

The Schoff Family

By Douglas Ewbank

Frederick and Hannah Schoff raised their seven children at 3418 Baring St. They moved there in the early 1880s and expanded the house to fit their family's needs. Hannah probably lived there until her death in 1940, almost 60 years later. Leonard and Hannah were very industrious. Frederick ran Stow Flexible Shaft Co., which was co-founded by George Burnham, Jr. (who lived at 214 N 31st). Their flexible shafts and variable speed motors were widely used in industry, and also made possible the dentist's drill. He was a member of the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborg), the Union League, and the Sons of the Revolution.

Hannah was by far the more interesting. In 1899, she read about an eight-year-old girl who set fire to a house. The girl was orphaned at two, raised in an orphanage and then worked in a boarding house. She was tried in a regular court and sentenced to a House of Refuge along with adults. Hannah convinced the judge to place the girl in a good home. She then set about reforming the treatment of juveniles in the criminal justice system in Philadelphia. Her efforts led in 1901 to the establishment of a juvenile court system (only the second, after Chicago's), separate detention homes, and a system of probation officers. During the first eight years, she observed almost every session of the new court. She pushed for a similar system in Pittsburgh and assisted efforts in several other states and Canada. She became the first woman ever invited to address the Canadian Parliament.



At the same time, she was involved in the establishment of the National Congress of Mothers in 1897 and served as its president from 1902 to 1920. She changed the organization's focus and its name to the National Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, thus playing a central role in the initial years of the PTA. She founded its journal, *Child Welfare* (later *National Parent-Teacher*) and edited it from her home. She was instrumental in getting Theodore Roosevelt to serve on an advisory board throughout her presidency.

A major focus of the National Congress of Women was keeping children from falling into a life of crime. For example, they opposed complete bans on child labor on the grounds that some children should work to keep them out of trouble. Hannah oversaw a large-scale investigation into the childhood circumstances that led to criminal incarceration. Her study of 8,000 questionnaires filled out by prisoners and her years of observing the criminal justice system and visiting prisons led in 1915 to her book *The Wayward Child*. She wrote that over the years that she had been in touch with the so-called incorrigible children and she had seen many who were regarded as hopelessly wicked respond to the love and care given them.

Hannah was very Victorian in that she stressed childrearing as "the highest, holiest duty of womanhood." She felt women needed to be better prepared for the task. She was often at odds with the more radical feminists of her day, but through her efforts to reform the criminal justice system and the founding of the PTA, she had an enormous influence on the fate of children in the twentieth century.

Frederick and Hannah Schoff with their son, Albert, on the day of his wedding to Lucy Porter. Taken in 1918 at 3418 Baring Street.