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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WILLIAM HARVEY WELLS:
HIS SUPERINTENDENCY AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO
THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY
CYNTHIA FELTON

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 1992

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PREFACE

A teacher touches the lives, hearts, and minds of many people and William Harvey Wells (1812-1885) was no exception. He was a teacher, a professional educator and an administrator. His educational career spanned more than thirty years and he favorably impressed those whom he supervised in each capacity in which he served. Wells was a well known educator during the nineteenth century and commanded much respect from many including his colleagues and peers. Besides inspiring his students, as so many teachers did, he was also an inspiration to other teachers, administrators and educators. Wells' value and quality was noted by people from nearly every aspect of the educational spectrum. A Board of Trustees' member said of Wells: "He has a vigorous and well furnished mind. He is ardent, devoted, enthusiastic even in his work. He has a rare faculty of inspiring his pupils with the like spirit of enterprise and love of study."¹

¹In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, Sketches of His Life and Character, Memorial Addresses and Proceedings and Resolutions of Public Bodies on the Occasion of His Death (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co. [1887]), 11.

Wells was genuinely committed to education and concerned with nearly every facet of it. As a student he worked diligently to obtain knowledge and understanding. Theodore L. Wright who became principal of the Hartford Grammar School and who was Wells' teacher when he attended an academy in Vernon, Connecticut in 1829-30 remembered that:

His lessons were studied in the most careful and thorough manner, and no subject or recitation satisfied him over which there rested a shadow of obscurity. Fresh in my recollection as if it were yesterday is that earnest, honest, persevering expression of countenance, habitual from day to day, and kindled with a glow of enthusiastic delight, as often as a new truth in literature or science was brought to his clear comprehension.²

As a teacher his priorities were: teaching his students what he thought they needed to know using the best means possible, and continual self-improvement in order to obtain the skills to properly execute the duties of his chosen role. As an administrator he was concerned with the welfare of students, involving parents in their children's education and the professional development of teachers. There were few if any elements in the field of education about which Wells was not concerned or in which he did not eventually become actively involved. He expressed his concerns verbally and through his actions. His care and concern for education were all encompassing. He was truly

²Ibid., 10.

an educator in every sense of the word.

Wells was the second superintendent of schools in Chicago, serving from 1856-1864; he was pivotal and very influential in the history of the Chicago Public Schools. It was this influence which motivated the author coupled with the fact that no major work had been written about the man whose impact spanned more than fifty years. This work will examine the effect which Wells had upon education in Chicago through his accomplishments as superintendent, his writings, educational philosophy, and efforts in teacher training. The primary focus will be on Wells' influence on schools and education in Chicago. In order to provide greater insight, the people and other factors which influenced Wells will also be discussed. This study is not meant to define his administrative style but rather his educational style. Wells made major contributions to education, especially in Chicago, and these will be analyzed.

This work provides an analysis of Wells' contribution to and impact upon education in general and the Chicago Public Schools in specific. It is not intended to be solely biographical, but more of an examination of the passions of the man, of those character traits, and endeavors which made him the nationally revered educator which he was. The majority of the study is devoted to exploring his interests, endeavors and accomplishments in the Chicago Public Schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The guidance of Dr. Joan Smith contributed greatly to the completion of this work; I am grateful for her encouragement and support. The advice, encouragement and support of Dr. Janis Fine and Dr. John Wozniak were very valuable and appreciated. The faculty of the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies are dedicated professionals to whom I am also indebted. The staff of the Graduate School Office at Lewis Towers have been very helpful and patient and are to be applauded for their assistance.

DEDICATION

To my mother who, affectionately known as "Dear" to all who knew and loved her, appreciated the value of education and encouraged her children to attain the highest level possible;

And to my family members and close friends who encouraged and supported me through this endeavor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE		iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		vi
LIST OF FIGURES		ix
CHAPTER		
I. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH		1
Genealogy and Early Life		1
Early Career		9
School Administration		19
II. A MAN OF VARIED INTERESTS		37
Physical Traits		37
Astronomy and Telescopes		39
Grammar of the English Language and Dictionaries		44
Professionalism		49
III. THE LEGACY OF WILLIAM HARVEY WELLS TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHICAGO		66
The Office of Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools		67
The Superintendency of William Harvey Wells		75
The High School		76
The Normal Department		79
Attendance		84
Buildings and Accommodations		92
Primary Education		99
The Legacy: Improving Education		108
IV. THE MAN AND HIS PHILOSOPHY		112
Why Educate?		113
The Roles Defined		115
The Student		116
Parents		117
The Teacher		119
Curriculum: The Graded Course of Instruction		135
Development of the Philosophy		153

V.	A TEACHER OF TEACHERS: WILLIAM HARVEY WELLS AND THE SATURDAY MORNING CHICAGO TEACHERS' INSTITUTES	156
	"Doing Good"	156
	Professionalism and the Improvement of Teachers .	158
	Evolution and Purpose of Teachers' Institutes . .	160
	The Saturday Morning Chicago Teachers' Institutes	169
	The Beginning.	169
	The Teaching of Teachers	173
	The Growth of the Chicago Teachers' Institute	176
	A Teacher's Perception.	185
EPILOGUE		
	THE SUPERINTENDENT RESIGNS	190
	A Fond Farewell	191
	A Befitting Tribute	197
	A Final Farewell	199
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	205

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Photograph of William Harvey Wells from daguerreotype by Jeremiah Gurney New York, 1859	36
2. Table of Oral Instructions For the Regular Course of Instruction	151
3. Photograph of William Harvey Wells by Mosher, no date	189

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Genealogy and Early Life

William Harvey Wells was "descended from Anglo-Norman stock"¹ with rather distinguished lineages on both sides. His mother, Rhoda (nee Chapman) born in Bolton, Connecticut, was a descendant of Phineas and John Chapman both of whom were said to have served in the Revolutionary War. John was a lieutenant and Phineas a carpenter's mate aboard the Oliver Cromwell which was a sixteen gun frigate under the command of Timothy Parker and said to have been the first American warship.²

The roots of his paternal ancestry have been traced to Northamptonshire, England and to Thomas Welles who emigrated from there in 1636, settled in Hartford, and subsequently became Governor of Connecticut. Samuel Welles was the fifth child of Governor Thomas Welles and was born in Essex County, England in 1630. The line continued as follows: a son of Samuel, Captain Thomas Welles, was born

¹"William Harvey Wells, A.M.," Illinois Teacher 10 (May 1864): 191.

²Paul Martineau, to Miss Mabel B. Adams, 26 May 1956, William Harvey Wells, Newspaper Clippings File, Chicago Historical Society.

at Wethersfield, Connecticut in 1662; his son, Ichabod, was born in Wethersfield, in 1712; his son, William Harvey's great grandfather, Benjamin Welles, was born in Wethersfield in 1733; his son was William Harvey's grandfather, Thomas Wells, and was born in 1760 in Bolton, Connecticut; and his son, of course was William Harvey's father, Harvey who was born in New York State in 1784. Harvey Wells migrated to a very small rural area in Hancock County, Illinois where he died in 1866.³

William Harvey Wells was born 27 February 1812 on his father's farm in Tolland, Connecticut. Young William helped his father on the farm which provided a moderate living for the family. As a result his early education was sparse and until the age of seventeen he attended a small district school only a few weeks each winter. An early indication of the persevering nature of his character is found in the following episode which occurred during his boyhood: Young William had endeavored to master the latter half of Daboll's Arithmetic. After he had advanced as far as the unit on cube root, without any assistance from his teacher, he began to experience difficulties. He worked on it alone for a day and told his father that he would have to get help from his teacher. Charles Northend a very good friend and biographer of Wells related the incident as follows:

³Albert Welles, History of the Welles Family (New York: By the author, 67 University Place, 1876), 132; 178.

The father had watched with interest the successive steps of his progress, and now advised him to remain at home a day, and see if he could not overcome the difficulty. The day passed, but no light dawned upon the mysteries of this cabalistic rule, and he gave it up in despair. Again his father encouraged him to persevere, and recommended that he should remain at home another day. The second day passed with no better success than the first; but his father still urged him to rely upon his own resources, and assured him that he had strength enough to master the rule alone, if he would only call it into exercise. The labors of the third day were crowned with success; but the triumph he had gained over the unexplained difficulties of a formal rule in Arithmetic, was of little moment compared with the new views he had acquired of the power of determined persevering effort.⁴

This experience sparked a lifelong irrepressible desire for education and young William pleaded with his father to allow him to attend an academy. This desire eventually realized fruition in Vernon, Connecticut where young William spent the fall and winter of 1829-30 at an academy under the tutelage of Theodore L. Wright who was quite impressed with him. Wright noticed early that his student was determined to make the most of this opportunity and thought that the young man was eager to conform to the teacher's requirements despite the mischievous activities of his classmates. It was during his stay at the academy that young William was first introduced to the study of English grammar, an

⁴Charles Northend, "William Harvey Wells," American Journal of Education 8 (June 1860): 529.

encounter which would prove to have a long-lasting influence and impact upon his life.⁵

Wells left the academy after two terms and spent the ensuing winter at an academy in his home town of Tolland. During the winter of 1831-32 he was paid a salary of ten dollars a month for teaching at a district school in Vernon and supplemented his income by boarding around; a practice in which a teacher lived with a family in exchange for instructing the children of the household and surrounding community.

Remembering the diligence with which he pursued his studies and his ardent desire to learn, Wright recommended that Wells begin a course of study designed to prepare him for college. Wells did so, studying during the evenings while continuing to teach during the day. His eyes became very weak as a result of this exhausting pace and failing eyesight forced him to abandon the program just before completion.

Sometime later Wells became an assistant at an English classical school in East Hartford under the direction of Theodore L. Wright who was a teacher there. Wright noted that Wells, "early exhibited that peculiar tact for teaching which has since more manifestly proved that his profession

⁵In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, Sketches of His Life and Character, Memorial Addresses and Proceedings and Resolutions of Public Bodies on the Occasion of His Death (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co. [1887]), 10.

for life was wisely chosen." Wells assisted at the classical school for two years but at Wright's urging he attended "the Teachers' Seminary, at Andover, Mass., in order to better qualify himself for his chosen vocation."⁶

Though Wells attended the Teachers' Seminary at Andover for only eight months, his experiences there served him well in his future. After leaving Andover, he returned to East Hartford to supervise the English department of the school. Wells was successful in that endeavor as well as popular with his students. Mr. Wright commented that forty pupils who lived in the city of Hartford walked two miles or more daily to avail themselves of Wells' tutelage. Additionally, Wright stated that; "When I left, for a voyage to Europe, I recommended Mr. Wells as my successor. He was retained on terms very advantageous to himself, and his services were held in the highest regard by the patrons of the school."⁷

Wells was an industrious and assiduous teacher and learner. His eyes continually weakened as his quest for the knowledge to be gained from the printed page intensified. At times he was forced to acquire "knowledge from books through the eyes of others, employed to read for him." His mentor, Theodore L. Wright, remarked that Wells used his knowledge practically in the preparation of his publications

⁶Northend, "William Harvey Wells," 530-1.

⁷Ibid.

as well as in teaching. Even though he was dependent upon others to read for him, he remained independent and self-reliant in the solution of difficult problems, questions and his thought processes.⁸

Wright related the following incident as an illustration of Wells' independence and self-reliance which he thought were predominant traits of his character: Wells was assigned to teach algebra to a class of older students. There were problems in the textbook that he could not solve and one in particular which he had tried several times without success. As the time-period in which Wells would have to introduce the problem to the class rapidly approached, he began to feel a sense of urgency about his lack of preparation for the problem. He worked on the problem for several hours to no avail. Reluctantly, he sought the assistance of a colleague who also was unable to solve the problem.

The urgency increased as his class was assigned the problem and Wells felt that: "To go before his class and acknowledge that he was unable to master it, would be to lose caste at once." When, after two days of trying, the class informed their teacher that they could not solve the problem Wells decided that his last hope was to take the problem to a friend who was a mathematics teacher in a

⁸Ibid.

nearby city. Wells set-out on foot to the home of his friend but was disappointed upon arrival to learn that he would be away for several days. According to Mr. Wright the following took place as Wells began to walk home:

With a burden of chagrin and mortification that was almost insupportable, he commenced retracing his steps. 'What,' thought he, 'does all this mean?' After walking a few moments in silent meditation, his emotions found audible utterance. 'I can solve the problem,' he said with emphatic gesture, 'and I will solve it.' He went to his room, and seating himself at his table, he did not rise till the task was accomplished. He has often alluded to this single triumph as of more real value to him than a year of ordinary study. It caused him to know his own strength, and taught him to think, and to depend upon his own resources.⁹

Wells' independence and self-reliance also impressed Reverend Samuel Read Hall, principal of the Teachers' Seminary at Andover. During Wells' eight months at Andover he gained the respect and confidence of Reverend Hall to such an extent that he was invited to return as Halls' assistant fewer than two years after leaving.¹⁰

Reverend Samuel Read Hall

Reverend Hall's high estimation of Wells was significant because he himself was an eminently respected educator. Hall, the first principal of the Teachers' Seminary at Phillips' Academy, Andover and an early advocate of teacher training is also credited with being the first

⁹Ibid., 532.

¹⁰Ibid., 533.

teacher to use the blackboard. Although he never attended college, he studied at Kimball Union Academy and in 1823, he established an institution that resembled a normal school in Concord, Vermont. His nationally known Lectures on School Keeping, published in 1829, was the first manual for teachers to be printed in the United States. Unlike most educators of that day, Reverend Hall did not condone the use of harsh discipline and fear with students. He thought the major goal of education was to prepare children to be happy, and toward that end the teacher should make the school a pleasant place to be.¹¹

Reverend Hall's book was replete with practical suggestions for teachers which included the use of globes, visual aids and maps. A prolific writer, his published works included an arithmetic book, a book on United States history and several other books which were used as texts. He was hired by Squire Samuel Farrar, who in arranging for Hall's salary, "devised a diabolical scheme that had a great deal to do with Hall's eventual resignation." Farrar, the treasurer of Phillips Academy from 1810 to 1840, "ran things rather than the Principals." The terms of the agreement between Farrar and Hall were such that the principal would receive no cash compensation, but instead would be allowed

¹¹Frederick S. Allis, Jr., Youth From Every Quarter: A Bicentennial History of Phillips Academy, Andover (Andover, MA, Phillips Academy; Hanover, NH: distributed by University of New England Press, 1979), 170.

the use of one of the buildings, Stone Academy.

Additionally, according to Frederick Allis, a Phillips Academy historian, Hall:

was to have use of the entrance fees and tuition money of the students and the freedom to set those fees himself. In this way the Squire hoped to encourage the Principal to develop a thriving institution and at the same time save the Phillips Academy Trustees a lot of money.¹²

Early Career

Andover

The Teachers' Seminary at Andover, one of the early teacher training programs in this country, was established in September 1830 as a department of Phillips' Academy.¹³ Founded in 1778 by the Phillips family, the academy's mission was to provide a free public school to combat the ignorance, vice and general wickedness which prevailed at the time. The curriculum included; English and Latin grammar, writing, arithmetic, science, but above all, endeavored to teach "the great end and real business of living."¹⁴ The founders of Phillips Academy were very definite about its goals and objectives. Three members of the Phillips family met on 21 April 1778 to sign the charter. Later known as the Constitution of Phillips

¹²Ibid., 172; 149; 172.

¹³"Teachers' Seminary at Andover, Massachusetts," The American Journal of Education 14 (September 1858): 386.

¹⁴Allis, Youth From Every Quarter, xxiii.

Academy it clearly proclaimed "'in order to prevent the smallest perversion of the true intent of this Foundation, it is again declared, that the first and principal object of this Institution is the promotion of true PIETY and VIRTUE.'"¹⁵ Establishing an academy during this time was of considerable consequence because of the onset of the American Revolution.

In a document dated 1839 the seminary's philosophy was clearly defined as follows:

the object of which was to afford the means of a thorough scientific and practical education, preparatory to the profession of Teaching, and to the various departments of business. . . . The repeated calls from the South and West and from the public generally, for well educated teachers, have induced the Trustees from time to time to make large appropriations for increasing the advantages and, at the same time, diminishing the expenses of the students in the Seminary. . . . It will promote the great interests of sound learning, by increasing the number of well qualified instructors; by aiding to elevate the standard of education in our common schools; and to prepare our youth to become intelligent citizens in the several occupations of life in which they may engage.¹⁶

The Teachers Seminary offered a three year course of study which included; composition, elocution, theology, chemistry, algebra, trigonometry and natural philosophy. Students in the Teachers Seminary were afforded the opportunity to practice the art of teaching in a preparatory department or

¹⁵Ibid., xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁶"Andover Theological Institution & Teachers Seminary"; a pamphlet which describes the seminary, 1 January 1839, Andover Historical Society Manuscript Collection.

model school which was in a separate building and taught by a separate teacher. It was an English school for boys ages eight to sixteen who were "taught the elementary branches of an English education, preparatory to their admission to the higher department."¹⁷

Wells began as an instructor at Andover in 1836 teaching in both the preparatory and teachers' departments. During his tenure he was plagued with increasingly weak eyes and for several years one of his students was employed to read to him in the evenings while Wells made written notes. Later he formed a reading partnership with a student from the Theological Seminary, and during a single term they read all of Shakespeare's dramas in addition to several volumes on mental and moral science.¹⁸

Despite the hardship that Wells' weak eyes presented he planned and implemented an extensive course of English reading in which he discussed the principles of grammar along with a careful analyses of Milton and other poets. While teaching this course he referenced examples of English grammar which could be used as illustrations or test items of general principles. Over a period of nine years, he referenced and classified thousand of examples in this manner. The result of these investigations and comparisons

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 14-15.

was embodied in his School Grammar, first published in 1846 of which nearly three hundred thousand copies had been issued by 1860.¹⁹

The Teachers' Seminary was continually plagued with financial difficulties and in 1837, Reverend Hall became frustrated with these problems which were compounded by dissatisfaction with his own personal financial situation and resigned as principal. The Reverend Lyman Coleman, a graduate of Yale, who was then head of the Burr Seminary in Manchester, Vermont succeeded him. Coleman "gave lip service to the idea of training teachers, but he was primarily interested in running an English School."²⁰

Financial instability prevailed at Phillips Academy and in December 1840 the Board of Trustees lowered Reverend Coleman's salary by two hundred dollars and Wells' by one hundred dollars. At this time Wells was corresponding with Henry Barnard concerning a revision of the School Grammar. In the course of their correspondence, Barnard, then secretary of the Board of Commissioners of the Common Schools of Connecticut, extended to Wells the possibility of a principal's position at a high school yet to be established. Wells hesitated to accept because he believed that Reverend Coleman would leave Phillips Academy at the

¹⁹Ibid., 15.

²⁰Allis, Youth From Every Quarter, 175.

end of the school year and that the position would be offered to him and his "situation would be made as good in respect to salary as it has ever been."²¹

Though Wells preferred the position in Connecticut he deemed himself obliged to decline because it was uncertain and he felt a sense of allegiance to the Board of Trustees at Phillips who had also offered him a new position as head of the English department. The financial problems and Lyman's lack of commitment to teacher training in conjunction with other factors, including the fact that the seminary received little support from Phillips Academy, precipitated a union of the Teachers' Seminary with the English Department in 1842.²² In August 1842 Wells related his anxieties to Barnard as follows:

Dear Sir,

In compliance with my engagement when I last saw you, I now send you the proceedings of our Board of Trustees at their recent meeting.

They have voted not to continue the English Dept of Phillips Academy as a separate institution after the close of the present term. Mr. Coleman, Mr. Gray and myself have according received notice that our present engagement with the Board will then expire. The Trustees have, however, voted me a permanent salary of \$800 to take charge of the English classes in Phillips Academy, under the general direction of Mr. Taylor, the principal of that institution.

I have not as yet signified to the Board whether I shall accept this situation or not nor indeed have I been able to form any definite purpose in regard to it.

I shall be happy to hear from you and learn the

²¹William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 4 January 1841, Henry Barnard Papers, Fales Library, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, New York.

²²Ibid.

state of your negotiation [sic] with the State Board of Education.

Very truly and cordially
Yours W.H.W.²³

Wells was in a quandary because he had to choose between two job offers; the first was a guaranteed position which would promote him to head of the English Department at Andover and the other was a speculative position as principal of a high school. He preferred the latter position which had been proposed by Barnard and Wells shared his agony over the situation in a letter to Barnard as follows:

If I am to remain in Andover I purpose [sic] to engage in my new duties with a whole soul, and not stand off a month or two undecided, and then come to the work with reluctance and misgiving. You must be aware that it would be very injudicious in me to say to our Trustees, that I have another situation in view which I much prefer, but if I do not succeed in obtaining that, then I will accept your proposals, and in this way put them off from week to week. If I do not remain, they wish to improve the time in negotiating [sic] with some other man. I am becoming more and more inclined to remain in Andover, and have expressed this feeling to the Committee of the Trustees.²⁴

Driven by a sense of loyalty and the desire to be straightforward which was further enhanced by the reality of a guaranteed position over a possible one, Wells accepted the position at Andover and with his affable nature he

²³William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 15 August 1842, Henry Barnard Papers.

²⁴William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 23 August 1842, Henry Barnard Papers.

became very popular with his students while head of the English Department. In 1844, one of his pupils, the Honorable W. W. Crapo commented that Wells "encouraged intimacy, and responded with advice and sympathy."²⁵

At their 1843²⁶ annual meeting the Trustees of Dartmouth College voted to grant the honorary degree of A.M. to William Harvey Wells²⁷ about whom his good friend and biographer Charles Northend commented; "Few men have proved more worthy of such a compliment." Although there was no mention in the trustees' records as to why Wells was awarded this degree one of the factors affecting their decision may have been that he was known in the state as an eminent educator.²⁸

Samuel Harvey Taylor, LL. D. first encountered Wells in a gathering of teachers while the latter was a student. Taylor who himself was an educator of some renown described his first impression of Wells as follows:

I was particularly struck with the confidence with which Mr. Wells advanced his views--not the confidence

²⁵Claude M. Fuess, An Old New England School: A History of Phillips Academy Andover (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 302.

²⁶Northend's biography of 1860 and subsequent biographical sketches of Wells gave 1845 as the date the honorary degree of Master of Arts was conferred. Perhaps there was some time lapse between the action taken by the Trustees and the college's actual granting of the degree.

²⁷"Trustees Records 1843," Dartmouth College Library Archives, Hanover, NH.

²⁸In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 15.

of one who seemed obtrusive, or out of his place, but one who had thoroughly studied the subject and knew what he said.²⁹ I then marked him for future observation.

In 1837 Dr. Taylor graduated from the Theological Seminary at Andover after having graduated from Dartmouth in 1832. He accepted the principalship of Phillips Academy in 1837 and remained in that position until his death in 1871. His reputation as an educator was widely known and one writer thought it was second to none. His teaching methods and governance "kept the standards of Phillips Academy so high that few schools equalled and scarcely one surpassed it." He was a disciplinarian, a teacher, a scholar as well as author and editor of some of the most valued classical text-books.³⁰

Dr. Taylor, who held William Harvey Wells in high regard and esteem, was very impressed with his teaching abilities and described him in great detail as follows:

He was thoroughly earnest; he was alive to his work, and was impelled by a strong inward impulse to do whatever would secure success in it. The clear ring of his voice as he propounded, in quick succession, questions to his class, was sufficient to indicate to those who might not see the glow upon his countenance, how strong a sympathy he had with his work. . . .

He was always master of the subject which he taught. He spared no expense of labor which might give him a more comprehensive and exact acquaintance with the various topics which came before his classes. . . .

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Sarah Loring Bailey, Historical Sketches of Andover, Massachusetts (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1880; reprint, Andover Historical Society and the North Andover Historical Society, 1974), 540.

He resolutely and persistently held the pupil responsible to do for himself all he supposed to be in his power. . . .

His views of discipline were sound and judicious. He governed with ease because he never required what was unreasonable, and what he did require, his pupils well knew must be met. . . .

Mr. Wells showed an energy and decision of character, a true heroism, which evinced his real worth, and assured his associates on how strong an arm they could lean. I need only add that all Mr. Wells' relations with his associates here were of the most happy and fraternal character.³¹

James S. Eaton succeeded Wells at Andover, and was also one of his students. He thought that Wells had a rare talent for communicating ideas to his students, inciting enthusiasm, and provoking thought within them. Mr. Eaton related an episode in an algebra class to illustrate Wells' tact and skills as a disciplinarian: "his skill in managing a recitation and controlling a wayward pupil." A very talkative young man offered as an excuse for doing poorly on a lesson in fractions the fact that it was algebra and not arithmetic. The young man thought that if it were arithmetic he could easily solve the problems. Wells immediately gave the student some arithmetic exercises which involved the exact same mathematical principles. Again, the student failed and became more loquacious than ever while trying to offer some other excuse. "Mr. Wells silenced him

³¹In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 16-17.

with a playful but decisive:--"Please allow me to talk a part of the time."³²

Wells' reputation as an excellent teacher spread beyond the environs of Andover. In 1847 he was elected principal of the Putnam Free School in Newburyport, Massachusetts, after eleven years at Phillips Academy. It was while he was in service at Andover that Wells met and married his first wife Hannah Maria, daughter of Jonathan Smith of Agawam, Massachusetts which is where they were married on 23 July 1840. Hannah Maria died 22 May 1842 exactly one month after the birth of their son Smith. Wells was probably in the process of writing his School Grammar, which was published in 1846, when he married T. S. Ordway in Lowell, Massachusetts. A set of twins, Alfred N. and Alfred O., were born to them on 26 January 1846.³³ While he was wrapping up his affairs in Andover Wells' mother died. His parents had moved to Chili, Illinois and he thought: "[I] may be obliged to go out and assist my father in arranging his affairs this fall."³⁴ Evidence compiled from subsequent letters to Barnard indicate that Wells probably did not make this trip; he was attending and conducting teacher

³²Ibid., 18.

³³Welles, History of the Welles Family, 176.

³⁴William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 11 August 1847, Henry Barnard Papers.

institutes throughout Massachusetts during the time he originally thought he would be in Illinois.

School Administration

Putnam Free School Newburyport, Massachusetts

Putnam Free School was established through the munificence of Oliver Putnam who was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts on 17 November 1777. During the later years of his life Putnam devoted much of his time to the study of political and economic issues and wrote essays relating to the protection of domestic industries. After his death some of these were collected and published, in 1834, in a work entitled "Tracts of Sundry Topics of Political Economy." In 1802, due to poor health Putnam moved to Hampstead, New Hampshire where he died. Conditions of his will provided for a certain portion of his estate to be allowed to accumulate to the sum of fifty thousand dollars. The funds were then to be used to establish and support a free English school in Newburyport where attendance would not be limited to local residents.³⁵

On 9 April 1838, the Trustees of the Putnam Free School were formed and incorporated. A dispute surfaced as to whether Putnam intended for both boys and girls to be

³⁵John J. Currier, History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764-1905 (By the author in two volumes in 1906 and 1909; facsimile of the 1906 edition, Somersworth, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1977), 326; 386.

admitted to the school. The exact words in his will were; "for the instruction of Youth. . . ." ³⁶ The controversy prompted the citizens of Newburyport to appoint a committee, on 9 April 1845, to confer with the trustees of the school about the proposed admission of both boys and girls. The trustees were in favor of admitting both sexes while the residents assumed Mr. Putnam wanted to establish a school for males only. The controversy raged through the local newspapers and the courts. In November 1847 the court ruled that the language of the will did not exclude girls from admission, "but was broad enough to justify the trustees in establishing a school for the instruction of youth of both sexes."³⁷

On 31 January 1845, Roger S. Howard, who had been one of the trustees, was appointed principal of the Putnam Free School but he resigned before the building was completed. On 24 May 1847, William Harvey Wells, chosen to fill the vacancy, was charged with the task of organizing the school.³⁸

The trustees had limited the number of students to be admitted to eighty because they were "determined that

³⁶Ibid., 326.

³⁷Currier, History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764-1905 328. The author (Currier) later noted on page 387 that this interpretation was rendered by "the supreme court of the commonwealth."

