

## Barnabas Coffin Hobbs

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In the history of education in Indiana the name of Barnabas C. Hobbs occupies a prominent place. Living at a period when the state's educational system was undergoing some radical changes, he took an ardent and active interest in the up-building and betterment of the schools. To him we may attribute some of the marked transitions in the development of Indiana's schools and school laws and in the epoch of 1836 to 1886—a half hundred years—he won for himself a niche in the brilliant assemblage of notable Indiana educators. To all the pioneer educators and teachers who labored so earnestly for the cause under adverse conditions, we, of today feel a debt of gratitude for the splendid things they wrought in the cause of education. But in the illustrious group of scholarly men of that era, the figure of Barnabas C. Hobbs appeals to us—the people of Washington county—more strongly because of his nativity. Born in this county, we claim him as our own and honor him as a native son.

Barnabas C. Hobbs first saw the light of day in a modest but well-to-do pioneer home just a short distance from Salem, one hundred and seven years ago, yet we bridge the century of time with little effort and endeavor to review the past and gather up the essentials to combine a short sketch of his life. A charm hovers over the people and the things of "yesterday." We believe heartily in that beautiful sentiment expressed by Alphonse Karr, in the words:

"Not to do honor to old age is to demolish in the morning the house wherein we are to sleep at night."

Imbued with this idea the Washington County historical society included in its work as a special feature historical sketches of its early pioneer eminent citizens and families. Under this list of biographies, that of Barnabas C. Hobbs has been written with the hope some student of local or state history may be benefitted by its preparation.

Barnabas Hobbs was born October 4, 1815 in an attractive and favored section of country about two and one half miles from Salem, Indiana, and about one-half mile west of Canton. He was the son of William and Priscilla Coffin Hobbs, who came to Indiana from Guilford county, North Carolina. Elisha and Fanny Hobbs were parents of William Hobbs. Early in life they embraced the Quaker faith. They and their children and their children's children have ever since been members of the Society of Friends. Priscilla Coffin was the daughter of Samuel and Mary Coffin. She became the bride of William Hobbs 1799, 8th day of the 8th month. In an autobiography of William Hobbs, edited by his son Professor B. C. Hobbs, William Hobbs says. "We had but little of this world's goods to begin with and land was very poor. We had to work very hard and having an increasing family, I learned the saddlers' trade, which I followed while I stayed in North Carolina."

In imagination we picture this Carolinian home and family eager to start on a journey northward to a land of promise—fair Indiana—then the great northwest. With many emigrants faring forth to a new country, they came in the spring of 1812 to Indiana territory and settled on the headwaters of Blue River, in what is now Washington county, then Harrison, a newly settled place. A few Friends had settled near them and thus the nucleus for pleasant worship of a common faith was started. From this time on there predominated in the life of this family that religious and Godly Christian living, the influence of which blended and formed the character of their son Barnabas C. Hobbs. Under the teachings of these strong determined characters that emigrated from the old North State he imbibed the firm and indomitable traits of his pioneer forefathers. As a Quaker minister William Hobbs was zealous and earnest and much of his time was spent in travel (horse back) to the meetings he served.

Three years after the death of Priscilla Coffin, whose piety and faith was as devout as that of her husband, William Hobbs was again married (1839) to Anna Unthank, an approved minister of the Friends church of Wayne county, Indiana, and

thus his ministerial calling and duties were strengthened and blessed in the union.

In this work of gospel preaching and teaching, his son Barnabas Coffin Hobbs, followed his father's footsteps and became a noted minister of the Society of Friends and was probably the greatest scholar of Bible literature in any Friends church.

Barnabas Hobbs was the youngest of a family of eight children—having two brothers and five sisters. At the age of about six years, his parents moved to Martin county. His boyhood was spent on the farm where he learned to hunt, fish, swim and enjoy all the sports of that day and generation. At an early age he evinced a strong liking for books and his future as student, teacher and scholar seemed assured by the time he reach his sixteenth birthday. At the age of eighteen he taught his first school. This was in Bartholomew county, Indiana.

At about this time—during the decade of 1830—he became a pupil of John I. Morrison, "The Hoosier Arnold" at the Washington County seminary at Salem, Indiana, having as classmates, John S. Campbell, James G. May, Z. B. Sturgis, W. C. De Pauw, Elijah Newland, Thomas Rodman and Nathan Kimball.

