

## Teaching the “Morally and Economically Destitute”: 19th-Century Adult Education Efforts in Newfoundland

Leona M. English

Volume 41, numéro 2, summer/autumn 2012

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad41\\_2art04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad41_2art04)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

English, L. M. (2012). Teaching the “Morally and Economically Destitute”:  
19th-Century Adult Education Efforts in Newfoundland. *Acadiensis*, 41(2),  
66–88.

Résumé de l'article

*Cet article porte sur l'éducation des adultes à Terre-Neuve au 19e siècle. Il examine les premiers efforts en matière d'éducation des adultes, tant formelle qu'informelle, déployés par les missionnaires dans la colonie ainsi que par le gouvernement et les dirigeants religieux de Terre-Neuve. Ces efforts comprennent ceux de la Society of the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), de la Newfoundland School Society (NSS), de tuteurs à titre privé, de diverses sociétés littéraires et associations religieuses, la formation sur place dans les usines, des cours et des stages de navigation et des écoles du soir organisées par des églises. L'article met en évidence les motivations qui sous-tendaient les diverses initiatives, car bon nombre de ces organisations poursuivaient des objectifs économiques et moraux et utilisaient l'éducation (formelle et informelle) pour les atteindre.*

# Teaching the “Morally and Economically Destitute”: 19th-Century Adult Education Efforts in Newfoundland

LEONA M. ENGLISH

*Cet article porte sur l'éducation des adultes à Terre-Neuve au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il examine les premiers efforts en matière d'éducation des adultes, tant formelle qu'informelle, déployés par les missionnaires dans la colonie ainsi que par le gouvernement et les dirigeants religieux de Terre-Neuve. Ces efforts comprennent ceux de la Society of the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), de la Newfoundland School Society (NSS), de tuteurs à titre privé, de diverses sociétés littéraires et associations religieuses, la formation sur place dans les usines, des cours et des stages de navigation et des écoles du soir organisées par des églises. L'article met en évidence les motivations qui sous-tendaient les diverses initiatives, car bon nombre de ces organisations poursuivaient des objectifs économiques et moraux et utilisaient l'éducation (formelle et informelle) pour les atteindre.*

*This article focuses on the education of adults in 19th century Newfoundland through an examination of the early adult education efforts, formal and informal, by the colonial missionaries and the Newfoundland government and church leaders. These efforts include the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), the Newfoundland School Society (NSS), private tutors, various literary societies and religious associations, on-the-job training in factories, navigation classes and apprenticeships, and church night schools. The article emphasizes the motivations underlying the specific initiatives, as many of the organizations had economic and moral goals and they used education (formal and informal) to accomplish them.*

The British population of the Island of Newfoundland is now about 90,000, of which about half are Irish. . . . They are poor, and they are destitute of education. . . . and what can we expect from the poor of Newfoundland? . . . [they are] without God and without hope . . . and remember the habits of the poorer Irish, both in southern Ireland and in the metropolis.<sup>1</sup>

WHEN REVEREND BAPTIST W. NOEL preached these words in 1831, he no doubt reflected the general sentiment of the benefactors of the Newfoundland

1 Baptist W. Noel, “Anniversary Sermon,” *Proceedings of the Newfoundland & British North America Society for Educating the Poor* (NBNASEP), *Eighth Year, 1830-31*, file “Education to 1949,” pp. 12-13, Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS), Memorial University. The author would like to thank Larry Dohey of the Roman Catholic Archives of St. John’s, who was most

Leona M English, “Teaching the “Morally and Economically Destitute”: 19th-Century Adult Education Efforts in Newfoundland,” *Acadiensis* XLI, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2012): 66-88.

School Society (NSS). Indeed, Noel may have intensified the rhetoric to shame some subscribers into further supporting Newfoundland schools. It appears that he and the society were quite successful in raising funds for education of the children and often the adults of this colony.<sup>2</sup> There were many sporadic adult education attempts such as those of the Newfoundland School Society during the late 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>3</sup> As in many other jurisdictions, such as Nova Scotia, much of this education focused both on reading and writing and supporting moral reform – a trend that was to continue in Newfoundland for many years.<sup>4</sup>

Although considerable attention has been given to school teaching in the early years of Newfoundland's history, the teaching of adults, which often occurred in the evenings after the day school finished, has been much less studied.<sup>5</sup> Despite the general lack of

knowledgeable and helpful in identifying archival resources; Joan Ritcey and Jackie Hillier of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, who were unstinting in providing resources; and Stephanie Baker, Lee English, and Jay McGrath, who provided able research assistance. Thank you also to John Griffin of the Provincial Resource Library; the staff of The Rooms Provincial Archives Division (TRPAD) and of the Robarts and OISE libraries, University of Toronto; Dr. John Grant of St. Francis Xavier University, who commented on a draft; and Dr. Phillip McCann, professor emeritus of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, and Brother Bert Darcy, who were both generous with resources. The anonymous reviewers of this manuscript provided considerable direction and assistance. Finally, the author would also like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Centre for Regional Studies at St. Francis Xavier University.

- 2 The NSS is described in many places. See Arthur Barnes, *The History of Education in Newfoundland* (PhD thesis, New York University, 1917); Reverend E. Hunt, "The Newfoundland School Society (Its First Five Years of Operation 1824-1829)," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1971): 30-5; Reverend E. Hunt, "The Newfoundland School Society (Conclusion)," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (1972), 35-8; Phillip W. McCann, "The Newfoundland School Society, 1823-55: Missionary Enterprise or Cultural Imperialism?" in *Benefits Bestowed: Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 94-112; Fred W. Rowe, *History of Education in Newfoundland* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952); and the many proceedings of the society (NBNASEP).
- 3 A widely accepted definition of adult education was developed by UNESCO in 1976: "The entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development." See UNESCO, *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, published in Canada (1976; repr. Ottawa: Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 1980), 3.
- 4 Robert Nicholas Bérard, "Moral Education in Nova Scotia, 1880-1920," *Acadiensis* XIV, no. 1 (Autumn 1984): 49-63.
- 5 For examples of educational history, see Fred Rowe, *History of Education*; Fred Rowe, *The Development of Education in Newfoundland* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1964); Fred Rowe, *Education and Culture in Newfoundland* (Scarborough, Ontario: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976); Jo Oppenheimer, *Some Patterns in the Early History of Newfoundland Education, 1578-1836* (MEd thesis, Memorial University, 1982); and McCann, "The Newfoundland School Society." A helpful summary of early education efforts is provided in Vincent P. Burke, "Education in Newfoundland," in *The Book of Newfoundland, Volume 1*, ed. J.R. Smallwood (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1937), 287-95. Interestingly, general histories of Newfoundland pay scant attention to educational developments. For example, the first two volumes of Patrick O'Flaherty's otherwise excellent historical trilogy hardly mention schools and education. See either of O'Flaherty's *Old*

archival material to develop a comprehensive adult education history of the 18th and 19th centuries, there are some sources available. This article aims to establish how sporadic and limited these efforts were while also gauging the motives of the various providers and how their efforts fit in the context of Newfoundland history.<sup>6</sup>

Though estimates vary, there is general agreement that literacy in 19th-century Newfoundland was limited. Fred Rowe, for instance, estimated that the literacy rate in the early 19th century was 25 per cent and that it rose to 50 per cent by 1900. Other estimates are similar. A.G. McPherson found that in St. John's, between 1841 and 1850, literacy – defined as the ability to write one's name – was 67.7 per cent for men and 52 per cent for women in the city but considerably lower in the outports.<sup>7</sup> Among the most quoted figures on literacy in this time is David Alexander's assessment, based on census data, that “at mid-century only 18% of the potential labour force was fully literate [able to read and write] rising to 25% at the end of the century.”<sup>8</sup> Definitions of literacy vary widely, and all are problematic: from the ability to write one's name, read the Bible, or understand simple texts, to the ability to read *and* write or the ability to read *or* write. Yet whatever definition may be selected, there was clearly ample scope for education through schooling and night classes, or informally through tutoring and on-the-job training, as well as through public lectures and associations. All of these efforts comprise the toolbox of adult education, and all appear to have been used in Newfoundland. But how and to what extent? Although we have these estimations of literacy, we do not have a clear picture of what was done to address literacy issues.

There is little doubt that the socio-economic context of Newfoundland, as well as the rugged geography and dependence on the resources of the sea, made achieving a higher standard of literacy a challenge.<sup>9</sup> In a setting dominated in part by imperial influences on Newfoundland and its fisheries, and ravaged by a rough climate, literacy education often had difficulty keeping afloat.<sup>10</sup> As Phillip McCann notes from his extensive quantitative work, educational expenditures were low as were the

*Newfoundland: A History to 1843* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 1999) or his *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland 1843-1933* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2005).

