

ARTICLE 7

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## A SOUTHERN PROGRESSIVE

### M. A. Cassidy and the Lexington Schools, 1886-1928

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This article will consider the career of Massillon Alexander Cassidy, a Progressive Era school superintendent in Lexington, Kentucky, 1886-1928. Our review of school board records, personal letters, newspapers, and scholarly accounts, presents a rich outline of one man's career in public education that is illustrative of how progressive reforms came to be implemented in Kentucky. The historical record paints a picture of a beloved superintendent who brought great energy to the work of transforming the modest schools of Lexington from an undistinguished collection of dilap-

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idated common schools, into to a more efficient system of graded schools. Cassidy improved school buildings and provided better teacher-training, while preaching the gospel of literacy and expanding educational opportunity to an increasing number of children. Under his watch, the schools in Lexington became early-adopters of progressive reforms and grew to enjoy a national reputation for quality. But the historical record on Cassidy also reveals seemingly contradictory views that defy easy categorization.

In *Managers of Virtue* (1982), David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot argue that Progressive Era school leaders, during the period 1890-1954, were a new breed of “administrative progressives” who combined scientific expertise with business efficiency to reshape society toward “ever nobler ends.” These “enthusiastic Americanizers” maintained the long-standing interest in moral and civic training shared by their predecessors. But the South had long provided a “great exception” to the educational development seen in the Northern section of the country. The combination of wide-spread illiteracy, low school attendance rates, tuition-based schools, the South’s conservative Protestantism, its “tortured racial history ... and its peculiar economic structure,” made the schools of the South appear as though they were in “another country.” In some ways the very idea of public schooling was antithetical to the Southern political economy with its view of education as a private matter, and its sharp caste divisions. Following Reconstruction, Southern states experienced an educational awakening which “transform[ed] white schools while it starve[d] those for disenfranchised blacks” (Tyack and Hansot 1982, 83-84). As progressive ideas slowly gained purchase in the South, it was local superintendents who exerted the most influence on the public school districts through the implementation of ideas learned in their association meetings (Tyack and Hansot 1982, 113).

Our study reveals Cassidy’s advocacy for increased professionalism, policy development, and a commitment to enhanced teacher preparation, including teacher testing. Cassidy worked to shift the focus of the schools away from local priorities toward meeting the modern demand for a better-trained workforce in the larger market economy. He challenged Kentuckians’ typical backwoods attitude toward literacy by promoting self-improvement and advancement in a meritocratic system. The superintendent merged nineteenth-century notions of personal responsibility with a progressive focus on improving personal health and the well-being of society through the application of science, business and expertise. This combination was a good fit for his constituents, as it provided a means to enhance the emerging Southern middle class by forging a new identity—but always within the existing social structure.

Among white Southerners, the two dominant approaches to race at the turn of the twentieth century were racial exclusion—abandonment of

black instruction altogether—and racial accommodation—maintaining white superiority but instructing blacks because it would be worse if they were left ignorant. The accommodationist approach was based on “scientific racism,” which had gained credence during the 1880s and 1890s and “found ready support ... among the Northern philanthropists who participated in the Conference for Education in the South and whose money financed the work of the Southern and General Education Boards” with which Cassidy was directly involved (Leloudis 1996, 177-182).

The ex-Tennessean’s social politics, while clearly racist, were consistent with the vast majority of Lexingtonians. Progressive and paternalistic, concerned and condescending, Cassidy’s racial attitudes were a comfortable fit with the white Democratic majority (Waller 1995, 151-160). But the historical record also makes clear Cassidy’s support for black education was far greater than the typical Southern response. His insistence that schools for blacks be maintained on the same level as those for whites, set him apart from the vast majority of his Southern contemporaries. Cassidy cooperated with black leaders, established and improved schools for blacks, created a black teacher association, and conducted periodic black teacher institutes. In his book, *Golden Deeds*, he shows no reluctance in praising Abraham Lincoln among other examples who were white, black, male and female. Our research indicates that Cassidy saw himself as the benevolent teacher and guardian of African American education, consistent with a Southern accommodationist’s approach to white supremacy as described by James Leloudis in *Schooling the New South* (1996).

