Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century saw an accelerating expansion of public education throughout much of the Western world. In a Europe whose map was being redrawn by national rivalries and imperial ambitions, public schools served to integrate diverse ethnicities and regional groups into a single nationality based on secular principles. Consequently, they were centrally administered according to the prevailing ethos of the state.[1] In the United States at the same time, the expansion of public education was similarly rapid but, perhaps surprisingly when the American Civil War (1861-1865) had been fought and won to determine where nationhood (and therefore sovereignty) lay, the character of its development and subsequent control took a very different and multifarious course. In Alabama, as elsewhere in the South, the socialisation of the young had always been regarded as primarily a parental and community matter; the idea that the state might have a legitimate role in the instruction of children was regarded with cautious scepticism if not bristling opposition.[2] The tradition survived the war.

Between December 1819 when Alabama was admitted to the Union, and February 1854 when the first comprehensive school law establishing a state-wide system of common schools was passed,[3] the educational enactments of Alabama's General Assembly were exceedingly modest – barely enough to give substance to the constitutional piety that "schools and the means of education, shall be forever encouraged in this state."[4] Prior to 1854, legislative action was mostly restricted to the chartering of fee-charging private academies (or "institutes" or "seminaries"). Community schools came into existence at local initiative; they survived at local pleasure. Educational policy was the province of elected school district trustees while township commissioners managed the problematic federal endowment of school lands and the funds derived from their lease and sale.[5] The trustees were responsible to their electors (their neighbours) and to patrons (chiefly parents) for building schoolhouses, employing teachers, choosing texts, prescribing

1. R. Freeman Butts, ***A Cultural History of Western Education: its social and intellectual foundations***, New York, McGraw Hill, 1955, 338.

2. Some of the objections to state control were voiced in the legislature by those opposing the School Law of 1854. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 62-63.

3. School Law of 1854 in ***Alabama Acts***, 4th Biennial session, 1853-1854.

4. Alabama State Constitution of 1819, Article VI.

5. See pages 168-172 of Chapter 5 regarding federal land provisions including the provision that the sixteenth section of each "township" should be for the benefit of education. See Glossary for definitions of "township" and "sixteenth section."

the curriculum, determining tuition fees (and the circumstances under which these might be waived) and operating the schools. According to the educational historian Edgar W. Knight, this model of schooling inspired "an ancient and persistent devotion to and confidence in localism in education."[6]

The statute of February 1854 which established the state public schooling system was the product of a new political milieu. It was sponsored by legislators who were impressed by the economic outcomes attributable to "the advancement of popular instruction" in New England whose states had, "despite every disadvantage of climate and soil, been the most successful in all the arts, comforts, conveniences, securities, and other excellences of a social and political character."[7] The general populace – largely Jacksonian in sentiment - may have detected the patronising scent of *noblesse oblige* attending the law's introduction; there was little indication that, outside the legislature, it was either actively supported or much appreciated.[8] Nevertheless, the first state superintendent appointed under the Act, the enterprising William F. Perry, set to work to realise its objectives. In 1855 he carried out a review to determine what was needed to implement a state-wide system.

Perry found too often that unless a community "happened to be blessed with public-spirited citizens" or teachers with "the power of personal magnetism" that educational provisions in whole blocks of counties were "wretched" and hundreds of townships could "scarcely boast of a single pleasantly located, comfortable schoolhouse." He decided it would be best to "begin at the bottom and build up, rather than make a vain attempt to begin at the top and build down." Perry's account of what he termed "the genesis of public education in Alabama" provides an early example of the hegemonic impulse of the knowledgeable professional or reformer bureaucrat in tension with an existing cultural tradition of independent,

6. Edgar W. Knight, ***Education in the United States***, 3rd rev. ed. New York, Greenwood Press, 1969, 563. Knight was not writing about Alabama in particular but about rural schools in general and their conduct and governance all over the United States.

7. Address by Alexander Beaufort Meek (from Mobile County) to Alabama's General Assembly in 1853. Alabama ***House Journal***, 4th biennial session, 1853-1854, 303-12. Meek was head of the education committee that drafted the school bill. He had also presided over the development of Mobile's public school system which was a sort of precursor to and prototype for the state system.

8. "Jacksonian" as in the egalitarian values associated with President Andrew Jackson. For a discussion of the motives and political interests of the sponsors of the school bill see J. Mills Thornton, ***Politics and Power in a Slave Society***, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1978, 300-05.

local decision-making which often rendered the reformer impotent.[9] When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, Perry's successor was still struggling to establish the system envisaged by the 1854 legislation. After the war it was pretty much necessary to start over, but the turmoil and uncertainty of the times weighed in favour of localism – the inwardly focused tradition of community self-reliance that had confronted Perry. This tradition had germinated in necessity and flowered in the isolation experienced by Alabama's early nineteenth century pioneers; it was deeply rooted.

Before proceeding any further with this introductory chapter, a definition of "public schools" should be given in order to delimit the scope of the term and avoid confusion later. From 1854 onwards, public schools were those provided for by successive statutes entitled *To organize and regulate a system of public instruction for the State of Alabama.* They were significantly supported from public funds even if (except during part of the postbellum Reconstruction period) such funds might be supplemented with parental tuition fees and other moneys. In accordance with the ideas of the hugely influential Massachusetts educator, Horace Mann (1796-1859), the schools were conceived as "common schools" – schools whose educational purpose was common to all and could be commonly attended by anyone between (initially) the ages of five and eighteen years regardless of class, religion, or gender (but not race).[10] Furthermore, the schools were to be a common resource of the communities they served and by whom they would be controlled. Public schools are sometimes referred to by various other terms in source material including "free schools," "free public literary schools," "county schools," "community schools," "township schools," "district schools," "municipal schools," and, (after 1907) occasionally as "elementary schools" – but not "state schools" which was a term applied to various other institutions.[11] Over time, state funds were also used

9. William F. Perry, "The Genesis of Public Education in Alabama." ***Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*** 2 (1898): 14-27.

10. Alexander Beaufort Meek was clear that the common school concept was necessary for the "protection and safety" of the state. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 59. After 1875 the age-band of eligibility for public school attendance was changed to between seven and twenty-one years. The *de facto* racial segregation of public schools after the Civil War was made an explicit constitutional requirement in 1875.

11. In his *Biennial Report* for the years ending September 30, 1903 and 1904, Isaac W. Hill, state superintendent of education, uses the collective term "State Schools" to describe the University of Alabama, the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the Normal Schools, the Girls' Industrial School and the nine District Agricultural Schools. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report of the Department of Education of the State of Alabama for the Scholastic Years September 30, 1903 and 1904,*** by Isaac W. Hill, Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, The Rogers Printing Company, 1905, 12-13.

to support normal schools, agricultural schools, county high schools, tertiary colleges and universities, but these other public educational institutions lie outside the scope of this thesis. As well, because even as late as 1910 nearly 83 percent of Alabama's population was rural and nearly 67 percent of all people over nine years of age were directly involved in agriculture, this thesis is *principally* concerned with rural schools or those in towns with fewer than about 8,000 people.[12]

In the half century following the Civil War, successive superintendents of education in Alabama oversaw the growth of a public schooling system that was first envisaged by the 1854 legislation. Bit by bit (but largely after about 1899) this system accrued features such as properly accredited teachers, a standard core curriculum, uniform text-books, lengthened terms, graded classrooms, better buildings and equipment, and so on. However, this thesis will show that the strong cultural traditions of localism - including self-reliance, autonomous community decision-making, and a cluster of ideas about education, parental rights and the socialisation of children – were pervasive and persistent influences on the development of Alabama's public schools. Reformers, even those armed with the authority of the state, were bound to respect and engage these traditions if they wished to succeed. Hence localism contributed to the agenda for educational reform and the terms of discourse within the educational polity. Upon the basis of this contention it will be argued in this thesis that, between 1865 and 1915, Alabama's public schooling system was shaped not by legislation and bureaucratic direction alone but also by an evolving cultural dialectic between (chiefly) rural traditionalists on the one hand and urban modernisers on the other during which, at times, there was mutual accommodation.

Despite being readily intelligible in everyday speech, words such as *localism, culture* and *community* have multiple meanings in the social sciences. In approaching a fuller understanding of these inter-twined concepts in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Alabama, the work of both classic and contemporary sociologists and anthropologists/ethnographers such as Anthony P. Cohen, Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Robert Redfield and Victor Turner (and the historians whose

12. 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. This provides information on population demographics and economic data.

research they have influenced) has proved useful (even if this choice of authorities may appear somewhat eclectic, and the theory drawn from their work rather diffuse).[13] One definition of *localism* that can be derived from their writings is "an attribution of value by a community to its own ways of doing things – to traditions developed for the community's own circumstances, maintained for their pragmatic value and cherished for their role in the community's culture." Also relevant is Clifford Geertz's metaphoric concept of culture – as the intricate "webs of significance" people spin for themselves and in which they are suspended. These webs are the interconnected meanings that inform the processes of daily life and are often encoded in specific behaviours or in symbolic forms such as ceremonies, rites and rituals, and the value attached or reverence shown to certain artefacts.[14]

A contemporary historian of Southern education, William A. Link, whose research will be discussed below, has defined localism as "the primary mode of social organisation in the decentralised world of nineteenth century America" characterised "by geographical proximity and reinforced by ties of wealth, kin, church and race."[15] Even if a perfectly sound description of a community social structure, this definition implies localism was necessarily a concomitant of such a structure. It is probably safer to say that localism was a product of community (usually rural) social structures – an outcome of a developed consciousness of "blood and belonging"[16] and the way identity was experienced.

Other uses of *localism* with a bearing on the topic include an antonym for *centralism*, and/or *modernisation*, and/or as a remedy for culturally destructive outside influences. Localism can also be represented variously as backward, romantic, or heroic. Not infrequently the word is used as a synonym for a type of grass roots

13. Anthony P. Cohen, ***The Symbolic Construction of Community***, London, Ellis Horwood Limited, Chichester and Tavistock Publications Limited, 1985; Emile Durkheim, ***The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life***, trans. Joseph Ward Swain, New York, The Free Press, 1965 [1915]; Clifford Geertz, ***The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays***, New York, Basic Books, 1973; Victor Turner, ***The Anthropology of Performance***, New York, PAJ Publications, 1992, 3rd Edition. See also Richard R. Beeman, "The New Social History and the Search for "Community" in Colonial America." ***American Quarterly*** 29, (Autumn 1977): 422-43.

14. The definition given is not a quotation but a composite of notions drawn from the work of the writers cited above. Geertz's metaphor originated with Max Weber. Geertz took the webs to be culture and cultural analysis to be a matter of interpreting their meanings. Geertz, ***The Interpretation of Cultures***, 5.

15. 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, Page x of Preface.

16. "Blood and Belonging" is the title of a BBC series by Michael Ignatieff about cultural identity and nationalism. Anthony P. Cohen explores localism as a matter of "belonging" or self-defined identity in ***Belonging: identity and social organisation in British rural culture***, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1982, 1-17.

democracy – an idea with a venerable lineage. In 1835 the French observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, commented in his now classic work, *Democracy in America*, that local independence was "the mainspring and lifeblood of American freedom."[17] Yet in the accounts of Southern educational reform produced during the first half of the twentieth century (by the reformers themselves and the heirs to their legacy), localism received a mixed report. Writing about the public schooling system of North Carolina, one observer stated approvingly that it "stood on a foundation of home rule and self-government."[18] In 1929 Edgar W. Knight represented localism as a blight. He tut-tutted that "the old district system, . . . still commends itself to wide popular approval because of the deep democratic color it is supposed to wear."[19]

Beyond the definitions given above, localism implies both an attachment to a specific place or regional area and, as well, participation in its social life and often its administrative and/or political affairs (de Tocqueville's idea of American democracy). In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Alabama, the place of attachment was most commonly a farming neighbourhood centred on a hamlet or village containing a store, one or more churches, a few dwelling houses and possibly a school, a railroad station or an inn. This place could also be a small town with an industrial enterprise such as a cotton mill and/or an emerging civic identity though mostly still dependent on the surrounding district for its existence. The inhabitants of this place of attachment were variously connected and comprised its community. Their interlocking relationships were those of family, kinship, friendship, religious affiliation, cultural origin, economic interest, occupation, shared idioms, moral outlook or any combination of these. A community might reveal a range of internal splits along lines of class, caste, religious denomination and/or political allegiance, et cetera, without being compromised as an entity. Communities were always very clear about their own identity and were conscious of their actual and/or notional boundaries, - their embedded social and spatial

17. Alexis de Tocqueville, ***Democracy in America***, Vol I, New York, Vintage Books, 1990 [1840], 40.

18. Unidentified writer quoted by James Leloudis in ***Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 6. N.B. "Home Rule" in this context means local decision-making or county (not state) governance.

19. Knight, ***Education in the United States***, 563. - But the wheel turns: in many of the debates about 21st century educational policy, participants depict local control of public schools as inherently good and implicitly democratic. On May 9, 2000, Senator Jeff Sessions (R) Alabama said in the US Senate (in connection with national school testing) ". . . a federal law that is absolutely undermining the ability of local school systems to educate. . . . I do not believe in a federal test. . . . I do not believe in that. I think that would be against our history. It would be against the policy of this nation since its founding because schools have been a state and local instrumentality. . . ."

distinctiveness. They were able quickly to spot "otherness" or who belonged and who did not. A man whose family had farmed for several generations at Fayetteville in Talladega County recalled: "You could always tell when somebody was a native because, if they are, it's always called 'Fedville' and we were natives so we called it Fedville."[20]

For most of the period under review, Alabama's farms and plantations were often widely dispersed and the state's county structure was able to give multiple neighbourhoods a sense of cohesiveness or a larger community identity. The county was, in some ways, an expanded version of the smaller communities from which it was composed. It might be distinguished by the nature of its agriculture or other primary industry, by its secondary industry, its racial or ethnic mix and the historical pattern of its development.[21] Newspapers with a county readership both represented and cultivated this sense of identity and cohesion. In a 1903 item about a teacher who had been appointed to a local township school but lived outside the county, the editor of *The Mountain Eagle* asked: "Why can't some more of Walker County boys prepare to teach and keep this money *here at home*?[22] On another occasion he reported from the Jacksonville State Normal School: "There are several boys and girls here from Walker – as is usually the case. Walker is pretty well represented in all good things."[23]

The county seat was the town with the county courthouse from which local government was conducted. This was consequently a focus for trade, commerce and social life. The county superintendent of education operated from the courthouse and many of the schooling issues that could not be resolved at the school district level converged on this officer.

20. Robert C. McMath Jr describes some of the issues involved in studying southern communities in his essay "Community, Region and Hegemony" in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr, eds., ***Toward a New South?: studies in post-Civil War Southern communities***, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1982, 281-295. Regarding the pronunciation of Fayetteville see recorded oral history from Tom Roberson in J. Mack Lofton, ***Voices from Alabama: a twentieth century mosaic***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 198. Roberson was a child in the 1920s and '30s but his family had been in Alabama since the nineteenth century.

21. Charles Johnson and Assocs. ***Statistical Atlas of the Southern Counties: listing and analysis of socio-economic indices of 1104 southern counties***, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1941, 1-4. Johnson conducted a seminal sociological study of the South in the 1930s showing the correlation between a county's agricultural and economic profile, and a range of sociological factors. The findings held across the Southern states.

22. ***The Mountain Eagle***, November 4, 1903. [Italics added].

23. ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 13, 1909.

Implicit in localism is the self-protective notion of *domain* or an inviolable boundary that encapsulates the identity of the community and its interaction with other entities. This is a defensive posture which operates on a number of levels. At the local level it is based on the belief that legitimate spheres of community influence are discrete; the intervention (or interference) of outsiders is unwarranted and possibly an infringement on their divinely ordained liberty.[24] Such intervention is particularly unwelcome when its source is a prescriptive government. Localism is not necessarily inconsistent with external governance or hierarchical control but such control has to have the imprimatur of community approval or operate under strict constraints lest it become tyrannical. More broadly, a sense of domain might encompass a suspicion of the rural community for the urban, the county for the state, the state government for federal authority, and the South for the North.

Studies of the development of Alabama's public schooling system in the half-century following the Civil War can be roughly categorised in three inter-related (sometimes over-lapping) but fairly distinct ways. One category is local history – both general and educational. County and other locally focused histories usually have entries on schools and schooling. Such a one is *History of Escambia County, Alabama* by Annie Crook Waters. Other local historians have written specifically about schools and/or teachers and/or students of a particular county, city, town or village within Alabama. Local educational histories are often (though certainly not always) non-scholarly, affectionate accounts written for a vested readership by enthusiasts such as (for example) Mrs Frank Ross Stewart and Lorene LeCroy.[25] Such histories tend to interpret the past through a lens of nostalgia but incorporate personal reminiscences as well as other information that can usefully illuminate the world of the district school. Though full of human actors these accounts are short on much analysis or structural interpretation.

A second category is concerned with the relationship between schooling and the

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24. "Divinely ordained liberty" – this is the idea developed from the American Declaration of Independence that "all men are .... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, *Liberty* and the pursuit of Happiness."

25. Annie Crook Waters, ***History of Escambia County, Alabama***, Huntsville, Strode Publishers, 1983; Mrs Frank Ross Stewart, ***The History of Education in Cherokee County, Alabama***, Centre, Stewart University Press, 1981; Lorene LeCroy, ***Old Schools of Chilton County, Alabama***, Maplesville, Chilton County Historical Society, 1997.

struggles of the African-American community. Writers such as Horace Mann Bond, Irving Gershenburg and Robert Sherer have examined issues including the black educational experience in Alabama following emancipation, the impact of the legislatively sanctioned fiscal strangulation of black schools, the effects of disenfranchisement on the ability of black citizens to influence public education policy, and the motives of northern capitalist philanthropists.[26] Black history is not infrequently written from a neo-Marxist viewpoint which ascribes all racial injustice (including the inadequacy of spending on black schooling) to white economic interests. Although the role of prominent black educators is usually considered and evaluated in such histories, the experience of ordinary individuals is somewhat neglected.

A third category encompasses all academic or analytic writing about educational development in Alabama. Studies from each of these categories have informed this research but those of the greatest relevance will be reviewed in the following pages. Besides providing a sort of historiographical inventory of standard accounts and pertinent published and unpublished material, this discussion will supply a frame of reference for contrasting the contentions of this thesis.

The standard history of Alabamian education up to 1915 (and one that is still an authoritative source of factual data) was written in that year by Stephen Beauregard Weeks. Weeks was an officer of the federal Bureau of Education which had commissioned him to prepare a series of state educational histories. His *History of Public Education in Alabama* is a straightforward (yet not uncritical) story of early beginnings and subsequent legislative, regulatory and institutional change. No less than four state superintendents of education plus John Herbert Phillips, the long-time superintendent of Birmingham's school system, were direct sources for Weeks and, inevitably perhaps, his book is a bureaucrat's report of centralized system building and organisational accomplishment.[27] An unpublished doctoral dissertation written in 1993 by George Wade Prewett thoroughly and chronologically traces the emergence of a modern school system in Alabama

26. Horace Mann Bond, ***Negro Education in Alabama: a study in cotton and steel***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994 [1939]; Irving Gershenberg, "The Negro and the Development of White Public Education in the South: Alabama, 1880-1930." ***The Journal of Negro Education*** 39 (Winter 1970): 50-59; Robert Sherer, ***Black Education in Alabama, 1865-1901***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1997.

27. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***. Weeks' history built on an even earlier account - prepared in 1889 by Willis G. Clark. See Willis G. Clark, ***History of Education in Alabama, 1702-1889***, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1889.

between 1896 and 1939. Prewett's focus is on the improvements to enrolments, facilities, supervision and teacher training made possible by funding increases over this period. It is thus, in a way, a contemporary extension of Weeks' study.[28]

General histories of Alabama usually include sections on public education. Two such histories are the canonical *A History of Alabama and its People*[29] written by Albert Burton Moore in 1927 (but subsequently updated) and the comparatively recent *Alabama: the History of a Deep South State* co-authored in 1994 by four prominent Alabamian scholars, William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins and J. Wayne Flynt.[30] Both these works describe the development over time of coherence and professionalism in the public schooling system, including incremental legislative interventions, institutional growth and the eventual rationalization and articulation between elementary, secondary and tertiary schools and colleges. They do not address localism directly (that is not their purpose) but, although the agency of educationists and other reformers in shaping the public schooling system is stressed, no corresponding agency is attributed to communities. Economic factors (such as the insecurity of farm income, resistance to taxation and the costs of a dual schooling system based on race, et cetera) are acknowledged as determinants of significant systemic shortcomings and the pace of change but cultural factors (other than racial attitudes) are not mentioned in this connection.

Other historians have turned a focused gaze on a number of specific matters affecting the development of Alabama's public schooling system. Such a study is Ira Harvey's *A History of Educational Finance in Alabama, 1819-1970.*[31] Harvey's book reviews the sources of school finance from the time of Alabama's admission to the Union onwards and considers the complexities posed by the federal grant of sixteenth section lands for education, the ambitious but eventually empty plans to

28. George Wade Prewett, "The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1993.

29. Albert Burton Moore, ***A History of Alabama and its People in Three Volumes***, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama, 1951, 543-61 and 728-45.

30. William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins and J. Wayne Flynt, ***Alabama: the history of a Deep South state***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994, 254-257, 323-325, 328-330, 363 and 378.

31. Ira Harvey, ***A History of Educational Finance in Alabama, 1819-1970***, Auburn, Truman Pierce Institute for the Advancement of Teacher Education, 1989. Other information on school funding can be found in an unpublished thesis by Russell Stompler, "A History of the Financing of Public Schools in Alabama from Earliest Times." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1955.

fund the school system properly under the constitution of 1868, the retrenchments of the Bourbon[32] governments after 1874 in the cause of fiscal prudence, the struggle for an increased state appropriation, campaigns for local taxation, and the funds derived from northern philanthropy. Still, Harvey's study does not mention the sometimes Byzantine contrivances of communities seeking on their own behalf to identify or establish reliable revenue streams and/or to overcome state imposed limits on taxes. Occasionally such efforts created intra-community conflict when local public opinion was not unified on such matters – one instance being the use of liquor licence revenue.

From the end of Reconstruction onwards, Alabama was politically a one-party state and thus, while educational reform might be taken up by individual legislators of conviction (sometimes under external influence), it was unlikely ever to be an issue upon which an election's entire outcome might depend. The populist "revolt" of the 1890s – the Alabamian expression of a national agrarian insurgency against the prevailing economic power and privilege in America - appeared to pose a political threat to the Democratic and Conservative Party's total dominance. Ultimately however, the revolt was unsuccessful. The ructions caused by Populism have been researched by several historians such as Gerald H. Gaither, Lawrence Goodwin, William Warren Rogers and Samuel Webb, but the way in which Populism's legacy of political suspicion at the neighbourhood level affected attitudes to educational officers and school trustees has not.[33] Evidence of this suspicion located in the superintendent of education's correspondence files will be put forward to indicate the importance of local factional politics in respect of educational appointees.

At the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, localism came under attack from professional educationists, activists (sometimes from an urban elite) and others possessing a reformist zeal that was directed at a range of social policy concerns in the name of "Progressivism." The reformers were knowledgeable about changing educational philosophies and were aware of new

32. See Glossary for a definition of "Bourbons" and "Redeemers." The policies of the Bourbon governments will be discussed in Chapter 1.

33. Gerald H. Gaither, ***Blacks and the Populist Revolt: ballots and bigotry in the "New South,"*** Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1977; Lawrence Goodwyn, ***The Populist Moment: a short history of the agrarian revolt in America***, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978; William Ward Rogers, ***One-Gallused Rebellion: agrarianism in Alabama, 1865-1896***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2001; Samuel L. Webb, ***Two-Party Politics in the One-Party South: Alabama's hill country, 1874-1920***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1997.

theories regarding the function of the school.[34] They believed the school curriculum should be broadened to include concerns for health, vocation and the quality of family and community life.[35] The perceived need for educational "modernisation" was a cause taken up by people who were often outside the realm of politics and were not part of the educational establishment. While much has been written about the modernising reformers themselves, their crusades and the policy changes these stimulated, less has been written about the responses to their school policies and programs once these started to be implemented.[36] Yet this is where the cultural dialectic comes sharply into focus. The reformers approached their task convinced that familiar social arrangements and/or cultural traditions were often problems in need of solution. Their opinions were anathema to resourceful, mainly rural, communities who were not inclined to receive assumptions about their inadequacies or incompetence without demur.

There are other omissions in the historiography of Alabamian education that warrant further investigation in the context of the thesis topic. For example, although anecdotes about the experiences of teachers are sometimes recorded in local histories, the full extent of their role is deserving of expanded attention because, being agents of both continuity and change, teachers were pivotal in the shaping of the public schooling system. They were expected to respond successfully to the needs of their multiple constituencies - pupils, parents, trustees, office-holders and so on - and yet they were often transients, their preparation and training was inadequate, their professional survival was tenuous and their rewards were paltry.

During a large part of the period under review, textbooks dominated what students

34. For a review of Progressivism in Alabama, see Shirley Garrett Schoonover, "Alabama's Quest for Social Justice During the Progressive Era." Master's thesis, Auburn University, 1970; Sheldon Hackney, ***Populism to Progressivism in Alabama***, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969. For accounts of Southern Progressivism see Dewey W. Grantham, ***Southern Progressivism: the reconciliation of progress and tradition***, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1983; William A. Link, ***The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992; and/or Hugh C. Bailey, ***Liberalism in the New South: Southern social reformers and the Progressive Movement***, Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1969.

35. This was the era of the development of novel theories of education and learning based on psychology and social philosophy. Some of the luminaries who had profoundly affected educational thinking were William James (1842-1910), Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949) and John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey was a one-time editor of ***The School Journal*** and believed that "education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform."

36. For example, Hugh Bailey, ***Edgar Gardner Murphy: gentle progressive***, Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1968; Anne Gary Pannell and Dorothea E. Wyatt, ***Julia S. Tutwiler and Social Progress in Alabama***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2004; Jessie Pearl Rice, ***J.L.M. Curry: Southerner, Statesman and Educator***, New York, King's Crown Press, 1949; Charles Eugene Millar, "The Contributions of William Francis Feagin to Education in Alabama." Ed.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1963.

learned in Alabama's classrooms and determined not only the pedagogical method and curriculum but often the facts learned in most subjects. An early contretemps in 1868 over some objectionable readers and histories that were allegedly full of Abolitionist sentiment and "un-Southern" social values was recounted by Walter L. Fleming in *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*.[37] Otherwise, apart from some studies of the ubiquitous McGuffey readers (for example, Richard Mosier's *Making The American Mind: social and moral ideas in the McGuffey Readers*[38] which reviews the secular ethic of these readers) and Noah Webster's spelling book (for example, E. Jennifer Monaghan's *A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's blue-back speller*),[39] the many other texts prescribed for Alabama's schools (particularly histories and geographies) have been ignored with respect to the values they contained and whether these were culturally confirming or at variance with local mores.

Considering Alabama's diverse geographic character, the significance of the county as the fundamental unit of socio-political influence in Alabamian life and the decentralised structure of the school system, relatively little scholarly interest has been shown in the extent to which educational reform was subject to variation across the state (the inevitable result of a localised system). Similarly, those aspects of the schooling system which remained impervious to central bureaucratic control have been little explored. This can also be said of the extent to which state officials extended latitude or reached some sort of rapprochement with county and municipal school authorities in order to accommodate the reality of local power and circumstances in both rural and urban schools.

One writer who has written about Alabama's educational history in the context of localism is David Mathews.[40] His book *Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools?* is chiefly about the development of schooling in antebellum Alabama - particularly in six south-west counties. Mathews posits that the schools of this era

37. Walter L. Fleming, ***Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama***, Spartanburg, Reprint Co., 1978, [1905], 623-624.

38. Richard Mosier, ***Making The American Mind: Social And Moral Ideas In The McGuffey Readers***, New York, Russell and Russell, 1965.

39. E. Jennifer Monaghan, ***A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's blue-back speller***, Hampden, Archon Books, 1983.

40. David Mathews, ***Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools? What Early Communities Have to Tell Us***, Montgomery, New South Books, 2003.

belonged to the public (when "public" and "community" meant much the same thing). He demonstrates that the involvement of local communities was historically important to the success of Alabama's first public schooling arrangements and suggests such localism might provide a remedy for the dysfunction he discerns and laments in twenty-first century public education.

Whilst Mathews' book is soundly researched and documented, it has a polemical objective. It is underpinned by a strong belief that the creeping centralization of educational policy-making – particularly after 1854 – eclipsed the role of the community as the leading force in education, diminished the collective capacity it had once demonstrated and led to a growing detachment of citizen interest and involvement in the public schools. Mathews does not acknowledge much continuing importance for localised decision-making after the Civil War. He may also underplay the limited reach of the antebellum schools, the inconsistent fashion in which they operated and the disdain which they sometimes attracted - it being prevalent opinion that a quality education was something to be purchased in private schools by those who needed it (and could pay for it).

Another study with relevance to this thesis is a lengthy case-history of schooling and education in Alabama's Butler County by Patricia Albjerg Graham.[41] This is one of four such case-histories within her *Community and Class in American Education, 1865-1918*. It is not so much an analysis of localism in this south-central piney woods area as it is a review of how educational change and development in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Alabama played out in a single county. While her research is thorough, Graham is perhaps incautious in implying that Butler was representative of conditions across the whole state.

At the close of the Civil War (and for all of the period under review) Alabama was almost exclusively a rural state dotted with villages, small towns and a couple of modestly sized cities but the urban dimension was growing in significance. In *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921,* Carl V. Harris documents the growth of Birmingham from the 1870s, when it was first founded, to the 1920s.[42] By then it

41. Patricia Graham, ***Community and Class in American Education, 1865-1918***, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, 117-41.

42. Carl V. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921***, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1977. See also by the same author, "Stability and Change in Discrimination Against Black Public Schools: Birmingham, Alabama, 1871-1931." ***The Journal of Southern History*** 51 (August 1985): 375-416.

had become one of the South's pre-eminent and diverse commercial and industrial centres - boosted by assorted coal, iron and steel entrepreneurs ("Big Mules"), real estate speculators and railroad magnates. An influential early sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, characterised emergent urban centres as being in a state of transition between *gemeinschaft* – an organic community characterised by family, neighbourhood, intimacy, close contact and stability – and *gesellschaft* - a mechanistic society in which relationships are discontinuous and there is more role specificity.[43] As Harris carefully traces the development of Birmingham it is possible to see this type of transition in train and, in a chapter on education, Harris reports on competing attitudes to public schooling by various city power blocs and/or interest groups. His chapter is an account of a multi-faceted urban localism which had a different character and value system from its rural counterpart but exhibited some of the same self-protective and/or self-interested qualities.

Leaving aside the historiography of Alabamian education to consider that of other Southern states where the role of localism was also a critical factor in the shaping of educational attitudes and traditions, two studies are particularly relevant to the thesis topic. These are both concerned with aspects of localism and their impact on schooling and on the overall development of educational systems in Virginia and North Carolina respectively.

The aforementioned William A. Link's *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: schooling, society and reform in rural Virginia, 1870-1920* probes the influence of localism on Virginia's rural schools - how they were governed, the experiences of teachers and pupils and the impact of community control on the process of schooling.[44] Link provides many examples of how rural schools accommodated the needs of their constituencies – but does not show where these were overridden in order to meet more universal concerns about schooling. Link's book is impressive but, in a system driven by local demands, (he attributes to localism the motive force on which the expansion of schooling in Virginia depended) he might have found greater variation across the state. Instead he claims that Virginia's experience can be regarded as representative of the South's experience overall - if not the greater part of rural

43. Ferdinand Tönnies, ***Community and Association (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)***, translated and supplemented by Charles P. Loomis, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, 37-41.

44. 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.

North America's. While there are many points of similarity between the circumstances of the two states, Alabama's experience was *sui generis*. An aspect of its own localism was, in part, a reaction to its experiences during Reconstruction.

James Leloudis' *Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* enquires into the wide-ranging social and psychological implications of the late nineteenth-century transition from the common school to the graded school. Such schools had an age-differentiated structure and professionally qualified teachers who prepared students to take their place in the so-called "New South."[45] Leloudis proposes that when North Carolina started this transition it was a critical juncture with far-reaching consequences for more than just educational reform. It was a metaphor for the state's overall rehabilitation and the bridge by which it moved from a plantation to a commercial economy based on wage labour, and to a society in which the customary relations of family and community started to be eclipsed by the primacy of self.[46] The importance of the age-graded school as a catalyst for educational reform may not have been quite as critical as Leloudis suggests. New ways of learning, examinations, report cards, standardised texts, new opportunities for women, improved teacher training and so on, were also affecting un-graded, one-room schools at this time. Yet Leloudis' book is valuable in constructing an ethnography of North Carolinian classrooms at the turn of the twentieth century and in deciphering their inner workings. He draws on the models and insights of anthropologists and sociologists to show how local schools were "tied to the rhythms of collective life." Leloudis' book and several of his sources suggested a method for examining some of the mores, traditions, folkways and overall beliefs that gave Alabamian localism its strength and vitality.[47]

The argument supporting the thesis topic will be developed upon the following plan. After first establishing the context for Alabama's public schooling system in the relevant period, the ways in which the system operated will then be explored.

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45. James Leloudis, ***Schooling the New South: pedagogy, self, and society in North Carolina, 1880-1920***, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

46. *Ibid.*, xii of Preface and 24-27.

47. *Ibid.*, 17 and 237. The sources referenced include Gary L. Anderson, "Critical Ethnography in Education: Origins, Current Status and New Directions." ***Review of Educational Research*** 59 (Fall 1989): 249-70, and Michael Apple, ***Ideology and Curriculum***, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

This will show how issues of "localism, community and domain" were inherent in or influenced different facets or elements of the system - for example, its structure, stakeholders, curriculum, funding, and so on. Evolving from this exploration is a description of how educational modernisers challenged longstanding practices and introduced changes to the system – and how their changes were received, ignored, modified or accommodated. The thesis topic is considered from multiple aspects in nine chapters as well as this introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter covers a number of inter-related sub-topics and employs a method of explication that draws on Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description."[48] This is description that seeks not only to build a detailed picture of educational localism in Alabama but also to establish its meaning, to describe its symbolic expression and to assess the underlying significance of statements made about (for example) schooling traditions. In this way localism can be comprehended and interpreted as an aspect of an authentic and robust culture. This method of explication makes copious use of illustrative examples drawn from material such as memoirs, letters, official reports and newspapers.

The first chapter provides necessary information for understanding the environment – geographic, regional, political, governmental and socio-economic - which furnished the conditions for localism in Alabama both before and after the Civil War. It shows how, even as this environment was altered with the expansion of railroad networks and a few areas of growing urbanization, localism persisted in a state which remained predominantly rural. It outlines the way in which public schooling was regarded in the war's aftermath, how communities responded to the establishment of black schools for former slaves, and how groups with differing interests reacted to the (Reconstruction) constitution of 1868 whose article on education was modelled on an Iowan prototype.[49] Also reviewed in this chapter is the impact on the public school system of the Democratic and Conservative Party's recovery of political power in 1874 and the Party's avowed determination to rid Alabama of outsider influence and fiscal extravagance.

Implicit in a *state* system of public schooling is the notion of a common educational objective expressed through a standard curriculum, an organisational structure

48. Geertz, ***The Interpretation of Cultures***, 6-10.

49. Alabama State Constitution of 1868, Article XI.

staffed with competent office-holders, and sufficient funds to ensure the system is operated with qualified teachers, purpose-specific buildings, appropriate equipment and other resources. The first chapter shows that, despite maintaining a commitment to *public* schooling, successive Bourbon governments were responsible for policies that weakened the role of the state and decentralised educational authority.[50] Commensurately these policies strengthened local influence and made communities themselves largely responsible for their own educational objectives until the end of the nineteenth century at which time Alabama's legislators started to be slightly more willing to invest in public education.

If the first chapter provides a broad context for the topic, the second demonstrates how Alabama's decentralised public schooling system was actually operated by those who were statutory officeholders, those who were local participants and those who had some type of vested interest in schooling. These included superintendents (with differing jurisdictions), trustees, patrons (parents and guardians), students, and those such as newspaper editors whose interests in schooling took a number of forms including civic activism.

The role of the teacher, community expectations about how this role should be performed, and the interaction of the teacher and community are subjects explored in the third chapter. Teachers were directly responsible to their employers (school trustees) and school patrons, but, from the latter part of the nineteenth century, they were also increasingly obligated to meet state prescribed standards of competence, to participate in development activities such as teachers' institutes (in-service training sessions), and to cultivate an awareness of being engaged in a profession rather than an occupation. At a time when teaching was becoming feminised and the traditional roles of women were undergoing change, independent young women often faced difficulties when the community on which their livelihood depended was unsympathetic to aspirations that differed from local norms. At the same time the state was setting stringent new certification standards. Such issues are canvassed here.

The fourth chapter considers the means by which the cultural tenets of localism

50. Allen Johnston Going, ***Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890***, 2nd ed. Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992. Chapters 1 and 5 of this book describe Bourbon actions in respect of state finances and general economic management. The Democratic and Conservative Party dropped the word "Conservative" from its title in 1906 to demonstrate it was by then more comfortable with a more progressive platform.

were confirmed and reproduced in the schools via the conduct of the schoolroom, pedagogy, textbooks and curricula. The chapter shows how these reflected parental attitudes, community moral values and a distinctly Southern viewpoint. It also shows how, after the state began to exert a stronger influence on public schooling by standardising curricula, the public schools helped to sustain the convictions upon which the rationale of the Southern caste system of racial segregation was elaborated. It also discusses the conflicts that occurred when the state decided to prescribe textbook uniformity – an action interpreted as unwarranted centralisation.

The fifth chapter demonstrates the resourcefulness of local communities acting on their own behalf to keep their schools going in spite of niggardly governmental investment and occasionally unreliable state revenue. Financial precariousness prompted improvisations, parental rescue plans, and novel taxation arrangements by municipal administrations. Some schemes resulted in litigation and others led to vigorous community disagreements - all of which are discussed here. Also considered is the nature of the interaction between state and county officials when the legislature did finally make more money available (or provided for local taxation) in the early twentieth century.

The sixth chapter considers early twentieth century "Progressivism" in relation to the shaping of public schooling. It looks into the role of civic activists (including socially concerned women) and the agencies that were collectively part of the "southern education movement." It explores how various interest groups, in a sort of symbiosis with state-paid educational office-holders and teachers, pursued a reform agenda on behalf of Alabama's public schools in the period between 1898 and 1915. The influence of the "country life movement" in "vitalizing" schools and school curricula is discussed together with the way rural children were introduced to ideas about better farming practices and "home economics" in order to improve rural productivity and domestic effectiveness. The chapter shows as well that, because reform initiatives were usually interpreted locally, there were frequently clashes of assumptions, priorities and realities at the county and neighbourhood level. The origins of school improvement associations are explained as are their interventions and the middle-class ideas they espoused. The contradictory and inconsistent quality of some of the reformers' attitudes and beliefs – especially their assumption of racial inequality - are matters canvassed. This chapter demonstrates

that while there were many improvements to the public schooling system in the early twentieth century - particularly under the administration of Governor Braxton Bragg Comer - things did not quite work out as hoped. It became clear – and this is at the centre of the argument of this thesis - that school modernisation could only be achieved successfully if reforms were consistent with the needs and wishes of the people at whom they were directed and the changes enjoyed widespread local as well as legislative support. Reformers really had no choice; school attendance was not yet compulsory, school districts had little money, county and municipal superintendents were generally unqualified and not firmly controlled by the state superintendent and the "Department of Education" had virtually no bureaucracy with which to coerce policy compliance.[51] Thus community acceptance was actually the only mechanism with which to accomplish reform.

