THE McNEESE REVIEW

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McNeese of Calcasieu

By T. R. Ratcliffe

PREFACE

Since this article, McNeese of Calcasieu, is a condensation of a Master of Arts Thesis, The Life and Services to Public Education of John McNeese by the same writer, no foot notes or bibliography has been included. The primary sources of information were files of the Lake Charles American-Press, the records of the Parish and State Boards of Education, the Journals of the Louisiana Teachers Association and many private letters written by McNeese and others.

Full notes and authority for all statements made are found in the original thesis written under the direction of Dr. Charles Flint Arrowwood of the University of Texas in 1933.

T. J. Ratliff

John McNeese, father of the public school systems of the city of Lake Charles and the parishes of Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis, was born in the city of New York, July 4, 1843, the son of William and Mary (Beechman) McNeese, both natives of Scotland. Following the early deaths of William and Mary McNeese their two younger children returned to Scotland to make their homes with relatives, but John remained in this country.

Finding a home with Dr. Stafford of Baltimore, Maryland, he grew up in that city and attended the local schools. The first authentic written records concerning him are those of the United States Department of War which show that he served in the Union Army between September 30, 1861, and July 17, 1865.

After his discharge the young veteran was advised that he had tuberculosis and decided to migrate to western Texas in search of health. He located at Menard, Texas, where he entered the mercantile and cattle business. Either he did not have tuberculosis or he recovered without delay as there is no further mention of the disease in his later life. When the county of Menard was organized he became District Clerk of the county in Novem-
ber, 1872. He evidently served less than one year, for he came to Louisiana late in 1873 and did not return to Menard county.

In the summer of 1873 he and a group of cattlemen started across Texas driving a herd of cattle toward a market in New Orleans. After the long drive across south Texas they attempted to cross the Sabine at one of the regular cattle crossings near Merryville, Louisiana. Some of the cattle were lost in the swamps along the river and some of the others ate too much of the rank bottom cane and died from the “bloat.”

When McNeese and his companion reached the east bank of the Sabine, they did not have enough cattle left to make worthwhile continuing the trip on to New Orleans. They disposed of the remainder of their cattle locally and each one prepared to make his own way as he best saw fit. The panic of 1873 having wiped out McNeese’s business in Menard county, he decided to remain in Louisiana. Having some ability as a singer and penman, McNeese decided to open a singing and writing school as a means of earning a living.

One of those schools was taught at Hickory Flat, near the present town of Oberlin. While there he boarded with the family of William Bilbo. In the latter’s family was a daughter of marriageable age, Susan. What was to be expected followed, the marriage of John McNeese and Susan Bilbo, on July 4, 1876, the thirty-third birthday of the groom. It was a typical rural wedding of the times—food in abundance, much laughter and good-natured teasing of the bride and groom by the guests. The honeymoon was spent on horseback, visiting among the neighbors and friends of the surrounding territory.

McNeese had already enlarged his teaching field to include the common branches and was teaching subscription schools in the Hickory Flat area. Some one suggested that Lake Charles was a thriving town and in need of schools, and since Mrs. McNeese had relatives in Lake Charles the McNeeses moved there and he began teaching a private school.

On account of the war and Reconstruction difficulties public schools hardly existed in Calcasieu parish at that time. The report of the State Superintendent of Public Education for the year 1869 states that there were in Calcasieu parish two thousand, five hundred and thirty-six children of school age, but not a single public school. The same report for 1872 says that a school board had been organized with John S. Spence as president and A. H. Moss as secretary-treasurer. It was unofficially reported that there were twenty-three public schools with a combined enrollment of five hundred twenty-three pupils in the parish. The teachers were appointed by the president of the Board. Most children who attended school at all attended the private subscription schools like those later taught by Mr. McNeese.

It is said that at one time the McNeese family lived in the lower floor of the Masonic building in Lake Charles and that Mr. McNeese taught his classes in the lodge hall above. When any strange noise was heard by the family below, when school was not in session, the McNeese children were told that it was caused by the “goat,” referring to the common manner of referring to the lodge’s initiation ceremonies as “riding the goat.” The last school taught by Mr. McNeese is said to have been on the LeBleu farm in the Chloe community.

