

## **Early School Days**

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### **C.B. Stebbins Tells of Lansing's First Schools.**

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#### **An Interesting Sketch That Will Appear With the City's School Exhibit at the Columbian Exposition –The First Teacher of the City's Schools**

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The Introduction to the Lansing school exhibit now at the world's fair, is a correct and intensely interesting history of the city schools compiled by C.B. Stebbins, who spent many weeks in searching for the details. As the growth of the schools and the city must necessarily be akin, the Republican takes pleasure in publishing Mr. Stebbins' history, and the articles will appear from time to time. To give a stranger in the capital of Michigan a just idea of the inception and development of the schools, it is necessary to glance at the circumstances under which Lansing came to be and there close connection with the establishment of the schools.

“In 1835 and '36 capitalist and speculators in the eastern states had their eyes on Michigan, about to become a state. ‘Land lookers’ were all over the territory through the central section from the Detroit river to Lake Michigan. Some sent agents to select the lands and some came themselves, axe and spade in hand to examine the soil and timber.

“Among the multitude who wished to possess the earth — of Michigan, was Hon. Horatio Seymour of New York, a man of abundant means. He made a deal with his cousin, James Seymour of Flushing, Mich., and the latter took the field. In the course of his search he came to the spot which is now the capital of the state and was especially attracted by the situation. He found the Grand river coming from the west (by a bend some distance above), a little south of the school section, then turning north through nearly the center of that section (one mile square) and in about two miles turning again to the west. Near each angle of the river there were rapids which would furnish valuable water power, and almost in the exact center of the school section was a beautiful elevation. He became so impressed that a spirit of prophecy seemed to come over him and he wrote to Horatio saying he had found the spot which would yet become the capital of Michigan. The capitol stands on the very spot designated by him.

‘The Seymours took up the land adjoining the school section on the north and two years before the location of the capital, built a dam and sawmill at the lower rapids where the river was some eighty yards wide. The work was done by Joab Page and his three sons. The next spring one end of the dam was washed out and in repairing it John W. Burchard was drowned. It is said that he built the first log home in this vicinity.

“At the session of 1847 it developed upon the legislatures to locate the capital, which had been to that time at Detroit. The rising cities along the Central railroad coveted the prize. A bill was introduced in the house with a blank for the successful place. The struggle continued for some weeks without any result. In the meantime the Seymours and others interested had been concocting plans and getting their strengths assured, and when the motion was made to fill in the blank with “Michigan” it was carried. Part of the members voted for it understandingly, and part considered it a grand joke which the senate would surely reject. But those interested had a majority of the sixteen senators pledged to vote for it, and the bill became law. The name was afterwards changed to Lansing.

“At that time not a tree had been cut on the west side of the river for miles, or on the east side except in the vicinity of the sawmill and for a road along the stream. Nor were there any inhabitants within three or four miles. Among the first, if not the first, who came after the capital was located, with a purpose of settlement, was John R. Powell and his family. They arrived at Lansing in April on the day when the commissioners drove the stakes for the site of the state house, not a tree had been cut. They spent the first night at the house of a Mrs. Holmes. This was a slab shanty, a shed roof, one room, one bed, and thirty occupants. The bed was assigned to Mrs. Powell with her daughter and child, and the twenty seven others slept on the floor. Besides this house there were two others like it, and two small log huts, called houses by courtesy.

“But amidst all these forbidding environments they were already taking school. There were some half a dozen children, and before the arrival of Mr. Powell a school district had been organized with Joab Page as director, and a school house was being built. Imagine a rough board shanty, with shed roof, a door hung with leather straps, and one window without glass, but a board screen hung by straps at the top, so that it could be readily closed when ‘school was out.’ In May the school was opened and Miss Powell installed as teacher with ten pupils. So Miss Powell, now Mrs. John N. Bush, has the honorable distinction of being the pioneer teacher in Lansing.”

**End Part One.**

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