

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RICHARD GAUSE BOONE

1893–1899

The announcement by the State Board of Sill's successor gave promise of a yet bigger and better future for Normal. It read:

Dr. Boone has already attained national prominence as an educator and author of educational works, and comes to our State and to the Normal School splendidly equipped for the services required of him. . . .

The equipment referred to was noteworthy in two respects: (1) it included teaching experience at every level of the educational scene, from rural district school to university; (2) it did not include a single earned degree from a college or university but it did boast two honorary degrees—an MA from DePauw University, and a PhD from Ohio University.¹

It also included rather extensive research done in residence at Johns Hopkins University, and the publication of two books on American education, one of which was described by William T. Harris, United States Commissioner of Education, as “the first noteworthy attempt at a general history of education in the United States.”² This became a standard textbook in colleges throughout the nation for many years.

Boone served for a year as superintendent of schools at Frankfort, Indiana, and in 1886 was called to Indiana University by President David Starr Jordan to organize a Department of Pedagogy. He remained there until called to Ypsilanti in 1893.

The six-year period of Boone's administration proved to be of great significance. It saw a professional course developed for college and university graduates; a still greater reliance on the high schools

for the academic work of that level; the expansion of physical facilities; important curricular development, and the Normal legally recognized as a four-year college. In 1897, the State Legislature authorized a change of name with respect to the four-year courses leading to a degree; in 1899 it changed the name from "School" to "College" and Richard Gause Boone became the first to hold the title President of Michigan State Normal College. It was the second normal school in the nation to become a four-year college-grade institution, the first being that at Albany, New York (in 1890).³

In another respect, too, Boone's coming was of exceptional importance. He represented the professional educator. Of his eight predecessors, five had been men of orthodox religious beliefs and strong missionary zeal. They were missionary-educators. Of the three exceptions (Welch, Bellows, Willits) the terms of office of two had been exceedingly brief. Richard Boone, despite a Quaker background (he had graduated from the Spiceland Academy of Spiceland, Indiana) presented the image of the educator rather than the preacher. In this respect, he picked up the lines of Normal's first principal, Adonijah Welch. Boone was primarily a student of the educational process.

Boone had noted in his writings the appearance of an educational development of "grave importance" namely, greater attention to psychological principles and "systematic observation and patient, scientific study of child-mind." But, along with his scientific emphasis Boone held as equally important knowledge of the historical antecedents. He stated:

. . . so vitally is every present related to its past, that the study of contemporary institutions can be made intelligent only in the light of their origin. To know along what lines in educational experience have been the great changes, and why, and so what is new and what old, in current doctrine and practice, serves to temper undue enthusiasm over real or supposed new departures, and saves from condemning the worthy only because it chances to be old.⁴

Boone was at pains to distinguish between training and education, and in consequence was considered unfriendly to vocational and physical training, a judgment that failed to do him justice. What he was insisting upon was that, to be educational, an activity must have an impact on the mental life. He said:

I shall not disparage any form of physical culture when I say that neither strength of body, nor grace of carriage, nor agility, nor attractive presence, nor health, nor endurance, can for the moment be considered as an end of training. Here as elsewhere the essential fact is the amount and quality of the mental life that goes into the process, and the reaction of the process upon the mental life . . . The skill—the finger skill—incident to a course in shorthand or piano, or sewing, or cooking, or painting may be a means of livelihood. . . . But the educational value of such acquisition may be next to nothing because of the absence of this mental reaction. For this reason certain of the so-called practical subjects are the most unpractical often. . . .

Pursuing this theme, he doubtless shocked most of his faculty when he brought religion and the Bible into his discussion.

The mistake of the schools seems to me to be far less that moral and aesthetic and religious instincts have been ignored, than that the intellectual faculties and activities are not recognized as a great natural gateway and highway to these qualities of a noble life, not less than to scholarship. . . . It would seem to be a less serious alternative that the Bible be thrown out of the schools, than that the teacher should lack in the endowment of wisdom and right motives and humane interest, and faith in human instincts.⁵

With this brief glimpse of Boone's educational thinking, let us turn to his impact on the curriculum, the first area that engaged his attention.

In December of his first year he presented a paper before the Normal School Pedagogical Society entitled "Education as a Dialectic Process." Defining "dialectics of the mind" as a process of experience, the process by which mind seeks to achieve truth, he said that "the current of the mind . . . is on the side of total, not partial effects." The tendency of the mind, he said, is to want to unify its experiences, and the teacher should serve to help this along. From this premise he undertook to persuade his faculty that the public school curriculum should be organized around a central subject, based on a principle of concentration.

