

EARLY HISTORY.

Previous to the adoption of the constitution of 1848, Illinois was peopled with emigrants who had generally come from the States of Indiana, Ohio, or Pennsylvania, where, at that time, there existed no system of common schools worthy of the name. These settlers brought with them the ideas and usages prevalent in their old homes. They were favorable to schools, but these schools were either academies, seminaries, or subscription primary, or district schools, supplemented generally by a little aid from the limited public funds. Our school laws were, however, an improvement upon those of many of our sister States, and our school funds were being provided for on a liberal scale by the donation of the sixteenth section of government land, which donation dates back to the admission of our State into the Union, in 1818, when the foundation was laid for the magnificent school system which we see to-day. This fund, however, though very well in theory, proved, in too many instances, a delusion and a snare in practice. Its management, in a great many instances in the older counties, fell into the hands of men who had no conception of the free school system, and even if they had foreseen the present value of the rich lands, they lacked the financial capacity to manage properly the great trust confided to their care. The settlers, in many instances, banded themselves together to purchase these lands at a mere nominal figure, thereby defrauding their posterity of the full benefit of this magnificent provision. Even where honestly and carefully managed, this fund often fell short of its capabilities, owing to the quality of the soil, the low value of all real estate, or to the inevitable losses resulting from panics, paper money, and incompetent supervision.

It therefore happened that from a variety of causes the college and seminary funds, and the general common school funds of this State, previous to 1848, were far below what the great men intended who provided for the original grant. Slowly and surely, however, our common schools were progressing. The cultured emigrants from southern States, liberally educated entirely with their parents' or guardians' money, and the descendents of our first settlers here, who were fortunate enough to enjoy the advantages of an education derived, in part, from public aid, were largely reinforced by emigrants from New York and New England. The latter were fresh

from States where common schools were free, and where the great principle of the Republic—free education of the masses—had been long enough in force to bring forth ripe fruit for western exportation.

These liberally-educated elements existed throughout the length and breadth of our State. Northern Illinois and the region west of the Illinois river, with scattering settlements in central and southern Illinois, were peopled largely with these New York and New England emigrants. Educated southerners were found all over the State, but more especially in southern Illinois.

The best educated native Illinoisans were most numerous in St. Clair, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, Gallatin, and the Ohio river counties. These elements did not, perhaps, strive with a common plan, but they were animated with a common purpose. They were widely scattered, and enjoyed few means of public discussion, either in convention or newspapers. But when their representatives met at our Legislature, and the school laws were being amended or revised, it was found that there was a pressing demand for the passage of such laws as should favor the free education of all the children in the State. The efforts of these pioneers were finally rewarded when the new constitution of 1848 was framed. This provided a State tax of two mills on the dollar, which should be annually levied by the State Auditor, without the intervention of the Legislature, and a great step was at once taken in the cause of education.

This tax, though not large in itself, when added to the revenue of the school funds, in counties where these funds had been successfully managed, was at least a nucleus. Legislation provided for the raising of money to erect school houses, and, eventually, by further amendments, our most advanced communities were enabled to present successful instances of well-managed public schools. The great impetus given to the cause of public instruction in New York, New England, Indiana, and Michigan, exerted a powerful effect upon the public mind of this State, and the act of 1854 placed our system far in advance of its previous condition.

The friends of education were scattered all over the State and counted our most energetic and most influential citizens among their number and were fast advancing to the supreme control of our State school legislation. They could now begin to point to hundreds of most admirable free schools, in various parts of the State, taught by the best teachers in the Union. These schools were very numerous in the extreme northern counties, where the settlers had brought with them, almost perfect and entire, their eastern schools and eastern ideas. These had become naturalized and matured under the liberal laws of Illinois. Scattered through the State were a few bright examples in other counties. LaSalle, Peoria, Knox, Morgan, St. Clair, Madison, and other counties, had brilliant illustrations to add to the general stock, and free schools had not only become popular,

but the demand of the hour. This was the period, embracing the year 1854, when our leading educators began to realize that, in order to make our schools all the public were now demanding, they must furnish some system, or source, through which more and better teachers could be provided.

There were teachers then in this State whose superiors have, perhaps, never been found. But it was undeniably true, and is, perhaps, true to-day, that many, many thousands were upon the teachers' platform, whose qualifications were far below the proper standard. Our best teachers were then mostly from the older States, and were those who had been educated at colleges or academies of a high grade, though there were not wanting numerous examples of home growth fully equaling the foreign article.

New England enjoyed almost a monopoly of supplying the best teachers, and had already commenced their regular production, Normal Schools having been in operation there for several years. Ohio was not far behind, while the best colleges of Virginia and Kentucky forwarded a goodly proportion.

