

## CHAPTER TWO

# FORMATIVE YEARS, 1853–1865

Dedicatory exercises for the Michigan Normal School were held in the auditorium of the new building on October 5, 1852. Hundreds of Michigan citizens, including the State Board of Education and “a large congregation of teachers,” climbed the flights of stairs and crowded into the room. Those on the program were Superintendent of Public Instruction Shearman, the first Superintendent of Public Instruction (Mr. Pierce), Issac E. Crary, president of the State Board; Chauncy Joslin, member of the State Board; Divie Bethune Duffield, secretary of the Detroit Board of Education; Adonijah Strong Welch, the newly-appointed Principal; and a guest speaker, Federal Judge Ross Wilkins.

The sentiments expressed were optimistic. Pierce, in a long address, revealed that he looked upon a normal school as an intermediary step from the public schools to the U-M.

Crary, in a brief statement, dedicated the building “to the People of the State of Michigan, to promote the great cause of education—the cause of man—the cause of God.” Joslin delivered the commission of office to the new Principal.

Judge Wilkens was concerned, not with the concept of an institution to prepare teachers for the public schools, but with that part of the statute establishing the Normal School which required that instruction be given in “the fundamental laws of the United States, and in what regards (concerns) the rights and duties of citizens.”

It was Duffield who suffused the proceedings with poetic fancy and optimistic hope. He had written a hymn for the occasion, in

which he addressed the “spirit of immortal truth,” in part as follows:

To thy great purpose now we raise  
These noble walls, this song of praise.

Here have we built a holy shrine,  
Where thy true worshippers may kneel,  
And seek to know the art divine,  
Of teaching what thy laws reveal;  
Pour then thy flood of golden light,  
And cheer the groping student’s sight.

Thus, with modest concept and high hopes, Michigan took her place among the first states in the Union to recognize the need for professional training for teachers.

An early means of providing some training for those who were engaged in the teaching of children was the Teachers Institute, an approach first definitely organized in Connecticut in 1839 by Henry Barnard who defined the Teachers Institute as follows:

A Teachers Institute, is . . . a gathering of teachers, old and young, experienced and inexperienced, of both sexes, and of schools of different grades;—in such number as will develop the sympathies and power of a common pursuit, and yet not so large as to exclude the freedom of individual action; for a period of time, long enough to admit of a systematic plan of operations, and yet not so protracted as to prove a burdensome expense, or an interruption to other engagements;—under the direction of men, whose only claim to respect and continued attention must be their experience and acknowledged success in the subjects assigned them—and in a course of instruction, at once theoretical and practical, combined with opportunities of inquiry, discussion and familiar conversation.<sup>1</sup>

In Michigan, establishment of a normal school was accompanied by organization of a teachers institute. This followed immediately after the dedication of the Normal building, and preceded the opening of the Normal. A circular from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, of July, 1852, contained the following announcement:

The permanent opening of the Institution for the reception of pupils, will be preceded by the holding of a Teachers Institute, at the Normal School,

for four weeks successively after the dedication (5th of October) and while citizens, parents and friends of Education are invited to attend and participate, the Teachers of the Primary Schools of the State are specially expected to attend. The exercises at the Institute will be free of expense to the Teachers, and it is expected that arrangements will be made with the officers of the Central and Southern Railroads, to extend to them the advantages of reduced rates of fare.<sup>2</sup>

The Institute was under the direction of Principal Welch. Courses offered were a review of subjects taught in the Common Schools: English, arithmetic, natural science, anatomy and physiology. The time allotted was three weeks. Two hundred and fifty teachers were in attendance. In addition to the course work, evening lectures were delivered on such topics as "Responsibility of Teachers," "Physical Science," "Female Education," "Teachers' Mission," "Natural Science," "Music," "Relation of the Normal School to Teachers," and "Teachers' Duties."

In 1855, the legislature passed a law providing for a limited number of teachers institutes annually, to be held under the general direction of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. During at least the remainder of the century, these institutes exerted a growing influence of public school teaching in Michigan.

One development of lasting importance, which occurred during the holding of the first Institute, was the organization of the State Teachers' Association, parent of the present Michigan Education Association. This was done at the suggestion and mainly through the efforts of Principal Welch. Officers were elected on October 12, 1852, Welch being named president. A constitution was adopted the following year.

At the opening of the school (March 29, 1853), two programs of study were offered, a "Classical Course" and an "English Course." The first catalog of the school gave this explanation:

The Classical Course is designed to prepare teachers for our Union Schools (predecessor of the high school) which are rapidly increasing in number and importance. As these institutions supply the place of Academies in the State, they should be conducted by men of thorough classical and scientific attainments.

The English Course is composed of studies which all who intend to become teachers should understand.<sup>3</sup>

The age for admission was not less than 13 years for the Classical Course, and not less than 14 years for the English Course. The Board of Education authorized each member of the House of Representatives to appoint two pupils (a boy and a girl) from his district. These pupils could attend at the reduced fee of \$1 per term for the English Course, \$2 for the Classical. All others paid \$3 and \$4 respectively. A higher scale of fees was prescribed for pupils not intending to teach.

