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State Government and Education: "For the Due Encouragement of Learning and the Better Regulating and Ordering of Schools"

. . . at the time Vermont entered the Union in 1791 the educational system effectively consisted of two discrete components, one espousing a comprehensive state vision, the other local, or more accurately, district control.

By P. Jeffrey Potash

Buried deep within the 1777 Vermont Constitution's plan of government, section 40 dealt with education, specifying that "A school or schools shall be established in each town, by the legislature for the convenient instruction of youth . . . One grammar school in each county, and one university in the State ought to be established by the General Assembly." This section was borrowed, as indeed was much of the document, from the short-lived Pennsylvania constitution of 1776, delivered to the delegates assembled at Windsor by Ethan Allen's good friend, Dr. Thomas Young, and proposed by him as a suitable model for replication. However, Vermont delegates did make modifications, most notably shifting the responsibility for paying teachers' salaries from the "public" at large to "each town."[1] This subtle change, which acknowledged the New England tradition of local school management, delegated tremendous power to Vermont towns to shape education and established the basis for two centuries of rancorous debate and disagreement between state and local school officials regarding the relative power of each to determine educational policy.

That debate persists. It has grown increasingly heated in recent years over such issues as funding, inclusivity, common standards, and com-

mon curricula. A review of the debate will help us to ascertain the extent to which recent trends continue or mark a dramatic break from Vermont traditions. It is tempting, in an era of rapid technological change and global transformation, to assert that the past is of little or no value for guiding the future. Yet the Vermont constitution, including its educational provisions, remains, with remarkably few modifications, the "fundamental law" of the land. That means we are dealing with a live tradition whose roots are over two hundred years old. Therefore, Vermonters must consider the possibility that there is value in revisiting Vermont's educational past.

Vermonters' decision to include education in their constitutional blueprint underscores their belief in education as integral to the enlightenment experiment. The decision is all the more significant when one recognizes that the federal constitution to which Vermont pledged allegiance in 1791 made no mention of education whatsoever. This belief in education, however, was not peculiar to Vermonters. The concept of a system of graduated public education was indeed articulated most impressively in Thomas Jefferson's "Bill for the Diffusion of Knowledge." Unlike Vermont, however, Virginia ultimately rejected such a blueprint.

Jefferson's premise was simple: the future of a fledgling republic rested in the capacity of its educated citizenry to contribute to its welfare to the best of their abilities. Jefferson believed that humans were innately unequal in their talents, intellect, and virtue. Education thus became a vehicle through which a "natural aristocracy" of educated citizens could be cultivated.[2] The hierarchical scheme of schools that Jefferson advocated, and Vermont's founders actually incorporated into their constitution, guaranteed all citizens three years of reading, writing, and arithmetic, regardless of ability to pay. Overseers were then to select the most talented pupils and send them to grammar school. Following another review, a tiny percentage of scholars were permitted entry at the university. Through the elimination of pay as the principal determinant for education, Vermont's citizens were empowered to achieve their Jeffersonian "calling" and, therein, ultimately promote the common good.

Visionary, in a word, describes the mandate contained within Vermont's 1777 constitution. Here was an independent state, populated by fewer than 30,000 souls scattered throughout its often isolated reaches. These were persons for the most part wholly preoccupied with carving out small self-sufficient farms from the largely aboriginal forests. Considering the constitution's bold objectives, one must ask: just how practical was the scheme it prescribed?

The constitutional pronouncement was accompanied by absolutely no financial commitment on the state's part. That, combined with the grim

fiscal realities of the severe post-war depression of the 1780s, quickly undermined the bold spirit of educational initiative. Shut off from lucrative British markets and subsequently unable to repay debts accrued while settling their farms, Vermonters concentrated on averting financial collapse. Some radicals, determined to prevent creditors from obtaining warrants to dispossess them of their properties, agitated through the familiar (albeit illegal) vehicle of the anti-court riot, hoping to suspend court operation. Moderates fueled the debate between rival politicians Nathaniel Chipman and Governor Thomas Chittenden over the creation of state banks and the institution of general tender. These acts, they hoped, would ease paper money shortages while permitting farmers to repay debts with unsalable farm produce such as wheat and corn.

Fiscal realities undoubtedly contributed to educational retrenchment during the 1780s. The revised Vermont constitution of 1786 deleted all mention of a state university, substituting the promise that "laws for the encouragement of virtue and prevention of vice and immorality ought to be constantly kept in force and duly executed," seemingly an oblique reference to the unstable political climate. Town responsibilities were similarly watered down, substituting for the declaration that "schools shall be established" the more voluntary sounding " a competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town for the convenient instruction of youth."[3]

Notwithstanding this retrenchment, the revolutionary vision remained intact in the public imagination throughout the final decades of the eighteenth century. One such reaffirmation of these fading ideals appears in Samuel Williams' *Civil and Natural History of Vermont.* Published in 1794, this first ever history of Vermont was written to inform a curious European audience about what was happening in America and, given his obvious biases, to lavish praise upon Americans generally and Vermonters in particular for having converted European enlightened philosophic thinking into a workable social system. This historical background served for Williams as a prelude for understanding contemporary Vermont. The struggle for independence, only recently completed, arose through the determined efforts of all Vermonters to overthrow the arbitrary bonds of authority in their quest to achieve their natural rights. In describing the egalitarian mood of contemporary Vermont society, Williams found commitment to education an essential ingredient:

