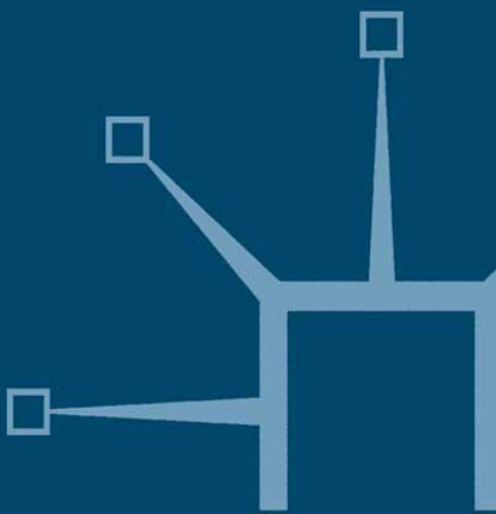


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THE AMERICAN STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

"AN INSTRUMENT OF GREAT GOOD"

Christine A. Ogren



Additional praise for Christine Ogren's *The American State Normal School*:

"A significant contribution to the literature in the history of American education . . . this book is amazingly well researched . . . a first rate addition to any history of education course." —James W. Fraser, Professor of History and Education, Northeastern University

"[*The American State Normal School*] is a terrific book, one that will have a major impact on many fields. This is an important contribution to the history of higher education, the history of teacher education, the history of teaching, and the history of gender in education. There is simply nothing else like it. . . . Christine Ogren carefully locates the normal school period in light of what came before and after, but she wisely keeps her attention on the period when it was anything but generic and when its identity was clear. . . . Ogren reconstructs the normal school as a vibrant, purposive, engaging, intellectually alive, and socially relevant institution, one that provided a rich experience of education and professional preparation for a large number of working and lower-middle class students, launching them on interesting trajectories of professional accomplishment and social mobility . . . Her effort to resurrect the valuable role that the normal school played in the lives of its students is an important part of what makes this book so effective, and this approach will serve to sharpen its impact on the literature. Like many people in my field, I will be assigning this book in my history of education classes as soon as it appears in print." —David Labaree, Professor, School of Education, Stanford University, author of *The Trouble with Ed Schools*

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Christine A. Ogren

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To my teachers

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Christine A. Ogren
Iowa City, Iowa
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INTRODUCTION: "IT WASN'T MUCH OF A COLLEGE"

Nearly five decades ago, David Riesman lamented "institutional homogenization" in higher education in the United States. He presented a "concededly oversimplified picture" of "a snake-like procession—the head of which is often turning back on itself . . . while the middle part seeks to catch up with where the head once was." He explained, "The assumption is that every decent university will offer courses in archeology, in Tudor history, or in the sociology of small groups, whether or not there exist topflight people to fill these lines, and even if to get them filled means sacrificing the possibility of building up a uniquely exhilarating department out of offerings not currently regarded as among the blue chips of academia." In the tail of the snake, Riesman located some denominational colleges, technical schools, and teachers colleges, which he called "colleges only by grace of semantic generosity."¹

Although Riesman did not acknowledge them, gender, race, and social-class assumptions helped shape and direct the academic procession. Ivy League colleges and research universities made up the snake's head partly because they catered to white, male social elites, while the institutions in the snake's middle had fewer, and those in the tail had very few, such students. As less prestigious institutions increasingly emulated the universities in the snake's head, they marginalized women, racial minorities, and working-class students. In addition to institutionalizing gender, race, and class bias, the academic procession has implicitly shaped the historiography of higher education. As this field has grown in the decades following Riesman's observations, historians have assumed that the story of elite institutions captures *the* history of higher education. By focusing on one type of college "only by grace of semantic generosity," this book illustrates the fallacy of this assumption as well as the damaging effects of the academic procession.

State normal schools grew out of the common school revival of the early to middle nineteenth century. Responding to an increased need for trained teachers, education reformers adapted the German teacher seminary and the French *école normale* to serve the growing system of American common schools. Massachusetts established the first state normal schools, in 1839. Within a decade, Connecticut and New York followed suit. By 1870, 18 (of 37) states had at least 1, and a total of 39 state normal schools were located in New England, the mid-Atlantic states, the Midwest, and California. Twenty years later, state normal schools numbered 103, and were located in

35 (of 44) states, as well as Arizona Territory. By 1910, there were 180 normal schools in states north, south, east, and west; 42 (of 46) states, as well as 3 territories, had state normals. A few additional normals opened during the 1910s and 1920s; only four states would never establish normal schools.² These 180-plus institutions did not offer bachelor's degrees and their official purpose was to prepare students for a low-status profession, which colleges and universities had little interest in doing. Normal schools had so little prestige that they were beyond the bounds of the academic procession, yet the great snake would have a profound impact upon them.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the spread of public high schools meant that increasing numbers of normal-school matriculants were high-school graduates, and that many states began to look to the normals to prepare teachers for the burgeoning number of positions on high-school faculties. As a result, a few institutions took steps forward in the procession. Before the turn of the century, the schools in Albany, New York and Ypsilanti, Michigan adopted the name "normal college." Beginning with Ypsilanti in 1903, several normals began to offer four years of college work and to grant bachelor's degrees. Replacing the title "normal school" with "teachers college" generally indicated that an institution required high-school graduation for admission and granted college degrees. The majority of state normal schools became teachers colleges during the 1920s and 1930s. But their quest to advance in the hierarchical procession did not stop there; beginning in the 1940s, they dropped teacher education as their organizing purpose. The flood of World War II veterans seeking higher education accelerated the move away from teacher education because all-purpose state colleges were better able to meet their varying needs. The 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s witnessed another flurry of name changes as the former normals became state colleges, first in the West, Midwest, and South, and later in the East. And by the end of the century, many would become state universities. In fact, institutions that began as normal schools formed the nucleus of state university systems in California, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin. Western, Central, Southern, and Eastern Connecticut State Universities, like the "directional" universities in Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington, also began as normal schools.

