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## Article Title: No Teacher for the School: The Nebraska Junior Normal School Movement

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Article Summary: A serious shortage of trained teachers led to the creation of Nebraska junior normal schools in the early twentieth century. When high schools were able to offer more normal school courses, they prepared a more adequate number of rural teachers and the junior normal schools were discontinued.

### Cataloging Information:

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Photographs / Images: 1902 class of the Freeman School, near Beatrice; State Superintendent of Instruction William K Fowler; charts: Daily Program, Junior Normal School; Daily Program, York County Public Schools; Junior Normal School Attendance, 1903-1914; Miss Phoebe Churchill, teacher, and her class at a log school near Rushville (c 1895)



*The Freeman School, which stands five miles northwest of Beatrice, was built c. 1871 with the assistance of first homesteader, Daniel Freeman. Also known as the Brick School or District 21, its 1902 class included the following: (front row) Harry Odell, Grace Odell, Genie Reel, Neva Wilson Sparks; (back row) Harry Wilson, Agnes Freeman, Theodosia Collett, Lee Clair Freeman, Frankie Shepard (teacher), Martha Scheve, Amanda Scheve.*

NO TEACHER FOR THE SCHOOL:  
THE NEBRASKA  
JUNIOR NORMAL SCHOOL MOVEMENT

By R. McLARAN SAWYER

**A**LTHOUGH THE UNITED STATES Superintendent of the Census reported in 1890 that the frontier had ceased to exist, pioneer conditions continued in teacher education in Nebraska into the twentieth century. Among the many problems facing educators, particularly those west of the ninety-eighth meridian, the task of obtaining qualified teachers for the rural schools long remained burdensome. This situation reached crisis proportions during the opening decade of this century. At the end of the school year in 1899, 55 per cent of the Nebraska children of school age were attending ungraded rural schools, 40 per cent graded elementary schools, and 5 per cent high school.

In his 1902 report the Nebraska State Superintendent of Public Instruction reported that 22 per cent of the teachers in the state each fall were "new inexperienced" teachers. Only "5.5 per cent are graduates of a college or university; but 40 per cent have a high school education or its equivalent; 29 per cent have less than three years' high school education, and 15 per cent have no high school training . . . less than 16 per cent have anything like professional training."<sup>1</sup>

In 1867 the establishment by the first State Legislature of the State Normal School at Peru in the extreme southeast corner of the state had not adequately met the professional

needs of the rural elementary schools. This institution was inaccessible to most of the residents of the state. It was obtained by the state as a "bargain" when the private female academy at Peru, unable to support itself, was offered to the state for \$3,000.

The University of Nebraska, which had opened its doors in 1871, established a Department of Pedagogy in 1895; but it too was located in the southeastern part of the state. To increase the supply of trained teachers, legislation was adopted in 1897 authorizing private institutions with a minimum of \$100,000 capital investment to offer teacher training programs and to award teaching certificates similar to those of the State Normal School and the University of Nebraska.

These public and private teacher training programs, however, did little to supply the demand for rural elementary teachers. Students graduating from a normal school or university easily obtained teaching positions in the graded schools of the larger communities. The primary source of professional preparation for rural teachers was the county teachers' institute. These institutes conducted by county superintendents varied greatly in the quality of the program and the length of the term. Frequently the quality of the instruction was poor: "The superintendent may not have a wide acquaintance among able instructors, and in selecting, follows the line of least resistance. He knows some very 'good fellows' in his own county. Why should he award this desirable job to a stranger when he can please a personal friend or secure support in the next campaign?"<sup>2</sup> George B. Lane, as State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1887-1891), made the ruling that joint county institutes could be organized by contiguous counties. By 1902 the Union Normal Institute, as these joint county institutes were called, was being rapidly accepted in Nebraska as a practical means of improving the quality of the teachers' institutes.

The Union Normal Institute held at Holdrege in 1902 enrolled over three-fourths as many students as the State Normal School at Peru. Its number of students, combined with those of the Union Institutes conducted at Culbertson and Sidney, exceeded the enrollments in all other publicly



*William K. Fowler served as State Superintendent of Instruction from 1901 to 1905. His office was located in the second state capitol in Lincoln. Twenty men were elected to this office between 1869 and 1955, after which it was abolished by constitutional amendment.*

supported teacher training programs. In the absence of an adequately located normal school, a type of teachers' institute had developed which was to prove vastly superior to that of the county institute.

