, 1997), 120.

<sup>8</sup> Beadie, *Education and the Creation of Capital*, 192; Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1750-1783* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> George W. Boudreau, “‘Done by a Tradesman’: Franklin’s Educational Proposals and the Culture of Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania History* 69, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 533.

<sup>10</sup> David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 77.

open, competitive market. At the same time (and not coincidentally), non-Quaker elites also began changing educational structures to maintain their own social coherence.<sup>11</sup> These developments support a characterization of eighteenth-century education as a chaotic market, but teachers and administrators in Friends' schools did attempt to impose a degree of self-serving order. This essay explores the tensions between market values and Quaker values as Overseers and teachers negotiated changes in salary, student enrollment, and the curriculum, all while considering the shape and function of a wider educational marketplace. With these tensions in mind, we must also remember that, in many ways, Quakers continued to dominate life in Pennsylvania throughout the eighteenth century and that their power had profound influence on educational debates. Even Benjamin Franklin, at the height of his fame, could not ignore the weighty Friends. He "continued to find that as a printer and public voice, he had to tune his perspective on things sacred very, very finely. In pluralist, Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania, religion was not an easy commodity in which to speculate." For Friends who saw education as a sacred extension of Quaker theology and values, men like Franklin could be dangerous.<sup>12</sup>

To argue for the importance of the Friends' position in Philadelphia's educational marketplace first requires a description of the market's atmosphere and trajectory during the eighteenth century; the first section attempts to provide the necessary context for understanding Quaker educators' internal debates. Section two addresses the most direct

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<sup>11</sup> George W. Boudreau, "The Surest Foundation of Happiness: Education in Franklin's Philadelphia," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1995); Boudreau, "'Highly Valuable and Extensively Useful': Community and Readership among the Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Middling Sort," *Pennsylvania History* 63, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 302-29; Susan Fatherly, *Gentlewomen and Learned Ladies: Women and Elite Formation in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*, 79.

link between Friends' schools and the market: employing school staff. Hiring teachers consumed a great deal of the Overseers' time and energy. Finding qualified teachers willing to work under their direction proved difficult, but no previous study of the William Penn Charter School offers any explanations for the protracted negotiations, failed hires, and resignations that peppered the Overseers' meeting minutes between 1740 and 1780. In disagreements about how to manage Friends' schools and their relationship to the market, teachers adopted secular language to defend themselves against the acquisitive charity and moral arguments of the Overseers. Section three further explores the dynamics of negotiation between teachers and administrators through conflicts over student enrollment. The difficulty of keeping the desired number of pupils in Friends' schools affected teachers' salaries, but also caused administrators to make curricular changes over the course of the eighteenth century. Section four examines the connections between those changes and Friends' market expectations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE WILLIAM PENN CHARTER SCHOOL AND THE EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PHILADELPHIA

251,000 people lived in colonial British America in 1700. By 1775, the population rose to 2,464,000. The increase came largely through procreation, rather than forced or voluntary immigration, which had two important consequences for American education: by the middle of the eighteenth century the colonial population was much younger and families much larger.<sup>13</sup> These trends had particular effect in cities, whose leaders blamed the deterioration of urban space and the moral decay of city-dwellers on larger populations.<sup>14</sup> Between 1740 and 1780, Philadelphia's population increased by over two-hundred percent, which led Quaker leaders to reconsider their responsibilities toward the two classes that posed the greatest moral and political problems for them: the poor and "middling sorts."<sup>15</sup> Pennsylvania's Quakers did not fail to notice these changes, even early on. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, an alarmed James Logan wondered whether all of Ireland was "to be transplanted hither" to Pennsylvania. Fears of

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Gary Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681-1726* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 322. For other useful assessments of Philadelphia's rapid demographic shifts during the eighteenth century, see John K. Alexander, *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst, Ma.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 26-60; Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 59-114; Simon Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 40-61.

<sup>15</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 150; Gary Nash and Billy G. Smith, "The Population of Eighteenth Century Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (July, 1975): 362-367. Recent studies of educational development in the American colonies rely on population growth during the eighteenth century to account for the rapid and often confusing growth of schools and public demand for education.

the rapidity of immigration and the perceived moral degeneracy of poor immigrants touched off heated debate among Quakers about how to maintain their sect's cohesion amidst the rising tide of worldly temptation and theological competition. Colonial leaders saw education as a means of simultaneously curbing vice and preparing poor youths to contribute to society economically, which alleviated fears about Friends' waning power and the spiritual wellbeing of their own children. Barry Levy was right to argue that, initially, Quakers could "maintain strong communities while tolerating the influx of a wide array of strangers" by confining "education and nurturance largely to private spaces." However, Levy underestimated the degree to which outsiders continued to prey on the minds of weighty Friends, both inside and outside the walls of "increasingly wealthy and enticing" Quaker spaces.<sup>16</sup>

Pennsylvania's unique religious history put it at the center of debates about both managing larger populations and educational reform. Religious toleration offered an economic boon in the early-eighteenth century as Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and various religious dissenters from German principalities flooded into the colony. Because religious institutions provided the most "public" form of education through charity schools, Philadelphia's religious diversity created more educational choices for poor and middling families. Initially, religious diversity meant little to Quaker educational leaders who were more concerned with raising their children among Friends. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century the presence of competing religious organizations caused legitimate concern.

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 16.

Before other denominations posed any real threat to Quaker authority, Friends in Philadelphia saw little need for an extensive school system. In Quaker theology, the greatest responsibility for educating children fell to parents.<sup>17</sup> Quaker leaders discouraged ministers and teachers from taking primary responsibility for children's education, instead characterizing them as "necessary Coadjutor[s]." Teachers and ministers should "Embrace all Opportunities of encouraging and strengthening the Hands of the truly concerned *Parents*," rather than take an active role themselves.<sup>18</sup> Because advanced learning did not necessarily further spiritual growth or lead to direct economic benefit in the early eighteenth century, children went to school "fundamentally to get basic learning useful to all." Nurturing children's spiritual development and finding apprenticeships or professions fell to the parents, not the teachers. This thinking certainly influenced the first charter issued for the Friends' school in 1689, which kept the school under the direct control of the Monthly Meeting and taught only basic literacy and mathematics. Twenty-two years later, the Monthly Meeting had created four new charters, each one expanding the mission and powers of the school. Although the school remained quite small by mid-century standards, by the fourth revision the charter contained provisions that administrators used to rationalize subsequent expansions.

