

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**CALEB MILLS AND HIS LASTING IMPACT ON INDIANA**  
**EDUCATION**

Indiana's struggle to create effective public education policy in the mid- to late-nineteenth century reflected different concepts regarding the proper role of the local community in education. Common school reformers in Indiana and other states of the former Northwestern Territory faced similar challenges. The work and experience of Caleb Mills was similar to other reformers throughout the Midwest. Many of those education reformers in the Midwest were part of a larger network of nationwide reformers, espousing similar ideologies during the mid-nineteenth century. While each state's network of education reformers was decidedly unique, many of the reformers incorporated similar ideas and suggestions for improved education throughout the nation.

The activities and espoused ideals of Hoosier education reformers during the 1840s and 1850s demonstrate the connectedness and importance of a nationwide cohesive network of free school advocates. Understanding the broader network of Hoosier education reformers also helps to properly contextualize the role and lasting legacy of the work of Caleb Mills. For example, the "One of the People" addresses for which Mills gained the substantial portion of his notoriety, are not merely the opinions of one man but rather the articulation of views held by common school supporters in the surrounding region since at least the time the first Indiana state constitution was drafted.

Though best known for his six written addresses published as “One of the People,” which culminated in the 1852 School Law, Mills’ other addresses and later writings continued to impact Indiana policy outside the Statehouse and long after the 1852 School Law. In fact, in many ways Mills’ ideas contained in his other lectures framed the debate regarding Hoosier education—a debate that existed well into the twenty-first century. “A Lecture on Popular Education” and “Knowledge is Power,” two examples of addresses written by Mills in addition to his “One of the People” addresses, describe public attitudes toward free schooling and explain the importance of standardized methods, proper institutions, and rigid and uniform standards in teacher training. Just as Mills continued to engage these ideas outside of legislative settings, Hoosiers also debated the ideas expressed in Mills’ speeches long after their origin.

### *Regional Reformers*

Early histories of education reform in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana tend to identify one person or a group of individuals who played the significant role advocating for, or sometimes creating, the policies that served as the foundation of each state’s education system. Moreover, the majority of scholarly attention has typically focused on those reformers who moved to the Midwest from New England, or at least clearly expressed influence from New England traditions of common education. Often, these education reformers are portrayed as mavericks fighting rugged conditions and backward public opinion to create a comprehensive education system that ultimately improves and benefits an entire state. Additionally, these men

were generally characterized by biographers as having strong work ethics and unwavering commitments to common education.

In Ohio, Samuel Lewis, Calvin Ellis Stowe and William Holmes McGuffey have been identified as central figures in the state's educational traditions. Lewis in particular is acknowledged as the force behind the common school in Ohio. Born in 1799 in Falmouth, Massachusetts, the son of a sea-captain, Lewis moved with his family to Ohio after his father lost most of his money as a result of the War of 1812. Lewis was mostly self-educated, and an aunt served as his primary instructor during his childhood years in Ohio. As a young man, Lewis began to study law and eventually found a job in the Office of the Clerk of Courts in Cincinnati. In 1837, Lewis was appointed the first Superintendent of Common Schools in Ohio and was instrumental in creating a report on the condition of decentralized schooling in Ohio, which eventually played an important role in the formulation of the 1838 school law. In 1838, Lewis was publicly elected to the position, but resigned after serving only two of the five year term.<sup>1</sup>

Some accounts of Samuel Lewis describe the formative years of Lewis' life in positive terms. As a young man working for the Clerk of Courts, one author notes, "his manly bearing and industriousness attracted the attention of eminent men who had business to transact at the clerk's office."<sup>2</sup> Another account describes the disappointment Lewis felt after some of his education proposals were not accepted or

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<sup>1</sup> James Jesse Burns, *Educational History of Ohio: A History of its Progress Since the Formation of the State, Together with the Portraits and Biographies of Past and Present State Officials* (Columbus, Ohio : Historical Pub. Co., 1905), 420.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

endorsed by the Legislature: “Mr. Lewis went out of office a disappointed man, with a feeling of righteous indignation” over certain failed policies he advocated.<sup>3</sup> The same account also describes Lewis and his family as having positive characteristics. “They were plain people, taking life seriously and yet finding a source of happiness in the performance of its manifold duties.”<sup>4</sup> Lewis is remembered by these authors as a man of commitment to education with a strong work ethic, and a contented personality.

