THE TEACHING OF LOCAL HISTORY

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ANY local community ranks small in the estimation of the world at large. The part that such a community can play, the contribution that it can make to the general welfare, the influence that it can exert seem so small that it merits little, if any consideration. The pulpit, the school, the press—all teach the brotherhood of man and the oneness of all humanity. In addition to this, the radio and the screen bring the whole world to our threshold and, in the immensity of it all, the local community—to say nothing of the individuals in it—seem almost infinitesimal. Our immediate surroundings shrink in our consciousness until they become a place of abode where we can earn a living and nothing more. We foolishly imagine that the view in some far off place is more glorious than that near at hand. The distant city seems to offer a more abundant opportunity. The desire to go places takes hold of our whole population. Youth in particular wishes to break the home ties and seek adventure afar. The young person who deliberately plans his life in the old home town has become a curiosity. Local interest is, for the most part, limited to those who have some business connection or some family relationship in that particular locality.

Worst of all in view of the present generation are the local historians. Local history plays little part in the universal pageant of time. The world is concerned with parliaments, dictators, or kings, and regards with pity and sometimes with contempt some old mortality renewing the humble story of years gone by. The local historian is often dismissed as a peculiar antiquarian who painfully works out a record of the insignificant. Local historical societies are considered to be pitiful groups whose interest in the
past is incident to genealogy which itself grows out of snobbishness and vanity.

This is the common understanding and it is one of the attitudes which have developed in an age when mankind is striving to adjust itself to the new and strange conditions which have been created by the scientific advance of the past century. In a world of steel and concrete, of whirling wheels, of stored up gold, of incredibly rapid transportation and communication, material things loom large and spiritual matters are well nigh forgotten. After all, however, few of us are called to positions of leadership in world affairs but live in relation to some restricted community where we must make our social contacts, earn our living and seek our happiness. Dr. Johnson said: "To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible if it were attempted, and would be foolish if it were possible!" Nothing can be of more value to the ordinary individual than to know his neighbors and the special heritage they share. Whether we consider the achieving of material success or the securing of happiness and approaching a high spiritual ideal, man must be considered in relationship to society and the little human group in its relationship to the soil, the climate and the contour of the land.

It is admitted that man is largely a puppet of nature. Our manner of living, our occupations, our politics, and even our physical appearance are the result of geographical conditions. The rugged soil of New England develops a people vastly different from that of the sunny fields of the South. All local study begins with that of geography and then proceeds to the historical, the economic, and the social. A scientific study of any community, having regard to the relation of cause and effect, and showing how the present status has resulted from past growth, not only prepares for living in that community, but has a broadening effect upon attitudes and ideals. This will be true because the individual will apply the same scientific method of thought to people of different ideals or of different races. This in turn, will cause a sympathetic understanding of different classes of society, will develop a feeling of brotherhood of all mankind, and will tend toward a permanent peace.

Local history is a rewarding study. The story of how our pioneer ancestors defied and conquered untamed nature and savage enemies cannot fail to enrich our characters and make life more
interesting and lovely. It is a mistake to think that all deeds of valor have been done or all noble sacrifices made in remote times or in lands across the sea. Almost every American county can boast of a history unsurpassed, anywhere in its power to thrill and inspire. A community consists not only of the material things of which it is composed, things of steel and concrete, but also of the traditions, lives, ambitions, and activities of its people. All these are largely the result of the labors of the past. They exist because of the ideals, dreams, and efforts of past generations. Our nation has been dedicated to an ideal of democracy, of government by the people, of the people and for the people. It differs from other governments in that it unites all in matters of general concern while giving to each local community almost absolute authority in matters which concern it alone. Local autonomy is the cornerstone of American democracy, and it can be best preserved by focusing attention upon local affairs. Men may not be willing to fight for high but distant ideals but they will make any sacrifice for those things which are nearest: home, family, and community. At present, democracy is being assailed by foes both from within and without. Patriotism always begins at home. Would it be too much to say that one way of safeguarding our democracy is to emphasize individual liberty in the local community?