### LEXINGTON AND KENTUCKY

Kentucky historian J. Winston Coleman wrote of Lexington during the Civil War that “nowhere were families more divided, or sentiments so mixed” (Coleman 1968, i). During the conflict, Kentucky was a border state whose regional identity was arguably more Western than Northern or Southern; but strategically, it was seen as central to the fortunes of both. Kentucky was a slave-holding state that contributed more soldiers to the Union than the Confederacy, though many eligible men declined to take up arms for either side. Following the war, Kentucky refused to ratify the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, which granted blacks manumission, citizenship, and suffrage. The state that bred President Abraham Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis was torn politically and socially throughout the long and bloody struggle, and well into the confusing decades that followed. The city that provided Lincoln a wife, was also home to Transylvania University where Davis was educated. Lexington was held in high regard by both men and, while solidly

Democratic, was a place where the Union stars and stripes competed from the rooftops with the Confederate stars and bars (Coleman 1968, i).

In the decades following the war, Kentuckians increasingly identified with the South as ex-confederates began to take hold of state and local government. Many Kentuckians embraced racial violence, attended Democratic rallies, and held a romantic attachment to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The proslavery theology of the antebellum period, was replaced by the institution of Jim Crow. Some historians argue that the people of Kentucky reacted negatively to Reconstruction and the post-war industrial age with its labor strikes and race riots. The general violence in the Bluegrass State caused the editor of the *Nation* to remark that there were more homicides in Kentucky, in 1878, than in eight Northern states with an aggregate population of ten million. In 1877, *Courier-Journal* editor Henry Watterson wrote that “cold-blooded, malicious murderers go scott free, or are acquitted ... officers refuse to enforce the law” and that the “jury system is a complete failure” (Tapp and Klotter 1977, 400-401). Such widespread unpleasantness caused many to escape into a romanticized notion of Southern antebellum life that was glorified in contemporary literature (Wall 2010, 3-6).

The writings of Kentucky’s first important author, James Lane Allen (1849-1925), lamented the loss of the genteel life of the South’s landed aristocracy (Knight 1935, 83). Among Allen’s most loyal friends was M. A. Cassidy. The superintendent not only carried on a correspondence with Allen until his death in 1925, but is mentioned in his will. Allen’s last book, *The Landmark*, is dedicated to Cassidy. The two men shared, and in many ways exemplified, an idealized genteel Southern code of conduct that saw manners and morals as paramount. Cassidy’s personal attachment to the neo-classical Allen is but one expression of the chivalric spirit of the New South that was present in Cassidy’s personal manner and language (Allen Letters, April 7, 1917-Jan 9, 1925).

### EARLY LIFE

Born in Morristown, Tennessee, on August 22, 1856, the second of six children, Cassidy learned the value of cooperation, hard work, and creativity. His father, Jeremiah, had been a manual laborer in the Appalachian region, later becoming a teacher and author of “something more than ordinary reputation” (Kerr 1922, 330; Untitled Article 1909, August 1). The elder Cassidy was a Republican who was said to be a turncoat in the Civil War, which fomented great feelings of disrespect from Massillon. During Reconstruction, Jeremiah abandoned the family and returned to his home state of Virginia (Jackson 2011). His son later wrote,

“I suppose I should respect him as my father, but I feel that he forfeited my respect when he left my mother and her helpless children to starve” (Cassidy 1890).

Massillon’s mother, Martha Matilda (Jackson) Cassidy, came from a family that valued education. Her father, John Batchelor Jackson, was a professor of music and mathematics at Monticello Academy in Wayne County, Kentucky (Jackson 2011). Cassidy adored his mother and was heartbroken when she passed away when he was eleven; his siblings were scattered to Texas, Kansas, and Oregon (Cassidy 1889; Jackson 2011). Cassidy remained in Tennessee with his youngest brother, Eugene Hubert Cassidy, who became a Methodist minister and was often compared to Billy Sunday. Despite the hardship of a “not too happy childhood,” Cassidy managed to receive an education in private schools until he was 17-years-old by “many days of hard work on farms, in brick yards, and at many odd jobs” (Cassidy 1889; Cassidy 1890; “M.A. Cassidy: The Efficient Superintendent” 1892, April 30). He continued his education at Reagan College in Tennessee and graduated with high standing. After graduation, Cassidy served as principal of French Broad Academy and Strawberry Plains Academy for five years before pursuing a legal career in Knoxville, Tennessee (Untitled Article 1909, August 1). In 1908, Cassidy received an honorary Master of Arts Degree from the State University of Kentucky.

