

THE CONTRIBUTION
OF
THE OSWEGO NORMAL SCHOOL
TO
*EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS IN
THE UNITED STATES*

BY
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PREFACE.

THE matter contained in these pages was originally projected as a thesis for a degree in the Department of Pedagogy of the University of Wisconsin. Upon the suggestion of friends the work has been enlarged with the hope that it may prove of some value to a future history of American pedagogy. Incidentally it is a small tribute to the life of a man whom to know was an education.

Many have assisted in its preparation, and the writer takes this opportunity of making the following acknowledgments : —

To the late Dr. E. A. Sheldon for access to many original sources possessed only by him, many of which were prepared at great sacrifice of time especially for this work, and for constant inspiration and encouragement extending over a term of years of helpful association.

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To many teachers, Oswego graduates, and others, for cheerful replies to letters of inquiry.

Since Chapter V. was written, Principal F. B. Palmer of the Fredonia (N. Y.) State Normal School, has pointed out to me that the Fredonia Normal School was reported by the superintendent of public instruction of the State of New York as having a kindergarten in connection with its training department a year earlier than Oswego. The priority given to Oswego was based on two letters received from Dr. Sheldon, and on the fact that both schools are listed in the Re-

port of the United States Commissioner of Education as having kindergartens for the first time in 1881.

The tables in the Appendices do not lay claim to absolute accuracy; but they were compiled with some care, and will not be without value as evidence for some of the statements made in the text.

MADISON, WIS., *December*, 1897.

A. P. HOLLIS.

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THE OSWEGO NORMAL SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

AMERICAN PEDAGOGY PREVIOUS TO THE OSWEGO MOVEMENT.

THE important place in the history of American pedagogy to which the Oswego Normal School, founded by Dr. E. A. Sheldon, is entitled, rests upon its claim to be the first institution to introduce in a practical and noteworthy manner the Pestalozzian principles of instruction into the American common school. In order to understand the significance of the Oswego movement in its relations to pedagogical forms already existing, it will be serviceable to take a short survey of the development of American pedagogy previous to 1860, the year when the Oswego teachers first received instruction in Pestalozzian principles.

One of the first things to be seen from such a survey is, that while the Pestalozzian principles had long been heard of and talked of in different sections of this country, they had taken no hold upon American schools. At the generous invitation of William McClure, an American who paid a visit to Pestalozzi's

school, Joseph Neef, one of Pestalozzi's co-workers, came to this country, and attempted to introduce the master's ideas in a private school in Philadelphia; and as early as 1809 Neef published a book entitled, *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education*. But after a few years of struggle the enterprise failed. From that time on, men like William C. Woodbridge, Horace Mann, William E. Russell, Henry Barnard, Charles Brooks, and Calvin Stowe, some of whom had visited the Prussian schools at various times, through press and platform, urged reform of existing methods, and the adoption of systems of instruction more or less in accord with Prussian ideals.¹ Educational journals like the *American Journal of Education*, *Annals of Education*, and the *Massachusetts Common School Journal*, frequently published accounts of the work being done in European schools which had adopted the Pestalozzian methods; and yet the evidence shows that up to 1860 Pestalozzian principles in America remained largely a matter of lectures and books among the initiated few. To the rank and file of the teachers of the land, Pestalozzi was but a name, or an eccentric personality. "Notwithstanding the diffusion of the principles of Object Teaching in this country during that period," says Mr. Calkins, in an address upon the History of Object Teach-

¹ For accounts of these reformers and others, see *Rise and Growth of the Normal School Idea in the United States*, by Professor J. P. Gordy, Bureau of Education, 1891.

See also Analytical Index to Barnard's *American Journal of Education*, issued by Bureau of Education, 1892.

ing, "its practice died out through the want of teachers trained in the system and its methods."¹

A second important observation to be noted is, that at this time (1860) the Normal School had become the highest and most promising expression of pedagogical thought in America. The monitorial system of Lancaster's had run its course. Before the establishment of the first American Normal School at Lexington, Mass., in 1839, it had ceased to exist. It failed because it assumed that students could teach well without a special preparation for teaching. The Normal School succeeded because it assumed nothing, took no risks; for each student-teacher must not only be considerably ahead of those he expected to teach, but must demonstrate that he could teach before he left its halls. It marked nothing less than the inevitable victory of science over chance. The discussions aroused by the monitorial system all over the country were of great value in interesting the people in methods of elementary education, and its very failure pointed out the way to success.

