

Omaha's School Where Boys will be Developed into Usefulness



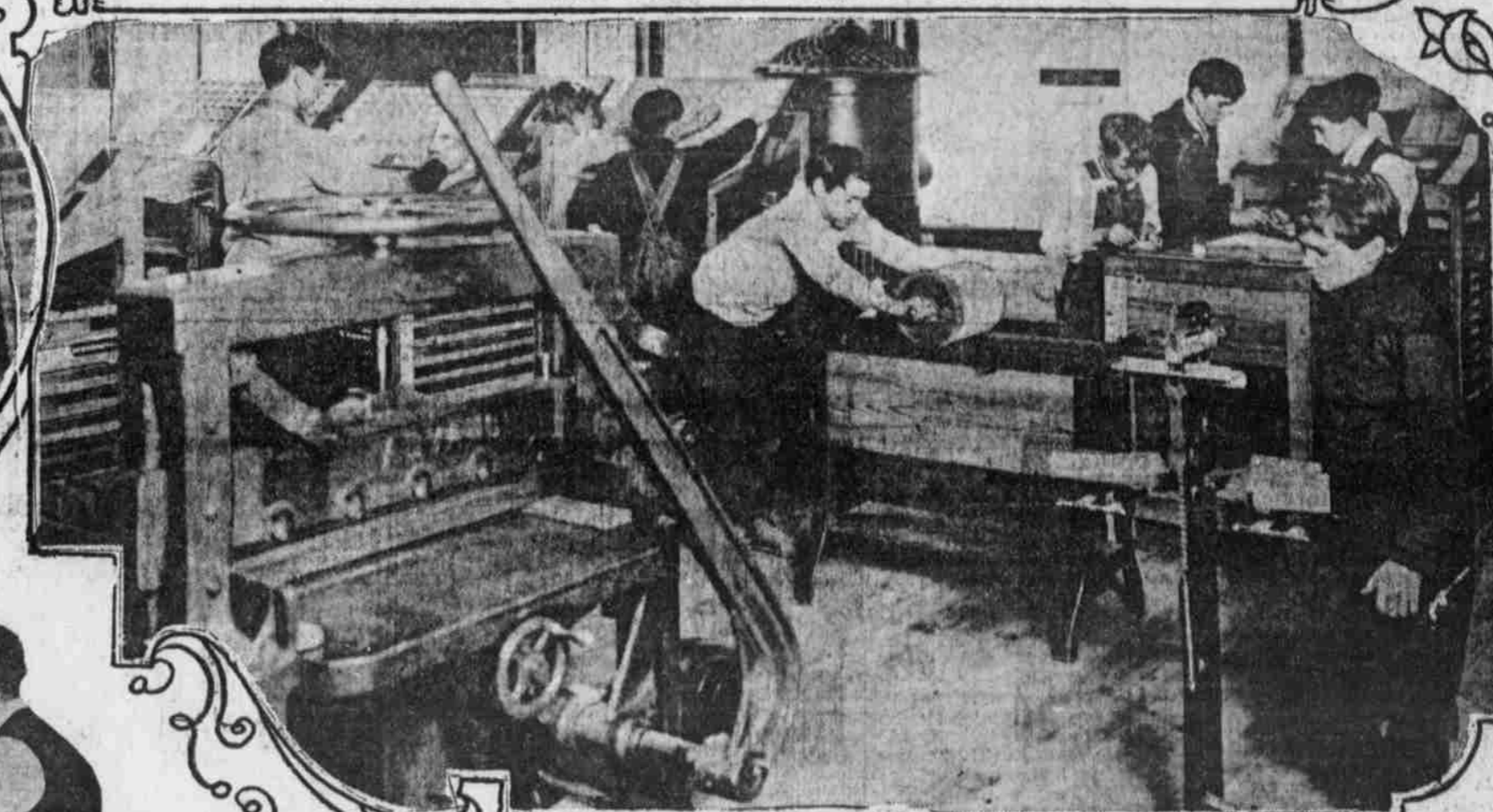
PRESIDENT WALKER STARTS THE MACHINERY—FORMER PRESIDENT HOLOVTCHINER and SUPT. E. U. GRAFF ASSIST



MR. BASON AND THE BOYS AT FORT SCHOOL



THE "MACHINISTS"



LEARNING TO BE "PRINTERS"

HERE is a bright boy, but he flunks persistently; he will not work and he does not learn; he does everything but study; he's boiling over with energy—misdirected energy; really, he's a mischief maker. What can we do with him? Time and again a puzzled truant officer led a sturdy, clear-eyed boy into the office of the superintendent of Omaha schools and asked that question. What can we do with him?

One day Superintendent Ellis U. Graff and President E. Holovtchiner of the Board of Education were discussing the problem presented by the increasing number of the boys who would not study; who were perfectly normal and more than normally troublesome.

"We could put them in a special school," suggested Superintendent Graff, "and there permit them to do the things they seem most apt in doing. Give them good, hard work and teach them a trade. Mix in the curriculum a little academic work—never enough to make their lives irksome. Entertain them and teach them at the same time."

