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EDUCATION IN ST. AUGUSTINE, 1821-1845

by **FRANK G. LEWIS**

The struggle for free public schools, particularly in certain cities and states, even in whole regions, has often revolved about historical issues such as those concerned with social and economic classes, taxation, and religion. Some observable differences in the development of school systems in the various regions of America can be traced to the different influences of the cultural heritages of the English and Spanish colonists. The struggle for a free school in St. Augustine during the territorial period exemplifies the evolution of an ever-increasing conviction of a need for a system of schools to train the youth of all classes without regard to rank or religion.

The acceptance of education as a definite social responsibility became an actuality in the northern and western states by 1860. Florida, like the other southern states, was unable to accomplish much until after the War for Southern Independence. Even then it was not without a struggle in which the controversy waxed hot between those in favor and those opposed.¹

The reasons given by the opposition to free and universal education fall under one or more of three classifications: (1) Religious intolerance and denominational prejudice, (2) a sentiment opposed to equal opportunities for all classes, and (3) unwillingness to assume the inevitable expense of a free school through public taxation.

In a discourse on education, a citizen of St. Augustine stated, in regard to the first, that religion should not influence or participate in education. In reference to grammar schools of the colonial period, he said:

1. George Gould and Gerald A. Yoakam, *The Teacher and His Work*, New York, 1947, p. 151.

Almost the only books used in them were, the spelling book, the Catechism, the New-Testament, and the Holy-Bible. The latter was read over and over without end.

. . . let it [religion] not be overdone, or it assuredly brings on dreadful reactions.²

Concerning the effects of the course taken in education by the early southern settlers, Brevard said in regard to the second:

In Florida as elsewhere in the south, the children of the well to do were taught at home, or attended private schools. Indeed, until after the war between the states, this was the usual plan for preparatory education and of course, tended to produce and maintain an aristocracy.³

The public's unwillingness to assume the cost of almost any civic improvement through taxation is aptly presented by a Mr. Colbert, who wrote:

Much complaint is made, by a respectable portion of the inhabitants, against the system of taxation, lately adopted by the Corporation of this City. It is considered extremely unequal and oppressive; at variance with a sound policy, and highly injurious to the industry and commerce of this place.⁴

THE COLONIAL BACKGROUND

Many references are found to schools of the first Spanish occupation in Florida in the Indices of Royal Cédulas, so even the earliest settlers apparently had some type of schooling for their children. After the transfer of Florida to the English an attempt was made to establish a school, but the salary offered was too low to tempt any qualified person to

2. *The Florida Herald*, September 6, 1832.

3. Caroline M. Brevard, *A History of Florida*, DeLand, 1924, p. 180.

4. *East Florida Herald*, March 7, 1826.

teach. In 1774 the Reverend John Leadbeater was offered a salary and the tuition fees, but he refused, stating that he would not live in East Florida, nor raise a family there for five times that amount.⁵

Though the Spanish probably planned a free school in East Florida before the English period of colonization, it was not until they returned in 1783 that definite plans were made for the establishment of such a school. Father Hassett who was chosen to establish the school wrote twenty-six rules for the guidance of both teacher and pupil, and these left their impress on successive generations, for they were followed by the Catholic instructors thereafter. They were translated and described by Joseph B. Lockety.⁶

The governor must have encountered great difficulty in filling the position of schoolmaster. A letter from Jose Monesterio, a teacher by temporary appointment, is replete with grievances that assuredly were no inducement for anyone to teach under such conditions. He wrote that when he was first appointed there were nine children of the First Class and fifteen writers, but "Today there gather about seventy, although eighty-one have gathered to put themselves on the list. . . . All are instructed in one hall of eight varas [22 1/4 feet] in width and as many in length. . . ." He pleaded for more space and equipment for the pupils and more salary for himself: "He cannot do it owing to the eight Pesos that have been assigned him for monthly salary being invested in increasing his food to more than his ration, because, attending to the teaching, he cannot take care of it himself, and in the other small expenses natural to Man."⁷

Considering the apparent attempt on the part of the Span-

5. Wilbur H. Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, DeLand, 1929, vol. I, p. 5.

6. Joseph B. Lockety, "Public Education in Spanish St. Augustine," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XV, (January, 1937), 147-168.