³⁸Ibid., 387.

thoroughness should constitute an important feature of instruction in this school."³⁹ They preferred having a small number of students thoroughly instructed rather "than a larger number less carefully taught." In addition the trustees required that each student be at least twelve years old and to commit to attending the school for one year or longer. The primary goal of the school was to provide an extended course of English study for the students, "embracing the higher branches of Mathematics, with their application to Mechanics, Surveying, Navigation, etc., Natural, Mental, and Moral Philosophy; Chemistry, geology, Astronomy, Rhetoric, History, etc."⁴⁰ Any student in the country who met the admission requirements was eligible to attend and no tuition was charged.⁴¹

While Wells was not expected to assume his duties at Newburyport until the spring of 1848, he resigned his position at Andover in August 1847, saying that he needed "the time to prepare my smaller grammar, etc."⁴² Another

³⁹In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 18.

⁴⁰"Putnam Free School," An announcement for the school published by order of the Board by N. Spell, Newburyport, 23 February 1848. (This printed notice was contained in a letter from Wells to Henry Barnard dated 28 March 1848.)

⁴¹"Plans and Descriptions of the Putnam Free School-House, Newburyport, Mass." The American Journal of Education 23 (Sept 1863): 617.

⁴²William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 24 June 1847, Henry Barnard Papers.

factor contributing to his decision could have been that the strict and stifling nature of Squire Samuel Farrar, who was referred to as "Uncle Sam," had become too much for Wells. According to Fuess; "His resignation, which was presented in 1847, was directly due to a disagreement which he had with 'Uncle Sam'."⁴³ Wells had intended to take some time off and relax. However relaxation was difficult for him; he seemed to have been driven by some sense of mission and Northend noted that; "it was no easy matter for a thoroughly live educator to cease from work." Instead Wells spent his vacation conducting teachers' institutes for Barnard, who was then superintendent of schools in Rhode Island.⁴⁴

Though Wells officially began his duties at the Putnam Free School in April 1848, during the summer of 1847 the Trustees asked him "to assist in furnishing their school house with seats, desks, etc". To that end Wells visited schools in Boston, Salem, Worcester and other cities.⁴⁵ Wells' assistants at the Putnam Free School were Miss Mary Ann Shaw, who was the preceptress of the female department and Mr. Luther Dame. On 7-8 April 1848 written examinations were administered to the candidates for admission in reading, spelling, writing, geography, arithmetic and

⁴³Fuess, An Old New England School, 302.

⁴⁴In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 19.

⁴⁵William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 26 August 1847, Henry Barnard Papers.

English grammar.⁴⁶ Only about half of those who applied were admitted.

Wells was determined to prove to the Newburyport "community that the two sexes can be educated in the same institution."⁴⁷ In one of his letters to Barnard, Wells commented that the ninety-nine female scholars who applied for admission were some of the best he had ever seen. Of the fewer male candidates who applied Wells observed; "the scholarship there is of course lower; though we have about half a dozen young men that take a high stand, and we shall of course try to bring the others up."⁴⁸ At the dedication ceremony for the new two-story brick school building, held 12 April 1848 the new principal, William Harvey Wells and His Excellency George N. Briggs, governor of the commonwealth were in attendance.⁴⁹

The trip to Newburyport proved arduous. Mrs. Wells became ill on the move from Andover and for awhile the

⁴⁶"Putnam Free School," An announcement for the school published at Newburyport, 23 February 1848.

⁴⁷William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 8 June 1848, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹John J. Currier, History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764-1905 (By the author in two volumes in 1906 and 1909; facsimile of the 1909 edition, Somersworth, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1977), 387.

family had to stay in Boston.⁵⁰ Other members of the family were sick in turn as Wells reported: "we have had one sick in the family ever since we left Andover. Mrs. W. is now better, and my boy is down."⁵¹ Mrs. Wells' illness may have been related to her pregnancy for shortly after the family's arrival in Newburyport, on 29 May 1848, her daughter Sarah Elizabeth was born. The ordeal of the journey, compounded by childbirth may have contributed to Mrs. Wells' untimely death in July 1848.⁵² William Harvey married his third wife, Lydia Sophronia Graves, at Niagara Falls during the summer of 1849.⁵³ She was the daughter of Cotton Graves of Sunderland, Massachusetts who was a veteran of the American Revolution "and a descendant of Thomas Graves, the original emigrant ancestor of 1645."⁵⁴ Three children were born to them while they were residents of Newburyport; William S. on

⁵⁰William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 23 March 1848, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁵¹William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 28 March 1848, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁵²William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 11 July 1848, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁵³William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 28 August 1849, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁵⁴William Warren Vernon, "William Harvey Wells, Sr., 1812-1885," William Harvey Wells Newspaper Clipping File, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

20 September 1850, Frances C. on 13 April 1852 and Lydia N. on 10 October 1853.⁵⁵

For six years Wells met the challenge at the Putnam Free School with the wonted ardor, dedication and enthusiasm for which he had become known. His labors at the Putnam Free School were not in vain; under Wells' leadership the school became quite successful and according to Northend the school was:

one of the most prominent attractions of the beautiful city in which it was located. From the outset, the Putnam Free School was an institution of rank and influence. It was well supplied with illustrative apparatus, and Mr. Wells gave an extended course of experiments every year, in chemistry and natural philosophy. These lectures and experiments were attended by a large number of citizens with manifest satisfaction and profit.⁵⁶

The Board of Trustees initially appropriated one thousand dollars for equipment with the understanding that more would be forthcoming as needed.⁵⁷ At his own expense, Wells procured an achromatic telescope for use at the school which he retained for his private use after leaving Newburyport.⁵⁸ He was very proud of this acquisition and expressed his excitement in a letter to Barnard:

⁵⁵Welles, History of the Welles Family, 176.

⁵⁶In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 19.

⁵⁷"Plans and Descriptions of the Putnam Free School-House, Newburyport, Mass." The American Journal of Education 23 (Sept 1863): 617.

⁵⁸In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 19.

We have now the 4th Achromatic Telescope in New England. 7 ft 3 in. focal length and $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches aperture. It is nearly three times as powerful as the one I carried to R. I. The object glass is larger than that of the black Telescope at Yale College and cost in its rough state \$70 in Paris. When ground the maker received an offer of 350 dollars for the object glass alone. The whole instrument cost me \$550. I was obliged to draw for the money from my own resources but I resolved to have a good instrument.⁵⁹

Wells was highly respected in the Newburyport community. Mrs. Louisa Parsons (Stone) Hopkins who was a student in the first class to be admitted to the Putnam Free School later became a highly respected teacher herself.⁶⁰ Since she was a student of Wells' for many years and also attained preeminence as an educator her estimation of him is worthy of note; following are excerpts from a quote in which she related her impressions of Wells:

In every direction in which his mind reached out he communicated magnetic fervor. . . . he taught us to achieve success. . . . I have never seen a man who combined the organizing ability, the administrative faculty and the personal influence for character with such earnest and philosophical method both intellectual and moral. . . . all his pupils loved and revered him. . . . He was a master builder of character. . . . Grammar was a pastime, and the clouds never gathered about it in his hands. Composition was an exciting romance. . . . In logic and mathematics, astronomy and physics, we went buoyantly through a course then equivalent to a collegiate one, under his stimulating and illuminating guidance. I do not believe any man ever taught those branches to more purpose or with more

⁵⁹William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 3 November 1848, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁶⁰William E. Sheldon, "Report of Committee on Necrology," in The Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, Session of the Year 1885 at Saratoga, N.Y., by the Association (New York: Press of J. J. Little and Co., 1886), 14.

enjoyment to his classes. . . . The discipline was unconscious and masterly.

Mr. Wells invariably addressed his pupils as "young gentlemen" and "young ladies" whether in school or out, at recess or in session. There was no insincerity or lack of respect toward any girl, whatever her degree of social position or innate refinement: his treatment of her was unfailingly loyal to her sex. He could not bear the most distant approach to looseness of manner or feeling, and every fibre of his nature vibrated to a refined courtesy.⁶¹

The Board of Trustees of the Putnam Free School also thought highly of Wells. Trustee L. F. Dimmick, felt that Wells had a well-furnished and vigorous mind. He saw Wells as enthusiastic and ardently devoted to his work. Dimmick wrote that Wells had "a rare faculty of inspiring his pupils with the like spirit of enterprise and love of study." He described Wells' instructional plan as well-balanced and comprehensive, noting that the manner in which Wells executed it caused his students to "call up and improve the deeper and stronger elements of their being." Mr. Dimmick considered Mr. Wells one of the most distinguished educators of his time.⁶²

As might be expected, Wells did not limit his time and attention solely to the school. He was a civic-minded citizen and became involved in other matters regarding the city. One such matter involved the prominent citizens of

⁶¹W. L. Pillsbury, "William Harvey Wells," in Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois. July 1, 1884-June 30, 1886. by Henry Raab, Superintendent of Public Instruction, XCIV.

⁶²In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 20.

Newburyport who wanted to enhance their city by establishing a large public library with an exceptional collection. On 7 september 1850 at a meeting of such prominent citizens a series of resolutions were adopted which favored the establishment of a public library. Wells was appointed to a committee to prepare rules and regulations for the library and to solicit funds for it.⁶³

Wells' interests and activities also extended to teacher training and in 1849 Barnard informed Wells that the state of Connecticut was considering establishing a normal school. Wells expressed his views and interest in the matter:

I am gratified to learn that my native state is at length moving in respect to Normal Schools.

I believe you understand my views and preferences in respect to the class of students with which I am to be connected. I think I have one of the pleasantest and most useful situations in New England, but I have always told you that I should not hesitate to exchange it for one in which my influence and usefulness might be still farther increased, and which would afford me an adequate support. Whether such a situation is likely to occur in Conn. you can judge better than I.⁶⁴

Wells learned during the winter of 1850 that the Connecticut legislature had decided to merge the position of principal of the normal school with the office of state superintendent of schools. Barnard offered Wells a position

⁶³Currier, History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764-1905, (facsimile of the 1909 edition), 522-523.

⁶⁴William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 28 August 1849, Henry Barnard Papers.

in the normal school but he refused, saying that he realized it was not expedient to ask the legislature to separate the two offices at such an early stage in the institution's existence and that he could not be satisfied with a subordinate position in such a school. "Even if the functions of the Principal were delegated to me, I should at best be only a substitute for the real and recognised [sic] Principal."⁶⁵ Subsequently, as Wells agonized over his decision to decline the position, he realized that Barnard's proposal was unethical, or at best improper, and he wrote to him saying: "For you to commit the duties of Principal to the hands of a substitute seems to me an evasion of the manifest intent of the law. . . ."⁶⁶

Massachusetts was well recognized as the leading state in educational reforms. While the state legislators in Connecticut were pondering the idea of providing normal schools in which to train teachers for the common schools the state of Massachusetts had forged forth and was well ahead. By the early 1850s, Massachusetts legislatures had established several normal schools. The state board of education, recognizing Wells' educational and administrative prowess, in the spring of 1854, offered him the

⁶⁵William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 6 February 1850, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁶⁶William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 12 February 1850, Henry Barnard Papers.

principalship of the Westfield State Normal School which had become vacant upon the resignation of David S. Rowe who left Massachusetts for a position in the state of New York.⁶⁷

Westfield State Normal School

The State Normal School at Westfield, Massachusetts was originally established in the town of Barre on 4 September 1839.⁶⁸ After its first principal, Professor Newman, died the school was closed "till a suitable and experienced teacher could be found to supply his place." This proved to be a more difficult task than originally perceived. In addition, a new location somewhat further west was being sought. The school re-opened on 4 September 1844 with the appointment of Reverend Emerson Davis as principal.⁶⁹

At the dedication ceremony for the new school building on 3 July 1846, Governor Briggs remarked that in and of themselves common schools were excellent but defective. He added that two new entities had come along to empower these schools to do better. These were teachers' institutes and normal schools but as much as teachers' institutes improve

⁶⁷"Personal Items," The Massachusetts Teacher, 7 (May 1857): 157.

⁶⁸William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 27 July 1855, Henry Barnard Papers. (A flyer/notice was attached to letter which described the school admission policy, terms, tuition, curriculum, etc.)

⁶⁹"Westfield State Normal School," The Common School Journal 7 (15 February 1845): 60.

the art of teaching they were too short. Governor Briggs felt that a permanent institution was required to improve the knowledge of the science of teaching and that this was embodied in the normal school.⁷⁰ This sentiment, along with a general concern for education from such an influential office, probably contributed to the state's strong lead and progress in educational matters.

Male applicants to Westfield were required to be at least seventeen years old and females at least sixteen. They had to declare an intent to teach in the public schools of the state and "present a certificate of good moral and intellectual character."⁷¹ They were examined in reading, writing, spelling, defining, grammar, geography and arithmetic. Room and board were the responsibility of the student and while tuition was free each student was required to pay a fee of three dollars per year for "incidental expenses."⁷² The state provided one thousand dollars each year to defray the expenses of those students who were in need of financial assistance. The core curriculum was quite comprehensive and included reading, etymology, geography,

⁷⁰"Dedication of Westfield State Normal Schoolhouse," The Common School Journal 8 (1 October 1846): 291-293.

⁷¹William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 27 July 1855, Henry Barnard Papers. (A flyer/notice was attached to letter which described the school admission policy, terms, tuition, curriculum, etc.)

⁷²Ibid.

physiology, English grammar and literature, history, rhetoric, bookkeeping, astronomy, moral and mental philosophies, the art of teaching and much more. There were "daily teaching exercises by the pupils, in all classes of the school besides frequent exercises . . . devoted entirely to the theory and practice of teaching." The course of study extended three terms of about twenty weeks each.⁷³

Under Wells' leadership the enrollment at Westfield State Normal increased rapidly and by summer of 1855 totaled 185, with 42 males and 143 females.⁷⁴ Of the 36 students who graduated that year one-third were males. As the enrollment increased, so too did community sentiment for a larger building as evidenced by the following:

When the normal school house was built, ten years ago, the school was very small, and the house was considered by many larger than the school would ever need; but the Normal Hall is now too small to accommodate the scholars, and the Legislature has been petitioned for aid to enlarge it. The members of the Legislative Committee, . . . promised their influence to procure the necessary state aid.⁷⁵

Public support and interest in the thriving institution was manifested in the large numbers who attended the examination exercises and comments such as: "Under the superintendence and sound instruction of its present highly

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 21.

⁷⁵"The Normal School In Westfield," The Massachusetts Teacher, 8 (8 August 1855): 255; 193.

popular and experienced Principal, William H. Wells, and his assistants, the school has attained a degree of usefulness and prosperity hitherto unexampled in its history." The examination exercises were interspersed with extemporaneous lessons taught by the students. The recitations were said to have been excellent, to have demonstrated great readiness and comprehension on the part of the students, and reflected "faithful and systematic instruction on the part of the teachers."⁷⁶

Wells implemented a system which combined practice teaching with the regular course of study rather than as a separate course towards the end. Northend thought this was worthy of note; not because it was unique to Westfield but because it received more attention at this school than at others, and because some normal schools did not attach enough importance to practice teaching especially in the lower classes. Upon entering Westfield, a student was "made to feel that all his studies and recitations must bear directly upon the main object before him;" teaching. The lessons and courses were all studied with the intent of being able to teach them. Even though they were required to learn the fundamental principles of a topic Northend added that the students knew that; "their ability to teach the principles they were studying would be regarded as the most

⁷⁶Ibid.

important part of the lesson--and that this ability would be sure to be tested at the recitation." Northend felt that Wells recognized the old adage that the best way to learn or master a subject was to prepare to teach it.⁷⁷

The study of the English language and literature was another prominent feature of the curriculum at Westfield. Wells had an intense interest in English grammar and as would be expected, the study of English was not limited to the principles of rhetoric and grammatical analysis but extended to the investigations of word and phrase origins. The Latin language was also studied for its contributions to the derivation of English rather than for proficiency in Latin.⁷⁸

Wells had gained experience in teacher training at Andover and he expanded on that by conducting and lecturing at teachers' institutes. Despite his expertise, however, Wells felt the need of counsel from others in teacher training. He wrote to several normal school teachers suggesting that a meeting be convened "for the purpose of mutual consultation and aid." His recommendation met with favor and he later sent letters of invitation to normal school principals to meet in New York at the annual meeting of the National Teachers' Association. A meeting was held

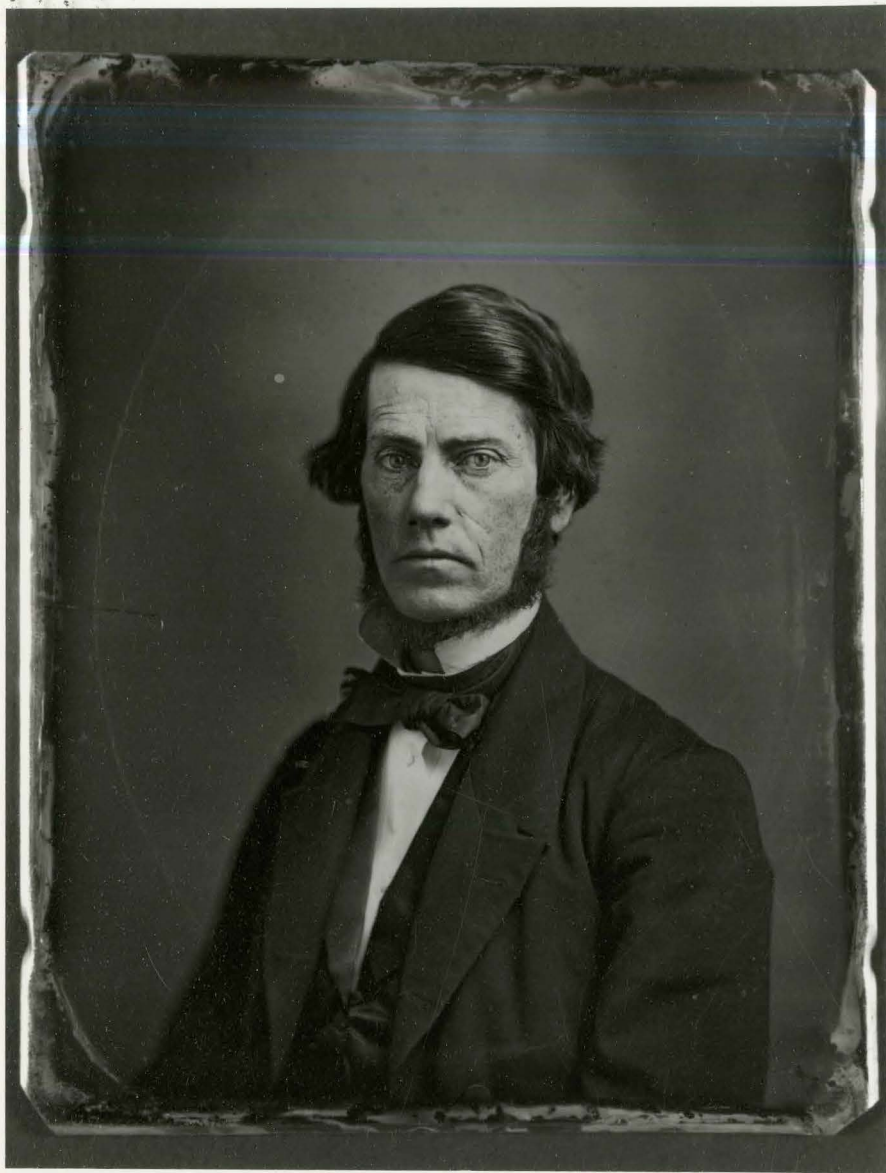
⁷⁷Ibid., 21-22.

⁷⁸Ibid.

on 30 August 1856 and from this evolved the American Normal-School Association. Wells did not remain very active in the association because in May 1856 he resigned his position at Westfield to accept the position of superintendent of the public schools in Chicago. Wells seemed to have a propensity for normal schools and teacher training as well as an ardent desire to work within these fields. After two short years in this capacity he was removed from what seemed to have been his favorite or preferred line of work. His career had advanced from the administration of a single school to that of an entire school system of a major city.⁷⁹

There is no doubt that Wells was sincerely devoted to education and teacher training. He worked diligently and unselfishly at his chosen career because he was totally committed to education as well to finding means of improving it. Education was a priority concern for him, however, he did find the time and energy to pursue other interests, and many of them with the same ardor as education. Some of Wells' other interests will be explored in the next chapter.

⁷⁹Ibid.



William Harvey Wells
Photograph from daguerreotype
by Jeremiah Gurney
New York 1859

Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society

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CHAPTER II

A MAN OF VARIED INTERESTS

Physical Traits

William Harvey Wells had many interests or curiosities some of these were directly related to his career and others remotely so. Insight into his likeness may provide greater understanding of the essence of the man. He was the subject of several biographical sketches both during his life time and afterwards. Many of these were accompanied by a photograph depicting his likeness probably because he exhibited such a striking presence. In the May 1864 issue of the Illinois Teacher a reprint of an article from the Phrenological Journal compared Wells to Horace Mann indicating that a marked resemblance existed between the two. They were similar in complexion, build, temperament, general expression, mind, and overall character. Wells was a little more than six feet tall and was considered "well built and well proportioned. The quality of his organization as a whole, including body and brain, is excellent; there is nothing coarse or gross in his composition." His hair, skin, nerve muscles and bones were characterized as soft and fine and his head was described

as; "long, high and comparatively narrow;" ¹ while his chin was portrayed as prominent and well-formed. The author detailed other physical features as follows:

[He had] a large cerebellum and a strong social nature, rendering him fond of the opposite sex--of wife, children, friends, home, and all the belongings thereto. . . . The mouth and the lips exhibit stability, decision, earnestness, and warmth of affection There is a length, breadth and fullness in the upper lip which indicates a degree of dignity not to be trifled with. The nose is ample and well formed; more after the Grecian than the Roman type, with all the marks of culture, originality, and analytical power. It is neither an aggressive nor an irritable nose, but it indicates intellectuality and taste.

The eye is large and very expressive. Color blue, and, in connection with the fine mental temperament and a highly cultivated brain, indicates a full development of language.

The hair is fine (color a dark brown), complexion between light and dark, and, without knowing the fact, we believe he is descended from Anglo-Norman stock.²

Wells' physical features were also described by an acquaintance who knew him when he, the writer, was a child. He described Wells' expression as fearless and listed some of his character traits as; sincere, frank, benevolent, "with leadership, mixed with unqualified ability. . . . Mr. Wells was a singularly handsome man notwithstanding his obvious ugliness and ruggedness of features."³

¹"William H. Wells, A.M.," Illinois Teacher, 9 (May 1864): 191.

²Ibid.

³William Warren Vernon, "William Harvey Wells, Sr., 1812-1885," William Harvey Wells Newspaper Clipping File, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

Astronomy and Telescopes

Wells acquired and developed an interest in the use of instruments with which to measure, explore or investigate. He had quite an affinity for the instrument used in astronomy as evidenced by the achromatic telescope which he purchased for use at the Putnam Free School. This curiosity has been traced to his youth when he read as much as possible about the subject. However, his study of telescopes was not limited to simply reading, but he "did his best to master the hidden depths of star lore." He managed to acquire some foreign publications which were quite sophisticated for a young man, these included such works as the astronomical and mathematical volumes of the Encyclopedia Metropolitana, the British Association's Catalogue of Stars, Symth's Celestial Cycle, and the thirty-six inch globe maps of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. He also obtained and diligently used a good quality refracting telescope with a five inch aperture.⁴

In the 1 December 1848 issue of The Massachusetts Teacher Wells wrote an article which compared the telescope at Yale College to the Lord Rosse telescope at the Imperial

⁴In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, Sketches of His Life and Character, Memorial Addresses and Proceedings and Resolutions of Public Bodies on the Occasion of His Death (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co. [1887]), 33.

Observatory in Russia and to the one in Liverpool.⁵ While collecting information about the various telescopes in the country he wrote to John Ludlow, in Philadelphia requesting information about the one at the University of Pennsylvania.⁶ Though Ludlow responded with the required information Wells did not include it in his article for he wrote only about the largest and most powerful telescopes. While at Newburyport he placed special emphasis on this topic with his students. His lessons, on the subject, always culminated with his students engaging in evening observations of the heavenly bodies and Wells required every student in the advanced classes to present at least one original calculation of an eclipse.⁷

Wells studied planetary movement but he was especially intrigued with the moon. "He watched her patiently and earnestly, not simply as a gazer, but as a man who wanted to know all about the most prominent spots on her surface."⁸ He studied the moon seriously taking copious notes and making sketches of its various phases which were accompanied

⁵William Harvey Wells, "Telescopes," The Massachusetts Teacher, 1 (1 December 1848): 367-368.

⁶William Harvey Wells, to John Ludlow, 28 September 1848, John Fries Frazer Papers, American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, PA.

⁷In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 19.

⁸Ibid., 33.

by statements of the moon's relative angle and distance from the sun at each of these observations. He lectured on astronomical topics in many places in the East but after he moved to Chicago he accepted fewer invitations to lecture on these topics.

While a resident of Chicago Wells was invited to attend an organizational meeting of men interested in building an observatory in that city. After examining their plan Wells decided it was unsatisfactory and corresponded with some of his friends in the East which resulted in sufficient knowledge to draft a satisfactory plan. Members of the committee were considering the purchase of a telescope, the Fitz refractor, which they had been led to believe was more powerful than the one at Harvard.⁹ There was some skepticism about the quality of this telescope and a committee went to Ann Arbor, Michigan where they learned it was not as powerful as had been proclaimed.¹⁰

Wells inquired as to the possibility of acquiring the largest and most powerful refracting telescope which existed at that time, and which had just been built by Alvan Clark

⁹In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 33.

¹⁰"A Short History of the Chicago Astronomical Society," prepared by the Society, n.d. 5735 W. Pensacola, Chicago, IL.

and Sons of Cambridgeport, Massachusetts.¹¹ The telescope's aperture was eighteen and one-half inches with a focal length of twenty-three feet. Shortly after a committee from the Chicago Astronomical Society visited the Clarks to discuss the purchase of the instrument its makers discovered, by chance while conducting further tests of it, the companion star to Sirius. Of course this amazing discovery made the instrument more valuable and desirable. Originally the telescope was to go to the University of Mississippi, but the eruption of the Civil War prevented the completion of the transaction. On 10 January 1863 the Chicago Astronomical Society purchased the lens for \$11,187.

Wells wrote an article on refracting telescopes which was printed in the March 1863 issue of the Illinois Teacher and also in the April 1863 issue of the Pennsylvania School Journal.¹² The article gave a brief history and a few facts about the construction of refracting telescopes. Wells also defined reflecting and refracting and described the telescope which the Chicago Astronomical Society had recently acquired and included the fact that the new

¹¹William Harvey Wells, "Refracting Telescopes," Illinois Teacher, 9 (March 1863): 81; "A Short History of the Chicago Astronomical Society," prepared by the Society, n.d. 5735 W. Pensacola, Chicago, IL.

¹²William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 20 April 1853, Henry Barnard Papers, Fales Library, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, New York, NY.

observatory was "to be established in connection with the University of Chicago."¹³

While the movement for an observatory in Chicago began in 1862; the Chicago Astronomical Society was formally chartered 15 February 1867.¹⁴ Wells became the vice-president at that time and held the office until his death; "being the only man who retained his place on the executive committee during all those years." He rendered invaluable service to the society and for a long while he managed the observatory. It was his books and charts which were used in the early days and he eased the tide of dissension which resulted from the observatory's association with the University of Chicago. The aggregate of Wells' contribution to astronomical concerns in Chicago is given by Northend as follows:

the well-known modesty of Mr. Wells preventing him from making the slightest allusion to a fact which really entitles him to rank as father of observational astronomy in Chicago.

And he was otherwise a devoted friend to astronomical study. More than one proprietor of a street telescope regarded him as a father, in the scientific sense of the term, and often applied to him for the solution of knotty problems. Many of these he answered off-hand, from the knowledge that was within him; and for the rest he would refer to the book or individual from which the desired information could be obtained.¹⁵

¹³Wells, "Refracting Telescopes," 83.

¹⁴"A Short History of the Chicago Astronomical Society," prepared by the Society, n.d. 5735 W. Pensacola, Chicago, IL.

¹⁵In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 34-35.

