

# MHC Quarterly

Mennonite Heritage Center

ISSN 1098-6359

Volume 22, No. 4, Winter 2019



Businesswoman and temperance crusader Flora Harley Britten (1864-1942) of Boston, MA, posing for a professional photograph in 1913. Her father, David Harley, a lawyer in northern Michigan, was born at Franconia, PA in 1834. This issue of the *Quarterly* features their family story through an unusual set of photos preserved in the Isaac Clarence Kulp Collection at the MHC.

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The **MHC Quarterly**  
is published four times per year

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Tuesday - Friday  
10 am to 5 pm  
Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm

Our mission is to educate, inspire and witness to the church and community by collecting, preserving and sharing the Anabaptist/Mennonite story.

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## New email address?

Sign up to receive Heritage Center news and announcements via email. It's the best way to stay on top of workshops and events happening throughout the year.

Go to [mhep.org](http://mhep.org) to sign up!



While on our website, check out the MHC blog, where there are many interesting articles about local heritage. New posts are added monthly, and you can sign up to receive those in your email inbox as soon as they go live.

## From the Executive Director



The year has passed quickly and it is time to reflect on another season of events—what was successful to our mission to “educate, inspire and witness” and what could maybe be changed or even discarded and something new be installed in its place? We have our annual events—Harleysville Hank, the Whack and Roll Croquet Tournament, Apple Butter Frolic, December Farm Market in the Barn, traditional arts workshops, programs such as “This Very Ground, this Crooked Affair” by John Ruth, and exhibits such as this year’s “Food Heritage of Eastern Pennsylvania.”

What ideas do you have? Is there a speaker or topic that the Heritage Center should sponsor? Have you attended an event that struck you as a good idea for the MHC? In looking to the future, will we continue to spend more time online or is it important to encourage people to put down the phone and go see an exhibit or participate in a workshop? We welcome your input and advice. My email is [heffners@mhep.org](mailto:heffners@mhep.org) and my phone is 215-256-3020, ext.112.

Thank you for your involvement and support.

Sarah Heffner  
Acting Executive Director



# Lawyers and Activists: The Harley-Britten Family

by Forrest Moyer, Archivist

Our nation is celebrating 100 years since the U.S. Constitution was amended to guarantee women the right to vote. The 19th Amendment was passed through Congress in 1919, and by August 1920 was ratified by 36 states, making it law. Numerous states rejected the measure, approving it only years later (Mississippi was the last to ratify in 1984).

Activists worked throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to elevate the personal liberty and equality of women in male-dominated society; and the work continues today, with advocacy for equal pay and attention to sexual assault reports that were ignored in the past.

Historically, our local Pennsylvania German region was opposed to equality of the genders. When Pennsylvania took a referendum in 1915, all counties south and east of the Blue Mountain (other than Chester) voted by wide margins against women receiving voting rights. An interesting article about the activism around this referendum was recently published in *Pennsylvania Heritage*, the journal of the PA Historical & Museum Commission (Fall 2019), available in the MHC library.

Some with roots in our community became active proponents of women's equality, both in political work and by setting an example of women in business and professions.

One of these was Flora Harley Britten (1864-1942) whose father's ancestry was solidly German Baptist (i.e. Church of the Brethren) in eastern Pennsylvania. Though she was born and raised in Michigan, her father grew up at Franconia and Harleysville, Montgomery County, PA. Her Harley grandparents (Jacob & Sarah Price Harley) resided in eastern PA until their deaths in 1882.

Flora became a leader and lecturer in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, working alongside her husband, Fred Britten (1860-1946), a Baptist minister. Though her primary emphasis was on temperance, she also supported women's suffrage, and was herself a businesswoman.

The Isaac Clarence Kulp Collection (Hist. Mss. 436) at the Mennonite Heritage Center includes a folder of photos from Flora Britten, providing an unusual amount of documentation on her influential family. Kulp received them from the former



Another portrait of Flora in 1913, taken at the same time as the photo on the cover.

historian of the Harley Family Association, Elizabeth Harley, who must have received them from the Britten family. The photos appear to be labeled by Flora herself.

Flora's father, David Sower Harley, was born at Franconia in 1834, where his father owned a general store. At the age of 20, he went to college to become a teacher. He was in charge of the public schools at Marietta, Lancaster County, PA, for a few years, after which he moved to Michigan and became a surveyor and mapmaker in partnership with John Geil from Line Lexington, PA. Digital images of their maps can be viewed on the Library of Congress website.

David graduated from the University of Michigan in 1867 with a law degree, and built a successful legal practice in the lakeside town of Manistee, MI.

