

## *Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800-1860*

THE MOVEMENT toward free, tax-supported education at the beginning of the nineteenth century began in urban America. Early public schools in most cities were pauper schools designed to educate poor white children.<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia was no exception. However, according to the Pennsylvania school laws of 1802, 1809, 1812 and 1818, that established these schools, the Negro was legally entitled to receive tax-supported, free education. But, as Philadelphian John Jay Smith pointed out to Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831, "The law with us is nothing if it is not supported by public opinion. Slavery is abolished in Pennsylvania but . . . the people are imbued with the greatest prejudice against Negroes, and the magistrates don't feel strong enough to enforce the laws favorable to them."<sup>2</sup>

School officials suffered from this same uncertainty. Although legally entitled to free schooling, Negroes suffered discriminatory practices before the first public school was built. An examination of the lists of indigent school children who attended private schools between 1811-1816, and who were reimbursed through the use of tax funds, reveals that no Negroes received public funds for their education.<sup>3</sup> Arthur Donaldson, a Quaker teacher in a Negro private school, attacked this practice in 1813, but he was unsuccessful in his attempt to gain public support for the alleviation of the Negro's

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Boston had public education during the seventeenth century, but it was not until 1790 that the city's poor children were admitted to the schools. Joseph M. Wightman, *Annals of the Boston Primary School Committee* (Boston, 1860), 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. by Phillips Bradley (New York, 1945), II, 373.

<sup>3</sup> School Children Enumerations 1811-1816, *passim*; Enumeration of Taxable Citizens 1811-1812, *passim*, City of Philadelphia Archives.

plight.<sup>4</sup> The inability of Negroes to gain tax monies during this early period set a precedent which hindered later efforts at gaining admission to public schools.

Public education began in Philadelphia in 1818, bringing with it a new bureaucracy. The Philadelphia schools were organized into four sections—the First Section, the city proper; Second Section, Northern Liberties-Kensington; Third, Moyamensing—Southwark; and Fourth, Spring Garden. Each section elected by popular vote its own school directors, the more schools the more directors. These directors supervised the conduct of each schoolhouse through visiting committees. At the directors' discretion was the power to admit pupils, hire and fire teachers, order supplies and erect and establish schools under the direction of the controllers.<sup>5</sup>

The controllers were elected from among the directors, one controller for every six directors. To the controllers went the responsibility of determining the number of schools and fixing the expense of schools—hence the title “controllers.” Roberts Vaux, a Quaker philanthropist, was elected the first president of the controllers, a post he held until 1832.

Considering the practice of excluding Negroes from tax-supported forms of education before 1818, it was natural for the controllers to continue this practice in the newly organized pauper schools. However, the lack of tax-supported Negro schools did not go unnoticed by some local school authorities. As early as December 3, 1818, the directors of the First Section appointed The Reverend P. F. Mayers, Joseph Reed, and R. C. Wood “to enquire into the legality and expediency of providing for the free education of poor persons of colour in the principles of the Lancasterian System.”<sup>6</sup> This committee reported to the directors that “the benefits of the Law were intended for and ought to be extended equally to them [*Negroes*] as to the poor white children.”<sup>7</sup> The report became a matter of record in the minutes of the directors, but no action was recommended to the board of controllers. As a result, by 1820 forces

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Donaldson, *The Juvenile Magazine* No. 3 (Philadelphia, 1813), 24.

<sup>5</sup> *First Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1819), 1–12.

<sup>6</sup> Minute Book of the Directors of the First Section of the School District of Pennsylvania 1818–1826, 12, Philadelphia Board of Education, Kennedy Center.

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1800–1824, Mar. 30, 1820, Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

within the Philadelphia community challenged this evasion of responsibility and demanded action from the board of controllers. One historian, Roderick Ryon, who recently has written on the subject, claims that the controllers were too busy planning and establishing a Model School.<sup>8</sup> The minutes of the Board of Education for the years 1818–1821 bear out this contention.<sup>9</sup> To Vaux and other board members, the Model School was essential to establishing firmly a system of free, public education.

Meanwhile another issue arose which was to affect Negro schooling. In 1819 the proposed admission of Missouri as a slave state precipitated a national debate. With eleven free states and eleven slave states, Missouri would tip the scales of power between North and South. Representative James Tallmadge of New York offered a rider to the bill to admit Missouri, requiring Missouri's Constitution to contain a clause providing for the gradual abolition of slavery.<sup>10</sup> In Philadelphia during the autumn of 1819, Vaux joined the national movement to secure the amendment.<sup>11</sup> Vaux urged Pennsylvania to join the cause of freedom in the West. With several Philadelphia civic leaders he sponsored public meetings in November, supporting congressional opinion in favor of a free Missouri. He urged the Pennsylvania General Assembly to express state approval for this cause, and in December the proposal passed in both houses.<sup>12</sup>

By January, 1820, opinion prevalent in Philadelphia accepted compromise as a political necessity. Maine was to be admitted as a free state; Missouri, slave. Fearing a violent reaction to a contrary stand, the Quaker-dominated Abolition Society of Pennsylvania barely criticized this settlement, embittering Vaux and other dissatisfied members. Vaux's friend Congressman John Sergeant begged

<sup>8</sup> Roderick Ryon, "Roberts Vaux: A Biography of a Reformer" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1966), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the Controllers of the First School District of Pennsylvania, 1818–1821, *passim*, Philadelphia Board of Education, Office of the Superintendent.

