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The First Evening High School in Old New York.

Having had the honor of organizing the first Evening High School in old New York in the fall of 1866, I may be pardoned for a small amount of egotism inevitable from the nature of the subject upon which I have been requested to write. The organization of the school was, to say the least, peculiar. The state did not authorize it, and the city only permitted it as an extension and improvement of the elementary evening schools then in existence.

I had taught in these schools twelve years, four years as assistant, two years as vice-principal and six years as principal; and the longer I taught the more I was convinced that the city received a very inadequate return for the money expended for their support. They were not organized, there was no discipline, the schools consisted of disorderly mobs, vicious and cruel, sometimes roaming in gangs seeking schools that contained one or two inexperienced teachers upon whom they could exercise their cruel "fun." Not infrequently the teachers were assaulted with stones and their lives were in danger. The men now living who taught in these elementary evening schools know that this picture is not overdrawn.

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For two or three years I urged the Board of Trustees of the Fifteenth Ward to abolish the elementary evening school held in No. 35 in Thirteenth Street. I appealed especially to Commissioner Richard Warren; I told him that the attendance was so irregular that the teachers might as well stand in the hallway of a great hotel and teach at the passersby, and that it would be better to cast the money given to support schools into the East river. I kept hammering at the Trustees until they became satisfied that my statements were correct. Mr. Warren requested me to call and see ^{him} ~~me~~ ^{to} meet the Hon. Richard C. McCormick then Representative in Congress from the Territory of Arizona and formerly a trustee of schools in the Ward.

Both gentlemen put me under examination. Warren began by saying, "You have been denouncing the common evening ^{schools} for two or three years; now I would like you to tell us what you will give us instead of them?" "Would you reorganize the present or establish an entirely new system?" asked Mr. McCormick. I replied I would construct a new system by making it difficult to enter the school and easy to be dismissed from it. Suppose Selter

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Wallack stood in front of his theatre and invited every body to enter, telling them he had the best stock company ever seen in America and that they could witness a splendid performance free of charge. The actors might perform to empty benches. But when Mr. Wallack charges two dollars a seat the theatre is filled to overflowing. The elementary evening schools have been too cheap.

I would begin a new system of evening schools by making every applicant earn his right to membership in the school by passing a good examination. I would then give him a ticket and inform him that as long as he held it no one could dismiss him; but if he proved disorderly or troublesome, the teacher could destroy his ticket and end his connection with the school. This plan would make it easy to get rid of the young and turbulent boys who were the bane of the elementary schools, who did not desire to learn and who attended for the purpose of having all the "fun" they could obtain in tormenting inexperienced teachers. Mr. McCormick asked me how I would manage so as to admit boys over sixteen and reject all below that age, for it seems to me that boys of thirteen or fourteen who have just been graduated from the elementary day schools would pass a better examination than would those two or three years older. The plan I would adopt might not please some people, but I think it would be necessary, even if irregular, in order

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to make the proposed school a success. If the examiners found a small boy coming for "furs" with mischief in his eye, he will receive three difficult examples in arithmetic which he can not solve and which will take the conceit out of him. He has failed and can not enter. On the other hand, if a young ^{man} between eighteen and thirty presents himself as a candidate for admission, and it is observed that he is really anxious to learn, he will receive three comparatively easy examples which he can solve and be admitted. In this manner the sheep can be separated from the goats; the turbulent element will be eliminated, and the faithful earnest students will remain.

Mr. Warren said, "This will not be an evening high school." I replied, "Oh, yes, it will; for there will be Latin, French, German, Spanish, English, Physics, Chemistry, History, Political Economy, Algebra, Geometry, Free-hand, mechanical and architectural Drawing, Stenography and arithmetic. But no student can take more than three of the above-mentioned subjects at one time. A student may take only one subject. From a printed programme he learns the hours when his subjects are taught; and he need only attend during those hours.

On entering this Evening High School the young man will be carefully advised in choosing the studies best suited for his business. The school

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is absolutely free; its students self governing under a few simple fundamental laws, and undisturbed by noisy and turbulent boys.

I had no idea why Mr. Warren wanted to talk to me on this subject of the evening school, for we had frequently discussed it until it was worn threadbare. He now said, "I've sent for you to inform you that the Committee on Evening Schools have agreed to establish (to establish) an Evening High School and to appoint you its principal." I replied, "It is a great honor; but I would rather you appointed some one else. My day school is very large and I hold a position in the Saturday Normal School for teachers. In addition, I'm clerk of your local Board. No man can do justice to these positions if he accepts an evening position." "Well," replied Mr. Warren, "if you don't accept the principalship, there will be no Evening High School this winter."

After a moment's reflection, I said, "I will accept on two conditions, first, that your Committee will be satisfied with an attendance of seventy-five the first year, because I want to furnish quality and not quantity; and, secondly, I must have a voice in the selection of my assistants." The Commissioner said, "The Committee will grant the matter of attendance, but I'm afraid they will refuse you a voice in the selection of the teachers." "Very well," I said, "unless they do, I shall not accept the principalship." — The Committee finally allowed me to choose my assistants; and I took very

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good care to pick the best and brightest young men in
the public schools. I preferred young men, because
? they would believe in, and be loyal to, me and the school.
I think the corps of teachers was the strongest
and most devoted the "Little Old New York" ever saw.
I shall name a few of those first appointed:
John D. Robinson, John Jasper, Arthur McMillin,
Edward C. Burnett, Arthur H. Dundon, George White
Wilbur F. Hudson, Jacob Boyle, Jared S. Babcock