Calvin Ellis Stowe was born in Natick, Massachusetts in 1802. Stowe served as a professor at Dartmouth College upon his graduation from Andover Theological Seminary. In 1833, Stowe moved to Ohio, accepting a position as professor of Biblical Literature at Lane Theological Seminary. Stowe also participated in the meetings and discussions of the College of Teachers in Cincinnati.<sup>5</sup> In 1836, the State of Ohio appointed Stowe to research the public school systems of Europe. In 1837, Stowe presented his *Report on Elementary Education in Europe* to the Ohio General Assembly. Among other things, Stowe’s *Report* described the benefits of teacher training and provided an outline for both education in Ohio and the rest of the

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<sup>3</sup> Alston Ellis, “Samuel Lewis, Progressive Educator in the Early History of Ohio” *Ohio History* 25, no. 1 (1916): 85.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Hansen, *Early Educational Leadership in the Ohio Valley* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 61.

nation.<sup>6</sup> Stowe's report was also widely received and referenced in other states in the nation including Kentucky, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Michigan.<sup>7</sup>

Burns' descriptions of Stowe's early life in particular emphasize character traits which became evident later in his life. One account notes that Stowe's "early history is that of very many New England boys—very limited means, very strong thirst for knowledge, and a will which ultimately attained him the goal of his ambition, a college education."<sup>8</sup> Not only does Burns portray Stowe as having traditional New England roots, but also emphasizes the character traits of perseverance and intellectual curiosity that served him later in life.

Finally, William Holmes McGuffey was born in Washington County, Pennsylvania in 1800. As a child, McGuffey immigrated with his family to Ohio. As an adult, McGuffey became a minister and school teacher. McGuffey worked with Calvin Stowe and others to establish the College of Teachers in Cincinnati.<sup>9</sup> McGuffey is best known for his *Eclectic Readers*, first published in 1836. The educational texts attempted to convey lessons of both an academic and moral nature while also holding children's interest. The McGuffey *Readers* became recognized

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<sup>6</sup> Charles G. Miller, "Background of Calvin E. Stowe's 'Report on Elementary Public Instruction in Europe' (1837)," *Ohio History* 49, no. 2 (1940): 185–190.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Travers, "Calvin Ellis Stowe and the History of Education," *Peabody Journal of Education*, 47, no. 2 (1969): 83–87.

<sup>8</sup> Burns, *Educational History of Ohio*, 443.

<sup>9</sup> Delores Sullivan, *William Holmes McGuffey: Schoolmaster to the Nation* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1994), 30–45, 56.

nationally and were eventually adopted and used as textbooks during the nineteenth century in many schools.<sup>10</sup>

Burns' account of McGuffey emphasizes those character traits that served him as an instructor and minister. Of his public speaking abilities, the author notes McGuffey was, "perfectly unassuming in manner, he was so clear in thought, so simple in language, so attractive in manner, that the crowds who gathered to hear him were held, sometime enchained, by the charm of his discourse."<sup>11</sup> Of his success, Burns notes that although, as a child, McGuffey may have "lacked many of the advantages that are possessed by the pupils of the present day . . . he had the benefit of one noble and quickening power that has not been surpassed by all the boasted progress of later years."<sup>12</sup> In Burns' account, adversity was no match for McGuffey's insatiable desire for knowledge. McGuffey biographer Harvey Minnich, writing in 1936, issues a similar announcement, noting that childhood struggles caused the educator to be forever characterized as "severe in disciplinary control, abstemious in his personal habits, lofty minded in his intellectual attitudes."<sup>13</sup> In both accounts, adversity actually provides the catalyst for McGuffey's success.

In Illinois, Newton Bateman is identified as a key reformer. Born in 1822 in Fairton, New Jersey, Bateman and his family emigrated to Illinois in 1833. Bateman attended Illinois College and then Lane Theological Seminary in Ohio, but poor

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<sup>10</sup> John H. Westerhoff, *McGuffey and His Readers: Piety, Morality, and Education in Nineteenth-Century America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 13–24.

<sup>11</sup> Burns, *Educational History of Ohio*, 430.

