HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN ST. GEORGE

Paper read by Josephine J. Miles at a meeting of the Daughters of the Pioneers
St. George Chapter, Sunday, January 28th, 1923

It has always been true of the Latter-day Saints' communities that the Church and school houses grew up together. In the history of St. George, the school house was first.

We find that efforts were made to give the children educational opportunities, even in the old camp. There was a large tent used for public gatherings, and in it Jabez Woodward taught school two weeks, when, because of a flood in Tonaquint, which washed away the homes of a good many people, the big tent had to be utilized for their shelter from the continuous rains, and education in the old camp was cut short.

The first school that was really taught in St. George city was by Sister Orpha Everett. She first taught in a tent on her lot. Afterwards she taught in a willow school house where the First Ward school house was built in very early times about 1868, it being the first school house erected. In the center of this willow school house was a flat rock which supported a post in the middle of the room. This rock was used for a desk when the pupils wished to write, or rather when they had writing materials. Dezzie Fawcett, Dezzie Perkins, Emma and Martha Truman had been to school in Salt Lake City and had pen and ink, and were therefore considered aristocrats.

Sister Everett taught again in her tent, perhaps while the school house was being built, and in the school house after its completion. Later she taught in the Second Ward house and in her own home – teaching a number of years altogether.

In the winter of 1864-65, Bro. James G. Bleak taught in a room of Jesse W. Crosby's home—that and the Bentley home built by Orson Pratt, were among the very first good houses built in St. George. Later, in 1866, Bro. Bleak taught in the basement of the Social Hall, which was the first public building. He also taught along in the 70's.

Mr. Burgon taught in the First Ward school house in 1866, and for several winters.

Other teachers in the early years were Judge McCullough, Orson Pratt Jr., and a Mr. Kessler. Orson Pratt Jr., taught in the Bentley home. George Spencer taught in the basement of the Social Hall in 1867-68.

Brother Samuel Miles was a veteran teacher, having taught in Nauvoo when he was quite young. He taught also several years in and about Salt Lake City, and after coming to Dixie, in Pine Valley and

Santa Clara. He was also a teacher in the First Ward, for two or three terms, assisted by Sister Eleanor Woodbury (Jarvis).

Aunt Mariette Calkins taught in a wagon box and in a tent on her lot. Brother Thomas Cottam claims to be a graduate of her school—having gone out of the other end of the wagon box. Other teachers about this time were Sarah Clark (Crosby), Cornelia Lytle (Snow), and San Giovanni Guelo-elmo, who taught in the basement of the Social Hall.

Brother John Macfarlane taught in the Whitmore House and in the Fourth Ward about 1872 or 1873. He also taught in the First Ward.

There were no facilities for large schools and some of the teachers were contemporaries, and some were private schools no doubt. The school year consisted of about two or three months in the middle of winter—young people had many other things to do, besides go to school. Text books and school equipment were conspicuous by their absence, mostly.

Joseph Orton taught a night school, for those too busy to attend during the day. Sister Liston taught in the First Ward in 1869, and Barbara Mathis and Annie McQuarrie in the Second Ward, about 1876. Mary Mansfield (Bentley) taught in the First Ward.

In the winter of 1869-70, Richard Horne taught in the basement of the Social Hall. During the winter, the Fourth Ward School house was finished, and the school removed there. Caddie Ivins McKean assisted during the first term and Eleanor Woodbury (Jarvis) during the second term. Richard Horne taught again in the Fourth Ward in 1870-71; in 1871-72 in the Third Ward. Susa Young Gates was an assistant. The coming of Richard Horne to St. George marked a period of great improvement in method. Text books were becoming more common and he did much in getting them more uniform. He also instituted better disciplinary methods. The students were known by numbers, and this was continued for some time after, as was the first Friday afternoon program for the entertainment and development of the students.

