

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' DEPARTMENT

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THE PROPOSED SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAM IN RELATION TO LOCAL AND STATE HISTORY

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THE social studies program recently issued by the State Department of Public Instruction may, upon first inspection, appear to be in striking contrast to that which is now being followed in a majority of the schools of the state. There are unquestionably innovations in this program, but for the most part, these changes relate more to procedures and points of emphasis for studying society than they do to content. Instead of continuing separate courses in world history, American history, local and state history, economics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and problems of democracy, this program proposes that problems significant to the life of the child and to society should be selected for study. It is impossible to conceive how any school could select significant problems from society which do not cross-section several, if not all, of the branches of social studies mentioned. This program transverses local, state, national, and international lines, and attempts to visualize the social order on a world-wide basis. Furthermore, one of the principles on which the program has been built is the importance of history as a foundation for understanding contemporary problems. It is not a study alone of the contemporary scene, but instead, it is a study of the contributions of the past as they relate to a more complete understanding of the present order of society.

In order to direct the thinking of teachers in preparing units of study for their classes, and in order to assist them in covering

every phase of human activity, the program has been developed around areas or themes of human experience. These areas have been determined upon the basis of activities in which people in any society are engaged, and with the purpose of encompassing the entire range of social relationships. In reviewing the activities of people in any locality and at any time, one will find that both youth and adults are engaged in such pursuits as earning a living, making a home, and improving the material conditions in their community. One will also find that these people cooperate for social and civic welfare, protect their common health and property and their individual lives and possessions, engage in recreation and express their impulses for beauty and their devotion to a Supreme Being. These are the common pursuits of people in any state of society. Consequently, schools which are engaged in educating youth for better understanding human relationships should take cognizance of these activities.

These nine areas of living form the basis for the suggested social studies program. In developing the program, phases of society have been included within each area to guide teachers in selecting units for study. The Committee on Social Studies was fully aware of the fact that the program would become unwieldy should every phase of social relationships be included therein. As a result, those phases of society which were referred to most frequently by authors of textbooks, contemporary scholars of society, and the public press were taken as a basis for the suggested phases to be included in the program. It is quite probable that in some instances teachers and pupils will feel a need for studying aspects of society not included in this program. When situations of this kind arise, the study should proceed along those lines which are deemed most expedient.

This program recognizes four different pupil levels, namely, the early elementary including kindergarten and grades 1, 2, 3; the later elementary including grades 4, 5, 6; the junior secondary, grades 7, 8, 9; and the senior secondary, grades 10, 11, 12. In the early elementary grades those things with which the child comes in contact in his everyday life from the immediate environment are suggested for discussion and inquiry. This program is planned to lead the pupil systematically and gradually out of the family, neighborhood, and community into the state, nation, and the world

always following those lines of experiences which bind the near to the remote and create a general understanding of the interdependence of people in society. As the child grows in experience and becomes acquainted with things about him, he has the background for exploring and learning about human relationship in other places and other times. By the time the child has reached the later elementary grades, he should be able to study about things which are more remote and abstract to his experience. The experience, interests, needs, and aspirations of the children should provide the basis for the selection of units for study. By following this plan from the first grades through the secondary school, the child will be brought into a fuller knowledge of society and consequently should be better prepared to participate constructively in the affairs of the community of which he is a part.

The study of any unit should begin with the current phases of the problem for the reason that what now is, is more significant for understanding contemporary society than that which has preceded. In history, as in economics, a law of diminishing returns operates. The more remote chronologically an incident is from the present, the less value that incident has in contributing to an understanding and interpretation of the present. It should be noted, however, that facts related to any trend in society do not decline in the same ratio when a counterchronological study is made of the incidents which have contributed to such tendencies. In other words, the lines of diminishing returns for every unit that might be considered in a social studies course do not cut across society at the same place. This theory of the social studies might be illustrated more definitely in the following manner. The architecture of Greece in the fifth century B.C. is more significant to an understanding of the architectural designs used in our own times than a knowledge of the Greek agricultural system in the same period is to an understanding of American agriculture in our own time. It should also be noted that any causation for a happening in society discovered many years after the date of the incident itself is less significant to an interpretation of society at that time than those causes which were attributed to the incident at the time of its occurrence.

The contemporary social order is the heritage of everything that has preceded it. Therefore, if an intelligent understanding of

society is to be obtained, it is essential first to find out what actually exists and with that as a basis, trace its antecedents. The historical study should be an outgrowth of and should follow the investigation of the contemporary aspects of the problem. Thus, it will be noted the study of history is not neglected in this program, but it becomes a means for interpreting more clearly modern tendencies.

