

The Idea of Popular Schooling in Upper Canada: Print Culture, Public Discourse, and the Demand for Education by Anthony Di Mascio

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by Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, who “lost an opportunity” (p. 119) to oust the Americans from the Niagara Peninsula by calling off the assault. This conclusion is not supported by the narrative, the sources cited, or the excerpt from a letter Prevost sent to his superior in London, which outlined the need for a larger coordinated operation, with naval support, to take Fort George, and Fort Niagara, which offered support from across the river.

There are a great many problems with *Redcoated Ploughboys*, yet, not all is lost, as historians, re-enactors and War of 1812

mavens alike will appreciate the many appendices offering details on the careers of select personnel, specifications of weapons, details on clothing and dress, and information on soldiering, discipline, diet, health and military families.

Unfortunately, careless research, imprecise writing and poor editing have dramatically reduced the quality of this work, which must be read with caution.

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The Idea of Popular Schooling in Upper Canada

Print Culture, Public Discourse, and the Demand for Education

By Anthony Di Mascio

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012. 244 pages. \$95.00 cloth. ISBN 978-0-773540-45-3. \$32.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-773540-46-0. (www.mqup.ca)

In approaching the subject of the development of education in Upper Canada, up to 1832, Anthony Di Mascio has chosen to focus on what he rightly claims is a neglected aspect, discussion of the subject by the people of the colony, through the press, in pamphlets and through other public forums such as petitions and debates in the two branches of the legislature. His argument is that public discussion helped to drive official policy. At times, what appeared to be actions initiated by leading figures in government were preceded by public pressure, exerted through newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, pamphlets, and possibly petitions.

As the author explains, much of the focus of historians of education has been on the period beginning in the 1840s, when Egerton Ryerson established the beginnings of the modern educational system. Discussions of the earlier period have focused largely on official policy and those who created it, but have neglected public pressure for development. The author has familiarized himself with various historians' views on the nature of Upper Canadian thinking on social issues and read the existing material on the development of education, but added to this a thorough reading of the newspapers, extant pamphlets of the period dealing with education, and

petitions. While others have used debates in the provincial parliament, Di Mascio focuses specifically on debates related to education. All of this material adds another dimension to our understanding of how education developed in the province of Ontario.

All of the legislation and proposed legislation is included, from the original 1807 act, establishing a school in each large district, through the 1816 legislation, creating a weak system of local schools, to the controversial British government Act to establish an Upper Canadian university linked to the Church of England. In each case public discussion, before and after, is highlighted. The controversy over replacing the school in York,

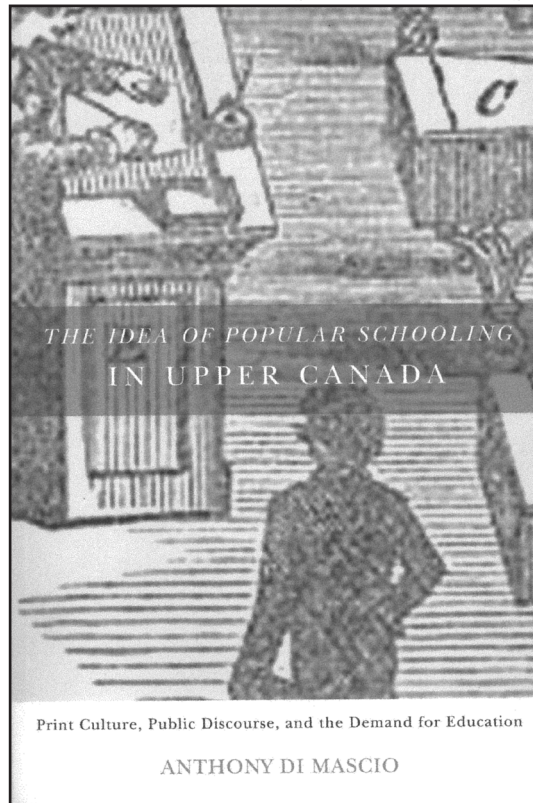
the capital, with a school run on a less expensive system, again tied to the Church of England, is also discussed. The writings of the two great proponents of education, John Strachan and Egerton Ryerson, who agreed that religious values were important in education but disagreed totally on whether any particular church should control how and what students learned, are covered extensively. While some of these and most of the remainder of the topics are featured in various histories of Upper

Canada, it is the public discussion in the press and in petitions that creates a broader picture of the evolution of education in Upper Canada.

This work should, however, be used with caution. After stating that material published in newspapers is not necessarily

reflective of broad public opinion (p.17-18), the author then proceeds as if it was. This is particularly questionable in the pre-War of 1812 period when there were almost no newspapers in existence. It is true that he offers other evidence, such as a petition from 1787, from the Niagara area, but this also is of limited use, for the following reason. While acknowledging that readership was limited by literacy and the ability to pay for a newspaper,

Di Mascio suggests that information was spread by those who had newspapers, both by passing on those publications and by public discussions of the content in places such as taverns. He acknowledges that the readership was, "professionals, clerks and shopkeepers, skilled artisans and journeymen, and most relatively established farm families." In 1787, there were few of any of these, particularly well-established farmers. Thus petitions tended to reflect the desires of those who had enough money to hire



labourers and did not have to spend their days hacking down trees to create farms. In fact, this is a dimension of the issue that the author misses throughout. Frontier farmers worried first and foremost about building a house and clearing enough land to grow crops. Only when they were well established did they turn to seeking roads and schools, and did they have time to meet in public places such as taverns and churches. The demand for education came from those who were in a position to take advantage of it.

