

The Free School Triumph in London, Canada West, 1840 to 1852 An Urban First

Michael Francis Murphy, Ph.D.

Volume 110, numéro 2, fall 2018

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1053513ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1053513ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Murphy, M. F. (2018). The Free School Triumph in London, Canada West, 1840 to 1852: An Urban First. *Ontario History*, 110(2), 210–229.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1053513ar>

Résumé de l'article

Grâce aux subventions et aux bourses les écoles publiques dans l'Ouest canadien étaient gratuites entre 1850 et 1870. Dans cet article, nous tenterons d'en expliquer les raisons en étudiant London entre les années 1840 et 1852. Nous éluciderons comment les citoyens, la structure du pouvoir et l'institution éducative avant 1850 ont contribué à la marginalisation des écoles publiques et de la plupart des jeunes de la communauté tout en privilégiant d'autres. Nous démontrerons également la façon dont le caractère évolutif du centre et le mouvement de réforme (nouvelles lois en 1849-50 concernant non seulement le système d'éducation mais aussi les municipalités, les élections et les évaluations) ont transformé le système scolaire, donnant aux écoliers la possibilité immédiate d'appartenance à un réseau compréhensif d'écoles publiques sans préjugés.

THE FREE SCHOOL TRIUMPH IN LONDON, CANADA WEST, 1840 TO 1852

An Urban First¹

by Michael Francis Murphy, Ph.D.

Between 1850 and 1870 grant-aided common schools in Canada West went free. That remarkable transition was not imposed by government. Rather it took place incrementally, locality by locality, school district by school district. Although scholars have identified the general contours of the transformation, far less is known about why schools in particular communities went free when they did?² This article attempts to answer the question by a detailed analysis of common school enrolments and

access in one urban community, London, Canada West, between 1840 and 1852. In February 1851, this inland place became the first such centre in the province to operate free schools, just months after the 1850 common school act mandated trustee elections for school boards.³ That story has two parts. The pre-mid-century narrative builds on previous work to detail how traditional relationships and provisions marginalized London's common schools and most youngsters while privileging others. The post-1850 ac-

¹ I thank W.P.J. Millar, R.D. Gidney, and an anonymous reviewer for their comments about this article.

² An exception is Peter N. Ross, "The Free School Controversy in Toronto, 1848-1852," in Paul H. Mattingly and Michael B. Katz, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 57-80.

³ "London Board of Education Minutes, 1848-1922" [London Board Minutes], The University of Western Ontario [U.W.O.], Western Archives, microfilm no. M315-20, 8 February 1851. Common schools in Toronto went free on 1 April 1851; Ross, "The Free School Controversy in Toronto," 70. Hamilton common schools went free in 1853, Kingston in 1856, Bytown (now Ottawa) in 1857 – *Annual Report of the Normal, Model, Grammar, and Common Schools in Upper Canada [sic] for the year..., with an Appendix, by the Chief Superintendent of Schools* [Provincial Annual School Report], (Quebec, John Lovell, 1854), Table B, pp. 18-20; *ibid.*, 1856, Table D, pp. 46-7; *ibid.*, 1857, Table D, 60-1.

Abstract

Grant-aided common schools in Canada West went free between 1850 and 1870. This article attempts to answer why by studying London between 1840 and 1852. It explains how citizens, the power structure, and schools intersected prior to 1850 to marginalize the community's common schools and most youngsters and to privilege others. It will demonstrate how the centre's changing character and the Reform impulse (writ both large and small, but reflected in this colony by new laws in 1849-50 covering not only education but also municipal, elections, and assessment matters), transformed education arrangements, bringing almost all school-age children immediately into its now ascendant free, comprehensive common schools.

Résumé: Grâce aux subventions et aux bourses les écoles publiques dans l'Ouest canadien étaient gratuites entre 1850 et 1870. Dans cet article, nous tenterons d'en expliquer les raisons en étudiant London entre les années 1840 et 1852. Nous éluciderons comment les citoyens, la structure du pouvoir et l'institution éducative avant 1850 ont contribué à la marginalisation des écoles publiques et de la plupart des jeunes de la communauté tout en privilégiant d'autres. Nous démontrerons également la façon dont le caractère évolutif du centre et le mouvement de réforme (nouvelles lois en 1849-50 concernant non seulement le système d'éducation mais aussi les municipalités, les élections et les évaluations) ont transformé le système scolaire, donnant aux écoliers la possibilité immédiate d'appartenance à un réseau compréhensif d'écoles publiques sans préjugés.

count provides fresh insights into how new statute law and London's unique characteristics as an urban centre, along with known factors like social and economic change, progressive attitudes, and middle-class empowerment, transformed schooling arrangements and power relations in London, quickly bringing almost all school-age (5 to 16) children into its

now ascendant, free, comprehensive (3Rs to the classics) common schools.

Right from the start (1826), London's white, Protestant, British, mostly middle-class residents, led by their Anglo-Irish elite, replicated homeland institutions, in the process turning their community into one of the most prosperous places in the province.⁴ These men were part of

⁴ London was incorporated as district centre in 1826. For more on London, see, for example, C.O. Ermatinger, *The Talbot Regime or the First Half Century of the Talbot Settlement* (St. Thomas: The Municipal World, Ltd., 1904), especially chapters XX1 and XXX1; Fred Landon, "London in Early Times," and "London in Later Times," in Jesse E. Middleton and Fred Landon, eds., *The Province of Ontario*, Vol. 11 (Toronto: The Dominion Publishing Co., Ltd., 1927), 1044-64 and 1065-83, respectively; Frederick H. Armstrong and Daniel J. Brock, "The Rise of London: A Study of Urban Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Southwestern Ontario," in F.H. Armstrong, H.A. Stevenson, J.D. Wilson, eds. *Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 80-100; Armstrong, *The Forest City: An Illustrated History of London, Canada* (Canada: Windsor Publications, Ltd., 1986); Orlo Miller, *This Was London: The First Two Centuries* (Westport, Ontario: Butternut Press Inc., 1988); John Mombourquette, "London Postponed: John Graves Simcoe and His Capital in the Wilderness," in Guy St-Denis, ed., *Simcoe's Choice: Celebrating London's Bicentennial, 1793-1993* (Toronto & Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1992), 1-30; C.F.J. Whebell, "The London Strategem: From Concept to Consummation, 1791-1855," *Simcoe's Choice*, 31-66.



Union School, c.1875 (Western University Archives, RC 60018, AFC 49-1)

the “Family Compact,” and the primitive state of colonial public administration allowed them to become oligarchs in their own sphere.⁵ By January 1852, London’s population was 7,035. Six percent of

household heads were upper-class; 59 percent, middle class; 29 percent, lower class; 12 percent unclassified.⁶ Furthermore, the town’s middling group was substantially larger than its counterparts in Toronto,

⁵ For more on the Family Compact, see Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), 109-110. For more on London’s elite, see Colin Read, “The London District Oligarchy in the Rebellion Era,” *Ontario History* 72 (December 1980), 195-209. For an assessment of how this oligarchy ran schools in the 1820s and 1830s, see Michael F. Murphy, “The Common School Amendment Acts of the and the Re-shaping of Schooling in London, Upper Canada,” *Historical Studies in Education* 8 (Fall 1996), 147-66. In the mid-1830s, most London youth were enrolled in a school (private, grammar, common). Also see Anthony DiMascio, *The Idea of Popular Schooling in Upper Canada: Print Culture, Public Discourse, and the Demand for Education* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012) for a unique view of these developments.

