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PRINT MEDIA, PUBLIC DISCOURSE, AND THE ORIGINS OF SCHOOLING IN  
UPPER CANADA, 1784-1832

by

Anthony Di Mascio

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in History

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## ABSTRACT

### Print Media, Public Discourse, and the Origins of Schooling in Upper Canada, 1784-1832

Anthony Di Mascio  
University of Ottawa, 2008

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Professor Chad Gaffield

The established research on the origins of the Ontario school system emphasizes the educational ideas of prominent public men who advocated for school reform in the mid-nineteenth century. In this research, scholars focus on official educational records and correspondence among the political and social elite. The initial educational legislation enacted by colonial leaders in Upper Canada is dismissed as largely irrelevant to the school movement of the mid-nineteenth century.

This thesis broadens the analysis of the origins of the Ontario school system by shifting attention back to Upper Canada and by considering the ideas about schooling that were exchanged in a broader public sphere through colonial newspapers, published pamphlets, and petitions. By systematically analyzing the expanding print media of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the educational history of Upper Canada can be seen from a vantage point broader than that of colonial elites or the well-known school promoters. One key conclusion of this study is that print media enabled the emergence of government-aided schooling as a central topic of discourse in Upper Canada. The movement for government-aided schooling in Upper Canada began in

earnest during the first decades of the colony's existence. In other words, the intellectual roots of the school movement of the mid-nineteenth century took hold by the 1830s.

Upper Canada was not an equal society, and the official political discourse on education, centralized in the colonial legislature, was a restricted discourse; however, through print media a broader range of participants from various corners of the colony took part in a public discourse concerning educational development. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an increasing number of inhabitants, although disconnected by geographic, social, and economic barriers, voiced desires for government-aided schooling that converged in the central meeting place of print media and impacted the official making of educational legislation. Despite varying opinions on the means and ends of government-aided schooling, there was widespread agreement about its need by the 1830s; the debate was no longer about whether government-aided schools were desirable, but rather about what specific kinds of schools would be established. It was this agreement that framed the policy debate among the school promoters of the mid-nineteenth century.

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## INTRODUCTION

Schooling has two faces. On one side, it can be used by political rulers as a means of societal organization and control; on the other, it offers a promise to those ruled of liberation from the constraints of societal organization and control. These two faces have left a puzzling complexity in the history of attitudes about schooling's potential to change society. Schooling means and promises many different things to many different people. In Upper Canada this was no different. Conservatives, radicals, liberals, socialists, religious fundamentalists, and secularists, among others, all held deep convictions about the capacity of schooling to bring about desired social, political, and economic changes. Considering the extent to which the majority of the population was scattered across poorly-connected settlements, it is remarkable that these different groups, with different goals and ends in mind, were able to create a common system of schooling. How they were able to do so poses interesting questions that in the writing of Canadian history have continued to be examined, with each new generation of scholars coming to new conclusions about the intentions of schooling and its advocates.

That the question of schooling continues to receive scrutiny stands as testimony to our fascination with it. One of the most common experiences of Canadians is that we have, in one form or another, received some type of regulated education. For the vast majority this regulated education has come to be experienced in the form of government-subsidized schooling. For the rest, some form of government oversight was a part of

their educational experience. Such experiences are relatively recent historical phenomena. In the nineteenth century, many nations throughout the world began comprehensive experiments in schooling. The education of children, and the rearing of youth, became a public concern. Within one hundred years, “growing-up” took on new forms. Parents began sharing the care of their children *en masse* with others. While initially government-aided and regulated schooling raised questions of concern among reluctant and wary parents, by the dawn of the twentieth century, such schooling was the norm. Throughout the twentieth century, Canadians continued what was started in the nineteenth century and built up a massive system of universal schooling. Why?

This thesis revisits the questions of why and how schooling became an accepted norm in our experience of growing up. It addresses the important question of how a multiplicity of participants agreed upon the need for a common system of schooling. How did so many different people, with so many different aspirations and perceived purposes in life, come to agree upon sending their children to the same schools? Despite decades of research into the origins of schooling in Ontario, this question requires examinations of the roots of the system in the nineteenth century.

This study explores the origins of Ontario’s system of schooling, or what is commonly called “public schooling.” The term “public schooling,” however, underwent variations in definitions throughout the nineteenth century. Often, and especially early in the century, it was used to distinguish schooling conducted in larger institutions, in which students were exposed to a broader public world, with schooling conducted in private dwellings by, for example, a governess or tutor. “Public schooling,” however, did not necessarily imply government-aided institutions. As Susan Houston and Alison Prentice

point out, “The distinction between the kind of private schooling that was chiefly or entirely supported by private funds and public schooling, defined as entirely government and tax supported, was only gradually to be made in the course of the nineteenth century.”<sup>1</sup> When terms such as public schooling are quoted from contemporaries, it should be kept in mind that this term had different definitions, according to the speaker, the time period, and the context. I have attempted to decipher such usages of the term, and apply my analysis accordingly, but do not impose a modern definition of “public schooling.”

#### THE HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ITS OPPORTUNITIES

What can a new study on the origins of schooling in Upper Canada contribute to our established historical understanding? Many scholars have tackled the above questions in ways that have advanced our understanding of schooling’s origins and the ideas and intentions of major school promoters in the nineteenth century. In doing so, they have placed considerable emphasis on the first face of schooling, that is, that it can be used by those who rule as a means of organizing and controlling society. Prior to the 1960s, scholars of Upper Canada typically represented educational history as the triumph of great men, such as John Strachan and Egerton Ryerson, who designed a universal system of education aimed at reshaping society in order to provide equality of opportunity.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 35-37.

<sup>2</sup> A.N. Bethune, *Memoir of the Right Reverend John Strachan, First Bishop of Toronto* (Toronto: Henry Rowsell, 1870); Nathanael Burwash, *Egerton Ryerson* (Toronto: G.N. Morang, 1903); J. Harold Putnam, *Egerton Ryerson and Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912); C. B. Sissons, *Egerton Ryerson: His Life and Letters*, 2 vols., (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, and Company, 1937-1947); George W. Spragge, “John Strachan’s Contribution to Education, 1800-1823,” *Canadian Historical Review* 22 (1941); 147-158; C.E. Phillips, *The Development of Education in Canada* (Toronto: W.J. Gage Limited, 1957); J.D. Purdy, “John Strachan and Education in Canada, 1800-1851.” Ph.D. Thesis, University of

this “whig” interpretation of educational history, the writing tends to link gradual political democratization with liberal theories of meritocracy. Modern schooling, according to this interpretation, is the result of post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment western world governing practices of political democracy and liberal capitalism. This interpretation characteristically embraces the development of a school system in Upper Canada as the by-product of a nineteenth-century liberal vision of society.

The idea of meritocracy, according to whig historians, became the driving-force of government and those officially in charge of the social, political, and economic development of the province. Prior to the Act of Union in 1840, Upper Canada was dominated by a conservative and hierarchically structured political system. In the developing liberal-democratic state after 1840, a new generation of political leaders became increasingly concerned that opportunity should be placed in the hands of an increasing number of individuals. To ensure this, government had to be involved in the education of all citizens. The whig interpretation of school formation often applauds a rational and enlightened political elite who built an educational system which placed opportunity in the hands of all inhabitants.

During the 1960s and 1970s, scholars criticized the whig interpretation by portraying the “great men” as socially conservative “school promoters” involved in the construction of a school system that taught the specific values of an emerging urban and middle class.<sup>3</sup> These scholars reassessed the nature and content of schooling and the

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Toronto, 1962; Silvia Boorman, *John Toronto: A Biography of Bishop Strachan* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1969); J.L.H. Henderson, *John Strachan, 1778-1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); David Flint, *John Strachan, Pastor and Politician* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971); J.D. Purdy, “John Strachan’s Educational Policies, 1815-1841.” *Ontario History* 64 (1972): 45-64.

<sup>3</sup> See Susan Houston, “Politics, Schools, and Social Change in Upper Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 53 (1972); Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly (eds.), *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario’s Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975); Alison Prentice, *The School*

means by which school systems developed. *Canadian Education: A History*, published in 1970, replaced the whig narrative with one that recognized the class-based ideas pursued by early school promoters.<sup>4</sup> Michael B. Katz and his graduate students in the 1970s developed a more radical revisionism that described government-aided and regulated schooling in terms of social control. Building upon his research in Massachusetts, Katz and his students argue that structural transformations in the commercial and cultural life of Upper Canada raised new concerns about the socialization of children.<sup>5</sup> Fueled by changing patterns of immigration, internal migration, and the gradual transition to wage labour in both urban and rural areas, the middle class used educational reform to contain and control these forces through the imposition of social discipline.

Focusing on pauperism and indolence, Susan Houston applies the social control model to Upper Canadian educational history and suggests that school formation in Upper Canada was part of an effort to curb crime and vice, the perceived foster-children of poverty, by a socially conservative urban middle class.<sup>6</sup> As part of a broader effort to institutionalize children and others whose perceived conduct gave rise to perceived social problems, she argues that school reformers made both the schools they inherited, and the ones they established, into agencies of the state. Advocates of schooling, Houston suggests, put forth a “hidden curriculum” that was to be imposed by teachers. Schooling

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*Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (eds.), *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, and Louis-Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> For his research on Massachusetts, see Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968; reprint, New York: Teacher's College Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Houston, “Politics, Schools, and Social Change in Upper Canada.”

in the nineteenth century, according to Houston, was not simply about the *three Rs*; rather, a rigidly timed schedule, obedience to authority, submission of will, and conformity of behaviour dictated the pace of the school day in an effort to project such behaviour onto the wider society.<sup>7</sup>

Alison Prentice also uses the social control model in *The School Promoters*. She suggests that Upper Canada's system of schooling was created by a clearly identifiable group of people whom she calls the "school promoters:" a group of nineteenth-century educational reformers led by Egerton Ryerson who had very clear social goals in mind. These goals included the socialization of working-class children with the moral values of "the respectable classes" of Upper Canadian Victorian society. The school system was created, as in other social control models, in a top-down and oppressive endeavor.

Further revisionist history and neo-Marxist theory in the 1980s and 1990s held that school promoters built a large and powerful system of schooling centralized in the office of education in an effort to secure political hegemony for a bourgeois elite.<sup>8</sup> In *Building the Educational State and True Government by Choice Men?*, Bruce Curtis argues that state education played a major role in the construction of centralized hegemony. "Educational practice," he proposes, "was centrally concerned with political self-making, subjectification and subordination; with anchoring the conditions of political governance in the selves of the governed; with the transformation of rule into a popular

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<sup>7</sup> Houston, "Victorian Origins of Juvenile Delinquency: A Canadian Experience," *History of Education Quarterly* 12 (1972): 254-280; "Social Reform and Education: The Issue of Compulsory Schooling, Toronto, 1851-71," in *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*: 254-276; and "Politics, Schools, and Social Change in Upper Canada."

<sup>8</sup> See Bruce Curtis, "The Political Economy of Elementary Educational Development: Comparative Perspectives on State Schooling in Upper Canada" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1980); Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London: Althouse Press, 1988); Bruce Curtis, *True Government By Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

psychology. By the same token, educational provision, as state formation, was about *rule[.]*<sup>9</sup> Curtis suggests that the promotion of schools in the nineteenth century involved the establishment of new forms of governance. According to Curtis, political leaders used schooling to create an “educational state,” in light of the unruly behaviour of the masses in the Rebellions of 1837-1838.

In their study on the origins of schooling in nineteenth-century Ontario entitled *Schooling and Scholars*, Houston and Prentice reexamine the question of schooling’s origins and argue that it was under Ryerson’s leadership that schools were transformed from their informal and familial pioneer origins to a bureaucratic and impersonal institution. The creation of a central bureaucracy within the office of a powerful superintendent, and a local school administration tied to central control and inspection, rules, regulations, the implementation of accountability, standardized textbooks, and certification requirements, reflected Ryerson’s ambition to secure political stability by teaching civility, good manners, Christian respectability, and self-discipline. Houston and Prentice, like Curtis, identify “governing” as the key concern of the school promoters.

Since the 1970s, Douglas Lawr, Robert Gidney, and Wyn Millar have examined the extent to which centralization efforts were widely accepted, and moreover whether directives from the centre were accepted at the locality.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on evidence from

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<sup>9</sup> Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Their research produced a plethora of work. R.D. Gidney, “Centralization and Education: The Origins of an Ontario Tradition,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 7, 4 (1972): 33-48; R.D. Gidney, “Upper Canadian Public Opinion and Common School Improvement in the 1830’s,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 5, 9 (1972): 48-60; R.D. Gidney, “Elementary Education in Upper Canada: A Reassessment,” *Ontario History* 65, 3 (1973): 169-185; R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, “Egerton Ryerson and the Origins of the Ontario Secondary School,” *Canadian Historical Review* 60, 4 (1979): 442-465; R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, “Bureaucracy vs. Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System,” *Journal of Social History* 13, 3 (1980): 438-457; D.A. Lawr and R.D. Gidney, “Who Ran the

small towns and townships, Lawr, Gidney, and Millar suggest that local decisions affected the development of schooling in Upper Canada as much as decisions from the central authority. Their research is valuable in demonstrating that parents, teachers, and other local school advocates were often leading public discourse concerning the creation of schools, and that central authorities themselves often reacted to local decisions. They conclude that an emerging “middle class” in mid-nineteenth century Upper Canada pushed for public funding for the schools as voluntary schooling was proving inadequate and often unaffordable for a middle class with limited resources for the financing of their children’s education. Through a process of conflict and compromise with central authorities, a system of schooling was forged.

The historiography abounds with studies that consider the efforts of, and reactions to, political leaders shaping and forging a system of schooling during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Whig scholars focus on school promoters as advocates of the lower classes and proponents of liberal democratization. Revisionists challenge these assumptions and bring to light the oppressive nature of bureaucratized schooling. Both see schooling as a top-down process of social control, with the former seeing the intentions of major school advocates for good, and the latter seeing those intentions for bad.

Our understanding of the second face of schooling, how it came to be accepted and used by those ruled for their own purposes, however, requires more attention in order

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Schools? Local Influence On Education Policy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,” *Ontario History* 72, 3 (1980): 131-143; R.D. Gidney, “Making Nineteenth-Century School Systems: The Upper Canadian Experience and its Relevance to English Historiography,” *History of Education* 9, 2 (1980): 101-116; R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, “From Voluntarism to State Schooling: The Creation of the Public School System in Ontario,” *Canadian Historical Review* 66, 4 (1985): 443-473; R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Miller, *Inventing Secondary Education: the Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

to untangle the complexity of school formation and its intellectual underpinnings. Was schooling successfully imposed from above, for good or bad, on those without any political authority or influence? Or, were parents willing participants in the formation of school systems in the nineteenth century? If so, what was their role, and what were their goals? Despite decades of research into the origins of schooling in Ontario, our understanding of the reasons why parents accepted and advocated schooling as a societal norm is limited.

To be sure, a number of scholars have also grappled with these questions. In his study of family economies in late nineteenth-century Ontario, Chad Gaffield argues that the appetite for schooling was both motivated and constrained by the political and economic realities of the times.<sup>11</sup> By looking at family economies, Gaffield explores the ways in which parents strove to provide material security and survival for the next generation. As limited land inheritance made out-migration common in Ontario, families sought to provide for sons and daughters who would not inherit land. The provision of schooling, in this sense, became a form of inheritance. If major school promoters were restructuring society and making schooling a common experience of growing up, then parents welcomed the intrusion as a material benefit to their families. The centrality of the family remained consistent as societies were being reorganized. Families could harness societal reorganization in ways that benefited them and posterity. In this regard, the desired ends of the ruled could converge with the desired ends of the rulers and provide for an agreement—albeit for different reasons—on the necessity of a common system of schooling. Gaffield’s study raises the possibility for explorations concerning

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<sup>11</sup> Chad Gaffield, “Children, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, 2 (1991): 157-191.

how multiple ideas and desired ends converged and allowed for different people to utilize schooling for their own reasons. Did different ideas converge even earlier in the century? How can we examine the ideas and intentions of those who willingly sent their children to school prior to the compulsory school attendance laws of the late nineteenth century, and even prior to the major school developments of the mid-nineteenth century?

Jane Errington explores these questions, among others, in her study of school teachers and female labour in early nineteenth century Upper Canada.<sup>12</sup> Despite being excluded from official colonial politics, wives and mothers played a significant role in the development of Upper Canada. Parents were often seeking educational opportunities for their children, but those children were too often faced with the demands of life in a frontier society. Daughters especially were expected to attend to the duties of the household which too often took time and energy away from their studies. Parents, especially those with modest incomes, were often left regretting that they could not provide an adequate education for their daughters which would allow them to sustain a modicum of material comfort independently. Their solace lay, as in the case of Frances Stewart in 1833, in that their daughters were at least acquiring skills that would be useful after marriage.<sup>13</sup> Errington demonstrates that an appetite for schooling was clearly alive among certain Upper Canadian parents in the early nineteenth century, and that efforts were often made to provide an education for their children. Indeed, in her meticulous examination of previously overlooked notices in the colonial newspapers, Errington

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, Schoolmistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), and "Ladies and Schoolmistresses: Educating Women in Early Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada," *Historical Studies in Education* 6, 1 (1994): 71-96.

<sup>13</sup> Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 77.

demonstrates that private individuals were often leading the way in the provision of schooling.

Similar themes are found in the chapters of *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*.<sup>14</sup> In their essay on women and education in central Canada, Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice demonstrate that there was widespread private involvement in school formation prior to the changes brought on by increased state involvement.<sup>15</sup> In *Gender and Education in Ontario*, Ruby Heap and Alison Prentice present a collection of essays that offer a series of explorations of those with especially little or no formal political clout, women, and their involvement in educational development.<sup>16</sup> One of the most striking common themes is that schooling and education were often sought out despite resistance from the state and the societal obstacles for women toward the pursuit of knowledge, material prosperity, and sustainable independence. Indeed, the case of women and education especially raises the importance of understanding the second face of schooling, or, the promise of liberation from the constraints of societal organization and control.

By contemplating the variety of possible motivations that made both major school promoters and parents seek the construction of a formal system of schooling, Paul Axelrod builds the central argument of his survey of nineteenth century educational

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<sup>14</sup> Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald (eds.), *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers' Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Central Canada," in *Women Who Taught*, 136-159. See also, Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto," *History of Education Quarterly* 24, 1 (1984): 75-100, and Marta Danylewycz, Beth Light, and Alison Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 16, 31 (1983): 81-109.

<sup>16</sup> Ruby Heap and Alison Prentice (eds.), *Gender and Education in Ontario* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1991).

histories. He suggests that both groups had their own reasons for advocating a system of schooling, and that we might better conclude that a mix of circumstances accounted for the its growth, particularly from the 1840s to the 1870s. “Compulsory-school legislation,” he argues, “tended to follow, not precede, large-scale participation in public schooling.”<sup>17</sup> Axelrod’s study raises a host of questions that offer new possibilities for further study. Indeed, both parents and major school promoters had their own reasons for advocating schooling; but did the two operate in isolation? That is, did they discuss the formation of a school system independently from one another? To what extent did their discourses overlap? Did groups outside of political circles contribute to the development of educational legislation? Was one group leading the movement for schooling, while the other was following; or, can we speak in terms of a symbiotic relationship that contributed to the formation of a school system in Upper Canada?

What role did parents, teachers, and other individuals with little or no political authority play in affecting educational legislation? Was it coincidental that school acts emerged from the offices of public leaders at the same time that private individuals were writing about the regrets of inadequate schooling in a frontier society, and providing themselves with forms of education where there were none provided by government? That is, did private individuals keep their educational ideas to themselves, or did they play an active role in the development of educational legislation? In what ways were the private thoughts and writings made part of the broader public debate concerning educational development? Were private educational ideas connected to those that were espoused by prominent leaders in the public arena? How can we connect the

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). See especially Chapter 2, “Building the Educational State.”

historiography concerning private educational initiatives to that which focuses on the ideas of prominent school advocates in the nineteenth century?

#### RETHINKING THE ORIGINS OF SCHOOLING IN UPPER CANADA: THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PRINT MEDIA ANALYSIS

The recent shift in research on Upper Canada away from the narrative of prominent individuals who controlled the social, political, and economic development of the colony and toward a “deliberative democracy” model of colonial development suggests new avenues of exploration in the history of Upper Canadian education. In his study of public opinion and deliberative democracy in Upper Canada, Jeffrey McNairn argues that public opinion emerged as a new form of authority in Upper Canada. Through a meticulous and thorough review of colonial newspapers, McNairn suggests that the public was exposed to, and involved in, the theatre of politics through the press.<sup>18</sup> He suggests that the increased publication of newspapers in Upper Canada resulted in public dialogue that not only influenced but also shaped the political development of the province.

Carol Wilton has also examined popular political participation in a study of petitioning movements from 1800 to 1850.<sup>19</sup> Wilton suggests that “ordinary Canadians” were much more involved in the political process than previously believed. She convincingly argues that political outsiders often challenged established patterns of paternalism and notions of hierarchy and promoted the development of an expanded

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey L. McNairn. *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791–1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000).

public sphere in Upper Canada.<sup>20</sup> Politics, in this sense, was not the exclusive domain of the elite, but rather a more open arena in which many ideas were exchanged.

My study builds upon the deliberative democracy model and explores how print culture during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries enabled the emergence of schooling as a central discourse in Upper Canada. An exploration of print culture can broaden our understanding of educational development in Upper Canada. Characteristically, the writing of the origins of the school system in Upper Canada has tended to focus on official government records and correspondence among the elite. Although certain scholars have examined records from ordinary inhabitants, including diaries, letters, and other private papers, and have demonstrated that there was a considerable appetite for schooling, these sources have not been linked to the legislative movement for government-aided schools. Ordinary inhabitants have been characteristically considered political outsiders, and their writings are generally regarded as having little or no influence in the colony's legislative development. We can broaden our understanding of educational development in early nineteenth-century Upper Canada, however, by utilizing the deliberative democracy model and tapping into overlooked sources in educational history, namely print media, and the ways in which print media facilitated the rise of educational discourse. Through print media, private thoughts could be made part of a broader public discourse.

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<sup>20</sup> These findings are also in line with recent historical sociological studies examining the rise of social movements and contentious politics. In his analysis of the British press between 1758 to 1834, for example, Charles Tilly finds over 8000 "contentious gatherings" described. He suggests that "ordinary British people" abandoned traditional forms of protest in favour of petition drives, public meetings, and other forms of popular politics. The result was a movement toward "mass participation in national politics." See Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

To what extent did inhabitants of Upper Canada discuss education outside of private letters, and to what extent did they make those thoughts part of a public discourse? To what extent did that discussion affect educational reform? Studies of deliberative democracy have shown that ordinary inhabitants utilized public discourse in ways that afforded them involvement in the political process. To what extent, then, were they involved in the creation of government-aided schooling? What can the exchange of educational ideas in the public arena tell us about the influence of public opinion on the official making of the school system?

In a classic article that considered the importance of public opinion on educational development in Upper Canadian newspapers in the 1830s, Gidney began to examine these very questions.<sup>21</sup> Gidney argues that in the 1830s “Upper Canada joined in the ‘education mania’ of the age” which allowed it to move forward with educational development in the 1840s. He indicates that 1830s Upper Canada was in the midst of fundamental political, religious, economic, and social debates. While public men could not agree upon what a better society would be, “they were almost unanimous in their conviction that popular education was one sure means of bringing it about.”<sup>22</sup> His study suggests that newspapers offer an invaluable insight into educational development. First, in an era with no central office of education, and thus very few archival sources, newspapers allow the historian to investigate educational discourse despite the lack of government records. Second, they provide a lens into educational discourse that moves beyond the views of major school promoters and prominent political leaders.

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<sup>21</sup> R.D. Gidney, “Upper Canadian Public Opinion and Common School Improvement in the 1830s.”

<sup>22</sup> R.D. Gidney, “Upper Canadian Public Opinion and Common School Improvement in the 1830s,” 49-50.

Marshall McLuhan's insights into communications provide a framework for analyzing the importance of print media and the participation of a broader public sphere in Upper Canada's development.<sup>23</sup> In McLuhan's conception of communication history, he divides the history of the world into four epochs and postulates that each epoch emerged from and was characterized by a new form of media. Print culture is the third epoch in McLuhan's model, following, broadly speaking, oral culture, and manuscript culture. In manuscript culture, the invention of the alphabet gave rise to the age of literacy and hand-written books. Manuscripts could travel and reach a widespread audience. As manuscripts travelled, they were copied and rewritten, allowing subsequent writers to add to or alter the text, creating a discourse between writer and audience. McLuhan sees this discourse as a chiasmus process in which numerous anonymous and known producers participated.

The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century spawned print culture and accelerated the deliberative process of literacy, which allowed individuals separated by geographical space to communicate with each other through the medium of print. The invention of newspapers and their subsequent multiplication revolutionized public discourse and shifted it, he argues, from "a private confessional form that provides a point of view" to "a group confessional form that provides communal participation."<sup>24</sup> Participants in the print culture were given a forum of self-expression where their voice was situated within the many other voices of the community.<sup>25</sup> The community, in this sense, was no longer confined by geography; print media allowed for public discourse

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<sup>23</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1962); *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 204.

<sup>25</sup> McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 130-133.

among people who did not have to come into physical contact with each other in order to engage in conversation. In this way, geographic space was collapsed enabling numerous communities to interact and its individual members to participate in an accelerated discourse.

McLuhan's communication theories were built upon those of historian Harold Innis. Especially important was Innis' conception of time-bending media, such as speech, and space-bending media, such as writing. Time-bending media transmit knowledge and allow communication to move forward in time into subsequent generations. Space-bending media, such as newspapers, carry knowledge across distances and allow mass transient communication. The balance between both of these media were central, Innis believed, to the development and sustainability of societies and empires.<sup>26</sup>

Such ideas are helpful in coming to an understanding of how the inhabitants of Upper Canada, separated from each other by great distances of geography, were able to build and maintain societal communication.<sup>27</sup> Seen through this lens, print media, and especially the rise of newspapers, allowed for distant individuals to participate in the social, political, and economic life of Upper Canada by contributing to print culture discourse. The speed-up of information gathering and publishing allowed for a centre of exchange between the individual and the public.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1950, reprint 2007) and *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

<sup>27</sup> An interesting discussion on print culture and its historical influence in the Canadian context can be found in Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> The limits and constraints of the term "the public" will be discussed later in this chapter.

More recently, Jurgen Habermas postulates that the press institutionalized regular contacts and regular communication and shifted the hegemony of information from “insiders” to the “general public.” The decisive mark of the new domain of the “public sphere” was the published word.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Benedict Anderson considers the rise of print culture central to the concept of the “imagined community” and the creation of modern nation-states. The reading of newspapers, he argues, gives rise to a “mass ceremony.” Although the newspaper is often read in silent privacy, each reader is aware that the ceremony is being replicated simultaneously by many others. This assures the reader of the existence of a community of participants, despite never having met many of them. The availability of print media in its physical form, such as newspapers, serves to reassure the reader that the imagined world indeed is real. The reader is a member of a public that is not tangible but explicably real.<sup>30</sup>

Seen in this light, print media offered Upper Canadians a way to see themselves as members of the same community. Upper Canada was only recently settled, with few roads and a simple transportation infrastructure. Print media provided individual voices with a “unified and ready-made public address system” in which ordinary inhabitants could raise ideas of importance that affected the social, political, and economic development of the region.<sup>31</sup> In Upper Canada, this “public address system” allowed for inhabitants, as remote to one another as neighbouring colonies and states, to share a common dialogue concerning the region’s interests. In this context, the press provided a platform for central discourses such as that concerning the schools.

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<sup>29</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 199.

## LIMITS AND CONSTRAINTS OF AN EXPLORATION OF “THE PUBLIC” OF UPPER CANADA

Terms such as “the public,” “the people,” and “public discourse” must be used carefully when examining late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Upper Canada. Who exactly do we mean by the public? Who were the people? Who participated in the public discourse, or, more importantly perhaps, who were excluded?

The public in Upper Canada was not a public of equals, and public discourse in Upper Canada, by extension, was not a discourse among equals. Race, gender, and class were major determinants of one’s social status and ability to participate in Upper Canadian print culture. A study of print culture and education in Upper Canada must therefore not purport to examine the entire population. Aboriginals and Upper Canadians of African descent were no more than minor participants in public discourse. William Lyon Mackenzie, editor and proprietor of the *Colonial Advocate*, reported Mississauga Aboriginals at Credit River among his subscribers.<sup>32</sup> Their participation in Upper Canadian print culture, however, appears to have been limited to reading, at least for a small minority. For those with the means, participation in print culture discourse through letters to the editor could be done anonymously. It is safe to suppose that the number of non-white participants was low, as literacy levels and schooling among non-whites was low.<sup>33</sup>

Women were excluded from official politics throughout Upper Canada’s existence. Errington points out that age, location, marital status, and class all had an

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<sup>32</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie, *Sketches of Canada and the United States* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833), 133; McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 131.

<sup>33</sup> Prentice and Houston, *Schooling and Scholars*, 85.

impact on what was expected of women, what they did, and how they did it.<sup>34</sup> Thus, some classes of women certainly had better means of participating in the print culture discourse than others, if indirectly through their affluent husbands or community circles and voluntary associations. In addition to indirect influence, the evidence analyzed by Errington and McNairn does suggest that women often made themselves a direct part of the print culture discourse. The goods and services found advertised within the colonial newspapers certainly acknowledge women as readers as well as consumers.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, some wives also managed newspapers during the absence of their editor-husbands; others retained ownership of newspapers as widows.<sup>36</sup> While women were excluded from the official legislative political process, the evidence suggests that a significant number of them were not systematically excluded from Upper Canadian print culture and public discourse.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For a discussion on the significant role played by women in the overall economy of Upper Canada, see Errington, *Wives and Mothers*.

<sup>35</sup> McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 133. Through an analysis of school notices in the colonial press, Errington has revealed a considerable degree of female participation in the educational development of the colony; see *Wives and Mothers*.

<sup>36</sup> McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 133.

<sup>37</sup> Participation in print culture discourse was probably limited to affluent Upper Canadians who were the most likely to be literate. Still, the evidence does suggest that there was no direct correlation between one's material prosperity or social status in Upper Canada with one's ability to read and write. Harvey Graff, in *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), indicates that literacy and illiteracy rates among the poor and wealthy were relatively the same. Despite acknowledging the limitations of his research, namely the limited evidence drawn from nineteenth-century census data, Graff successfully challenges the literacy myth, and calls into question established assumptions concerning the hegemony of literacy among the quintessential upper echelons of society. For Graff's other work that specifically looks at literacy in the Canadian context, see "Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City," (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1975); "Toward a Meaning of Literacy: Literacy and Social Structure in Hamilton, Ontario, 1861," *History of Education Quarterly* 13, 3 (1972); "Literacy and Social Structure in Elgin County, Canada West: 1861," *Histoire Social/Social History* 6, 11 (1973); "The Reality Behind the Rhetoric: The Social and Economic Meanings of Literacy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Example of Literacy and Criminality," in Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (eds.) *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), 187-220. For another discussion on the prevalence of literacy in Upper Canada, see Harry Smaller, "Teachers and Schools in Early Ontario," *Ontario History* 85, 4 (1993): 291-308.

While literacy might have been more widespread than generally assumed in Upper Canada, class could still place limitations on one's ability to participate in print culture discourse. Money, after all, was necessary in order to subscribe to Upper Canadian newspapers, or purchase the pamphlets and books available. In the early nineteenth century, it cost approximately four dollars a year to subscribe to one of most Upper Canadian newspapers.<sup>38</sup> This number represents roughly three days' wages for the average artisan and some journeymen.<sup>39</sup> A general profile offered by McNairn suggests that subscribers included professionals, clerks and shopkeepers, skilled artisans and journeymen, and most relatively established farm families. Subscribing to a newspaper in Upper Canada represented a considerable investment, or a luxury, for many of these subscribers.

A newspaper subscription, however, was not necessarily out of reach, even for the poorer classes. Many subscribers were constantly in arrears, and paid only what and when they could. Newspapers would threaten to stop sending copies, but only when they were more than a year behind in payment, thus creating opportunities for many individuals to receive newspapers without incurring the expense.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, payment could take the form of wheat, flour, and other produce, thus expanding the scope of potential subscribers.<sup>41</sup> Participation in Upper Canadian print culture discourse was limited by class, but it was not confined to the wealthy alone.

Considering the extent to which newspapers were passed on in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of participants might be significantly higher than the

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<sup>38</sup> Carl Benn, "The Upper Canadian Press, 1793-1815," *Ontario History* 70 (1978): 100.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 114-115; McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 130.

<sup>40</sup> McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Benn, "The Upper Canadian Press," 100.

number of subscribers. In 1825, Mackenzie was informed that a number of non-subscribers were reading copies of the *Colonial Advocate* that had “made the tour of Brockville half a dozen times.”<sup>42</sup> Access to newspapers was made possible in Upper Canada through the subscriptions of family and friends, at local stores, inns, and taverns, through voluntary associations, and through libraries, newsrooms, and mechanics’ institutes. Domestic servants could find newspapers to read in the homes of their affluent employers. Boarders could find newspapers there as well, as they were more likely to stay in the homes of the affluent than in the homes of the poor.<sup>43</sup>

Readership is not the only indication of the extent of public discourse. To what extent did print media reflect public discourse, and to what extent did print media shape it? This two-sided question is central to understanding the importance, and the complexities, of print media and print culture discourse in Upper Canada. In *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas raises the example of London coffee houses and other public spaces as mediating centres of public discourse.<sup>44</sup> Private people could meet in public spaces where they shared and debated ideas. This interaction was both shaped by, and itself shaped, the print culture discourse. In this sense, Anderson’s theory of “mass ceremony” in private newspaper reading was given a subsequent congregational space, where newspaper readers and non-readers alike could discuss the information drawn from the print media. Once in the public space, literacy was not a prerequisite for participation in the public discourse. Such was the case in John

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas S. Maitland to William Lyon Mackenzie, 8 March 1825, quoted in McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 132.

<sup>43</sup> McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 132. For a discussion on boarding patterns in Upper Canada see Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>44</sup> Habermas, *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*, esp. 30-36.

Howison's *Sketches of Upper Canada*, where the author recounts an Upper Canadian landlord entering his tavern and reading newspaper articles to a group of seamstresses. Rather than being passive recipients of this performance, the landlord's audience actively commented upon and critiqued the articles in a lively public discourse.<sup>45</sup>

Such accounts serve to suggest that many more inhabitants were influenced by and influenced print culture discourse than any observation of subscription rates or interpretations of class might suggest. Print media collapsed space in Upper Canada and allowed for literate persons in Upper Canada to participate in centralized public discourse; but illiteracy did not prevent individuals from taking part in this discourse. Print culture was influenced by public discourses through participants not directly involved in the making of the content of the print media.

Still, there were the serious inequalities in Upper Canada that remind us that public discourse in Upper Canada, even if widespread, was not a discourse among equals. Aboriginals, Upper Canadians of African descent, women, the poor, and other minority groups all faced obstacles to participate in Upper Canadian print culture discourse. The majority of the participants were those who had access to newspapers and the time to engage with them; and this was usually, but not always, men of British origin. It is in this sense that "the public" in Upper Canada was not a public of equals. McNairn is surely right in suggesting that many of the editors of Upper Canadian newspapers exaggerated and assumed a community of interest when they spoke of "the people" rather than "the public of newspaper readers."<sup>46</sup> Any study of the public through print media can not

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<sup>45</sup> John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local, and Characteristic: to which are added, Practical Details for the Information of Emigrants of every class; and some recollections of the United States of America* (East Ardsley: R. R. Publishers, 1821; Toronto: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), 207-208.

<sup>46</sup> McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 134.

purport to enumerate the educational ideas of the entire population. What it does offer, however, is an important step toward a broader understanding of the intellectual underpinnings of schooling in Upper Canada.

#### TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORIGINS OF SCHOOLING

The main sources for this study are newspapers, pamphlets, petitions, and proceedings and reports of the Journals of the House of Assembly and Legislative Council. Surviving copies of each issue of the twenty-seven newspapers printed in the period from 1793 to 1832 have been systematically analyzed.<sup>47</sup> From the hundreds of surviving pamphlets from this period, I have analyzed all pamphlets dealing with the educational and political developments of Upper Canada. These pamphlets typically include traveler's observations, political writings by both prominent and anonymous inhabitants, civic and religious writings, and statistical and geographical accounts.<sup>48</sup> In order to link print culture discourse with the political developments of the day, I have juxtaposed my print media analysis with an examination of the Journals of the House of Assembly and Legislative Council. In addition to those found in the newspapers, many of the petitions

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<sup>47</sup> Some issues have been lost or destroyed, but most of them have survived and have been micro-reproduced. The Early Canadiana/Canadian Institute of Historical Microreproduction (hereafter CIHM) collection of Upper Canadian newspapers was primarily utilized. Some newspapers and issues not found in the CIHM collection were also examined at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto, and at the special collections reading room of Library and Archives Canada. In addition to commentary, editorials, letters to the editor, advertisements, and official and non-official proclamations and announcements, the newspapers also served as valuable resources for the reportage of public gatherings and the printing of petitions.

<sup>48</sup> A number of pamphlets not examined here might be useful to an examination of Upper Canada's intellectual development, but were not directly relevant to this thesis. These pamphlets typically include literature, short stories, poetry and other forms of fiction; and also almanacs, self-help books, and other forms of what contemporaries often called "useful information." The CIHM collection of pamphlets was utilized. Some other pamphlets that were not micro-reproduced were also examined at Library and Archives Canada. Additionally, a number of pamphlets that cannot be found in any of our archival collections were often printed in series within the newspapers of the day, and were drawn out from a reading of those newspapers.

cited in this study have been gathered from the Journals. Inhabitants generally petitioned the House of Assembly directly upon educational matters, such as requests for school funding. The *Documentary History of Education*, compiled between 1894 and 1910 by historian and former Assistant Superintendent of Education for Canada West, J. George Hodgins, remains a valuable resource for documents pertaining to educational development in Upper Canada.<sup>49</sup> In particular this collection provided complete reproductions of educational reports and House of Assembly and Legislative Council committee reports.

Chapter 1 of this study examines the early roots of educational discourse in late eighteenth-century Upper Canada. It begins by examining educational discourse at the time of the arrival of the first loyalist settlers in the western portion of Quebec in 1784. The colony's first newspaper, the *Upper Canada Gazette*, was published in the spring of 1793, and articles concerning education appeared regularly. What was printed about education, and to what extent was education a part of the collective discourse? Toward the end of the decade, in 1797, funds and land were set aside for a government-aided system of education, and in 1799 the legislature was granted permission to procure an agent to organize and take charge of school development in Upper Canada. Where did the impetus for educational reform derive? What can we learn about it through the print media?

Chapter 2 deals with the period in which district schools were first built in Upper Canada. The District School Act was passed in 1807 as the idea of government-aided schooling became important in political circles. But we also know that this period was a

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<sup>49</sup> J. George Hodgins (compiler), *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, from the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791 to the Close of the Reverend Doctor Ryerson's Administration of the Education Department in 1876*, 28 volumes, (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, 1894-1910).

time of political conflict and upheaval in the colony's early life. Radicals such as Joseph Willcocks, William Weekes, and Robert Thorpe emerged as anti-establishment leaders. Radicals found their way into the elected House of Assembly, and in 1807 established an anti-executive press, the *Upper Canadian Guardian*. If the concept of government-aided schooling found its way into the legislative life of the province in this environment, to what extent was its emergence reflective of the tumultuous political life of the province? Gidney and Millar suggest that "We know almost nothing about the political context of the attempts to secure and preserve that appropriation except what the barebone record of the legislative journals tells us."<sup>50</sup> Print media tells us more.

Chapter 3 looks specifically at the War of 1812 and subsequent school developments in Upper Canada. What role did the War of 1812 play in the drive for common schooling? This chapter reexamines the era in light of recent histories that contest the role of the War as a unifying event. Chapter 4 then examines the years immediately after the passing of the Common School Act of 1816. It asks what common school development was like in Upper Canada and how ordinary inhabitants responded to the availability of public money for their children's education. By shifting attention to print media discourse, we can consider the degree to which inhabitants were talking about school formation at the time and what they envisioned for the future.

Chapter 5 looks specifically at the emergence of the radical press in Upper Canada, and its role in educational discourse. William Lyon Mackenzie immigrated to Canada in 1824 and founded the radical newspaper the *Colonial Advocate*. Little has been written about his views on education and the extent to which he, and other radicals, took part in educational discourse in the 1820s, despite a wealth of educational writings

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<sup>50</sup> Gidney and Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*, 82.

appearing in his newspaper. This chapter examines the overlooked material. Chapter 6 examines the central debate between John Strachan, the colonial spokesperson of the Church of England, and Egerton Ryerson, an emerging Methodist leader. By examining the debate as it became available, throughout the colony, in the press, we might arrive at a better understanding of its impact not only on colonial politics, but also on inhabitants and their perception of events. This chapter considers Strachan's attempts at establishing a university in Upper Canada aligned with the Church of England and the Upper Canadian executive. The debate over the university extended the animosity between religious and political sects in the province, but our understanding of how that animosity affected educational development is limited to the debates of later years. An analysis of the broader print culture discourse surrounding this era provides important background for an understanding of the origins of schooling.

Chapter 7 extends the examination of the political and religious turmoil in the province and its impact on educational discourse through an analysis of emerging political deliberations among reformers and conservatives in the late 1820s. In 1828, the electorate sent a clear majority of reformers to the House of Assembly. What inhabitants of Upper Canada thought about this change, and what this political shift meant to educational development, is important to our understanding of the developments of the next decade and how inhabitants of Upper Canada reacted to the rise of the reform party and their increased involvement in educational legislation. Chapter 8 leads into the 1830s, when Upper Canada was in a state of social and political reorganization. This decade witnessed the release of a number of school reports calling for rapid educational

transformations, and attempts at new educational legislation. Both conservatives and reformers, by the late 1830s, advocated universal schooling.

## CHAPTER 1

### BETWEEN VISION AND IMPETUS: THE DEEP ROOTS OF SCHOOLING, 1784-1799

Studies of the history of Upper Canada usually begin with the arrival of the early loyalist settlers in 1784 and the creation of the colony of Upper Canada through the Constitutional Act of 1791, which divided the former province of Quebec into Upper and Lower provinces. The central theme is the transformation of a “howling wilderness” into fruitful settlements containing most of the comforts of modern life as it was understood in the late eighteenth century. The central figure in this history is John Graves Simcoe, the colony’s first lieutenant governor.<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about Simcoe and the other prominent political leaders of late eighteenth-century Upper Canada. This writing has contributed to a deep understanding of the social, political, and economic development of the colony in its earliest years. The history of education is usually not considered a central theme in this early period. In 1797, land was set aside for a university and grammar schools, but little else was done in the political arena to promote schooling. The development of government-aided schooling in Upper Canada is characteristically written as a

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<sup>1</sup> The standard introductory text remains Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1963).

development of the nineteenth century, with most major initiatives coming to the fore at mid-century.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will begin by examining education at the time of the arrival of the first loyalist settlers, in 1784, in the western portion of Quebec, which would become Upper Canada through an act of the British Parliament in 1791. This chapter will explore the development of education beginning in the late eighteenth century, the years in which Upper Canada was settled and made a colony. This chapter will also consider the early political discussions on education in an effort to explore the connections between discourse in the print media and discourse among the political elite.

The government-sponsored *Upper Canada Gazette*, which began publication in the city of York (later Toronto) in 1793, was the colony's first newspaper. A second newspaper, Upper Canada's earliest independent newspaper, appeared in Newark (present day Niagara) in 1799. In addition to news, official notices, and general advertisements from within the colony, much of the content of the early newspapers was borrowed from American and British publications. The newspapers also featured editorials and correspondence from the reading public. Pamphlets also circulated the colony, but in these early years were limited in production, and the extent to which we can speak of a widespread reading culture is surely also limited. Still, the extant print

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<sup>2</sup> With no provincial department of education or other central educational institutions, the archival records concerning schooling in the late eighteenth century are limited. The historian and former Assistant Superintendent of Education in Canada West, J. George Hodgins, compiled a documentary history of education in the early twentieth century. Of the twenty-eight volumes covering the period from 1791 to 1876, the first volume covers the entire period to 1832. This example points to the scarcity of official government records concerning schooling in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By focusing on such archival material, it is little wonder that the mid-nineteenth century usually receives the lion's share of attention in the writing of the history of education in Upper Canada. Considering the extent to which the recent shift in historical research in Upper Canada has brought to light the importance of print media sources to the province's early social, political, and economic development, the possibility of broadening our understanding of educational development in this early period through those sources should certainly also be considered.

media sources allow us to juxtapose the evidence from official government records and the developments occurring at the level of the political elite with the ideas of certain individuals outside of official government circles. To what extent was the idea of government-aided schooling in Upper Canada a part of the educational discourse of late eighteenth-century Upper Canada?

#### SETTLEMENT AND GROWTH: A PROVINCE IS BORN

The political context of public discourse in late eighteenth-century Upper Canada includes the opening of Upper Canada's first legislature on 17 September 1792. In his speech from the throne, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe announced that he had summoned the legislatures "under the authority of an Act of Parliament of Great Britain passed in the last year, which has established the British Constitution and all the forms which secure and maintain it in this distant country."<sup>3</sup> That he referred to Upper Canada as a "distant country" under the British constitution illustrates that Simcoe was committed to an Imperial view of the colony. His commitment to establishing a society based on the pillar of the British constitution was firm. Creating an affinity for an empire with its centre across the Atlantic might have proven more difficult. Many of the early loyalist settlers might easily have been perplexed at the thought of living in a "distant country;" the United States, where most of them had come from, was only a few steps away from the Newark building that housed Upper Canada's first legislature. Yet, Simcoe also echoed sentiments on both sides of the Atlantic with the acknowledgement that Upper Canada was a distinct political entity and had acquired a form of government

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<sup>3</sup> *Journals and Proceedings of the House of Assembly of the Province of Upper Canada*, 17 September 1792, 1; *Journals and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Province of Upper Canada*, 17 September 1792, 1.

within the empire to “a degree infinitely beyond whatever till this period have distinguished any other Colony.”<sup>4</sup> The early loyalist settlers, he emphasized, had received a unique place in the British empire as a reward for their loyalty to the empire.<sup>5</sup> What was granted to them in 1791, Simcoe held, was a self-contained, self-governable colony within a greater political body.

Simcoe’s first opportunity to address a broader audience came in the spring of 1793 with the publication of the first volume of Upper Canada’s first newspaper, the *Upper Canada Gazette, or, American Oracle*.<sup>6</sup> The newspaper itself was supported by government funds, and was intended to be a source of information in which inhabitants could learn about the political goings-on of the province. The first issue printed a proclamation by Simcoe emphasizing the character of the society he and other colonial leaders wished to build. In this proclamation, he focused on the “duty of the people” and on the virtues and morals desired in Upper Canada. It was “the indispensable duty of all People, and more especially of all Christian Nations,” he proclaimed, “to preserve and advance the Honor and Service of Almighty God, and to discourage and suppress all Vice, Profaneness and Immorality, which if not timely prevented may justly draw down the Divine Vengeance upon Us and our Country.”<sup>7</sup> Simcoe was doing more than simply encouraging good behaviour; he proclaimed that morality and law went hand in hand. Simcoe instructed all authorities to enforce laws “made against Blasphemy, Profanation of the Lords Day, Swearing and Drunkenness” strictly in all parts of the colony, and for

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<sup>4</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 17 September 1792, 2; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 17 September 1792, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 17 September 1792, 2; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 17 September 1792, 2.

