

Poweltonians of the Past: A Quirky Family in a Quirky House

By Doug Ewbank

Dear Powelton History Hound: Wasn't the house at 3309 Baring modified to include a painting studio? Regards, Curious G.

Dear Curious G.: Yes, a painting studio was added for a muralist – but that's not half the story.

3309 was squeezed in between 3311 and 3305 about 1879. Its red and green, Arts and Crafts appearance contrasts with older stucco and stone neighbors. This quirky style fit the James Monaghan family perfectly. They moved from Swarthmore to an apartment in 3316 Arch where they lived for a few years before buying 3309 Baring about 1910.

James Monaghan was born in Missouri in 1854, attended Lafayette College and was admitted to the bar. He edited volumes on Pennsylvania court cases including Monaghan's Supreme Court Cases but also wrote a monograph titled Lafayette at Brandywine. Anna grew up in a Quaker family that hosted many prominent Quakers, including Lucretia Mott.

The youngest Monaghan made headlines first. In 1911, the New York Times reported the outcome of the Battle of Juarez early in the Mexican Revolution. They reported that James, Jr., a student at Swarthmore, went sightseeing in Juarez and was arrested as a spy. He was held prisoner for several days during the battle. Earlier, he worked as a cowboy in roundups in Wyoming – an unusual job for a 5'6", 100-pound 17 year-old.

After an M.A. from Penn and 14 years running a livestock business, James got the job that every adventurous boy desires: State Historian for the State of Illinois.

Gertrude was the artist. She and sister Hannah combined Quaker zeal with a passion for art. Hannah later wrote: "Something happened in this Quaker household. A virus struck under the pseudonym of ART. How it entered this sanctuary and hit two who came from a long line of Quaker martyrs cannot be explained. Thereafter these two victims live for nothing but art." Training at the Philadelphia School for Design for Women and the Pennsylvania Academy led Gertrude to painting murals, which required a large studio space. In 1916, The New York Times mentioned a landscape series of overdoor and overwindow panels by Gertrude featuring views of sand dunes. Later, she was inspired by trips to Morocco, Portugal and Spain. Meanwhile, Hannah dedicated herself to writing and acting.

Illustrator and muralist Violet Oakley suggested the sisters move to Nantucket where they became early members of the art colony. After a few years, they bought a decrepit, eighteenth-century cow and pig barn and renovated it as a summer home and art space. They named it "Greater Light" after the Quaker concept of a guiding light. The renovation combined Quakerism's mysterious inspiration with "dumpster-diving." Before going to Nantucket, they were inspired to purchase two twelve-foot-high wrought-iron gates



3309 Baring Street, home of the Monaghans (Doug Ewbank)

from a junkyard in Philadelphia. Later, the gates fit perfectly into the barn doors. The renovation also included salvaged stained-glass windows and a Mohammadan harem curtain.

The Monaghan family's passion for art, religious inspiration and adventure are an important part of Powelton's legacy.

You can find more stories about the sisters at the Nantucket Historical Association web-site by Googling: Gertrude Monaghan Nantucket. More stories about Poweltonians from the past can be found on doug's blog: <http://poweltonhistoryblog.blogspot.com>

