

A Little about the Public School System in This Area: Although the early “William Penn” Quakers and some of the country’s founding fathers believed in public education for everyone, it was about 1829 before any sort of law was passed in Delaware saying, more or less, that every child should have a chance for a public education, which was very loosely defined. We believe the Hockessin, Quakers established a wooden schoolhouse in what is now a corner of the Hockessin Friends Cemetery about 1790. About 1830, an octagonal schoolhouse was built to the west of the Quaker Meeting House, and this served children in the Hockessin and Auburn (later Yorklyn) communities until 1869. William H. (Billy) Little, chief maintenance man and mechanic under Clarence Marshall when the main fibre mills were built in Yorklyn in 1911–12, recalled having attended this octagonal schoolhouse. Billy Little was born about 1860 and died in 1931.

Both Hockessin and Yorklyn got new public school buildings in 1869. Of somewhat similar design, these structures and those who taught in them provided elementary education for more than 60 years. Having three floors each, they afforded advantages not available in one-room schoolhouses, which dotted the rural countryside. Both these buildings are standing and in good repair. The Hockessin School, at the corner of Valley Road and Old Lancaster Pike, housed the Lamborn Library for many years with a private apartment on the third floor. At Yorklyn, the building has been a private residence since the school closed in 1932. Ashton Buchanan, a brother-in-law of storekeeper Grover C. Gregg, was the first to live here with his family. Presently the building, on Yorklyn Road, is owned and occupied by FAHP member Suzanne Moran. Warren, Anna, and Clarence Marshall attended school here between 1890 and 1900.

In 1932, both Hockessin and Yorklyn got new schools of similar design but not of equally good location. The school at Hockessin was built on the highest ground in the village, a beautiful piece of property, while the Yorklyn school was in the flood plain of Red Clay Creek on land probably donated by the George W. Helme Company, manufacturers of snuff. Both closing in the mid-1970s; one is the home of the Hockessin Baptist Church and the other of the Center for the Creative Arts.

In the early 1930s, however, the big “new school” news in this area was the building of the Kennett Consolidated School on a large tract in the south of the borough of Kennett Square facing South Broad Street. Financed by Pierre S. du Pont, it boasted 1,380 students when it opened, becoming the largest consolidated school in the country outside the large cities. Largely replacing one-room schools, it is my understanding that all 12 grades were taught in this school before newer elementary schools were built in outlying sections of the Kennett School District. Mr. du Pont became to schools in this area what Andrew Carnegie was to libraries. The “flagship” P. S. du Pont High School at 34th and VanBuren Streets in Wilmington, a beautiful school that opened in 1934, immediately became the arch-rival of the older Wilmington High School.

Even prior to the building of Kennett Consolidated, there was no segregation in Pennsylvania schools. Such was not the case in Delaware, however, and the segregated “colored” school on Mill Creek Road in Hockessin had to suffice for black students before a few of them could transfer to Howard High School in Wilmington, also segregated and their only chance for a high school education.