

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDING OF MICHIGAN NORMAL

Creation of a state-supported institution for the training of teachers in the young backwoods State of Michigan in 1849 was an extraordinary step forward in education. The very concept of a Normal School was, for America, new; her people had yet to be persuaded that to teach, one must have special preparation. Of the twenty-five states that preceded Michigan into the Union, only two—Massachusetts and New York—had taken such a step, and in both the venture had been recent, experimental and tentative. That twelve-year-old Michigan, rural and wooded and remote, with her population of just under 400,000 widely scattered over a vast area, should become the third state to establish an institution exclusively for the training of teachers must be attributed to her good fortune in having attracted a few exceptionally public-spirited citizens who were at the same time alert and well-informed as to what was taking place in the outside world.

A vivid picture of early Michigan and sense of its rapid development is provided by the following description by a former State Superintendent of Public Instruction:

The first half century of state history has witnessed many wonderful changes. In 1837 the interior was sparsely settled, and the forests and prairies showed few signs of human industry. Wagon roads were scarce and poor, and there was no completed railroad. Postal arrangements were exceedingly inconvenient, and correspondence was an expensive luxury. The population of the state was 174,467. Cities there were none. Schools, churches and newspapers were few, and the privations of pioneer life were many and severe.¹

When, in 1835, a convention met to form a state government for Michigan, the subject of elementary education was being pressed as of great importance. Population was increasing rapidly; more and more school districts were being formed; there were no uniform requirements as to courses of study or length of terms or qualification of teachers. There was no professional training for teachers. Judge Cooley, in his "Michigan, a History of Governments," remarked that there were as yet no professional teachers. Some farmer or mechanic, perhaps a grown-up son or daughter, who had the advantage of the common schools of New York or New England, offered his or her services as teacher during the dull season of regular employment and consented to take as wages whatever the district could afford to pay.

By the fall of 1838 some 245 townships reported to the newly created office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction a total of 1509 school districts, and 34,000 pupils between the ages of 5 and 16.

In the East, particularly in Massachusetts, a new type of school was being considered as the answer to the problem of the untrained teacher. Known as the Normal School, this concept was supported by reports from educators who had traveled in Europe. Among these reports was that of the Rev. Charles Brooks of Hingham, Massachusetts. On a journey from Liverpool to New York in 1835 he was accompanied by Dr. H. Julius of Hamburg who had been commissioned by the King of Prussia to visit schools in America. Brooks became acquainted in detail with the Prussian system of elementary schools, and became an urgent advocate of the normal school idea. He spent much time in the next three years traveling throughout Massachusetts, explaining the Prussian system. Henry Barnard of Connecticut visited European schools in the years 1835-1837, and thereafter devoted his great editorial talents to the improvement of public education in this country, particularly through the *American Journal of Education* (which he founded).

Three reports in particular on European educational systems attracted major attention beyond the confines of Massachusetts and Connecticut, and were widely circulated. These were that of the Frenchman, Victor Cousin, made to his government in 1831; one by the Rev. Calvin E. Stowe of Ohio; and the 1843 report of Horace Mann. The Cousin Report included surveys of several European countries. The first half dealt with the Prussian system of public

education, and was translated into English and reprinted in New York in 1835. It is described as the first document on the subject to make a deep impression in America. Two aspects of the report found acceptance here—the policy of centralized state control of education, and the concept of the normal school for the professional preparation of teachers.

The report by Stowe (husband of Harriet Beecher Stowe) came as the result of a visit he made to Europe in 1836 to buy a library for Lane Theological Seminary. He was at the same time commissioned by the Ohio Legislature to report on systems of elementary education there, and did so in his "Report on Elementary Education in Europe" of 1837. It was quoted extensively by educational journals and was read widely.

In 1843, Horace Mann, secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts, spent several months visiting schools in Britain, Holland, Belgium, German States, and France. From this came his "Seventh Report." This is held to be the most influential of all reports on European education. In it, Mann ranked the Prussian system first and the English last.

Thus, the educational pot was being brought to a boil at the time that the two founders of the Michigan system, Isaac Crary and the Rev. John D. Pierce, appeared on the scene. These men were friends. Crary, indeed, had lived in the Pierce home at Marshall, Michigan, for a time. Both were deeply interested in the problem of education.

Pierce had been sent to Michigan in 1831 by the Home Missionary Society. He settled in Marshall and organized the Congregational church there. He had been born in New Hampshire, educated in Massachusetts, and was a graduate of Brown University. While in Marshall, Pierce showed great interest in public education. He obtained a copy of the Cousin Report as published in the United States and discussed it at length with his friend, Crary. This occurred just when Michigan was organizing to become a state. Crary was a member of the Convention of 1835 that would draw up the Constitution.

