



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

Guide to the Committee for Superintending the School for Mutual Instruction records

Finding aid prepared by Diane Pierce-Williams and Kristen Swett

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

With funding from a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC)

Repository: City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division
Title: Committee for Superintending the School for Mutual Instruction records
Collection No.: 0401.001
Dates: 1821-1823
Quantity: 0.01 Cubic feet (4 folders)

TABLE OF CONTENTS SERIES LIST

[Historical note](#)

[Series I: Committee correspondence and reports](#)

[Scope and Contents note](#)

[Series II: Reports on attendance and tokens](#)

[Related Material](#)

[Series III: Observation reports](#)

Historical note

The mutual (or monitorial) system of instruction, which had been created by English educator Joseph Lancaster, was widely popular in the early part of the nineteenth century. The Lancasterian system relied upon having the older or more advanced students instruct the younger or weaker students under the supervision of the schoolmaster. Tokens with an attached pecuniary value were distributed as rewards for successful students. The students could redeem the tokens for books and other prizes.

On 2 July 1820, at a Town meeting, an appropriation of \$1000 was voted and the School Committee was authorized to establish a School for Mutual Instruction. The School Committee voted on 22 October 1821 to create a committee of seven men to oversee and care for the School.

Because it required fewer trained professionals, this system became a factor in the expansion of free education. Indeed, the Committee found the school and its method of instruction to be superior and recommended its general adoption. The School Committee took charge of the school in September of 1823 and the Committee for Superintending the School for Mutual Instruction was disbanded.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Contents note

This collection consists of three series: Series I - Committee correspondence and reports; Series II - Reports on attendance and tokens; and Series III - Observation reports. Series I includes correspondence, votes, reports, and records of the business of the Committee. One significant item is a detailed description by William B. Fowle of his visit to the Free Schools in New York City. Series II includes the reports of the schoolmaster, William B. Fowle, which provided attendance statements, tallies of tokens distributed and redeemed, and minutiae concerning the functioning of the school. Series III includes reports of visits to the school by various committee members.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Related Material

Annals of the Primary Schools, compiled by Joseph M. Wightman, Boston: Rand & Avery, City Printers, 1860 can be found in the Publications Collection.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Series I: Committee correspondence and reports, 1821-1823 (1 folder)

1 1821-1823

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series II: Reports on attendance and tokens, 1821-1823 (1 folder)

2 1821 November-1823 January

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series III: Observation reports, 1821-1823 (2 folders)

3 1821 November 4-1822 April 18

4 1822 April 22-1823 August 4

[Return to the Series List](#)