Although institutions whose roots are in nineteenth-century normal schools play a central role in mass higher education today, their story is not well known. Looking only forward to the head of the snake, former normals have generally buried their roots as deep as possible. As education scholar Paul Woodring explained, "A speaker before an academic group (or a radio announcer of football scores) could always get a laugh by mentioning 'Slippery Rock State Normal School.' Students and faculty members in such institutions were sensitive to their lack of status and hence eager to transform the normal schools into colleges."³ With each advance in the procession, these institutions breathed a sigh of relief. For example, a 1940s in-house history of the New York State College for Teachers at Albany (as it was then

called) reported that, in 1908, “the last two-year class was graduated. Rid at last of this final incubus of its normal school days, the institution in all its departments reached full collegiate stature.”⁴ Other teachers colleges sandblasted buildings to remove the ignominious word “Normal,” and saw to it that their town’s Normal Avenue became College Avenue, and then University Avenue.⁵ In his study of the history of teacher education, John Goodlad found that in the late twentieth century, such schools paid little attention to their past in teacher education. He reported,

The bundle of catalogues, recruitment documents, and the like forwarded to us prior to our arrival to one such campus, known by us to be one of the earliest and most respected normal schools, included no mention of this august past. At another university, the one-room schoolhouse recently transported to the campus appeared to be less a nostalgic symbol of worthy services rendered than a monument to an impoverished past thankfully left behind.⁶

Able to view themselves only according to the model of the academic procession, these institutions were quick to discard their past.

Historians of education have tended, with only a few exceptions, to be co-conspirators in the former normals’ efforts to bury their roots.⁷ With little respect for nineteenth-century approaches, historians of teacher education have painted a disparaging picture of these institutions. And, interested only in the head of the snake, historians of higher education have simply omitted them. Their silence has further encouraged society and the schools themselves to measure their worth only according to the great snake. Thus, biographer Robert Caro’s description of the institution that Lyndon B. Johnson entered in 1927 encapsulates the dominant condescending view of state normals and infant teachers colleges:

In all the 24,000 square miles of the Hill Country, there was only one college.

It wasn’t much of a college. Its Main Building—surmounted by four spires and by layers of arches, gables, pinnacles and parapets—had been built to impress, and had been placed on the highest hill in the San Marcos area, so that its red spires, trimmed with gold paint, glittered for miles across the hills as if Camelot had been set down in dog-run country. But “Old Main,” as it was known, and three other buildings lined up on the steep stairstep campus—a library so rickety that when, the year before, it had enlarged its reference department on the second floor, that floor had begun to cave in and all encyclopedias had had to be hastily moved downstairs; a rough, wooden, barn-like “gymnasium”; and a squat, unadorned classroom structure—were, except for a few frame houses, converted to classrooms, the extent of the campus of Southwest Texas State Teachers College at San Marcos.⁸

The normal school/teachers college certainly fell far short of elite institutions of higher education.

Casting aside the paradigm of the academic procession reveals, however, a very different image of this institution. After discussing their early years,

this book presents a wide-ranging look at state normals during their heyday from 1870 through the 1900s, based upon archival research at seven former normal schools (located in Castleton, Vermont; Geneseo, New York; Florence, Alabama; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; San Marcos, Texas; Oshkosh, Wisconsin; and San Jose, California) and a review of various sources on close to one hundred other former state normals. These sources include some additional archival materials and many institutional histories, which I have used selectively—like Frederick Rudolph, I have “carefully culled episodes and illustrations” to use as primary material for my own analysis.⁹ Examining the many dimensions of curricular and extracurricular life reveals that, although it “wasn’t much of a college,” the state normal school was a revolutionary institution in the field of higher education.

In their early years during the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, state normal schools had the potential to be revolutionary, but their future was far from certain. Part I describes the successful and unsuccessful struggles of educators in various states to establish normals, as well as the experiences of early normal-school students. In many ways, early state normals deserved the criticism they received at the time, and have since received from historians. Chapter 1 explains that they were bare-bones institutions, most of whose students were barely educated beyond the elementary level. The academic curriculum was necessarily low-level, and the teacher-education curriculum was immature. At the same time, however, early normal schools broke new ground in even offering teacher education. They served women, who were not welcome at most higher-education institutions, and children of struggling small farmers, who had limited access to any other type of higher education. And many of these students seized their opportunity, however limited it was. Chapter 1 also documents what early students made of their normal-school experiences, and how attending normal school helped to shape the course of their lives.

The revolutionary spark of the early normal schools ignited during the institutions’ heyday between the 1870s and the 1900s. Part II focuses on this important period in educational history. Chapter 2 describes the growth and expansion of state normal schools during these decades and their accessibility to students who were new to higher education. Normal schools welcomed students who were female, older than typical college students, had work experience (usually in teaching), were not well-off financially, and were from provincial, educationally unsophisticated backgrounds. Also during this period, normal schools began to educate members of racial minority groups, both in separate institutions and in majority-white schools. Not only did normal schools serve such “nontraditional” students, but many of their policies also met these students’ needs for guidance and financial assistance.

