

Lancaster County's Superintendents of Public Instruction

By A. G. SEYFERT

I AM not unmindful of the fact that all history is that which the human race has made, either in units or as a mass of units. To me there is nothing so interesting as the story of a human life, be that life great or small. If truthfully written, it is more fascinating than romance, because facts are always better than fiction.

The autobiography or biography of an individual is not only the history of that person's achievements, but it is largely the history of the times and environments in which the individual lived.

The other day the bronze statue of Andrew Jackson was dedicated as the gift of Tennessee to the nation. President Coolidge, in his splendid address, pointed out the prominent historical events of the national government from the General's birth to his death. That is what I mean by the historical environments of a human being from the cradle to the grave.

The lives of the seven men who for seventy-three years (from 1855 to the present time) acted as superintendents of schools, or head of the public school system in Lancaster county, contain very largely the history of the public schools of the county.

No books have been written about any of them from a biographical viewpoint, although of some you will find life sketches in various local histories of the county.

The design of this paper is to have a concise biography of each in one publication. Each one of the seven has made much local history during the past seventy-three years—a history of achievement that is worthy of being recorded in our archives for future reference.

The law creating the common school system of Pennsylvania was passed by the Legislature in 1834. It made no provision for a Department of Education, but provided that the duties of organization and enforcement of the law should be under the Secretary of State, as the office of Secretary of the Commonwealth is now known.

It was indeed fortunate that the State had a scholarly man like Thomas H. Burrowes as the head of that office. Unpopular as the measure was throughout the State, Mr. Burrowes was the man of the time for this important work. Under his supervision order came out of educational chaos, and the intent of the law became a fact. His heroic, self-sacrificing toil in travelling from county to county all over the Commonwealth, deserves nothing but the highest praise and admiration.

It is well known that Mr. Burrowes was a Lancaster county man, and his preeminent success in accomplishing what he did in educational affairs, is a credit to the county to this day. In my opinion he was one of the many great and prominent men that the county produced during its history of two hundred years.

For twenty years (from 1834 to 1854) there was no county head of the new school system. The school directors were largely a law unto themselves, and did about what they had done before—that is to say very little.

The Act of 1854 creating the office of County Superintendent of Schools provided that the school directors of each county "shall meet in convention and elect a Superintendent of the Schools with certain educational qualifications; the directors to fix his salary, and the state to pay for the same."

The law defined the duties of the Superintendent, and among these duties was the examination of all applicants for certificates to teach, and that "he shall visit all the schools in the county during the year when they are in session."

Lancaster county had at that time between four and five hundred schools. Some of them were only open for a term of four months. At best the office of Superintendent of Schools was a laborious and unpopular one to have and to hold. Public sentiment was opposed to the free school system, and now but two decades after its adoption, that system was to have a man in each county who was to be paid a high salary to "boss" the schools. This was an outrage to the tax-payer, and an intolerable condition of affairs!

Even the majority of teachers were up in arms and bitterly opposed to being examined by this "Czar", as many of them called the new official.

Notwithstanding the law defining the duties of the Superintendent, making it imperative to examine all applicants for teaching, the Lancaster City School Directors held a meeting and passed a resolution, "That the County Superintendent be requested to examine all the teachers in the employ of the Board, and all new applicants, to enable them to be candidates for election as teachers."

The teachers resented this innovation, and a conflict of authority arose, which created a good deal of excitement among the members of the Board and the teachers themselves.

At a meeting of the School Directors of the county, held in Lancaster on the first Tuesday in May, 1854, James Pyle Wickersham, principal of the Marietta Academy, was elected the first Superintendent. His salary was fixed at \$1,500 per year, which was more than any other county outside of Philadelphia and Allegheny agreed to pay. In some of the smaller counties the compensation was less than a hundred dollars. Berks county, with nearly as many schools as Lancaster, fixed the salary at \$250.

To me the so-called high salary in Lancaster county indicates that there was a more pronounced sentiment in favor of the free school system than in any other rural county of the State.

Mr. Wickersham was born on the 5th of March, 1825, in Newlin township, Chester county. He came from an honorable ancestry, and was brought up under the influence of the best type of Quaker training, which laid the foundation for a strong character. From the country school he passed to the Unionville Academy, where Bayard Taylor was one of his fellow students. When he was but fifteen years of age he took charge of a country school. In 1845, at the age of twenty, he came to Marietta as principal of the Marietta Academy. It was his intention to read law, but his success as a teacher, and the advice of his family to remain a teacher, made him forget the study of law.

