Benjamin Orr Peers: Educator

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BENJAMIN ORR PEERS:
EDUCATOR

BY

AUGUSTON ALVIN PAGE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

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Approved: -

major Professor  
Department of Education  
Minor Professor  History  
Graduate Committee
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREFACE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II TEACHING CAREER AND AGITATION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III LATER LIFE</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to bring to the attention of the public the contributions of Benjamin Orr Peers and to show his influence on the development of our present public school system in Kentucky.

Material, other than secondary, has been scarce and widely scattered. The greater part of the source material was found in the Transylvania Library, Lexington, Kentucky, and in the private collection of Miss Mary O. Gray, Louisville, Kentucky. Some valuable information was obtained in each of the following places: Paris, Lexington, Louisville, Frankfort, and Bowling Green.

The writer wishes to thank his professors in the departments of Education and History for valuable criticisms and encouragements. He also wishes to thank the librarians at Bowling Green, Frankfort, Lexington, and Louisville for their courtesy and cooperation. Special thanks are due Mrs. Norton of Transylvania Library, Lexington, Kentucky, and Miss Mary O. Gray, Louisville, Kentucky, for placing at his disposal much source material.
CHAPTER I
EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Benjamin Orr Peers was born in Green Hill, Loudon County, Virginia, April 20, 1800. He was the son of Major Valentine Peers. The Peers family moved from northern Ireland to Scotland, and from that country Valentine Peers came to America when a small boy. When Independence was declared Valentine Peers joined the Revolutionary forces and was soon given a major’s commission. He demonstrated ability as an officer at the battle of Brandywine and was commended by George Washington for his part in the victory over Burgoyne at Stillwater, New York, September 19, 1777. Major Peers was also with Washington at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777 and 1778.

In 1803, when Benjamin Orr Peers was only three years of age, his father moved with his family to Kentucky. Major Peers must have been a man of considerable wealth and culture, as he is given credit by Collins for bringing to Kentucky the first piano, and also the first family carriage. He settled first at Lower Blue Lick Springs in Nicholas County and engaged in the manufacture of salt. In 1806 or 1807 he moved to Paris and

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1Richard Collins, History of Kentucky (Covington, Kentucky, Collins and Co., 1878), I, 442.
2Ibid., II, 583.
3Loc. cit.
4Ibid., I, 25.
5Ibid., I, 519.
established cotton factories at that place and at Maysville. He was at one time judge of the court of quarter sessions at Paris and was a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church. In 1810 he was one of the promoters of the Kentucky Assurance Society, and in 1817 he helped sell stock in the Maysville and Lexington Turnpike.

Benjamin O. Peers had a sister and two brothers. His sister, Mary Eleanor Peers, married the Kentucky historian, Lewis Collins. One of his brothers, Valentine J. Peers, moved from Kentucky to Missouri in 1823. He located in St. Louis and became closely identified with the political life of that section. He served at least one term as judge of the Recorders Court of St. Louis.

H. P. Peers, the other brother of Benjamin O. Peers, remained in Kentucky and became interested in the state's history. He began the collection of material that became the foundation for Collins' History of Kentucky. H. P. Peers had started the collection of material for the purpose of writing a history of Kentucky; but his untimely death prevented it. At his death the material that he had collected was turned over to his brother-in-law, Lewis Collins. Collins used this material with

7Ibid., V, 536.
8Collins, op. cit., II, iv.
minor revisions for his *History of Kentucky*.\(^9\) Collins' history is valued because of its number and range of historical facts. These facts, other than biographical, were nearly all collected by H. P. Peers.\(^10\) He, no doubt, spent much time and money in the collection of these facts which, to the average man, would seem unimportant; but like his brother, Benjamin O., he was unwilling to report on any subject without first making a thorough investigation.

Benjamin O. Peers was fortunate to have lived in a Kentucky community that valued education. We have every reason to believe that his home environment was one of culture and refinement. The famous Bourbon Academy, presided over by John Lyle, was located at Paris. Major Valentine Peers was a trustee of this academy,\(^11\) and it was here that Benjamin O. received his early education.

Just when he finished his work in Bourbon Academy is not known, but he entered Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky, when he was sixteen or seventeen years old.\(^12\) At the time that he entered Transylvania it was the most outstanding university of the West and ranked with Harvard and Yale both in size of student body and in scholarship of its faculty.

\(^9\) *Loc. cit.*


\(^11\) Robert Peter, *History of Bourbon County* (Chicago, O. L. Raskin and Co., 1882), p. 113; also the unpublished minutes of the Bourbon Academy now in the possession of Miss Blanche Lilleston, Paris, Kentucky.

\(^12\) *The Western Citizen*, Paris, Kentucky, May 17, 1817.
During Peers' college days Transylvania was presided over by Dr. Horace Holley. It was during his presidency that the university reached the height of its fame. Dr. Holley was one of America's ablest college presidents. He had breadth of vision and administrative ability that has rarely been equaled. He gathered around him a faculty of such noted men as: Benjamin W. Dudley, James Elythe, Charles Caldwell, William T. Harry, Daniel Drake, Jesse Hledsoe, and Constantine S. Rafinesque. Rarely in the history of any college has so illustrious a faculty been brought together. In 1820 President Holley sent Dr. Caldwell to Europe with $7000.00 to purchase books for the college library. During his presidency he brought to Lexington such men as President Monroe, LaFayette, Governor Shelby, Lord Stanley, and others. Transylvania became the educational center of the West. It was fortunate for Benjamin O. Peers that he was permitted to attend the college at this time, and it seems that he took advantage of every opportunity that the college had to offer. In addition to doing high type class work he was one of the most extensive readers of library books. He confined his reading to no special field, but he read much in science, philosophy, history, religion, and literature. We find listed in his range of reading such books as: Stewart's Elements, Edinburgh Review, Dwight's Sermons, King's Origin of Evil.

13 Kentucky Gazette, Lexington, July 9, 1819.

14 Transylvania Library Journal, Lexington, Kentucky, 1819-1821. A record of books taken from the library and the name of the person who took them.
Priestly on History, Barton's Botany, Clark's Homer, and Ciceroni's Opera. 15

Peers had not been long in college before he impressed the faculty with his ability. His work had been so satisfactory that he was given a place as tutor in the Preparatory School in 1818. 16 He continued as a tutor in this department until 1821, when he received his A. B. degree. 17 In the early part of 1821 Peers was given complete control of the Transylvania Preparatory School. 18 The year 1821-1822 was possibly the greatest from the standpoint of attendance in the school's history. 19 The writer does not attempt to give credit to Peers for this success of the university, but he was a part of the organization, and he must have been considered, by Dr. Holley, a man of unusual ability or Holley would not have retained him as principal. During the time that he was connected with the Preparatory School he not only carried on his studies and tutoring, but he attended to that department's finances. 20 The college records show that Benjamin O. Peers took care of most of his expenses while in college. He also paid the college expenses for his

15loc. cit.
16Transylvania Letters, 1822-U-20.
17Transylvania Catalogue, 1823, p. 134.
18Report, July 30, 1821.
19ibid., January 18, 1822.
20Transylvania Letters, 1822-U-20.
brother, H. P. Peers, for one semester. \(^{21}\) Why he was required to take this responsibility is not known, for all records would indicate that Major Peers was a man of wealth.

At the close of Transylvania’s year in 1821 Benjamin O. Peers severed, temporarily, his connection with the college. He entered Princeton to begin training for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church. His reason for entering the ministry is not known, but the wish of his father probably had something to do with it. \(^{22}\) Major Peers, who was by conviction and racial tradition, a Presbyterian, was anxious for his son to enter the ministry of his church. Benjamin O. Peers’ connection with Transylvania as a tutor had given him a permanent interest in the teaching profession and in the education of young people. He must have given considerable of his time to the study of the school systems of the United States, for in 1822 he was offered a scholarship in Switzerland. It was at this time that the teaching of Pestalozzi and the Fellenburg School in Switzerland was getting world-wide attention. He was offered a year in Switzerland, with all expenses paid, if he would go and make a study of the Fellenburg Plan of education. He was then to return to the United States and introduce this system. \(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) Loc. cit.


people in the United States had given serious thought to the teaching of Pestallozi or to the Fellenburg School; so we find young Peers quite in advance of his time. He made his plans to take advantage of the year in Europe, and he wrote at length to his father, offering his reason for abandoning the preaching ministry. He stated that after mature deliberation he had come to the conclusion that he could render a greater service to humanity in the teaching ministry. In January, 1823, Peers was very much disappointed because he had to abandon his trip to Switzerland. He wrote his sister saying that on account of discouraging intelligence received from Europe his trip abroad would have to be postponed. If this offer of a scholarship was again renewed to Peers or he contemplated study of the Fellenburg School, we do not have any record of it.