7. St. Augustine Historical Society Library. Photostatic copy of original letter.

ish colonial government to establish satisfactory and adequate education, the inhabitants should have enjoyed a higher economic and social standard than is evidenced. Such attempts met with little success, however, due primarily to the inability to secure suitable teachers because of the low pay offered, and because of the deep-rooted indifference with which the inhabitants viewed the education of their children.

The prolific Minorcans who migrated from New Smyrna to St. Augustine during the English occupation to seek refuge from the tyrannical overseers of Dr. Turnbull, represented a large portion of the inhabitants of St. Augustine when the Floridas were receded to Spain. The background of their exodus, as presented by Romans, is of value in understanding the problems of social and economic nature arising during the future Territorial Period. Romans pictured these people as being of high caliber, whose migration to Florida was enticed by unfulfilled promises of Dr. Turnbull.⁸ Turnbull, in retaliation to the stinging attack on his integrity by Romans, stated that the immigrants were shiftless vagrants and of such undesirable character that the officials of their native lands encouraged their departure.⁹ Regardless of the character of these people when they first landed on Florida's shores, those who escaped to St. Augustine must have been bitter indeed, with little present enthusiasm for self or civic improvement.

The early schools supported by the Spanish government was an attempt toward universal education, especially those of the second Spanish dominion. From the time of the founding of St. Augustine, the Roman Catholic Church, under whose guidance these schools functioned, appeared persistent in its determination to educate all children and to eradicate

8. Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, New York, 1775, pp. 268-273.

9. P. Lee Phillips, *Notes on the Life and Works of Bernard Romans*, DeLand, 1924, pp. 106-111.

ignorance. Following the recession in 1783, steps were taken to bring the school within the reach of all children. Provisions were made for the compulsory attendance of those of the white race, while attendance of colored was purely voluntary. Father Hassett's rules and regulations were definitely a step toward universal education and, had the Spanish treasury been more liberal in its aid, probably would have succeeded to a greater extent in educating those children who were to take a part in the civil and social life of St. Augustine during the Territorial Period.

The Anglican Church, during the period of the English dominion, attempted education to a small degree until the civil government provided professional teachers. The little good resulting from this attempt was partly offset by the selfish and inept acts of a few wealthy Englishmen in providing workers for their lands. The migrants from New Smyrna, who represented 70 per cent of the population of St. Augustine at the time of the recession, were poor and, generally speaking, ignorant, with little desire for the benefits of education.

This, then, was the general background of colonial education: A long history of church sponsored schools, some free and some levying fees; a populace who were not permanent, but the majority of whom moved in order to remain loyal to the flag of their country; and a government that did not levy or collect taxes.

THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS

During the early part of the Territorial Period a certain pattern began developing that had, by 1832, definitely presented itself as a movement by a small minority to create in the citizens of St. Augustine an interest favorable to schools. Theirs, however, was a difficult task that met with many defeats. The educational horizon must have appeared

very dark to these advocates, since the few schools that did succeed in making a start seldom endured the indifferent attitude of the populace and soon succumbed to the insufficiency of pupils and lack of income.

There were more than twenty-three private schools, nine academies, and three seminaries taught by more than thirty-nine teachers in St. Augustine during the Territorial Period, 1821-1845.¹⁰ St. Augustine may have been more fortunate in education than the few other towns in Florida during this and prior periods because of the interest and efforts of the Roman Catholic Church. In view of the fact that most of the inhabitants at that time were of that denomination some provision was usually made by the Church for child education, at least in the elementary subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Most of these older schools apparently concentrated their efforts on boys. A review of the numerous county court records in which land or merchandise was transferred from one person to another reveals that the man's signature was usually his own, while that of his wife bears the name written in another hand followed by her (x) mark, signifying that she could not write her own name. Because the records of this period involve those people who were subjects of the King of Spain during the colonial occupation, and since the Crown frowned upon coeducation, it is natural that many of the girls of that time grew up to be the illiterate women of the Territorial Period.