On the urging of Crary, Michigan's first governor, Stevens T. Mason, appointed Pierce State Superintendent of Public Instruction, an office created by the new Constitution. Pierce served for five years, returning to the ministry in 1842. In 1847 he was elected to the State House of Representatives, and was re-elected in 1851. He

was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1850. During his incumbency as State Superintendent he founded and edited the *Journal of Education* (1838–1840), an official voice of the department and a means of communicating with township and district school officers throughout the State and securing their support for this program.

Crary (some seven years younger than Pierce) was a lawyer. He, too, was born in New England (at Preston, Connecticut). He graduated from Trinity College, Hartford, studied law, and commenced his practice in Marshall in 1833. As a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1835, he was made chairman of the Education Committee. He was elected as a Democrat to the 24th, 25th, and 26th Congresses, serving as Michigan's first Congressman from 1837 to 1841. He served as a Regent of the University of Michigan from 1837 to 1844, and was a member of the State Board of Education from 1850 to 1852. He served as a member of the State House of Representatives from 1842 to 1846, and as Speaker of the House in 1846.

Pierce and Crary held similar views as to what should be done in Michigan about education. To these two men Michigan owes her pioneer position in the history of public education in America. Crary was the creator by virtue of the fact that, as chairman of the Education Committee of the Constitutional Convention, he was the author of Article X which established the Michigan system. Its distinctive features were that education should be represented by a separate branch of the government, that there should be a state officer in charge of the whole system, and that lands granted by the federal government for school purposes should be granted to the State as trustee rather than, as had been the rule, to the townships.

With the creation of the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Michigan became the first state to adopt the Prussian system of vesting the educational authority in a single individual.

Pierce was the organizer. As the first State Superintendent of Public Instruction, it was his responsibility to present to the legislature a system of common school and university education, and to administer the system as well as the more than a million acres of federal-grant lands. Of his part in the establishment of the public school system, he said:

It is my pride to have been one to help lay the foundations of our present system, and I want no better monument to my name than this.²

Our interest in these two men lies in their basic concepts concerning public education. Both believed it to be a state, rather than local or private, function. Superintendent Pierce found opportunity in his annual reports to express his philosophy and outlook in some detail. He was so strongly in favor of free public education that he would have liked to make it compulsory and prohibit private academies.

With regard to teachers to conduct these schools, he did not doubt the necessity for professional training. But he did not, in fact, at this time propose a normal school. Rather, he would have used the proposed branches of the University of Michigan as teacher training institutions. He recommended that, in each county with a sufficient number of inhabitants, a school or branch of the U-M be established, with a department for the education of teachers for primary schools, and a three-year course of instruction.

But the U-M branches, designed to feed it with students prepared to undertake university-grade of work, failed to prosper. In 1839, five such branches were in existence in Pontiac, Monroe, Kalamazoo, Detroit, and Niles. Of a total of 161 students attending these branches, just 10 were planning to teach in the public schools. At no time were there more than 10 branches, and in August of 1848 only 4 were in existence. Furthermore, they proved to be a serious drain on the financial resources of the young and growing U-M. From this time, little is heard of the branches and no further appropriations were made for them. Their place, as far as preparatory schools for the U-M was concerned, was taken by the Union School system (parent of the high school), and unincorporated academies and seminaries, mostly with religious backing.

Superintendent Pierce's successor, Francis Sawyer jr., in his report for 1841, dwelt on the importance in a teacher of the ability to teach, and referred to examples in Holland, Prussia, and in Massachusetts where "*the art of teaching* is taught like any other art."

Oliver C. Comstock, successor to Sawyer, in his report for 1843, also urged the importance of knowing *how* to teach, and referred to practices elsewhere. He said:

. . . it is plain that an acquaintance with general literature and science does not of necessity prepare one for the arduous, but delightful business of educating the undying mind. Such a preparation is chiefly derived from the study of the science and art of teaching. Firmly persuaded of this truth, many of the governments of the old world and some of our sister

states have instituted normal schools, in which the science and art of teaching are elucidated and enforced. Model schools are formed and taught in these institutions.³

Ira Mayhew, Comstock's successor, repeatedly asserted the importance of a normal school. But he seems to have felt that Michigan was not yet ready and urged the value of teachers associations and institutes. In his report for 1847 he became more definite:

The interests of popular education require that something should be done for the improvement of the present generation of teachers. This, perhaps, can better be accomplished through the agency of Teachers' Institutes, than by any other instrumentality. There is, at present, a great lack of suitable persons to take charge of these institutes. This lack can be supplied only by the establishment of a Normal School for the professional training of teachers. Such an institution would be productive of incalculable good. In relation to the nature and advantages of both of these institutions the Superintendent is prepared to submit his views to the legislature in such form as they may direct.

In his report for 1848 Mayhew, while repeating his belief in the need for normal schools, added:

I would not, however, at our age as a State, and the advancement we have made in the department of public instruction, recommend the establishment of a single Normal School; and especially when we consider our present necessities.

