

# PRIMITIVE DELAWARE

State of the Whipping Post and "Bound" Children, Awakened Now,  
Is Fighting Hard for Decent Schools

**W**HEN Caesar Rodney put to blush all the other historic Caesars and Czars and Kaisers by signing the Constitution of the United States, he also put Delaware, whose representative he was, into the very forefront of the thirteen Colonies, for she was first to ratify. That was nearly a century and a half ago; and Delaware, heaving a contented sigh at this indefeasible proof of her initiative and progress, thereupon went away back and sat down.

Sitting, Delaware slumbered. This is not literally true, but it assumes the aspect of accuracy when an examination is made of the crazy quilt which constitutes the fabric of her laws. For many of the statutes enacted in the post-Revolutionary period of adolescent democracy, somewhat patched and refurbished, remain on her books. Delaware alone has the whipping post. It is not so very long since she abolished the pillory. She even retains the ancient system of indenture, whereby children are "bound out" to masters until they reach maturity; and in no other State, even in the "benighted" South, was it stipulated, say, a year ago, as it was in Delaware, that white men should not be taxed to help educate the negro.

It was the world war that awakened the State to her backwardness. In the effort to mobilize her forces she found with a start that her outworn machinery wouldn't function. She found she had almost no State or county records. She discovered that she, a proud part of the original core of the Union, was the most illiterate Commonwealth outside the "Black Belt," and possibly New Mexico and Arizona; and so, even while she was busily subscribing, out of all proportion to her pigny size, to Red Cross funds and Liberty Loans, she found time to set about reforming her educational system, that her children might go to decent schoolhouses and might receive competent instruction. A new code was enacted to replace the hodge-podge of laws in effect; and then, when this first step had been taken toward a general rehabilitation, the State was plunged into a bitter fight to hold her ground. Even now there lies on the Governor's desk a bundle of petitions, bearing nearly 7,000 names, for a special legislative session to reconsider the new laws; and it is a shocking commentary on conditions that many of the signers, unable to write their names, have made their "marks." It is as though the blind were protesting against sunlight!

It may seem incredible that statements accepted as axiomatic in most American communities today are being challenged in a State on the Atlantic seaboard, and yet that is true—Poor schools are a poor business policy, the people of Delaware are being told. Good schools make for



## SCHOOLS OF A BYGONE AGE.

Above.—The "Eight Square School" Was Built "when it was considered essential to one's educational development that he be within reach of the master's rod."

Below.—Where the Primary Pupils of Dagsboro Go to School in an Abandoned Building. "It has not been within the experience of the Survey Commission," Says an Official Report. "to find children housed in a more damnable room."

good citizenship. Schools are fundamental to political development, and through them a peaceable way may be found to the correction of community evils. Proper education will make democracy safe for the world. These and similar postulates, generally considered as self-evident as the truths which preface the Declaration of Independence, are being dinned by Pierre S. du Pont and other State leaders into the reluctant ears of Delaware's farmers.

To understand how such a situation could prevail in a region almost encircled by America's most famous universities, it is necessary to consider briefly Delaware's physical and political background. Wilmington, with 105,000 inhabitants, is the only city having a population of more than 10,000. The peninsula between the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays was settled by English

stock, and until within the last quarter of a century no railroad disturbed its agricultural tranquillity; whereas Wilmington, on the beaten path between Washington, Baltimore and New York City, thrived as an industrial centre.

The peninsula stock, in Maryland as well as in Delaware, was almost undefiled with the passage of a century. The families intermarried. They retained many quaint locutions of the England of an earlier day. They were a people apart, somewhat like the mountaineers of Kentucky and Tennessee, a people of singular frugality and piety, among whom it was a special credit to be a "meetin' man" and who, when the charter was granted for the railroad which now forms the Maryland Division of the Pennsylvania, specified that no trains should run on Sundays. It was not until ten years ago that a law was passed

amending that charter. The rural population takes its Bible verbatim. Mostly it is a Methodist Bible, for there the Methodist Episcopal Church was born. They are law-abiding people, too; the courts are almost idle, and the Wilmington workhouse serves well enough as a State penitentiary. A sugar shortage does not bother the farmers. They know nothing about refineries, but they can grind cane and make syrup from it, and that is what they have done while urban housewives have wrung their hands in helplessness. Antiquated grist mills are still in use among them. They form a community self-containing and almost self-sustaining.

