Great Men Have Advanced New Orleans Public Schools

By FRANCES FORT

The history of public schools in New Orleans might be told through the names of the schools—John A. Shaw, John McDonogh, William O. Rogers, Warren Easton.

The men who bore those names played prominent parts in the development of the school system. Public education in New Orleans began in 1841 when the state legislature required the three municipalities of the city to establish schools for the free instruction of children. In 1852 the city was consolidated and the town of Lafayette annexed. Separate school systems were maintained.

SHAW SUPERINTENDENT

The second municipality, in which John A. Shaw was first superintendent of schools, was the most progressive. An appropriation of about $4000 was made to provide for two adjacent schools, one for boys and one for girls, which were opened on Julia at the end of 1841.

A high school for boys was opened two years later and one for girls several months thereafter.

Progress in other districts followed that of the second municipality, but none was so successful with its schools.

In 1850 John McDonogh made his bequest to New Orleans. Born in Baltimore, Md., in 1779, McDonogh came to New Orleans in 1800 to become very successful in business and most popular in society. In 1817 he moved to a plantation across the river, where he saw few people, lived simply, worked unceasingly and became the subject of many rumors.

Upon his death in 1850, New Orleans and Baltimore received the largest share of his estate for the education of the poor. Twenty-one McDonogh schools were built. The first school, built in 1858, is still in use.

WAR TURMOIL

The turmoil of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods was reflected in the public schools. Federal occupation of the city came in May, 1862, and one of the results was the consolidation of the four school districts.

With the Emancipation Proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863, it became necessary to provide education for Negroes. The period immediately following the Civil War lasting until 1877 when the Carpetbag government ceased to exist was one of constantly changing policy.

No new schools were built for a period of 10 years. In 1877 teachers were forced to take a cut in salary. The following year teachers were unpaid for six months.

Supt. William O. Rogers headed the system in those trying years.

At the turn of the century under Supt. Warren Easton the system entered into one of its most suc-