Mr. Wickersham was one of the organizers of the County Teachers' Institute and the State Teachers' Association, in 1853, both of which were prominent in the agitation for the establishment of the office of County Superintendent of Schools.

In the summer of 1855 he held a Normal Institute at Millersville, which made such an impression that it was decided to continue this school as a permanent institution, which a few years later became the First Pennsylvania Normal School.

May I say that at the local teachers' institute held at Hinkletown during the winter of 1855, John C. Martin of Earl township and one of the organizers of the Teachers' Association of the county, introduced a resolution calling upon Superintendent Wickersham to hold a summer school for teachers, where they might get training to become more efficient teachers.

This resolution passed unanimously, and led Mr. Wickersham to Millersville, where he organized the teachers' training school now known as Teachers' College. This school was so successful that in the fall of 1856, Mr. Wickersham resigned as Superintendent of Schools of the county, to remain the Principal of the Normal School.

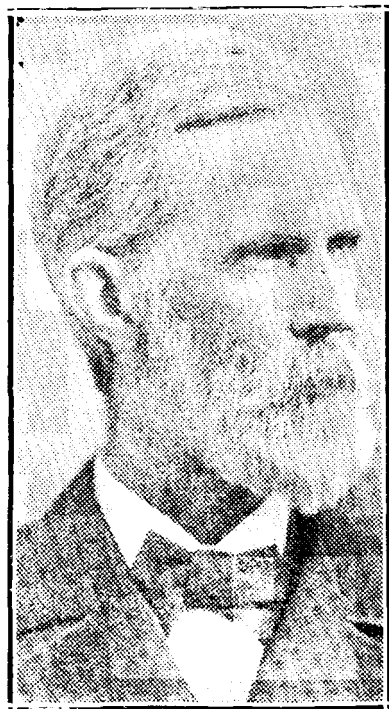
In the summer of 1863, when the Confederate invasion of Lee's army on Pennsylvania soil took place, Principal Wickersham organized a company.

mostly students of the Normal School, that became part of the 47th Pennsylvania Regiment, and of which he was made Colonel. The regiment was sent to the coal fields to look after the enemies in the rear, and its members saw some real and hard service in keeping the disloyal miners within the bounds of the law.

Col. Wickersham in this emergency proved that he was as successful in commanding troops in the field as he was a teacher in the school room.

In the meantime Lafayette College conferred a degree upon him, and in 1866 Governor Curtin appointed him State Superintendent of Schools, in which capacity he adjusted, reconstructed and perfected the educational system of the State for fourteen years, until it was recognized as one of the best in the Union.

Soon after retiring from the office of State Superintendent, President Arthur appointed Col. Wickersham minister to Denmark. He remained only about a year, when he resigned on account of his wife's ill health.



James Pyle Wickersham



John S. Crumbaugh

As an author of many books, his best work was issued in 1886 under the title, "History of Education of Pennsylvania."

I knew Prof. Wickersham for many years and listened to many of his forceful educational addresses at teachers' institutes and other educational meetings. In August of 1890 I called at his North Duke street residence to invite him to come to Rutland Park on the last Saturday in August, to deliver an address at the Annual Teachers' Picnic of the New Holland District

Teachers' Institute. I found him in his flower garden without coat or hat, working among his rose bushes, of which he was passionately fond.

I assured him that he would have good company, and that Dr. Lyte, Superintendent Brecht, W. U. Hensel, and others would act as a bodyguard on the Welsh mountain. He consented, and when the day arrived he and the others named above, with hundreds more from Lancaster, came to the Park. The thousands present seemed to inspire him with his old-time vigor, and he delivered a masterly address. This, by the way, was the last time that his eloquent tongue was heard in a public address. After a brief illness he died on March 25, 1891. His remains repose in the family lot in Lancaster cemetery.

In 1851, at the August meeting of the Lancaster City School Board, Rev. John S. Crumbaugh was elected Principal of the Boys' High School. Two years later he resigned, and the Directors unanimously passed the following resolution:

"Resolved, That in separating from the Rev. John S. Crumbaugh who for the past two years has filled the station of Principal of the Boys' High School, this Board feels a due sense of his services, and hereby express their thanks for the able, impartial and dignified manner in which they were at all times performed."

