

Omaha Teachers Learn Use of Tools



Teachers in the Clay Modeling Class

A Student in Wood Carving

Using the Spoke Shave

Learning to Use the Saw

Using the Plane

In the Wood Carving Class

WHEN WE were boys and girls, in Omaha many years ago, manual training was not included in the public school curriculum. It seemed we had incentives at home to develop our dexterity or ambidexterity. It was little or no trouble to make a sled, fashion a dog house, mend a chair and even patch the house or barn. Every boy had his work tools and every girl could sew and bake. The home in those days was a manual training school, social center and a lot of other things which since seem to have taken wings. Everybody worked, even father. At school we learned that the earth was round, that two plus two equal four, that there are certain rules of grammar and that an ocean is a large body of water. If anybody would have suggested manual training he would have been turned over to the constable for examination. The specialization was confined to drawing and music. Kate M. Hall went from school to school and taught the kids how to draw. The papers last week stated she has just been honored by the art people of San Francisco. A kindly woman of small stature and large soul—her name was Miss Rogers—also went around the schools and taught the gospel of music. Every Friday afternoon there was a spell-down of a program. We recited "Paul Hervey's Ride," "A Soldier of the Legion," "The Psalm of Life," "The Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight," and a few other classics. We bought golden opinions of our teacher by conferring "apple showers" on her. We always had a valentine box in our room every year. Superintendent James visited our room every now and then. We even invited our teacher home to dinner or to see the new baby arrival. Teacher would take us to the park several times each season. Those were the happy days!

The Transformation

Then came the transformation, stealthily and surely. One by one the industries of home went out as into the darkness of the world. Mother no longer made homespun garments, nor did she

knit socks and stockings. New attractions and distractions of advancing civilization and city life usurped the places of the homely virtues. Canned soup and canned music demanded their places in the home. The old melodeon was thrown into the back yard. Horrors of horrors! Boys and girls were forgetting how to work. The dignity of labor was in jeopardy. There was a cry from Macedonia, or some other place, "What shall we do for our boys and girls? They have nothing to do at home. A grave situation is confronting the young republic," were the words heard on every hand.

Modest Beginning

A wise man then had a thought. "Teach our boys and girls these lost arts in the public schools. The suggestion was something of a shock at first. Many who had been reared in the old Spartan school of domestic thrift and industry inveighed against the proposition of teaching boys in school to use hammer and saw, and to direct girls in sewing. But it had to come. It was the dawn of the new education. Manual training gradually was introduced into the high school. Boys surprised their fond parents by bringing home articles they had fashioned out of wood with their own hands. Girls were learning how to bake bread and to sew and mend. There was new hope for the human family. Mothers and fathers were heartened over the thought that their boys and girls would be able to use their hands as well as their heads when they grew to the estate of men and women.

After the experimental stage of high school manual training had passed, some bold citizen suggested that the useful arts be extended to the grade schools. That progressive idea was attacked at first, but in the end won out. "Where are we going to stop in this business of intensive and extensive education?" inquired a good old mother, who had raised ten children and baked bread twice every week. "Might just as well let the children stay at school all of the time," was another plaint. The preponderance of evidence, however, was in favor of the extension of the

manual training idea. Then it happened. Superintendent Davidson was authorized to engage Miss Lux, then at Topeka, to come here as manual training teacher at the Cass school, where grade school manual training work was introduced here.

The work at Cass school was started on a modest scale. The boys were taught the use of hammer and saw and a few other implements. They made simple articles and did wood carving. The idea was a success. Parents in other parts of the city soon began to clamor for equal privileges for their boys and girls. The system was extended, until today there are forty public schools in Greater Omaha equipped with manual training facilities, the work being taken by all boys and girls of the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. A staff of thirty manual training specialists devote their entire time to the work. Each child is given two fifty-minute lessons a week and allowed credits for these branches.

