Chapter 5

Localism and Public School Funding

Over the whole period with which this thesis is concerned, Alabama's public schools were chronically under-funded. In the early years (despite the provisions of the 1868 constitution) the lack of funds was so grave that teachers were being paid in valueless state warrants (promissory notes upon which the promise was not forthcoming). In 1873, in order to avoid worsening an already dire situation, Alabama's Board of Education decided not to open the public schools at all. By the end of the nineteenth century Alabama's annual per pupil expenditure ($0.38) was lower than any of the states in the Union including those with large black populations, and the state's other indices of educational efficiency (such as literacy, term lengths and attendance) were all similarly dismal.[1] Although Alabama moderately increased its educational investment in the early twentieth century, in 1910 just on 23 percent of the population over ten years was illiterate. In 1912, when the Russell Sage Foundation of New York published a wide-ranging survey of public schooling across the whole of the United States, Alabama's "general rank" against ten tests of educational efficiency was at the very bottom of the forty-eight states.[2]

The reasons for the continuous under-investment had many antecedents but were most directly connected to the policies implemented by the Democratic and Conservative Party when it gained political power in the elections of 1874. The ascension of the so-called Bourbons effectively brought the Reconstruction era to an end and began the long-term political hegemony of economically like-minded people who, after the financial imprudence of the Republican régimes during Reconstruction, were philosophically committed to minimal expenditure, low taxation and debt recovery. Their policies were institutionalised in the constitution adopted on December 6, 1875, which placed a cap on the total rate of taxation on assessable property that could be levied by the state, its various counties and its cities or incorporated municipalities. When there was scarcely sufficient revenue to

1. United States Department of the Interior, ***Report of the Commissioner for Education for the year 1897-98***, Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1: 1xxxii. Quoted in George Wade Prewett, "The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1993, 7.

2. United States Department of the Interior, ***An Educational Study of Alabama***, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 41, Washington D.C., 1919. (Hereinafter cited as ***1919 Educational Study***), 18. See also Russell Sage Foundation: Division of Education, ***A Comparative Study of Public School Systems in the Forty-Eight States***, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1912, 33. This survey provided data for multiple dimensions such as (for example) the number of children actually attending school as a percentage of total school-age population. In almost every one of the dimensions surveyed, Alabama was amongst the bottom five states.

fund a single public schooling system, it was this constitution that mandated a dual system of racially separated schools.[3]

Taken together, the constitutional articles on education and taxation ensured that Alabama's educational system would operate largely in a decentralised polity and on a financial shoestring. This enhanced the conditions not only for local educational decision-making but also for the development of a multiplicity of "home-grown" solutions to ameliorate funding deficiencies and ensure the actual survival of public schooling. These solutions were contrived and implemented by parents and guardians as well as those community members whom historian Wayne Fuller has termed "educators in overalls."[4] These were the citizens (frequently farmers) who served as unpaid township superintendents/trustees for rural and village schools.

Other factors that assisted the survival of public schools included the community's own provision of land, buildings and equipment; parental tuition subsidies; philanthropy (by both "public-spirited men of means," as well as foundations and corporations); the preparedness of teachers to work for meagre wages; and the use of school fund moneys to underwrite the costs of private academies (some of which offered a "free term" and, over time, metamorphosed into full public schools). For example, in 1886 *The Troy Messenger* told its readers:

> *The Superintendent of Education has sustained the action of the trustees in placing the public school funds in the Troy Male High School and female seminary with the exception that the schools are to continue four months instead of three.*[5]

The manner in which local communities acted on their own behalf to keep their schools going in spite of niggardly governmental investment is the principal topic of this chapter. The actions to be reviewed include the improvisations of rural

3. Article XI of Alabama's 1875 State Constitution (Taxation) stipulated that the maximum tax rate that could be levied at the state level was 75 cents per $100.00 of assessed property value. The maximum tax rate that could be levied at the county level (except in Mobile) was 50 cents per $100.00. Counties could also levy an additional tax of up to 25 cents per $100.00 exclusively to service or retire debt incurred before 1875. Mobile was permitted to levy a ten-mill tax until 1879.

4. Wayne E. Fuller, ***The Old Country School: the story of rural education in the Middle West***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982. "Educators in Overalls" is the title of a chapter in this book.

5. The description of school benefactors as "public spirited men of means" is in Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, xvi. The role of large scale philanthropy will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 8. See also ***The Troy Messenger***, November 25, 1886.

communities with scarce funds; the recurrent resort to the venerable American tradition of the town meeting to resolve educational crises; the opportunistic use of county/city licensing arrangements and novel taxation measures; the litigation that tested constitutional constraints; and the cultural conflicts revealed by disputes over funding options – specifically funds derived from liquor sales. Also considered is the nature of the interaction between state and county officials after the 1901 constitution allowed local taxation for schools (subject to voter approval). Although inadequate funding posed severe operational problems for public schools and limited options for their future modernisation, some communities preferred their customary self-reliance over the prospect of increased taxation or a possible alteration to the racial status quo.

The topic here is made complex by the number of variables which affected school funding over time. These included constitutional and legislative provisions; a range of revenue sources and types; governmental and regulatory tiers; racial politics; and other factors which multiplied the options for local solutions and made variation inevitable. Thus, to demonstrate the contentions of this chapter, the topic will be treated thematically with illustrative examples rather than approached chronologically. Also, in order to provide a context for the matters discussed here it is necessary to provide a brief repetition of the well known but complex origins of public school funding by the state and describe those aspects of the funding arrangements which remained a perennial feature of Alabama's schooling system.

In 1785, at the behest of the United States Congress, a survey was undertaken of practically all lands north of the Ohio River and west of the Mississippi River plus Florida, Mississippi and Alabama. The survey lines imposed upon the landscape a grid pattern of "townships."[5] These were numbered and described in relation to survey bearings such as "base lines," "ranges" and "meridians." Each township was an area of approximately thirty-six square miles comprising thirty-six

5. A "township" is an area of approximately 36 square miles but due to the convergence of meridians and other factors, no township is exactly 6 miles square. Rows of townships are surveyed east and west along the baseline and a row is called a "tier." Tiers are numbered north and south from the baseline. A row of townships extending north and south is called a "Range." Ranges are numbered east and west from the principal meridian. A township located 12 tiers south of the baseline and 14 ranges east of the principal meridian is written "T12S, R14E." Ranges are separated by "range lines", but the lines separating tiers of townships are not named. Retrieved from http://www.rootsweb.com/~algenweb/landrec.html (accessed March 30 2007). 36 square miles = 93.24 square kilometres. One square mile = 640 acres (259 hectares).

numbered "sections" of 640 acres (approximately 259 hectares) each. Congress stipulated that the sixteenth section of each township be reserved for the "maintenance" of public schools and this provision became part of all subsequent legislation admitting states to the Union. In Alabama, the township and the county school district were one and the same until 1903.

Thus, when Alabama was admitted to the Union on March 2, 1819, the sixteenth section of each of its 1,572 townships was granted to the inhabitants of those townships for schooling purposes. There were, however, significant value disparities between (for example) the sixteenth sections of townships in the fertile Black Belt and those in poorer areas of the state. Also, much of the original sixteenth section land was under water or in swamps or otherwise valueless. In 1841, as a sort of recompense for the valueless sixteenth sections, Congress set aside an additional 100,000 acres (40,469 hectares) of indemnity lands (some in other states and territories such as Nebraska) and other federal lands within Alabama which had been claimed by the state in lieu of valueless sixteenth section lands. Yet further federal largesse was extended to Alabama in 1836 when Congress allocated to the state some $669,086.78 of "surplus revenue" from tariff collections and this was made part of the public school fund.[6]

Alabama's General Assembly started early to regulate the use of funds derived from the leasing or outright sale of school lands. From 1828 all such funds had to be deposited with Alabama's state bank with an interest rate of 6 percent going back to the township schools. Similarly, the U.S. surplus revenue fund was also deposited with the state bank. For a time the bank was so prosperous that its earnings paid *all* the expenses of government and taxation was suspended. In 1839, the Assembly required the bank to pay a dividend of $150,000 per annum for the support of schools and in 1840 this payment was raised to $200,000 p.a. But, because the state-wide public school system would not be organised for another fourteen or fifteen years, the funds were often dissipated in the hands of private and denominational schools. They contributed little or nothing to the development of public education.

6. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 26-29. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1878***, xii. In this report Leroy F. Box, state superintendent of education stated that, under an Act of Congress of 1836 and amending legislation in 1845, 1847, 1849 and 1853 and an Act of Alabama's General Assembly in 1846, indemnity lands were selected in Louisiana and Arkansas but, except in one case, these were never accepted by the townships for which they were selected and were thus "held for cancellation" by the General Land Office in Washington.

In 1843, after a period of financial instability, the bank could not meet its statutory obligations to either the state or the school fund. The Act requiring the payment of $200,000 was repealed thus cutting off funds for education. In January 1846 action was begun to liquidate the bank and the funds accumulated in the bank to that date were effectively lost.[7] In 1848 and 1851-52 the Assembly enacted a number of measures by which the townships would receive interest from a notional capital fund equivalent to the sums lost as a result of the bank's failure. This fictional "perpetual fund" was to be financed from taxation and thus the tax-averse people of Alabama assumed the burden of providing the annual interest on a paper fund whose principal had been lost as a consequence of governmental action. When funds were received from new land sales, the cash receipts were used for miscellaneous public purposes and interest bearing certificates in the perpetual fund took their place. In February 1854 when the legislation establishing the state-wide education system was enacted, the new state superintendent of education was made responsible for the management of an "educational fund." This comprised interest on the U.S. surplus revenue fund, interest on the proceeds of the valueless sixteenth sections, and interest on the funds which had accrued from sixteenth section lands (or might do so). Additional funds were to be derived from escheats and various corporate taxes. Counties were authorised to levy a small one-mill *ad valorem* tax on property,[8] and school trustees were permitted to charge moderate tuition fees when the public funds were insufficient to compensate the teacher fairly. The economic disparities between townships arising from sixteenth section value were partly addressed by adding a special annual appropriation of $100,000 from the state treasury for the purpose of ensuring a minimum level of spending per pupil.[9] Each year, in his apportionment of public school funding, the state superintendent calculated the income due to those townships or other school districts having an actual or notional income due to them from trust moneys in the hands of the state or moneys due from the sale or lease of their sixteenth section lands. No additional funds from the balance of the educational fund (comprising all other appropriations, taxes and revenue, et cetera) were allocated to these townships or school districts until the townships or school districts which did *not* have trust funds received state

7. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama,*** 28 and 35-41. The Bank's liquidation was completed in 1853.

8. A mill tax is a tax equal to one-thousandth of a dollar levied on a specified income source. (for example, for every $100 of assessed property value, a mill tax of 2.5 would be 25c).

9. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama,*** 60-61.

moneys sufficient to equalise a minimum per capita apportionment. This method of smoothing the disparities of township land values became a constant feature of educational administration.[10]

What was left of the actual sixteenth section and indemnity lands would remain a matter of contention and confusion for most of the period with which this thesis is concerned. The lease or sale of these lands and/or the proper evaluation of their timber, mineral and other assets were adversely affected by the inexperience of trustees, poor administration, disputed ownership, lost title deeds, expenses exceeding proceeds, and other factors. A representative example of trustee inexperience is shown in a letter written in 1880 by William D. Wilson, a township superintendent to Leroy F. Box, state superintendent of education. Wilson was a farmer and, obviously uncomprehending of his statutory responsibilities, enquired:

> *Is it lawful to sell the 16th Sections in Winston County at this time? There is a good chance to make a good sale of the 16th Section in T12, R7 at this time and there is a dispute as to whether it is lawful to sell or not.*[11]

Bafflement at matters as complex as asset management and conveyancing did not augur well for an ideal outcome.

Successive state superintendents had neither the staff nor financial resources to be able to influence significantly much improvement in the situation of the school lands. In 1899 an Act was passed to enable Alabama's governor to employ a land agent with the view to recovering the lands which had passed illegally out of the possession of the state and settling or straightening out titles then in dispute. The powers of this agent were extended in 1911 but recoveries were not sufficient to make an appreciable difference to the educational fund.[12]

The immediate post-Civil War constitution of 1865 was silent on school funding but the constitutions of 1868, 1875 and 1901, all maintained what was essentially a ruse

10. Russell Stompler, "A History of the Financing of Public Schools in Alabama from Earliest Times." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1955, 273-274.

11. William D. Wilson to Leroy F. Box, state superintendent of education, October 28, 1880, in SGO15974, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1867-1916***, ADAH.

12. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 39. In 1881 an additional attempt was made to create a discrete school fund. Old sixteenth section land notes were compromised and the yield invested in state bonds. The arrangement did not give satisfaction and the enabling legislation was repealed in 1889.

with respect to interest-bearing "entrusted" funds the principal of which was to be preserved "inviolate and undiminished" in spite of its being largely a fiction. The payment of interest might be a constitutional obligation but it was mostly derived from taxation not investment. Besides the "trust fund" income, each of these constitutions also provided for additional revenue via either an annual appropriation by the state or (in 1901) a specially identified school tax. A long-term legacy from the original school funding provisions was that some communities believed the school fund was "not a bounty from the state, but was a fund belonging to the people of a township to dispose of as they might think best."[13]

In the four years following the adoption of the constitution of 1875, its provisions on education were given shape by three pieces of school legislation: *An Act to Establish, Organize and Regulate a System of Public Instruction for the State of Alabama* approved March 8, 1876; the *General School Law* of October 1, 1877, and *An Act to Establish, Organize and Regulate a System of Public Instruction for the State of Alabama* approved February 7, 1879.[14] These provided the legislative framework within which the public schools largely operated until the next state constitution was adopted in 1901.[15] Yet it is not so much the legislation that is of concern here as the extent to which its financial and administrative provisions helped to perpetuate localism in the public school system and the relationships, behaviours and traditions that were a feature of such localism.

The post-constitutional school legislation of the 1870s was consistent with the Bourbon régime's goal of reducing governmental expenditure, but it also devolved power – principally to parents and guardians and three trustees (or between 1879 and 1891 just one "township superintendent" who carried out a trustee role). As mentioned in the second chapter, the township superintendent was likely to be a

13. The ***Alabama State Constitution, 1865*** merely gave the Assembly the authority to "enact necessary and proper laws for the encouragement of schools and the means of education" but otherwise was short on detail. The (Reconstruction) ***Constitution, 1868*** addressed education in some detail - Article XI, Sections 10-13. In this Constitution, Article XI, Section 10 mentioned the "perpetual fund" in its list of revenue sources. In the ***State Constitution, 1875***, Article XIII, (Education) Sections 2 and 5 covered the trust funds as educational revenue. In the ***State Constitution, 1901***, Article XIV, Sections 257 and 260 covered the trust funds as educational revenue. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899-1900***, 150.

14. ***Alabama Acts***, 1875-76, 1877-78, 1878-79.

15. There was additional general School Legislation in 1886, 1891 and 1895. There was a large quantity of separate pieces of legislation establishing city school districts, approving school bond issues and stipulating county uniformity in textbook selection, et cetera.

person of influence in the neighbourhood – probably a farmer, but more prosperous than his neighbours – certainly not a transient sharecropper.[16] Although required by law to take a census of school aged children in the township/school district, the township superintendent was often too busy with his own concerns to do so. He often submitted just a population estimate - inflated to ensure there would be sufficient school funds forthcoming.[17] The township superintendent was additionally responsible for selling or leasing school lands and reporting on any income received. But he was not an alchemist, and in communities where there was no spare money, he and/or the patrons were forced to improvise. Such improvisations were most frequently seen in relation to providing accommodation for schoolhouses. The examples below illustrate this improvisation *in action*.

In the 1880s Benjamin Frank Weathers was a sawmill owner in the Roanoke area of Randolph County. He employed a large number of mill-hands including members of the local black community. Wishing to assist his workers, he established a small school near his mill, contracted a teacher and urged his workers to have their children attend. When Weathers moved his mill elsewhere, the black community decided to makes its own schooling arrangements and accordingly the men:

> *went to the forest and cut pine poles about eight inches in diameter, split them in halves and carried them on their shoulders to a nice shady spot and there erected a little schoolhouse. The benches were made of the same material and there was no floor nor chimney.*[18]

Similarly, in the early twentieth century when four white families – the Evans, Meriwethers, Pughs and Rutlands - of Mitchell Station, near Greenwood in Bullock County decided that they wanted a nearby school for their children:

> *Mr Pugh donated a lot and the four families got together and built a one-room schoolhouse. The county wouldn't pay a teacher to teach just eight children, but they agreed to pay half if the families would pay the other half.*[19]

16. See pages 74-75 of Chapter 2.

17. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1903 and 1904,*** 5.

18. William Holtzclaw, ***The Black Man's Burden***, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1971 [1915], 25-26.

19. Ben Meriwether of Bullock County quoted in J. Mack Lofton, ***Voices from Alabama: a twentieth century mosaic***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 176.

Both the above accounts show how neighbours with a common need relied on each other and their shared know-how to find a solution. They display an insouciant optimism in the benefits of joint enterprise unshackled by any consideration for statutory compliance or the prescriptions of educational officials. Such enterprise created feelings of connectedness to others within the community and strengthened commitment to the schoolhouse as a symbol of that connectedness.[20]

The downside of purely local initiatives was that, while the law sought to limit the number of schools that could be established for either race in any township, this was often flouted and the already scant resources had to be spread even more thinly.[20] This meant term lengths were shaved and it was more difficult to attract teachers or pay them sufficient wages. While the law of 1879 only stipulated that teachers should not be engaged for less than three scholastic months and should receive a monthly wage of not more than one third of the amount allocated for their school, it did not set a minimum pay level. As late as 1899 the average monthly pay of school teachers was only $25.05 for teachers of white schools and $17.06 for teachers of black schools. Mobile County paid the highest overall salaries at an average of $48.39 for white teachers and $39.36 for black. Macon County paid the lowest white salaries (an average of $10.00 per month) and Crenshaw County paid the lowest black salaries (an average of $9.29 a month).[22]

Devising ways to open public schools with scant resources was not just a puzzle for rural parents to solve. In 1876, upon the conclusion of his term as state superintendent, John McKleroy went back to Eufala in Barbour County and to private life as a lawyer. Upon becoming a member of the local school board McKleroy and his fellow board members were faced with a funding shortfall as they tried to improve Eufala's public schools. In August 1877 McKleroy wrote to his successor (Leroy Box) and advised him that the board had anticipated being able to

20. See pages 210-11 (Chapter 6) regarding the development of such connectedness during Clean-Up Days.

21. ***An Act to Establish, Organize and Regulate a System of Public Instruction for the State of Alabama*** approved February 7, 1879." Article IV, Section 34. This was made more explicit in 1886 when the provision was tightened to state "but not more than two schools shall be established for either race in any township in which the fund of such race does not exceed fifty dollars."

22. Stompler, ***A History of the Financing of Public Schools in Alabama from Earliest Times***, 331-332.

obtain municipal support but that

> *Just as we had got public sentiment up to the right point it was discovered that the new constitution imposed a limit of 5 mills on any municipal tax raised for city expenses and thus cut off all hope of aid from the corporate authorities.*

The board believed that opening a school on the assumption of subscriptions was "too uncertain and indefinite" but they were not giving up:

> *One idea is to start with the fund we get from the state including the poll-tax and what we can get from the Peabody Fund and establish a school with a limited number of grades – say 4 or 6 with a single teacher for two grades.*

McKleroy asked Box if he knew of any young man who might be secured to organise the school and be its principal teacher:

> *We could not pay much at first but I am confident that when the school is once established correctly it will grow and the Principal can grow with it, both in grade and salary.*[23]

Here was the same optimism that persisted in face of what might have seemed like insuperable difficulties. As will shortly be seen, not a few schools seemed to operate in a perennial state of hope of something turning up that would enable them to keep their doors open.

As the nineteenth century progressed, there was an accelerating trend towards carving off from townships special school districts centred on towns or municipal areas with coterminous boundaries. The legislation establishing these districts sometimes specified that their schools might receive public funds – distributed via the mayor and aldermen – on the condition that city commissioners were represented on the board of trustees. This was the case with the city of Florence in Lauderdale County whose school district was created in 1890. The mayor was the *ex officio* chairman of the three member school board one of which was elected annually by the city commissioners at the Florence City Council's

23. John M. McKleroy to Leroy Box, state superintendent of education, August 16, 1877, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH.

November meeting.[24]

There was no educational bureaucracy to assist in the drafting of the bills that created these special school districts but this did not seem to cause any impediment. In Alabama's legislative session of 1898-99 there were 136 local bills setting up or regulating separate school districts.[25] The process of generating these bills was wholly an exercise in local democracy as shown in the following example drawn from *The Mountain Eagle*. This newspaper regularly covered all matters to do with education and adopted the role of community coach by constantly urging its readers to do their duty with regard to local schools.

On November 7, 1894, *The Mountain Eagle*, advertised the date of a "mass meeting" to be held the following Saturday at Jasper with the city's mayor and aldermen in attendance. The objective of the meeting was "to adopt some plan to maintain and promote the interest of our school."[26] The meeting was held under the chairmanship of the probate judge, James W. Shepherd, and a number of speeches were made "on the advantages and benefits that would accrue, not only to the children but to the town of having a good system of public schools in Jasper." A committee of six was formed that included Thomas Amiss (the county superintendent of education) a physician and two lawyers. Its task was to draft a bill that could be presented to the General Assembly with the aim of creating a special school district.[27]

A week later *The Mountain Eagle* had a progress report. On November 17 the committee had submitted two draft bills for consideration by "quite a number of citizens of Jasper together with several of those who live within the bounds of the proposed extension of the corporate limits." One bill would extend the corporate limits of Jasper and allow up to 50 percent of the gross revenue of the town to be set aside for school purposes. The other would "create a separate school district for

24. Jill Knight Garrett, ***A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama***, Columbia, Jill Knight Garrett, 1964, 148.

25. Malcolm Cook McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901: a study in politics, the Negro, and Sectionalism***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1978, 241-42. The sheer quantity of local bills tended to push general law-making off the legislative calendar. A few years later John William Abercrombie, the reforming state superintendent of education, would blame "the evil of local legislation" as the sole cause of the defeat of his general school bill in the session of 1900-01."

26. ***The Mountain Eagle***, November 7, 1894.

27. ***The Mountain Eagle***, November 14, 1894.

the city of Jasper."

The content of the bills was debated thoroughly at a meeting in the courthouse. Those who might be roped in by an extension to the corporate limits wondered if they might be encumbered with Jasper's bonded indebtedness and were told they would – but not for fifteen years; others thought Jasper could sustain a good public school without extending the corporate limits; another thought the city's boundaries and the school district did not have to be coterminous; several others said they did not mind paying a school tax but were not willing to come into the municipal corporation. Back and forth went the discussion until agreement was finally reached. Colonel Thomas L. Sowell, a lawyer, was appointed to be "a committee of one" with the responsibility of ensuring the proposed bills were presented to the Assembly immediately. The bills were enacted on February 8, 1895.[28]

The creation of a special school district for Jasper did not realise all the benefits anticipated by the town's community. On September 9, 1896, the "Jasper Male and Female Academy" - which actually operated as the white public school (it was later called the "Jasper Graded School") - opened for its annual session. A month later *The Mountain Eagle* advised "students are still coming in" and "those who want public money during the next scholastic year should patronize the school during the next three months." By November the running total of enrolments had reached two hundred and twenty-five and the paper trumpeted "we now have a school second to none." The paper exhorted its readers (as fellow citizens of Jasper) to go ahead now and fulfil their "whole duty" by erecting a good school building "in keeping with the character of the school and the progress of the city."[29]

The Jasper Academy had to attract pupils from beyond the city limits in order to be viable. In 1897 it advertised accordingly:

> *Our next session opens Tuesday, September 14, 1897. Tuition $1.00 to $3.50 per month. Public fund deducted. No half tuition allowed. Board in good families $7.00 per month and upward. Incidental fees of fifteen cents monthly in advance for each pupil whose parents reside within the city limits to pay for coal, chalk and janitor hire, etc.*[30]

28. ***The Mountain Eagle***, November 21, 1894. See also ***Alabama Acts***, 1895, Number 275.

29. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 9, 1896, October 6, 1896 and November 11, 1896.

30. ***The Mountain Eagle***, August 25, 1897.

On September 1, 1897, the school's principal, Professor Powell Johnston, was said to be out and about drumming up business and "receiving much encouragement with considerable boarding patronage promised."[31] Ultimately though, the school could never be sure of just how many students would present themselves for enrolment upon its opening or how many would attend regularly.

The very survival of the Jasper Graded School was a matter of seemingly constant tenuousness and it was rescued on several occasions by direct citizen action. In June, 1908 following the resignation of all but one of the members of Jasper's board of education plus the then principal, Professor W.E. Turnipseed, a new board was appointed. On July 1, 1908, *The Mountain Eagle* revealed that this new board estimated "it would take $6,500 to run the Jasper school for five months but there was scarcely $3,000 of public money from all sources available." What to do? The dilemma was solved by appointing a committee to solicit voluntary subscriptions and by widening the catchment area for enrolments. By the end of the month there was relief all round:

> *Jasper will have a free school the coming session. . . . The members of the city school board deserve praise for this happy solution of the school question in Jasper which looked very gloomy a few weeks ago as there was not half enough money in sight to run the school for a session of nine months. They took hold of the question like men however, and succeeded in raising the deficient amount of money required by volunteer subscription.*[32]

But just twelve months later there was an identical crisis and an identical response. In April 1909 *The Mountain Eagle* had to advise its readers once again that members of Jasper's board of education were doing everything in their power to see that the public school ran its full length but, if the citizens of Jasper failed to come to its aid, the school would have to close. A week later the paper's headline was "**No, Our School Will Not Close** – Patrons Patriotically Come To The Rescue With Necessary Funds." But the same patrons were "urgently requested to pay the school's treasurer by Friday of this week." It seems that not all were flush with cash. When the new term opened in October, some patrons were being referred helpfully to moneylenders.[33]

31. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 1, 1897.

32. ***The Mountain Eagle***, June 10, 1908, July 1, 1908 and July 29, 1908.

33. ***The Mountain Eagle***, April 14, 1909, April 21, 1909 and October 7, 1909.

Pledges and subscriptions were an unreliable source of contingent funds and a clumsy mechanism for remedying inadequate financial forecasting or over-spending. Yet the usual forum by which a deficit crisis was communicated and the necessary funds sought - a town meeting of citizens - was a social legacy from the earliest days of American democracy. It reflected the Jeffersonian idea that people should be free to conduct their own business however they might see fit – that they should:

> *Reserve to themselves personally the exercise of all rightful powers to which they are competent and to delegate those to which they are not competent to deputies named, and removable for unfaithful conduct, by themselves immediately.*[34]

As was mentioned in the Introduction, anthropologists have defined *culture* in multiple ways and these provide a diffuse set of options for understanding localism in Alabamian communities. Amongst a broad portfolio of definitions developed by Clyde Kluckhohn was "a set of standardized orientations to deeper (recurrent) problems."[35] In Alabama, the frequent resort to the time-honoured American tradition of the town meeting for the purpose of discussing and resolving educational issues and problems helped to weave public schools into the web of community consciousness. Contemporary newspapers from many counties show that questions of school survival and continuance - and the funding on which such continuance depended - were regularly decided at such meetings.[36]

When the public school at Camden in Wilcox County was running short of funds the "standardised orientation" to solving this recurrent problem was similar to Jasper's. In 1887 the *Wilcox Progress* addressed its white readers with some urgency:

> *The people of Camden have witnessed the close of another session of the Camden Public School. Everyone seemed well pleased with the general character of the school. . . . What*

34. Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, April 24, 1816. Thomas Jefferson, ***The Correspondence of Jefferson and Dupont de Nemours*** - with an Introduction on Jefferson and the Physiocrats by Gilbert Chinard, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1931, 256-257.

35. Clyde Kluckhohn, ***Mirror for Man: a survey of human behavior and social attitudes***, London, Harrap, 1950, 31. Kluckhohn is talking about how a society deals with deep societal problems such as death but he points out that a culture is designed to perpetuate group solidarity and meet the demands of individuals within the culture for an orderly way of life.

36. Besides the accounts provided here, see also ***The Troy Messenger*** of June 16, 1881 and the ***Fort Payne Journal*** of July 5, 1905. ***The Troy Messenger*** was published in Pike County and the ***Fort Payne Journal*** in DeKalb County.

> *are they going to do for next year? . . . The people of Camden are intelligent, reliable, and earnest people, and they appreciate education and all the blessings that flow from it. . . . The public school must be reopened under more flattering auspices than ever before.*

A week later the paper announced a town meeting to "determine whether the people desire to continue the Camden Public School or not." On July 6, 1887, the paper was able to report that, on the previous day, "quite a large and enthusiastic crowd of the *best* citizens of Camden" had assembled at the courthouse to "discuss school matters and elect a new Board of Education." This board was to appoint a school principal who would collect all tuition due from patrons of the school plus the public funds of the township (when due), to disburse such funds and account to the board at the end of each five month term. Professor W.C. Jones was shortly appointed and the *Wilcox Progress* announced he would soon visit "the good citizens of Camden and Wilcox County to seek patronage for the school." The newspaper ventured the optimistic opinion that "with the next session of the Camden Public School will dawn a new era of education in the history of Wilcox County."[37]

The town meetings described above had a loose equivalent in black communities though these were not held as the result of a call to educational conscience by local newspapers and the outcomes were not always satisfactory. Ned Cobb, who was a black activist during the Great Depression, had several children who went to school in Alabama in the first quarter of the twentieth century. He recalled:

> *We'd hold meetings and we knowed what we had to do. We just had to supplement our school money to a greater extent if we cared to carry our schools on. Well, there was so many patrons disagreed – and there's some false-hearted folks amongst every race of folk God got on this earth. My children could have got a good education even under supplement if some of my own color had abided by their race.*[38]

Exhortations to community educational conscience and town meetings were a recurrent mechanism for resolving school funding shortages because the under-funding of the schools was perennial. However, these community responses to crises need to be seen against a background of changing circumstances which meant

37. ***Wilcox Progress***, June 22, 1887, June 29, 1887, July 6, 1887 and July 20, 1887. As the ***Wilcox Progress*** makes no further references to the school, it is not possible to discover whether the success of this citizen action was lasting.

38. Theodore Rosengarten, ***All God's Dangers: the life of Nate Shaw***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000, 218. Nate Shaw's true name was Ned Cobb.

the measures adopted to secure additional funds varied over time.

All levels of government were hamstrung by constitutional restrictions on property taxes (which were generally conservative in their assessment and never efficiently collected anyway). However, they could raise additional revenue from business, professional and/or special purpose licence fees. Counties and municipal corporations could also issue bonds (subject to legislative approval). All these options were exploited for educational benefit. The school law of 1879 stipulated that school revenue could include:

> *Licenses to be paid into the school fund of any county, the same to be expended for the benefit of the public schools in such county: and all such license tax shall be promptly paid by the probate judge, or such person collecting such tax to the county superintendent of education.*[39]

Laws creating special school districts often stipulated the licence collections that would form part of school revenues.[40] There were multiple options for licence fees. In 1881 at Troy, the county seat of Pike County, no less than thirty-seven different types of licence were scheduled under the ordinance governing the city. The highest licence fee ($150.00 per annum) applied to "retail dealers in spirituous, vinous or malt liquors in any quantity less than one quart" (a year later this was raised to $250.00). For each "theatrical, dramatic or operatic performance or entertainment" the licence fee was $10.00 per performance but for circuses the fee was more than double at $25.00 per performance. While dancing masters had to pay $10.00 per annum for a licence, cotton weighbridge operators and "transient dealers in horses or mules" only had to pay $5.00 per annum. The fees provide a sort of index to the Troy City Council's regard for the desirability or utility of different sorts of businesses or occupations as well as its willingness to cash in on the passing parade of popular diversions.[41]

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39. Act to organize and regulate a system of public instruction for the State of Alabama, approved February 7, 1879, Section 1, Paragraph 8.

40. For example, a special school district was established in the city of Eufala in Barbour County on February 14, 1891 and specified that it would "receive all moneys which are or may be collected from license from the sale of liquor in beat 5 in Barbour County."

41. Under Section 52 of the 1881 Revised Code of Laws for the City of Troy, it was unlawful to carry on a business or occupation for which a licence was required without having paid the scheduled licence fee to the City Clerk and Treasurer. ***The Troy Messenger***, January 13, 1881.

The extent to which licence fees were used as a source of school funds differed by county and town or municipal area and were subject to variation. In 1893, when a school district was established at Dadeville in Tallapoosa County, the enabling Act required that one third of the revenues derived in that year by the city government from licences or other special taxes must be used exclusively for Dadeville's public schools. In succeeding years the figure was to be one half of all such revenues.[42]

Because the requirement to have a certain type of licence (as well as the fines for licence violations) could be matters of state legislation or of county/municipal ordinances there was inevitably much local variation which gave rise to confusion. In August 1899 Frank L. McCoy, the superintendent for Eufala's schools in Barbour County, asked the state superintendent (John William Abercrombie) for clarification as to whether whiskey licence moneys collected from the city's saloon keepers had to be paid into the school fund. Abercrombie could not advise him; he was unsure himself.[43]

As with those issued by the City of Troy, licences and also special purpose taxes levied by the state can be seen as a guide to contemporary community concerns and attitudes as well as being an indicator of a resourceful opportunism. Some of the fees and charges had a distinctly local character and their application and the issues they raised are described below.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, newspapers often excited their readers with tales of wild and hydrophobic dogs - "roving curs." For example, in 1881 the *Union Springs Herald* (a Bullock County publication) related how Mr Joe Knowles of Bruceville had been savagely attacked by "a crazed animal" whose "jaws were covered in froth and whose eyes were a blood-shotten green." The rabid "brute" was only downed when shot twice at point-blank.[44] In 1885 *The Wetumpka Times* carried an account of the pre-emptive killing of twenty-eight

42. ***Alabama Acts***, (Act 499, S. 333, approved February 21, 1893). Quoted in Stompler, ***A History of the Financing of Public Schools in Alabama from Earliest Times***, 294.

43. F.L. McCoy to John W. Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, August 24, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1904***, ADAH.

44. The ***Union Springs Herald*** item was reprinted in ***The Troy Messenger*** in its edition of May 5, 1881.

dogs in Elmore County because they had all been bitten by a mad dog.[45]

In 1887 - perhaps to slake community alarm whilst at the same time discouraging the random killing of dogs on the mere suspicion of their being diseased - Alabama's General Assembly enacted a law entitled *For the Protection of Dogs*. The law entitled the owner of any dog to register this ownership by taking the animal to the county probate judge and paying licence fees and taxes amounting to $1.25. The proceeds from these charges were allocated to the school fund of the county where they were collected thus establishing a nexus between a community concern, a legislative response and a local benefit.[46]

At some time during the 1890s it occurred to a number of Alabama's politicians that the large quantities of guano (a fertiliser) sold in the predominantly agricultural state might make a "guano tag tax" a productive source of school revenue. In 1895, when the idea was formally proposed to the Assembly by Robert H. Walker, a state senator from Henry County, the proposal was referred to the legislature's agriculture committee – which rejected it. Twelve years later, when the legislature approved an Act to improve the quality of rural schoolhouses, this stipulated that an annual sum of $67,000 be appropriated out of the proceeds of the sale of fertiliser tags "for the purpose of aiding in the erection or the repairing of schoolhouses."[47] Each county was to receive $1,000 and none of this "could be used in an incorporated place" (city, town or municipality). To qualify for the funding, the rural school district had first to raise not less than $100; the county would then match this up to a maximum of $200. A similar bill to improve schoolhouses had been debated by the 1903 legislature when it was to have been funded from the leasing of state convicts. On that occasion *The Mountain Eagle*

45. The ***Wetumpka Times*** item was reprinted in ***The Troy Messenger*** in its edition of May 21, 1885. Between January 1, 1881 and December 31, 1885 this paper reported thirteen accounts of mad dogs in nine different counties. Louis Pasteur's rabies vaccine was only developed in 1885 and not available in the U.S. for years.

46. ***Alabama Acts***, 1887. The Act was amended on February 18, 1891. Proceeds from Dog registration fees were available to the school funds of all counties except Clay, Dale, Elmore, Fayette, Geneva, Greene, Hale, Henry, Marshall, Morgan, Perry, Tallapoosa and Winston Counties. Information included in ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Alabama's Educational Status from 1855-1898, prepared by John O. Turner,*** 75-76.

47. ***Acts of Alabama***, Number 163 of 1907. Enacted on March 2, 1907.

had commented:

> *Even the poorest settlement in Walker or any other county can build a schoolhouse with $50 to $200 help. Of course, much will depend upon the interest the teacher takes in arousing the patrons to a sense of their duty and privilege.*[48]

As has been shown, communities were remarkably adept at developing their own solutions to school resource problems and did not expect to rely on state largesse – though private largesse was applauded. In 1905, (in the years between the defeat of the first bill for state schoolhouse funding and the enactment of the successful bill in 1907) some "prominent citizens of Montgomery and Birmingham" offered to donate half the cost of building rural schoolhouses in Lowndes and Bullock Counties providing the relevant school communities contributed the other half.[49] Because guano was widely used on Alabama's farms, rural communities may well have regarded the fertiliser tag moneys as a tax rebate rather than a state handout.

On February 10, 1883, when the Peabody School District was established at Girard in Russell County, the enabling Act provided for the president of its board of trustees to "have the same jurisdiction, powers, and authority, and be entitled to the same fees, as a justice of the peace of the precinct in which said district is situated." Being an officer of the law with summary court powers, the president of the school board was not only "to serve the civic government and keep the peace" but he was to use his police powers to provide funds for the public schools. If anyone damaged school buildings and/or grounds or was "disorderly" in the school precinct, the president/constable was entitled to issue a fine of up to $50. Fine proceeds went to the school fund "for educational purposes." Similarly, the Assembly authorised the board of trustees to assess the "moral fitness" of applicants for liquor licences and to issue these to (suitable) "retailers of spiritous, vinous or malt liquors." The fees for such licences (which initially ranged from $10 to $100 but were increased by a factor of ten in 1886) plus fines for licence violations also went into the school fund. Defaulters could be sentenced by the president and committed to "a house of detention" – essentially a school jail – purposely established by the board of trustees for such delinquency. The trustees (having given bond and taken an oath) were

48. ***The Mountain Eagle***, March 11, 1903.

49. ***Bullock County Breeze***, February 14, 1905.

accredited as a marshals and could supervise defaulters sentenced to "hard labor on the public roads."[50]

The potential conflict of interest in these peculiar arrangements does not appear to have fazed unduly the community they were intended to benefit. On the contrary, when the Russell County's grand jury made its "Presentment" (a sort of "state of the county" report) in May 1883 it stated Girard had recently "been organised for educational purposes within its limits with full power to preserve the peace and suppress local disturbances" and this would lead to "a rapid increase in prosperity in that district."[51] The grand jury's confidence was justified. The following month the *Russell Register* proclaimed:

> *The schools of Girard's Peabody School District are booming and the trustees think they are still on rising ground and will have enough money to safely and successfully run the schools until the first of October next when the school funds from taxation fall due.*[52]

The rather punitive level of licence fees charged to retailers and wholesalers of liquor was justified by the public benefit supposedly to be derived from the revenue. Initially the licence moneys generated local optimism. They seemed to offer a win-win situation for the community and the schools - but the bargain was Faustian. High licence fees merely concentrated control of the liquor trade in the hands of a few politically powerful dealers. As well, the certainty of a revenue stream for schools predicated upon liquor licence receipts and other alcohol derived charges was often chimerical or short-term. It could also divide communities. In Pickens County, the patrons of a Carrollton district school which had been operating in "perfect harmony" became disunited when revenue from liquor sales was used for school support.[53]

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a South Carolinian experiment with a

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50. ***Acts of Alabama***, 1883. Enacted on February 10, 1883. Quoted in Stompler, ***A History of the Financing of Public Schools in Alabama from Earliest Times***, 303.

51. ***Russell Register***, May 3, 1883. This paper was published at Seale in Russell County.

52 ***Russell Register***, June 14, 1883.

53. Annual Report for Carrollton District in Pickens County for 1904-05 by R.T. Clayton, superintendent of education, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SG011916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1871-1905***.

new type of liquor control – a state monopoly of the liquor trade via "dispensaries" (stringently regulated, licensed bottle-shops) caught the attention of Alabama's temperance advocates. These were dismayed at the influence of saloons and their contribution to drunkenness, violence – both domestic and otherwise - and high rates of crime. In 1897 Frank S. Moody of Tuscaloosa introduced a bill into the Alabama Senate which was eventually passed the following year and permitted seventeen counties to establish dispensaries. Annual licence fees had to be paid to the state treasury and taxes were due to counties where the dispensaries operated.[54]

While Moody's bill was indirectly complementary to earlier social legislation requiring public schools to teach physiology and hygiene "with special reference to the effect of alcoholic drinks, stimulants and narcotics upon the human system," a more direct benefit for the public schools was anticipated. A percentage of the fees generated from dispensaries was to be allocated to education. For example, in 1902 the dispensary at Troy in Pike County turned over $500.00 per month to each of the city's two public schools and *The Troy Messenger* at least believed that "the moral condition of Troy has been improved since the dispensary was established.[55] In 1904, 40 percent of the net profits from the sale of liquor in Walker County's four dispensaries, went straight to education. This amounted to a sum of $6,688.83 or an additional 75 cents for each of the county's school aged children and added "from one to two months free school in every school district within the county."[56] In May 1904 Professor W.E. Turnipseed of the Jasper Graded School announced that:

> *Educationally speaking, Walker County sees the dawn of a day that far exceeds in brightness any in its past history. The proceeds of the dispensaries and the funds accruing from the local tax, which will no doubt be levied, will more than double the public school money of the county for next year.*[57]

Four years later the same Professor and his school board all resigned when the

54. James B. Sellers, ***The Prohibition Movement in Alabama, 1702-1943***, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1943, 86-93. The law did not affect the status of prohibition in twenty counties brought about by "local option" elections or special legislation and there were some specific exemptions. Incorporated cities having a population of 10,000 or fewer people were limited to one dispensary; larger communities might add another for every additional 10,000 people.

55. ***The Troy Messenger***, - item reprinted in ***The Standard Gauge***, January 15, 1903.

56. ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 11, 1905 and January 18, 1905.

