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GAUNTT ACCUSED OF GRAFT

FORMER LA GRANDE PRINCIPAL
ATTACKS HIS CHARACTER.

La Grande High School Basis of Alleged Attempt to Employ Graft.

Writing in the Portland Oregonian, Prof. H. J. Hockenberry, formerly superintendent of schools here, aims a scathing attack at Architect Newton C. Gauntt, supervising architect for the La Grande high school building. It follows:

Portland, Ore., Feb. 4.—(To the Editor)—A "Wandering Willie" architect, styling himself Newton C. Gauntt, is getting a great deal of cheap advertising through the papers of Portland,

and I propose giving him some more. He once lived in Seattle, was at Othello in 1903, in La Grande in 1910, and God knows where in 1911, wherever he can find a school board to employ him.

In this article I propose to give you some fact in regard to the school houses he built at North Yakima and La Grande, if necessary, I shall give other facts at a later date. Perhaps the best way to begin this article concerning North Yakima is by quoting from the Pacific Builder and Engineer of Seattle, October 17, 1908.

"The castellated architectural abortion that stands as a monumental graft on Capitol Hill, North Yakima, is the only argument necessary to convince the lawmaker that school boards as well as other gulleless boards representing public sentiment, public voice and public money in public buildings, need protection. They need it from the artistic radiators of a cribbed knowledge of architecture and the only way that this can be brought about is by the enactment of a law governing the practice of the

profession."

This refers to the schoolhouse built at North Yakima by Mr. Gauntt, and is part of an editorial in favor of a law to license architects, thus protecting the public from the bushwhackers of the profession.

Mr. Gauntt boasts that this school house at North Yakima is unlike any other in the country and it is to be devoutly hoped that it will remain so.

Charges of graft at North Yakima were bandied back and forth at the building of the school house, but the most direct proof I hold in my hand as I write. It is a letter from Mr. Gauntt to the W. G. McPherson Heating Co., of this city, demanding of them \$50 before he would send them plans that they might bid on some of his work. I forbear from quoting the paragraph. The letter is in the possession of the McPherson Co., and can be seen by anyone interested:

"I have given you a chance for you to get your feet in here. You are not the dead game sport I took you to be.

It does not matter to me at all, as there are plenty of firms willing to pay for the work. I am the architect for the school board and will draw plans for a \$50,000 high school fire-proof construction. Now you go and get a good cigar and forget that you had a good thing. Yours truly,

"NEWTON C. GAUNTT."

The letter alone would cause the expulsion of Mr. Gauntt from any architectural society in the United States.

North Yakima is not so far from Portland that the facts in regard to the utter impracticability of their building as a school building can be learned, hence, I shall turn to the building at La Grande, with the construction of which I am more familiar. I am a taxpayer there and was City Superintendent of schools for 8 years.

Bids Vary Widely.

Last year the people of La Grande voted \$75,000 for the purpose of building a new high school building. The bonds were sold at a premium, getting the board, as I remember over \$76,000. Three bids were received for \$62,000, \$98,000 and \$118,000, respectively. The difference in the amount of the bids will tell its own tale to architects and contractors.

The board had the plans revised, and the contract was let to a firm in Washington at \$52,400. The building is not yet entirely finished. When the tax was levied the levy was raised from 5 mills for last year to 11 mills this year. The reason given by the board was that the increase was needed to finish the high school and put in a heating plant in an eight-room ward school. The county of Union adopted the Lane County system of High schools, hence the county paid, or will pay the board \$4,000 for the support of the high school this year, where they paid nothing last year. This \$4,000 will pay for the heating plant. The 6 mills extra will give the board \$12,000, which added to the \$76,000 makes \$88,000 on a \$52,400 contract. I have heard that there will be enough outstanding warrants to bring the cost up to \$100,000.

The La Grande building has been

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FIGURE WITH

C. T. Darley

compared by Mr. Gauntt to the Jefferson High School building of this city. Nothing could be more misleading. The Jefferson was built by an architect; the La Grande building is a pile of brick. The Jefferson building is well adapted to school purposes; the La Grande building is an architectural hermaphrodite, an attempt to be an opera house and a school house at the same time. The Jefferson building has a good foundation; the La Grande building has a foundation of brick that in that climate will begin to crumble at the surface of the ground in less than two years. The Jefferson building has face brick for its outside walls; the La Grande building has common brick burned in that city, with a very few white brick scattered through them looking like a piebald horse. I am told that the walls are only nine inches thick, but I have not verified.

The main feature of the building is the opera house in the center, which is so dark it cannot be used for assembly purposes as it is so high that in order to get in the galleries it would require all the wood in Union counties to heat it for five years.

I have tried to be thus brief, but I feel strongly upon this subject. I have spent more than 40 years in the schoolroom and I am convinced that it is a damnable crime to allow any fact that comes along to build our school houses. Did it ever occur to Mr. Haak his friends that there are reputable architects in Portland who would give him the facts in the case and would be glad to aid any reform in school

building, where it was needed? Is it reasonable that an architect who seeks a new stamping ground each year is of the same calibre as the man who is known in a community and has done work there for years? The utter gullelessness of Mr. Haak is at least refreshing in an age of pessimists.

I am not an architect but a simple school teacher and therefore I am not violating professional ethics by writing this letter.

H. J. HOCKENBERRY.

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