

HIGH SCHOOLS IN TERRITORIAL WASHINGTON

1. *Pioneer Zeal for Education*

One of the chief concerns of the earliest settlers in Oregon and Washington was the education of their children. Those intrepid pioneers who had trekked across the expansive plains and rugged mountains or who had braved the hardships of an ocean journey around Cape Horn erected school houses almost as soon as their rude cabins were made inhabitable. The first school was started at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia just a hundred years ago, November, 1832. It was then under the British flag. Old Doctor McLoughlin employed John Ball, a Yankee school master then adventuring in the great Northwest, to teach the children of the officers of the Hudson Bay Company and the half breed children of various employees.¹

In the next two decades settlements were made to the northward along the Columbia and Cowlitz Rivers, on the shores of Puget Sound and in the vicinity of Walla Walla, Spokane Falls and Colville. Primitive rural schools were established in each of these communities. Many of them were private schools. Even when public they were supported by assessments upon the families sending children and not by public taxation.

2. *Initial Educational Legislation*

Governor Stevens' Inaugural Message. The idea of a complete system of public education was clearly expressed in no uncertain terms by the first Territorial Governor, Isaac Ingalls Stevens, in his inaugural address to the first legislature, February 27, 1854. He said:

"The subject of education already occupies the minds and hearts of the citizens of this Territory, and I feel confident that they will aim at nothing less than to provide for a system which shall place within the means of all the full development of the capacities with which each has been endowed. Let every youth, however limited his opportunities, find his place in the school, the college, the university, if God has given him the necessary gifts. Congress has made liberal appropriations of land for the support of the schools, and I would recommend that a special commission be instituted to report on the whole system of schools. I will also

¹ Bolton, Frederick E., "The First School in Washington," *Washington Education Journal*, 12: pp. 71-72, 85. December, 1932.

recommend that Congress be memorialized to appropriate land for a university."²

First School Law in Washington. On March 28, 1854, D. R. Bigelow of Thurston County presented Senate Bill No. 17 in the Legislative Council (now Senate), "An act establishing a common school system in the Territory of Washington." The bill was passed on April 12, 1854. Revenues were to be derived from (a) the permanent school fund, (b) a tax of two mills on the county, and (c) by a district levy to equal the county tax and any additional revenues deemed necessary. Apportionments were to be made to the districts on the basis of the number of census children from four to twenty-one years of age. It is important to keep this last provision in mind. The whole meaning of the term "common school" depends upon it. The provision was not for any specified type of school or for any stage of pupil advancement. It was for all children from the earliest age when they could profit by formal schooling up to complete adulthood.³

University and Agricultural College Established. At the next session of the Legislative Assembly a bill was passed on January 29, 1855 establishing two coordinate branches of a Territorial University. One branch was located "at Seattle in the County of King" and the other "on Boisfort Plains, in Lewis County."⁴ On January 31, two days later, a bill was passed providing for the selection of the two townships of land granted by the Federal government for the support of a university.⁵

On January 28, 1864 a bill was passed for an act "To accept the Proposition of the Congress of the United States Granting Lands to the Territory of Washington for Agricultural Colleges."⁶ On January 1, 1865 the Legislative Assembly provided for the establishment of such a college⁷ and the next day definitely located it in Clarke County. Three commissioners were named to select the location. They later located it at Vancouver.⁸

That the University and the Agricultural College were re-located need not be considered here. The point to be emphasized in this connection is the comprehensiveness and the completeness of the plans for the educational system of the new commonwealth.

² *House Journal*, 1854, p. 21.

³ *Laws of Washington*, 1854, Ch. I-IV., pp. 319-328.

⁴ *Laws of Washington*, 1854-5, p. 8.

⁵ *Laws of Washington*, 1854-5, p. 8.

⁶ *Laws of Washington*, 1863-4, p. 60.

⁷ *Laws of Washington*, 1864-5, p. 36.

⁸ *Laws of Washington*, 1864-5, p. 31.

Vision of Complete Educational System. It is very clearly evident that those pioneer settlers and legislators had in mind a complete and unbroken system of public schools beginning with the primary, continuing through the secondary school, and ending with the university and a college of agriculture and mechanic arts. This is shown (a) in the common school law of 1854, (b) the establishment of the two coordinate branches of the Territorial University in Seattle and Boisfort Plain in 1855, and (c) in "An Act for the Establishment and Government of an Agricultural College" in Vancouver on January 2, 1865.

