

The Academy is located between the Cynwyd Elementary School and the Bala Cynwyd Middle School

Lower Merion Academy

1812



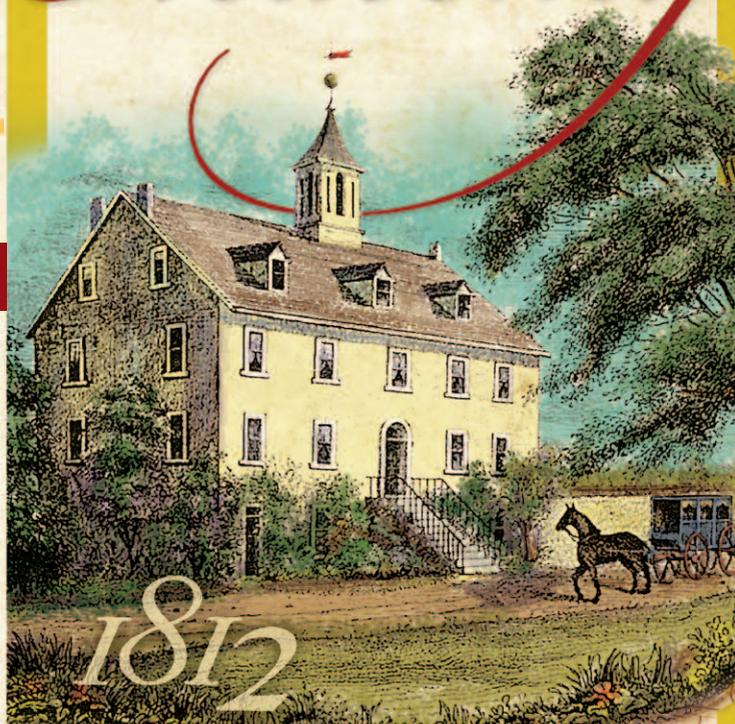
Library Hours:

Wednesday evenings, 7:00 to 9:00pm
 Saturday afternoons, 2:00 to 4:00pm
 Also by appointment
 Phone: (610) 664-3216
 E-mail: LMHistory@comcast.net

LowerMerionHistory.org

Preserving Our Past for the Future
 The Lower Merion Historical Society
 Lower Merion Academy
 506 Bryn Mawr Avenue • Box 2602
 Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania 19004