Many educational leaders welcomed the innovation. A county superintendent wrote: "I believe the joint institute to be far superior to the county institute for the following reasons: We are enabled to secure the best of instructors; we can have larger and better institutes at less expense; we can give the teachers the benefit of a lecture course, which alone is worth the price of the tuition."<sup>3</sup> The Chancellor of the University of Nebraska, E. Benjamin Andrews, commented enthusiastically, "The launching of the Union Normal Institutes . . . constitutes in my judgment one of the largest steps forward in public school work which the history of the state has ever witnessed."<sup>4</sup> Charles Fordyce, first Dean of Teachers College at the University of Nebraska and at this time Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Nebraska Wesleyan Uni-

versity, welcomed the Union Normal Institutes as an improvement over the poorly conducted county institute. "The results achieved by the Union Normal Institutes already conducted in Nebraska give evidence that the greatest efficiency may be brought about by the merging of the energies and the funds of several contiguous counties into one central, vigorous, inspiring summer training school."<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the state's educational leadership recognized that a new day was dawning in the preparation of rural elementary teachers in Nebraska. However, with the initiative for the formation of Union Normal Institutes and the control of them in the hands of the county school superintendent, difficulties were unavoidable. "Local pride in holding the institute in the home county [of each county participating] and the political dictation of the bosses over the county superintendents are the principal obstacles to be overcome in establishing Union Normal Institutes."<sup>6</sup> Forceful leadership in this movement for the improved preparation of rural teachers was required. William K. Fowler, elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1900, provided the needed leadership. A native of New Jersey, he had attended elementary and high school in New York State, where he had participated in the normal training program offered in the secondary schools. After teaching several terms in a district school, he attended the College of the City of New York, the University of Edinburgh, and Monmouth College in Illinois, each for one year. Fowler then settled in Nebraska, where he was principal in the school system at Scribner for five years and then superintendent of the city schools in Blair until the time of his election to the state superintendency.

Fowler, as state superintendent, stressed the shortage of qualified teachers, especially rural teachers, as Nebraska's most acute educational problem. He recommended the relocation of the State Normal School, the establishment of a new normal school, and the liberalization of qualifications required of private normal schools and colleges for recognition of their teacher training program. His most unusual recommendation, however, called for the creation of a system of state junior normal schools. This unique teacher training institution would be funded by the state and placed under the direction and

control of the state superintendent of public instruction. The creation of junior normal schools would temporarily meet the need for a program of pre-collegiate normal level teacher training. Fowler also recommended the establishment of a teacher training program, patterned after that in New York State, in the public high schools. However, in the geographic areas of greatest need, public high schools did not exist. The junior normal school could meet this demand.

In its 1903 session the Nebraska Legislature adopted a bill establishing a system of Junior Normal Schools. The statute located them at Alliance, McCook, and Valentine and authorized the state superintendent to locate two additional schools. These were placed at Holdrege and North Platte.

The Junior Normal Schools were under the direction of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. All costs were borne by the state, with the students required to pay only their living expenses. Each community made arrangements for the students to be boarded at low cost, and the railroads offered a special one-third fare to those who attended. To defray the cost of the program the Legislature appropriated \$12,000 for the biennium.

The Junior Normal Schools were conducted for a minimum of ten weeks between June and September, and it was directed that "at each of these places the public school buildings, textbooks and apparatus of the respective school districts be placed at the service of the state under the jurisdiction of the state superintendent."<sup>7</sup> The program of instruction "shall be a part of the regularly prescribed course of the state normal school as schools, and students in regular attendance and pursuing and completing these studies in a satisfactory manner shall be granted a certificate . . . which . . . shall entitle the holder to proper credit at the state normal school or schools."<sup>8</sup> Three Junior Normal School sessions were equivalent to one year's work at the State Normal School.