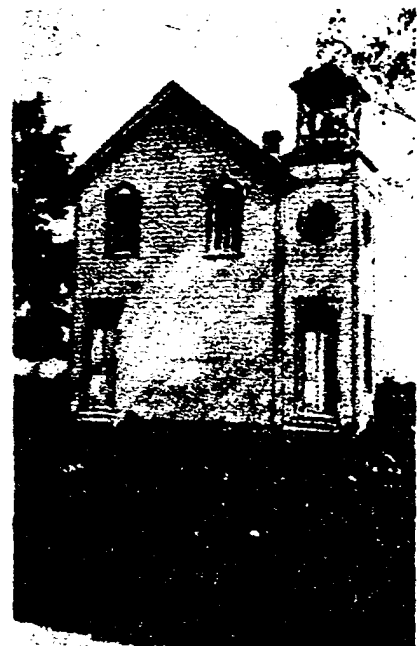
Retaining primitive phrases and machinery and habits, the folk of the Delaware peninsula retained also the primitive English political unit of the "hundred" as a township and much of the old English terminology. Ten "hundreds" constituted a county. There were thus three counties—Kent, Sussex, and New Castle, good English names all—when the State threw off the proprietary claims of Pennsylvania and asserted full sovereignty. The three county courts were "levy" courts, and the County Commissioner was a "levy courtman." Business was done by the "hundred" unit, and when money was appropriated, say, for road building, it was divided equally among the townships, which might lay a highway where or whither they chose, without regard to any other, or might spend the money for whatever purpose pleased them. Each of the three counties is now represented equally in each branch of the General Assembly; so that Wilmington, which has half the population of the State and pays 95 per cent. of its income tax, is outvoted two to one by the rural down-State Senators and Representatives, who cherish toward the "city" legislators that cordial animosity common to all such State Assemblies.

These conditions had an immediate bearing on the old school laws under which Delaware bought a brand of education so cheap that only seven other States rivaled her niggardliness in that direction—and still paid high for what she got; and they have a vital bearing, too, on the fight now being waged against the new code. The defective old laws were not a product of viciousness, indifference, or neglect, but of tradition, political reaction and an almost penurious thrift; and the same factors are manifest in the present conflict of opinion.

Delaware presents within compact compass a cross section of American problems and is a fine laboratory in which to work them out. A commission to study educational affairs was appointed by the Legislature in 1917, and was authorized to "harmonize, unify, and

revise" the school laws; but the members, after a hasty look around, decided that this was a job requiring experts and turned to the General Education Board of New York. The experts assigned to the task were Dr. Abraham Flexner, now one of the secretaries of the board, author of "The American College" and other books, and Dr. Frank P. Bachman, a member of the staff which had surveyed the schools of New York City and the author of "Problems in Elementary School Administration," among other books. Both men had assisted in a Maryland school survey. While Delaware was about it she wanted a thorough piece of work done.

It is impossible to present in any detail here the findings of these experts. Delaware at that time had dilapidated and unsanitary school buildings, almost no equipment, an attendance which made a mock of the supposed compulsory provisions, and teachers many of whom had



At Canterbury, Kent County, Is This Two-Room School. "The interior," Says an Official Report, "would be a disgrace to any community. Plaster has been broken from the walls in many places, blackboards have been torn down, and the roof has leaked in places."

not even a high school education. Only three States in the Union (Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina) paid teachers less. Only a few so-called "black" States had shorter terms and a lower percentage of pupils. In some Delaware schools there had been no textbooks for at least five years. Teaching was by word of mouth and the blackboard. The map at one place had been printed in 1839, before the Mexican war, and some schools had no map at all.

Administration of the schools lay between the State Board of Education, the County School Commission, and the District School Committee, which worked independently of one another, sometimes had not even concurrent terms, had no authority over one another, except in a nominal sense, and no real jurisdiction. Some of the schools were "incorporated" and owned property. Schools for negroes were under separate management from schools for whites, and were independent even of the district committee within whose territory they were located. They were separately financed, too. The negro schools subsisted on the scant proceeds from the taxation of negroes in the district. "No such anomalous and undemocratic arrangement can be found in any other State of the Union," observed the experts.

