

CHAPTER 6

New Castle County Teachers and Their Schools



NEW CASTLE COUNTY produced more samplers than the other two Delaware counties combined. While many samplers were made in schools in the city of Wilmington, schools and teachers in other parts of the county contributed to New Castle's sampler legacy. Deborah Hicks Mundall taught in the town of New Castle, about six miles south of Wilmington, before moving to Philadelphia, where she opened a needlework school. Two half-sisters, Susannah Pusey Harvey and Hannah Harvey Hollingsworth, taught in Wilmington and north of the city, near the boundary between Delaware and Pennsylvania. These three teachers were closely tied to the schools that they operated.

DEBORAH HICKS MUNDALL, A TEACHER IN TWO CITIES

Deborah Hicks Mundall's years in Philadelphia as a needlework teacher at her school located in the shadow of Independence Hall are known to many textiles scholars. Few, though, are familiar with her work as a teacher in the town of New Castle, Delaware, before relocating to Philadelphia.

New Castle, first settled by Swedes, later claimed by the Dutch, and finally taken over by the English, was an attractive location for reasons of geography. In the 1700s the town saw economic successes and declines, and served as a port of entry for many immigrating to America, especially arrivals from Scotland and Ireland. It was a thriving port town in the early 1800s. "Philadelphia packets" brought goods to its docks, transported crops from farms outside town to markets upriver, and carried passengers to Philadelphia and Baltimore. But Wilmington





Figure 6-1
The Academy, New
Castle, Delaware.

The Academy was
constructed in 1799 to
provide schooling to
children in the town of
New Castle. Boys and
girls attended. It is not
known if needlework
was part of the
curriculum.

Courtesy of
Cynthia Steinhoff

quickly overtook New Castle as the region's
business hub by the mid-1800s, settling New
Castle's future as a small town.¹

EDUCATION IN NEW CASTLE

Education was important in New Castle's
early history, though later the town had
difficulty maintaining schools. Churches ran
some of the early schools. The town's first
teacher, Evert Pietersen, arrived from
Amsterdam 1657 and operated a school in a
private home under the auspices of the Dutch
Reformed Church. With limited resources, he
taught writing, reading, and arithmetic to
about twenty-five young scholars. William
Penn decreed in 1682 that a system of public
education should be created in what
eventually became the state of Delaware, but
it was years in the making. In 1727 the
Reverend George Ross, rector at Immanuel
Episcopal Church, lamented the lack of a
schoolmaster for the town, noting that some
families pooled funds to hire teachers. In 1772,
the town set aside the northwest corner of the
New Castle Green for a school building,

though it was not constructed for another
quarter century. Meanwhile, leading citizens
rented the old unused Quaker meetinghouse
and opened a school in 1779 that operated for
about twenty years.¹

The school building on The Green, officially
named the New Castle Academy and more
commonly called "The Academy," was
constructed in 1799 with funds from the state
of Delaware, donations, and subscriptions. It
opened the same year. Although it was called
a public school, families paid tuition of two to
six dollars per term based on the pupil's age.
Girls attended from its start. The school
employed two male teachers and offered an
academic curriculum of reading, writing, and
arithmetic. Some reports indicate that the
girls' curriculum may not have been as
rigorous as that of the boys. Students
represented many of the wealthy families of
New Castle, with two-thirds of the parents in
the top forty percent of taxpayers in the town.²
It is not known if Deborah Hicks Mundall
was involved with the academy, but at least
one of her needlework students attended
academic classes there.



The Mundalls in New Castle

Deborah and her husband, John Mundall, resided in New Castle by the mid-1790s. Deborah was born about 1762, based on her age of eighty-eight years at her death in 1850.³ She may have been the daughter of John and Elizabeth Hicks, who was born October 6, 1763, and baptized November 11, 1763, by the Reverend Richard Peters at Christ Church in Philadelphia.⁴ There is some confusion about Deborah's surname prior to marrying John; some records refer to her as Deborah Marsh or Deborah Hicks Marsh, resulting in speculation that she was related to the famous Marsh needlework teachers in the Philadelphia area. John Mundall was born December 16, 1757, in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.⁵ He immigrated in 1790, arriving at the port of Charleston, South Carolina. There are reports that John and Deborah married about 1800, though no documentation can be located to confirm this.

