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Attitudes towards the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax

Every student of the history of colonial society in English Canada is familiar with the major themes explored by historians in their chronicling of the development of education. Most studies have been preoccupied with unravelling the tortuous course of government legislation for schools, with detailing the proliferation and consolidation of colleges of higher education, and with describing the character of established institutions.¹ The prominence given to these themes has reinforced the impression cultivated by nineteenth-century liberals that popular education was the partner of democracy and that the progress of the two movements went hand in hand. Nevertheless, colonial Nova Scotia reveals a far different situation. While educational reforms undeniably occurred, they were promoted for the benefit of an elite, not for the welfare of the population at large. Nowhere can this elitist self-interest be more explicitly demonstrated than by an examination of the growth of school facilities in Halifax and of the prevailing attitudes towards the education of the city's poor in the first half of the nineteenth century.

It is the urban centres of British North America which yield the historian an identifiable concentration of poor inhabitants unable to pay for the education of their children. Such a class of indigent persons emerged in colonial Halifax, a busy seaport and commercial centre which received its share of destitute immigrants and provided ample opportunities for household and indentured service, casual labour, and prostitution. As befitted the capital of an English colony, the town possessed its humane citizens, its serviceable poor law, and the only poorhouse in the colony, all of which attracted distressed and disadvantaged elements from the rural areas of the province like flies to a jam jar.² It was the children, both white and black, of these transient

1 A recent article by Susan E. Houston represents an attempt to break away from the traditional emphasis but it is preoccupied with debunking the educational heroes rather than with examining in depth the "myth of progress, enlightenment, and humanitarian concern" in education. "Politics, Schools, and Social Change in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, LIII (1972), pp. 249-71.

2 Stanser to Hatch, 24 October 1808, Bray Associates MSS, Canadian Papers 1784-1836, Bray 12, Archives of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London (hereafter S.P.G.). Nova Scotia had acts of settlement passed in 1770 (10 Geo. 3, cap. 1) and 1803 (43 Geo. 3, cap. 3).

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and town paupers³; of servants⁴; of the labouring poor who suffered from seasonal and cyclical unemployment, and of helpless widows, as well as orphaned and illegitimate youths⁵, who required free schooling, if they were going to be educated at all.

As early as 1751 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel began to provide gratuitous education in its Halifax school. The SPG school, which operated spasmodically and without local public support, had the dubious distinction of being the only institution that catered to poor children in the pre-loyalist period and it was not particularly effective in that capacity. While most of the society's schools in Nova Scotia were intended to operate only in part as charitable institutions, the 18 free scholars taught by Joseph Peters in the Halifax school in 1781, out of a total of 144 children, represented a smaller proportion of free pupils than was usually required by the society.⁷ Although Peters claimed that Halifax required an extensive charity school,⁸ the SPG discontinued its school at the end of 1785 on the ground that Hali-gonians were rich "and could afford to support a dozen of large schools".⁹ Shortly afterwards, in 1787, the government closed down the Halifax orphanage, the building in which the SPG school had been conducted and the institution from which most of the charity pupils had been drawn; thereafter the magistrates were content to lodge orphans in the poorhouse, and until the 1820's avoided responsibility for their education by apprenticing them to farmers or tradesmen as soon as they reached school age.¹⁰

The lack of a charity school during the subsequent period of loyalist predominance provides some insight into the character of Halifax citizens. If they worried at all about the deficiency, they took no effective steps to remedy it. There is no evidence that any voluntary effort other than unsuccessful Sunday

3 Petition of Trustees of National school, February 1819, School Papers, Halifax City 1808-1845, RG 14, No. 30, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (hereafter P.A.N.S.).

4 Petition of the Rev. Robert Willis on behalf of African school, 7 February 1842, *ibid.*

5 The Rev. John Carroll described the labouring poor as the most indigent in the community. Petition of Carroll on behalf of Catholic school, 1826, *ibid.*; for the identification of poor as immigrants, see *Novascotian*, 1 January 1835; for the effect of commercial depression on the labouring poor, see Petition of Executive Committee of Royal Acadian school, 1 February 1849, Legislative Assembly Papers, RG 5, Series P (Petitions), vol. 75, P.A.N.S.

6 Petition of Trustees of National school, 26 February 1820, and Petition of Infant School Society, 1834, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.

7 Notitia, 24 June to 25 December 1781, B MSS, vol. 25, No. 267, S.P.G.

8 J. Peters to S. Peters, 18 October 1783, Samuel Peters Papers, vol. 1, No. 87, P.A.N.S. (microfilm).

9 J. Peters to S. Peters, 11 October 1785, *ibid.*, vol. 2, No. 54.

10 Evidence of R. J. Uniacke (a commissioner of the poor in Halifax since 1801), 22 March 1826, before the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom, *P.P.*, 1826 (404), IV, 1, pp. 39-41.

schools was undertaken until the 1810's.¹¹ The one public attempt, in this instance emanating from the provincial government, occurred in 1791, when the legislative assembly, under the sponsorship of the police magistrate and member for Halifax county, John George Pyke, passed "An Act for Establishing a Charity School in the town of Halifax" to be financed from the proceeds of a tax on public houses.¹² For some unknown reason, the council rejected the bill and for another twenty years the only charity school conducted in the capital was the English-supported Bray school for black children, founded in 1785, but unwilling to admit whites.¹³ Significantly, the Bray school, like the earlier SPG school, made no financial demands on the local population, nor did local worthies volunteer to assist the enterprise.¹⁴ At the same time, well-to-do Halifax parents devoted ample attention to the provision of 'superior' educational facilities for their own children. Besides private schools set on foot by individual teachers, the Halifax Grammar school opened under Anglican sponsorship in 1789 and soon received public funds by means of a grant from the legislature. At Windsor the King's College establishment of the same vintage began as a grammar school and attracted the sons of Halifax's influential families.¹⁵

Public interest in the educational needs of the poor was finally aroused in 1813 when the Royal Acadian school was established for the benefit of the poor by Walter Bromley, a peripatetic Englishman who introduced the Lancasterian branch of the monitorial system. Three years later the Church of England clergy in Halifax reacted to the success of Bromley's school by inaugurating the National school on the approved Anglican (Madras) monitorial plan¹⁶ maintained with the assistance of the SPG and catering to the poor of St. Paul's parish.¹⁷ The Catholics, who claimed to minister to the

11 Inglis to Gaskin, 12 November 1809, Inglis Papers, C-25, P.A.N.S. (microfilm); Inglis to Moore, 18 April 1798, *ibid.*, C-23.

12 Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Legislative Assembly* (hereafter *J.L.A.*), 7 June 1791; An Act for Establishing a Charity School in the town of Halifax, 1791, RG 5, Series U (Unpassed Bills), vol. 1, P.A.N.S.

13 Minutes of Legislative Council, 22 June 1791, RG 1, vol. 218, g, p. 20, P.A.N.S.; Stanser to Lyttleton, 24 October 1797, and Stanser to Hatch, 27 October 1801, Bray 12, S.P.G.

14 Stanser to Hatch, 24 October 1808, Bray 12, S.P.G.

15 The Catholics unsuccessfully tried for a second time to found a school in 1802. The chief aim of Edmund Burke, vicar general, was a college though he tried to pass the venture off as a charity institution. Memorial of Catholics, 13 June 1786, RG 1, vol. 301, No. 83, P.A.N.S.; Inglis to Moore, 16 February 1804, Inglis Papers, vol. 3, p. 130, P.A.N.S. (typescript); Burke to Plessis, 24 March 1806 and 8 November 1807, Burke Papers, vol. 2, P.A.N.S. (microfilm); J. E. Tulloch, "Conservative Opinion in Nova Scotia during an Age of Revolution, 1789-1815" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1972), pp. 66-69.

16 On the controversy surrounding the establishment of these schools, see J. Fingard, *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1783-1816* (London, 1972), pp. 139-48.

17 The degree of poverty was illustrated by the need to provide clothing for pupils. West to Hamilton, 6 January 1819, C/CAN/NS. 2, No. 154, S.P.G.; Petition of Trustees of National school, December 1820, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.

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greatest proportion of the labouring poor in the city,¹⁸ followed suit, opening their own monitorial school, St. Mary's, in 1820 at the instigation of Bishop Edmund Burke.¹⁹

While these three schools (each with a boys' and girls' department) remained the largest and most prominent institutions for the education of the poor, a number of other ventures were successfully launched during the next quarter century. A school in the poorhouse for orphans and inmates was begun under the supervision of the commissioners of the poor in 1823 and was initially conducted by the master of the Acadian school.²⁰ In Dutch Town, where poor immigrants congregated, the Reverend Robert Fitzgerald Uniacke, the evangelical Anglican rector, established St. George's parish school in 1828.²¹ Four years later the wives of the city's clergymen, and of prominent businessmen and political officials, followed the fashionable course by founding an Infant school, a charity institution for children too young to attend the other schools who were clothed and fed at the ladies' expense.²² Meanwhile the Bray school for black children, after a chequered career and a hiatus of about a decade, was refurbished in 1836 as the African school and thereafter remained a charity school under Church of England control.²³ In 1839 the Methodists opened the Wesleyan school for the poor of their church.²⁴ In the suburbs, Three Mile House school on Bedford Basin, which enjoyed a continuous existence after 1845, was also supervised by pastor Uniacke.²⁵ About the same time two other schools were founded in the Dutch Town area of early Victorian Halifax — St. Patrick's school, a struggling Catholic institution for the many children too distant to attend St. Mary's Catholic school,²⁶ and St. John's school established by the new Free Church of Scotland for the poor of that persuasion.²⁷ All these institutions professed to be open to children of all

18 Petition of Trustees of Catholic school, 1826, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.

19 Burke to Plessis, 8 September 1820, Burke Papers, vol. 2, P.A.N.S.

20 *J.L.A.*, 29 March 1823; Extract of Letter from Bromley, 18 September 1823, British and Foreign School Society, *Annual Report*, 1824, p. 134.