In 1711, the Monthly Meeting delegated all administrative powers to the Board of Overseers, a public corporation that remained open to non-Quakers (though the Meeting

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<sup>17</sup> John Griffith, a friend of the minister John Woolman, argued even as late as 1764, "That which is likely to have the greatest influence upon [children's] tender minds, is a steady circumspect example" from their parents. John Griffith, *Some Brief Remarks on Sundry Subjects* (London, 1764; Dublin, 1765), quoted in Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman* 276.

<sup>18</sup> David Hall, *An Epistle of Love and Caution to the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings of Friends in Great Britain, or Elsewhere* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.: London, 1750), 27. Quoted in James, *A People Among Peoples*, 62.

asked explicitly that no outsiders be voted onto the Board). The final charter also charged the Overseers and teachers with more important civic, moral, and academic responsibilities.<sup>19</sup> In addition to encouraging religious virtue, teachers should qualify scholars to “serve their country and themselves, by breeding them in reading, writing, and learning of language, and useful arts and sciences, suitable to their sex, age, and degree.”<sup>20</sup> In the minds of the Board, these new duties for teachers would have remained secondary to parental guidance as the primary means of educating youth. However, the presence of poor students and orphans in Friends’ schools forced the Overseers to rethink their position during the first decades of the eighteenth century.

Quaker children without parents posed an immediate challenge for the Friends’ hands-off approach to formal education. Because the spiritual and physical wellbeing of these children fell to the Meeting, the salaried schoolmaster became, in effect, a surrogate parent and thus the primary spiritual educator. Poor children, whether Quaker or not, created similar problems for educators; lacking either spiritual or material support at home, they were “unusually susceptible to corrupting influences.”<sup>21</sup> Fending off the sinfulness of the world, a task that so consumed Quaker parents, thus fell increasingly

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<sup>19</sup> Although this essay focuses on the middle decades of the eighteenth century, it is also possible to view the evolution of the school’s charters with the political struggles of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries in mind. The resolution of the pitched battles in the Pennsylvania Assembly between the factions of David Lloyd and James Logan may also have influenced the Overseers’ thinking as they broadened the scope of responsibilities for Friends’ Schools. As Quakers attempted to repair the political fabric by passing an unprecedented number of new resolutions in the Assembly to demonstrate the efficacy of their new consensus, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that the Overseers—many of whom sat on the Assembly themselves, or had family members who did—could see increased educational regulation as a similarly conciliatory gesture. See Nash, *Quakers and Politics*, 308-309.

<sup>20</sup> James Mulhern, *A History of Secondary Education in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: 1933), repr. Arno Press (New York: 1969), 30-35.

<sup>21</sup> James, *A People Among Peoples*, 65.

onto the shoulders of Quaker educators.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the new charters emphasized charity toward the poor and hiring teachers well qualified as academic and spiritual mentors.<sup>23</sup> These precedents eventually became the foundation for the school's expansion, but it is notable that the Overseers did not choose to expand for the next thirty

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<sup>22</sup> J. William Frost argued that "a great deal of the motivation behind the care of youth was due to fear" of the outside world: "In rearing children in the eighteenth century, Friends emphasized seclusion from the world's evil. If the 'infant and feeble' mind were exposed to good and evil, the child would not sift and winnow to arrive at good. Rather, his natural inclinations to evil would predominate, and he would soon become so hardened in his vices that the grace of God could not reach him." That fear, according to Frost, raised a contradiction in Quakers' thinking: Quaker parents had managed to overcome worldly sin, but they would not admit to the possibility of their children doing the same if left to their own devices. I would argue that in the context of eighteenth-century Quaker education, this thinking raised another contradiction as well: as Friends opened their schools to Quaker orphans they believed to be morally weak, they endangered their own children through their charity. Frost argued that Quakers never addressed the first contradiction, but as the eighteenth century wore on, the second became unavoidable. J William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1973), 74-75.

<sup>23</sup> Decades later, Anthony Benezet eloquently stated the important implications of educators' new status as spiritual "parents," which offered, for Benezet, democratizing possibilities in the field of education: "Why then do they stand so long idle, when so large a field lies before them? . . . What a beautiful and noble prospect do such thoughts open to the view of those whose eyes are not blinded . . . If a number of such Friends would freely dedicate themselves to the care of the youth, not limiting themselves to the narrow views of family ties, nor even to religious denominations, but looking upon themselves as fathers and brothers of all that want their help, taking more especial concern to make the poor and helpless the first objects of such a care, not solely of necessity, but of a willing mind, what a blessing might they be, not only to our youth in particular, but also to mankind in general." Anthony Benezet, *Some Necessary Remarks on the Education of the Youth in the Country parts of this and the Neighboring Governments* (Philadelphia, 1778), 1-4. Kashatus argues that Benezet's philosophy was "advocating nothing less than a public education with a special emphasis on teaching the disadvantaged to become useful members of society, not the religiously guarded instruction of Quaker youth. The most important role in this plan, for which good, pious Friends were suited, was that of a teacher." Although that assessment pushes beyond the horizon that Benezet most likely saw for the future of Quaker education, Kashatus is right to emphasize the growing distance between Quakers' dual impulses toward egalitarian educational opportunity and insulated religious upbringings for their own children. William C. Kashatus, "A Reappraisal of Anthony Benezet's Activities in Educational Reform, 1754-1784," *Quaker History* 78 (Spring 1989): 24-36.

years. Without external pressure, Quaker leaders saw no urgent need to look outward and no extraordinary threats to the spiritual development of their own children.

The connection between the increasing population and growing school systems may seem obvious, but its importance for educational change in colonial cities cannot be overstated. This was especially true for the two profit-driven education models that dominated the landscape for most of the eighteenth century: private tutors and entrepreneurial venture school masters.<sup>24</sup> Traditionally, income levels determined students' educational trajectories, which led to a three tiered structure: tutors and private schools for elites, apprenticeships or other professional training for the "middling sorts," and charity or church schools for the poor. During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, population growth and increased income widened the range of people who could purchase some form of education for themselves or their children. However, with changes in fortune, families and students often moved rapidly between tiers, in both directions. Benjamin Franklin's education offers a good example of this phenomenon: his father sent him to a venture school in Boston for a few months, but could not afford to continue paying the tuition, so Benjamin began his apprenticeship in his brother's printing shop instead.<sup>25</sup>

During the second half of the eighteenth century, schools funded by churches or municipalities came under increasing pressure from independent tutors and teachers who opened their own "venture schools." Kim Tolley has defined venture schools as institutions "supported entirely by tuition" that offered a "diverse curriculum that went beyond the basic studies of read, writing and spelling," though many teachers also

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<sup>24</sup> Beadie, *Education and the Creation of Capital*, 107-108.