<sup>12</sup> Burns, *Educational History of Ohio*, 431.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey C. Minnich, *William Homes McGuffey and His Readers* (Detroit: Book Tower, 1975), 11.

health caused him to leave before completing all of his course work.<sup>14</sup> From 1847 to 1851, Bateman worked as an English professor at a school in St. Louis. Also during that time, Bateman assumed the role of a “lay preacher.” In 1851, Bateman returned to Illinois where he became principle of West Side Union School.<sup>15</sup>

In 1858, Bateman was elected Superintendent of Public Instruction in Illinois. Bateman strongly supported the standardization of teacher training requirements and helped establish the Illinois State Normal University. The Civil War and a party realignment led to Bateman’s ousting during the 1863–1865 term. Upon his re-election in 1865, Bateman continued to publish reports and suggestions regarding the improvements of common schools in Illinois. In 1870, the Illinois General Assembly adopted a new constitution. Two significant provisions in that constitution indicated that Illinois would be obliged to provide public schooling indefinitely and that the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction could not be abolished by the General Assembly—essentially, the office became a constitutional mandate.<sup>16</sup> Bateman’s work, suggestions, and guidance during this time are largely credited for the ratification of the new constitutional provision.<sup>17</sup>

Bateman’s impact and perceived contribution to Illinois public schooling is perhaps best described by John Cook. Upon Bateman’s retirement from the office of

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<sup>14</sup> John Pulliam, “A History of the Struggle for a Free Common School System in Illinois from 1818 to the Civil War” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1965), 233.

<sup>15</sup> John Cook, *Educational History of Illinois: Growth and Progress in Educational Affairs of the State from the Earliest Day to the Present, with Portraits and Biographies* (Chicago: Henry O. Shepherd, 1912), 114–115.

<sup>16</sup> Illinois—Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, *The Sesquicentennial: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Illinois Education* (Springfield: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1967), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Pulliam, “History,” 233–234.

Superintendent of Public Instruction, he became president of Knox College. Cook notes, “he spent the remaining years of his working life, loved and honored by a grateful people whom he had served with such fidelity and ability.”<sup>18</sup> Cook also reprints a memorial address delivered by Samuel Willard, which almost described Bateman as a prophet, noting that his, “appeals to teachers and to the people were not law, but gospel, the revelation of new and better ways, with encouragement to walk therein; the incitation to a perpetual ascent. Like the angel in the Apocalypse, he was saying, ‘Come up hither and I will show thee’.”<sup>19</sup>

In Michigan, John D. Pierce and Isaac Crary receive credit as key reformers for the state’s mid-nineteenth century educational developments. Like many other Midwestern reformers from that time period, Pierce and Crary were born and raised in New England States. Accounts of the two men tend to portray them as working closely together to develop the free school provision of the 1851 Michigan Constitution.

John D. Pierce was born in 1797 in Chesterfield, New Hampshire and spent his childhood in Worcester County, Massachusetts. Pierce graduated from Brown University in 1822 and enrolled in Princeton Theological Seminary in 1823, but left in 1826.<sup>20</sup> In 1831, as an ordained Congregationalist minister, Pierce accepted a mission in Marshall, Michigan. In 1836 Pierce became the first Superintendent of Public Instruction in Michigan, an office established by the first Michigan

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<sup>18</sup> Cook, *Educational History of Illinois*, 136.

<sup>19</sup> Cook, *Educational History of Illinois*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Hoyt, *John D. Pierce, Founder of the Michigan School System: A Study of Education in the Northwest* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Scharf Tag, Label and Box Co., 1905), 56.

constitution. In that capacity, Pierce drafted a comprehensive plan for the development of universities and division of school lands, which became the basis for the state's school system. Also, in 1850 Pierce served on a state legislative committee with Isaac Crary to develop the educational provision of Michigan's 1851 constitution.<sup>21</sup>

Pierce's efforts, particularly as the first superintendent of public instruction, caused Tappan to conclude, "the work of preparing the most beneficial provisions of our present school system are the direct result of labors of this noble man, who has rightly been named 'The Father of Our School System.'"<sup>22</sup> Tappan further notes that Pierce "perhaps, above all his associates" realized the importance of common school education in Michigan.

