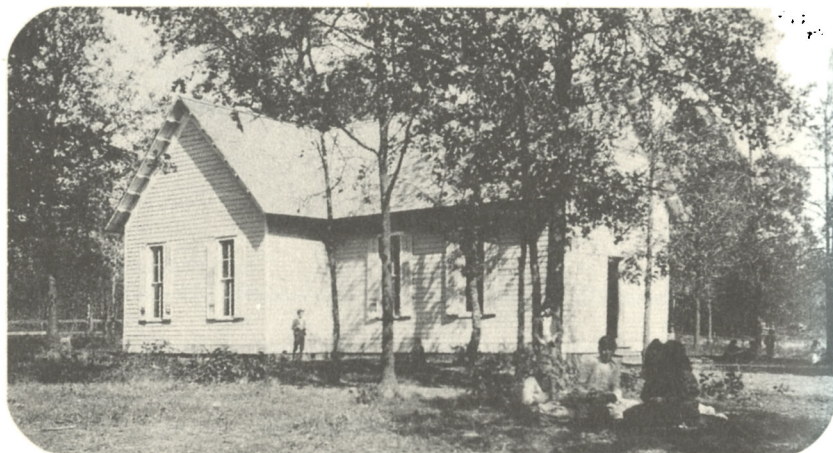


The Park Hill Mission



Letters from a Missionary Family

*By Kristina L. Southwell**

In the late 1970s Kathleen Leiper Faux was assisting with preparations to sell her childhood home of Benholm Farm in Blauvelt, New York, when she discovered a box of letters in the attic. To Faux's surprise, the letters were written by her grandfather, the Reverend Joseph Leiper, his wife, Fanny Leiper, and his aunt, Margaret McCarrell. The three served as Presbyterian missionaries among the Cherokees in Indian Territory from 1889 to 1893. Written from Park Hill Mission located five miles from the Cherokee capital of Tahlequah, the letters were addressed to

Joseph's aunts, Rebecca and Julie McCarrell and Sarah McCarrell Welling, who resided together in Warwick, New York. The letters vividly describe the McCarrell-Leipers' experiences among the Cherokees during their first year of missionary work. Accompanying the letters were a scrapbook, photographs, and drawings that document their mission work for the Presbyterian Church. Faux donated many of the items to the University of Oklahoma Libraries' Western History Collections in 1995 to establish the Kathleen Leiper Faux Collection. The collection is comprised of .45 cubic feet of correspondence, primarily from Joseph Leiper and Margaret McCarrell to their New York relatives in 1889–1890. Also included are photographs and supplemental explanatory notes on the history of the McCarrell-Leiper family. The broad scope of materials in the collection and the depth of the information contained in the letters provide an unusually clear and poignant view of missionary life in Indian Territory.

Joseph Leiper was born in Pittsburgh in 1860 to Hannah and Bartram Leiper. In 1862, while Bartram, a colonel in the First Kentucky Regiment, was engaged at the Battle of Shiloh, Hannah fell ill and died. Joseph went to Newburgh, Pennsylvania, to live with his maternal grandparents, the Reverend Joseph and Jane McCarrell. Joseph's father never recovered from Hannah's death and also died shortly thereafter. Joseph was reared by a large circle of relatives which included his grandparents and four of his aunts, Margaret, Sarah, Rebecca, and Juliet. Joseph's grandfather was pastor of the Associate Reform Church in Newburgh and had been president of a Presbyterian seminary there as well. As a result, all members of the McCarrell household were well educated and extensively involved in work for the church.

After Reverend McCarrell's death in 1863, Margaret and Juliet helped support Joseph and their sisters by opening private schools for children. They were unable to afford a college education for Joseph, so at age sixteen he began working as a clerk for the Dodd, Mead Publishing Company in New York. He worked there and practiced farming until age twenty-seven, when he was introduced to missionary work for the Presbyterian Church. In July, 1888, Joseph attended a ten-day church conference held by the evangelical team of Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey in Northfield, Massachusetts. Joseph became strongly interested in missionary work through the contacts he made at the non-denominational revival. The event also was the setting for his arranged introduction to and courtship of Fanny Heywood Smith, whom he would marry one year