57. ***The Mountain Eagle***, May 11, 1904.

school was on its knees financially and had to plead with the public for ongoing support.[58]

In May 1906 the *Cherokee Harmonizer* published a letter from Dr George Sharp who was a candidate for election to the Alabama legislature. After stating he was committed to better schools and roads he noted that such improvements would be expensive. But, he said:

> *By having a Dispensary we can not only secure the additional revenue without adding to the burdens of taxation but we can and will improve the moral tone of the county. . . . an idle, vicious population who has never contributed to the support of the county government will bear, through the Dispensary, a part of the burden.*[59]

Twenty-five counties eventually had dispensaries.[60] Others, such as Escambia County, were suspicious that revenue from dispensaries would prove to be fool's gold, and voted against them being established.[61] Because the dispensaries of Walker County and their benefits were covered regularly and thoroughly by *The Mountain Eagle* in its editorials, news items and correspondence, the paper provides a useful guide to the dilemmas posed for a community by depending on school funding from what many in that community regarded as a tainted source. Once the dispensary legislation was passed, *The Mountain Eagle* vigorously urged its readers to support the local dispensary adoption referendum. The editor solicited letters from the counties where dispensaries had already been established. In July 1903 he published three columns of testimonials as a means of influencing opinion.[62]

Although the dispensary revenue for 1904 seemed to have advantaged Walker's schools so significantly, *The Mountain Eagle* predicted even better results in 1905 because the first year had been one of "establishment when each dispensary had had to purchase its stock on credit, and borrow money to pay for state, county and

58. See page 178 of this chapter regarding later difficulties for this school in 1908.

59. ***The Cherokee Harmonizer***, May 10, 1906. This paper was published at Centre in Cherokee County.

60. These were Barbour, Bibb, Blount, Bullock, Butler, Chambers, Cleburne, Crenshaw, Geneva, Henry, Houston, Limestone, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Perry, Pike, Randolph, Shelby, Talladega, Tuscaloosa, Coffee, Walker, Wilcox and Chilton. Nine of these counties also had saloons. Sellers, ***The Prohibition Movement in Alabama, 1702-1943***, 100.

61. ***The Standard Gauge***, April 27, 1905. This paper was published at Brewton in Escambia County.

62. ***The Mountain Eagle***, July 1, 1903.

city licences." Having got these matters out of the way, the schools stood to receive "fully $10,000 or as much as the county gets from the state appropriation, about $1.00 per child."[63]

Over the next couple of years the paper continued to gloat over the benefits flowing to Walker County's schools from the dispensaries. However, by the end of 1906, a change of opinion started to be noticeable in the paper. Temperance campaigners had been regrouping and by 1907 a campaign against the dispensary and for prohibition was well and truly under way. *The Mountain Eagle's* editor and correspondents crossed over to the side of temperance and prohibition. At the end of October 1907, in a rather tortured piece of logic, the paper claimed that, while abolishing saloons and establishing dispensaries had led to increased school attendance (having lessened the sale and consumption of liquor) prohibition would increase it further. The paper stated:

> *The sale of liquor never sent a child to school, unless it was the saloon keeper's child, but it has kept countless thousands out of school and caused them to grow up in ignorance and crime. We dare say every one of our readers know of a child, or a family of children who have been deprived of the privilege of attending school because the father is a slave to the curse of drink. Is it a good policy to say to the father of a child we will take 40 percent of the profits from your money and send your child to school. . . . . To take $2.25 from the father of the child and make him drunk is a poor way to place the child in school even if 40 cents of the money is applied to school purpose.*[64]

A week later W.R. Beale of Oakman wrote to the paper. He asked every "honest, hardworking man in the county who drinks whiskey" whether he was,

> *willing to continue to take food from the mouths of your wife and children and spend it to educate the children of parents who are far better able to pay their own tuition than yourself? If not, vote for prohibition in December. An honest man does not want other men to pay his tuition any more than he wants him to pay his groceries.*[65]

The campaign against the dispensary was successful.[66] In September 1908 the paper

63. ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 11, 1905.

64. ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 30, 1907.

65. ***The Mountain Eagle***, November 8, 1907.

66. In fact, all liquor sales in Alabama were outlawed from the beginning of 1909.

related that Professor Letson was building up the [Jasper Graded] school and "succeeding without any whiskey money – without blood money obtained at the expense of some hungry child."[67]

With the loss of its dispensary revenue, the Jasper school struggled and it was not alone. All of Walker County's schools were similarly distressed. In February 1909 the county's board of education met to discuss the "school situation." While it had previously given warning that funding might be insufficient to keep the public schools open for even four months, it was now of the belief that they might be kept open for five months and three weeks. With its usual optimism (and without much evidence) *The Mountain Eagle* stated the board's actions would "be received with joy by the people of Walker, who are becoming more enthusiastic over the question of schools each year."[68]

The benefits of dispensary revenue were as elusive in Houston County as they had been in Walker. In July 1905 the *Columbia Breeze* newspaper favourably mentioned that, in the previous scholastic year, the local school had experienced its highest enrolments and best results owing to the town's dispensary's revenue. However, because the dispensary was about to be closed pending the outcome of a "wet or dry" election, neither the school principal nor the teachers would accept contracts for the upcoming year being unsure whether they would actually be paid without dispensary moneys. The editor carped that "those who were chiefly instrumental in ousting the dispensary do not have to face the problem of raising revenue for carrying on the affairs of the city, the schools, etc."[69]

A much less contentious source of revenue – and, in view of Alabama's extensive river system, one that might have been utilised more often - was that derived from licensing a ferry that operated across the Tennessee River but docked on school lands in the Pleasant Grove school district in Jackson County. The trustees of this school district also operated a farm on their sixteenth section and both farm and ferry contributed substantially to the public school fund not only of Pleasant

67. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 30, 1908.

68. ***The Mountain Eagle***, March 3, 1909.

69. ***Columbia Breeze*** item was reprinted in the ***Opelika Daily News*** of July 15, 1905.

Grove but of another township as well.[70]

The paths to new sources of school financing seemed regularly to end in blind alleys. An expanding school population just could not depend indefinitely on an inadequate state allocation supplemented by miscellaneous revenue from (for example) bonds, liquor licences, dog registration fees and fertiliser tags, et cetera. Yet as late as 1919, an educational study commissioned by Alabama's governor, found that the people of one county (Bullock) depended "entirely on state funds, dog and poll taxes to educate their children."[71] Those seeking to modernise the education system were increasingly convinced that local taxation held the solution.[72]

It was not long after the 1875 constitution had been adopted, that legislation creating special school districts and systems for cities, towns and municipal areas started to be enacted. While the content of these Acts initially followed precedents set by cities such as Montgomery and Selma, there was no template other than the clause stating that the new district would receive a pro-rata share of school funds as they were apportioned for township schools and that schools would be racially separate. As has been described in Jasper's case, the content of the bills was generally developed at a grass roots level and then taken to the legislature to be initiated by the appropriate representative.

When an Act was passed in February 1877 creating the special school district of Oxmoor in Jefferson County, it contained the novel provision that "the trustees and their successors in office, shall have the power to levy a tax on all property, both real and personal, within the bounds of such school district not to exceed one half of 1 percent for school purposes; and for the first and second years, half of 1 percent for building purposes."[73] Over the next ten years, similar tax provisions were included in a number of other Acts passed to create special school districts. As these appeared to be unconstitutional, some disgruntled taxpayers in Cullman

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70. Stompler, ***A History of the Financing of Public Schools in Alabama from Earliest Times***, 308-309.

71. United States Department of the Interior, ***1919 Educational Study***, 143.

72. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 122. The need for local taxation had been advocated during the state superintendency of John M. McKleroy (1874-1876).

73. *Ibid.*, 123.

County mounted a test case (*Schultz vs. Eberly*) in the Alabama Supreme Court in 1887. The Court confirmed that only municipal corporations including counties had taxing power (within constitutional limitations) and this could not be delegated to school trustees.[74] In 1895 Birmingham secured legislation for a school tax which was to be additional to other municipal taxes (on which there was a constitutional cap). This was to be levied and collected as a state tax and then paid back to the city's board of education. This attempt to shift the extra tax to the state was tested at law in 1897 and disallowed (*State of Alabama vs. Southern Railway*).[75]

When all attempts to levy school taxes directly were stymied, municipal corporations found they could allocate to the schools an "appropriation" from their own tax revenues. Though never adequate, such appropriations did allow city and town schools to employ better teachers, extend school terms and provide a higher standard of education than previously possible. Because these special districts were beacons for making people aware of what public schooling could be like, some of them attracted philanthropic assistance from the Peabody Education Fund whose mission was to encourage public education.[76] Rural schools were unable to benefit from such arrangements.

From about 1888, a member of Alabama's Assembly, Oscar H. Hundley, conducted a vigorous campaign to secure a constitutional amendment providing for the levying of a special local school tax. His campaign was actively supported by most newspapers, and organised (largely urban) educational interests such as the AEA. Hundley's rather conservative amendment was put to a referendum in 1893. It was overwhelmingly defeated by the people "dying of indifference in the camp of its friends, the most cruel and ignominious fate that could have befallen it."[77] The people, it seemed, were far more interested in the internecine political struggles of this period between Reuben F. Kolb and William C. Oates.

74. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 122.

75. *Ibid*, 123.

76. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 124. See also Kenneth R. Johnson, "The Peabody Fund: Its Role and Influence in Alabama." ***Alabama Review*** 27 (April 1974): 111-112. The special school districts that received Peabody assistance in 1886 were Auburn, $300; Tuscaloosa, $300; Prattville, $250 and Marion, $100. In 1887 assistance was made to Cullman, $300; Tuscaloosa, $300; Auburn, $300; Prattville, $300; Marion, $300; Decatur, $150; and the Peabody School District in Russell County, $300.

77. Membership of the AEA in 1897 was only about 250. There were about 10,000 teachers in the state (6,302 in public schools in 1901). The quoted comment is from *The Educational Exchange* magazine and is quoted by Albert B. Moore, ***A History of Alabama and its People in Three Volumes***, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama, 1951, 552.

In 1898 upon the urgent request of John William Abercrombie, the determinedly modernising superintendent of education, the Assembly increased the annual direct appropriation for public schools by $100,000. It also passed (against the wishes of the state governor) an Act to levy a state tax of one mill for the exclusive use of the public schools. But Abercrombie was only getting started on his reform crusade.

Abercrombie had strong centralising inclinations – even a corporate view of the education system for which he was responsible. He implemented the state-wide examinations for teacher licensing, made progress with the question of textbook uniformity, mandated a minimum free term of five months, and recommended many other measures not acted upon during his tenure. Yet he was also an experienced politician and understood that "local self-government is a principle for which the Southern people, and especially the people of Alabama, have always contended." Comments in Abercrombie's *Biennial Report* for 1899 and 1900 might have been penned by Thomas Jefferson:

> *If the people of any county, township, district, city or town desire to levy a tax upon their property to build a schoolhouse or to supplement the state fund, for the purpose of educating their children, they should have the right and power to do it. People should have the right to do as they please with their own. Otherwise this is not a government by and for the people.*[78]

In 1901 Alabama adopted another new state constitution. Within its article on education was a provision allowing counties to "levy and collect a special tax not exceeding $0.10 on each $100.00 of taxable property in such counties, for the support of public schools." Before counties could levy this tax, they first had to inform their (by now almost entirely white) electorate of the rate, duration and purpose of the tax and submit the proposal to a county referendum. This needed the approval of three-fifths of the qualified voters in order to pass. The proceeds of the tax were to be used to extend school terms.[79] An enabling Act was passed in October 1903 and most counties held elections over the next three years.

In April 1904, at the annual meeting of the Conference for Education in the South in Birmingham, Professor H.O. Murfee of Marion, spoke in favour of local taxation.

78. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** vii.

79. ***Alabama State Constitution, 1901,*** Article XIV, Section 269.

He alleged that because they were "supported and controlled by the remote power of the State," public schools had come to be regarded "as eleemosynary institutions . . . which are never held in high esteem among a free and independent people." This low esteem he attributed to education having been delegated "to an authority too obscure and a power too remote." If people perceived they possessed the "sovereign power of support and the saving grace of control," then "public education would become each citizen's private concern and each Christian's religious obligation."[80]

As there had been with the (unsuccessful) Hundley referendum, there was widespread support for the county tax by those newspapers whose editors were supportive of both education in general and local public schools in particular. On June 8, 1904, *The Mountain Eagle* urged its readers "Don't fail to go to the election Saturday and vote for the special school tax."[81] A week later the editor was bursting with local pride:

> *Walker County took the lead in all the counties of the state in voting for the special school tax. Walker leads in many things and she is going to be found in the lead from now on in educational matters.*[82]

This typical optimism was partly predicated upon the anticipated dispensary profits (which were to be additive) but he was intuitively aware of the dynamics of identity – how to appeal to local pride, to excite a competitive spirit and to promise benefits for living up to some ideal of community behaviour.

In the Black Belt and counties with large black populations, a very different kind of identity was in play. In June 1905 the *Opelika Daily News* in Lee County told its readers that the school tax had just been voted down in Lauderdale County. The editor's scorn was palpable: "Lauderdale has done a most foolish thing in refusing to have more and better schools at a slight cost."[83] Yet only a short time later the editor had changed his mind asserting that the constitutional provision was "not

80. Charles W. Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1936, 280.

81. ***The Mountain Eagle***, June 8, 1904.

82. ***The Mountain Eagle***, June 15, 1904.

83. ***Opelika Daily News***, June 26, 1905.

put there at the demand or suggestion of the people that will have to pay the tax." He advised his readers:

> *A vote for the tax is a vote to raise the salaries of three officers and for more white folks' money to be expended on Negro education. Will free white caucasian Lee County men cast such a ballot. – NO.*[84]

When the election was held in September 1905 the tax proposal failed to attract sufficient support to pass. The newspaper recorded the vote in a matter of fact way without further editorial comment.[85] A month later Harry Gunnels, state superintendent, wrote to Edgar Gardner Murphy,[86] describing progress in the campaign for local taxes:

> *Lee voted it down on account of pure "cussedness." If you know anything of the politics of Lee County, you will remember that things usually go the other way.*[87]

Murphy did know something of the politics of prejudice. In 1904 he had written, published and arranged for the wide distribution of a pamphlet called *Alabama's First Question*. This urged Alabamians to vote for local school taxes because these were almost universally used throughout the whole of the United States, were essential for school betterment and engendered local pride. But in a period when there was something approaching racial hysteria about black civil rights, Murphy was associated with the conviction that although white education should be the priority of educational reformers (because this would lead to improved race relations), black education must not be neglected either.[88]

By 1907, forty-six counties had voted in favour of the local tax, four counties had voted against it and seventeen had not voted on it at all.[89] In the Black Belt counties

84. ***Opelika Daily News***, September 15, 1905. (Capitalisation original).

85. ***Opelika Daily News***, September 19, 1905.

86. Edgar Gardner Murphy had been an Episcopal clergyman in Montgomery who became an activist against child labour. He was later a member of the Southern Education Board (to be discussed in the next chapter).

87. Harry Gunnels, state superintendent of education, to Edgar Gardner Murphy, October 27, 1905, in SGO7765, Folder 29, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1904-1905***, ADAH.

88. Hugh C. Bailey, ***Liberalism in the New South***, 148-49.

89. Hugh C. Bailey, ***Edgar Gardner Murphy: gentle progressive***, 171 and Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 150-151.

the tax was not even on the agenda. Since 1891 the school law had authorised state educational funds to be distributed in a manner that township trustees deemed to be "just and equitable."[90] The consequence of this provision meant that, each year when the superintendents in Black Belt counties received funds originally calculated on the basis of their *total* school-aged population, these were aggregated and re-channelled to white schools. Roughly a decade later when the school tax (which in most counties only had a shelf-life of ten years) needed to be voted on again, the state superintendent started giving campaign advice to county superintendents. On this occasion the superintendent was ambitious enough to try and rope in the Black Belt. In August 1912 Henry Willingham wrote to the county superintendent of Wilcox (Will M. Cook) to ask whether "it would be well to have an election on the one-mill tax in Wilcox this Fall." Willingham expressed the hope that the people of Wilcox "might be in a frame of mind at this time to vote for the tax." The very tentativeness of Willingham's language suggests he did not want to appear to be intruding on Cook's domain.[91]

Cook prevaricated. On September 5, 1912, he told Willingham that the Wilcox Board of Education had decided that "the matter of the tax was inopportune." He provided the explanation that:

> *Our people have just faced a raise in the value of property for taxation and with a $140,000 bond issue to be voted on in November, our people turn a deaf ear to any further taxation for any purpose whatsoever.*[92]

Twelve months later the matter was followed up again. The response was brusque: "Wilcox has enough school money and our people do not wish to be taxed any higher."

While it was the role of state superintendents to urge school taxes and to offer

90. ***Public School Laws of Alabama, 1891***, Chapter II, Article IV, 19.

91. Henry J. Willingham, state superintendent of education, to Will M. Cook, August 3, 1912, in SGO7765, Folder 23, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1911-1914***, ADAH.

92. Will M. Cook to Henry J. Willingham, September 5, 1912; William Feagin to Will M. Cook, December 17, 1913; Will M. Cook to William Feagin, December 18, 1913, in SGO7765, Folder 23, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1911-1914***, ADAH. In 1889-90 Wilcox had spent $2,379 on white teacher salaries and $7,157 on black salaries (reflecting the dominance of the black population). In 1907-08 the county was spending $24,168 on white teacher salaries and $3,940 on black teacher salaries. Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900." ***The Journal of Negro Education*** 22 (Spring 1953): 129.

"cooperation in securing elections" so educational improvements could be made, county superintendents were more closely attuned to local inclinations. In August 1912 Henry Willingham wrote to the superintendent of Perry County, Charles C. Johnson, to offer assistance in securing an election and achieving "favourable action." Willingham was again rebuffed. Johnson's reply (shown below) perfectly illustrates the priorities of rural communities:

> *We have thought over the agitating of the one mill tax, talked it over and at one time had decided to ask for an election but with the weather such as we have had this spring, with no crops started, with a large part of the best lands of the county now under water or still too wet to plough and no certainty of sunshine for more than two days at a time it would be foolishness to do anything now. I have made several engagements for school meetings in different parts of the county for times most suitable for the locality and will feel the pulse of the people. I want to warm them up a little after all this wet weather. We do not wish to fail at this matter so it had best be gone at carefully.*[93]

The "foolishness" of raising the question of taxes when farmers were dealing with the vicissitudes of weather and crop planting would have been exacerbated by the external origin of the proposal. Living in relative geographical isolation and often in great poverty, rural communities in Alabama drew strength from their interdependence, their shared culture and their common enterprise. The influence of community leaders was accepted because they were from within. People and ideas from outside the community were treated initially with great caution. The communities within Alabama were deeply resentful at what they regarded as the taxation régime's inequities. The vast majority of taxpayers were farmers whose only asset was land. The rich, whose representatives determined tax rates, objected to paying taxes commensurate with their wealth and ensured that they did not do so. The people of the Black Belt whose fertile lands were a source of high tax yields felt they made a disproportionate contribution to state coffers.[94]

When resentment at taxation was coupled with a sense of white racial entitlement,

93. Henry J. Willingham, state superintendent to Charles C. Johnson, superintendent of education for Perry County, April 17, 1912, in SGO7765, Folder 23, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1911-1914***, ADAH. See also Charles C. Johnson to Henry J. Willingham, April 23, 1912, in same location.

94. William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins and Wayne Flynt, ***Alabama: the history of a Deep South state***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994, 322.

black communities were bound to be the losers in school funding and, in an environment of perpetual stringency, they most certainly were. Even the small quantity of funds that trickled down to black schools was often protested by white taxpayers. These saw black citizens as the undeserving beneficiaries of excessive taxes paid by the "productive" (and white) members of the community. That the same black citizens were the actual producers of much of the wealth upon which the taxes were paid and that the paucity of black land ownership was not a situation of their own making, went unconsidered or was rejected by whites.[95]

The taxation and education sections of both the 1875 and 1901 state constitutions specified a poll tax on adult males living within each county. The poll tax was $1.50 and the proceeds went to the county school fund. The superintendent of education for each county was responsible for seeing that poll taxes collected from white people were applied exclusively to the maintenance of schools for white pupils, and those collected from black people applied exclusively to the maintenance of "colored" schools. Each county superintendent's annual report had to show how much poll tax had been received for each race in each district of the county. In 1901, payment of the poll tax was made a condition of being able to vote in elections. If the tax went unpaid in one election, the arrears had to be met before a voter could cast a ballot in the next. This was effectively a means of disenfranchising ill-educated poor whites along with the black voters most of whom had been intentionally disenfranchised. Unless they were determined to vote, adult males had little incentive to pay the tax which, in any case, had always been poorly collected.[96]

In April 1905 the *Bullock County Breeze* (published in the Black Belt town of Union Springs) printed a list of 441 people who had paid poll taxes for 1904. The paper

95. Horace Mann Bond, ***Negro Education in Alabama: a study in cotton and steel***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994 [1939], 153. Bond provides many examples of legislative debates which support this statement. This citation is based on comments made by Mr Paine of Macon County in a debate in the General Assembly in 1888 when an increase to the school fund was being debated. The debate was reported in the ***Montgomery Advertiser*** of December 4, 1888. See also Pamela Barnhouse Walters, David R. James and Holly J. McCammon, "Citizenship and Public Schools: Accounting for Racial Inequality in Education in the Pre- and Post-Disenfranchisement South." ***American Sociological Review*** 62 (February 1997): 35.

96. Poll tax provisions are included in the various post-War constitutions as follows: - Alabama State Constitution of 1868, Article XI, Section 12; Alabama State Constitution of 1875, Article XIII, Section 4; Alabama State Constitution of 1901 Constitution, Article XIV, Section 259.

drew the attention of its reader to the fact that:

> *Of those who have paid, only 15 are colored. This money is used for public schools, and these figures show what a small percent is paid by the colored population, yet it is divided in proportion to the number of children of school age in each district without regard to who pays it.*[97]

This was pure mischief-making. The entire black school community of Bullock would have received just $22.50 from poll-taxes.

In 1900 Birmingham was becoming a major metropolis with a population of 132,685. Its educational system, led by the educationist John Herbert Phillips, was centrally directed and its white schools had qualified teachers, fine buildings and plentiful equipment financed from the great wealth of its industrial base. Also, although Birmingham's black schools were separate and inferior and suffered funding discrimination, they were still the best black schools in the state.[98] Other cities, having access to better-off patrons and more resources, were somehow also managing to build modern school systems and it was urban schoolmen who would drive the campaign for educational investment by the state. In concert with the state superintendent, these assumed the mantle of state-wide leadership of school modernisation.[99]

But, at the turn of the century, nearly 70 percent of all children nine years and over were directly involved in agriculture.[100] If they attended school at all, they did so in their county's township schools. The educational system they experienced tended to operate on might be called a "do it yourself, figure it out for yourself" principle. As this was the way in which Alabama's rural communities had always operated, it

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97. ***Bullock County Breeze***, April 11, 1905.

98. Carl V. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921***, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1977, 172. White schools in Montgomery and Selma were advantaged simply because they were in the Black Belt where the apportionment of moneys was not on a per capita basis.

99. John W. Abercrombie, James B. Cunningham of the AEA, John L. Dodson, William F. Feagin, Isaac Hill, John H. Phillips and Henry Willingham were some of the most active of the educationist modernisers of this era.

100. Alvord, Crosby and Schiffman, Benjamin F. Alvord, M. A. Crosby and E. G. Schiffman, ***Factors Influencing Alabama Agriculture, its Characteristics, and Farming Areas***, Bulletin 250, Agricultural Experiment Station, Auburn, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1941, 45.

does not appear to have led to any upsurge of outrage or strident demands for change. The inadequacy of school funding was part of a pattern of shared rural hardship in both black and white communities. When such hardship was encountered it was dealt with and solutions were found as each new problem arose. Black communities got the worst of the bargain "only half a loaf where others get a whole one, but in some cases practically nothing."[101] They were consequently not disappointed – just fatalistic.

When modernisers did achieve what they regarded as improvements to public education (or at least opened the door for change) in areas such as the redefinition of school districts, textbook uniformity, schoolhouse building subsidies and local taxation, some Alabamians were indifferent, some hostile and some were "aroused" (as so many superintendents asserted in their annual reports without supporting fact). The early twentieth century's educational improvement initiatives by the state were a beginning but they cost relatively little and, while they modified some of the conditions of schooling, they did not intrude fundamentally on the domain of individual communities which still took many of their own educational decisions and decided if and/or how they would pay for these. For example, in 1901 a teacher named D.A. McNeill taught a nine month school in Bullock County for $100.00 per month (three times the average salary). The state paid $500 of this amount and the remaining $400 was provided by a local merchant (Gray Brothers) in the form of a credit note. This allowed McNeill to charge merchandise at the store in lieu of receiving payment. In turn, Gray Brothers collected the $400 from school patrons. This was apparently a not uncommon practice in better-off communities.[102] Also, as late as 1915 a third of all buildings in use for public school purposes were privately owned by members of these communities.[103]

Perennially frustrated by constitutional limits on taxation, educational modernisers were convinced that satisfactory levels of school funding would only ever be achieved by a constitutional amendment. This would allow communities to tax themselves by allowing not only county but also school district taxes. These would,

101. William J. Edwards, 1918, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt***, Repr., Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 100.

102. D.A. McNeill to John William Abercrombie, August 25, 1901, and reply from Abercrombie to McNeill, August 27, 1901, quoted by Prewett, ***The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939***, 29.

103. Paul Monroe, ed. ***Encyclopedia of Education,*** Vol 1, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1915, 74.

in effect, formalise and regularise the local arrangements that communities already made for themselves. Yet in 1908 when the question of local taxes was being canvassed, Charles W. Simmons, superintendent of education for Coffee County and a lawyer, pointed out that school district taxation, "could be a dangerous thing in some respects." He supported his assertion by stating:

> *If the centers of wealth and population should vote it and the sparsely settled communities should refuse to vote it or should vote it and it be completely inadequate, then many people would leave their school and move to town. The rate ought to be higher possibly but ought yet to be levied by counties. In that way all wealth would be reached for the benefit of all the children of the county alike. The one mill tax should stand and if a district should wish to levy an additional tax it ought to be allowed to do it.*[104]

When the provision for a district tax was finally approved after a constitutional amendment in 1916, the outcome was exactly what the prescient Simmons had foreseen.[105] The tax led to greater disparities in the funds available to schools with long term consequences and - in rural areas at least - it also meant a continuing self-reliance in many matters to do with public schooling. Thus, having sought by constitutional change and legislation to ameliorate the funding inadequacies of a localised schooling system, the modernisers may have actually helped to sustain them.[106]

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104. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908***, 33.

105. See page 312 of Chapter 9.

106. In 1930 in an extensive review of Alabama's elementary schools, Danylu Belser (an educationist) noted:

> *The burden of providing educational opportunity under legally fixed tax rates within the county and the school district within the county has brought about gross inequality of opportunity in Alabama. The richer counties have been able to provide fairly adequate school terms, well trained teachers, good buildings and at least a minimum of those materials and equipment requisite to good teaching, while the counties in which property values are low have been able to offer none of these essentials.*
>
> Danylu Belser, ***Conditions and Practices Influencing the Elementary Education of White Children in the Public Schools of Alabama,*** Birmingham, Birmingham Printing Company, 1930, 33.

Chapter 6

Progressivism, Modernisers and Reform Initiatives: Community Attitudes and Responses

The preceding chapters have mentioned the state legislation which conferred significant educational responsibilities on the elected officials of small towns and on rural communities themselves – particularly on township superintendents/trustees and school patrons. These responsibilities included policy-making in respect of the location of schools, the employment of teachers, the administration of allocated funds and the acquisition of sufficient additional revenue to keep the schools from closing their doors. With so much authority vested at the community level, schools and schooling became part of the intricate web of local cultural significance. When changes (such as state-wide teacher certification and redistricting) started to be legislatively mandated at the initiative of modernising reformers such as John William Abercrombie, there was suspicion and resistance. To be successful the changes needed community engagement and approval but the reaction suggests there were nascent forebodings about cultural rupture, the compromising of identity and a loss of local control.

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, Alabama's public schools came under the purview of social activists beyond the educational establishment. These activists were becoming involved with program driven reform not only in education but in matters as various as temperance and prohibition, female suffrage, child labour restrictions, race relations, convict welfare, reformatories, public health and child protection. The focus on reform was part of a regional trend termed "Southern Progressivism" which was derived largely from Protestant humanitarianism and "a mixture of paternalism and *noblesse oblige*."[1]

This chapter discusses various Progressive interest groups, organisations and individuals who, in a sort of symbiosis with state-paid educational office-holders and teachers, sought to reshape Alabama's rural and small town schools in the period between 1898 and 1915. Urban schools were not ignored by modernisers but the vast majority of Alabama's children attended rural schools and, as has been

1. Dewey W. Grantham, ***Southern Progressivism: the reconciliation of progress and tradition,*** Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1983, 23.

shown, these lagged on a number of measures of educational effectiveness. Moreover, rural schools were regarded as being a key success factor in the "renewal of country life" - a nation-wide preoccupation in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[2]

At the turn of the twentieth century, interest groups outside the region were also concerned with the need to reform and modernise the South's public educational systems. The "southern education movement"[3] was a coalition of reformers pursuing a broadly conceived program of educational intervention in multiple states. The movement had inter-sectional involvement and financial backing from Northern philanthropists. The agencies through which the southern education movement operated in Alabama, the mission of these agencies, their impact (both direct and indirect) on educational modernisation and the shaping of educational policies – particularly the "revitalisation" of the curriculum - are all matters reviewed in this chapter.

The concerns of Progressives for rural education were often predicated upon a condescending and elitist assumption that, owing to their isolation and meagre circumstances, rural people were backward, ignorant and apathetic about effecting social improvement for themselves.[4] In support of the overall argument of this thesis, this chapter will show that the extent to which the Progressive agenda was successful in shaping Alabama's educational system was linked directly to the congruence of modernising reform initiatives with traditional community culture, racial restrictions, gender roles, economic interests and the deference paid to neighbourhood hierarchies. Where reforms were not congruent with the needs and inclinations of the communities at which they were aimed then there was resentment and/or resistance and, consequently, a lesser achievement with the price

2. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 23. See also Lawrence A. Cremin, ***The Transformation of the Schools: progressivism in American education, 1876-1957***, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961, 82. See also David B. Danbom, "Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920." ***Agricultural History*** 53 (April 1979): 462-74.

3. Charles W. Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1936. Dabney used this term as the sub-title for the second volume of his work on Southern education. It covers collectively all the organised educational reform initiatives of the late 19th and early 20th centuries but particularly those of the Conference for Education in the South, the Southern Education Board, the General Education Board and various state educationists.

4. This assertion is based on multiple sources. It was the *raison d'être* for the post-Civil War missions to the people of the Appalachians, it underpinned the assumptions upon which President Theodore Roosevelt's 1908 Commission on Country Life was predicated and it is the implicit premise of material in W.F. Feagin's ***An Educational Survey of Three Counties*** conducted in 1914. Most particularly see David B. Danbom, "Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920." ***Agricultural History*** 53 (April 1979): 474.

of modernisation being regarded as too high.

In describing the traditional rural localism that was such a factor in Alabama's public schooling system in the nineteenth century, previous chapters of this thesis have considered the roles of legislators, educational office-holders, parents and guardians, township superintendents/trustees, teachers and the children themselves – all insiders to the "educational system." The activists who took it upon themselves to assist with the modernisation of public schooling were (initially) often outsiders to the communities whose schools they wished to improve. They were frequently members (or the wives of members) of a newly prominent social class with industrial and/or commercial interests and they tended to approach reform as if it were simply a matter of applying good business practices or the nostrums of middle-class housekeeping to the organisation and management of civic and social life. For urban women this "municipal housekeeping" meant their "household" now included "the marketplace and city hall."[5] By inference, the household also included the farm and the school. These women valued efficiency, expertise and sound management but not the antithesis offered by rural cultural tradition and its improvisational resourcefulness. Understandably, this attitude did not serve the women well at the outset and they had to learn to proceed carefully in order to ensure their intervention was not rendered futile by local irritation at intrusion on the well-established domain of school patrons and township superintendents/trustees.

The Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs (AFWC) was formed on April 17, 1895, at a meeting in Birmingham. It joined together six literary clubs previously unconnected (in an organisational sense). Its total initial membership was 150 women. By 1915 it comprised 153 clubs with a total membership of 4,250 women.[6] Its early aims were to stimulate "self-culture and to promote Southern literature and writers." At its second convention the president of the federation, Ella Gaines Parker Going, told delegates that "Women's work is largely altruistic . . . it is necessary to make this altruism less abstract, more concrete." She made a plea

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5. Mary Martha Thomas, ***The New Woman in Alabama: social reforms, and suffrage, 1890-1920***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992, 4.

6. *Ibid.*, 43.

for "isolated neighborhoods – their imperfect educational facilities, the poverty of their social life."[7] The objectives of the AFWC evolved further when Mrs George B. Eager first put into the heads of the federated club women "that they could accomplish great things by influencing legislation." This was to be achieved by urging their menfolk to "cast their ballots in the interests of reforms which we feel to be necessary."[8]

Between its second and third annual convention - held in 1898 at Selma in Dallas County - the AFWC created a committee on education with Kate Hutcheson Morrisette of Montgomery as chair. Morrisette made a speech to several hundred delegates at the Selma meeting about the deplorable state of public schooling in Alabama. She was described as "having enthusiasm like a flame and an energy that was tireless in any cause she espoused." She told those assembled that the level of Alabama's illiteracy was a bar to civil, moral and religious progress as well as retarding the industrial and commercial potential of the state. Because education was an issue of such importance she said it behoved "the mothers of Alabama, the Press, businessmen and commercial bodies, the clergy of all denominations and every known factor in the state" to enlist their energies in an effort "to create public sentiment strong enough to demand for the children of the state adequate educational facilities."[9]

In its description of the AFWC convention *The Selma Times* told its readers:

> *Mrs Morrisette came out strongly for a new constitution for the reason that many educational needs were irremediable because of constitutional limitations, especially on funds for education. Alabama is spending only 39 cents per capita for her schools.*

The newspaper said that Morrisette's report was a revelation to the delegates and literally a battle cry as she concluded her speech by evoking "Robert E. Lee and his thin line of Gray defending the land we love" and calling on delegates "to emulate him in defense of the children of Alabama." Her stirring address was printed and

7. Lura Harris Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, Vol 1, 1895-1918, Montgomery, Paragon Press, 1936, 24.

8. *Ibid*, 27.

9. *Ibid.*, 35-36. In 1910, 23 percent of Alabama's population over ten years of age was illiterate.

sent to the superintendents of education in every county.[10] For the AFWC, education was to be "the central thought, the pivot upon which all other reform should turn."[11]

Mrs Morrisette was soon working in alliance with John William Abercrombie, and the AEA which had formed a "Committee of Thirty-three" to lobby actively for educational improvements through political action for legislative and constitutional change. At its annual conference in 1901, the AFWC passed resolutions in favour of local taxation for public schools, a school year of at least five months, compulsory attendance, adequate school buildings and trained educators as county superintendents instead of local politicians.[12]

Not all AFWC members had quite the same list of modernising priorities as the AEA. At the federation's annual conference in 1903, Mrs Charles A. Cary of Auburn, told attendees that "the public school was the chief place in which to promote a more wholesome and beautiful public life in America" - by which she seemed to mean tidy towns. She claimed men and women could not be expected to have nice homes and villages if they had spent their childhoods in dreary schoolhouses. In order to rectify this dreariness, members of her art committee were offering to one school in each county (probably via the county superintendent) a "beautiful historical picture." Thirty-one schools had already "expressed interest" but "the silent, unresponsive" counties were to be written to "again and again" until the right person could be found to "awaken children to the beauty of art." Mrs Cary seemed oblivious to the condescension implicit in her endeavours to administer doses of cultural uplift. The reaction of the schools to her badgering is not recorded. By 1913, the AFWC was at least suggesting that schools be given prints of paintings "emphasizing the dignity of [rural] labor such as those by Millet and Dupré."[13]

Yet members of the AFWC were sincere in their concerns about public schooling and wanted a more direct role in achieving modernising reforms. Without being

10. *The Selma Times*, May 5, 1898.

11. Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 43-44.

12. ***Birmingham Age-Herald***, May 14, 1901.

13. ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 128 and 303. Jean-François Millet and Jules Dupré were "naturalistic" French painters of the nineteenth century Barbizon School and both depicted peasants harvesting hay and tending sheep. Ironically, 1913 was the year of the ground-breaking Armory Show of modern art in New York with works by Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.

able to vote, they had little idea of how to achieve any of their goals apart from writing letters and addressing memorials to the legislature.[14] An opportunity to work in a more hands-on manner with "the people" came about in 1905 when a past president of the AFWC and Mobile resident, Lura Craighead, invited to dinner Isaac W. Hill, state superintendent of education. Other guests included members of the AFWC who were in Mobile to attend its annual convention.[15]

During the table talk, Superintendent Hill told Mrs Craighead of some work that was going on in Massachusetts and other states that might appeal to clubwomen.[16] Craighead was all ears as she listened intently to Hill explaining what he had in mind. This was the organising of school improvement associations. Hill believed such associations would interest communities in the betterment of their schools and bring together the school and home. Much taken with the idea of a fresh project, Craighead decided that the AFWC should take on the creation of local school improvement associations throughout the state. The very next day a resolution regarding the organising of such associations, particularly in the rural districts, was adopted at the morning session of the convention.[17] This was two years after the legislature's defeat of the first bill that sought state assistance for building or improving schoolhouses and two years before the enactment of the successful bill for that purpose in 1907.

In April 1905 *The Mountain Eagle* carried an item on the AFWC's intentions:

> *They propose to perfect an organisation in every school district, the members to consist of the women of the communities to be benefited. A school improvement association in every school district would be powerfully promotive for good, and the women of Alabama will assuredly sprinkle the state with better schoolhouses if their plans are carried out. . . . Poor schoolhouses point to ignorance – to stagnation and the women of Alabama see what is*

14. Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 36.

15. *Ibid.*, 139.

16. It is likely Hill was also aware of the Women's Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses which had been formed in North Carolina in 1902. The formation of these is described in James L. Leloudis, ***Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 153-173. In fact there was an Alabamian precursor to school improvement associations. In its edition of June 14, 1882, the ***Russell Register*** (published at Seale in Russell County) mentioned that "the ladies of Girard have organised an Aid Society which is materially assisting the Trustees in keeping up the schools and a number of donations have been given to the enterprise."

17. Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 139. School Improvement Associations would later evolve into modern parent-teacher associations or PTAs).

> *needed and propose to do their utmost to induce each and every district in the state to build better schoolhouses.*[18]

In this newspaper extract some of the elements of the eventual success of the school improvement associations can be detected. These were to comprise "the women of the communities to be benefited." Though coordinated externally, the associations would be organised by local mothers interested in the welfare of their own children – their normal concern. The bettering of schoolhouses by women was only but a variant of that most womanly responsibility – the bettering of the home through good housekeeping. Proud communities would not be receiving charity nor being told what to do by condescending outsiders - no matter how well intentioned. Poverty among Southern whites was "an acceptable if not desirable condition as long as it was not attended by dependency." Every white southerner knew this was what separated them from the black people under them who, "even if they might not *feel* dependent could be forced to act in a dependent manner" owing to the expected behaviours imposed upon them by the caste system.[19]

The AFWC brought together the parents and the teachers and created a base of support for the public school system that did not previously exist. Its work was so successful that in 1907 a separate organisation - the Alabama School Improvement Association - was created from the estimated five hundred local associations. It operated under the aegis of the state superintendent of education and had as its constitutional objective "to create and foster a general sentiment in favor of education in the improvement of public schools and the advancement of all cultural influences."[20] By 1911 school improvement associations existed in all but four counties. In 1912 in Monroe County there were eighty-four white school districts and each had its own school improvement association.[21]

Writing to *The Mountain Eagle* in September 1909, Professor W. Dean King of

18. ***The Mountain Eagle***, April 5, 1905.

19. Joseph F. Kett, "Women and the Progressive Impulse." In Walter J. Fraser, R. Frank Saunders Jr. and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds. ***The Web of Southern Social Relations: women, family and education***, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1985, 172.

20. ADAH, SPR0106, Alabama School Improvement Association, ***Records, 1912-1919***. Constitution included in Proceedings of the Alabama School Improvement Association, March, 1913.

21. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 176. See also Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 215-216. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912***, 25.

Oakman in Walker County said he wanted "to speak a few words in favor of school improvement associations in Walker and Alabama." He concluded his letter by exhorting the people of Walker County "to be up and doing what our conscience tells us we ought to do and thereby make the schools of Walker County as well as those all over the state, better in every way."[22] Neither the role of the AFWC nor any other external agency was mentioned; school improvement was now a matter squarely within the hands of local people.

The women of the AFWC, whilst progressive in respect of a wide range of social concerns, were constrained by contemporary racial assumptions. For example, when the chair of the AFWC's education committee, Kate Morrisette (she of the flame-like enthusiasm and evocations of Robert E. Lee) decided in 1899 to enrol her daughter at the prestigious Oread Institute in Massachusetts, she discreetly enquired as to whether the college "received negresses." She received an absolute guarantee from the principal that "her daughter need have no fear of being thrown into the association of this race."[23] Some members of the AFWC were often also members of the racially conservative United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) whose policies were unequivocally supportive of white supremacy. These attitudes meant the AFWC would not permit the affiliation of even the small number of black women's clubs then existing in the state. Yet, whilst excluded from the AFWC, black women's clubs were also concerned with arousing interest in support of social reform and school improvement. The State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs comprising four or five clubs was formed in Montgomery in December 1899. Its president was Miss Anna M. Duncan. By July 1908 it had "more than forty sister clubs."[24]

In 1895 Margaret Murray Washington organised the Tuskegee Women's Club whose goal was to improve the intellectual, moral and spiritual qualities of its members. Its members were all either female teachers or the wives of teachers at the well-known Tuskegee Institute in Macon County. The members of this club first concentrated on improving the lives of poor, black tenant farmers on the Russell plantation near Tuskegee. One initiative was the creation of an elementary school

22. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 1, 1909.

23. Letter written in 1899 to Mrs E. O. Morrisette from the uncle of John William Abercrombie, in SGO15975, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904,*** ADAH.

