

# The Awakening, 1776-1826

*The muffled sounds of freedom rang loud and clear on July 4, 1776, when the General Assembly in Philadelphia declared that the people of the United States of America were, and had a right to be, free and independent. The political decision represented the sentiment of a majority of the inhabitants of the Eastern seaboard, uniting them in a war which was resolved by the Treaty of Paris in 1783.*

*Education was not an issue of the Revolutionary War, but in at least one incident school children of Boston made it an issue and won the battle. The Boston Latin School recounts in its history that "in the Winter of 1774-75 the boys of the Latin School were accustomed to bring their sleds and, as soon as school was done, to coast down Beacon Street,*

*across Tremont, and down School Street. General Haldimand, commanding the British troops under General Gage, lived on School Street, and his servant cut up the coast and put ashes on it. The lads made a muster—probably of the first class—and chose a committee to wait upon the General, who admitted them, and heard their complaint, which was couched in very genteel terms, complaining that their fathers before 'em had improved it as a coast from time immemorial, etc. He ordered his servant to repair the damage, saying that he had trouble enough with Boston men, and wouldn't have any with Boston boys. He acquainted the Governor with the affair, who observed that it was impossible to beat the notion of Liberty out of the people, as it was rooted in 'em from their childhood."*

*The war exacted its educational tool in many ways. The history of the Latin*

*School provides another example. John Lovell, a strong loyalist, was Head Master, and his son James, an ardent patriot, was usher. "They taught from desks at opposite ends of the schoolroom; and, voicing opposite political convictions, they typified many a Boston family in those trying times. On the morning of April 19, 1775 . . . John Lovell angrily announced, 'War's begun and school's done; deponite libros.' When the British evacuated Boston, in March 1776, both the Lovells sailed with Lord Howe to Halifax, N.S.: the father as Howe's guest, the son as his prisoner. Shortly afterwards James was exchanged and later became a delegate to the Continental Congress."*

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## The Educational Setting

The Revolutionary War did interrupt education throughout the Colonies, in a number of instances causing the schools to close completely. But following the war the need for education emerged as a necessity in the new society. Education during the Colonial period was not well organized, neither continuous nor uniform among the Colonies, and was frequently in the hands of unskilled teachers. The sketchy facilities for education served a small top layer of society.

Illiterate parents produced illiterate children who learned to do the things required to provide sustenance for the family, such as shoeing horses, repairing wagons, and tanning leather. But literacy had been a goal from the beginning of the Colonial period—first, for the purpose of improving the soul, and later when secular ideas about social equality led to the doctrine that literacy was a basic right of all people. It is interesting to note that initially the prime purpose of literacy was not so much to benefit the people concerned, but to benefit the State. These ideas of social equality and literacy were incorporated into the building of the American public school system.

The first 50 years of our national period represented a transition in education from control by the church to control and support by the State. This was a difficult and sometimes bitter period of change. But a number of forces—philanthropic, political, economic, and social—produced conditions which made it both desirable and feasible that the State control and support education. The new constitution did not make any provision for education, which meant that this was a function of state government. In time the relationship was established so that education was considered to be a *concern* of the federal government, a *function* of the State, and a *responsibility* of the local community.

The educational historian, Ellwood P. Cubberley, held that the most important of these forces causing change toward educational consciousness in the United States were (1) the Sunday School Movement, (2) City School Societies, (3) the Lancastrian Movement, and (4) the Infant-School Societies.

The Sunday School Movement, a philanthropic venture, was borrowed from England and introduced in 1791 in Philadelphia. Instruction was aimed at poor children, but it did not have the sting of the pauper school. It

brought children of all classes together in perfect equality. The concept of the secular Sunday School spread rapidly.

Prior to 1825 a number of subscription societies, organized by philanthropic citizens, contributed the funds which made some education possible for many children who had no opportunity for such instruction. One of these city societies, The Manumission Society, organized in New York in 1785, had as its purpose "mitigating the evils of slavery, to defend the right of blacks, and especially to give them an education." Alexander Hamilton and John Jay were among the organizers. The most famous of all school societies was the New York Free School Society founded by De Witt Clinton in 1805. Other public school societies flourished throughout the new nation and their efforts were directed toward providing free public education.

The Lancastrian Movement, named for its organizer, Joseph Lancaster, was a system of instruction in which large numbers of students could be taught to read. The system used clever boys, called monitors, who were instructed by the master. Then in turn each monitor would teach 10 boys what he had learned from the master. The plan was cheap and effective in teaching reading to large numbers of students. The idea found fertile ground for development in the United States. Although the Lancastrian system was born in poverty (which was its best excuse for existence), the system did appear to stir enthusiasm for education and was unquestionably one of the steps toward development of a public school system.