In 1856, when Mr. Wickersham resigned the office of Superintendent, Mr. Crumbaugh was appointed his successor.

John S. Crumbaugh was born November 7, 1831, at Woodsboro, Maryland. His father was German and his mother of Scotch ancestry.

In 1846 he entered the preparatory department of Gettysburg College, from which college he graduated in 1851, and immediately came to Lancaster as a teacher in the Boys' High School.

Dr. McCaskey tells me that he was a man of noble presence—tall, well formed, erect and calm, with kind eyes that saw everything, but always too wise to act upon everything he saw. While in the High School he studied theology under Rev. John C. Baker of Trinity Lutheran church. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran church—a daughter of Trinity—was organized by Mr. Crumbaugh, and he became its pastor when Superintendent of Schools.

Under the long strain of intense study in college and preparation for ordination as a clergyman, with frequent lectures before educational bodies, the strength of the heroic body gave way, and one of the most brilliant men who ever came to the city was in his grave at the age of 27 years. He was endowed by nature with talents of a high order, and stood in the front rank as a scholar of rare attainments.

His two years as head of the schools of Lancaster county were years of great and tactful influence in the rural districts of the county where public opinion was so bitter against this office of superintendent of schools. Mr. Crumbaugh had two strong elements in his favor to overcome the opposition: First, he was a Lutheran clergyman in whom the public had implicit confidence as an upright Christian gentleman; and second, he could talk with and to these enemies of the public school system in German, since many in the upper end of the county understood that language only, and that not too well. He did a fine work among these people in creating a sentiment for free education to all.

Mr. Crumbaugh died in Lancaster on the 13th of January, 1859. In the February number of the "Pennsylvania School Journal" of that year I find the following excellent editorial from the pen of Mr. Burrowes, the editor:

"This learned, able, conscientious and untiring public officer died in his twenty-eighth year and the third of his superintendency. He is believed to be the first member of the corps of County Superintendents removed by death, and truly may it be said that no more shining mark could have been selected from their ranks."

The city school board of which he was a member said:

"In his death we deplore the loss of one whose learning, zeal, sound judgment and practical common sense in the discharge of his varied and difficult duties was unsurpassed.

"May the name of John S. Crumbaugh be added to that of our most worthy citizens,—a man whose brief life is a record of learning, usefulness and honor."

Dr. McCaskey who was a teacher in the High School under Crumbaugh as principal, years afterward wrote of him:

"He died as he had lived—a Christian in the best sense of that great word. The memory of his fine personality, his helpfulness, his self-sacrifice, his love of all things pure and good, his undying purpose to work while the day lasted, has in it all the old inspiration, though nearly half a century has passed since his untimely death."

In February of 1859 Mr. David Evans was appointed as Mr. Crumbaugh's successor. Mr. Evans was born in Manheim township, February 21, 1827. His father was of Irish and his mother of German extraction. His father was a farmer and also in the butchering business. The boy was fond of books and attended the schools of the township. When twenty years old he began teaching. Later he attended the Strasburg Academy; also White Hall Academy in Cumberland county, from which place he entered Franklin and Marshall College, graduating in 1858 and obtaining the Marshall honor. He was elected to succeed himself as Superintendent in 1863, 1866 and 1869. In 1872 he was again a candidate, but was defeated by B. F. Shaub in a triangular contest.

I saw Mr. Evans when a boy going to school for the first time. During the winter of 1861-62 he came to visit the Bowmansville school. Before he left that afternoon he said to the pupils, "Tell your parents to come to the school house this evening, for I want to see them and talk to them." I accompanied my father, and the only thing I now remember of what Mr. Evans said was a story he used to illustrate the importance of knowing something.

Be it remembered that this was the first year of the Civil War and soon after the Confederates had captured Alexandria near Washington. Mr. Evans told how he had overheard a conversation between two men on the subject, when one said to the other: "Who in creation was this Alexandria anyhow, and what did he do—they make such a fuss about him in the papers?"

Ten years later, in the fall of 1871, some of the members of the Brecknock school board thought I was big enough to teach the Stone Hill school, but I had to have a certificate from Mr. Evans; so I came to a special examination held in the Prince street school building, Lancaster, one Saturday just a few weeks before the schools opened. The class was large and the examiner not in good humor. When the subject of grammar came under consideration, I was given the sentence, "A severe battle was fought on the plains of Italy," to parse. I knew nothing about grammar, and very little of anything else, consequently fell down and went home without a certificate. The secretary of the board said to me, "You can lawfully teach for a month—go ahead and open the school, and we will see what can be done."