Deborah Hicks Mundall began teaching in New Castle by 1817. In that year, John reported that most of the family income came from a school operating in his home.⁶ Additionally, student Mary Ann Sturgeon wrote a copybook that year, in which she stated that the contents were "written in D. H. Mundall's School, New Castle, Delaware" in 1817.⁷

Needlework may have been produced at the school as early as 1817, but the only two pieces known today were made in 1824. Both girls marked their samplers with the school name—D.H.M.'s Seminary—and stitched "New Castle" as the location. Sampler historian Betty Ring reported a third New Castle sampler made under Deborah's direction in 1823 by Mary Leland Howley in a private collection.⁸



Ann Jane Couper, 1824

Ann Jane Couper (1812–1877), daughter of Hannah McIntier Couper and her husband, Dr. James Couper, made a sampler at Deborah's school in 1824. Ann Jane was born October 1, 1812, in New Castle County and made her sampler when she was eleven. Her sampler includes cross, eyelet, queen, and Irish stitches. Ann married George Kerr on April 23, 1844, at New Castle Presbyterian Church.⁹ In the 1860 census, Ann lived with her mother, a widow, in New Castle. A seven-year-old boy named James Kerr, probably Ann's son, also resided in the house.¹⁰ Ann Jane Couper Kerr died June 14, 1877, and is buried in the New Castle Presbyterian Church Cemetery, as are her parents.¹¹

Figure 6-2
Ann Jane Couper,
1824.
New Castle, New
Castle County.
Silk thread on linen
ground.
Stitches: Cross, cross
over one, eyelet, rice,
satin, straight.
Size: 17 in. by 13 in.
Winterthur Museum
(1993.0048)
Photo courtesy of
Winterthur Museum





Sarah McCullough, 1824

Sarah McCullough (ca. 1812–1873) also stitched her sampler at Deborah’s school in 1824. She used cross, eyelet, and queen stitches. In addition to her sampler, Sarah left a memoir that provides insight into life in her hometown of New Castle. Though she did not write about needlework, her book presents many details about every day living in nineteenth-century New Castle.

Sarah was a daughter of Mary McCullough and James McCullough, first cousins who married in New Castle on October 10, 1804.¹² James, who was born in England about 1777 to William and Sarah Warnes McCullough, arrived in America about 1797 and was naturalized as a citizen in 1802.¹³ James worked as a mariner until about 1815, when he went into business as a merchant with his brother, Edward, in New Castle.

Several of James’ aunts and uncles left England for the colonies in the mid-1760s,

which may have influenced his decision to immigrate as well. Sarah’s mother, Mary McCullough, was the daughter of a member of this group, another James McCullough, born in England in 1745. Mary’s father settled at Bloomfield, a farm outside New Castle, in 1784. He soon moved into town where he ran a public house and later served in the state legislature. He was living on his farm when he died about 1810.

Mary and James McCullough had seven children. According to Sarah’s memoir, twins Louisa and Mary Jane were born July 17, 1806, followed by William in 1807/1808, a son described as “short-lived” in 1808–1810, Sarah in 1810 (though other sources state her birth year at 1811 or 1812), and Annabelle in 1812. Another son was born sometime between 1813 and 1820, and “lived but a few days.” In poor health after the birth of the twins, Sarah’s mother, Mary, died on April 26, 1820.

Prior to his wife’s death, James asked his unmarried sister, Eliza, living in England, to immigrate and help care for his family. Life in the McCullough home changed with her arrival. Aunt Eliza ran a well-organized household and, as Sarah pointed out, excelled at governance. When James died from gout and dropsy on April 4, 1836, Aunt Eliza was left in charge of the family. Sarah shared her perspective on life with Aunt Eliza (the emphases are hers):

We will never forget the sensations caused by her arrival. Her English wardrobe attracted great attention, particularly a great steeple cap, of the finest thread lace, made in bands of inserting and puffings The first gaiter boot we had ever seen, she brought; scissors, pins, needles without end, evidently thinking, that in this wild country, she might never get more. . . . when speaking of England, delighted to call it “my country.” When he [Sarah’s father] thought her too lofty in her ideas, he would select out the worst part of his history, and remind her . . . “that the time had been when he had but one shirt to his back, and was glad to eat out of an iron pot.”