He married Flavia Jane Phelps (1832-1912), the daughter of early Michigan settlers from New York. Jane was described by her daughter Flora in the Price Genealogy (1926):

*My mother was in the first woman's temperance movement, that preceded the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and assisted in leading the movement and in building the first Woman's Temperance Building as far as is known. Then the [Temperance] Crusades came along and she was one of the leaders of Northern Michigan, organizing and leading other women for months until the Crusades were cemented into the W.C.T.U., and in her home town was built the first Woman's Temple.*



David and Jane Phelps Harley, circa 1870 and circa 1885.





Flora Harley at ages 3, 5 and 7.

About herself, Flora wrote:

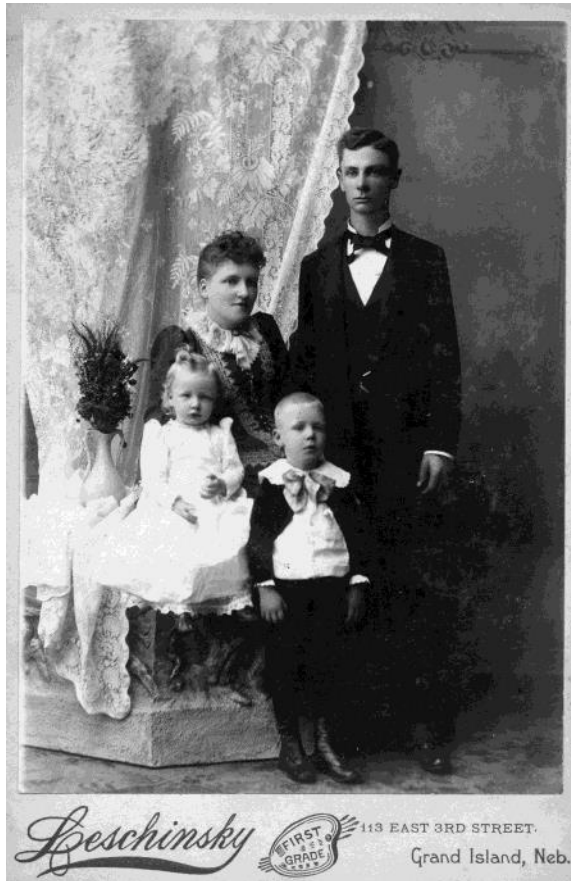
*I was educated at Manistee High School and Michigan University, B.A. course. After marriage [to Rev. Fred Ernest Britten] in 1886, we moved to Minnesota and in the fall of that year to Iowa, where I began some public work outside the work of a pastor's wife.*

*Taught in the public school of Michigan and in the University of Pella, Iowa, during 1886-1888; both had charge of the classes in Art Studies, also taught Greek and some classes in Latin; conducted the work in elocution. Mr. Britten went to Pella to be Acting President of the College; to teach Psychology and Ethics, and also as pastor of the Baptist church. We moved to Grand Island, Nebraska in the fall of 1889.*

*Licensed preacher holding regular pastorates in Nebraska and Michigan; reform and popular lecturer, for both the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Prohibition Party. [Is Flora referring to roles held by herself or her husband? Both were popular lecturers.]*



Flora at age 20 in 1884.



Fred & Flora Britten with sons Clarence and Rollo at Grand Island, NE, 1891.



Sons Rollo, Merle and Clarence with a pet at Albion, MI, 1899. The youngest, Merle, would meet a disastrous end (next page).

*At Grand Island, Rev. Britten was largely instrumental in the establishing of the State Baptist College; and was among the leaders in establishing the World Baptist Young People's Union. We were pioneers in the Baptist work of the West in many ways.*

*My lecture work finally took me to most parts of the U.S. and I was well known from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, when my health gave out.*

*We moved back to Michigan in 1893—starved out during the long tug of the three years drought in Nebraska. We were at the heart of the starvation section during the entire time and finally had to return.*

*Settled first in Albion, where in 1898 [Fred?] became the office manager for the State Prohibition Party for four years following. Rev. Britten became the State Manager at the period of the split of the Party and we undertook a new, pioneer work with only courage to back us. The four years saw the Party more than successful and the last three years were spent in Detroit, where Rev. Britten was candidate for Mayor on the Prohibition ticket. I travelled with the Presidential train, speaking for the party during its trip through the State [this may have been the campaign train of John Woolley, U.S. presidential candidate for the Prohibition Party in 1900].*

*Moved to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1903. [Flora?] became General Secretary for the Gospel Prohibition Association, 1903-1905; also State Superintendent of Christian Citizenship; President of the Boston W.C.T.U. and National Lecturer and leader in innumerable other reform enterprises until about 1909, President and Treasurer of the Boston Development Co. and the Citrus Fruit Co. from 1905 to 1912, with many other side lines of a business nature.*



*A severe breakdown caused a stoppage of all work for some time. Was office manager for an occult [spiritualist/metaphysical] magazine for one year.*