24. ***The Colored Alabamian***, July 25, 1908.

which became part of the public education system in 1906. The club went on to develop an extension program with day and night classes in both vocational and academic subjects. It also created the Tuskegee Mothers' Club whose aim was to help black women become better at child-rearing and keeping house. Mothers' clubs were also established by black women elsewhere in Alabama. These served as school improvement associations using extremely limited resources for purchasing window-shades, maps and other school equipment.[25]

School improvement associations (whether black or white) successfully harnessed to the cause of educational modernisation the cooperative enterprise of small communities seen in other pursuits such as road mending, barn raisings, log-rollings, and quilting parties.[26] No better illustration of this could be found than in a description of the response to "Clean-Up and School Improvement Day" in October 1914. This was held under the auspices of the Department of Education and the respective county superintendents who scheduled a holiday from ordinary schoolwork for the occasion. In a bulletin reporting on some results of the day the Department of Education declared:

> *Any movement which takes the lawyer from his office, the minister from his business, the farmer from his field and housewife from her home duties to the school with the view of making it more convenient and attractive, is paving the way for the first and fundamental step in community cooperation, which, in its final analysis, means better schools, better churches, better homes and a better people.*[27]

The bulletin further claimed that, owing to Clean-Up Day, Alabama now had fewer "places of refuge for bats and owls." More school communities than ever before had, by being brought together in common cause at the school, experienced "the first piece of practical result-getting teamwork." As a consequence "thousands of children were more comfortably housed" and thus happier and it "was all completed at little cost."[28]

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25. Thomas, ***The New Woman in Alabama: social reforms, and suffrage, 1890-1920***, 74-75.

26. Writers' Program of the WPA. ***The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama***; introduction by Harvey H. Jackson III, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2000 [1941], 124. Some of these rural pursuits are referred to in this guide. Log rolling was the group effort by multiple men of lifting and stacking large trees that had been felled after being ring-barked earlier for land clearing.

27. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, SG013232, ***Results of Clean-Up and School Improvement Day,*** 7-9.

28. *Ibid.*, 9.

In Clarke County, forty-three white schools and nineteen black schools took part and a huge number of completed tasks were recorded. These included the removal of stumps and the marking out of basketball courts in school grounds, the scrubbing of floors and the installation of book shelves, stoves and flues inside schoolhouses. At Prattville in Autauga County, the broader environs of the school received attention:

> *A line was formed and the two hundred children with their teachers and the ladies marched merrily through the streets with hoes, rakes, shovels and axes over their shoulders preparatory to making war on the weeds and rubbish of the town.*[29]

In Macon County, preparations were made in advance for Clean-Up Day. At the Fort Hull "Colored" School, items were stockpiled and included window glass, blackboard paint, buckets, stove polish, window curtains, a teacher's desk, lock and key, crayon, lumber for two sanitary toilets and lime for whitewashing same.[30]

Reports for this initial Clean-Up and School Improvement Day show how public schools were not only a focus for community life (they had long been this) but were becoming as well symbols of neighbourhood solidarity around which secular rituals could be performed. Participation in these rituals strengthened a sense of connectedness. At Grove Hill in Clarke County, the president of the school improvement association, Mrs Thomas L. Head, noted that "a great deal more than the material things was accomplished." She disclosed that members of two warring factions who "had been afflicted with an old school fuss for a number of years" worked in complete harmony and "she was unable to detect a selfish spirit behind a suggestion."[31]

The self-reliance of rural and small town localism was a strength that could be utilised in the neighbourhood activities prompted by school improvement associations. But the impact of the associations, though positive, sometimes had

29. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, SG013232, ***Results of Clean-Up and School Improvement Day,*** 25 and 28. This description of rustic gaiety inescapably suggests the sort of picture painted by Winslow Homer or a genre painting of country life as seen in the lithographs of Currier and Ives - perhaps an indicator of the cultural resonance in the activities of the Clean-up and School Improvement Day and the participation it inspired.

30. *Ibid.*, 40.

31. *Ibid.*, 23.

unintended effects. The better equipped and beautified schoolhouse increased the potency of its actual and symbolic value to school patrons; its loss through relocation or consolidation was more likely to be keenly felt. On the other hand, a new interest in their schoolhouse could also mean communities being more supportive of measures to improve public schooling in general – such as increased taxation.

In June 1905 the *Opelika Daily News* covered the proceedings of the twenty-fourth annual convention of the AEA. This was then being held in Montgomery and its agenda was dominated by the subject of rural schools. The *News* noted that Isaac W. Hill, superintendent of education, and his associates had been very busy over the last twelve months "in this class of service" and that "more than twenty counties have voted the special (school) tax." It also noted that there had been "an uprising of interest in the schoolhouse question" and that many communities had gone to work to achieve better pupil accommodation. The newspaper attributed the aroused interest in "more modern houses and furniture" to a "committee of ladies."[32] The desire of such "ladies" to attend further to "the problem of the socialization of rural communities which, by reason of isolation, have long suffered from an excess of individualism" led Alabama's club women to consider how they might best encourage in schools the sort of reading that might expand horizons and increase knowledge.[33]

The question of how to stimulate habits of private reading was sometimes a topic at teachers' institutes with attendees reporting their patrons either wanted libraries (a set of books for recreational reading) but could not afford them, or were simply indifferent. A speaker at one institute, Miss Jennie Lee Reese, suggested to her colleagues that they become "hustlers" and organise "ice-cream suppers" to raise the necessary funds for book-buying. If this were not possible - she did not seem entirely sanguine about support – she recommended to teachers that, as a first step, they buy with their own money "fifty cent editions of Washington Irving's

32. ***Opelika Daily News***, June 5, 1905. This paper was a Lee County publication.

33. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 176. Weeks is quoting from reports of the Alabama Educational Association. Actually, an oral culture, being dependent on personal interaction, has fewer resources for the modes of silent thought which engender "individualism."

Sketchbook and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.*"[34] As a tale of the isolated, self-sufficient man who found he still needed society, Miss Reese's last suggestion was an apposite parable for the intended purpose.

On April 13, 1911, Alabama's legislature enacted the Rural School Library Bill establishing the funding arrangements by which school libraries could be purchased annually by rural school districts.[35] Shortly afterwards the then state superintendent of education, Henry J. Willingham, informed the AFWC that its members could "inspire local communities to take advantage of this Act."[36] But inspiring rural communities to part with scarce funds to acquire books was an uphill battle. Private reading was a middle-class pastime which smacked of self-indulgence – something that was antithetical to community mores and usually did not stray beyond the Bible, an almanac or occasionally a newspaper.[37]

At the AFWC's annual conference in 1912, Mrs Leopold M. Bashinsky of Troy told delegates her education committee had exerted every effort "to spread the news of the Rural School Library Law." A year later she reported that county superintendents, many teachers and club women "had been *urged to induce* their respective communities to avail themselves of the benefits of the Library Law." Despite this urging, the 1914 conference heard that only six out of sixty-seven counties had availed themselves to the *fullest* extent of the appropriation.[38] When the county presidents of school improvement associations met annually they shared similar frustrations. They were disappointed at the less than wholehearted commitment by school districts in taking the necessary steps to acquire libraries and also at the laggardness of county officers in fulfilling their part in the funding process. There was even talk of repealing the Act owing to the inadequate

34. "Libraries for the Rural Schools." Address by Miss Jennie Lee Reese to The Inter-County Teachers' Institute held at Winfield, Alabama on August 29, 30, and 31, 1907. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 11, 1907. The full title of the Irving book she referred to is *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*

35. ***Alabama Acts***, 1911. The state would provide $100 for each county to be appropriated by the proper county courts in sums of $10 to such school districts as could raise a matching sum. To these sums was to be added $10 more making a total of $30 p.a. Each county was initially entitled to 10 libraries.

36. Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 269.

37. Mitchell B Garrett who grew up in Clay county in the 1880s and 1890s recalled his family "was perhaps a trifle more given to reading than the average of the community because his father was a preacher." Yet his family's reading matter was a "Testament, a Primitive Baptist Hymn Book, a cheap edition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and a couple of old dilapidated volumes, seldom touched, which dealt with some such abstruse subject as Baptist doctrine." They also took the ***Atlanta Constitution***. Mitchell B. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1957, 38.

38. Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 287, 303, 335. (Italics added).

interest shown.[39]

In December 1914 when the county presidents of Alabama's school improvement associations met in Montgomery, they discussed how they might "secure legislation for schools" and a Miss Strickland gave "an inspirational talk" urging each person present to "do something for their state so that we need not be embarrassed by seeing her at the bottom of the list."[40] In the same year, the AFWC's committee on education told the annual conference that it had recently conducted a survey of affiliated clubs and asked for recommendations regarding school legislation. While there had been "wonderful unanimity on compulsory education and increased local taxation" there was also a welter of other suggestions – all matters of educational policy. The AFWC advised its member clubs to adopt a number of measures that seemed very close to prescribing methods for teacher supervision and for curriculum design.[41]

The educational activism of the club women - in concert with local communities - was political. The women had become influential lobbyists without seeming to unsettle cultural traditions or challenge the status quo. Their efforts supported and complemented those of professional schoolmen, educational philanthropists and politicians. While they had experienced some setbacks, arguably their greatest achievement was in creating a congenial social context within which the professionals were more likely to be successful.[42] In 1909 Professor Charles B. Glenn, the assistant superintendent of schools for Birmingham, spoke admiringly of school improvement associations and the manner in which they connected home and school without intruding on traditional domain. "The central thought of their constitutions is cooperation and not interference, making for

39. ADAH, SPR0106, Alabama School Improvement Association, ***Records, 1912-1919***. Report of meeting of the county presidents of the Alabama School Improvement Association held in March 1913. See also report of meeting of the county presidents of the Alabama School Improvement Association held on December 19, 1914. Despite the patchy take-up of the library offer, the numbers of school libraries did rise significantly. By the close of the 1914 scholastic year white schools had 1,418 libraries and black schools had 55. The numbers of volumes in these were 171,288 and 3,044 respectively.

40. Alabama Department of Archives and History, SPR0106, Alabama School Improvement Association, ***Records, 1912-1919***. Report of meeting held on December 19, 1914. Her comments were a likely response to the findings of the 1912 educational study of 48 states by the Russell Sage Foundation placing Alabama bottom.

41. Craighead, ***History of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs***, 336.

42. Joseph F. Kett, "Women and the Progressive Impulse." In Walter J. Fraser, R. Frank Saunders Jr. and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds. ***The Web of Southern Social Relations: women, family and education***, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1985, 174.

harmony and peace rather than misunderstanding and war."[43]

In its coverage of the AEA's 1905 convention, the *Opelika Daily News* noted Edgar Gardner Murphy presented a paper on the Southern Education Board.[44] This item is a way of introducing the role of the near legendary "southern education movement."[45] This was the collective name for the organised inter-sectional coalition of Northern industrial philanthropists and southern middle-class school modernisers who were set upon improving the quality of southern public schools, the lives of southern people and the economic prosperity of the South overall. Before discussing the impact of the southern education movement in Alabama, some brief background and contextual information will be given about the origin, structure and policies of the movement's two principal organisational agencies, - the Southern Education Board and the General Education Board.

In 1898 the first of what were to become annual meetings of The Conference for Christian Education in the South was held at Capon Springs, West Virginia. The attendees (mostly clergymen) were few in number and focused on a missionary agenda of Christian education - particularly the schooling of illiterate black people and poor mountain whites. The following year, Dr Jabez L.M. Curry - doyen of southern educators and General Agent for the philanthropic Peabody Education Fund and also the John F. Slater Foundation - was elected to the presidency.[46] The

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43. ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 1, 1909.

44. ***Opelika Daily News***, June 5, 1905. See also James Leloudis, ***Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920***, 162 quoting a letter from Murphy to Wallace Buttrick dated November 14, 1907.

45. James D. Anderson has pointed out in ***The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988, that this was actually the third "southern education movement." The first was the struggle for universal public schooling in the Reconstruction period and the second was during the Populist political challenge to dominant planter interests during the 1880s and 1890s.

46. Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry was born in Georgia in 1825. He attended the University of Georgia graduating in 1843. He next studied law at Harvard where he heard a lecture by Horace Mann. This awakened a passionate interest in universal education. In 1845 Curry was admitted to the Alabama bar, and he quickly gained prominence as a lawyer. He served three terms in the Alabama Assembly and then four years as a member of the U.S. Congress (1857-61). After secession he served first in the Confederate Congress and then as a colonel on the staffs of Generals Joseph E. Johnston and Joseph Wheeler. After the Civil War he accepted the presidency of Howard College in Alabama (1865–68) during which period he was ordained as a Baptist minister (in 1866). He later became Professor of English and Public Law at Richmond College in Virginia (1868–81), and served as U.S. minister to Spain (1885–88). After 1881, as administrative agent of the Peabody Education Fund, Curry established state normal schools and fostered better rural schools throughout the South. He further extended his work after 1890 as Agent of the John F. Slater Fund. In 1901 he became supervising director of the Southern Education Board. He died in 1903.

conference dropped "Christian" from its title in order to broaden participation and include the widest possible attendance of (white) people with an interest in education. At a third meeting in Capon Springs in 1900, Robert Curtis Ogden was elected to the presidency and he retained this position until his death in 1913.[47]

Ogden was a wealthy New York department store magnate. He was the long-time president of the board of trustees of the Hampton Institute in Virginia, a pioneering vocational school for black students with an "industrial" curriculum and early model for Alabama's Tuskegee Institute and its eventual satellites. Ogden saw himself as a "businessman of ideals" and was not only a philanthropist in his own right but a consummate organiser and promoter. He wanted to interest other Northern industrialists in the cause of southern education, to heal any bitterness left over from the Civil War, and to bring southern economic development up to parity with the north. He became the guiding influence on the future direction of the conference. This was apparent the following year when the conference moved from the rather remote location of Capon Springs to the town of Winston-Salem in North Carolina. Thereafter the conference was held each year in a different location somewhere in the South. In 1904 it was held in Birmingham.

The 1901 conference held at Winston-Salem received national attention because Ogden hired a plush train of Pullman carriages to transport more than seventy Northerners to the southern town. These included influential academics, bankers, clerics, editors, financiers, industrialists and publishers. Amongst their number were John D. Rockefeller Jnr, George Foster Peabody and Walter Hines Page. In 1897 Page had coined the notion of "the forgotten man" – the poor white who had been overlooked by progress, ill-served by unsuitable education and easily misled by Populist agitators and racial demagogues. When a reporter who was suspicious of the goals of the southern education movement asked Page whether there were not "a nigger in the woodpile," Page assured him that when the woodpile was turned over it would be found to contain "not a nigger but an uneducated white boy. *He* is the fellow we are after." From the second Capon Springs conference onwards the southern education movement veered towards a concern with addressing the educational needs of the forgotten man with suitably vocational schooling. At Winston-Salem this hardened into policy and concerns for

47. Leon H. Prather, ***Resurgent Politics And Educational Progressivism,*** Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979, 208-210.

the educational needs of black children were left for another day.[48]

One of the speakers at the Winston-Salem conference was Charles W. Dabney, President of the University of Tennessee. He gave a frank and uncompromising address (to which other prominent Southern school men had provided input) on the deficiencies of Southern education – the poorly trained and paid teachers, the inadequate term lengths, the lack of supervision, and so on. He insisted unequivocally that if the South were to have an efficient system of public schools, educational legislation and methods of taxation had to be completely "turned around." He strongly emphasised the need for a central propaganda agency "which shall conduct a campaign for free public education" and urged those at the conference "to take steps to establish such an agency."[49]

By February 1902 just such an agency – the Southern Education Board - had been established comprising both Northerners and Southerners. Its president was Ogden and its executive secretary was Edgar Gardner Murphy. But, because this Board lacked permanent endowment, another organisation, the General Education Board, was incorporated by an Act of Congress in January 1903 to hold and disburse funds for a broad range of educational activities - particularly in the South. Having been interested by his son in the strategic potential of the General Education Board, John D. Rockefeller, the oil tycoon, undertook to provide it with a substantial endowment. In a series of large gifts made between 1902 (pending the steps necessary for incorporation) and 1909, Rockefeller placed a total of fifty-three million dollars in the hands of the Board.[50] The General Education Board served effectively as "an interlocking directorate" for the Southern Education Board as well as being a type of holding company for vast philanthropic interests. Its secretary and executive officer was Dr Wallace Buttrick who was also a member of the

48. Theodore R. Mitchell, "From Black to White: The Transformation of Educational Reform in the South, 1890-1910." ***Educational Theory*** 39 (Fall 1989): 345-46. Page's speech was given at North Carolina Normal and Industrial College for women. Its president was Charles D. McIver and he later served on the Southern Education Board. (Italics added).

49. Quoted in Prather, ***Resurgent Politics And Educational Progressivism***, 213. Regarding the input from other school men to Dabney's talk, see Louis Harlan, ***Separate and Unequal: public school campaigns and racism in the southern seaboard states 1901-1915***, New York, Atheneum, 1968 [1958], 85, footnote 30. Regarding Page's speech see also Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, 46.

50. General Education Board, ***The General Education Board: an account of its activities, 1902-1914***, New York, n.p., 1914, 15-17. In 1913-1914 the endowment fund stood at $33,939,156.89 and produced an income of $2,417,079.62.

Southern Education Board.[51]

Writers and historians have examined extensively the southern education movement and the modernisation process it stimulated. The agencies of the movement (and their principals) have received particular attention. The most significant texts in this historiography include the accounts of the original founders who fought a heroic "crusade against ignorance" with "disinterested devotion, sympathy and intelligence."[52] They also include highly critical examinations by modern historians – particularly black historians – of the evolution of a movement initially concerned with black schooling to one that decided consciously to make the education of poor white children its primary focus.[53] The consequence of this evolution was to corral black students into schools teaching only the skills needed for servitude and menial manual labour. As the southern education movement was an intersectional coalition of nationally important people with a wide regional perspective and somewhat imperial goals, these are the aspects that have invited most attention. But regional histories leave interstices within which the specific experiences of one state (such as Alabama) can be explored.

The goals of the southern education movement were expressed in a familiar litany of needs – at least in respect of white education. These were better trained teachers, longer school terms, improved facilities, local taxation, rural school consolidation and compulsory attendance. Club women, educationists, teachers, progressive politicians and others were generally in accord on these matters. They trusted that white educational progress would lead to nothing less than a social transformation in which the pathological aspects of poor white

51. Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, 153.

52. This phrase (coined by Jefferson) was on the seal of the Southern Education Board. The first accounts include a book commissioned by the General Education Board itself in 1914 - an historical description of the development of that Board which is full of useful data but, understandably, infused with a corporate pride in GEB achievements and without analysis of motives. In 1936, Charles W. Dabney (who delivered the stirring the Winston-Salem address), published his magisterial ***Universal Education in the South***.

53. Louis R. Harlan, ***Separate and Unequal: public school campaigns and racism in the southern seaboard states 1901-1915***, New York, Atheneum, 1968 [1958]; Robert Sherer, ***Subordination or Liberation? the development and conflicting theories of black education in nineteenth century Alabama***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1977; William H. Watkins, ***The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954 (Teaching for Social Justice, 6)***, New York, Teachers College Press, 2001; ***The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988. See also an article by Theodore R. Mitchell, "From Black to White: The Transformation of Educational Reform in the South, 1890-1910." ***Educational Theory*** 39 (Fall 1989): 337-50.

N.B. This is only a small selection of the numerous books and articles on the southern education movement, its leaders, agencies and office bearers, et cetera.

society - lynchings and other violence, illiteracy, intractable poverty from non-productive farm practices, populist political insurgencies – would be eliminated. One board member claimed (in a singular piece of calculus) that educating one ignorant white person was "worth more to the black man himself than the education of ten negroes."[54]

In reviewing the role of the Southern and General Education Boards in Alabama, it is noticeable that, while there appears to have been some distrust of the southern education movement arising from a suspicion of Northern intrusion (that ultimate trespass on domain), this was probably less than in other parts of the South – at least initially. This may have been attributable to the fact that both Edgar Gardner Murphy and Jabez L.M. Curry (who was one of the first members of the Southern Education Board) were both Southerners and had significant associations with Alabama. As far back as 1854, Curry had helped draft the first legislation for Alabama's public schooling system and, though near the end of his life, still wielded enormous educational influence. It is also noticeable that, although the southern education movement's agencies and office-holders scorned the deficiencies of localism, their approach to arousing educational interest harnessed some of its strengths. Community traditions and culture (including the crusading approach of evangelical religion) were employed in aid of the modernising reform process.

From its inception the Southern Education Board decided that none of the funds at its disposal would be used to assist schools and institutions *per se*. Instead, funds would be spent on raising community awareness at a grass roots level. This was in order to create an environment in which modernising reforms were more likely to be sought from the legislature and measures such as local taxation more likely to be approved. Propaganda work would be carried out through conventions, summer schools, local associations and field agents who would get the message out to sparsely populated rural communities.[55] In May 1902 Edgar Gardner Murphy appointed Joseph B. Graham, as Alabama's field agent. Graham was a one-time superintendent of education for Talladega County as well as a state attorney and, the previous year, had chaired the constitutional convention's committee on education. In the eleven months following his appointment, Graham visited

54. Edwin A. Alderman quoted in Dumas Malone, ***Edwin A. Alderman***, 145-46 and requoted in Louis R. Harlan, ***Separate and Unequal: public school campaigns and racism in the southern seaboard states 1901-1915***, 93.

55. Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, 222-23.

twenty-two counties delivering up to four addresses in each. His objective was to stimulate the people "to self-reliance and to the local support of their schools, looking ultimately to free public schools supported by local taxation with the district as the unit." He started his first campaign by utilising an existing opportunity - the first day of the circuit court. This was a regular occasion when people from all sections of a county came to the county seat. Some were jurors, litigants or witnesses but others just came to swap horses and tobacco, greet friends, talk politics and/or exchange the news. Such gatherings had always been a captive audience for politicians and office-seekers and, similarly, Graham used them to speak about "good schools, sounder morals and higher and purer aims."[56]

In July 1902 when Alabama was in the grip of a drought which had "almost destroyed the cotton and corn crops," Graham arranged an all day educational rally in a mountain county more than forty kilometres from the railroad. He recalled:

> *The people came in great numbers from the surrounding country. Many walked, some rode in good buggies and surreys; but many families of from three to twelve persons came in plain farm wagons with straw-covered beds, chairs from the fireside as seats, drawn by a yoke of oxen. Many of those attending were clad in home-woven jeans and cotton; most of them wore shoes, but some, even adults were bare-footed; but all were happy and cheerful and welcomed visiting speakers most cordially.*[57]

The similarities with religious revival meetings were not coincidental. In fact educational rallies and revivals were sometimes one and the same. Graham attended such a gathering where the "protracted meeting" had begun in the morning with a service at 11 o'clock. A further sermon was delivered at 6.30 p.m. and at 8.00 p.m. Graham and two other speakers began their talks which went on for two hours. These were "pitched along the line of close relation of home, school and church, and of intelligence, morals and religion." Afterwards the preacher declared to his congregation that they had just heard "the best sermons of the revival." Three years later when the battle for educational converts was still being waged, some rallies had actually moved inside the church. In July 1905 the *Florence Herald* (published in Lauderdale County) notified its readers of one such

56. Joseph B. Graham, "Current Problems in Alabama." ***Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*** 22 (September 1903): 36.

57. *Ibid.*, 37.

event to be held at the New Hope Church. Everyone was invited to bring well-filled baskets and enjoy an all-day event at which there would be "prominent speakers and a "pleasant, profitable program."[58]

Utilising familiar forms of local engagement such as revivals to achieve new social objectives and policy awareness was not an entirely novel approach. For example, in 1893, John G. Harris, the then state superintendent of education, had held mass field meetings in order to arouse interest in and a commitment to public education.[59] But the Southern Education Board was able to subsidise the campaigning with advertising, literature, professional advice and field agents such as Graham. Its influence allowed it to summon gatherings of educational office-holders in the state system as well as legislators - and be reasonably sure of their attendance. This was critical in order to push for legislative action within the context of heightened community interest in education. Once this interest had subsided, it was likely that the interest of legislators would also subside.

In January 1903, with $600 in funding from the General Education Board, Edgar Gardner Murphy convened a special conference of Alabama's county superintendents of education at Montgomery. Fifty-nine out of a possible sixty-six superintendents attended.[60] Both Murphy and Robert Ogden believed this meeting had to be successful if the southern education movement itself was to sustain its momentum. They pulled out all stops to ensure such an outcome.[61] They scheduled the meeting to coincide with a sitting of the Legislature and almost every representative attended two evening sessions to which members of the public were also invited. Writing later about the meeting Joseph B. Graham recalled:

> *For power and widespread influence among educators, citizens and legislators, it was beyond anything in the history of the state and it brought our best citizenship into thorough sympathy with the work of the two great Education Boards.*[62]

58. Joseph B. Graham, "Current Problems in Alabama," 37. See also ***Florence Herald***, July 14, 1905.

59. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1894***, 11 and 9.

60. In January, 1903 there were only sixty-six counties. Houston County, the sixty-seventh, was created in 1903. Although Graham claimed there were sixty attendees, newspapers reported fifty-nine.

61. Hugh C. Bailey, ***Edgar Gardner Murphy: gentle progressive***, Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1968, 158-59.

62. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

But Graham was not an entirely impartial observer. There seems to have been some skittishness on the part of the Southern Education Board as to how the public might regard too much talk of "power and influence." Prior to the superintendents' meeting a press release pointedly emphasised that "these boards are conducting their work only through the accepted methods and the *appointed authorities of the state.*"[63] When it was over, newspapers recalled the proceedings in terms not unlike a post-revival religiosity. These were said to have been "characterised by a spirit of deep earnestness and patriotic *consecration* to the cause." The removal of limitations on local taxation was felt to be the first step towards school improvement.[64]

Whether it was the campaigning of the Southern Education Board or just the culmination of many years of lobbying by state superintendents of education, the AFWC and the AEA, 1903 saw multiple pieces of new and important school legislation passed that were recognisably consistent with long sought goals. Some of the most significant of these goals were textbook uniformity, school redistricting, teachers' summer schools, local taxation and arguably one of the most important, the teaching of agriculture in the public schools.[65]

As has already been described elsewhere in this thesis, modernising reform legislation was rarely received rapturously by all those whom it was intended to benefit – particularly Acts concerning the redistricting of schools and textbook uniformity - which struck against local decision making and parental control of schools. The teaching of agriculture was an altogether different type of reform. It

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63. For example, see ***The Standard Gauge***, January 15, 1903 (this paper was published in Brewton in Escambia County) and ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 14, 1903. (Italics added).

64. ***The Standard Gauge***, March 5, 1903. (Italics added). The four major problems of schooling that received particular attention at the meeting were school districts and location of schools; local taxation by county, districts and municipality; consolidation of schools and improvement of school houses; the education of the negro.

65. ***General Public School Laws in Alabama, 1905*** issued by Isaac W. Hill, superintendent of education. The titles of these laws in full were as follows: No. 164 of 1903, ***An Act to create a Text-Book Commission, and to procure for use in the public schools in this state a uniform series of text books; to define the duties and powers of such commission and other officers; to make an appropriation for the carrying into effect of this act, and to provide punishment and penalties for the violation of the same.*** Act No. 365 of 1903, ***An Act to provide for the redistricting of the public schools of the state and for the management and control of same.*** No. 391 of 1903, ***An Act to establish at the University of Alabama a summer school for teachers and to provide an appropriation for its maintenance, and to provide an appropriation for its maintenance and to provide for the examination of teachers attending said summer school.*** No. 409 of 1903, ***An Act to provide for an election to levy and collect a special tax for the support of public schools in the various counties of the state of Alabama.*** No. 560 of 1903, ***An Act to provide for the teaching of Agriculture in the public schools.***

had the potential for allowing some convergence between contemporary educational theory and the lives and customary occupations of those in rural communities.

Alabama had actually been a pioneer in the teaching of agriculture through its state funded "District Agricultural Schools" established under legislation passed in 1888. These did not entirely fulfil their original purpose and had tended to evolve into conventional high schools with a regular curriculum until they were placed under a central board of control in 1903 – the same year that agriculture was made a core subject of the rural school curriculum.[66]

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Alabama's poorer farmers (frequently tenants) were regularly beset by problems including agricultural recessions, low crop yields, soil exhaustion and subsistence poverty. Hoping for a political solution to their vicissitudes, in the early 1890s farmers had been part of an (unsuccessful) agrarian populist challenge to Alabama's ruling Democratic and Conservative Party. But Alabama was not alone in its rural difficulties. All over the United States Thomas Jefferson's Arcadian ideal of the superior yeoman, the primacy of agriculture and the inextricable link between farming and democracy was under threat. Despite their all too frequent ugliness, squalor and corruption, America's growing cities were attracting droves of young people fleeing rural disadvantage and this was causing alarm and pessimism. In 1900, Thomas A. Craven, Bullock County's superintendent, wrote:

> *It would be better for the future of our fair land that the state do all that is possible, to improve the country schools than to have the country homes abandoned and the songs of children in the country schools hushed.*[67]

Somebody who was determined to reverse the national rural exodus was Dr Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell University (a one-time Michigan farm boy himself). Starting

66. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 178-79.

67. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** 136. A corollary to the concern with country life was the revaluing of the notion of wilderness and the frontier. Around this time (specifically in 1896 and 1903) historian Frederick Jackson Turner, was propounding his theory of the importance of the frontier for American individualism and for socially regenerating liberty – and the implications of the loss of the frontier on democracy. His pessimism was widely shared and prompted many Americans to seek ways of retaining the influence of wilderness in modern civilisation - the Boy Scout movement was one response. Roderick Nash, ***Wilderness and the American Mind***, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, 146-147.

in 1888, Bailey wrote pamphlets, tracts, articles and books which proclaimed insistently that "to be close to the earth is to be in touch with the simplicities that are the moral bulwarks of civilisation." He preached that "Agriculture is not only the rock foundation of democracy, it is the very basis of humanity, morality and justice." He promoted "Nature Study" as a means of converting children to a love of the outdoors but his overall goal was nothing less than the regeneration of country life through a wholesale redirection of rural education. He wanted school curricula to be concerned with rural needs and problems and for teachers to cultivate a love of agriculture and the land. He also wanted schools to work closely with other local organisations so as to tie the community together and make it a better place within which to live.[68]

Liberty Hyde Bailey was one of the Northerners who attended the 4th Conference for Education in the South at Winston-Salem. He also attended the 5th and 6th conferences held respectively in Athens, Georgia in 1902 and Richmond, Virginia in 1903. At the conference in Richmond he gave an address on "Education through Agriculture."[69] Bailey and Walter Hines Page (who was an original member of the Southern Education Board and later a member of the General Education Board) were of a similar educational mind and, in 1908 would both serve together on President Theodore Roosevelt's "Commission on Country Life." This commission was set up to investigate why farmers were leaving the farms for the cities and to suggest ways to make farm life so attractive that "the most precious part of the state," as Jefferson had called small landholders, would remain there and their children also.[70]

Around the turn of the century, an articulate minority of farmers was also beginning to have a clearer idea of what it wanted from elementary schools and this was not merely nature study. The farmers' organisation – The Patrons of Husbandry (National Grange) - resolved in 1902 that, while it might be "better for a six-year-old to make friends of robins, squirrels, and ladybugs than to pore over primers and the first book in numbers," the Grange itself was asking "for the teaching of

68. Cremin, ***The Transformation of the Schools: progressivism in American education, 1876-1957***, 75-76 and 78.

69. Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, 98-99.

70. Report of *The Commission on Country Life* quoted by Fuller, ***The Old Country School: the story of rural education in the Middle West***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 220. The Commission on Country Life Report was quoting a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to James Madison on October 28, 1785.

the elements of agriculture in the country schools."[71] Alabama's own Grange had always been interested in education and urged schools to devote more attention to the practical side of farming.[72]

It was against the backdrop of this increasing sentiment in favour of validating rural life and making farming more effective through an experience-based curriculum that Alabama's 1903 legislation regarding the teaching of agriculture was passed. Although directly relevant to the lives of rural people, as with most state mandated educational changes, this novel curriculum requirement was greeted (as was usually the case with externally imposed innovations) with some caution by teachers of county schools. Riley D. Argo, Walker County's superintendent of education, tried to provide reassurance. He explained to teachers that although the new prescribed text was "too difficult for the very elementary grades" . . . . as long as pupils "take up the book on agriculture" they would be complying "at least with the spirit of the law." It was not a ringing endorsement but Argo urged every parent (especially farmers) to read the text which, he said, "treats not only the care and cultivation of crops but everything pertaining to home life in the country, the garden, poultry, domestic animals, etc."[73] "How to teach Agriculture" was a topic at every teacher's institute in Walker County for each of the three years following its inclusion in the curriculum.[74]

In 1910, the intent of the legislation regarding the teaching of agriculture was made very explicit when Alabama's Department of Education issued a manual for public elementary schools. This contained hints for young teachers, pedagogical theory, curricula details, lesson plans, and other information. The manual stated that, because 90 percent of Alabama's people were living in the country and about 70 percent were engaged in farming, the state's schools, especially the elementary rural schools, had to be "the outgrowth of the leading community interest and the exponent of the activities of the people." To fulfil this role "agriculture in

71. *Journal of the Proceedings of the National Grange, the Patrons of Husbandry, 1902*, 242-243, 246, quoted by Ann M. Keppel, "The Myth of Agrarianism in Rural Education Reform, 1890-1914." ***History of Education Quarterly*** 2 (June 1962): 105.

72. Theodore Saloutos, "The Grange in the South, 1870-1877" ***The Journal of Southern History*** 19 (November 1953): 485. Alabama's Grange had actually opened its own schools.

73. ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 2, 1903.

74. ***The Mountain Eagle***, editions of April 19, 1905, April 11, 1906, and September 11, 1907.

some form should be the *main* work of the schools. It should be vitally interwoven into the course in all of the grades." There was the implication that "predestined rural youth must be trained in the tasks of his future occupation" and that country children must be "ruralized beyond the seductive call of the city."[75]

The manual provided a course outline for teachers in "Nature Study and Agriculture." By the seventh grade, pupils were expected to be studying such matters as: the Value and Care of Barnyard Manure; Fertilizers; Crop Rotation; Plant and Crop Diseases; Trees and Fruits; Bees and Insects; Livestock, Poultry and Dairying; Farm Machinery and Buildings; and Country Roads. A huge list of *Farmers' Bulletins* issued by the Federal Department of Agriculture in Washington was suggested as reference and learning material. Children were encouraged to "feast on the literary resources of farm journals and agricultural bulletins for which there is no better reading."[76]

What could not be learned easily in the classroom, could be learned by practical hands-on experience. The development of boys' and girls' agricultural clubs from about a year before the date of the manual's publication is a case in point. Though not directly under the Department of Education's control, the clubs operated closely with the public schools. They were "a movement in the interest of better farming for the state of Alabama" and supposed to "contain the germ of the solution of the vocational problem in the rural districts." They were supported by the state government and largely funded and coordinated by the General Education Board which, for this purpose, had fifteen agents in Alabama by the close of 1912.[77]

Alabama's Department of Education attributed the boys' corn club movement to a Northerner, William B. Otwell, who was secretary of the farmers' institute movement in Cacoupin County, Illinois and offered prizes for the highest yield of corn grown from improved seed which he distributed to farm boys throughout that

75. ADAH, Alabama State Department of Education, ***State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama,*** (hereafter cited as ***1910 Elementary Schools Manual***), 180. See also Orville G. Brim "The Curriculum Problem in Rural Elementary Schools." ***The Elementary School Journal*** 23 (April 1923): 588. Brim criticised the enthusiasm for closely relating school instruction to rural life.

76. ***1910 Elementary Schools Manual,*** 185-187. See also Brim, ***The Curriculum Problem in Rural Elementary Schools,*** 592.

77. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912,*** 21. See also ***General Education Board,*** 68 and 65.

state.[78] In Alabama, the movement appears to have started in 1909-10 (probably at the instigation of Dr Seaman A. Knapp - whose work will be described below - though Luther N. Duncan of the Auburn agricultural experiment station was credited for actually organising the clubs throughout the state). In that year 265 boys in just two counties took part in raising corn in home or school gardens. They were given seeds, growing instructions and a chance to win prizes. In 1911 there were 3,800 boys from 52 counties taking part and by 1912 every county in the state had corn clubs and 10,894 boys were participating and making money. Many clubs exhibited their produce at state fairs.[79]

Girls too were part of the extracurricular (if school endorsed) club movement. They were encouraged to open their eyes to the possibilities of adding to the family income through simple work in and about the home. This work was initially focused on cultivating a kitchen garden, growing tomatoes, learning canning skills and later selling produce. Tomato clubs were just the first of other agricultural, animal husbandry and educational extension clubs that were focused on raising poultry and pigs, improving health, and learning domestic arts and sciences. The girls' clubs were conceived as a way of bringing "a new interest into the home and cooperation in domestic tasks between mother and daughter." They encouraged rural families to provide "better food at lower cost by utilising orchard and garden products and of furnishing teachers a method of keeping entire communities."[80] School improvement associations helped girls buy canning and other equipment.[81]

The Peabody Education Fund was another philanthropic underwriter of rural school modernisation. In 1911 it provided funds via the General Education Board to provide for the salary and expenses of a rural school supervisor (Professor Norman R. Baker) who would operate under the authority of the state

78. The clubs seem to have sprung up independently in several places. Superintendents Albert B. Graham of Clark County, Ohio and O.J. Kern of Winnebago County, Illinois may deserve the honours for making the first extensive use of them. By 1906 literally thousands of children all over the country were growing corn, tending gardens, raising chickens, collecting insects and wild flowers, and cooking, canning and baking under the auspices of local school authorities. Information from Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Better Farming Day***, 13-15. See also Cremin, ***The Transformation of the Schools: progressivism in American education, 1876-1957***, 81.

79. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, 1913, ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** (hereafter cited as ***Alabama's Country Schools***), 64-65. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912***, 36. See also ***The Citizen Examiner***, February 24, 1910 regarding L.N. Duncan.

80. General Education Board, ***The General Education Board: an account of its activities, 1902-1914***, 63.

81. ADAH, SPR0106, Alabama School Improvement Association, ***Records, 1912-1919***. Report of meeting of the county presidents of the Alabama School Improvement Association held in December, 1914.

superintendent of education. Baker's duties required him to travel all over Alabama visiting the state's white rural schools, although, as he himself pointed out, it would take him years to visit all the schools at a feasible weekly rate.[82]

Baker's duties also involved him in grading schools, improving their supervision and suggesting vitalising programs. "Vitalising" and "vivifying" were vogue words with educationists at this time. They implied that rural schools - and rural life itself - were stagnant and disintegrating - the view of the dominantly urban educationists (and the Commission on Country Life). Vitalising activities were largely extra-curricular and included organising the aforementioned clubs, scheduling school fairs, arranging lyceums (literary or instructional lectures), acquiring libraries, forming reading circles (for teachers and pupils) and improving school sanitary arrangements. In the course of his travels Baker seems to have developed an understanding of the risks of condescension from outsiders and the need for community trust. In 1912 he recommended to teachers that, when arranging lyceums, they should use caution and tact so the residents of a district would not gain the impression "that the speaker or entertainer was coming in the spirit of a missionary."[83]

While rural schools were being turned into agencies to fit children with vocational skills so they could both perform traditional roles and participate in the market economy, the General Education Board was turning its attention to the children's parents. It believed farming communities would support school improvement if they simply had the financial wherewithal. This could only be acquired through increased farm productivity. The Board therefore decided to underwrite demonstrations of "scientific farming." This was a method of improving cotton and other crop yields developed by a nationally influential agriculturalist, Dr Seaman A. Knapp who had striven for years to bring a scientific spirit to primary producers whose ideas were still often shaped by ancient folklore.[84] On the other hand, Knapp's science was well-served by that persistent and *un*-scientific narrative of American culture - the belief that transformation may always be possible in even the humblest life. This was an idea of sufficient strength to conquer suspicion of

82. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1913***, 36-37.

83. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912***, 25.

84. *Ibid.*, 22-23. In 1913 there were 6,492 rural schools of which 4,574 were white and 1,918 were black.

outsider interference. In fact, all the tropes and conventions of twenty-first century transformation quests such as *Extreme Makeover* were present in the account of his approach.[85]

Knapp's work in Alabama began in 1906 when one of his agents visited and reconnoitred a rural district in the south of the state. The agent then selected "a poor one-mule farmer" who was "in debt and without hope." Initially reluctant to co-operate, this forlorn farmer was persuaded to put himself in the hands of the agent/expert who promised him [the farmer] that if he planted his fields with special seed and followed explicit cultivation rules, within just one season his crop yield and income would significantly improve.

After complying diligently with "the ten commandments of agriculture" devised by Knapp, the promise held out to the farmer was fulfilled. His achievements were then revealed to his admiring neighbours at a "field meeting." Buoyed by his new status as a person of consequence, the farmer became the local demonstration agent himself and assisted his neighbours to emulate his achievements. In his made-over self he discovered initiative and took pride in his farm. He "cleared brush from his fence corners and weeds from his fields, straightened his fences, whitewashed his buildings and renovated his harness." Knapp crowed: "the man made a good crop but the man grew faster than the crop."[86]

The farm demonstration program like the club work was all about the redefinition of the cultural and economic setting for education. It achieved its aim because it was conducted within the sphere of the familiar.[87] In 1908 the superintendent of Cherokee County was gleeful:

> *Our farmers are making crops with less labor and drudgery than ever before, by the use of machinery and the intelligence by which they select their fertilizers and till their soil; such*

85. *Extreme Makeover*™ is a trademark of The American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. The conventions of makeover quests include the selection of a person regarded as a "failure" against either societal norms or benchmarks determined by the change agent. On the basis of promises of future transformation, this obscure nonentity (who is either sceptical or hopeful) places him or herself in the hands of the change agent and/or some external expert whose advice is followed closely. Time elapses, transformation is achieved and the new person is "revealed" to admiring friends and neighbours at a public gathering. It is implicit that henceforward the person will enjoy a life of success and happiness and will be emulated by the same people who had previously regarded him/her with either pity or scorn.

86. General Education Board, ***The General Education Board: an account of its activities, 1902-1914***, 32-33.

87. *Ibid.*, 69. The GEB stressed that practical programs succeeded because they were carried on "in normal ways and in their natural habitat."

> *conditions have been a wonderful impetus in the building of school houses and repairing and making them comfortable.*[88]

The strategy underpinning farm demonstrations seemed to be successful in this county at least.

When Northern philanthropists seemed to challenge the status quo – especially the racial status quo - then there was (in some counties) a stridently defensive outcry. Some of this was directed explicitly at Robert C. Ogden as the president of the Southern Education Board who was regarded by some newspaper editors as being too friendly with Booker T. Washington – the black principal of the Tuskegee Institute in Macon County. In June 1905 the *Opelika Daily News* reprinted (with its own endorsement) an item from an unnamed New Orleans publication of which an extract is shown below:

> *There are many reasons why Mr. Robert C. Ogden's so-called "educational movement" has not appealed to the favor of the southern people and one of them is his exuberant enthusiasm for the negro. . . . Mr Ogden is a negro-worshipper pure and simple. His interest in the poor white man is merely a means to an end.*[89]

The alleged "end" implied by the *Opelika Daily News* was that Ogden supposedly believed black men would be fit teachers for any school in the South. This was patently untrue but shows how the slightest hint of concern for black education was maliciously portrayed as the thin edge of a wedge that might split the whole edifice of white supremacy. Ogden made himself something of a target for criticism because of his rather ostentatious travelling arrangements when he attended the annual Conference for Education in the South. His trips were often construed as condescending junkets.[90] One newspaper described them bitterly as "invasions" a word carrying all the freight of associations with the Civil War and Reconstruction. Ogden may also have been the recipient of a redirected hostility at Edgar Gardner

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88. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908,*** 23.