Cassidy married Tennessee native Martha Caroline Rogan on January 13, 1881. Martha was the youngest and only surviving child among O. H. P. and Caroline (Powell) Rogan’s eight children. Martha’s father was an auditor and paymaster for the Tennessee, Virginia, & Georgia Railway and her mother was active in the Presbyterian Church. Cassidy and Martha had four children: Henry D., Martha, Perry R., and Margaret (Kerr 1922, 330).

Cassidy practiced law for two years before beginning a career in journalism with the *Nashville World* and the *Knoxville Tribune* (Untitled Article 1909, August 1). He relocated to Lexington, Kentucky, in 1880 (Untitled Article 1909, August 1) and accepted positions at the *Lexington Transcript* and *Lexington Press* (“M. A. Cassidy: The Efficient Superintendent” 1892, April 30). It was there Cassidy discovered that the schools were in dire straits. State Superintendent H. A. M. Henderson (1871-1879) described the shameful conditions in stark terms: desolate, lonely, and uncared-for, schools were usually located on barren and treeless hillsides, on narrow strips of land at the junction of highways, or in the busiest portions of villages, where study was interrupted and the morals of the children endangered (Tapp and Klotter 1977, 188). The ravages of the Civil War, in concert with a general apathy toward education, had left Kentucky schools destitute.

### SUPERINTENDENT CASSIDY

In his 1922 *History of Kentucky*, Judge Charles Kerr praised Cassidy as “one of the most progressive, thorough and successful educators of the South” whose Lexington schools “compare favorably with those of any other city in the country...” (Kerr 1922, 329-330). So great was the public affection for Cassidy, that upon his sudden death in 1928 from myocardial heart disease, the school children of Lexington and Fayette County collected sufficient funds to erect an impressive monument in his honor. An unnamed Italian artist was commissioned to design a monument, which included a marble bust of Cassidy. It still stands in the Lexington Cemetery near Henry Clay’s (“Dedicate M.A. Cassidy Memorial” 1930, October 15).

Cassidy’s eulogy was delivered by Dr. A. W. Fortune, pastor of the Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who said it was the optimism of M. A. Cassidy that created confidence in the public school system.

His genial spirit created an atmosphere of good will which has characterized our schools,” Fortune said. “M. A. Cassidy loved people and enjoyed mingling with them. He had a big heart and was sympathetic in his attitude toward all. He had the confidence of children and.... He had the confidence and love of his teachers. We honor M. A. Cassidy because of the conception of education which he impressed on our children.... He believed the supreme function of education is the development of character. He said, “Learning without character is a vain and noxious thing (“Dedicate Cassidy Memorial” 1930, October 15).

By exploring Cassidy’s background, the condition of education in Kentucky at the time of his administration, and the initiatives he advocated, we can better understand how progressivism manifested itself in Kentucky’s schools.

In Lexington, Cassidy’s Southern sympathies put him in good standing with the state’s dominant political forces. Following the Civil War, “the Commonwealth’s political system, including local officials, the governorship, and the General Assembly, quickly came under the control of ex-confederates” who established themselves as the ruling elite (Ellis 2011, 70). Over succeeding decades, white Kentuckians’ memory of the war would be less challenged by ideological conflicts between Unionist and Emancipationist politics than was true for whites in most other states. Postbellum reconciliation in Kentucky was premised on white supremacy and “the ‘emancipationist’ narrative was never in viable contention for white memory” (Marshall 2010, 6). Cassidy remarked to his uncle that he could not fathom how anyone “with a drop of Southern blood in his veins” could be a Repub-

lican. He thought that Northerners were “not our kind of people ... have nothing in common with us...have none of the finer sensibilities ... [nor] strong sentiments of honor that are found in Southerners,” and were only waiting for the next occasion “to rob us again” (Cassidy 1890). Such sentiments did not put him at odds with the majority of Kentuckians during this period of post-war resentments and great violence. He wrote to his uncle about his travels to Boston during the summer of 1889 where he encountered over 2,000 Grand Army men on a boat. When they sang “Hang Jeff Davis on a Sour Apple Tree,” Cassidy offered a lonely hiss, and he encountered a “pitying contempt” from the ex-soldiers when he gave a Rebel Yell as the band played “Dixie” (Cassidy 1890). Of his northern travels Cassidy wrote,