During his stay in Princeton, Peers became dissatisfied with the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church and came under the influence of the Episcopalians. Disappointed because of his failure to go to Switzerland and dissatisfied with the doctrine of the Presbyterians, he decided to enter the Seminary of the Episcopal Church at Alexandria, Virginia. His stay at Alexandria was rather uneventful. He served a few parish churches in the community and pursued his regular theological studies. Being a Virginian by birth and of a well known family, he was


possibly included in many of the social gatherings of the community. In 1826 he was a guest in the Washington house for a week-end. While there he wrote of having been permitted to use the writing desk of George Washington and of having a needle cushion made from a piece of the wedding gown of Martha Washington. 26

At the end of the school year 1825-1826 Peers completed his work at the seminary and was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church by Bishop Moore of Virginia. He remained in Virginia only a short time and then returned to Kentucky. It seems that he had definitely decided that he would make Kentucky his field of endeavor. While at Alexandria he had made contacts with churches that would probably have retained him as rector, but he wrote his father that he was very anxious to return to Kentucky. 27

In the summer of 1826 Benjamin O. Peers returned to Kentucky and began to establish himself as a school and church worker. The next nine years were spent in intensive work for the cause of education.

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26Letter from B. O. Peers to a friend in Louisville, Kentucky, 1826.

CHAPTER II

TEACHING CAREER AND AGITATION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

When Peers returned to Kentucky, he did not remain long out of Lexington. In the fall of 1826 he was again listed as one of the extensive readers in Transylvania Library. His reasons for returning to Lexington were many: It was one of the cultural centers of the United States at that time; Transylvania's Library offered a rich field for study; and the last, but probably the most outstanding reason was that Lexington was the home of Mary Ann Bell, whom Peers married on October 2, 1827.

Peers did not remain long without employment. In the fall of 1826 he opened a school of his own in Lexington, but he did not conduct it longer than the latter part of February, 1827. During this time the chair of Moral Philosophy in Transylvania University had become vacant and he was offered the place. To a man of Peers' age the offer of such a position was a distinct honor, but Dr. Holley was still Transylvania's president, and no doubt had great faith in the ability of this young man. On February 13, 1827 Peers wrote John Bradford, chairman of Transylvania's Board of Trustees, accepting the appointment.

1 Transylvania Library Journal, Lexington, Kentucky, 1826-1827.
2 Family Tree of Orrs and Peers, in possession of H. O. James, Paris, Kentucky, (unpublished); also Marriage Book of Fayette County, Lexington, Kentucky, 1827, p. 27.
3 Transylvania Manuscript, 1827-U-104.
Peers remained with the college as professor of Moral Philosophy for one term, but just what his position was after the summer of 1827 is not known. We know that he did not completely sever his connection with Transylvania, for in the college records of the next three years he was paid sums of money at intervals, apparently for teaching. When President Holley resigned in 1827, the trustees placed Peers and Professors Mathews, Chapman, and Roche in charge of the academical department. Peers helped direct the college until the Reverend Alva Woods, who was elected president in 1828, took his office.

Although Peers did not completely sever his relations with Transylvania in 1827, he evidently exerted his better efforts in another field. In the fall of 1827 he again established a private school in Lexington. Just why he decided to establish again a private school is not known; but he was searching for new truths in education, and it is possible that he had some new theories that he wanted to try out. We know that he had become interested in Pestalozzi's plan of education, and he hesitated to introduce anything new or revolutionary in Transylvania, fearing that it might bring embarrassment to the trustees. President Holley had been forced to resign merely because he was too broad-minded for some of the religious bigots of Lexington.

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5Minutes of Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky, pp. 120, 162; also Transylvania Manuscripts, 1827-U-100.

6Lexington Daily Press, June 3, 1876.

7Transylvania Manuscripts, 1827-U-104.
and because he refused to let past customs stand in the way of educational advancement. It is thought that Peers began his school in Lexington in a room rented from Transylvania College, but in February, 1828 he bought a farm three and one-half miles from Lexington and moved his school to it. He moved to the country in order that his students might be removed from the attractions of the town and that he might have a better opportunity to put into effect his plans. He advertised his Pestalozzian School in the Lexington papers, and he gave as his aim, the preparation of the children for life, "by preparing them to think and act for themselves." The body was to be developed by proper work and exercise, and the mind by research and preparation of original materials.

The educational movement had become so important to Peers that to him it was almost a crusade. He believed that "an education was the rightful heritage of every child," but he knew that before the opportunity for an education could be placed at the disposal of every child, the state at large would have to believe as he did. In order then that education might be made universal he began, in 1828, a series of lectures that he hoped would shape public opinion for it. He traveled over a

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8Loc. cit.
9Reporter, Lexington, Kentucky, February 20, 1828.
10Loc. cit.
good part of the state delivering lectures on popular education, whenever he could get away from his school.\textsuperscript{12} In this fight for a great popular cause, Peers was almost alone. He gave not only of his time, but freely of his money in furthering this movement. His effort was not in vain, for a historian of the period speaks of his effort thus:

"Light began to dawn upon the cause of popular education and it soon became a question of formulating a system to meet the rapidly growing sentiment in favor of free schools.\textsuperscript{13}

When in 1828, Louisville decided to revise her charter, she gave much study to her school system. Messrs. Guthrie, Garnett, Duncan, and their associates, after having made a thorough study of plans for a school system, adopted the views of Peers and incorporated them in the new charter.\textsuperscript{14} Thus Louisville, early in her history, started with a good school system that was later, to a great extent, patterned after by the state.

When the legislature convened in the winter of 1828, public sentiment had been so aroused over state wide education that some action had to be taken. In 1822 a report on public education had been made to the legislature, but the state at large was not yet aroused sufficiently to cause any action to be taken on it. Peers' speeches, however, had been fruitful, and in 1828 there


\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Loc. cit.}

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 234.
was a militant group demanding a school system that would be state wide. On January 29, 1829 the legislature requested the Reverend Alva Woods and Benjamin O. Peers to give it any information that might help in the establishment of a common school system for the state.15 Woods was chosen, no doubt, because of his connection with Transylvania University. Since that college was the educational center of the state at the time, naturally no great movement would be undertaken without its council. Peers was chosen because of his enthusiasm for, and his interest in, public education.

Peers immediately began the work with zeal. It was an opportunity to further the cause for which he was working. Woods was fully in sympathy with the work, but his duties as president of the university prevented him from making a very great contribution. Since the greater part of the work was to be left to Peers, he at once began the systematic organization of any material that would have bearing on the building of a public school system. However, he still had his private school which could not be neglected.

In June, 1829 he moved his school into Lexington again and opened it under the name of Mechanics Institute.16 Here he began the development of a school that rivaled if not surpassed, for a short time, Transylvania in influence. Here too he began

15Collins, op. cit.
16Lewis, op. cit., p. 68; also Lexington Literary Journal, September, 1829, p. 323.
his fight in earnest for popular education. In a lecture before his school on June 20, 1829 he said:

"Our best interest as well as our safety, therefore, impel us to aim at universal diffusion of knowledge among the people. As a nation we have embarked in the novel and perilous enterprise of attempting to govern ourselves. The eyes of the civilized world are upon us. With a wise and virtuous population all is safe, but national shipwreck must be the inevitable consequence of popular ignorance."

He began a practice in his Mechanics Institute which was almost identical with that used by some of our leading colleges and universities of today. He introduced lecture courses in which outstanding and learned men of the state were invited to deliver series of lectures before the student body. In this school Peers also gave special attention to the training of young teachers.

In October, 1829 Peers decided that if the report which he had been commissioned to make to the legislature was to be productive it must be convincing; and in order to be convincing, it must have something definite to offer. The only direction that he could turn for help was east and north. In order to make a thorough study of the school systems of the New England and other Eastern and Northern States, he decided to close his school and go there that he might study them. He left Kentucky.

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in October, 1829 and spent three months observing school systems and interviewing educators. Although he tried to study every school that offered any possibility of aid to a Kentucky system, he felt that the schools of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York were the best, and it was in those states that he spent the greater part of his time.  

While on this trip, he had an opportunity to make a close study of the Kingsley School of Troy, New York, which later influenced him greatly in his educational work. When he felt that he had become thoroughly acquainted with the better school systems, he returned to Kentucky and began the formulation of his report to the legislature.