In the year 1837-38 he was assistant principal of the Blue River Friends academy east of Salem and the following year served as principal of the school. This practically closed his career in his native county.

The following sketch from the *Indianapolis Journal*, published just after Mr. Hobbs' death, June 22, 1892, at Bloomington, Indiana, gives the outstanding events of his life:

Professor Hobbs was born near Salem, Washington county, Indiana. At the early age of eighteen he taught his first term of school. His pupils numbered forty and many of them his seniors. In 1837 he entered the Cincinnati college. He chose an elective rather than a regular course, and hence was not eligible to the honor of a degree on his withdrawal in 1839, though he was recognized as possessing all that is implied by a thorough college training and subsequently received a master's degree from Wabash college.

In 1839 he assumed charge of a boarding school at Mount Pleasant, Ohio, and remained at the head of that institution until 1843, when

he married and removed to Richmond, Indiana. He established a school there and conducted it for four years with marked success. The Society of Friends then established a school, of which he was made superintendent. In 1851 he was chosen to the superintendency of the Bloomingdale, (Ind.) academy, where he continued for sixteen years. In 1866, he was appointed by Governor Morton, a member of the board of trustees of the new State Normal school. In the same year he was elected the first president of Earlham college at Richmond. At the end of two years he was elected superintendent of public instruction.

Immediately after the election—in October 1868—Superintendent Hoss resigned his office, and Mr. Hobbs was appointed by the governor to fill the vacancy, the regular term not commencing until about five months later. Superintendent Hobbs was thus left to make the biennial report of 1868. It is unique in style and most interesting in substance. He presented the cause of the colored people in a masterly manner. On the 28th of July of that year the fourteenth amendment had been declared a part of the constitution.

Superintendent Hobbs was among the first in his country to give attention to the subject of graded public schools. It was his idea that the rural schools should prepare pupils systematically for the high schools and the latter for the State university. In 1869 he issued a new edition of the school law, and in 1870 he made his second report to the legislature. Disappointed in his effort to secure needed legislation, it remained for him to do what he might to promote the efficiency of the school system as it was. He labored to secure the levying of a special tuition tax where it was necessary to extend the school term.

He retired from the department in 1871, and immediately returned to Bloomingdale, where he again assumed charge of the academy. In all the years that followed he has been a very busy man. In 1872 he made a geological survey of Parke county. As trustee of the State Normal school and of the Rose Polytechnic, he has contributed largely to their success.

In 1879, the Friends of America were moved to send a message to Alexander, the Emperor of Russia, and another to William, the Emperor of Germany. Professor Hobbs was chosen to perform this mission. At St. Petersburg he left with the prime minister, a memorial, which urged that the mennonites of the empire—a sect conscientiously opposed to war—might be relieved from military service. At Berlin, Professor Hobbs presented the Crown Prince a memorial which advocated the settlement of international disputes by arbitration, rather than by war. For some years, Professor Hobbs worked in the interest of Indian Education in North Carolina and Tennessee. For the enterprise undertaken by the Friends with reference to the descendants of aborigines in those states he has secured the sanction and aid of the government. He made an enumeration of the Cherokees of the reservation and determined their share of apportionments of revenue authorized by the

general congress—which share had been diverted from its purpose by errors and frauds. Professor Hobbs was noted as a clear and forcible speaker, a logical thinker and graceful writer. No member of the Society of Friends in this country was so widely known.

He leaves a widow and six children—William H. Hobbs of Indianapolis; Mrs. D. W. Stark of Rockville; Mrs. W. L. McMillin of Chicago; Mrs. T. C. Trueblood of Ann Arbor, Mich.; D. Y. Hadley of Las Cruces, N. M.; and Fowell B. Hobbs of Bloomingtondale.

The Rockville *Republican* on the death of Mr. Hobbs published the following news article and tribute:

The death of Dr. Barnabas C. Hobbs occurred last Wednesday afternoon and came much sooner than was expected, though fears were entertained that his sickness would be fatal. He went to Michigan for relief but did not obtain it and was brought to his home in Bloomingtondale on Monday. He rapidly failed until the end came. After an attack of the grip some months since, he was further depressed by the action of the Bloomingtondale meeting, charging him with teaching false doctrine, and the many attacks that have been made on him in one way and another by those who were not worthy to unlatch his shoes. Yellow jaundice was the final cause of his death.