Wells was also attracted to mathematical instruments which included the theodolite; a surveyor's instrument used for measuring angles. While at Andover he paid special attention to practical surveying and some branches of civil engineering. He spent an inordinate amount of time with his classes, after school hours, surveying in the fields and on various farms.¹⁶

Grammar of the English Language and Dictionaries

As has been noted Wells exhibited an intense interest in English grammar. He made a hobby of collecting books on English grammar and at one time had accumulated more than two thousand volumes. Wells' extensive study and analysis of grammar of the English language evolved into a textbook; A Grammar of the English Language; for the Use of Schools which was also known as Wells' School Grammar. It was first published in 1846 with subsequent printings in 1847, 1848, 1858 and 1862.¹⁷

In the books' preface Wells explained that the work was written as the result of an English reading course which he had begun teaching to a class of teachers nine years prior. He discussed with the class all the important principles of

¹⁶Ibid., 18.

¹⁷William Harvey Wells, A Grammar of the English Language (1846), Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill, and Wardell, 1846; a photoreproduction, Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1984), XV. (page reference are to the photoreproduction.)

the English language and carefully compared definitions and rules of various grammarians. He stated: "In conducting the exercises of successive classes of teachers, a similar course has been repeated from year to year till the present time. The result of these labors is embodied in the work now offered to the public."¹⁸

Wells defined English grammar as "the art of speaking and writing the English language correctly" and a sentence as "an assemblage of words making complete sense." As much as Wells viewed grammar as an art form rather than a science his approach to its study was somewhat methodical and scientific. He encouraged teachers to write the rules of grammar on the board along with a list of words from which the students were to compose sentences. The artfulness of his approach may have been in his insistence upon the students' having ample opportunity to apply the rules of grammar. He felt it very important for students to have plenty of practice in constructing sentences and thus learning to apply the rules of grammar. He explained his rationale to the teachers as follows:

Rules may be recited very fluently without being understood, but an application of them in the construction of sentences, requires a careful attention to principles, while it also aids the learner in forming an accurate style of writing.¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 23; 119; 132.

In 1848 Wells' Elementary Grammar, or The Elements of English Grammar was published. In the preface to the latter work he stated that; "The **Shorter Course** is intended to furnish all the aid that is needed by the ordinary student in learning to speak and write well."²⁰

Wells' Grammar was very successful and enjoyed widespread use in the schools. Fifty-five hundred copies were printed for the second edition in the spring of 1846; of these more than two thousand had been ordered prior to publication. Printing of the third edition was scheduled for late June 1846, less than six months after publication of the first edition.²¹ A professor in Rochester commented to Wells in March 1846; "' I intend to have your work in all the schools of Rochester, soon as it can be brought about, . . .'"²² By 1876 more than a half-million copies of the 1846 textbook had been printed.²³ One authority on the subject thought that it was:

a most excellent and wonderful book, and calculated to give a rapid and thorough knowledge of our language wherever it may be used as a class-book. It is also admirably adapted to the wants of the private student,

²⁰William Harvey Wells, Shorter Course in English Grammar and Composition (New York and Chicago: Ivison, Blakeman, and Taylor, 1880), 3.

²¹William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 12 June 1846, Henry Barnard Papers.

²²William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 30 March 1846, Henry Barnard Papers.

²³Albert Welles, History of the Welles Family (New York: By the author, 67 University Place, 1876), 177.

who cannot find any work of its size, equally rich in essential and trustworthy information.

The enormous sale it has had is very strong evidence as to the great merits of your work.²⁴

In the fall of 1846 Wells sold half his interest in the book for six thousand dollars.²⁵

Wells' preoccupation with grammar inevitably extended to a fascination with word usage and dictionaries. In his concern for and investigations into proper word usage he consulted recognized authorities of the time. In February 1842 he wrote to Noah Webster, a noted dictionary author, to inquire about the misuse of certain words and terms which he specifically cited from an article in the Connecticut School Journal. Webster agreed with Wells with regards to the corruptions, of the English language, that were noted but indicated that some of them had become widely used and therefore acceptable.²⁶ Wells received a letter in April 1857 from dictionary publishers, George and Charles Merriam, in which they enclosed an acknowledgement of his contribution to Webster's Dictionary. Apparently the recognition was to appear in the dictionary itself and read;

²⁴Arnold J. Cooley, to William Harvey Wells, ALS, 21 June 1873, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago.

²⁵William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 2 November 1846, Henry Barnard Papers.

²⁶Noah Webster, to William Harvey Wells, ALS, 17 February 1842, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago.

"To W. H. Wells, . . . I am indebted for important suggestions relative to pronunciation. These have been embodied in the work and they add much to its value."²⁷ As with any endeavor, Wells pursued the study of dictionaries with fervor and he seemed obsessed with the proper usage of the language; in 1873 George and Charles Merriam wrote; "you are entering so enthusiastically into the science of Lexicography, we are having one of our Large Paper copies of Webster, in 2 vols prepared to send you. It will be convenient for marginal notations."²⁸ Just as Wells wrote to Webster seeking his opinion and advice he wrote to a British authority on the English language to the same end. In the 1870s he engaged in a mutual correspondence with Arnold Cooley of London, England. In May 1873 Wells inquired as to the present usage and prevailing tendencies in orthography in England. Cooley's response included the use of the double consonant in words such as; traveller.²⁹

Wells conducted lengthy investigations and research into the study of dictionary-production which culminated in a series of articles on the topic. These were printed in

²⁷G and C Merriam, to William Harvey Wells, ALS, 14 April 1857, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago.

²⁸G and C Merriam, to William Harvey Wells, ALS, 3 June 1873, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Joseph Regenstein Library.

²⁹Arnold J. Cooley, to William Harvey Wells, ALS, 21 June 1873, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Joseph Regenstein Library.

The Dial of Chicago in May and October 1883 and April 1884. In these he compared and contrasted the quality of definitions used in several dictionaries during the period from 1730 to 1882. Wells also defined encyclopaedic dictionaries, discussed them generally, and specifically named a few. In a major portion of the series called "The Philological" he discussed the "Age of Dictionaries" in Great Britain. This term was used to describe the period roughly between 1825 and 1880 and Wells examined the history and contributions of The Philological Society of London to the progress of dictionary-making.³⁰

Professionalism

When Wells was truly interested in a cause he pursued it with zeal and such was the case with his devotion to professional development. It was not merely a passing fancy for he was actively engaged in this endeavor for several decades. One can readily determine that when William Harvey Wells was expressly interested in a matter he was not content simply to read the literature or discuss its merits with his colleagues; his interest was manifested in active pursuit or participation. His professional development activities included involvement in professional organizations, and he began attending the conventions of professional associations in 1830, at the tender age of

³⁰In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 105-128.

eighteen.³¹ At this time he participated in local, city and county meetings and conventions to pursue his endeavor to promote the cause of popular education. He was not simply an attendee at these professional meetings; at times he would lecture or actively engage in discussions of significant topics. He subscribed to several professional journals and quite often submitted articles for publication.

Wells was especially concerned with Barnard's American Journal of Education. Within his many correspondences to Henry Barnard he would discuss the value of such a periodical, its impending fate and his efforts to support the journal by donating money, contributing articles, and recruiting new subscribers. He often conducted self-imposed and seemingly one-man campaigns to help the journal survive. He acted as an informal agent for the journal and it is likely that he was perceived as an official staff member for he was approached by subscribers who reported problems with their subscriptions or who simply wanted to remit renewal fees. Wells would relay these messages to Henry Barnard or his publisher; one such letter, to Barnard on the topic, contained the following passage:

³¹Charles H. Keyes, "Henry Barnard's Home Life and His Work and Influence Upon Education as Commissioner of Connecticut and Rhode Island," in The Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the NEA held at Detroit, Michigan July 8-12, 1901, (Published by the Association, printed Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1901), 402.

Permit me to recall the subject of your Journal of Education, alluded to in one of my last letters. You cannot be expected to continue the Journal without renumeration beyond the ten volumes proposed in your advertisement at the close of the 5th volume, and the educational world has no claim to the sacrifices you are making to continue the ten volumes: but there are not a few who will regard it a national loss to have it suspended at any time. . . . It ought to be fully and cordially sustained as it is; and I am exceedingly mortified that no more copies are taken in Chicago. I have spoken of it at our City Institutes; called the attention of our teachers to it particularly in my Report for 1858-9; and I have spoken of its claims repeatedly and publicly at our State Institute. It is by no means true that there are no more teachers who can afford to pay the \$4.00, and it seems to me that Mr. Sherwood or any other efficient agent who would go directly to all our teachers in person might secure a list of at least ten subscribers--I should hope would. But I have presumed to offer one or two suggestions³²

Wells continued with a suggestion to have a man compile educational news from the state journals and other sources. He noted that Harper's Magazine had done something similar and that it had "been one of the special and well played cards of the work,--thus furnishing a brief history of the time?"³³

There were at least two other suggestions which Wells repeatedly offered and implored Barnard to consider, for he was certain that they would greatly increase the journal's circulation. First, he thought that Barnard should hire an agent whose sole responsibility would be to travel across

³²William Harvey Wells, to F. B. Perkins, 10 November 1859, Henry Barnard Papers; William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 9 April 1860, Henry Barnard Papers.

³³Ibid.

the country and solicit subscriptions face-to-face.

secondly, he felt that Barnard should have an established firm publish the journal rather than to continue doing so himself. He told Barnard:

it seems to me that you should have some efficient business house in more immediate charge of that department. You could still prepare and own the plates, copyright and stock. . . . This was the course adopted by Prescott in preparing his histories. Neither you nor I have now to learn that nineteen-twentieths of the authors who have published their own works have lost money by the operation.³⁴

He continued to work to keep the journal abreast by lauding its merits, both specifically and generally, and soliciting subscriptions.

With his forceful personality and zealous desire to provide as much support to professional development as humanly possible Wells was not content to simply attend meetings or be a passive member; he became a leader and organizer. For several years he was a very active member and officer of the Essex County Teachers' Association in Massachusetts. He faithfully attended the associations' semi-annual meetings always searching for ways to make them more practical and interesting. Wells' long-standing friendship with Charles Northend began at this time and he later had the following to say about Wells:

While president of this association, he offered prizes for essays on educational subjects, to be read at the semi-annual meetings. These premiums he paid from his

³⁴William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 11 July 1860, Henry Barnard Papers.

own resources. It is not too much to say, that Mr. Wells' influence will be felt for good in this association for scores of years to come--a perpetuating good.³⁵

Wells was one of the founders of the Massachusetts Teachers' Association which was organized around 1845. At the first meeting which was held in Worcester Wells was chosen one of the councilors. He was quite outstanding in the early proceedings, "submitting a series of resolutions on school discipline, of a strong and wholesome character, which were unanimously adopted."³⁶ He was one of the projectors and early editors of The Massachusetts Teacher which began 1 January 1848. The journal was originally published twice monthly with a different editor for each issue. Wells was editor of the second and twelfth numbers of the first volume; 15 January 1848 and 15 June 1848, respectively. In the latter issue he printed one of the prize essays from the Essex Teachers' County Association; "How to Teach and Learn Geography," which was written by a female teacher.³⁷

³⁵In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 20.

³⁶William E. Sheldon, "Report of Committee on Necrology," in The Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, Session of the Year 1885 at Saratoga, N.Y., by the Association (New York: Press of J. J. Little and Co., 1886), 14.

³⁷"How to Teach and Learn Geography," The Massachusetts Teacher 1 (15 June 1848): 177.

Indicative of his quest to support teachers and education Wells also printed in the twelfth number a list of books and periodicals devoted to the cause of popular education. He introduced the list by commenting that it was the best service the journal could offer its readers in that teachers often had difficulties finding the best sources of information relating to their professional duties.³⁸ He also edited the November 1855 issue which was the eleventh number of volume eight; by this time the journal had become a monthly. The issue contained articles on topics towards which Wells was very partial such as; astronomy, self-dependence, self-education, punctuality, the Normal Teachers' Association, and many others. The authors of most of these articles were not listed, and it is likely that as editor Wells wrote many of them himself.

At the sixth annual meeting of the association in 1850, Wells gave a lecture entitled "The Importance of Cultivating Self-Reliance on the Part of the Pupil."³⁹ Wells was elected president of the Massachusetts Teachers' Association at its seventh annual meeting in Fitchburg on 24 November 1851 and again the following year. During his second term as president the annual meeting was held at Faneuil Hall in

³⁸"Educational Library," The Massachusetts Teacher 1 (15 June 1848): 181-187.

³⁹"Massachusetts State Teachers' Association: Preliminary Conventions and Associations," The American Journal of Education 15 (September 1865): 514.

Boston in the fall of 1853. In his presidential remarks Wells commented upon the gracious support of the state legislature to the association. He also enumerated and elaborated on some of the negative aspects of education which included; complacent teachers who do not seek professional improvement or those who teach lessons mechanically or repetitively without any additional preparation from year to year. He cited as sources of these "evils" large class sizes which make the teacher's job so "arduous . . . that they have no strength left, at the close of school hours, either for personal improvement, or for review of lessons to be heard on the following day."⁴⁰

Wells was also a very active member of the American Institute of Instruction which was one of the first national educational associations formed. It was organized in 1830 by men from varying professions and parts of the country who endeavored to "awaken the public mind on the subject of Education, and to present teachers the conclusions of thought and experience on the important work in which they

⁴⁰"Massachusetts Teachers' Association: Seventh Annual Meeting," The Massachusetts Teacher 5 (January 1852): 24; "Massachusetts Teachers' Association: Eight Annual Meeting," The Massachusetts Teacher 6 (January 1853): 23; Chas J. Capen, "Opening Address of Mr. Wells, Before The Massachusetts Teachers' Association, at Their Late Meeting in Faneuil Hall," The Massachusetts Teacher 7 (January 1854): 17-19.

engaged."⁴¹ For several years Wells served as one of the many vice-presidents of the organization. At the twenty-sixth annual meeting held in Bath, Maine on 21 August 1855 Wells was appointed one of three delegates to attend a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Education which was to be held in New York on 28-31 August 1855.⁴²

Wells made frequent use of his lecture on "Self-Reliance"; as previously noted he had an experience with this trait early in life after which it became especially significant to him. At the twenty-third annual meeting of the American Institute of Instruction, held at the Athenaeum Building in Troy, New York on 6 August 1852; Wells delivered his lecture on "Self-Reliance." His purpose was to illustrate to teachers "the fatal error into which [they] often fall"⁴³ by making lessons too easy for their students. Wells contended that this practice weakened the student's reliance upon his own powers and subsequently retarded his progress. He said that teachers should encourage students to use their minds to solve problems which would strengthen

⁴¹T. Cushing, Jr., "American Institute of Instruction," The Common School Journal 5 (1 August 1843): 239.

⁴²"American Institute of Instruction, Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting," The Massachusetts Teacher 8 (October 1855): 305.

⁴³"Meeting of the American Institute of Instruction," The Massachusetts Teacher 5 (September 1852): 275.

it and promote progress and future effort. Wells also condemned "the principle of scholars assisting each other [and] publishing keys." He thought that these elements weakened the student's self-reliance on his mental power and the teacher's as well. He provided anecdotal support for this and other opinions rendered.⁴⁴

The increased responsibility which Wells shouldered with his move to Chicago in 1856 did not cause him to waver in his commitment to professionalism. He became active in professional and civic organizations locally and statewide. He was one of the first members of the Illinois State Board of Education which was formed in 1857 for the purpose of organizing the first state Normal University in Illinois for which Wells rendered invaluable assistance. He was elected to serve a six year term on the board during which he contributed greatly to the cause of popular education in Illinois. He also served on the Boards of the Chicago Public Library, the Chicago Academy of Science and the Chicago Historical Society. Wells was an avid historian and concerned with the preservation of history and historical documents. In October 1877 he wrote to Albert D. Hager, who was then secretary of the Chicago Historical Society, to offer "a package of English Education Reports." In 1879 he

⁴⁴Ibid.

offered a set of antiquarian books, and in 1884 Hitchcock's two volume report on the geology of Massachusetts.⁴⁵

The roots of the Illinois State Teachers' Association can be traced to the Illinois State Education Society which was formed in February 1841; "'to promote by all laudable means, the diffusion of knowledge in regard to education; and, . . . to render the system of common schools throughout the State as perfect as possible.'"⁴⁶ The association evolved through several conventions and name changes. In the fall of 1853 three men who shared common interests met accidentally and engaged in a spirited conversation about schooling. They were Henry H. Lee, principal of the Garden City Institute in Chicago; James A. Hawley of Dixon, an agent for an eastern book publisher; and Daniel Wilkins, president of the Central Illinois Female Institute at Bloomington. They sought the support of the ex-officio state superintendent of common schools in organizing an educational convention which was subsequently held on 26 December 1853 at Bloomington. It was attended by teachers, superintendents, school commissioners and others interested

⁴⁵William Harvey Wells, to Albert D. Hager, 2 October 1877, Wells Collection, Manuscript Collection, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago; William Harvey Wells, to Albert D. Hager, 25 February 1879, Wells Collection; William Harvey Wells, to Albert D. Hager, 4 February 1884, Wells Collection.

⁴⁶"Illinois State Teachers' Association," The American Journal of Education 16 (March 1866): 160-161.

in popular education; the Illinois State Teachers' Association was formally organized, a constitution was adopted and officers were elected.⁴⁷

At the associations' third annual meeting, held in Chicago on 22 December 1856, Wells delivered a lecture on the "Science of Teaching." He suggested that teachers study the laws of nature and thought that, "The teacher who fully understands the successive steps by which Newton and Milton attained their greatness is a teacher in the true sense of the term." Wells declared attention to be the most important intellectual power and that intellectual attainments were formed through habit. He advocated the use of review to aid retention and thought it was wiser for the teacher to go over less material and help students to carefully learn what was covered. Recognizing the importance of teacher training he discussed normal schools.⁴⁸

At the seventh annual meeting of the Illinois State Teachers' Association, held on 26 December 1860 in Quincy, Wells was elected president. The following year, in Bloomington on 26 December 1861, he spoke on the "History of

⁴⁷George Propeck and Irving F. Pearson, The History of the Illinois Education Association (Springfield, IL: by the association, 100 East Edwards Street, 1961), 32.

⁴⁸"Proceedings of the State Teachers' Association," Illinois Teacher 3 (January 1857): 11-12.

Education."⁴⁹ He discussed several firsts in this country; the first teachers' seminary to be established, the first educational journal, the first normal school, and the first teachers' institute. Additionally, he talked about early professional organizations, the history of corporal punishment, and Pestalozzi and object teaching. The ninth annual meeting of the association was held 31 December 1862 in Rockford and Wells' lecture was entitled "Orthoepy and its Representatives." He thought that correct pronunciation and articulation were best taught along with reading and sound analysis which would provide a clear understanding of the fundamental sounds of the English language. He alluded to the fact that this system would be enhanced as the compilers of dictionaries responded to this new trend of working with word analysis. He described the contents of these forthcoming dictionaries at length and reportedly said that "as soon as lexicographers could revise and change their system of marking we would have what we need."⁵⁰

Four years after the founding of the Illinois State Teachers' Association the National Teachers' Association, which eventually became the National Educational Association, was organized in 1857 at a meeting held in

⁴⁹"Illinois State Teachers' Association," The American Journal of Education 16 (March 1866): 161.

⁵⁰S. A. Briggs, "Illinois State Teachers' Association: Ninth Annual Meeting," Illinois Teacher 9 (February 1863): 44.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The founding fathers felt the need for a national organization that would provide teachers the opportunity to share, combine and disseminate their knowledge and ideas, and raise educational standards. The meeting was sponsored by the presidents of ten state teachers' organizations and was called to order by Thomas Valentine, president of the New York association. The attendance was meager but not discouraging to these determined men. Valentine summed up their aspirations by saying:

What we want is an association that shall embrace all the teachers of our whole country, which shall hold its meeting at such central points as shall accommodate all sections and combine all interests.⁵¹

The three subsequent meetings were increasingly successful but the association was not able to compete with the disappointments and hardships placed upon Americans by the Civil War. The 1861 and 1862 meetings were cancelled because it had "become apparent that in consequence of the war excitement a successful meeting could not be secured."⁵² However, in 1863 members of the Illinois State Teachers' Association were not content to allow another annual meeting to be cancelled. They saw no reason why a meeting should not be held especially since their state association

⁵¹Edgar B. Wesley, NEA: The First Hundred Years (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), 3; 22.

⁵²"Editors' Table: The National Teachers' Association," Illinois Teacher 9 (June 1863): 195.

meetings continued to attract large enthusiastic groups of teachers. Wells joined the committee of arrangements and was quite anxious to re-convene the annual meetings of the National Teachers' Association.⁵³ Under Wells' leadership the association attracted an estimated sixteen hundred to two thousand teachers in Chicago for the meeting on 5-7 August 1863. The men of the West were correct, there was no reason for the association to continue to cancel its meetings. The teachers wanted the support and counsel offered by these national meetings and expressed the same with their record attendance. As a member of the arrangements committee and superintendent of the school system of the hosting city Wells welcomed the teachers recognizing each section or state in turn along with the great educators in each. Near the close of this meeting he was elected president of the association.⁵⁴

Plans for the next meeting of the association were delayed due to lack of a site. The directors initially decided that the 1864 meeting should be held in Detroit, Michigan if an invitation were offered; but none came. The directors subsequently proposed "that the meeting should be held at some Eastern point." Again members of the Illinois

⁵³Ibid., 196.

⁵⁴Wesley, NEA: The First Hundred Years, 32; "Editors' Table: National Teachers' Association," Illinois Teacher 9 (September 1863): 295.

state Teachers' Association expressed concern for the annual meeting of the National Teachers' Association; in the June 1864 journal one of the editors wrote:

The meeting of this year seems likely to go by default, no one in the East, where it must be held, being interested enough in its success to look up a place of meeting.⁵⁵

Wells scolded educators in general and Detroit's educators in particular for not extending an invitation for the meeting. The meeting was held in Ogdensburg, New York, 10-12 August 1864. The difficulties which the association encountered in locating a suitable site for the meeting caused a delay in announcements and notices. This was compounded by a disruption of transportation caused by the war and resulted in a poorly attended meeting at Ogdensburg.⁵⁶

For his presidential address Wells delivered; "Methods of Teaching English Grammar." He started with a few brief comments about the organization itself which included a discussion of the "grand patriarch of all American Educational Associations, the American Institute of Instruction."⁵⁷ Then Wells engaged in a lengthy oratory

⁵⁵"Editors' Table: National Teachers' Association; Arrangement for Teachers' Exercises," Illinois Teacher 10 (June 1864): 284; 277.

⁵⁶Wesley, NEA: The First Hundred Years, 35.

⁵⁷"Methods of Teaching English Grammar: Introductory Address Before the American Teachers' Association, at Ogdensburg, New York, August 10, 1864, by W. H. Wells, President of the Association," The American Journal of

about the teaching of English Grammar. His comments and suggestions paralleled those in his textbook thus emphasizing the importance of allowing students practical experiences; to write and discuss those principles of grammar which they had been taught.⁵⁸

William Harvey Wells was an active, thoroughly engaged, Christian and family man. Though he was passionately devoted to education he also ardently pursued other related interests. He sometimes contributed his personal funds to causes for which he had intense emotional concerns. He was a respected educator, leader, organizer and a true friend of the teacher. This friendship was manifested in his fervent desire to improve the teacher's plight in any way he could for he knew that this would directly impact upon education in general and student achievement in particular. He felt strongly that simply imparting knowledge was not the most important mission of teachers "but rather to rouse and call forth the pupil's own energies. He well knew what obstacles lie in the scholar's path, and also how to surmount them."⁵⁹ He worked with diligence and sincerity for nearly half a century to improve the educational advantages of this

Education 15 (March 1865): 145.

⁵⁸Ibid., 145-154.

⁵⁹In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 28.

nation's youth and children of the Chicago Public Schools were the fortunate recipients of his concern and expertise.

CHAPTER III

THE LEGACY OF WILLIAM HARVEY WELLS TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHICAGO

The labors of William Harvey Wells were performed with devotion and were motivated by a strong emotional attachment to his chosen career. Everywhere he worked and in every endeavor that he pursued he left a mark, a legacy, a gift. His tenure in the public schools of Chicago was no exception for indeed his impact upon them was felt for more than twenty-five years. According to one writer, Wells left "a mark upon Chicago schools deeper than that of any other man in their history."¹ His legacy to the Chicago schools can better be appreciated with a glimpse at the condition of the system prior to his arrival. It is for this reason that a discussion regarding the creation of the office of superintendency is offered along with Wells' predecessor in that office.

¹Hannah B. Clark, The Public Schools of Chicago: A Sociological Study, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1897), 21.

THE OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The 4 March 1837 charter of the city of Chicago placed all corporate power in a body called the Common Council which consisted of a mayor and ten aldermen. The charter granted to the men of the Common Council total administrative control over the several entities in Chicago including the public schools. Section eighty-three of the charter stated:

That the Common Council of the city of Chicago, shall by virtue of their office, be Commissioners of Common Schools in and for the said city, and shall have and possess all the rights, powers, and authority necessary for the proper management of said schools.²

The day to day operations of the public schools were directed by seven unsalaried school inspectors appointed by the council. Their duties included examination of teacher applicants, selection of textbooks, provision of adequate quality and quantity of school buildings, regular visits to the schools and equitable distribution of the monies from the school fund.³

As early as 1841, the committee on schools of the Common Council recognized the need for a single person to manage the school system if it were to be done properly, and

²Joan Marie Duck Raymond, "The Evolution of the Chicago Public School Superintendency" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1967), 45.

³Mary J. Herrick, The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1971), 24.

they reported these sentiments to the council on 14 January 1841. This recommendation went unheeded for more than a decade. The legislative and administrative bodies of Chicago were engaged in an activity that eventually became a part of the history and tradition of Chicago politics: the struggle for political power. Chicago was a rapidly growing metropolis, its population was increasing so dramatically that according to one author, "every powerful adjective of the movie industry would not be too strong to use for description; it was tremendous and colossal!"⁴ With this increase in population there was much political power to be had and the attention of the members of the Common Council was directed to this end. Thus, the needs of the public schools of Chicago were not uppermost in their minds.

As the population of Chicago increased so too did the size and demands of its school system. In 1853, the Common Council could no longer continue to look the other way, for the fate of the city rested in their hands. It finally became apparent to them that the school system was not serving the needs of Chicago's youth. They followed the lead of many northeastern cities and in November 1853 passed an ordinance creating the office of superintendent of

⁴Evelyn F. Carlson, A Great City and State: The Story of Chicago and Illinois (Chicago: The King Company, 1947), 178.

schools to provide structure and centralization of the school system.⁵

The ordinance specifically defined the duties and responsibilities of the superintendent who was to be under the auspices of the Board of School Inspectors. The superintendent was required to devote himself exclusively to the duties of his office; to visit the public schools as often as possible; to address the issue of classification of the students; and, to implement improvements and remedies in problem areas. Additionally, the superintendent was to attend all meetings of the Board of School Inspectors, serve as secretary of that body, and keep them informed of the condition of the schools. He was to keep a record of his activities which was to be available to the Inspectors at all times and at the end of each school year prepare a report detailing the general condition of the schools. The ordinance also required the superintendent to carefully observe the public school teachers and report those found to be incompetent to the board.⁶

The Board of School Inspectors looked to the northeast for the man they thought best suited to handle the

⁵Raymond, "The Evolution of the Chicago Public School Superintendency", 50.

⁶Chicago, IL, First Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, by John C. Dore, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of School Inspectors (Chicago: Democrat Book and Job Office, 1854), 3-4.

formidable task of providing order and unity for the public schools of Chicago. There were at least two reasons for this; first it was a well accepted fact that New England produced the best educators; and secondly, many of these men had migrated from that area themselves. Their first choice was John Philbrick, principal of the State Normal School, New Britain, Connecticut, who incidentally was a good friend of William Harvey Wells. Philbrick declined and the position was offered to John C. Dore, principal of the Boylston Grammar School in Boston. He accepted the position and was appointed by the Common Council on 6 March 1854 and took office in June 1854.⁷

Dore found the schools in Chicago in amazing disarray some of which he described in his first annual report:

In some schools the want of system and proper classification was so great, that the same pupils attended one department in the forenoon and the other in the afternoon. No class books or general registers of admissions and discharges of pupils were kept, and it was utterly impossible to tell what pupils did or did not belong to the Schools at any given time except by their presence. The classification was so imperfect in the Primary Departments in particular, that in consequence of pupils reciting in very small divisions in the recitation rooms, and there being no more than one division in those rooms at the same time, about as

⁷Chicago, IL, Proceedings of the Common Council, "Appointment of John C. Dore to the Office of Superintendent of Public Schools," Box 109, Document 1612, 6 March 1854, Illinois Regional Archives Depository System, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago.

much time was consumed in going to and from the recitation rooms as in teaching.⁸

Dore made impressive improvements in the public schools of Chicago during his first year as superintendent. He implemented a system of promotion which heretofore was done arbitrarily at the whim of the principal. The new system used the student's achievement, on examinations, as the criterion for promotion. He personally administered these general examinations and the results were used to classify the students according to some level of achievement.⁹ Other changes and improvements instituted by Dore included classification of the schools and leveling of classes so that each teacher had approximately the same number of students. The teachers were provided with books in which to place class rosters and keep daily and accurate records of attendance, conduct and recitations. Dore recognized that education was not a priority for many Chicago residents and cited the "migratory character of the pupils" as one of the reasons for widespread truancy and recommended a truancy law to remedy this situation.

