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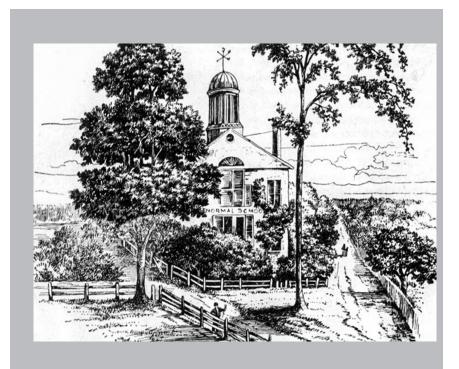
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Remembering Massachusetts State Normal Schools: Pioneers in Teacher Education

Massachusetts State University Council of Presidents

Edited by Mary-Lou Breitborde, Ed.D. and Kelly Kolodny, Ph.D.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Remembering Massachusetts State Normal Schools: Pioneers in Teacher Education

MARY-LOU BREITBORDE AND KELLY KOLODNY



Editor's Introduction: Our Editor's Choice book selection for this issue is Remembering Massachusetts State Normal Schools: Pioneers in Teacher Education, edited by Dr. Mary-Lou Breitborde of Salem State University and Dr. Kelly Kolodny of Framingham State University. The book was published in 2014 by the Institute for Massachusetts Studies to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the state teachers college system and celebrate the history of the system's eight founding schools, now Massachusetts state universities. Excerpted here is the introduction, written by Breitborde and Kolodny, which encapsulates the history of the state teachers college system and touches on its lasting benefits to the people of Massachusetts and beyond. Dr. Mara Dodge, editorial director of the Historical Journal, writes in the book's introduction:

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As a historian, what is most exciting to me is the tremendous transformation and evolution of public higher education in Massachusetts over the last two centuries. This 175th anniversary means remembering who and what we were when we opened as "normal schools" and appreciating how far we have come. It means remembering how fragile our beginnings were and honoring those who championed the cause of expanding public higher education over the centuries.

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THE PEOPLE'S SCHOOLS FOR TEACHERS OF THE PEOPLE

A century and a half before Thomas Jefferson called for public support of education to fend off tyranny ("If a nation expects to be ignorant & free ... it expects what never was & never will be"), the Massachusetts Bay Colony enacted the first law related to education.² Towns of 50 or more households must hire a schoolteacher at public expense, and towns of 100 or more must establish a grammar school. The motives of the good Puritans of 1647, however, were far different from Jefferson's: the "Old Deluder Satan Act" was meant to arm the colony's children with enough literacy to decipher the Bible's teaching about sin and temptation, "[i]t being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures."³ The habit of digging into their pockets to support basic schooling for children caught on; for the next 200 years, Massachusetts taxpayers would fund an assortment of schools-from simple one-room wooden structures in country villages to the Federalist brick of Boston's English Classical High School. The range of buildings was some indication of their range of quality. The Commonwealth's first Secretary of the State Board of Education, educational reformer Horace Mann, would earn fame by documenting the uneven, often inadequate, condition of the Commonwealth's schools. In 1837, he set out on horseback to evaluate schools in the tiny hill towns in the Berkshires and the larger cities of the east and to argue publicly wherever he could find an audience for a system of tax-funded "common" schools which would be "the great equalizer[s] of the conditions of men."4

Mann argued that it was not enough that schooling be available and free: It must provide new generations with a common preparation for a truly "American" social and economic life and a truly "American" culture. Common schools should be accessible, public, systematized and professionalized, and



Early Instruction

A classroom at Westfield Normal School in the early 1900s. In 1900, a separate building was constructed to house the "Normal Training School." This was an elementary school where Westfield students trained to become teachers. Courtesy of the Westfield Atheneum.

there should be standards for the teachers who "kept" them. His appeals to business (the common schools would instill in future workers important work habits such as persistence, punctuality and discipline) and civic leaders (educating together children from all backgrounds in an increasingly competitive and ethnically complex society would help reduce conflict and preserve the social order) worked.⁵ As the common schools took hold, towns began to organize their district schools into primary, intermediate, grammar and high schools.⁶ In the countryside, independent rural schools collaborated to form larger districts. It was the beginning of an era of organization and centralization.⁷