The only private school that was carried over in 1821 from the Spanish flag of which there is a record, was that of Eusebio Maria Gomez. This was not in the true sense a private school for it was financed, at least in part, by the Royal Spanish Treasury until the exchange of flags. It apparently continued to function, however, until 1824, for

10. *East Florida Herald, Florida Herald, The Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, The News, passim.*, 1823-1845.

there are no known records nor reasons to believe that it had suspended.

Gomez was first appointed master of the King's School on November 7, 1817.¹¹ The next reference to him is in a deed book wherein is recorded a yearly rental lease dated April 17, 1824, and again a few months later when he was evicted from his house. Following the eviction, Eusebio Gomez retained a lawyer and filed his complaint:

Gomez' house was situated in a certain street there called George's Street, he the said plaintiff then and there being a school-master, and then and there holding his school and teaching divers young children, then and there present in said dwelling house, and they the said defendants then and there with force and arms turned the said plaintiff and the said young children out of his said dwelling house, and greatly frightened the said children and dispersed and drove them to their homes in great trepidation and distress and by that means wholly broke up the school of the said plaintiff and the said defendants kept possession of the said house for the span of 4 hours and searched and rifled the same against the will of the said plaintiff and they the said defendants still keep possession of the said house against the will of the said plaintiff and five chairs, three tables, four benches, four writing desks, two bedsteads and two beds, the property of the said plaintiff, and in the said house then being, all of the value of one hundred dollars were then and there by the said defendants turned out of the said house into the street and utterly spoiled.¹²

There is reference in the same packet wherein two fathers

11. Coppinger to Cevallos, Jan. 22, 1817, and accompanying documents - A.G.I.:S.D., Leg. 2580.

12. St. Johns County Archives, File G-4: Gomez vs Gibson.

would not send their children back to Gomez for further instruction. So apparently he either tried to reorganize his school and failed, or did succeed, and taught for a time.

Various other schools were established or proposed during the early Territorial Period as will be seen in various city documents and advertisements inserted in the newspapers of St. Augustine.

At a meeting of the City Council on December 20, 1822, a resolution was made permitting “. . . the lower part of the City Hall be given to Mrs. Girty for the purpose of a school until such time as it shall be wanted for a more important one or for other purposes.”¹³ No other reference has been found to show how long Mrs. Girty taught; but a month later, on January 24, 1823, also in the Minutes of the City Council, it is found that “A letter was received from Messrs. Cotter and Waldo soliciting the room in the lower part of the City Hall for the purpose of establishing a Classical and English School - Resolved that the said Messrs. Cotter and Waldo have the use of said room for the space of two months free of rent.” They were the first to advertise a school, offering spelling, reading, and writing for two dollars per month; arithmetic and grammar for two dollars and fifty cents; geography and the construction of maps, three dollars; surveying and navigation, four dollars; Greek and Latin, including the other branches necessary for a collegiate course, five dollars per month.¹⁴

In the same issue of the *Herald* appeared an article by a proponent of education, but he was either against taxes or foresaw the problems that would arise from the establishment of a public school. It may be possible that he was well-acquainted with the findings of the committee for a

13. “Minutes of the City Council,” December 20, 1822.

14. *East Florida Herald*, February 1, 1823.

school of a year and a half previously.¹⁵ He stated that education was a ". . . grand instrument for conveying light to the human mind," and that "If we wish to promote public virtue, elevate national character, and add strength to the national institutions, let the youthful mind be instructed." He quickly added, however, "Although our situation is not favourable for the establishment of common schools, . . . the matter should not be forgotten."

On March 22, 1823, P. Menard, who previously had advertised in the *Florida Gazette* (September 8, 1821) his intention of establishing an auction business in addition to such items he had for sale as gun-powder and shot, soap, tobacco, sugar, nails, brandy, etc., stated that ". . . having been solicited by some respectable citizens of this place, to teach the rudiments of the French Language, offers his services to the public. . . ." ¹⁶

M. Andrew Burgevin, formerly a surveyor,¹⁷ proposed to teach ". . . the young gentlemen of this town . . . the art of **RAISING PLANS and SURVEYING.**" He also proposed to teach the officers of the militia . . . who are desirous to know the first rudiments of the career of glory. . . ." elementary principles of campaign fortifications.¹⁸ Mr. Burgevin probably did not meet with much success.