The teachers' classes in academies had been tried and found wanting. Those classes had attained especial prominence in New York, where from 1827 to 1844 they were the chief means provided in New York State for the training of teachers. They never gave satis-

¹ "History of Object Teaching," an address delivered by N. A. Calkins in 1861. Published in Barnard's *American Journal of Education*, vol. xii., p. 639.

faction; and Horace Mann, appreciating his own Massachusetts Normal Schools, well expressed the chief objection to them. "So far as the plan is concerned, the striking point of dissimilarity is, that in New York the teachers' department is grafted upon an Academy; it is not the principal but an incidental object of the institution; it is not primary, but secondary; it does not command the entire and undivided attention of the instructors, but shares that attention with the general objects for which the Academy was founded."¹

Many of the teachers' classes were discontinued in 1844, with the establishment of the Albany Normal, from which time they have ceased to occupy so prominent a part in the training of teachers.²

The decline of these two sturdy institutions left the field clear for the Normal School. The first Normal School in America possessed the advantage of having good models. Its type had existed from the beginning of the century in Prussia, and it thus came to us no unfledged birdling; it needed only judicious adaptations to American soil to demonstrate its fitness to survive. It started out with every distinctive feature of the modern Normal School, embracing:—

¹ Quoted from Horace Mann by Professor J. P. Gordy in *Rise and Growth of the Normal School Idea*.

² In 1889 a law was passed in New York which transformed the training-classes in academies from the control of the Regents of the University to that of the superintendent. This was done to unify the professional work of the schools, — the training-classes being classed as elementary training-schools, leading up to the Normal Schools proper.

See Report of Superintendent Draper for 1890, p. 22. See Gordy's *Rise and Growth*, etc., p. 39.

- (1.) A department of Academic Instruction,
- (2.) Theory of Teaching,
- (3.) School of Practice.

The Academic department always remained a strong one; the department of Theory of Teaching made serious efforts to impart correct methods for teaching a wide range of subjects. Unfortunately for the early development of a definite and systematic pedagogy, no detailed and personal knowledge of the great improvements which Prussia had made in her *methods of teaching* guided those attempts of our Normal School pioneers; and consequently the methods given were frequently but crude applications of principles of mental growth, only vaguely conceived and not philosophically systematized.¹ No mention is made in available accounts of

¹ In referring to the establishment of the New Britain (Conn.) Normal School, Hon. David N. Camp, State Superintendent of Instruction, said in his report for 1860: —

“When the Normal School was organized . . . only two States, Massachusetts and New York had established Normal Schools. No well-defined principles of organization or methods of instruction and training had been published, as adapted to the schools of this country.”

A few years later, while in attendance at a convention of educators held at Oswego, Hon. David Camp told the convention that he had visited schools in all of the Eastern States, also in the principal cities from Maine to Missouri. He had also visited schools in Canada, and in all he had sought for something good to take back to his own State; “but” he added, “during all of those visits, I have never found the principles of education so simplified and systematized — crystallized as it were — as in the schools of the city of Oswego. I came here to learn; and I shall go back to New England, and tell with gladness what my eyes have seen and my ears heard.”

Barnard's *American Journal of Education*, vol. xii., p. 646.

these early Normal Schools of any distinct and radical advance on existing methods. Object-teaching as a general method, resting on universal and fundamental laws of mental life, was certainly not worked out in the early Normal Schools. The third department — the School of Practice, or Model School — maintained a checkered existence; indeed, the one at Lexington after a time suffered a serious decline. As a rule, however, the model school was considered an essential piece of apparatus for a Normal School, but its possibilities were not appreciated. The classes were sometimes absurdly small; and before 1860 no Normal School had a model school containing all the grades of the public schools, and approaching in numbers a system of city schools;¹ and so the opportunities for training in executive force, in discipline, and in planning for the exigencies of a city school, were often denied the student teachers.

The second Normal School to be established in America was opened at Barre, Mass., in the autumn of 1839. It led an uneventful career, with the exception that at one time it apparently came near being the pioneer in introducing object-teaching into the schools; for we are told in an address delivered by Hon. J. W. Dickinson, that "The Westfield² Normal School was the first to

¹ The Model School of the New Britain Normal, over which the enlightened Dr. Henry Barnard had presided, contained, in 1860, 500 children, and was divided into four grades.

² The Barre Normal School was moved to Westfield in 1841.

show that all branches of learning may be taught by the same objective method." Unfortunately this valuable phase of the work at Westfield attracted little general attention; and it remained for another Normal School in another State, at a considerably later date, to demonstrate on an important scale the great value of object-teaching in common-school branches.

The third Normal School was that established at Bridgewater in 1840. A girls' Normal School was established in Philadelphia in 1844. In New York the Albany Normal was established in the same year. During the fifties, Normal Schools were established in New Britain, Conn., Boston, Mass., Ypsilanti, Mich., Normal, Ill., St. Louis, Mo., Salem, Mass., Trenton, N. J., and Millersville, Penn.