It has been said that history is the life of the common people. It must be remembered that all great events have their inception in attitudes created in thousands of small centers in every land. Before Gettysburg could be fought the ladies aid society of X church in Y village had aroused the people to the evils of slavery, and cotton planter A in county B had decided that his family would be destitute if the economic ideas of the North should prevail. If this be true, a study of local history has scientific value. If all local history were thought through with sympathy and understanding, there might result an authentic history of the world. “The study of local history is a method of applying the modern scientific method of research to the study of the past and brings the speculative reason close to the concrete.”

The common idea then, in regard to the study of local matters, is wrong. In fact the first essential of success is a thorough understanding of the local community, geographically, historically, economically, and sociologically. The object, then, of this local study, is to learn and appreciate the place of the community in its
relation to the state, the nation, and the world, and what is equally important, to determine the relation of each individual to the social group with which he is surrounded, to the end, that he may plan his own career to the best advantage and may be a useful member of our democracy. This objective can be obtained only if along with an understanding of the community there is developed a deep and abiding interest in it and its welfare.

Unquestionably, then, the local community and its various interests ought to be taught in the public schools, for the school age is the most suitable age in which to develop an interest and understanding of local affairs as well as a loyalty to our democracy.

Immediately the school is confronted by problems of the administration of courses of this kind. One of the first and most serious of these problems is that of finding a place in the overcrowded curriculum for such courses. Three methods of solution suggest themselves: (1) To make local study a course by itself, setting aside six to ten weeks of this work and giving proportional credit toward graduation for work so done; (2) To take time from other subjects either on a rotating schedule or by omitting lessons in major subjects at regular times; (3) To teach local matters in connection with and as part of related subjects.

The objections to the first and second of these plans are serious and obvious, because these methods could be employed only by reducing the time allotment in a major subject to the extent necessary to permit the completion of the work in local matters. The time allotment in any line is so limited in proportion to the work to be done that teachers will justly resent any such plan. Antagonism at the beginning will inevitably spell failure. Then too, there is the danger of overemphasis on a real study of local history, which is likely to develop when and if this study is conducted by itself and without proper relation to other subjects. While this whole article is an attempt to show that local study is worth while, it must always be kept in mind that local events are a part of a larger whole and derive their significance from their relationship to national and world affairs.

If we assume that this study is to include not only the history but also the science, economics, geography, etc., of the locality, there may be difficulty in securing a teacher or teachers able to conduct a complete course of this kind. This is an age of specialization when certification is necessary before any subject may be taught. If a teacher can be found who is willing and able to
undertake the study and research necessary for teaching local history, it is almost unthinkable that she will be able to do the same for geography, economics, geology, biology, and all other subjects.

On the part of our young people, the arousing of interest together with the ability of the pupil to discern his place in his community, is the primary purpose of such a course and the acquisition of facts is largely a means for attaining that end. In many other courses pupils may by long, uninteresting, and tedious labor acquire skills which may be of untold value in later life. In local study, however, if interest is lost the results are apt to be worse than disastrous, for in such a case the pupil is apt to acquire a distaste for local matters and a dislike for the local community—results the opposite of those intended.

Since interest not only furnishes the motivation but is one of the major objectives of these courses, it follows that they should be presented in such connections, in such grades, and in such manner as will make the strongest appeal to the pupil. For instance, local history by itself is apt to appear to the average high school pupil as a most uninspiring subject. Affairs very closely connected with his immediate surroundings are so familiar that they breed contempt. Then too, there is a dearth of material. In other subjects there are textbooks, work books, and helps without number. For local history, however, the material consists largely of records assembled by interested persons or compiled by local historical societies. Some county histories have been published but from the very smallness of most of our counties, the editions of such books must be limited and the prices high. A prerequisite for work in local history is the assembling of material and arranging it in a way that will make it accessible to high school pupils. With the help of the school administration this work can be done by teachers who as a class are loyal to the community in which they are employed and who, I believe, would not only be willing but enthusiastic in the study and teaching of local history. As for the pupils, we may assume that the average boy or girl has a reasonable interest in the subject being studied. If this subject be United States history, local history may be so correlated and integrated that it is difficult to see how such study can fail to attain its objective.

Similarly, high school seniors about to graduate and seek employment should be allowed to make an industrial survey of their
own particular community, so that they may know what opportunities it presents as to employment and wages, and what are the possibilities for a person desiring to enter business or professional life. Self-interest alone would compel attention to such a course.