More schools, graded schools, and longer school terms and a common curriculum called for teachers who were skilled and serious about the work of teaching. Massachusetts legislator James Carter believed that it would "do but little good to class the children" until there were instructors properly prepared to take charge of the classes.8 The reformers turned to Prussia, a mandatory stop in the continental travels of educators, for ideas about how to prepare such teachers. There, teacher "seminaries," had been operating since 1819, attracting worldwide attention. Teaching in Prussia was considered a specialized profession; those who taught in the state schools must have completed a program of rigorous coursework. William Channing Woodbridge described in the American Annals of Education and Instruction in 1831 the teacher seminaries and their professional graduates: "School-keeping, in Germany, appears to be a very healthy employment," he wrote, where teachers" pursue the business for life."9 On his return to America, Hingham Reverend Charles Brooks traveled through his own and other states promoting the establishment of state-supported teacher training schools, lecturing under the title, "As is the Teacher, So is the School." Brooks often shared the podium with Mann; they spoke in tandem to the state legislature and in local districts. Daniel Webster added his voice to the pair in one meeting at Plymouth, claiming, "It is a reproach that the public schools are not superior to the private. If I had as many sons as old Priam, I would send them all to the public schools."10

THE EXPERIMENT

The Brooks-Mann arguments for formal teacher preparation proved convincing. In 1838, they reached a wealthy citizen, Edmund Dwight, who offered to contribute \$10,000 for the purpose of "qualifying teachers for the common schools" if the Massachusetts Great and General Court would match the donation. There were many opponents, whose concerns ranged from the lack of a plan for long-term funding of the schools to their secular bases and the political affiliations of their backers, but the legislators rose to the challenge. In an act affirming that "The practicality and usefulness of institutions for the education of teachers should be brought to the *test* of experiment," they took responsibility for a trial program that would formally prepare teachers for its public schools, the first in the nation.¹¹

Three schools were established in short order: at Lexington (later moved to Framingham), in 1839; at Barre (now Westfield) a few months later; and at Bridgewater in 1840. The program of study was one year and included "instruction in the 'common branches,' the art of teaching and the science of school government and theory applied to practice in the model school." The curriculum included algebra, natural philosophy, physiology, bookkeeping, moral philosophy, geometry, reading, grammar, music, Massachusetts and U.S. history and Constitution, and the "principles of piety and morality common to all sects of Christians."¹²

Candidates for admission must declare it to be their intention to qualify themselves to be schoolteachers. If males they must have attained the age of 17 and of 16 if females, and must be free from any disease or infirmity which would unfit them for the office of teachers. They must undergo an examination in orthography, geography and arithmetic. They must furnish satisfactory evidence of good intellectual capacity and of high moral character and principles.¹³

The normal school program was free of charge to students who declared their commitment to teach in the Commonwealth's schools. Textbooks were likewise free, though some of the schools asked students to come with a Bible, dictionary, and atlas.

The title that Massachusetts gave to its new teacher preparation institutions came from France. French *écoles normales* were model schools where those who were preparing to teach could observe lessons and instruction that met certain standards, or "norms," of curriculum content and teaching practice.¹⁴ By arrangement with local citizens, at the conclusion of an initial three years, the legislature would determine whether the schools should be continued. Though the state Board of Education feared that three years was too brief a period of evaluation, since the "work of educating teachers must be slow, and … their influence upon the schools



Ground Work

Model school students learn by doing (1904). Courtesy of Salem State University Archives and Special Collections.

can only become gradually manifest," the normal schools were sustained and a movement in formal teacher preparation was born.¹⁵

Normal schools competed with other institutions that prepared teachers in the 19th century: private academies that educated the sons and daughters of the wealthy, a few private normal schools, some normal "departments" within secondary schools and within some colleges that prepared teachers. (The city of Boston, for example, had a normal department within its Girls High School which separated in 1872 to become the city-sponsored Boston Normal School.) The state normal schools were unique in that they were public institutions whose mission was exclusively teacher education. As the normal school movement gained momentum, they eventually eclipsed other routes to teacher preparation across the country.

By 1845, despite some opposition and ongoing financial struggles, all three of the original normal schools had survived, flourished and captured public imagination. Soon there were others strategically located throughout the populous state. By 1901 there were seven more state normal schools: Salem in the northeast (1854), the Normal Art School—later Mass. College of Art—in Boston (1873); Worcester (1874), then in 1894 Fitchburg, North

Adams, Hyannis, and Lowell. Lexington-Framingham, Salem and Fitchburg were originally women-only; the other schools were co-educational. Initial enrollment was relatively small; sometimes an entire class only included 25. These numbers grew and by the early 20th century, the normal schools enrolled thousands of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, races and ethnicities, and ages in programs that had become a dominant force in teacher preparation. As the nation expanded and with it the need for teachers for the new district schools in new states and territories, the state-supported normal school movement spread; in the 1840s to New York and Philadelphia; in the 1850s to Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Jersey, then Michigan and Illinois; in the 1860s to Kansas and Wisconsin; and in the 1870s to Iowa. By 1870, eighteen states had at least one normal school, and there were thirty-nine across the country. Thirty years later, there were 180.¹⁶ The roots of this pivotal movement in teacher education in the United States rested squarely in Massachusetts soil.

THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

Early state normal schools typically were in session from Monday through Saturday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Scriptures were read at the start of each day. Students studied a formal subject matter curriculum in a mix of disciplines. Knowledge of teaching and learning was rudimentary; besides Pestalozzi's object lessons, there were few exemplars to follow. But students heard lecturers and practiced how to organize a classroom, whether to allow students to change seats, how to build on previous learning, whom to call on with questions, when to use moral suasion, etc. As the century moved on, the field of psychology helped students understand thinking and learning, and the schools included innovations in teaching methods, with more attention to the use of realia, nature study, oral presentations and group work. Normal school curricula included art and music instruction, and physical exercise; students were encouraged to engage in gymnastics and outdoor activities. Early reports from the Massachusetts State Board of Education suggested that the students "devoted themselves to the work of preparation for teaching with a zeal and indefatigable perseverance."17

As would be expected, both advances in fields of study related to education and the circumstances of the common schools themselves influenced changes in the normal school curriculum. Over time the state normal schools offered a curriculum which not only prepared the teacher with what we would today call more expansive "content" knowledge but also new knowledge of the growth and development of children; e.g., how to use motivation and memory to stimulate learning, how to organize the curriculum around themes of study; how schools are organized and managed. Differentiated programs of study for teachers of primary grades, intermediate grades, and upper grammar school grades emerged. In some state normal schools, such as North Adams in the mountainous corner of the state, the curriculum also addressed the needs of rural elementary children and their schools.

Following the Prussian model, several nineteenth-century state normal schools opened model schools for the neighborhood children at which the "normalites" assumed some teaching responsibility. Channing had described these schools as places where teachers learned to coordinate all aspects of teaching, to teach using a variety of disciplinary methods, govern the class and learn about the "peculiarities" of children and work with them accordingly.¹⁸ Methods of "practice teaching" were increasingly discussed and refined and eventually included a role for the critic teacher and the field supervisor and a "handbook" of practice.¹⁹



A Heady Mix

Students followed a diverse curriculum. Shown here is a dressmaking class at Framingham Normal School, an unusual offering at the time. Courtesy of Framingham State University, Archives and Special Collections, Framingham, MA.

THE "NORMALITES"

That principles of effective teaching could be taught, that pedagogy was a science in its own right, were revolutionary concepts. But the early normal school curriculum was not much more than a survey of the subjects taught in the common schools. Originally intended to prepare teachers for the primary or elementary-level district schools, the normal schools were meant to help Massachusetts villages 'grow their own' teachers from among the local young people. They were to graduate the sons and daughters of farmers and tradespeople with a thorough knowledge of the elementary material themselves, thus improving the quality of rural teachers who too often had had no preparation to teach at all—who, in the words of William Fowle, editor of *The Common School Journal*, began to use the rod "the moment they have ceased to feel it."²⁰

As always, however, education had unintended consequences. While many "normalites" did live up to their commitment to teach in the common schools, others used their free higher education as a means of social mobility, leaving the rural areas for the cities with their certificates in hand, looking to advance themselves professionally and socially at a time when high school teachers earned more than elementary teachers and teachers in town schools earned more than country schoolteachers. There were complaints that the normal schools were draining the minds of the countryside, that male graduates taught only temporarily and didn't really justify the public's investment in their education, that women taught only for a few years until they married or ventured west or abroad to begin new lives far from the farm. Some of the normal schools reinforced these ambitions by including what were considered college subjects in the curriculum, offering, for example, Latin and Greek, subjects which had no part "in the original design of the schools, in the wants of the districts, or in the common sense of the people... Teachers had no business learning Latin and French when what they needed was better instruction in English," grumbled Fowle.²¹

The normal schools did indeed bring higher education and mobility to the working people of Massachusetts. In 1859, two-thirds of normalites were from blue-collar families. A disproportionate number were the children of farmers; while 33% of Massachusetts families farmed, 43% of normal school students came from farm families. Another 28.5% were the sons and daughters of artisans and 1.7% had fathers who were unskilled laborers. Twelve percent were the children of professionals (doctors, lawyers, ministers) or merchants. Interestingly, normal schools that enrolled more students from farm families were co-educational; in the women-only schools at Framingham and Salem, only 22% were the daughters of farmers. Teaching at midcentury may have offered men the promise of work at a time when agriculture was in decline and women a respectable way into a larger world of social and professional relationships than they would have had had they stayed "home."²²

