CONCLUSION

Indiana in the mid- to late-nineteenth century was a state in transition. Just emerging from the pioneering era, the still relatively young state government was trying to meet the changing demands of Indiana’s growing population. At the same time, Hoosiers were beginning to develop a sense of identity. The constitutional convention of 1850–1851 gave legislators and concerned citizens a unique opportunity to rewrite Indiana policy to some extent. The convention addressed a wide range of topics deemed significant to the state’s development—foremost education. The statewide platform provided Caleb Mills with a unique opportunity to recommend a centralized common school system, which he believed would remedy many of the deficiencies in Hoosier education.

Mills saw some degree of success as the state legislators and delegates to the convention approved of a number of his recommendations. Even after his initial writings, Mills continued to build upon his recommendations, adapting them to address the pertinent issues of an evolving common school system in nineteenth-century Indiana. Mills’ writings, including those writings other than his popular lectures to the General Assembly, help provide a better understanding of how Hoosier education reformers influenced school policies before and after the constitutional mandate for a statewide common school system and subsequent legislation implementing school development.

The first chapter of this thesis discussed the development of common education in Indiana within larger regional and national contexts. Mid-nineteenth
century education reformers—many of whom shared white, protestant, and professional backgrounds—championed improved education systems in their respective arenas of activities and influence. In Indiana and in other states formerly part of the Northwest Territory—in particular in Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio—state legislatures began traveling down what would be a bumpy road of reform, a road littered with failed legislation and public protest of a common education system. In Indiana, that journey included a relatively weak provision for school funding in the first state constitution, followed by the creation of various privately-sponsored Sunday schools as well as conventional private schools. The efforts of education reformers in Indiana and the establishment of a common school system realized a major success with the ratification of Indiana’s second constitution in 1851. The constitution contained a provision mandating the establishment of common schools open to all, where tuition would not be charged. Following the ratification of the 1851 constitution and the enactment of the “1852 School Law,” education policy was hardly clear and unambiguous. Even after education reformers had made so much progress, it was clear that “common education” was not an experience “common” to all Hoosiers. Under new laws, students still received varying degrees of quality education influenced by race, gender, and geographic location.

Chapter Two focused more specifically on Caleb Mills’ role in the common school movement in Indiana. Mills migrated to Indiana in the 1830s, and prominently—though anonymously at times—entered the state education debate in the 1840s. Due to his position as a professor and his experience as a teacher, Mills was especially poised to articulate and encapsulate the education discussion in
Indiana. Like reformers in Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan, Mills described the disappointing reality of Hoosier intellectual aspirations and achievements to a diverse and divided audience of citizens and legislators. In a series of addresses to the Indiana Legislature as “One of the People,” Caleb Mills, writing anonymously, summarized and effectively conveyed the various concerns of other common school advocates in the state. The “One of the People” writings were Mills’ most famous writings and have become a critical part of Indiana’s educational history. In many respects, the addresses incorporate the objectives of reformers in other Midwestern states. Not only did Mills describe the distressing state of common education in Indiana, he also adeptly outlined the arguments and viewpoints of a larger network of free school advocates both in the state of Indiana and in other states. Mills’ writings are significant not only to historians of Indiana education, but also to historians of the broader public education movement in the nineteenth-century United States.

Mills’ continued commitment to quality common education is evident in his other lectures as well. The third chapter of this thesis examines two previously unpublished addresses by Mills, which have been transcribed and emended in their entirety in Appendix A of this thesis. In these writings, Mills describes in his own words the need to ensure the proper sequence of instruction, and to provide students with the proper education at the appropriate times in their lives. He warns against artifice used in place of sturdy instructional foundation. Mills advocates for student welfare, calling township trustees to take into account the comfort of children in the learning environment in addition to the costs of constructing an adequate school building and paying competent teachers. Mills also warns against the kind of public
sentiment that views education as peripheral or superfluous to the establishment and maintenance of strong communities.