89. ***Opelika Daily News,*** June 1, 1905.

90. Although he bore the full costs himself, Ogden always travelled to the annual meetings in a luxurious private carriage accompanied by numerous Northern guests whom he was trying to interest in Southern education. The train stopped *en route* at multiple locations for inspections and sightseeing. The Northern press dubbed the train "The Millionaires' Special."

Murphy whose humanitarian efforts to control child labour in Alabama's cotton mills had attracted the fury of Southern manufacturers. These were always on their guard against further restrictions and mounted offensives against compulsory schooling through *The Manufacturers' Record.*[91]

Ogden ignored all hostility in the belief it would dissipate when the positive aspects of the southern educational movement were better known and it was properly understood there would be no attempt to foist upon the South externally devised policies.[92] But, as recounted in the last chapter, in Lee County, where the *Opelika Daily News* was published, the election on local taxation was lost. White voters appeared to prefer caution rather risk their money going to black schools.[93]

The local taxation measure was not only lost in Lee but in a number of other counties as well. Some counties did not vote on the measure at all. This was despite the vigorous campaign waged by Murphy and the prominent educationists of the Alabama Education Committee (formed after the death of Joseph B. Graham to continue the Southern Education Board's propaganda work).[94] Although people might be "aroused in favor of the local taxation idea" as one superintendent asserted, no one could tell how people would vote until the ballots were tallied.[95]

The results of the tax elections were a salutary reminder to modernisers that they could only achieve so much by moral suasion, propaganda and evangelical campaigning. At the point where heightened community awareness had to be translated into raising funds and agreeing to a reordering of the educational polity, objections to taxation, centralised bureaucratic power, and/or externally imposed decisions often reasserted themselves. Also, educational modernisation did not occur in a vacuum. Progressives were working on a number of fronts at this time as they tried to effect changes to social policies with a direct impact on the daily lives of ordinary people (such as limiting the availability of liquor, securing female suffrage, restricting child labour, etc). The price of modernisation seemed to

91. Bailey, ***Edgar Gardner Murphy: gentle progressive***, 150-151.

92. *Ibid.*, 150.

93. ***Opelika Daily News***, September 19, 1905.

94. See pages 191-196 of Chapter 5 regarding the campaign for local taxation.

95. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1903 and 1904***, 76.

be a profusion of threats to longstanding traditions of independence with regard to school governance, to gender roles, to parental authority and to community domain. While the legislators and educators often held sway in the end, the electoral defeat of local taxation proposals – even when the tax would mean better schools - was often the authentic *vox populi* and appears to have indicated a broader dissatisfaction with aspects or all of the progressive agenda.

A long-standing objective of educational progressives – the rationalisation of rural school districts was achieved in September 1903 with the passing of an *Act to provide for the redistricting of the public schools of the State and for the management and control of same*. This abolished the township as the basis of the school district, made the county the principal point for educational administration, and required counties to lay out new school districts based logically on centres of population and natural barriers. The Act provided that:

> *Such districts shall be so arranged, if practicable, as to place a public school within two and one-half miles of each child within school age within such district, provided that no district shall be formed which contains less than fifteen children within school age.*

This Act also provided for the direct election by "freeholders and householders who can read and write" of a local board of three district trustees to serve for four years. The chairmen of the several boards of district trustees within the county had to elect from their number, four county trustees who would serve for four years and, together with the county superintendent would constitute a "County Board of Education."[96] School funds, which had always been allocated on a per capita basis to the townships, were now to be apportioned by the state to the county. The county was to have the responsibility for equalising school terms, locating schoolhouses and prescribing studies.[97]

The county officials charged with school redistricting sometimes sought community input. The superintendent of education for Walker County addressed a letter to the citizens of that county stating the only way the redistricting board could "do its

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96. ***Alabama Acts*** of 1903. An Act *to provide for the redistricting of the public schools of the State and for the management and control of same.* No: 365 (S210). Approved September 30, 1903.

97. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1905 and 1906***, 4.

work to the convenience and satisfaction of all the people" was if people got together to map out the boundary lines themselves and then sent their proposals to the board to assist its decision making."[98] But consultation could not entirely assuage community anxiety about the Act's diminution of local autonomy.

For almost the whole period with which this thesis is concerned, the reports prepared each year by county superintendents and attached to the statutory *Annual* (or *Biennial*) *Report* of the state superintendent, differ significantly in consistency, length and content – the result of there not having been any specified format. The reports of the state superintendents do not provide a satisfactory synthesis until about 1910.

In any decentralised organisation, preparing a report for Head Office is a chore; it induces the temptation to regurgitate those submitted for a prior period – especially if not much has changed. In the narrative section of the reports submitted to the Department of Education by Alabama's county superintendents, this tendency is evident. Some of the expressed sentiments sound like a rehearsed litany: "our people are seemingly *aroused* in the interest of education as never before," or "pupils, school officials and teachers are more wide awake and *enthused* on educational work than ever known before" are the sorts of comments that frequently reoccur.[99] The cumulative effect of such reports must have given some comfort to state superintendents who could rest assured that, while there might be concerns for the particulars of the system, it was developing nicely overall. Yet in the reports attached to the state superintendent's *Biennial Report* for the two years ending September 30, 1904, approximately one third of the county superintendents related that their constituents were negative about school redistricting or had adopted a wait and see position or were angry about the "exercising of undue authority."[100] John D. Forte of Monroe County thought he would have to rid his people's attachment to the township system by "drilling" it out of their minds. He estimated this would "take at least two years."[101]

98. ***The Mountain Eagle***, May 11, 1904.

99. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899-1900***, 171, 174. (Italics added).

100. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1903-1904***, 78.

101. Report by John D. Forte, superintendent of education for Monroe County, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SG011916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1904-05***.

A similar tale was told many times over in a hostile discourse. A typical comment was that of William G. Jarrell of Chambers County who asserted that "in many communities confusion and dissatisfaction prevails."[102] Robert L. Prince of Bullock County was contemptuous:

> *The redistricting law in Bullock is a matter of prophecy. The people generally oppose it. A very few communities seem to be benefited by it*[103]

While not quite so dismissive, C. Hurley Lewis of Butler County observed:

> *There appears to be a prevailing sentiment among those [who oppose the new law] to change back the districts to the old township system as before but giving the patrons power in each township to elect their own trustees as they now elect the district trustees empowering them with the same power as the township trustees once had.*[104]

When the superintendent of Henry County disclosed that the redistricting law seemed "to be very unpopular, and in some districts the people are badly frustrated on account of the removal of their school" or the superintendent of Coosa County divulged: "there are some who would prefer a small school at their own door than send to a large and interesting one at some distance," the anger at inconvenience and the angst of cultural change can both be detected.[105] In Jackson County the people "raised a howl" at redistricting.[106] Several years later the superintendent of Mobile County reported that many communities were still objecting to seeing their schools "of long-standing abandoned and moved to other localities."[107] In 1907 superintendent Ollie A. Steele of Blount County griped that recent school legislation had "too great a tendency toward centralization."[108]

The state superintendent of education, Isaac W. Hill, expressed his own opinion

102. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1903-1904***, 31.

103. *Ibid.*, 27.

104. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1903-1904***, 28.

105. *Ibid*, 67, 45.

106. *Ibid*, 70.

107. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907-1908***, 90.

108. *Ibid.*, 14.

rather defiantly:

> *As soon as the new plan is understood, the people will endorse it without question . . . under the old plan there was no one who had direct control over the common schools of the various counties.*[109]

Hill was completely mistaken in his belief that the only impediment to the people's endorsement of redistricting was a lack of understanding. In fact, "the people" understood the implications of the reform all too well. Hill seemed not to appreciate that, while decentralisation and localism were problems for systematisation, standards and consistency, they allowed people freedom to conduct their own business as they saw fit even if this did not produce ideal results. The complaints relayed by the county superintendents were symptomatic of an inchoate anxiety about the diminution of local identity, a creeping loss of neighbourhood control and the consequent likelihood that parents might not being able to influence what their children were taught.

Redistricting anticipated the relocation of existing schools and the eventual consolidation of a number of small one-room schools into one larger school and this sometimes caused acrimonious clashes. In the wake of the new legislation, Jay Mabrey, the superintendent of Marshall County, described a trustee dispute concerning their long-held rights to locate schools and employ teachers. This went to the chancery court at Guntersville for resolution. In April 1905 Judge James A. Bilbro decided against the trustees thus confirming the centralising trend of the new legislation.[110]

The consolidated schools that were the goal of modernisers depended on actually being able to get pupils to them. While children often had a long walk to township schools, consolidated schools could be beyond walking distance altogether. In 1910 the superintendent for Houston County, Russell B. Dell, informed the state superintendent that a "consolidated system" was being discussed in Houston but the parent of such a system must be "good roads and other convenient forms of

109. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1903-1904***, 7.

110. Report by Jay Mabrey, superintendent of education for Marshall County, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SG011916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1904-05***. See also a report of the case in ***The Mountain Eagle***, April 26, 1905.

transportation."[111] John William Abercrombie had formally told the state governor in 1901 that not only school consolidation but also the introduction of compulsory attendance rested upon the provision of publicly funded wagons as "operate successfully in several of the New England states."[112] The lack of such transportation prolonged the life of the neighbourhood school and allowed some continuity in the longstanding relationship of school and community. In 1912 the supervisor of rural schools advised that only *four* schools in the state had acquired wagons and were transporting pupils at public expense.[113]

In the first dozen years of the twentieth century different groups of modernisers pursued various avenues toward the betterment of rural education. They were significantly aided during the tenure of Governor Braxton Bragg Comer (1907-1911) whose attitude to education was that it was "the most successful foundation for the future of the state." This was not just rhetoric. Owing to the number of pieces of educational legislation approved during Comer's tenure (including the path-breaking stipulation that there should be a [white] public high school in every county) he has received history's accolade as Alabama's "Education Governor."[114]

Yet even in a more responsive political climate, modernisers could only do so much. Large revival-like gatherings to arouse educational sentiment might be enjoyable diversions but they did not necessarily translate into votes for legislative change – or at least not in the short term. Indeed, without a central administrative bureaucracy of adequate size to sustain reform measures, these continued to be largely left to district trustees. The General Education Board believed the plight of public schools could only be ameliorated by harnessing "community ideals, community initiative and community support, even to the point of sacrifice."[115] The

111. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1910***, 73.

112. Jesse Monroe Richardson, ***The Contribution of John William Abercrombie to Public Education***, Nashville, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1949, 42-43.

113. Prior to October 1, 1915 there was actually no legal authority for the consolidation of schools and the transportation of pupils at public expense. Norman R. Baker's comment on the number of schools using wagons is included in Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912***, 28. (Italics added).

114. Samuel L. Webb and Margaret E. Armbrester, eds. ***Alabama Governors: a political history of the state***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2001, 153. Comer's administration was also generous with appropriations for higher education.

115. General Education Board. ***The General Education Board: an account of its activities, 1902-1914***, 14.

board was correct but the sacrifices it expected were not always the same ones communities were prepared to make.

Where Progressive initiatives and modernising reform worked best it was because there was an immediate and/or obvious benefit to the school community or because local cooperative enterprise was involved. The participatory potential of school improvement associations, the highly practical agricultural curriculum designed to make rural schooling vocational and thus seem more relevant, and the re-valuing of country life, were all measures that met the benefit criteria and assisted the shaping of Alabama's educational system in a more contemporary guise. Where reform was harder to achieve - for example, in respect of district taxation, compulsory school attendance, school consolidation and, to some extent, textbook uniformity – it was because communities perceived such reforms to be inimical to their own economic and/or cultural interests or an intrusion on parental domain. By objecting to such changes or insisting on some accommodation of their wishes, local communities continued to exert a persistent and direct influence on the development of the public schools and also on the impact of Progressivism on educational reform.

Chapter 7

School Observances, Ceremonies, Rites and Rituals: their place in a localised system and their role in modernisation

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When Clifford Geertz defined culture as the "webs of significance" people spin for themselves and in which they are suspended, he conceived these webs as the interconnected meanings informing the processes of a community's daily life and encoded into its calendar, its social etiquette, its regard for its artefacts, and its ceremonies, rites and rituals. Another seminal anthropologist, Emile Durkheim, held that participation in ritual (by which he meant a shared – usually formalised - social performance around a symbolic object of common reverence or collective aspiration) is an act of group solidarity which establishes and maintains social order. Such participation is one way children learn and absorb the dominant norms and values of their community.[1]

Alabama's public schools reflected the encoded cultural meanings of the communities by which they were established and within which they were situated. The school calendar was harmonised with the seasonal requirements of the state's agricultural economy and its rural society. The public schoolhouse was a symbol of neighbourhood solidarity, a site for community assembly and a valued totemic artefact of enterprising improvisation. In the daily routine of the school there was much that was ritualistic and informed by beliefs, values and procedures whose origins were based in local culture and were often religious as well as educational.

A few of the specific rituals performed within Alabama's schoolhouses were recorded in the fourth chapter.[2] These included the "opening" at the start of each day with prayers and/or readings from the King James Bible and the hymn singing in some schools on Friday afternoons. Other rites and rituals (formal and informal, secular and sacred) assisted to perpetuate local and cultural traditions. Holidays such as Christmas were often marked by schools in individual ways devised by their teachers, school openings and closings had a seasonal as well as a social import, and games played in the schoolyard - though of ancient lineage – reflected

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1. Clifford Geertz, ***The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays,*** New York, Basic Books, 1973, 5. Emile Durkheim, ***The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,*** trans. Joseph Ward Swain, New York, The Free Press, 1965 [1915], 243.

2. See page 137 of Chapter 4.

sufficient variants to make them, collectively, a folkway with their own rules (rites) of observance.

In the years between 1903 and 1915 the Department of Education[3] issued a plethora of circulars and pamphlets urging the observance of newly minted festivals as well as "Special Days" - some established by legislation. These days had a number of purposes. Some were scheduled to venerate prominent Southerners who might be termed "secular saints" in that they were ordinary mortals who had been invested with transcendent and quasi-religious significance. These included men such as Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis who joined the legendary George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in a pantheon of mythic heroes. Other Special Days were adjuncts to progressive reform initiatives and made the public school an instrument of state policy.

The observance programs issued for these state devised celebrations included a number of unique litanies or creeds of belief based on religious formularies. These are one indication that, in the early twentieth century, various state superintendents[4] became conscious of the role and importance of rituals, symbols, and special occasions in public school life and adopted these as strategic tools for developing community patriotism and cultivating a sentiment for educational reform. This state ritualisation of the scholastic calendar complemented and, in some cases, was integrated with the other contemporary initiatives that were enabling Alabamian communities to have a direct involvement with the shaping of the state's educational system. Some of these initiatives included (for example) school improvement associations, the educational campaigns of the Southern Education Board, school vitalisation through the agricultural club movement and the promotion of Southern identity through curricula and textbooks.

Another influential anthropologist, Victor Turner, made a distinction between *ceremony* and *ritual*. He held that the fixed and formal repetition of a ceremony

3. In 1902 the "Department of Education" was just the state superintendent and four clerical/administrative staff. In 1914 there was one additional clerical staff member and a supervisor. In 1906 Isaac W. Hill was able to obtain funds from the Peabody Educational Fund for one professional assistant to assist the AFWC in organising county and district school improvement associations. Austin R. Meadows, ***History of the State Department of Education of Alabama***, 1854-1966, Montgomery, n.p. 1968, 7 and 34.

4. Circulars, pamphlets, bulletins, et cetera were issued during the terms of office of Solomon Palmer, Isaac W. Hill, Harry Cunningham Gunnels, Henry Jones Willingham, and William F. Feagin.

makes it an act of social confirmation (a recitation of a group's definitional essentials). On the other hand, he believed ritual to be a "culturally subjunctive" process - a breach of quotidian existence enabling participants to consider other possibilities for their life or to undergo some type of transformation.[5] The various Special Days scheduled by the Department of Education were intended deliberately as a breach of school routine and, being state sponsored, participation in the programs for their observance lifted the awareness of teachers, students and parents to a plane beyond their own small world and allowed them to glimpse an alternative future. In this respect the observance programs for the Special Days meet the Turnerian definition of ritual.

This chapter will consider fully the school holidays, festivals, ceremonies, rites and rituals that sustained local tradition in rural and small town communities. It will also examine the calendrical, ceremonial and ritual inventions of the Department of Education mentioned above. It will show that, whilst the Department's recommendations were usually hedged as "suggestions" which school managers (county boards of education) were "urged" to adopt, these had the effect of appropriating from local communities some of their own traditions and rituals as well as imposing upon them new observance requirements. Various observances might still be of local significance but were no longer vested in any single community's own culture. This conscious intervention helped to strengthen centralised state power, to promote a specifically Southern nationalism fairly closely connected with the ideology of "The Lost Cause" and to assist with the development of a reverence for the broader "civil religion" of the United States - those beliefs, symbols and rituals expressing a collective understanding of America's history and its destiny to fulfil a God-given mission.[6] By making school rituals a state concern, Alabama's Department of Education sought to challenge localism whilst acknowledging both the strength of its traditions and the value of its ongoing influence.

The school year in Alabama's public education system was shaped by the seasonal

5. Victor Turner, ***The Anthropology of Performance***, New York, PAJ Publications, 1992, 3rd Edition, 100-101.

6. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America." ***Daedulus*** 96 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

requirements of the agricultural cycle and the corresponding need for the labour of farm children. In late February or early March, fields had to be weeded, hoed and prepared for spring ploughing. Planting began in late April and continued into early June and cultivation could go on until the last days of July. Wheat and oats were sown in the Fall and reaped in early summer. Cotton picking could begin in early September and other crops might be gathered as late as November. The need for labour was less urgent in winter when farmers mended fences, cleared additional land and dug drains. Matched to this cycle was the formal scholastic year specified in school legislation as shown below:

> *The scholastic year shall begin on the first day of October of each year, and end on the thirtieth day of September of the following year. Twenty days shall constitute a school month. A school day shall comprise not less than six hours.*[7]

Township superintendents/trustees were required to fix "the length of the session, which shall not be less than twelve weeks."[8] All other matters relating to the time of a school's opening or the lengthening of a session (and the observance of holidays) were matters for the determination of the township superintendent in consultation with the school patrons or the city/county board of education.

Until the twentieth century, school sessions were generally held in winter and only lasted the minimum twelve weeks (unless extended by private tuition supplements). Attendance started falling off in March when pupils were needed to help prepare for planting. Some schools opened again for a short summer session in the latter half of July (after reaping) and then closed in September in time for cotton picking (which took about six weeks). The extent to which the already short sessions were interrupted by holidays is hard to gauge, because in the absence of an established church, religious festivals (such as Easter) were not state holidays. On the other hand, Christmas Day (being as much secular festival as sacred observance) was made a state holiday in Alabama in 1836. The only widely recognised holidays falling during the winter session were Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's

7. Chapter II, Article VII, Paragraph 50 of ***Laws Relating to the Public School System of Alabama with an Appendix of Forms***. Prepared by Leroy F. Box, superintendent of education, [1871], 22.

8. *Ibid.*, Chapter II, Article IV, Paragraph 31, #2, 17.

Day.[9] Yet, in its edition of December 10, 1885, the *Russell Register* reported that Professor G.A. Granberry of the Hatchechubbee School in Russell County was having "two weeks vacation embracing the Christmas holidays." The item suggests that, at some schools, more days than just December 25 may have been observed as a time for "exemption from labor."[10]

From the close of the Civil War onwards there was a trend across the whole of the United States to reconstruct the religious and civic calendar commercially to serve the needs of an expanding consumer market. Holidays offered merchandising potential and traditional observances were manipulated and refocused for this purpose.[11] However, in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Alabama, holiday observances in the public schools were not a response to commercial change but tended to be decided by communities themselves on the basis of longstanding custom and local religious practice. A number of memoirs suggest a school's holiday observances (principally at Christmas) were designed by individual teachers – doubtless in concert with the wishes of parents and trustees. In 1908, the teacher of a one-room school at Josephine in Baldwin County organised a Christmas party at which there was a decorated tree with "refreshments and a present for each child."[12] In 1910 at the Speake School in Lawrence County, the pupils received

9. Alabama scheduled Christmas as a state holiday in 1836. By 1859 Alabama was celebrating Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November. However, in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War there was a reluctance by some Southerners to celebrate the national Thanksgiving Day as it was "used to exploit the war issue and to wave the bloody shirt." At this time, Southerners were more likely to observe thanksgiving days designated by their own denominations – and associated with Harvest Festival. In 1910 the ***Dothan Weekly Eagle*** published at Dothan in Houston County announced a non-denominational church service for Thanksgiving and noted that "The observance is not an ecclesiastical, but a civic and national institution, coming down to us from the earliest days of our country and observed in response to the annual proclamation and suggestion of our chosen rulers." ***Dothan Weekly Eagle***, November 26, 1910. New Year's Day appears to have been widely observed as a holiday - though this may have varied from place to place. Black children may have celebrated the Emancipation Declaration on New Year's Day. – This was observed annually in Montgomery at the State Normal School. ***The Colored Alabamian***, December 28, 1907.

   In 1884, John Herbert Phillips, superintendent of education for Birmingham's city schools issued formal regulations for that city's school system. Section 3 of these stated that "Every Saturday, annual Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day and other days appointed by the Board shall be regarded as holidays." Marshall F. Phillips, "A History of the Public Schools in Birmingham, Alabama," Master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1939, 137.

10. The ***Russell Register***, December 10, 1885. See also "Legal Holidays." ***The American Law Register***, (March 1890): 137.

11. Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Commercialization of the Calendar: American Holidays and the Culture of Consumption, 1870-1930." ***The Journal of American History*** (December 1991): 887-916. In the 1890s, the trend towards the commercialisation of Christmas can be seen clearly in the special Christmas supplements included in Alabama's county newspapers such as ***The Mountain Eagle***.

12. Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 83.

from their teacher, Emmett Burch, a souvenir booklet containing all their names and a selection of Biblical verses.[13] At Stewart's Chapel School in Blount County where the school "ran for four months or until the money ran out," the pupils did not have a tree at Christmas but enjoyed themselves with a spelling competition. They also "celebrated Easter with an Easter-egg hunt" where barnyard eggs had been coloured by boiling them with crayons.[14]

Besides any holidays that may have been observed, the ritual calendar of the school was shaped by its openings and closings which, with differing degrees of formality, marked both the beginning and the ending of the scholastic year or the major session. Openings usually included a meeting of parents and students at which any new teacher or teachers were introduced. The speeches given typically stressed "the duties of parents to their children and the duties of children to their parents and teachers" and pleas were issued for "cooperation."[15] Openings in small towns or cities were opportunities for local worthies to talk about the importance of education and to spruik the benefits of the town's own "Graded School" and its excellent teachers who were "to be congratulated upon the flattering prospects for a successful session."[16] Opening events were often orchestrated to entice potential patrons into enrolling their children and paying the fees needed to supplement the inadequate allocation from the state school fund. The final number of students might not be known until a month after the start of the scholastic year. A running score was helpfully provided by the town newspaper. On September 25, 1889, the *Wilcox Progress* reported: "Professor John M. Webb's school (at Furman) opened on the 9th inst. with 40 pupils and numbers 45 now. On 1st October it will be increased to between 50 or 60."[17]

School closing exercises generally marked the end of the winter session in April,

13. Lawrence County Heritage Book Committee. ***The Heritage of Lawrence County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1998, 14.

14. Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 67.

15. ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 9, 1901. Report on the opening of Holly Grove School in Walker County.

16. ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 3, 1894.

17. ***Wilcox Progress***, September 25, 1889. Schools such as Professor Webb's were not strictly speaking "public schools" but their costs were supplemented with a pro-rata parental share of the public moneys allocated to the township/municipal school district in which they were located. The point being made is in relation to the uncertainty of the enrolment process and the need for a certain amount of promotion to ensure numbers.

May or even June. If a summer session were held, then closing exercises might be held in August or September. The exercises might involve an (oral) examination at which teachers and parents quizzed children on what they had learnt during the session. They almost always included an "Exhibition" of (rehearsed) student capabilities. The special closing ceremony of "Commencement" was held for final year or graduating students.

Closing ceremonies were significant to the cultural life of small communities in a number of ways. They were calendrical markers and for some children, rites of passage; they were opportunities for rural social interaction (there were frequently accompanying picnics or suppers) and they were an assurance to the community that its school was imparting its values as well as skills. The Exhibition (in some places called a "Turn-out") was a group ritual in which children performed (by reciting poems, delivering orations, reading compositions, singing songs and taking part in tableaux, et cetera) while various onlookers (parents and guardians, friends and families, neighbours and visitors) listened and applauded.[18]

Even the poorest of the poor wanted to ensure their children not only performed well but also passed favourable muster with their neighbours and any others who might attend a closing exhibition. When William Holtzclaw was a young child at a black rural school in Randolph County, his teacher "ordered all the pupils to appear dressed in white" to deliver their exhibition pieces. Not having money to buy new white clothes, his mother made three little suits for William and his two brothers from a white petticoat. He "supposed we looked as well as the others," and "there was no mother who was prouder of her children than ours."[19]

In planning a closing program, teachers sometimes drew on ancient folk traditions such as festivals of the May. These had crossed the Atlantic from England in colonial days and were associated with the agricultural cycle. In its issue of May 15, 1879, *The Troy Messenger* described the exercises of a school at which,

18. A description of the closing at Iron Mountain Public School is given in ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 5, 1904. It included parents observing the "management and discipline of the school which continued its regular routine of work until noon." Then there was a picnic followed by "some excellent, singing, readings, et cetera. In the evening there were "short and impromptu speeches, spontaneous from the hearts of many of the patrons and citizens." "Turn-out" was the term used in Marengo County for the end-of-year Exhibition. See Susie P. Tompkins, ***Cotton-patch School-house***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992, 208.

19. William Holtzclaw, ***The Black Man's Burden***, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1971 [1915], 28.

during an afternoon packed with poems and speeches, a young pupil was crowned "Queen of May" and presented with a sceptre. Her "royal attendants" represented Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.[20]

School closings, examinations, exhibitions and commencements were often covered in the local newspapers in considerable detail so their enjoyment could be prolonged and the roles of participants remembered. In 1887, when two girls graduated from the Camden Public School, the *Wilcox Progress* was able to wring from their commencement ceremony enough material to fill half a column and inflate it with a civic gravity normally associated with much larger events:

> *Before dark on Friday last the people began to come into the spacious room at the Institute in order to secure a good seat. While a pleasant march was played, the two beautiful graduates, Miss Katie McDaniel and Miss Hattie Ratcliff marched in followed by Professor W.C. Jones and Col. S.W. John the orator of the occasion and the Board of Education.*

Miss McDaniel - aged about eighteen - was depicted as a "queenly young lady," who read her essay – *The Night Brings Out the Stars* - "clearly, distinctly and eloquently." Miss Ratcliff - "graceful, tall and stately" – also read an essay "filled with beautiful thoughts of a golden life and of rich expressions to delight the mind." A "splendid speech" was delivered by Colonel John who had come from Selma and was "a handsome man in the prime of life of extraordinary talent and ability who had the boldness to declare his ideas fully without qualifications." Professor Jones also acquitted himself well and made the "most appropriate and finished speech to the graduates we have ever heard."[21] It may be inferred from this item that, besides oratorical skills, the attributes admired by the Camden community included female refinement, youthful optimism, masculine authority and military bearing. It may also be inferred that, by such ceremonial investment in just *two* students, Camden attached much value to this rite of passage and recognised the importance of a community's regular confirmation of its culture through public performance.

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20. ***The Troy Messenger***, May 15, 1879. For a discussion of historical celebrations of The May see Ronald Hutton, ***The Stations of the Ritual Year in Britain***, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, 226-261.

21. ***Wilcox Progress***, June 22, 1887. It will be recalled (see pages 179-180 of Chapter 5) that in July 1887 there was doubt that the Camden Public School would survive. The Commencement coverage may have had something to do with promoting the value of the school.

Besides the calendrical fixtures of openings, closings, examinations, exhibitions and commencements and their associated rituals and ceremonies, the smaller rituals of school life such as the games children played at recess provide examples of a localised culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before the encroachment of organised sports, playground supervision and manufactured toys, or the advent of the specialist physical education teacher, there was huge diversity in children's play. In 1914, a survey of the conditions affecting schooling in Covington, Morgan and Macon Counties identified about one hundred different games that were known and played by the children of those counties. A review of all sixty-seven counties would no doubt have revealed even more.[22]

Many of the games played in Alabama's schoolyards were universal - jumping rope, hopscotch, hide and seek, knuckle-jacks and marbles were just some of the most common. Other universal games involving catching, chasing, jumping, seeking and tagging were also played but there were infinite local variations on their general principles or rules – many controlled by their own peer laws. In Clay County the rules for ball games played in the 1880s such as "paddle cat" and "town ball" (a precursor to baseball) were different from those reported from some other counties. Around 1900 games called "prisoner's base," "blind-man's buff," "stealing sticks" and "ante-ever," were played at the Pine Flat School in Shelby County.[23] At the Old Vaughan School in Pike County they played "paddle ball" and "bugger on the log."[24] "Halo-over the schoolhouse" was played in Coffee County.[25] Teachers often joined in as if they were just older playmates (as in some cases they were). Sometimes girls played their own games but in small schools the boys needed the girls (and sometimes the teacher too) to make up teams.

22. Brian Sutton-Smith, ed. ***A Children's Game Anthology: studies in folklore and anthropology***, New York, Arno Press, 1976, 33-42. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***An Educational Survey of Three Counties in Alabama***, Issued by the Department of Education, Montgomery, Alabama, July 1, 1914, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1914, 140-141.

23. Shelby County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Shelby County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 83. "Prisoner's base" and "blind man's buff" were widely played all over the United States and had originally been brought from the British Isles. Brian Sutton-Smith ed., ***A Children's Game Anthology***.

24. Pike County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Pike County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 70.

25. Fred S. Watson, ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, Anniston, Higginbotham, 1970, 57.

Black children had their own forms of play such as the ring games "Little Sallie Walker, sittin in a saucer" and "Stooping on the Window, Wind the Ball." These had accompanying chanted "game songs."[26] Having one's own games or one's own rules was clannish and a claim on identity (including racial identity) by the children of a community. Games that were played in one part of a single county might not be known to the children in another part of the county. Games provided a differentiator between neighbourhoods and, for children, they were markers of domain.

In the period with which this thesis is concerned, the resources available to Alabama's public schools were insufficient for special playground equipment. As late as 1918 play equipment in public schools was "so meagre and so infrequently found as to be non-existent."[27] In their play - as in the rest of their life - country children were expected to "make do" and they did so - improvising from materials at hand. In Bullock County, Elma Lee Hall (born 1895) recalled "the girls played what the boys played – marbles and ball and sich [*sic*] like. We made our balls out of old socks. Our bat was a hickory tree limb." Beansie Hall Hall (born 1908) and two other children constructed "a playhouse from old tree branches."[28] In Cullman County discarded pieces of lumber served as springboards and (when placed over a saw-horse) as see-saws.[29] At Princeton in Jackson County, where the schoolhouse was at the bottom of a hill covered with grapevines, Sue Mae Freeman Powell (born 1903) remembered "the boys would go up and cut some of the long grapevines, remove all the leaves and knots and we would jump rope over the vines."[30] At Belforest School in Baldwin County "the boys and girls had separate play areas" but, wanting somewhere to play baseball, the boys themselves

26. Alabama State Department of Education, ***An Educational Survey of Three Counties in Alabama***, 142. See also Virginia Pounds Brown and Laurella Owens, ***Toting the Lead Row: Ruby Pickens Tartt, Alabama Folklorist***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1981, 15-16. Ruby Pickens Tartt found that games known to black children in one part of Sumter County were not known to those in other places.

27. Edward N. Clopper, ***Child Welfare in Alabama: an enquiry by the National Child Labor Committee Under the Auspices and with the Cooperation of the University of Alabama***, New York, National Child Labor Committee, 1918, 81-82.

28. Wade Hall, ***Conecuh People: words from the Alabama Black Belt***, Montgomery, New South Books, 2004, 127 and 95-96. Oral histories recorded from Elma Lee Hall and Beansie Hall Hall.

29. Margaret J. Jones, ***Combing Cullman County***, Cullman, Modernistic Printers Inc. 1972, 91.

30. Ronald Dykes, ***Growing Up Hard: memories of Jackson County, Alabama in the Early Twentieth Century***, Paint Rock, Paint Rock River Press, 2003, 37. Oral history from Sue Mae Freeman Powell.

"cleared a nearby cotton patch."[31]

These makeshifts by children imitated those of adults who, without financial resources, cut their own timber for schoolhouses, desks and benches and constructed these themselves in neighbourly cooperation. In the recollections above there is a sly pride in the self-sufficiency of the country child and the independent resourcefulness within a rural community.

The first foray by Alabama's Department of Education into mandating a "Special Day" for state-wide observance was in 1885 when the then superintendent of education, Solomon Palmer, requested:

> *All schools of the state to observe the 22nd February (George Washington's birthday) as Arbor Day, by planting shade trees and shrubbery on the school grounds and dedicating them with appropriate ceremonies to the memory of those they love.*

Palmer earnestly invoked the aid of "the state press and the hearty, active cooperation of superintendents of counties, cities and townships, and separate school districts as well as every teacher" in order to make the day a success. He hoped that Arbor Day would continue to be observed until:

> *Every schoolhouse in the state is surrounded by shade trees and environed with bowers of shrubs and vines bearing beautiful and sweet scented flowers, the delight of children; and until the ravages of the murderous axe shall cease to needlessly lay waste our majestic forests and the thoughtless woodman shall be constrained to heed the plaintive voice of our children as they cry "Woodman spare that tree."*[32]

Palmer's enthusiasm was consistent with that expressed by Arbor Day speakers elsewhere in the United States. These saw trees as embodiments of rural virtues and attachments. In a mobile, rootless, urbanising world, the trees planted at schools "would endure and bind, span generations, and evoke commitment to place and community." In turn this would deter the young's "hankering for city diversions

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31. Baldwin County Heritage Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County,*** 66.

32. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1885,*** 29. Palmer was complying with "a request made by the Southern Forestry Congress, and in accordance with a beautiful custom that is prevailing in well nigh every state in the Union." See also ***The Troy Messenger,*** January 27, 1887.

and excitements."[33] These ideas presaged, or were consistent with, the concerns of Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell University whose campaign to have Nature Study included in school curricula was being pursued at around this time. He was the harbinger of a growing conviction in national life that urban drift was threatening the lifeblood of American national identity – a conviction that would lead to the establishment of the Commission on Country Life.

Being also the birthday of George Washington, Arbor Day did double duty. As well as planting trees, schoolchildren celebrated "the memory of one of the country's most illustrious sons" with recitations, readings, songs and appropriate short talks. One newspaper told its readers:

> *It is a suitable occasion for patriotic effort. The spirit to be imbibed by the children and the lesson they are to learn from the occasion is really of more importance than the mere planting of these particular trees.*[34]

In addition to the formal celebratory program, teachers arranged their own observances to honour Washington. In 1906 Professor and Mrs W.E. Turnipseed of the Jasper Graded School gave nineteen pupils a "delightful entertainment" including "delicious refreshments" at their own home. Their rooms were "artistically decorated with flags, cherries, hatchets and the national colors. The evening was pleasantly spent in games of different kinds, prizes being given for some of them." The boys' prize was "a colonial picture."[35] The decorative combination of cherries and hatchets was presumably intended to evoke the Reverend Mason Locke Weems' invented myth of Washington's spotless boyhood during which he allegedly cut down a cherry tree with a hatchet but later confessed his misdeed. The tale had some ambiguity for Arbor Day.

In 1903, the state superintendent of education, Isaac W. Hill, acted on a suggestion by the AEA that, each year on December 14, schools should celebrate the anniversary of Alabama's admission to the Union. Whereas Arbor Day originated outside the state, "Alabama Day" was home-grown and the program of

33. Leigh Eric Schmidt, "From Arbor Day to the Environmental Sabbath: Nature, Liturgy, and American Protestantism." ***Harvard Theological Review*** 84 (July 1991): 299-323, 304.

34. ***The Mountain Eagle***, February 20, 1901.

35. ***The Mountain Eagle***, February 28, 1906.

activities for its observance was prepared by a committee comprising members of the AEA, the Department of Archives and History and the Department of Education. Teachers were advised the occasion should be the means of "bringing together patrons, neighbours, and friends" so they could "partake of the interest, enthusiasm and fraternal feelings which always come from the mingling of people at such meetings." The program provided for the reading of a message from the governor regarding Alabama and its future. There was a salute to the state flag and then selected children were to read both the resolution upon which Alabama was admitted to the Union in 1819 as well as an extract from the address of William L. Yancey in the Secession Convention of 1861. Songs were to be sung (for example, *Away Down South in Dixie* or *Dixie's Land* - with verses in a contrived "darkie" idiom) and a poem, *A Ballad of Emma Sampson*, was suggested for recitation. This poem concerned a Civil War incident when a plucky Alabamian girl had enabled Nathan Bedford Forrest to elude the Union army by guiding him to a secret ford. The anthem *America* (*My Country 'tis of Thee*) completed the proceedings.[36] The program for this celebration is notable in a number of ways. It recognised (through its suggestion of an assembly of patrons, neighbours and friends) the strength of (an implicitly rural) localism; it engendered a reverence for ritual objects such as Alabama's admission document and the state flag; it linked Alabama to its Confederate history (and the part children played in that history) but also to a broader Southern identity. Ultimately however it encouraged children to recognise their fealty to the American nation and was thus an integrative ritual.

Alabama's Southern identity was something which, during the 1890s, a formidable organisation of white middle-class women was becoming increasingly keen to impress upon the state's children. The so-called "Lost Cause" – that prolonged lament for the Old South and what might have been had the Civil War not been lost – enjoyed its high noon in the period between 1896 and about 1918. This was partly as a result of the efforts of the United Confederate Veterans but, perhaps even more importantly, because of the efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). For example, 93 percent of the monuments to the Confederate dead that

36. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Program and Selections for Celebration of the Anniversary of the Day on which Alabama was Admitted to the Union: for use in the schools of Alabama***, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1903.

eventually dotted nearly every small town and city across the South, were erected after 1895 as a result of UDC fundraising.[37] From 1896, when Miss Sallie Jones, a "well known and socially loved" schoolteacher of Camden in Wilcox County obtained a charter to establish a chapter of the UDC in Alabama, the organisation grew rapidly throughout the state. It actively pursued a goal of educating white "Anglo-Saxon" children in the tenets of the Lost Cause and rooting out any apostasy in respect of "our heritage."

The UDC sponsored essay competitions, influenced the choice of "unbiased" history textbooks, provided teaching scholarships to "aid the lineal descendants of veterans" and, most visibly, provided white schools with Confederate flags and portraits of Robert E. Lee (who was central to Lost Cause mythology), Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson.[38] In 1907 and 1908 the organisation was particularly active in portrait distribution since those years marked the centennials of the births of Lee and Davis respectively. In 1909 Mrs John A. Gravlee, who was president of the UDC chapter in Jasper (and also president of the school improvement association), presented "a beautiful picture of Jefferson Davis, the *only* President of the Confederacy" to the Jasper Graded School. *The Mountain Eagle* reported that "the presentation ceremonies, which took place at the school auditorium, proved most appropriate and impressive" and that everywhere there were "flags and flowers in profusion. These ceremonies included a speech by Miss Mabel Loveland, "a daughter of a soldier who wore the blue" which suggested that, in Jasper at least, obsequies associated with the Lost Cause did not include a sustained rancour for the North.[39]

The birthday of Robert E. Lee (January 19) was a state holiday in Alabama (as well as five other states in the South). As the centenary of Lee's birthday neared,

37. Karen L. Cox, ***Dixie's Daughters: the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture,*** Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003, 50.

38. Mattie Huey, ***History of the Alabama Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy,*** Opelika, The Post Publishing Company, 2002 [1937], 11 and Karen L. Cox, ***Dixie's Daughters: the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture,*** 130-131. See also ***Wilcox Progress,*** September 7, 1887, regarding description of Miss Sallie Jones. See also the ***Dothan Weekly Eagle,*** July 30, 1910, for an advertisement for UDC scholarships.

39. ***The Mountain Eagle,*** April 28, 1909.

Governor William D. Jelks, issued a proclamation requesting that:

> *All of the schools in the state celebrate the day in such a way as may be suggested by the management of such schools, or in a way that might be suggested by the State Department of Education.*

Isaac W. Hill, the state superintendent, responded to the governor's suggestion with "hearty concurrence" and prepared a program which was then promulgated so that:

> *The children of Alabama may learn to emulate the hero of the Southern Confederacy. True to himself, true to his country, true to his God, no man of the nineteenth century is more worthy of our love and admiration.*

Superintendent Hill recommended that as many children as possible take part in exercises that included songs, recited testaments to "The Character and Achievements of General Lee," and an original address – preferably from a Confederate veteran.[40] Lee's moral and Christian credentials and his dignity in adversity– the indicators of a real hero and exemplar – were the attributes stressed rather than Lee's association with war and defeat.

Hill's specificity about Lee being the man of the *nineteenth* century may have been deliberate to ensure that George Washington's stature was not diminished at Lee's expense. This was a potential risk when observance of Washington's birthday had been conflated with Arbor Day and Lee's portrait was often deliberately hung next to Washington's so children would equate Lee's significance with that of the Founding Father.[41]

Robert E. Lee's centenary celebrations showed the Department of Education contributing to the development of a civil religion based on the orthodox tenets of the Lost Cause. A civil religion gives its adherents a shared sense of history and destiny, an integrating vision and a set of symbols, ceremonies, rites and rituals that

40. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Programs and Selections for the Celebration January 19, 1907 of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of General Robert E. Lee,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1907, 3-8.

41. Cox, ***Dixie's Daughters: the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture,*** 130. Something similar happened in the North as well – but there it was Lincoln who was given paramountcy.

invest community life with sacred meaning. The department was assisting to create a patriotic sentiment centred on the conservation of a particular historic tradition born out of "the sting of defeat, the unhealed wounds of oppression and the proud memory of ancestral valor."[42] The observance was a sign of things to come.

