

apologized to the Club for overstaying his time, and concluded without reading his own paper. He did, however, state before stepping down that it was a sketch of a seventeenth century Englishman named Thomas Coryate, and that he hoped to present it at some subsequent meeting.

There being no further business, the President ordered the meeting adjourned.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME IN HICKORY

April 10, 2000

David Edmundson

"School days, school days,
Good old golden rule days.
Readin' and writin' and 'rithmetic,
Taught to the tune of a hickory stick."

These lines from a century-old song suggest the power of nostalgia to overlook much that was dismal and distressing in favor of rosier recollections. For most Americans at the last turn of the century, schools were underfunded, violence-prone places managed by ill-prepared, underpaid teachers who were barely able to imagine the changes implied by the industrial age and hadn't much of a clue how to prepare their students to face the new century. When memories of our current educational system have sufficiently faded to qualify for nostalgia, songs will no doubt be sung (or rapped or down-loaded) recalling what a blessed and joyful period this was in the annals of American education - or maybe not.

To some extent what follows will reflect several sorts of truths. Some will be cultural, some anecdotal, and some scientific. For those who feel the term social science is a bit of an oxymoron, let me reassure you. This paper doesn't depend on statistical analysis to get to the punch line, but has just enough

data to supply rhetorical heft whenever the claims it makes seem a little far-fetched. Its concerns are the intersections of education, violence, history, and culture, its form a combination of narrative and what I hope will prove to be thoughtful discussion. And since all papers have to have a beginning, the following sentence will suffice.

At the end of the 19th century, the industrial revolution was more and more dependent on petroleum for energy. The economic structure of oil production was more and more controlled by one man and his company, John D. Rockefeller and Standard Oil. As the Pennsylvania oil fields played out and the search for new reserves led gradually westward, small deposits were discovered in eastern Ohio. With his base in Cleveland, Rockefeller easily absorbed these new fields, but they were clearly not the answer to the long-term supply problem. Foreign oil production looked like the main threat, with major fields in Baku, Russia. Rockefeller needed plentiful crude supplies if Standard Oil was to continue to be a major international player, indeed even to hold on to its dominance of the domestic market. And there was promising news from the western end of Lake Erie.

Huge (by late 19th century standards) reserves of crude were being located in northwest Ohio and northeast Indiana. Geographically convenient to Standard's headquarters, these new fields seemed ideal for Rockefeller's needs except for one problem. The crude contained so much sulfur that no one knew how to refine a kerosene that people would consider using in their lamps - the stuff clogged wicks, smuted chimneys, and smelled so bad it was unmarketable. Because of this drawback, few oilmen were interested in the fields. There was a potential for enormous profit for the man who had two things; a lot of money and the technology to solve the sulfur problem.

Rockefeller had the money and he decided to gamble on the technology. He staked the future of Standard on the solution to the sulfur problem. You don't need to be told that the problem was solved. While German chemist Herman Frasch was working on the refinancing technique, agents for Standard fanned out across the

new oil fields and bought up mineral rights at bargain prices. In due time the pieces of the puzzle fell into place and the oil boom was on.

The boom drew all manner of oil-field workers to what had been rural backwaters. The residents were not all pleased to have these new neighbors. Men who were in the way of supplying the oil fields or families whose lands were deemed valuable to the oil people thought of them as necessary evils. Those who clung to the old ways in their livelihoods (farming) and worship (mostly Quaker) agreed with the evil part but would not admit to the necessary. Because they were Quakers they did not socialize with the newcomers but rather avoided them wherever possible and tolerated them as best they could when circumstances compelled them to interact. And because they were Quakers they were prepared to do business, even if their customers were violent and profane men. You may have heard it said that Quakers will pray for you on Sunday and prey on you the rest of the week.

