

the Agassiz Whistler

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Ten Cents

A DIFFERENT CLASS

The Agassiz Community Schools Program ran a unique ten-week learning experience during the last few months. Sixteen people, ranging in age from ten to fifty, came together to study urban architecture with the technical assistance of three graduate architectural students.

Meeting once a week, the group explored two distinct problems: 1) specific architectural questions concerning the Sachs Estate and the "Y" Field; 2) the learning possibilities involved in a class which encompassed such a wide age range.

The first area was by far the easiest to investigate. After considering school construction, park layouts, and facility use, the class decided to design a skating rink to be constructed on the "Y" Field. After several weeks of work a plan was formulated and submitted to the Corporation of Harvard University, owners of the land, for final approval. (See sketches on Page 5.) It is hoped that the Corporation will be able to find time to consider the proposal soon while cold weather remains.

The second area the class considered was much more difficult to define, and therefore almost impossible to deal with. How do a ten-year-old and a fifty-year-old overcome their stereotypes of each other, so they can start to listen and learn from the other as equals? By normal standards the class was unsuccessful in dealing with this question. Only 8 people of the original 16 finished the course. But then this was not a normal course - it was an experiment. It should be tried again.

EDITORIAL

Have you visited the Agassiz Community Schools office in recent months? What was a drab basement room a year ago has been transformed into a bright, cheerful meeting-place.

This transformation has been a community undertaking, involving people of all ages, including teen-agers, pre-schoolers' parents, our Community Schools staff, the School Department, and other neighborhood friends.

The room was painted this fall as a part of the rejuvenation of the entire Agassiz School. Teens built a wooden "balcony", made curtains, and put up posters. A few weeks ago playgroup parents and friends, with the staff, cleaned the room thoroughly, built a toy closet under the balcony, painted the floor, and purchased a new rug. New toys were made - a rocking boat, blocks, a felt board, an oragami mobile - and donated. Old ones were refurbished. There is even a new coat rack by the door.

The staff estimates that the cost of this "new" room has been only about \$150.00 because of donations of time and goods. Go see for yourself, and don't forget to leave your ideas for Community Schools activities.

New Community Schools activities were announced last week! Come to the office if you did not receive a flyer.

LOUIS AGASSIZ

by Priscilla Dunn

There are several buildings and streets in Cambridge and Boston bearing the famous name of Agassiz, but alas, over the years no one seems to be able to tell young children who he was or what he was famous for. In addition to our own school, there is another Agassiz School in Boston. There is an Agassiz Street, and the Agassiz Theatre at Radcliffe.

Several books have been written about this interesting gentleman so it isn't easy to encompass his life in a short space.

Born on May 28, 1807, in Motier, the French-language section of Switzerland, Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz was the son of the village minister and schoolteacher. He was taught at home in his early life by his father. At nine he could read and write in Latin and was learning to translate from the Greek.

The family planned that he should become a medical doctor like two of his uncles. From friendly local fishermen on the Lake of Morat he first obtained information about the names and identification of various fish with which he was fascinated. His mother disapproved of the vast collection he kept in his room - birds' nests, snake skins, and frog remains. He often kept field mice or a live squirrel in a cage. A large mineral and rock collection was prized. Two or three black, smooth pebbles similar to big beans were his treasures. Later he would find out that these were really fossils.

With his remarkable memory, he had "learned all his notebooks" at the college of Bienne. He wanted to study the sciences in Germany and do his graduate work in Paris, but finances would not permit this.

He felt lucky to be able to study medicine at the University of Zurich for two years. He then went on to Heidelberg, but he and his best friend, Alex Braun, found it to be too old-fashioned, so they went to the University of Munich.

Agassiz was still intensely interested in natural history, particularly fish. Someday there would be many fish and fossil fish whose names would end with Agassii, or Agass or even Ag. And soon the name of Agassiz would be found in every natural history museum where fish were studied and shown.

Before Agassiz had received his Ph.D. he had published his first book. He promised his father he would also become a medical doctor, however. (He had already discovered a new species of fish.) When he satisfied his family by passing his medical examinations just before he was 23, he was already at work on a five-volume set of books about fossil fish.

