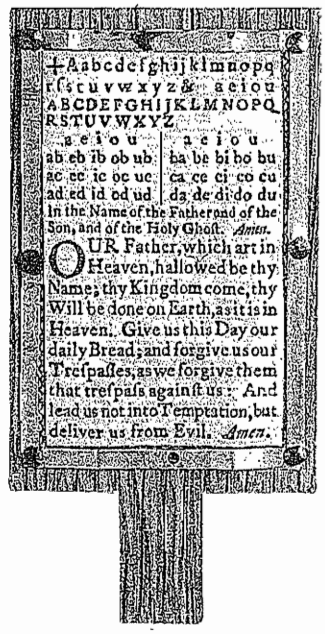
In the thirteen colonies of pre-revolutionary America, only the larger towns in New England were required by law to build schools. Elsewhere, education was neither free nor public. Chester Finn, education policy expert, suggests that "if there were schools at all—and many communities had them and some didn't—there were schools because people in a particular town or village or section of a county decided they wanted to get together and pool their resources and hire a teacher. And thus you have the famous old stories about the teacher who was paid with two bushels of wheat and a half a cow."

Some colonial parents paid a fee to send their youngest children to "dame schools." Historian Nancy Hoffman tells us, "If you have ever seen those wonderful pictures of a sort of Mother Goose–

LEFT
A typical hornbook. Reproduction from Tuer's History of Hornbooks.

RIGHT *"The major thrust of schooling was to preserve the status quo. Eighteenth-century schools were preparing children to take the place of their parents, to be like their parents." —Kathryn Kish Sklar, historian*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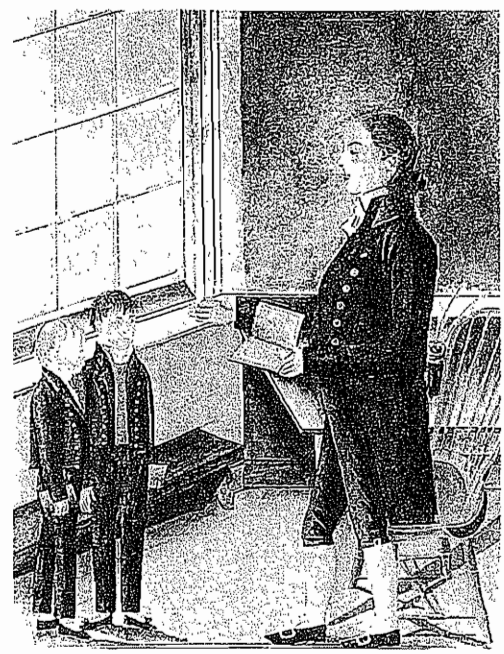
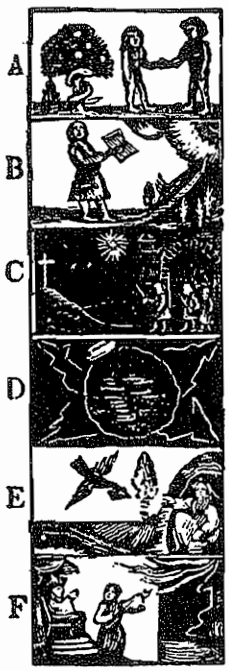
In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt. *Amen.*
OUR Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy Kingdom come, thy Will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this Day our daily Bread; and forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us: And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil. *Amen.*



School: 1770-1900



Religious alphabet from The New England Primer.

like person with three or four kids clustered around her skirt, that is sort of the romanticized view of the dame school. It's probably something between learning your letters and learning some discipline and what we now call day care." Little children were given a "hornbook," which was a printed copy of the alphabet and a short prayer mounted on wood and covered with transparent cow horn. Most schooling was closely linked to the Protestant Bible, brought by early settlers to the New World.

The most common schoolbook was the *The New England Primer,* used by instructors to teach reading and the Protestant catechism. Some older boys went to grammar schools, where they studied mathematics, Latin, and philosophy. Only the most privi-

leged had the means to continue on through college or university. By the time of the Revolutionary War, the vast majority of Americans were educated just enough to read the newspaper and the Bible, and figure their taxes.

Having won their independence from Britain, Americans rallied under the leadership of General George Washington. Ahead lay the difficult task of building a nation out of thirteen former colonies. Many believed that schools could play a critical role.

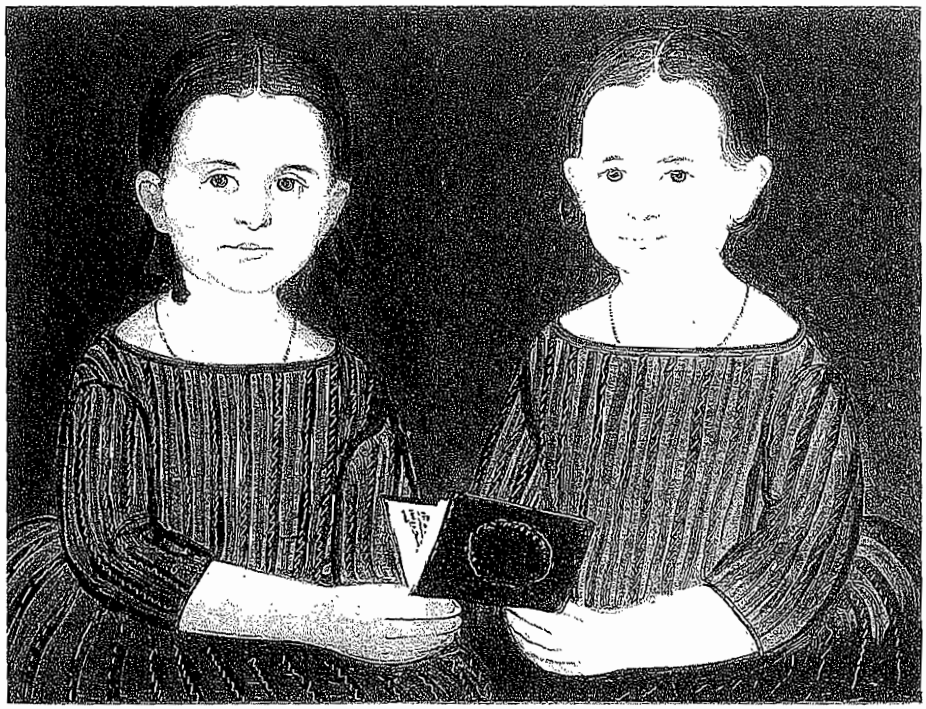
For Noah Webster, a teacher in Connecticut, the first step was to eliminate British textbooks from American classrooms. He wrote, "For America in her infancy to adopt the maxims of the old world would be to stamp the wrinkles of old age on the bloom of youth.... Begin with the infant in his cradle. Let the first word he lisps be Washington." In 1783, Webster published a textbook known as the "Blueback Speller." Webster's "Speller" promoted a new national language to be spelled and pronounced differently from British English. It sold millions of copies over the years and was a forerunner to Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language.*

To leaders like Thomas Jefferson, the survival of the democracy depended on educating all Americans. As he put it, "Preach a crusade against ignorance.... Establish and improve the law for educating the common people.... General education will enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom." Historian Diane Ravitch describes the ideals that underlay his commitment to general education: "Jefferson said that

in a democracy the people vote and choose their rulers, and that means you have to learn to read and write and you have to learn enough of the foundations of education to be a citizen."

Thomas Jefferson, proponent of universal education. Portrait by Charles Wilson Peale.

Jefferson had received the type of education available only to the wealthy of his time. Privately tutored as a child, he later graduated from the College of William and Mary in Virginia. In 1778, as a member of the Virginia Assembly, he drafted a proposal to guarantee three years of public schooling for all children, with advanced education for a select few. Author and journalist Nicholas Lemann explains the two-tiered system: "Jefferson's idea was a little bit of universal education with two purposes: One, to give people the democratic basics, and two, to be a kind of staging area or an audition site for this small group of natural aristocrats who would then be given a full-dress university education and then serve the country as he had done." Historian David Tyack adds, "As Jefferson put it, 'raking a few geniuses from the rubbish,' and giving them scholarships to go on to secondary school and then to the university would result in a meri-



Double portrait of Mary Cary and Susan Elizabeth Johnson, 1848, oil on board mounted on panel, by William Mathew Prior (1806–1873).

