

Comment by the Editor

EDUCATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The growth of democracy in America has been closely associated with the progress of free public schools. If the people are to rule wisely, they must not be kept in ignorance. The founding of the Boston Latin School three hundred years ago was a manifestation of that principle. When Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Ordinance of 1787, "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged", he was expressing an idea already well established.

While the necessity for "common school" education was generally recognized, higher schools were open only to people who could afford to pay for the privilege. Even Jefferson, democrat that he was, thought that three years of free schooling would be enough for all children. Only boys "of best genius", in his opinion, were entitled to more advanced education at public expense. Ability, like wealth, was thus tentatively suggested as a legitimate basis of educational opportunity.

The pioneers who came to Iowa believed in

equalitarian democracy. All children, they thought, deserved education to the limit of their capacity. From the beginning, schools were maintained by general taxation. As early as 1858, communities were encouraged by law to establish free public high schools. Upon completion of the elementary subjects, every boy and girl in such a district was challenged to accept the opportunity of more advanced study. Residence, ability, and ambition were the qualifications, irrespective of family and fortune.

While private academies declined, public high schools grew in number and size. Over 4000 students graduated in 1910, yet only about two-fifths of the school population lived in districts that maintained high schools. Finally, in 1911, the privilege of free high school training was extended to all children regardless of residence. Attendance soared upward. More high schools were provided. Last year 25,100 boys and girls graduated from Iowa high schools.

If the success of political democracy depends upon democracy in education, Iowa ought to be well governed.

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