

MEMOIRS
OF THE
MIAMI VALLEY

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711 votes was cast, with a majority in favor of the erection of a building, but war conditions deferred its erection, and rooms in the old Lebanon academy, which was built in 1844, were appropriated for the use of high school pupils.

Lebanon Normal School. It can be truthfully said that no school in the middle west—possibly greater extent of territory might be included—ever exerted so wide an influence in the cause of education, as the normal school at Lebanon, opened by Prof. Alfred Holbrook and wife in the year 1855. Normal schools were scattered over the country since the opening of the first school of the kind in Massachusetts in the year 1839, some being organized under the name of "seminary."

The founder of the Lebanon school was born in Connecticut in the year 1816. His father had achieved a reputation in the eastern part of the country as the founder of the lecture system of popular instruction and teachers' institutes, and he also carried on in Boston, between his lecture periods, a manufactory of school apparatus. Young Alfred's school days were almost entirely included in the first twelve years of his life, as he was then made to go and work in his father's manufactory, but his father, ambitious for his son's intellectual culture, occupied the lad's unemployed hours with hard study, which naturally broke down the boy's health and he returned to his home in Derby, Connecticut. Inheriting from his father a desire to impart instruction, Alfred at the age of seventeen years embarked upon his life profession of teaching. But for a while his course was changed, and determining to become an engineer, he went to New York and, for a time, engaged in the manufacture of surveyor's instruments. A desire to go to college was frustrated by his father's refusing to grant his permission, although a college man himself, for the reason that colleges were promoters of bad methods and morals. The young man came to Ohio to begin his surveying experience, but his ill health prevented the carrying on of the work, and he accepted a place as teacher at Berea, a village not far from Cleveland. The school in which he was engaged became the nucleus of the famous Baldwin university, for many years one of the largest and most favorably known schools in northern Ohio. While here he had the happy fortune to marry Miss Melissa Pearson, whose intellectual endowments and culture were of great assistance to him in his life-work of teaching. As the years came, Prof. Holbrook was connected with several large schools in northern Ohio, but in the year 1855 was asked to take the superintendency of the Southwestern Normal school about to be established at Lebanon, Ohio.

The establishment of the normal school at Lebanon is not only an interesting incident in the history of Warren county, but in that of the state as well, and was the result of a conference of a small number of the leading instructors of southwestern Ohio, who felt the need of such a school in this part of the state. The conference decided to call a general convention, and in obedience to the summons, between three and four hundred teachers assembled at Miami university at Oxford, Ohio, and effected an organization, to be known as the Southwestern Normal School association for the purpose of

establishing and maintaining a state normal school until such time as the state would make it one of its own institutions. After much debate as to the location of the school, Lebanon was chosen as the most desirable place. The trustees of the association immediately got in touch with the right men in Lebanon, who at once perceived the immense advantage such an institution would be, both intellectually and financially, to the village, and the trustees of the Lebanon academy were persuaded to make over the academy erected in the year 1845, and grounds to the trustees of the proposed normal school, and also agreed to furnish at least eighty pupils every year for four years towards the support of the institution.

But where could be found an instructor both intellectually and executively able to fill the demands of leadership? The success of Prof. Holbrook as an instructor had reached the Miami valleys, and he was urged to resign the superintendency of the public schools at Salem, Ohio, and assume the directorship of the new venture instituted at Lebanon. Acceptation with him meant action, and he hurried to the village and at once began to pull wires for the success of the school, which he had immediately described as possessing great potentialities in many directions. On November 24, 1855, ninety-five pupils registered as students of the new Southwestern Normal school; ninety of these enrolled were from the homes of Lebanon, the remainder from outside localities, one of whom was William H. Venable, the distinguished poet and teacher. Little did the residents of Lebanon know the benefit in every way that this school was to bring to their village. It placed the little town among the leading intellectual centers not only of the state, but the school eventually gained a national reputation for progressiveness in every department for the guidance and development of those placed in the responsible, and even sacred, office of instructing the young. The teaching corps for the first year was small, consisting of Prof. Holbrook, his wife and three assistants, but so thorough was the instruction imparted, so fully did it meet the requirements of the pupils, that the attendance yearly increased, and in the year 1881, its high-water period of success, the enrollment was 1,850. Nearly every state and territory in the Union was represented upon the school register.

The name of the school underwent several changes. From "State Normal school" it was altered to the "Southwestern Normal school," and becoming more ambitious, in the year 1870, it was transmuted into the "National Normal school," and eleven years later ascended into the "National Normal university," but the organization of numerous schools of the same type throughout the state seemed to rob the school of its particular prestige or individuality, and in the year 1907, the word "normal" was entirely eliminated and the name "Lebanon university" adopted. But to the gray-haired men and women who, so many years ago, saw the bright stars of future success gleaming through the many discouragements of their school-life, and as memory brings back the pleasant friendships formed, and even more tender association, it is still the "dear old Normal."

