

## The Quiet Reformer

One spring morning Anne Lemist Page (1828-1913) swung open the doors of the family barn on Elm Street in Danvers. With one hand outstretched she greeted the first class into what would become the Page Kindergarten. With a smile upon her face she called each child by name, bending down with a smile that one student would remember “seemed meant for you alone.”

<sup>1</sup>That day, like many singular days, would go unnoticed in the Annals of history had it not been for Anne’s love and dedication to change how America educated its children. Despite all the gifts she bestowed on so many for so long, the knowledge of her contribution to educational reform in America is barely a whisper on the pages of history.

The birth of Anne Page’s legacy resided in the hearts of her students and it is through them that her memory was nurtured and gifted to many generations of young teachers. One of her students Annie Moseley Perry, founder of Perry Kindergarten Normal School in Boston wrote to her alumnae: “You owe to her (Anne Page) so much of what has come through me to you.”<sup>2</sup> A former student of Anne’s, Mrs. Alice Hanson Witherbee, recalled in an article entitled ‘The Page Kindergarten,’ “we learned the facts not only in a way never to be forgotten, but from her wise understanding we learned truths which are at the foundation of life itself”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Witherbee, Alice H. "The Page Kindergarten", The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society Volume 39. (1951), pp. 66-70, (accessed April 3 2009)

<sup>2</sup>Zollo, Richard. "Anne Page was a local kindergarten pioneer." Danvers Yesterday, May 1982, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Witherbee, Alice H. "The Page Kindergarten", The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society Volume 39. (1951), pp. 66-70, (accessed April 3 2009)

The accomplishments of Anne Page and many other women like her must be viewed within the context of the role of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the century women had few legal, social, or political rights. The role of middle class women was restricted to the home, taking care of the children and managing the household affairs. The opportunities for lower class were often found as domestic servants or as laborers in factories and mills. The doors of higher education were closed to women. During the latter two thirds of the century women actively resisted these restrictions struggling to find their place within the American expression of “all men are created equal.” Victorian women were considered to be the vessels of propriety, high moral standards, and the sources for social harmony. These innate female sensitivities of civility and gentility provided the catalytic leverage for women to expand their influences outside the home and into the political arena, as well as the professions of art, literature, and education.

The success of the female in the arena of education as well as other areas of social activism is evident with women such as Margaret Schurz who founded the first German kindergarten system in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1856. She was a disciple of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) a German educator who based his innovations on German Philosophical Idealism. Miss Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) who was born in Billerica Massachusetts but lived a great part of her life in Salem is considered one of the leading educational reformers and the driving force behind the kindergarten movement in America. Elizabeth met Margaret Schurz in 1859 during an abolitionist meeting in Boston where Elizabeth first became knowledgeable of the teaching philosophies of Friedrich Froebel. She would become a Froebel apostle for the rest of her life.

The philosophy of Friedrich Froebel emanated from the principles that all existence originates from God, all human development is fueled by one’s spirituality, and that elements of the universe are all connected to form a singular orderly system. It was his thesis that each child

possessed an internal spiritual essence and that the full body of that essence can be made to flower through self-activity. According to Froebel, an essential self-activity for a child is play and through the activity of play a young mind begins the process of self-actualization.

The revolutionary nature of Froebel's educational philosophy was a perfect fit for America which was breaking away increasingly from old European Victorian institutional models. Political leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century along with its social leaders; ministers, writers, and educators understood that the future of America with its expanding industry and technologies lay in a more enlightened citizenry. The education of children became central to the survival of a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Froebel's doctrine of childhood self-actualization demanded the end to learning under conditions where the rod was frequently used, forcing children to sit erect in their chairs in often crowded, hot, ill-ventilated rooms reciting rote spelling lessons. It would be people like Margaret Schurz, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Anne Page and so many other women like them who would become the engineers for educational reform in America, they all became disciples of Friedrich Froebel.