In Indiana education historiography, Mills receives the most attention for his published “One of the People” addresses and for the influence of those addresses on the content of the 1851 constitution and the 1852 School Law. Scholars have spent considerably less time focusing on addresses such as “A Lecture on Popular Education” and “Knowledge is Power.” While these addresses reflect a career-long commitment to the education provisions advocated in his famous addresses as “One of the People,” the addresses go further to examine and refine Mills’ positions in the education policy debates continuing into the late nineteenth-century in Indiana. It appears that these writings are not widely read because scholars have focused on the more well-known and publicized “One of the People” addresses as critical sources for describing the educational environment in Indiana prior to the 1851 constitution as well as the position of Hoosier common school reformers.

A careful reading and consideration of Mills’ works, particularly “A Lecture on Popular Education” and “Knowledge is Power,” as edited and discussed in the third chapter and Appendix A of this thesis, reveal in part the climate of Indiana education reform during the mid-nineteenth century. While Mills’ addresses as “One of the People” explained how to improve common education and mobilized lawmakers, these two unpublished addresses explained the education debate in greater detail and mobilized a wider audience. That wider audience would ultimately determine the success or failure of the state’s education system. Both writings appear to have been addressed to Hoosier citizens responsible for educating and ensuring that
proper educational facilities were maintained in their communities. “A Lecture on Popular Education” addresses the importance of a unified community genuinely committed to a fulfilling and environmentally sound education. In that lecture, Mills calls upon all citizens to abandon selfish desires and prejudice and keep the interests of the larger community in mind. “Knowledge is Power,” delivered to teachers as a lecture on the proper type of instruction a student should receive, attempted to respond to some of the critical views that teachers were likely to encounter from stubborn community members and parents.

As Indiana’s education policies continued to undergo refinement and reevaluation following the adoption of the state’s second constitution, Mills continued to address the significant features of the Hoosier education system. Mills’ assessment in “Knowledge is Power” of the value of common education and his way of framing the issues that are often subject to public debate has had a lasting impact. Indeed, many of his ideas continued to define the debate that lasted into the twentieth century. Mills’ writings, “A Lecture on Popular Education” and “Knowledge is Power,” provide a valuable contribution to the literature of the history of education in Indiana.

Indiana may well owe its often lively and animated debate regarding modern public educational measures to the legislators and public school advocates of the mid-nineteenth century. Caleb Mills, in framing the debate for the establishment of public schooling in Indiana, also identified those issues which are considered important in early twenty-first century Indiana. As recently as March 2006, the Indiana Supreme Court once again considered the meaning of an education that was “without charge.”

\[1\] Indiana Constitution (1851), art. 8, sec. 1.
In the decision, the court held that school systems could not charge students an additional fee for “programs, services, and activities” already provided for by the Indiana legislature and funded by statewide taxes designated for education. The Court did decide, however, that local school systems may charge separate fees for additional programs, services, and activities not already contemplated by the state legislature to be provided with public funds. Justice Robert D. Rucker, writing for the majority, noted that an additional charge for maintenance, construction, and other services already included in state taxes, “becomes a charge for attending a public school and obtaining a public education. Such a charge contravenes the ‘Common Schools’ mandate as the term is used in Article 8, Section 1 and is therefore unconstitutional.”\(^2\) The education debate as articulated by Caleb Mills remains as vibrant in contemporary Indiana society as discussions of other more modern school issues such as school vouchers and teacher layoffs.

Mills continued to write and speak on the topic of education, even after the implementation of a new state constitution, which is a testament to the evolving nature of a community’s education policy and also Mills’ ability to adjust and refine his own ideas. Mills’ speeches inform an understanding of the evolution of Hoosier education policy and also of Hoosier education reformers. The underlying goal has remained the same—the creation of a sound education system that benefits an entire community. Mills’ speeches evolved to address the problems encountered in the actual implementation of common education throughout the state. By integrating Mills’ essays “Knowledge is Power” and “A Lecture on Popular Education” into the

study of education in Indiana, it is clear that issues of sound education policies are always current. The role of common schools, or public education, requires continued thought and engagement by both ordinary citizens and vocal reformers.