Chapter Seven reviews some of the time-honoured observances of school life and their social and symbolic function in Alabama's rural communities and small towns. It also lists and discusses the calendrical, ceremonial and ritual inventions of the state in the early twentieth century which sometimes appropriated local practices and frequently used the culturally familiar forms of Protestant Christianity to engender in school students an awareness of their role as citizens of the state, region and nation. This was a non-contentious means of creating a climate of congruence between innovation and tradition while at the same time strengthening centralised power at the expense of localism. The actual programs created are reviewed in the context of studies of "civil religion" and the dynamics of ritual.

Following Reconstruction, black schools in Alabama (urban and rural) operated to some extent in much the same way as white schools – even if under much greater financial privation (particularly after 1891) and usually with less qualified teachers. Where issues were common to black and white schools, illustrative material drawn from the experiences of both races is included in the appropriate chapter. Yet, to the extent that Alabama's public schooling system was shaped (as is being contended) by a dialectical contest between (chiefly) traditional rural communities with a desire to retain local control of decisions affecting their own children and modernising urban reformers with a preference for a centralised and progressive educational

51. Between 1875 and 1899, the "Department of Education" comprised the state superintendent and a clerk. In 1902 the superintendent was assisted by just four clerical/administrative staff. Austin R. Meadows, ***History of the State Department of Education of Alabama***, 1854-1966, Montgomery, n.p. 1968, 7.

policy-making, the black community was outside the main contest arena. The schooling needs and wishes of black communities became even more marginal to Alabama's educational policy-makers after the adoption of a new state constitution in 1901 which disenfranchised black citizens and established white supremacy.[52] Those who sponsored the constitution thought it would enable Alabama to pursue a vigorous "New South" ideology of business oriented, efficient (centralised) government that would energize society to be forward-looking and no longer hampered by considerations of black political influence. The eighth chapter gives an account of the impact of legislative and constitutional change on black schooling in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It discusses the social and economic constraints on black communities which limited their agency in determining how their own schools might operate. It also describes the types of assistance programs that were funded by northern philanthropy and the nature of the curriculum often recommended for black students.

The ninth chapter summarises the status of Alabama's public schooling system in 1915 when fifteen bills concerning educational reform were approved by the legislature – including one providing for a vote on a constitutional amendment relating to local taxation. It relates how William Francis Feagin, the state superintendent, responded to the influence of localism as he led his campaign for wide-ranging legislative reform. It mentions some of the fruits of Feagin's efforts and how his legislative success was based in broad and popular consultation – an acknowledgement of the continuing desire for parental and community control in schooling and educational policy-making. The Conclusion summarises and synthesises the findings of all nine chapters in order to draw together the threads of the thesis contention and to provide an overall conclusion to the argument.

In order to undertake this research, primary source material – governmental records, contemporary newspapers, manuscripts and memoirs - held by Alabama's State Department of Archives and History (ADAH) and other depositories, was extensively reviewed.[53] In addition, a very broad range of secondary source

52. Alabama State Constitution of 1901. Article VIII (Suffrage and Elections).

53. Unfortunately, the records of individual schools and (for example) the minutes of trustee meetings and/or county board of education meetings during most of the thesis period are not extant.

material – books, essays, journal articles, monographs, unpublished dissertations - on topics with any bearing on the subject was considered and evaluated. The ADAH newspaper holdings were a particularly useful source of data. In the period under review most towns of any size had a weekly newspaper; some had a daily paper. Editors were firmly aspirational in deciding that good schools would confer civic benefits on their communities but anything to do with local schools or broader educational matters was usually grist for the journalistic mill. Reading every edition of a local paper over a continuous number of consecutive years allows the local world of several towns and the *dramatis personae* of superintendents, school principals, teachers and parents to become very familiar. Yet, because the educational coverage of some newspapers was frustratingly inconsistent whilst other papers had an item in almost every edition, three newspapers from representative areas of the state have been relied on (though certainly not exclusively) to provide some continuity in the illustrative examples used to support the topics reviewed. These papers are *The Mountain Eagle*, *The Troy Messenger* and the *Wilcox Progress/The Wilcox Progressive Era.*[54]

The Mountain Eagle was published at Jasper, the county seat of Walker County - a northerly area of minerals and mines as well as farming districts. This paper regularly reprinted articles of interest from other major Alabamian newspapers such as the *Birmingham Age-Herald*. *The Troy Messenger* was published at Troy in south-eastern Pike County – an agricultural area and trading point for the counties of the "Wiregrass Country."[55] In the 1880s a normal school was established at Troy making the city something of an educational centre. The *Wilcox Progress/The Wilcox Progressive Era* was published at Camden, the county seat of Wilcox County in the Black Belt. The main economic activity in Wilcox was cotton production and its population was predominately black. A newspaper with state-wide importance was the *Montgomery (Daily) Advertiser* – published in the state's capital city. Owing to its thorough coverage of political debates in Alabama's House of Representatives and Senate proceedings, it was consulted in order to amplify the official legislative journals.

Whilst the correspondence files of Alabama's state superintendent of education are

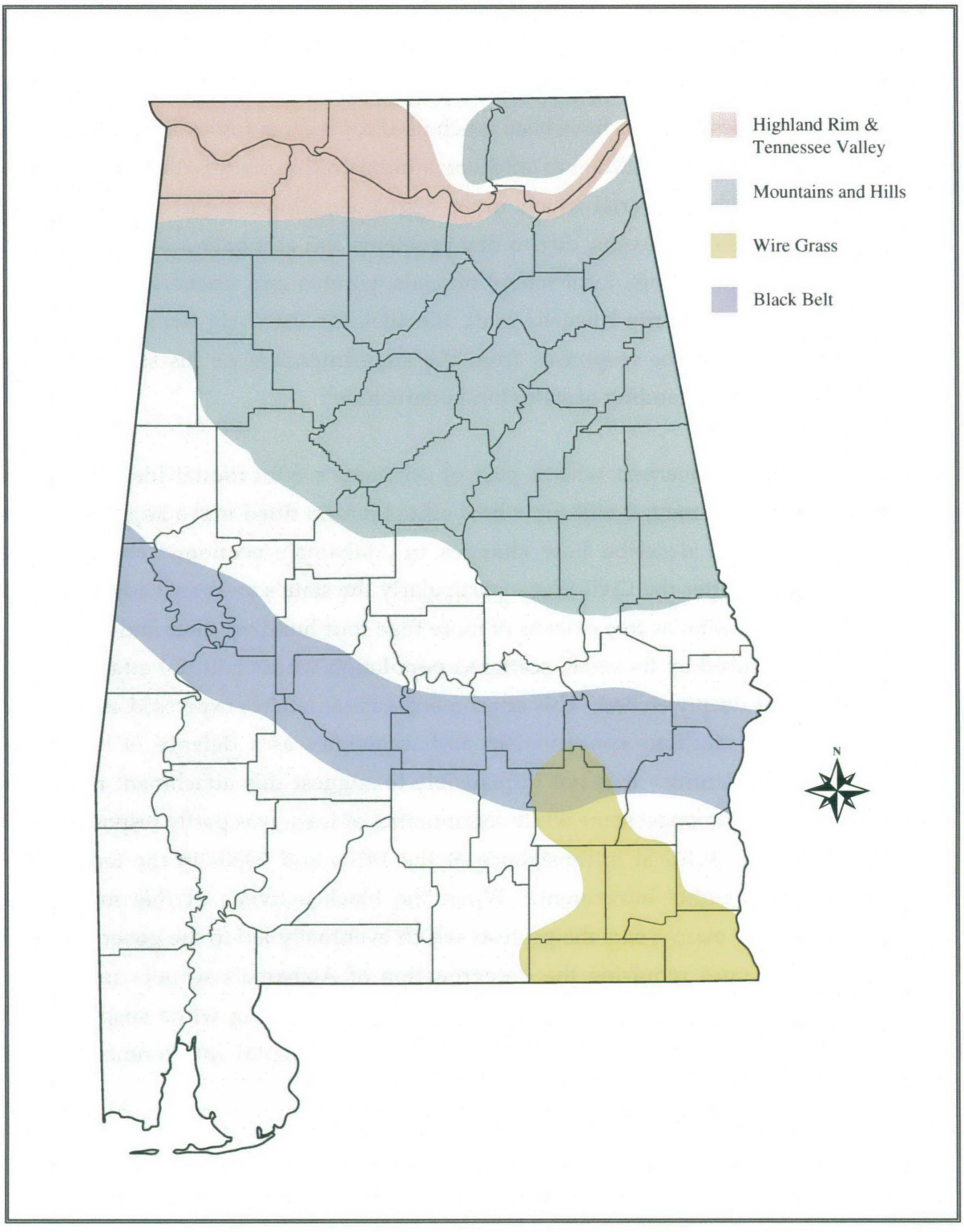
54. The ***Wilcox Progress*** was founded in 1887 but merged with other newspapers over the years. It was called ***The Wilcox Progressive Era*** from 1900.

55. See Glossary for definition of "Wiregrass Country."

hardly a new source of material with which to study educational history, it is not evident that these records have been much used to research topics similar to the one investigated here. In addition to letters on administrative matters, the files contain a great deal of other material which, in the aggregate, allows one to discern some of the more pressing concerns, day-to-day problems and administrative dilemmas of county superintendents, local school officials, parents and teachers. While early files often contain only inwards mail, the files for the early twentieth century include copies of the responses from the superintendent or his staff members enabling an understanding of state / local interaction.[56]

This thesis is concerned with a part of Alabama's educational history but, in pursuing its argument, it will show how school reform fitted into a larger historical picture. It will describe how changes in Alabama's economic and political circumstances after the Civil War – particularly the state's awkward adjustment to the accommodation as free citizens of more than four hundred thousand ex-slaves - were experienced by its small, scattered population whose cultural attachment to localism was deeply etched. This attachment was sometimes expressed as reaction, sometimes as cautious conservatism and sometimes as a defence of legitimate domain and identity. It is not implausible to suggest this attachment remained ingrained and, amongst some white communities at least, was partly responsible for the social and political intransigence of the 1950s and 1960s in the face of the modern civil rights movement. When the black activists of this movement sustained over many years the protests which eventually led to the government of the United States requiring the desegregation of Alabama's schools and public facilities, this federal intervention resurrected longstanding white suspicions of infringements on parental prerogatives, of governmental interference and of external social and cultural control.

56. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Correspondence of the State Superintendent of Education, 1852-ongoing.***



Alabama's principal geographic areas.

Composite of maps produced by i) Department of Geography, University of Alabama. Downloaded from http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/contemporarymaps/alabama/basemaps. and ii) Robert Stroud of Auburn University, Alabama. Stroud map included in Wayne Flynt, ***Alabama in the Twentieth Century (The Modern South)***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2004, opposite page 292.

Chapter 1

Geography, Culture, Politics and Economics - Public Schooling in Context, 1865-1898

The localism that was the prevailing cultural condition in much of Alabama between the end of the American Civil War and 1915 can be attributed to a number of causative factors. Amongst these were the state's geography, its historical settlement, its ethno-cultural origins, its socio-economic circumstances and a political system based on mutual obligations rooted in a web of relationships developed at the community and county level. This chapter provides a brief description of these factors in the antebellum period and explores their ongoing influence on public schooling up to 1898.[1] This chapter also discusses the attempt to establish a centrally directed education system during Reconstruction. As a product of that time of bitter upheaval, the system was probably doomed for early extinction once Reconstruction ended. Its fate was sealed by unsustainable cost and inept administration. The decentralised system re-established from 1875 with local schools under more direct parental control was a comforting and familiar cultural restitution. It would prove resistant to change and external interference. Yet there was an inherent paradox in the arrangements. Implicit in the very concept of a *state* education system – almost the justification for its existence – was the assumption that community domain was anachronistic and antithetical to the interests of the New South. Towards the end of the century a growing number of modernising reformers believed it was time for the state to exert a more direct influence on the system. How this might be done began to engage their minds.

Alabama covers a large area of 135,775 square kilometres.[2] The distance from its northern border with Tennessee to the most southerly point on its Gulf of Mexico coastline, Alabama is 531 kilometres. Its width from east to west (from Georgia to Mississippi) is 306 kilometres.[3] Within the borders of the state (as shown on the map opposite) are a number of fairly distinct geographical regions which are

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1. This date is chosen because it was the year a number of significant educational reform bills were introduced into the legislature by the (modernising) state superintendent of education, John William Abercrombie.

2. Data retrieved from http://www.netstate.com/states/geography/al_geography.htm (accessed December 6, 2007). Alabama's area makes it about the same size as England which has an area of about 130,410 square kilometres (50,352 square miles).

3. The corresponding imperial measures for Alabama are 52,423 square miles (area), 330 miles (length) and 190 miles (width).

themselves composed of varying landscapes.

Prior to the arrival of railroads and the later expansion of rail networks, Alabama's regions were often practically isolated from each other because, while the state has an extensive and navigable river system, this did not create a connecting transport link between the north of the state and the south. Furthermore, the large and lush Tennessee Valley was cut off from the rest of the north by the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Similarly, while Alabama is divided into sixty-seven counties[4] for local governmental and administrative purposes, in the mid-nineteenth century, people living in a single county could be separated by natural barriers of ridges and valleys, rivers and plateaux or dense forests of hardwood and pine. This limited options for social interaction and transportation in many areas, but the resulting insularity strengthened self-sufficiency and allowed ancient cultural traditions to develop local expression. In the white community these traditions had their origins in what was (most frequently) an Anglo-Celtic ethnicity,[5] a Protestant Christianity (usually of an evangelical strain), a shared pioneer experience and, all too often, economic deprivation.

Apart from an early French presence in the south of the state (from 1702), the European settlement of Alabama was largely undertaken in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by a migration of people seeking land. This internal movement was driven by "Alabama Fever" - the same phenomenon that Alexis de Tocqueville had identified elsewhere as an "ardent and restless passion" for prosperity, a "game of chance" pursued for "the emotions it excites as much as for the gain it procures."[6] The migrants were generally either small farmers spilling south from Tennessee or moving west from Georgia (or even further afield) or well-to-do planters who had given up on the depleted soils of Virginia and the Carolinas and were looking for new opportunities for large-scale cotton production.[7]

4. In 1865 there were fifty-two counties. Seven more were created in 1866, three each in 1867 and 1868, one in 1877 and Houston, the last and sixty-seventh county, in 1903.

5. "Anglo-Saxon" was a more commonly used self-description. The people of the Appalachian hill country were often also termed "Scotch-Irish" indicating an ethnicity derived from the mostly lowland Scottish Protestants who, beginning in the sixteenth century, migrated to Ulster in Northern Ireland. They inter-married with Irish Protestants and subsequently migrated onwards in the eighteenth century to the American colonies.

6. In 1817 there was further French settlement by Napoleonic sympathisers who were granted land by the US Government in the then "Mississippi Territory." Marengo County owes its name to this settlement. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, ***Democracy in America***, Vol I, New York, Vintage Books, 1990 [1840], 295.

7. 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, 54-55.

The destination of planters with slaves and capital was Alabama's "Black Belt" – a twenty-five mile wide swath of fertile clay soils (often black) bisecting the centre of the state.[8] These soils were ideal for large-scale cotton production and provided the means by which Black Belt planters became prosperous and politically powerful as Democrats and Whigs.[9] Small farmers tended to take up land in the northern "Hill Country" of the Appalachian Ridge and Plateau area or in the south-eastern "Wiregrass Country" (so called because of its tough forest undergrowth). On the eve of the Civil War about 80 percent of these small farmers owned the land they tilled. They rarely possessed slaves and had neither commercial fertilizers to make their land productive nor access to railroads that would allow them to convey their goods to market. They eked out a meagre subsistence growing corn, sorghum, oats and vegetables as well as raising hogs. The similar circumstances of the inhabitants of Hill Country and Wiregrass counties tended to make them political allies. They were generally against secession prior to the Civil War; afterwards they were more likely to be Republican Party supporters. From the late 1870s onwards they were frequently the agrarian dissidents who gave strength to various populist political movements.[10]

By 1860 the beginnings of economic and industrial change were apparent. A number of cotton-spinning, flour and saw mills had been established, eleven railroads with 1,196 kilometres of track had been constructed, and iron foundries had been erected. The port of Mobile was still the only city of any size but had a growing population of nearly 30,000.[11] Despite these signs of change, 95 percent of Alabama's population of 964,201 lived and worked in rural areas. Moreover, in the two decades leading up to the Civil War, visitors to the state often expressed surprise at its crude and frontier nature. They favourably noted the generosity and hospitality of its inhabitants but adversely noted their violent behaviour, intemperance, class divisions and/or sectarian zeal. One of these visitors was a

8. Being an area where African Americans comprise the majority of the population, the name "Black Belt" has long had a demographic and political significance as well as being a geographic term.

9. J. Mills Thornton, ***Politics and Power in a Slave Society***, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1978 87-96. Thornton provides a detailed analysis of antebellum party factionalism in Alabama.

10. Samuel L. Webb, ***Two-Party Politics in the One-Party South: Alabama's hill country, 1874-1920***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1997, 2.

11. US Census data for 1860 retrieved from website http://www.archives.state.al.us/timeline/al1801.html (accessed December 6, 2007). See also Rogers, Ward, Atkins and Flynt, ***History of a Deep South State***, 133, 176-77, and 179. Mobile's population in 1860 was about 29,000 including 800 free people of colour with 400 more living in the surrounding countryside.

celebrated geologist called Charles Lyell who described the state as "a region where the schoolmaster had not been much abroad." Another was a Scottish Presbyterian minister - the Reverend G. Lewis – who observed that the numbers of people in Alabama who were above twenty years of age and unable to read and write indicated "a very low state of education amongst the white population compared with the northern or eastern states." Philip Henry Gosse, a British naturalist who taught in a one-room Dallas County school for about eight months in 1840, later published his impressions. He recalled the situation of the school as "singularly romantic" and his pupils as being,

> *mostly, as rude as the [school] house – real young hunters, who handle the long rifle with more ease and dexterity than the goose-quill, and who are incomparably more at home in "twisting a rabbit," or "treeing a 'possum," than in conjugating a verb.*[12]

Had he known of these observations, Alabama's first state superintendent, William F. Perry, would probably have endorsed their validity. The account of his first attempts to implement the 1854 school law across the state revealed to him just how indelibly Alabama's frontier ethos, its rural society and its subsistence economy was stamped on the schools then existing.[13] Yet, while hardly much of a sample, these and other contemporary observations do provide a glimpse into the sort of existence that was the very stuff of American mythology.

Gosse's "real young hunters" were not unlike the sorts of people upon whom writers (for example, James Fennimore Cooper in his Leatherstocking Tales) had built the prototypical frontier hero - the shrewd backwoodsman conquering and controlling nature by his own human resourcefulness.[14] In a study of cultural values in the Old South, the writer Grady McWhiney has extensively examined other sources to define the skills admired most by rural people. These were not taught in school by outsiders under the guise of enlightenment and knowledge – the "book learning" necessary for trade and industry (and thereby associated with the

12. Gordon Baylor Cleveland, "Social Conditions in Alabama as Seen by Travellers, 1840-1850." Part 1, ***Alabama Review*** 2 (January 1949): 3-23, Part 2. (April 1949): 122-38. Lyell, Gosse and Lewis all visited Alabama in the 1840s – about a decade before the Public School Law. Gosse's impressions were published in his ***Letters from Alabama (U.S.): chiefly relating to natural history***, London, Morgan and Chase, 1859, 44.

13. William F. Perry, "The Genesis of Public Education in Alabama." ***Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*** 2 (1898): 14-27.

14. A discussion of the literary hero in the backwoods is discussed by Roderick Nash in ***Wilderness and the American Mind***, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982 [3rd edition], 75-78.

North). Rather, they were the skills that allowed rural people to live in accord with their environment – those of the "hunter, fisher, fighter and fiddler."[15] In 1880 *The Courier Journal* (published at Opelika in Lee County) affectionately (and implicitly approvingly) described as "presidents in embryo" the barefoot boys dressed in "a hickory shirt and one suspender" who were commonly to be seen about Troy in Pike County on trading days. The extract below suggests a hierarchy of admired skills and attributes in a closely bound world.

> *They know but little of "book learning," but they can crack a whip to perfection; drive an ox team, or ride a pony as well as any other boy, Colmuck or Comanche. They are pugnacious, and always spoiling for a fight. They will protect their bench-legged yellow dogs with chivalrous heroism and the inspiration of courage. These little Bedouins are courageous and magnanimous, and always ready to oblige and do you a service without hope of reward.*[16]

The poorest white people of the South – particularly in the mountain counties – were often pejoratively stigmatised as "crackers", "clay-eaters", "hillbillies", or "plain people." Yet, because they lived close to the land, their crops and gardens, to the seasons and the weather, to the daily narrative of church and community and, most deeply, because of the ties of blood, they had a surety about the moral quality of their simple lives. According to another writer, Anthony Harkins, they (under a number of labels) were the "keepers of the traditional values of family, home and physical production."[17] In Alabama such people were often sustained in their isolation by a rich oral culture and an ancient folklore of many strands which had been adapted by local conditions and was couched in a local idiom. In determining when to plant crops, kill livestock, cure meat and/or fell timber, many farmers gave earnest consideration to the phases of the moon and other auguries. For example, a lore-wise farmer believed he should not plant "eye-crops" such as potatoes or Jerusalem artichokes at night because then the eyes would not be able to find their way to the surface, - and there was much else besides. Lore was one way in

15. Grady McWhiney, ***Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1988, 210.

16. ***The Courier Journal***, January 27, 1880. This newspaper was published at Opelika in Lee County. This article was reprinted in ***The Troy Messenger***, February 12, 1880.

17. Anthony Harkins, ***Hillbilly: a cultural history of an American icon***, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, 5-6.

which life was understood.[18] Along with their self-sufficiency, many poorer Alabamians often also had a contempt for authority and a spirit of rebellion.[19] They also believed that *all* black people were inferior.

The belief in black inferiority was the *sine qua non* of Southern life. It was the basis for the construction of the Southern caste system and, later on, the elaborate laws, codes and customs of "Jim Crow" which rigidly enforced segregation. In Alabama - as in the South overall - whiteness was a non-negotiable racial and cultural identity which governed life from cradle to grave. While the everyday lives of all poor people (black and white) were not significantly different in most important respects, poor white people derived a sense of cultural superiority from their skin colour. Colour always mattered more than class and people with any trace at all of a black ancestry were relegated to a status that was permanently subordinate.[20]

In the decades that followed the end of the Civil War in 1865, much of Alabama's socio-economic landscape underwent redefinition. By 1880 nearly half the state's farmers had become cash or share tenants and this figure continued to increase making some communities a little less stable. The urban sector also started to grow but, even by as late as 1910, nearly 83 percent of the state's population was still located in rural areas.[21] Also, despite a postbellum increase in the number of black people living in urban areas, more than 90 percent of the black population remained rural in 1870 – many becoming tenants or sharecroppers.[22] As will be shown later, the continuing importance of rural life in Alabama - and the hardship that often went with it - was a defining factor in the way in which educational policies and the public schooling system would be shaped.

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18. 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], 122-123.

19. Webb, ***Two-Party Politics in the One-Party South: Alabama's hill country, 1874-1920***, 2. Webb discusses these attributes in relation to Hill Country/Wiregrass political attitudes.

20. Gunnar Myrdal, ***An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy***, Vol 1, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1944, 113. Myrdal discusses at length the social construction of race.

21. 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, ***Factors Influencing Alabama Agriculture***, 45.

22. Peter Kolchin, ***First Freedom: the Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation***, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1972, 12.

In the immediate post-war period – the so-called years of "Presidential Reconstruction" (1865-1867) - Alabama's legislature (General Assembly) appears to have been primarily concerned with returning the state to a recognizable normality - which meant conservative white supremacy and the continued repression of its black population which now included 437,000 emancipated slaves - the freedmen. A constitution adopted in September 1865 reflected this goal of normalization and incorporated a number of conditions required for Alabama to rejoin the Union. The Assembly was granted authority to "enact necessary and proper laws for the encouragement of schools and the means of education" but otherwise was short on detail.[23] Implicitly the schooling to be encouraged was to benefit the white population. This was significantly illiterate and experiencing a baby boom.[24] At the same time, the freedmen were beginning to seek the schooling they had been denied in slavery and with which they associated power and influence.[25]

The educational aspirations of the freedmen were met initially by Northern schoolteachers, often under the auspices of agencies such as the American Missionary Association (AMA), working in conjunction with the Bureau for Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen's Bureau). Many white Alabamians regarded the teachers as purveyors of alien notions that breached age-old conventions and taboos. Some teachers had been schooled in the equalitarian ideas of Abolitionism and, whether through righteous conviction, noble idealism, naïvety or mindless stupidity, they ignored the racial reality in Alabama. According to one historian, their activities were regarded as a "continuation of hostilities against a conquered people."[26]

An emerging pattern of black repression all over the South in this postbellum period was highly provocative to the Radical element in the US Congress. In March 1867 the Congress placed Alabama (along with Georgia and Florida) under the military

23. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 84.

24. Statement based on estimate derived from school population figures for 1868/69 (357,181 white and Negro combined) and 1873/74 (233,333 white only) included in *Ibid.*, 197-198.

25. Kolchin, ***First Freedom: the Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation***, 84. Legislation in 1832 explicitly forbade slaves from being taught to read and write.

26. Albert B. Moore, ***A History of Alabama and its People in Three Volumes***, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama, 1951, 487. The Northern missionary teachers (the largest number of whom were from Ohio) also came equipped with their own racial prejudices - see Kenneth B. White, "The Alabama Freedmen's Bureau and Black Education: The Myth of Opportunity." ***Alabama Review*** 34 (April 1981): 107-24.

rule of General John Pope thus initiating "Congressional (or Radical) Reconstruction." This period of an externally prescribed political order created ambiguity and crisis in Alabama's white society. It created a breach in all the normal interactions, transactions, reciprocities and customs that had long been woven into the state's cultural fabric.[27]

Some Northern teachers seemed blind to the sort of redress they might expect for their part in this societal disturbance and their trespassing on local domain. The shared heritage of white Alabamians not infrequently included a tradition of responding to perceived threats with summary justice and ritualised violence. Occasionally this frontier violence - intimidation, arson and even murder - was delivered to teachers via the agency of organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan which sometimes extracted contrite confessions from its victims - before lynching them. This was the fate of William Luke, a Canadian missionary who conducted a school at Cross Plains in Calhoun County and taught his pupils that, in the eyes of God, a black woman was equal to a white woman and that workers of both races should receive the same wages.[28]

While white attitudes toward black education did not follow a simple trajectory from resistance to acceptance, overt hostility subsided somewhat after about 1868 when the idea of black education seems to have been grudgingly acknowledged as necessary.[29] "Colored" schools in what were regarded as the *safe* hands of Confederate veterans, black teachers or local white female teachers – that is, naturalised into the terrain of the familiar - seem actually to have been tentatively encouraged in some places, though expenditure on such schools was another matter.[30]

27. The anthropologist, Victor Turner, defined cultural ruptures or *breaches* as a necessary prelude to change. A sense of shared sentiment and connectedness (*communitas*) occurs in a temporary period (*limen*) which presages resolution or renewal. ***The Anthropology of Performance***, New York, PAJ Publications, 1992, 3rd Edition, 84, 90 and 91.

28. William Luke was lynched by the Ku Klux Klan in 1870. No-one was ever convicted despite a number of court hearings. Gene L. Howard, ***Death at Cross Plains: an Alabama Reconstruction tragedy***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1984. See also Henry Lee Swint, ***The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870***, New York, Octagon Books, 1967, 102. Drawing on testimony to the Congressional investigation of the Ku Klux Klan, Swint relates hearsay evidence about "an outrage upon a teacher, and the burning of a school in Chambers County" as well as the "burning of two schools in Choctaw County, possibly in 1869."

29. Kolchin, ***First Freedom: the Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation***, 93.

30. Walter L. Fleming, ***Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama***, Spartanburg, Reprint Co., 1978, [1905], 625-26. There was resentment that public funds once expended wholly on white schools would now also be distributed to black schools.

In 1867 a constitutional convention dominated by local Republicans ("Scalawags") and elected freedmen was called; this led to the adoption of a new state constitution the following year. In the make-up of the 1867 convention's "Committee on Education and the School Fund,"[31] in the constitution's article on education, and in the structure erected for its administration, all the elements that would lead to the eventual demise of this particular educational system can be readily discerned, and these were apart from its lack of affordability. Being based on a Northern (Iowan) model, the new system suffered from the ultimate expression of localism, the "not invented here" syndrome – the initial distrust of something on principle regardless of its merits. Also, whilst the system retained some antebellum features, authority for school law and policy-making was centralised.

It is not clear why the convention's education committee believed the public schooling system put in place by Alabama's antebellum legislature in 1854 needed comprehensive change; its association with the *ancien régime* may have been taint enough. Two candidates have been proposed as the instigators of what was literally an "outlandish" system.[32] These were John Silsby of the Freedmen's Bureau and John Hardy, the Radical editor of the Montgomery *Daily State Sentinel*, a Republican journal. Nearly a month before the Convention met, Hardy had advocated a very similar educational system to the one adopted.[33] This provided for a centralised "Board of Education of the State of Alabama" which was, in some respects, a rival legislative body to the Assembly. It had power to enact all laws for the public education system which was to be funded by one-fifth of the state's *entire* revenue together with the proceeds from a school district poll tax and other special corporate taxes, plus the income from school lands.[34] Newspapers covering the proceedings of the convention did not hold back with opinions on the new

31. The education committee comprised four Carpetbaggers (opportunistic Northerners who had moved South), two Scalawags (local Republicans) and one black representative, Peyton Finley. The chairman, Gustavus Horton, was a Mobile cotton broker who had assisted in organizing Mobile's public schools in 1852 but three members of the Committee - John Silsby, Benjamin Yordy and Charles Waldron Buckley - were agents of the Freedmen's Bureau. Buckley was state superintendent of education for the Bureau and Silsby was a preacher attached to it. Jennifer Spiers, "Educating Blacks in Reconstruction Alabama: John Silsby, the American Missionary Association, and the Freedmen's Bureau." Master's thesis, Auburn University, 1991, 50.

32. The word "outlandish" is derived from the Old English word *utlendisc* meaning "out land" or "foreign country" which exactly conveys the intended meaning. The new system even changed the titles of office holders. The antebellum "state superintendent of education" became the "state superintendent of public instruction."

33. Quoted in 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, 144.

34. Alabama Constitution, 1868, Article XI, Sections 10-13. The details of the school funds derived from the original federal land grants and later provisions will be covered in Chapter 5.

constitution. The Montgomery *Daily Mail's* description of the education article was a primal scream of racial angst:

> ***One** legislative body, not able to do all the harm to the white race, desired by the majority of the convention; an additional one, nicknamed the Board of Education, is created, and armed with the power to force all white children to go into all the free public schools upon terms of social equality with all sorts of negro children or else surrender the schools as a monopoly to the negroes. These schools to be the nurseries of such social equality, or the monopoly of the negroes. Enormous amounts of public property and taxes are dedicated to the schools, and even the helpless, non-voting insane people admitted to the Alabama Insane Hospital, robbed of their existing support, to swell the influence of these schools.*[35]

This intemperate outburst was prompted because, whilst Section 7 of the proposed article did not specifically rule in integrated schools, it did not specifically rule them out either. Proposed amendments to make separate schools compulsory were defeated. This allowed opponents of the new constitution to whip up white fears about social equality, miscegenation, and "Negro supremacy." While black members of the education committee had not really believed in the likelihood of racially mixed schools, they knew that if the constitution provided specifically for separate schools, inferior schools for black pupils would be the probable outcome.[36]

Another novel feature of the new system was that attendance was to be entirely free of charge to all comers between the ages of five and twenty-one. In the antebellum period, those who attended school without paying something towards their tuition usually did so after consideration by the trustees of parental financial circumstances. Being exempted fully from tuition obligations was usually an indication of familial poverty. Thus, as will be discussed later, the new provision was regarded not as a guarantee of universal access to schooling but as an unnecessary expense with the possible added potential for stigmatising all children in public schools as paupers.[37] For a proud and independent people this was insufferable.

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35. Montgomery ***Daily Mail***, December 25, 1867, quoted by McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901***, 160.

36. Jerome A. Gray, Joe L. Reed, and Norman W. Walton, ***History of the Alabama State Teachers Association***, Washington, National Education Association of the United States, 1987, 17-22.

37. David Mathews, ***Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools? What Early Communities Have to Tell Us***, Montgomery, New South Books, 2003, 65-66 and 178.

After a vigorous campaign by conservative interests and newspapers such as the Montgomery *Weekly Advertiser* to denigrate the provisions of the new constitution and create fear about its implications for racial equality (thus causing anxiety amongst white Republicans as well), it was not ratified by the people.[38] The constitution came into effect anyway in March 1868 as a result of the fourth Reconstruction Act of the United States Congress.

Great public occurrences activate mythmaking and story telling; critical events are portrayed in dramatic terms. A sense of identity and unity (*communitas*) is derived by those who have participated in or survived such events and whose role becomes part of the story.[39] Until well into the second half of the twentieth century, Radical Reconstruction was recalled or imagined by many Alabamians and by white historians as a particularly gruesome *Grand Guignol* cast richly with iniquitous Republican scalawags, rapacious Northern carpetbaggers and illiterate black dupes straight from their last occupation as plantation field-hands. Allegedly, the collective venality of this gang of fraudsters and fools plus their incompetence, bankrupted the state and, between 1867 and 1873, increased the state debt from seven million to thirty-two million dollars.[40] For many of the state's white citizens – particularly disenfranchised conservatives who had positioned themselves politically as victims - Reconstruction also closely resembled a Quest Epic wherein they were required to undergo tests and trials (economic, political, racial) before their kingdom could be repossessed and redeemed, its legitimate (white) rulers reinstated and the familiar routines of community life and racial relationships re-established. For black Alabamians it was the beginning of a different kind of quest – for full societal inclusion as citizens. But their quest would take a century to achieve and be littered with false hopes and foiled progress.[41] The socio-political meta-drama of Reconstruction would be a long-term reference point for all governmental policy.

38. McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901,*** 1160-1165.

39. Many anthropologists have stressed the significance of drama and rituals to public life. In particular, Victor Turner's method for studying relations between politics and ritual action in communities evolved from an analysis of theatrical social dramas. Turner, ***Anthropology of Performance***, 33.

40. The principal "traditional" historian of Alabama's Reconstruction period is Walter L. Fleming whose 1905 book, ***Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*** really established the "Redeemer" version of Reconstruction.

41. Attitudes by white conservatives to Reconstruction are discussed at length by Eric Foner in ***A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877***, New York, Harper and Row, 1988, xi-xv and 232-34.

The reluctant - even truculent – (white) response throughout much of the state to the new education régime indicates the extent to which it was regarded as a malignant incubus – a temporary external imposition to be waited out until the state's redemption. In his first *Annual Report* to the governor in 1869, Dr Noah B. Cloud, the state superintendent of public instruction, reported the unpopularity of the schools with those whom they were intended to benefit:-

> *The County Superintendents . . . met with opposition and, in many cases insult, in a large proportion of the townships in almost every county in the state. The good people of the country, usually quiet and always willing to give every new and plausible enterprise a fair hearing were not so much opposed to the new system of the Free Public Schools as they were to the government and its agents engaged in the organisation of the schools.*[42]

Cloud's report also blamed "idle politicians and certain unscrupulous disappointed newspaper editors." But whoever or whatever was to blame for their attitude, white communities (as represented through the annual reports submitted by county superintendents) appeared not so much interested in accessing schooling for their own children as in demonstrating their suspicion of funds being expended on schools for "colored" children. The experience of the superintendent of education for Coffee County, M. Miller, was typical:

> *At the time I commenced appointing trustees, the prejudice of the people was general and strong against the public school system – so great that there was difficulty in getting people to act. This prejudice was mostly on account of the proposed enumeration of the colored children and their prospect of the benefit of the system. The opposition to colored schools was deep and general and caused all the difficulties I had to encounter and prevented the establishment of colored schools.*[43]

The superintendents of education for Sanford (now Lamar), Marengo and Macon Counties all advised that the feeling against the school system was very strong. It was hard to procure teachers or to get men to act as trustees and even actually

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42. ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual, Biennial, and Special Reports: state publications, 1855-[ongoing].*** SG021047, Box 1, ***Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Alabama to the Governor for the fiscal Year Ending 30th September, 1869***, 6. (Hereinafter this report and other Annual [or Biennial] and Special Reports of state superintendents will be cited throughout the entire thesis simply as Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report or Biennial Report [year/s]).*** Before the Civil War Dr Cloud had been a well regarded scientific agronomist and publisher of an influential agricultural journal, *The American Cotton Planter and Soil of the South.* After the War he joined the Republican Party and was tainted as a Radical and a "Scalawag." Problems with the new education system further unfairly damaged his reputation.

43. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1868-69***, 9.

dangerous to propose the organisation of colored schools.[44] Joseph Sears of Dallas County also found a "great want of confidence in the system." He found it difficult to get persons who would act as trustees in carrying out the law.[45]

School trustees and teachers generally looked no further for educational policy direction than to the relevant county superintendent. During Reconstruction the holders of that office were often tainted by their association with the Radical régime and its centralised political control of education. Rather than being voted into office by county electors, they were political appointees of the state superintendent. In the fractious and factional political climate, county superintendents could only ever be as popular as their patron.[46] Aspersions (smacking of disgruntled local gossip) were cast on some of the appointees – one was allegedly illiterate, another corrupt, and yet another (Dr Ezra F. Bouchelle of Pickens County) was both incompetent *and* corrupt.[47] In Clarke County, a dispute over the payment of teachers' wages erupted into a bitter contest between the county superintendent, Miel S. Ezell, and the local Democratic "courthouse clique." Ezell owed his appointment to a state superintendent who was a Republican and therefore tagged as a *Radical*. Ezell's supporters described him as being "from an intelligent and respectable family," and as "a man noted for his piety and devotion." His enemies, on the other hand, claimed Ezell was a person of "repulsive temperament and manners" and a "Radical of an independent faction." As soon as the Democrats recovered the state superintendency, Ezell's enemies claimed he had been corruptly installed and - this was key – that his political positions "were against the interests of the Democratic and Conservative Party in Clarke County." Ezell was soon dumped.[48]

44. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1868-69***, 9.

45. *Ibid*, 10.

46. *Ibid*., 5. The state superintendent appointed the county superintendents and, in turn, the county superintendents appointed three trustees in each township so there was a direct line of political influence.

47. Fleming, ***Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama***, 609. Fleming was a historian of the pro-South "Dunningite School." He names J.E. Summerford (the superintendent of Lee County) as being "of bad morals and incompetent" though he cites no source for this nor for other allegations. Regarding Dr E.F. Bouchelle see James F. Clanahan, ***The History of Pickens County, Alabama, 1540-1920***, Decatur, Decatur Printing Company, 1964, 272.

48. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Correspondence files of the State Superintendent of Education***, SG015974-SG015981, Alabama Dept. of Archives and History. (Hereinafter cited throughout the entire thesis as [Series Number], ***Superintendent's Correspondence, [years]***), ADAH.

    Miel S. Ezell, superintendent of education for Clarke County to John M. McKleroy, state superintendent of public instruction, March 29, 1875, and D.D. Dawson to John M. McKleroy, March 5, 1875, and June 15, 1875, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. Eighteen other pieces of correspondence concerning this matter can be located in this Box.