6 Important to note here is that education and literacy may be different. Education refers to the structured efforts, mostly through schools, to provide formal instruction usually to children in school. Fundamental literacy refers the ability to read and write at a level that allows individuals to function within the society in which they live. This literacy is often acquired through schooling, though it may also be acquired through tutoring, self-teaching, or home instruction.

7 Cited in Phillip McCann, “Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education: 1836-1901,” *Historical Studies in Education* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 191, <http://historicalstudiesineducation.ca/>. According to MacPherson, literacy was much lower in rural Newfoundland at this time. In Hermitage, for instance, it was 5.1 per cent for men and 1.7 per cent for women.

8 David Alexander, “Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland,” *Acadiensis* X, no. 1 (1980): 29.

9 This article does not address adult education in Labrador (where initiatives were pursued within the distinctive context of Moravian-Inuit interaction), and so focuses on the island of Newfoundland – where the availability of evidence dictates a primary though not exclusive concentration on St. John's.

10 Within the field of adult education in Canada, relevant histories include Michael R. Welton, ed., *Knowledge for the People: The Struggle for Adult Learning in English-Speaking Canada, 1828-*

qualifications of teachers and the rate of school attendance.<sup>11</sup> This mixture made significant progress on literacy virtually unattainable, given that those uneducated in traditional schools became the illiterate adults of the public sphere.

The following analysis seeks to supplement Alexander's work on literacy rates, and McCann's on finances in a fishing economy, by providing a picture of the varied adult education efforts during this time period. Whereas both of these scholars were focused on numerical data, much of it in relation to schooling, neither addresses in any substantive way the actual efforts on behalf of adults. Although literacy rates were low, this was not because attempts to instill basic literacy for adults were entirely lacking. Efforts ranged from a focus on functional literacy (reading and writing), to on-the-job training, to private tuition, to various lectures and associational activities and night schools. Taken together, they help provide a picture of a Newfoundland unsure of what to do to educate adults, how to do it, or how to fund it. This situation must also be contextualized in its time and place in a land beset by many hardships. Providing for children was a struggle that so occupied the churches and the government that attending to adult needs was often well beyond them.<sup>12</sup>

Like children's education during the 1800s, adult education was funded by churches, government, and private individuals (with an increasing tendency during that period for the government to assume financial responsibility); yet adult education was to wait until 1920 for reliable funding through the government's first grant for night schools.<sup>13</sup> Many of these educational efforts, including those for adults, sought to link and address both moral and economic destitution in Newfoundland. Moral education was of particular concern, since there was a persistent belief that poverty was connected to immorality and that education was one means to make people less immoral and less poor. This belief continued into the 20th century, and Newfoundland's schoolteachers, government officials, and missionaries were not alone in making such links.<sup>14</sup> Nova Scotia's leaders, for example, also saw education as a means of instilling – or imposing – moral values and behavior in a struggling population.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the infusion of moral teaching with education in the hopes of strengthening the economy and the general civilizing of the population became a widespread and time-honored tradition.<sup>16</sup>

1973 (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1987); Gordon Selman, Michael Cooke, Mark Selman, and Paul Dampier, *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Thompson, 1998). Yet these histories are mainly with regard to the 20th century. Early settlement in Newfoundland calls for a history that goes further back than these two works.

11 Phillip McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society: Education and Economic Conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador 1836-1986* (St John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1994).

12 For a narrative history of Newfoundland, with an emphasis on its economic struggles and challenges with geography and the maritime environment, see Sean T. Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

13 The first grant of \$10,000 was made by the newly established Bureau of Education, with Arthur Barnes as minister. See Rowe, *History of Education*, 68.

14 James Overton, "Moral Education of the Poor: Adult Education and Land Settlement Schemes in Newfoundland in the 1930s," *Newfoundland Studies* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 250-82.

15 See Bérard, "Moral Education in Nova Scotia, 49-63.

16 Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America*, 3rd ed. (1959; repr. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1984).

The earliest adult education initiatives in Newfoundland were undertaken by Protestant missionary societies associated with the Church of England and with Wesleyan Methodism. Efforts at inducing basic literacy among the adult population of Newfoundland dated back to the 18th century, during which era the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) preceded the NSS and prefigured its interest in literacy as a way of facilitating evangelization.<sup>17</sup> Writing about Newfoundland adult education, the 20th-century Newfoundland educator and civil servant Vincent Burke identified extensive adult education efforts in Newfoundland and credited the SPG's Rev. Henry Jones with educating adults. Burke's assertion, however, is hard to substantiate. Although Jones started the first school for children in 1727, there is no direct evidence that he himself had a night school. His own letters to the SPG contain no references to night schools, although those of later missionary colleagues did. Burke was correct to note, however, that under the NSS it was customary for the day school teachers to have night schools.<sup>18</sup>

It seems that during the 18th and 19th centuries a number of Newfoundland communities had teachers who taught children by day and adults by night. This was especially necessary since many boys left school early to go into the fishery and manual labour, a situation that continued up until 1942 when Newfoundland developed its first compulsory education laws.<sup>19</sup> Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, these young people seem to have attended the night schools along with older adults – often making it difficult to sort out whether the people being taught were children or adults in the conventional sense.<sup>20</sup>

The letters of William Lampen, schoolmaster for the SPG in Harbour Grace from 1785 to 1821, indicate that he had both adults and children as pupils in his evening classes.<sup>21</sup> His are among the first recorded instances of adult education classes in Newfoundland. In a letter home to the society in 1788, Lampen reported that he “established an evening school during the months of January, February and March, that those grown persons . . . employed in the fishery in the summer and work[ing] by day in winter, may have an opportunity of learning something by night.”<sup>22</sup> Given the numbers who were forced to leave school early to contribute to the household

17 Technically these societies overlapped, with the NSS being established in 1823 to focus on schools (which the SPG did not). The SPG continued on in some fashion until 1833, when it was no longer funded by Britain. Extensive work on the SPG has been done by Gay J. (Peddle) White in *A History of SPG Supported Schools in Newfoundland: 1701-1827* (MA – Religious Studies – thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2001).

18 Vincent P. Burke, “Adult Education in Newfoundland,” 1938, GN/77/1/B, box E17, p. 1, TRPAD.

19 The Compulsory School Attendance Act was passed in 1942. See Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage website, “The Commission of Government and Education,” [http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/education\\_comm.html](http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/education_comm.html). See also the booklet to accompany this display: *The History of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador 1727 to 2000* (St. John's: Faculty of Education, Memorial University, 2007).

20 In a letter to the editor in 1870, a writer (pseudonym “Terra Nova”) notes that “thousands of young men and boys left the schools within the last ten years to go to trades, the fishery, or to work at manual labour.” See Terra Nova, “The Night School Question,” *Daily Colonist*, 23 November 1887.

21 White, *History of SPG Supported Schools*. White (176) notes that Lampen's were the only adult schools during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

22 William Lampen, letter to SPG, 10 October 1788, letterbook, ser. C, vol. 25, p. 118, CNS.



economy, Lampen evidently felt obliged to help them. Writing again to the society in 1797, he appears to have continued with his evening classes during the intervening years: “He has also taught 11 young men and 2 young women to read, write and cypher during the winter evenings, and several children by day.” Unsurprisingly, Lampen’s letters showed a strong missionary zeal and a penchant – no doubt pleasing to the society itself – for using schooling as a way to increase reading of the Bible and religious texts. In his letter of 1797, he boasted that one of his students had learned and repeated to him almost half of the catechism.<sup>23</sup> Yet Lampen did not confine himself to reading, also encouraging writing and numeracy. In his letter of 1798 he reported again that he was teaching adults in the evening, this time “13 young men.”<sup>24</sup> Lampen’s letters serve as a permanent record of his and the SPG’s commitment to missionary activity overseas.<sup>25</sup> They also portray a teacher who was not only interested in teaching skills; he wanted to increase both commitment to God and general contentment in the population.<sup>26</sup> Of course, it must be remembered that Lampen knew his audience and funder, the SPG, and he likely intensified his religious rhetoric to please them.

There were also socio-political motives for supporting education in Newfoundland. According to SPG historian Gay (Peddle) White, “A common education was desired to strengthen the social order of a mercantile society and not as a vehicle for social or economic betterment.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, politics was mixed with religion and education for the SPG and its supporters. The British governors, especially in the first decades of the 19th century, were keen to support Anglican educational activity through the SPG as a way of resisting Irish Catholic expansion. The governors supplemented Anglican clergy salaries as well as those of the minister-teachers in the SPG.<sup>28</sup>

SPG efforts petered out with the advent of the Newfoundland School Society in 1823. The NSS was concerned mainly with setting up schools, which the SPG had not been. Although they shared an interest in making adults and children both literate and good Christians, the religious differences between the two organizations caused some friction. White, for instance, details the tensions that existed between the Anglican SPG and the Methodist-Wesleyan influences in the mainly Anglican NSS, noting that the SPG felt that the NSS was competing with it and that the NSS had formed alliances with Methodists. A further difference is that the NSS was intentionally set up to educate people of all Christian denominations (not just

23 William Lampen, letter to SPG, 31 October 1797, letterbook, ser. C, vol. 27, pp. 248-9, CNS.

24 William Lampen, letter to SPG, 22 October 1798, letterbook, ser. C, vol. 27, p. 377, CNS.

25 See Patrick O’Flaherty, “The Seeds of Reform: Newfoundland, 1800-18,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 48-9.

