



The biggest hole in the school's student body was its most obvious: African Americans.

The hypocrisy of a Quaker school not practicing equality was apparent to everyone, especially fellow Quakers, and it was Florida Avenue Meeting which first publicly challenged the school about the fact that the school had no black students, when it wrote a letter in the mid-1940s to a dozen Quaker schools asking them what they were doing to end racial discrimination. Hadassah Leeds, as the clerk of the education committee of the Friends General Conference (a conglomeration of mostly Hicksite Quaker yearly meetings), wrote a similar letter. In 1949, the members of the Quaker meetings in the Washington area adopted a joint statement denouncing segregation. "We are brothers and children before God," it read, "before whom our petty differences fade away."

Even though the pressure being applied was

Busing. *Sidwell Friends ran an extensive and expensive busing program for most of the twentieth century, but it was not until the 1960s that the buses carried African-American students.*

local, even from members of his meeting (Stone was clerk of Florida Avenue from 1935 to 1940), Stone did not answer the letters' basic question: how could a Quaker school not be integrated?

Meanwhile, blacks began applying to Sidwell Friends. In 1940 an African diplomat applied for his twin boys. In June 1947 Alonzo Smith, a local doctor and attendee at Florida Avenue, sought a spot for his six-year-old son Alonzo, Jr. in the Sidwell Friends summer camp. When that failed, he applied the following winter for his son's admission to the third grade: "I am still desirous of his having the moral and spiritual advantage of attendance at Sidwell. I hope that despite differences of opinion among members of the Board of Trustees that some unifying Christian



approach to this application will be found and that it will receive favorable approval." Alonzo Smith, rejected by Sidwell Friends, was eventually accepted by Westtown School.

Beginning in 1950, there was at least one new application from a black family each year. Some were Quakers; some were incredibly well educated. In 1951 Jane Snowden applied: her father had a doctorate from Harvard, and her mother was the daughter of the president of Cheyney University. Lyle told the Snowdens, "There is not sufficient feeling of unified thinking in various groups of our school to make it advisable for us to consider this application further." A year later, he was more candid and told Zandra Whiting's parents that "as yet the school has not undertaken a policy of admitting negroes." Karen Page grew up in Northeast Washington. When she was a teenager, she took a bus past Sidwell Friends to Immaculata, a nearby Catholic school. "I rode that bus, the 30 bus and went past Sidwell every day," she said, "and thought, 'Why? They're Quakers—the Underground Railroad—and yet I can't go to their school?'" In 1992 Page came to the lower school to teach second grade.

The board officially discussed integration nineteen times in the decade before February 1956, but it could not cut its Gordian knot. Unlike some Quaker committees, it did not operate on a "sense of the meeting" or consensus model until 1964. The board followed *Robert's Rules of Order* and voted on all matters. A number of board members favored integration, but

Conservative. *Mid-century students at Sidwell Friends, like these two posed at the entrance to Zartman House, had mixed views about integration, with its supporters often pressing the more reluctant administration and board of trustees to take action.*



Fourth. *Bob Lyle succeeded Doc Zavitz as headmaster at Sidwell Friends. A former teacher at Friends and a convinced Quaker, Lyle was not a member of the board of trustees and so did not have an official say when the board voted on the integration issue.*

Jimmy Stone, along with a majority of trustees young and old, were adamantly against the idea.

Some Friends students were resentful of the delay. In 1947 Barbara Meleney Wise, a junior, made an appointment with Edwin Zavitz to talk about integration. He told her that there were "many things that you can't understand on this issue." The following year, the Current Events Club took polls of the Sidwell Friends community, researched the situation at other schools and drew up a report, which they gave to Zavitz. "Segregation is inconsistent with Friends principles," senior Fortis Mosier wrote in the *Quarterly* the fall of 1951. "Sidwell, as a Quaker School, and as an independent school, has an obligation to other



Founder's Day. On the 16th of May each year, the school community gathered to celebrate the birthday of Thomas Sidwell. There were speeches and many posed photographs (like these taken by the school's unofficial photographer Abdon Ackad), but the most memorable act was the annual planting of a tree in Sidwell's honor.

Washington institutions to lead in the movement toward non-segregation. Certainly in Christian philosophy Friends can find no grounds for excluding Negroes.”