The difficulties of supervising the county schools were either genuinely onerous and the additional duties required by the role were overwhelming or the county superintendents had an inflated idea of their own importance. Perhaps the public trough was irresistible; some had rather ambitious expectations in regard to remuneration. In May 1867 the tax assessor for the Black Belt's Bullock County had appropriated half of the state's increased taxes for the relief of indigents and for the county jail. Even twenty years later the chronic poverty in Bullock was still a matter of concern.[49] But, writing to the state superintendent of public instruction in 1869, Bullock's county superintendent (C.J.L. Cunningham) put his hand up for an annual salary of $1,200 - which he felt should actually be higher. The "Committee of Clerks and Trustees" who had decided on his level of remuneration were "reflecting the general desire that such salary should be given as will secure the services of entirely competent and reliable men in the office."[50] Perry County's committee decided to recommend an annual salary of $2,000 for Louis W. Temple, because of the "large number of children and amount of labor devolving on the superintendent of public instruction." When the state superintendent reduced this to $1,500, committee chairman, Theophilus G. Fowler, darkly alluded to "political and civil issues in the county which made the superintendent's labor arduous." He huffily remained convinced that:

> *The reduced amount will be insufficient compensation for the amount of labor needed to be done for the cause of education, particularly among the colored people, where the field is a vast one and their desires and necessities urgent.*[51]

Across the rest of the state the level of recommended salary varied from $375 in Covington County to $2,000 in Dallas County (where the successful salary proposal must have been more plausible than the one knocked back in Perry). Washington County's committee decided to recommend a salary of not less than $800 p.a. owing to the "difficulties the superintendent has to deal with and the fatigue he has to

49. John L. Rumph, "A History of Bullock County, 1865-1906." M.A. thesis, Auburn University, 1955. Quoted in J. Wayne Flynt, ***Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1989, 54. See also 63 and 69.

50. C.J.L. Cunningham to Noah B. Cloud, state superintendent of public instruction, 20 February, 1869, in SGO15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH.

51. T.G. Fowler to Noah B. Cloud, state superintendent of public instruction, 4 May, 1869, in SGO15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH.

undergo through the county."[52]

At the lower end at least these salaries were not unreasonable, but in the postbellum climate of poverty and uncertainty they were an indicator of what was looming as a much larger problem – the capacity of the state actually to fund the school system in the way stipulated in the constitution. It was all very well for Noah B. Cloud to flatter the framers of that document as "statesmen and sages" and assert that its article on education was:

> *The first decisive blow ever before struck in the planting states, and especially in Alabama, to clear out among all classes every vestige of ignorance with its long and attendant train of evils.*[53]

The reality on the ground was that, despite the constitution, the money earmarked for schools was not being made fully available. It was hardly any time at all before local trustees were telling patrons that schools were being closed and teachers that they were not going to be paid.[54] Always suspicious of centralization, this early breach of "the *chartered pledge* of the state to furnish the means and facilities adequate to the education of all the children of the state" just confirmed to local communities the value of self-reliance and the validity of their distrust of government.

In the years between the establishment of the board of education and the election of 1874 which returned to power the conservative, agrarian-minded Democratic and Conservative Party,[55] the *Annual Reports* to the governor by successive state superintendents contained both self-justifications for their own actions and broadsides against their predecessors.[56] The stance of each report was influenced by

52. Various letters but specifically, Samuel Macartney, probate judge for Washington County, to Noah B. Cloud, state superintendent of public instruction, 8 December, 1868, in SGO15979, Folders 2 and 3, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH.

53. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1868-69***, 5.

54. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

55. The Democratic and Conservative Party was formed in 1866 after three antebellum political factions – Whigs, Know-Nothings and Unionists came together. Initially preferring the name "Conservatives," the Party was also known as the "Conservative Democrats" and later just as "Democrats." It dropped "Conservative" from its title in 1906.

56. For example, see Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 12. This report was made by Joseph Hodgson who was Noah B. Cloud's successor. In turn, Hodgson's successor Joseph H. Speed was scathing about Hodgson's regime. See ***Annual Report, 1873***.

whether the superintendent and the governor were of the same or different political stripes.

Similarly, the turf wars between the board of education (where the Republicans held a majority) and the legislature (where, after the 1870 election, the Conservatives held a majority in the lower house) meant that what was actually going on in the schools up and down the state was a matter of contested opinion. Yet reading the reports of the county superintendents (which, possibly anticipating the future, were starting to be couched in the possessive terms of local identification – "my county," "my teachers")[57] that were appended to each *Annual Report* of the state superintendent, a picture does emerge of the extent to which communities at the county level regarded schooling as part of their cultural and socio-economic life. The reports also tend to show how local practices were fitted into the interstices of what was being prescribed by the board.

In 1871 many superintendents commented that their townships were often without their own schoolhouses and that pupils had to be taught in churches or Masonic lodges. However, when James L. Williams of Baker (later Chilton) County mentioned that his schoolhouses, having "been built by the people" thus belonged "to the people" this appeared to mitigate the fact that some were "in very poor condition."[58] Superintendents frequently described the complete inadequacy of school buildings, furnishings and equipment, - complaints that would be heard repeatedly over the next forty years and longer. Yet parents overlooked exhortations to provide something better citing "the hard times, the bad crops, &c" Schooling was not compulsory and money could not be wasted on what was still something children might opt to squeeze into "every spare day" when they could be excused from farm duties.[59]

The county reports of 1871 show the difficulty some of the superintendents were having with the concept of universal free public schooling, still regarding assistance from the state as a last resort for children who were unable get an education in any

57. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 39 and 41.

58. *Ibid.*, 59 and 39.

59. *Ibid.*, 58, 57.

other way.[60] Many thought public funds should be supplemented by private tuition fees and favourably recalled "the plan that was in use before the War."[61] One specifically urged the speedy abolition of the state board of education so that the money saved could be given to the "bright-eyed intellectual orphan children to enable their widowed mothers to give them at least the rudiments of an education."[62] Blount County's superintendent outlined his method for keeping schools open: - "we have made the *public* fund auxiliary only, and the patrons are required to pay the teacher the principal part of his salary." He had had to do this, he said, because parents were only sending their children to school while it was *free* and withdrew them once funds ran out. This overwhelmed the teacher in the first instance and then cheated the children "out of the benefits of schooling and the teacher out of employment."[63] The idea of the subscription school supplemented by state resources had the compelling appeal of the tried and true. More importantly, it allowed teachers to believe they would actually be paid.

In June 1870 General Oliver Otis Howard, who headed the Freedmen's Bureau, ordered its work in Alabama to be finished by July 15 – a month later. After that date, the schools operated for black children by missionary societies in conjunction with the Bureau, became part of the state system. In the county superintendents' reports for 1871 some of the particular circumstances of the black schools, their teachers, white attitudes to black education, and the assistance that was rendered to black communities in building schoolhouses are all matters of mention. Even if written from a white (and sometimes patronising) perspective, the reports describe the black communities struggling with much the same problems as the whites – non-attendance owing to parents needing their children's labour, inadequate schoolhouses, teachers going unpaid, unreliable trustees, and/or insufficient private funds to buy books or supplement public allocations.[64]

The reports just described were made to Joseph Hodgson, a Conservative, who had been elected as state superintendent in November 1870 and would serve until 1872.

60. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 56 and 77.

61. *Ibid.*, 61.

62. *Ibid.*, 44.

63. *Ibid.*, 44.

64. *Ibid.*, 49, 52, 60, 61, 51-52, and 78.

He reorganised the board of education and intended to "restore a degree of self-government" to the counties by permitting the election of county superintendents and two directors as well as three school trustees in each township. This was to be regarded as progress toward the restoration of "the old order."[65] Yet, during his term of office, Hodgson could not secure the school funding appropriation supposedly provided for in the state constitution. This funding deficiency continued to dog the progress of the public schooling system. In order to survive in this period, some teachers were being paid in credit – vouchers with which they could redeem goods from a local merchant thus establishing a practice that lasted into the twentieth century.[66] Superintendents in some desperation and often fruitlessly, issued warrants for payment from local tax collectors. According to Hugh W. Caffey, the superintendent of Lowndes County, some teachers bore "their deprivation of pay with commendable fortitude" and

> *displayed a liberal disposition to regard with kindly forbearance the unavoidable financial embarrassments which our present state authorities received as a heritage from their predecessors (the Scalawags) in office.*[67]

In his *Annual Report* for the 1872 scholastic year (his last before leaving office at the end of that year), Joseph Hodgson wrote at some length about what education was for and how it might confer benefits on the state – crime reduction, improved juror and voter competence. His report may have been merely valedictorian rhetoric but it was the first fully expressed theory about the purpose of education since Alexander Meek (the head of the committee that drafted the 1853 school bill) had addressed Alabama's Assembly prior to the introduction of the state-wide schooling system the following year. Hodgson described the state's alarming rate of illiteracy and pointed out that though "the great mass of the people are and must ever remain producers and laborers" just being able to read with "facility and zest" would put them within reach of a "pastime and a power" – such as the pleasure derived from being able to read newspapers and periodicals. In his comments there is a glimpse of the Jeffersonian ideal – access to education for the common man whose world need not be limited by occupation or location. Hodgson also showed that he

65. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama,*** 96.

66. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871,*** 59.

67. *Ibid.*, 60-61 and 59.

appreciated education was more than schooling.[68]

Hodgson's ideas did not suit the hour. The financial situation of the school system was in dire straits and deteriorating. The number of school warrants issued and unredeemed in 1872 very nearly equalled the annual amount of the state revenue. As tax collectors were required by law to receive these warrants in payment of taxes virtually nothing came into the treasury except the warrants. To arrest a free fall to certain bankruptcy, the board of education passed a law in December 1872 ordering the closure of all schools from January 1, 1873, until such time as the superintendent of public instruction advised funds were available for the prompt payment of teachers.[69]

The public schools stayed closed for the next nine months and any teaching done was privately paid for. In November 1873 the next (Republican) state superintendent, Joseph Speed, addressed the board regarding this catastrophe. He justified the action taken and suggested a remedy which prompted a memorial to both houses of the Assembly. This gave an itemised account of revenue shortfalls and the accumulating deficit. He sheeted home blame for the situation to the treasury, alleging constitutional breaches and the diversion of funds to defray other governmental expenses. He thereby protected local school officials from any charges of incompetence.[70] The memorial was ignored.

The closure of the schools fell most heavily on the teachers who sent off desperate (often ill-spelt) letters to anyone they thought might be able to help. A black teacher wrote to a legislator:

> *We the teachers of Chambers County have not got any money this hole year and now we are in debt and don't no how to get out.*[71]

68. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1872,*** 8-15. Hodgson estimated there were 144,000 illiterate voters in Alabama.

69. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama,*** 101. See also letter from Joseph Speed dated July 7, 1873, to W.H. Lawrence, Editor, ***Clarke County Democrat*** and published in that paper's edition of July 29, 1873.

70. ADAH, Alabama Board of Education, SG13206, ***Journal of the Board of Education of the state of Alabama, Session Commencing November, 1873,*** 20-22.

71. Lucille Griffith, ed. ***Alabama: A documentary history to 1900,*** Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1968, 570. Letter dated October 29, 1874, from H. C. Calhoun (self-described as "colored") of Bluffton, Alabama to Hon. Mr Bingham (probably Daniel H. Bingham).

A white teacher from Conecuh County pleaded to the state superintendent for moneys due.

> *I have had to mortgage oxen and wagon – the only property I have accept [sic] for seven head of cattle and if I cannot make some arrangements in a few days, yes in less than ten days, I will lose them having been compelled to do so to get bread and meat for my family consisting of five little children.*[72]

Many whose patience had been exhausted by "long delayed, incomplete or uncertain payment," took up other work. When the schools reopened, teachers were often selected for "the price they could be obtained instead of their qualifications." Poorly trained and compensated, some found the performance of their school duties "humdrum, listless and lifeless."[73]

The records do not show whether, or to what extent, school patrons – parents and guardians - were fazed by the accumulating problems of the education system. This may have been because schooling was still often only on the periphery of the familiar routines of rural life or because patrons had long-harboured suspicions that the imported and over-expensive centralised system was unsustainable. Yet Joseph Speed was scathing about what he interpreted as parental indifference. He expressed astonishment that children were turned over to teachers with absolute unconcern and that parents neither knew nor cared whether teachers were competent, whether their principles were compatible with home values or "whether their little ones were receiving proper mental food." He described the parents as showing "cold-blooded apathy" and devoid of the slightest interest in even visiting the schools or caring that pupils sat in "shabby and outrageous buildings." He expressed the rather naïve opinion that if parents could just see for themselves what went on in the schools, this would magically cure the problem of absenteeism and that "the question of compulsory attendance at school would solve itself."[74] Yet Speed (indeed, all the state superintendents) actually had a vested interest in denigrating and delegitimising community practices so as to validate the need for a state-wide education system and promote its virtues as the agency by which the

72. Oliver H. Farnham of Evergreen to Joseph Speed, state superintendent of public instruction, June 13, 1873, in SG015979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH.

73. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1874***, 5.

74. *Ibid.*, 7-10.

social changes required for a modernising state could be achieved.

Away from Montgomery, the pressing exigencies of rural subsistence and agriculture meant other priorities held sway. Cotton production alone required children to work in the fields from four in the morning until nightfall at certain times of the year. Parents believed a school of five months in length was unrealistic. For example, in Talladega County parents could not and would not spare children for more than three months from farm-work – even if the schoolhouse was only four hundred yards from their door. The county superintendent opined "the people of the state will have to be educated to the idea of free public schools before any system will succeed. The experiment will be expensive and tedious."[75]

It seems from both the defensive comments in the superintendents' reports of this period, as well as opinions offered in other forums, that not all people of influence in Alabama were even yet committed to public education and the need for a public school system might have to be justified all over again. In 1875, the state superintendent, John M. McKleroy,[76] expressed the hope that it "shall not be permitted to die, either slowly or by retrograde." In Jefferson County there were "many persons, generally the largest taxpayers, who desire to see it (the public school system) abolished and everyone placed upon his own resources for educating his children."[77] Some members of the Baptist Church were of the opinion that their children should only be educated in denominational schools so they would not "be subjected to the contamination of un-Christian ideas and ways of life."[78] Hostility to public schooling took a long time to die. A teachers' institute held in April 1890 at Midway in Bullock County was addressed by Colonel William Jordan, one of the town's oldest residents. He told the attendees "I'm opposed to this public education; I don't think it is right and I voted against it in the legislature. I think it is an imposition on the people."[79]

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75. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 106. Regarding hours worked in cotton fields, see Trudier Harris, ***Summer Snow: reflections from a black daughter of the South***, Boston, Beacon Press, 2003, 23.

76. McKleroy was state superintendent from 1874 to 1876.

77. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 48 and 85.

78. Glenn Sisk, "Denominational Schools and Colleges for White Students in the Prairie Section of Mid Alabama, 1875-1900." ***The Peabody Journal of Education*** 35 (July 1957): 27.

79. The Union Springs ***Herald***, April 30, 1890.

The political trials of white Conservative Democrats ended in 1874 when, as one historian put it, they "struggled out of the abyss of Reconstruction."[80] In other words they buried their internal differences sufficiently so as to be able to exploit the splits that were opening up in the Republican Party. Their nominee for governor (George Smith Houston) was elected and they were successful in recovering both houses of the General Assembly thus restoring "home rule." By so doing, they cast themselves as "Redeemers" of the state and were determined to implement a régime of thrift and low taxation. There was to be general retrenchment in the area of governmental expenditure and, while strictly speaking there was no need for a new state constitution, in their complete break with Reconstruction, the Redeemers decided to hold a constitutional convention. The days of the board of education – that rival to the Assembly - were numbered. Democrats made the abolition of the board one of the main reasons for calling the convention; it was an article of faith.[81]

The 1875 convention's committee on education brought in a report that was thoroughly in tune with the *zeitgeist*. Its recommendations would abolish the board of education; provide for an elected state superintendent of education; make separate schools for black and white children compulsory; and set aside at least $100,000 annually for educational purposes together with poll tax revenues, interest on the School Lands (Sixteenth Section) Trust Fund, interest on the surplus revenue fund and moneys from the estates of persons dying without heirs (escheats). This reduced the annual school budget from $484,000 to $348,000 at one blow. Another stipulation was that not more than 4 percent of the school funds could be used or expended otherwise than for the payment of teachers.[82]

Republicans charged that the funds provided were too meagre and that the education system would be destroyed leaving the schools "dependent on the

80. Moore, ***A History of Alabama and its People in Three Volumes***, 543. Influential Southern historian C. Vann Woodward preferred the term "New Departure Democrats" as an alternative to "Redeemers" or "Bourbons." In Alabama the term *New Departure* came to be used during the months preceding the 1872 election. It was associated with those Democrats who sought cooperation with Liberal Republicans in the state's northern region. Opponents of the *New Departures* came to be called Bourbons.

81. Allen Johnston Going, ***Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890***, 2nd ed. Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992, [1951], 148.

82. McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901***, 206. See also Daniel Savage Gray, (in collaboration with J. Barton Starr) ***Alabama: a place, a people, a point of view***, Dubuque, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1977, 181.

prejudice, whim or caprice of the legislature."[83] The Mobile *Register*, in a running commentary on the convention, told its Republican readers that their protestations were pointless. "The convention don't see no use in so much schooling no how."[84]

Democrats admitted that the money earmarked for schools was less than that in the constitution of 1868, but declared schools would actually receive more because there would be fewer useless school officials. In any case, as they correctly pointed out, the schools had never actually received the fifth of annual state revenue provided for in the 1868 constitution.[85] Some at the convention wanted to abolish the position of state and county superintendents altogether and turn their duties over to the secretary of state and local trustees respectively. Dissenting opinion regarding the intended changes to the educational provisions in the constitution was scathing. One newspaper described them as a proposal "to reduce the mass of the people to something like the literary equivalent of the mule." It went on to say that "a herd of voting cattle is to be created, and the herd is to be domineered over by a privileged caste of educated men."[86]

On November 16, 1875, the people ratified the proposed constitution by a vote of 85,662 to 29,217. Only four Black Belt counties came out against it - and this was because of the still enfranchised black voters. The Democratic and Conservative Party was now in power and on its way to becoming entrenched politically.[87] In the fall of 1876 the Assembly met to work out a reorganisation of the public schools under the new constitution. Its (rather delusory) object was:

> *To re-establish the grand old schools of primary, academic and collegiate; to restore local self-government of schools to parents, to teachers and to trustees, and to have a high rank of teacher and continuous school for the better promotion of "popular education." . . . It is the object of this law to give the rural portions of the state an equal chance with cities and municipalities for good schools.*[88]

83. Mobile ***Register*** for September, 21, 28, and October 2, 1875, quoted by McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901***, 207 (*footnote 119*).

84. *Ibid.*

85. Mobile ***Register*** for October, 26 and 31, 1875, quoted by McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901***, 213 (*footnote 24*).

86. ***Alabama State Journal*** of October 27, 1875, quoted by McMillan, 213.

87. McMillan, ***Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901***, 216.

88. Letter from S.J. Doster quoted in ***Montgomery Daily Advertiser***, September 2, 1877.

The response to the new arrangements suggests they met with approval – probably because they were recognisably familiar. Samuel C. Oliver, the superintendent of education in Tallapoosa County, provided a not untypical comment in his 1875 report.

> *The change in the school law, extending the term to at least five months, and forcing the patrons to supplement the fund, in order to secure good teachers, has brought back some of the best teachers of the county who were driven out of the profession by the two or three months free school system. Since this change, I think the public schools are regarded with more favor than heretofore.*[89]

Because the restoration of "home rule" (decentralisation) appeared to be so well accepted, it was easy for leaders who were not particularly committed to popular education to throttle the schools in the name of frugality – that sacred cow of the Democratic and Conservative Party whose members were now known as "Bourbons" – a not always kindly meant soubriquet. On one occasion, LeRoy F. Box, who was state superintendent from 1876 to 1880, expressed a rather curious view of his portfolio. He boasted that Alabama's education expenditure for the 1877-78 school year was only 57 cents per pupil per month, or $2.45 per term of 84.33 days and, in this respect, "for cheapness of instruction and economy of supervision" Alabama surpassed all the other Southern states.[90]

Without much positional power attached to the state superintendent or any sustained advocacy on behalf of schooling from those to whom the schools had actually been entrusted, the Assembly was not inclined to rethink its approach to the public schooling system. When budget surpluses did start to accumulate during the 1880s, it occurred to only a few persons that these might be profitably employed in reducing illiteracy among the rising generation. The solution commonly suggested for surpluses was tax reduction. Although the legislature's revenue appropriation for the schools did increase over time so that it was $350,000 by 1890 or $1.34 per capita of school population, in December 1888 when a motion came before the legislature to further enhance an approved increase to the school appropriation, it was voted down by representatives from the Black Belt.

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

90. Quoted by Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 118.

The *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* came out for the schools.

> *We doubt not that some of the votes against the amendment were due to a preference for reducing the tax rate. Is it, then, a choice between helping our decaying schools to the extent of $100,000, and reducing the tax rate? Have the white children of the white counties no claims which property is bound to respect?*[91]

One of the reasons there was no groundswell of opinion in favour of higher educational expenditure from the rural communities who might have stood to gain from better schools was the aversion shared by Alabama's white farmers to taxation. Before the Civil War farmers were largely exempt from land tax, – a tax on slave property had generated a significant proportion of state revenues. During Reconstruction, Republican legislators turned to land taxes to make up for the loss in the slave tax and, between 1860 and 1870, farm taxes multiplied by almost two and a half times.[92] To meet their increased tax liabilities, farmers had to generate significant additional cash income and so they moved from subsistence farming to cotton production - cotton being a high yielding cash crop – albeit on a falling market. A greater availability of commercial fertilizers also now allowed expansion into marginal areas of poorer soils. Cotton was a labour-intensive form of farming and children were a valuable resource because they extended the productivity of the family. But even large families could only farm about sixteen hectares (at most) and white tenant farms were rarely as large as this.[93] These hard-pressed farmers were not sympathetic to expenditure on social-service programs (including schooling). They may have realised that increased taxes at the state level might again relocate lines of authority and reversion to a highly centralised school system (with consequent additional expense and loss of community control). White farmers were particularly unsympathetic to social expenditure for black non-taxpayers. While black tenant farmers or sharecroppers indirectly contributed to tax receipts by providing part of the income out of which the white farmer paid his land taxes, the white farmers did not see it that way.[94]

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91. Moore, ***A History of Alabama and its People in Three Volumes***, 543. See also ***Montgomery Daily Advertiser*** for Tuesday, December 4, 1888.

92. J. Mills Thornton, 1982, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South." In J. Morgan Kousser, and James M. McPherson, eds. ***Region, Race, and Reconstruction: essays in honor of C. Vann Woodward***, New York, Oxford University Press, 1982, 351-52 and 367-77.

93. J. Wayne Flynt, ***Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites***, 60.

94. Thornton, 1982, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South." 377.

In 1868 the Mobile Board of School Commissioners directed an allocation of black school expenditure based on the taxes paid by black citizens.[95] Outside Mobile it was really only in the 1870s that murmurings were heard more widely regarding a racially based disbursement of tax revenue for school expenditure. In 1871, Miles H. Yerby, superintendent of education for Hale County, was emphatic:

> *The public school system will ever be below par in this county so long as there remains among us so great a preponderance of the black population. The cry will ever be raised that the negro gets all the school funds and we pay the taxes, and then blame . . . somebody, they care not whom, so fault can be found.*[96]

Unpopular or not, it became clear to Alabama's professional educationists that school funding deficiencies would only be solved by local county taxation or local school district levies – a source from which schools in some other states derived the major portion of their revenue.[97] Local taxation became the focus of educational lobbying right up to 1916.[98] In 1891, white schools, - particularly in the Black Belt - became the beneficiaries of a new law which, allowed school trustees to apportion the funds of the township to each school as they saw "just and equitable."[99] In practice this meant that the black schools got the smallest crumbs from the white schools' loaf and the Black Belt's white community no longer had the slightest motivation for agreeing to higher taxation.

From the middle of the 1880s there were signs that some of the thinkers in Alabamian society (usually outside the Assembly) were beginning to be seriously concerned about what they regarded as the defiantly inadequate quality of public

95. Robert G. Sherer, ***Subordination or Liberation? the development and conflicting theories of black education in nineteenth century Alabama***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1977, 8. One of the features of the 1875 constitution was that the independent status of Mobile's County's public school system was again recognised – as it had been in 1854 and 1865. Ironically, although it was men from Mobile who were early promoters of the state public education system (on the basis of that county's early and successful experimentation with free public schooling), the county itself had stayed outside the state system. Noah B. Cloud had tried to reverse this in 1868 but the struggle for centralised control lasted as long as Reconstruction and was ultimately unsuccessful. Mobile was allowed the special privilege, first granted by statute in 1854, of using liquor and other licence taxes for the support of its schools. See Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 90.

96. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 52.

97. Going, ***Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890***, 155.

98. The campaigns for local taxation will be covered in Chapter 5.

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

schooling. Modernisers believed local taxation would provide a panacea and the federal government was also considered as a possible funding lifeline. During four federal Congresses between 1881 and 1889 a proposal was discussed to grant money to each state based upon its rate of illiteracy. The so-called "Blair Bill" passed each time in the House but failed in the Senate. John Tyler Morgan of Alabama led the opposition vigorously. Senator Morgan based his objections primarily on the potential increase in federal taxation implied by the bill but, according to the historian Allen J. Going, he was more concerned with external intrusion upon Alabamian domain.[100]

There was a consequence for the under-investment in public schooling. In 1890 the federal commissioner of education collected a listing of various school statistics for all states; Alabama ranked fourth from the bottom. Forty-one percent of its population was illiterate – perhaps unremarkable when attendance at school was not compulsory.[101]

After Major John G. Harris was elected as state superintendent and took up his position in December 1890 a slightly increased tempo began to be discernible in discussions about schooling in newspapers. There was a growing sense too of an embryonic "teaching profession" – promoted through teachers' associations (both black and white) and an educational press. The *Montgomery Advertiser* was a fervent campaigner for a constitutional amendment proposed by Oscar Hundley in Alabama's House of Representatives as early as 1888.

> *There is no escape from the inevitable. Public schools cost money and the only way to get money for that purpose is to raise it by taxation. . . . Mr Hundley is proposing for submission to the people a constitutional amendment which provides for the levy of a special local school tax. . . . Should the legislature pass the bill giving such authority to the trustees they could exercise or not, as they choose.*[102]

Walker County's *The Mountain Eagle* was one of many newspapers that regularly

100. See "Morgan on the Blair Bill" in the ***Wilcox Progress*** of February 15, 1888. See also Going, ***Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890***, 157.

101. Going, ***Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890***, 168.

102. ***Montgomery Advertiser***, November 18, 1888. See also ***The Mountain Eagle*** for August 23, 1893, and the ***Montgomery Advertiser***, July 8, 1893.

reprinted articles appearing elsewhere commending support of the amendment. Teachers spoke at institutes in its favour. In 1894 the *Wilcox Progress* published a Commencement address at the State Normal School in which the speaker, a Mr Cory of Birmingham, stated:

> *The children are multiplying and the present beggarly per capita of 70 cents will presently be reduced to 60 cents and after a while to 50 cents. That means increasing rather than diminishing illiteracy in a state whose percentage of white men unable to read and write is a disgrace to the civilization of the century. Few of the cultivated people who make up such an audience as this appreciate just how serious a problem does confront us in the ignorance among the masses of the back country.*[103]

Yet, when the amendment was finally put to the people after a campaign of arguably more than six years, it was overwhelmingly defeated. Fear of increased taxation had again trumped any recognition that further expenditure on public education was required.

In 1893 Major John G. Harris carried out a wide-scale educational crusade throughout the state. *The Mountain Eagle* of August 2, 1893, advertised six meetings in Walker County, with an agenda of fifteen items covering such matters as the duty of the state to provide ways and means for the support of the public schools, the obligations of citizens to support the schools, the duties and responsibilities of trustees, teacher competence, local taxation, and "old and new methods of education," et cetera. Harris claimed 3,600 people attended his "Mass Meetings" in Walker County – possibly around 15 percent of the population. For the whole state he claimed an attendance of 100,000.[104]

In his report to the governor for the period ending September 1894 Harris asserted:

> *The minds of the people have been stirred as never before. To reap the fruits growing out of this enterprise it is necessary that the campaign, so auspiciously inaugurated, be carried on*

103. ***Wilcox Progress***, June 13, 1894. This was probably Chappell Cory, a newspaper editor who was private secretary to Joseph Johnston who would later become governor.

104. ***The Mountain Eagle***, August 2, 1893. According to the United States Census for 1900, Walker County's population in that year was 25,162. The United States Census (population figures) for 1900 retrieved from US Government website:- http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/al190090.txt (accessed December 6, 2007).

> *annually . . . opening new avenues of thought, creating new methods and systems by which to reach a greater degree of success.*

He desired that: "Agitate, agitate, continue to agitate, should be the motto, that the people may realise the responsibility that rests upon them in reference to a higher and more general education."[105]

Harris had a secular purpose but he claimed in his report that he had a more "nobler aim than politics." He employed familiar and trusted forms of communication, - a sequence of speakers to make exhortations to a crowd of both believers and sceptics, a conditional promise of a better future and a request for their commitment. His campaign was usually conducted in a field and his audience members were often friends and neighbours.

Whether consciously or not, Harris was harnessing to his purpose one of the most traditional of Alabama's performance rituals – the summer religious revival camp-meeting. Harris' successors would increasingly be professional educationists with more knowledge and expertise in all aspects of educational policy-making. Yet Harris' rallying of ordinary people in the campaign of 1893 was a sign of just how effective it could be to use long-standing forms of local engagement to arouse interest in social objectives and policy awareness. Although the failure of the Hundley Constitutional Amendment occurred after some of the 1893 mass meetings had been held, in the years ahead there would be successful educational campaigns using similar evangelical techniques.

On the eve of the twentieth century and the imminent onset of a period of social activism, Alabama was again witnessing many changes within its borders including changes to agricultural and land-holding practices, the growth of major industries, the expansion of the railroad network (to approximately 8,927 kilometres in 1905) and the development of large towns and cities such as Birmingham. Yet in the face of change – particularly in rural areas - there was also a tenacity in respect of ideas about community autonomy, personal liberty, attitudes to coercive government, cultural traditions and racial caste. The following chapters will

105. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1894***, 12 and 9.

show how, following the adoption of the 1875 constitution, Alabama's public schooling system actually operated in a manner that was congruent with these cultural traditions.

Chapter 2

Decentralised Public Schooling: office-holders, participants, supporters and their respective roles

The previous chapter described the setting – geographic, socio-economic and cultural – and the politico-regulatory environment in which Alabama's public schooling system developed in the years after the Civil War. It noted how, as a consequence of the adoption of the constitution of 1875, the whole schooling system operated thereafter according to a highly decentralised model of authority, policy-making and administration – the ideology of "home-rule." This meant that local communities improvised many of their own solutions to educational needs and, by so doing, helped to maintain neighbourhood power structures (of which the school was an appendage), to perpetuate venerable folkways and to strengthen a culture of individualism and self-reliance. In 1901, John William Abercrombie who was then the state superintendent of education, surveyed the results of nearly a quarter of a century's localised decision-making (particularly the legislature's practice of enacting educational bills that were locally specific rather than of general application). He lamented: "Many, too many, local bills were passed. Each one of them is but another patch upon our patchwork system."[1]

Abercrombie's metaphor suggests he regarded Alabama's schooling system as a randomly patterned quilt rather than the coherent (if racially bifurcated) system he believed necessary for educational betterment and for which he had striven since being elected to the state senate in 1896. After his election as superintendent in December 1898, Abercrombie used all the influence he could muster to secure constitutional and statutory changes in order to centralise and/or standardise educational policy (while at the same time lobbying for local taxation).[2] Abercrombie's initiatives were those of someone whose combined professional experience had been gained as a teacher, lawyer, educationist and bureaucrat. He considered existing schooling arrangements alarmingly inefficient and he was frustrated by a lack of statutory coercive power.

This chapter will show how the system which Abercrombie viewed in such a

1. John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education to John D. Humphrey, superintendent of education for Madison County, March 13, 1901, in SGO15976, Folder 10, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1906***, ADAH.

2. Jesse Monroe Richardson, ***The Contribution of John William Abercrombie to Public Education***, Nashville, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1949, 28-29.

dubious light actually operated up until at least the early years of the twentieth century and from whence it derived its strength. It will describe its (legislated) structure and the allocation of authority within this structure to various officials - the people responsible for securing and sustaining the community approval upon which the continuing existence of public schooling depended. Specifically the chapter will discuss the roles of state and county superintendents, county education boards and township superintendents or trustees. It will also discuss the participation of parents and guardians (generally known as patrons), the students and the influence of other community stakeholders. The critically important role of teachers will be considered in Chapter 3. It may avoid confusion to explain at the outset that, between 1879 and 1891, there were three positions within the education system carrying the title "superintendent." These were provided for by statute and had respectively, state, county and township (school district) responsibilities.

The organisational structure of the post-1875 educational regime in Alabama was pyramidal. At the peak was the state superintendent of education who was an elected government official with a term of two years. Under the school law of 1876, he was legally bound to "devote his time to the care and improvement of the common schools and the improvement of public education," and to diffuse "as widely as possible by personal addresses and personal communication, information as to the importance of public schools."[3] The state superintendent was supposed to visit each county annually to inspect schools and to encourage the holding of teachers' and superintendents' institutes but most of his duties were fiduciary and administrative. He was responsible for the annual distribution and apportionment of the state's "educational fund" and the oversight of its disbursement, for book and record keeping, for reporting, for issuing standardised forms, for distributing pamphlets, and similar matters. The "Department of Education" was embodied in the person of the superintendent himself.[4]

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3. ADAH, ***Alabama School Laws and Codes, 1858-1901***. Laws Relating to the Public School System of Alabama, 1876-1879 with an Appendix of Forms. Prepared by LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, Chapter II, Article II, Sections 5-11, (particularly Section 7), 8-11. From 1876 until 1898, each state superintendent served for four years except for Solomon Palmer who served six years (1884-1890).

4. According to Austin R. Meadows, the state superintendent did not have any clerical assistance until the end of the century. Austin R. Meadows, ***History of the State Department of Education of Alabama***, 1854-1966, Montgomery, n.p. 1968, 34. However, an aside by Leroy F. Box his *Annual Report* for 1878 suggests there may have been a small budget for some such expenses, Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1878***.

The legislative prescription of the state superintendent's role seems to have been based on some template of educational administration which had not been modified in accordance with the expenditure constraints of successive Bourbon governments, the bureaucratic demands of the office, or the geographic reality of Alabama's vast territory and sparse settlement. Some of the early *Annual Reports* of the state superintendent show how the practical difficulties of fulfilling his duties isolated him from the rural communities supposedly being served by the education system. In 1878 Leroy F. Box, the incumbent state superintendent, recounted that he had been too buried in paperwork "to visit the several counties for the purpose of inspecting schools."[5] In 1891 John G. Harris stated emphatically that it was not possible for the state superintendent to visit sixty-six counties annually and "at the same time conduct the office business of the department."[6] Even office business could not be conducted efficiently without resources. Harris' successor, John O. Turner, actually had a circular printed with the caption "MUST STOP" and this was mailed to anyone seeking information from his department. The circular explained it was just not possible to answer enquiries because there were too many. Sometimes even the standardised forms specified for various purposes (such as teachers' reports) were not issued with the result that county superintendents threatened to take matters into their own hands and have the forms printed up at their own expense.[7]

One of the principal roles of the state superintendent was to appoint upwards of sixty county superintendents - a task fraught with controversy owing to rumbustious local disputes and vigorous county politicking. In this connection the correspondence files of successive superintendents are full of nominations and petitions in support of candidates. There are also letters of denunciation. For example, in 1877 George M.D. Lowry was recommended to LeRoy F. Box as a worthy candidate to be the county superintendent for DeKalb County. One of Lowry's backers was John G. Nichols who, in a letter of support written to Box (a Democrat), positioned himself politically as a "member of the Democratic Executive Committee for DeKalb County." On August 3, 1877, Nichols again wrote to Box stating that, since signing his recommendation for the appointment of

5. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1878***, xviii.

6. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891***, 6.

7. Albert Burton Moore, ***A History of Alabama and its People in Three Volumes***, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama, 1951, 553. (Capitalisation original). See also Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 77.

Mr Lowry as county superintendent, he had heard that the *current* incumbent, P. Brown Frazier, actually wanted to remain in the position but another member of the Committee had withdrawn his support for Frazier "through outside and improper influences." Nichols requested Box to withdraw his [Nichols'] earlier support for Lowry; he was now supporting Frazier. Three days later another letter arrived from William J. Haralson, a lawyer and circuit judge, supporting Mr Frazier's appointment claiming "the disaffection of one of the Executive Committee (John B. Appleton) was solely attributable to an enmity between Mr Frazier and one of Appleton's neighbours." Haralson anxiously reported to Box that there were "Republican candidates in the field claiming that if either of them got a majority vote you'd be under promise to appoint them." A further correspondent, James C. Sizemore, offered a highly derogatory view of Frazier depicting him as "almost destitute of firmness of character and as little qualified to the business as anyone." Because local communities felt they should be able to exert some control over appointments, the petitions against Frazier piled up. Claim, counter-claim and shifting alliances all had to be assessed without any prospect of eventual satisfaction.[8] The DeKalb dispute illustrates the ultimate impotence of the state superintendent in satisfying local expectations when superintendents were political appointees and educational qualifications were not a requirement for the position. In this respect, things were little better than they had been under Reconstruction.

The state superintendent was rarely in a position to actually solve neighbourhood disagreements but these were referred to him anyway for adjudication. Such matters might concern the need to remove a school official owing to his being morally unfit, or (for example) dissatisfaction with a trustee's decision on the location of a school. In 1883, a Mr H.J. Martin wrote to Henry Clay Armstrong on behalf of the residents of a number of adjoining townships in Winston County. They were outraged at a recent school location decision and believed the county superintendent had "trampled upon our rights as free American citizens." Martin seemed to realise that Armstrong might not wish to get involved in a local contretemps but requested he might "cite a law that would free us

8. J.G. Nichols to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, August 3, 1877, and from W.J. Haralson to LeRoy F. Box, August 7, 1877, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. Also Colonel S.K.M. Spadden to LeRoy F. Box, enclosing undated letter from J.C. Sizemore (probably written in August 1877) in SGO15974, Folder 3, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. This file has a number of letters of support for G.M.D. Lowry and a number of petitions against Mr Frazier.

from his [the superintendent's] tyranny."[9]

At the next level in the organisational pyramid was the county superintendent and, as with the state superintendent, he was part administrator, part receiver of public moneys, part steward for sixteenth section real estate, and part payroll officer. In the school law of 1879 - *An Act to Organise and Regulate a System of Public Instruction for the State of Alabama*) - there are fourteen sections dealing with the role of the county superintendent. None of these sections deal with educational policy-making or school supervision, although the county superintendent was responsible for appointing and providing some oversight for arguably the most important educational official - the township superintendent - whose role will be discussed below.[10] He also had to preside over a "county educational board" – actually (until 1903) just himself and two teachers he appointed. This was supposed to meet monthly for the purpose of examining and licensing teachers who did not already possess "a diploma from any chartered institute of learning." The board was also supposed to organise three teachers' institutes for each race during the scholastic year but excuses were sometimes found to ignore this requirement.[11]

Despite it being rather a thankless role with mundane duties and inadequate resources, the position of county superintendent was sought after and fought over. This was because it both conferred upon its incumbent a certain prestige and provided him with some remuneration – albeit only a small stipend of $75.00 per annum plus a commission of 2 percent on moneys disbursed. A reasonable recommendation from the superintendent of Washington County in 1875 that superintendents should receive a uniform salary of $300.00 or $400.00 per annum together with a per diem for visiting schools does not seem to have received any attention.[12] Those wishing to be considered for the position of county superintendent had to arrange a substantial bond to be underwritten by several reputable citizens.

9. H.J. Martin of Houston, Winston County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, August 11, 1883, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH.

10. ADAH, ***Alabama School Laws and Codes, 1858-1901***. Laws Relating to the Public School System of Alabama, 1876-1879 with an Appendix of Forms. Prepared by LeRoy F. Box, superintendent of education, Chapter II, Article III, Sections 12-26, 11-15.

11. *Ibid.*, Chapter II, Article VI, Section 47, paragraphs 1-10, 20-21.

12. *Ibid.*, Chapter II, Article III, Section 24, 15. See also Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 108.

