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April 20, 1984

Education in Colorado City and Colorado Springs

Colorado City boasted the first school in El Paso County. Started in 1861, it was a subscription school where patrons paid a set fee to hire a teacher and buy meager supplies. In 1862 the first public school was constructed, and soon after private high schools arrived. Colorado College was founded in 1874, open to both sexes and all races. In 1905 the first black students were admitted.

Public schools' fortunes have always followed those of Colorado Springs and Colorado City. When silver was discovered in Leadville, school enrollment in this area shrank as miners and merchants eagerly flocked north. The discovery of gold in the Cripple Creek and Victor region brought thousands flocking in once more. After the gold vanished, so did many families, and some schools closed for lack of students. From 1915 to 1940 few new schools were built. However, after World War II, the introduction of military installations into Colorado Springs brought a huge surge in the population, and phenomenal growth occurred.

Parents in days past had many of the same concerns as their twentieth-century counterparts. They wanted quality

public education, but chafed at paying higher taxes. Parents in the mining area that is now Hockrimmon complained about their youngsters being "bused" to downtown schools in large wagons. Violence was of a different nature, but still a problem. During the late 1860's many a pioneer mother hesitated to send her children out in the mornings because of Indian attacks.

Of course, technology, population growth, and child psychology brought about numerous changes to educational systems in the Pikes Peak region. Children as young as eighteen months participating in preschool programs are a product of twentieth-century thinking that would puzzle parents of days past. Mandatory education for people eighteen and under would have been an especial hardship on ranchers and farmers who depended on their children to help at home during busy seasons.

Most recent figures show that School District 11 now has 52 schools, ranging from elementary to secondary.

Education: 1866

In 1862 the first public schools arrived in the Colorado Territory. Prospectors had packed family and belongings to journey west in search of gold. The gold soon vanished, but some miners stayed on and were joined by merchants, farmers, and cattlemen. Their children required an education. Three years after its founding on August 13, 1859, Colorado City boasted a twenty-foot square "grout" school constructed of adobe and stone. Grades one through eight met five days a week in the one-room structure. Despite the town's wild reputation, an impressed Rocky Mountain News reporter exulted in 1867:

Colorado City is a thriving city in relation to schools. It is decidedly in advance of most places in the territory. In addition to a good school, they have a good high school, conducted by Professor Beattie.¹

High schools were often private institutions in those days, and the title of "professor" was known to be

¹ Harriet Seibel, A History of the Colorado Springs Schools: District 11 (Colorado Springs: Century One Press, 1975), p. 7.

self-appointed by individuals confident that no one would question their credentials. However, Beattie and his private high school were quite legitimate. A former mathematics professor at Iowa's Wesleyan University, he had come to Colorado City for his health. He founded his school in 1866 with thirty pupils; eventually, it became Fountain College.

In 1863 the tax for public education in Colorado City was one mill (one-tenth of a cent) on the dollar.² Apparently the job of city school-board superintendent was a thankless task, since the position enjoyed a brisk turnover. In 1868 the El Paso county superintendent, R. Douglass, reported, "[Six] districts, 235 persons of school age, salaries of teachers from \$40 to \$60 per month."³ The one-room schools were small and crowded, poorly equipped, and no truancy laws existed.

The early 1870's saw the arrival of more families in the area, and the financial support of education increased somewhat. Conditions, while far from ideal, did improve. John Reynolds, a young midwesterner who chose Colorado City for his first teaching assignment, wrote his mother in 1872:

I have a Chicago House, which is portable, for a schoolhouse. It is built in sections, so that it can be easily moved, and set up⁴

² H. M. Hale, Education In Colorado (Denver: News Printing Co., 1885), p. 22.

³ Seibel, p. 7.

⁴ Seibel, p. 8.

again. . . .They are 12 feet by 16 feet, and they have two windows and a door, all quite narrow. As for school furniture, there are three long benches, without backs, four chairs and a pine table. There are no desks. These are used by 19 children and myself. ⁵

That same year, General Palmer moved into Glen Eyre and realized the need for a school for the children of his estate's employees. In 1888, School District 35 was organized. At first, the west room of the Chambers house was rented for ten dollars a month, which included coal, a stove, and a blackboard. The teacher's salary was set at \$40 per month. Within three months the school-board voted \$1000 for a new one-room school located half-way between the entrance to Garden of the Gods and Glen Eyrie. It operated until 1930 and finally burned down in 1947. The Palmer daughters were educated in a private log school on the grounds. ⁶

The curriculum of the mid-nineteenth century western public school leaned heavily on the three-R's and McGuffey's Eclectic Reader. In the latter, prose stories and poetry ~~was~~ surrounded by articulation, pronunciation, and spelling drills, most of which appear bewildering to modern eyes. Stories carried moral titles such as "Where There's a Will, There's a Way", "Waste Not, ⁷

⁵Seibel, p. 8. ⁶Seibel, p. 47.

⁷ W. H. McGuffey, McGuffey's Fourth Eclectic Reader (Cincinnati: Van Antwerp, Bragg and Co., 1866).

Want Not", "Perseverence", "The Creator", "My Mother's Grave", and--most threatening of all to the lazy scholar-- "Consequences of Bad Spelling".⁸ Children were required to buy their books, so siblings shared texts and slates. School could meet in summer as well as winter, depending on enrollment, and a birch rod supplied the discipline. It was a no-frills education with emphasis on the practical.