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

later. Fanny, an art teacher educated at the Massachusetts Normal Art School, shared Joseph's enthusiasm for missionary work. By the time Fanny and Joseph departed from Northfield, they were engaged, and Joseph planned to resign from the publishing company and enroll in winter courses at Union Seminary in New York to prepare for ordination. Many years later Joseph said of the conference, "I was not at all enthusiastic about going for I was not at all acquainted with what Northfield and D. L. Moody really meant. I had known and heard Moody at the Hippodrome Meetings in New York, but Northfield was only a name. It was part of the Divine plan that meant an entire change in all my future life and work."¹

Immediately following his resignation at the publishing company, Joseph traveled to Texas and Indian Territory to tour the Presbyterian missions. After visiting many mission schools for Creeks, Choctaws, and Cherokees, Joseph finally found a suitable school with an opening at Park Hill in the Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory. The Park Hill Mission had been reopened only a few years since its closure during the Civil War. His position at Park Hill secured, Joseph returned to Union Seminary to begin his studies for the winter semester in 1888.

In June, 1889, Joseph eagerly went out to the Indian Territory missions before he was ordained. To get around that technicality, Joseph took along his aunt Margaret McCarrell as his tutor. Margaret was an accomplished scholar in theology and had already completed the full course of studies at the seminary in Newburgh where her father had been president. Joseph and Maggie left Blauvelt, New York, on June 5 and traveled by train to Muskogee, Indian Territory, and by stagecoach to Tahlequah. Upon arrival at Park Hill, Joseph and Maggie began making repairs and improvements to the Presbyterian parsonage on the mission grounds. They also made preparations to receive Fanny, who would marry Joseph in December. Joseph completed his seminary studies while serving at Park Hill and was ordained by the Sequoyah Presbytery in Indian Territory one year after his arrival.

The cache of letters Kathleen Leiper Faux discovered in the Benholm Farm attic begin with Fanny's arrival at Park Hill Mission on December 18, 1889. In the first letter, Joseph wrote to his New York relatives:

Aunt M. left this on my desk when she went to school for me to finish & take to town with me. I did not want to go very much as there is so little time & so many things to be done before Sabbath, but we need provisions & have had no mail for several days so must go this evening. We

PARK HILL MISSION

arrived yesterday afternoon. . . . The car from Wagoner to Ft. Gibson was very hot & the ride in the sun after it with an almost empty stomach was a little much for Fanny & she had a sick headache when we arrived here. The first she has had but rest & sleep fixed her all right & she was quite herself this morning.²

Despite Fanny's difficult start, she and Joseph had embarked upon what both would likely consider the most interesting and challenging period of their lives. The Park Hill Mission was one of several Presbyterian missions in the area near Tahlequah, including the Elm Springs and Woodall missions. Park Hill was mainly comprised of two buildings: a church, and a white, two-story parsonage. The church also served as a two-room school for local Cherokee children. The Presbyterian Mission Board directed operations and provided modest funding. However, the missionaries soon learned they were largely on their own in managing the finances and day-to-day business of the mission. It was a huge undertaking for the newlywed couple and their aunt.

Joseph, Fanny, and Maggie divided the work at the mission according to their individual talents. Joseph served as pastor of the



Fanny Leiper photographed a Cherokee family standing outside their cabin (above) and what is undoubtedly the Park Hill Mission church/school (p. 216) (All photographs courtesy Faux Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries, Faux 47, above / Faux 37, p. 216).

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

church, led school classes, and ministered to Cherokees in outlying areas of Park Hill. Fanny managed the parsonage, taught the men and boys' general education class, and gave art lessons and devotional chalk talks. Fanny was very popular among the students, and her artistic abilities made her unique among missionaries. Maggie also taught Cherokee students at the mission, but found a strong calling to educate the black children in the area, for whom there were no schools. When Maggie and Joseph approached the Mission Board about starting a separate school for them, they were told there were not sufficient funds for such a project. Ever resourceful, Maggie secured the necessary funding from her widowed sister, Sarah McCarrell Welling. Maggie's school for blacks became known as the McCarrell Institute. She also began a similar school at the nearby Woodall Mission. Maggie and the Leipers received assistance at the parsonage and school from several other missionaries, including Sallie Mathes, Louise Thomson, and Miss Montgomery.³

Work at Park Hill often made the days long and difficult. The endless duties of instruction, community involvement, and missionary work were compounded by the harshness of life in the unsettled hills of the Cherokee Nation. Salaries from the board were often delayed, and common household supplies were unavailable in Indian Territory. The missionaries relied upon the relatives in New York for assistance with funding and procuring household goods.