<sup>6</sup> The title of this paper suggests an awareness, if not an attachment, to the continent. The extent to which this attachment conflicted with that to the empire was something that the early settlers had yet to work out.

<sup>7</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 18 April 1793.

the courts to punish severely those who broke any of the virtuous laws. Finally, he ordered that his proclamation be read in all Courts of Justice, and recommended that all Christian ministers read the proclamation in church at least four times that year. The fear of a pluralistic society made up “of every denomination” weighed heavily upon Simcoe’s shoulders; without the pillar of the established Church of England, creating a British ethos would prove challenging. For this reason, he insisted that religious leaders of all denominations throughout the province address the entire population regularly to emphasize at least the common morality and character of the society.

In the same issue, the *Upper Canada Gazette* reprinted Simcoe’s speech to both branches of the legislature on 13 December 1792. The political tone in its earliest days reflected the broader transatlantic discourse that saw representative democracy (rule by the many) in opposition to monarchical constitutionalism (rule by the few). In Simcoe’s first speech, he warned of “riot and insurrection” in the province, which might eventually require the intervention of military force. The unrest in the province, as Simcoe saw it, was coming from “a design to attempt the destruction of our happy constitution, and the subversion of all order and government; and this design has evidently been pursued in connection, and concert with persons in foreign countries.”<sup>8</sup> Loyalists had found a sanctuary in British territory north of the United States, but given the province’s geographic location, the penetration of republican ideas would be difficult to stop, he believed. With the world in the midst of revolutionary political changes, most profoundly in the United States and France, Simcoe warned that Upper Canada was in danger of becoming immersed in republican discourse unless it defended its own ideological foundations. Simcoe warned that radicals in both the United States and

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<sup>8</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 18 April 1793.

France wished to spread their revolutionary ideas to foreign countries, and insisted that Upper Canada must always stand strong against the forces of anti-monarchialism. He made it clear that he would use all his powers, including military powers, to curb republican influences in Upper Canada. Upper Canada, Simcoe proclaimed, was to remain an appendage to the British Crown. Simcoe then instructed both branches of the legislature to adopt any measures they saw fit to promote and enforce obedience to the laws, especially to repress attempts to disturb the peace and tranquility of the land, and to support a “free and loyal people.” Simcoe insisted that Upper Canada not be put in danger of losing its attachment to the British constitution.

In order to appreciate the insecurity felt by the ruling elite, we should remember that the late eighteenth century was a tenuous time for monarchists in the Atlantic world. Not only had the thirteen colonies declared their independence, but moreover the political face of continental Europe was changing as well, and was posing a perceived, if not real, threat to the security of the British people. Simcoe’s proclamation about the character of Upper Canada, along with his speech from the throne, was reprinted in the *Upper Canada Gazette* for the following four weeks. During the ensuing period, articles concerning the values and character of Britain, and obedience to the constitution, became familiar in each issue.<sup>9</sup> Articles concerning the events in revolutionary France were frequently printed as well, and on 9 May those reading the newspaper learned that the republican government of France had “actually declared war” upon the British Empire.<sup>10</sup> His majesty, the *Upper Canada Gazette* told its readers, was confident that he could rely on

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *Upper Canada Gazette*, 25 April 1793. In this issue, an article reprinted from a London newspaper urging loyalty to the sovereign, as well as a declaration in support of the constitution of Great Britain, out-shadowed other content.

<sup>10</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 9 May 1793.

the support of all those loyal to him. Support was solicited in Upper Canada, if not in actual military contributions, then at least in the assurance of firm loyalty to the crown. On 16 May, a new proclamation from Simcoe was published in which he urged ordinary inhabitants to curb any disorder. In doing so, he suggested, they were playing a part in the war against republican France.

Being a loyalist seems to have meant more than simply rejecting the republican ambitions of the thirteen colonies. Upper Canadian social and political culture in the 1790s was characterized not only by a reaction against the formation of the republican United States, but by a reaction to the republican forces throughout the Atlantic world. Colonial leaders took every opportunity to reiterate that idea. It was in this political climate that the inhabitants of Upper Canada found themselves settling their colony in the early days and began to build the social institutions and infrastructure for its development. It was in this context that the idea of government-aided schooling in Upper Canada was first raised by colonial officials.

#### THE IDEA OF GOVERNMENT-AIDED SCHOOLING

Before arriving in Upper Canada, Simcoe had insisted upon the necessity of making immediate provision for “the education of the superior classes of the country.” He warned the government in Britain that without government provisions for schools in the colony, the elite in Upper Canada would be forced to send their children to the United States, where British principles would be “totally undermined and subverted.”<sup>11</sup> To colonial officials, then, the idea of government-aided schooling was raised with the

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<sup>11</sup> E.A. Cruikshank (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with allied documents relating to his administration of the government of Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1923-1931), quoted in Craig, *The Formative Years*, 25.

intention of educating the elite with values conducive to the success of creating a British ethos in Upper Canada. Their conception of the public, or at least the public that they wished to aid, was a restricted one.

The idea of government-aided schooling was already alive to some extent in the territory that would become Upper Canada. In 1787, some early loyalist settlers, scattered in settlements that stretched from around present-day Kingston to Niagara, collectively petitioned the governor general of Quebec for schools. They insisted, in fact, upon a relatively comprehensive network of schools funded directly through government funds.<sup>12</sup> In that year, Governor General Lord Dorchester appointed William Smith to head a special committee to report on the state of education and literacy throughout the entire province. Smith had been Chief Justice of New York State. When Guy Carleton (later, Lord Dorchester) had arrived there as head of the British Forces during the American War of Independence, the two men established a political friendship and “conversed frequently about ideas of empire and imperial management.”<sup>13</sup>

The report that Smith presented in 1789 offers a glimpse into the earliest views and philosophy of education in the territories that would become Upper and Lower Canada. The committee of the council first assembled on the 31st of May 1787. An address from Dorchester was read to those assembled in which the members of the committee were curtly told that the system of education throughout the entire province was defective, and it was therefore their duty to find a remedy.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the preposition of

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<sup>12</sup> “Petition of the Western Loyalists,” 15 April 1787, in Arthur G. Doughty and Adam Shortt (eds.), *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791* (Ottawa: J. de L. Taché, 1918), 2:949-951.

<sup>13</sup> L.F.S. Upton, “William Smith,” in George W. Brown and Marcel Trudel (eds.) *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965-).

<sup>14</sup> *Report of a Committee of the Council on the Subject of Promoting the Means of Education / Rapport du comité du conseil, sur l'objet d'augmenter les moïens d'éducation*. Quebec: Samuel Neilson, 1789.

the report was, and as many educational reports throughout history have been, that the education system was lamentable and needed improvement.

William Smith and the committee, composed of five English and four French appointed officials, drafted three questions that were to be posed to religious leaders throughout the province.<sup>15</sup> The first question aimed to unveil the present condition of education. A list of the parishes and incumbents was to be drawn up, detailing the number of parishioners, the number of schools, and the “kinds” of instruction theretofore offered. Of most importance to the committee was revealing literacy levels: “Can it be true,” the committee asked, “that there are not more than half a dozen in a parish, that are able to write or read?”<sup>16</sup> The second question posed by the committee reinforced the first, as it addressed “the cause of the imperfect state of instruction;” thus, whether perceived illiteracy rates were valid or unfounded, the system was in any case presupposed to be “imperfect.”<sup>17</sup> The second question also provided the basis for the third, which sought the system’s remedy.

In addition to the three questions of inquiry, the committee sought support for its preconceived proposal of a unified system of schooling available to all inhabitants. The committee believed that if the main object of schooling was “the cultivation of knowledge” for all inhabitants, then it proposed a union of Catholic and Protestant students attending free schools in every district, with a bilingual university at the helm. The overarching question found in the report has hovered above the heads of Canadians for two and a half centuries: can English and French be raised together, live together, and educated together within a unified and shared system? The committee believed the

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<sup>15</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 2.

answer was yes, and in order to achieve its ambitions it was determined to find “men of learning for the professors chair, free from narrow prejudices[.]”<sup>18</sup>

The committee has been characterized as a “commission,” and even as a type of early “royal commission” on education.<sup>19</sup> Actually, while the committee had a clear mandate to make recommendations, those recommendations were not binding, nor would the committee’s findings have obliged Lord Dorchester and his council to implement a system of education. Real authority would be exerted only by government, and in particular the Governor-General himself. The committee, therefore, knew that if its recommendations were going to be acted upon, they would need to be taken seriously in the public arena, and would therefore need broader support. Thus, before it recommended steps that would fundamentally transform the nature of schooling as it had theretofore existed, it sought support from religious leaders across the province.

The bishop of Quebec, Jean-François Hubert, provided the answers from French Catholic Quebec to the committee’s questions, and these answers were incorporated into the final report in 1789. Hubert agreed that “Nothing is more worthy of the wisdom of the Government under which we live, than the encouragement of Science by every possible means.”<sup>20</sup> He immediately began his assessment of the committee’s purposes by addressing the university question: “At the name of an University in the province of Quebec, my *native* country, I bless the Almighty for having inspired the Design, and my prayers are offered for the execution of it.”<sup>21</sup> He cautioned, however, that undertaking

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<sup>18</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Louis-Philippe Audet, “Attempts to Develop a School System for Lower Canada: 1760-1840.” In *Canadian Education: A History*, 150; Roger Magnuson, *The Two Worlds of Quebec Education During the Traditional Era, 1760-1940* (London, Ontario: Althouse Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 6.

the task of building a university in a frontier society might be a premature idea: "It is very doubtful whether the Province can, at present, furnish a sufficient number of students to occupy the masters and professors that would necessarily be required to form an University. While there remains in Canada so much land to clear, it is not to be expected that the country inhabitants will concern themselves about the liberal arts."<sup>22</sup> Quebec agrarian life was conservative, and thus heavily endorsed by the Catholic Church. But Hubert also believed agrarian life in Quebec was preservative. Every nation in the world, he was sure, had proven that schooling flourished only when demographic changes occurred resulting in a population with an abundance of labourers no longer needed to work the land. This was not yet the case, he thought, in eighteenth-century Quebec.

Hubert did concede, however, that the appetite for elementary schooling was alive and well. In addition to the Jesuit schools run by the church, he told the committee, private schools could be found in Montreal, Quebec, and Trois Rivières. With the basic curriculum of reading and writing, the "schools are regular and daily, and pretty well frequented."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the parents, he believed, were well satisfied with the education provided. The Jesuit's Montreal seminary, he furthermore noted, had always supported an additional free school in which reading and writing were provided to children "of all ranks." The school was, he thought, "remarkable for its extreme regularity, [and] has had 300 children at a time."<sup>24</sup> Even among young women, he noted, the appetite for education was bursting. Both the congregated sisters at Montreal and Ursuline nuns at Quebec and Trois Rivières oversaw schooling; in addition to these schools, other

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<sup>22</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 11.

institutions could also be found in these towns with the schools supported by the “communities at their own charge.”<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the quality of education, Hubert argued, was not as defective as the committee presupposed. He insisted that literacy levels in the province were not as low as reported. Whereas the committee suggested that barely a dozen people in each parish across the province could read and write, Hubert insisted that the minimum literacy levels represented at least double that number. The “English” government either misjudged literacy levels in the province, or were badly misinformed. While the committee asked how widespread ignorance was, Hubert suggested that the presupposition of ignorance was itself unfounded and, in fact, objectionable.

The bishop’s acknowledgment that an appetite for elementary education existed, and in certain cases thrived, begs the question, was his assessment for the expansion of a system of education accurate? Was he misled? Did he miscalculate the appetite for higher education, despite his confession that a clear appetite for elementary instruction was present and expanding? The final report of the committee implies that it thought Hubert’s pessimism was not well-founded. Rather than accepting the inability to carry out its plans, the committee insisted upon driving forward a scheme which it believed was as crucial to the intellectual growth of the colony as it was to the growth of a united national character in British America.

The committee was bent upon a system composed of three levels. First and foremost, it believed that “certainly there could be no division of sentiment, respecting that elementary instruction, necessary to the lower classes in all countries,” must be

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<sup>25</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 11-12.

provided for.<sup>26</sup> Thus Parish Free Schools with a basic curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic would compose the first level of instruction. At the secondary level, County Free Schools would also be established in which additional subjects such the languages, grammar, book-keeping, and elements of the sciences and mathematics would be added. Third, despite the perceived opposition from French Quebec, the committee proposed a university. On this point there was some caution. The chairman “concurred with the venerable Bishop, that the erection of an University, measuring it by European scale, would be extravagant.”<sup>27</sup> Still, the committee would not back down. Once children received an elementary and secondary education, it believed, the appetite for further schooling would be insatiable, and it was better, the committee thought, that Quebec children seek higher education within Quebec. It was therefore “to be wished,” the committee reported, “that the youth of the province might not be estranged from it, by an Education in foreign parts, but find *at home* sufficient means to qualify them for the trusts, offices and honors of their native *community*.”<sup>28</sup>

The committee had a national vision, and they predicted that Quebec would prove to be the cornerstone for all of British America. “A College under one Rector and four tutors, dividing the labour between them, would, in its opinion, be sufficient, for instructing the students to be expected from all the provinces on this Continent, now remaining to Great-Britain, in Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Metaphysics and Ethics.”<sup>29</sup> Students, the committee believed, “may be expected from all the provinces under the Governor General residing in this; and the

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<sup>26</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 20-21.

<sup>29</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 21.

advantage of acquiring one of the most universal Languages of Europe, may be a motive, even in remote countries, for taking the whole circle of the sciences, in a College projected for the commencement of an University in Canada, for His Majesty's American Dominions."<sup>30</sup>

The committee believed that it was crucial to establish a university because only with a university could a locally-born body of social and political leaders be cultivated. Without one, it believed the colony would remain "indebted to Emigrants from other Countries," for social and political leadership, thus hindering the unity of the province.<sup>31</sup> The committee's vision, to be sure, was of an education system that fostered a self-sufficient province. Although alert to the Bishop's trepidation, the committee believed there was no reason to insist that a university project was inevitably doomed. Moreover, since it would be built through funding from the crown, it would not prove a financial burden to the people of the province.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the committee believed it had public support: "Abstract from the encouragement of public Bodies," it argued, "there are instances of private opulence in many places." Should government aid in providing "a generosity equal to that opulence," then the school system could prosper and be devoted "to enterprises for advancing the honor of the Nation, in interest of learning, and the welfare of the Human Race."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it was better to try, the committee thought, lest the people of the province remain subject to imported social and political leaders for years to come.

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<sup>30</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 24-25.

<sup>31</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 23-24.

<sup>33</sup> *Report on Education of 1789*, 24.

In the end, the committee failed to convince Dorchester to implement such an ambitious system, and failing to acquire enough support, the report was shelved and the proposed system was not initiated. Was Dorchester, as was Hubert, concerned that a bilingual university would not succeed? Did he also agree that schooling could only flourish when demographic changes occurred resulting in a population with an abundance of labourers no longer needed to work the land? Whatever the answers to these questions, their relevance was essentially nullified for the future of education in Upper Canada. In 1791, the Constitutional Act divided the province into two separate colonies, and Upper Canada would forge a school system on its own.

A decade later, in 1799, an anonymous traveller and pamphleteer reflecting on education in Upper and Lower Canada found in Lower Canada a college which was “out of repair.”<sup>34</sup> Although the school contained a library and good accommodations, it had been converted into barracks for soldiers and a prison. From the first settlement of the province, he learned in his travels, large reservations of lands were made for the promotion of education, and immediately “excellent colleges” and seminaries were erected, but then never fully cultivated. When he became acquainted with the report of 1789, he simply lamented its dismissal.<sup>35</sup> The inability of colonial leaders to act upon proposed school initiatives, he believed, had set back educational development in Quebec, and thus all of British North America as well.

The American observer echoed the conclusions of the 1789 report when he emphasized the necessity of an educated population in the Canadas. Turning his attention

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<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, *A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada. By a Citizen of the United States. Containing, A View of the present State of Religion, Learning, Commerce, Agriculture, Colonization, Customs and Manners, among the English, French, and Indian Settlements* (Litchfield, 1799), 11.

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous, *A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada*, 25-26.

specifically to Upper Canada, he asserted that “An extensive field is opened for men of letters in every profession. Destitute of colleges, academies and schools, and confiding in the qualifications of the clergy ordained by the bishops in the States, governor Simcoe wished to have introduced such, but an act of the British parliament disconcerted his design.”<sup>36</sup> Why were school initiatives disconcerted? The efforts for school expansion in Canada were thwarted by British colonial policy, he believed, because the majority of teachers would have had to be recruited from the United States, thus threatening the idea of loyalty to Britain. “The object of the British nation, is to people and cultivate this country, and to make it as perfect a part of the empire as possible. Dreading revolutions, they are cautious in receiving republicans from the States, and wish to encourage husbandmen and labourers only.—Clergymen, lawyers, physicians, and school masters from the States, are not the first characters who would be fostered. Many congregations would have been formed, and schools opened, if the policy in this particular had been different.”<sup>37</sup> The American observer concluded that colonial leaders ultimately chose not to erect a school system in order to maintain a firm hold on the professional leadership of the colony through imported British officials.

In sum, the American observer, like the committee of education a decade before him, concluded that education was in a lamentable state. Professionals and “Men of distinguished talents and acquirements” were not being cultivated, to the detriment of those born in Upper Canada who would not receive the type of training they needed in order to advance to positions of leadership in their native land. “Pension, place, and favor are reserved for the English and Scotch adventurers, and the sons of Oxford and

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<sup>36</sup> Anonymous, *A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Anonymous, *A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada*, 55.

Cambridge.”<sup>38</sup> Was this assessment of education shared by those living in Upper Canada? If so, what alternatives, if any, did they conceive?

The idea of government-aided schooling certainly existed in the minds of at least some of the early settlers of Upper Canada, as the petition of the western settlers in 1787 attests. Government officials also took seriously the question of school formation. With a properly established system, these officials believed, the appetite for schooling could be satiated while governing would be made easier through properly trained locally-born inhabitants. To what extent did these ideas remain alive after the founding of Upper Canada? The American traveler saw a need for schooling, but says little about the want of it. Turning our attention to the newspapers, the evidence suggests that the American traveler’s observations reflected a central theme in the educational discourse in late eighteenth-century Upper Canada: government-aided schooling was increasingly considered central to the colony’s development and ability to survive on its own.

In some ways, the press itself acted as an outlet for education. One of the first actions of government was to aid in the establishment of a printing press in Upper Canada. The result was the *Upper Canada Gazette*, established in 1793. The printers of the *Upper Canada Gazette* often emphasized the newspaper’s utility itself as “the Vehicle of Intelligence” in the province, and in “the advancement of useful learning”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as the newspaper grew in popularity and circulation, articles concerning education and advertisements for schools began to appear regularly. On 2 November 1796, a notification regarding a shipment of books, “including School material and prayer

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada*, 57-58.

<sup>39</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 18 April 1793; 26 October 1796.

books,” was even important enough to be printed on the front page.<sup>40</sup> This is interesting because the front page was usually reserved for government proclamations and other important official notices. The notice for this book sale appeared for several weeks following its initial printing. Two weeks later, the *Upper Canada Gazette* informed its readers that it was preparing “The Upper Canada Calendar For The Year 1797,” containing astronomical calculations, lists of the legislative, executive, and military officers, times and places of holding courts, and so on. Ideas for additional content and involvement in the publication of the almanac was solicited. An analysis of the *Upper Canada Gazette* in the 1790s indeed lends support to the idea of an intellectual culture thriving in Upper Canada. In 1796, for example, the newspaper began to publish literary works such as stories, poems, and the works of William Shakespeare.<sup>41</sup>

But for whom was this outlet for education intended? McNairn suggests that the content of the early newspapers, with some articles frequently using Greek and Latin, reveals much about the assumed readership of the early colonial press.<sup>42</sup> But while much of the newspaper’s content was aimed at a small segment of Upper Canadian society, the newspaper also increasingly served useful for a broader population. In addition to its growing emphasis on literature and the arts, the *Upper Canada Gazette* began to print articles and essays directly addressing the topic of education. In “A Word to Parents and Masters,” an article appearing in the *Upper Canada Gazette* in November 1796, the author urged his readers to begin the training of children at a young age so that the

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<sup>40</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 2 November 1796. A similar announcement was made a year later in the 25 November 1797 issue.

<sup>41</sup> See especially volume 3, numbers 6 to 12.

<sup>42</sup> McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge*, 118.

lessons they learned would remain with them as they grew.<sup>43</sup> Focusing on virtues and morals, the article echoed the spirit of Upper Canadian culture that Simcoe promoted in his legislative speeches at the beginning of the decade. In this sense, a broader public was still a restricted one, in which education was related to the teachings of virtues, morals, and the classics. In that same issue, however, what was perhaps the first advertisement in the press for formal schooling in Upper Canada was placed in the *Upper Canada Gazette*.<sup>44</sup> Mr. Rich Cockrel informed the readers of the *Upper Canada Gazette* that he would be opening an evening school in the upcoming week with the basic curriculum of writing, arithmetic, and book-keeping. A practical education was favoured over a classical one in Cockrel's school.

The idea of practical and useful learning was echoed in the *Upper Canada Gazette* later in 1797 as it began to print self-help essays and articles on topics such as agriculture, and "The importance of Punctuality" in the social and commercial life of the province.<sup>45</sup> In March of 1797, Mr. Arthur offered a further option for parents wishing to educate their children with the creation of a boarding school in Newark. Like Cockrel's evening school, Arthur's would emphasize "an useful and ornamental education" in addition to attention to "behavior, religious instruction, and literary improvement of all his pupils."<sup>46</sup> These early schools, as advertised, emphasized the practical utility of education for the growing literary and commercial life of the province. The audience for this education was not only the elite, but also the more ordinary inhabitants who had settled Upper Canada seeking financial independence in an unpredictable frontier society.

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<sup>43</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 30 November 1796.

<sup>44</sup> That some previous issues of the *Upper Canada Gazette* are missing makes it impossible to say with certainty that this was the first school advertisement in the history of the province.

<sup>45</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 21 December 1796.

<sup>46</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 8 March 1797.

A practical curriculum, certain inhabitants argued in the press, was a necessary ingredient to prepare oneself for frontier life in Upper Canada. On 10 March 1798, an article entitled “Education. Instructions from a Parent to the Tutor of his Son. A Scrap,” was printed in the *Upper Canada Gazette* with this idea in mind. The article outlined the type of education that its author, a parent, believed was desired by most inhabitants. According to this parent, a practical education was favoured over a classical one: “I would not have you, through any zeal or attachment to me, think of pushing my boy into learning of the languages, beyond his own pleasure.” Above all, this parent wanted his child to learn what “is necessary or useful to man.”<sup>47</sup> Preparing the child for a useful station in life was, it seems, a common theme in articles concerning education in late eighteenth-century Upper Canada. In August 1798, the *Upper Canada Gazette* further emphasized this point in another article concerning the rearing of youth. Tying education to the practical commercial interests of the ordinary inhabitant, the writer of this article reflected upon a recent job advertisement in which individuals with a “bad character” were told not to apply. The teaching of virtues and morals thus had an additional benefit, including the attainment of suitable employment. The financial utility of obtaining a good character at an early age, he emphasized, was crucial to achieving financial independence.<sup>48</sup>

The growing appetite for education was itself the subject of a sarcastic manuscript appearing in the *Upper Canada Gazette* entitled, “An Oration in *praise of Ignorance*.” In this article, the author jeered at the growing demand for educational institutions. After suggesting that the growing number of schools, academies, colleges, and universities

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<sup>47</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 10 March 1798.

<sup>48</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 11 August 1798.

“erected for the purpose of encreasing [*sic*] knowledge” were in fact increasing “sorrow,” and that the education received in such schools afford the student only to learn that “water will not run up hill” or that “the wind blows sometimes one way, and sometimes another,” the author made clear that his “little shots” were intended as humour “in an age where the pressure of science and knowledge is clearly a burden among the people. Education is seen as so important, that it occupies much time in the psyche of the individual to attain it, or to at least get their children to attain it.” He wanted to offer “comic relief in the midst of that pressure” to reassure readers that an education was not worth the present “hysteria” for its attainment. “Men of education are continually haranguing on the advantages of learning; and in many parts of the world, have had much success,” he wrote; and, pointing out the shortcomings of education in North America in a sarcastic tone, he suggested that “it must give infinite satisfaction on to every lover of his country, to see that the good sense of America will battle their attempts among us.”<sup>49</sup> Whether it was hysteria or not, what was clear was that the appetite for education was alive and well. This author’s viewpoint was certainly supported by the increasing number of boarding school announcements throughout the later years of the decade, while articles on education, morality, learning, and literature proliferated.

Charitable organizations were instrumental in strengthening the discourse concerning the need for education among the youth of the province, and especially those who could not afford education through their own means. On 28 June 1797 the *Upper Canada Gazette* reported that Philanthropy Lodge No. 4, at a meeting in Newark, had resolved to establish a fund for, among other things, “*the education of orphans &*

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<sup>49</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 16 March 1797.

*indigent brethren's children.*"<sup>50</sup> This article suggests a growing concern to extend education to those who could not afford it on their own; it suggests a desire, that is, for *mass* education. What was once a private matter was clearly becoming a public issue in late eighteenth-century Upper Canada.

#### TOWARD AN UPPER CANADIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Writings on education appearing in the print media reflected what was an increasingly public dialogue concerning the need for formal education through schooling. By the end of the decade, this dialogue was reflected in the political arena. In July 1797, the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly, although disagreeing on the scope and form of government-aided schooling, adopted a joint Address to the King requesting him to set apart land for the establishment of schools and a university in Upper Canada. It had been ten years since the petition of the western inhabitants had been drawn up and five years since Simcoe's proclamation promoting the establishment of classical schools, but government had stalled on any measures. Increasingly, however, interests in schooling were being raised, and the press allowed for educational ideas to be brought into a broader public discourse. Reflecting this discourse, perhaps, the colony's political leaders moved toward the idea of providing a broader system of schooling. While this discourse might have influenced the colony's political leaders, they were by no means advocating schooling for the entire population. Still, the activities in the legislature indicate the political debate on education reflected the idea of the need for a broader educated population in Upper Canada.

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<sup>50</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 28 June 1797.

Within the request for school funding was a proposal for a system of free grammar schools in each district (the district schools) and for a college or university.<sup>51</sup> The response from Britain arrived several months later, but was favourable to the cause, requesting only a report from the executive council outlining the costs and measures of the proposed system of education.<sup>52</sup> On 18 June 1798 President Peter Russell, who in essence if not in title was the acting lieutenant governor, relayed this information to the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly.<sup>53</sup> In November of that year, Russell formed a committee to report back on education, and though not required to, provided a seat for a member of the elected House of Assembly on the committee.

On 1 December 1798, a report on the royal grant of 1797 was issued by the Executive Council, entitled “Report of the Executive Council and its Committee on the Original Royal Grant of 1797.” While Russell explained that it was not to be expected that on a subject of such debate unanimous decisions could be made, he found that for the most part the committee members agreed on what the basics of the school system should be.<sup>54</sup> On the subject of funding, all committee members agreed that too much funding was better than too little, as the extra funds could eventually be put to use for the expansion of the system. The funds should be used to first erect the necessary buildings, second, pay the salaries of the masters, and third, maintain the buildings and purchase books and other supplies necessary. The committee was divided on the number of schools necessary; some members felt two were sufficient for the time being, while

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<sup>51</sup> John Elmsley (Speaker of Legislative Council) and D.W. Smith (Speaker of the House of Assembly), *Address from the Upper Canada Legislature to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty*, DHE 1:16.

<sup>52</sup> Duke of Portland to President Russell, 4 November 1797, DHE, 1:17.

<sup>53</sup> *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 18 June 1798, 63-64; *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 18 June 1798.

<sup>54</sup> “Report of the Executive Council and its Committee on the Original Royal Grant of 1797,” Council Chamber, York, 1 December 1798, DHE 1:20.

others felt four were necessary. All members agreed that both one in Kingston (east) and one in Newark (west) were of immediate necessity, with funds going toward establishing schools in Cornwall and Sandwich as soon as possible. Finally, the committee agreed that the provision for the establishment and maintenance of a university be at least equal to that of the four schools taken together, but the report did not specify when the university should be built.

Appended to the report were the individual opinions of the members of the committee. D.W. Smith, the speaker of the elected branch of government, the House of Assembly, was the most vocal of the group. He emphasized the need to educate a broad population, and to promote good manners, religion, arts and science, and loyalty. As the sole elected representative of the people on the council, he expressed the Assembly's desires: "The regulations for the school I should recommend to be on a broad basis and as liberal as it may be thought prudent to permit—may loyalty be professed and taught as a necessary combination with good manners, and the progress of the arts and sciences—may the influence of religion spread itself among the rising generation, to the credit of the pastors, and to the honour of the Lord—and may the youth with hilarity, and their parents with gratitude never cease to pray—'God save the King!'"<sup>55</sup> The schools, all of the committee members agreed, should be used to inculcate and indoctrinate an identity favourable to the growth of the province. Key to Smith, however, was that more inhabitants benefit from the schools than simply a select elite.

Russell opened the legislature in 1799 by announcing that the crown was satisfied with the efforts legislators were putting toward the creation of schooling in Upper

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<sup>55</sup> "Report of the Executive Council, 1797," *DHE*, 1:25.

Canada, and he was eager to move forward.<sup>56</sup> Funds and land had successfully been set aside for a government-aided system of education. The shape and form of the school system, however, was yet to be determined and was thus wide open for debate.

David McGregor Rogers, a member of the House of Assembly for Prince Edward and Adolphus Township, sensed that, whatever the case, the atmosphere was conducive to school legislation, and so he brought in an additional bill aimed at providing technical education to orphaned children.<sup>57</sup> The bill was presented on 17 June 1799 and after two readings was put to a committee the very next day. After a series of amendments exchanged between the lower and upper houses, on 29 June 1799, “An Act to Provide for the Education and Support of Orphan Children” was passed.<sup>58</sup> The bill itself was not an elaborate one, but contained an interesting provision in which orphaned or abandoned children would be placed under the custody of town wardens who had the power “to bind the said child or children as apprentices until he, she, or they, shall have obtained the age of twenty-one years in the case of males, and eighteen in the case of females.”<sup>59</sup> There was no outline of the type of education the children would receive, thus the curriculum might have been left to the discretion of the town wardens. Nevertheless, the bill provided for the first government-aided and regulated form of education and the oversight of children in Upper Canada. In this sense, Upper Canada’s first educational act was passed in the eighteenth century.

Later in 1799, the *Upper Canada Gazette* reported that the legislature solidified its commitment to government-regulated education by introducing the certification of

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<sup>56</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 12 June 1799, 99.

<sup>57</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 15 June 1799, 104.

<sup>58</sup> *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 29 June 1799, 96.

<sup>59</sup> “An Act to Provide for the Education and Support of Orphan Children,” 39th George 3rd, Chapter 3, in *DHE*: 1:29.

teachers. The *Upper Canada Gazette* applauded government efforts in regulating teaching, and relayed the news: “We are happy in being informed that no person will be coumenanced [*sic*], or permitted, by the government, to teach school in any part of this province, unless he shall have passed an examination before one of our missionaries, and receive a certificate from under his hand specifying, that he is adequate to the important task of a tutor.”<sup>60</sup> Such a measure was seen as essential as it acted as a check upon “itinerant characters,” who preferred the sedentary life of a teacher “to a more laborious way of getting thro’ life.” It also, and more importantly, acted as a check upon the potential influence of foreign morals and values into the schools of Upper Canada: “the rising generation will reap infinite benefit from it,” the *Upper Canada Gazette* read, “as it will tend to stimulate and encourage men of literary character to make permanent residence among us.” Finally, in order to support and promote the law, the *Upper Canada Gazette* encouraged its readers to “patronize so laudable an institution” as that of Mr. William Cooper, who was the first certified teacher in the history of Upper Canada. Before the dawn of the nineteenth century, then, the wheels of government-regulated schooling were in motion.<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At the end of the eighteenth century, the idea that the community should play a role in the establishment of schooling was significant enough to effect legislation. An essay on the necessity of education published on 13 July 1799 reflected the idea that the community

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<sup>60</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 6 July 1799.

<sup>61</sup> Holding certification was not an enforced requirement, however, and the lack of records dealing with this issue leads me to conclude that it was purely symbolic. Nevertheless, the idea that government could play a role in what was generally considered a private matter was alive.

had a role to play. Echoing earlier articles stressing the importance of providing an education early in life, the author emphasized that early impressions were often the leading traits “by which his future conduct and character will be shaped.”<sup>62</sup> This being the case, the importance of an early education could not be too forcibly emphasized. More importantly, the author stressed the growing sentiment in the province that education was a matter of public concern. “It is a matter of the greatest moment,” he wrote, “and he who has the superintendance [*sic*] of the education of a family of children, should consider it an employment of the greatest importance that could devolve upon him.-- He is not only acting for himself, but for the community at large, and probably for many generations yet to come. He is forming them for action on the great theatre of the world, where they will undoubtedly act in conformity to the precepts and examples received in their infancy.”

Education, this author stressed, laid the foundation for what makes “a man a valuable member of society.” So valuable was the education of children to society at large, that its custodianship could not be trusted to parents alone. In fact, the author suggested that the growing level of crime was directly connected to the neglect parents showed in educating their children: “And I am bold to assert, that it is chiefly owing to the neglect, and misconduct of parents, and those whose duty it is to form and fashion the tender minds of youth, that prisons are so crowded with criminals, and courts of justice have the culprit so often arraigned before them. Wherever I see a person receiving a punishment, inflicted upon him for a crime committed against the community, I consider him less guilty than those who had the superintending of his education.” Most Upper Canadian children, the author lamented, received a horrible education at home, “learn the

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<sup>62</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 13 July 1799.

most impious language,” and “practice every impiety which we should expect to find in the most abandoned character of mature age.” The community, therefore, should provide for the education that parents either could or would not.

The extent to which the colonial government would support a system of schooling in Upper Canada, and to whom the schools would be made available, however, was yet unclear. In the summer of 1799 Richard Cartwright and Robert Hamilton of the Legislative Council, reflecting the anxiety to develop a system of education in the province, were granted authority to procure an agent to organize and take charge of schooling in Upper Canada. They applied to their friends at St. Andrews in Scotland, and after a Mr. Duncan and a Mr. Chalmers declined, John Strachan “was induced, after some hesitation, to accept the appointment.”<sup>63</sup> Strachan arrived in Upper Canada on 31 December 1799. Neither he nor those who had sent for him knew what action he would take toward the establishment of a school system for Upper Canada; but they were all eager to continue the work.

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<sup>63</sup> John Strachan, *Autobiography*, reprinted in *DHE* 1:9.

## CHAPTER 2

### FROM EDUCATIONAL EXPANSION TO EDUCATIONAL DEADLOCK, 1800-1811

In the first issue of the *Canada Constellation* for the year 1800, the editor of the newspaper offered a short review of the progress of Upper Canada in the last century. The editor rejoiced in the transformation of “howling wildernesses” into a populated province, and an air of optimism blanketed the editorial. “In 1700,” he wrote, “the quarter of the globe which we inhabit was scarcely known; in 1800, we see an extensive and populous nation existing, beside almost well settled and almost boundless territories of other nations, on the same continent: if so rapid has been population in the last [*sic*], what may our rational calculations be for the ensuing 100 years!”<sup>1</sup>

The expansion of the non-Aboriginal population was from approximately 14,000 in 1791 to between 25,000 and 46,000 in 1800.<sup>2</sup> Most of this population was scattered on farms in isolated communities, with Newark (Niagara), York, and Kingston being the three major towns. It was a nascent society, but as the optimism of the *Canada Constellation* suggests, some of its inhabitants did not regard it as such. The establishment of two private newspapers at the turn of the century, the aforementioned *Canada Constellation* in 1799 and the *Niagara Herald* in 1801, at a time when the province was composed of scattered communities, suggests that newspapers themselves were an important component in supporting the intellectual culture of the province. Both

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<sup>1</sup> *Canada Constellation*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>2</sup> McCalla, *Planting the Province*, Appendix B, Statistical Table 1.1.

newspapers were independent and can be considered “moderate” in that they neither toed nor defied government lines. Their content reveals that they were also an important means to connect to other communities within the province, and to communities outside the province; as with the *Upper Canada Gazette*, at least one page per issue was devoted to notices and advertisements. Each newspaper contained local news content, but most stories were copied from American newspapers and contained foreign stories from the United States and Europe. In this way, the different towns and settlements in Upper Canada could connect themselves to events outside of the province as well.

The press was also an important outlet for discourse among ordinary inhabitants and their political leaders. One inhabitant, writing to the *Upper Canada Gazette*, and calling himself “Elector,” used it in this way. The House of Assembly, he insisted, must have real power. “[Y]our duties,” he told the members of the Assembly, “are, to enact wise and beneficial laws for yourself and your constituents—your country and posterity.”<sup>3</sup> The following week, “A Farmer” wrote to the newspaper. Calling himself a “plain” man who was “educated to follow the plough and not to wield the quill,” he believed his humble background made him best acquainted with the general interests of fellow inhabitants, and urged them to vote for candidates with similar attributes, without dwelling on their social status.<sup>4</sup>

Did ordinary inhabitants, then, utilize the press to contribute a popular voice to political dialogue? Were they successful? If so, did Upper Canada’s political elite respond? This chapter explores these questions by focusing on the development of educational legislation in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The District School

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<sup>3</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 15 March 1800.

<sup>4</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 22 March 1800.

Act was passed in 1807, one decade after land and funding had been secured for that purpose. What can we learn about the development of this act through an examination of print culture?

The District School Act is commonly characterized by scholars as the result of efforts by the political elite to establish grammar schools for Upper Canada. Houston and Prentice, however, point out that the act was also met with a mixed reception. The act was immediately questioned by critics who saw the establishment of grammar schools as a benefit to those who were already privileged in the colony. “Certainly the 1797 legislation envisaging free grammar schools,” Houston and Prentice conclude, “had been ignored[.]”<sup>5</sup> Although Houston and Prentice point out the opposition to the District School Act, the writing of educational history in Upper Canada has tended to look at the making of the act in isolation, and not in terms of developments after 1797.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will ask what happened between the 1797 granting of school lands, and the passing of the 1807 District School Act. Since the historiography focuses on legislative developments, scholars have characteristically assumed that not much happened.

An analysis of public discourse and political developments in education within this period is also valuable because the first decade of the nineteenth century was a time of political conflict and upheaval. Radicals such as Joseph Willcocks, William Weekes, and Robert Thorpe emerged as anti-establishment leaders who opposed the executive government’s policies and practices, and questioned its right to power. These radicals not only found their way into the elected House of Assembly, but also they published

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<sup>5</sup> Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> For the most part, this is because little was done to promote schooling in the legislature during this period, as J. George Hodgins points out, and very few records pertaining to the making of the 1807 act are available. See *DHE*, volume 1.

some influential pamphlets and in 1807 established an anti-executive newspaper, the *Upper Canadian Guardian*. This newspaper provided a new platform for the dissemination of the ideas of political radicals in an effort to subvert the colonial government. In what ways was the idea of government-aided schooling a part of the growing radical discourse? Houston and Prentice point out that the central leading critics of the colonial administration, including Thorpe and Willcocks, were also among the first who voted against the District School Act and later led moves to repeal it.<sup>7</sup> What explains the development of government-aided schooling before 1807 and the reaction to the District School Act?

#### DEVELOPING PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION IN THE ‘PUBLIC SPHERE’

In its customary annual reflection, an open letter “To the public” in the *Upper Canada Gazette* in 1801 reflected upon the religion, morality, and social order of Upper Canada and vowed to serve as a literary agent promoting the connection between the “Literary Character” and good government.<sup>8</sup> There was growing optimism, moreover, that government-supported schools could cement this connection. This optimism was expressed in the *Niagara Herald*, when on 16 May 1801 it announced the opening of the provincial legislature, and pointed out that school legislation was among the subjects that were to be discussed in the upcoming year, making the upcoming session, the newspaper believed, one of the “more interesting sessions than that of any former.”<sup>9</sup>

The connection between schooling to train Upper Canadian children for their future civic duties and the successful development of Upper Canada was a key theme of

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<sup>7</sup> Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 10 January 1801.

<sup>9</sup> *Niagara Herald*, 16 May 1801.

the early nineteenth century. In a series of lectures appearing in 1801 on the necessity of education, a writer in the *Niagara Herald* espoused a curriculum in which civic education was at the core.<sup>10</sup> History, the study of statistics, and the politics of the modern states were touted as the backbone of education, “for the first accounts of any country or people, make the strongest impressions on our minds.” Civic education was suggested as imperative to any curriculum that might be developed in the schools. Moreover, it provided a justification for school expansion.

On 24 July 1802, an extensive article on education was printed in the *Upper Canada Gazette* outlining what the author believed reflected a maturing philosophy of education in Upper Canada. In it, the link between religion, education, and their benefits in cultivating civic loyalty was touted. “The Romans,” the author claimed, “made it a primary object of attention to educate their children in the principles, ceremonies and practices of their religion; and some of their most distinguished statesmen having declared, that the strength and glory of the commonwealth was owing, in a great measure, to this important circumstance.”<sup>11</sup> The strength of the Roman Empire, according to this writer, was in its insistence on indoctrinating children at a young age with the values and culture of the society. Their children were “trained up” with the values of Rome, and in doing so the values and culture “took root and grew up with them.” The success of Roman education was contingent upon the “religious” values promoted in that curriculum.

In comparison, the author pointed to the contemporary French republic, under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, which he believed was neglecting religious values,

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<sup>10</sup> *Niagara Herald*, 21 February 1801; 28 February 1801, 7 March 1801.

<sup>11</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 24 July 1802.

and was in fact promoting atheism. France stood “as an awful beacon to warn the world.” Wherever religious values were neglected, the social order was destroyed. It was therefore necessary “to rear children for excellence and usefulness, as citizens, and in the various social and domestic departments.” In an age when the world was saturated with new political and religious ideas, this writer suggested that Upper Canada indoctrinate children with values supportive of monarchy and Christianity. This author’s ideas support historian Christopher Bayly’s argument that one effect of the French Revolutionary wars was to promote religion as an integral component of British imperial rule. In this sense, religion was Christian, but not necessarily linked to the Church of England. Some form of tolerance for other Christian sects was necessary in order to defend the empire against atheistic France.<sup>12</sup> This tolerance and Christian indoctrination could be supported by government through the aiding and funding of schools. A good education, seen in light of the above writings, provided for good government.

Still, there were other reasons for promoting education. In an 1802 article in the *Upper Canada Gazette*, mothers were called upon to be attentive to the first impressions they made upon their children, which would last for their entire lives. The idea of raising respectable and properly mannered children was touted.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, there were a number of such writings that tended to promote the educational function within the household. As Prentice and Houston argue, such writings “make it clear that education was not by any means equated with schooling in early British North America.”<sup>14</sup> These writings suggest that ideas of child rearing and education were increasingly becoming a focus of

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 21 August 1802.

<sup>14</sup> Alison L. Prentice and Susan E. Houston, *Family, School, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 6.

public debate. In eighteenth-century western societies, the rearing of children was considered to be the sole responsibility of the family, but by the early nineteenth century we begin to see that many individuals had much to say about what went on inside the homes of others.

Writings in the Upper Canadian press concerning such issues at the turn of the century overwhelmingly emphasized the public benefits of education. As such, education was increasingly advocated as a public concern. While child rearing was still considered largely a private matter, the idea that the community should be involved in the process was intensifying. There was also a growing belief that children should be reared not solely for the individual, but also for the public good. To what extent did this burgeoning belief manifest itself within the public arena of official politics and colonial governance?

#### THE POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Although the discourse on education continued in the first few years of the nineteenth century, very few developments in schooling in fact occurred within government circles. After the optimistic report of 1797, which had called for, and set aside, land and funds for a system of free district schools and the establishment of a college or university, little was initiated to begin the process of erecting publicly-aided schoolhouses. John Strachan, who arrived in Upper Canada in 1799, concluded that the inadequacy of resources and lack of government aid made the task of school promotion a difficult one. Even the less expensive apparatuses and supplies necessary for effective teaching, he found, were hard to come by.<sup>15</sup> While continuing his theological studies, he began work to establish a

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<sup>15</sup> He explained this in 1809 as the basis for writing *A Concise Introduction to Practical Arithmetic; For the use of Schools* (Montreal: Nahum Mower, 1809).

grammar school in Cornwall. He also increasingly acquired the ear of prominent Upper Canadian political leaders whose children and relatives attended his school.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the appeals of school promoters such as Strachan, government leaders could hardly ignore the growing discourse concerning the development of a school system within the broader public arena. While the progress of schooling was sluggish, the appetite for it was growing. On 16 February 1804, a petition from inhabitants of the county of Glengary was read in the House of Assembly.

Notwithstanding “the wise exertions of the Legislature to promote public prosperity,” these inhabitants decried, “they still contemplate anxiety, the ill consequences that may result from the want of schools, both to the present generation and to posterity.” For this reason, they petitioned for government-aided schools in “the most central places” in the colony, under the control and regulation of government.<sup>17</sup> In 1804 and 1805, similar proposals were made in the Assembly to establish such schools in the province, but failed to pass.<sup>18</sup> In 1806 a bill for “the more general dissemination of learning throughout the Province,” initiated by the political dissenter William Weekes, went through the

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<sup>16</sup> According to historian George W. Spragge, Strachan was also probably working behind the political scenes, as when the question of the advisability of establishing schools was raised in the House of Assembly, Spragge reasons, the majority of those who were trying to secure funds for grammar schools were either parents or relatives of the pupils at his Cornwall school, or members of his neighbourhood. (See George W. Spragge, “John Strachan’s Contribution to Education, 1800-1823,” *Canadian Historical Review* 22 (1941): 149). This idea, however, requires further research to be substantiated. One such school effort was made by Ebenezer Washburn, who presented a school bill to the House of Assembly in 1805. Although his son attended Strachan’s school, Washburn was involved in dissident political circles and was unlikely a proponent of Strachan’s. Moreover, the 1806 school legislation was introduced by William Weekes, a known political dissenter, who was certainly not influenced by Strachan. The evidence indicates that support for schooling in Upper Canada extended beyond Strachan’s circles, and that a variety of prominent Upper Canadians were involved in school promotion. This idea is expanded later in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 16 February 1804, 429-430; see also, *DHE* 1:48-49.

<sup>18</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly, 1804*, 16, 17, 20 February 1804, 430-432, 435, 438; and 19, 25, 27 February 1805, 34, 43, 46.