Some of these schools were not exclusively Normal Schools, but were conducted in connection with high schools. Such were the Boston Normal at Boston, the Girls' Normal School at Philadelphia, and the St. Louis Normal School at St. Louis, Mo. Such were also a Training-Class at Syracuse,¹ New York, a State Normal School and High School at Charleston, S. C., and a Girls' High and Normal School in the same city. At New Orleans there was a State and city Normal School. These Southern schools lived exceedingly precarious lives, and could scarcely be expected to develop foreign

¹ Started in 1855, according to Report of U. S. Com. of Ed. for 1889. For dates of others mentioned, see p. 962 of same report.

pedagogical theories. There were three private Normal Schools in Ohio, which seem to have lived a very quiet life. In Iowa a normal department was maintained at the State University.

It thus appears that up to 1860 there were some ten regular State Normal Schools in different parts of the country, and perhaps an equal number which had assumed the name, if not all the functions, of a Normal School. It is thus evident that the people had become convinced of the need for special training for teachers; and though during the nineteen years succeeding the establishment of the first Normal School, only ten had been established and maintained by the States of the Union, still the experiments with Normal Schools had not proven failures; and the substantial advantages they had furnished their graduates over untrained teachers were sufficient to lead educators to look to the Normal Schools for the more radical and far-reaching improvements which the great body of the common schools were still sadly in need of.

The professional work in these early schools was very rudimentary. But a few good text-books of Theory of Teaching existed; the best of them, Page's *Theory of Teaching*, did not appear until 1847. Hall's *Lectures on School Keeping* (1829), Abbott's *Teacher* (1833), and Emerson's *School and the Schoolmaster*, were among those most frequently used. None of these books, however, had been the result of a close acquaintance with the new education in Prussia and Switzerland; and most

of them were general treatises upon school-keeping in all of its phases, especially the moral and disciplinary, precluding any detailed development of pedagogical principles or any systematic treatment of methods in specified subjects. Of more value to the investigating few, but of little interest to the toiling many, were such descriptive sketches of European methods as Professor Stowe's *European Educational Institutes* (1836), Dr. Julius' *Outline of the Prussian System* (1835), and *Public Instruction in Prussia*, Key and Biddle (1836). Dr. Henry Barnard was continuously trying to popularize these methods in his admirable journal. All of these articles did good service in letting us know that such things were doing, and in creating a desire in some circles to know more concerning the elaborate efforts of the old world teachers. They labored under the disadvantage of being too abstract to reach the average teacher. What was needed was a practical teacher versed in the methods at first hand, who could put the actual work in operation before the eyes and ears of the common school teacher. Such a teacher did not succeed in accomplishing this until the opening of the Oswego School.

The soil was being prepared in other ways for a revolution. Teachers' Institutes and Associations, both State and National, had become popular and useful means of spreading pedagogical interest and knowledge in nearly all of the States.

The American Institute of Instruction was organized

as early as 1830; and for many years it was the principal focus of the progressive ideas of the country, and more especially of New England. Such men as Northend, Mann, Page, and Krüsi made its meetings the Mecca of thinking teachers. The National Educational Association had just been organized (1858), and a few years later became an important instrument in aiding the almost universal adoption of the Oswego methods. There were numerous educational journals, the best of which have already been mentioned.

Such, then, were the most obvious features in American pedagogy at the time of the founding of the Oswego School: the monitorial system had flourished and fallen; the training-class idea in academies, as an equivalent of Normal School training, had been abandoned; and the Normal Schools held the field, as the most promising exponents of professional training for teachers. They had not, however, during the nineteen years of their existence, effected any striking changes in the great body of the American common schools; but their influence, combined with other forces such as the educational associations and accounts of Prussian schools and schoolmasters, had made the time ripe for a popular reform in education which in a few short years swept through the common schools and the Normal Schools of the land. How this reform began will be traced in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

OSWEGO'S INNOVATION.

“THE history of the Normal School at Oswego, N.Y., constitutes an important chapter, not only in the history of the training of teachers, but in the history of the public schools of this country.” So writes Professor Gordy in his *Rise and Growth of the Normal School Idea in the United States*.

Referring to the Oswego Normal School, Dr. A. D. Mayo said in an address delivered before its alumni in 1886, “It was reserved for New York, always the broadest and most catholic of the older States, to take up the work so well begun, and establish the *final type of the American State Normal and City Training-School*.”

How was it that the Oswego Normal School, with ten State Normal Schools already established in this country, some of them having twenty years the start, came to be the type of the American Normal School, — came to be regarded as the “Mother of Normal Schools”?

The answer to this question involves a rehearsal of some features of Oswego's history. At the first reading of the early history of the Oswego schools, one is