A PATHWAY TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

In the early nineteenth century, the highest calling for women was to help build the new nation by raising "good republican sons."23 In an age of economic specialization and industrial growth, women were no longer needed to work alongside their men and were thus free to use their "innate" virtue, propriety and dignity to instruct their children in moral behavior, civic responsibility and basic academic skills. "Republican mothers" would instruct their sons in the principles of government and liberty and instill in them the important values of patriotism, honesty, responsibility, self-reliance, and the need to sacrifice one's own needs for the greater good of the country.²⁴ While women's first priority were their own children, they could, if they had no children, exercise "moral motherhood...[by] embrac[ing] roles other than motherhood itself; "[T]eacher, charity worker, writer of didactic and advice literature were but expressions of women's motherly nature."25 Nineteenth century women teachers were imbued with a strong sense of mission and grand social purpose that transcended the welfare of the individual children in their classrooms. Teaching could transform lives, communities, and whole nations. It could also support young women who wanted a taste of independence before marriage, never-married "spinsters"-by circumstance or choice-and widows.

The "feminization of teaching"—a change in the balance of teachers from mostly men to mostly women—came to Massachusetts early, and affected the enrollment in the normal schools. In the Northeast in general in 1850, 60% of teachers in New England were women, as contrasted with 24% in the South. In the Midwest, where men were still breaking the land in new settlements, 81% of schoolteachers were women. Between 1870 and 1900 the number of teachers in the U.S. more than tripled; at the beginning of this period, 66% were women, by the end, the figure was 75%.²⁶ The feminization of teaching was aided by the development of hierarchical graded schools (where women classroom could be supervised by a male principal), by the Civil War and the death of 600,000 American men, and by the increasing emphasis on teaching credentials. Women at mid-century typically had more education than men, including high school diplomas; as requirements for admission to the normal schools were raised, more women than men could



Well Played

Members of the North Adams Normal School basketball team of 1908. Courtesy of the Freel Library Archives at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

meet them. Teaching continued to be a relatively low-paying profession, and, in many places, for limited terms, offering a salary that, despite the male pay advantage, was not enough to support a family. Conversely, teaching offered a professional life and association to women at a time when every other profession was dominated by men.²⁷

Many superintendents and school boards were delighted to hire female graduates of the normal schools, confident that they were hiring knowledgeable, nurturing, young women skilled at managing children, at half the price of men. But there were also many who were concerned about the gender imbalance in the schoolrooms and in the halls of the normal schools. Even in Massachusetts, the Joint (legislative) Committee visiting the normal schools in 1852 issued a report in which they expressed concern for "a considerable falling off in the number of males in proportion to females applying for instruction, attributed to the increased and increasing demand for female teachers." ²⁸

Whether by design (i.e., at Lexington-Framingham and Salem Normal Schools) or by accident, the Massachusetts normal schools introduced women to educational and career opportunities they would otherwise have found difficult to consider. Many normal school female (and male) graduates became school administrators, professors, writers, artists, nurses, doctors and agency directors at a time when women did not yet have the vote in the United States. They went abroad to undertake religious and educational missions; they went south to teach former slaves and west to work with Native Americans; they pioneered education for the blind, deaf and others left out of the educational mainstream; they were activists in the abolitionist, suffrage and temperance movements; they worked on behalf of political and social change. They were also models of independence and professionalism for the working-class and for young immigrants. "I have forgotten everything the schools ever taught me. But the glamour of the lady teachers, shining on the East Side world, I shall never forget," wrote a New York Public School alumna.29

Besides providing new life pathways for women, Massachusetts normal schools opened their doors early to students of color and minority ethnicities. In 1843, the Normal School at Lexington graduated its first African-American student, Mary Elizabeth Miles, who was also the first African-American graduate of any public teachers college in America. Miles married escaped slave Henry Bibb and then worked with him to teach and lead in the abolition movement in Ontario. Poet and writer Charlotte Forten graduated in the second class at Salem Normal School in 1856, becoming the first black teacher of white children in Salem and the state, later teaching among the freed people in South Carolina as part of the Port Royal Experiment. In many areas of the country, black teachers were typically only hired to teach black children; in general, white teachers were preferred. That restriction, the limited number of schools for black children, and higher class sizes made it more difficult for black teachers to find work. Teaching, nevertheless "provided an important avenue for the development of an educated cadre of leaders in the African-American community" and class rosters of the normal schools are evidence that the state-supported schools contributed to that goal.³⁰

