

THE FLORIDA STRUGGLE OVER UNIFORMITY OF TEXTBOOKS:
Part I, The Battle for Uniformity, 1868 - 1917

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Textbooks have played a strategic role in American Education since the days of the young republic. When the too frequently ill-prepared instructors in the common schools based their instruction largely upon books placed in the hands of their pupils, the textbook was often of greater importance than the teacher. For a long period of time, whatever texts the parents were able to provide for their children served as the media of instruction. This practice went unquestioned when the method of instruction was largely individual; however, by the middle of the nineteenth century when public schools were being organized to educate large numbers, classification of pupils became important. Common textbooks in the hands of all pupils in the same class (grade) were considered essential. Hence began the first part of the struggle, that of securing uniformity of textbooks. Much later the battle to provide diversity of texts developed.

The period, 1868-1917, may be assumed to be the time when school men fought for uniformity of textbooks. Part I deals with this era; Part II, describing the struggle for variety in textual materials 1917-1960, will be presented later. The chief data sources for this study were the annual and biennial reports of the State Superintendents of Public Instruction, the Laws of the State of Florida, and the minutes of the County School Boards of the following ten counties: Broward, Calhoun, Duval, Escambia, Gadsden, Hillsboro, Holmes, Lake, Walton, and Washington.

In the early days of statehood, state superintendents were concerned with establishing and financing a system of public schools, to the exclusion of relatively minor problems, such as the textbooks in use. Moreover, teachers during this period utilized the individual method of instruction. For these reasons it was after the Civil War before attention was given to materials of instruction, chiefly textbooks. The school law of 1869, which implemented the articles of the Constitution of 1868 dealing with public schools, invested the State Superintendent with "the oversight, charge, and management of all matters pertaining to ... libraries, textbooks, and apparatus." (1) This same law empowered the county school boards "To do whatever they may judge expedient with regard to ... procuring ... textbooks for the schools." (2) Consequently

both state and county superintendents began to be concerned with the selection and use of textbooks, as one of their responsibilities.

Although the two differing and complementary views of textbook usage, referred to earlier, existed in Florida as elsewhere in the United States, school officials struggling with the problem of textbooks for the evolving public schools were troubled by those created by the many varieties of texts in use. Their concern was that pupils have sufficient of the same texts to enable the teachers to work more efficiently and effectively. When this condition was achieved their interest in providing a variety of materials developed. Both of these aspects of uniformity will be discussed. This paper presents an overview of the former as based upon the examination of minutes of selected county school boards, reports of the state superintendents, and other state documents.

Uniformity from 1868 to 1883

With some exceptions, the State Superintendents of Public Instruction* from the time of C. Thurston Chase (1868-1871) vigorously supported state uniformity of textbooks. In their annual and biennial reports recurred, as a refrain, statements of the "drawbacks to the education of youth of the state caused by the multiplicity of texts." Chase, State Superintendent when the school law of 1869 was enacted, recorded that a selection of textbooks had been made for the public schools and that the publisher had sent them to each superintendent. He did not specify whether these were samples for examination or a supply to be sold to the public. (3)

During Chase's administration, S. F. Halliday, Superintendent of Alachua County, wrote that an obstacle in the way of progress was

the want of suitable books. Most of the pupils have books of some kind but not such as are suitable for their age or degree of advancement. Many of the patrons are satisfied if their

*They were C. Thurston Chase (1868-1871); Rev. Charles Beecher (1871-1873); Jonathan C. Gibbs (1873-1874); Samuel B. McLin, Secretary of State and Acting Superintendent (1874-1875); Rev. William Watkin Hicks (1875-1876); William Penn Haisley (1877-1881); Eleazer K. Foster (1881-1884); Albert J. Russell (1884-1893); William N. Sheats (1893-1905, 1913-1921); William M. Holloway (1905-1913).

children only have books, without at all considering their suitability or adaptation to the age and capacity of the child In my visits to the different schools under my supervision I have been surprised at the great number of different readers, spellers, geographies, grammars, and arithmetics in some schools. The teachers could not classify these pupils to any advantage nor properly economize their labor When we shall have secured a uniformity in textbooks it will make a new era in the way of advancement. (4)

Thus early school leaders on both state and county levels were recognizing the difficulties existing in a school room where each child brought whatever book his parents could provide, or brought none if they were financially unable to furnish him one.