> Among the customs which are universal among the people in all parts of the state, one that seems worthy of remark is the attention that is paid to the education of children. The aim of the parent is not so much to have his children acquainted with the liberal arts and sciences; but to have them all taught to read with ease and propriety; to write a plain

> and legible hand; and to have them acquainted with the rules of arithmetic, so far as shall be necessary to carry on any of the most common and necessary occupations of life . . . Such kind of education and knowledge, is of more advantage to mankind, than all the speculations, disputes, and distinctions, that metaphysics, logic, and scholastic theology, have ever produced. In the plain common good sense, promoted by the one, virtue, utility, freedom, and public happiness, have their foundations. In the useless speculations produced by the other, common sense is lost, folly becomes refined, and the useful branches of knowledge are darkened and forgot.[4]

If the Revolutionary inheritance forms one of the key foundations behind two centuries of Vermont educational policy, a second equally important, though frequently incompatible, reality is shaped by the colonial New England inheritance, local autonomy.

The centrality of the town in New England life was an outgrowth of two impulses. The first was Congregationalism, which permitted communicants in each town the freedom to select their membership and frame much of the language governing church policies and doctrine. The second was political democracy, which meant that the majority of public concerns, ranging from the construction of roads, bridges and meeting houses to resolution of land disputes, was decided in the democratic confines of the town meeting.

Local autonomy for educational policy was similarly entrenched in the New England way of life. Recall the 1777 constitutional framers' provision for support of teachers that is local and generated by the town as opposed to the state or "public" at large. Townspeople traditionally maintained complete control over collecting taxes, building schools, and hiring teachers. Local autonomy was further magnified by the further breakdown of towns into numerous small school districts. On average, Vermont towns boasted anywhere between five and twenty-five discrete school districts, each functioning, as one historian has describe it, as "a little scholastic republic."[5] Replete with an independent board of officers, each district was typically responsive to the petty political animosities that invariably arise in response to questions surrounding such explosive issues as taxation, location, construction cost, and maintenance of school buildings. That such discussions often generated hard feelings is best demonstrated by a Pomfret gentleman who, protesting the poor services provided for his children, found himself cast out of the district in town meeting and separated into a school district in which his family were the only members. In the absence of any person to whom he might appeal, the hapless soul was forced to suffer the indignity until the following year when his public apology resulted in reinstatement and relief.[6]

The degree to which district policies prevailed over the constitutional vision of a graduated statewide network of public schools was evident

to New Hampshire historian Jeremy Belknap during his extensive travels throughout Vermont at the turn of the eighteenth century. Belknap described a checkerboard of educational variations. While acknowledging the presence of fine quality schools in some towns, he reported that others, often adjoining towns, remained altogether "destitute." There is in Vermont, he observed, "still in many places a great and criminal neglect of education."[7]

It is quite easy to say then, that at the time Vermont entered the Union in 1791 the educational system effectively consisted of two discrete components, one espousing a comprehensive state vision, the other, local or, more accurately, district control. In the absence of any state aid to supplement local taxes, the power of the latter over the former was best described by John Huden, who observed that "every district was its own certification bureau, every teacher his own curriculum director, every family its own textbook committee."[8]

The first major statewide challenge to local control originated during the 1820s. An understanding of historical context is essential for grasping the motives governing this movement. Vermont in the 1820s was substantially altered from what it had been a half century earlier. With Vermont's entry into the Union, an unparalleled flood of immigrants poured into the state; by 1820, total population numbered a quarter million. While many came as speculators, free thinkers, and marginalized political or religious radicals, larger numbers were guided by a desire to replicate the traditional comforts of the New England way. They built white clapboard churches and constructed roads and canals to overcome the obstacles that inhibited trade. Accompanying this flurry of settlement and construction was an explosion of religious revival and social reform. A maturing Vermont was seeking to create, according to Randolph Roth, a "new order," which balanced the revolutionary commitment to equality and popular government with a return to the traditional New England emphasis on religious piety and social order.[9]

Accompanying the dramatic growth of rural villages, Vermonters found themselves caught up in national and international events: the Embargo of 1807 and subsequent War of 1812; the industrialization of textile manufacture, which produced sizable mills and gave rise to a sheep craze lasting three decades; and, finally, during the 1820s, the emergence of Jacksonian democracy. All underscored Vermonters' growing attachment to the American spirit of progress and democratic reform.