⁶ Data for religion, birth, and social class between 1842 and 1852 can be found in Murphy, “School and Society in London, Canada, 1826 to 1871: The Evolution of a System of Public Education,” Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1995, Department of History, U.W.O., II, Tables 29-31, pp. 449-51. For the doctorate and for this study, I created social class categories (upper, middle, lower, unclassified) based on a widely accepted occupational classification scheme developed for the Five Cities Project in

Hamilton, Kingston, and Bytown.⁷ No residents were of French origin, unlike in the other places.⁸ Its share of English, Welsh, Scottish, American, Methodist, and Baptist settlers was the highest of

the five communities,⁹ whereas its share of Irish and Catholics was the lowest,¹⁰ as was its pupil numbers.¹¹ London's percent share of lower-class household heads also was the second lowest in the quintet.¹² I

the United States, one subsequently expanded upon by Michael B. Katz and Ian Davey for the Canadian Social History Project – see, for instance, Theodore Hershberg, et al., “Occupation and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth-Century Cities: A Collaborative Inquiry,” *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 7 (June 1973), 174-215; Hershberg and Robert Dockhorn, “Occupational Classification: The Philadelphia Social History Project,” *Historical Methods Newsletter*, (June 1976), 59-99; Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), Appendix Two, 343-48; and Murphy, “School and Society,” 1, 15-21.

⁷ These were the five largest urban places in the province, and the only urban places in Canada West separated out for special attention by census enumerators in 1851-52. 58.6 percent of London's household heads were middle class, 48.8 percent in Toronto, 32.0 percent in Hamilton, 44.8 percent in Kingston, and 40.8 percent in Bytown. Figures were calculated from data in Canada, *Census of Canada, 1851-2* [*Census of Canada, 1851-2*] (Quebec: John Lovell, 1853), First Report, Appendix No. IV, Upper Canada, Personal Census, Professions, Trades and Occupations, 1851-2, pp. 506-25.

⁸ 1.5 percent of Toronto residents were of French origin; 0.1 percent, in Hamilton, 1.8 percent, in Kingston, 26.5 percent, in Bytown. Figures were calculated from data in *Census of Canada, 1851-2*, Appendix No. 1, General Abstract of Origins - Upper Canada, p. 36.

⁹ For London's percent share of Methodists and Baptists see endnote 10. For origin see below.

LOCATION	ENGLAND/ WALES	SCOTLAND	IRELAND	CANADA	UNITED STATES	OTHER
Ontario	8.7	8	18.5	58	4.6	2.2
London	19	10.1	26.7	37.2	5.6	1.4
Toronto	16.1	7	36.7	33.9	4.6	1.7
Hamilton	16.1	9.8	33.2	32.7	5.2	3
Kingston	11.3	4.6	37.9	41.5	3.2	1.5
Bytown	4.2	4	32	57.7	1.3	0.8

Figures were calculated from data in *Census of Canada, 1851-2*, Appendix No. 1, Origins, p. 36

¹⁰ For London's percent share of Irish see endnote 9. For religion see below.

LOCATION	CHURCH OF ENGLAND	PRESBYTERIAN	ROMAN CATHOLIC	BAPTIST	METHODIST	OTHER
Ontario	23.4	21.4	17.6	4.8	22.4	10.4
London	31.3	14.9	16.8	5.3	15.8	15.9
Toronto	37.6	14.8	25.8	3.1	13.4	5.3
Hamilton	30.9	18.9	33.2	3.8	16	2.2
Kingston	35.5	18.6	32	1.2	10.4	2.3
Bytown	12.3	10.7	61.8	0.3	7	7.9

Figures were calculated from data in *Census of Canada, 1851-2*, First Report, Appendix No. II, General Abstract of Religions - Upper Canada, pp. 70-71.

¹¹ Provincial Annual School Report, 1850, p. 72. I used data for the 1850 school year, which ended 31 December, because the successful free school vote took place on 10 February 1851.

¹² 23.2 percent of London's household heads were lower class compared to 21.8 percent in Toronto, 33.4 percent in Hamilton, 25.7 percent in Kingston, and 31.6 percent in Bytown – *Census of Canada, 1851-2*, Appendix No. IV, pp. 506-25.

will endeavour to show that these factors plus those identified above account for why London produced free common schools faster than any other urban centre in Canada West.

The journey to tax supported schools took years to complete. Hamilton Hunter, a Royal Belfast College, Ireland, graduate, and the second headmaster of the prestigious Union (common) school, described the inhibiting impact of the British cultural heritage on educational change at an April 1852 "Soiree." Speaking to enthusiastic Londoners about the triumphs of the past two years, when numbers of school-age (5 to 16) children in common schools had risen from four to nine of ten, he claimed that they had resulted from a decline in the "lurking remains of... aristocratical feelings". Hunter continued:

It is considered by some to be wrong to educate the children of all classes of the community at the same school. They tell us practically that the children of the rich should not be educated with those of the middle and lower classes of the community... because by coming into contact with the inferior classes, feelings of pride and haughtiness are engendered by the consciousness of worldly superiority... It is said that by educating all at one school we bring them to the same standard and that a 'low standard'.¹³

The headmaster's statement highlights the significant roles that culture

and class played in stalling educational innovation in Canada West during the mid-nineteenth-century. Proponents of the British cultural heritage believed that they should extend their institutions elsewhere because they were superior and good; that there was a class to rule and classes to be ruled; and that a formal alliance between church and state was necessary. They also expected education provisions to reflect the demands of their stratified society and that parents pay to educate their own children.¹⁴ R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar elaborate on the last point, noting that authorities in Canada West, as in Britain, provided the 3Rs to many children and an advanced education to a select few; bifurcated studies into a "common" or "ordinary education" and a "superior education;" divided schools by sex and by social class; and made schools "extensions of, and subordinate to, families."¹⁵ The same expectations prevailed in London at mid-century, where residents can be classified as "integrationists" (egalitarians) and "segregationists" (separatists). Integrationists supported schooling the classes, races, sexes, and denominations together. Segregationists wanted them educated apart.

Appointed, powerful, propertied, British, mostly Anglican, London district commissioners ran their grammar

¹³ "Union School Soiree," *Canadian Free Press*, 15 April 1852.

¹⁴ Robin W. Winks "Introduction," in *British Imperialism*, R.W. Winks, ed., (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 3; William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 19-49.