<sup>25</sup> Boudreau, "Done By a Tradesman," 525-527.

advertised those subjects exclusively.<sup>26</sup> Estimating the number of venture schools and independent tutors during the eighteenth century is difficult because many teachers taught only for supplemental income or gained reputations by word-of-mouth.<sup>27</sup> However, historians point to the rapid increase in the number of newspaper advertisements for schools as evidence of the industry's growth, beginning in the 1720s.<sup>28</sup> Contemporary commentators expressed alarm because venture schools remained unregulated except by the reputations of their various masters. Even Franklin, a man sympathetic to acquiring education by any available means, disliked venture schools' open competition, which prompted him to call for reform and regulation in his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*.<sup>29</sup>

Private teachers and venture school entrepreneurs were not the only ones to recognize potential in education; beginning in the 1740s, religious organizations also entered the market in earnest. According to historian Sydney James, the Great Awakening "had stirred other denominations to zeal for education and a somewhat competitive effort to found schools."<sup>30</sup> Baptists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians began operating schools in Philadelphia and surrounding towns during the 1740s and 1750s. Crucially all of these groups conceived of education in competitive terms. The politics surrounding the founding of Franklin's Academy of Philadelphia in 1751 provides a representative example of how religious zeal translated into competition for educational

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<sup>26</sup> Tolley, "Mapping the Landscape of Higher Schooling," 20.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 3-5.

<sup>28</sup> Charles E. Clark and Charles Wetherell, "The Measure of Maturity: The Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1765," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April, 1989): 285-286.

<sup>29</sup> Boudreau, "Done by a Tradesman," 524-557.

<sup>30</sup> James, *A People Among Peoples*, 70.

power. Franklin politicked to keep Quakers from joining the board of the academy in an effort to minimize religious influence on his ideal of “useful” education. Unfortunately, obstructing one denomination opened the door for another to manipulate decision-making at the academy: Presbyterians quietly gained control of the board and privately congratulated themselves on their victory at the Quakers’ expense.<sup>31</sup>

The threat to Friends’ schools posed by Franklin’s academy and competing religious schools was not imagined. In 1751, the Overseers expressed their displeasure at losing two Quaker students “in a manner which may bring some discredit on the manages and Masters of the [Latin] school.” There appeared to be “no just Cause of Disatisfaction,” but the students’ father decided a private tutor would better serve their educational needs. Master Alexander Seaton also complained of losing two fee scholars—one to Joseph Hite’s venture school and the other to “some Trade.”<sup>32</sup> In a

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<sup>31</sup> Mulhern, *A History of Secondary Education in Pennsylvania*, 176. Benjamin Franklin’s complicated personal and professional relationships with Philadelphia’s Quaker elite undoubtedly affected his proposals for education reform and Quaker leaders’ responses. The political battles between Philadelphia’s Quakers and non-Quakers do not have a prominent place in this essay, but their reverberations certainly did affect Quakers’ internal debates about education. See Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 247-255; Joseph Seymour, *The Pennsylvania Associators, 1747-1777* (Yardley, Pa.: Westholme Publishing, 2012), xviii. J. William Frost offered a dissenting opinion, arguing that it was “partially true” that “Quakers became involved in the educational competition among denominations that resulted from the schools founded after the Great Awakening,” but that the revival of Quaker interest in education and school expansion stemmed more from the “general tightening of discipline [among Quakers] in both England and America after 1755.” Both arguments are compelling, but Frost’s belief that Friends would not engage in educational competition because such competition was based on values of which they did not approve seems unlikely. Frost was quick to point out Quakers’ ideological contradictions elsewhere, so it would not be unreasonable to argue that they approached education with a similar tendency toward ideological inconsistency. Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 100-101.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander Seaton to Overseers, 30 July 1761, WPCS Archives.

similar incident, John Todd, then master of the Latin School, took particular umbrage when Richard Wistar removed his children “from the Public School and plac[ed] them under the tuition of a person, not of our Society, nor subject to [the Overseers’] Patronage and Direction, to be taught the same Branches of Learning which I teach.”<sup>33</sup>

Samuel Powel III’s experience provides an idea of what the Overseers saw as possible outcomes when losing students to outside competition. Powel, born to a wealthy Quaker family in 1738, entered the Academy of Philadelphia instead of a Friends’ school. In 1759, he graduated from the College of Philadelphia and traveled to Europe for seven years. Powel converted to Anglicanism during his travels, which gave him the opportunity to marry into two of Philadelphia’s most powerful (non-Quaker) merchant families upon his return. For Quaker educators, Powel’s decisions undoubtedly would have stemmed from his lack of proper religious education. Failure to keep Quaker pupils represented real spiritual dangers if secular education led away from Quakerism, but Powel’s example would also sting the Overseers because of the financial loss.<sup>34</sup>

Another example of the perils of a worldly, non-Quaker education can be seen in the experience of George Logan. Logan’s father, William, pulled him out of the William Penn Charter School because “Philadelphia was growing fast—too fast, the Stenton farmer thought—and losing its Quaker purity...To let his sons remain ‘where there is so much liberty allowed to almost all youth, and where there are more avenues to every kind of vice than in any other city, numbers excepted,’ would, he feared, ‘end in their ruin.’” At least part of William Logan’s decision stemmed from the presence of non-Quaker

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<sup>33</sup> John Todd to Overseers, 23 June 1768, WPCS Archives.