The following chapters describe the many dimensions of normal-school life during the schools’ heyday. Chapter 3 focuses on academic studies and intellectual life. Although still somewhat restricted, the curriculum introduced students to the life of the mind. Required classes in mathematics, the sciences, history, and English language arts developed students’ reasoning

and analytical skills as well as their abilities to express their ideas, while optional advanced studies presented the opportunity to acquire prestigious cultural knowledge. Student-organized extracurricular activities, especially the literary societies, enabled students to gain further intellectual capital, or the cultural knowledge of the middle and upper classes. At the same time, as chapter 4 explains, the teacher-education program fostered a sense of professionalism. As students studied teaching, observed and practiced in “model” elementary schools, and delved into educational topics in their societies, they viewed themselves as dedicated educators. Other aspects of public life at state normal schools, described in chapter 5, also prepared students for middle-class life, and sparked in them a sense of possibility, especially for women. During a time when women struggled for acceptance in the public sphere, female students served as class officers, debated current issues, and dominated the basketball court. Not surprisingly, many graduates went on to lead lives that reached far beyond their humble origins, and in the case of female graduates, their gender. Among graduates, long teaching careers were common, even for some women who married. Teaching and missionary work sometimes took them far from home. Numerous normal-school graduates went further educationally, and a few pursued careers in law and medicine.

When Massachusetts opened its second normal school, at Barre in 1839, Governor Edward Everett congratulated his “fellow citizens and friends . . . on the establishment, in this community, of an institution, destined, we trust, to be an instrument of great good.”¹⁰ After a few decades of uncertainty, normal schools between the 1870s and the 1900s lived up to Everett’s prediction in ways he probably did not foresee. Then, as the state normal school reached its peak in the second decade of the twentieth century, the institution changed in significant respects. The epilogue to this book describes how normals began by the 1910s to emulate collegiate institutions in the curriculum and extracurriculum, in the process of transforming themselves into state teachers colleges. While the model of the academic procession might suggest that such an increase in stature was nothing but positive, this book suggests otherwise. To dismiss the state normal school as not “much of a college” is to sell it short, for it was not only “an instrument of great good,” but also a revolutionary institution of higher education.

PART I

EARLY NORMAL SCHOOLS, 1840S–1860S

“TO AWAKEN THE CONSCIENCE”:
ESTABLISHING TEACHER EDUCATION
AND STATE NORMAL SCHOOLS

Marshall Conant was principal in the 1850s of the Bridgewater State Normal School in Massachusetts, one of only a handful of such institutions. A former district-school teacher and head of a private school, Conant had also run the topographical department of the Boston Water Works and served as a consulting engineer for both a railroad and cotton gin company. While his route to the principalship had been circuitous, Conant’s sense of the normal-school mission was straightforward; he explained, “I have sought to awaken the conscience to feel the responsibilities and duties that devolve upon the teacher . . .”¹ In this statement, Conant captured the spirit of the preceding three decades of advocacy for teacher education. Education reformers of the early to middle nineteenth century sought to awaken the conscience of the public and state legislators to the importance of teaching and teacher training, and to establish state normal schools as the primary vehicle for shaping a professional teaching force. For more than a quarter-century following the establishment of the first one in 1839, however, state normal schools did little more than “awaken the conscience.” They remained an unpopular option among many for the education of teachers, and their methods of teacher training lacked substance. Early state normal schools did succeed in instilling future teachers with the sense that they were undertaking a consecrated mission and, in the process, they also awakened students’ consciousness of the wider world.

EDUCATION REFORMERS MAKE A CAUSE
OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education was one plank of the antebellum common school reform movement, which sought to improve society by instilling uniform values in standardized elementary-level schools. Horace Mann explained, “Above all others, must the children of a Republic be fitted for society, as well as for themselves. . . . however loftily the intellect of man may have been gifted, however skillfully it may have been trained, if it be not guided by a sense of justice, a love of mankind and a devotion to duty, its possessor is only a more

splendid, as he is a more dangerous barbarian.” During the decades following the American Revolution, rudimentary schooling had gradually become widespread while remaining remarkably unsystematic. In rural areas, locally controlled district schools had short, rather chaotic sessions and were subject to the whims of the community. Urban schools included a variety of independent pay schools tailored to different parental interests and income levels, and charity schools to acculturate the poor. Rapid social change by the 1830s challenged this *laissez-faire* approach to schooling. The extension of voting rights among white males, the growth of manufacturing and factory production and the corresponding move away from a predominantly agricultural economy, increasing immigration of Roman-Catholic Europeans, and rapid urbanization, ignited leaders’ fears of social and political instability. As a state senator in Massachusetts, Mann proposed a solution: state-controlled education to instill republican virtue, Protestant morality, and capitalist sensibilities.²

Henry Barnard in Connecticut, Horace Eaton in Vermont, John Pierce in Michigan, Calvin Stowe in Ohio, Calvin Wiley in North Carolina, and many others, joined Mann in a self-styled crusade for common schools. Primarily members of the Whig party, middle-class, and Protestant, these reformers adhered the “cosmopolitan” belief in government intervention and institution building to shape the country’s economic and social growth. Like state-run canals, prisons, insane asylums, and poor houses, a system of public schools would foster the nation’s orderly advancement. The school activists admired the development of state-regulated schooling in Prussia, apparently overlooking its monarchical government structure. Despite fears of “Prussianization,” reform campaigns were most successful in Massachusetts—where Mann was appointed state superintendent in 1837—and in other northeastern states. The Middle Atlantic and Middle West also saw many reforms before the Civil War, but it would take longer for substantial systematization to reach the South and Far West. Everywhere the reformers called for bureaucratic changes in the interest of creating centralized, uniform systems. The top of the bureaucracy would be a state department of education, headed by a superintendent or secretary of education. Throughout the state, city or county superintendents would answer to the state superintendent and disseminate state-department policies. Education journals and reports would help spread information about policies and effective practices. Tax money would ensure free schooling for all citizens. In urban areas, pay and charity schools would come together to form public systems, while rural districts would consolidate into larger, more efficient systems. Wherever possible, principals would oversee age-graded schools. Longer school terms, increased daily attendance, and uniform textbooks would enable all pupils to absorb the morals and virtues of a Protestant, capitalist republic—as long as they had effective teachers. Thus, teachers, the foot soldiers in the crusade, received much of the reformers’ attention.³