21 Petition of Uniacke, 25 February 1829, RG 5, Series P, vol. 69, P.A.N.S.

22 Return of Infant school for year ending September 1841, and Petition of Managers of Infant school, 16 February 1842, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.; Infant school appeal, *Novascotian*, 30 December 1835.

23 Renewed Anglican interest in their education can be explained by the attempt of the blacks themselves to establish a school in connection with their Baptist chapel in 1834. Proceedings at Meeting held in the African chapel, 19 May, for establishing a school for coloured children, *Novascotian*, 25 June 1834; Memorial of Richard Preston and others, 1834, RG 5, Series P, vol. 72, P.A.N.S.

24 Petition of John Marshall and Charles Churchill, Wesleyan ministers, 20 January 1840, RG 5, Series P, vol. 73, P.A.N.S.

25 Uniacke to Inglis, 20 January 1845, C/CAN/NS. 8, No. 420, S.P.G.

26 Petitions of Catholics of Halifax, 1846, RG 5, Series P, vol. 74, P.A.N.S., and 1849, *ibid.*, vol. 75; *J.L.A.*, 1846, App. No. 81, p. 249; *J.L.A.*, 1848, App. No. 77, pp. 281-2.

27 Petition of St. John's church, 1845, RG 5, vol. 74, P.A.N.S.

denominations,²⁸ and all justified their appeals for public financial aid on the ground that they devoted a significant proportion of their facilities to the education of the poor.²⁹

The degree of public interest in or indifference towards the instruction of the poor can be suggestively gauged in terms of the financial fortunes of these schools. None of the dozen schools for the poor founded between the 1780's and the 1840's depended solely on charitable donations. In those instances where local inhabitants contributed their mite, the charity tended to be channelled through churches or local school societies. The membership of the latter paid an annual subscription, and from this fund the education of poor children was financed at an annual rate, usually £1 per child. The Royal Acadian School Society of 1823, for example, was organized on this principle. But the method of a sponsoring society, adopted from the English model, was not widely used in Halifax to support schools. The National school of 1816 remained a responsibility of the corporation of St. Paul's church until St. Paul's National School Society was formed in 1850 in the face of the threatened loss of legislative aid to confessional schools.³⁰ Funds were also occasionally raised by bazaars conducted by the fashionable ladies of Halifax.³¹

Charity, however, continued to be the least remunerative source of funds despite frequent exhortations that a rich man's "wealth is a talent, for the employment of which he must hereafter render an account."³² The attitude of "men of rank, wealth and influence" often appeared a major obstacle to the progress of education. The rich continued to preoccupy themselves with the instruction of their own children, a policy which did attract the censure of contemporary critics. Throughout the period under discussion, Nova Scotians with a liberal outlook argued that "Education for the poor is lost sight of, in securing Education for the rich."³³ Discerning observers ascribed this apparent indifference more to an ultra-conservative opposition to innovation than to an endemic lack of benevolence. As in so many other respects, Halifax society was slow to move. Even a governor as traditional in his views as Lord Dalhousie

28 See for example Petition of General Committee of Acadian school, 23 February 1830, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.; Bishop Walsh to G. R. Young, 27 February 1848, School Papers, Halifax City 1846-1884, RG 14, No. 31, P.A.N.S.

29 In 1844 the proportions of free pupils in schools partially supported by the government were: National, 190 of 250; Acadian (boys), 61 of 127; St. George's, 100 of 120; Wesleyan, 50 of 88; St. Mary's, 409 of 477; Infant, 100 of 100; African, 69 of 73. Fourth Annual Report of the Central Board of Education, *J.L.A.*, 1845, App. No. 38, p. 122.

30 Inglis to Walmsly, 20 October 1817, John Inglis Papers (Folio 26), No. 11, S.P.G.; *Church Times*, 2 August 1850.

31 *Acadian Recorder*, 18 June 1842.

32 Letter from John McDonald to William Young, *Guardian*, 10 February 1841; Petition of Committee of Royal Acadian Institution, 1814, RG 5, Series A (Assembly Papers), vol. 21, P.A.N.S.

33 Editorial, *Novascotian*, 9 January 1843; also *Acadian Recorder*, letter from Y.Z., 1 February 1823; Editorial, 3 December 1825; Pericles, Letter V, 14 January 1826.

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commented on the stubborn resistance of Haligonians to the march of improvement.³⁴ In 1816 Bromley complained that the social leaders whose aid he needed most in the active promotion of charity education were the very people who opposed him the most resolutely: hence his description of the clergy as “bigotted” and of the town’s private schoolmasters and mistresses as “petty” in their approach to education.³⁵

At the same time, the apparent success of the occasional benevolent undertaking filled the townspeople with spasms of self-congratulation. In 1821 the *Acadian Recorder* complacently mused that Bromley’s flourishing Acadian school “has been supported with a liberality not unusual in Halifax and which reflects credit on the town.”³⁶ When such charitable ventures suddenly declined, as in 1823 when the Royal Acadian school languished, observers were quick to blame commercial stagnation for interrupting the flow of philanthropy.³⁷ Yet this convenient economic explanation did not seem plausible to all contemporaries. One newspaper correspondent claimed that influential citizens preferred to confine the benefits of education to their own children, and that the decline of the Royal Acadian school could thus be attributed “to the prevalence of an opinion that knowledge is to be kept within certain limits, beyond which it is detrimental to society.”³⁸ This critic was not alone in expressing the belief that “The rich man fears that the lower classes will become presuming and insolent in proportion as they are more enlightened.”³⁹ In a similar vein, Thomas Chandler Haliburton directed his sardonic wit against the members of the colonial council in 1827 for rejecting the educational measures passed by the assembly. He characterized the councillors as “12 dignified, deep read, pensioned old ladies, but filled with prejudices and whims like all other antiquated spinsters,” who believed that the poor should be in the Halifax poorhouse and that “to educate the lower orders, was to injure their morals and manners.”⁴⁰ It was reactionary notions such as these, one observer claimed, that discouraged people from contributing voluntarily to the schools and from treating the lower classes with anything but contempt.⁴¹

34 Memo, 2 May 1820, Dalhousie Journal, 1816-1828, Public Archives of Canada (microfilm) (hereafter P.A.C.).

35 Bromley to Burder, 12 October 1816, London Missionary Society Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 5, No. 12, Archives of the Congregational Council for World Mission, London (hereafter C.C.W.M.).

36 Editorial, *Acadian Recorder*, 4 August 1821.

37 British and Foreign School Society, *Annual Report*, 1823, p. 120.

38 Candidus, No. 1, *Acadian Recorder*, 27 September 1823.

39 Candidus, No. 2, *ibid.*, 11 October 1823.

40 Speech by T. C. Haliburton, House of Assembly debate, 26 March 1827, reported in *Nova-scotian*, 29 March 1827.

41 Probus, ‘Plain Strictures on Education’ No. 5, *Acadian Recorder*, 21 February 1824.

Because charitable or voluntary support tended to be sporadic, most of the schools relied on fees. The labouring poor were encouraged by the school managers wherever possible to pay the fees, because it was popularly assumed that a purchased service was more highly prized by the recipient than a free gift. A government education committee reported in 1825 that schooling "should not be gratuitous, because what costs nothing is generally valued at nothing," an argument that was subsequently used to justify school taxes.⁴² Where schooling had to be free of charge, as in the case of the poor blacks, admission was made to appear as a favour, not a right, "and continuance in the school must be dependent on good behaviour."⁴³

While the amounts charged annually in the schools, ranging from 2s6d to 20s, were not prohibitive except to the most indigent or intractable of the poor;⁴⁴ the admission of fee-paying pupils meant that the schools were in no way exclusively confined to the poor. According to the school trustees, prospering tradesmen in Halifax did not hesitate to take advantage of cheap educational facilities for at least some of their children. Since the fee-paying pupils attended with poor children, publicly-supported schools might have provided an opportunity for the mixing of social classes in the 'levelling' environment of the colony not usually found in the hierarchical institutions of the mother country, and colonists of a liberal disposition regarded the avoidance of social stratification in the schools as eminently desirable.⁴⁵ Although Halifax society was popularly noted for its fluidity,⁴⁶ evidence concerning the operation of the schools suggests that they did not encourage social mobility and indeed countenanced a double standard of education. The Royal Acadian school, for example, reflected a conservative respect for the existing class structure. Here, for many years, the payment of fees bought a more varied and advanced education than the plain fare of the three R's provided for charity pupils. The poor children were physically separated by partitions from their social betters and their distinction as inferiors was thereby carefully inculcated.⁴⁷ The Anglicans pursued the same practice in their National school where the poor were

42 Report of Joint Committee of Council and Assembly on Education, 7 March 1825, School Papers, 1813-1840, MSS vol. 439, No. 41, P.A.N.S.; Letter from Fellenburg, *Christian Messenger*, 3 March 1837; Letter from Scholaris, *Novascotian*, 29 March 1832, and Letter from J. M., Education No. 2, *ibid.*, 4 April 1839; G. R. Young, *On Colonial Literature, Science and Education; written with the view of improving the Literary, Educational, and Public Institutions of British North America* (Halifax, 1842), p. 150.

