Education in Washington County

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I

When the pioneers came to Utah they brought with them the attitudes toward education that existed in the localities from which they came. However, their attitudes were often influenced by the economic, social and political conditions that were present when decisions concerning education were made.

Many parents were in favor of as much formal education for their children as possible. Others actively worked against "book learning" and any taxation proposed to support it.

Many of the first generation pioneers came with a craft or skill and some had a formal education. These people generally wanted their children to have at least a primary schooling that would prepare them to read, write, do arithmetic, and master their church related materials. However, it soon became evident that most, if not all, of the second generation was going to be engaged in subsistence agriculture in order to survive. Much of this burden fell to the women and children because the men were often engaged in missionary work or church related public works or service. Many of these women hoped for a better lot for their children.

In 1851, the Territorial Legislature created the office of Superintendent of Schools in order to promote centralization of school policy and curriculum. In 1854 the Territory Legislature authorized school districts to levy taxes on property in each district. There were 226 schools with about 13,000 students and 300 teachers. Various lengths of terms.

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This tax money was to provide for buildings and furnishing. The law made no provision for teacher's salaries and was subject to a vote by school trustees. In 1866 this law was revised and authorized school trustees to assess a tax up to one-fourth per cent without a vote of property owners and with a 2/3rds vote at a school meeting they could increase the tax up to 3%. And they could levy a one percent per annum tax to pay teachers and buy supplies. This taxing power was seldom used in the early schools.

During the 1850's and 1860's most elementary schools in Utah were organized in connection with their respective Mormon wards and were held in buildings used for church, school and community activities. Each ward constituted a school district with its control under local trustees appointed by the Mormon bishop. They were quasi-public schools that used Mormon scriptures along with whatever secular materials that were available. They were supported by tuition and later with some local taxes. Schools varied widely in offerings, quality, teaching and length of term.

After it become clear that Utah was going to be governed by the United States, it became Mormon Church policy to try to get into the Union as a state. As a result of this policy, secular institutions were created and staffed

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by the same people who ran and controlled the church. This arrangement applied to education and in many other areas up until relatively recent times and still has some significance today.

After 1869 with the coming of the railroad and an influx of non-Mormon residents, more emphasis was put on public schools organized into districts and financed to some extent by public money. In addition, several Christian churches began to establish private elementary and secondary schools aimed at providing an acceptable education for their children and at the same time try to "Christianize" and/or "Americanize" Utah's Mormon children. The first of these schools was at Marks established by the Episcopal Church in 1867. This school grew into several different arrangements and became Rowland Hall School For Girls and later became co-educational. The Catholics have maintained one or more schools since 1875. Judge Memorial is still functioning today. In 1888 there were 99 denominational schools in Utah only 6 of these were Mormon. In 1894, there were 113 denominational schools, of these 26 were Mormon, 33 Congregational, 33 Presbyterian, 21 Methodist, and others numbered among Baptist, Lutherans, Episcopalian, and Catholic. Today there are home-schools operated by

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individual parents that number in the hundreds. There are also commercial schools of various kinds operating in the state today. Charter schools are .....by the most recent ....

The Deseret News reported in 1850 that Elder Woodruff had arrived in Salt Lake City with two tons of school books. The pattern in each Mormon community was to build a public building that could serve as a church, school and community meeting place. Brigham Young and the Church leaders generally promoted and supported the idea of having their children go to school. However, Brigham Young and John Taylor both opposed free public schools supported by taxation. Brigham maintained that it was the parent's obligation to arrange and pay for their children's schooling and if they were too poor to do it, they should rely on private charity.

Insert B.Y. quote.

The argument wasn't so much over whether the children were going to have a formal education but it was over how they were going to get it. The issue over free, tax-supported elementary schools gradually became a test of Mormon willingness to become more "Americanized" or of "the World", as the term was used. Getting rid of polygamy and the establishment of the two party system also fell into this category.

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By the 1870's it was apparent that district schools were becoming more secular and Protestant mission schools were attracting a significant number of Mormon children. In response, the Mormon Church organized a church run secondary school system which operated, more or less, until 1933.

The University of Deseret (which become the University of Utah) was established in 1850. It sputtered along for about three years and became almost dormant until 1869. It became apparent that there was not an effective secondary school system to prepare students for college training. Attempts were made by the Mormon Church to solve this problem by establishing church academies through the territory.

The great depression of the 1930's hurt the church financially and the public schools had become more acceptable since the released-time seminary program was introduced about 1912. Students attending Mormon seminaries were given credit toward graduation until 1981 when the courts prohibited the practice.

By the late 1800's, the federal laws against polygamy had effectively dis-enfranchised enough Mormon votes to allow non-Mormons to get enough influence in the territorial legislature and the

Salt Lake City government to pass an act establishing free public schools throughout the territory. This was done in 1890.

By 1910, 58% of 16-17 year-old students in Utah were enrolled in high school. By 1940, 86% and by 1991, 90.3 %. After 1890, Utah's efforts toward becoming a state tended to minimize local circumstances and influence. National trends became more evident in the make-up and functioning of Utah's school system. As schools were now tax supported, efforts to consolidate, centralize, and equalize became the rule and Utah became a leader in such movements.

In 1946-47, leaders in education worked with business leaders and civic organizations to propose amendments to the Utah Constitution, which when passed, consolidated the various sources of funding for public education. Their aim was to have a state wide standard which would provide an equal opportunity for students in all districts while distributing the financial burden more equitably among the taxpayers.