Assembly, but the legislature was prorogued before the Legislative Council was ready to vote on it and the bill was dropped.<sup>19</sup>

The political situation abroad certainly preoccupied political leaders, and educational issues received less attention in political debates; this, in part, contributed to the deceleration of educational development while also fostering the idea that civic loyalty needed to be inculcated within Upper Canada. Peter Hunter, now the main administrator in the province, dismissed the legislature in 1803 and urged its members to promote loyalty and “good order” within their constituencies by example.<sup>20</sup> Government could promote morality and order through the laws, but ultimately it had to be fostered and made part of the ethos of the culture.

Much of the perceived threat of social instability uttered by leaders like Hunter owed its existence to the competing forces of monarchialism and republicanism prevailing throughout the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century. Upper Canada was very much situated in this Atlantic world by geography, political ties to Britain, and a press providing weekly news on events in the United States and Europe. To what extent would Upper Canada resist the forces of republicanism and remain an appendage to the British constitutional governance? In Britain itself, constitutional governance was changing. The increasing authority of the House of Commons throughout the eighteenth century suggested that a broader population had a place to play in politics. In the United States, this idea was the basis of its new political system in which all branches of government required popular support. In Upper Canada, however, it was still unclear as to which powers each of the three branches of government could sustain. The nature of

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<sup>19</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 22 February to 28 February 1806, 85-101; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 28 February to 1 March 1806, 267-269.

<sup>20</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 5 March 1803.

the constitution and popular participation in colonial politics in Upper Canada was an issue, to be sure, that would be central to political discourse throughout the colony's existence.

D'arcy Boulton, a lawyer and entrepreneur who came to Upper Canada in 1802 from New York State, published a pamphlet in 1805 that touched on these questions. Comparing the differences between Upper Canada and the United States, he deemed the republic a home for the "political dissenter," while Upper Canada was suited best for "English people, untainted by political speculations" who were "attached to their own constitution."<sup>21</sup> Having himself lived in America prior to settling in Upper Canada, he expressed a sense of homecoming when having first crossed the St. Lawrence and set foot "on British ground."<sup>22</sup> Boulton also admitted, however, that the country possessed its own political problems that had to be resolved. Boulton found in Upper Canada a number of complaints from many inhabitants that prominent individuals within government circles were hoarding land and, by extension, power. A wary population that had "come into this country to settle, without being able to advance money, not being possessed of any capital," would certainly be enraged by a system that afforded "an excessive advantage to the monied man."<sup>23</sup>

The pamphlet hinted at what was becoming a very clear facet of political culture in Upper Canada. On 30 August 1806, the *Upper Canada Gazette* reprinted correspondence between William Weekes and the new lieutenant governor, Francis Gore, which expressed a new tone for politics.<sup>24</sup> Weekes presented Gore with an address

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<sup>21</sup> D'arcy Boulton, *Sketch of His Majesty's Province of Upper Canada* (London: C. Rickaby, 1805), 4.

<sup>22</sup> D'arcy Boulton, *Sketch of His Majesty's Province of Upper Canada* (London: C. Rickaby, 1805), 4

<sup>23</sup> D'arcy Boulton, *Sketch of His Majesty's Province of Upper Canada* (London: C. Rickaby, 1805), 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 30 August 1806.

signed by a number of inhabitants that pressed for changes in the political culture of the province. "In approaching your Excellency, with a zealous attachment to a Constitution, which neither innovation can impair, nor anarchy deform, we lament our being under the necessity of stating to you, that, since the establishment of it in this Country, its system has been mistaken, and its energy misused." Private interest, Weekes and the petitioners complained, trumped the public good in too many actions of government. In a forceful tone they insisted that "prerogative and privilege have been indiscriminately sacrificed at the shrine of arbitrary imposition." While Weekes and the other petitioners assured the lieutenant governor that "the structure of the constitution would be supported, and indeed any deviation from it would be counterproductive," they wanted to make clear that their support must be reciprocated. Their loyalty, they warned, was not to be taken for granted. Gore offered a curt response that was neither empathetic nor sympathetic. He ignored much of the petition and instead told the inhabitants "I highly approve the sentiments you profess of the British Constitution. My utmost endeavours will be exerted to Administer it here with Impartiality, and to preserve it from Anarchy and Innovation." Gore made clear he would not acquiesce to the demands of political agitators.

Weekes' complaints were not universal, and Gore's stance was supported by many inhabitants. Pledges of loyalty proliferated in the press. A group of petitioners from Kingston assured Gore that "none of his Majesty's subjects are more firmly attached to his Person and Government, and our happy Constitution" than they.<sup>25</sup> The Society of the People called Quakers were compelled to affirm their loyalty to the crown in the same issue. And while they could never offer military support on religious grounds, they promised to be loyal and peaceful subjects. Robert Hamilton and

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<sup>25</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 4 October 1806.

inhabitants of Niagara also presented Gore with a pledge of loyalty to him and the constitution. The country was still young, these inhabitants argued, therefore “Some difficulties will naturally arise, some inconveniences may present themselves requiring amendment.”<sup>26</sup> But no reforms in government were necessary.

Whether or not the petition by Weekes and his associates represented only a small group, what was clear was that the debate on political reform was open in Upper Canada, and its existence was enough to stir the emotions of inhabitants. In this context, a burgeoning culture of reform divided Upper Canadians between those who envisioned increasing powers for the elected branch and those who saw little problem with the status quo.<sup>27</sup> It was in this political climate that Upper Canadian legislatures would begin building the first forms of government-aided schools.

#### POLITICS, THE RISE OF THE REFORM PRESS, AND THE RESURGENCE OF EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE

Robert Thorpe, a judge serving in Prince Edward Island who had been appointed to the Court of King’s Bench in Upper Canada, entered the political arena in 1805. His ideas often put him in direct opposition with the executive government. Thorpe’s main objection in Upper Canada concerned land policy. Like Boulton, he warned that the complaints from a number of inhabitants concerning the unfair distribution of land could lead to political upheaval. Unlike Boulton, Thorpe became active in cultivating political upheaval. Thorpe and Weekes came to form a friendship, and in 1805 they began an active campaign aimed against executive government. “Within a year these two men and

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<sup>26</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 11 October 1806.

<sup>27</sup> For more elaborate discussions on political culture and ideology in Upper Canada, see David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty* and Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*.

their small group of associates became identified as champions of ‘the people’ against the tyranny of the government.”<sup>28</sup> Other prominent members of their group included Joseph Willcocks, the Home District Sheriff from 1804 to 1807, Charles Burton Wyatt, the surveyor general from 1805 to 1807, and John Mills Jackson who arrived in Upper Canada from England in 1806 and would later write an important pamphlet outlining the grievances of the group.

Speeches and public addresses were their primary means to disseminate their ideas. Petitions were also used, although they were ineffective.<sup>29</sup> These efforts received considerable attention in the press, but were ultimately portrayed in a negative light in the government-sanctioned *Upper Canada Gazette*; as one contemporary anonymous pamphleteer suggested, they inevitably found “a great obstacle” in the publisher of the *Upper Canada Gazette*, who refused to insert their speeches and writings, and thus denied them an audience in Upper Canada’s print culture. In order to overcome this obstacle, they relied upon the support and resources of Willcocks, and established a printing press of their own. The *Upper Canada Guardian; or Freeman’s Journal* was established in 1807 with Willcocks as its founding editor.

The establishment of this newspaper was a watershed in the history of print culture in Upper Canada. With the voice of a newspaper, these men became, as an anonymous pamphleteer commented in 1807, “the rallying point for all the disaffected and turbulent spirits in the Province, and gained strength daily.”<sup>30</sup> At the core of their

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<sup>28</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Ultimately because of the modesty of their efforts and the unresponsiveness of the British government. See Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Anonymous, *To the Right Honourable Lord Castlereagh one of His Majesty’s Principle Secretaries of State* (Quebec, 1809), 3. Historians generally agree that the author of this pamphlet was Richard Cartwright, Member of the Legislative Council.

grievances were patronage and power in Upper Canada. The structure of the system itself was not the root of their frustration; rather, it was that the Executive Council was hoarding power. Although a popular voice existed in the House of Assembly, it was becoming clear, to them at least, that this institution was simply a figurehead. Real power lay with the Executive. Thus, with the establishment of the *Upper Canada Guardian*, the radical group gave a voice to a broader population through print media where it did not have one in government.

From its onset, the *Upper Canada Guardian* was an anti-establishment newspaper. Willcocks stated early in his newspaper that he intended “To shew the world the extent to which persecution has gone in this province.”<sup>31</sup> The anti-establishment newspaper provided a medium for “the people” to express their views on issues of the day. Loyalty was certainly an important one of these issues. An anonymous writer to the newspaper in 1807, entering into the discourse on loyalty, suggested that loyalty did not mean blind obedience to the established powers. “There is a strong idea in the minds of many,” he suggested, “that to be loyal, is to support any system the Government may adopt, whether confident with, or subversive of the Constitution.” True loyalty, as he saw it however, did not require the public to be unconditionally faithful to the king. Certainly, he asked, “it would not be loyalty to assist a monarch in rendering himself absolute, who would overturn the constitution and subvert the law? If that were the case, our hardy ancestors who opposed the strides of arbitrary power and raised the fabric of our glorious constitution, which they cemented with their blood, must have been REBELS.” The “true loyalist,” he insisted, strove to be loyal not only to the crown, but also to “the people”. It would be disloyal to support an executive that did not respect

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<sup>31</sup> *Upper Canada Guardian*, 27 August 1807.

ideas shaped in the public arena. The true loyalist worked within all systems of government, and respected popular opinions, “because he knows it is wealth and happiness to the people, strength and security to the government, and support and aggrandizement to the Throne.”<sup>32</sup>

The radical group continued their attack in a political pamphlet that ignited one of the fiercest political discourses in the province’s history. In 1809, John Mills Jackson attacked the colonial government for practicing what he believed were systemic abuses of arbitrary patronage, and for neglecting to honour the opinions and wishes of the House of Assembly. Jackson argued that whatever power was vested in the House of Assembly was not real and that, in fact, the Assembly had become a farce. Real power and real decisions were made strictly by the Executive Council.<sup>33</sup>

Whether or not the Executive monopolized power, the radical group certainly did not speak for the majority of Upper Canadians, or the majority of electors. What is clear, however, is that the material distributed by radicals in the anti-establishment press increasingly opened up the debate. Furthermore, the press was used as a counterbalance to whatever power the executive could exert. Often the executive itself entered into print culture discourse in an effort to usurp that discourse. With a printing press of its own, the executive was free to print whatever it chose in this effort, a point that Jackson decried as foul play.<sup>34</sup> The establishment of the *Upper Canadian Guardian* and the reform press suggests that the voices of opposition were alive and well. According to historians Carol

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<sup>32</sup> *Upper Canada Guardian*, 27 August 1807.

<sup>33</sup> John Mills Jackson, *A View of the Political Situation of the Province of Upper Canada, in North America in which her physical capacity is stated; the means of diminishing her burden, encreasing her value, and securing her connection to Great Britain are fully considered, with notes and appendix* (London: W. Earle, 1809), 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> John Mills Jackson, *A View of the Political Situation of the Province of Upper Canada*, 16.

Wilton and Bruce Wilson, it was a valuable weapon in “the struggle to forge an effective local opposition to the mercantile-official elite of the Niagara district.”<sup>35</sup> The threat, however, extended beyond Niagara. Indeed, the press was apparently so threatening that in 1812 the newspaper was bought by supporters of the executive just to shut it down.<sup>36</sup>

The rise of the reform press provided an anti-establishment platform from which to follow and take part in debates about the social, political, and economic life of the province. One of the most important of these debates centred upon the schools. On 10 March 1807, “An Act to establish public schools in each and every District of this Province” was passed.<sup>37</sup> The act did not pass unanimously in the House of Assembly, however, with a group of dissenters voting against the bill. Among these dissenters was Thorpe, who had taken Weekes’ seat after his untimely death in 1806. Dissenters considered the District School Act elitist, and argued that the funds being applied to district schools would be better utilized toward a common system of schooling available to all inhabitants. The District School Act, however, nevertheless passed without causing much public debate. The act was, of course, a culmination of the efforts of the late 1790s. At the same time, however, it marked a renewal of political involvement in education. On 25 April, the entire act was reprinted for the public eye. The *York Gazette* had made a habit of printing the acts passed in each session of the legislature, and it is interesting to observe that although the District School Act was not the first act passed that year, it was the first act to be published, suggestive of its importance in the public

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<sup>35</sup> Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Carl Benn, “The Upper Canadian Press, 1793-1815,” *Ontario History* 70 (1978): 100.

<sup>37</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly* 10 March 1807, 185; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 10 March 1807, 293. The act provided a total of £800 for eight grammar schools which were to be centrally located in each of the colony’s eight districts. Five trustees in each district, appointed by the lieutenant governor, were given powers to appropriate funds and appoint teachers. Teachers were to be natural born subjects, and could be unilaterally dismissed from their positions by the lieutenant governor. See *DHE* 1:60-61.

arena.<sup>38</sup> Although the dissenters in the Assembly considered the act elitist, it still represented the first time that public funds were granted for educational initiatives, and perhaps for this reason there was no immediate widespread rejection of the act as it was drawn up.

Later that year, the *York Gazette* printed an address from John Strachan to his students at Cornwall at their public exam. The school had become one of the first government-aided grammar schools since the passing of the school act earlier that year. This address says much about what elite leaders like Strachan considered the utility of the district schools to be. “One of the greatest advantages you have derived from your education here,” Strachan told his students, “arises from the strictness of our discipline.” The undisciplined person, he insisted, quickly becomes ungovernable. Strachan’s students, however, were governable. An elitist order of society was promoted in Strachan’s Cornwall school. Strachan made it clear that he was educating a body of students who would enter positions of leadership in the province, and in doing so attempted to instill “a mildness of treatment, a condescension to inferiors, a ready obedience to the just commands of superiors,” in order to make them “content and useful in society.”<sup>39</sup>

Strachan was slowly becoming a relevant public voice with considerable influence among government circles. As such, there was a growing audience for what he had to say. His first pamphlet was printed in 1807, and it concerned the place of religion in education.<sup>40</sup> Although Strachan considered himself a liberal thinker and a proponent

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<sup>38</sup> *The York Gazette*, 25 April 1807.

<sup>39</sup> *The York Gazette*, 11 November 1807.

<sup>40</sup> John Strachan, *The Christian Religion, Recommended in a Letter to his Pupils* (Montreal: Nahum Mower, 1807).

of practical Scottish educational values, one of his fundamental aims, as drawn out from this pamphlet, was to curb secular Enlightenment ideas in favour of Christian theology. Although pragmatic and well schooled in the practical subjects, Strachan insisted upon indoctrinating the elite of Upper Canada with more conservative values. Strachan warned that in the present age of political revolution, dissenters “attempt to inculcate the young” with anti-religious values.<sup>41</sup> His solution was to provide inculcation of his own. Christianity, he told his students, was the culmination of moral and intellectual thought; from the Greeks and Romans, to the Jews, to the middle ages, to the Enlightenment thinkers, many of whom—citing Bacon, Newton, and Locke—he reminded them, were Christians.<sup>42</sup> Christianity, he thought, should be the backbone of education. This pamphlet situated him among the other conservative voices in the province, such as that of the anonymous writer in the *Upper Canada Gazette* in 1802, arguing for the dissemination of Christianity as a means of fortifying the empire.<sup>43</sup>

Political involvement in education continued after the passing of the District Schools Act in 1807, and in Gore’s speech from the throne in 1808, he echoed Strachan’s religious sentiment and clearly drew the connection between morality, loyalty, and education that he wished to achieve in the schools of Upper Canada. “Since the last session of this Legislature,” Gore told the house, “the necessary measures have been taken on my part, and on that of the Trustees appointed by me, for the establishing of Public Schools; institutions which I trust will be the means, not only of communicating useful knowledge to the youth of the Province, but also of instilling into their minds the

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<sup>41</sup> John Strachan, *The Christian Religion, Recommended in a Letter to his Pupils*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> John Strachan, *The Christian Religion, Recommended in a Letter to his Pupils*, 15-20.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 13, page 62, above.

principles of Religion and Loyalty.”<sup>44</sup> Gore was very direct in asserting his position; a fundamental aim of government-aided schooling was to instill loyalty to the crown. So, while the schools were advocated for practical reasons by certain inhabitants in the press since the late eighteenth century, they were also advocated as vehicles of indoctrination by the government elite. In either case, government-aided schooling was being advocated.

Considering their shared interest on the matter of education, however, the lower and upper houses of the legislature were not so cooperative in developing school legislation. In 1808, Willcocks, seconded by fellow dissenter David McGregor Rogers, who had in 1799 effectively put forward legislation providing education to orphaned children, moved for leave to bring in a bill to repeal parts of the District School Act.<sup>45</sup> In 1810, they attempted it once again.

For what reasons did the reform-minded group oppose the District School Act? Jackson’s radical pamphlet of 1809 provides part of the answer. Although a “laudable attempt” was made in the House of Assembly in 1806 for a more general system of education, Jackson proposed, it faced resistance from the establishment, which instead “voted eight hundred a year for eight schools [the district schools], as an inducement for protestant clergymen to settle in Canada.” While the students in these elite schools received a proper education, Jackson complained, the rest of the population was left with limited choices of private schools run by “unfit” teachers.<sup>46</sup> The district school system, according to this view, was an elite one, providing limited education for those with above

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<sup>44</sup> *The York Gazette*, 20 January 1808; *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 20 January 1808, 191-192; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 20 January 1808, 297-298.

<sup>45</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 2 February 1810, 284-285.

<sup>46</sup> John Mills Jackson, *A View of the Political Situation of the Province of Upper Canada*, 18.

average resources. That system, anti-establishment reformers like Jackson argued, should be abandoned and replaced with a system of common schooling.

The movement for common schooling, however, should not be confused as an exclusively reform cause. It was not dissenters alone that took to the cause of common school promotion. For their own reasons, conservatives also pushed for the expansion of schooling. A pro-establishment anonymous pamphleteer who challenged Jackson's charges agreed that the privately-funded schools were run by unfit teachers. The condition of Upper Canadian schools, he acknowledged, was "an evil loudly complained of by every well-wisher of the country," and was the greatest contributor to political instability.<sup>47</sup> The threat imposed by these schools, as he saw it however, was that they were run by mostly American teachers introducing "a system of discipline not only repugnant to decency and common sense, but highly injurious to morality, and inimical to our form of government."<sup>48</sup> For their own reasons, pro-establishment inhabitants, such as the anonymous pamphleteer, also supported common schooling.

On 3 February 1810, a common school bill was introduced by more conservative members of the House of Assembly.<sup>49</sup> The act would have appropriated funds for common schools in every district, while maintaining the district schools. The bill, however, faced resistance among the more reform-minded members still bent upon repealing the District School Act. Only through a shared system of common schools, it seemed that anti-establishment men in the House of Assembly believed, would the real advantages of education be shared by the poor and rich alike. There was a clear division

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<sup>47</sup> Anonymous. *To the Right Honourable Lord Castlereagh*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous. *To the Right Honourable Lord Castlereagh*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 3 February 1810, 286-287. The bill was dropped after second reading.

in the conception of government's role in education. On the one hand, both the executive and the legislative council, supported by conservative members of the House of Assembly, favoured the idea of a system of district schools where only certain inhabitants could receive an education aimed at preparing them for leadership roles within the province. Such a system, however, would work to perpetuate the social and political hierarchy that radicals wanted to subvert, and did not address the concerns of certain members of the House of Assembly that increasingly advocated the need to educate all inhabitants, rich and poor, in order to expand participation in the social, political, and economic interests of the province.

The inability to reach a compromise in the legislature gave rise to a division concerning the shape and form of government-aided schooling. Nevertheless, we should be careful to remember that although the shape and form of government-aided schooling was a matter of debate, the need for it was not. For different reasons, and with different ends in mind, both establishment and anti-establishment inhabitants agreed upon government-supported schooling. Which schools would receive support, how much support those schools would receive, and to whom those schools would be open, was, by the second decade of the century, still an issue that needed to be resolved. What was not an issue, however, was whether government should at all be involved in education.

What needed to be sorted out now, however, was whether government's role in schooling should be expanded. A pro-executive newspaper, the *Kingston Gazette*, was established in 1810 and in its very first issue, for its own reasons, it took up the cause of promoting common schools. The importance of educating children, the newspaper suggested, had been admitted by many inhabitants in Upper Canada but was not yet fully

realized by government.<sup>50</sup> Schooling, according to the *Kingston Gazette*, was required in order to indoctrinate common values from which a cohesive identity and stable society could foster, in which not only the intellectual, but also the moral, character was elevated. “Habits of subordination acquired in well disciplined schools essentially aid the administration of civil government,” the *Kingston Gazette* read. “They introduce a certain uniformity of manners, sentiments and characters, which is a desirable object in any state of society and under any form of government, and peculiarly important to this province, now in its youth, and not yet ripened into national manhood.” The idea of a young nation in need of a common identity was at the core of the system of education advocated here. “Our population is composed of persons born in different states and nations, under various governments and laws, and speaking several languages. To assimilate them, or rather their descendants, into one congenial people, by all practicable means, is an object of true policy. And the establishment of common schools is one of those means.”<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the newspaper offered another justification for common schooling when it suggested, as political dissenters had been suggesting, that Upper Canada required trained and locally-born leaders in order to fill the influential offices in the colony. A democratic, elected assembly, the administration of justice which “calls men in the common walks of life to act as jurors,” and the “various subordinate offices” requiring an informed mind gave rise, they believed, to an additional motive “to train up the rising generation in such a manner as to fit them for the performance of civil duties and the enjoyment of civil rights.” Upper Canada’s system of education theretofore

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<sup>50</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 25 September 1810.

<sup>51</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 25 September 1810.

failed to produce such an educated population, and so it was the intent of the newspaper “to awaken the public attention to this most interesting subject.” In sum, the *Kingston Gazette* entered into the public debate on education by promoting a common system of schooling intended to assimilate foreigners, indoctrinate children with the value of subordination to government, and to train a generation of locally-born provincial leaders. For both different and similar reasons, this conservative newspaper found common ground with dissenters in the House of Assembly promoting a common school system.

The press proved to be a valuable forum for educational discourse. In an article on morality and education in the *Kingston Gazette*, “A friend to improvement” suggested that “no subject, of so much importance, has been treated with so much neglect, as the proper education of children.”<sup>52</sup> Once again, the call for school expansion was made. “A small part of the community,” this writer admitted, “need to prepare themselves for the learned professions, for a small proportion only can be useful, as *divines, lawyers, or physicians*; yet every person ought to be able to read and write his own language with propriety, and to have that knowledge of arithmetic, which will enable him to transact all necessary business with ease.” Moreover, it was the responsibility of government to provide this education because the demands of a frontier society offered very little time and resources for parents to attend to the education of their children. Were education to be expanded, “we should not see so many taverns and tippling houses crowded as we now do.” Moreover, “few broils or disturbances would exist; and the community at large would become enlightened, loyal, and happy.” Education was touted by this inhabitant as the panacea for peace, order, and loyalty to the state.

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<sup>52</sup> *Kingston Gazette* 30 October 1810.

On 13 November 1810, an inhabitant of Kingston provided his reasons for supporting a system of common schools. When the province was first settled, he argued, the demands of a frontier society were so great that the settlers “had not the means of giving much education to their children, or obtaining much information themselves from reading.”<sup>53</sup> In a course of more than twenty years, however, these difficulties were chiefly surmounted. Towns were populated and the physical labour of settling the province was relaxed. “Means of information, education and improvement in science, ought now to receive that attention, which the state of the country heretofore rendered impracticable. Common schools ought to be put upon a more liberal establishment.” This inhabitant called for an extensive system of education, including a network of libraries to be built where Upper Canadian families could not afford to purchase books on their own. He suggested that a voluntary tax should be collected for the school system. Schools were being built in many other places, he argued; it was a transnational phenomenon. This inhabitant feared that the “neglect necessarily introduced by the early state of this country” would operate to “retard the progress of improvement” and place Upper Canada behind other nations. He therefore called upon every “patriot and philanthropist” to take up the cause of promoting schools and libraries for the good of the country.

Calls for the expansion of the school system continued in 1811. In a more cautious tone, however, one inhabitant from the Midland district argued that the present district school system should not be altered until Upper Canada could train its own battalion of teachers to support a home-grown common system of education. As it stood, the system, he believed, was serving the community well, and while he admitted there

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<sup>53</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 13 November 1810.

existed a “thirst for knowledge” in the province that could not be “easily repressed,” any immediate expansion of the school system, he believed, “would defeat completely the designs and success of this establishment, without affording the least comparative benefit.” Common schools, he argued, did indeed require support, but such support should be limited. From the district schools, the province would “be soon supplied with well educated teachers, with whose qualifications and morals we may be well acquainted. They will ultimately preclude the admission and employment of itinerant and illiterate pedagogues, who to the disgrace of our country and the injury of our youth, impose themselves, as teachers, on the community.” Clearly, this writer feared that Upper Canada did not have enough teachers of its own to support a common school system, thus any expansion would mean that foreign and dangerous teachers would have to be employed. Any change to the school legislation, he warned, “would be a paralytic stroke to the improvement of our infant country.”<sup>54</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Private schools continued to open after the passing of the District School Act, as advertisements indicate, and the movement for common schooling in this sense continued to gain momentum. With only a limited number of district schools aided by government, but which themselves depended upon tuition fees that many inhabitants could not afford or were not willing to pay, the extent of government involvement in school development did not meet the demand. To what extent were the political elite prepared to expand the system of education?

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<sup>54</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 12 February 1811.

On 3 September 1811, the *Kingston Gazette* reprinted Strachan's last speech at the annual examination in his Cornwall school before moving to York where he was offered a pastoralship in 1812. In this speech, Strachan expressed what he had attempted to build in his grammar school in Cornwall, and by extension what he believed the utility of the district schools to be. The infusion of "sound moral principles," he claimed, was the first principal of education. Strachan made no apologies for his conception of education, asserting that "the enemies of the classics are like the enemies of rank and title in society—enemies only because it is beyond their reach, or they are profoundly ignorant and the enemies of freedom." He was training British children, he believed, to take positions of leadership in a British colony. "Never forgetting that I am charged with the education of a portion of British youth, I take every reasonable opportunity to inspire them with love for their country, and loyalty to our gracious sovereign."

In closing, Strachan stressed his hope for what the seeds he had planted offered to the future of the colony: "we look forward with confidence, to the time when the young men who have been educated here and at the other district schools, will give a tone to the manners and opinions of the inhabitants of this province; when their just partiality for our mother-country, their love for our gracious sovereign, and their veneration for our laws and institutions, together with the sound moral and religious principles which they have imbibed, shall spread and take deep root in the country, till the warmest patriotism, and the purest piety, adorn the banks of the impetuous St. Lawrence."<sup>55</sup>

Continued attempts were made by the House of Assembly to limit the duration of the District School Act, believing that the funds would be better put toward a common school system. While the Legislative Council was equally consistent in refusing to assent

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<sup>55</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 3 September 1811.

to the repeal of the District School Act, it sought, through a bill proposed by Richard Cartwright, to give it a wider scope.<sup>56</sup> The Council's bill, however, was rejected by the Assembly.<sup>57</sup> The political bickering resulted in an educational deadlock in which the Assembly and the Council could not agree on further school legislation.

The evidence from both the print media and the legislative journals suggest that the development of the district schools was part of a central debate on elitist versus popular schooling that occurred early in the century. This debate was situated in a period of intense political strife characterized by pro-establishment and anti-establishment men seemingly unable to agree upon effective educational legislation. The different ideas in the legislature concerning who schooling should be made available were reflective of a print culture in which a variety of opinions concerning the direction of government-aided schooling in Upper Canada had surfaced. Educational discourse in the first decade of the nineteenth century was part of a complex debate about class and power, and what forms of social institutions Upper Canadians would build.

Late in 1811, an ill Gore decided to return home to England to improve his health. He left the administration of Upper Canada in the hands of Isaac Brock and the Executive Council. Letters to Gore were printed in the *Upper Canada Gazette* in which members of the legislature and inhabitants expressed their gratitude toward him and his administration. Inhabitants of the Eastern District felt that above all, the most important contribution to the public welfare made under Gore's administration was the "provision made for giving the youth of the Province such a liberal education as may not only qualify them for the learned professions, but establish firmly in their minds the purest

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<sup>56</sup> *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 23 and 25 February 1811, 377-379.

<sup>57</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 26 February 1811, 432-433.

moral and religious principles, principles which shall enable them to give the most salutary direction to the general manners of the Province, and revive that ardent patriotism for which their fathers have been so honorably distinguished.” Executive interests and government-aided schooling went hand-in-hand according to these inhabitants, and the province was already benefiting from the school act of 1807. “The fruits of this noble measure patronized and sanctioned by your Excellency, we begin already to enjoy; as many of the young men have left the schools crowned with literary honors, and with the fairest promise of future worth.”<sup>58</sup> While the value of their education was still a “promise,” what was certain was that inhabitants supported a system of education, and were convinced of its benefit to the general welfare of the province and the loyalty of its residents. For different reasons, and with different ends in mind, inhabitants involved in the public discourse on education now favoured and promoted the expansion of schooling.

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<sup>58</sup> *The York Gazette*, 11 December 1811.

## CHAPTER 3

### WAR AND SCHOOLING, 1812-1815

In 1816, Upper Canada became one of the first jurisdictions in the modern world to pass a common school act. Because no records of the proceedings of either the House of Assembly or the Legislative Council in 1815 are extant, the debate in the legislature in 1815 that led to the Common School Act of 1816 has not been well-documented. What is known is that John Strachan prepared a report on education early in 1815, at the end of the War of 1812, and that much of this report can be found in the subsequent Common School Act of 1816. Scholars of educational history in Upper Canada have concluded that the design and content of the colony's first common school act in 1816 is largely attributed to Strachan's educational ideas.<sup>1</sup> Animosity felt toward the United States after the War of 1812, and the desire to ensure that Upper Canadian children be educated within the province if they were to remain attached to the parent state and British

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Spragge, "John Strachan's Contribution to Education, 1800-1823," *Canadian Historical Review* 22 (1941): 147-158; Alison Smith "John Strachan and Early Upper Canada, 1799-1814," *Ontario History* 52 (1960): 159-173; J.D. Purdy, "John Strachan and Education in Canada, 1800-1851." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1962 and "John Strachan's Educational Policies, 1815-1841." *Ontario History* 64 (1972): 45-64; Silvia Boorman, *John Toronto: A Biography of Bishop Strachan* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1969); J.L.H. Henderson, *John Strachan, 1778-1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); J. Donald Wilson, "Foreign and Local Influences on Popular Education in Upper Canada, 1815-1844." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1971, and "Education in Upper Canada: Sixty Years of Change," in J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, and Louis-Philippe Audet (eds.) *Canadian Education: A History* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 190-213; David Flint, *John Strachan, Pastor and Politician* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971).

heritage, are seen as central driving forces which led to common school legislation.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on official government records and correspondence among the elite, scholars have characterized the Common School Act of 1816 as a measure undertaken by the executive elite to secure “centralized regulation of popular elementary education[.]”<sup>3</sup>

The evidence presented in the previous chapter suggests that the idea of assimilating Upper Canadian children was nothing new in the public arena. Evidence from the print media demonstrates that, for different reasons, both conservatives and political dissenters in the first decade of the nineteenth century were advocating the expansion of schooling. Some advocated the diffusion of common schooling to all classes in Upper Canada as a means toward expanding civic political participation and practical economic opportunities, while others argued for the need to create a common identity and obedience to the colonial government and British constitution. They were doing this even before the threat of war with the United States. To what extent, then, should we rethink the link between the Common School Act of 1816 and the War of 1812? And to what extent did the War of 1812 itself alter or perpetuate educational development that followed?

This chapter examines these questions through an analysis of print media discourse. It revisits the era while considering recent histories that bring to light the complexity of identity and the politics of governance among colonial leaders that were much more divided on the issue of the colonial identity than we have characteristically assumed. George Sheppard convincingly contests the assumption that the War of 1812

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<sup>2</sup> Houston and Prentice draw a connection between the impact of the War on people like John Strachan and the rise of anti-Americanism with the making of the Common School Act of 1816 and the desire to forge a British legacy in the common schools. See Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 27-29.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 22.

was a determining factor in the emergence of a British identity for the colony. He effectively demonstrates that the inhabitants of Upper Canada were deeply divided before the war, and that the war itself had many harmful effects on the development of the colony afterwards.<sup>4</sup> Jane Errington points out that the development of Upper Canadian political culture was much more pronounced and distinct from either British or American influence than previously contended.<sup>5</sup> David Mills has considered the dual nature of loyalty in Upper Canada: that of patriotism, which was attachment to place; and that of loyalism, which was attachment to parent. Both conservatives and reformers, according to Mills, were loyalists who attributed different intellectual and moral qualities to loyalty, some favouring attachment to Britain, while others to the colony itself.<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey McNairn has broadened the discourse and has challenged historiographies such as those emphasizing the “conservative consensus” in Upper Canadian political culture, while arguing that Upper Canadian conservatives themselves often looked to the federalist model in the United States as a cure to the province’s constitutional maladies.<sup>7</sup> Carol Wilton has furthermore shown that Upper Canadians, through petitioning movements, were involved in the political process in ways that had a lasting impact on the province’s political development.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> George Sheppard, *Plunder, Profit, and Paroles: A Social History of the War of 1812 in Upper Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill University Press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey McNairn, “Publius of the North: Tory Republicanism and the American Constitution in Upper Canada, 1848-54,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77, 4 (1996): 504-537; “Towards Deliberative Democracy: Parliamentary Intelligence and the Public Sphere in Upper Canada, 1791-1840,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 33, 1 (1998): 39-60; and *The Capacity to Judge*.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada*.

Much has been written about the importance of the War of 1812 in galvanizing the political elite into creating a system of common schooling in 1816. Considering the degree to which the creation of a common school system had already been part of the collective discourse before 1812, however, we should revisit the effect of the war on school legislation in order to assess the degree to which it provoked the colonial executive and served as the impetus for a system of common schooling, and the degree to which we can situate the actions of Upper Canadian legislators within the broader public discourse on education.

#### PRINT MEDIA AND EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE AT THE DAWN OF WAR

Between 1812 and 1815, no subject appears more important to the inhabitants of Upper Canada than the war with the United States. On 11 July 1812, inhabitants of Upper Canada learned, through a proclamation by Isaac Brock, Upper Canada's top militia officer who had become president and administrator of Upper Canada upon Gore's departure in 1811, that the United States had declared war on the United Kingdom and its dependencies on 17 June through a declaration by the United States Congress.<sup>9</sup> In his first public address, Brock emphasized the idea of loyalty: "I do hereby strictly enjoin and require all His Majesty's Liege Subjects to be obedient to the Lawful Authorities to forbear all communication with the Enemy or Persons residing within the Territory of the United States and to manifest their Loyalty by a zealous co-operation with His Majesty's Armed Forces in defence of the Province, and repulse of the Enemy." Earlier that year, the Assembly had pledged to work as one with the Council and Brock in any militia measures necessary to prepare for war. Such measures would include censorship and

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<sup>9</sup> *The York Gazette*, 11 July 1812.

arbitrary incarceration.<sup>10</sup> Together, it seemed, both conservatives and reformers in the legislature were unified in the war against the United States.

Were the inhabitants of Upper Canada as unified as their leaders? Recent writings suggest that they were not. Many Upper Canadians wanted nothing to do with the war.<sup>11</sup> Certain inhabitants of Upper Canada were clearly troubled as they faced the prospect of War with the United States. Many of them, after all, had close ties with the United States through family and friends, and had “few personal ties with the British establishment.”<sup>12</sup> Years of immigration from the United States only made these ties closer. Initially, Errington argues, “Upper Canada was intended as a home for loyal British subjects.”<sup>13</sup> By 1812, however, one American traveller could observe that in the western districts “the loyalist element was scarcely noticeable amongst the diversity of people who had come to take up land or engage in trade,” and that in the Kingston area a good portion of inhabitants “had no claim to the appellation loyalists.”<sup>14</sup> Isaac Brock himself believed that much of the population, especially in the western districts, were disloyal. Throughout the war, it was believed that many settlers of American origin had supported or even joined the American armies.<sup>15</sup> For the colonial elite, the War of 1812 was a war against an ideology that threatened the security of British governance in Upper Canada.

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<sup>10</sup> *The York Gazette*, 12 February 1812

<sup>11</sup> George Sheppard, *Plunder, Profit, and Paroles*.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Smith, *A Geographical View of the Province of Upper Canada* (Philadelphia: Thomas and Robert Desilver, 1813), 82, quoted in Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, 26.

In the Summer of 1812, Strachan addressed this question in a sermon on the war delivered to both branches of the legislature.<sup>16</sup> In “a free country like this,” he warned legislators, “where differences of opinion concerning public affairs may be sincerely maintained, great danger arises, more especially in such critical times as the present, least a few designing men who are secretly hostile to the best interest of the country, take advantage of any party spirit that may exist to promote their machinations.”<sup>17</sup> The political divisions in Upper Canada, Strachan was well aware, were represented in the Upper Canadian legislature, especially the House of Assembly, where the executive had no authority to deny reform-minded men their elected offices. Strachan thus urged the house to put opinions aside, and to “carefully avoid all those questions on which we are known to differ” in order to “defend our country against the common enemy.”<sup>18</sup> The common enemy, Strachan did not fail to remind the Assembly, was a nation that had betrayed their British brethren by siding and aiding France in Britain’s battle with Napoleon.

Later in 1814, Strachan delivered another sermon in which he reiterated the sentiment of the political elite that the war against the United States was a war based upon betrayal. In it, he reviewed recent history in an attempt to make sense of the War. While the American Revolution itself divided the British Empire from its American colonies, it was not the crucial moment in which Americans and the British were divided as a people. Strachan focused on the war between Britain and France as the period in which Americans severed themselves from their British heritage. Strachan blamed

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<sup>16</sup> John Strachan, *A Sermon Preached at York before the Legislative Council and House of Assembly, August 2nd, 1812* (York: John Cameron, 1812).

<sup>17</sup> John Strachan, *A Sermon Preached at York before the Legislative Council and House of Assembly*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> John Strachan, *A Sermon Preached at York before the Legislative Council and House of Assembly*, 17.

Americans for siding with the French, and not the British, during the Napoleonic wars. In doing so, they created a divide in the Atlantic world.<sup>19</sup>

If the executive elite believed that the war put the British constitution in danger, then the House of Assembly agreed. In September 1812, the Assembly put forward an address to “the people” of Upper Canada in order to stress this point.<sup>20</sup> Sensing that the war against America was not receiving the popular support originally expected, the message was clearly directed at inhabitants who felt ambivalence about fighting and were uneasy about involving themselves in a war that pitted them against friends, neighbours, and not-so-distant family members. The Assembly sympathized with these unmistakable attachments to America, and thus carefully avoided blaming Americans as a people for the war. Rather, this was a war of ideas, and Americans, the Assembly suggested, had been coerced and “bribed by the Tyrant of France.” The Assembly warned that the United States had betrayed the Anglo-Atlantic alliance, through misleading negotiations with Napoleon. The war, as it was depicted for the people of Upper Canada in this address, was not so much against the United States as it was France: “The government of this bloody Tyrant penetrates into everything—it crushes individuals as well as nations; fetters thoughts as well as motives, and delights in destroying for ever all that is fair and just in opinion and sentiment. It is evidently this Tyrant who now directs the Rulers of America, and they show themselves worthy disciples of such a master.” With neighbours, friends, relatives, and parents living in America, and with many of themselves originating from America, the Assembly members opted to vilify France, and

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<sup>19</sup> John Strachan, *A Sermon Preached at York, Upper Canada, on the Third of June, being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving* (Montreal: William Gray, 1814).

<sup>20</sup> House of Assembly of Upper Canada, “Address of the House of Assembly to the People of Upper Canada,” *Kingston Gazette*, 5 September 1812, 12 September 1812, 19 September 1812, and 26 September 1812.

not America, in order to garner support for the war against the United States. What had reached Upper Canada was an Atlantic storm in which republicanism and constitutional monarchialism were violently clashing and threatening the foundations of British society.

On 15 February 1815, word that the war had ended was printed. The article informed of peace, and boasted victory.<sup>21</sup> As a result of their own activities during the war, David Mills contends, “the Tories immediately adopted a myth that Upper Canadians had proven their loyalty. The accuracy of the myth is beside the point; the Tories believed that loyalty was earned in 1812 as it had been by the original Loyalists in 1776, except that this time it was earned by staying rather than by leaving.”<sup>22</sup> According to Mills, the impact of victory confirmed to many political leaders, especially to the colonial elite, “that their vision of Upper Canada was confirmed by the results of the War and, consequently, Upper Canadian conservatism was crystallized.” The belief in the importance of the British connection thereafter intensified, with a particular emphasis on the need for internal unity in the province.<sup>23</sup>

In many ways, the War served as a lesson to Upper Canadian political leaders. The security of government, and the continuation of the British constitutional heritage in Upper Canada, depended upon a loyal population. The idea of loyalty had been challenged in the first decade of the nineteenth century, due in large part to prominent individuals who were able to steer print culture in new directions. The war, for its duration, provided an obedient population while suppressing dissident political factions. The task of government, now, was to perpetuate this socio-political culture. It could do this, of course, through a common school system that inculcated loyalty. But was there a

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<sup>21</sup> *The York Gazette*, 15 February 1815.

<sup>22</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, 27.

will among the political elite to establish such a system? Could they act unilaterally?

Who would drive forward the movement for common schooling?

## TOWARD COMMON SCHOOLS

With loyalist rhetoric dominating discourse among the political elite during this period, their labours in 1815 and 1816 to arrive at a common school act could be considered as the result of fears concerning the loyalty of the population of Upper Canada, and the desire to shape a sense of loyalty conducive to the maintenance of a British constitutional system. The timing of the Common School Act of 1816 immediately after the war indeed seems to be more than simply coincidental. The war certainly demonstrated a need for a system of schooling in which a collective identity could be shaped and formed. But such an idea had been around for many years. Common schooling had been advocated in the colonial legislature since at least 1806, and the Legislative and Executive Councils often served as barriers for any common school legislation that was presented to them by the House of Assembly. With this in mind, we should therefore retrace the developments that led to the Common School Act of 1816.

As a result of the educational deadlock of the two houses of the legislature after 1811, a new school law was not passed prior to the War of 1812. The House of Assembly, however, did not relax its efforts to repeal the Act of 1807; the Legislative Council, for its part, continued to promote the passage of a more elaborate District School Act in an effort to appease those calling for a system of common schooling. With both pro-establishment and anti-establishment writers in the print media agreeing upon the

utility of a common school system, however, it was clear that widespread support for such a system was felt by a growing number of inhabitants.

The extent to which pro-establishment pamphleteers, the conservative press, and even political dissidents, spoke for the entire population is, of course, debatable. Nevertheless, evidence does suggest that their calls for common schooling were representative of a growing movement in favour of a government-aided system of education. On 11 February 1812, for example, two petitions were read in the House of Assembly in which certain inhabitants complained about the inadequacy and unfairness of school funding in the province. Inhabitants of Hamilton petitioned that the grant for district schools be applied to common schools; they found the money for district schools to be “entirely useless.”<sup>24</sup> Inhabitants of the Midland District agreed, and called for the complete repeal of the District School Act. The act, they argued, “fails to provide for the educational wants of ‘the middling, or poorer class of His Majesty’s subjects.’”<sup>25</sup> In its place, they wanted provision to be made “as may be conducive to public utility.” Because only one school was supported in the district, “most of the people are unable to avail themselves of the advantages contemplated by the institution. A few wealthy inhabitants, and those of the Town of Kingston, reap exclusively the benefit of it in this District.” The District School Act, “instead of aiding the middling and poorer class of His Majesty’s subjects,” they went on, “casts money into the lap of the rich, who are sufficiently able, without public assistance, to support a school in every respect equal to the one established by law.” That year, and again in 1814, the Assembly, both leading

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<sup>24</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 11 February 1812, 15-16.

<sup>25</sup> Petition of the Inhabitants of the Midland District, *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 11 February 1812, 16-17.

and responding to the movement for common schooling, unsuccessfully continued its attempts to repeal the District School Act in favour of common schools.<sup>26</sup>

Strachan's Report of 1815 is the evidence of record when examining the making of the Common School Act of 1816. The Report of 1815 has received considerable attention by scholars but it remains unclear why Strachan, representing the political elite, was finally compelled to support common schooling. Can we connect it to the educational discourse concerning common schooling prior to the War of 1812?

In Strachan's opening words, he made clear that the common schools should have a utilitarian focus; they should not be preparatory schools like the district schools, established in 1807, but they should instead serve an immediate purpose. He believed his plan was "as economical as it can well be, to render it respectable and useful."<sup>27</sup> Unlike the district schools, the common schools were also not to be exclusive, and were proposed to serve all denominations, including Catholics, and to be made available to both rich and poor. The whole population was intended to be served, but this was almost an irrelevant point because the call for schooling had come from "the people" themselves, a fact that Strachan could not neglect to point out: "That the people have shown among themselves a most laudable zeal in this particular," was something, he stated, "which ought to be fostered & encouraged."<sup>28</sup> In contrast, government had theretofore failed to respond, and "nothing has been yet done to promote education among the poorer Inhabitants."<sup>29</sup> After resisting the currents of common school development for a decade,

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<sup>26</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 26 February 1812, 54; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 3 March 1812, 427; *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 4 March 1814, 132-133; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 4 March 1814, 446-447.

<sup>27</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG24-J1, John Strachan Fonds, Letterbooks and Miscellaneous papers, "Report on Education," 1815.

<sup>28</sup> John Strachan, "Report on Education," 1815.

<sup>29</sup> John Strachan, "Report on Education," 1815.

the ruling elite was now seemingly ready to support this development. Had the war, in this sense, aligned their interest in common schooling with that of “the people?”

“The people’s” interest in education, Strachan furthermore noted, was resulting in a number of Upper Canadian children sending their children outside of the province for education where they could not receive it at home. Dangerously, he suggested, Upper Canadian children were increasingly being educated in the United States. This was a point that Strachan believed should serve as a key reason for the executive to support a system of common schooling in Upper Canada. “[T]he necessity of sending young men out of the Province to finish their education which has hitherto existed,” he insisted, “has been found both dangerous and inconvenient.” In the United States, especially, Strachan feared that the children of Upper Canadian inhabitants would be imbued with foreign, republican, anti-monarchical and anti-British, thus “dangerous,” values. Since there was no way of stopping Upper Canadian parents from sending their children to school, he thought, then the colonial government might as well get itself involved in the process.