The profoundly egalitarian mood of the 1820s generated reformist demands to abolish traditional havens of favoritism, including the Bank of the United States, property requirements for suffrage, and imprisonment for debt. This energy for social reform contributed to public clamoring for educational reform. In 1824, Gov. Cornelius Van Ness called

for a legislative mandate to impose state controls to guarantee equality of educational opportunity. The philosophic rationale he presented hearkens back to the theme of the well-being of the republic so beautifully articulated by Thomas Jefferson:

> The universal diffusion of early education is so indispensable to the promotion of social order, of morality, and religion, and to the maintenance and permanency of republican institutions, that its cause demands our most decided and vigorous support.[10]

Van Ness further alluded—for the first time ever—to the use of federal aid to support the schools, noting that "we cannot but be struck with astonishment, that the General government, with such ample means as it possesses, should so long have delayed to lend its direct and efficient aid to the general purposes of education."[11] While this recommendation would, in the waning years of the nineteenth century, launch native son Senator Justin Morrill's efforts to fund land grant colleges, it would take more than a century before federal support for elementary and secondary schools became a reality.

Besides Van Ness, the most vocal proponents of educational reform were members of self-avowed "working-men's societies," voluntary organizations scattered throughout Vermont's industrial and urban centers. Championing the cause for "free, equal, and Republican education," these societies used the editorial pages of their newspapers to lash out against "despotism . . . Which consigns the multitude to comparative ignorance, and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich."[12] The dichotomy they presented, distinguishing rich and poor, reflected an emerging awareness that a commercialized Vermont proffered opportunities for some but not all.

Reforms in the 1820s aimed primarily at developing a system of statewide supervision to introduce greater uniformity into Vermont's crazy quilt of schools. In 1827, Vermont became only the third state in America and the first in New England to establish a state board of commissioners of common schools. Immediately the board embarked on its charge by debating the issue of texts. Tradition permitted parents to select their children's readings, with the predictable result that teachers were placed in the difficult position of trying to instruct from several dozen books at once. Accordingly, the state board of commissioners compiled and distributed a narrowed list of standardized texts from which parents could select.

Doubtless the commissioners were ill-prepared for the public's clamorous response. Widespread condemnation led legislators to revoke this bill. Not content to stop there, five years later the legislature succeeded in disbanding the board of commissioners. Reflecting on the fate of the book bill, commissioners reported that

> so generally diffused through the great mass of the community is the sense of personal as well as political independence, and so sleepless is the jealousy of arbitrary power, which is almost instinctive in the popular mind, that the attempt, however well-intentioned, to dictate the books to be used in our common schools is regarded by many as invasion of the right of private judgment and consequently incompatible with the genius of our free institutions.[13]

Additional reform efforts aimed at partial state funding of schools met with an equally ignominious fate. Fearful of assessing a direct state tax on Vermont residents to fund education, the legislators chose instead to levy a 6 percent tax on excess bank profits along with tavern and peddler license fees. As historian David Ludlum observes, "this provided no solution, for the sum grew so slowly that an impatient Legislature a few years later confiscated it for ordinary expenses."[14]

Efforts to impose statewide regulation during the 1820s were soundly defeated by those staunch proponents of local or, more accurately, district autonomy. Reformers, however, refused to buckle under and, some twenty years later, mounted yet a second campaign for statewide educational reform.

Other efforts to improve education during this period met with success. Two prominent illustrations deserve recognition: Emma Hart Willard's innovative school for girls, operating in Middlebury between 1814 and 1818 before moving to its more famous Troy, New York quarters, developed a rigorous and wide ranging curriculum consciously modeled after Middlebury College. In Concord, Vermont—in what some Vermonters maintain was the first teacher training (or "normal") school established in America—the Rev. Samuel Read Hall used his own text, *Lectures on School-keeping,* to inspire interest in such traditionally neglected areas as American history and geography.[15]

The next great state initiative began in the mid-1840s and culminated with the successful creation of a uniform common school system in 1850. It reflected earlier effort in its results but differed markedly from them in its ideological and social origins. Vermont itself had changed. The burgeoning economy of the 1820s had foundered in the great depression of 1837. Many Vermonters had lost faith in unstoppable progress. Salvation for some took the form of sheep. By 1840, a "sheep craze" had placed 1.7 million sheep in the state—leaving one wag to comment facetiously "that everything save for the kitchen sink had been given to sheep."[16] The process of farm consolidation to obtain economies of scale meant that Vermont's rural communities suffered dramatic declines as small farmers, their sons and families trekked westward in search of new opportunities.

Emma Hart Willard ran an innovative school for girls in Middlebury, 1814–1818, and published A Plan for Improving Female Education *(1819).*

There were other causes for dramatic changes in Vermont's rural landscape. Commerce, industry, and especially the arrival of the railroad spawned unparalleled urban growth. Burlington, Vermont's largest town in 1840, boasted 4,000 residents; that figure almost doubled to 7,700 in 1850, and doubled again, to 16,000, in 1870.