Soon after Peers returned from the East, a meeting was held in Frankfort by some of the most outstanding citizens of the state, for the purpose of studying a public education programme. Peers attended this meeting, and in an address he gave them whatever information he had gathered on his tour of the eastern and northern states. He especially stressed the need of Kentucky for some form of public education. Those who had gathered in Frankfort were so impressed by Peers' findings that, before adjourning, they formed a society whose object should be the furtherance of popular education. This was indeed gratifying to Peers, for he saw in the formation of this society a means for shaping public sentiment for public education.

20 Kentucky Gazette, January 8, 1830.
21 Commentator, December 29, 1829.
By January, 1830 Peers had completed his report. How he could have covered so much territory and could have made such a complete study of the school systems visited is almost inconceivable. The report as given to the legislature was divided into two parts. The first was a report of the legislative committee, prompted by Peers' findings; and the latter consisted of Peers' findings and recommendations.

The committee's report first accepted Peers' report and commended it to the legislature. They then commented on the Auditor's report on educational conditions and deplored the lack of educational opportunities:

"To the patriot, it is melancholy to reflect, that so large a portion of the rising generation is without means of instruction, while the vast multiplication of books, their cheapness, and the constant and progressive improvement in teaching, have brought the intellectual treasures of every science almost within the grasp of universal attainment." 22

A proposal was made that, since Louisville was so far ahead of the rest of the state in education, the state be divided into districts similar to Louisville and these districts allowed to tax themselves for at least a part of the schools' expenses. This tax was to be supplemented by the patrons. A general tax for school purposes, however, was insisted upon, for they said:

"In a land of freemen, it is the interest of every man that there should be a universal diffusion of knowledge, and all should therefore pay something in order to produce so desirable a result. The man who has no children to...

educate, has no more right to complain of the payment of taxes to educate the children of others, than he who has never had any law suits would have to complain of taxes to support courts of justice. When taxes are imposed on all, those who have children will be urged by the payment of a small sum, to pay something more and send them to school to reap the reward of what they pay; and the cost of education will be lessened and brought within the reach of the poorest man of the community, by what will be paid by those who have no children, and by the greater amount collected from the rich.\textsuperscript{23}

The possibility of using the income from the Literary Fund to further public education was discussed, but due to its size it was considered too small to be of material help to the public schools. It was suggested, however, that wherever a community was interested enough to put up half of the purchase price a part of the Literary Fund income might be used to buy equipment for the county seminaries. It was further suggested that a part of that fund be loaned to Transylvania for building purposes. This was because Transylvania had just been visited by disastrous fire, and too, because it was considered a state institution.

Peers knew that one of the first questions that would be asked when his recommendations came before the legislature would be: \textit{What will a public school system for the state cost, and how will the money be raised?} He therefore made a minute study of school costs in all of the states that he visited. Three states seemed to furnish examples of the methods pursued by all the states, and for this reason he confined his report almost

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 5.
exclusively to the three states formerly mentioned.

Connecticut derived the support for her public schools exclusively from a fund. This fund amounted to $1,882,261.68 in 1829 and was invested in bonds and mortgages, bank stock, real estate, farming utensils and stock, and wild lands. The expense of administering the fund was $3,603.85; the dividends to the schools were $72,164.15 as a per capita distribution of 85 cents.24 The number of children enumerated were 84,889, the number of teachers 1,580, and the average number of pupils in each school 45. The Connecticut school fund had been created by the sale of lands in Ohio. This state had had a public school system since 1655 with revisions in 1677, 1690, 1700, and 1795. Until 1795 a general property tax had been levied and distributed to those communities that added enough to it to support the schools for the time prescribed by law. Under this scheme a school had been brought to every man's door, and it was said that the native of mature age who was unable to read the English language was looked upon as a prodigy. Peers' research in Connecticut showed that "Nothing had been gained as to time by the operation of the fund, nor the qualification of the instructors increased, or the branches of instruction multiplied through its influence."25 He further observed that the only apparent benefit was a relief from taxation, and that on the whole the benefit was limited to the pocket. Another condition

24Ibid., p. 13.
25Ibid., p. 16.
that he deplored was that Connecticut in no way fostered higher education.

"So inveterate is the impression that the higher literary institutions operate exclusively in favor of the rich to the prejudice of the poor, that not a cent of their vast fund in Connecticut can be diverted to support them."26

This, Peers argued, should not be the case, for if the state would provide colleges, the poor man would send his sons to them. Otherwise he could not give them the advantage of a college education because of the cost.

New York had a school fund of $1,684,628.80 invested in bonds and mortgages, state loans of 1786, 1792, and 1808, canal stock, and bank stock. In addition to the above fund New York held for school purposes 869,173 acres of unappropriated lands. The income from the state school fund was distributed to the school districts of the state upon the condition that they raise locally an amount equal to that received from the state.27 There were in 1828, 8,609 school districts and 449,113 school children between the ages of 5 and 15.

Massachusetts relied exclusively on taxation for raising money to defray all the expenses of common school education. Peers speaks of Massachusetts' system of finances in this manner:

"As far as I could judge from passing through the state the people generally appeared satisfied with this arrangement, and I could not say it does not procure for

26Loc. cit.

27Ibid., p. 18.
them as great an amount of education, and
of as good a quality as is secured by the
systems either of Conn. or N. Y. But what
is safe for them might be hazardous to
others, who have not been so fortunate in
inheriting the same habit of raising money
by taxation for the support of schools, and
the same public sentiment with regard to the
value of education; and this happy
circumstance, I am confident, is the cause of
their independence of Legislative aid; for
although, on the face of their statute, the
threat of heavy penalty in case of failure
appears to be the motive for taxation, yet
I could never hear (and I enquired repeatedly)
of a single instance in which it had been
enforced. . . . I conclude, therefore, that
where there exists a considerable degree of
apathy in regard to popular education as in
the case with us, Legislative interference,
either by coercion or inducement, is necessary,
and as it is not probable that the people of
Kentucky would not submit to the former,
that the New York system, so far as it relates
to the collection and application of means,
is decidedly the best for us."

Peers, in his report to the legislature, then pointed out that
by raising a very small fund for distribution the state could
induce the districts to raise a local fund to supplement that
received from the state. He further pointed out, in his report
on education, that the state should require the local districts
to meet certain requirements before they could be participants
in the fund.

"The first remark that I shall make on
this subject, is, that in all those states
whose systems I have examined, the only
tendency, if not the aim of legislation, has
been the multiplication of schools. In this
they have succeeded to perfection. I can
scarcely imagine a school to be wanting,
where there is already provided one for every

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28 Ibid., pp. 19-20.
fifty children between the ages of 5 and 15. But generally speaking, it has been a multiplication of bad schools. . . . This is just what might be expected from the excessive economy with which education has been conducted. There is an invariable and obstinate relation between quality and price, in everything above the control of legislation, and as the theory has been, to make education universal, by making it cheap, depreciation has been the unavoidable consequence. . . . The young teacher is sustained and stimulated by no hope of promotion. His salary is not on a par in many cases, with that of the day laborer, but connected with the smallness of his pay, there is this peculiar discouragement; that it is fixed and made permanent, either by law or custom, so that there is but little hope, (a hope enjoyed by every other class of persons) that enterprise and industry will be rewarded by such an increase of his gains, as will enable him to lay by something for the future wants of his family. . . . Under such circumstances, what else could be reasonably be expected, than that the business of education should be conducted by the refuse talents of the community. . . . To corroborate the statements, I appeal to fact, and inquire who are the teachers of the common free schools of New England? In the first place they are in a majority of cases, young, unmarried men, I might almost say youths. Secondly, and consequently they are without experience. Thirdly, their employment is but transient. Teaching is with them but a temporary expedient, a means to some ulterior end. . . .

"The making of a little ready money, and not the improvement of their pupils, is avowedly their object. As the same individuals are rarely engaged two or three winters in the same neighborhood, or in the business anywhere; reputation for teaching is not an object of desire. . . . The next remark I shall make respecting the defects of the New England and New York systems of popular education, is, that without some essential changes, they must defeat the patriotic and cardinal object they have in view, viz. the union of the children of all classes, on terms of perfect quality as to opportunities of intellectual and moral improvement. Indeed they are already, in some cases, particularly in Connecticut, producing that
very discrimination between rich and poor, which above all things they aim to prevent, and are accelerating the classification of the members of society, according to their wealth.