The State Superintendent required that students be at least "fourteen years of age, of good moral character, and of good physical health, who have a fair knowledge of the common school branches such as may be obtained in the country

schools or in the lower eight grades of well organized city schools.”<sup>9</sup>

The Junior Normal course of study, established by the State Superintendent, emphasized academic work in the common branches taught in the rural schools and practical work in the “Model School.” The prescribed daily program typically was:

**DAILY PROGRAM  
JUNIOR NORMAL SCHOOL<sup>10</sup>**

Time	Principal	Instructor	Instructor	Instructor	Primary Instructor
8:00-8:40	Office	Geometry	Advanced Arithmetic	Geography	Model School
8:40-9:20	Pedagogy	Reading and Literature	Adv. Grammar and Composition	Bookkeeping and Physiology	Model School
9:20-10:00	School Management; School Laws	Algebra	Elementary Arithmetic	Botany	Model School
10:00-10:40	CHAPEL AND CHORUS				
10:40-11:20	Civics			Physics	
11:20-12:00		Orthography and Word Analysis	Elementary English Grammar		Drawing and Penmanship
12:00-1:40	NOON INTERMISSION				
1:40-2:20	Conference Hour	Conference Hour	Conference Hour	Conference Hour	Primary Methods
2:20-3:00	Office	History		Elements of Agriculture	
3:00-3:30			Music		

It was recommended that prospective teachers take three or four academic studies and devote the remainder of their time to professional training. The Model School was regarded as the key to professional preparation. "By Model School, it is meant to have the work demonstrated by classes of children in the first, second and third grades in reading, numbers and language. The other features of the Model School will comprise instruction in methods, busy work, nature study, etc. It will be a Model School in fact as well as in name—a school in which the young teacher may have the benefit of actual exercise in the business of instruction under the direction of a model teacher."<sup>11</sup>

It was expected that observation and some supervised teaching in the Model School would aid the prospective teacher in acquiring techniques necessary for classroom management. The problem of organizing the classroom activities was regarded as a major source of difficulty for the rural teacher in an ungraded school. One highly recommended daily program for rural schools was developed by Edward C. Bishop, Superintendent of York County and later State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1909-1911). His daily program, designed to provide order and system, required strict attention by the teacher and a good school clock on the wall.<sup>12</sup> (See schedule, page 198.) This daily program was widely copied and used by Nebraska educators. It was praised as a means of class organization that "would work." However, Bishop became better known for his pioneering efforts in introducing a program of school gardens and agricultural education in the elementary schools of Nebraska.<sup>13</sup>

The Junior Normal Schools served not only to prepare new teachers for the rural elementary schools, but also to provide a means of improving the teaching skills of those practitioners with little professional training. These summer programs further contributed greatly to the general interest in education throughout Nebraska. R. W. W. Jones, a member of the Legislature and a former teacher, visited all the Junior Normal Schools during the 1904 session. His enthusiastic report did

**DAILY PROGRAM**  
**YORK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

DISTRICT NO.....

DIVISIONS		D-PRIMARY	C-SECONDARY	B-INTERMEDIATE	A-ADVANCED
RECITATION BEGINS	TIME	GRADES I, II.	GRADES III, IV.	GRADES V, VI.	GRADES VII, VIII.
<b>GENERAL EXERCISES</b>					
9:00	10	<b>GENERAL EXERCISES</b>			
9:10	25	Silent Reading.	Word Study—From Spelling or Feading Lesson	Nature Study	Arithmetic
9:35	10	READ	Study Reading	Arithmetic Analysis—Note Book	Study Arithmetic
9:45	10	Silent Read'g	Study Reading	Study Arithmetic	Study Arithmetic
9:55	15	Form Work—Paper Folding, Stick Laying, etc.	Reading	Study Arithmetic	Reading and Word Study
10:10	20	Outdoor Recreation	Arithmetic—Written Analysis of Simple Problems	Arithmetic	Reading and Literature
10:30	10	<b>RECESS</b>			
10:40	25	Numbers—On Slate or with Objects	Study Arithmetic	Word Study—Use Tablet or Note Book	Reading and Literature
11:05	15	Numbers	Study Arithmetic	Study Reading	Nature Study
11:20	20	Busy Work in Numbers	Arithmetic	Reading and Literature	Study Grammar
11:40	20	Outdoor Recreation	Written Work From Oral Lessons of Previous Day	Reading and Literature	Study Grammar
12:00	60	<b>NOON INTERMISSION</b>			
1:00	10	<b>GENERAL EXERCISES CURRENT EVENTS, CIVICS, MORALS AND MANNERS</b>			
1:10	15	Silent Reading	Nature Study	Map Drawing—Geography or History	Grammar
1:25	10	READ.	Form Work—Map Drawing, Sand Moulding, etc.	Study Geography	Map Drawing—Geography or History
1:35	10	Silent Read'g	Study Reading	Study Geography	Map Drawing—Geography or History
1:45	10	Form Work—Clay Modeling, Paper Cutting, etc.	Study Reading	Geography	Study Geography
1:55	15	Form Work—Clay Modeling, Paper Cutting, etc.	Reading	Study Language	Study Geography
2:10	15	Outdoor Recreation	Study Language	Study Language	Geography
2:25	10	Outdoor Recreation	Study Language	Language	Study Spelling
2:35	10	<b>RECESS</b>			
2:45	10	Numbers—On Slate or with Objects	Language	Study History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>	Study History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>
2:55	10	† ORAL LESSONS		Study History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>	Study History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>
3:05	20	<b>WRITING<sup>3</sup></b>		<b>DRAWING<sup>2</sup></b>	
3:25	10	Seat Work from Oral Lessons	Study Spelling	History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>	Study History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>
3:35	15	Outdoor Recreation	Study Spelling	Study Spelling	History <sup>3</sup> or Physiology <sup>2</sup>
3:50	10	Outdoor Recreation	Spelling	Spelling	Spelling

