

*The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. See the Boston Herald, Boston, Dec. 13, 1853. See also the Boston Herald, Boston, Dec. 13, 1853. See also the Boston Herald, Boston, Dec. 13, 1853.*

# Annals from the Archives

## The Oath of Allegiance for Teachers 1935

William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951)  
Newspaper Baron and Leader of  
The Anti-Red Crusade

Image from The Library of Congress



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**Written by**

**Nancy Barthelemy**

**Archivist**

**[nancy.barthelemy@sndden.org](mailto:nancy.barthelemy@sndden.org)**

**[sndbostonipswich.wordpress.com](http://sndbostonipswich.wordpress.com)**

**[bolparchives.omeka.net](http://bolparchives.omeka.net)**

—In October of 1935, nearly all the Convent Annals housed in the Ipswich archives reported the same news, that, “the Sisters had to take the oath of allegiance to the U.S. before a Notary. . . The teachers in all schools were obliged to do this so we were under the same necessity.”

This “necessity” came about in June of 1935 when the Massachusetts Legislature passed the Teacher’s Oath. This law stated that, “No professor, instructor or teacher who is a citizen of the United States shall be permitted to enter upon his duties within the Commonwealth unless and until such oath or affirmation shall have been so subscribed.” While such legislation had or would be passed in many other states, Massachusetts was unique in requiring teachers not only in public schools, but also at private schools, to comply with this oath.

In the years since World War I, the United States had experienced many “Red Scares.” The first Red Scare occurred between 1919-1920, just after the success of the Russian Revolution. Fears that there was a communist plot to undermine the American government continued throughout the next two decades and beyond. Fanning the fuel for these theories was the continued increase in immigrants arriving in the U.S. and a renewal of populist politics. Many patriotic societies, such as the American Legion and Daughters of the American Revolution added their voices to the belief that America was under threat. One of the most vocal proponents that communism was an ever increasing danger to America during those years came from newspaper baron, William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951). Hearst bought his first newspaper in 1887 in San Francisco and by 1900 his publishing empire stretched from coast to coast. He grew increasingly conservative through the years and during the 1930s became certain of a communist plot against America.

Just a few months before the Teacher’s Oath was introduced to the Massachusetts Legislature by Representative Thomas Dorgan, Hearst began an Anti-Red Crusade, using his many newspapers to sound the alarm. During his long career, Hearst promoted what became known as ‘yellow journalism,’ that is, encouraging his reporters to use sensational headlines and populist politics in their reporting. As part of this Anti-Red Crusade, Hearst urged his editors to do whatever it took to promote his agenda, including publishing false stories. One such false article reported that subversives had been responsible for importing more than 200,00 Soviet textbooks for American classrooms. Another tactic used by his reporters had them going to Harvard to ferret out any communistic beliefs of teachers and students. The reporter asked professors if they were members of the Communist Party, if they had thought there should be changes to the Constitution, if they thought people should swear allegiance to the flag, if communism should be studied by students and their thoughts on Russia.

When the Teacher's Oath was passed in June of 1935, teachers and organizations protested. Harvard's president James Conant and historian Samuel Eliot Morison spoke out against the law. Two professors from Tufts refused to take the oath and resigned from their posts at the college. Another professor, Kirtley Mather, a professor of geology at Harvard, refused to take the oath at first, but under pressure from Harvard's president, whose resistance to it eventually caved, finally relented and he signed the oath. Samuel Eliot Morison continued his protest against the law by forming the Massachusetts Society for Freedom in Teaching [MSFT]. Faculty from Harvard, Wellesley, Tufts, Simmons Colleges and many others joined the society. Morison believed that people had become frightened by "*imaginary red networks, which link educators and social workers with Moscow by a syllogistic process that would have puzzled Aristotle and Aquinas.*" [Sletcher]." In the end, despite his protests, Morison took the oath rather than lose his teaching position at Harvard.

Fears of communist infiltration faded during World War II but resurfaced after the war under Joseph McCarthy. Professors from Harvard as well as other Massachusetts universities were summoned to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Though the tactics used by McCarthy finally ended during the 1950s, especially with the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement, the law requiring the oath of loyalty to the U.S. continued on the books in Massachusetts until 1967, when it was invalidated by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. All laws requiring loyalty oaths in the Commonwealth were finally repealed for good in 1986.

**Every teacher, whether a kindergarten instructor teaching 3-year-olds how to weave colored straws or a professor of chemistry probing the structure of chlorophyll, will be required to take the same oath. It is estimated that there are 25,000 teachers in the public schools of the State and 15,000 in private schools.**

Excerpt from *The Boston Globe*  
September 5, 1935

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