A regard for status and position might seem a contradiction in a culture of frontier individualism yet, as the Southern writer W.J. Cash observed in his highly regarded cultural analysis, *The Mind of the South*, "crackers and farmers" accorded such entitlements to their "captains" in the public arena because they associated the "master class, not with any diminution of their individuality but with its fullest development and expression." This may have been a remnant attitude from their Celtic ancestors who idealised the heroic warrior aristocrat.[13] For about thirty years after the Civil War these "captains" were often literally so - former Confederate officers in whom a degree of local swagger was invested. Whilst it was seen as a *dis*advantage for a superintendent to have "scarcely enough education to attend to ordinary business affairs," (Mr Sizemore's scathing opinion of Mr Frazier) the opposite did not hold. If a potential appointee had specific skills or knowledge as an educationist or teaching experience this might stand him in good stead but, as with other county office holders, it was more important that he was attuned to county and neighbourhood political sympathies and values.

Most county superintendents were not from the antebellum gentry but were local businessmen, - cotton and produce buyers, druggists, printers, general merchants, undertakers, dealers in wagons, carriages and furniture, or involved in similar commercial activities. Others were newspaper editors, physicians, lawyers or notaries. Some were planters and some were farmers. For others the position was just one occupation amongst many in a varied career. Eugene C. Williams, who was elected superintendent for Shelby County on three successive occasions from 1896, was later postmaster at the town of Vincent. He followed this with a stint of several years as nightwatchman for the Bessemer city jail and ended his working life as caddy-master for a golf club. A one-time superintendent of Fayette County went on to be a dealer in "fruit, vegetables, candies and stationery."[14]

The position of county superintendent did not become an elective office in all

13. Wilbur J. Cash, ***The Mind of the South***, New York, Vintage Books, 1991, [1941], 112-113. See also Grady McWhiny, "Revolution in Nineteenth Century Agriculture." In Sarah W. Wiggins, ed. ***From Civil War to Civil Rights – Alabama, 1860-1960: an anthology from the Alabama Review***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1987, 120.

14. Occupations determined from multiple pieces of correspondence in SGO15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH. Also, V.C. Sizemore to John M. McKleroy, state superintendent of public instruction, August 1877 in SG015974, Folder 3, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1867-1916***, ADAH. See also Shelby County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Shelby County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 400. See also correspondence for 1903 and 1904 in SGO15980, Folder 11, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

counties until early in the twentieth century but, even when appointment to the office was a matter for the state superintendent, there was still significant community input to the appointment process (as discussed in relation to the DeKalb appointment in 1877).[15] A person desirous of holding the position might submit his name to the state superintendent and then arrange one or multiple petitions of recommendation from county residents and men of local significance. In October 1877, when Samuel C. Oliver's appointment as superintendent of Tallapoosa County was about to expire, no less than one hundred and thirty-eight petitioners supported his reappointment. Individual supporters might send in their own letters of recommendation asserting that they knew "the sentiments and desires of the people of the county."[16] However, some candidates regarded the gathering of petitions as demeaning and believed their known achievements and/or record of public service should be sufficient testament for suitability.[17]

An expanded set of personal characteristics and other criteria regarded as important in a county superintendent emerge from a review of the petitions and letters from members of various communities in the state superintendent's files. It did not need spelling out that any candidate would have to be both white - after 1875 this was assumed - and male. Beyond this, the superintendent definitely had to be a local person. This was partly because of the way communities tended to define themselves and assert their identity - by claiming their difference from an "other" - but, as well, external appointees might deprive one of the county's own people of a due entitlement. Thus petitioners mentioned that "his property is here and he has long been fully identified with this county," or "Pickens County can furnish citizens to fill her offices without going to Tuscaloosa for them," (or, in objecting to an appointment) "he is not in touch with the teachers of the state having come

15. By Act of the Alabama Assembly in 1888-89 a provision was made for the election of county superintendents. These were elected in the August of even years and went into office the following October except for Autauga, Barbour, Chambers, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Jefferson, Lowndes, Macon, Madison, Montgomery, Mobile, Perry, Pickens, Randolph, Sumter, Talladega, Washington, Wilcox, Choctaw and Cleburne. Article III, Section 954 of the Public School Law of 1891 stated "Unless by special act it is otherwise provided, a county superintendent for each county shall be appointed by the Superintendent of Education. From the letter files of the state superintendent it seems elections for the county superintendent's position may have been held earlier.

16. Petitions from 138 citizens of Tallapoosa County to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, in SG15978, Folder 5, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1877-1878***, ADAH. Also James T. Jones to Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, October 6, 1885, in SGO15974, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, Folder 13, ADAH.

17. Regarding reluctance to secure petitions see A.S. Stockdale to John M. McKleroy, state superintendent of education, January 12, 1875, in SG15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH. See also Sam C. Cook to John M. McKleroy, January 3, 1875, in SGO15974, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

from abroad."[18]

Confederate credentials were highly regarded by petitioners; - "he went to battle in his country's cause and made a most gallant officer," "he is a true soldier." So illustrious were these credentials that they were allowed inheritance by a civilian son; - "his father was Col. F.R. Beck who was killed . . . during the war." The superintendent had to be a "high-toned" person of impeccable behaviour; - he is "industrious and temperate," "he is a gentleman of the very best position." He had (preferably) to be a member of one or more of the associations that were an organised expression of male camaraderie (and exclusivity) such as local fraternal societies or farmers' groups; - "he is a good Templar," "he is a Mason," "it will be gratifying to the Patrons of Husbandry to know that one of their number has been made superintendent." Moreover, for this secular position, while the county superintendent was expected to remain non-partisan in denominational battles, he did have to be a man of faith (and a Protestant); - "he is a strict member of the Baptist Sabbath School," "his walk, conversation and habits are those of a Christian gentleman." In addition, his political sympathies had to be aligned unambiguously with his white political constituency; - "he is the choice of the Party," "he is no fair-weather Democrat," or (a non-supportive view) "he is a *Radical* and has done all he could in opposition to the Democratic Party."[19]

Overall, county superintendents were expected to be virtuous and conventional. A candidate for the superintendency of Bullock County was described as not only "worthy and suitable" but "as a man of most excellent moral character."[20] If

18. ***The Troy Messenger*** reported in its edition of March 9, 1871, that a black Radical preacher named Smith had been elected superintendent of education in Barbour County. This was probably Ferdinand Smith. John C. Robertson to John M. McKleroy, state superintendent of public instruction, January 4, 1874, in SGO15974, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. Also N.L. White to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, September 4, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1904***, ADAH. Also J.L. Davis to John William Abercrombie, February 27, 1899, in SG15979, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1904***, ADAH.

19. Felix Tait of Wilcox County to John M. McKleroy, state superintendent of public instruction, December 4, 1874, in SGO15978, Folder 3, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1873-1874***, ADAH. Also R.H. Dawson to John M. McKleroy, December 24, 1874, in SGO15974, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH; Sam C. Cook to John M. McKleroy, January 3, 1875, and D.C. White to John M. McKleroy, January 26, 1875, in SGO15974, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. Also Amos L. Moody to Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, September 5, 1887, in SGO15980, Folder 4, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1886-1887***, ADAH. Also unnamed correspondent to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, November 1879, regarding J.W. Ferguson in SGO15974, Folder 3, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. (Italics added).

20. S.T. Frazer of Bullock County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, regarding Professor W. P. Stott, September 6, 1883, in SG015978, Folder 10, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1883-1884***, ADAH.

superintendents did not meet community expectations in this regard, petitions flew up to the state superintendent seeking their removal from office. In 1885, the superintendent of Morgan County, Edison J. Oden, was accused of being "a whoremaster" - a person making use of prostitutes - and was thus "unsuitable to be at the head of our moral institutions." Multiple perfidies were attributed to Thomas Cowart of Winston County (allegedly of a "mean disposition") but his use of "insulting, profane and indecent language" in the presence of a patron's family and his drawing of a knife and pistol on a township superintendent were matters of outrage. The removal of James H. Ward of Dale County, was urgently requested because Ward was not behaving in accordance with "the dignity of the office." Ward had transgressed by compromising a young female relative and - this seemed the greater concern - by "professing to be a hypnotist." It was alleged he "gave entertainments in different places and exhibitions of his hypnotic powers and legerdemain."[21]

In February 1886 when the superintendent of Pike County, John T. Stephenson, attempted suicide, the "unhappy man" was found to have been subsidizing his business losses with school funds. The extent of community investment in the office and its holder can be seen in the editorial comment of *The Troy Enquirer*:

> *If he could have realised the immense amount of trouble and worry in which the state, the county, the town, the poor teachers of the county, many of his fellow citizens and not a few personal friends and relatives would have been involved by his acts, perhaps he would have paused in his career ere fraud, forgery and dishonor had met their victim.*[22]

County superintendents had to be smooth politicians who knew how "to keep themselves in office by currying favour with the people of the county."[23] Yet they also had to be able to stand above the fray of competing interests. Those who did so successfully were accorded honorary titles of grateful esteem. William Neal, who

21. Allegation made against E.J. Oden of Morgan County in letter from M.F. Patterson to Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, November 30, 1885, in SGO15974, Folder 13, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. Also, H.J. Martin to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, August 11, 1883, in SG15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. Also Joseph E. Acker to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, August 12, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1904***, ADAH.

22. Margaret P. Farmer, ***History of Pike County Alabama, 1821-1971***, Anniston, Higginbotham Inc. 1973, 213. Farmer is quoting from ***The Troy Enquirer*** of April 1, 1886. This incident was also covered in ***The Troy Messenger*** on February 11, 1886, February 25, 1886, April 8, 1886, and April 15, 1886.

23. Mitchell B. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1957, 136.

served as Escambia County's superintendent of education for twenty-three years from 1886 and was a tireless campaigner for better schools, was remembered as "The Father of Public Education in Escambia County."[24]

As the state superintendent's appointee, the county superintendent was implicitly expected to promote the cause of public education.[25] Yet, in accordance with the tradition of devising local rules for local needs, some superintendents declined to observe the lines of separation between public and private schools (which were blurred anyway by the not infrequent use of public funds to subsidise private schools). For example, the superintendent of education in Butler County during the mid-1870s was Professor J. Mack Thigpen. At the beginning of the decade he was engaged in establishing a new private school for boys and girls - the South Alabama High School. At the end of the decade, (whilst still superintendent) he had become principal of yet another private school - the Baptist South Alabama Female Institute and teachers seeking positions in Butler's public schools had to contact him at his office there (rather than at the courthouse). As this Baptist school was competing for students with a nearby Methodist school, Thigpen saw no interest in turning away potential patrons so they might send their children to the county's public schools.[26] Similarly, William Neal also divided his time between "keeping alive the badly paid public schools scattered over Escambia County and conducting private schools."[27]

Although dignified by its own article in the pages of the school law, the county educational board (the superintendent and two teachers) was hardly the authoritative regulator by which a county's educational standards were going to be securely established or maintained.[28] The superintendent of Fayette County wrote to LeRoy F. Box in 1880 advising him that "if the local board *must* be composed of professional teachers, there cannot be one formed in this county according to the

24. Annie Crook Waters, ***History of Escambia County, Alabama***, Huntsville, Strode Publishers, 1983, 318.

25. The state superintendent's promotional obligations are stipulated in ADAH, ***Alabama School Laws and Codes, 1858-1901***, Chapter II, Article II, 9. The Articles setting out the obligations of county and township superintendents did not actually repeat the requirement to promote public education.

26. Patricia Graham, ***Community and Class in American Education, 1865-1918***, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, 130-131.

27. Waters, ***History of Escambia County, Alabama***, 318.

28. ADAH, ***Alabama School Laws and Codes, 1858-1901***. Laws Relating to the Public School System of Alabama, 1876-1879 with an Appendix of Forms. Prepared by LeRoy F. Box, superintendent of education, Chapter II, Article VI, 20-21.

requirements of law. There is but one man in the county who follows teaching as a profession and he is sixteen miles from the courthouse."[29]

Though the county superintendent was somewhat circumscribed by law in respect of his educational responsibilities, the legal authority vested in him – particularly in relation to the examining and licensing of teachers through his presidency of the county educational board – allowed him to exert a certain amount of local positional power. For a fee of one dollar he could hand out first, second or third grade teacher's certificates on the basis of an examination that he himself prepared, supervised and marked. It was claimed that in Coffee County if one could spell "baker" and pay a dollar the certificate was granted. It was also claimed "that for a fee, a well-educated person could take the test for anyone who desired a certificate." At the end of the century (when the state assumed the licensing authority) John William Abercrombie - the earnest proponent of modernisation - was horrified to learn that one superintendent "in one day, without calling his examining board together, issued ninety certificates, and put ninety hard-earned (?) dollars into his pocket." In another county where "horse-swapping conventions" were held, a first grade teaching certificate might be tossed in with a "critter" - no doubt in order to equalise the exchange value.[30] There is a folkloric quality to these anecdotes but just the telling shows that in at least some counties a teacher's certificate was not so much regarded as a testament to knowledge as it was a neighbourly transaction or a tradeable commodity.

Some superintendents took pride in using the somewhat blunt instrument of their licensing authority to try to raise educational standards. The school law specified only "intemperance or unworthy or disgraceful conduct" for the cancellation of teaching licences. In 1875 the superintendent of Sumter County boasted that his teachers were an "intelligent, educated, industrious and efficient corps" because he had weeded out the "ignorant, indolent and drunken teachers."[31]

29. A.M. Nuckols to Leroy F. Box, state superintendent of education, February 2, 1880, in SGO15974, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. There were licensed teachers in Fayette County but "not more than ten of them had gone beyond the minimum grade which was very low." Female teachers could not then serve on boards of education.

30. Watson, ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, Anniston, Higginbotham, 1970, 194-95. See also ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, xii.

31. ADAH, ***Alabama School Laws and Codes, 1858-1901***. Laws Relating to the Public School System of Alabama, 1876-1879. Prepared by LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, Chapter II, Article VI, 21. See also Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 104.

Yet the determination of unworthy and disgraceful conduct could be very subjective or partisan. In the 1880s there was an upsurge of agrarian political populism throughout the South which challenged the dominance of the Democratic and Conservative Party. An organisation called the Agricultural Wheel was active throughout Alabama but particularly so in the northern counties including Lawrence and Franklin. When a branch of the Franklin Wheel decided to replace a local teacher with a "Wheeler" (Jeremiah S. Daily) - Asa Frederick, the county superintendent (and a Democrat) suspended the school trustees and cancelled Daily's contract. By so doing he unleashed a blizzard of protest and petitions for his own removal to the state superintendent, Solomon Palmer. Palmer had to try to sort out the brouhaha but was warned off by Franklin's probate judge who reassured him that "the controversy . . . is of a purely local character growing out of neighborhood prejudices and in which the county generally has no interest whatever."[32]

The county superintendents of education were only loosely under the direction of the state superintendent with whom their contact was infrequent - generally on matters to do with their own appointment or on contentious issues needing external intervention. Most of the time county superintendents operated on their own authority with quite a deal of latitude and this meant that reports of defalcation and financial irregularities were not unknown.[33] There were also other illicit activities. On June 3, 1880, a Franklin County farmer named Isam J. Loyd, wrote to LeRoy F. Box, with a range of complaints. He was living in the south-west corner of a township that was "cut off by Bull Mountain Creek, from any convenient school" but, as there was a school close by in another township, he wanted authority to transfer his four children to this school. Transfer requests to the county superintendent, Mr Vickery, had apparently gone unheeded and, probably as a means of settling the score, Loyd went on to provide a colourful tale of how the superintendent notoriously operated a whiskey still and, some months before, had

32. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 104. Also letters and petitions of various dates in 1887 to Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, particularly letter from James M. Jordan, probate judge for Franklin County to Solomon Palmer, August 31, 1887, in SGO15980, Folder 4, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1886-1887***, ADAH.

33 Defalcations (which were reported with gusto and condemnation in the newspapers), occurred in Blount, Colbert, Covington, Escambia, Lauderdale and Pike Counties. In 1883, the use of Colbert County school funds to fund an interest bearing mortgage on a property belonging to a township superintendent's wife was a matter of great local disquiet - though defended as an honest commercial transaction. Other disputes (in Baldwin, Clarke and Etowah Counties) concerned the manner in which county superintendents calculated commissions due to them.

been in the middle of an oration at a school house when a revenue marshal arrived to arrest him. Seeing his quarry take off into the woods, the marshal sought to remedy the disappointment of those assembled, by giving them a speech himself – "if they would just tell him Mr Vickery's topic."[34]

If the actual educational responsibilities of the county superintendent were somewhat constrained by the constitution and by legislation, those at the next level down the organisational pyramid – the "township superintendent" were quite extensive. Prior to 1879 this role had been performed by three trustees and would be again after 1891. Old habits dying hard, township superintendents were sometimes referred to as trustees and, where there might otherwise be confusion, the position will be referred to below as "township superintendent/trustee."

The 1879 legislation conferred on the township superintendent the obligation to conduct a biennial census of school-aged children and the power to establish one or more schools for each race in the township he was charged with supervising - unless there were insufficient funds for multiple schools. He had to meet annually with the parents and guardians of the township's children and, in consultation with them and "with a view to subserving their wishes, interests and convenience," determine the number of schools required, where these should be located, where children unable to be accommodated in the schools provided should be transferred and, in the event of transfer not being feasible, the amount of school moneys to be paid to patrons (who would make their own arrangements).

Township superintendents/trustees were required to locate schools in places where the community was likely to be willing and able to supplement the school fund and also where teachers were likely to be able to procure and teach the greatest number of pupils (but not less than ten) within the educational age. They had to ensure that schools did not open at all unless they could operate for a minimum of three scholastic months. As well, they were responsible for selling or leasing school lands and reporting on any income received. Perhaps most importantly they had to contract with (supposedly) licensed teachers, visit schools, remove any teachers for cause and make certain that teachers complied with various record-keeping

34. I.J. Loyd to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, June 3, 1880, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. Loyd had four school-aged children. Vickery was Thomas Vickery, superintendent of the adjoining Marion County.

obligations. The township superintendents/trustees received no remuneration for these duties other than what might be called a "social wage" – being freed from certain county obligations such as paying poll-tax, serving on juries and undertaking the onerous annual road duty - a civic chore which required all the able-bodied men in the county to spend ten days each year repairing corduroy roads, ploughing drainage ditches and maintaining surfaces to ensure roads remained passable.[35]

While, as has been said, much actual educational influence at this time resided with school patrons, township superintendents/trustees reflected the local social hierarchy. The law prescribed that for appointment to the office, one had to be a "freeholder and householder." This meant township superintendents/trustees were generally yeoman farmers or store-keepers and slightly better off financially than some of the school patrons. Not being paid, they needed to be better off. In fulfilling the obligations of public office, they were very much accountable to their community. Yet township superintendents/trustees could only be as effective as the community (of which they were a member) allowed them to be. If a community was indifferent to the importance of schooling, the township superintendents/trustees were also likely to be indifferent. Yet if they were officious then this too was unacceptable. In February 1880, a Lowndes County farmer named Jesse S. Sampley, wrote to the state superintendent requesting a copy of the school law. Sampley believed the local township superintendent - J. Wesley Avenger - was wrongfully construing his authority. He was said to have:

> *A great deal of zeal for the educational caus and not much of anything els as he is a very bussy body in the matter – to much so some of us think to do the people the justise of giving them fair play.*[36]

One county superintendent complained that many of his trustees took little interest in their schools: - "They say the matter is a farce and is no use in spending their time in such manner." Another felt it was impossible to keep the schools regulated without the help of the trustees but, as these had not informed themselves regarding the duties imposed on them, they "were consequently exercising very little interest

35. ADAH, ***Alabama School Laws and Codes, 1858-1901,*** Laws Relating to the Public School System of Alabama, 1876-1879, Chapter II, Article IV, Sections 27-44, 16-20. See also Chapter 5, pages 170-171.

36. Jesse S. Sampley to state superintendent of education, February 5, 1880, in SGO15974, Folder 5, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1916,*** ADAH. (Spelling original).

in the management of the schools." Yet another superintendent described the trustees of his county as being "careless and inefficient" but he attributed this to their lack of "pay or emolument." A writer to the *Dothan Home Journal* asserted that, while some trustees were competent and disinterested, others used their office "to secure positions for relatives and friends regardless of fitness."[37]

Successful township superintendents/trustees were "as punctual in the discharge of their duty as could well be desired"[38] and valued the good opinion and approval of school patrons though these sometimes acted as wilful clients who expected all their desires to be satisfied: - "The main trouble with public education is that 9/10ths of the public want to boss the schools," claimed one exasperated superintendent. If patrons were displeased with a township superintendent's decision they might refuse to assist in acquiring the land and/or materials necessary for building and maintaining schoolhouses. As well, they might withdraw their children from school or at least allow them not to attend. In 1877, John J. Steele, the superintendent of Lowndes County, reported that he had a petition signed by 104 "colored" patrons who were angry that they had been entirely ignored when "they distinctly notified the trustees they would *not* send to a certain teacher if employed,"[39] Boycotts threatened the very survival of schools which often depended on patron subsidies to meet tuition costs.

Fiats from Montgomery advising county superintendents that trustees should not be allowed to locate schools just to suit themselves (thus ensuring there were too many schools with insufficient students for the funds available), and reminding them as well that parents and guardians had no legal entitlement in the selection of teachers,

37. M.C. Byrd, superintendent of education for Colbert County to Joseph H. Speed, state superintendent of public instruction, September 12, 1873, in SGO15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH. Also J.L. Peters, superintendent of education for Bibb County to LeRoy F. Box, December 15, 1876, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. Also see report from James T.B. Foard, superintendent of education for Escambia County - included in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report 1875***, 82. Also see article by Dr Richard McIlwaine in ***Dothan Home Journal***, February 3, 1902.

38 Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 98.

39. John J. Steele superintendent of education for Lowndes County to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, February 5, 1877, in SGO15979, Folder 8, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1865-1875***, ADAH. See also ADAH, Alabama Dept. of Education, SG011916, ***Annual Historical Reports on Condition of Education for each County/City Board of Education, 1904-05*** (Hereinafter cited as Alabama Dept of Education, ***County/City Board Annual Report [years]***). Report by Charles McDowell, superintendent of education for Barbour County. See also Farmer, ***History of Pike County Alabama,*** 204.

were largely ineffectual.[40] They failed to acknowledge the reality on the ground, - the almost tribal sense of the families comprising the school community, their belief that the school was theirs alone to control, the strength of local customs and ways of doing things in rural neighbourhoods and the need to recognise these customs and improvise solutions to accommodate them.

Some trustees anticipated disputes and sought to pre-empt them. In 1894 a newspaper advertisement notified parents and guardians of a meeting being held by the school trustees of Township 14, Range 7 (in Walker County) to locate schools and apportion money. The patrons were requested to attend and make their wishes known to the trustees "or else not be too severe if their actions fail to please them."[41]

One matter that could be guaranteed to arouse the ire of patrons was unacceptable nepotism - both actual and suspected - on the part of township and even county superintendents in the selection of teachers. In 1877 an angry patron wrote from DeKalb County to the state superintendent about a township superintendent who had employed his own daughter. She was said to be:

> *A young lady just grown up, with **no** experience in teaching, has acquired a very limited knowledge of the primary branches only and is wholly incompetent to properly conduct a school.*[42]

In 1880, petitioners from Washington County felt themselves to be "imposed upon" because they had selected a teacher and, although he had been examined and licensed, their township superintendent would not provide him with a contract. This was allegedly because he [the township superintendent] wanted to employ his own son - described as "totally unfit" - and apply the available school funds for the establishment of a school near his own home.[43] In 1883, the superintendent of Winston County – Thomas Cowart - was accused by some outraged school patrons of pressuring their township superintendent to resign, appointing a more malleable

40. Department of Education circular addressed to county superintendents from John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, September 26, 1900, in SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH.

41. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 9, 1894.

42. F.M. Oliver of DeKalb County to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, July 10, 1877, in SGO15978, Folder 7, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. (Emphasis added).

43. Richard D. Bounds of Washington County to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, August 28, 1880, in SGO15978, Folder 7, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH.

replacement and then requiring this new superintendent to appoint Cowart's sixteen-year-old son to teach for six months thus consuming funds anticipated elsewhere.[44]

In 1884 a teacher who had taught for many years at a school in Marengo County, brought a lawsuit against some members of his township superintendent's family. He was subsequently advised that his teaching contract would not be renewed. In asking for guidance on the distressing matter, the county superintendent, Levi Reeves, felt obliged to assure the state superintendent, that nepotism was not a factor in his representations, - "he [the teacher] is no kin – true – not connected with me in any way – owes me nothing."[45]

Most complaints about township superintendents concerned the imposition of an unsuitable teacher, the location of schools and/or the consequent allocation of funding. "Is it right," asked the citizens of one township in Henry County, "to deprive a large percent of the people of their public money or have them send [their children] to a school dominated by a man that is odious to them?"[46] Some disgruntled patrons in Lee County went to the trouble of employing attorneys to stop "the unauthorised action of the township superintendent in the location of school funds."[47]

In adjudicating disputes and trying to withstand factional pressure, county superintendents were often faced with a dilemma. They were well aware that, along with the church, the school was one of the few social institutions regularly encountered by the community. In fact, for black rural people, church and school were usually the *only* institutions they encountered away from the farm or plantation. The schoolhouse was an artefact of local enterprise and a focus for

44. H.J. Martin of Winston County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, August 11, 1883, in SGO15978, Folder 7, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH.

45. Levi W. Reeves, superintendent of education for Marengo County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, October 10, 1884, in SGO15974, Folder 12, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. (Emphasis original).

46. J.B. Espy, superintendent of education for Henry County to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, November 28, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1904***, ADAH.

47. Samford, Chilton and Meallors, Attorneys, to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, March 16, 1880, in SGO15979, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

neighbourhood activities such as Masonic meetings, exhibitions, spelling bees, and "box-suppers, fish fries, cake-walks, ice-cream socials and plenty of music."[48] Being such a focus, each public school both resembled and helped to shape the very identity of the community in which it was located. It therefore needed the support and participation of the whole community in order to survive. But superintendents were also responsible for seeing that meagre public funds were spent appropriately. In 1880, Crenshaw's Lawrence S. Knight wrote to the state superintendent (Leroy F. Box), to relate how some of his township superintendents had made contracts with teachers who, upon examination, showed they knew "scarcely anything about even the simplest elements of a very common school education."[49]

When all community stakeholders and educational office-bearers saw eye-to-eye and policy determination was a consensual affair, the schools operated reasonably smoothly in accordance with traditional processes of local decision-making and acknowledged lines of authority. One county superintendent purred about the long tenure of his township superintendents/trustees and how they consulted in a "concert of action for the interests of their schools."[50]

Harmony could be disrupted by matters that, while not directly connected with the public schools, were an extension of a community's political attitudes or religious allegiances. The factionalism of contemporary politics was a case in point. Between 1874 and 1890 a relatively small group of Bourbon Democrats was able to control Alabama politically without serious challenge but, from about the mid 1880s, the discontent of economically distressed farmers started to find a political voice. Members of farmer alliances and societies such as the aforementioned Agricultural Wheel and Granges as well as organised labour and Republicans grouped under

48. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 148-149. See also Joe G. Acee, ***Lamar County History***, Vernon, Lamar Democrat, 1976, 68. See also Blount County Heritage Book Committee. ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 60-61. See also Lawrence County Heritage Book Committee. ***The Heritage of Lawrence County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1998, 12.

49. Lawrence S. Knight, superintendent of education for Crenshaw County to LeRoy F. Box, state superintendent of education, February 20, 1880, in SGO15979, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

50. Levi Reeves, superintendent of education for Marengo County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, October 10, 1884, in SGO15979, Folder 12, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

various populist banners.[51]

As county superintendents were appointees of Alabama's dominant political regime, those who dealt with them were anxious to establish their political fealty or stance on some issue in Party terms. In 1875 Colonel Asberry S. Stockdale of Clay County (a member of the "Executive Committee of the Democratic and Conservative Party") expressed his dissatisfaction to the state superintendent with the incompetence of the county superintendent, Archibald J. Williamson. Stockdale wrote "Williamson *claims* to be a member of Our Party," (as if "incompetent Democrat" were an oxymoron). In 1875, mystified petitioners from Chilton County protested the replacement of their superintendent asserting he had been "a good superintendent and *a good Democrat.*" When a school staffing dispute in Franklin County was fomented by the Agricultural Wheel in 1887, the organisation was described to the state superintendent by a Democrat newspaper as "a secret, socialistic, *Republican* organisation in this County that is abominably obnoxious to all decency." As late as 1902, the superintendent of education for Geneva County defended himself from the allegations of school trustees that he was a drunkard by explaining the calumnies as the work of his "*Populist* enemies."[52] The aspersions "Pop" "Kolbite" and "Republican" occur frequently in letters written to the state superintendent providing a sort of thumbnail designation of potential or actual political enemies and also class suspicions.[53] During the Bourbon ascendancy, to be accused of sympathy with political populism could lead to social ostracism and loss of office.

As with county superintendents, the appointment of township superintendents was made an extension of the political process and helped to strengthen the web of personal, social and political relationships within the community. Allegiance to a

51. William Warren Rogers, ***One-Gallused Rebellion: agrarianism in Alabama, 1865-1896***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2001, xx-xxi. Some of the parties representing agrarian dissatisfaction were the "Jeffersonian Democrats," the Republicans and the Populist Party.

52. A.S. Stockdale of Clay County to John M. McKleroy, state superintendent of public instruction, February 6, 1875, in SGO15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH. Also petition from eleven citizens of Chilton County to John M. McKleroy, June 23, 1875, in SGO15978, Folder 4, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1907***, ADAH. Also J.B. Steadham of "*The Southern Idea*" to Solomon Palmer, state superintendent September 5, 1887, in SGO15979, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1868-1913***, ADAH. Also Frank Justice to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, January 14, 1902, in SGO15980, Folder 9, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1889-1953***, ADAH. (Italics added).

53. "Pop" for Populist Party member, "Kolbite" for a supporter of Reuben F. Kolb, a Populist (and apostate Democrat), "Republican" for a member of the post-Reconstruction (mainly white) opposition party whose supporters were largely in the north of the state. Virginia Van der Veer Hamilton, ***Alabama: a Bicentennial History***, New York, Norton, 1977, 174.

particular political party was another tradition, not unlike religion, which gave a community its sense of self. It was almost a tribal marker.

A further factor that was important in ensuring the roles of superintendents were not compromised by conflict and that the schools operated with a reasonable level of cooperation was the degree to which they were able to keep religious sectarianism or denominationalism out of the schoolhouse. This was not always easy in nineteenth century America when localism and denominational religiosity went hand-in-hand. Denominations fitted people into their own community whilst providing reference to the larger society; they gave people a sense of heritage and place in the socio-cultural milieu. Furthermore, full participation in civil society anticipated membership in *some* denomination even when a single community might be represented by several denominations or multiple divisions of one, – for example, the Baptists and Primitive Baptists or the Methodists and Episcopal Methodists.[54]

The public schooling system was only secular in the sense that it was conducted under state legislation and that it was non-denominational. All public education at this time was underpinned by the contention that the true citizen of the American republic was a moral individual rooted in a (Protestant) Christian community. One county superintendent finished his comments on educational progress by stating:

> *Alabama needs that her children be educated, and her young men and women be taught correct conduct, pure morality, right living with all the sweetness and light that shed their radiance about the teachings of the gospel of Christ.*[55]

The Bible was read daily in most schools and morning lessons often began with prayers but parents were wary of denominational dogma. In 1884, the superintendent of Cullman County wrote to Henry Clay Armstrong, asking if he could recommend a teacher who would "start the day with a prayer but will not advocate his religious views too freely for we have several religious

54. Henry H. Swatos, Jr, "Beyond Denominationalism: Community and Culture in American Religion." ***Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*** 20 (September 1981): 217-27.

55. Report by E.R. Harris, superintendent of education for Lamar County, in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908***, 74.

denominations here."[56]

Denominational differences could impede the efforts of county superintendents seeking to maximise educational efficiency. In 1885 there were two black public schools in Troy which together had an enrolment of 225 pupils supported entirely from public funds. An attempt to combine the two schools foundered because the respective patrons were so set on having their children taught solely by members of their own denomination.[57] In 1906, the state superintendent (trying to establish the *full* extent of educational provisions in Alabama) asked each county superintendent to advise on the numbers of children attending private and denominational schools in his county. Josiah W. Johnson of Colbert County replied that he would only be able to guess at the numbers attending Catholic schools because, of course, as a practising Methodist, he would not actually be able to *visit* them.[58] Years after the public school system was recognised as a permanent fixture of the educational landscape, an anxious preacher from Hale County wrote to the state superintendent stating he had observed a "tendency on the part of teachers to teach religion more and more." He was concerned that, as every community had various denominations (he himself was an "Old Line Baptist"), it would be "quite difficult for any teacher to teach religiously so as not to offend or disgust some of the patrons and supporters of the school." The superintendent of Escambia County reported "denominational factions" were a barrier to educational progress, with "each faction wanting a "teacher of their creed."[59]

It was eminently reasonable that the public schools should not - at the very least – "offend and disgust" their patrons and supporters because, until the end of the nineteenth century, these were the people comprising the next level of the

56. P.H. Kinney of Bremen, Cullman County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, August 27, 1884, in SGO15974, Folder 12, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

57. Farmer, ***History of Pike County Alabama, 1821-1971***, 206.

58. Report from Josiah W. Johnson, superintendent of education for Colbert County to state superintendent of education, September 30, 1906, in Alabama Dept of Education, SG011916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1871-1905.***

59. George W. Stewart of Akron, Hale County to Harry C. Gunnels, state superintendent of education, March 17, 1910, in SGO15440, Folder 8, ***Superintendent's Correspondence***, ADAH. See also report from John B. O'Bannon of Escambia County in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908***, 52.

educational system's organisational pyramid. Apart from teachers, these most heavily influenced the ways in which schools actually operated.

The state constitution of 1875 stipulated that virtually all public educational funds had to be spent solely on teachers' salaries.[60] This left all decisions regarding other expenditure – on land, buildings and equipment - in the hands of trustees and also in the hands of the school patrons themselves. The authority of patrons to influence expenditure was in addition to the authority they held for deciding whether to support the teachers contracted to instruct their children, whether to subsidise tuition so as to extend the school term and whether to allow their children actually to attend and how frequently. Patron attitudes to schooling largely determined or influenced when schools would be held, what would be taught and what educational outcomes were, ideally, to be achieved.

Of course, when patrons were poverty-stricken (and many were, particularly in black communities) their options were limited and their schoolhouses, if they had any at all, were "very poor structures." In the face of such exigency, patrons and/or trustees arranged for pupils to be taught in churches, in private houses or in other public or privately owned buildings such as Masonic Lodges.[61] It often happened that a better off farmer and/or patron – someone with sufficient land - would donate part of his own holding so a schoolhouse could be built. This was sometimes done out of self-interest (it might enable the donor's children to be schooled close to home) and the gesture might be a conditional one. The title to the land might revert to the owner or to his/her estate once the schoolhouse was no longer required. Schoolhouses built on a donated site were often named for the donor – for example, Blalock School near Hood's Crossing in Blount County was so named because it was on land that had been part of Jack Blalock's farm. Such naming was a long-term reminder of the obligations of the better off to

60. Under Article XIII, Section 6 of the constitution of 1875 not more than 4 percent of moneys raised through taxation or appropriations could be spent other than on teachers' salaries.

61. For examples see county superintendents reports in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 101, 105. See also oral history of Sue Mae Freeman Powell recorded by Ronald Dykes in ***Growing Up Hard: memories of Jackson County, Alabama in the early twentieth century***, Paint Rock, Paint Rock River Press, 2003, 36. See also Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 67.

those less fortunate.[62]

While township superintendents were responsible for locating schools, their final decisions might be determined after taking advice from patrons who exercised influence or authority over their neighbours. For example, William L. Lewis of Talladega County reported:

> *Old and influential Negroes control the sentiment of the colored population with regard to the location of school-houses and employment of teachers and they take pride in exercising the influence they have.*[63]

Location was always a crucial decision for patrons and trustees because it could make schooling accessible to one community while denying it to another. In a "sparsely settled" county such as Shelby or one "cut up with streams and mountains" such as Talladega, it was difficult to place either sufficient schools or ones that were accessible to enough children to make them viable or "acceptable to all." In Perry County, which was also interlaced with waterways, one parent complained that it was not possible for him to send his children to a school over a river that could not be crossed without difficulty and whose schoolhouse was three or four miles south of his home. As a consequence of this, seven children were being deprived of an education.[64] A long, tiring (sometimes barefoot) walk - up to eight kilometres was considered walking distance - which sometimes involved wading through streams or negotiating muddy roads, was not the only disadvantage of remote schoolhouses. In heavily wooded areas of wilderness, parents had to consider the possibility of their children encountering wild animals

62. Winston County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Winston County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1998, 23 regarding deed of Louis Harvey Gray and his wife to Pleasant Hill School. See also Barbour County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Barbour County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 127 regarding donation of land near Texasville by members of the Adams family. See Watson, ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, 57 regarding donation of land in the Farmers Academy community by John H. Watson. Other examples of school naming in Blount County were the "Bailey School" which stood on land given by William Bailey, and the "Ellison School" which stood on land deeded to Alabama for the purpose by L.W. Ellison, Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 56-59.

63. Report by William L. Lewis, superintendent of education for Talladega County included in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 78.

64. Also reports by David W. Caldwell, superintendent of education for Shelby County and William L. Lewis, superintendent of education for Talladega County in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 103 and 106. Also Alvin M. Spessard, superintendent of education for Perry County to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, December 12, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1904***, ADAH.

such as bears, livestock and other perils. When parents lived at too great a distance from the schoolhouse they might arrange for their children (even those as young as six) to board with relatives or friends whose homes were nearer.[65]

Once patrons had exerted influence on decisions regarding the location and construction of the schoolhouse, they were able to flex their parental muscle in all sorts of other ways too. As early as 1875 one superintendent suggested that the government should furnish aid for uniform textbooks because the patrons "are too apt to buy those in which they themselves studied despite all persuasion from teacher or superintendent."[66]

Patrons also influenced directly the length of the school session and the wages paid to teachers through the tuition supplements they were expected to provide. In writing about his childhood during the 1890s in Tallapoosa – a county in the piedmont south of the Appalachian plateau which was then an agricultural area of poor tenant farms, - a black man called Ned Cobb recalled:

> *My daddy, when he had the opportunity, never did send me to school long enough to learn to read. If he'd sent his children he'd have to supplement the teacher's salary. But if he don't send his children, it don't cost him nothin and there's nothin said.*[67]

Plenty *was* said about parents who could afford to pay a tuition supplement and exercised their choice not to. In 1875 Robert B. Crawford, the superintendent of Marengo County, described a common situation:

> *I will instance a township in which the fund received from the state was $100.00 and where there is a teacher who is competent and well-qualified and who has built him up a school which pays him $50.00 per month. If he contracts with the trustees to teach for five months at twenty (20) dollars per month the patrons perceive that they are released from all obligation to supplement his salary, and he is left to suffer. A few may be willing to bind themselves to supplement, but others of more ability, governed by the law of avarice, refuse*

65. Margaret J. Jones, ***Combing Cullman County***, Cullman, Modernistic Printers Inc. 1972, 90. See also Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, 65. A photograph of children attending the Caney Branch School in Baldwin County in 1895 shows all of them to be barefooted. See also (regarding children boarding) Hoyt M. Warren, ***Henry's Heritage: a history of Henry County, Alabama***, Abbeville, Henry County Historical Society, 1978, 353.

66. Report of George M. Mott, superintendent of education for Washington County, in Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 108.

67. Theodore Rosengarten, ***All God's Dangers: the life of Nate Shaw***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000, 25. (Nate Shaw was a pseudonym for Ned Cobb).