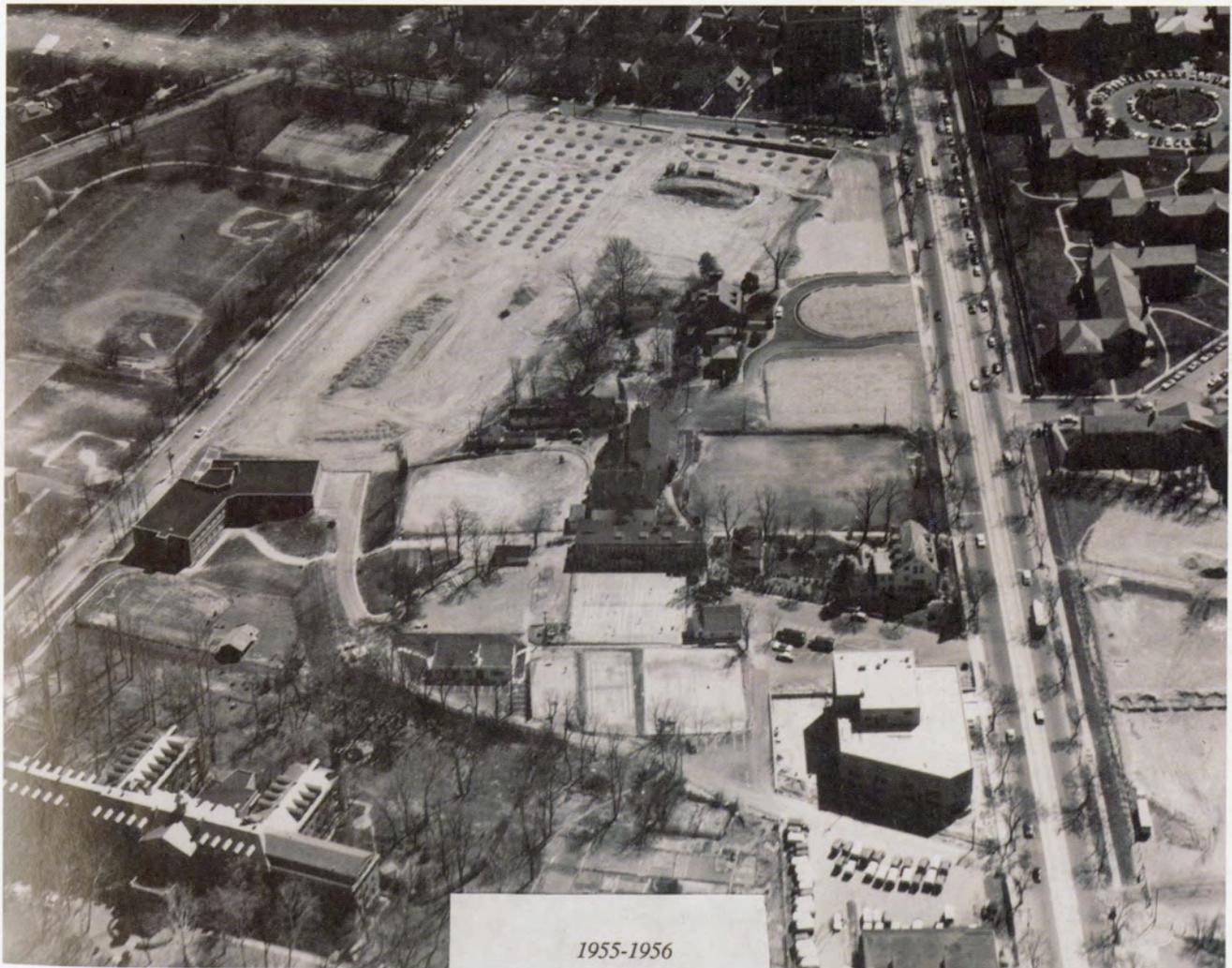
In early 1953, two points of pressure hit Bob Lyle. The student council asked him to speak about integration at an assembly, saying it was “a widespread subject” of interest among the students. At the same time, a ninth grade boy submitted a poem to

the *Quarterly*:

Quakers believe we are brothers
 Beneath the color of our skin.
 But my Quaker school won't let
 My black brothers in.
 It troubles me that we do not do what we say.
 Why can't Sidwell Friends follow the Quaker way?

Lyle summoned the editors to his office and told them, according to senior Helen Austern Colson, “That poem will not appear in the *Quarterly*. It's one fire I don't want to put out.” Colson went to Jef Forsythe and asked whether the students should go out on a protest strike. “Good grief no,” Forsythe said. “I

Construction. This aerial photograph, taken in 1956, showed a Wisconsin Avenue campus in transition. A half century later, more than ten buildings shown here no longer exist.



1955-1956



want you to graduate and go on to do good in the world." That spring, a group of seniors lit a bonfire on the campus and tossed in the student handbooks.

