

## The High School

Let us assume that it is commencement day at the high school. Youth and vigor and inspiration are everywhere apparent. Many boys and girls are graduating who in the years ahead will be leaders in home and school and church and State. Who knows? One of these lads may become our banker. Another may preach our sermons, present our cause in the courts of law, or represent us in the halls of Congress. One of them may stand watchfully at our bedside as a fever rages, or at the operating table he may alleviate pain through the skillful use of the surgeon's knife. One of the girls may become a Florence Allen, a Jane Addams, or a Florence Nightingale of the twentieth century. More probably, these boys and girls will pursue the humbler walks of life, but surely they will contribute their full share to wholesome living in the community in which they reside. Their high school education has been a profitable investment. It will pay large dividends. The youth of to-day may be congratulated upon their educational opportunities.

But whence came the high school? It did not spring full fledged into being. Rather, it is the



result of a gradual evolution, development, and growth through the period of three hundred years. Beginning with the tiny seeds of culture in New England long ago, it has grown and blossomed abundantly. It has expanded onward, outward, and ever westward until the fragrance of its flower and fruitage has covered the land from sea to sea. On April 13, 1635, the freemen of Boston passed an order that "our brother Philemon Pormont shall be entreated to become schoolmaster for the teaching and nurturing of the children with us". This marks the beginning of the Boston Latin School — the first school for secondary education in America.

The Latin School, as the name implies, was an institution where the sons of the well-to-do might study Latin and the classics in preparation for college and the pursuit of the learned professions. With the passage of the years there was an increased demand for higher education and the establishment of additional free public schools for the rich and the poor alike. In 1821 a new educational standard was attained, when the Boston High School was established to provide at public expense an education that would fit the children of that community "for active life" as well as entrance to college.

Just as elementary education, the academy, and



the college moved westward with the pioneer, so also the high school advanced to extend opportunities of secondary education to the youth of the common folk on the western prairie. Soon after the middle of the nineteenth century the high school crossed the Mississippi River and became a part of the public educational equipment of Iowa.

In 1849 the school laws of Iowa, which had hitherto dealt only with elementary education, were supplemented to provide for the establishment of "a school of a higher grade". But legislation alone does not produce public sentiment, and the time was not yet ripe for the establishment of such schools. Thomas H. Benton, Jr., who was the Superintendent of Public Instruction, together with other educational leaders continued to encourage the development of higher education. Probably the first community in Iowa to respond to this influence was district number one of Bloomington Township in Muscatine County, which in 1851 erected a new building and began to expand its program. Five years later some pupils of Muscatine were examined at the end of a term in algebra, geometry, astronomy, physiology, and history, and in addition had received instruction in natural philosophy and bookkeeping.

Tipton pioneered in Iowa public education by starting a "high school" in 1856 — the same year in



which the first high school was established in Chicago, and the year in which the first high school building was erected in Saint Louis. This new school was known as the Tipton Union School, and was under the leadership of C. C. Nestlerode, a native of Ohio, who, in later years, played an important rôle in the development of public education in Iowa. In 1858 thirteen of the original pupils in the Tipton Union School finished the prescribed course of study. If commencement had been in vogue in those early days, this would have been the first class to have graduated from an Iowa high school.

In Dubuque as early as 1856 plans were under way for the development of public secondary education, and a full four-year course of study was outlined. It appears, however, that no immediate action was taken as a result of this plan. Two years later provisions for elementary education in that city were pronounced "magnificent". To supplement this work the board of education encouraged secondary education and revised the plan already projected for higher instruction. At that time a three-year course of study was outlined, and on May 17, 1858, a high school department was opened in that city. The subjects offered included higher arithmetic, English history, Latin, algebra, geometry, bookkeeping, English composi-



tion, natural philosophy, physiology, botany, and it is not without interest to note that German, Greek, and French were offered as optional courses.

Within the first decade of high school development in Iowa a widespread interest was manifested. Substantial courses of study were provided in various parts of the State — at Mount Pleasant, Burlington, and Iowa City. There were, however, comparatively few high schools in Iowa prior to the Civil War. Graduates from the Springdale Seminary, reorganized as a public school in 1866, were among the first to be admitted to the State University without examination.

In the early stages of high school development it was thought that there would eventually be one high school in each county. Indeed, in 1858 a law was passed which provided for county high schools, whenever the population and educational needs seemed to warrant their establishment. Two or three such schools were projected, but were never fully organized. In 1870, a more definite county high school law was enacted, and one high school — that of Guthrie County at Panora — was opened in 1876. This single example of a county high school in Iowa continued to function and to exert a wholesome influence in its local sphere for a period of more than fifty years. It



was discontinued in 1930, whereupon the Panora school district assumed the function of providing a high school and occupied the buildings formerly used for the county high school.

The real development in public secondary education, however, has been through the school district system. Upon the simple but sure foundations laid in 1849 more than nine hundred and fifty high schools have developed in Iowa. All but sixty-six of them offer a regular four-year course of instruction. The number of high schools which have been established in the several counties varies from one to fourteen per county, depending upon the size and population of the area. There are two counties, each of which has but one four-year high school. Four counties, however, have as many as fourteen high schools. A typical Iowa county has nine high schools, each offering a four-year course of study. There are now approximately as many high schools in Iowa as there are cities and towns.

