

# PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' DEPARTMENT

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## PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS

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**O**NE of the chief defects in secondary school education in Pennsylvania has been the lack of emphasis on the teaching of Pennsylvania government, state and local, in the social studies curriculum. Its absence is attested by the blank areas in the mental equipment of the ordinary high school graduate and of the average college student in the field of government and politics, especially of the local variety. Whatever one's profession, a certain amount of sound knowledge in that field is necessary. This is true in the practice of responsible citizenship. The truth of the matter is that our Pennsylvania youth has not generally been well equipped to carry out its duties in state and local government, whatever its preparation may have been on the national level.

But this defect cannot be laid at the door of the secondary school teacher. For the most part he is blameless, encompassed as he is by a set of circumstances over which he has little control. The first of these is the fact that an overwhelming majority of high school civics and problems of democracy textbooks are written for the national market. The inevitable result of trying to write a text for forty-eight states is that the material on state and local government is flat, colorless and wholly superficial. While it is true that each state has a governor, a legislature and a judiciary, for purposes of real understanding of specific local problems that will lead later to intelligent participation, that is where similarity between states ends.

For while it is impossible to take up the ramifications of state taxation throughout the United States in high school classes, it is

possible to cover the fundamental features in a particular state. Generalizations covering a multitude of conditions are meaningless and positively harmful to immature students and are responsible to a great extent for the apathy and indifference so common in later life. The same holds even more true for local government. How can local government throughout the United States be given adequately in one unit of study? How much better to study the local government of one's own state so that the facts taught and discussed can be accurate, because a mass of exceptions are eliminated; interesting, because it is about something real and near to the student; and useful, because the student is going to be an active part of the system in a few years.

The colleges that train secondary teachers must also take a share of the blame for this condition of affairs. It is entirely probable that ninety per cent of all Pennsylvania social studies teachers have never had a course in Pennsylvania government while in college. Most of them had no opportunity, for it is never included as a required subject and very few colleges list it as an elective for future teachers. How can they be expected to teach these facts if they themselves are not well grounded? It should be required of every certified social studies teacher in Pennsylvania schools that he or she either have had such a course in college or get it within three years from the issuance of the certificate.

Deeper than this lies the direction of American philosophy of education during the past thirty years towards a national outlook in all fields. Applied to the field of social studies, it has these characteristics. First, it conceives of government and politics largely in terms of the happenings in Washington. While this tendency may have gained impetus from the increased vigor of the United States Office of Education, it stems largely from the overwhelming influence of a few nationally-minded schools of education in metropolitan universities, notably Columbia University and the University of Chicago, in American educational practice and procedure. This, in turn, is not a unique condition of affairs for in all walks of life we find a back-drop of national uniformity in thought and action.

The situation, however, must not be accepted without challenge when the results appear to have such adverse effects upon the citizenship of our Pennsylvania youth. If democratic education

is to stand up to its responsibilities, it must train citizens to know the fundamentals of our governmental system at all its levels, national, state, and local.

How can a more effective study of Pennsylvania state and local government lead to better citizenship among our young people? It will bring about more and better participation in the affairs of government. Given a thorough knowledge of Pennsylvania government and an idea of how it should work, the young citizen will vote and do it more intelligently. He will be happy, as he grows older, to run for office even at a sacrifice, and he will help to promote movements for civic improvement. He will do this because on a local level it is possible to tie together ideals of democracy and a working procedure in his own life. For all of us must realize that government in boroughs, cities, counties, townships and school districts still holds the greatest number of possibilities for the amateur in government. It is the intelligent amateur that will keep democracy in proper balance. This is not to say that the professional administrator and the professional politician are not important in our complicated process of democracy. But they need the restraint, the vigor and freshness of a continual stream of good, solid citizens who do not spend their entire life in the governmental process.

If it be suggested that Pennsylvania material might be too specific and minor for a general high school education, let us pause a moment to illustrate. Can it be possible that questions such as follow are not useful to, or understandable by our young hopefuls in that blessed span of years from twelve to eighteen? Is it not well for them to know about Pennsylvania such facts as, for example: the main offices in state, county, city, borough and township government; from what sources state and local taxes are derived; for what main purposes such taxes are ultimately spent; the party primary and election process; the steps in the administration of criminal justice; how state laws and local ordinances are passed; the relation of our local units to the Commonwealth and to national government; the work of building roads, handling relief, conserving health, educating the youth that actually goes on in *our* state; what defects exist in *our* governmental machinery and what can be done about them. These and other such problems cannot be discussed from a birds' eye view over the nation nor by recourse to glittering and inaccurate gen-

eralities. They can and must be understood in their local setting as Pennsylvania problems if our young people are to take hold and exercise an active citizenship once they are of age. It is not without cause that studies of non-voting have revealed that the ages from twenty-one to twenty-nine are one of the most lax in the exercise of the franchise.