He tried to practice medicine for a while but his heart was not in it. In Paris, where an understanding uncle had sent him, he met his heroes, Cuvier and Humboldt. He dreamed of working and study-

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ing at the famous Jardin des Plantes. In later years he was to refuse the honor of becoming the head of this illustrious institution.

Agassiz began teaching upon his return to Switzerland. He married Cecile Braun and they lived in Neuchatel - a city he helped make famous. He was the leading ichthyologist in all of Europe. Now he dreamed of coming to America. In 1845 the King of Prussia gave Agassiz money to look for glacial evidences in the New World. His wife was not well and his two daughters and son would stay in Germany with her.

En route Agassiz lectured in London on his glacial theory. But one great British scientist held out against him - this was Charles Darwin.

In later years Agassiz fell into disfavor in some circles. He still believed that there had been an Ice Age and that man had always been man and had nothing to do with other animals. Charles Darwin believed that the ancient cave-men looked very much like gorillas and were descended from them. Darwin and Agassiz accepted each other's ideas but they were never really friends.

In Boston, Agassiz lectured at Tremont Temple and each talk was sold out - he was a sensation! A wealthy Bostonian, Abbott Lawrence, gave \$50,000 to start the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard University, and asked Agassiz to become Professor of Zoology and Geology. Agassiz had fallen in love with America, and apparently America with Agassiz. He went on to many triumphs, both personal and scientific, at Harvard. He kept open house and at one time had 22 guests living in his house. He lived at one time on Oxford Street where the rent was \$400 a year!

Many years had gone by and the only sadness in Agassiz's life was his separation from his family. Finally, after years of poor health, the first Mrs. Agassiz died. He sent for the children and they came to live with him in Cambridge. Agassiz built a new, large red brick house on the site of the present Fogg Museum, on Quincy Street. His son Alexander went to Cambridge High and Latin School and then to Harvard, where he rowed on the crew.

In April, 1850, Agassiz married again - a Miss Elizabeth Carey, member of a prominent Boston family, Mrs. Agassiz, to augment the income of her intellectual but often financially improvident genius husband, began a school for girls in the attic of their house. It was costly to attend but its impressive list of faculty was drawn from the great contemporaries of Agassiz's age. Later this was to enlarge and become Radcliffe College.

Louis Agassiz made significant scientific expeditions to Brazil, to Western America, and many other places. He also had a great deal to do with making Cornell University outstanding in natural science.

He kept a shack on the Charles River bank for his odd collections. But he dreamed of one huge museum where specimens of everything living or prehistoric could be studied, and natural history museums all over America as well. (He was already a member of the governing board of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.) After refusing the offer from the Jardin des Plantes he wanted to build a grand museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Francis Calley Gray put up the large amount of money to build it on Oxford Street. Everybody thought it should be named after Agassiz. But he

felt that natural science was more important than any one man and so it became the Museum of Comparative Zoology. Millions of people who have visited it still refer to it as "The Agassiz Museum."

Agassiz worked and played hard. He never seemed to rest. His students were already becoming noted in their field. He had always loved little children and now had his own grandchildren to enjoy. He was continually looking ahead to new adventures. His correspondence alone with the great men of science had made Cambridge, Massachusetts the world center of that day in natural science.

On December 14, 1873 Louis Agassiz died peacefully in his sleep. A black glacial stone from the valley of the Aar was brought from Switzerland for his monument. You can see it at Mount Auburn Cemetery surrounded by the graves of other illustrious dead.

His greatest monument was the students he had trained and the museums he had encouraged. He was perhaps the first science teacher to train his students to observe directly from life, whether it was a fish or a rock. His son eventually headed the museum his father founded. Ida, Agassiz's eldest daughter, married Major Henry Lee Higginson, a Civil War hero. They established the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

(We once had a letter in Louis Agassiz's own handwriting as a proud possession in the school, but it has disappeared.)

I have barely touched on the exciting life of Louis Agassiz - you may read all about it in many books. I particularly recommend "Louis Agassiz, Adventurous Scientist" by Louise Hall Tharp. A book editor friend in New York has given me

an autographed copy.

Today you will look in vain for evidence of this great man's influence at the great museum now named the Peabody Museum. There is a portrait of his son but little trace of the man whose imagination made it all possible - Louis Agassiz.

