

The Lyceum Movement

The first adult education school system
in the United States:

1826-1845

Pronunciation: Lay-See-uhm





Description of photo:

shot on 35mm film in 2006 from inside an old town hall in New Mexico.

I imagine the birth of The Lyceum Movement happened in a beautiful space such as this...

Historical Context

Jacksonian Democracy, The Common Man and The Lyceum Movement

Andrew Jackson's election in 1828 marked a new direction in American politics. He was the first westerner elected president and the first president from a state other than Virginia or Massachusetts. He boldly proclaimed himself to be the “champion of the common man.”

“Between the end of the American Revolution and the eighteen-thirties, the intellectual and social climate in the United States was not too favorable to elaborate experiments in adult education.”

This statement sets the foundation of the Lyceum Movement. Prior to the election of Andrew Jackson, it was assumed that education *could* enlighten a community but wasn't necessary worth the use of time or resources. This sentiment started to shift after 1828, which helped create the fertile grounds needed for the Lyceum Movement to take root.

“Some of the factors that acted as a check on this cultural improvement being realized were problems involved in establishing the new government, political and social conservatism, lack of publicly supported education, fear of secular education and preference for church-or religious-charity-dominated education, and political apathy and powerlessness of the masses.”

Diffusion

Diffusion is a broad term. It includes the spreading of ideas through newspapers, lectures, and academic and popular writing. Information is diffused through both formal and informal means. Diffusion is the primary source of non-institutionalized adult and continuing education.



Antebellum Diffusion
is the period before the civil war. It begins with formal and non-formal learning but for the purposes of innovation or invention; for economic growth; and for change (economic, religious, and social).



The Lyceum Movement
was uniquely developed for the purpose of diffusion.

Also, classified as a utopian movement by Stubblefield and Keane (1994).



“It was presumed that individuals acted out of ignorance and if only they were provided with the correct information their behavior would change accordingly.”

The Father of the Lyceum Movement:

Josiah Holbrook



- Holbrook was born in Connecticut in 1788
- His father, Colonel Holbrook, was an officer in the Revolution and was a man of wealth and influence in the Connecticut community
- For primary school, Holbrook attended an “ordinary common school”
- Holbrook entered Yale College in 1806 and graduated in 1813
- “Several influences in Holbrook’s early life seem to have guided the course of his career in connection with the Lyceum Movement: his years at Yale and his exposure to current ideas and theories”
- His biggest influence stems from his exposure to Dr. Benjamin Silliman, a professor of chemistry and mineralogy, during his junior and senior years at Yale
- Even after graduation, Holbrook continued to attend Silliman’s lectures to nurture his interests in science and eventually became a self-made geologist
- Another influence on Holbrook was the cultural context of his time and how for the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Rationalism and emerging Liberalism were the dominant philosophical approaches.

The Definition(s)

The Lyceum Movement

"to provide practical scientific instruction for workmen" and to produce the similar result of turning out "a more intelligent worker and a better product"

...Everyone realizes that there is nothing new in a group of persons gathering together and listening to educational lectures. But when those gatherings follow the same general plan and when they multiply far beyond their original number, then a social institution is in the making.

Rationalism

... opinions and actions should be based on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.

Powell and Benne (1960) postulate that in adult education, rationalism means "content and process."

Liberalism

"According to Elias and Merriam (2005), Liberal adult education focused on liberal learning, knowledge, and intellectual rigor. It's purpose was tied with democratic citizenship and with methods ranging from discussion to lecture" (161).

“Among those friends of education who took an active part in endeavors for the improvement of schools during the second quarter of the present century, none labored more strenuously or devotedly than **Josiah Holbrook**. Nor was he less active in the sphere of benevolent exertion for the diffusion of useful knowledge in scientific forms among adults, engaged in the various pursuits of life, and particularly those occupied in farming.

The main object of interest to Mr. Holbrook's own mind, was the establishment, throughout the United States, of popular associations for the diffusion of scientific knowledge connected with the useful arts. . . To bring his views and purposes to actual accomplishment, he traveled for successive years, from place to place, founding branches of what he fondly termed the American Lyceum.”