The idea of obtaining a State Normal School began to take root and grow about 1856, especially among the teachers of the State who had by this time commenced holding annual conventions. The formation of the Illinois State Teachers' Association marks an era in our educational affairs. Previous to that time the schools of the State were almost entirely without organization. The general management was in the hands of the Secretary of State, and the schools formed simply a department in his office. Of course they could receive but little intelligent attention from that officer. The free school law itself met with bitter opposition in many parts of the State. Its principles were either misunderstood or misrepresented. County commissioners were elected in the several counties, but their salary was extremely low in nearly every instance. Free high schools were unknown. Under these circumstances, three men, H. H. Lee, of Chicago, J. A. Hawley, of Dixon, and Daniel Wilkins, met at the home of the latter, in Bloomington, for the purpose of trying to devise some plan by which the condition of popular education might be improved throughout the State. As a result of this conference, a call was issued for a general meeting of the friends of free schools to meet in Bloomington, December 26-9, 1853. The convention assembled pursuant to this call, and D. Brewster, of Kane County, was chosen president, and Wm. H. Powell, of LaSalle County, secretary. It was reported at our late meeting in Springfield that the president is still living. The secretary has not been heard from for several years.

Three topics were thoroughly discussed at this meeting: It was resolved to ask the Legislature to establish, as a separate office, the State Superintendency; to establish and maintain a Normal School;

and it also determined to organize a State Teachers' Association, and secure, if possible, the publication of a journal devoted to the cause of free schools in the State. The Normal School question seems to have provoked a long and spirited debate. It is a curious fact that the same objections were then urged that are biennially reproduced in our Legislature against these schools. Can it be that we are never to reach a period in the discussion when these questions will be settled by the logic of events? It does seem as though the actual workings of these schools, in the past twenty-five years, has abundantly demonstrated the weakness of the arguments put forth against them in 1853.

After the adjournment of the convention, the Illinois State Teachers' Institute was organized. The name was changed to Illinois State Teachers' Association, two years afterward, at the second annual meeting, held in Springfield.

Rev. W. Goodfellow, of the Illinois Wesleyan University, was the first president, and Rev. Daniel Wilkins, the first secretary. A constitution was adopted, which contained nothing remarkable, except that it made provision for the appointment of a committee on almost every conceivable department of school work. After providing that the first annual meeting should be held in the city of Peoria, in December, 1854, the meeting adjourned.

The most prominent topic in all the early meetings of the Illinois State Teachers' Association, was the organization of a Normal School. At the Peoria meeting, in 1854, and again at Springfield, in 1855, the discussion was continued with much warmth. There seem to have been really three parties to the contest: The Normal School men, who contended that the great want of the State was trained teachers, and that these could be secured in no other way than by establishing a separate institution for that purpose; on the other hand, a large and influential class of educational workers, headed by Prof. J. B. Turner, of Jacksonville, who maintained that either an Industrial University, with a Normal Department, should be established, or else that an Agricultural Department should be attached to the Normal School; lastly, those who thought it would be disastrous to the best interests of all parties if education and religion were divorced, and who favored the founding of Normal Departments, by the State, in connection with all the sectarian colleges already established. The discussion of these various views was so long and bitter at the Springfield meeting that the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Association does not wish to discuss any university question, but occupy themselves (*sic*) with the interests of common schools and Normal Schools.

When the Association met in Chicago, in 1856, Prof. Turner sent a letter, gracefully withdrawing from the contest. The following extract will contribute to a clearer understanding of the whole controversy:

"It has ever been my opinion, and the general opinion of the friends of the Industrial League, that a Normal School, with an Agricultural Department connected with it, would be more strongly bound to the interests and feelings of the masses of our people, and therefore more popular and prosperous than if it stood entirely alone, for precisely the same reason that such institutions do not so well prosper when standing beneath the shadow of a college or university, or higher order of school; for it is a law of nature that the stronger and higher should draw from the weaker and the lower. Still, if this is not agreeable to the teachers of the State, or the friends of the Normal School, I wish them to organize it in such manner as they think best; and in any plan the Teachers' Association may devise, the friends of the League will most heartily cooperate, provided it is effectually separated from such partisan political control as would render it a curse instead of a blessing to the State.

It is high time, my friends, that you had your Normal School, whether we ever get an Agricultural Department to it or not. Let us all take hold together and try to obtain it in such form as you may, on the whole, think best.

Respectfully submitted, by yours most truly,

J. B. TURNER."

After a long and animated discussion, the Association passed the following:

"*Resolved*, That the educational interests of Illinois demand the immediate establishment of a State Normal School for the education of teachers: and, in the language of the Board of Education, 'We therefore recommend an appropriation, by the next Legislature, of a sufficient sum annually to support such a seminary of learning.' In the following February, the Legislature passed, and the Governor approved, 'An act for the establishment and maintenance of a Normal University.'"

Before giving a history of the University, its organization, etc., allow us to introduce a letter received by C. E. Mann at the quarter-centennial of the State Teachers' Association, held at Springfield, December 26, 1881. It contains many interesting facts respecting the

ILLINOIS PIONEERS OF EDUCATION.

CENSUS OFFICE,

WASHINGTON, D. C., December 26, 1881. }

C. E. MANN, *Chairman Executive Committee, S. T. A.:*

DEAR SIR: C. E. Hovey insists that I shall explain his failure to write and myself respond for him. He is in a great pressure of work just now, and regrets he did not begin when your note first came, when he might have written something. We have recalled many things in view of the anniversary at hand. I knew most of the men prominent in the first meeting, and I had an early part in