26 Though he did not run a full-fledged program or school, in many ways Lampen’s focus on adults in the late 1700s was unique. According to literacy scholar Allan Quigley, the “first documented program for the teaching of adults in the English-speaking world was begun by the Bristol Adult School Society in 1812.” See B. Allan Quigley, “Literacy,” in *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education*, ed. Leona M. English (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 383. The Bristol school was focused on moral education and religious commitment. The purposes of literacy then, as now, vary from improving self-esteem to becoming critically aware and politically active.

27 White, *History of SPG Supported Schools*, 244.

28 See O’Flaherty, “Seeds of Reform,” 48-9.

Anglicans), though its teachers were Anglican. Furthermore, the NSS schools did not charge tuition fees whereas the SPG schools did.<sup>29</sup> These frictions, however, did not hamper the growth of the NSS, and by 1833 the SPG efforts had been edged out of Newfoundland. The NSS founder, Samuel Codner, was a fishing merchant out from England in the early 1800s who was concerned about the need for schools in the colony as well as with the salvation of souls.<sup>30</sup> His successful efforts to generate benefactors, especially among the merchants, allowed the society to continue in both day and night school ventures.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the society's published annual reports routinely included statistics for night school classes – and Sunday Schools – along with its regular, day school accounts. Even in one of its earliest reports, for 1825-26, the society indicated that it had taught 35 adults in St. John's, 41 in Trinity, and 20 in Carbonear.<sup>32</sup> By 1827 it had opened another adult school in Petty Harbour with 27 students.<sup>33</sup> The society's leaders saw its work in education as a way of proving that "Christianity is able to civilize, moralize, and to save man wherever God has fixed the bounds of his habitation."<sup>34</sup> Yet, as with the SPG, the records of the NSS do suggest no vision of education that might help the locals attain greater autonomy or self-sufficiency. As Phillip McCann has noted, there were strong mercantile interests in using education to "promote among the lower orders obedience to the laws and friendly feelings towards the higher ranks of society."<sup>35</sup>

The society lost no time in proclaiming its success in educating adults along with children. The *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* for 1827, for instance, reported that the society had bestowed "the blessings of Education among at least 1000 scholars, children and adults," and no fewer than 274 of these were adults.<sup>36</sup> The society's fifth annual report, in 1828, indicated that some 340 adults and 546 children were being educated.<sup>37</sup> By 1830 the society had opened 28 day schools, 18 Sunday schools and 10 adult schools,<sup>38</sup> and by 1833 its leaders were claiming that its education of 2,359 scholars, including adults, was a testament to their diligence in evangelization through education: "There are many also among the adults in whom

29 White, *History of SPG Supported Schools*, 216, 220.

30 The Newfoundland School Society, at various times in its history, has been known as the Society for the Education of the Poor in Newfoundland (name change in 1829), the Newfoundland and British North American School Society, and now the Intercontinental Church Society; see <http://www.ics-uk.org/about/history.shtml>. This NSS, though local in name, made international efforts in education, not just in Newfoundland.

31 McCann has argued convincingly that the NSS, backed as it was by the merchant class, was an instrument of social control, or a means of "socializing them for life in a merchant-dominated economy." See McCann, "Newfoundland School Society," 98.

32 *Proceedings of the Society for Educating the Poor of Newfoundland (SEPN), Third year, 1825-1826*, pp. 26, 36, 37, 38, CNS.

33 *Proceedings of the SEPN, Fourth Year, 1826-1827*, p. 21, CNS.

34 *Proceedings of the SEPN, Fifth Year, 1827-1828*, p. 39, CNS.

35 McCann, "Newfoundland School Society," p. 97.

36 "Newfoundland School Society," *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine for the Year 1827*, 6, 3rd ser. (1827), p. 479.

37 *Proceedings of the SEPN, Fifth Year, 1827-1828*, p. 21, CNS. Mr. Jeynes in St. John's reports that his adult scholars are much more regular in their attendance than in any previous winters (p. 42) and Mr. Fleet of Quidi Vidi reports some 21 adult students in winter (p. 45).

38 McCann, "Newfoundland School Society."



a decided religious change has been produced.”<sup>39</sup> Virtually every year the society added new adult schools: Little Placentia appears in reports for 1832-1833; St. George’s Bay and Bellorum are reported on in 1846.<sup>40</sup> The society continued in Newfoundland until 1923, though its influence diminished during the mid-1800s after repeated clashes with Anglican Bishop Feild and after the granting of responsible government to Newfoundland in 1855.<sup>41</sup> With increased independence and the right to set its own priorities, Newfoundland turned its attention to improving the education of children through the school system. The decline of the NSS proved to be most unfortunate for adult education since government and church efforts after this time concentrated on day schools and the education of children rather than adult and night schools.

There is ample evidence that members of local communities valued the work of the NSS. The society’s annual reports show that there were many local subscribers, drawn from all social classes; supporters’ names and donations are recorded in the reports, and the lists are lengthy. Further evidence of local support is that there were frequent requests to the society for teachers and energetic efforts to keep them once they had them.<sup>42</sup> Yet religious tensions suffused the society’s activities, coming to a head during the mid-1830s.<sup>43</sup> Sectarian rivalries had been aggravated when the Benevolent Irish Society (BIS) established the Orphan Asylum School in 1826, not long after the NSS was formed. Though technically non-denominational, the BIS was identified with Roman Catholicism and Catholics began to choose the BIS school over the NSS schools (thus decreasing the NSS numbers). When Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Fleming brought in the Presentation Sisters to set up schools in 1833, the numbers in the NSS schools declined even further.<sup>44</sup> In 1834, Governor Thomas Cochrane complicated matters by deciding to end the government grant for the nondenominational Charity Schools (Schools of Industry) in St. John’s, which many Roman Catholics had attended since their 1802 inception.<sup>45</sup> In throwing his support behind the NSS, the governor showed his religious stripes and thus angered the Catholic community. In the absence of government support for adult education – a situation only made clearer in light of the grants for education (usually meaning schools) by the legislature in 1836 – the Newfoundland School Society had a significant role to play in filling gaps for adults; but it would prove difficult if it

39 “Newfoundland and British North-American School Society,” *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine for the Year 1833*, 12, 3rd ser. (1833), p. 440.

40 *Proceedings of the NBNASEP, Twenty-third year, 1845-1846*, pp. 17-18.

41 McCann, “Newfoundland School Society,” 95, 105.

42 For instance, see the *Proceedings of the NBNASEP, Ninth Year, 1831-1832*, pp. 30-9.

43 An account of these religious tensions is given in John Greene’s *Between Damnation and Starvation: Priests and Merchants in Newfoundland Politics, 1745-1855* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999). See especially his fourth chapter entitled “Religion and Politics, 1832-36” (68-107).

44 As O’Flaherty notes, anti-Catholic sentiment was not new. He observes that during the late 1700s and early 1800s anti-Catholic sentiment was strong, and Catholics were excluded from most public affairs and viewed with a “fearful vigilance.” See Patrick O’Flaherty, “Government in Newfoundland Before 1832: The Context of Reform,” *Newfoundland Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 30.