Some attempt was made to supply an education to the children of indigent families, because in the Minutes of the City Council, November 15, 1823, James P. Cotter was permitted to ". . . have the school room now occupied by him, free from rent, provided that he consents to receive three

15. *Florida Gazette*, September 15, 1821. Fifty-eight days after the exchange of flags a meeting was held to consider establishing a school, a library, and a Protestant Church. Nothing else is recorded concerning the actions of the committees. Apparently no enthusiasm or support was received from the citizens.

16. *East Florida Herald*, March 22, 1823.

17. Historical Records Survey, *Spanish Land Grants in Florida, passim.*, Vols. I to V.

18. *East Florida Herald*, August 23, 1823.

children of indigent parents into his school free from all charge for schooling."

On August 30, 1825, the proponents of education must have received a pleasant and encouraging surprise for it was announced that an academy would be started in St. Augustine. Furthermore, this academy was to have trustees in St. Augustine, Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. They planned to lease a temporary structure until a permanent building could be erected, to apply to the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida for permission to incorporate when that governing body met in November, 1825, and to accommodate students not only from St. Augustine, but from neighboring states at well. They also anticipated a rather large paying student body, and had "... good reasons to believe that the establishment will meet with the encouragement and support of the Congress of the United States."

In their address the trustees mentioned the importance of education in a democracy where, "... without the vain distinctions of birth or rank, [a person] may boldly aspire to the highest offices of trust, of honor, or of emolument in his country." They also observed that in states where there was a comparatively adequate standard of education, "... their laws are formed with more wisdom; their administration of justice is more sound and correct, - public spirit is more active, public morals more refined; public improvements more advanced. . . ." On the board of trustees were Joseph L. Smith and the editor of the *East Florida Herald*, E. B. Gould, both of whom were later to become mayors of St. Augustine.¹⁹

The academy did not materialize. Possibly the same hidden forces were at work here as were those that influenced the abolishment of the free school established seven years later.

19. *Ibid.*, September 6, 1825.

Possibly the trustees made a mistake in stating: "The sentiments of religion and morality will be strongly inculcated, but the tenents and principles of no particular religious sect will be instilled into their minds." Then, too, some may have counted on help from Congress. Such aid would permit all children to receive education, regardless of the social position of their families, and result in a society that would be less liable to aristocratic domination. Such significant underlying forces as religious influences and aristocratic principles, should be neither overlooked nor underestimated in an attempt to analyze the struggle for public schools or the development of education in St. Augustine during the Territorial Period.

Many teachers advertised in the weekly paper for pupils, but the most persistent, and therefore probably the most successful, were Mr. and Mrs. Ball, whose school was later taken over by a Mr. Lewis and a Mr. Phillips. The latter must have been a good public relations principal when one considers that he had public demonstrations of his students' advancements and succeeded in teaching both Catholic and Protestant children. Most of the teachers taught for but a very short time and only a few continued for more than a year or two, whereas advertisements are found showing that Mr. Phillips was teaching fifteen years after he established his first school.

These pioneer teachers had serious financial difficulties. A teacher with twenty pupils in the higher courses, which was very unlikely, might have a gross income, if all pupils paid, of \$30 to \$40 per month. After the overhead, such as rent, supplies, etc., is deducted, the remaining net income would be grossly inadequate.

There were other conditions prevalent in St. Augustine to discourage teachers. One individual wrote: ". . . our sit-

uation is not favorable for the establishment of common schools. . . ." The majority of the inhabitants were poor and received their scant sustenance from the land or by fishing, a class whose indifference toward education, and apathy, or a general attitude of satisfaction with the present day, virtually forbade improvements, and thus encouraged their children to grow up with the same attitude, and to be satisfied with the same standard of living. To these unfortunate conditions was added the serious blow of the great freeze of 1835 when the thermometer sank to ten degrees above zero.²⁰ This abnormal cold froze the orange trees to the ground and eliminated the income of those dependent on the citrus market which had been quite lucrative. R. K. Sewell stated in his *Sketches of St. Augustine* (see *post*) that just before the freeze the orange trade reputedly supplied an income of \$72,000 per year.