Progress, however, exacted a heavy price, including the rapid deforestation of Vermont's forests. The shattering of Vermont's cherished homogeneity followed the arrival of the Irish and French-Canadians. Most devastating was an explosion of emigration facilitated by ease of railroad travel. By 1850, fully 42 percent of native born Vermonters resided out-

side the state, the bulk drawn from Vermont's youth who had abandoned exhausted soils and marginal hill farms to venture to the beckoning west.[17] Confronted by the waning of Vermont's golden age, Vermonters were catapulted into an identity crisis.[18]

The spirit of these trying times was reflected in the broader culture. James Fennimore Cooper's Natty Bumpo decried the senseless substitution of commerce and greed for God's nature. The Hudson Valley school painters romanticized a God's wilderness unsullied by humans. Thoreau retreated into the sanctity and silence of Walden Pond. Vermonters, too, tried to hang on to a lost innocence, as dramatically evidenced in the mythicization of Ethan Allen by historian Zadock Thompson and author Daniel Thompson. They employed exorcism to erase Allen's missteps from the public record and artistic invention to create a swashbuckling frontier hero in the mode of Daniel Boone.[19]

The above background helps us understand the impulses directing those who convened in Middlebury in May, 1845, to discuss educational reform. Much like the reformers of the 1820s, these men championed education as a vehicle for stabilizing a society in flux. Statewide solutions were essential to create standards for teachers, develop a program of systematic visitation and supervision, and impose uniformity in the use of text books.

What distinguished these reformers of the mid-1800s from their earlier counterparts was their place in society. In contrast to their workingmen predecessors, these reformers, like Horace Eaton, William Slade, and Thomas Palmer (two of whom served as governor of Vermont) were men of considerable economic substance, political Whigs who championed the spirit of the native "self-made man" while harboring fears of Irish immigration and the growing disparities between themselves and the enlarging numbers of poor.

The explanation of why so many of Vermont's shining lights chose now to rally around the flag of educational reform can readily be deduced from Horace Eaton's first Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Schools in 1846.

> Experience proves that as society advances in age, there is ever growing up a tendency to widen disparities of rank and condition. And what means can be devised that shall be so effectual in guarding against them as the general diffusion of knowledge? Here is an equalizing power—a leveling engine, which we may rightfully and lawfully employ. Its operation will not undermine, but consolidate and strengthen society. Let every child in the land enjoy the advantages of a competent education at his outset in life—and it will do more to secure a general equality of condition, than any guarantee of equal 'rights and privileges' which constitution or laws can give.[20]

Here is a conscious renunciation of the spirit that had originally animated the campaign for a uniform system of schools. These conservatives were reacting to a pervasive fear that, in the absence of an educational safety valve, increasing numbers of poorer Vermonters might choose—as they had in selecting Ethan Allen—to pursue extralegal methods with which to redress grievances. Moreover, this shift in tone was not an isolated phenomenon; we find it contemporaneously in Vermont's temperance movement. During the 1820s and 1830s, advocates employed moral suasion to induce individuals to take a pledge renouncing the consumption of liquor. Frustrated by limited success in the 1840s, reformers turned their sights on prohibition. Here, as in educational reform, the later impulse was decidedly paternalistic.

The momentousness of the Middlebury gathering seems to have captured the legislature's attention, for within five years, Horace Eaton and his colleagues affected a multitude of major reforms. Foremost among these was state-controlled supervision, designed to break down local autonomy and impose a measure of standardization. At the local level, town superintendents, elected by the voters, were responsible for visiting schools at least once a year and for examining and certifying teachers. Town superintendents, in turn, were supervised by a county superintendent (a position which shortly thereafter was deemed unnecessary and abolished). At the top of the bureaucratic pyramid was a state superintendent (initially Horace Eaton himself), whose responsibilities, besides advising county superintendents, focused on securing information abroad, preparing an annual report, and submitting recommendations to the legislature.

In his first Annual Report in 1846, State Superintendent Eaton enumerated several problem areas requiring state intervention. Foremost on his list were the more than two thousand small school districts scattered across the state. Each Vermont district, he observed, enrolled an average of thirty-seven pupils, a figure roughly half that of similar districts in New York or Massachusetts. This situation dictated that a single teacher was responsible for teaching two or three pupils at ten different levels.

Consolidation, Eaton maintained, was imperative to meet the challenge of the scarcity of funds available for each school. Schoolhouses he visited were generally in miserable condition with sparse furnishings: an 1847 survey of 1,190 schools throughout Vermont revealed that fewer than half had blackboards, only ninety had maps or charts, and only twenty-eight were furnished with globes.

An infusion of state moneys was necessary, according to Eaton, to bolster the salaries of teachers as an incentive for enlarging the pool of

Horace Eaton was governor of Vermont, 1846–1848, and simultaneously the first state superintendent of schools. He called for a substantial infusion of state money and a uniform school system.

labor and thereby improving overall quality. The response here was rather interesting. It was not, in effect, to raise salaries. As sociologist Margaret Nelson of Middlebury College found in her recent studies, the primary response to the problem was to substitute young, unmarried females for traditional male teachers. Proponents like Eaton argued the appropriateness of this change on the grounds that a woman's "moral and intellectual qualifications, her devotion, her unselfishness, her calm quiet resolution, her love of children and natural aptitude to teach, may all find ample scope, and profitability to the public good."[21] It is quite possible that the key term here is "profitability to the public good," for Nelson's research reveals that towns paid female schoolteachers, on av-

erage, about half the salary awarded to their male counterparts. These eager young women, says Nelson, generally taught school for two years, sufficient time to showcase their maternal instincts, bolster their dowries, marry, and embrace the "cult of true womanhood."[22]

The reforms of the 1840s had several other noteworthy features. Recognizing that only about half of Vermont's school age children attended school at all, with far fewer doing so regularly, Eaton insisted that the legislature address the issue of mandatory attendance. Furthermore, he urged the General Assembly to deal with the problem of the persistent "Babel-like confusion of books." However, cognizant of the 1820s fiasco, Eaton chose not to press his challenge, and several years would pass before superintendents possessed anything more than advisory powers in this area.