The Rev. Charles Beecher (1871-1873) concurred with preceding leaders when he reported that the want of suitable textbooks was an obstacle to educational progress second only to financial difficulties. He noted that parents able to furnish books had supplied their children with almost every variety and that many were unable to provide books of any kind. Halliday of Alachua, who was keenly aware of instructional difficulties traceable to the excessive multiplicity of textbooks, again wrote:

There are still some schools that have not uniformity of books. This is owing, in a great measure to the prejudices of parents and guardians, who are disposed to give the preference to such books as they were accustomed to use in their own school days. This want of uniformity increases the labor of the teacher and is a great obstacle in the way of his success. (5)

Because of conditions such as those described above, Superintendent Beecher urged the state legislature to require county school boards to provide textbooks for indigents and to forbid the use of those books not on the state-adopted list, saying that the law provided that there be a uniform list. (6) This last statement was correct if the law of 1869 were broadly interpreted, since it had given the state superintendent management of the textbooks. However, no means of enforcement were provided.

Though chiefly occupied with other matters, the Rev. Jonathan Gibbs (1873-1875) selected and listed a state-approved series of textbooks. (7) Included in his report were statements from two county superintendents

relative to the textbook situation. Superintendent W. B. Varn of Polk County wrote that "in addition to the want of a competent corps of teachers, is the necessity of a uniform series of textbooks." (8) Superintendent Dennis Eagan of Madison County affirmed that whole schools objected to the state series, but that he had instructed the teachers "to insist upon [the use of] the state adoption unless scholars have sufficient other books to be properly classified." (9) Since this was the period when aid from the Peabody Education Fund was being given directly to public schools which met certain criteria, among them that they must classify pupils in grades (10), it was important to local school officials that they be able to classify their pupils.

Samuel B. McLin, Secretary of State and Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction (1874-1875), spoke out firmly in regard to the need for uniformity of textbooks. He maintained it to be folly for the state to adopt a series since it lacked money to supply texts. Even were it financially feasible he doubted the wisdom of such action, but considered county uniformity an educational necessity. (11) Below are statements expressing his opinions:

The propriety of the State adopting a series of textbooks, the use of which should be enforced in the public schools, is becoming more and more questionable every day, particularly in those States distinguished for efficient school systems and educational advancement Let county boards determine upon a good series of textbooks and use whatever means [are necessary] to acquaint parents, children and teachers with the fact that a series has been selected--urging purchase. (12)

The Rev. William Watkin Hicks (1875-1876) failed specifically to recommend state-wide uniformity, yet in effect did so. He furnished county superintendents with a list of texts upon which he had been able to secure a "minimum scale of prices," and entreated county school boards to adopt the series "with all practical dispatch." (13)

During the second year of Superintendent Hicks' term, Thomas Hannah, Superintendent of Washington County, recommended to the Washington County School Board that the school treasurer also be appointed librarian and that all books and monies on hand be placed in his charge. The librarian was authorized to sell copies to patrons and to persons "actually engaged in teaching." (14) Hence the school officials in this county had in 1876 selected and supervised the sale of books for use in the county

schools. Whether uniformity of use was required is unknown, but one may assume that it was encouraged.

William Penn Halsley (1877-1881) was another of the state superintendents who recommended county-wide uniformity, but only because it was favored by most county school officials. Early in his term he had sent a circular to all county superintendents asking their opinions with regard to uniform texts. Superintendents of Alachua, Jackson, Orange, and Nassau wrote him in support of county-wide uniformity. However, Superintendent Hicks personally favored state-wide adoption because of the constantly shifting population. His position was supported by at least one county school board, that of Hillsboro. The superintendent of Monroe County also agreed that state uniformity was desirable, and even suggested a plan for the selection of texts for state adoption by a committee of three county superintendents, the books to remain in adoption for twelve years. (15)

In 1877, Superintendent Hannah of Washington County again reported extensively to his school board upon the need for "proper books":

Parents are careless and almost indifferent ... and seem to think it is sufficient that their children go to school whether provided with books ... or anything else, and that he would suggest that some measure be adopted by the board to compell persons who are able to provide their children with necessary books and those unable be reported by their teachers and provided from the county library. (16)

The selection of books in the "county library" being somewhat broken, the superintendent was authorized to order such books as were needed. A year later he was reporting that at one school most of the pupils were destitute of books, and that those on hand were of such diversified character as to make it impractical to organize the school into classes, thus retarding materially the progress of the pupils. (17)

