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INSTITUTIONS OF TEACHER EDUCATION, 1845-1920

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University of Miami, 1962
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THE HISTORY OF THE RHODE ISLAND INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION
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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT AND DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The teachers' institute and normal school movements in Rhode Island originated through the efforts of interested persons attempting, on many broad fronts, to find ways toward improvement of the common schools. The events leading to the founding of these institutions and much of their subsequent histories serve to illustrate Rhode Island's uniqueness and determination to carve out her own social and cultural path in which highly diverse religious, vocational and ethnic groups could enjoy a maximum of personal independence within a framework, in many spheres of activity, of very loose governmental organization. It is striking to note that Rhode Island, in the face of such fundamental differences and divisions in its people, developed a system of normal instruction which by the early twentieth century was able to earn such a tribute as that implied by David Snedden, Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, who wrote: "No other state, except Rhode Island, surpasses Massachusetts in facilities for the

training of elementary school teachers."¹

In view of Commissioner Snedden's opinion, and the new plan, adopted by the state government in 1969, for a Board of Regents to begin a restructure of all Rhode Island education, including the existing teacher education and certification requirements,² studies of the roots of Rhode Island's educational system assume an ever greater potential importance, especially for those who will help to shape the newly-evolving and rearranging thrusts of the State's present and future public education.

Statement of the Problem

This study was designed to document in historical sequence the origins and development of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction and the Rhode Island Normal School as agencies and institutions of teacher education from 1845 to 1920. Emphasis is given to those guiding personalities who brought early teacher training into being in Rhode Island, and to later leaders who brought changes and broader concepts of the role of the training institution into realization. Attention is also focussed upon curricula, admissions, the varying forms and modes of study

¹Massachusetts Board of Education, Seventy-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Education. (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1916), p. 32.

²The text of this plan may be most readily found in The Journal of the Rhode Island Education Association, October, 1969, pp. 55-63.

programs, the government and financing of the entities concerned, and upon those critical decisions and periods in the history of the Institute of Instruction and the Normal School which profoundly influenced the course of Rhode Island teacher education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In concise terms, the problem was to (1) identify the emergence of those factors which made state-sponsored teacher education activities a necessity in Rhode Island, (2) to identify the aims and philosophies of educational leaders and the teacher education entities they fostered, (3) to trace the alteration in the basic functions and organization of the established bodies which took place, and (4) to identify emerging trends and pressures which appeared and which indicated the new directions and expansions teacher education activities were to undergo as the normal school period ended and the teachers' college era opened in Rhode Island.

Limitation of the Study

The study was limited to the period between the foundation of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction in 1845 and the renaming of the Normal School as the Rhode Island College of Education in 1920. The first date marks the origination of a state-wide body, a great portion of whose functions were directly concerned with the improvement and

education of common-school teachers and teaching, and which received significant leadership and financial support through the early Commissioners of Public Schools of Rhode Island. The second date represents not only the end of the normal school movement in Rhode Island, but also a symbolic coming-of-age for teaching as a profession in the state.

The study was also limited as to that portion of the history of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction wherein the training of teachers was a major function and concern. This period was found to commence with the inauguration of the Institute in 1845, and to effectively conclude with the 1868 state appropriation of funds authorizing the Commissioner of Public Schools to hold teachers' institutes at varying intervals. These were much shorter sessions and were on a local rather than a state-wide basis, the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction no longer able to accomplish meaningfully such work in the face of major financial and personnel limitations. These changes in structure and the steady growth of the revived State Normal School in the 1870's and beyond as the chief agency for the training of teachers brought to a close the "temporary normal school" function of the Institute which Henry Barnard had begun.

Conversely, it was found necessary to expand the study to more clearly transmit understanding of the Rhode

Island Normal School's foundation in the strenuous efforts of such men as Wilkins Updike, Henry Barnard, William S. Baker, and Samuel S. Greene, whose labors were so important in bringing about the opening of a public normal school for Rhode Island.

Rhode Island was selected for this study for its important role in the history and development of teacher education. The Rhode Island Institute of Instruction was the first state teachers' association in the United States, and the first body of its kind to be incorporated by law into the educational system of its state. Moreover, the teachers' classes and "itinerating normal agency" were pioneers in achieving a state-wide system of teacher training. Additionally, the Rhode Island Normal School, the first totally state-supported normal school in the United States, began its career in a conservative manner but developed through the years to amply fulfill the visions for it imagined by Henry Barnard, and the innovations and practices of its later leaders and faculty became subjects of nationwide interest. The state of Rhode Island is most important as a subject area, for this study, however, as a proving-ground for the work and ideas of those personalities who there found inspirations and experiences which were to have deep positive consequences for all of American education. Unfortunately, much of this story has not been expounded previously, Rhode Island most often being rele-

gated to a few mentions in the older histories of American education as, for all practical purposes, an adjunct to the system of Massachusetts, for example, or in Henry Barnard's great work in Rhode Island, which was close to having been the most successful of his long career, being described in accounts of his life as only a continuation of his early Connecticut labors. A fair overview of the Rhode Island experience, then, should lend much light to the history of teacher education in the United States as a total entity.