There were 424 local school committees or boards of education in Delaware at that time, and a total of 1,399 local administrative officials. The total expenditures during the school year of 1917-18 on white schools, exclusive of those in Wilmington, was \$400,126.37, which gave \$20.13 for each enrolled white pupil during the year. The figures for the negro schools were \$37,126.81, which amounted to \$8.29 each per year on total enrollment.

Owing to the lack of records, it was impossible for the investigators to find out exactly how many teachers there were in Delaware, but they set the figure at 734. They were sure that number was at work. To all of them questionnaires were sent, but only 651 replied. Among those, only 127 held normal or college graduate certificates. Eighty held provisional certificates, and 358, two-thirds of the teachers, held the very lowest grade of certificate issued, showing a limited elementary education.

Not only were the teachers defective in training, they were immature. About one-fourth of them were under 21 years of age. Forty-three were 18 years old and nine only 17. About one-fourth of the whole number entered the work during that year. Only about two in five remained as long as five years. Inadequate provisions for training teachers contributed to this. Until 1915 there was no normal school in the State, and the one then established was for women only. The salaries, too, were a factor. The median wage of high school teachers, excepting eight of the Principals, was \$90 a month, about half receiving less than that. The average elementary teacher got \$65 a month, the average white rural teacher \$60, and the average negro teacher \$45 a month.

Physical education was entirely ignored in the schools, there was little or no attention to recreation grounds, manual training, agriculture and domestic science. Only two high schools provided work for girls in the household arts, and only one or two attempted manual training or agriculture for the boys.

In regard to the State board the experts said in their report:

"In practice the State Board of Education, has no way of enforcing the school laws or its regulations; indeed, it has only nominal control over the county Superintendents, and none at all over the county School Commissions. Thus, in effect, the State Board of Education, with all its powers, becomes little more than an advisory body. A school officer, for example, may commit malfeasance—the State board is powerless to act. Teachers may be employed without licenses—the State board can only protest. Plans for a new school building may run counter to the principles of good school architecture, or a school-house and outbuildings may endanger the health of pupils—the State board can only counsel.

In regard to the disadvantages of the "deestrick skule" the experts observed:

"The district system inevitably makes for excessively wide differences in educational opportunities and in school tax burdens. In one district the schools are open nine months, in another eight months, and in still another seven months. Likewise, in one district the school poll tax is \$2, in another \$6. Again, the property school tax in one district is 7 cents on \$100, and in another district 100 cents. Thus inequality reigns where sound policy requires something approaching uniformity. The truth is the district system represents pioneer conditions. It goes back to the time when an isolated group, desiring some sort of school for its children, pooled its meagre

resources in order to establish a neighborhood school. Increased wealth, larger numbers, improved communication, more complicated educational requirements, render the district system obsolete."

Buildings for rural schools were of all colors. The lighting was nearly always poor, a stove was used for heating in

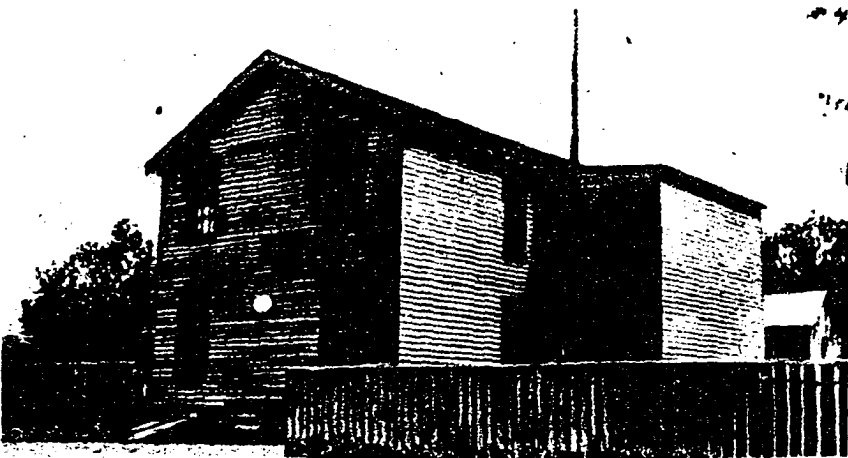


Pierre S. du Pont, Chairman of the Board of E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Who Has Given Large Sums for Public Education in Delaware and Is now Leading the Fight for the New School Code.

most of them, the seats were the old-fashioned double desks abolished twenty-five years ago by enlightened communities, the blackboards were usually of slate, and arrangements for washing the face and hands were a rarity. The building as a rule consisted of a rectangular room (although one was built as an octagon, presumably that the teacher might stand in the middle and have all the flock within reach of the birch), and of course there were no cloakrooms. Some of the larger village schools were found to be firetraps. Even in the towns conditions were not much better. Only two high-class modern school buildings were found, both in Wilmington, which does not fall under the operation of the new code.

