The Multifaceted Functions of the Beverly Evening Schools
by Adrienne Baker

Abstract

The object of this paper on Evening Schools is to demonstrate why they came about. What was the reasoning behind starting up another type of school setting? In this paper, there will be a list of classes that show who attended what class to demonstrate how immigrants benefited from Evening Schools. This paper will be used to show if the Evening Schools improved the education of the attendants. City directories and city documents will be used in order to show who lived in the city of Beverly over the years. Old attendance records will be very helpful to find out who attended which classes and where they were from. Annual school reports will also be of great help to show who went to which schools. The annual school reports will be used to compare the data from three different cities, Beverly, Cambridge and Danvers. Also, inside the annual school reports are reports from the Principal of the Evening Schools, which will be used to learn about the progress of the classes.

There has never been a paper written solely on Evening Schools. The only records of Evening Schools are city documents and annual school reports. Another piece of information linking with Evening Schools is the Gary Plan, from Gary, Indiana. The Gary Plan was a plan from many citizens to make schools open twenty-four hours to extend the activities available. In order to link Evening Schools to the bigger picture, a few questions will be answered in this paper. How large does a city have to be to have Evening Schools? Was immigration an influential factor to why Evening Schools came about? Were the Evening Schools beneficial to the people? What jobs did the attendants obtain?
Narrative

Today, it is mandatory that all children attend school. It is the law. In the early and mid-19th century, this was not the case. In this period, many people dropped out of school for a variety of reasons including lack of interest. Many had to go to work to help support their families. Many women did not attend school in order to tend to the housework and to babysit younger siblings. These conditions created the need for an alternative for people who could not attend school in the daytime. This is one reason why the evening school came about.

An evening school is an extended curriculum administered during the evening hours. “Evening classes emerged as a substitute for the non-vocational obligations under the apprenticeship contract from basic instruction in literacy and arithmetic to more practical and vocational subject matter.”[1] During the 18th and 19th centuries when apprenticeship diminished, children would more commonly attend day school and adults would attend evening schools. For the people who could not attend during the day, there was now an alternative.

Another reason evening schools emerged was a result of immigration. Evening schools in larger cities such as Cambridge and Lawrence, Massachusetts were significantly influenced by immigration due to the fact that the immigration rate in these cities was quite high. Most immigrants could not read or write and by attending evening school their literacy rate obviously improved. Although many immigrants attended voluntarily it was inevitable that it would soon be the law. In 1887, Massachusetts was the first state to pass a law stating that any minor who could not read or write English was mandated to attend evening schools. This soon led to classes that were devoted to non-English speaking immigrants.

A similar plan for extended activities into the evening hours, which is known all over the United States, originated in Gary, Indiana. The “Gary Plan” was used all over the country. On July 1st, 1907, a man named William A. Wirt and his co-worker Thomas Knotts signed a contract which granted the school system twenty-five thousand dollars for larger facilities and more supplies.
The people of Gary, Indiana wanted to develop new types of educational ideas. The first step of the proposed plan was to modernize the course of study by introducing new subjects and activities to change school spirit and attitude. There was also to be changes in the conditions of the facilities and a specialized staff. The four components of the new schools would be academic work, science/industrial training, community or group work and physical education. The day would be evenly split to accommodate all four of these components.

These innovations included “enriched curriculum, addition to common academic branches, community activities, facilities for recreation, shop work, household arts, discipline, modern psychology, ethics and social philosophy.” [2] In 1917 there was a debate in New York City about “Garyizing” schools although a clear majority favored it.

Evening schools in Cambridge, Massachusetts came about earlier then most, although an exact date is unavailable. In 1857, the legislature made evening instruction attached to the regular school funds. In 1869 the age of admittance for evening classes was lowered from fifteen to twelve, significantly increasing the number enrolled. Boston, Lowell and Lawrence eventually added evening schools as well as a result of this legislation.

Immigration was the primary factor for the development of evening schools in Cambridge. (See Appendix A) The census of 1910 shows 34,608 foreign born people living in Cambridge. Many immigrants were seeking education in order to get a job although the majority wasn’t. The 1910 census also shows 1,857 Portuguese living in Cambridge, although only 194 enrolled in evening classes (10.45%). This census shows 1546 Italians were present but only 417 were enrolled (26.97%), and 1797 Swedes were present but only 68 were enrolled (3.78%). The adults enrolled in the evening classes were taught vocational instruction, common morality, and introduction to culture. [3]

For those who were enrolled, attendance was a significant problem. In many cases, the classes were too large with not enough seats. Nor was there adequate supplies for every person. In other cases, people would enroll in evening classes and not show up at all or show up only a few
times. In Cambridge, it was thought that in order to have good attendance a good teacher was needed along with enough materials and adequate facilities, i.e. lighting. [4] The more people who attended the evening classes, the lower the cost was per person because the total cost could be divvied up between more people.

An experiment was developed in Cambridge in 1913 to determine how many immigrants and native born people actually wanted to receive an education. At an evening high school, the attendance was voluntary with very strict teachers. The students would attend three nights a week as opposed to five days a week. Pupils who worked hard and passed a test toward the end of the session received a high school diploma.