The Goals of the Lyceum Movement

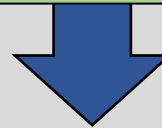
a. to develop “mutual instruction in the sciences, and in useful knowledge generally”

b. to unify the efforts of “men of views enlightened enough upon education to see its defects and its wants”

c. to encourage, through the establishment of village associations, the rapid increase and “general diffusion of knowledge and (the) raising (of) moral and intellectual tastes of countrymen”

d. to “check the progress of that monster, intemperance”

e. to “divert the attention of the young from places and practices which lead to dissipation and to ruin”



Objectives

... to procure for youths an economical and practical education and to diffuse rational and useful information through the community generally.

“Associations of Adults for the Purpose of Mutual Education”

– Josiah Holbrook

... to apply the sciences and the various branches of education to the domestic and useful arts, and to all common purposes of life.

System of Sharing

Holbrook believed in “common school education” that could be grown from local organizing bodies to national organizing bodies. His vision was to create governing boards that could meet on an annual basis with principle objectives and shared goals. For many years and at least nine national meetings, these Lyceum networks operated around the world. While the national gatherings focused on schoolteacher training, gender equity, data gathering, curriculum development, and strategic planning, the local gatherings focused on manifesting these visions in nonformal learning spaces across growing communities.

“There are no sources available to show that the American Lyceum held any more national meetings after 1839. Apparently, there were quite a few problems inherent in the structure of the national organization. Representation at the annual meetings was not good, and attendance was poor. Many State lyceums never sent delegates and others did so irregularly. The local lyceums seem to have been popular, but the idea of representation on a national level did not work well.”

Beyond 1840

Even though the national organization of The Lyceum was no longer in operation after 1839, the local chapters did continue offering access to nonformal education. The movement also elevated the stature of teachers and inspired organization beyond the classroom as local and county associations popped up all over the country in support of their development and growth. Because Holbrook showcased the value of systems and the need for common education, the first State Board of Education was formed in 1837 in Massachusetts.

The Lyceum movement also inspired lectures as entertainment, “The most well-known was the Chautauqua Institution that was founded in upstate New York in 1876. Chautauqua began its two week training program for Sunday School teachers, but it evolved and reinvented itself several times. It quickly moved from its limited teaching curriculum to a more broadly defined liberal arts curriculum. Emulating the lyceum, it provided lectures as entertainment” (183). The Chautauqua Institute is still functioning today.

Currently it seems the lyceum model continues to flourish. Whether you’re considering the influence of TED Talks or motivational speakers, all walks of life can access a plethora of nonformal learning opportunities across the world that are affordable, entertaining and informative.

Synthesis

The Lyceum Movement was significant because fifty years prior, education had been grossly neglected. Perspectives changed when Andrew Jackson was elected and after 1828, a greater emphasis was placed on educating the “common man” with the ultimate goal of creating a more intellectually engaged society. The movement also built a model that could be replicated across the country. In fact, the system was intended to establish libraries and museums; state supported elementary schools; and teacher education. Considering most teachers were female at the time and had no legal access to education or property, the Lyceum movement countered the trend of patriarchy and helped create a nurturing space for their learning, professional development and growth. This philosophy trickled down to the “common woman” and for the first time thousands of women were exposed to intellectual opportunities at pioneer institutions across the eastern United States. The movement also operated outside of the traditional university system in order to serve the growing number of adults who needed accessible, non-formal, community based structures.

The most significant takeaway is Holbrook's influence on the systems we have in place today and how he believed that education could be used as a lever to inspire and ignite new and old generations in a young country trying to figure things out.

References

J. Ross-Gordon, A. D. Rose & C. E. Kasworm, (2017). Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 432 pp. ISBN 978-1118955093 (hardcover)

Stambler, Leah G. "The Lyceum Movement in American Education, 1826-1845." *Paedagogica Historica* 21, no. 1 (1981): 157-185.