The Leipers and their aunt tried to make the two-storied parsonage at Park Hill comfortable and cheerful for themselves and their Cherokee students (Faux 45).

Joseph's benevolent aunts continually supplied clothing, blankets, Bibles, and funds to the missionaries and their students. Without their assistance, the work at Park Hill would not have been possible.

The missionaries made the best of their situation and tried to maintain a sense of normalcy while living at Park Hill. They took great care to make the parsonage as presentable as possible and as much like their homes in the northeast. They ordered furniture, wallpaper, and even a piano from Chicago to complete the home. Their house had a patio and veranda attached to the front, and long honeysuckle vines covered the side of the home. Joseph's improvements to the property included a cellar, a well and pump house, and a fireplace and chimney. Unfortunately, the house had been constructed of green timber, which caused cracks to form in the walls. They stuffed the gaps with straw to prevent winter winds from entering the bedrooms. Upon completion of some refurbishing projects and improvements to the parsonage in 1890, Maggie sent this description to her sisters:

The house is much improved by the wall paper, which covers the living room, bed room and the bed room up stairs, the down stairs bed room has a double bed and one side a wash stand with glass over it and two ends curtained to form wardrobes for the ladies, a large box under the window covered with same kind of calico holds the bed & table linen, the floor is covered with rag carpet which give a comfortable, country look to the room, and that is all the furniture. The living room is bare floor except for a strip of rag carpet across the middle. Miss Thompson's [*sic*] trunk in one corner and Miss Montgomery's in another, two tables and some chairs are the furniture of this room.⁴

Fanny sent her McCarrell aunts a photograph of the exterior of the parsonage in the spring of 1890, and Joseph narrated it with these words:

Is not that a pretty picture Fanny sends of our manse? The two windows on the ground floor open into our room. The room above is Miss Sallie's. The window at the side looks over toward Mr. Lewis' cottage. The little shed you see back of Aunt Maggie is the well & cellar, opening from the kitchen porch, so all are under cover. One side of the roof is extended out & covers the wood which I pile up there when cut. Our well & cellar are such a comfort & convenience. The stone chimney you see the top of beyond the front porch & the corn crib of logs in the distance. The vine over our window is a honey suckle which at present is covered with blossoms.⁵

As missionaries, Joseph, Fanny, and Maggie worked among the Cherokees to introduce them to Christianity and to provide basic



Students and their teacher at Park Hill gathered for a chart lesson (Faux 44).

education to the children. However, it is clear from the sentiments expressed in their letters that they also considered it their duty to teach them the housekeeping standards they had known while living in the northeast. Joseph wrote, "We try to make our home as bright & pretty as we can & have the people enjoy it with us. Outside of distinctive Bible teaching, nothing is more needed by these people than to teach them how to live."⁶ The parsonage, in fact, stood in great contrast to the homes of their Cherokee neighbors. Whereas the parsonage had amenities such as glass windows and Victorian furniture, most Cherokee homes in the area were wooden one-room cabins which often housed large families. Joseph described them as "the most forlorn places you ever want to get into."⁷ Maggie wrote of the parsonage:

The Indian boys have examined the cottage with great interest and will probably copy to some extent when they come to have houses of their own. . . . We hope the influence of our house here will silently do them good[. O]ne dare not say a word[. T]hey would be offended[. T]hey think they are as far advanced as people in the East.⁸