State Superintendent Eleazer K. Foster, in agreement with preceding state superintendents, strongly favored uniformity of texts, stating that especially in country schools he found efficiency hindered by lack of uniformity. He lamented the unnecessary expense to parents caused by a teacher's endeavoring to introduce books and courses of his own choice and denounced the practice whereby teachers opposed to a county adoption neglected to use the selected texts. He recommended to the legislature the passage of a law to provide county uniformity. (18)

The first law providing for county-wide uniformity was enacted during Superintendent Foster's term on March 1, 1883. Its chief provisions reflect his recommendations:

Section 1. On the first Monday in May, 1883, the Boards of Public Instruction of the several counties that have not provided for uniformity of textbooks in the public schools shall meet and adopt a series of textbooks ... the use of such books ... shall be obligatory upon the Trustees and teachers of the several counties; and said adoptions shall be in full force in said counties for a period of not less than five years.

Section 2. Any teacher refusing to use the textbooks adopted ... shall not be entitled to any compensation for his or her services as such teacher. (19)

Thus was taken a long step toward uniformity of textbooks, that of providing uniformity within each county. The law seemed to have little opposition, State Superintendent Haisley's contention that most people desired county-wide uniformity apparently being correct. Among the reasons why counties favored uniformity were these: (1) The desire of school officials to organize the schools into classes; (2) the growing practice of county school boards to supply indigents with texts; (3) the demand of parents to eliminate the expense of changing texts with each employment of a new teacher or upon the whim of one already employed; and (4) the wish of teachers to instruct children supplied with uniform texts rather than with a miscellany of whatever their parents supplied.

During the preceding and ensuing years an increasing number of county school boards had of their own volition begun to adopt the state-recommended series of texts. Hence was won the first skirmish in the battle for state uniformity, not merely that of passage of the law of 1883 but the more important creation of a climate in which passage and acceptance of such a law became possible.

Uniformity from 1883 to 1899

From the enactment of the school law of 1883 until 1892, school men gave relatively little attention to the question of uniformity. Most counties apparently conformed to the law, each five years adopting a new series or continuing in adoption the old. Albert J. Russell (1884-1893), State

Superintendent at the time when the constitution of 1885 was adopted, was concerned chiefly with organizing and administering the schools under the "new" constitution, the enactment of related laws, and the adoption of regulations by the State Board of Education necessary to implement these. Copies of such regulations, included in his reports, contained no reference to textbooks. (20)

However, the law requiring county-wide uniformity was omitted from the codification of laws in 1892, whether inadvertently or not is conjecture. Afterwards, there being no state law requiring county adoption of texts, some county school boards ceased providing for such adoptions. (21) Conditions in schools were reverting to those prior to 1883, with frequent changes and multiplicity of texts. At the 1898 State Convention of County Superintendents, Philips of Levy had reviewed both the conditions in the past and the existing situation with regard to the use of textbooks. Speaking at length in favor of county uniformity he indicated that although most counties still followed the law of 1883 (no longer as part of state law), some were "breaking away."

State Superintendent William N. Sheats (1893-1905, 1913-1921) in his 1898 report quoted extensively from reports of the county superintendents which were based largely upon a questionnaire sent to them concerning the question of textbook uniformity; superintendents of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Lee, and Marion expressed opposition to state uniformity. A number of others who were pleased with county-wide uniformity made no statement regarding state uniformity. Whether or not they desired it is unknown. The superintendent of one county, Barthoff of Manatee, spoke strongly in favor of state uniformity. (22) Doubtless influenced somewhat by the judgments of county superintendents and by their reflection of the opinions of citizens, Sheats urged the passage for a second time of a law for county-wide adoptions.

School leaders and other citizens having recognized that a change was essential, such a law was enacted in 1899. This law was to become effective gradually, but by July 1, 1901, all counties were to have provided county adoptions. In general, its provisions were similar to those of the law of 1883, but were more specific as to administration; for example: "The county Superintendent shall see that the books adopted are used by the pupils and teachers shall not use any other books in teaching." (23) From this period county uniformity was recognized as essential and opposition of any importance ceased.

Uniformity from 1899 to 1917

The advantages of county-wide uniformity being enjoyed by the citizens of the several counties of the state, many were desirous of extending these benefits through state uniformity. The struggle to do so, though not quite so long in years as that to achieve county uniformity, was as bitterly fought.