He implored the Board of School Inspectors to recommend the establishment of a high school to the Common Council: "When the High School shall be established, . . . the gradation of the Schools will be complete, viz: Primary,

⁸First Annual Report, 5-6.

⁹Herrick, The Chicago Schools, 38.

Grammar, High School, . . ." He felt the high school would motivate the students in the primary and grammar schools by giving them a goal towards which they could endeavor. He supported this rationale as follows:

Children are always anxious to be promoted from low classes to higher, and delighted to be promoted from Schools of a lower grade to a higher grade. In their minds special honor attaches to every upward movement.¹⁰

The Common Council passed the ordinance establishing the Chicago High School on 12 February 1855 and Dore proclaimed it as the "first important event in the history" of the school system.¹¹

In his second annual report he cited several other improvements. Beginning with a discussion of new school buildings, Dore then noted extraordinary progress in six instructional areas; spelling and definitions, reading, English grammar, arithmetic, geography, and penmanship. He felt that the instructional progress along with improvements in discipline contributed to some parents removing their children from private schools and enrolling them in the public schools. According to Dore, the public schools of Chicago had attained such a reputation that when people from

¹⁰First Annual Report, 7; 9; 10.

¹¹Proceedings of the Common Council, "Ordinance to Establish a Pubic Male and Female High School in Chicago," Box 130, Document 1870B, 12 February 1855, Illinois Regional Archives Depository System.

other cities visited they made certain to stop into one of the schools.¹²

Albert G. Lane, who subsequently became a superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools said that: "Mr. Dore had been a mighty factor in bringing success to the efforts to organize a complete educational system including a high school." He was riding high on the tides of success but something happened to suddenly end it all for on 15 March 1856 Dore resigned after serving fewer than two years as superintendent. Little was mentioned about the reasons for Dore's sudden resignation, but it is possible that it was related to the charges brought against him for incompetency and mismanagement.¹³

On 29 October 1855, Alderman Samuel Ashton informed the Common Council of the alleged mismanagement of the school system by Dore: he had used outside business interests, which were expressly forbidden by the ordinance that created the office of superintendent. A special committee was formed to investigate these charges and Ashton was appointed

¹²Chicago, IL, Second Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools for 1855, by John C. Dore, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of School Inspectors (Chicago: Daily Democrat Print, 1856), 5; 9-11.

¹³Albert G. Lane, "History of the Schools in Chicago," Handwritten Manuscript, circa 1901, Albert G. Lane Collection, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

chairman.¹⁴ After two weeks, when Ashton had not scheduled a meeting of the special committee, the two other members met without him on 17 November 1855. They asked the mayor to assist them in examining witnesses. On 26 November 1855, they reported to the council that the charges against Dore were unfounded and "that Mr. Dore has been guilty of no neglect of duty nor been engaged in any other business calculated to take or distract his attention from the duties of his office." The committee praised Dore's efforts in superintending the public schools of Chicago and condemned the malicious persons who sought to malign his character and reputation.¹⁵

Although Dore was cleared of all charges, it is likely that the strain of the ordeal combined with his realization of the damage to his credibility, precipitated his resignation fewer than six months later. Whatever the reason for his resignation it is certain that he had a positive impact upon the schools in Chicago for the school system which he left did not resemble the chaotic and

¹⁴Proceedings of the Common Council, "Rep. of Alderman Ashton on Charges Against J. C. Dore, Superintendent of Public Schools," Box 150, Document 1605, 26 November 1855, Illinois Regional Archives Depository System.

¹⁵Proceedings of the Common Council, "Report Special Committee Relative to the Management of J. C. Dore, Superintendent of Public Schools," Box 150, Document 1557, 17 November 1855, Illinois Regional Archives Depository System.

unproductive one which he had found.

THE SUPERINTENDENCY OF WILLIAM HARVEY WELLS

Once again the Board of School Inspectors looked to New England for a master educator to manage their school system. They found the qualities they sought in the person of William Harvey Wells, principal of the Westfield State Normal School in Massachusetts. Wells began his duties in Chicago in May 1856 with a sincere desire to give all the children of Chicago the best education possible. He brought with him the benefits of experience as a teacher trainer and the zeal and enthusiasm of a truly progressive educator. Though Dore had laid the foundation and started the process of transforming the Chicago schools into a systematic structure in which teaching and learning could actually occur, there was still much to be done. Wells assumed the task adroitly and systematically built upon the foundation set by Dore. It must be noted that Dore's contributions to the public schools of Chicago did not cease when he decided to resign; "He was instrumental in securing Mr. Wells as his successor . . . and greatly aided Mr. Wells in his work." In addition, Dore was immediately appointed to the Board of School Inspectors; he served for seven years, and was president in 1861.¹⁶

¹⁶Lane, "History of the Schools in Chicago."

The High School

Wells' first chore was to organize the Chicago High School which was scheduled to open in September 1856. Dore had provided much of the basic design for the school detailing the location and plans for the building, the admission criteria, and more. Finalizing and implementing these plans were left to Wells. The high school was to admit both boys and girls and would be the first one in this country to provide for the education of both sexes in one building. Wells noted that "No other city in the Union has so early in its history manifested such liberality in the endowment of a High School for both sexes." He also thought the Common Council had exhibited wisdom in their decision to admit girls to the high school which was evidenced by the "number and character of the girls . . . admitted."¹⁷

Wells' procedure for conduct of the admission examination to the high school carefully guarded the identity of each candidate to insure objectivity on the part of the teachers responsible for grading and scoring. Wells designed and implemented an elaborate system for determining each candidates' eligibility by computing composite averages for the seven examination areas and then re-assessing the work of those candidates who were just below and above the

¹⁷Chicago, IL, Third Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of School Inspectors (Chicago: Daily Times Book and Job Print, 1857), 12-13.

acceptable standards. This process was very important to him, and he explained it in great detail in his first annual report, as follows:

To render the result of the examination still more reliable, the Principal of the school and the Superintendent select the papers of all the candidates whose general averages are within five or ten percent of the lowest rank admitted, whether above or below, and revise all the estimates with special care. This course ensures uniformity in the standard of judging, and also the correction of any slight errors that may have occurred in estimating the answers of any candidate who could possibly be affected by such an error. The names of the candidates are never seen by anyone, from the time they are received on the morning of the examination, till after this revision of estimates and the final decision of the Board.¹⁸

On 15 July 1856, 158 candidates were examined in reading, writing, spelling, grammar, geography, arithmetic, and United States history and 114 of these were admitted to the high school.¹⁹

The ordinance which established the high school restricted the admission of students who were not Chicago residents or who had not previously been enrolled in the public schools. In addition, candidates for admission were required to be at least twelve years old. The ordinance also provided that the high school would have three departments; classical, English high, and normal.²⁰ Wells organized these as distinct units under one principal,

¹⁸Ibid., 16.

¹⁹Ibid., 19.

²⁰Second Annual Report, 6-7.

Charles A. Dupee, a Yale graduate, who had taught in a Chicago school for several months.²¹

The course of study in the English high department was quite comprehensive and in Wells' 1856 report he listed thirty-two subjects including; arithmetic, trigonometry, botany, music, history, geography, surveying, bookkeeping, French or German, rhetoric, logic, science and English literature. Four years of attendance was necessary for graduation from this department.²²

The classical department was designed to prepare students for college and the course of study included many of the same topics as the English high department. However, it omitted subjects such as surveying, navigating, bookkeeping, science, rhetoric and logic and included Greek and Latin grammar and composition. Three years of attendance were required for graduation.

The purpose of the normal department was expressly to prepare female teachers for the primary and grammar schools. The minimum age for admission was fifteen and the young ladies were required to attend two years in order to graduate. Several of the topics from the English high

²¹Illinois, Second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois, for the Years 1857-8, by William H. Powell, superintendent of public instruction (Springfield, IL: Bailhache and Baker, Printers, 1859), 303.

²²Third Annual Report, 22-24.

department were also included in the normal department's course of study with the exception of topics such as surveying, navigation, logic, and economy. French and German were optional and the students were required to study the theory and practice of teaching.²³

The Normal Department

According to Herrick, a historian of the Chicago Public Schools, normal training was one of Wells' primary goals and within two years the high school "was sending back into the Chicago schools a few teachers with at least some training for their work."²⁴ These few did make a difference since the schools were in dire need of teachers and especially those actually trained and qualified to teach. However, in 1859 Wells reported that the normal department was not meeting all of its expectations. The teachers which it produced were excellent, but they were too few in number to justify the expense. He explained that one of the problems was the minimum age required for admission and recommended that it be changed from fifteen to sixteen. Additionally, he thought that the examination for candidates to the normal department should be different from the classical and English departments. He recommended that a separate examination for the normal department be given and that

²³Ibid., 22-29.

²⁴Herrick, The Chicago Schools, 41.

"pupils be received at other times than the two regular periods of examination."²⁵

In 1859 Luther Haven, who was then president of the board of education, expressed concern with the normal department of the High School, noting that it failed to meet the board's expectations.²⁶ He cited the following weaknesses: the age and maturity of the students were such that conditions would not improve; the normal department was only operating at about 75 percent capacity; and, many of the students enrolled "have no special adaptation to the profession of teaching." He suggested that the high school be placed under the special supervision of the superintendent who would have authority to implement any changes he deemed necessary. Haven added that Wells' "experience and success in conducting one of the Normal Schools of Massachusetts are a sufficient guarantee that our

²⁵Chicago, IL, Department of Instruction, Fifth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1859, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Book and Job Printing Office of Scott and Co., 1859), 45-46.

²⁶On 14 February 1857 the new city charter of Chicago provided for replacement of the seven member Board of School Inspectors with fifteen School Inspectors, who were to be called the Board of Education, Chicago, IL, Rules of the Board of Education, of the City of Chicago, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of Education (Chicago: Daily Press Printing House, 1858), 3.

own Normal School would not suffer under his direction."²⁷
 This vote of confidence in Wells proved quite fruitful and the normal department improved continually thereafter.

In the 1859 "Report of the Principal of the Chicago High School", which was incorporated in the superintendent's report, Dupee commented that the average age of the students in the normal department had been steadily decreasing and would probably continue to do so unless the admission requirements changed. He further noted that many of the students would be too young to be hired as teachers upon completion of the course of study.²⁸ Thus, it seems that Haven, Dupee and Wells were all concerned with the maturity of these young ladies who would embark upon their teaching careers at the tender age of seventeen. In his 1860 report, Wells wrote the following about the normal department:

The change that has taken place during the last year in the organization of the Normal Department of the High School, and especially in the conditions of membership, have already been productive of the most satisfactory results. The average age and maturity of the pupils are considerably advanced; selections for admission are made with special reference to those qualities which give promise of success in discharging the duties of a teacher; the course of instruction is more strictly professional; and the school no longer presents the

²⁷Chicago, IL, Department of Instruction, Report of the President of the Board of Education for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1859, by Luther Haven, president of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Book and Job Printing Office of Scott and Co., 1859), 15.

²⁸Fifth Annual Report, 76.

anomaly of Normal pupils pursuing their studies without any intention of becoming teachers.²⁹

This represents just one of the many instances in which Wells' superior insight was useful in detecting and remedying unsatisfactory conditions within the school system. His keen observational skills, his astute ability to analyze a situation and his experience in teacher training helped him to realize that these young ladies were not quite ready to manage a crowded classroom of possibly disruptive children along with all of the other responsibilities of a full time teaching position.

As much as the school system needed teachers, Wells, with his desire to improve conditions in the schools, was not willing to sacrifice quality for quantity. He could not be content with just warm bodies; he wanted well-qualified and fully capable ladies to teach the children of Chicago. In his report for 1861, Wells indicated that there was little room for improvement in the normal department and that most of its graduates were among the best teachers in the city. He recommended enlarging the department and provided the following rationale,

so that we may hereafter be able to educate most of our own female teachers. We should by this means not only secure a higher standard of qualifications, but greater unity and efficiency of action, since the teachers

²⁹Chicago, IL, Department of Instruction, Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1860, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Press and Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1860), 28.

employed would be those who have become familiar with our school system before engaging in the service of the Board.³⁰

Wells was permitted to implement his recommendations and the normal department improved as he anticipated it would. In his report for 1862, Wells noted that the enrollment in the normal department had increased despite the fact that the admission criterion was more rigorous than the previous year. Several graduates from the English high and classical departments chose to teach in the public schools. Wells explained, that after careful observation and comparison of these teachers with those who had graduated from the normal department, the latter were much better teachers. He said that the two years of preparation in the normal department was more valuable in this instance than four years in the other departments.³¹ As the normal department continually improved, Wells reported in 1864 that

³⁰Chicago, IL, Department of Public Instruction, Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending December 31, 1861, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Chicago Times Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1862), 27.

³¹Chicago, IL, Department of Public Instruction, Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending December 31, 1862, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Evening Journal Book and Job Print, 1863), 46.

"No branch of our school system is working more successfully than the normal department of the High School."³².

Attendance

Wells' efforts within the normal department confirmed that he was adamant about providing excellent teachers for the children of Chicago. However, this was just one of several elements which he knew were required to insure an educated citizenry and thus reduce ignorance, crime, violence and the poverty associated with these. Wells also understood that it was important for all the children of Chicago to take full advantage of the available educational opportunities. His concerns in this regard were two-fold: first to improve the attendance of the students actually enrolled in the schools and secondly; to increase the number of enrollees.

Irregular Attendance

With respect to the improved attendance, Wells addressed what he termed irregular attendance. He was fully cognizant of the detriment poor attendance was to a child's education. He said that "the evil of irregular attendance is . . . the greatest that exists in connection with the

³²Chicago, IL, Department of Public Instruction, Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending December 31, 1863, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: The Chicago Times Book and Job Printing House, 1864), 21.

free school system, and the one most difficult to correct." He collected and reported data illustrating the percentage of attendance and tardies in the primary and grammar schools for he felt that this was an "important agent in correcting the evil." He also thought that publishing this information at the end of the school year would appeal to the students' self-respect and their desires to impress their peers which, in turn would motivate them to improve their attendance.³³

In his 1858 report, Wells stated that the greatest improvement which had been made in the primary and grammar schools was in student attendance. He went on to discuss a rule which had been adopted by the board in the latter part of 1857 which declared that any student who had been absent from school, without an excuse from the parent or guardian, for six half-days within any four week period, would forfeit his seat. The student was to be suspended and, in order to obtain permission to return, would be required to convince the superintendent of his ability to be punctual in the future.³⁴ If the amount of effort or time devoted to a concern is a measure of the significance one places in it then it can be safely assumed that attendance was extremely

³³Third Annual Report, 39; 38.

³⁴Chicago, IL, Fourth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1858, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Chicago Daily Press, Book and Job Print, 1858), 42-43.

important to Wells for in addition to the above measures he also wrote a ten page essay on it in his 1858 report. Furthermore, in a letter to Barnard he wrote: "The portion of my Report which I think most of is a discussion of Irregular Attendance in its relation to the stability of our Free School System."³⁵

In discussing the propriety or impropriety of adopting a rule for attendance, Wells said that it "involves grave questions which lie at the very foundation of our system of free schools." The concept of free education formed the basis for the several arguments he presented in support of this rule. He rationalized that free education was fundamental to the safety of the country because uneducated people were dangerous. There were many people who did not entirely trust free schools but without such rules, which Wells noted were unpopular with the masses, there would be a great deal more distrust. He concluded his argument as follows:

Even among the ablest and most devoted friends of popular education, there are not wanting those who regard it as unwise to make our schools entirely free to children whose parents are able to contribute to their support. They believe that opportunities which cost nothing can never be fully appreciated, and that our schools can never rise to the highest order of excellence while those who enjoy their benefits do not

³⁵William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 6 April 1858, Henry Barnard Papers, Fales Library, Elmer Bobst Library, New York University, New York, NY.

put forth any direct effort to aid in sustaining them.³⁶

Wells addressed the issue of the waste of funds associated with irregular attendance. He noted that the time lost in arranging for make-up lessons exceeded the amount of time needed to teach those fewer students who were in attendance. He calculated a loss of twelve thousand dollars during 1857 and added that "in two years this loss amounts to a sum sufficient to build one of our first class school houses." Waste of money was not Wells' major concern for he reiterated the sentiment that "one of the principal objects in making the schools free and common to all classes, is to remove the danger of having an uneducated and vicious class of persons constantly growing up, to prey upon society." He added that if those who would be raised from vagrancy regarded the schools with indifference and neglect then the objective can never be accomplished.³⁷

The effect of irregular attendance upon an entire classroom of students also concerned Wells. He commented that when some of the students were absent the entire class suffered, because its progress was retarded when time had to be taken to re-teach the material to the students who were absent. He expressed dismay that since some parents felt they had the right to keep their children home at will this

³⁶Fourth Annual Report, 42; 43.

³⁷Ibid., 44.

also gave them the right to impede the educational progress of several other students. A large percentage of the parents who transferred their children into the private schools did so because of the jeopardy which irregular attendance presented. Wells felt it important to expound on this issue believing he would be negligent to ignore the situation. In the fourth annual report, he said that it was because of the aforementioned parental concerns and actions that the board adopted the rule requiring regular attendance. He added that "the rule has already accomplished twice as much in improving the standard of punctuality in our schools, as all previous agencies combined." The attendance rule provided another important advantage; that of affording the superintendent the opportunity to confer with parents.³⁸

Wells' extensive essay on irregular attendance referenced reports of other school systems which had handled the problem similarly. He also depicted attendance data for the entire system, and individual schools for 1856 and 1857, using tables accompanied by detailed explanations, to provide a dramatic representation of irregular attendance. Calling attention to the problem by reporting the actual data was just one of the means by which Wells hoped to remedy it. To promote parental communication and

³⁸Ibid., 47.

involvement, the board adopted a rule which required teachers in the grammar schools to send monthly reports to the parents or guardians of each student which indicated the student's averages in scholarship and deportment. However, the majority of the form was devoted to reporting attendance, having columns labelled as follows: punctual, late, dismissed, absent and attendance average.³⁹

For the next two years Wells reported significant increases in both enrollment and percentage of attendance. In the report for the year ending 1 February 1860, Wells said that the attendance had increased steadily for the past four years and the percent of absences in 1859 was half of what it was in 1856. He listed the names of all the students who had perfect attendance in 1859 and also those students with perfect attendance for the previous two years.⁴⁰

The following year Wells reported that the percent of absences in the school system had decreased from 29 to 10 percent and credited the now three year old rule for this remarkable improvement.⁴¹ After the rule had been in effect

³⁹Ibid., 48-52.

⁴⁰Sixth Annual Report, 33-37.

⁴¹Chicago, IL, Department of Public Instruction, Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1861, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Press and Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1861), 78.

four years, Wells reported that absences had been reduced to 8 percent, and he continued the practice of recognizing students with perfect attendance by listing their names in his annual reports.⁴² Even though Wells' efforts to improve attendance were very successful he was not satisfied with this singular triumph; he continued to work on the other end of the spectrum--that of students not involved in any educational programs.

Uneducated Children

The superintendent referred to students not engaged in any educational program as uneducated children and decided to call attention to this matter by determining how many such children existed in Chicago. He began with the number between the ages of five and fifteen as reported in the Chicago census and subtracted the number of children who were enrolled in either public or private schools. After accounting for children who might be instructed by their parents or by tutors at home Wells concluded that at least 3,000 of about 17,100 eligible children were not receiving the benefits of education. He explained as follows:

This is no theoretical speculation. The facts I have adduced have been collected and revised with the utmost care. . . . The truth is demonstrable, that not less than 3,000 children in our city are destitute of all proper instruction during the period, which is to

⁴²Eighth Annual Report, 28.

decide their future character and influence as citizens of a free Republic.⁴³

Wells discussed this issue at length in his report for the 1856 academic year. He recommended that the board appoint a truant officer who would locate these uneducated children and encourage their parents to send them to school. He felt that this person should be kind, judicious and use gentle persuasion and he "believed that the good results of such a system of visiting would be soon apparent." His 1858 report discussed uneducated children very briefly and reported that their number had decreased. Wells had much more to say about uneducated children in 1861 as he reported, that of the 27,000 school age children in Chicago, there were still about 3,000 who were not being educated.⁴⁴

He was quite troubled about the fate of these children and expressed it as follows:

Most of this class of children are constant and punctual in their attendance upon the various schools of poverty and crime; and although never found within the walls of a school room, it is to be feared their education will prove the most expensive that is furnished to any class of children in the city.⁴⁵

Wells felt that one solution to this problem would be to provide suitable accommodations. He explained that there was not enough space to accommodate all the children who

⁴³Third Annual Report, 6-7.

⁴⁴Ibid., 11; Fourth Annual Report, 54.

⁴⁵Eighth Annual Report, 9.

would attend school and that if there were adequate space more children would attend. For years, he implored the board to provide additional classroom space by building more schools to relieve the overcrowded condition of the schools.

Buildings and Accommodations

When Wells arrived in Chicago in 1856, there were 8,542 children enrolled in nine public schools identified as; School Number One, School Number Two and so on.⁴⁶ Wells, noting that enrollment in the schools had increased by 1,751 over the previous year, expressed grave concern about the overcrowding which prevailed, commenting that some teachers had "twice as many pupils as one teacher can instruct to advantage." In some cases, this number was as high as 120, and Wells explained that the problem stemmed more from a lack of space than an insufficient number of teachers.⁴⁷

The schools were feeling the impact of Chicago's rapidly growing population, for as quickly as a new school building was constructed it was filled to capacity or became overcrowded. Recognizing the need for additional funds to build new schools, Wells recommended that the city consider

⁴⁶At the suggestion of Luther Haven the Common Council passed an ordinance in February 1858 declaring that the schools would be known by names instead of numbers, [Shepherd Johnston], Historical Sketches of the Public System of the City of Chicago to the Close of the School Year 1878-79, (Chicago: Clark and Edwards Printers, 1880), 36.

⁴⁷Third Annual Report, 40; 41.

issuing bonds or some similar measure to secure the necessary capital. He also entertained building larger and less elegant buildings and using less expensive materials, but he cautioned that the latter suggestion could effect the durability of the buildings. Nonetheless, he said that some steps had to be taken to provide the needed space and offered the following argument:

The question is not, can we afford to provide accommodations for all the children that desire to attend the public schools, but rather, can we afford to leave a portion of them to grow up in ignorance and crime,⁴⁸ and then prey upon the morals and wealth of the city.

In 1859, Wells again recommended that the Common Council issue bonds in order to aid the school tax fund to construct new buildings; he noted that proportionally the public schools of Chicago had the smallest amount of classroom space than any city in the Union.⁴⁹

The president of the board of education agreed with Wells' sentiments and noted that overcrowding was one of the reasons for so many uneducated children in Chicago. He said that thousands of children were kept home by their parents, either because there were no seats available in their neighborhood school or they were not willing to subject their children to the overcrowded conditions. He reiterated Wells' suggestion of issuing bonds to provide funds for new

⁴⁸Fourth Annual Report of, 21.

⁴⁹Fifth Annual Report, 19-20.

school buildings. In 1860, Wells commented that about half the schools had adequate accommodations, but the others needed some temporary relief from overcrowding. Since there were insufficient funds to build new schools, he suggested renting space to be used temporarily as branch schools to relieve overcrowding. One of his goals was to reduce the number of students assigned each teacher to sixty. Two years later, Wells reported that a large number of branch schools existed in every part of the city and most of them were in rented rooms which had been designed for other purposes and not really suitable for schooling.⁵⁰

There was good news, however; a new school was being built on the South side with the capacity for 720 students. A small frame building was under construction near the Scammon School to provide temporary relief to the overcrowding in that school. Wells recommended the building of similar structures near Kinzie, Franklin, Washington and School Number Twelve but commented that this would only provide temporary and partial relief.⁵¹ In 1863, Wells reported that the increase in accommodations for students had been greater than during the past year than during any previous year in the history of the city and that 2,420

⁵⁰Report of the President of the Board of Education for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1859, by Luther Haven, president, 4; 10; Sixth Annual Report, 18; Eighth Annual Report, 4.

⁵¹Seventh Annual Report, 4.

additional seats had been provided. New branches had opened for the Scammon, Kinzie, Franklin, Washington and Foster Schools and in September 1862, the Haven School was opened. Wells cautioned, however, that this did not solve the problem of providing accommodations for the annual increase of students. Again he implored board members to petition the State Legislature for the authority to issue bonds to obtain money for the school tax fund. He expressed his concerns as follows:

but delay will not dispose of the practical difficulty that presses upon us, and that must soon be met and overcome in some way.

During the next eighteen months, I see no escape from falling back upon hired branch rooms, in Mission School buildings, church basements, etc., for the accommodations, or mal-accommodations of more than a thousand children, unless we can obtain the aid that I have suggested.⁵²

Wells proposed that the board appoint a committee to study the subject, and in 1864 the president of the board reported that the newly established Finance Committee had sent a letter to the governor requesting him to bring the matter of providing financial relief for the Chicago Public Schools before the legislature. He cautioned, however, that in light of the Civil War and the increased taxation which had accompanied it; "should an additional tax be levied for

⁵²Ninth Annual Report, 30-34.

school purposes, the whole system might be endangered, resting as it does on popular sentiment."⁵³

Though it was a long-time coming, board members finally decided to take action on Wells' suggestion to raise additional funds for the school system.⁵⁴ Even with the extra strain presented by the war, their request to the state Legislature was granted and the city was authorized to issue twenty-five thousand dollars annually in school building bonds for the next four years.⁵⁵

Comfort and Heating

While supplying space was just one factor to be considered in providing appropriate accommodations, Wells also felt that it was important to increase the level of comfort in order to encourage children to enroll and subsequently attend school. To that end, he addressed the issue of heating and ventilation. In 1858 he noted that even though the newest school buildings were structurally excellent, their heating and ventilation capabilities "would hardly compare favorably with the poorest [school] houses in the country." He went on to explain the deficiencies in detail and castigated the school system's administration for

⁵³Ibid., 30-34.

⁵⁴Tenth Annual Report, 7.

⁵⁵John Howatt, Notes on the First One Hundred Years of Chicago School History (Chicago, IL: By the author, 1940), 15.

being so far behind in providing adequate heating and ventilation.

Wells did not need to rely on experts for advice in this area. He had studied this issue for ten years and had recently visited schools in several large cities in which he examined the heating and ventilation systems. He reported his findings in his 1858 report and explained that some school systems were experimenting with the use of steam heat. Two companies were allowed to install their equipment into Chicago schools, at their own expense, for the purpose of comparison. Though it was too soon to make a decision, Wells commented that both heating systems were working well. In 1861 Wells remarked that he was still unable to make a final recommendation regarding the best heating and ventilation method for new school buildings, but he was leaning toward hot water heat.⁵⁶

Wells had become quite engrossed in the matter. In a letter to Barnard he indicated that he had given considerable attention to equipment and systems used for heating and ventilation of school buildings for the past two years.⁵⁷ In the December 1858 issue of the Illinois Teacher Wells published an article on the subject in which he noted

⁵⁶Fourth Annual Report, 23; 26-27; Seventh Annual Report, 82.