While teaching, McNeese undertook the study of law in the office of Judge G. A. Fournet. When Mr. McNeese expressed a wish to attend the Tulane law school at New Orleans, Mrs. McNeese sold some of her dowry property to pay the expenses of the family and they moved to New Orleans where McNeese entered the law class of Tulane. Mr. McNeese also earned some money by acting as the agent for a Chicago publishing house while a student of law. He graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1887.

There is evidence that while he was admitted to the bar his legal career was brief. It included his association with his former Tulane classmate, E. D. Miller, in the defense of a man charged with a crime, the trial of a few minor civil cases, assisting in the settlement of a few estates, and, much to the disappointment of his wife, his legal career came to an end.

He was appointed a member of the parish Board of School Directors by the State Board of Education in 1883. On September 8, 1888, he was elected by his fellow board members as secretary of the board and ex officio parish superintendent. McNeese’s career as a school administrator had begun.

The Calcasieu Parish of 1888, known as Imperial Calcasieu,
consisted of what is today Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis parishes. According to the census of 1890 the area of the parish was 2,047,541 acres upon which lived 20,176 persons. The chief towns were Lake Charles, Oakdale, Oberlin, Sugartown, Lake Arthur, Welsh and Jennings. The soil regions were as they are today except that huge forests of long leaf pine, of which only the stumps remain today, covered the northern half of the parish.

The population included descendants of the French and Spanish Creoles, the Acadians, Anglo-Saxons from the northern and eastern part of the United States, Negroes and several hundred people of Indian ancestry who lived in the northern part of the parish.

The chief occupations were farming, stock raising, commercial hunting, fishing and trapping and lumbering. Along with these went the usual service occupations of the time.

Public schools in Louisiana had their origin in the constitution of 1845, but actual schools before 1890 were few in number and limited in scope. The reasons for these conditions were caused by the poverty of the people, the devastation caused by the war in some parts of the state, the troubles resulting from the Reconstruction periods, and the lack of educational leadership. It was almost 1900 before a worthwhile start in public education was possible.

While there are no available records of schools covering the years of 1872-1884, it may be safely assumed that the schools were of the private subscription type in the English speaking rural sections, those sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church among the French speaking sections, and private schools in the towns. Some people taught their own children or, if they were able to do so, employed private tutors.

McNEESE'S FIRST TERM AS PARISH SUPERINTENDENT
1888-1892

The Minutes of the Parish Board of School Directors begin with the year 1888. On September 8, 1888, on motion by C. D. Welsh, Mr. McNeese was nominated as parish superintendent. John H. Poe moved that the nomination be closed. Motion was seconded and passed. Mr. McNeese was unanimously elected.

On July 6, 1889, McNeese reported that there were six schools in the parish open for six months, three for ten months, and two that were open for less than six months. Where these schools were the report does not say, but by inference none of them were in Lake Charles, since a committee of five citizens was appointed by the Board to solicit funds for the erection of a school building. The president of the Board was authorized to borrow $1500 to pay for the labor and materials to be used in erecting the building.

A news story published in June, 1889, mentions a teachers' institute held in Lake Charles. In October of the same year an editorial praises the work of public schools of Lake Charles. An entertainment was to be given to raise funds for the school.

In Mr. McNeese's first annual report, dated January 4, 1890, there were twenty-four schools listed with a total enrollment of eight hundred forty. There were thirty log buildings and forty-six frame school buildings. The superintendent complained that it was difficult to please the people as to the location of the schools and recommended that the Board locate the schools according to their judgment. He mentioned his efforts to harmonize the conflicting opinions of the citizens in regard to schools and to improve the quality of teaching by institutes and school visitation.

Two schools had terms longer than ten months, but only some of the schools had accommodations for the teaching of writing. There were more boys than girls enrolled in the schools and more than thirty were in log buildings.

Finances continued to be the most pressing problem. McNeese, convinced that the system of donations from the Police Jury was impractical, urged the legislature to pass laws permitting the voting of special taxes for school purposes.

Up until this time the office of the School Board had been in one room of the superintendent's home, but on February 15, 1890, the Board voted one hundred dollars to provide for an office. According to a news story published in June, 1890, the office was next door to J. W. Bryan.

On March 31, 1890, the building committee of the Lake Charles school filed its report stating that the building had been completed as of October 23, 1889, at a total cost of $5,966.19. The
report was signed by A. Thomson, J. W. Bryan, and James P. Geary. The new school opened Monday, September 15, 1890, with the hope of operating for eight and one half months. There were to be four teachers at the beginning with others to be added as needed. Prof. Dolby was elected principal with Misses Crossman and Jenkins as assistants. At the end of two weeks a fourth teacher was added. More than two hundred pupils were enrolled with more coming in daily. It became evident that an additional teacher would be required, so A. S. Vincent was elected as first assistant.