This I did, and when the four weeks were at an end, the Teachers' Institute was due and I was again told to go to Lancaster and attend every session until it was over; then go to see Mr. Evans at his home. This I did, and on a Saturday morning called at his residence on North Queen street. I rang the bell and he came to the door. After I told him who I was he invited me to step inside. In reply to his question "What can I do for you?" I said that I was teaching at Stone Hill in Brecknock, and came to Lancaster on Monday morning and attended the Institute all week; that I had come to see him about securing a certificate. He replied that he was pleased to

learn that I had ambition enough to do this, for most of the teachers from Brecknock never came near the institute.

"How about that grammar? Do you know more about it than you did?"

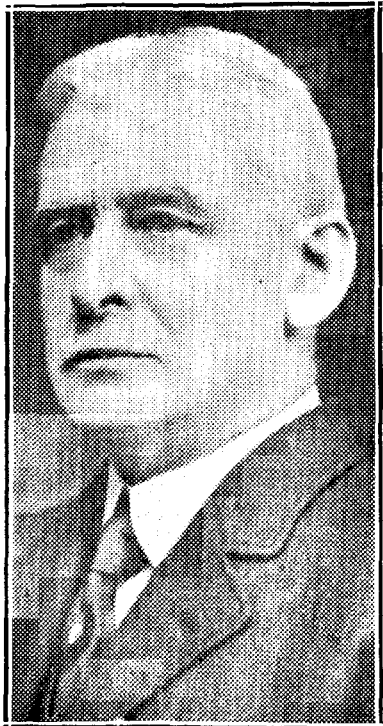
"No," I admitted, "I do not," but added, "Out on Stone Hill they do not want grammar, for they say they have no use for it."

He laughed and said, "I guess that is true. You go home and finish the term and I will mail you a certificate," which he did. After the holidays he came to see me, and was well pleased with what we were trying to do in the little stone building on Stone Hill.

This may seem somewhat like personal "gossip", but it is the story in brief of how I taught my first and only term of school when David Evans was the county superintendent.



Benjamin Franklin Shaub



Milton J. Brecht

Mr. Evans was a well preserved, dignified gentleman, somewhat austere in appearance, yet affable and smiling, as I well remember, which showed his Irish extraction. He was learned, a fluent talker in German or English, and during the eleven years he was superintendent the schools of the county made great progress. The anti-school sentiment was all but dead.

Mr. Evans died in 1887, a comparatively young man, just past his sixtieth year. I am one of the few living who taught when he was at the head of the county schools, almost sixty years ago. I owe his memory a debt of gratitude for what he did for me in getting a start as a teacher.

Benjamin Franklin Shaub—Mr. Evans' successor in 1872—was the son of a Strasburg township farmer. He was born April 25, 1841. His parents were Mennonites, and are buried in the old Mennonite cemetery at Strasburg.

Young Benjamin attended the township schools, and at the age of eighteen was far enough advanced to begin teaching. His success was such that at the age of twenty-three he became the principal of the Bellefonte high school, in Center county. He remained but one year, when he entered the Millersville Normal School and graduated with high honors in 1869. For two years after graduation he taught German and Physics at the Normal, when he was elected County Superintendent.

From 1872 to 1883 he devoted his best efforts to the schools of the county. He resigned to become Principal of the Millersville Normal School, where he remained as such for four years, resigning to go into business in Lancaster.

Franklin and Marshall College, as well as Lafayette, conferred degrees upon him, the former A.M., and the latter Ph.D.

Prof. Shaub was a man of fine and rather striking appearance, with a pleasing personality. As an educator he was practical and well adapted to do the work of supervising the schools of the county. As a lay preacher in the Methodist church he was at his best in expounding to others what was always uppermost in his heart—religion. He was a high type of Christian gentleman; a scholar with unusual executive ability and tact. By force of character he threw himself whole-heartedly into the work of bettering conditions in the schools of the county, during the dozen years that he was at the head. The result was a decided change for the better when he turned them over to his successor.

Mr. Shaub died at his home in Lancaster on August 31, 1913. His remains rest in Greenwood cemetery.

