

Percy Criddle's Education

Branch II C of the Alabaster Tree

By Oriole Vane Veldhuis

Numerous articles have been published about Percy Criddle of Aweme, Manitoba. He is described as an 'English Gentleman', well educated in music, law and medicine, and master of several languages. With determination to find the source of this education, I have been searching for documentation to verify these claims.

As early as 1979, a letter from Heidelberg University cut off that venerable institution as a source of Percy's education. The archivist confirmed that Percy Criddle had registered December 21, 1861 for a course in history. Percy had stated that he was born in London, was a Protestant, and his father, Harry Criddle (Deceased in 1857) was a gentleman of private means. However, he was enrolled only for one semester. It may be that he had previously enrolled in a private school connected to Dr. Wiss for on November 11, 1861 Percy's landlord, Dr. Wiss, sent a quarterly statement to his mother that included £12.20 for history lectures. He alerted her to a problem:

I am sorry to say Percy is not attending the lectures regularly as he ought, I have spoken to him but in vain, it is of course difficult for him to follow at first [in the German language], but he would have sooner overcome this difficulty by attending them regularly.

Further to this, his mother wrote Percy on the 16th of November:

May God bless and prosper you in the coming year and enable you to control your erratic temperament and concentrate your efforts on self-improvement in all branches. Do not give yourself up to Music entirely yet. Cultivate languages and Mathematics to the utmost of your power till you leave Dr. Wiss the beginning of next May, and pray do not let the money for those lectures on history be wasted. Do attend them regularly whether you understand them or not. It will accustom your ear to the German tongue. Get all your masters to converse in German. Your French master excepted. Get him to converse in French. Don't speak a word of English till I see you next May, then we will determine our next move. (Punctuation is added for ease of reading.)

George Nicol, who had gone with Percy to Heidelberg, returned home at the end of 1861 when his parents learned the boys were getting into trouble. Percy's mother wrote, 11 December 1861:

My dear Percy, I am very grieved to hear of the brawl . . .

Percy's mother was constantly worried about finances. She wrote before the trouble began, Nov. 4, 1861.

I could manage to keep you at Munich or Vienna or King's College London till next September. . . , but I could not be sure. I might gain sufficient from the sale of the furniture at Notting Hill to manage this but it is all-uncertain. – one thing you may be sure of I will strain every nerve to help you forward, in any way you wish.

Percy continued piano lessons through another term with a private teacher, Herr Beck on the Plöck. (Street). In a letter dated November 20th, 1861, he wrote to his mother.

"Now about the musical profession. I have as good as made up my mind to it. . . it is the only thing I like."

He continued with Herr Beck until the spring of 1863 when he wrote another letter home to his mother. She had been trying to rent her cottage in Addlestone so she could keep house for Percy in Munich or wherever he planned to continue his musical studies.

My dear Mutter, I got your letter yesterday afternoon & the money therein. Don't think of coming to Germany. I shall be in England myself in 4 weeks - I am not well and I want English air. I am going to take a glass of wine every day as long as I remain here. Don't be alarmed, England will put me to rights again in no time -I've had my chest examined and it is quite sound. The Dr. says that German living is not good enough for me & that I must not work hard at present & must take much exercise - We've moved to 43 Plöckstrasse. Send me the Pkr stamp on this letter back again -Don't forget. I'll write a longer letter when I get the other halves of the notes - Yrs Very affectingly, P Criddle (Punctuation added for clarity)

Did Percy study elsewhere in Europe? Various letters show that apart from trips to Germany, Percy resided in England from May, 1863. Chaloner Alabaster responded, from China where he was administering justice to the Chinese as Joint Magistrate, to his Aunt's worried letters concerning Percy's future Aug 21, 1864:

"I wish I had Percy here. I'd commit him a vagrant"

In 1865 the Surrey Advertiser includes both Percy and his mother as members of the Addlestone Choral Society. Percy's name appears in a concert program to raise funds for the local rifle club. He had an extended visit with his fiancée Elise Harrer in Heidelberg in 1866 which led to pregnancy.

Percy, however, could not marry in Germany (A groom there needed security of a home and job) so the couple travelled to England in January, 1867.

After writing to many music establishments in London with only negative results, I finally found Percy's name in an 1871 announcement in *The London Times* for a Chamber Concert. The professional students of the London Academy of Music were presenting a concert at St. George's Hall. Percy's name appears at the end of the list of several vocal students. This music school, established in 1861, operated out of St. George's Hall. It is not to be confused with the prestigious Royal Academy of Music founded in 1823.