<sup>34</sup> Richard L. Bushman, “American High-Style and Vernacular Cultures,” in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, eds. Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 351.

students in the school.<sup>35</sup> Again the Overseers lost the patronage of a leading Quaker family because of their insistence on expanding the scope of their mission. The spiritual results for George were also disastrous from a Quaker point of view. While traveling in Europe he, too, turned away from Quaker values and came back to Philadelphia as an example of the continued failings of the Friends' system of education in the colonies.<sup>36</sup>

Although the Penn Charter School had long provided basic education for Quaker youth and some poor non-Quakers in Philadelphia, increased sectarian competition in the 1740s posed spiritual and material threats to Friends' influence in the city. The Quakers "discovered that they were lagging behind" in the newly competitive marketplace and would have to operate schools "comparable to those of their rivals" in order to maintain their position.<sup>37</sup> The Overseers responded quickly and "endeavor[ed] to make this part of the charity of more extensive service" through a steady expansion of school facilities until the Revolutionary War. The Overseers had in mind a benevolent plan to educate all segments of society, but unlike either venture schools or other church schools, they also had the financial clout to open schools that served varied student populations and educational functions. In 1742, the Overseers hired Anthony Benezet to teach poor boys and girls in his own grammar school, separate from the Latin school. Two years later the Overseers built a new schoolhouse in "a more Airy part of the City," and another school building went up the following year.<sup>38</sup> In 1752, Alexander Seaton petitioned the Board to

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<sup>35</sup> Frederick Tolles, *George Logan of Philadelphia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 10-12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 107.

<sup>37</sup> James, *A People Among Peoples*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> Overseers Minutes I, 29 September 1744 and 30 November 1745, William Penn Charter School Archives, Collection #1115, Haverford College Special Collections, Haverford, Pa. Subsequent citations to the minutes are abbreviated "OM I" or "OM II."

open a school in “the upper part of the city” with himself as the master. Because it appeared “likely to be of Service to have such a school settled there under the Direction of this Board,” the Overseers paid to open the school and charged Seaton with ten free scholars in addition to any paying students he could find.<sup>39</sup> Benezet opened another school at the Overseers’ urging in 1754, this time to teach girls arithmetic, English, and grammar. Not all of the free scholars could fit in the Friends’ new school buildings, so the Overseers began hiring women to teach out of their own homes or already established schools. Although the Overseers’ minutes do not mention many of the mistresses by name (and those that are mentioned do not appear with any regularity), their presence also represented a sizeable expansion of the Overseers’ reach because they paid rent and supplied firewood in addition to the mistresses’ salaries.<sup>40</sup>

The Overseers not only expanded the number of Friends’ schools in Philadelphia, but also their own administrative powers within each school, which shaped their interactions with the educational marketplace. In 1743, the Overseers moved to take power out of the teachers’ hands in deciding which paying students to accept. Five years later, they instituted a code of behavior for teachers and scholars in the Latin School, which they ordered to be posted and read aloud every three months at all Friends’ schools.<sup>41</sup> Teacher reactions to the Overseers’ control varied, but whether they resisted or acquiesced, teachers recognized that the new network of Friends’ schools occupied a unique place in the market. The schools’ distinct position held advantages for some teachers, but also created problems for the Overseers as they tried to attract qualified

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<sup>39</sup> OM I, 26 October 1751, and 30 January 1752.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Woody, *Early Quaker Education in Pennsylvania* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 208-213.

<sup>41</sup> OM I, 26 November 1743, and 30 August 1759.

teachers to vacant positions. Over the course of the eighteenth century, hiring and retaining high-quality, expert teachers repeatedly caused the Overseers difficulty. Their struggles demonstrated that Quaker teachers also approached the intersection of profit and benevolence with no small amount of ambivalence.

### CHAPTER THREE

## “YOU MUST ADVANCE THE PAY”: HIRING DIFFICULTIES AND THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN TEACHERS AND OVERSEERS

The position of Quaker schools within the competitive marketplace becomes clearer with an exploration of the difficulties that plagued the Overseers while hiring teachers. The Overseers’ problems centered on three areas: moral and intellectual qualifications, salaries, and authority within the school. We will explore each of these issues with a view to how the market functioned by assessing the assumptions and expectations of both the Overseers and teachers.

In 1746, the Overseers began a search for a new master of the Latin School. The primary requirements for any candidate were that he be “a Sober and discreet person.” After meeting those two moral qualifications, the Overseers asked that the new master be “skilled in [the] Latin and Greek languages.”<sup>42</sup> The order of their requests was not accidental. The primary object of Quaker education during the first half of the eighteenth century was to raise children to moral rectitude through the disciplined endeavor and Christian love.<sup>43</sup> Moral quality held heightened importance for the master of the Latin School because it was the most prestigious branch of the Penn Charter School network, in which many of the students were sons of “weighty Friends” and only the most gifted

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<sup>42</sup> Overseers to John Hunt, 30 January 1746, WPCS Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Barry Levy, “‘Tender Plants’: Quaker Farmers and Children in the Delaware Valley, 1681-1735,” *Journal of Family History* 3 (Jun., 1978): 116-135.

“free scholars” gained a place. However, finding a man to fill this honorable post who could command both moral and intellectual respect proved exceedingly difficult.

The Overseers recognized the possibility of failure even as they sent their first request to John Hunt, a Friend in London: “[T]here may be a necessity of supplying a person whose character you can have only by insinuation...[but] if any disappointment should happen [in] their Manner...whatever excuse [you give] shall be honorably said.”<sup>44</sup> Despite their desperate need, the hiring process took over two years. In Hunt’s letter of introduction for the new master, he noted that “the difficulty of meeting with a suitable person must plead our excuse” for the lengthy delay. Hunt also addressed his own reservations about the candidate by framing clear shortcomings as possible advantages: “[B]elieving him to be sober and of an orderly conduct, we judged he might be suitable for your purpose; and capable of making up his want of Experience in teaching by assiduity, and a more general acquaintance with men and things, however circumscribed this may at first sight appear, than we could expect to meet with in a person only bred to teach school.” The candidate also had only a “tolerable knowledge of the Languages,” which would not have reassured the Overseers.