In his second annual report dated July 5, 1890, the superintendent reported fifty-seven schools and fifty-seven teachers with total enrollment, white and colored, of 2,250. He mentioned his visits among the schools and in the homes of the people. Stories are still told about how Mr. McNeese, while spending the night in the homes of the rural citizens, would often gather the entire family about him and teach young and old alike as much as was possible in one evening. It is possible that from these experiences he drew the inspiration for the plan for adult night schools which he was later to inaugurate in the parish.

At a regular meeting of the Board in July, 1891, a committee previously appointed reported that the Town Council of Lake Charles had decided to levy a tax of one and one half mills for school maintenance and a like amount for improving the school property. McNeese also read a report on the proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of Parish Superintendents which he had just attended.

In the Directory of Lake Charles College, Mr. McNeese was listed as teacher of school organization and discipline.

The School Board in October, 1891, voted to increase the size of the Lake Charles school district to extend beyond the corporate limits of the town in order that children living on the outskirts of town might attend school. Miss Susan Bradley was employed as an additional teacher to take care of the added enrollment.

In his report for 1891, the superintendent suggested that schools in the northern part of the parish be operated during the summer months because of the "indifferent conditions of the school houses in some of the districts."

The report for 1892 shows one hundred three white schools and eleven colored schools in the parish. The total enrollment of white students was 4,084 and 521 colored students. This was the period of expansion in the number of schools; later in his administration Mr. McNeese was to begin a program of consolidation of the smaller schools into a smaller number of larger schools. This trend has been continued by his successors in office. He mentioned in his report that the number of schools had increased from forty to one hundred twenty. He warned the Board that there was danger of increasing the cost without increasing the length of term if too many small schools were allowed to spring up. He hoped to be able to operate the schools for five months during the session of 1893. The problem was then to get as many schools going as possible and operate them for as long a term as was possible with the funds available. Later the length of term was to be assured and then the quality of instruction was to be the problem. In his report the superintendent stated that there was general improvement in school conditions in most respects.

McNeese's Second Term as Parish Superintendent 1892-1896

The records of this term are rather meager. Perhaps some of the records were destroyed in the court house fire of 1910, in spite of the story that Mrs. McNeese crawled into the burning building through a window and saved some of the records after most of the men fire fighters had retreated before the flames and given the court house up for lost. The newspapers of these years do not have much to say about the schools or about Mr. McNeese personally. Maybe these were the years when public schools and Mr. McNeese were proving themselves in spite of the whisperings about "damnyankee" and "carpet bagger" that must have gone on behind the superintendent's back when he did something to help schools which was also expensive to the tax payer. The Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education to the General Assembly printed Mr. McNeese's report from Calcasieu parish. The work of Prof. J. E. Keeny in teacher training through institutes was given high praise. Private schools outside of Lake Charles had given way to public schools. The
average attendance in 1893 was 3,866. The tendency over the parish was toward better physical conditions in the schools. Mr. McNeese recommended the establishment of (1) a central high school for the parish in Lake Charles and (2) a normal institute for the training of teachers.

In December, 1893, McNeese read a paper on *Practical Supervision* before the Convention of the Louisiana Public School Teachers Association. This can be taken as evidence that he was a pioneer in class room supervision as a means of teacher improvement in service.

The *Lake Charles Daily American* of May 20, 1896, commented on the good work being done at the summer normal in Lake Charles. Incidentally, these summer normals were the teacher training institutions of the day. The procedure was to gather the prospective teachers together for a few weeks during the summer to receive instruction in the subjects that they were to teach during the coming session. Students of the history of education will recognize this as a variation of the older Lancasterian or monitorial system of teaching.

In nearly all of his public utterances Mr. McNeese pleaded for a law that would permit school districts or parishes to vote on themselves taxes for the maintenance of public schools, rather than depend upon the Police Jury or the Town Council for donations of public money.

The Board reorganized in September, 1896, and elected Mr. McNeese as Secretary and *ex officio* parish superintendent. The position of secretary was still regarded as paramount to the superintendency.