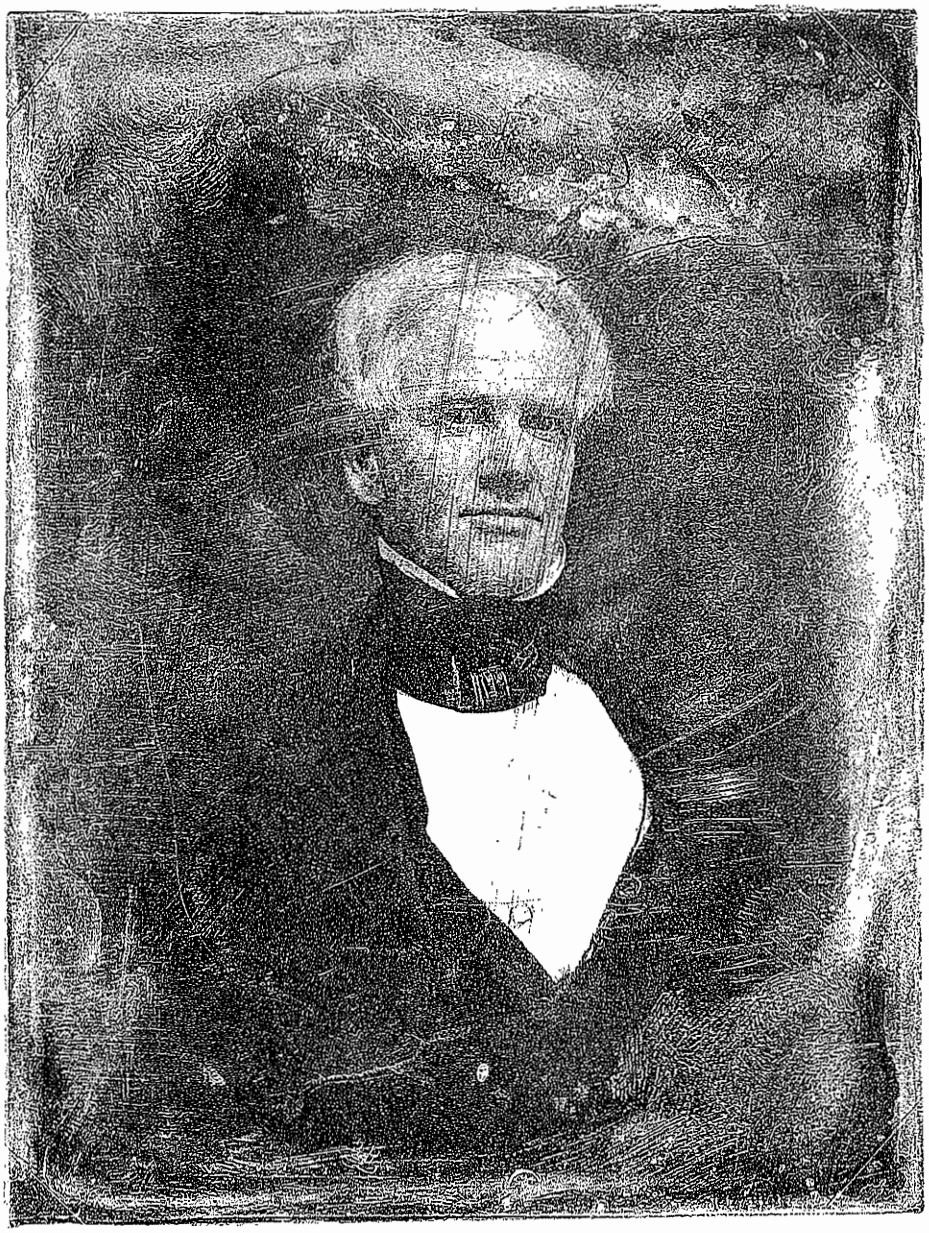
tocracy in which the most able people could be educated—at public expense—up to a high level."

Jefferson didn't consider the possibility of female geniuses; his plan allowed three years of schooling for girls, enough to prepare them for marriage and motherhood. And he offered no education to slaves. For slaves, education was often a hidden and dangerous undertaking. Historian Vanessa Siddle Walker gives an example: "There was a sewing school . . . where the children came to school ostensibly to learn sewing and they would sit and they would sew, but of course underneath that material would be textbooks. And so even during slavery at risk of life, people were interested in trying to attain this magical something that we call literacy."

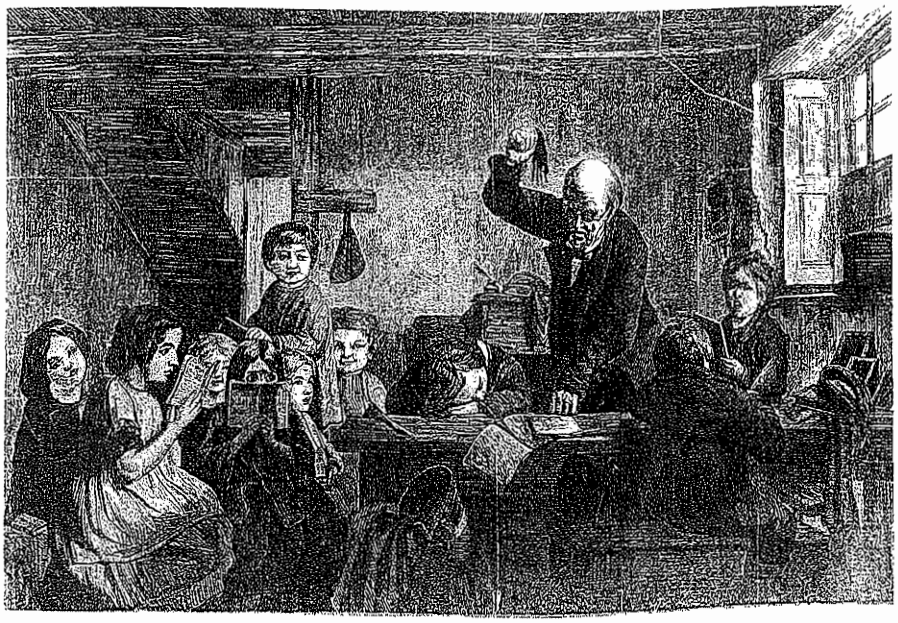
Notwithstanding his views on blacks and women, Jefferson's ideas about education were considered radical. Virginia assemblymen scoffed at the notion of sending farmers to college. A wealthy Virginia planter suggested that "it is a great mistake to suppose there is more knowledge or utility in philosophy than in the agricultural or mechanical arts. Take away the food of man and his existence would cease. Take away his philosophy and he would scarcely know it was gone."

Jefferson persisted in trying to persuade the Virginia Assembly to ratify his education proposal. Three times between 1779 and 1817, Jefferson's "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" came up for a vote. Each time, to his frustration, it was defeated. As he put it, "There is a snail-paced gait for the advance of new ideas.... People have more feeling for canals and roads than for education." Jefferson continued to push for public schooling, even as he served as secretary of state, vice president, and, finally, president. His final educational battle led to the creation of the state-supported University of Virginia. But his most powerful legacy was the argument that public education was essential to democracy. As he put it, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be."

In the 1830s and 1840s, Jefferson's dream of statewide school systems began to take root, most notably in Massachusetts through the work of a reformer named Horace Mann. Mann was the secretary of education for the state of Massachusetts, the first such official in the United States. As the majority leader of the



Daguerreotype of Horace Mann. "The equalizing capacity of the school was something that he very much believed in. The common school became for him the place where we all come together, elite and poor." —Kathryn Kish Sklar, historian



"Caught Napping." Line drawing, 1866.

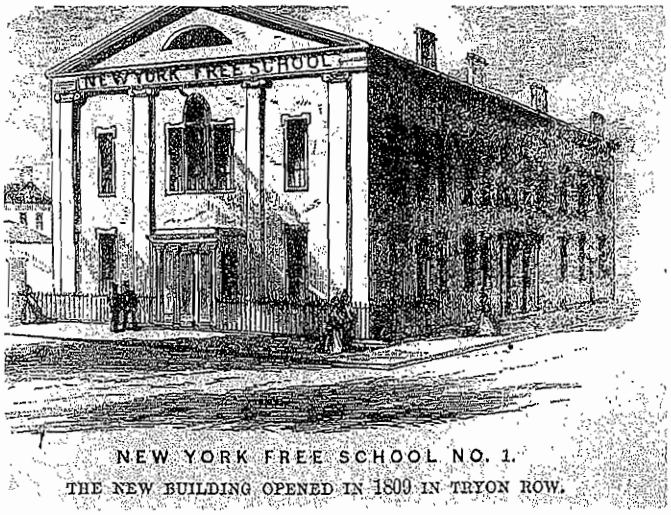
Massachusetts State Senate, Mann had been a builder of railroads and canals, and was in on the building of the insane asylum in Massachusetts. Historian Kathryn Kish Sklar describes his hands-on approach to overseeing the state's schools: "It is very interesting how Horace Mann has become our paragon for the promotion of public schools. He endeared himself to people in the nineteenth century by riding horseback from district to district and reviewing the actual physical facility."

Inspecting as many schools as he could, Mann found a system built on inequity. With no state supervision, schools varied widely from town to town. They were supported by local taxes and by fees charged to parents. Wealthy children could stay in school longer; the poorest couldn't afford to go at all. According to Mann, the

Daguerreotype of boy and girl with books.

overall state of learning left much to be desired. Mann visited one thousand schools over the course of six years and wrote detailed reports on their physical condition. Most lacked adequate light, heat, and ventilation. Some were in such bad shape that Mann was surprised to find them standing at all. Of one school he wrote, "The schoolhouse in District No. 3. How shall we speak of that? Clear away the surrounding forest which protects it and before the next gale is over, the foundation stones would be all that remain of it. Already aware of the danger, the mice have forsaken it."

Other problems existed aside from the condition of the facilities. Schoolchildren spent hours sitting on hard benches, which Mann feared would damage their spines. There were no blackboards and no standardized textbooks, so pupils spent hours memorizing or reciting passages from books they brought from home, no matter how outdated or irrelevant. One book on penmanship devoted an entire page to the proper writing of the letter O, at a 53-degree slant. A geography text described a sea serpent found off the New England coast. The state took better care of its livestock, Mann concluded, than of its children in school: "You crowd from 40 to 60 children into that ill-constructed shell of a building, there to sit in the most uncomfortable seats that could



NEW YORK FREE SCHOOL NO. 1.
THE NEW BUILDING OPENED IN 1809 IN TRYON ROW.