By 1850, Eaton and his fellow reformers could point to an impressive list of accomplishments. As David Ludlum observes:

> A healthy consolidation of districts was in progress. Teachers' wages had been raised and the profession made more attractive. Attendance was increasing, until the average for the school year almost doubled former figures. State financial assistance, a powerful weapon, had been employed to enforce compliance with the law. In short, a system of state-controlled, tax supported, nonsectarian schools—the ideal of Horace Mann—was becoming a reality.[23]

To imply that this extensive state initiative had effected a panacea for problems facing Vermont schools, however, is to dramatically overstate the case. A generation later every superintendent's report (either local or state) was still laden with jeremiads bemoaning persistent shortcomings.

An enlightening exchange between historians Marshall True and Betty Bandel of the University of Vermont, published in the spring, 1972 edition of *Vermont History,* reveals the difficulty in assessing education reform at the middle of the nineteenth century. Marshall True, taking aim at the popular romanticizing of the one room schoolhouse, recites a litany of offenses culled from state and local superintendents' reports. The Burlington school superintendent's 1855 report included a portion of an editorial published in the Rutland *Herald,* which commented wryly that "If each school house in Vermont is twenty-feet square then they would all cover twenty acres. What a heap of rubbish. One half of them are black, rickety, ugly boy-killing affairs where comfort never comes and where coughs, consumptions, fevers, and crooked backs are manufactured wholesale." He appended the comment "these words pretty well describe the condition of things among us in Burlington." Moreover, the educational system continued to be plagued by an absence of quality teachers. In the case of Chittenden county, thirty percent of the teachers were

uncertified. As Secretary of the State Board of Education Adams wrote: "Many of the teachers of the district schools of our state do not know enough of reading, spelling, geography, grammar, and arithmetic to teach these studies passably and have little desire to improve."[24]

Indeed, True concludes, the core of the educational experience for most Vermont school children was discipline. Hiram Orcutt's *Hints to Common School Teachers,* published in 1859, advised teachers that school children had to be taught "the necessity of subjection." "The gaining of knowledge," he maintained, "is a secondary consideration. It should be better to leave this entirely out of the question than to have it substituted for discipline." In sum, True concluded, the preoccupation of Vermont education with austerity and authoritarianism was simple: the late nineteenth-century Vermont classroom was "in part a battleground in which the issue was discipline."[25]

Betty Bandel offers an alternative interpretation. "Mr. True," she observes, "has found something very interesting—but . . . it has to do not with schools but with human nature, and particularly human school superintendent nature. New school superintendents view with alarm. Their purpose in life is to stir us up to see what is wrong in what we have for so long taken for granted."[26] Bandel concludes that the polemical nature of reports was then, as perhaps it is now, a necessary convention to call attention to the educational process.

Regardless of how we interpret the results for students, it is safe to say that the statewide common school system introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century marked a permanent departure from local autonomy. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the role of the state as enforcer of uniformity continued to expand. In 1856, a newly formed five-member state board of education, including the governor and lieutenant governor, was given the power to select texts and to prohibit the use of all other books. In 1870, legislation required sheriffs to enforce school attendance for children between the ages of eight and fourteen. While the onus was later shifted onto parents, the law effectively imposed compulsory attendance. Kindergartens were introduced in 1888; and, following considerable debate, an 1892 state law dissolved all existing school districts and substituted the town as the sole instrument for defining and enforcing educational policy.

The "vicious Act of 1892," as it became known to traditional strong advocates of district control,[27] marked the broadening influence of state control over education throughout the state. To be sure, many Vermonters remained disgruntled, particularly with the preponderance of consolidated schools. Newbury's superintendent bemoaned the growing cost of transporting students to school and campaigned for the elimination

of centralized schools on the grounds that they invariably bred "rude pupils."[28]

Retrenchment, however, was not what reformers had in mind. Indeed, growing calls for Progressive reform at the turn of the twentieth century strengthened efforts to increase the state's role in education. Pedagogical innovations, shaped by the pragmatic movement led by Vermont native John Dewey, questioned traditional methods of teaching. State Superintendent Mason Stone's 1900 report illustrates this third reformist movement. In this section, which he called "Defects," Stone remarked:

> The great sin of our public school system is the lack of a definite and exalted aim, a lack resulting from a grievous defect of the present organization of the State . . . Because the teacher is usually aimless,—because untrained and undirected—she does not and probably cannot engage herself to sort the useful from the useless, the essentials from the non-essentials; but, with a morbid and superstitious regard for the text-book, immerses the child at the beginning and requires him indiscriminately to gulp the good, bad and indifferent of consecutive lessons, regardless of his capacity, his liking or the effect upon him. As a result teaching is irksome to the teacher, the work is unpalatable to the pupils, all is spiritless and intangible. This makes school life hard, barren and sordid, because labor without heart or inspiration is drudgery.[29]

The standardized text, so ardently fought for as an improvement in education during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, now twenty-five years later is characterized as part of the problem rather than the solution to dull, routinized, and ineffective learning. Mechanization has supplanted inspiration, and Stone laments the repressive environment, which he charges has tragically suppressed "self-activity" and curbed "vivacity."[30]

Stone's critique meshed well with growing Progressive concerns over the great new industrial leviathan that had taken hold of America in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Reformers charged that industrial consolidation, illegal trusts, urban political machines, and other new entities had undermined the traditional American moral fabric. In Vermont, the progressive impulse asserted itself in Governor Allen M. Fletcher's 1912 invitation to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to undertake a study of the entire state's educational system. Dr. Henry Pritchett, President of the Carnegie Foundation, selected ten nationally known educational experts from around the country, and accepted the challenge presented to "hew to the line and let chips fall as they would in seeking after the truth of the educational conditions of the state."[31]

The research took two years, with a report published in 1914. The results were extremely unflattering. Teachers, school houses, and pro-

grams all were portrayed in singularly unfavorable fashion. An excerpt on teachers, for instance, described "the typical rural school teacher as a young woman of about twenty-three who . . . is a graduate of a four-year high school, but also has had no professional training. Never having been taught the methods and devices that might enable her to meet the situations of the classroom, she either succeeds or fails in accordance with her native ability."[32] Pedagogy was similarly inadequate, with elementary school curricula lacking "in substance and in form." And schoolhouses, as we've come to expect, were characterized as "dingy," and "dilapidated."[33]

Progressive reformers laid ultimate blame for conditions on the state's failure to overcome the evils of localism. Local control, in the words of the Carnegie Report, marked a "failure to adapt . . . to modern conditions."[34] Harkening back to Jefferson by insisting that "education is a common good," reformers, observing that "the majority of the children educated within a community do not stay within the community," insisted that "not only should the child be educated for the state, but, in a larger degree, he should be educated by the state."[35] Problems that persisted in spite of state initiatives were now deemed resolvable only through further centralization and a significant boost in state funding.

In response to the report, the 1915 legislature voted an additional $250,000 to be placed in the School Fund and passed new laws designed to streamline the bureaucracy and promote "efficiency." A small state board was appointed by the governor and given the power to appoint a state commissioner and union superintendents, all paid for by the state. Mason Stone, who as commissioner of schools had originally called for the Carnegie study, now voiced his opposition to the "dictatorial" manner in which state control had all but eclipsed local autonomy, labeling the new board "autocratic" and the new organization "antithetical to the republican form of government."[36] Stone and his supporters, however, were thoroughly repudiated, when Milo Hillegas, the Columbia University professor who had helped write the Carnegie Report and—most importantly—a non-Vermonter, was appointed to serve as the first state commissioner.

Hillegas labored vigorously to develop teachers' institutes, courses of study, college courses, and other means to improve the quality of Vermont education. In the end, though, historian John Huden observed that the "Carnegie legislation of 1915, born in grave emergency, was strangled in its infancy by the exigencies of WWI."[37] Eight years after the law was passed and the progressive era was replaced by the joie de vivre libertarianism of the 1920s, proponents of local control were again successful in breaking down the uniform system of supervision, curtailing

the board's powers, and transferring the responsibility for hiring and paying superintendents to the towns.

The seesaw struggle between the state and localities persisted throughout the 1930s and 1940s with now predictable consequences. Andrew Nuquist's *Town Government in Vermont* reported that during 1943–44, the state of Vermont paid only fourteen percent of the total cost of its public schools compared with a national average of thirty-three percent paid by all state governments. Towns, burdened with the bulk of expenses, were obliged to allot upwards of half their budgets to school costs, "and find that even with this exertion they have second rate schools."[38]

Yet another attempt (phase four in Vermont's reformist history, for those still counting!) to impose greater state regulation of schools arose during the 1960s. Democratic Governor Philip Hoff, buoyed by his victory on legislative reapportionment, proposed to substitute "comprehensive" and "regional" school districts for traditional local and union schools to facilitate equity and efficiency. With Hoff's blessing, newly appointed Commissioner of Education Richard Gibboney went even further by recommending that educational facilities be consolidated on an unprecedented county level, using Addison County as a model. In March, 1966, Gibboney submitted a plan to Vermont's Board of Education calling for all Addison County students to attend a single high school, three middle schools, and a number of grade schools, all governed by a single, county-wide school board. This model, Gibboney promised, placed within Addison County's "grasp a great opportunity for leadership that could distinguish it within Vermont and the East."[39]

While Gibboney's plan received initial support from the Board of Education and the Vermont Educational Association, it unleashed a tremendous public uproar among proponents of local control. Carrying the debate onto the legislative floor, these traditionalists warned that Gibboney and fellow educational "professionals" were plotting nothing less than the elimination of lay school boards and the cherished principle of local control. Maintaining that "what was good enough in the past is still good enough now," the legislature's steadfast opposition led Hoff to disassociate himself from the plan, and Gibboney, in turn, was forced to submit his resignation. In announcing Gibboney's resignation, Chairman of the State Board of Education Harold Raynolds assured Vermonters that public education would continue to rest in the hands of elected school boards and not in those of statewide administrators desiring "to set up another level of government."[40] Once again, reform efforts fell victim to a pervasive public mistrust, borne out in past performances, that greater state control of education promised far more than it could deliver.

