# A Look at SJSU's History and the Educated Person

# Alumni Reading Circle

Some graduates of the Normal School continued their studies in a somewhat formal manner by joining the Normal's Alumni Reading Circle.  Apparently the Circle began in 1887 and continued at least through 1892, perhaps longer.

Readings were generally assigned in four categories:

- § History
- § Historical fiction
- § Professional (related to teaching)
- § General literature

The course for 1891 also included books on science and civics.

The reading assignments were quite extensive. Some of the books assigned for the year were over 300 pages long. At the beginning of each year, information on the assigned books were sent to alums. At year end, examination questions were issued. Those who satisfactorily completed the work were given a certificate and after four years of study, diplomas were distributed.  Annual meetings were held during commencement week in June. At the 1891 meeting held on June 25,  Professor Charles H. Allen (former principal of the Normal School) gave an address.  The meetings included both literary and social activities.

Alums paid a one dollar initiation fee to join and then annual dues of 50 cents to remain in the Circle.

The purpose of the Alumni Circle was to provide graduates an opportunity to associate and to further explore and be prepared for their common interest of teaching.  The readings would help broaden knowledge beyond what was learned at the Normal School and help teachers who might be in areas without good libraries and other students. Graduates were encouraged to join some reading circle with the Normal one designed to particularly meet the needs of Normal graduates. Information about the Circle was reported in *The Normal Index* (and perhaps other places as well).

Following are the reading lists for the Alumni Reading Circle for 1887 to 1891.[1]

## Course for 1887
History
- § *The Story of Chaldea* by Z.A. Ragozin
- § *The Story of Ancient Egypt* by George Rawlinson
- § *The Story of the Jews* by James K. Hosmer

Historical novels recommended with the above
- § *An Egyptian Princess* by Georg Ebers
- § *Ben-Hur* by Lew Wallace

Professional
- § *Payne's Lectures on Education*

Recommended, not required
- § *Hypatia* by Charles Kinglsey
- § *Uarda* by Georg Ebers



## Course for 1888
History
- § *The Story of Assyria* by Z.A. Ragozin
- § *The Story of Persia* by S.G.W. Benjamin

Historical Novel
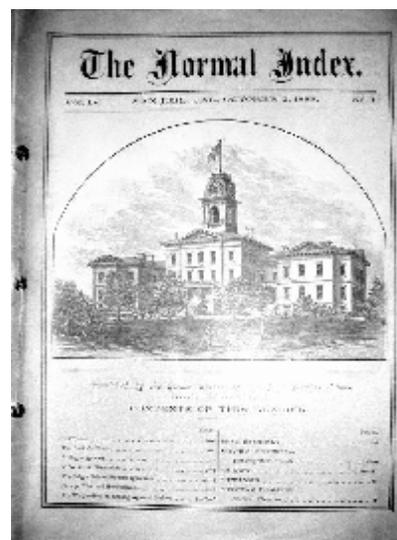- § *Zenobia* by W. Ware

Professional
- § *Philosophy of Education* by J.K.F. Rosenkranz

General Literature
- § *Lay of the Last Minstral* by Sir Walter Scott
- § *Vision of Sir Launfal* by James Russell Lowell

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[1] *The Normal Index* for April 25, 1891 (Vol. VI, No. 8) and May 25, 1891 (Volume VI, No. 9).

## Course for 1889
History
- § *The Story of Greece* by James A. Harrison
- § *The Story of Alexander's Empire* by John P. Mahalfy

Historical Novel
- § *Aspasia* by Robert Hamering

Professional
- § *Compayre's History of Pedagogy*, Translated by W. H. Payne

General Literature
- § *The Alhambra* by Washington Irving
- § *Preparatory Greek Course in English* by J. Wilkerson

## Course for 1890
History
- § *The Story of Rome* by Gilman

Historical Novels
- § *Antinous* by Taylor translated from German by Mary J. Safford
- § *Last Days of Pompeii* by Bulwer

Professional (one of the following)
- § *Mind Studies for Young Teachers* by Jerome Allen
- § *Lectures on Teaching* by Fitch

General Literature
- § *Preparatory Latin Course in English* by Wilkerson
- § *The Newcomes* by Thackery

> "You teach, not only by what you say and do, but very largely by what you are." (p. 22)
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> "[W]e are to have in view, for schools of all kinds, an education which may well deserve to be called 'liberal,' because it seeks to train the man, and not merely the good tradesman or doctor or mechanic. " (p. 53)
>
> "Remember, if [a child] is ever to love reading, he must have room left to him to exercise a little choice." (p. 88)
>
> *Lectures on Teaching – Delivered in the University of Cambridge, 1880* by J.G. Fitch (1898)

## Course for 1891
General History
- § Meyers. "Part II to be carefully studied as a basis for Modern History which will be begun next year. While Part I is to be used, when necessary, for reference and review."

Science
- § *Tropical Africa* by Drummond

Professional
- § *Self culture* by James Freeman Clarke

Civics
- § *How We Are Governed* by Dawes

Fiction
- § *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens. "(A story of the French Revolution.)"

Optional
- § *Quentin Durward* by Scott "(A story of the Court of Louis XI of France.)"
- § *Schonberg-Cotta Family* by Mrs. Charles "(A story of the Reformation.)"

*The Normal Index* for May 25, 1891 reported: "The course of study while broad in its scope, is not so heavy as to prove a burden to a poor tired teacher." Comments from some of the Circle members included that the books were expensive, the course required too much time; though at least one participant noted that it broadened one's horizons.

Try it for yourself—Many of these old books are still available (Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* can be purchased at any bookstore). You may find several of these books online for free at various literature sites or at the King Library. The quantity of yearly readings is comparable to a full course load for an academic year. Some of the assigned books were over 500 pages.

> In *An Egyptian Princess* by Georg Ebers, the historical novel assigned for 1887, the author notes that many scholars "take it amiss if a student of science clothes the result of his researches in a fanciful garb." While Ebers notes that he is somewhat in agreement with such scholars, he thinks that some readers who pick up his historical novel may subsequently "be induced to turn to a more learned work, and may even be won over to the study of antiquity."   [Ebers' preface to the second edition of *An Egyptian Princess*.]