43 Inglis to Wix, 11 November 1835, Bray 12, S.P.G.

44 Inglis to Hamilton, 17 July 1821, John Inglis Papers (Folio 26), No. 28, S.P.G.; Petition of General Committee of Acadian school, 23 February 1830, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.

45 See letter from M. G., *Novascotian*, 4 September 1839.

46 *Letters from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, illustrative of their Moral, Religious, and Physical Circumstances during the years 1826, 1827, and 1828* (Edinburgh, 1829), p. 147.

47 Petition of Bromley, 1814, RG 1, vol. 305, No. 77, P.A.N.S.

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“kept in distinct apartments.”⁴⁸ Such a policy of physical segregation was denounced as hypocrisy by the Reverend Cornelius Griffin, a renegade clergyman thoroughly disenchanted with the elitism of colonial society. He recalled seeing “a partition erected in the school room, to separate the ‘higher’ from the ‘lower orders’”; and in 1828 claimed in a petition to the House of Commons that the people of England, who supported the National school through the government grant to the SPG, were being deceived by this society’s report that “the system of education is there made to embrace a wider scope than is the practice in England.”⁴⁹

By the 1830’s, however, Halifax schools had divided into two categories, a distinction which continued until 1850 when more uniform policies, including the exaction of fees, were implemented from above by the new Halifax board of school commissioners. Until then three of the schools seem to have catered principally to a middle-class clientele, while the remaining institutions, especially the schools for blacks and Catholics, preserved their close association with the education of the poor. The Acadian school became one of the former variety because it acquired a more elevated social character which partly stemmed from its success in producing graduates who were “in high standing in Society.”⁵⁰ Even more influential as a cause of this rise in status than the ambitions nursed by ‘old Acadians’ for their school was the interest taken in its management by the impressive general committee. In 1840 its prominent members included Henry Hezekiah Cogswell, an executive councillor and leading banker, Martin Gay Black, a merchant banker, the Reverend John Martin, Dr. Robert Hume, Hibbert Newton Binney, the collector of imposts and excise, James W. Nutting, prothonotary of the supreme court, all of whom had supported the school for about twenty years, Joseph Howe MLA and editor of the *Novascotian*, James William Johnston, councillor and solicitor-general, Charles Twining, a lawyer, and George N. Russell JP. Nutting, Twining, and Russell were city poor commissioners and men such as Cogswell and Black were noted for their genuine benevolence and service to the community. But since the trustees were also advocates of efficiency and improvement, they favoured converting the Acadian school into a first-class model school. They thus devoted more attention in the 1840’s to an unsuccessful attempt to turn the school into a teacher training institution than to the expansion of its facilities for the education of the city’s poor. This concern with progress

48 Education Committee Report, RG 5, Series R (Reports and Resolutions), vol. 22 (1836), No. 46, P.A.N.S.; Inglis to Hamilton, 15 May 1828, John Inglis Papers (Folio 26), No. 72, S.P.G.

49 Griffin’s Petition to the House of Commons, quoted in *Acadian Recorder*, 10 May 1828.

50 Letter from a Nova Scotian on education, *Novascotian*, 29 November 1838. Unfortunately there is no way of determining the names of children who attended the Acadian school or any other school in this period; school registers date from 1869. For tendency towards a social rise in similar schools in England, see D. Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1600-1960* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 149.

encouraged the trustees to secure as successive superintendents of the school the very latest products of the British training schools⁵¹

Under these circumstances, the institution grew in reputation and attracted children of parents of the "highest respectability," but in the process inadvertently tended to underplay its partial function as a charity school. The praise bestowed by the Baptists on the pioneer institution in 1846 reveals their greater concern for its middle-class than its charity preoccupations:

It is not now, nor ever has been, merely a school for the rudiments of Education, but an efficient seminary for instruction in every branch of useful English learning, where not only the children of the poorest parents, but likewise many of those of the highest respectability receive the elements of a sound, practical Education.⁵²

The children of Baptists and Presbyterians were readily sent to the Acadian school because these denominations, with the exception of the Free Church of Scotland, did not establish their own schools and because the growing influence of Protestant nonconformists in colonial Halifax coincided with the social rise of the Acadian school.

A more striking transition can be illustrated statistically in the case of the Wesleyan school, where the proportion of free scholars fell from one-half in 1844 to less than one-quarter in 1850.⁵³ This once plain day-school had by 1850 branched into five or six departments as the social expectations of Methodists grew and was by that date proudly advertised as an "academy."⁵⁴ Like the Methodists' school, that opened by St. John's Free Church of Scotland in the 1840's catered primarily to the church's own congregation. It began and continued with a very small proportion of free scholars,⁵⁵ a fact which indicates the middle-class character of the Presbyterians more than their lack of social responsibility towards the poor.

In contrast to these examples, a similar social rise appears not to have occurred in the case of the Anglican schools, despite John Inglis' early insistence

51 For information on Hugh Monroe (1838), Alexander S. Reid (1840), and Stephen Selden (1845), see Petition of Committee of Royal Acadian school, 6 February 1839, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.; *Guardian*, 19 December 1838, 22 April and 29 July 1840, 3 January 1845.

52 Editorial, *Christian Messenger*, 6 February 1846. The social rise of the Baptists can of course be linked to the ex-Anglican element in Granville Street church. See *Novascotian*, 21 June 1847.

53 Fourth Annual Report of the Central Board of Education, *J.L.A.*, 1845, App. No. 38, p. 122; Report of Committee of Board of School Commissioners appointed to visit schools, 20 June 1850, Records of the Board of Commissioners of Schools for the City of Halifax 1850-1864, RG 14, No. 65, P.A.N.S.

54 The lowest department represented the common school. *Wesleyan*, 19 January and 17 August 1850.

55 Report of Committee of Board of School Commissioners appointed to visit schools, 20 June 1850, RG 14, No. 65, P.A.N.S.

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that the poor could be attracted only by the fashionable social appeal of the schools, and that the National school must therefore “be made desirable to the rich and the poor.”⁵⁶ In order to fulfill its pretensions as the established church, the Church of England had to continue to serve the needs of the colonial poor. Its long-time monopoly of charity education for the Nova Scotian blacks is the best illustration of this concern. That monopoly was broken for a time in the 1810’s and 1820’s when the Royal Acadian school opened its doors to the poor regardless of creed or colour. It provided ‘higher’ education for the blacks in the form of writing and ciphering, attributes which they had not been encouraged to attain in the Bray school.⁵⁷ Colour prejudice, however, hastened the decline of inter-racial schooling. The subsequent conversion of the defunct Bray school into the monitorial African school was an attempt by the Anglicans to ensure the continuance of elementary education for the poverty-stricken Halifax blacks, a necessity well understood by the local government. In 1836 the school committee of the legislature reported that

. . . room could be found in the other three Schools for the admission of these children were they not of African extraction. But the known repugnance of the Whites to mix with them, shuts them out from the benefit of the other Institutions, and if they are to be taught at all, they must receive their rudiments of knowledge in a separate and distinct establishment.⁵⁸

While the establishment of the African school indicates that the Church of England felt responsible for the blacks, it also represented a reassertion of the monopoly over their education. The church never welcomed competition in the realm of charity education. Robert Uniacke, for example, vied with the Catholics in his parish of tradesmen, mechanics, and labourers for the enrolment in St. George’s school of children of the Catholic poor.⁵⁹ While fulfillment of its role as the established church might necessitate this policy, the church also had its own fee-paying school — the Halifax Grammar school — for well-to-do Anglicans who were accordingly discouraged from sending their children to the monitorial schools where they might have acted as a social leaven for the mass of the poor.

56 Inglis to Hamilton, 27 March 1821, John Inglis Papers (Folio 26), No. 27, S.P.G.

57 Stanser to Parker, 27 April 1814, and Stanser to Wix, 24 April 1815, Bray 12, S.P.G. In 1818, 26 of the 326 children in the Acadian school were blacks. Statement of funds of Royal Acadian school, 1818, RG 1, vol. 305, No. 120, P.A.N.S. The preponderance of X’s for signatures on the petition of the Halifax blacks for a school in 1834 casts serious doubts on the effectiveness of the ‘higher’ education. Memorial of Richard Preston and others, 1834, RG 5, Series P, vol. 72, P.A.N.S.

58 Education Committee Report, RG 5, Series R, vol. 22 (1836), No. 46, P.A.N.S.

59 Uniacke’s Missionary Return, 27 January 1846, E MSS vol. B (1846), pp. 313-15, S.P.G.; for an indication of Catholic invective against Uniacke, see speech by Joseph Howe, 25 March 1858, Nova Scotia, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 1858, p. 243.