These adverse conditions, plus another which was implied in the newspapers and other contemporaneous writings, imposed a difficult problem on the private school teacher. This was the fact that a large majority of the inhabitants were of the Roman Catholic faith. There is no evidence that the Church interfered with a school provided the teacher limited his lectures to academic work or fulfilled the religious obligations sanctioned by the priests.

On March 6, 1834, a letter to the editor of *The Florida Herald* stated: "Although it is a circumstance seriously to be regretted that there is not a public Seminary for the education of the numerous children with which our streets are crowded, yet there is an Academy and a Preparatory School, where a few are educated, and the instructors have given great satisfaction. There are also three or four schools for small children kept by young ladies, but the number edu-

20. J. Frederick Davis, "Early Orange Culture in Florida and the Epochal Cold of 1835," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XV, (April, 1937), 238.

cated in these different establishments does not exceed 100 or 110 - a very trifling proportion of the number who cannot get educated."

Evidence is available, however, that points to the interest of several of the mayors and the City Council to offer aid in the education of the youth of St. Augustine. It was to them that Michael Usina addressed the following letter in 1838:

Gentlemen:

I offer myself to your honorable body, as candidate for clerk of the Market and Marshal. Should you think proper to confer the appointment upon me, I will oblige myself to pay out of my salary, the schooling of four poor children of the City for one year, those who may be designated by your Honorable Body.²¹

At the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century a trend to religious schools is noted. These schools, apparently pioneered by Reverend Timothy McCarthy, stressed an effort to imbibe into the minds of the pupils a moral training in addition to academic instruction. The school, or schools, that advertised in the newspapers and were under the auspices of the Catholic Church made their debut during the middle of the Territorial Period and either constantly or intermittently functioned until after Florida was admitted into the Union in 1845.

THE FREE SCHOOL

St. Augustine was the site of a heterogeneous grouping of people whose economic, social, and religious characteristics and heritages retarded the growth and development of education during the Territorial Period. The arresting factors influencing the achievement of free, and consequently an attempt at universal, education included influences attributed

21. City vault, file 2.

to aristocracy and refusal to support education through taxation.

That these characteristics and inheritances were largely legacies of the Spanish colonial government is shown in an article written for the purpose of educating the public as to the necessity of taxes in a democracy:

The former government was colonial, and altogether military. It was supported by the mother country, but which, from a narrow and jealous policy, drew little or no revenue from it. Neither agriculture, commerce, nor the useful arts were, in the least degree, encouraged.²²

The daily rations of the inhabitants were generally meager. Religion was dominant. There was no encouragement of initiative. The citizens seemed to personify the town itself in reflecting the antiquity of life as well as of thought. Sewall briefly summarized this: "On the whole, it will be seen . . . that this city is not without its interest to the antiquary and to the historian. If not old Spain in miniature, it is a chip of the block of the old in the new world, a relic of the past interwoven with the texture of the present age."²³

It was several years before the immigrants from the northern and bordering states who came to St. Augustine overcame the passive apathy of the native Floridians. An article entitled "Public Spirit" appeared in the *East Florida Herald* on August 2, 1823, stating, "It is an undeniable fact that this town, and indeed, the country generally, have been in a state of woeful retrogression ever since the exchange of flags." He "fondly believed" that the aggressive northerners who came to St. Augustine would impart some of their industry to the native Floridians but, unfortunately, the same ". . . sluggishness and indifference which characterized the

22. *East Florida Herald*, March 7, 1826.

23. Sewall, R. K., *Sketches of St. Augustine*, New York, 1848, p. 17.

colonial dependents upon a foreign government . . . was instead adopted by them. This is no exaggerated picture; and although some persons may think it bad policy to exhibit it to the world, I am convinced of the contrary.”

There were a minority of citizens, however, who foresaw the need of common school education and sought to persuade their fellowtownsmen to prepare their community for such a school. On September 13, 1821, only fifty-eight days after the exchange of flags at St. Augustine, a group met to discuss the possibilities, “and take into consideration the subject of establishing a Protestant Church, a Library and a Public Academy . . . that a committee of three be appointed to report the best practical plan of a Public School or Schools, for the Inhabitants of East Florida. . . .”²⁴

Nothing else has been found concerning the committee. It may be assumed, in the light of evidence herein later mentioned, that the efforts of this group to establish the school, church, and library failed miserably.