They do love a negro up there. They eat with them, sleep with them, and vote with them, and sometimes marry with them. One old soldier told me how well the negroes treated him when he left the South after the war. He said they brought him a great many chickens, and his feelings were hurt when I told him that he ought to be in the penitentiary for receiving stolen goods (Cassidy 1890).

In 1886, Cassidy was elected superintendent of the Fayette County schools. Two years later, running on the Democratic ticket, Cassidy challenged Republican incumbent Col. John O. Hodges for superintendent of the Lexington city schools, and since Fayette County Democrats held “full sway,” he won with an overwhelming majority, and held both offices jointly for a period of four years, until the new state constitution forbade holding two municipal offices at once. He would hold the county office until 1902, when Cassidy was elected superintendent of the city schools (Kelley 1927, 82; Cassidy 1889; “A Good Choice” 1888, June 16). The energetic young superintendent immediately set out to remedy the derelict educational system by implementing progressive initiatives that sought to improve the quality of Lexington’s schools.

### **INITIAL REFORMS**

At the time Cassidy began his superintendency, the typical Kentucky school house contained a solitary teacher with about 40 pupils. Moreover, the general fitness of teachers varied widely as moral concerns over some teachers’ gambling, drunkenness, philandering, and thievery stood beside concerns over teacher competence (Tapp and Klotter 1977, 197). One of Cassidy’s first efforts was to increase the quality and quantity of teachers (He Will Step Down: Superintendent Cassidy 1892). He investigated teacher salaries to determine whether the monthly teacher’s salary of \$22

was fair (Kelley 1927, 78), and the results led him to increase salaries and start a teacher pension fund (Lexington Public Schools 1911). Cassidy required biennial competence testing for teachers. But he believed that such exams should not occur too frequently or they might transfer teacher efforts from student success to the successful completion of an exam (Lexington Public Schools 1892-1893).

The Fayette County Normal Institute began in 1887 (Kerr 1922, 329-330) along with regular in-services and professional gatherings (Lexington Public Schools 1907). In 1901, Cassidy formed the Fayette County Colored Teachers' Institute with Professor J. H. Johnson of the State Normal School for Colored Persons in Frankfort ("Dunbar" 1901, September 16). He later removed the Colored Board of Trustees for failure to report attendance (Lexington Public Schools 1911).

Cassidy razed dilapidated buildings, and consolidated the numerous one room rural schools into larger two or three-room schools (Wright 1994, 120). He built Lexington's first high school (Ellis 2011, 96) and added a music and art program (Lexington Public Schools 1892-1893). Cassidy implemented dual sessions which he believed would re-energize teachers and reduce discipline problems ("Two Sessions a Day" 1891, July 10), started the first kindergarten program in the South (Lexington Public Schools 1892-1893), and opposed homework and the common practice of teaching through rote memorization (Lexington Public Schools 1892-1893). Lexington became one of the first cities in the nation to adopt the 6-3-3 (elementary, junior high, high school) plan (Lexington Public Schools 1915).

Cassidy opened the schools to community events including religious services, club meetings, plays, elections, and concerts (Lexington Public Schools 1918). The first annual Patrons' Day attracted over 2,000 citizens who visited the schools (Lexington Public Schools 1892-1893; "Steps in Advance," April 4, 1904). Parent-Teacher Associations were established in every Fayette County school (Lexington Public Schools 1912) and parents provided library books, playground equipment, and music supplies (Lexington Public Schools 1923). Cassidy implemented the first medical inspections in the Lexington schools (Lexington Public Schools 1905), initiated physical education courses (Lexington Public Schools 1910), implemented a pen-pal system ("Lexington Joins New Movement" 1912, June 8), and encouraged students to visit markets, manufactories, and businesses where they could consult with professionals. The field trips gained national attention in 1913 when the *New York Globe* ran a story about Lexington curriculum and its relationship to real-world issues titled, "Where School Pupils Study City Business" (Lexington Public Schools 1913).

