

The Changing Fashions of FCS



Female students of the Class of 1910, while somewhat restricted in their clothing choice by the School uniform, sported the fashionable hairstyles of the period.

BY JIM DAVIS, ARCHIVIST

The longer I live with our FCS Archives, the more I realize how fortunate we are to have the depth and breadth of material that is housed there. In this issue, we look at perhaps a lighter part of the collection dealing with concerns over the dress and hairstyles of our students. Our archives contain a number of documents, letters, memos, and photos pertaining to the seemingly eternal tug-of-war between personal expression and expectations of a certain standard of conformity by others.

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Apparently, some standard of “simplicity and plainness” was the norm for much of our history, as an excerpt from a slightly later letter in 1900 to parents from Alfred Moore, clerk, reveals:

“If parents and guardians of those admitted, whether member [Friend] or otherwise, permit the violation of our rule and regulation

“We ... discourage the present practice of wearing in school ornaments that are wholly useless and which obtain an improper share of of attention both from the wearer and others.”



Let us begin with a very early example from the notes of the Executive Committee in 1846:

“In our visits to both departments [boys and girls schools], we have observed with regret that the testimony long borne by Friends in favour of simplicity and plainness of dress and address is too much lost sight of. We do not recommend the adoption of any particular form of dress, but we suggest for the consideration of the General Committee the propriety of adopting some measure that would tend

and decline taking effective measures to restrain those under their direction from wearing ornaments or using language disapproved by Friends, they are to be informed that the object in establishing the School is in danger of being frustrated by such a course and, if no improvement takes place, such pupils are to be dismissed.”

However, the biggest battles were to be fought in the heat of the social changes of the 1960’s, a divisive and tumultuous era in US history and equally a period of contentiousness here at FCS. Roles

of women and changing gender assumptions, war and peace, and individualism vs. conformity were all undergoing reexamination.

No small area of tension centered around clothing and hair. I have some personal experience here. As one who was denied entrance to his college dining hall in 1968 for sporting what I thought was a pretty nifty beard, I may be especially sensitive to the constraints adults sometimes put on adolescents regarding their appearance. Four years later I, as an FCS faculty member, was called into the Head's office for "inappropriate dress" at homecoming. So it is clear that hair and dress mattered a great deal – to some.

In a letter to parents in 1969, comes this very familiar sentiment from Head of School Dr. Bush:

"Friends' Central welcomes and encourages diversity, but it insists upon the Quaker values of simplicity and the avoidance of ostentation. Students are allowed considerable latitude and individuality in their appearance. The school reserves the right to determine what is unkempt, bizarre or undesirably conspicuous and to send home any student who does not meet the School's standards."

Skirts and blouses or dresses and coats and ties were the standard until there was pressure from the students to relax the dress requirements. Polls were taken, articles appeared in the School newspaper, and numerous faculty meetings were given over to weighing some redefinition of the code of dress. The major change implemented was the lifting of the requirement for coats and ties. Blue jeans were still forbidden, as were beards and moustaches.

This change caused a tidal wave of comment. Letters from parents and alumni/ae flooded the office of the Head of School. Passions were inflamed. In the archives are many letters (mostly opposing any change) to Dr. Bush, and from the evidence in the archival files, he

answered each one! One might assume that alums would have sided with the current students and endorsed relaxation of the rules. Many did not. Here is one who objected:

"When my classmates' children who go to other private schools in the area say that the students at FCS look like a bunch of slobs – that's real bad!!!"

Here's another:

"I don't really care if they (the current students) object to being told to look like gentlemen or not. They should be told. Some people might see what is happening as a wonderful example of independence and as the result of an intellectual and free-thinking atmosphere. I don't believe that."

The faculty were often caught in the middle. Here's a typical memo from the Head of School in 1973 to a beloved teacher: "(Name redacted), who is in one of your classes, wore dungarees to school all day. You did not notice this nor speak to him about it."

Teachers themselves, at times, reported similar concerns back to the Head. "I think (name redacted)'s attire is offensive today. I do not think it is necessary to wear a v-neck sweater and no shirt which shows his hairy chest," said one teacher in a memo to Head of School Tom Wood.

Hair styles often elicited equally ardent expressions of outrage as the clothing, as multiple letters in the Archives attest.

The two photographs in this article – the female members of the Class of 1910 and the graduating Class of 1970 – are a small taste of the changing norms regarding hair and dress. Clearly, the fashion of hair and dress, considered the norm in their own time, can seem odd or perhaps comical to those removed from that time.

Plus ça change! QW



At their Commencement, members of the Class of 1970 reflected the atmosphere of political and social change that was around them in their choices of hairstyle and clothing.