Ironically, though Vermont's school reform effort failed, the reform impulse itself, fueled by the growing federal determination to assert its influence upon American education, continued to develop momentum. The Soviet launch of the satellite Sputnik in 1958 placed union schools near the top of the state's education agenda and indirectly spurred innovations like "tracking." Introduced during the 1960s, tracking was a response to growing numbers of baby-boomers competing for college admission. So, too, new programs introduced by federal mandate during the 1960s – special education, gifted and talented programs, Headstart, etc. – expanded education's role as an instrument for addressing what educational historian Michael Katz calls "environmental assumptions" which held that "altered environments can change character and behavior."[41] In this heady atmosphere of reform, a document distributed by the Vermont Department of Education in 1968, titled "Vermont Design for Education," illustrates the magnitude of this change. Schools, it reported, were to be governed by "a student-centered philosophy," wherein each "student must be accepted as a person."[42] Henceforth, schooling options were expanded to facilitate individualized attention. Serving individual students with vastly disparate needs and capabilities thus became the paramount gauge for determining how well the educational bureaucracy was doing.

Reforms of the 1960s provoked strenuous opposition in the 1970s and 1980s from conservative social commentators such as Diane Ravitch, E. D. Hirsch, and Lynne Cheney. Cheney charged that "revisionists" had functionally undermined the traditional fabric of American society by gutting the "standards" embodied in the traditional educational curricula.[43] These voices reinforced the cry for "back to basics," with advocates charging that falling test scores of Vermont's students proved that the growing expense of education yielded few if any concrete benefits.

The introduction of the federal government as a major player within the educational bureaucracy clearly altered the character and objectives of Vermont's schools, and the outcry against reforms did not reverse the trend. The educational pendulum has not swung back in the direction of greater local control. Advocates of statewide control, led by Governor Howard Dean, have continued to champion new statewide programs, among them, "Success by Six" and "Reading Recovery" for youth, "School to Work" for secondary students, and "Adult Basic Education" for an estimated eighty-eight thousand Vermont adults who "lack literacy skills needed to succeed in today's world."[44]

The foremost achievement of statewide educational policy, however, was the adoption by the State Board of Education in August, 1993, of

"Vermont's Common Core of Learning." Presented as a "revolution" in education, wherein "old [disciplinary] wars are broken down" and teachers "work with students as coaches and guides and partners in learning," the Common Core defined "what every student should know and be able to do" and set forth performance standards and "essential learning experiences." It was drafted under the premise that Vermont's educational shortcomings—which many critics insist are the fallout from three decades of state and federal policies—could only be solved by more, not less, centralized control. Much as in the progressive era of the 1910s, Vermont proudly took the lead in educational reform.[45]

What should we glean from this brief historical journey into Vermont's educational past? From the outset of its creation, Vermont's educational system has been a hybrid. Visions of the benefits of a graduated statewide system, nurturing the unique contributions of all citizens, have been tempered by a pragmatic realization that the greatest powers, those of funding and day-to-day delivery of educational services, ultimately reside with each locale.

That historical amalgam has, for more than two centuries, given rise to a series of pendulum swings. Those seeking to extend the state's ability to impose greater uniformity succeed in part, then find themselves pressed to the defensive when insufficient financial resources and exaggerated promises induce localities to defend their traditional rights.

Over the past three decades, the growing influence of the federal government has bolstered the call for greater statewide uniformity in a variety of educational areas and accelerated both the pace and the scale of reform. Yet past memories of unfulfilled state mandates, deeply ingrained skepticism toward educational professionals, and attitudes passed down from one Vermont generation to the next, insisting that educational values must originate in the locale—all contribute to a continuing resistance to jettisoning powers traditionally exercised by Vermont localities.

History shows us that education has been a policymaking battleground for Vermonters from the moment independence was announced: so it is likely to continue to be in the future.

Vermont's founders recognized this, when, in article VI of the Vermont Constitution of 1777, they took Thomas Jefferson's comment that "the earth always belongs to the living generation" to heart and reminded future Vermonters that they retained "an indubitable, unalienable and indefeasible right to [undertake] reform . . . judged most conducive to the public weal."[46] How Vermonters choose to exercise that power for providing clarity of educational direction and administration in the future remains to be seen: posterity must ultimately be the judge.

Notes

[1] David Schaeffer, "A Comparison of the First Constitutions of Vermont and Pennsylvania," *Vermont History* 43 (Winter, 1975), 33–43.