THE RISE OF THE STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

From the beginning Massachusetts state normal schools were the "people's colleges," appealing to middle class and working families as routes to higher education, social mobility and meaningful careers.³¹ They enrolled students

of any age over sixteen or seventeen, provided flexible programs for students, requiring less time for those who had previous teaching experience and more time for those who wanted an advanced program enabling them to teach at higher levels. Male students might, for example, drop in and out between terms to help on the family farm when needed. As they enrolled increasing numbers of students interested in a high-quality, low-cost higher education, one that would allow them to continue to work, take on family responsibilities and fit the vicissitudes of life into and around their educations, the curriculum expanded beyond teacher preparation to the liberal arts, to business, nursing, communication, and other professional fields. To acknowledge their broader curricula, the Massachusetts legislature changed their names several times; the State Normal Schools became State Teachers Colleges in the 1930s and comprehensive State Colleges in the 1960s. They added master's programs and certificates of advanced study and many became State Universities in 2010. They grew physically from one building to campuses with tall residence halls, libraries and science centers that sprawled across cities and required bicycles and shuttle buses to navigate. Throughout this expansive history they continued to offer an increasingly broad education at the fraction of the price of the private higher education institutions in the Commonwealth, enroll more of its citizens and prepare them for work in the state.

In the twentieth century, the state normal schools that had opened their first doors to the children of farmers and artisans threw them wider for successive waves of immigrants and refugees, first from Eastern and southern Europe and later from virtually every country on earth. Thousands of students on our campuses grew up speaking a language other than English. Many of our students are still the first generation in their families to attend college. And just as the "normalites" managed to combine school with time to help at home on the farm or in the shop, many students at today's state colleges and universities pursue their educational goals while working parttime, sometimes managing family responsibilities as well. The GI Bill that gave educational aid to GIs returning home from World War II led to an enrollment explosion at mid-century. Today, soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan bring hard-won real-world experience into our classrooms. The Civil Rights Movement and legislation that followed added to the diversity of our campuses, bringing to campus more students of color, more women working toward "non-traditional" careers, more welcome to LGBT students, more appreciation for students whose knowledge of how they learn helped faculty improve their own teaching and helped students who planned to be teachers. Title IX ensured equal access for women from admissions to athletics and strengthened the call for respectful behavior toward all. Today's



Training School Pageant

A troupe of school-age performers at the Salem Normal School. Teacher training gave educators a chance to flex their muscles in several subject areas beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. Courtesy of Salem State University Archives and Special Collections.

campuses celebrate diversity in background and ideas, and boast climates far more welcoming than the one that warned against "that old deluder, Satan."

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the former "normal" schools are being challenged to find new ways of teaching that prepare students to hold their own in global spheres. At home in the Commonwealth we continue to join Horace Mann's battle to equalize education so that it might help "equalize the conditions of men." Waves of educational reform leave us wrestling with perennial questions about what should be taught and how to judge whether students have learned. Many of us have partnered with local schools and community organizations to find creative ways to engage students in projects that are meaningful and substantive. Some help educate families along with their children or provide direct services to communities so that the "conditions of men" are a bit more equal before their children are sent to learn in schools. We work with other universities, with the schools, with our state agencies and professional communities to set high and appropriate standards and live up to them in programs that now extend beyond teacher preparation to the education of physicists, art historians, nurses, software developers, geographers, and playwrights.

Today's state college and university graduates look nothing like the first twenty-five graduates of The Normal School at Lexington (Framingham). Notebooks have been replaced with a different kind of tablet. Students no longer listen for bells that signal the beginning of classes, relying instead on electronic devices to tell them the time, work on their assignments, hold discussions and, perhaps, bring them to class "virtually." But our ideals remain much the same: We open the doors of higher education to many who would not otherwise be able to step through. We broaden their horizons, deepen their knowledge and hone their skills so that they can go out into the world when they finish as "instruments of great good."32 The twentyfirst century versions of those early graduates who broke boundaries by teaching the blind, deaf and others left out of the mainstream still work to solve critical problems in creative ways, on behalf of political and social improvement. Massachusetts teachers and educational leaders still look to the former normal schools-now the state colleges and universities-for preparation, professional development, guidance and support in their work.

The state colleges and universities, which have grown impressive academic wings, are proud of their roots in teacher education. The following pages tell their individual stories and highlight some of the graduates who did remarkable things. In this 175th anniversary year of their founding, we celebrate the role the "people's colleges" have played in the development of our civil society. We hope their story inspires support for the next stages of their contributions.

HJM

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