Immigrant Education
School Building, the first "public" school, built by the Free School Society in New York City in 1809. The upper room seated five hundred children.

be contrived, expecting that with the occasional application of the birch they will then come out educated for manhood or womanhood . . . ?"

From Cape Cod to the Berkshires, Mann held a series of public meetings to propose a new system of what he called "common schools." They would serve all boys and girls, and teach a common body of knowledge that would give each student an equal chance in life. "It is a free school system, it knows no distinction of rich and poor . . . it throws open its doors and spreads the table of its bounty for all the children of the state. . . . Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the equalizer of the conditions of men, the great balance wheel of the social machinery."

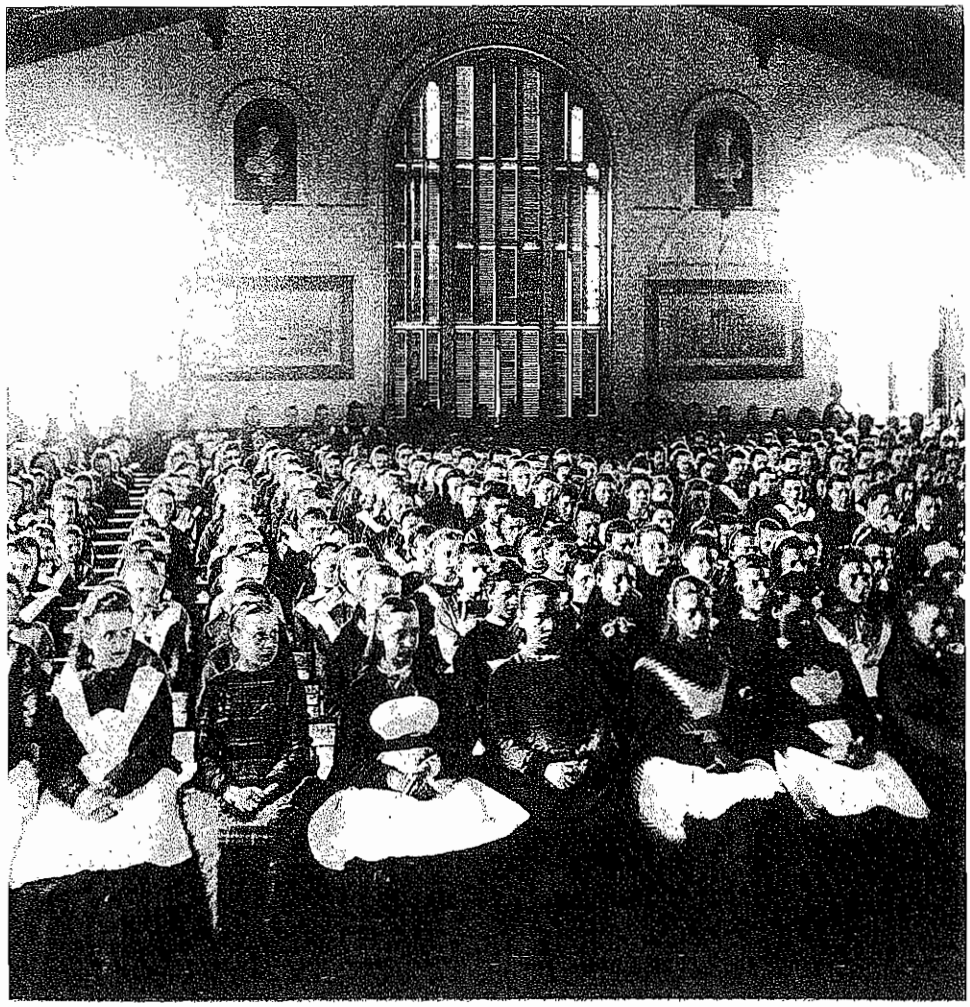
Common schools would be free of charge, so that poor children could attend. They would be of the highest quality, to draw wealthier students away from private schools. Standards would be set

Studio portrait of Teacher Orva Haskin Smith and her students.

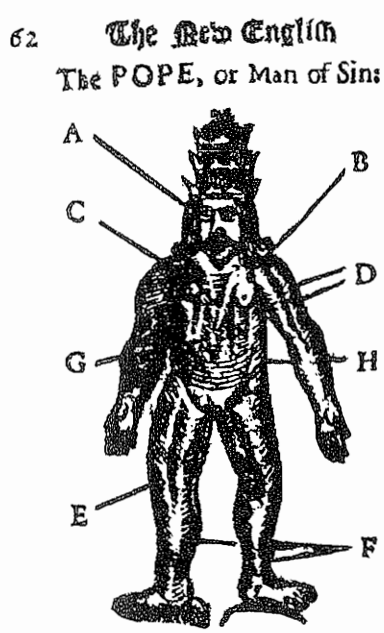
and enforced by the state, and the system would be entirely funded with tax dollars. Mann's plan was instantly and vigorously opposed because it imposed state control over traditionally local concerns, and imposed a tax burden on all citizens. Nicholas Lemann describes the basis for this resistance: "If you go back and read the history and Horace Mann's writing and so on, it impresses on you the precariousness of this basic idea that we take for granted, that all citizens have an obligation to reach into their wallet and pay for children to be educated even if they're not their own children."

Mann gained a wider audience through the annual reports he wrote while serving on the board of education. He recommended many of the things we associate with schools today: chairs with backs, a bell, a blackboard, standardized textbooks. Mann's writings were read and debated from New England to the Southwest, from Europe to South America. His ideas on school reform made him one of the most influential writers of his time, and his victories included state bureaus of education, teacher training, and free tax-supported education for many children in the northern states. Author and educator E. D. Hirsch summarizes Mann's achievements: "Horace Mann is rightly the patron saint of public education, not because of what he always managed to accomplish in Massachusetts but because of what he said in those reports. He talked about the public schools having this leveling effect, that merit should be able to rise. There is, I think, a deep connection between Mann's vision and Jefferson's because both of them disliked the idea of the family you were being born into determining how you ended up in American life."

Even as the common school movement got under way, conflict arose over the question of religion. Growing numbers of immigrants were arriving from Europe. By 1840, nearly half of New York City residents were foreign born. Many were Irish Catholics, who were generally poor and desperate for an education. Yet in New York, they found that the public schools, while free and open to all, were effectively, Protestant. "All the Protestant sects could feel very comfortable in American public schools," says historian



"Assembled for Morning Exercises." Grammar School No. 56, New York City.



"The Pope, or Man of Sin," from The New England Primer, *ca. 1737. "There are statements in public school textbooks that would just astound you today. 'Catholics return from Communion invigorated for the perpetuation of new offenses.' 'The Irish immigration has emptied out the common sewers of Ireland into our waters' and so forth." —Carl Kaestle, historian*

Diane Ravitch. "If you read Horace Mann you will see that his idea was we should have no sectarianism in the schools—we should all read the same Bible. We should all say the same prayers, we should use those religious ideas that are common to all of us—meaning all of us Protestants." As Father Richard Shaw, a church historian, says, "Irish Catholic children were being expected to attend schools where the King James Bible was read, where Protestant hymns were being sung, where prayers were being recited, but most importantly where textbooks and the entire slant of the teaching was very much anti-Irish and very much anti-Catholic."

At Old St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, Bishop John Hughes launched a protest. A forty-three-year-old Irish immigrant known as "Dagger John," Hughes was fierce and uncompromising. He proclaimed, "We are unwilling to pay taxes for the purpose of destroying our religion in the minds of our children. That such books should be put into [their] hands [is] unjust, unnatural, and intolerable." Father Shaw describes the effect of the schools' anti-Catholic bias: "That created a situation in which

Bishop John Hughes.
"Bishop Hughes felt that the Catholic children in those schools would be subjected to an indoctrination into the Protestant faith and he was right."
—Diane Ravitch, historian

some twenty thousand children were running the streets of New York without benefit of education because they refused to be part of a system biased against themselves."

These children deserved their own schools, Bishop Hughes believed. He demanded that the New York Public School Society, the Protestant civic leaders in charge of education, make city funds available for Catholic schools. When Jews and Presbyterians also asked for funds, city leaders agreed to hold a debate. "The great school debates in New York City in 1840 were amazing if for

Children in yard of Home for the Friendless, a New York orphanage, ca. 1860s.

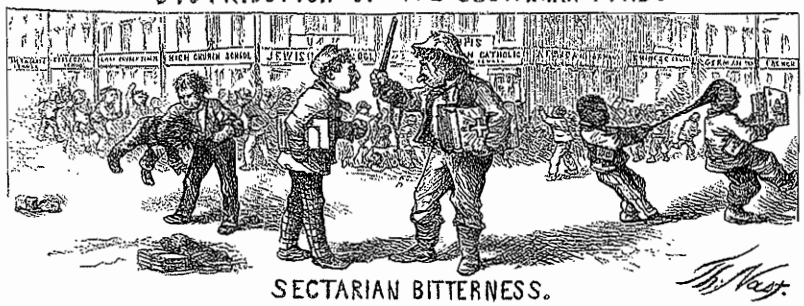
no other reason than they packed the galleries. This was great entertainment for all of New York City," Shaw tells us. "More significant was that it was one man against a whole army of people. Different ministers of different denominations kept spelling one another and coming after Hughes, and hour after hour, evening after evening, he would stand up and rebut them." Bishop Hughes exclaimed to the crowds, "We will not send our children where they will be trained up without religion, lose respect for their parents and the faith of their fathers, and come out turning up their noses at the name of Catholic.... In a word, give us our just proportion of the common school fund!"