The rituals associated with the Lost Cause were all devised to celebrate a mythical past in which a pantheon of heroes – the highest products of Old South civilization – appeared to battle the forces of evil as represented by the Yankees.[43] But, as the sociologist, W. Lloyd Warner has shown, the bonding that takes place when people participate in rituals – that which defines what it is to be "us" – members of a certain group - also creates feelings of separateness from those who are "not us" – those who are a special group within the whole.[44] The crusading zeal of the UDC and its assertiveness in respect of the state's white cultural heritage was echoed in the Assembly. It is perhaps no accident that Alabama's state Government began promulgating observance procedures for dead Confederate heroes at around the same time it was consolidating white supremacy as a political doctrine and constitutional fact. Just as black public schools did not feature in the early twentieth century campaigns for educational improvement, the probable sensitivity of black schoolchildren to Confederate ritual seems never to have been taken into account.

Following the apparent success of the Robert E. Lee Centennial celebration, the state seemed keener than ever to develop Special Days that were to be observed in all of Alabama's public schools. In 1909 another *Program and Selections* booklet was issued to celebrate the birthday of Thomas Jefferson on April 13. This provided a recommended list of recitations, songs and readings. In the booklet, Harry Cunningham Gunnels, state superintendent of education, addressed some prefatory remarks to "The Teachers of Alabama" in which he claimed the sage of Monticello

42. Richard Pierard and Robert D. Linder, ***Civil Religion and the Presidency,*** Grand Rapids, Acadamie Books, 1988, 22-23. These authors have identified five characteristics by which a civil religion can be defined. See also William N. Hutchins, "Moral Values in National Holidays." ***The Biblical World*** 49 (March 1917): 168-70.

43. Charles R. Wilson, ***Baptized in Blood: the religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920,*** Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1980, 223.

44. W. Lloyd Warner, ***The Living and the Dead: a study of the symbolic life of Americans,*** New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959, 233-34.

as a *Southern* hero. Jefferson was being celebrated because,

> *his work for the cause of education, for the uplift of the masses, his statesmanship, his patriotism and prophetic vision have made the South, especially, what it is in an education way.*[45]

This comment may have left some teachers perplexed in view of the recent campaign waged by the Southern Education Board to do something about the dreadful state of the South's public schools (including Alabama's). Moreover, Thomas Jefferson was an ardent nationalist.

Just seven months after the formal celebrations for Jefferson's birthday, another *Program and Selections* pamphlet was issued to public schools for the observance of "Alabama Library Day" on November 4, 1909. The date chosen was that upon which the Alabama Library Association had been formed and the celebration can be seen as an accompaniment to the contemporary efforts being made by teachers to develop the private reading habits of school children. These efforts culminated in the passing of the Rural School Library Bill in April, 1911. The Library Day Program was structured to include songs, testimonials, recitations, poems, declamations and tableaux. It made provision for a roll call and when each student's name was called, he or she had to respond almost liturgically with the name of a favourite book or a quotation about books and reading. The day finished with hymn singing.

The Special Days designed to honour and celebrate the great men of Southern history or the saints of the Lost Cause had elements of propaganda but Alabama Library Day was pure educational advocacy. It was specifically intended to exert pressure on trustees or the local school board to "bring about the introduction of

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45. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, 1909, ***Thomas Jefferson's Birthday: Program and Selections for its Celebration in the Schools of Alabama,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1909, 2-5. On the eve of the celebration of Washington's birthday in 1911, ***The Wilcox Progressive Era*** reminded its readers of Washington's "fame as a Southerner" suggesting that being a Southerner trumped being an American. ***The Wilcox Progressive Era,*** February 9, 1911.

46. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, 1909, ***Alabama Library Day, Programs and Selections for the Observance of Library Day, November 4th, by the Schools of Alabama,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1909.

library facilities." Teachers were urged to:

> *approach the Alabama Department of Archives and History for particular suggestions as to forms of organization, buildings, library furniture, book lists, plans and methods of raising funds, traveling libraries and for other details.*[46]

Library Day was an example of the state using its nascent authority to make school fund-raising by trustees an obligation in the service of a progressive crusade.

Just six months after Alabama Library Day, schools were sent "Bird Day Books" and asked to observe May 4, 1910, as Alabama Bird Day. Harry Cunningham Gunnels, the state superintendent of education explained to teachers that:

> *The time has come in Alabama and in the South when, if we would get the most of what God has given us, we must instil in the minds and hearts of our children . . . . a love of nature and nature's things.*

This observance was consistent with the ideas incorporated into the 1910 *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama.* Bird Day was, like Arbor Day, all of a piece with the concerns of the Commission on Country Life at a national level and also the concerns for Alabamian agricultural production being addressed at the local level by the farm demonstration agents.[47] While the Bird Day Book offered no formal program to be followed, it provided biographical information on the great Southern ornithologist and artist, John James Audubon, promoted the importance of preserving Alabama's wildlife, and praised the "usefulness" of Alabama's state bird - the Yellowhammer.[48] Bird Day was, together with Arbor Day, a means by which the state could inculcate conservation awareness and promote the importance of children being connected with Nature in order to grow into virtuous citizens.[49] These Days helped with the validation of country life.

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47. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1910 (hereinafter cited as ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910***). Pages 172-173 of this manual provide a course outline on Nature Study including information on migratory birds, et cetera and the need to observe Arbor Day and Bird Day.

48. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Bird Day Book, May the Fourth, Nineteen Hundred and Ten,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1910, 3-13. The Yellowhammer, a type of woodpecker, was also called a Flicker.

49. Schmidt, ***From Arbor Day to the Environmental Sabbath: Nature, Liturgy, and American Protestantism,*** 307.

Contemporary educational journals exhorted teachers not only to encourage their pupils to venerate the natural world and to develop a preservationist's love of forests and wildlife but also to revive traditional folkways and festivals some of which, like May Day, had European origins. In April 1904 an article appeared in a national educational journal - *The Elementary School Teacher* - which said in part:

> *Surely it is worth bringing back, through the maypole, the Harvest Home and the Yule mumming, that childlike overflow of joy in the ceremony and ritual which greeted the days of great memory or the season's turning – seedtime and harvest, summer and winter – and lavished upon them such a wealth of happy inventiveness and creative activity? We should preserve in him, if we can, something of the child-man's responsive glow in the presence of the changes of nature – Christmas and New Year, with their returning light and length of days; Candlemas, the old mid-winter feast; Easter, with its tribute to Flora: Thanksgiving and Harvest Home, with their grateful load of winter store. It is more important still that the child should recall on birthdays and death-days the great heroes and martyrs and sages to whom the race owes its priceless gifts of liberty and humanity; its inventors and voyagers and toilers, its singers and artists; as well as the great historical anniversaries and centennials which mark turning points in man's advance along the centuries.*[50]

The manuals and booklets that were issued in the first two decades of the twentieth century by Alabama's Department of Education were often prepared with the assistance of professional educationists (specifically Professors James R. Rutland of Auburn Polytechnic Institute and James J. Doster of the University of Alabama).[51] As these men were themselves contributors of articles to educational journals, it is highly probable that they subscribed to *The Elementary School Teacher* and were familiar with the quoted plea and/or other educational opinion in respect of folkway and festival revivalism and activities intended to connect children with "God's Gifts in Nature."[52] Some of the sentiments expressed in the article certainly appear to have been adopted in Alabama's schools over the following decade.

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50. Percival Chubb, "The Function of the Festival in School Life." ***The Elementary School Teacher*** 4 (April 1904): 559-65.

51. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910***, 4.

52. In 1907 another article appeared in the journal, ***The Elementary School Teacher*** on this topic. See Frank A. Manny, "Types of School Festivals." ***The Elementary School Teacher*** 7 (March 1907): 411-13. In ***Special Days in the Sunday Schools*** (1916) Marion Lawrence listed May Day pageants, plays, poles, and picnics; Flower Days; Bird Days; City Beautiful Days; and Fresh Air Days. Quoted in Schmidt, ***From Arbor Day to the Environmental Sabbath***, 307. Dr Fletcher B. Dresslar who contributed to the ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910*** wrote for ***The School Review*** (another contemporary journal).

In 1910 the *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama* addressed teachers with this statement: "The schools are for the home and the state. Do something that will serve the home and elevate the state."[53] This was quite a novel claim in view of the fact that ever since 1875 the legal structure of the educational system had supported the concept of the public common school as a *local* institution governed by trustees, parents and guardians, and supervised (when at all) by the county superintendent. Although there had been progressive changes in educational policy-making such as the abolition of school districts based on townships, the encouragement of consolidation, the centralised prescription of textbooks and the introduction of state-wide standards for teacher examination, the essential nature of the school was still much as it had always been – a local institution meeting the needs of its own community. The comment was a further indication that professional educationists were starting to envisage the school in an entirely new way and attempting to use the public schools to amplify governmental social policy.

A state-wide prohibition law had been implemented on January 1, 1909, but it was under challenge by liquor interests. On August 19, 1909, the Legislature passed an *Act to educate the Children of Alabama on the Evil of Intemperance.* Section 6 of the Act required that:

> *There shall be one day in each scholastic term of the public schools to be known as Temperance Day, when a suitable program shall be prepared to the end that the children of Alabama may be taught the evils of intemperance.*

Temperance Day was initially observed on February 18, 1910, and thereafter as scheduled. Teachers were sent placards setting forth "by statistics and mottoes, the evils of intemperance" but they were expected to create observance procedures themselves. The teacher of a school at Fatama in Wilcox County – "a noble teacher who tries *to do all the state requires of her*" - arranged a program for her class that included recitations such as "The Price of a Drink" and "Alcohol's Curse."[54]

53. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910***, 8.

54. ***The Citizen Examiner***, January 13, 1910 and February 3, 1910. See also ***The Wilcox Progressive Era***, February 24, 1910 and February 23, 1911. (Italics added).

Another special publication of the Department of Education - *Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life* (issued in 1913) gives some indication of the way in which both state and county were appropriating the rituals and observances of local communities, codifying these and attaching them to specific ceremonies. They may also have picked up on the festival revivalism recommended so strongly in the *Elementary School Journal.* For example, (because after 1907 there were growing numbers of county high schools) it was common to hold a county commencement ceremony for all those children who had completed their elementary education and were proceeding to high school or those who had passed a county examination and were leaving school forever. At the Calhoun County Commencement in May 1913 a great number of schools in that county were represented. The program included a "May Day Festival" in which children performed various rites of the May. Children sang traditional folksongs, waltzed around a beribboned maypole and danced old English measures such as the milk maids' dance and the weaver's dance.[55]

In *Alabama's Country Schools and their relation to Country Life,* the state superintendent of education, Henry Jones Willingham, made explicit the case for Special Days and their purpose:

> *There are really no school holidays in Alabama unless authorised by the county boards. As a rule, the term is so short that the observance of holidays to any extent would interfere with the completion of the term's work. It is to be hoped therefore that county boards will encourage the observance of "Special Days" rather than holidays, aside from Christmas and perhaps Thanksgiving Day. Teachers may observe special days by teaching the history and purpose of the day and allowing selected pupils to recite or speak something appropriate during the last hour or half-hour of the day's session after the regular program of the day has been observed.*[56]

Willingham then went on to make a few suggestions for what might be regarded as stations in the ritual year of the schools. He cited New Year's Day as an occasion

55. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** Bulletin No. 33, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1913 24-28. See also Kimberly O'Dell, ***Images of America, Calhoun County,*** Charleston, Arcadia Publishing, 1998.

56. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** 29.

which should "be pre-eminently a day of good resolutions and far-reaching plans – an inventory along all lines should be taken." He then listed the days and dates upon which to observe the birthdays of Robert E. Lee, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, as well as "the birthdays of other great men, whether soldiers, statesmen, authors or benefactors." He made a further suggestion that days for observance could include Columbus Day, Bird Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, as well as moveable days such as Mardi Gras, Good Friday and Thanksgiving. He also mentioned Temperance Day and Mother's Day and a "few days well worthy of some appropriate observance [which] are proclaimed from time to time by the governor or state superintendent.[57] In 1914/15 these would include "Clean-Up and School Improvement Day," "Good Roads Day," "Better Health Day," and "Better Farming Day" but these were to be something of a departure from those observances relating to the celebration "of the season's turning" or "the birthdays and death-days of great heroes."

As deliberate contrivances to pursue a specifically educational cause, these Special Days had a precursor in Alabama Library Day but they represented an all-out effort by the state (in the person of William Francis Feagin, the state superintendent of education from 1913) "to arouse community interest throughout the state with the rural school as the moving agency."[58]

William Francis Feagin was a professional educator of an energetic and persuasive bent (one paper described him successively as "a man of small body, but big in mind and heart" and as "wide awake, efficient and hustling")[59] who had been President of the Albertville Agricultural College in Marshall County from 1897 to 1903. He next served as a member and secretary of the State Board of Teachers' Examiners from January 1903 until January 1907 when he was appointed to the

57. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life***, 29. On May 1, 1911, Willingham issued a bulletin to all Alabama school teachers advising that the state governor had issued a proclamation naming May 14, 1911, as a day which the people of Alabama were requested to observe as Mother's Day. Willingham wanted all school children to be made aware of this proclamation so that "many additional thousands of young people" might observe the day. He asked that they do this "in honor the best mother who ever lived, - YOUR MOTHER." ***The Wilcox Progressive Era***, May 11, 1911.

58. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Better Health Day, February 12, 1915***, Bulletin No. 49, Montgomery, Alabama, January 22, 1915, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1915, 3.

59. ***The Wilcox Progressive Era***, January 29, 1914, and January 15, 1915.

position of Chief Clerk in the Department of Education. He held this position until November 20, 1913, when he was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Henry Jones Willingham as state superintendent of education. On January 18, 1915, he entered upon his own (elected) term of four years as state superintendent.[60] During both his time as chief clerk and his appointive years, Feagin had helped to plan and build strong county or local school improvement associations throughout Alabama.

As "a man of realities, a man of facts and calculations,"[61] Feagin was earnestly convinced that the prolonged lack of success in real educational reform and modernisation in Alabama was because arguments in favour of local taxation had been based on "general observations" of need rather than on "detailed study and statistics." In 1914, in order to remedy this absence of data, Feagin commissioned a comprehensive survey of educational conditions in three "divergent geographical sections of the state that would typify conditions both fairly and generally." He chose Covington County (a Wiregrass county in the south of the state where timber-getting was the principal economic activity and whose largest town, Andalusia, had only 2,500 residents); Morgan County (a northern county bordering the Tennessee River which had sections of both rich farmland and hardscrabble hill country and whose county seat, Decatur, had just over 4,000 residents); and Macon County (an easterly county with both small farms and large plantations together with a black population which out-numbered the white population by a ratio of six to one. Its largest town was Tuskegee with 2,243 residents).

The survey, which was later published as *An Educational Survey of Three Counties in Alabama*, was undertaken by the state's two rural school supervisors, Norman Baker and James Sibley, and investigated thoroughly a large number of criteria. These included the quality and ownership of schoolhouses, the level of certificates held by teachers and their salaries, the length of school sessions, attendance levels, the implications of farm tenancy on educational continuity, the nature of supervision, student health and sanitary arrangements and the differences between white and "colored" schools. Feagin was widely congratulated for the report which one

60. Thomas M. Owen, ***History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography in 4 Volumes***, Chicago, S.J. Clarke Publishing Co. 1921, 566. See also Austin R. Meadows, ***History of the State Department of Education***, 8.

61. The characteristics of Charles Dickens' "modern man" - Thomas Gradgrind. Charles Dickens, ***Hard Times***, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, [1854], 3.

correspondent termed "this exceedingly valuable collection of facts."[62] The *Educational Survey* was not the last investigation and report initiated by Feagin. In April 1914 he made an impassioned address to a meeting of the AEA in Birmingham which was later printed as *More Revenue for Education in Alabama* and distributed to legislators.[63] The following year he prepared a study of the disparities between three Black Belt counties in teacher salaries, session lengths and teacher-pupil ratios. He also prepared a leaflet entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity for Alabama Boys and Girls,* issued a *Manual for County Institute Instructors* so as to have teachers understand his goals and ambitions, and sent weekly material to newspaper editors to use to enlist the aid of the public in his reforms.[64] All of this case-building had a propaganda value and was part of his strategic planning for the day in 1915 when he would place before the Legislature fifteen bills relating to educational reform. These included two bills authorising constitutional amendments to levy additional *ad valorem* (property) taxes for school purposes.[65]

Feagin might have been an exemplary modern bureaucrat but his work in the development of school improvement associations had taught him that educational modernisation would never succeed if imposed by the state on local communities;[66] the forces of localism had to be enlisted in the cause of educational reform. Feagin was the first of the major educational modernisers who appears not to have regarded the disadvantages of rural schooling with either impatient frustration or total disdain. He usually showed insight and empathy into rural community needs and understood that the school could be made a focal point for improvements in rural life. Thus, at about the same time as he was commissioning surveys, making addresses and writing reports, Feagin was also occupied in the planning of his four Special Days ("not holidays but *occasions*") whose specific purpose would be to attract to local schools not just teachers, students, trustees, parents and guardians

62. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***An Educational Survey of Three Counties in Alabama,*** issued by the Department of Education, Montgomery, Alabama, July 1, 1914. See also George [obscure] to William Feagin, state superintendent of education, September 17, 1914, in SGO7765, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1911-1914,*** ADAH. Population figures for Andalusia, Decatur and Tuskegee are from the 1910 Federal Census.

63. William F. Feagin, "***More Revenue for Education in Alabama.***" an address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Alabama Educational Association, Birmingham, Alabama, April 9-11, 1914, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1914.

64. Charles Eugene Millar, "The Contributions of William Francis Feagin to Education in Alabama." Ed.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1963, 53.

65. Ira Harvey, ***A History of Educational Finance in Alabama, 1819-1970,*** Auburn, Truman Pierce Institute for the Advancement of Teacher Education, 1989, 94-99.

but as many other people as might be interested.[67] Feagin believed that his Special Days would provide:

> *unmistakable evidence that teachers, pupils and parents are thinking as never before of the place which the school should fill in the community, and the part that they should have in helping the school to do its work.*[68]

Yet rural people had *always* had a view of the place their schools should fill in the community. It can be inferred that what Feagin actually meant (and this was an enlargement of the sentiments expressed in the 1913 manual) was that the state wanted communities to rise to a fresh challenge. It wanted them to accept a new role for their schools – one entailing an obligation to pursue a whole complex of progressive causes including better schoolhouses, better community health and temperance, better rural roads and better farming practices *and* he wanted communities to vote on his planned constitutional amendments for increased taxes to allow schools to be more effective institutions.

Because Feagin was a professional educationist, it is impossible to know the extent to which, in designing observance programs for his Special Days, he was simply drawing on his past experience of organising school events or whether he deliberately copied the programs already created to celebrate (for example) the birthdays of great men. He may have been following a precedent set by the organisers of the 1912 Alabama State Fair who, in planning the Fair, decided that several days would be characterised as "Special Days." These included "Farmers' Day," "Good Roads Day" and "Christopher Columbus Day." Similarly, in 1914 Governor Emmett O'Neal had proclaimed a "Good Roads Day" to be observed on August 14 and 15 when "every man and boy was expected to give his time to working the roads for the public good."[69]

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66. Meadows, ***History of the State Department of Education of Alabama,*** 8.

67. The clarification that the Special Days were "occasions" was provided by Clarence M. Dannelly, Chief Clerk of the Department of Education in 1916 when the Special Days were all held again. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, SGO13206, Box 8, ***Minutes of County Boards of Education, December 4 and 5, 1916, Montgomery, Alabama,*** 13.

68. Alabama State Dept. of Education, ***Better Health Day, February 12, 1915,*** Bulletin No. 49, 3.

69. ***Dothan Weekly Eagle,*** August 30, 1912. The Alabama Good Roads Association had also inaugurated and designated August 14, 15 and 16, 1912 as "Good Roads Days" with the object of having all the people subject to road duty to work simultaneously all over the state on those days. ***The Citizen Examiner,*** July 25, 1912. See also ***The Wilcox Progressive Era,*** August 6, 1914.

Some of the material included in the pamphlets issued in connection with the Special Days has a credited author but some does not. The structure and wording of the observance programs suggests that, whoever was responsible for these was aware of the importance of ritual solemnity in special observances and may consciously have used religious orders of service as an accessible template. The language of the pamphlets is informed by a religious sensibility and a familiarity with scripture and liturgy.

As already noted in respect of the ceremonies developed for Robert E. Lee's centenary, Feagin's programs were all of a piece with what is often referred to (generally in a national context) as "civil religion." This is the non-denominational expression of religious piety in official observances – a piety which rests on the assumption of the over-arching guidance of the state by a transcendent deity.[70] The virtues of liberty, justice and integrity are the pillars of civil religion and these lend a moral dimension to the state's public decision-making processes. In Alabama, the civil religion reflected in the Special Day observance programs issued to schools, might not have been denominational but it was, unambiguously, the Christian religion - and a Protestant version thereof. That all school students would be adherents was implicit in the program material and reflected a familiarity with the cultural expectations of those for whom the programs were designed. Each Special Day (which was carefully constructed so as to be highly relevant to the topic of its focus and to allow the broadest possible participation) variously included readings from the King James Bible, hymns, prayers and the recital of creeds - as shown below.

"Clean-up and School Improvement Day" (held first on October 30, 1914, and the following year on December 10) had a merry, jamboree-like quality involving the whole neighbourhood in co-operative endeavour.[71] It maximised the potential for group participation in activities such as painting, cleaning, repairing, weeding and land-clearing. These were all activities which strengthened or renewed existing relationships and feelings of local connectedness. They bore strong similarities to

70. Richard Pierard and Robert D. Linder, ***Civil Religion and the Presidency***, 20-25. In the chapter "What is Civil Religion?" these authors offer a synthesis of ideas derived from Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who coined the term) to Robert Bellah whose 1967 essay ***Civil Religion in America*** was highly influential. They also reference Clifford Geertz and others.

71. See pages 209-211 of Chapter 6.

other rural activities such as barn-raisings and corn-shucking parties. Yet, according to one newspaper, the activities had a higher purpose which sounded very much like being absolved from sin and born again: "Clean-up Day has a broad meaning. In a *spiritual sense* we can 'rise on stepping stones of our dead selves.'"[72]

The pamphlet issued for "Good Roads Day" (January 15 1915) was part consciousness raising document, part information handbook for improving the state's roads and part an observance program. It is a rather mixed compendium of reprinted newspaper clippings - "Good roads and good schools exist together. Good roads will help replace the little one-room, one-teacher schools so prevalent in many sections of the country." It included a description of road building from the Romans to modern times, a discussion of MacAdam and his principles, and a history of road building in America. Each page of the pamphlet was headed by a newly minted aphorism such as *Mud roads belong to the log-cabin days, and log-cabin days belong to the past.* The Good Roads Day program started with a hymn and included devotional exercises to be led by a pastor whose role was to explain the benefits of good roads for the church and school life of the community. There were poems for children to recite about the value of good roads to farmers, a list to be learned of "things I should know about roads," and instructions on how to make a "split-log drag" – an implement used in road levelling.[73]

The next two Special Days were "Better Health Day" (February 12 1915) and "Better Farming Day" (March 12 1915). The pamphlets issued in connection with these days were similar to that produced for Good Roads Day in that they sought to make teachers, pupils and parents aware that the school existed in an improvable environment and it was their duty to undertake such improvement. The "Better

72. ***The Wilcox Progressive Era***, December 16, 1915. (Italics added). The editor was paraphrasing Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem *In Memoriam* whose first canto states:

> *I held it truth, with him who sings*
> *To one clear harp in divers tones,*
> *That men may rise on stepping stones*
> *Of their dead selves to higher things.*

According to Erik Gray, a contemporary editor of *In Memoriam*, "these lines refer to the German poet Goëthe, who wrote in many different styles ('divers tones') and who believed, Tennyson suggests, that individuals should profit from painful experiences and move on." Erik Gray, ***Alfred, Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam: authoritative text criticism***, 2nd ed., New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2004, 6. The editor of ***The Wilcox Progressive Era*** seems to have taken this a step further by suggesting *spiritual* renewal.

73. ADAH, Alabama State Dept. of Education, ***Good Roads Day, January 15, 1915***, Bulletin No. 47, issued by the Department of Education, Montgomery, Alabama, December 16, 1914, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1914, 4-16.

Health Day" pamphlet was instructional – it included information about the causes of typhoid and hookworm disease and how the risk of contracting these diseases could be minimised, how to improve sanitation, ventilation and lighting, and how to secure an uncontaminated water supply. It was part political in that it urged rural school communities to support local taxation for health purposes and it included poems for recitation and a creed ("My Health Creed") for children to memorise (this will be discussed further below). The pamphlet also had page headers with dark warnings about the consequences of poor health. At least one of these might have been a pulpit warning about a deviant religious sect:

> *Our schools are still cursed with the doctrine that teaches people to neglect their bodies and even to mortify the flesh, in order to gain spiritual control and to subdue their passions.*[74]

In the next pamphlet distributed by the Department of Education, Feagin urged teachers "to assemble the friends of education in your school on Friday, March 12, 1915 for the purpose of celebrating BETTER FARMING DAY." He went on to explain that:

> *It is within the province of the public school to stimulate farming activities through theoretical and practical instruction and, in addition, to give an impetus to every movement which tends to elevate farm life socially and economically.*

He suggested that Alabama's social and economic life depended in no small degree upon her agricultural development.[75]

The suggested program for Better Farming Day was similar to those of the other Special Days with a reading from the New Testament (the parable of the sower from The Gospel According to St Matthew), songs, recitations, declamations - "The Ten Commandments of Agriculture" (by ten boys) and "The Farmer's Creed." There were also orations by boys and girls about the value of corn and canning clubs, tomato gardens, poultry raising, and similar activities as well as talks on "how to

74. ADAH, Alabama State Dept. of Education, ***Better Health Day, February 12, 1915***, Bulletin No. 49, issued by the Department of Education, Montgomery, Alabama, January 22, 1915, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1915, 8-16.

75. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Better Farming Day, March 12, 1915***, Bulletin No. 50, issued by the Department of Education, Montgomery, Alabama, February 12, 1915, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1915, 2.

build up worn-out soil" or "how I cared for my pig." Children learned that, as a result of better farming methods, they might then be able to proclaim: "Now abideth Increased Production, Business Methods and Organization; but the GREATEST of these is ORGANIZATION."[76]

The state's insertion into the school calendar of contrived rituals whose features (unlike those of traditional observances) had not been smoothed out by the passage of time had the potential to yield odd results. As part of the program for "Better Health Day" teachers were encouraged to make children aware of the risks of flies by cutting out letters from cardboard and learning a poem comprising couplets each of whose first letter was part of an acrostic that spelled S-W-A-T T-H-E F-L-Y. Ten pupils would stand in line with their letter behind them until it was their turn to recite. They would then hold up their letter, keeping it in place until the acrostic was complete.[77] Less than a month earlier (on January 19) it is entirely possible the same children may have been celebrating the birthday of the illustrious General Lee in an identical manner with a different set of ten letters. These revealed R-O-B-E-R-T E. L-E-E as the children recited "**R**oyal spotless Southern knight, **O**f the great none greater than he," et cetera.[78] The acrostic/poem was amongst material issued to schools by the UDC for anniversary ceremonies. Whether anyone noticed the absurd conjunction of the fly "who makes thousands sicken and hundreds to die" (from the Health Day acrostic/poem) and the "spotless knight" goes unrecorded.

An aspect of all this ritualisation worth remarking upon further is the use of liturgical structures not unlike those used in some forms of Christian worship. The inherent religiosity would have had a special resonance in communities where the church probably had even more cultural significance than the school. In the published observance programs for the Special Days were various creeds for recitation, declamation, memorisation and/or internalisation. These included "The

76. *Ibid.* (Capitalisation original). The structure of this wording is informed by that of St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, 13: 13 in the King James Bible. This says: "And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity."

77. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, 1915, ***Better Health Day, February 12, 1915***, Bulletin No. 49, 12.

78. ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 15, 1908.

School Teacher's Creed," "The Country Boy's Creed," "The Farmer's Creed," "My Civic Creed," "Our Creed" and "My Health Creed."[79]

In their incantatory repetition of "I believe" it is possible to discern in these creeds a trace of (for example) The Apostles' Creed and thus, by implication, an integrated set of convictions that might validate a teacher's choice of vocation or a child's attachment to rural life. The "School Teacher's Creed" (1901) and "The Country Boy's Creed" (1912) were written by Edwin Osgood Grover who was a popular poet and Professor of English at Rollins College in Florida. Grover's creeds were published in *Rural Manhood*, a YMCA journal. This Christian organisation supported the objectives of the Commission on Country Life and, together with the Church and Sunday School, was recommended to teachers by Alabama's Department of Education as an "indirect socialising agency."[80] "The School Teacher's Creed" was reprinted as "A Teacher's Creed" in a number of departmental publications. "My Civic Creed" appeared in the 1910 *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama* and was written for teachers by Dr Fletcher B. Dresslar. It has nine statements of belief such as:

> *I believe in the boys and girls of Alabama and that if the teachers and parents do their whole duty by them, they will grow up into better men and women than those we honor today.*
>
> *I believe in the divine right of each child to have a fair chance in life, and will strive with all the zeal and knowledge I can command to help each pupil of mine to live a better, purer, and a nobler life than he could have lived without my aid. . . .*[81]

The authorship of "The Farmer's Creed" which appeared in the program issued for "Better Farming Day" in 1915 is not attributed but is unlikely to have been written by Edwin Osgood Grover who had some feeling for language. Although one of the assertions of "The Farmer's Creed" – "I believe in a country school that prepares for

79. These were:- *"The School Teacher's Creed"* - ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910,*** 2; *"The Country Boy's Creed* – ***Rural Manhood,*** April 1912, 106; *"The Farmer's Creed"* - ***Better Farming Day, March 12, 1915,*** Bulletin No. 50, 9; *"My Civic Creed"* – ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910,*** 17. *"Our Creed"* - ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** Bulletin No. 33, 97; *"My Health Creed"* - ***Better Health Day, February 12, 1915,*** Bulletin No. 49, 16.

80. ***State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama,*** Bulletin No. 35, Revised Edition, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1913 (hereinafter cited as ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1913),*** 14.

81. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1910,*** 17.

country life, and in a country church that teaches its people to love deeply and live honorably" - has a certain psalmodic loveliness, the same cannot be said for "I believe that the only good weed is a dead weed and that a clean farm is as important as a clear conscience."[82] Similarly, "My Health Creed" (whose authorship is not attributed either) starts promisingly with "I believe my body and good health are sacred."[83] This is followed by a rather more prosaic list of promises such as "I will not put pins or money in my mouth," "I will not spit on floors, stairways or sidewalks," and "I will use a toothbrush – if I can get one."[84]

"Our Creed" was written for teachers by John Herbert Phillips the long-time superintendent of Birmingham's school system who may have wanted to make an Alabamian contribution to the accumulating litany. Phillips was a highly regarded educationist and administrator but "Our Creed" was so fancifully over-wrought and ambitiously metaphysical that it is unlikely to have meant much to young teachers. It expressed beliefs in the PAST, the PRESENT and (as shown below) the FUTURE:-

> *WE BELIEVE IN THE FUTURE and in the Suns and Stars that are yet to shine upon the Earth, to hasten the realization of the Divine Purpose in the world. We believe in Faith and Hope as the noblest senses of the soul and in Love as the very essence of the Primal Energy whose creative fiat, "Let there be Light," is silently through the ages evolving the Eternal Kingdom of the Spirit.*[85]

All these Special Days, constructed ceremonies and specially written creeds indicate that the professional educators who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, were keen to transform Alabama's public schools, realised (long before the advent of Victor Turner) that they might be helped in this objective by harnessing the power of the ritual process and of group participation around a common cause or symbol. Such rituals had always been a staple strength of scattered rural communities whose members derived comfort from shared religious expression as well as the value of

82. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Better Farming Day, March 12, 1915***, Bulletin No. 50, 9.

83. This probably owes something to the statement in St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians 6: 19 in the King James Bible: "Know ye not that your body *is* the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

84. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Better Health Day, February 12, 1915***, Bulletin No. 49, 16.

85. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** Bulletin No. 33, 97.

mutual help and cooperative enterprise.

The adoption of traditional forms of participation in the cause of educational reform and modernisation can be traced back to John Harris' crusades of 1893. The approach had been partially successful in 1902/03 when the revival-like campaigns of Joseph B. Graham (funded by the Southern Education Board) had been waged to arouse interest in school improvement and encourage a "yes" vote for local county taxation. But Graham had been a single proselytising field agent preaching to large outdoor meetings held serially in different locations. The Special Days devised by William Francis Feagin involved a spaced sequence of focused and patterned observances conducted by local rural and village schools and held in a familiar location (usually the schoolhouse itself) with as many as possible of the schools' own community participating. The Special Days created, and then through a series of activities built, interest in a range of matters pertinent to that community. Feagin was shortly to have success in getting his fifteen bills for educational change passed by the legislature and his proposals for constitutional amendments approved by Alabama's electors. This success was in part due to the interest he created through the Special Days.

When the revised *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama* was issued in 1913, it included a section entitled "The School As a Socializing Agency" by Norman R. Baker.[86] Prefiguring some of William Feagin's ideas and concerns, Baker addressed teachers (via the manual) advising them that "the school must forestall the arrest of social development caused by the limitations of the community." . . . . "The horizon of the future must be enlarged." He then went on to enumerate a long list of modern developments that included automobiles, railroads, agricultural improvements and better roads – to indicate some of the means of that enlargement. Baker next considered all the "socializing agencies" contributing influence to a community which he divided into direct and indirect agencies. School fairs and pageants, commencements, libraries and agricultural clubs were *direct* socialising agencies whereas the Church, Sunday School, YMCA, Boy Scout and Campfire Girl groups and educational associations

86. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1913,*** 10.

were *indirect* agencies. In turning his eye on the less formal rituals of school life Professor Baker found that "play is difficult to classify as either a direct or indirect socialising factor" but "is one of the richest and best factors in the socialisation of children" because it includes all – mental, physical, social and moral development."[87]

Baker was correct, but when he proceeded to list and codify games, to suggest those which should be encouraged, to advise teachers on "games of imitation" and how they might "create interest for boys" and to even suggest a reading list of books such as *What to do at Recess* and *Education by Play and Games*, he was seeking to impose upon a localised world of improvisation and invention, a standardised set of games and rules.[88] By so doing he was thus (indirectly) also imposing the imprimatur of the state on what he termed "a few typical plays that might be encouraged in our schools."

Just some of the games suggested by Baker included croquet, baseball, basketball, tennis, vaulting, running, putting shot and hammer throwing. They were games that anticipated the gymnasium, the special court, the levelled playing field, the inter-school competition and the public spectatorship of the later twentieth century with its industrial standardisation of sport.[89] The trend towards competitive sport was already showing up at teachers' institutes; – attendees at a Houston County institute in August 1911 discussed "School Athletics."[90] The informal learning provided by organised games might provide "mental alertness and physical development" but the games themselves were rather different from play as folkway or as rituals confirming local relationships, community cultural traditions and neighbourhood differences. Baker's ideas indicated his appreciation of the significance of local games but a lack of insight about the implications of their

87. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1913,*** 14.

88. These books were both written by George Ellsworth Johnson, 1862-1931. ***Education by Plays and Games*** was issued in 1907 and ***What to do at Recess*** was published in 1910. Both were published by Ginn and Company of Boston. Johnson wrote a number of books on similar topics.

89. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Elementary Schools Manual, 1913,*** 15.

90. ***The Citizen Examiner,*** August 26, 1911. Report of Houston County Teachers Institute Program, August 21-26, 1911.

appropriation and standardisation in the cause of making them educationally effective.

In the history of Alabama's public education system up to 1915, prominence is usually given to the various constraints of the state constitution on educational funding, the frustratingly slow pace of organisational reforms and the efforts made to achieve an adequate and reliable source of recurring revenue – particularly through local taxation. These factors were, of course, all critically important but the ceremonial and ritual inventions of the state which helped school communities to broaden their horizons beyond the immediate neighbourhood (and which arguably made the ground more fertile for future legislative change and increased taxation) have received virtually no attention.

This chapter has shown that, over the period with which this thesis is concerned, from a base position where holidays, school ceremonies, associated rituals and schoolyard customs were wholly matters of local determination and of cultural and/or religious tradition, the state appeared to recognise the value of using specially designed observances to lift the gaze of children attending district public schools to the county, the state and the nation. Through their participation in seemingly familiar but contrived ceremonies and rituals, children were encouraged by the state to honour the national (if also Southern) heroes of the United States such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, to develop an understanding of Alabamian history and Southern identity, to demonstrate pride in the Confederate Lost Cause, to appreciate the value of Nature and country life, and to take pleasure in revived seasonal traditions. In 1915 these observances were extended when William Francis Feagin's program of Special Days was implemented. All these days explicitly recognised the significance of ritual to the maintenance of local culture and traditions but also its potency as a catalyst for change. Ritual was harnessed to involve students, parents, neighbours and other community members in developing an awareness of the public school's potential as a agent in progressive educational and social reform.

Chapter 8

Black Communities and their Schools: aspirations, perseverance and support

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In a thesis about the influence of localism, community and domain on the development of Alabama's public schools, the need for a separate chapter on black public schools might be queried. After all, from July 1870 when the Freedmen Bureau's schools for ex-slaves became part of Alabama's public education system, black schools were a recognised (if at times begrudged) element of that system. This remained the case even though the constitution of 1875 mandated racially separate schools.[1] Whether black or white, many public schools operated under similar circumstances of poverty and isolation and teachers and children of both races had many experiences in common. Yet the very fact that the system was racially bifurcated means claims of similarity in the two systems have a fictive quality and can only go so far; the black education system could never be either a true equivalent or replica of the white system. Furthermore, to the extent that Alabama's public schooling system was shaped (as is being contended) by an implicit dialectical contest between traditional rural communities with a desire to retain local control of decisions regarding their own children, and professional reformers with a preference for state-wide standards and for centralised and progressive educational policy-making, the black community was outside the arena of that contest. Reformers were interested in the main game – which was white schooling. Thus a chapter is needed to consider the topic in relation to the specific circumstances of black communities – particularly after 1891.

White localism can be attributed plausibly to the experiences of pioneers on Alabama's geographically isolated frontiers of settlement. The necessity of independent self-sufficiency created a suspicion of centralisation and outside influences that might prove culturally destructive. It also created a preference for a sort of grass-roots democracy where local communities expected to be closely consulted about matters concerning their own lives. The circumstances of slavery created a different sort of localism for black communities which, in freedom, had to establish their basic right to a place in Alabama's social structure. Black localism was an expression of what the black intellectual and writer, W.E.B. Du Bois, called

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1. Article XIII, Section 1 of Alabama's State Constitution of 1875 stated that "separate schools shall be provided for the children of citizens of African descent." In the 1901 Constitution, Article XIV, Section 256 stated "Separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race."

"the souls of black folks." By this he meant not only the unique culture of black people and their attribution of value to this culture (seen, for example, in their post-emancipation preference for their own preachers and churches), but also their struggle for recognition by and/or co-existence with white America.[2] It was akin to what, in the twentieth century, was called "black pride" – and it quickened the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s.

The struggle by black people for schooling began even before the Civil War was quite over when many ex-slaves, calculating that education was going to be necessary to fulfil their hopes for economic improvement and increased power and influence, started setting up schools to obtain the basic skills of literacy and numeracy denied to them in bondage. While the Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies organised or actively supported many of these schools, there were others in the sparsely settled, remoter areas of the state that they simply did not even know about.[3] The schools were not only the spontaneous products of black initiative but they indicated the strength of family-based communities. In fact, the black family had survived the adverse conditions imposed upon it by slavery and gone on to become the core of black existence - particularly in rural areas where, even as late as 1917, approximately 80 percent of Alabama's black people lived and worked and where kinship networks of multiple generations sustained close-knit communities.[4] These ties, together with a rich expressive culture and shared occupational circumstances, contributed to the "webs of significance" – the meanings within which black life was conducted. But these webs were always under the tension of harsh restraints imposed by whites.

In the immediate wake of the Civil War, whites were generally apprehensive of the potential of black education to stir up claims for civil rights or social equality. From the 1870s however, a major concern regarding black schooling was its potential to interfere with labour requirements. William Holtzclaw, who spent his childhood on a tenant farm in Randolph County recalled such concerns and how these were

2. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, ***The Souls of Black Folk***, New York, Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003 [1903] 9-14. "Black Pride" in the 1960s was an active celebration of the distinctive African American experience and was associated with people such as Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, et cetera.

3. Peter Kolchin, ***First Freedom: the Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation***, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1972, 175-176.

4. Howard N. Rabinowitz, ***The First New South, 1865-1920***, Arlington Heights, Harlan-Davidson, 1992, 148-149.

negotiated in his own case:

> *[In Fall] the landlord wanted us all to stop school and pick cotton. But Mother wanted me to remain in school, so, when the landlord came to the quarters early in the morning to stir up the cotton pickers, she used to outgeneral him by hiding me behind the skillets, ovens and pots and throwing some old rags over me until he was gone. . . . . When I was nine years old I took turns with my brother as a regular field hand. My mother now devised another plan to keep me in school: I took turns with my brother at the plow and in school; one day I plowed and he went to school; the next day he plowed and I went to school; what he learned on his school day he taught me at night and I did the same for him. In this way we each got a month of schooling during the year.*[5]

A more severe restraint was placed on black public schools when, in 1891, a statutory change allowed state school funds to be distributed at the discretion of township superintendents rather than in accordance with a per capita formula.[6] How Alabama's black public schools survived the consequences of this provision, which led to their near fiscal strangulation, is a principal topic of this chapter. The chapter will also show that the reality of black education offered a counterpoint to the hopeful white meta-narrative of this period - the constitutional and statutory reform, the evangelical campaigns, the increasing professionalism of teachers and office-holders, the improving resources and infrastructure, and the measurable outcomes of progress such as longer terms. Black education was a conundrum for the educational modernisers whose wish-list of legislative changes and necessary revenue increases only encompassed black educational needs in the most vestigial fashion. The ongoing neglect of these needs was actually a reproof to Progressivism.

Despite being beset by white restraints and discrimination, not all black communities were passively resigned to the oppressions of an inequitable system. While some families kept their children out of school because their labour was critical for economic survival, others were strongly interested in their children gaining an education and made use of any opportunities that might support such ambitions. They took heart from influential black leaders who promoted the public

5. William Holtzclaw, ***The Black Man's Burden***, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1971 [1915], 30-31.

6. This introduced the discriminatory apportionment of school funds by authorising township trustees to distribute state educational funds in a manner they deemed to be "just and equitable." ***Public School Laws of Alabama, 1891***, Chapter II, Article IV, p. 19. See also page 195 of Chapter 5.

school as a focal point for black life and an agency for its improvement. The strivings and resourcefulness of black communities were somewhat validated and rewarded when northern philanthropic funding provided sufficient support to allow black localism to demonstrate its inherent strength and capacity for shaping black educational outcomes. This strength was also demonstrated in urban settings such as Birmingham where white office-holders and employers saw value in black education. The black community of Birmingham was thus able to exert an influence on educational policy in that city and derive benefits not available in rural areas.