The creation of a home-grown common school system, Strachan believed, would do much to convince Upper Canadian parents to keep their children in Upper Canada. An Upper Canadian common school system, furthermore, had to be, like all other institutions in the province, responsible to the executive. The existing district schools should not be abolished but instead he suggested that they should be made “free of charge” to the scholars, in an effort to expand the system and in order to “train up masters” for the common schools. Americans should not be entrusted as teachers, and in his report Strachan insisted that they be kept out of the schools: “no person who is not a natural born subject of the King and fully qualified to teach these different Branches of

Education shall be capable of becoming the Master of any of the District Schools.”<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, while Strachan admitted to responding to the growing appetite for common schooling, he also wanted to maintain an elitist bent to any system of schooling. The district schools were to remain intact, and at the pinnacle of Strachan’s educational design was a university for the province based upon the Scottish and German models. Strachan’s aim was not to extend the classics to the masses; rather, this was a new endeavor in a new colony, one based upon practical principles in line with the times.

A re-reading of Strachan’s report of 1815 requires us to reconsider who pushed for common schooling in this era, and when that push came about. Understanding the executive elite’s involvement in the making of the Common School Act of 1816 must be within the context that “the people themselves” had shown “a most laudable zeal” for educational expansion. Although creating a loyal population in the wake of the War of 1812 has often been described as a catalyst for the elite’s involvement in common school development in Upper Canada, Strachan’s acknowledgement that “the people” had been pushing for it indeed requires further attention. Common schooling, he suggested, had successfully been promoted in Upper Canada outside of government circles. Can the elite’s involvement in 1815, in this sense, be better characterized as a response to outside interests rather than the promotion of its own? What exactly were those outside interests? The evidence from the print media suggests a variety of interests. Were the ideas in Strachan’s educational report, then, novel? Strachan himself suggests that the thrust of them were not. Seen in this light, the drive for common schooling was not necessarily one steered by the executive elite.

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<sup>30</sup> Strachan, *Report on Education*, 1815.

## EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE AFTER THE WAR OF 1812

By 1815, the discourse on common schooling was growing more widespread. While articles on schooling and announcements on school openings continued throughout the war years, they picked up pace as peaceful times returned, and when once again educational thought could receive attention. Reflecting the growth of print media as a forum for public discourse, a new publication entitled the *Canadian Visitor* “designed to extend useful information and promote a taste for reading among all classes of the community,” was established in the summer of 1815. It began its very first issue “by recommending those plans and new improvements in Education which have proved extensively useful in Great Britain, and in many other parts of the civilized world.”<sup>31</sup> This was a reference to the Lancastrian system, which allowed for the instruction of exceptionally large groups of children under one instructor.

With matters of education proliferating in the print media, one writer, in an article entitled “*A friendly hint to Parents & Guardians of Youth in Canada*,” touched upon the dual utility of education—to both the parent and the community.<sup>32</sup> “On your conduct,” this writer suggested, “depends in a great degree the prosperity of the community.” This consideration, he thought, should be sufficient to excite all persons “of every rank and station in life” to exert themselves to the extent of their power “to train up the rising generation in the way they should go.” For those concerned about the financing of school promotion, he reassured them “You will never regret that you have expended a small part of your property in building school-houses and places of worship; and providing competent and wholesome Instructors for your offspring wards.” Educating the masses

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<sup>31</sup> Prospectus of the *Canadian Visitor* reprinted in *Kingston Gazette* 6 May 1815; *York Gazette*, 29 July 1815.

<sup>32</sup> *York Gazette*, 9 September 1815.

was not money wasted, he thought, and so the executive would be right in spending public revenue in this area. The cost for not doing so, he insisted, was far greater.

The *Kingston Gazette* printed a multi-part summation on the utility of education throughout the summer and autumn of 1815. “It it [*sic*] the fate of all new settlements,” its writer stated, “to labour under many disadvantages, not only till they clear land, build houses, make roads; but likewise till they get other institutions brought to some order and utility. Among such institutions as they want, the education of children ought to have the first place.”<sup>33</sup> Lamenting the present state of education, he suggested that common schooling ought to be the priority in the educational plans set out by government leaders. Government should finance both existing and new country schools and furnish them with qualified teachers. His solution to educational problems in the colonies was “comfortable school houses” in every township or small district, employing qualified teachers of good moral character.<sup>34</sup> Improving the schools would reduce the gap between rich and poor by instilling a general knowledge and taste for learning among “all classes.” The benefits of education, under the present system, were confined to the wealthier inhabitants “who do not owe their education to this country.” The time had come, he insisted, to expand schooling to the masses.

In a third letter printed on education, this writer reiterated his belief that quality in education and the remuneration of teachers had a direct correlation. “Now the only way to avoid employing the ignorant, the immoral, the empty pretenders to *learning* in the capacity of teachers, is, to encourage proper persons to come forward, by giving them such wages as may induce them to cultivate their talents and employ them in that way,

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<sup>33</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 22 August 1815.

<sup>34</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 29 August 1815.

and to give neither countenance nor employment to characters that are unqualified and improper.”<sup>35</sup> With this inhabitant’s letters, we can see a shift emerging in perceptions of the teaching profession by 1815. In the past, qualifications and moral character composed the qualities of a good teacher. But morality trumped quality, and usually the best teachers were believed to be those connected with the churches. We see a shift here toward the professionalization of teaching, with qualifications taking precedence over morality, and, just like in the marketplace, the level of remuneration was, increasingly, believed to measure the level of quality.

The matter of textbooks provided for the final concern taken up by this writer on education in 1815. More than any other instrument, he supposed, textbooks shape the minds of the students. Since the highest aim of the schools was to teach children to read, then it would follow “that the books which we put in the hands of our children should be calculated to furnish the mind with correct ideas on Religion, Morality, the Customs, Manners and Laws of our own country.”<sup>36</sup> Proper instruction on these subjects was required, he insisted, “in order to act our part in society, and under the government of our country.” Assuming this as a principle, he concluded that many schools, using American textbooks, were deficient. In a scathing warning, he suggested that the schools were not producing loyal subjects because “the books principally taught are imported from the U.S. and are completely calculated to train up our children as citizens of that Republic,” and to divest them of their loyalty to Britain. He suggested that public resources should be immediately used to import British books. Moreover, itinerant teachers, he warned, knew no better than what they themselves were taught in the United States. Thus, he

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<sup>35</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 5 September 1815.

<sup>36</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 19 September 1815.

called for government regulations respecting “both imported school books, and imported teachers.” This writer’s views on the importance of curbing American influence shows us that it was not the political elite alone who attempted to curb that influence. Thus, instilling a British character into the schools was not always a top-down process.

Strachan’s Report on Education in 1815 did not make the news. In fact, it is doubtful than many inhabitants were aware that the Executive Council was undertaking plans toward the establishment of a common school system. With government not responding to efforts at establishing common schools, many school promoters in the colony were simply prompted to establish private institutions of their own. Many of these institutions were about more than providing education for a select few; they were based upon principles concerning the value of extending education to the masses. One of the more progressive movements was made in Kingston between 1814 and 1816 to establish a school in that city under the Lancastrian system of education. The Lancastrian system as it appeared in Upper Canada was adopted from England, where it was very popular at that time. It was based upon the Madras system of India, which, briefly summed, involved the promotion of self-education under a firm mode of discipline, combined with religion, leisure activities, and monitorial instruction. The system was very popular for both its perceived effectiveness, and for the fact that a large number of students could be placed under the care of a single teacher. Thus the financial burden of running a school, especially in a scattered society such as Upper Canada, made the system all the more appealing.

Thaddeus Osgoode was one of the most active promoters of the Lancastrian system and was also one of the shareholders of the Midland District School Society. In

1814 he was sent to England by that society to secure a school master qualified to teach a school in Kingston; he arrived with one in October of that year.<sup>37</sup> After money had been collected through the combined efforts of the shareholders, inhabitants, and benevolent societies in both Upper Canada and Britain, the Society met and passed a series of resolutions designed to establish a school house in Kingston under the direction and control of a board of trustees. The society then petitioned the Upper Canadian legislature for public support, which it received in March 1815 through legislation entitled “An Act to Incorporate the Midland District School Society.”<sup>38</sup> The act itself fell short of securing provincial funds for the school, but allowed for the trustees to conduct the school in virtually any manner they desired and gave the school public credibility; but one strict clause was inserted into the act that reflected the price of executive support for their system of mass schooling. The clause insisted that no person who was not a natural born or naturalized British subject could be trustees or teachers. Certain inhabitants in Kingston were grateful for the progression of the school, and expressed their satisfaction in the press.<sup>39</sup>

Misunderstandings between the Secretary and Treasurer of the Society in regard to the mode of collecting and depositing funds ensued, and caused some public debate in the press.<sup>40</sup> The result was that very little was done in establishing a Lancastrian school, and the efforts soon languished. It would not be until 1837 that the school system actually began operating. While the realization of the school itself might have been a failure, the efforts to establish it reveal that the desire for schooling to reach a broader

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<sup>37</sup> *DHE* 1:90.

<sup>38</sup> *DHE* 1:92.

<sup>39</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 2 December 1815, 30 December 1815.

<sup>40</sup> The matter was followed closely by the *Kingston Gazette* in the Fall and Winter of 1815-1816.

population was increasing, and, perhaps more importantly, that government was compelled to assist.

## CONCLUSION

The release of John Strachan's report on education in 1815 coincided with the end of the War of 1812, but the evidence from the print media suggests that the drive for common schooling was not simply the direct consequence of the war of 1812. The movement for common schooling was, by 1816, decades old. Still the war served as a catalyst to compel the executive to find a way to extend education to a broader population. As a result, common schooling became one of the most important matters of concern for government after the war, reflecting its importance in public discourse before the war. In this way, ideas on common schooling converged and saw many different people, with many different interests, agree in principle upon a common system of schooling in Upper Canada.

As seen through print media of the time, the creation of a common school system should not be seen as an intrusion into parents' lives; rather, it reflected the aspirations and demands of many inhabitants who had been actively engaged in the discourse on common schooling for many years. Upper Canadian parents were increasingly voicing support for educating their children, even sending them abroad for schooling, and the executive was, in 1816, responding to that trend. The resolutions of the House of Assembly committee entrusted to draw up the Common School Act of 1816 matched,

almost word-for-word, Strachan's Report of 1815 as well as the public discourse of the previous several years.<sup>41</sup>

The extent to which the War of 1812 served as the impetus for the Common School Act of 1816 must be evaluated in the context of the lively public discourse surrounding the idea of common schooling prior to the war. Would the ruling elite have enacted a bill for common schooling had it not been for the anxieties brought onto its shoulders as a result of the war? Strachan himself, after all, was opposed to common schooling and deeply committed to a hierarchical conception of education prior to the war. In this sense, did Strachan's ideas in 1815 represent the conservative prerequisites for common schooling? Was his blueprint for indoctrinating a British character among the masses a reaction to the American threat as it was made aware during the War of 1812? Perhaps, but that still does not suggest that Strachan's ideas in 1815 were new among conservatives. The editorial of the *Kingston Gazette* in 1810 that deemed the "assimilation" of individuals from "various countries" through a system of common schools a precondition for successful governance in the colony suggests that the idea of instilling a British character, or at least a common identity, was alive and well before the dangers of American annexation were brought to the fore in the War of 1812.

For different reasons, then, many different Upper Canadians, from varying backgrounds, agreed upon developing a system of common schooling by 1816. But what type of system would be erected? Who would control the schools? What curriculum would be promoted in the schools? Would the schools be places where knowledge was acquired in the prospect of utilizing it for material prosperity, as some inhabitants desired? Would they be places of indoctrination where a common British character could

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<sup>41</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 27 February 1816, 207-208.

be instilled? Could they be both? The following chapter examines these questions through an analysis of educational discourse in the print media during the period from the Common School Act of 1816 to the passing of its second and final amendment in 1824.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RISE AND FALL OF COMMON SCHOOLING IN THE POST-WAR ERA, 1816-1824

In 1816, the returning Lieutenant Governor Gore opened his post-war throne speech to the legislature with two matters of concern; first, to reform the militia code, so to have regular forces should they be needed again, and second, to establish common schools.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the same concerns that Strachan raised in the educational report of 1815, Gore told the legislature that in addition to securing further aid for the district schools and advancing higher education, legislators ought to make the matter of common schooling their first priority. “The dissemination of Letters is of the first importance to every Class; and to aid in so desirable an object, I wish to call your attention to some Provision for an Establishment of Schools in each Township, which shall afford the first Principles to the Children of the Inhabitants, and prepare such of them as may require further Instruction, to receive it in the District Schools; from them it seems desirable that there should be a resort to a Provincial Seminary, for the Youth who may be destined for the Professions, or other distinguished Walks in Life, where they might attain the Higher Branches of Education.” The Royal Bounty had already been bestowed toward that end, he told the house, and land set aside. Thus, with the executive on board, there was little standing in the way of any legislation that either house might draw up.

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<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 6 February 1816, 167-170.

An analysis of print media indicates that Strachan, Gore, and other elite political leaders were not alone in promoting common schooling. Indeed, Strachan and the executive entered the discourse on the extension of schooling at a much later stage in its development than the existing historiography supposes. Print media analysis is helpful in reexamining the impetus for the 1816 common school legislation in light of recent histories that contest the role of the War as a unifying event shaping the direction of the province. But what was common school development like in Upper Canada after 1816, and how did ordinary inhabitants respond to the sudden availability of public money for their children's education?

Much of the existing historiography tends to suggest that the Common School Act of 1816 did little to alter the pattern and rhythm of schooling in early nineteenth-century Upper Canada. Although the new law began the process of government involvement in what was theretofore a private matter, both the administrative intervention and financial assistance were to be minimal.<sup>2</sup> Despite promises of the "dissemination of letters" to all classes, government-aided schooling was still overwhelmingly restricted to a limited number of schools for children of the more privileged.<sup>3</sup> Many parents found it difficult or impossible to pay the fees required to supplement the government grant.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, efforts by school administrators such as Strachan in nurturing the common school system have been regarded as weak. By turning their attention to the establishment of a university, administrators did not ensure that the Common School Act was being properly carried out.<sup>5</sup> Two amendments were made to the 1816 Act in 1820 and 1824. Both

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<sup>2</sup> Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 27-30.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Smaller, "Teachers and Schools in Early Ontario," 291.

<sup>4</sup> J. Donald Wilson, "Education in Upper Canada: Sixty Years of Change," 200.

<sup>5</sup> J.D. Purdy, "John Strachan's Educational Policies," 51.

amendments worked only to reduce the effectiveness of the common school system. In 1820, funds to the common schools were drastically scaled back, while the 1824 amendment required that teachers theretofore be certified by at least one member of their district board of education, thus minimizing the power of local trustees.

The historiography generally considers the Act of 1816 to be ineffective. Scholars examining educational development in the early nineteenth century have tended to focus on the pioneer and voluntary schools. Most of the information available about this early era, according to historian Harry Smaller, “is couched in such negative terms and images, with schools described as log shanties and teachers as ‘misfits from other walks of life[.]’”<sup>6</sup> It was not until the 1840s that the true beginning of a universal school system is seen as taking off.

This chapter reconsiders the movement for common schooling in the initial years following the passing of the Common School Act of 1816 in light of evidence from the print media. To what extent did inhabitants of Upper Canada discuss common schooling? How were the schools regarded by contemporaries? Did they consider the schools as ineffective? To what extent were the common schools utilized? By shifting attention to print media discourse, we can consider the degree to which inhabitants were talking about school formation and using the government-aided common schools, and what they envisioned to be the next step, if any, in the development of government-aided schooling.

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<sup>6</sup> Harry Smaller, “Teachers and Schools in Early Ontario,” 292.

## GENERATING A SYSTEM OF COMMON EDUCATION

Two days after Gore's Throne Speech of 6 February 1816, the House of Assembly created a select committee with the purpose of drawing up a school bill.<sup>7</sup> James Durand, Member of the House of Assembly for West York, headed the select committee on education and provided its report with the following points, echoing, almost verbatim, Strachan's report of 1815:

*Firstly*:--That the education of youth is a subject worthy of the most serious attention of the Legislature

*Secondly*:--That the necessity of sending young men out of the Province to finish their education, which hath heretofore existed, has been found extremely inconvenient.

*Thirdly*:--That sound policy dictates that our youth should be educated within the Province, or in England, if we wish them to imbibe predilections friendly to our different establishments, and attached to our Parent State.

*Fourthly*:--That but few of the inhabitants of this Province can support the expense of sending their children to be educated in Great Britain; and parental authority would reluctantly trust them at such an immense distance from its care, observation and control.

*Fifthly*:--That there is, at present, no seminary at which they can obtain a liberal and finished education.

*Sixthly*:--That, in order to diffuse liberal knowledge generally throughout the community, it appears expedient that a University should hereafter be established, where the arts and sciences may be taught to the youth of all denominations, in and of which establishment may be embraced the funds which are anticipated from His Majesty's munificent donation of lands for its support.

*Seventhly*:--That nothing has yet been done to promote education among the poorer inhabitants.

*Eighthly*:--That it is expedient to extend the benefits of a common education throughout the whole Province.

*Ninthly*:--That the people have shown among themselves a laudable zeal in this particular, which ought to be fostered and encouraged.

*Tenthly*:--That, with respect to the present district institutions and grammar schools, your Committee feel it their incumbent duty to state as their opinion, the advantages which were expected to be derived from this source, have fallen short of the object.

*Lastly*:--Your Committee, for these considerations, request that they may be permitted to submit to your Honourable House a Bill which they have framed for the establishment of common schools throughout this Province.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 7 and 8 February 1816, 170-173.

<sup>8</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 27 February 1816, 207-208.

While in the midst of legislative debate for common schools, petitions were read in the House of Assembly which solidified the idea of public support for a common school bill. A petition of inhabitants from Williamstown, in the Charlottenburgh township, demonstrating their desire for common schools, was introduced into the Assembly on 28 February 1816, and, although the provincial government no longer needed convincing, it further added to the discourse surrounding the need for common schooling. The petitioners informed the Assembly that a school in Williamstown had been opened on 2 January 1815 for the “benefit of such poor children whose parents or friends have not the means of defraying the expenses attending the same.” The school, having 60 children and running short of funds to pay the schoolmaster and repairs to the schoolhouse, had to increase tuition, keeping many poor children out. The petitioners thus sought financial aid from government.<sup>9</sup>

On 21 March 1816 the Common School Bill was passed by the House of Assembly, and the following day it was passed by the Legislative Council without any amendment. The Common School Act, the province’s first, was given royal assent and enacted on 1 April 1816.<sup>10</sup> The act was the first significant accomplishment which marked government responsibility for aiding the education of the whole population. It provided a fixed annual grant of £6000 to each of the ten districts, in which “Inhabitants of any Town, Township, Village or place,” could meet together to create a common school for twenty or more children. Elected trustees were given power to make rules and regulations for the government of the schools, the selection of teachers, and the

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<sup>9</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 28 February 1816, 209-211.

<sup>10</sup> “An Act Granting to His Majesty a Sum of Money, to be Applied to the use of Common Schools Throughout this Province, and to Provide for the Regulations of Said Common Schools,” in *DHE* 1:102.

purchasing of books, while school boards in each district, appointed by the Lieutenant General, would oversee matters and allocate the legislative grant among the common schools of each respective district.

In order to qualify for the common school grant, certain conditions had to be met. These conditions are reflective of concerns emanating from Strachan and the executive in the wake of 1812. While elected trustees were given power to make rules and regulations for the government of the schools, the selection of teachers, and the purchasing of books, they were ultimately responsible to the lieutenant governor appointed Board of Education in each district. Moreover, the act specified that “teachers MUST be natural born subjects or have taken the oath of allegiance” and trustees were given the power to remove any teacher for any impropriety and appoint another person.

Why did Upper Canadian legislators finally pass a common school act in 1816? What do we make of the democratic nature of the act, which placed considerable control in the hands of elected trustees at the local level? Was the act intended to respond to the mounting calls for common school advocates? Or, was it designed to use the common schools as a tool to mark the colony with a loyal British character, as the requirement for natural born teachers suggests? The incomplete answer, perhaps, is that the act was designed to do both. Without the creation of a centralized board of education, we might assume that centralization and control from above was not the aim of those drawing up the legislation. Pursuant to Strachan’s suggestions, however, the trustees were required to report on the state of schools at least once a year to their respective board of education, which would then relay that report to the lieutenant governor and Legislature. In this way, it seems, the executive reinforced its position as head of the school system, and

believed it could monitor the character of the schools. By making government funds available to all inhabitants meeting the requirements, on the other hand, the act appeased the many members of the House of Assembly who had been advocating, since 1806, for a common school system. Maintaining a loyal British character, as sought out by many conservatives concerned about the British character of the province, and providing a universal system of common schooling, then, was enough to satisfy all of those involved in the process for the time being. The act was to be in force for four years.

Once a “public” request is bequeathed, it encourages that “public” to demand more. As the debate over education in the press was making clear in Upper Canada, the appetite for schooling had been growing stronger since the late eighteenth century. In a reprint from the *St. David's Spectator* on 18 May 1816, just over a month after the passing of the Common School Act, an extract of a letter from an inhabitant of York to his friend in Niagara appeared in the *Kingston Gazette* concerning recent political developments. When the legislature met on the 6 February, he recounted to his friend, Lieutenant Governor Gore directed the attention of the members to what was to be done to promote industrious habits, and promise wealth and happiness to the colony. “In order to secure protection and enjoyment of these blessings, he directed their serious attention to the Militia code, but especially to the instruction of the people by the establishment of common Schools in each Township, and promised his cordial co-operation in carrying into effect the result of their deliberations on this important subject.”<sup>11</sup> This inhabitant praised the common school legislation, which, he was sure, “will in a few years have a most sensible effect on the character of the Province.”<sup>12</sup> Expanding schooling,

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<sup>11</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 18 May 1816.

<sup>12</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 18 May 1816.

decreasing the gap between rich and poor, assimilating a pluralistic society into a common mold, and expanding knowledge were touted, and this inhabitant believed such values were representative of the growing sentiments of Upper Canadians.<sup>13</sup>

While the expansion of schooling might have been a popular view, the political elite nevertheless continued to favour a hierarchical system of schooling. After having contributed to the establishment of a system of common schooling, Strachan, bent upon enlarging the Church of England's presence in the colony, turned his attention to the religious education of certain inhabitants. In 1818, he petitioned the House of Assembly for aid toward the education of Church of England divinity students. Operating on £200 pounds from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Church of England, he argued, as the official church of the province, was entitled to government relief.<sup>14</sup> But more importantly, funding Divinity students would benefit Upper Canada by giving it a "a number of young men equal to the number of Districts," who could educate others, filling the province in a few years with a number of educators "particularly qualified from their knowledge of the manners and customs and the people."<sup>15</sup> The extent to which Strachan's ideas reflected wider public discourse is suggested by the Assembly's ambivalence, which took no action on the petition and simply left it on the table in the House to die.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, what action the Assembly did take that session on educational matters worked to reopen the discord between the upper and lower branches by once again introducing legislation designed to repeal the District School Act of 1807.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See also *Upper Canada Gazette*, 6 February 1817.

<sup>14</sup> Strachan's Petition to the House of Assembly, *DHE* 1:117-118.

<sup>15</sup> Strachan's Petition to the House of Assembly, *DHE* 1:117-118.

<sup>16</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 26 February 1818, 475.

<sup>17</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 10 and 14 February 1818, 438 and 444.

The Assembly's ambivalence toward elite education was, perhaps, in part owed to the expressions concerning school expansion that continued to proliferate in the press. Members of the Midland District School Society, who continued to debate the set rate of tuition for their school, came to the resolution that "to make the institution really effective, they thought, a fund for the education of the children of the destitute poor had to be created."<sup>18</sup> Should they fail to secure adequate government funds for their proposed monitorial school, they pleaded with the public for an annual subscription to be raised for the intent of educating the "children of poor and indigent Parents" as well as the "children of emigrants and others who cannot afford even the present small monthly payment[.]"<sup>19</sup> In some form or another, they thought, every child ought to be able to attend school.

The grants for the common schools were welcomed, but increasingly public debate over education concerned expanding school funding even further. Upon the premise that "every man should consider himself bound to contribute his mite towards the public benefit," the *Kingston Gazette* printed an "Essay on the Education of Upper Canada" in 1818.<sup>20</sup> To those that argued that school expansion could not be undertaken on a large scale in Upper Canada due to its geographic and demographic makeup, the writer of this essay responded that the problems facing the construction of a school system were not unique to Upper Canada; truancy, discipline, and the remote locations of schools were indeed troublesome to Upper Canada, but "similar miseries" afflicted the teacher "in an English, as well as in a Canadian village." "Let it then be the business of every friend to education," he argued, "to awaken more liberal sentiments with respect to

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<sup>18</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 26 May 1818.

<sup>19</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 2 June 1818.

<sup>20</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 9 June 1818.

both teachers and pupils. A glorious field is open to our view; and our Legislatures are aiding in its cultivation.”<sup>21</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, he argued for more funds in order to expand the scope of common schooling. He suggested that an increased salary for teachers would attract more qualified individuals to the profession, and that funding for massive school expansion was well within the fiscal capabilities of government. “[A] few thousand pounds annually expended on them [teachers], would confer more time and lasting favour, [to the colony] than millions wasted in destructive wars.”<sup>22</sup> And for those in government unwilling to increase funding to the common schools, he used their own logic to refute them, and insisted that only a properly funded system would secure the admiration of their educational efforts: “Dr. Strachan in the preface to his *Arithmetic*, very properly observes that ‘he who is anxious to spare labour, ought not to be a public Teacher;’ and it may be added, that, those who are anxious to withhold adequate reward, are not worthy of a good one.”<sup>23</sup>

#### ROBERT GOURLAY AND UPPER CANADA’S FIRST STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF EDUCATION

An analysis of print media in Upper Canada points to the growing number of inhabitants in favour of increased funding of common schooling, and the expansion of the system itself. Print media discourse revealed a burgeoning appetite for common schooling. With funding for such schools made available in 1816, did inhabitants utilize the common school grants and send their children to school, as the discourse in the print media suggests that they might? By utilizing an important statistical account of

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<sup>21</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 9 June 1818.

<sup>22</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 9 June 1818.

<sup>23</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 9 June 1818. Author’s quotation taken from John Strachan, *A Concise Introduction to Practical Arithmetic; For the use of Schools* (Montreal: Nahum Mower, 1809), vi.

education undertaken in 1818, two years after the passing of the colony's first school act, we can begin to address this question and furthermore explore the extent of the popularity of the common schools after the passing of the act.

Robert Fleming Gourlay travelled to Upper Canada in 1817 and quickly made his mark on the political scene with the publication of an open letter "To the Resident Land Owners of Upper-Canada" which appeared in several newspapers of the day.<sup>24</sup> Gourlay was a political agitator, and had earlier been kicked out of his father's home for the printing of a mischievous pamphlet in Scotland. He settled in England where he racked up a large debt on farmland and made a name for himself after publishing yet another scathing pamphlet, this time on an agricultural society in England. Eventually, he found his way to Upper Canada, where his wife had inherited land. He brought with him a flare for the dramatic, but also a self-proclaimed desire to improve the living standards of the inhabitants of Upper Canada.<sup>25</sup>

Gourlay's 1822 pamphlet, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*, is helpful in addressing the question of common schooling popularity after the passing of the 1816 act.<sup>26</sup> Under the premise that he sought aid for promoting emigration from England, Gourlay asked the residents of Upper Canada for answers to a series of statistical questions. Through his continued appeals in the press, Gourlay quickly raised the interest of a great proportion of the province, and thousands gathered in scattered communities

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<sup>24</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 10 October 1817; *Kingston Gazette*, 18 November 1818; *The Spectator*, 9 April 1818.

<sup>25</sup> A discussion of Robert Gourlay and his effect upon Upper Canadian political culture has been taken up by many authors and is beyond the scope, and purposes, of this study. See, for example, Lois Darroch Milani, *Robert Gourlay, Gadfly: The Biography of Robert Fleming Gourlay, 1778-1863, Forerunner of the Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837* (Thornhill: Ampersand Press, 1971); Wilton *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada*; Mills, *Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*; Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*; Craig, *The Formative Years*.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*. 2 vols. London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1822. Reprint, Toronto, 1966).

throughout the province in an effort to galvanize the statistical data required for his account.<sup>27</sup> Gourlay's findings provide us with some valuable numbers immediately after the passing of the Common School Act.

Gourlay's report pointed out that common schools were in abundance, and that the Common School Act of 1816 providing a growing number of common schools with government aid, making the idea of sending children to school a reality for certain inhabitants. The Common School Act of 1816, "however incomplete as a system," he proposed in his account, "indicates a favourable progress of public sentiment on the subject of Education."<sup>28</sup> A total of 34 259 inhabitants from eight districts responded to Gourlay's statistical request, and from that number of respondents the report shows that by 1818, there were 193 common schools in the province, and the trend was an increasing number of schools being established every year. Gourlay's findings are supported by comparable figures that James Strachan (John Strachan's brother) offered in his visit of Upper Canada in 1819. James Strachan found that in the eight district schools 220 students were being taught and in the numerous common schools, approximately 3500 students were being instructed, and these numbers did not include "a great number of Schools of a similar description, to which the bounty of Government cannot be extended."<sup>29</sup>

These numbers, and the interpretation of them by contemporaries as a significant development in Upper Canadian schooling, offer a stark contrast to the established historiography that suggests that schooling in Upper Canada was modest at best prior to

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<sup>27</sup> A plethora of town meeting notices can be found in all the newspapers in response to Gourlay's address.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*, 258-259.

<sup>29</sup> James Strachan, *A Visit to the Province of Upper Canada, in 1819*, (Aberdeen: D. Chalmers & Co., 1820), 132.

the developments of the mid-nineteenth century. Many of the common schools indicated in Gourlay's report were, no doubt, established prior to the passing of the Common School Act of 1816. In the first few years of government-aided common schooling, Gourlay's report suggests that inhabitants were utilizing the common school grants in order to increase school enrolments, and that they were furthermore building more common schools. Moreover, when this evidence is intersected with the print media discourse and the various calls for increased funding to meet the educational demands of inhabitants, we can suggest that the Common School Act of 1816 was successful in attracting the attention of those wishing to educate their children but who might not have had the means to pay for private schooling.

These numbers, of course, do not measure attendance, and so we should not assume that the popularity of common schooling at this time reflects our present day patterns of regular school attendance and participation.<sup>30</sup> Gourlay's report is significant, however, in that it illustrates that in the years following the passing of the Common School Act of 1816, the appetite for schooling was strong, and the number of schools being built was growing. Through his inquiries, Gourlay believed that "A spirit of improvement is evidently spreading. The value of education, as well as the want of it is felt."<sup>31</sup>

While the spirit of improvement was spreading and the value of education felt, certain inhabitants also reported to Gourlay that most of the schools remained in

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<sup>30</sup> For valuable discussions on school attendance in nineteenth century Upper Canada, see Michael Katz, "Who Went to School?," *History of Education Quarterly* 12, 3 (1972): 432-454; Ian Davey, "The Rhythm of Work and the Rhythm of School," in Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (eds.), *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), 221-253; Ian Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class: School Attendance in Hamilton, Ontario, 1851-1891," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1975; Ian Davey "School Reform and School Attendance: The Hamilton Central School, 1853-1861." M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1972.

<sup>31</sup> Gourlay, *Statistical Account*, 247.

unsatisfactory conditions. Although “the liberality of the Legislature has been great in support of the District Grammar Schools,” the residents of Grimsby reported, the liberality did not extend to the bulk of the people because they were “looked upon as seminaries exclusively instituted for the education of the children of the more wealthy classes of society, and to which the poor man’s child is considered as unfit to be admitted.”<sup>32</sup> And while common schools, these inhabitants admitted, were being erected, “the anxiety of the teacher employed, seems more alive to his stipend than the advancement of the education of those placed under his care.” Thus, the common schools were not always appealing institutions for their pupils. Furthermore, certain inhabitants complained about the character of the school, and especially the unfavourable American influence in them. The executive’s attempts to instill a British character into the schools, as indicated in Gourlay’s report, were yet to be realized. While rules were laid down for the government of schools, inhabitants complained, they were scarcely adhered to, and in many cases “in the same class you will frequently see one child with Noah Webster’s spelling book in his hand, and the next with Lindley Murray’s.”<sup>33</sup> Given these complaints, it was no wonder to Gourlay that the province was failing to establish a homogeneous British character. And while government efforts were not necessarily berated in his report, the call for increased government involvement, especially through increased legislative grants, was welcomed.

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<sup>32</sup> Gourlay, *Statistical Account*, 225.

<sup>33</sup> Gourlay, *Statistical Account*, 226.

## AN APPETITE TOO STRONG? CURBING SCHOOL EXPANSION

Despite the growing popularity of common schooling, and the increased calls for greater government aid, provincial legislators made educational matters even more problematic in 1820 by amending the 1816 school act to limit funding to the schools in an effort to curb state expenditures on education. The appetite for common schooling, they reasoned, was too strong and could not be supported by provincial funds. On 21 February 1820, Lieutenant Governor Peregrine Maitland opened the legislature with a speech from the throne that made this point clear. With the Common School Act of 1816 set to expire, he pleaded with legislators to consider restructuring the provisions for establishing common schools because “on the present scale,” the province could not afford to keep pace with the widespread demand for common schooling. Common schooling was important for cultivating a loyal population, Maitland agreed, and he insisted that he did not want common schooling to be scaled back entirely. Still, Maitland felt that government could not ignore the heavy costs. Thus, he asked legislators to consider if “measures may possibly be adopted, to produce the same good at a more moderate expense.”<sup>34</sup>

While Maitland insisted upon reduced funding to common schools, he acknowledged their importance to inhabitants. Schooling in general, he proposed, was “becoming daily more important in this Province. The population of Upper Canada is rapidly increasing; new Townships are filling with actual settlers, and the conditions of cultivation and improvement now rigidly insisted upon by His Majesty’s Government, are suddenly displaying the advantage of the present system, by a lively contrast with the former.” The message to legislators was to somehow maintain a common school system with reduced funds to support them.

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<sup>34</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 21 February 1820, 205-208.

Maitland's appeal was effective in convincing the Assembly that school expansion was simply not fiscally possible. The Assembly thus responded to Maitland's request two days later, and assured the executive that "We shall direct our attention to such laws as are about to expire, and give to the revision of the Common School Act that due consideration which its importance demands." They reminded Maitland, however, that the price of schooling could not be measured in fiscal terms only, and if Maitland wanted to maintain a loyal population, common school funding could not be scaled back too far.<sup>35</sup> The revision of the school act, they further made clear, must be achieved through a negotiation between the lower house and the executive. The interests of government must be balanced with the interests of those whom it represented.

In the public arena, it was clear that any attempt to reduce common schooling would not be welcomed. In fact, the press continued to print articles concerning the unsatisfactory state of common schooling, as was the case in an article comparing Upper Canadian schooling to that of its neighbours.<sup>36</sup> While those in Upper Canada could boast that their system of education was not as lamentable as that of Lower Canada, they were reminded that upon a global comparison, there was indeed a lot more to that could be achieved. The state of New York, it pointed out, reported in 1811 to have 5000 common schools, and that the number of scholars exceeded 200,000. And for those skeptical about comparing the dense population of New York with that of Upper Canada, the paper also offered figures for the year 1815, in which New York State reported that, not including the city and county of New York and the city of Albany, there were 2 621 common and primary schools with 140,106 scholars, and all of this was achieved with an

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<sup>35</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 23 February 1820, 211-212.

<sup>36</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 13 January 1820.

expense of only \$55,720.<sup>37</sup> Upper Canada could not fall behind the pace, the writer thought, let alone reduce its number of schools.

The House of Assembly nevertheless took measures to scale back on common schooling that year. Although it conceded to reducing the actual funding, it did insist upon maintaining the principal that those seeking funds would receive them. They did this on 4 March 1820, and two days later were informed that the Legislative Council had passed their proposed amendment without any changes. The Common School Act of 1820 was given royal assent on 7 March.<sup>38</sup> The act was printed later that month in the *Upper Canada Gazette*.<sup>39</sup> In the end, the act reduced heavily the amount of funding provided for schools and teachers. The legislative grant of £6000 a year in aid of common schools was reduced to £2500. Moreover, the Board of Education was instructed that any surplus in funding must be directed back to government. The provisions for residents to apply for a common school grant, however, were left unchanged. Thus, despite allowing that residents could apply for school funding, the pace of school expansion was curbed by the financial restraint of government. It was clear that common school expansion had, for the time being, reached its peak.

Although the House of Assembly acted in accordance with the wishes of the executive and legislative councils in 1820, it was clear that bitterness between the two was alive and well. Earlier, in 1819, the House of Assembly had again made efforts to repeal the District School Act of 1807. Moreover, when legislation was first introduced for the continuance of the Common School Act of 1816, which was set to expire in 1820, so many amendments were made by the Legislative Council on the Assembly's Common

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<sup>37</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 13 January 1820.

<sup>38</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 4, 6, and 7 March 1820, 247, 253-254, and 261-262.

<sup>39</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 31 March 1820.

School Act continuance bills that it simply could not be passed by the lower house.<sup>40</sup>

Some common ground was found, however, in the District School Amendment bill, which was passed on 12 July 1819. This act was considered as a sort of compromise between the District School Act of 1807 and the Common School Act of 1816. The new act provided for the free education in every district school of ten “promising children of the poorer inhabitants.”<sup>41</sup> Trustees were now obligated to report annually to the lieutenant governor on “the state of the said schools, the number of scholars, the state of education, with the different branches taught in the said schools.”<sup>42</sup> The grant to all new teachers was reduced to a maximum of £50.

While the Legislative Council was granting small concessions to the House of Assembly, the elite were also construing grander educational plans of their own. In 1819, the Executive Council met on its own to discuss options on a proposed university. The report of 1798 was dusted off the shelves, and the Executive Council found the cost estimated by the committee of 1798 to be no longer applicable. Thus, it proposed new measures in which the lieutenant governor would grant 500 000 acres of land for the purpose of establishing a university in the province, £10,000 for a library, philosophical apparatus, and botanic garden, plus £4,000 annually to pay for a principal, professors, preceptors, scholarships, librarian, gardener, and other officers. In order to raise the funds, it recommended the sale of land from time to time until the revenue would supply

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<sup>40</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, and 30 June 1819, 114-115, 118, 120-121, 133-134, 136, and 157-158; *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 21, 22, and 28 June 1819, 469-470, 471-472, and 477.

<sup>41</sup> “An Act to Repeal Part of, and to Amend, the Laws Now in Force for Establishing Public (Grammar) Schools in the Several Districts of this Province, and to Extend the Provisions of the Same,” Clause 6. In *DHE*, 1:148-150.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Clause 5.

the annual expenditure. It also recommended a constitution be obtained for the university by Royal Charter.<sup>43</sup>

#### TOWARD A TWO-TIER SCHOOL SYSTEM? THE ROOTS OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS SCANDAL

Although the executive insisted upon scaling back common school funding as a matter of fiscal necessity, it also began plans to put funds toward a different type of mass educational system that it hoped would replace the common schools. The common school in York was one of the first casualties of the reduced amount of spending on common schooling introduced by the 1820 legislation; however, the events surrounding the closing of the York Common School illustrate a desire by the elite to redesign the system of education in Upper Canada. By 1820, it seems that Strachan and the executive were beginning to question whether or not the common schools could effectively bring about a truly loyal population committed to executive supremacy, and whether they had instead created a system which was proving to be uncontrollable. Strachan began, in that year, to seek alternatives in education which would provide a system for Upper Canada conducive to the efforts of strengthening the province's attachment to British values, as he saw them.<sup>44</sup>

In 1820, Strachan, without seeking the approval of the House of Assembly, insisted that Lieutenant Governor Maitland send to England for a Lancastrian school teacher. Joseph Spragg was selected, and was appointed to the York Central School, where the common school teacher, Thomas Appleton, was fired. Appleton appealed to

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<sup>43</sup> "Report of the Executive Committee of 1819," *DHE* 1:150-152.

<sup>44</sup> J. George Hodgins, *DHE* 1:175.

the lieutenant governor and the Provincial Board of Education, but was given no help.<sup>45</sup>

The Trustees, however, came to Appleton's aid, via a letter to the lieutenant governor, in which they stressed that Appleton enjoyed the confidence of the parents and students, and his "expectations have been increased and strengthened by the great increase of scholars, and the approval of all." They saw no need to dismiss Appleton, and suggested that his call for redress was "too reasonable and just to be disappointed."<sup>46</sup> Maitland replied through his secretary George Hillier, who informed the trustees that upon the matter of their petition, the lieutenant governor "sees no occasion for any reference to it."<sup>47</sup>

Appleton was, simply put, a common school teacher out of a job. Maitland transferred control of the common school to a special board of trustees, and renamed the school the "Central School of York." While it was to remain a common school by name, it was by all means a British National School conducted on the Lancastrian system.<sup>48</sup> It was the executive's first attempt to introduce a British school system, under the sanction of the Church of England. By little stretch of the imagination the Central School of York could be considered a state-church school.

Why did the executive take this unilateral measure to create a British National School? Did they fear that the Assembly might resist a Church of England system of instruction in the province? Did they fear that there was not enough popular support to make the issue a matter of public debate? Do the efforts on the part of the executive elite

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<sup>45</sup> The Assembly took up the matter 8 years later in 1828, and it became, as historian J. George Hodgins calls it, a *cause celebre*, evoking a great deal of feeling, as well as a politico-religious discussion, both acrimonious and bitter, throughout the province. It developed into a prolonged struggle against the alleged attempt to introduce a quasi state-church system into Upper Canada, pitting the public in direct opposition to the Family Compact. The events surrounding the 1828 public backlash will be discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>46</sup> York Trustees to Lieutenant Governor Maitland, 28 August 1820, *DHE* 1:175.

<sup>47</sup> "George Hillier to the Trustees of the Common School of the Township of York," 31 August 1820, *DHE* 1:176.

<sup>48</sup> *DHE* 1:175.

to introduce this system without any public debate illustrate fears that the general will of the province was not in line with their conception of a British colony? Uncertainty to the religious leanings of many inhabitants were in fact earlier described by Strachan in the *Christian Recorder*, a newspaper aligned with the Church of England he edited between 1819 and 1821. “A wide field is open in Upper Canada for all religious denominations;” he told his readers, “the majority of the people are still undecided, and of that majority, the greater part will join those Teachers who are most zealous and attentive to the discharge of their sacred duties.”<sup>49</sup> Throughout 1819 and 1820, the *Christian Recorder* attempted to gain a favourable sentiment among its readers toward the idea of the British National Schools by printing a history of the system, along with propaganda on the advantages of that system.<sup>50</sup> Such ideas, however, did not permeate into other newspapers and did little to affect public discourse surrounding the common schools outside of Church of England circles. Nevertheless, the executive curiously moved unilaterally to initiate a new system of schooling in Upper Canada.

The promotion of a British national school was also fueled by the intellectual remnants of the war with the United States, and by the nagging questions of loyalty and identity. While the executive could “trust” that “the daily accession of Emigrants, from older countries, which rapidly fills our new Townships, brings with it settled principles of religion, and good Government,”<sup>51</sup> the government had no certainty that the inhabitants of Upper Canada were truly attached to the British heritage. In fact, the republican storm that had threatened the transatlantic world in the first decade of the nineteenth century had yet to be calmed. Whether they wanted to or not, monarchists throughout the world

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<sup>49</sup> *Christian Recorder*, March 1819.

<sup>50</sup> See in particular May 1819 and September 1820.

<sup>51</sup> Address of the Legislative Council, in *Upper Canada Gazette* 24 February 1820.

had to respond to the revolutionary events in France and the United States, and to the increasingly popular ideas of Enlightenment thinkers espousing notions of democracy and liberty. It was, in a word, an era of democracy in which oligarchs such as the executive council in Upper Canada were losing legitimacy in the public mind.

The newspapers had indeed been consistent in their reports of major reform initiatives in Britain, such as the corn laws and Catholic emancipation, and, increasingly, they were reporting upon the rise of new political leaders in Britain bent upon introducing the politics of reform. On 7 September 1820, the *Upper Canada Gazette* reported on growing discontent in Britain, and dissident debates in the Imperial Parliament. "When this current of mischief, uncontrolled, and bearing down before it every barrier of public authority or law had thus far succeeded to sap the foundations of civil society, what next ensued? The next step has been the same here as in the French Revolution. The formation of local societies, clubs, and unions, of various description, sedulously contrived and organized, for the diffusion of these impious and destructive doctrines, by frequent and familiar intercourse, and for the establishment of an extensive concert and co-operation in the prosecution of the only practical results to which such principles can lead."<sup>52</sup> Discontent with unrepresentative political leadership was on the rise around the world, and Britain itself was not immune to change. To what extent, however, the constitution would be retained in Britain, and by extension Upper Canada, was still up in the air. Were Strachan and the executive, then, initiating a British National School system with the intention of indoctrinating loyalty to their particular conception of the division of powers?

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<sup>52</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 7 September 1820.

The “First Annual Report of the Upper Canada Central School on the British National System of Education” for the year 1820-21 sheds light upon the intentions of the executive elite in establishing a British National School in Upper Canada. The success of the common schools had illustrated to everyone in Upper Canada the strong appetite for schooling. As such, “in an age when the thirst for improvement is continually increasing among all ranks,” the board insisted that it must “implant with useful knowledge, good principles and notions in the rising generations.” This could be achieved, of course, in the district schools. Unlike the district schools, however, the proposed British National Schools would not be designed for the children of the elite only. It was the board’s intention “To train up, not only those who are destined for the higher departments of life, but also the rising generation in general, to proper and regular habits of application and industry combined with sound moral and religious notions[.]” The board did not fail to mention the benefit of the system to the “general good” of the province. In Upper Canada especially, “where the population is small and where a change of many of the inhabitants is continually occurring,” the necessity of shaping a common character was even more fundamental. For this purpose “it is of essential consequence, under the frequent change of scholars that takes place, to have always a good succession of those who have, by practice, become well qualified to be teachers.” Copying from the success of the Central School in London, England, the board expressed its hope that the York Central School would plant the seeds for a system of education that would spread “throughout the whole of this Province.”<sup>53</sup> They had little faith, it was clear, in planting such seeds through the common schools, which had been granted too much local

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<sup>53</sup> “First Annual Report of the Upper Canada Central School on the British National System of Education.” *DHE* 1:177-178.

autonomy. Through a centralized system promoting attachment to Britain and British social institutions such as the Church of England, however, the preservation of their conception of society and governance could be, they believed, maintained.

A despatch from Maitland to Earl Bathurst in 1822 makes clear that it was the intention of the Executive Council to introduce, without the assent of the House of Assembly, the Church of England National School System into Upper Canada. "It is proposed," Maitland told Bathurst, "to establish one introductory school on the National plan in each town of a certain size."<sup>54</sup> Bathurst, from the Colonial office, gave his assent to the plan in a reply in October 1822. This despatch was never made public. Thus, in 1822, Upper Canada was funding two systems of elementary schools. The first, the common schools, were established and supported by the legislature. The second, the Church of England National School, was established by the authority of the Executive Council alone.<sup>55</sup> With the common schools proving to be uncontrollable, and with the religion of the population they served proving to be unpredictable, the executive elite silently began efforts to replace the common school system with a British National one. In addition, the Executive Council stepped up its efforts to wrestle control of education in 1822 when it approved the appointment of a centralized general board of education, headed by Strachan, to oversee the common schools.<sup>56</sup>

#### THE DEMISE OF COMMON SCHOOLING

The matter of common schooling was not taken up in the 1821 legislative session, and for the time being inhabitants of Upper Canada were adjusting to the 1820 act. As a result of

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<sup>54</sup> "Maitland to Bathurst," 1822.