The school year was organized into two terms, one of 17 weeks, beginning the last Tuesday of March, the other of 23 weeks, beginning the first Tuesday of October. A Model School (primary and secondary) was to be opened with the first fall term, to be taught "by a Principal Teacher, assisted by the Senior Class of the State Normal School."<sup>4</sup>

The minimum length of the program of academic studies was to be two years, to which would be added the work of the Model School and the professional courses. But one need not complete even the two years to be qualified to teach. And the State Board soon imposed a requirement that all who entered the school must make a declaration of intent to teach. This requirement remained in force for more than three-quarters of a century.

Principal Welch reported that students who had completed certain listed courses were considered capable of conducting a primary school, and recommended to the Board that certificates be granted to this effect. On the list were arithmetic, geography, map drawing, orthography, English grammar, vocal music, and drawing. These would require about a year of study.

The suggestion by Welch that the State Board issue certificates to those held to be capable of conducting a primary school was not followed, but Superintendent Ira Mayhew, in his report for the following year (1858) did recommend granting a diploma to all Normal School graduates. He noted that under existing conditions all graduates must submit to an examination before a township board of school inspectors before they could be recognized as "qualified teachers."

In 1861, an additional stipulation for graduation required that every student should master the rudiments of two foreign languages, the comment being made that there was a demand for young men to teach the two "ancient classics" in the Union Schools, and that there was also a demand for young women who could teach French. It

was further observed that the young men who graduated were being encouraged to complete their classical studies at the University of Michigan before entering permanently on the duties of teaching.<sup>5</sup>

Students were not enrolled as freshmen, sophomores, etc. but in classes designated as B, C, D, E, F, and Senior Class. Students were considered capable of teaching in the primary grades after completing classes B and C. Some difficulty had been experienced from the fact that students were inclined to go out and get a teaching position after having only the B term. As a result, the Normal School exacted a promise not to teach until at least two terms (B and C) had been completed. This meant a full forty weeks of work. The remaining classes (D, E, F, and Senior) averaged one and a half terms each. The total time for graduation as of 1861 thus appeared to be about four years (as compared with three years in 1856). Terms were numbered consecutively from the time of the school's opening. Thus, the term beginning in April of 1861 was designated as the "17 term."

The early influence of the Pestalozzian method of teaching was being felt. In his annual report for 1861, Principal Welch said:

The objective methods of training the senses of the child and the more natural order of studies adopted here and recommended by those high in authority as educators, are gradually finding their way into the primary schools, and we are glad to know that our theories of education, in general, harmonize with those of prominent teachers in other institutions.<sup>6</sup>

In 1863, the course of study was reorganized to give all students instruction in the Pestalozzian system. This was reported by the State Board as follows:

The Board of Education are now convinced that the time has come, when the school can render no greater service to the State, than to so modify its course of study that all its pupils may receive thorough instruction and practice in the Pestalozzian system of Primary Teaching.<sup>7</sup>

The courses of study were reorganized into two major programs—a Normal Training Course, for teachers of primary schools, and a Higher Normal Course, for teachers of Union and Graded Schools. One-third of the total time was to be given to strictly professional (education) courses.

Finally, the legislature of that year granted authority to issue a

diploma to graduates. "This diploma," the Board commented, "supercedes the necessity of examination by the Township Inspectors of the State."<sup>8</sup>

A study of student enrollment during the Welch period (1853–1865) reveals an uneven growth. In general, the Fall (long) Term exceeded the Spring (short) Term in numbers. "Ladies" exceeded "Gentlemen" in all of the Fall Terms, and in all but three of the Spring Terms, (the exceptions being 1858, 1859, and 1860). In general, enrollment of men in the Spring Term ranged from 30 per cent (Civil War years) to approximately 50 per cent (in 1858). The low point for men was the fall of 1863 when only 48 enrolled, as compared to a high of 148 in 1858. Total enrollments for a single term ranged from 122 (the first year, 1853) to a high of 357 (1859).<sup>9</sup>

Enthusiasm as to the success of the new institution was more consistent. Reports of the State Superintendent, the State Board and the Board of Visitors, as well as of the Principal, all reveal pride in the work being done by the Normal School and confidence in its future.

In one respect only do we hear a negative voice, and that points out the serious lack of capacity of school to meet the needs of the State.

Michigan Normal's first graduation class—that of 1854—numbered three. For the next ten years no graduating class numbered more than twenty-four. Michigan contained several thousand school districts, so by no stretch of the imagination could Normal, even counting the relatively many who earned teaching certificates without graduation, begin to meet the State's need.

Statistics for the year of 1850 show the number of teachers in the public schools as 3,231. In his report for 1853, Superintendent Shearman noted a sharp rise in the reported number of children attending school. Superintendent Mayhew suggested that the small number of trained teachers would act as leaven "until the whole body of teachers and the whole community, is leavened."