The teacher should, therefore, select "such thinking and other activities as most easily combine into one whole; and to effect this activity through the employment of properly coordinated subjects; this gives also the ground for the concentration of studies." He

referred to the humanities (history, literature), language study and science as subjects that coordinate well with other subjects to form a natural center of concentration.

Boone's presentation to his faculty stimulated formal papers by the heads of the Departments of Modern Languages, History, Physical Sciences, and Education, and the five presentations were promptly set in print and bound into a volume titled "A Study in Unification of School Work."⁶ They formed a symposium that exemplified a seriousness of interest in the essential function of education that is impressive. But they revealed, too, a feeble hold by the department heads on the "concentration" concept; a determination to force it into the traditional mold.

Boone's proposal is of particular interest as a forerunner of the present-day "core curriculum" concept that has found wide acceptance in the public schools. The "core" people of today look back largely to Abraham Flexner and the Lincoln School of Columbia University's Teachers College. Flexner's widely-read essay, "A Modern School," appeared in 1916 and the Lincoln School experiment was undertaken a year later. Thus a pioneering concept that might have developed into one of major significance lay dormant until picked up again some two decades later and developed by the more perceptive mind and persistent effort of Flexner, and the added prestige and resources of a more alert board of control, the General Education Board of New York.

Boone's influence on the curriculum at the Normal, however, was significant. Two major policies were adopted: (1) the grouping of courses that related to each other; (2) the expansion of the area of free electives by the student but at the same time the requirement that the student elect groups, not individual courses. In his 1895 report to the State Board, Boone was able to say:

A continuous line of electives covering from three to five years each, may be had in any one of the following departments: history, music, mathematics, English, German, French, Latin, Greek, physics and chemistry, biology, and geography and drawing . . . Disconnected and aimless selection of studies is discouraged or prohibited.

But attention was also given to other aspects of the curriculum: the relative amount of the curriculum devoted to professional work; the upgrading of courses by the improvement of entrance examina-

tions and encouragement of high school graduates to enroll at the Normal; expansion of the professional program for graduates from liberal arts colleges.

In 1898, Boone drew up a detailed report of Normal's progress during the past decade, a report that showed not only the developments that had occurred under his own administration but gave due credit to his predecessor, Sill. Boone acknowledged indebtedness, for example, for a Training School that was staffed with a teacher for each elementary grade and had added a ninth grade. Sill's policy of recognition of the high school diploma for admission bore fruit in Boone's time. By 1896, Boone could show that two-thirds of the student body had been admitted on this basis. Sill's one and two-year certificate courses for high school graduates had contributed greatly to this development. The appropriation which Sill succeeded in getting for a gymnasium made possible, the following year under Boone, a new building and the organization of the new Department of Physical Training. Sill's emphasis on more flexibility in the student's program was given greater importance by Boone's insistence on a higher percentage of free electives.

Sill's policy of expanding course offerings and at the same time increasing the relative amount of professional work bore fruit under Boone to the extent that, in his review of the decade ending in 1898, he could report that the list of classes had almost trebled, and the amount of professional work relative to the whole had increased from 12 to 21 per cent. Moreover, he was able to show that class attendance relative to enrollment had substantially increased. He pointed out that class attendance at the Normal had long been much better than at seven large normal schools in seven other States. The current attendance at the Normal was 93 per cent of enrollment; for the other schools, 60 per cent.

In 1895, Boone had reported that the four-year "full diploma" (two preparatory and two college years) students could now elect a third of their courses and the "advanced" students (those enrolled in the four-year college-grade program that led to the bachelor of pedagogy degree) could in their last two years elect all of their courses. As for the course provided for graduates of liberal arts colleges, Boone had expanded it from the half-year under Sill to a full year. College graduates were now being admitted from the University of Michigan, Michigan Agricultural College, Michigan School of Mines, and the following private colleges: Adrian, Albion, Alma,

Detroit, Hillsdale, Hope, Kalamazoo, and Olivet.

The Boone administration was soon faced with a problem of major import. A development took place that had been long in the making, the occurrence of which had been delayed largely because of the resistance of Normal's faculty and administration—the establishment of additional normal schools in Michigan. Factors of prestige, and a deep-seated fear, born of long experience, that the Legislature, which had often been penurious with Normal, would find it much more difficult to support two Normals, were responsible for this attitude. The Board of Visitors for Normal had supported this stand in its report for 1889.

