

[Gunnison, Walter Balfour]

DR. W. B. GUNNISON, ERASMUS HEAD, DIES

Well-Known Educator Victim of Bright's Disease—Ill Several Months

HIGH SCHOOL IS CLOSED

Funeral Services at All Souls To-morrow Evening—Pallbearers From School

Dr. Walter Balfour Gunnison, principal of Erasmus Hall High School, died last night at the residence of his son, Stanley E. Gunnison, after an illness of several months.

Dr. Gunnison was obliged to leave school last June and spent the summer at his country home at South Egremont, Mass., returning to the city before the schools opened and taking up a temporary residence with his son. To his great disappointment, he found it impossible to take up his school work this fall. He suffered from chronic Bright's disease, which developed gradually and became alarming only a few weeks ago. He was conscious almost to the last and peacefully passed away last night with his family physician, Dr. Rodney E. Flake, at his side. Dr. Gunnison's residence was at 77 Wilson street, where he had lived for many years.

Funeral services will be held tomorrow evening at 8 o'clock in All Souls Church, the Rev. Dr. A. Eugene Bartlett officiating. The honorary pallbearers will be from Erasmus Hall, where a committee, headed by Professor Eugene W. Harter, was named today to arrange for the services. The singing will be by pupils in the choral societies of the school. Interment will be at Sheffield, Mass.

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Dr. Walter B. Gunnison, by many considered one of the ablest and most successful school principals in America and the originator of a system of school management that has become general in this country at least, was a man who brought nothing but clean fame and respect to the name of Yankee. He was born in Abington, Mass., in 1852, the son of the Rev. Nathaniel and Ann L. Gunnison. He graduated from Westbrook Seminary, Portland, Me., in 1871 and then went to St. Lawrence University, from which he graduated in 1875. He became professor of Latin and Literature in the university, remaining in that scholarly position ten years. While thus engaged he studied law and was admitted to the bar, resigning his position in the university to practice the profession of law in Madison, Wis. The year following he came to Brooklyn and became principal of Public School No. 19, at South Second and Keap streets. For ten years he remained at the head of that institution, and when he left it, in 1896, it was regarded as one of the finest schools in Brooklyn, whose educational system had long been known as a model for all large cities.

Dr. Gunnison would probably have remained with "No. 19" if the choice had been left with him, for he was a teacher with all the love of a scholar

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and the spirit of a volunteer for the work; but the school authorities needed men like him in the work of superintendence, and in June, 1896, he was elected Assistant Superintendent of Education in New York City. In July of the same year, or a month later, he was chosen as principal of the new Erasmus Hall High School, and thus went back to his old love—teaching.

Erasmus Hall Academy, the oldest in the State, was organized in 1786, and opened to its patrons in 1787. Girls were first admitted to the school in 1801.... The academy was contemporaneous with the Boston Latin School, the Philips Exeter and the Philips Andover Academies. The building in which Erasmus Hall High School began work was the original one, hardly changed in any particular from the old one of the Eighteenth Century....

The loyalty and affection of school children for their principals and teachers which has distinguished the Brooklyn Public schools and made them known all over the educational world had their full development at Erasmus Hall High School from the very first days of Dr. Gunnison's regime....

Dr. Gunnison made it a practice to teach at least one class a day, believing that in this way he could come in closer contact with his pupils and study their individual needs. He remembered his pupils, and could tell in what class room they had studied. This was one of the characteristics of Dr. Gunnison—he never forgot his pupils—that endeared him to all who studied under his guidance. He was a teacher to whom graduation meant separation, but not forgetfulness. And the graduates, no matter how far from him the fortunes of life took them, never could forget him and his paternal kindness and consideration.

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Dr. Gunnison always advocated "parents' meetings." He was, for a long time, a warm partisan of this feature of school work assistance.

Late in 1909 Dr. Gunnison broke down from overwork and his physician cautioned him to put on the brakes; so, in 1910, he decided to take a trip to one of the German spas. The trip was nothing more than a decision, in April, 1910, when a committee of the General Organization of Erasmus Hall High School and the teachers arranged to send him to Europe at once, with Mrs. Gunnison as his companion. Dr. Gunnison deprecated the action taken, but the affair was placed before him in such a way that he could not refuse, and he and Mrs. Gunnison sailed for Europe. They returned home the following September, the sick man much improved in health.

Dr. Gunnison's study of the law proved of great help to the teachers on several occasions. In 1904 he advised a test case to recover about \$300,000 for Brooklyn teachers, and the case was won. Dr. Gunnison appeared in the case of the plaintiff. The suit was for unpaid salaries for the months of April, May and June, 1899, the year following the consolidation of Greater New York. This action, known everywhere as the "Gunnison case,"

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brought out a new point of law establishing the status of the Board of Education.

The one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Erasmus Hall Academy was celebrated October 10, 1912 and, as part of the event, the new wing of the main building of Erasmus Hall High School was dedicated. By the time the celebration was nearly over the people had begun to look upon it as Gunnison Day as much as anything else.

A man like Dr. Gunnison could not be anything but a good citizen, a loving father and a model husband. He was blessed with a mate who was a help. But the Gunnison character, a new England product, was the granite foundation of his success. Manly to the tips of his fingers, kind and considerate to all, an unostentatious friend to the poor, and favored with an [sic] universal tolerance in religions that was truly Christian, he is mourned by the many thousands of people in this city and elsewhere who have come under his teaching and influence.

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He was a member of All Souls Universalist Church, the Hanover and Municipal clubs, the Beta Theta Pi college fraternity. He was a Phi Beta Kappa man, had the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, was for many years a trustee of St. Lawrence University and was treasurer of the Brooklyn Law School.

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Dr. Gunnison is survived by two brothers, Herbert F. Gunnison, business manager of The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, and Dr. Almon Gunnison, president emeritus of St. Lawrence University; his wife, Blanche Eaton Gunnison, and the following children: Stanley E. Gunnison, Almon Gage Gunnison, Miss Alice Gunnison, Mrs. Adelaide Calder, Mrs. Portia Caten, and several nephews and nieces, those in Brooklyn being Frederick E. Gunnison, Raymond M. Gunnison, Foster Gunnison, Mrs. Leslie Harrington and Miss Florence Gunnison.

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[considerably abridged]

Transcribed on 24 Feb 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY