

HISTORY
OF THE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OF
MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OGN.

PREPARED FOR THE CENTENNIAL BUREAU.



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The Territorial laws of Oregon, as promulgated in 1850, provided for a system of public schools in the various counties, and required the commissioners to divide the territory into convenient districts. At that time Clackamas and Washington counties extended to the Columbia river, and the work was performed by Rev. Mr. Atkinson, or Oregon City, for the former, and Rev. Mr. Lyman, of Forest Grove, for the latter county. It may be imagined that these first districts were frequently conspicuous by the absence of either population or school privileges. Some of them reached to Mount Hood, or had nebulous boundaries in the backwoods and swamps. Districts from No. 2 to No. 7 originally occupied the portion of the county east of the Willamette. Upon this side of the river, No. 1 was described with the boundaries it has now. As people settled upon the lands, the original limits of most of the districts were contracted and new ones formed, so that there are enumerated thirty-six on the school map in the superintendent's office.

Throughout the Territory, at this early day, the first attempts to organize public schools met with many obstacles, the chief of which were the transitory character of the population, and the difficulty of obtaining competent teachers. There were many persons who were ignorant of the scope and intent of public education, but the general opinion, though not prepared for any material effort in their behalf, was in favor of free schools. The first undertakings were only quasi public, and quite frequently were developed from private enterprises or adopted "rates." The towns were thought to be the only places fit for public schools. In some localities (are there not a few such even in 1876?) they continued for a long period of time to be regarded as a make shift for the less favored members of society, and any special tax to sustain them was sure to arouse the ire of the "Philistines" as Carlyle would call them, including bachelors, sectarians and some of the "better classes." But scattered everywhere were men who had seen the system in older States, and shared its benefits, who realized the central idea of public education as a chief factor in making a homogeneous people. These men, and we should add, women, by their earnestness and sacrifice, have made the public school system what it is today. To one of our Territorial representatives, J. Q. Thornton, Esq., belongs the distinction of introducing the clause into the general congressional law which entitles each State to the thirty-sixth section of the public lands for school purposes. No more important act in the

interest of public schools has ever been passed since Nathan Dane's bill, bestowing the sixteenth section of land for the same purpose.

Prior to the formation of Multnomah county the history of the schools of this locality cannot be easily traced. In the absence of records the files of the weekly papers of the time have been faithfully examined, but such examination fails to elicit anything more than the bare legal notices of an occasional school.

In 1849 the first school, called by courtesy public, was taught, Rev. Mr. Lyman being the teacher. From this date to 1854 several small private schools were opened and had their day. The names of Messrs. Keeler, Limerick, Chandler and Kingsley figure in this capacity. Especial mention should be made of the Academy founded in 1851 under the auspices of the M. E. Church, which through the course of many years down to the present day has done efficient service in the cause of education.

The older citizens of Portland well remember the edifice first erected, on the site now known as Glisan's block, (a photograph of it accompanies this paper.) which served for everything from a political caucus or party jollification up to grand meetings of state and service of religion. In this honored "Cave of Adullam" the children were occasionally harbored, at the public charge, and no doubt there are many persons today who remember distinctly, the shooting of their first ideas, under its persuasive roof. Such men as Col. King, Alonzo Leland, Anthony Davis, Benjamin Stark, R. P. Boise, (there were giants in those days!) officiated as school officers, and took a genuine interest in putting the public school upon a good foundation.

In the WEEKLY OREGONIAN of Dec. 6, 1851, appeared the following notice: "In pursuance of a vote of the Portland school district at their annual meeting, the directors have established a *free school*. The first term will commence on Monday, the 15th inst., at the schoolhouse in this city, near the City Hotel. (John W. Outhouse, teacher.) The directors would recommend the following books to be used in the school, viz.: Sandler's Series of Readers and Spellers, Goodrich's Geography, Thompson's Arithmetics and Bullion's Grammar." The next notice (one year later) in the public prints is as follows: Nov. 20, 1852. "The citizens voted at a recent meeting to raise a tax of \$1,600 upon the property of this district to support a *free school*. This sum together with the amount derived from the county was supposed to be sufficient to employ two teachers, (one male and one female,) for ten months in the year." In the interval between these two notices, there is a manifest growth in the public sentiment. The community was rapidly taking form as a city, and in the same year a notice over the name of A. Leland, Clerk, informs the people, "that Miss A. M. Clark, (now Mrs. Byron Cardwell) is employed in another building, and the increasing number of children is thus divided." This new school received instruction in a building, still standing near the corner of Jefferson and Second streets. *One Hundred and twenty-six* children were enrolled in it at one time. The apartment was graced by a flight of steps leading into the attic above, and a visitor of the day describes said steps as "full nearly to the top with children!" This might be called a "graded" school in more senses than one. In spite of the inconvenience incident to these early times, it was a *successful* school, and one which Mrs. Cardwell may remember with pride as years go by. The seed planted by her efforts and those of others like-minded in self-sacrifice and courage, are bearing increasing fruit for the wellbeing of the city and State.