But agitation for additional normal schools persisted, and by 1895 the barrier was threatened. Two bills were proposed, one for a State Normal at Mount Pleasant, the other for one at Marquette in the Upper Peninsula.

Boone acted promptly. In a letter to Governor John T. Rich, dated May 25, 1895, he expressed, on behalf of himself and his faculty, great concern over the possibility of establishing other normal schools of equal rank with that at Ypsilanti. He said:

With the present Board of Education there would doubtless be no difficulty, but the Board of Education is a changing body, and a new set of members might immediately present a bill to establish another or two more schools of exactly equal rank with our own. This . . . opens up opportunity of competition between different sections of the state for support at every session of the legislature.⁷

The Mount Pleasant bill represented an effort by local citizens to get the Legislature to adopt an existing private school. In 1891, a group of leading citizens had become interested and, on September 13, 1892, had opened a normal school in that city. C. F. R. Bellows (erstwhile of the Ypsilanti Normal) had been made principal. The hope was that the State could be persuaded to take it over. An effort to this end was made in the same year, secured the approval of the Senate, but failed in the House. In 1895, a second attempt was made and this time was successful, though failing to secure an appropriation. The Act authorized the institution to prepare teachers for the rural district schools (the one-room schools) and the primary departments of the graded schools of the State.⁸

At this point the role played by Boone was quite the opposite to

that of his predecessors. Mindful of the jealousy of his staff and of the financial hazard, he yet saw and was concerned about the broader aspects of the problem. He undertook, therefore, simply to secure legal recognition of the pre-eminent position of the Ypsilanti school. He was eminently successful. Not only did the Act adopting the Mount Pleasant Normal limit the school to the preparation of teachers below the high school level, but in 1897 the Legislature enacted a statute confirming this status. At the same time it not only confirmed the Ypsilanti institution in issuing teaching certificates at all levels, but also authorized it, in certain instances, to use the title of "The Michigan State Normal College."⁹

As to the movement for a normal school in the Upper Peninsula—frustrated first in 1875 by faculty and friends of the Ypsilanti Normal and again in 1895 by proponents for the Mount Pleasant Normal—Boone was active in its support.

In 1899, a statute was finally enacted "to provide for the location, establishment and conduct of a Normal School at Marquette, in the Upper Peninsula of this State, and to make an appropriation for the same." As to the status of the school, the Act included the provisions of the Act of 1897 which defined the status of the Central Normal at Mount Pleasant.¹⁰

The Act of 1897 which empowered the State Board to designate the Ypsilanti Normal as Michigan State Normal College with regard to life-certificate and degree courses was accepted as changing the name of the school. Boone thenceforth signed himself as "President of Michigan State Normal College;" the annual catalog appeared under the new name; the school periodical changed its name from the *Normal News* to *Normal College News*; and the *Michigan School Moderator* commented that "Michigan State Normal School is now no more; 'tis now Michigan State Normal College."

Thus when, in 1899, the legislature passed the bill formally changing the name of the school (coincident with the establishment of a third normal, Northern, at Marquette) this was merely a legal confirmation of the step taken in 1897, and of the superior status of the Ypsilanti institution relative to other Michigan Normals.¹¹

The proposal to hold a summer session was first made by President Boone. In his report of 1896 to the State Board, he stated that for several years there had been a demand for a summer session, and that occasionally short terms had been held, directed by someone not

connected in an official or professional way with the Normal. He recommended that for the summer of 1897 the Normal hold a session of not less than eight weeks, whose offerings and conditions would be the same as during regular year.

The Board failed to act, and we find him repeating his recommendation two years later, with added arguments. A similar request, strongly supported by facts, was made at the same time by Charles McKenny, then principal of the Central State Normal School at Mount Pleasant. This time the State Board acted.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Jason E. Hammond, "impressed with the desire on the part of progressive school superintendents working in the smaller towns of the state, to avail themselves during the summer vacations of the advantages offered by the Normal College," presented to the Board a motion that reorganized the academic calendar so as to make this possible. Thus, the first regular summer session was held in 1899, coincident with the abandonment of the semester system and the organization of the academic year into four quarters.

When Boone came to the Normal, the Training School occupied the lower floor of the west addition to the Main Building. Adequate when first occupied, the area had become seriously inadequate. Just prior to Boone's arrival, the School had been reorganized to provide a critic teacher for each grade. This and the growing enrollments presented an urgent need for more rooms and more space. In his first year, therefore, Boone recommended that a separate building be erected for the Training School. At the same time he secured the backing of the Board of Visitors.