Alabama's public schools had, from the beginning, been racially segregated in practice but this *de facto* situation was made a constitutional requirement after 1875. Yet before 1891, although separate, black schools were funded in a manner that was racially equitable (if hardly adequate). Had this funding continued it might have given black communities grounds for cautious optimism in relation to their educational future if not complacency with regard to their educational present.

The data collected by Alabama's Department of Education in the nineteenth century are not always reliable but they show that during the scholastic year ending September 30, 1890, the total number of black public schools taught in the state was 2,174 and that nearly 35 percent of these (753 schools) were taught in the Black Belt. In this same year, of all the children who were enrolled in public schools, slightly more black children actually attended than did white children (61.82 percent *vs* 58.87 percent). The average length of the black school term approximated that of the white school term (sixty-nine days) and the average monthly pay of teachers of black schools was only a dollar less than the average monthly pay of teachers of white schools. There were twenty-nine counties in which the teachers of black schools were paid *more* than the teachers of white schools.[7]

During these early years, black communities (like white communities) faced difficulties in acquiring land for their schoolhouse (often having to rely on a

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7. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1890***, cxc-cxci. James D. Anderson, has examined data from twenty-one Alabama Black Belt counties and concluded that, in the period when state funding was racially equitable (even if inadequate), "black communities, given their quest for education, could continue to foster the expansion and improvement of public schools." See James D. Anderson, "Black Rural Education and the Struggle for Education during the Age of Booker T. Washington, 1877-1915." ***Peabody Journal of Education*** 67 (Summer 1990): 51.

sympathetic farmer making land available for the purpose) and for building it. Any equipment (desks, benches) had to be home-made or acquired with private funds or donations. Black teachers, like their white counterparts, were answerable to their neighbours for the way in which they conducted their schools, but – and this was a noteworthy difference - black teachers also had to be mindful that the purse strings of the public school fund were held by white office-holders who were not always sympathetic to the idea of black education. In addition, the office-holders were often hostile on the subject of the source of school funds – white taxes.

Few county superintendents exhibited much insight into the circumstances of black life or the economic sacrifice necessary to spare children from agricultural labour (particularly cotton production). Fluctuations in the value of cotton meant survival itself was precarious. Irregular school attendance - even for a lamentably inadequate three month term – was almost inevitable. Such lack of insight is evident in a 1875 report from the superintendent of education for Sumter County, Michael C. Kinnard who wrote:

> *The colored people will not build schoolhouses; but with the assistance of the whites they manage to get a church building of some kind, which they use for school purposes. . . . . [these people] will not supplement a school by paying pecuniary consideration towards its support; not even being willing to board the teacher when the state plays the entire tuition. . . . Some of these schools have from sixty to one hundred scholars with only one teacher and, of course, he or she could not teach so many.*[8]

Kinnard's comments do not suggest he had given much thought to the causes of the situation depicted. He may never even have been inside a black school nor seen what poverty meant for learning – as, for example, had Booker T. Washington, principal of the famous black normal school, Tuskegee Institute. In 1880 Washington visited a number of black schools in Alabama. In one old log cabin school he saw five pupils trying to study a lesson from a single book:

> *Two of these on the front seat, were using the book between them; behind these were two others peeping over the shoulder of the first two, and behind the four was a fifth little fellow who was peeping over the shoulders of all four.*[9]

8. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 106.

9. Booker T. Washington, ***Up From Slavery: an autobiography***, Garden City, Doubleday and Company, 1963 [1900], 116.

White superintendents may not have appreciated either the isolation of black teachers or their special difficulty – their wistful (but largely futile) desire for inclusion. In 1878 Bosun Roughton, a former Georgia slave who was teaching at Choctaw Corner in Clarke County, wrote to the state superintendent (Leroy F. Box) requesting a copy of the "revised code of this state." He described the area where he was living as,

> *a backwoods part of the country and to me its [sic] quite desolate as I have no relations in this state. There is but little intelligence realised among the colored race in this section of hills and piney woods. . . . If the larger mass of colored people were enabled to read and write fluently it would put an end to the practical humbugry and deviltry [sic] perpetrated in elections to a great extent.*[10]

Black public schools not only existed within a system administered by sometimes obtuse and sometimes unsympathetic white superintendents at the township, county and state levels, but their pupils were taught within a white pedagogical framework and against a background of racial and caste prejudice as well as prevailing scientific theories of racial hierarchies.[11] These held that people of African descent were an inferior people who were less intelligent than whites and thus did not need the same level of education. Some white people thought their black fellow citizens were "members of a child-race grown-up in body and physical passions, weak in foresight, self-control and character" – characteristics that had been tempered by slavery - who needed the discipline of work rather than schooling. Furthermore, as black people were destined for a lifetime of agricultural labour, then too much schooling would be pointless and might "spoil" them. The more virulent critics of black education implied it would lead to a bloody war between the races. Besides, according to the *Marengo Democrat*, "as whites paid practically all the taxes, so the Negroes had only the right to a pauper's pittance."[12]

10. Bosun Roughton to state superintendent of education (Leroy F. Box), May 17, 1878, in SGO15978, Folder 5, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1878,*** ADAH.

11. In a report to Governor Joseph F. Johnston on Alabama's educational status from 1855-1898, John O. Turner, state superintendent, stated "One of the marvels of the nineteenth century is the educational progress of the southern negro since the Civil War. . . . No Southern state has made a better showing in this respect than Alabama." It should be noted that there were some elected black school trustees in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – even after black disenfranchisement.

12. Jacob E. Cooke "The New South." In Donald Henry Sheehan and Harold C. Syrett, eds. ***Essays in American Historiography: papers in honor of Allan Nevins,*** New York, Columbia University Press, 1960, 68. See also James L. Leloudis, ***Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920,*** Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 181. See also ***Marengo Democrat,*** July 19, 1901, quoted by Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900." ***The Journal of Negro Education*** 22 (Spring 1953): 129.

After the 1891 apportionment provisions of the school law were implemented, the "souls of black folks" were sorely tested. The resemblances between the schooling experiences of black and white children or the circumstances of teachers and school facilities quickly faded. As funds which had previously been allocated to black students were diverted to whites the effects were dramatic, especially in the Black Belt. In the scholastic year ending September 30, 1890, Wilcox County's per capita educational expenditure was $1.02 per white child and (the not so very different) $0.92 per black child.[13] In 1907, the respective expenditures were $10.50 per white child but only $0.37 per black child. In 1903, Lowndes County was spending $13.00 on each white child for every $1.00 it spent on a black child. In 1912 this difference had widened even further with $33.40 being spent on each white child for every $1.00 spent per black child.[14]

In Butler County, which adjoins Lowndes, the ratios were similar and, in all but Greenville, the county seat, the length of the school year for blacks was more than forty days (two scholastic months) less than the white school year. The low salaries of Butler's black teachers were explained away as a result of a disparity of competence. On the basis of the kinds of certificates each held, such an argument could be maintained although the differences were not marked. Both whites and blacks had more teachers with second-grade certificates than any other kind, and the next most common for both whites and blacks was the bottom certificate, third grade.[15] A former county superintendent for Butler, I. T. Little, both perceived and attacked the injustices which he claimed were being perpetrated by people from the same churches that were seeking Christian converts in China and Africa.[16]

In 1908 the total value of *all* the equipment in Alabama's public schools was only $262,218 but the black share of this was just $21,825 (about 8 percent). This was despite approximately 45 percent of the school-aged population being black. Of the 383 libraries in public schools, pupils in black schools had access to 25 (only just

13. Calculated from Table VI in Horace Mann Bond, ***Negro Education in Alabama: a study in cotton and steel***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994 [1939], 162.

14. Richard A. Couto, ***Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn me Round: the pursuit of racial justice in the rural South***, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991, 204 and David Nasaw, ***Schooled to Order: a social history of public schooling in the United States***, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, 140.

15. Patricia Albjerg Graham, ***Community and Class in American Education, 1865-1918***, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, 134.

16. Hugh C. Bailey, ***Edgar Gardner Murphy: gentle progressive***, Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1968, 111. Bailey is quoting from a letter written by I. T. Little to Booker T. Washington on July 2, 1905.

over 6 percent).[17] What these figures all confirm is that "white people had it hard and black people had it harder because what are the table-scraps of nothing?"[18] Yet, in the face of the precipitous decline in funding for their schools, black communities still did not entirely yield their educational ambitions – nor their pleas for justice.

In August 1901 a prominent black Baptist called Charles Octavius Boothe, who described himself as having a heart that was "sick under its helpless longings for the mental elevation of my people," implored John William Abercrombie for public expenditure on what he termed "efficient educational facilities for the masses of the colored people." Boothe pointed out that common schools were the "center of the bulk of human life" and, while funding them properly would involve "vast expenditures upon the part of the state" the losses incurred from "ignorance, shiftlessness and criminality" would be even greater.[19] In 1907, *The Colored Alabamian*, a black newspaper published in Montgomery, commented with some hostility on a just released report by the superintendent of that city's schools. This bragged the city had recently provided for its white children ten "large, nicely constructed, brick buildings well equipped for school purposes." The newspaper pointed out that this provision was more than twice that made for the city's more numerous black children whose schools were smaller and more poorly equipped. *Their* teachers had had to turn away "HUNDREDS of negro pupils" – while the city commissioners spent money on street paving! The paper asked for help "in the great and heroic effort we are making for our uplift." It said "we do not ask for any special favors. All we ask for is 'Equal Rights' before the law and common justice in educational affairs."[20] This newspaper sustained for years its rage at inequitable educational funding and racially based school legislation.

The comments quoted earlier of Michael C. Kinnard, the superintendent of education for Sumter County in the 1870s, had a later echo in those of Thomas A. Craven, who was superintendent of education for Bullock County

17. William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins and Wayne Flynt, ***Alabama: the history of a Deep South state***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 325.

18. The phrase is from Rick Bragg, ***Redbirds: memories from the South***, London, Harvill Press, 1998, 4. Though writing about Alabama in the 1950s, Bragg's comment is apt.

19. Reverend Dr C.O. Boothe to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, August 4, 1901, in SGO15976, Folder 11, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1906***, ADAH. (Emphasis original). Boothe was a prominent Baptist preacher and educator and involved with various social causes aimed at black "uplift."

20. ***The Colored Alabamian***, October 26, 1907. (Italics and capitalisation original).

in 1899 – eight years after the funding changes. He advised:

> *The colored people are almost destitute of schoolhouses. Many of their schools are carried on in churches. It is hard to get the colored people to build schoolhouses but they are mighty in erecting churches as is indicated by the number in this county.*[21]

Public schoolhouses were more than "passive wrappings for classroom life."[22] Throughout the nineteenth century they were often crude artefacts of rustic improvisation constructed from whatever materials might be at hand and erected with cooperative neighbourhood endeavour. White town schools (like the Jasper Graded School in Walker County) were supported with municipal and citizen funds and were vested over time with local pride. Schools acted as a centre for community social activity and (as already described) when school improvement associations were formed in the early twentieth century, schoolhouses became totemic symbols of neighbourhood solidarity. In black communities the schoolhouse was not only the place where children obtained an elementary education but, in some places, it was also where adults could enrol to acquire vocational skills or undertake extension course in academic subjects.[23]

In neighbourhoods where there was no schoolhouse, people often made use of local churches to hold educational meetings and to conduct schools. In 1901, when the "Colored Teachers' Institute of Calhoun County" was convened, its meeting was held in the Galilee Baptist Church.[24] In 1893 the Hopewell Baptist Church near Carlowville in Dallas County was described as:

> *A large log cabin 30 by 36 feet on the road-side with a double door and three holes for windows cut in the sides. . . . Here 500 members congregated one Sunday each month and spent the entire day in eating, shouting and praising God for his goodness toward the children of men. Here also the three month school was taught during the winter.*[25]

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21. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** 136.

22. The phrase is from Norris Brock Johnson, ***West Haven: classroom culture and society in a rural elementary school,*** Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 15.

23. This was, for example, the case in Macon County where, amongst other subjects, adults undertook courses in black history. Mary M. Thomas, ***The New Woman in Alabama: social reforms, and suffrage, 1890-1920,*** Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992, 74-75.

24. S.E. Moses to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, February 26, 1901, in ADAH, SG015976, Folder 5, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1906,*** ADAH.

25. William J. Edwards, 1918, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt,*** Repr., Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 28.

While churches were far from ideal for educational purposes, they were at least closely related to the daily lives of those who used them. They did not distance children spatially from other aspects of their ordinary existence and being taught in a church allowed black children to associate schooling with probably their race's greatest consolation – religion. A black Alabamian folk song asserted:

> *If-a 'ligion wuz er thing that money could buy,*
> *The rich would live and the po' would die.*
> *I'm so glad things jes' like dis,*
> *Dere's 'nother good chance for the po' coon yet.*[26]

In fact church and school were often so closely aligned that the functional boundaries were not always clear. In 1893, a visitor to a service held at Tilden in Dallas County, noted of the several ministers who were preaching that "their texts were as often taken from Webster's blue-back speller as from the Bible." Sometimes teacher and preacher were one and the same.[27]

The apportionment law was not the only blow to the overall support for black public schooling. From 1887 the Peabody Education Fund had been providing financial support for teacher training in Alabama by making grants to normal schools (including black normal schools), and funding scholarships to these schools.[28] It also provided funds for week-long teachers' institutes to be held in each congressional district of the state. The funds for institute support had been matched with support from Alabama's Assembly – for example, in 1888 a Peabody grant of $1,000 was matched with $500 from the state.[29] In 1895 the Peabody Fund decided to allocate all of its teacher training funds to normal schools alone. This cut off one important forum black teachers had for developing their professional

26. Lawrence W. Levine, ***Black Culture and Black Consciousness***, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, 160.

27. Edwards, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt***, 30. Of course Webster's *Speller* included Biblical selections. In Coffee County, the first black man to receive a teaching certificate was C.P. (Charley) Larkins. Larkins also held a licence to preach. Fred S. Watson, ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, Anniston, Higginbotham, 1970, 201.

28. The Peabody Education Fund was endowed by the international financier, George Peabody, in 1867. Peabody directed that the fund be used "for the promotion and encouragement of the intellectual, moral and industrial education among the young of the more destitute portion of the Southern and Southeastern States of our Union." J.L.M. Curry, ***A Brief Sketch of George Peabody and a History of the Peabody Educational Fund through Thirty Years***, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1898], 24.

29. Kenneth R. Johnson, "The Peabody Fund: Its Role and Influence in Alabama." ***Alabama Review*** 27 (April 1974): 122.

consciousness and for airing matters of general concern.[30] Yet black teachers with aspirations for betterment still conscientiously attended the two-day institutes that the school law required county superintendents to hold throughout the year and the week-long institutes supported with a state appropriation after 1911. In his report for the scholastic year ending September 30, 1900, John G. Apsey, the superintendent of education for Greene County, wrote that he had held two teachers' institutes for "colored" teachers. He felt he had succeeded better with these than with the white teachers whose "interest was hard to keep up" because the "white population in some of the townships is widely scattered." In the same year, the superintendent of Barbour County, Charles McDowell Jr, reported black teachers attending two county institutes (the same number as the white teachers).[31]

Even well-intentioned and conscientious teachers and parents could not always overcome the reality of inadequate school buildings and resources, short terms, non-compulsory attendance and poor qualifications. These established what has been termed "a curriculum in low expectations" which had a long-term effect.[32] Robert A. Margo, an economic historian, has established that, even if public education officials had not violated the 1896 "separate-but-equal" decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, black children across the South would still have attended school less frequently than white children because their parents were poorer and less literate than white people. Before there was compulsory education (and accompanying compliance officers) poor attendance was a perennial problem for which there were long-term consequences.[33] In 1900 John A. Ellerbe, superintendent of education for Hale County observed that, although black people in his county seemed keen to have their children educated they did not "show their appreciation of the opportunities given them" because their children attended "very irregularly."[34]

30. Robert Sherer, ***Subordination or Liberation? the development and conflicting theories of black education in nineteenth century Alabama***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1977, 19. See page 130 of Chapter 3, regarding summer schools for black teachers after 1908.

31. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** 177 and 130.

32. Richard A. Couto, ***Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn me Round: the pursuit of racial justice in the rural South,*** 190.

33. Robert Margo, "Accounting for Racial Differences in School Attendance in the American South, 1900: The Role of Separate-but-Equal." ***The Review of Economics and Statistics*** 69 (November 1987): 661.

34. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** 178.

Ellerbe's comments, like those of Bullock County's superintendent, showed little appreciation for cause and effect. In the absence of compulsion, there were black parents (as there were white parents) who did not see the point of attending school at all. In the first generation born in freedom, the freedmen's early fervour for schooling – that expression of optimistic black localism - had somewhat subsided in rural areas. Verse Lee Johnson Manley, a black woman who was born in 1915 and thus should have been attending school in the 1920s (when attendance was supposed to be compulsory) recalled:

> *Our daddy didn't send us to school, so aint none of us older chilluns can read and write. . . . When us older ones got big enough to work, Papa kept us in the fields. . . . I learned nothing out of a book.*[35]

In any discussion of the influences which shaped Alabama's black *public* schools, the role of black *private* schools and state subsidised secondary or normal schools such as the Tuskegee Institute (which was also heavily subsidised by the John F. Slater [philanthropic] Fund) simply has to be commented upon. This is because the nature of their influence was direct. The private schools trained teachers for the public system and, upon the completion of their studies, found them placements. These teachers took up their positions having imbibed a social vision that extended far beyond the schoolhouse. They had been taught the local school could be made an agency for the transformation of rural life and "for the moral, religious and physical status of the people immediately touching it [the school]." They were expected to grapple with "the practical problems of social welfare," by explaining how to extend the length of the school term beyond three months, how to build better schoolhouses and how to improve attendance.[36] In other words, the teachers had been given a battery of knowledge and ideas on how they might be catalysts for revitalising black communities using the district school as the focal point of their endeavours.

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35. Wade Hall, ***Conecuh People,*** 19. Oral history recorded from Verse Lee Johnson Manley. See also Charles Johnson, ***The Shadow of the Plantation,*** Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1934, 129-132. [Spelling original].

36. For example, see William B. Paterson to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, September 4, 1883, in SGO15974, Folder 11, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916,*** ADAH. See also Booker T. Washington to John O. Turner, February 20, 1896 in J.L.M. Curry manuscript collection; quoted in Horace Mann Bond, ***Negro Education in Alabama: a study in cotton and steel,*** 218-219. See also Michael Fultz, "African American Teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the Ironies of Expectations and Protest." ***History of Education Quarterly*** 35 (Winter 1995): 406-407.

In the late 1880s and 1890s when ambitious but poor black students - whose only education had been in rural public schools - heard about the Tuskegee Institute they seem to have regarded it as a beacon of educational hope and Booker T. Washington as an exemplar of black achievement. William J. Edwards learnt of Tuskegee in 1887 when listening through a church wall to a speaker at a revival. He immediately sent for a prospectus. Two years later, William H. Holtzclaw accidentally ran across a copy of the *Tuskegee Student* (a campus newspaper) and saw it was advertising student vacancies. He felt this was "providential."[37]

Booker T. Washington's legacy is contested and contentious in part because, as historian Louis R. Harlan's close examination of his papers has revealed, he was a highly complex and enigmatic person who wore different masks and played different roles to different publics in a great number of compartmentalised worlds.[38] His ideas about rural life were highly conservative, if not reactionary, and informed the development of what he considered to be an appropriate (because *practical*) curriculum at the Tuskegee Institute. This curriculum was largely "non-literary" (anti-intellectual) and comprised "industrial training" a somewhat imprecise and malleable term which embraced not just vocational skills but a taught value system of thrift, duty, hard work and self-discipline. It was a curriculum Washington himself had imbibed at Virginia's Hampton Institute where he studied in the 1870s. Hampton's founder, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, had learned the principles of industrial training from his missionary parents in Hawaii and adopted these for the purpose of educating former slaves and native Americans. From its embryonic stage, Tuskegee had been modelled intentionally on Hampton.[39]

While the impact of Washington's educational ideas helped to circumscribe black occupational options, to confine black people to a separate and (inevitably) subordinate economic sphere, and to perpetuate traditional black roles in rural communities, his own objectives were always projected positively as those of a realist operating in a white-dominated world. Washington wanted black people to pursue and develop the opportunities they actually had rather than engaging in futile quests for opportunities they would forever be denied (or so he was

37. Edwards, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt***, 17. See also Holtzclaw, ***Black Man's Burden***, 36-37.

38. Louis Harlan, "Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective." ***The American Historical Review*** 75 (October 1970): 1581-1586.

39. Booker T. Washington, ***Up From Slavery: an autobiography***, 109.

convinced). Although he had trenchant contemporary critics (such as W.E.B. Du Bois), Washington did inspire black educational ambition and, in his role as a sort of racial statesman, he helped mould the opinions of Alabama's white educationists and the philanthropists of the southern education movement.[40]

Washington's philosophies became widely known in a number of ways. He was the president of the (black) Alabama State Teachers' Association (ASTA) between 1888 and 1891, he was a consummate educational propagandist, he worked tirelessly to obtain northern philanthropic funds to support black education in Alabama, he cultivated powerful political connections, and his methods were practised quite widely by Tuskegee's graduates – in 1900 one hundred and fourteen former students of the Institute's normal department were involved in teaching.[41]

Some graduates (including Edwards and Holtzclaw) so thoroughly absorbed Washington's ethos and the industrial curriculum he espoused, that they started their own schools which they modelled on Tuskegee. In fact, several black private schools in Alabama owed their foundation or inspiration to Washington including the Mt Meigs Colored Institute in Montgomery County, the Calhoun Colored School in Lowndes County and the Snow Hill Colored Literary and Industrial Institute in Wilcox County. These have thus been termed "little Tuskegees."[42]

As they became established, some of the small private black schools were favourably commented upon by county superintendents – partly because they were offering educational opportunities to black students where few others existed. This was one way in which they came to the notice of state office-holders (such as John William Abercrombie). In 1900, John Mack Jones, the superintendent of education for Wilcox County and also a local farmer, wrote in his report to the state superintendent that he "desired to make special mention of three colored schools and their teachers in our county." One of the schools referred to by Jones was the

40. Harlan, ***Washington in Biographical Perspective***, 1590, 1593 and 1583.

41. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, 57. In an extract from Washington's annual report on the Tuskegee Institute published in ***The Colored Alabamian*** on October 19, 1907, he claimed that he received "constant and urgent demands from all sections of the country" for Tuskegee graduates – particularly from "colored people who want them engaged as teachers in the public schools . . . ." Hardly an issue of this paper was without some praiseworthy report on the Tuskegee Institute, its principal and/or its current activities.

42. Sherer, ***Subordination or Liberation? the development and conflicting theories of black education in nineteenth century Alabama***, 147.

aforementioned Snow Hill Colored Literary and Industrial Institute whose Principal was William J. Edwards and whose faculty at this date included five Tuskegee alumni. Jones described the teachers as "highly educated" and "doing good work in their line." He added:

> *They seem to be on the order of Booker Washington, teaching their race politeness, respect for the white race, and not antagonism. We think it not amiss to encourage their schools in their work.*[43]

Jones' suggestion that these schools be "encouraged" may have been influenced further by the fact that Ransom O. Simpson – a prominent local landlord, store owner and Methodist Sunday-school superintendent – had extended significant support to Edwards' school by endowing it with more than 40.5 hectares of land and by providing him with encouragement and advice.[44] The Institute thus had the imprimatur of white approval from someone who represented the local power structure in the Furman/Snow Hill area of Wilcox County. Such white encouragement was often a necessary precondition for the survival and growth of black schools.

During the 1890s, the *Wilcox Progress* had an occasional series called "Rambles in Old Wilcox." This published matters of interest from each of the county's villages and provided a sort of inventory of their socio-economic vitality – the number of their steam mills, ginneries and stores, their hotels, their post and telegraph offices, their railroad lines and also their churches, schools, and fraternal societies. As well, people of local significance or interest (such as teachers) had their doings noted. In October 1896 (five years after local discretion was granted to township superintendents in the matter of school funding apportionments) the series journalist or "Rambler" disclosed that a number of Wilcox's villages had "a nice new two-story schoolhouse." One such was that recently erected at Snow Hill which was supervised by Miss Mary Hobdy, the adult daughter of a local

43. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, 230. By 1900 there were a number of Presbyterian mission schools in Wilcox County providing schooling for black children. These were Miller's Ferry School (1884), Prairie Institute (1894), Camden Academy (1895), Canton Bend Mission (1896). Two more were established in 1902 and 1903. Jeanette Steele McCall, ***The First and Last Bell: A story of six missions for blacks in Wilcox County, Alabama***, Baltimore, American Literary Press, 2005.

44. Simpson is mentioned in the ***Wilcox Progress***, October 28, 1896. In his memoirs, William J. Edwards said that Ransom Simpson conferred on Snow Hill three separate parcels of land making a total of more than 40.5 hectares. The Institute later bought from Simpson one half of his plantation. This brought the Institute's overall landholding to more than 809 hectares. Edwards, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt***, 39.

white family of landlords, farmers and store owners. Black schools (including Edwards' private Snow Hill Institute) might be favourably regarded by the county superintendent (Jones) but they received not a single comment in this "state of the county" roundup.[45] They were apparently what Washington termed "mere objects in the landscape."[46] Washington was optimistic enough to believe that this invisibility could be reversed with the *practical* curriculum he espoused. He thought this would make rural schools "the center of Negro rural life" and enable teachers to be recognised as local leaders.[47] The Snow Hill Institute's own goals were,

> *to have its graduates influence the people to build schoolhouses where needed, to extend the school term, and by arousing public interest, to assist in bringing about the reforms essential to economic and upright living.*[48]

Positively expressed goals and local role models such as Edwards and the teachers he trained were critically important for black parents and children – especially at a time when all the Deep South states were adopting new constitutions for the purpose of disenfranchising black voters.

Alabama's State Constitution of 1901 disenfranchised most of its black citizens (together with many illiterate whites) and entrenched racial discrimination. Several historians, including Horace Mann Bond and James D. Anderson have attributed to this disenfranchisement the dramatic worsening of discrimination against black schools in the ensuing era of Progressive social reform.[49] The constitution's article on education made it clear that future state responsibility for public education would be almost entirely directed towards white children. Section 256 specified that the public school fund should be "so apportioned to the schools in the districts or townships in the counties as to provide, as *nearly as practicable*, school terms of equal duration in such school districts or townships."[50] These were weasel words

45. ***Wilcox Progress***, November 4, November 11, November 18, November 25, 1896.

46. Holtzclaw, ***Black Man's Burden***, 8-9.

47. *Ibid.*

48. ***The Colored Alabamian***, February 26, 1910.

49. Bond, ***Negro Education in Alabama: a study in cotton and steel***, 153-156. Between 1890 and 1908 all the deep South states passed new constitutions disenfranchising black voters.

50. ***Public School Laws of Alabama, 1891***, Chapter II, Article IV, p. 19. (Italics added).

whose intent was the same as that of the 1891 School Law regarding funding apportionments. Yet, after the constitution was adopted, Joseph B. Graham, who had chaired the committee on education at the constitutional convention and in 1902 would become the Southern Education Board's field agent for Alabama, asserted that the new organic law was free from discrimination. He said it,

> *had been framed from a spontaneous philanthropy too generous to take advantage of the poor, and a sense of right and humanity too proud to wrong an inferior race.*[51]

He seemed quickly to have forgotten the minority report of the education committee he had chaired. This had advocated county superintendents being permitted to set up two kinds of school districts – black and white – in which residents could vote for property taxes to be levied on racial lines. This would have segregated all tax revenues according to the race of the taxpayer.[52]

Since emancipation, the "inferior race" (as Joseph B. Graham termed those of African descent) had believed it would achieve full participation in American society via politics and education. The new constitution seemingly cut off both routes yet it did leave the gate slightly ajar to education. Many members of Alabama's black community had been eagerly seeking schooling for themselves and their children from before the Civil War was quite over. Some parents were even prepared to accept the loss of extra farmhands and additional household income to enable their children to attend classes. Their determined aspirations occasionally found outré expression. At the first Conference for Education in the South in 1898, delegates heard about the "debased coin" of higher degrees that were being issued by newly chartered black "colleges." There was concern that symbols of educational achievement were becoming more important than the actual knowledge they were supposed to represent. Similar complaints were made at the second conference about the indiscriminate use of the terms "institute", "college" and "university" in connection with schools that were no such thing. A case in point was the Snow Hill Colored Literary and Industrial Institute whose pupils included children as young as five. A rare concern was raised at the deleterious impact such

51. Joseph B. Graham, "Current Problems in Alabama." ***Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*** 22 (September 1903): 39.

52. Malcolm Cook McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901: a study in politics, the Negro, and Sectionalism***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1978, 322-323. Poll taxes were already racially allocated.

titular inflation might have on the regular public schools though the names can be interpreted not as a "childish mimicking of the habits of whites" but as an expression of long held yearnings for recognition.[53]

Despite growing discrepancies between white and black schools according to every measure of educational effectiveness, black public schools still somehow managed to survive. In his *Annual Report* for 1909, the state superintendent of education stated that the total number of black schools in Alabama had increased by 6 percent and that the number of unsuitable buildings being used as black schoolhouses (such as churches) - had decreased by 13 percent. He further stated that the total value of the schoolhouses in which schools were being taught was "$375,000 for the negroes" and that this was "an increase of $71,625 on the value reported previously." This same report revealed that all the indicators of progress given by the state superintendent for black schools – expenditure, schoolhouse numbers and valuations, term lengths, teacher qualifications - were significantly poorer than those given for white schools.[54] This is hardly surprising given that only 12 percent of school funds went to black schools and the fact that black schools were in no-one's special care. Yet, while it was only just perceptible, there was *some* improvement to report and the schools were still an acknowledged part of the public system despite the odds stacked against them.

Whilst fragile gains can be seen when aggregated in state reports, they were less easy to discern in struggling rural neighbourhoods. In his old age, Ned Cobb, who had been a sharecropper, tenant farmer and jack-of-all-trades in Tallapoosa County during the early part of the twentieth century, recalled:

> *My children weren't going to school worth nothin then. It weren't their fault, they wanted to go, and it weren't my fault. I wouldn't have stopped em from goin. That school for colored children up yonder, it'd run two or three weeks, maybe a month and a half on the*

53. Address by A.B. Hunter of Raleigh, North Carolina included in ***Proceedings of the First Capon Springs Conference***, 11-12 and address of Reverend G.S. Dickerman of New York included in ***Proceedings of the Second Capon Springs Conference***, 20 both quoted in Henry A. Bullock, ***A History of Negro Education in the South: from 1619 to present***, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, 96-97. In 1904 the name of the Snow Hill Colored Literary and Industrial Institute was changed to "Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute" - Sherer, ***Subordination or Liberation? the development and conflicting theories of black education in nineteenth century Alabama***, 173. See also (regarding ages of Snow Hill pupils) back cover note on James D. Anderson's ***The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988. The cover photograph is of Snow Hill students in 1902.

54. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1909***, 6.

> *outside, and word would come down from Beaufort, "Cut the school out; money's gone. . . . . Mighty little we got from the state government. That money was coming here through white hands and they was half concerned with keeping colored children out of school. I don't know how it was in other states but it was this way in the state of Alabama: the white people's schools would start on due time.*[55]

Cobb's first hand account is one of the very few that gives some idea of the impact of inequitable school funding as experienced by a black rural community. He was convinced that the distribution of school moneys was calibrated with the shifting needs of white planters for a labour supply. This is consistent with the interpretations of black historians such as James D. Anderson. Anderson has argued that the discriminatory nature of early twentieth century educational funding was all of a piece with a white supremacist agenda bent on confining black people to subordinate roles and on preserving a racially segmented labour market. W.E.B. Du Bois believed that "enforced ignorance" was "one of the inevitable expedients for fastening serfdom on the country Negro." One clear outcome of the inadequate and begrudged funds for Alabama's black schools after 1891 was, in many places, the preservation of an all too familiar socio-economic rural landscape in which black farmers and tenants knew their "place" and recognised their economic fealty.[56]

In 1908 a catalyst for a change in the circumstances of Alabama's black rural schools arrived in the shape of philanthropic funds from the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation. The nature of this funding was such that it would empower black communities to take into their own hands the responsibility for improving their schools in a way that did not appear to be unacceptable to whites.

In 1904, Anna T. Jeanes, an elderly and very wealthy Quaker woman who lived in Philadelphia, decided she wanted to assist "the poor little Negro cabin one-teacher

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55. Theodore Rosengarten, ***All God's Dangers: the life of Nate Shaw***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000, 216. "Beaufort" was a fictional name for what was possibly Notasulga. The period was around 1914.

56. Anderson, ***Education of Blacks in the South***, 33. See also W.E.B. DuBois, and Augustus Granville Dill, eds., ***The Common School and the American Negro; report of a social study made by Atlanta University under the patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund; with the proceedings of the 16th annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, on Tuesday, May 30th, 1911***, Atlanta, Atlanta University Press, 1912, 68-69.

rural schools." Initial grants of $10,000 were made respectively to Hampton Institute in Virginia and to Tuskegee Institute for extension work in their adjacent localities. Miss Jeanes made a further benefaction of $200,000 to the General Education Board in 1905 stipulating that the interest from this sum be used "on behalf of Negro schools." Two years later in 1907 (the year of her death) she set aside $1,000,000 to establish a fund she wished to be known as "The Fund for Rudimentary Schools for Southern Negroes" and the income to be devoted to:

> *the one purpose of assisting, in the Southern United States, Community, Country, or Rural Schools for that great class of Negroes to whom the small Rural and Community Schools are alone available.*[57]

Jeanes made it explicit that, unlike previous philanthropic funding which had gone to colleges, normal and secondary schools (many of which were privately run) her support was *not* for the use of large institutions, but solely "**for the purpose of rudimentary education** and to encourage moral influence and social refinement which shall promote peace in the land and goodwill among men."[58]

Dr James Hardy Dillard was appointed "President and Director of the Negro Rural School Fund, Anna T. Jeanes Foundation." The Jeanes trustees included such luminaries as Andrew Carnegie, William Howard Taft, George Foster Peabody, Booker T. Washington, and Reverend Dr Hollis Burke Frissell (then Principal of Hampton Institute).[59] Some of these had connections with the southern education movement which had redirected northern concerns for black education and made the "forgotten" poor white child the priority for philanthropic and educational attention.

Dr Dillard needed some type of model for providing the assistance to black schools envisaged by Miss Jeanes. He was shortly to find this in Virginia. In 1908 Dillard was persuaded by Jackson Davis – a superintendent of education in Virginia's Henrico County - to finance a project in rural school supervision in that county. Davis had been impressed by the work of one of his black teachers, Virginia Estelle

57. Lance Jones, ***The Jeanes Teacher in the United States,*** Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1937 18.

58. *Ibid.*, 19. (Emphasis original).

59. *Ibid.*

Randolph, who had formed a school improvement league and then leveraged the interest this aroused not only to transform her "little wayside school" into a model progressive rural school but also to assist her local community to "live better, to do their work with more skill and intelligence and to do it in the spirit of neighborliness."[60] Davis recommended to Dillard that the Jeanes Board support the "industrial work of Henrico County" by paying the salary of two black supervisors and Dillard agreed.[61] Randolph became the first Jeanes "supervising industrial teacher" or simply "Jeanes teacher" as the position became commonly known.

Initially the duties of a Jeanes teacher involved giving demonstrations of effective teaching methods and "industrial training" at a centrally located school and then spending several days a week visiting communities and other schools within a radius of a few kilometres. This program eventually developed so that the Jeanes teacher became the equivalent of a county supervisor for black rural schools. The teaching demonstration work was undertaken during the winter months while during the summer the Jeanes teacher helped to organise "Home Makers' Clubs for Negro Girls" which were intended to interest girls and their mothers in home improvement. Such work could involve kitchen gardening, organising canning clubs, teaching sanitation and arranging displays for county fairs and exhibitions.[62]

In 1909 *The Citizen Examiner* reported: "the negroes of the Clio neighborhood [in Barbour County] have received a large donation from the Jeames [*sic*] Fund for the promotion of education in the common schools."[63] The first *official* reference to Jeanes teachers in Alabama is in a 1913 report to the state superintendent of education by James Longstreet Sibley, state supervisor of elementary rural colored schools. This hybrid public/private position was funded by the General Education Board but answerable to the state superintendent of education). Sibley had spent three years in the Philippines as well as in India and other parts of Asia. He had attracted the attention of Henry J. Willingham, the state superintendent of

60. Lance Jones, ***The Jeanes Teacher in the United States,*** 15-16.

61. William A. Link, ***A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920,*** Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1986, 186.

62. ADAH, Alabama State Dept. of Education, ***The Work of the Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teachers and the Homemakers' Clubs for Negro Girls, Alabama 1916,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, Printers and Binders, 1917. (Hereafter cited as Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers***), 6, 11 and 24.

63. ***The Citizen Examiner,*** January 21, 1909.

education, when he (Sibley) was a student teacher at the State Normal College at Jacksonville. Willingham was impressed by Sibley and thought he "had developed broad views on the training of primitive peoples." Charles William Dabney claimed that Sibley knew how to "discuss all the difficulties between the whites and the blacks to overcome their prejudices and difficulties." He "gradually led the public opinion among the white in the direction of more liberal treatment of the Negroes."[64]

By 1913 there were sixteen Jeanes teachers working in seventeen of Alabama's counties.[65] In the year ending September 30, 1916, there were twenty-seven teachers in twenty-three counties many of whom had been trained at the Tuskegee Institute. They were selected by the state supervisor of elementary rural colored schools (Sibley) and were under his overall supervision though employed by county boards of education.[66] Eventually the counties where they were located started contributing something towards their salary costs.[67]

Sibley's official reports as well as his correspondence indicate he considered the Jeanes work as being very suited to women. In November 1913 he opined in his correspondence "I think . . . as a rule, the women make better workers than the men." A week later he submitted his *Annual Report* in which he claimed: "Experience has shown that, on the whole, women make better supervising industrial teachers than men." Sibley believed that this was "owing to their ability to reach the homes of the children."[68] In 1914 he advised Dillard that Mrs Waterfield (the Jeanes teacher in Lowndes County) had done "such good work this year that she should be kept at a salary of $50.00 per month for at least nine months." As if worrying that he had not made his point strongly enough, later in the same letter he again asked that Dillard "allow $450.00 as it would be impossible

64. Dabney, ***Universal Education in the South***, Vol 2, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1936, 521-522. In 1914 Sibley gave a speech at a school in Coffee County whose Home Makers' Club had mounted a canning exhibition. Sibley said that "through industrial education, the colored people could hope to win a worthy place in the hearts of white people." ***The Colored Alabamian***, September 9, 1914.

65. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1913***, 44-56.

66. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers***, 6.

67. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG015442, ***Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1913-1914***. Letter dated August 10, 1914, from James Sibley to James H. Dillard. In 1914 Sibley wrote to Dr Dillard that "the counties of Mobile, Barbour, Bullock, Coffee, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Greene, Perry, and Russell had agreed to pay $100 or more toward the work."

68. *Ibid.*, letter dated November 10, 1913, from James Sibley to Mrs J.M. Carmichael of Ozark, Alabama. See also *Annual Report* of state supervisor of elementary rural colored schools dated November 18, 1913, 46.

to secure her [Mrs Waterfield] otherwise."[69] Dillard shared Sibley's opinion of women's abilities and claimed "we never had a man on the list that measured up to the work which women accomplish."[70] Only about 15 percent of Alabama's Jeanes teachers were male.[71]

The composition of the Jeanes teaching corps paralleled the late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminisation of Alabama's teaching profession but, perhaps more importantly, it introduced a new source of black authority into the rural schools (at least in those counties where there was a significant black population). The claim by early black scholars (such as W.E.B. Du Bois) that slavery created a matrifocality in black families (with lasting and deleterious implications), has been questioned by more recent investigators.[72] Yet black women did seem to be able to bring to the role of the Jeanes teacher a self-assured confidence that derived from their domestic status as house-keepers and home-makers. Being a Jeanes teacher offered black women a number of tangible advantages too. The position was adequately paid and relatively secure. As teachers became more experienced they were allowed a certain amount of latitude as to how they performed their duties thus allowing opportunities for job enlargement and development. They were a point of contact with a previously indifferent white officialdom who, even when well-intentioned, were usually cautious not to upset their white constituency. – "Our county superintendent is handicapped on account of the intense prejudice against negro schools in this [Dale] county," wrote a white woman to Sibley in 1913. She had recently experienced some sort of epiphany and had decided to get involved in assisting with black education. Previously she had always "considered it beneath my dignity to so much as ask a question about a Negro school."[73]

69. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG015442, ***Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1913-1914***, letter dated August 10, 1914, from James Sibley to James H. Dillard. Sibley must have been successful in his request to Dillard regarding Mrs Waterfield because in this same file there is a letter to Dr Dillard dated January 2, 1915, from Arthur J. McCray, the principal of a school at Palmyra in Lowndes County. McCray advises Dillard of the support he was getting from Mrs Waterfield as well as the county superintendent in establishing a graded, consolidated "industrial" school.

70. For Dillard's opinion of women see a quotation from his correspondence in Leloudis, ***Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920,*** 188.

71. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers***, 6.

72. Barbara Finlay Agresti, "The First Decades of Freedom, 1870 and 1885." ***Journal of Marriage and the Family*** (November 1978): 697.

73. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG015442, ***Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1913-1914***, letter dated November 12, 1913, from Mrs J.M. Carmichael of Ozark, Alabama to James Sibley.

Since 1891 black schools had not only been receiving a pitiful portion of the school fund, but they were taught by always ill-trained and often ignorant teachers who, of necessity, had to adapt for the special needs of their pupils a course of study and textbooks designed primarily for white children. Under the direction of the county superintendent, Jeanes teachers showed regular teachers how to make the basic branches of the school curriculum "part of an interested, alert and active response to the whole environment" and how to connect the community to the school.[74] They spoke about the necessity of thrift, of how to maintain kitchen gardens in order to achieve self-sufficiency in food supplies, of sanitation, of canning methods for fruit and vegetables, of the improvement of homes, of raising crops and of animal husbandry. They worked directly with school patrons by organising meetings and encouraging them to raise moneys for new school buildings and equipment.[75] While this was praiseworthy to white modernisers, the benefits accrued to black communities. These were shown how to take measures by which they could shape and direct their own destinies so as avoid the risk of being permanent mendicants in a white dominated society.