<sup>55</sup> *DHE* 1:179.

<sup>56</sup> J.D. Purdy, "John Strachan's Educational Policies, 1815-1841." *Ontario History* 64 (1972): 45-64.

reduced government funding to the common schools, fewer schoolhouses were expected to be opened in the first year of the act. The appetite for schooling, however, was still alive, and in the newspapers increased notices of private schools and academies were printed, including the re-opening of the attempted Lancastrian school in Midland under the new auspices of William Hodgson, offering a practical education, and the opening of several night schools and ladies seminaries.<sup>57</sup> That the schools were opened at night is suggestive of their purpose to serve labouring classes; it is also highly suggestive of the weight given to education by parents as a necessity for their children, and in certain cases themselves. Children were needed to work in the day, but were given an education at night. The increasing number of ladies seminaries reflects the wishes of parents to have girls educated, as well as boys, and under the direction of female instructors, at a time when teaching was still mainly a male-dominated profession.

On 22 March 1821, the British National School at York made the news. “*The Central School* was again visited on the 5th inst. by His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, and Lady Sarah Maitland,” the *York Weekly Post* reported, “who appeared much gratified with the growing improvement and promising aspect of the institution; which now begins to shew the excellence of the National System of instruction, on which it is established, and from which it is earnestly anticipated that the greatest good will result to the Province in general, not only from the Central School at York, but also from others, becoming established in those parts of the Province where they they [*sic*] may be needed, and their being supplied with masters duly trained in the system of our Central

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, *Kingston Chronicle*, 30 March 1820, 26 October 1821; *York Weekly Post*, 26 December 1821. A plethora of similar ads were repeatedly printed in the *Upper Canada Gazette*.

School.”<sup>58</sup> The *York Weekly Post*, a pro-executive and government-funded newspaper, praised the school, and promoted it as perhaps the best option for parents: “All who are sensible of the great benefits to be derived from the rising generation being well educated in good principles according to true religion will doubtless make every exertion to aid in promoting the benevolent designs most kindly introduced by our excellent Governor.”

The *York Weekly Post*'s praise of the Central School should be taken with a grain of salt, as it does not necessarily reflect acceptance of the system upon the part of the general public or the press. The school, remember, was new, and it is questionable how many people knew about it. Aside from the attempt of the less read *Christian Recorder* to promote the British National system of education, this article was probably the first time many inhabitants had even heard of it. Moreover, the *York Weekly Post* was a government newspaper, distributed with the *Upper Canada Gazette*, and thus any criticism of the system would have likely been sanctioned by Maitland or other members of the executive.

The executive government did not have to rely on its own press for support. The executive was also aided by a print culture that had become infused with an anti-American and pro-British discourse in the wake of the War of 1812. Challenges to measures advocated by the lieutenant governor and his council were often criticized as a betrayal of the colony and a sign of disloyalty.<sup>59</sup> When war veterans from Hallowell, for example, complained that not enough money was being spent on public services, such as compensation to soldiers and the building of schools for their children, the response in

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<sup>58</sup> *York Weekly Post*, 22 March 1821. From 1821 to 1828, the *Upper Canada Gazette* was published in two parts. The first part – the official part – continued to be named the *Upper Canada Gazette*, while the second part – the news part – was called the *York Weekly Post* from 1821 to 1822, the *Weekly Register* from 1822 to 1826, and the *U.E. Loyalist* from 1826 to 1828.

<sup>59</sup> See David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*.

the press was that “A brave and generous people never boast of their courage, nor expect to be paid for defending themselves and the government they have sworn to maintain.”<sup>60</sup> The executive, however, still faced many challenges to its authority. Through the momentum of the petitioning movement, and the growing number of newspapers in the province, public pressure continued to put the executive into check. The British government, once the proud symbol of executive authority, was, as was evident in news from Britain, now moving toward a new conception of politics promoting responsible government and decreased executive authority; it was no longer the reliable supporter of executive supremacy in Upper Canada. Moreover, the Assembly, which had theretofore performed its duties as the popular branch of government while ultimately showing ineffectiveness in thwarting Upper Canada’s oligarchy, was by the 1820s itself growing tired of the small group of political heads in Upper Canada who were unwilling to relinquish any power. And with the electorate sending more and more anti-establishment men to the Assembly, the popular branch was daily becoming an antagonistic voice that could not easily be silenced in government.<sup>61</sup>

The Assembly ultimately facilitated the decline of the common schools in the early 1820s. Nevertheless, for many inhabitants of Upper Canada, rectifying inadequacies in school funding continued to force both the House of Assembly and Legislative Council to direct their attention toward the idea of school expansion. In 1823, legislators responded to certain petitions by establishing a grammar school in the Ottawa district and extending common school grants in the Bathurst district, while also providing

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<sup>60</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 21 January 1819.

<sup>61</sup> Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, 118. For a general discussion on the parliaments of Upper Canada and their relationships with the executive, see J.K. Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada, 1791-1841* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

financial relief to the teachers of Niagara who had been petitioning their cause for some time to both legislators and the press.<sup>62</sup> William Baldwin also introduced a College bill that year, but it was unsuccessful.<sup>63</sup> The bill was probably an attempt to reintroduce the Weekes' estate issue into the House of Assembly.<sup>64</sup> More importantly, the College bill demonstrates that the want of a university was also felt by those outside the executive elite.

The Common School Act of 1824 was passed on 19 January 1824. The act incorporated the Board of Education established by Maitland and the Executive Council in 1822. John Strachan was made chairman of the board, which was comprised of several other members of Maitland's inside circle. The act also provided for the permanency of the Common School Act, a measure that gave assurance to the Assembly, perhaps, that schooling for potentially all inhabitants would continue to be an Upper Canadian value. It also gave aid in the sum of £150 annually to Sunday Schools, and made provision for the first time, under the authority of the Legislature, for the education of Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, it addressed executive concerns over itinerant teachers by insisting that teachers were to be tested before they were paid. The General Board of Education was granted the power to withhold teachers' salaries if they felt that their qualifications were not up to par.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 19 March 1823; *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 4 January 1823.

<sup>63</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 4 March 1823, 372.

<sup>64</sup> William Weekes had left provisions in his will for part of his estate to be used toward the creation of a college in Upper Canada. Parliament could not decide on what form the college should take, and thus could not agree upon how to use Weekes' estate for that end.

<sup>65</sup> Common School Act of 1824, *DHE*, 1:198-199.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the 1820s, the zeal with which common schools were erected after the Common School Act of 1816 was quelled by the acts of 1820 and 1824. But while the building of common schools was quelled, the appetite for them was not. The idea of government-aided schooling, that is, was decades old, and although legislation was deemed necessary in the early 1820s to slow down what was already becoming a heavy financial strain on the Upper Canadian budget, many inhabitants continued to send their children to increasingly overcrowded common schools. By the 1830s and 1840s, school advocates called for massive state intervention. The amplified discourses of those decades has led historians to suggest that the Common School Act of 1816 was a relatively insignificant development in the process toward universal schooling, and to focus instead on the mid-nineteenth century as the point of departure for mass schooling in Upper Canada. By intersecting the existing statistical data, such as Gourlay's report, with evidence found in the print media, however, we find an earlier, more popular, trend toward school expansion. The legislation enacted in the early 1820s that limited funding to the common schools, and thus restricted the growth of the system, poses some serious challenges to longstanding top-down interpretations of the origins of common schooling in Upper Canada as a measure of the executive elite. Through an analysis of evidence from the print media, zeal for the common schools seems to have come, as Strachan suggested in his 1815 report, from "the people" themselves. By contrast, apathy toward them seems to have come from the top.

The Common School Act of 1824, the third common school act in less than a decade, fueled the lively and interminable debate on education in Upper Canada. The

executive elite was aware that there was a popular interest in the common schools, and with control placed at the local level, it could not shape the character of the common school system from the top. It did, however, limit government aid to the common schools and introduced measures to establish a British National School System in Upper Canada.

In addition, the executive turned its attention to establishing a university for the privileged elite. The development of the university in Upper Canada is, like the making of the District School Act, characteristically looked at in isolation from the development of the school system in general.<sup>66</sup> The making of the university, however, was also part of the central debate concerning the future form of government-aided schooling in Upper Canada. The political turmoil of recent years did not sit well with the executive, and led Maitland to remark to his Executive Council whether the goings-on in the province did not demonstrate the political necessity of establishing a university where the “principal young men might receive an education likely to impress upon them common feelings of attachment to the Crown, and of veneration for the Church of England.”<sup>67</sup> The university, it was believed, offered the promise of shaping future leaders, both in the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly, with values conducive to a loyal and “British” colony.

To what extent did ordinary inhabitants concede to or resist the executive’s conception of a British character for the province? To what extent did they concede or resist this conception in the schools? Were the proposed British National schools successful? The historiography, of course, demonstrates that they were not. By 1841,

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<sup>66</sup> It is usually, in fact, the focus of entire studies of its own. See, for example, A.B. McKillop, *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.)

<sup>67</sup> Craig, *The Formative Years*, 119.

there was certainly no discourse concerning these schools, as efforts toward establishing a universal public system of schooling were once again initiated. Little, however, is known about the demise of the British National schools in the 1820s. The next chapter will consider these and other educational developments in light of educational discourse in Upper Canada, and the ways in which government-aided schooling was shaped by emerging and competing political ideologies.

## CHAPTER 5

### EDUCATION AND THE RISE OF RADICAL POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1824-1826

By 1824, ideas in Upper Canada about the direction of the social, political, and cultural life of the province were divided. Roughly a decade after the War of 1812, the divide between political conservatives and reformers, a divide that had characterized the social and political culture of the province since virtually its inception, had yet to be resolved. While the executive elite and its supporters remained committed to an eighteenth-century conception of the constitution, which saw the executive as supreme, many others continued to advocate increased authority for the elected House of Assembly. The schools continued to be affected by this divide, with clear indications that popular support for common schooling would have a difficult time meeting the educational aspirations of the elite.

Two minor school bills were passed in 1825, a bill “To incorporate the Trustees of the Waterloo School House” and a bill to make perpetual the Bathurst Common School Act of 1823.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Osgood’s petition seeking Sunday School funding was also read in the Assembly in 1826, and other petitions ranging from requests for funding, to requests for schoolhouse establishments, to concerns about the day-to-day operations of the schools, were also discussed.<sup>2</sup> These were relatively minor matters that dealt with

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<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 9 February and 7 March 1825; *DHE* 1:200-202.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, 29 December 1826, 19-35.

the functioning of certain schools rather than province-wide policy-shaping concerns that had dominated the legislature theretofore.

While the developments in the legislature were cooled, however, the discourse outside its doors was as hot as ever by the mid-1820s. The seeds of government-aided schooling had been planted in the province, and out of those seeds came the roots of a contentious public discourse concerning the direction that government-aided schooling should take. This discourse reflected the increasingly contentious debates surrounding many political matters in the province. Such a discourse was fuelled, in 1824, with the establishment of two radical newspapers: the *Colonial Advocate*, founded and edited by William Lyon Mackenzie; and, the *Canadian Freeman*, founded and edited by Francis Collins. Indeed, by the mid-1820s a rapidly expanding press in Upper Canada both enlarged the scope and accelerated the speed of educational discourse throughout the province.

The educational ideas of radical reformers in the 1830s has received considerable attention from scholars of Upper Canadian education.<sup>3</sup> Most notably, Charles Duncombe and the reform party's 1835 report on education that was presented to the House of Assembly is seen as a crucial document outlining the educational ambitions of reformers in Upper Canada. Little, however, is known about the ideas and ambitions of reformers in the years leading up to that report. With limited influence in the House of Assembly in the 1820s, few official records documenting reformist ideas on education are available. By turning our attention to print media, however, we can find some important overlooked sources that can contribute to our understanding of the intellectual underpinnings of universal schooling in Upper Canada. William Lyon Mackenzie, leader of the Upper

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<sup>3</sup> See especially, Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 22-96.

Canadian Rebellions of 1837-38, and political agitator for most of his career, launched the *Colonial Advocate* in May 1824 with the matter of education taking up a significant part of his first editorial. Indeed, throughout the 1820s Mackenzie continued to focus on the development of education in his newspaper, as did other newspapers. In 1830, Mackenzie published a pamphlet entitled *Catechism of Education*.<sup>4</sup> What can we learn about the reformist ideas concerning education from these overlooked print media sources? What can they tell us about the development of government-aided schooling in Upper Canada prior to the debates of the mid to late 1830s? This chapter begins to consider these questions through an analysis of the rise of the radical press and its impact on educational discourse in Upper Canada.

#### POPULAR POLITICS AND THE QUESTION OF POWER

The influence of the radical press on educational discourse should be understood within the context of other issues of public concern at the time. One of the most significant items of public discourse in the middle years of the decade was the Alien Question. The Alien Question became an important political concern when the British courts decided that the American settlers who had come to Upper Canada after 1792 were not legally subjects of the Crown.<sup>5</sup> Inhabitants of Upper Canada thus became busy asking what characteristics constituted being, or making one, British. Who in Upper Canada was a British subject, who could become one, and who could not? The question was generally complicated by two matters. First, there was no consensus on whether or not certain inhabitants, namely those born in the United States, needed to be naturalized as British

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<sup>4</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education. Part First* (York: Colonial Advocate Press, 1830).

<sup>5</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty*, 34.

Subjects or were, contrary to the British courts' ruling, already naturalized upon entry to the province. Second, and perhaps most important, there was no consensus to begin with on what exactly being "British" was.

In addition to the debate on Aliens was the question of power in Upper Canada. Should it continue to rest with the lieutenant governor and his council? Or, should the public have a stronger voice? If so, how would this voice be heard? In a letter from "Liberatar" on "The Liberty of the Press" printed in the *Kingston Gazette*, one writer expressed his views concerning the indispensable liberty that everyone should be involved in protecting. Upper Canada, while a loyal province, he conceded, needed to maintain a voice for opposition.<sup>6</sup> In an article on the "Freedom of the Press" from the *Weekly Register*, the paper warned both its readers and other newspaper editors not to be sympathetic to the cause of the executive, lest precedent be set and the press sanctioned and censored. "We certainly never wish to see the day when a struggle shall exist between both parties [government and the press] for their rights and privileges; but were that struggle unfortunately to arise, we should declare at once, and our efforts would be in support of that declaration, 'the Press must triumph.'"<sup>7</sup> These ideas point to what was becoming a complex question in Upper Canada: what real power did the Assembly wield? It was clear to these writers, at least, that true representation rested within the press, and not the House of Assembly.

The press was indeed increasingly looked upon as an arena for public debate for those without a voice in public office. To make matters even more intricate, in May of 1824 this arena was radically altered with the emergence of Mackenzie's *Colonial*

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<sup>6</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 3 December 1824.

<sup>7</sup> *Weekly Register*, 22 January 1824.

*Advocate*. Historians debate the influence of William Lyon Mackenzie. Some see him as an extreme radical who thrust peaceful inhabitants of Upper Canada into unnecessary discord. Others are more sympathetic, and blame the political establishment for refusing to allow Mackenzie a position of influence, despite his various election victories.<sup>8</sup> Still other historians depict Mackenzie as a man of ideas who was inspired by the reform movements in both Britain and the United States.<sup>9</sup> The province had indeed received news from across the Atlantic for years. In this sense, Mackenzie offered nothing new in his newspaper; he did not raise consciousness to new ideas. Mackenzie was perhaps neither a political nor intellectual leader who shaped the direction of the province in a way that it otherwise would not have travelled. He did provide, however, an immediate medium to conduct public dialogue on certain contentious issues that other newspapers of the time were not willing to engage. The establishment of the *Colonial Advocate* altered the tone of public discourse in Upper Canada. The *Colonial Advocate* was a clear anti-establishment newspaper intending to bolster the voices of reform. Mackenzie provided the province with a more radical voice that had theretofore been limited. In a word, he brought to Upper Canada in the 1820s what Willcocks had brought in 1807 with the *Upper Canadian Guardian*.<sup>10</sup>

In order to discredit Mackenzie's newspaper, and his opposition to the establishment, pro-executive newspapers immediately labeled him a republican, and a mischief.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, in his very first issue Mackenzie attempted to explain his political

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<sup>8</sup> J. M. Dent, *The Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion*, 2 vols, (Toronto: C. Blacknett Robinson, 1885); Colin Read, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> McKillop, Romney (eds.), Wise, *God's Peculiar People*.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> For one of the most scathing attacks on Mackenzie's character, see *Weekly Register*, 27 May 1824. Other, more moderate newspapers, also got into the mix, see, for example, *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 28 August 1824.

stance.<sup>12</sup> However he felt about the United States, he preferred to remain a British subject: “We like American liberty well, but greatly prefer British liberty. British subjects, born in Britain, we have sworn allegiance to a constitutional monarchy, and we will die before we will violate that oath.” Mackenzie advocated a limited monarchy with representative democracy, with the Assembly holding the balance of power and not the executive. Such lines of thought put him in line with advocates of nineteenth-century liberalism across the Atlantic, such as Joseph Hume and the would-be British Prime Minister, Robert Peel.

Mackenzie went on to highlight the importance of the dissemination of knowledge in a political democracy. He suggested “that a free and cheap exchange of newspapers between editors in this country and Great Britain would have done more for the colonies than most people are aware of.” Mackenzie believed that Britain was moving toward expanding the rights of “the people,” and empowering the lower house. The struggle against the higher and lower branches of government in Upper Canada, he insisted, was “on the one hand, a struggle for political power,” but more importantly it was “on the other for political existence—might against right.” Had Upper Canada been involved in a true transatlantic dialogue, through the press, he thought, the existence of the executive branch in Upper Canada, or at least its power, would have been diminished. It was time, as he saw it, to truly collapse space and connect the people of Upper Canada to the people of Britain in order to share in the political developments across the Atlantic.

Other newspapers were not as welcoming to new political ideas, and raised concerns about the winds of change blowing from across the Atlantic. The moderate *Gleaner* pointed out that “two of the most violent demagogues of its [the Assembly’s]

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<sup>12</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 May 1824.

'*ruff oppositions*' which has endeavoured through the last session incessantly to impede every salutary measure brought forward by the respectable members are British Emigrants, one of them of not very long standing in the province, and who yet enjoys the full pay of his rank in a most respectable Corps."<sup>13</sup> The *Gleaner* was generally sympathetic to the causes of the Assembly, but it did also project some of its frustrations with the changing political culture of Upper Canada which saw that Assembly increasingly disrupting the legislature in its struggle for increased power. In a report on disputes between the Assembly and Legislative Council in early 1825, the newspaper predicted that the legislative session would have to be prorogued.<sup>14</sup> Although the newspaper often took anti-executive stances, on this occasion the editor placed the blame for deadlocked politics mainly on the Assembly, which the newspaper claimed had tried to change the rules of the House that had been in operation since the beginning of Upper Canada. The Assembly alone could not rule Upper Canada. The Council was also berated by the *Gleaner*, likely because it feared a backlash from a readership that supported the Assembly. In any event, a new type of politics was on the rise in Upper Canada which challenged the existing balance of power.

A *Gleaner* editorial late in 1825 remarked that Upper Canada had been injured by the inability of the two branches of the legislature to work together, but also conceded that the shift to a new balance of power in the legislature was inevitable.<sup>15</sup> While insisting that the three constitutional branches must operate in isolation from one another, it conceded that the Assembly's influence would eventually trump the Council's. It told its readers that measures were already being discussed among Assembly members to

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<sup>13</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 9 July 1825.

<sup>14</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 26 March 1825.

<sup>15</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 26 November 1825.

insist upon coercing the upper house. B.C. Beardsley, Member of the House of Assembly for Lincoln, it reported, advocated increased powers for the Assembly. He was backed by George Hamilton, Member of the House of Assembly for Wentworth, who declared that precedent had been set in Britain, where the Commons was the most powerful branch of government. Upper Canada, like the parent state, was shifting to a nineteenth-century conception of the constitution with the balance of power resting with the elected branch.

#### THE PRESS AND EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE

The discourse on education in the second half of the 1820s was situated in the discourse on reform, conservatism, and the rise of a new political culture. Educational observers in the mid-1820s continued to lament the development of education in Upper Canada, and many placed the blame on the conditions of politics in Upper Canada, which saw no real voice for the masses. A conservative inhabitant from Niagara, for example, expressed his opinions on education when favouring the Bell's, or National Schools, system of education. The spread of the system throughout Europe and the United States should not go unnoticed in Upper Canada, he argued. "The system, like that of the Sunday School, rests on the benevolent principles of dispensing gratis, the blessings of education, to the poor, but with this difference, that the usefulness of the latter is circumscribed, while that of the former is unlimited." With the firm philosophy that education was a right of every inhabitant, regardless of social status, the ability to reach the masses was emphasized by this writer. Expanding educational opportunity would benefit government in "training up the lower order of society in moral and religious principles, and in habits of useful

industry, thereby raising them above the mean, low, and besotting vices, which at present degrade them, it would prove a great and lasting blessing to the Country, and be a powerful instrument for forming an intelligent, industrious, and virtuous people, giving to the Provinces, in the words of its author, “new strength, stability and glory.”<sup>16</sup>

In April 1824, the *Gleaner* was happy to announce that progress in government-aided schooling was being made, but also lamented its sluggish pace in Upper Canada. Urging that an expanded school system be commenced for the general instruction of all inhabitants, the newspaper promoted a school in every village and increased spending on books. Upper Canada, the editors furthermore lamented, was too far behind the United Kingdom in the establishment of libraries. Freedom, the paper expressed, was cultivated through an educated population. One could not enjoy true freedom without knowledge. This axiom was all the more important in Upper Canada, the newspaper thought, where the basis of freedom and liberty was in the printed word.<sup>17</sup>

Mackenzie entered the debate on education in his radical newspaper’s very first issue, which printed an essay, continued in the following issue, concerning his personal thoughts on the direction of education in the province, and the need for expanding its reach. “We ought to enrich the minds of our youth,” Mackenzie suggested, “by giving them such instruction and conformation of character as may able them to serve their country.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the inhabitants of Upper Canada ought to dispel “the mist of prejudices that has so long and so injuriously operated against our own interests” and turn to the educational systems in the United States as models for that of Upper Canada.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 24 January 1824.

<sup>17</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 3 April 1824.

<sup>18</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 May 1824.

<sup>19</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 27 May 1824.

Mackenzie's disdain for Strachan and the schools promoted by the Upper Canadian elite theretofore was not concealed, but he did manage to find some common ground with his adversary. He agreed with the need for a university, but did not believe that the university should be "an arm of our hierarchy." "[I]f students are to be tied down by tests and oaths, to support particular dogmas, as in the case in Oxford, the institution will answer here no good purpose. Upper Canada had peculiar circumstances, that, like those in Europe and America, had to be addressed. Education was tied to the needs of "the nation:" "We ought to enrich the minds of our youth, by giving them such instruction and conformation of character as may able them to serve their country, by the practical application of a systematic education, and like William Pitt, to blend the wisdom of age, with the complexion of youth." Upper Canada, he believed, was in need of men with a liberal education who, "untainted by the enjoyment of power and place," would sacrifice their personal interests for the good of their country. Mackenzie advocated meritocracy in favour of patronage and hierarchy.<sup>20</sup> Like certain conservatives, Mackenzie spoke of the necessity of expanding common schooling and establishing a university; but he had different ideas concerning the shape and form of the school system.

Mackenzie's conception of education was that of a mass system serving both rich and poor alike. Ultimately, Mackenzie believed that the inhabitants of Upper Canada, through education, ought to produce educated leaders "to plead the cause of a poor man oppressed, rather than of a rich oppressor; who would rather *physic pomp* than pamper it—rather *despise* arrogance, clothed with a little brief authority, than cringe to and flatter it."<sup>21</sup> In order to achieve this in Upper Canada, he claimed, serious attention must be paid

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<sup>20</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 May 1824.

<sup>21</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 May 1824.

to education. “If we are, indeed, to be blessed with such pastors, counselors, and politicians—if we are to lessen our importations of the first and last classes; and if we hope to feel no inconvenience at having laid an embargo on the second,—if we really love to encourage *native talent*,” Mackenzie argued, “we must encourage—*liberally encourage*—competent professors of science and literature to emigrate hither.”

More specifically, Mackenzie took aim against the existing elitist system of education, as he saw it. “The education which a boy now receives at any of the district schools is very costly. Not less, if the youth’s board is included, than from seventy to ninety pounds, provincial currency, a year.—Far more—aye, *more than double* what would be required in Scotland to send a student to Edinburgh, or any other Scots university, and keep him there for the same space.” Mackenzie berated Strachan and the establishment for creating what he regarded a defective school system in Upper Canada. “Knowing this, we opine that the honourable and reverend Doct. John Strachan, D. D. &c &c or his brother, or whoever wrote “Strachan’s Tour,” must have been half asleep, or nodding, when he or they stated that children can be instructed cheaper in Canada, and as well as at home, (Britain.) We wonder what part of Canada, and what part of Britain are meant to be spoken of?” Upper Canada’s system needed improvement, he insisted, and improvement meant an expansion of the system to all classes.

Perhaps above all else, Mackenzie was opposed to the connection of church and state in matters of education. Suggesting the benefits of sending children to the United States for schooling, he urged his readers to dispel “the mist of prejudices that has so long and so injuriously operated against our own interests.” The inhabitants of Upper Canada should not fear sending their children to the United States for education. Scottish youth,

he proclaimed, were often sent to Dutch schools, without them returning opposed to the British government. Any defect in the identity of the children must be from some defect in the social and political conditions of the province. And in any event, no one could deny, he thought, that the advantages in sending a child to Harvard or Yale far outweighed any dangers in halting their education at one of the district schools in the province.<sup>22</sup> Foreshadowing events that Mackenzie perceived were coming, he warned against a University tied to an established church, and advocated a university free from sectarian tenants, such as those found in the United States.

The *Canadian Freeman* added another radical voice to educational discourse in 1825 by echoing a common theme of the time: increased funding and mass school expansion. Schools were needed, the newspaper decried, in order to produce home-grown talent.<sup>23</sup> “How could a system of Aristocracy be raised up and supported in this country? Is it under the present Common School system? No; but on the contrary, the march of the human mind must be retrograde—the dark cloud of ignorance must lower over the face of the country, and become so sense, as in a short time to exclude the rays of intelligence and knowledge from the greater part of the Colony.” The newspaper called for “an entire revision of our Common School system—by the appointment of General Examinators, who would go forth throughout the Province, and sweep the drouth from the hive, by making a *certain* and *suitable* provision for the active and capable labourers who are worthy of their hire—a provision so certain and so suitable, as not only to hold fast the capable persons already engaged in it, but also to induce men of learning and intelligence, to turn their thoughts to that line of life.” An educated population, the

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<sup>22</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 27 May 1824.

<sup>23</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 1 December 1825.

newspaper insisted, secured civil liberties and guarded against arbitrary power. The good common school system promoted intelligence and “patriotism.” The paper also echoed a growing theme when it pushed for funding to attract the most qualified and able instructors. With the right teachers, it believed, the right system would be established.

Whether conservative or reformer, virtually all participants in print media discourse were agreeing upon the need for increased attention to matters of education and schooling. Educational discourse was shifting, in this sense, from a debate on the necessity for government-aided schooling to a debate on its future scope. In a letter to the *Gleaner* in mid-1825, an inhabitant of Niagara criticized the government for failing to adequately expand the system of education. In particular, he addressed the lack of higher education in Upper Canada which was felt at the expense of providing a professional class of locally-born leaders.<sup>24</sup> “It is to be lamented that the leading men of the Province do not endeavor to have a College and an Academy established in some central part, to be provided with Presidents and Tutors sent from home.” In Nova Scotia, he claimed, which was by no means “as flourishing a Province as this,” there were two colleges. The result was that Nova Scotia was furnished with home-grown leaders able to promote the interests of the province.

Moreover, this inhabitant believed that education and class were intrinsically linked: “The middle class of people are more anxious to give their children a good education than the first and you will find that the sons of the first men fill situations not at all respectable, in proportion to the situation and rank of their fathers.” Without an education, men of the middle and higher ranks would not be able to fulfill their aspirations. Furthermore, education brought peace and order, as was evidenced, he

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<sup>24</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 9 July 1825.

believed, in Nova Scotia: “What a disgrace it is to Upper Canada, a colony inhabited by Christians, that the education of youth should be so little attended to. Gaming, and other practices prevail in a great degree, which is entirely owing in the want of education; and many other disadvantages attend the want of it.”

Thus, while reform-minded individuals promoted school expansion for their own reasons, more conservative inhabitants also advocated it for their own reasons. Upon this cause, the two political factions could increasingly find common ground. Although opposed to many of his ideas, Mackenzie allowed a letter from “Paget” to be printed in his paper suggesting that Upper Canada should never allow “men who have been taught even in childhood to prefer the republican institutions of a foreign power” to teach in the province.<sup>25</sup> What Mackenzie could agree upon with Paget, however, was that school expansion was necessary for the development of the colony. With the poorest inhabitants under “the spiritual guidance of the most ignorant and absurd enthusiasts,” the only option, as Paget saw it, was for government to counter the efforts of itinerant teachers by expanding a system of education in which the poor would be sure to be taught by government-regulated teachers under a government-run curriculum. The executive, he was convinced, had been backing down from the expansion of schooling at a time when it was most needed; for ordinary inhabitants as much as for the governing elite. In order to promote “British liberty,” government ought to expand education before the itinerant teachers “turn a *Province* into a *State*.” Echoing many of his contemporaries, Paget called for greater government intervention in schooling, including the establishment of a university, available to every inhabitant, thus driving the itinerant teacher out of the province. While promoting “British liberty,” however, he made clear that he was no

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<sup>25</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 10 March 1825, 7 April 1825.

advocate of exclusivity. Sensitive to the fact that the system of education should not, like in Strachan's national school model, force an English Episcopal clergy upon the people, this inhabitant argued that the diverse population of Upper Canada "would certainly feel justly alarmed and displeased, if the British government were to support the episcopal clergy only." He thus promoted a system of education available to all inhabitants that would "throw open the floodgates to the people."

Mackenzie seconded these remarks in an editorial later that spring.<sup>26</sup> "In a free country it ought to be the object of those in authority to enlighten the great body of the people," he insisted, "and to set a lesson of morality before them, in order that they may be fit for discharging those important duties which devolve upon them as men, as citizens, as office bearers, and as heads of families." While education was widely discussed in Upper Canada, Mackenzie believed that very little was being done to make it truly expansive. Unlike other parts of the world, and especially neighbouring New York, Upper Canada was halting educational legislation. Nothing but legislative will, he believed, was preventing the expansion of education. "To those who may complain of the inability of this province to vote much money in aid of education," Mackenzie suggested, "we could say that money so given is not lost to the province, is not paid to foreigners, but merely passes from one hand to the other, and like a refreshing shower on a dry and parched soil, causes the intellectual power of our youth to grow into maturity and will elevate the moral character of the people, and promote the best interest of the province." Hand-in-glove with his conceptions for reform for the province were his conceptions for educating the masses.

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<sup>26</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 16 June 1825.

## EDUCATION, RELIGION, AND POWER

Understanding the importance of the rise of radical political discourse in the 1820s also requires us to understand the discourse concerning the relationship between church and state in Upper Canada. In its efforts to encourage its own conception of the British heritage in Upper Canada, the executive elite held steadfast to a determination to steer the religious and educational advancement of the province. They made this clear in their promotion of British National Schools earlier in the decade, and continued the trend in their plans for a university connected to the Church of England. For the executive elite, the Church of England was viewed as the established church of the colony. Such a view had for years perpetuated an acrimonious debate concerning the role of church and state centred upon a discourse concerning who had a right to the infamous Clergy Reserves set aside in the late eighteenth century for the religious and educational advancement of the province. Members of the executive elite insisted that the Church of England alone could claim rights to the reserves, while the province's other denominations, together representing the majority of inhabitants, put forward claims of their own to these reserves.

Mackenzie's *Colonial Advocate* was clear on where it stood on the question of church and state. "[W]hen we reflect that our population is not like that of Scotland, a body of people nearly unanimous regarding the fundamental points of christianity, and undivided in their manners and customs;" the paper expressed, "when we consider that (we except the Catholics in the lower province) the Canadas are peopled by emigrants from many countries, and that they have been accustomed to enjoy many different religious opinions and forms of worship, or have perhaps left their respective countries

that they might be enabled here peaceably to worship their maker according to their consciences.” When this is reflected upon, Mackenzie argued, the inhabitants of Upper Canada must be compelled to acknowledge that the Imperial Parliament did not consult the “best interest of the people nor of Britain” by endowing the Clergy Reserves to “a militant dominant church.”<sup>27</sup> The Church of England, that is, could hold no claim to the reserves that could be popularly supported.

Mackenzie did not conceal his disdain for the Church of England and took special aim at Strachan, who he held in high contempt: “We have known ministers connected with other churches, in coming into this province, change their religion and become Episcopal clergymen. Christian charity induces us to believe that their motives were disinterested, but as some of them have grown very bigotted to their adopted faith, their sphere of usefulness is diminished, many attributing the change of principles thus miraculously achieved, to far less honorable motives than either conviction or conversion.”<sup>28</sup> Labeling him a bigot and attacking his values, Mackenzie quickly made a new enemy. Every sect, Mackenzie believed, including Catholics, deserved to share in the income produced by the land that Strachan and the elite were, according to Mackenzie, hoarding.

While Mackenzie’s attacks did not sit well with a great deal of inhabitants who knew all too well how long the issue had divided the province, they seem to have been representative of the feelings of a growing number of inhabitants who opposed the Church of England’s perceived dominance in political affairs. A letter from a Kingston inhabitant calling himself “Cornelius” warned of political agitation that could be stirred

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<sup>27</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 May 1824.

<sup>28</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 May 1824.

by establishing the supremacy of one church over another in a province as pluralistic as that of Upper Canada. In addition to this, he thought, declaring one church supreme would go against the trend of modernizing societies: “At this enlightened period of christianity, and in such a Province as this, containing a great majority of dissenters from the English Episcopal church, it would be as impolitic as unjust to attempt to coerce the conscience of the inhabitants by disabilities and privations, or to establish one denomination of christians over others equally conscientious in their respective modes of worship, and equally entitled, as good subjects, to the protection of government.”<sup>29</sup> Instead of strengthening the government, this inhabitant believed that an established church would divide the colony, and thus lead to government’s destruction. On the first of February, the *Upper Canada Herald* furthermore came out in defence of Methodist rights to hold land for religious purposes.

Such views from these newspapers should not suggest unanimity in the entire population. Writing to the *Kingston Chronicle*, “Rupert” took issue with “Hampden’s” remarks in the *Upper Canada Herald*. Referring to Strachan as “the little bigot of Little York,” Hampden had suggested that Strachan and his pupils were “parasites and sycophants” hindering the development of the province. Rupert argued that such slander should never have been allowed to be printed, and issued a challenge to Strachan’s opponents to present evidence “justifying the illiberal remarks they have passed upon him.”<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the dominance of the Church of England was increasingly called into question in the 1820s. In what ways would Strachan and the executive elite respond

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<sup>29</sup> *Upper Canada Herald*, 25 January 1825.

<sup>30</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 20 May 1825.

to challenges to their authority? Could a system of education integrating church and state be built within this public climate?

Strachan had been successful in influencing and shaping public policy since his arrival in Upper Canada. He was a well-connected individual who emerged as a prominent leader in the Lieutenant Governor's Executive Council. Indeed, he might have felt an extreme intrinsic worth in having the ear of lieutenant governors who sought his advice on virtually all matters of public policy. By the mid-1820s, he furthermore had the clear support of a Legislative Council composed of many of his former pupils. Yet, Strachan failed to properly assess his popularity outside of elite government circles. Or, perhaps, he felt he did not require support outside of those circles in order to exert his political influence. Whatever the reason, in the public arena, Strachan projected and acted upon a haughty self-importance that only an unelected official could display without danger of receiving retribution from the electorate.

On 3 July 1825, Strachan delivered a sermon on the death of the late Bishop Mountain of Quebec. As his hierarchical authority, it would have been customary, if not a polite gesture, for Strachan to remark some kind words on the Bishop. The sermon would have received little, if any, attention when it was printed in 1826 if it had confined itself to a reflection on the life and character of Bishop Mountain. But it did not confine itself; and it did receive vast public attention. In his sermon, Strachan lashed out at the rising Methodist influence in the religious culture of Upper Canada. Strachan was probably not intending to stir controversy, but in his sermon he undeniably attacked the character of the Methodist population. "[W]hen it is considered that the religious teachers of the other denominations of Christians, a very few respectable Ministers of the

Church of Scotland excepted,” Strachan preached, “come almost universally from the Republican States of America, where they gather their knowledge and form their sentiments, it is quite evident, that if the Imperial Government does not immediately step forward with efficient help, the mass of the population will be nurtured and instructed in hostility to the Parent Church, nor will it be long till they imbibe opinions any thing but favourable to the political Institutions of England.” The Methodists were spreading false teachings, the type and quality that could destroy colonial attachment to Britain, Strachan contended, and the only way they could be counteracted would be to increase the number of Church of England ministers through massive state interjection through the means of public funds.<sup>31</sup>

This sharp and bitter attack at Methodists thrust the sermon into the public arena. The Methodists, Strachan argued, were “uneducated itinerate preachers,” who took themselves “to preaching the Gospel from idleness, or a zeal without knowledge, by which they are induced without any preparation, to teach what they do not know, and which, from their pride, they disdain to learn.”<sup>32</sup> The Methodists were thus pushed into a larger debate over their loyalty.<sup>33</sup> They were forced to defend their loyalty in light of Strachan’s accusations of disloyalty due to their connections with American Conferences.

Using the power of the press, a 23-year old freshly ordained minister, Egerton Ryerson, championed the Methodist response to Strachan’s charges in an elaborate series of letters to Strachan which were printed in the *Colonial Advocate* and later in pamphlet

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<sup>31</sup> John Strachan, *A Sermon Preached at York, Upper Canada, Third of July, 1825, On the death of the Late Lord Bishop of Quebec* (Kingston: James McFarlane, 1826), 26.

<sup>32</sup> Strachan, *A Sermon Preached at York*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, 51.

form.<sup>34</sup> Rather than putting himself and other Methodists on the defensive, however, Ryerson attacked back: “I am no republican,” Ryerson argued, “but, I will take the liberty to observe that the United States, without the assistance of a religious establishment, can produce men, who, for piety, learning, and talents, both in the pulpit, in the closet, and in the senate, make a much more honourable display, than those who seem to despise them.”<sup>35</sup> Ryerson claimed that Strachan’s problem stemmed from the fact that the Church of England in Canada was too small, and that until the pews were filled with people, “the Doctor’s mournful cries of Sectarianism! Schism! Republicanism! will be screeching in our ears; and the repose of the ‘Imperial Parliament’ will continue to be disturbed by the desponding exclamations.”<sup>36</sup> He argued that Strachan’s aim was to mislead the Imperial government in an effort to acquire more money for his own church.

Ryerson was not alone in his battle, and as the debate was made widespread in the public arena, voices of discontent proliferated. “A Wesleyan” writing to the *Upper Canada Herald* claimed that “loyalty” was part and parcel to being a Wesleyan. He pointed to the example of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and the fathers of Wesleyan Methodism to denounce Strachan’s charges.<sup>37</sup> It was a “calumny,” he thought, to suggest that the Methodists were spreading disloyal teachings and that the only way to counteract them was through the fattening of the Church of England. Public opinion, “A Wesleyan” postulated, was turning against Strachan. “Clothed as he is with honorable and reverend

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<sup>34</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *Letters from the Reverend Egerton Ryerson to The Hon. And Reverend Doctor Strachan* (Kingston: The Herald Office, 1828). The letters originally appeared in the *Colonial Advocate* throughout the Spring of 1826.

<sup>35</sup> Ryerson, *Letters to Strachan*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ryerson, *Letters to Strachan*, 39-40.

<sup>37</sup> *Upper Canada Herald*, 22 October 1827. Reprinted in *Canadian Freeman*, 25 October 1827.

titles, and apparently favoured by the Provincial administration, he is doing more to disaffect the people generally towards the Government, with which he is thus identified, than any or all of those, whom he has denounced as hostile to our civil and religious institutions.”

William Lyon Mackenzie, who had granted Ryerson a public forum by printing his letters to Strachan, also printed correspondence from “Castigator.” This inhabitant believed that there would be few readers who would deny Ryerson praise “for perspicuity—correctness—courteous address, fairness of explanation and quotation, and last of all, of keeping to the point.” It was Strachan, Castigator believed, who should be on the defensive; “if the Doctor or his friends could by any defence or explanation do away or neutralize the allegations against him, it should be done forthwith; but it must be done by a statement of facts.”<sup>38</sup> Mackenzie himself had admitted that before he had read Ryerson’s apology for dissenters, he was prejudiced against the Methodists. “We are so well pleased with it, that we mean to print 500 in a pamphlet form which will be sold at a very low price in order to facilitate their circulation.”<sup>39</sup> To be sure, there was no widespread support for either Ryerson or the Methodists in general. “Monitor,” for example, was one inhabitant that blasted Ryerson for slinging the Methodists into a debate in Upper Canada that was really between the Church of England and Church of Scotland. He warned Ryerson not to speak with the authority of “*public opinion*” and indeed to “beware of it; for if he seeks that of the *intelligent* public, he invites his unequivocal condemnation as an arrogant, pert, and ignorant intruder.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 July 1828.

<sup>39</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 11 May 1826.

<sup>40</sup> *U.E. Loyalist*, 6 June 1828.

Certainly, Ryerson loudly defended the Methodist position, and directed the attention of the public to the “inaccuracies” in Strachan’s charges. Ryerson’s rebuttal, historian William Westfall contends, “caused a sensation; it was reprinted quickly in pamphlet form and spread like wildfire throughout the colony. The Methodist cause in Upper Canada had gained a new champion.”<sup>41</sup> This was plain to see even for the more conservative press of the time.

Within the public arena of print media, the result of the debate between Strachan and the “Methodist” was detrimental to Strachan. Even the conservative and pro-establishment press could do little to quell public sentiment against the executive elite. The government newspapers, of course, were expected to toe the line, and so they generally published correspondence favourable to Strachan’s position.<sup>42</sup> The independent *Kingston Chronicle*, which had virtually always supported the executive and its members, however, could not ignore the public backlash against Strachan’s charges. Although “A Church of England Man” wrote on 7 July 1826 suggesting “that in *every country* there should be a religious Establishment,” and that for Upper Canada the Church of England should be that establishment, “A Friend to Merit,” whose letter was also printed that day, critiqued the “monopoly” of the Church of England in the Legislative Council which worked to exclude members of other churches such as the Church of Scotland.<sup>43</sup> Ryerson’s letters, as they appeared in the press and as published in pamphlet form in 1828, electrified the debate in Upper Canada over the centralized powers of the executive and the extent to which individuals like Strachan who seemingly controlled the lieutenant

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<sup>41</sup> William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston and Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 24-25.

<sup>42</sup> *U.E. Loyalist*, 3 June 1826; 24 June 1826; 15 July 1826.

<sup>43</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 July 1826.

governor, should be allowed by the public to direct the social, political, and cultural direction of the province.

## CONCLUSION

While educational developments in the legislature were cooled after the passing of the Common School Act of 1824, the discourse outside its doors was as hot as ever by the middle years of the 1820s. The seeds of government-aided schooling had been planted in the province, and out of those seeds came the roots of a caustic public discourse concerning the direction that it should take. With the existing system in place, it invited further demands from unsatisfied participants. Moreover, residents were not only continuing to request schools and school funds after 1824, but they were also discussing the fundamental shape and character of schooling – including the relationship between church and state, the extension of schooling to the poor, the regulation of the teaching profession, and the inequity of school funding – in what would become an elaborate public discourse by the later years of the decade. With the framework for mass schooling potentially at hand, the discourse was shifting from the need for government-aided schooling to expanding the system and reforming its shape and character. This discourse was fuelled by an expanding press that in the years 1824 and 1825 witnessed the emergence of two reform newspapers positioning themselves in direct opposition to the governing classes.

The reform press intensified its attack on Strachan early in 1826 when learning that Strachan had replaced John Beverley Robinson on a political embassy to England. “Can the society who uphold this clergyman really approve of the active part he takes in

politics?” Strachan, Mackenzie argued in the *Colonial Advocate*, was an opportunist who had now made his church “a mere secondary consideration.” He was motivated, Mackenzie insisted, by political power, and especially wealth. Strachan earned £300 as head of education, and £350 as a protestant missionary to Upper Canada. Should he abandon these posts by taking a political missionary to England, then he should abandon the salary as well.<sup>44</sup>

While’s Strachan’s trip initially raised suspicion, few newspapers, including the *Colonial Advocate*, concerned themselves with Strachan’s intentions in England. But in 1827, Strachan’s visit to England became the dominant theme of public discourse in Upper Canada, and began a series of events that would eventually lead to discourse concerning the restructuring of Upper Canada’s political landscape in which education was a central theme. On 8 September, the *U.E. Loyalist* printed notice of the safe return of John Strachan from his trip to England. The following week, it was happier to report that “It will be gratifying to the inhabitants of the Province to learn, that the object of Dr. Strachans [*sic*] visit to England has been most fully accomplished, and that the establishment of a University in Upper Canada, is an event, no longer to be desired, but one which will be carried into immediate execution.”<sup>45</sup>

Although the idea of a university had been part of print media discourse in the years leading up to the 1827 charter, its granting was a somewhat unexpected development. What was the nature of this university charter? What would the university plan look like? Strachan and the executive elite had essentially acted unilaterally in securing the university charter. Yet, once it was brought home, it was open to scrutiny.

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<sup>44</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 9 March 1828.

<sup>45</sup> *U.E. Loyalist* 15 September 1827.

The events surrounding the attainment of the university charter, and the print media discourse surrounding its public scrutiny, will be the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### ECCLESIASTICAL EXCLUSIVITY DENOUNCED: PRINT CULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION, 1826-1828

The bitter public discourse that was cultivated with the release of Strachan's *Sermon* highlighted what some inhabitants regarded as the type and quality of arrogance and sense of entitlement with which the executive elite governed the colony. Yet, radical ideas emerging from the reform press and certain political leaders in the middle years of the 1820s remained controversial. Many inhabitants were sure to express both their loyalty to the executive and their indignation of the new breed of radical thought. John Huston and certain inhabitants of the Newcastle district, for example, printed a letter of support for Lieutenant Governor Maitland in early March 1826. Moreover, their determination to remain "uninfluenced" by "party prejudice or feeling" was stoked.<sup>1</sup> The times were changing, Huston and the Newcastle inhabitants wrote about their contemporary political culture, and they "perceived, with feelings of honest indignation, an attempt base, malicious, and unfounded, of rendering the Government of Your Excellency an object hostile to the best interests of the Province."