† ORAL LESSONS  
History, one week each month.  
Physiology and Hygiene, one week each month.  
Nature Study, one week each month.  
Geography, one week each month.

DIRECTIONS:  
§ 3 The small figures at the right indicate the number of lessons per week.  
Neatness and accuracy should be required in all written work.  
Teachers should consult the County Superintendent before making any change in this program.

**ED. C. BISHOP, County Superintendent.**

much to insure continuing support for this venture in teacher education.

In reviewing the observations and experiences of the week I am led to believe that, under existing conditions, the Junior Normals are peculiarly well adapted to the educational needs of those sections of the great west in which these schools are established, and that the necessity and demand for them will continue to exist for at least some years to come . . . The number of qualified and professionally trained teachers yearly graduated from the State University, the Normal Schools, and our larger High Schools is sadly insufficient to fill even the more attractive positions of the better settled eastern and central counties of the state . . . all classes and conditions of men seemed to agree that the work of the Junior Normals had warmed their interest into positive enthusiasm, aroused professional pride and ambition in many of the teachers, and brought large returns to them, their schools, and the state for the amount of capital experimentally invested.<sup>14</sup>

This quickening of interest in education by the public was a significant product of the junior normal movement in Nebraska. Interest was particularly drawn to the quality of teaching in the schools and the need for professional training for teachers. "This junior normal idea is a good one. Anything that helps to fit teachers to teach assists in advancing the cause of good government and solving the problems of civilization which have hitherto remained unsolved. We hope these schools will continue, and that those employed to do for our offspring the best that may be done in this wide world, will ultimately receive such compensation that they won't go about as some of them now do, feeling down-trodden and oppressed and thoroughly imposed upon."<sup>15</sup> Opportunities for improved teacher status, combined with an increased professional competence, were recognized as being beneficial to both society and the teacher. "It [the junior normal] has been a success in every way . . . These schools are the means of lifting the profession up to that broader level where it belongs and may Northwestern Nebraska be blessed with many more such as this has been."<sup>16</sup> The success of the junior normal movement was due to the highly effective leadership provided by the State Superintendents of Public Instruction. They were successful in appointing well recognized Nebraska educational leaders as the principals of the junior normals and in securing an instructional staff gleaned from the most competent classroom teachers in the state. The public was given the opportunity to attend the lecture programs of the schools, and those who attended were impressed with the quality and reputation of the speakers.

Common among those addressing the junior normal schools were the state governors, members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation, university presidents, deans, and professors. These lectures greatly impressed upon the public the relationship between good educational opportunities and facilities and the economic and social welfare of the state.

This reawakened interest in education soon produced change. The need for more teacher training programs, emphasized earlier by State Superintendent W. K. Fowler, had resulted in the establishment of the junior normal schools. From this came the realization of his goal for a program of normal training in the high schools. In 1905 legislation was adopted which,

Provided, that on and after September 1, 1907, no person shall be granted a first grade county certificate who has not had at least twelve weeks normal training, and no person shall be granted a county second grade certificate who has not had at least eight weeks normal training, in a college, university, or normal school of approved standing in this or in another state, or in a state junior normal school of Nebraska, or in a high school in Nebraska, approved by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction as being equipped to give such normal training.<sup>17</sup>

This legislation produced a critical reaction among many educational leaders. The fear was widely expressed that it could produce a normal training program in the high schools of low quality. As a result, in October 1905, the Association of Superintendents and Principals of Graded Schools formed a committee to consider the matter of normal training in Nebraska high schools. Its recommendation favored this training provided that regulations be adopted and supervision maintained to insure a program of acceptable quality. This recommendation was unanimously adopted by the Nebraska State Teachers' Association in December 1905. Legislation adopted in 1907 provided for rigid control and supervision for normal training programs in Nebraska high schools. To qualify for the program, high schools must be accredited by the University of Nebraska and meet minimum standards respecting enrollment and number of faculty members. The program was initially limited to sixty-seven high schools and was permanently under the supervision of the State Superintendent.