Since contemporary society encompasses a very wide range of human relationships, it is impossible to make a thorough study of every phase of human activity in the course of twelve years in the public schools. Confronted with this perplexity, it becomes necessary to select for study those trends and phases of society which are most significant at the present time and which are likely to remain significant for some time in the future. By following this plan, students will be introduced to the more important aspects of contemporary civilization.

The function of social studies very broadly conceived is to guide the growth and development of youth in society. Unless youth are prepared to cope intelligently with the problems of modern civilization, we cannot hope for a much higher order of society in the future than now exists. Fundamental problems of present day society which are likely to continue as vitally important issues should form the nucleus of the social studies program. When people clearly grasp the tendencies of modern civilization, they will be in a better position to modify those tendencies to conform to the higher ideals of the social order which they have commonly agreed upon.

Another function of the social studies is to educate youth to cooperate with others. Acceptance of this function presupposes that pupils will not only discover how people in our own and other times are dependent upon one another for their existence, but that learning experiences will be set up where pupils will be required to work and cooperate with their fellow students in the accomplishment of a desired goal. Whatever enterprise youth may be engaged in at present, or plan to enter at some future time, it is certain that they will be working with others to a greater or lesser extent. Success in these ventures will depend to a large extent upon the ability of youth to make the necessary adjustments. The theory of individualism cannot function in our complex social and industrial age as it did when the great majority of our citizens

were engaged in agrarian pursuits. As civilization becomes more complex and people become more interdependent, the need for a better understanding of human relationships becomes apparent.

Social studies should contribute to defining and upholding social values. Society has values which are more than economic or political in nature but which are the motivating forces for economic and political operations. If such values are founded on honesty in public affairs, respect for the rights of others, a fair living standard for all, the right to speak and write on any social issue within bounds of decency, the privilege of worshipping a Supreme Being according to the dictates of one's conscience and the assurance of a fair and impartial trial if brought before the bar, then life will have a richness of satisfaction and opportunity which makes it worth the living. Upon the schools in general and upon the social studies teacher in particular rests the responsibility of giving expression to these higher values. To impress upon pupils such cultural values means that teachers and supervisors must first be in sympathy with them, and second they must be principles which guide the thought of youth in the study of social situations.

A purpose of the social studies which bears a close relation to method but is essential to the achievement of other purposes is that of training the intellectual processes relative to the functioning of society. A knowledge of the sources of information respecting a given social situation, skill in evaluating the authenticity of these sources of information, skill in investigating every angle of a controversial issue, and skill in reaching a conclusion on the basis of evidence that has been examined are handmaidens of intelligent living in a democracy. The bases on which democracy functions are free and open discussion of social issues, an exploration and study of apparent needs, suggestions as to remedial measure, and adjustment and compromise with relation to existing and proposed measures. The problems that confront each individual require intellectual processes akin to those which operate in American society. It follows, therefore, that instruction in the social studies should provide training in the analytical, critical and constructive powers through school practice in numerous historical and contemporary situations.

The study of society should contribute to constructive social action. It is not sufficient that the individual should be sensitive

to the problems of society, that he should be skilled in analyzing such problems on the basis of the available evidence, that he should be willing to cooperate with others, that he should contribute to defining and upholding social values, but it is equally essential that he should be educated to participate effectively in social action. It has been generally believed that active participation in the affairs of society does not begin until the citizen reaches his majority. This theory is no longer accepted by many of our progressive educators. More and more, pupils in our schools are being encouraged to study not only social problems, but to write, speak, organize, and otherwise participate in the solution of these problems.

How then does local and state history fit into a program such as has been outlined? In the first place, it has been suggested that the study of any unit which is taken up in a social studies class should begin with the immediate locality, and with the contemporary state of society as it relates to the problem. It has been further stated that, after a survey has been made of the present aspects of the problem, pupils should be encouraged to search the past to determine how what we now have has come into being. More specifically, if a class should take as a unit for study the architecture of our own and other times, probably the best point of orientation would be to make a study of the architectural designs of public buildings, homes, and churches in the immediate locality. Since these buildings will, in many instances, reflect a cross-section of the architectural designs of buildings in other communities, we have a nucleus for beginning the study of the problem. By following this approach to the introduction of the problem, the children are brought into contact with material things in their home community. Their interest has been enlisted, and they are now in a position to be led into the study of the architecture of other communities, and of other nations and states as it is at the present time.

Out of this study will naturally arise such questions as this one. Are the church buildings, court houses, and homes of the same design now as they were fifty years ago or more? When questions such as this are brought before the class by interested pupils, the time is propitious for an investigation of the historical background of the architectural structures which the pupils

have been studying. After a study, such as the one outlined above, has been made, then it would be educationally proper to draw some conclusions. These conclusions or generalizations constitute the fundamental ideas which the teacher hopes members of the class will carry with them as useful knowledge for the better understanding of the phase of society that has been under study.