¹⁵ R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario Education* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 23-30.

and common schools in the 1840s as in the past. They set high fees for the London district grammar school, making it an exclusive preserve for rich boys;¹⁶ and they distributed small state grants to local common school officials to help them educate less well-off, but fee paying, children.¹⁷ Wealthy parents patronized private schools too, both at home and elsewhere.¹⁸

School and society were compatible for much of the decade. When steady demographic growth in the late-thirties caused municipal services to crumble, for example, the desire to have greater control over their own destiny motivated progressive Londoners to ask the legislature in 1840 to incorporate their centre as a police village. Lawmakers allowed them to extend municipal boundaries to create four wards, and to elect one councillor per ward to a co-ordinating agency called a Board of Police.¹⁹ A fifth

person elected at large completed its membership. Councillors chose a mayor from among their midst—George Goodhue, a former American, being the first.²⁰ But even though mainly middle-class Londoners elected councillors like themselves to run the town in their best interest, the province vested power over common schooling in district councils via an 1841 statute for that purpose.²¹ Once operational in January 1842, commissioners²² appointed Anglo-Irish clergyman and future Bishop of Huron, the Reverend Benjamin Cronyn, as council chair and Englishman, the Reverend William F. Clarke, a Congregational, as council secretary. Cronyn divided the wards into three school divisions. Local trustees, with his approval, hired male teachers to instruct in these institutions. Six women ran private schools.²³

To improve bungled operations, government replaced the 1841 law

¹⁶ Pupil fees were \$5 a quarter – “London District Grammar School,” *London Inquirer*, 5 August 1842.

¹⁷ Murphy, “School and Society,” II, Table 36, p. 459.

¹⁸ Provincial annual school reports record four to five private schools annually in London between 1847 and 1849, one in 1850, and none in 1851 and 1852. Other sources list twenty-two private schools between 1843 and 1852 (per quarter, girls paid \$3 to \$4, boys, \$4 to \$8) – Murphy, “School and Society,” I, 161-64.

¹⁹ Wards were named after patron saints of the United Kingdom (St. Patrick and St. George wards were north of King street, St. David and St. Andrew wards were south of it) – for a map of wards and school sites between 1843 and 1852, see Murphy, “School and Society,” I, 110.

²⁰ Landon, “London in Early Times,” 1060-62.

²¹ Miller in *This Was London* (p. 65) wrote that 384 of 4,668 residents (8 percent) voted for mayor when London became a town in January 1848. Of the twenty-four councillors between 1843 and 1847, two-thirds were middle class and one-third, upper class. Most were Anglicans and skilled craftsmen from the British Isles – Murphy, “School and Society,” II, Table 35, p. 458.

²² “Education - London and London District Board Members,” *Upper Canada Gazette*, (Toronto, 12 November 1840), 269, c. 1 Government House: Toronto, 3 November 1840.

²³ Archives Ontario [AO], RG2, C6C, Box 1, London Board of Police to Robert Murray, Deputy Superintendent, 5 December 1842; *ibid.*, George Railton, Deputy Clerk, London, to the Education Department, 15 September 1842.

with the 1843 common school act.²⁴ Commissioners appointed John Wilson county school superintendent in February 1844,²⁵ William Elliott a year later.²⁶ Both men were Scots, Presbyterians, lawyers, and prominent Tories.²⁷ In April 1844, Wilson and councillors appointed Cronyn local superintendent. He opened common schools in each ward.²⁸ Between 1843 and 1849, trustees (three per school), with the superintendents' permission, again hired male teachers.²⁹ In 1845, Elliott reported that they were "better than the average in the country; the remuneration is greater, and the Teachers consequently are better qualified persons."³⁰ Wilson and Elliott exemplify the "choice men" described by Bruce Curtis, district superintendents who, between 1844 and 1850, molded educational administration and practice

in their respective jurisdictions as they themselves had been molded.³¹

Winds of change gathered force in the late forties. Compared to Toronto, where councillors, trustees, and residents were so conflicted over financial, legal, social, political, class, and economic issues that they had to close their common schools between July 1848 and July 1849, London was a bastion of innovation. Take the selection of its first community-wide school board, for example. When London became a town on 1 January 1848, the newly elected, mainly middle-class, mostly Anglican, nine-man council—two per ward and a mayor elected at large—appointed six trustees with similar class backgrounds, a power given to them by the 1847 act.³² The step was important, because these men took on roles formerly played by elite commissioners. The new board members,

²⁴ "An Act for the Establishment and Maintenance of Common Schools in Upper Canada," in J. G. Hodgins, ed., *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, from the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791 to the Close of Dr. Ryerson's Administration of the Education Department in 1876* [DHE], 4:1841-1843, 4 (Toronto: Warwick Bro's & Rutter, 1897), 251-62. This statute (effective 1 January 1844) was necessary because it and the 1840 Act of Union—a reaction to turbulent relations between Upper and Lower Canada in the thirties, and one intended to promote a cultural union between the two distinct provinces—were aligned with a municipal bill that failed to pass the Assembly.

²⁵ AO, RG2, C6C, Box 3, J.B. Strathy to Dominic Daly, 17 February 1844.

²⁶ AO, RG2, C6C, Box 4, William Elliott to A. MacNab, 19 May 1845.

²⁷ For more information on Wilson and Elliott, see *History of the County of Middlesex*, Canada [History of Middlesex] (London: W.A. & C.L. Goodspeed, Publishers, 1889; reprinted, Belleville: Mika Studio, 1972), 181, 133-36.

²⁸ AO, RG2, C6C, Box 3, George Railton to Alexander Murray, 10 April 1844.

²⁹ "Early Schools of London: Reminiscences of the City's Pioneer Teacher, Mr. Nicholas Wilson: The Teachers and Buildings Under the Fee Schools of the Early Days - Establishment of the Public School System I 1844 - London the First Place in the Province to Have Free Schools," *London Free Press*, 5 May 1894.

³⁰ AO, RG2, F3A, Annual Report of the London district superintendent, 1845.

³¹ Bruce Curtis, *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

³² Landon, "London in Early Times," 1060-62; "An Act for Amending the Upper Canada Common School Act of 1846," DHE, 7, pp. 26-28. For the occupations of councillors and trustees, see Murphy, "School and Society," II, Tables 39, 40, 41, 43, pp. 462-65, 467-68.

most of them not Anglican and English like their precursors, were headed by mayor Simeon Morrill, a former American and a tanner. Tellingly, councillors asked John Wilson on 15 January to become local superintendent. He accepted.³³

According to renowned teacher Nicholas Wilson, the trustees of 1848 wanted to “place the schools on a better footing, so as to be more in keeping with the requirements of the rising town.”³⁴ So for the first time the board assumed operating expenses. It also increased the best teachers’ salaries to \$200 each plus fees; released the inefficient ones; hired a Toronto Normal School (TNS) graduate; purchased first-rate equipment; set a minimum pupil fee of 50 cents per quarter; and sanctioned use of the Irish National School Books, a province-wide measure.³⁵ In 1850, the board treated the contest for Union school headmaster (won by Nicholas Wilson) as a public event, drawing in the TNS headmaster to conduct the examination.³⁶ It is noteworthy that Father Thaddeus Kirwan was a member of the initial selection committee, and other Roman Catholics

served as common school teachers, trustees, and committee management members in the early fifties.³⁷

Trustees also erected a union school. The idea first appears in board minutes on 14 March 1848, when members decided to raise \$1,200 that year to construct their own building capable of housing 350 to 400 pupils. Council quickly agreed to the plan, granting \$1,600 on 24 April 1848—\$400 more than requested—to be paid over three years. Superintendent Wilson recommended, and the motion carried, that common and grammar school trustees exchange lands so that the Union school could be built at the head of York street in east London.³⁸

Councillors informed trustees in July 1848 that over the next quadrennial they would grant them \$4,000 for school improvements.³⁹ Their munificence actually exceeded \$12,000, a contribution that Egerton Ryerson, the chief superintendent of education for Canada West, called “conspicuous beyond all precedence” in 1852.⁴⁰ The partnership between most trustees and most council-

³³ London Board Minutes, 5, 26 January 1848.