> *to do so; the first mentioned become indignant, and declare they will not pay to educate their rich neighbour's children, and the teacher is left to reap the consequences. Should he refuse to contract, the position will be awarded by the trustees to some incompetent person, and let the matter end as it may, the cause of education is made to suffer.*[68]

Disputes about supplementation and difficulties in dealing with the inequities produced by a system in which such subsidies were assumed to be a vital part of public school financing, outlasted the nineteenth century. In 1910 Charles J. Tapscott, who was the secretary of the board of trustees for a Cullman County school district, wrote to Alabama's attorney general claiming that public moneys funded only a quarter of the school's costs; the remainder was supplied by tuition fees charged to patrons and some of these were refusing to pay. A very vexed Tapscott wondered about legal remedies but his enquiry was driven by his sense of justice. The refusal of some families within the district to pay tuition subsidies was "unfair" to those families who did pay.[69]

Other than those whose roles have already been described and teachers (who are the subject of the next chapter), there were those who provided the whole *raison d'être* for the public schooling system - the students themselves. These might be anywhere between the ages of five and twenty-one years but sometimes even older than this maximum.[70] In the year ending September 30 1890 there were 292,052 students enrolled.[71] With so many students and with such a wide age-range, their attitudes to education, their expectations of what they might learn or achieve by attending school and their experiences were probably nearly as various as their numbers.

For many country children, schooling was actually just one non-compulsory component in an educational process by which they were prepared for a future that

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68. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875,*** 91.

69. C.J. Tapscott of Cullman County to Alex Garber, state attorney general, January 20, 1910, in SGO15440, Folder 8, ***Superintendent's Correspondence,*** ADAH.

70. The law provided for students between the ages of seven and twenty-one years. See also Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 144.

71. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1890,*** Table IV, cxciii.

would probably be spent entirely on the farm. The vocational education for this future was largely undertaken at home. Boys learned practical skills such as splitting rails, land clearing, timber-getting, ploughing and planting, crop production and harvesting, raising livestock and butchering hogs. Girls learned how to spin thread, to weave and to sew, to milk cows and to tend chickens, to bake bread and to cook, to keep house and to make soap and candles.[72] Elma Lee Hall, whose girlhood was spent in Bullock County recalled:

> *I learnt how to cook and make soap and milk and churn. . . . I'd make plenty of cornbread and biscuits. . . . we'd salt down the hams and shoulders [of hogs] about nine days to cure them, then rub cornmeal and red pepper on em and hang em up and smoke em over hickory coals.*[73]

Those students who did attend school – and, even by 1900-01, only 54.3 percent of the school-aged population was actually enrolled and only 46.9 percent of those were in average attendance[74] – generally understood that they went to school because it was the place where they would learn the additional basic skills needed to survive in a farming community. Personal memoirs of schooldays in this period suggest that unless there was a particularly harsh teacher, many children often enjoyed being in school even when they were taught in dark, uncomfortable and inappropriate buildings. Part of this enjoyment was the relief it offered from the physical toil of working in the fields from "can't see to can't see" (before daybreak until after nightfall).[75] Pleasure was also derived from being with other children from the same familiar world of inter-connected kinsfolk and inter-dependent human relationships. Not infrequently the teacher might be a neighbour from the same community or a brother, sister or cousin and this could cause problems for role differentiation. The reputation of a teacher who was not really competent but happened to be a relative could suffer because, as one student remembered, "a

72. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 167. See also Linda Jolly Hallmark of Blount County Historical Society in Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***Heritage of Blount County***, 63.

73. Wade Hall, ***Conecuh People: words from the Alabama Black Belt***, Montgomery, New South Books, 2004, 109-110. Oral history from Elma Lee Hall.

74. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 196. By 1913-14 enrollment had increased to 60.5 percent of the school population and of those, 60.5 percent were in average attendance.

75. Trudier Harris, ***Summer Snow: reflections from a black daughter of the South***, Boston, Beacon Press, 2003, 23. Harris relates the hardships of her mother (Unareed Harris) who worked on a cotton plantation in Greene County throughout her girlhood and had to pick at least two hundred pounds of cotton each day. See also page 133 of Chapter 4 regarding parental expectations of what children should learn at school.

prophet is not without honor save in his own country."[76] Older students might assist the teacher to hear the lessons of younger children and, by so doing, start down their own road to becoming a teacher. During his schooldays in Jackson County, James Clemens remembered such older children being in the same room:

> *There were two that I thought of as ladies there, Maude Boggus and Amy Lewis, and I thought they were grown, but of course they weren't hardly. They were students too.*[77]

While such assistance might involve some overlap in roles, it was an arrangement children often took for granted. Such mentoring was commonplace in the home and Sunday-school and an unremarkable feature of a collective community life and the even more personal world of the extended family.

Some students approached school with a specific objective. William Edwards, who as an adult founded a black training college (the Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute), recalled:

> *When I was old enough, I was sent to school for two or three months each winter, . . . My one desire was to learn to read the Bible for my old grandmother, who like my mother, was very religious.*[78]

The Bible had an exalted authority for many illiterates because it was the one book whose text was constantly cited and recited in church – a place of key cultural significance for both black and white people.

In some black rural communities where, as a result of slavery, illiterates were over-represented, the ability to read and to write (the skills that had been so eagerly sought in the early days of emancipation) was, in some instances, regarded with ambivalence in the first fully free generation. In a study conducted in Macon County in the 1930s, the adults interviewed did not always look back to their nineteenth century childhoods with fondness. They thought of school as an unfamiliar institution with a harsh instructional environment. Those who had

76. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 157 and 166.

77. Memoir of James Norwood Clemens in Dykes, ***Growing Up Hard***, 106.

78. William J. Edwards, 1918, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt***, Repr., Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 5.

attended school had done so fitfully because they were needed on the farm and they feared being whipped at school. They recalled learning to read from the universal Webster's blue-back speller, the almanac and the Bible but they believed that "reading and figuring" had carried elements of danger to established relations between plantation owners and their tenants and had not really been needed in the routine of daily life.[79]

While students knew that they were expected to be able to read so they could (for example) study the Bible, they also knew that many parents placed importance on mastering practical arithmetic and spelling in particular. Being acquired through drill and repetition, competence in spelling was regarded as an index of a student's actual scholastic progress. Spelling took on a significance that outlasted schooldays and competitive spelling bees were a much anticipated community social activity well into the twentieth century.[80]

While Alabama was predominantly rural in the period under review, it did have a growing number of cities where new industries were springing up together with new specialised occupations to meet their needs. The roles of those in charge of urban schools were somewhat different from those performed by office holders and trustees in rural areas. City school systems preferred progressive educational experts and corporate-bureaucratic managers rather than teachers who were subject to community and patron control and the lay management of school affairs by (for example) farmer trustees.[81] Such attitudes were most clearly seen around the turn of the century in Birmingham. Members of Birmingham's middle-class, including commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, evangelical Protestants, German and Irish immigrants, and even the leaders of the black community, all regarded the public schools as a device for enhancing local productivity and economic development. In 1890, expenditure on public education represented 20 percent of Birmingham's

79. Johnson, ***The Shadow of the Plantation***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1934, 129-132.

80. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 166. See also advertisement for a competitive spelling bee in ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 29, 1902.

81. David B. Tyack, ***The One Best System: a history of American urban education***, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974, 6.

general operating budget.[82] Such an investment was intended to have demonstrable economic benefits and had to be managed effectively.

Whilst the citizens of urban centres might have a set of preferences for the governance of their public interests, many still retained the religious values, kinship ties, and folkways of their rural origins. A sort of urban localism is discernible in the sense of domain demonstrated by Birmingham's superintendent of education, its Board of Education, its Trades Council and the *Labor Advocate* as each variously developed, or sought to influence, city educational policies without assistance from Montgomery.[83] In 1873 when a group of labouring men appealed to a prominent citizen, Colonel John T. Terry, to help them in providing a school for their children, he solicited a site that was donated by the president of the Elyton Land Company, Colonel James R. Powell (also the mayor of Birmingham). Powell subscribed liberally to a school building fund and turned over his mayoral salary to be used in paying teacher salaries.[84] These arrangements were not dissimilar to those worked out in the rural townships – but writ larger for a larger sphere.

In its rapid growth in size, its increasing complexity and its diversification, Birmingham was something of a special case. Most of the state's hundreds of small towns were variously sized villages servicing their immediate surrounds. For example, Jasper had a population of 2,334 in 1880 and 3,088 in 1890. Camden had a total population of 3,795 in 1880. In 1888 its white population was 1,400.[85] Most of these towns had their own newspaper - in 1890 there were 179 newspapers in Alabama, sixteen of them dailies[86] - and there was generally one that was regarded as the representative voice of the county. This voice actually imposed a coherent identity on multiple communities and helped to mark the boundaries for that

82. Carl V. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921***, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1977, 168-169.

83. *Ibid.*, 170 and 175.

84. Marshall Fred Phillips, "A History of the Public Schools in Birmingham, Alabama," Master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1939, 2.

85. ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 12, 1900. ***Wilcox Progress***, October 10, 1888. For percentage of population that was rural in 1890 see 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.

86. 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], 113.

identity. Newspaper editors played a greater or lesser role in shaping opinion about schools and education overall. Some were vocal on the subject of the need for educational improvement and well-funded schools and helped to inform opinion on the subject. At the same time they also both reflected and strengthened local cultural attitudes. They promoted schools as places where (for example) "temperance and good morals" could be taught and reinforced.[87]

The *Wilcox Progress* was published at Camden and regularly exhorted its readers on the subject of education. In May 1888 the editor defined schools as the mark of a progressive town and a necessary factor for realising civic potential. He complimented the capabilities of local teachers, scolded his readers for lacking public spirit and not rising to the challenge of developing good schools, and endorsed the direct election of county superintendents. Over a year later the newspaper reported that Camden's citizens had met for the purpose of organising a public school and a committee had been elected to put things in train.[88]

The Mountain Eagle also preached a progressive message. In 1893 the paper stated:

> *A well-regulated, well-disciplined and well-governed free school would add more to Jasper's growth and advancement than any other institution be it a cotton-mill, rolling-mill or anything else that would tend to build up our town.*[89]

Any seeming lack of enthusiasm was met with a tetchy exasperation:

> *Rally to the support of your school and all will be well. Continue your indifference and that lethargy to which you have unwillingly become accustomed will continue to hang as the pall of night over your institutions.*[90]

The boosterism and the hectoring were relentless. In the 1890s Professor Douglas Allen, who was the principal of the Jasper Public School, often addressed parents

87. ***Wilcox Progress***, July 24, 1889.

88 ***Wilcox Progress***, May 30, 1888, and July 17, 1889. Many town schools were of high quality. In the 1880s the Montgomery Public School was one of the principal attractions of the city as also was the Selma Public School, - Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900." ***The Journal of Negro Education*** 22 (Spring 1953): 131.

89. ***The Mountain Eagle***, July 12, 1893.

90. ***The Mountain Eagle***, August 6, 1893.

directly through the pages of *The Mountain Eagle*. He was firmly in the camp of education's new men who, like the editor, approved of "a well-regulated, well disciplined and well governed school" – providing the teachers did the governing. He suggested that, just as teachers sought "to come in touch with the home surroundings," parents should "bring themselves into an understanding of the spirit and aims of the school." He asked rhetorically whether parents were acting in the best interests of the child when they failed to make their children attend school regularly and explained that children could be *trained* to habits of punctuality. In September 1898 he announced that, at the end of each month, he would be issuing "punctuality cards" to students who had not been tardy. Allen was actually signalling that he wanted to socialise children to be workers in the New South world of modern industry, a world in which they needed to be attuned to hierarchy, obedient to directive power and comfortable with fixed routine.[91] This world was foreign to Alabama's rural and small town communities where social and economic roles over-lapped and were flexible, unspecialised, familiar and loosely organised to match seasonal rhythms not man-made schedules.[92]

Until 1915 when schooling was eventually made compulsory, erratic attendance by students was a constant subject for discussion in newspapers and at teachers' institutes. In December 1897 at an institute held in Walker County, attendees discussed "The *Evils* of Irregular Attendance" suggesting that a longstanding nonchalance about regular attendance was now a question of morality.[93] Another linked topic was on the necessity of teachers and patrons cooperating. From a review of this institute's program and many of those that were held around the same time, it is not unreasonable to conclude that, in town schools at least, teacher frustration with the roles of patrons and trustees and their assumed right of direction and interference was growing. However, from the frequency of entreaties to parents in contemporary newspapers, it seems that these were not entirely persuasive and that patrons continued to prefer to exercise their own choices regardless of teacher sensibilities.

91. ***The Mountain Eagle***, September 7, 1898.

92. Edward P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." ***Past and Present*** 38 (December 1967): 84, 89. Although principally concerned with the impact of the industrial revolution in England, Thompson's article makes the point that "there is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of a culture."

93. ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 1, 1897. (Italics added).

Besides their role as a sort of community coach in the cause of better schools, newspapers were a mirror of contemporary societal ideals and attitudes. *The Mountain Eagle's* items on educational matters frequently referred to the youth and appearance of teachers and students: – for example "the teachers of Walker County are a fine looking body of men and women," and "no country could assemble more intelligence, more beauty and finer specimens of young manhood."[94] In a community where most people were likely to know each other, teachers were often referred to by name. Female names were always qualified with complimentary adjectives such as "beautiful," "accomplished," "neatly dressed," "deservedly popular" thus reinforcing the womanly attributes that were culturally approved of in the communities served by the newspaper.[95] The *Wilcox Progress* also favourably commented on personal attributes. Just some of its descriptions of young female teachers or pupils were "bright and winsome," "a queenly young lady . . . with charming manners," "a person who combined grace of mind and person with a sweet disposition" and "lovely and intelligent."[96] These young women were presented by the newspapers in terms that suggested their incipience as candidates for what W.J. Cash called the "mystic symbol" of Southern nationality, - its lily-pure and superior womanhood.[97] The newspapers seemed to imply that the future of traditional Southern values was safe in their hands.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Alabama not only remained predominantly rural but attracted comparatively few immigrants at a time when the north-eastern and mid-western states were receiving literally millions from all over Europe.[98] This relative socio-economic stasis meant traditional folkways, local hierarchies, community-dominated institutions and the meanings derived from shared ethnicity and/or race and kinship had a particular tenacity and cultural vigour. The educationists and other modernising reformers who railed against schooling arrangements they considered provincial and anachronistic did not go

94. ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 10, 1894 and September 9, 1896.

95. ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 9, 1894, June 3, 1896, and September 9, 1896.

96. ***Wilcox Progress***, January 1, 1896, November 11, 1896.

97. W.J. Cash, ***The Mind of the South***, 86.

98. In the 1900 federal census there were 10,213,817 foreign-born white people in the United States. Between 1860 and 1920 the foreign born population was approximately between 13 percent and 16 percent of the total population. In 1890, Birmingham's foreign born population was less than 7 percent of the city's total.

unheard but they were largely ignored outside professional circles.[99] In 1901 one county superintendent opined - apparently without intentional irony - that "the public school system we now have . . . is almost an ideal system and few changes only should be made to make it perfect."[100]

The fully devolved educational model that had been put in place by school legislation enacted since 1875 continued to be sustained by successive Bourbon administrations (as was the régime of stringent governmental thrift). In 1898, James E. Alexander, a candidate standing for election to the position of state superintendent of education, stated his policy position thus; - "if elected I shall endeavour to observe the ideal of local self-government in educational affairs."[101] Alexander lost his bid for election to John William Abercrombie – the state superintendent who, as recounted at the start of this chapter, was so dismayed by the "patchwork system" he beheld when he took office.

Abercrombie was an energetic and reform-minded educationist and he and his successors would embark upon an ambitious process of "modernisation" but this process was neither linear nor smooth. Nor did their initiatives for change all go unchallenged. This was particularly the case when opinions were strongly held about the roles of those with responsibilities for the schooling system. The tenacity of these opinions matched the degree to which the rural schools were woven into the fabric of daily community life.

Until the early years of the twentieth century, the rural and small town school was largely beyond the reach of progressive modernisers who, if well-intentioned, were informed by ideas of technological and industrial efficiency and characterised the rural schools by their deficiencies rather than their strengths. They tended to believe that such deficiencies could be remedied by central direction and professional bureaucratic management. They were imbued with an energetic zeal to bring the schools up to some idealised standard of professionalism and fought mightily for constitutional, legislative and financial changes to enable this to

99. Dr Jabez L.M. Curry, Edgar Gardner Murphy and Dr John Herbert Phillips were three of those most vocal regarding the need for reform.

100. John D. Humphrey, superintendent of education for Madison County to Joseph B. Graham, Chairman of the Education Committee at the 1901 Constitutional Convention, May 1901, in SGO15976, Folder 8, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1906***, ADAH.

101. Letter from James E. Alexander in ***The Mountain Eagle***, February 23, 1898.

happen. Their efforts were aimed at making educational policy primarily a matter for the state. As has been shown in this chapter, they were keen to end an era during which, except in the large towns or emergent cities (such as Birmingham, Mobile and Montgomery), Alabama's "education system" was really just the composite of a dispersed multitude of separate community arrangements that were virtually unsupported administratively by any bureaucratic structure, where policy decisions were usually taken by people with no relevant qualifications and where the actual operation and governance of local schools was directly affected by community circumstances and locally accorded authority. There is little evidence to suggest that rural communities shared the same educational vision as the reformers.

Chapter 3

Teachers in a Localised Schooling System

The previous chapter considered the roles of various participants - county superintendents, county education boards, trustees, patrons, students and others with a vested interest - in the community enterprise that was Alabama's education system in the last third of the nineteenth century. This chapter goes on to discuss the pivotal role of public school teachers in approximately the same period. It considers the characteristics of the teachers – their economic circumstances, ages, gender, marital status - and the criteria by which they were selected for employment. It further considers their actual experiences in interacting with local communities and understanding the character, needs and values of those communities. It discusses the increasing feminisation of the teaching workforce and some of the implications of this for preserving racial attitudes and cultural tenets. It also describes the ways by which teachers acquired their basic skills and how these were matched to the expectations of trustees and patrons. Finally it discusses the initial impact of the changes made to the school law of 1899 by the modernising state superintendent, John William Abercrombie. It describes the nature of the resistance to these changes in (mainly) rural communities and the ways in which community objections were eventually accommodated.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and during Reconstruction, teaching in the public schools was a precarious occupation. Wages were frequently paid late or not at all, public opinion was not yet universally in favour of the state being involved in education and the resources available to provide accessible and properly equipped schoolhouses were scant. Yet in the state superintendent's *Annual Report* for the 1868/69 scholastic year there were 2,902 teachers conducting public schools throughout Alabama. By 1876/77, the number had reached 4,225 and by the first year of the twentieth century, the number was 6,302.[1]

In the early years of the postbellum period, the employment of some teachers appears to have involved an element of community charity towards destitute whites and disabled veterans. Teachers were needed for white elementary schools and also

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1. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 197.

to instruct the newly emancipated slaves. The *Montgomery Advertiser* and other newspapers took the position that with such people in charge of the schools, it would save the freedmen from indoctrination by northerners with alien values.[2] A former Confederate hero, General James H. Clanton, who had been active in conservative politics immediately after the Civil War, assisted many former soldiers and Confederate widows to secure positions teaching in black schools.[3] The county superintendents also assisted in appointing the old and the destitute to teach in black schools. Michael C. Kinnard of Sumter County reported in 1871 that he had "induced moral and highly respectable old men who had taught the white children in former years to teach the colored schools." He added the political comment that "many who believed it a disgrace to teach under Radical rule are most efficient and faithful teachers under the Democratic." Four years later (in 1875) he again reported that "gentlemen and ladies are teaching colored schools now, who a few years since would have been driven out of society for attempting such a thing." In 1884 Levi W. Reeves, who was the superintendent of education for Marengo County, described (to the state superintendent) an elderly white teacher whom he had appointed to teach a black school. The teacher was very poor and encumbered with "a large dependent family" but Reeves believed him to be:

> *A gentleman of good standing and character and of undoubted qualifications. His example and association with the colored race are advantageous to them.*[4]

Aside from veterans and Confederate widows, the sorts of people initially prepared to undertake what was actually just another type of rural seasonal labour, were often either unqualified or uncommitted to making teaching their long-term vocation. In 1871, Frank Dillon, the superintendent of education for St Clair County opined:

> *Most of those engaged at it are not teachers by profession, but teaching to fill up time or making it a stepping stone to something else.*[5]

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2. The ***Montgomery Advertiser***, July 30, 1866, and ***Selma Times***, June 30, 1866, quoted by Walter L. Fleming, ***Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama***, Spartanburg, Reprint Co., 1978, [1905], 625-626.

3. *Ibid.*, 625.

4. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 77 and ***Annual Report, 1875***, 105. See also Levi W. Reeves, superintendent of education for Marengo County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, October 10, 1884, in SG015974, Folder 12, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

5. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 75.

In the same year, William L. Lewis, Talladega's superintendent, commented:

> *There are a few good schools under the control of educated professional teachers, but in most cases the public schools are taught by persons who are watching for an opportunity to get the school through the influence of friends, that they may get the fund, and when it is exhausted let some other person teach a subscription school; in such instances we have very indifferent schools.*[6]

Of five teachers from Etowah County who, in 1874-75, made claims on the Department of Education for long outstanding unpaid wages, only one was described as a teacher in the 1870 census. This was William H. Archer who was a white man teaching a "colored" school – a still fairly uncommon vocation. Several were shown in the census as "farmers."[7]

Until the 1890s, it was only necessary for aspiring teachers to pass a low level knowledge test (usually of the county superintendent's own devising) in order to be licensed. Their grade of certificate was based upon their oral competence or aptness in answering the superintendent's questions.[8] In the early 1870s the superintendent of Baker (later Chilton) County, James M. Cordirie, issued a teacher's certificate to a farmer who, having broken his leg, could not work his land. He was allegedly told to "go on back home and start a school in the community." The farmer cleaned out a stable and opened a school the following Monday.[9] This was, as it had been with the veterans and the widows, employment as community welfare at a time when little in the way of relief was provided by the state. As either a political appointee or (as later) someone elected in a popular ballot, the county superintendent had to balance all the needs of his constituency not just subscribe to some theoretical educational ideal.

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6. Alabama Dept of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 77.

7. T.V.R. Matthews to state superintendent of education, September 5, 1874, and Statement of Claim, March 31, 1875, in SGO15974, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. Also affidavits from J.N. Black and William H. Archer, September 9, 1875, in SGO15974, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. Also Statements of Claim from James Crump, March 20, 1875, and from James R. Trotter, (undated) in SGO15974, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. The occupations of these claimants have been cross-referenced with census data retrieved from www.ancestry.com (accessed September 2006)

8. Marion County Teachers, ***History of Marion County, Alabama***, Hamilton, n.p., 1959, 26. The need to sit for a *written* examination was entered onto the statute books in 1891 though the requirement for teacher examination dated from 1879.

9. The anecdote is included in Thomas Wyatt, ***History of Chilton County and her People: history of Chilton County, Alabama***, Montevallo, Times Printing Company, 1976, 42-43.

Recognising the need for teacher training, the board of education established under the constitution of 1868 passed an Act to establish normal (teacher training) classes in a number of towns and cities. In 1869 Dr Noah B. Cloud, the state superintendent of public instruction, advised that nine classes had been held in six different places and that three hundred pupils had been taught. Some further attempts were made to establish normal schools and by 1875 the state was making an annual allocation for the training of white male and female teachers at Florence and black teachers at Marion, Huntsville and Sparta.[10] In 1878 there were 147 students enrolled at the Florence Normal School and forty-seven of these were being trained specifically for teaching.[11] In the 1880s further normal schools for white teachers were opened at Troy, Livingston and Jacksonville. Yet these schools could only prepare a small fraction of the students needed to maintain teacher numbers.

To the communities in which the teachers were going to work what mattered more than formal qualifications was the ease of fit between the teacher, his or her values and those of the community itself. The township superintendents/trustees were the gatekeepers to ensure this fit was achieved and that teachers conformed to the locally understood code of proper behaviour. With so much power vested at this neighbourhood level, virtually no bureaucratic protection or oversight, and little sense of belonging to a profession, teachers were obliged to act in accordance with local expectations or risk their future employment.

Not infrequently the teacher was already a member of the community or linked to it by kinship and might be in charge of instructing his or her own siblings, cousins and other students with a less well-defined familial connection.[12] He or she knew how the community operated and the deference due to various members of its hierarchy. For example, between the end of the Civil War and his election in 1884 as state superintendent, Solomon Palmer operated several schools and had a number of business interests in Blountsville, Blount County. His daughter, Rosa also became a teacher and taught in Blountsville from 1887. Such inter-generational continuity of occupation or involvement with the same township

10. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama,*** 155.

11. ***Annual Report, 1875,*** 121.

12. Mitchell B. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek,*** Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1957, 151, 157, 163 and 165. Garrett relates how, during his schooldays in Clay County in the 1880s, on two separate occasions his teachers included his first cousin, Marshall Pitts and a cousin by marriage, James. L. Ingram. Garrett attended school with his elder sister Eva and his brother, Warner.

schools was unremarkable. Josiah Brackin, a farmer with seven children, obtained a teacher's licence in 1870 to teach school in Henry County. Thirty years later one of his sons - Elisha Brackin - was a school trustee in the same district.[13]

If not from the same community, teachers were likely to have come from a comparable environment – some small hamlet or farm - and were familiar with rural routine. This was beneficial not only in understanding their students, but also in adapting to a life where their every move was noted – particularly as they often had to board with someone in the school district. A woman who attended school in Jackson County around the turn of the twentieth century recalled that "most of the teachers were local but we had some from Scottsboro or Sand Mountain or somewhere. These would usually board with my grandmother." Just prior to 1900 the Lagoon School was built near Knob Hill in the coastal area of Baldwin County. Its successive teachers, including Ethel Lee Bauman who taught in 1902, were accommodated by "neighbours having enough space for them." Katharyne Perdue who taught in Escambia County in 1899 paid $8.00 per month from her monthly salary of $25.00 to board with a local family. In Marshall County teachers "would go home with pupils to spend the night." In the Federal Census of 1880, 15 percent of those listing their occupation as "teacher" in Chilton County were living in someone else's household. Boarding actually offered advantages to teachers because it enlarged their knowledge of their students and the patrons they served. Some teachers moved from one family to another in a round robin fashion with their board being a "payment in kind" element of their remuneration. When they could not find appropriate lodgings at all, they improvised. One slept in a cloakroom attached to the schoolhouse.[14]

While local teachers had the advantage of understanding the school community, it meant that their horizons rarely extended beyond it. Young teachers in particular were restricted to teaching in accordance with the methods by which they had

13. Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 67. See also Hoyt M. Warren, ***Henry's Heritage: a history of Henry County, Alabama***, Abbeville, Henry County Historical Society, 1978, 353.

14. Ronald Dykes, ***Growing Up Hard: Memories of Jackson County, Alabama, in the early twentieth century***, Paint Rock, Paint Rock River Press, 2003, 37; Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 71-72; ***The Standard Gauge***, March 24, 1904. Margaret J. Jones, ***Combing Cullman County***, Cullman, Modernistic Printers Inc. 1972, 90; J. Mack Lofton, ***Voices from Alabama: a twentieth century mosaic***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 186; Lorene LeCroy, ***Old Schools of Chilton County, Alabama***, Maplesville, Chilton County Historical Society, 1997, 6. The 1880 census does not specify whether these people were public school teachers. The numbers only reflect those who actually listed their occupation as teacher – not all the teachers.

themselves been taught in their own elementary schooling. They also had to respond to the demands of school patrons who were anxious their children should be drilled in basic skills but did not see the need for instruction in "advanced studies" such as geography and grammar.[15] Thus quarantined from outside influence and ideas, schools helped to perpetuate local cultural traditions and a general distrust of external intervention. The sort of education they provided would later be castigated by modernisers and influential national educationists as "the main single deficiency in rural life today." They were said to have "but little comprehension of the rural life problem or of the possibilities of a reorganised and redirected rural school."[16]

After the Civil War teaching started to become a feminised occupation in all the states of the former Confederacy. This was probably attributable to male mortality in the War itself (Alabama alone is thought to have lost between 34,000 and 40,000 of its enlisted soldiers).[17] Male labour shortages meant young men had more occupational choices and these did not carry teaching's disadvantages. Such disadvantages included uncertainty about the regularity and continuity of employment, a short annual contractual engagement (usually about three months in the winter-time) and an inadequate salary of $20.00 per month.[18] In his *Annual Report* for 1874, state superintendent Joseph H. Speed was blunt:

> *A male teacher has the same needs and feelings with other men. . . . . He cannot do his duty as a teacher with the harassing fear of hunger in his family hanging over him; he cannot govern his school and teach abstract science while he knows that for lack of the pay due him by the state, those who may be dependent on him be suffering for want of medicine and medical attendance.*[19]

The correspondence files of the superintendent of education for the 1870s contain many letters from indignant male teachers seeking the salaries due to them. Typical of these is a claim for unpaid wages from T.V.R. Matthews of Etowah County. He

15. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 141.

16. 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, 105.

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, 1994, 228.

18. LeCroy, ***Old Schools of Chilton County, Alabama***, 6. $20.00 per month was paid in Chilton County in 1875. In 1899 some counties were paying even lower salaries - see page 174 of Chapter 5.

19. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1874***, 6.

wrote: "I served the people of Township 11, Range 7 in the capacity of teacher in the Free Public Literary School for which services there is the sum of $40.00 owing to and due me from the Public." His letter has a notation from the county superintendent which says: "Matthews taught the school regular but the Trustees did not stop public school when they knew the money was exhausted." Matthews was still chasing his money six months later.[20] Some male teachers who did teach were hardly fit. One superintendent said he knew of a few who went into the schoolroom "because it is easier to sit in the shade than to plow; although from education and physical culture they are better qualified for the latter."[21]

In 1884, Amory Dwight Mayo, a careful observer of the educational scene in the South overall, noted that "too few, by far, of the foremost young men of the South will be persuaded to serve for the scanty pay of the schoolmaster." Yet Mayo, who was a Unitarian minister and had been influenced by the "new education" (a child-centred pedagogy based on the ideas of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi) believed the massive movement of women into the classrooms of the South was "almost providential." He felt that these "consecrated" young women would become a "beautiful object lesson" in uplifting the region's backward people and "joining them to the larger nation in an enduring social bond."[22] Mayo described the children of a family he had glimpsed in Northern Alabama:

> *Two or three wild-looking boys romping with the inevitable crowd of dogs that is the annex to every poor Southern family; two pairs of girls with hair in snarls and bare feet heavy with the red mud of the roads, and such strange looks in their faces, with their arms thrown over each other's shoulders, slouching in the rear.*

He compared some other children he had seen in Wilmington, North Carolina who,

> *would have grown up as wild, as unkempt, as hopeless as that group I saw in Alabama had the Lord not come by in the form of a good schoolmistress and made of them such a kind of children as we might not be ashamed to call our own.*[22]

20. T.V.R. Matthews to state superintendent of education, September 5, 1874, and Statement of Claim, March 31, 1875, in SGO15974, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

21. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 90.

22. Amory Dwight Mayo, "Building for the Children of the South." ***Education***, V (1884), 10-11 and "The Women's Movement in the South." ***New England Magazine***, V (1891): 258. Both articles quoted in the introduction to Mayo, ***Southern Women in the Recent Educational Movement in the South***, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1978 [1892], xiii and xxi. See also 242-243 for second quotation.

Actually, many young rural women in the South had no position open to them as satisfying as teaching – particularly one with such a low entry threshold in respect of age and qualifications. It was a role that provided them with a certain amount of status and further educational opportunities both formal and informal. Also, while a young woman's wage might be used to supplement family earnings, she was not usually the family's sole breadwinner and was consequently more likely to be able to exist on the paltry wage available. At the same time, even if teaching took women away from their own home or neighbourhood, it was an occupation consistent with traditional gendered expectations of behaviour – the complex of attributes described as "true womanhood" in nineteenth century America.[23] A female teacher's virtue, religious piety and ability to keep house - whether at home or in the community - were traits or skills that confirmed and strengthened the status quo.

If they were able to receive "proper" formal training, teachers could also perpetuate for generations the principles of the Old South including state's rights, white supremacy and reverence for the Confederate past. Martha Gielow, an Alabamian member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) - an organisation devoted to "The Lost Cause" ideology - certainly thought so. Alive to the opportunity that teachers presented, towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth, the UDC expanded the scope of its financial assistance. Besides its ongoing support for Confederate veterans and its monument building, the organisation started providing scholarships - mainly for young white women - to study at institutes of higher learning across the South such as the Peabody Normal College at Nashville in Tennessee. Training young women to become teachers provided some assurance that the narrative of the Lost Cause, with its lessons about class and race, would be spread to coming [white] generations.[24]

The feminisation of teaching was strongly evident in Alabama.[25] In 1890 female

23. Myra H. Strober and Audri Gordon Lanford, "The Feminization of Public School Teaching: Cross Sectional Analysis, 1850-1880." ***Signs*** 11 (Winter 1986): 218-219. See also Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood." ***American Quarterly*** 18 (Summer 1966): 152.

24. Karen L. Cox, ***Dixie's Daughters: the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture,*** Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003, 87-91.

25. Alabama was actually behind other Southern states in the feminisation of its workforce. Across the South as a whole, women made up 51.2 percent of the teaching workforce by 1880. Ten years later in 1890 the figure was 58.9 percent.

teachers represented nearly 36 percent of Alabama's public school workforce of 5,916 and by 1901 nearly 48 percent. At the end of the 1906 scholastic year the total teaching workforce numbered 6,323 and, while more than a quarter of all the counties still had more male than female teachers, women comprised just on 60 percent of the state total. In eighteen counties the figure was even higher at 70 percent or more. In five counties (Escambia, Greene, Lee, Mobile and Washington) 80 percent or more of the teaching workforce was female (in Washington it was 90 percent). The trend was much the same in both white and black schools. In 1906 more than 58 percent of the state's 1,591 black teachers were female. In fifteen counties the figure was more than 70 percent and in five counties (Etowah, Franklin, Greene, Lee and St Clair) 80 percent or more. Franklin County's three black teachers were all female.[26]

Over time, it appears that men may have started to regard teaching as women's work because the trend towards feminisation accelerated. In the two years ending September 30, 1908, the female composition of the teaching workforce increased by nearly six percentage points. Yet in some counties there appears to have been a reluctance to employ women. More than 75 percent of Winston County's teachers were male in 1908.[27] Male teachers in charge of schools were accorded the honorary title "Professor" and regarded somewhat as the local intellectual.

The interest in "school discipline" which was a staple discussion topic at teachers' institutes over several decades was possibly due in part to this demographic change.[28] It was also possibly the reason that school trustees and other educational authorities took it upon themselves to give advice to teachers on how to conduct themselves socially - particularly with the opposite sex. Enrolled students could include mature adolescents and young men of up to twenty-one years or even older (sometimes older than the teacher). In 1912, Clarke County's board of education advised the county's young female teachers that taking walks in the woods alone with a young man would "overstep the line of what the board considers decent." Such inflexible restrictions must have been irksome to young people and topics such as "The Social Life of Teachers" or "The Teacher in Society" were occasionally

26. Calculated from tables appended to a) Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1901 and 1902*** and b) Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1905 and 1906***.

27. Calculated from tables appended to Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1907 and 1908***.

28. See pages 114-119 for a discussion of county teachers' institutes.

discussed at teachers' institutes. In some communities teachers were actually welcomed as potential brides for male residents. Such was the case around the turn of the century at Oak Hill in Wilcox County when no fewer than seven teachers married local men. Those who sought to regulate personal relations could not be always be sure their advice would be taken anyway. During the 1880s in Randolph County, an assistant teacher (called "Miss Deely" by her students) ran off with the male (and married) head teacher. This caused such moral consternation amongst the patrons that they considered closing the school.[29]

The state superintendent's *Annual Reports* do not record the ages of teachers but census reports, published oral histories, memoirs, scholarship announcements and other sources occasionally provide actual or indicatory data. In the 1880 census report from Chilton County, more than 28 percent of the teachers listed were twenty-five years of age or younger though the oldest teacher listed, Ezekiel W. Dunlap, was eighty-two. The youngest, Lisa Langford, was seventeen. Of the twelve people specifically identified as female, four were thirty-five years or over. The male teachers ranged in age from twenty-six to eighty-two. The average age was 35.35 years or, if Dunlap is excluded, 31.25 years.[30]

In 1889 Hattie E. Taylor was granted a licence to teach in a township near Vernon in Lamar County. She was only seventeen and later remembered being "not competent to teach anyone" though she had "fifty-six pupils and all kinds of books and grades."[31] In 1892 Vincent Jones Gragg, a sixteen-year-old farm boy, was licensed to teach in Chilton County.[32] In 1896, fifteen-year-old Clara Hall taught in a Baldwin County school until other arrangements could be made.[33]

In order to obtain one of the much sought after Peabody scholarships which enabled

29. Sumter County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Sumter County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2005, 94; David Mathews, ***Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools? What Early Communities Have to Tell Us***, Montgomery, New South Books, 2003, 206; ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 27, 1909; Mrs Frank Ross Stewart, ***The History of Education in Cherokee County, Alabama***, Centre, Stewart University Press, 1981, 86; Wilcox County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Wilcox County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2002, 51. William Holtzclaw, ***The Black Man's Burden***, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1971 [1915], 27.

30. LeCroy, ***Old Schools of Chilton County, Alabama***, 6.

31. Rose Marie Smith, ***Lamar County – A History to 1900***, Fulton, privately published by the author, 1987, 155.

32. Wyatt, ***History of Chilton County and her People: history of Chilton County, Alabama***, Montevallo, Times Printing Company, 1976, 78.

33. Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 68.

students to study for two years at the Normal College in Nashville, applicants had to be at least seventeen. They had to pledge in writing to teach for two years after graduation and to "express a purpose to make teaching their profession in life."[34] They would thus have taken up their positions at around the age of twenty or twenty-one years of age and, as a condition of their bond, been teaching until they were at least twenty-two or twenty-three. From these illustrative samples, it seems not unreasonable to claim that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, whilst men and women of a broad range of ages taught in Alabama's public schools, the greater number were clustered in the seventeen to twenty-five age group and were increasingly more likely to be female than male.

At the end of the nineteenth century when all features of Alabama's education system started being seriously questioned by professional educationists and urban modernisers, a major focus of their attention was the alleged deficiencies of teachers, their qualifications and all aspects of their licensing. Influential national educationists such as Ellwood P. Cubberley (who had a marked anti-rural bias) would condescendingly describe the rural schoolteacher as:

> *a mere slip of a girl . . . . who knows little as to the nature of children or the technique of instruction and whose education is very limited and confined largely to the old traditional school-subjects.*[35]

Though most of the young teachers were single, some of these "mere slips" were actually older unmarried women and others were married women whose husbands were employed in the local neighbourhood. Three years after being licensed, the now twenty-year old Hattie Redus (née Taylor) was a farmer's wife and had a baby girl (Lillian). She taught a winter school of twenty-five children in a log cabin while her child slept in a cradle near the fireplace. The following year (1893) Redus was still teaching though by now Lillian was walking and talking – and sharing her day with the school children.[36] In 1896 at Fairhope in Baldwin County, a school was conducted by Clarence L. Mershon but, when he left for the North to pursue

34. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1889***, 18-19.

35. Cubberley, ***Rural Life and Education: a study of the rural-school problem as a phase of the rural-life problem***, 283.

36. Smith, ***Lamar County – A History to 1900***, 157. Supplemental information retrieved from US Census for 1900 and Alabama marriage records via www.ancestry.com (accessed November 20, 2007).

medical studies, it did not continue. Several years later when Mershon returned to the area he was both qualified and recently married. Bertha, his new wife, was hired to carry on his former occupation for the sum of $25.00 per month.[37]

The expedience of the arrangements just described were in accord with a way of life where daily problems were solved and/or new needs met by improvising solutions to suit the circumstances. It has already been shown how such attitudes affected decisions about the location of schools and the usage of schoolhouses. Similarly, when contracting with licensed teachers, township superintendents or trustees did not consult anyone outside the community itself except the county superintendent (and not always then). In other parts of the United States women might need to retire from teaching upon getting married or having children but this was not provided for by law in Alabama. Teaching after marriage never appears to have been considered a breach of customary female behaviour.

