

RHODE ISLAND YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW **1963** YEAR BOOK



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TWO DOLLARS



East Providence High School

EDUCATION

by GEORGE E. BURKE

a portion of teachers' salaries, parents were usually required to pay a small school rate, furnish board to the teacher, purchase textbooks and supplies, and provide wood for the school stove.

Free in this sense meant open to all, not free of expense to the student with the entire cost being paid for by the government through taxation. It was not until the free textbook law was enacted in the latter part of the 19th century that our public schools could be really termed "free" in the real sense of the word.

Significant events in the forward progress of public education in Rhode Island came in the 19th century. The law of 1800, although repealed in 1803, established the concept of state support for public schools and certification for teachers. The law of 1828 placed the control of schools in the hands of local school committees, instead of in city and town councils. It also established a permanent school fund. The constitution of 1842 established the principle that education is a state responsibility. It was this principle which paved the way for the passage of the Barnard Law in 1845.

The Barnard Law established a state department of education administered by a Commissioner of Public Schools; made support of the public schools by cities and towns compulsory; provided a state appropriation for teachers' salaries; established a minimum school year, and established minimum certification standards for teachers.

The Barnard Law is undoubtedly the most important single piece of educational legislation ever passed in this state, or for that matter, the nation. Although enacted over a century ago, it still provides the framework around which our modern educational system is built.

The year 1892 marks the founding of Rhode Island State College, now the University of Rhode Island. This was the first tax-supported institution of higher learning in the state providing tuition-free education at the collegiate level to qualified residents. The free textbook law passed in 1893 was the last of the great educational advances made in Rhode Island in the 19th century.

The early 20th century witnessed a large growth in development and enrollment in the eight year grammar school. The school year was lengthened and compulsory attendance laws more strictly enforced. It was also during this period that the four year high

Early Rhode Island Education

“THE DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE, as well as of virtue among the people, being essential to the preservation of their rights and liberties, it shall be the duty of the general assembly to promote public schools, and to adopt all means which they may deem necessary and proper to secure to the people the advantages and opportunities of education.” This is the mandate given to the Rhode Island General Assembly by the framers of the Rhode Island Constitution in 1842.

Thus the year 1842 is a momentous one in the history of Rhode Island as it not only represents the beginning of government under a state constitution but also marks the year that the state assumed the legal responsibility for establishing a system of public schools for the education of our children and youth.

This does not mean that the state and the cities and towns were not interested in education prior to 1842. In fact, what some historians believe to be the first free public-supported school in America was established in Newport in the year 1640 when the town meeting voted to set aside one hundred acres “for a school for the encouragement of the poorer sort to train up their youth in learning.” Thus only four years after Roger Williams founded Providence Plantations, the foundation of a public system of education was laid in this state.

From these beginnings at Newport, there sprang up throughout the state hundreds of so-called “free public schools” whose primary purpose was to teach the youth the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic.

It should, however, be noted here that “free public schools” in our early history did not mean that the student had nothing to pay. For although the several cities and towns set aside land for school buildings, erected and rented school buildings, and paid all or

THEN AND NOW

school became an integral part of our educational system, thus giving rise to the so-called 8-4 type of school organization.

This was changed to a great extent in the late twenties and early thirties when the junior high school concept was introduced. The junior high school was intended to bridge the gap between elementary school and high school. In addition to teaching the basic subjects, it was to provide exploratory opportunities to assist the student in choosing his high school program.

The junior high school grades are generally considered to be grades 7, 8 and 9. Thus with the coming of the junior high school, the 8-4 type of school system organization generally gave way to a 6-3-3 system.

Rhode Island Education Today

Rhode Island today has forty-one school districts including two regional high school districts. Education is administered from the state level by a State Board of Education appointed by the governor. The chief executive officer of the board is the Commissioner of Education who is appointed by the board. Control of education in Rhode Island rests with the school committees elected locally in the forty-one school districts.

In 1961-62, Rhode Island schools had a total kindergarten through twelfth grade enrollment of 192,693 pupils. Of that total, 141,971 or 74% were enrolled in public schools as against a national average of 86.4%. A total of 50,722 pupils was enrolled in non-public schools. This was an average of 26% as against a national average of 13.6%. The non-public school enrollment was composed of 46,704 Catholic parochial school children and 4,018 independent school children.

Public school facilities included 365 school buildings of which 298 housed elementary pupils, 36 junior high pupils, and 31 senior high pupils. The non-public school facilities included 145 school plants of which 118 housed elementary pupils and 27 senior high school pupils. These statistics rank Rhode Island last in the nation in the per cent of school age children attending public schools and first in the nation in the per cent of its school age children attending non-public schools.