During 1853 and 1854, the schools receive no notice at the hands of the public press. We find no advertisements, no leaders, no locals, no “nothing” to indicate that the sovereign people had a child. Whether “things” went right or wrong, fast or slow, may be written in some “book of Jasher,” but the time presents a simple hiatus, where imagination may picture what it pleases. In 1854 Multnomah county was constituted. The air of those days is full of the smoke of battle. Politics raged, and every man was a perennial politician. If any one is disposed to complain of the public inattention to school questions, at such a time, when “every one did that which was right in his own eyes,” let him reflect how good a fortune it was that no political simoon swept the schools out of existence, and let him discern that the obscurity in which they were left may have been a chief reason for their remaining and emerging at last into light. The children, *rari nantes in gurgito vasto*, survived by some Darwinian process, and we next hear that “by an act of the Territorial legislature in 1854, A TAX OF ONE MILL was required to be collected in every county for common school purposes,” which sentence may well appear in capitals, as defining an era in the civilization of the great Northwest.”

From the records in the superintendent’s office it appears that S. Limerick was the first county school officer. In March, 1855, the Portland district was divided on the line of Morrison street. The portion of the city north of this line contained 339 of school age, the new district, 209. But the more valuable portion of the town was then, as now, north of Morrison street. [The south district was unable to sustain a school through the year, and the two were united by petition in the spring of 1856]. At this time Messrs. Frazar, Norris and Ladd were directors, and Mr. Pennoyer was teacher. “The school averaged about thirty pupils in attendance, some coming three miles. W. F. Boyakin was superintendent, but I do not recollect that he ever visited the school. There was no janitor; the studies were elementary, and but one scholar studied Latin.” Mr. Pennoyer was followed by Rev. Mr. Chandler, now of Forest Grove. “In those days,” one of the directors informs me, “I have called by notice upon the people six times for a school meeting, before getting a quorum of seven to vote.”

The next ten years exhibit marked growth. In 1857 the Central building was erected, “the agreement being that no school should be held for a year, in order to meet the expenses of building. In 1859 there were four teachers, viz: Messrs. Terwilliger and Pennoyer, Mrs. Hensil and Miss Way. The Harrison street school was built in 1865, Mr. R. K. Warren being principal. The North building was finished in 1868. From 1856 to 1870 the following named gentlemen served as superintendents of the county: Wm. Davis Carter, C. S. Kingsley, S. Pennoyer, J. J. Hoffman and Rev. Mr. Atkinson. The remaining officers to the present time were: R. Wiley, G. W. Brown, Rev. G. H. Atkinson (1870 to 1872) and T. L. Eliot.

It will not be invidious to refer to the labors of two of our citizens, who, by their earnestness during many years, have largely contributed to the life and growth of the cause of public education. JOSIAH FAILING, for ten years a director, worked in season and out of season, leading public sentiment, determined, as he said “to have the model school, not only of Portland, but for the whole State.” To his indefatigable efforts mainly, are owing two of the school buildings, generous district taxes, and the choice of efficient teachers. He was the ready defender and champion of public schools “against all comers,” and whether opposed by sectarians, indifferents, the childless rich or the unreasonable poor with “quiver full,” had always an argument or a visible demonstration,

either for their satisfaction or discomfiture. The names of such men as Col. King, W. S. Ladd, S. J. McCormick, T. J. Dryer, Thos. Frazar, E. D. Shattuck, A. L. Lovejoy, T. J. Holmes, H. W. Corbett, M. P. Deady, A. P. Dennison, and many others, appear in the great work, but Portland will do well to name the next great school edifice its citizens build, the *Failing* school.

REV. DR. ATKINSON, as a citizen, and chiefly as a school officer, has taken a prominent part in the cause of education ever since his settlement in Portland in 1863. During his administration, the schools of the county assumed definite character, and received a great impulse. The boundaries of the various districts were carefully determined and the schools were systematically visited. The school lands received his careful attention, and the schools of Portland were graded. He forwarded public sentiment by careful reports, and occasional articles upon school morals and discipline, primary instruction, the selection of teachers and other subjects. He encouraged young men of good education who were out of employment or disheartened, to teach, and in this way several successful teachers were made. To his patient attention and great wisdom, may be assigned much of what constitutes the present distinguishing excellence of the schools of the county. The following named persons were leading teachers in Portland during this period: Mr. Pershin, Mr. Frambes and wife, Messrs. Crawford, Garlick, Warren, Pratt and Johnson; Miss Tower and Miss Hodgdon.