3. *High School Work in the First Three Decades—1853-1883*

Cause of Slow Development. The main cause of the slow spread of high schools during the territorial period was the sparseness of population. A perusal of statistics showing the population of the Territory from 1854 to 1890, reveals the chief reason why high schools were not numerous during the period antedating statehood. At the time of admission as a territory the total population was only 3,965. By 1860 it had increased about three times and by 1870 about six times. During the next decade the increase was very rapid, reaching 75,116 by 1880. Cities and towns were few and very small. Spokane was not mentioned in the United States census in 1880 but by 1890 it was a city of 19,922. While Tacoma was listed in the census of 1880 it numbered only 75 souls, but when that village was made the western terminal of the Northern Pacific in 1887 it grew into a metropolitan center overnight. By 1890 it numbered 36,006 inhabitants. What was later amalgamated into Bellingham was in 1880 only a group of fishing villages. By 1890 New Whatcom, later Bellingham, had grown to a fine city of 8,136 inhabitants.

In 1887 the Northern Pacific Railway reached the Puget Sound and immediately a great influx of settlers reached the Territory. New towns sprang up both east and west of the Cascades and the earlier established centers grew like mushrooms.

Pioneer Private Academies. Just when the first high school work was given in Washington can not be ascertained. Several private schools offered high school subjects nearly two decades before any public high schools were organized. The earliest records of high school subjects being offered were in private schools in Olympia. In July, 1854, Bernard Cornelius, recently from Canada, started a private school in a school building constructed

with public funds raised by levying taxes upon the community of Olympia. Whether any high school branches were taught it is impossible to tell. There is considerable probability that some high school subjects were offered. Before going to Olympia he had taught in private schools in California and Victoria, B.C. After leaving Olympia he taught in a boys' school in Portland, which later became the present Hill Military Academy.⁹

On March 7, 1855, the following advertisement was published regarding a private school to be started by George F. Whitworth, later President of the University of Washington:

"Mr. & Mrs. Whitworth propose to open a Boarding School, for children of both sexes, at their residence, distant about one and a half miles north of Olympia. Should sufficient encouragement be given it is intended to commence about the 1st of April. The terms for boarding and tuition, (which will be reasonable,) can be ascertained by applying to the undersigned. County produce will be received in part payment if desired. G. F. Whitworth, Olympia, March 7, 1855."¹⁰

Again uncertainty exists concerning the scope of the subjects offered. In all probability they intended to give any subjects desired, primary or secondary. That was usual in private schools of that time. The advertisement of the school in the following years confirms this belief. Evidently the school was a success as in 1855 another advertisement appeared announcing the opening of the school and stating that the tuition per quarter of eleven weeks was \$8 in the primary department and for more advanced scholars \$10 to \$12.

On July 24, 1856 an advertisement announced the reopening of the Whitworth school on the 4th of August. It stated that "All the branches of an English and Classical Education are included in their course."¹¹

On October 10, 1856 the following notice appeared regarding the Olympia Public School which was to be taught by George F. Whitworth and M. E. Whitworth:

"Olympia Public School"

The school will be reopened on the 3d day of November next, for a term of five months. Tuition per quarter as heretofore—\$5, \$6, \$8, and \$10. No extras.

⁹ Bibb, Thomas W., *History of Early Common School Education in Washington*, p. 84.

¹⁰ *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, March 10, 1856.

¹¹ *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, July 24, 1856.

The course of study embraces all the branches usually taught in High Schools.

It is designed to procure a Philosophical and Chemical apparatus for the use of the school during the next term.

A few boarders can be taken. Terms moderate. G. F. Whitworth, M. E. Whitworth."¹²

In 1856 a girls' school was opened in Olympia. The following advertisement shows that high school subjects were included:

"Miss Pabb will open a school in the Masonic Hall in this place on Monday, May 5th at 9 o'clock A.M. Tuition per quarter (11 weeks): For common English branches, \$5.00; Higher English branches, \$6.00; Drawing extra, \$3.00; Painting, (in water colors) \$3.00; Music (Piano) \$20.00. Young ladies and little girls from the country are invited to attend as board is very cheap."¹³

On October 3, 1856, a notice was published announcing the Puget Sound Institute which was to open in Olympia on November 10. It was signed by J. F. Devore. The announcement specified "Primary, Common English, Higher English, Music, Ancient and Modern Language, Drawing and Painting."¹⁴

On January 3, 1857, the school was reorganized as the Puget Sound Wesleyan Institute.¹⁵

University Preparatory Department. For many years the University of Washington maintained a preparatory department. This served as a high school for Seattle and vicinity. That was undoubtedly the reason why the formal organization of a high school was so long delayed in Seattle.