Teachers were required to be certified, and examinations tightened in the late 1870's.

⁸ McGuffey, 1866.

Education: 1895

The Colorado Department of Public Instruction's Biennial Report of 1895 carries a glowing review by O. Finch about El Paso County's achievements in public education.¹ New and better schools were being built, more competent teachers were being hired, and the caliber of instruction had improved so that El Paso's eighth-grade examinations allowed graduates into any high school in the state without further entrance exams.

The most important practical change was the initiation of free textbooks which put a public education within everyone's reach. Mrs. A. J. Peavy, State Superintendent of Schools, was proud of this achievement, and firmly believed that it alone could claim credit for a dramatic drop in the illiteracy rate. Twenty-six local superintendents in Colorado were women, and a glance at the El Paso County Superintendent's Record shows that more women than men were working as teachers. Teachers' pay ranged from \$50 to \$210.52 per month, depending upon the degree of certification and experience.² The majority of life

¹ Biennial Report, 10th ed., pp. 120-122.

² County Superintendent's Record, El Paso County, 1895-97.

certificates were held by men who earned more than less-seasoned instructors.

If John Reynolds had arrived in 1895 rather than 1872, his pay would have been twenty dollars higher. Colorado City teachers were earning between \$60 and \$70 per month. New people were flocking to the area, and the school system felt the strain. District 11 alone grew by 432 pupils that year, according to county records.

Teaching requirements were tightened in the 1890's. County superintendents held teacher examinations the last Friday of February, May, and August annually. In addition to the basics, teachers were required to demonstrate ability in foreign language, higher mathematics, history, and philosophy. In rapidly growing areas, the need for teachers may have caused some laxity on grading standards: of 140 applicants in 1895, 120 passed with 77 first or second grade certificates.⁴

The curriculum was expanding, and a new attitude toward teaching was evolving as well. Mrs. Peavy earnestly observed:

The idea must be rooted out which is so prevalent that any one who has passed through a fair course of instruction is competent to engage in the work of instruction, and unfortunately, one too often thinks that the ability to procure a teacher's certificate is identical with the ability to teach.⁵

^{4,5} Biennial Report, p. 121, pp. 12-13.

Education: 1907

Upper class children in the Colorado Springs area were educated in private or parochial institutions or tutored at home, as were the Palmer girls. College meant a trip back east or enrollment at Colorado College in the Springs. Tuition to the liberal arts institute was \$230 annually. In 1904, 114 students were enrolled in the freshman class.

Colorado College had gotten off to a rocky start in 1874, and was, from the very beginning, beset with financial difficulties. Then in 1888, William Slocum, a Congregational minister from New England, was hired as president. Not only did he teach several classes, but he was also dean of men, campus minister, and director of development. He cheerfully hounded eastern power magnates such as Andrew Carnegie for donations and rarely missed a chance to improve enrollment by extolling the virtues of clean and healthy living in the Pike's Peak region. Irreverent students were amused by his trips east to drum up contributions and enthusiastically sang:

Prexy Slocum 's back today

Ta, ra, ra boom de ay,

Now the profs will get their pay,

Ta, ra, ra boom de ay. ²

^{1,2} James Juan Reid, Colorado College: The First Century, 1874-1974 (Colorado Springs: Colorado College, 1982), p. 71.

Times were changing. Colorado College's first student protest occurred in the early 1900's when students demanded--and received--permission to smoke and play cards in the campus common room.³ The first fraternities, Kappa Sigma and Sigma Chi, arrived about the same time and brought some relief to the crowded housing problem. Much of the student social life revolved around smokers, open houses, dances, and informal outings. The Bruin Inn was a favorite haunt of the area's young people because it had a small dance floor. Couples could walk back down Cheyenne Cañon in the moonlight to catch the last streetcar, all under the watchful eyes of faculty chaperones.

Dean Loomis from Vassar was in charge of women students, and she made it her duty to polish the rough edges of her charges. One former student recalling those days admitted:

While the college boasted of enough girls with cultivated backgrounds to leaven the group, most of the others came from the dry-farming towns and mining-camps of Colorado with some from the scattered cattle ranches of Wyoming and New Mexico.⁴

Dean Loomis herself taught the mandatory sex education class for women every fall, and insisted

^{3,4} Reid, p. 78, p. 50.

that young ladies modestly wear long bloomers when climbing out of dormitory windows for the annual fire drill.

Freshmen were hazed mercilessly, especially the men, who emerged from chapel more than once to find upperclassmen lined up a block long to swing their belts at the unlucky newcomers' posteriors.⁵ Former literary and engineering clubs became more social; indeed, the emphasis appears to have shifted from academics to The Good Life. Certainly a liberal arts education was still offered, but a shift evolved in student thinking: college could be a great deal of fun.

The color line at Colorado College was finally broken in seventeen years after it was founded. In 1905 Fred Roberts and Charles Jackson entered and became members of that season's undefeated football team.⁶

^{5,6} Heid, p. 69, p. 71.

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The above proved too general for the specifics necessary according to the outline; however, they do provide good background information. They are all available at Penrose Public Library. Most of the works listed in the Bibliography proper can be found at Penrose and Tutt.