

School Visitor Report – 1850

In times gone by, before the days of school superintendents and supervisors, local school systems consisted of a board of education, the teachers and school visitors. These men (I can find no reference to women being appointed to this post) held a powerful position, as they passed judgment on the books to be used, the teachers to be employed, and wrote reports on their observations while visiting the classroom. The Connecticut law required them to make at least one visit per session. During the first half of the 19th century, there was a summer and a winter session. The winter session began in early October and continued four months. The summer session commenced around the third Monday in April and continued for 20 weeks.

The following are excerpts from Mr. Homer Wolcott's report for the School Society of Colebrook 1850-51:

“The labors of the board of school visitors for the year now closing commenced with the examination of teachers. Most of those who presented themselves for examination as candidates for teachers were probably as well qualified as those of former years, but the committee felt that their duty required them to reject one, and there were one or two others who, if the committee had adhered to the strict letter of the law, and approved ‘*such only as were found qualified to teach reading, writing, grammar and arithmetic thoroughly*’, would have shared the same fate.”

Among the hindrances to the progress of our schools is a want of interest on the part of the scholars, especially the smaller ones, while the larger scholars may in some measure appreciate the value of education, and find in the advantages it presents some incentives to exertion. - - - there is no such thing as infusing knowledge into the minds of others; they must gain it by their own exertion.”

“If parents would adopt the practice of visiting the school where their children attend, and see for themselves any defects that need remedying, they might cooperate with the teacher for their removal, and effect by their combined influence what neither would be able to accomplish alone.”

“A variety of text books is still an existing evil; and though the law is plain as to the duty of the Board of Visitors, yet the almost universal testimony is that there is difficulty in carrying its provisions into effect, and though the visitors have authority to make a change in the text books of our schools at any time, still it is thought we ought to look for something of permanency in this respect, and that the advantages of slight improvement will hardly counterbalance the disadvantages of too frequent changes.”

Condition of the Several Schools.

“Center School, winter term. Teacher A. Rockwell. His aim is to be thorough and accurate in what was taught - - to teach not only theory, but also a practical illustration of principals, and this undoubtedly is the correct method. There were classes in algebra, philosophy and history as well as in the more common, though no less important, branches of study.”

“Center School, summer term. Teacher Elisabeth Cobb. At the examination at the commencement of the term, the appearance of the school was such as to give hope of a fair, though not very rapid improvement. The school was prematurely closed by the

sickness of the teacher without examination, and it is not known what advancement was made by the scholars.”

“Rock School, winter term. Teacher Adams continued from the fall term. This school, considering the age of the scholars, was thought to be as forward as any in the society at the first examination, but there is understood to have been some want of confidence in the teacher by some portion of the district which is thought to have had an unfavorable influence to some extent, and the advancements of the scholars did not appear so great as their natural capacities and attainments at the commencement of the school.”

“Forge District, summer term. Teacher Anna A. Bates. Something of the same restlessness was noticed as at the commencement of the winter term, to correct which, there was a much more frequent administration of slight punishment than was approved by your committee, tending rather to irritate and annoy the scholars, than to command affection or obedience. Still the teacher was faithful in her efforts to instruct, and the progress of some of the students was commendable. There were several who commenced the term in the alphabets who had made a very fair advancement.”

There are many more pages covering all the schools in Colebrook at the time, but we will end this portion by including an excerpt taken from the report of the North School.

“There were a considerable number of scholars in this school whose age and attainments seemed to require a well qualified teacher, and it could not reasonably be expected that a teacher could be procured for six dollars per month who would give satisfaction to the district where circumstances demanded one who could earn three time that amount.”

Historic Bytes
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