In his report for 1859, Superintendent Gregory pointed up the problem:

The question of the establishment of additional Normal Schools in this State has often arisen among those who know the utter inadequacy of this one school to supply the thousands of teachers needed yearly in the state.

He stated that in 1859 there were 7,504 teachers employed, of whom "probably not less than two thousand were without any previous

experience in teaching, and it is safe to affirm that the ranks of our public school teachers must be reinforced each year with more than two thousand fresh recruits.” He continued:

To furnish these new teachers with professional training, would require twenty Normal Schools of the same capacity as that at Ypsilanti, costing an annual expenditure of nearly two hundred thousand dollars.

Gregory’s solution to the problem was to organize teachers’ classes in all the colleges, leading Union Schools, and academies in the State, under general supervision of the State Superintendent. He repeated this suggestion in 1860, 1861, and 1862.

In their report for 1859, the Board of Visitors of the Normal School made the following recommendation:

. . . the accommodations in this school are far below the demands of the State. We would therefore respectfully urge upon your consideration, the organization of at least one other like School in some other convenient portion of the State . . .

Gregory, in his report for the same year, went on to make a suggestion that was receive serious consideration at a later date, namely, that the Normal School confine its work to professional instruction (courses in Education), thus increasing its teacher training capacity. He said:

Could our present State Normal School be relieved, on the one hand, from some portion of the labor of merely academic instruction, and provided, on the other hand, with increased accommodations for students, it would probably be able to furnish professional training to all who wish to devote themselves somewhat permanently to the business of teaching, and who desire to pursue a full course of normal instruction.

Superintendent Hosford, his successor, referred to the shortage problem. He said:

One of the most serious obstacles in the way of the complete success of the school system has been the difficulty of obtaining competent teachers for the district schools . . . much more remains to be done, before this sad want shall be fully supplied. The great demand was formerly for cheap schools; teachers must be obtained at very low wages—‘the cheapest is the best’ was the prevailing sentiment. Good schools are now called for, and competent teachers earnestly sought after.<sup>10</sup>

In a later report, Hosford stated that hundreds of teachers annually were getting their training in the Union Schools. He pointed out that nearly 10,000 teachers were now employed in the state, instructing some 338,000 children. Then he said:

Although we have no definite statistics to determine the number of new teachers added to the list every year, we may safely write it in thousands. Whence do they come? The University, the colleges, and the Normal School furnish but a fraction of them. The Union Schools, in the aggregate, give them hundreds. The remainder are but graduates of the primary schools, and it is to be feared that many of these are from the shorter course.<sup>11</sup>

He urged that a Normal Department be formed in the colleges and in every Union School, under supervision of the State Board and State Superintendent. "This (he said) would be almost equivalent to creating a hundred normal schools at once." And again came the suggestion that the proper function of the Normal School was to give professional courses only:

With this arrangement the Normal School could at once so arrange its course of study, as to attempt nothing but professional work. This is the legitimate sphere of this school. This is the kind of work which it was intended to do . . . The Normal School should be purely a training school. Its course should be confined to two years.<sup>12</sup>

A modified curriculum, eliminating academic courses, was attempted some ten years later but was never put into more than partial operation. Professor Putnam, writing in 1899, remembered the plan as having been abandoned after a trial of a couple years.

The only solution, of course, was the establishment of additional normal schools but that was still a long way off and the very idea was fought tooth-and-nail every step of the way by the faculty at Ypsilanti.

That the State Board had done well in the choice of a principal became increasingly evident in subsequent years. Welch's concept of the educational process was expressed early.

No amount of text book knowledge as such, no memory of straggling undigested facts or details—no skimming of the area of knowledge of whatever sort, can make the genuine scholar or the independent thinker. It is rather by investigating the relations of *facts* and *things*—by a close

scrutiny of the reasons on which opinions are founded . . . that the student, at last, attains to a genuine cultivation of the intellect.

He emphasized the importance of a balanced education, insisting that the function of the true teacher is to educate the whole mind. He said:

By some, even the eccentricity of a distorted intellect is regarded as an index of genius. The nose of the antagonist of Sancho Panza, which hid all his other features, was not in more ghastly disproportion. Would we nourish an exuberance of limb or feature, until it amounts to a deformity? Would you fix the head of a giant upon the shoulders of a dwarf? . . .<sup>13</sup>

Welch was impressed with the educational philosophy of Pestalozzi who would make the child, rather than subject matter, the center of the educational process. In 1862, he published a book titled “Object Lessons Prepared for Teachers of the Primary Schools and Primary Classes.” In the preface he wrote:

The first instruction given to a child in school should be based on the fact that his intellectual activity consists in seeing and hearing rather than in reasoning and reflection . . . equally natural, also, is his aversion to abstract thinking. Any mode of teaching, therefore, which thwarts the former while it seeks to overcome the latter, is false in its philosophy and bad in its results.