Besides business there was another arena of interaction. That was education. The Quakers had long ago developed a passion for record-keeping and sharing information. This required literacy. It was not necessarily the mastery of literature in the traditional sense, but rather the literacy of self-discovery and improvement. Quakers did not learn to read and write so that they could keep up on the fashions of fiction, but so they could record their personal development and the state of the local meeting and share those thoughts with Quakers with whom they interacted at quarterly and yearly meetings. Learning to read and especially to write were acts which were intended to enable the spiritual growth of the brotherhood of Friends, and to allow them to regulate the larger Quaker community.

The commitment to literacy also allowed Quakers to prosper in a variety of middle-class undertakings. Frequent correspondence with widely scattered co-religionists kept them apprised of business opportunities and market information which, in that day before the communications revolution, provided advantages in commerce. Even the agriculturalists

profited from information about when and how to sell their produce.

Into this earnest and regulated community came the children of oil-field roustabouts. Survival in the oil fields required an ability to do hard brutal labor and to interact with other hard brutal laborers. Fighting, drinking, and swearing weren't requisite, but considered normal for oil-field workers. Their children must have absorbed some of these habits at home, for when they showed up in the one-room school houses they brought a boom-town attitude with them. They could be controlled, but until you could prove it to them they were independent and resistant to discipline.

Add to these the sons of the local farmers, including eighth graders who were old enough to vote in some states. Frequent absences from school to work with their families in the demanding, physical labor of 19th century farming had made them tough and left them so far behind their sisters that they still hadn't demonstrated enough learning to pass the eighth grade by the time they were 17 or 18 years old. Full-grown youngsters who had been doing a grown man's work for several years were no doubt frustrated by sharing a classroom with six- and seven-year-olds and having to abide the same discipline.

In Jay County, Indiana, a mile or two from the crossroads town of Fiat, and three or four from the new village of Petroleum, stood a typical Indiana country school house. Made of brick, it showed the value the community placed on education and the expectation that brick would be cheaper in the long run to maintain. There was a well and an outhouse on either side at the back. There was a chimney for the wood-stove and an odd little business on the front gable for the school bell. It had been a difficult winter and the schoolmarm had reached a difficult decision. Rather than put up with the intimidating misbehavior of the teenage boys, she had notified the local superintendent that she would not finish the year, and that unless he found a replacement she would begin summer recess in April, which she did.

The boys went home with a sense of triumph and the township superintendent was left with a knotty problem. And his solution was simple and direct. He approached one of his better teachers with this request - "I want you to go over there and get control of that school. And if you have any time left over, try and teach 'em something." The man he approached was a 20 year old descendant of the Quaker pioneers and a graduate of the standard six-week course of normal training provided at the state university in Bloomington. He had been considered a success as schoolmaster in his home district, teaching his cousins and neighbors. Now he was asked to take on the children of roustabouts and wildcatters, children who experienced discipline as violence, both at home and in the schools.

Our young schoolmaster was a fortunate choice for the new assignment. Although Quaker-bred, he and his family had gradually turned away from strict observance of "plain living." His ancestors had come to Indiana as Hicksite Quakers who no longer thee'd and thou'd in their speech and tolerated non-Quakers as neighbors and in-laws more readily than their old-line co-religionists. His mother had taken to reading romantic novels, and named each of her eight living children after one or more characters she had fancied in her reading. Our schoolmaster's name was Clarel Vivien, after Lord-know-what dashing 19th-century novel heroes. He preferred just his initials, and was known as C.V. to most, Clarel to friends and family - no one mentioned Vivien.

He was also considered somewhat worldly because of his trip to St. Louis in 1904 to take in the World's Fair. He had gotten off the train in St. Louis and walked out to the fairgrounds to find enough work to pay for his trip. Hired on the spot, he was handed a shovel and told that he and five other men must dig 25 feet of ditch before the end of the day. C.V. started to say that he could dig that much ditch himself by noon, when one of his co-workers smacked him in the pants with a shovel and told him to shut up if he knew what was good for him. This was, perhaps his first inkling that modern life might mean more differences than the new inventions and fashions he had seen in the catalogues. They finished the ditch in due time - he

said that it was harder trying to goldbrick than actually working - and he headed out to find a room.