The *Lake Charles Weekly American* of October 7, 1896, reported that the Central School of Lake Charles had an enrollment of 612, Goosport, 114, South Lake Charles, 56, and the Lake Charles Colored School, 258. The editor referred to the Lake Charles schools as better than those of any other town of comparable size in the United States and gave most of the credit to Supt. McNeese and Principal J. E. Keeny.

**McNeese's Third Term as Parish Superintendent 1896–1900**

The Teachers' Institute was held at Lake Charles Central and High School building with 100 teachers present the first day and two hundred present the second day. Supt. McNeese opened the session with a brief talk and was followed by Judge Gorham who painted a rather gloomy picture of the future of the school year.

There seemed to be some doubt in the minds of some people as to whether the Lake Charles schools would open in the fall of 1897. At the joint meeting of the School Board, the president of the Police Jury, Mr. Adolph Meyer, and representatives of the banks, a plan was worked out whereby the banks would lend the School Board enough money to start the schools and operate them until the first of the year, when tax collections were expected to begin. It was decided to open the schools on October 1, 1897. Prin. J. E. Keeny having resigned, Charles Grant Schaeffer was elected in his place.

An editorial of the *Lake Charles Daily American* on February 1, 1899, mentioned the need of increasing the length of term for rural schools. With this editorial the paper took up the fight for better schools in the parish. Prin. Schaeffer appeared before the Police Jury and urged that something be done about the crowded conditions in the Lake Charles schools. The same news story mentioned that a frame school building, twenty-four by thirty-six feet had been contracted for on South Ryan street. A news item from DeQuincy stated that work on a new school building was soon to start in March, 1899. This was to be a frame structure twenty-four by forty feet.

In April, 1899, the School Board held a very fruitful meeting. A petition of the people of the Gillis community was presented asking for a school. It was voted that a school would be built and operated if the community would provide the land for the site. The superintendent suggested the plan of building a central graded school in each ward of the parish. Prin. C. G. Schaeffer read a report showing the condition of the Lake Charles schools. He went into detail, showing progress of the different departments, but concluded with a plea for more room and more teachers. The total enrollment for all public schools in Lake Charles was nine hundred thirty with room for five hundred seventy. He asked for $5,000.00 from the Police Jury to remedy these conditions.
A few days later a mass meeting was held to consider the matter. Two plans were suggested, to build a new school in Ward Two of the city or to make two additions to the Central School as suggested by Mr. Schaeffer in his Report.

On May 2, 1899, Supt. McNeese and Dr. James Ware of the School Board met with the Police Jury and laid before them the plans for Central Ward Schools over the parish but no action was taken.

The new school building at DeQuincy was destroyed by fire on the night of May 18, 1899, just as it was to be given its formal opening with a dance. It is thought that the fire was set by someone who was either opposed to dancing or to schools, but no proof of either of these theories was ever produced.

Later in the summer of 1899 Supt. McNeese made a trip to the Iowa community to discuss the matter of a school with the citizens. The citizens expressed themselves as willing to vote the tax and a committee was appointed to meet with the Board and work out the details.

The mass meeting was held in Lake Charles on October 20, 1899, at the Central School. H. B. Milligan was elected chairman of the meeting and J. Sheldon Toomer, secretary. Prin. Schaeffer again read his report. There was no difficulty in getting a majority of the meeting to favor a petition calling on the Town Council to call an election calling for the levying of the tax. It should be kept in mind that at this time the School Board had no authority to call such elections but that the Police Jury and the Town Council did.

In his Biennial Report of the State Superintendent for the year 1899 Supt. McNeese stated that the schools had done as well as he had hoped for, but he expressed the hope that better times were ahead.

In August the State Board of Education appointed the following members of the Parish Board: Daniel Iles of Oberlin, A. B. Reeves of DeRidder, L. A. Perry of Vinton, Dr. R. R. Arca-neaux of Welsh, John McNeese, L. H. Moss, and Dr. James Ware of Lake Charles. Mr. McNeese was elected as Secretary of the Board and parish superintendent. For the first time the phrase ex officio was eliminated. The salary was $100 a month and an assistant was provided at twenty-five dollars a month.

In the year 1900 was marked or rather marred with bitter quarrels between the School Board and the Town Council over the subject of school funds. Various plans of increasing the funds were suggested and often heatedly discussed but no additional funds were forthcoming. The Lake Charles schools went into the summer of 1900 facing a dreary prospect. Prin. Schaeffer, disgusted at the outlook, resigned to accept a principalship in Newark, N. J.

