

The Bergwalls Valued and Served Public Education in Wisconsin



George and Ebba Bergwall's letters tell how important public education was to them and how they and their children relied on it and contributed to it in Wisconsin.

Excerpts from the Letters of George Edward Bergwall –
1858 - 1881

George, writing to his brother Anton in Sweden:

1859: January 22, Vanhem (North Lake);

-“I am at present treasurer of our town, having to collect and distribute the taxes. ...Besides, I am the school treasurer. I receive \$80.00 per year for the first mentioned office, ... For the second I receive work and prestige—this for two year period”

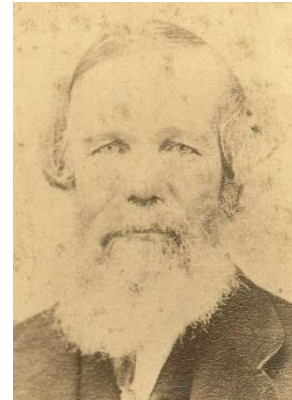
1866: March 18, North Lake;

-Step-daughter Agnes, finished school, “...likely to take a teacher's examination...”

-Daughter Charlotte, “...wishes to be a school ma'am.”

1867: June 21, Waukesha;

In November of 1866, George was elected Treasurer of Waukesha County. From his office in the County Courthouse, he writes; “In two weeks I'll be going home again. At present I must be here to receive about 6,000 dollars school money from the State of Wisconsin to distribute among 16 sub town treasurers who in turn divide the same among school treasurers. Finally the school teachers—men and women—the latter in the majority are properly paid.”



George Bergwall

“With Admirable foresight the government has taken steps to insure educational opportunities to the coming generation even from the very beginning of the settling of the new country.”

Gustaf Unonius
*Vol I Page 133-134, A
Pioneer in Northwest
America 1841-1858*

Unonius was referring the practice of reserving a portion of every Township—Section 16—as a land grant slated to be used as a source of income to support public education. This was the U.S. federal government's means of supporting the schools which allowed George and Ebba's children the opportunity to become educated and in turn to educate others. This commitment was set into law by the land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance.

From: *University of Wisconsin Whitewater Historical Timeline*

1866: Wisconsin Board of Normal School Regents awards a normal school to the village of Whitewater.
1868: April 28 Whitewater Normal School Opens.



George to Anton continued:

1872 September 26, North Lake;

“My daughter, Charlotte has taught school three terms – is now in Whitewater studying – not only to receive the necessary knowledge for teaching, but to learn how to manage a large school...”

“...I had the pleasure of reading an article...that our state ranks highest in America in quality of teachers and instruction and that is saying a lot.”

“My Hedda, next to Charlotte, ... also wishes to try her luck in the teaching profession. When Charlotte shall have finished her courses she wants to teach in Milwaukee at a salary of perhaps \$600 per year that is two terms for 4 months each.”

This was George’s last letter to Anton. He died on March 24, 1873 and was buried in St. Peter’s yard in North Lake.

From the letters of Ebba, George’s wife
Ebba to her brother-in-law Anton in Sweden:

1879: February 1, 1879, North Lake

“Charlotte secured a position as a teacher in Milwaukee last fall. She receives four hundred and fifty dollars for ten months. And is well pleased with her work. She comes home every holiday and whenever she has time off. Hedda is in Chicago with Agnes where she attends school so that she may pass examination to teach the same as Lotten (Charlotte).”

"I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. no other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom, and happiness."

Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, August 13, 1786.

Jefferson was instrumental in creating the laws, the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance that insured public education was available to Americans.



Ebba Bergwall

1879: April 12. North Lake

“Charlotte had her vacation during the Easter holidays. She spent it at home among us. She was tired out from too much work and not well, but felt rested and much better when she left us. She now has 56 new pupils as her old pupils moved up a grade. I hope she will not find things as difficult as she expected. She is satisfied however to have left the country even though there is more work to do. I only hope that her health holds out. At the present time she is the child I have every reason to be happy over. With little help many trial and much perseverance she has advanced to the position she now holds.”

1881: August 17, Milwaukee

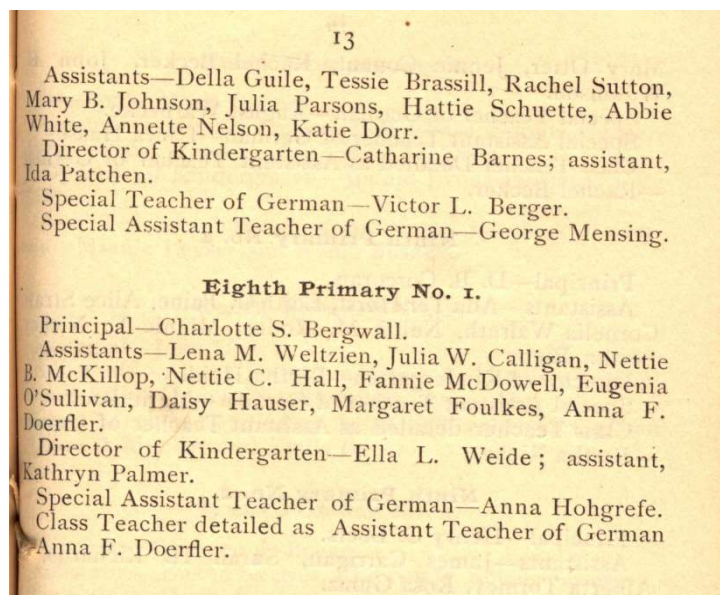
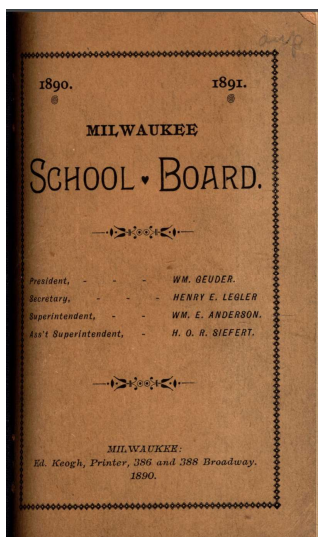
“Charlotte, the oldest, has been promoted. She is now principal of a new school with a salary of \$900 a year. She has four teachers under her and is pleased with her work.”