Mrs. Dunn teaches second grade at the Agassiz School.

AGASSIZ TO SEND REPRESENTATIVE

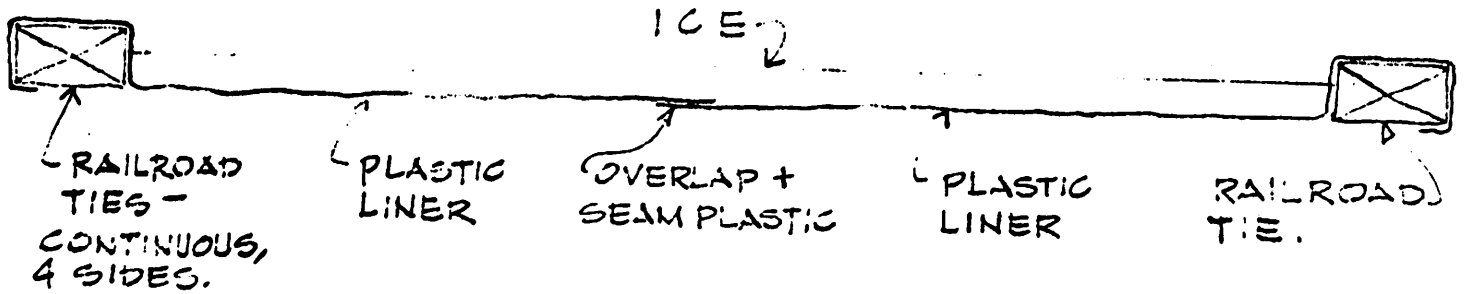
The Agassiz community is one of the 14 local citizens groups which has asked to meet the final candidates for Cambridge's new Superintendent of Schools.

The article in the Cambridge Chronicle for January 21st reporting the school committee meeting said:

"Despite Committeeman James F. Fitzgerald's notice that he will move reconsideration on the motion passed January 5 outlining a policy for community participation in the selection of a permanent superintendent, (Committee Secretary) O'Connell said that local citizens' groups may still apply to interview candidates for the post."

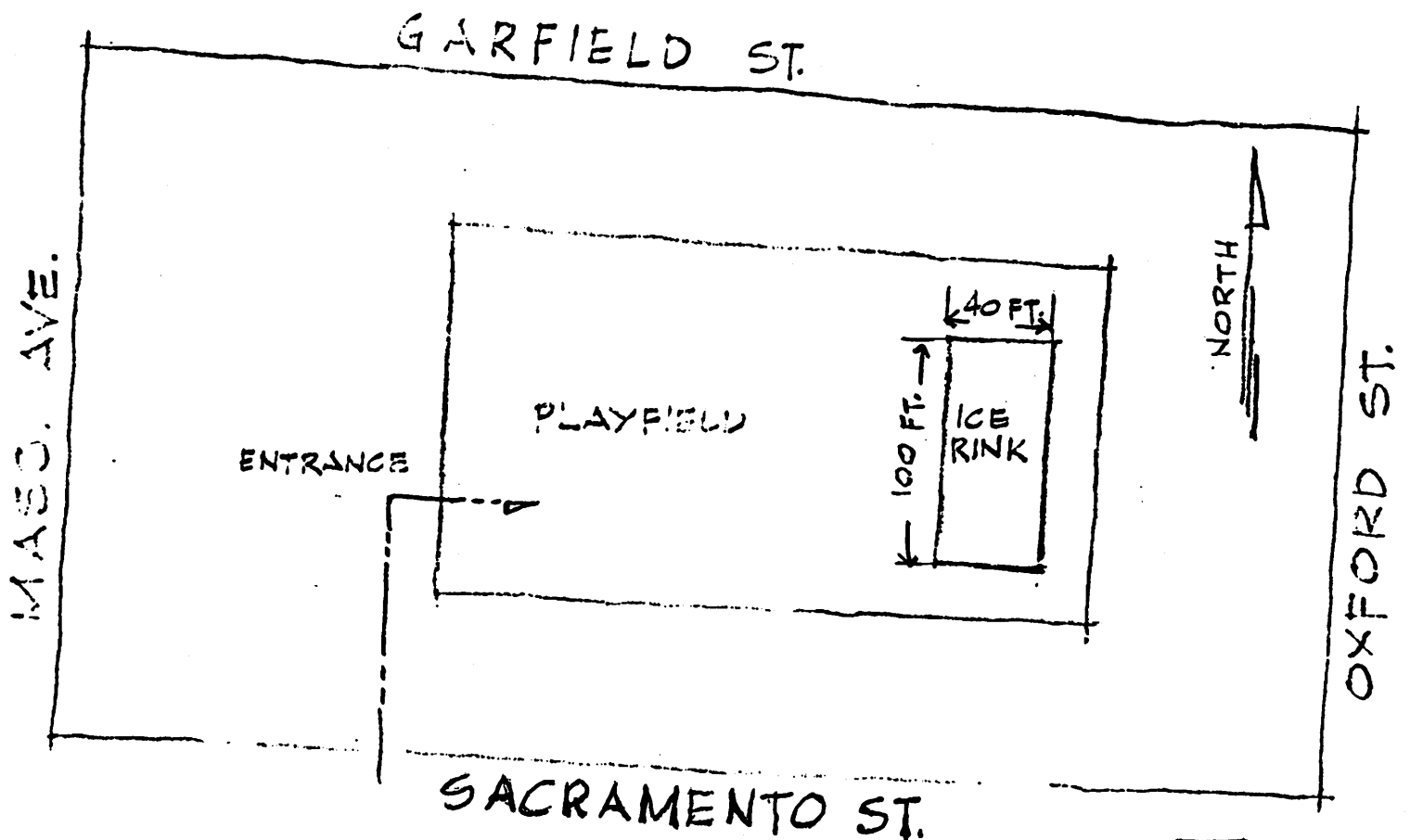
Approximately 150 applications were received for the post of Superintendent by the January deadline.