What applied to the Anglican schools in connection with their charity function was even more pronounced in the Catholic institutions where large numbers and a preponderance of pupils receiving free or virtually free instruction suggest that the Catholics included more poor parishioners than did the other denominations. The majority of the city's poor appear to have been Catholics because these comprised the bulk of recent Irish immigrants and uneducated labourers.⁶⁰ Another factor that reinforced the Catholics' preoccupation with educational facilities for the poor was the introduction into Halifax in 1849 of the city's first religious order, the Sisters of Charity, who immediately turned the girls' school of St. Mary's parish into the most efficient public school in Halifax.⁶¹

Consequently, because financial need forced most schools to accept fee-paying students and led to the social rise of some of these institutions, the incipient middle class thereby developed a stake in the future of public schooling which helped not only to preserve but to increase their interest in education. But fees and charitable contributions were insufficient and school administrators were forced to look to external aid supplied by benevolent societies in England and subsidies inveigled from the local government as alternative sources of revenue. Several cases of English financial support to colonial education endured throughout the period, but in the urban area imperial assistance terminated in the 1830's, except for special causes such as black education. Until the Whig administration in England curtailed the parliamentary grant to the SPG, most of this money was used to bolster an unpopular religious establishment. The SPG granted funds to the National school and the African school; the Bray Associates maintained the Bray school, with occasional assistance from the interdenominational New England Company, until the school collapsed in the 1820's and then underwrote the same institution when it was resurrected as the African school in the 1830's. Later the Colonial Church Society (and its successor societies) aided the Three Mile House school. To the Anglican leader, the Reverend John Inglis, this external assistance provided the Church of England with an essential independence of both local indifference and local control. His reliance on the SPG stemmed in part from the impossibility of financing the National school by private means, especially when "the receipts of the school are diminished as the proportion of the poor children, whose instruction is our principal object in-

60 Of 210 labourers — family men — employed in stone-breaking by the authorities in the winter of 1833, 198 were from Ireland. *Novascotian*, 3 January 1833. Statistics for the years 1833-7 show that one-half of the town's transient paupers were Irish. *J.L.A.*, 1834, App. No. 44, 48; 1834-5, App. No. 12, pp. 22-23; 1836, App. No. 10, pp. 49-50; 1837, App. No. 8, p. 24; 1838, App. No. 29, p. 89. A critical Protestant claimed in 1847 that nine-tenths of the city's institutionalized poor were Catholics. Letter from P. Power's Friend, *Guardian*, 19 March 1847.

61 Sister Maura [Mary Power], *The Sisters of Charity Halifax* (Toronto, 1956), pp. 2-5; *Church Times*, 30 August 1850.

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creases." But Inglis was also anxious to avoid a complete dependence on the colonial assembly for public funds, since "a popular body composed chiefly of Dissenters" might use its financial power to force a change in the sectarian nature of the school.⁶²

The only other long-term English support came from the non-sectarian British and Foreign School Society, the successor to the Lancasterian Institution, but its aid continued on a much smaller scale than that contributed by the Church of England. The BFSS assistance to the Acadian school tended to take the form of slates, copies of scriptures, and other school materials.⁶³ The Church of England schools in St. Paul's parish, on the other hand, received substantial grants of money towards the salaries of teachers and other basic expenses, including the construction of buildings. Because the National school received such dependable support until the 1830's, it tended to draw pupils away from the less well-endowed Acadian school, the "School for the people and for the poor,"⁶⁴ and the latter institution's existence and welfare were thereby effectively undermined. By its reduction of the need for colonial exertions, financial aid from England stifled the local initiative on which charity education at the Acadian school materially depended.

The apparent willingness of the Halifax citizenry, particularly the Anglicans, to rely as long as possible on English sponsorship of charity schools illustrates their colonial mentality — that is, the immature and opportunistic character of the colonial response to its own social problems. Not until the SPG discontinued aid to the National school did its managers appeal to the public in 1835 for voluntary subscriptions.⁶⁵ Under the goading of critics who expressed surprise "that the members of the church with which it is so intimately connected do not at least emulate the voluntary munificence of other denominations, less wealthy, in sustaining their educational institutions,"⁶⁶ Anglican opinion began to recognize that local indifference could be ascribed to local dependence on Britain. Gradually progressive Anglicans came to exhort their brethren: "Let the sluggish apathy, which has been too much the characteristic of Churchmen in Halifax be thrown off, and succeeded by active and untiring exertion . . . Let us in fact depend upon ourselves, and rely less upon external assistance."⁶⁷

62 Inglis to Hamilton, 24 May 1819, John Inglis Papers (Folio 26), No. 21, S.P.G. In 1841 Bishop Inglis claimed that a Roman Catholic MLA objected to the government grant to the African school on the ground that it was a Church of England institution. Letter of Inglis, 3 March 1841, Bray Minute Book, 1835-45, pp. 180-1, S.P.G.

63 See British and Foreign School Society, *Annual Report*, 1830, p. 9, and 1831, p. 21.

64 Petition of Committee of Acadian school, 1819, RG 5, Series P, vol. 69, P.A.N.S.; Statement of National school, c. 1824, RG 14, No. 30, P.A.N.S.

65 National school appeal, *Novascotian*, 29 July 1835.

66 Editorial, *Acadian Recorder*, 29 June 1850.

67 Editorial, *Church Times*, 12 April 1850.

By the middle of the century Nova Scotians had become irrevocably committed to the financing of Halifax schools through the medium of their representative assembly. As early as 1814,⁶⁸ Walter Bromley, with some reluctance in an age that was suspicious of government interference, applied to the legislature for financial aid to preserve the Royal Acadian school, the school which "directed general attention to the intellectual and moral wants of the children of the poor, and soon led the way to the formation of similar scholastic establishments."⁶⁹ Thereafter the local government subsidized most schools that taught free pupils,⁷⁰ demurring only in the 1820's when the admission of increased numbers of fee-paying children to the National, Catholic, and Acadian schools was resisted as a dilution of the charitable function of those institutions.⁷¹ The local authorities were not yet ready to underwrite to a significant extent the education of fee-paying children. In 1824 the members of the council agreed "to afford reasonable assistance to poor persons, to enable them to teach their children reading, writing, and arithmetic; but they cannot concur in any bill which provides for the education of the children of the rich and poor, indiscriminately, at the public expense."⁷² Nonetheless, with the exception of a few years when disagreements between the council and the assembly interrupted the supply bills, the government's respect for the work done by the quasi-charity schools of Halifax, in particular the relatively large number of children trained by each,⁷³ ensured the financial backing which local benevolence did not provide. Because of the lingering tendency amongst administrators to believe that government aid was granted solely to subsidize the instruction of the poor who did not pay fees,⁷⁴ such assistance was recognized as representing provincial largesse. Only the continued existence of the schools and the increasing acceptance of the principle of general education in a long series of school bills eventually transformed the image of education for the poor from benevolent charity into a public duty.⁷⁵

68 Petition of Bromley, 1814, RG 1, vol. 305, No. 77, P.A.N.S.

69 Editorial, *Guardian*, 19 April 1850.

70 Subsidies, usually £100, were first granted to the Acadian school in 1814, the National school in 1820, St. Mary's school in 1821, St. George's school in 1828, the African school in 1836, the Wesleyan school in 1839. Smaller grants to the poor house school (£25) date from 1823, the Infant school (£50) from 1833, St. John's school (£50) from 1845. For the redistribution of grants by the city school commissioners in 1850, which included aid to St. Patrick's school and Three Mile House school for the first time, see Minutes, 7 August 1850, Halifax School Commissioners, RG 14, No. 65, P.A.N.S.

71 Compare British and Foreign School Society, *Annual Report*, 1816, p. 20 with *Annual Report*, 1819, pp. 68-69.

72 *J.L.A.*, 24 January 1824.

73 Letter from Candor, *Acadian Recorder*, 8 February 1823. In 1833 the number of children in the Catholic school was 338; in 1834 it was 379; in 1835 it was 491. *J.L.A.*, 1836, App. No. 46, p. 89.

74 Inglis to Hamilton, 26 November 1830, John Inglis Papers (Folio 26), No. 92, S.P.G.

From the 1820's this government involvement in common schooling was justified by a cross-section of Nova Scotian opinion on the ground that the maintenance of the morals of the populace constituted a legitimate sphere of legislative activity;⁷⁵ only the means and degree of that involvement remained the subjects of inconclusive debate, a debate which also focused on the social utility of educating the poor. While considerable continuity of views on this matter existed throughout the period, a subtle change in mood occurred in the 1830's and 1840's as colonists began to exercise greater control over their local affairs through the increased political power enjoyed by their elected representatives. In its broadest terms, the change in the prevailing concept of education might be described as a gradual transition from tory paternalism to middle-class opportunism. This resulted in the shift of emphasis from the need to educate the poor in order to protect property and the *status quo* to the desirability of general education to promote the accumulation of property and unimpeded material progress.

