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EDUCATION ON THE GREAT PLAINS

AN INTRODUCTION

Few people asked to identify outstanding exemplars of education in the United States would immediately think of the Great Plains or its people. And it may well be that the authors of the Land Ordinance of 1785 were more interested in enticing settlers to the old Northwest Territory than in providing financial support for education when they set aside one section of public land in every thirty-six sections for the support of education. Yet education has become very important to the immigrant peoples who have occupied the Great Plains over the past two centuries, and there can be little doubt that the promises, both of free or inexpensive land and of educational opportunity, were factors that helped lure them here. Today students in the plains states regularly achieve among the highest ACT and SAT scores in the nation, and colleges and universities in the region have achieved a degree of prominence.

Once here, the settlers moved quickly to establish schools for their offspring and to provide means for recruiting and preparing teachers. The Morrill Act of 1862 soon provided land grant colleges to complement the common schools. Established primarily to promote the scientific study of agriculture and mechanic arts, these new institutions appealed as well to devotees of the arts and to young women infused with the ideals of a nascent feminist movement.

In a relatively short time, then, the states carved from the Great Plains region established a school system capped by a state university or land grant college.

This special edition of *Great Plains Quarterly* captures in three articles a few important and well-researched snapshots of that educational development. Two give us glimpses into the lives of plains teachers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One addresses the motivation, the opportunities, and the accomplishments of female teachers; the other explores the careers of male teachers. A third essay traces the cultural and educational contributions of an enterprising pioneer musician, educator, and music administrator. Together they provide some lively insights into educational developments on the Great Plains that more general historians of education have failed to capture.

Kathleen Underwood's "Schoolmarms on the Upper Missouri" gives readers a quick view of Margery Jacoby, who moved to Montana at the age of twelve, secured a teaching certificate by examination at the age of fifteen, and was elected a county superintendent at the age of twenty-three. She motivated her four children to earn college degrees, and her three daughters followed their mother's career in education. Margery Jacoby is presented as a rather typical turn-

of-the-century plains teacher. Such women often earned their first certificates by examination, moved frequently, improved their knowledge and skill by attending summer sessions at a college or university, and continued to teach for years. They became teachers for a variety of reasons: because they needed money, because they wanted to improve their social or educational lot, or because they wanted to assert their personal independence. Their individual motivations were complemented by a growing population's demand for teachers on the frontier and society's belief that women would be good teachers because of their "natural nurturing instincts." These women apparently felt they were well served by teaching, so much so that they commonly bequeathed their careers to their daughters.

In "Male Teachers, Male Roles: The Progressive Era and Education in Oklahoma," Courtney Ann Farr and Jeffrey A. Liles investigate men's reasons for becoming teachers and the rewards of their choice. The study is based on autobiographical sketches of sixty-seven retired Anglo-American male teachers living in Oklahoma in the mid-1970s. These autobiographies supply an important picture of at least one category of male teachers in a Great Plains state. Largely from rural agricultural backgrounds, they soon came to regard teaching as a desirable alternative to backbreaking toil on farms and ranches in the extremes of temperature and rainfall that characterized the Plains. Often their choice of teaching was reinforced by a popular belief that young men needed masculine role models and teachers capable of enforcing discipline by physical means, if necessary. Moreover, salary schedules strongly favored male teachers. By law or custom they were also given preference for administrative positions, thus guaranteeing a *de facto* male hegemony for the teaching profession. While some used teaching as a temporary stepping stone to more illustrious and rewarding careers, many others remained in teaching and eventually succeeded to college or administrative positions.

In the third essay of this special edition, Marilyn Hammond and Raymond Hagg argue that musical life and the kind of education needed

to sustain it flourished on the Great Plains under less than favorable circumstances at the turn of the century. In "Willard Kimball: Music Administrator on the Great Plains," they use Kimball's career to demonstrate that competent and determined musicians could earn a livelihood as teachers and performers in an isolated plains city. Having already gained considerable recognition for his achievements in the field of music education in Iowa, this energetic musical entrepreneur risked relocation to a small and relatively remote city that had little to offer save opportunity. Here he combined musical genius with financial skill to found a conservatory of music that became affiliated with a fledgling land grant state university. This was no mean cultural and economic feat, given the drought and depression that plagued the region in the 1890s. It may be arguable whether Kimball, as he intended, actually succeeded in providing the best music instruction between Chicago and San Francisco. Nevertheless, he achieved a degree of national acclaim that helped bring recognition to the city of Lincoln, Nebraska. Kimball sought to recruit a faculty of outstanding talent and was, with a few notable exceptions, successful in doing so. Kimball also contributed significantly to the cultural life of Lincoln by bringing to the city a number of famous touring orchestras and opera companies and such individual musicians as Ignaz Jan Paderewski and Ernestine Schumann-Heink. Certainly both education and the arts were well served by this enterprising artist.

Lee Shulman of Stanford University, in his efforts to encourage research aimed to improve the effectiveness of teacher education, has called for greater production of case literature comparable to that used in the education of lawyers and architects. The three essays of this issue appear to be moving toward the fulfillment of Shulman's hope for the development of greater case knowledge concerning teachers and teaching.

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