Lower Merion Academy



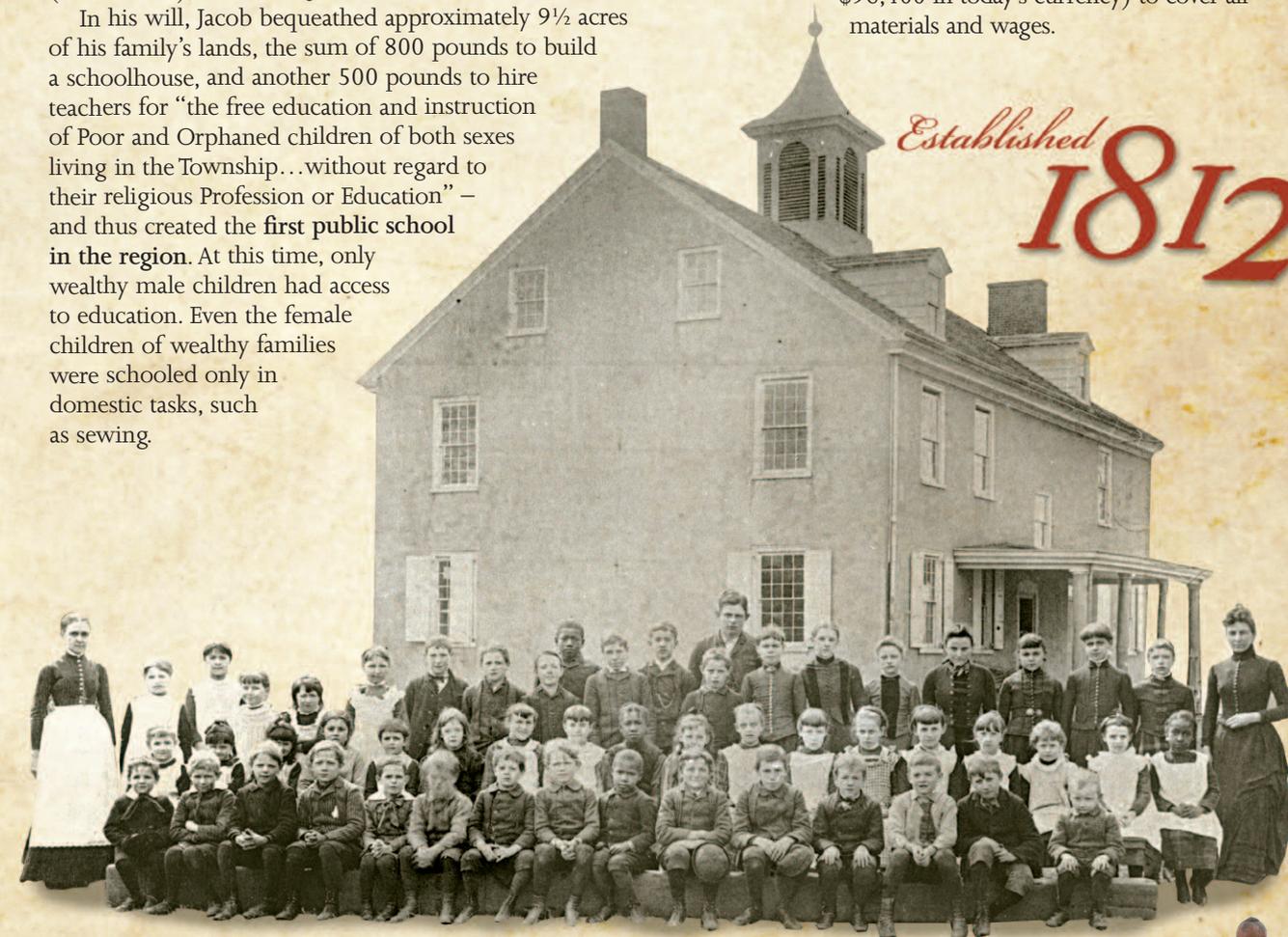
March 1681 marks the creation of Pennsylvania, or Penn's Woods, when King Charles II of England granted a land charter to William Penn to repay a debt the king owed to Penn's father. This was one of the largest land grants to an individual in history. William Penn proved to be a wise steward of this gift, establishing what came to be known as "Penn's Experiment," a way of living with the principles of democratic and religious freedom at its core.

Dr. Edward Jones, one of the original Welsh settlers, was assigned a tract of land by Penn in what is now the Township of Lower Merion. Years later, a portion of this same tract was inherited by his grandson, Jacob Jones (1713-1810), a devout Quaker and farmer.

In his will, Jacob bequeathed approximately 9½ acres of his family's lands, the sum of 800 pounds to build a schoolhouse, and another 500 pounds to hire teachers for "the free education and instruction of Poor and Orphaned children of both sexes living in the Township...without regard to their religious Profession or Education" – and thus created the first public school in the region. At this time, only wealthy male children had access to education. Even the female children of wealthy families were schooled only in domestic tasks, such as sewing.

After his death in 1810, Jacob's wishes were carried out by the trustees and "their heirs and assignees" to oversee his trust. The original five trustees were Jonathan Jones, Algernon Roberts, Henry Bowman, Jonathan Walters and David Roberts—all Quakers and members of Merion Meeting.

The trustees fulfilled Jacob's wishes by constructing a building, hiring teachers, governing the school and admitting as many poor and orphan children as their proceeds would allow. In 1812, the trustees selected Quakers Joseph Price and Nathan Lewis to build the schoolhouse for the sum of \$5,700 (about \$96,400 in today's currency) to cover all materials and wages.



With the creation of the Lower Merion Academy, or "Benevolent Schoolhouse," the tradition of the right to free and public education for all was established.





On November 1, 1813

the Academy opened with Joshua Hoopes as Headmaster. He was followed by 13 other worthy men, the last of whom, Israel L. Irwin, served for a period of 23 years. Over the years, the Academy, and the surrounding village of Academyville, evolved.



In 1834, a law “to establish a general system of education by common schools” was enacted in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, resulting in a joint governing arrangement between the Academy trustees and the Lower Merion School District.

