

## Parents Refuse To Pay...

### "Rate-bill" and "Fuel Tax"

The schools at first provided were of an elementary and a rudimentary nature only. Reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic constituted almost the entire curriculum at first. Grammar, geography, and history were added a little later. The term was short, and a small tuition fee, in the form of the "rate-bill," was usually charged to supplement the small income from school funds and from taxation. Those who could not pay the charge were usually admitted as indigents, much as text-books are now supplied to indigents in some of our states. A "fuel tax" was also charged for a time, and admission was denied to those whose parents had not provided their quota of wood.

.....  
. . . The cities were the first to throw off the "rate-bill" and to provide absolutely free schools. By 1860, it had been abolished in most of the states, and in 1871 the last state, New Jersey, did away with this objectionable provision.

E. P. Cubberley, Changing Conceptions of Education, 1909, pp. 35ff.

## A Mind-Set is Hard to Break!

1834

... our school-houses are left to be supplied by the necessitous and unqualified. Indolent, immoral, and ignorant men are often employed to teach our common schools: these disgrace the calling, and have made the saying "as lazy and conceited as a schoolmaster" familiar everywhere. Now, what is it that draws into our schools the worthless, and excludes the worthy. What is it that prevents men from becoming capable teachers? What is it that makes teaching disreputable? Parents, it is your sordid avarice, your own shortsightedness, and your cruelty to your own children! By offering an adequate compensation to teachers, you could demand learning, talent, and elegance. By a high-minded, generous attention to your children's education, you may make the profession of teaching take an equal rank in usefulness and respectability with the lawyer's and the divine's. **YOU MAY MAKE OUR LITERARY MEN FEEL IT THEIR HIGHEST AMBITION TO BECOME GOOD SCHOOLMASTERS.** The honour of the profession of teaching rests with you; you can continue its low condition, or you may raise it to honour and respectability.

The great thing that is wanting is the co-operation of parents. Unless parents are willing to unite their efforts with legislation and official counsel, they will receive but little aid from the government. Great assistance, indeed, may be had from the school funds and the school system, if parents will make this active, liberal co-operation; but without this obligatory exertion on the part of parents, the state can do them but little good. It is to be regretted that so great a part of the school fund is lost by being squandered on unqualified teachers. Parents, by hiring such teachers, pervert the benevolence of the state, and exclude themselves from those advantages which the government wishes to give them. If the funds were bestowed on worthy, well-qualified teachers, the inhabitants of the district would be greatly assisted, and the spirit and intention of the school law would be fully answered. But the public funds are lost when they support men who are rather an injury to the schools than a benefit; and the parents voluntarily deprive themselves of that aid which is so generously offered to all.

**1960s** Richard Hofstadter, an American historian summarized: American communities had found it hard to find, train, or pay for good teachers. They settled for what they could get, and what they got was a high proportion of misfits and incompetents. They tended to conclude that teaching was a trade which attracted rascals, and, having so concluded, they were reluctant to pay the rascals more than they were worth.

J. Orville Taylor, The District School, 1834, Harper & Brothers, 128-9  
Anti-Intellectualism in American Life, Richard Hofstadter, Alfred A. Knopf, 1963, 316

## 1830s

Capable, faithful teachers do not receive a sufficient compensation. The common school teacher, who is employed for twelve successive months, does not receive more than eleven dollars per month. There are a few who get more than this sum, yet a greater number who receive less. Now the common labourer, who hires himself to the farmer by the month, gets as much as the teacher ; and the wages of the mechanic are double the wages of the teacher.

It is a very common practice with young men who teach during the winter, to labour on the farm during the summer : and they make this change because the summer wages of the farm *are more* than the wages of the summer school. *There is no employment among the American people (what a reproach to our intelligence and affluence!) which receives less pay than elementary teaching.* Yes, there is no service so menial, no drudgery so degrading, which does not demand as high wages as we are now giving for that which is the life of our liberty, and the guard of our free institutions.

Our leading intelligent citizens perceive this fact, and they have published it, and done much to make the lamentable truth known and felt by every parent and guardian in this republic ; yet, but few, very few consider it ; for even now, many honest men think that teachers have an easier life, are better

paid, and better treated than any other labouring class in the community. The great majority of the people do not see that they give no extra advantages whatever to those who are giving the nation its education and its character.

The little compensation which parents are disposed to give their instructors, offers no inducement to young men to make any preparation for teaching.\* The consequence is, that a great number of our school-houses are furnished with incompetent teachers. Parents complain loudly of this deficiency ; but they seldom perceive the cause of the ignorance and inexperience of teachers.

But few parents perceive the bad effects of giving low wages to teachers. The evils arising from this ill-judged parsimony are numerous and destructive. It prevents young men from obtaining proper qualifications—it makes teachers indifferent and unfaithful in their employment—it makes them dislike their business, and anxious for some other occupation—it puts men in our schools who are lazy and ignorant—it makes teaching a temporary business for a few idle months, and it makes the teacher's profession low and disreputable. These are some of the evils which make our schools, in a great measure, useless to what they might be, and evils which arise from giving teachers too small a compensation.