The educational historian, Cochran, expressing his opinion of the law of 1899, stated that the only criticism of which he was aware was that it should have provided state-wide uniformity. State Superintendent Sheats in 1904 indicated that the school superintendents of twelve counties desired state uniformity: Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Dade, DeSoto, Franklin, Holmes, Lee, Marion, Monroe, Nassau, and Sumter. The reasons given for their support were that state uniformity would aid those pupils who moved frequently, that it would be economical, and that it would more easily provide for better classification and uniformity of instruction. (24)

Sheats also cited excerpts from reports of sixteen county superintendents who were opposed to state uniformity. Their opposition was explained by statements, such as: that state uniformity would be more likely to "fasten a series of texts that would remain in use for economy's sake long after the state had outgrown them," that it would keep out competition, and that the "scheming politicians ... may thrust upon youth ... very inferior books." Just as were the counties where superintendents had favored state uniformity, these counties were scattered geographically. They were Baker, Brevard, Calhoun, Duval, Gadsden, Hernando, Hillsboro, Jackson, Liberty, Madison, Manatee, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Putnam, and St. Johns. (25)

Perhaps the superintendent of Escambia expressed the feeling of those officials in many counties which had developed the better school systems in the state when he wrote: "If the balance of the state will adopt the textbooks now in use in this county I would have no objection to state uniformity." (26) Apparently the consensus was not opposition to uniform texts throughout the state but rather fear of the poor administration of such a law with its consequent lessening of quality of texts and the dread of the loss of local control.

During succeeding years in the administration of State Superintendent William M. Holloway (1905-1912) some educators and school officials labored vigorously for state-wide adoption, while others as strongly

opposed this action. Two high school principals, one from Tampa, the other from Fernandina, had written the Walton County School Board in 1907 stating their opposition to state uniformity and requesting the board to take action against it. In that year with concerted effort to stem the tide toward state uniformity, several county school boards passed and forwarded to their legislators resolutions against state uniformity. Among them were Duval, Gadsden (which had also been opposed in 1905), Holmes (where in 1904 the superintendent had favored state uniformity), and Walton. (27)

Typical of these resolutions was that sent to the Holmes County legislative delegation:

Resolved--That the Board of Public Instruction of Holmes County in open session place ourselves on record opposing the enactment of a law providing for the state uniformity of textbooks as we believe such a law would be detrimental to the best interests of education and that the members of the next legislature be requested to oppose such a measure. (28)

However, opposition to state-wide uniformity was diminishing after reaching a high point in 1907. Only in Duval did the 1909 county board minutes reveal opposition. Explanations found there for opposition were similar to those cited earlier. The members "felt" that each county could select those texts best adapted to the degree of educational advancement in such county, that schools would be supplied with inferior books, that they would face increased expenditures, that changes from defective books would likely be impossible, and that it would "result in the retrogression of the Public School System of Florida." (29)

Resistance continued to lessen. No statement of opposition was located in the 1910 or 1911 minutes of the school boards of the ten counties referred to above.

In the 1911 session of the legislature, the forces supporting state uniformity were able to secure passage of a law applicable to the elementary school subjects. Although a vocal minority had fought this legislation in the Senate, they were unsuccessful in their efforts to defeat the bill. They had attempted first the passage of a substitute bill which in effect would have continued county uniformity. Failing, they then tried a motion to postpone the bill indefinitely. (30) Both failed to gain more than token support.

The lengthy law of 1911 provided a method for selecting and distributing uniform textbooks in specified elementary subjects. Its enforcement was strengthened by the provision that a teacher using other books in these subjects was to be discharged and to have his certificate cancelled. As had the 1899 law, it provided gradual adoption. (31)

By 1916 the success of the 1911 law was so great that no county superintendent in his report to the state opposed state uniformity of elementary texts. Thirteen desired extension through high school. They were Brevard, Broward, Clay, Gadsden, Lafayette, Lake, Marion, Osceola, St. Lucie, Santa Rosa, Suwannee, Taylor, and Volusia. (32) Only two of these, Clay and Marion, had been among those which in 1904 had desired state uniformity. In addition to the success of the 1911 law, the reasons for these changes are unknown. They may have been: that in some instances new county superintendents were in office; that Broward had been a part of Dade which had favored it then; and that population in some counties had increased greatly, perhaps bringing a new philosophy related to the selection of textbooks.