The population explosion of the fifties and sixties is now having its full impact on our schools. Many school systems, unable to keep pace with their building needs, have had to resort to double sessions despite



Rhode Island College

the fact that Rhode Island communities have spent over one hundred million dollars on new school housing projects since the end of World War II. In 1962 alone, Rhode Island school housing applications amounted to over ten million dollars.

Rhode Island communities are fortunate to have the state share in helping them meet the tremendous increases in their school budgets. The 1960 State Foundation Act, among the best in the nation, allows the state to share from 25% to 51% of the cost of both school operational expenses and new school plants.

New Challenges to Rhode Island Education

Today's schools are confronted with challenges of a magnitude never faced by them before. The population explosion, the explosion of knowledge, and automation are the bases for these challenges. More has been revealed about man and the universe in the past two decades than has been uncovered in the past five centuries. Some competence in this new body of knowledge is important for our survival. Seven out of every ten students drop out of school today before graduating from high school. These students have acquired none of the skills necessary to secure employment in an age of technological change.

Fortunately, Rhode Island schools are beginning to take steps to meet these new challenges. They are making a concerted effort to keep students in school until they have acquired the tools needed for education beyond high school or the new skills necessary for employment in a technological society.

All this has meant changes in the school curricula and the introduction of new teaching techniques and devices which were unheard of a few years ago. These include tape recorders, overhead projectors, educational television, programmed teaching machines, and language laboratories.

The non-graded secondary school such as Middletown High School, the comprehensive high school,

flexible scheduling and team teaching are examples of efforts being made in Rhode Island to tailor the school's program to the needs of the student rather than the student's program to the needs of the school.

Curriculum changes include the introduction of new math, science and foreign language programs at the elementary and secondary levels. The new math and science programs place the emphasis on the learning of concepts which can be applied to the solution of technological problems rather than the mere mastery of content. The foreign language programs, many of which include the teaching of Russian, are aimed at improving the student's facility to communicate in the pluralistic world society in which he will live.

Many Rhode Island high schools have developed programs to meet the needs of the academically talented. These programs are aimed at allowing such students to reach their full academic potential earlier in their high school careers so that they can devote their final years in high school to more advanced college level courses. The Advanced Placement Program at Hope High School and the Superior Student Program at East Providence High School are examples of this new curriculum procedure.

Vocational education in Rhode Island schools is currently one of the most controversial subjects facing the citizens of the state. The controversy is more concerned with where the training is to be offered rather than the need for offering such training to our youth. Three solutions have been offered: (1) regional vocational technical schools; (2) comprehensive high schools; (3) skill centers.

Whatever the ultimate solution, there is little doubt that if our state is to meet the challenge of providing technical skills to our youth, more modern flexible vocational and technological education must be offered both at the high school and post high school level. Currently less than 1,000 of Rhode Island's 20,000 male students, secondary grades 9-12, are enrolled in federally approved technical-trade programs. Furthermore, facilities for technology training at the associate degree level are extremely limited. This should not be in an industrial state such as ours.

Special education in Rhode Island includes those schools which provide facilities for the training of the emotionally disturbed, and physically and mentally handicapped. Since 1952 it has been mandatory for Rhode Island school systems to provide training for mentally retarded students.

In 1961-62 an estimated 1600 children were receiving such training in the schools of the state. A recent survey, however, indicates that there are some 4000

mentally retarded children in the state who should be enrolled in special classes. Many of the 2400 who are not in special classes are enrolled in regular classes throughout the state. Although progress has been made in this area, much in the way of acquiring training facilities and qualified teachers for these programs remains to be accomplished.

Adult Education

Adult education courses are offered in fourteen Rhode Island school systems. In 1961-62 the local communities spent \$133,662 for evening classes. This is an insignificant amount of the total expenditure for public education of \$54,751,743. In fact, the net cost of evening classes to the local communities is much less than their expenditure as a large portion of the costs are absorbed by registration fees and state and federal reimbursements.

Our evening schools are doing much to improve the cultural level of the state. However, probably their most significant contribution lies in the opportunity they provide for school drop-outs to acquire a high school diploma. Also, they are providing our citizens with new skills through apprentice and national re-training programs.

Brown University, Bryant College, Providence College and the University of Rhode Island also conduct extensive adult education programs.

