THE LOG COLLEGE OF THE REVEREND JOHN MCNILLIAN, BUILT IN 1780, NOW IN CANONSBURG.

[From a photograph in the possession of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania]
A century ago a revolution was in progress in the United States. It was a revolution as fraught with meaning for the everyday life of the average person of 1933 as the political revolutions of 1776 and 1787. The social institution that has received ever since a larger proportion of the conscious attention of men, women, and children than any other was taking form—the public-school system. It is the institution that has absorbed, directly and indirectly, a larger share of the national income than any other. The public-school system with its ideal of universal education as a panacea for social ills is still generally taken for granted, although it is not improbable that the current criticism of the tremendous burden of expense may mark an epoch in its development. It is generally forgotten that one hundred years ago the idea of providing an equal opportunity for the education of every child at the expense of the state was regarded by many as a radical and dangerous innovation tending to social "leveling"—the current term is communism. The idea was not new but in the second quarter of the

1 Read at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on May 23, 1933. The author is assistant professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh. Ed.
last century the issue was joined, the battles were fought, and what may be called the modern theory—the "new deal"—prevailed.

The history of Pennsylvania furnishes the best opportunity to see clearly the issues and the stages of development of this controversy. The second constitution of Pennsylvania, that of 1790, authorized the legislature to provide for the establishment of schools throughout the commonwealth, “in such manner that the poor may be taught gratis.” A social philosophy is contained in that clause. It shows appreciation of the desirability of universal education but an implicit denial of the democratic function of the state. The poor we have always with us, charity is necessary; we should furnish them a minimum of food and clothing, shelter in poorhouses, and the rudiments of education in pauper schools. Let them be duly grateful and humble, conscious of their subordinate status in society.

For four and one-half decades the legislature of the commonwealth perpetuated this theory officially. In 1802 a law was passed with the title, "An Act to provide for the education of poor children gratis." In 1804 a new law was called, "An Act to provide for the more effectual education of the children of the poor gratis." A law of 1809 bore a similar title. A new day began to dawn in 1824 with a law to provide "more effectually for the education of the poor gratis, and for laying the foundation of a general system of education throughout the Commonwealth." This law was not carried into effect and was soon repealed. It is not within the province of this paper to trace the final development of the democratic ideal in educational legislation to its culmination in the act of 1834 entitled "An Act to establish a general system of education by common schools."

The passage of this act and especially the provision for local option, in that each school district was to vote on the acceptance or rejection of the system, initiated a new flood of argument. Wickersham, the pioneer historian of education in Pennsylvania, says that "no other question was ever debated so generally in Pennsylvania, or with the same warmth,

2 Article 7, section 1.
with the same determination, and, it may be added, with the same bitterness, as the question of free schools." The system met with most favor in the northern counties and "was comparatively well received in the counties west of the Alleghanies," where the population was more homogeneous—economically, socially, religiously, and racially—and "a diversity in wealth had not yet bred distinctions of class." In Allegheny County, twenty-five districts voted to accept the system, two voted to reject it, and two made no returns. Thaddeus Stevens championed in the legislature the cause of free education, and the law was not repealed. The last hope of the ultra-conservatives was dispelled by the supreme court of Pennsylvania, which decided that "while the Constitution imperatively demanded the establishment of schools in which the poor should be taught gratuitously, it did not forbid the establishment of those in which all children, rich and poor alike, should be so taught."

During the period of this bitter controversy and momentous decision in Pennsylvania, the other states, especially those in the North, generally with considerable difficulty and friction, laid the foundations for that great American institution, the public schools. It is the ultimate purpose of this paper to examine a specific and perhaps typical example of educational experience during this period of beginnings. A rural specimen is the more nearly typical because in the generation before the Civil War the majority of the population lived in the country or in the village and was educated in the ungraded, one-room school. But before proceeding to the analysis the writer deems it not improper to justify to his fellow members of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania his selection of material dealing with a community separated from Pennsylvania by political mischance, although actually in every natural sense a part of western Pennsylvania and even of the Pittsburgh district: Jefferson County, Ohio, of which Steubenville is the county seat.

All persons interested in local and state history have heard reiterated the complaint that Pennsylvania, more than almost any other state, has grossly neglected the intellectual and emotional opportunities afforded by her glorious history. Accepting this as an approximation of truth, it may be suggested that of all the proper fields neglected, the one most

neglected, and that one particularly pertinent to western Pennsylvania, is that of the expansion of Pennsylvania and her influence on the regions to the west. General histories make much of the expansion of New England and the far-flung political and cultural dominion of Virginia, but of the expansion of Pennsylvania, little or nothing. Even in the development of that "Western Pennsylvania Irredenta," that politico-geographical monstrosity, the West Virginia Panhandle, and in the influences involved in the creation of the state of West Virginia, the possible claims of Pennsylvania have been somewhat neglected. Northern Ohio is credited to New England and southern Ohio to Virginia; yet in 1850, when the census first takes account of nativity, 200,634 of the residents of Ohio were natives of Pennsylvania, as compared with 85,762 of Virginia, and only 66,032 of all New England. The biographical data for the middle eastern counties of Ohio give the impression that the community leaders generally were sons of Pennsylvania.

A few examples will illustrate the particularly close and mutual association of Jefferson County with western Pennsylvania. The site of Steubenville was owned in part by James Ross, a prominent lawyer and political leader of Allegheny and Washington counties, Pennsylvania, and in part by Bezaleel Wells, described as a son of the man who built the first frame house in Washington County, Pennsylvania. Ross and Wells laid out the town of Steubenville. The instance of Edwin M. Stanton, who might be described as of Pittsburgh and Steubenville, is well known to all. Alexander Martin, the first president of West Virginia University, and later of De Pauw University, taught school in Brush Creek Township, Jefferson County, in 1844, graduated from Allegheny College in 1848, was admitted to the Pittsburgh Synod, and taught Greek in Allegheny College from 1855 to 1864. His brother, James Martin, bought a farm in Jefferson County, Ohio, from the United States in the eighteen thirties; he moved to Logan's Ferry, Pennsylvania, in the eighteen forties, where he operated a stone quarry and coal mine; soon after the war he retired to a twenty-acre farm on

5 United States Census, 1850, p. xxxvi.

6 History of the Upper Ohio Valley, vol. 2, passim (Madison, Wis., 1890).

7 History of the Upper Ohio Valley, 2: 341.
Mt. Lebanon near Pittsburgh, where he lived until his death in 1896. Instances of the human interrelation of western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio may be multiplied indefinitely.

One of the earliest settlements west of the Ohio River was at the mouth of Yellow Creek, near Wellsville, Ohio. Less than ten miles up from the river lies a region that, because of its hilly character and stony, rather thin soil, did not attract the first comers to permanent settlement; but in the first three decades of the nineteenth century it was occupied by settlers who came almost entirely from western Pennsylvania or from Scotland. The original political organization was Saline Township, Columbiana County; in 1832 it was reorganized as Brush Creek Township, Jefferson County. The settlers were an industrious people and found that, after the strenuous labor of clearing the unbroken forest, they could obtain a good living by raising wheat and cattle. They found a market in the towns along the Ohio River; and the old residents still recall traditions of annual trips to the great metropolis, Pittsburgh, in the days before the railroad. These journeys were financed, with something over, by the animals driven, or the produce carried in wagons, over the long road to the great city. The produce, generally butter and eggs, sometimes included knitted goods and other simple products of home manufacture in the winter months. The community progressed until near the Civil War, when soil exhaustion and the competition of western wheat and cattle brought the decline that has been the fate of so many similar communities in eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. The population of Brush Creek Township in 1840 was 757; in 1860, 623. The construction of an improved road in 1929 has somewhat brightened the complexion of the community, but the Baldassaris, the Letinskys, and the Gruscheskys are now coming to occupy the homesteads of the Clarkes, Dallases, Kerrs, McIntoshes, Mackenzies, Roses, and Russells.

The original settlers were a literate and socially-minded folk who regarded the institutions of religion and education as universal essentials of human life. The early years have left little trace of educational experience; but for School District No. 2 of Brush Creek Township, from its reorganization in 1830 until 1867, there exists a continuous
record of educational, economic, and social data, compiled by a series of faithful secretaries.  

On September 15, 1830, the inhabitants of the district met and elected officers, "and unanimously voted a tax sufficient to build a school house twenty feet square, of hewn logs, shingle roof, stone chimney, and with door, windows and floors as usual." The building was erected by the inhabitants, it is said, in one day. It has been described as follows:

The house was but eighteen feet square, with a low, rough ceiling, unwhitened and unadorned with the least hint at art or luxury. There were six small nine-light windows, near enough to the ground to permit the children to feast their curious eyes on the traveler who at very long interims passed that way... Along two of the sides of this room, with one edge fastened to the wall, ran the writing desks, fronted by long benches of oak wood without a back... A huge chimney fronted and gaped at the master, with an iron bar for its upper lip.

Whether the building was eighteen feet square or twenty feet square it was surely none too large. The total enrollment in several winter terms was more than seventy and the average attendance more than forty. It is easy to calculate that on average days the maximum floor space per pupil was less than ten square feet. The master would hardly have room to swing his birch. The building was warmed by a wood fire, which for several years burned in the open fireplace. In 1841 a wood stove was procured, and in 1849 another stove was purchased for eight dollars and ten cents. The latter may have been a coal stove as there is an item of one dollar's worth of brick for the chimney; but the first record of the purchase of coal was in 1858. In 1849 the directors "entered into to [sic] an agreement with Joshua Clark to put a roof on the school house in district No 2 and to put new barge boards [barge-boards] on and to box the eve in good workman like manner, said Joshua Clark furnishing all the materials, for which he is to receive

8 The remainder of this paper, except as otherwise indicated, is based on this manuscript record, which is in the possession of the author. Brush Creek Township had an earlier log schoolhouse built in 1814. History of the Upper Ohio Valley, 2:402.

9 Alexander Clark, The Old Log School House, 12 (Philadelphia, 1861). This rare book was written by the son of Samuel Clark, the first clerk of district no. 2 and a teacher both in this building and in the earlier one of 1814. See History of the Upper Ohio Valley, 2:401.
Aside from these minor alterations and repairs there was little change in the building until it was torn down in 1874 to be replaced by a frame building. With slight allowance for differences in detail, look at the picture of the Log College in the possession of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and you will see the old schoolhouse of Brush Creek Township.¹⁰

Educational finance was a small but rather complex matter. In the early years certain fines were turned into the school fund, but for the period generally there were four sources of revenue—local taxation, contributions, the common school fund received through the county treasurer, and the income from section 16. The first tax schedule (1830) contained the names of thirty-six “residents” who owned in the aggregate 1,791 acres of land assessed at $2,296. Chattel property totaled $2,032. Adding the land of eight non-residents and applying a rate of ten mills, “made the sum total of the duplicate at about fifty-three dollars.” There was some confusion in the original tax list and some holders of chattel property “had escaped the eye of the Assessor,” and, as the clerk notes in the records in language very familiar to the modern taxpayer, “there had been much inequality in the appraisement.” In a list of thirty-nine taxables of 1843, only the local magnate owed a school tax of more than one dollar, while poor John Householder owed only one cent and eight mills. The revenues were always small and occasionally there was resort to private contributions, a practice much more common in earlier years before any regular system of school finance had been provided. In January, 1844, a time when many agricultural areas in the United States were near the bottom of the depression following the panic of 1837, the wood and the money both ran out. Seventeen of the patrons signed an agreement “to pay . . . our proportion of the wood bill, for the quarters school now being kept . . . in proportion to the time by us respectfully [sic] sent to said school.” A similar arrangement was made at the beginning of the next term. The wood for the three months’ term, which had cost twelve dollars in 1841, cost ten dollars in 1843, and eight dollars in 1844. Subscription lists were also made to guarantee salaries and to repair and furnish the

¹⁰ This picture is reproduced opposite p. 163.
schoolhouse. The "treasurer of section 16" provided a small but regular sum for the district budget. The records show only the amounts for the early years when they varied from about eight to nineteen dollars annually. The annual budget from 1830 to 1852 averaged scarcely one hundred dollars. With the increase in length of term and rising salaries it was considerably larger in the fifties and sixties. The customary bond of the district treasurer in the early period seems to have been one hundred dollars.

The school year was divided into a winter term, usually beginning in the first half of December, and a summer term beginning in May. In the period from 1844 to 1866, the summer term varied in length from two to more than four months, apparently according to the condition of the funds. The winter term was of three months until 1853 when it was increased to three and one-half months, and in 1854 it was extended to four months. The teacher in the winter term was, until 1860, invariably a man; the summer teacher was usually, although by no means invariably, a woman. In the winter the school was designed primarily for the older youth, especially the men, aged twelve to twenty; consequently the superior intellectual as well as disciplinary capacity of the male teacher was essential. Children of all ages were enrolled, but the younger were often unable to walk the miles through the snows or storms of winter, and when present, it is said, customarily recited their "a-b, ab," to one of the older pupils. It is a reasonable inference that the summer school was regarded as a sort of combination kindergarten, day nursery, and girls' seminary. The men, aged about twelve and upwards, would all be required to labor in the season of seed time, cultivation, and harvest. In this district the assumption of the intellectual superiority of the male was laid aside in 1860 for from that time until the end of the record in 1867 women taught both summer and winter terms. The theory that the war alone caused the change is in this case somewhat weakened by the fact that the first employment of a woman teacher for winter occurred just two weeks after the secession of South Carolina. Possibly the news of the secession reached the community just in time to turn the balance in favor of her election.

The first record of a teacher's contract is dated December 10, 1838, and is as follows:
At a meeting of the school directors held at the house of William Kerr, Samuel Clark Jr. having exhibited a certificate from the school examiners of this county, it was agreed to employ him to teach school three months, teaching five days each week, and not less than six hours each day, and twenty four days to be reckoned a month; for which he is to receive eighteen dollars a month. School to commence on the 24th of this month.

This agreement illustrates the general character of the fifty-four contracts included in this record. Only one, and that the first summer contract (1840), seems to indicate that the practice of "boarding round" occurred in that community. Probably the practice was not as common as is often assumed, unless possibly in the earliest stages of frontier society. It seems reasonable to believe that school directors then were as well aware as many of them are now of the desirability of patronizing home talent. A large majority of the approximately sixty terms for which data are available were taught by resident teachers. The Clarks had the best of it. Samuel Clark, Jr., taught the winter terms that began in 1838, 1839, 1842, 1846, 1847, 1850, 1852, and no doubt several terms prior to 1838. But there were also Hugh Clark, J. L. Clark, George D. Clark, and Catherine Clark. William Kerr, Samuel C. Kerr, and Leah B. Kerr were responsible for no small part of the education of the Brush Creek Township youth.

There is possibly no current subject in which there is a more extensive interest or on which there are a greater number of authorities than that of the salaries of school teachers. Prior to the Civil War, lacking professional organization, minimum salary laws, and other adjuncts, the teacher candidate made his bargain with the directors as best he could. The salaries in the second district no doubt depended on the prices of wheat; they maintained a striking harmony with the ups and downs of agricultural prosperity generally in that period. No exact data are furnished before 1838, but it seems quite certain that the eighteen dollars a month for the term beginning in December of that year was more than the salary for the preceding winter term. The salary for 1839 was also eighteen dollars. In other words, the depression beginning in 1837 had not yet struck Brush Creek Township with full force. But it was in the years following 1839 that this community, in common with nearly all of the older agricultural areas of the United States, North and South, lay in the doldrums, wondering, no doubt, when if
ever prosperity was coming round the corner. In the second district, from 1840 to 1851, salaries ranged from thirteen to seventeen dollars a month in the winter term. The same superior teacher who got eighteen dollars in 1838 and 1839 taught for seventeen dollars in 1842 and for sixteen in 1846 and 1847. The Mexican War and the discovery of gold in California were about to initiate the next "new era," but this schedule of teachers' salaries shows no response until 1852, when Samuel Clark finally got back to his eighteen dollars of thirteen years before. Prosperity had returned, matching the prosperity of the United States as a whole. The great business boom of the fifties had come to Brush Creek. People went wild. In 1853 a teacher hired for eighteen dollars committed the inconceivable act of breaking his contract, and a new man had to be paid twenty dollars. The rise continued, with a two-dollar increase in 1855 and another in 1856; and in December, 1857, the teacher who had taught the preceding term was given a sixteen and one-half per cent increase, raising the salary to the fabulous sum of twenty-eight dollars a month. The panic of 1857 was then months old but the wheat crop of that year went off at a good figure and money was still plentiful. Salaries reacted in the following year and reached a low of nineteen dollars in December, 1860; but the beginning of that term marked a new thing—a girl teaching the winter term. The new competition seems to have overcome the stimulating effects of war, as another low was reached at seventeen dollars and fifty cents a month for the term 1863–64; but the same female was reëlected for the first winter after the war at twenty-four dollars and in the second and third winters after the war females received twenty-five dollars a month.

Before 1860, the discrimination against women was not limited to their relegation to the summer term. They taught the summer-term schools from 1844 to 1852 for the average salary of seven dollars and fifty cents a month, while the winter males for the same period received an average of sixteen dollars. Men also taught the summer terms, from 1853 to 1857, at an average of twenty dollars. In the war period and after there is a definite tendency to diminish the spread between the salaries of males and females.

These teachers would appear to have earned their modest compensation. The average enrollment in the winter term in the period for
which reports are included, 1839–53, was sixty. The average daily attendance for the same period was thirty-three. The average enrollment in summer for about the same period was forty-seven but the average daily attendance was only twenty-two.

The standard curriculum of the period in the winter term was spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic, at the beginning, to which was soon added English grammar; and apparently geography also was standard after about 1845. Samuel Clark, who in 1839 certified that bookkeeping was included in his offering, reported in 1846 and 1847 the most elaborate curriculum recorded during the period: “Alphabet, Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, Geography, Algebra.”

This is the narrative of the educational practices of one community, but in its essentials so far as they have been presented, it is the story of the educational practices of a very large proportion of communities in the United States at some stage of their development.