The same principles apply in other courses. In science, geography and sociology, information exists only waiting to be put in a form intelligible and accessible to our young people. The field in science is especially broad. It needs no proof that the workings of nature as they can be observed in any locality, not only interest us in that locality but vitalize and motivate the study of all science. Local study in any field should be made in connection with related subjects. This method is psychologically and pedagogically correct.

In schools of Stroudsburg, studies of this kind have been carried on for over twenty years with varying degrees of success, and the plan which is in operation at present is the result of experimentation of many years. Local study includes that of the state, the county, and the borough, and is made a part of every course where such correlation is possible. For instance, all high school courses in geography require a study of the geography of Pennsylvania and a detailed study of the county, including the names and locations of its political divisions, townships, and boroughs, their population and industries as well as the physical features. A similar procedure is followed in other subjects.

Each year additional material is obtained. All of this is organized and made available to teachers and pupils. At the beginning of each school year an outline is given to each teacher showing the work in local history, etc., which she is expected to cover. It is also required that questions on local matters be asked in final examinations where this study has been a part of the course. It is believed that time will prove that this is an efficient method of presenting studies of this kind and that the ultimate results will justify our efforts.

TEACHING STATE HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS

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ABOUT seventy years ago the state legislature compelled the addition of United States history to the branches taught in our school system. Mr. Coburn, a representative of the State De-
partment of Common Schools, emphasized the importance of the new branch by claiming its introduction would create a place for the teaching of Pennsylvania history. Many county institutes, in the sixties, heard his famous phrase, “All people know the ship of the Pilgrims, but few the ship of William Penn.” For a movement fostered over such a period of time, but little organized progress can be noted in our present trends.

An examination of the state course of study in social studies shows only fragmentary reference to state history in connection with commemorating holidays in the early grades. Later, in grade five, a section is devoted to the founding and settlement of Pennsylvania by William Penn. Emphasis should be placed on Unit Twelve for grade six, headed “Pennsylvania, 1789 to the Present Time.” In grade nine, another entire unit is applied to the study of state and local government with considerable detail relating to local rather than state problems.

A final evaluation of the entire course of study would lead us to the conclusion that the proper place to teach the historical development of our state is in the sixth year. But the specific objectives given to guide the teacher in this classroom work present rather a weak framework on which to erect a structure of permanent worth. The following are these objectives:

1. To learn something of the economic development of the state and community.
2. To learn something of, and to find the part played by Pennsylvania in wars waged by the nation between 1789 and the present time.
3. To learn some of the significant provisions under the law for education in the state.
4. To become acquainted with opportunities offered in the state for higher education.

It is not my purpose to criticize this unit of work, although the second objective is certainly open to question, and the others probably are given to children at too early an age. The new texts for this grade follow the outline in the course of study with such rigidity and exactness that teachers are unable to stimulate any interest on the part of their pupils. Unfortunately teachers rather conscientiously follow a syllabus, and textbooks are written to be sold by the clinching argument that they conform with the state course of study.
The above survey is intended to show the extent that state history is taught in our schools. Now let us turn to suggestions for improving present conditions. Our first consideration should be given to the type of historical data which we intend to impart to the pupils in our schools. Is there a definite, sequential type of state history, which by being taught in true historical unity and style, will instill and inspire children to revere and respect their parent state? Should Pennsylvania history merely be used to supplement and enrich our present courses with no attempt to establish particular levels or definite units of work? Dr. Flick, state historian of New York, inclines to the latter idea which would fully utilize all local and state materials to vivify the past by bringing to our pupils an intimate connection with their present neighbors and surroundings.

Regardless of attitude on the above issue, a problem confronts us, for our teachers are not properly trained and the syllabi are inadequate both as to type of material and proper levels for instruction. Even with improvements in courses of study and teacher training, the majority of teachers now actually engaged in classroom work do not have sufficient background to engage in the new type of instruction demanded by such proposals. Naturally the first task of every social studies instructor should be to acquaint himself thoroughly with all phases of local history in the particular region where his school is located. Unfortunately, easy access to necessary data is next to impossible and research requires a skill which usually develops only through graduate study. The region served by our teachers' college is especially rich from an historical point of view. The entire area from Delaware Water Gap to Port Jervis, was the beloved land of the Delaware Indians which was the disputed territory in the Walking Purchase. The number of schools in the immediate vicinity using this episode as an entering wedge for further study of Indian life is few.