⁵⁷William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 20 December 1858, Henry Barnard Papers.

that the proper temperature for school rooms was sixty-eight degrees Fahrenheit according to recognized doctors and educators. He explained that proper ventilation was important to the health of school children and described several modes of heating, discussing the merits and demerits of each.⁵⁸

Wells worked vigorously and diligently to improve the public schools of Chicago. He dealt with each issue or concern, utilizing every resource at his disposal. He made great strides in improving attendance but his efforts in reducing overcrowding and building new schools were not as successful. "In spite of vigorous effort, Wells had been able to exercise little effect on school housing and overcrowded rooms." There was some success, however, but according to Herrick, the process of getting a new school building erected was slow and arduous and often impeded by the division of authority between the board of education and the Common Council. While the board was authorized to choose school sites, it was the council which had the authority to purchase them with school funds.⁵⁹ Wells turned his attention to instruction and began to concentrate on improving primary education.

⁵⁸[William Harvey Wells], "Heating and Ventilation," Illinois Teacher 4 (December 1858): 361-367.

⁵⁹Herrick, The Chicago Schools, 44.

Primary Education

Overcrowding was most severe in the primary grades and Wells saw it as the major impedient to their success as well as the greatest evil with which the schools had to contend. He said that the primary schools were doing quite well in spite of the overcrowding but in some instances felt that "this allowance cannot be regarded as less than one-half of the effective power and influence of the school." During 1857, some instructional modifications were introduced in the primary schools including the use of object lessons in place of formal recitations to encourage oral communication between students and teachers. Wells explained these lessons as follows:

The object of these "Developing Exercises," is to give the pupils clear and accurate ideas of the nature and relations of common objects around them, and also to give them such power of expression that they will be able to clothe these ideas in appropriate language.⁶⁰

Wells added that significant improvement in the method of teaching the elementary sounds of the English language had occurred in several schools which consequently led to improvements in teaching the elements of reading. He noted that generally grammar school students had progressed more than students in the primary schools and attributed this to the lack of space and teachers in the latter.⁶¹

⁶⁰Fourth Annual Report, 40.

⁶¹Ibid.

As he had done previously, Wells collected and reported data to call attention to this problem to help others better understand it and also to recognize the severity of it. He compared average class sizes in grammar and primary schools of several large cities to those in Chicago. Buffalo had the smallest class size with an average of forty-six students per class while New York and St. Louis each had fifty. The average class size in Chicago was seventy-eight and the next closest city, Boston, had fifty-seven. Wells noted that though Chicago employed fewer teachers proportionally than any of these other larger cities, this was not due to "a lack of disposition on the part of the Board of Education to furnish a suitable number of teachers, but from the fact that there were no rooms in which additional teachers could be placed if they were appointed." He added that in some instances, a teacher was responsible for as many as 150 students.⁶²

Wells began his 1859 report by lauding the efforts of the board of education in incorporating the best components from the best school systems of other and older cities. He also praised the teachers, calling them faithful and efficient. He felt that no major changes were needed in the overall organization of the school system since the grammar and high schools were showing signs of accomplishment.

⁶²Ibid., 39-40.

Wells noted, however, that in the primary schools there were "some very serious and radical defects." He discussed this matter at length detailing the problems and his recommended solutions.⁶³

Wells also explained why he felt it so important to devote so much effort and time to this concern. He said that the primary schools were the foundation of the entire school system and weaknesses which were allowed to exist at this level would manifest themselves throughout the higher grades, impede a student's educational progress and "cling to him through life." Wells further explained that more than one-half of public instruction was imparted in the primary schools and that for a large portion of students it was their only exposure to formal education because they would not remain in school beyond these grades.⁶⁴

While Wells conceded that there were few issues about which educators universally agreed, he observed, however, that there seemed to have been a consensus among educators that sixty was the maximum number of students which one teacher could instruct effectively. He explained that when the class size is greater, "the loss to the first sixty is larger than the gain to those that are added." Though the board of education had endorsed a maximum class size of

⁶³Fifth Annual Report, 17.

⁶⁴Ibid., 18.

sixty in principle, Wells wondered if the number should be less in the primary schools. Notwithstanding that some teachers still had more than 155 students in their classes Wells believed that his effort would be better expended to provide a remedy for the problem rather than to dwell on the details of it. Since adequate classroom space was the root of the problem, Wells recommended that the council issue bonds to provide the funds necessary to erect new school buildings.⁶⁵

Concern for overcrowding led Wells to consider the age of admission because increasing the admission age would decrease the number of children eligible to enroll in school. Illinois state law, gave the minimum age at which a child could be enrolled in school as five, while surrounding states and most other cities outside New England required students to be six years old prior to admission. Wells felt that five year olds were not ready to handle the structure and rigor of schooling saying that it would be injurious to their minds and bodies. He wrote to school systems in about forty major cities with the following inquiry: "'Are the advantages of admitting pupils under six years, in the estimation of your School Board, as great as the disadvantages?'" The response was overwhelmingly negative and Wells therefore recommended that at the next

⁶⁵Ibid., 17-20.

session of the state legislature either the school law or the city charter be changed to raise the age of admission to six.⁶⁶ He did not want to deprive these children of educational opportunities, however, he knew that the school system was not prepared to serve them and expressed his sentiments as follows:

The time may come when we can afford to indulge in the luxury of Infant Schools, but it is manifestly unjust in the present crowded state of our rooms, to receive children at five, and thereby exclude those who are old enough to receive the full benefit of school discipline and instruction.⁶⁷

A review of the Rules of the Board of Education for the years 1860-1864 reveal that the admission age was not changed during Wells' superintendency.

Not only was Wells concerned about the admission age, he also addressed the status of primary teachers who were perceived less important than grammar school teachers. He defined the attributes needed to excel as a primary teacher and commented that of all the applicants examined by the board more were qualified to teach in the grammar schools than in the primary grades. In the primary grades, the teacher's personal character was a significant factor and unlike the grammar schools "the teacher is herself the text-book, the living oracle; and nearly all impressions received by the pupil are a direct reflection from her own mind and

⁶⁶Ibid., 22-23.

⁶⁷Ibid., 23.

heart." Wells commended the several primary teachers who were exemplary and thoroughly capable of executing their duties. He noted that many of them entered the teaching force without proper preparation but had expended much effort to fill that void and qualify themselves for their duties. The primary teachers worked harder and had greater responsibilities than their counterparts in the grammar schools; yet they received less pay. Wells recommended that the Chicago Board of Education follow the lead of the St. Louis schools and raise the pay of the primary school teachers so that it would equal that of the teachers in the grammar schools, thus giving the former equal status and importance.⁶⁸

Wells also discussed the need for primary teachers to receive special training. He noted that in most teacher examinations he found a majority of the applicants extremely deficient in some of the fundamental principles of primary instruction. He discussed some specific examples and went on to say that the normal department of the high school was doing a good job in teaching these principles and expressed the hope that the time would soon come "when a majority of our female teachers will be furnished by our own normal school." Wells thought that if some special provision could be made for primary teachers to receive normal instruction

⁶⁸Ibid., 24.

while observing model classes they would be happy to avail themselves of this opportunity. In that regard he recommended that the superintendent be authorized to dismiss all but one of the primary schools in each section of the city for one-half day per term "for the purpose of calling together all the Primary teachers, to witness exercises and receive suggestions relating to the peculiar wants of the Primary Schools." Wells ended his discussion of primary grades, in this report, with a lengthy essay on the use of object lessons in primary instruction. He included detailed explanations to be used by the teachers because each of them would have an opportunity to read his report.⁶⁹

The bleak conditions which Wells described in 1859 changed as his recommendations were implemented. He said that the improvement in instruction and discipline of the primary classes during the past year was the most noticeable feature in the history of the schools. The three most significant changes which he described in his 1860 report would never have occurred without his direct intervention: (1) directing the board's attention to the primary branch of the school system; (2) increasing primary teachers' status and salaries to the same level as grammar school teachers; (3) and holding special institutes for primary teachers. Wells added that these teachers had "made a praiseworthy

⁶⁹Ibid., 26-33.

effort to improve their systems and modes of instruction." He provided detail explanations of a few of these improvements and noted that the impact of some of them had been reduced by overcrowded classrooms.⁷⁰

Wells' comments on primary schools in his 1860 report were brief. He noted that he had devoted more attention to the primary grades than to the upper grades during the previous year, and that most of the primary teachers had worked diligently. Though considerable improvements had been made Wells pointed out that there was still much to be done to achieve a satisfactory standard of excellence. He provided a footnote to his comments in which he cited the recent report of Newton Bateman, Illinois State Superintendent of Public Instruction. It contained an elaborate essay on primary instruction which Wells felt surpassed any others he had ever seen. He sent a copy of the essay to each school in the city with a special request that the primary teachers should read it. He quoted the report, an excerpt from which follows:

The best teachers are needed for Primary Schools. At no point in the whole course of study are the results of incompetent teaching so disastrous as at the commencement. If utter inexperience must sit at the teacher's desk, let it be anywhere, everywhere, save in the Primary School; for anywhere and everywhere else its ability to do irreparable mischief be less.⁷¹

⁷⁰Sixth Annual Report, 21.

⁷¹Ibid., 76-77.

In his report for the year 1861, Wells expressed dismay over the fact that there was still an insufficient number of adequately trained teachers to teach in the primary grades. He reiterated that teachers in the primary schools worked harder and had greater responsibilities than teachers in the upper grades inasmuch as more of the instruction was received directly from the teachers than from books. Wells noted while it often happened that better teachers were transferred from the lower grades to the upper grades it should have been the other way; if a teacher exhibited extraordinary ability she should have been transferred to the lower grades. Wells recommended additional compensation for teachers in the lower grades "who give evidence of more than ordinary tact and skill. . . ." ⁷² The superintendent did not specifically discuss primary teachers in his two subsequent reports. The salary schedule for teachers listed in the 1864 Rules of the Board of Education indicate that the primary teachers did not receive the additional compensation as suggested by Wells. The pay for all primary teachers was still equal to that of grammar school teachers. ⁷³

⁷²Eighth Annual Report, 12-13.

⁷³Rules of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, Adopted March 8, 1864, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary to the Board on Education, in Tenth Annual Report, 74.

After eight years of conscientious and diligent service to the public schools of Chicago Wells retired due to poor health. His mission was to provide optimal educational opportunities for all of Chicago's school-age children. He may have experienced stress from his burning desire to do everything within his power to fulfill his goal; expending much time and physical energy, which could have contributed to his early departure. The task was monumental, and he communicated to Barnard, "I have the work of two men on my hands, . . . "⁷⁴ As he devoted increasingly more time to improving the schools he had less time for professional activities. He expressed his disappointment to Barnard as follows:

I wish it was practicable for me to mingle more with teachers out of Chicago. No field of labor is more congenial to my tastes than Educational meetings; but these Schools of Chicago tie me up more closely than I have ever been bound before.⁷⁵

The Legacy: Improving Education

Wells' legacy to the children of Chicago was born of his sincere desire to provide the best education possible. His efforts were not in vain for he made countless improvements and implemented several innovations through which he made a lasting impact on the public schools of

⁷⁴William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 21 September 1858, Henry Barnard Papers.

⁷⁵William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 16 August 1859, Henry Barnard Papers.

Chicago. He was thoroughly devoted to improving the schools in Chicago and thus providing optimal educational opportunities for all the children. When he identified a weakness which he thought would seriously impair or impede educational progress he worked to correct it. Often, his first step in the process would simply be to enlighten the board, the teachers or the general public about the problem. He offered recommendations for improvements which were often based upon knowledge gained from researching the issue combined with his keen insight into the educational needs of children. His primary mission, that the schools of Chicago produce an educated citizenry, required that all children receive the benefits of schooling. Though regular attendance was of paramount importance, academic achievement was also critical to the mission.

Wells attempted to improve student achievement in several ways. Fundamental to all other endeavors was enrolling children in school and, to this end he strove to improve attendance. After getting the children in school he concentrated on keeping them there. He knew that improving motivation was consequential because keeping children interested would help to keep them in school. Wells sought to improve motivation by introducing interesting lessons and hands-on activities. For the younger children he encouraged teachers to combine instruction with entertainment for a major part of the day.

Improving instruction was another means by which Wells sought to increase student motivation and achievement. His endeavor in this regard was two-fold: he addressed curriculum issues and teacher improvement. His efforts in the normal school were aimed at improving the quality of teaching and to the same end he endeavored to make the mandated teachers' institutes more meaningful. At times Wells combined his efforts to improve teaching with those for curriculum enhancements by explaining to teachers what to teach and how to teach it. This was evidenced in his discussions on object teaching and oral instruction which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Wells used his annual superintendent's reports as a vehicle to relay messages to three different constituencies: teachers, parents and the general public, because it needed to be heard and he knew that each of these would read them. Information about curriculum and instruction was included for teachers; he recognized parents as vital partners in the effort to improve student achievement and for this reason included messages to parents in his annual reports. Other issues which Wells addressed in his endeavor to improve schooling in Chicago included: the use of slates and pencils by students in the primary grades; physical education; moral instruction; discipline; and furniture, equipment and other apparatus.

Wells' singular contribution to the Chicago Public Schools was his Graded Course of Instruction. This was quite a significant document because it represented a monumental effort on his part and was used for several decades after Wells left the Chicago schools. Its impact was so great that if it were Wells' only contribution he would have made considerable impact. This contribution is worthy of further and expanded discussion and therefore the Graded Course of Instruction will serve as the foundation of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

To study a man's philosophy is tantamount to examining the depths of his heart and soul because according to one dictionary's definition: philosophy is the beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual.¹ Much of what Wells valued or deemed important was epitomized in those elements of schooling which he sought to improve in the Chicago schools. Several of these were discussed in the previous chapter, and Wells wrote about them extensively in his annual reports. Wells was not shy about sharing his beliefs in regards to education and how he thought instructional programs should be conducted, for he often expounded components of his philosophy in speeches, in lectures and in articles in professional educational journals.

In 1861, Wells produced a major curriculum document in which he also shared his educational philosophy. It was adopted for use in the Chicago Public Schools by the board of education and represented the culmination of many years

¹Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, (1967).

of research and writing. The Graded Course of Instruction was an extremely significant document for the following reasons: (1) it provided classification, structure and a more orderly learning environment; (2) it was Wells' best known educational accomplishment, according to Herrick; (3) he published the work in 1862 with two subsequent editions; (4) it was adopted, in modified form, as the official curriculum in several Northwestern states; (5) it influenced curriculum design in Chicago schools as late as 1933; and, (6) it was the embodiment of Wells' educational philosophy. Since Wells' perceived purpose for education served as a foundation for his philosophy, this will be investigated along with his conceptions of the roles of the students, parents, and teachers in the educational process.²

Why Educate?

Schooling in colonial America originated for varying reasons depending upon location, economic conditions, political and other beliefs. However, there was one fundamental concern common to nearly all colonial efforts to establish formal educational programs: religious beliefs. The church had a major role in the education of early colonial children for early colonists believed that

²Mary J. Herrick, The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1971), 42-43; Denton L. Geyer, "A Century of Educational Progress in Chicago, 1833-1933," Chicago Schools Journal 15 (January-June 1933): 67.

salvation was the individual responsibility of each man, woman, and child. They rationalized that every person was required to learn to read the Bible so that they could gain knowledge of the religious principles which were required for salvation. The primary purpose of the colonial Protestant churches, especially the New England Puritan churches--later called Congregational Churches because the congregation controlled them--was to teach. Wells was a Congregationalist and maintained some of the early tenets of the religion.³

This intense association between school and church waned in time but did not totally fade away as Americans became less obsessed with dying and more concerned with living. During Wells' lifetime the concept of education for the sake of salvation had evolved into education for the sake of a civilized society in which to live. He envisioned an educated citizenry for which crime, poverty and their associated evils either did not exist or were kept at a minimum. Wells was adamant that all children should be educated, and that schools were to "train the intellect, the heart, the will. Children must be taught in time to yield to rightful and wholesome authority. Then only are they ever qualified to rule." Wells believed that the failure to

³H. Warren Button and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr. History of Education and Culture in America (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), 12-15.

yield to rightful and wholesome authority precipitated the outbreak of the Civil War which he said could have been avoided "if these lessons had been thoroughly taught in all the schools of the Union."⁴ Thus, for Wells, the purpose of schooling was to produce this educated citizenry and eliminate the abhorrent elements of society, which he expressed as follows:

One of the principal objects in making the schools free and common to all classes, is to remove the danger of having an uneducated and vicious class of persons constantly growing up, to prey upon society.⁵

The Roles Defined

The educational process involved numerous constituencies, each serving different purposes or having varying roles. Federal, state and local governments funded education; community and business leaders served as board members and supervised the process; and then there were central administrators, school administrators, the teachers, the parents, and the students. Wells was primarily concerned with these latter constituencies; those who were

⁴S. A. Briggs, "A Sketch of the History of Education," Illinois Teacher 8 (February 1862): 62; The article contains the following note: "Abstract of the Address delivered by President Wells at the Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Teachers' Association at Bloomington, Dec. 26th, 1861. Reported by S. A. Briggs, Associate Editor."

⁵Chicago, IL, Fourth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1858, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Chicago Daily Press, Book and Job Print, 1858), 44.

more directly involved in the instructional program; parents, students and teachers. He focused mainly on the roles of parents and teachers probably because he felt that if students were instilled with proper values, both at home and at school, and the teachers provided interesting, high quality and motivating lessons, the students would learn.

The Student

The student's responsibility with respect to education was to expend as much effort as possible toward that end. In his discussion on self-reliance, Wells stated that the primary goals of intellectual education were mental discipline and the acquisition of knowledge. Of these, mental discipline was more important and Wells defined it as "the power of using the mind to the best advantage." Effort or intellectual labor was required to achieve mental discipline and Wells commented that no man had ever progressed intellectually without intellectual labor. "It is this alone which can strengthen and invigorate the noble faculties with which we are endowed."⁶

⁶William Harvey Wells, "Self-Reliance," article in, The Graded School: A Graded Course of Instruction for Public Schools: With Copious Practical Directions to Teachers, and Observations on Primary Schools, School Discipline, School Records, etc., (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1867), 144.

Parents

Though Wells' guidance for students had intrinsic connotations, his advice to parents was more extrinsic. Sending their children to school regularly was perceived as the duty of parents. Wells admonished parents who used the schools as convenient places to "send their children on days when they happen to have nothing else for them to do." The consequence, of this behavior, was that these children formed the habit of attending school only once or twice weekly or in some instances no more than two or three days in a month. In expressing concern for the manner in which this lackadaisical attitude of parents impacted their children and others as well, he said that these habitually absent children would attend school just:

often enough to retard the progress of the class with which they were connected, but not often enough to derive any substantial benefit themselves. . . . Every one at all conversant with our schools, is aware that most of the absences that occur, are occasioned by the carelessness and neglect of parents, and not by real necessity.⁷

The consequence of this pressing concern was the attendance rule which eventually produced the desired results of improving student attendance.

Though Wells thought it imperative that parents instill good attendance habits in their children, he frequently addressed the importance of parents taking an active role in

⁷Ibid., 44-46.

their children's education. In his first annual report as superintendent, he implored parents to visit the schools and he extended "to every parent . . . a special card of invitation from the teachers of his children to visit them at least once every quarter." He added that the teachers were always "at home" during school hours, and both they and the children would provide the best entertainment within their powers. Wells deemed it important for parents to witness the efforts of the teachers who were molding the minds and hearts of their children. Also, if the parents would understand the difficulties, the trials and perplexities, to which teachers were subjected, their obligation to those teachers who were placed in loco parentis during so large a portion of their children's waking hours would have been more strongly felt.⁸

Though Wells conceded that fathers would not be able to visit the schools as often as mothers, he felt strongly that if a father had the welfare of his children at heart, he would find one or two hours a year to visit the school and witness the children's progress. To increase the interest and involvement of parents and the public, in the welfare of the schools, Wells recommended and the board approved,

⁸Chicago, IL, Third Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of School Inspectors (Chicago: Daily Times Book and Job Print, 1857), 34.

annual public examinations at each of the schools to which the friends of the students would be specially invited.

The teachers' invitation should have been reciprocated, for if parents were to fulfill their entire obligation to their children's education, as Wells perceived it, they would invite their children's teacher into the home. Wells considered it important for the child's teacher to engage in "the social intercourse of the family circle." The personal acquaintance of the parents with the teacher of their child was very valuable, because as the teacher became more familiar with the home she could better understand the character of the child. Wells noted that cultivating such friendly and familiar relations would not only "spread sunlight over the path of teachers," but would also enable them to discharge their duties to the children more intelligently.⁹ Wells conceptualized the role of parents as being three-fold: to send their child to school regularly; to visit the school and observe their child's progress as often as possible; and, to invite their child's teacher into their home so that the teacher could learn more about and thus better understand the child.

The Teacher

Wells saw that the teacher's educational role was multifaceted and its components revolved around instruction

⁹Ibid., 34-35.

and methodology, the latter, taught in order to provide interesting and motivating lessons. Wells spoke on that subject in his 1860 lecture, "The Philosophy of Education," in which he said that the teacher's first and most important task was to obtain the students' attention and that the teacher's success in securing attention was the true measure of his power. Wells took great pains to establish the fact that the needs of primary students were much different from and greater than those of grammar school students and likewise, were the roles and responsibilities of the teachers.¹⁰

Discipline

There was no domain in which Wells was more progressive than discipline in the schools and the classrooms. While he concurred with other educators that "good order and a ready compliance with the directions of the teacher," were critical to the success of every school, he recognized that there were different methods being employed towards that end. Some teachers were proactive and utilized preventive measures, while others were reactive and utilized punitive measures. Wells explained as follows:

One of these teachers commences his efforts before the tendencies to misconduct have ripened into action, and avoids the necessity for punishment; while the other

¹⁰"Editor's Table: National Association," Illinois Teacher 6 (October 1860), 397.

delays till his rules are violated, and is then compelled either to punish the offender or abandon his rules and with them all hope of subordination and improvement.¹¹

Though corporal punishment was an acceptable practice, Wells felt that it should be used as little as possible. He maintained that the teacher should be able to establish order and discipline with minimal use of physical punishment and it was the teacher's responsibility to find other means to check and control the student's tendency to misbehave. Wells believed that the teacher needed to look inward for these, saying that "the first and most important of these must be sought in the personal influence of the teacher. He must have the ability to inspire his pupils with a love of virtue and every adorning excellence for its own sake."¹²

Self-governance or self-control was the ultimate goal or cardinal point of school discipline anything less should be regarded as unsatisfactory and defective. Wells described two different kinds of obedience. The first he defined as compliance through a sense of duty within the dictates of reason which required no sacrifice of self-respect or honor. The student simply recognized the true and natural relation between student and teacher. When the student's actions were governed by reason his obedience was yielded freely and cheerfully. The second form of obedience

¹¹Third Annual Report, 45-46.

¹²Ibid., 48.

"yielded to arbitrary authority without any regard to reason and duty." Wells thought that it was in this instance that the teacher must take the necessary measures to exert control over the student:

When the pupil will not acknowledge his duty to submit to the rightful authority of the teacher, when the will of the pupil gains control over his reason and judgement, then the teacher must take such measures as may be necessary to bring this wayward will to bow. The authority of the teacher in school must be complete and unquestioned.¹³

Wells implored teachers to remember that children's love of freedom, independence, and power was innate. These were important attributes to be dealt with wisely "and no unskillful teacher should be allowed to lay his hand ruthlessly upon them. No degree of eminence is ever attained without them." Wells asserted that these same qualities were to be controlled and regulated, by the teachers and were not to be crushed out. He explained that to yield to arbitrary power without regard to reason was similar to a state of servility which denigrated self-respect, degraded ambition and paralyzed every noble and worthy effort.¹⁴

¹³William Harvey Wells, "School Discipline," article in, The Graded School: A Graded Course of Instruction, 167.

¹⁴Ibid.

self-Reliance

Wells wanted teachers to help their students to become self-reliant and never to do for students that which they could do for themselves. It was not the teachers' responsibilities to remove all impediments or to make a task as easy as possible. Wells compared the practice of eliminating the difficult elements of tasks to that of doing the work for students and explained that:

Familiar explanations, and illustrations, and simplifications, and dilutions, too often spare the pupil the labor of thinking for himself, and thus dwarf the intellect, and defeat the highest object for which our schools are established. . . . And this brings to view what must be regarded as the highest gift of the teacher: namely, the ability to teach his pupils how to think and act,¹⁵ without doing their thinking and acting for them.

Wells offered strategies to assist teachers in building self-reliance within their students which included the use of questioning or probing techniques designed to help the students call the principle or concept to mind. To reinforce the notion of students doing for themselves, he cautioned teachers not to ask leading questions or an excessive number of questions which directly suggested the answer being sought. The use of less complicated examples or several examples which would gradually lead the students to the concept was recommended. Wells thought the practices of allowing students to help each other and giving them

¹⁵William Harvey Wells, "Self-Reliance," article in, The Graded School: A Graded Course of Instruction, 145-146.

answer keys were "always injurious, sapping the very foundation of every thing adapted to promote manly, independent thought." Wells objected to what he termed passive instruction and elaborated on it as follows:

It is not sufficient to illustrate principles by examples and then leave them. They may be understood at the time, and yet not fully possessed. The learner must go through the process himself, to be sure he is master of it. . . . In our efforts to cultivate habits of self-reliance on the part of our pupils, one of the best and most feasible measures to which we can resort is the practice of introducing frequent written reviews.¹⁶

Review was an important part of a system and method which Wells advocated pointing out that it helped retention because it fixed in the mind that which had been learned.¹⁷

Instruction

Wells believed that for instruction to be effective it was necessary for teachers to develop a method and system for teaching. Since Wells viewed teaching as a science, he posited that teachers should study the laws of nature and that those who totally understood "the successive steps by which NEWTON and MILTON attained their greatness is a teacher in the true sense of the term. He who should seize upon the one truth that the growth of mind depends upon its own intense efforts has made but one step in the art of

¹⁶Ibid., 149; 155-56.

¹⁷"Proceedings of the State Teachers' Association," Illinois Teacher 3 (January 1857), 11.

teaching."¹⁸ In his lecture "The Science of Teaching" which he delivered at the 1856 annual meeting of the Illinois Teachers' Association, he said:

Most of the lack of success in life is lack of method. . . . To method is due the success of the teacher. The true teacher does not waste time to teach the pupil what he knew before. . . . Does this power come by nature, or intuition? The answer in the affirmative is an ignorance of the laws of mental growth. It comes by acquisition. No science can be obtained but by study, by method and system.¹⁹

While Wells did not define the method, he identified several seminal features of it. The first of these was securing the students' attention which he deemed crucial to effective instruction. Wells felt that attention was the most important intellectual power and that it was through proper use and control of this power that people achieved success. However, Wells cautioned teachers that "the attention of children can not be long kept to a single subject;. . ." without providing motivating and interesting lessons which included a variety of topics and techniques.²⁰

Once the teachers had captivated the students' attention then they were to help them form proper habits. He believed that teachers were capable of controlling the habits of students and it was through proper habits that

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 11-12.

²⁰"Proceedings of the State Teachers' Association," Illinois Teacher 3 (January 1857), 11.

students were able to make accomplishments, especially intellectual growth. In cultivating moral faculties, Wells said that "the child exposed to temptation, and overcoming it, by that habit increases his power to resist it; and the converse is equally true." Similar to twentieth century educators, Wells regarded reading as the most important branch of school instruction and shared with the teachers of Chicago his philosophy on how it should be taught.²¹

Reading

Wells denounced that which he termed unnatural reading which predominated in the Chicago schools. When a student was reading aloud in school, his tones and modulations would differ markedly from those used in common conversation, even with the most colloquial of reading matter. Wells said that the principal cause of this was that students were taught to identify words by sight without any regard to their meanings. To remedy this situation, Wells suggested that the meanings of words be taught along with the words themselves and that care be taken to make certain that students understood.

Wells proposed that the first words introduced to students be the names of common and familiar objects; advising that:

The object themselves should be referred to, and if possible presented to the test of the senses. The

²¹Ibid.

teacher should talk with the pupils about the objects, and employ the words in simple and familiar sentences, so that the reading may be associated with common conversation, and be made as nearly like it as possible.²²

When introducing words, Wells thought that teachers should not focus on the letters which composed them but rather on the word themselves. He said that words had meanings, letters did not and words naturally preceded letters.

In consideration of the natural order of things, Wells hoped that the time would come when all teachers would follow the laws of nature in their efforts to cultivate students' minds. He elaborated on this concept by asking "who would think of teaching a child the different parts of which a tree is composed, before he has learned to distinguish the tree itself?" Wells posed a similar query about a house and its components; windows, doors, roof, chimney, and so on. He said that the natural order in reading was for students to learn the whole word first and then to learn the names and sounds of the letters composing it. Wells called this the word method and thought that it helped students learn to read naturally and with correct expression. He enumerated the natural order of the word method as follows:

²²Chicago, IL, Department of Instruction, Fifth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1859, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Book and Job Printing Office of Scott and Co., 1859), 35.