The Infant School was organized in Scotland by Robert Owen in 1799. Children three to four years of age entered the school, were taught whatever might be supposed to be useful (moral, physical, and intellectual training) and that they could understand. Instruction was combined with singing and dancing "to render them active, cheerful, and happy." The idea of the Infant School reached Boston in 1816 and was used as a preparation plan for children to enter the grammar school. Again, the idea of Infant Schools spread rapidly in the East and contributed toward the sentiment for public education.

"These four important educational movements—the secular Sunday School, the semi-public city School Societies, the Lancastrian plan of instruction, and the Infant-School idea—all arising in philanthropy, came as

successive educational ideas to America during the first half of the nineteenth century, supplemented one another, and together accustomed a new generation to the idea of a common school for all." (Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States*, Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1934.)

### Apprenticeship in the New World

Apprenticeship is an old form of education, used generously by the ancient nations, the Greeks and Romans, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. It is not surprising that the Colonists would import the concept of apprenticeship and adjust that concept to suit their needs in the new world. Apprenticeship in Colonial America was one of the fundamental educational institutions of the time. It represented a pathway to literacy for the boy or girl who could not pay for an education.

Both voluntary and involuntary apprenticeship systems were practiced which provided, in some respects, a neat way to solve the social problem of the orphan or the children of poor parents. The City or Town controlled the apprenticeship system, and the indenture of apprenticeship set forth the conditions to be imposed upon both the apprentice and the master. Apprenticeships provided five basic elements: food, clothing, and shelter; religious instruction; reading and writing; skill training, and the "mysteries" of the trade.

Apprenticeships involved the jobs common to the needs of society and avoided generally "useless occupations, such as minding cattle."

Some historians have seen other motives in the early apprenticeship legislation such as one class legislating for another class, "partly for the benefit and control of the poor, and also partly for the benefit and relief of the rich." There were hints in the acceptance of apprenticeship that the system had motives other than intended benefit to the apprentice and his social class. Yet the system appeared to flourish for nearly a century and a half.

Apprenticeship declined in importance in the Colonial period and even more rapidly afterward. The abundance of land, the mobility and freedom of the people, the willingness of the frontiersmen to do with makeshift implements and furnishings, and the immigration of mechanics and craftsmen who had been trained in Europe,

all worked against the apprenticeship system. The heaviest blow was delivered by the factory in the nineteenth century, but the system had been declining in Colonial days.

Rapid development of labor-saving machinery contributed much to the decline of apprenticeship, at first in the textile industry and later in industries using the steam engine and other power sources characteristic of the developing factory system. Although apprentices were largely superseded by machine operators, there was always a demand for workers who knew the whole of their craft. Nevertheless, changes in industry inevitably brought changes in schooling.

### Extending Educational Opportunities

An education-conscious labor force developed rapidly in the early years of our nation. A labor movement which strongly favored public education promoted the concept of equal educational opportunity at public expense.

Private charity schools and societies of mechanics came into existence during the early part of the nineteenth century in an attempt to supply the educational advantages of apprenticeship for factory workers. Many of these institutions were founded for charitable purposes, but in time also provided regular schools and classes.

The Boston Asylum and Farm School, founded in 1814, was devoted to the education of orphaned boys. Each boy selected practical work and study in one of several trades, in addition to a basic academic course. The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, founded on November 17, 1785, had by 1821 embarked upon a full-scale educational program. When public education became generally available, this society relaxed its direct participation in educational work. That it did not lose interest is indicated by the fact that it has continuously maintained scholarships for craftsmen at New York University and the New York Trade School.

The lyceums and mechanics institutes, which developed during the early years of the nineteenth century, provided additional education for mechanics. The Gardiner Lyceum, founded in 1823, and the American Lyceum of Science and the Arts, proposed by Josiah Holbrook in 1826, were typical. The educational goals of the lyceum were broad enough to include the cultural needs of the artist, the farmer, and the mechanic.

Another phase of the manual labor movement developed with the formation of manual labor academies. In addition to studies in the academy, each student worked in a shop or factory owned by a local businessman who paid the institution for the student's services. The expense of education was reduced materially. Distinctions between rich and poor tended to break down. It was contended that the combination of studies and labor contributed to the development of better citizens.