Mrs. Barbara Brower, who is president of the Agassiz School PTA, has agreed to represent our community when the candidates meet the citizens' groups.



SKETCH CROSS SECTION THRU RINK

NO SCALE



LOCATION PLAN of PROPOSED ICE SKATING RINK

NO SCALE

PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE

The first People's Conference on Education was held at the Morse School on January 9th.

Many people from all parts of Cambridge met and pooled their ideas about education in the Cambridge Public Schools. Those in attendance included School Committee members, Agassiz's Miss Barron, students from Cambridge High and Latin School, teachers, and many parents.

Mary Newman was the moderator of an uncommon format. Not until the participants had arrived were the topics of discussion chosen. Popular topics were: the parent's role in the school system, the needs of special students, alternative forms of education, the role of the superintendent and principal, and the tenure system.

The most common catchword of the conference was "change". In one discussion group it was suggested that change, by itself, was too big a word and like a blind-date could be an alarming prospect. The changes suggested in the summary statements covered a wide range. The summaries were recorded and were to be passed on to the School Superintendent and School Committee.

A subsequent meeting of the Conference on Education was called for Wednesday, January 20th. Unfortunately,

this date conflicted with other education-oriented meetings in the city. However, general goals were discussed and several study and action groups were organized. Participants, although eager to accomplish changes, realize that they can't do anything very tangible without "the facts."

The agenda for the following meeting of the Conference, on Thursday, January 28th, was to include a report from the superintendency task force and selection of a representative to interview the final candidates. After the general meeting the High School and Community Relations groups were to hold separate discussions. Although the initial emphasis seems to have been on the school superintendency, the future scope of the conference will be broader.

For those interested in participating or supporting the Conference, keep posted through the Cambridge Chronicle or call Janet Burns at 354-7116 to have your name put on the mailing list.

PLEASE NOTE

February 8 will be the next regular meeting of the Agassiz Community Schools Council. The evening has been changed from Thursday to Monday in hopes that more people will be able to attend. It will begin at 8 p. m. in the school library (entrance on Oxford Street).

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VOLUNTEERS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED

For the four days in February (during winter school break) when the Agassiz Community Schools program will participate in activities with other Community Schools groups. Work will be with the Kindergarten through 3rd grade group, Tuesday through Friday mornings 9 to noon. Call 876-9268 if you can help.