The Daily American in September, 1900, published an item from the New Orleans Picayune quoting Supt. McNeese to the effect that the Lake Charles schools had an enrollment of 1300 and that the system was entirely self-supporting. He also stated that a college was to be opened in Lake Charles under the direction of Prof. Barrett.

The Board in January, 1901, passed a resolution providing that no schools except Central Ward Schools, Graded Schools or High School should be permitted to teach high school subjects. Another resolution stated that the School Board would neither build nor accept any more log school buildings.

In September, 1902, the Board, upon recommendation of the Superintendent, stated that thereafter all principals of Central Ward Schools should be graduates of Louisiana Normal, or some other institution authorized to grant degrees.

Supt. McNeese in September, 1903, recommended that an assistant superintendent be employed to devote his time to supervision. The question was deferred until the next meeting. At the same meeting it was voted that the salaries of all teachers receiving fifty dollars or less per month be increased to sixty-five dollars.

In spite of the interest shown in the Schaeffer Report nothing had been done to relieve the crowded conditions in the Lake Charles schools. Rev. G. B. Hines, Pastor of the Simpson Methodist Church, denounced these conditions in a sermon and declared that the Lake Charles people were guilty of sin when they allowed such conditions to exist when it was within their power to remedy them.
Finally Supt. McNeese and a committee of the Board, D. B. Gorham and Leon Chavanne, took the matter into their own hands. They called upon Mr. J. B. Watkins and went into negotiations for the purchase of the old Lake Charles College property. When Mr. Watkins discovered what they planned to do with the property, he made a very nominal price of $7,000 for the entire property. The committee immediately accepted the offer, lending the Lake Charles Schools seven thousand dollars of the Sixteen Section Funds of the Parish. Anticipating the opposition that this move would meet from certain citizens, Supt. McNeese prepared a statement for the press defending the committee's action. He was later to face great criticism from certain quarters but time justified his judgment.

In June it was announced that Prin. James F. Yeager had resigned and that Mr. E. F. Gayle had been elected in his place. The same announcement said that the Singer school had been made into a Central Ward school to serve all of the schools in a five mile radius and that it would operate for a term of eight months.

The Lake Charles High School was transferred to the old college property in September, 1903. It was planned to add a one year normal course to train teachers for the parish schools.

In the fall of 1903 for the only time in its history Calcasieu parish experimented with the idea of electing the parish superintendent by popular vote. Mr. McNeese, John H. Poe and M. E. Shaddock were the candidates. The Lake Charles Daily American supported Mr. McNeese editorially. The vote in the first primary was:

- John McNeese .................... 1,275
- John H. Poe....................... 1,812
- M. E. Shaddock................... 701

Then in the second primary McNeese was elected.

Several towns, Vinton, DeRidder, and Oberlin had built or had contracted to build new schools. The Welsh school was destroyed by fire early in April, 1904.

The purchase of the Lake Charles College property solved the problem of space for the time being but it aggravated the question of support. Mr. McNeese and the Board began a hard-fought campaign to convince the public of Lake Charles that the only hope was a tax election.

At a called session of the Board in August, 1904, Supt. McNeese was reelected for a four year term at a salary of eighteen hundred dollars per year with an assistant secretary at seventy-five dollars per month.

When school reopened in September of 1904, the old problem of finances again faced the Lake Charles schools. Even the new space provided by the college property was inadequate and it was decided to add one room and one teacher to the South Street school, of which Ward Anderson was principal. In December the superintendent stated that in all probability the school would not reopen after Christmas. His suggestion of a three mill tax to support the schools went unheeded. The Daily American remarked editorially that the Civic League might as well disband in a town that was so uncivic minded as to allow their schools to close when it could be prevented.

McNeese's Fifth Term—1904-1908

On January 6, 1905, Dr. S. Perkins, President of the School Board issued a statement favoring the separation of the Lake Charles Schools from the control of the Parish Board. It had been suggested that if such action were taken then the Lake Charles citizens might be willing to support a tax for the support of their local schools. At a meeting on January 13, the Board met and passed a resolution to give the local committee as full control of the local schools as the state laws would permit.

The next day, Mr. McNeese met with the Town Council to discuss the matter of school support. Some of the Council were critical of the manner in which the school funds had been handled, especially in the matter of salary increases. Mr. McNeese offered to pay back into the local fund its share of the money used as an increase in pay for himself if that would aid in keeping the schools open.