The first monitorial schools were founded on the assumption that the poor needed instruction in the rudiments of learning and the principles of the Christian faith in order to mould them into good Christians and good citizens. The purpose of the schools was aptly embodied in the National school medal of merit, engraved with the injunction, "Fear God, Honour the King."⁷⁷ All the institutions emphasized as their primary concern the spiritual welfare of the poor, the object being to improve their morals and character, not their opportunities. The essential reader was therefore the bible;⁷⁸ the ultimate goal, salvation; the more immediate objective, seemly behaviour outside the school. The master accordingly taught the children in the Royal Acadian school to abhor "profane language, the uttering of falsehoods, pilfering and violating the Sabbath."⁷⁹ Similarly in 1819 William West, master of the National school, exhorted his school-leavers to "show by their propriety of conduct and religious observance of the Sabbath that a systematic and religious education makes an impression upon the youthful mind and is not easily, if ever, obliterated."⁸⁰ The parochial school in St. George's parish openly acknow-

75 See speeches by John Young, House of Assembly debate, 12 February 1828, reported in *Novascotian*, 21 February 1828; by Stephen Deblois, 10 December 1830, reported in *ibid.*, 16 December 1830; by Lawrence Doyle, 19 February 1839 and Thomas Forrester, 4 March 1839, reported in *ibid.*, 28 March 1839.

76 Letter from Y. Z., *Acadian Recorder*, 1 February 1823; Letters from Pericles, *ibid.*, 24 September and 12 November 1825; Speech by John Homer, House of Assembly debate, 12 February 1828, reported in *Novascotian*, 16 February 1828.

77 P. A. Emenau, "The SPG in Nova Scotia: a Survey of a System of Parochial Education" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1967), p. 77.

78 See petition of Willis, 7 February 1843, RG 5, Series P, vol. 74, P.A.N.S.

79 Report of Royal Acadian School Society, 23 April 1819, *Acadian Recorder*, 8 May 1819.

80 West to Hamilton, 19 July 1819, C/CAN/NS. 2, No. 155, S.P.G.

ledged its concern for “extending benefits of general education amongst the children of the poor in promoting their moral, religious, and mental improvement.”⁸¹ Without such training, Uniacke cautioned, the children of the poor in the parish “would remain uneducated and exposed to the numerous temptations of idleness, ignorance and sin.”⁸² Even the Protestant ladies who managed the Infant school, where the children’s ages ranged from eighteen months to seven years, primarily aimed “to instill into the infant mind the blended elements of knowledge and religious truth.”⁸³ Experience suggested to contemporaries that the schools did improve the morals of the poor. Assemblyman John Alexander Barry, for example, deplored the decline of the Royal Acadian school in the 1820’s and enumerated the consequent evils with typical Methodist apprehension:

When the Acadian School was in full operation, and encouragement given to its teacher, they [Halifax streets] were not thronged as they now were with idle and uneducated children. It was now impossible to pass from one corner to another, without the ear being assailed by oaths, by curses, and by language, such as ought not to proceed from the mouth of any individual, much less from the lips of a child and on Sunday, was it not a notorious fact . . . that from one end of the streets of Halifax to the other, the playing marbles and tossing of coppers was a common amusement?⁸⁴

At the same time, the problem of the uncertain future of the monitorial schools caused assemblyman Charles Rufus Fairbanks to suggest that “If persons were compelled to support the National, Acadian, and Catholic schools, the streets of Halifax would not be lined as they were with idle and dissolute vagrants.”⁸⁵

Although Nova Scotians generally admitted that good Christians made good citizens, colonial legislators and property-owners were preoccupied with the latter consideration — the production of docile, law-abiding youths — and they assessed the success of charity education in terms of the secular benefits to society. Supporters of the African school recognized as one of its prime functions the training of “loyal and faithful subjects” who would evince the highest respect for “the paternal government under which they live.”⁸⁶ The relation-

81 Petition of Uniacke, 1 March 1830, RG 5, Series P, vol. 69, P.A.N.S.

82 Petition of Uniacke, 9 February 1836, *ibid.*, vol. 72.

83 Petition of Committee of Halifax Infant school, 17 February 1838, *ibid.*, vol. 73; Petition of Ladies, Managers of Infant school, 1852, *ibid.*, vol. 76.

84 Speech by J. A. Barry, House of Assembly debate, 12 February 1828, reported in *Novascotian*, 21 February 1828.

85 Speech by C. R. Fairbanks, House of Assembly debate, 12 February 1828, *ibid.*

86 Letter from Clericus, *Colonial Churchman*, 13 December 1838. In school petitions the more ethereal objective of preparing the poor for the afterlife tended to be applied primarily to the blacks. Petitions of Willis, 4 February 1836, RG 1, vol. 313, No. 23, and 7 February 1842, RG 5, Series P, vol. 73, P.A.N.S.

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ship of publicly-sponsored religious and moral training to the fashioning of the desirable citizen was precisely captured in comments in the first local history of Nova Scotia written in 1823, the emphasis of which is typical of eighteenth-century England in the respect shown for property:

There is more necessity for affording means of education to the poor, than to the rich. The poor in all countries form the mass of the people, and it is upon their morals and manners, that public tranquility and happiness is built. Whatever makes them good christians makes them good citizens. The more instructed and the better informed they are, the less liable are they to be affected by the delusions of superstition and enthusiasm, which among ignorant people occasion the most dreadful calamities An instructed and intelligent people are more decent and orderly than an ignorant one. They feel and know the respect due to themselves, and are more willing to pay a proper regard to their superiors, in the different stations of life. It is this that gives a security above the law, and confirms to Nova Scotia the blessing of undisturbed repose⁸⁷

Astute petitioners to the legislature clearly understood that the argument of law and order as a justification for education appealed to the government far more effectively than the claims of purely religious, moral, or sentimental considerations. The major value of education, as expressed in the Acadian school petition of 1814, was held to be its “probable influences on the welfare peace, and good order of Society.”⁸⁸ The press tended to emphasize the same theme. Correspondence to the *Acadian Recorder* adhered to the theory that “as knowledge increases, crimes diminish.”⁸⁹ Although learning might not prevent crime, it would reinforce public order. Indeed, if money was not spent on education, it would have to be spent on “asylums, penitentiaries, poor-houses, workhouses, jails and courthouses.” Sweeping quantitative generalizations were paraded before the public, such as the assertion that “the bulk of criminals are persons who were not favoured with a good education.”⁹⁰ While due allowance must be made for the rhetorical language of petitions and newspapers, the views of leading citizens tend to confirm the impression that they unhesitatingly endorsed the belief that common schooling provided “one of the main pillars of social order.”⁹¹

87 [T. C. Haliburton], *A General Description of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1823), p. 162.

88 *J.L.A.*, 24 February 1814.

89 Letter from Y. Z., *Acadian Recorder*, 29 March 1823.

90 Probus, ‘Plain Strictures on Education’, No. 2, *ibid.*, 20 December 1823; also Pericles, Letter V, *ibid.*, 14 January 1826.

91 Speech by Homer, House of Assembly debate, 12 February 1828, reported in *Novascotian*, 16 February 1828; Letter from a Wesleyan, *Wesleyan*, 23 March 1850.

Since the primary emphasis was thus placed on the contribution of education to the welfare of society, the denominational character of most of the schools was considered unexceptionable, or at least irrelevant. As the Reverend Thomas McCulloch explained, with reference to every type of school, "it ought first to be ascertained, how far it is calculated to improve the community; and, if its general utility appear, it is, in proportion to its value and to the extent of the public funds, unquestionably entitled to the protection of Government, whether it belong to churchmen or dissenters, protestants or catholics, ought to be entirely disregarded."⁹² This opinion remained a widely accepted one during a period which marked the decline of the Anglican establishment and only the earliest manifestations of the coming anti-Catholicism of the 1850's. With the exception of the Acadian, Infant, and poorhouse schools, charity education in Halifax remained sectarian, though not exclusive, and the years before the fifties were characterized more by denominationalism than by antagonism between Catholics and Protestants over separate schools.⁹³ Many lay leaders therefore agreed with the opinion voiced by assemblyman James DeWolf Fraser in 1849 that in new countries the state ought to assist in the education of the people, even if the institutions assisted were denominational, "providing *that the funds contributed by the state are applied solely to secular purposes.*"⁹⁴

The contribution which the education of the poor made to the welfare of the community implied not only an assurance of public order but also the attainment of more practical objectives. One of the chief aims of the abortive charity school bill of 1791 had been to render the colonial youth "usefull members of the Society in which they live."⁹⁵ The moral training offered by the schools was thus designed to foster "industry and sobriety" amongst the capital's future citizens, as temperance was expected to do for the older generation.⁹⁶ Moreover, those institutions most concerned with the indigent, such as the Royal Acadian school in its early years and the successive schools exclusively for blacks, supplemented moral education with vocational or manual training, and the operations of these establishments resembled very closely the schools of industry of eighteenth-century England.⁹⁷

92 Investigator, *Halifax Journal*, 2 April 1821; Petition of Committee of Wesleyan school, 1842, RG 5, Series P, vol. 73, P.A.N.S.

93 See Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies, *Wesleyan*, 2 December 1839; 'On the advantages of education when based upon religion,' *Guardian*, 23 February 1842; Letter from a friend to the religious education of the young, *Christian Messenger*, 5 April 1850; Letter from J. S., *Church Times*, 16 May 1851.

94 Speech by J. D. Fraser, House of Assembly debate, 26 February 1849, reported in *Novascotian*, 16 April 1849; see also Report of Commissioners of Schools for County of Halifax, 28 December 1840, *J.L.A.*, 1841, App. No. 15.