45 See Sister Mary Nolasco Mulcahy, “Schools of Industry,” *Newfoundland Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (Spring 1983): 17-22.

could not address the educational needs of Catholics.<sup>46</sup> Catholics sent their own children to the Catholic schools for children. Adult education did not seem to be part of the Catholic vision of education at this time, ensuring that the NSS efforts in the early 1800s were to be among the most concerted efforts to educate adults until the 20th century.<sup>47</sup>

Despite these religious tensions a more systematic approach to education was slowly developing, reflecting the ability of the denominations to find workable solutions to their differences. As Jerry Bannister observes, it was actually remarkable that educational and political outcomes in 19th-century Newfoundland were as strong as they were given the possibilities. Noting that religious and government leaders were able to negotiate power sharing and to manage workable solutions, Bannister draws attention to the alternative possibility of conflicts along the lines of those in Northern Ireland – a situation that never developed in Newfoundland.<sup>48</sup>

In the midst of these tensions the NSS continued to publish inspirational stories about adults, especially as they pertained to those who became fervent Christians as a result of learning to read and write – and sometimes Protestant converts from Catholicism. Mr. and Mrs. Martin at Petty Harbour, a husband and wife team, provided an exemplary tale<sup>49</sup>:

The children came in the evening to change their library books; one of the Adult scholars, a girl of 18, said, “Would you sell me this book, Sir?” “Let me see it,” I said, and looking at it I found it was a book of Hymns and Prayers. I said, “Why do you want it? Is it because you like the hymns that are in it?” She answered, “No Sir, the prayers.” “Do you love to pray?” “Yes, Sir,” she modestly replied. I let her have the book. She has been in our school about 15 months, during which time she has learned to read the Bible. She usually brings the greatest number of answers to the weekly question, and her general conduct affords us great encouragement.<sup>50</sup>

A negative story is never reported in these annals, suggesting the writers’ self-perception of benevolence and unassailability. It was such religious commitment

46 In that first grant, the NSS received £300. See *Journal of the House of Assembly* (28 March 1836): 100-1, <http://www2.canadiana.ca/en/home>.

47 For a useful comparative perspective on sectarianism in education, see George D. Perry “‘The Grand Regulator’: State Schooling and the Normal-School Idea in Nova Scotia, 1838-1855,” *Acadiensis* XXXII, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 60-83.

48 For a critical view of John Greene’s discussion of these issues, see Jerry Bannister, “Laying the Blame: John Greene’s View of Sectarian Politics,” *Newfoundland Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 2002): 114-22 (esp. 120). Bannister makes a similar point in “A Species of Vassalage: The Issue of Class in the Writing of Newfoundland History,” *Acadiensis* XXIV, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 124-44. He calls for more complicated readings of the class system in Newfoundland, noting that the standard merchant/fisher division is far too simple a division.

49 The NSS teachers are always referred to as “Mr.” and “Mrs.” in the reports.

50 *Proceedings of the SEPN, Fifth Year, 1827-1828*, p. 50, CNS. During this year, the Martins had 18 males and 7 females in their adult school. The overall total for the NSS during that year was 7 schools and 340 adults.

that the society teachers focused on, and this commitment also prompted their belief that every step they made to improving literacy levels helped the cause of Protestantism. That this young woman typified desirable gendered behavior (modesty, good conduct, and piety) was no doubt a contributing reason for highlighting her story, and likely made it even more palatable to funders' ears.<sup>51</sup> Nor was the society's fervor confined to its dealings with young adults. There were students of all ages in these schools, all interested in learning to read and write. Mr. Bridge, a teacher in one of their schools, reported that a near-octogenarian had been taught to read and write, and converted from Catholicism to boot:

I have one of the most interesting circumstances to mention. It pleased God, three or four years since, to make me the instrument of converting an aged Roman Catholic; he was then upwards of seventy; he is now, at nearly eighty years of age, a scholar in the Society's school, and is making astonishing progress. It is delightful to me when I visit his hut to find this aged pilgrim poring over the Word of God, which he is now in some measure able to read for himself. . . . He has seen his way clearly to a renunciation of the errors of Romanism.<sup>52</sup>

This religious conversion exemplifies how the society measured success. It was both trying to evangelize and increase reading *and* writing levels, but it clearly saw conversion to Protestantism as the highest level of achievement. Literacy levels were so dire that the NSS was also able to enlist groups of influential men to lobby for funds to sustain their efforts, including direct appeals to likely donors. In an 1834 letter to the Earl of Aberdeen for support for education, a group of planters and merchants – indicative of the social character of the society's support – noted that they had been successful in supporting education, and specifically in operating with the NSS a thriving Central School in St. John's since 1824. Some 14 other main schools had also been opened in a number of rural areas along with 21 branch schools, which were satellites of the main schools. The NSS had taught some 5,234 day scholars, 3,386 Sunday scholars, and 984 adult scholars.<sup>53</sup> High as these numbers seem, they spoke to the strength of the NSS and its adult educational offerings at this time although perhaps coexisting uneasily with the letter's assertion to Aberdeen that Newfoundland was "destitute of any means whereby the children or adults can acquire any instruction whatever."<sup>54</sup> The letter was signed by multiple

51 A discussion of gender and teaching in Nova Scotia is given in Janet Guildford, "Separate Spheres: The Feminization of Public School Teaching in Nova Scotia, 1838-1880," *Acadiensis* XXII, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 44-64. A more recent discussion of gender and teaching in Newfoundland in the 20th century is given in Kay Whitehead and Judith Peppard, "Women Teachers in the Turbulent Educational World of St. John's, Newfoundland, 1920-1949," *Acadiensis* XXXVII, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2008): 56-75.

52 *Proceedings of the NBNASE, Nineteenth Year, 1841-1842*, p. 8.

53 See letter (handwritten) of Merchants, Planters, etc. to the Earl of Aberdeen for financial help to open free schools, 5 March 1834, GN 1/1/1 1833-35, box 4, TRPAD.

54 Rowe notes that this Central School functioned as a teacher training school. See Rowe, *History of Education in Newfoundland*, 106.

influential men, including members of the Job, Stokes, Thomas, Brown, and Ayre merchant families. Through the 1800s, along with approaching private donors, the NSS lobbied the government, and it was among the first to receive funding in the initial education grant of 1836.<sup>55</sup> This grant marked the first distribution of funds for education in Newfoundland; receiving even a portion of this grant indicated strong government support.

Several features of this society's system of education are quite remarkable. Not only were its teachers successful in teaching adults, but the society itself was also frugal with resources (human and otherwise). Teams of husbands and wives, or "masters" and "mistresses" as the society called them, were assigned to the schools.<sup>56</sup> For example, in 1825-1826 Mr. and Mrs. Jeynes were teaching in St. John's and Mr. and Mrs. Teulon were in Carbonear.<sup>57</sup> In 1830-1831, Mr. and Mrs. Kingwell were in Harbour Grace, Mr. and Mrs. Martin in Petty Harbour, Mr. and Mrs. Meek in Bonavista, Mr. and Mrs. King in Green's Pond, and Mr. and Mrs. Flint in Twillingate.<sup>58</sup> In 1832-1833 plans were in the works for Mr. and Mrs. Bradford to go to Twillingate and for Mr. and Mrs. Netten to replace them in Petty Harbour.<sup>59</sup> Many of these couples stayed for a number of years, strengthening education in the communities and building a pattern of education for old and young alike. Having at least two teachers in the community gave more time for the evening school, even though they might have taught all day. Considering that, certainly by the early 20th century, women were expected to quit teaching when they married, this early pattern of joint effort by married couples was significant both for adult education and for women's educational role since it gave women some degree of professional freedom.<sup>60</sup>

Although it is true, as Alison Prentice argues, that moving from home schools to public schools brought these women under state or – as in this case – religious jurisdiction, it is also true that it allowed them to have a new identity as workers and as professionals contributing to the building of a nation in a way similar to their male counterparts.<sup>61</sup> Working outside the home gave female teachers money and a career, options available to few other women at the time.<sup>62</sup> These team arrangements also provided mutual support, not possible when teachers were alone in one-room schools.

Yet not all efforts to educate adults in 19th-century Newfoundland were church-sponsored. The early newspapers, including the *Royal Gazette* and *Newfoundland*

55 *Journal of the House of Assembly* (28 March 1836): 100-1.

56 The *Newfoundland Mercantile Journal* for 19 January 1826 lists the many teaching couples and refers to them in this fashion.

57 *Proceedings of the SEPN, Third Year, 1825-1826*.

58 *Proceedings of the NBNASEP, Eighth Year, 1830-1831*.

59 *Proceedings of the NBNASEP, Tenth Year, 1832-33*.

60 Guildford, "Separate Spheres"; see also McCann, "Class, Gender and Religion."

61 Alison Prentice, "From Household to School House: The Emergence of the Teacher as Servant of the State," *Material History Bulletin*, no. 20 (Fall 1984): 19-29.

62 For an account of the progress of women in adult education in the early decades of the 20th century, see Leona M. English, "Adult Education on the Newfoundland Coast: Adventure and Opportunity for Women in the 1930s and 1940s," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 25-54.