First, the object itself is presented to the senses; next, the name of the object is pronounced and learned. As the spoken word consists of sounds, the next step in order is to analyze the sounds and utter them separately. After this the names of the letters are to be learned.²³

Articulation was also important when teaching the elements of reading, according to Wells. Without proper articulation, he thought that good reading could not exist. Since children learned by imitation, Wells advised teachers to clearly enunciate all the words in the lesson, while the students listened attentively and pointed to the words in their books, as they were pronounced. It was absolutely necessary for the teacher's voice to be heard frequently during every reading exercise so that the students would have a model to imitate. Wells thought that it was better to suspend a lesson or omit it altogether rather than to let students read by themselves. Since the teaching of reading began in the primary grades, Wells had special and lengthy advice for those teachers.²⁴

Primary Teachers

Indeed, Wells thought the primary schools were the most important component of the educational program. He viewed primary teachers as critical elements to the educational process and consequently they received an extraordinary

²³Ibid., 37.

²⁴Ibid., 40.

amount of attention from him. He recommended a method for the primary teachers to use during oral reading exercises. One student was to read the first sentence which would be followed by choral reading of the same sentence. Then another student would read the second sentence and the pattern would continue. Wells thought that this method offered the advantage of allowing the class to advance "much faster than the method of hearing each pupil read a sentence in turn, without the concert practice," and each student had the benefit of reading the entire lesson. Wells cautioned teachers, in the use of concert exercises, to make certain to guide the students to the use of free and natural voice tones for he said that it was "always better to dispense with exercises in concert, than to have them become a means of forming bad habits in modulation and inflection."²⁵

Wells thought that children were to be taught to print or write on their slates as soon as they were able to read. The freedom of hand movement along with the improvement in eye coordination which drawing offered prompted him to suggest that it would help children to learn to write and therefore the two subjects "should receive early and constant attention in the Primary School." Wells encouraged the use of long pencils by primary students, noting that short pencils promoted the formation of bad habits in

²⁵Ibid., 41.

holding writing instruments. He favored drawing over writing because it was more pleasing to children and evoked creativity and imagination. It also led "the young mind to observe and analyze the forms of things" and cultivated the child's taste. Wells felt teaching the fundamentals of geometrical drawing provided a foundation for "map drawing and other illustrative exercises in the higher department of instruction."²⁶

Wells' suggestions to the primary teachers were not limited to instruction; he also shared his views on the character traits of the ideal primary teachers and the ideal learning environment. He felt that primary teachers should spare no pains, indeed do everything within their powers, to make the primary classroom as attractive as possible and proposed that "the perceptive faculties should at this period receive much more attention than the reflective." Since he was cognizant of the limitations of these very young students, he reminded teachers that primary students should not be confined for long periods of time and both their bodies and mind required frequent breaks or periods of relaxation. He said:

If children of five and six years are to be confined in school six hours a day, it is highly important that they should have some means of entertainment during a considerable portion of the time that is not occupied with school exercises. When circumstances permit, it is an important part of the teacher's duty to introduce a variety of intellectual and physical recreations, and

²⁶Fifth Annual Report, 33-34.

not allow the first years of instruction to be associated with the idea of confinement.²⁷

Wells cited the use of slates and pencils as the best means available for young children to entertain themselves. He noted the impracticality of using these in the overcrowded classrooms of Chicago because of the potential noise level. He recommended, instead, a newly introduced noiseless substitute: small paper slates which he attempted to procure for the Chicago schools.²⁸

Though kindergartens were not established by the Chicago Public Schools until 1892, Wells recognized the special needs of children under the age of six who were embarking upon their first year of schooling. He believed that five year olds were not ready for the drill and discipline of schooling and that their effects "would be alike injurious both to body and mind." Realizing that the school system was not prepared to serve these children and that even the sincerest efforts to do so were detrimental, Wells recommended that the admission age be changed from five to six.²⁹ Since this suggestion was not adopted during Wells' tenure as superintendent, he felt an increased urgency to help primary teachers minimize the damage that premature schooling would do to five year olds. To that end

²⁷Third Annual Report, 42.

²⁸Ibid., 42-43.

²⁹Fifth Annual Report, 23.

he discussed, at length, the instructional program and climate for the first year primary student.

Wells' perception of the ideal learning environment for primary students was based upon his knowledge of the physiological and psychological needs of young children. He realized that the life styles of these youngsters were changing dramatically, from the freedom of being able to move about at home whenever they pleased, to the regular discipline and confinement of the classroom. He said that "all the efforts of the teacher should be specially adapted to this peculiar condition of the pupil. Children of this age should not be expected to sit without moving a muscle." Wells explained that the nervous system of the five or six year old child was more than three times as large as the body, proportionally. Therefore the young child's body required frequent physical exercise and this could not be ignored by the teacher. The first year spent in primary school was to serve as a transitional period from the liberty of home life to the structure of the school-room.³⁰

Wells understood that primary education was the foundation of the educational process; because of this concern he spent much time and effort describing the attributes of the ideal primary teacher and advocating that their salaries be raised to at least that of the grammar

³⁰Ibid., 26-27.

school teachers. He proposed this recommendation for two reasons. Firstly, he believed that their inferior salaries perpetuated the misconception that primary teachers were not as important as grammar school teachers. Secondly, he knew that they had greater responsibilities and that they worked harder than the grammar school teachers. According to Wells, the personal character of the teacher had greater impact in the primary grades than it did in any other grades. To excel as a primary teacher required special talents which included:

acquaintance with the first principles of knowledge, special fondness for young children, and an abiding consciousness that there is really no higher department of useful labor than that of giving direction to the first efforts of minds that are opening to an endless existence.³¹

During Wells' first year in Chicago, he introduced some modifications in the instructional program of the primary schools. Among these were "Object Lessons or Lessons on Common Things" which he thought were better suited for primary instruction than any other. These lessons were meant to be less formal than ordinary recitations and were to take the form of conversations between the teacher and her students, with the topics being familiar objects such as a book or a pencil. The object was not only to be discussed but also was to be displayed during the conversation. The

³¹William Harvey Wells, "Primary Schools," article in The Graded School: A Graded Course of Instruction, 158-161.

purpose of these lessons was to help the students clearly understand the nature and relations of familiar objects within their environment and also to improve their ability to express ideas and make appropriate use of the language.³²

Wells felt strongly that readiness and precision in the use of the language were to be major instructional objectives for the primary teacher and were to be pursued from the beginning. In support of this goal, he thought that every question should be answered completely and with grammatical correctness. He summarized his views on object lessons and the course of instruction for primary students as follows:

[It] should consist of familiar conversations upon common objects, giving clear ideas of their various properties, forms, colors, uses, etc., and cultivating a familiar and accurate acquaintance with the words employed to describe them; simple exercises on the slate or black-board, imitating some letter, or word, or drawing; singing; repeating verses, singly and in concert; counting; learning words and letters, and their uses, from the black-board and from cards; with frequent interchanges of physical exercises and recreations.³³

The object lessons which Wells developed and implemented were not only a prelude to but also a major component in his Graded Course of Instruction.

³²Fourth Annual Report, 40.

³³Fifth Annual Report, 27.

Curriculum: The Graded Course of Instruction

It was immense in details and profound in impact. The "Graded Course of Instruction" dramatically changed the course of instruction in the schools of Chicago and in several other school systems. It was adopted by the Chicago Board of Education, at its meeting of 6 March 1861, and the entire document was included in the superintendent's annual report. One of the most significant works of its time, the "Graded Course of Instruction," systematized graded schools and offered a curriculum which was uniform across the grades. Though Wells' annual reports were always replete with practical suggestions to teachers, he knew that the teachers and children of Chicago needed more; they needed a major restructuring of the existing system and a new curriculum to accompany it. Being a practical man himself, he knew a theoretical document would not serve the needs of the Chicago teachers. He analyzed and digested the theory and produced a remarkably practical document which provided abundant details that were to carefully guide the teachers toward implementation. Wells described the new curriculum as follows:

In the course of instruction . . . I have endeavored to digest a pretty full outline of a systematic and progressive oral course, embracing object teaching, moral lessons and other conversational exercises. . . . Though necessarily confined to the limits of a mere syllabus, and not designed to relieve teachers from the labor of making special preparation for the daily lessons, I trust it will be found sufficiently full to guide even inexperienced teachers in the selection and arrangement of topics, and in the general method of

treating them. . . . But the most important new feature of the course, is the extension of oral lessons on practical subjects.³⁴

Previous to Wells' graded course, the structure of the school buildings dictated the curriculum. Older school buildings in Chicago could not accommodate more than six teachers and it was for this reason that there were exactly six divisions in the course of study; three each in the grammar and primary schools. The newer buildings had space enough for ten teachers, and though Wells probably preferred twelve divisions, he chose to divide his course of study into ten grades; five each in the primary and grammar departments. They were numbered from ten to one and the tenth grade was for five year olds. The time was opportune to increase the number of divisions or grades because the board of education "had recently united the Grammar and Primary Departments of each District School into one organization." Wells felt it important for the divisions between successive grades to be precisely defined and he endeavored to do so, saying that it would "give efficiency and value to a graded course of study."³⁵

In the introduction Wells proffered a rationale for it; citing the transiency of the student population in 1860, noting over two thousand transfers from one public school to

³⁴Ibid., 28-29.

³⁵Ibid., 22-23.

another. As students moved from one part of the city to another, in some branches of the course of study, they found as much as a year's difference, between the class they had left and their new class. Parents often complained that their children were demoted subsequent to transferring.³⁶

Wells conceded that it was not reasonable to expect that all schools would make the exact same progress in every subject. However, he felt that there should have been some bench-marks in the course of study which all students would be required to attain a certain level of achievement "in all the parallel branches." In any given subject, all students would have to attain this standard of achievement before the teacher would move to the next topic. Wells thought that this would resolve the problem; he called these bench-marks stand points and said:

At these particular points, it is plain that the pupils will be together in all the branches in all the schools; and if these points are sufficiently numerous in the course, a pupil may pass from one school to any other in the city, at any time, and he will find some class equally advanced with himself in all the studies.³⁷

Another advantage to the new course of study was that it allowed students to advance from one grade to another as

³⁶Chicago, IL Department of Public Instruction, Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1861, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Press and Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1861), 22.

³⁷Fifth Annual Report, 29.

soon as they were qualified to do so. Wells said that this was accomplished through more frequent examinations by the principals "and by making the distinction between the grades more definite and exact." Teachers would appreciate this new system because they would be able to witness their students' successes and achievements before they were moved along to the next teacher. Wells' course of study was decades ahead of its time in its similarities to the twentieth century's mastery learning or criterion referenced curriculum:

These examinations by the masters, at frequent and regular intervals, comparing the attainments of each grade with a fixed and known standard, will try every teacher's work, and award to the most deserving the credit which justly belongs to them.³⁸

Wells' major purpose in introducing the course of study was to assist teachers in improving instruction and in increasing their standards of excellence. Noting the progressive nature of many Chicago teachers, he assured them that this new curriculum was not meant to inhibit them in any way.

He indicated that in compiling this work, he garnered information from other cities, teachers in Chicago, and he was especially grateful to the principals for their kind and efficient aid. A large portion of the general directions, taken from Wells' diary of visits to the schools, were

³⁸Ibid., 23.

"designed to supply the deficiencies most frequently observed, and to correct the most common faults." The suggestions were to substitute for the constant visits from the superintendent; as the Chicago school system steadily grew, Wells probably realized that it would be physically impossible for him to visit and assist every teacher as often as needed.³⁹

Wells recognized that the curriculum then in use was deficient in those subjects which he thought were necessary for a sound practical education. He lamented that physiology, mineralogy, geology, natural philosophy and chemistry which offered essential knowledge, were not taught, and children left the schools of Chicago uninformed about basic health issues or simple scientific phenomena. His new course of study would remedy this deficit. To preclude increasing the already extensive branches of study, Wells instituted a series of fifteen minute daily oral lessons, which would be conducted throughout the entire grammar school course and which "would be sufficient to embrace a wide range of practical exercises in common philosophy and common things." When used properly Wells thought they would infuse new life and vigor in the classes.⁴⁰ Wells was very explicit in the goals and

³⁹Ibid., 25.

⁴⁰Ibid., 26-27.

objectives of this vast document, which was published in 1862 with slight modifications; he shared his innermost feelings on the work in a letter to Barnard:

It is the result of six years experiment and observation in the seventeenth century schools of Chicago, with a careful examination and comparison of the systems and methods of other cities, . . .

I hope it will be found philosophical in its gradation and arrangement, and that it may do something to aid teachers in their efforts to introduce improvements and advance the standard of excellence in their modes of instruction, without imposing any restraints upon the enterprise of progressive teachers.

Most of the directions and suggestions have literally had their origin in my notebook.

I have not been ambitious of presenting a great many things strictly original and new; but I would fain hope the work will be found to embody a good many directions that are based on nature and common sense.

I cannot go so far as some of my object lesson friends, who make object teaching the basis of their system of primary instruction; but I have endeavored to intersperse a regular and systematic course of oral teaching among the other exercises, so as to afford an agreeable variety and healthful relaxation without interfering with the successful prosecution of the ordinary branches. I have particularly endeavored to give such shape and direction to the oral course, that parents will have less ground for complaining that the instructions of the schools are not practical.

I have also attempted a some what copious list of marginal references to the best sources of information and direction in filling up the oral course.

All this I have aimed to accomplish. How far I have succeeded, others must judge.⁴¹

The "Graded Course of Instruction"⁴² had two fundamental components which were integrated throughout the

⁴¹William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 13 September 1862, Henry Barnard Papers, Fales Library, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, New York, NY.

⁴²The work was originally included in the seventh annual superintendent's report in 1861, and subsequently published as a separate entity in 1862.

work: the regular course of instruction and directions to teachers. They were distinguished by different type sizes and each was complete in itself. Wells began with "General Directions for All the Grades" which contained thirteen points. Although Wells had discussed many of the points in annual reports prior to 1861, several had never been discussed before publication of the document.

Wells began the general directions with a discussion of the principal purpose of reading. Contrary to what some teachers thought, Wells stated that the principal goal of a reading exercise was to express its meaning, not simply to understand its meaning. "The sense of the piece must be studied then, not . . . as an end, but as a means to enable the pupil to execute the reading successfully." Wells believed that reading and spelling were interrelated and suggested that during reading and spelling lessons, brief daily concert exercises be conducted in all the lower grades of the primary department. His directions for spelling were: that students pronounce each word distinctly before spelling it; that special attention be given to syllabication; and that teachers make frequent use of sources other than the speller for lessons.⁴³

Wells was adamant in his insistence that teachers direct their students in the proper use of the language;

⁴³Seventh Annual Report, 30-33.

advocating a program which contained some of the elements of the twentieth century whole language approach. He instructed teachers to make secure their students' "habits of readiness and precision in the use of language," especially during recitations. It was also important for teachers to be clear and accurate in their own expressions and to encourage students to always select the best words and phrases. Wells believed that exercises in composition would aid in this endeavor and he suggested three formats to help make compositions more pleasant tasks for the students. Each format required students to record informal conversations, or their own thoughts on a given subject or object. As the students examined and analyzed these, they would learn that every spoken sentence constituted a composition and when written, it became a written composition.⁴⁴

Wells' general directions with regard to arithmetic were brief. He instructed teachers to have frequent extemporaneous exercises in which students would be required to combine a series of numbers involving principles which they had studied. The teacher was to begin dictating numbers slowly and as the students achieved mastery the pace of the dictation was to increase. He gave the following example: "5, add 3, add 10, subtract 9, multiply by 8, add

⁴⁴Ibid., 34-35

20, subtract 40, divide by 10, -- result?" Students who knew the answer were to raise their hands and the teacher would call on one or more students individually.⁴⁵

The teacher was expected to inculcate good morals and manners, not so much "by direct exhortation and formal precepts, as by resorting to expedients that will call these affections and qualities into active exercise." Wells recommended anecdotes and familiar examples which illustrated love between siblings, respect for the elderly, kindness to animals, benevolence and so on. During recess, the teachers were directed to carefully watch the students so that they could take advantage of opportunities to encourage kind and noble acts and to express strong disapproval for any departure from virtue and honor. Since good manners were necessarily connected to good morals, Wells enjoined the teachers to seize every opportunity to instill civility and courtesy within the students.⁴⁶

The "Graded Course of Instruction" provided for oral lessons and Wells anticipated that the teachers would extend the outline and write complete oral exercises. He said that it was very important for every exercise to have some definite purpose and aim and for the teachers to cover every subject listed. The oral lessons in the grammar division

⁴⁵Ibid., 33-34.

⁴⁶Ibid., 35-36.

were to be fifteen minutes in length and to be reviewed as often as necessary, so that they would be thoroughly learned and remembered. Wells directed the teachers, in most schools, to increase the amount of time spent on reviews, explaining that "each lesson should be made, to some extent, a review of the previous lesson." Though Wells thought that both written and oral reviews were appropriate at specific times, he felt written reviews were one of the best means for "securing thoroughness and accuracy of scholarship." They were reliable in testing the students' knowledge of a subject, nurturing freedom of expression in the use of language and affording a valuable discipline to the mind, by forcing students to rely totally upon their own resources.⁴⁷

Included in the general directions to teachers were comments on the order of exercises and the length of recitations. Wells told the teachers to post an established order of exercises in their classrooms, for each day of the week, indicating the beginning and ending time for each recitation. He suggested specific lengths of time, which varied according to the grades, for recitations. He also provided a general guide for the frequency of recitations and rhetorical exercises which varied likewise. Wells devoted the last several pages of the document to physical

⁴⁷Ibid., 38.

exercise, providing specific instructions on arm and leg movements and breathing. ⁴⁸

Though it may appear to have been overwhelming in its specificity, Wells' graded course was praised and favorably received by many. One author commented:

That such a revolution in procedure--and in the long established daily activities of teachers--was accomplished so quickly and so thoroughly was a tribute to the superintendent's administrative ability and to his skill with people, both teachers and Board members. The minimum standards he set apparently ⁴⁹ did not seem unreasonable to most of his teachers.

In his "History of the Schools in Chicago," Lane applauded Wells for systematically grading the schools of Chicago, and for formulating and publishing the first course of study for elementary schools which had ever been published, to his knowledge.⁵⁰ A reviewer of the 1862 published version of the work concurred that it was the first book published on the subject of American graded schools though several articles, lectures and school reports had treated the subject.⁵¹

Newton Bateman, superintendent of public instruction for the state of Illinois, commented that the Graded Course

⁴⁸Ibid., 38-39; 68-73.

⁴⁹Herrick, The Chicago Schools, 42.

⁵⁰Albert G. Lane, "History of the Schools in Chicago," Handwritten Manuscript, circa 1901, Manuscript Collection, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

⁵¹"The Graded School," Illinois Teacher 8 (October 1862): 440.

of Instruction was the most valuable treatise ever published in America and that it was successful in its attempts to delineate a course of study for common schools. He highly recommended it to all teachers and friends of common schools and thanked its author for this valuable and timely contribution to the cause of education. Bateman's comments were written in a letter to the editor of the Illinois Teacher who said that Bateman was an authority on the matter. The letter also included high praise for Wells, saying:

No one but a practical teacher of large experience and of clear and comprehensive views of educational philosophy and of the laws of mental growth, could have written the book. Mr. Wells has grappled with the elements of his difficult problem with great patience and skill, and educed order from confusion. It can not be denied that many of even our best teachers have no well-defined conception of what a graded school is, and what the course of study should be: hence they work on no plan; circumstances, continually changing are allowed to determine the course of study, defeating all hope of symmetrical training. This, with Mr. Wells's volume at hand, need be so no longer. The directions to teachers are clear, full and eminently practical; and the work opportune, appearing at a time when the subject of oral and object teaching is arresting general attention.⁵²

Object Lessons

In the original "Graded Course of Instruction," which Wells prepared for the Chicago schools, he specifically discussed the objects which were to be used at each grade

⁵²Newton Bateman, "The Graded School," Illinois Teacher, 8 (November 1862): 476 (a letter to the editor).

level and the properties of the objects which were to be discussed during the oral instruction. In the tenth grade, for instance, the teacher was to use home objects with which the students were already familiar and in which they had great interest: their toys, friends and so on. Wells reminded the teachers that for students in the ninth and tenth grades the major objective was "to cultivate habits of observation, improve the perceptive faculties and secure habits of accuracy in the use of language."⁵³

Object teaching was new to American education and Wells was instrumental in disseminating it throughout the Midwestern states. He was concerned, however, that several teachers were using it improperly because they had only vague notions about its true meaning and intent. He addressed this concern in an 1862 article in the Illinois Teacher. He said that the system of object teaching was as old as nature and if the word nature had been used in the name, instead of object, "it would have saved, many excellent teachers from failing to comprehend the end to be sought, and wasting their time in aimless efforts."⁵⁴

Wells cited three prevalent abuses in the use of object teaching. The first was the presentation of object lessons without any definite purpose or aim, which, he said, was a

⁵³Seventh Annual Report, 41.

⁵⁴William Harvey Wells, "Object-Teaching: Its Origin--Uses--Abuses," Illinois Teacher 8 (November 1862): 441.

waste of time. In defining their purpose, he said that object lessons should be conducted in such a manner as to provide students a clear and definite understanding of the common things, their properties and relations. In addition, students should be able to readily use the best words to verbalize these properties and relationships. Object lesson should "embrace an accurate knowledge of principles directed to practical use."⁵⁵

The second abuse in object teaching was "object-less object lessons," which lacked natural progression or system. Wells noted that the teacher's fault was attempting to do too much, that is, they were introducing principles which were too advanced for their students and more suitable for high school or college. Wells advised the teachers to bring the "common philosophy of common life into its appropriate place in the common school," rather than bewildering themselves and their students with abstruse principles and technicalities. The third error which Wells described was the use of words derived from Latin and other foreign languages, while neglecting words from Saxon origin which were more valuable, even though they did not sound as impressive. Wells explained to teachers that words should receive attention in proportion to their value and use in the language. Only when a Saxon word is already understood

⁵⁵Ibid., 442.

by the students should the teacher have devoted more time to the Latin equivalent.⁵⁶

Wells lamented that when a new method or technique was incorrectly implemented by poorly trained or untrained teachers, and the program was unsuccessful, the new technique or system was blamed for the failure rather than the real underlying causes. As this condition affected object teaching, he advised:

It is quite time that the abuse of the system should be checked; and its healthy growth and progress require that it should be watched with vigilance and criticised [sic] unsparingly. It is time for teachers every where to learn that it is in reality a system of science, and that its principles need to be studied and understood before they can be successfully applied.⁵⁷

Oral Instructions

Object teaching and oral instructions were major components of Wells' "Graded Course of Instruction" and each was dependent upon the other. The objects which were defined for use at each grade level were to be used in the oral lessons. Through conversation, students were to understand ideas related to the objects, such as form, color, size, weight, position, parts, and so on. An important new feature of the oral course of instruction was the addition of practical subjects including chemistry, natural philosophy, mineralogy, geology and physiology which

⁵⁶Ibid., 443.

⁵⁷Ibid.

were to occupy fifteen minutes of oral instruction daily in the grammar schools. Wells also directed the teachers to introduce geography and English grammar through the use of oral lessons rather than from text books. In the lower grades oral exercises were to totally replace the primer.⁵⁸

Morals and manners were to be inculcated through the use of oral instructions in all the grades. In the tenth through seventh grades, the teacher was to use verses and maxims which embodied moral sentiments or useful information. Wells indicated that the verses were to be kept simple and suggested maxims and sentiments such as the following: "'What is worth doing at all, is worth doing well; It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong; Never leave till tomorrow, what should be done to-day.'"⁵⁹

Oral lessons were to be conducted twice daily in all the grades with the length of time gradually increasing across the grades. Beginning in the fourth grade, Wells instructed the teachers to spend an amount of time on oral instruction, each week, equivalent to fifteen minutes a day. Wells' dictates for oral instruction are depicted in table 1.

⁵⁸Seventh Annual Report, 25-29.

⁵⁹Ibid., 43.

Table 1. -- Oral Instructions For the Regular Course of Instruction

Grades	Objects and Topics	Frequency/ Time
Tenth	embracing lessons on common things; on form; color; animals; morals and manners	two or more lessons a day, each from five to eight minutes long
Ninth	embracing lessons on parts, form, and color, illustrated by common objects; on animals, mostly those with which the children are already familiar; morals and manners; miscellaneous topics	two or more lessons a day, each from five to ten minutes long
Eighth	size; general qualities; trades and professions; moral lessons; miscellaneous topics	two or more oral exercises a day, each from five to twelve minutes long
Seventh	form, size weight, animals; the five senses; common things, miscellaneous topics, morals and manners	two or more oral exercises a day, each from five to twelve minutes long
Sixth	form; animals; shells; foreign productions; miscellaneous topics; common things; manners and morals	two or more oral exercises a day, each from eight to fifteen minutes long
Fifth	form; common things; trees; plants, etc.; geography; miscellaneous topics; morals and manners	two or more oral exercises a day, each from ten to twenty minutes long

Fourth	sound; light; air and water; meteorology; miscellaneous topics; moral and manners	The time devoted to oral instruction each week, to be equal in amount to fifteen minutes a day.
Third	historical sketches; electricity and magnetism; minerals; morals and manners; familiar exercises in grammar, embracing the parts of speech and construction of sentences	The time devoted to oral instruction each week, to be equal in amount to fifteen minutes a day.
Second	properties of matter; laws of motion, etc; physiology and hygiene; morals and manners	The time devoted to oral instruction each week, to be equal in amount to fifteen minutes a day.
First	popular astronomy; elementary book-keeping; government; heat; geology; morals and manners	The time devoted to oral instruction each week, to be equal in amount to fifteen minutes a day.

Source: Seventh Annual Report, 41-66.

Development of the Philosophy

With Wells' affinity for grammar and proper use of the language, one can readily perceive that he would strongly favor oral communications which, in turn explains why he included oral instruction in his curriculum. If Wells were to be credited with the originality of any of the concepts included within the Graded Course of Instruction it would be the oral lessons and his insistence that teachers engage their students in conversations. As Wells noted in his, 13 September 1862, letter to Barnard, he did not attempt to introduce a great deal of original material. Though he indicated that much of the information was gleaned from his notes, he traced the true conceptions of the system of object teaching to the works of the distinguished seventeenth century Austrian teacher, Amos Comenius. Wells credited the celebrated Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi with further development and application of object teaching at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰

Wells, a pedagogical scholar, was exposed to Pestalozzi's philosophy during his early involvement with educational associations and through reading their journals. However, in all likelihood, the most direct influence on Wells' use of object teaching was Henry Barnard, who as an

⁶⁰William Harvey Wells, "Object-Teaching: Its Origin--Uses--Abuses," 441-442.

early advocate of Pestalozzi, wrote and published works on object teaching. As early as 1839, Barnard "made a conscious effort to acquaint himself and then his readers with the Pestalozzian corpus." In fact, one biographer said that Barnard promoted Pestalozzi's philosophy in American education and credited him with providing students of educational philosophy ideas which eventually became quite prevalent in the writings and practices of later nineteenth century theorists as well as perspectives which were innovative and advanced.⁶¹

In 1859, the second edition of Barnard's book on the life and educational philosophy of Pestalozzi was published and in 1860 Barnard published an article on object teaching which Wells described as elaborate and valuable. Barnard's works were replete with Pestalozzi's philosophical ideals, from which Wells developed his own, including:

Pestalozzi's emphasis on the child, and on the role of the environment in education, his insistence on the importance of the real and the immediate as sources for the teaching of children, and his elevation of the teacher as the moral as well as intellectual guide for children, . . .⁶²

Wells and Barnard shared a long-term professional association and friendship which spanned more than four decades. The fact that they had several philosophical

⁶¹Edith Nye MacMullen, In the Cause of True Education: Henry Barnard and Nineteenth-Century School Reform (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 306.