Both the Overseers and London Friends knew that the reasons for the delay directly stemmed from the desired qualifications. As a result, Hunt compromised teaching experience and intellectual achievement, but put it in the best light possible. The last line of Hunt’s letter underlined the uncertainty of the enterprise and hinted that the Overseers may need to adjust their expectations to the realities of the market: “[We] earnestly design that he may so comport himself on all occasions as to merit both [his

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<sup>44</sup> Overseers to John Hunt, 30 January, 1746, WPCS Archives.

salary] and your esteem. If it should happen otherwise we must appeal to your generous intimation, that you would not think hardly of us for another person's faults; we have done the best we could."<sup>45</sup> Although the Overseers continued to seek teachers of the highest moral quality, the realities of school management caused them to shift emphasis toward more worldly qualifications in the coming decades. In 1757, the Overseers requested a teacher "who is qualified to teach the Latin and Greek Languages, some branches of the mathematics, and well acquainted with the former would be further acceptable." They also asked that the teacher be a Quaker, but saw no need to specify any of the moral qualifications from nine years earlier. As moral rectitude slid down the Overseers' list of requirements, academic qualifications gained ground.<sup>46</sup>

However, Anthony Benezet, one of the most gifted and progressive Quaker educators of the eighteenth century, did not hesitate to point out the deficiencies of his colleagues or the attendant lowering of employers' expectations in both areas as the years went on. In a letter to a friend, Benezet wrote that any "person of tolerable morals who can read and write is esteemed sufficiently qualified for a school master."<sup>47</sup> Despite Benezet's vocal opposition to what he perceived as an inversion of proper Quaker principles, the Overseers continued to court teachers with an eye first on academic qualifications, then on morals, while teaching ability almost became an afterthought. When listing the requirements for a teaching position in 1770, the Overseers described the sort of person they wanted "as someone who would be prepared to teach Latin and Greek, arithmetic, the 'most useful parts of mathematics,' geography, and the use of

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<sup>45</sup> John Hunt to Israel Pemberton, 26 February, 1748, WPCS Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Overseers to Jonah Thompson, [Unspecified date ],1757, WPCS Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Benezet in George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937), 31.

globes.” After these qualifications were met, the master “should be a friend both in principle and practice, and if possible to be had of an easy and agreeable disposition fit to have the care and education of youth.”<sup>48</sup>

Despite worrying less about candidates’ moral standing, economic factors continued to hamper the Overseers efforts to hire teachers. Decisions about taking a job at one of the Overseers’ schools (or leaving one) demonstrated that many teachers imagined employment at Friends’ schools to be a transitional professional phase. After ten years of “endeavor to make this part of the charity [Friends’ schools] of more extensive service,” Israel Pemberton complained that the Overseers could only take on more scholars when “[we] procure suitable Masters to entrust them, in which we labour under great difficulties in this part of the World, where Men of Genius can readily find more profitable Employments.”<sup>49</sup> Even after successful hires, greater potential profits often lured teachers away, either into other trades or into opening their own schools. After marrying in 1757, Charles Thompson informed the Overseers that it would “not suit him to continue in the service” as a teacher, and that he would instead try “engaging in trade” to provide for his new family.<sup>50</sup> Samuel Elridge made a similar decision just two years later. Elridge began as a student at the Latin School, where later he became an usher. He was promoted to a teaching position at the Grammar School, demonstrating the Overseers faith in his abilities, as they increasingly tried to fill vacant positions with their most promising scholars. Unfortunately, their investment did not pay off: Elridge quit after two years because of “circumstances that render [teaching] to me very

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<sup>48</sup> Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 112; OM II, 26-28 February 1770.

<sup>49</sup> Israel Pemberton to Peter Colinton, 15 December, 1749, WPCS Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Overseers to Jonah Thompson, [date unknown], 1757, WPCS Archives.

disagreeable and unpleasant.” Elridge argued that “Youth is not always capable of judging what kind of life will be agreeable when more advanced in years,” and he found the “business of a Merchant” more attractive. Just a few months after Elridge resigned, Charles Thomson, the master of the Latin School, abruptly notified the Overseers that he also intended to “enter Business.”<sup>51</sup>

The Overseers met these difficulties with as much money as they could muster. When courting Peter Warren to replace Elridge, the Overseers offered “a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds per year,” fifty percent more than a master’s starting salary just six years previous. The Overseers reserved the right to fill the position with “one better qualified than thou art for teaching” if the London Friends could find someone, but they also assured Warren that his salary would be guaranteed for the first year, as “we expect there will be sufficient employment for you both in such branches of the business as will not interfere with each other.”<sup>52</sup> Warren turned down the offer. Although “to be settled amongst a body of good and Weighty Friends” would be “for the good of himself and family in a religious sense,” Warren thought it “scarcely prudent to remove...without any surety of continuing in the school more than one year.” Warren’s success in Virginia had brought him to the Overseers’ attention, but also gave him the security to refuse a generous salary because he already enjoyed a network of support “with Pupils and reputation.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Samuel Elridge to Overseers, 29 November, 1759; James Pemberton to Peter Warren, 11 December 1760; Overseers Minutes 2 January 1760, WPCS Archives.

<sup>52</sup> James Pemberton to Peter Warren, 11 December 1760, WPCS Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Pleasant to Overseers, February 1761, WPCS Archives.

During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the Overseers continued to increase teachers' salaries in an attempt to make them comparable to venture schools and academies, but still achieved only limited success finding and retaining employees.

The Quaker administrators tried to insulate themselves from changes in the job market, but teachers' expectations and the Overseers' need for labor caused the attempted regulation to fail. For the first sixty years of the Penn Charter Schools' existence, the Overseers negotiated individual contracts for each teacher, which became increasingly expensive and time-consuming as they continued to expand during the 1740s. In 1754, four years after receiving "advice" from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Overseers tried to stop all of the renegotiations by setting fixed salaries for the masters and ushers of each school.<sup>54</sup> Despite the Overseers' best efforts, the initiative failed within three years, when John Thomson lobbied successfully for a pay-raise "as his labour and trouble [was] increased by the additional number of Scholars" in his school.