Isaac Crary was born in 1804 in Preston, Connecticut. A lawyer by training, Crary moved to Michigan in 1832 and, in 1836, moved to Marshall, Michigan, where he became a neighbor to Pierce. Crary served in 1835 as a delegate to the first constitutional convention and sat on the committee which established the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.<sup>23</sup> In 1850, as mentioned above, Crary worked on the same constitutional committee with Pierce.

Putnam writes of Pierce and Crary working in Michigan that "more than any other two men, they were instrumental in laying the foundations of her educational

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<sup>21</sup> Harvey Tappan, *School Law and a History and Description of the Education System of Michigan* (Port Huron, MI: Sherman Printers, 1889), 28–29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Putnam, *The Development of Primary and Secondary Public Education in Michigan: A Historical Sketch* (Ann Arbor: George Wahr, Publisher and Bookseller, 1904), 22.

system, and in giving direction to its early development.”<sup>24</sup> Putnam also characterizes Pierce and Crary in 1830s and 1840s: “they were both young and filled with enthusiasm and hopefulness of that time of life, and with the spirit of enterprise which characterized the new-comers in the Territory.”<sup>25</sup>

Although early historians discussing the efforts of common education reformers in the states of Ohio, Illinois and Michigan could at times be aggrandizing in their descriptions, the histories also create a picture of a typical and influential Midwestern reformer. Usually born in New England, reformers develop an interest in education early in their careers. As their commitment to the cause of common education grew, these reformers generally surrounded themselves with like-minded individuals and together they actively advocated state-level policies to create the ideal school system.

#### *Caleb Mills and the 1851 Indiana Constitution*

Caleb Mills deviates very little in his characteristics from those of the most outspoken Midwestern reformers. Like many of his Midwestern colleagues, Mills’ formative years were spent outside the state of Indiana, growing up and attending schools in New England. Mills was born in 1806 in Dunbarton, New Hampshire, the son of a farmer. As a child, Mills attended local primary schools and Pembroke Academy before graduating from Dartmouth College in 1828. Mills then attended Andover Theological Seminary and graduated in 1833.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 21.

Mills first became acquainted with Indiana and the condition of its education system while pursuing his studies at Andover. During a two-year leave of absence from his studies at the school, Mills traveled to the Midwest instituting Sunday School programs in northern Kentucky and southern Indiana.<sup>26</sup> According to early Mills biographer Charles Moores, the time Mills spent in Indiana left a significant impression upon his psyche, and Mills resolved to the task of, “awakening the public sentiment to the importance of organizing the public schools” in Indiana.<sup>27</sup>

Mills pursued that objective when he answered an inquiry in the *Home Missionary* journal advertising for teachers at a new college in Indiana. In 1833, after his graduation from Andover and following his marriage to Sarah Marshall, Mills accepted a position as the first English professor at the new Wabash Manual Labor College and Teacher’s Seminary, later renamed Wabash College, in Crawfordsville, Indiana. In December of that year, Mills and his wife—along with two other teachers at the institute—made the journey to Indiana.<sup>28</sup> Mills spent the next thirteen years serving as a professor at the College.<sup>29</sup>

The mid-nineteenth century is the period during which Mills’ is most well-known due to his activities on behalf of statewide education policy. It was also one of the most active periods in education policy formation in the state of Indiana in

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<sup>26</sup> Charles W. Moores, *Caleb Mills and the Indiana School System*. (Indianapolis: Wood-Weaver Printing Company, 1905), 382.

<sup>27</sup> M. Teresa Baer. “Loyalty, Morality, and Uniformity: Indiana’s Search for a Cohesive Society through Public Schooling.” Unpublished manuscript, 2001. Indiana Historical Society. Indianapolis, IN.