The debate continued in the press, where many readers spoke out against public funding for religious schools. In November 1841, an editorial writer for the *New York Herald* wrote, "Once we admit that the Catholics have a right to a portion of the school fund, every other sect will have the same right.... We shall be convulsed with endless jarrings and quarrels about the distribution of it, and little left for the public schools." A citizen's letter to the editor agreed: "The Catholics have a right to think and worship in their own way, but have no right to claim one cent of the public money to propagate their own faith." Controversy over the use of the Protestant Bible in the public schools escalated nationwide. In Pennsylvania in 1844, a Catholic church was burned to the ground and thirteen people were killed in a conflict known as the Philadelphia Bible Riots.

But change was under way. After the City Hall debates, school

"UNION IS STRENGTH."

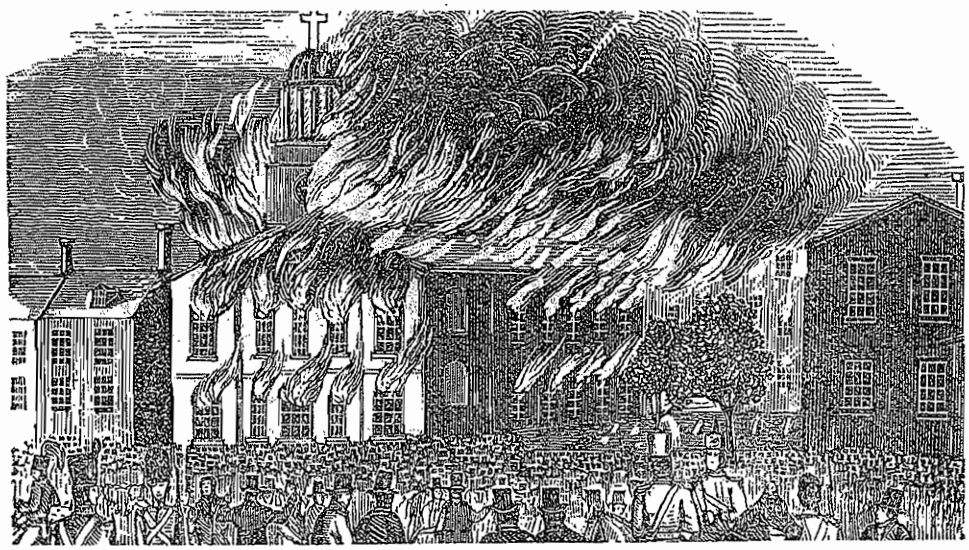
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SECTARIAN FUND.



SECTARIAN BITTERNESS.

OUR COMMON SCHOOLS AS THEY ARE AND AS THEY MAY BE—[SEE PAGE 141]

"Once we admit that the Catholics have a right . . . every other sect will have the same right. We shall be convulsed with endless jarrings and quarrels."
—New York Herald *editorial, November 1841*

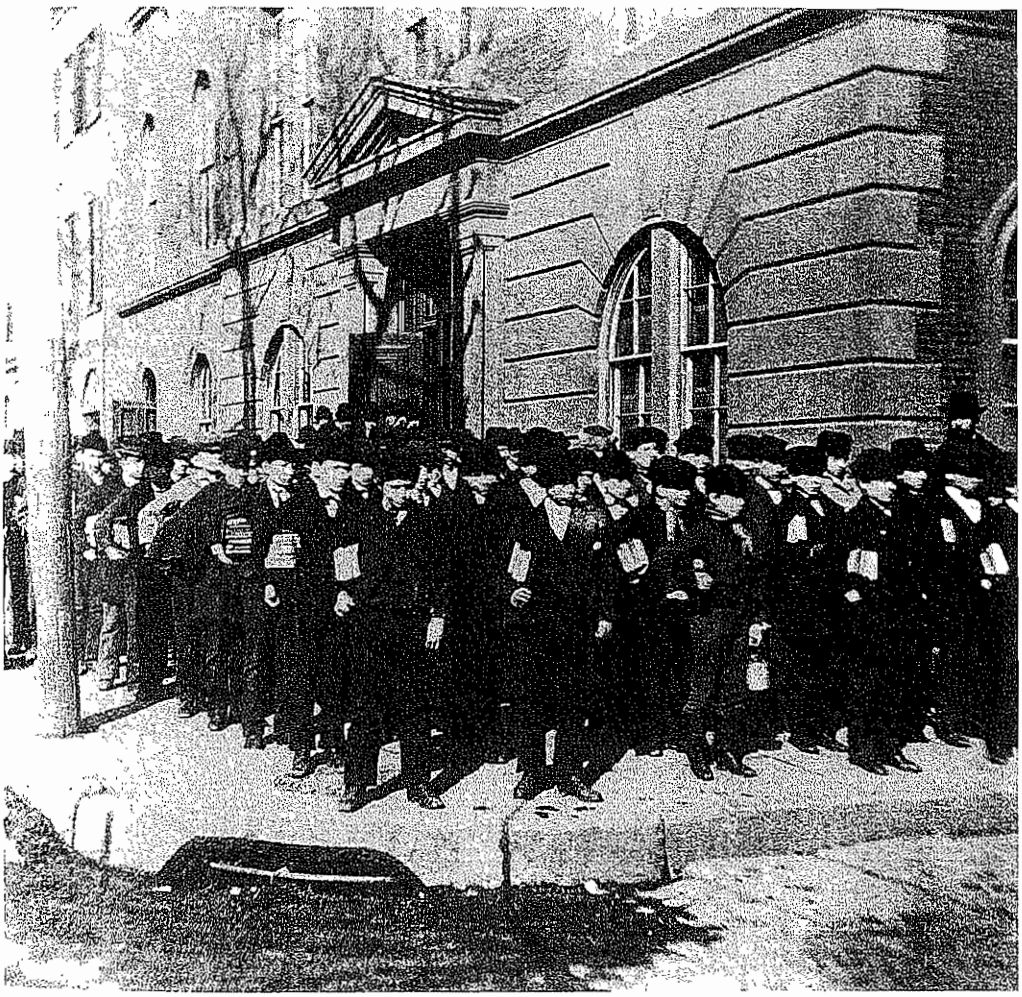


Catholic Church in Flames during the Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1844.

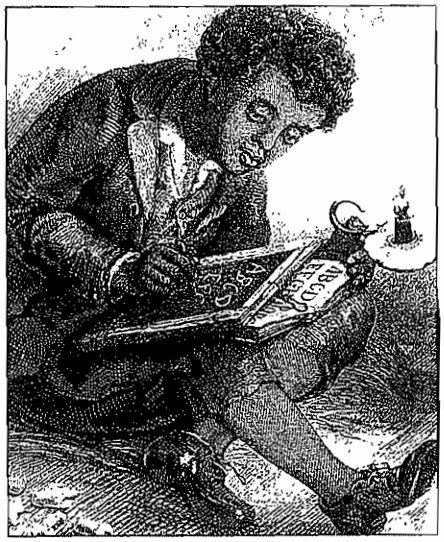
"We have to recapture the extent to which anti-Irish feeling and to some degree other ethnic slurs were really racial. People talked about the Irish as a race. The feelings were very akin to what we call racism today."
—Carl Kaestle, historian

principals in New York were ordered to search through textbooks for passages offensive to Catholics, which they painstakingly removed by hand. Two years later, the Public School Society was replaced by the newly formed New York City Board of Education, an elected body. Growing numbers of Catholic children enrolled. Meanwhile, John Hughes was named archbishop of New York in 1850, and he used his considerable power to help create a privately funded national system of Catholic schools. It became the major alternative school system in the United States.

The issue of religion took its place alongside other crucial issues facing the architects of public education, most notably that of race. In the years just prior to the Civil War, two-thirds of African Americans lived in the South, most of them as slaves with little or no access to education. In the North, blacks were entitled to

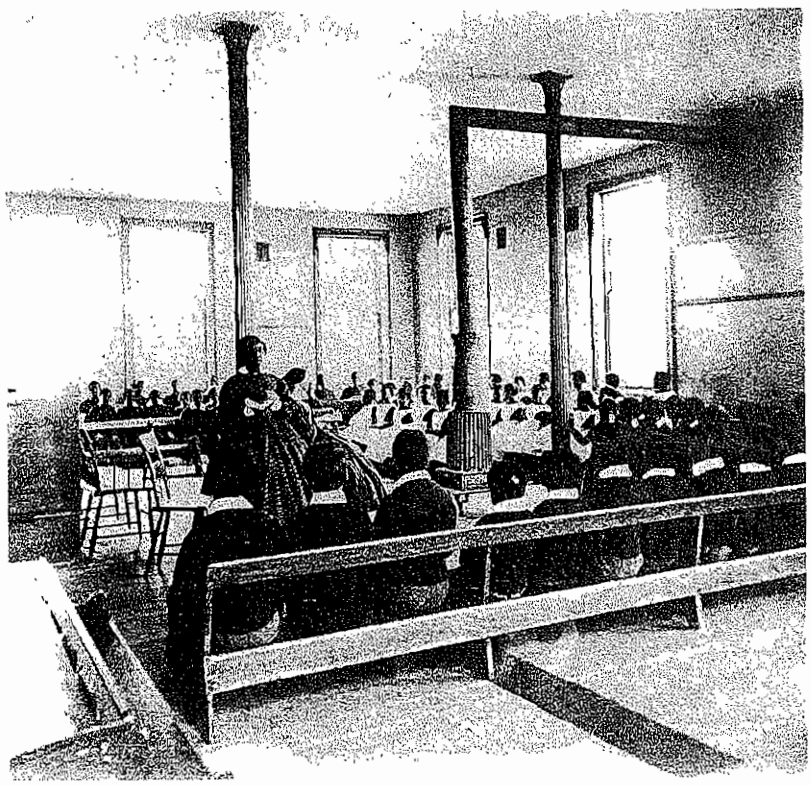


Dismissal at 3:00 P.M., Grammar School No. 3, New York City.