The files of Alabama's state superintendent of education reveal little data about the sources of those contracted to teach in the public schools and the relative importance of each source must thus therefore remain a matter for conjecture. Whilst some teachers were graduates of the various normal schools established by legislation in the 1870s and 1880s, these schools went nowhere near satisfying the demand. In his *Annual Report* for 1890, the state superintendent of education (Solomon Palmer) pointed out that Alabama needed two thousand trained teachers annually but:

> *If all the graduates of the university, normal schools and denominational colleges, and all the high grade high schools and academies in the state were trained for teaching, it would not meet the [annual] falling off.*[38]

Even those who did attend normal schools could not always be relied upon to honour their written pledge to teach in the public schools for two years after graduation.[39]

37. Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, 68. There is no accurate way of converting salaries of past periods into modern equivalents but in 1890 the purchasing power of $25.00 was approximately equivalent to the purchasing power of $571.43 in 2006.

38. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1890,*** xxxviii-xxxix.

39. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1889,*** 23.

Sometimes the normal schools recommended their better (and compliant) students for employment. In 1883, William B. Paterson, the president of the (black) Lincoln Normal University - wrote to the state superintendent advising he was:

> *holding some teachers in reserve that can get schools elsewhere. I would very much like to send half a dozen good teachers to Chambers [County] for the sake of our school. . . . I will send strictly first-class teachers, no politicians or mischief makers.*[40]

Some aspiring teachers had representations made on their behalf by people such as clergymen who could vouch for their suitability. The pastor of the Baptist Church of Evergreen in Conecuh County provided such a letter of support on behalf of Miss Ethel Ervin listing the characteristics and qualifications that were presumably prized by school patrons and trustees. He wrote:

> *It affords me very great pleasure to commend in unreserved terms a young lady of irreproachable Christian character, modest almost to a fault, full of lofty ambition and determination to succeed, self-reliant and industrious. Miss Ethel has taken the full course at the South-Western Agricultural School located at this place acquitting herself with great credit to her mother, her teachers, and herself.*[41]

Some of those who wanted teaching positions canvassed on their own behalf. In August 1873, M.H. Savage of Wisconsin wrote to the state superintendent (Joseph Speed) describing his experience and qualifications. Savage's employment included a stint as an agent for P.T. Barnum's circus. He pointed out that while he could earn more in this role (which was again on offer) he "preferred teaching to any other employment." He wanted a new school placed in his hands where he could feel that much depended on his own exertions and that he could "work up."[42]

By the late nineteenth century there were already specialist employment agencies supplying both teachers and superintendents and these did a bit of prospective marketing. In 1883 the North West Teachers Agency forwarded a circular to the

40. William B. Paterson to Henry Clay Armstrong, superintendent of education, September 4, 1883, in SGO15974, Folder 11, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

41. S.P. Lindsay to the state superintendent of education, n.d. (but written in the late 1890s) enclosing letter addressed "To Whom It May Concern," in SGO15974, Folder 17, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

42. M.H. Savage of Delevan, Wisconsin to state superintendent of education, August 7, 1873, in SGO15978, Folder 3, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1873-1874***, ADAH.

state superintendent which stated:

> *Knowing how difficult it is to get teachers through the ordinary mediums we call your attention to the fact that by putting yourselves in communication with us you will save all unnecessary trouble and also have the opportunity of securing the best talent possible.*[43]

But the "ordinary mediums" of obtaining teachers still remain unclear. Until the twentieth century, when state examinations and standardised certification protocols had been introduced and the respective roles of (and articulation between) elementary schools, high schools and tertiary training schools had been determined, it appears teachers with either some qualifications (or with none) frequently arranged their own employment. Generally this was done by initially seeking a licence from the county superintendent. Once licensed the teacher might go prospecting for a school. The recollections of a man who taught a public school during the 1880s in Tennessee – Alabama's neighbouring state where arrangements were similar - give some idea of this undertaking:

> *I see now the white, hot roads lazily rise and fall and wind before me under the burning July sun; I feel my heart sink heavily as I hear again and again, "Got a teacher? Yes." So I walked on and on. . . . Sprinkled over hill and dale lay cabins and farmhouses, shut out from the world by the forests and the rolling hills towards the east. There I found at last a little school.*[44]

Once a district's need for a school had been established, the aspiring teacher would contact the township superintendent/trustee requesting consideration. It was the custom in some counties for a licensed teacher to present "articles of agreement" to prospective patrons to initiate a new district school. These "articles" were essentially a written proposal regarding minimum length of engagement, salary and conditions and other pertinent matters. These would be discussed and amended or ratified by the township superintendent/trustees and patrons. The financial position of the township was the main consideration in determining

43. Circular from North West Teachers Agency to state superintendent of education, n.d. in SGO15974, Folder 10, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH. Later there was also at least one "Colored Teachers' Agency" managed by W.T. Breeding of Montgomery who supplied black teachers to "colored" schools in many counties. ***The Colored Alabamian***, November 30, 1911.

44. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, ***The Souls of Black Folk***, New York, Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003 [1903], 49.

whether to employ a teacher.[45]

Parents who wanted their children taught also solicited teachers directly. These might be local young men or women known to everyone and toward whom there was already an inclination to employ. Parents might reach agreements with them that would later be formalised by the township superintendent/trustees. When such arrangements were just another outcome of a process of the community decision-making that was an everyday part of rural life, all was well. When decisions were reached without unanimity the outcome was, predictably, unhappy.

In March 1880 Sarah A. Marshall, a thirty-five-year-old farmer's daughter living at home in Elmore County, wrote in consternation to the state superintendent. She described herself as "a lady schoolteacher" who had been solicited by the parents of nineteen children to take their school. She had commenced on February 1, 1880, but only a few days later had been advised by the township superintendent, a farmer named Alex Nummy, that he would not be giving her a contract nor allowing any of her pupils their share of the public school funds. Miss Marshall had tried to have the matter resolved by the county superintendent, but he would not grant her a hearing. She concluded her letter by stating: "My patrons are very displeased with Mr Hummie's [*sic*] proceedings. None of them are posted in regard to the school laws." She wanted to know "is Mr Hummie acting according to laws?"[46]

Once contracted, the teacher had further responsibilities beyond those principally associated with instruction. He or she was expected to make the rounds of the community to seek pledges from the patrons for the additional tuition fees that supplemented the public funds. These fees also had to be collected by the teacher. Tuition supplements could significantly exceed the total combined revenue derived from the state appropriation, poll tax, permanent school fund and other sources of public moneys which might comprise as little as a *quarter* of the total funds

45. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 136-137. Also Jones, ***Combing Cullman County***, 89.

46. Miss S.A. Marshall of Elmore County to state superintendent of education, March 10, 1880, in SGO15974, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1867-1907***, ADAH. Miss Marshall may have furthered annoyed the township superintendent by getting his name wrong. According to the 1870 US Census, the man's surname was Nummy. This matter may or may not have been resolved satisfactorily because on the 1880 census (taken in June 1880), Miss Marshall's occupation was shown as "teacher." Census data retrieved from www.ancestry.com (accessed November 20 2007).

required to operate a school for longer sessions than the minimum twelve weeks prescribed by law.[47]

Whilst having to tramp around local farms to obtain or collect subscription pledges made the teacher something of a mendicant, the experience provided him or her with a firsthand knowledge of the school neighbourhood - its geography and terrain - as well as its economic circumstances. Teachers became aware of the patrons who were in financial straits, those who were generous, those who were avaricious, those who envied a neighbour's greater means and those who were unreliable. In turn, by necessarily revealing their circumstances, patrons vested substantial trust in teachers but respect for this trust was the price of continuing employment. It was another of the intimate reciprocities and mutual understandings that were part of the web of close community life.

A further way in which teachers developed a close understanding of their community was through their statutory periodic reporting obligations. The school law required teachers of both black and white schools to complete a monthly (or quarterly) report.[48] This report showed student enrolments (and whether male or female), actual attendance, transfers in from other parts of the county, the branches (subjects) covered and the number of days actually taught. Teachers also had to calculate the amount due to them from the township's school revenues and list the number of visits made to the school by their township superintendent. The report had to be sworn to by the teacher completing it and approved by the township superintendent. Failure to comply meant the teacher would not be paid.[49]

These reports were consolidated by the county superintendents and sent to Alabama's Department of Education in Montgomery where, each year, a state-wide

47. See pages 82-83 of Chapter 2.

48. Up to 1879 the report was prepared monthly and teachers were supposed to be paid monthly. Between 1879 and 1903 the report was made quarterly and teachers were paid quarterly. After 1903 the report had again to be prepared monthly and teachers were also again paid monthly.

49. ***Public School Law, 1879***, Article IV, Paragraphs 43 and 44. The reporting requirements for teachers were carried over into later versions of the school law – e.g. ***Public School Law, 1891***, Chapter 3, Article 1, Section 2, Paragraphs 986 and 987. ***Public School Law, 1905***, Article VI, Paragraphs 3580 and 3581. ***Public School Law, 1911***, Paragraphs 1748 and 1749, . . . et cetera. The reports of some county superintendents suggest monthly payrolls may have been required earlier than 1909. Before 1879 the Teacher's Report was prepared monthly and teachers had to list the number of visits by the county superintendent as well as the trustees and also indicate pupil "grading."

summation was prepared and printed. This (by now rather bland) bureaucratic product was attached to the state superintendent's *Annual Report* - together with a county overview of educational progress. But at the township level where they were first completed – where the teacher knew the faces and names behind the numbers – the reports were as much a socio-economic and seasonal snapshot as they were an educational audit.

From the county superintendents' overviews, some not unreasonable assumptions can be made regarding just what teachers knew when they completed their periodic reports. For example, they knew erratic attendance was often due to children being needed "at home during April, May and June to make crops and during October, November and December to gather them, thus saving the expense of hired labor" or simply to "bad weather."[50] They knew which households needed "an improved social and pecuniary condition" in order to develop the habit of turning up regularly.[51] They knew which parents kept children at home because of political hostility and which could not see the point of schooling - having had none themselves.[52] They also knew the number of children who would disappear permanently from their reports having been removed by their parents to join the wage economy via employment in the rapidly expanding cotton mills.[53] In the centres where mills and other industrial enterprises were located, teachers knew their enrolments were inflated by transient children who frequently moved from one employer to another.[54]

Teachers knew too which families had moved into and which out of the neighbourhood, which hamlets were growing and needed additional instructors and which areas of the township were beset by illness.[55] They knew for just how

50. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891***, 23 and ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, 142.

51. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 115.

52. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1871***, 60 and 75.

53. This was particularly the case in the northern counties where mill-agents recruited from the surrounding area. In the Dwight Mill in Alabama City near Gadsden children represented nearly 30 percent of the workforce in 1900. Shelley Sallee, ***The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South***, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2004, 28 and 30.

54. Report from J. M. Atkinson, superintendent for Alabama City Schools, for the scholastic year ending September 30, 1905, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SG011916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1871-1905***.

55. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 106. See also Charles C. Pittman, superintendent of education for Randolph County to Leroy Box, state superintendent of education, September 6, 1880, in SGO15978, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1878-79***, ADAH.

long they were likely to be able to keep their schools open owing to the limited public money available and the frequent difficulty of procuring private supplements.[56] They were aware too that they could be beholden to the township superintendent for their salary. In 1901, several teachers in Jefferson County accused their township superintendent of refusing to approve their reports unless they agreed to shop at his store.[57]

The teachers did not always know how to force-fit local circumstances onto a standardised pro-forma. In 1884, John B. Appleton, superintendent of education for DeKalb County, complained to the state superintendent of such difficulties. He found it hard to get teachers to specify in their reports what support they had received from patrons and the value of school buildings because, as he explained, "most of our schools are taught in houses used for other purposes which sadly interferes with the schools in the summer season."[58]

In a régime where schooling was not compulsory, the report - with its enumeration of potential and actual attendees – was a reasonably well-tuned instrument for measuring patron satisfaction. It was the teacher's responsibility to seek school enrolments and then to sustain the interest of those who committed to attend. In the hands of the county and township superintendents of education, the periodic reports were also an indication of how well they were each doing their own jobs – for they were responsible respectively for licensing and contracting teachers and a teacher's performance was not unconnected with their decision-making.

Township superintendents/trustees and patrons would have all had their own ideas on what made somebody a good teacher but, at least in the initial years of Bourbon rule, there was still a less than wholehearted commitment to public education overall. Governmental reluctance extended to the normal schools whose function was to prepare young people for elementary teaching and to give "tone

56. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 82.

57. John W. Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, to Isaac W. McAdory, superintendent of education for Jefferson County, February 22, 1901, in SGO15976, Folder 7, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1899-1906***, ADAH. McAdory investigated but could not substantiate this allegation.

58. John B. Appleton, superintendent of education for Clay County to Henry Clay Armstrong, state superintendent of education, September 30, 1884, in SGO15974, Folder 11, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1867-1916***, ADAH.

and character to the vocation of the teacher."[59]

Although the normal schools survived and eventually grew "in usefulness and in popularity with all thoughtful educators," a different solution to improving teacher knowledge and competence was being developed at the grass-roots level – the teachers' institute (a sort of in-service professional development seminar).[60] As with so much else to do with schooling at this time, institutes were somewhat improvisational. They picked up where the rural school left off in imparting knowledge. They were also largely self-supporting and locally financed.

The school law stipulated that county superintendents must hold three teachers' institutes annually for each race (providing there were at least ten teachers of that race in the county). Teachers were supposed to attend at least one of the county institutes. For most teachers, such training was the only exposure they ever received to educational ideas and pedagogical methods – particularly those to do with "disciplining schools, the textbooks used and other matters connected with the schools and school laws."[61]

The responsibility for holding teachers' institutes was actually held by the county educational board but, in practice, the institutes were usually organised by the county superintendent. As the superintendent was more answerable to the wants and needs of his constituency than he was to the Department of Education in Montgomery, the institutes were shaped with that constituency in mind. In planning institutes, many superintendents gave primacy to local conditions rather than legislative obligations. In 1891 Fred S. Bryars, the superintendent of Baldwin County, reported that, because many of his teachers resided outside the county and facilities for travel were inadequate, it was impossible "to collect a sufficient number of teachers at one point to effect the purposes of the institutes." Yet, in the same

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59. Taken from a speech given by Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, to Alabama Educational Association in 1889 and quoted in Don Eddins, ***AEA: Head of the Class in Alabama Politics: a history of the Alabama Education Association***, Montgomery, Compos-it Inc. 1997, 232.

60. *Ibid.*, 232-233.

61. The ***Public School Law of 1879***, Article VI, Section 47, Paragraphs 7-10. See also the ***Public School Law of 1891***, Article II, Sections 995, 996, 997 and 998. See also the ***Public School Law of 1905***, Article VII, Sections 3590, 3591, 3592 and 3593. See Footnote 68 regarding additional types of institutes introduced in the 1880s.

year, Samuel M. Hendricks of Blount County held four institutes and pointed out that while his institutes had been held at places "away from the railroad and very far in the interior of our mountainous country, this seemed to be a small hindrance."[62]

In the same way that student school attendance was often subject to other priorities, so too was teacher attendance at institutes. In 1875, James G. Dement of Limestone County admitted:

> *I have had but one Teachers' Convention. This was owing to the excessive rains during the spring. Afterwards, both teachers and trustees were too busy to attend regularly. During the next year I expect to hold them monthly.*[63]

When schools only lasted three or four months, many teachers (particularly men) took other jobs for the remainder of the year and were not free to attend institutes. Some might sustain a full time occupation as a teacher by moving successively from one school to another as each session ended. Female teachers with children might fail to attend owing to parental responsibilities.[64]

The county institutes were actually a sort of self-help forum where, for a few days, teachers trained each other and provided mutual support, encouragement and aroused a "laudable spirit of emulation." The institutes allowed teachers to "add to their stock of knowledge" and to "learn the causes of the failures experienced and the best means of achieving success in the future."[65] Their unpretentious, commonsensical and practical quality made them readily acceptable to local communities – perhaps even more so than the normal schools. They stripped teacher training to its bare essentials and had the advantage of also being inexpensive. However, some plans for institutes went unrealised because teachers were "too poor to pay their board while in attendance."[66] In his *Annual Report* for 1882 the state superintendent declared emphatically that it did not seem

62. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891,*** 19-20.

63. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875,*** 88.

64. Jesse Monroe Richardson, ***The Contribution of John William Abercrombie to Public Education,*** Nashville, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1949, 3. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1901 and 1902,*** 40.

65. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1885,*** 19. See also ***Annual Report, 1874,*** 12.

66. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891,*** 32.

"right or just" that teachers' minimal salaries should be taxed with the expense of attending institutes."[67] This was a particular concern later in the decade when additional types of institutes were offered (assisted with funding from the Peabody Education Fund). These were held over longer periods.[68]

Institutes (along with everything else to do with public education in the late nineteenth century) were organised on a racial basis. Yet in 1891 John F. Vardaman of Coosa County stated that, although he "had *never* held a colored teachers' institute in this county," a few ["colored"] teachers had attended the institutes of the whites and were "well pleased with them." On the other hand, in the same year, the superintendent of Jefferson County explained that, despite their taking a great interest in the work of the institutes and attending whenever possible, his "colored" teachers had difficulty in finding a place to meet "where they could be entertained" (find accommodation). He said this was because the "the negroes do not seem to be able to take care of the teachers in some communities."[69]

The white teachers fared much better. In 1891 when thirty-five white teachers participated in an institute in Oneonta in Blount County they were extended "free entertainment" and "unbounded hospitality" by the local citizens. Prior to a Cherokee County institute in 1898, the county board of education assured teachers that they would "be taken care of by the hospitable people of Cedar Bluff." After an institute held in July 1899 at "the flourishing little town" of Hartford in Geneva County, the county superintendent averred that "no people could surpass them [the citizens of Hartford] in hospitality or in interest manifested in educational work." The livery men had cared for their horses, the public hotels had been available (gratis) to all attendees and the homes of all the prominent citizens had been thrown open for their reception.[70]

67. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1882***, 8.

68. In 1889 Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, explained that *three* type of institutes had been held in Alabama in the scholastic year ending September 30 1889. He designated these as "Normal, Congressional and County." Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1889***, 22. "Normal institutes" offered courses over a period of up to five years and allowed participants to accumulate credits for the knowledge and skills that they would otherwise have to attend Normal Schools to obtain. Four Normal Institutes were held in 1889. "Congressional Institutes" were held in each congressional district and had inter-county participation. Ten such institutes were held in 1889 for each race.

69. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891***, 26, 34 and 21.

70. Mrs Frank Ross Stewart, ***The History of Education in Cherokee County, Alabama***, 88. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, 175-176.

Local newspapers covered teachers' institutes in some detail though they gave considerably more column space to white institutes. They would first announce the dates and agenda for the forthcoming event and after it had been held would, not infrequently, give an exhaustive account of all that had taken place. The names of those who had participated were often given together with a critique of how they had presented their topic. This coverage had the effect of providing feedback to patrons and the wider community generally regarding the work of the public schools and the competence of the teachers; it also demonstrated the importance of the institutes themselves as educational activities with direct relevance to "the common people who heartily give them their support."[71] Being mentioned in a newspaper that might be read by their families and neighbours vested the young attendees with a status and importance that they would rarely, if ever, have otherwise experienced.

The *Wilcox Progress* often promoted the cause of education including the value of public schools. In 1888 (in a manner both condescending and congratulatory) it published an account of the proceedings of "The Seventh Annual Session of the Colored Teachers' Institute." It explained that the leading (and best) speakers or debaters for every discussion were C.W. Childs, J.W. Philen, J.A. Lawson, E.H. Allen and G.K. Carmichael and these were a model for the less experienced teachers to emulate. The article went on:

> *Many of our white citizens were present and expressed surprise at the intelligence of the speakers. . . . The colored people are in earnest about education and are making rapid progress.*[72]

Reviewing the often fulsome contemporary newspaper accounts of teachers' institutes creates an understanding of why institutes developed an economic and calendric significance for communities in which not a great deal usually happened outside agricultural, seasonal and religious routines. Small towns were particularly keen to be selected as the site of an institute – "the people of Brundidge (in Pike County) desire the institute to be held here and the members will be well entertained."[73] An extract from the *Wilcox Progress* shown below illustrates a sort of

71. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891***, 21.

72. ***Wilcox Progress***, October 3, 1888.

73. ***The Troy Messenger***, October 7, 1886.

chamber of commerce concern for an upcoming institute.

> *Welcome Teachers! Commencing Thursday morning, the white teachers of several counties are expected in Camden to attend the Teachers' Institute. It will be presided over by Dr. E.R. Eldridge, President of the State Normal College at Troy, and one of the best Southern Normal teachers. The exercises will be very interesting throughout the week's term, and we are sure that those of our citizens who are not teachers will enjoy the intellectual talks. . . . The Progress welcomes the teachers to Camden, and we trust their stay may be so pleasant in our midst that when they, like other visitors, leave us only delightful remembrances of Camden may remain. Our exchanges and the courtesies of The Progress business office is at their disposal and use.*[74]

The *Wilcox Progress* showed itself to be alive to the opportunities represented by the institute and ingratiating in its welcome. It basks in the prestige of the institute's presiding officer (*Dr* Eldridge, not just a *mere* college president but one of the *best* in the South); it alerts members of the local community to the *intellectual* benefits to be enjoyed in the same way it might spruik the self-improvement or diversionary benefits of a chautauqua. It again offers a welcome and the use of its own facilities to assist the teachers. The newspaper conveys the idea of teacher training as civic event and institutes as something beyond just the concern of teachers - something for the involvement of the whole community. On at least one occasion a teacher repaid editorial attention and confirmed the cultural significance of institutes as *events* by penning a poem about an institute held in August 1886 at Troy in Pike County. This was published in *The Troy Messenger* and two (of twelve) verses are shown below.

The Teachers' Normal Institute
Was nice as it could be,
For it was held in Troy, you know,
Where everything was free.

They'd board you there for nothing,
And treat you like a queen,
And never poke a bit of fun
At teachers that are green. . . . . [75]

74. ***Wilcox Progress***, August 7, 1895. Normal institutes were longer and held less frequently than regular county institutes.

75. ***The Troy Messenger***, September 9, 1886.

For at least a couple of decades from the early 1880s onwards, county institute programs reflected the desire of the county superintendents (by whom they were usually compiled) to give teachers practical skills for application in the schoolhouse. Some of the recurring topics prefaced by the words "How to teach" were spelling (or "orthography" as it was often more grandly called), arithmetic (particularly percentages, fractions, multipliers and divisions), reading, writing, grammar (infinitives and participles, phrase and clause modifiers), history (a Southern viewpoint was favoured), physiology and hygiene, and geography.[76] The topic of "School Discipline and How to Maintain it" was a staple of institute programs as was how to create a "good tone" in the schoolhouse. Debates on the pros and cons of corporal punishment were held on more than a few occasions.[77]

Some of the teachers (who may or may not have attended institutes) were certainly in need of additional skills. As an adult, William Holtzclaw, who had been a student at a black school in Randolph County in the 1880s recalled:

> *Almost as soon as the Negro pupils got as far as "baker," and certainly when they got as far as "abasement" in the old blue-back speller, they were made assistant teachers. . . . The colored teachers were doing pretty good work but the best of them had advanced only about as far as the fourth grade.*[78]

Mitchell Garrett remembered that although one of his teachers - Greenberry Jenkins - "tried hard enough, he simply could not solve the problems that lay beyond the middle of the [Robinson's Practical Arithmetic] book." This cost him his credibility and his older pupils stopped attending school.[79]

On February 10, 1899, Alabama's General Assembly, prodded by John William Abercrombie, the energetic and modernising new state superintendent who had

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76. Examples of institute programs and topics discussed taken from a) Stewart, ***The History of Education in Cherokee County, Alabama***, 81-91; and b) ***The Mountain Eagle***, March 2, 1894, February 5, 1896, December 7, 1898, April, 24, 1901, April 19, 1905; c) ***Wilcox Progress***, December 25, 1889, September 19, 1894, August 7, 1895.

77. ***Wilcox Progress***, December 25, 1889, and September 19, 1894 (announcing agenda for teachers' institute of October 5 and 6, 1894) and ***The Mountain Eagle***, July 12, 1899, (announcing agenda for a teachers' institute on July 21-22, 1899).

78. Holtzclaw, ***Black Man's Burden***, 14.

79. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 164.

been elected in 1898, passed *an Act to establish a uniform system for the examination and licensing of teachers of public schools.* Once the first round of quarterly examinations (held in July 1899) had been marked, a precise gauge was available to assess the actual level of knowledge held by Alabama's teachers. *The Mountain Eagle* reported:

> *Friday was an unusually hard day with public school teachers whose papers are being examined by the state board of examiners at Oxford. Seventy-six of a hundred applicants failed to pass. A graduate of the State University who has held various important school positions got a percentage of less than fifty and received only a third grade certificate. . . . The answers to many of the questions show lamentable and ludicrous ignorance.*

In the tradition of protecting local interests and community pride, the newspaper made the best of a dismal result. It told its readers that Walker County "made an extra good showing, *only* seven of thirty-two Walker County candidates failing to pass.[80]

Whilst Walker's failure rate of 22 percent was dire, it was not as bad as the overall state-wide performance for the first year of the examination. In turn, this was not quite as horrendous as *The Mountain Eagle's* report might have suggested. In the first full year of the new certification régime, over 39 percent of the 10,171 candidates failed and, without a compromise by the state superintendent, the schools would have had a "scarcity of teachers."[81]

Abercrombie was delighted by the changes to the old examination and licensing arrangements. In his next official *Biennial Report* he pointed out that, under the old law, each of the sixty-six counties[82] had its own arrangements and these had "no system, no uniformity, no standard of qualification." This laxity had allowed certificates to be obtained by graft or highly creative exchanges. When Abercrombie cites people having been licensed who "did not know a verb from a noun, who could not solve a simple example in simple fractions – men and women destitute of moral character" or whose fitness for teaching was frequently determined "by a man's political affiliations," the contempt of the modern reforming bureaucrat for

80. ***The Mountain Eagle,*** September 20, 1899. (Italics added). ***The Mountain Eagle*** was a weekly which came out on Wednesdays.

81. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** xv.

82. This was written in 1900. Houston County (the sixty-seventh county) was not created until 1903.

the improvisations of localism is almost palpable. He gloats that the new "superior" system will be removed from "local prejudices and local influences," and examiners will "not know the applicants personally."[83] At the end of that section of Abercrombie's report headed "State Board of Examiners" he describes a compromise he had to make to ensure there would actually be enough teachers to open the schools (conditional contracts). He also makes what amounts to a throwaway remark indicating that, for the moment, the prerogatives of localism were being exercised in some places:

> *There may be a community here and there without a teacher but in most instances it is because the township trustees **insist** upon a teacher who lives in the community.*[84]

Whilst obliged to comply with the law, some superintendents were going down fighting to protect their domain and protest against centralised state prescription. The superintendent of Etowah County, Newton M. Gallant was explicit:

> *The educators of the county know the needs of the people better than it is possible for a State Board to know and are fully competent to take care of the interest of the people in the matter of examinations. The people of Etowah County believe in the doctrine of **local self-government** and are not prepared to accept the suggestion as true that they need a State Board of Examiners to save them from themselves.*[85]

While all major organisational and cultural change is perplexing, the letter files of the state superintendent provide some indication of just how baffling the new examination arrangements were to teachers who had spent their lives - both as students and instructors - in a rural world well away from "system, uniformity, and standard." Some believed the examination questions were unnecessarily difficult and their point was not wholly unreasonable. Patrons usually just wanted their children to acquire (through a process of self-paced learning and recitation) a basic competence in such things as the multiplication tables, spelling and reading.

To qualify for the lowest level (third grade) certificate, teachers had to obtain a minimum of 70 percent in every subject in order to pass. They were examined in

83. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900,*** xii-xv.

84. *Ibid.*, xv. (Emphasis added).

85. *Ibid.*, 169. (Emphasis added).

reading, geography, English grammar, arithmetic, and physiology. For the second grade certificate candidates had to pass all the third grade subjects plus United States History and Alabama History. For the first grade certificate candidates had to pass all the second grade subjects plus algebra, physics, theory and practice of teaching, and school law.[86] After some amendments to the law made in February 1901, the pass was 50 percent in each subject with an overall average of 75 percent.[87]

Jordan J. Williams, a sixty-five-year-old white male teacher with forty-two years' experience wrote to warn Abercrombie regarding the new school laws:

> *I want you for your own good and for sake of the public good to go very slowly. . . . Their application and enforcement will render all parties connected therewith most unpopular throughout the state. Good in themselves but Utopian – utterly impracticable. God knows my heart.*[88]

John Jackson Mitchell, a member of Alabama's legislature, wanted Abercrombie to brief him on just how the new examination arrangements were going to be an improvement on those they replaced. He said they were "getting an enormous amount of cursing among our people."[89]

Questions addressed to both Abercrombie and to Professor John L. Dodson, the secretary of the State Board of Examiners, indicate a level of incomprehension regarding the new centrally imposed system. This was perhaps associated with its novelty and menacing strangeness. Henry C. Gilbert, who was superintendent of the Florence school system in Lauderdale County, explained that though his teachers were going to work heroically "this is their first experience in state examinations and they are extremely nervous about it." They wanted to know whether they would be examined "in vertical or slant writing." They were also uncertain as to whether their spelling and penmanship would be judged from their

86. John W. Abercrombie, "Official Announcements of State Department of Education," Educational Exchange, XVI, 9 (1901): 22-25.

87. ***General School Laws of Alabama 1905.*** Issued by Isaac W. Hill, superintendent of education, Section 9 (as amended), 44. (Laws not in Code of 1896, as amended). See also ADAH, SGO15978, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1867-1907.*** *Examination Papers for State Examination – Alabama.* Papers include English Grammar, (All Grades) December 3-4, Physiology and Hygiene (All Grades) December 3-4, Arithmetic (All Grades) December 4-5, Geometry (First Grade) December 3-4 and Algebra (First Grade), December 3-4.

88. J.J. Williams to John W. Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, February 23, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904,*** ADAH.

89. John Jackson Mitchell of Lauderdale County to John W. Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, March 3, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904,*** ADAH.

papers or whether they would be required to explain the rules of spelling or the principles of letter writing.[90] Leander J. Sherrill, the superintendent of education for Autauga County, wondered whether teachers would write answers to questions on both sides of the paper or only one. He pointed out that it would take much less paper to write on both sides and "if there were many applicants in such a place as Prattville, paper might run short."[91]

Ambivalence (if not outright hostility) to the new examinations and a scornfulness at some of the knowledge needed to pass them was newspaper fodder for some years to come. In 1905 the *Florence Herald* reported a waspish teacher saying:

> *If you are preparing to take the state examination you should study biology, physiology, etymology and all the other ologies. Don't be sure you will pass unless you have a knowledge of theosophy, sociology, agriculture, chemistry, socialism, anarchism and any old thing not pertaining to books and libraries.*[92]

In the same year the *Fort Payne Journal* asserted (with the implication schooling was getting too fancy) that:

> *In another generation nobody will be able to spell "baker" unless some old fogy insists that his children shall learn. . . . Every child is entitled to a knowledge of spelling, reading and writing, for the public pays for it.*[93]

In a vitriolic letter to the editor of the *Cherokee Harmonizer* a correspondent who merely signed himself W.N. (and may have been a disgruntled teacher) avowed:

> *There is not a teacherless school in the county [Cherokee] but what could be furnished with a teacher that would do credit to himself and give satisfaction to patron and pupil but the* ***voice of authority*** *says they shall not teach unless they have attained a certain height in their knowledge . . . which is to be ascertained many times, by unfair questions in the examination. . . . If you cannot solve the most difficult problem in arithmetic, you cannot teach a child how to add and subtract and multiply. If you are unable to grasp some poetic*

90. Henry C. Gilbert to John W. Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, March 11, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904,*** ADAH.

91. Leander J. Sherill to John L. Dodson, secretary of State Board of Examiners, August 5, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904,*** ADAH.

92. ***Florence Herald,*** January 19, 1905.

93. ***Fort Payne Journal,*** June 14, 1905.

> *thought and untangle and straighten it into a sentence of prose and parse the same, you are incompetent to teach a child the simplest forms of language lessons. If you cannot mention the jaw-breaking name of some volcano, river or city in a distant country, you cannot instruct a child as to the geographical situation of its own state.*[94]

In a final flourish W.N. asserted that the country teachers from whom George Washington and Abraham Lincoln had both received their educations, would not be employed under contemporary conditions.

Playing as it does on the protective instincts of parents, the topic of "back to basics" in education has always been a hardy perennial for newspaper editors. Yet Alabama's new school laws were genuinely threatening to a society where local people were used to (and emotionally attached to) deciding what was best for their own communities and looking after their own affairs. As well, from the beginning of the scholastic year beginning on October 1, 1899, fourteen hundred teachers were precariously working on conditional contracts. The condition was that they would receive no pay for any further teaching unless they passed the examination at their next attempt. When those who were retained on conditional contracts were re-examined, 20 percent did not pass.[95] J.H. Nunnelee, the proprietor of the *Selma Morning Times*, told Abercrombie the new school law had "played the devil with us in big black beats." He had written to Abercrombie on behalf of a Captain N.N. Shephard who was a school trustee and was not now able to find sufficient numbers of licensed teachers. Nunnelee said he "would take it as a personal favour" if the law "could be stretched a little bit" for Shephard.[96] He wrote from the viewpoint of local need and a tradition of a little back-scratching, legal elasticity and reciprocity when it came to favours.

Until 1899, if a teacher's overall performance was satisfactory to his or her patrons and the school trustees, any inadequacies in his or her knowledge or methods tended to be overlooked. After all, the teacher was often kin and his or her

94. ***Cherokee Harmonizer***, February 8, 1906. W.N. claimed there were seventeen schools (involving between 800 and 900 students) that could not open in Cherokee owing to teacher shortages. Other comments in his letter make it clear the writer was male. (Emphasis added).

95. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, xv.

96. J.H. Nunnelee to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, November 11, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH.

employment could be a kind of community welfare.[97] Abercrombie received many letters from those for whom a loss of livelihood would mean ruin for their families. One woman begged for mercy explaining that she had been teaching for years to support her invalid father and her siblings and just did not know what she was now going to do.[98] George Jones, a farmer from Shoal Creek in Shelby County, wrote that he had been examined in 1884 and had obtained a first grade certificate. He thought this had been orally endorsed for about ten years "until the Third Party people [Populists] got control in this county." He was now too ill to work his farm and needed to teach again but was worried that, if he sat the examination, he would not pass at the level needed to obtain a first grade certificate. He asked Abercrombie to oblige him by suggesting "a plan" by which he could procure a life certificate thus "putting him on the tracks."[99] A presumably desperate B.W. Collins of Jackson in Clarke County went beyond asking for a "plan" and offered Abercrombie a bribe. A furious and indignant Abercrombie threatened Collins with the prospect of gaol.[100]

For all the actual and supposed disadvantages of the old arrangements, when licences were issued by the county board of education, superintendents generally knew something about the competence (or incompetence) of the teachers to whom they were issued because they had tested the candidates themselves. As soon as the new law was implemented there was evidence of fraud, and in some counties of wholesale cheating.

As early as June, 1899 Abercrombie was being warned that, in parts of the state, stolen examination papers were being peddled to anyone willing to pay $5.00 for them. The source of the stolen papers was alleged to be F.L. Todd, an enterprising black man who worked at the Capitol and had apparently identified a niche market amongst teachers of his own race desperate to retain their jobs. Whether from Todd or another source, stolen papers turned up in Barbour and Bullock Counties and, at

97. See Pages 96-99 of this Chapter.

98. Letter quoted in George Wade Prewett, "The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1993, 22.

99. George Jones to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, October 6, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH.

100. B.W. Collins to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, n.d. in SGO15975, Folder 14, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH. (Letter is mostly illegible and poorly spelled).

the time of the next round, in St Clair.[101] In Jackson County, an administrative bungle meant teachers in the town of Pisgah had the examination questions before anyone else in the county. These were soon distributed via the rural grapevine. It is possible that the motive here was not cupidity but opportunism and neighbourly helpfulness at the expense of the careless superintendent, Charles L. Hackworth. Needless to say it was not seen this way by Abercrombie and Dodson.[102]

When the next (quarterly) examinations were held, Abercrombie was on his guard. He wrote to the superintendent of Barbour County warning him to avoid *every appearance of irregularity*. He rather anxiously explained that:

> *Opponents of the examination law, unsuccessful applicants and personal enemies take every opportunity to accuse county superintendents of wrongdoing.*[103]

Abercrombie seemed oblivious to the cause of the acrimony - that many people were peevish at the central government's assumption of rural ignorance, its trespassing on local domain and its depriving people of their livelihood – the attitudes exemplified by the comments of Newton M. Gallant, the Etowah superintendent quoted previously. The "opponents of the examination law" were taking out their resentment on the nearest available educational official. Even ten years later one superintendent said that while he believed he had won the fight to prevent "fraud from the examination of teachers" his struggle to do this had been "arduous" because candidates had "formerly received aid from outsiders and certificates were easily obtained."[104]

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101. Charles McDowell of Eufala, Barbour County, June 19, 1899; J.M. Sanders of Union Springs, Bullock County, November 13, 1899; P.B. Mize of Brompton in St Clair County, June 7, 1899; to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH. The F.L. Todd mentioned was almost certainly Frank L. Todd, a black porter at the Capitol who lived in Montgomery and was later a rural mail carrier or postman. Before coming to Montgomery he had been a teacher at Union Springs. However, the allegations may have been unfounded slander. When Frank Todd died in 1913 there was an obituary in the black press noting that he was "highly respected and greatly beloved" in the black community. ***The Colored Alabamian***, February 22, 1913.

102. G. W. Brock of the State Board of Examiners to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, regarding cheating in Jackson County, August 4, 1899, and Judge C.L. Cargile of Scottsboro in Jackson County to John William Abercrombie, August 30, 1899 regarding claims of injustices to teachers in that county, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH. This folder holds a number of other letters on this matter.

103. John William Abercrombie to Charles McDowell, superintendent of education for Barbour County, August 29, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH.

104. Report of William M. Cook, superintendent of education for Wilcox County, October 4, 1910, in Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1910***.

Prior to 1900, before teachers could be licensed by the county board of education (in practice often just the superintendent himself) they not only had to satisfy the board regarding their level of knowledge but also their "good moral character." Licences could be cancelled if a teacher was found "guilty of intemperance" or of "unworthy or disgraceful conduct." But members of the county board of education, being responsive to their communities, appear to have been fairly lenient in matters of teacher behaviour and displayed the sort of indulgence that might be extended to a wayward family member. Thus James Agnew of Escambia County, who had been seen under the influence of whiskey at school meetings, was nevertheless described as "a fine scholar and trying to reform."[105]

While county superintendents could exercise their own judgements, when it came to assessing moral character, state officials had to be scrupulous in demonstrating impartial objectivity. When a state examiner, George W. Brock, discovered he not only knew several of the teachers presenting for examination in Escambia (including Agnew), but also knew them to be overfond of liquor, he had to achieve with paperwork what had previously been a local discretionary matter. He required each candidate for examination to furnish a certificate of good character signed by "three or more persons in good standing within their communities." He then enclosed these with the examination papers he sent in to the State Board of Examiners.[106]

In Henry County, where the rancid politics of this period were fought out with gusto at the local level, twenty-five citizens were determined to see that a black teacher named Culver was not granted a life certificate. They testified to his "immorality." The local superintendent, James B. Espy, was able to advise John Dodson that Culver had been instrumental in giving the county to the Democrats in the last election and the Populists were determined to thwart his teaching ambitions on that account.[107]

105. G.W. Brock to John Dodson, secretary of State Board of Examiners, August 11, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH.