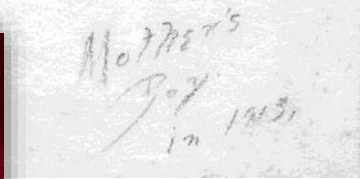
*Fall of 1918 [Flora] went to Washington to visit—when the “Flu” broke out was asked to handle the immense proposition of distributing literature for educating the people regarding the disease by the Public Health Service and is still [1926] engaged in that work. The office is now at 455 W. 23d St., New York City.*

In this autobiography, Flora glossed over several difficult years. The “severe breakdown” that caused a pause in her work was the tragic death of her son Merle in 1912 and the end of her marriage in 1915. The details were probably too painful to include.

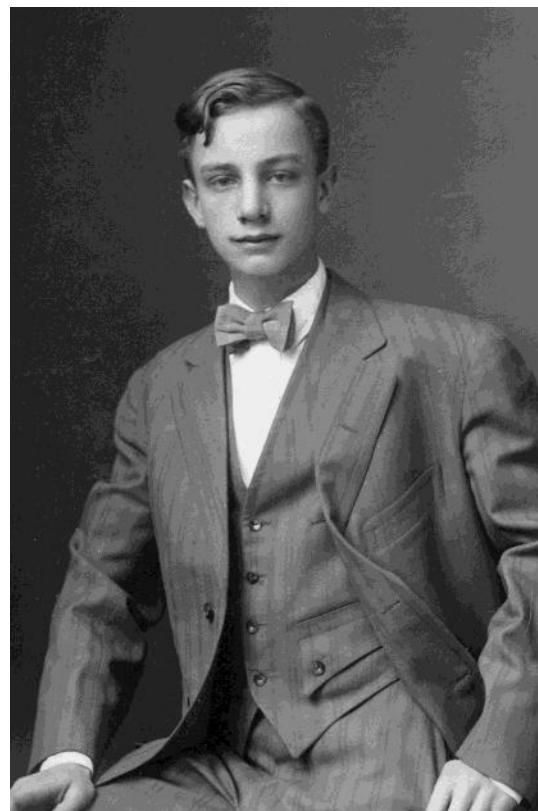
### **“His Head Crushed”**

All three of Fred and Flora’s sons attended Harvard University. While the youngest, Merle, was a freshman there in 1912, he worked as a “strike-breaking” conductor on the Boston Elevated Railway. It caused his death.

The Boston Globe reported on July 5, 1912, that Merle DeWitt Britten was “killed last night by having his head crushed between two [rail] cars in the City Point car barns. Arthur H. Wilson, another Harvard student, was the motorman of the car that crushed out his life. Britten, who was 21 years old and who roomed at 9 Trinity Hall, had been employed only a few week. Last night, about 9:10, Britten and Wilson were making preparations to get their car out of the barn preparatory to making their trip. Britten had left the car and had passed behind it, when without warning the car backed down upon him and crushed his head against a car that was standing directly in the rear.... He leaves a father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Fred E. Britten of the Massachusetts Chambers [apartment building], and two brothers, Clarence Dewey and Rollo Herbert Britten, both of whom were graduated in June from Harvard, Clarence having been president of the Harvard Monthly.”



(Above) Clarence Dewey Britten, in a portrait given to his mother on Mother’s Day, 1913. Also pictured is his Bowdoin Prize from Harvard, 1908, which is now in the Kulp Collection at the MHC.



Merle D. Britten, 1910.



Fred and Flora Britten were divorced in 1915. Flora left this out of her statement in the Price Genealogy, never guessing that later genealogists would have easy access to Michigan divorce records from anywhere in the world via Ancestry.com.



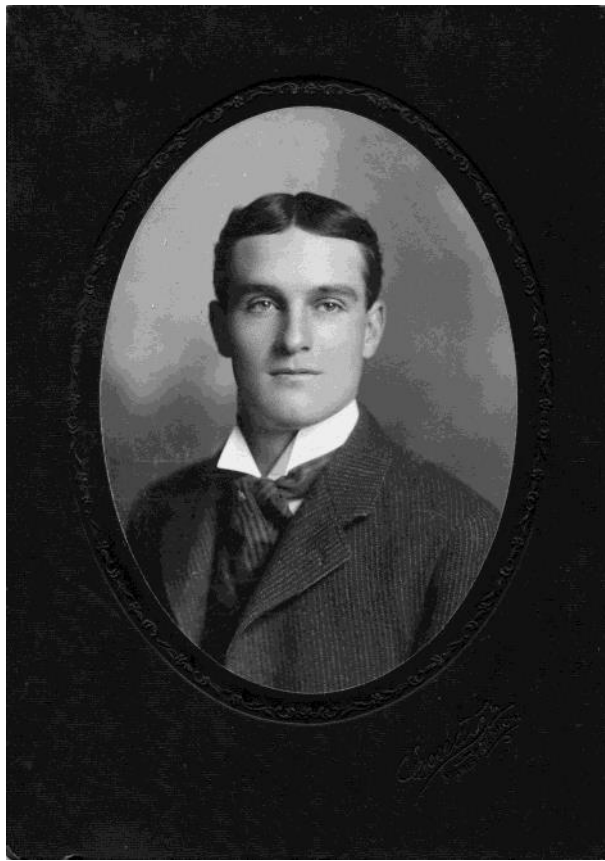
Flora with grandsons Roy and Herbert, 1922.