Figure 6-3
Sarah McCullough,
1824.
New Castle, New
Castle County.
Silk thread on linen
ground.
Stitches: Cross, cross
over one, eyelet,
queen.
Collection of the
Loeekerman Bradford
Family
Image courtesy of the
Sampler Archive Project



Our mother died about eighteen months after Aunt Eliza came. The latter took her place in bringing up the family, but had English notions of authority and subjection not exactly suited to those who had imbibed somewhat of the independence of their ancestors. The writer, for one, was kept in complete subjection, and knew nothing of self-respect or self-reliance until after her father's death, when, by changing her home, set up for herself. She is perfectly willing to admit, however, that apart from her love of governing, this aunt was an excellent woman, naturally smart, generous, and affectionate.

After Sarah's father abandoned his seafaring life, he owned a pier, warehouses, hotel, and shop along the New Castle waterfront. Some of his buildings faced Front Street, now called "The Strand." His pier provided docking space for the packet boats that traveled along the Delaware River and a ferry that transported passengers across the river to New Jersey.

Sarah was a student at the Academy on the New Castle green when the great fire of 1824 broke out in the waterfront area. Students heard fire bells and their teacher had no choice but to allow them to go outside and satisfy their curiosity. Sarah described the fire in her memoir:

It was on Monday, April 26, 1824. We were in school, and at three o'clock, was heard the (to us) unusual cry of fire. Without waiting for leave, all simultaneously rushed out, down Read's Alley, as it was called, when it was discovered that Mr. Bowman's boatyard was on fire, and that it originated in an old shanty called "Riddle's stable," through two little boys, John Roberts and Dick Riddle, making a fire to warm some pups. The wind blew fiercely and soon each neighbor feared for himself. "That whole side of the street must go," said one and another, but we hoped to preserve the western side, on which our own home was. This was owned by the writer's father, as well as a large store, full of goods,

which he occupied; also, its adjoining hotel, together with two storehouses full of grain, all these latter on the river side. Soon the flames reached there. It was now evident that they were devoted to destruction. All was confusion. Fire apparatus was hardly to be found. From Wilmington soon came help. Each did his best – but the flames continuing to spread, soon crossed the street, and before night we were houseless and homeless; so were most of our neighbors.

Sarah's father had purchased the family home with a mortgage and had made the final payment just prior to the fire. Sadly, "No insurance had been made." The family spent the night with neighbors whose houses had survived the fire and later "our kind neighbor Sawyer" offered the family part of his home until the McCullough house could be rebuilt. Sarah's father had an excellent reputation, and between loans and a contribution of nineteen hundred dollars from a fund to help those who suffered losses in the fire, had a new house within a year. In addition to the other losses from the fire, Edward, the children's uncle and James McCullough's business partner, developed a skin infection following the fire and died shortly after falling ill.¹⁴

The fire destroyed at least forty-two buildings in town.¹⁵ In addition to building a new house for his family, Sarah's father constructed new warehouses. He was fortunate to be back in business before too long.¹⁶ The new McCullough home stands today in the New Castle Historic District as a private residence.

Maria Booth Rogers, a New Castle resident, wrote another account of the fire, directed to her husband, who was out of town at the time it occurred. She described the fire starting about 3:00 in the afternoon, and "a wind blowing very fresh from the north" that drove the fire as it destroyed the entire side of one block.

Mr. McCullough has lost everything, house, store, store house, goods, furniture all





Figure 6-4
New James
McCullough House.

