

Rotary



Club of Washington

Thursday, March 4, 2021

March 2, 2021

Dear {%FName%},

The Rotary Club of Washington met by Zoom

Present were: **Brad Montgomery, Tom Drewitz, Dave and Shirley Moore, Dave Hart, Mary Jo and Rich Podgurski, John Hopper, Kathy Sabol, Tom Uram, Park Burroughs, Bill Allison, Andy Goudy, Ken Baker, Bill and Susan Price, Lars Lange, Joe Piszczor, Susan Priest**

(In the following account of the meeting, up to the program itself, I cribbed from a certain religious work. Persons who can provide the citation will receive a free meal on me when the club returns to in-person meetings. Deadline is before next week's meeting.)

Pre-Meeting

Due to a glitch, many members did not receive the new Zoom link which President Brad had created, and were having trouble getting to the meeting. As we gathered for pre-meeting fellowship, Brad kept getting calls from frustrated wanna-be attendees. He ended up resending the link, and more and more members joined us.

As **Joe Piszczor** joined us, he greeted **Park Burroughs** with the news that he (Joe) had soothed relations with his (Joe's) aunt by gifting her with copies of his (Park's) complete body of work. Nothing was said about what Joe had done or left undone which required this peace offering. With a tip of the hat to **Mary Jo Podgurski**, Joe continued by saying that, while it was not ♦The Doctors♦, he had been included as a speaker in a Zone ICA meeting.

We all were pleased to see **Bill Allison** again, looking in the pink. Someone asked him if he had returned to the Wellness Center yet. Bill said that he has had a first dose of the COVID vaccine, and plans to return after the second, although he is not sure what it will be like to exercise while wearing a mask.

Susan Price then said that she had recently connected with former member **Dick Feldstein**, who asked her to say hello to us all and to hope that we were all well. He is doing fine, himself.

Getting Started

The time being after noon, **President Brad** rang the bell to start the meeting, and himself gave the invocation. For the Pledge of Allegiance he used a picture of the flag flying beside the city transportation station, which is next to the site of the Greenhouse Project.

- **President Brad** went on to say that he attended last night's District Zoom meeting. The subject was international projects. These need to be more sustainable. The emphasis needs to move beyond merely raising funds for projects to following up to insure implementation and sustainability of projects.
- He also attended the second Virtual Membership meeting last Thursday and came away with a confirmation that mass appeals to draw in members is not as effective as one-on-one interaction with people to draw them to see how Rotary can help them more efficiently serve the community. There will be three more Thursday meetings starting on March 11.
- The nominating committee is nearly done with finding officers for our next Rotary year, and its recommendations will be presented to the club before the end of March.
- President Brad reported that the Family Essentials project is really taking off. On Friday the Teen Center brought a giant box of kits, and several Rotarians dropped off more yesterday. He mentioned **Tom Drewitz, the Prices**, and of course **Dave Hart**. He apologized if he had left out anyone. At last count there were 248 kits, and **Dave Hart** and **Dave Moore** have received cash (or check) contributions towards the purchase of items for kits as well.
- **President Brad** asked if **Dave Hart** had anything to add. Dave said he just wants to encourage us all to spread the word to friends and neighbors. This project will make an impact. He thanks all who have done things to help.
- **Susan Price** chimed in: this is a collective effort which can continue beyond the first week of April. Her local Dollar Store is getting used to seeing her often as she works on assembling kits. She points out that there is an article in the latest Rotarian about the Los Angeles Rotary clubs, whose work, chronicled in the *Los Angeles Times*, was her inspiration to bring this idea to the club.
- **President Brad** said that the more you do something, the better you get at doing it.
- **Brad** then brought up what can be done to properly install **Brandi Moore** as president for the 2021-2022 Rotary year. He felt that it might have to be a virtual event, although he really did not want Brandi to miss out on a physical transfer of authority. **Joe Piszczor** commented in a chat note: Why not combine President's Night (or Day) with the dedication of the Main Pavilion. **Bill Price** interjected that we now have the plaque for the pavilion. Members were enthusiastic about this. Maybe we could have Angelo's cater it. It would need to be in late May or early June to be sure that the weather would be conducive for an outdoor meeting.