In 1764, after more than three years serving as an usher, Moses Patterson notified the Overseers that he did not "incline to engage for any longer time [as an usher,] choosing to make a Trial of a small school under my own Direction."<sup>55</sup> When John Todd hired an usher, Caleb Gough, without the Board's consent—presumably at a rate that increased Todd's own profit margin—the Overseers demanded that Todd fire him. In an attempt to retain the services of Tesse Waterman, the Board-approved usher, the Overseers offered "£15 towards his salary the ensuing year, £20 the next year and £25 the third year if he continues so long in service." The balance of power tilted toward even

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<sup>54</sup> OM I, 25 July 1754; Woody, *Early Quaker Education in Pennsylvania*, 167.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Patterson to Overseers, 26 January, 1764, WPCS Archives.

teachers' assistants because of the lack of willing candidates that met the Overseers' requirements.<sup>56</sup>

Ann Horton's two-year stint as mistress of the Friends' Grammar School showed that teachers' market orientation could force the Overseers to increase pay simply because of their desperate need for qualified employees. Horton agreed to receive thirty shillings from each pay scholar at her school in addition to a yearly salary of £20 from the Overseers to teach "which[ever] poor children the Board may put under her care." Notably, the Overseers did not specify the number of free scholars they would send to the school. Horton did not think her pay justified the number of free scholars she received, especially considering the disciplinary troubles that naturally accompanied higher enrollment. She resigned the position after only three months under the new arrangement, arguing that the Overseers' over-enrollment and impossible behavioral expectations outweighed "the small advantages that may accrue to me beyond those of a private school." However, the Overseers were so desperate for teachers that they refused Horton's resignation, convincing her to stay on with promises of more pay scholars. Three months later, Horton submitted her second resignation and did not hesitate to explain her reasons for leaving: "I find the school under its present alteration of price and restrictions, will not answer the purposes intended by me when I first undertook it; which were to maintain myself in Lodging & have somewhat to spare. And it is a Business too fatiguing to be loved by me, without some hope of Profit." She refused to "continue longer, except on the Conditions [of] 35 pay scholars certain or £70 per annum." Horton expected to be compensated fairly for teaching the Overseers' free scholars, and like

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<sup>56</sup> OM II, 29 July 1773.

many other teachers who could make money elsewhere, she would not give up her “Judgment and Interest” by taking on more students than her income warranted. Horton’s tumultuous tenure and resignation represented one episode in a power struggle over student enrollment that intensified because of the Friends’ school expansion in the 1740s.

Benezet benefitted from Horton’s resignation because it enabled him to regain his post as a teacher in her former school, but his willingness to accept the same pay-rate that Horton had refused appeared, more than anything else, to be an act of charity on his part—and one which he would later regret. He could not afford to keep teaching for such a low salary any more than Horton could, so Benezet also resigned, “with some rebuke,” when his contract expired the following year. The wound to his reputation remained sore years later; Benezet confided to George Dillwyn that he had “ever since had a secret uneasiness” about the terms of his service and graceless exit from the school. Much to the satisfaction of the Overseers, Benezet’s conscience eventually got the better of him: he returned to the school nine years later and agreed to the previous terms of service.

Despite Benezet’s charitable inclination and his widely recognized talent as an educator, the financial and personal demands of teaching—particularly dealing with the expectations of school administrators and parents—took their toll even on his famously generous spirit.<sup>57</sup> Benezet happily and readily dedicated his life to the education of young men and women, but the low pay and Overseers’ meddling caused no small amount of

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<sup>57</sup> Benezet’s personal financial difficulties also found their way into his broader spiritual critique of mid-eighteenth-century Quaker society. It was not without some bitterness that Benezet pointed to a contradiction he saw in the lives of his wealthy contemporaries: “That a man should labour to be rich and amass wealth, a state which... proves the ruin of so many thousands – is this keeping clear from defilement[?] Now, that such a person shall esteem himself, and be esteemed, a religious man, and perhaps be the more regarded, even by religious people, is a mere paradox; yet it is too often the case.” Eiler, “Capitalism and the Quaker Reformation,” 19.

disappointment and disillusion. On hearing from a friend that a young man was considering a teaching position at a Friends' school on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Benezet did not mince words: "Discourage him! [The people] are shamefully penurious. It is uncertain; the better he does his duty, so as to bring on the children, so much the sooner is he likely to be out of employ."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Anthony Benezet to George Dillwyn, February 15, 1774, in Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet*, 314.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MORE STUDENTS, MORE PROBLEMS: BALANCING BENEVOLENCE AND PROFIT THROUGH STUDENT ENROLLMENT

After a round of school visits in 1798, the Overseers blamed the poor quality of education in their schools on teachers who “generally take a much larger number [of students] than they can do justice to in bringing them forward in learning.”<sup>59</sup> Student enrollment problems had bred antagonism between teachers and administrators since expansion began in the 1740s, and its continued presence even after the Revolution merits closer attention than previous scholars have given it. The conflicts between the Overseers and teachers over how many students and what sorts of students should be taught in Philadelphia’s Friends’ schools offer insight into how the market operated and how each group conceptualized the role of Quaker education within it. While the Overseers thought overcrowded schools shortchanged students’ education, teachers saw overcrowding as a legitimate strategy to meet their material needs.

Since the charter of 1698, the Overseers had instructed masters to admit wealthy students at “reasonable rates” while poor students were to “be freely maintained...until they [became]...fit to be put out apprentices, or Capable to be masters or ushers in the said school.” In theory, the salary paid by the Overseers accounted for the tuition of the free scholars and the pay scholars. However, the Overseers did not execute a consistent policy on how salary related to the numbers of free and pay scholars. Some teachers, like Ann Horton and Alexander Seaton, received fixed amounts to take on a certain number of

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<sup>59</sup> OM III, 7 June 1798.

free scholars and expected to supplement their incomes with as many pay scholars as they could find. The Overseers expected teachers like John Todd and Joseph Yerkes, who taught at the more prestigious Mathematical and Latin schools, to maintain fixed enrollments (determined by the Overseers) without any additional salary.

The Overseers made their first concerted effort to regulate enrollment in 1743, declaring that the board must “certify their Approbation” for the applications of all prospective students, but the measure did little to stop teachers from continuing the practice of over-enrolling schools. Teachers viewed paying students as valuable sources of income, which made the benefits of unlimited admissions self-evident. Teachers could also argue that higher enrollment furthered the growth of Quaker values as students gained a Quaker education, but the pay took precedence over spiritual benefits. Ann Horton’s refusal to teach “without some hope of Profit” was the rule, rather than the exception, during this period. Even Anthony Benezet, later renowned for his work teaching African-Americans and women, received reprimands from the Overseers for accepting paying students without their consent in 1745 and 1747.<sup>60</sup>

The same moral imperative that allowed the Overseers to rationalize building more facilities and hiring teachers in the 1740s also kept them from enforcing enrollment policies that would maintain a manageable number of students. The external pressures from competing schools and the Overseers’ need to appease teachers caused them repeatedly to act against their stated purpose of managing reasonable student populations. After noting that Robert Willan had been admitting unapproved students into the Latin School, the Overseers chose not to censure him. Instead, they rewarded Willan with

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<sup>60</sup> OM I, July, 1747.