In keeping with their attempts to acquaint their students and neighbors with Euro-American ways of living, the McCarrell-Leipers made special efforts to observe traditional Christian holidays in the parsonage and schools. For example, they decorated the interior of the parsonage for Christmas of 1889 with live greenery, holly berries, cotton balls, and a small Christmas tree. They outfitted the church with a false chimney decorated to resemble a Victorian Christmas hearth. They artfully constructed the chimney of boards and brown paper, with gifts displayed on the mantel, and completed the scene with two red "sofas" made from school seats and blackboards covered in red tablecloths and stockings filled with candy. The children received gifts of dolls, tops, marbles, candy, handkerchiefs, and soap-and-brush kits, items sent to the mission by relatives and Presbyterian churches in New York. The celebration encompassed all branches of the area mission schools, including Woodall, Elm Springs, and the McCarrell Institute. Christmas programs took place at each site over a span of several days and included recitations, songs, and gift giving. The whirlwind of activities prompted Maggie to remark, "This is the longest Christmas I ever knew." However, she must have found the exhausting holiday season rewarding, as after the Park Hill program she commented in a letter to her sisters, "The effect of the school is so excellent on the community as well as the children who have improved wonderfully."⁹

Joseph felt similarly rewarded by their efforts at religious instruction in the community and often spoke of their progress in his letters. Although he conducted classes and church services in English with only occasional assistance from Cherokee interpreters, attendance proved better than expected. Joseph wrote of his Sunday services, "We feel much encouraged at the continued attendance of the boys & men. Some are coming in that have not gone to church for years. . . . [T]here is no attraction except the Word of God, & that is new enough to many of them."¹⁰

Maggie proudly related other stories of success to her sisters. One such account is of the Crow family, who left their farm to live closer to the mission school:

Yesterday we held the Communion. . . . Mrs. Crow . . . was baptized, her husband is full blood and does not speak English, that is will not, can I believe if he will. She is an interesting woman about half blood and quite intelligent. This family moved into this neighborhood for the benefit of the school for the children, three of them attend. Mr. Ross is helping them build a log cabin on the mission ground. They put their

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

farm in the hands of a renter[,] will that way get a little profit from it. They rent a little cabin now but it is a cold uncomfortable place.¹¹

Joseph added to Maggie's story of that day by telling of the Gist family and their efforts to join the church: "We had the preparatory services Saturday evening & session held at the parsonage afterwards when five presented themselves for admission. Among them Mr. & Mrs. Gist who walked 2 miles carrying the baby & leaving the other five children at home to care for themselves until they returned."¹²

On the whole, the missionaries were greatly pleased with their success in introducing the Cherokees to Christianity. Cherokees in



Fanny Leiper's lens captured scenes of everyday life around the mission, including a wagon "waiting for the ferryboat" (above) and a baby that was probably one of her own sons (opposite) (Faux 19, above / Faux 51, opposite).

the community began organizing prayer meetings and other groups to assist the missionaries in their efforts. Of that development Joseph wrote, "We all feel that after the dark days & troubles that have been about us . . . the Lord is sending us a blessing that we may be strengthened & encouraged. We will go forward with new hope & faith strengthened casting all care in Him & feeling that after doing all we can He will bring all out right in the end."¹³

The missionaries sometimes felt less successful in their efforts to educate the local Cherokees in traditional school subjects. Many

PARK HILL MISSION

children in the area found it difficult to attend classes regularly due to farm duties. Joseph remarked to his aunts, "More new scholars this week at school, if all in the role [sic] would only get here more regularly, would have a nice school, but they are so irregular from one cause & another it makes rather discouraging work for the teachers."¹⁴



Maggie echoed Joseph's frustration, telling her sisters that when visitors came to the school, she never attempted to "show off" her students' recitation skills. She lamented, "[T]hey are so irregular in attendance they cannot be classed."¹⁵ Joseph explained:

More new scholars are in the school & the primary dept. is full. Aunt Maggie won't suffer because the older boys & girls are kept out so much for work. The farmers are beginning spring work now & some of the boys are gone for good this year. They just get started & then are taken away[. It seems too bad but we just have to do the best we can & urge in all the ways we know how the parents to let their children stay in school.¹⁶

The students' need to perform farming chores was not the only hindrance. The sudden weather changes that are the hallmark of the Oklahoma climate also prevented many of them from attending class. Many of the Park Hill children lived several miles away and could not reach the school during such times. Both Joseph and Maggie wrote home describing one such storm. Joseph said:

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

We have had a tremendous rain. It commenced Monday & rained almost steadily all day & throughout the night, the branch was a river. I went down to the little foot bridge Mr. Evans built where it crosses the road & it was boiling & surging & rushing under the bridge & the back water had flooded all around so I could not get to the bridge itself, we had thunder & lightening [*sic*] all day & through the night, it was a remarkable day. We would not let Miss Sallie go up to school, Aunt M. took care of it herself, small of course[,] 18 pupils out. One of the boys who had started home early came back in haste to tell them the branch was rising very fast[,] so Aunt M. dismissed at once that all who had to cross it might get over at once. We were almost an island, there are two branches on either side of us."¹⁷

Education at Park Hill was not limited to standard reading, writing, and arithmetic. The missionaries strove to provide a well-rounded education, which included an introduction to the fine arts. Fanny, who was an art and music teacher prior to her missionary service, regularly provided drawing lessons to the students in class. The lessons were very popular with the children and teens and offered a welcome respite from regular studies. Maggie wrote of Fanny's art instruction, "She had a bright lively way of teaching. The children will doubtless learn and they need waking, have few ideas outside their daily life . . . are not dull children only ignorant and their lives restricted."¹⁸ Fanny kept many sketch books filled with beautiful drawings of her experiences in Indian Territory. She executed portraits especially well and often drew the faces of the local Cherokees. Few of Fanny's sketches survived with the letters, however, as they were likely given away or used in Presbyterian publications to advertise the missionary work at Park Hill.

Joseph and Maggie contributed to publicity for the Park Hill Mission by documenting their work in photographs from which they created lantern slides. They frequently traveled to neighboring towns and missions to exhibit them and often sent them back home for viewing by churches in the East. Circulating the slides helped church members understand the work of missionaries in Indian Territory and encouraged support for them. Joseph also used the lantern slides as entertainment for the local Cherokees, as the "magic lantern" was a novelty to most. One of the most popular slides Joseph exhibited was of the new Brooklyn Bridge, which was constructed during his years in New York City. Because the missionaries owned no projection screen, they often used the side of a prairie schooner to view the slides. Joseph and Maggie's slides captured many views of life at Park Hill, including the Cherokee students, scenes of daily life, and shots of the school picnics. They also

traded slides with other Indian Territory missionaries to build their growing collection. Using her artistic talents, Fanny created a large scrapbook of photographic prints documenting their experiences in Indian Territory, complete with hand-calligraphied titles and captions.

Social events also interrupted school work at Park Hill from time to time. The most popular of these were picnics, at which the entire countryside would gather together. One of the most festive picnics held in the area was the May party of the Cherokee National Female Seminary in Tahlequah. Held on the banks of the Illinois River, it included the selection of a May queen, speeches, singing, and the requisite picnicking. The mission schools were closed for the annual event, as all in the area planned to attend. Always intrigued by the artistic aspect of things, Fanny looked forward to seeing the fashionable clothing worn at the picnic: "We can study the fashions at the picnic Friday, I mean to get some photographs. The Seminary girls were the most gorgeously dressed creatures – such width of hat rim! And flower gardens thereon!" But, she continued, "[T]he flowers are so numerous - also! alas! are the ticks - I wish the bugs and reptiles were not so various out here. I suppose I shall get used to them – in time."¹⁹



Cherokee women and children attended one of several picnics the Leipers sponsored during their tenure at Park Hill (Faux 83).

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

The Park Hill community apparently appreciated the missionaries' efforts. The closing exercises of the four mission schools of that first year of work by Joseph, Fanny, and Maggie in June, 1890, must have brought much satisfaction. For the ceremony, they decorated the school with greenery and wild flowers, and Fanny played the piano as the students filed in and took their arranged places before the audience. They recited the Nineteenth Psalm, sang songs, and made other recitations. The highlight was a brief impromptu speech by a Cherokee audience member, David Smallwood: "Public Schools (Cherokee National) no good. Children no study, laugh[,] talk[,] look around[,] teachers don't know anything[.] Mission School, Dwight, Tahlequah[,] Park Hill, Elm Spring learn fast."²⁰ Maggie related the event to her sisters and remarked that it was especially important because it was spoken by a fullblood Cherokee citizen.