There were enrolled in the 1917-18 scholastic year 2,013 white children 10 years of age. Probably there were just as many children 11 years old, just as many 13; but as a matter of fact the enrollment number dropped to 1,874 for 11, and 1,712 for 13. Beyond 14 the drop was increasingly rapid. There were only 669 children enrolled of the age of 16, only 198 of 18. The schools thus failed to reach nine-tenths of the 18-year-old children.

In the whole State, outside of Wilmington, only 116 pupils reached the fourth year of the high school. It was estimated that more than 2,000 should have been in attendance. The Delaware com-



Built as a Soldier Barracks During the Civil War, This Public School in Dover, Capital of Delaware, Is Now So Overcrowded That Part-Time Classes Are Necessary. It Has None of the Features Considered Necessary in Modern Education.

pulsory school law specified that all children between the ages of 7 and 14 should attend school continuously for at least five months a year, but the local boards were permitted to reduce the period to three months, and more than half of them did reduce the period. Even so, the compulsory law was not enforced. For example, in Kent County the average number of days for boys in one-room rural schools having a three months' compulsory period was sixty-nine days; in one-room rural schools having a four months' compulsory period, sixty-eight days; and in one-room rural schools having a five months' compulsory period, seventy-two days. The enforcement of the compulsory attendance law was in the hands of the clerks of the local boards, the County Superintendents, and the teachers. There was not a truant officer in all the State. In consequence, the law was a dead letter.

To revise laws so chaotic was out of the question. The only recourse was to scrap them and erect a new machinery. The experts therefore drew up an entire new school code for Delaware which may be analyzed briefly as follows:

It differs from the old, first in fixing responsibility for the proper conduct of the schools upon certain persons who can no longer escape their responsibility through failure of the law to give them sufficient power to do their work. Those appointed to care for the schools must carry out the work allotted to them and must report to the public each year the result of their efforts.

There is a difference in the method of raising money for the support of the schools. Under the old system each school district, that is, each school building, was partly supported by a tax levied by its school committee which made the assessment of value of property and fixed the rate of taxation. Low as the tax levy was, the schools accumulated debts of \$260,000 to which the amended system fell heir.

Under the new code the high schools have been made centres of what are known as special districts; that is, the land and property immediately surrounding these schools is taxed for the benefit of the schools, and a rate of taxation is fixed by the County Levy Court for each special district separately in order that the money raised, when added to the State appropriation, may be sufficient to operate each school under the estimate of its needs.

All the remaining land and property of each county, apart from the Special Districts, is taxed by the Levy Court at a rate necessary to produce the money necessary for the conduct of the schools. The levying of uniform taxes constitutes a main difference between the old law and the new. This principle of levying a uniform rate places a greater burden on some districts and benefits others, but is in line with advanced practice in education.

The new law also changes slightly the rates of capitation tax. The old poll tax varied from \$2 to \$6. The new law fixes a minimum of \$3 and a maximum of \$6.

The pupils are divided among schools of varying grades.

A yearly term of 180 school days is fixed for pupils of 7 to 14 years.

This code was passed last March. Immediately opposition sprang up. The landowner who had been been paying picayunish school taxes, the farmers who had been sending sons, daughters, and "bound" children to school only two or three months a year and had taken them out at the age of 14, the rural reactionaries who regarded all change with suspicion and alarm, and politicians who saw an opportunity to exploit all these causes of discontent, joined in an outcry against the new code. They charged that it was subversive of the old "hundred" democracy of Delaware, that it was slipped unexpectedly through the Legislature, that it put a grievous burden on the taxpayer, that it made for one-group control, that it was Prussian.