When dealing with the post-1815 period, there are numerous newspapers from which to quote and the author is on safer ground in talking about the desire to educate the next generation. This desire came, of course, from longer settled areas, as mentioned above. It was a desire for free education for all, as Di Mascio explains. However, free education is not free. Someone has to pay, and, while he mentions funding in various places, he does not explain that this issue was one that held up the implementation of a more extensive school system. Using money generated by eliminating the expensive original district system (77), using the money that could be generated from land set aside early in the existence of Upper Canada to fund education (actually marginal land of little value) (154), and using money from the Clergy Reserve lands (130), set aside for the support of Protestant clergy, but claimed by the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, are mentioned at various times as ways that the assembly saw to finance education.

At no time does he explain that the Family Compact, the oligarchy that controlled the upper house of parliament and also the Executive Council, the body that advised the governor, pushed the idea that those who used the school system should bear most of the cost, while the assembly,

representing frontier farmers who strongly resented taxation, looked to existing sources of money, particularly the Clergy Reserves, as ways to pay for 'free' education. This confrontation resulted in a situation where no more government funding, indeed less in 1820, went into education and this was a constant source of irritation in Reform newspapers, yet little of this is found in Di Mascio's account. This partly may be attributed to his decision to end his work in 1832, when the various positions on education had been set out in the public domain. Since the funding of education and the debate over religious involvement in education were major causes of the Rebellion of 1837, the decision to stop at 1832 seems a curious one.

There are a few smaller points of contention in this book. On a couple of occasions the author contradicts himself. For instance, in dealing with the War of 1812 he mentions that there was substantial opposition to fighting the Americans among the population, many of whom had come from the United States, opposition even to the point of fighting for the United States. Yet he concludes that: "The war, for its duration, provided an obedient population while suppressing radical political factions." In his conclusion, Di Mascio includes a long digression on the ideas of Egerton Ryerson, which seems out of place in the context of a summary of the content in the remainder of the book.

The largest problem with this work, however, aside from the failure to deal fully with the funding issue and its ramifications, is his handling of the university question. John Strachan, the Church of England cleric who was a leading figure in the Family Compact, went to England and arranged for a charter for a provincial university. The assembly rejected it because of its ties to the Church of England. The author points out

that the assembly was in no mood to accept a Church of England university after Strachan had twice publicly accused the Methodists, the largest religious sect in Upper Canada, of being disloyal because of their American roots, and had incorrectly claimed that most people in Upper Canada belonged to the Church of England. Di Mascio is mistaken, however, in claiming that all the professors would have had to be members of the Church of England, and that the Church would have total control of teaching (106). This was a very liberal charter for its day, rejected because of the animosity generated by Strachan's utterances. Except for the seven members of the college council, and presumably professors in the divinity school, should one exist,

there was no religious requirement of the faculty. It is strange that the author would make such a fundamental error, given that the charter is readily available online, and is discussed in detail in that old but still excellent history of Upper Canada, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841*, by Gerald M. Craig.

Used with its limitations in mind, this work adds a useful dimension to the history of education in Ontario. Used, however, by someone who does not know these limitations, the book is likely to create a somewhat distorted picture of discussions of education in Upper Canada.

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Escape From Van Diemen's Land

The James Gammell Chronicles

By Elizabeth Gammell Hedquist

Provo, Utah: Y Mountain Press, 2013. 335 pages.

\$US 19.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-611660-32-6. (www.byubookstore.com)

Two Thousand and Thirteen marks the 175th anniversary of the 1838 Upper Canadian Rebellion/Patriot War. The publication of Michigan-based author Elizabeth Gammell Hedquist's book is therefore most timely. Hedquist who is James Gemmell's (now spelled Gammell) great, great granddaughter, builds upon her father's research from the 1950s to tell the fascinating story of her Patriot relative. She presents her research in a chronological order, reflecting upon James Gammell's life experiences from birth to death.

The book is divided into two distinct sections. Chapters one to twenty-three deal with Gemmell's life from his birth on

26 October 1814 in Kilmarnock, Scotland, through to his return to the United States after his escape from incarceration as a political prisoner in Van Diemen's Land (now the Australian state of Tasmania). The second half of the book investigates Gemmell's association with the Mormon Church and his involvement in the opening up of the western American frontier states of Texas, Utah and Montana.

The first chapter deals with the history and genealogy of the Gemmell/Gammell family in Scotland. Chapter two details the departure from Scotland, life in New York City and James' departure to live with his uncle at the Gore of Toronto (now Bramp-