CHAPTER 5

SCHOOLTEACHERS IN MONTEREY COUNTY IN
THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the United States, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of America’s children attended one-room schoolhouses where the teachers were young women. Just how central women were as schoolteachers in the far reaches of the West is exemplified in Monterey County California, where, in the year 1900, the school system was divided into 101 school districts employing 125 female teachers and 10 male teachers. Based on those figures, the Monterey County school system was dominated by one-room schoolhouses with women making up ninety-three percent of the schoolteachers, engaged in elementary education.

Very early in the history of Monterey County, one finds a well-organized effort to further the education of schoolteachers. Much of this organization resulted from California State Normal School having been established in nearby San Jose, and the Superintendent of California’s Public School System headquartered in San Francisco. One of efforts to advance the education of schoolteachers of the region was the establishing of Monterey County Teachers Institute.
MONTEREY COUNTY TEACHERS INSTITUTE

In 1870, in fulfillment of the request of the County Superintendent, the teachers of Monterey County held their first annual convention. This convention, referred to as the Monterey County Teachers Institute, provided a five-day educational program and the opportunity for schoolteachers of the County to gather.³

The Monterey County Teachers Institute continued to hold an annual meeting for the next several decades. A review of the Teacher's Institute programs for 1888 -1892, which to-date are the only five programs to be physically located, finds both Euna B. and her sister Olive B. Hamilton mentioned among the list of participants.⁴

The following paragraph presented in the Fourteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction describes the program during the Monterey County Teachers Institute of 1899.⁵ The program for this convention mentioned Olive Hamilton among the County teachers listed to attend.

MONTEREY

 Job Wood Jr. County Superintendent

On October 1, 1889, the Teachers’ Institute of Monterey County met at Bagby's Opera House, in the city of Monterey, and continued in session four days.

One hundred and seven of the one hundred and nine teachers employed in the county were present, Mr. Allen McLean and Miss Arabella Thompson being absent on account of sickness.

Prof. Chas. H. Allen, assisted by Professor Worcester and the County Superintendent, conducted the Institute.
The class was divided into sections A and B, presided over by leading teachers selected for the purpose. The expense of the Institute was $126.90.

Being the first Institute in the city of Monterey for many years, the citizens spared no pains in making the teachers welcome.

The first (Monday) evening was spent in organizing; the second in a very pleasant social reunion; the third in listening to a very interesting lecture, “The Make-up of a Daily Paper” by Hon. T. J. Vivian, of the San Francisco “Chronicle;” and the fourth in listening to “The Boys and Girls of To-day the Men and Women of the Future,” by Professor Allen, and “The Volcanoes of Hawaii,” by Mr. Vivian.

The teachers, one and all, were very enthusiastic, and gave close attention to the work before them. The time given to each subject was too short, and all felt that we had scarcely begun to discuss the work of teaching, when the Institute must close.

The unanimous verdict “the best Institute we have ever held” received a hearty response from the County Superintendent. The schools of Monterey County are progressing in a very satisfactory manner.

During the convention, Professor Charles H. Allen, Principal of California State Normal School of San Jose (1873-1889) presented talks on the following subjects: School Discipline; Mental Arithmetic; Moral and Manners and Spelling.
Monterey County Teachers Institute, Colton Hall, 1889. Charles Herman Allen to center of the picture directly below the bell. Photograph courtesy of the Monterey Public Library
A review of five published programs 1(888-1892) for the Monterey County Teachers’ Institute indicates that instructors from the California State Normal School, University of the Pacific, and Stanford University contributed to the annual meetings.

BEYOND THE MONTEREY COUNTY TEACHERS INSTITUTE

Beyond their attending the annual Teachers Institute, as schoolteachers in Monterey County, Euna and Olive Hamilton likely had access to, and were familiar with the teachers’ journals - the Pacific School Journal (1877-1883), The California Teacher (1883-1887), and the Pacific Educational Journal (1887-1896) - published by the California State Board of Education.⁶

Within these teacher’s monthly journals one finds mention and praise for the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Louis Agassiz, William Shakespeare, Alfred Tennyson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Bronson Alcott.

In addition to the teachers’ journals, the Hamilton girls likely had access to the popular periodicals of the day, such as The Californian, Overland Monthly, and The Cosmopolitan. These periodicals celebrated the great writers of the humanities, publishing excerpts of the works of William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, Robert Browning, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Joseph Addison, John Muir, Walter Scott, James Russell Lowell, Alfred Tennyson, John G. Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Cullen Bryant, Henry David Thoreau and John Milton.
The intention of these periodicals reached beyond simple entertainment - as the editors attempted to shape the social landscape of California by promoting in the state’s literary and moral development.

Beyond Samuel Hamilton’s bluestocking daughters, another influence that has seldom been considered in shaping John Steinbeck as a writer was the community of Pacific Grove. A good part of the author’s early life was spent living in this small coastal community, an early Puritan outpost where the Protestant American myth dripped like morning dew from the fog-drenched grove of pine needles.