The "industrial skills" that Jeanes teachers were expected to demonstrate were mainly (for girls) cooking, sewing, growing vegetables in a school garden and preserving and canning fruit. Twice each week female students might spend one hour learning how to cook and keep house while boys might spend the same amount of time acquiring manual skills and agricultural techniques.[76] As well, Jeanes teachers assisted the formation of school improvement associations. In turn, these associations enhanced the physical conditions under which children were taught and made schools a centre for black social life. Some of the direct dividends of such aroused interest were that more patrons were willing to pay tuition supplements thus enabling school terms to be extended. Also, whole communities took part in activities to raise funds for new school buildings and equipment such as patent desks, for acquiring property, for holding adult night schools and for constructing sanitary toilets using plans issued by the Department of Education but

74. Lance Jones, ***The Jeanes Teacher in the United States,*** 110-111.

75. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers,*** 24-25.

76. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG015442, ***Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1913-1914,*** letter dated November 10, 1913, from James Sibley, state supervisor of elementary rural colored schools, to Mrs J.M. Carmichael of Ozark, Alabama.

devised at Tuskegee.[77]

In 1914 the Jeanes teacher in Mobile County was Miss Olegra Boyd. A glimpse into her role and also at her ambition and application can be gained from a letter that she wrote to James Sibley (who had chided her for the sin of using the term "Canning Club" in her formal reports when the proper term was "Home Makers' Club" and also for spending too much of her time at too few schools).[78]

> *I have successfully supervised the county and given these schools their proper attention also. Although this has worked me very hard I have taught work in every one. Some weeks I spend the entire time away and nearly all Saturdays and so many Sundays with the other schools. . . . All of my schools are well cared for I think, for I visit them as regular as time will admit. I also have a teachers' class each month. I teach them and they help me a great deal. Now Mr Sibley I am willing to do anything to make Mobile County schools a success. . . . The girls' gardens are doing fine. I have distributed the seed to a number of the schools. A few I shall send today. Most of them have already planted and their tomatoes are growing nicely.*[79]

The obligation placed upon Jeanes teachers to teach "industrial" skills seemed to reflect at the level of the neighbourhood school the hugely contentious curriculum debate at the turn of the century with regard to black normal schools and colleges. It may also have been attributable to the Jeanes' Foundation's board whose members had conservative ideas on black education. Yet at this time, *all* rural schools in Alabama were supposed to be operating in accordance with the same manual. This emphasised the importance of teaching agriculture as well as the staple elementary "branches" and endorsed "vitalisation" activities such as school farms and gardens, corn clubs and canning clubs. In a Department of Education bulletin published in 1913 - *Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life* - several pages are devoted to corn and canning clubs and the benefits to be derived from these by students – for example, "Misses Carrie and Lucy Sapp of Cullman County are partly making their way through school by raising

77. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers,*** 16-22. (Sanitary toilets were particularly important for all children because of the prevalence of hookworm disease in the rural South which was spread by a ground parasite).

78. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG015442, ***Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1913-1914,*** letter dated April 29, 1914, from James Sibley to Miss Olegra Boyd of Plateau, Alabama.

79. *Ibid.,* letter dated April 30, 1914, from Miss Olegra Boyd to James Sibley.

tomatoes." Instructions were given on how to ship corn to fairs for exhibition purposes.[80]

When the work of black students was selected for display at county fairs and when black students took off prizes (as, for example, did Willie Fort when he won $15.00 at the 1916 Macon County Fair for raising "the best Hampshire boar"), these achievements carried the implicit assertion that children from schools in black communities had just as much right as those from white communities to participate fully in the state's education system. At Dadeville in Tallapoosa County "many [white] ladies and schoolchildren" spoke encouragingly of the high quality of the work "and seemed surprised to know such was being done in the Negro schools of the county."[81]

The items made by black schoolgirls and exhibited at county fairs typically included clothing, intricately patterned quilts, rag rugs, hats made from pine needles and corn shucks as well as baskets made from split white-oak and willow. Some of the basket-making techniques were those of traditional African societies which had been brought to America by slaves and represented a continuous folk tradition.[82] Thus the school craft-work had a double value. It validated black competence and culture to white society and showed black students how to improvise from any materials at hand. Tommie Manley, who grew up in Bullock County at this time, recalled such improvisations. His family slept on mattresses made by stuffing ticks with the crowfoot grass that sprouted in the fields after a frost; other families he knew stuffed theirs with corn shucks. Some women made sheets out of flour bags and some made clothes from guano or feed sacks. This practice continued whilst ever there was rural poverty. During the Great Depression of the 1930s children in school could discern the faint pentimento of a stencilled fertilizer number such as 6-8-4 or 7-10-3 on the backs of their fellow pupils' dyed sacking shirts.[83]

The Anna T. Jeanes Foundation and the teachers whose salaries and expenses it

80. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** Bulletin No. 33, 62-73. Misses Carrie and Lucy Sapp of Cullman County were white girls.

81. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers,*** 10 and 22.

82. *Ibid.*, 8. See also Howard Marshall, "Basketmaking," in Wilson and Ferris, eds., ***The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture,*** Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1989, 461.

83. Wade Hall, ***Conecuh People: words from the Alabama Black Belt,*** 39-40. See also J. Mack Lofton, ***Voices from Alabama: a twentieth century mosaic,*** Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 22.

funded allowed many struggling black communities - gripped by circumstances of poverty and racial prejudice - to shape their own educational priorities whilst remaining within the state system. If any Jeanes teachers in Alabama encountered resistance to their advice or were resented as outsiders interfering in matters of local domain, then no evidence of this survives. On the contrary, the "Special Agent" who coordinated the summer work in twenty-five counties recalled that:

> *Every house I went into was home to me. I went in not as a guest of honor, but as one of the family circle to serve in whatever way I could and thus I was received and welcomed.*[84]

This reaction was probably attributable to the narrative of transformation held out by the Jeanes teachers. It was not unlike the hope offered to desperate farmers via the Knapp demonstration program.

The resourcefulness of those black communities who were determined to achieve better educational outcomes for their children was exhibited once again in 1912 when another philanthropist decided to do something about their deplorable schoolhouses. This was Julius Rosenwald, the president of Sears Roebuck, the retailing giant. Rosenwald was Jewish and claimed that coming from "a people who have known centuries of persecution" he had always "felt keenly for the colored race."[85]

Rosenwald had become a trustee of the Tuskegee Institute in December 1911. The following year he made a substantial grant of $25,000 to Booker T. Washington to be distributed by him amongst some of the offshoots of that Institute. Upon special request, Washington was authorised to use $2,100 of this sum to build six black rural schoolhouses. Pleased by the results of this building program, on August 1, 1914, Rosenwald agreed to provide a further sum of $30,000 to aid the erection of about one hundred schoolhouses in designated counties of Alabama. Not more than $350 was to be allocated to any one school and all the schoolhouses

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84. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Work of the Jeanes Teachers***, 31. Report of Hattie J. Huckabee, Special Agent.

85. J. Scott McCormick, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund." ***The Journal of Negro Education*** 3 (October 1934): 606. The Julius Rosenwald Fund itself was not actually incorporated until October 30, 1917, but Rosenwald had made several direct grants himself before this date.

were to be owned and operated by the county as part of the public school system. By February 22, 1916, Alabama had seventy-nine new black schoolhouses. These were built as model schools on plans developed specifically at Tuskegee. Just before Washington's death in 1915, he [Washington] wrote to Julius Rosenwald to say that the new schools were "effecting a real revolution in the attitude of the southern people toward Negro education."[86] Perhaps more importantly, black communities had changed from feeling despair and hopelessness to being encouraged and determined.

Rosenwald's philanthropic strategy was underpinned by the religious injunction to do "tzedakah" – an act of righteousness and justice to those less fortunate than oneself. Yet he was also committed to a philosophy of self-help. He did not subscribe to the idea that governments should intervene on behalf of society's less fortunate citizens but believed that race relations should play no part in suppressing the educational ambitions of individuals with initiative, merit and ambition. Rosenwald was paternalistic and stipulated how his money should be spent. He was not interested in just making grants for building schoolhouses but would match funds (either fully or in part) raised from within a community. His interest was in helping where help was wanted, where local political organisations cooperated, and when an equal or greater amount of help was forthcoming locally. Rosenwald believed the schools should act as a stimulus for continued and permanent support by the proper authorities. They would engender "enlightened progress."[87]

The first Rosenwald school in Alabama was built at Loachapoka in Lee County, in the spring of 1914. It was a small frame building erected at the modest cost of $942. Nearly 30 percent of this amount was contributed in cash and kind by the local black community - Lee's total population was about 60 percent black at this time. Local white citizens donated $360 and Rosenwald contributed $300.[88] All the schools that were built subsequently were the result of substantial black

86. J. Scott McCormick, ***The Julius Rosenwald Fund***, 608-610. Regarding number of schools built by February 22, 1916, see Anderson, ***The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935***, 158.

87. J. Scott McCormick, ***The Julius Rosenwald Fund***, 610. The Rosenwald Fund had a northern-based board which established general policy and extended assistance along similar lines to those developed by the Jeanes Foundation, – for example, grants for school buildings were made with the full cooperation of state and/or county educational authorities.

88. *Ibid.*

contributions – in cash, in land, in building materials and in labour ("sweat equity").[89]

Despite being known ever afterwards as "Rosenwald Schools" these schoolhouses were testaments to enterprising black localism and educational aspiration. The Rosenwald Fund stipulated that the schoolhouses must be built on a lot of at least two acres (0.8094 hectares) so there could be a school garden as well as playground space. The buildings themselves had large windows so as to maximise sunlight and ventilation. Their interior walls were painted in specific colours in order to improve lighting and minimise glare. Moveable partitions were installed between large classroom areas so that schools could be used for community gatherings and sometimes a stage or platform was provided. The schoolhouses had heaters and properly constructed, hygienic privies.[90]

The rudimentary shacks or improvised accommodation in which black schools had been taught since the end of the Civil War were themselves products of community initiative. The Rosenwald schoolhouses showed how, with some well-directed philanthropic assistance, this initiative could result in high quality buildings equal to or better than those in which white schooling was conducted.[91] But they were much more than just attractive, well constructed, purpose-specific buildings. They were a taunt to Jim Crow – that all-embracing set of arrangements for racial segregation. Since the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy vs Ferguson*, segregated facilities were only supposed to be legal provided the principle of "separate but equal" was observed – but they never were equal for those of African descent. As the historian John Hope Franklin has pointed out, this meant the most effective lessons learnt by both black and white children in the public schools was that even in institutions dedicated to training the mind, "a greater premium was

89. Anderson, ***The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935***, 154-155. By 1932 the Rosenwald Fund had built 389 schools in Alabama at a total cost of $1,285,060. The Fund contributed $248,820 of this amount (19.36 percent), black people contributed $452,968 (35.25 percent), whites contributed $137,746 (10.72 percent) and public funds $445,526 (34.67 percent).

90. Russell O. Mays, "Julius Rosenwald: Building Partnerships for American Education" ***The Professional Educator*** 28 (Fall 2006): 5-6.

91. By 1919 Rosenwald was receiving complaints that the schoolhouses were not being constructed correctly because white builders were not comfortable working in a program operated by African Americans. The building program was reviewed by Fletcher B. Dresslar of Peabody College in Nashville. Dresslar was white as was Samuel L. Smith who was appointed to direct the school building program in Tennessee. This caused anger at Tuskegee. By 1928, a fifth of the South's black schools were Rosenwald schools. They housed one third of the region's rural black schoolchildren and teachers.

placed on color than on brains."[92] Nevertheless, even more than the displays of black accomplishments at county fairs, the Rosenwald schoolhouses proved whites did not have a mortgage on the whole of black existence.

While undoubtedly significant to black educational ambition and enterprise, the Rosenwald schools were unable to effect an overnight transformation in the quality and suitability of schoolhouse accommodation. They were also located in very few counties – mostly in those contiguous with Macon County where the Tuskegee Institute was located. In 1919 a U.S. Bureau of Education report on education in Alabama pointed out that the poor condition of many school buildings and their unsuitability for educational purposes was due in part to "the fact that such a large percentage of Negro school buildings are privately owned."[93] Black communities could not always be persuaded that, having invested so much effort in raising sufficient funds to purchase a school building site, this should then immediately be deeded to the state. To rural black communities who were "far removed from capitol, from courts and from contact with modern ideas," any notion of the state was based on "their knowledge of the county sheriff, the county courthouse and the county jail." The "state" was the "white man who brings the handcuffs, a judge who pounds with the gavel and pronounces sentence."[94]

For all of the period with which this thesis is concerned, the preponderance of the black population was located in rural areas. In 1910 however there were substantial and growing black communities in some of Alabama's cities such as Mobile, Montgomery and Birmingham. Birmingham's population in the 1910 census was 132,685 of which 39 percent was black. This was the highest percentage of any American city with a population of more than 100,000. Yet some features of black urban life were all too familiar. The city was sharply segregated along racial lines, the caste system of white supremacy governed all inter-personal relations, and black

92. Franklin, John Hope. "Jim Crow Goes to School: The Genesis of Legal Separation in Southern Schools." ***South Atlantic Quarterly*** 58 (Spring 1959): 235.

93. United States Department of the Interior, ***An Educational Study of Alabama***, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 41, Washington D.C., 1919, 181. The report stated that 65.1 percent of black schools were privately owned compared with only 22.2 percent of white schools.

94. Clement Richardson, "A Rosenwald School." ***Southern Workman*** 45 (January 1916) quoted in McCormick, ***The Julius Rosenwald Fund***, 616.

people were generally assigned to low-status, low skilled and low-paying occupations though there was an emergent middle-class.[95] The experiences of Birmingham's black community were, in some respects, just those of rural communities on a larger scale – some sub-groups of this community were, in fact, transplanted population segments from specific counties.[96] Yet this community had a number of advantages not available to black people living in the isolation of Alabama's sparsely settled counties. They were able to use these advantages to influence their educational circumstances - even after they too had suffered disenfranchisement.

In 1874 Birmingham had two schools – one for each race. In his *Annual Report* to the state superintendent of public instruction (John M. McKleroy), the then city superintendent, L.H. Mathews, advised:

> *The black school is dependent entirely on the school fund and has been kept running nearly five months. The teacher is a colored woman and the pupils are but little advanced all being primary in the strictest sense.*[97]

Nine years later there were two schools for each race. Each school had its own trustees, decided on its own curriculum, and determined classroom procedures. The schools received some public funding but were significantly supported by patron tuition fees.

In 1883, as a result of action by Judge Alexander O. Lane, the then mayor of Birmingham, the position of "Superintendent of Education" was established in order to create a proper system of city schools. The first person appointed to the position was John Herbert Phillips and he would hold the office continuously for thirty-eight years until his death in 1921. Phillips was, like John William Abercrombie, one of the new breed of professional, reform minded, modernising educators. He was an energetic, proselytising champion of centralised, bureaucratic school systems staffed by highly trained and properly paid professional teachers

95. Carl V. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921***, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1977, 34.

96. For example, a large part of the black community from Marion in Perry County moved to Birmingham. Lynne B. Feldman, ***A Sense of Place: Birmingham's black middle-class community, 1890-1930***, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1999, 36.

97. Report by L.H. Mathews, superintendent of Birmingham schools, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SGO11916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1874.***

and administrators. He was also enthusiastically supported by the Birmingham Board of Education.[98] Phillips (like many others who considered themselves educated and enlightened) believed that black people were inherently inferior and behind white people in their cultural evolution. At an address he gave to the Southern Educational Association in 1896 he told the delegates:

> *It remains to be seen whether the instruction of an infant race can proceed along the same lines and by the same methods as that of a race whose culture is based upon centuries of struggle and self-effort, without involving the violation of all sound economic and pedagogic doctrine.*[99]

Yet he was willing to try such instruction. He was convinced that the "enlightened selfishness" of white southerners as well as "their sense of right, justice and patriotism" would lead them to invest significant resources in black education. He also had a deep faith in the capacity of education to "uplift the children of any race." He believed "the school alone could make black people an asset instead of a burden to the South."[100]

Upon taking charge of the city schools, Phillips organised them all – including the struggling and largely ignored black schools – into a centralised system that was operated under the authority of the city (and only more distantly, the state). He then devised common standards for all areas of educational policy and administration. Once Phillips' professional approach had been sanctioned by Birmingham's governing bodies, his policies and his rules for their implementation became the administrative basis for determining school funding allocations for the long term. The rules acted both as a buffer to drastic racial inequities – such as those produced under the 1891 School Law and also as a permanent constraint that perpetuated discrimination. Yet, owing to the fact there *were* rules, black communities found that, if they lobbied the board of education sufficiently for amendments, they could sometimes achieve improvements and/or novel

98. Elisabeth Mason Ware, "John Herbert Phillips, Educator" Master's thesis, Birmingham Southern College, 1937, 2-9 referred to in Carl V. Harris, "Stability and Change in Discrimination Against Black Public Schools: Birmingham, Alabama, 1871-1931." ***The Journal of Southern History*** 51 (August 1985): 393-394.

99. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG013240, State Publications, 1896-1991, ***"White Teachers in Colored Schools."*** Address given to Southern Educational Association at Hot Springs, Arkansas, on January 2, 1896, by Superintendent J.H. Phillips, Birmingham Alabama.

100. Harris, ***Stability and Change in Discrimination Against Black Public Schools: Birmingham, Alabama, 1871-1931***, 396.

provisions. In this way they were able to obtain public funding for a black "industrial high school" which commenced in September 1900. This school quickly developed into a cultural centre for Birmingham's black middle-class – a sector of the population whose leaders commanded greater resources than did those of any rural black community. Members of this middle-class knew how to appeal to professional educators and to the sorts of people who dominated the board of education.[101] They also had articulate spokesmen such as Ulysses G. Mason of the black *Birmingham Reporter* who, in 1910 was able to highlight deplorable sanitary conditions in some of the city's black schools. His reports were then picked up in the white press.[102]

In the Black Belt, white planters considered schooling unnecessary for their black labourers whom they preferred to remain ignorant and dependent,[103] but urban industrialists - the so-called "Big Mules" - though also self-interested, saw education differently. They recognised the value of schooling as a means of upgrading the productivity of their semi-skilled and skilled employees. Furthermore, they saw that having good black schools in Birmingham could attract and retain black workers and make them less susceptible to the inducements of recruitment agents who were actively soliciting workers for job opportunities in the North.[104]

Birmingham's black community was thus able to derive an educational dividend from several strands of white self-interest. Its own growing and increasingly confident middle-class was also able to wring concessions from the city's educational establishment. However, while the quality of black education in Birmingham was better both in comparison to its rural counterpart and in absolute terms, it was hardly adequate. It did not even approach the standards of the city's white schools. In 1911, the city's school appropriations per child of school age were $18.86 for whites and $2.81 for blacks and city expenditure per pupil enrolled was 33 percent less for black pupils than for white. After a tour of black schools

101. *Ibid.*, 403-405. By 1910 the high school had 200 pupils and had to move to a bigger site.

102. George Wade Prewett, "The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1993, 100.

103. Anderson, ***Education of Blacks in the South***, 33. See also W.E.B. DuBois, and Augustus Granville Dill, eds., ***The Common School and the American Negro; report of a social study made by Atlanta University under the patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund; with the proceedings of the 16th annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, on Tuesday, May 30th, 1911***, Atlanta, Atlanta University Press, 1912, 68-69.

104. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921,*** 173.

in 1913, the editor of the *Birmingham News* observed:

> *Only one negro school . . . is a modern, safe, proper building. The rest are shacks, with overflows into adjacent one story tenement houses. All of the rooms are crowded, sometimes three children to a bench.*[105]

The curriculum in Birmingham's black schools was said to have been "modified to meet the needs of the boys and girls in the negro schools" – it reflected the enthusiasm for "industrial education." In the upper grades of the elementary school (the city schools were all graded), students were taught "cooking, sewing, laundering, manual training, furniture repairing, chair caning, handicrafts, shoe repairing, tailoring, and gardening besides the other fundamental subjects."[106] The curriculum did have one feature suggesting somebody appreciated the unique heritage of those whose parents and other forebears had been slaves. It required emphasis be placed on "the study and singing of the Negro Spirituals."[107]

The ability of black rural communities to influence educational policy in respect of their own schools was a victim of the discretionary funding provisions of the 1891 School Law, the populist political ructions of the 1890s (which resulted in ballot rigging and manipulation of the black vote), of disenfranchisement under the 1901 constitution and of a subsequent progressive modernisation agenda that was for whites only. Above all of these political reasons was the all encompassing environment of racial prejudice and Jim Crow segregation. By the early years of the twentieth century, black people had been virtually banished from the educational stage. They were unable to enter any official discourse about such matters as session lengths, school consolidation and curriculum and any desires they might have for influencing educational policy were unlikely to receive bureaucratic consideration - let alone support. All professional development activities for teachers such as institutes were segregated and teachers could not even join the AEA. Should black teachers wish to develop contacts and share experiences with members of their own race they could join a separate professional association

105. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921,*** 172.

106. Marshall F. Phillips, "A History of the Public Schools in Birmingham, Alabama," Master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1939, 109.

107. *Ibid.*

(ASTA). Furthermore, black teachers were not permitted to attend meetings such as the Conference for Education in the South.

Black public schooling was a near casualty of Alabama's strident white supremacist agenda in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was largely ignored by the campaigns of the Southern Education Board. Black children were not thought to have any special rights but were largely valued according to their usefulness in the agricultural economy (often even by their own families). Nevertheless, as has been shown, black communities were not all just passively resigned to the oppressions of an inequitable system and some did continue to keep their local schools operating - after a fashion. It was a strategy for survival until such time as white injustice became less extreme. When northern philanthropic support arrived from the Jeanes and Rosenwald Funds, communities were able to demonstrate the extent of their initiative, pride and desire for self-determination. Also, in urban centres where communities were large and the benefits of education were more highly valued, black people had additional options and resources with which to shape their schooling requirements, to demand consideration from educational officeholders and to exert some influence on the curriculum so that it reflected black culture and racial pride. Unfortunately, neither the benefits of philanthropy nor the successes of city communities were systemic. Even the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1915 was implicitly intended for whites only. Overall, despite the legislative reforms of that year the educational prospects for black communities across most of the state looked fairly discouraging.

A long-term effect of slavery and the familial and community insecurities created by that institution meant black localism was not so much a demonstration of local community preferences but of racial and cultural pride and aspiration – a way to achieve "uplift" - as black social improvement was termed at the time. In the early twentieth century black communities hoped that schooling would assist uplift and, in turn, this would result in recognition by and coexistence with a white society built and operated upon assumptions of racial supremacy. But, as this chapter has pointed out, white society was reluctant to admit a black entitlement to schooling and insisted that this should be limited and circumscribed. Two such divergent positions were hardly reconcilable and it was not really surprising when, in 1915, black Southerners - including black Alabamians - started heading *en masse* to the North in search of economic and educational opportunities that would serve better their aspirations.

Chapter 9

1915 – A Watershed Year for Public Schooling

Almost fifty years after the end of the American Civil War, the Alabama legislature met in January 1915 for its regular quadrennial session. Its principal educational work for the session was to be the consideration of fifteen bills which had been placed before it by the state superintendent of education, William Francis Feagin. The intent of these was to extend further the modernisation process that had begun when John William Abercrombie introduced his own bills to the Assembly in the 1898-99 session.[1] Despite political differences in 1915 between the legislative and executive branches and the overriding dominance of another reform issue (prohibition), Feagin's bills were all enacted. This was a testament to Feagin himself, his political acuity and the influence he had developed both within the Department of Education and as an office-bearer in a number of important educational organisations.[2]

This chapter will review the more noteworthy or relevant (to the topic) of Feagin's fifteen bills including the outcomes they sought to achieve. It will show that while Feagin's tenure as state superintendent occurred at a time when national as well as regional socio-economic changes were providing a new setting for educational policy and an urgency for modernising reform, the actual changes accomplished by the enactments were modified to a greater or lesser extent by the continuing strength of traditional localism in Alabama.

Feagin's principal achievement (securing a bill for a constitutional amendment enabling county and district taxation and then driving the campaign for its adoption) was owed in part to a *modus operandi* that recognised the criticality of consultation and a policy dialogue. His cognisance of community attitudes helped him to plan his strategic and multi-faceted crusade to mobilise interest in support of an educationally progressive agenda. Where his measures did not achieve the

1. Jesse Monroe Richardson, ***The Contribution of John William Abercrombie to Public Education***, Nashville, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1949, 32-34.

2. Charles Eugene Millar, "The Contributions of William Francis Feagin to Education in Alabama." Ed.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1963, 44-45, 40 and 93-94. Feagin was chairman of the Alabama Educational Association's committee on legislation, a past secretary and treasurer to the Southern Educational Association, an active member of the National Educational Association (NEA), and an advisor to the Union Committee of Women's Organization (UCWO) which was formed in 1914 when six white women's organisations united their efforts on state educational reforms. These represented between 15,000 and 16,000 women including the School Improvement Associations and the UDC.

benefits intended it was because a sizable number of people were still unwilling to support the modernising reforms or had insufficient resources to do so.

If not the most important in the 1915 reform package, the first bill was at least socially innovative. It authorised women to serve on boards of education in counties, cities and towns for the first time. Feagin explained the purpose of the bill by saying that:

> *no tales of yesterday and no romance of today can eclipse in wonder the improvements [women] have wrought in local school conditions, when banded together. It is altogether fitting that their partnership in the school work should have the same recognition that is found in the home where the most refining thing is the maternal instinct and mother-love."*[3]

By 1915 women all over the state had shown themselves to be shrewd political campaigners on behalf of schools and had demonstrated their ability to get things done, but Feagin's bill (and his hyperbole) did not mean he recognised any intrinsic rights owed to women for their relentless and beneficial activism. Rather than being informed by a nascent feminism, Feagin's comments were a throwback to the nineteenth century construct of "true womanhood."[4] Another of Feagin's bills (the ninth) specified the powers and duties of the [elected] county boards of education on which women would now be able to serve. One of these duties included the appointment of county superintendents (thus making the position non-political).[5] Although for many years the majority of the teaching workforce had been female and county superintendents were increasingly expected to have teaching or other "specialised abilities," there was no intention that such appointments would go to women, – that would have put Feagin too far ahead of his conservative constituency. The hierarchy of the school system relied heavily on the dominance of

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3. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 10.

4. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood." ***American Quarterly*** 18 (Summer 1966): 152. Feagin did act as an advisor to the Union Committee of Women's Organization which had as one of its objectives the authorisation for women to serve on school boards.

5. In 1911 an attempt was made to enact a bill requiring county superintendents to be qualified teachers but this failed owing to pressure on legislators from county superintendents. Whilst the superintendency was no sinecure, divesting it of value as a political prize with all the attendant prestige implied by political office, was not something to be countenanced. Owen Hunter Draper, "Contributions of Governor Braxton Bragg Comer to Public Education in Alabama, 1907-1911." Ed.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1970, 204-206.

men in the wider society and the gendered nature of most managerial positions. In spite of some notable exceptions such as, for example, Julia Strudwick Tutwiler - the long-time president of the Livingston Normal School for Women in Sumter County and a formidable activist on behalf of a number of issues of progressive concern - the traditional expectation that professional executive authority should only be wielded by men remained unchallenged by the legislation. Women would be administrators.[6]

Feagin's second bill was concerned with the societal context of public schooling. Its enactment established the Alabama Illiteracy Commission with a charter to wipe out adult illiteracy. The 1910 census had shown that 23 percent of the state's population over ten years of age was illiterate (40.1 percent of the black population and 9.9 percent of the white population).[7] This was a source of shame to Alabama's citizenry and a reproof to the state government for its lack of adequate support for the educational system overall. Feagin believed that when adults "could be rescued from the confines of the gross ignorance in which they have spent so much of their lives" there was likely to be a "more wholesome interest in education on the part of the entire citizenship."[8]

In his *Annual Report* for the scholastic year ending September 30, 1915, Feagin detailed the legislative successes just accomplished and drew a genuinely touching picture of the benefits that literacy programs had already had in some parts of the state. He related his first-hand experiences in Dale County where people had been "inspired to go to school although their faces were furrowed and their locks white" and he had heard from "scores of old folks of the new joy that has come into their lives and the chasm that has been breached for them" by being able to read.[9]

The campaign for the reduction and eventual removal of illiteracy was organised and conducted on a decentralised model - as was the educational system itself. The

6. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 10 and 18. See also David Tyack, "Pilgrim's Progress: Toward a History of the School Superintendency." ***History of Education Quarterly*** 16 (Autumn 1976): 265. See also Anne Gary Pannell and Dorothea E. Wyatt, ***Julia S. Tutwiler and Social Progress in Alabama***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2004.

7. Census figures quoted in James E. Akenson, and Harvey G. Neufeldt, "Alabama's Illiteracy Campaign for Black Adults, 1915-1930: an Analysis." ***The Journal of Negro Education*** 54 (Spring 1985): 189.

8. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 10.

9. *Ibid.*, 11.

Alabama Illiteracy Commission received grants from the AFWC and utilised voluntary labour – often the after-hours labour of regular public school teachers. The literacy classes were a way in which rural people who may not previously have been part of their school community could become so whilst also learning about the work of the school and the worth of the teacher. In December 1916 a Miss Foster, a field agent for the commission in Barbour County, reported the work done in removing illiteracy had a "wonderful effect on the community." It was responsible for increasing enrolments and attendance in the regular day school. Also, because parents attending night literacy classes could see the need for classroom items such as blackboards, it made it easier for teachers to secure better equipment.[10] Yet, in a reflection of everything else in the state's education system (as in society as a whole), the commission adopted a "whites first" policy and black communities had to find their own funding to pursue their literacy improvement goals or rely on philanthropic grants.[11]

While Feagin might occasionally display his enthusiasm or approval in somewhat florid and/or emotional terms (such as in his comments about the contribution of women to school improvement or the elderly participants in Dale County's literacy programs), he was actually a well informed, astute and practical realist when it came to educational modernisation. All of his legislative proposals addressed matters for which there was likely to be some prospect of success. The third of his enacted bills prescribed a minimum age for teaching – which was to be seventeen. He said this was a "check upon the employment of immature persons for the serious work of teaching." While it might be thought that seventeen was fairly "immature," Feagin recognised that rural elementary schools were heavily dependent on very young women (often from local families) and was trying initially just to eliminate those "of tender years" who were even younger (those like the fifteen year old Clara Hall of Baldwin County).[12]

Feagin was also aware that 80 percent of first-time teachers had no occupational training at all and the *only* place they were likely to acquire any knowledge of

10. ADAH, Alabama Department of Education, State Publications, SG013206, Box 8, ***Minutes of County Boards of Education, December 4 and 5, 1916,*** 10.

11. Akenson and Neufeldt, ***Alabama's Illiteracy Campaign for Black Adults, 1915-1930: an Analysis***, 189-195.

12. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915,*** 14. See also page 103 of Chapter 3 regarding Clara Hall in Baldwin County.

pedagogical theory, curriculum content and instructional skills was the in-service institute. As a consequence he decided that the standard of the institutes available had better be as high as possible and that attending should provide no hardship. His fifteenth and final bill provided for the holding of teachers' institutes with professional conductors *and* the payment of teachers while they attended - just as if they were undertaking their regular work.[13] This bill was incremental to those already in place – particularly the Act passed in April 1911 - but it complemented the manual Feagin had prepared for institute instructors advising them how they could enlist the aid of the teachers in community uplift – making a community "more liveable and likeable."[14]

The major feature of the 1915 package of modernising reform legislation was the fifth bill. This was to enable a referendum to be held for a constitutional amendment allowing local taxation – conditional upon the subsequent approval of eligible voters. A companion bill (the sixth) provided for the follow-on electoral arrangements should the amendment be adopted.

The public school system was supported by the state with revenue from a number of different sources (perpetual fund, escheats, licence fees, supplemental appropriations, et cetera). In total this revenue constituted the "Public School Fund" and it was allocated to the counties on a per capita basis according to an annual enumeration of students though, after 1891, its discretionary distribution at the township level redounded almost entirely to the benefit of white children in predominantly black counties. From 1901 onwards the Public School Fund remained the only significant *public* support available to schools unless counties levied the one-mill tax permitted by the constitution or municipal districts made appropriations from their general town or city funds.[15] However, the tradition of supporting schools with *private* funds such as parental supplements or tuition fees and/or subscriptions to pay for schoolhouses and their equipment continued throughout the state. As these funds bore a direct relationship to parental capacity to pay, they were inherently inequitable, yet they increased the level of a

13. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 21-22.

14. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***A Manual for County Institute Instructors,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1914, 9.

15. In 1911, Governor Emmett O'Neal persuaded the legislature to substantially increase the state's contribution to the fund by increasing the state appropriation for that purpose.

community's vested interest in local schools and perpetuated local influence and control. Feagin described the need to resort to such payments an "uncertain and antiquated plan."[16] In 1915 the financing of any public school still largely mirrored the socio-economic, racial and fiscal status of the community in which it was located.

The bill to secure the constitutional amendment that would allow both counties and school districts to levy school taxes (subject to voter approval) had long been sought by the AEA as well as all those who had been active in seeking educational modernisation. They hoped a more reliable source of revenue would eliminate gross disparities between neighbourhood schools and the sometimes tenuous nature of their support. They also hoped that the revenue from county and district taxation would foster "local initiative, local interest, and a keener regard for the methods and management in each public school."[17] A supplementary bill (the seventh) provided for the state to assist counties that undertook what Feagin believed was a "most desirable educational activity" by paying them an annual bonus for levying the tax.[18]

Once the enabling bill for the constitutional amendment was passed by the legislature, Feagin conducted a vigorous campaign in its favour. He even borrowed a large sum of money ($6,000) on his personal account to finance this campaign because he was determined to ensure the amendment would be ratified when put to a referendum in November 1916.[19] His appeal to voters (which included an illustrated pamphlet of questions and answers) was persuasive. The amendment was ratified by a clear majority with nearly 60 percent in favour. By 1918, fifty counties had been given voter approval to levy a three-mill tax for educational

16. Official Proceedings of the 33rd Annual Convention of the Alabama Educational Association, 27-31 quoted in Don Eddins, ***AEA: Head of the Class in Alabama Politics: a history of the Alabama Education Association,*** Montgomery, Compos-it Inc. 1997, 249.

17. Edward N. Clopper, ***Child Welfare in Alabama: an enquiry by the National Child Labor Committee Under the Auspices and with the Cooperation of the University of Alabama,*** New York, National Child Labor Committee, 1918, 73. See also Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912,*** 10-11.

18. Alabama State Dept, of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915,*** 17. The bonus provided for in this seventh of Feagin's bills was set at $1,000 per one-mill of tax raised. After October 1, 1917, if a county was levying a three-mill tax it would receive $3,000.

19. Adelaide Kilgrow and Eugene M. Thomas, ***"History of Education in Alabama."*** Bicentennial Intern Project Conducted by the Alabama State Department of Education in Cooperation with the Southern Regional Education Board, Montgomery, Alabama State Department of Education Bulletin, 1975, No 7, 1975, 42.

purposes but the district tax was much slower to catch on – particularly in rural areas.[20]

Yet several years later when the initial caution had passed and electors had given many local school districts the authority to levy taxes, the impact of these on rural schools just increased the inequities within and between local systems. Having a much higher tax base, city school systems derived much greater revenue from local taxes than did county systems. By 1924, Birmingham was receiving $20.00 per student from the three-mill tax whereas Lamar County was receiving less than $3.00 per student. The total income in the Birmingham system was $48.00 per student whereas in Lamar it was $16.00.[21] After 1916, the total moneys available to Alabama's public schools increased significantly but individual schools and school districts, whether by choice or circumstance, remained mirrors of the community in which they were located. District taxation also gave new legitimacy to local communities wanting to maintain their own schools and resist consolidation.

There could be no better example of the persistence of localism as a factor which influenced educational policy-making well into the twentieth century than the issue of school attendance. There were still many people living a traditional life who failed to accept the notion that schooling would significantly benefit their children. As will be shown below, the notion that the state should have the right to prescribe compulsory attendance had been debated over many years and widely rejected as something that would be an unwarranted intrusion on parental rights and community domain. At the turn of the century this idea had been lent support by self-serving industrialists who employed large numbers of children in cotton mills and did not want their options limited. Eventually a mild child labour bill was passed in 1903 after years of lobbying by child labour prevention activists including Edgar Gardner Murphy who, from 1901, was leader of the Alabama Child Labor Committee (ACLC). The question of the state's right to compel attendance was particularly contested in the Black Belt, where as late as 1914 only about 40 percent of school-aged black children attended school. Plantation owners feared compulsory attendance by black children would have an adverse effect on their labour requirements and absorb funds that would otherwise be spent on white

20. George Wade Prewett, "The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1993, 73.

21. *Ibid.*, 125-126 and 134.

children. Also, because there was a correlation between tenancy and a low level of school attendance (tenants being less fixed in their abode than landowners), the notion of compulsory attendance in high tenancy areas was regarded as impractical.[22]

In the state superintendent's *Biennial Report* for 1907/08 all the county superintendents of education were asked to comment specifically on their constituents' attitudes to compulsory attendance. As might be expected, opinion varied widely across the state. The superintendents of Calhoun, Clarke, Clay, Crenshaw and Hale Counties all felt their people were neither ready for nor would have any use for compulsory education and would not vote for it.[23] James W. Barnard of Fayette County disclosed that, while he *occasionally* met "some who are in favor of compulsory education" it was his opinion that "Alabama, and especially Fayette County is not yet ready for such a *radical* move."[24] Montgomery County's superintendent was firmly of the opinion that neither he nor anyone in the Black Belt would favor compulsory education "unless we could by some means get around the Negro question."[25] This was echoed by the superintendent of Dallas County who said the disadvantages of not having children in school should be borne rather than "distress the people of the Black Belt."[26] Washington County's Richard E. Blunt asserted that his constituents wanted "a compulsory school law and would vote solidly for it, *nigger* or no *nigger*."[27] The superintendents of Bibb and St Clair Counties seemed to believe the best justification for compulsory education was that it might help to lower crime rates while those of Butler, Jefferson and Lamar believed compulsion and penalties were necessary to break down the "fortress of parental disinterest."[28] Others wanted "a mild form" of compulsion or felt there were other more pressing educational priorities or that attendance could

22. Eva Joffe, "Rural School Attendance." In Edward N. Clopper, ***Child Welfare in Alabama: an enquiry by the National Child Labor Committee Under the Auspices and with the Cooperation of the University of Alabama***, 101-111.

23. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908***, 19, 31, 29, 41 and 56.

24. *Ibid.*, 57-58. (Italics added).

25. *Ibid.*, 94.

26. *Ibid.*, 47.

27. *Ibid.*, 121. (Italics original).

28. *Ibid.*, 11, 110, 17, 70, and 73.

be secured by methods other than legal compulsion.[29] Josiah W. Johnson of Colbert County thought an attendance law would be nothing less than his county's "salvation."[30] There was a range of other opinion as well. In 1909 when the legislature debated a bill on compulsory education it did not pass. This bill had had been intended to apply to all children "except Negroes." Its failure was applauded by the black press which described it as "founded on prejudice, injustice and narrow statesmanship."[31]

In the scholastic year ending September 30, 1912, the number of white children attending school as a percentage of those of school age had actually fallen by one percentage point while the number of black children attending had fallen by three percentage points.[32] At the start of 1915 Alabama was one of only three states left in the Union without a compulsory attendance law.[33] In April 1914 Feagin addressed the AEA and put his own position without equivocation:

> *There are still those who would question the state's right to compel attendance.. . . . The parent has rights, - yes, but the helpless child has rights too, society has rights and the state has rights. . . . . Nor do I have any patience with that prejudice which would have hundreds of our white children grow up in ignorance lest the aspirations of the negro child be awakened too. . . . . If the white man's boasted superiority is not sufficient to keep him well in advance of the ambitious negro, then civilization is a farce and education a hallucination.*[34]

When the 1915 education bills were being "threshed out in committee rooms" before being presented for a vote by the legislature, one member said: "Some of them, the compulsory features especially, will meet determined opposition."[35] The ensuing *Compulsory Attendance Act* of 1915 was thus a feather in Feagin's cap and a

29. ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908***, 63, 10 and 45.

30. *Ibid.*, 34.

31. ***The Colored Alabamian***, August 14, 1909.

32. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912***, 5.

33. Only Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi did not have compulsory school attendance laws. Alabama enacted a law of limited scope in 1915, Georgia followed in 1916 and Mississippi finally legislated for compulsory attendance in 1918.

34. William F. Feagin, "***More Revenue for Education in Alabama.***" Address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Alabama Educational Association, Birmingham, Alabama, April 9-11, 1914, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1914, 7-8.

35. ***The Wilcox Progressive Era***, February 4, 1915. Comment by Hon. Ross Speir.

satisfactory outcome for his indefatigable championing of the cause, but its provisions were hardly stringent - Feagin himself described it as "mild." The law required that children between the ages of eight and fifteen years [inclusive] must attend school for eighty days annually unless they had completed the work of the seven elementary grades. The county boards of education were given the right to reduce the period of compulsory attendance to sixty days if, in its opinion, hardship warranted an exemption from full attendance. It was recognised that in cases of extreme poverty children might have to work in order to support themselves and/or their parents and these could be exempted entirely. The enforcement of the law was in the hands of the county boards of education which, despite being empowered to appoint compliance staff, offered such poor salaries that few such positions were ever filled.[36] The law had to be strengthened in 1919.

If Feagin had expected his bill to achieve a dramatic improvement in attendance he was overly optimistic. On February 6, 1919, Governor Thomas E. Kilby, established a commission to report on Alabama's public educational system and "to make recommendations for increased efficiency and economy." The United States' Bureau of Education was contracted to undertake the necessary investigation and *An Educational Study of Alabama* was subsequently published in July 1919. This study showed that school enrolments had climbed by only two percentage points in the three years between the bill's enactment and 1918 and this disappointing result was largely due to a belief by some Alabamians regarding their sovereign and supreme parental rights – particularly their seemingly immemorial rights to their children's labour. In Etowah County where the school term was seven months long, many enrolled children attended for a few months only with many turning up more than a month after the session had started. The majority of parents kept their children out of school to work on the farms in the fall and spring. The position was similar in Chambers County where the authors of *An Educational Study* stated that:

> *As in other sections of the State, farm work has precedence over school work. The immediate income of the farm is tangible, while the value to the school of having his [the child's] life broadened and enriched by the school is not so near nor so tangible.*[37]

36. Clopper, ***Child Welfare in Alabama: an enquiry by the National Child Labor Committee Under the Auspices and with the Cooperation of the University of Alabama***, 83-84.

37. United States Department of the Interior, ***An Educational Study of Alabama***, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 41, Washington D.C., 1919, 168-69 and 174.