Cassidy used the new moving picture apparatus to show “The Fruits of Thoughtlessness,” to educate students about safety on city streets (“Moving Picture to Show Accidents” 1913, December 1). He introduced the controversial Montessori Method of teaching (Lexington Public Schools 1912; “Originality and Initiative in Pupils” 1913, November 25), fought against tobacco use among children (“W.C.T.U. Fights Cigarettes” 1912, December 6), supported athletic programs (“Ward School Basket Ball” 1915, February 1), and established a Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) in the Lexington high schools (Lexington Public Schools 1919).

Cassidy also lobbied for broader improvements to the state system. He championed professionalism, and although he was not born a Kentuckian—an exception of some significance—he was elected President of the Kentucky Education Association in 1895 and greatly influenced state school laws, particularly during the 1903-1905 sessions (Lexington Public Schools 1923; Hopkins 1957, 87; Gooden 1995, 307-311; Kerr 1922, 330). Cassidy pressed the legislature to pass higher county taxes to increase the school fund, extend the school term, and increase teacher salaries (“Teacher’s Institute” 1894, September 23). He advocated for compulsory attendance in the cities and equitable funding for all districts which he said should be consolidated into 119 county districts with the elimination of the trustee system (Cassidy 1899; “School Board: Supts Resolution” 1903, November 6; Kentucky Educational Commission 1922, 28; Cassidy 1900).

In a 1919 study of the Lexington Schools, the U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, was surprised at every turn to see what has been accomplished in laying the foundations of a progressive school system.

And particularly was it struck by the fact that Lexington, in contrast to many cities of the South, has made no discrimination in its school facilities between whites and Negroes.... Open-air schools; the penny lunch; a community center schools with a swimming pool, showers, and auditoriums; manual training and domestic economy in the fifth and sixth grades of all schools; rest rooms for the anemic and poorly nourished children; opportunity classes in some schools for irregular children; a junior high-school organization throughout; kindergarten in all white schools and in some of the Negro schools; laundries in the basements of schools for use by both children and parents; moving picture apparatus in some schools; the opening of the buildings to the use of citizens; and, for the most part, clean and well-kept buildings are some of the things which belong to progressive schools systems and which the school authorities of Lexington have secured in the face of a very meager income. Thus again the statement is vindicated that vision and good management go far toward compensating for a thin purse (Bureau of Education 1919, 16).

### RACIAL POLITICS

In 1906 the Kentucky State Superintendent, J. H. Fuqua, selected Cassidy to deliver the state address on educational progress in Kentucky at the meeting of the Southern Education Association in Montgomery, Alabama. For Cassidy to appear before one of the largest gatherings of educators in the South was seen as a high honor (Cassidy 1906). In his speech, Cassidy blamed Kentucky's district system for the state's low national literacy ranking (36th of 45 states). He also argued for federal assistance in advancing the educational opportunities for Blacks saying,

Ignorant and poverty-stricken, the negro was made a citizen, by no fault of ours, and the federal government should aid us, who are doing our best, in making him a good citizen.... Now I maintain that the negro should be educated. It is right and proper that he should have those advantages.... What we need is intelligent men to administer the negro schools, just as the white schools are administered; and until the negroes have been educated up to that point, they should by no means have the supervision of their own education (*Southern Education Association Proceedings* 1906, 89).

Two years later Cassidy was appointed to the Co-operation Committee for the Seventh Congressional district of Kentucky to assist in the planning of the meeting for the National Educational Association ("Supt. M.A. Cassidy" 1908, December 26). This event advanced Cassidy's reputation nationally and resulted in his election as President of the Southern Education Association in 1910 ("Supt. M.A. Cassidy Now Heads" 1910, December 29) where he pressed the association to address the "problems" of educational quality in mountainous and rural areas, and the education of African Americans ("President M.A. Cassidy" 1911, January 2).

