

Teaching Iowa Cupids

The year 1870 saw an unexpected honor come to Iowa—the Federal Census showed Iowa with fewer illiterate than any other state in the Union. Iowa has maintained this enviable position down to the present, although the Federal Census stopped carrying illiteracy statistics after 1930. The 1930 Census classified anyone above the age of ten who could not write in any language as illiterate. In 1920 there were 1.1 per cent in Iowa who fell in this category, whereas the average for the United States was 6.0 per cent. In 1930, illiteracy in Iowa had dropped to 0.8 per cent, while in the United States it had dropped to 4.3 per cent.

The fine showing of Iowa can be attributed (firstly) to the character of the people who settled in the state and (secondly) to the good educational system which Iowa has supported from its infancy. In 1869 the State Census showed that 296,138 out of 418,168 who were between the ages of 5 and 21, were attending school. There were 4,479 male teachers and 7,515 female teachers in Iowa who taught in 6,407 schoolhouses in Iowa valued at \$5,295,364.45.

Then, as now, there seemed to be a teacher

shortage in Iowa. On October 28, 1869, the Knoxville *Iowa Voter* declared:

There appears to be a very considerable scarcity of School Teachers in this County now. What has become of them? Why, in our younger days—and they were not so very long ago, either—it seemed to us that there were at least a dozen Teachers to every situation in the County; and now the case is quite the other way. Why is it? Where, oh where are all the blooming Misses, and spindle-shanked and soft-bearded young men, who, like ourselves, used to “look around for Schools” some ten years ago? And where are the others, like unto them, who should have grown up to take their places? And echo answers, can't say. But withal and certain the truth remains that a few more good School Teachers are wanted in this County, at say \$30 to \$45 per month. And Teachers in this County wanting Schools, and Schools in the County wanting Teachers, may apply to this Office and we will publish a Notice in each case free of charge, for the good of the public.

A century ago teachers seemed to have something about which to complain and invariably found the local editor a ready protagonist. Thus, the *Iowa Voter* of October 28, 1869, declared:

Attention is called to the third Resolution adopted by the Teachers of this County in Institute last week assembled—as per Report herewith published. The evil of which it complains is by no means imaginary. Teachers are a very poorly paid class of people, and seldom or never above the necessity of watching just where their money goes. There is a manifest injustice in compelling them to come to the County-seat and spend a week every

year, pay their board meanwhile at the Hotels, and get no pay for it anyway. The law intended no such injustice. But we believe a sufficient remedy for the evil lies with the State and County Superintendents. Let them rule that in all cases where it is shown that the Teacher would receive no compensation during the week of the Institute, that fact itself should be received as a valid excuse for non-attendance. If experience should show that this would have a tendency to break up Institutes, then the law would need to be changed. For instance, it might be declared that the spirit of the law was that all Teachers should attend Institutes, and that no deduction should be made from their pay as Teachers on that account; and School Boards and Directors might be specially prohibited from making any contract which would tend to the contrary.

Few editors surpassed the editor of the *Iowa Age* in his support of the local schools and their teachers. On February 19, 1869, this enthusiastic Clinton editor reported on the "wonderful growth and progress" of the public schools since the first school district was organized in 1856. The enumeration showed 173 scholars in the district but no school was open until May of 1857. During the next decade the story of Clinton, which would be representative of the larger Iowa cities, is the story of more schools, more scholars, more taxes.

On a pleasant day in February of 1869, the Clinton editor joined the local school board members in an inspection of the entire school system.

Our first visit was to the old church building, where we

found 85 little urchins, between the ages of six and eight, very earnestly engaged in learning how to get ready to climb the hill of science. A crowd of the little creatures—boys and girls—were in front of the teacher reading from a chart. Their little upturned faces beamed with intelligence and pleasure, while the remainder of the school were studying harder than we ever saw scholars studying before—but their eyes peeping over the top of their books, led us to believe they were studying the visitors rather than the books—a very natural “oversight” for little ones on such occasions. This is called the third primary department, and is presided over by Miss Carrie Goodale, who seems to understand her business and to love it too. The studies pursued here are reading from the charts and first reader, oral instruction on form, color, objects and numbers, slate exercises, and spelling by letter and by sounds.

The Clinton editor made a fine report on the other teachers. Miss E. W. Berry ruled a kingdom of “94 little dressed up boy and girl Cupids, full of fun and mischief.” Miss Spencer looked upon teaching 84 youngsters as “Jolly fun.” Maggie Young ruled 75 “industrious subjects whose singing was good but whose speech making very poor.” The courses of study were listed in each class. It was natural that the editor should find some room for improvement and this dealt largely with more schools, more money, and particularly the necessity of parents visiting the schools and lending their encouragement and support to them. Neglect could kill the schools.

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