By following this procedure, each problem that is taken up for consideration will call for a study of local and state affairs as an introduction to the broader aspects of the study which follow in their proper order. There may be some phases of society, which heretofore have been regarded as fundamental, neglected in a program such as is proposed for the public schools. At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that other phases of society which have received only passing consideration will be given correspondingly greater emphasis than in the traditional course of study. It would seem that this approach to the study of the local history is much more defensive than a separate course which presumes that the child has an adequate background for understanding local affairs in relation to the national and international affairs.

The basis on which this proposal is made presumes that what exists in the locality is a reflection of what exists in the state, and throughout the nation with some modifications. For some time, the foundation which pupils presume to have obtained as the background for advanced or more specialized courses of study has been questioned. The presumption upon which the problems of democracy course is built is that pupils have obtained in the first eleven years of their formal education an adequate historical background for understanding the significance of these problems in relation to the present social order. My own experience has been that the presumption is too often not founded on fact, and that, therefore, when a class does take up the study of a contemporary problem, a majority of the pupils are at a loss to understand the relation of this problem to its historical antecedents.

In such instances, the teacher finds it necessary to review the historical background of the problems taken up for consideration in order that the pupils may view these problems in their proper

prospective. It would, also, follow that, if a specialized course in local and state history were offered, the pupils would be expected, in a large measure, to understand the relation of this history to national and international history. It is very probable that not more than ten per cent of the pupils in a class in local and state history would see this relationship.

Teachers of social studies should educate youth to have a pride in the institutions of their community and state based on tenable grounds rather than to accept the dictum of zealots. Emphasizing local and state history without seeing its relationship to national and international history, tends to develop localism in a period when more consideration should be given to internationalism. Certainly, every pupil in the school system should be taught to respect the institutions under which he lives, but not to be so blinded by an exulted importance of those institutions as to be unwilling to approve of modifications when the need for such modifications is generally apparent.

In order to carry out a program such as has been outlined, it is necessary, in the first place, to have an adequate supply of materials so that teachers and pupils can follow through the study which has been planned. This material should consist of slides, pamphlets, maps, charts, planned school journeys, and other similar aids. It would seem that one of the most constructive things that could be done to assist the schools in carrying forward the study which has been outlined would be for an organization, such as the Pennsylvania Historical Association to sponsor the preparation and publication of materials on local and state history suitable for use in the public schools. These materials should be adapted not only to the secondary school grades, but they should be prepared for the pupils of the elementary grades, as well. If every problem is to start with the study of the immediate community, and then expand to the state and nation, it is very important that teachers and pupils have materials with which to work. We have talked a great deal about local and state history in the past, but when one investigates the published materials suitable for use on the elementary and secondary level, there is strikingly little that is available. Very recently, a number of county historical societies have taken up the study of special phases of local life and institutions. These materials are being used in local schools as a basis

for a better understanding of the locality in relation to the larger problems of society. It is hoped that the volume of authoritative studies in local life and institutions will be increased and that such materials will be written in a style suitable for school use.

The subject which has been discussed in this paper has been considered under three main headings, namely, the organization and nature of the social studies program proposed by the State Department of Public Instruction, the place of local and state history in that program, and the materials needed for putting it into effect.

FRANCIS RAWN SHUNK
GOVERNOR OF PENNSYLVANIA
1845-1848

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F RANCIS RAWN SHUNK was born at Trappe, Montgomery county, on August 7, 1788. He was of pure German descent. His grandparents on his father's, and mother's side were from the Palatinate. These ancestors emigrated to Pennsylvania about 1715. The story of the life of Francis Rawn Shunk is a story of a poor boy, who did not even have the rudiments of an education, making himself one of the most important figures in Pennsylvania by his own honesty and effort. As a boy of ten he was forced to work in the fields, and when his tasks were done he would come home and read by the chimney the few books that were available. In 1803 at the age of fifteen he became a teacher, and he taught for nine years. His first advance came in 1812 when he was selected by Andrew Porter, then surveyor-general under Governor Snyder, to be a clerk in his department. While working in this position he formed friendly relations with David Porter, who later as governor selected Shunk to be secretary of state.

While thus employed he studied law under Thomas Elder and was admitted to the bar in 1816. Shunk was soon made assistant, and then principal clerk of the House of Representatives. A few years later he became secretary of the Board of Canal Commissioners, and in 1838 he was chosen secretary of state by Governor

Porter. On retiring from that office in 1842 he moved to Pittsburgh where he practiced law.