Special Classes for Teachers

The manual training feature of the school system, having been firmly established, the Board of Education adopted the idea of starting a training school for teachers who aspired to this branch of the service. This school is being conducted at the manual training department of the Farnam school, with Helen M. Thompson, supervisor in charge. Sessions are held every Saturday morning from 8:20 until 12 o'clock. Entrants must be regular teachers in the schools and are required to show aptitude for this specialization.

It is stated that comparatively few teachers are inclined to take up this work, but those who do enter the field are enthusiastic. Certain temperamental qualifications, as well as pedagogic experience, are prerequisites.

The accompanying illustrations show three groups at bench work, wood carving and clay modeling. The fourth branch is sewing. Two years' attendance at this training school equips a teacher to enter the manual training field. Most of the teachers enter the Omaha school system, also some have gone elsewhere. Some take special summer courses at Columbia and other institutions. The superintendent of schools explained that the particular value of this training is that the teacher is drilled in the methods used in the Omaha schools. During the five years the school has been in operation there have been seventy-five graduates. Eighteen are now taking the work.

Efficiency of Women Teachers

The question has been asked: "Why should women be employed as manual training teachers?" The answer is: "Because manual training is so closely associated with the regular branches of education that the woman teacher best fills the place. A general knowledge of pedagogy is essential and these women have proved successful in the work."

The manual training section of the new course of study has this comment: "The general aim is to teach orderly arrangement of the hundred and one things and what can be made with or out of them."

"To see beauty in common things and to be able to create it in little or great ways. Art not necessarily as an end in life, but art as a means to a better and richer life."

"To direct the creative impulse—the impulse to adapt and change the thing or idea, to stamp himself upon it."

"To be guided that you may enable your pupils to know 'what to do next' and to do each next thing right."

These teachers become proficient in the use of saw and hammer and a vice in the class directed a prevailing opinion that a woman cannot drive a nail without hitting a finger or use a saw without sawing a hand. They learn to become adept in such bench work as making rectangular case boards, elliptical bread or sleeve boards, teapot stands, card racks, broom holders, candlesticks, bird houses, taboret, foot stools, magazine

racks, letter racks, sewing stands, serving tray, and many other articles.

The wood carving embraces circular or rectangular trays, with outline decorations; spool holders, card racks, thermometer backs, trays, hand mirrors, clocks, book racks, platter mats and various articles of everyday use.

In the sewing course the girls are taught button holes on practice pieces, canvas bags with cross stitch decorations, darning of stockings, aprons, patches on torn articles, basting, running, back stitching, overhanding, blanket stitch, hem-stitching, and cross stitch or initial embroidery, gathering, hemming.

Variety of Work

The clay modeling includes work which illustrates stories and geometrical forms. Some of the pieces wrought are: Apple, orange, bowl, bird's nest, basket, pitcher, vegetable, hat, wigwag, mill, vase, tree stump, bee hive, match safe, ink well, candlestick, small animal heads, tiles with convenient designs, statuettes, cupids, large tiles from casts or pictures, fern dishes and nut bowls.

During the last school year the school board started a kiln at the supply shop, Twenty-second and Nicholas streets, where all clay modeling work is fired and glazed. The pupils keep all of their manual training work and pay for the actual materials used.

The bird house exhibit held two weeks ago in the city hall was an interesting demonstration of one phase of the public school manual training work. Many homes bear evidence of the efforts of boys and girls in these manual training departments.

The modern public school manual training equipment is pretentious, compared with several years ago. Regulation work benches and all sorts of tools are provided and special rooms are used in the school buildings.

High Commendation

In a recent address before the Western Drawing and Manual Training association, William T. Hawden, of the United States Bureau of Education, made these statements: "I am sure that no one who is informed upon current educational progress can deny that the manual arts are more important and have a better standing right now than they ever had. It is important, as it seems to me, that we should appreciate the responsibilities that are ahead of us, that we should attempt to meet these responsibilities; that we should be carefully studying these problems."