"The fact of the existence of this tendency, was made known to me by the acknowledgement and complaint of every intelligent gentleman I met with in Connecticut, and the reasons for it are obvious. Education in the free schools, has, in reality, been so much cheapened in more senses than one, that all those who can help themselves, will not accept of it, even as gratuity, and are consequently providing select private schools for their children, in which, by the liberal payment of salaries, they engage men of talents and attainments.

"The only possible way in which this separation of the children of the rich and poor, and the existence of two sets of schools, Plebian and Patrician, can be prevented, is, to make the state schools such as will satisfy the rich, in short, the best that can be had. To accomplish this, it is indispensable that it be made the interest of men of talents, to fit themselves for the business of instruction as a profession.

"Look at the schools of Boston, the pride of the literary capital and the acknowledged models for the Union.

"At the head of these institutions, public and private, you will find gentlemen of the first respectability for talents and acquirements, almost without exception, college graduates; some of whom have even abandoned the profession of medicine and law for that of teaching; and why? The answer is obvious. Because it was their interest.

"Contrast with this the state of things in Connecticut, where about the time of Thanksgiving, the roads will be lined with young cultivators of the soil, who not being able to find in winter employment for their hands, itinerate the country, vending the services of their head to the highest bidder.
and accepting of salaries of from five to twenty dollars a month.

"In the one case, you will find a proud and honorable satisfaction with their schools; in the other, universal complaint....

"Another defect in the systems that we have been considering, is, that they contribute in no degree to produce uniformity in education, by directing the composition or selection and distribution of good school books....

"Having completed the statements I had to offer, respecting the leading features, I shall conclude this report by specifying some of the practical inferences which after much observation, reading and reflection, I think are clearly deducible from the experience of the older states, and may afford assistance in the way of recommendation or admonition, in the attempt to devise a system adapted to the wants and circumstances of our own community.

"1st, In the first place, the experience of those states, whose systems I have examined, recommends very clearly that popular education should be taken under legislative patronage and control. It cannot be denied that in some cases legislative effort has not been crowned with all the success desired; yet it is also true; that the general diffusion of education has never been effected in any age or country except by governmental aid and direction....

"2nd, New England experience would suggest the division of our counties into school districts as absolutely essential.) might not the systematic multiplication of our election precincts, answer this purpose.

"3d, The experience of New York and Connecticut united, strongly dissuade from the attempt to create an immense fund.) Vermont and New Jersey, for many years, aimed at this, but they have both abandoned the idea, having discovered that they were providing for a future generation, to the neglect of the present....

"4th, The fourth inference deducible from eastern experience on the subject of common
schools, (is that nothing whatever can be achieved by legislation unless the people be previously or simultaneously interested).

"It is to public sentiment, much more than to her legislatures, that New England is indebted for her signal attention to education. That public sentiment, the present generation has inherited. It has started and cherished by the religion of the Pilgrims. We shall have to create it for ourselves, and I would respectfully submit it, whether it is not one of the finest things to which legislative effort should be directed. Without its aid, legislation is altogether powerless. What can a republican government accomplish, without hearty concurrence of the people. . . .

"5th, There is no suggestion of New England and New York experience, which comes to us more strongly recommended, than that the efforts of a state to multiply, be accompanied by efforts to improve its schools. I have shown that they have erred in this respect, and therefore, the only question for us to settle, is, whether we will be convinced from their or our own experience. . . . The favorite measure for accomplishing this, is the one repeatedly urged upon the New York Legislature, that is, the establishment of schools for the education of teachers, and the erection of the business of instruction into a fourth profession. . . . The vocation of a teacher, in its influence on the destinies of the rising and all future generations, has either not been fully understood or not duly estimated. . . . I therefore recommend a seminary for the education of teachers, for whatever is done to elevate the character of teachers, elevates at the same time and in the same degree, the character of the schools they teach, and enlarges and strengthens their influence on the community. And whatever is done or suffered to lower the character of the teacher, must sink at the same time and at the same degree, the character of the school, and destroy or prevent their influence upon society. . . .

"The Connecticut committee, observed that, 'inattention to the character and qualifications
of teachers, will be followed by deplorable consequences.'

"The language of the Massachusetts committee, is not less emphatic: 'It needs at this time, neither arguments nor exhibition of facts, to demonstrate to the legislature, that the free schools of the commonwealth are not such as they ought to be; that they fail most essentially of accomplishing the high objects for which they were established. . . . In a great majority of cases, the cause can be traced to no other than the incompetency of teachers. And in this fact there is nothing mysterious. Can the teachers be otherwise than incompetent, when no pains are taken to instruct them in the business of their profession?'

"The funds of our Legislatures have been liberally and laudibly spent in procuring lectures and libraries, for those to whom the care of our bodies is intrusted; but there is not the Legislature of the Union, which has appropriated a farthing for the elevation and improvement of this neglected, undervalued and depressed profession. May it not be left to Kentucky to distinguish herself by setting a proud example in this particular? Others have suggested the scheme of an institution for this purpose; universal approbation and mature experience advise it; and can it be too much to hope from the wisdom and liberality of our Legislature, or can it be judged officious, to express the hope that it may soon be made the subject of moderate experiment?

"Before leaving this topic, I would just observe, that in any efforts made for the improvement of education, by the improvement of teachers, equity and policy, both appear to require that respect be had to the advantages of existing teachers, as well as of those who are to be created. When we reflect that the number at present employed in Kentucky, is probably not far short of 1000 and that allowing even fifty scholars to the school, our population requires at least 2000; it is obvious that as it would take a long time, even under the most favorable circumstances, to make up the complement of the number needed,
much more to provide substitutes for those engaged, the affording facilities for the self improvement of the latter, would be nearly equivalent to the education of an equal number. If existing teachers could be prevailed upon to organize themselves into a State and neighborhood societies, to meet together and compare their views and experiences, as to modes of teaching, books, &c. and above all patronize a periodical tract, or pamphlet on education, and promote its circulation among their patrons, I cannot but indulge the hope that immense good would be accomplished. . . .

"Among other expedients suggested by experience in New England, for the improvement in education, is a reform in school books. . . .

"In case your honorable body should concur with the opinion, and be disposed to seek and apply the remedy for an evil, in other words, to act where others have paused at recommendations, I think I can demonstrate that success is signally attainable. During my stay in the city of New York, I took particular pains to ascertain the minimum cost of publishing and I found that a small volume of 180 pages, could be afforded on good paper, neatly bound, for less than ten cents. . . .

"Now, supposing a selection were to be made of the best school books used in the eastern states, (and I procured copies of almost all,) that the copyright for this state were purchased, (and if this could not be done at a moderate price, we could make books for ourselves,) and that the capital were advanced for the purchasing the stereotyped plates; a calculation based upon the data above given, will clearly demonstrate, that in consequence of the large editions which would be needed, the best school books might be introduced into every school in the State. . . .

"A sixth practical inference from New England experience, is, that it is impolitic to aim at expensive economy in education. There is nothing more self evident, than that if we would have good education, we must pay
for it. Where a people are able to pay for good instruction, it is better to elevate their taste than lower the price of teaching. . . .

"7th The experience of New England also recommends that nothing be left undone, to make the public elementary schools the very best that can be furnished; for in this way only, can the children of the rich and poor be kept together.

"8th It is strongly recommended by the experience of the eastern states that local interest and neighborhood effort, be relied on as much as possible, in procuring and expending funds, and superintending the interests of the schools."29

At the conclusion of his report Peers gave several extracts from letters that he had received from the East after his return. He had interviewed many men, some of whom he asked to give their criticisms of the existing systems in their respective states. All of these letters in one way or another confirmed Peers' findings and recommendations.30 The press of the state was impressed by the report and gave it favorable comment. The Lexington Reporter of April 7, 1830 said: "The information contained in this report cannot be too highly valued, nor the zeal and benevolence of Mr. Peers in collecting it too much commended." Peers' report to the legislature represented more work than possibly has ever been done by one man on a report of that type. Although he spent little more than three months in the collection of his material, he had done his work thoroughly.

29 Ibid., pp. 22-44.
30 Ibid., pp. 45-52.
How he covered the territory in so short a period is a puzzle, but he was an untiring worker. He visited schools, studied their methods of teaching, and examined their text books. Their method of finance and control was given special attention, and he sought criticisms from many of the most outstanding men of the country. After he had finished his report, he felt satisfied with its findings and recommendations; but he felt that the Auditor's report on schools and school children of 1829 was incomplete. Since he believed that this was information that would be greatly needed before a public school system could be established in the state, he took upon himself the task of making such a report. The result was his gathering together information that most people would have considered impossible of procuring. In gathering the information for this report, he left out nothing that he thought might be of help to the state in establishing her school system. The table when completed was submitted with the following letter:

"Lexington, Dec. 21, 1831

Dear Sir;

Enclosed I send you a statistical table exhibiting a more minute, various and I believe, accurate account of the condition of common school education in Kentucky than is possessed by any state in the Union respecting its own schools. For the return from which this table was made out, I am indebted to Gen. McCalla, who was kind enough to send out the circulars I gave him to all the agents whom he had appointed for taking the last census, with his personal request that they would attend to obtaining the information which the form requested. I send these statistics to you, hoping that from the deep interest which I know you feel in the great subject with which they are connected, you will transmit the same to the legislature in such a manner as will call their attention
to them and perhaps secure their publication.