Milton J. Brecht, who succeeded Prof. Shaub, was born at Old Line in Rapho township, December 3, 1855. He was the son of Dr. S. S. Brecht, a well known physician of the upper end of the county.

Prof. Brecht began his educational career in Ruhl's school in Rapho. In 1872, when he was in his seventeenth year, he began teaching at the Locust Grove school in his native township. From there he entered the Millersville Normal School, and graduated in the summer of 1875. From the date of his leaving the Normal School until 1877, he taught with marked success at the Lincoln school in East Donegal. The following three years he was principal of the Manheim borough schools. His success was such that when a superintendent of the Mt. Joy Orphan School was needed, he was appointed, and remained in charge for three and one-half years, when he was appointed County Superintendent by State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Higbee.

Sept. Brecht began his new duties in September, 1883. The first school he inspected in his official capacity was Locust Grove in East Lampeter township. The teacher did not know him, and doubted his authority until he convinced her by producing his record book. As a singular coincidence, may I say that this same school was also the **last one** that he visited at the end of his twenty-eight years of service as head of the county schools. In May of 1884 he was elected by the directors of the county, and from that time on he was unanimously re-elected at the tri-annual convention of school directors of the county. He was active and energetic in the discharge of his duties. He had no assistance in the laborious task of examining applicants for certificates to teach and in the inspecting of schools of every township and borough of the county.

Mr. Brecht's great success was largely due to his tact as a disciplinarian. He assumed that an education without a disciplined mind to control the body

was a failure and a farce. This he enforced in the school room as a teacher and impressed upon the teachers when he was superintendent.

As a Teachers' Institute leader and school inspector he had no superior in the state. This fact the Department of Education at Harrisburg more than once affirmed.

From the County Superintendency to the State Public Service Commission was a big step and to an entirely different atmosphere and line of work. The former was exclusively educational, in which the welfare of the children was ever the responsibility in view; the latter dealt with more material affairs, requiring a practical line of thought and all for the welfare of the state.



Daniel Fleisher



Arthur P. Mylin

Mr. Brecht's well trained mind, however, made him equal to the transfer, in which he attained a state-wide reputation as an official of the Public Service Commission for many years.

During the more than quarter of a century in which Mr. Brecht filled the office of Superintendent of Schools, he became so widely acquainted that when he retired he was the best known man in the county. He was ever progressive in his ideas of improving the schools and raising the standard of the teacher. He had a somewhat retiring, modest and unassuming per-

sonality, with a high sense of moral manhood in private life as well as in public service, a pleasing associate in every day life. The reader will recall his sudden death in the court house less than three years ago. At the close of an August afternoon his remains were consigned to their lasting resting place in the family lot in Woodward Hill cemetery.

When Superintendent Brecht resigned in 1911, Daniel Fleisher was appointed by Dr. Schaeffer who was then State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the unexpired term of that year.

Mr. Fleisher was born in 1852, in Oliver township, Perry county, this state. He was educated in the public schools of his native county and at the Bloomfield Academy. From the latter institution he entered Gettysburg College, graduating in 1880. He was principal of the Troy schools in Bradford county and also of the Wellsboro schools in Tioga. He came to Columbia in 1900 as superintendent of the borough schools, where he remained until he was appointed County Superintendent in 1911. While attending the Pennsylvania State Educational Association meeting at Altoona, he became ill and died there on the 2nd of January, 1922. His remains are buried in the Newport cemetery, Perry county.

I knew Dr. Fleisher quite intimately, and spent many delightful days with him visiting schools in different sections of the county. He was a thoughtful, conservative, safe and constructive leader in all educational affairs. He was not given to much talking, but he had a way of teaching pupils to think for themselves; a cheerful personality that radiated with kindness and sympathy wherever he went.

It was during his term that the office of Assistant County Superintendent was created, but the law was void for several years, due to the fact that the Legislature failed to provide an appropriation to pay the salaries of assistants.

Upon the death of Dr. Fleisher, Arthur P. Mylin was appointed as his successor and later elected by the directors. His three assistants are G. R. Alexander, E. U. Aumiller and D. W. Geist.

This concludes my story of the "seven wise men" who from 1854 to the present time have been at the head of the Lancaster county schools. Six of them have gone to their long home, and each one with a record of duty that was faithfully and well performed.

The seventh has the best years of his life before him, and when they are ended, it may likewise be said of him: "thou hast been faithful and thy reward awaits thee for work well done."

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