Despite his prejudices, Superintendent Cassidy consistently advocated for the improvement of education for all children, including African American students. As early as the 1892-1893 school year, Cassidy built two new schools for black children and announced that these schools would be graded on the same plan as the white schools. During the 1890s, attendance in the black schools grew from 350 to 1,600 (Kelly 1927, 88). He also advocated salary increases for black teachers and principals (Lexington Public Schools 1892-1893). For more than a decade, Cassidy fought for the addition of kindergarten to black schools (Lexington Public Schools 1912) arguing that,

Lexington has had this kind of training for her white children for twenty-five years. It was among the first cities of the country to take this forward step. There is no reason why negro children should be longer denied this privilege (Lexington Public Schools 1915).

His persistence finally paid off and Cassidy declared kindergarten for black students in Lexington a success in 1924 (Lexington Public Schools 1923-1924). In 1925, the Paul L. Dunbar Colored High School opened as 2,120 black children attended school in Lexington (Kelly 1927, 100).

But Cassidy's abiding attachments to the Confederacy led to the banning of a history text. In 1908, the Lexington chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy was initiating plans to erect a statue in honor of Lexington-raised Confederate Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan. Morgan's command had been suspended, in 1864, on reports that his men had robbed and looted in Kentucky, including the theft of many highly-valued thoroughbred horses on September 4, 1862, and again on June 10, 1864. Of the latter raid, the *Observer & Reporter* wrote that in a matter of a few hours, Morgan and his men broke into stores and helped themselves to whatever they wanted, including \$10,000 from the Branch Bank of Kentucky, and \$25,000 worth of horses from John M. Clay alone (Coleman 1968, 25, 36-38). He was shot and killed trying to escape a court inquiry in Tennessee. When Cassidy learned that his students' history text, *The Story of the Great Republic* (1899), contained an unflattering description of Morgan, he banned the books from the schools and demanded that the publisher correct the "error." The offending text declared,

In 1863.... Morgan raided Kentucky.... His quick movements and his fearlessness enabled him to do much damage and to get away again before any troops could be collected to crush him. During this expedition his men took horses, plundered mills and factories, and made the people pay large sums of money to save their buildings from being burned down.

*The Lexington Leader*, a Republican newspaper, supported the superintendent's demand (Wall 2010, 235-237) but our review of the 1899 and 1927 online editions revealed that no changes were made (Guerber 1899, 1927).

When Cassidy endorsed a Lexington viewing of the controversial film, *Birth of a Nation* (1915) he joined Southern-born Democratic President Woodrow Wilson, the entirety of the U. S. Supreme Court, many members of the House and Senate, and the *Lexington Herald* in doing so. He praised the film for its educational qualities while The Colored Ministers Alliance and The Women's Christian Temperance Union protested the showing. The film, which "glorified the Lost Cause and the Ku Klux Klan, condemned Reconstruction, and demonized and disparaged blacks at every turn," opened to huge crowds at the Lexington Opera House on March 20, 1916 (Morelock, 2010, 154-156; Marshall 2010, 170-171). According to Yale historian David Blight, in Kentucky, sentiment won over ideology as "reconciliation joined arms with white supremacy in Civil War memory" (Blight 2001, 6, 397).

### **CASSIDY'S GOLDEN DEEDS**

Cassidy had long viewed the school system as a training ground for future citizens and believed that teaching methods and educational opportunities should reflect this aim. Consistent with this philosophy, Cassidy's Golden Deeds Program, which began in 1904, sought to encourage moral growth among Lexington's students. The aim of this project, supported by a book Cassidy authored of the same title, was to instigate healthy competition among the classrooms of Lexington to perform as many selfless deeds as possible and record their acts of generosity. *The Lexington Leader* (1910) explained that "the children of the public schools report any good deed expressive of kindness, heroism, or self-sacrifice, taken from actual life and that comes under their observation." Within the first year of implementation over 6,000 of these acts of kindness were reported ("Golden Deeds" 1910, February 6).

This plan was sufficiently successful in promoting community involvement among Lexington's youth that it was endorsed by the National Character Development League and was featured in a League article titled, "Character Lessons" (1910). This approbation also led to Cassidy's appointment to the League's national board, increased national interest in the Golden Deeds Plan ("Golden Deeds" 1910, February 6), and gained acknowledgement in the U.S. Bureau of Education's 1919 annual report. Cassidy's intervention was implemented in Utah and Los Angeles, as well as various other schools nationwide, and was incorporated into Iowa's plan for character development which won a \$20,000 award for public school character education plans in 1922 (Pietig 1977; Hartshorne 1932, 65-69).