Other teachers about this time, or a little later, were Seth A. Pymm, David LeBaron, Zina Clinton. A Mr. Schultz taught in upper part of the Social Hall in 1874 and also in the Third Ward. President. E. H. Snow went to his school there. A Mr. Peck taught in the upper part of the Social Hall in 1875. Martha Cox, a veteran teacher, taught in the Third and Fourth Wards about this time. Other teachers were a Mrs. Purse, Retta Cox and Ruth Fawcett. Sister Emily Spencer taught in the First Ward. It was there I learned the States and their capitals by changing them.

We would begin at "Washington, Olympia: and repeated twice, and go chanting across the continent to "Maine, Augusta". We also learned the Great Lakes and the rivers in the same manner. It was customary, too, to chant the multiplication tables, and we learned these things very thoroughly. This chanting was also useful in helping to drown the other noise in the room.

Our beloved president, Sister Annie W. Romney, a veteran teacher, had been to the University of Utah, a rare achievement in those days, and she taught a splendid school in the First Ward in 1877, and also on the Romney lot, later. Her discipline was good—her praise and smile, a triumph. It was there we learned the foundational principles of grammar, which I have never forgotten, from "Pinnero's" text. We memorized many rules, the meaning of which became useful later. It was years after before "two negatives make an affirmative," meant anything to me. I shall have to allude to my own experience, because as some one lately remarked, it is the only experience I've had.

Sister Orpha Everett was my first teacher in about 1872 or 1873. The school was held in the west room of her home. There were no conveniences of any kind—a four legged, long stool furnished seats There were no desks, blackboards, charts or maps. We had few books, but were just past the stage of having an old Book of Mormon, or other Church book for a reader. I was the proud possessor of the corner of an old slate on which I was fond of drawing pictures, a crime in those days, by some unknown process of reasoning. It was considered much more instructive to sit and gaze on the bare desolate adobe walls, than to have wreaths of smoke curling gloriously from our chimneys, so there was always some little spy calling out: "Teacher, she's drawing pictures." They had to be promptly erased by the primitive method which, no doubt, you all remember. Thus, perhaps, many an artist was nipped in the bud.

When our supply of slate pencils became exhausted, a hike to the foot hills north, followed, where by expert selection, the soft pieces of slate rock, suitable, were secured. We had good times together and chewed each other's gum in perfect friendliness, with never a thought of the dreadful disease germs later to be discovered.

We considered Sister Everett a marvel—like the teacher described by Goldsmith in "The Deserted Village,"—"It was rumored he could write and cipher, too." So it was rumored she had studied algebra. We didn't know just what that meant, but it cast a halo about her dear old head. She was somewhat deaf, and we discretely lowered our tones when an unknown word came in our reading class. We sometimes changed places in order to avoid some difficult word in our paragraph, for reading around was the approved method in the best of schools, those days. Sister Everett had a profound regard for her students,

and was proud of their success. Such men as Heber J. Grant, and A. W. Ivins filled her soul with joy. When the old Everett home was torn down a few years ago, a book of A. W. Ivins' was found.

Contemporary with Sister Orpha Everett was a Sister Margaret Snell, who taught a select private school in her home for years. Her school was quiet and orderly. Her students were taught to be truthful and honest and the school was closed with singing and prayer. I never attended her school, but judging from observation, from the other side of her fence, the methods in force were similar to those described by Dickens in "Nicholas Nickelby." The English master required practical knowledge of pupils: they spelled "win'der'" and were sent to clean his windows, etc. So, at Sister Snell's they must have spelled C-o-w, and were sent to water her.; W-e-e-des" and were sent to pull them; for all of her outside work seemed to be done by her students.

Teachers that I remember between the years of 1875 and 1880, were Louise Worthen, Elida Crosby, Elizabeth Snow, Martha Cox, Josephine Snow. These were in the First and Fourth Wards. In the Third and Second Wards perhaps Mrs. Purse, Nette Cox and Martha Cox were then teaching.