106. *Ibid.*

107. John Dodson, secretary of State Board of Examiners, to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, August 9, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 2, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904***, ADAH. The objecting citizens may have been successful. In the 1900 US Census no black male in Henry County with the surname Culver is shown as having the occupation of teacher.

In 1901 the law was amended so that candidates had to produce written character references before being examined "unless the applicant is *known to the person appointed to conduct the examination* to be of good moral character."[108] This was a pragmatic compromise which recognised the importance of local knowledge because, while the county superintendents no longer devised their own examinations and issued licences, they did conduct the state examination.

If the county superintendent was also a teacher, things were more complex and adjudication was necessary at the state level. Towards the end of 1901, when Frank M. Justice (who was both superintendent of Geneva County and a teacher) was accused of intemperance by his Populist opponents, Abercrombie obtained an attorney's advice on the validity of the charges. No fewer than twenty-five affidavits were forwarded from members of Justice's school community stating they "had never seen him under the influence of whiskey." Justice weighed in himself with a vigorous denunciation of his accusers. One of these "was billed at last term of court for stealing" and another "lay in jail at Montgomery and also went to coal mines for twelve months, which time he served out."[109] As he pursued his crusade to professionalise all things to do with Alabama's education system, Abercrombie may have pondered with dismay the mischief and malice of local factionalism.

The changes to the teacher licensing law were largely accepted by those administering the education system as improvements likely to lead to higher standards. Abercrombie attached reports from fifty-five county superintendents to his *Biennial Report* for the scholastic years 1899 and 1900. Thirty-nine of these supported the changes while eleven either provisionally approved of them (making suggestions as to where the law was deficient) or were dead set against them. Others objected to the stringency of the questions and the rigid criteria for passing. The superintendent of Colbert County said it had broken up the "evil" by which schools were reserved "for the kinspeople of trustees or persons of such standing in the community as to give them undue influence."[110] The remainder did not comment. More than half of those who responded were highly indignant at the

108. ***General School Laws of Alabama 1905,*** Section 8, 44. Alabama Dept. of Education.

109. F.J. Milligan, attorney, to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, March 6, 1902. Also Frank M. Justice to Abercrombie, February 10, 1902, in SGO15980, Folder 9, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1902***, ADAH.

110. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900***, 153.

law's exemption of normal school graduates from examination claiming this struck at egalitarianism.[111] This exemption was later abolished.

In the years after the new examination régime was implemented and beset by a teacher famine, some county superintendents were still protesting, with good reason, at "the present rigid examination for teachers." In Lee County, after the examination in July 1905, only 33 percent of the candidates had passed and most of these had attended a special summer school in order to achieve the necessary standard.[112] Ollie A. Steele of Blount County alleged the examination had "driven a great many of our older and more experienced teachers out of the profession" and opined that a "less rigid and more practical enforcement of our present examination law would bring us better results." John N. Word of Randolph County complained that the examination was, "too hard and as a result of this fact teachers are very scarce. The state board has nearly rid our county of colored teachers." Winston's superintendent, Levi T. Steele actually pleaded for "all the leniency that is possible" in the next examination as "the children of this county are suffering on account of the scarcity of teachers" and he believed that "a poor school is better than no school at all."[113] In 1903 lawyers from Camden in Wilcox County lobbied their state senator for assistance in procuring a teacher's licence for a Mr Fortune Williams. He was said to be "a negro of excellent moral character and of much more than ordinary ability" – (though he had failed to pass the arithmetic test).[114] Seven years later William M. Cook, the superintendent of Wilcox County (and also a Camden resident), was adamant that "public opinion is opposed to a too rigid enforcement of the rules."[115]

Here were the pleas of men who were not wholly resistant to the modern values of efficiency and progress but believed these should be tempered with concessions and

111. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1899 and 1900.*** The response of superintendents to the 1899 examination law has been assessed from a close reading each county report and a tabulation of various comments.

112. ***Opelika Daily News***, July 14, 1905. The white teachers had attended the "East Alabama Summer School" held in Opelika.

113. Reports from O.A. Steele, superintendent of education for Blount County, J.N. Word, superintendent of education for Randolph County and L.T. Steele, superintendent of education for Winston County, in Alabama Dept. of Education, SGO11916, ***County/City Board Annual Report, 1905.***

114. E.N. and P.E. Jones, Attorneys at Law, Camden, to the Hon. William Clarence Jones, September 26, 1903, in SPR184, William Clarence Jones Letters.

115. Alabama Dept. of Education, SG021050, ***Annual Report, 1910.*** Report dated October 4, 1910, from William M. Cook, superintendent of education for Wilcox County.

local adaptation. They were not staunch defenders of tradition for its own sake but saw value in the compromises and practicality of localism and they were struggling for an outcome that mattered to their constituency. They were anxious that their schools should have adequate numbers of teachers and that these could go about their work without interference from over-zealous outsiders. Their protests can be seen within the context of a changing distribution of power. Where once these superintendents might have expected consultation and negotiation, there was now just executive fiat. Their comments suggest that, to an extent, they were aware of being marginalised but such was the strength of their local constituency, their opinions needed accommodation by the modernisers. County superintendents also recognised that making very young, ill-trained and poorly-paid teachers the front-line in the battle for educational reform, was harsh and unfair. Resistance was always likely from the communities to whom the teachers were accountable and of which they were frequently long-time members.

The reality of teacher shortages caused by the new requirements was acknowledged in October 1903 when the legislature enacted a bill authorising an annual appropriation of $5,000 to fund regular six week summer schools (for white teachers only) at the University of Alabama. The schools were essentially crammers for the teaching certificate examination.[116] In 1907, of those who attended the university summer school, 77 percent subsequently passed their certification examination.[117] Of these, about a quarter obtained a first grade certificate. Summer schools started being offered widely in other parts of the state as well. Such a school was held in 1908 at the black (Baptist) Selma University in Dallas County. The eight week course was advertised as "the teacher's golden opportunity."[118] From April 1911 state support was provided annually for a week-long teachers' institute for each race in each county. These were led by paid "expert instructors" and attendance was compulsory for all teachers without life certificates.[119]

116. ***General Public School Laws of Alabama, 1905***, 75.

117. Prewett, ***The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939***, 54.

118. ***The Colored Alabamian***, May 9, 1908. In 1910, this paper also advertised a nearly month-long summer school for black teachers at The Tuskegee Institute. ***The Colored Alabamian***, April 16, 1910.

119. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1911,*** 24. In 1910, black teachers were encouraged by the state superintendent to attend the Alabama State Teachers' Association' meeting. As this served as an institute they could attend without loss of pay. ***The Colored Alabamian***, April 2, 1910. The professional development function of the county teachers' institute was met at an expanding number of forums in the twentieth century.

When William Francis Feagin became state superintendent in 1913 he was astute enough to recognise that the law governing teacher accreditation had hurtful limitations and many shortcomings. He said:

> *We are shutting the door in the face of many teachers who are succeeding in other states and will not make the change to Alabama so long as the grind of an examination is a condition precedent to admission here.*[120]

In 1915 Feagin was successful in having the legislature enact a bill which ameliorated the absolutist nature of John William Abercrombie's teacher certification régime. Feagin's law allowed graduates from certain institutes of higher learning (in Alabama and elsewhere) to be granted first grade certificates. The law also allowed Alabama's State Board of Examiners to issue certificates to teachers who held certificates issued in other states. The legislation was a sensible and informed response to the problems actually experienced by those who had to deal with the consequences of teacher shortages; it was also a strategic intervention. It recognised that, in a state as vast and various as Alabama, issues of locality and identity not only had a cultural dimension but a political dimension as well and all sorts of compromises had to be made if reforms were to be achieved. Modernisation required negotiated change and practical solutions if it were to have credibility with traditionalists and actually to meet local needs.

120. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1914***, 52.

Chapter 4

The Schoolhouse: Pedagogy, Curriculum and the Conservation of Cultural Values and Identity

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From 1875, Alabama's decentralised public schooling system placed the weight of educational decision-making at the level of the school district. This had consequences for the ways in which schools were conducted, what was taught and the actual experience of attending school. This chapter investigates these consequences. It explains why communities had a direct sense of ownership for the schoolhouse itself and, by extension, for all that went on within its walls. It shows how, from the 1870s until at least the first decade of the twentieth century, the cultural tenets of localism, including parental and community moral values and attitudes, were confirmed and reproduced via pedagogy, student discipline, curricula and textbooks. It shows too that as curriculum and textbook prescriptions became more widespread – initially by county boards of education and later by the state (through a statutory textbook commission) - there were objections to what was recognised as a diminution of community control and trespass on local domain. At the same time, the commission was responsive to local sensitivities about what children should be taught – particularly in respect of secession and Alabama's subsequent role in the Confederacy. The histories adopted by the commission provided an epic version of Alabama's achievements and were written from a Southern viewpoint in respect of slavery, the Civil War and its aftermath. The adopted geographies helped to sustain the convictions upon which the South's rationale for white supremacy and racial segregation was elaborated. Yet culturally suitable material did not assuage objections to state uniformity because such uniformity was emblematic of a much broader range of uninvited and interventionist social change being wrought by modernisers.

In the late nineteenth and earliest years of the twentieth century, the pedagogical methods employed in Alabama's public elementary schools were intended to assure (almost wholly rural) parents that their children would acquire basic skills in the subjects (branches) regarded as the essence of education.[1] These were orthography

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1. In 1855, the first state superintendent, General William F. Perry, had outlined a course of study for common schools including the branches mentioned. Stephen B. Weeks, 1915, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, Repr., Westport, Negro Universities Press, 1971, 65-66.

(spelling), reading, writing (penmanship), mental (or "intellectual") and written arithmetic, history (of the United States and Alabama), geography, and language (grammar and composition). Parents, who did not always even see the need for their children to attend school regularly, were wary of subjects outside this core curriculum. Few of them had much to read besides the Bible, rarely had an occasion for writing anything, and had no recourse against being cheated even when they knew how to calculate, nevertheless "the basic skills of literacy were held to be so desirable that someone who lacked them felt a certain sort of extra helplessness." Those without such skills were destined forever to be (for example) agricultural labourers or miners and had to survive on what they called *mother-wit*.[2]

Parents (particularly farmers) needed their children to be taught those things they were not necessarily able to learn elsewhere in the community so they would be fully equipped to undertake the work they would probably be doing for the rest of their lives. It was taken for granted that home was the place from which children would "take their conduct, morality and their mental, emotional and spiritual key"[3] but teachers were expected to mirror and reinforce parental conduct and values in their own behaviour and within the schoolhouse. These values were generally those of not just a single set of parents but reflected a community consensus on the nature of society overall. In the 1880s and on into the twentieth century, a teacher in Alabama was obligated to improve the "education and the morals of his pupils" as a contractual condition of employment.[4] In some counties expectations went further and a teacher was actually required to "be active in the leadership of the church and community affairs."[5]

In going about the socialisation of their pupils, teachers had to reinforce the cultural traditions and ideologies of what was a hegemonic group of parents, trustees,

2. The observations and quotations are from James Agee and Walker Evans, ***Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: three tenant families***, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1988, 295. Agee was writing about sharecroppers in Hale County in the 1930s but rural attitudes to schooling had not really changed much since the late nineteenth century. See also Charles Johnson, ***The Shadow of the Plantation***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1934, 132.

3. Agee and Evans, ***Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: three tenant families***, 295.

4. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1879, Appended Forms [9]***. See also Lucille Griffith, ed. ***Alabama: A documentary history to 1900***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1968, 556. This shows a contract issued to Leona Thompson of Clay County on 27th October, 1906 requiring her to improve pupils' "education and morals."

5. Hoyt M. Warren, ***Henry's Heritage: a history of Henry County, Alabama***, Abbeville, Henry County Historical Society, 1978, 354.

preachers and other community leaders. This group expected teachers to uphold their attitudes to authority, to strengthen religious beliefs, to explain social and class relations, to instil an understanding regarding the implicit rights of democracy (individual and collective) and, very importantly, to confirm attitudes about race and inter-racial relationships which were reflected in the constitutional provision that "separate schools for each race shall always be maintained by said school authorities."[6] These cultural traditions and ideologies may be described as the hidden curriculum.[7] Before the teacher moved on to teaching the branches, he or she began imparting the hidden curriculum by organising the schoolhouse itself and determining the validating rituals and ceremonies that would be performed therein.

The successive pieces of legislation which regulated the organisation and administration of Alabama's public schools from Reconstruction onwards defined the school calendar – its scholastic year, months and days. Within this context however, school trustees, patrons and teachers determined their own school routine to match local needs, priorities and resources. Schools were held from Monday to Friday and, depending on the extent to which patrons supplemented the teacher's salary, the length of the annual session was (theoretically) from upwards of a minimum three months. The prescribed session was twelve continuous weeks within the scholastic year but, in practice, this was often cut in two to accommodate the needs of an agricultural economy. There would then be a winter session and a summer session. By law, no school of fewer than ten pupils was permitted to receive state funding and the maximum number of pupils per teacher was fifty. There was not always compliance with legal prescriptions on minimum sessions and/or student numbers.[8]

Pupils shared the divided attention of (usually) just one teacher. As late as 1913

6. Alabama State Constitution of 1875, Article XIII, Section 1. A similar provision was included in the Alabama State Constitution of 1901, Article XIV, Section 256.

7. Henry A. Giroux, ***Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling***, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981, 3. Giroux discusses school pedagogy as an instrument for transmitting cultural tradition and ideology as the knowledge of hegemonic groups in society. See also Michael W. Apple, ed. ***Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: essays on class, ideology and the state***, Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, 4.

8. ***Public School Laws of the State of Alabama, 1891***, Chapter II, Article IV, Section 974, 21 and 28. The school law does not specify "Monday to Friday." According to Mitchell B. Garrett, it was general practice to close schools on Friday afternoons. Mitchell B. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek on Hatchet Creek***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1957, 147.

nearly 80 percent of rural schools had only one teacher. A further 16 percent had just two.[9] This teacher was often young and inexperienced but, at law and within the context of the school, a person of authority and "within reasonable bounds, the substitute for the parent, exercising his delegated authority."[10]

Seating was commonly organised so that the youngest pupils sat at the front of the schoolroom with each "grade" a row further back. Girls and boys mostly sat on opposite sides of a central aisle – possibly divided yet once again (as was the case in the twentieth century) to ensure cleaner children from *better* homes sat together. The teacher occupied a desk facing the class – often on a platform.[11] Such elevation not only assisted the teacher both to see and be seen but it also had a symbolic value. The schoolhouse interior was a reflection of the outside community's unambivalent ideas about race, hierarchy, gender, class and authority.

As has been briefly touched upon already, until the early years of the twentieth century, the township schoolhouses in rural districts were commonly as unpretentious and familiar as the vernacular farm buildings that were scattered throughout the local area and from which they were barely distinguishable. Literally hundreds of descriptions from all over Alabama describe the public school buildings of this period as rudimentary barn-like structures made of logs or planks – some *so* rudimentary that they shook when anyone entered and needed buttressing with logs. They were often windowless or had unglazed window openings with wooden shutters or oiled paper to keep out the rain. Some were without ceilings or floorboards and infested with fleas. Those elevated on pillars might serve as a shelter for hogs, goats and even sheep in inclement weather. Ventilated only by the cracks in the wall, they were stiflingly hot in summer and often freezing in winter. They were entered by a single door at one end. Schoolhouses were usually built near a spring but when no spring was nearby, a well was dug in the grounds. There were rarely sanitary facilities such as

9. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report***, 1913, 34.

10. See footnote 33. This wording is from Boyd *vs* State, a case heard in the Alabama Supreme Court in 1890 which decided the rights and limits of teacher authority.

11. Ronald Dykes, ***Growing Up Hard: memories of Jackson County, Alabama in the early twentieth century***, Paint Rock, Paint Rock River Press, 2003, 36. See also Pike County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Pike County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 69. See also Rick Bragg, ***Redbirds: memories from the South***, London, Harvill Press, 1998, 55.

outhouses; children "went in the woods" to gender designated areas.[12] As state funds could only be spent on teachers' wages, the quality of the schoolhouse was a gauge of a community's economic wherewithal.

The school buildings in cities and towns were altogether more suitable in every way because they were acquired or constructed with funds that were not generally available to poor farmers and other labourers. Even in the rural districts there was occasionally a purpose-designed school building owned by some affluent individual who might, as a matter of benevolence, make it available "for the use of the free schools." Such buildings were likely to be "roomy, well-ventilated and have comfortable seats and other conveniences."[13]

The hand-made, improvisational nature of the rural schoolhouses extended to their equipment. Some were furnished with rough wooden desks and seats fabricated by parents to their own design from split pine. According to one superintendent these were "low enough for a pygmy and the desk part high enough for a giant."[14] But many had old church pews or log puncheons on pegs for benches with sometimes a second elevated log (still with the bark on its underside) serving as a desk. If the logs had been recently cut they were likely to exude a resin which stuck to the children's clothes. In some schoolhouses the blackboard was merely an area of an interior wall painted with lamp-black. There were rarely pictures, pointers, globes or charts of any kind. Most had a wood-burning stove to ward off winter cold. The students drank with a shared gourd dipper from a communal water pail. A container of hickory switches was on hand so the teacher could administer beatings if required.[15]

Despite all their shortcomings, schoolhouses constructed of local materials and

12. Details of inadequate schoolhouses gleaned from superintendents' reports and local histories: i) Margaret J. Jones, ***Combing Cullman County***, Cullman, Modernistic Printers Inc. 1972, 88; ii) Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2001, 72; iii) James Thomason, ***General History of Marshall County, Alabama***, Albertville, Creative Printers, 1989, 3; iv) Hoyt M. Warren, ***Henry's Heritage: a history of Henry County, Alabama***, Abbeville, Henry County Historical Society, 1978, 341; v) Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama***, Clanton, Heritage Publishing Consultants, 1999, 61 and 63: vi) Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek on Hatchet Creek***, 152 and 162-163. See also Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***.

13. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875***, 85.

14. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1901 and 1902***, 36-37.

15. William Holtzclaw, ***The Black Man's Burden***, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1971 [1915], 26 (regarding resin on benches). See Footnote 12 for other reference sources on schoolhouse interiors.

equipped with improvised furniture seem to have engendered a quiet satisfaction even when they were recognised as not being quite adequate for their purpose. This was possibly because they were the heroic improvisations of self-reliance, exertion and economic sacrifice. It may also have been because, as the writer James Agee later observed of dwelling houses in Hale County, the lack of skill evident in their "failing horizontals," and "lack of earnest exactitude" created a sort of "dissymmetrical power" which was "the particular quality of a thing hand-made."[16] Their unpainted wooden exterior was not unlike a protective colouration which merged them into the topography of the countryside. Their very names tied them to their locality. They might be called after the farmer who donated the land for the schoolhouse (King's Schoolhouse), a prominent citizen (Kelley's School), a village feature such as a turpentine still (Mill's Still School), a nearby church (Shiloh, Mt Zoar), a creek (Turkey Branch) or they might be named in ways that associated them with the surrounding forest. In Greene County there were schools named Beech Grove, Pine Grove, Live Oak, White Oak, Green Oak and Gum and Oak Hill.[17] As community property, schoolhouses were under direct local control – a factor that went some way towards extenuating their deficiencies.

Personal accounts of the experience of attending a rural school in Alabama in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, suggest the school day generally began at around eight in the morning and continued until after four with an hour's break at noon as well as fifteen minute morning and afternoon recesses. The first session was an "opening" of about fifteen minutes during which the teacher recited a prayer and/or read from the King James Bible. This ritual performance with a sacred object served to confirm the group identity of both teacher and students. It also confirmed the Christian and Protestant (if non-sectarian) ethos of the school and gave religious legitimacy to its educational agenda.[18] At the end of each week some schools closed with hymn singing. It was said approvingly of Winston County's

16. See pages 173-174 of Chapter 5. See also Agee and Evans, ***Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: three tenant families***, 144. John Ruskin, the famous nineteenth century English aesthete and architectural historian, believed the imperfect handmade building indicated human effort and deserved the judgement of mercy. He wrote: "To banish imperfection is to destroy expression, to check exertion, to paralyse vitality." John Ruskin, ***The Stones of Venice***, Vol II, London, George Allen, London, 1906, 169. Though Ruskin had other and more significant types of buildings in mind, his viewpoint is apposite.

17. Jones, ***Combing Cullman County***, 95. See also Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, 75. See also Greene County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Greene County, Alabama***, 28.

18. "Ritual" is used here to denote a social function which, though it may have something to do with the sacred, is more to do with maintaining stability and contributing to a sense of group solidarity – a definition of ritual derived from the anthropological theories of Emile Durkheim. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

schools in the 1870s and 1880s that, even if they might have been "limited in academic curricula, they were strong on their endeavors to teach the principles of morals and religion."[19] Whether religious exemptions were allowed for Catholic or Jewish pupils is not mentioned in any official documents though such children were certainly amongst those attending public schools. In the 1890s, the offspring of a number of Jewish merchant families at Greenville in Butler County dominated the public school's honour roll.[20]

The principal pedagogical method employed by Alabama's school teachers, until well into the twentieth century, was memorisation and recitation – a method peculiarly suited to a world in which the ancestral Celtic traditions of oral communication – particularly spinning yarns and telling folktales - were still strong and sustained by an agrarian culture. A *Daily Programme for School* included in the state superintendent's *Annual Report* for 1889, recommended a lesson plan for a day of seven hours (inclusive of breaks). This plan required the teacher to conduct twenty-one separate recitations (for four different student "grades") in Spelling, Reading, Arithmetic, History, Geography and Civil Government.[21] In reality, teachers sometimes conducted fifty or more recitations in a single day.

If not particularly effective as an educational technique - though at the time it was believed that by training memory, the faculties of reason and logic were also trained - recitation had several advantages. It assisted teachers to assert control over their classes (often by delegating the hearing of recitations to older pupils), it allowed one person to manage a fairly large number of children and it did not require students to be seated at desks. When up to fifty children inside a single schoolhouse were, by turns, jumping up from their benches and queuing to recite a multiplication table, to spell a list of words, to stumble over a passage from a reader, or to rattle off the names of history's great men or some country's cities, rivers and principal industries, the result must have been a constant serial clamour. In fact, before the Civil War, schools were sometimes pejoratively labelled *blab* schools. Teachers were advised that they should regard the schoolroom as "a musical

19. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 157-159. See also Wesley S. Thompson, ***"The Free State of Winston": a history of Winston County Alabama***, Winfield, Pareil Press, 1968, 198. The author is quoting from the ***Winston Herald***, June 25, 1885.

20. Patricia A. Graham, ***Community and Class in American Education, 1865-1918***, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, 120.

21. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1889***, 33.

instrument" and themselves as performers. If the teacher was a "skillful performer," harmony would result but if unskilled, "discord, strife and war."[22]

Teachers were concerned to ensure that during the hearing of recitations the children who were not involved did not talk or communicate with each other – an ill-conceived instruction when the whole tenor of the schoolroom was vocal. "How to Control Whispering" was sometimes a subject for discussion at teachers' institutes.[23] Yet whispering was the least of a teacher's problems. Their greatest difficulties were absenteeism and the tardiness of those who did attend. These factors played havoc with any attempts to classify children and could render ineffectual a pedagogical approach which assumed a progressive (if self-paced) acquisition of skills and knowledge.

Because students lived at varying distance from the schoolhouse, not all arrived at the same time. Even the children of a single family did not always set out together having been delayed at home by farm chores such as milking. Katharyne Perdue who taught in the public schools of Escambia County in the 1890s recalled: "The children came to school at all hours of the day and cared not for "tardy marks."[24]

Sporadic attendance by students was not just the result of an indifference to "book-learning" or an attitude that school was something to be fitted in amongst a number of competing priorities. Nor was it due entirely to an undeveloped sense of regularity and discipline. All these factors may have been contributory but children were a major part of Alabama's rural workforce and some families risked destitution without the contribution that children, including the very youngest, made to subsistence.

Variable weather also affected the attendance of the children who were enrolled. A further impediment to continuous schooling was sickness which was rife around rivers and creeks. In 1880 the superintendent of education for Randolph County

22. Reference to 'blab schools' is in Fred S. Watson's ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, Anniston, Higginbotham, 1970, 191. Watson is quoting Albert Burton Moore. See also ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 1, 1909 – address to Walker County Teachers' Association by Professor Charles B. Glenn, assistant superintendent of Birmingham schools.

23. ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 16, 1908 – notice of agenda for a meeting of Walker's Teacher Association on December 19, 1908 to be presented by Charles B. Levey and Miss Mattie King.

24. ***The Standard Gauge***, March 24, 1904. This was a published extract from private letter from Katharyne Perdue to William Neal which was written to support Neal's re-election as superintendent for Escambia County.

related that two of his schools had "failed to continue for sixty days owing to whooping cough and measles."[25] Other scourges were malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, yellow fever and/or a debilitating lassitude caused by hookworm.

The enrolment figures compiled each year for the state superintendent's *Annual Report*, show that for the scholastic year ending September 30, 1880, just 46.3 percent of the school-aged population was actually enrolled in public schools and 65.7 percent of those were in average attendance. For the scholastic year ending September 30, 1910, although 59.3 percent of the school-aged population was enrolled, only 62.8 percent of those were in average attendance.[26] It is probably prudent to treat these data with some caution but they do suggest that, whilst parental intentions regarding schooling may have improved over this thirty year period, actual rates of attendance had not.

Data for a number of different years show a clearly discernible correlation between low black daily attendance as a percentage of enrolments in the Black Belt counties and low white daily attendance in the "white counties" of the Appalachian hills and valleys or the piedmont. For example, in the scholastic year ending September 30, 1890, the number of enrolled black students in Bullock (a Black Belt county), was 4,347 but the actual average daily attendance was only 224 (5.15 percent).[27] In 1896, William C. Bledsoe, the superintendent of Chambers County made an audit of that county's public schools. He found that despite the enrolled students numbering 7,155 students, nearly 9 percent of these attended classes for less than ten days each year. More than a hundred students were over the age of sixteen and could not read or write.[28]

Whether they were facing the disruption of latecomers or the irregular attendance resulting from seasonal agricultural or other needs, teachers just had to cope. More serious difficulties arose from discipline problems within the schoolhouse. When

25. Charles C. Pittman, superintendent of education for Randolph County to Leroy Box, state superintendent of education, September 6, 1880, SGO15978, Folder 6, ***Superintendent's Correspondence, 1878-79***, ADAH.

26. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 198. The figures compiled by Weeks from the ***Annual Reports*** of various state superintendents show the lowest rate of attendance as a percentage of enrolments was in 1901 (46.9 percent) and the highest was in 1880 (65.7 percent).

27. Calculated from tables included in Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1890***, Table IV, cxciii.

28. Bobby L. Lindsey, ***The Reason for the Tears: a history of Chambers County, Alabama, 1832-1900***, West Point, Hester Print. Co., 1971, 215.

students became disorderly, teachers had to deal with the problem on their own; there was no-one of higher authority whose name might be invoked to instil fear or to whom they might send an unruly student. Sooner or later many felt they had to resort to corporal punishment.[29] For young female teachers this could be an alarming requirement when some of their students were actually grown men – up to twenty-six years of age.[30] Some teachers - such as Mattie Lou Williams who taught at Mascot School in Bullock County and discovered one day that her pupils had put a small snake under her hand bell - merely threatened to beat their pupils without actually doing so. Some dealt with discipline problems by absenting themselves from the schoolhouse until the trustees could persuade them to return.[31]

Teachers could experience other kinds of intimidation besides schoolroom pranks. Some actions carried the implication that a teacher must conform to community mores. In the late 1880s, Sally Roberts was employed to teach a school at Bon Secour on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay in Baldwin County. Roberts was known to be a member of the Episcopalian Church which, owing to its rites of worship, was sometimes regarded by rural Southerners as a veiled form of Roman Catholicism and aroused a similar suspicion. With a touch of Breughelian rustic heartiness, the lumpen element of Bon Secour expressed its disapproval of Roberts' appointment by placing a dead hog on the school steps with a label "for the teacher's lunch."[32]

Male teachers seem to have had no difficulties in meting out corporal punishment and, when they took on grown adolescents, the results could be very nasty. In 1889 at China Grove in Pike County, a twenty-five-year-old schoolteacher named Benjamin Boyd ran out of patience with the behaviour of Lee Crowder, an eighteen-year-old youth who was "subverting the good order of the school" by using

29. An account of a female teacher controlling classroom misbehaviour with physical violence is related in Susie Powers Tompkins, ***Cotton-patch School-house***, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992, 3-4. See also Dykes, ***Growing Up Hard***, 105. Oral history from Sue Mae Freeman Powell, 36.

30. James Thomason, ***General History of Marshall County, Alabama***, Albertville, Creative Printers, 1989, 9. Thomason wrote his history in 1945. In the 1890s he had attended school at Arab in Marshall County and did not leave until he was twenty-six.

31. Recollection of Elma Lee Hall of Bullock County in Wade Hall, ***Conecuh People: words from the Alabama Black Belt***, Montgomery, New South Books, 2004, 127. See also Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, 72. Incident was at the Koehler School when a Miss Grace Ulrich refused to teach after two incidents of intimidating student pranks.

32. Baldwin County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Baldwin County, Alabama***, 79. The hog incident occurred at The Witt School. See also Glenn N. Sisk, "Churches in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1917." ***Church History*** 23 (June 1954): 163 regarding Alabamian attitudes to Episcopalians.

"objectionable language." The teacher not only "severely chastised Crowder in the classroom" but took the farmer's son outside and struck him first with the limb of a tree (thus bruising Crowder's eye), and later with his fists. Crowder brought charges against Boyd for battery and the Pike County Criminal Court found in the plaintiff's favour. An appeal by Boyd to the Supreme Court was dismissed. In a rather arch sounding judgement, his conduct was found to be "unseemly on the part of one whose duty it was to set a good example of self-restraint and gentlemanly deportment to his pupil."[33]

Not many assaults reached as far as Alabama's Supreme Court but schoolroom beatings were by no means rare. Mitchell Garrett recalled one of his teachers, John Towles, viciously thrashing two boys who tried to ward off the blows with their arms. Garrett "hoped never to see such a thing again" but he hoped in vain. Half of all the teachers he was taught by at his Clay County school employed corporal punishment.[34] William Holtzclaw claimed his teachers had "learned to perfection" the use of the rod. He recalled a day when, having exhausted his teacher's knowledge of arithmetic, the teacher became irritated and, after "roasting some hickory sticks in the fire, then jumped at me like a fierce tiger." Subsequently the teacher beat the boy to the floor and continued to flog him until some older pupils intervened. The young boy had to be carried home by his father owing to "the lacerated condition" of his flesh.[35]

Some students seem to have been particularly afraid of being beaten but this may have been because (as the following recollection suggests), they anticipated a continuation of the culture of violence they experienced at home:

> *My folks wanted me to go to school but I was scared of whuppings so I never would go. I uster hide behind the pines 'stid of going to school. . . . The teacher whupped me once and I didn't want to go back no more. When my mother found out I wasn't going she whupped me till I like to had spasms. She knocked a hole in my head.*[36]

33. The quotations are from the written judgement by Justice Henderson M. Somerville of Alabama's Supreme Court in Boyd *vs* State, a case decided in 1890 which determined the limits of teachers in chastising students. Included in ***Public School Laws of the State of Alabama, 1891***, 142-148. There were other cases in which schoolmasters were charged with an abuse of their authority: - e.g. McCormack *vs* State (102 Alabama 156).

34. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 153.

35. Holtzclaw, ***Black Man's Burden***, 14-15.

36. Johnson, ***Shadow of the Plantation***, 131-132. This was the recollection of a man whose childhood was spent in Macon County.

It may be unlikely that most children experienced incidents as ugly as the ones described above but these were hardly alien to the local communities in which they took place. Corporal punishment by teachers was an approved aspect of nineteenth century schooling all over the United States and the ultimate authority of the Bible could be cited to give the practice legitimacy.[37] Parental acceptance may have been religiously based but it was not in conflict with frontier traditions of summary justice and ritualised violence in the face of perceived threats. Black teachers could draw on a legacy of the inherent violence of slavery and the remembered practices of plantation overseers for models of discipline.

Yet it would be misleading to imply that corporal punishment was purely a rural phenomenon – part of a continuum that began with "paddlings" and ended with lynchings. At a meeting of the Alabama Educational Association (AEA) in 1884 (a largely urban white teachers' association begun in 1882), some of the foremost citizens of the state were present including the state superintendent of education (Major Solomon Palmer), a former governor (Robert M. Patton), and a judge (William B. Wood). A lengthy session concerned the topic "Can a School in which Corporal Punishment is Prohibited be Successfully Taught?" Six of the seven speakers on the topic believed "No" was the proper answer. Judge Wood went as far as saying he was "in favor of flogging. Moral suasion was a humbug. A good whipping [had] a good effect upon mind and body." .... "Moral suasion led to the penitentiary."[38]

The extent to which discipline was constantly a topic at teachers' institutes and meetings such as that just described is an indication of the importance placed on a teacher's being able to establish his or her authority and implementing what the parents considered were the rules of good conduct. Sometimes just the sight of a bucket of hickory switches was enough to deter bad behaviour but teachers were expected to demonstrate that they could control their charges without constantly

37. Incidents involving severe corporal punishment in Ohio, Nebraska, Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota and Wisconsin and are described in Wayne E. Fuller's ***The Old Country School: the story of rural education in the Middle West***, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 209-210 and Paul Theobald's ***Call School: rural education in the Midwest to 1918***, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1995, 137-139. The Biblical authority for corporal punishment was derived largely from the King James Version of the Old Testament (e.g. Proverbs: 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13, 23:14, 29:15).

38. Proceedings of the Alabama Teachers' Association for 1884, 14-16 reprinted in Don Eddins, ***AEA: Head of the Class in Alabama Politics: a history of the Alabama Education Association***, Montgomery, Compos-it Inc. 1997, 227-229.

resorting to beatings.[39]

Their *in loco parentis* status permitted teachers not only to beat children but also to demonstrate approval and affection by patting and kissing them – at least in the 1870s. In March 1874 at Troy in Pike County an eleven-year-old girl was sexually molested. Her parents had ignored her earlier complaints of being kissed by her teacher because "it is an almost common practice for teachers to kiss their pupils." *The Troy Messenger*, commented:

> *Although the habit of kissing schoolgirls - indulged in by male teachers both North and South – is, as a general thing, prompted by a pure regard for their pupils . . . the custom is one that is calculated to lead to sad and disastrous results when practiced by men of impure desires.*[40]

The good governance of a classroom was more frequently related to how well teachers engaged the interests of their students in the curriculum. In turn, such engagement depended on how well teachers were able to organise their pupils so that the variables of age, learning stage, capability, motivation and other factors were all addressed simultaneously.

In 1854, General William F. Perry, the first state superintendent of education, had not only outlined a course of study for common schools, but had suggested a grading structure and recommended textbooks and teacher guides on theory and practice.[41] Similarly, in December 1869 the board of education set up under the Reconstruction constitution of 1868 legislated for four grades (primary, intermediate, grammar, and high school grades).[42] That board also considered the benefits of uniform textbooks but had only firmly decided on two grammars

39. Dykes, ***Growing Up Hard***, 105. Oral history from Sue Mae Freeman Powell, 36.

40. ***The Troy Messenger***, March 12, 1874. The assault was not by a public school teacher but by a music teacher yet the parents' reaction and the newspaper's comments suggest the practice of kissing children was commonplace.

41. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 66-67. Perry's list of books for teachers included Henry Barnard's ***School Architecture*** (1850) which he commented was "an excellent work for those who may be engaged in the erection or furnishing of schoolhouses." As Perry had seen for himself that a large number of Alabama's schoolhouses were floorless shanties furnished with logs for seats, his recommendation suggests he was unrealistically ambitious.

42. ***Acts of the Board of Education passed at the Session Commencing July 23, 1868***, 21.

before the financial exigencies of the state overtook its further enquiries.[43] These recommendations and deliberations suggest the more senior educational officials of the state had some knowledge of contemporary schooling theories and were conscientious in thinking about how these might be translated into teaching practices and reflected in the curriculum. Yet, until the latter years of the nineteenth century, because teachers were so meagrely trained, they depended almost entirely on textbooks for what and how to teach.[44] The textbook for any subject and the curriculum for the same subject were as one.

At the end of 1889, Solomon Palmer, state superintendent of education, wrote in his *Annual Report* that:

> *Alabama stands alone in having no statute upon the subject of the textbooks to be used in the public schools, and in having no provision of law whereby uniformity of textbooks may be secured and enforced.*[45]

But parents were not necessarily in favour of uniformity and, as will be shown below, demonstrated a mix of attitudes (some antagonistic) when attempts to achieve uniformity were proposed. In 1875 one county superintendent complained that patrons were too apt "to buy those [texts] in which they themselves studied, despite all persuasion from teacher or superintendent, and, consequently, there is no uniformity."[46]

As parents had to provide the textbooks and this involved a cash outlay from their scant resources, any texts acquired had to last a long time. Some of the books children brought to school had the attributes of a family heirloom passed down from one generation to the next – more a talismanic artefact testifying to a family

43. ADAH, Alabama State Dept. of Education, ***Journals and Acts of the Board of Education and Board of Regents of the University or State of Alabama, 1869-1874***. ADAH SG013206, Folder 1, Session commencing November 25, 1872, 62 and 79-80. ***Act No. 9*** of this session adopted Goold Brown's ***The First Lines of English Grammar*** (1851) and ***The Institutes of English Grammar*** (1850) both published by William Wood and Co of New York, as the "uniform standard for this branch of study in the free public schools of this State." Noah B. Cloud, who was superintendent of public instruction during Radical Reconstruction, recommended for adoption (at his own initiative) a number of standard textbooks written in the 1850s and 1860s and published by A.S. Barnes (and Burr) of New York. These included a series of national readers by Richard Green Parker, Charles Davies' arithmetics, James Monteith's geographies, Stephen Watkins Clark's grammars and an American history by Emma Willard, et cetera.

44. John A. Nietz, ***Old Textbooks***, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961, 1.

45. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1889,*** 26-27.

46. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1875,*** 108.

member's literacy rather than a learning aid to a contemporary curriculum. In some cases textbooks were a family's only reading material besides a Bible and perhaps an almanac. Recalling her frustrations as a teacher in Escambia County in the 1890s, Katharyne Perdue remembered:

> *And as for books – a blue-back speller, perhaps a reader and an arithmetic that "Pa" or "Buddie" had studied – and very few of these books of the same grade were by the same author – were the only things which the teacher had with which "to rear the tender thought."*[47]

The "blue-back speller" was Noah Webster's *The Elementary Spelling Book* (its name derived from its binding). In 1854, when Alabama's education system was first established, Webster's speller and William Holmes McGuffey's series of readers were already in use. These same texts (if later editions) were still being used in schools more than forty years later.[48] In 1903, when Alabama's Textbook Commission mandated state-wide textbook uniformity, neither of these books were adopted. A sense of cultural loss may have contributed to the hostility to uniformity that was expressed in other ways. The reasons for their perennial appeal to Alabama's teachers, parents and students and their talismanic significance to their owners is worth reviewing.

During much of the nineteenth century, Webster's speller and McGuffey's readers were popular across the whole of the United States (including the South) and both books sold in their millions. Numerous writers have examined the multiple reasons for this popularity. For example, E. Jennifer Monaghan has demonstrated that Noah Webster's genuine innovations, scrupulous editing and unflagging promotion led to his spelling book's early success and, after his death, this success was sustained when D. Appleton and Co. took over publication.[49] The historian, Henry Steele Commager has shown how Noah Webster combined a commercial acuity with regard to book publishing with an early recognition of the limitless potentialities of

47. Extract from private letter from Katharyne Perdue to William Neal published in ***The Standard Gauge***, March 24, 1904.