Things were coming to a boil. A group of Florida Avenue Meeting members met with the members of the Sidwell Friends board, calling for it to approve integration at its May 1954 meeting. The board ignored the effort. Days later, the Supreme Court issued its decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*, outlawing segregated public schools. Although the landmark decision did not directly affect private schools like Sidwell Friends, it further alienated the school from mainstream society.

In February 1955, after long debate and a 7-7 vote, the board quietly announced that "present policy as regards racial integration will be continued," in a letter to the school community that highlighted the Highlands real estate triumph. *The Washington Post* ran a story headlined "Friends to Continue Race Ban" and quoted Lyle as lamely saying, "We simply haven't done it ... there's no agreement to doing it." The students became even more passionate about integration. "Certainly segregation appears to be against the high principles of SFS," the lead editorial of the *Quarterly* commented on the February 1955 board decision. "This lack of progress appears to be in opposition not only to the trends of modern society, but also to the established tenets of the Quaker beliefs. Integration is a step necessary to all schools, in-

Groundbreaking. *In the spring of 1958, the school hosted a ceremony for the start of the construction of Kenworthy gym. The racial homogeneity of the lower school students, pictured in front of the old Wisconsin Avenue playground, was evidence of the slow pace of Sidwell Friends' integration.*

dispensable to a Quaker one." In the spring, the student council hosted a series of open meetings attended by Lyle, Zartman and Curtiss.

The faculty favored integration. Jef Forsythe, the school's leading Quaker faculty member, wrote an essay in the winter 1955 *Quarterly* saying that "the admission policies are judged un-Friendly as representing distinctions not in harmony with Friends' doctrine and practice." In the summer of 1955, a faculty committee chaired by Richard Abel, a middle school social studies teacher, studied other schools' experiences with integration and submitted a thirty-three-page report to the board. The committee surveyed twelve Quaker schools and twelve non-Quaker schools. It discovered that most Quaker schools around the country had already integrated. Oakwood Friends became the first Quaker high school in the country to enroll and graduate black students. It broke the color barrier when it enrolled Fred Yergan in 1934. Fred graduated in 1938; his brothers Max Jr., '39 and Charles, '41 also graduated from Oakwood (Max Yergan, their father, was a leading black activist and lecturer at the City College of New York). Media-Providence Friends integrated in 1937, and the school almost went under because enrollment dropped from ninety-three to sixty-two as parents withdrew their children. Swarthmore and Haverford integrated towards the end of the Second World War; Guilford did not until 1961. Westtown and George School integrated in 1946. (The first black student at George School was a Jamaican Quaker; the school rejected Ralph Bunche's application for his daughter Joan in 1947, and four years later Bunche, after he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950, turned down an invitation to be commencement speaker, citing his daughter's experience.) Germantown Friends

integrated in 1947, Penn Charter, Friends' Central and Friends' Select in 1948, and Friends Seminary in 1952. Most importantly, Baltimore Friends, Sidwell Friends' sister school, old rival and nearest Quaker school, announced in November 1954 that it was opening up its kindergarten to blacks the following fall.

In Washington, however, Sidwell Friends was not alone in its desire to remain segregated. Georgetown Day School had been integrated since it was founded in 1945 (in part as a reaction to Sidwell Friends' racial policy), and Beauvoir integrated in 1952 and Georgetown Prep in 1953. But many schools lagged well behind Sidwell Friends. St. Albans integrated in 1957, Landon in 1963, Bullis in 1964, Madeira and Potomac in 1966 and Holton-Arms in 1969. In October 1966 the *Christian Science Monitor* calculated that ten out of the thirty-five leading independent schools in Washington still had not integrated.

In late January 1956 the board met again and voted once more. There was no pattern—old members split, new members split (there were four new trustees that year due to deaths and retirements)—except that all the women on the board voted in favor of integration. In early February the board announced that the school

In 1955-56

Friends To Continue Race Ban

The Sidwell Friends School, 3901 Wisconsin ave. nw., will continue its segregation policy through the 1955-56 school term, its board of trustees has advised the school's patrons.

The announcement said that "whatever developments take place later on will depend on subsequent board action."

Over the signature of Board Chairman J. Austin Stone the report noted that the trustees of the nonprofit institution are "aware of developments in this city and nationally, especially as a result of the decisions of the United States Supreme Court based on cases which were brought by taxpayers in the several states. The board has been studying the subject for many years and will continue to do so."

In further explanation of its stand on the segregation question the board advised:

"It may be of interest to you to know that integration in Friends Schools is not a practice of long standing. Thus in 1934, only two or three of the Friends Schools in the United States counted Negroes in their classes. The acceptance of Negro students in Friends Schools has moved slowly southward.