“Both of my youngest daughters are at home with me. Emma has helped me with the housework. Ida has done well in school this term but she does not want to become a teacher like the other two sisters. She is talented for music and should like to be a music teacher. She has had lessons, but I want her first to finish her studies in school before I fulfill her wishes. We are happy to have a good piano belonging to a friend, but after a while I want to get one of our own.”



Charlotte Bergwall: First Female Principal in the Milwaukee Public Schools

In 1881, Charlotte Bergwall became the first female Principal in the City of Milwaukee School System. She accepted the position at the newly constructed Eighth District School. The school system is confused about this. Milwaukee Schools have named a school after another woman—Doerfler—who they say was the first female principal of a Milwaukee City School. As one can see in the School Board yearly report below, Ms. Doerfler assisted Charlotte as Assistant Teacher of German. Later in her career Ms. Doerfler did become a principal.



From: *"America is the women's promised land": Swedish Immigrant Women and American Domestic Service* Joy K. Lintelman

Charlotte Bergwall

Perhaps the most successful example of a Swedish-American women's employment experience in the greater Milwaukee community was that of Charlotte Bergwall. Charlotte was born in 1855 in the Unonius colony near Pine Lake, Wisconsin, the oldest daughter of Ebba Marie Eleonora Hallstrom Peterson (emigrated 1843), one of the teenage Swedish apprentice tailors spoken about at the January meeting, and George Edward Bergwall (emigrated 1842), a native of Göteborg, Sweden. At an early age she expressed a strong desire for a career as an educator and,

while still a teen-ager, secured employment as a teacher for three years in a Waukesha County country school. In 1869 she enrolled at the Whitewater Normal School for advanced training not only in primary subject matter and teaching skills but also for classes in academic administration. By the mid-1870's Charlotte had obtained a position in the Milwaukee school system. Her starting salary for 10 months of teaching was \$450, quite modest even for that time period but still noteworthy for a female offspring of immigrant parents.

In 1881, at the age of only 26 years, Charlotte Bergwall was appointed principal of the new 8th District Primary School built on Milwaukee's south side at South 10th and Madison Streets. She was the only female principal of a city primary school then serving in the Milwaukee system. Here her salary was double that of her first position in Milwaukee (\$900 annually), and she had four teachers serving under her on her staff. About this time her mother sold the family farm in Waukesha, moved to Milwaukee and built a new home for her family (including Charlotte) on Washington Street. In letters home to relatives in Sweden, Mrs. Bergwall wrote proudly of Charlotte's position and of the modern improvements in their new residence (gas for lighting, hot and cold running water, a second floor bathtub) which Charlotte's presence helped pay for.

Charlotte Bergwall died prematurely in 1893 at the age of 38, having reached a level of employment success in terms of status and salary that was well above many of her fellow Swedish Americans, both male and female.

LOCAL NEWS NOTES.

Miss Bergwall Dead.

Miss Charlotte Bergwall, who for years has been a teacher in our public schools, and principal of the Eighth district primary school at the time of her death, died last Friday afternoon of heart disease at the Vauwatoosa sanitarium.

She suffered an attack of nervous prostration last winter and the school board at once gave her a leave of absence until the close of the school year. She took a trip to Colorado in the hope of benefitting her health, but she soon returned. Shortly afterward she went to the sanitarium but there too, she seemed to continue declining until death overtook her.

Miss Bergwall received her education in the public schools of Milwaukee and at the Whitewater normal school. She had travelled in Europe and became well known for her wide culture and ability as a teacher. She was considered one of the most capable teachers in the city.

During the winter she presided over the organization that arranged and carried out the south side course of university extension course of work. She was a sister of E. A. Bergwall, president of the K. A. Bergwall company, druggists of 450 Eleventh avenue. Her home was at 633 Washington street with her brother. She had a brother in Sweden who is a physician there. Four sisters also survive her.

The funeral was held last Monday morning at 9:30 o'clock from St. John's Episcopal church, the Rev. James Stidell officiating. Interment took place at North Lake cemetery.

The Eighth Ward schools were closed for the funeral and the church was filled with teachers, pupils and other friends, who covered the coffin with flowers. The pallbearers were six school principals, Walter Allen, S. A. Hooper, C. F. A. Zimmermann, Arthur Berch, H. D. Hesse and Donald Schuler.

1853-1893

Charlotte Bergwall was buried in St. Peter's yard in North Lake