³⁴ Nicholas Wilson, “History of London Schools,” London Public Library [LPL], London Room, Box 120, p. 6.

³⁵ London Board Minutes 15, 24, 26 January; 14, 31 March; 14, 24 April; 10 July 1848.

³⁶ Trustees announced Nicholas Wilson was Union school headmaster on 16 February 1850.

³⁷ Kirwan was joined by the Reverends William Proudfoot (Presbyterian) and Cronyn (Anglican) as well as superintendent John Wilson – London Board Minutes, 12 February 1850. Also see, for instance, Franklin A. Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Upper Canada* (Toronto: The Catholic Education Foundation of Ontario, 1955); and Murphy, “‘Catholic Schools for Catholic Children’: The Making of a Roman Catholic School System in London, Ontario, 1850 to 1871,” *CCHA, Historical Studies* 63 (1997), 59-79.

³⁸ London Board Minutes, 10 July 1848.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ “Papers on the School System of Upper Canada, 1852. 1. The Spirit in which the Present Educational Movement Should Be Directed: by the Chief Superintendent of Education, II. Origin of the Princi-

lors, many of whom served on both corporations at one time or another, ensured the primacy of the institutions.⁴¹ The collaboration is impressive, considering that at the time the town always was in the red financially, and that trustees could not compel councillors to raise monies until the 1850 school Act gave them the power.⁴² On 7 March 1849, trustees approved construction of a brick building capable of housing 600 pupils. Tenders were advertised, estimates requested, an architect hired.⁴³ The “Seminary” was completed by November.⁴⁴ The cornerstone ceremony took place on 25 June 1849. Superintendent John Wilson addressed a cheering crowd describing:

... the satisfaction it gave him to see the progress... made towards the erection of a school-house... where all might receive [instruction]... on the improved plan... and

where opportunity would be afforded to banish from the minds of the rising generation those... distinctions which... private schools continue.⁴⁵

On 2 January 1850, the four ward schools moved into four of the six Union school classrooms. Hamilton common school trustees described it as “by far the finest school house in the Province.”⁴⁶ Trustees charged residents 25 cents for the “first class” (junior), 50 cents for the second (intermediate), and \$1.00 for the third (senior).⁴⁷ Council united the four school sections in April 1850 (three classrooms for girls, three for boys), passing a by-law that “pointed out the desire of the people to have one large school building, where scholars could be classified according to their knowledge. Each class should have a teacher, and all work under the direction of a headmaster.”⁴⁸

ple of Free Schools in Upper Canada, vol. 5,” *Historical and Other Papers and Documents illustrative of the Educational System of Ontario, 1842-1861, Forming an Appendix to the Annual Report of the Minister of Education*, (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1912), 157. For more on Ryerson, see R.D. Gidney, “Egerton Ryerson,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography [DCB]* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), XI: 783-795.

⁴¹ Mayor Thomas C. Dixon, a merchant, was one of four Tories on council in 1849—five others were Reformers. When a resolution was presented to councillors to pay a special tax based on the value of one’s property to build the Union school, the segregationist refused the question, adjourned the session, and left. The remaining councillors recommenced the meeting and passed the motion – Orlo Miller, *This Was London*, 65-66. Reformers under Robert Baldwin in Canada West and Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine in Canada East began a political crusade in 1848 that quickly enabled them to supercede the Tories or conservatives (Family Compact) who had long dominated the elected assembly. Together with Nova Scotia reformers, they persuaded British leaders to award responsible government to the British North American colonies. Reformers also supported free schools, a position eventually taken by most Tories.

⁴² Orlo Miller, *100th Anniversary, St. George’s School, Waterloo Street, 1852-1952, London, Ontario*, (London, Ont.: Schools: Public Schools: St. George’s Public School, 1952), 13.

⁴³ London Board Minutes, 7 March, 11 May 1849.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, “Public Meeting About A New School,” *Canadian Free Press*, 13 February 1849; and *History of Middlesex*, 290.

⁴⁵ “The New School-House,” *Canadian Free Press*, 26 June 1849.

⁴⁶ Provincial Annual School Report, 1851, 195-96.

⁴⁷ LPL, London Room, Box 120, William Elliot to Nicholas Wilson, 2 March 1850; London Board Minutes, 17 April 1850. The new rates commenced in February 1851.

⁴⁸ *History of Middlesex*, 290.

London's usual (Whiggish) common school story to mid-century, therefore, praises progressive leaders who built a flagship institution for the town's youngsters staffed by experts. If the reason for the project was to thrust the community into the vanguard of urban educational administration and practice it failed, because just 38 percent of school-age children attended it during the first year of operation. If the intent was to create an educational oasis for fee paying, mainly middle-class boys and girls, it succeeded, at least at first. Had the "noble example," as Ryerson called it, the "improved plan;" and the radical school Acts of 1846, 1847, and 1850 changed nothing?⁴⁹

Charging fees was the final gasp of a dying regime, because Dr. Ryerson's prescriptions, which captured best practices in America and abroad, soon brought most youth into free common schools. But that outcome, one also driven by "school promoters" and struggling newcomers hoping to compel the state to cover the total cost of their children's education, awaited critical changes in

statute law and economic forces.⁵⁰ In the interim, systematic and systemic barriers blocked about sixty percent of school-age youth from the establishments (Table 1). For example, even when fires, cholera, and depression lowered enrolment rates, which were about forty percent a year in the forties, officials awarded free spots to formerly *admitted*, temporarily impoverished youngsters, not poor youth.⁵¹

Furthermore, since most legislators and voters believed parents should pay to school their own children, lawmakers were slow to pass laws allowing common school boards to levy rates to build or to rent school houses or rooms.⁵² Thus revenue shortfalls and traditional biases spurred local authorities to limit school, teacher, and pupil numbers to fit available funds and social realities as they saw them, and teachers to find their own instructional spaces, the rent for which was recovered from rate-bills and paid as part of their salary.⁵³ It also caused instructors to seek cheap accommodation to keep expenses low to win the position over other teachers competing for the same

⁴⁹ Provincial Annual School Report, 1850, 310.

⁵⁰ See, for example, J.D. Wilson, "The Ryerson Years in Canada West," in Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, and Louis Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1970), 214-40; Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Gidney and D.A. Lawr, "The Development of an Administrative System for the Public Schools: The First Stage, 1841-50," in N. McDonald and A. Chaiton, eds., *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), 160-83; Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Bruce Curtis, *Building The Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ontario: The Althouse Press, 1988); Gidney and Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*.

