

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST SCHOOLS

Surprisingly little information is to be obtained about the first schools in this county. It is all tradition, and very doubtful at that. Probably here as elsewhere throughout the new Western country the itinerant school master settled for a few months at a time, interested mainly in finding fairly good places for eating and sleeping, with plenty of amusement in the way of hunting, fishing, dancing and drinking. Occasionally, but rarely, some of these traveling teachers were fairly well grounded in the rudiments of the Three R's—Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic; and still rarer instances have been mentioned of them having a smattering of Latin and Greek. But always they were rare penmen, making their own quill pens and their own ink.

Under the old Virginia regime there were no free schools. Teachers were employed by the patrons and paid at the rate of so much per pupil. In the case of poor people unable to pay the tuition fee, the State kindly stepped in and paid their share of the charges. but the children of the poor had to sit apart from the sons and daughters of those who could afford to pay. It may well be supposed that a feeling of degradation prevented some children from attending school, and for that reason the percentage of illiteracy in the State was large.

The early log school houses have so often been described that it is needless to repeat the description here. As late as the middle of the decade of 1890 there were still two log school houses in the county, one of them being

on Henry Camp run. During the fifties there was a floating school anchored at the head of the Vaucluse Narrows, which was attended in the Summer by children from as far up the river as Grape Island.

After the formation of West Virginia as a State Washington district or township, as it was then called, was divided into three subdistricts, No. 1 above the creek, No. 2 including the neighborhood about St. Marys, and No. 3 extending to French creek. R. P. Caldwell, a young lawyer, was chosen township clerk in 1865, and from his record we learn that in the school election of that year William E. Bier and E. N. Cooke were elected to serve as school commissioners with John M. Strobel, the member holding over. Mr. Cooke failed to qualify, but Mr. Bier appeared and took the stringent oath required at that time. in the last year of the Civil War. Many citizens of the new State had been Southern sympathizers, and apparently were not yet to be trusted in any form or manner with the government, in fact, under the registration law then in force no one who had aided, abetted or sympathized with the Confederate States was permitted to vote. About one-third of the voters of West Virginia were thus disfranchised, and remained so until the passage of the Flick amendment in 1871. which not only lifted the ban but forbade any further registration of voters in this State. The oath then required, and as taken by Mr. Bier, is here given:

"I, Wm. E. Bier, do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of this State; that I have never voluntarily borne arms against the United States; that I have voluntarily given no aid or comfort to persons engaged in armed hostility thereto by countenancing, counseling or encouraging them in the same; that I have not sought, accepted nor attempted to exercise the functions of any office whatever under any authority in hostility to the United States; that I have not yielded a voluntary support to any pretended government, authority, power or constitution within the United States hostile or inimical thereto, and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

"W. E. Bier."

For the ensuing term the board elected Mary E. Bailey to teach the school in No. 1 at \$25 per month; Ben K. Piersol to teach in St. Marys at \$30 per month, and Fanny Cohagan to teach in No. 3 at \$25 per month.

The town school was located at the corner of Second and Clay streets, opposite the present railroad station, on ground obtained from Silas Gallaher, the house and lot costing \$400. School in No. 1 subdistrict was held in the Bethesda Church, for which a rental of six dollars per month was paid for six months. It seems that a building in No. 3 had been used as a school known as the Dye and Cooke school, and it was ordered to purchase half an acre of land from Col. R. T. Parker, on which the house was situate, for the sum of ten dollars, and that Dye and Cooke be allowed eight dollars each for the building.

E. N. Cooke not taking the oath, the board appointed John F. Taylor to fill the vacancy.

The tax list of the district shows the following names for the year 1865:

John R. M. Agnew, R. G. Bailey, D. K. Baylan, James L. Bailey, Wm. O. Barrick, Wm. E. Bier, Daniel Bailey, Bolden Biddle, Anthony Boley, D. D. Boley, David Boley, Joseph Bookman, John D. Bailey, John Bryson, W. H. Benson, Braden & Co., J. M. Bushfield, Brewer, Berk & Co., Charles Bills, John Boley, Wm. A. Brown, J. W. Baldwin, John Bailey's estate, Wm. Brown, James Bailey, Solomon Bills, Banks W. Broadhurst, Wm. Bennett's estate, Thomas Browse, Walter Brady, Zachariah Cain, E. N. Cooke, I. J. Cooper, John M. Collard, Martha Cooke, Wm. G. H. Core, Timothy Cohagan, Wm. Carroll, R. P. Caldwell, John Cooper, Wm. H. Dye, John Dye, Maxwell Dearth, Jacob W. Dearth, Elias Decker, Dils & Hopkins, Catherine S. Delavan, Harriett Flint, Rachel Ferguson, John W. Gattrell, Silas Gallaher, R. A. Gallaher, Catherine A. Gale, George W. Gale, I. N. Hodgins, Eli Hudkins, Robert Harvey, John Hines, Henry Hess, Joseph Hubbs, D. A. Houser, Rodney Hickman, Thomas Hammond, Wm. Hammond's estate, J. B. Jackson, John Justice, William Jarvis, Amanda Jerard, James Kerwood, Richard Kerwood, John Kelly, George Kelsall, Zadock Knight, Catherine Kimball, Aaron Knight, Rebecca LaRue, Wash-

ington Larimore, Wm. Larimore, Harvey Locke, Isaac LaRue's estate, Samuel Logan, Logan & Brother, John McCune, Phillip Meisenhelder, Joseph Mason, I. D. Myers, John G. McCally, Wm. Morehead, Elinor Moor, Wm. P. McKinney, Peter Odenwelder, B. F. Pickens, Powell & Harvey, Josiah Powell, Isaac A. Powell, Jack Powers, Jacob Prunty, Samuel W. Pickens, Hugh L. Pickens, B. K. Piersol, Helen Pickens, Narcissa Pickens, Col. R. T. Parker, Robert Patterson, Jr., George W. Reynolds, G. W. Riggs, Martin Riggs, S. M. Riggs, Wm. Rymer, Nancy Riggs, Sarah Reed, Joshua Ruttencutter, Edmund Riggs, Jr. Rodney Reynolds, Mary Rymer, J. F. Ruttencutter, T. H. C. Reynolds, Isaac Roby, Mary F. Riggs, Thomas Rymer's estate, Daniel Reynolds, Isaac Riggs' estate, Francis Shepherdson, George Shai, John M. Strobel, Absalom Smith, A. A. Stephens, Thomas A. Smith, Abram Samberson, Job Smith, Elijah Scribner, Washington & Hamilton Schmidt, Agnes Smith, John F. Taylor, Toler Oil Co., F. M. Triplett, F. C. and Thomas Taylor, Taylor, Nye & Co., J. B. Townsend, Richard Towzey, Joseph Taylor's estate, Michael Weaver (Weber), Isaac Watson, J. B. Watson, Francis Woods' estate and Edward Willis.

In addition we find the following listed in the town:

Samuel Barkwill, A. H. Creel, Wm. Dils, E. S. Haddox, Wm. L. Jackson, Granville Keller, Logan & Keller, John Logan, Meredith Spencer & Co., James Patterson, H. H. Rymer's estate and Edward Johnson, Sr.

The amount raised by levy for teachers fund was \$852.69, and the State contributed of its fund \$361.71, making a total for the teachers of \$1214.40. Some contrast to the fund of the present day.

Teaching school in the sixties and seventies was not taken up as a profession by many men outside of the larger cities, although the remuneration was probably fair enough, compared with the average wages of the period. Many of them went into the profession with the idea of earning enough money to start in some small business or to take them through a course of law or medicine; while in the rural districts the young men found it more pleasurable and profitable than simply feeding the stock all winter, then, the short term of teaching ended, back they would go to the spring work on the farm.

But there were a few exceptions, and among them in this vicinity were Aaron Delong, William Jones and C. E. Slemaker, survivors of the old pioneer school masters. In addition to the regular winter term, they usually gave a six or eight weeks' course in the Spring to "subscription" or pay pupils. Aaron Delong was the most famous of the old-time teachers, and it is claimed that he knew the text-books so well that he could hear any class without having to refer to them. In addition to his talents as a teacher, he himself laid claim to being the ugliest man in the county although his claim was warmly disputed by a Mr. Gorrell of Hebron.

To this day the older inhabitants talk with respect of the abilities of Aaron Delong. His favorite pursuit was mathematics, but he also delighted in polemics, and was a skillful writer. He served a term as county school superintendent in the late sixties, and was succeeded by William N. Jones of Hebron, who held the office until 1872. Our recollection is that Mr. Jones had an inclination towards natural philosophy, as the science of physics was then termed. In his day there was no examining board; applicants for teachers' certificates called at any time on the county superintendent, who propounded a few questions and then, if the applicant created a favorable impression, granted the certificate.