95 An Act for Establishing a Charity School in the town of Halifax, 1791, RG 5, Series U, vol. 1, P.A.N.S.

96 Petition of Royal Acadian School Society, 1823, MSS vol. 411, No. 103, P.A.N.S.

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The practical training given in these schools, as well as the emphasis placed on encouraging the virtues of thrift, industry, and self-help in all educational institutions, were specially designed to create an alternative to poor relief at the public expense. The Royal Acadian school claimed to render a great service to the community when its school-leavers could be found employed as useful clerks, apprentices, and servants.⁹⁸ The Church of England prided itself on being able to produce excellent domestic servants out of its Bray scholars and to find them benevolent masters.⁹⁹ The cultivation of a sense of both personal and social responsibility in the children through their free education meant that they would not “grow up in ignorance and become hereafter a burden to themselves and the community.”¹⁰⁰ Even the Infant school could claim to fulfill a vital utilitarian role in the community because the school was analogous to the modern day-care centre for young children. “By being sent to the Infant school their parents are during most of the working hours of the day relieved from such charge and are thus enabled with less care to devote their time to the procuring their support.”¹⁰¹

The contemporary enthusiasm for self-help also focused attention on education as a means of stimulating the poor to aid themselves. Their education could be profitably promoted by society as “the purest charity” on the grounds that it was utilitarian and palliative. Schooling was intended to provide for that “unfortunate class the best means of earning for themselves an honest livelihood, and of neither dishonouring Society by their crimes, nor burdening it with the effects of their reckless and improvident habits.”¹⁰²

Although the emphasis on teaching industrious working habits was designed to instruct the poor to take seriously their responsibilities as useful members of the community, educationists and school sponsors did not intend to hold out to them the prospect of a collective improvement in their economic station in life. Even inhabitants of a more liberal disposition were not prepared to go further than to recognize that schooling did elevate “the character and condition of the poorer classes,”¹⁰³ and make them more pliant and respectable. Such commentators were particularly concerned that the lack of education

97 Petition of Willis, 21 February 1837, RG 5, Series P, vol. 72, P.A.N.S.; Petition of Willis, 7 February 1842, *ibid.*, vol. 73.

98 Report of Royal Acadian School Society, 23 April 1819, *Acadian Recorder*, 8 May 1819.

99 Stanser to Parker, 13 January 1810 and 10 January 1811, Bray 12, S.P.G.

100 Petition of Uniacke, 1 March 1830, RG 5, Series P, vol. 69, P.A.N.S.

101 Memorial of Ladies, Managers of Infant School, 1849, *ibid.*, vol. 75; Infant school notice, *Novascotian*, 9 February 1832. The first provincial superintendent of education, J. W. Dawson, thought that more infant schools were required. J. W. Dawson, *Report on Schools of Nova Scotia for the Year 1850* (Halifax, 1851), p. 83.

102 Education Committee Report, RG 5, Series R, vol. 22 (1836), No. 46, P.A.N.S.

103 Report of Joint Committee of Council and Assembly on Education, 7 March 1825, MSS vol. 439, No. 41, P.A.N.S.

amongst the poor fostered a contemptuous attitude on the part of their social superiors and acted as a stain on the reputation of the country. Education therefore had nothing to do with the eradication of inequality, since the poor could be safely invited to share with their betters the moral and enlightening benefits of education without at the same time sharing comparable economic prospects. Nor would education necessarily give the poor pretensions and make them dissatisfied with their lowly occupations. The argument that education might deplete the ranks of the workers and leave insufficient manpower to perform the meaner tasks was countered by an unquestioning faith in the beneficial operation of market forces; available employment would always attract labour.¹⁰⁴ One of the city's Catholic papers, anxious to foster education as a means of improving the opportunities of Catholics in a Protestant-dominated society, also impatiently rejected such groundless apprehensions; labour problems created by an educated working class would not have to be faced until all the poor had in fact been educated, and that prospect was as yet far distant.¹⁰⁵

In line with these preconceptions, the kinds of work the poor were trained and encouraged to perform consisted of the humblest occupations — servants, clerks, sailors, and labourers — and so the fund of exploitable labour was never threatened. Charity education served as a conditioning process as much as a cure for illiteracy. The most extreme example of the attitude that the poor must be trained to accept their station in life prevailed in the case of the blacks, who were regarded in purely socio-economic terms as the most poverty-stricken and most permanent of the poor. Through the African school in Albermarle Street the black children were enabled to “fill their humble station here with credit to themselves, and advantages to the Community.”¹⁰⁶ The stark reality of the results of this education was noted in 1843 by the inveterate traveller and colonial publicist, James Silk Buckingham, in his comments on the Halifax blacks: “The greater number of them appear to have made little or no improvement; their condition being poor, ignorant, dirty, and indolent; while no pains seem to be taken, either by the government or by any benevolent society, to elevate them, by education and training above their present state.”¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, some contemporaries recognized that natural ability was not the preserve of the middle and upper orders of society.¹⁰⁸ As in England,

104 Thoughts on education by Philadelphus, *Guardian*, 23 February 1849; Speech by Samuel Creelman, House of Assembly debate, 24 February 1849, reported in *Novascotian*, 16 April 1849.

105 Editorial, *Register*, 15 July 1845.

106 Petition of Willis, 4 February 1836, RG 1, vol. 313, No. 23, P.A.N.S.; African school examination, *Guardian*, 30 October 1839.

107 J. S. Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the other British Provinces in North America with a Plan of National Colonization* (London, 1843), p. 341; see also Minutes, 12 June 1850, Halifax School Commissioners, RG 14, No. 65, P.A.N.S.

108 Letter from Pericles, *Acadian Recorder*, 20 January 1827.

public-spirited inhabitants believed that unusual talent occasionally appeared even amongst individual poor children and that society had a duty to discern and foster it. The difference between the talented poor and the talented rich remained largely a question of education. As one contemporary metaphorically explained, "We may all recollect the very beautiful and applicable comparison of the human mind to a block of marble. Education is the only sculptor that can bring its latent beauties to light."¹⁰⁹ To some extent, therefore, education of the urban poor could not entirely ignore the flowering of individual talent.

An acknowledgement of a responsibility for talent-spotting by Nova Scotians during the period of the loyalist ascendancy can be found in the constitution of the Halifax Grammar school. After its foundation in 1789, it remained for twenty years an institution exclusively for the fee-paying elite. In 1808, however, the assembly temporarily suspended its annual grant to the school on the ground that the public should not have to bear the expense of educating the sons of the well-to-do while the poor remained destitute of learning.¹¹⁰ The grant was restored on condition that the school, like the projected public grammar schools to be established in every county of Nova Scotia, should accommodate an equitable proportion of the bright poor boys of the town free of charge, their number being set at ten.¹¹¹ Although the Anglican trustees, represented by John Inglis, deplored the prospect of having to burden the school "with a number of free scholars, who would have driven out all the rest,"¹¹² the financial power of the assembly gave it the authority to impose its will; from that time until mid-century a few of the talented poor children of Halifax were apparently enrolled to receive free secondary education. But, as an inveterate schemer, Inglis saw a way to nullify the objectives of the assembly and by 1820, if not before, the poor children in the school were not being advanced from English to Latin scholars despite the clear provision in the act that they should be taught "in the same manner as any other scholars."¹¹³ It is difficult to see, therefore, how the ten poor children in the grammar school were given anything more advanced than the elementary education concurrently being received by the generality of poor in the charity schools.

Examples of a disposition to discern ability amongst the poor can also be found in the schools specially designed for them. Bromley certainly believed in the efficacy of recognizing and encouraging talented black children in his

109 Thoughts on education by Philadelphus, *Guardian*, 23 February 1849.

110 *J.L.A.*, 7 December 1808; Petition of George Wright, 15 February 1812, Halifax Grammar School Papers, RG 14, No. 33, P.A.N.S.

111 51 Geo. 3, cap. 2, An Act to amend an Act, passed in the twentieth year of His Majesty's Reign, entitled, An Act for establishing a Public School in the Town of Halifax.

112 Letter from Inglis, 18 October 1809, *Journal of Proceedings*, vol. 30, pp. 33-35, S.P.G.

113 That is, from primary to secondary education. 51 Geo. 3, cap. 2; Memo, 2 May 1820, *Dalhousie Journal*, 1816-1828, P.A.C.

school. As an exponent of a 'back-to-Africa' movement for the Nova Scotian refugee blacks, he wanted to train its religious and educational leaders in his school. He envisaged that they would not only serve as the social leaders of their people, but once established in Africa, they would naturally assume the position of the elite in a more primitive society.¹¹⁴ Elitism was never a monopoly of whites; nor were such aspirations confined exclusively to Protestants. Until the establishment of the Halifax board of school commissioners, the Irish immigrants of Dutch Town campaigned unsuccessfully for an equitable share of the legislative grant to the city schools.¹¹⁵ As poor Catholics they felt deeply their lack of power *vis à vis* other denominations and social classes and thought that the only solution was to produce their own qualified leaders. They must educate their own ethnic elite or be "destined to be puppets in the hands of knaves, or victims beneath the heel of power, for ever and ever."¹¹⁶ While talent-spotting among the poor had its limitations and class overtones in Halifax, it was officially acknowledged in the government school report of 1836, which recommended that more free schooling would multiply "the chances of bringing forward those rare talents which occasionally appear among the humbler orders."¹¹⁷

While these particular considerations continued to be discussed, Nova Scotians of the political reform era of the late 1830's and 1840's gradually came to regard the education of the poor in a wider and distinctively different context. As a result of a burgeoning interest at this time in the provision of 'national education', the needs of the urban poor commonly came to be seen as only one element in a school system that had to satisfy the varied demands of inhabitants throughout the province. With the creation of such a system in view, the educational debates of the period centred round the feasibility of compulsory assessment as a method of financing it, and the attitudes of politicians and prominent educationists towards this issue were influenced by their overriding concern for the character of secondary and higher education in the province. While this controversy had little direct relevance to the interests of the poor, their apparent indifference to education was employed by both the opponents and advocates of compulsory school taxes as convenient ammunition to reinforce their arguments. Politicians, wary of implementing direct taxation, tended to portray the poor as the element in the population least able to pay school taxes, and, since they were uninformed and apathetic, the

114 See 3rd resolution in 'First Report of a Meeting of the People of Colour, held at Halifax, 14 July 1815; enclosed in Bromley to Burder, 31 July 1815, London Missionary Society Correspondence, Continent of America, Folder 5, No. 7, C.C.W.M.