The depression has caused considerable comment on the machine driving men out of work. The Pope suggested that a "Holiday on all inventions" would be quite beneficial until mankind understood how to use the mechanical devices already on hand. While the speaker would not recommend quite such a drastic measure, it seems quite in order to propose that, not research, but the assimilation of the materials obtained by the same should be our scholastic aim. Administrators and educators must have the assistance
of eminent historians to produce a living picture of the past. Let those engaged in the field of historical production give some attention also to the scope of its consumption. An enriched curriculum, a delight to teacher and pupil, would produce a new type of citizenship.

This suggestion can be fully utilized if properly trained teachers are carrying out the objectives in our public schools. No Pennsylvania teachers' college today requires a special course in state and local history. Certainly for those students specializing in the social studies, such a course should be added to the required list. By placing in their hands the history of our state and allowing each student to present in theme form the history of his own locality, these institutions would instinctively cause future teachers to become familiar with regions in which they will serve as teachers. Performing the task for one locality, soon suggests the method of duplicating the process for another region.

The problem of giving an adequate background to teachers already in the field can only be met by a state-wide organization with an organ fitted to reach all the teachers. The Pennsylvania Historical Association, with its magazine PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, could perform such service by devoting some attention to the needs of the teacher. At present the quarterly prints excellent articles from a research point of view and extended bibliographies on state history for the assistance of scholarly individuals. The teacher, unfortunately, does not have time to indulge in the field in such intricacy. If the board would permit part of the space to be devoted to supplementary material and brief, essential bibliography, teachers could make their teaching more vivid and interesting. Why not publish an article on “Penn, the Law Maker” or give space to the “Background of our State Constitution.” There is no written volume on the making of our state constitution and by reading the debates of the Convention of 1873 every teacher would notice improvement in imparting knowledge relative to our state government.

In conclusion, let eminent historians assist in making the courses of study; let teachers' colleges give courses in Pennsylvania and local history; and let the Pennsylvania Historical Association reach teachers in the field through its magazine, PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY.
NO member of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, with the possible exception of James Madison, had a more profound understanding of the theories of government than James Wilson. This Scotch-Irish immigrant left for America in 1765, studied law with John Dickinson in Philadelphia, opened an office at Reading near his future wife, Rachel Bird, of the Birdsboro iron family, went to Carlisle where he built up a wide practice, and then returning to Philadelphia acted as legal counsel, engaged in land speculation and commercial undertakings, gave the first lectures on law at the College of Philadelphia, and held public office. The peak of his achievement in public office was his part in drawing up the Constitution and in its ratification.

Most conspicuous of his political beliefs was the insistence that all authority is derived from the people. He believed that all men have equal rights and that the power of the government should flow from the people at large. He favored popular election of the members of the House of Representatives. It was his opinion that the election of the Senate by the state legislatives was unwise as the general government should not be for the states but for the individuals composing them. Proportional representation according to population for both branches in Congress should be adopted. He suggested that the President be elected by the people for a term of three years and be eligible for re-election.

The most difficult problem of the framers of the Constitution was to form a strong union without destroying the states as integral parts. James Wilson, holding to the idea that sovereignty rests with the individual, saw no incompatibility between the national and state governments. He had the ability to see that people could be citizens of a state and at the same time citizens of a larger government, the United States. The state governments were to exist for local purposes and the national government for those objects which extend in their operation or effects beyond the bounds of a particular state. He believed that the national government should be strong enough to operate with energy and dispatch. Power given to an agency of the people need not be feared.
With Hamilton and Madison, Wilson performed valiant service in securing the ratification of the Constitution. He believed that it should be ratified by state conventions selected by popular vote. It is significant that of Pennsylvania's large delegation to the Constitutional Convention, he was the only one who was elected to the state ratification convention. Although others have been given more credit, James Wilson was a leader of the group who secured the acceptance of our present form of government.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


The most comprehensive study of James Wilson is the biography by Burton Alva Konkle which has not yet been published.