Fire destroyed the original home of Sarah McCullough and her family in 1824. Within a few years, James McCullough constructed a new home in New Castle for his family.
Courtesy of James Meek

destroyed. About twelve o'clock we prepared for bed thinking the fire would not increase, as it was nearly subdued – but unfortunately the wind had changed to North East, and blowing with considerable violence, and we were again alarmed with the cry of fire together with the ringing of the bells. . . . I have concluded not to go to bed to night, for if the bank takes fire Mr. Mundally's house will go, and then if the wind should change, . . . no human means could save all this street.¹⁷

After her father's death, Sarah moved to Philadelphia, in part to escape the confines of life with Aunt Eliza and also to be closer to her older sister, Mary Jane, one of the twins. She lived on her own near her sister's family and helped care for Mary Jane's children. Mary Jane married John Farr, a chemist from Philadelphia, in New Castle on February 15, 1826.¹⁸ The Farris had fourteen children, twelve

surviving to adulthood. Edward, one of their younger boys, drowned while at New Castle during the family's annual summer visit. This was devastating for Sarah, who maintained a very close relationship with her sister, even after Mary Jane married. Sarah also frequently visited an uncle who lived in New York City.¹⁹

Sarah's nephew Charles Heber Clark, the son of Anabelle, Sarah's youngest sibling, wrote extensively about Sarah and her immediate family in his own memoir. He admired her independence and noted that her memoir contained "facts about our ancestry which, without this record, would now be beyond our reach." Charles greatly admired Sarah's father and referred to him as "Captain James," a nickname that remained with him after his seafaring days ended. James spent at least fifteen years at sea during a time when American merchant ships were regularly interfered with, generally by the Royal Navy, and indeed he lost one vessel to the British, probably during the War of 1812.²⁰

It is from Charles Clark that we learn about Sarah's health and her passing. She suffered an accident as a child that left her with a spinal curvature. Charles described her as a "semi-invalid." He reported that Sarah went to England to pursue her interest in McCullough family history in the late 1860s or early 1870s. While a visitor at the home of a clergyman in a rural area, she fell ill with smallpox and died. She was buried at Highgate Cemetery in London on February 11, 1873, with her family in America bearing the expenses associated with her death and interment.²¹

The Mundalls in New Castle

John Mundall initially prospered. He owned several pieces of property in town, after acquiring a house with outbuildings in 1792 for 257 pounds from the estate of Charles Gofton.²² In 1798 he paid taxes in the amount of \$804. An analysis of wealth in the town based on local tax records by Liam Riordan, a University of Maine professor, placed John in the second quintile



from the top that year.²³ John's investment in property grew as measured by his assessments; at the time of Riordan's next analysis in 1815, John was at the top of the first quintile with a tax assessment of \$2,354.²⁴

John acquired the Van Leuvenigh House in the late 1790s. The large brick house is located at the corner of Front and Delaware Streets. In addition to the house, the parcel included gardens and other buildings. The

indenture listed John's occupation as "shopkeeper," one of many times that this would be listed as his profession.²⁵ The residence likely housed Deborah Hicks Mundall's New Castle Seminary.

The 1800 census reported three members of the Mundall household: a female between the ages of twenty-six and forty-four (likely Deborah), a male aged forty-five or over (John), and a female between ten and fifteen years old (possibly a servant or child).²⁶ The next several years would prove challenging for the Mundall family, when John's past deeds caused upheaval in the family.

In April 1807, Janet Givan wrote a letter to her mother, Jennett Mungall, in Scotland, expressing amazement that Mrs. Mungall was alive. Janet explained that her father, John Mungall (or Mundall, as he was known in the United States), enrolled her in boarding school in London. They later moved to New Castle, Delaware, where John purchased a building that was both their home and his store (likely the property bought in 1792). Janet wrote that John had taught her to believe that her mother had "ceased to exist." In reporting her father's marriage to Deborah in about 1800, Janet used Marsh as Deborah's surname. Janet urged her mother to reply through an intermediary in Philadelphia and to not contact John directly.²⁷



Janet Mundall Givan married William Givan in 1796 and noted in her letter that he was "a man of excellent character and amiable disposition." They had three sons prior to his death in 1803. Economic reasons forced her and the children to move in with her father until eventually she was able to "earn a decent living by my needle."²⁸

John continued to be an active citizen. Saint Peter's Catholic Church in New Castle appointed him as a trustee in 1808.²⁹