We find Percy that same spring in the census of 1871 as a "Professor of Music." He was visiting the home of Henry Nicol (George Nicol's home). His cousin, Alice Nicol, (21 years of age and occupation of "Spinster") lived with her uncle since the death of her parents. Alice became Percy's wife.

The Assistant Librarian, Bridget Palmer, of the Royal Academy of Music wrote:

"I suggest that your great grandfather set up as a teacher of music. At that time. "Professor" was the usual term for what we would now call a teacher."

An extensive search has not found Percy listed among the music teachers of London. He took part in other musical and dramatic events that year and also the next at St. George's Hall and along with Alice Nicol in her uncle's home, Winchester Place, during "The Winter Season" when many London entertainments took place.

I concluded that Percy did not obtain a degree from Heidelberg University nor studied in other universities on the continent. In England, his name does not appear in graduate lists of Cambridge or Oxford; while his friend George Nicol went on to obtain a law degree. There was only one part of Percy's education missing. Where was his boyhood education obtained before January, 1861 on his leaving for Heidelberg. I determined to find these details.

Until 1870 education in England was not compulsory. The poor had little or no opportunity to become literate while most children of well-to-do families were educated in their own homes. Did Percy have a formal (preparatory) education? Finally, Jan 11, 2007, I have found the missing piece of Percy's education puzzle.

The following clues gleaned from several sources and in combination, led me to believe there was a school to locate.

1. Percy kept a diary and on March 28, 1876, after a quarrel with friends, John and Edward Tulk he wrote:

It certainly is very extraordinary how tetchy [sic] these young men are occasionally - probably the result of having been brought up like girls. What a pity- had they been but educated at a Public School they would have been 1st rate fellows. [Public is a private school in England.]

As most sons and daughters of the wealthy, they must have been educated at home until going to study law at Oxford.

2. His sixteen-year-old cousin, Chaloner Alabaster's letter written shortly after sailing for China, October 1855, asked Percy this question:

How are you getting on at the Kings?

3. Percy's mother wrote while he was away with his Uncle John Greeves and family, January 17th 1856:

Louisa [?]ing came to see you last night, she hopes you will come back to school early, in order to make sure of the prize next term.

4. Cousin Henry Alabaster to Percy wrote, July 24th 1857:

I'm glad you are getting on in Algebra, it is capitol stuff to exercise your wit. From what you tell me I should think you are a very lucky fellow in having a master like Mr. Menzies.

5. Percy's diary, Sept. 6th, 1876, mentions a tutor from his childhood but provided no indication of date. Was this extra tutoring during a holiday at the seaside or did he attend a school in Eastbourne?

Mr. Gerlach my old tutor at Eastbourne called at the office yesterday.

6. Henry Alabaster, the last cousin to leave England, wrote to Percy, Nov. 2nd 1860:

You are now rapidly approaching manhood, your preparatory education must be drawing to a close.

Another letter from Henry, Dec 28th, 1860, confirmed a new plan.

I hope and expect this will find you in Germany. You will there be polished out of your nonsense a little and if you determine not to behave otherwise than as a gentleman you will always be glad of going there.

Combined, these clues seem to point to a public school from 1855 to the spring of 1860. Unfortunately, Percy was not at school during a census year. The 1851 census showed him seven years of age, a student at home and by the 1861 census he was in Germany. The Alabaster family in England have assumed Percy had attended King's College School, which was part of King's College at that time. They knew that all three cousins, Charles, Henry, and Chaloner Alabaster were students there. When the school archivist, Mr. Stokes, replied to my query he affirmed the cousins had attended and provided dates. However, he found no record for Percy Criddle.

King's College School is now a separate entity from the College. Given that Charles, unlike his younger brothers, had not attended the School, it was necessary to write to King's College to obtain its specific records. In late 2005, I wrote the King's College archivist, "Was there a preparatory school named on Charles Alabaster's entrance record? The reply came, April 21, 2006:

There was no school as such listed in Charles Alabaster's Entrance Paper, rather there was only a name listed as "J.C." -Under whose care the student has been educated: J. C. J. [?] ING ESQ [the handwriting is very hard to make out, could perhaps be Jeling?] J.C. J. [?]ing Esq is obviously an individual rather than a school. Perhaps it was a very small class run privately by one man? Caroline Lam, Archives Assistant, King's College.

This information didn't seem helpful. I filed the letter and failed to remember the details.