<sup>10</sup> Richard H. Brown, *The Missouri Compromise: Political Statesmanship or Unwise Evasion?* (Boston, 1964), 5–15.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Waln to Roberts Vaux, Nov. 12, 1819, Vaux Papers, HSP; E. B. Washburne, *Sketch of Edward Coles, Second Governor of Illinois and of the Slavery Struggles of 1823–24* (Chicago, 1882), 253. See also John Sergeant to Roberts Vaux, Mar. 27, 1818; Thomas Clarkson to Roberts Vaux, Jan. 31, 1820; Samuel Emlen to Roberts Vaux, Feb. 19, 1821, Vaux Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Ryon, 95.

him to use his pen to encourage opposition to the appeasement of the slave interest, and Vaux persuaded Robert Walsh, a local editor, to publish a new newspaper, *The National Gazette and Literary Register*, to lead the opposition. The tenacious struggle waged over this issue caused a significant loss of membership in the Abolition Society.<sup>13</sup>

The decrease led to a shortage of funds for educational purposes. To overcome this handicap the Society attempted to gain money for segregated Negro education from the controllers. On March 2, 1820, a communication sent from the Abolition Society's three-man committee, led by William Wayne, to the board of controllers requested an interview in regard to the appropriation of funds for the education of poor colored children.<sup>14</sup> The board appointed Joseph Reed, Peter Keyser, J. B. Southerland and David Woelpper to meet with Wayne's committee.<sup>15</sup> Reporting to the Abolition Society on March 30, 1820, Wayne offered the opinion that "the controllers have never had the subject of the Education of the Coloured children before them, that the [Board of Controllers] Comm. considered the Law for public education to imbrace children of colour but the expediency of their Education at present was questioned. There had been considerable expenditure of money already in public education and fear existed of the consequence of an increase there of at the present time. They considered that our application should be made to the Directors within whose sections schools were wanted, that it belonged more properly to them in the first place."<sup>16</sup>

The unwillingness of the controllers to consider the matter can be understood by examining the temper of the times. Social disruption caused by the admission of Missouri as a state during the previous fall had not yet abated, the issue was still being widely discussed. Vaux knew what this issue had done to the Abolition Society and wanted to avoid the same divisive forces in education. He recognized that open support for public Negro education would involve the school system in the slavery issue and political questions involving the Negro which simply clouded reasoning on school ques-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Pennsylvania Abolition Society Minutes, 1800-1824, Mar. 30, 1820.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of Controllers, 1818-1821, Mar. 6, 1820.

<sup>16</sup> Pennsylvania Abolition Society Minutes, 1800-1824, Mar. 30, 1820.

tions. Vaux believed that "society" must be improved and reformed without reliance upon political means.<sup>17</sup>

Unwilling to let the matter rest, the Abolition Society directed William Wayne to apply for a meeting with the directors of the First Section. Delayed for nine months, the meeting finally convened on December 28, 1820. The school group explained that they could "fully appreciate the benevolent views of this society and discovered a disposition to represent the subject to their Board in a favorable light, but suggested some doubts of carrying into immediate effect the desirable object for want of suitable rooms in which to open schools."<sup>18</sup> On hearing this, Wayne committed the Abolition Society's school building, Clarkson Hall, for free and unlimited use by the directors "until more suitable facilities could be found."<sup>19</sup> The directors did not accept the offer, instead, they declared their intention to inform the controllers of the Abolition Society's generosity.

What followed placed Negro education and the Abolition Society in a bind. The controllers who administered the monies refused to consider the request because it was, according to them, the directors who had the responsibility of ruling on pupil applications to the schools. The directors, in turn, refused to act on the proposal because, according to them, it was the duty of the controllers to raise money for the schools, and it was obvious that more money would be needed to support Negro schools. The fact that numerous other petitions had been quickly expedited by the controllers—*e.g.*, those for the hiring of teachers, for establishing the Model School, and for renting school buildings—exposes this administrative red tape as a dodge.

That "acceptance of the plan was not resolved" by the December meeting was borne out on May 29, 1821, when the controllers sent word that "it is inexpedient to make appropriations for the education of children of colour that would operate in a partial manner only."<sup>20</sup> However, there were some encouraging signs. The board

<sup>17</sup> Roderick Ryon, "Moral Reform and Democratic Politics: The Dilemma of Roberts Vaux," *Quaker History*, CIX (1970), 3-14.

<sup>18</sup> Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage etc., VIII, Dec. 28, 1820, Abolition Society Papers.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 28, 1828.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes of Directors First Section 1818-1826, 79.

had passed a resolution at this same May 29 conference that directed the various assessors in the city to report to the controllers the number of colored children in their respective wards and districts. This report was to include all boys between the ages of six and fourteen and girls between the ages of five and fifteen.

Finally, on April 30, 1822, the directors announced that "it is expedient that a school or schools be established for the free instruction of children of indigent coloured people. . . ."<sup>21</sup> This announcement was acted upon by the controllers on July 9, 1822, and a school was opened in the old Presbyterian meetinghouse on Mary Street on September 6, 1822, with Henry A. Cooper utilizing the Lancasterian system to teach 199 pupils.<sup>22</sup> Why, after three years delay, were the doors of public education suddenly thrown open to *all* poor Philadelphians?