"May I be allowed the liberty of suggesting an arrangement you may have it in your power to have made, by which the value of this expose would be very much enhanced. It is this: Along with the returns alluded to I obtained the names and post office of every school master in the state which would enable me to send out a circular to every school in every quarter of this community, and ascertain in a manner which precludes the possibility of a mistake, the exact condition of each as to the number of scholars, price of tuition, school house, books used and a rarity of other particulars which it was impossible for the census agents to embrace in their returns.

"Now if you see proper to obtain the appointment of a Board of Education, composed of persons living in different parts of the State, who shall be desired to collect all the information in their power respecting the condition of Education and communicate the same to the next legislature, and will have me appointed chairman or secretary of that board, so that all the intelligence obtained may be collected in our point, I will most cheerfully devote a larger portion of my time during the coming year to carrying on a correspondence on this subject without any other remuneration than, the defraying the expense of the correspondence. And even this condition I would withdraw if it should throw any impediment in the way. My only reason for inserting it at all is that I have already spent so much money in this cause (between $1000.00 and $1500.00) that unless it be necessary in order to prosecute an investigation which I am determined to carry through; prudence would dictate that for the present at least I should be more moderate in my expenditures. I beg, however, that the consideration be not suffered to throw the cost impediment in the way of having the arrangement made should you approve it, and think proper to solicit it of the legislature.

I am, very respt.,
Yr. obt. servt.,
B. O. Peers."31

Gov. Metcalfe

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"The melancholy picture which this table exhibits of the condition of Education in our State, makes it an important inquiry, whether the returns from which it was made out can be relied on as correct? There are three reasons which make it appear but too certain that they may. 1st. - They were obtained by perhaps the fairest of all methods for procuring Statistical information. 2. - The table possesses internal evidence of its correctness which of itself is irresistible, and which any one may perceive by taking the trouble to compare our county with another. On doing so, he will observe that the relative supply of schools is in a remarkable degree, accordant with the relative situation, circumstances and population of the different counties. As the returns were made in every instance by different men, amounting in all to upmost of a hundred, this coincidence can be accounted for only on the supposition that the table is correct."32

In 1831 the Louisville Lyceum offered a prize of $100.00 to the person presenting the best treatise on education and asked Governor Metcalfe to appoint the judges. Peers entered the contest, and even though he competed with outstanding people from all sections of the country, he was awarded the prize.33

In January, 1830 Peers announced in the Lexington papers that he would again open his school. His report to the legislature had been completed and submitted, and he was again ready to resume his school work. This time he opened his school under the name of Eclectic Institute,34 and he began the most brilliant period of his school career. He stated,

32Loc. cit.
33Loc. cit.
34Kentucky Gazette, January 8, 1830.
"The main purpose of his school would be to ascertain in what manner the powers of the mind might be most favorably developed and what kind of knowledge would be of greatest use." 35

He sensed the value of equipment in a school and placed the most modern that could be obtained at the disposal of his pupils. His library, consisting of newspapers, periodicals, and books, was second to none west of the Alleghenies, and his laboratory was ample for the teaching of any of the sciences. 36 Probably his success lay in his ability to choose his teachers. While he was in New York, he had met Henry H. Eaton, the son of the president of the Rensselear School at Troy, New York. He was impressed with young Eaton's ability and brought him to Lexington in 1830 to teach in Eclectic Institute. Eaton later became a science teacher in Transylvania, where he was credited with being one of the greatest science teachers of his time. 37 H. A. Griswold, who was at one time president of the Bank of Kentucky, started his career as a teacher in Peers' school. Dr. Robert Peter, who was one of the most distinguished chemistry teachers that Kentucky ever had, was also brought to Kentucky by Peers.

Peers' journey through the East had convinced him that before the state could have good schools it must have qualified

35 Prospectus of Eclectic Institute, Lexington, Kentucky, 1830.

36 Reporter, June 22, 1831.

37 Charles W. Short, Memoir on H. H. Eaton, Delivered before a Medical Class of Transylvania University, November 10, 1832.
teachers. When he opened his school in 1830, he announced that he would take free of cost five young men who were interested in improving or preparing themselves for teaching. He stated further that he would include in his course of study "subjects on school keeping."

Eclectic Institute grew rapidly, and by 1832 it had become one of the most outstanding schools of the West. Its student body represented five states, and it had an enrollment of near 100. Peers introduced an idea into his school, which at the time was considered rather revolutionary; but which was later accepted as fundamentally correct. That idea was: That all truths were simple and when properly presented were easily comprehended.

Although Eclectic Institute had become a school of outstanding importance and demanded most of Peers' time, he did not lose interest in public education. In October, 1832, he traveled over the state delivering lectures at Danville, Lancaster, Harrodsburg, Nicholasville, and other places on popular education. When he returned to Lexington, he saw new possibilities in an educational field if he could bring about the union of Transylvania University and Eclectic Institute.

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38 Kentucky Gazette, January 8, 1830.
39 Lewis, op. cit., p. 68.
40 Prospectus of Eclectic Institute, 1831.
41 Short, op. cit.
42 Collins, op. cit., I, 38.
Since the founding of the latter the two schools had been closely associated. Transylvania, however, had gradually lost prestige since Holley's resignation, and Eclectic Institute had gained national recognition. In October, 1832 Peers proposed to Transylvania's board the union of the two institutions. They were to be conducted on the true university plan, with Eclectic Institute remaining a separate and distinct college. The latter was to be more or less a laboratory, "where the education of youth and the cultivation of the mind with an eye to qualify them for the business of human life in all its avocations." Transylvania declined the invitation on the grounds that Eclectic could not be carried on as a separate school since Transylvania was a public enterprise. Transylvania must have seen that something must be done if she were to remain in the educational field; so on December 29, 1832 Peers was elected proctor of Morrison College and acting president of Transylvania. He debated the wisdom of accepting this new position, and his friends advised against it; but on March 11, 1833 he wrote the board accepting the appointment. This was, without a doubt, a great mistake for Peers. Transylvania had gradually lost standing since Holley had left; yet Holley had

43 *Transylvania Manucripts*, 1833-U-69.
44 *Transylvania Minutes*, November 1832, p. 189.
45 *bid.*, December 29, 1832, p. 201; also Letter of Dr. Robert Peter in the possession of Lies Johannah Peter, Lexington, Kentucky.
46 *Transylvania Minutes*, March 11, 1833, p. 23.
been forced to leave on account of his liberality. The board wanted the university brought back to its standing of Holley's time, but they were unwilling to relinquish the responsibility that had naturally fallen to them in the absence of a leader. Under conditions of this type Peers and the board were bound to clash. He was constantly reaching out to grasp every new idea; they were looking backward to the glory of Holley's days. Peers was seeking some means of making education a possibility for every child in Kentucky. Transylvania's board was seeking some means of again making Transylvania the literary center of the West.

Early in 1833, Peers with some of the most outstanding men of the state, including Governor John Breaux, James T. Morehead, John C. Young, Henry B. Bascom, Thomas Marshall, and Daniel Breck met in Frankfort and formed the Kentucky Common School Society. The organization of this society was in reality a culmination of the interest that had been aroused by the meeting at Frankfort in 1830.

The prestige that Peers had gained for Eclectic Institute must have been of value to Transylvania for in the fall of 1833 the college had again reached the large attendance that she formerly had. There were enrolled in the college 260 students from fifteen states, mostly of the Southwest; and Transylvania had another distinguished faculty.

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When Peers became president, Morrison College was under construction. At the opening of the fall term in 1833 the board asked the president to give them a report on the condition of the school.48 This report was so favorable concerning the general condition and outlook for the university and showed Morrison College to be so near to completion that Peers was asked to submit plans for the dedication of Morrison College and the installation of the faculty.