The first overt attack was on the con-

(Continued on Page 12)

# Primitive Delaware

(Continued from Page 2)

stitutionality of the law, and when a test case was before the Supreme Court of the State something very like a mob was organized to go to Dover, the capital, to "show the Judges which side their bread is buttered on," as one leader is said to have put it. (A Governor is to be elected next year, and the Governor will name the new judiciary.) Probably 1,000 strangers gathered at Dover, which normally has a population of only about four thousand. The transportation of the visitors was paid, yellow badges were printed for them bearing the words "No School Code for Me," and a mid-day meal was provided. They thronged the courtroom and held overflow meetings in the streets. They did nothing to disturb the peace. They were there merely to let the judiciary know where they stood. And the Supreme Court, studying the yellow badges thoughtfully, unanimously upheld the law.

Opponents now took the campaign throughout the State. Meetings were held to denounce the code. Parents were as conspicuous in them, it may be said, as were the "masters" of "bound" children; for although the indenture system still prevails widely in Delaware, and children are imported from orphanages in other States because the Delaware output is insufficient to meet the demand, the new code does not materially alter the situation. The "master's" objection to the law is that it takes the child away 180 school days—nine calendar months—and that precisely is the frugal father's objection. Both of them protest because they foresee higher taxes, even though the new taxes are proportionately as low as those in other States where educational facilities are adequate, and even though Mr. du Pont has offered to bear about one-third of the initial expense.

For it was here that Pierre S. du Pont took an active hand. Mr. du Pont is head of the corporations bearing his name and Chairman of the Executive Committee of General Motors, a \$1,000,000,000 corporation, one of the greatest industrial organizations in the United States. Unlike some others of his family, he is averse to politics. He is one of three brothers who have immersed themselves in the task of expanding and managing the du Pont organization with its 115 by-products, including the largest dyes plant in this country. Until recently he was not known to many persons in Delaware. Yet he has always been interested in education. He has given generously to his alma mater, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and just prior to America's entrance into the war he and his brothers gave Delaware State College \$1,000,000 for buildings and equipment.

Mr. du Pont virtually abandoned his business and plunged into the fight in support of the new school code. He has spoken in fifteen towns. The Governor has made him a member of the State School Board. To offset the outcry against higher taxes needed to replace shacks used for schools Mr. du Pont donated \$2,000,000 to be used in new buildings where needed, and to be so distributed in connection with State funds that he will bear about one-third the

cost. He has set by sixty free scholarships in Delaware College for the training of teachers, and finally, to quiet the objection that "the new law taxes the white man to build nigger schools," he agreed to build every schoolhouse needed for Delaware negroes.

Mr. du Pont believes the opposition to the code is diminishing. "I do not see how it can be made the basis of successful political campaigning," he said not long since, on his return to Wilmington from a mass meeting down State. "Opponents of education cannot long get votes. Indeed, its political opponents now say that they only seek amendments.

"For the most part the opposition is sincere. The farmer does not want to pay higher taxes, and it seems to him too costly to spare children nine months of the year from work. To meet that objection, the State Board provided for exemption of pupils until November if needed for farm work, and made the parents sole judges of the case; but in spite of that we had, under the new code, during September and October, an attendance of 85 per cent., which is much higher than it had been before. It is apparent that even with the longer term more children will study if we have better schools.

"As rapidly as may be the schoolhouses will be improved. I recall a one-room negro school, 15 by 19 feet, with a nine-foot ceiling, where the enrollment is seventy-two pupils. The attendance is only sixty-two, however, which eases the congestion a little.

"Under the former law taxes from the persons and property of white people were expended on the white schools while the taxes from the persons and property of colored people were used on colored schools. These forms of taxation tended to impose a light burden on the richer communities and a heavy burden on the poorer, with a result that the latter were unable to maintain proper schools. That system was not American. It is one of the soundest principles of our Government that a child's opportunity shall not be fixed by accident of birth. Hope for advancement and enrichment shall be open to all. Such a condition is impossible if the child does not receive a fair education. Therefore, advanced thought recommends a common school fund for the support of all schools, the richer taxpayers contributing toward the education of the poor on the theory that education is the right of every child.

"I am confident that the new law will be maintained, and that it will not be so altered as to weaken it."

Governor John G. Townsend, Jr., has sent a letter to each of the signers of the petitions for a special session of the Legislature, which is not due to reconvene until January, 1921. Some of the petitions made no mention of what the Assemblymen were to do, some stated that reconsideration of the code was required, and others asked that the Legislature be reconvened to repeal the code—which is quite beyond the Governor's province. So he asked what prompted the signatures. Many replies have been received to the Governor's letters, but he has not yet made public his findings.

"I am sure," he said, "that the result will be extremely interesting."