The next chapter of family problems began in October 1811, when John announced in a local newspaper that he would not be responsible for financial matters relating to Jennett Mungall of Scotland, as she was not his wife.³⁰ During that year, Jennett came to Delaware and filed suit against John in the Court of Chancery, asked for financial support, and indicated a willingness to relocate to New Castle and resume their marriage.³¹ Jennett provided testimony from church officials in Scotland who reported that she behaved "soberly and honestly" and was free of scandal.³² Scottish records confirm that John Mungall and Jennett Mungall had married in her home parish on November 21, 1771.³³

John's legal problems escalated further in 1815, when Deborah sued him. She accused him of not repaying a loan of more than \$10,000 that she had made to him. He briefly put Van Leuvenigh house up for sale to raise money to pay off the loan, but soon took it off the market.³⁴

Figure 6-5
Van Leuvenigh House.
John and Deborah Mundell owned Van Leuvenigh House in New Castle. In addition to being the Mundell residence, it was also home to Deborah's needlework school.
Courtesy of Cynthia Steinhoff



Legal matters moved slowly and the Mungall vs. Mundall case was finally settled in 1817 in favor of Jennett. Court documents seldom mentioned Deborah. In a financial disclosure near the time of settlement, John wrote, "The principal source of maintenance for my family including five children two of my own and two of my grandchildren and a bound girl consists of a school kept in my home," probably Deborah's needlework school.³⁵

John's financial report to the court in 1817 confirmed that he owned the Van Leuvenigh property, which included the brick house where the family lived, gardens, stable, slaughterhouse, smokehouse, and small frame house that he rented to a tenant for fifty dollars per year. An inventory of such items as barley, spices, soap, playing cards, turpentine, cough drops, and cooking utensils in the disclosure supported the notion that John still operated a store. He owed about fifteen thousand dollars in debts, including loans and payments due for goods purchased for the store. One loan to him was from Deborah H. Marsh (probably Deborah Mundall) in the amount of \$5,333.33, confirming that he did pay down the balance after she filed the lawsuit in 1815. He owed thirty-two dollars to Sarah Marsh in Philadelphia.³⁶

The case record revealed more about John's early life. He was one of five children born to a soldier and his wife; both died of a fever when John was but six years old. He learned weaving, worked aboard a Royal Navy ship with an uncle, and finally relocated to Paisley, Scotland, where another uncle lived. He married Jennett Mungall, the uncle's daughter, in the hope of securing a future for both of them. Instead, the marriage was unsuccessful because, he claimed, she engaged in extramarital relationships. John left and returned to the marriage several times over nearly twenty years. During this time, he converted to Catholicism, becoming very devout, and frequently sought advice from priests about his marriage. He left for the United States with their daughter, Janet,

about 1790, effectively ending his marriage. In 1795 acquaintances from Scotland informed him that Jennett Mungall had died, and he believed that the information came from reliable sources. Possibly, the outcome of the lawsuit influenced the decision by the Mundalls to relocate to Philadelphia after 1824.³⁷

No other samplers made under Deborah Hicks Mundall in New Castle are known at the time of publication. She may have continued to teach there until the family moved to Philadelphia; exactly when they moved has not been determined. The sheriff sold Van Leuvenigh house in 1824, the same year that the McCullough and Couper girls made their samplers.³⁸ John appeared in records of Old St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1827 as a member.³⁹ John Mundle (Mundall), merchant, can be found in the 1828 Philadelphia city directory at 101 South Fifth Street, the address that later appears on samplers made in Deborah's school. In the 1829 Philadelphia directory, both John, a merchant, and Deborah H., operating a seminary, are at this address.⁴⁰ The first known sampler taught under Deborah's direction in Philadelphia was made in 1829.

The Mundells in Philadelphia

Deborah became the leader of the family after its move to Philadelphia. She appeared for the first time in the records of the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society on August 28, 1828, holding an account in her name for John Mundall. Less than two weeks later, on September 8, 1828, she opened an account for herself. Deborah was a regular depositor at PSFS for many years and supported accounts for other family members.⁴¹ The PSFS was a savings bank similar to modern savings and loan associations. Founded in 1816 as a way for the less wealthy to save, it claimed many Philadelphia families as members for generations.⁴²