Peers seized this opportunity to plan for a great educational convention. He submitted the following programme: On Monday, November 4 there was to be a city procession and the inauguration of the faculty, with an address by the president; on Tuesday, addresses by Judge Turner and Henry Clay Jr.; on Wednesday, a convention of teachers to be addressed by Professor Caldwell and the Reverend Dr. Beecher of Cincinnati; and on Thursday, a general education convention to be composed of delegates from the various counties of the State.49 The board accepted Peers recommendation,50 and he at once began preparation for the celebration. That he wished to center the whole program around the question of public education was brought out in the newspaper publicity. October 23 he stated in the Lexington Intelligencer that he hoped to make the convention a forum for the discussion of the following

48Transylvania Minutes, p. 287.
49Transylvania Manuscript, 1833-U-31.
50Transylvania Minutes, p. 295.
questions:

1. Is it not desirable and practicable to establish somewhere in the state, a college for educating teachers?
2. Is it not expedient to establish throughout the state an organized system of societies to promote the interests of general education?
3. Is it desirable for the legislature to direct the county courts to divide each county into school districts and to authorize the voters in each to impose an advalorem tax on the property of the district, that shall be adequate to the support of a teacher?
4. Will it not be advisable for the convention to meet in Frankfort during the meeting of the legislature?
5. Should teachers be required to obtain license before being permitted to teach? (as lawyers)
6. How can the educational standards of colleges be raised?”

When Peers delivered his address at the dedication of Morrison College, it clearly reflected his interest in public education.

“Let us establish in connection with Transylvania a department for educating teachers, and let us proffer its advantages to all who aspire after respectable qualifications for this most important office; let us try to make it the interest of those already engaged in the arduous work of instruction, annually to assemble within her walls for the purpose of mutual improvement, and to avail themselves of the advantages of such lectures and on such subjects as they themselves shall desire; and finally let us found an intelligence office, through which neighborhoods, whither remote or near, may communicate with teachers in search of employment, thus endeavoring to promote our own interest by the sure and unexceptionable

51Lexington Intelligencer, October 23, 1833.
method of taking pains to promote the interest of others." 52

His address further showed that complaints against schools of his day were not different from those of the present.

"I want the reproach no longer to be heard, that college graduates are not qualified to perform the office of store boys, nor to do ordinary marketing of their fathers' families, without studying anew the very elements of arithmetic... Never, never may my ears be grated with the painful declaration, that one of our graduates had received so little practice in composition, as actually to be unable to write an ordinary note or letter, without bad spelling, and with not much better sense." 53

People from all sections of the state gathered in Lexington. There were representatives from Bourbon, Clarke, Fayette, Jefferson, Franklin, Green, Garrard, Hardin, Henry, Jessamine, Madison, Mercer, Montgomery, Scott, Shelby, Todd, Wayne, Woodford, and Warren Counties. 54

All of the people who came from a distance to Lexington on this occasion were either teachers or people interested in education. Peers had carefully prepared for the four days. He had printed copies of his legislative report, which he distributed to the delegates. He pictured the deplorable condition of public education in the state and verified the criticism with his statistical table. Dr. Lyman Beecher had


53. Ibid., p. 28.

54. Lexington Intelligencer, November 8, 1833.
been chosen by Peers because of his power as a speaker, and because of his interest in the public school movement. Dr. Beecher's speech seemed to climax the whole program and aroused the people to the need of schools. The Lexington Intelligencer commented on Dr. Beecher's address thus:

"We are certain that the vast importance of a more efficient and perfect system of Common Schools was never more forcibly illustrated and brought home to the feelings and interest of an audience. We sincerely hope that the laudable excitement which at present exists on the subject of education throughout our state, may not be suffered to subside until such steps are taken as shall insure a general diffusion of knowledge throughout our borders.\(^{55}\)

The fruition of Peers' cherished hope for a common school system seemed imminent. Public interest was thoroughly aroused, and the teachers of the elementary schools were interested; yet this very interest and enthusiasm acted as a boomerang to Peers.

A jealousy had grown between the university and the common schools,\(^{56}\) which at this point manifested itself. Since coming to the presidency, Peers had constantly advocated the establishment of a normal school at Transylvania.\(^{57}\) This normal school was to be at the head of a great state educational system, and its primary purpose was to be the training of teachers. The advocacy of such a policy was bound to bring

\(^{55}\) Loc. cit.

\(^{56}\) Kerr, op. cit., II, 761.

\(^{57}\) Lewis, op. cit., p. 68; also Transylvania Manuscript, 1833-U-66.
about discord with the board, because there existed at that day a very distinct feeling among the colleges that public schools could be established only at the expense of the colleges.

Soon after the dedication of Morrison College Peers recommended the purchase of suitable furniture for the professors' rooms, modern equipment for the library, and new laboratory equipment especially suited for the study of state botany, mineralogy, and geology. He further requested that the keys to the college be turned over to him if the board expected him to be responsible for the building and its equipment. Peers' recommendations, if they had been carried out, would have placed Transylvania on a level with any of the Eastern colleges; but they called for the expenditure of several thousand dollars, and Transylvania's board was already under a financial strain. Peers' recommendations were only followed in part, but he was informed that the keys would be turned over to him at once.

The language of the board's reply to Peers, although courteous, showed that their relations were becoming more strained. The open break came on December 28, 1833.

Peers' recommendation in the election of a Professor of Languages had been ignored, but he had tried to avoid strife by letting the matter pass without comment. When the board informed

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58 Transylvania Manuscript, 1833-U-66.
59 loc. cit.
60 Transylvania Minutes, p. 317.
61 Ibid., p. 302.
him, however, that he would be held responsible for oversight of the Preparatory School, and then, not only refused to elect as its principal a man whom he recommended, but elected instead a man whom he was opposed to, Peers protested. He stated that he would not be held responsible for a department in the appointment of whose head he had no part. He alleged:

"I am bored out in it by (reason and common sense) what is obviously reasonable; by a due regard to the genuine policy of the university; by precedents established by your Board; by the uniform example of our best colleges of the East; and by the universal sentiment of those most conversant with the management of literary institutions."63

In their reply to Peers' protest the board made it clear that they would brook no advice from him on the conduct of the university. Although Peers might have been a little tactless in his dealing with the board, the policies that he contended for are recognized today as educationally sound.

On February 8, 1834, the board appointed a committee to investigate the conduct of Peers. The board did not notify Peers of its action, and he got the information only from public rumor. Immediately upon hearing of the board's action, he addressed a letter to them asking for a public trial.66 The

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63 *Loc. cit.*
64 *Transylvania Minutes*, p. 312.
66 *Transylvania Manuscript*, 1833-U-3.
board ignored all of Peers' communications, and refused to let him plead his case. The only report that the committee, appointed to investigate the conduct of Peers ever gave was that "They have not felt bound to investigate the conduct of the acting president." With the attitude that the board had reconciliation was impossible, and in February, 1834, they dismissed Peers.

He again, unsuccessfully, tried to get an audience with the board, and, failing in this, he replied to their action in the Lexington Intelligencer. The board made no reply and on May 27, 1834 elected John C. Young president of Transylvania.

His dismissal from Transylvania seemed to lessen Peers' faith in his cherished public education programme. He did not abandon the cause of the public schools, but from that time forward his best efforts were exerted in another field. He remained in Lexington until the close of his school term in 1834 and then moved to Louisville.

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67Ibid., 1834-U-3.
68Kerr, op. cit., II, 1058.
69Transylvania Manuscript, 1833-U-60.
70Lexington Intelligencer, March 21, 1834.
71Ibid., May 27, 1834.
CHAPTER III
LATER LIFE

From 1826, the time of his graduation from the seminary, to 1834 Peers had given the greater part of his time to education. Yet he had not abandoned his church. In 1829 the Episcopal Church held its primary convention in Lexington, and Peers acted as its secretary.1 He had been an active worker in the church in Lexington and was especially interested in the Sunday School.

That he was genuinely interested in the welfare of the Episcopal Church was demonstrated by the establishment of a seminary under the auspices of the church at Transylvania during his term as president.2 The seminary was a separate institution conducted in its own buildings under the auspices of the Episcopal Church.3 It was soon discontinued, doubtless because of the small number of Episcopal communicants living in Kentucky at the time, and because there were already seminaries established in neighboring states that were taking care of all the needs of the church.

Probably the thing that influenced Peers most in accepting the presidency of Transylvania was the belief that from such a position he could bring to successful issue some of his cherished

1Collins, op. cit., 1, 439.
3Episcopal Seminary leaflet in the possession of Miss Mary O. Gray, Louisville, Kentucky.
plans for public education. His efforts, however, had been so disappointing that when he reached Louisville in 1834, he decided that he would attempt to accomplish his purpose from another direction. Transylvania was considered a state institution, and it gathered its student body from all classes and all creeds. Peers decided that he would go back to the private school and his own church. By narrowing his field he would reach fewer individuals, but he could more thoroughly indoctrinate them with his educational plans. In this way he hoped to build a solid foundation for a future educational program.