The editor of the *East Florida Herald*, the only newspaper in St. Augustine in 1823, E. B. Gould, a native of New Jersey, was quite sympathetic toward education. He reprinted many articles from other newspapers and magazines that pertained to education and was apparently eager to receive letters from his subscribers that would stir the people to pave the way for public schools. He commented, “There is not a subject in any country so well worthy of public and individual attention as that of education.” He recommended that full consideration be given to every opportunity that presented itself relative to “. . . the various systems which may seem best to suit their conditions.”

Their condition, the citizens must have concluded, was not best suited for a public school-especially if its cost was

24. *Florida Gazette*, September 15, 1821.

to be borne by taxation. An article appeared in the *Herald* on March 7, 1826, that seems to explain this reluctance on the part of the citizens to pay taxes:

Much complaint is made, by a respectable portion of the inhabitants, against the system of taxation, lately adopted by the Corporation of this City. . . .

In all civil governments taxation, of some kind or other, is indispensably necessary, for the well-being of society.

Under the Spanish government, no regular system of taxation was adopted, either for this city or any part of the country. Hence the strong repugnance of the old inhabitants to any sort of taxes. But this is a prejudice of the most injurious nature to the welfare and prosperity of the country. They must renounce it.

The *Herald*, July 31, 1824, in an article written in both Spanish and English, stated that of the 350 children within the city only eighty were receiving the benefits of education. In 1832, only 27.4 per cent of the children under fifteen years of age were attending schools of all sorts, and only 16.7 per cent receiving what may be considered proper instruction.

Considering the small number of children receiving education it is of little wonder that the small minority of friends of education formed the St. Augustine auxiliary chapter of the Florida Education Society in 1831.

This society wasted little time before planning for and working toward its ends. On March 3, 1832, Thomas Douglas and Dr. W. H. Simmons wrote a letter of acceptance to serve as trustees to the free school. On May 17 the *Florida Herald* published the ordinance that provided for a school "which shall be free to all free white children of both sexes residing within the limits" of St. Augustine. It provided, how-

ever, "that no children shall be admitted to said school whose parents or guardians . . . shall not pay a city tax." One-fourth of all the taxes collected would be turned over to the trustees for operation of the school. It specified the following taxes:

"On every hundred dollars in value of real estate, 25 cents, and when the value is under one hundred dollars, 12 1/2 cents.

On every slave between the ages of fifteen and fifty, 25 cents.

On every dray or cart kept for hire, 25 cents.

On every dog, 25 cents.

On every person (other than transient traders,) vending goods, wares or merchandise within said city, the following taxes, on amount of capital employed in trade, to wit;

On every hundred dollars, 10 cents.

On every sum less than one hundred dollars, 25 cents.

On every Billiard Table, 25 cents."

Section eight of the ordinance requested the trustees to have the school "open and ready with one or more instructors for the reception of free white children of both sexes, of this city, on or before the 20th day of May next." This ordinance was passed March 31, 1832.

Even before the school was opened a petition was circulated upon which over one hundred citizens affixed their names in open disapprobation to that part of the ordinance which levied a tax for support of the school. This petition stated "However desirous we may be of promoting education among all classes, it is not, at this moment of unexampled pecuniary distress, felt alike by those few who enjoy a comparative independence, as well as the many who are placed in humbler circumstances; that a tax (which may be called exorbitant) should be imposed on us and our fellow citizens."

Many of the citizens were determined not to pay the school tax. Action was taken by the sheriff against John Gibson and John Alden for refusal to pay. Several letters and articles derogatory to the free school were published in the *Herald*. The theme of each was to oppose the tax and praise education.

These letters and articles in general seem to have been written in sincerity and in good faith even though they were detrimental to the free school. Had the mayor and City Council called a public meeting to review and explain the ordinance and to clarify its authority by the Act of Incorporation of 1831, such letters would have been contradictory because the people voted for the Act of Incorporation of 1931, which expressly permitted establishment of such a school. On the other hand, sincere as these letters may appear, they objected to the small tax which really amounted to much less than what the current costs were for sending a child to a private school.

