

Course was spelled out for pupils 100 years ago

By Jerry Bowen

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In my last column we took a sneak preview of what it was like for school students back in 1909. I thought you might find it quite interesting how much of an education you had to have just to enter high school. In 1911, the Solano County Schools Board of Education issued a book of "Rules for Promotion and Graduation" and a "List of Supplementary Reading Books."

In the book, teachers were required to concentrate principally upon the essential grammar school branches, such as Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Spelling, Composition and United States History.

It also stated, "The Course, while necessary under the provisions of Section 1771 of the Political Code, should not hamper the originality of the teacher, nor the capacity of the pupil to do more extended work than that assigned the various grades. The work of any course can only be in the main suggestive."

In other words, the teachers were allowed discretion as regards the course content, required in order to teach effectively.

One of the first requirements for the teachers was "Order and Neatness." It goes on to state, "It is a matter of practice more than of precept; the teacher's own personal appearance, her desk, her books, the appearance of her work upon the blackboard, all should be models for her pupils. Schoolbooks and desks should be inspected frequently, and failure to keep them in proper condition should be considered a breach of discipline. From the lowest grade to the highest, nothing should be accepted which does not show painstaking effort. If the best is insisted upon it will become habitual."

I can't help but wonder how such a rule would measure up in today's schools.

"Patriotism" is another item promoted in the rules. It partially stated that, "Early in life a love of country should be instilled in the hearts of the children. A good way to do this is to recount the story of our nation's birth, the noble sacrifices of its heroes and the blessings, which our forefathers have secured for us. The "Stars and Stripes" should float from every schoolhouse, and before assembling each day, the flag should be saluted.

Under "Decorations, Improvement Etc" it was suggested the student become involved

with the upkeep and neatness of the school grounds including seeing to that "the schoolyard is free from rubbish."

Another significant necessity for the teachers was, "Interesting Parents and Trustees." Under its heading it stated, "Every teacher should endeavor to interest the parents in the work of the school. Encourage them to visit and see the work that is being done in the school from day to day. Give them to understand that you enjoy their visits and consider them helpful. Encourage Trustees to visit and take a more active interest in the welfare of the school.

"Enlist the support of the local papers, and by all means let your school occupy a prominent place in the affairs of the community." On this item it's my opinion that several of the conditions are being followed today, even though it is a tough road to hoe in today's society.

One of the first, and in my opinion, highly important subjects discussed in "Working Directions," is mathematics. In part it states, "Pupils graduating from our elementary schools should be able to add, subtract, multiply and divide readily. They should also have a good, clear working knowledge of the general principles of arithmetic.

'It is a regrettable fact, however, that many of those leaving the grammar schools are decidedly weak in this subject. More attention should be given the subject of arithmetic in every grade of the school course.'

After the initial introduction of items as stated above, the rule book gets down to educational specifics. Over the next few columns I will only be able to give a short digest of the requirements as in the mathematics section.

Shortly, in the near future the entire contents of the "Rules for Promotion and Graduation" will be posted on a new Vacaville Heritage Council Web page. The Web address is <http://www.solanohistory.org>

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