⁵¹ Dan Brock, "'Half Of London In Ruins!' London's Great Fires of 1844 and 1845," *Simcoe's Choice*, 116-36.

⁵² AO, RG2, C6C, Box 5, Trustees, London school district no. 3 to Egerton Ryerson, 23 September 1846.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

TABLE 1: Numeric and Percent Enrollments for London Common School Students Ages 5 to 16 by Sex, and London Population Figures, 1840 to 1852

Key: ^a Total Children of all ages in school; * estimated population (22.22% total pop.)

Sources: *Provincial Annual Reports, 1843 to 1852; Annual Report London Board Common School Trustees, 1843 to 1852; London Newspapers and Yearbooks; Journals of the Legislative Assembly (Canada West), 1848, 1850; Census of Canada, 1851-52; The Canada Directory, 1851*

YEAR	LONDON POPULATION	CHILDREN 5 TO 16	PUPILS 5 TO 16	% CHILDREN 5-16 IN SCHOOL	TOTAL # PUPILS	TOTAL NUMBER MALE PUPILS		TOTAL NUMBER FEMALE PUPILS	
1840	1716	381*	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1841	2078	462*	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1842	2616	581*	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1843	3000	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1844	N.D.	1014	425	42%	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1845	3500	1174	509	44%	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1846	N.D.	1018	433	43%	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
1847	3942	1479	370	25%	393	219	56%	174	44%
1848	4668	1081	362	34%	362	243	67%	119	33%
1849	N.D.	1201	499	42%	499	304	61%	195	39%
1850	5124	1583	598 ^a	38%	598	331	55%	267	45%
1851	6000	1789	1143	64%	1157	703	61%	454	39%
1852	7035	1800	1587	88%	1617	863	53%	754	47%

job. Some London trustees believed that this parsimonious approach produced common schools that were “too small, badly ventilated, badly warmed, etc.,” thus rendering the children “sickly and squalid, and the teacher emaciated and pale.”⁵⁴

London leaders also reshaped financial arrangements to preserve orthodox provisions when necessary. Between 1843 and 1847, for example, the legislature, reflecting environmental factors, distributed substantially less grant mon-

ey to local officials than it did between 1834 and 1837, causing the latter to raise tuition fees and thereby trigger an enrolment drop.⁵⁵ Admissions declined further in 1848 when authorities decided to pay greater but equal salaries to fewer teachers, thus eliminating the cheaper options (including females) they had offered less well-off, but fee paying, parents between 1833 and 1840.⁵⁶ The measures reflected another lesson learned in the thirties—cheap schools and economic booms attracted undesirables, which

⁵⁴ “Union School,” *London Times*, 16 February 1849; “Town Council Proceedings,” *Canadian Free Press*, 29 January 1849.

⁵⁵ Murphy, “School and Society,” II, Table 18, p. 420 and Table 36, p. 459.

⁵⁶ When nearby St. Thomas common school trustees lowered the rate-bill, for instance, it crowded their schools to such an extent (enrolments rose from 80 to 180 pupils) that they had to raise it again – “St. Thomas Free School Meeting,” *Canadian Free Press*, 12 February 1852.

many residents believed were not their responsibility.⁵⁷

The quintessential purpose of the initiatives was to privilege certain youth. Although the school population rose from 1,014 in 1844 to 1,479 in 1847, for example, the new board and council in April 1848 quickly agreed to replace its ward schools with one building for 350 to 400 fee paying pupils.⁵⁸ Since on average 434 pupils enrolled in these institutions between 1844 and 1847, board members targeted a smaller school population going forward than in recent years. The scaled-back total and consensus on the “school-house scheme” clarifies two more points. Appointed school leaders intended the swanky new institution for a limited number of children with social characteristics like their own; and the “ornamental building” was not ear-

marked for commonfolk.⁵⁹

Class and religious discrimination, therefore, explain why administrators ignored terms in the 1841, 1843, 1846, and 1847 Acts, enabling them to waive fees for up to ten “poor persons” per district and to open free, or partially free, religious, separate and/or common schools for poor children.⁶⁰ Class and racial prejudice explain why they disregarded pleas to right wrongs forcing fee-paying black Londoners to withdraw their youngsters from the same schools for the entire decade.⁶¹ “Tyranny” like this occurred despite laws making it illegal for common school officials to exclude any child from their institutions.⁶² Had they wanted to, then, London’s Police Board between 1843 and 1847 and its common school board starting in 1848, with the superintendents’ sanction, could have opened

⁵⁷ Provincial Annual Reports, 1843 to 1848; Murphy, “The Common School Amendment Acts of the 1830s,” London Board Minutes, 24 January 1848.

⁵⁸ London Board Minutes, 14 April 1848.

⁵⁹ Councillor William Barker used the words “school-house scheme” and “ornamental building” to argue against a \$4,000 school for 1,000 pupils. He preferred two cheaper, “plain,” schools for 500 pupils – “To the Rate-Payers of London,” *Canadian Free Press*, 6 February 1849.

⁶⁰ See section 44 (7) of “An Act to Repeal Certain Acts Therein Mentioned, and to make Further Provision for the Establishment and Maintenance of Common Schools Throughout this Province,” DHE, 4, pp. 48-55; section 9 of “An Act for the Better Establishment and Maintenance of Common Schools in Upper Canada,” DHE, 6, pp. 59-70; and “The Chief Superintendent’s Annual Report of Common Schools in Upper Canada for the Year 1847, XVIII. Miscellaneous Remarks on the Foregoing Local school Reports, 3. Provisions for Denominational, or Mixed, Schools,” (Egerton Ryerson, Toronto, August, 1848), in J. George Hodgins, ed., *Historical and Other Papers, 1842-1861*, 51-52.

⁶¹ “The Memorial of *The Coloured Inhabitants* of London, Canada West & of Wilberforce,” Western Archives, Box 4626, File Fred Landon, Collector, Wilberforce Settlement, 10 October 1842; Letter John Fraser, President, John Michie, Treasurer, Edward Ebbs, Secretary, London Branch Bible Society to the Honourable William Draper, Montreal, 27 March 1847; “Principal Locations, Numbers, Churches and Schools of the Black Population in Canada West, 1848,” *Oberlin Evangelist*, 30 August 1848. The children of black Londoners went to a black separate school in 1849, one that was grant aided after the fact.

