

Stories of New Hampshire

Three Hundred Years Of Education

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95 Years Young

The beginning of public schools in the Colony of New Hampshire is legendary. Without doubt the King James Bible of 1610 was the first text book and it is rumored that pebbles were the materials for number work.

Imported paper was expensive but a white pine board and a charred twig served for writing and



quilled pens had been in use, fashioned from the tail or wing feather of a sea gull. Sheets of birch bark provided practice paper for penmanship.

Soon after the two Colonies united in 1641 a law was enacted by the General Court that every town that contained fifty families must provide a public school. Records prove that a male teacher from Massachusetts was employed in Dover and another in Exeter in 1642. About 1700 Portsmouth was building two new schoolhouses.

A very early text book was the Horn Book, now a museum piece, so named because its back binding was horn. In 1785 "An easy and pleasant guide to the Art of Reading" named The New England Primer, was published in Boston for B. Larkin of Cornhill which became a universal text book.

It contained as a frontispiece a picture of George Washington. There was the alphabet with each letter illustrated by a picture, poems and the Shorter Catechism which was a long list of questions and answers beginning with, "What is the chief End of Man?" and the answer, "Man's chief End is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

Every child was supposed to commit this Catechism to memory. In the early towns that were granted after 1720, usually the minister taught classes from the Catechism and reading and writing.

By law, school taxes built schoolhouses and later the towns merged into neighborhood Districts. The town employed one teacher, a man

Many a grandfather of today recalls tales that his grandfather related about how he assisted in scuffles to "Carry out the teacher."

After the Revolution, higher branches were desired. In 1783 the wealthy Philips Family of Exeter founded Philip's Exeter Academy for Boys. New Ipswich began an academy in 1789, later changed to Appellaton Academy. Atkinson and Derry in 1790 and Haverhill and Gilmanton in 1794 were followed by twenty-five academies, several being co-educational.

When a bill was introduced into the legislature for an appropriation for higher branches, an aged man was heard to remark, "In our state we hain't believed much in edicating women." Not so in New Hampshire! Both girls and boys were legally admitted to public schools and several academies were opened for girls.

About 1875 high schools were established in the cities and larger towns and in 1870 the Plymouth State Normal co-educational School opened with one year courses for experienced teachers and a two year course for other pupils.

By act of the legislature a Department was established with a Commissioner and several deputies who soon elevated the standards for teachers by demanding examinations in the common school subjects before a certificate of teachers was granted.

In 1910 eight hundred small rural schools were scattered over the state, all controlled by town school boards. The remarkable Commissioner Henry C. Morrison who was soon called to become the superintendent of schools in the City of Chicago, began to inspect these small schools. He found the buildings dilapidated, unsanitary and the classes taught by inexperienced young women.

A law was enacted that permitted school taxes to be used to employ experienced educators for supervision of all schools.

Gradually, as bus service became available, rural schools disappeared. A law provided that in towns where high school privileges did not exist, qualified students were permitted to attend a high school of their choice and the taxes of the town paid the tuitions.

Trained teachers were in demand and a second Normal School was founded at Keene and the State University of New Hampshire opened at Durham. Today the three institutions are under the control of one Board of Trustees with the two Normal Schools now State Colleges with power to grant both college and masters degrees.

The early academies are now in most situations, Junior colleges. Vocational courses are offered in all high schools and institutions that offer specialized vocational training are established in all sections of the state.

High Schools are consolidating and multimillion dollar school buildings with modern equipment, classrooms, libraries, science departments, theaters, music rooms and cafeterias should be inspected by all citizen taxpayers to complete their education today.

Without question, the standards of public education that are available are equivalent to those in other states. This statement is proved when high school graduates enter Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth or the School of Technology and graduate with honors.