No-one made any attempt to enforce the attendance of black children in the belief that black schools (which were already totally inadequate and overcrowded), would be made even more so if they had to accommodate additional children. Professor James J. Doster of the University of Alabama, who had conducted another review of the state's educational position in 1918, appreciated the agricultural economy's need for the labour of black children but felt there needed to be "a quickening of public sentiment among Negro parents with reference to regular attendance and punctuality."[38]

Besides compulsory attendance, another article of faith for modernisers was the need to consolidate the one-teacher rural schools into larger units with multiple teachers. Modernisers, including Feagin, were certain consolidation would mean "better buildings, better teachers, better instruction, and decidedly better results" and larger schools would make school life more stimulating and interesting for the students. Moreover, instead of small groups of children playing improvised games with improvised equipment, students would be able to participate in organised and competitive sport. Consolidated schools, would also make the teacher's role more satisfying. In the small rural school the teacher was:

> *superintendent, supervisor, janitor, and community worker. . . . . In addition to professional burdens, he meets difficulties in poor living conditions, inadequate equipment, stinted social life, and the absence of many other legitimate attractions found in the town.*[39]

The consolidated school – being more like a town or city school would arrest the rate of teachers leaving for opportunities "offering better salaries and more conveniences" elsewhere.[40] It was an urban oriented viewpoint. Prior to 1915 there was no evidence to show that rural communities had found arguments in favour of consolidation convincing. The only demonstrable successes in school consolidation were in Mobile County and at Cuba and Geiger in Sumter County.

There was some inconsistency between Feagin's eager championing of school consolidation and his genuine interest in community engagement. None of the

38. Clopper, ***Child Welfare in Alabama: an enquiry by the National Child Labor Committee Under the Auspices and with the Cooperation of the University of Alabama***, 97.

39. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 37.

40. *Ibid.*

modernisers who promoted consolidation sufficiently considered such factors as the added difficulty in actually getting to a consolidated school, or the implications for a small village of the loss of an institution which was the focal point for community activities and in which some community members held a proprietary interest, or the hold-outs of parents who resisted consolidation.[41] Similarly, they did not factor in the social detriment of diminishing the status of community leaders such as well-to-do farmers whose donation of land for a neighbourhood schoolhouse might no longer be valued. They thought the benefits of consolidation far outweighed the loss that was involved when a local teacher's knowledge of individual children was replaced with the less personal supervision necessarily involved in a much larger school.[42] Yet in some places consolidation meant irremediable cultural injury. In Lamar County,

> *most of the communities that lost a school owing to consolidation also lost their heart. Activities once carried on in rural communities took place in the school building. Now most of these activities ceased to exist.*[43]

Until the enactment of the new county school board law there was no legal authority for the consolidation of schools which also meant no authority for the transportation of pupils at public expense – and this could be considerable. The wagons employed to carry children to the Geiger consolidated school cost $40.00 a month (more than many teachers earned). The aggregated daily journey of these wagons was nearly twenty-three kilometres.[44] It is likely (because this was a common sentiment elsewhere) that parents were not happy about such journeys and viewed them as tiring for their children.[45] There is certainly evidence from

41. See page 78-79 of Chapter 2, regarding social purposes of the schoolhouse. See page 83 of Chapter 2, regarding proprietary interest in schoolhouse.

42. Regarding accessibility see report by J.D. Forte, superintendent of education for Monroe County, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SG011916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1904-05***. Regarding hold-outs against consolidation see Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 73. Regarding community involvement in local school see Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 60-61.

43. Joe G. Acee, ***Lamar County History***, Vernon, Lamar Democrat, 1976, 68.

44. Clopper, ***Child Welfare in Alabama: an enquiry by the National Child Labor Committee Under the Auspices and with the Cooperation of the University of Alabama***, 79. See also Eddins, ***AEA: Head of the Class in Alabama Politics: a history of the Alabama Education Association,*** 248 regarding data on Geiger consolidation.

45. Wayne E. Fuller, ***The Old Country School: the story of rural education in the Middle West***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 235-237. Fuller reports on the multiple adverse experiences of country children who were transported to school by wagon in Iowa, Indiana and Ohio.

other counties in Alabama that some parents feared the loss of proximity to their neighbourhood school as a consequence of consolidation.[46] By 1915 the modernisers' enthusiasm for consolidation had just not caught on with those supposed to be its potential beneficiaries. One principal reported rather wearily: "It is hard to get our people to understand the consolidated school over the little one-room school."[47]

The fourteenth bill of 1915 appears to have been an effort to try to reverse this disappointing sentiment and provide some incentive for consolidation. The bill amended a previous state law (*Article 31, Chapter 31 of the Code of Alabama, 1907*) and appropriated further state support for the "erection, repair and equipment of schools" because, Feagin said:

> *the rural school of the future in Alabama is to be a consolidated school usually with three or more teachers, comfortably housed, suitably equipped with ample grounds and a teacherage nearby.*[48]

Between 1915 and 1918 one hundred and sixty-two consolidations of various types were effected, but the slowness of progress and what appeared to be community recalcitrance was a source of almost palpable frustration to the authors of the 1919 *Educational Study*. For example, in their review of conditions in Pickens County they wrote:

> *The county school board until recently has been* ***increasing*** *instead of diminishing the number of school districts. . . . . The tendency has been to erect school buildings in every district asking for them. The consolidation of schools has not been seriously considered either by the school officials or by the patrons of the schools. There is in the county only one transportation wagon.*[49]

The remaining bills in the 1915 package were largely administrative. They concerned such matters as the teaching certification of graduates, town and city

46. See pages 232-35 of Chapter 6.

47. Arthur J. McCray to Dr James H. Dillard, January 2, 1915, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SG015442, ***Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1913-1914***, ADAH.

48. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 21.

49. United States Department of the Interior, ***An Educational Study of Alabama***, 163. (Emphasis added).

boards of education, the enrolment of advanced students, wholesale textbook purchases and new reporting obligations for denominational and parochial schools.[50] Their enactment indicated the growing role of the Department of Education as a regulatory authority and was a sign of the developing strength of a new type of governance within the state.

The 1919 *Educational Study* showed disappointing results against many other (by now familiar) measures of school progress. It found that *inter alia* teachers were poorly trained, school buildings were frequently inadequate, session lengths varied and funding was insufficient. The *Study* also pointed out in no uncertain terms that:

> *One in every three black children who should have been in school for upward of three years, could neither read and write and . . . the state must equalise the [educational] investment better between the races than it has done if this unfortunate condition is to be remedied in the near future.*[51]

It would have been entirely understandable if the many professional educationists and their allies who had worked so hard and so long to improve Alabama's public schooling system were perplexed by and/or disheartened at the slowness of the modernisation process. They may have wondered whether local communities, county school boards, parents and pupils were being deliberately obstructive. Yet the modernisers remained optimistic – and Feagin was careful not to castigate the very people on whom modernising reform depended. He said he did not detect any "lagging public sentiment or a lack of effort on the part of those engaged in educational work." The culprit was the outdated laws and constitutional inhibitions that were now "cumbersome and obstructive."[52] Yet despite his empathy, like other contemporary modernisers and those who might collectively be termed "Country Lifers," Feagin was not above considering rural education in the light of a pathological condition – part of a "rural life problem."

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50. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 13-20. These bills were the third, eighth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth in the package.

51. United States Department of the Interior, ***An Educational Study of Alabama***, 163.

52. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1914***, 7-8.

In 1909, Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life had been predicated on the assumption of rural dysfunction throughout the nation and it accumulated plenty of evidence to support its starting premises and eventual findings. The commission was particularly critical of rural schools which it held largely responsible for "ineffective farming, lack of ideals and the drift to town."[53] Widely read national educationists and sociologists at this time regularly used the term "rural life problem" or "rural school problem" as if the findings of the Commission on Country Life were universally agreed upon and not subject to question. Such a use can be seen in the title of a book written by the authoritative Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, called *"Rural Life and Education: a study of the rural-school problem as a phase of the rural-life problem."* Cubberley was a fervent campaigner for "the better correlation of rural schooling with socio-economic forces."[54]

William Feagin is likely to have read Cubberley (or to have at least been informed by his theories) because Cubberley's ideas turn up occasionally in Feagin's own writings. For example, in one of his reports Feagin claimed "the *school problem* in Alabama is a *rural problem.*"[55] This was not the most promising position from which to secure cooperation for the overturning of long-standing traditions of local school control. It appeared, at face value, to overlook the fact that a well-established, organically integrated culture needed to evolve from within rather than have change imposed upon it from without. Yet all of Feagin's actions indicate he understood fully that externally devised educational change was only ever going to be successful if the *need* for change was actually perceived and accepted by those whose customs and institutions were thought to be wanting.[56] All the agents of modernisation had to demonstrate that they actually had something to offer and were not trespassing on community domain, interfering with parental rights and/or scorning neighbourhood folkways and traditions.

When John William Abercrombie was actively prosecuting his modernising

53. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 48-50 quoted by Wayne E. Fuller, "Making Better Farmers: the Study of Agriculture in Midwestern Country Schools, 1900-1923." ***Agricultural History*** 60 (Spring 1986): 162.

54. Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, ***Rural Life and Education: a study of the rural-school problem as a phase of the rural-life problem***, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1914. Cubberley wrote at least eight books on education between 1910 and 1920.

55. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1915***, 23.

56. This underpinned all Feagin's initiatives for community engagement – such as the Special Days discussed in Chapter 7.

program of legislative reform from 1898 onwards, his focus was on *bureaucratic* reform. He was distressed that Alabama's public education system demonstrated "no system, no uniformity, no standard of qualification."[57] In 1924 he addressed the AEA's annual convention and reiterated a litany of deficiencies associated with the school system from the close of the Reconstruction period onwards as quoted below:

> *We had no form of taxation for school purposes, no trained teaching force, no competent supervision, no compulsory attendance, no uniform course of study, no adopted textbooks, no libraries, no laboratories, no gymnasiums, no graded schools, no high school system, no modern buildings, no consolidated schools, no transportation of pupils, no vocational training, no physical and health education, no removal of adult illiteracy, no school improvement clubs, no teachers' organizations, no reading circle courses, no educational publications, no articulated systems, no free schools. Excepting children alone, we had almost none of the things that go to constitute an* ***efficient*** *school system."*[58]

By enumerating the deficiencies of the past, Abercrombie was implying that each of these had been remedied - though this was not the case. In addition, despite Abercrombie having received his own elementary education in one-teacher rural schools and having served as superintendent for the schools of Anniston in Calhoun County, he offered no counterbalancing virtues for the localised system nor its heroic frontier resourcefulness. – He may neither have seen any virtues nor recognised that "efficiency" was just shorthand for a different cluster of educational values which had developed in part as the result of nineteenth century industrialisation.[59]

During Abercrombie's tenure as state superintendent (1898-1901), the Department of Education comprised himself and three clerical staff only.[60] Nevertheless, he was able to develop the concept of a strong, somewhat coercive, centralised policy-making and administrative authority as the basic requirement for educational

57. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** xv.

58. Eddins, ***AEA: Head of the Class in Alabama Politics: a history of the Alabama Education Association,*** 349. (Emphasis added).

59. Richardson, ***The Contribution of John William Abercrombie to Public Education,*** 3 and 9-11.

60. Austin R. Meadows, ***History of the State Department of Education of Alabama,*** 1854-1966, Montgomery, n.p. 1968, 34.

modernisation. His actual achievements all reflected his belief in the need for such control and included the introduction of state standards for teacher examination and certification, the prescription of minimum terms and the seeking of state textbook uniformity (which was achieved after the first Textbook Commission was established in 1903).[61] These were as much his legacy as the influence he exerted in securing the constitutional changes of 1901 which put public schools on a slightly more secure funding basis and allowed an optional one-mill county tax for schooling purposes (a decentralising policy).

William Feagin probably could not have accomplished what he did without the spadework done by Abercrombie and his other predecessors. Yet, although he always saw his legislative package of 1915 as just a start and was ambitious to achieve more, he had greater success overall with his attempts to shape Alabama's education system than Abercrombie and others. This was because, as his writings indicate, while Feagin tended occasionally to share the prejudicial notion of the "rural life problem," he had some appreciation of the underlying strengths, resourcefulness and dynamics of rural and small town culture and approached the modernisation task with this awareness rather than resorting to corporate diktats.

Besides his understanding of the dynamics of rural communities, Feagin also seems to have had an understanding of the importance they attached to their schools as a neighbourhood symbol and a shared facility. He believed the common school was "the institution nearest to the soil and should be made the apostle of intelligence, of industry and of thrift for the regeneration of our rural life."[62] He was also on record as saying that he would strive for Alabama to have its own Commission on Country Life composed of men and women who would lead the uplift of community life and make the country schoolhouse their base of operation.[63] His goal was to make communities fellow travellers on the road to modernisation – participants in an evolving change process.

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61. In his article "Bureaucracy and the Common School: The Example of Portland Oregon, 1851-1913." ***American Quarterly*** 19 (Autumn 1967): 475-498, the educational historian, David Tyack, has pointed out that for many late nineteenth century educationists, "reform" was the same thing as "conformity" and "standardisation."

62. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1914***, 8.

63. *Ibid.*, 9.

This chapter has shown the extent to which the reform bills of 1915 were a signal modernisation achievement in spite of the fact that they did not fully realise the hopes that so many - including their sponsor - had held for them. Though some rural traditionalists were still unwilling to accept the state's right to compel compulsory attendance and others remained unconvinced of the benefits of school consolidation, a dialectical debate was evolving into a reform dialogue between traditionalists and modernisers. This was facilitated as much by William Francis Feagin's passionate campaigning, his marshalling of community interest and his involvement of thousands of people throughout Alabama in school-centred activities, as it was by his legislative accomplishments in 1915 and the ensuing constitutional amendment of 1916 on local taxation.

Conclusion

With the implementation of the legislation that was devised and sponsored by William Francis Feagin and enacted in 1915, Alabama's public schooling system became more recognisable (in law) as the enterprise of a modern state in the twentieth century. This legislation built on past reforms and was intended to create the conditions that would deliver significantly improved educational outcomes. This accords with the way the history of public education in Alabama has mostly been written - as a progressive narrative of system building. In this narrative, the various accomplishments of office-bearers, educationists, legislators and other reformers with influence or power have been noted as way stations passed on a road leading to educational modernity (albeit an elusive destination). However, this thesis has shown that, while there was certainly a gradual accretion of modernising measures - constitutional, legislative and regulatory - over the fifty year period that ended in 1915, Alabama's educational system was not shaped solely by the proponents of modernising reform.

The modernisers, who were always fewer in number than those whose schools were to be the beneficiaries of their reforms, made most headway with their goals when they were able to orchestrate legislative action, philanthropic commitment and, most critically, community engagement. Where they failed fully to achieve their goals it was because they were unable to secure adequate funding and/or could not provide sufficiently compelling reasons for communities to re-calibrate their priorities, repudiate their own resourcefulness, deny their attachment to a particular place or surrender their time-honoured right to manage their own affairs. The modernisers often failed to grasp that this right - particularly in white rural communities - was part of an authentic and traditional culture of localism with its own values, perspectives and customs and these were cherished by people who frequently lived lives of economic privation, if not actual poverty.

An assertion of cultural pride (and all this implied) was one of the few resources available to Alabama's rural and small town communities if they were to avoid being patronised or marginalised by (usually) urban elites with different values and ideas about the purpose of schooling and the socialisation of children. This meant, as this thesis has argued, that Alabama's educational system was shaped within the context of an ongoing and evolving cultural dialectic between (chiefly) rural traditionalists on the one hand and urban modernisers on the other who, at times,

reached a mutual (if uneasy) accommodation for their respective viewpoints. Therefore, between 1865 and 1915, issues of localism, community and domain were persistent influences on the development of Alabama's public schools. This Conclusion summarises the principal findings of each chapter to retrace the evidence for this claim and the thesis argument.

The first chapter provided contextual information for the thesis topic - geographic, historical, ethno-cultural, socio-economic and political. It explained how the Civil War interrupted the progress that had already been made in establishing a state education system in Alabama and how, during the postbellum period termed "Congressional (or Radical) Reconstruction" (1867-1874),[1] a new system based on an Iowan model was implemented. There was widespread resentment toward this system (given voice in newspapers such as the Montgomery *Daily Mail*). This was because it was an out-of-state design, it had a highly centralised policy-making structure, it was free to all comers (thus, by the values of the times, tainting all who enrolled in it as paupers), it was unrealistically expensive (its chief undoing), it assumed the right of black access to schools (perhaps its only lasting innovation), and it was ambiguous on the subject of racially segregated schools. This system was regarded by the Democratic and Conservative Party as an alien imposition. After that party came to power in 1874 and a new constitution was adopted the following year, the principal features of the system (except the provision for black schooling) were abolished. The socio-economic turmoil of Reconstruction and the over-ambitious projects of its Republican government served white conservatives as a convenient and long-lasting object lesson on the perils of administrative centralisation, budget deficits, black political power and external intervention in matters of Alabama's own domain. This helped to perpetuate localism and sustain longstanding attitudes to schooling.

The first chapter went on to show how the legislation predicated upon the educational articles of the 1875 constitution reinstated most features of the antebellum system and made explicit the requirement to maintain racially separate

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1. The immediate postbellum period was termed "Presidential Reconstruction." In March 1867, provoked by an emerging pattern of black repression all over the South in this immediate postbellum period, the Radical element in the US Congress placed Alabama (along with Georgia and Florida) under the military rule of General John Pope. Because the Republican Party in Alabama was the political beneficiary of this action, the period is sometimes also called "Republican Reconstruction."

schools thus mandating an unaffordable dual system. The economic arguments and moral sentiments that had spawned the first state-wide education system in 1854 were missing. These were replaced by a calculation that, as black children now had an entitlement to public schooling, then there must be public schools for white children as well.

For the last quarter of the nineteenth century, public schooling in Alabama was largely a matter for the people inhabiting the state's sparsely settled regions. Despite their isolation, these rural people were frequently members of real (if scattered) communities that were connected by kinship, ethnic origin, folkways, religion, economic interest and moral outlook. Black communities shared the common experience or heritage of slavery. Public schools were part of each community's terrain and were expected to reflect and sustain its values and precepts. Although the education system implemented after 1875 did not remain entirely static, most real development was associated with municipal and urban schools. The system was chronically under-funded and minimally resourced. This was notwithstanding the efforts of educational office-holders, a few legislators, teacher pressure groups and others who sought to achieve modernising reform. These started to have some impact towards the end of the 1890s.

The second chapter outlined the decentralised organisational structure of the education system after 1875 and explained the legislative distribution of authority for public schools to state, county, and school district office-holders respectively. It showed how the county superintendent - whose duties were largely fiscal and administrative - had to exemplify all that was best in Southern manhood and fulfil multiple expectations of leadership including political affiliation and religious piety. The status and prestige vested in the position were a projection of local pride; special educational knowledge was not a requirement. The preponderance of decision-making on educational matters was allocated (in different periods) to a township superintendent or three trustees. These unpaid office-holders were representatives of neighbourhood hierarchies and/or factions. They performed their duties in accordance with the level of interest (or indifference) displayed in schooling matters by the members of the community they served. When they failed to meet its wishes or demands - in locating schools or appointing teachers - they were regarded as having broken a *social* contract and this was likely

to cause ructions. The complete integration of the trustee role with local community interests meant that when changes were made to schooling policies that challenged the traditional prerogatives of trustees these were loudly protested and sometimes legally contested. Successful reformers adopted consultative approaches in order to deal with this influence.[2]

The second chapter also considered the roles of other participants or stakeholders in the schooling system including parents and guardians, the students themselves and newspaper editors. Newspapers not only relayed to their readers information on school legislation and policy proposals but were also mirrors of the communities they served and with which they had a sort of bond. The opinions they conveyed can be read as a gauge of local support for (or traditionalist objections to) various modernising reforms such as curriculum expansion or school taxes. As well, editors could either be a reactionary force or a progressive coach regarding school interests - at one time *The Mountain Eagle* had a dedicated column on educational topics.[3] Modernisers frequently used newspapers as a means of publicising their intentions and promoting their reforms. As mouthpieces for their communities, newspapers were a major influence on educational policy outcomes.

The role of the schoolteacher was explored in Chapter 3. It showed that teachers were frequently members of their own community – sometimes older siblings of their pupils. Though representatives of an enacted state system they were wholly answerable to their employers (trustees and patrons) with whose ideas regarding politics, religion and morality they were expected to comply. All too often they were very young and untrained. They had to teach the essential "branches" but most of what they knew of their subject or of pedagogical method was gained from attending county teachers' institutes a couple of times a year. They were also without effective supervision though they had to manage a (usually) ungraded schoolroom of up to fifty students between the ages of seven (or younger) and twenty-one (or older). For all that was laid on their shoulders, teachers were poorly paid and their contract was for such a short period it made teaching a precarious career. There was thus a constantly revolving door of people joining and leaving

2. See pages 230-231 of Chapter 6 for one example where a consultative approach to redistricting was taken (in Walker County). See also page 233 of Chapter 6 for an instance where trustee prerogatives were legally contested.

3. In October 1900 *The Mountain Eagle* initiated a two or three column section entitled "Educational and Literary Department" edited by Douglas Allen, principal of the Jasper Graded School. It did not survive very long.

the teaching ranks and a rapidly increasing feminisation of the occupation. This feminisation was an accepted social change because, even if teaching took women away from their own home or neighbourhood, it was an occupation consistent with nineteenth century notions of womanly behaviour and responsibilities. Teachers bore the brunt of one of the first major modernising reforms – a uniform and compulsory system for teacher examination and licensing. This was introduced by John William Abercrombie in 1899.

The examination was applauded by the growing numbers of mostly urban teachers who saw it as an attempt to upgrade what was increasingly being regarded across much of the United States as a profession. Yet it was genuinely distressing and ominous to rural traditionalists - particularly parents - who were used to (and emotionally attached to) deciding by whom their children should be taught, and how to manage their own affairs. Abercrombie's doctrinaire approach to barring teachers who could not pass the state examination at a second attempt meant some schools were left without teachers entirely and this caused bewilderment, dismay and anger. The shortage of teachers created problems all over the state - particularly in predominantly black areas. The cheating that was rife in the first years of the certification régime was a measure of a fear about job loss. It was also a sign of neighbour helping neighbour in adversity. In October 1903 the modernisers accommodated local opinion regarding the examination's contribution to teacher shortages and obtained a government appropriation to fund a six week summer school for teachers at the University of Alabama. Nearly eight years later, state support was also provided for an annual, professionally led teachers' institute in each county for each race. Amongst the reform measures of 1915 was a provision for recognising appropriate teaching qualifications obtained outside the state.

The next and fourth chapter considered the schoolhouse itself as an artefact of local enterprise and a focus and facility for community activities. It discussed the instructional methods employed there, the textbooks used and the curriculum followed, and how these were all means by which teachers and those involved in public schooling could further conserve and/or amplify long-held customs, values and beliefs. Whilst parents had no specific philosophy of education, they generally wanted their children to learn basic skills such as reading, spelling and arithmetic – the skills that would serve children best as the farm workers they would mostly

become. Had teachers ever demonstrated either an inclination or ability to question or challenge prevailing social attitudes, it is unlikely they would have been permitted to do so. Trustees and patrons "owned" what went on in their schools and were suspicious of externally imposed innovations. This chapter related the community rancour at the beginning of the twentieth century when several pieces of reform legislation were enacted at the urging of educational modernisers. One such piece established a commission to select uniform textbooks for all the state's public schools. Uniformity was regarded as "a mischievous innovation" as textbook choice had always been regarded as a parental or local matter and complaints were still being expressed years after the policy change. The superintendents of city school systems were concerned that the books chosen would not meet their own high academic standards while rural and poorer city parents worried about unnecessary expense. The eventual choices of history and geography textbooks may have mollified white parents as these confirmed both racial stereotypes and a version of Alabamian history in which slavery and secession were treated in ways that were defensively Southern. Some of the strident objections raised in relation to state textbook uniformity were products of a nervousness about the rate and scope of other educational changes being implemented contemporaneously. These changes were, in turn, being implemented within a broader landscape of unsettling social and economic disruptions. Modernisers helped to allay some of this anxiety by starting to steer the school curriculum in a vocational direction so as to make it "relevant" to rural parents who were concerned about an expansion of the core branches. "Agriculture" was made a compulsory subject in 1904. In 1911 a position entitled "State Supervisor of Elementary Rural Schools" was created with the express intention of addressing the needs of rural schools and their teachers.

The fifth chapter looked further into the actual operation of a localised school system by explaining the origins of the "Public School Fund." The chapter recounted how, in the face of inadequate state support and before the adoption of local taxation, communities acted on their own behalf with optimistic enterprise and improvisational flair to keep their schools open. This often meant relying on a confusing mélange of taxes and other revenue streams. The source of some school moneys (such as those derived from liquor licences) were highly controversial. Schools also depended on benefactions of land from prosperous farmers and a pooling of neighbourhood resources to build and equip schoolhouses with

whatever materials were to hand. Whenever the actual survival of a school was threatened by financial and other contingencies, communities regularly resorted to the democratic and venerable cultural tradition of the town meeting of citizens to find a solution.

The fifth chapter explained why funding was a matter of particular concern to Alabama's towns and county seats where, in the later years of the nineteenth century, schools were becoming symbols of civic pride and an economic benefit in themselves. Where municipal funds might be available for schools, public spirited citizens sometimes took it upon themselves to draft the bills that were required to establish municipal school districts and define the ways in which these would operate. Subsequently they would shepherd these bills through the legislature until enactment. Modernisers believed such initiatives resulted in a confusing "patchwork" rather than a rational standardised system but were prepared to be tolerant of community developed funding arrangements (such as teachers being paid with credit notes redeemable at neighbourhood stores) if such arrangements enabled schools to operate for an adequate session length. (Abercrombie's stipulation was that any schools receiving public money *must* offer a free minimum session of five months). With the passing of an Act in 1903 permitting counties to hold a vote regarding the levying of a one-mill local school tax, it seemed to the modernisers that their hopes for more educational revenue might be realised. Over the next three years referenda were held but, in accordance with a localised system where people determined their own priorities, fewer than 70 percent of the counties approved the tax. The modernisers blamed "cussedness" in one county but the state had a history of being tax-averse. There was a widely held view that the tax was not proposed by those who would actually have to pay it. When a constitutional amendment in 1916 eventually enabled both county and district taxation, the long-term effect was actually to increase funding disparities. District taxation also gave new legitimacy to communities that wished to maintain their own schools and resist their consolidation.

The next and sixth chapter considered the advent of the "Progressive Era" around the turn of the twentieth century. This saw interventions in all sorts of social policy - including education - by activists both within Alabama and external to it. The era coincided with the late nineteenth century appearance of full-time professional educationists and organised urban teachers. These believed the

modern state (and the "New South" as the postbellum rhetoric of industrialists and boosters would have it) required an educated populace to function properly and therefore had an obligation to fund and support an *effective* system of state public schools. This marked a changing understanding about the role of the state. The Progressive Era was notable for what was to become something of a debate in society at large over the very nature of the social contract and the extent to which centralised government power - or even the non-governmental power of large scale philanthropy - should interfere with local freedoms and community self-determination – even when these were responsible for poor social outcomes.

In the context of Progressivism, the sixth chapter explored the role of various reform influences and influential modernisers. These included members of women's clubs whose backgrounds were middle-class and usually urban but who took up the cause of rural educational improvement with a fervour. Allying themselves with officers of the AEA and interested legislators, the women initially approached their task with the patronising assumption that, because of their isolation and meagre circumstances, rural people were backward, ignorant and incapable of effecting social improvement for themselves. The club women achieved a notable success when they channelled their energies into the formation of school improvement associations across the state. These mobilised local people and empowered them to effect their own school reforms – those they actually wanted and that were in accord with their own ways of doing things.

The sixth chapter also reviewed the role of the coalition of educational reform interests (including northern philanthropists) termed the "southern education movement." It defined the respective roles of the two principal agencies that supported the movement - the Southern Education Board (with propaganda) and the General Education Board (with major funding). This last agency employed a strategic approach to encouraging educational reform in the South lest its goals be compromised on the ground by a fear of outsiders – particularly "Northerners" intruding on community domain. The board recognised early that "the plight of public schools" could not be ameliorated by a paternalistic disparaging of localism but only by harnessing "community ideals, community initiative and community support, even to the point of sacrifice."[4] The extent to which the southern education

4. General Education Board, ***The General Education Board: an account of its activities, 1902-1914***, New York, n.p., 1914, 14.

movement was successful in helping to reform schooling in Alabama was mainly governed by how far these principles were heeded by modernisers. Funds made available by the Southern and General Education Boards were also critical to the success of many reform endeavours. These funds met the salaries and expenses of rural school supervisors, underwrote the costs of farm demonstrations and agricultural and canning clubs, and financed the evangelical crusades that swayed elector sentiment in favour of local taxation.

In the early twentieth century there was a pervasive national angst about the numbers of people leaving farms to work for wages in the growing cities. President Theodore Roosevelt's establishment of the "Commission on Country Life" in 1908 was an attempt to identify causes for the exodus and find ways of halting the flow. The commission's findings represented prevalent contemporary opinion that rural life had to be revitalised and re-valued and that schools had a part to play in this. The special needs of rural schools and their core curriculum were assessed and debated in educational journals and books. Alabama's educational modernisers absorbed the key national concerns – particularly the need to make schooling relevant to rural students through vocationalism. In 1910, the Department of Education issued the *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama* which embraced the importance of rural life and culture. The aforementioned rural schools supervisor was appointed in 1911. These initiatives were a rare instance of national, state and local interests being in alignment.

A further topic covered in the sixth chapter was the level of complaint by traditionalists when, in 1903, the township was abolished as the basis for the school district.[5] County superintendents reported in no uncertain terms that, whilst redistricting might be an effective way of rationalising the rural school landscape, their constituents saw it as a diminution of the way their identity (their sense of place) was experienced, an incursion on their domain and a sign of creeping centralism. Modernisers were only partially successful with this reform. School districts were redrawn along more rational boundaries but the numbers of schools did not diminish in the short term and consolidation was a long time coming. In 1913, Alabama had 6,492 rural schools. Nearly 80 percent of these (5,184) had just one teacher and a further 16 percent of these (1,003) had only two. In 93 percent of

5. Pages 231-235 of Chapter 6 cover the widespread and negative response to redistricting.

black rural schools there was only one teacher.[6]

The seventh chapter considered the role of calendric markers, holidays, ceremonies, rituals and games in school life. It described how, in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, the Department of Education devised a series of special observances to lift the gaze of local school students above and beyond their own communities to the county, the state and the nation. These assisted to establish the tenets of a state civil religion in which all Alabamians could share. A ritual year with multiple stations was married to the scholastic year and forms of Christian worship were utilised as a sort of accessible template for designing observance programs. In 1914/15, when William Francis Feagin scheduled four "Special Days" to draw attention to issues such as school improvement, good roads, better health, and better farming, he planned observance activities that would involve not only people directly associated with schools but also whole neighbourhoods. These Special Days required (and secured) the enthusiastic participation of local community members but their sponsorship by the state and their concern with state-wide issues (albeit with local relevance), meant they had the potential for diluting localism. This chapter discussed the function of school ceremonies and special occasions in the light of the theories of Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner and assessed whether they were rites of cultural solidarity or breaches of quotidian routine enabling participants to open themselves up to new ideas and future possibilities.

The interplay between traditionalists and modernising reformers was complicated by the operation of a dual schooling system based on race. White resistance at both the community and political level meant Alabama's black communities were never permitted to participate equally in either the educational system or in debates about its reform. The claims of black people on all the rights of citizenship - including public education - were only reluctantly acknowledged by whites after the Civil War and became increasingly resented after 1875. Much of this resentment stemmed from the alleged expenditure on black schools of white tax receipts. The eighth chapter described the aspirational nature of black localism and the hopes held by black people that schooling would be a means of uplift and societal inclusion. It discussed the black experience of public education and the valiant

6. Alabama State Department of Education, ***Annual Report, 1913***, 34.

efforts made by black leaders, teachers and communities to maintain schools and keep alive the idea of a schooling entitlement – particularly after 1891 when state funding was allocated on a discretionary rather than per capita basis. This chapter reviewed the eventual (yet circumscribed) assistance black schools received from northern philanthropists and the positive influence of the Jeanes teachers who worked as rural school supervisors. One way in which black communities differed from whites when it came to schooling was that, from 1901 – when they were effectively disenfranchised - they had no latent political strength with which they might exert influence on educational decision-making.

The ninth and last chapter brought the thesis to the point in 1915 when William Francis Feagin's fifteen bills concerning educational reform were submitted to the Legislature. One of these gave approval for a vote to be held for a constitutional amendment allowing further local taxation for schools by counties and districts. This chapter related how Feagin tirelessly campaigned in the years leading up to his submission and for the constitutional amendment afterwards. It described some of the fruits of his efforts and how his successes were based on an extraordinary personal commitment and extensive popular consultation and information sharing. This was his acknowledgement of the continuing desire by parents and communities to have some control over schooling and educational policy-making as well as his appreciation of the social and cultural context of schooling. Feagin's approach to achieving change was strategic negotiation and partnership rather than executive fiat.

Finally, what has been shown overall is that, between 1865 and the last decade of the nineteenth century, after an unsatisfactory experience with an imported and unaffordable educational model during the Reconstruction period, and long-term governmental inertia subsequently (a reaction to Reconstruction), Alabama's educational system was structured in a manner that devolved responsibility for its management and operation to parents, guardians and local communities. This structure happened to accord neatly with the longstanding practices of localism. In the years leading in to the twentieth century, various modernising interests became convinced that localism was a retardant to the reforms needed to fit schools to the needs of a society that was both developing an important industrial sector and requiring greater agricultural productivity. Accordingly, the public school and the

system of which it was a part, became the focus for their reformist zeal. Their efforts resulted in educational policy and decision-making being increasingly standardised and centralised. The modernisers were also successful in having legislation enacted to effect many regulatory reforms. Yet, because they tended to equate localism with backwardness and gave small credit to its intrinsic strengths (let alone any heroic qualities it might have), modernisers found that their change programs were often resented, resisted and/or only grudgingly accepted. They had their greatest success when they showed they were prepared to engage with local people, respond to their concerns, coax their gaze beyond their immediate neighbourhood, and involve them directly in educational reform – as did William Francis Feagin. Similarly, although Isaac W. Hill encountered a firestorm over redistricting in 1903, when he sponsored the initiation of school improvement associations in 1905, he put in train a process that aroused and mobilised community interest and created an environment more likely to be conducive to educational development.

Many features of a localised schooling system would linger in Alabama for a long time to come owing to the labour needs of farmers, to insufficient state funding and to the haphazard benefits conferred by local taxation.[7] They also lingered because of the pertinacity of cultural attitudes to education (that "ancient and persistent devotion"[8]), and to the expectations of parents and other traditionalists who wished to see their own identity, values and customs – the webs of significance and meaning within which their own lives were conducted and understood - safeguarded by and replicated in their children.

7. The dark side of such persistence was a continuing underperformance against national educational benchmarks. In 1917, 70 percent of Alabama's rural teachers held the two lowest grades of teaching certificates. In 1927 Alabama ranked 45th of 48 states in literacy and had the 7th highest rate of white illiteracy. Indicators of educational under-investment could be cited for a large part of the twentieth century and is still a matter being canvassed in the twenty-first century. Wayne Flynt, ***Alabama in the Twentieth Century (The Modern South)***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2004, 222-225.

8. Edgar W. Knight, ***Education in the United States***, 3rd rev. ed. New York, Greenwood Press, 1969, 563.

Glossary

A and M Colleges	Theses were "Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges" which provided post-secondary vocational and technical training – particularly that appropriate to employment in the farm sector.
Alabama Assembly	The 1819 Constitution of Alabama, created a General Assembly which included a House of Representatives and Senate, patterned after the U.S. Congress. The Assembly was charged with writing the laws of Alabama within the framework of the Alabama and U.S. Constitutions. After 1901 it was called the Legislature.
Big Mules	The colloquial term for owners and managers of big business firms and major industrial enterprises in Alabama – specifically in Birmingham.
Black Belt	The crescent-shaped sector of rich farmlands and cotton plantations stretching across about seventeen counties in the southern half of Alabama in which the black population was larger than the white.
Bourbons	The white Democrats who gained power in the election of 1874 and continued to dominate Alabama politics for the next century. Named after the aristocrats in France who tried to resurrect the *ancien regime* after the defeat of Napoleon. The term was used by their political opponents in a pejorative sense.
Carpetbaggers	Opportunistic Northerners who moved to the South after the Civil War for economic and political motives.
Common School	See Public School.

County-seat Elites	A term for the professional and governing middle-class in local politics often comprising bankers, merchants, land-owners, lawyers and doctors.
Courthouse Cliques	The politicians and their coteries that controlled the governing party in a particular county.
Educational Establishment	This is a collective term for professional educationists, elected educational office-holders and professional bodies such as the Alabama Educational Association, et cetera.
Educational Development	This means the expansion of and/or increased support for Alabama's publicly funded schooling system and associated matters.
Educational Reform	In this thesis this normally means the reorganisation of publicly funded schooling by legislative or regulatory means, the professionalisation of teaching and the implementation of a unified educational vision.
Freedmen	Slaves emancipated as a result of the American Civil War whose immediate needs were addressed by the Bureau for Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands established by the Federal Congress.
Legislature	See Alabama Assembly.
Mill-tax	A tax equal to one-thousandth of a dollar levied on a specified income source. (for example, for every $100 of assessed property value, a mill tax of 2.5 would be 25c).

New South	A term popularised by Henry W. Grady in 1886. It was used to denote "a new era of history" in which the South's ante-bellum identity, which rested on a slave-dependent agricultural economy had been replaced by an identity associated with a diversified industrial economy based on free labour. It soon became a slogan connoting a belief in progress, a hopeful nationalism and the abandonment of the ideals of a rural society.
Normal School	A non-degree granting teacher training institution or course of study to upgrade teacher skills (e.g. a "Summer Normal School") or subject option within a broader curriculum. The phrase *normal schools* is French in origin and has to do with the acquisition on the part of teachers of society's highest "norms" or ideals and standards of behaviour.
Old South	A term for the eleven states whose economies were largely agricultural and based on slave labour and whose governments seceded from the Union in 1861 to form the Confederate States of America thus precipitating the Civil War. The term is richly freighted with stereotypes of plantation life and leisure, and white paternalism towards Negro slaves.
Progressivism	A "movement" of activists who were concerned around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century with a range of social justice issues. These included but were not limited to convict leasing, prohibition, educational reform, women's suffrage, care of the mentally ill and juvenile delinquents and the improvement of race relations.

Public Schools	In the first couple of decades after the Civil War, the meaning of the term "public schools" was not always uniformly agreed upon. For much of the nineteenth century schools supported with public funds were also described as "common" (meaning they were commonly accessible), "popular", "universal", "free" (meaning freely accessible rather than without charge) as well as "public" schools. The term "public schools" will be used herein as a synonym for non-tertiary schools principally supported from governmental funds. After 1907 when provision was made by the State for county high schools the common school started to become an elementary school only.
Range	See "Township."
Redeemers	Another term for the dominant Democrat members of the post-Reconstruction Southern legislatures, – often used inter-changeably with "Bourbons." There was a conscious religious connotation associated with the name "Redeemer." After regaining political power in 1874 these white (often former Confederate) Democratic and Conservative Party members claimed to be "redeeming" Alabama after the suffering of the Civil War and Reconstruction.
Scalawags	Local Alabamians who became members of the Republican Party after the Civil War and were regarded as complicit in the Northern directed Reconstruction of the State.
Sixteenth Section	See "Township."

Township	A "township" is a measured area of approximately thirty-six square miles but, due to the convergence of meridians and other factors, no township is exactly six miles square. Rows of townships are surveyed east and west along the baseline and a row is called a "tier." Tiers are numbered north and south from the baseline. A row of townships extending north and south is called a "Range." Ranges are numbered east and west from the principal meridian. Each township has thirty-six numbered "sections" of one square mile or 640 acres each. Congress stipulated that the sixteenth section of each township be reserved for the "maintenance" of public schools and this provision became part of all subsequent legislation admitting states to the Union. Income from the sale or lease of the sixteenth section lands was intended to fund public schools on a permanent basis. The township was, until 1903, the basis for defining the rural school district.
Wiregrass Country	This is the south-eastern area of Alabama whose name derives from the type of grass that grew on the floor of its once thick forests. Eight counties are generally either designated as "Wiregrass Country" or have wiregrass areas.

Abbreviations

ACLC	Alabama Child Labor Committee
ADAH	Alabama Department of Archives and History
AEA	Alabama Educational Association*
AFWC	Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs
AMA	American Missionary Association
ASTA	Alabama State Teachers' Association
AFWC	Alabama Federated Women's Clubs
GEB	General Education Board
NEA	National Education Association
SEB	Southern Education Board
UCWO	Union Committee of Women's Organization
UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

* The Alabama Educational Association became the Alabama Education Association in 1921.

Notes on Spelling and Other Style Conventions

1. As an Australian thesis, the spelling used throughout this document accords with standard Australian English **except** where quotations are being made from American material. Thus words such as *practice, labour, organisation, centre, colour,* etc. will be so spelled if they occur in the general text. If such words occur in quoted material, the original spelling will be used - for example, *practise, labor, organization, center, color,* et cetera.

2. Information in the thesis on distance, length, quantity, area, et cetera will usually be given in metric measure (kilometres, millimetres, hectares, litres) with a bracketed imperial equivalent if relevant. An exception applies to the land survey (and school district) unit of the "township" - an area of thirty-six square miles comprising 36 numbered "sections" of 640 acres. As an American survey term it has a logic, precision and historical significance that would be eroded if converted. Any direct quotation containing some measurement remains unchanged.

3. The problematic decision of how best to identify Alabamian citizens of African descent has been resolved as follows. Within the text itself, the adjective "black" has been used to describe schools, teachers, journals, institutes, educational programs, et cetera which were associated exclusively with the community now (2008) generally termed "African-American." Being neither contemporaneous nor particularly helpful to the topic, the descriptor "African-American," has been used only rarely. Other terms used in context are "former (or ex-) slaves" and "freedmen." Where the term *colored* is used (in the context of contemporary circumstances) – quotations marks will indicate the writer's awareness of the condescension now implicit in the term. Having always been an offensive and pejorative term, the word *nigger* will only appear in the text if part of a quotation. For most of the period under review the identifier used by those who considered themselves to be educated and progressive was *Negro.* When this term occurs it will not be specially indicated with quotation marks.

4. The bibliography, footnotes and style (for example on capitalisation of titles, et cetera) all generally accord with ***The Chicago Manual of Style***, 15th Edition, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

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