Shunk would have probably lived secluded in Pittsburgh for the remaining six years of his life, but for the death of Henry A. Muhlenberg. Muhlenberg was the Democratic nominee for governor in 1844, and had the party well organized when he died suddenly on Sunday, August 11, 1844. Four days later the following appeared in a Harrisburg newspaper: "Public sentiment clearly points out Francis Rawn Shunk as the most judicious selection that can be made to supply the vacancy in the gubernatorial nomination."¹ The Democratic convention met at Harrisburg on Monday, September 2, 1844 to consider nominations for a new candidate. Their choice was Francis Rawn Shunk.

Shunk was elected governor on Tuesday, October 8, 1844 over the Whig candidate, General Markle. The official figures of the election were, Shunk (Dem.) 160,403. Markle (Whig) 156,120. LeMoyné (Abolition) 2,675.

Three years later Shunk was re-elected over James Irvin, who was the Whig candidate. The official figures of the election were, Shunk (Dem.) 146,081. Irvin (Whig) 128,148. The probable reason for fewer votes being cast in 1847 than in 1844 is because 1847 was an off year in national politics, while there was a national election in 1844, about one month after the state election. Shunk's governorship of Pennsylvania nearly parallels the Presidency of Polk.

On July 9, 1848, Governor Shunk resigned after a severe hemorrhage. On Thursday evening July 20, 1848, he died. He was buried at Trappe.

The period of his administration was marked by his sincere attempts to relieve the serious plight of the public treasury. Not only had the debt of the state reached the then staggering sum of approximately \$40,000,000,² much of which had been accumulated in the construction of canals and other public works, but also the revenues were insufficient to meet the regular obligations of the government. For a period of two years the interest on the state debt had not been paid, and the credit of the state was

¹ *The Enquirer & Signal* (Harrisburg, Pa.), August 15, 1844.

² *Pennsylvania Archives*, Fourth Series, VII, 11. Public debt, January 29, 1845, \$40,703,866.89.

seriously impaired. To this problem Shunk devoted much time, and at the time of his death the credit of the state was on a firm basis, and the interest on the debt had been paid, and the debt itself greatly reduced.

Governor Shunk was of the opinion that all branches of business within the reach of individual enterprise and responsibility, were more successfully prosecuted by individuals than by corporations, and this idea he carried out to the utmost of his ability. His first attack on corporations came on March 22, 1845 when he vetoed a bill granting special privileges to the Duncannon Iron Works of Perry county. In vetoing this bill Shunk was consistent with his argument concerning individual enterprise: "Furnaces, forges, rolling mills and nail factories, are found in all parts of our commonwealth, and are carrying on as active and thriving business, on the basis of individual enterprise, without exclusive privileges, by their industry, to the wealth and honor and credit of the State; and it would seem unfair to them to raise up a class of privileged corporations, sustained by aggregated wealth and discharged of individual liability, to compete with them in their praiseworthy exertions."³

During Shunk's governorship the Whig Senate tried to pass acts establishing new banks in Pennsylvania, but the governor opposed most of these attempts. According to his ideas there were two things necessary for a sound banking system: "First, a limitation of the banking capital to the amount which, after the late revulsion, had a legal existence; and secondly, a provision making bankers liable, as all other men are liable, to pay their just debts."⁴

The period of his administration included the Mexican War, to which Pennsylvania contributed more than its quota of arms and men. By July 15, 1846, 7,475 men had volunteered. President Polk requested Governor Shunk to send one regiment of ten companies to Pittsburgh, and to have them organized at Pittsburgh by December 15, 1846. In this regiment there were six companies from Philadelphia, one from Pottsville, one from Wilkes-Barre, and two from Pittsburgh. The Philadelphia volunteers were forced

³ *Ibid.*, VII, 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 148.

to walk 150 miles, due to the fact that the canals were frozen. The remaining distance was traveled by rail.

Concerning the incorporation of the Ocean, Delaware, and Philadelphia Telegraphic Company, Shunk said in his veto message that "the communication of intelligence by magnetic telegraph is a very late invention, and the extent of its application and interference with the general post office neither can be foreseen nor calculated."⁵ In refusing a charter to the Reading, Lebanon and Harrisburg Telegraphic Company on April 5, 1848, he used the same reasoning: "A little delay need not be deprecated. The developments now in progress will in a few years solve the mystery which as yet hangs over the subject."⁶

Had Shunk lived he might have gone much farther in public life. The following quotation is from a Democratic paper: "F. R. Shunk for President—The Perry County Democrat recommends Governor Shunk as the Democratic candidate for the Presidency in 1848, and the *Doylestown Democrat* endorses the recommendation—What a glorious nomination this would be to present to the Nation."⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*, VII, 248.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VII, 248.

⁷ *Bedford Gazette*, November 12, 1847.