It was decided to call an election for a special tax to support the schools. The campaign was hot and bitter. Prominent figures were aligned for and against the tax. The newspaper editors, doctors, ministers of all churches, lawyers and businessmen were as a general rule in favor of the tax. Editorials were written and
sermons were preached favoring the tax. Those who opposed the tax did so for what seemed to them at that time to be good reasons. On October 30, State Representatives Toomer and Rhorer and State Senator Drew announced that they would sponsor a bill at the next session of the General Assembly giving the local board of Lake Charles full control of their schools, if the tax was voted. The tax election which took place on October 31 carried by a popular majority of 185 and a property valuation majority of $363,149.

At a meeting on January 19, 1906, the Parish Board took action on a resolution of the State Board requesting that the parish boards look into the qualifications of the Parish Superintendents of the various parishes. The Calcasieu Parish Board passed the following resolution:

That it be resolved at this regular adjourned session, that it is the sense of this Board that the competency of the parish superintendent of this parish is beyond question and that we most respectfully assure the State Board of the same.

A bill drafted by City Attorney Overton provided for the complete and separate control of the city schools. A local board of five was provided for with full power to elect a superintendent who would have the same general qualifications as a parish superintendent. In November, 1906, the first Lake Charles Board was elected. In April, 1907, the Parish Board passed a resolution passing control of the city schools to the city board.

In April, 1907, Superintendent McNeese attended the annual meeting of the Louisiana Teachers Association at which he read a paper advocating the establishment of night schools for adults. He stated that he intended to try out the idea at the beginning of the next school session.

The superintendent's annual report for 1906 was published in May of 1907. It was filled with interesting statistics revealing the growth of the schools in enrollment, and in the number of teachers employed, as well as the type of education offered. The night schools referred to by Mr. McNeese had been authorized. Fuller Hamilton, who was principal of the Oakdale School, taught in the first of these night schools.

In his Biennial Report for 1906-07, the first steps toward consolidation of the schools were mentioned. The results were rather discouraging, however, because of poor roads, scattered settlements, and local opposition. The superintendent realized that good roads would have to precede much work toward consolidation. The shortage of good teachers and suitable boarding places for them were serious problems. One problem that arose as a result of the separation of the Lake Charles Schools was what to do about the children who lived just outside of the town limits. The problem still exists to some extent.

In December, 1908, Mr. McNeese was re-elected for another term. His salary was fixed at two hundred dollars per month with a secretary at ninety dollars per month. In his report Mr. McNeese stated that Merryville, Lake Arthur, DeRidder, and Singer were voting special taxes to support their schools. DeQuincy had voted a five mill tax for ten years to build a modern brick school. Six small schools had been consolidated with Central Graded Schools and six wagonettes put into service.

McNeese's Sixth Term — 1909-1913

In May, 1909, at the suggestion of Mr. McNeese the Board voted to employ an assistant superintendent who was to devote his entire time to supervision. The position was offered to and accepted by Mr. Fuller Hamilton of Oakdale at fifteen hundred dollars per year. In September of 1909 arrangements were made to purchase nine acres of land at Merryville to establish an agricultural high school.

At a Board meeting in August of 1910 the superintendent was authorized to employ two more supervisors, a man at one hundred dollars per month and a woman at eighty dollars per month, with traveling expenses. The woman was employed the first year but replaced by a man the following year. A number of communities and Wards were voting special maintenance taxes. In December, 1910, the Board called on the Police Jury to levy the full three mill constitutional tax as they were having a difficult time collecting the taxes levied to rebuild the courthouse which had been destroyed by fire. The Board replied that the public was now demanding nine months of school and that the full tax must be levied.

The Louisiana Teachers Association met in Lake Charles in April, 1911. When the time came for election of officers Dr. J. B.
Aswell, President of Louisiana State Normal, placed the name of McNeese in nomination for president of the association. He was elected by acclamation and a committee was appointed to wire him notice of his election, the superintendent being out of the city on a much needed vacation.

In 1912 the first full time agricultural agent was employed in the parish with the School Board and the Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Mr. J. A. Redhead was the agent. Half of his time was spent in Club work in the schools and half with the adult farmers. Pig clubs were formed at Merryville, Singer, Westlake, Oakdale, Kinder, DeQuincy, and Hayes. Corn Clubs were organized at Fulton, Pine Ridge, DeQuincy, Kinder, Oakdale, and Westlake. The girls at the above schools had Tomato Clubs.

