

Nash, Sally (Sarah) Kollock and Maria Jane Nash ^[1]

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By Mary Claire Engstrom

21 Jan. 1811–4 June 1893 (Sarah); 19 Nov. 1819–29 Apr. 1907 (Maria)

Sally (Sarah) Kollock Nash and Maria Jane Nash, Hillsborough educators and founders and principals of the Nash and Kollock Select Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies ^[2] (1859–90), were born in Hillsborough, the daughters of North Carolina Supreme Court ^[3] Chief Justice Frederick ^[4] and Mary Goddard Kollock Nash. They were the granddaughters of Governor Abner ^[5] and Mary Whiting Jones Nash of New Bern and of printer-publisher Shepard and Susan Arnett Kollock of Elizabethtown, N.J.

Little is known of the formal education of the Nash sisters, both of whom were middle-aged when they opened the Nash-Kollock school in 1859. Maria had attended Miss Mary (Polly) W. Burke's ^[6] School on East Queen Street in Hillsborough. Sally had taught briefly in the Burwell School ^[7] and in a short-lived local venture about 1858. She had also reputedly studied drawing for a short time in New York. Both women, however, had spent their lives in close juxtaposition with the remarkable Kollock family of Elizabethtown and Princeton, an acknowledged leader of American Presbyterianism, and with the equally remarkable Nash family of Virginia and North Carolina, a leader of colonial planter aristocracy. Although Sally and Maria Nash "spent their entire lives from birth to death in the old gray unpainted house on Margaret Lane" in Hillsborough, as Ann Strudwick Nash remarked, they were far from being provincial.

Two unrelated events—the closing of the Burwell School in 1857 and the death of Chief Justice Nash in 1858—impelled the sisters to begin a school of their own in the old Nash home. They enlisted the aid of their younger cousin, Miss Sarah (or Sara) J. Kollock (7 Nov. 1826–26 June 1907), a tiny lady of spectacular appearance and hair-trigger temper, and the trio of spinsters, all with totally different personalities, began a surprisingly effective partnership that terminated only with their deaths.

In spite of the fact that the new school opened on the eve of the Civil War ^[8], it was immediately successful. The impeccable church and family connections of the Nash women attracted both Presbyterian and Episcopal "young ladies" from old plantation homes up and down the eastern seaboard, even from Kentucky and New Orleans. Inevitably, the Nash-Kollock school was virtually a carbon copy of the earlier Burwell School, with the same strong Presbyterian atmosphere and curriculum and similar living arrangements.

Although both Nash sisters were listed officially as principals of the school, it was always understood that the elder, Miss Sally, was the court of final decision. Besides teaching Bible and arithmetic, Sally met the public, conducted general school exercises, and supervised the servants and the operation of the dining room. Miss Maria taught English grammar and composition, her particular forte; Miss Sarah taught French and saw to all clerical work, advertising, and so forth connected with the school; and an assistant, a Miss Goodridge, taught history and geography. Music, painting, and drawing were taught by a succession of imported masters who used Chief Justice Nash's old law office as a studio. (Still standing, it is a National Register House owned by the Hillsborough Historical Society.)

If the Nash-Kollock school appears to have had a larger and more cosmopolitan student body than the Burwell School, it seems also to have expanded its musical offerings considerably beyond those provided earlier by the Burwells. Five pianos were in use, and the annual *soirée musicale* at Masonic Hall received highly favorable newspaper reviews.

From the beginning, the Nash and Kollock ladies had welcomed to the school a few small boys, cousins from the Nash and Strudwick families. When the school finally closed its doors in 1890, Sarah Kollock, still active, operated for some time—in the old law office—a small day school of her own for Hillsborough boys and girls. Maria and Sarah died within a few weeks of each other. All three women were buried in the Nash-Strudwick plot in Hillsborough's Old Town Cemetery. In 1926 a memorial plaque to the Misses Nash and Miss Kollock, "Being dead, yet liveth," was placed by their students on the interior south wall of the Presbyterian church. At the same time, simple stones were placed at the unmarked graves of Maria and Sarah.

No catalogue of the school was ever issued, nor were any formal records kept. In 1964 Ann Strudwick Nash, widow of Francis (Frank) Nash, following a suggestion of her late husband, published her own collected firsthand memories of the Nash-Kollock school under the title, Ladies in the Making ^[9]. Her sympathetic eyewitness account of the day-by-day operation of the school is the only sustained record of any of Hillsborough's numerous nineteenth-century schools.

References:

Mary Claire Engstrom, *The Old Town Cemetery, 1757* (1966)

Ann Strudwick Nash, Ladies in the Making ^[10] (1964)

Francis Nash Collection (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh)

Francis Nash Papers ^[11] (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

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