Despite the constant rhetoric concerning the federal government's involvement in the public

schools, Utah has been the recipient of considerable federal money. The Smith-Lever Act of 1862 financed the "land grant" colleges (USU). The federal government contributed to a library in territorial times and during the depression of the 30's. Considerable federal money was pumped into building schools as make-work projects to prime the economy. During WWII ROTC programs and research grants aided local schools. The G.I. Bill financed many veterans through school after the war and with the advent of Sputnik in 1957, demands for better science led to the NDEA and there has been a federal pressure in local schools in various forms since. Civil rights issues, handicapped students, teacher training, foreign languages, advanced placement programs, female equality and many more programs are a regular part of local schools and are financed by the federal government. When Utah became a state, it received four sections in every township for educational use and (????studying) of Federal employed bring federal money into the district.

Utah has unique problems. Education in Utah consumes about ½ of the state's revenue, more than any other state. Still, Utah has the lowest expenditure per student in the nation. And has the highest pupil-per-teacher ratio in the nation. Even so, Utah leads the

nation in the percentage of the population over 25 years of age who has graduated from High School. Teacher's salaries are low compared to the rest of the nation, 39th in 92. Just last week, Utah was ranked high in preparing students for college.

Now for the local story.

Erastus Snow, the leader of the Dixie or Cotton Mission that established St. George had quite a different view toward education than did Brigham Young. In 1872, he "said that [the] state owed an education to its citizens and parents and to every child that is born into the world." He promoted government support of schools and pushed for a teacher training school. When he reached the encampment in what was to become St. George in 1861, he had a Board of Trustees appointed with a mandate to establish and administer a school system. The trustees had a large tent set up on camp for school.

As soon as the city was surveyed and the pioneers had moved to their individual lots, the city was divided into four wards. For the first two years, the schools in these four districts were held in make-shift arrangement, tents, willow sheds, wagon boxes, private homes, etc. In 1863, work was begun on four school buildings. The buildings were made of adobe on

rock foundations. Each school had its own Board of Trustees and the buildings were used for church and community meetings. Teachers were poorly paid and were required to supply most of their own needs as far as supplies and janitorial services were concerned. In some cases, they had to collect their pay from the parents. There was no grading system in their schools. All of the students met in the same room and progress was measured by the mastery of books and requirements.

Between 1862 and 1890, there were some private schools in Washington County. Some were specialized in areas such as music, drama, advanced subjects, etc.

In 1869, the superintendent of schools for Washington County reported that "many of the districts are paying teachers by taxation, and think it an improvement upon the system of teachers collecting their pay directly from parents of the scholars."

Throughout the territory a movement for the support of free, tax supported, public schools began to change people's attitude toward public education. Utah lagged behind most of its neighbors in the matter of tax support for public schools.

In 1871, the bishops in St. George voted to establish a high school to be known as the

St. George Academy. It lasted one year.

George Spencer taught advanced classes in the basement of the St. George Hall and Richard Horne taught classes in the Gardner's Club Hall.

In the early 1870's an attempt was made to consolidate the four districts for advanced training and Henry Schulz was hired to teach the school. After being here a short time, he demanded $30.00 per month or he would leave. After his contract was up, he left.

In 1878, Eugene Schoppman was hired as instructor and he taught until 1883 after which Albert Whitelock took over from 1883-1884.

Erastus Snow was pushing for music and drama teachers and he had a son going on a mission to a Spanish peaking area so he arranged for James G. Bleak to teach Spanish along with other advanced sources. In 1885, E. Snow pushed for a Seminary Academy or Theological School.

In 1877, my great grandfather, William Ellis Jones, started a school in Gunlock with 28 pupils. The district paid him $28.50. After four weeks, Dudley Leavitt withdrew his 18 children from the school and this ended the term.

In 1886, school was held in Hebron for four

months and the teacher was paid $20.00 per month. The appropriation for the district was $56.00.

In 1889, Washington County reported that 51 percent of its students were attending school. That same year Salt Lake district reported 33% of its school age children were attending public schools. As mentioned earlier, in 1890, the territorial legislature passed an act establishing tax-supported free public schools.

It provided that "every district school shall be open for the admission, free of charge, of all children over six and under 18 living in the district. It also provided that "every parent, guardian or other person having control of any child between ten and fourteen years of age, shall be required to send such child to a public, district or private school in the district, in which he resides, at least sixteen weeks in each school year..."

In 1888, the LDS Church send Nephi Savage to St. George to teach in the St. George Stake Academy to be held in the basement of the Tabernacle. He taught there for five years after which the Academy was discontinued. It was at this time the Federal Government was threatening to confiscate Church property. (Public schools pulled out other ????) Savage taught for the school district for the next three years.

The Tabernacle basement proved to be a poor place to hold school. The lack of light, hear and

poor ventilation made it undesirable for a place to learn. Willie Jarvis was attending school there on April 5, 1881. He was killed by lightening while playing on the Tabernacle steps during recess time. The upper floor of the Court House and the St. George Hall were used for educational purposes.

The Presbyterian Church opened a mission school in St. George in 1880. Some form of this school continued until 1944. The last 31 years was under the direction of Miss Louisa Conklin.

(See page 5)

By the 1890's, it was obvious that there were too many students for the available facilities. There were about 500 students using buildings designed to serve about 200. The four ward school districts were consolidated into one and a school board for the entire city was organized.

1970-77 Melvin P. Jarvis (??) 10 new teachers, new plicies