<sup>28</sup> Betty Jane Krueger, “Caleb Mills: Pioneer Educator,” *Public Welfare in Indiana*. September, 1943: 12–14.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew A. Sherockman, “Caleb Mills, Pioneer Educator in Indiana” (Ph.D. dissertation University of Pittsburgh, 1954), 67.

general. An 1837 education convention held by common school advocates and sponsored by an Indiana Supreme Court justice was among one of the first activities signaling a new emphasis on Indiana education policy.<sup>30</sup> The 1840 United States Census revealed that Indiana ranked sixteenth among the twenty-three states in terms of literacy. By the 1840s, education advocates within the state began to lobby elected state representatives for an improved educational system. One contemporary said of the system, “The state of common education is truly alarming. Only about one child in eight between five and fifteen years is able to read. The common school and competent teachers are few.”<sup>31</sup>

In December 1846, after serving as a professor at Wabash College for thirteen years, Mills turned his attention to the condition of public education in Indiana. Mills crafted an anonymous address, signed “One of the People,” to the Indiana General Assembly, which was later published in the *Indiana State Journal*. The address utilized statistics from the 1840 United States Census to emphasize the lack of literacy among Indiana residents. Mills offered a solution that included statewide taxation and a centralized school system, through the establishment of the Office for Superintendent of Public Instruction. Because economic development seemed to take priority over education, Mills queried in his first address, “shall we dig canals and build railroads to transport the products of our rich soil to markets, and leave the intellect of the rising generation undeveloped and undisciplined?” Mills’ statements

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<sup>30</sup> M. Teresa Baer, “Education and the Perception of Equality: Defining Equality Through the Establishment of Public School Systems in Indiana and Ontario, 1787–1852” (master’s thesis, Indiana University at Indianapolis, 1998), 88.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Richard G. Boone, *A History of Education in Indiana* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1892), 87.

prompted Governor James Witcomb to similarly encourage the General Assembly to restructure the school system under a centralized superintendent.<sup>32</sup>

Boone suggests that the reaction of the General Assembly to Mills' address was not necessarily noteworthy, but observes that "the friends of education were aroused as they had not been" by Mills' first writing. The General Assembly called a state common school convention to be held in May 1847. Attendees and organizers provide a list of the other prominent education reformers in mid-nineteenth century Indiana.<sup>33</sup> Ovid Butler chaired the convention committee and Calvin Fletcher helped organize it. Isaac Blackford, who was by that time Chief Justice of the Indiana Supreme Court, presided over the three-day convention attended by nearly three hundred supporters of common schools.<sup>34</sup> The convention was divided into two committees. One committee prepared a general address, which was eventually circulated in newspapers throughout Indiana and the rest of the country, that identified and explained the general problems with the Indiana education system. The committee recommended the allocation of additional funds to education, that Indiana public schools should be free to students, that schools and teacher standards should be uniform, and that a superintendent of common schools should be established.<sup>35</sup> Another committee prepared a bill that was presented to the General

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Boone, *History of Education*, 90–93.

<sup>33</sup> Baer, "Education and the Perception of Equality," 104.

<sup>34</sup> Boone, *History of Education*, 96.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 96–97.

Assembly on December 8, 1847 calling for a poll tax, an organized system of superintendents and trustees, an a referendum upon the issue of common schools.<sup>36</sup>

Mills' second address was published on December 31, 1847. In it, he reiterated many of the observations he made in his first address and emphasized the resolutions and conclusions drawn from the activity of the common school convention.<sup>37</sup> In addition to Mills' lecture, the address also included five appendices on the topics of illiteracy, labor and education, school sanitation, the relation between illiteracy and "pauperism," and religious education.<sup>38</sup> The work of the common school convention attendees, as well as the second address published by Mills, influenced the General Assembly to sponsor a referendum on the topic of common schools in the 1848 election in which a majority of Hoosier voters expressed support for the system.<sup>39</sup>

Mills' third address was distributed to legislators in December 1848. While it reemphasized the themes of his earlier addresses, the third address also dissected the results of the 1848 free school referendum. Although Mills took time to examine the negative votes, he asserts that the ultimate result of the referendum is a cause for encouragement on the part of education advocates in the Hoosier state: "There was more genuine patriotism in the school vote of last August than was ever expressed at the ballot box since she [Indiana] became a sovereign state."<sup>40</sup> Mills' third address,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 98–99.

<sup>37</sup> Baer, "Education and the Perception of Equality," 106.

