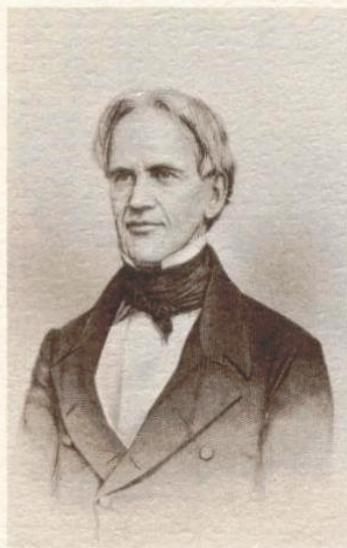


*What was called the love of knowledge, was in my time, necessarily cramped into a love of books; because there was no such thing as oral instruction.*



*Horace Mann*

## The Power of Reading

Though Horace Mann, the father of American public education, may not have attributed his success to the “venerable librarian,” he was influenced by his reading of some of the Franklin books. In her biography of Horace and Mary Mann, *Until Victory*, Louise Hall Tharp describes Horace Mann at Brown University, “Foremost in Mann’s mind and the delight of his heart was oratory. He had loved it ever since Gordon’s *Tacitus* had captured his imagination – all five volumes of it in the Franklin Library.” (Tharp p. 35) Tharp tells us that later in his life when he met Elizabeth Peabody, who was to become his sister-in-law, “Horace Mann was astonished to find that Miss Peabody rekindled his own boyish enthusiasm for the Greeks. Somehow, she made him feel again the thrill of his first discovery of the Classical world in those books in the Franklin library!” (Tharp, 102) Tharp gives as her source a letter written by Mary Peabody to Sophia Peabody, dated February 17, 1833.

Horace Mann’s own words on books and the Franklin library corroborate Tharp’s characterization:

What was called the love of knowledge, was in my time, necessarily cramped into a love of books; because there was no such thing as oral instruction. Books designed for children were few and their contents meagre and miserable.

(Mann p. 11)

I said we had but a few books. The town, however, owned a small library. When incorporated, it was named after Dr. Franklin, whose reputation was then not only at its zenith, but like the sun over Gibeon, was standing still there. As an acknowledgment of the compliment, he offered them a bell for their church; but afterwards, saying that, from what he had learned of the character of the people, he thought they would prefer sense to sound, he changed the gift into a library. Though this library consisted of old histories and theologies, suited, perhaps, to the taste of the “conscript fathers” of the town, but miserably adapted to the