"Sidwell Friends is not under the jurisdiction of, or operated by, any Friends Meeting, but is operated by a board of trustees of an independent, nonprofit corporation, which board endeavors to so conduct the school that it follows the recognized and long-honored principles of the Religious Society of Friends."

Following an announcement by the Friends School of Baltimore last fall to the effect that Negroes would be admitted as students beginning immediately on a gradual, year-by-year basis, Sidwell Headmaster Robert Lyle said: "We simply haven't done it." Adding that "there's no agreement to doing it."

Publicity Woes. However Jimmy Stone and Bob Lyle tried to spin it, the story of Sidwell Friends' embarrassingly slow progress towards integration was a headline worthy for the city's newspapers like the *Washington*

would follow the Baltimore Friends model and integrate grade by grade starting with kindergarten. "No departure from the school's academic standards will be made," the board assured jittery parents. At the same time, Stone resigned from the chairmanship of the board, saying that by integrating Sidwell Friends the board was doing "a great disservice," that "a generous history of first class value in the field of education" was now going to be lost.

The odd thing was that after the decision, nothing dramatic happened at the school. Abel left, perhaps frustrated over his fight to integrate. A few patrons of the school, including Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, withdrew their children and sent them to segregated schools (Eastland's children, Susan, ex-'62 and Woods, ex-'63 went to Congressional School in Arlington). But enrollment went up by ten children that fall. In October 1957, the Current Events Club invited Clarence Mitchell, an official with the NAACP, to give a talk.

Because of the gradual integration scheme, no black faces appeared

in the middle or upper school, as the only African American student who entered in 1956, Jeffrey Mazique, was in kindergarten. Mazique's older brother had applied that year too, but since he would have joined the first grade, he was rejected. "The only African-Americans at the school were me, the staff in the kitchen and the janitors," Mazique, ex-'70 later said.

In 1957 a second black student enrolled in kindergarten, Guilford Queen, '72 whose mother, Alice Queen, became the school nurse in the late 1960s. By the summer of 1963, just seven African American students were enrolled at the school, the oldest of whom was in sixth grade (Mazique left after fourth grade). This was not unusual for schools that were integrating, even for Quaker schools. Friends Seminary had just two black students in the entire school in 1965. George School only graduated three black students before 1966. Baltimore Friends also had no black students in its upper school in the fall of 1963 and would not graduate one until 1968.

Two incidents on the exact same day in August 1963 inspired the complete integration of Sidwell Friends. The first was that a large contingent of Sidwell Friends students, faculty, staff, parents and alumni attended the epochal March on Washington and heard Martin Luther King, Jr. give his "I Have a Dream" speech. The *Quarterly* published a long photo essay on the story, interviewing Senator William Proxmire (D-

Next Semester

Sidwell To Admit Negroes

A "limited number" of Negro students will be admitted for the first time to Sidwell Friends School during the next school year, Sidwell's Board of Trustees announced yesterday.

In a statement, the trustees declared:

"This change of admission policy is based upon the board's concept of the purpose of Sidwell Friends School: to provide college preparatory training at a high level of academic excellence, with an awareness of an obligation to train for subsequent leadership in good citizenship.

"It follows that the advantages of such schooling should be made available to Negroes also, in order that they too may be better prepared for ultimate professional and civil leadership. Accordingly, these advantages will be made available to qualified Negro applicants."

According to Headmaster Robert S. Lyle, there will be "no established quota" for Negro students, but instead admissions will be based on a flexible policy determined by the number of qualified applicants.

For the 1956-57 school year, Negroes will be admitted to the kindergarten. Each succeeding year, admission will be extended another grade upward.

Wis), among others. Emboldened by the March, some parents pushed the school to fully integrate.

The second thing was a heart-rending incident. Bill Zantzinger, '57 was the son of a Maryland farmer who had attended Sidwell Friends for his last three years of high school. In February 1963, while at a black-tie ball at a Baltimore hotel, he drunkenly assaulted a black bartender and mother of ten named Hattie Carroll with a toy cane. She died the next day. The case was a national story, and Zantzinger was convicted of manslaughter on the same day as the March on Washington. That fall, Bob Dylan wrote and started performing "The Ballad of Hattie Carroll," a song that has remained in his concert song list and has been covered by numerous other singers.

In the fall of 1963, a group led by two Sidwell Friends parents, Alison Stokes MacLean, a Quaker, and Lydia Katzenbach, the wife of the future attorney general, formed the Negro Student Fund to raise money to give scholarships to African Americans to attend private schools like Sidwell Friends. African Americans began enrolling in the upper school in 1964, and in 1967, after more than eighty years of segregation, the school finally graduated its first five black students.