<sup>38</sup> Moores, *Caleb Mills*, 429–500; Boone, *History of Education*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Boone, *History of Education*, 110.

coupled with the results of the public referendum, was responsible in part for the creation of the 1849 school law. Much like the free school referendum, the School Law of the 1849 determined that only those counties who voted in favor of the law would be subject to it. Fifty-six percent of counties voted in favor of this law. Baer writes, “once again, Indiana residents received a permissive school bill that allowed one-third of the state townships to provide locally for schoolhouses, teachers, rules, curriculum and fees.”<sup>41</sup> In his fourth address to the Legislature, Mills emphasized the importance of quality primary schools, noting that those schools were the institutions in which the vast majority of Hoosiers would receive all of their education.<sup>42</sup>

Mills distributed his fifth message to the representatives at the Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850–51. Mills’ message addressed land grants, education funds, school libraries and training schools, and the state university. Mills noted the importance of the constitutional convention’s attention to education, stating, “there is no portion of constitutional revision . . . more intimately connected with the highest welfare of the people in all their relations and pursuits, civil, social, and commercial.”<sup>43</sup> Partially as a result of his written argument, the Indiana Constitution of 1851 included a revised education provision establishing “a general and uniform system of common schools, wherein tuition shall be without charge and equally open to all.” The constitution left the specific steps to establish the “general and uniform system” to the legislature.

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<sup>41</sup> Baer, “Education and the Perception of Equality,” 112.

<sup>42</sup> Moores, *Caleb Mills*, 389

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Boone, *History of Education*, 131.

Mills' final directive was recognized and distributed to the General Assembly in 1852. According to Boone, while the legislature readily approved of some of Mills' proposals, they "were slow to accept" some of the reformer's more progressive suggestions.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the legislature eventually enacted the "School Law of 1852," which established a common school fund, a centralized system of school organization, and a Superintendent of Public Instruction—all features Mills' had strongly supported in his address. The 1852 law did not fully incorporate Mills' proposals for graded schools and normal schools to standardize education and teacher training.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Mills' Impact on the Continuing Educational Debate*

Mills is best known for his six addresses delivered to the General Assembly around the time of the ratification of the 1851 constitution, but he continued to discuss the issue of education in other forums and in later years as well. Even after the passage of the 1852 School Law, Mills continued to advocate for popular education, speaking and writing on the subject and using his own name rather than a pseudonym. The preeminent nineteenth-century historian on the subject of Indiana education, Richard Boone, writes, "Caleb Mills . . . deserves to be held in grateful remembrance by Indiana teachers, Indiana children, Indiana Legislatures, and all who have interest in Indiana schools or the public morals incident to intelligence."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Boone, *History of Education*, 141.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 141–142.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 93–94

Though his identity as the author, “One of the People,” remained unknown for some time, Mills was in other ways quite public in his support of education. In addition to his professorship at Wabash College, Mills served briefly as the Superintendent of Public Instruction, helped to found the Indiana State Teachers Association, and wrote and spoke publicly on the subject of education. The ideas that Mills presented writing as himself encapsulated and engaged the debate over Indiana education long after his death.

The subjects of Mills’ speeches, including the two examined in this thesis, would become topics of significant attention in the decades following the speeches. For instance, in 1917, Indiana ranked seventeenth in a survey of education across the United States. Lawmakers and reformers, disappointed by this rating, sought to improve the state’s position in the 1920s, making the decade a very active period of time for education reform.<sup>47</sup> In 1923, the Indiana Education Survey Commission, appointed by the General Assembly in 1921, issued a report containing its analysis of the condition of Indiana education. As part of the survey, the commission issued standardized tests in reading, spelling, math and history to nearly sixteen thousand Indiana students in city and county schools. In all areas, students enrolled in schools which had only one teacher consistently ranked lower than students in schools with more teachers, and town schools typically ranked lower than city schools. One analysis determined that by the time a student reached eighth grade in a one-teacher

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<sup>47</sup> James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920–1945*, vol. 5, *The History of Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1982), 266.

school, he or she was nearly two years behind the educational attainment of an eighth-grade student in a city school.<sup>48</sup>

In assessing the causes for the achievement deficiency in rural schools, the commission suggested that the shortened school terms, inadequately-trained teachers, and school buildings that were “less well adapted and less well equipped” for educational purposes were primarily to blame.<sup>49</sup> The survey committee also identified problems with localized control, particularly the township trustee method of governing county and rural schools. The commission noted that rural schools, were “conducted in hand-to-mouth fashion without policy or vision.” The commission also noted that township trustees, “are generally satisfied with the poorest kind of school grounds, building and equipment . . . .”<sup>50</sup>