The common school reformers’ mission was to reverse two centuries of high turnover and ignominy in the teaching ranks. Before the antebellum

period, teachers were most often young, white males who were preparing for other professions, especially the ministry. Short school sessions enabled them to teach during college vacations or while they awaited a church appointment. Longer-term teachers tended to be men who farmed or ran other businesses on the side, or whose handicaps made them unsuitable for more physically taxing occupations. The few women who taught ran rudimentary “dame schools” in their homes or perhaps presided over the local school’s summer session. Historian Willard Elsbee’s tongue-in-cheek description of the character of early schoolmasters highlighted their unfavorable reputation: while most were “sober, upright, virtuous, and God-fearing,” Elsbee wrote, the “schoolteacher who was a rogue, scoundrel, defamer, souse, or knave” dominated popular memory. Whether virtuous or scoundrels, teachers before the antebellum period had no specialized training. They were usually hired by town elders or some sort of community group, who attempted to test applicants’ subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, as well as character and religion. In some towns, the ignorance of the hiring committee or lack of applicants made the interview process a bit of a farce; other committees forewent the interview to hire their relatives. Disturbed by such trends, school reformers called for a wider pool of better-prepared applicants as a step toward the professionalization of teaching.⁴

At the same time that reformers wanted to select teachers more carefully, their agenda called for more oversight of teachers and for teaching to occupy more of the year, which made it less attractive to men looking for independence and temporary work. Furthermore, as the agricultural economy declined, so too did the family unit of production. Middle-class gender ideology told men to make their way in the public world, and the growth of manufacturing and trade created changes in the labor market that presented them with all sorts of new options. Teaching, especially of small children, was outside the public, male sphere because the school was seen as an extension of the family. Catharine Beecher lamented in 1846, “Thus it is that two millions of American children are left without any teachers at all, while, of those who go to school, a large portion of the youngest and tenderest are turned over to coarse, hard, unfeeling men, too lazy or too stupid to follow the appropriate duties of their sex.”⁵

The same social changes that pulled men out of the classroom suggested that women take their place, as middle-class mores defined females as nurturing, gentle, maternal, pious, and obedient. Prescriptive gender ideology limited women to the private sphere of domestic life and motherhood, condemning the many poorer and immigrant women who worked in factories and the rare middle-class women who pursued the established professions. As early as 1818, Emma Willard invoked these constructions of gender to argue that teaching children was appropriate for women; nature, she explained, “has given us, in a greater degree than men, the gentle arts of insinuation . . . a greater quickness of invention . . . and more patience.” She also mentioned that “women had ‘no higher pecuniary object’ or ambition than to teach and ‘could afford to do it cheaper.’” Three decades later, Beecher

proclaimed, "*The educating of children, that is the true and noble profession of a woman,*" and went on to argue that filling the teaching ranks with women would solve multiple problems, including the "sufferings" of women who worked in eastern mills and factories, boredom among middle-class women, and the teacher shortage on the western frontier. Mann agreed that teaching was ideal for women, stating that reasons for employing female teachers included "the greater intensity of the parental instinct in the female sex, their natural love of the society of children, and the superior gentleness and forbearance of their dispositions." Indeed, education reformers were attracted to the image of peaceful schoolrooms governed by female teachers' "moral suasion," not to mention the positive budgetary effects of their low salaries.⁶

School leaders still sought to hire male teachers, especially for older pupils, yet they also began to hire greater numbers of women. Massachusetts led the way in the feminization of the teaching force, as it did in school reform in general. As early as 1834, 56.3 percent of Massachusetts' teachers were female. By 1850, 66 percent, and by 1860, 77.8 percent of teachers in the state were women. Beecher's own efforts increased the number of women teachers in the Middle West: between 1846 and 1856, her National Board of Popular Education sent nearly six hundred women from New England to teach on the western frontier. By 1860, women were the majority of teachers nationally; their predominance in the northern states outweighed their relatively low numbers in the South. In each region, the shift to women teachers tended to accompany urbanization and the systematization of schooling in urban and then rural areas.⁷

While employing women was a solution to the problem of finding a larger pool of prospective teachers, it also had indirect effects on the problem of inadequate teacher preparation. Longer terms of employment, education publications, and coordination at the state level, as well as training for teaching, were intended to create a more professional teaching force. The traditional professions, however, resided squarely in the male sphere of middle-class gender ideology. School reformers resolved the potential conflict between professionalization and feminization by emphasizing women's "natural" affinity for teaching, creating gender divisions in the educational structure, and reducing teachers' independence. Superintendents and principals, who were mostly male, would be decision-makers, and teachers, who were increasingly female, would follow their directions. Historian Jurgen Herbst argues that the long-term result was that administrators, and not teachers, became the professionals in education.⁸ In the short term, feminization indirectly encouraged the growth of teacher training. Not only would formal training offer another avenue for administrators to direct teachers' actions, but the supposedly innate female characteristics of gentleness, obedience, and patience also must have made women seem especially moldable and thus open to formal training. In addition, women—who had very few options for advanced education—were more willing than men—who had many other career options—to pursue education for a marginal, low-paid occupation.⁹ The shift to a feminized teaching force paralleled the intensification of the

crusade for common schools and teacher training. Although reformers did not make a connection between feminization and teacher education—in fact, they often spoke as if the teaching force was still composed exclusively of men—perhaps the movement of women into teaching made legislators and the public more willing to heed the reformers’ calls.

