

**Mr. Leigh Takes Some Photographs**

by Larry Kidder

Joseph K. Leigh liked social gatherings and he liked to take pictures. At the turn of the century amateur photography was becoming very popular and a variety of equipment was available from catalogs such as Montgomery Ward's. When the teacher of his young children threw a picnic at the end of the school year, Joseph made sure to bring his camera. The picnic was held at the Pleasant Valley school house and at the end of the day Joseph commemorated the occasion by taking several photos. The first picture he took was of the school house. Then he got all the students together beside the school for a group shot and finally all the parents and guests joined the students for the final photo. Mr. Leigh had made his record of the day's event.

Joseph Leigh was a well-known Pleasant Valley farmer and active citizen. He was about 41 years old in 1902 when he took his photos and throughout the 1890s and into the 1900s he was active as an officer in the Pleasant Valley Vigilant Association and the Union Sunday School. His daughters Anna and Mellie were noted for their good attendance at school and participated in school events such as the annual Arbor Day celebrations. In 1901-1902 Anna and Mellie Leigh were the students of Miss Adeline MacNair, the teacher who gave the picnic the day Joseph took his photos.

Adeline MacNair had really enjoyed the year she taught at the Pleasant Valley School. She had come to Pleasant Valley as an 18 year-old farm girl from her Bucks County home in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania and by all appearances she had been embraced by the community. Her appointment had been late for some reason. When teacher appointments were announced in May 1901 it was simply recorded that, like several other schools, the Pleasant Valley position still needed to be filled. Adeline's older sister, Maria, was scheduled to be the teacher at the Bear Tavern School. By the time school opened in September 1901, though, Adeline had been appointed by the Hopewell Township Board of Education. When the Pleasant Valley School had been built in 1889, the local community chose the teacher but by 1901 the township board of education made the appointments. The board also determined curriculum and text books. For example, at the September 5, 1901 meeting of the board it was decided to adopt "the semi-slant copy book" and to "continue with all the other old books, except to use Fry's geography in Pennington school."

Her first year of teaching hadn't been an easy one for Adeline. In addition to being young and a beginning teacher, Adeline had suffered with health and other problems. Teaching wasn't easy for anyone, and local attitudes towards education and teachers could be daunting to the young women who made up a large portion of the teaching corps. A good example of these attitudes can be seen in the following comments published September 4, 1901 by the editor of the *Hopewell Herald*.

The children are overjoyed because school opens soon, for they love their teachers so that it has been a positive hardship for them to be deprived of their society and instruction all summer. That remark is poetic and sentimental, per Sunday school fiction, but it's not true. Children don't love their teachers as a rule, and they would rather play than go to school. But the mothers will be genuinely glad when school opens – they will know where the little ruffians are for a few hours a day at least. Then, besides being relieved of looking after them continually, those mothers who cannot control their youngsters at home will have an opportunity of criticizing the teachers because the little nihilists get along no better at school. Teaching is a noble profession. To those that like that sort of thing, that is just the sort of thing they like, but while ditch digging or any such easy job is available, we would not choose pedagogy as a means of livelihood.

This comment was printed just as Adeline was beginning her career. Even with this inauspicious send off to the new school year, Miss MacNair seems on the surface at least to have had a

relatively normal year. In October school was closed for a day so the children could attend the agricultural fair and other holidays were observed. In November Miss MacNair reported just one student had not been absent during the month, but Joseph Leigh's daughter, Mellie, was among five students who only missed one day. In December Miss MacNair apparently missed school for some time when she contracted pneumonia. During her absence a sister substituted for her. However, at the end of May the paper reported that, "All teachers who served for the past year were again engaged with the exception of one or two." Although not mentioned by name, Miss MacNair was one who was not rehired.

Apparently, though, Miss MacNair was popular with the people of Pleasant Valley. Rachel Williamson, local correspondent to the *Herald*, wrote that, "This neighborhood is sorry to have Miss MacNair leave the school on such a flimsy excuse as the Board of Education has seen fit to give." Joseph K. Leigh was so incensed that he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Herald* on June 2 under the headline – "Not Satisfied." In his letter he wrote:

It seems very mysterious to the people of District No. 1, that when we have a teacher that no one likes in the school, and the school to dwindle down to 3 or 4 pupils, that we were compelled to tolerate it. And, on the other hand, when we had one that was trying to do her best to build up the school, and did to 28 or 30 pupils, and not one employer can say that she did not do her part, for the children all respected her and have learned more than they did in two years before, it seems very strange that she should be turned down and not given another school in the township.

Would it not have been better for the board, if they thought that she should keep the property in repair, to have had a talk with her in regard to such matters, instead of laying her before the township in the way they did?

Not the voice of one, but of the whole district or school.

J.K.L.

So the "flimsy excuse" had to do with how well she kept up the property of the school, not with how well she taught. In the days of the one-room schoolhouse the teacher was responsible for everything, including the upkeep of the building and grounds.

The board was not moved by Mr. Leigh's very public outcry and now the year had ended and Adeline MacNair wouldn't be returning to Pleasant Valley the next year. As a sign that she had enjoyed her time there and had been well received by students and their parents, she wanted to show her appreciation by giving them a picnic at the school house.

The June day chosen for the picnic turned out to be stormy in the morning and so only about 40 people came out for the event. Rachel Williamson reported that those who braved the weather, however, had a very pleasant time. The whole crowd was treated to an appetizing dinner that was served in the afternoon at the school house and with the clearing weather everyone enjoyed social conversation and playing croquet in the school yard. Miss MacNair had invited her parents, Howell and Hannah MacNair, to come over from Neshaminy to share in the social event with the people Adeline had grown to like so much.

At the end of the day, Mr. Joseph K. Leigh recorded the event with his camera by taking three photos. After the picnic the families went home and Miss MacNair and her parents went back to Neshaminy. The story might end there except that a curious letter to the editor of the *Hopewell Herald* appeared on July 9 under the heading – "A Misunderstanding."

As the idea has gone forth that certain members of the school board of Hopewell township, and particularly Mr. Isaac Horn, was responsible for my not being re-elected as teacher of Pleasant Valley school, I am glad to say, from what I have learned from a trustworthy source, that Mr. Horn did not oppose my

appointment, but on the contrary labored in my behalf, and feel it my duty to make this statement, that a wrong may be righted.

Thanking my friends for their kindness to me during my stay with them, and the efforts they have made to have me return, I hope further agitation of the matter will cease.

Adeline MacNair, Neshaminy, Pa.

Although not rehired in Hopewell, Adeline MacNair continued her teaching career. In 1903 the *Herald* reported she was a teacher in Princeton Junction and that her teaching certificate had been renewed. After the June 1902 picnic, Joseph Leigh took his family home and had his three photos developed. The third has apparently survived to the present and is included here. While we can't be absolutely sure this is the photo, it fits the description of the event given by Rachel Williamson and there is nothing in the photo to make us think it is not the third one taken by Joseph Leigh at Miss MacNair's picnic.



This photo is believed to be the one taken by Joseph K. Leigh in June 1902. Miss MacNair is most likely the young woman just to the right of the couple in the center who are probably her parents.



In this detail Miss MacNair and her parents can be seen more clearly.