There are, of course, many other examples of organized groups, such as agricultural societies, that attempted to educate themselves for the purpose of improving the productive capacity of the nation. Instruction in business and commercial pursuits, which had its start in apprenticeship, developed in many of the early schools and academies. It is quite evident that the nation was seeking new avenues to provide the skills and knowledge required of a society that was destined to show extreme growth in its practical affairs.

### Education of Women

Although some kind of education for girls was available throughout the Colonial period, it was meager and few women were ever able to take advantage of it. The ladies in 1776 were unversed in academic subjects, "unequal to any interesting or refined conversation—spent their time in sewing and taking care of their families; they seldom read."

Colonial society lagged behind Europe in giving countenance to feminine intelligence. Following the Revolutionary War a few inspired people attacked the prevailing complacency in regard to women's education. Their attack resulted in the development of female seminaries, which "sprang up like mushroom growths" along the Atlantic seaboard and far into frontier areas.

It was a far cry from the educational needs of women in the towns and cities to the educational needs of a great majority of women on farms, in the wilderness, and on the frontier. A woman in the latter group did not have much need for education. "Not twice a year did she see a piece of printed paper, and then since she couldn't begin to read it, she probably greased it and used it for a windowpane."

The academies in the more populous areas soon reversed the situation regarding women's education and be-

came increasingly coeducational. In addition, in New York state alone 32 academies were incorporated between 1819 and 1853 with the prefix "Female" to their title. One of the best known documents on the construction of women's education is Emma Willard's *A Plan for Improving Female Education*, published in 1819. Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary opened its doors in September 1821 to 90 young women from seven states.

Seminaries for girls slowly incorporated the study of intellectual subjects which were not preparatory to domestic duties. The demand for teachers for the rapidly increasing schools swept away the eighteenth-century objection to women as teachers. The first girls' high school was opened in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1824, and two others opened in 1826, one in Boston and one in New York. The entry of women into the teaching profession was followed by their admission to other professions and their active support of reform movements. Although the feminist movement was derided by many, it was definitely on the move.

#### Educational Consciousness

"In the 18th century the rising merchant and trading classes began to press for an education more appropriate to their interests, an education more useful and utilitarian than that of the Christian Scholar and Gentleman. Trade, commerce, and business required skills in modern languages, navigation, surveying, accounting. The emerging city life and greater affluence and leisure created demands for the arts of polite society.

"The private venture schools taught the 'accomplishments' which the new leisure and affluence seemed to require: for boys, fencing, dancing, horsemanship; for girls, French, needlework, dancing, drawing, and vocal and instrumental music. The private venture schools taught as well the business and commercial subjects like surveying, navigation, bookkeeping, Italian, Portugese, and Spanish. Unhindered by tradition, free to experiment, offering whatever was needed to whom ever would pay for it in day schools, evening schools, early morning schools, even in correspondence schools, offering group or tutorial instruction, to girls as well as boys, they offered the most popular instruction of the secondary grade of the 18th century, and after incorporation into the Academy, the most popular into



the 19th century.

"The emergence of the private schools that marked the definite transfer, for example, of vocational education from the family and apprenticeship, where a trade, a skill, a craft, could retain its 'mystery' into a world of publicly available schools, marks the beginning of the end in America of certain restrictive practices by which control of education and apprenticeship, and hence recruitment into the trades of an orderly society, had been maintained. It was an early indication that America was going to be an open, fluid, mobile society, in which the lines of social stratification would be soft and penetrable; the schools would provide opportunity for careers." (Cohen)

Benjamin Franklin's wide range of interests included education. His plan was embodied in *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, published in 1749. Franklin proposed the establishment of an academy which was a far cry from the usual educational fare offered the

*Even when held in the same classroom, home economics and industrial arts students were sexually segregated for many years. The times have changed, though, and voc ed has changed along with them. Today such a combined class might see boys at the sewing table and girls doing the planing. (Library of Congress Photo)*

public in general, but did not neglect entirely the values of the contemporary form of education.

"But Franklin spoke for the awakening middle class. The new school's character was to be utilitarian and secular in tone and content; the technical and vocational education long taught by private masters or under contract through apprenticeship was to be formalized and institutionalized. Franklin had no quarrel with the classical subjects as such, only their monopoly on education. Franklin's academy was opened in 1751. By 1775 it had fallen into the hands of a conservative elite, whose cultural ties were closer to London than to Philadelphia. Franklin then severed his relations with it,

asserting that it 'was no longer concerned with education for such a country as ours.'" (Cohen)

Franklin had intended that students be taught everything useful and everything ornamental related to the professions for which they were training. Although Franklin's attempt to introduce a new form of education failed at the time, it nevertheless left its mark on the newly developing system of American education.