The junior normal school movement paved the way for the acceptance of the idea of normal training in Nebraska high

schools as well as raising the certification requirements for rural teachers. With the advent of a normal course in the high schools, the junior normal legislation was amended in 1907. The new law provided for the establishment of eight junior normal schools instead of the previous five, three of them to be established at Alliance, McCook, and Valentine, with the State Superintendent authorized to locate the other five where the need was the greatest. He established these five at Alma, Broken Bow, Geneva, North Platte, and O'Neill. To encourage attendance, the term was reduced from ten to eight weeks.

Although the state of Nebraska established a public normal school at Kearney in 1905, purchased a private normal school at Wayne in 1909 and a private academy at Chadron in 1911, these institutions still were not able to supply the need for teachers in the rural schools of Nebraska. However, with the growth of the normal course in the high schools, a more adequate number of rural teachers became available. Normal training in high schools grew rapidly after 1912 and junior normal school attendance declined.

#### JUNIOR NORMAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, 1903-1914

School Year	Attendance at Junior Normal Schools for full term	Number of Students Enrolled in High School Normal Training Course
1903	1160	0
1904	1099	0
1905	929	0
1906	860	0
1907	1262	1212
1908	1448	1338*
1909	1394	1465
1910	1414	1769
1911	1407	1860
1912	1405	2883
1913	513	3343
1914	501	3343

\*Estimated



*Miss Phoebe Churchill, left, taught in this log school ten miles north of Rushville in Sheridan County (c. 1895).*

The Nebraska State Teachers' Association adopted a resolution at its Forty-fifth Annual Session, held at Lincoln in November 1910, recommending the termination of the junior normal schools. "We view with satisfaction the establishment of additional normal schools which will render unnecessary the long continuance of junior normals and similar temporary institutions for the training of teachers."<sup>18</sup> However, it was not until 1914 that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction recommended, "The junior normal schools should be discontinued. They have served their purpose."<sup>19</sup>

The summer of 1914 saw the termination of the Nebraska junior normal movement. During the period of its existence, 1903-1914, a unique type of teacher training program had

been developed. This was a temporary step toward normal training in Nebraska high schools. The junior normal movement was the direct result of the educational frontier which continued to exist in western Nebraska into the early twentieth century. The passing of the junior normal school marked the attainment of an educational structure which had progressed beyond the educational frontier in teacher education.

## NOTES

1. *Seventeenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the State of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Woodruff-Collins Printing Co., 1903), 147.
2. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Nebraska for the Years 1895-6* (Lincoln: State Journal Co., 1896), 154.
3. *Seventeenth Biennial Report*, 175.
4. *Ibid.*, 169.
5. *Ibid.*, 169-170.
6. *Ibid.*, 170.
7. *The School Laws of Nebraska 1905*, Subdivision XII, Section 48.
8. *Ibid.*, Subdivision XII, Section 20.
9. *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the State of Nebraska* (York, Nebraska: York Times Print, 1905), 288.
10. *Ibid.*, 332.
11. *Ibid.*, 286-287.
12. *The Nebraska Teacher*, September 1902, 118.
13. Little has been written specifically about Bishop. His efforts in agricultural education in elementary schools are mentioned by Lawrence Chemin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 79-80. After serving as State Superintendent of Public Instruction, he joined the staff of Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts at Ames in 1911 as a staff member in the Schools Section of the Extension Department.
14. *Eighteenth Biennial Report*, 355-356.
15. *Republican* (Valentine, Nebraska), August 7, 1903.
16. *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, August 14, 1903.
17. *Nineteenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the State of Nebraska* (Fremont, Nebraska: Hammond Printing Co., 1907), 167.
18. *Minutes*, Nebraska State Teachers Association, Vol. 1903-1910, 478.
19. *Twenty-Third Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the State of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Woodruff Press, 1914), 2.