⁶²Ibid., 316.

concepts and interests in common probably strengthened their relationship and contributed to its longevity. Besides object teaching and other Pestalozzian concepts, they shared an interest in teacher training which was important to both men. Wells' work in that regard constituted another major contribution to education and will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

A TEACHER OF TEACHERS: WILLIAM HARVEY WELLS AND THE SATURDAY MORNING CHICAGO TEACHERS' INSTITUTES

"Doing Good"

Wells was relentless in his efforts to improve the schools of Chicago. His motto, "Doing Good," is an appropriate characterization of his efforts, for he was adamant in his desire to do good for the schools of Chicago. He could have been content or complacent with either of his celebrated accomplishments and rested upon his laurels. Instead, he executed a diligent and continuous campaign dedicated to improving the schools of Chicago because he was determined that they would be the best possible; he was doing good. Realizing that his task was multifaceted, Wells worked from a broad perspective. He analyzed issues in priority order and systematically implemented plans which were designed to remedy or diminish problems and concerns which included attendance, parental involvement, overcrowding and curriculum development.

Wells recognized that teachers were an important component of schooling and, as such, were crucial to any improvement efforts, saying:

The character of the schools must always depend mainly upon the character of the teachers, and the progress

and improvement of the schools generally bear a direct relation to the efforts made by the teachers for their own improvement.¹

Armed with his belief in the value of teachers, and with his expert knowledge of teachers, pedagogy and teacher training, Wells strove to do good by assisting teachers in their professional development. In this endeavor as well, he used the broad approach; and worked on the improvement of instruction and professionalism. The latter being of particular concern to him, in that Wells' personal quest for professional growth was long-standing, and pursued with immeasurable ardor and zeal. His good friend and biographer, Charles Northend, said that Wells engaged in teaching con amore, and gave it all his thoughts, talents and energies. "He was not content with the old ways, unless fully satisfied that they were the best. Consequently he was always aiming to improve in methods of teaching." Again, he was "doing good."²

¹Chicago, IL, Department of Instruction, Fifth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1859, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Book and Job Printing Office of Scott and Co., 1859), 60.

²Charles Northend, "William Harvey Wells," The Indiana School Journal 9 (July 1864): 204.

Professionalism and the Improvement of Teachers

The superintendent, who was passionate in his convictions toward professionalism, felt that teachers were as responsible for their own professional growth as students were responsible for their own intellectual growth.³

Consistent with this belief, Wells said that it was "the manifest duty of the teacher to strive every day to make some positive advance upon the labors of the previous day." Among the suggestions which he offered for improvement, the equivalent to the twentieth century process called networking, Wells told teachers to avail themselves of the wisdom and experience of their colleagues:

The model classes, and essays, and discussions, which are presented at our monthly Institutes, are full of practical suggestions, from which every teacher may derive important aid in improving the character of their own instruction.⁴

Visiting others schools was a means of networking for professional improvement and the Rules of the Board of Education permitted teachers to visit other schools "for the purpose of observing different modes of instruction and discipline." Each teacher was granted one-half day per term for this purpose. Prior approval from the president of the board or the superintendent was required and it was the teachers' responsibilities to provide "for the proper care

³Ibid., 205.

⁴Fifth Annual Report, 61.

of the pupils under their immediate charge."⁵ Wells encouraged teachers to visit other schools or teachers in the same building and noted that it was one of the several influences which had combined to excite a healthy emulation among the schools and provide a stimulus for the teachers to work harder. He also stated that; "another agency is the practice of exchanging visits at the different schools once each term, which brings the methods of different teachers into frequent comparison."⁶

Though networking and professional interactions were important, Wells did not discount the value of reading educational literature which he explained embodied the best efforts of successful educators in America and other countries. To support this belief, he included a professional reading list in his 1859 report which contained practical books, with a special listing for primary teachers. For those teachers who wished to be held in high esteem in the profession Wells said that reading educational works was an "indispensable auxiliary . . . [and that] they

⁵Rules of the Board of Education, of the City of Chicago; Adopted April 25, 1860, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary to the Board of Education, in Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1860, (Chicago: Press and Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1860), 78.

⁶Chicago, IL, Department of Public Instruction, Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending December 31, 1862, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Evening Journal Book and Job Print, 1863), 14.

would meet an abundant reward, both in their own improvement and in the increased power it would give them to elevate and improve the character of their schools."⁷

Reading educational journals was another of the teachers' professional obligations and Wells said that it "was one of the indexes to a teacher's professional character."⁸ He held that this would allow them to avail themselves of improvements in discipline and instruction and also to extend their "range of observation and comparison among the teachers now in the field." Wells suggested that the teachers should especially read Barnard's Journal of Education which he proclaimed was the most elaborate and comprehensive periodical in existence at that time.⁹ In addition to professional literature and networking, Wells favored teachers' institutes, which provided excellent opportunities for networking, and were one of the most prevalent means of professionalism and teacher improvement during the mid-nineteenth century.

Evolution and Purpose of Teachers' Institutes

One of the earliest calls for teachers' institutes was credited to Dennis Olmstead, a graduate student at Yale

⁷Fifth Annual Report, 61.

⁸William Harvey Wells, to Henry Barnard, 17 September 1860, Henry Barnard Papers, Fales Library, Elmer Bobst Library, New York University, New York, NY.

⁹Fifth Annual Report, 61.

College. In his 1816 master's thesis he showed that the poor condition of the common schools of New England "was caused chiefly by the ignorance and incompetence of their teachers." Consequently, he formulated a plan for a schoolmaster's academy. In 1823, Yale College professor James L. Kingsley developed a proposal for the instruction of those who aspired to teach. Thomas H. Gallaudet was another proponent of some form of training or instruction for teachers. In 1825, at Hartford, Connecticut, he published a series of essays which focused on the importance of teachers' seminaries.¹⁰

Henry Barnard, in response to the increasing need for trained teachers, has been credited with actually conducting the first teachers' institute in 1839 at Hartford. However, the first teachers' institutes so named were conducted in 1843 by J. S. Denman who was superintendent of schools in Tompkins County, New York; it "lasted two weeks and was a revelation of the new agent in school improvement." In 1885, James H. Smart, former superintendent of public instruction for the state of Indiana, a recognized authority on teachers' institutes and president of Purdue University, described the early institutes conducted by Barnard as

¹⁰Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Circulars of Information, Teachers' Institutes, No. 2-1885, by [James H. Smart], submitted by John Eaton, Commissioner of education (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), 8.

follows:

This training included a review and extension of the topics then usually taught in common schools, and also a thorough instruction in pedagogics. Thus normal schools and teachers' institutes began their work in this country almost at the same time, and either together or separately began to extend to other states.¹¹

Smart proclaimed teacher institutes' a necessity arising from the inability of normal schools to accommodate the need for instruction in practical pedagogics. He said that, because normal schools were few and small, it was imperative that teachers' institutes quickly acquire "much greater importance as an educational training appliance." Smart noted that the purpose and use of teachers' institutes would vary depending upon locale and other demographics and listed some of these:

It may be useful in solidifying and concentrating public sentiment in favor of public schools; . . . it may prove vastly useful in disseminating useful knowledge about the nurture, instruction and culture of youth throughout the whole community; . . . it may be useful chiefly for the effective instruction of the teachers . . . in the most useful and practical methods of conducting and teaching their schools; . . . it may serve most effectually to imbue a corps of teachers, hitherto working towards various and conflicting results, with vital unity of purpose and common sympathy of thought.¹²

Teachers' institute became more prevalent as legislative bodies and eminent educators realized that poorly trained teachers were a major detriment to the

¹¹Ibid., 7; 9.

¹²Ibid., 9-10.

country's quest for a well educated citizenry. Teachers were poorly paid and consequently those who were attracted to the profession often were young women who wanted "an addition to their scanty pocket money or young men who [would] teach in order to procure means for the prosecution of their own studies during the rest of the year." Often, the young women would leave the profession after marriage and the young men would enter the ministry, bar or medical practice. This transient population, which lacked dedication, formed a significant portion of the teaching force and thus constituted a major rationale for the maintenance and support of teachers' institutes.¹³ This sentiment was expressed in an 1851 article in The Common School Journal which also discussed the purpose of teachers' institutes.

The great object of the wise and prudent should be to provide an improved race of teachers for our schools, as soon as possible; and the true policy is, to have many Normal Schools, in which a large company of picked men and women shall be training, thoroughly training for the work, by a long course of study and practice; while at the same time, the present race of temporary teachers, whose hearts are rarely in the work, and who do not intend to make it the business of their lives, are quickened and improved by Teachers' Institutes.¹⁴

Under the influence of Henry Barnard, state

commissioner of education, teachers' institutes flourished

¹³Ibid., 8.

¹⁴"Teachers' Institutes," The Common School Journal 13 (15 October 1851): 305.

in Rhode Island during the middle of the nineteenth century. His support was manifested in 1844 when he drafted and presented an educational reform bill to the state legislature, which specifically listed the establishment of teachers' institutes as one of the duties of a commissioner of public schools.¹⁵ Wells was an avid participant in some of Barnard's institutes and expressed the pleasure and gratification which they provided him in a 12 December 1845 article for the Boston Traveller. He praised the state for its commitment to education and highlighted its efforts toward the professional growth of Rhode Island teachers. Wells was particularly impressed with the state's teachers' institutes and wrote:

I have enjoyed the privilege of being present at two of the institutes and have formed a very high estimate as to their utility. I have attended . . . a variety of teacher's conventions and associations, but justice requires me to say that I never before received so much valuable instruction on the subject of teaching in the same space of time.¹⁶

Wells was not new to the subject of professional development, having personally engaged in the endeavor for

¹⁵Edith Nye MacMullen, In the Cause of True Education: Henry Barnard and Nineteenth-Century School Reform (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 116-117.

¹⁶Charles H. Keyes, "Henry Barnard's Home Life, and His Work and Influence Upon Education as Commissioner of Connecticut and Rhode Island," in National Education Association Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Fortieth Annual Meeting held at Detroit, Michigan July 8-12, 1901, by the Association (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1901), 402-403.

about fifteen years. Given this background, he knew the importance and impact of a good professional meeting. Wells was so awed by Barnard's institutes that he felt compelled to communicate his impressions to the Rhode Island superintendent. In a letter written during the winter of 1846, Wells explained to Barnard that one of the elements which made the Rhode Island institutes superior to county conventions and association was the depth to which the institutes covered a topic. He also cited the far-reaching impact of the institutes as another factor, noting that they left intelligent and enthusiastic interest in the entire community. Wells summed this feeling by saying that "your institutes left the places where [they were] held in a red-hot glow."¹⁷

Wells declared that the manner in which Barnard had designed the program and accommodations for the institute participants was judicious and a stroke of genius. The day sessions were devoted to practical professional work for teachers while the evening sessions provided popular addresses for parents and the general public. The teachers, speakers and others assisting with the institutes were housed with local families,

where the work done and to be done was sure to be talked over, Your educational tracts scattered broadcast before and after the meetings, your provisions for educational addresses in all the neighboring towns during the week preceding and during

¹⁷Ibid., 403.

the sessions of the institute, was inspiring work of the best sort. The whole thing to be appreciated needs to be seen and felt, and no teacher who has shared the enthusiasm will ever forget a Rhode Island institute.¹⁸

Conditions in New Hampshire were not as favorable during that time. Though the state allowed towns to levy a small tax for the support of county institutes, several simply did nothing, since this was not a mandate and it presented a burden which many counties could not overcome. On the other hand, Massachusetts provided a "sum sufficient to defray the expense of as many Institutes as may be authorized by the Board of Education. . . ." However, the number of teachers' institutes held in Massachusetts was much fewer than needed due to a lack of applications and proposals from local school districts. The matter was handled by the legislature in Maine much more efficiently. Not only were sufficient funds provided, but the legislature also required "the members of the Board of Education to establish an Institute, each in his own county, and to superintend it." Consequently, every county held an institute and attendance at those in Maine was twice that in Massachusetts.¹⁹

As funding and legislative support for teachers' institutes varied, so too did their actual structure. Some

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹"Teachers' Institutes," The Common School Journal 11 (15 June 1849): 182.

were conducted by superintendents and others by teachers, both veteran and inexperienced. The length of institutes varied also, ranging from a few days to several weeks. The activities included lectures, the reading of essays, drills, discussions and model lessons. As this movement, which began in New England, spread to the West, local characteristics and needs molded it.

Teachers' institutes arose from a need to provide free or inexpensive local opportunities for teacher improvement. By the end of the 1840s, teachers' institutes were being held regularly in Ohio, Michigan and Illinois. An institute held in October 1846 immediately followed "The Common School Convention at Chicago." The convention was hailed as "the best ever held in the State." Credit for the successful convention was given to Henry Barnard who, along with the assistance of Mr. Phelps of Albany, and Mr. Pierce of New York, directed the proceedings of the convention. In his Friday evening address, Barnard rendered high praise to the public schools of Chicago in which he had visited saying "that in arrangement and the ability of teachers they would compare favorably with those of any city he had ever visited."²⁰

²⁰W. L. Pillsbury, "Early Education in Illinois," in Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois. July 1, 1884-June 30, 1886. by Henry Raab, Superintendent of Public Instruction, CLII.

The teachers' institute which followed the convention commenced on Monday 12 October 1846 and continued through Saturday. It was proclaimed the first institute in the state of Illinois, and several teachers from the Chicago schools participated. It was conducted by Mr. Phelps who was the principal of the model department of the normal school in Albany, New York. One attendee described the institute as follows:

The activities passed off with increasing interest, from day to day; the evening lectures were well attended, and it was evident, that the public mind was in some degree waked up to the high importance of extending the benefits of common school instruction to all the children of the great West.

At the close of the Institute, the Teachers of the city organized a society, with a view of holding frequent meetings for mutual improvement.²¹

Hannah Clark called such gatherings "' campaigns of education'" which she said were to arouse the public's intelligent interest in education, "while at the same time they cultivated an esprit de corps among the teachers that added to the dignity of their profession and broadened their views." It was probably this heightened interest in education and esprit de corps, along with the influence of educators from New England, which led the Board of School

²¹Ibid.; Stephen R. Sweet, Teachers' Institutes or Temporary Normal Schools; Their Origin and Progress, (Utica, NY: H. H. Hawley and Co., 1848), 55.

Inspectors in Chicago to recommend that teachers' institutes replace the half-day of school on Saturday mornings.²²

The Saturday Morning Chicago Teachers' Institutes

The Beginning

The Chicago Board of School Inspectors had long recognized the need for professional improvement among teachers, and in their 1850 annual report proposed the following:

The 23rd Section of the School Ordinance requires schools to be held 5¹/₂ days per week. The one-half day on Saturday is not believed to be of sufficient benefit to warrant its continuance. If teachers were required to occupy a portion of the time by holding teachers' institutes for their own improvement in teaching, the result would appear in the improved condition of the schools.²³

At its meeting of 16 December 1850, the Common Council complied with this request. Section twenty-three of the school ordinance was amended requiring all teachers to meet on Saturdays "under the directions of the Inspectors, for their own improvement." According to Clark, the Saturday morning institutes were to serve as a sort of contracted

²²Hannah B. Clark, The Public Schools of Chicago: A Sociological Study (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1897), 17; Hildegard Romberg, "The Origin and Development of the Public Elementary Schools in Chicago, Illinois" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1935), 133.

²³Annual Report of the School Inspectors, Document 6604, City Clerk's Office, Chicago, November 30, 1850 in Romberg, "The Origin and Development of the Public Elementary Schools in Chicago, Illinois," 133.

normal-school course "to supplement the defective preparation of teachers."²⁴

The Board of School Inspectors took action on the council's ruling at its meeting of 28 December 1850 and issued a two-part resolution which elaborated on the teachers' duties and the purposes of the institutes. The first part of the resolution declared it the duty of the teachers to meet for a minimum of two hours on each of the first three Saturdays of every month, except during vacations. The teachers could choose the school in which to meet and were allowed to decide the time. It was the duty of one of the principal male teachers who was to "have been selected and chosen for the purpose at a previous meeting, to take charge and direction of the Institute." He was to determine the topics to be studied and the means of doing so, and the institute was to take the form of a model class.

In the second part of the resolution, the purposes of the institute were listed as follows:

- 1st. To enable the teachers to review their studies and thus become familiar with all the branches taught in the schools.
- 2d. That the teachers may become conversant with the best method of imparting instruction, and thus not only

²⁴[Shepherd Johnston] Historical Sketches of the Public School System of the City of Chicago, To the Close of the School Year 1878-79 (Chicago: Clark and Edwards Printers, 1880), 27; Clark, The Public Schools of Chicago, 17.

promote the interest of the school, but increase the usefulness and dignity of the profession.²⁵

Teachers were expected to report the names of colleagues absent from the institutes, and the cause of such absence, to the inspectors. The resolution also proclaimed it the duty of the members of the Board of School Inspectors to visit the institute occasionally "to explain to teachers more fully . . . the wishes and expectations of the Inspectors and to afford such aid and assistance in conducting the exercises as they" were able to render.²⁶

In October 1852, the board changed the meetings of the institute to the first and third Saturdays of each month of the academic year, from ten to noon. In 1855, Superintendent Dore reported that most of the teachers were attending the meetings regularly. The exercises included "instruction in the branches of education taught in the Public Schools, discussions and exhibitions of model classes of pupils taken alternately from the Primary and Grammar Schools." According to Dore, the model class demonstrations allowed teachers to observe and compare the progress of similar classes in different schools and various instructional methods. He explained that this opportunity

²⁵"Action of the School Inspectors," Chicago Daily Democrat 31 December 1850.

²⁶Ibid.

had produced a degree of emulation among the teachers which had "done much to elevate the schools."²⁷

An item in the Illinois Teacher which hailed Chicago as the leading city of the Northwest also commented on an occurrence at one of the city's teachers' institutes. The statement that teaching in the common schools had a tendency to weaken the minds of teachers had evoked a debate which "was quite spirited and racy." The writer felt that there was little danger of the teachers of Chicago becoming "rusty so long as such meetings continued to be held."²⁸

Superintendent Wells reduced the number of meetings to one per month, to be held on the second Saturday, from nine to noon with a fifteen minute recess. In 1856, Wells reported full attendance at the meetings, the purpose of which was "mutual improvement in the theory and practice of teaching." He indicated that the institute had afforded him the opportunity to communicate freely with the teachers on general matters relating to the schools. Being a proponent of networking, Wells pointed out the instances in which it had occurred. In one such example he noted that the

²⁷Chicago, IL, Second Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools for 1855, by John C. Dore, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of School Inspectors (Chicago: Daily Democrat Print, 1856), 10-11.

²⁸"Editor's Table," Illinois Teacher 2 (July 1856): 194.

teachers had not only become better acquainted with each other personally, but also had become more familiar with the views and methods of discipline and instruction of their colleagues. Model classes from different schools were still presented and practical questions relating to daily school routine were "freely and familiarly discussed."²⁹

The Teaching of Teachers

"Not only could William Wells teach, he knew how to help others learn how--a gift invaluable to schools of Chicago in 1856." His endeavor to help teachers improve was a serious and sincere manifestation of his creed: "doing good." Herrick said that Wells decreased the number of days the Chicago teachers' institute met because "he wanted the principals to have more time to help the teachers." He felt that having the principals work individually with the teachers would be more valuable than the extra time spent in the Saturday morning institutes. Wells wanted teachers to feel appreciated and he made sure they knew that their work with the students was of primary importance and "worthy of their best effort." He did his best to make certain that

²⁹Chicago, IL, Third Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of School Inspectors (Chicago: Daily Times Book and Job Print, 1857), 49-50; Chicago, IL, Fourth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools for the Year Ending Feb. 1, 1858, by William Harvey Wells, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Chicago Board of Education (Chicago: Chicago Daily Press, Book and Job Print, 1858), 14.

teachers understood that they were not simply to impart knowledge to passive students but were to arouse their interests and to direct their energy. Superintendent Wells told teachers that mental discipline could not be accomplished by rote memorization; conscious directed effort on the part of the students was required.

He stressed the need of children for sympathy and understanding, and told his teachers in his Saturday morning training classes that a kind word to a desponding pupil might accomplish more than any reprimand and that punishment not aimed to help a child develop self-discipline was worse than useless.³⁰

The teachers of Chicago grew professionally under Wells' leadership. In his annual report for 1862 the superintendent cited several factors which had contributed to the improvement of instruction. One of these was the annual written examinations in which students in the same grade were tested with the same questions. Of this examination, which was an early form of teacher accountability and probably paralleled twentieth century criterion referenced tests, Wells said it was a "searching test of every teacher's work, and the salutary influence . . . [of it] is now felt during every term of the year." The desire of each school to prepare the greatest possible

³⁰Mary J. Herrick, The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1971), 40; 45.

number of candidates for admission to the high school also contributed to improved instruction.³¹

One of Wells' major contribution toward increasing the professionalism of the teachers of Chicago was the "Graded Course of Instruction." The superintendent observed that it was an "important agency in stimulating the teachers to put forth their best efforts." He said that the complete and delineated outline for each grade provided a clear and reliable standard by which each teacher's work could be evaluated. Giving the teachers a complete and easily adapted curriculum upon which to plan their daily lessons was masterful on Wells' part. He knew that it would not only invoke uniformity of instruction but it would also evoke professional behavior which would lead to improved instruction:

Among the strongest incentives to increased effort on the part of the teachers, may also be mentioned the outline of oral instruction introduced in our present course of study. These oral lessons embrace a wide range of practical subjects, and require careful preparation on the part of the teachers. Most of the teachers have become so much interested in this oral course, that they have devoted a large amount of time to it out of school hours, writing out abstracts on the different subjects, and otherwise preparing themselves to interest and instruct their classes.

But over and above all these influences, is a strong and growing purpose with a large portion of our teachers, to rise to the first rank in their profession.³²

³¹Ninth Annual Report, 14.

³²Ibid., 14-15.

The Growth of the Chicago Teachers' Institute

As the teachers grew professionally their attendance at the Saturday morning institutes, which were being held at the high school, increased. The rise in attendance was partially attributable to the practicality of the model classes, essays and discussions which were presented. Wells thought these significant because they assisted the teachers in improving their own instructional programs. In the fifth annual report, the superintendent commented that the teachers had produced a monthly paper, or newsletter, containing essays which had been read at the Chicago teachers' institutes. "Many of the essays that first appeared in this paper have since been published in the Illinois Teacher and the Home and School Journal, [sic] and in several instances have been copied into the educational periodical of other states."³³

As he had done so often with other issues, Wells sought the opinions of prominent educators and superintendents in other cities in the conduct of teachers' institutes. Besides heightening his own scholarship, this practice supplied him with data which he often used to help improve conditions in the Chicago schools. In 1862, the superintendent "sent out letters of enquiry to nearly all the principal cities of the Northern states," and received

³³Fifth Annual Report, 60.

responses from more than one hundred towns. Wells' nine page summary of his findings was included in the ninth annual superintendent's report. He found that most cities of the Western states required that teachers attend institutes for professional improvement as a condition of employment. Most of these institutes were held twice monthly on Saturdays with the length of the sessions varying from two to three hours. In some cities, Saturday morning normal classes were provided for "teachers of limited experience, or those holding certificates below first grade." Some cities had experimented with voluntary teacher associations for the purpose of professional improvement and generally found them unsuccessful due to poor attendance.³⁴

Wells' survey revealed a growing interest in the professional improvement of teachers, with institutes being the most popular means of accomplishing that goal. The superintendent noted that the greatest obstacle to the success of teacher institutes was the teachers' feelings "that they encroach[ed] upon the time that properly" belonged to them. He thought it important to use whatever means necessary to dispel this belief, to interest the teachers in the meetings and to secure their willing

³⁴Ninth Annual Report, 18-20.

attendance. Wells had definite and well planned suggestions for motivating the teachers to this end.³⁵

Though these suggestions were confined to his annual report, other educators and administrators would have had access to them since Wells' reports, as were those of other major city superintendents, were disseminated nationally. Wells felt that the first and most important task, in promoting professional growth, was to make certain the teachers fully understood that their continued employment was contingent upon attendance and active participation in the institutes. Absence from one of these meetings was to be considered "quite as important a neglect of duty as absence from school during any of the regular sessions." In fact Wells recommended that participation in teachers' institutes should be obligatory nationally. He knew that this was a pipe dream which would not happen soon if at all and said "if the custom of devoting a certain number of hours in a month to exercises for mutual improvement was universal, no teacher would think of objecting to it."³⁶

He also believed that if each member of the board, in Chicago and other cities as well, would spend two or three hours a year at the institutes, "it would do very much to encourage the teachers and stimulate them to put forth their

³⁵Ibid., 22-23.

³⁶Ibid., 23.

best efforts to render the exercises interesting and profitable." Again, Wells' keen insight came to the fore in the recognition that the support and attention of those perceived to be in authority, or who were otherwise significant, were as important to teachers as they were to children. His final suggestion was that the institutes be designed so that as many teachers as possible would be actively involved:

It is those who sit as passive listeners, or in passive listlessness, that are not interested and benefitted. Practical drill exercises, on some subject connected with the daily routine of the school room, and in which all the teachers are expected to take a part, should form a part of the programme of every Teachers' Institute.³⁷

Wells reiterated his position on the vital importance of the professional improvement of teachers to the well being of the Chicago school system. He reported that a decided improvement had been made in this area during the previous two or three years, and that books on oral instruction and other educational works had replaced "works of fashionable literature . . . on the teachers' desks." He proudly boasted that more Chicago teachers were subscribing to the Illinois Teacher than ever before.³⁸

Attending and actively participating in teachers' institutes, Wells knew, would contribute to professional

³⁷Ibid., 24.

³⁸Ibid., 27-28.

growth and improved instruction. However, it would not be enough for those teachers who aspired to or had the proclivity for educational leadership. Before psychologists or researchers proclaimed the benefits of ownership in a project, Wells realized that if the institutes belonged to the teachers, they would appreciate them more, and would be more likely to implement the suggestions offered. To this end, the superintendent included teachers in the management, planning and conduct of the institutes, of which he said the following:

The management of the Institute has been left by the Board in the hands of the Superintendent, and it has been my uniform practice to invite a committee of teachers to aid me in arranging the successive programmes of exercises. In most other cities, the programme of exercises is always prepared by the Superintendent. This is a safeguard against the introduction of discussions upon the policy and measures of the Board of Education, and other irrelevant topics. Except in the matter of attendance, the course I have adopted has given to the Institute much of the freedom of a voluntary association, and thus far I have found very few evils resulting from it. I do not recollect a single instance during the past year in which the committee have desired to introduce a subject for discussion that I did not approve.

The teachers have performed cheerfully the parts assigned them, and the interest of the meetings has been well sustained through the year.³⁹

The March 1862 issue of the Illinois Teacher reported that the Chicago teachers' institute committee had decided to include in each institute one or two ten-minute exercises "illustrating knotty points in any part of the course of

³⁹Ibid., 17-18.

instruction," and a lecture from one of the principals.⁴⁰

However, as the number of teachers in Chicago increased it was impractical "to introduce drill exercises in any portion of the course of study, that . . . [would] be equally profitable to all." Since primary teachers were not interested in the same topics as grammar school teachers, the program of the institute was altered. In the modified program, the first part of the morning was devoted to general exercises for all teachers and the second part to specific topics. During the last hour, the teachers were divided into five groups of two grades each, with the first and second grades constituting the first group. Drill exercises were conducted for the five different groups simultaneously at each monthly institute and the teachers were engaged in those subjects in which they had particular interest.⁴¹ The Illinois Teacher reported as follows:

In the Institute, which is held in the High-School building on the Second Saturday of every month, a new plan has been adopted, calculated to make the Institute more of a working one than it has hitherto been, and intended to familiarize the teachers with the Oral Course, in teaching of which there has been great lack of uniformity. Through the last hour of the session the Institute is divided into five sections of two grades each, each section being presided over by an officer elected for the term. Two teachers are appointed to every section, who give regular half-hour class exercises, on an assigned topic in their grade. The programme at the last institute, October 11, was as follows:

⁴⁰"Local Intelligence: Chicago," Illinois Teacher 8 (March 1862): 132.

⁴¹Ninth Annual Report, 17.