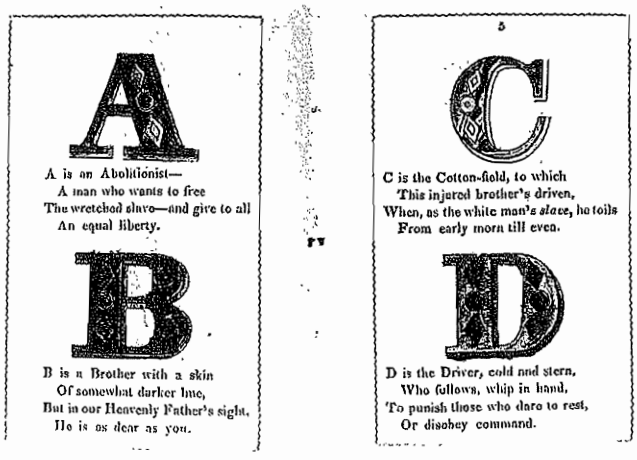
LEFT *Engraving of African American boy writing by candlelight.*

BELOW *Interior School Room No. 2, Colored Orphan Asylum, Good Friday, 1861.*



attend public school. Yet they were often prohibited from attending school with whites and were instead segregated in separate and usually inferior facilities.

The African American community in Boston, Massachusetts, had a long history of fighting for the abolition of slavery and for equal access to the city's public schools. But in the 1840s, black primary schoolchildren were still restricted to just two schools in Boston, both segregated. Parents and reformers gathered at the African Meeting House to debate strategies for protest. They were encouraged by escaped slave and noted abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who wrote, "The point we must aim at is to obtain admission for our children in to the nearest school house, and the best school house in their own neighborhood." Historian James Anderson explains the importance of education to African Americans at this time, despite the fact that they would be denied equal opportunities: "It became clear to most of them that a better education would not mean a better position in society, or a better job. They knew that they couldn't get into the trades in most places, so they began to redefine the very purpose of education. African Americans began to tie the quest for freedom and the quest for education and



From the Anti-Slavery Alphabet, *a children's book, 1847.*

excellence together. And so they began to think of education as part of the freedom struggle."

In the winter of 1846, a group of nearly ninety African Americans drew up a petition to the Boston School Committee that called for an immediate end to segregation in the city's public schools. It read in part, "The establishment of separate schools for our children deprives us of those equal privileges and advantages to which we are entitled as citizens. These separate schools cost more and do less for the children. We therefore earnestly request that our children be allowed to attend schools in the Districts in which we live." In response, the school committee investigated the state of the black schools. In their report they revealed many deficiencies: "The school rooms are too small, the paint much defaced, the apparatus is so shattered it cannot be used." Despite the report, no action was taken.

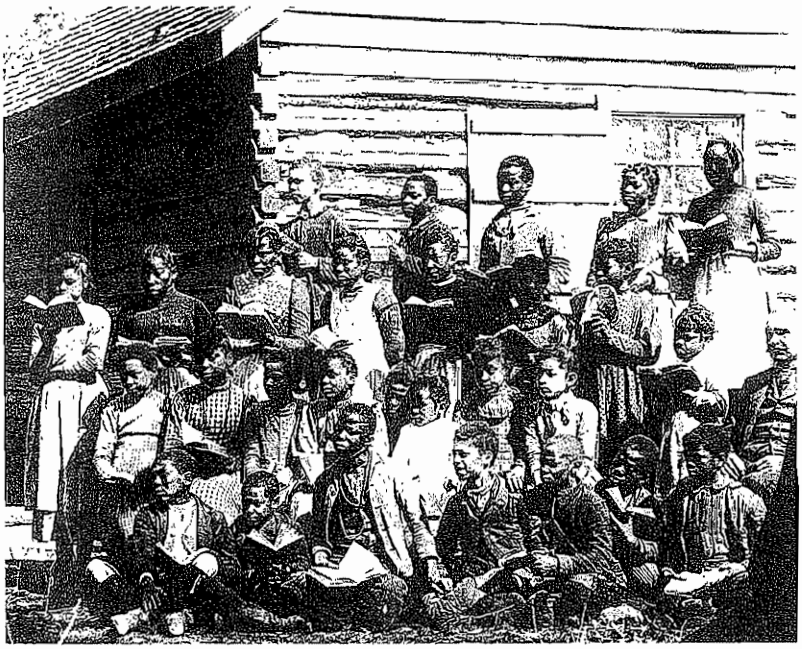
Soon after the school committee's investigation, five-year-old Sarah Roberts was assigned to the Smith School. Her father, Benjamin Roberts, tried to enroll Sarah in a better school closer to home. Her application was denied. Roberts then tried the other four schools that Sarah would pass on her walk to the Smith School. At each, she was refused admission. Once, she was physically ejected by a teacher. Members of the school committee defended segregation, claiming that it was maintained for "the special benefit of colored children." In the words of the committee, "In the case of colored children, we maintain that their peculiar physical, mental and moral structure requires an educational

Sally and George Davis Washington. "There wasn't anybody too old or too young who didn't feel as though he or she couldn't benefit from some level of education." —Vanessa Siddle Walker, historian

treatment different from that of white children." Outraged, Roberts vowed to sue the City of Boston, naming his daughter Sarah as plaintiff.

Some African Americans opposed Roberts's efforts. "Integration would bring colored children into competition with more advanced and wealthy white children," wrote one opponent, adding that it might result in "sneers, insults, assaults and jeers." Another black Bostonian added, "What kind of education would our children receive from a white teacher? The Smith School should simply hire a black teacher with a college degree." James Anderson explains: "There were many people in the African American communities who simply said we don't have a ghost of a chance to achieve integrated education. And so let's develop a full-fledged quality system of education even though it is segregated. And then there were others who said, we cannot accept this position in society because we will be doomed forever."

With the majority of African Americans in favor of integration, Roberts filed his suit. By 1849 the case reached the Massachusetts State Supreme Court. Representing Roberts were Robert Morris, one of the nation's first African American lawyers, and abolitionist lawyer Charles Sumner. "The school is the little world in which the child is trained for the larger world of life, beginning there those relations of Equality which the constitution and the laws promise to all," Sumner argued. "I conclude that there is but one kind of public school, free to all, whether rich or poor, whether Catholic or Protestant, whether white or black—excluding none,



comprehending all." Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw ruled against Sarah Roberts. Undeterred, Roberts and a group called the Negro School Abolition Society took their cause to the state legislature. In 1855, a law was passed abolishing segregation in the schools of Massachusetts. It was the first such law in the nation.

"Reconstruction was as Booker T. Washington described it: an entire race trying to go to school."
—Vanessa Siddle Walker, historian

The Roberts case was a foundation on which others would build. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court cited Judge Shaw's decision when it permitted segregation on the grounds that separate could be equal. In 1954, the Supreme Court cited Charles Sumner in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the case that finally launched the desegregation of American public schools. Of those who brought the Roberts case, James Anderson explains, "They were the

dreamers. They were the ones who believed in an America that was hard to imagine, an America without race discrimination. An America in which all people irrespective of race, creed, or color would have equal access to public institutions, public places. They were dreamers."

Issues of race and schooling would only become more urgent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Civil War ended in 1865. Four million Americans, formerly slaves, were now free. As we learn from Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Reconstruction was, as Booker T. Washington described it, an entire race trying to go to school. There wasn't anybody too old or too young that didn't feel as though he or she couldn't benefit from some level of schooling and it was seen as the most valuable undertaking—the notion of going to school."