Methods gradually improved and new studies were added to the curriculum. Slate boards, charts and maps were in evidence in a limited way.

In 1878, Miss Mary, E. Cook came to St. George and taught in the basement of the Tabernacle for ten months. She was a good teacher for the times, but we little girls thought that she favored the boys; especially one day when she kept her whole arithmetic class in during the entire noon hour, with the exception of Thomas P. Cottam, whom she dismissed with the remark: "Mr. Cottam, I think your head aches." We had done our best for preparation; I had carefully copied every figure from Mary Mansfield's slate, and Martha Snow had copied from Georgianna's. This particular noon hour, and the fact that I had to stand and hold my slate for half an hour because it had clattered a little on the desk, has always impressed me.

Laura Gardner and Mame Ashby and Alice Worthen were then teaching in the Wards about this time.

In 1879-80 and 1880-81, Eugene Schoppman taught in the basement of the Tabernacle. His methods were somewhat different, and his discipline of the noisy order. We were using "National Readers and Spellers" and wrote many dictation exercises. We liked him and learned considerable—especially the problems on which we drilled for weeks prior to a public examinations. His morning stories of his heroism and wonderful exploits, were more thrilling than harmful.

Mr. J. A. Whitelock came from the East in 1882, and taught in the basement of the Tabernacle. His was a real school. His discipline was perfect, and his methods of monthly report cards, and preparation rolls, entirely new in St. George. The next year his school was so crowded, that all three rooms in the basement of the Tabernacle were used, and Martha Snow and I assisted him. He also taught in the County Court House about 1884-85. There was school singing, and a school entertainment; more social life than we had known before.

During this time, schools were being taught in the Ward school houses and in the Social Hall. Teachers from about 1885-1901 were Eliza Lund, Andrew Winsor, M. M. Harmon, Mary Redd, Isabell McArthur, Annie Cottam (Miller), Mary Nixon, Martha Snow, Zaidee Walker, Mary Judd, Mr. Romney, Eva Cannon, Mary DeFriez, Edith Ivins, Julia Sullivan, Mary Judd, Ella Jarvis, Charles A. Workman, Louisa Cox, Rachel Cottam, Kate Kemp, Mary Thompson, Jennie Lund, Josephine Jarvis, Rosina Jarvis, John T. Woodbury, Sr., Nephi M. Savage, and Lena Nelson, named last, but as a teacher she was first.

John T. Woodbury, Sr. is also a veteran teacher, having taught in St. George sixteen years, and in and about Salt Lake City, nine years. Martha Snow, Zaidee Walker, Rosina Jarvis and Josephine Jarvis also taught for many years.

Methods and equipment improved gradually, and about 1888, there was an appropriation from the State of $.50 per student per term of twelve weeks. This gave a little cash to go along with our pickles, brooms, wood, molasses, etc., for we still had to collect our own pay from the parents, furnish our own wood, clock, brooms, etc., and hire our own janitors.

A Church Academy was established here in 1888 with Nephi M. Savage, Principal, John T. Woodbury Sr. Assistant. The next year Rosina Jarvis also assisted. This gave an opportunity for the High School work, and continued five years, when, because of the financial condition of the Church—its property having been confiscated—the Academy could not longer by maintained. Bro. Savage taught a district school in the basement of the Tabernacle for the next three years.

In 1890, the free school system was established, and the state paid the teachers. The schools were grades. This was more than a step forward—it was a bound. Prior to this, all grades were in one room, under one teacher, in each ward. This new system enabled the teachers to do better work with less exhaustion. Just imagine, eighty-five pupils, of all grades, in the upper room of the Fourth Ward school house three in a seat, when seated at all many little ones sitting patiently around the edge of the platform. There was one small blackboard, no maps, charts, nor other apparatus. This was my experience one winter.