Meanwhile, in August, 1847, a significant report of the Board of Visitors of the U-M had been made to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The chairman of the Board was the Rev. Mr. Pierce, and it is reasonable to assume that he wrote the report. After commenting vigorously on the need for good grammar schools, seminaries, or branches of the U-M "to fill the intervening space between the common school and the University," the report turned to the topic of a normal school:

New York has for many years past emulated New England in its liberal and varied provisions for diffusing education and knowledge among the masses of her multitudinous population. She has also within a few years past established a State Normal School, which has excited the strongest

interest . . . Michigan need not be far behind her elder and more advanced, but not more forward, sisters. She has accessible and quite within her reach, an ample fund . . . It is not by abstracting from either the common school or University funds . . . But we have certain Salt Spring lands . . . We propose that they should be appropriated to the support and assistance of a State Normal School, Branches of the University, Academies, High Schools and other Seminaries of learning of a high order, throughout the State.⁴

The center of interest in this report was unquestionably the U-M; the proposal for a normal school was merely a part of a wider proposal for a variety of intermediate institutions that would serve to feed the University. But there was here a practical suggestion for financing, and on this the Board of Visitors for the U-M took formal action, as follows:

Resolved, That it is expedient that the Salt Spring Lands should be appropriated to the support and assistance of a State Normal School, branches of the University and other seminaries of learning . . . and that we recommend that the Legislature take immediate measures to appropriate the Salt Spring Lands to the purpose above contemplated.

The salt spring lands referred to were those granted to the State by an Act of Congress of July 25, 1838. Salt springs, not exceeding 12 in number, together with 6 sections of adjoining land each, were granted to the State for its use, but could not be sold or leased for a period longer than 10 years without the consent of Congress.

It should be noted that salt springs were held to be of great potential value as possible leads to salt sources that could be profitably mined. The first task that Douglass Houghton, first State Geologist, assigned to himself was the investigation of brine springs of the Lower Peninsula. By 1840, he had located more than half of the salt spring sections, but the manufacture of salt was not put on a commercial basis until 1859, when the Saginaw valley was found to be sufficiently productive.

There is little doubt that the consistent emphasis of the first four Superintendents of Public Instruction (Pierce, Sawyer, Comstock and Mayhew) on the importance of professional preparation for teachers of the common schools, the numerous references to the importance of Normal Schools and what must have been an increasing concern on the part of parents over the kind of education their

children were getting, served to stimulate active interest in the state legislature.

In 1848, a resolution was offered in the House of Representatives as follows:

That the committee on education be instructed to inquire into, and report to this House, the propriety of establishing by law a separate department in the university of this state, for the education of teachers, both male and female, and that they have leave to report by bill or otherwise.⁵

But no bill was reported in the House. A bill was introduced in the Senate to establish a branch of the U-M as a State Normal School. It failed to pass. Two petitions in the House requesting passage of a bill providing for a State Normal School were tabled.

In 1849, Superintendent Comstock was succeeded by Francis W. Shearman. Comstock was elected to the State House of Representatives and was made chairman of its Committee on Education. It was this committee that reported out a bill for the establishment of a normal school, and Comstock worked hard for its adoption. Success rewarded his efforts. On March 28, 1849, Act No. 138 was passed, entitled "An Act to establish a State Normal School."

The purpose for the new institution was stated as follows:

Section 1. *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Michigan*, That a State Normal School be established, the exclusive purposes of which shall be the instruction of persons both male and female in the art of teaching, and in all the various branches that pertain to a good common school education; also, to give instructions in the mechanic arts, and in the arts of husbandry and agricultural chemistry, in the fundamental laws of the United States.

The Normal School was placed under the authority of a Board of Education to be appointed by the Governor by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. This board was to consist of three members, with a term of three years, and two ex-officio members—the Lieutenant-Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Provisions as to the powers and duties of the Board included the annual election of a president "who shall be empowered to visit the various villages and places of importance in the State, and obtain donations and receive propositions for the establishment of said normal school." The Board was also to appoint a principal, an

assistant, and teachers, prescribe the textbooks to be used, make all the regulations and by-laws necessary “for the good government and management of said school.” The Board was also to procure a site and erect buildings “in or near some village in this State, where it can most conveniently be done, and where in their judgment it will most subserve the best interests of the State.” A model school in connection with the Normal School was to be established.

The Board was also to set the rules for admission of pupils, following these guidelines set forth in the Act:

Every applicant for admission shall undergo an examination under the direction of the board, and if it shall appear that the applicant is not a person of good moral character, or will not make an apt and good teacher, such applicant shall be rejected.

Furthermore, each applicant could be required to sign a declaration “of intention to follow the business of teaching primary schools in this State.” The Board was authorized to make exceptions, however.