As for the method of improvement, the commission seemed to echo the sentiments first expressed by Caleb Mills over seventy years earlier. The committee recommended better local and state administration of the schools and, significantly, the consolidation of smaller rural schools into county schools. Proponents of consolidated schools argued new school buildings would allow children to learn in more comfortable, safer, and healthier environments. The buildings also provided students with more opportunity to pursue a vocational curriculum, such as shop and

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<sup>48</sup>General Education Board, *Public Education in Indiana* (Broadway, New York: General Education Board, 1923), 3–17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

domestic science, and the yard space to engage in organized physical education and activity.<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, more than fifty years prior to the General Education Board survey, Mills engaged the very same topics in his writings. Mills particularly favored the institution of the graded systems within well-built schoolhouses. Of graded schools, he noted in his “Knowledge is Power” address, “Its superiority in securing better classification, more thorough instruction, uniform text books, efficient discipline an improved state of morals and mental application, are equally manifest.”<sup>52</sup>

Mills also argued that a graded system of education produces the very results the General Education Board suggested in its report. Mills, however, argued that the graded system is responsible for the added benefits of teacher standardization and student achievement, writing, “[graded schools] have roused teachers to a higher standard of professional attainment, and their influence in prompting pupils to better habits of application and department, is not among the least of the merits of the system.”<sup>53</sup> In the same speech, Mills also suggested that graded schools resulted in the improved physical condition of school buildings: “with their superior facilities they have doubled the amount of attainment in a given time and diminished the period of a given attainment at least one half.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *The Story of Rural School Consolidation in Indiana* (Indianapolis: Boorwalter-Ball Print. Co., 1915), 18.

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix A, page 216, lines 5–9.

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix A, pages 217, lines 7–12.

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix A, page 217, lines 15–18.

Mills also emphasized the need for competent teachers. In his “Lecture on Popular Education,” Mills described a simple way to ensure quality teachers were attracted to the education system. Mills wrote, “Let it be understood that our incompetent teacher cannot find employ and it will not be long before a suitable one can be obtained.”<sup>55</sup> Mills went on to say, “Employ only competent teachers and the incompetent will either quit the field, or qualify themselves for the business.”<sup>56</sup>

In discussing his views on the proper aspects and character of Hoosier education, Caleb Mills did not limit his audience to the Indiana Legislators, nor did he cease expressing his views with the adoption of a new state constitution and the passage of the 1852 School Law. Mills continued to discuss and write about the issues he believed most salient to the development of an exceptional and imitable system of statewide education.

The long and sometimes difficult process through which Indiana developed its first significant education policy in the mid-nineteenth century illustrates the merging of two sets of education values. Nationally-disseminated ideas about free schooling at times were consistent, and at other times conflicting, with the unique situation of Hoosier residents and their attitudes. Despite the unique circumstances that existed in each state, educational reformers in the Midwest often possessed many characteristics in common. The most prominent reformers in a state were rarely native to it, most were born in New England states and pursued similar collegiate and post collegiate courses. Also, most reformers argued for similar school policy, including free schools that were centrally and clearly organized.

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix A, page 125, lines 17–20.

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix A, page 126–127, lines 20–2.

Certainly the work of Caleb Mills and his fellow reformers in Indiana reflected the course of action taken by many Midwestern educational reformers. His now famous “One of the People” addresses are an integral part of Indiana’s history and also reflect the objectives of reformers in other Midwestern states. Moreover, Mills’ “One of the People” addresses encapsulated the arguments and views of a network of free school advocates within the state of Indiana as well as in the surrounding region.

The two addresses by Mills, “A Lecture on Popular Education” and “Knowledge is Power,” illustrate that education issues were being discussed in new forums and at later time periods. These two lectures inform an understanding of the political and cultural landscape during the mid-nineteenth century, identify education issues that were of concern at that time, and help explain the development of the publicly-funded education system in Indiana. Finally, the disparate conditions of Indiana’s schools in the early-twentieth century emphasize the foresight of Mills’ arguments and their lasting place in Hoosier education debate.