After a year of searching and writing many schools of the 1850s in London and the Eastbourne areas without success, I determined to contact King's College School again. I was desperately hoping Mr. Stokes had been mistaken and perhaps there was still a possibility that he might find an item to give me a clue to Percy. His reply was crystal-clear:

Our present records are based on the original Admission Registers, into which all entrants were entered by hand. These registers are bound books with numbered pages. Each admitted pupil occupies one whole page, and no pages are missing. When enquiries such as yours are made, I always check from the original Admission Registers, to avoid any possibility of an omission having been made in later transcription.

We do have complete records of attendance of all our pupils right from the start of the School in September 1831. I have searched these records and am sorry to have to tell you that Percy Criddle was not a pupil at King's College School at any time. His friend John Tulk did not attend King's either, and there was no one on the School teaching staff by the name of Menzies.

Faced with a brick wall I retraced my steps and carefully studied the letter written in January 1856. "Louisa [?]ing came to see you last night" Could the missing letter be K? However, I could find no promising leads for teacher King or Percy's other teacher, Menzies.

Serendipity came to the rescue at this opportune time. My cousin, Myrna Paquette sent a file of Mary Ann Criddle's (Percy's mother) business letters for proof reading. She was preparing them to be sent to the Art Gallery of Ontario. The Gallery had been offered the donation of a painting of 1840 and needed information about the artist. I had read these letters some years ago but now I am more familiar with Mary Ann's life and times. Suddenly a signature at the end of a letter jumped off the page- **Joseph Charles King of 9 Northwick Terrace**. It was a letter from Mr. King answering an invitation to have a mutton supper with Harry Criddle, Mary Ann's husband. King was to bring along an old man, Cattermole (an illustrator for Charles Dickens) to talk about Mary Ann's paintings. **Eureka!!**

At last I had a full name and address. Mr. J.C. King, 9 Northwick Terrace, Christ Church, Marylebone, was easily located in the 1851 census. Mr. King was a teacher of Latin, Greek, and English; his wife was a teacher of English. Also listed below were his daughter, Louisa L. J. King, two other daughters, teachers, student Walter Dickens, Young Gentlemen, two other students, a cook, and a housemaid. But the proof of Percy's favourite teacher, Mr. Menzies, was missing.

June Noble, an astute researcher came to the rescue. Examining the 1861 Census, she realized that James Mingis (Scottish pronunciation) was really Mr. Menzies. For further proof she found Louisa's marriage listed in the London, Middlesex, Marriage Indexes.

LOUISA KING married JAMES M. MENZIES in 1857. (Reference: MAR. Marylebone 1a 711)

There were individuals who supported themselves by setting up a school in their own homes. When the schools closed their records were rarely saved. This explains why there is little chance to obtain information through archival records.

Schools in houses, as described in Charles Dickens' novels, are just like the King School. The Principal was usually the paterfamilias of the family and might, or might not, have had any true scholarship himself. As at the King school, family members were sometime drawn into the enterprise, particularly if there were boarders involved. The King School at 9, Northwick Terrace, St John's Wood, seems to have been a good school of its type and the tutors and governesses (teachers) themselves well educated.
June Nobel

We had our 'Dickensian' school for Percy in the King home.

I was disappointed not to find Henry, George Nicol's younger brother, among the King students in 1861. The question remains; how did Percy meet George who went with him to Heidelberg in 1861? If they did not go to school together in London, was their contact through his mother's connections as a portrait painter?

Percy must have realized by 1872 that he could not make a living from his music. In order to win Alice Nicol's hand in marriage he needed to be self-supporting. For the first time his name appears in the 1872 Southwark Court Directory at 131 St. George's Rd. The next year the Commercial Directory lists him as a merchant at the Hop Exchange in Southwark. The same directory shows him the following year in a partnership with H. Smith, whose father had looked after the family business previously

Criddle, Percy. Wine Merchant, See Smith, Criddle & Co.

This ends my lengthy search for Percy's formal education. My summary to date provides the following evidence. Percy was a student approximately from age 11-14 in Mr J. C. King's School at 9 Northwick Terrace, 1855-59. He took classes in Latin and Greek, which he didn't like, and algebra and geology, which he claimed to enjoy. In Germany, Percy and George may have taken classes from their landlord Dr. Wiss who taught languages on the Plöck, a main street in Heidelberg. He enrolled at Heidelberg University in a history course but his attendance was limited due to his difficulty understanding German and he did not complete the course. Percy had private music lessons as a boy and continued these in Heidelberg with Herr Beck from January 1861 to May 63. He was a music student at the London Academy of Music ending in 1872 when he became a merchant in Southwark. Percy managed to live the Gentleman's life through the sacrifices of his cousin Chaloner, his mother's portrait sales and his grandmother's inheritance. After his mother's death and with no more paintings to sell, his move to Canada was no doubt a plan to make use of Alice's inheritance from her recently deceased brother, Henry. He would make a new start in Canada and continue the lifestyle of an English country gentleman.