115 *Cross*, 3 July 1847; Petition of Catholics of Halifax, 1849, RG 5, Series P, vol. 75, P.A.N.S.; Report of Education Committee, *J.L.A.*, 1848, App. No. 77; 13 Vic. cap. 39, An Act for the Encouragement of Education.

116 Editorial, *Register*, 17 June 1845.

117 Education Committee Report, RG 5, Series R, vol. 22 (1836), No. 46, P.A.N.S.

least likely to take advantage of the extended facilities that would thus be expensively and pointlessly made available.¹¹⁸ For their part, the opponents of the excessive expansion of higher education and advocates of assessment, whose vision of universal education often proceeded from the most laudable sentiments of equal opportunity, were sometimes perplexed by the indifference of the poor. "It is strange," commented one such enthusiast, "that they do not see that Common Schools *must* chiefly benefit the poor . . . it is remarkable, that the poor are those, I believe in all parts of the country, who chiefly complain" at the cost of schooling.¹¹⁹ Liberals interpreted this negative response at the grassroots as evidence that the poor were suspicious of seemingly expensive educational measures at a time when they believed, under the coaxing of secularist propaganda, they were already supporting a multiplicity of colleges for the exclusive benefit of the rich.¹²⁰

More germane to the interests of the poor than this largely academic debate were the concepts of patriotism and progress which came to animate public discussion of education during the reform period in Nova Scotia. Indeed, the greater interest accorded education at this time can be traced in part to its supposed capacity to produce public-spirited citizens. Even in the earliest stages of the reform movement, representative institutions in the province were said to require a properly trained electorate because the "public good" was becoming increasingly subject to the will of the people.¹²¹ Subsequently, the electorate had to be taught how to use its powers along the lines the reformers desired, for "Among the uneducated, nothing was established, or firm, and the spirit of self-sacrifice, so necessary for the wise management of public affairs was wanting."¹²² The editor of the *Christian Messenger* agreed that the "great mass of the people" had to be raised "to the highest possible standard of intelligence, in order to fit them for duties which are the privilege and birthright of freemen."¹²³ The same theme was expounded by the editor of the *Novascotian*:

. . . mental improvement and consequent elevation of the masses of our population is the only safe basis upon which free Representative Institutions can safely repose. Formerly, when our Country was ruled by a Governor and Council, and even at a very recent period, when the people through their Representatives could exercise very little control over the administra-

118 Editorial, *Guardian*, 19 May 1841; Speech by J. B. Uniacke, House of Assembly debate, 22 March 1841, reported in *Novascotian*, 1 April 1841.

119 Letter from Ben, *Christian Messenger*, 5 February 1841.

120 *Novascotian*, 7 August, 23 October, and 6 November 1843.

121 Editorial, *Christian Messenger*, 27 January 1837.

122 Speech by Howe, House of Assembly debate, 22 March 1841, reported in *Novascotian*, 25 March 1841.

123 Editorial, *Christian Messenger*, 1 September 1843.

tion of public affairs, it was then of less consequence, politically speaking, that they should have a keen perception of the obligations of the Government to the governed. Since, however, by the introduction of the new system, the relative position of the people and their rulers, is reversed, and the Government of the Country is virtually placed in the hands of the people themselves . . . they should be endowed with such an amount of education . . . to resist the encroachments of the Government upon their civil rights¹²⁴.

Nova Scotians clearly interpreted the colony's state of development as passing from its childhood to "its youthful career" and as requiring a more educated youth in preparation for its more mature and responsible role.¹²⁵ Moreover, the arrival of industrialization in the form of the railway necessitated education in both science and citizenship; technical advancement might otherwise be controlled by outsiders or be voted down by the masses.¹²⁶

This determination to educate the electorate was accompanied by a desire to cut the umbilical cord with beneficent mother England. Such a change was to be expected in a colony developing both a local patriotism and a greater self-reliance. In education as in most other matters, the province had long been dependent on Britain; Nova Scotians now felt that they must themselves provide the necessary educational facilities. By the 1840's educationists particularly deplored the continued dependence on Britain for the supply of teachers. As the Reverend Edmund A. Crawley, a steadfast champion of indigenization, argued:

We of course admire, and owe much gratitude to, the liberality of those abroad, who thus extend their care and pecuniary aid across the Atlantic for our advantage. But is not such a system a mark of feebleness in us, and a means of *perpetuating* our weakness? . . . Leaning wholly on our Parent Country, we lost the vigour, activity, and enterprize of manhood. We remain sickly infants, hanging on maternal care, when we ought to be manly offspring, clustering, with the other Colonies, around the 'Father-land' with all the strength and dignity of a perfect growth.¹²⁷

The rise of a more patriotic sentiment in Nova Scotia was accompanied by an ardent faith in the concept of improvement, to which education could materially contribute. As one observer so appropriately put it, "Places of education are like roads, bridges, and inns: they *facilitate* our progress."¹²⁸ In

124 Editorial, *Novascotian*, 17 March 1845.

125 Editorial, *Presbyterian Witness*, 2 February 1850.

126 Editorial, *Novascotian*, 6 October 1851.

127 E. A. Crawley, 'The People's Interest', *Christian Messenger*, 16 October 1840.

128 *Christian Messenger*, 7 April 1837; Crawley, 'The People's Interest', *ibid.*, 14 August 1840;

these circumstances, opinions on the education of the poor came to be more positively influenced by the colonists' economic expectations. Since the poor were assigned to a predictable position at the base of the socio-economic pyramid, their "*common schools must be the foundation of any general system They are essential to the improvement of the great bulk of the population.*"¹²⁹ The education of the masses, it was presumed, would make them plumper, riper fruit for commercial exploitation.¹³⁰ Joseph Howe savoured this prospect with pleasurable anticipation.

In proportion as the poor were educated around the rich, in the same proportion would the rich become more wealthy, more independent, more at ease Every where the increase of intelligence among the mass of the population, caused an increase in the value of property. The products which depended on ingenuity and skill, were made doubly valuable by education.¹³¹

Similarly, a Methodist observer predicted that the diffusion of knowledge would stimulate greater industry and enterprise and promote a "more rapid development and more profitable employment of the resources of the country." As for the potentialities of the consumer society, he pointed out that "A *well educated* people . . . constitute a virtuous, industrious, comfortable, capital-accumulating community."¹³² Schooling, declared an earlier commentator, contributed to "the accumulation and due distribution of wealth. National riches were the true and genuine fruit of national intelligence . . . as the blessings of education are spread in a community, the lower and middle orders rise in morals, in mechanic skill and sagacity, in better directed efforts of productive labour and in acquiring taste and relish for the conveniences and comforts."¹³³

While supporters of public schooling always singled out the poor as the most direct beneficiaries of such a system, they realized that instruction of the poor would indirectly produce economic advantages for the rich. Accordingly, when an unsuccessful attempt to implement assessment in Halifax schools was made in 1850, the superintendent of education, John William Dawson, predicted that the benefits would be universal, but his appeal was essentially aimed at the upper strata of society: "The poor would receive a

W. Annand, ed., *The Speeches and Public Letters of the Hon. Joseph Howe* (Boston, 1858), I, pp. 307-18.

129 Crawley, 'The People's Interest', *Christian Messenger*, 18 September 1840.

130 Young, *On Colonial Literature* . . . , p. 137.

131 Speech by Howe, House of Assembly debate, 22 March 1841, reported in *Novascotian*, 1 April 1841; Thoughts on education by Philadelphus, *Guardian*, 23 February 1849.

132 Letter from a Wesleyan, *Wesleyan*, 23 March 1850.

133 Quintilian, 'On Education', *Novascotian*, 4 January 1827.

considerable boon; the middle classes would not pay more than they do now in Fees; and the rich would be well repaid by the improvement of society around them and the increased value of their property."¹³⁴ A constant appeal to the selfishness of property-owners characterized the efforts of the education lobby to overcome the supposed reluctance of the rich man to pay taxes for the support of schools of no direct benefit to his privately-educated family. It was the intimate connection drawn between the self-interest of the affluent individual and the economic progress of the country which was intended to secure his support for general education.