Professor Hobbs, as he was more familiarly known, was one of the best known men of the Society of Friends in the world; he was head of the Bloomingtondale meeting and was a man of unusual attainments. He was a ripe scholar, a man of stern and uncompromising integrity, and a good man in every sense. Many of the younger generation of men in Parke county, and particularly those of the Friends church, were under him while he was principal of the Bloomingtondale academy and remember him with reverence and good will. Any one of them who has followed in his footsteps is today a good man without doubt. His influence was wholesome at all times. These school sons of his rise up and call him blessed.

He was a stately gentleman of the old school, kind and courteous, grave, as became a man of his position, but with a keen sense of humor. Like all of his church during the war he was an uncompromising Republican and stood for his country at all times. He did not desert his party but maintained its principles to the close of his life. For this, much fault was found with him by those who thought he ought to join another party. But he was doubtless as conscientious in his belief as they were in theirs. Professor Hobbs occupied many positions of honor and usefulness in his long life, as may be seen by the biographical sketch printed in this issue. In all these he was equal to the occasion, doing his work modestly and promptly and with a high regard for duty.

The funeral, which took place at nine o'clock Saturday morning at Bloomingtondale church, was largely attended, not only by people from the vicinity, but by numbers abroad. Persons were present from Richmond,

Terre Haute, Rockville and other places. The funeral discourse was preached by President J. J. Mills of Earlham college. It was a most praiseworthy effort and received the highest encomiums of those present. Prayer and remarks were made by Mr. Allen Jay of Richmond, and remarks by President Parsons of the State Normal school, Professor McGaggert of the same school and Mrs. Mattie Curl Dennis of Earlham college.

The interment took place in the Bloomingdale cemetery.

On Sunday, after the death of Barnabas C. Hobbs which occurred Wednesday June 22, 1892, a memorial service in his honor was held at the Friend's church in Bloomingdale, at three o'clock p. m. It is said "that friends and acquaintances, those who had known the distinguished educator for more than a quarter of a century, as well as those who had seen him only in the last years of his life, the governor of the state, members of the Rockville bar, ministers of varied denominations, his former students now middle aged men and women, Sunday school teachers and scholars, citizens and strangers," formed the assembly, paying public tribute to his abilities, his exalted character and his eminent services to the church and state.

Among the speakers of the afternoon was Governor Ira J. Chase, who said he came to represent the state and also to pay his tribute of respect to the memory of the deceased, as a friend. Governor Chase spoke of the services of Dr. Hobbs in behalf of peace among nations and his labors in behalf of the Indians. These topics were outstanding points in his address. The Hon. Thomas N. Rice delivered a noble eulogy, in which his intellectual abilities, and moral character were clearly set out. Mr. Rice made special mention of the valuable services of Professor Hobbs in perfecting the school laws of Indiana and establishing our present school system. He said that hardly a measure had passed the legislature in reference to our common schools but had first received the examination and sanction of Barnabas C. Hobbs.

In regard to the life and work of her distinguished father, Mrs. Carolyn H. Trueblood, wife of Professor T. C. Trueblood of Ann Arbor, Michigan, says:

My father visited personally every public school in Indiana twice while he was in the position of superintendent of public instruction. He

did not leave this to others as many other superintendents did. In this way he was very helpful to young teachers. He saw the great need of a first class normal school and advocated the building of such a school. Thus, the Normal School of Terre Haute was started. He was always a strong advocate of the higher education of woman and through him or his influence Bryn Mawr college was opened up.

In his lifetime he was given at different times three degrees of L. L. D. He was probably the greatest scholar of Bible literature in any Friend's church. He was a man who always lived and thought ahead of his time. This is the reason many at Bloomingdale failed to appreciate him or rather failed to understand him. This is why some of them claimed he preached "unsound doctrine," because he so often preached from the Old Testament. They thought he should confine himself to the New Testament.

I remember, now, that when in California some years ago Allen Jay told me of his being in Washington, D. C., when an eminent German professor of education, who had been sent to the United States to examine our schools, gave a lecture on public schools and a friend asked him if he would not like to go and hear it. He went. The professor said in his lecture that the best public schools in the U. S. were in Indiana and made so by a man named Barnabas Hobbs. This was interesting to me on account of it coming from a German, a stranger and foreigner.