In 1869, during the directorship of Messrs. A. P. Dennison and A. L. Lovejoy, a High school was organized. The effect of this school has been felt through the whole system of schools in this city, and indirectly through the State.

The limits of this historical account do not permit a narrative of other districts, nor are the materials at hand for such a work, were it desirable. Such schools as No. 5, Mt. Tabor, No. 2 (Kelly), No. 20 (Sandy), No. 27 (Watson's), No. 31, Holladay's Addition, and No. 21, East Portland, are worthy of special mention, and in every district there are earnest friends of education. During the past year an average of over six months' instruction, per district, has been given, and many districts, comparatively feeble, have maintained a teacher for eight months. One must realize the sparsity of population and ride through the forests, over the heavy roads of winter, where for miles he sees no house and meets no traveler, to appreciate the character of the public interest thus indicated. In most of the districts the teacher must labor for \$33 a month and "board round." The cheerfulness and fidelity with which the trust is maintained by many teachers, whose ability fit them for better conditions, against inconveniences, misunderstandings and even hardships, entitle them to fullest praise. Among the term reports filed in the superintendent's office are many which display the most conscientious care and precision. The sacrifices of people and teacher in some obscure districts, in order to give the advantages of an education to the children, have frequently challenged my admiration and inspired my hopes for the future of the State. Out of these solemn forests and from these farms comes the sinewy purpose whose presence brings health into the councils of State and the affairs of men. All honor to the country school, built of logs and rudely seated though it be! Our civilization has no finer emblem than it presents; and when the farmer ceases to thus labor for the sturdy individualization of his neighborhood, and sends his boys and girls to "the town" for their school and "manners," we may look for a measurable decay in the manhood and womanhood of the age. The traveler on his journey should hail with pleasure the modest, unadorned edifice, and pausing a moment, to watch the curling

smoke as it rises from the fire, about which group the forms of children, let him refresh his heart against the perils of his road, and in that presence “take the benediction of the air.”

From the reports of the superintendents I have compiled the following table, indicating the number of children and amount of funds expended in the county during the past ten years:

<i>Year.</i>	<i>No. of Children.</i>	<i>Coin.</i>	<i>Currency.</i>
1864	1,982	4,373.04	
1865	1,963	9,419.39	2,995.71
1866	2,416	6,866.21	2,329.81
1867	2,547	9,540.81	2,750.80
1868	2,274	10,017.24	1,200.00
1869	2,607	6,752.13	2,235.31
1870	3,000	11,000.00	2,000.00
1871	3,498	14,081.67	990.71
1872	3,730	15,027.26	2,805.66
1873	3,768	17,229.78	
1874	3,777	25,352.76	1,092.17
1875	4,731	34,072.48	

These figures, taken from the reports, are mainly correct, and probably include, except in one or two instances, the State fund, as well as the county fund. They do not include district taxes. Adding these, it is fair to estimate that \$250,000 have been expended for public schools during the past decade.

During the last few years several important changes have been wrought in the general management of the schools in Portland. The twenty-six schools have been thoroughly graded, a system of semi-annual examinations instituted, a city superintendent appointed, the buildings enlarged and school furniture improved. Carefully prepared rules and regulations define the duties of teachers and scholars, and control absenteeism and tardiness. The grade work is closely defined, and the High School, with five efficient instructors, graduates yearly a class of well educated young women and men. The people of Portland annually vote a liberal tax for education, and thus place the schools on a footing of equality with the best in the United States. The teachers are all of high order and ample experience, —none more efficient and earnest can be found anywhere. Nothing short of general calamity to the country can disturb the stability and progress of public education in our midst. We think that the next ten years will indicate a growth in intelligence, order and character as a community, and by the diminution of crime, the wisdom of the expenditures for the education of the people. The CHURCH, the PRESS, and the SCHOOL, which are the joint builders of our national life, are, here, in the hands of workmen, not to be ashamed. And the citizens, individually and collectively, in early or in later days, who have shared in upholding and informing mental and moral forces side by side with material progress, in the life of the State, may think of their work as the first to be remembered in history, and the last to cease among the trusts of the coming ages.

Herewith are submitted, as part of the record of progress, the reports of 1874 and 1875, on the condition, prospects and wants of the schools of the county. To these is to be

added the report for 1876, now in course of preparation, and the reports of the city superintendent of Portland. Through the kindness of Messrs. Buchtel & Stolte, photographs of the public school buildings will accompany this article, and form a part of the Centennial record. Plans of the same, including the various stories and rooms, will also be forwarded.

[THOMAS LAMB ELIOT'S CENTENNIAL HISTORY, 1876]