



History of the Guilford College Community and Education

by James Simmons, Guilford College, 2014

The area now known as the Guilford College community has changed dramatically since the region was first settled by European American Quakers in the 1750s. Since then, many schools and people have come and gone, but the community remains intact. The community has historically focused on creating opportunities for education to those in and outside of the community and it continues to do so today.

Guilford College Community

In 1750, a small group of Quakers established New Garden in the western part of what is now Guilford County.¹ This community of Quakers predates the British mapping of Guilford County by twenty-one years. The correspondence between the New Garden Monthly Meeting, established 1754, and the North Carolina Yearly Meeting, established 1698, documents their desire to found schools that would both educate and maintain a burgeoning population of North Carolina Quakers and non-Quakers alike.² Establishing itself as a community devoted to education helped North Carolina Friends to spread their principles through schools like New Garden Boarding School.

New Garden Boarding School opened in 1837, bringing with it a deeply invested population of Quaker educators and students. Starting in 1846, all denominations of students, so long as they had recommendations, would be able to attend the school. New Garden Boarding School—the

¹ Stoesen 2.

² Briggs 7.

Yearly Meeting school of North Carolina—thusly grew over the nineteenth century, but years of the United States' Civil War brought with it debt, lower subscription rates, and years of instability for the school. Further, in 1865 the war ended, leaving behind fears of emigration as “the steady flow of emigration was checked during the war—now it was a flood.”³ In response to the emigration of Friends from North Carolina, the Baltimore Association of Friends “decided to appropriate five thousand dollars to New Garden Boarding School to establish a primary system,” both to prepare students for higher education and to create incentive for Friends to remain in North Carolina.⁴

This plan worked, bringing more people to the New Garden community seeking education and opportunity. Mary Mendenhall Hobbs puts the importance of the investment into context when she says, “The public schools were either suspended or were very inferior, and pupils not Friends entered our Monthly Meeting Schools.”⁵ The community and school of New Garden grew outward until 1888 when “the final step was taken and the institution was re-chartered and became Guilford College.”⁶ Following the college's renamed status, the New Garden community was quickly re-chartered to the town of Guilford College.

At this time, the town was both indistinguishable from the college and primarily a Quaker community, but as Guilford-born resident Frank Crutchfield says, “That was changed when [the community] voted for an extra tax to extend the public school year for more than 5 months.”⁷ The community's commitment to education was so appealing that North Carolinians from all over started migrating to Guilford College; Harriet Hood's father is one of these early re-locators, saying “I cannot afford to send my children to college, but I can go where the school and college is.”⁸ Like many during this period, they moved to Guilford College, a “village with a College as the

³ Gilbert 112.

⁴ Gilbert 112.

⁵ Hobbs 40.

⁶ Klain 91.

⁷ Harris.

⁸ Hood 2.

center of most activity.”⁹ This movement towards Guilford College continued, and in 1935 a census from the General Assembly of the state's schools showed community and student population as 2500 and 500 respectively.¹⁰

The community and the college were together until April 1959, when Robert H. Frazier, Chairmen of the Board of Trustees of Guilford College, sought for the General Assembly to annex Guilford College to Greensboro. The private landowners were unanimously opposed.¹¹ The college was seeking annexation because the Trustees were interested in a one million dollar expansion that “depended on fire protection.”¹² In 1961, the state General Assembly removed the college from the town of Guilford College so that it could be annexed by the city of Greensboro.

Only eleven years after the college was annexed, “the 95 acres and 26 houses and five businesses of the town [became] a part of the city of Greensboro,” much to the chagrin of the residents.¹³ After this annexation, expansion followed with the widening of Friendly Avenue from two to five lanes to better accommodate a “serious traffic bottleneck,”¹⁴ leaving Guilford College as a “no longer sleepy community.”¹⁵

New Garden Yearly Meeting School

Agreed upon in 1831, chartered in 1834, and opened in 1837, New Garden Boarding School was the product of North Carolina Yearly Meeting’s commitment to education. The 1831 agreement was meant to resolve needs for teachers, coeducation, and the establishment of primary schools in all Quaker communities,¹⁶ leading to the charter of New Garden Boarding School through North Carolina’s General Assembly in 1834. New Garden Boarding School opened in 1837 with “50

⁹ Hood 2.

¹⁰ Guilford College Parent Teacher Association Scrapbook, 1934-1935, March.

¹¹ “Guilford College Asks Annexation by City and Arbitration on Issue of Water Rates.”