"Just the thing," said Dr. Holovtchiner, calling to mind numerous examples of bad boys who became illustrious men. And so they set about to build such a school. They purchased two little buildings and moved them to lots on Fort street owned by the school district. They named the truant officer, a scholar and a sensible fellow, very wise in the ways of boys, principal of the school and they found a practical man well versed in the several trades to assist him. The school they named the Fort Special School for Boys.

Next had to be met the problem of selecting the boys who were to be trained in this special school. The school authorities decided to call the experiment anything but a reformatory and the impression that it was an institution for the correction of "little toughs" was painstakingly strangled. Later events proved that the authorities did their work only too well. They notified the principals to send the superintendent the names of the "backward" boys—those who continually failed to make good. At the opening of school the building was still in course of equipment. Within a few weeks it was ready for business. Half a dozen names had been sent to the superintendent.

School opened at the Fort Special School for Boys and half a dozen sulky youngsters were instructed to report there for work. Three or four reached the school. The others, for known and unknown reasons, never reached the Fort school.

The first few days at this school was a revelation to the boys who had rebelled against the irritating discipline of the graded schools. Here there was discipline, but of a different sort. "Do this or do that," said Principal E. D. Gepson or his assistant, F. W. Bason, "and do it well." But the tongue-lash of the teacher who must see that certain lessons are ready at a certain period was not there. Further it was different work. Here



HERE'S THE "PRESSMAN"

were lathing machines, a printing press and long cases of type, little electrical devices, a blacksmith shop; and down in the basement rooms were being made ready for a gymnasium—all things to delight any kind of a real high-strung boy.

"It's great," said an apprentice printer, as he fumbled with the cases. "Some class to this." But habit was strong within him and when the patient Bason's back was turned a piece of perfectly good type went hurtling at the forehead of a fellow-student. However, hope grew stronger in the hearts of the principal and his assistant. "We'll have a wonderful institution here," they told Superintendent Graff. "A little more time. We are making progress—marvelous progress, sir."

So Superintendent Graff and Dr. Holovtchiner visited the school to see for themselves. "Hello, Graff," shouted a tousle-headed, ink-faced "pressman" as he shoved down a lever and turned on the "juice." And "How are you, Holovtchiner," was another's greeting. Because of these and numerous other unconventionalities these boys had been called bad. The men sloughed the little niceties, rolled up their sleeves and tackled the work along with the boys, becoming one of them, working side by side with them and helping—always helping.

Attendance jumped. Twenty-five boys were

enrolled. Barring a few distressing incidents—an attack on a grown-up with a keen-edged knife—a few desperate battles on street cars—a few bruised heads and battered faces—work went quietly. The "bad boys" were becoming interested. All of a sudden the fact that a boy could learn a real vocation and could work with real, man-size machinery and tools at this school was known to every ambitious fellow in the grades.

Principals of grade schools continued to slowly list the names of those who were "qualified" to enter the Fort school. The list grew. There are now fifty attending the institution—crowding it, but not too much. A kind of routine is maintained at this school, but it is not objectionable. The fact that it is not objectionable is proven by the report of the two men in charge that the boys have absolutely ceased to play "hookey." There is something about the whirr of machinery and the scrape of planers and the pounding of hammers which appeals to them greatly.

Principal Gepson is authority for the statement that so deeply interested in the work are some of the boys and so enthusiastic about the future of Fort school that they fairly must be driven from the school house at the close of day. They hold their old aversion for the academics, but are more than willing to learn grammar, reading, writing and arithmetic in order to be allowed

to follow the lure of the trades. It is "our school," emphatically, now.

And Principal Gepson and his less imaginary assistant see visions of a great institution where the frame building of Fort school now stands. In time will arise a huge brick building and hundreds of boys—who may be "bad" and who may be just "backward"—but who have in them the energy and the brain, will flock there for training. There will be complete instruction in all the vocations— instruction to fit them for work without making them "skilled artisans." They will be taught the great fundamentals. It will be the beginning of the unchanging ideal—the fitting of a boy to do the particular thing for which he seems by nature and inclination best equipped.

Thus far the school has cost but a few thousand dollars. The plans of the Board of Education—plans extending into a dim future—are to gradually build it up—not wholly as a trade school nor as a parental institution—but as the place where an American boy may do the good thing he desires to do and forget the oppressive grind of

the things which held no interest for him, but harassed him until hope fled and hate ruled him.

"The purpose of Fort school is the same as the purpose of all true education—the development in the pupils of those qualities which will fit them to meet conditions of life," said Superintendent Graff. "The nature of its equipment would lead to the belief that the purpose was to train artisans or tradesmen, but it is the boy and not the occupation, which is of chief concern. The time of the pupils will be about equally divided between academic and hard work, experience having shown that this will produce the best results. The shop work will all be practical and so far as possible the actual conditions and demands of a given industry will be reproduced.

"A boy will not completely learn a trade or occupation, but his work will be correct as far as it goes and he will not be taught anything which he will have to unlearn. The various kinds of hard work will enable a boy to test himself—his tastes and capabilities, and will help him to find the line of work to which he is best suited."



IN THE "WOOD LAB"