. . . since the greater the degree of mental cultivation among his neighbours, his domestics, and his dependants, the more agre[e]able will be the society with which he intermingles and is surrounded, the greater the security of person and of property, and the more rapid the decrease of crime; while, in the same proportion that knowledge is diffused, the capabilities and resources of the country will be investigated and developed, property will increase in value, the means for employment and accumulation of capital be indefinitely augmented and extended, and the truth of the poet's maxim be more distinctly and unequivocally demonstrated, that 'true self love and social are the same.'¹³⁵

While law and order were still mentioned as beneficial results of education, interest in the mere protection of property had, at least by the 1840's, become augmented by a paramount concern for its accumulation.¹³⁶ The partnership between material progress and education remained an enduring one, reinforcing the exploitation of the lower orders as workers and introducing the exploitation of wage-earners as consumers.

Now that the subservience of the poor was accepted by Nova Scotians as fully compatible with the principle of free schooling, the right of every child — including every poor child — to demand an education from society was universally recognized as inalienable.¹³⁷ Yet initially very little was done to match professions with performance. The expanding number of schools in Halifax made the citizens complacent until the 1840's when a growing realization emerged that the schools were not meeting the needs of the urban poor. In the forefront of this concern over deficient educational facilities were the supporters of secular education who tried to discourage the government from

134 *Guardian*, 6 September 1850; for plan, see *Scheme Proposed by the City Commissioners of Schools, with the view of bringing about a better regulated, and more uniform system of education in Halifax, by means of assessment* (Halifax, 1851).

135 Letter from J. McDonald to W. Young, *Guardian*, 10 February 1841.

136 Quintilian, 'On Education,' *Novascotian*, 1 February 1827; Speech by Howe, House of Assembly debate, 22 March 1841, *ibid.*, 1 April 1841.

137 Letter from a Wesleyan, *Wesleyan*, 23 March 1850.

propping up sectarian institutions of higher learning and encourage it to transfer “the larger part of the public funds appropriated to Education, to the support of Common schools, as they embrace the Education of the Poor.”¹³⁸ In 1843 George Renny Young, one of these protagonists, expressed the problem in numerical terms when he calculated that 1500 or 1600 children were growing up in ignorance, an estimate which two years later was said to represent more than half the total number of children in Halifax.¹³⁹ The dimensions of the problem were indicated by the provincial board of education’s remark “that in the capital . . . the proportion of those who are receiving education is far below that of the rest of Nova Scotia.”¹⁴⁰ This was a sobering reflection for those who argued that Halifax must provide the lead in such matters. “What can be expected from scattered settlements,” ‘A Friend of Education’ posited, “if the crowded city presents so deplorable an aspect?”¹⁴¹ If public lethargy was to be overcome, this must first be accomplished in the urban setting where “progressive influences” were assumed to exist.¹⁴²

Though this unsatisfactory situation can be attributed to the inadequacy of educational facilities and to prevailing priorities, contemporaries concentrated their criticism on the evils of the system of voluntary attendance at the schools. Instead of examining the deficiencies of the schools, they presumed that poor parents who were sufficiently concerned with improving their lot sent their children to the existing institutions. If large numbers of parents did not take advantage of the education available, this had to be attributed to deliberate choice or widespread indifference. Moreover, such people were likely to be intemperate as well as intractable. Many parents of very limited means apparently preferred to spend their slender resources on rum rather than on their children’s welfare. While they frequented the grog shops their offspring were allowed “to grow up in idleness and ignorance.”¹⁴³ In these circumstances, worthy citizens were appalled by the unsavoury prospect of 1500 to 3000 un-schooled children “growing up in ignorance and neglect, forming . . . a street school, into which the other schools poured when their daily tasks were ended, to learn vicious habits.”¹⁴⁴ By the forties the social menace of juvenile

138 Resolutions of educational meeting in Halifax, *Novascotian*, 2 October 1843; Primary Education Society, *Register*, 16 May 1843.

139 Young’s speech at educational meeting in Halifax, *Novascotian*, 9 October 1843; Letter on education, *ibid.*, 30 June 1845. Dawson officially confirmed that half the children of the city were entirely without education in 1850. *Guardian*, 6 September 1850.

140 Fourth Annual Report of the Central Board of Education, *J.L.A.*, 1845, App. No. 38, p. 113.

141 Letter from a Friend of Education, *Novascotian*, 9 September 1850.

142 Editorial, *ibid.*, 16 June 1851.

143 A Scotsman, Letter on education, *Novascotian*, 1 February 1838; Proceedings at Meeting held in the African chapel, 19 May, *ibid.*, 25 June 1834; Speech by Howe, House of Assembly debate, 22 March 1841, *ibid.*, 1 April 1841.

144 *Church Times*, 30 August 1850.

delinquency coloured middle-class urban attitudes towards the education of the poor more strongly than mere illiteracy had ever done in the past.

The solutions suggested for this perennial urban problem during the nineteenth century adumbrated future developments in Halifax. Firstly, public-spirited citizens would have to adopt the customary practice of British cities and provide a ragged or industrial school, "a school for the refuse of all other schools," which "seeks its children among the very lowest class of poor, where vice has stamped poverty with a deeper dye of wretchedness." Even with the poor productively employed in such institutions, however, the pragmatic leaders of society maintained that "The work, indeed, is less one of charity than economy,"¹⁴⁵ and that "under judicious training you may mould them into any shape that may be desirable."¹⁴⁶ The other solution for combatting the regrettable apathy of poor parents was that advocated by Joseph Peters when he closed the doors of his SPG school in 1785 — compulsory attendance.¹⁴⁷ As G. R. Young more obliquely put it, the government had by coercion to create the demand among the poor for the provision of schooling, since to leave "the labouring and lower classes, — whose time, and energies, and means, are required to sustain physical existence, to support at their pleasure schools for their children, is to perpetuate irreligion, ignorance, and vice."¹⁴⁸ With the growing problems caused by urbanization, Young was not the only person to assume that compulsory attendance would bring the poor the kind of education they needed.

Free and compulsory schooling, however, required legislation and from the 1830's an oligarchic executive government had been blamed for the failure of attempts to produce a viable system of education. The editor of the *Novascotian* asserted in 1840 that the chief reason why a suitable educational policy had not yet been adopted "arises out of the irresponsible nature of the Government."¹⁴⁹ Concerned citizens therefore put their faith in the principle of ministerial responsibility which was achieved later that decade; the elected representatives of the people would surely remedy the current deficiencies. In 1848, noted one commentator, the people had

145 Editorial, *Guardian*, 13 December 1850.

146 'Ragged Schools', *Novascotian*, 10 December 1850. In 1863 when statistics revealed that only 1938 children were in school in Halifax out of a school age population of 5591, Alexander Forrester, superintendent of education, argued that reformatories would be superfluous "until something more had been done to foster and encourage education among the masses;" *Witness*, 24 January 1863.

147 Letter from C. D., *Christian Messenger*, 11 March 1842; Letter from a Nova Scotian on education, *Novascotian*, 29 November 1838; J. Peters to S. Peters, 5 January 1789, Samuel Peters Papers, vol. 4, No. 2, P.A.N.S.

148 Young, *On Colonial Literature* . . . , p. 178.

149 Editorial comment on a letter from J. McP., *Novascotian*, 14 May 1840.

42 *Acadiensis*

... nobly done their duty, by sending to the Commons House of Parliament a majority of Liberals pledged to work out Responsible Government; by the adoption of which, it is ardently hoped, the moral and social condition of the masses will be elevated through the wise introduction of an improved system of Common School Education¹⁵⁰

Since free school legislation was not passed until 1864-6, the new executors of power apparently displayed no more urgent attention to social improvement than had their predecessors. In their preoccupation to maintain power, members of the first responsible ministry continued the old school regulations, which they had formerly "denounced as an absurd, ridiculous, and oppressive system — one which provides . . . for the education of the rich at the expense of the poor."¹⁵¹ Although the schools were now better supervised by school commissioners, the poor had essentially exchanged one unsympathetic set of masters for another, who voiced their concern in empty platitudes and whose priorities and policies in education remained largely elitist.

But the sluggishness of the movement for free schools in the colonial period should not be allowed to obscure the fact that elitist self-interest would predominate even more effectively after the implementation of such a system. This was because the social philosophy underlying public interest in educating the urban poor was no more democratic during the decades after the popular basis of government had been broadened than it had previously been. While one strand in public attitudes had shifted from a paternalistic to a patriotic outlook, the crucial preoccupation continued to be that of the economic well-being of the elite. In the pre-reform period social commentators expressed a determination to promote the morals and good behaviour of the poor in order to maintain public order and protect property. As the colony matured and entered the era of reform, education of the poor was interpreted as the patriotic duty of an independent-minded people, whose economic prospects would also be considerably brightened by improving the quality of the labour force. Thereafter education was seen as the means of making the population more productive and society more consumer-oriented. The last step in this process, for which Halifax society was not quite ready, would be compulsory schooling.¹⁵² How else but under the guise of democratic legislation for free and compulsory education could the elite ensure that the masses would contribute peacefully and fulsomely to the welfare of a bourgeois society?

150 Letter from Rustic, *Acadian Recorder*, 17 June 1848.

151 Speech by J. J. Marshall, House of Assembly debate, 30 January 1850, reported in *Nova-scotian*, 4 February 1850; Thoughts on education by Philadelphus, *Guardian*, 6 April 1849.

152 51 Vic. cap. 46, An Act to provide for the Compulsory Education of Children in the City of Halifax.