Census reports to verify Mr. J C King school

HO/107/10 1841 Census for (9) Northwick Terrace, St John's Wood Road, St Marylebone. folio 17 v

NAMES	AGE & SEX		Profession trade	Born in same county
	Male	Female		
Joseph Charles KING Head	45		Classical Teacher	N Norfolk
Harriet King Wife	45			Y
La. L.J. Ditto Dau		15		Y

Josephine	Dau		10		Y
Gertrude Jane	Dau		9		Y
James A. POWER		30		C. Teacher	Scotland
Willm. A. ARMSTRONG		10		Pupil	N
Charles E. NEATE		12		"	N
James A. NEATE		9		"	N
Fred K. WATSON		10		"	N
Wm. H. CATTERMOLE		10		"	N
Henry L. HODDING		10		"	Y
George L. DAWSON		13			N
Henry K. DAWSON		12		"	N
Caroline SMITH		20		Servant	N
Louisa BAINES		20		Housemaid	Y

HO 107/1491 1851 Census for 9, Northwick Terrace, Christ Church, Marylebone ff.343-345

Names & surnames of each person who abode in house on the night of 30 th of March, 1851	Relation to head	Condition	Age		Rank, Profession or Occupation	Where born
			Male	Female		
Joseph Chs KING,	Head	Marr.	55		Teacher of Latin Greek English,	Norfolk Dickleburgh
Harriet Ditto	Wife,	Marr.		57	Teacher of English	Middx. London
Louisa L.J. Ditto	Daur.,	Unm.		26	Ditto of Latin Greek and Italian	"
Josephine Ditto	Ditto	Unm.		21	Ditto of Latin Greek and German	"
Gertrude J. Ditto	Ditto	Unm.		19	Ditto Latin and English	" "
Walter DICKENS	Pupil	Unm.	9		Yg. Gentleman	London
George PHILIBAR?	Assistant,	Unm.	26		Teacher of Mathematics	Suffolk, Gosford? (Gosbeck)
William HARRISON	Pupil	Unm.	11		Pupil ,	York, Benningbrough?
John F.W.BULLOCK	Pupil	Unm.	10		Pupil ,	Essex Earles Colne ?
Charlotte ROBERTS	Servant	Unm.		20	Cook	Bucks. Wingrave
Fanny HUDSON	Servant	Unm.		19	Housemaid	Middx. London,

Gosford Suffolk, Benningbrough East Yorkshire and Earles Colne, Essex are the correct names. Those recorded on the Census do not exist.

RG9/87 ff 76-79 1861 Census return for 9 Northwick Terrace, New Church Street, St Marylebone.

Name	Relationship	Condition	Age		Occupation	Where born
			M	F		
Harriet KING	Head	Widow		67	Teaching	(born) London Tower Hill
James M. Mingis	Son-in-law	Marr	35		G(eology) Teacher	Scotland N.K. Menzies is pronounced Mingis by the Scots.
Gertrude KING	Daur.	Unm		27	Teacher's daughter.	Middx. MRY. = St Marylebone
Frederick S.GRAKIN	Scholar	Unm	12		Scholar	"
Reginald BURR	"	Unm	14		Ditto	Bedfordshire, Luton
Esther DARSON Possibly DAWSON	"	"		18	Ditto	Berbeice (Berbice?) British Guinea ?
Sophie DARSON	"	"		16	Ditto	Berbice, British GUYANA
Fanny HUDSON	Servant	"		26	Servant	Surrey, Kew. [Different from 1851]
Charlotte ROBERTS	Ho. Servant	"		30	Housekeeper	Bucks, Wingrave.

June's Notes

Mr. Menzies/Mingis This accounts for the muddle made by the census collector's hash of the name. Spelled one way and pronounced another.

It is quite likely that all the boys in the 1851 Census boarded with the Kings.

Mrs King has fallen on hard times by 1861 and seems grateful to get any pupils and does not discriminate because of sex.

The KING family and school had gone by the 1871 Census. A George BONANA, from Malta but a British subject, was in residence at Northwick Terrace by 1871 aged 50 and a Portrait Painter. Probably the school was dissolved upon Mrs King's death.