Program: Park Burroughs

At this point **Susan Priest** was asked to introduce our speaker. She said that we all knew **Park** from his years as editor of the Observer-Reporter. Since she was a history major in college, she particularly appreciates his work in writing about the past in a way which brings it to life. At the moment she is rereading his book *Washington County Murder and Mayhem*, and particularly recommends his account of the massive accidental explosion of a large amount of nitroglycerine on East Maiden Street over 100 years ago. However, it is a section in his first book, *Enter with Torches*, which led her to ask him to speak to us. Here is a copy of his presentation. (She is very thankful that this week she is not going to have to reconstruct a speaker's words from her scribbles.)

Darrow and the Shakers

In my first book, ♦Enter, With Torches,♦ there's a chapter titled ♦The Spirits of Lebanon.♦ It is about my experiences at Darrow, a prep school perched on a mountainside in the Berkshires once occupied by the Shakers. Sue Priest suggested that I speak to the club on this topic.

When I was 14 years old, my parents sent me away to a fancy prep school in Connecticut ♦ Taft, my father's alma mater. I flunked out after my first year. I would have been happy to return home and attend our local high school, but my father wanted me to have the same ♦ well, nearly the same ♦ experiences he had as a boy, to grow up in a highly disciplined environment and to learn to become independent.

And so I was sent to the Darrow School, about 28 miles east of Albany, New York, and a short stroll from the Massachusetts state line. It was not a fancy prep school. More than a few of the students were like me ♦ rejects from better schools. Many of the 185 boys could not get into those better schools or afford them. Some were scholarship students, bright kids given a chance to escape the poverty and violence of inner cities. Our dormitories were not ivy-covered gothic halls but rather plain, ancient, creaking wooden buildings, from which windows we could watch sheep grazing in pastures.

Those buildings were not constructed for school boys; they were built by the Shakers as their living quarters and workshops. Let me read a little from the start of ♦The Spirits of Lebanon♦:

I spent three years at Darrow in the 1960s. Its history is odd and fascinating, the school itself is a National Historic landmark, with many of its buildings comprising the first Shaker community in the US; The Shakes, more formally known as the Unites Society of Believers in Christ ♦s Second Coming, once numbered 6,000 members living in 18 major communities in eight states. But because they were celibate and gained new members only by conversion and adoption, the sect largely died out by the early 20th century, and now only a handful remain in the community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

We teenage boys cloistered there in those days of the middle of the last century treated our school ♦s Shaker heritage like an embarrassing family secret. The idea of celibacy was incomprehensible; we were obsessed with losing our virginity, not preserving it. We did our best to ignore the history, but we could not escape it. The Shakers first came to that Berkshire mountainside near New Lebanon in 1781, and 100 years later had built Utopia. Then they dwindled, disappeared. We felt the chill of their presence in the dark corners of old buildings, imagined their whispers in the damp woods.

♦The Shakers selected this spot for a purpose, ♦ wrote Cheryl Moore, an art teacher and theater director, on Darrow ♦s Web site. ♦Something intangible happens to you here. You see poppies in bloom that were originally planted by the Shakers 200 years ago, and you feel a tremendous connection. ♦

I ♦m wondering, now that a number of my own classmates have died, if someday, perhaps even now, the students at Darrow feel the chilling presence of not just the Shakers but the students of long ago. That place has been worn smooth by humanity; it is rich in experience; its stories need to be told.

It was hardly a secret that the Shaker had settled on Mount Lebanon. I ♦m going to read a couple of paragraphs from a 1975 article in the New York Times:

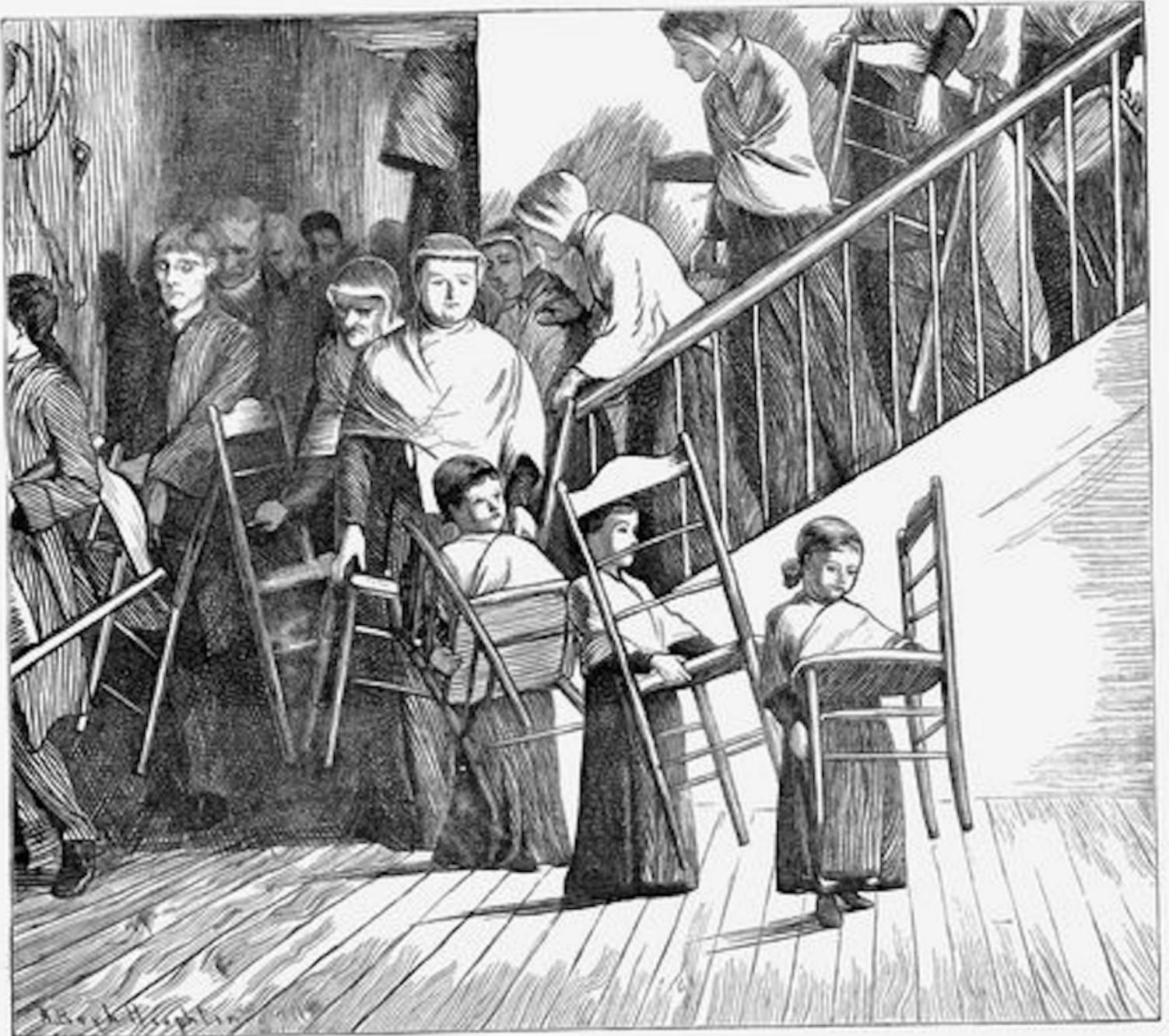
♦In 1842, an English visitor stopped at the Shaker village in Mount Lebanon, N. Y., and to his dismay had the worst of times. Accustomed as he was to the cozy environment of British parlors, Charles Dickens obviously found Shaker rooms not to his liking and wrote accordingly, ♦We walked into a grim room, where several grim hats were hanging on grim pegs, and the time was grimly told by a grim clock. ♦ Dickens came away with a distinct impression of the Shaker style ♦sparse, relatively subdued in color and entirely free of cozy clutter.

♦Few visitors today seem to agree with Dickens. Where he found esthetic and emotional poverty, we tend to find refreshing spaciousness. Our appreciation of Shaker design is, of course, just as much influenced by our own times and taste as Dickens's disapproval was by his. ♦



♦Shakers♦ was really a derogatory nickname for the sect, which in theology was similar to the Quakers. But because they believed that God would be found within the person, they were often self-absorbed during religious services and prone to dancing mumbling and shaking. It was this behavior and their adherence to celibacy that subjected them to ridicule from the outside world.

But Shaker philosophy involved much more. The Mount Lebanon Society was the oldest and largest Shaker community, which at one time had 600 people, 100 buildings and 6,000 acres of land. Almost entirely self-sustaining, Shakers grew their food, flax and herbs; built their own buildings, made their own clothes, drugs, equipment, furniture, stoves and tools. They provided their own dyes, lumber, waterpower, instruction and entertainment.



They did not vote and refused to bear arms, and perhaps it was their celibacy that channeled their energy to more useful purposes. They were incredibly industrious and inventive. You can thank the Shakers for such inventions as the circular saw, double-hung windows and even the clothes pin.

They believed in purity of mind and body, honesty and integrity in words and dealings, kindness to friend and foe, education, common ownership of property and freedom from debt.