Consider two hypothetical cases: First: a wealthy family with an exceptionally large estate and orange groves, (this was before the freeze of 1835, when the orange trade was active and lucrative,) valued at \$5,000, two pleasure buggies, eight slaves, and two dogs, would have to pay fifteen dollars and fifty cents the cost of sustaining one child in a "Classical course" for three months. Second: an average family with a house valued at \$1,000, a buggy, and a dog would have to pay three dollars tax - the cost of an elementary "English course" for about six weeks.

In October (1832) the City Council passed a resolution closing the free school because of the widespread opposition and interruption of the collection of the school tax. It was resolved that the free school ". . . be for the present, suspended until the said question can be tried and deter-

mined at the next Superior Court in November ensuing." The case to be tried was a test as to whether or not the City Council could force the citizens to pay a school tax.

In accordance with a resolution of the City Council, the mayor issued the following proclamation decreeing suspension of the school:

PROCLAMATION

Mayor's Office, Oct. 17th, 1832

In pursuance of a resolution of the City Council, I hereby make known to the citizens of St. Augustine, that the free school recently established in this city under and in virtue of the act of incorporation of the 4th of February, 1831, has been suspended. It is proper and perhaps expected by those who have both advocated and supported so useful and beneficial an institution to explain the motives and reasons which have induced the City Council to discontinue it. A charitable and benevolent feeling for those whose station in life rendered them unable to bestow upon their children the advantages of education, and an honest and thorough conviction of the important benefits that must necessarily result to the community from a measure effectually calculated to improve the minds and morals of the young who are now springing up among us, and render them useful citizens, and virtuous members of society, induced the City Council to establish this school by taxation, as the only mode which could render it permanent. The plan was the only effectual one that could be suggested, and which is in general and practical operation in many parts of the United States, where hundreds and thousands of the youth of our country are enjoying and reaping the benefits of a good education on economical terms. Various objections were stated by certain persons to this institu-

tion at its first establishment, but obviously intended to cloak the real motives of their opposition, as we think that no reason offered by them can strike the mind of any reasonable being with any force whatever. Three competent persons were appointed to conduct the school, one female and two male instructors, to receive the three a sum not exceeding \$1100 per annum, and this raised by a tax in proportion to the amount of property owned by those subjected to it. But the small circle of opposition soon began to expand, until the most decided and inveterate hostility, threw every embarrassment that could be devised in the way, and resorted to every measure that could impede and finally annihilate the school, by refusing themselves to pay, and encouraging others also to resist the payment of the taxes necessary for its support. They have succeeded, and let the consequences rest with them. The school is ended - one hundred and twenty children are again turned adrift; those, whose parents can afford it, to continue their education in some other institution, but those whose parents are unable to assist them, to grow up in ignorance, and at some future day to curse in bitterness of heart those who have thus contributed to their degradation and wretchedness. The City Council have discharged their duty - and though they have been compelled to submit to the opposition for the present, they are sustained by a conscious feeling that they have acted for the people's good. To those who have opposed them in this useful measure, they wish that time may bring no bitter reflection for the injury they have done to themselves and their unfortunate fellow creatures. Whilst they sincerely regret the condition of those who have been the victims of a selfish opposition,

and trust that their suffering offspring will find a redress in the watchful care of a superintending Providence.

Let those alone rejoice, who grudge to the children of the poor, the benefits of learning.

JOHN GRAY, JR. Mayor.

Test, Jos. S. SANCHEZ, Clerk.

Just what the mayor meant by his statement: "Various objections were stated by certain persons to this institution at its first establishment, but obviously intended to cloak the real motives of their opposition . . ." is not definitely known. The answer, however, may possibly be found in the statement by the "Native Floridian," concerning the part played by a dominating religion and a selfish aristocracy.²⁵ Evidence points directly to the latter, whereas only allusions are made to the influence of the former.