All of the schools were crowded. Strange as it may seem, some bright pupils advanced rapidly, and were good Third Readers at the end of their first year, and also could write nicely and do simple problems in arithmetic. They were graded by reading and we promoted them when we saw fit. We may not sympathize very deeply with the "over-worked" teacher of today, although we know the requirements are greater. If the requirements then had been greater, we would not be here to tell the tale.

In 1894-95, I taught the Central School in the Court House,--the 5th and 6th grades and a class of left-overs. There were 199 enrolled. I had no assistant. There was no playground, nothing attractive nor convenient, but many inconveniences. The higher grades were taught by John T. Woodbury in the basement of the Stake Tabernacle.

The need of a suitable school building in St. George was imperative. The tax-payers were called together and voted a 2% tax, and the building of the Woodward School, so named for George Woodward, was commenced in 1896. E. H. Snow was Clerk of the School Board at that time, Horatio Pickett, John E. Pace, and Zaidee Walker were the other Trustees. The tax was payable in "School Tax Script", and repeated for several years. The foundation was out in the first year. E. H. Snow went to Salt Lake City and engaged the services of Joseph Monson, who drew the plans. E. H. Snow employed James G. Bleak Jr., to come and cut the red rock in "pitched ashler" style. The second year the first story was put up. E. H. Snow was then called to New York on a Mission and Joseph Orton took his place as Trustee.

(Copy of notes of E. H. Snow for Sister Josephine Miles)

Mass meetings were called in the movement for a Central School Building. "Let's Build with Tax Script." We had no money. For three successive years the people regularly voted the limit, about $7500 beginning in 1897, and the four years, 1900, voted $6000 (six) in bonds to complete the building. I was Secretary of the Board and I issued thousands of Warrants for tax script. The building was up to the 2nd story when I left for the Eastern States on a mission. Joseph Orton took my place and pushed the work along. Besides he enlisted the aid of George Woodward, who gave over $3,000 in money towards its finishing, and for the heating plant.

When Pres. E. H. Snow returned the building was being finished, the district had bonded, etc., and he, as Stake President, was authorized to employ a principal. After consultation with Pres. Brimhall, A. D. Christensen was called to come here and act as the first principal. The district bonded, to finish the building, to the amount of six or eight thousand dollars a year for four years, 1897-1901, and it was completed in 1901.

Then all the children came together in one building, with suitable desks, and more conveniences then St. George had ever known. Later the 9th and 10th grades were added. The children had equal opportunities with text books, note books, pencils, etc. furnished them.

The Woodward school was a great achievement but the progressive citizens of St. George were not satisfied. President Edward H. Snow conceived the idea of an Academy for Dixie, and his plans were well worked out when he present to the Church Authorities that the proposition was considered favorably. The construction of the Dixie Academy was commenced in 1909, under direction of Thomas P. Cottam. The Church contributed $25,000.00 and the people of St. George Stake $35,000.00.

Many sacrifices were made, for people who lacked the common necessities of life, contributed liberally of money and labor. "Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of Heaven", and what a blessing the school, which opened its doors in 1911, has been in giving our children equal opportunities with those in the larger cities. There have been three hundred school graduates, where there would have been but few, had not the school been brought to us, with its social life, teachers, and school entertainments, all of which make life in St. George more worth while.

The Dixie Normal College was established in 1916, and this necessitated the erection of another building, the Gymnasium. The people of St. George City were again called upon for donations, and they responded as they always have done for the education of their children. This college offers splendid training for teachers who are rated among the best, as is also the work of the Academy, according to a report lately given by Prof. Cowles of the University of Utah.

Another improvement is the change in the state laws which provide that all school affairs in the counties be under the supervision of one school board. The system of supervision is much more complete and efficient than was possible when each district had its own trustees—men who were busy with their own affairs—and often not qualified for the work. We now see the standard of teaching being raised, and the proficiency of teachers steadily increasing.

The Junior College was established in 1923, and the College became a State Institution in 1933.

(Note: Information on the early schools of St. George was obtained from Eleanon Cannon Woodbury Jarvis)