Higher Education in Rhode Island

There are eleven colleges in Rhode Island which offer full time undergraduate degree or associate degree programs. These colleges are Brown University, Bryant College, Pembroke College, Providence College, Rhode Island College, Rhode Island School of Design and Roger Williams Junior College in Providence; Barrington College in Barrington; University of Rhode Island in Kingston; Salve Regina College in Newport; and Our Lady of Providence Seminary in Warwick.

Catholic Teachers' College in Providence offers in-service degrees to teachers who attend on a part-time basis. Graduate degree programs are offered by Brown University, Pembroke College, Providence College, Rhode Island College, Rhode Island School of Design. Our Lady of Providence Seminary and the University of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island has five accredited 3 year nursing schools. They are located at Rhode Island Hospital, Roger Williams General Hospital and St. Joseph's Hospital in Providence; Memorial Hospital in Pawtucket; and Newport Hospital in Newport.

The state has six post-secondary schools which offer business education or technician courses. These schools are Johnson and Wales Business School, Katherine Gibbs School, New England Technical Institute, Rhode Island Radio and Electronics School, and Sweeney School, all located in Providence, and Hubbard Business School in Pawtucket.

There are 14,629 students currently enrolled full-time in higher education courses in Rhode Island. Of this total, 13,306 are enrolled in degree courses, 728 in three-year nursing programs, and 595 in post-secondary schools.

The colleges of Rhode Island are making a major contribution toward the improvement of elementary and secondary education in the state. Brown University, Bryant College, Pembroke College, Providence College, Rhode Island College, Salve Regina College and the University of Rhode Island all have teacher-training programs and cooperative student-teaching or internship arrangements with the local school systems.

Rhode Island College, the principal teacher-training institution in the state, has an intensive training program for college graduates who desire to enter the teaching profession. Brown University and Rhode Island College offer Master of Arts in Teaching degrees. In-service extension courses for teachers are offered by Brown University, Providence College,

Rhode Island College, Rhode Island School of Design, Salve Regina College and the University of Rhode Island.

National Science Foundation workshops for the improvement of teachers of mathematics and science have been offered at Brown University and Rhode Island College. Guidance and Counseling Institutes under the sponsorship of the National Defense Education Act have been offered to school guidance counselors by the University of Rhode Island.

Saturday morning seminars in the areas of mathematics, science, and English have been offered to high school students of high scholastic standing by Brown University, Providence College and the University of Rhode Island.

Our colleges and schools are deeply concerned with those students of high scholastic aptitude who for one reason or another do not achieve in school. In an effort to find the solution to this problem, Brown University is currently working with a group of junior high school under-achievers. The University of Rhode Island is working with a group of high school junior under-achievers in connection with its guidance institute.

Rhode Island education has come a long way since the days of the first schoolhouse in Newport. Our high school curricula is far superior to what was offered at the college level in colonial times. The schools

Van Wickle Gates and University Hall at Brown



today are teaching much more than the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. They are good schools but are they good enough to meet the challenges of the times? Every citizen must ask himself this question, for our schools are only as good as the community wants them to be.

Rhode Island today is spending on the average about \$425 per pupil annually in average daily attendance. This is about the national average. Is this enough for a state which ranks 16th in per capita personal income?

It is certainly not enough to provide the quality education which educational authorities say our schools must have in our fight for survival in the last half of the 20th century. It is not enough to provide the vocational and technical institute facilities which are so badly needed.

The price tag for this kind of education today is \$700 to \$800 per pupil. Not one Rhode Island community currently approaches this figure. In fact, only four Rhode Island communities are spending as much as \$500 per pupil.

Although since 1955 the state has been giving increased assistance to our cities and towns, it is still only providing 30% of the total cost of education. The national average is 40%.

The machinery for increasing the state's share of the cost of education already exists through the 1960 open-end state foundation formula. Under this formula, the state reimburses the local community 25 to 50 cents for every dollar it spends on its schools. If the state and local government cannot meet the cost of quality education, it will be necessary to ask for federal assistance.

In 1790 Benjamin Franklin, speaking of the need for more knowledge on the part of the citizens to meet the challenges of that day, said, "Knowledge is long and time is short." In 1954 Walter Lippman said, "We are quite rich enough to defend ourselves, whatever the cost. We must now learn that we are quite rich enough to educate ourselves as we need to be educated.

"There is an enormous margin of luxury in this country against which we can draw for our vital needs. We take that for granted when we think of our national defense. From the tragedies and bitter experiences of being involved in wars for which we were inadequately prepared, we have acquired the will to defend ourselves . . .

"In education we have not yet acquired that kind of will. But we need to acquire it, and we have no time to lose."

Harkins Hall at Providence College