Closing exercises at the McCarrell Institute were successful as well. Maggie wrote to her sisters:

Joe and I went up yesterday A.M. to the closing of the colored school. Minny & Mary Shannon, Hannah's daughters[,] did remarkably well, as well as did the others. It is not quite three months since they began, did not know their letters and they could read quiet well in the second reader. The children read, spelled, recited some very short pieces, answered a good many questions in Geography, many of them I am sure were learned by rote and they did not know what they meant but they named the New England states (& Middle) giving the capital of each, and (more than I can do,) the names of the Presidents though when they came to the last they said Benjamin Franklin.²¹

The first year of missionary work for the McCarrell-Leipers (1889–1890) is the most carefully documented period reflected in the letters of the Faux Collection. They continued their work as missionaries at Park Hill for three more years. Their work and experiences among the Cherokees changed little with each passing school season. Joseph and Fanny became the parents of Henry in 1891 and Bartram in 1893. Joseph and Maggie bore the difficulties of life in Indian Territory well, but Fanny was not so hardy. She suffered frequently from various physical ailments and was forced to spend the summer months of each year with relatives in New Jersey to escape the stifling heat. By mid-1893, the stresses of caring for two children and the parsonage, and her declining health, became too much for her. She also was expecting a third child. Although reluctant to leave their friends and students at Park Hill, the Leipers realized it was time to leave the mission. Prior to their departure, Joseph arranged a position for himself as pastor of his

former church in Blauvelt, New York. Following their return to the northeast, Fanny gave birth to their third son, named McCarrell, in 1894. After McCarrell's arrival, Fanny's health declined sharply, and she succumbed to tuberculosis in January, 1896, at age thirty-two.²² She left Joseph with three sons aged four, three, and two. Joseph's aunts, the McCarrell sisters, reared the children, just as they had Joseph years earlier.

Joseph was grief stricken by Fanny's death and did not marry again for ten years. He destroyed most reminders of her and even gave away the piano she had so often played in Indian Territory.²³ Family members recall that he never spoke of his experiences at Park Hill with Fanny and his aunt Margaret. Instead, the letters, drawings, and photographs of the Faux Collection serve as the sole reminders of that brief period at Park Hill Mission.

ENDNOTES

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¹ Joseph McCarrell Leiper, "Some Notes on Life and Experiences," foreword by Kathleen Leiper Faux, ca. 1935, Box 30, Folder 11, Kathleen Leiper Faux Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman. Unless otherwise noted, all of the following sources are from the Faux Collection.

² Joseph Leiper to Aunts, December 19, 1889, Box 29, Folder 1.

³ See "A Cross-Section in the Life of a Missionary Teacher among the Indians," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 17 (September, 1939): 328-332, for an account of Louise Thomson's experiences at Park Hill.

⁴ Margaret McCarrell to Sisters, October 16, 1890, Box 29, Folder 59.

⁵ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, May 20, 1890, Box 29, Folder 40.

⁶ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, January 6, 1890, Box 29, Folder 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Margaret McCarrell to Sisters, December 25, 1889, Box 29, Folder 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, February 24, 1890, Box 29, Folder 23.

¹¹ Margaret McCarrell to Sisters, February 10, 1890, Box 29, Folder 19.

¹² Joseph Leiper to Aunts, February 10, 1890, Box 29, Folder 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, March 14, 1890, Box 29, Folder 29.

¹⁵ Margaret McCarrell to Sisters, May 19, 1890, Box 29, Folder 39.

¹⁶ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, February 13, 1890, Box 29, Folder 21.

¹⁷ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, March 12, 1890, Box 29, Folder 28.

¹⁸ Margaret McCarrell to Sisters, January 15, 1890, Box 29, Folder 11.

¹⁹ Fanny Leiper to Aunts, May 1, 1890, Box 29, Folder 34.

²⁰ Joseph Leiper to Aunts, June 7, 1890, Box 29, Folder 43.

²¹ Margaret McCarrell to Sisters, July 11, 1890, Box 29, Folder 50.

²² William J. Schmidt and Edward Ovellette, *What Kind of A Man?: The Life of Henry Smith Leiper* (New York: Friendship Press, 1986).

²³ Leiper, "Some Notes on Life."