⁶² St. Andrew ward inhabitants used the word “tyranny” to describe the behaviour of mayor Dixon and a few other councillors who opposed extending the education franchise to poor pupils – *Canadian Free Press*, 6 February 1849.

free or partially free schools for poor youth at any time.⁶³

J.D. Wilson identifies another key factor in this one-sided battle. He writes that although Ryerson wanted to insert “the *poor man’s* clause” (italics in original) in the 1846 law, he recognized the timing was not propitious, because many rich residents would not support tax-based free schools and the colony’s growing middle class was just recognizing the concept’s importance. And although a few village and rural communities opened free schools in the late forties, London’s Tory elite delayed them until 1851, instead issuing debentures and levying assessments and rate-bills on users and excluding the poor. The “*poor man’s* clause” became propitious when the forties ended and demographic and attitudinal change threatened the way that conventional sentiments were institutionalized in governing structures and voting requirements.⁶⁴

Ryerson’s manoeuvring opened a door for egalitarians. Even so, the pioneering public servant and Methodist

minister recognized he could not “force the results of any School Legislation upon the Country.” Any “principles,” “elements,” and “provisions” he thought “essential to an Efficient System of Education” would have to be “sustained by the convictions and feelings of the public mind.” His task, as he saw it, was to identify problems and to offer solutions. Voters would make decisions. And voters had to be educated to make good decisions.⁶⁵

The metamorphosis in local educational governance foreseen by Ryerson and others with similar schooling views occurred after legislators passed four crucial, interrelated statutes in 1849-50. Responsible government was a factor too, because its introduction at the colonial level in 1848 mirrored the shift in public opinion favouring elected officials at the local level. More specifically, C.F.J. Whebell and Gilbert A. Stelter point out that *The Municipal Corporations* (Baldwin) *Act of 1849* “demolished the magistracy as a perpetual power base for the Tories,” while enhancing the influence of

⁶³ Annie O’Connell claims that prior to Confederation the dominant British “white settler society” made a distinction between “the deserving and non-deserving poor,” concepts which led to “silences” and “losses” when creating policy and “*the* social welfare history.” The notions also influenced “the acceptance or rejection of relief requests,” distinctions and responses which, I believe, are similar to school requests by poor parents – see her “The Deserving and Non-deserving Races: Colonial Intersections of Social Welfare History in Ontario,” *Intersectionalities: A Global Journal of Social Work Analysis, Research, Polity, and Practice*, 2 (2013), 1-23.

⁶⁴ J.D. Wilson, “The Ryerson Years in Canada West,” *Canadian Education*, 223.

⁶⁵ “Chapter IV, II. Draft of a Common School Bill for Upper Canada, 1846, The Reverend Doctor Ryerson’s Reply to the Secretary of the Province: Expounding and Recommending the Original Draft of the Common School Act of 1846,” DHE, 6, p. 71; Egerton Ryerson, “Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada,” [Report of 1846], dated 27 March 1846, in Chapter VII, Foundation of the Present System of Public Instruction in Upper Canada, DHE, pp. 139-211; “Annual Report 1852, “XII: Recent Amendments of the School Law of 1850,” *Historical and other Papers and Documents*, 5, 138-39.

the rising middle class.⁶⁶ As of 1 January 1850, the statute transferred power to spend education taxes from appointed, elite, mostly Anglican district and state authorities to elected, mostly middle-class, religiously diverse, town officials.⁶⁷

The Municipal Act by itself could not turn the old education order upside down. But that changed when the Reform ministry passed three more statutes.⁶⁸ The Elections Act, passed the same day as the Baldwin Act (30 May 1849), clarified property qualifications for voting and made British subjects of

foreigners in the province at the time of Union.⁶⁹ The “Great Charter” of common schooling in Canada West, passed in July 1850, gave elected trustees the tools to run their own schools.⁷⁰ The 1850 Assessment Act empowered local officials as of 1 January 1851 to develop their own assessment system and method of property valuation, giving London officials the power to tax a larger group of voters than before.⁷¹

Even though the 1850 School Act was a compromise between Tories and Reformers based on experiences with the

⁶⁶ John H. Taylor, “Urban Autonomy in Canada: Its Evolution and Decline,” in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan E.J. Arbib, eds., *Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1984), 478-503; Whebell, “Robert Baldwin and Decentralization 1841-9,” *Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, 61.

⁶⁷ “An Act to provide, by one general law, for the erection of Municipal, Corporations, and the establishment of Regulations of Police, in and for the several Counties, Cities, Towns, Townships and Villages in Upper Canada,” *The Provincial Statutes of Canada*, 3.2, (Ottawa: S. Derbishire & G. Desbarats, Law Printer to the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1849), pp. 453-537 (passed 30 May 1849, enforceable 1 January 1850). In 1850, trustees had Presbyterian, Anglican, New Connexion Methodist, Wesleyan Methodist, and Roman Catholic affiliations.

⁶⁸ Although focusing on the impact of the Rebellion Losses Bill, Landon recognizes that the “year 1849 marked... the beginning of a new day in Upper Canada” and in London – see his “An Upper Canada Community in the Political Crisis of 1849,” *Ontario Historical Society Papers And Records* 26 (1930), 461-73.

⁶⁹ “An Act to repeal certain Acts therein mentioned, and to amend, consolidate, and reduce into one Act, the several Statutory provisions now in force for the regulation of Elections of Members to represent the People of this Province in the Legislative Assembly thereof,” *The Provincial Statutes of Canada*, 3.2, pp. 171-212. Also see “Chapter 1, British North America 1758-1866, Upper Canada: The Era of the Family Compact and The Province of Canada: Changing Rules Reflect Instability,” in Elections Canada, *A History of the Vote in Canada*, 1-32 <<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=his&document=chap1&lang=e>>.

⁷⁰ London assessment and tax records are unavailable in these years, so general trends from census data, common school board election results, and trustee votes helped me to arrive at these conclusions. Also consult “An Act for the better Establishment and Maintenance of Common Schools in Upper Canada,” Provincial Annual Report of Schools, 1850, pp. 217-42 – Section 21 of the law permitted trustees to appoint their own superintendent. Sections 22 and 23 set criteria for trustee elections and retirements. Section 24 required councillors to pay monies requested by trustees to them. Section 40 authorized freeholders and householders to decide on the mode to cover school expenses (rate-bill, property assessment, voluntary subscription, or a merger of the three alternatives). Section 47 mandated trustee elections on the first Tuesday in September.

⁷¹ “An Act to establish a more equal and just system of Assessment in the several Townships, Villages, Towns and Cities in Upper Canada,” *The Provincial Statutes of Canada*, 3.3, pp. 1388-1402.

cumbersome laws of the forties, Susan Houston and Allison Prentice note that “The politics of opposition was complex, cross-cut by local, denominational, and ideological interests.”⁷² London was no exception. There, as elsewhere, the war over the classics and free schools pitted class against class, race against race, segregationists against integrationists, and newcomers against nativists, although lines often were blurred and individuals changed their minds. Even members of the established and rising middle-class could be conflicted, the former on average being more conservative than the latter.⁷³ Three options dominated local debates in which “pet men of former [Tory] governments” held the upper hand until September 1850.⁷⁴ Would trustees provide an ordinary education to a fee paying minority? An ordinary and a superior education to a fee paying minority? Or a free, ordinary, and superior education to all children?⁷⁵

Discord reigned throughout 1850. At the January 15th meeting, and in a de-

parture from Section 22 of the School Act of that year, past and present trustees, all appointed, unanimously decided to “act in unison for the current year,” because it was “best... for promoting the educational interests of the town.” Nevertheless, when rising merchant George Magee, a New Connexion Methodist, and brewer Samuel Eccles, an Anglican, moved that classical studies be offered at the Union school, the motion failed. They represented St. Patrick’s and St. David’s wards respectively, where on the whole better-off Londoners lived—that is, those who on average wanted a superior education for their children.