Education leaders began to make a case for teacher education long before the feminization of teaching. As early as 1750, Benjamin Franklin proposed an academy, one of the purposes of which would be to qualify “a number of the poorer Sort . . . to act as Schoolmasters.” In 1789, the *Massachusetts Magazine* published a call to “annihilate all the Latin grammar schools” and replace them with higher-order public schools that would “fit young gentlemen for college and school keeping.” The preceptor and board of overseers would “annually examine young gentlemen designed for schoolmasters in reading, writing, arithmetic, and English grammar, and if they are found qualified for the office of school-keeping and able to teach these branches with ease and propriety, to recommend them for this purpose.” While Latin grammar schools continued, various academies and colleges in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made independent, fleeting attempts to add teacher preparation to their offerings. In 1816, Denison Olmstead’s commencement address at Yale outlined his plan for “an academy for schoolmasters,” inaugurating the movement for separate teacher-training institutions. Seven years later, Samuel Read Hall, a Congregational minister impressed with early institutions for professional training in theology, medicine, and law, opened a seminary for teacher training in Concord, Vermont. This effort continued until 1830, when Hall moved his operation to Andover, Massachusetts, where it became a department in the Phillips Academy. Although he trained only a limited number of young men, Hall also welcomed visiting educators and politicians. “Let the character of teachers be improved, and improvement in the schools will follow of course,” he wrote. Hall’s efforts, along with earlier advocacy for teacher education, laid the foundation for the veritable crusade in the second half of the 1820s and the 1830s “to awaken the conscience” to the necessity for teacher-training institutions.¹⁰

The middle to late 1820s saw the publication of a number of pleas for teacher education. Hall himself, in the preface of his 1829 *Lectures on School-Keeping*, argued that, to improve

the character of teachers . . . institutions should be established for educating teachers, where they should be taught not only the necessary branches of literature, but, be made acquainted with the science of *teaching* and the mode of *governing* a school with success. The general management of a school should be a subject of *much study*, before one engages in the employment of teaching.

He explained that he was publishing this series of 13 lectures as a fallback because there were so few teacher-training institutions; if a future teacher were unable to attend a teacher seminary, at least he or she could read his

book. Beginning in the winter of 1824–1825, James G. Carter, a Massachusetts statesman and the Reverend Thomas H. Gallaudet, principal of the school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut published a series of articles and essays elaborating on the need for formal teacher training and how to structure it. Carter’s “Essays on Popular Education” proposed that future teachers ground themselves in the subjects to be taught, study the as-yet-to-be-developed science of teaching, and have the opportunity both to observe their professors and hone their own skills in a practice school. Gallaudet’s “Plan of a Seminary for the Education of the Instructors of Youth” reinforced the need for an “experimental school” and declared that a teacher-training institution should be well furnished with teaching “apparatus” and a library. Gallaudet and Carter, with the backing of Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York, added that these institutions should be state-supported. Gallaudet proposed that a teacher seminary “be established in every state” and “be so well endowed by the liberality of the public that it may have professors of talent who should devote their lives to the theory and practice of the education of youth.” Carter opened a teacher seminary in Lancaster, Massachusetts in 1827, and eloquently, yet unsuccessfully, appealed to the state legislature for aid. As these ideas attracted attention throughout the country, newspaper and journal editors wrote supportive reviews and reprinted the writings of Gallaudet and Carter.¹¹

Just as the teacher-seminary idea began to receive publicity, education reformers discovered Prussia’s successes in establishing institutions to educate teachers for its new centralized school system. Various German cities had established teacher seminaries as early as the mid-eighteenth century, and France and Holland had done so in the 1810s. But it was Prussia’s establishment in 1819 of a state-supported system of teacher-training institutions that attracted worldwide attention. Henry E. Dwight’s *Travels in the North of Germany in the Years 1825 and 1826*, published in New York in 1829, praised the Prussian government for requiring teacher training and establishing institutions to instruct future teachers in “the best methods of educating and of governing children as well as the subjects they are to teach.” Two years later, editor William Channing Woodbridge published commentary and translated reports on Prussian teacher education in the *American Annals of Education and Instruction*. When he noted that the Prussian institutions were for male students and he printed the translation of a female Prussian educator’s plea for seminaries for women teachers, Woodbridge was one of the few education leaders to acknowledge unresolved gender issues.¹²

While Woodbridge was spreading the word about Prussian teacher seminaries, French philosophy professor Victor Cousin, commissioned by the French government, spent several weeks visiting the school systems in the German states. He visited many elementary and secondary schools, universities, and the larger and more prominent teacher seminaries. Although he learned of Prussia’s smaller, rural teacher seminaries through official documents and conversations with high-level administrators rather than firsthand visits, Cousin lavishly praised their approach to discipline and moral instruction

as if he were intimately acquainted. Herbst explains that Cousin’s *Report on Public Instruction in Germany*

was less an objective account of Prussian schools and education than the projection of a French philosopher’s ideal version of a school system intended to wed progress and stability. And it was this ideal combination of a nation’s progress under responsible conservative guidance that appealed to American education reformers and assured the enthusiastic reception Cousin’s report received in the United States.