Numerous factors account for this change in policy. First, the public alarm sounded by the Missouri question had subsided. Peace between the North and South apparently had been secured through a compromise. Second, the public pauper schools of Philadelphia, open for three years, were functioning efficiently in the judgment of the controllers. However, the number of children in the schools had decreased greatly in 1822. Newspapers of the day called attention to the drop in enrollment and reported that only 2,969 pupils attended school during the year, 2,402 fewer than the previous year. The controllers claimed the cause of the decline was "the increase of manufacturers in Philadelphia and its vicinity."<sup>23</sup> However, on February 22, 1822, an anonymous writer to the *American Sentinel* disputed this. Claiming to have visited the schools during 1821, the writer said that "it is not possible for these schools to teach 5,369 children as the report indicated." The previous high figure was "put down at random for the purpose of keeping the cost of education within the maximum of \$4.00 for each child taught per year."<sup>24</sup> Friends of Roberts Vaux counseled him to refute these accusations so the public might know the truth. Vaux brought

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Ellis, *Lancasterian Schools of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1907), 56.

<sup>23</sup> *Fourth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Philadelphia Schools* (Philadelphia, 1822), 4-5; *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Mar. 4, 1822.

<sup>24</sup> Article entitled "Lancasterian," *American Sentinel and Mercantile Advertiser* (Philadelphia), Feb. 23, 1822.

the matter before the board of directors, who noted that "one means of increasing these enrollments was to include coloured children."<sup>25</sup>

A third factor in the advance for public education of the Negro was the popular belief that the Lancasterian system was a deterrent to crime and other social vices. This claim was publicized by Benjamin Shaw in 1818 during his campaign on behalf of the Lancasterian system.<sup>26</sup> A report of his printed in the *Aurora General Advertiser* concluded: "It is confidently stated by the London Committee that among the thousands educated by this mode [*Lancasterian System*] in England, no scholar has been convicted of a crime."<sup>27</sup> Incidents in the winter of 1821-1833 prompted the controllers to try the application of this innovative system.

Poor Negroes like poor whites had always been involved in crime but, either because of stricter control or because Negroes were fewer in number, they had never attracted special attention as a class more vicious than whites. Beginning on November 23, 1821, however, and continuing until February 18, 1822, six accounts of brutal robberies appeared in the newspapers.<sup>28</sup> Entitled "Daring Outrage,"<sup>29</sup> "Street Robberies,"<sup>30</sup> and "Beware of Foot Pads,"<sup>31</sup> the articles singled out the Negro as the culprit. In the opening session of 1822 an aroused State Assembly asserted "that the number of crimes within the few past years, had increased among the people of colour, in a greater proportion than the ordinary increase of their population. . . ." <sup>32</sup> Roberts Vaux, who was also an eminent criminologist, claimed that the rampant crime of the 1820's stemmed

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of Directors First Section, 1818-1826, 136; John Binns to Roberts Vaux, Feb. 23, 1822, Vaux Papers. The clipping from the *American Sentinel* was enclosed with this letter and is preserved in the Vaux Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Shaw, *Brief Exposition of the Principles and Details of the Lancasterian System of Education* (Philadelphia, 1817), 15. The reason given for a lack of crime by Lancasterian pupils was that "The order of the school, the organization of the classes, the obedience inculcated, the influence imperceptibly operating on the mind, to induce order and regularity, give to this mode of teaching an advantage over all others." See also *Aurora General Advertiser*, May 29, 1817.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Edward R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery—Servitude—Freedom 1836-1861* (Washington, 1911), 157.

<sup>29</sup> *The Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), Feb. 11, 18, 1822.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1821, Feb. 14, 1822.

<sup>31</sup> *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia), Nov. 23, 30, 1821.

<sup>32</sup> George E. Reed, *Pennsylvania Archives, Fourth Series* (Harrisburg, 1900), V, 386.

from the failure of Pennsylvania to offer universal education which accented "religion and morality."<sup>33</sup> Assured by Benjamin Shaw that the Lancasterian system was successful with the Negroes of Haiti, Vaux moved to recommend the expediency of educating Negro children, "since all must admit that education is the most effective human means which can be resorted to for improving the conditions of this class of persons, and thus to relieve society of the evils which it suffers. . . ."<sup>34</sup> And so, after three years, Negroes were admitted on a segregated basis to the Philadelphia public schools.

Available evidence points to the Quaker-dominated Abolition Society as the only group that petitioned the board of controllers for Negro schools.<sup>35</sup> Their efforts resulted in little or no action by the board until conditions such as a drop in school enrollment, the settlement of the Missouri question, and the increase in the crime rate among Negroes made the admission of Negroes into public education more favorably regarded by the controllers. Hence, Negroes gained admission to public education not because of any humanitarian feeling, although some may have existed, but rather because conditions prevalent in urban America made necessary their education.