For Anne knowledge began by "drawing forth the child's power of observing, comparing and doing." <sup>4</sup>She would often take the children outside on expeditions of discovery; "perhaps to the brook in the cemetery, to gather plants for the gold fish tank, or elsewhere for mulberry leaves to feed the silk worms..."<sup>5</sup>In the morning before school the yard in the rear of the Page house

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<sup>4</sup>Zollo, Richard. "Anne Page was a local kindergarten pioneer." *Danvers Yesterday*, May 1982, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Witherbee, Alice H. "The Page Kindergarten", *The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society* Volume 39. (1951), pp. 66-70, (accessed April 3 2009)

would serve as a playground where both boys and girls jumped and shouted while playing their chosen games. Everywhere she took the children she would stop and point out things she found of interest, instructing the children to look and observe carefully. Anne often would allow the older children to visit the Page House conservatory during the evening hours, “to see the flowers close up their leaves to go to sleep.” (Danvers Yesterday) <sup>6</sup>

Anne was very much a woman who considered nature God’s learning laboratory. Her devotion to the idea that a children’s education should begin at an early age when a curious mind can be enriched by things that they feel, touch, and even smell. Anne used the metaphor of a garden to express this notion: “the younger tender plants require more care and attention...when the twigs are all bent wrong; it is too late to incline the tree”.<sup>7</sup>The minds of children should be released from the drudgery of rote learning. Their bodies should be active and out in the fresh air to see and touch nature as God intended. Minds need to be challenged with no preconception as to limitation; challenge them with questions and wait patiently for their answer.

Although Elizabeth Peabody was senior to Anne by some twenty-four (24) years they were kindred spirits when it came to matters of childhood education. On so many other levels, however, they were very different. From a very early age, Elizabeth was anxious to break away from her family and strike out on her own. Her sister Mary would remember how her older sister Elizabeth “had made up her mind to become a teacher in some female academy as soon as possible”.<sup>8</sup> Her ambitions reflected the slow but determined transition in the status of women in

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<sup>6</sup> Zollo, Richard. "Anne Page was a local kindergarten pioneer." Danvers Yesterday, May 1982, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Witherbee, Alice H. "The Page Kindergarten", The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society Volume 39. (1951), pp. 66-70, (accessed April 3 2009)

<sup>8</sup> Tharp, Louise Hall. 'The Peabody Sisters of Salem'. Boston: Little, Brown, 1950.

post-Revolution America. It would be women like Elizabeth Palmer Peabody who would, by the nature of their personality, accelerate that change. Where Elizabeth was like a soaring eagle roaming the width and breadth of an open sky; Anne was the mother hen whose wings were not for flying but were spread out in welcome for anyone who needed their protection, comfort, and warmth.

Throughout her entire life Anne Page rarely went far from home. Anne's relationship with her mother Mary Fowler Page (1787-1876) and the Page family would greatly influence her life and career as an educator. Anne was the youngest of eight (8) children of John Page (1779-1854) and Mary Fowler Page (1787-1876), the 7<sup>th</sup> generation of Pages who came to the New World in 1630 aboard the ship Jewel which was one of eleven (11) in the John Winthrop fleet which landed in Salem village on June 22<sup>nd</sup> of that year. She was of Pilgrim stock; the Bible and the power of prayer were in her blood. When Anne was born in 1828 her mother Mary was forty-one (41) years old. The oldest daughter, Mary, was twenty-one (21) when Anne was born. By the time Anne was a teenager most of her siblings were married with families of their own. Anne's sister Caroline Elizabeth died at the age of twenty (20) in 1841.

Anne's father John was a successful business man in the brick industry which he inherited from his father Jeremiah. John Page was said to be the first to produce "clapped bricks" which became in high demand for the young American government to build fortifications and lighthouses. His bricks became the government standard. He was a busy man, rarely at home and the affairs of the household and the care of eight (8) children was left to his wife Mary.

In her memoirs, Harriet Putnam Fowler would recall that although all of Mary's daughters, with their children and grandchildren would visit their mother in her later years; "the daily and hourly ministrations devolved chiefly upon her youngest daughter, Miss Anne".<sup>9</sup> Harriet would comment that "no mother ever watched more tenderly over a child than did this child over her mother." It is said that Mary's happiness and the generous length of her life was due to a great extent on the dedication of Anne who was "her (Mary) constant companion, the sharer of her joys and sorrows, her wise counselor, her helper in all her charitable plans, her nurse in her illness."<sup>10</sup> When Mary died she was eighty-nine years old and in her final moments she expressed confidence that the loving-kindness of her Heavenly Father would protect her and lead her beyond the "valley of the shadow of death".

Anne was forty-eight when her mother died; she had no regrets for all those years of living in the house of her birth and caring for her mother. Harriet Fowler would recall; "after her mother's death, she (Anne) perfected herself in the Kindergarten System of education...surrounded by numerous friends, possessing the love and respect of her pupils, she is very happy in this sphere of usefulness; but she has told me several times that she looks back upon those years of seclusion spent in taking care of her mother, as the happiest in her life".<sup>11</sup>

Anne's faith in God along with her great capacity for compassion, empathy and equanimity radiated throughout her career as an educator. Mrs. Alice Hanson Witherbee, a former student, recalls, "Her patience...with the child who was naturally slow, or suffered a disadvantage from

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<sup>9</sup>Fowler, Harriet P. "Harriet Putnam Fowler Manuscripts." *Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society* Vol. 18, no. (1930): pp.1-21.