My father's ambition for a better education was so great, he left his home and went to Cincinnati and then to teach in a Friend's Academy at Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, where my mother was living and where he met and married her. Father was always dignified and mother was a young, bright, happy girl. Father was twenty-eight years old when he married my mother who was twenty-four year old. When he brought her to Richmond, Indiana, to take charge of the academy there, The first time he took her to meeting an old friend came to him and told him he was ashamed of him to marry such a pretty young girl. My father asked him how old he thought my mother was and he replied: "Not more than sixteen, if that old." "Well," said father, "she is twenty-four," but the man would not believe it. Mother always looked younger than her years. Father was slender and delicate but by careful living, taking regular exercises, he grew stronger with the years. His eyes were blue gray, his hair a very light, almost yellow, and at sixteen years it began to turn white and was all white at twenty years of age. I am the only one of the family who inherited this white hair and I have had white hair since I was twenty years old. Neither of us ever was gray. He was five feet, eleven and one-half inches tall and until his later years was very slender. While father always carried his dignity, he enjoyed a joke as well as any one.

An idea of his obedience and respect to his parents and his filial duties are related of Dr. Hobbs in a reminiscent story by his nephew, C. M. Hobbs of Plainfield, Indiana:

Uncle Barnabas said it was his job when a boy to get his mother to fifth day meeting, she being stout and very fleshy. Barnabas would hitch an ox to the cart and back up to a high door. His mother would waddle in and they would drive off.

He recalls another incident, thus:

Uncle Barnabas told me that on one of his trips abroad, he concluded that he (Barnabas) would like to imitate Gladstone and take a coach that carried the workmen out of London, that he might learn what they were thinking and talking about. So on going out to call on his friend Bevon Braithwaite a prominent Friend and Councillor to the Queen, he took a coach filled with workingmen, smoking their pipes and using the weed generally. And of course his clothing became thoroughly infected with the fumes of tobacco. When he arrived and was met at the door by his friend, Bevon remarked, "Why Barnabas has been smoking."

Reviewing the history of his uncle's family, C. M. Hobbs, speaks of this great uncle, William Hobbs (father of B. C. Hobbs) a minister of the Friend church at Blue River and an ardent friend of peace who was one of the promoters and officials in the Salem Peace society, which had its origin in the Blue River Friends' church at a meeting held the 19th of the 12th month 1818 and quotes the following paragraph from the minutes of the Western Yearly Meeting held at Plainfield, Indiana, (Sixty years later) ninth month, 14th day, 1877:

This meeting with the unity and approbation of Bloomington Monthly and Quarterly Meetings liberate Barnabas C. Hobbs to pay a religious visit to Great Britain, Ireland and the continent of Europe. This visit was accomplished the next year. On this visit Barnabas presented personally to the crowned heads of Europe, a memorial on peace. The Czar of Russia at that time was Alexander II. His son the late Czar called the first World's Peace Conference at The Hague. Mr. Hobbs concludes with this query, "It would be interesting to know whether the Salem Peace Society had any connection with this event?"



Professor James G. May of Salem, that prince of early and pioneer school masters of Washington county and southern Indiana, in an historical article on the Blue River academy in the *Washington County History* published in 1884 pays this tribute to Hobbs:

Place that man in the most uninviting log cabin and give him boys and girls, young men and women to teach and his school will be a first class college. In a haw-patch he would teach every thing and teach it well.

Perhaps the last visit of Barnabas Hobbs to Salem and his native county was the occasion of the Old Settler's annual meeting, August 9, 1883, when he gave an address on the life of John I. Morrison. This was an elaborate and memorable speech. The *Salem Democrat*, the week following (issue of August 15, 1883) says that he was listened to with marked attention. He was described then "as quite a venerable gentleman but well preserved for his age." He spent two or three days with relatives and friends and on Sunday evening during his stay "he lectured at the Presbyterian church on the Bible to an appreciative audience."

Barnabas Hobbs labored not with an eye to fame but for the benefaction of mankind and the uplift of humanity. His voice and pen were ever busy. In preaching, teaching, writing and other avenues of life, he achieved success and benefits not only for his day and age but for generations coming and yet to come. In closing this memoir, one of the dearest thoughts to his heart as expressed in the last paragraph in the chapter on Indiana School days is a ringing keynote today and is well worth repeating:

Men and nations are as they are taught. As a people elevate and sustain their educators so will their educators be found, in turn, the great instrumentality which brings them intelligence, freedom and prosperity, and peace and in the end true glory and honor.

So to perpetuate and honor his name as teacher, minister, lecturer, scholar and educator, we weave together and preserve this little paper as a chaplet of flowers and dedicate it to his memory.