After a couple of nights of temporary arrangements he found a street-side room in a boarding house. (He wrote to his mother that the first two nights he had slept in a buggy bed. She wasn't sure whether he had bunked in at a livery stable or if she would have to boil his clothes when he got home.) Conveniently, his room overlooked a trolley stop. Convenient, that is, if all you care about is transportation. Those who remember the Judy Garland song from "Meet Me in St. Louis" will recall just what noise the trolley made. For a farm boy on his first stay away from home the clang, clang, clang must have been startlingly unfamiliar. (He wrote his mother that the first night the trolley came by and clanged him awake every 15 minutes. He wondered what anyone could have to do so late at night. The next night, he said, the trolley seemed to stop about a half hour after he turned in, and from then on it quit running as soon as he went to bed.)

Besides an introduction to turn-of-the-century urban life, he had an opportunity to sample the first hot dogs, see a wild-west show featuring Sitting Bull and the rope tricks of Will Rogers, hear Scott Joplin play the piano, and witness the marvelous invention of moving pictures. When he returned to Indiana and his clothes had been properly boiled, he was much in demand socially. He was usually asked to tell about his experiences and perhaps he got used to the idea of explaining things to people and decided to try his hand at teaching. A short session at the normal school and a vacancy in the nearest school found him in business as an educator.

A year later came the request to take the unruly school and straighten it out. C.V. was big and strong enough to hold his own with the older students. He could have used the traditional bundle of hickory sticks to whip his pupils into line, but he decided to try another way. Maybe he didn't like violence, which would have been in keeping with the pacifism of his heritage. Perhaps he knew that such a victory would only be short-lived and would only invite retaliation

and resistance from the boys. He had a reputation for fairness, so it is possible that he didn't like using his size and strength to intimidate those who were, individually, smaller and weaker than he.

For one or all of these reasons he arrived at school on the first day in September with a different strategy. He rang the bell, called school to order, took attendance, and then paused to look the pupils over. They ranged in age from 6 to 18, with the little ones in front and the girls on one side and the boys on the other. The boys were full of themselves, smirking openly to one another about their last year's triumph and what they were going to do to the new schoolmaster. At this point, C.V. did something unexpected. He announced that the first class would be recess. He told the older girls to take the little ones out to the tree in front and organize a game. The boys he invited out back to learn about the new game of football.

He produced an odd-looking leather object and explained the object of the game was to keep the opposing team from carrying the ball to the goal line by knocking the ball carrier down somehow. This caused the boys to perk up with interest. They divided up and went to opposite ends of the playground. Just to show how things were supposed to go, C.V. offered to be the first ball carrier. There was a definite gleam in the eyes of the bigger boys when they realized what was being proposed. Here was this new teacher offering them the chance to gang up on him and they weren't even going to have to wait until he wasn't looking. He hollered, "Try and stop me!" and ran directly at them. Some he side-stepped, and some he stiff-armed and was soon at the other end of the field without much effort. The boys were embarrassed and a little sore. He turned and asked, "Who wants to play next?" He threw the ball to the biggest boy who was only two or three years younger than he, and whom he knew was the ringleader of the boys who had tormented last year's teacher. "You couldn't stop me because you don't know how to tackle. Let me demonstrate." The boy tried to run past him, and C.V. executed a perfect shoulder-in-the-ribs tackle that lifted him off his feet and laid him on the ground. The boy, surprised, breathless, and in some pain, lost his nerve. C.V. picked up the ball and

turned to the other boys and said, "Who's next?" Viewing their fallen comrade on the ground gasping for air, none volunteered. "In that case, recess is over, let's get back to the school room."

Did the rest of the year proceed smoothly from that moment? No, of course not. No enterprise that involves 20 or 30 human beings proceeds for long without some complication. Later in the year one of the older boys was tormenting a smaller one. C.V. stepped in to break it up and, when his back was turned to attend the smaller boy, the tormentor hit him with a set of brass knuckles. Unfortunately for this student, he didn't knock his teacher out cold. C.V. grabbed the boy and gave him a thorough thrashing. That pretty much ended the need for violence as a part of the lesson plans.