48. In his report for the scholastic year 1854-1855, General William Perry had recommended the adoption of (amongst others) Webster's speller and dictionary, Tower's arithmetic and McGuffey's series of readers. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama***, 66-67. Almost every memoir of schooling in nineteenth-century Alabama mentions the blue-back speller and McGuffey readers. See also Rose Marie Smith, ***Lamar County – A History to 1900***, Fulton, privately published by the author, 1987, 157.

49. E. Jennifer Monaghan, ***A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's blue-back speller***, Hampden, Archon Books, 1983, 208-210 and 219.

education for the encouragement of nationalism with the schoolbook as the vehicle. Webster was "attentive to the political interests of America" and chose for some of the earlier editions of the *Speller* such reading selections as (for example) the Declaration of Independence and George Washington's farewell to his army. He felt these contained "such *noble, just and independent sentiments*" that he could not "help wishing to transfer them into the breasts of the rising generation."[50] The Civil War created new military heroes for the South such as Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson but it did not erase its reverence for earlier heroes such as Washington who remained the iconic "Founding Father."

The McGuffey *Readers* were a direct expression of the deeply held religious beliefs long associated with communities on the American frontier. Harvey C. Minnich claims the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus were not only basic but plenary for McGuffey and, because his *Readers* were full of lessons for moral guidance, they could comprise a reasonable curriculum for right living (both public and private) in a good community.[51] Their inherent messages were wholly consistent with the values and evangelical Protestant religious beliefs that were dominant in Alabama.

Elliott Gorn acknowledges that, throughout all their editions and revisions, the McGuffey *Readers* were written entirely within a religious (and rural) frame of reference. They sustained an emphasis on individual choice in the matter of salvation, on leading a Christian life and on taking personal responsibility for sin. But Gorn also shows how the *Readers* (particularly the 1879 edition) can be seen as products of social and economic life, teaching values that prepared children for an urban-industrial culture such as the avoidance of idleness, steadiness, thrift, responsibility, piety, and self-restraint. Even abstention from alcohol, which the readers repeatedly taught, was not an age-old Christian virtue but a new social imperative for an era demanding regularity in labour habits. Eternal salvation and economic success required the same sorts of behaviours.[52]

50. Henry Steele Commager, ed. ***Noah Webster's American Spelling Book***, New York, Columbia University, 1962, 10-11. Originally both speller and reader, Webster's book was largely supplanted as a reader by the McGuffey readers but its popularity and success simply as a speller did not decline until the twentieth century. [Italics original].

51. Harvey C. Minnich, ***William Holmes McGuffey and his Readers***, New York, American Book Company, 1936, 89-90.

52. Elliott J. Gorn, ed., ***McGuffey's First-Sixth Eclectic Reader: selections from the 1879 edition***, Boston, Bedford Books, 1998, 11-12.

Richard Mosier, another writer who has examined various editions of the McGuffey *Readers*, has pointed out their highly conservative attitudes on political, social and economic matters including their rationalisation of class and wealth differences. His analysis of their content – particularly that of the earlier editions – shows they were implicitly distrustful of popular participation in government (that is, they took an anti-Jacksonian position). Mosier also describes how the *Readers* depict women - as symbols of virtue and charity - but of limited capabilities.[53]

Parts of the content of the McGuffey *Readers* may have jarred with the beliefs of some Alabamian parents, and the students themselves were not oblivious to their moral didacticism but overall the books were regarded as having a beneficial effect on "shaping character."[54] Children enjoyed their "interesting" stories and pictures and their underpinning belief that country life with its closeness to Nature was superior. The *Readers* were well-produced, were relevant to an oral culture (because they emphasised the importance of reading aloud), and provided concrete rather than abstract examples of moral philosophy. Also, they did not patronise their readership with second-rate material but included selections of both prose and verse from writers of the very first rank.[55]

Other readers were also used in Alabama's public schools. In 1896 a teachers' institute in Walker County discussed the topic "How to teach the first three lessons in Holmes' First Reader."[56] Holmes' *Readers* were a series written by George Frederick Holmes who was Professor of History and Literature at the University of Virginia between 1857 and his death in 1897. Before the Civil War, Holmes had staunchly defended slavery on philosophical, sociological, historical and racial grounds. He had been responsible for fear-ridden attacks on critics of conventional Christianity and believed the modern economy had eaten away the traditional bases of society. The attitudes and the values of the *Holmes' Readers* were conservative,

53. Richard Mosier, ***Making The American Mind: Social And Moral Ideas In The McGuffey Readers***, New York, Russell and Russell, 1965, 167-170.

54. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 140.

55. In the 1879 edition of the McGuffey Readers, particularly in the fourth and fifth readers, authors such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, Walter Scott and many others were represented as well as selections from the Bible. John A. Nietz, "Why the Longevity of the McGuffey Readers?" ***History of Education Quarterly*** 4 (June 1964): 123-124. The cultural significance of the McGuffey Readers in Alabama may explain why these nineteenth century school texts are now sold in facsimile editions in the souvenir shops at Alabamian tourist attractions (for example, "Old Alabama Town" in Montgomery).

56. ***The Mountain Eagle***, February 5, 1896.

suspicious of social change and written within a religious frame of reference. In Alabama they would have had the inestimable appeal of having been written in the South.[57]

Learning to spell and to read was an insistent process of rote learning and drill with progress checked by recitation to the teacher. The routine of constant repetition had the further educational benefit of developing patience, perseverance and self-reliance which stood the students in good stead for their vocational schooling at home and on the farm. It also stood them in good stead for the spelling competitions that were as much a high spirited game as they were an educational activity. These frequently took place at the end of the school week or at special events organised to demonstrate student accomplishments or as a piece of holiday fun.[58] There could not have been much other immediate purpose for farm children knowing how to spell *peripateticism, provincialism* or *scholasticism* – all words on page 132 of the blue-back speller.[59]

The scarcity of books and their pedagogical function meant that when a student finished one reader there might not be a more advanced one available to which to progress. Leola Tidwell, who attended school at the beginning of the twentieth century near Logan in Cullman County, recalled: "often as not when we had finished a reader, the teacher would decide we might as well go through it again." Sometimes students would go through each reader up to three times.[60] When students had worked through their own textbooks they might borrow from other boys and girls.[61] Once all the books in the neighbourhood had been shared and exhausted, parents might decide their children had had enough education. In Coffee County in the 1870s when a child "had conquered the blue-back speller, he

57. Neal C. Gillespie, "The Spiritual Odyssey of George Frederick Holmes: A Study of Religious Conservatism in the Old South." ***The Journal of Southern History***, Vol 32 (August 1966): 305 and 307. Besides his series of five readers, Holmes also wrote grammars and histories. Some of his books were published by the University Publishing Company with which General John B. Gordon was associated.

58. For two examples of competitive spelling competitions see Blount County Heritage Book Committee, ***The Heritage of Blount County, Alabama,*** 67 and Thomason, ***General History of Marshall County,*** 9.

59. Noah Webster, ***The Elementary Spelling Book: being an improvement on "The American Spelling Book"***, New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1857, 132.

60. Jones, ***Combing Cullman County,*** 90. See also Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek,*** 140.

61. William J. Edwards, 1918, ***Twenty-five Years in the Black Belt,*** Repr., Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 15.

was considered pretty well educated."[62] In Clay County's rural schools in the 1880s "few pupils ever studied the Fourth [McGuffey's] Reader."[63]

Public school students received their instruction in the other branches – arithmetic, grammar, geography and so on, in much the same way as they learned to spell and to read, – by memorisation, recitation and rule based exercises. For example, the teaching of grammar assumed students were deficient in their own language and could only use it properly if they first had its conventions drilled into them and could then parse and analyse with mechanical correctness. Geographic and historical facts were also learned by heart. The teacher would test this knowledge by asking a question which would be responded to in catechismal fashion by all the students in unison. Similarly, learning arithmetic was a matter of committing various rules to memory and then trying to work out the answers on a slate. Slates were also used to practise "penmanship" with special slate pencils or chalk which students often wiped clean with their sleeves.[64] Advertisements for writing tablets appeared in contemporary newspapers but paper was too costly to be used regularly in rural schools.[65]

The instruction described above achieved its objectives insofar as basic skills were taught, rules imbibed, routine and repetition accepted, and moral precepts absorbed. The clamour of the schoolhouse, rather than being a hindrance to learning, was consistent with an ancient oral culture and helped to reaffirm the everyday connections of neighbours and the bonds of community life. This was schooling as social reproduction in communities that were conformist and conservative, religious and reactionary, self-protective and self-aware. But these communities knew that to maintain the autonomy provided by the decentralised educational system required constant vigilance. White communities also knew that they must be ever watchful in defending their own cultural tenets – particularly those to do with race and Southern identity.

62. Watson, ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, 201.

63. Garrett, ***Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek***, 140.

64. For example see Watson, ***Coffee Grounds: a history of Coffee County, Alabama, 1841-1970***, 57. The slates measured 305 mm x 381 mm (actually described as 12 x 15 inches) and are mentioned in a memoir by Mr A.C. McElroy contained in Lucille Griffith, ed. ***Alabama: A documentary history to 1900***, 564.

65. For example, see an advertisement for "School Tablets and Satchels" placed by E.W. Hausman and Co in ***The Mountain Eagle***, October 24, 1894.

In his 1912 book *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama,* the historian, Walter B. Fleming alleged that, during Reconstruction, the first superintendent of public instruction (Noah B. Cloud) recommended history books for use in Alabama's public schools that "were insulting in their accounts of southern leaders and southern questions." Fleming also alleged that Cloud secured a donation of several thousand copies of history books which gave a northern view of American history and "these he distributed among the teachers and the schools." Other material "objectionable to the whites" came from the Freedmen's Bureau and "was used in the schools for blacks."[66] Some of this was material from the American Missionary Association and included *The Freedmen's Book* by Lydia Maria Child which was full of selections from Abolitionist writers such as William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips and described the daring deeds of black insurrectionists.[67] Freedmen's books generally aimed to "communicate religious and moral truths" and provide "instruction in civil and social duties as are needed by them [the freedmen] in their new circumstances."[68] As many white Alabamians in the postbellum period did not yet accept the change in the civil status of former slaves, textbooks with such avowed intentions were destined to provoke outrage.

The school legislation passed following the adoption of the 1875 constitution was silent on the subject of textbooks meaning their selection was to be a matter for local school communities. Yet this did not mean the end of anxiety about the representation of the South in textbooks and a general belief there was a need for an Alabamian (or more generally) a Southern curriculum.

In the years following the Civil War, John B. Gordon, a famous Confederate general, had become an agent for the University Publishing Company of Virginia. One of the goals of this company was "to create non-partisan school literature" that would help rid the nation, and the South in particular, of sectional hate. It also sought to promote Southern self-respect. General Gordon regularly addressed audiences all over the South including Alabama. "Do the schoolbooks illustrate Southern life,

66. See footnote 43. See also Walter B. Fleming, ***Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama,*** Spartanburg, Reprint Co., 1978, [1905], 623.

67. Horace Mann Bond, ***Negro Education in Alabama: a study in cotton and steel,*** Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1994 [1939], 115-116.

68. For example, these were the objectives intended by The American Tract Society of Boston which produced material for black schooling. See Introduction in Robert C. Morris, ed. ***Freedmen's Schools and Textbooks,*** Vol 2, [The Freedmen's Spelling Book, The Freedmen's Second Reader, The Freedmen's Third Reader] New York, An AMS Reprint Series, AMS Press Inc. 1980.

Southern habits, and Southern history?" he would ask rhetorically. He would then answer his own question: "I have been unable to find in a solitary school-book used in the South, where justice is done to her people in the late trouble in which we have been engaged."[69] This was, of course, a not disinterested sales pitch from a publisher's representative - albeit someone with impeccable credentials – but, like all successful product marketing strategies, it was based on the recognition of a real and perennial customer anxiety. In 1889, during a discussion on textbooks at a teachers' institute held in Wilcox County, the teachers resolved that: "children must not be taught their fathers were traitors and rebels." In 1898 in Walker County, a teachers' institute debated "The Need of Southern Histories."[70]

On September 11, 1891, John G. Harris, state superintendent of education, issued a circular advising county and municipal superintendents that their respective educational boards should,

> *inquire into the character of the school books used in public schools, white or colored. No book should be taught in any public school that reflected on the character, patriotism, chivalry and honesty of those who supported and defended the Confederacy, or in any way took part on the Southern side.*[71]

John F. Vardaman, the superintendent of Coosa County, reported back that, to the best of his knowledge, there were no such books by "prejudiced authors" being used in Coosa's schools though he had "not yet investigated closely the kinds of books used."[72]

Even before the Civil War there had been calls in Southern legislatures to address the need for textbooks written from a southern point of view.[73] There was a

69. ***Alabama Educational Magazine***, Vol 1, Number 3 (June 1871): 191 and 197-198. This has a report of General Gordon addressing the citizens of Eufala in Barbour County as well as those of Memphis Tennessee.

70. ***Wilcox Progress***, December 18, 1889 reporting on an institute held at Camden on December 13, 1889. See also ***The Mountain Eagle***, December 7, 1898. This discussion was led by Professor C.R. Williams at a teachers' institute at Eldridge in Walker County. He presented the same topic at another teachers' institute at Oakman in Walker County on April 19, 1899.

71. Alabama Dept. of Education. Circular from John G. Harris dated September 11, 1891.

72. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891***, 26.

73. Marie Carpenter, ***The Treatment of the Negro in American History School Textbooks: a comparison of changing textbook content 1826 to 1939, with developing scholarship in the history of the Negro in the United States***, Menasha, George Banta Publishing Company, 1941, 9. In an article entitled "Home Education at the South" by Rev. C.K. Marshall in *De Bow's Review* of May 1855 a whole range of options relating to the Southern production of textbooks was canvassed including legislative action.

conviction that Abolitionist sentiment pervaded the textbooks sent South from Northern publishers and this was decried. During the War itself – presumably owing to the Northern supply chain having been cut – several textbooks were written locally in Alabama. These included readers and spellers (*"carefully prepared* for family and school use") by Mme. Adelaide De Vendel Chaudron of Mobile. Standard texts, such as Warren Colburn's 1840 *Mental Arithmetic,* were given a makeover, printed in Mobile and advertised as "prepared *expressly* for use in Southern schools."[74] However, the success of these books and the extent to which they were adopted in public schools either during or after the War, is not known.

Textbooks – specifically history and civics textbooks – have always been (and continue to be) critically important "sites of public memory." They transmit ideas about both an idealised past and a promised future. The adoption of a particular textbook gives it an official imprimatur that allows it to be seen as a canonical narrative.[75] Its purpose is thus to institutionalise a particular set of cultural beliefs, to define and spread a particular version of patriotism and thus set the terms of citizenship for the future. Because these terms are themselves contested, textbook content is often bitterly contested as well. This type of contest was behind the ongoing determination by (white) office-holders, teachers, and parents to ensure Alabama's textbooks reflected an orthodoxy in respect of all the tropes of white Southern identity. For example, the Confederate Veterans Association kept a close eye on history text content.[76]

Attitudes to textbook selection were not solely to do with the cultural suitability of their content; there was the principle of local domain. An early article in the Alabama Educational Magazine was forthright:

> *In the past administration of the school system of this country, there has been the wise recognition that the state should assume no power which can be safely left to the people in their local capacity.*[77]

74. Stephen B. Weeks, ***Confederate Text-books***, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1900, 1143-1147. (Italics added).

75. For a discussion of this topic see Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., ***Censoring history: citizenship and memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States***, New York, M.E. Sharp, 2000, 3-4. See also Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, ***The Politics of the Textbook***, New York, Routledge, 1991, 5.

76. Joint History Committee of the Confederate Veterans Association of Alabama, ***Appeal for Information Respecting Histories in Use in Alabama Schools***, Montgomery, n.p., 1902.

77. ***Alabama Educational Magazine***, Vol 1, Number 3 (June 1871): 155.

The article went on to describe the proposed adoption of a state series of textbooks as a "mischievous innovation" and the promotion of the benefits of uniformity as a "specious plea."

The issue rumbled on for years. The *Montgomery Advertiser* was an unswerving opponent of the state adopting uniform textbooks. In November 1888 it claimed publishing houses would be the only beneficiaries of such a policy and their financial interest in gaining a monopoly would create scope for corruption. By 1892 the paper was strident. Any compulsion with regard to state uniformity in textbooks would, it claimed, "be condemned by the educational sentiment and experience of age." It would be indefensible as a political principle and could never be enforced "except by the most arbitrary legislation and the unjustifiable interference with the domestic rights of the people." Because such legislation had actually been proposed, the newspaper went on the offensive. Such a prescription would be "paternalism of the rankest kind" and a declaration "that the people are unfit to manage the affairs of their local schools." In essence, it said, uniformity would be "wrong in principle and injurious to the public weal in practice."[78]

The *Montgomery Advertiser's* position was consistent with a number of interests. Textbook production in the late nineteenth century was a highly competitive business. Whilst some publishers had sound commercial reasons for retaining as many outlets for their products as possible, others saw the benefits of selectively dominating target markets. When the profit considerations of what was termed the "book trust" coincided with the reluctance of parents and teachers to relinquish their right to choose the books that would be taught in local schools, the combined opposition to a centralised prescription of textbook titles was formidable. This was recognised in discussions at teachers' institutes and seemed a comforting bulwark against change.[79]

Around the turn of the century the textbooks being used in the schools were no longer just those either owned or preferred by school patrons. The teachers (who had to be familiar with certain texts in order to pass their certification examination)

78. The ***Montgomery Advertiser***, November 11, 1888, November 22, 1888, and December 1, 1892.

79. ***Wilcox Progress***, December 18, 1889, reporting on a discussion at a teachers' institute held at Camden on December 13, 1889.

were prescribing their own preferences. With every new teacher, patrons were asked to shell out afresh for new books and were distinctly unimpressed with arrangements they found "costly and burdensome."[80] In his report for 1901/02, Elmore County's William C. Cousins described the book system as "chaotic" and driven by the "caprice of the teachers."[81]

Publishing interests were thought to influence educational associations. They were certainly assiduous in lobbying the legislature against state uniformity and it is not improbable they also paid commissions to teachers who chose books from their list. No less than twelve superintendents of the twenty-six who mentioned textbooks in their reports for 1901/02 complained of teacher selection of books. William W. Hinton of Autauga County said the practice had "a disintegrating effect rather than a tendency to organize" and tantalisingly alluded to there being "many other reasons but I cannot mention here why we should have uniformity of books in the county." Sanders Jackson Griffin, a member of Alabama's house of representatives from Cullman County and also on that county's book selection board, wrote to John William Abercrombie to complain that Thomas C. King, the county superintendent, "has 'kinda' kicked out because he could not get two certain books on the list."[82]

Yet the cause of uniformity was gaining by stealth. The special school districts created to serve the needs of municipal areas or large towns were making considerable progress in the development of their own public schooling systems. These were supported by a rising middle class and by the allocation of municipal funds and special bond issues. The boards of education for these districts adopted uniform texts and some seventeen counties had followed suit by the end of the century.[83] For example, on December 9, 1896, Alabama's General Assembly approved an *Act to establish a County School Book Board to select a uniform series of text-books for use in the public schools in the County of Winston.* A similar Act in 1898 for Lamar County established a county book board comprising the probate judge, the

80. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1901 and 1902,*** 13.

81. *Ibid.*, 37.

82. *Ibid.*, 5-6. See also S.J. Griffin to John William Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, May 1, 1901, in SGO15976, Folder 8, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1906,*** ADAH. King's attitude was attributed to his having been "got at" by Griffin's Populist political enemies. It is more likely that he had made some commitment to a publisher.

83. Weeks, ***History of Public School Education in Alabama,*** 136.

circuit clerk, the county superintendent and three teachers. It was this board that chose the books to be used in Lamar's public schools.[84] Some of those who were supportive *in principle* of county uniformity did not believe it required state legislation and were sceptical it could be enforced.[85]

County uniformity still allowed local inclinations to be embedded in the legislation. The Act authorising the uniform adoption of textbooks for Winston contained the injunction that no book proposed by any publisher must contain "anything partisan, prejudicial or inimical to the interest of the people of the State, or cast a reflection on their past history.[86]

Just how rigorously such uniform textbook laws were enforced can only be a matter for speculation but, as the county superintendent was the compliance officer, some leeway was no doubt given when school patrons were not keen on prescription – particularly as neither the county nor the state were actually paying for the books. In Winston there was a longstanding fear of educational materials that "were all too modern for the spiritual and moral safety of the students"[87] and the new law only provided for a penalty when teachers were guilty of "persistent neglect" in using the prescribed books.[88]

Once uniformity had been adopted as a county matter, that is where teachers, publishers and parents wanted it to remain. At a teachers' institute held at Jasper in December 1900 the thirty-seven teachers present resolved:

> *That we express our desire for county uniformity to remain as it is and that . . . the law for county uniformity in Walker County be so amended as to make text book uniformity in said county of permanent continuance.*[89]

84. ***Alabama Acts:*** - Act No. 123 of 1896. ***An Act to establish a County School Book Board to select a uniform series of text-books for use in the public schools in the County of Winston,*** 284-286. See also Smith, ***Lamar County,*** 157.

85. William C. Griggs, president of Spring Lake College, St Clair County to John W. Abercrombie, state superintendent of education, February 25, 1899, in SGO15975, Folder 1, ***Superintendent's Correspondence 1899-1904,*** ADAH.

86. ***Alabama Acts:*** - Act No. 123 of 1896. Section 2, 285.

87. ***Winston Herald,*** June 25, 1885 quoted by Thompson, ***Free State of Winston,*** 198.

88. ***Alabama Acts:*** - Act No. 123 of 1896. Section 2, 286.

89. ***The Mountain Eagle,*** December 12, 1900. The ***Birmingham Age-Herald*** believed the county uniformity bills were devised by the book trust to protect its outlets.

In the state superintendent's *Biennial Report* for the 1901 and 1902 scholastic years, twenty-six of the reports from county superintendents commented on textbooks. Of these, fourteen declared that uniformity was working well at the county level whilst twelve said they were seeking or would like to have county uniformity. Only five superintendents (7.5 percent of the total number) proffered the once unthinkable opinion that state uniformity might be beneficial.[90] A bill to achieve state uniformity had been introduced into the Assembly in 1900 but rejected. Senator Ariosto A. Wiley of Montgomery claimed such prescription would "invade the home of parents and dictate to them what school books their children should use."[91]

Yet on March 4, 1903, the state legislature was successful in enacting a law *To create a Text-Book Commission, and to procure for use in the public schools in this State a uniform series of text books.*[92] The adopted booklist was intended to be in use by September 1903 and to remain unchanged for five years. The Act specified that no textbook "was to contain anything of a partisan or sectarian character."[93] The exquisite irony implicit in this goal would almost certainly have been lost on the contemporary legislators who, owing to black disenfranchisement in 1901, no longer had a "colored" constituency of electors to consider - even if only perfunctorily. Had any of the books prescribed by the commission been unacceptable to the deeply held cultural tenets of Alabama's white community – specifically its racial and caste attitudes - textbook uniformity would have been resisted as intolerable. It is therefore worth looking closely at some of the relevant content of the chosen books to see why this was not the case.

One of the selections made by the commission was *Elementary Geography*[94] by Matthew Fontaine Maury, an historically important oceanographer, meteorologist, cartographer and geologist as well as a highly respected Confederate naval commander in the Civil War. Lesson XVIII in the *Geography* formally introduced students to the idea of race and humanity's racial hierarchy. It asserted that all humankind was divided into five races – the white (Caucasian), the yellow

90. Calculations made from a review of all the reports by county superintendents included in Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1901 and 1902.***

91. George Wade Prewett, "The Struggle for School Reform in Alabama, 1896-1939." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1993, 26.

92. ***General Public School Laws of Alabama, 1905***, 62-75.

93. ***General Public School Laws of Alabama, 1905***, 63.

(Mongolian), the black (Negro), the red (Indian) and the brown (Malay). Students would read that the white man was "found in every continent, and is the master of the world." Red men were "**savages**" who lived in tents and had no books or schools, "wandering Arabs" were "**barbarous**," the Chinese were "**civilized**" because they had books and schools and were "**industrious**" but "in the countries of the white race, there are more books, better schools and governments than anywhere else. *We* have churches, railways, steamers and telegraphs. *We* build hospitals for the sick and care for the poor. People who live as we do are called **enlightened**." "Africa is the home of the Negro. The people are mostly ignorant savages; but many have become Christians." A student exercise was to "compare different people with regard to their occupation, government and religion. Show how a boy or girl may be a barbarian in the midst of civilized surroundings."[95]

The stature of Maury's reputation guaranteed his opinions would be regarded as authoritative and Alabama's children (both black and white) would thus memorise the five races of man and learn how savages, barbarous people, civilised people and enlightened people each lived respectively. Unfortunately, although "The Best Methods of Teaching Geography" was sometimes a topic at black teachers' institutes, the records do not show how the teachers attending resolved the matter.[96] Neither is there any record of how the remaining Choctaw Indians in Washington County regarded their categorisation as "savages" and the information that they were "dying out."

The ideas in Maury's *Geography* were not his alone. Ever since the Civil War Americans had been struggling with issues regarding the place of African Americans, indigenous Americans and immigrants in their society. Children all over the United States learnt: - "Nature has formed the different degrees of genius and the characters of nations which are seldom known to change."[97]

In 1896 the landmark decision of the United States' Supreme Court in the so-called

94. ***The Mountain Eagle***, November 25, 1903. The paper gives full list of all textbooks adopted.

95. Matthew Fontaine Maury, ***Elementary Geography***, New York, University Publishing Company, 1899, 21-22 and 26. (Emphasis original).

96. ***The Mountain Eagle***, January 26, 1898.

97. Ruth Elson, ***Guardians of Tradition: American schoolbooks of the nineteenth century***, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1964, 65. Elson shows that racial concepts were latent in all late nineteenth-century schoolbooks, in stories, in descriptions, even in arithmetic problems and most of all in geographies.

"separate but equal" case (*Plessy vs Ferguson*) had accelerated the process of rigid racial segregation in the South. Virtually all public facilities and institutions, residential neighbourhoods, and most forms of employment were subject to a comprehensive array of "Jim Crow" ordinances and covenants.[98] These were further strengthened by suffrage restrictions. A new state constitution adopted by Alabama in 1901 had disenfranchised almost all the state's black citizens and institutionalised white supremacy. The immutable racial inferiority of non-whites was an idea entirely in accord with the tenor of the times. Even the highly influential Dr Jabez L.M. Curry, who supported Negro education, believed that "behind the Caucasian lay centuries of uplifting influences; behind the Negro were centuries of ignorance, superstition, idolatry and fetishism."[99]

The Alabamian history books chosen by the first textbook commission complemented the ethnographic position of Maury's *Geography*. Yet, despite reaffirming that "whites in all ages have been the dominant race of the world and will continue to lead all others" and that blacks and whites "should be kept separate from childhood and work out their destiny on parallel lines,"[100] the history books presented the state's racial order as one of kindly white paternalism on the one hand and deferential black obeisance on the other. The principal Alabamian history adopted was William Garrott Brown's *History of Alabama* which, in a chapter entitled *Life on the Plantation* supplied an idealised romance of:

> *Lavish hospitality, easy cordial manners, good-natured, saucy house servants, the black "mammy," the masterful planter – a king within his own domain – and the gracious women and sweet-voiced children.*[101]

In accordance with the way the subject of history was being taught at this time – largely as a narrative of intrepid conquerors, brave explorers, gallant commanders, and noble statesmen - Brown's *History* has many illustrations of famous Alabamian white men such as (for example) governors, generals and judges, which,

98. C. Vann Woodward, ***The Strange Career of Jim Crow***, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974, 81-87.

99. Excerpt included in Claude H. Nolen, ***The Negro's Image in the South; the anatomy of white supremacy***, Lexington, Kentucky University Press, 1967, 125.

100. L.D. Miller, ***History*** of ***Alabama: adapted to the use of schools, and for general reading***, Birmingham, published by the author, 1901, 147. Miller's history was a supplementary history on the adoption list of 1903.

101. William Garrott Brown, ***A History of Alabama for Use in Schools***, New Orleans, University Publishing Company, 1900, 225-26.

unremarkably, confirmed the state's male dominated leadership structure and honoured its achievements. Other illustrations included a number of pictures of handsome school buildings – generally those of higher learning. Perhaps these were intended to provide inspiration or aspiration to the *History's* readers; they were misleadingly unrepresentative of the educational accommodation enjoyed by rural school students at least. Brown's *History* has one notable variance from earlier Southern orthodoxy, - a highly sympathetic treatment of Abraham Lincoln.[102]

The 1908 Textbook Commission adopted a different history text – Joel DuBose's *Alabama History*. Like Brown's *History of Alabama*, the DuBose book contains material written with a rosy view of a mythical past. A chapter entitled *The Negroes* is illustrated with a picture of a benevolent plantation mistress reading to her neatly dressed slaves who are seated around her like docile children. She is shaded by trees and in the background there are simple but tidy slave cabins. The iconography is of that of maternal kindliness, of the obligations of the rich to the poor and the parent to the child, and of the plantation as an idealised pastoral landscape.[103] The children of white farmers may have been beguiled by this tender legend of antebellum civilization but it is hard to imagine how it was received by the children of black sharecroppers (if indeed they read it). The book was prescribed for adoption in all public schools and was thus presumably used in black schools as well as white.

There were some grumbles of discontent when state-wide textbook uniformity was first introduced in 1903. However, two years before the second textbook commission convened, objections were heard from a very powerful quarter indeed. In April 1906 the AEA met for three days in Birmingham and more than a dozen speakers made an attack on the new arrangements. The Association resolved to "make a determined fight to do away with the uniform text book law in the state." One reason put forward for dissatisfaction was that uniformity had resulted in increased costs and the constant purchasing of new books. This was alleged to be due to cost cutting at the production point which meant books fell apart and

102. Brown, ***A History of Alabama for Use in Schools***, 257. Brown wrote "Though few people of the South then knew it, and some did not learn it for many years, Lincoln's was the gentlest heart in Washington towards them. . . . His idea was that certain persons had been in insurrection, but that Alabama was still a state, and it was only necessary to organize a state government loyal to the Union. His plan was a simple and a kindly one. He wished the Southern people to come back like sons and brothers to the home they had abandoned."

103. Joel DuBose, ***Alabama History***, Atlanta, B.F. Johnson Publishing Company, 1908, 215.

did not last.[104] As the bindings and paper of some of the books (the histories and geographies reviewed above) are still in reasonable condition more than a century later, the Association's objections seem somewhat implausible - even allowing for the robust treatment of books by students and the many years of (albeit gentler) handling by library users. The Association's objections are more likely to have originated in patron dissatisfaction with centralised prescription and/or the teachers' preference for selecting the titles they wanted to teach themselves.

Some parents and guardians were still mystified as to why they had to incur the cost of new books at all when they still had perfectly adequate old ones in their possession. The cost of books had always been a genuine cause for concern – "at the present prices, a proper supply is a heavy tax upon our people" cautioned the superintendent of Clay County in 1891.[105] In Birmingham, tuition and book fees often deterred workingmen from sending their children to school at all. In fact the historian Carl V. Harris, has demonstrated a direct and quite dramatic nexus between school imposed costs (including textbooks) and the level of enrolments in Birmingham's public schools between 1897 and 1912.[106] The city's working parents were eventually relieved when the powerful advocacy of the Trades Council convinced the City Commission to provide free textbooks to some grades. Having no such advocate, rural parents sometimes demonstrated a sort of passive resistance. In the mid-1920s a young female teacher of a one-roomed school in Marengo County had to deal with the angry outburst of a parent who told her (by way of rejecting the suggestion that he buy textbooks) "Ma'am, if you can't teach 'em what they need to know, you don't b'long here."[107]

From 1903 teachers had to teach from a uniform list of textbooks but they were still the guardians (as parental proxies) of the traditional subject matter or branches

104. ***The Cherokee Harmonizer***, April 19, 1906. This paper covered the educational meeting in some detail.

105. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1891***, 23-24. Comment by A. S. Stockdale.

106. Carl V. Harris, ***Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921***, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1977, 170. The retail cost of Du Bose's ***Alabama History*** was 75 cents. The retail cost of Mrs Pitt Lamar Matthews' ***History Stories of Alabama***, which was on a supplementary reading list, was 70 cents.

107. Tompkins, ***Cotton-Patch School-house***, 34.

being taught in the schools. But, around the turn of the century, new branches were added to what might loosely be called the "elementary curriculum." Interest groups put forward recommendations on subjects they believed should be included on the curriculum and these were accepted (or not) to the extent that they met the needs and approval of local communities. Some were made a matter of statute.

From the beginning of the 1892 scholastic year, schools were required by law to teach "physiology and hygiene as regularly as other branches are taught" and "with special reference to the effect of alcoholic drinks, stimulants and narcotics upon the human system." This legislation was framed within the context of a vigorous ongoing debate over how to limit the production and sale of alcohol in the state. In fact "temperance" was arguably becoming Alabama's most contested social welfare issue. From the beginning of 1904 the subject of "Agriculture" was also made compulsory in all public schools except those in towns with more than five hundred inhabitants.[108] Additionally, children had to be taught "the constitution of the United States and of Alabama."[109]

Henry Steel Commager described the period at the turn of the twentieth century as a time when "the new America came in as on floodtide."[110] The educational historian, Lawrence Cremin, has interpreted this to mean it was when virtually every field of knowledge was under revision from science in general and Darwinism in particular. The new sciences included sociology and psychology and research discoveries from these disciplines were finding their way into pedagogical theory. Teachers across the nation began to be entrusted with delivering a curriculum that did not just include additional subjects but was based on fresh ideas – educational, sociological and psychological.[111]

Alabama was still some way off from the mainstream but it could not help being

108. *An Act to provide for the teaching in the public schools of Physiology and Hygiene, with special reference to the effect of alcoholic drinks, stimulants and narcotics upon the human system*:- effective September 20, 1891. *An Act to provide for the teaching of Agriculture in the public schools*:- approved October 10, 1903. Both Acts included respectively in ***Public School Laws of the State of Alabama, 1891***, 24-25 and ***General Public School Laws of Alabama, 1905***, 78-79. The health legislation also aimed at limiting tobacco use by schoolboys. Although the effects of nicotine were not then known, the spittle from chewing tobacco aided the spread of tuberculosis.

109. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Biennial Report, 1905-1906***, 5.

110. Henry Steel Commager, ***The American Mind***, Chapter ii, quoted in Lawrence A. Cremin, ***The Transformation of the Schools: progressivism in American education, 1876-1957***, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961, 90.

111. Lawrence A. Cremin, ***The Transformation of the Schools: progressivism in American education, 1876-1957***, 90-91.

affected by the tide. Changes to the public school curriculum, textbook uniformity, graded schools and other mandated changes were, to a greater or lesser extent, all related to the contemporary advances in educational knowledge and theory. During their terms of office, Alabama's modernising superintendents, particularly John William Abercrombie and William Francis Feagin, were very much preoccupied with system building, policy standardisation and the broadening of educational revenue sources. Yet implicit in all their reports, speeches and pamphlets was a belief that schooling should not merely prepare students for roles defined by their local community. Schooling was to assist students to play a part in a modernising Alabama and the economic development of the New South. The need to expand the branches being taught was predicated on this idea.[112]

If newspaper comment is any guide to curriculum satisfaction, it seems not everyone was happy. In June 1905 the *Fort Payne Journal* covered the proceedings of a just-held meeting of the "State Educational Society" in Montgomery. The topics discussed had included better schoolhouses, better pay for teachers, how to get more money out of the people by way of taxation, and "the various fads and fashions which infest the popular idea of education." But, the paper complained:

> *Nowhere is it set down that anybody proposes to tell how the average pupil should be taught to read and spell and the best methods of imparting this best of all branches of education. Maybe these simple studies have fallen beneath the notice of the advanced teachers of the present day.*[113]

The *Fort Payne Journal* was addressing a white readership and its concern was for white children. The *Opelika Daily News* was also concerned for white education. In its account of the same meeting the *News* noted approvingly that proceedings:

> *[were] marked by an expressed determination on the part of the Alabama educators to do the duty of the white people of Alabama toward the white boys and girls of the rural*

112. That education should fit students for a changing world is implicit in all contemporary publications of the Alabama Department of Education such as (for example) ***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.

113. ***Fort Payne Journal,*** June 7, 1905. This newspaper was published in DeKalb County. The meeting was actually that of the Alabama Educational Association.

> *districts of the state. . . . A resolution was offered providing for a committee of five to be appointed to draft a course of study for rural schools.*[114]

In the Black Belt, the *Bullock County Breeze* (whose associate editor and business manager in 1905 just happened to be Bullock County's superintendent of education) regularly and somewhat insistently offered its readership opinions on black education. It came out strongly against any expansion of the curriculum for black students. Nothing, it asserted, "further than the elementary branches – the ability to read and write and the learning of some useful trade" was appropriate for the Negro. Anything additional, such as higher education, would take him "out of the fields of labor for which he is best fitted by nature and would create within him an unwholesome discontent."[115]

The protests regarding textbooks and curriculum can be seen within the wider context of the public schooling modernisation process that gathered pace during the first decade of the twentieth century. This process was led by educationists, lay activists and philanthropists and included plenty of legislative prescriptions. Textbook uniformity and the expansion of the branches to include unfamiliar subjects were matters that provided a useful focus for various interest groups to express their dislike of such governmental prescription (particularly where this involved unnecessary expenditure). Teachers, parents and other community members were generally hesitant and sometimes angry in the face of too many schooling innovations because these struck at their sense of identity, questioned their capacities and interfered with their respective prerogatives. For reform to proceed, at least some of these anxieties had to be accommodated – particularly the special requirements and opinions of rural communities.

Making agriculture a compulsory branch of the rural school curriculum was an early indication that rural schooling would become increasingly vocational. In 1910 the first comprehensive *State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama* was published and distributed by the Department of Education. The content of this manual was significantly directed toward the rural school and

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114. ***Opelika Daily News***, June 8, 1905. This newspaper was published in Lee County.

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

the knowledge needs and extracurricular activities of farm children. Further such publications soon followed.[116]

In 1911 the Department of Education received a grant of Peabody money from the General Education Board. A sum of $3,000 p.a. was made available for the purpose of appointing a dedicated "State Supervisor of Elementary Rural Schools" and meeting the continuing costs of this position. The first person to hold the position was Professor Norman R. Baker. Two years later James L. Sibley was appointed "State Supervisor of Elementary Rural Colored Schools."

Professor Baker's appointment (which will discussed further in Chapter 6) was another indication of the state superintendent and other modernisers recognising that traditionalist suspicions of educational change were not just a reflexive reaction to the new but arose from different conceptions of the purpose of schooling and parental authority. Baker's first *Annual Report* showed he was keen to address such concerns. He was sensitive to issues of domain and believed he could help to revitalise rural schools in ways that respected the wishes of parents and the influence of other stakeholders. In his first report he wrote that "everyone" was taking kindly to his close attention to the needs of rural schools.[117] Baker was fortunate in coming to his task when he did. The first two decades of the twentieth century were a time of a growing national and state recognition that the economic and cultural importance of rural society and the virtues of country life (if not localism) were overdue for re-validation.[118] This would have a major impact on what was taught in rural schools.

116. Successive publications of the Department of Education that were designed with rural schools in mind were ***A Suggestive Course of Study for the Common Schools of Alabama,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1908; ***State Manual of the Course of Study for the Public Elementary Schools of Alabama,*** Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1910. ***Daily Programs of Recitation and Study Suggestive for Use in the Rural and Village Schools of Alabama,*** Montgomery, n.p., 1910. ***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. ***Alabama's Country Schools and their Relation to Country Life,*** Bulletin No. 33, Montgomery, The Brown Printing Company, 1913.

117. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1912,*** 28. In Baker's next annual report in 1913 he laid out a comprehensive plan for rural school improvement. Alabama Dept. of Education, ***Annual Report, 1913,*** 36-39.

118. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.