The board addressed free schooling on February 27th. Proponents were stymied, because previously assigned ward delegates had not obtained constituent wishes on the matter prior to the January deadline, making it too late that year to formally vote on it. Accidental this was not. Appointed trustees rejected free schools, so they had not made prior arrangements for the meetings.⁷⁶ Cooper

⁷² Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 125-30. For two more general overviews on how the educational state was built in these years, see Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 24-43 and Curtis, *Building The Educational State*.

⁷³ Arguments for and against improving school provisions are contained in *Canadian Free Press*, 6, 13 February 1849. Trustee George Magee, a rising merchant and common school board chairman between 1855 and 1860, for instance, led the fight for equal teacher pay and equal school user fees in 1849 and for the provision of classical instruction a year later, not free schools or compulsory schooling – London Board minutes, 30 March 1849, 27 February 1850.

⁷⁴ “The Governor’s Visit to London,” *Canadian Free Press*, 1849 (day and month unknown).

⁷⁵ Secretary Abbott did not register individual trustee votes, merely recording resolutions as “lost on motion,” “carried unanimously,” or “carried.”

⁷⁶ Writing to Francis Hincks, the Provincial Inspector General, former district superintendent William Elliot, now secretary of the London common school board, stated that he did not believe “the time has yet arrived for supporting all the schools by a uniform taxation.” He recommended abolishing the rate-

James Reid, a Roman Catholic, and tinsmith Samuel Condon, a Methodist, kick-started the initiative. Trustees for St. Andrew and St. George wards, respectively, where on average less wealthy citizens lived, or those who in the main would favour free schools, resolved to hold ward hearings the next Tuesday to obtain elector wishes on the subject. The motion carried.⁷⁷ After being directed almost unanimously by voters in every ward on March 5th to establish free schooling as soon as possible,⁷⁸ confectioner Henry Mathewson, a Congregational, and merchant William Begg, a New Connexion Methodist, both of them from St. Patrick ward where most well-off residents were against free schooling,⁷⁹ presented a resolution the next evening to inform council of the result. It carried. Then on 13 March 1850, dealer William Dalton, a Roman Catholic, and Samuel Condon, two of three representatives for St. George ward, moved: "That the trustees are of the opinion that the schools should be supported by an assessment upon property, and that the mayor and town council be requested to carry out the same." The motion carried. Public debate

over alternatives, sometimes portrayed as equality or serfdom for poor youth, continued during the year.⁸⁰ To placate both camps, trustees directed the headmaster to congregate and reclassify pupils. They also ordered him to separate the sexes by classroom, by sex of teacher, by playground, by out-building, by school entrance and exit, and by school-leaving time. The measures were inadequate. Just 38 percent of school-age children attended the Union school that year.

The jockeying between emissaries of different worlds continued in 1851, but the tide had turned. This time free school advocates at the ward level met the legal deadline (8 January).⁸¹ Then, championed by first-time trustee, harness maker Benjamin Nash, a Wesleyan Methodist from St. David ward, and William Begg, a decidedly cautious motion carried on 10 February: "that the common schools of the Town of London be supported by a tax on all rateable property within the town *for the current year.*" Board members next directed the secretary to have "400 Hand Bills printed and circulated, notifying the inhabitants of this town that the Common Schools shall

bill, substituting for it a provision that would give trustees "the power to levy an annual rate upon every child between 5 & 16 years of age resident in the section" (his underlining) – AO, RG2, C6C, Box 8, William Elliott to Francis Hincks, 29 January 1850.

⁷⁷ *Canadian Free Press*, 28 February 1850.

⁷⁸ "School Meeting," *Canadian Free Press*, 2 May 1850. The city solicitor advised that trustees had to follow the process outlined in the 1850 School Act. Thus Londoners had to wait until 15 January 1851 to vote on supporting their common schools by a property tax.

⁷⁹ "Free-School Meetings," *Canadian Free Press*, 7 March 1850.

⁸⁰ "School Meeting," *Canadian Free Press*, 2 May 1850.

⁸¹ After a unanimous vote for free schools took place at the 8 January St. Andrew ward meeting, an observer wrote "How have the mighty fallen." – "The Town Elections," *Canadian Free Press*, 10 January 1851.



The Return From School, 1884 by Frederic Marlett Bell Smith, showing Union School in the background. (Oil on canvas, 91 x 152.5 cm). Collection of Museum London. Presented to the City of London by Mrs. Annie W. G. Cooper in loving memory of her husband, Albert Edward Cooper, 1940. 40.A.04 40.A.04

be free.”⁸² No doubt integrationists were overjoyed when hundreds of formerly ostracized youth marched into the Union school after it went free in late February. On the other hand, segregationists surely were horrified, because many new pupils were “indigents” without books, slates, and pens; and they created discipline, accommodation, and other challenges, that were aggravated further when St. George’s school, a second free institution, was opened in early March.⁸³ In-

triguingly, the latter establishment was not proposed by the school board. It was imposed upon taxpayers by a divided council, the prime advocates being powerful ward seven residents.⁸⁴

The seventh ward school was another attempt at appeasement. Not only did the former establishment serve formally shut out youth, but it also lessened concerns of north ward parents, who felt the trek to the Union school was too far and too dangerous for their children.⁸⁵ The institution also

⁸² London Board Minutes, 10 February 1851.

⁸³ London Board Minutes, 3, 10 February 1851; 3, 20 March 1851. It is unclear whether St. George’s school opened in late February or early March.

⁸⁴ Miller, *100th Anniversary*, 14; History of Middlesex, 290. The advocates were John Carling, William Barker, and Henry C.R. Becher. Carling, later a highly successful brewer, entrepreneur, and politician, was a former common school pupil and the son-in-law of board chairman Henry Dalton. William Barker was an agent, H.C.R. Becher, town solicitor.

⁸⁵ Apparently Carling was one such parent. He served as trustee in 1850-51 until the school was

kept most lower-class, “country kids” away from the town core and middle- and upper-class youth.⁸⁶ It separated most Protestants from most Roman Catholics and most Irish from most English, many of whom held Old World animosities.⁸⁷ And it was a compromise with Irish Roman Catholics, many of whom lived in or near the north precinct, because the well qualified headmaster was both Irish and Roman Catholic.⁸⁸

In another move illustrating the ascendancy of the middle class, trustees in April 1851 replaced Nicholas Wilson as headmaster with Hamilton Hunter.⁸⁹ Hunter was hired to teach the classics, thus completing the Union school curricula and making it a competitor to, and a cheaper alternative than, the district grammar school. To meet the soaring demand for schooling, to calm social sensitivities, to attract well-off pupils, and to diminish safety concerns, trustees increased the number of highly qualified instructors at the two schools to five males and five females;⁹⁰ this ensured

major religious groups—Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Christian and Disciple—were represented in the teaching force;⁹¹ and built a sidewalk from Wellington street to the Union school.⁹² Enrollments spiraled from 598 pupils in 1850 to 1,143 in 1851.