A week after the proclamation by the mayor, a letter to the editor signed *Stator*, in reviewing the causes of the downfall of the free school wrote, "This opposition arose, as we have been informed chiefly from those who were most able to pay the tax; who seemed to consider it as an imposition that they should be made to contribute to the education of the children of the poor and the destitute." This is the same thought as that conveyed by the "Native Floridian," only more forcefully stated. He reminded those objectors that their own children were educated on far cheaper terms than that involving a tutor or private school: "By this economical arrangement the children of the Poor may be said to have been instructed without cost, as they were educated along with those of the rich, who were yet put to no extra expense thereby; but on the contrary, had these children taught upon much cheaper terms than they could otherwise have been."

To those who desired to help the poor, but feared that

25. *Florida Herald*, September 6, 1832.

their gestures may be misinterpreted, or even refused, by the indigents designed to be benefited, he said, they “. . . are pleased at having an opportunity of administering to the mental and moral wants of the poor, and of concealing the hand of charity under the mantle of the State, which is thus thrown with a wise and Paternal care over the lowest of her children.”

In answer to the complaints of those who objected that they would pay taxes from which they would receive no benefits, he stated: “We doubt indeed, whether that can be considered as charity, which redounds as much to the benefit of the giver as to the receiver, which tends to attach the citizens of the state more firmly to it; and to strengthen the cause of liberty by diffusing its blessings, and promoting a knowledge of its principles. . . .”

In verifying the statement of the mayor in regard to the authority of the City Council to establish a free school, and to levy taxes to support it, he clearly stated, “. . . it is objected that the tax imposed by the Council is a special tax, which the People are under no obligation to pay. This tax, however, is authorized by the charter of Incorporation; this Charter has been accepted by the People, and they therefore cannot complain of the enforcement of its provisions by the council. Where the object was their own good, and that of their children, they had surely the less reason to complain. . . .”

Stator also mentioned that a public examination of the pupils was successful in the branches “. . . taught at the School, in Reading, Parsing, Writing, Arithmetic, and Astronomy, . . .”

In an effort to test the legality of this undertaking, various records relevant to the free school were assembled and prepared for offer to the Superior Court which was to convene

in November of 1832. These exhibits are in the city vault in St. Augustine and reveal, among other defaulters of the school tax, such names as Andrew Burgevin, formerly a teacher in St. Augustine; John Drisdale, formerly a member of the committee of trustees of the first academy proposed for St. Augustine in 1825, active in civic affairs and probably in the higher social brackets; E. B. Gould, editor of *The Florida Herald*, later mayor of St. Augustine, and an advocate of better education (providing, as noted, that he did not have to pay taxes to support it); Eusebio Gomez, a teacher in St. Augustine from 1816 to 1824, recipient of a land grant of twelve thousand acres, and whose daughter was at this time teaching school there; G. W. Perpall, active in civic and church affairs, and a member of the board of trustees of the free school.

Summary

It appears then, that the fate of the free school was controlled by both economic and social influences with religion playing an important, if apparently only an implied, part. Objection to paying the school tax was the outward reason given by most of the opponents. Some were probably sincere in believing that these taxes were illegal and oppressive. The evidence seems to indicate, however, that others may have used the objection to the tax only as a pretext to veil their real motives. These, in many instances, were the people who could best afford to pay the tax, who had previously led the public to believe they were staunch supporters of education, and who were often leaders in civic affairs. The inclination toward the aristocracy of wealth and position, and the influence of the Catholic Church were factors which seemed important to the writers of that time in determining the fate of the steps taken toward providing free educational opportunities for all the youth of St. Augustine.

The educational background of the majority of the inhabitants of St. Augustine was responsible to no small degree for the resistance to the movement favoring education. The schools that were established during the colonial period functioned under such adverse conditions as insufficient supplies, inadequate housing, and especially underpaid and dissatisfied teachers. Only boys attended these schools. It was these children who grew up to be the men and women who viewed with indifference the matter of education during the Territorial Period.

In spite of the adverse forces, there was a slow development in education, even though successful establishment of free schools was not accomplished. The legacies and inheritances of the colonial period were, to a great extent, responsible for the three fundamental reasons used openly or hidden by the opposition. These may be classified as: A sentiment opposed to equal opportunities for all classes, an unwillingness to assume the inevitable expense of a free school through public taxation, and religious opposition.