Widely read in Europe, the report appeared in translation in New York in 1835 and immediately made a splash among school reformers, who began to use the term “normal school,” a translation of the French *école normale*. In August, the meeting of the American Institute of Instruction in Boston included a reading of a summary of Cousin’s findings. In December, Unitarian minister and school reformer Charles Brooks, who had learned of the Prussian system from a fellow passenger on a trans-Atlantic steamer in 1834 and begun corresponding with Cousin, embarked upon a lecture tour to promote state-supported normal schools in his home state of Massachusetts, as well as New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Brooks considered himself the “missionary angel” of normal schools; he appeared in cartoons holding a ferule, leading teachers toward a normal school in the heavens. In 1837, Calvin Stowe’s *Elementary Education in Europe*, a report to the Ohio legislature on his own trip to research education in Prussia, strengthened the argument for an American adaptation of the German teacher seminary.¹³

By the middle 1830s, education reformers had certainly gone a long way toward awakening the conscience of the American public and political leaders to the importance of teacher education. A series of small triumphs during the second half of the decade brought them closer to their goal of state-supported normal schools. In 1836, James G. Carter, recently elected to the Massachusetts legislature, was appointed to chair a government committee on education. Not only did he use his new position as a platform for advocating teacher training, but he also helped to create the State Board of Education and appoint Horace Mann its first secretary. Mann and the superintendents in other states, in turn, used their positions to lobby further. Henry Barnard arranged many public meetings in Connecticut beginning in 1839, for the purpose of promoting teacher education. Farther west, throughout the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, Missouri’s state superintendents of public instruction or secretaries of state made regular appeals to the legislature for the establishment of normal schools. In Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1838, Charles Brooks enjoyed the support of former President John Quincy Adams and United States Senator Daniel Webster, at one of his public meetings on normal schools. Adams declared rhetorically, “We see monarchs expending vast sums, establishing normal schools throughout their realms, and sparing no pains to convey knowledge and efficiency to all the children of their poorest subjects. *Shall we be outdone by kings?*”¹⁴

Perhaps inspired by Adams and Webster, Edmund Dwight, a philanthropist and leader in industry, donated \$10,000 to the state of Massachusetts for “qualifying teachers of the common schools.” The legislature matched his donation, and Governor Edward Everett signed the normal-school bill in April 1838. With \$20,000 and the expectation that towns willing to host these new institutions would donate buildings and furnishings, the State Board of Education decided to establish three state normal schools. State normal schools would appear in New York within five years, and Connecticut within eleven years. Education crusaders viewed the fruits of their efforts with great anticipation. Mann declared, “Coiled up in this institution, as in a spring, there is a vigor whose uncoiling may wheel the spheres.” Governor Everett was more circumspect. In his address to mark the opening of the normal school at Barre, he celebrated its potential to be “an instrument of great good,” but also noted, “These institutions are, of course, to some extent experimental.” Indeed, the normal schools’ future was far from certain in 1839. While reformers had set their sights on state-supported institutions devoted exclusively to teacher education in the mold of the German teacher seminary, several other approaches to teacher training had taken shape, and would overshadow the state normal schools for the next three decades.¹⁵

TEACHER TRAINING IN ACADEMIES AND COLLEGES, TEACHERS’ INSTITUTES, AND NON-STATE NORMAL SCHOOLS

During the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, state normal schools educated relatively few teachers; it was in multipurpose institutions of higher schooling, short-term teachers’ institutes, and city, county, and private normal schools, that greater numbers of teachers received their training. For centuries, colleges had produced teachers rather unintentionally, in the process of preparing graduates to be ministers, doctors, lawyers, and college professors. By the late eighteenth century, academies were an increasingly popular alternative to colleges for higher-level education. Early teacher education in academies, as one historian explained, was likewise an unintended “by-product. This instruction was incidental, unorganized, unrecognized by the State and even unnoticed for a time by the academy officials themselves.” Beginning in the late 1830s, colleges and academies recognized this heretofore-unofficial purpose and made it more explicit. For example, Principal Alvin M. Dixon advertised in 1839 that the curriculum of the fledgling Platteville Academy in Wisconsin embraced “all the branches commonly taught in Academies to prepare youth for college, for teaching, and for filling important stations in life.” While Platteville and most other academies were coeducational and antebellum colleges remained for the most part male-only, separate female academies or seminaries proliferated. Following the lead of Troy Seminary in New York State (started in 1821 by Emma Willard), Hartford Seminary in Connecticut (established in 1832 by Catharine Beecher), and Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts (opened in 1837 by Mary Lyon), many

of these institutions articulated teacher education—alongside preparation for motherhood—as a primary mission. Mount Holyoke’s healthy endowment enabled Mary Lyon to fulfill her desire to offer tuition assistance specifically for women of limited means who planned to be teachers. Thus, at Mount Holyoke and other multipurpose institutions of advanced learning, teacher education arose as an official function.¹⁶

Growing numbers of colleges and academies offered teacher training as a specific course of study or curricular track. In the 1830s, Ohio University established a partial, nondegree course for aspiring teachers, and Lafayette College in Pennsylvania established a model elementary school on campus in which students who were future teachers could observe and emulate good teaching practices. By the 1840s, academies commonly offered “teachers classes.” In western New York, the 1842 catalog of Brockport Collegiate Institute announced that the formation of a “teachers class” would “receive particular attention,” and an 1849 flier for Geneseo Academy declared, “The faculty will make arrangements to give a course of instruction especially adapted to those who are preparing themselves to become teachers.” Platteville Academy catalogs listed a “Teachers Class” beginning in the late 1840s, and the 1850 catalog of Castleton Seminary in Vermont included the following description of its “Teacher’s Class”:

A class will be formed at the beginning of each term for the benefit of those who may wish to qualify themselves to teach either common schools or those of a higher order. Every facility will be given to qualify them for their important task. They will be required to pursue critically and thoroughly those branches they may design to teach; also to inform themselves as to the best method of imparting instruction and of governing schools.