“forty pounds extraordinary” so he could employ “an Usher to enable him to take a greater number of scholars and to make the service of the school more extensive.”<sup>61</sup> A similar circumstance occurred at the Latin School in 1771, but this time Overseer Israel Pemberton personally sought an assistant for the master.<sup>62</sup>

The problem became so common that the Overseers began writing explicit instructions against unsanctioned admissions into teachers’ contracts. When Willan presented his accounts as master of the Latin School for 1749 in order to have his contract renewed, the Overseers informed him “that no scholar shall hereafter be admitted into the Latin School without the Consent of this Board.” Benezet was also offered a “salary of £80 for the ensuing year [1755], and that he is not to take more than thirty scholars for which he is to demand forty shillings each, the amount of whose schooling he is to acct. for with the Board in part of his salary,” but the Overseers could not actually limit the number of students Benezet admitted to his school.<sup>63</sup> In 1777, after years of trouble, they stipulated in Joseph Yerkes’ renegotiated contract that he was “to discount out of his Salary what he may receive from the parents or Guardians of such children as are able to pay him at the rate of three pounds yearly for each, and that none be admitted without the Consent of the board.”<sup>64</sup> In 1777, the Overseers refused to renew John Todd’s contract until he had reduced the number of students in his school from eighty-two to fifty, which Todd was “willing and ready to do; but find it more difficult than I at first expected.” One reason for Todd’s difficulty was certainly the tuition he had already received from the students, but the Overseers were also partly responsible for the

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<sup>61</sup> OM I, 29 January 1750.

<sup>62</sup> OM II, 5 January 1771.

<sup>63</sup> Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> OM II, 1 March 1777.

enrollment problems that plagued the schools throughout the period. Overcrowded classrooms posed moral and economic dilemmas for administrators committed to expanding school facilities and outreach.

Retaining teachers required high enrollment to ensure competitive salaries, but paying families expected their children to learn in a controlled environment that would keep worldly sinfulness at bay. Even as early as 1758, the ballooning enrollments at Philadelphia's Quaker schools alarmed and disheartened John Woolman, who argued that "small classes given by inspired teachers are the only way for students to focus on pure wisdom."<sup>65</sup> While the Overseers never solved the problem of over-enrollment to teachers' satisfaction (complaints persisted into the nineteenth century), they did employ strategies to retain paying students by appealing to parents' changing educational expectations. Offering "useful" subjects of study—previously seen only as an avenue for poor students to better themselves—became a major priority for administrators in the prestigious Latin and Mathematical schools, but curricular change came at a cost.

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<sup>65</sup> Slaughter, *Beautiful Soul of John Woolman*, 212.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PRUNING THE BRANCHES OF KNOWLEDGE: BACKING INTO QUAKER SIMPLICITY DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

In the face of competitive pressures, the Overseers had to reconsider the best means of attracting and keeping students and teachers in Quaker schools. Reformers like Franklin championed practical, secular education. Venture schools advertised new subjects with economic value that appealed even to the most religious Quakers.<sup>66</sup> The Overseers had to act, so they began changing their schools' curricula in the 1750s. Jack Marietta has argued that beginning in 1750 Philadelphia "produced [Quaker] reformers zealous to restore or refine the 'primitive purity' of the Society," but little religious reform is evident in the records of the city's Quaker schools before 1775.<sup>67</sup> Although the political divisions of the American Revolution caused Quakers to close ranks (briefly) because of outsiders' suspicion of their pacifism, the middle decades of the eighteenth century were characterized by a relaxation of Quakers' religious values in education.

Samuel Elridge gained his first paid position at the Latin School teaching "Merchant Accounts and some Branches of the Mathematics," which had not featured in any earlier teachers' contracts, but remained a staple until at least the 1780s.<sup>68</sup> In his 1758 critique of Friends' schools, John Woolman took issue with the new focus on teaching students how to make money—a direct response to the "merchant accounts" courses

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<sup>66</sup> Ruskin Teeter, *The Opening Up of American Education: A Sampler* (New York: University Press of America, 1983), 23.

<sup>67</sup> Marietta, *Reformation of American Quakerism*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> OM I, 6 March 1756; OM II, May [blank] 1777.

springing up in various schools.<sup>69</sup> James Dickinson petitioned the Overseers in 1768 to furnish his school with maps and scientific instruments “with an intention to show [students science’s] Usefulness, Extension, and Beauty; as also to diver [sic] their Minds with something New, Pleasing and Profitable.” Dickinson outlined a new curriculum that featured courses in geography, astronomy, mechanics, optics, and micrography.<sup>70</sup> Three years later, the Overseers also encouraged John Thompson to exert himself “diligently in instructing scholars, more especially in Mathematical Learning,” which diverted attention from the rigorous moral expectations they had emphasized in the early years of the eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup>

William Kashatus has argued persuasively that the Overseers “allowed practices that deviated from Quaker principles of simplicity and plainness” in managing student behavior, and also that emphasis on Quaker morality was “waning in the curriculum” in the years before the Revolution.<sup>72</sup> The use of “premiums” or prizes in Friends’ schools provides one example of this tendency. Premiums were awards given to students who showed “extraordinary performance at their Books” or “to such Boys whose industry entitles them to some particular mark of regard.” Masters usually rewarded students with cash prizes, but they occasionally gave books or other gifts as well. In defense of Quaker philosophies of education and simplicity, minister John Woolman argued that premiums and prizes “tend to divert [students’] minds from true humility” and caused them to “savour of the wisdom of the world,” but the Overseers did not appear to see any

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<sup>69</sup> Slaughter, *Beautiful Soul of John Woolman*, 212.

<sup>70</sup> James Dickinson to Overseers, 28 April 1768, WPCS Archives.

<sup>71</sup> OM II, 25 April 1771.