But without sex, the Shakers had to rely on converts to maintain their population, which inevitably led to their decline. By 1929, the community had dwindled so severely that Sister Emma Neale, a teacher, weaver and cloak maker who had been there for more than 75 years, arranged with a lawyer friend to have the village become a school for boys in the hope that the traditions and buildings would survive.



The Darrow School that I arrived at in 1964 favored no religion, and it was made clear that the school had no connection with the Shaker Society. However, traditions persisted. Sunday morning services ♦ without the dancing ♦ were mandatory, as was Vespers, a service in the chapel before dinner, every night except Sunday.

Our life at Darrow was regimental, our schedules designed to obliterate idleness. We attended classes on Saturday mornings, the afternoons dedicated to sports, which were, of course, mandatory. We had no classes on Wednesday afternoons ♦ that time being dedicated to what was called ♦Hands to Work, ♦ from the Shaker motto, ♦Hands to work, hearts to God.♦ The student body was divided into work crews to do maintenance, landscaping, repairs, farm chores and labor for Darrow Enterprises, which included the sale of apple cider, black walnut candy and wool.

Wednesday chores took us over the fields and into the woods to cut brush and clear fallen timber, and we sometimes found evidence of the old Shakers and their work ethic. I am still in awe of the walls they built of rock, chiseled and tightly fit to last through the centuries and wide enough to accommodate horse-drawn wagons.

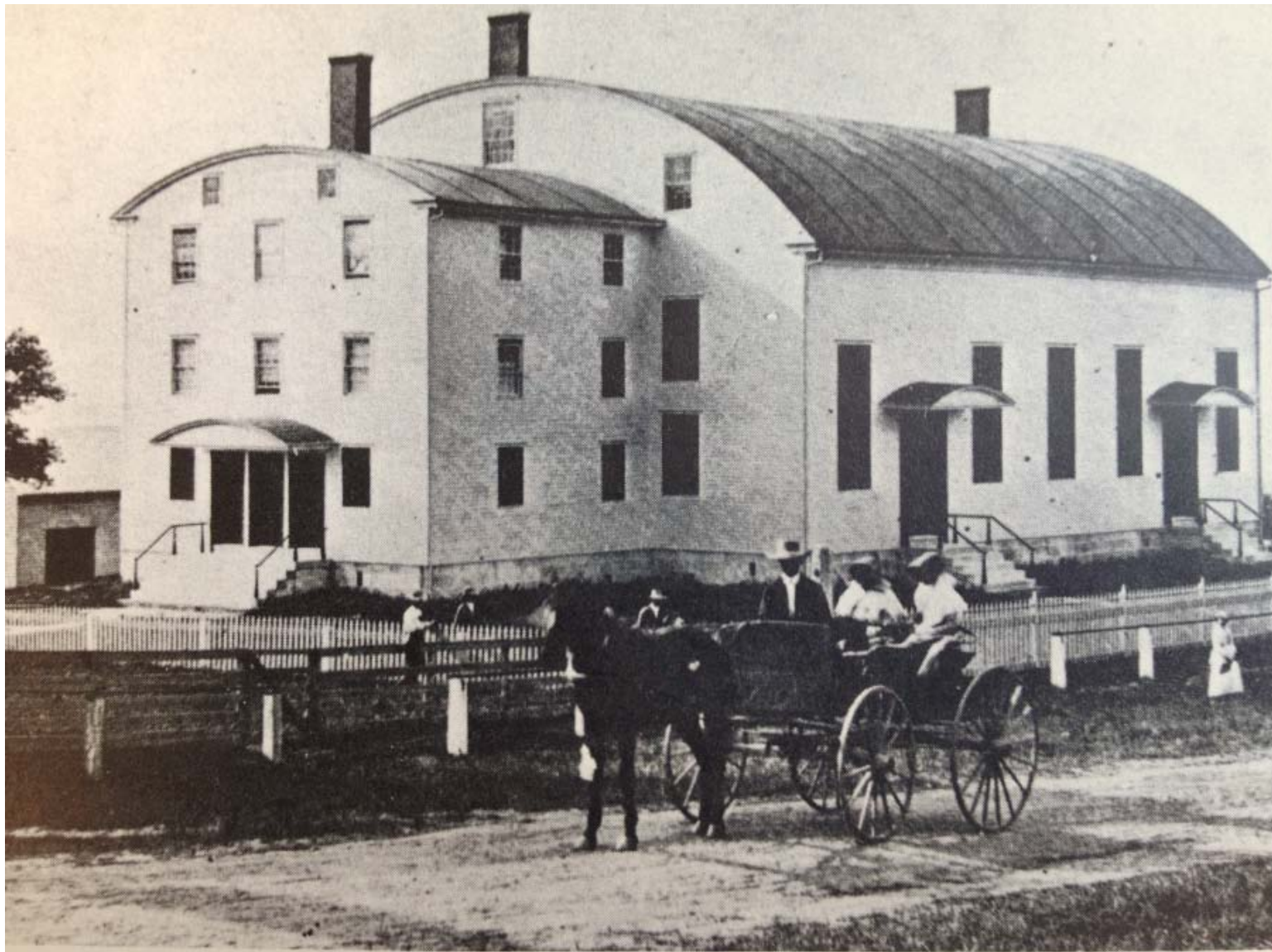
Physical labor for the school was not limited to Wednesdays. Once a boy had accumulated 12 penalty hours, he would have to work them off. Being late to any meal or class resulted in one penalty hour. Missing breakfast meant three hours; miss a class, six hours.