C.V. had followed his superintendent's direction and gotten control of the school, and he then proceeded to "try and teach 'em something." What he taught them was what he had learned himself, what he had become. He was hardly a stern man, generous rather, friendly, and fair. He had an abiding sense that fair meant using his strength and position to keep the stronger from victimizing the weaker and to give all a chance to prosper in a system that valued strength of mind and character over brute power.

The next question is whether this anecdote from a century ago has any useful meaning for those of us concerned about the seemingly intractable problems of public education on the eve of a new century. The odds aren't good. Only the century is new, the problems have been around for a long time. The central problem is the one of violence, and not just the violence of students toward one another and their teachers.

Violence inheres in any system of governance, or as Mao said, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." In a society that preaches the freedom and value of the individual, a public education system run by and for one social class must necessarily do violence to the well-being and self-esteem of the class whose values are not supported. To be more specific, Public Education is the province of the middle-class.

It is shot through with middle-class values and norms. Its goal is to offer the middle-class path to success to all, whether they want it or not. Neatness, punctuality, respect for authority, self-management, self-improvement, delayed gratification, in fact, the entire contents of Poor Richard's Almanac are the basis of the only education the public is willing to pay for. To know that these values are not universally accepted requires only a glance in the direction of any housing project or trailer park, any poor city neighborhood or rural district. Or for that matter, at any of the pop-culture landscape.

But how can anyone argue that these are not good, solid, values whose virtue is proven by two centuries of American experience? Or that our society would be better off if more people embraced them? It isn't that these aren't worthy values. Rather, they aren't the values of a large segment of the population, and no amount of force is sufficient to change this fact without doing unacceptable violence to our belief in the freedom of the individual to decide for him- or her-self what to believe and how to live. This is the violence implicit in public education, the pervasive rejection of the values of some in favor of those built into the system. This clash can be sharp, requiring some students to choose between the values of the system and those of home. Even if it isn't what most of us think about when we think of violence, the pressure to choose against family and for school can be harsh, often leaving those who don't fall in line with a deep sense of alienation and rejection. When we disciplined students by whipping them we taught them to solve problems by hitting something. Now we teach them that in a world dominated by standards they don't understand, they are inadequate. We have removed the hickory stick from the school house and replaced it with other, subtler forms of coercion.

Although most of us don't experience it firsthand, physical violence, "real" violence is an all too common part of many American lives. It shapes the landscape, and provides the nurturing and training of those who live in some parts of our community. This is the experience they bring to school. As a consequence schools are perceived as violent places. The violence

experienced at school resembles and reinforces the violence of the streets and homes. The system is a closed loop and it is the unusual child who escapes it.

I have been speaking of the children of the inner city and the rural districts, of poverty, what we now call disadvantage. Those of the upper and middle classes, of the suburban and private schools, are not part of the problem. These children will receive an adequate education no matter what policies are adopted for public education. Indeed, like the children of the lower classes, they will receive their deepest and longest lasting education at home. These homes represent the standard to which we want all children to aspire. Unfortunately, all children don't live in such homes. The vast majority of children will learn to resemble the people they grow up with.

Each of you will be able to tell the story of one person, or several, of your acquaintance whose lives disprove this last point. These are stories of great accomplishment in spite of humble or tragic beginnings. There have always been examples of great talent and drive which have led to great success, just as there have always been stories of great wealth and promise brought low by misfortune or turpitude. The fact remains that these are exceptions and statistically insignificant with regard to public education. Rhetorically significant they may be, but of relatively little use when it comes to addressing the central educational problem - how can we design schools that will end the cycle of poverty and violence, that will cancel out the disadvantage so many of our public school student begin with?