Each year the number of graduates increased due to more interest and better supplies. In the Cambridge School Report of 1913 there are two accounts of immigrants who attended evening schools. These students learned English very well and enjoyed attending evening schools. (See Appendix B) Before the war, most non-English speaking students were found in these classes. With more students in each class, the cost was lower per student. (See Appendix C)

Evening schools in Lawrence, Massachusetts were started in 1895. The requirements to receive a diploma in Lawrence were different from that of Cambridge. A student had to attend three classes per year for three years to receive a high school diploma. Attendance seemed to be less of a problem in Lawrence with an average attendance rate of eight-one percent in 1897. Each year the number of students enrolled increased. Again, in Lawrence, immigration had a large influence on the evening classes being held. (See Appendix D)

In smaller cities and towns evening schools came much later then in large cities such as Cambridge and Lawrence. Evening schools started much later in Ipswich, Massachusetts and did not last long. From the start of evening schools in 1914, their importance was not valued as much as other cities due to fewer immigrants and a smaller population. There were too many problems with the regular schools to add additional schools or classes. The drop out rate was very high in Ipswich, causing the school system to lose money. It costs the school committee
money to retain a student. Twelve percent of the students were over-aged due to lack of equipment and difficult facilities to work in.

In Salem, evening schools came about around 1914, although an exact year is unknown. After the revised child labor laws, enforcement of the attendance of illiterate minors was increased in order for them to be schooled. The first and second year classes were developed in order to teach English. The classes offered in Salem included machine shop, pattern making, mechanical drawing, bookkeeping, stenography and typewriting. Even with a large variety of classes attendance was still a problem. In four different classes the attendance rate was less than fifty percent: 204 enrolled and sixty-two attended (30.39%), 418 enrolled and 140 attended (33.49%), 400 enrolled and 157 attended (39.25%), and 435 enrolled and only 173 attended (39.77%). [5] This may have been due to the fact that many people had to work in order to help support their families.

Most cities had evening schools although not all of them lasted long or made much progress. In some cases the size of the city and the population were two large factors in determining whether or not there were to be evening schools. In cities such as Ipswich and Salem evening schools would not necessarily be as important as Lawrence and Cambridge because there were fewer immigrants in those cities. In towns such as Danvers, Hamilton and Wenham, Massachusetts there are no accounts that evening schools ever existed probably due to the smaller population.

The first account of evening schools in Beverly, Massachusetts was in 1877. On December 1st, 1877 a meeting was held to discuss the idea of evening schools because not enough people were receiving an education. The outcome was to allow any child or adult who could not attend day school to attend evening schools. The basic classes taught in the first evening schools were spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic and bookkeeping, using the books and supplies from the day school curriculum.

The purpose of having evening schools in Beverly was so people could better their
education. There were many illiterates, both native and foreign born, who had been deprived of any education and only wanted to learn. In 1896, a class at the Briscoe Evening School had nine people enrolled, all of which were immigrants. Another evening school in Beverly had sixty-two enrolled and fourteen of them were immigrants (22.58%). (See Appendix E, Appendix F, and Appendix G) In 1897 and 1898 attendance became a large problem again. (See Appendix H) This may have been due to the fact that many people had to work all day long. They may have enrolled in evening classes to attempt to receive an education but were impeded by their work schedules.

Another reason why attendance was problematic was due to lack of supplies and lack of space in the evening classes. In 1899 better accommodations such as space and more supplies existed. In a mechanical drawing class there were enough supplies for twenty-four pupils and no more than twenty-four could enroll.

In 1900 a law was passed mandating persons over twelve years of age to attend evening schools to obtain an education. This law was a revision due to laws from 1883 (Chapter 147, Acts of 1883) and after this law was made the number of attendants increased yearly. [6] In 1901 free evening classes were established availing opportunities for people who were neglected from day schooling to obtain the schooling they needed. These classes were also established for people who wanted extra schooling and were ambitious to improve their quality of life. People who had to drop out of day school due to work or family needs now had an opportunity to succeed.

In 1902 classes such as arithmetic, penmanship and English were extended to two nights per week. No pupils enrolled in evening classes attended day schools at the same time. Attendance was again becoming a problem in Beverly. In 1902, 254 were enrolled and only 110 attended (43.01%). In 1903, 340 were enrolled and only 153 attended (45%). In 1905, 333 were enrolled and 195 (58.56%) attended and in 1906, 351 were enrolled and only 212 attended (60.4%).

“Affording as they do, school privileges for all persons ambitious to improve their condition of life, and also for foreigners who are required by law to become proficient in the use of the
English language, the Evening Schools have become a necessity to the well-being of our city.”

[7] In 1911 and 1912 around fifty percent of the pupils attending the Beverly evening school were foreign-born. (See Appendix I) In the Annual School Report of 1914 there are six accounts of foreign-born students who attend evening schools. It is clear from these accounts that the evening schools greatly improved the literacy rates and lives of the attendants. (See Appendix J)

In 1910, English classes in Beverly were extended to four nights a week and beginning in 1912, if a student enrolled in an English class and passed they could be promoted to the next grade. In 1915 and 1916, there were many different nationalities registered for evening classes. Most enrolled in English classes with the hopes of one day graduating school. (See Appendix K) In 1917, the number of people enrolled was 892, which had dropped drastically from 1916. This was due in large part to the war where many students voluntarily dropped out of school to enlist; in addition, many students were drafted. Along with native born people enlisting, many foreign born people returned to their home country at this time of war.

The establishment of evening schools was a great accomplishment for the state of Massachusetts. With a large amount of immigrants coming into the country, evening schools provided an opportunity for them to learn the American culture and the English language. Because of evening schools everyone was able to obtain a good education to better their lives.
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Footnotes