As soon as he had settled with his family in Louisville, he opened a select school for boys. Although he continued his school for the four years that he remained in Louisville, it did not attain the fame of either his Mechanics, or Eclectic Institute in Lexington. This was possibly caused by the fact that he did not devote as much time to his school in Louisville as he had given those in Lexington; and too, the severe panic that swept Louisville in 1836 and 1837 would naturally have had a bad affect on its growth.

Peers, in addition to his school work, became an active church worker in Louisville. In 1834 he was given charge of the Sunday School work of Christ Church. After that time Peers

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4 Craik, op. cit., p. 61.
5 Loc. cit.; also Louisville Directory for 1836 and 1838 (Louisville, G. Collins, J. E. Marshall printer).
6 Craik, op. cit., p. 62.
gradually gave increasingly of his time to religious education. His work in Christ Church was richly rewarded, for by 1835 the Sunday School had become so large and the membership of the church had grown until the organization of a new parish was necessary. He was given complete charge of the formation of this new parish in 1835, and later in the year when he had succeeded in organizing St. Paul's Church, he was elected its first rector. His services to the church had been so outstanding that in 1838 he was invested with priest's orders by Bishop Kemper.

In the same year his book entitled American Education was published. In 1837 he went to New York to attempt to interest the publishers in this work, but due to the panic that gripped the country at that time, they were not accepting anything for publication. Peers had decided to abandon the attempt to get his book published and to return to Louisville. He remained in New York over Sunday, and being a devout Christian, he sought a place of worship. He decided upon the first Episcopal Church that he found and entered to take part in the services. The rector of the church was the Reverend Benjamin J. Haight, who had as the theme of his sermon Christian education. Peers was so inspired by the sermon that he remained after the service to express his gratitude to the minister. When Haight found that

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7 Loc. cit.; also L. A. Williams, History of Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties (Cleveland, L. A. Williams, 1882), 1, 277.

8 Letter in the possession of Miss Mary O. Gray, Louisville Kentucky.
Peers was a stranger in New York, he invited him to his home for dinner. There Peers told of his purpose in coming to New York and of his disappointment at not getting his book published. Haight became interested in the book and asked to read it. He was so impressed with the value of the work, that it was through his influence that the book was published. It never had a wide circulation, but it was rich in educational theories that are today accepted by all school authorities.

In 1838 the success that Peers had had in the Sunday School and the ability which he had demonstrated in the organization of St. Paul's Church brought him national recognition within the Episcopal Church. He was called to New York as editor of the Journal of Christian Education, the official organ of the Episcopal Church, and to take complete charge of the educational interests of the Episcopal Church in America. Peers' new duties called for an unusual amount of work. The editing of the Journal of Christian Education was, within itself, a task that called for careful preparation and a great amount of work. It was a monthly publication that had a wide circulation and covered all the activities of the church. As educational director he was as much responsible for the publication of all Sunday School literature for the church or for any other material of an educational nature. Either of the responsibilities

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9 Loc. cit.

above mentioned was enough to keep one man busy, but Peers was a willing worker and never tired of a task which interested him. His love for the teaching profession soon became known in New York, and he was given charge of the parochial school of All Saints Church. The last responsibility, even though it was an added burden to Peers' already heavy load, was a welcome one. Teaching still held for him a fascination, and he did not wish to lose contact with the school.

In 1838 the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church requested Peers "to make such a Report to the next General Convention as may aid them in adopting the best measures for the promotion of Christian Education." The general convention felt a need for a better educational program within the church. Peers was among the best qualified within the church to make recommendations for two reasons: He had made a close study of education for several years and had had varied experiences in the teaching field; the knowledge that he had gained in making the educational report to the Kentucky legislature eminently qualified him for making such a report as the convention desired.

Peers immediately began to prepare to make such a report to the convention as would enable it to know the needs of the church from an educational standpoint. In order that he might be familiar with the needs of the church, he made a thorough

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11Minutes of the Vestry of All Saints Church, New York, September 20, 1842.

12Journal of Christian Education, November and December, 1841.
study of the rubrics of the church, the Prayer-Book, the educational agencies, and the Bible. Since his other duties demanded so much of his time, Peers was three years in preparing the report. In October, 1841 the report was submitted to the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church then in session in New York, and it was published in the November and December issue of the Journal of Christian Education. The following extracts from the report demonstrate its profoundness:

"Your Committee recognizes the natural, and we may say, the Divine right of every child to receive a certain degree of education. ... The church, although she undertakes to educate all without exception, avoids the absurd idea of educating all to the same extent. ... She fixes a minimum, but not a maximum. ...

"Education then, we may say without presumption, we use in the only full and proper sense of the term, as including not merely instruction, and primary religious instruction, but the formation of habits. Perhaps no word, so frequently heard, has, in modern times been used with less perception of its import and extent than that of education. In the sense in which it is usually taken, it signified instruction in letters, in human science, and various accomplishments of the mind and body. ... Education, in its largest sense, as it is enjoined in the word of God, is the training up of a child; so that education includes the whole process by which a human being is formed to be what he is, in principles and habits, and cultivation of every kind."

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14Ibid., p. 321.
15Ibid., pp. l-1xxviii.
Among the recommendations at the close of the report are the following:

"The first in importance as well as order, is to create an intelligent and hearty church sentiment and feeling on the subject. . . .

"The next measure in point of importance, is the immediate provision for the professional education of Teachers. . . . The professional character and qualifications of schoolmasters must be raised before there can be any material improvement in education, and to effect this object the general sentiment and experience of the Christian world have declared the establishment of Normal or Training schools to be indispensable. . . . Without the establishment of Normal schools, the multiplication of parish schools to any great extent will be impossible. . . .

"If the proper educational attention to baptized children form so large and serious a part of ministerial duty as has been represented, should it not be added to the list of subjects embraced in our course of theological studies? The duties of a Professor of Pastoral Theology certainly, are not fulfilled, if his classes are not informed how they may execute that most touching part of the Master's instructions, 'Feed my lambs.'"16

In 1841 Peers' health began to give way under the severe strain of so much work. He had never been strong physically, nor was he of robust health. Doctors and friends advised him to give up some of his duties, but he had started work on the report mentioned above and refused to stop until it was completed. Before the report had been completed in October, 1841, his health was so depleted that he himself became alarmed. In December he

16Ibid., pp. lxxxix-lxxx.
contracted pneumonia and was almost totally incapacitated. In order that he might regain his health, Peers was given a leave of absence in January, 1842.\textsuperscript{17} He left New York for the South, hoping that the warmer climate might help him. He stopped for a short while in Mobile, Alabama and went from there to Cuba.\textsuperscript{18} Peers' sickness had so weakened him that he contracted tuberculosis. He soon realized that he would not recover.

Peers sailed for New Orleans in the spring and from there traveled to Louisville by way of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. He did not live long after reaching Louisville and died August 20, 1842.\textsuperscript{19} Few people have crowded so much work into such a short life as did Benjamin Orr Peers.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., January, 1842.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., February, 1842.

\textsuperscript{19}Collins, op. cit., I, 442.
At the close of his life in 1842, Benjamin Orr Peers probably felt that the better years of his life had been spent in a vain effort to advance the cause of public education in Kentucky. The recommendations that he had made in his report to the legislature had not been followed, and his proposals at Transylvania had been completely ignored. The principles that he had fostered in his private schools at Lexington thrived for a time, but lacking his direction, they languished and apparently died. Peers' experience was that of the average pioneer in that he did not live to see his ideals materialize, but that he was one of Kentucky's greatest pioneers in education, none can deny.

The people of the state had been so busy wresting a living from the wilderness and protecting their homes from the Indians, that little thought could be given to education. A few private schools scattered about the state accommodated the rich and well-to-do, but the poorer people had little opportunity for education. No public school system was in existence in the state, and only Louisville, among the towns, provided any plan for a general education.

Others before Peers had attempted to bring about the establishment of a state wide school system in Kentucky, but their efforts had met with such weak response that they usually became discouraged and gave up the fight. Peers, though many times discouraged, was determined to push with every resource at
his command, the cause to which he had dedicated his life. As a result of this gallant struggle there was, even though he never lived to see it, a definite sentiment for public education—a sentiment that later culminated in our state school system.