There is another aspect of this puzzle which has been given too little attention. I have been reading and thinking about it for the past five years, and I am still not sure just how to approach it. That issue is culture. No matter what we say about the American melting pot, a great deal of cultural information has endured with relatively little change since the earliest days of European migration to North America. And in some profound ways this cultural heritage complicates the educational puzzle. While the general sense of what follows must also be true for African,

Asian, and Latin American cultures, I make no claims about these widely diverse groups. I will focus rather on one of the four predominant British cultural groups in America, specifically on the people who became the Appalachians, the Scots-Irish.

The very name Scots-Irish is a bit of a misnomer. Strictly speaking they are neither Scots nor Irish, but rather a mixture of the native Celts with some of every group which has occupied the land along the English-Scottish border, including Roman legions, Saxons, Scandinavians, Irish, and Normans. With the Act of Union in 1706, their skills as warriors were no longer required, the borderlands were cleared of people to make way for sheep, and a mass migration begun which carried the borderers to northern Ireland (the Irish part of the Scots-Irish label), on to Pennsylvania and the back country of the Appalachian mountains, through to Kentucky and Tennessee, on to Missouri and Arkansas, and finally to Texas. In general this was a very successful process. I cite that more of our 42 presidents came from this cultural background than any other, that this culture has produced many exemplary leaders. But many stayed behind in the backwoods pockets, particularly in the Appalachian highlands, for whom progress and worldly success were only rumors. It is these and their descendants who came in such numbers to Ohio whose children make such a large proportion of the public school population. In my school the percentage who claim at least one parent or grandparent from Kentucky is around 90%.

As I have taught at this school for the last eleven years I have noticed a troubling trend. It seemed that the best of my female students got pregnant before they graduated. Despite all that I and the counselors explained to them about the economic hardship implicit in starting families while in high school, year after year a significant percentage of what should have been our best graduates left school, at least for a while, to become parents. I despaired of changing, or even understanding, this tendency.

Several things occurred to shed light on this conundrum. In discussions with the pregnant students and sometimes their parents, I learned that the mothers

of these girls had very often also conceived while in their mid-teens - so, like mother, like daughter. And while reading the richly detailed Albion's Seed, Four British Folkways In America by David Hackett Fischer, I came upon the narrative of an Anglican clergyman who had spent most of a year in the American backwoods in the 1790's. He recounted performing around 50 marriage ceremonies and noted that two thirds of the brides were "showing" on their wedding day. This he ascribed to the scarcity of clergymen on the frontier and the moral laxity of the settlers, whose salvation by return to the Anglican fold he had failed to accomplish. Had they rejoined the Anglican communion he might have been more generous in his estimation of their morals, but his sense of dismay at the public tolerance of premarital sexuality matched my own, perhaps for different reasons. My dismay was (and is) based on the data which doom single mothers without a high school diploma to the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder. And in addition to mere data, I have heard first-hand stories of struggle and deprivation from former students and their mothers. How, I wondered, could otherwise intelligent young women be so blithe about their prospects as too-young mothers in a world that rewards the deferral of motherhood in favor of some kind of economic preparation?

The answer may lie in two ideas. One, supported by Albion's Seed with an overwhelming array of archival research, is that culture is persistent. From generation to generation, stretching back to times when history was remembered and not written, certain attitudes and beliefs have come down to the present day with only slight modification. The other I learned in a conversation with Indiana University folklorist Henry Glassie. We were talking about Appalachian culture when the topic turned to tolerance for pre-marital sex. He related an interesting insight derived from a study of pre-modern peasant societies in which young men were unwilling to marry until they had proof that their intended spouses were fertile. This behavior was based on the simplest economic principle - the ability to work a prosperous farm depended on plentiful labor. Fathers of daughters tolerated a certain amount of pre-nuptial intimacy with the understanding that pregnancy would be followed by a wedding. And they were willing

to use whatever force was necessary to see that it was. We use the term shotgun wedding to describe this phenomenon, but it is much older than firearms.