Huston and inhabitants from the Newcastle district sensed a growing divide in Upper Canada between those who believed in the supremacy of the executive versus those who believed in granting greater power to the popular branch of government. With Britain itself reforming its conceptions of liberty, equality, and the character of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 2 March 1826.

constitution, many individuals and groups in Upper Canada began to question why their own leaders were unwilling to open up the same discourse in the province.

This issue surfaced, however, upon Strachan's return from England, when the reform press accused Strachan of misrepresenting Upper Canadian demographics in an effort to acquire a charter for the province's new university that ensured its connection to the Church of England. This chapter considers Strachan's attempts at establishing a university in Upper Canada aligned with the Church of England and controlled by the executive. The debate over the proposed university prolonged the animosity begun by Strachan's 1826 sermon, and continued to pit the various religious and political sects in the province against each other. Our understanding of how that animosity affected educational development, however, is limited to similar debates of later years.

Considering the degree to which the debate concerning church and state had become a major part of print media discourse in the mid-1820s, however, an analysis of the public debate surrounding the university charter can contribute to a greater understanding of the educational developments that led to the debates of later years.

#### THE ECCLESIASTICAL CHART AND UNIVERSITY CHARTER

Having been aroused by the debate between Strachan and the Methodists, many inhabitants grew increasingly suspicious of executive conduct, and especially of Strachan's and the Church of England's influence in politics. The suspicion grew into disdain when Strachan's writings in England were made public in Upper Canada. In the interval between Strachan's arrival in England in April 1826, and the granting of the Charter in March 1827, Strachan drew up an elaborate "Appeal" for circulation in

England, which was published early in 1827.<sup>2</sup> In his *Appeal*, Strachan insisted that the defective state of education in Upper Canada was not only lamentable, but dangerous. It could not be expected, he thought, that any of the numerous students leaving the province to receive an education in the United States “on their return will give up their hearts and affections to their Parent State with the same cordiality that they would have done had they been carefully nurtured within the British Dominions.”<sup>3</sup> Strachan insisted upon the expansion of an school system in Upper Canada capped with a university attached to and controlled by the Church of England. “In what other way,” he asked, “can we ever obtain a well-instructed population by which to preserve our excellent constitution and our connexion with the British Empire[?]”<sup>4</sup>

The *Appeal* also included information regarding the religious breakdown of the province. In the *Appeal*, however, Strachan exaggerated the number of Church of England inhabitants in Upper Canada, and claimed that members of the Church of England represented a clear majority of the Upper Canadian population. These numbers helped him gain support among Imperial leaders for his idea of a Church of England school establishment in the province. Although non-Church of England members could be admitted as students, only members of the Church of England would be professors or members of the college council. Predictably, as historian John Webster Grant argues, the prospect of a state-supported university under Church of England control stirred

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<sup>2</sup> Strachan, John. *An Appeal to the Friends of Religion and Literature, in Behalf of the University of Upper Canada*. (London: R. Gilbert, 1827).

<sup>3</sup> Strachan, *Appeal*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Strachan, *Appeal*, 6.

indignation “which was not lessened by a provision that the rector of York should ex officio be president.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Fall of 1827, Strachan’s university charter became one of the dominant focuses of print media discourse in Upper Canada. While the *U.E. Loyalist* had represented Strachan’s visit to England and acquisition of a university charter as a success, public attention was soon drawn to a letter written by John Strachan to William Horton, a member of the Imperial Parliament, while overseas, in which Strachan presented his ecclesiastical chart purporting to offer a religious breakdown, in numbers, of Upper Canada. Strachan’s letter to Horton was published originally in the *Quebec Gazette* of 10 September 1827, and it soon appeared in Upper Canada. As was evident in the chart, Strachan provided figures that did not represent the true religious breakdown in the province. Moreover, he argued in his letter that, because the majority of Upper Canadians were members of the Church of England, the Church of England should therefore have favoured status in the charter of the proposed university as the established church in the colony.

The *Colonial Advocate* immediately pounced on Strachan’s letter. “It is to be lamented,” the newspaper printed, “that the Bishop and the Lt. governor did not succeed in the way they wished---but as the money is open for appropriation---we trust parliament will apply for it for the purposes of education, before our ‘venerable’ friend and his truly loyal associates shall have entirely swallowed it up.”<sup>6</sup> The *Colonial Advocate* concurred with the *Canadian Freeman’s* conclusion that “the home government was deceived by

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<sup>5</sup> John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 90.

<sup>6</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 27 September 1827.

the misrepresentations sent home by men in authority in the Province.”<sup>7</sup> The consensus among the two major anti-establishment newspapers was that the established elite was consciously deceiving the home government.

On 29 September 1827, the moderate, and self-proclaimed neutral newspaper, *Gore Gazette*, also turned its back on the establishment when it printed news about the ecclesiastical chart. George Gurnett, the editor of the *Gore Gazette* who would in the 1830s become a major supporter of the conservatives, was kind to Strachan, relative to the type of animosity Strachan received from the reform press. Although Gurnett condemned Strachan’s statistical inaccuracies, he did not pass harsh judgment on Strachan. He did, however, permit inhabitants to voice their own partisan opinions without censorship.<sup>8</sup>

Francis Collin’s radical *Canadian Freeman* was not so kind. Strachan’s chart was just the sort of thing, the paper contended, that they had been reporting for months; that is, that the home government was receiving false information from a small elite. It was “such information as we have long contended that the home government received, from time to time, from our little *religio-political* divine, and the other advisers of the present administration—namely, a tissue of the grossest falsehoods and misrepresentations that ever appeared in public print.”<sup>9</sup> Strachan had provided ample evidence, in the newspaper’s opinion, to justify the impressions the newspaper had impressed upon him and the ruling elite for years, “namely, that he was possessed of more cunning—more illiberality in politics—more bigotry and prejudice in religion—than any other man in Upper Canada.” The paper expressed its hope that the Methodists would once again take

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<sup>7</sup> *Canadian Freeman* reprinted in *Colonial Advocate*, 27 September 1827.

<sup>8</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 29 September 1827.

<sup>9</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 11 October 1827.

immediate steps to refute Strachan's claims, and to enable those in Upper Canada "to view the author in his true colours."

The *Gleaner*, although a more moderate newspaper, was equally furious with Strachan's conduct. The newspaper insisted that Strachan's chart did not go unnoticed. "We have never known a document published in any of the Canadas," it claimed, "that has attracted so much attention in both Provinces." Every other denomination in the province, the newspaper argued, had to pay their clergy and build churches without the aid of government, and the newspaper expressed that it was simply fed up with the special privilege that the Church of England was receiving. Any rational person, the newspaper proclaimed, would find Strachan's assertions absurd that the greater part of the province would be induced to become Episcopalians. The *Gleaner* claimed that Strachan wanted to mislead the Imperial Parliament on the progress and size of the Church of England in an effort to subvert the other denominations. "Should the Doctor really be honest and intend (contrary to the opinion of many) to promulgate only truth," the *Gleaner* offered, "he can have complete information from every quarter; we shall therefore say little on that subject."<sup>10</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the executive elite was percolating. The press increasingly printed correspondence from its readers who were in opposition to Strachan, including a letter from "Philo Veritae," who opposed Strachan's actions and begged for honesty among political leaders.<sup>11</sup> The *Upper Canada Herald* printed a letter on 25 Sept 1827 from "A Member of Mr. Foote's Church" refuting the chart, and the *Gore Gazette* printed one on 21 September 1827 from "A Friend to Truth," who demanded honesty:

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<sup>10</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 29 October 1827.

<sup>11</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 3 December 1827.

“When the Hon. and Rev. Doctor has again occasion to draw up a Chart of a similar description, I would seriously recommend to him inquiry into the state of that Church; for, let me say, when he is reduced to the necessity of exhibiting such a statement, in order to establish the empire of Episcopacy in Upper Canada, I envy him not the glory of success.”<sup>12</sup>

On 18 October 1827, “A Presbyterian” wrote to suggest that public discourse was galvanized by this issue. Strachan had, the author believed, quickly become a public enemy. “I dare say he *little imagined* they [Strachan’s statistics] would come to light in this country, where the truth is better known---but so the event has turned out, and, in the end, will do his party more harm, in the eyes of honest and good men, than all he has done besides will advantage it.” The Presbyterian correspondent accused Strachan of lying to the Imperial Parliament in order to favour his cause over that of his opponents: “But his dark plans have failed.”<sup>13</sup>

“A Scot” wrote to the *Canadian Freeman* to express his own amazement at Strachan’s actions. “O, Doctor, Doctor,” he asked, “when will your misrepresentations cease?”<sup>14</sup> “Vindex” suggested that Strachan’s chart confirmed the suspicious behaviour of the establishment and proved that Strachan visited London “with no friendly feelings towards christians [sic] in this province, not connected with the church of England.” Vindex concluded that Strachan must be held accountable and explain to the public whether he was “either *grossly ignorant* of the state of religion in this province, or that he has *willfully* misrepresented it. He is at liberty to take his choice.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it was clear

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<sup>12</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 29 September 1827.

<sup>13</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 October 1827.

<sup>14</sup> *Canadian Freeman* 6 October 1827.

<sup>15</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 25 October 1827.

to most observers that Strachan had willfully lied and ought to come clean and provide the truth. "Peter Poundtext" of Bytown wrote to the *Upper Canada Herald* attacking Strachan's chart, and in words written directly to Strachan he exclaimed that he was "anxious that in the next edition of your observations these errors may be corrected, in order that your veracity may be cleansed from the fond aspersions, with which it is at present best measured, by divers of the heterodox."<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, discord and discontent was widespread, and affected every strata of society. "A Farmer in the Home District" claimed that Strachan's true character and true motives had been "unveiled." A mounting number of inhabitants, he believed, thought Strachan had too much influence in civil governance and that such influence ought theretofore be limited.<sup>17</sup> "A Baptist" was appalled, and proposed that all denominations unite in petitioning the king for all religions to be put on an equal level in the province, including equality in funding given to churches according to their numbers. "This will be fair play," he believed, "and it will confirm the affections of his majesty's Canadian subjects to the British throne---whereas a contrary system will naturally tend to alienation."<sup>18</sup> By the end of 1827, public discontent was so widespread that one observer from the *Quebec Gazette* in Lower Canada concluded that Strachan's chart "has produced more newspaper discussion in both Provinces, than any other document which has ever been made public in Canada."<sup>19</sup>

To make matters worse for Strachan, he could not find comfort in old friends. Even the pro-establishment and ultra-sympathetic *Kingston Chronicle* could do nothing

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<sup>16</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 8 November 1827, reprinted from the *Upper Canada Herald*.

<sup>17</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 November 1827.

<sup>18</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 20 December 1827.

<sup>19</sup> *Quebec Gazette*, December 1827, reprinted in *Colonial Advocate*, 27 December 1827.

to sway public opinion on this matter. Although it did not place the blame directly on Strachan, it did suggest that all parties were to blame for the negative political climate and that both sides, including Strachan, were in the wrong.<sup>20</sup> Still, such a concession of guilt was a radical departure from previous propaganda emerging from the pro-executive newspapers. The *Colonial Advocate* picked up on this point immediately, reprinting the *Chronicle* editorial, and suggesting that it was “A manly stand taken by the Kingston Chronicle.”<sup>21</sup> Such a stand by the pro-establishment press led Mackenzie’s paper to suggest that Strachan’s chart would “do a great deal of good in the end—its unfairness, its privacy, its want of truth and manly candour, are acknowledged by all—we learn that even the archdeacon himself blushes and is ashamed and sorry for his misconduct—so much so that in his Loyalist he is perfectly silent and allows judgment to go against him by default.” Little could be done by the executive elite and its supporters, Mackenzie believed, to espouse propaganda which could “warp” the public mind.<sup>22</sup>

#### CHURCH, STATE, AND EDUCATION REVISITED

While the chart’s inaccuracies stirred the emotions of certain inhabitants of Upper Canada, its consequence, a university charter that gave exclusive powers of management to the Church of England, turned discontent into sheer resistance. With knowledge that the Charter was granted in light of inaccurate demographic evidence provided to the Imperial Parliament by Strachan, an aroused public increasingly raised objections to the legitimacy of the ruling elite. Previous scholarship has acknowledged public discontent concerning the religious nature of the university charter, but they have limited that

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<sup>20</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 19 October 1827, reprinted in *Colonial Advocate*, 25 October 1827.

<sup>21</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 25 October 1827.

<sup>22</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 25 October 1827.

discontent to a small group of reformers represented by an even smaller group in the House of Assembly that challenged and blocked the establishment of a university for many years through frequent attempts to relinquish its charter. It was not until the charter was rewritten and secularized in 1849, in fact, that the university finally began operating as a functional institution.<sup>23</sup>

To what extent did the print media debate, ignited by the exposition of Strachan's chart, affect the process toward the building of Upper Canada's first university? We know that although the charter was granted in 1827, progress in establishing the university was immediately halted due to dissatisfaction in the House of Assembly with its terms.<sup>24</sup> Evidence from the print media suggests that discontent was felt by a much broader population, including many conservatives themselves. As with the ecclesiastical chart, discontent concerning the university charter was expressed by radicals, moderates, and even pro-establishment inhabitants. To what extent was the political debate ignited, mediated, and cultivated through print culture? What can an analysis of print culture discourse concerning the university charter itself add to our understanding of educational discourse in this period?

The acrimonious discourse surrounding Strachan's ecclesiastical chart in 1827 soon developed into a broader discourse concerning the legitimacy of the university charter he acquired in England. Both the *Colonial Advocate* and the *Canadian Freeman* were fast in linking the infamous ecclesiastical chart with the granting of the university charter. Mackenzie was very direct in objecting to certain principles in the charter, including the following: that the lieutenant governors were to be perpetual chancellors;

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<sup>23</sup> For a detailed account about the making of the university in Upper Canada, see A.B. McKillop, *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 186-187*.

that the archdeacons of York were to be perpetual presidents; that the professors must take sign of the thirty-nine articles;<sup>25</sup> that the lieutenant governor was to have the sole appointment of professors; that Strachan, Maitland, and seven professors from the Church of England were to form the college council; that the council would have sole and entire control of the university, with the scholars and graduates having no voice; and that divinity students must “swallow” all the test oaths of the Church of England creed. Should “the people,” Mackenzie argued, “submit quietly and without a murmur to be priest-ridden in this fashion, if they will peaceably admit another tool of Doctor Strachan, they deserve to have the dungeons of the inquisition set up among them, priests familiars racks and all for the next half century.” Mackenzie emphasized that Strachan’s “misrepresentations” in his chart was a glaring piece of evidence pointing out the need for direct representation of Upper Canada in the Imperial Parliament. Reflecting a nineteenth-century conception of the constitution, which favoured greater powers for the elected branch, Mackenzie also questioned whether such charters could be given by the king to Upper Canada without the consent of the colonial legislature.<sup>26</sup>

The *Canadian Freeman* also quickly condemned the proposed university and its utility to the population of Upper Canada. The principles, the paper thought, were not to be established upon those of Upper Canadians generally, but “upon Dr. Strachan’s own principles.” The paper anticipated, when it “heard the Doctor had any thing to do with it,” that the university would be “a superstructure of prejudice, erected on a base of bigotry and intolerance—and if the graduates from it be turned loose upon society, with the same character and principles that have hitherto distinguished a majority of Dr.

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<sup>25</sup> Such a clause, in fact, did not exist in the charter, and so Mackenzie either misinterpreted it, or misled his readers on this point.

<sup>26</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 11 October 1827.

Strachan's pupils, it will, as we before remarked, prove a curse, instead of a blessing to the country."<sup>27</sup>

It was not the reform press alone that voiced concern over the proposed university. The more moderate *Gleaner* was equally furious with Strachan's design. The paper insisted that the university charter acquired by Strachan in England should not go unnoticed. That the university should be established, it thought, was a desirable objective; "but, that an Institution of this nature should be under the exclusive controul of any one religious denomination in this Colony is in our opinion highly objectionable; particularly as our population is composed of a great variety of religious sects who so long as they conduct themselves worthy of the character of British subjects, should be equally entitled to share all privileges and enjoy all the rights which are in the [midst?—*illegible*] of the Government Trust."<sup>28</sup> The newspaper saw "no reasonable answer" to the question of religious exclusivity. In a direct shot at the executive elite, the paper insisted that the guiding principles of the university appeared "to be grounded in those principles of narrow minded popery which have characterized too much the proceedings of several individuals interested in administering the more important duties of our provincial Legislature."

The tone of discontent among many inhabitants crossed the line of simple criticism into the realm of sheer anger. "Every Body" wrote to the *Colonial Advocate* to suggest that "Strachanism," as he called it, was "a bane and curse" to the future development of the province. In addition to calling Strachan a bigot, this inhabitant, believing to speak for the vast majority, argued that the "inevitable consequence" of

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<sup>27</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 11 October 1827.

<sup>28</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 22 October 1827.

executive control over education would be “inextinguishable discord and opposition.”<sup>29</sup> The political climate of Upper Canada was changing, he thought, and the general public would never agree to the measures of the charter. “A friend to civil and religious rights” agreed, and urged inhabitants to petition the king, who “is the most liberal of any generation,” for reform. Attuned to changes in the character of politics across the Atlantic, this inhabitant blasted Strachan for deceiving the “liberal” Imperial government.<sup>30</sup>

An inhabitant from Brockville believed that “every friend to good government & the prosperity of Canada” must lament “The Doctor’s College.”<sup>31</sup> The “exclusive disposition” which had lately been evidenced by “the high Church,” he believed, had manifested itself into a university charter which had produced the most “degrading” discourse in the press that Upper Canada had perhaps ever witnessed. The editor agreed: “Doctor Strachan’s famous Chart and his Episcopalian College has attracted the public so much that good part of a number of papers, in both *Provinces* have been filled up with strictures thereon, several of which we intend to lay before our readers from time to time which will save us much trouble in writing out our own ideas on the interesting matter contained in that famous Chart.” Although Mackenzie and the *Colonial Advocate* proclaimed “PERSECUTION,” and urged the “People of Upper Canada” to “rouse yourselves!,”<sup>32</sup> the editor of the *Gleaner* believed there was no need to persuade public

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<sup>29</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 8 November 1827.

<sup>30</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 8 November 1827.

<sup>31</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 19 November 1827.

<sup>32</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 20 December 1827.

opinion against the Charter; it was clear, the newspaper thought, that the public backlash was heavy handed enough.<sup>33</sup>

#### PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND THE POLITICAL DEBATE CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY CHARTER

How did Strachan and the colonial executive respond to the public backlash as manifested through the print media? Despite the clear backlash, on 22 December 1827, the *Upper Canada Gazette*, the government newspaper, printed a notice from the Government House, dated 17 December 1827, proclaiming the foundation of King's College. This notice marked the beginning of a long, bitter, and acrimonious political debate concerning the future of the colony, the nature of church and state in Upper Canada, and the rights of ordinary inhabitants to influence government legislation through the elected branch. The executive elite was willing to move forward with its plans despite the apparent opposition in the public arena. Notwithstanding such opposition, the governing elite continued with its plans and also announced that the council of the college would be composed of mainly establishment men, including Maitland, Strachan, and other members of the Executive Council. Only one House of Assembly member, John Beverly Robinson, a well-known member of the lieutenant governor's inner circle, was appointed to the college council.<sup>34</sup>

The executive did not seem to entirely ignore the public backlash. Beginning in the late fall of 1827, it increasingly used the government press to counter the backlash blanketing the other newspapers, including the *Kingston Chronicle*, a long-time supporter and proponent of the executive government. When the *Kingston Chronicle* printed

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<sup>33</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 19 November 1827.

<sup>34</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 22 December 1827.

communication blasting what it saw as the arrogance of the ruling executive, the *U.E. Loyalist* responded by printing communication from “A Hater of Hypocrites,” who himself blasted the *Kingston Chronicle* for perpetuating the “prejudice which ignorance and Malice are endeavouring to excite against the University which, through the patriotic zeal, and perseverance of Dr. Strachan, has been established in this favored Province.” It accused the *Kingston Chronicle* of betraying British feelings and not showing “a love of British Laws and Government.” The university, it argued, was an establishment calculated to disseminate principles and loyalty and attachment to the king and constitution. It regretted that such principles were being endeavored to be destroyed, and called upon “calm” inhabitants to support the university.<sup>35</sup>

When upon the opening of the legislature in January 1828 Lieutenant Governor Maitland announced the founding of King’s College, a clear divide between the Legislative Council and House of Assembly was quickly made evident. While the Legislative Council thanked the lieutenant governor for the endowment, the Assembly’s response on 21 January echoed public sentiment and warned that the university must be open to all inhabitants, and must be made free of religious influence if it were to be accepted by the representative branch of government.<sup>36</sup>

Almost immediately after the opening of the legislature in 1828, the House of Assembly began entertaining numerous petitions from inhabitants in all parts of the province inquiring into the principles upon which the University Charter was granted.<sup>37</sup> On 15 February 1828, Marshall Spring Bidwell moved for an address to the king in

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<sup>35</sup> *U.E. Loyalist*, 1 December 1827.

<sup>36</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 26 January 1828.

<sup>37</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 8 February 1828 to 3 March 1828. A total of 46 petitions signed by 5146 inhabitants were presented to the Assembly from 8 February 1828 to 3 March 1828. In *DHE* 1:230-244.

which the Assembly would formally inquire into the principles of the university charter. That session also saw the formation of a Select Committee, headed by Bidwell, which was authorized to inquire into the drafting of King's College Charter. Strachan himself was called down from the Legislative Council to appear before and answer questions from the Committee. The opinions formed in the public arena, it seems, obliged politicians to conduct inquiries in line with those expressed in the print media.

On 6 March 1828, Strachan was called to the floor of the Legislative Council and given the opportunity to speak and defend his chart and charter. On 19 April 1828, the *U.E. Loyalist* gave Strachan a broader public platform by printing his speech. The apology itself was later printed as a pamphlet.<sup>38</sup> Strachan expressed gratitude for being called to speak before the Legislative Council, as it gave him the chance to clear his "good name." He insisted that he had been harshly criticized, and was "exposed to much calumny and misrepresentations." Strachan also admitted that he had lost a good deal of popular support, and that his damaged name needed to be restored.<sup>39</sup> However, he neither backed down from his assertions concerning the religious character of the province, nor apologized to those offended. "We have been attacked on all sides, our exertions concealed, our success undervalued, and our actions misrepresented.—We have been charged with intolerance, selfishness, and bigotry; and we have refrained from vindicating ourselves, and preserved a silence, which some many have construed into an admission that the character and claims of our Church are indefensible."<sup>40</sup> Speaking as a victim rather than a perpetrator of wrongdoing, Strachan proposed an open public inquiry

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<sup>38</sup> *U.E. Loyalist*, 19 April to 17 May 1828; John Strachan, *A Speech of the Venerable John Strachan, D.D., Archdeacon of York, in the Legislative Council, Thursday Sixth March, 1828, on the Subject of the Clergy Reserves*. York: Robert Stanton, 1828.

<sup>39</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 13.

into the religious character of the province. In such an inquiry, he claimed, the Church of England in Upper Canada would be vindicated.<sup>41</sup>

Strachan also attacked the press itself for what he deemed “slander and persecution.”<sup>42</sup> While he admitted that he had made some errors in his famous chart, especially in reference to other denominations, he nevertheless suggested that his critics “have no just reason to complain, as they have never, to my knowledge, given any authentic account of themselves, and I gave the best within my reach.”<sup>43</sup> He regretted the public accusations of bigotry, and insisted that he had always treated every denomination with the utmost respect. The unfortunate conduct of the press, he believed, had resulted in public chaos. “The torch of discord has been kindled through the whole Province, and its tranquility disturbed.”<sup>44</sup>

On the subject of the university charter, Strachan said little, but he insisted that the university would be an open one and that “young men of every Christian denomination” were free to attend and receive the advantages of higher education. He did, however, insist that the university should not be secular. Foreshadowing his departure from political life, perhaps, Strachan boldly spoke of his accomplishments as a public figure: “I have been assiduously engaged as opportunities offered, in contributing to the formation of a system of Education for this Colony, which though still new in operation, contains the seeds of great perfection. The outline, by the Establishment of the University is now complete, but a strict superintendance [*sic*] will for many years be absolutely necessary. If therefore, I should not appear so often in my place, as my

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<sup>41</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 14-18.

<sup>42</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 22.

respect for the House would induce, I hope my absence will meet with a kind interpretation: not that I wish to be absent when my presence is deemed necessary, or, when the interests of Religion and Education are concerned.—But in other matters I confess that I feel less interest and may be well spared, as many of my Hon. Friends are far more competent than I, to discuss and decide upon questions of policy, and the general business of the Country.”<sup>45</sup>

Strachan’s apology seems to have done little to affect public sentiment. “The march of mind will progress in spite of the most high-handed Tories & bigotted Churchmen,” *The Gleaner* told its readers after reviewing Strachan’s speech.<sup>46</sup> The winds of reform, the paper thought, were too strong, and Strachan was simply not situated well enough to deal with the widespread concerns for change. “His Honor and Reverence advocates there the necessity of the connection of Church and State, as strong as was done in the Reign of our Elizabeth. The Doctor ought to take into consideration, that a great change has taken place in the minds of all the civilized world since that period—and that it is necessary (it will soon be absolutely necessary) that the laws and regulations of every country should be made to correspond with the liberal sentiments of the present enlightened age.” Strachan ought to catch up to the changes sweeping the Atlantic world, the newspaper thought: “The fact is undeniable—that the population of England are becoming more dissatisfied with the despotic mandates of the Established Church; and Dissenters from that Church are becoming more and more numerous every day.”

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<sup>45</sup> Strachan, *A Speech*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 28 April 1828.

A group of reformers believed that they were left with little to do but oppose the charter and appeal directly to the Imperial Parliament for redress. In the spring of 1828, the “Petition of Christians of all Denominations Against Doctor Strachan’s University Charter, Church Monopoly, &c. &c.” was drawn up. It was printed in virtually every newspaper throughout the colony. Roughly eight thousand signatures were secured to the petition.<sup>47</sup> The petition took direct aim at Strachan and the executive generally. The petitioners warned that an exclusive university would produce “alarm and jealousy” throughout the province, “and has in some measure already produced,” which would limit the benefits that might otherwise be derived from it. They proposed instead a university “adapted to the character and circumstances of the people,” and which “would be the means of inestimable benefits to this province. But to be of real service, the principles upon which it is established must be in union with the general sentiments of the people.” Public opinion had proven, these petitioners believed, that the charter, as it stood, did not express the general will. Because they could not affect change within the balance of powers in the colony, it was thus up to the Imperial Parliament, they thought, to rectify the injustices of an exclusive charter.

The Imperial Parliament responded. It immediately took up an inquiry into the chart and charter. The *Advocate* was but one paper that printed the proceedings of the Imperial Parliament on this subject. On 3 July 1828, it printed extracts from the Imperial Parliament concerning Strachan’s chart and on the Canadas generally. James Mackintosh, Member of the Imperial Parliament for Knaresborough, suggested that the principle of equality should be supreme: “Let the policy of the country be, to give to all classes equitable law and equal justice.” Edward Stanley “considered that the Legislative

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<sup>47</sup> Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, 175.

Council is that institution which especially required revision and alteration.” The foundation of politics in Upper Canada itself, he believed, ought to change. “In all instances they were opposed [by] the people, and were placed as a substitute [for] an Aristocracy, without possessing any of [the] qualifications of an Aristocracy, according [to] our notions of that body in England.” A consensus was brewing in the Imperial House of Commons in which the problems in the political culture of Upper Canada were attributed not simply to the conduct and character of one man, Strachan, but from the inability of the Upper Canadian legislature to uphold the true principles of the British Constitution.<sup>48</sup> The Upper Canadian political system, and its conceptions of the balance of powers within the constitution, that is, were not keeping pace with the changes in Britain.

#### “THE DAY OF RECKONING MAY COME:” POLITICS AND THE THOMAS APPLETON CASE

In 1828 fuel was added to the public fire that condemned an executive elite for misusing its power; this fuel was added with the rehashing of events surrounding the dismissal of Thomas Appleton in 1820.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the 1820s, Appleton had continued to maintain that he was unjustly relieved of his duties as common school teacher by the Church of England elite in 1820, which was determined to bring a church-state system of schooling to Upper Canada through the National Schools. Initially, Appleton’s pleading received little attention by House of Assembly members. After years of lobbying on the part of Appleton, however, the Assembly finally took up the matter in 1828 when it appointed a

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<sup>48</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 3 July 1828.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 4.

committee to report on the case of Appleton's firing.<sup>50</sup> The report concluded that Appleton was fired "without any reason," and "as a matter of regret." More striking to the Assembly was the evidence it found concerning the establishment of the aforementioned "national" school. Appleton placed considerable blame for the affair on Strachan, who, he claimed, had applied to the trustees of the common school at York on behalf of the lieutenant governor to obtain the school house for the use of Spragg, the National School teacher who had been sent from Britain. Strachan did this, Appleton claimed, "without consulting your Petitioner, or obtaining his consent to remove from the Common School House." The committee found that while the York trustees supported Appleton, Strachan and Maitland went ahead with plans anyway. When the trustees applied to the Board of Education to rectify the situation, however, they received no answer.

The committee brought forth various witnesses, including parents and trustees, to testify on the events surrounding the establishment of the National School. John Fenton testified "that it is the practice, from all he has seen and heard, that the District Board of Education gives the money to whom it pleases, and withholds it from others, as they think fit and proper." William P. Patrick, a trustee, saw no reason for Appleton being fired. David Morrison said that he did not know the cause of Appleton's dismissal, but he blamed Strachan for making an application in the name of the lieutenant governor "without his knowledge."<sup>51</sup> The committee inquiry was important in that it revealed to

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<sup>50</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 20 March 1828. The complete report can be found in *DHE* 1:245-246. It was also published in its entirety in a series of issues of the *Colonial Advocate* beginning on 31 July 1828.

<sup>51</sup> *DHE* 1:245-246.

the Assembly, and to inhabitants of Upper Canada at large, the arbitrary and unilateral actions of the executive elite.

The Assembly found that the “‘National School’ it appears has been supported out of the revenues of the Province without the knowledge and consent of Parliament and your Committee regret, that it would have been further supported to the injury of other Common Schools, which, notwithstanding the injustice they have received, have, from their usefulness and merit, met with public support.” Not only did the Assembly find the National School a matter of perplexing anxiety, but it also insisted that such a school represented the antithesis of the type of schooling that inhabitants of York, and Upper Canada generally, wanted. The money used to appropriate a teacher from England, and then to establish and operate the National School could have been better spent, they argued, had it been used for the support of numerous common schools throughout the province. Above all, the Assembly found the character of the school to be the most dissatisfying. “The ‘National School’ is founded upon the Reverend Dr. Bell’s system, and is professedly adherent to the Church of England—and, therefore, ought not to be supported by the revenues of a country struggling against ecclesiastical exclusion.”<sup>52</sup>

With the release of the committee’s findings, the Appleton Case became a highly publicized event stirring a politico-religious debate throughout the province linked to the conduct of Strachan in recent years and the future of church and state in Upper Canada. In addition to raising religious questions, the Appleton case surfaced concerns about the right of the executive elite to deal with the question of education unilaterally and independently of the House of Assembly. The Assembly entertained Appleton’s complaint on the grounds that the executive overstepped the Common School Act of

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<sup>52</sup> *DHE* 1:245.

1816, which did not give it unilateral decision making powers. Moreover, another objectionable feature presented itself in this case regarding one in which the House of Assembly had, on more than one occasion, strongly protested; and that was the appropriation of the revenues of the province by the executive without the knowledge and consent of the House of Assembly.<sup>53</sup>

The Assembly condemned the District Board of Education, which was then under the direction of the executive, and the heavy influence that Strachan had over that board. The Appleton case evoked a strong hostile feeling between the House of Assembly and Executive Council, which was intensified all the more by the knowledge of the events surrounding the granting of the university charter. Historian and former Assistant Superintendent of Education for Canada West, J. George Hodgins, argues that the Appleton Case “began a strife for supremacy between these two chief powers in the State, which was only ended, after years of conflict, in the passage of the Clergy Reserves Act of 1854, which abolished all semblance of connection between Church and State, and recognized the claims of each Church in Upper Canada to equal protection and the acknowledgment of an equal status, and of equal rights.”<sup>54</sup>

The *Colonial Advocate* immediately made the Appleton Case findings available to its readers.<sup>55</sup> Although the newspaper had advocated the expansion of schooling, it warned that the school system, controlled by a select elite, could potentially “become a powerful engine in the hands of a party or a faction, and be perverted to the worst and most dangerous purposes, to the destruction of civil and religious liberty, to the support

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<sup>53</sup> *DHE* 1:245.

<sup>54</sup> *DHE* 1:246

<sup>55</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 31 July 1828.

of bigotry, superstition, and arbitrary power.”<sup>56</sup> Some factions, it warned, “are too deeply impressed with a sense of its mighty power, as an engine of party,” and desire to draw the system “entirely into their own hands, and to wield and exert it for their own purposes.” The Appleton case, the *Colonial Advocate* argued, was an awakening to the dangerous consequences of centralized power in the executive.

By 14 August 1828, the *Colonial Advocate* made the report and evidence from the Appleton petition front page news. It placed the blame for Appleton’s firing squarely on Strachan’s shoulders. The investigation into the common schools in the early 1820s had revealed inconsistencies for which the newspaper thought Strachan alone needed to answer. “[I]t appears that in 1822, only 19 schools received £10 each, and the same number in 1820. Will the Venerable Doctor, or the Board, or the editor of the Loyalist, be pleased to favour the public with some history of the odd £30 a year, granted by the public, of which no account appears? Did the Doctor, or the board, squander that sum away in salaries to themselves or friends while Messrs. Stewart, Appleton, and others were unjustly deprived of their incomes?” Relentlessly, the *Colonial Advocate* continued its attack on Strachan’s character. “While the teacher of the central school, an institution scarcely known even in this country, feasts on luxuries afforded by an income out of the public purse, amounting to nearly \$2,000 a year, Mr. Appleton, Mr. Stewart, and other respectable and useful schoolmasters are denied the statutory pittance in aid of their school fees. Verily Doctor Strachan’s patronage hath been something beyond an empty boast of late years.—But the day of reckoning may come.”<sup>57</sup> The day of reckoning

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<sup>56</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 7 August 1828.

<sup>57</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 14 August 1828.

indeed seemed near, as Strachan's educational, political, and social influences were rapidly called into question in a heated public discourse.

#### RENEWED CALLS FOR SCHOOL EXPANSION

The discourse concerning Strachan's chart and charter, along with concerns about Appleton's firing, once again thrust educational discourse into the spotlight. School expansion generally continued to be a central discourse in both the legislature and the press in the late 1820s, and, fuelled by the discourse concerning hegemony of power in higher education, inhabitants began to espouse their views on improving the school system at all levels to make it more equitable. William Morris' resolutions in the House of Assembly in early 1827 epitomized this idea. Among his resolutions, Morris resolved that in a thinly inhabited country such as Upper Canada, "where the means of moral instruction to the poor are not easily obtained, it is the bounden duty of the Parliament to afford every assistance within its power, toward the support of education." He found the present provisions for the support of district and common schools to be inadequate to "the wants of the people" and thought that the Assembly should respond by extending education.<sup>58</sup> The editor of the pro-executive *U.E. Loyalist*, however, did not agree. "The Parliament has liberally afforded 'every assistance within its power to that desirable object,' and we regret that they should consider it necessary to censure themselves (tenacious as they are when censured by others) on such a subject. In every *District* a Public School is established, and respectably supported, and an allowance made for as many *Township* Schools, as Township may be able to support."

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<sup>58</sup> *U.E. Loyalist*, 20 January 1827.

The *Gore Gazette*, however, concurred with the message of school reformers. It believed that no subject “is more important for the legislature of the country than that of Public Education.”<sup>59</sup> “Public intelligence,” the *Gore Gazette* believed, was essential to the permanent existence of a liberal form of government, and constitutes the surest safeguard against the arbitrary means of power, on the one hand, and the “cajolery of the prejudiced or designing political adventure,” on the other. The *Gore Gazette* asserted that “The Provincial Legislature, with truly laudable *intentions*, have made appropriations upon several different occasions, for the encouragement of Education within this Province; and yet, we take it to be an irrefragable fact, that there is no country in which the English language is spoken, wherein the system of Public Education is *less* efficient. We speak particularly of the Common Schools of the country, with the condition of which we have had some opportunities of making ourselves acquainted.” The newspaper called for more “public attention” to schooling, which it regarded as necessary in order to truly reform the system.

A letter from “X. Y. Z.” on 24 March 1828 indicates that some inhabitants believed “public attention” toward common schooling was in fact very widespread. “The necessity of a good education, as well as the advantages resulting from it, are so obvious, and so generally acknowledged,” this inhabitant believed, “that nothing need be said on that part of the subject.” “X. Y. Z.” argued instead that good teachers were needed, and that they could only be attained by strong support and higher wages, making it more professional. Until “suitable encouragement is held out, and the proper compensation made, such men will never fill our schools in general.” “Such the teachers, such will be

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<sup>59</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 3 March 1827.

the scholars.”<sup>60</sup> He also blamed parents for only “occasionally” sending their children to school, and insisted that regular attendance was required for a successful system. Good teachers, plus proper attendance, could make the schools, he believed, meaningful social institutions. The editor of the *Gore Gazette* agreed. The newspaper begged for amendments to the existing laws on education. The editor of the *The Farmers’ Journal and Welland Canal Intelligencer*, a moderate newspaper intended primarily to serve agricultural and canal workers in the Niagara region, also shared those sentiments, and added that education ought to be encouraged among young women as well as men.<sup>61</sup>

In the late 1820s, inhabitants of Upper Canada continued to measure their own school system against those found in other regions. On 13 September 1827, the *Colonial Advocate* reported an important change that had taken place in the free schools of New York, which were to be converted into schools educating “the children of the rich as well as of the poor.”<sup>62</sup> The system of instruction in Upper Canada, it thought, “with all its numerous benefits, was still however susceptible of great improvement.” Echoing the sentiments of others, the newspaper suggested the need for better qualified, better paid, and more highly respected teachers. “The vocation of a teacher, *in its influence upon the characters and destinies of the rising and all future generations* has either not been sufficiently understood or duly estimated. It is or ought to be ranked among the learned professions.” Improving the teaching profession was increasingly a major theme among school advocates in the 1820s.

The pro-executive *Brockville Recorder* also believed in the need for school expansion, as did many of its readers. “Hibernicus” complained that the tuition fees in

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<sup>60</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 24 March 1827 and 21 April 1827.

<sup>61</sup> *The Farmers’ Journal and Welland Canal Intelligencer*, 26 September 1827.

<sup>62</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 13 September 1827.

the schools served to make the schools institutions for wealthier inhabitants, to the detriment of the poor. He insisted that a fairer system be put in place, one in which extra tuition would not be charged, and one in which all classes could be proud to send their children<sup>63</sup>

Support for school expansion, then, came from both reformers and conservatives, though certainly not all inhabitants of Upper Canada. “One of the Old School,” for example, claimed that the current system of education supported by government was sufficient for the province.<sup>64</sup> The condition of the schools were by no means as deplorable as many would suggest, he thought, and he questioned whether “if, in any country, the poorer classes of the community are better able to acquire instruction.” The legislature, he insisted, had “always directed an intense attention to the subject.” And, considering the various school acts and school discourses that had dominated the provincial legislature for many years, there was certainly some truth to his claim. Still, while “One of the Old School” did not believe that schooling needed to be expanded, he did agree that government ought to continue its role in providing and regulating the schools.

#### EDUCATION AND THE ASCENDANCY OF REFORM POLITICS

Perhaps he could not endure the scrutiny that his council was enduring, or perhaps he was left out to dry as an easy scapegoat. What is clear is that by 1828 Lieutenant Governor Maitland’s days in Upper Canada were numbered. Something, it seemed, had to give, and someone had to be held accountable for the discord that had aroused a fiery public

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<sup>63</sup> *Brockville Recorder* 8 July 1828.

<sup>64</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 18 January 1827.

discourse. To be sure, the winds of reform were clearly in the air for quite some time in Upper Canada. The first “anti-establishment” Assembly came to a close in 1828. Although governance was still centralized in the executive, what is certain is that in the years from 1824 to 1828, the House of Assembly asserted and acquired for itself an independent voice in government.

The winds of change were reflective of an international trend toward reform. By the late 1820s, the spirit of reform that had blown over the Atlantic for nearly half a century was awakening a consciousness that increasingly penetrated into the minds of Upper Canadians. The United States was a full-fledged republican democracy, and was in no danger of altering its political structure. France, although a monarchy once again, maintained many of the reforms introduced in the Revolution and Bonaparte years. Britain’s conceptions of governance, too, were changing. The new wave of constitutional liberalism had been reverberating across the Atlantic and into Upper Canada via the press for years, and the establishment of popular presses committed to reform within the province had only solidified the voice of reform in the province.

On 15 March 1828, with rumours of Maitland’s imminent departure, Mackenzie printed a speech at the fifth meeting of the Constitutional Society of Upper Canada, in which he himself decreed that the executive, whether it was willing to or not, would have to bow down to the public will. “The high character of the present ministry of Great Britain forbids me to doubt even for one moment,” he thought, “but that if General Maitland and his friends were removed, a government composed of men of business habits, and philanthropic patriotic characters would succeed.”<sup>65</sup> With such men

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<sup>65</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 15 March 1828.

committed to reform, he believed, reforms in education, public expenditures, justice, and the like, would certainly dominate the next wave of Upper Canadian political life.

The prospect of Maitland's departure from the province led many inhabitants to believe that a new era in politics was indeed on its way. Rumours of Maitland's departure circulated, and found a receptive audience. The *Canadian Freeman* was not as sure as Mackenzie in what type of lieutenant governor would thereafter be appointed by the Imperial Parliament, but it expressed joy at the "good news" that change was on its way. While it regretted that it did not know who would replace Maitland, it agreed that "A change is necessary—a *radical* change is loudly called for—but any change must turn out for the good of the people."<sup>66</sup> Under Maitland's administration, the newspaper argued, men "void of honour, principle, and talent," had nested. Such men, most notably Strachan, had "gained complete ascendancy over his Excellency," who abdicated his own responsibility to govern. Upper Canada, the newspaper thought, was in need of a lieutenant governor who could rule without the influence of the established elite. This theme was echoed by the *Montreal Herald*, which insisted that Strachan's power be curbed. Strachan was "all important in Upper Canada," it believed. Strachan "is generally reputed the Vice-Roy OVER THE GOVERNOR; and without doubt, is the leader of the Legislative Council. There is scarcely an institution in the province, civil, political, military, commercial, or ecclesiastical, in which his presence is not seen, and his power not felt."<sup>67</sup> The dismissal of Maitland, it suggested, would be tantamount to the dismissal of Strachan.

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<sup>66</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 15 May 1828.

<sup>67</sup> *Montreal Herald*, 30 January 1828, reprinted in *Colonial Advocate*, 16 May 1828.

The press' calls for change were supported in 1828 by a group of inhabitants who prepared a petition for the king asking for political reform. The result of Maitland's administration had resulted in the "practical irresponsibility of Executive Counsellors, and other official advisers of your Majesty's Representative, who have hitherto with impunity both disregarded the laws of the land, and despised the opinions of the public."<sup>68</sup>

The idea of change was reflected in the election results of 1828 that produced an even stronger majority of representatives committed to reform. The result of the County of York riding highlights the extent to which change was desired. Robert Baldwin, running in the riding, was a known anti-establishment man committed to the popular causes of reform. He lost the election in this riding in 1828, however, to the more radical Mackenzie, who was clearly not only an anti-establishment man, but a well-known radical. Although the *Canadian Freeman* expressed concern that Mackenzie himself was elected into office, it did declare "GLORIOUS NEWS!" in announcing the results of the general election. "It must be cheering to every lover of national freedom to see that public opinion has been roused from its former crouching position in this colony, and assumed an erect posture. In every corner of the Province, save York and Kingston, the people have put in their men, and the tools of the Executive have been swept before them like chaff before the wind!"<sup>69</sup> The policies of the present administration, it thought, had been to set public opinion at defiance, "and they will now have to abide the results. They

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in *Colonial Advocate*, 21 August, 1828.

<sup>69</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 31 July 1828. In reference to the riding at York not granted to a reform member, the newspaper is alluding to the return of John Beverley Robinson, a friend of the Compact. He was, no doubt, an esteemed public figure rewarded for his years of dedicated service to public life. Upon his retirement in 1829, however, it should be noted that Robert Baldwin was able to win his seat in a bi-election, reflecting, once again, the will of the electorate to send reform-minded members to the House of Assembly.

will now see whether an equitable and liberal policy was not better suited to the temper of the country.”

## CONCLUSION

By the end of 1828, political change had become a central theme in public discourse. In no small way had the controversy surrounding the ecclesiastical chart, the university charter, and the Appleton case, affected public sentiment. The shape and form of education in Upper Canada aroused passions and raised voices. The growth of the press and availability of print media had allowed many more inhabitants to become a part of the political discourse surrounding the future of educational development in the province.

With a new political atmosphere came new questions. The editor of the *Gore Gazette* thought it “abundantly obvious” that “nearly the whole of the newly elected members are persons avowedly hostile to the Government.” But it did not see any danger in this, as “the natural inference from this fact is, that the majority of the people entertain similar sentiments.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, it believed reforms “have long been obviously necessary.”<sup>71</sup> To what extent would a change in the political scene affect the development of schooling in Upper Canada? To what extent would public discourse continue to influence those developments?

Change was desired, and change, it seemed, was coming. In the Fall of 1828, the Imperial government replaced Lieutenant Governor Maitland with John Colborne. Colborne had served as a general in the War of 1812, and both the anti- and pro-establishment presses expressed their faith that Colborne would adopt liberal and

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<sup>70</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 30 August 1828.

<sup>71</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 4 October 1828.

conciliatory policies in line with the interests of the Upper Canadian population generally. Inhabitants of Upper Canada were also informed of an Imperial inquiry into the affairs of Upper Canada, and specifically into the complaints of the arbitrary power of the executive. The winds of reform had swept the Atlantic; how would such reform impact Upper Canada's educational development and the discourse surrounding it?

## CHAPTER 7

### EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE IN A TIME OF POLITICAL DISCORD, 1828-1830

“Glorious News!” exclaimed the *Colonial Advocate* on 25 September 1828. Word that Maitland had been replaced with Colborne suggested to the newspaper “that the exalted and liberal views of the great statesmen who first offered the blessing of a free constitution upon these provinces, are not as yet forgotten at home, however our official characters here may be inclined to trample them under foot.”<sup>1</sup> What would follow, the newspaper believed, was that Strachan’s “school of intolerance,” would be remodeled and established upon principles representative of broader public views in the colony.