Section A.	Grade 1.	Government, by Mr. Howland.
	Grade 2.	Circulation of the Blood, by Mr. Slocum.
Section B.	Grade 3.	Division by Factors, by Miss Phillips.
	Grade 4.	Reading, by Miss Bliss.
Section C.	Grade 5.	Arithmetic, by Miss Cooke.
	Grade 6.	Form, by Miss Dow.
Section D.	Grade 7.	The Eye and the Ear, by Miss Perkins.
	Grade 8.	Reading, by Miss Bradley.
Section E.	Grade 9.	Animals, by Miss Norman.
	Grade 10.	Form, by Miss Clarke. ⁴²

A similar program was planned for the next institute and the superintendent was expected to comment, as he normally did, on a topic germane to the management of the schools.⁴³

Each of the monthly institutes began with songs performed by students from one of the schools. The next order of business was the paper, probably the monthly newsletter, which was presented by teachers from one of the schools. This activity was followed by a lecture from one of the principals, and the morning concluded with a fifteen minute recess. The afternoon session usually began with remarks by Superintendent Wells who took advantage of the teachers being assembled regularly to share insights and concerns. At the 14 February 1863 institute, in response to a complaint that teachers were recommending a particular book and bookstores to the students, a heated debate, in

⁴²"Local Intelligence: Chicago," Illinois Teacher 8 (November 1862): 471.

⁴³Ibid.

which the superintendent and several principals and teachers participated, ensued:

The opinion of the principals was that they stood in a false light before the Board, who had taken the false statements of certain parties for truth, seemingly without any efforts to arrive at the true state of affairs. The superintendent thought the principals were to a certain extent at fault in not consulting with the members of the Board, and relieving themselves of the odium of having acted contrary to their wishes.⁴⁴

The opportunity to air such grievances and concerns in an intellectual environment and among their peers must have been endearing experiences for the principals and the teachers.

At a subsequent institute, the superintendent complied with a directive from the board and discussed its decision to censor the monthly newsletter and institute. Apparently, the paper had included two items, "one of them on negro equality," over which the political parties were divided and which sparked discussions at the institute. The board adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, that we recommend to the teachers of the public schools carefully to refrain, at all times, from advocating and discussing, either in the schools or in the teachers' institute, any sectarian or political question of a partisan character.⁴⁵

⁴⁴"Local Intelligence: Chicago," Illinois Teacher 9 (March 1863): 95.

⁴⁵"Local Intelligence: Chicago," Illinois Teacher 9 (May 1863): 166.

Wells explained that the inclusion of such controversial matters in the paper, "was not in accordance with the wishes of the Board, and that he hoped hereafter all vexed questions of this nature would be excluded from the paper." The teachers took exception to the board's mandate and engaged in an animated interchange after which they voted to omit the monthly newsletter from the proceedings of the institutes. The superintendent commented "that if there were no Paper the ladies must expect to have other exercises in its place." After reconsideration, the motion was reversed.⁴⁶

Though the board chose to censor the topics or issues which the teachers could discuss, the teachers still found matters which interested them and about which they could engage in lively discussions. At the June 1863 institute the discussion was "on Verbal Accuracy as Connected with Mental Discipline." It was the unanimous opinion of the teachers present that verbal accuracy should not be obligatory, except in definitions. On 3 October 1863 "the question of the propriety of singing immediately after entering school was discussed with great animation, showing little uniformity of opinion or practice." The following month the superintendent objected to an editorial in the monthly newsletter which congratulated newly elected

⁴⁶Ibid., 166-167.

officials. He thought the item was political and therefore inappropriate for the paper. "A sharp debate arose as to the character of the paragraph" in which several of the principals disagreed with the superintendent and two of them concurred with Wells. The Chicago teachers' institutes provided opportunities for teachers to openly voice their opinions on professional matters which, besides heightening their critical thinking abilities, increased their self-esteem and thus their adroitness in the classroom.⁴⁷

As one would expect, Wells used the forum, which the institutes presented, to discuss pedagogy. In October 1863, he reminded teachers that general principles and the interest of their students should guide lessons from the new grammar textbook rather than the book itself. He also noted that too much attention was given in the schools to memorizing suffixes and foreign words. The following month, among other issues, the superintendent "spoke of the necessity of harmonizing the several editions of the geography."⁴⁸

A Teacher's Perception

In 1861, "Miss Jones," a newly appointed Chicago teacher, related the anxieties which she experienced when

⁴⁷"Local Intelligence: Chicago," Illinois Teacher 9 (July 1863): 238; (November 1863): 366; (December 1863): 411.

⁴⁸"Local Intelligence: Chicago," Illinois Teacher 9 (November 1863):366; (December 1863): 411.

attending her first Saturday morning institute. In an article, "My First Institute," she wrote that she would relay her feelings exactly as they were that day and that she intended to be as frank and candid as possible. After having the attendance requirement and the program of activities satisfactorily explained to her, she was faced with the age-old question; "What shall I wear?" Her anxiety was heightened by the fact that she did not know anyone intimately enough to broach the subject. Miss Jones settled on "traveling-gear" and arrived at the high school at ten minutes before nine on the assigned day. She recognized the superintendent when he entered the room but saw no other familiar faces.⁴⁹

The jingling of a large bell signalled the start of the institute "and Mr. Wells called the assemblage to order." As was the custom, someone read the "Chicago Teacher," the monthly newsletter, though Miss Jones did not recall who. "After the paper, a model class, from the Erie School, and then, after a few remarks by the Superintendent, recess." According to Miss Jones this was the difficult portion of the morning, for the twenty minute recess seemed like an eternity to her. The superintendent stopped to chat with her until a colleague from her school joined them, afterwhich Wells "passed on, remarking that he left . . .

⁴⁹"My First Institute," Illinois Teacher 7 (November 1861): 379.

[her] in good hands." Miss Jones was amazed by the fact that she had taught in the same building with this teacher for an entire week and had never seen her before. After the recess:

A discussion followed, of which the principal business seemed to me to be to see which gentleman could make the most sport and pass the best jokes on others, and escape unharmed himself. I enjoyed the fun as much as any one; but I could scarcely see how it advanced the cause of teaching.⁵⁰

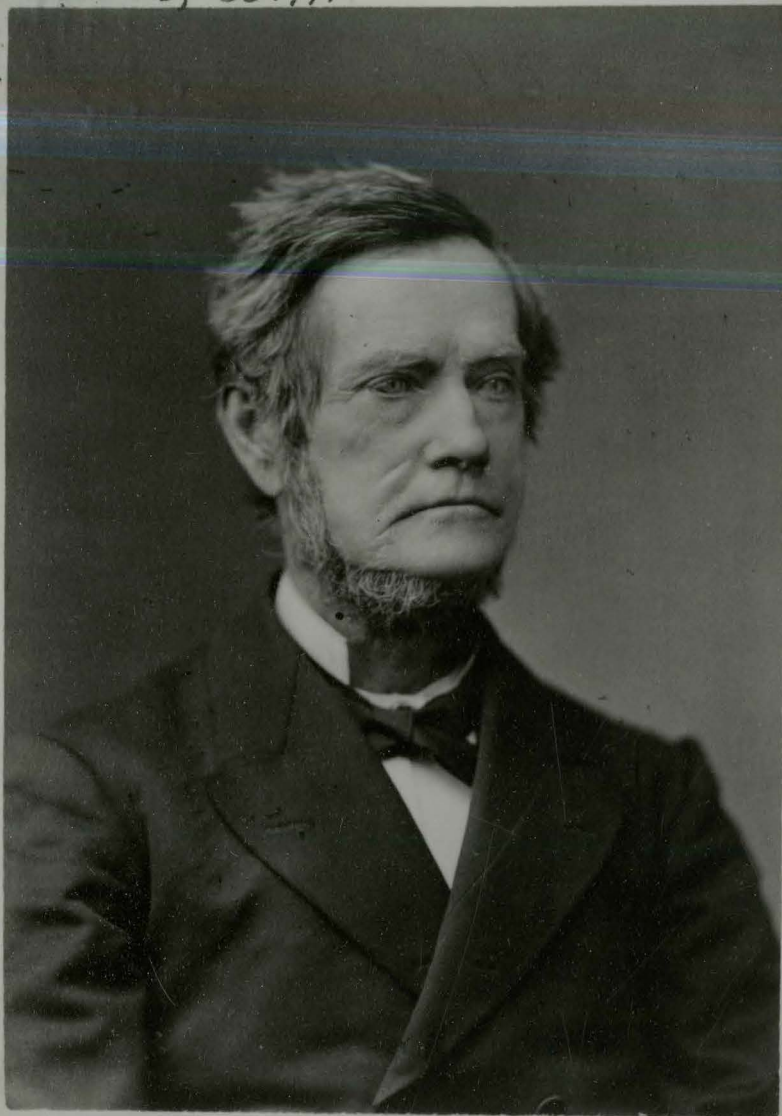
Miss Jones noted that she was somewhat shy and did not make new acquaintances easily. As a result, she felt ill at ease in attending her first institute and protested against the "leaving of new teachers to make their way alone." While she commented that she felt more comfortable the next month, she suggested to her colleagues that a friendly handshake or "even a nod of the little head" would have eased some of her anxieties. "If I had received one such good shake of the hand, or hearty 'good-morning,' as I saw and heard you, Miss Wilde, give to Miss Ball this morning, at my first institute, I should not now be writing here of what happened that day."

Wells did offer his teachers that friendly handshake, nod or other gesture to help them feel more comfortable, which made them realize that he cared about each of them as individuals. He did not supervise the schools or teachers

⁵⁰Ibid., 380.

from a distance but did so with an intimacy, applying his personal touch where needed. His modus operandi with the teachers' institutes was no different. Though he allowed the teachers and principals to plan and conduct the program, the superintendent remained personally and actively involved. As the superintendent of a rapidly growing school system, he could have created layers of bureaucracy which would have distanced him from the schools and teachers. Instead, Wells remained personally involved and insisted upon visiting the schools and teachers as often as possible. This exhausting pace, coupled with his poor health, precipitated his sudden resignation. Though everyone was saddened by his decision none were more so than Wells himself, for having to leave the work which he dearly loved. Wells had devoted himself completely and entirely to the schools of Chicago for eight years. Apparently, he did not have the strength to give more.

WELLS, W.H.



W. H. Wells
4 Howland Block

William Harvey Wells
by Mosher, no date

Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society

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EPILOGUE

THE SUPERINTENDENT RESIGNS

Superintendent Wells was untiring in his dedication and devotion to the public schools of Chicago, and his persistent efforts took a toll on him physically. His health was always less than optimum and the pace to which he subjected himself weakened him even further. It was probably with much anguish that Wells presented the following undated letter to the board on 7 June 1864:

To the Board of Education
of the City of Chicago:

Gentlemen:

I have long found it impossible to secure the relaxation which my health requires while discharging the duties of my present position, and I am admonished that I ought, without further delay, to seek relief from labors which are constantly undermining my physical strength. I now have a favorable opportunity to enter a different field in which my duties will be much less exhaustive.

The term for which I was elected in my present office, will not expire till about nine months from this time, but the close of a school year is a more favorable time for a change of incumbents in the office of Superintendent, and I now tender to the Board my resignation, to take effect at the close of the present term.

In reviewing my connection with the Board of Education during the last eight years, it is a source of great satisfaction to me that this relation has at all times been a relation of mutual confidence and

hearty cooperation. I cannot to [sic] strongly express the gratitude I feel for the uniform kindness and support which I have received at your hands.

I part with the Board, and with the teachers and pupils, from a sense of duty to myself and my family, but with many regrets. I shall never cease to feel the deepest interest in the welfare of the Public Schools of Chicago, in which I have spent eight of the best years of my life.

Very respectfully,
W. H. Wells¹

A Fond Farewell

The teachers of Chicago were enamored of their superintendent and upon learning of Wells' intention to resign, became adamant that he should know how much. The teachers petitioned the board to allow them the opportunity to express their affection and to say farewell to their beloved superintendent. A farewell assembly was held on 6 July 1864 at the high school:

The exercises of the High School were closed at noon to admit the assemblage of the teachers in the High School building in the afternoon to listen to an address by the retiring Superintendent--W. H. Wells--whose resignation, recently tendered, was very unwillingly accepted by the Board. The teachers were anxious to have an opportunity of hearing his parting words of cheer and counsel, and of testifying in something stronger than words, their high appreciation of his worth. The large room was filled. There were present the members of the Board of Education, several gentlemen formerly members, and many others who have been prominent in the education of the rising generation in this and other cities. Nearly all the

¹William Harvey Wells to the Chicago Board of Education, n.d., circa 4 June 1864, Manuscript Collection, William Harvey Wells Folder, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

teachers in the public schools in the city were present. The occasion was one of deep interest.²

Levi B. Taft, president of the board of education, chaired the proceedings and addressed those assembled noting that the meeting was in response to a request by a large number of teachers who wanted "an opportunity to exchange final greetings with Mr. Wells, and to listen to some parting words from him. . . ." Taft said that it was with pain and reluctance that the board had accepted Wells' resignation and that every effort possible had been made to "induce Mr. Wells to withdraw his resignation, but his failing health compelled him to decline. . . ." The president commented on the harmonious relationship which had existed between the board and the superintendent and the debt which the school system owed to him for his untiring labors and his arduous efforts. He wished Wells success and happiness.³

The salutation which began Wells' address to the assembly: "Gentlemen of the Board of Education, and fellow teachers." is significant because it indicated that he considered himself one among the ranks of the teachers not separate from them. He shared memories of his youth and

²"Public Schools, Annual Examination of Pupils for the High School, Parting Address of Superintendent W. H. Wells to the Teachers," Chicago Tribune 7 July 1864.

³"Educational Miscellany and Intelligence: William H. Wells," The American Journal of Education 14 (December 1864): 811.

early days in the profession which the occasion had brought to mind. He also spoke of his reminiscences of eminent educators with whom he had interacted during his educational career, the American Institute of Instruction, the teachers' seminary at Andover and others. Wells' lengthy oration included a discussion of the history of the public schools in Chicago and his involvement therein. After mentioning the normal department, Wells said:

The largest portion of my time has been given to the Primary Schools. . . . If I had remained in the schools another year, there are two objects on which my heart was specially set, as ends for which I should labor with all the energy that I could bring to bear upon them. The first of these objects relates to the discipline of the schools. . . . The second object to which I refer, relates to the use of our mother tongue. . . English Grammar.⁴

Wells genuinely cared about teaching and learning. Even at the end of his educational career, he took advantage of the opportunity of having teachers assembled to elaborate on English Grammar and discipline discussing the improvements he would have made in each case.

Wells noted that the "ready support of the Board of Education and the hearty cooperation of the teachers" had combined to make his tenure in the Chicago schools the happiest time in his life and that the cordiality with which he was received during his visits to the schools would be placed among his sweetest memories. After showering more

⁴Ibid., 810-811.

praise and compliments upon the "competent and laborious teachers" and mentioning that his ill-health had forced his decision to resign, the retiring superintendent concluded as follows:

My educational life has already covered a period nearly equal to the average life of man, and I must now lay it down, and turn to pursuits widely different, but I trust not wholly uncongenial. And now, honored gentleman of the Board of Education, and dear fellow-teachers, as co-laborers we part. May every blessing attend you in your continued efforts to elevate and improve the public schools, and a generation of children be made wiser and better by your self-sacrificing labors.

"Farewell! a word that must be hath been,
A sound that makes us linger--yet farewell!"⁵

When the board of education concluded its portion of the meeting, J. J. Noble, principal of the Haven School, chaired the meeting for the teachers. S. H. White, who was chairman of the resolutions committee and had organized the meeting introduced the following resolution:

Whereas, Mr. William H. Wells, Superintendent of the Public Schools of this city, has resigned the position which he has so long successfully filled,
Therefore, Resolved, That we, the teachers in said schools, deeply regret such action on his part, especially as it was made necessary by a proper regard to his health, now impaired by close application to his arduous duties.

Resolved, That in his resignation the Public Schools of this city have lost the services of one to whose untiring labors in promoting their interests they are largely indebted for their past successes and present prosperous condition; and that the cause of popular education has lost one of its ablest and most successful laborers in the promotion of its interests.

Resolved, That his uniform kindness and encouragement have contributed very greatly to the pleasure, as well as the success of the teachers in the

⁵Ibid., 814.

Public Schools; that his many excellent qualities of mind and heart have won for him an affectionate regard, and that his devotion and zeal in the duties of his office furnish an example worthy of imitation by all.

Resolved, That our kind remembrances and best wishes attend Mr. Wells in his new vocation.⁶

George Howland, principal of the high school, presented the guest of honor with a "magnificent gold watch--valued at \$400--finished in the highest style of art." Howland told Wells that the watch represented a visible token of the teachers esteem and kind regard, and it was meant to be a reminder of their appreciation. "By your enlightened and comprehensive views, you, sir, have won golden opinions from all true friends of popular education, and it seems but fitting that these opinions should be reflected in our gift." Wells accepted the gift saying:

Emotion does not always find relief in utterance. I have no language to express the gratitude I feel for these kind expressions of confidence and esteem, and for this munificent token of sympathy and affection. I have not been in constant communion with you during the last eight years, without making this parting hour one of intense feeling--the strongest of which my nature is capable. . . .

For all these manifestations of kind regard, may you receive a rich reward in your own hearts; and may your future lives be as peaceful and happy as they are useful and honored.⁷

It was a painful farewell, but Wells' services to the public schools did not totally terminate; he did not believe that the responsibilities which he incurred as

⁶Ibid., 815.

⁷Ibid., 815-816.

superintendent would end simply because he was resigning. It was a continuing endeavor, for him, though he no longer had the stamina or energy to be as actively and intensely involved. He was immediately appointed to the board of education to complete an unexpired term. When this term ended the position was offered to him again but he declined. Wells did return to the board and served in 1872-1873, during the 1877-78 and 1878-79 school years, he served as vice-president and president, respectively.

His annual president's report was quite similar to the reports he had written as superintendent and were replete with professional advice for the teachers and educational advice for the members of the board and city council and the general public. Wells reiterated his view of the importance of primary and grammar schools: "A high standard of excellence in the Grammar and Primary Schools, and especially in the Primary, is the first demand of the City, and if the High Schools cannot be sustained without depressing this standard, then the High Schools should be left to suffer." Wells also discussed overcrowding, poor accommodations in the primary grades, current reform in the teaching of spelling, and the large numbers of children in

different parts of the country who were "growing up without receiving sufficient education."⁸

A Befitting Tribute

The influence and impact which Wells had on schooling in Chicago, without question, was profound. His position in the evolution of the Chicago public school system was pivotal. As the second superintendent of schools, Wells inherited a system in dire need of organization and structure and it was fortunate that Wells had the desire and the talents to create the solid foundation which he did. Albert G. Lane, the sixth superintendent of schools described Wells' influence as follows:

In reviewing Mr. Wells' work, it is plainly seen that his administration was formative. He shaped the educational system of Chicago in harmony with the most advanced thought and practice. He secured progressive teachers from the colleges, and Normal schools of Massachusetts, and elsewhere, who by their training and experience were able to work out his plans. His gradation of the work for children advanced their interests, and attracted the attention of the whole country. The Superintendents of other cities visited our schools, acknowledged their merit, and adopted our plans. His success was made possible by the loyal

⁸In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, Sketches of His Life and Character, Memorial Addresses and Proceedings and Resolutions of Public Bodies on the Occasion of His Death (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co., [1887]), 49; Chicago, IL, Department of Public Instruction, Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Education for the Year Ending July 31, 1879, by Duane Doty, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of Education (Chicago: Clark and Edwards, Printers, 1880), 17-23.

support which was given to all his efforts by the Board of Education during those formative years, . . .⁹

These sentiments were made manifest when the Chicago Board of Education honored Wells by naming a school for him shortly after his retirement. "Ground was broken for the Wells' School Building about the first of August" in 1865. It was a four story brick building on the corner of Reuben and Cornelia streets.¹⁰ Like its namesake the building was "formally dedicated to the cause of education" on Friday 14 September 1866. The ceremony was attended by the president of the board of education, C. N. Holden., and the Honorable John B. Rice mayor of Chicago, spoke as did the school's principal Jeremiah Mahoney. Wells, whose remarks were brief, commented that until his visit to the board's office that morning "he had fallen asleep over the subject of education." His visit had awakened old memories of his "labors in this city," and he shared some of these. John C. Dore, first superintendent of schools; Josiah L. Pickard, Wells' successor in the office; Willard Woodward, chairman

⁹Albert G. Lane, "History of the Schools in Chicago," Handwritten Manuscript, circa 1901, Albert G. Lane Manuscript Collection, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

¹⁰In 1935, a new structure was erected on the same site, with additional ground to the north and located at 946 N. Ashland. As of 25 March 1931, the 1935 building was originally to house a junior high school. During the summer of 1933 the plans were changed to provide for a senior high school: Wells Senior High School.

of the committee on schools of the common council and other board and council members also made remarks.¹¹

A Final Farewell

After leaving the Chicago school system, Wells became an agent for the Charter-Oak Life Insurance Company and executed the duties of this position with characteristic zeal and enthusiasm. As he had done for the schools of Chicago, Wells availed himself of the knowledge necessary to conduct his responsibilities as expertly and thoroughly as possible:

studiously acquainting himself with the flaws, condition, and business methods of the company he was to represent, and applying himself to the study of the principles and laws of life insurance, until he became widely recognized as one of the best-informed men in the profession.¹²

In 1880, Wells became a manager for Provident of New York, and in 1883 took a position with Aetna Life Insurance Company, which he held until his death.

The circumstances of Wells' death were described in a letter from his widow, Lydia Sophronia Graves Wells, to Henry Barnard. Apparently Wells' youngest son, Ebenzer H.,

¹¹Chicago, IL, Department of Instruction, Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Education, from September 1, 1865 to August 31, 1866, by Josiah L. Pickard, superintendent of schools and secretary of the Board of Education (Chicago: Round and James, Book and Job Printers, 1866) 12; Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education, for the Year Ending August 31, 1867, by Josiah L. Pickard (Prairie Farmer Company Steam Print, 1867) 58-68.

¹²In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 47.

born 22 March 1860, had died during the winter of 1884.¹³

Mrs. Wells noted that her husband probably never "recovered from the shock of this terrible blow." She went on to discuss the close relationship between her husband and their youngest son and the dreams which his father held for him. Mrs. Wells described this relationship and her husband's last days as follows:

It was beautiful to see their daily companionship. He [their son] left us so suddenly, so unexpectedly, . . . that it was apparent to me that his father would sink under the blow. Two months later Mr. Wells, made a hurried business trip to Washington, took cold in the Sleeper, had strong congestion of the lungs which aggravated, his heart disease from which he has suffered for several years, as perhaps you know. He never seemed the same after Eben left us, and was never able to accomplish much afterward. He went to his office two or three times in the week when the weather was fine and staid [sic] two or three hours--From Nov. he seemed to be losing ground. The last time he went to town was Jan. 10, walked about the house till the 18, and left us the 21. He spoke intelimently [sic] the morning of the 19, had little consciousness afterward.¹⁴

Death came 21 January 1885. Though, it did not come as a surprise to those closest to him, Wells' death brought deep sorrow to all who knew or loved him. Expressions of homage and sympathy poured in from all over the country and

¹³William Harvey Wells, to Mrs. Henry Barnard, 11 March 1884, Henry Barnard Papers, Fales Library, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, New York. (In this letter Wells offered condolences to Mrs. Barnard on the death of her son, Henry D. Barnard, and mentioned his own recent bereavement, as well.)

¹⁴Lydia Sophronia Graves Wells, to Henry Barnard, 5 February 1885, Henry Barnard Papers.

his widow received letters from: one of Wells' dear friends in St. Louis, Reverend H. B. Holmes; Reverend Henry C. Graves of Haverhill, Massachusetts; Professor Edward A. Peck of Andover; Professor and Mrs. Cowles of Ipswich, Massachusetts, who wrote separate correspondences; Professor E. C. Hewitt, president of Illinois State Normal University; and former students and friends from Boston and Philadelphia. All were replete with praise for a great humanitarian and educator who had devoted his life to mankind. For example, Mrs. E. C. Cowles wrote:

He was beyond the comprehension of many men of business; he had nothing in common with their peculiar genius; his heart and mind were set on other things. Money was nothing to him but as a means of advancing education, and education nothing but a means of lifting his fellow-being to loftier heights. With him religion and education blended.¹⁵

Each of the daily newspapers in Chicago printed biographical sketches of Wells and periodicals in other major cities followed suit as did prominent educational journals. The Chicago Board of Education met in special session on 23 January 1885 "to take action on the death of Mr. Wells. . . . The attendance was a very large one, an invitation having been extended to all former members of the Board." A resolution was drafted which included the following:

Mr. Wells was elected as superintendent, and entering at once upon the work, continued in that position until impaired health led to his resignation

¹⁵In Memoriam William Harvey Wells, 98.

in 1864. His connection with the school system of the city marked an era in its history. Before him, it is true, public opinion had not been indifferent to the interests of education, and public-spirited citizens had, from an early period in the history of the city, done what was then possible to organize schools and foster the spirit of education among the people. Under Mr. Wells, however, what had before been crude and provisional was brought to thorough organization and efficiency. It is not too much to say that his work was the foundation of whatever is best and most permanent in our present educational system, and so well did he do his work that those who have followed him have found little else necessary than to build on the foundations which he laid. . . .

It would, however, be injustice to Mr. Wells to limit his public services to his educational work. On the contrary, he held the broadest view of his responsibilities and duties as a citizen, and we believe we express the unanimous judgment of his fellow-citizens in saying that during his nearly thirty years in this community, Mr. Wells has uniformly stood for whatever is best in the character and progress of the city; and that by his public services, and still more by his pure and upright character, he has deserved, as he will receive, the gratitude and lasting honor of his fellow-citizens.¹⁶

Similar actions were taken by the Chicago Public Library Board of Directors on the afternoon of the same day.

Wells had been the first and only president of the Life-Underwriter's Association of Chicago and the association met on 23 January 1885 to pay homage to him with expressions of sympathy and a resolution which they declared was to be published in local newspapers and sent to Wells' family. The directors and officers of the Chicago Astronomical Society and the Chicago Academy of Science, the latter of which Wells was vice-president, did likewise. The

¹⁶Ibid., 85-86.

tribute which probably would have been most cherished by Wells was signed by thirty-three teachers, and read:

MRS. WILLIAM H. WELLS AND FAMILY:-- We, the undersigned, teachers in the public schools of Chicago during the superintendency of William H. Wells, desire to express to you our heartfelt sympathy in your bereavement, our affection for him as a friend and co-worker, and our high appreciation of him as a public officer and a pure-minded, honest man.

We well remember when he first came to Chicago to commence his labors with us, his kindly greetings and warm friendship, his words of cheer, his intense zeal and enthusiasm, early impressed us with admiration of him as a leader in educational work.

We have pleasant memories of his kind words and acts in times of trouble and difficulties.

Chicago owes to Mr. Wells a debt of gratitude.

Our public-school system was organized and perfected in a great degree by his thorough encyclopedic knowledge of everything pertaining to the development of schools and by his tireless energy.

Thousands of our people are wiser and purer for his life and services among us.

While we can not mourn his loss as those of his own household, yet he has presented to us many noble and inspiring examples and dear cherished memories.¹⁷

The funeral services were held 24 January 1885 at "the Union-Park Congregational Church, which was well filled in spite of the bitter weather." The pastor, Reverend F. A. Noble, conducted the services and introduced the first speaker, Professor F. W. Fisk of the Chicago Theological Seminary, as the man who could best speak of Wells' earlier life, having known him from boyhood. Their acquaintance began when Wells was a young teacher in the English department of Phillips Academy and the speaker was his student. Fisk summarized Wells' character as follows:

¹⁷Ibid., 94-95.

All these responsibilities and duties, Mr. Wells discharged, not only as a citizen having at heart the welfare of his fellow-men, but as a man loyal to God. He was an earnest, consistent christian, whose great aim in life was the faithful performance of duty, both to God and to Man. He was not demonstrative in the expression of his religious views and feelings, but a christian of decided convictions, whose life was under the control of religious principle.¹⁸

After Fisk's address the choir sang Wells' favorite hymn, "Jesus Lover of My Soul," and the congregation was invited to sing along with them. Reverend Noble then spoke of his last visit with Wells. His health failing Wells very courageously told his pastor that he knew death was near, but that it held no terrors for him. "He expected it, and was prepared to meet it. He did not look upon death as most people did, but regarded it as simply passing from one room to another in his Father's mansion."¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid., 71.

¹⁹Ibid., 68-72.

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

31 March 1992
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