The opening of the city's first Negro public school, the Mary Street School, passed without incident, and by the end of 1823, 237 boys and girls were enrolled in it.<sup>36</sup> In 1826 the Gaskill Street School for Negro girls was begun and the Mary Street School became a boys' school. In neither case were the schools educationally comparable to the white schools of the day. Both were nothing

<sup>33</sup> Roberts Vaux, *Notices of the Original and Successive Effects to Improve the Discipline of the Prisons at Philadelphia and to Reform the Criminal Code of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1826), 127.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Shaw to Roberts Vaux, Aug. 4, 1818, Vaux Papers; *Fifth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1823), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Negro activity centered around the formation of their own educational organization, the Augustine Society. Formed in 1818 at the Bethel Church by Negro men led by Prince Saunders, this society was to conduct a school during the early years of 1820. The school failed when Prince Saunders left Philadelphia. *An Address, Delivered at Bethel Church Philadelphia on the 30th of September 1818 before the Pennsylvania Augustine Society for the Education of People of Colour by Prince Saunders* (Philadelphia, 1818); *History of the Association of Friends for the Instruction of Adult Colored Persons in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia 1890), 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Fifth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1823), 4; Ellis, 56.



more than rooms which had been converted for school purposes.<sup>37</sup> Further, the progress of the Negro pupils in both schools during 1826-1827 was far below that of white children in the city. Of 324 pupils on the roll, only 64 had progressed to the elementary stages of the alphabet. Also, only 12 per cent studied the more difficult skill of writing. This reflected the least accomplishment in any Philadelphia public school.<sup>38</sup> Since these records were printed in the board of controllers' report for 1827, it must be assumed that board members were aware of the poor academic performance in the Negro schools. They certainly were aware of the poor facilities in both of these schools, since they made special note that the Negroes were "at present crowded in the inconvenient apartments of Mary and Gaskill Streets."<sup>39</sup> But the controllers displayed no concern for alleviating these conditions. In fact, their reports made a dismal situation seem rosy. Compare Vaux's report of 1827 with evidence of the poor academic performance of the pupils and the neglected physical condition of the school: "The proficiency of the colored children in the branches they are taught, and the orderly habits which they acquire by attendance at school, promise the happiest results for society."<sup>40</sup>

The deficiencies in their education did not go unnoticed by the Negro community. In 1827, two Philadelphia Negro women assailed the public schools for the unequal treatment of Negroes. Not impressed with the board's reports, they condemned the public schools as "so few and imperfect, ought others to wonder, that not many [Negroes] are fitted to take a respectable stand in society."<sup>41</sup> The women went on to decry the caliber of teachers assigned to Negro schools: "We suspect, it is unnecessary to mention, that much depends upon the teacher as well as the pupil. We are so skeptical, that we cannot believe that almost anyone is qualified to keep a school for our children. Enemies may declaim upon their dullness and stupidity, but we would respectfully inquire, have they not

<sup>37</sup> Franklin D. Edmunds, *Public School Buildings of Philadelphia 1845-1852* (Philadelphia, 1915), 1-5. The Lombard Street building was the second public school building constructed by the controllers (1820).

<sup>38</sup> *Ninth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1827), 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Tenth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1828), 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ninth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *The African Observer* (Philadelphia), July 18, 1827, 122.

had dull and stupid Instructors; who, if placed in any other than a coloured school, would hardly be considered earning their salt; but we must be silent, as any one who possesses a few qualifications is, in general estimation fit to keep a school for us. . . . Conscious of the unequal advantages enjoyed by our children, we feel indignant against those who are continually vituperating us for the ignorance and degradation of our people.”<sup>42</sup>

As might be suspected from these telling criticisms, these women also had a plan to correct the poor condition of Negro schools. “Let our children and youth be but convinced, that as much is expected from them as from other boys of the same standing; let the elementary branches most essential to the business of afterlife, be well fixed in their minds; let public communities and trustees visit their respective schools more frequently, and examine more thoroughly, and see that teachers do not keep their pupils unprofitably employed, or exercised upon the same rules in arithmetic and grammar . . . for a *show-off* against visitation day.”<sup>43</sup>

Though a copy of this comment can be found in the Vaux papers, it is not clear whether these criticisms were read by the controllers. However, not long after, the Negro schools of the city were combined and improved. A new school built on Locust Street permitted the controllers to transfer all of the white pupils from the Lombard Street schoolhouse on March 20, 1828. Negro children were moved from their two inadequate schoolrooms into the Lombard Street School. This initiated a practice in the Philadelphia school system of giving Negro children the older school facilities while reserving the newer structures for white children.<sup>44</sup> The Lombard Street schoolhouse, now eight years old, was built for the express purpose of educating children in the Lancasterian system. It contained two large rooms—one on the first floor for boys, one on the second floor, for girls. Each was planned for use by 500 pupils. In 1829, the school

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–123.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>44</sup> *Tenth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools*, 6. Philadelphia schools continued this practice as late as 1958, when Northeast High School was rebuilt and occupied by white children while the old building was renamed Edison High School. When the new Northeast High School opened, it had taken with it the school trophies and monies, while leaving the now predominately Negro school an old building.

was repainted inside and out; permission was also granted to purchase world and Pennsylvania maps for use in the school.<sup>45</sup>

The white teachers for the Lombard Street School during most of the antebellum period were James M. Bird and Maria C. Hutton.<sup>46</sup> Bird was considered the principal of the school, although the boys and girls school usually operated independently. Both were interested in their pupils and were generally accepted by the black community they served. Bird's sympathies were usually with the Negro, and on one occasion he gained considerable favor by permitting black voting-rights petitioners to enter his school for signatures from his pupils.<sup>47</sup> He was qualified as a teacher of music and produced a high level of musical accomplishment in Lombard pupils.<sup>48</sup> The distaff side was noted for its ornamental needlework and the neatness of the pupils' copy books.<sup>49</sup> Miss Hutton also organized and conducted a special Sabbath school in the Lombard Street building for the children who could not attend weekday classes.<sup>50</sup> Impressed with Miss Hutton's arguments for such a school, the controllers deviated from the usual policy of refusing requests for the use of public buildings for Sabbath schools, "provided the said school shall be under the management of Miss Hutton and the Superintendent and the regular visiting committee of that Public School."<sup>51</sup>

Writing in 1833, the board of controllers made special note that they "fully approved of the Lancasterian system as administered by James M. Bird in the Lombard Street School."<sup>52</sup> The Negro school was noted as a school where "everything must be done according to rule."<sup>53</sup> Philadelphia's Lancasterian system was designed by John L. Rhee, principal of the Model School. Approved by the board and printed as *A Pocket Manual of the Lancasterian*

<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the Directors of Public Schools, 1827-1841 33, 35, Philadelphia Board of Education, Kennedy Center.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> *Christian Recorder*, June 23, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin C. Bacon, *Colored School Statistics* (Philadelphia, 1853), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Bacon, 1; Joseph Lancaster, Memorandums of Visits to Public Schools in Philadelphia, May 3, 1838, Lancaster Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>50</sup> Minutes of the Directors, 1827-1831, 21-24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24. Elizabeth Eastburn, teacher of the Locust Street School, was denied her request to use her school room for a Sabbath School.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>53</sup> See "Colored People of Philadelphia No. VI," *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 28, 1853.

*System* this book was to be read and followed by all teachers in the Philadelphia schools.<sup>54</sup> The manual spelled out in detail the use of redemption tickets for rewarding the services of monitors or for good behavior in pupils.

From this it can be surmised that the Lombard Street School for Negroes during Bird's principalship conducted its educational program with emphasis on repetition and practice. The classroom had three classes, each subdivided into three groups. These nine groups moved simultaneously in production line rotation; from semicircles for recitation, to desks for writing, and so forth. Emphasis was on control and mass production.<sup>55</sup>

An example of the rudimentary nature of the subject matter is shown by the five classes of arithmetic taught:

1st Class—making of figures and reading numbers in order

2nd Class—addition

3rd Class—subtraction

4th Class—multiplication

5th Class—division both long and short<sup>56</sup>

Even this limited program did not continue to function efficiently at the Lombard Street School. On December 16, 1833, James M. Bird was appointed principal of a new white school in the southeast section of the city, a move detrimental to the Negro school.<sup>57</sup> Despite the continued service by Maria C. Hutton the school fell into a sorry state after Bird's departure. The inability of the Lombard Street School to attract and keep male teachers loomed as the problem. Between 1834 and 1839 no less than six principal-teachers served the school.<sup>58</sup> When the faculty was enlarged in 1838 there

<sup>54</sup> John L. Rhees, *A Pocket Manual of the Lancasterian System* (Philadelphia, 1827).

<sup>55</sup> Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1868), *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> Rhees, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the Directors 1827-1841, 127.

<sup>58</sup> An examination of the Directors' Minutes for 1827-1841 reveals the following teachers at the Lombard School:

1833	James W. Bird	Became principal of a white school, 1834
1834	William Stratton	Resigned, 1834
1835	Thomas Eastman	Resigned, 1837
1838	Wilson H. Pile	Became principal of a white school, 1838
1838	Henry Smith	Died, 1839
1839	Daniel Fuller	Resigned, 1840
1840	James W. Bird	Returned to school and remained until he retired in 1864.

also occurred a turnover in assistant teachers. As one observer on the Philadelphia scene noted, most of Lombard Street School's male teachers were "just new out" in teaching.<sup>59</sup> Of the principals who left Lombard Street School three resigned from teaching, one died, and two became principals of white schools. Faculties of the white schools of the same period remained comparatively stable.<sup>60</sup>

Another sign of neglect was the continuance of the Lancasterian system of education in the Lombard Street School until 1839. The school law of 1836 had eliminated pauper schools and made the use of the system optional; however, Thomas Dunlap, the second president of the board of controllers (1831-1840), disliked the Lancasterian Schools because they had become synonymous with pauper schools. His distaste for this system was widely known. Calling the Lancasterian system "Schools where a baby of five was all-sufficient teacher of the baby of four," Dunlap went on to criticize the Lancasterian teacher who "l lounged through two or three hours in the morning and as many in the afternoon gazing down upon the intellectual pandemonium beneath his rostrum . . . not infrequently bring[ing] his rattan in as 'thirdsman' between the stout baby and the cowardly baby monitor."<sup>61</sup> He concluded that, "The only true argument ever advanced in its favor was its cheapness. It was cheap, very cheap! Sand and rattan were its chief outlay and on every principle sand and rattan were its chief returns."<sup>62</sup>

Dunlap's order of priority for removal of Lancasterian schools favored whites. By 1838 in Philadelphia, every public school for whites had numerous assistant teachers to aid in breaking the school into classes, while Lombard Street School still had only one teacher for 199 boys and two teachers for 251 girls.<sup>63</sup> On July 3, 1838, \$125 was allocated by the directors of the First Section for partitions to

<sup>59</sup> Lancaster, Memorandums, May 3, 1838.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* The following public schools kept the same principal over the same span: Model School—John L. Rhees; Moyamensing—Peter McGowen; Northern Liberties—John M. Coleman; Southeastern—James W. Bird (after 1833-1840); Northeastern—Wilson H. Pile (after 1838); Locust Street—William S. Cleavenger.

<sup>61</sup> Franklin S. Edmonds, *History of the Central High School* (Philadelphia, 1902), 24.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Twentieth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1838), 4, 20.

divide the two large rooms into six classrooms.<sup>64</sup> When the school opened in September, 1838, the Lombard Street faculty grew to six teachers for 458 pupils in self-contained individual classrooms.<sup>65</sup>

However, the elimination of the Lancasterian system came too late. The continual teacher turnover had caused a breakdown in morale and discipline, and attendance decreased. The visiting committee noted the need for remedial action. Hearing of the condition of the school in March, 1840, the directors of the First Section then formed a committee to investigate "the condition of the Lombard Street Schools, the qualifications of the teachers therein and generally all matters connected therewith."<sup>66</sup> After intense study the committee decided "that it be recommended to the Board of Controllers to lay down the coloured school, as at present constituted *provided* there can be established in its place one primary school for boys and one for girls. . . . Resolved that authority be granted the 1st Section (should the schools contemplated in the first resolution be established) to open the Lombard St. building as a school for white children . . . and authorize the changing of two of the primary schools for white children to those of coloured and that they be recommended to erect on the Lombard Street lot a building capable of accommodating two [white] primary schools."<sup>67</sup>

In effect this recommendation would close the only Negro grammar school (equivalent to grades four to eight) in the city while allowing Negroes only a primary school (equivalent to grades one to three) education. The reaction of the Negro community was immediate. On June 30, 1840, the directors of the First Section were petitioned by James Forten, a representative of the school community who lived at 92 Lombard Street, not to close the school.<sup>68</sup> Forten was chosen by the Negroes of the school to defend their cause since he was the most highly respected black in Philadelphia. On July 1, 1840, the Abolition Society conferred with a special Negro committee headed by Forten on the best measures to be taken to

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the Directors, 1827-1841, 268.

<sup>65</sup> *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1839), 5, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes of the Directors, 1827-1841, 334.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

keep the school open.<sup>69</sup> After a free interchange of sentiment the committee pledged to do everything in its power to induce parents to send their children to the school. Both white and Negro agreed that this would convince the directors of black interest in education—thus keeping open the Negro school. Sensing that the Negroes were anxious to pursue this course, the Abolition Society initially felt it unnecessary to adopt further measures.<sup>70</sup> However, on July 28, 1840, the Society did add its own petition. It also informed the directors of the Forten committee's efforts to increase school attendance. Satisfied, the directors passed, on the same day, a resolution to keep the Lombard Street School unchanged until the end of the year.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, the directors of the First Section requested the controllers for former principal James M. Bird to be transferred back to the Lombard Street School. This request was granted in hopes that Bird could solve the problem within the school.<sup>72</sup>

For the Abolition Society the issue was not completely closed. Discussions followed on August 8, 1840. Incensed by a report that the directors believed "no reasonable hopes can be entertained of another school of the kind being established, perhaps in many years, "the Society vowed "not to have the Lombard Street School closed." For this reason, they decided to "visit meetings of different colored people, and impress upon them the seriousness of the subject and the danger of their losing the privileges of a Public School for their children unless prompt measures are taken by them to increase the number of scholars in the building."<sup>73</sup>

A second action by the Abolition Society came as a surprise considering the shortage of Negro schools in Philadelphia. In December of 1840 it recommended that Clarkson Day School be discontinued

<sup>69</sup> William Buck, "Extracts of the MSS Collection of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society" (1876), July 1, 1840, Abolition Society Papers.

<sup>70</sup> Pennsylvania Abolition Society Committee for Improvement of Colored People, Minutes 1837-1853, 30, *ibid.* The Pennsylvania Abolition Society felt that the Negro had to increase the number of black students at Lombard to "manifest more decidedly, that they appreciate the good intentions of the Directors in continuing the school." The Negro not only had to endure unequal schools, but also should be thankful for them.

<sup>71</sup> Minutes of the Directors, 1827-1841, 349-350. The record of votes by the directors was twelve in favor of keeping the Lombard Street School open and eight against.

<sup>72</sup> Minutes of the Directors, 1827-1841, 346.

<sup>73</sup> William Buck, "Extracts," July 1, 1840; Pennsylvania Abolition Society Committee for Improvement, 1837-1853, 30.

so it would not interfere "with the well being of the Public Schools. . . ." <sup>74</sup> In June, 1841, this was accomplished. The campaign to retain the lone Negro grammar public school in Philadelphia was over. The Negro, with the help of the Abolition Society, had organized enough support from within its community to keep the school open.

Despite this success, other facets of the Negro public education picture showed a deteriorating situation. Every additional educational opportunity added to the white schools' advantages and that caused the Negro to fall further behind. For instance, the first public infant school opened in 1832 was for white children between the ages of four and six; no similar institution was begun for Negroes until 1841. <sup>75</sup> Although the Infant School Society of Philadelphia did provide for an infant school for Negroes during this period, there was neglect of colored children by the controllers of public education. <sup>76</sup> Perhaps the greatest educational opportunity denied the Negro occurred with the institution of a public high school in 1837. Not accepted as candidates for admission, Negroes terminated their public education at the grammar school level. <sup>77</sup> Educational progress through broadening the curriculum aided white students and handicapped the Negroes.

Construction of schools for Negroes lagged behind population increases; so, too, did Negro pupil enrollment. When the Lombard Street School operated under the leadership of James M. Bird in 1829, there were 552 Negroes attending public school in a total public school population of 4,297. <sup>78</sup> Despite the opening of the Roberts Vaux Primary School in 1833, there were only 590 pupils attending Negro public schools in 1839. <sup>79</sup> This figure, when placed alongside the total enrollment of 18,794, reveals the depths to which

<sup>74</sup> Buck, "Extract," Dec. 15, 1840.

<sup>75</sup> *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1833), 6. "The establishment of an Infant Model School, [established] upon a moderate scale, in the school house in Chester Street . . . was instantly filled. . . ." Also see, Benjamin C. Bacon, *Statistics of the Colored People of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1856), 4.

<sup>76</sup> Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color* (Philadelphia, 1838), 29.

<sup>77</sup> *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools* (Philadelphia, 1837), 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools*, 5-6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*



Negro education had sunk. In 1829, 14 per cent of the total public school population was Negro. By 1839 that figure had slipped to 3 per cent.<sup>80</sup>

Negro public education reflects W. E. B. DuBois' contention that "the tide had set against the Negro strongly, and the whole period from 1820 to 1840 became a time of retrogression for the mass of the race, and of discountenance and repression from the whites."<sup>81</sup> To DuBois the responsibility for such a turn of events could be traced to at least five social developments. First, the Industrial Revolution changed the manner of life of the old "port" cities; second, the rise of the abolitionists and the slavery controversy increased hostility toward the free Negro; third, foreign immigration rapidly increased; fourth, the free Negro and fugitive slave populations increased in urban centers, especially in Philadelphia; fifth, the slave rebellions of 1822 and 1831 added to the fears of whites.

DuBois pointed out that racial animosity developed from these trends and resulted in Philadelphia's race riots of 1828, 1832, 1834, 1837 and 1842.<sup>82</sup> The effect of these riots upon the attitude of Negroes toward public education was significant. During the last of these riots on August 1, 1842, whites attacked Negroes who were parading in honor of West Indies Emancipation Day. Of particular interest to the white attackers was Robert Purvis, militant leader of the all-Negro Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia. His efforts in the underground railroad and his reputation as a fighter for Negro rights made him the target of the mob. Influenced by his connections with New England Garrisonian Abolitionists, Purvis had been one of the few Philadelphia Negroes who favored desegregation of the public schools. So vicious were the attacks upon Purvis that he moved his family to Byberry in the northeast section of the city.

In his new locale Purvis directed his energies to the desegregation

<sup>80</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (New York, 1899), 46-53.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>82</sup> An extensive computerized study of the Negro population during this period is now underway at the University of Pennsylvania. Early findings indicate a direct connection between urbanization, industrialization, and immigration and the increased depressed state of the free Negro population of Philadelphia during the 1830's and 40's. For the first findings of this study, see Theodore Hershberg, "Slavery and the Northern City: The Case of Antebellum Black Philadelphia" (unpublished paper, conference on the History of the Peoples of Philadelphia, Temple University, 1971); Dubois, 25-26.

movement. He wrote the tax collectors of the township that "my rights as a man and a parent have been grossly outraged" in denying him the equal "benefits of the school system."<sup>83</sup> "I shall resist this tax," and resist he did. Laying the robbery of school rights at the door of the "miserable serviles to the slave power the Directors of the Public Schools of the Township," Purvis was told by one of the pious Quaker directors, "with sanctifying grace . . . , that a school in the village of Mechanicsville was appropriated for 'thine'."<sup>84</sup> To Purvis this "miserable shanty was so flimsy and ridiculous a sham" that for them to consider it adequate was an insult. Purvis called for Negroes in Philadelphia to rally to the cause of integrated schools. His advice went unheard or unheeded for its advocate was ten miles from the Philadelphia Negro community.<sup>85</sup>

Purvis was not the only one to quit the city during the 1842 riots. Entering the private homes of Negroes on Fifth and Sixth Streets around the Lombard Street School, whites routed the inhabitants. One reads of hundreds chased from the city during the riot, most of whom never returned.<sup>86</sup> Quakers, considered by the Negroes as friends, stood aloof from racial problems in the city because of their abhorrence of violence. The Negro faced his white oppressors alone. James Forten, who was the Philadelphia Negro community's most successful spokesman with white leaders, died that same year. Where could the Negro turn for help? Purvis and

<sup>83</sup> *The Liberator*, Dec. 16, 1853.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* Whether Purvis paid his taxes or not cannot be verified. The available tax records for Byberry Township are listed only to 1853. The city consolidation of 1854 forced a change in the system of collection and the records for 1854-1860 are not available. Information found in the City Archives, City Hall, Philadelphia.

<sup>85</sup> In 1848, when Garrisonian abolitionist William Wells Brown visited Philadelphia, he was welcomed by Purvis but not by the Philadelphia Negro community. He found "the doors of all the churches, colored and white closed against bleeding humanity, except the Big and Little Wesley churches . . . shame upon the hypocritical religion of the colored man which will prompt him to shut his door against a brother slave. . . ." Brown, not welcome in Philadelphia, did lecture in Penn's Manor, Newtown, and Byberry. *The Liberator*, Sept. 1, 1848.

<sup>86</sup> Nicholas B. Wainwright, *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871* (Philadelphia, 1967), Aug. 10, 1842, 135. Fisher reported the findings of the Grand Jury after the riot was over: "To crown the whole . . . a temperance hall erected by blacks in Moyamensing, on the grounds that it produced excitement . . . was torn down by the commissioners. A greater outrage than the riot itself." See also DuBois, 32.

his connections with Boston abolitionists was gone, Forten dead, Quakers inactive, and Philadelphia whites in no mood to listen to Negro complaints. More and more, Philadelphia Negroes came to view racial solidarity and self-help as the means to oppose the inequities in the city.

In education this meant severing white ties and providing for education of Negroes by Negro teachers. To accomplish this, Negroes with the aid of Quakers moved the Institute for Colored Youth from its suburban location to a new building at Seventh and Lombard, the center of the Negro community, in 1852. Curriculum changed from emphasis on the practical to emphasis on the academic. Robert L. Reason of New York's integrated Central College, a leading Negro educator of the period, became the new principal. The school's purpose was to educate Negro teachers for the Negro community. Although only seven graduated during the decade of the 50's, it represented a substantial effort in Philadelphia to further the ideology of Negro self-help. But, the antebellum Philadelphia school directors hired none of the seven graduates for the city's public schools.<sup>87</sup>

Within the private realm of education the trend toward Negro teachers for Negro schools was forcefully exhibited. Elizabeth Middleton, a white woman of average education and rather imposing physique, had opened a school on Lombard, above Seventh Street in the fall of 1853.<sup>88</sup> Many Negro parents allowed their children to attend this school because other schools were not available. Enjoying her relationship with the blacks and being ostracized by the whites, Miss Middleton began to worship at Bethel Church. Parishioners reacted unfavorably and determined to "have her turned out."<sup>89</sup> Distrust of whites led to demands for isolation from

<sup>87</sup> *Objects and Regulations of the Institute for Colored Youth with a List of Officers and Students and the Annual Report of the Board of Managers for the year 1860* (Philadelphia, 1860), *passim*. Graduates in the 1850's were: J. Ewing Glasgow, 1856; Jacob C. White, Jr., 1857\*; Samuel G. Gould, 1858; Octavius V. Catto, 1858\*; Martha A. Farbeaux 1858\*; Mary E. Ayres, 1858; and George B. Roberts, 1859. (\*Taught later at the Institute.)

<sup>88</sup> Daniel A. Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville, Tenn., 1888), 115-117. Payne, an A.M.E. Bishop, supported Miss Middleton's cause but was unsuccessful because of a lack of cooperation from the pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mother Bethel. See also Bacon, *Colored School Statistics* (1853), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Payne, 116.

all whites, even those who confessed a willingness to give aid. Insulted in class and elsewhere and faced with parental disapproval and decreased attendance, Miss Middleton found it expedient to close her school by the end of the year.<sup>90</sup>

The demand for Negro teachers increased after passage of the amended state School Law of 1854. The law had three major provisions for Negroes—first, it legalized segregation of Negroes into separate schools if twenty or more Negroes were able to attend school; second, communities that provided separate schools were not required to admit Negroes into white schools; third, Negro separate schools need stay open only four months a year.<sup>91</sup> This law, like the disenfranchisement, was protested by black leaders during the 1850's but to no avail.<sup>92</sup> In general, it had the effect of creating more all-Negro schools, thus providing more teaching opportunities for blacks. In Philadelphia this prompted the first petition to the school directors for a black teacher in 1856. Further efforts to have Negroes hired as teachers became an important part of the black community's educational demands in post-Civil War Philadelphia.<sup>93</sup>

The experience of Negroes attending public schools in antebellum Philadelphia must be described, at the very least, as frustrating and humiliating. Clearly, Philadelphia Negroes faced delay in efforts to gain admission to public schools, and, when finally admitted, Negro schools were segregated. High teacher turnover, refusal of the directors to improve physical facilities, and efforts by whites to close down the only Negro grammar school in the city caused the Negro to distrust the white school directors. After the intense racism of the 1830's and the riot of 1842, Negroes turned to their own institutions and schools for help. The resulting demands by Philadelphia Negroes centered on hiring Negro teachers for the separate Negro public schools of the city. Post-Civil War efforts in Philadelphia, by Negroes like Octavius V. Catto and Jacob C.

<sup>90</sup> Bacon, *Statistics of the Colored People of Philadelphia* (1856), 8.

<sup>91</sup> *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1854), 622-625.

<sup>92</sup> Purvis, *passim*; *A Memorial to the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth by the Colored Citizens of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1854), *passim*.

<sup>93</sup> *Proceedings of the State Equal Rights Convention of the Colored People of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1865), 20.

White, Jr., both teachers themselves, would result in eventually accomplishing this goal. However, the interest in Negro self-help within the Philadelphia community often obscured and handicapped efforts at school desegregation. It is not surprising that the United States Bureau of Education reported at the conclusion of the nineteenth century that "only in the city of Philadelphia did the Negro accept segregation 'by common consent' even after 1900."<sup>94</sup>

*Philadelphia*

HARRY C. SILCOX

<sup>94</sup> U. S. Bureau of Education, *Negro Education, A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States* (Bulletin #38, 1916, Washington, D. C., 1917), II, 688.