*Advertiser*, contain many references to private tuition and schools in the early 1800s, although in the very early references it is often difficult to know if these were for adults or children.<sup>63</sup> Examples of those quite clearly for adults include Mr. E. Gleeson's school in 1827 for "Youth, and those of riper years"<sup>64</sup> as well as Mr. M'Donald's private night school for adults in 1829 "for the convenience of those who cannot attend during the day."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in 1831 James Crosby offered a "night school for adults, in which both writing and arithmetic will be taught." While Crosby's school was in the evening, he held a writing school presumably for children in the daytime.<sup>66</sup> It seems that Crosby's idea of dividing children and adults was used by others. Gleeson advertised both a night and a day school in the *The Times* in 1833.<sup>67</sup> This school was intended for "those who have not had the advantage of day School [so they] will have an opportunity of forwarding themselves in their respective capacities." The first adult-only school was advertised in *The Times* on 3 December 1834, to teach "reading, writing, arithmetic" to adults.<sup>68</sup> Along with these night schools to teach reading and writing, there were private lessons offered in very specific professional areas. For instance, Dr. William Carson – the future political reformer – advertised medical instruction in 1814 while Thomas Codner twice advertised navigation classes in the *Public Ledger* in 1828.<sup>69</sup>

In the absence of any state-funded night school or technical education programs, these private courses of instruction served as a makeshift adult and higher education system (without any overt religious influences). Responsive to a public need, although with clienteles restricted according to the ability to pay fees, they helped to fill the gaps among a large population who had never been to school or who had left very early on. They focused on helping people become self-reliant and employable as well as helping uneducated members of society gain skills. These private lessons, unlike the work of the SPG and the NSS, were not tied to moral reform: they were pragmatic – and potentially profitable – attempts at educating adults for work. As effective as these private schools could be, they diminished when initial funding for schools was granted in 1836.<sup>70</sup>

There were also forms of adult education during the 19th century that were not confined to a classroom. By mid-century less formal educational associations and groups were proliferating, some with an interest in promoting workers' education along with promoting moral and literary improvement. William Barker and Sandra Hannaford, in their "History of the Book in Newfoundland," provide a comprehensive overview of the many book and literary societies operative in Newfoundland during this time, concentrating on the Athenaeum (1861-1898) since it was the largest and over time absorbed many other literary societies and libraries

63 On reform movements of this era, see O'Flaherty, "The Seeds of Reform."

64 E.J. Gleeson, *Public Ledger*, 23 October 1827, p. 3, CNS.

65 Mr. M'Donald, *Public Ledger*, "School," 27 October 1829, p. 2, CNS.

66 James Crosby, *Public Ledger*, 28 October 1831, p. 3, CNS.

67 E.J. Gleeson, *The Times*, 20 November 1833, p. 3, CNS.

68 "Adult School for Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, etc." *The Times*, 3 December 1834, CNS.

69 Dr. William Carson, *Gazette*, 28 July 1814; Thomas Codner, *Public Ledger*, 4 January 1828, 16 December 1828.

70 *Journal of the House of Assembly* (28 March 1836): 100-1, <http://www2.canadiana.ca/en/home>.



(including the Mechanics' Institute, formed in 1849).<sup>71</sup> At its peak the Athenaeum had an auditorium to seat 1,000 and it housed some 6,000 books, offering lectures for the public; it burned in the St. John's fire of 1892 and was then rebuilt on a smaller scale. There were many other literary associations in the city around the same time, such as the St. John's Literary Society and the Bible Class Library, but none so large as the Athenaeum.<sup>72</sup> While catering primarily to a literate clientele, these associations also devoted efforts to extending adult literacy and increasing participation in the public sphere. The breadth of topics covered in these societies is reflected in Judge Daniel Prowse's account of a lecture he gave to those gathered for a Mechanics' Institute meeting in the Old Factory in 1852. In this latter meeting, he lectured on a process of selling fish that he had learned while studying in Spain.<sup>73</sup>

The churches also sponsored a number of associations and societies. The Methodist College Literary Institute, for instance, carried on adult education activities, including lectures and debates, on "a variety of historical, literary, scientific, even political and economic questions."<sup>74</sup> The institute was to continue for more than a hundred years. There was also the St. Joseph's Catholic Institute, formed in May 1872 as a result of the amalgamation of the Catholic Institute, founded in 1864, and the St. Joseph's Institute, founded in 1871. No doubt the two had already had overlapping memberships arising from their similar purposes. The documentation of the St. Joseph's Institute shows it was well organized, with a constitution and an extensive list of rules. Its organizers were adamant that the institute was needed in the city and that it was distinct from the many other associations such as the "Unions of Merchants, Mechanics, Agriculturalists, and Artists." The goal of the St. Joseph's Institute, in contrast, was "the Religious, Moral, and Literary Advancement of the young men of St. Johns,"<sup>75</sup> and to fulfill its mandate it had a billiard room and a librarian (and sub-librarian) to run the reading room and library. So organized were its leaders that they even had by-laws for the library and reading room as well as for the billiard room. By 1872 membership stood

71 William Barker and Sandra Hannaford, "Towards a History of the Book in Newfoundland" (History of the Book in Canada, 2002), p. 5, [www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca/fconfnfld\\_en.htm](http://www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca/fconfnfld_en.htm).

72 This Mechanics' Institute, formed in 1849, is not to be confused with the Mechanics' Society. See "Mechanics Institute," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Vol. 3, ed. Cyril Poole (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1991), 489. The Mechanics' Society, formed in 1827, was primarily Catholic and it forbade speaking about religion or politics. It provided education in their hall during the mid-1800s, but later began to focus on the formation of unions. See "Mechanics Society," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 3:489-90. The Mechanics' Institute did not have a history of success in British North America, in part because it was formed and led by the middle class to serve the needs of the working class and its educational offerings often seemed to be out of step with the needs of the intended audience. For an account of the limited progress of the institute in Montreal, see Nora Robins, "'Useful Education for the Workingman': The Montreal Mechanics' Institute 1828-70," in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*, 20-34; and Martin Hewitt, "Science as Spectacle: Popular Scientific Culture in St. John, New Brunswick, 1830-1850," *Acadiensis* XVIII, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 91-119.

73 Judge Daniel W. Prowse, "Progress in Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (October 1908): 5.

74 "Methodist College Literary Institute," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 3:320.

75 *Rules and Constitution of the St. Joseph's Catholic Institute*, 1872 (pamphlet from the Roman Catholic Archives, St. John's), 4, 7.

at 128 members, including the future Bishop Michael Howley and his brothers John and James. Yet it is unclear to what degree the St. Joseph's Institute was genuinely assertive in sponsoring formal educational activities or had a positive impact on literacy rates in the city. A sharper focus may well have been on keeping young men out of trouble in a time when boys working on the wharves were given liquor to drink three times a day.<sup>76</sup> This theme of moral regulation corresponded loosely with the goals of the NSS and the SPG, though in a Catholic context. Commenting on similar uses of adult education during the 20th century, James Overton notes that it was a way of domesticating the working class<sup>77</sup>; however, for the institute's supporters – in a world where poverty was seen as linked to degradation and immorality – education was viewed as a cure.

Even according to those terms, however, the educational associations frequently fell short. In his discursive account of old St. John's, Paul O'Neill names many of these associations and their buildings.<sup>78</sup> Seemingly, the various classes of men and women had many places to go to read, talk about books, and listen to lectures on topics as various as Egypt<sup>79</sup> and roads.<sup>80</sup> Yet despite the presence of a Mechanics' Institute and the seemingly duplicate Mechanics' Society, there is a question of how helpful and accessible these were in advancing the education of the working classes and the illiterate. Indeed, a newspaper editorial in 1887 suggested that the Mechanics' Society and Home Industries Society had not done much to educate the working men.<sup>81</sup> Although certainly attempting to keep young men healthily busy, the associations' efforts at education as such appear to have been sporadic.

Apart from the literary efforts of the various societies, institutes, and associations, several groups in St. John's were also focused on skills and trades – specifically in increasing the employability of the adult poor through teaching artisanal skills.<sup>82</sup> Among these were the schools of industry or charity schools, formed in 1802, which though technically non-denominational were attended by many Roman Catholics. The St. John's Factory, formed in 1832 by a group of 36 women, with an all-female executive, was one such effort to educate for practical skills and employability.<sup>83</sup> This factory was an outgrowth of the work of the St.

76 Bishop Michael F. Howley, *Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland* (1888; repr. Belleville, ON: Mika Publishing, 1979), 226-30.

77 Overton, "Moral Education of the Poor," 253.

78 Paul O'Neill, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland*, 2nd ed. (St. Phillip's, NL: Bolder Press, 2003).

79 Moses Harvey, *Lectures on Egypt and its Monuments as Illustrative of Scripture* (St. John's: Thomas McConnan, 1857).

80 Alexander Murray, "Roads: A Popular Lecture Delivered before the Athenaeum Institute on March 26, 1877" (St. John's: Robt Winton, 1877).

81 "Education Out of School," *Daily Colonist*, 1 October 1887.

82 As early as John Guy's settlement in Cupids in Conception Bay in 1610, there were accounts of apprentices sent to learn a trade in the colony. Letters and journals from John Guy are now archived on the website of the Baccalieu Trail Heritage Corporation. See especially "A Letter from John Guy to John Slaney," [http://www.baccalieudigs.ca/journal\\_1.asp](http://www.baccalieudigs.ca/journal_1.asp). There is also considerable discussion of apprenticeship in Newfoundland in Oppenheimer, *Some Patterns in the Early History*, 30-40, as well as reference to apprenticeships at Cupids in Mel Baker, "Schools," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 5:100.