It would seem that the much-deplored tendency of young women in my classes to conceive before graduation reflect a cultural norm that has been in existence for time out of mind. The standard was originally based on sound economic principles. The economics have changed, but the cultural norm has persisted. Any attempt to persuade these young women to another standard is not only going to have to work against the current fashion of permissiveness, but must also divide them from their families - from their mothers and grandmothers - and ask them to figure out for themselves how to navigate one of the most difficult passages from adolescence to adulthood. As much as we might wish them to do just that, many, though not most, will depend on the cultural norms they have learned at home. As an educator, my choice seems clear. I will have to accept that there are some things that I, with all the power of the educational system behind me, cannot change and make the best of it. And this June, just as in past Junes, when students receive their recognition for completing high school, many will do so with their infants in attendance.

If this particular cultural bias has lasted for centuries and survived several mass migrations, there might be other folkways that have persisted as well. And there are. Two that affect the educational context are willful individualism and non-literacy. By willful individualism I mean the belief that the wants and needs of the individual come before the interests of the group. With each individual asserting his or her own will, conflicts are common and easily escalate into violence. It hardly needs to be mentioned that willful individualism is incompatible with Poor Richard's advice on proper behavior. Or that a class of such willful individuals would pose a challenge to the most adept classroom manager. By the time one gets control of that class, there won't be much time left over to teach them anything. But they will already have learned something about methods of control.

Non-literacy refers not to the inability to read and write, but rather to a general lack of interest in the process. From history it was an often expressed belief among Scots-Irish that writing was what lawyers did when they wanted to cheat you. Even today in Northern Ireland, in order to deal with the very complex system of renting and leasing agricultural land, first the farmers and landlord's agents will negotiate agreements which will be converted to proper contracts by the lawyers. Then the interested parties will meet and seal the bargain. Words on paper are all very well, but what really counts is what is said face-to-face, eye-to-eye, and hand-to-hand. Without this meeting, the bargain is not complete. For such people personal honor trumps the arcane and dubious process of the law. Likewise, when I succeed with my students it is because I have somehow earned their personal loyalty, not because I am the agent for an educational system in which they have little faith. For them literature is meaningful when they hear it from my lips, not because it is in some text book.

By the wistful glances in the direction of the kitchen door, I can sense it is time to wrap things up. What happened to our Hoosier schoolmaster? After teaching for four years, C.V. gave up the classroom, married, and bought a farm in the newly drained Loblolly Swamp five miles east of the schoolhouse where he taught the boys to play football. He and his wife raised seven children to adulthood, one of whom was my father. Among his legacies is a respect for education and fair play that has served his descendants and his former pupils well.

If public education is going to survive in the United States, there is much work to do. We might begin with the notion that students are people whose ethnic and family cultures will have to be considered if we are going to design educational programs that will ever give the disadvantaged in our communities the intellectual tools and the self-respect necessary to become productive citizens. It is probably more than any educational system can deliver, but it ought to be our goal nonetheless.

What passes for knowledge in our colleges of education bears very little resemblance to the received wisdom of the faculty lounge. I leave you with the following examples.

There we say that, "No matter how good or how poor a teacher you are, there are some students who can't be hurt and some who can't be helped. Spend your time working on the ones in the middle."

"Take your students where you find them and improve them as much as you can."

"For a student who, after eleven years of instruction still hasn't grasped the rudiments of grammar, making them redo the same lessons in the same way has the same prospect of success as shouting at a Parisian in the hope that the increase in volume will improve his English comprehension."

"Because you are outnumbered in the classroom by twenty-five or thirty to one, if you want to succeed you will have to rely on intelligence rather than force."

My hope is that parents, school officials, and politicians will heed this last bit of faculty-lounge wisdom before we correct the mistakes we made the last time we fixed the education system.

WHY HATH GODFREY WROUGHT?

April 17, 2000

Lewis G. Gatch

Why is it the middle children who test parental limits? Seldom the responsible, oldest child and rarely the youngest. In this case, Philip's rebellion shocked the family because it challenged the bedrock of their rural existence - their religion - their life in the Church of England. What would you do if your son