The Act further provided that a student, after having attended the Normal School for 22 weeks, would, upon due examination and approval, be certified for teaching.

Ten sections of salt spring lands were set aside as the Normal School Building Fund. Fifteen sections were placed in a trust fund, the interest from which would be used for salaries. This was designated as the Normal School Endowment Fund. The 25 sections were not to be sold at less than \$4 per acre. The State Treasurer was to be treasurer of the Board. Three days later a supplementary act was passed consolidating the two funds into a single permanent endowment fund, the proceeds to go to buildings and current expenses.⁶ It is worth noting here that the land, 16,000 acres in all, was completely sold by 1868, the average price being \$4.50 per acre. As of 1880, the endowment fund stood at \$69,000, and produced an annual income of \$4,300 (round figures).

On March 25, 1850, an “Act to consolidate and amend the Laws relative to the establishment of a State Normal School” was approved.⁷ This ratified the two preceding acts, located the school at Ypsilanti, and included a number of other features. The three members of the Board of Education were to be appointed by the Governor “by and with the consent of the Senate and House of

Representatives in joint convention.” The State Treasurer was to serve as an ex-officio member of the Board. A Board of Visitors was to be appointed by the State Board to report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The superintendent himself was to visit the Normal once a year and make an annual report to the legislature.

Important financial provisions followed. The State Board was given authority to receive and spend sums donated by the citizens of Ypsilanti and vicinity. All lands granted to the State or the Board in trust for the support of the Normal were to be held in a perpetual fund for the use of the Normal School. The Board was incorporated.⁸

The decision to locate the Normal in Ypsilanti had been made by the Board more than six months earlier. This Board was composed of Samuel Barstow, Randolph Manning and the Rev. Samuel Newberry, with State Superintendent Francis Shearman and Lt.-Gov. William M. Fenton as ex-officio members. Newberry was elected president, and had set forth to find a site for the school.

His success may be measured by the fact that the Board was able, at its meeting in September, 1849, to consider five written offers. These came from Niles, Gull Prairie, Jackson, Marshall, and Ypsilanti. The last-named was supported by recommendations from Monroe, Adrian, Tecumseh and Detroit. After due deliberation, the Board unanimously decided to accept the offer of Ypsilanti.

Superintendent Shearman reported the decision in the following words:

The location of the school has been a duty of great delicacy and no small difficulty. Each of the places mentioned proposed to furnish a site for the buildings, and tendered a large subscription in aid of the institution, to be paid in money. After a full investigation and examination of the various proposals, and taking into view all the objects to be attained by the location, the board finally fixed upon the village of Ypsilanti, which was conditionally designated as the location of the normal school . . . The advantage of this site in point of health, accessibility and locality, were deemed, under all circumstances, not second to any other, while the proposition to the board was by far the most liberal . . . Such a proposition was deemed by the board satisfactory evidence not only of the liberality and public spirit, but of the existence of interest in the general subject of education . . . which cannot be less important to the institution in the future, than the liberal offer which it induced.⁹

The Ypsilanti offer consisted of a site of four acres; a subscription of \$13,500 "well secured," one-third payable September 1, 1850, and the rest within two years thereafter; the use of temporary buildings for the Normal and the Model School until suitable buildings could be erected, and the salary of the principal (\$700.00) for five years.

By the revised Constitution of 1850, the composition and manner of selecting the Board of Education were changed. The three appointive members became elective, for a six-year term. The number of ex-officio members was reduced to one, the State Superintendent, who served also as secretary of the Board.

The first election, which took place in 1852, resulted in the following membership: Isaac E. Crary, president; Chauncey Joslin, Gideon O. Whittemore. Superintendent Shearman was named secretary. To this Board fell the responsibility for breathing life into the plan for the Normal.

To the four acres donated by Ypsilanti were added four acres by purchase. On this site was erected a three-story building which was described at the time as follows:

The building is of brick, finished with stuccowork, three stories in height, with a basement for furnaces and is divided into a model school room, with entries, reception, library, and recitation rooms and entries; a Normal School room in the second story with similar arrangements, and a large and spacious hall in the upper story.¹⁰

Faculty positions and staff were determined as follows: Adonijah Strong Welch, Principal and Professor of Greek and Latin Languages; Miss Abigail C. Rogers, Preceptress and Teacher of Botany and Belles-Lettres; Orson Jackson, Professor of Intellectual Philosophy; and J. M. B. Sill, Teacher of English Grammar and Elocution. Four other positions were created but not filled, namely, Professor of Natural Sciences and Professor of Modern Languages, Teacher of Vocal Music and Drawing, and Principal of the Model School.

The Michigan State Normal School was the fifth such institution to be authorized by a state legislature, and the sixth to open its doors. It was the first institution west of the Allegheny Mountains. On the continent of North America, it was the ninth, Canada having previously established three.