83 The establishment of the factory is reported in *The Royal Gazette* (18 December 1832).

John's Charity Schools, which were absorbed into the Newfoundland School Society in 1834.<sup>84</sup> In its many grant requests to the House of Assembly,<sup>85</sup> the Committee of the St. John's Factory described its work as helping the poor to become self-reliant. In its request to the legislature in 1838, for instance, the group claimed to have employed some 50 to 60 persons permanently through its various departments "of spinning, sewing, knitting, and netmaking." According to the committee, the poor people working in the factory were developing "habits of industry and a consequent feeling of independence from which such blessings to themselves and to the country would result." The petitioners, William Thomas and J. Jennings, chair and secretary, respectively, of the committee, argued that "in a fishing country the instruction of the poor, in the art of net making particularly, must eventually become to them a source of permanent and substantial advantage."<sup>86</sup> It seems odd that men were leading the factory committee so soon after its founding by women, but no explanation is given. Similar requests were made in 1844 and 1849, the latter asking for a continued yearly grant since the group not only gave employment but also "instruction in many useful arts."<sup>87</sup> The last reference to the factory in the *Journal of the House of Assembly* was in 1852.<sup>88</sup> In many ways, this factory was a precursor of the trade schools and workplace education programs of the 20th century and a continuation of the industrial tradition of the St. John's Schools of Industry. Given that the factory was repeatedly funded through the public purse, one assumes strong public support for it or at least support in influential quarters of society based on the principle that training led to employment.<sup>89</sup> The petitions to the House of Assembly claimed that the skills being learned, especially net-making, were invaluable in a fishing country. Whether many trainees of the factory actually found work in the town is unknown.

The tradition of the St. John's Factory was apparently taken up by the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which was established in St. John's in 1852 by Roman Catholic Bishop John T. Mullock.<sup>90</sup> This organization, created to provide support of diverse kinds for the poor, is still strong within many Catholic parishes today, though its role now is basically confined to providing food and furniture to those who request it. The society's "brief history" indicates that it continued the industrial training tradition of the Old Factory until the fire of 1892, after which it opened a new building on Harvey Road.<sup>91</sup> According to its published reports, by 1877 the society

84 Mulcahy, "Schools of Industry," 18. See also Barnes, *History of Education*, 43.

85 A previous request from 1835 is referenced in *Journal of the House of Assembly* (29 September 1838): 60.

86 *Journal of the House of Assembly* (29 September 1838): 60.

87 *Journal of the House of Assembly* (20 March 1849). The Secretary of the factory, Robert Prowse, Judge Prowse's father, makes a petition on their behalf in 1851, and they are granted 40 pounds. See *Journal of the House of Assembly* (1851): 145, 263.

88 *Journal of the House of Assembly* (1852): Appendix, 296.

89 See also White, *History of SPG Supported Schools*, 131.

90 David J. Grant, "The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Newfoundland. 1852-2002" (unpub. manuscript, 2002). See also n.a., *The Rules and Regulations of the Society*, box St. Vincent de Paul, Roman Catholic Archives.

91 This is likely an extension of the work of the St. John's Factory. In a history of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Grant notes that the society's factory was on the lands of the Continental Church

was employing 145 widows and orphans in “cutting and bundling splits, bagging coal, sewing clothes from cut patterns, and mending various garments.”<sup>92</sup> Whether this continued the factory practice of training is unclear; likely, it was viewed as charity work and the educational intent declined over time. The limited evidence suggests that both employment and on-the-job training in the factory had ceased by the time that the great fire of 1892 burned its building and records: the one surviving letter following the fire mentions only day schools and the need for a night school.<sup>93</sup>

Very well documented is the navigation school of the Benevolent Irish Society (BIS).<sup>94</sup> Following its success with providing free education for children through its Orphan Asylum School, the BIS decided early on to extend its efforts to young men. Flush with a grant of £100 from government in the first education grants of 1836, the BIS opened a night school for adults to expand its efforts in teaching navigation (as it did in the day schools).<sup>95</sup> Candidates for admission to the navigation class for adults were “not to exceed forty in number” and each applicant was to have “a certificate of good character from merchants, masters and owners of vessels, and others connected with the shipping interests of the colony.”<sup>96</sup> Not only was the BIS a supporter of good character, but its leaders were also conscious of St. John’s as a port city with a population heavily dependent on fishing and sealing and, consequently, of the potential for nautical training to increase young men’s chances of gaining employment. By 1837 the society had launched a night school for navigation, and four years later it took pride in reporting that some of its students were working at sea.<sup>97</sup> Also in 1841 the BIS claimed more generally that its nautical school was helping men to “become useful and respectable members of society” – that is, employable and not prone to the temptations of idleness. The society’s records confirm that the young men who learned navigation were able to find useful work, and BIS efforts in navigation were to continue for much of the 19th century.<sup>98</sup> In addition to this concerted effort in navigation, and with the assistance of

Society (known as the Newfoundland School Society), and it was located at Fort Townsend. The St. Vincent de Paul Factory burned down in the fire of 1892, after which the society established the new factory building on Harvey Road. See Grant, “The Society of St. Vincent de Paul.”

92 “Annual Report of the St. Vincent de Paul Society,” *The Newfoundlander*, 12 January 1877; see also “Report of the Proceedings of the St. Vincent de Paul Society,” *The Newfoundlander*, 7 December 1865. Notable among the list of subscribers in 1865 are the names Ayre, Howley (Rev. Dr.), and Job, which were well-established Newfoundland families.

93 “New Factory, Harvey Road,” 20 February 1893, handwritten manuscript, box St. Vincent de Paul Records, Roman Catholic Archives.

94 For a thorough discussion of the BIS contributions to education in Newfoundland, see Noel A. Veitch, *The Contribution of the Benevolent Irish Society to Education in Newfoundland from 1823 to 1875* (MEd thesis, St. Francis Xavier University, 1965). And Bishop Howley waxes eloquent about the formation and accomplishment of the BIS in his *Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland*.

95 Brother J. Bert Darcy, “The B.I.S., Part 1,” *The Monitor* (St. John’s), September 1989. See also Minutes of the BIS, 17 February 1836, p. 140, TRPAD.

96 Minutes of the BIS, 24 August 1836, pp. 155-6, TRPAD.

97 Minutes of the BIS, 17 February 1841, p. 260, TRPAD. See also Barnes, *History of Education in Newfoundland*, 51.

98 Minutes of the BIS, 17 February 1841, p. 260, TRPAD; see also Minutes of the BIS, 7 February 1845, pp. 27, 28, TRPAD.

Franciscan monks who arrived in 1847 to teach in the Orphan Asylum School, the BIS was able to offer public lectures and a Sunday school for those who were unable to attend school during the week.<sup>99</sup> The BIS saw this school as contributing to the “moral and religious as well as the educational character of the community.”<sup>100</sup> Again, education was seen as a way of raising the moral fibre of the population. Archbishop Mullock encouraged children and adults, including servants who were working during the week, to attend the school on Sunday, especially since it was free.<sup>101</sup> Mullock’s intention clearly combined religious sentiment with his version of economic realism, but there is no evidence that these efforts had any impact on either employment or poverty in Newfoundland.

Towards the end of the 19th century, however, a sharper focus on literacy itself began to inform adult education initiatives in Newfoundland. Following an inspection of Anglican schools in 1876, Canon William Pilot reported widespread anxiety regarding high levels of illiteracy. Of night schools, Pilot wrote: “Everything should be done to encourage their establishment. Many have been in operation during the year now past.”<sup>102</sup> And indeed there were, though obviously they were insufficient to meet the need; eleven years later, an editorial in the *Daily Colonist* of 1 October 1887 advocated “education out of school” and cited general concern about illiteracy.<sup>103</sup> The writer lamented that there were many mechanics and working men with no formal education and that nothing was being done for them: “We need only turn our attention to the state of workmen in other countries, to find out how backward our mechanics are in those respects.” The editorialist pleaded with the Mechanics’ Society and Home Industries Association to start offering free public lectures on practical subjects, the hope being that it would result in “the possession of a better educated mechanics class, a class of thinking, well-informed men, interested in matters of public importance, and capable of forming a just and true opinion concerning them”; the editorialist also called for a free public library to augment the lectures. Thus, literacy was now connected to a wider concern for the general level of intellectual discourse.