Perchance, what might be called a mistake was made in the early nineties, when, owing to financial difficulties, the school was reorganized, and its business affairs placed under a board of control, for Prof. Holbrook had, for so many years, held the management of the school along all its lines, that he grew restive under the changed conditions, and in the year 1897 submitted his resignation, which was accepted, and in the following year took the position of chancellor of the Southern Normal university, located at Huntington, Tennessee, which, he said, he should endeavor to bring up to even a greater efficiency than the school at Lebanon, with which he had been connected as manager and leader for over forty years.

It is comparatively easy to speak of a man as being "wonderful." It is better to know wherein his success consisted, and thus be truly able to appreciate and, if possible, to emulate the qualities that rendered him distinguished, especially when those qualifications went to the betterment of the community in which he lived. And this may be truly said of the life and work of Prof. Alfred Holbrook, during his educational labors in the little town of Lebanon. His utter contempt of all obstacles in his work won the respect and confidence of all associated with him. At the opening of the school, the public school teachers of the Miami valley, as a rule, were opposed to the institution, on the ground that the influx of teachers from other neighborhoods would tend to lower the wages of the Miami valley instructors. Prof. Holbrook knew that it was not a matter of numbers or wages, but of efficiency, and the teachers who, in time were graduated from the Holbrook Normal school, quickly found that the diplomas received by them from this institution were "open sesame" to better situations and more lucrative salaries. The high ideals in work and character held up by Prof. Holbrook constantly before his pupils made stronger men and women of them for battling for success in their life-work, and many of the fathers and mothers of the present generation are in the wise and loving counsel given by them to their children, simply reflecting the wisdom and able counsel given them, so long before, at the Holbrook school in Lebanon.

When he accepted the control of the Lebanon school, Prof. Holbrook had six young children, who grew up an honor, both to their parents and the community. When they reached manhood and womanhood they became able assistants to their father in his work. Josiah Holbrook, the present recorder of Warren county and a resident of Lebanon, is a son of the eminent founder of the Lebanon Normal university. Of this able county officer, it may truly be said that he is "a worthy son of a worthy father." He was seventeen years of age when, as a member of company F, 12th Ohio Volunteer infantry, under the captaincy of Rigdon Williams, for over three years he followed the flag of his country in the Civil war, returning, after his discharge, to his father's school to complete his studies, receiving his diploma in the year 1865. Choosing his father's profession as his own, Mr. Holbrook for some years was at the head of the public schools in Montgomery, Alabama, and later organized and was president of the Holbrook Normal college at Knoxville, Tennessee, for three years. In the year 1876 he was

united in marriage to Miss Laura Mason, daughter of one of the leading physicians of Harveysburg, a young woman known throughout the Miami valley for her beauty of face and refined, cultured, womanly qualities.

After they have crossed the threescore line of human existence, there are but few men courageous enough to enter as a competitor the arena of politics. For over a year and a half Josiah Holbrook filled the office of clerk of the trustees of public affairs, and is now completing his fourth term as recorder of Warren county.

The many cares devolving upon Prof. Alfred Holbrook in the responsible work that crowded his days, did not keep him from using his pen to extend his influence. Two books of value to every teacher are his "School Management," and "Normal Methods"; the latter has been translated into the Japanese language, and is much prized by the teachers of that far-off island. Two works on the English language, "English Grammar" and "Training Lessons," have been of practical use in the educational world.

After several years' residence in the South, Prof. Holbrook returned to Lebanon, and passed his last days among his friends, who realized that, through his efforts, their home town had become widely known as a college center, and that, in a certain sense, he was the greatest benefactor, in the deep, true sense of the word, that had ever gone up and down the streets of the pretty village. Financially, his life had been a blessing to the community, for the patronage of the hundreds of students, who yearly were residents of the town, was far from trifling. But better than the financial gain was the impetus that his teaching, his standards of thought and education were to the youth, not only of the village, but also to those who came from near and far, to carry away with them ideals of true living which, in turn, they also would impart to others. In a book published in his seventieth year, entitled "Reminiscences of the Happy Life of a Teacher," Prof. Holbrook has written of his life work in Lebanon, and it is a chronicle that shows deep devotion to the highest, best things in life.

He passed away at his home in Lebanon, April 16, 1909, at the advanced age of ninety-three years. The "last of life" was to him singularly happy. His friends delighted to show their respect and honor for him. The anniversary of his birthday was always remembered, and the one hundredth anniversary of his natal day, which fell in June, 1916, was made a veritable "homecoming" occasion, for Lebanon was full of gray-haired men and women who, for a brief period, dropped the cares of business and home, and journeyed, from near and far, to the pretty shady town in the Miami valley, to honor the memory of the man who, each and all realized, had impressed them with the truth and joy of noble living.

Teachers' Institutes. Four years after the first teachers' Institute was held in 1847 at Cincinnati, the teachers of Warren county organized a similar association and held its first meeting in the ensuing summer in the academy at Maineville. And during the nearly seventy years that have elapsed since that date, regular sessions of the institute have been held, where leading speakers, of