Deeper understanding of local and state government will also do much to correct over-centralization on the part of the national government. Implemented as it is by a superior taxing power and trained personnel, it is fast gaining ascendancy over the other levels. One of the reasons always given for this movement is the inefficiency of the state and its local units. Too often there is adequate cause for this complaint, but it is not a compelling one. There are many examples of good government in Pennsylvania, and there are ways and means for further improvement if popular support is made possible through diligent education.

But there is still another reason to study Pennsylvania state and local government in our secondary schools. It is to further an appreciation for, and interest in the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. No state in the Union has such a diversity of politico-economic-social problems to be solved. No state has such a variety of races, industries, religions and culture patterns to be integrated and amalgamated. To a Pennsylvanian, born and bred, there is no state more beautiful, no place with such a rich historical background. The Commonwealth has ten million people in its sixty-seven counties, nine hundred boroughs, forty-eight cities, fifteen hundred townships, and twenty-five hundred school districts. The government of each one of these subdivisions is close to the lives of hundreds of people and should be important enough to be given proper attention in our schools. But this should not only apply to Pennsylvania's government, but also to her geography, history, industry, agriculture and all of her important human activities.

Fortunately, an emphasis on Pennsylvania in our secondary social science curricula has recently begun to assert itself. Text and supplementary material in Pennsylvania state and local government as well as in history, literature, geography and industry is now available. The Bureau of Instruction of the Department of Public Instruction can furnish teachers and administrators with a list of such material, modern and up-to-date, upon request.

Many high schools have already taken up the study of Pennsylvania government either in ninth grade civics or twelfth grade problems of democracy. It should be a "must" in every social science program. It will pay dividends in future citizenship.

## HOW DO PENNSYLVANIA TEACHERS WANT TO TEACH PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY?

By S. K. STEVENS

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**F**OR some years there has been a growing movement in Pennsylvania toward a greater emphasis upon the importance of teaching Pennsylvania history in the schools of the Commonwealth. At least two reasons have appeared for its support. A considerable number of people have advocated it on the grounds of what might be termed Pennsylvania patriotism. In other words, Pennsylvanians as a patriotic duty should know more about Pennsylvania, and this should begin with the schools. A strong support for this point of view has developed especially upon the part of non-educators. It is, beyond a doubt, the non-professional point of view on the matter, but one that seems reasonable to the average Pennsylvania citizen.

Another, and weightier reason for this development has been the growth of interest in local history and affairs and their national relationships upon the part of students of history and of contemporary social and political problems. There is accumulating evidence that the tendency to think only in terms of the nation, rather than the state or the community, has become a thing to be deplored. The resurgent nationalism which swept the United States in the days of the Spanish-American war and reached a peak in the patriotic excesses of the World War and post-World War era was not an altogether splendid thing.

One of its evils was an over concentration of attention upon national government and history. Today, professional historians, political scientists, sociologists and economists are beginning to re-emphasize the importance of the study of local conditions as a background for understanding national problems. It is beginning to be appreciated, for example, that the cause of good government

begins at home in the improvement of local politics. It is coming to be realized that the improvement of social and economic conditions is not to be achieved entirely by national legislation. They must be made the subject of more local and regional consideration with greater emphasis upon the peculiar problems of certain localities and regions. The Social Science Research Council has recognized the nature of the problem and is engaged in its consideration.

From this realization has come an increased support for the study of local history and conditions through the schools. The new social studies program for Pennsylvania, designed by the Department of Public Instruction, places emphasis upon major areas of human experience as the basis for a modern social studies program. It adopts likewise the view that the closer those areas of experience are to the present life of the pupil, the greater, relatively, will be their educational value. Certainly, such a program must rely heavily upon the study of local history in terms of the background of contemporary social, political and economic problems.

Recognizing that the problem of an increased use of local and state history was one of major importance to the historical interests of the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Historical Commission decided some time ago to undertake an approach to its solution. Acting upon the assumption that the best place to find out what teachers in the public schools thought about the use of state and local history was from the teachers themselves, a survey was prepared and mailed in December, 1937, to teachers of social studies in two hundred selected schools in Pennsylvania. The schools contacted were selected as being already distinguished for their secondary social studies program. Ninety-one of the two hundred teachers replied to the questionnaire. Not all answered the questions asked in such a fashion as to make possible an exact mathematical calculation as to the results. The views expressed, however, were so decisive as to make the survey of the utmost value in determining certain major conclusions as to what the teachers of Pennsylvania desire in the way of a state history program.

One of the most interesting revelations of the survey is the overwhelming endorsement by the teachers of a mandatory program for Pennsylvania history in the schools. Sixty-seven replies support affirmatively the question, should the study of Pennsyl-

vania history be mandatory upon the part of all pupils? But twenty-four replied in the negative. This would indicate that approximately two out of every three teachers feel that a study of Pennsylvania history is so important that it should be made a requirement in the school program.