Upper Canadian historiography has identified the replacement of Maitland with Colborne in 1828 as an important turning point in the political history of the province. With the Alien Question settled, and the emergence of a new lieutenant governor, it was hoped by a number of inhabitants “that Upper Canadians could now embark on the road to prosperity, united in their allegiance to the king and in their commitment to the development of a progressive North American community.”<sup>2</sup> With the fury over Strachan’s chart somewhat quelled, and a respite from denominational bitterness, the development of Upper Canada is seen as making a new point of departure in 1828.<sup>3</sup> This point of departure, Jane Errington argues, was not the hallmark of what some

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<sup>1</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 25 September 1828.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 186.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, 176.

contemporaries believed would be an era of “good feeling,” but rather “it really marked only the end of the beginning of serious political controversy in Upper Canada.”<sup>4</sup>

To what extent did this new point of departure in the political development of the province reflect a new point of departure in Upper Canada’s educational development? Historian J.D. Purdy suggests that from 1828 to the Rebellion of 1837, reformers maintained a constant assault upon Strachan’s educational design and were successful in preventing him from completing his school system.<sup>5</sup> Still, little remains known about the educational ideas of reformers within this period. The historiography generally begins an intensive analysis of reform ideas on education with a review of Charles Duncombe’s *Report Upon the Subject of Education* published in 1836. This report has characteristically been linked to grander ideas of radical reform in the province that led to the Rebellion of 1837, and the subsequent structural overhaul of Upper and Lower Canada, which set in motion the educational developments of the 1840s and beyond.<sup>6</sup> Seen in this light, Duncombe’s *Report* is itself considered a new point of departure in the educational development of Upper Canada. By tapping into the print media of the time, however, we can begin to reexamine this era and come to a better understanding of the educational ideas of reformers in the years that led up to the *Report* of 1836.

An analysis of print media to 1828 has suggested that reformers and conservatives shared many similar views upon the subject of education and the idea of creating a school system. Did the new political point of departure in 1828 for the province, then, alter the congruency of these ideas? With the rise of the reform movement and the increased involvement of anti-establishment men in official colonial politics, did conservatives

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 187.

<sup>5</sup> J.D. Purdy, “John Strachan’s Educational Policies,” 58.

<sup>6</sup> See especially, Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State*.

become hostile to the educational aspirations of their adversaries? What can we learn about the new dynamics in the political culture of Upper Canada and their relationships to the educational discourse found in the print media? The following two chapters consider these questions in an effort to link the print media discourse of the late 1820s and early 1830s to the educational developments of Upper Canada in subsequent years.

#### PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN AN AGE OF TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL CHANGE

The Report of the Select Committee of the British House of Commons was made available in Upper Canada in the fall of 1828.<sup>7</sup> The report concluded, as the reform press had been suggesting for several years, that the disputes in Upper Canada between the executive and the House of Assembly reflected the turmoil felt generally by inhabitants of the province.<sup>8</sup> It especially pinpointed the events surrounding the creation of the university charter as a catalyst for discord. It suggested that the charter, which “might have been drawn up hastily, and perhaps ill-advised,” should be remodeled. In a province where only the minority adhere to the dictates of the Church of England, the committee reported, “a suspicion and jealousy of religious interference would necessarily be created” with an ecclesiastical exclusive charter. The committee thus recommended changing the constitution of the university. It furthermore suggested establishing two permanent theological professorships, one of the Church of England and one of the Church of Scotland; but the president, other professors, and all others connected with the college, should have no religious requirement. Professors, however, should agree that when religion was taught, the “Christian faith” ought to guide the lessons. Both the

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, 195.

<sup>8</sup> “Report of the Select Committee on the Affairs of Upper Canada,” reprinted in *Kingston Chronicle*, 30 August 1828.

radical *Colonial Advocate* and pro-establishment *Kingston Chronicle* believed that the Imperial Report was “evidently drawn up with every wish to meet the wishes and conciliate the prejudices of the people generally.”<sup>9</sup>

The immediate reaction to the Imperial report and the anticipated political changes in Upper Canada, from both the reform and conservative presses and the broader public, was optimistic. Gerald Craig suggests that the report “was interpreted as a great blow to the oligarchy in each province, and as an ‘extraordinary document’ that promised much hope for the future.”<sup>10</sup> The reaction from some inhabitants seems to support this analysis. “Cincinnatus” wrote to the *Canadian Freeman* expressing his hope that with a new attitude from the Imperial Parliament, a new Assembly, and a new lieutenant governor, it was only a matter of time before a new executive council would be formed as well. “Sir John [Colborne] I trust, will ponder well on these things upon his arrival amongst us, before he involves himself with a council which might better be exchanged for another free from Clerical influence, and sympathizing more with the feelings of the people over whom he is appointed to preside.”<sup>11</sup> An inhabitant from Brockville also held faith that Colborne would “adopt the most liberal and conciliating line of policy to the country over which he is destined to preside—instructions, which we are informed, fully comport with his Excellency’s own feelings and principles.”<sup>12</sup> Even the pro-establishment *Kingston Chronicle* remarked that “We hope the reign of theory and declamation is near its close.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 30 August 1828. See also *Colonial Advocate* 25 September 1828 and 27 November 1828.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, 195.

<sup>11</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 23 October 1828.

<sup>12</sup> *Brockville Gazette*, 17 October 1828.

<sup>13</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 17 January 1829.

There was even reason to believe, some thought, that changes in British politics, which were witnessing a number of social, economic, and political reforms, would soon be transplanted to Upper Canada. News from George Ryerson, an agent in London for certain petitioners to the Imperial Parliament, confirmed such a view. In a letter addressed to Doctor Morrison, the Secretary of the reformist York Central Committee, which was reprinted for the *Colonial Advocate*, George Ryerson suggested that the British government wanted to promote the “true interests” of the colony as suggested by public discourse.<sup>14</sup> He found “Liberal” and “conciliatory” feelings in the British House of Commons. Reforms were sweeping Britain, George Ryerson observed, and so there was optimistic reason to believe that these reforms would permeate Upper Canada as well. Politics in Britain, he reported, were “above the mercenary selfishness, the illiberal and contracted views and crooked ways that we have been too much accustomed to see in some other countries. There is every thing in the Parliament and Government of Great Britain, that should inspire in us respect and confidence.” The *Kingston Chronicle* agreed: “let it [the Upper Canadian Legislature] meet the beneficent views of the British Government towards this country but half way,” the newspaper read, “and it will deserve the gratitude of the present and the admiration of succeeding generations.”<sup>15</sup>

The initial optimism surrounding Colborne’s arrival also marked optimism for a new era of educational development in Upper Canada. Public discourse surrounding the common schools had revealed a lamentable condition of schools that needed to be rectified. Colborne’s arrival seemed to suggest that the system of education in Upper Canada was going to receive the overhaul that had been advocated in the public arena

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<sup>14</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 4 December 1828.

<sup>15</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 17 January 1829.

throughout the 1820s. Indeed, in his first speech from the throne in 1829, he announced major changes. It seemed, then, that changes in the political development of the province brought with them the promise of changes in Upper Canada's educational development.

#### A 'NEW ERA' FOR SCHOOLING IN UPPER CANADA

The school system was clearly on Colborne's immediate agenda. "The Public Schools are generally increasing," he remarked in his first throne speech, "but their present organization appears susceptible of improvement." He promised measures to reform the York District School, which he would rename the Royal Grammar School, and incorporate it with the recently endowed university. In this sense, it would serve as a preparatory college along the lines of the grammar schools of England. Reflecting opinions formed in the public arena in the late 1820s concerning the teaching profession, Colborne also expressed his will that "Unceasing exertion should be made to attract able Masters to this Country, where the population bears no proportion to the number of Offices and employments, that must necessarily be held by men of education and acquirements, for the support of the Laws, and of your free Institutions."<sup>16</sup> Having satisfied both conservatives and reformers with his initial plans for education, both the Assembly and the Legislative Council responded favourably.

The tone in which each respective house responded to Colborne's speech, however, was very significant. The Assembly was excited to "direct our anxious attention to the state of the Public Schools, and consider what improvements, in the present imperfect and unsatisfactory system, are best calculated to open to the youth of this Province the means of receiving a liberal and extensive course of instruction[.]" The

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<sup>16</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 10 January 1829.

Assembly was happy that the lieutenant governor concurred in the view that the present state of education was in need of repair. The Legislative Council, however, was not so sure that the present state of education, which it had largely been the architect of, was lamentable. Nevertheless, and “Notwithstanding that Your Excellency considers the organization of the Public Schools susceptible of improvement,” it too agreed to take the issue of education under serious attention in that session.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps also an interesting commentary on the dichotomy of the legislature, and a sign of the times, that the Assembly members addressed themselves as the “Canadian people” while the Legislative Council preferred to use the term “Canadian subjects.”

Colborne’s first speech reflected the optimism in the press that the matter of education would be finally dealt with in accordance to general public sentiments as evidenced in the print media. The *Gore Gazette* of 17 January 1829 printed an elaborate article on education that reflected this optimism. Certainly, the newspaper remarked, “the common schools of the country—upon which a vast majority of the rising generation are solely dependant for their education—we know to be miserably defective.” The reasons for such a defective system, they argued, were numerous: unqualified and underpaid teachers; incompetent trustees superintending the schools; and an overall ill-advised foundational structure. Nevertheless, the system, the newspaper believed, could be remedied.<sup>18</sup> The newspaper suggested that the quality of common school teachers was the primary cause of schooling’s maladies. In Upper Canada, where the value of labour was high, the newspaper thought, respectable teachers could not be attracted as the

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<sup>17</sup> *Journals of the Legislative Council*, 14 January, 1829, 14-15; *Upper Canada Gazette*, 22 January 1829.

<sup>18</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 17 January 1829.

remuneration provided in the schools did not meet that provided in labourious occupations.

To remedy the situation, the newspaper offered three solutions. First, “a direct tax upon the people, the proceeds of which should be applied to a school fund, and to no other purpose.” Neighbouring New York had a successful tax, the newspaper thought, so why not Upper Canada? The second provision suggested was “the organization of a *competent* Board of Education in each District.” Third, “in lieu of the present common school trustees, superintendents should be appointed—say two for each township—whose duty it should be, to visit the schools in their respective townships, say once a month, to examine the teachers and the scholars, and to report thereon to the Board of Education, which board should be empowered, on the certificate of the superintendents, to pay the teachers’ salaries, and to remove such as are unfit to discharge their duties.”<sup>19</sup> With these recommendations, the newspaper offered the framework for a centralized, government inspected, universal system of education. With Colborne in power, the newspaper thought, the time had come to consider enlarging and expanding the system.

Still, school expansion and centralization raised some concerns. The *Niagara Gleaner* questioned the ability to pay for teachers, but suggested that whatever money was put into education, it ought to go to the teachers and not be consumed by a board of education “with salaries which ought to be parcelled out to those township schoolmasters who both more need and deserve it.”<sup>20</sup> With the realization that Strachan was receiving a wasteful salary as head of the board of education, the newspaper suggested that inhabitants would not support centralization. Upon the issue of funding, however, the

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<sup>19</sup> *Gore Gazette*, 17 January 1829.

<sup>20</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 23 January 1830.

*Gleaner* agreed with views found in the *Gore Gazette*. It firmly insisted that there was a clear “advantage of a public over a private education.”<sup>21</sup> The plan as it stood, allowing for a certain sum for each district, was no longer conducive to the educational needs of Upper Canadian inhabitants. Some districts, with numerous schools, had to spread the money out thinly, while the less populated districts could afford to equip the schools better. The newspaper called upon parents to contribute funds, in some form of taxation. “Much is said in every Parliament, respecting the education of our youth,” the newspaper wrote; however, “All that can be done will be of no avail unless parents are more interested in the education of their offspring.”

The members of the House of Assembly responded to the growing public sentiment as it was surfacing in the press. Education received a great deal of attention in the new House of Assembly in 1829. Mackenzie, who was one of the new members of this reform-dominated House, immediately brought up the topic of schooling. Within days of the opening of the legislature, he gave notice of a move for a Standing Committee on Education. A host of others took up the cause along with Mackenzie, and the House made clear their intention to take into consideration the state of education in the province.<sup>22</sup>

Among the educational issues occupying the attention of the House was the interminable debate concerning the proceeds of the Clergy Reserves. The majority of the Assembly agreed that such monies should be put toward the advancement of education in the province. After addressing the lieutenant governor with such an idea, Colborne

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<sup>21</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 23 January 1830.

<sup>22</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 14, 15, 16 January 1829, 10-13.

advised them that he concurred.<sup>23</sup> The Committee on Education continued its inquiries into education in the province throughout the session. Along with petitions from various inhabitants, such as those in support of the incorporation of the Grantham Academy in Niagara and public funding for its teachers, the committee requested documents and reports throughout the province for an extensive review of education.

Not to be outdone by the Assembly's meticulous review of education, the Executive Council itself undertook its own review of education, culminating in John Strachan's 1829 *Report from the President of the General Board of Education of Upper Canada*.<sup>24</sup> Strachan visited district and common schools throughout the province, examining both teaching and management in the schools. In several of the schools he found the attendance "thin and discouraging," but also noted that in many parts of the province "the business of instruction was well conducted and the system [was] such as to merit his approbation." Strachan admitted that he could not provide concrete numbers on attendance as many families sent their children to schools in rotation. He estimated that between 40 000 and 50 000 should be going to the schools, but that public money only provided for 10 000. As a result, Strachan admitted that increased funding, as many inhabitants had been demanding, was necessary. This was especially the case in the more populated districts, where "the salaries allowed to the Schoolmasters of the Common Schools are exceedingly small." The "natural consequence," he thought, was a decrease in the quality of instruction. The system was well constructed, he concluded, all that was needed was greater financial support. Moreover, government had "obligations" to provide this support, as both a matter of charity and duty.

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<sup>23</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*. 17 January 1829, 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> This report was presented to the Lieutenant Governor in on 5 February 1829, who thereafter forwarded a copy to the House of Assembly on 20 February 1829.

Despite agreement among the upper and lower branches of government that the schools required an infusion of support, they continued to have difficulty working out legislation together. Two months after the opening of what many considered a promising session for educational matters, Colborne prorogued what was becoming an unworkable house. With neither the Assembly nor the Legislative Council compromising in order to make the legislature work, Colborne expressed regret that the session would close without deliberations on “two subjects of primary importance—improvement of Public Schools, and the measures that should be adopted to ensure good Roads and safe Bridges throughout the Province.”<sup>25</sup> Issues of schooling and regional infrastructure would be delayed because of what seemed to be increasingly irreparable party politics. Still, the public discourse concerning the revamping of the school system had cemented itself as a central political discourse.

#### THE NEW EDUCATIONAL DEADLOCK? PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

The establishment of a new government certainly paved the way for a new era in the social, economic, and political life of the province, but the optimism that marked Colborne’s appointment soon dwindled as it became apparent to some reformers that the new lieutenant governor was not as enthusiastic about overhauling constitutional politics in Upper Canada as they were. Colborne quickly positioned himself within the established superstructure of politics in Upper Canada. This meant that he and his executive council were supreme. Moreover, the Executive Council itself was not altered

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<sup>25</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 20 March 1829.

when he took office; the members remained the same as those who served under the “expelled” Maitland.

Nevertheless, the deadlock in politics did not prevent reformers from using the power of print media to affect public discourse. In the autumn of 1829 Mackenzie continued to put education at the forefront of public discourse in his newspaper. On 17 September 1829, he devoted a section of the *Colonial Advocate* to the subject of education. In it, he pointed to the progress of education in both the United States and Germany. The *Colonial Advocate* reprinted statistics from the *New York Observer* showing that there was, “on an average, one student in college for every 2,000 inhabitants.” In the middle States, one for 4,000; and in the States south and west of Pennsylvania, one for every 6,000. Information from the *Boston Courier* newspaper showed that in Germany, “the lower orders of the German population are among the most favored in the world. It is said that the system employed throughout Austria for spreading instruction among the lower orders is attended with great success.” In each village, the paper told its readers, there are schools in which, unlike Upper Canada, the masters are paid in full by government. The result was a rising level of literacy combined with a decreasing level of crime.<sup>26</sup>

The *Advocate*'s readers responded to Mackenzie's provocative numbers. On 1 October 1829, “Tyro” praised the development of education as reported in the United States. “Some of the American papers literally overflow with notices of the approaching sessions of Schools, Colleges, Universities, Academies, and other literary institutions throughout the Union,” he noted.<sup>27</sup> Speaking in particular of one affordable college in

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<sup>26</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 17 September 1829.

<sup>27</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 October 1829.

Ohio, Tyro implored other Upper Canadian inhabitants to “compare this cheap and valuable institution on the banks of the Ohio, to which any farmer or mechanic may easily send a son without inconvenience to his means of living, with the gorgeous and costly education of an English University, unapproachable by the youth of Great Britain, unless the favoured few who riot in islets of wealth and grandeur in the midst of an ocean of national misery.” The United States offered a model for education in Upper Canada; but such a model, Tyro declared, could not be implemented in Upper Canada so long as Strachan remained at the helm of education. Colborne, he thought, “may allow himself to be flattered by executive councillors, judges, and senators,” but these were men “in whom this country has ceased to have confidence[.]” Too many inhabitants were, and would remain, he believed, opposed to Strachan and what he stood for. “[P]ublic opinion on this continent has declared itself opposed to clerical bigotry and courtly extravagance, and a *parental* government would best prove its character by taking heed to the signs of the times, for they are such as those who run may read.” It was time, Tyro thought, to reform Upper Canada. In doing so, a proper school system could be forged.

The newly established and conservative newspaper in Kingston, the *Patriot and Farmer's Monitor*, agreed with its reform counterparts and also argued that it was time to revamp education in order to bring Upper Canada's system in line with developments around the world. It suggested, in its first issue, that the province needed a system of “national education in which the poor will be equal participators with the rich.”<sup>28</sup> The editor of this newspaper, Thomas Dalton, promised to promote the expansion of education in his newspaper. The importance given to education by the popular press was reflected in his opening editorial. Addressing himself “To the Canadian Public,” Dalton

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<sup>28</sup> *Patriot and Farmer's Monitor*, 30 November 1829.

suggested that “Education is a matter of such high importance, such deep and intense interest to a free people that no pains or expense shall be spared to enrich these columns with every kind of information that can give light to the subject.”<sup>29</sup> In the United States, he stated, educational discourse had been all-engrossing and as a result, a universal system of education was created in where “the better instructed of the working classes” could meet in organized assemblies, to propound, discuss, and resolve issues of the day. Education enabled the lower ranks to participate in the political process. Such a system, he thought, ought to be fostered in Upper Canada. “A grand system of national education, in which the poor will be equal participators with the rich, is professed to be the object, and sanguinely expected to be the fruit, of this universal agitation.” It was his duty, he thought, to lay before his readers any piece of writing promoting this objective.

Writing to the *Colonial Advocate*, “A Canadian Farmer” applauded the editor of the *Patriot* for promoting common schooling. “Had it not been for the blessings of Education and the advantages derived from Common Schools,” he thought, “in how miserable a state would this continent have been at the present day!”<sup>30</sup> Education, however, was not useful unless it was spread to all inhabitants. Education was dangerous, in fact, “where it is in possession of a few, while [the] community is deprived of its choicest blessings. Such is the case at this day in some of the British Colonies.” Education, as established by Strachan, he sarcastically pointed out, was carried out “on a plan so very liberal that nine-tenths of the people will derive no advantage from it.” It was time to spread schooling to the masses.

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<sup>29</sup> *Patriot and Farmer's Monitor*, 12 October 1829.

<sup>30</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 3 November 1829.

This newspaper reader clearly did not have faith in the establishment, but neither had he any in the members of the House of Assembly. The Assembly, he cautioned other readers, should not be counted upon to promote measures reflective of public sentiment. The Assembly, he believed, was composed of self-interested men: “their war losses, and their peace losses, weigh heavier than their patriotism or love of country.” Were education more widely diffused throughout the province, however, “more faithful stewards & sentinels would be found, and more active and intelligent watchmen and aide-camps would be at hand to cheer them in the good work.” In a direct public outcry for reform, “A Canadian Farmer” asked “my dear fellow countrymen, is it not high time that something should be done in this province, in order that our offspring may be capable of vindicating their rights, maintaining their civil and religious privileges, and holding civil offices of trust, instead of being passive like wax in the hands of Doctor Strachan and other ambitious men of education from other countries, and whose wishers are not, as I and my neighbours think, after the good of society, but merely that a few may be taught to inherit the labours and industry of the youth of the colony as if we were so many slaves living in the West Indies.” It was time to take control of education, he thought, in order to take control of their destiny: “Parents, I address myself to you[.]” Education for the masses, he thought, would rescue Upper Canada from its elitist confinement.

“A Friend to Education” supported the idea of extending education to all inhabitants, and insisted that education, industry, and religious studies must be united in a system promoting the needs of the colony, within the colony. Even the best education attained abroad would not benefit the youth of the province, “If they must return and

spend their days in searching or preaching in the new settlements of Canada.”<sup>31</sup> Upper Canada, he thought, was in need of a practical, well-funded system of education adapted to the particular needs of the province. “A Friend to Union” concurred. He suggested that the “mechanics and the labouring class in Kingston unite in a school, on the plan adopted in Quebec, Montreal, and many other places” in order to receive the benefit of education at a moderate cost.<sup>32</sup>

“Balaam’s Ass” added to the discourse concerning a home-grown system when he lamented the absence of colleges in Upper Canada. He was convinced that too many Upper Canadian students were still going to school in the United States. Yet, by 1829 nothing had been done to reverse the trend. Balaam’s Ass, moreover, did not believe that schooling should be reserved for a privileged few. In remarks that were “intended as much for the government, as for the public,” he called Strachan and the established elite “Miserable drivellers!” in their endeavors for school reform. “Little can they appreciate the spirit of freemen, when they tell us we *shall* have neither colleges nor schools, but which as they approve of; and that our ministers and elders *shall* continue to wear the badge of inferiority, notwithstanding every effort of our houses of assembly on their behalf.”<sup>33</sup> While he could agree with men like Strachan on the necessity for a distinctly Upper Canadian system of schooling, he did not share in the elitist conception of schooling. Schools were needed, he firmly believed, for the masses.

“A Trustee of a District School” wrote into the Kingston Chronicle in the Fall of 1829 in order to add his thoughts into the public discourse. Believing that the general will favoured mass school expansion, “A Trustee” insisted that he “shall waste no time in

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<sup>31</sup> *Upper Canada Herald*, 25 February 1829.

<sup>32</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 28 February 1829.

<sup>33</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 3 December 1829.

expatiating upon the advantages of Education, or upon the necessity of some public provision for rendering those advantages generally accessible; because from the one there is no dissentient voice, and the other seems to be sufficiently recognized in the present direction of the public anxiety to the subject.”<sup>34</sup> The time was ripe, he thought, to advance schooling as “public men” were “more alive” than ever to the consideration of education. It only remains, however, that improvements “keep steadily in view the benefit of all classes of the community.” Education, he thought, ought to be made free and universal. The current system saw far too many of the lower classes using an overburdened common school system while the more wealthy could afford to send their children to private schools. The proposed establishment of Upper Canada College, he argued, was only another example of how government policies, as initiated from the executive, maintained a system that provided public funds to the rich. He furthermore identified low teachers’ salaries in the common schools as the primary cause for the inadequacy of common schools, and argued that better teachers were needed in order to create better schools. In sum, more money was needed, and it was only through an injection of public funds that this money could be made available to the schools.

“A Trustee” moreover reiterated concerns raised by the more conservative elements in the province concerning sending children abroad for education. He argued that more district schools were needed so that everyone could afford to send their children, including mechanics and farmers, without the expense of boarding their children.<sup>35</sup> He did not, however, see a “national” danger in sending children to the United States. For him, building more district schools in Upper Canada was a matter of

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<sup>34</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 10 October 1829, 31 October 1829, 7 November 1829, 21 November 1829, 5 December 1829, 19 December 1829.

<sup>35</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 November 1829.

extending equality, not identity. “If we are to remain a British colony, and God forbid that we should,” he stated, then surely sending children to the United States would not encourage the British identity. More importantly, however, Upper Canada ought to establish its own identity, which required a solid school system in which to foster a local identity. “It is probably the habit of *all* young countries,” he thought, “to make their national and political topics a more common and popular theme than is want to be the case in older governments.” The United States was successful in this, and he did not blame them for it. “They are right to train up *their* youth sedulously in the principles of their own peculiar polity.” It was up to the inhabitants of Upper Canada to now stake their own claim to national education. He thus advocated an elaborate system of education, with common and district schools made free and universal, and capped with a university. Universities were important, he believed, because they “contribute to the glory, the safety, the happiness of a nation.”<sup>36</sup> The universities, he contended, promote national unity and pave the way for an independent identity.

#### NEW POLITICAL RESPONSES TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The call for reforms to the existing system was not lost on the Upper Canadian elite in this new era of politics. In a pamphlet on the management of the district schools, Strachan admitted that the schools had been inadequate in accomplishing what they were set out to do, and especially in providing an adequate quality of instruction.<sup>37</sup> Strachan lay out five principles upon which the schools should be revamped, which echoed the public discourse from both conservatives and reformers in the late 1820s. First, the

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<sup>36</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 19 December 1829.

<sup>37</sup> John Strachan, *A Letter, To the Rev. A. N. Bethune, Rector of Cobourg, on the Management of Grammar Schools* (York: R. Stanton, 1829), 3-4.

system should be uniform throughout the province. Second, the schools should be preparatory for the university. Third, better teachers were needed. Fourth, better instructions to the trustees to make for better inspection was necessary. Fifth, the district schools should qualify students to “finish their education at an English University.”<sup>38</sup> Strachan also provided a new curricular framework in his pamphlet which heavily emphasized the classics, and had only two hours of mathematics per week. Nevertheless, he also stressed the need to make the schools such as to qualify students for the different professions in Upper Canada.<sup>39</sup> Strachan was no doubt determined to maintain a modicum of elitism in his model of schooling, but he was certainly also influenced by the public discourse that called for widespread regulations and better teachers. “The management of every well regulated School,” he concluded, “resolves itself into two great departments of Government and Instruction.”<sup>40</sup>

The *Christian Guardian*, a newspaper started in 1829 by the Methodists and headed by Egerton Ryerson, suspected that under the circumstances of a “deplorably inefficient” system of education, an entirely new conception of schooling was necessary. “[F]or the honor of the Government—for the credit of the public schools—for the sake of the youth in the Province, ought not some measures to be adopted to produce a reform in the District Schools, or supersede them by the establishment of other schools equally efficient—supported at a cheaper rate, and more vigilantly superintended.”<sup>41</sup> The *Upper Canada Herald* concurred, and called for more school divisions in the towns to make schooling accessible to more inhabitants. Why, the newspaper asked, should only a few

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<sup>38</sup> Strachan, *Management of Grammar Schools*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Strachan, *Management of Grammar Schools*, 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Strachan, *Management of Grammar Schools*, 10,

<sup>41</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 12 February 1831.

“reap the benefit of public money” when schooling could be made more accessible?<sup>42</sup>

Schooling should and could, it thought, be expanded. Thus while Strachan was seeking to find a balance between the aspirations of conservatives and reformers, other voices were calling for a completely new conception of schooling altogether.

Despite his new tone of moderation, by the summer of 1829 John Strachan was well aware that his public image had been not only tarnished, but close to destroyed. It was evident that he had lost the confidence of the Imperial Parliament, as its report on Upper Canada had made clear. His ecclesiastical chart had opened the door to an Imperial Parliamentary inquiry into the political affairs of Upper Canada, and member upon member expressed shock at the “misrepresentations” found in that chart. In an effort to defend his reputation and clear his name, Strachan wrote an open letter to Lord Sandon, Member of the Imperial Parliament for Tiverton.<sup>43</sup> Strachan was clearly tired of the abuse he had received via the Upper Canadian media, and his lethargy showed in the Fall of 1829 after another attack from the editor of the *Upper Canada Herald* prompted Strachan to beg for an end to the abuse. “[Y]ou have identified yourself with the incorrect statements furnished you from the Colony,” Strachan wrote to the *Herald*, “and made yourself a party in the personal slander and abuse, with which your correspondents here have endeavoured to overwhelm me.”<sup>44</sup> The chart’s inaccuracies had been greatly exaggerated, he argued, and closer examination would reveal that he had not acted in the bad faith that the media had projected.

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<sup>42</sup> *Upper Canada Herald*, 21 December 1831.

<sup>43</sup> “Archdeacon Strachan’s Letter, From the London Standard,” reprinted in the *Kingston Chronicle*, 1 August 1829.

<sup>44</sup> *Upper Canada Herald*, 9 December 1829.

Strachan's character remained tainted in reformers' eyes by his continued commitment to the idea of a church establishment in Upper Canada. In an elaborate pamphlet on the subject in 1830, Strachan insisted that the Church of England be set upon a stronger foundation. Although he was aware of his unpopularity and was "not insensible to the disadvantage attending my undertaking the present temper of the times," he believed he must support "religious establishments" for the good of the province.<sup>45</sup> For good or bad, Strachan believed he could not back down on this fundamental belief, and he portrayed himself as a pastor concerned about the salvation of the population. Nevertheless, his pamphlet reeked of elitism, as he claimed that it was for the Loyalists, and not the rising number of "other emigrants" who "have no attachment to our Civil and Religious Institutions," and who "were never invited," that the connection between church and state should be maintained.<sup>46</sup> All others, he insisted, who had come into the Province without attachment to "Civil and Religious" British institutions, by which he meant non-members of the Church of England, should accept that Upper Canada was a British colony with an established church. They had no claim, he insisted, "to have any of our Institutions changed, because they may prefer others, which are not congenial to our form of Government."<sup>47</sup> His words, however, did not strike a favourable chord with, nor did it seem logical to, the great number of those born in Upper Canada without attachment to the Church of England. In this sense, Strachan was becoming detached

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<sup>45</sup> John Strachan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Thomas Frankland Lewis, M. P.* (York: R. Stanton, 1830), 3-4. Strachan expressed similar sentiments in two other pamphlets, *A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.D., Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, on the Life and Character of the Right Reverend Dr. Hobart, Bishop of New-York, North America* (New York: Swords, Stanford, and Co., 1832), and *Church Fellowship: A Sermon Preached on Wednesday, September 5, 1832, at the Visitation of the Honorable [sic] and Right Rev. Charles James, Lord Bishop of Quebec* (York: Robert Stanton, 1832).

<sup>46</sup> Strachan, *Letter to Lewis*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Strachan, *Letter to Lewis*, 9.

from a growing number of new conservative voices that were espousing conceptions of greater equality among religions and classes.

Although Strachan's position in relation to that of the Church of Scotland was more accommodating, the other protestant denominations made it clear that either of the churches' claims to religious establishment, and thus to the rich Clergy reserves, were "equally unfounded and unjust."<sup>48</sup> Ryerson, who had proved a successful writer and powerful voice in the public forum, continued to be the most outspoken through editorials in the *Christian Guardian*. In an editorial on civil authority and education, Ryerson argued that Upper Canada was at the inauguration of its national existence, and thus needed to abandon old conceptions of religious division. "The present is a most eventful period to the religious and civil interests of this interesting and important portion of the British Empire. The nature of our depending relations—the principles of our foreign intercourse—the complexion of our internal regulations—and the aspect of our literary and religious institutions, are about taking the hue of a permanent character[.]"<sup>49</sup> The foundation of civil governance in Upper Canada should be the principles of Christian morality, he thought. This was a non-sectarian Christian morality, however, from which Ryerson believed every member of society was protected equally. It was the duty of government to provide a good and just form of governance, and in turn they would receive "obedience to the properly constituted authorities."

Governance and education went hand in hand, Ryerson insisted, and education must be considered as the highest importance to the comforts of life, the suppression of

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<sup>48</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 26 December 1829.

<sup>49</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 21 November 1829.

evil, “and the stability of Good Government.”<sup>50</sup> In this light, it was essential that education be available to “the poor as well as the rich,” and Ryerson was convinced that the present government remain committed to educational expansion. Making education available to all classes also meant freeing it from sectarian divisions, he thought. Ryerson was certain that a common, secular system of education would abolish religious indifference. The Clergy Reserves should be sold, “and a fund formed from their proceeds to support a general system of education free from all religious tests and disabilities; that Colleges, open to all denominations, may be endowed on the same principles.”<sup>51</sup> Should the government adopt such a policy, Ryerson was sure, “it would bring blessings incalculable to the cottage of every poor man in the community—it would banish religious feuds and animosities, and in their place excite a praise worthy and holy emulation between Christians of different opinions.”

## CONCLUSION

As Upper Canada approached the 1830s, a new era in its political and cultural existence was dawning. Reformers and conservatives were divided, but in the print media they both supported the idea of school expansion and the need to extend education to the masses. Strachan was detaching from this congruency of ideas, and for many Upper Canadian inhabitants he came to represent a past from which the colony was breaking.

The ideas surrounding a fully-funded school system were emerging as a congruent discourse in the print media. Money collected by all inhabitants, and set aside for the purpose of education, was an idea increasingly promoted by both conservatives

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<sup>50</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 21 November 1829.

<sup>51</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 26 December 1829.

and reformers alike. Although divided politically on the question of education, public discourse in Upper Canada suggested that government should take a more active role, and that education should be made universally accessible to every child.

In this sense, the divide between reformers and conservatives in the political development of the province was not reflected in the discourse concerning the educational development of the province. Still, reformers and conservatives in the provincial legislature were finding it difficult to work together in the legislature, and thus drawing up new and effective educational legislation posed a real challenge. The next chapter will continue an analysis of print media after the watershed political changes of 1828 and will consider the effectiveness of the new lieutenant governor in stabilizing the political and public discourses as Upper Canadians entered what would be the most tumultuous decade of the colony's existence.

## CHAPTER 8

### TOWARD MASS UNIVERSAL SCHOOLING: REFORMERS, CONSERVATIVES, AND SOCIETAL REORGANIZATION IN THE AGE OF MOVABLE TYPE, 1830-1832

By 1830, Upper Canada was being transformed. Socially, politically, and economically, the province was more divided in opinion than it had ever been. Yet, despite the divisions, there was considerable optimism expressed for Upper Canada's future in the popular press. Much of this optimism stemmed from a widespread public discourse concerning the types of social institutions, including universally accessible schools, that provided a unifying force in the colony. Still, Upper Canada's political climate was unstable for the established elite. A divided legislature and a radical faction in the House of Assembly seemingly bent upon opposing the Legislative and Executive Councils, upon principle, threatened the hegemony of conservatism in Upper Canada and the ideal future of the colony as they saw it.

John Colborne tried to stabilize the political climate when he dissolved the legislature and called for new elections in 1830. The election results indicated that the electorate was not in favour of radical change, and that year it sent more conservatives to the House of Assembly than it did in either of the previous two elections. Yet, it was clear that conservatives in Upper Canada had a new tone of moderation and reconciliation, and that they were indeed open to the ideas of reformers. The discourse on schooling, for example, suggested that conservatives and reformers could find

common ground on a number of ideological principles that could otherwise pit them against each other. The radical reform press, for its part, made sure that radical debate continued. “It is well known,” Francis Collins of the *Canadian Freeman* wrote, “that the people of this colony have been gulled, their best interests neglected, and their fair prospects blighted, since the very foundation of the colony, from the prevalence of corruption in the Executive department.”<sup>1</sup>

The 1830s represented a decade of turbulent political discord between reformers and conservatives and a political climate that was stabilized only after the threat of widespread revolution ceased in 1839. But the trends were clear earlier than that. Upper Canada was moving in the direction of political reform by the late 1820s. As Upper Canada entered the 1830s, it was evident that the divide between conservatives and reformers was very deep, and, thanks to print media, the bruises were very much exposed. Was this turbulent political discourse, however, reflected in matters of education? The evidence from the print media immediately after the changes of 1828 suggests that the divide in the political arena was not necessarily reflective of a divide in popular opinions concerning schooling. Did the divide among politicians, however, change the tone of educational discourse in the 1830s?

The rise of reformers and their resistance to the established political elite in the 1830s has generally been projected onto educational issues in the writing of Upper Canadian history. That is, reformers are generally considered hostile to educational measures proposed by the established elite, and they are portrayed as a faction that was unilaterally working toward the creation of a new system of schooling in Upper Canada. While conservatives remained adamant about completing a school system that promoted

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<sup>1</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 6 January 1831.

the values and attitudes conducive to maintaining British social and political heritages, the central focus of reformers in this period became the necessity to reorganize society and establish a new political state. Reformers therefore became concerned with creating subjects in the schools who were capable of being governed, and able to govern themselves, in this new society. The condition of the colony was increasingly tied by reformers to the education, or lack of it, of the people of Upper Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Were the educational ideas of conservatives and reformers in the 1830s diametrically opposed? Evidence from the print media up to 1830 suggests that they were not. Did Duncombe's and the reformers' 1836 *Report Upon the Subject of Education* change the tone and come to represent a new point of departure for reformist ideas on education? What can tapping into the print media discourse tell us about the lead-up to that report, and the extent to which the educational ideas of reformers became irreconcilable—if indeed they did—with those of conservatives? Moreover, did reformers themselves have a unilateral outlook on the shape and scope of schooling in Upper Canada?

This chapter will consider these questions through a continued analysis of the overlooked print media discourse on education. It will also focus on a key overlooked document on education: William Lyon Mackenzie's 1830 pamphlet, *Catechism of Education*. Considering the extent to which Mackenzie is considered a central figure in the societal reorganization of the Canadas in the 1830s, this document should illuminate the educational ideas of reformers prior to the rebellious radicalism of the middle and late 1830s. This chapter will also examine the educational writings of Egerton Ryerson as put

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian State" and *Building the Educational State*; Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 100.

forth in the editorials of the *Christian Guardian* in the early years of the 1830s.

Considering the extent to which Ryerson is seen as a central figure in the development of the school system in the mid-nineteenth century, Ryerson's early writings on education broaden our understanding of the roots of a universal school system in Upper Canada.

#### MACKENZIE'S CATECHISM

On 24 December 1829, Mackenzie began publishing extracts of writings on education entitled *Catechism of Education* in the *Colonial Advocate*. It was published in pamphlet form in 1830.<sup>3</sup> The pamphlet is a watershed document in the history of education in Upper Canada that has previously not received attention from educational scholars. In it, Mackenzie published the first detailed model of education based upon reformist values. The pamphlet itself reflected the growing discourse concerning the expansion of schooling to the masses, the need for free schooling, and the idea that schooling itself could be instrumental in creating an equal society. Mackenzie, among others of course, had already been espousing such notions in the press from his newspaper's first issue in 1824. With the *Catechism*, however, Mackenzie attempted to express not only his ideas for schooling, but more generally to link these fundamental principles to his political ideas concerning the foundations of a new society.

The pamphlet itself was based upon Joseph Hume's "Essay on Education" which had earlier appeared in Britain. The pamphlet opened as a very abstract and vague philosophical discourse concerning the nature of education. Quoting heavily from Adam Smith, John Locke, William Paley, and John Stuart Mill, the pamphlet reeked of the Enlightenment values that had permeated British culture since the seventeenth century.

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<sup>3</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education. Part First* (York: Colonial Advocate Press, 1830).

Borrowing ideas from enlightenment thinkers, the “individual,” Mackenzie thought, was to be made an instrument of happiness through education.<sup>4</sup> Mackenzie also emphasized the connection between a highly educated populace and the success of the nation.<sup>5</sup> For Mackenzie, as for other reformers, efforts in education were efforts in nation building. In a system of education for the colony, Mackenzie found the potential to shape a new generation with the values and morals conducive to consolidating a national character for Upper Canada.

Mackenzie’s pamphlet did not remain vague and philosophical, but in fact laid out some concrete applications for transforming schooling in Upper Canada. Paramount to Mackenzie’s ideas was that schooling should be free and universal. Although he conceded that only a certain “class of society” would “have wealth and time for the acquisition of the highest measure of intelligence,” he advocated the extension of schooling to apprentices, mechanics, labourers, and others who were not able out of their own means to acquire it.<sup>6</sup> This would mean rethinking the very foundation of the school system. Fashioning Upper Canada’s schools after “old and opulent establishments for Education in Europe” would prove “far less useful” than following the more accessible American model, and would serve only to instill subordination to whomever held political power.<sup>7</sup> Borrowing from the discussion on “National Free Schools” that was taking place in the United States Congress, Mackenzie argued that the expansion of free schooling in Upper Canada would see representative power extended.<sup>8</sup> “Until lately,” he argued, “it was denied, that *intelligence* was a desirable quality in the great body of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 4-6.

<sup>5</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 24-46.

<sup>7</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 32, 36-40.

<sup>8</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 35.

people.”<sup>9</sup> But make no doubt, he insisted, it was desirable: “if Education be to communicate the art of happiness; and if Intelligence consist of knowledge and sagacity; the question whether the people should be Educated, is the same with the question whether they should be happy or miserable.”<sup>10</sup>

Mackenzie’s pamphlet provided a sort of manifesto, calling for “a judicious system of *National Free Schools*” in which both government and “the people” would be served. The “beneficial effects” attending such a system, he insisted, were incalculable: “Additional stability would be given to free institutions; the sum of public and private happiness would be greatly increased; the power of the people extended; crime diminished; an inviolable respect for the laws maintained; and a constitutional vigilance more increasingly exercised, against all encroachments upon national or individual rights.”<sup>11</sup> Mackenzie provided a counter-model of education to that advocated by Strachan and the elite, designed upon reform principles in which a sense of egalitarianism, meritocracy, and democracy would be introduced into Upper Canada. The consequences of having an elite model of education in the hands of the establishment, Mackenzie thought, were too devastating on that part of the population not able to afford schooling: “They are trained generally to habits of servility and toleration of arbitrary power, in as far as precept and example can influence their minds.”<sup>12</sup> By expanding education, however, and by allowing a greater number to “obtain those keys of useful knowledge, the faculties of reading and writing,” then “they are prevented from becoming instruments of evil, and enabled to form a just and correct estimate of their

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<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 36-38.

own situation, and of the conduct and character of the government under which they live.”<sup>13</sup> Education, he thought, was the best means by which to counter the arbitrary power of executive rulers in Upper Canada. In this sense, Mackenzie’s pamphlet stressed schooling’s potential to liberate those ruled from the constraints of societal organization, rather than government’s potential to control society.

Mackenzie’s pamphlet was well-received by certain inhabitants. “W.C.” believed that the infrastructure for schooling was indeed the root from which all other social infrastructure could be developed. “We may go on improving in canals and roads; form bible societies and Sunday schools; our clergy may increase yearly,” he noted, “but unless we have a firm basis laid of intelligence, morality, and virtue, we build but upon a sandy foundation.”<sup>14</sup> The expansion of government-aided schooling, he thought, should be made the priority in order to lay the foundations for a stable and progressive social and economic structure.

The editor of the moderate *Gleaner* believed that Mackenzie’s *Catechism* was one of the best articulations of the province’s educational needs in recent years. Although a long time critic of Mackenzie and his political views, the newspaper hoped that the pamphlet be met with a “favourable reception” among the political elite, but feared that it would not. Although optimistic about the direction of government-aided schooling, the newspaper was still pessimistic of the ability to effect change in the present political climate.<sup>15</sup>

A “Gentleman in the Eastern District” responded to Mackenzie’s *Catechism* in a letter entitled “The Importance of Education to the Farmers and Mechanics of Upper

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<sup>13</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 38-40.

<sup>14</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 7 January 1830.

<sup>15</sup> *The Gleaner, and Niagara Newspaper*, 24 April 1830.

Canada” printed in the *Colonial Advocate* on 9 August 1832. The “Gentleman” was happy that Mackenzie was against making “a monopoly of knowledge,” and expressed the benefits of the ideas he saw in the pamphlet, and especially that of educating the poor. He concurred that education in Upper Canada could be made stronger through certain measures including the regulation of the teaching profession through annual examinations of teachers, and compulsory education. He expressed his faith that education could uplift inhabitants from ignorance and poverty, which he saw as two sides of the same coin, and, by extension, from oppression. He called upon government to act quickly in order to develop a more favourable school bill. He believed that inhabitants of Upper Canada were waiting for such a system. “Some are (very unjustly) censuring the illiterate for not having an appetite for education,” he thought, “but how can such have a relish for a thing they never tasted[?]” Education, he insisted, “is a successful weapon in the hands of others;” it was time, he thought, that education move beyond the realm of the elite into an expanded system of schooling for a broader population.<sup>16</sup>

#### EGERTON RYERSON’S EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

Mackenzie was not the only reformer in the possession of a printing press with which to spread educational ideas. Egerton Ryerson, editor of the Methodist *Christian Guardian*, believed that no topic was more important for the executive government to consider than that of education. From its onset, the *Christian Guardian* was used as a vehicle to express the educational ideas of Methodists in general, but its editor in particular. As Ryerson saw it, education was an especially important topic of public interest in Upper Canada because the colony’s existing system was ideologically driven by intolerance and

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<sup>16</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 9 August 1832.

elitism. “Those literary and ecclesiastical fabrics that were reared in the days of superstition and selfishness, still bear the unseemly marks of their bigoted origin.”<sup>17</sup> Maintaining such a hierarchical system of education in Upper Canada, he thought, would place the colony at the stub of the world. “If the *foundation* be not based upon the ‘chief corner stone’ of public *expedience* and *utility*,” Ryerson insisted, “expenditure lavished upon the superstructure is worse than *useless*, if not *criminal*, prodigality. We go not to the infancy of modern kingdoms to learn the wisest maxims of state policy—we go not to the infant ages of modern literature to become acquainted with the sciences—nor should we go to literary institutions established in ages of bigotry and exclusion, for exemplars of those that may be established in this Province.” In a word, Ryerson called for a renovation of education in Upper Canada.

Upper Canada’s system of schooling, Ryerson advanced, needed to be remade. The existing system was not favourable to the peculiar economic and social conditions of the province. Upper Canada, although a colony within the British Empire, was on the verge of laying the foundations of a new society. “What may suit one age and one country, may not suit another age and another country. What may be adapted to the circumstances of the parent, may not be adapted to the circumstances of the child. What may be very suitable to an older and more wealthy branch of a family, may be very unsuitable to a younger and poorer branch of the same family. Hence then as the literary events of this Province arise from the local circumstances of its inhabitants, it must be by a reference to those local circumstances, that a suitable and adequate relief can be

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<sup>17</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 16 January 1830.

imparted.”<sup>18</sup> His remarks, he made clear, “lay the foundation for the principal position we [the Methodists] would assume in reference to a judicious system of education in this Province.” Two things in particular, he argued, were necessary: “1. It should be popular; 2. It should not countenance any sectarian exclusion or supremacy.” Schools “must,” he insisted, “receive the approbation of public sentiment or they will not receive the support of public patronage. They should therefore be popular. In order to this, they should be free from all *sectarian supremacy and exclusion*.” Ryerson argued that sectarian discord had brought about turmoil in the parent country that Upper Canada should be set apart from. Most importantly, he insisted that the system be a public one. By public, Ryerson made clear that he meant popular schools available to, and supported by, all.