<sup>10</sup>Fowler, Harriet P. "Harriet Putnam Fowler Manuscripts." *Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society* Vol. 18, no. (1930): pp.1-21.

<sup>11</sup> Fowler, Harriet P. "Harriet Putnam Fowler Manuscripts." *Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society* Vol. 18, no. (1930): pp.1-21.

some physical deformity.”<sup>12</sup> She taught her students that everyone’s life was a microcosm of a great cosmic battle between good and evil. Anne would often lecture that when a child misbehaved it was evidence of how the ‘evil spirits’ had been doing their busy work. Each school day began with a reading from the Bible followed by a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. To nurture a sense of self-esteem Anne employed an honor system where responsibility for order, obedience and civility was in the hands of the children themselves; “so that those who did not wish to be disturbed frowned down the mischief maker”.<sup>13</sup>

For both Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and Anne Page education was much more than the exercise of accumulating facts, it was food for the soul that one should dedicate a life time consuming. Most importantly, in their minds, education was not only for self-aggrandizement but rather a moral duty to use knowledge in creating a better world. Where Elizabeth viewed educational reform and her role within it from a global perspective, Anne’s view was local. The town of Danvers was her universe; she wanted her hometown to be immersed within the wind of change gusting across America. She spoke out in support of Catholic women being accepted into the Danvers Home for the Aged. She opened the Page House for the organizational meetings of the Danvers Women’s Association (1892), the Danvers Historical Society (1889), and the General Israel Putnam Chapter of D.A.R. (1895). Anne’s personal philosophy was to, “help others not by changing their environment, but by revealing new ideals to them so that they may choose.”

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<sup>13</sup>Fowler, Harriet P. "Harriet Putnam Fowler Manuscripts." *Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society* Vol. 18, no. (1930): pp.1-21.

Anne Lemist Page was a proud woman and was especially honored by her family's heritage. Her great-great-grandfather, Israel Hutchinson had fought in three (3) of this country's wars. Her grandfather Jeremiah Page was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Continental Army who along with his son, Samuel fought in the Battle of Lexington. Captain Samuel Page was with Washington at the crossing of the Delaware, and in the severe winter of 1777 shared in the sufferings of the American army at Valley Forge. After the Revolution, Samuel settled in what is now Danversport where he was owner of ten (10) vessels, mostly schooners, and part owner of three more. One of his ships, the *Putnam*, was captained by a young man named Nathaniel Bowditch. Anne wrote of her family history, "and no one need wish for, and no one has, a better one."<sup>14</sup>

Anne never married. Her life was dedicated to her family, her young students, and her beloved town of Danvers, and to the rights of women. She was the quiet reformer who passed away on May 27, 1913. That same year Katharine Coman, a professor of economics along with Katherine Lee Bates as fund raiser interested the Wellesley Improvement Association in the establishment of a free kindergarten for local children and teacher training. A single donor made a gift to build the school. It became one of the first lab schools in the country. They named it The Anne Page Memorial Kindergarten. One of her students, Anne Devereaux, became the first director of the Page School. Now called the Wellesley College Child Study Center, located on the corner of Weston Road and Central Street the name Anne Lemist Page is engraved over the main entrance.

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<sup>14</sup>Fowler, Harriet P. "Harriet Putnam Fowler Manuscripts." *Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society* Vol. 18, no. (1930): pp.1-21.



It has been said that over the morning mist of a spring morning one can see the image of Anne greeting each child as they enter, hoping that once inside, they all will learn the truths which are at the foundation of life itself!

*Post Script:*

*As part of a much wider research into the Page family, the story of Anne was my favorite. She is my ancestral aunt whom, ironically, I feel her presence every day. From my office in the Sullivan Building I often see the children playing in the rear of the Horace Mann School named after the renowned educator Thomas Mann whose wife was Mary Peabody Mann (1807-1887) sister of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and a very close friend of Anne's. Anne's uncle, Captain Samuel Page, who is briefly mentioned in this article, was a celebrated Revolutionary War hero as well as a successful shipping merchant; one of his captains of the ship 'Putnam' was Nathaniel Bowditch, the founder of modern maritime navigation who is remembered on the Salem State University Campus in the naming of one of its original dormitories, Bowditch Hall.*

*Thomas M. Page*