

THE
CHRONICLES OF NEW BRUNSWICK,
NEW JERSEY


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By
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THE LANCASTERIAN SCHOOL

In the last will and testament of Mr. William Hall, made in 1803, after various bequests, he disposed of the remainder of his property to "Thomas Grant and his son Ebenezer, and to the survivors of them in trust to be expended by them in educating poor children in the City of New Brunswick." They declined the trust, which amounted to a little more than \$4,000, and obtained an act from the Legislature creating a Board of Trustees to be composed of two persons of each of the churches then in the city, viz.:

John Neilson and Moses Guest from the Presbyterian Church, James Schureman and Staats Van Duersen from the Reformed Church, Robert Boggs and W. P. Dear from the Episcopal. This Board had its first meeting June 8, 1809. Before 1812 New Brunswick did nothing for education, but in that year, at a town meeting, the words "public schools" for the first time were used. It was then voted that "the sum of \$800 for the purchase or erecting of a building for the use of a public school be raised." This appropriation was called forth by the then recent Hall bequest, by means of which the Lancasterian School was established. The old Queen's College building, then standing on the site of the Soldiers' Memorial, was bought for \$450, and \$560 was paid to Staats Van Duersen for the corner of Schureman and George Streets.



QUEEN'S COLLEGE
The Lancasterian School

The building was removed in December, 1813, the cost and removal of which came to \$740.85.

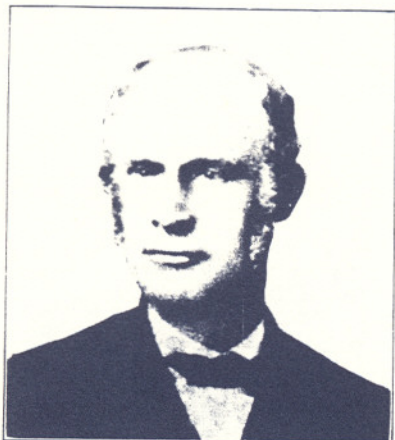
This building was given to the "Trustees of the Society for Educating poor children," or of "the charity or the Lancasterian School," as the establishment was then variously called. June 1, 1814, the School was opened with 35 free and 6 pay pupils.

The school was conducted on the Lancasterian or Monitorial plan.

It was not until April 6, 1814, the first teacher, Mr. Shepard Johnson, was appointed at a salary of \$150 per year and house rent.

Mr. Johnson resigned his position November 20, 1816, and Mr. Henry B. Poole was appointed his successor. Mr. Poole resigned

June 30, 1818, and was succeeded by Mr. Zenophon T. Maynard, who resigned July 7, 1824. Mr. Harrison succeeded Mr. Maynard and retained the principalship until the close of 1831; when in February, 1832, Mr. Elihu Cook was appointed. Judge Cook resigned in 1838. Mr. A. W. Mayo was appointed on April 4, 1838, being the sixth principal. At the opening of the Bayard Street school, in



ALFRED W. MAYO

1853, this school became so small that it was closed June 1, 1853, and remained so until December 1, 1855, when it was reopened. Mr. Mayo took charge of the school and remained its teacher until its close about 1879. The school occupied the same building during its entire existence.

The interest on the Hall fund, on which the school was established, was made use of, but it was not sufficient alone to carry it on. An additional appropriation by Common Council, for \$125 to \$500, was usually made each year, with some exceptions,

during which time the school had to be "closed" on account of want of support. When these appropriations were made they came, as a rule, from the receipts of tavern licenses.

"Free Education" was not much thought of in the early days and was considered a public charity to be given only to the poor and then to a limited extent. The income of the Lancastrian school fund has been appropriated to the managers of the Children's Industrial Home, on Somerset Street, to be applied to the education of their children until further notice.

THE ORIGIN OF NEW BRUNSWICK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The inner history of the origin of the movement that resulted in the introduction of the public free school system into our city has never been fully told. And, as a very few only of those who have since enjoyed its common and universal benefits have ever heard of the prejudices and other obstacles which had to be encountered, and the discouragements and defeats that had to be suffered, before its es-

establishment was effected, they may feel interested in the following sketch of the incidents which led to that auspicious result.

The account is by Mr. Charles D. Deshler, the man, above all others, who was the prime factor in the establishment of our public school system.

Mr. Deshler's narrative is as he related it to me and later edited by him personally. It follows:

"While I was conducting business as a druggist in our town my



CHILDREN'S INDUSTRIAL HOME
Somerset, Prospect and Scott Streets.

store was in some sort a rendezvous for many of our citizens, some, especially among the younger of whom, 'dropped in' quite regularly early every evening after active business hours to discuss subjects of local, public, or literary interest.

"One evening in the winter of 1849 I had just returned from a visit to New York, I remarked that at the instance of Abraham Ackerman, I had employed an entire day of my visit to the city in company with an enthusiastic friend of public free schools, in order to observe their methods and judge of their merits, and especially to ascertain how successful they were in reaching the youths and children of the lower and middle classes. And I said that, as a result of what I had observed, I had arrived at the conviction that it was about time that we,

in New Brunswick, abolished our miserably poor and inefficient district schools, and substituted the public free schools in their stead.

"This precipitated an earnest discussion of the questions: Whether our district schools were really the wretched concerns that I represented them to be and whether the public free school would be any improvement upon them?"

"Among the gentlemen whom I distinctly recall as present on this occasion were David Bishop, Abraham Ackerman (himself formerly

the teacher of a successful private school in which he was the successor of his even more successful brother, Richard Ackerman), Henry Sanderson, Nelson Dunham and, I think, Moses F. Webb. There were several others whose names have escaped my memory.