The *Daily Colonist* continued its crusade to foster adult education. On 7 November 1887 it published an editorial article that named education as a key priority for the island.<sup>104</sup> It stressed the importance of education to improve citizens’ knowledge of its government and public figures, as well as increasing their awareness of the “soil, minerals, forests and fisheries” of Newfoundland and other places. The editorial also argued that education “will make our people look to themselves and not to the government or merchants” and that once the public was

99 Public lectures are noted in the *BIS Minutes*, 17 February 1849, pp. 150, 152, TRPAD. The schools for adults are discussed in the *BIS Minutes*, 17 February 1853, p. 225, and 17 February 1854, p. 232, TRPAD.

100 Minutes of the BIS, 17 February 1849, p. 52, TRPAD.

101 “Pastoral of the Rt. Rev. Doctor Mullock, RCB of Newfoundland on the Opening of the Sunday Schools in the Orphan Asylum and Presentation Convent School-Rooms of this Town,” *The Pilot*, 21 February 1852.

102 Canon William Pilot, *Report of the Public Schools of Newfoundland under Church of England Boards for the Year Ended December 31, 1876* (St. John’s: Robert Winton, 1876), 24.

103 “Education Out of School” *Daily Colonist*, 1 October 1887.

104 “What We Need in Newfoundland,” *Daily Colonist*, 7 November 1887.



educated it would be able to demand more honesty in public figures. To underscore the point, the writer declared that “education costs \$100,000 per annum, and pauperism \$200,000,” concluding with a call for an increase to the education grant and for a plan and a person to lead the way. The call for increased participation in the public sphere was now explicit and urgent.

This clarion call prompted a vigorous response from correspondents of the newspaper. One, whose pseudonym was “Mall Boy,” decried the neglect of “our young tradesmen, fishermen and laborers.” He noted that Father O’Brien, a Roman Catholic priest of the town, had started a night school to address the problem. “There appears to me,” wrote Mall Boy, “to be only one man in the city who has thoroughly grasped the difficulty, and who is making most philanthropic and successful efforts, to overcome it and that man is the Rev. Fr. O’Brien, and the means – his night school.” Yet it seemed that this night school could only take “two or three hundred pupils,” which was not enough to meet the need. Mall Boy acknowledged the education efforts of societies such as the BIS, and called on the “British, Total Abstinence, the United Fishermen, the Star of the Sea and the Mechanics,” as well as the Home Industries Association, to rise to the occasion by establishing a technical school to teach carpentry, navigation, farming, and other skills.<sup>105</sup>

Mall Boy recognized the importance of an intermediary organization in the effort to improve education. Newfoundland did not develop a series of vocational and technical schools until well into the 20th century. Resorting to shaming, Mall Boy pointed out that many of these societies had heated and lit facilities for their own members, and there were many teachers who could be available for a small sum to teach in the winter months. To add insult to injury, he implied that they had spent too much time in their “cosy bar-rooms; they needed to “get out of the old, selfish conservative rut,” by setting up night schools. There was no indication, however, that any of them did. Mall Boy’s letter was distinctive in its concern for employment rather than intellectual development, thus illustrating anew the ongoing tension in adult education discussions between these competing emphases.

Mall Boy and the *Daily Colonist* soon received support from another anonymous letter writer, “Terra Nova.”<sup>106</sup> Reiterating that many young men had left school early and had not had a chance to further their education, Terra Nova pointed out that too many of them had little to do in the evening and ended up in trouble (again raising the issue of morality in the context of education). Night schools would remedy the problem, and Terra Nova called on the various societies to act accordingly. President O’Neil of the Total Abstinence Society, in particular, could “immortalize” himself, according to Terra Nova, and if O’Neil championed the cause other societies would follow. Again, however, there is no indication that the various societies responded by taking on the cause of adult education in any systematic way. In retrospect it seems odd in a town with so many societies declaring themselves supportive of education that one of them did not take up the challenge right away. The need for

105 Mall Boy, “The Introduction of Night Schools” (letter to the editor), *Daily Colonist*, 15 November 1887.

106 Terra Nova, “The Night School Question.”

education for employment, as well as education to combat the immorality of idleness, was thus allowed to remain as a recurring theme for almost another century.

Yet Mall Boy had been right to point out that, as an individual, Father Patrick O'Brien had taken up the cause of night schools.<sup>107</sup> He had revived the Old Factory night school in 1886, likely the same school referred to by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Father O'Brien's night school ran mainly with volunteers and enrolled some 200-300 students.<sup>108</sup> A fundraiser for this night school at the Star of the Sea Hall was noted in the *Daily Colonist* in the fall of 1887, with a Mr. Hutton and a Miss Fisher scheduled to entertain the crowd. The paper reported that the concert would take place at 8.30 on a Friday evening, giving those working in retail stores the opportunity to attend, and that the proceeds would go towards lighting, school furniture, and other necessities.<sup>109</sup> Although the newspaper subsequently provided a review and description of the concert, including the names of performers and the fact that Governor Henry Arthur Blake and his wife attended, it offered no discussion of the school itself.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, few records of the school appear to have been kept. O'Brien had been a trained teacher before his ordination, and consistently set up night schools to teach basic reading and writing in other parishes to which he had been assigned: at the Roman Catholic Cathedral, St. Patrick's Church in the west end of St. John's, and in Mobile, Witless Bay, and Bay Bulls.<sup>111</sup> While he was in St. Patrick's Parish in St. John's, he and Bishop Howley exchanged correspondence on renting facilities for a night school.<sup>112</sup> Howley commended O'Brien for "the great amount of work you have done under such difficulties which would crush a person of less strength of character."<sup>113</sup>

O'Brien's interest in teaching adults seems to have sparked a tradition of night schools within the Roman Catholic Cathedral parish. Vincent Burke, while superintendent of Catholic schools, noted in 1937 that there had been a night school there for 30 years.<sup>114</sup> Although specific evidence is fragmentary, a Reverend Dr.

107 Father O'Brien was born at Bay Bulls, 1859, and educated at St. Bonaventure's College and All Hallows Seminary in Dublin; see *Monitor*, 23 March 1940. He was also an inventor with a number of marine patents, one of which he gave free to fishermen and shipbuilders. See "Rev. Father O'Brien will give them the Privilege of Using his Patent," *Evening Telegram*, 26 May 1894.

108 Mall Boy, "The Introduction of Night Schools."

109 "Concert in Aid of the Night School," *Daily Colonist*, 25 October 1887.

110 *Daily Colonist*, 29 October 1887.

111 "Obituary, Rev. P.J. O'Brien, PP," *Monitor*, 23 March 1940. See also file of Reverend Patrick O'Brien, Roman Catholic Archives.

112 Bishop Howley to Father O'Brien: 11 December 1901, 21 March 1902, 15 October 1902, file 106/10/9, Roman Catholic Archives. Indeed, so important was the matter that the diocese leased land in 1898 from the Ryan Family at Riverhead, where St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Parish is located. See Bishop Howley files, file 106/16/20, Roman Catholic Archives.

113 Howley to O'Brien, 11 December 1901, Roman Catholic Archives.

114 "Adult Education – A Challenge" – unsigned and unaddressed draft of letter (likely from Vincent Burke) acknowledging the night schools at the Goulds led by Rev. Dr. Carter. Burke notes that Dr. Carter had served previously at the Roman Catholic Cathedral, where there had been a night school for more than 36 years. The date of this letter is likely 1930-1931, given the nature of its references to the Newfoundland Adult Education Association, which had been formed in 1929. See GN /77/1/B, box E17, TRPAD.

James J. Greene, who had attained his doctorate in Rome, was one of the leaders<sup>115</sup>; his night school of 1915-1916 had 130 young men registered.<sup>116</sup> Greene was also chaplain of the Star of the Sea Association, which held night schools prior to a 1920 fire that destroyed its building for the second time (the first being the fire of 1892).<sup>117</sup> The Christian Brothers were also involved in this Roman Catholic night school at some point in the early 1900s, likely in response to a request by Bishop Howley.<sup>118</sup> The bishop was greatly concerned about the young men of the town, in whom he feared idleness and illiteracy to be a toxic combination for which night schools could be a remedy:

There is a class of boys too advanced in years, and too wayward, to be amenable to the influence of their parents – of too low a grade in the social scale to be reached by our present educational machinery – and for whose custody we have no competent public Institutions. They are, consequently, thrown into the most uncongenial surroundings, and exposed to many temptations to vice. It was in an endeavor to rescue this race of incipient criminals that our night schools were opened.<sup>119</sup>

Likewise, according to a history of the Christian Brothers by Brother Bert Darcy, a Brother Vincent Michael O’Sullivan, who during the day taught 140 students in grades one to three at St. Patrick’s Hall from 1904 to 1909 (later at St. Bon’s from 1909-1921), also taught adult evening classes – apparently at some cost to his health:

There were many young men in St. John’s who had never had the benefit of an education, religious or otherwise. During the day, they were busy in their various employments, so, to help them, the Brothers had instituted a night school. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from Christmas to Easter, Br. O’Sullivan and the other Brothers taught these under-privileged youths from seven to nine o’clock at night in the Vincent de Paul rooms. The attendance was usually about two hundred. The Brothers, assisted by some of their senior students and ex-pupils, taught these youths and adults to read and write and to perform elementary calculations, while preparing them also for the reception of the sacraments: First Confession, First Communion, and Confirmation. It was no wonder that Br.