The appeal was successful. The Legislature of 1895 appropriated the sum of \$25,000 for a building, to be ready for occupancy early in 1897. The sum appropriated, however, was inadequate to implement the plans drawn. On the completion of the building, Boone complained:

The new training school building . . . is left unfortunately with the two end wings having foundations only. The original plan contemplated nine rooms, one for each of the eight elementary grades and the kindergarten, and a number of classrooms in which student teachers might have opportunity for their own teaching and practice in handling classes.¹²

Two years later Boone made another urgent appeal. The legislature responded, and by 1900 the two wings were constructed.

It should be noted, in passing, that the land on which the Training School building was constructed was part of a parcel of 3.99 acres, known as the Rorison site, donated to the Normal by the citizens of Ypsilanti in 1896, and dedicated by the State Board to provide a site for the erection of a building to house the Student Christian Association. Mrs. Mary A. Starkweather had just announced her gift that would make such a building possible, and that structure, occupying only a portion of the area donated, was dedicated in March of 1897.

At a much later time, Normal's Alumni Association was given the western part of this land as the site for a Union building.

Boone's deep interest in the history of education and his belief that no sound educational progress could be made in ignorance of the past led him to a keen appreciation of the significance of the history of his own institution at Ypsilanti. In his second annual report to the State Board, he sketched a brief history of the Normal and announced that a holiday had been declared for the school "to commemorate its founding in an appropriate way, and to make deserved and public acknowledgment of its generous service." The day set aside was the 28th of March, 1895 (commemorating the signing of the "Act to establish a State Normal School," on March 28, 1849), and was devoted to history and reminiscence. Boone said in part:

It is earnestly hoped and recommended that, as the year 28th of March recurs in each succeeding year, it may be appropriately observed and bring with it some worthy contribution to the history and achievements and influences of the State Normal School. Much of its best history is yet little more than tradition. The occasion may serve at least as an incentive to gather up, as the years go on, the dropped strands of its life. Whatever was really worth incorporating into the school or, being incorporated, influenced its work or usefulness, is equally worth preserving.

This day was observed thereafter for many years.

In the spring of 1899, just as the Normal School had become legally designated as the Normal College, the *Detroit Free Press* revealed that all was not well between President Boone and his faculty. Within the next few days and weeks much of the story appeared in the Detroit, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor newspapers.¹³

Boone had asked the State Board for the removal of the head of the Training School, James W. Simmons, and two critic teachers.

The *Free Press* article said that Boone was admitted to be a good educator and possessed of good executive ability but that he was alleged to have permitted personal animosities to dominate his judgment.

Pandora's box was opened. The *Detroit Evening News* dwelt on attitudes in the faculty, indicating that the row with the president had been going on for some years. The article said that the trouble arose "over the question of fads and as to whether President R. G. Boone should rule the faculty, or the old instructors whose influence dominated the school for half a century or more, should rule." He was called the "Miss Coffin of the Normal," a reference to an assistant superintendent of the Detroit schools who had earned a reputation as an extremely arbitrary, but able, administrator. The article went on to explain:

The fad that President Boone first sprung at the Normal was the system of teaching by correlation. Correlation hypnotized H. R. Pattengill who was then State Superintendent of Public Instruction and ex-officio a member of the State Board of Education, at the very beginning. He agreed with President Boone that it was just what the Normal needed to make it the first institution of the kind in the United States. The older and more influential members of the faculty didn't approve of the system. Correlation, it may be said for the enlightenment of the common people, is a system of teaching a given thing and then dragging in everything that can be associated in any way with the subject.

The *Evening News* continued:

There are members of the faculty who did much, long before Michigan heard of President Boone, to build up the Normal and place it in the front rank. They think they know as much as the president how to educate young men and women for teachers. There is a difference of opinion among disinterested citizens of Ypsilanti as to whether the burden of censure should be placed on President Boone or on the faculty.¹⁴

The controversy split the State Board two and two. The hold-over members (State Superintendent Hammond and Perry F. Powers) opposed Boone, the two new members hesitated to vote for his dismissal, but all agreed to re-hire the teachers. An article in the *Free Press* quoted Superintendent Hammond as follows:

President Boone is a very able man, and a fine talker, but to the few persons who know what his methods are he is not the man the general public believe him to be. . . . He is a man who looks upon teachers and members of the faculty as he does upon the trees and walks in the college grounds. If any one offends him, he casts them out with the same hard-hearted purpose that he would order the removal of dead trees or any other offensive object.¹⁵

The unrest, unfortunately but inevitably, reached the student body. A mass meeting was held, viewpoints were presented, a rising vote was held (it was Boone vs. Simmons), and the Boone supporters overwhelmed their opponents 449 to 28, with many abstaining. Two seniors featured the close of the meeting by coming to blows.¹⁶

Beyond the borders of the State notice was also taken of the dispute. The *New York School Journal* expressed the hope that Governor Pingree would intervene to save Boone, saying: "Dr. Boone is widely known and recognized as a leader among normal school men. If the three most efficient workers in this important field were to be mentioned, his name would be one of the three. Michigan ought not to let him go."

But feelings on the Normal campus and at Lansing were running too high. Boone resigned on September 1.¹⁷ Editor Henry R. Patten-gill of the *Michigan School Moderator* commented:

Dr. Boone's administration has been a vigorous and successful one. The school has very materially improved under his regime, and the Board will find it no easy matter to secure a successor in every way as able as Mr. Boone. The Doctor is a fine speaker and well known in educational circles all over the United States. He is a man of untiring energy, and of inexhaustible capacity for work.

Names of possible successors to Boone soon appeared in the press, and they made a very impressive list. Included, among others, were Burke A. Hinsdale, incumbent of the Chair of the Science and Art of Teaching at the University of Michigan; David Eugene Smith, former head of the Mathematics Department at the Normal, then president of the Brockport State Normal School in New York; David McKenzie, superintendent of schools at Muskegon, Michigan (later to become the first Dean of Wayne State University's College of Liberal Arts); A. S. Whitney (later to become Dean of the School of

Education at the University of Michigan); Superintendent Lewis H. Jones of the Cleveland Schools (destined to accept the offer when renewed at a later time); and Albert Leonard, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Syracuse University.

The position appears to have been offered informally to Smith, who was not interested. Hinsdale, Jones, and Whitney were satisfied in their positions. McKenzie had doubts as to the progressive spirit of the Normal faculty and, on their side, the faculty felt that he was not well-enough informed as to the training of teachers. The choice finally went to Leonard, who accepted.¹⁸

Boone accepted an offer as superintendent of the Cincinnati public schools. There he found a school system in great need of being updated. In a centennial edition of the *Cincinnati Times-Star*, the article on the public schools had this to say:

The close of the century finds the school system in a condition of reaction and decadence. An order of things which had undergone no essential change in half a century was visibly approaching the climax of its obsolescence. Regeneration was at hand. Superintendent Morgan was followed by Dr. Richard C. Boone . . . former president of the State Normal College, Ypsilanti, Michigan. Teachers were charmed by his cheerful smile, the effect of which was aided by a flowing mustache . . . amused at the opulence of his well-nourished frame and amazed at his facile fecundity of speech. They misunderstood his significance. For . . . Dr. Boone brought the earliest message of the new education which was destined to overturn an outworn system and remains dominant today.¹⁹

Shortly after Boone's arrival in Cincinnati, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* ran an article stating that the new superintendent of schools shocked the members of the Board of Education by rejecting all the changes recommended by the Board's committee on salaries. The article continued: "As Dr. Boone is on record as holding his independence higher than his position, the Board of Education will probably be treated to more shocks of this kind from time to time."

The statement was prophetic. After three years, Boone left the Cincinnati system.

For a number of years he edited F. H. Palmer's periodical, *Education*, and lectured on education. In 1913, he accepted an appointment as Professor of Education at the University of California at Berkeley, serving also for a year as acting head of the School of Education there. When he died, in 1923, Normal and Michigan had

almost forgotten him. Only in the educational periodical then published by Normal's faculty was mention made, and this in the form of a quotation from the journal of the California Teachers' Association. It was unaccompanied by comment of any kind.²⁰

The administration of Richard Gause Boone at Normal was epoch-making. Not only did the Normal become the second in the nation to achieve legal status as a four-year degree-granting college (with Boone as its first president), but its national status was greatly enhanced. His up-to-date and forward-looking philosophy of education was revealed by papers read at national meetings, a full dozen in number by the time he left Ypsilanti. He was the first of Normal's administrators to bring its name vigorously to the national attention. On his own campus he played the stimulating role of iconoclast, and proved to be the first of a line of presidents whose professional approach represented a new emerging era in teacher preparation.