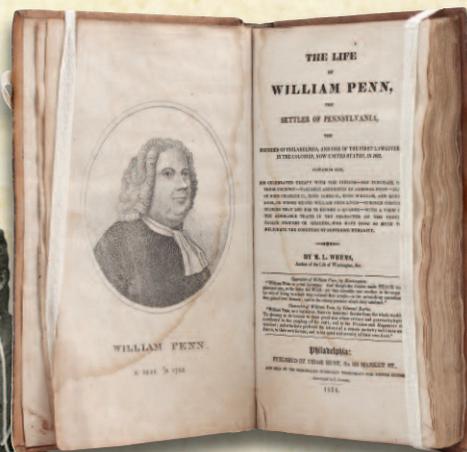
In 1842, the services that the Academy provided were expanded when the trustees established the “Lower Merion Library Company” - the township’s first public library. Operating out of the Academy’s third floor, the library first consisted of books that were donated to the cause. Later, additional books were purchased from the proceeds of Library Company stock sales. This collection of books is still intact and on display at the Academy.



In 1861, the Union Sunday School, under the direction of the American Sunday School Union of Philadelphia, began meeting at the Academy. The headmaster of the Academy also served as superintendent of the Sunday School.



In 1914, the Lower Merion School District built the Cynwyd Elementary School on a portion of Jones’ original nine acres and closed the Academy. Also added to the campus was the Bala Cynwyd Middle School, built in 1938. At this time, the Academy underwent significant reconstruction allowing it be repurposed as an annex classroom in which **home economics, botany, art, bicycle repair,** and other classes were held.



In 1877, at the conclusion of the Centennial Exhibition in Fairmount Park, several houses went up for auction. One of these buildings, a small frame building known as “The American Kindergarten” was purchased and moved next to the Academy, to be used as a Sunday School. While the Academy provided education to the community, the Union Sunday School satisfied more spiritual needs.

By 2000, the Bala Cynwyd Middle School required additional classrooms to meet the requirements of the school district’s growing student population. When these new facilities were completed, the school district no longer needed to use the Academy and sub-leased a portion of the building to the **Lower Merion Historical Society.** To properly repurpose the building as a special library, the school district and the Historical Society partnered to perform the necessary structural repairs and mechanical upgrades to the Academy building.

In 2002, the Lower Merion Academy (including the Cynwyd Elementary and Bala Cynwyd Middle School Complex) were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2004, the Academy became the headquarters of the Lower Merion Historical Society. To this day, five Trustees meet once a year, under the directive of the Montgomery County Orphans’ Court, to ensure the proper administration and care of the facility.

The Historical Society, trustees, and school district remain dedicated to upholding and nurturing Jacob Jones’ legacy. And over 300 years after the Welsh settlement of Penn’s Woods, the Historical Society continues to fulfill Penn’s Experiment of racial, class, and religious tolerance.

Today, the Academy is a respected symbol of Lower Merion’s rich heritage, and is a safe haven, open to anyone who requests its use for peaceful purposes.

Problem Rule. Examples.



Above, top: Song book published by Lippincott in 1873, used at the Union Sunday School. Above, middle: “Problem, Rule and Examples” of trigonometry from a student’s cipher book from the 1830s. Since books were expensive, boys and girls kept these books for future reference. Above: A pair of student reading glasses.

Top, left: The Academy and Union Sunday School (building at right) as seen in 1886 photo. Pictured is Israel Irwin (on horseback) with wife and three daughters, Laura, Cora and Della. Above: Vintage 1903 photo of the 4th, 5th and 6th grades at the Academy. Total enrollment: 78.

Above, top: Slate chalk boards were used by the students in the classroom. Above, middle: One of the library books from the Lower Merion Literary Company. “Life of William Penn, the Settler of Pennsylvania and Founder of Philadelphia,” by M.L. Weerns, 1836.

Cover: Early engraving of the Academy as it appeared on John Levering’s 1851 map and detail of “Atlas of Lower Merion” published by A.H. Mueller, Philadelphia in 1896 showing the area around the Academy as Academyville. Inside cover: Class photo, late 1890s on the side of the Academy and the Academy school bell.