115 “Star of the Sea Night School,” *Monitor*, 22 February 1936. See also Reverend Dr. Greene files, Roman Catholic Archives.

116 Michael McCarthy, “Education in the Roman Catholic Schools in 1915-16,” *Monitor*, June 1980.

117 “Star of the Sea Association,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 5:292-3.

118 “Pastoral Letter of Bishop M. Howley,” 22 February 1903, Howley files, file 109/9/2, Roman Catholic Archives. The night school appears to have reverted from the brothers back to the priests of the Roman Catholic cathedral since Reverend Dr. Greene was teaching there in 1915. See Michael McCarthy, “Education in the Roman Catholic Schools.”

119 Bishop Howley, Pastoral Letter, 22 February 1903, Howley files, 1892-1914, file 106/9/2, Roman Catholic Archives.

Michael developed stomach trouble which plagued him most of his life and was the principal cause of his death in 1950.<sup>120</sup>

In this instance again, as in church-related initiatives reaching back to the 18th century, adult education was seen as contributing to a wide range of goals: addressing idleness (and accompanying moral decay), fostering religion, and increasing employment to boot.<sup>121</sup> This hodgepodge of motives had to serve in the place of any coherent educational philosophy while also perhaps helping serve the interests of the Roman Catholic church during the late 19th and early 20th centuries by forestalling any state monopoly of educational curricula and practices or teacher education.

There were also many other sporadic efforts regarding adult education in Newfoundland towards the end of the 19th and the early 20th century. There were navigation schools in Twillingate,<sup>122</sup> industrial schools at Mount Cashel to prepare young boys for jobs in industry,<sup>123</sup> night classes in technical drawing offered by the minister of Maritime and Fisheries,<sup>124</sup> classes for outport girls offered by the Girls' Department of the King George V Institute,<sup>125</sup> and night schools in basic literacy for members of the Fisherman's Protective Union<sup>126</sup> as well as the naval reserve.<sup>127</sup> The preoccupation with education in the trades remained as did the pursuit of basic literacy, but systematization began to prevail only with the provision of a government grant for night schools in 1920 followed by the formation of the Newfoundland Adult Education Association in 1929.<sup>128</sup>

The preceding tradition, therefore, had been one of erratic and unfocused efforts, animated by deep and interlocking concerns for moral fortitude, literacy, and economic independence. Despite the initiatives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Newfoundland School Society, and their successors, schooling for children took priority. This was especially true after the first educational grant of

120 Brother J. Bert Darcy, "Out of the Past: Teaching 100 Years Ago," *The Christian Brothers Educational Record (Necrology)* (n.p., 1951), pp. 153-97, Christian Brothers Archives, St. John's.

121 To mark the 1936 closing of the cathedral night school, recently moved from the Holy Name Hall to the Star of the Sea Hall, there was a major gathering in St. John's attended by the archbishop, Dr. Burke, and Mr. Frecker (the deputy minister of education). The report of the closing noted that the school had been ongoing for more than 40 years. The school moved to yet another location, given that enrollments were still strong (some 150 boys and men were registered in the 1935-36 year, from all denominations). See both "Formal Closing of Night School," *Monitor*, 16 May 1936, and "Opening New Quarters," *Monitor*, 23 July 1936.

122 *Twillingate Sun*, 23 December 1880.

123 Judge Daniel W. Prowse, "Industrial Education," *Orphan's Friend*, no. 2 (December 1901): 2-5, box Villa Nova, Roman Catholic Archives.

124 Eli Dawe, "Technical Education" (advertisement), *Newfoundland Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1909), back cover.

125 Annie H. Hayward, "The Girls' Department of King George V. Institute," *The Distaff* (1916): 11 (digitized archive of the CNS); see also "The Seamen's Institute," *Among the Deep Sea Fishers* 12, no. 1 (1914): 27.

126 Melvin Baker, "The Rise of the Fishermen's Protective Union, the First World War and the National Government, 1908-1919," 1994, <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~melbaker/fpuhis.html>.

127 "The Newfoundland Naval Reserve," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1906): 17-18.

128 Newfoundland Adult Education Association, *What is it? What are its aims?* (St. John's: Advocate, 1930), CNS. A description is also provided in Overton, "Moral Education of the Poor."

1836, when there was a concerted effort to establish a stronger and more extensive system with schools and designated school boards. As the NSS then fell into decline, so the neglect of adult education became a contributing force to Newfoundland's persistence as a country with low levels of literacy; the numerous societies that sprang up in the mid-to-late 19th century – however far-reaching their stated ambitions – could do little more than fill in the gaps where they perceived them.

The long-term effects of a population with limited literacy are no small matter, and this problem persists in Newfoundland. As late as 2003 the province had a 50 per cent rate of literacy, which is below the national average of 58 per cent.<sup>129</sup> The insufficiency of efforts to educate adults, whether informal or formal, during the 19th century contributed to the limitation of Newfoundland's opportunities for economic development – even though this was just one factor and has to be interpreted in the context of broad issues such as the predominant role of the fishery and uncertain relationships with other governments. Newfoundland lacked an educated populace and, as David Alexander argued many years ago, there was an economic price to be paid.<sup>130</sup> For all that, there were many leaders in adult education during the period under review. The men and women of the NSS come immediately to mind, as do Father O'Brien and the committee of women who sponsored the St. John's Factory. Yet, in the absence of an overriding vision and a comprehensive education plan for adults, and within the circumstances created by the lack of a stable and prospering economy, the adult education efforts documented here were splintered and clearly not enough to meet the needs of a society where children left school all too early.

Newfoundland did develop a strong oral culture that no doubt had an ameliorating effect. The *Journal of the House of Assembly* and the myriad newspapers from the 19th century, for instance, reveal a lively debating culture that developed over time. Patrick O'Flaherty's historical work provides evidence of the internal agitation for reform, even from the earliest years, and shows how it was made manifest in public forums.<sup>131</sup> This oral and indigenous culture developed despite the lag in literacy rates. Further research may uncover other examples of adult education history, especially women's efforts in the community and in the home, as well as the various popular education techniques like memorization and recitation, which helped to develop this strong oral culture. But the sparseness of evidence is bound to present obstacles. Much of the written documentation reflects the views of those who kept the historical records, in many instances the churches and the government. We do not have substantial resources in the way of letters and diaries from this period to reveal the students' needs, the communities' interests, nor the public's opinions on adult education and literacy – and, in any event, the written record can only faintly and indirectly relay the voices of those who themselves lacked literacy.

129 This is for the 16-65 age group, as reported in the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALLS) (2003). There has been no significant change in the data since 1994. See Statistics Canada and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey* (Report from IALLS) (Ottawa: Author, 2005).

130 Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development," 4.

131 O'Flaherty, "Seeds of Reform," 39-56.



At best, we can draw inferences from participation rates, subscription levels, and letters to the editor that there was substantial public support for educational efforts such as the NSS night schools and those by O'Brien. Yet the picture that emerges from this article is of a haphazard array of effort – well intentioned but never quite sustained enough to make a major impact. While social control and religious proselytization were always at play in the adult education attempts of the era, the evidence suggests that the expected economic and cultural benefits from both vocational training and a more general enhancement of literacy were also to the fore. To be sure, this was top-down education in which the providers of adult education decided the curriculum and determined its societal goals. This depositing of knowledge, without a clear plan or strategy, comes close to what educationist Paulo Freire called “banking education,” or a way of limiting participation or engagement.<sup>132</sup> In some cases, including the early religious societies, the specific goals were seen through a moral and religious lens. In others, the pursuit of a practical and ready solution to pressing social and economic problems was paramount. The BIS, for instance, decided that a marine economy required marine-skilled workers, and so provided a navigation school. Similarly, the Old Factory organizers decided to teach knitting and netmaking. What else Newfoundland and its adult learners may have needed was not considered. As Sean Cadigan has shown, however, Newfoundland's needs were nothing if not complex, and multiple issues affected the colony's development and in particular its marine-dominated economy.<sup>133</sup> Lack of literacy and lack of adequate training for employment were identified by the country's early adult educators as key socio-economic factors. In an educational climate short on staff, funds, and schools, and with resources stretched to the limit, it is difficult to see how their efforts might have been substantially different. In fact, they were considerable for their time.

132 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), 53.

133 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 3-12.