Student labor was important, not just for the soul but for the school ♦s finances. The school nearly closed in 1963 when two buildings housing the gym and dining hall were destroyed by fires set by two students. What endowment the school had probably disappeared with the construction of a building to replace the lost facilities. Called the Dairy Barn (the original purpose of one of the destroyed buildings) it contained all the athletic facilities, dining hall and an auditorium. Money ran out when it came to installing seats in the auditorium however. For all of my three years at Darrow, we sat on cold, concrete slabs where one day in the future, comfortable seats would be.

We were embarrassed when hockey teams from fancy prep schools visited our campus. Our rink was a pond, and the boards were made of two-by-fours and chicken wire. The teams would dress in a barn, serenaded by bleating sheep, and step down a hay-covered path to the pond for the game.

In my senior year, thanks to uncooperative weather and alumni pride, we played all our home games at an indoor rink in nearby Pittsfield, Mass.

The Shakers had built the houses in which we lived. They made the pegs on which we hung our clothes and cleared the field we played on. We were surrounded by their spirits, their architecture and ingenuity.



This is a photo from the late 19th century showing the meeting house. It is still in use today as the school ♦s library. Note the gently rounded roof ♦ quite an architectural feat for that time. And here is a view of the library now, from the rear.



This next photo is of the ruins of the stone barn, which had four stories. It is being stabilized and restored by the Hancock Shaker Village Museum, which owns some of the buildings in what once was the Shaker village.



I lived in Ann Lee Cottage, named for Mother Ann, who, the Shakers believed, represented the second coming of Christ. Although it had been retrofitted with a boiler and radiators, and plumbed to add sinks, showers and toilets, it was otherwise as constructed in the mid 1800s. The window by my bed was original and faced the west, and when the wind blew up the valley in wintertime, fine particles of snow accumulated inside on the sill and the coffee in my cup placed there the night before would be frozen by morning. (The coffee was never really hot to begin with, having been made from instant coffee and hot tap water. We weren't allowed any appliances, of course. Ann Lee Cottage was a fire trap. No radios or TVs, either.)



The dorm can be seen just barely behind this photo of its occupants in 1966: 27 boys, an assistant house master, and our housemaster, his wife and two children. His toddler daughter is sitting on my lap.

Once, I could not contain my curiosity about a long, low third-floor closet, the door of which had been painted shut. One Saturday afternoon, when everyone else was watching a soccer game, I worked at it with a table knife and got the door open. I don't know what I expected to find: skeletons, or maybe treasure. To my disappointment, it was stuffed full of chairs, old ladderback chairs.

Those Shaker chairs would soon be worth a fortune. We had no idea that the old furniture we abused would someday be commanding huge sums on the auction block at Sotheby's.



Here is a photo of the 10 senior boys of Ann Lee in the spring of 1967, just after Sunday services.

Years after I left Darrow, when enrollment had plummeted and the school was in poor financial shape, much of its Shaker furniture was sold. I don't think that Sister Emma Neale would have objected, though. I think she would have felt that it was not the object that is sacred and has value, but rather the work that made it.

When you take 185 boys and isolate them in the Berkshire Mountains, away from the outside world, from television and radio, and most importantly, from girls, something is going to happen. Teenage boys have a lot of energy, and when that is stifled for a long time, it builds up, finds a weak spot and explodes through it. That's how pranks happen.



In the minds of some of the seniors in the spring of 1965, that weak spot was an old panel truck, used for maintenance, its dark blue paint faded from years of exposure to the elements. The truck could be seen every morning, chugging up the unpaved road that cut through the campus, its gears grinding, making the rounds to pick up trash.