The University was opened for instruction, November 4, 1861. It was really a private school taught by Asa Shinn Mercer in the Territorial University building. The tuitions went to the instructor. There is no record of the subjects taught. There were about 30 pupils, probably most of the primary pupils, a few of secondary grade, and one, Clarence B. Bagley, collegiate. There is a good record concerning the second year. The announcement was as follows:

"UNIVERSITY
of the Territory of Washington
A Primary and Collegiate School,

To be conducted under the supervision of Mr. A. S. Mercer,

¹² *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, Oct. 10, 1856.

¹³ *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, Apr. 25, 1856.

¹⁴ *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, Oct. 3, 1856.

¹⁵ *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, Jan. 16, 1857.

A.B., in which will be taught all the branches usually taught in the *Primary* department of the public schools of the Territory and all the branches usually taught in the *Grammar* and *High Schools* of California and the Atlantic States.

The girls will be under the immediate care of Mrs. *Virginia Calhoun*, including the *Piano Pupils*. Vacation—Christmas to New Year.

Prices of Tuition in the Primary School	\$5 pr. qr.
Prices of Tuition in Common English	\$6 pr. qr.
Prices of Tuition in Higher Classes	\$7 pr. qr.
Prices of Tuition in Collegiate Studies	\$9 pr. qr.
Prices of Tuition in Music	\$10 pr. qr.
Board per week	\$3.00.

The term of five months will commence on Monday, the 20th of October next. Pupils of both sexes will be under proper restrictions and care be received, and their education in the several branches above named industriously and carefully attended to, *without any sectional bias* or influence whatever, and subject at all times to the most rigid guards over their moral demeanor and accomplished manner. For further information apply to

A. S. Mercer, Principal, at Seattle, W.T.
September 17th, 1862. 56:tf¹⁶

During Mr. Mercer's second year, of five months, beginning October 10, 1862, the following course of study was in effect. We do not know the sequence of the studies or the length of time pursued, nor the numbers in each class. Of the 51 pupils, 35 were in Primary Department; 13 in the Grammar School; 7 in the Preparatory Department; and 1 in the Freshman Class. The following is taken from the Regents' report to the legislature:¹⁷

"Statement of Organization

Statement showing the several classes, the books used, and the number of scholars in the primary and collegiate school, under the charge of A. S. Mercer, A.B., referred to in report of the Regents.

The school is divided into four classes, as follows:

Primary Department

Orthography,	Webster.
Reading (1st and 2nd Series,)	Parker and Watson.
Arithmetic (1st part,)	Ray.

¹⁶ *Washington Standard*, Olympia, Oct. 4, 1862. See also Meany, Edmond S., "Early Records of the University," *Washington Historical Quarterly*, vol. 8, pp. 114-123.
¹⁷ *House Journal*, 1860-1-2, Appendix, p. IX.

Grammar (1st lessons,) Tower.
 Geography, Cornell.
 Writing,
 Vocal Music,
 Declamation,
 Thirty pupils.

Grammar School

Orthography, Town.
 Reading (3rd and 4th Series,) Parker and Watson.
 Grammar (English,) Bullion.
 Geography (Intermediate,) Cornell.
 Arithmetic (2d and 3d part,) Ray.
 American History,
 Composition and Vocal Music,
 Thirteen pupils.

Preparatory Department

Orthography, McElligot.
 Reading (5th serie,) Parker and Watson.
 Arithmetic (higher,) Ray.
 Grammar (Anylitical and practical,) Bullion.
 Geography (high school,) Cornell.
 Algebra, (1st part,) Ray.
 Latin grammar and reader, Bullion.
 Greek, Bullion.
 Caesar, (4 books,) Anthon.
 English composition and declamation.
 Seven pupils.

Freshman Class,

Caesar, (last three books,)
 Virgil.
 Anabasis of Xenophon.
 Classical Antiquities.
 Algebra, (second part,) Ray.
 Geometry, Legendre, Davies.
 Horace's Odes
 Homer's Iliad, (three books.)
 Plane Trigonometry.
 Physiology.