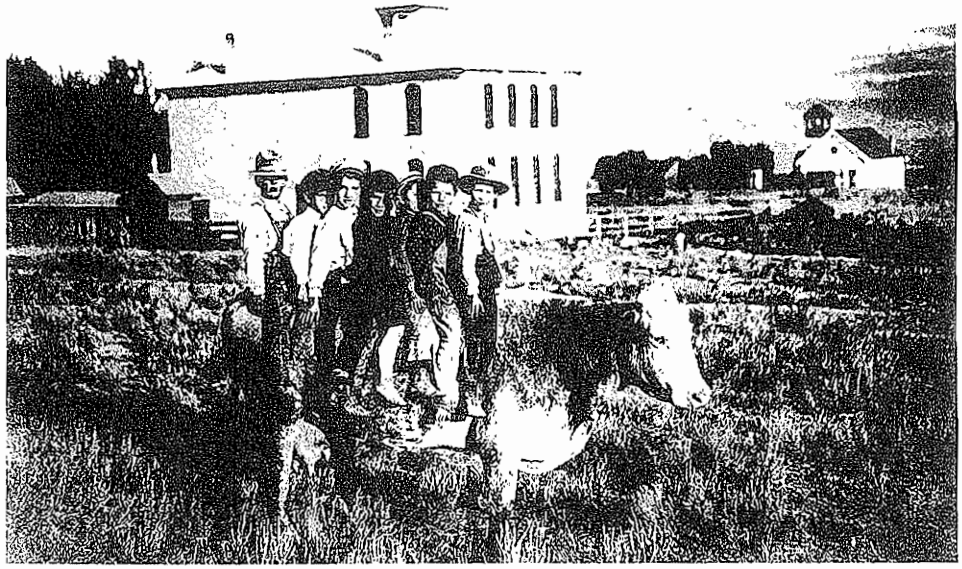
During this same period, a vast movement of settlers into the western United States was intensifying the demand for schools. "What you had was a group of people as they moved west, as they went in their Conestoga wagons, or went around the Horn, who wanted to reproduce the institutions that they remembered in the East," explains David Tyack. "As you look across the new states as they were created in the Middle West and the Plains States and the far Pacific Coast, the states talked forever about education as an absolutely essential means of creating a stable, and prosperous and virtuous republic. So

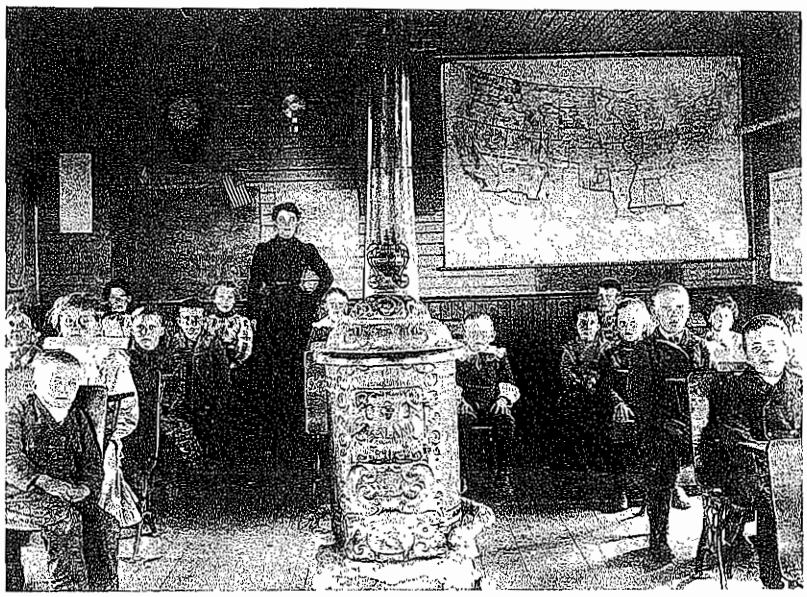
American flag with country school image.

Sod school, Logan County, Colorado, 1909. Frontier schools were set up in saloons, sod dugouts—wherever space was available.

that after the Civil War, the Congress actually required states to guarantee in their constitutions that they would offer a free nonsectarian education to all children." "Schools became important civic amenities that could draw settlers," notes historian Kathryn Kish Sklar. "As people migrated ... they founded their own towns, they invested their money in those locations and then they hoped that their town would be a success. It was important to them to have something to offer settlers and attract them, and a school was a very important institution that they could offer."

On the frontier, families were widely scattered. Some school districts covered a thousand miles. Getting to school could take





ABOVE

"Her Daily Duty." Rural schoolchildren pose on cow.

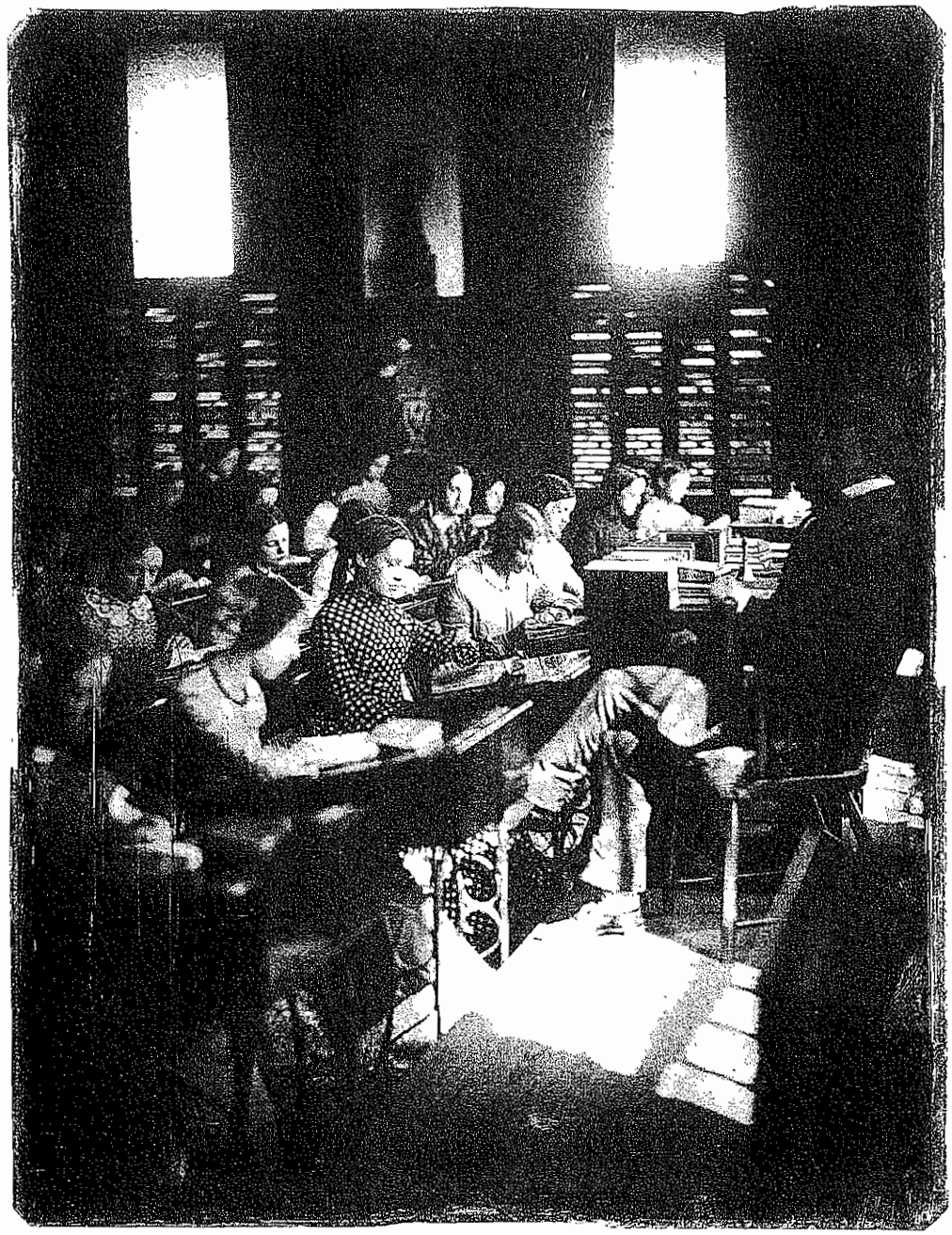
RIGHT

Sargent County, North Dakota, classroom with Garland No. 18 nickel-plated stove.

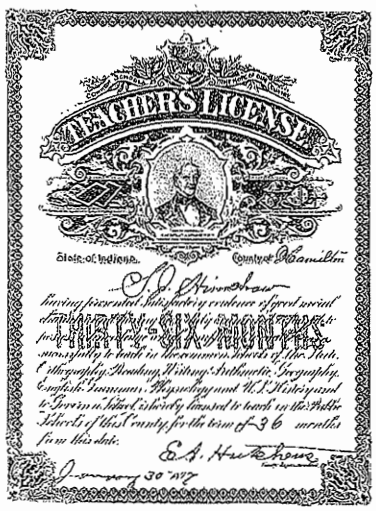
Daguerreotype of Catharine Beecher, 1848. "She argued for female teachers, to create a profession for the women of her time that would be as great as medicine or law for men." —Carl Kaestle, historian

grit, determination, and, at times, ingenuity. In wealthier settlements, schools were built as ornaments to success. More often, classes convened in sod dugouts, defunct saloons, and wherever else space could be found. In this vast territory, with new schools cropping up everywhere, a crisis arose: who would teach the children of the settlers?

Advocate Catharine Beecher promoted female teachers as a civilizing force in the West. A member of a prominent New England



Daguerreotype of classroom in the Emerson School for Girls.