Richard Towzey, of whom mention has been made before, followed Mr. Jones as superintendent, and in 1873 Archimedes W. Gorrell of Hebron succeeded to the office. Mr. Gorrell served several terms, but, curiously enough, none consecutively. He was distinguished for his complaisant and courtly manner, and was greatly admired and beloved by the teachers.

C. E. Slemaker (usually pronounced "Sleighmaker") taught a term or two in St. Marys. It had long been the belief that the school could not be taught successfully without strict discipline, usually enforced with a rod; but the ingenuity of the old time teachers frequently devised other schemes for enforcing order. Physical torture was resorted to by some, such as compelling the refractory pupil to hold a heavy book out at arm's length for a certain time; or stand on one foot; or, with his heels at a certain distance from the base-board, to lean back with

his shoulders to the wall until he could no longer stand the strain and fell to the floor. Another teacher carried with him a number of patent clothespins, the kind that close with a spring, which he attached to the pupil's ears. One teacher in St. Marys had a peculiar form of punishment, as related by one of his pupils. About the walls of the room, suspended from the ceiling, he placed a number of straps, each with a small noose at the lower end. The disobedient pupil was compelled to stand with his face to the wall, his thumbs were inserted into the loops and the straps drawn up until the arms were fully extended. His pupil said that it was no uncommon thing to see an entire side of the wall occupied by twitching and squirming penitents.

These methods were not regarded generally at that time as cruel; in fact, we are told that they were not so distasteful as the floggings, and many of the boys delighted in showing their stoicism under punishment, boasting of how long they had withstood the torture before succumbing.

The first teacher of the town school under the new State constitution was Ben K. Piersol, who was then beginning the practice of law. We are indebted to one of his pupils for the statement that Mr. Piersol had plenty of time to read law during school hours and also to consume great quantities of chewing tobacco, adding that he could spit farther and straighter than any one else in the community. This would seem to confirm the opinion of Charles Dickens as to that peculiar skill among the early residents of the Ohio Valley.

Soon after the close of the war John L. Knight, a young veteran of that great conflict, taught two or three terms in the town school, until he was elected to the office of county reeorder, which he assumed in 1869, and he is credited with having been a good teacher. P. Gano was employed for a time, also Clinton C. Davis, who taught two terms, during which he qualified himself for the bar.

The population of the town was increasing, and the one-roomed building became entirely too small, so a little building farther down town was rented for the primary pupils until 1876, when a two-story building was erected on the lot purchased from Silas Gallaher. It

was the building now occupied by the St. Marys Fruit Company, opposite the railroad station, and was asserted to be the finest school building along the river between Parkersburg and Moundsville. It contained only two large rooms, the upper one for the more advanced pupils and the lower for the primary grades. Later, when it was necessary to employ three teachers, a partition was run the full length of the lower room; and in 1894, when a fourth teacher was employed, the principal's room at the head of the stairs was converted into a class room.

The first principal in this new building was John F. Wayman, of Marshall county, a graduate of Mount Union, Ohio, and his assistant was Greenberry Ruttencutter, a son of J. Frederick Ruttencutter of this county. It was established under the old system which authorized town graded schools, and was directly under the control of the board of education of the district, who employed the teachers and had some direction over the course of study. But in fact at that time there was no established curriculum for any of the common schools in the State. Certain text books were prescribed, but teachers paid little attention to any requirements for their use. The greatest legal obligation resting upon the instructors was to keep school open twenty-two days in each month and to file reports of attendance.

The sub-district or country schools, whose teachers were employed by trustees appointed by the board of education, often had enrolled pupils of all grades, from the infant learning the alphabet to students of higher arithmetic, algebra or Latin, comprising from thirty to forty class recitations daily. At times older pupils were drafted to hear recitations of beginners, while the teacher was employed with intermediary classes.

It is customary among old people to recall with pleasurable emphasis the accomplishments of their youth, and often they comment upon the thoroughness of education in the old days, but it is not reasonable that any teacher who can spare only an average of ten minutes to a class recitation could give thorough instruction. It is more probable that in any case of marked progress it has been due rather to the ability and earnestness of the