"By the end of the colonial period, education was no longer dedicated exclusively to the classics and religion. This did not however herald a decline of interest in education. What occurred in the 18th century was not so much a decline of interest in education as a reordering or shift in educational priorities. New courses in surveying, navigation, and French seemed to many colonists of more relevance than the study of Latin and Greek. Further, the layman with his interests in the more practical pursuits of life was beginning to charge the schools with a great variety of responsibilities. Education had become an instrument to achieve a wide range of social and economic as well as religious goals." (Cohen)

The awakening or dawning of educational consciousness for the whole of society did not really occur in America until early in the nineteenth century. Obviously it is difficult to pinpoint a date, because educational roots reach deep into the past, but around 1820 arguments, pro and con, about free, public, tax-supported schools were much in evidence. Those persons supporting such schools were the philanthropists, humanitarians, persons of vision, non-taxpayers, "citizens of the republic," city residents, and others. Those opposed to the idea were taxpayers, the old aristocratic class, conservatives, residents of rural districts, some church people, politicians of small vision, and others.

Poor Tom, Dick, and Harry were caught in the middle. On the one hand there were strong arguments about the need for their education. On the other hand the opponents of the idea had reasons why they should not be educated at public expense. The evidence suggests that Tom, Dick, and Harry, who were not consulted in the matter, were not very excited about the idea either way. Mostly, it depended upon where they lived.

Educational historian Cubberley recounts a number of the reasons for and against tax-supported schools. Some of

these reasons are listed below—note that some of the reasons do not show their age.

Arguments for public tax-supported schools:

- Education tends to prevent pauperism and crime.

- Education tends to reduce poverty and distress.

- Education increases production and eliminates wrong ideas as to the distribution of wealth.

- A common state school, equally open to all, would prevent that class differentiation so dangerous in a Republic.

- The old church and private school education had proved utterly inadequate to meet the needs of a changed society.

- Education as to one's civic duties is a necessity for the intelligent exercise of suffrage and for the preservation of republican institutions.

- The free and general education of all children at public expense is the natural right of all children in a Republic.

Arguments against public tax-supported schools:

- Impractical, visionary, and "too advanced."

- Would make education too common and would educate people out of their proper station in society.

- Would not benefit the masses, who are already as well cared for as they deserve.

- Would tend to break down long-established and very desirable social barriers.

- Those having no children to be educated should not be taxed for schools.

- Taxes would be so increased that no State could long meet such a lavish drain on its resources.

- Education is something for a leisure class, and the poor have no leisure.

Nevertheless, the developing educational consciousness in the nation proceeded with increased support. Slowly but surely schools flourished where none had existed before. Sensitivity to the educational needs of a larger population developed. In many ways the foundations for vocational preparation were being strengthened, but actual vocational preparation for the masses was still a century away. At least one of the values of the old apprenticeship received new attention by the educational movement — that of reading and writing.

In part, the interest in education

was sparked by the work in Europe of a number of educational reformers whose educational activities were gaining attention in this new nation. A few of our native philanthropists made it possible for the European educational experiments to gain ground in America, and these moves strengthened further the foundations upon which public vocational education was to be based.

### European Educational Reformers

Traditional ideas of educational theory and practice were supplemented generously by the views of educational reformers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. As literate use of the vernacular spread, the common man became more important in the eyes of leaders, and his education became a matter of at least casual notice. Now and again, a faint tribute to some phase of vocational education would drop from the pen of some writer or wedge into the common educational experience of some school.

Drawing was taught at Mulcaster's Merchant Taylor's school after 1561; John Locke, the seventeenth-century English philosopher, thought that trade education might be useful; and Jean Jacques Rousseau, French philosopher and social reformer, desired that Emile learn the carpentry trade, spending one or two days each week with a master carpenter. Be it noted that, although Rousseau felt that man needed to work in order to live, he would be sure that Emile would raise himself to the "state" of being a carpenter, not merely to the occupation of a carpenter.

Educational theory was one thing, making the theory work another. Rousseau's *Emile*, published in 1762, was read two years later by the eighteen-year-old Pestalozzi, who was so touched by the direct simplicity of the work that he was inspired to organize a school that would embody some of Rousseau's ideas.

The Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi developed a system of educational theory and practice from which vocational education borrowed heavily during its formative years. One of Pestalozzi's fundamental principles was that *impression* resulted in *expression*, and this principle became the basis of learning in his school, in which a child was allowed to "learn by doing."