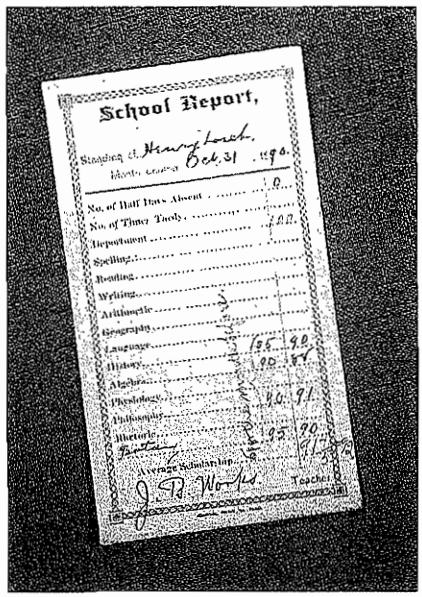


ABOVE *Miss Blanche Lamont with her school at Hecla, Montana, 1893.*

LEFT *Teacher's license, Hamilton County, Indiana, 1897.*

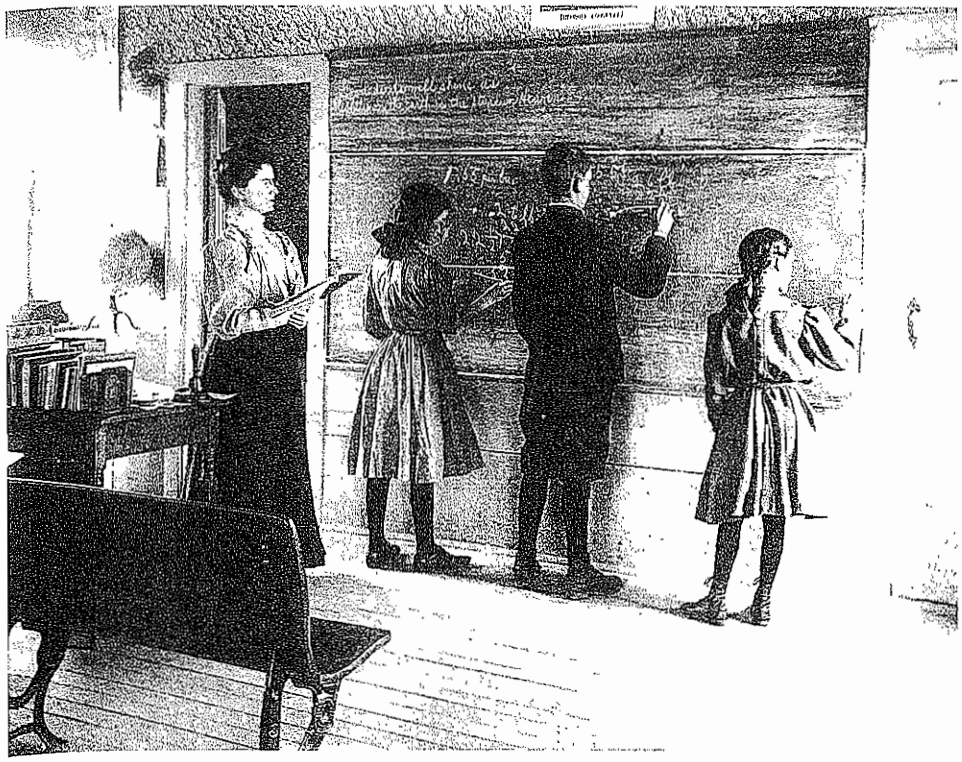
Schoolchildren playing a circle game with their teacher, Miss Sherman.
Pine Creek School, Livingston, Montana, area, 1898.

family and sister of author Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher saw teaching as a woman's moral calling: "God designed women to be the chief educators of our race.... It is woman who is fitted by disposition and habits and circumstances for such duties." Beecher founded colleges to educate women in philosophy, science, and mathematics and train them for service out west. Kathryn Kish Sklar brings to light Beecher's influence: "She really made teaching respectable for middle-class women. She was an elite person who advocated that this was really a very appropriate behavior for a young woman to leave her family and go and live in another community and board around as a teacher. This was not on the face of it necessarily what a respectable young woman who wanted to make a good marriage would think to do."



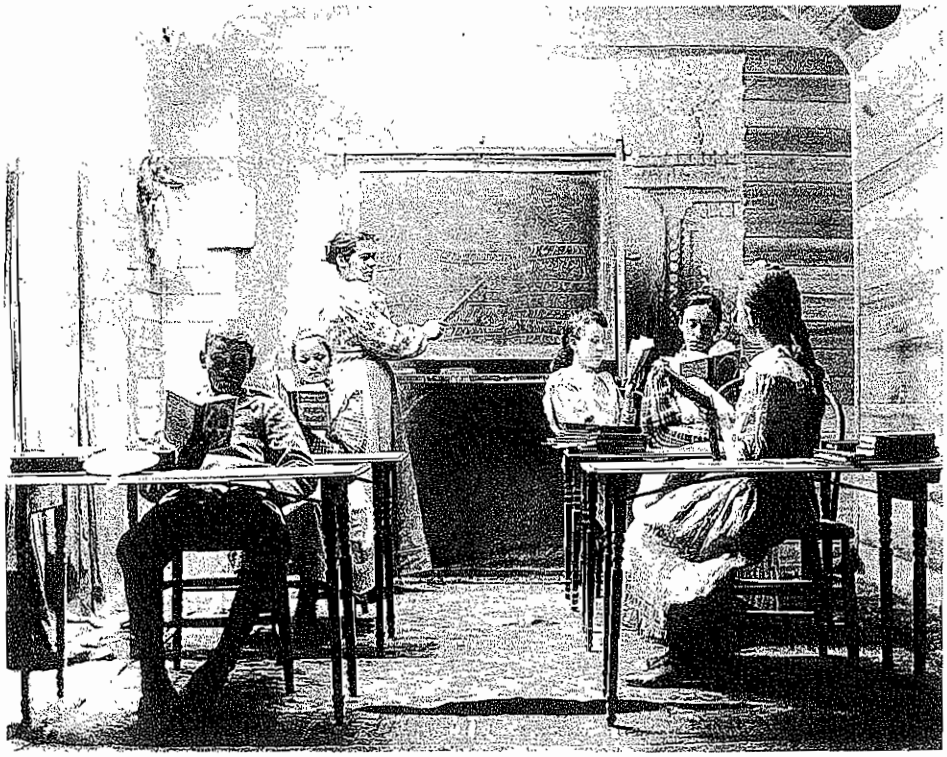
Report card, 1890. Children had to master a great deal more than the three Rs.

Determined and educated, an army of young women teachers headed west. Nothing could have prepared them for the conditions they found upon arrival in their lonely outposts. One young lady witnessed a gunfight outside her classroom. Another found herself boarding in a two-room cabin with a family of ten. Ellen P. Lee of Hamilton County, Indiana, wrote about her teaching experience, "Nearly all the people are kind to me, but have not had an



An arithmetic class taught by Carrie Southworth at Morton School near Groton, New York, 1907.

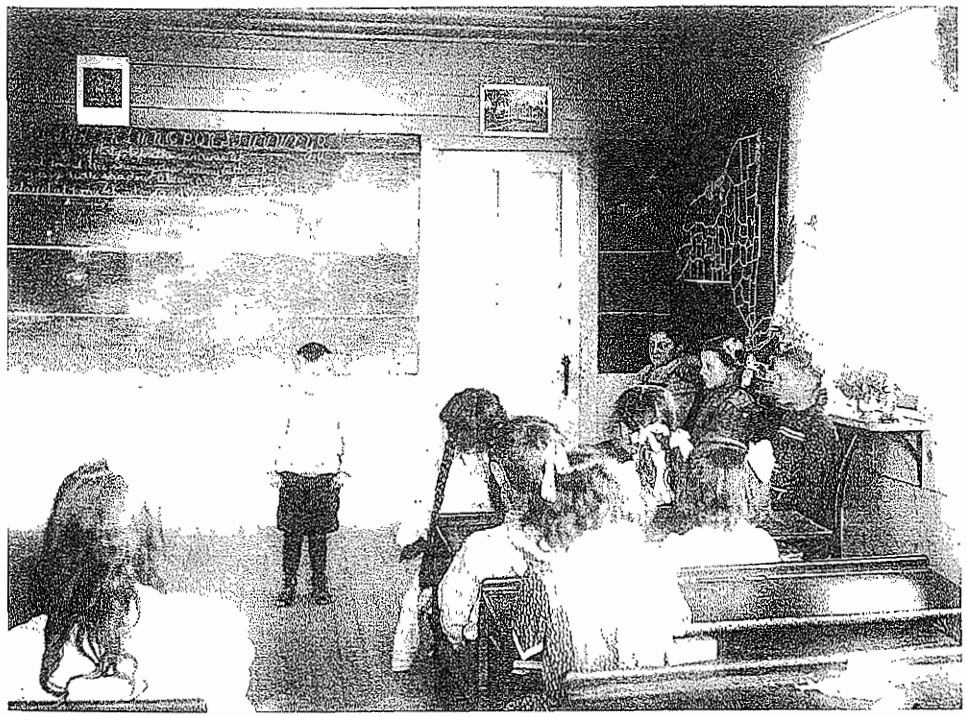
opportunity for improving their minds. So they are very ignorant . . . many of the adults can neither read nor write. Some cannot tell one letter from another. And so it is with the children." Ethel Hall Besquette of Tulare County, California, wrote of her classroom, "There are many openings in the walls of our school that admit birds, lizards, mice and snakes. During one lesson a snake appeared in the opening above a window, sticking his tongue out at us. I disposed of him amidst great applause." Kathryn Kish Sklar describes how women changed what went on in the classroom: "[The hiring of women] created a new ethic in schools that

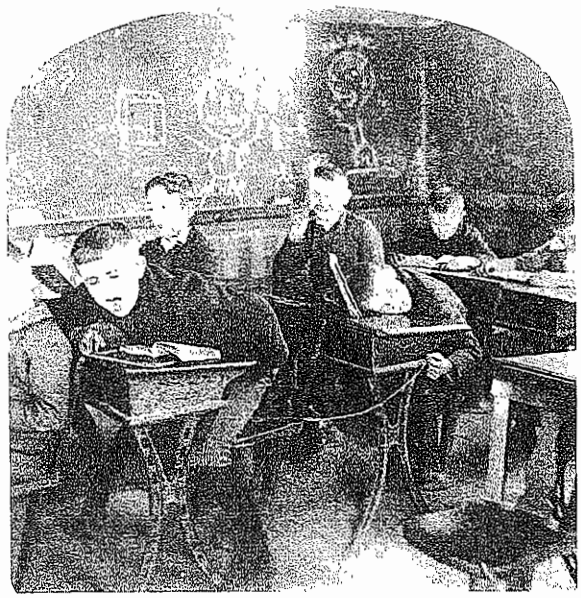


Rosebud Agency School, Nebraska.

was feminized in which the teacher cared for the students—the teacher was not only a disciplinarian but also offered, not exactly the comforts of home, but a lot of the similar ingredients that had gone on in home schooling a century before that."

