Headmaster started Pottstown Ys

Surprising but true: Both the Pottstown YMCA and the Pottstown YWCA were founded by John Meigs, second headmaster of The Hill School, and his wife.

Meigs’s father, Matthew, began “the family boarding school” in 1851, but it was his son John who turned The Hill School into one of the most distinguished college preparatory schools in the nation.

In 1876, John became headmaster at age 24 and spent 35 years building up the faculty, curriculum, and facilities to earn national renown.

But Meigs and his wife, Marion, were also heavily involved in the Pottstown community. In 1895 The Hill School built and oversaw the Bethany Mission on Grant Street as a religious and social center for disadvantaged children. The mission evolved over the years into the present-day Ricketts Community Center operated by the Olivet Boys & Girls Club.

In 1898 Mrs. Meigs founded the “Boys’ Free Reading Room,” the precursor to the Pottstown Public Library.

Equally important, in 1904 the Pottstown YMCA was incorporated with John Meigs as president of the board. At first the YMCA used rented rooms, but funds were raised to build a spacious structure at King and Evans streets. Meigs died in 1911, and his son, Dwight, oversaw construction of the building in 1913.

That same year, Marion Meigs founded the Pottstown YWCA at its present location and was elected president.

According to Hill historian Paul Chancellor, a parade of Pottstown citizens accompanied by a marching band ascended the entrance to The Hill School one evening shortly before Meigs’s death, called him out of his study, and publicly thanked him for his many services to the community.

It is hard to imagine such a scene today.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

BRONZE TABLET, ABOVE, hangs in the Pottstown YMCA on North Adams Street. It originally hung at the 1913 YMCA building at King and Evans streets, which was demolished after the current YMCA building was constructed in 1970. It reads:

In memory of
JOHN MEIGS
Whose devotion and generosity to the Young Men’s Christian Association of Pottstown made possible the erection of this building.

(Meigs was headmaster of the Hill School 1876-1911)