

Columbus, Birthplace of American Kindergartens

by Chester C. Winter

In my article in the May 2007 issue of the *Heritage*, I extolled the German influence in establishing kindergartens in this country. Further research led to this sequel on how kindergartens were first established in the United States, in COLUMBUS, OHIO.

Caroline Louise Frankenberg studied and taught the Friedrich Froebel classroom method of early education of children. Frankenberg, a spinster, born in Hanover, never learned to speak English, but relied on German-Americans for her history-making triumph. She studied under Froebel and lived under his roof part of her seventeen-year training period in Keilhau, Dresden and Bautzen, Germany prior to 1836. In that year, she came to Columbus where two of her brothers had settled as farmers. Her effort to start a kindergarten did not implant, and after four years, she returned to her homeland and resumed the teaching of young children under her former mentor. Froebel inspired her to return to this country when he wrote, "the United States is the country best fitted by virtue of its spirit of freedom, true Christianity and pure family life, to receive and profit by (his) educational message." The Prussian government had burned his books and persecuted him for his educational beliefs. Frankenberg returned to Columbus in 1858 and set up a kindergarten in her small house at the corner of Pearl Alley and East Rich Street. (The house was replaced by Baker's Art Gallery and today the city map shows only City Center Mall on that site). Her advertisements in *Der Westbote* garnered only a few pupils, and she sold lace and other handicrafts to eke out a living. Documentation for her pioneering kindergarten efforts was lost in a fire; however, relatives, friends and pupils have attested to her introduction of the kindergarten in this country.

In her sixtieth year, Caroline fell on the ice and became permanently disabled (probably a broken hip). Her final years were spent in Zaneville, Ohio and finally in a Lutheran Home for the infirm in Germantown, Pennsylvania where she died in 1882. Elizabeth Peabody visited Froebel in Europe as well as Caroline Frankenberg before her death in the Lutheran Home. Other women continued her kindergarten efforts, and, in 1912, after intermittent success, kindergartens were reinstalled into Columbus Public Schools. Public kindergartens were abolished again during the Great Depression, a reflection on the state of the economy. The New Deal brought them back in the 1940's.

Columbus can claim having the first training school for kindergarten teachers in Ohio. Mrs. Anna Ogden, wife of the head of the Normal School in Worthington, journeyed to Boston to be a student of Elizabeth Peabody who had opened the first kindergarten training school in America. Upon returning to Columbus, she opened a kindergarten in the 1870's for seven pupils, three of whom were in her training school.

All of the early kindergartens and training schools in Columbus were short-lived. They did not become permanent for fifty years.

In 2007, Columbus Public Schools will be operating twenty-eight pre-kindergarten classes for four-year olds, and funded from the No Child Left Behind federal program.

(I am indebted to Ruth Young White, editor of *We Too Built Columbus*, Columbus, Stoneman Press, 1936.