

Briefing Document: The Earlham Academy (1893-1923)

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the key themes, important ideas, and factual information presented in the provided excerpts from Ronald Myers' "The Earlham Academy: A Quaker Founded Institution of Iowa, 1893-1923." The document covers the founding and development of the town of Earlham and the Academy, the nature of the Academy's curriculum and student life, its unification with the public school system, its eventual closing, and its impact on the surrounding community.

Key Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

I. The Founding and Development of Earlham, Iowa:

- **Location and Early Settlement:** Earlham is located in the northwest corner of Madison County, Iowa. Prior to 1847, the area was primarily inhabited by trappers and traders. Later, many settlers migrated from Indiana, drawn partly by Quaker influences.
- **Purpose of Settlement:** Earlham's existence was facilitated by the construction of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad through Iowa in 1868. The town was established for the purpose of a rail center on the mainline between Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebraska.
- **Naming the Town:** Several names were suggested for the town, but "Earlham" was chosen. This selection was favored by Mrs. Milton Wilson and was derived from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, a Friends school. This name reflected the community's Quaker background and the intention of establishing a similar institution in the new town.
- **Growth and Development:** The year 1870 marked a period of rapid growth for Earlham following its incorporation. By 1890, the population had reached six hundred and thirty persons. However, by 1873, the town's population had slightly declined as plans for Earlham to become the most important rail center in central Iowa did not fully materialize. Despite this, the town continued to grow, and by 1871, the first public school building was completed.

II. The Founding of the Earlham Friends Academy:

- **Background and Motivation:** The establishment of the Earlham Friends Academy was deeply rooted in Quaker tradition, where it was "common practice in a Quaker

settlement that a church and school be built simultaneously." The Friends community in Earlham and the surrounding area felt the need for educational opportunities beyond the elementary level for their young people.

- **Development of the Academy:** In the late 1880s, the idea of a Quaker secondary school in Earlham was revived. A board of trustees was formed, including prominent citizens, who worked to approve plans and solicit funds. Reasons for needing such an institution included the perceived inadequacy of the existing public school system in providing advanced education beyond the eighth grade and the desire to offer a private, Quaker-influenced education to students both within and outside the local district.
- **Financing and Construction:** Financing the Academy was a significant task, but the entire amount was raised through the solicitation of funds from local Friends. The construction of the building began in 1890 and cost between \$10,000 and \$12,000. The Academy was situated on ten acres of ground, and the building was a two-story structure containing recitation rooms, a music room, a library, two assembly rooms, a furnace room, kitchen, and dining room. Construction was completed in 1891, and the Academy opened for the fall term in 1892.
- **Administration and Organization:** The Earlham Friends Academy was opened in the fall of 1892. A board was selected to direct the affairs of the school. The first faculty selected included C.B. Pickrell as principal, who had previous experience in public schools, and teachers for mathematics, science, Latin, grammar, English, and vocal music. Enrollment in the first year was "remarkably large."
- **Nature of the Curriculum:** In its early years, the Academy aimed to provide grades nine through twelve. By 1892, a curriculum offering academic and preparatory courses was established. The academic course was designed to prepare students for professions and/or college, requiring two years of study for the academic and the preparatory. Subjects included Algebra, Latin, Rhetoric, Essay, Geometry, General History, Caesar, Political Science, Trigonometry, Literature, Christian Studies, American Government, Economics, and Bookkeeping. Music was also an important part of the curriculum, with instruction in piano, harmony, voice culture, and sight reading.
- **Continuity of the Academy:** Despite changes in principals and faculty over the years, the Academy continued to operate. Enrollment fluctuated, experiencing periods of growth and decline. The curriculum also evolved to meet the needs of the students and the community.

- **Unification with the Public School System:** By 1900, financial difficulties made it apparent that the Academy could not continue without a different source of revenue. The board of directors discussed the possibility of uniting the Academy with the public school system. A proposal was made to the district board, requesting that the local board take over the operation of the Academy on a trial basis for one year. Following a special election in March 1901, the proposal was overwhelmingly approved, and the Academy became the possession of the public school district. This unification significantly improved the educational system by maintaining the Academy's established educational standards and curriculum.
- **Closing of the Academy:** The provided excerpts do not detail the specific reasons or exact date of the Academy's final closing. However, the narrative shifts to its integration with the public school system, suggesting that the Earlham Academy as a separate entity ceased to exist at some point after the unification.

III. Effects on the Town of Earlham and Surrounding Area:

- **Educational Influence:** The founding and operation of the Earlham Academy significantly impacted the educational landscape of the town and surrounding area. It provided advanced educational opportunities that were initially lacking in the public school system. The Academy also attracted students from outside the immediate district, contributing to a more diverse student body.
- **Community Hub:** The Academy served as a social center for the community, hosting commencement exercises, baccalaureate services, and other events that drew large crowds. Its athletic and musical programs also fostered community engagement and pride.

IV. Religious Aspects of the Academy:

- While founded by the Friends Church, the Academy was not strictly a religiously oriented school. Religious facilities were available, and the school day was marked with some religious implications, including morning chapel services. However, there were no specific requirements in regard to religious subjects as part of the course of study. After unification with the public school system, the school gained a "more liberal atmosphere."

V. Extra-Curricular Activities:

- The Academy fostered a vibrant extra-curricular environment, including athletic programs (though initially not highly emphasized due to religious convictions), and a strong music program. The Academy maintained one of the largest school

orchestras in the state, and musical training was offered to all students free of charge.

Quotes from the Original Sources:

- On the founding of Quaker settlements: "It was common practice in a Quaker settlement that a church and school be built simultaneously." (Chapter II)
- On the reason for establishing the Academy: "Many Friends felt that the creation of an academy would remedy this situation by affording a high school education to students not only of the Earlham area, but to students outside of the district as well." (Chapter II)
- On the naming of the town: "The selection was derived from Earlham College of Richmond, Indiana, a Friends school and this was a community settled by Quakers." (Chapter I)
- On the unification: "The purchase was made and the Academy became the possession of the public school district." (Chapter II)
- On the music program: "During its time, the Academy had the distinction of maintaining one of the largest school orchestras in the state. Every student in the Academy was given musical training free of charge and could join the chorus, band, or orchestra." (Chapter III)

Summary and Conclusions:

The Earlham Academy, a Quaker-founded institution, played a crucial role in the development of education in Earlham, Iowa, from 1893 to its unification with the public school system after 1901. Driven by the Quaker emphasis on education and the perceived need for advanced schooling beyond the elementary level, the Academy provided a valuable service to the community and attracted students from a wider area. Despite facing financial challenges, the Academy maintained relatively high academic standards and fostered a rich extra-curricular life. The eventual unification with the public school system marked a significant moment, allowing the continuation of quality secondary education within the community. While the excerpts do not cover the final closing of the Academy in detail, they highlight its important legacy in shaping the educational landscape of Earlham.