This study was further limited to the preparation of teachers for the common, or elementary schools. Other types of teacher training and their origins and growth in Rhode Island, such as the high school teacher education courses developed at Brown University, and art education as it was formulated at the Rhode Island School of Design, were considered so much special areas of concern of themselves and developed so late in the nineteenth century that it was felt they deserved their own separate treatment which would include their later histories and growth than can appear in a study terminating in 1920.

Method of The Study

Locating and reading the relevant primary and secondary documents and sources, and their analysis and compari-

son, comprised the historical method used in this study. In addition, interviews were conducted with former students of Rhode Island Normal School as well as with other persons who experienced or were conversant with teacher training in the early part of the twentieth century. These interviews often led to new perspectives on the actions and course of the normal school, its faculty and students, in Rhode Island.

Definition of Terms

Rhode Island Institute of Instruction and the capitalized terms Teachers' Institute, Institute of Instruction and Institute will refer to the same state-wide organization founded in 1845. The uncapitalized terms teachers' institute and institute will refer to local town and district classes and other forms of meetings for teachers.

Rhode Island Normal School will refer first to the short-lived private school which operated in Providence from 1852-1854. The city of Providence proposed in 1854 to adopt this institution and designate it the Providence Normal School but state action and sponsorship of a public normal school in the same year forestalled this plan. After 1854, the terms Rhode Island Normal School, State Normal School, and Normal School were interchangeably used to designate the same institution, although the term Rhode Island Normal School was always its sole official

name until 1920, when the State Legislature changed it to the Rhode Island College of Education.

"Itinerating Normal Agency," "Itinerating Agency," "Itinerating Normal Agent," "Itinerating Agent," will all refer to the position and work of William S. Baker, the extraordinary teacher brought to Rhode Island by Henry Barnard to act as a liaison between the local and state school systems, and to directly effect improvements upon local methodology and conditions.

"Model School" will refer to a primary or other school attached for observation and training purposes to a normal school. The term will also refer to Henry Barnard's attempts to set up many "model schools" throughout the State as reference-centers for experienced and novice teachers alike. These schools were to be granted special aids from the Commissioners of Public Schools in personnel, curricula, and methodologies.

"Training Schools" and "Training Classes" will refer to those classrooms and entire schools outside the Normal School in which experienced teachers acted as critics and guides for novice teachers.

Review of the Related Literature

The most important primary sources concerning the origin and development of teacher training in Rhode Island are contained in the volumes of the annual Reports of the

Commissioners of Public Schools, first issued in 1845 and made continuous from 1849-1869, and the annual Reports of the Board of Education and Commissioners of Public Schools, issued 1870-1922. In addition to a wealth of information touching the teachers' institutes and the Normal School, those Reports published from 1856 to 1911 contained large-scale excerpts from the various town school reports which form a kind of printed seminar on all the areas of concern and discussion in the public educational spheres of the day. Very frequently, special reports, speeches, dedicatory programs, and other documents, are to be found in the volumes of the Reports, many of which have become totally unavailable elsewhere. So important are the Reports toward a compiling of the historical narrative of public education in the State that it is doubtful whether any study of nineteenth-century Rhode Island schools and schooling would be of value were they not extant. The Reports are available in the Library of the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Special Collections Room of the James P. Adams Library at Rhode Island College.

Of much importance to this study were the Public Laws of Rhode Island, the Reports of the Providence School Committee, the Providence Reports of the City Council, all available in the Library of the Rhode Island Historical Society, and the Providence Public Library. In addition, certain important financial and other data were found in

the surviving Minutes of the State Board of Education, and in legal notes kept by some of the early Commissioners. These are all hand-written in ledger books and were located in the Commissioner of Education's office in Providence.

Other primary sources for this study included the catalogues, bulletins and circulars of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction, local teachers' associations and institutes, and the Rhode Island Normal School, including publications from its beginnings as a private entity. Institute and Normal School lecturers' and teachers' publications, students' memoirs and other published and unpublished materials, and various papers, addresses and letters of others connected with the examined institutions proved of great value as primary sources toward achieving insight and perspective on the course of teacher education. All these materials were found in the collections named above. Additionally, a limited examination of the parallel public records of neighboring state education laws and normal school administrations was made to more properly ascertain the nature of Rhode Island's debt to such forerunners in teacher education as, for one example, the State Normal School at Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Such records were found in visits made in the course of data collections for this study.