At the end of the 1911-12 session it was voted that only those schools that had voted special taxes would teach Domestic Science and Industrial Arts. The rule was also to apply to wagonette service.

The Board met January 3, 1913, for the purpose of reorganization. Supt. McNeese announced that he wished to retire at the end of the current session. Mr. Fuller Hamilton was then nominated as superintendent and was elected to take office on July 1, 1913.

Mr. McNeese spent the remainder of his term receiving the reports from the various schools and preparing to turn the office over to his successor. The Board met July 5, 1913, to install the new superintendent. After Mr. Hamilton had exhibited a receipt showing that he had receipted Mr. McNeese for all funds, the former was declared installed. In receipt reference is made to the funds of Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis Parishes. The division of Imperial Calcasieu was completed early in 1913. One editor in commenting upon Mr. McNeese's retirement and the division of the parish said that it was peculiarly fitting that Mr. McNeese's retirement should come just as the parish was divided as, "there would be something incongruous in John McNeese being superintendent of anything less than Imperial Calcasieu."

After Mr. Hamilton was installed Vice-President, L. L. Funk assumed the chair and President Leon Chavanne offered the following resolution which was seconded by R. W. Vincent:

Whereas, the retiring superintendent, John McNeese, has rendered long and efficient service in behalf of the schools of Calcasieu Parish and believing that this board should recognize in some small way his devotion to public education:

Therefore, be it resolved that we present him with a typewriter, desk and chair.

Unanimously adopted.

The active administration of John McNeese of Calcasieu had ended, but not his interest in public schools.

The Last Days of John McNeese

The last days of McNeese are best shown in the letters written to his daughter, Mrs. Emma McNeese Squires of Lake Charles. He retired to his suburban home south of Lake Charles where he planned to spend his last days writing articles for education journals and in such other light occupation as his age and failing strength would permit. These letters were filled with references to his home, the weather, his crops, short trips to the Gulf seeking improvement from his lameness by the "baths." His younger children and grandchildren occupy his thought a great deal of the time and a realization that the end was not far off and that in his words he "must soon make up my camp here below." The end came June 2, 1914, with burial in the Orange Grove Cemetery in Lake Charles.

Soon after his death a project was launched for a McNeese Memorial. Various suggestions were made, a monument on the Courthouse lawn, a loan fund for students, or naming the Lake Charles High School for him, but none of these suggestions were ever carried out. The name of the street upon which the DeQuincy Schools face (McNeese Street) was his only memorial until a full generation had passed when the junior college at Lake Charles was named in his honor, John McNeese Junior College. It has been said that the whole school system of the state of Louisiana is his greatest memorial.
McNEESE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROGRESS OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

No list of the contributions of men like Mr. McNeese can ever be complete. A partial list of his contributions must include the following:

He found Lake Charles without a public school of any sort in 1888, but by 1891 he was able to open a school with three teachers and over two hundred pupils. He fought the battle of the schools for support, often opposing the citizens themselves in his efforts to coax and threaten the City Council and Police Jury into granting more funds. He was able to turn over to the city in 1906 a system of public schools that has since grown into a model for the whole state.

In the rural sections he found poorly trained, poorly paid teachers teaching in buildings so poor that schools were closed in the winter months. He literally forced people at times to do better for their children's schools. He started early to raise the standards of teaching through Normals and Institutes, often teaching the teachers the common branches which they were in turn to pass on to the pupils. Supervision of teaching, consolidation, transportation of pupils to schools, night schools, uniform examination questions, agricultural clubs and the right of the people to ask for elections and the right of the School Board to call elections for voting of taxes for support of schools were all "firsts" with him. When the constitution of 1909 was being written, it is said that Mr. McNeese called on his friend the Hon. J. Murphy Foster, Governor of Louisiana. The governor asked, "Mac, what is it that you want for public schools?" Mr. McNeese replied, "I want a provision in the new constitution allowing the citizens of parishes, municipalities and specially created school districts to vote taxes on themselves for the support of schools."

It was done.

In the time when newspapers were filled with stories of bad faith in office on the part of public officials it is refreshing not to be able to discover in the public prints any reference at all to any irregularity in the office of McNeese of Calcasieu.