One pupil. In all, fifty-one pupils.

There is also a music class of seven pupils, under charge of Mrs. V. Calhoun."

It is thus seen that the institution was more of an elementary and secondary school than a university. The one college student was probably not of the James A. Garfield type and even though the president had been of the Mark Hopkins type his duties were so varied and manifold that he had little time to be at the other end of the log to give him individual stimulation. There is no record of the name of the one student. The University opened this session on October 10, 1862. It was still on a tuition basis, and the teachers' salaries were derived from that source.

As late as 1875 the University maintained a complete curriculum of elementary and secondary studies as well as the college courses. The annual register or catalogue for 1875, the earliest now available, contained the following:

"University of Washington
Courses of Study School.

Primary Department.

Monteith's Primary Geography.	Sander's Reader (3rd completed)
Robinson's Mental Arithmetic.	Union Spellers.
Butler's or Kerl's English Grammar (Introductory).	

Intermediate Department.

Monteith's Intermediate Geography.	Sander's Fourth and Fifth Readers.
Robinson's Arithmetic.	Union Spellers.
Butler's or Kerl's English Grammar (Practical).	¹⁸ Livingston's United States History.

Preparatory or Academic Course.

<i>First Year</i>	<i>Second Year</i>
English Grammar.	Latin.
Arithmetic Completed.	Greek.
Geography.	Algebra (to Quadratics).
English Composition.	Geometry (4 books).
Latin commenced.	Modern Languages.
Greek commenced.	Composition.
History United States.	History.

In justification of the maintenance of these elementary courses President Anderson made the following statement:

¹⁸ Typographical error in the catalogue; intended for Swinton.

"Our common school system is in so imperfect a condition, that the district schools do not to any extent become feeders for a College. While these causes operate, the conversion of the University to a College proper must be slow and gradual. From the necessity of the case, it must yet provide instruction in the lower branches of study, until such time as our district schools shall be thoroughly graded, and the Academy system engrafted thereon. To build up the University, schools must grow up here on the ground."¹⁹

A normal course and a commercial course of three years were maintained at the same time. In each was a "senior preparatory" course of one year followed by two years intended to be of college grade. The "senior preparatory" and the next or "First Year" covered subjects of grammar school and high school grade. The Third year, denominated the "Second Year" included college subjects like trigonometry, chemistry, psychology, surveying, rhetoric literature, etc.

4. *The Rise of Graded Schools*

Late Beginnings. During the pre-territorial period there were a few graded schools north of the Columbia, mostly private ventures. Doubtless a number of villages employed more than one teacher but the records are so lacking that only a few can be definitely located prior to 1890. Superintendent Bryan's Report for that year gives a list of towns employing more than one teacher. Superintendent Houghton's report of 1881 inaugurated the custom of indicating the number of graded schools in each county. That report shows that there were but 7 counties maintaining graded schools. King, Pierce and Thurston counties had 2 each and Clarke, Columbia, Jefferson and Klickitat one each; 10 in all the Territory.²⁰ In the early reports we are not sure whether or not the several buildings in towns like Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane were listed as separate graded schools. It would make considerable difference, for example, whether there were 9 towns in King County with graded schools or whether Seattle had 9 buildings. The records do not help us to decide.

In all probability in 1881 there were graded schools located in Vancouver, Dayton, Goldendale, Tacoma, Olympia, Port Townsend, Steilacoom and Tumwater. In 1883 the records show that there were 11 graded schools; in 1885 there were 23; in 1887 the year of the last Territorial Report there were only 32.

¹⁹ *Register of the Territorial University*, 1875, p. 13.

²⁰ *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 1881, p. 10.

Loose Graduation. At first the graduation was very loosely organized. The exact date is not known when the schools were organized so that a given year of work was in one room and taught by one teacher. As late as 1891 the report of the State Superintendent classified the pupils as "Numbers in the First Reader," in the "Second Reader," "Third Reader" and "Fourth Reader." In the 1892 Report the terms "First Grade," "Second Grade," "Eighth Grade," etc., were used.²¹

Number of Graded Schools. Available records show the number of graded schools in each county of the territory during successive years from 1881 to 1889. There were none in the following counties: Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Franklin, Grant, Island, Kitsap, Okanogan, Pacific, Pend O'reille, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Stevens, Wahkiakum.

(To be Continued.)

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²¹ Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1892, p. 28.