One Saturday morning, arriving from breakfast at the Dairy Barn, we were shocked to see the old blue truck parked in the lobby of the building, painted all over in yellow polka dots. Looking like some sort of enormous dead beetle.

How had it gotten there? The doors to the Dairy Barn were just wide enough to get it in, but how had it been moved up the flight of steps to the doors? Presumably, a large number of senior boys had either carried or pushed the truck up all those steps in the middle of the night, doing it quietly enough not to waken anyone.

The entire student body buzzed with excitement over the prank and wondered what awful punishment might befall the culprits. The masters (that's what we called the faculty) did their best to appear disgusted and outraged, but they could not quite conceal their true emotions. Even with jaws clenched, smiles twitched at the corners of their mouths. Many of them must have thought the prank was simply brilliant.

Darrow seemed like the same place to us, year after year, but the school was ♦ and is ♦ in a constant state of change. Girls were admitted to the school beginning in the early 1970s. Today, there are 110 students. Tuition, room and board comes to just under \$62,000 a year. (It was probably about \$2,500 in my day.) There have been improvements to the athletic facilities and there's a new building for the arts, but students live in the same old dormitories we did, play on the same fields, and attend Vespers in the same chapel. That chapel was once a tannery used by the Shakers, and its cavernous interior of oak and chestnut timbers has such marvelous acoustics that in the summer it is the venue for Tannery Pond Concerts, where world-class chamber musicians perform.

I performed a little better academically at Darrow than I did at Taft ♦ good enough to be accepted at Washington & Jefferson College. I came to W&J because it was small, and all-male ♦ not all that different from Darrow, or so I thought. But of course, the experience here was quite different. The world had become much different. I met a local girl named Alice and married her, and after a brief stint in Florida, we settled down here and raised a family.

I was transformed from a child to an adult during those three years at Darrow. What happened there then, and really what occurred there so many years before I arrived, had much to do with the person I am today.

Brad Montgomery asked if his years at Darrow included his chance to get a free ride to Woodstock. Park said that they were before that experience.

A question was asked about children in the community.

Park: Children became members of the community in two ways. Many were abandoned by parents who could not care for them. Others came when their parent or parents became converts and joined the community. During the lifetime of Ann Lee, families were separated by sex, but lived in the same building and continued family ties. After her death the sect became more strict, and children were not kept within a family setting. Ann Lee herself had had 4 children who died, and she would not have approved of the change. The change meant that most of these children left the community when they reached adulthood, quickening the drop of membership caused by the sect's celibacy rule.

Dave Hart asked how the **Park Burroughs** he knew could have flunked out of school.

Park: ♦ I was always a terrible student. At Washington & Jefferson I was on academic probation more often than not. ♦ At graduation he was surprised to learn that six other classmates had even worse grades than he did. To graduate from W&J a student had to have a GPA of 2.2 or higher. Park's was 2.22. Looking back, he believes that if he had been born a few decades later he would have been put on Ritalin. He was a day dreamer and could not pay attention.

Bill Allison said that, based on Park's account, Darrow seemed the kind of place Dickens could have written about.

Park: No. He was *not* miserable. He was very happy there. The disciple was helpful. The disincentive of the ♦ Hands to Work ♦ penalty hours was a help. No one was anxious to repair fences, or shovel manure in the sheep barn.

The meeting ended with the Four Way Test, led by **President Brad**.

Speakers

March 9th
Dr. John Six

March 16th
Betsie Trew

March 23rd
Larry Maggi

Washington Hospital and COVID: One year later
March 30th
Brad Montgomery
Club Assembly

Washington County Community Foundation

Participating in a COVID Vaccine Trial

Events

No Events found

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[Lars Lange](#)
Secretary

[David W. Moore](#)
Treasurer

[Diane L. Ambrose](#)
Club Service Chair

[Dorothy Curley Tecklenburg](#)
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President -Elect

[Susan E. Priest](#)
Assistant Secretary

[David A. Hart](#)
Rotary Foundation Chair

[Thomas C. Drewitz](#)
Webworker

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Area Governor

[John P. Hopper](#)
Vice President
Vocational Service Chair

[Robert K. Wicker](#)
Assistant Treasurer

[William J Mesler](#)
Membership Chair

[Angeline Anyango East](#)
Community Service Chair

Club Meeting

Washington
Meets at W & J College, The Commons
60 S. Lincoln St.
Washington, PA 15301
Time: Tuesday at 12:00 PM