

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Brighton Area Settlers Valued Education — Part 1

In the beginning, settlers arriving in the area (the Maltbys, the Lees, the Eulers) knew full well their children’s education, as they had experienced it in the east would come to a screeching halt.

In fact, without bothering with the formality of forming a school district, Maynard Maltby built a school on the NE corner of Grand River and Hope Streets in Brighton, in 1835. One assumes it was mainly for village children.

In our country’s colonial period one’s education was usually determined by the wealth/or lack of, of one’s parents and one’s sex, one might attend a private school or be home schooled. Opportunities were very unequal since it was often only the boys who it was believed needed a formal education.

By the 1830s public schools were the norm in the east, as opposed to private and subscription schools. However, the public schools were not always the best. There might be poor teachers, lack of materials, overcrowding, buildings in need of repair, and not everyone wanted to be taxed for education of child who was not theirs. However, education was always important to the American people as a whole. An educated citizenry is the major component of a democracy. A free public system of education is imperative.

Shortly after the Revolutionary War, with western borders open to expansion, the Land Ordinance of 1785 was passed. This provided for the surveying of land before it was sold. Previously land had been meted out to those favored by rulers in Europe; boundaries were rivers and mountain ridges. A rectangular system of boundaries was developed. Counties and townships were surveyed in which each township equaled 36 square miles, with one square mile containing 640 acres.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, reads in part: “Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” This Northwest Ordinance also set up statehood requirements of these new lands and promoted education by setting aside the profit from the sale of Section 16 of each township for education. However, with no such practically free land, \$1-2 per acre, income from the school section sales was insufficient.

Prior to Michigan’s Constitutional Convention in 1835, planning for a farsighted system of education was underway. Isaac E. Crary, an attorney, and Rev. John D. Pierce researched and discussed what educational provisions should be included in the new Michigan Constitution. Crary was appointed chairman of the committee to prepare the Article on public education for the Michigan Constitution: he was elected to serve as Michigan’s first Representative to the National Congress. Governor Mason appointed Pierce as Michigan’s Superintendent of Public Instruction; the first in the nation in such a position. The concept that the state was responsible for the comprehensive education of its citizenry has been supported though the years by Michigianians.

To be continued...

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: Bill Pless writings; “Michigan — A History of the Wolverine State” by Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May. Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)