"The result of our discussion was that we then and there resolved ourselves into a committee, each one of which engaged himself to visit the different schools in our School District (No. 1), and post ourselves on the following points: The qualification of their teachers, the nature and



CHARLES D. DESHLER IN 1850

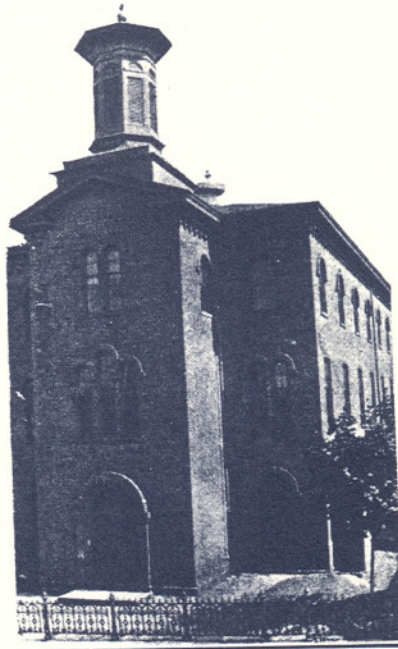
quality of the education dispensed in them, the classes of our people who availed of or were reached by them, and the proportion that the number of pupils in them bore to the whole number of our children between the statutory ages of 5 and 18.

"The upshot of our investigations was the unanimous verdict of those of us who had prosecuted them, arrived at after frequent meetings for discussion and for comparing notes, that, as a rule, our district schools were a humbug and a delusion; that, with a few honorable exceptions, the teachers were wretchedly incompetent, the studies pursued of the most elementary character, and the text-books few and miserably poor; that any grading or classification of the pupils was impossible under the system, and, consequently, the teacher was utterly unable to give the requisite attention to all the pupils; that the children in attendance were drawn almost exclusively from the poorer and worst educated portion of our people; that the schools failed absolutely to reach the better classes; that the proportion of the whole

number of children of those in attendance was absurdly small; and, finally, that the district schools ought to be abolished and a free public school established.

"The question then arose. How shall we proceed in order to effect this result? And it was decided that each of us, in his sphere, and as opportunity offered, should do his utmost to educate public citizens to intrinsic defects and the actual failure and fruitlessness of the district schools, and also by showing them the actual benefits and advantages and the great possibilities of the public free school system. It was also decided that we should 'break the ice' at the coming election of School Trustees, which, by law, was then held on the first Monday in April in each and every year, by nominating and trying to elect three trustees who shared our views. This left us but little time for missionary work, for although we now numbered about half a score of active workers, all of us, except David Bishop, were business men whose time was fully engrossed, and who had few leisure moments. Still, we set about the crusade of manufacturing public opinion hopefully, and with the persistency and earnestness—perhaps I should also add, the obstinacy—that always characterize the efforts of young reformers.

"We were rewarded by a fair measure of success. We succeeded in enlisting a respectable number of active and intelligent supporters among the young, energetic and influential men of both political parties, who sympathized with the determination to break up the cheap and wretched district schools and to establish large and handsome public schools, modeled on the plan of the public schools in New York, Philadelphia, Providence and Boston.



THE OLD BAYARD STREET SCHOOL.

The first Public School to be built in the city. The bricks in the foundation were used first to build the Colonial Barracks on the block between Bayard and Paterson streets, facing on George Street, next to build the first jail on the site of the present Bayard Street School. Part of the ground facing Liberty Street was at one time a graveyard.

"We now frankly announced that at the ensuing election for trustees we should do our best to elect those who would endeavor to carry out this idea. We made no attempt to conceal the fact that the new plan would cost more money than the old one, and freely admitted that taxes would necessarily be considerably increased. We urged, however, that in the long run our citizens would save money, inasmuch as their children would get real instead of sham education, and also inasmuch as the education thus got would be free and universal.

"In the meantime our adversaries who were numerous, were not slumbering. They were wide awake, busy and noisy. They were made up of the most opposite elements: Of those who had been enlisted against a public school by the persuasion of district school teachers who foresaw that their perfunctory occupation was in danger; of those old fogies who held to the maxim of 'letting things alone'; strangely enough, of many of the working class who fancied that the free public school was anti-democratic; of those, on the other hand, who declared that it was too democratic; and of those who avowed that they did not propose to be taxed for the education of other people's children.

"When the evening of the first Monday in April, 1850, arrived there was an unwonted and somewhat turbulent crowd in attendance. Hitherto, half a dozen men had assembled at these meetings and 'fixed things,' but this time more than a hundred had gathered in the upper room of the City Hall (the old Court House), then occupied by the New Brunswick Library.

"And there was a tussle. We proposed our ticket and squarely announced what our trustees would do if elected. The other side also nominated their ticket, and were applauded vociferously by their adherents. Then, one after another of our side took the floor. We presented with all the vehemence and eloquence at our command the inadequacy of the existing system and the advantages of the new one.

"We rehearsed the results which had been accomplished by public schools in other states; the necessity for free, public, and universal education in a republic; and the constant menace of ignorance to public security and the general welfare. We shirked nothing as to the increased cost or the complete revolution as to methods and teachers which must ensue if we prevailed. There were noisy interruptions and loud jeers and clamorings in reply, but no argument. The stolid prejudice of the masses, reinforced by the selfishness of some of the very rich, floored us.

"We were beaten, but not vanquished. We had not expected to win in our first battle, but we had made a good fight against large