The striking developments recast the educational experience of most youngsters. Wealthy males still patronized the grammar school in west-central London, twenty well-off girls attended a core area private school, and a few children went away to be educated. But the decimation of the private sector was offset by a corresponding boom in common school enrolments. Parents now sent two-thirds of their children to the spanking new Union and St. George’s schools in east London, where highly trained instructors plied the skills of their profession. Nevertheless, thirty percent of the school population remained outside the institutions. That outcome likely reflected the desire

built and free schools and classical instruction were achieved – Peter E. Paul Dembski, “CARLING, Sir JOHN”, *DCB*, 14, pp. 185-88.

⁸⁶ Miller, *100th Anniversary*, p. 18.

⁸⁷ See, for example, T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, (Harper Collins Manufacturing; Glasgow, 1986); James S. Donnelly, Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2001); and *Comparative aspects of Scottish and Irish economic and social history, 1600-1900*, L.M. Cullen and T.C. Smout, eds., (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd. 1977).

⁸⁸ London Board Minutes, 10 February 1851. Irwin was a first-class TNS teacher.

⁸⁹ London Board Minutes, 25 April 1851.

⁹⁰ A commentator noted that “Until a very recent date the number of teachers employed by school trustees was far from being sufficient for the numerous attendance of pupils. There were formerly but four, at the present time there are seven teachers, and the number is yet said to be rather small” – “School Examinations,” *London, Canada West - Times and Western Advertiser*, 22 August 1851. One male and one female TNS trained teacher instructed at the St. George ward school – London Board Annual Report, 1851.

⁹¹ AO, RG2, F3B, Box 40, Annual Report of the Board of School Trustees, 1851.

⁹² London Board Minutes, 17 July 1851.

by some mothers and fathers for their offspring to finish the private school term; the lack of awareness by others that the institutions were free; the informal costs of schooling; the dearth of space, desks, materials, and teachers for students; the uncertainty by a few parents about how to proceed; and indifference.

On 22 January 1852, tanner Ellis Walton Hyman, a former American and an Anglican from St. Andrew ward, and Samuel Condon extended the historic resolution passed twelve months earlier, moving “that the expenses of Common Schools in this Town be defrayed by general Tax on all Rateable property within the Town.” The motion carried. Two free schools were a major victory for egalitarians. Once supported by a general property tax plus government grants, they were put on a firm financial foundation.

In the medium term, the grammar school remained the institution of choice for affluent boys. Wary of social mixing, its trustees did not exercise terms in the 1850 and 1852 Common School Acts allowing county grammar schools to unite with common schools.⁹³ Nor did they accept an offer in 1854 from common school trustees to amalgamate the

two bodies. “Aristocratical feelings” kept that institution a haven for affluent white boys until 1865, denying this government money to the common schools for another generation.⁹⁴

Despite the exception, chairman James Daniell, a lawyer and a free school advocate from St. Andrew ward, proclaimed in 1852:

Under these circumstances the Board are satisfied that the progress of Common School Education in London is onward, that it has realized their expectations, and that the inhabitants enjoy educational advantages, second perhaps to no town or city in the Province. The trustees do not make this statement unadvisedly but are perfectly willing that any person should test the accuracy of this report by a minute personal examination.⁹⁵

Thus time, place, new laws and ideology, relative religious and racial tolerance, a large, British, English speaking, middle-class population, obliging Irish-Catholic leaders, progressive educational restructuring that virtually obliterated private schools because it met diverse community interests, American influence, and a small pupil population all facilitated the early march to free schools in London. In other words, this town in 1851-52 was not a port

⁹³ “A Townsman” complained that the local Member of Parliament (Dixon) was “adverse to the union” of the grammar and common schools boards and thus had not filled empty trustee positions on the grammar school board, thereby enabling local elites to continue to control the institution – “The Grammar School Board,” *Canadian Free Press*, 24 April 1851.

⁹⁴ “An Act to Make Certain Provisions with regard to Common Schools in Upper Canada for a limited Period,” DHE, 12, pp. 130-32. Abbott included a report of a meeting between the two boards in the official record - London Board Minutes, “Special Committee Report,” 6 July 1854.

⁹⁵ London Board Annual Report, 1852 – trustees also noted in this report that “whilst efforts have been made in different parts of the Province to establish Sectarian Schools no such demand has been made in London, and no evidence manifested that any section of inhabitants would desire thus to impair and destroy the efficiency and uniformity of our present system.” Also see Murphy, “Unmaking and Remaking the ‘One Best System’: London, Ontario 1852 to 1860,” *History of Education Quarterly* 37 (Fall 1997), 291-310.

centre undergoing demographic stress like Hamilton, Toronto, Kingston, and Bytown, places that had their own linguistic, religious, economic, geographic, ethnic, class, gender, and private school challenges, as did, it can be assumed until further work is done, the counties. Paraphrasing a 1986 Chad Gaffield quote is appropriate, then: “Rather than being composed of general trends with certain diversity, the history of *free schooling* [my words, Gaffield used ‘education’] now appears to be composed of general diversity with certain trends.”⁹⁶ These distinctions underscore the importance of the London case for present and future scholars.

This research also discloses that a majority of Londoners were buoyed by the educational settlement of 1850, especially those who previously could not afford to formally instruct their children. It was too early in the execution of this centrally controlled system of public instruction for them to understand the impact of disciplinary procedures and practices implemented by state education administrators (Curtis’ “subjectification”), because in their view the advantages of the new scheme far outweighed the disadvantages.⁹⁷ It was an acceptable result for well-off middle- and upper-class parents too, because grammar and private schools at home and elsewhere met their needs, which included segregating their offspring from lower- and middle-class children and reducing crime and mischief.

Three assertions by Michel Ducharme about the impact of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American, French, and European revolutions on Canadian affairs also played roles in this free schooling outcome. First, the liberal Canadian politicians who passed the transformative laws of 1849-50 drew intellectual inspiration from the “Atlantic world” and from the related, internal republican impetus that launched the 1837-38 Canadian rebellions. Next these forces of innovation energized marginalized American and British immigrants plus rising residents to turn the old British constitutional order on its head. Last, because the subordination of the executive to the legislative branch of government in Canada West was not revolutionary but evolutionary, the empowerment process took longer there than in other places.⁹⁸ So when provincial Reformers passed the pathbreaking laws of 1849-50, they increased the sovereignty of just enough property-owning, middle- and lower-class London egalitarians to alter the educational electoral balance in their favour. It was these stimuli and responses, therefore, that inspired mainly self-made Londoners to quickly open free common schools, putting them in the vanguard of urban education reform in Canada West.

⁹⁶ Chad Gaffield, “Coherence and Chaos in Educational Historiography,” *Interchange*, 17, 2 (Summer 1986), 112-11.

⁹⁷ Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 12-20.

⁹⁸ Michel Ducharme, “Canada in the Age of Revolutions: Rethinking Canadian Intellectual History in an Atlantic Perspective,” in *Contesting Clío’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson, eds., (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), 162-86.