The curriculum in the *Golden Deeds* text incorporated widely accepted notions of character development including honesty, kindness, courage, gratitude, healthy living, and the idea that to be a "good Christian" one needed to act in accordance with Biblical beliefs. The book used national heroes, primarily Lincoln, to teach one's duty to environmentalism and capitalism, particularly the idea that thrift, perseverance, and hard work will eventually pay off. Cassidy also wrote about the deeds of national heroes which included two examples each from Washington, Lee, Jefferson and Franklin, and nine examples from Lincoln.

### **LATER REFORMS**

The quintessential progressive education initiative in Lexington was the establishment of the Abraham Lincoln School and Social Center, championed by Madeline "Madge" McDowell Breckinridge, who was becoming

one of Kentucky's leading social reformers. The school would become a model of school-family cooperation for the state, teaching healthy living, powers of observation, cooperation, and manual training. In 1902, Breckinridge approached the school board with a request for \$350 to erect a playground for children in the west end of the city. Previously the board had only been able to muster enough resources for a vacation school and a kindergarten, but the board was sufficiently impressed that it awarded \$400 to assure the playground would be completed, took over the project, and promised Breckinridge that a school would eventually be built to serve the impoverished neighborhood (Breckinridge 1921, 51).

Cassidy supported the establishment of the Lincoln School, and asked the board for \$15,000, which would allow for a "proper auditorium" so the school could serve as a social center. But the school board only contributed \$10,000 of the \$46,000 needed to complete the school. Following the advice of progressive reformer Jane Addams, Breckinridge had vigorously set about to supplement the public grant, ultimately gaining private donations from 760 contributors including the first \$1,000 from Robert Todd Lincon. Cassidy joined Breckinridge in promoting the model school, and consistent with the Social Gospel tradition, he begged a large gathering of potential donors at the Lexington Opera House to remember that Christ taught it was our duty "to love our neighbor--love means service, and the whole world is our neighbor" ("Chicago Settlement Leader Speaks" 1909, May 26). The school opened in 1912 (Breckinridge 1921, 91-92).

In 1911, Cassidy first proposed the establishment of a night school in the Lexington high school in an effort to combat adult illiteracy. This proposal was influenced greatly by Cora Wilson Stewart's persistent campaign for "Moonlight Schools" in the Commonwealth. As President of the Southern Education Association (SEA), Cassidy invited Stewart to offer an address in Houston, Texas, in December of 1911, to gain support for the movement. He contended that Stewart's approach would provide education to those whose work schedules prevented school attendance (Lexington Public Schools 1911). With Cassidy's support, Stewart's work received an endorsement from SEA and received national attention (Baldwin 2006, 45-46).

In response to dozens of deaths in Lexington from the "white plague," or tuberculosis, the superintendent joined the Clean City Club and chaired its Clean up Committee. Cassidy deployed 5,000 students to clean up yards and remove refuse from basements and attics under the supervision of teachers. The city arranged for the trash to be hauled off while the *Lexington Leader* ran editorials linking sanitation to good health and encouraging women to adopt the "science of housekeeping" to increase the efficiency of the home ("Five Thousand School Children"

1914, March 22; "School Children Report," 1914, April 6). Cassidy justified the students' activity as "a means to a cleaner and healthier city" as well as a "fine practical lesson in home and civic cleanliness" that would "foster in the children a spirit of civic pride that will be of inestimable value" (Morelock 2008, 165-171; Lexington Public Schools 1914).

Cassidy was an author whose love of literature was no doubt influenced by his long friendship with James Lane Allen, "Kentucky's first important novelist" (Kleber 1992, 14). Cassidy maintained a correspondence with the author following Allen's relocation to New York City in 1893. Until Allen's death in 1925, the two exchanged numerous letters (letters that Allen implored Cassidy to destroy, but which he did not). Allen asked Cassidy, whom he referred to as "Captain," and "My Dear Director General," to write about his childhood, share essays written by Lexington students and report on news of the day, like Lexington's National High School Basketball Championship in 1922 (Allen letters, April 7, 1917-Jan 9, 1925). Allen encouraged Cassidy saying, "The things you wrote regarding the schools were immensely interesting. Man, you are modern! You are constantly moving forward to the freshest turf of the world" (Allen letter, June 16, 1919).