Meanwhile, those who wished “to qualify themselves to teach” in the Baltimore area could study in “normal classes” established during the 1840s and 1850s at Patapsco Female Institute, Baltimore Female College, or the city’s public high schools.¹⁷

These early teachers or normal classes were usually just add-ons to the regular academic curriculum and rather thin in content. Various institutions took the additional step of establishing separate normal departments. Randolph-Macon College in Virginia added a normal department as early as 1839, and by the 1850s, these departments were becoming common. Platteville Academy’s 1855–1856 catalog promised, “Arrangements are being made for a Normal Department to be connected with the School, which will be perfected as soon as the necessary buildings are erected.” From 1856 to 1857 into the 1860s, each Platteville catalog listed the subjects to be studied in the Normal Department, as well as the English and Classical Departments. Most of the Normal-Department classes were in academic subjects—and students probably took these classes with the other academy students—but “Theory and Practice of Teaching” was a staple by the late 1850s, and “Science and History of Education” was a third-year course

beginning in 1861. Throughout the late 1850s and early 1860s, Geneseo Academy's catalogs listed a "Teachers' Department . . . for instruction in the Science of Common School Teaching." Denominational colleges in Michigan and other states, as well as some private universities, also established normal departments. The first university department, at Brown University in Rhode Island, was established in 1850 and suspended only four years later. Normal departments were especially common, yet also short-lived, at mid-western state universities. Indiana University's normal department existed intermittently between 1852 and 1873, and normal departments appeared at the state universities of Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas in 1855, 1868, and 1876, respectively. The University of Wisconsin had appointed a normal professor as early as the late 1840s, but lack of interest among the male-only student body delayed the establishment of a normal department until 1863, when the Civil War depleted the number of male students and the university sought for the first time to attract women. At Wisconsin and other universities, the normal department offered both academic and teacher-education courses, segregating female students as well as preparing teachers for the common schools.¹⁸

State support legitimated and privileged multipurpose institutions' role in teacher training. In addition to funding the establishment of normal departments at public universities, several states took explicit steps to encourage and support teacher education in academies and private colleges. New York State's tradition of providing limited financial support for its academies through the "literature fund" made them "quasi-public" in the early nineteenth century. While much of this funding was for general operating expenses, the minutes of the New York State Regents noted as early as 1821, "When it is recollected that it is to these seminaries that we must look for a supply of teachers for the common schools . . . the Regents trust they shall be enabled to extend the sphere of their bounty . . . [as far as] the finances and resources of the State may warrant." In 1834, the Regents selected eight academies, one in each senatorial district, to receive \$400 each for special teacher-training classes, in addition to their regular share of the literature fund. Seven years later, the number of designated academies doubled and the subsidy decreased to \$300. This practice was discontinued in 1844, although academies continued to train teachers. Then, in 1849, the state began to designate one academy per county to receive a yearly grant of \$10 or \$12.50 per teacher-education student, with the stipulation that no single institution receive more than \$250. Geneseo Academy's Teachers' Department received this appropriation, allowing its catalogs to advertise during the 1850s, "The appropriation of the State for the support of this department provides for the instruction of twenty-five [later: twenty] teachers, four months, gratuitously," provided they "give a written pledge to engage in teaching."¹⁹

While New York's program was probably the most extensive, other states also provided funding for the purpose of teacher education. New York's neighbor to the south began in 1834 to support teacher education through

monetary and land grants. Although few would offer actual teacher-education courses, several of Pennsylvania’s colleges received land grants that required them to train a certain number of students as teachers, and 29 academies chartered by the state received monetary support and/or land on the same condition. Farther south, the Virginia legislature in 1842 passed an act that started the Virginia Military Institute “on a distinctive mission as a normal school to supply the schools of the Commonwealth with efficient teachers.” A state grant covered the board and tuition for teachers in training, or “state cadets,” in exchange for their promise to teach for two years following graduation. To the west, Wisconsin in 1857 passed “An act for the encouragement of academies and normal schools,” which established a system for dissemination of one-fourth of the proceeds from the sale of state-owned swamplands to academies and colleges, and a board of regents to oversee the process. Instead of establishing normal schools, the board at first preferred to support teacher training in existing institutions. Funds were to be distributed according to students’ performance on a state teacher-certification examination; each academy or college was to receive \$40 for each student who passed the examination. This funding encouraged the growth of Platteville Academy’s Normal Department. Other states also provided some financial support for the education of teachers in existing institutions. For example, Maine passed an act in 1860 that funded the creation of “normal departments” in academies, and Alabama enacted a similar law in 1868. Although these programs were short-lived, they did convey state support for teacher education.²⁰

With and without state support, teachers classes and normal departments became prominent at many multipurpose institutions of higher learning during the mid-nineteenth century. At the elaborate commencement ceremonies in which each graduating student presented an oration, essay, or declamation, it became very common for one or more students to address an educational topic. At Platteville Academy, for example, in 1854, N. D. Glidden won a prize for his declamation, “Educational Prospects of Wisconsin”; the following year, A. W. Bell presented a speech entitled “Education” and J. W. Blackstone spoke on “The American Student”; and in 1863, Meta Waters discussed “Practical Education.” Meanwhile, at Geneseo Academy in 1863 Jennie E. Buell presented “The True End of Education,” and at different end-of-term commencements in 1867, W. S. Peterson’s declamation was entitled “The Education of the Masses, the Security of the People,” and Mary E. Cole answered the question, “What is Education.” As education became a subject of study at these multipurpose institutions, they became an important source of teachers. Randolph-Macon College produced many of Virginia’s outstanding male educators of the mid-nineteenth century, while a majority of the teachers in Pennsylvania and other states received their training in academies. Female seminaries such as Hartford and Troy produced huge numbers of teachers. Historian David Allmendinger explained that, between 1837 and 1850, “Mount Holyoke graduates taught in overwhelming proportions.” More than 80 percent taught at least briefly, and