Henry Barnard's great contributions to Rhode Island education extended for many years beyond his formal service

as Commissioner of Public Schools. So strong was his influence on theory and practice in Rhode Island that it was found fruitful to investigate the surviving Barnard papers and monograms. Examination of the various historical collections proved exceptionally rewarding in the area of Barnard's work, especially those of the Library of the Rhode Island Historical Society. Barnard's personal scrapbook compiled during his Rhode Island experiences may be seen there, as well as other useful sources of primary data on Barnard including the many previously unpublished Henry Barnard letters of the Wilkins Updike Papers, the Peck Papers, and the Elisha R. Potter Collection. Important references detailing Barnard's many contributions toward the development of the institute and normal school ideas and his influence on the leading personalities of both entities were thus located.

Further Barnard papers and letters bearing on his Rhode Island years were read at the Watkinson Collection of Trinity College Library, Hartford, Connecticut, and in the very large Will S. Monroe Collection at New York University. Other important Barnard items were read in the Special Collections rooms of the James P. Adams Library at Rhode Island College and the Providence Public Library, and in the private collection of the late Mr. James Tyson of Tyson's Book Shop, Providence.

Several educational and historical works were investigated for possible value as source materials for this

study. These included:

Charles Carroll's³ Public Education in Rhode Island, a broad but careful study of the origins and development of public education in the state. Important materials relative to teacher education are presented, but of necessity the coverage given to the Institute of Instruction and the Normal School is very sparse.

Edwin M. Stone's⁴ history of the Institute of Instruction is a detailed study covering not only the Institute's growth and functions but includes valuable material on the Normal School and much on the Commissioners of Public Schools of the early period. Stone's work with its notes on the Institute meetings and special activities, has proved invaluable as a source to all succeeding historians. Stone was involved in much of the Institute's early activities, was an officer for many years, and served as the official Historian of the organization.

Thomas B. Stockwell's⁵ History of Public Education in Rhode Island, 1636-1876, a volume compiled expressly for the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876, is useful for gaining perspectives on many points but did not prove a valuable

³Charles Carroll, Public Education in Rhode Island (Providence: E. L. Freeman, 1918).

⁴Edwin M. Stone, Manual of Education: A Brief History of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1874).

⁵Thomas B. Stockwell and Others, A History of Public Education in Rhode Island: 1636-1876 (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1876).

source on teacher education since those sections specifically on the Institute of Instruction and the Normal School are entirely paraphrased and condensed from Edwin M. Stone's earlier work, cited above.

Thomas W. Bicknell's⁶ A History of the Rhode Island Normal School is interesting largely as an anecdotal collection. Bicknell wrote most of the volume and the remainder is composed of various letters and memorial articles by former students, faculty members and principals of the Normal School. Bicknell believed that his refounding of the State Normal School in 1871 marked the School's true beginning, with the result that very little material is presented on Rhode Island teacher education previous to that date. The book is most valuable for its presentation of philosophic trends and issues of the later teacher education in the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth.

William H. Tolman's⁷ monograph on the History of Higher Education in Rhode Island proved very useful on the early academies of the state, but the State Normal School receives only a limited presentation.

⁶Thomas W. Bicknell (Author-Editor), A History of the Rhode Island Normal School (Providence: 1911). No data regarding the publisher are available; the volume was probably a private printing.

⁷William H. Tolman, History of Higher Education in Rhode Island. Contributions to American Educational History No. 18. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894).

The three major histories of Rhode Island, by Field,⁸ Bicknell,⁹ and Carroll,¹⁰ each contain chapters including material on the Institute of Instruction and the Normal School. Of the three, Field proved most useful for a study of teacher education, but both Bicknell and Carroll provided helpful items of information as well.

Much important information was secured from journals of the period. These included: The Journal of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction, published from 1845 to 1849 by Henry Barnard; the short-lived The Practical Teacher, published in tabloid form by William S. Baker in 1849; The Rhode Island Educational Magazine, published by Commissioner Elisha R. Potter from 1852 to 1853; and The Rhode Island Schoolmaster, published by various editors from 1855 to 1874, when it was merged, along with the other teachers' journals of the area, into the New England Journal of Education. In addition to these publications, others such as the local newspapers of Rhode Island, especially the Providence Journal, and such widely-circulated out-of-state periodicals as The North American Review, the Common School

⁸Edward Field (Editor), State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History (Boston: The Mason Publishing Co., 1902).

⁹Thomas W. Bicknell, The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (New York: The American Historical Society, 1920).

¹⁰Charles Carroll, Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1932).