That he has been recognized, however, as the founder of our public school system is attested by the following extracts from the writings of outstanding Kentucky historians:

"In active and effective means to promote the cause of this period, none worked more efficiently than did the Rev. B. O. Peers, whose great services in the cause justly entitle him to be termed the founder of our system of common schools."¹

"He did much to bring about the present common school system of Kentucky."²

"We shall find that he is the virtual founder of the public school system of Kentucky, at least in being the first one who most prominently and successfully agitated the question of its adoption."³

That Peer's educational theories were modern cannot be denied when compared with present day practice, and none of the policies that he tried to introduce are considered out of date at present. In fact, our present educational program in Kentucky contains very few ideas that were not advocated by Peers. When we look backward over the obstacles that have had to be overcome in the building of the present Kentucky school system, we can understand why Peers did not immediately succeed in establishing

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²Ranck, op. cit., p. 54.
³Lewis, op. cit., p. 68.
his educational ideals. He was not only working in the field of
public education, in which few were interested, but he was
projecting educational policies that were far ahead of his time.

A practice that today is considered necessary to project
any program was inaugurated by Peers in education. He was the
first in the state to recognize the necessity of proper
publicity in shaping public opinion before any educational
advancement could be made. He traveled over the state in 1828
and again in 1832, making speeches for the purpose of shaping
public opinion for education; and the educational conventions
held in Frankfort and Lexington in 1833 were called for this
same purpose. He recognized public opinion as being supreme:
"Such is the nature of our government, that public sentiment not
only originates the law, but sometimes becomes superior to it,
rendering it null and void." And, "Is it not expedient to
establish throughout the state an organized system of societies to
promote the interests of general education."6

Peers recognized that many factors were necessary for the
conduct of a successful school, but he was in agreement with
modern educational authorities in that he believed that the
teacher was of greatest importance.

"A school is what its director is. If
he is a man of ability, he will turn the
poorest and humblest element to account; if

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4Report of the Committee on Education, p. 32.
6Lexington Intelligencer, October 23, 1833.
he is incapable, the best and most prolific, will remain sterile in his hands. . . . The character of the schools, depend almost solely on the teacher."7

"The vocation of a teacher, in its influence on the destinies of the rising & all future generations, has either not been fully understood or not duly estimated."8

Peers was not an idealist who proposed a theory without offering a plan for its accomplishment. Since the teacher was such an important part of a school, he proposed teacher training.

"We do not send an old shoe to be mended, except it is to a workman, of whose skill we have had ample proof. Yet we commit our children to be educated, to those who know nothing, of the complicated and difficult duties assigned them."9

"Hence, the first, and by far the most important, in the whole series of measures requisite for the establishment of a public school system has been habitually overlooked; I mean the education of teachers."10

Peers recognized the need for training schools for teachers: "I therefore recommend a seminary for the education of teachers."11 Training schools for teachers must be established."12

In connection with these schools for teachers he recommended:

8Report of the Committee on Education, p. 35.
10Ibid., pp. 96-97.
11Report of the Committee on Education, p. 35.
12Peers, op. cit., p. 245.
training schools similar to those maintained by all modern teachers' colleges.

"The schools for teachers must afford them an opportunity to practice the art of teaching and governing, that they may be able to learn the art... They should also be allowed to see teachers of known ability handle their classes."13

Nor did Peers neglect the teacher who was already in the service. He proposed self-improvement through study while teaching and study in college between terms.15

We think of the teacher placement service of our teachers' colleges of today as being new, but Peers recommended such a service for Transylvania.16

He also maintained that before teaching could be made a profession, an adequate salary would have to be paid.17

"It may be said that it will be impractical for the state to help educate teachers with no guarantee of their staying in the profession. This I grant, but better pay for teachers would cause them to stay in the service."18

A few of the other theories that Peers advocated, which are considered modern today, were:

13Rbid., p. 246.
15B. O. Peers, Inaugural Address and Dedication of Morrison College.
16Loc. cit.
18Peers, op. cit., p. 252.
Compulsory education,

"The people have the right to say that every child shall be taught. But suppose a father so lost to a sense of what is due the community in which he dwells, as to refuse to permit his children to be taught the rudiments of a common English Education, has not the state the unquestioned right to take the man's child and put it in school." 19

Minimum education,

"We want for every child in our land ... such an education as will enable him to understand his rights, and appreciate his privilege; as shall inspire him with respect both for himself, and for the laws; shall qualify him for discharging the various duties he owes his God, his country, his neighbor, and himself; in short, such an education as can make him equal to his conditions, both as a private citizen, and as a participator either directly or indirectly in the administration of government." 20

"An essential feature of a system of national education should cause the child to continue at school for seven years." 21

Text books,

"The continual fluctuation in the use of books with which the schools are inundated, subjects the parents to a heavy expense, and prevents that uniformity, without which there can be no classification—a principle highly conducive to success in every grade of instruction." 22

Peers then recommended that the state publish its own text books. 23

19Lexington Intelligencer, November 5, 1833.
21Ibid., p. 92.
23Ibid., p. 40.
Libraries,

"Suppose for example, that a juvenile library were placed in every log school house in the country, . . . what an invaluable auxiliary would be afforded to teachers, and what incalculable influence exerted upon the minds and characters of the children of the community."24

Child-centered school,

"Instead of wearing out his own patience and that of the child by repeated admonitions to sit still let the teacher endeavor to adapt the lesson to the child's age and capacity and consequently to render it sufficiently interesting to arrest the child's attention."25

"Watch development of every faculty of the child, for if one faculty is excessively cultivated at the expense of others, an imperfect character is the inevitable result."26

Physical education,

"The culture of physical powers should not be overlooked. I regard it as a subject by itself. . . . It embraces nursing, diet, clothing, exercise, study, recreation, medical treatment and many others."27

Child labor,

"Neither a parent nor society under any circumstances has a right to put children to work so early, nor to keep them at work so long, as to deny them the necessary time for getting an education."28

Vocational school,

24Ibid., p. 41.
26Ibid., p. 224.
27Feers, op. cit., p. 94.
28Ibid., p. 23.
"Then why not a seminary located in the country on farm land where each young man could put in some time at manual labor to help pay expenses."29

State support of education,

"Education is a social want; its cost therefore, ought to be sustained by society."30

"The burden of supporting general education should be thrown as much as possible, upon the rich. The rich having paid much toward the support of schools will naturally patronize them, and the poor having prospect of a good and cheap education will take advantage of such."31

"The true way to look at the question of ability to educate all the children of a community is to consider, not the means of individuals, but those of society at large. The aggregate property of the community consists the fund for this purpose."32

Influence of education on government,

"The eyes of the civilized world are upon us; with a wise and virtuous population all is safe, but national shipwreck must be the inevitable consequence of popular ignorance."33

"No free country has long been continued free which has been swayed by the iron sceptre of ignorance. . . . Rational, practical liberty, must be founded on the basis of knowledge."34

A casual study of the above theories will convince any

29Ibid., p. 250.
31Ibid., p. 110.
32Ibid., p. 24.
33Lexington Literary Journal, September, 1829.
student of modern educational trends that Peers was a profound thinker, and that he was indisputably right in the principles that he advocated.

Benjamin Orr Peers gave the best part of his life to the cause of popular education. That he has not been recognized along with Horace Mann and Henry Barnard in this field is probably due to the fact that he left very few records telling of his activities; and, too, Mann and Barnard lived and worked in states that had been fostering public education for more than a century and a half.

The writer believes that future histories of education should and will give to Benjamin Orr Peers a place among the great pioneers of American education. The honor is rightfully his, and it is the duty of Kentucky to demand that such recognition be accorded this her worthy son.

Mann and Barnard lived in states which had rich educational heritages that had been built up over a period of two centuries or more. They lived among people who were conscious of the need of universal education. Peers lived in a new state with little demand for public education and among few people who believed in such. Neither Mann nor Barnard became actively interested in educational work until in point of time Peers had already made his greatest and most effective contributions. Mann and Barnard both became interested after they were given positions with their respective state boards of education with salaries that at least insured the necessities of life. Peers not only received no salary, but he was not even reimbursed for
his own money that he spent in working for the state. Mann and Barnard gave abundantly of their services after a cause found then. Peers sought the cause and gave abundantly of his life to it.

The writer would leave the following thoughts: To what can we attribute the remarkable foresight of Peers? Was it a part of the great liberal movement then sweeping the United States, or was it a result of his profound study of and thought on public education? Why, for the last century, have we had to have periodic educational revivals to reestablish these same ideals that Peers worked for and which modern educators accept as practical and sound?
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