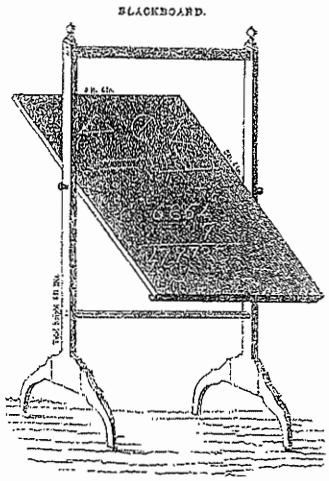
In their classrooms, such as they were, women teachers gave children on the remote frontier an introduction to literature, standards of behavior, and national ideals. In these tasks they relied on a series of textbooks written expressly for the children of the West, known as McGuffey readers. These readers, which eventually sold over 122 million copies, consisted of "moral tales," says

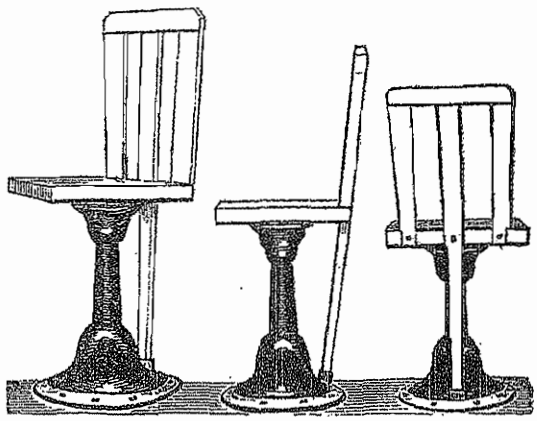




ABOVE *Little boy reciting in front of class. Morton School, near Groton, New York.*

RIGHT *"Peck's Bad Boy in School." Niagara Falls, New York. 1890.*





PATENT AMERICAN SCHOOL CHAIR.

historian Joel Spring. "The idea was that while the students learned how to read, they also learned the morality that would be this common morality of society.... And that is the idea that if you should work hard and acquire wealth then you are blessed by God." Such a lesson is apparent in a passage from McGuffey's *Third Eclectic Reader*, revised edition, 1879: "Lesson 40: Charlie and Rob. 'Don't you hate splitting wood?' asked Charlie. 'No, I rather like it,' said Rob. 'It's a tough job and it's nice to conquer it.' Now which of these boys do you think grew up to be a rich and

LEFT *School blackboard. From* The School and the Schoolmaster, *1858.*

RIGHT *Drawing of school chair. From* Common School Journal, *ca. 1840.*

useful man and which of them joined a party of tramps before he was thirty years old?"

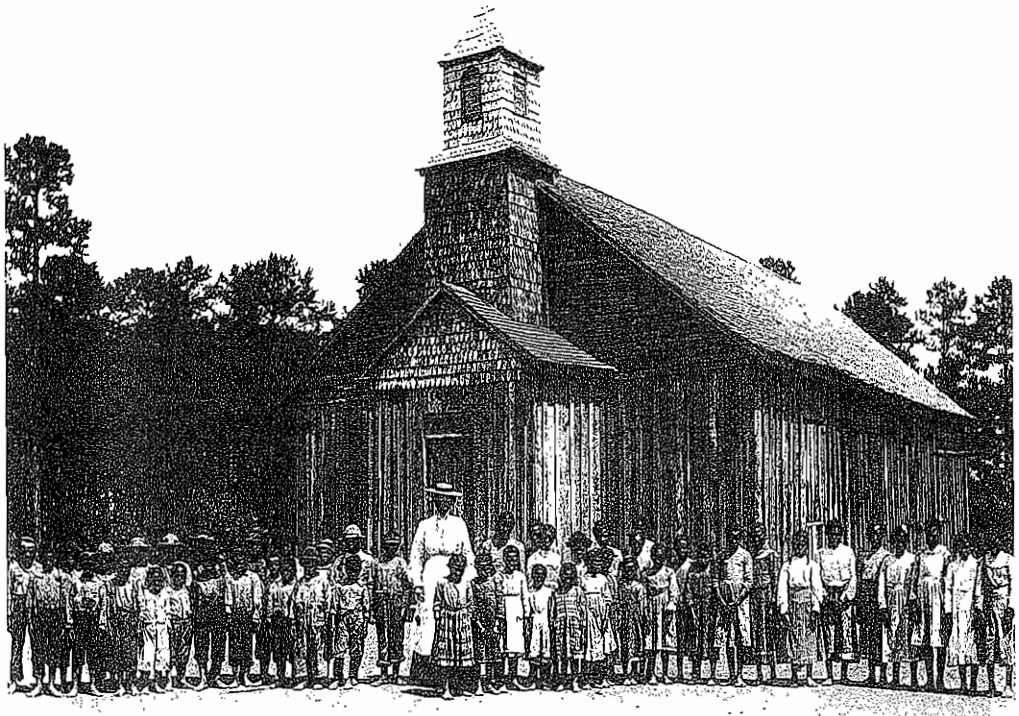
Capping off the school year was the annual spring exhibition when parents and friends gathered to review the work of America's teachers and the lessons being taught. By this time, students had to master a great deal more than the three Rs. The curriculum included physiology, an old-fashioned term for health and hygiene, biology, zoology, and even ichthyology for the upper grades. A favorite event was the spelling bee. Standing before a rapt audience, students competed fiercely over the spelling of exotic words such as "argillaceous" (of the nature of clay), "tetrastoon" (a four-sided court with porticoes), and "acephalous" (without a head).

The end of the nineteenth century saw explosive growth in America's public schools. Public school expenditures rose from $69 million in 1870 to $147 million in 1890. Public school enrollment increased from 7.6 million in 1870 to 12.7 million in the same decades. The United States was providing more schooling to more children than any other nation on earth, thanks in large part to the nineteenth-century movement for school reform. Yet not all children could attend public schools together. Many Native Americans were sent to special government schools, where they were forced to abandon tribal languages, customs, and dress. African Americans also faced exclusion, and many created their own schools. Despite hardship, black literacy soared in the decades after the Civil War, from 5 percent to 70 percent.

The great American experiment of universal education was well

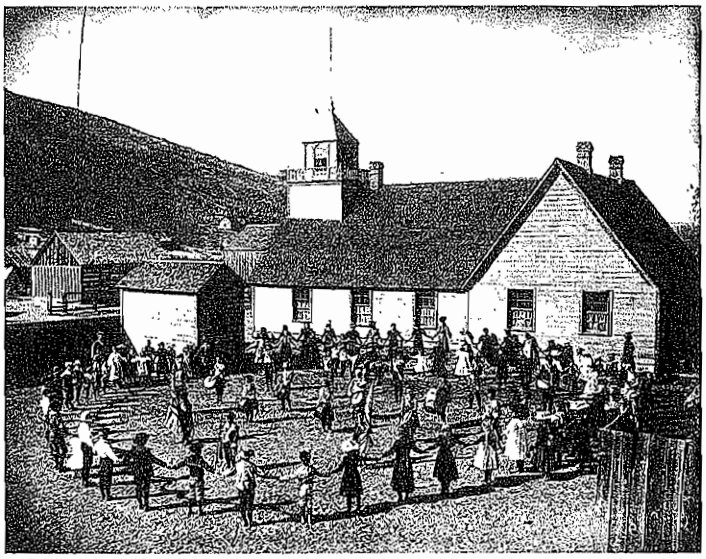
LEFT *"Not all children went to school together." Pawnee schoolchildren.*

BELOW *"Some African Americans created their own schools." Group portrait of children with teacher in front of school in Athens, Georgia.*



LEFT *Chiricahua Apaches four months after arriving at the Carlisle School, an Indian industrial school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.*

BELOW *Scofield School, Utah, 1899.*



under way. Inspired by Thomas Jefferson, promoted and refined by Horace Mann, Catharine Beecher, and others, America's public schools were a tremendous achievement with great promise for all. It remained to be seen how that promise would be met, as schools faced the enormous challenges of the twentieth century.