It is gratifying that, as a great agricultural State, Iowa has done much to extend high school facilities to rural communities. In this development the consolidated school has had an important part. The first consolidated school in Iowa was established at Buffalo Center in 1896. There are now nearly four hundred consolidated schools,



most of which maintain well equipped high schools. Usually the school is located in town, with both rural and urban areas being consolidated into a single district. In a few cases the school is established in the open country — the district being composed entirely of a rural area. In either case transportation is usually provided for pupils who live more than two miles from the school. Thus high schools in consolidated districts have done much to make educational opportunities for farm boys and girls equal to those enjoyed by their city cousins.

The development of the high school has not always been accompanied by a brilliant display of colors or the militant sound of advancing footsteps. The movement for many years was gradual, yet constantly forward and ever progressive. From the close of the Civil War to the turn of the century there was a wide-spread interest in secondary education throughout the State. But with that advancement there was still much to be gained. In 1905 only forty per cent of the public school children lived in districts maintaining high schools. Of this forty per cent of school population, 32,000 pupils were in high school. From the remaining sixty per cent, 7000 pupils enjoyed the privileges of public secondary education by the payment of tuition in other districts.



By 1910 high school enrollment had increased to 45,000, about one-fifth of whom were tuition students. During the following year free secondary schooling was made available for every child in Iowa, upon completion of the elementary course of study. The free-tuition law of 1911 was a great boon to secondary education. It was the signal for a further advancement. Twenty-one years after its passage high school enrollment had mounted to more than 153,000 — an increase of more than 240 per cent. The number of high schools in Iowa in 1910 was 406, many of them comparatively small. By 1934 the number had increased to 953 — the average enrollment per school having been likewise greatly augmented. The coming of the high school, at first attended with little display, has on the whole been impressive. In 1856 there seems to have been only one public high school with scarcely more than a dozen pupils. To-day there is an average of more than nine high schools for each county, and the boys and girls enrolled in them are sufficient in number to constitute a city larger than Des Moines.

If there has been a phenomenal growth in the number of schools and enrollment, there has been a growth of almost equal significance within the school itself. Once the interest of the student centered around the classics — a school for the select.



Then the curriculum was broadened to include algebra, geometry, bookkeeping, physiology, and natural philosophy. Later courses were developed in agriculture, manual training, domestic science, art, and a multitude of subjects formerly unknown — all of which are valuable and essential in the program of a modern high school.

And what shall we say of the extra-curricular activities — athletics, dramatics, debating, and music? What is high school without football, basketball, a pep club, dramatics, a band and orchestra, the 4-H Club, and all the rest? Without these a high school would not be a well-rounded and thoroughly equipped training school in which to prepare for the activities of life. Many are the contests lost and won, many are the lessons learned in these extra-curricular interests. Such activities are a part of school. They add much that is of interest, and contribute much to the preparation for wholesome living.

Iowa high schools, for the most part, are well provided with buildings — many of which are elaborate and beautiful. The records show, however, that this has not always been true. Indeed, many of the early schools were very poorly equipped. In 1872 William M. Bryant, Superintendent of Schools at Burlington, said that conditions were not "altogether satisfactory" in the



public high school there. The teachers he believed were unjustly criticised for things over which they had no control. The building, he said, was "exceedingly ill-adapted" to the needs of the school. Its location was "very unfavorable". On one side was a rough street along which passed a constant procession of heavily loaded wagons. On the other side was a railroad track where trains and switch engines rushed by within less than a hundred yards of the school. There was no suitable playground near the building and "the surroundings were anything else than attractive to the eye". The building had originally been erected for church purposes, and the large hall in which the pupils assembled seemed to have been designed to enable its occupants "to make the greatest possible amount of noise with the least possible exertion". The floor was likened to "the stretched head of a large drum". Even the most careful movements of the pupils produced much noise, which resounded again and again "in a prolonged succession of echoes".

But that was many years ago. We are now living in a new era. A modern Iowa high school building is spacious and beautiful. Its large, well-equipped class rooms, its auditorium, laboratories, and gymnasium, its inward conveniences and outward beauty make it a joy to teachers and students



and patrons alike. Designed by a master mind, constructed by skillful hands, equipped with modern appliances, surrounded with wholesome influences, and dedicated to a lofty purpose, it subordinates things material to that which is cultural, and rivals all other buildings in the city in widespread community interest. In many Iowa communities the high school building towers above all others in architectural structure. In many ways it is the best that the community affords.

Three hundred years have now passed since the founding of the Boston Latin School. Three hundred years of history have been written. Meanwhile secondary education has made wonderful advancement. It has moved ever westward. The course of study has been enriched and expanded to meet modern needs. School buildings — thousands of them elaborate and beautiful — have been erected and maintained. But one may ask, what constitutes a high school? Not great massive walls of brick and stone, not modern appliances, elaborate equipment, large gymnasias, and spacious playgrounds, although these are essential; but youth, high minded, enthusiastic, cultured youth, and also those who teach and guide and plan and work. These are they who make our schools and revel in the making.

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