Extension upward to include secondary textbooks was provided by the legislature in 1917. Thus the battle for state uniformity of texts, begun in the 1870's and fought on local, county, and state levels, was won. In retrospect the support for uniformity of texts had gathered momentum as it had been successful, first on the county level, then on the state level; first for the elementary subjects, then for high school. It had taken approximately forty years to gain and establish state uniformity at the elementary level. With this success it took only a short six years to achieve the same at the secondary level.

Provision of uniform texts was a definite step toward improving the administration and organization of the public schools throughout the state. Uniformity of texts made possible the establishment of consecutive grades, with promotion from one grade to another either within the same school or when transferring to another school. The law had insured a standard curriculum for each grade in all schools, with the required use of the texts adopted for each course listed in the law and the strong prohibition against the use of other texts. It had secured a standard curriculum so far as could be obtained by the use of selected texts and the prohibition of others.

Despite these many advantages, the once highly desired uniformity of textbooks became a straight jacket preventing movement toward enrichment of the curriculum through varied texts. The standard curriculum and the rigid grades became chains forcing all youth into lock-step

progression until graduation or withdrawal from school. These conditions made more difficult the provision for individual differences among communities and among individuals, differences of which educators and school officials were becoming more aware. Teachers who were far better prepared than those of the late 1800's found themselves thwarted in attempts to improve instruction, or else forced to close their eyes to the law. The struggle for variety of materials and against uniformity of texts will be presented in the second part of this study.

Footnotes

1. Laws of Florida, 1869, Chapter 1686, Section 12.
2. Ibid., Section 19.
3. C. Thurston Chase, "Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction," Proceedings of the Assembly, 1870, Appendix, pp. 66-67.
4. Ibid., p. 70.
5. Charles Beecher, Report of the State Superintendent for the Year Ending September 30, 1871, p. 6.
6. Ibid., 1872, p. 18.
7. Jonathan C. Gibbs, "Report of the State Superintendent for the Year Ending September 30, 1873," Florida Assembly Journal, 1874, Appendix, p. 60.
8. Ibid., p. 51.
9. Ibid., p. 48.
10. Marion W. Black, "The Contributions of the Peabody Fund to the Development of Education in Florida, 1867-1900," Florida Journal of Educational Research, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 10, 11, 13.
11. William Watkin Hicks, "Biennial Report of the State Superintendent, 1876," Florida Senate Journal, 1877, Appendix, pp. 91-93 (Quoting report of McLin).
12. Ibid., pp. 91-92.
13. Ibid., pp. 93-94.
14. Minutes of the Washington County Board of Public Instruction, May 6, 1876 (Hereafter referred to as Washington County Minutes. Minutes of other county school boards will be referred to similarly.)
15. William P. Haisley, "Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Years, 1876-1878," Florida House Journal, 1879, Appendix, pp. 179, 190, 196; Hillsboro County Minutes, August 9, 1877.

16. Washington County Minutes, September 1, 1877.
17. Op. cit.; Ibid., April 6, 1878.
18. Eleazer K. Foster, "Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Schools, 1881-1882," Florida Assembly Journal, 1883, Appendix, p. 214.
19. Laws of Florida, 1883, Chapter 3446.
20. Albert J. Russell, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida, 1884; 1891; 1892.
21. Thomas Everett Cochran, History of Public School Education in Florida. Bulletin 1921, No. 1. Tallahassee, Florida: State Department of Education, 1921 (Lancaster, Pa.: The New Era Printing Co., Inc., 1929), p. 175.
22. William N. Sheats, Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for the Years Ending June 30, 1898, passim.
23. Laws of Florida, 1899, Chapter 4680.
24. Cochran, Op. cit., p. 176; Sheats, Ibid., 1904, passim.
25. Sheats, Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 280.
27. Duval County Minutes, March 9, 1907; Gadsden County Minutes, April 4, 1905; February 5, 1907; Holmes County Minutes, February 4, 1907; Walton County Minutes, February 5, 1907; March 5, 1907.
28. Holmes County Minutes, February 4, 1907.
29. Duval County Minutes, May 20, 1909.
30. Florida Senate Journal, 1911, pp. 215, 249, 504, 567, 618, 1003, 1125, 1170, 1224; Florida House Journal, 1911, pp. 1347, 1348.
31. Laws of Florida, 1911, Chapter 6178.
32. Sheats, Ibid., 1916, passim; Laws of Florida, 1917, Chapter 7374.