Once this point is established, the next problem, of course, becomes that of determining the nature of the program to be offered. In the survey, teachers were offered a preference as to three types of Pennsylvania history program: (1) a single course on Pennsylvania history alone; (2) emphasis upon Pennsylvania contributions to our national economic, social and political development worked into the regular United States history course; (3) a special and separate course on "Pennsylvania in the Making of the Nation," emphasizing state history in its natural relationships.

Only ten persons gave the first alternative a first choice, with seventeen second, and forty-five, third. Support was overwhelming for the second type of program with sixty-four first choices and eleven second. The third approach won seventeen first places, with a striking total of fifty-seven for second choice. In short, Pennsylvania teachers obviously do not want to be mandated to teach a single course on Pennsylvania history as such. They prefer in overwhelming numbers to utilize state history in connection with the national interpretation of our history. Such a course would obviate the most general criticism of state history courses—that of provincialism. Pennsylvania teachers do not want provincialism. They do desire to use the history of their Commonwealth to show its important relationships to the development of the nation.

Several other results of the survey were interesting from the teachers' point of view. In response to a question as to the proportionate amount of total time devoted to social studies which should be expended upon Pennsylvania history and affairs, the general reaction indicated about one-fourth. This evidently was deemed sufficient to accomplish the results desired by those supporting the conclusions above.

One of the major portions of the survey attempted to determine the proper emphasis in presenting Pennsylvania history in the social studies program. Those replying were asked to express their preference for: (1) a purely chronological treatment; (2) a topical approach in terms of significant phases of Pennsylvania

history regardless of chronology, such as a study of the development of democracy in Pennsylvania; (3) a problem approach in terms of tracing back counter chronologically to historical origins present problems of Pennsylvania, such as the rise of trade unionism as a background for the present conflict of C.I.O. and A.F.L.

The proponents of chronology in history will gain little comfort from the resulting replies. But seven teachers gave this a first choice, with twenty giving it second place, while fifty-six relegated it to third place. On the other hand, thirty-nine voted first place to the second emphasis, with forty-one favoring the third counter-chronological approach. A total of forty-four second places for the topical method of emphasis gave it a somewhat predominant position over three in terms of total score. It is evident, therefore, that progressive social studies teachers are alive to the importance of the topical and problem approaches to history. There is little danger that they would willingly accept a mandatory chronological course in Pennsylvania history.

Another interesting problem touched upon by the survey was that of the extent to which the study of Pennsylvania history should treat present day governmental, social and economic problems. Teachers were given a choice of *very much*, *considerable*, *moderate* and *little* in expressing themselves on this point. Thirty-one voted for very much emphasis upon the present, with thirty-five supporting considerable. But twenty-three felt that only a moderate or very limited emphasis was justifiable. In short, Pennsylvania teachers would prefer to tackle the problems of contemporary history rather than to avoid them in favor of the story of colonial wars, labor and government, etc.

It is also evident from the results of the questionnaire that Pennsylvania teachers are more interested in the presentation of Pennsylvania contributions to the nation than in the study of purely local history and conditions. Asked to express a preference for certain suggested aids to the teaching of Pennsylvania history, articles and booklets dealing with purely local history received virtually no preference. On the other hand, booklets and materials dealing with the larger subject of Pennsylvania contributions were accepted by a large majority as being essential aids to such a program.

The survey further indicates that Pennsylvania teachers feel that the lack of suitable materials to assist in presenting the his-

tory of their Commonwealth constitutes the most serious obstacle to the successful introduction of such study into the school program. Existing county and state histories are in too many cases so bulky, expensive or unreliable as to make difficult the task of the teacher who seeks to introduce pupils to the story of Pennsylvania. Especially is this true in the important fields of social and economic development. Military history and Indian wars have received disproportionate attention.

The survey served a useful purpose in providing certain clues as to the best possible approach to the development of a Pennsylvania history program for the schools. It is entirely legitimate to suppose that this select sampling would be duplicated as to results were an effort made to contact a larger number of schools. The fact that the schools approached were among a select list and ranged from urban to rural gives further validity to the conclusions reached.

It seems fair to conclude from its results that Pennsylvania teachers are overwhelmingly in favor of the use of Pennsylvania history in the school program on at least the secondary level. It is further obvious that they prefer to integrate that history with the existing social studies program rather than to introduce a new course; that they prefer to use the problem and topical methods of approach and to emphasize strongly the nature of contemporary problems and their immediate background. All of these desires represent a most commendable approach to the problems of Pennsylvania history in the schools.

The challenge to the various agencies concerned with forwarding Pennsylvania history is obvious. There is a serious lack of materials and guides which will forward the use of Pennsylvania history in the schools. Most teachers are willing to go ahead if the tools are provided. Spade work can hardly be done without the spades, and these must be provided before much is to be realized in the use of state history in our school program.

The problem is not a simple one, however, and is not to be solved overnight. An approach to its solution from these major angles, if conducted over a sufficiently long period of time, may produce outstanding results. The coöperation of the public schools with the Pennsylvania Historical Association, the Federation of Historical Societies and the Historical Commission is solicited to that end.