26 percent taught for ten or more years. Colleges and academies, as well as growing numbers of public high schools, would continue to play an important role in teacher training into the late nineteenth century; they provided the opportunity to study education alongside academic subjects, for students who could afford the time and cost of sustained higher schooling.²¹

Many teachers in the mid-nineteenth century did not have the benefit of extensive higher schooling. For them, as well as teachers who needed to brush up on or had never studied teaching methods, teachers' institutes provided at least a modicum of professional guidance. As part of his efforts to rally support for teacher education in 1839, school reformer and Connecticut State Superintendent Henry Barnard held an experimental six-week meeting for 26 male teachers in Hartford. The teachers studied pedagogy, reviewed common-school subjects, and observed in the Hartford public schools. Barnard repeated the experiment the following year, inviting women as well as men teachers to attend. In 1843, a county school superintendent applied the term "institute" to the two-week teachers' meeting that he convened in Ithaca, New York, which replicated much of what Barnard had done in Hartford. While the ultimate goal of Barnard's undertakings was permanent, state-supported institutions along the lines of the German teacher seminaries, the more immediate result was the inauguration of teachers' institutes, which historian Carl Kaestle calls "one of the most popular innovations of the reform program."²²

The idea of establishing teachers' institutes spread quickly throughout Connecticut and New York, and to the rest of the country. By the end of the 1840s, education leaders in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin convened teachers' institutes at least somewhat regularly. The idea reached California by the mid-1850s, New Mexico by the 1860s, and southern states such as West Virginia and Arkansas soon after the Civil War. State laws and funding often supported the spread of teachers' institutes; a law passed in Rhode Island in 1845 called on school commissioners to hold "institutes 'where teachers and such as propose to teach may become acquainted with the most approved and successful methods of arranging the studies and conducting the discipline of instruction of public schools.'" Teachers were strongly encouraged—sometimes required—to attend institutes, which were scheduled in various locations throughout each state in order to ensure accessibility. For example, in 1857 in Vermont, institutes took place in six different towns, ranging from St. Johnsbury in the northeast to Townshend in the south. The first law regarding institutes in Arkansas stipulated that one be scheduled in each county, and the revised law in 1875 required the state superintendent to organize an annual "normal district institute" in each of the state's 14 judicial districts. Most of these Arkansas institutes met in county courthouses, and leaders in other states used whatever facilities they could find. In 1859 and 1860, Wisconsin's Platteville Academy donated its facilities for an institute; Henry Barnard, then serving as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, directed the 1859 meeting.²³

Teachers’ institutes generally convened once or twice per year, and lasted between two and four weeks. Like other southern states, Arkansas first only provided institutes for white teachers, but later added separate institutes for black teachers. Henry Barnard explained in 1865 that the “exercises” of each institute should include three elements: a review of common-school subjects, with attention to the best methods of teaching them and a discussion of “such difficulties as any member of the Institute may have encountered in teaching the same”; lectures on and discussions of “the organization of the schools, the classification of pupils, and the theory of practice teaching”; and public lectures on and discussions of broader educational topics, to take place in the evenings. Especially in the early years, institutes often fell short of this ideal because the teachers’ thin grasp of subject-matter knowledge necessitated thorough reviews. Nevertheless, even the early institutes did give teachers a chance to grapple with some issues. For example, teachers at the 1847 Chautauqua County Institute in New York discussed extensively, “What is the best method of preventing whispering?” and “What is the best method of teaching morals?” Questions for discussion at an institute in Pennsylvania 11 years later included, “Should teachers open their schools in the morning by reading a portion of the scripture?” and “Should the wages of females be equal to those of male teachers?” Guest lectures for the institutes’ evening sessions throughout the country included Louis Agassiz and Henry Barnard. By the 1880s, Arkansas teachers also listened to local doctors, ministers, and lawyers address school law, as well as hygiene and morals. Institutes gave practicing teachers a rare and brief chance to reflect just a little on their craft.²⁴

What teachers’ institutes lacked in serious content, they made up for in abundant enthusiasm for education and teaching. The superintendent of public instruction in Illinois in 1858 likened the importance of the institute for a teacher to the pilgrimage to Mecca for a Muslim—“the source whence he renews the spirit and life of his existence.” In only slightly less flowery language, the superintendent in West Virginia in 1870 listed many benefits of institute attendance for the teacher, including, “[It] inspires him with an unwonted enthusiasm, caught by contact with superior and sympathetic hearts; and carries him back to his school room with new impulses and higher aspirations, to work out better results.” Henry Barnard was hardly exaggerating when he called the teachers’ institute an “educational revival agency.” While teachers’ institutes did more to engender enthusiasm than to provide in-depth training, they reached a very broad number of teachers. Reports indicated high attendance figures: in 1849, 36 percent of the teachers in Maine, in 1859, about 20 percent of the teachers in Wisconsin, and also in the late 1850s, approximately 15 percent of the teachers in Michigan attended institutes. According to historian Paul Mattingly, in the mid-nineteenth century, “institutes were the most prevalent teacher preparatory agency in America and touched the lives of more teachers than any other educational institution.” The institutes’ popularity would continue through the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, teachers’ institutes did much to “awaken the