"I came to the conviction," says Pestalozzi, "that the fundamental

error—the blind use of words in matters of instruction—must be extirpated before it is possible to resuscitate life and truth.”

One of Pestalozzi's instructors, Francis Joseph Nicholas Neef, opened his own school in Paris in 1803. His school attracted the attention of Napoleon and Talleyrand and, more importantly from our point of view, the attention of a delegation from the United States which included the philanthropist William Maclure. After considering the schools he had seen in Europe, Maclure sent for Neef and offered him aid in opening a school in America. In 1809 Neef opened his school in Philadelphia, which he continued for three years before moving to Village Green in Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

One of Neef's young students, David Farragut, was destined to become famous a half century later for his statement, “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”

Farragut said of his experience, “I do not regret the time passed at this school, for it has been of service to me all my life.”

Neef's school failed as did another school in New Harmony, Indiana. Of the many reasons cited for these failures, the one that seems most credible is that it merely transplanted the Pestalozzian system without Americanizing it.

An associate of Pestalozzi's, Philip Emanuel von Fellenberg, conducted a variety of educational activities at Hofwyl, Switzerland. Agricultural and industrial instruction were combined with some elements of literary instruction in an educational experiment with strong social implications. Manual activities were stressed for all students, but the emphasis was placed upon literary activities for the well-to-do students and upon practical aspects for the poor children. All teaching was inspired by Pestalozzian principles.

Fellenberg's Academy at Hofwyl was a reflection of the best of Pestalozzian theory and practice. The children were properly clothed and fed. Their manual labor activities in agriculture were related to their school studies, providing a source of real interest in school work for them. Trade instruction was given by skilled craftsmen representing a dozen or more trade areas, who were employed by the school as a part of their regular work.

Fellenberg's Hofwyl school attracted much attention in Europe and America. William C. Woodbridge, editor of

the *American Annals of Education*, featured in many issues “Sketches of Hofwyl,” which brought to American educators a wealth of information concerning this noble experiment in education. These ideas influenced developments in vocational education in the United States.

Many other nineteenth-century educational reformers contributed to the growth of the concepts of vocational education. Among them were Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus Froebel, Uno Cygnaeus, Otto Salomon, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and Tuiskan Ziller. Their contributions and views of activity, handwork, and industry all added emphasis to the necessity of vocational education.

Vocational education provided a natural avenue for educational reform. It was practical, close to the common daily experience of man, and therefore easily understood.

Learning about educational ideas in Europe, or in America for that matter, was a special problem because there were no educational journals published in the United States prior to 1818. The first professional publication in education, *The Academician*, was published in New York from 1818 to 1820. Beginning in 1826 and continuing to 1830, *The American Journal of Education* was published by William Russell. Then, from 1831 to 1839, the *American Annals of Education* carried information to teachers about practices in Europe and America.

### The First Fifty Years

Vocational education as we know it at the Bicentennial period was only faintly visible at the beginning of our national period. Education of a kind was available to certain groups of people but the masses seldom saw the inside of a schoolroom. Vocational education, such as it was, continued under the time-honored methodology of the father-son relationship, or apprenticeship. From a public point of view little or no notice was given to the vocational needs of youth or adults. Educational attention was focused on expanding the common school to all youth and making such instruction free. This was a bitter battle which the states undertook individually.

Some private ventures and societies of craftsmen were prompted by concern for expansion of the values of the declining apprenticeship system. The factory system exerted little or no ef-

fort in the matter of vocational education. Apprenticeship did not die out, but the system did not adjust to the new demands for workers and hence served less effectively as the basic training ground in vocational education. However, labor as an organized group did much to promote schools with expanded curricula of a practical nature.

Concurrent with the development of educational consciousness, attention was focused upon the educational needs of women. Private ventures were the first to develop facilities for the education of women and the plan grew rapidly. Educational proposals, such as Franklin's, sought to extend the educational opportunities for boys and girls into a wide variety of practical subjects. The battle to extend the educational system centered largely on the use of tax money for education—free public education was a hard concept to sell.

The work of European educational reformers came to the attention of the struggling educational system in America and within a number of years began to have an impact on the American system. The European educators are important to vocational education because we borrowed so much from them in designing our own system of vocational education. Remember the “steps of instruction?” These came from Herbart, a German educator, in the early years of the nineteenth century.

But what happened about vocational education during the first 50 years of our national period? Well, not too much actually. The groundwork was being laid, and this did represent progress, but the specific educational problems of the farmer, the mechanic, the businessman, and the housewife were solved, as they had been from time immemorial, by themselves. It would be a day in the distant future when these educational needs became a national goal at public expense.