<sup>72</sup> Kashatus, *Virtuous Education*, 43-45.

problems with the practice. In 1753 and 1755 the Overseers expressed open support for premiums to reward students' good behavior or scholarship.<sup>73</sup>

One of the few attempts at reform in the Friends' schools before the Revolution came when Latin School master John Wilson submitted his resignation in 1769. The Overseers' visiting committee had complained of poor behavior in the schools since the 1750s, but usually censured individual teachers instead of proposing institutional reforms. Wilson complained about teaching Latin to any students able to pay, regardless of their capacities, while the Overseers carefully weighed the qualifications of non-Quaker and poor students. Predictably, Wilson first framed his concern in financial terms: "The employing so large a [number] of your Friends upon the Latin School and the indiscriminate receiving into it all sorts of boys without regard to Capacity or Behavior... has made me strongly doubtful whether I am not a party in a glaring misapplication of Money devoted to charitable Uses." Wilson argued that the Overseers used "care and caution in admitting poor children" but "little or none in admitting [paying] Latin Scholars." In his analysis, this practice actually cost the school more money than subsidizing free scholars because unqualified fee scholars required more attention and exhibited worse behavior. The fee scholars' sense of entitlement caused some of their poor behavior, and Wilson blamed the Overseers' inaction: "[fee scholars] ought certainly to be equally subject to your controul and are as much partakers of publick charity tho how far they are Proper Objects of it deserves your consideration."

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Howard H. Brinton, "Quaker Education in Theory and Practice," *Pendle Hill Pamphlet*, no. 9 (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill, 1940): 76; OM I, 26 January 1753, and 25 December 1755, WPCS Archives.

Wilson saw the curriculum as a negative influence on student behavior and the school's moral culture. He pointed to the secularized Latin curriculum as evidence of moral decay: "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 [and] should be obliged to be Pimps to the detestable Lusts of Jupiter & Mars attend the thefts & villainy of Mercury or follow Aeneas on his Murdering Progress...Perhaps you may say they will get acquainted with the Latin poets, those eldest Sons of Satan." Wilson recognized connections between the influence of fee scholars, the secularized curriculum, and the school's moral corrosion. His call for a return to traditional Quaker religious values in education represented a contemporary response to the Overseers' market-driven campaign of expansion during the previous three decades. Thomas Slaughter has argued that educating non-Quakers was seen as an "essential act of charity" among Friends, but the Overseers' inconsistent application of that charity infuriated Wilson. Although Wilson's resignation did not receive any open response or lead to any action from the Overseers, their attitudes shifted within three years.<sup>74</sup>

In 1772, the Overseers publicly acknowledged the need to reassess Quaker schools' relationships to the community: "It appears necessary at this time to look back to the original Institution of the Public School in this City, and to revive the former and present state thereof under our present Charter...in order that it may be more fully known to Friends of this City and County, and as it hath been the Care of the Overseers...and it

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<sup>74</sup> It may also be noted that the Overseers' decision to include Wilson's resignation in their minutes and to preserve his original letter in its entirety could represent a tacit acknowledgement of the importance of Wilson's criticisms, even if they refused to respond publicly.

is our earnest desire the same care may ever be maintained.” The best means of achieving that goal in the face of increased political pressure for their religious and economic ties to England during the early 1770s (and their pacifism once armed hostilities began) caused an abrupt policy reversal. In 1775, with “many applications [having] been of late made to admit for instruction a number of Children who are not of our religious Society,” the Overseers spent “some time...Considering the present income of the Corporation,” and agreed that to admit any qualified applicants, regardless of religious affiliation. However, their openness proved short-lived.

Outsiders’ suspicion of Quakers’ pacifism during the Revolution caused the Overseers to reevaluate their schools’ relationship to the wider marketplace. The renewed focus on the school’s charitable mission quickly disappeared under the weight of political pressure, and the Overseers made religiosity and exclusivity their new priorities. In February 1777, the Overseers had an uncharacteristically contentious meeting; the minutes described two irregular circumstances that demonstrated the issues’ importance. First, the debate over enrollment and the curriculum led to a “free conference on the State of the School,” rather than the customary reports of the school’s subcommittees. The outcome of the debate, though decisive, also showed fractures among the Overseers: instead of the usual language, “it being agreed,” or “it being unanimously agreed,” the debate concluded with “it being the desire of the Overseers in general” that “hereafter none but the Children of Friends should be taught in [the Latin] School in order that the greater care may be taken respecting their Conduct and Religious Instruction.”<sup>75</sup> The conflict between receiving non-Quakers’ tuition and the desire of Quaker parents to

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<sup>75</sup> OM II, 5 February 1777.

educate their children in a sheltered religious environment had finally surfaced in open debate among school administrators. The 1777 decision, though contentious, opened the door for a series of changes made on the recommendations of the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, which gave stern reminders about preventing “evil communication” between Quaker children and their non-Quaker peers.<sup>76</sup> During the war, Quaker solidarity took precedence over market-driven thinking, but the Overseers’ religious zeal did not last beyond the end of hostilities, as they immediately raised enrollment and re-admitted non-Quaker students.

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<sup>76</sup> OM II, 9 July 1779; Quarterly Meeting of Philadelphia to Overseers, 25 August 1779, WPCS Archives.

## CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted to recover some of the dynamics of the mid-eighteenth-century colonial educational marketplace through a close examination of Philadelphia, which possessed the greatest amount of educational choice in British North America during the period. By focusing on Quaker school expansion in a market context, this essay augments recent scholarship that has explained the relationship between education and the market revolution through the academy and charter school movements, but also argues that colonial educators interpreted their own decisions in a market context beginning early in the eighteenth century.

Quaker school administrators and teachers both recognized that they occupied distinct positions in a competitive marketplace. This led many teachers to express their employment decisions in economic terms and to over-enroll classrooms as a means of achieving their monetary goals at the expense of educational effectiveness and religiosity. The Overseers also understood that Friends' schools operated in a competitive market, but they were ambivalent about the implications for moral education. As a result, they fought over-enrollment even while expanding schools and accepting new students. They also secularized the curriculum and emphasized teachers' academic qualifications over moral rectitude while extolling the value of shielding Quaker children from the world. The American Revolution temporarily flattened these ambiguities as Quakers closed ranks against political pressure, but did not erase the contradictions. In 1798, the Overseers still complained about teachers' consistent over-enrollment, but also determined that "the poor of other religious denominations may have such share of our

care and income as is fully consistent with the original design and the express or general tenor of William Penn's charter."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> OM III, 7 June 1798, WPCS Archives.

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