¹² Weaver.

¹³ Weaver.

¹⁴ Schlosser.

¹⁵ Schlosser.

¹⁶ Klain 72.

scholars 25 of each sex.”¹⁷ New Garden Boarding School remained a Quaker select-school until a transformation occurred in 1846, changing the school's recruitment criteria in order to promote financial solvency.

Regardless of these efforts, the 1860 balance of the school's debt stood ominously at \$16,000, threatening to close the doors of New Garden Boarding School. However, Jonathan Cox took over the debt and the school to keep it alive.¹⁸ It was the actions of Jonathan Cox and Nerus Mendenhall that brought the school through the troubled years of war and Reconstruction, and it was the Baltimore Association's campaigning and donations that drove-back the overhanging debt. The attention that the Baltimore Association gave to North Carolina should not be glossed over, “The Baltimore Association had not only assisted New Garden Boarding School at a critical time but had established a normal school and a set of forty elementary schools employing 62 teachers and having enrollment of 2425 students by 1871.”¹⁹

Starting around 1873, the Baltimore Association, with the leadership of Baltimore Quaker Francis T. King, began guiding New Garden Boarding School to become the establishment of a Yearly Meeting College.²⁰ The result of this movement was a college aptly named: Friends School, Guilford, North Carolina. Despite the name change, the school was still known as New Garden Boarding School for five years preceding the final 1888 rechartering of the institution to Guilford College.²¹ Guilford College was “thus the first degree granting institution in the county.”²²

Since that time, Guilford College has grown and celebrated many changes, but none as great as that from boarding school to college.

¹⁷ Harris.

¹⁸ Gilbert 100.

¹⁹ Gilbert 148.

²⁰ Klain 89.

²¹ Gilbert 162.

²² Stoesen 14.

New Garden Monthly Meeting School

The New Garden Monthly Meeting School began as a “little brick school built just back of the old meeting house,”²³ but the meeting minutes for this time are so flimsy that “when the yearly meeting call for the report [in 1830], there was no school being taught at New Garden.”²⁴ After finding out that the schools were struggling, the Yearly Meeting began to focus more on the stability and upkeep of monthly meeting schools. By 1832, “twenty-seven pupils were enrolled” to the New Garden Monthly Meeting School.

One of the struggles facing monthly meeting schools was finding and holding onto quality teachers. This would change, however, with the success of New Garden Boarding School; they say in a letter from the North Carolina Yearly Meeting to New Garden Monthly, “Four hundred students have received education in New Garden Boarding School and nearly one hundred have since been employed as teachers,” and further, “never again would Monthly Meetings find it necessary to report, as they did in 1831, that there were few Quaker teachers.”²⁵

These monthly meeting schools were becoming very popular, as Mary Mendenhall Hobbs puts it “the public schools were either suspended or were very inferior, and pupils not Friends entered our Monthly Meeting schools.”²⁶ The little brick school held until 1885, when a new public school building became the focus of the Monthly Meeting. In 1903, the first usage of the new public school in Guilford College took place. This building stood and served for many years as a Monthly Meeting school, until it was inevitably absorbed: “The Monthly Meeting Schools have been absorbed by our rapidly developing public system, which has so changed in outlook that a good high school course will soon be within reach of every boy and girl in the state.”²⁷

²³ Gilbert 8.

²⁴ Gilbert 22.

²⁵ Gilbert 76.

²⁶ Hobbs 40.

²⁷ Hobbs 47.

New Garden Friends School

A group of concerned citizens met to discuss a new school in 1971; they wished to use Carolina Friends School in Durham-Chapel Hill as a “model of education in which a radically diverse student population would work well together.”²⁸ The plan was to open up Carolina Friends School/Guilford division in Fall 1971. The school started in the basement of Persimmons Grove A.M.E. Church, situated near Guilford College.

In 1972, “the school was incorporated as New Garden Friends School”²⁹ with a 12:1 student-teacher ratio, spanning kindergarten to sixth grade. In 1973, eighth grade was added, and the middle-school arm moved to Greensboro College. There they stayed until 1980, when the middle and upper divisions—now spanning to tenth grade—moved into a few mobile classrooms on the back section of Guilford College. The current curriculum—as opposed to the traditional *guarded education*—works towards “an educational environment wherein children can discover, reinvent, and construct knowledge through a process of exploration, experimentation, and creation.”³⁰

²⁸ Raper 10.

²⁹ Raper 11.

³⁰ Raper 12.

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