[2] Thomas Jefferson's "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," details his plan; Jefferson used the term "natural aristocracy" in an October 28, 1813 letter to John Adams. Both documents can be found in Wilson Smith, *Theories of Education in Early America 1655–1819* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 232–239, 306–312; see also Gordon Wood, *Creation of the American Republic* (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1969), 426–27.

[3] A copy of the Vermont Constitution of 1786 can be found in Paul S. Gillies and D. Gregory Sanford, eds., *Records of the Council of Censors of the State of Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt., 1991), 85–90.

[4] Samuel Williams, *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont* (Walpole, N.H., 1794), 324–325.

[5] David Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 223.

[6] Henry Hobart Vail, *Pomfret Vermont* (Boston: Cockayne, 1930), 269–71.

[7] Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* (Dover, N.H.: J. Mann & J. K. Remick, 1812), 247.

[8] John Huden, *Development of State School Administration in Vermont* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1943), 18.

[9] Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 110–111.

[10] *Governor and Council* (Montpelier: J. & J. M. Poland, 1879), 7: 441.

[11] Ibid., 448–449.

[12] *Working-Man's Gazette*, 7 October 1831.

[13] *Report of the Board of Commissioners For Common Schools . . . 1828* (Woodstock: Rufus Colton, 1828).

[14] Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 225.

[15] Emma Willard, *An Address to the Public: Particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New York, Proposing a Plan For Improving Female Education* (Middlebury: J. W. Copeland, 1819); Samuel Read Hall, *Lectures on School-keeping* (Boston: Richardson, Lord & Holbrook, 1829).

[16] Quoted in Paul W. Gates, *The Farmer's Age* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), 224.

[17] Lewis D. Stilwell, *Migration From Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 216.

[18] This theme is developed in Randolph Roth, "Why Are We Still Vermonters? Vermont's Identity Crisis and the Founding of the Vermont Historical Society," *Vermont History* 59 (Fall, 1991), 197–211.

[19] For elaboration, see P. Jeffrey Potash, "Deficiencies In Our Past," *Vermont History* 59 (Fall, 1991), 212–226.

[20] *First Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Common Schools* (Montpelier: Eastman & Danforth), 33.

[21] *Eighth Annual Report of the Vermont Board of Education* (Burlington: Free Press Book and Job Printing Office, 1864), 80.

[22] Margaret K. Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers in the Nineteenth Century," *Vermont History*, 49 (Winter, 1981), 5–30.

[23] Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 236.

[24] Quoted in Marshall True and Betty Bandel, "'School Days, School Days . . . ': An Exchange," *Vermont History* 40 (Spring, 1972), 85–104.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 97.

[27] Cited in Andrew E. Nuquist and Edith W. Nuquist, *Vermont State Government and Administration* (Burlington: Government Research Center, 1966), 265.

[28] E. W. Goodhue, county education supervisor, while maintaining that the Newbury superintendent was among many "making political capital out of the opposition," felt "bound to acknowledge that a majority of the people in this county seem to be opposed to the new school law." See *Thirty-First Vermont School Report* (Montpelier: Watchman Publishing Co., 1890), 34–35.

[29] *Thirty-Sixth Vermont School Report* (Albany: Wyncoop, Hallenbeck, Crawford, 1900), 23.

[30] Ibid., 24.

[31] *Report of the Commission to Investigate the Educational System and Conditions in Vermont* (Brattleboro: Vermont Printing Co., 1914).

[32] *A Study of Education in Vermont* (Montpelier: 1914), 42.

[33] Ibid., 56–58.

[34] *Forty-Third Vermont School Report* (Montpelier: Capital City Press, 1915), 10.

[35] Ibid., 15–16.

[36] Mason Stone, *History of Education: State of Vermont* (Montpelier: Capital City Press, 1934), 78. Also see Michelle A. Cross, "Mason S. Stone and Progressivism in Vermont Public Education, 1892–1916," *Vermont History* 62 (Winter, 1994), 26–40.

[37] Huden, *Development of State School Supervision in Vermont*, 205–209.

[38] Andrew E. Nuquist and Edith W. Nuquist, *Town Government in Vermont* (Burlington: Government Research Center, 1964), 148.

[39] Quoted in Albert Norman, "The Case of the Slippery Pig: Primacy as an Issue in Vermont Education, 1965–67," *Vermont History* 45 (1977), 109.

[40] *Burlington Free Press*, 15 July 1967.

[41] Michael Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 150–151.

[42] *Vermont Design for Education* (Montpelier: State of Vermont Department of Education, 1968).

[43] Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Lynne Cheney, *Tyrannical Machine: A Report on Educational Practices Gone Wrong and Our Best Hope for Setting Them Right* (Washington: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1990).

[44] *Vermont School Progress Report* (Montpelier: State of Vermont Department of Education, 1996).

[45] *Vermont's Common Core of Learning* (1993) and *Content Standards* (1995) are distributed by the State of Vermont Department of Education in Montpelier.

[46] A copy of the 1777 Constitution can be found in Gillies and Sanford, *Records of the Council of Censors*, 3–18.