In the end, it was Cassidy's good will, expressed through his personal relationships that prompted the community to respond with strong feelings of affection for his leadership. Soon after his death, in December 1928, Cassidy's friends and colleagues throughout the city began receiving his annual self-designed Christmas cards in the mail—complete with one of his celebrated poems ("Last Poem Was on Friendship" 1928, December 22).

#### My Picture Gallery

I've strolled in halls where famous art displayed in all its splendor,  
 stirred deep emotions in my heart—repulsive mixed with tender.  
 But in my heart there is a hall adorned with finest pictures,  
 on every side they deck the wall with no revolting mixtures.  
 A single artist painted them on canvas that's eternal,  
 and every one that artist's gem, whose joy is diuturnal.  
 The artist is well known as Friend, a true and tender painter,  
 whose colors last unto the end nor with the years grow fainter.  
 His colors are affections, smiles, and trueness and devotion,  
 unmingled with any sordid wiles, or any base emotion.  
 Within my hall, you I behold, and count you as a treasure,  
 that paintings all by artists bold can never find a measure.  
 And in my heart hall there's a glow that comes from sunny faces;  
 and nothing sweeter shall I know than all your friendly graces.

## CONCLUSION

The 42-year career of M. A. Cassidy exemplifies the transition of public school leadership in Kentucky from non-educators who held religious-political ideologies to professional progressive educators who sought to make Kentucky schools more efficient through expertise and scientific management. This concept was fully adopted in Section 183 of the Kentucky Constitution (1891) which required the General Assembly to “provide for an efficient system of common schools throughout the state.” Confident that professional educators were best suited to devise solutions to social problems, and justified by the twin notions of equality of educational opportunity and meritocracy, Cassidy was part of a new breed of progressive educators who joined with the business community to declare that a modest amount of schooling would prepare all for a life of equality, not by restructuring society, but by making each individual better (Tyack and Hansot 1982, 105-112).

Cassidy belonged to that class of Southern accommodationist progressive educators who saw themselves as the teachers and guardians of subordinate African Americans in whom they would cultivate “some measure of collaboration and consent” (Leloudis 1996,179-182; Cremin 1961, 168; Tyack and Hansot 1982, 95, 106-109). Cassidy presents as a Southern-style reformer working in a border state, but one who held conservative and progressive ideals in equal measure. Like most white Southerners, Cassidy believed that blacks were inherently inferior to whites. But unlike his Southern peers—and despite being part of a community that did not embrace social mobility for Blacks—Cassidy was an early adopter of educational equality that included blacks, albeit, in a separate system under Jim Crow. His attention to physical and operational improvements to black schools, including enhanced teacher training and the addition of innovative programs for students, was remarkable for its place and time.

But apparent philosophical conflicts fall into place once we see Cassidy for who he was: a public official who necessarily had to work closely with his constituency to achieve his goals; a change agent who used the bully pulpit to extol the virtues of literacy and a proper education; a Christian in the Social Gospel tradition who saw a duty to the least among us; and a personable superintendent who used his sense of Southern gentility to attract more citizens to the enterprise.

As Tyack and Hansot established, there was a difference between Northern progressive educators and their Southern counterparts. But Dewey Grantham, in *Southern Progressivism*, found that “it was not altogether clear how [Southern] progressivism paralleled or differed from contemporary reform in other sections.” While the South shared the national reform ethos and dozens of educators launched campaigns for

public education, its “distinctive institutions, one-party politics, and perennial concern with the ‘race question’ no doubt gave a special color to its social reform.” And no aspect of social reform touched more lives than the great educational awakening that focused on creating an adequate system of education for white children following the turn of the century (Grantham 1983, xv, 246-247).

Was Cassidy unique, or were there other border state progressive educators who were early promoters of equal, if separate, schools for blacks? Future research in this area could reveal the extent to which other school leaders may have sought nondiscriminatory systems, and whether there was a distinct group of border state administrative progressives who combined Northern and Southern views.

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