Fred filed for divorce in January 1915 on grounds of “cruelty and desertion”. We may wonder what was behind the claim. Some fault was required for divorce in those days. Most applicants cited cruelty. Fred added desertion. Perhaps Flora was too independent and career-oriented for him. Whatever the case, she did not contest the divorce. Rev. Fred remarried and moved to Florida, where he continued as a Baptist minister and was remembered at his death in 1946 as a pioneer Florida clergyman.

Flora died on February 16, 1942 in Bronx, New York. I could discover nothing about her career after 1926, when she was working for the U.S. Health Service. Perhaps she retired soon after that. Her earlier biography appeared in several *Who's Who* books.



Clarence Britten, with brother Rollo on the left, sailing their uncle Herbert Harley's sloop on Long Island Sound, August 1929. A second tragic death beset the family when Clarence, a journalist and editor, was killed in an auto accident on November 9, 1929. Flora had these snapshots enlarged to 8x10, probably as a memorial to her son. She noted details of his death on the reverse.



Herbert and Blanch Hilton Harley, circa 1896. Kulp Collection, MHC.

### **Herbert Harley, founder of the American Judicature Society**

Flora's only sibling, Herbert Lincoln Harley (1871-1951), was also an activist. Following in his father's footsteps, he became a lawyer; but he always lacked confidence in his ability, and decided to quit after one of his clients was imprisoned but later proven innocent.

Herbert then worked as editor of the *Manistee Daily News*, where he excelled and became a community leader. While boating one day on Lake Michigan with local businessman Charles Ruggles, the old man said to Harley: "I can get along with the laws of God alright. It's the laws of man that trouble me." Inspired by this perspective, Harley asked if Ruggles (a millionaire lumberman) would support a foundation to study and improve areas of weakness in the American judicial system. Ruggles agreed.

In 1913, Herbert Harley organized the American Judicature Society in Chicago, IL and began publishing bulletins on legal issues. In 1917, he issued the first *Journal of the American Judicature Society*, which later was called simply *Judicature*.

Herbert spent the remainder of his life traveling the country and publishing for the Society, advocating for practical nonpartisan judicial reform and "the efficient administration of justice." At the time of his death in 1951, the American Judicature Society had over 11,000 members—lawyers, judges and interested citizens. In the 1970s there were 50,000 members. In 2014, after a century of operation, due to funding challenges, the society transferred most of its assets to other judicial studies centers and scaled back its program.

## Upcoming Exhibit

### **The Quilt as Art: Creating Movement and Depth**

Rachel Derstine Designs

January 15-March 14, 2020

Artist's reception with gallery talks on Sunday, January 19, 2:00 pm

We're pleased to present this show of Rachel Derstine's bold and imaginative quilted art. Previously of Schwenksville, now of Philadelphia, Rachel has done commissioned works for Salford Mennonite Church, Souderton Mennonite Homes, the Hershey Medical Center, and private collections. Her work has appeared, and received awards, in various solo and juried shows since 2011. Her combinations of color, design and texture are often stunning, sometimes subtle. Some pieces will be available for purchase.



## Upcoming Workshops

Mark these Saturday workshops on your 2020 calendar, and watch for details coming soon!

March 14, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm

Cathead Basket Weaving Workshop led by Karen Wychock

March 21, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm

Grain Painting Workshop (frame only) led by Jim King

March 28, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm

Sgraffito Pottery Workshop led by Denise Wilz

April 18, 9:30 am to 3:30

Fraktur Drawing Workshop led by Emily Smucker-Beidler

May 16, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm

Grain Painting Workshop (chest and frame) led by Jim King

June 6, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm

Twill Basket Weaving Workshop led by Karen Wychock

June 20, 10 am to 3:30/4 pm

Paper Marbling Workshop led by Ramon Townsend

September 26, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm

Wall Basket Weaving Workshop led by Karen Wychock



Grain painted document chest and frame workshop, May 16

For more information or to register, check [mhep.org](http://mhep.org) or call 215-256-3020.



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