

GRATZ DOESN'T FEAR SURVEY OF SCHOOLS

Welcomes Investigation, but Wants Experts to Do Work. Asserts State Is Holding Up Payments. For Teachers' Rise.

By GEORGE NOX MCCAIN

"I have never been a reactionary. I have always stood for the advancement of public education in Philadelphia." Simon Gratz uttered the words in a quiet tone of emphasis in his office in City Hall this morning.

"Doubtless mistakes have been made," he said. "There are now more in public life who have escaped. As for the Board of Education as a whole, it has devoted itself to the betterment of conditions in the public schools of the city. For myself, I welcome anything, any movement, that has for its purpose the advancement of our present educational standards or methods of management."

"Then I take it that you favor a school survey?" I suggested.

"I am not only in favor of it, but I welcome it. Only, it should be done by experts. I have so expressed myself to Doctor Finegan. When the subject of a school survey was under discussion and Doctor Finegan intimated a desire to undertake it, I expressed to him my hearty approval.

"But it must be an impartial survey and must be complete. It must be done in fairness and with the sole purpose of betterment. It should be of a constructive character and not one of a destructive nature, as an attack on the Board of Education."

Has No Doubt of Weak Spots in System

"I have no doubt that there are weak spots in our present system of education. We are deplorably weak in the matter of our finances. The property is perfectly secure, but the demands for money increase every year. Our temporary borrowing capacity is limited and there is delay in securing our share of the state appropriation. Under the law the board can go just so far in raising funds and no farther."

"How about the immediate advance and payment of teachers' salaries?" I asked.

"The board is anxious to do everything it possibly can to meet that situation. We appreciate its importance. The finance committee has studied the problem with great care from every angle. We will be compelled this year to utilize almost all of our temporary borrowing capacity, in addition to the tax receipts, to meet salaries as they come due monthly."

Appropriation Overdue

"This delay in receiving the city's share of the state appropriation, is it long overdue?"

"Since February 1," was the answer. "The board decided last fall that, as one-half of the appropriation would not be available until February 1 and the other half in June, it would advance the whole sum and then use the appropriation when received to repay the amount. Tax receipts in the first half of every year are very small. After August 31 people rush to pay their taxes and larger sums are available. Nothing delayed receipt from Harrisburg of the advance demanded, then, cannot be met by a temporary loan?"

"If we had a temporary borrowing capacity of \$5,000,000, instead of something more than half that sum, we could pay the advance asked provided we saw our way clear to meet the repayment of that sum within two years. Nothing would give the board greater pleasure, as I have said, than to grant the teachers the immediate flat advance which they ask if it could be legitimately and safely done."

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"What about the other employees of the Board of Education?"

"While considering the demands of the teachers for an immediate increase in salary we must take into account the engineers, janitors, nurses and clerical assistants, who are also entitled to an advance in salary and perhaps some other employees of the board."

"Do you care to indicate where improvements could be made for the betterment of the public schools as a whole?" I had in mind some assertions that the general staff, in places, was inadequate to the work. Mr. Gratz's reply was instant and direct:

"There are not enough school nurses and doctors. We need more attendance officers. There is a dearth of trained teachers coming on. The normal school is not attractive. The entering of a sufficient number of the best graduates of the high schools is retarded because of the insufficiency of the compensation given to teachers."

"Not many years ago the normal school was crowded. We were barely able to receive all the girls applying for admission. We graduated every year more qualified teachers than could find places in the elementary schools, so that many waited for months and years, till they got sick at heart over the poor prospect of securing positions as teachers."

"Now, the number has fallen at least one-half and the quality is not as good as it used to be. Please understand," and there was added emphasis in Mr. Gratz's manner and words, "I do not mean to intimate that the girls who now receive certificates at the normal schools are not qualified for positions. There may be other things than those mentioned, but all of them can be met only by increased revenue. It all comes back to that."

"What is your opinion of Doctor Finegan's suggestion that members of the Board of Education be elected di-

rectly by the people, instead of being appointed, as at present, by the board of judges?"

"I do not believe that Doctor Finegan's suggestion is a wise one. There are several different reasons which lead me to this conclusion. In the first place, election by the people would necessarily make the board to an extent, large or small, somewhat subservient to political conditions."

"There was a time, in the not far distant past, when the board was elected by the sectional boards. Members had to meet the views of their boards. This ultimately gave rise to scandals so pronounced that the board to an extent, large or small, somewhat subservient to political conditions."

"Another reason rests in the fact of the very great advantage of continuing in a position of this kind a man or woman who is qualified in all respects. Who by long service has learned the particulars that are needed to insure the proper administration of the school system."

"As to the general condition of the Philadelphia public schools, which have been criticized, what is your opinion?"

Leaning forward in his chair and tapping the desk he thought to stress more emphatically his words, Mr. Gratz replied:

"I believe that, in spite of all the troubles that have beset the administration of our schools, the quality of the teachers employed and the instruction given from the lowest grade of the elementary up to the high and normal schools is, at least, as good, on the whole, as in any city in the country."

The brief reference of Mr. Gratz to the fact that Philadelphia's pro-rata share of the state appropriation has been held up since February 1 is an unpleasant thing for the public to contemplate. The city is compelled to pay 4 per cent on borrowed money to carry along its school work in the meantime.

Auditor General Snyder boasts of the millions he has collected in tax arrears, and State Treasurer Kenphart prides himself on his conduct of the Treasury. There are millions in state depositories, and it would seem that some explanation is necessary from one or both as to why Philadelphia should be compelled to pay at the rate of \$20,000 interest annually for borrowed money, while State Treasurer Kenphart is holding in his control sums that are rightly due our schools.

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