The separation of church and state was a pivotal part of Ryerson’s plans. It was on this point that his ideal system hinged. No value was dearer to the inhabitants of Upper Canada, he believed, and certainly the turmoil over the University Charter had proven as much. Moreover, the winds of change sweeping the Atlantic world, he argued, demanded a clear separation of church and state. “Hence then while the Government of Great Britain is steadily and firmly advancing towards recognizing the principles of general emancipation: and while we are informed on good authority, that His *Majesty* King George the Fourth is the *primum mobile* of these improving changes; we are also assured by His Excellency from the Throne, that it is “the earnest desire of his Majesty—to *guard* this colony against evils that have to be remedied in the Mother Country—‘that

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<sup>18</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 16 January 1830. This very idea made its way into the Duncombe Report on Education in 1835, p. 19: “Hence, *now*, whatever may have been the state of things heretofore, it is criminal to acquire knowledge merely for the sake of knowledge—The man must be disciplined and furnished according to the duties that lie before him.”

this portion of his dominions should reap the full benefit of good Laws and FREE INSTITUTIONS.” Inhabitants of Upper Canada, he suggested, had made clear their will for reform. “In this his Majesty and his faithful subjects have the inhabitants of Canada so fully and so warmly expressed their opinion and wishes, both at the fireside, at the Hustings, in petitions to the Provincial and Imperial Legislatures, in and out of Parliament, as they have on the subjects of *Education and Religion*: and on every occasion the united cry has been, let us ‘enjoy the FULL benefit of FREE Institutions.’ If therefore, they do not enjoy it, the fault cannot, according to his Excellency’s statement, lie with his Majesty—nor can it lie with the people of this country; the blame must lie elsewhere—it must lie at the door of those who have gotten up a University Charter, that his Excellency gives us to understand, ought to be ‘revised.’”<sup>19</sup> In sum, church and state must be separated in a properly established school system that was universal and free. Without such a foundation the system would not reflect public discourse, and thus would not receive popular support.

Ryerson’s conception of education centred on the idea that the system be designed, legislated, and controlled by “the people” within the colony itself. Who, Ryerson asked, were the most proper persons to plan and establish these “free institutions?” To determine this, he insisted, “no candid person can scarcely be at a loss. It should be constitutionally the people themselves.” On this point he insisted that Upper Canada legislate for itself a school design. “It may be said, that our Legislators are not so wise, and learned as those of the Mother Country. This is granted, but can a learned philosopher, or a profound statesman, the other side of the Atlantic, be as well acquainted with the local wants, local circumstances, local wishes of the inhabitants of this country,

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<sup>19</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 16 January 1830.

as even a common Canadian farmer, who knows them from *individual* experience and *personal* observation?" Ryerson thought not. For too long Upper Canada had been at the mercy of the parent state; Ryerson offered a clean break. "A contrary course of proceeding would, in our opinion, blast the brightening prospects of one of the fairest portions of the globe."

Like Mackenzie, Ryerson's conception of education was clearly imagined in response to that put forward by Strachan and the executive elite. Ryerson adamantly lamented the hierarchical nature of education in Upper Canada which favoured the Church of England in all matters. "This failure," he made clear, "is attributed to the appointment of trustees, for the public schools, from one communion only, thereby depriving other denominations of that benefit, which they had a right to expect would have arisen from them."<sup>20</sup> The executive, he believed, was unfairly excluding other denominations from school governance. "And this strong *political* bias," Ryerson insisted, had hindered the development of a universal system of education. He placed the blame, as did many other educational thinkers, squarely on Strachan. "[B]eing originally created by an *ecclesiastical* dominancy, and a Dignitary of a certain communion, not remarkable for his liberality of sentiment or feeling, being *ex-officio* President of these Boards of Trustees, the public schools, intended by the Legislature to be *national*, both in their character and benefits, become comparatively circumscribed in their advantages, and engines of an influence not the most favorable to the moral and civil interests of the country." The solution, as he saw it, was to eliminate the boards of education, and the overarching General Board of Education, and to let the schools "be altogether controlled

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<sup>20</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 30 January 1830.

by the representatives of the people.” Such a sentiment, he believed, was widespread and had been advocated from all corners of the colony for years.

Ryerson’s proposals to reverse Church of England exclusivity, however, also ironically foreshadowed the seeds of a religious controversy that would plague the province thereafter. “[T]o meet the views and circumstances of those who wish to educate their children in their own religious communion, let other provisions be made.” Upper Canada could have a secular system of education, he thought, that could also provide for dissident schools. “This can be done in perfect consistency with, and in subserviency to, other literary regulations which have been asked for, and which are now contemplated by our Provincial Legislature. Equal rights and privileges are the acknowledged maxims of sound policy in matters of religion; so let them be in literary affairs.”

Although the Methodists themselves were committed to secular schooling, other denominations, such as the Catholics and Presbyterians, it was clear to Ryerson, were not. Thus, “In acceding to their wishes, we hope our House of Assembly will pass a general bill authorizing (by giving power to form corporations) each religious community, under certain restrictions, to erect at least one literary institution.” Such institutions should be funded by government. This, he hoped, would help encourage a home-grown system of education. “Many persons who now look on with cool indifference, or send their children to a foreign country to be educated, would devote a liberal portion of their property and their utmost influence, in promoting the means of education in our own country; and very many parents who now, through ignorance, mistaken views or limited means, leave their children to grow up with scarcely learning

enough to read and write, would then be prevailed upon and enabled to impart to them the inestimable blessings of a liberal education.” Ryerson tolerated religious education upon the condition that the superstructure of education remain funded by government, and universally accessible; no one denomination alone should “receive a slice from the golden loaf.” He clearly favoured a system in which Upper Canadian children were educated within a public system in the province, even if this meant in different schools, than in different countries or by foreign teachers.

In 1831, the Methodist community initiated its own design of education in response to Upper Canada College by building its own preparatory school, Upper Canada Academy. In an editorial on 23 April 1831, Ryerson reflected upon the intellectual foundation of Upper Canada Academy, marking his second major apology for education in Upper Canada. Upper Canada needed, Ryerson insisted, a universally free system of schooling. “On the importance of education generally; we may remark, it is as necessary as the light—it should be as common as water, and as free as air.” Schooling was as necessary to the individual, he thought, as it was to the community. “Education among the people is the best security of a good government and constitutional liberty; it yields a steady unbending support to the former, and effectually protects the latter. An educated people are always a loyal people to good government—and the first object of a wise government should be the education of the people.” But Ryerson did not advocate subservience. Rather, education empowered the individual not to obey, but to serve. “An educated people are always enterprising in all kinds of general and local improvements. An ignorant population are equally fit and liable to be the slaves of despots, and the dupes of demagogues; sometimes, like the unsettled ocean, they can be thrown in

incontrollable agitation by every wind that blows; at other times, like the stupid ass, they tamely submit to the most unreasonable burdens.” In a word, “Education, like seeing, is one of the most fruitful sources of public, social, and individual happiness.”<sup>21</sup> In this sense, Ryerson advocated a complex ideological design for the system in which children would receive an education that would make them easily ruled by, and yet liberated from, their rulers.

#### EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE IN THE AGE OF REFORM

The blueprints for education put forward by Mackenzie and Ryerson were part of a widespread public discourse concerning the development of mass schooling. By the 1830s, evidence from the print media suggests that the idea of school expansion began to dominate public discourse. Government involvement increasingly came to mean a trend toward universal and free education for all inhabitants. Writing in the *Brockville Recorder* on 4 May 1830, “Presbuteros” believed that “No money if judiciously laid out is better spent by any government[.]”<sup>22</sup> Pointing to the example in Britain, he argued that systems of government around the world were promoting the causes of education, and that a free government such as Upper Canada’s should not “be alarmed from an increase of light and knowledge among all classes of the people.” “Universal education,” he argued, was a fundamental Upper Canadian value. Both the District School Act of 1807 and the Common School Act of 1816 were passed upon the idea of both “the members of the House of Assembly” and also “the inhabitants generally,” that “they should be *Free Schools*, that is, that there should be no charge for education, and they understood this to

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<sup>21</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 23 April 1831.

<sup>22</sup> *Brockville Recorder*, 4 May 1830.

be the meaning of the term *Public Schools* and in some instances the Trustees and Teachers acted on this principle and made no charge for tuition.” The inhabitants of Upper Canada wanted free schools, he insisted, and he pointed to the overwhelming number of students attending the less expensive common schools *vis-à-vis* the district schools as proof of his assertion. Moreover, free schooling should come under the regulation of all inhabitants, he thought, and should not fall under the authority of an elite. Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, although comprising the majority of the population, he thought, must have a “painful feeling” in being required to support schools they cannot regulate, as the Boards of Education and Trustees were always appointed Church of England members.<sup>23</sup> The elitist system of education had seen its course, he was certain, and it lacked “public confidence” because its superintendence had been denied public representation.

On 18 May 1830, “Presbuteros” expressed shock at the printing of the Report of the Legislative Council. The Council had concluded that there was no ground for complaint in the school system.<sup>24</sup> This was further proof, he thought, that the executive elite was trying to keep education in their own control and inaccessible to many. Jealousy and fear, on the part of the Legislative Council, he later wrote, had caused instability and turmoil in Upper Canada, where sound public discourse should have taken place.<sup>25</sup> “An Observer” agreed with him. “The School system,” he told the *Brockville Recorder*, “must be reformed. Complaints against its defects and abuses are coming from

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<sup>23</sup> *Brockville Recorder*, 11 May 1830.

<sup>24</sup> *Brockville Recorder*, 18 May 1830. Presbuteros was referring to the Report of the Legislative Council on the Petition of William Smart and others on the subject of the District Schools. The full report was printed in the *Kingston Chronicle* on 3 April 1830.

<sup>25</sup> *Brockville Recorder*, 15 June 1830.

every part of this Province.”<sup>26</sup> It was the duty of the Assembly, he cried, to reform the system and to stop bringing down the various common school bills being introduced, such as William Buell’s in the last session, aimed at increasing common school funding.<sup>27</sup>

An inhabitant under the pseudonym “Clio” believed that a more effective form of school funding might be developed, and urged her readers to consider ways in which to raise the revenue needed. “Poverty, and a thin population,” she thought, “might, in some parts, render considerable aid necessary; while, in others, little or none would be required. It is the poor that require assistance—not the rich.”<sup>28</sup> “A Canadian” echoed this sentiment, and insisted that better education for all classes required an increase in teaching salaries to attract the best teachers.<sup>29</sup> Both favoured the expansion of schooling.

The *Upper Canada Herald* also expressed its own views on educational finance. “It is mortifying to see so much money already wasted,” the newspaper read, and without some sort of alteration in the system, more money would be improperly wasted.<sup>30</sup> At the centre of the inadequacy of the system, the newspaper thought, was the injustice of the funds, whereby the district schools received the lion’s share of funding instead of those funds going to “the children of those in poor and moderate circumstances.” The schools, the newspaper thought, ought to be accountable to “the public.” “No person can have

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<sup>26</sup> *Brockville Recorder*, 22 June 1830.

<sup>27</sup> William Buell, a reform Member of the House of Assembly from Leeds, headed a committee on education in early 1830. Also sitting on the committee were Robert Baldwin, Peter Perry, George Rolph, and James Lyon. On 24 February, their proposed bill was voted down, 20 to 19, by a majority of conservatives in the House. See *Journals of the House of Assembly* 22 January 1830 to 24 February 1830, and *DHE* 1:300-316.

<sup>28</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 4 March 1830. This writer did not explain the use of the pseudonym “Clio,” but, significantly, she noted that “no new ideas are advanced” in her letter. The idea of extending education to the poor, she thus alludes, had a history in Upper Canada.

<sup>29</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 12 February 1831.

<sup>30</sup> *Upper Canada Herald*, 3 March 1830.

any objection to another spending his money in educating his children in Latin and Greek, and other useless languages. But the public have a great objection to their property being taken away from them, and applied in that disguised way for such purposes.” The time had come, the newspaper thought, for schooling to benefit the masses and not the elite.

#### REFORMERS, CONSERVATIVES, AND THE POLITICS OF SCHOOL REFORM IN UPPER CANADA

The influence of reformers on Upper Canadian political discourse and public opinion could hardly be overlooked. John Carey, editor of the pro-establishment *York Observer*, was especially concerned with the growing influence of Ryerson and the *Christian Guardian*. “During the late session your influence in the assembly was all-powerful,” he wrote to Ryerson through an editorial appearing in the *York Observer* in 1830. “The base majority obeyed your nod with as much alacrity as a slave does the orders of a West India planter!”<sup>31</sup> “A Traveller” agreed, and as “a British Subject,” he wrote to the *Canadian Freeman*, he felt compelled to speak up against Ryerson and the impact of the *Christian Guardian*, blaming the newspaper for initiating political disruptions that the province was attempting to be done with.<sup>32</sup> “Stentor” addressed himself to “the Friends of Loyalty in Upper Canada,” and suggested that the “two radical and venal organs, the ‘Advocate’ and ‘Guardian,’ were attempting to misrepresent the motives of and ridicule the principles of the executive while promoting their own selfish interests.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> From the *York Observer*, reprinted in *Canadian Freeman*, 26 August 1830.

<sup>32</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 26 August 1830.

<sup>33</sup> *Brockville Gazette*, 28 December 1830.

It was not conservatives alone who grew wary of the influence of reformers such as Ryerson and Mackenzie. Indeed, the complexity of political ties themselves shone in the editorials of the anti-establishment *Canadian Freeman* in 1830. The editor, Francis Collins, although himself a reformer, was growing increasingly suspicious of the reform movement, which, he believed, had become corrupted and whose unofficial members, he bemoaned, were behaving too much like a “party.” Reformers had become more concerned, he argued, with controlling patronage than with representing “the people.” They should be more independent. “Here are the Baldwins, the Rolphs, the Perrys, the Bereczys, the Woodruffs, the Thompsons, and other *saddlebag patriots*,” he remarked, “that dare to insult an intelligent community by calling themselves “*friends to the Press!—friends to the People!*” The *Freeman’s* scorn was directed especially at “Pope Ryerson” and what it believed was unfounded influence upon the House of Assembly, or what Collins called “This Ryersonian House.”<sup>34</sup>

The voice of reform had certainly become a powerful one by 1830, and many now questioned reformers’ political ambitions. When the legislature was dissolved by Colborne in 1830, the *Canadian Freeman* declared it “a glorious triumph of liberal opinion and true Christian benevolence, over sectarian bigotry and intolerant pharisaical hypocrisy.”<sup>35</sup> “We want no parties, in our Assembly, neither ministerial nor popular.” The *Brockville Gazette* concurred, suggesting that Ryerson’s remarks against the Church of England had not earned him the favour of a great deal of inhabitants. “A revolution, in public opinion,” the newspaper suggested, had occurred and many Upper Canadians were beginning to see that Strachan and the executive were not the elitist oligarchs they had

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<sup>34</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 22 April 1830.

<sup>35</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 28 October 1830.

been portrayed as.<sup>36</sup> Both the radical *Canadian Freeman* and the conservative *Brockville Gazette*, and many of their readers, believed that conservatives and reformers should avoid party spirit and work together.

The election of 1830 swept out a number of reformers from the House of Assembly. Still, clear radicals like Mackenzie and Jesse Ketchum of York were returned that year, while new radicals, such as the American-born Charles Duncombe of Oxford County, also found their way into the Assembly. Combined with the moderate tone of conservatives, it seemed that the winds of reform were blowing through the colony. By the end of the year, even Collins was suggesting that the character of the Assembly had not really changed. It remained, to some extent, a reformist house.<sup>37</sup>

Of the new members that emerged in the House of Assembly after the 1830 election, one of them, Charles Duncombe, would become a key figure in the history of education in Upper Canada. While Duncombe is most commonly remembered in educational historiography as the author of the watershed 1836 report on education, he had been active in educational matters since his election in 1830. He was also influenced in these early years by the educational ideas that were espoused by his contemporaries, such as Mackenzie and Ryerson.

Duncombe headed a select committee on education in 1830 in which he and his committee found that “the Common Schools of this Province are generally in so deplorable a state that they can scarcely deserve the name of Schools.”<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> *Brockville Gazette*, 14 December 1830.

<sup>37</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 9 December 1830.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Duncombe, *Report of the Select Committee to which was Referred the Petition of David Burns, and others, Inhabitants of the County of Oxford, and Draft of an Address to His Majesty on the Subject of Lands for Common Schools Founded on the Same* (Committee Room, House of Assembly of Upper Canada, 1830).

committee's findings clearly echoed the print media discourse of recent years. Duncombe's committee isolated inadequate funding as the primary cause of school deficiency. Asking for revisions to the school laws, the Committee suggested that school funds be made sufficient "to support Common school teachers respectably." The quality of teaching was in decay, the Duncombe committee thought, and had resulted in too high a number of "transient persons, or common idlers," who, with increased funding, could be discarded from the system. It was necessary for teaching to become "a regular respectable business, in the hands of gentlemanly, well educated persons." Schooling and money went hand-in-glove. Moreover, the committee recommended that school funds and appropriations should be made permanent and should not depend upon the annual vote of the Legislature. Duncombe and his committee asked for a reexamination of how school funds were generated, and whether a more suitable way could be found. Selling the Clergy Reserves, the committee thought, would provide an immediate source of revenue, but it also suggested that "a small tax be levied," in order to provide support thereafter. In line with reformist thought at the time, Duncombe insisted that the government rethink how schools were administered.

To what extent did the rise of Duncombe, Mackenzie, and other reformers in the House of Assembly represent a new point of departure in the educational history of Upper Canada? The answer is not clear-cut. Their ideas, after all, were as often supported by conservatives as they were opposed by other reformers. A cursory observation of Duncombe's 1836 report on education suggests that the document itself might not represent a new point of departure in the reform position on educational development. Much of what is found in that report can be found in the print media

discourse of the late 1820s and early 1830s. Basing the report on an examination of schooling in the United States echoed Mackenzie's call to look toward schooling in the United States as a model for Upper Canada. Duncombe's provision in 1836 for dissident religious schools within the public system echoed Ryerson's earlier promotion of a general bill authorizing each religious community to erect schools of their own. Increased funding to teachers, the promotion of moral education, and the reconstruction of government-aided schooling, were all themes that were central to educational discourse in the print media in the years leading up to the 1836 report.<sup>39</sup> Many of these ideas were expressed by both conservatives and reformers. In this sense, the report itself represents not a new point of departure, but rather the culmination of educational ideas as expressed through public discourse for at least a decade.

#### CONSERVATIVES AND EDUCATION

While reformers continued to call for a complete restructuring of the school system, the colonial elite proceeded with plans of their own. Upper Canada College, which had been established in 1829, became a key topic of discourse in the early 1830s. The college itself was a bitter-sweet creation in the minds of many reformers. While they could certainly support the establishment of an institution of higher learning, the college was designed to provide a classical curriculum, in line with the elitist preparatory schools of England, such as Eton. In many ways, the establishment of Upper Canada College

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Duncombe, *Doctor Charles Duncombe's Report upon the Subject of Education: Made to the Parliament of Upper Canada, 25th February, 1836, through the commissioners, Doctors Morrison and Bruce, appointed by a resolution of the House of Assembly in 1835, to obtain information upon the subject of education, &c* (Toronto: M. Reynolds, 1836).

represented both Colborne's desire to further the interests of education in the province and his refusal to break ranks with the establishment.

The college did not receive widespread acceptance. The House of Assembly expressed its suspicion of Colborne's intentions in its response to the Throne Speech in 1830.<sup>40</sup> While it was glad to see the lieutenant governor's involvement and enthusiasm in education, and while it did not question the need for such an institution in Upper Canada, it did express concern that before Colborne begin his educational undertakings that he address the inquiries raised by the Assembly in the previous session; namely, the expansion of common schooling and the religious questions surrounding the university charter. Above and beyond all else, the Assembly wanted to ensure that educational institutions in Upper Canada be founded upon "equal rights and liberal principles." This meant especially that the lieutenant governor's first task should be rewriting the university charter. Upper Canada must also abolish its exclusive and elitist model of schooling, members of the Assembly thought, and implement a system of schooling "for the general extension of the means of education among the people in every Township."

Certain inhabitants picked up on the debate in the legislature over Upper Canada College, and expressed their own views in a lively print culture discourse. Of particular importance to a number of inhabitants was the curriculum. "A Father" wrote to the *Brockville Gazette* suggesting that "In this transit age to reform," inhabitants of Upper Canada should question the classical system of education offered by the college. Education, he thought, ought to reflect the "intellectual and political change" of the

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<sup>40</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, 21 January 1830.

times.<sup>41</sup> The *Canadian Freeman* agreed. Although grateful to Colborne for his promotion of higher education, the newspaper felt he was “badly advised.” In this instance, the newspaper thought it “right, under such circumstances, that the wishes of the people should be met.”<sup>42</sup> “One of the People” certainly agreed. Supporting the editor’s views, he suggested that the York District School be reestablished for those parents wishing a more practical education for their children, “so as to make a School far more efficient than Upper Canada College, and prevent us from being any longer cursed with Masters who are under no responsibility—who substitute beating for teaching—and who being paid whether they have Scholars or not, laugh at us in the sleeves, and say the few Scholars the better[.]”<sup>43</sup> One of the People asked Colborne if he thought “that the inhabitants of the District are blind to the grievances they are suffering through your miserable cowardice[.]” He urged the lieutenant governor to relieve their grievances and represent the interests of the majority, rather than work to appease his own advisors who had themselves lost popular support.

The debates on education continued at the first sitting of the legislature in 1831. Two attempts at forming a new common school bill were made in a second sitting of the legislature that year in the Fall. One, by William Buell Jr., a reform member for Leeds County, promoted a moderate view of universal education, and focused its attention on increased funding in order to make schooling available to a greater number of inhabitants. The other was made by Mahlon Burwell, a conservative member for Middlesex County.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Brockville Gazette*, 1 December 1831. This theme would also be picked up on in the Duncombe report of 1836.

<sup>42</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 15 September 1831.

<sup>43</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 6 October 1831.

<sup>44</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 18 November 1831, 23 November 1831, 5 January 1832, 25 January 1832, 8, 14, 76, 122.

Burwell had earlier moved for a Standing Committee on education in the spring of 1831, with a focus on settling the question of how much of the clergy reserves were initially intended for the purposes of education.<sup>45</sup> The committee, headed by William Morris, a conservative member for Lanark County, reported its findings on 22 February 1831. It found that the report of 1797 clearly expressed the desire of the executive to work with the House of Assembly to establish grammar schools, colleges, or a university. The original allotment of 500,000 acres should be respected, it thought, and it should be put toward school expansion. The committee pointed out that efforts were made in 1819 to utilize the land, but that the lieutenant governor at the time, Peregrine Maitland, scoffed at the ideas. In thirty years, the committee reported, “no apparent benefit has resulted to the inhabitants of the country from the school reservation,” despite efforts to utilize the land, and the original intension of the 1797 school plan had “been lost sight of.” Although the district schools had been established in 1807, the committee found that the spirit of school expansion that had inspired the 1797 plans had somehow been lost, and it was this spirit that it wished to rekindle.<sup>46</sup>

Rekindling this spirit was not a difficult task. Public discourse demonstrated a desire for school expansion, and there were few in the Assembly who would reject a plea for school expansion. What was more difficult, however, was presenting a conservative agenda of education in an era in which reformist ideas were leading the discourse in Upper Canada. The committee recommended setting aside the money from land sales for the support of eleven additional “respectable Seminaries” providing a liberal education, and where children would not have to be sent away to attend. It called for the district

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<sup>45</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly* 1 February 1831, 34-35.

<sup>46</sup> “Report of Select Committee on School Lands,” *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Assembly*, 1831, 214-215.

schools to be made free, as per the original intentions, and for expanded funding for additional common schools and raises in common school teacher salaries. Once this plan was in place, the committee thought, the Assembly's energy could be put toward erecting King's College.

Finally, and crucially important to understanding the change of tone in the development of schooling in Upper Canada among conservatives by the 1830s, Burwell's committee recommended that control of money arising from the sale of the school lands should be put into the hands of the Receiver-General, and not the executive, allowing for "the general superintendence and organization of the whole system of management [to] thus be open to public inspection and approval." The committee's report can only be appreciated when we understand that it in many ways represented a new tone concerning schooling among conservatives in Upper Canada. Conservatives were clearly reflecting the same views as reformers concerning the "public" nature of schooling in Upper Canada.

The report had an immediate impact on the executive. The next year, Colborne called for a full explanation as to why the district schools had yet to be made free. He furthermore concluded that the original intentions were to clearly make the schools free, and that the executive and his advisors had theretofore failed in this regard. Conservatives had adopted reformist policies in education, and schooling in Upper Canada had entered a new stage of development.

## CONCLUSION

The convergence of ideas among conservatives and reformers on the need for educational reform in these years translated into real developments in education. Late in 1831, Duncombe, seconded by the radical Absolom Shade, moved for an address to the lieutenant governor pointing out “that there is in this province a very general want of Education, that the insufficiency of the common school fund to support competent, respectable and well educated Teachers, has degraded common school teaching from a regular business to mere matter of convenience to transient persons or common idlers[.]”<sup>47</sup> The quality of schooling had to improve, he insisted, and this required a mobilized effort on a scale theretofore not seen. Duncombe argued that if better teaching was available, the teaching of common schools would soon become a regular and respectable calling. Respectable, well-educated teachers could be attracted, and the scholars would benefit. Moreover, the province would benefit. With a well-functioning school system, “Upper Canada would then form a national character that would command respect abroad and ensure peace, prosperity and happiness at home; perpetuate attachment to British principles and British institutions, and enable posterity to value, as they ought, the inestimable blessings of our glorious Constitution.” Duncombe’s speech was adopted as a resolution on 26 December 1831 by both conservatives and reformers in the House of Assembly.

Public discourse concerning the need for universal schooling had set a new tone for educational discourse in Upper Canada, and a new wave of educational leaders were emerging in Upper Canada that reflected that tone. Buell’s and Burwell’s educational efforts continued in the House of Assembly in late 1831 and into 1832. Buell continued

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<sup>47</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 13 December 1831, 40.

to promote the idea of school expansion while granting superintendence of the schools to the localities. His proposed bill, however, failed to pass and was dropped by the Assembly on 5 January 1832.<sup>48</sup> Burwell continued his efforts to make education more generally accessible as well, but his efforts focused on the importance of the district schools and maintaining the character of a classical British curriculum. Nevertheless, the tone, whether reform or conservative, continued to favour school expansion. The idea of change had permeated public and political discourse. In a deed that was reflective of the changes to come in the system of schooling in Upper Canada, the colonial elite ordered the dissolution of the General Board of Education, headed by John Strachan, in 1832. The popular appetite for universal schooling had made itself clear in the print culture discourse, and both conservatives and reformers reflected that appetite in the legislature.

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<sup>48</sup> *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 5 January 1832.

## CONCLUSION

The history of education in Ontario began in earnest during the first decades of Upper Canada. Upper Canadians began writing about, conceptualizing, and forging a system of schooling from the time of its earliest settlers in the late eighteenth century. This is significant as it contributes to our understanding of educational development in Upper Canada in two important ways. First, it demonstrates that Upper Canadian political leaders did not unilaterally create a system of schooling. The evidence from the print media indicates that inhabitants of Upper Canada were not passive recipients of school legislation imposed from above, but rather were active participants.

Second, the mid-nineteenth century is too late a point of departure to begin analyzing the origins of the school system in Upper Canada. Understanding the origins of the school system requires us to understand the importance of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century education as a central discourse in print culture. Inhabitants of early Upper Canada participated in an intellectual exchange with much broader import in the process toward mass universal schooling than scholars have previously assumed. Developments and debates surrounding the District School Act of 1807 and the common school acts of 1816, 1820, and 1824, as well as other initiatives of the period, were more than small steps in the progression toward mass universal schooling; they are very telling of a complex and contested history surrounding the origins of schooling in Upper Canada.

Upper Canadians participated in a wide discourse on education in the central meeting place of print media. A shared print culture linked inhabitants across the colony, allowing them to collapse space and experience in what McLuhan calls the centralizing force of print media.<sup>1</sup> In shifting our attention to print culture and the public conversation that surrounded educational developments, trends and themes in the intellectual life of the province can be seen to have had a profound impact on the development of schooling. Print media allowed inhabitants of Upper Canada to participate in a trans-regional, and often trans-national, discourse concerning the development of forms of schooling. Upper Canadians were often leaders in the international movement for government-aided schooling, and enacted legislation before many other regions of the modern world. That Upper Canada was at the forefront of government involvement in schooling and enacted legislation that reflected public discourse so early is testimony to the importance of intellectual networks of thought in shaping the colony's social development.

We can conclude that by the 1830s, there was deep agreement upon the need for a government-aided system of schooling. The debate was no longer about whether schools were needed, but rather it was, by then, about what specific kinds of schools should be established. The central discourse on education had shifted from one of lament to one of opportunity. It had shifted from the desirability of a government-aided school system to the necessity of it. Government was expected to play a central role in establishing a system of schooling where all inhabitants could send their children. Despite varying opinions on the means and ends of schooling, the need for massive government intervention was agreed upon as a prerequisite for a successful system of schooling in Upper Canada. By the 1830s, the educational ideas of both reformers and conservatives

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<sup>1</sup> McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 199.

had converged. The process of convergence, however, was by no means linear. Upper Canadian public discourse was more complex and uneven. The scholarly writing of educational development in Upper Canada which traces a linear and progressive trend toward mass universal schooling only appears from the vantage point of hindsight. The evidence suggests that both political leaders and ordinary inhabitants in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were unsure about the path they were embarking upon.

Upper Canadians grappled with the complexity of schooling as both a form of oppression for those who ruled in society, and as a weapon against oppression for those ruled. Print media in early nineteenth-century Upper Canada reveals a remarkably diverse discourse among a variety of groups and individuals who, for very different reasons and with very different ends in mind, were able to agree upon the need for a common system of schooling. While their ideas converged upon the need for a system of government-aided schooling, there was hardly consensus about the form, character, and content of such schooling. The following decades would continue to pit school advocates against each other, even while remaining unified on the need for government involvement. Ideas and ideals diverged. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, schooling held a promise for everyone.

The preceding analysis of print media and public discourse in Upper Canada requires us to rethink what we know about the social, political, and economic foundations of Upper Canadian societal reorganization in the nineteenth century. Educational discourse was part of the discourses about the question of power, the legitimacy of the constitution, and the future of democracy in the province. Upper Canadian inhabitants

concerned about social, economic, and political developments often turned to the press. They did this in the first decade of the nineteenth century: when the Legislative Council refused to concede to the Assembly's proposals for a common school system, certain inhabitants, including House of Assembly members themselves, turned to the press to garner support; by the middle of the next decade, Upper Canada enacted its first common school act. They did it again in the late 1820s: when an overconfident executive council attempted to seize control of the resources for educational development and shape the character of schooling according to its own parochial conceptions, a number of inhabitants turned to the press to voice their displeasure; by the end of the decade the Imperial Parliament froze plans for the creation of a university under the Church of England in Upper Canada, and sent a new lieutenant governor in order to appease the mounting voices in an aroused public discourse.

In 1832, the colonial government drew up plans to disband the General Board of Education and essentially end John Strachan and the executive elite's control over the schools. As the case of educational development demonstrates, the press served as the unofficial fourth branch of constitutional governance, and often as a check on official power in Upper Canada. Democracy in Upper Canada was promoted through print culture discourse.

Upper Canadians agreed upon the need for school reform by the 1830s, but they still could not agree upon its shape and form. By that time, there were two models of education competing with each other for supremacy of schooling. These two models of education reflected distinct political groupings struggling for the hegemony of power in the colony. John Strachan and the executive elite proposed that common school

education in Upper Canada be rooted in a British identity. With the aid of Lieutenant Governor Peregrine Maitland in the early 1820s, they attempted to forge this identity in a British National Schools system, intended to replace the common schools, under the auspices of the Church of England. By the late 1820s they furthered their intentions by attempting to subvert the religious character of the province, and acquired a university charter that was centred upon the assumption that the Church of England was the supreme authority for the institution. John Strachan and the executive elite's educational plans for Upper Canada represented an elitist model of education, centred upon privileges and entitlements for the Church of England and its burgeoning leaders. In order to fully understand the religious conception of this model, and how Strachan and the executive elite believed such a system could serve the colony, a future study ought to examine the symbiotic relationship between religion, education, and state, as imagined by the Church of England in Upper Canada, and, indeed, throughout the British Empire.<sup>2</sup>

Although aided by a conservative press that supported the idea of maintaining the British heritage in Upper Canada, the executive elite were not able to appeal to the majority of inhabitants in the public sphere, including many of their own conservative supporters, and with the emergence of the reform press in the 1820s, the voice of opposition placed their educational plans in check. Indeed, once Strachan's religious "falsehoods" and "misrepresentations" had been exposed in print through the media, the reform cause grew considerably credible. William Lyon Mackenzie's *Catechism of Education* served to illustrate the anti-establishment educational ideas of the more radical element of reformers. Mackenzie and other reformers advocated the extension of

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<sup>2</sup> The groundwork for such a study has certainly been laid by scholars such as Spragge, Purdy, Wilson, Fahey, Grant, and Westfall, among others.

schooling to apprentices, mechanics, labourers, and others, who were not able out of their own means to acquire it. Central to reformist concerns was the basis upon which Upper Canada's schools were modeled. Fashioning those schools after elitist institutions found in Europe was less appealing than following the more accessible American model, which would put in check "the habits of servility and toleration of arbitrary power."<sup>3</sup>

Mackenzie argued that through schooling, "the power of the people" could be extended.<sup>4</sup> These schools would be free of sectarian interests, and religious dissenters were free to form schools of their own.

Such ideas were central to the reform model of education as it appeared in early nineteenth-century Upper Canada. Charles Duncombe, who along with Mackenzie would come to provide leadership in the rebellions of 1837-38, also played an important role in the development of this model as his early inquiries into education and proposals for educational reform foreshadowed a report on education he prepared in 1836 based upon a tour of educational institutions in the United States he took in 1835.

These two models, the elitist and the reform, represented the general political dichotomy in the province. They represented, on the one hand, a hierarchical conception of education, and on the other hand, a liberal, or universally accessible, one. Upper Canada was in the midst of a political battle that would eventually pit republicans against monarchists, bringing into question in the 1830s the future of governance in Upper Canada. Education was a central theme in this battle. The general dichotomy in the province was furthermore complicated by the various opinions in educational discourse that crossed party lines. Conservatives and reformers had educational ideas that

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<sup>3</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 32, 36-40.

<sup>4</sup> Mackenzie, *Catechism of Education*, 35.

overlapped, making the discourse on education much more complex and uneven than other debates, often pitting allies against each other, and making the future of schooling in the province much more contentious.

The province was indeed at a crossroads in the 1830s. “One of the People,” writing to the *Kingston Chronicle*, made this idea the focus of a series of writings that appeared in 1831 concerning the divide between reformers and conservatives in Upper Canada. “These are fearful times,” throughout the world, he thought. “The people are struggling for supremacy, unlimited and uncontrolled as the winds of heaven.” He pointed to both the French and British examples as evidence of the winds of change. Upper Canada, he warned, did not “escape the general infection.” Change was imminent, he suggested to his readers. Disloyal and dangerous reformers such as Mackenzie and Ryerson, he feared, were taking control of political power.<sup>5</sup>

The preceding chapters provide a new foundation for analyzing educational development during the mid-nineteenth century. That Egerton Ryerson was linked with men like William Lyon Mackenzie is highly significant. Scholars tend to depict Ryerson as a social conservative aligned with the executive and bent upon creating a stable and controllable society. And there is good reason for this characterization; in 1844, it was Ryerson himself who came to the defence of the conservative Governor General Charles Metcalfe, who was struggling with Robert Baldwin, Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine, and their reform ministry, determined to introduce “responsible government” in Canada. How and why did Ryerson, a perceived radical reformer by contemporaries, a reformer who made his name lashing out against Strachan and the executive in the 1820s, come to be perceived as a conservative in defence of the executive in the early 1840s? And what

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<sup>5</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 28 May 1831, 11 June 1831, 9 July 1831.

can this apparent metamorphosis tell us about his role as superintendent of education thereafter?

Such questions illustrate the complexity of Ryerson's ideas in Upper Canada's educational history. Consider Ryerson's letter in 1844 to Governor General Charles Metcalfe in which he stated the following regarding the opposition Metcalfe was facing from reformers: "In the present crisis, the Government must of course first be placed upon a strong foundation, and then must the youthful mind of Canada be instructed and molded in the way I have had the honor of stating to your Excellency if this country is long to remain an appendage to the British Crown."<sup>6</sup> While these words make clear Ryerson's intentions to undermine the reform cause, the deeper meaning of this statement is still not clear. This statement has been interpreted in a variety of ways by different scholars. Chad Gaffield suggests that this statement reveals that a dominant theme in Ryerson's promotion of education was the importance of the British "heritage."<sup>7</sup> Bruce Curtis uses the same statement to suggest that a dominant theme in Ryerson's school promotion was indoctrination for political stability.<sup>8</sup> In order to acquire a deeper understanding of the statement we must come to understand what was meant by "British." As Gaffield points out, this is difficult and there is no consensus among historians on Ryerson's use of the term. Nor, as evidence in the Upper Canadian print media up to 1832 suggests, was there a consensus among the inhabitants of Upper Canada in general on that term at the time that we can convincingly attain.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in J. George Hodgins (ed.), Egerton Ryerson, *The Story of My Life* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1883), 284.

<sup>7</sup> Chad Gaffield, *Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of the French-Language Controversy in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 98.

Some evidence in print culture, such as the writing from “One of the People” cited above, shows that Ryerson was believed by a number of his contemporaries in the late 1820s and early 1830s to be anti-British and disloyal, and clearly aligned with the more radical elements of reform. The *Brockville Gazette* believed that Ryerson was in fact too radical, and that the *Christian Guardian* was used to propagate radical ideas.<sup>9</sup> Francis Collins of the *Canadian Freeman* warned that “the Ryersonians” had “assumed the control of public opinion, bearded the government, and put all others at defiance.”<sup>10</sup>

As a reaction to the perceived danger, many conservative inhabitants condemned Ryerson and the radical reformers. “An Anglo-Canadian” attended the “splendid meeting of the *really Loyal Inhabitants*” of the Eastern District for the purpose of “expressing our abhorrence of the seditious principles of Mackenzie, Ryerson, & Co.” whom he believed were both disloyal and in opposition to the Crown.<sup>11</sup> “Canadianus” expressed abomination against perceived anti-British radicals. “Thank heaven,” he expressed, “I *now* know that I am living under the British flag, among a people devoted to their king, their country, and their glorious constitution.”<sup>12</sup> “Hibernicus” agreed, and urged the inhabitants of Upper Canada to read the radical newspapers and their “Republican principles” with caution.<sup>13</sup> Numerous letters poured into the *Kingston Chronicle* in the Spring of 1832 suggesting that the reform movement was treacherous. “An Anglo-Canadian” identified Mackenzie and Ryerson as “false patriots” with “plans of rebellion.”<sup>14</sup> Their real intent was to overthrow British institutions in the province.

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<sup>9</sup> *Brockville Gazette*, 5 January 1832.

<sup>10</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 23 February 1832.

<sup>11</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 10 March 1832.

<sup>12</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 10 March 1832.

<sup>13</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 17 March 1832.

<sup>14</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 24 March 1832.

“Upper Canadian” claimed that the province was at a crossroads between two factions with whom most inhabitants knew little about.<sup>15</sup> “A British Subject” agreed, but implied that the province was in the midst of civil discord, divided between the “oligarch faction” of Strachan’s, and the “*Ryersonian*” faction. Neither party, he believed, could be trusted.<sup>16</sup>

Ryerson himself, however, distanced his ideas from radical reformers and instead proclaimed his attachment to Britain. Ryerson certainly saw himself as a reformer in these years, but attempted to clarify questions concerning the principles of reformers in Upper Canada in a balanced way that distanced himself from political radicals. In an elaborate article printed on 10 May 1832 in the *Christian Guardian*, he specifically addressed what it meant for him to be a “reformer.” To be a reformer, he thought, did not make one a radical. “This question has been differently answered by persons differently interested,” he admitted, but there were clear trends. Reformers were not, as their opponents had attempted to portray them, “advocating principles Anti-British, Revolutionary, and Republican in their nature and tendency.” Indeed, he suggested, reformers had never lied about what they stood for and had always been clear and honest, something he believed that the established political elite could not claim. Reformers did not stand for the elimination of the constitution, but rather their principles had consistently been in favour “of reform as far as it relates to the enjoyment of equal religious and civil privileges by the several christian denominations in this Province—the removal of all Clergymen from the Legislature—a system of common and classical school education adapted in the wishes and the wants of the people.” The three pillars of

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<sup>15</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 24 March 1832.

<sup>16</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 31 March 1832.

reform then, as Ryerson saw them, were religious tolerance, the separation of church and state, and free schooling. “On other points,” he said, “we leave every reader to judge for himself[.]”<sup>17</sup> John Cameron shared this viewpoint, and suggested that the establishment was spreading rumours, the chief among them that “the methodists are going to overturn the Government.”<sup>18</sup> “Canadians,” he argued, were being “divided” and “kept in the dark” in an era when reform was sweeping the world.

Religious freedom was crucial to Ryerson’s conception of reform. In this sense, he was “anti-British” in as far as “British” suggested the legitimacy of an established church. Ryerson, however, did not believe that it did. In 1832, the *Brockville Recorder* reprinted for its readers a letter from Ryerson to John Colborne concerning the lieutenant governor’s emigration plans. Colborne had previously suggested that within a few years, Upper Canada would be populated “by millions of our own countrymen,” and implied that such inhabitants would be naturally predisposed to favour conservatives, and by extension they would support the supremacy of the Church of England.<sup>19</sup> “His Excellency seems to anticipate a great change in public opinion in the Province,” Ryerson thought, “on the subject of a Church Establishment by the influx of emigration.”<sup>20</sup> Colborne did not appear to be aware, he went on, that “nine tenths of the European population are decidedly favourable to the principles of civil and religious liberty[.]” Nor was there any reason to believe, he noted, that the incoming immigrants would think any differently. Ryerson believed that Britain itself was in the midst of change, and that Britons themselves would bring that spirit of change to the colony. Given the debate on

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<sup>17</sup> *Christian Guardian*, 10 May 1832.

<sup>18</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 March 1832.

<sup>19</sup> See Colborne’s reply to the Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada, in *Canadian Freeman*, 5 January 1832.

<sup>20</sup> *Brockville Recorder*, 12 January 1832.

Catholic emancipation, religious tolerance, and the nature of reform across the Atlantic, he had good reason to think so. Attachment to Britain, then, did not necessarily mean attachment to British institutions such as the Church of England. Given the politico-religious developments across the Atlantic, in fact, Ryerson, a religious minority, could find great solace in advocating British values.

The historiography is ambivalent in pinpointing Ryerson as a either a reformer or a conservative. Generally, historians agree that Ryerson's 1826 letters to John Strachan thrust him into the public arena and began what would be a lengthy and influential career in Upper Canadian political life. Still, the historiography has not yet reconciled Ryerson's characteristic radicalism in the 1820s with his characteristic social conservatism in the 1840s. Bruce Curtis attempts to reconcile this contradiction when he suggests that Ryerson's trip to England in 1833 turned him away from radical circles.<sup>21</sup> His analysis, however, is speculative. There is no evidence of Ryerson's awakening while on his trip to Britain, and in fact the evidence from the print media suggests that Ryerson was aware of the changes in British politics and spoke publicly about them before he even embarked on his trip. An analysis of print media in late 1820s and early 1830s Upper Canada suggests that Ryerson had already disassociated himself from radicals and was increasingly advocating his "Britishness."

But what did being "British" mean to Ryerson in an age of burgeoning colonial identity? To what extent can we situate Ryerson's ideas among others in the colony? Print media allows us to examine the multiple answers to these questions that an emphasis on government documents and correspondence among the elite does not. Ryerson's initial years in public life especially allow us to understand the social and

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 97-98.

political ideas that shaped him in the 1820s and brought him into public prominence in the 1830s. It is his growth and maturity in these years, and his understanding of Upper Canada's growth and maturity, that might allow us to understand his seemingly contradictory transition from an anti-establishment radical in 1826 to a staunch supporter of the conservative governor general in 1844.

Future studies need to take a closer look at print culture discourse from the 1830s and beyond in order to determine how educational advocates arrived at their positions in the mid-nineteenth century and the extent to which they were both initiating and reacting to public discourse. Doing so will allow us to rethink what we know about the policy debates surrounding educational development in Canada West and Ontario. In particular, any future investigation of Ryerson's educational and political views must take into account the print culture discourse within which he operated. A preliminary look at the print media in the 1830s indeed already reveals some trends and themes. Most striking to educational historians should be a set of letters written to the *London Times* by Ryerson in 1836, on the eve of the Upper and Lower Canadian Rebellions. Ryerson wrote these letters in response to efforts by Duncombe, who had travelled to London in 1836 to present a petition to the Imperial Parliament for political reform in Upper Canada. In these letters, Ryerson offered a remarkable view of the culture and heritage of the colony that sheds light on his subsequent educational ideas in the 1840s and provides the contextualization that begins to answer the question, where can we situate Ryerson's political leanings? "I am, what I assume to be," he announced in the press, "A Canadian."<sup>22</sup> Arguing that the clash between conservatives such as John Strachan, and

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<sup>22</sup> *The Times* (London, UK), 6 June 1836; reprinted in Egerton Ryerson, *The Affairs of the Canadas in a Series of Letters by A Canadian* (London, UK: J. King, College Hill, 1837).

radical reformers such as Charles Duncombe, had brought the colony to the brink of political disaster, Ryerson offered a third option for governance of the colony which was based on what he considered a distinctly “Canadian” perspective. This involved an attachment to Britain and the maintenance of the constitution, thus putting him in opposition to radicals. But it also insisted upon colonial self-government, and rejection of certain British institutions such as a Church of England establishment, thus putting him in opposition to a number of conservatives.

Sensing the growth of republican ideology in Lower Canada as well, and its potential to terminate the constitutional link with Britain, Ryerson even urged British parliamentarians to consider the union of Upper and Lower Canada and establish a national system of education in which the “British” link would be promoted.<sup>23</sup> The threat, he warned, was an otherwise independent and republican Lower Canada to the east, a super-republic to the south, and the inevitable influx of republican thought and propaganda into an already unstable Upper Canada. Ryerson emphasized adamant support of the tripartite constitution, and explained that he feared the growth of republicanism in North America; and, for this reason, he advocated a British constitutional link.

Maintaining the constitution seems to have legitimized the British heritage in Upper Canada for Ryerson. That is, what gave the constitution in the Canadas legitimacy for Ryerson was the British link. While Canada did not have a royal line of its own, what made the lieutenant governor’s presence legitimate was that he was responsible to the Imperial Parliament. It was on this point that his thought departed from other reformers in the late 1830s and 1840s. The lieutenant governor could not be responsible to the

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<sup>23</sup> *The Times* (London, UK), 30 June 1836; *Affairs* 32-35.

House of Assembly, as many reformers were urging. The lieutenant governor, Ryerson insisted, could not serve two masters. The British heritage according to Ryerson, seen in this preliminary reading of the print media, was a matter of constitutional legitimacy. It was also, perhaps, an articulation of a burgeoning local identity by Ryerson in an attempt to find the balance between the need for self rule while maintaining the constitution.

To what extent, however, were Ryerson's "Canadian" ideas reflective of a broader public discourse? An analysis of newspapers in both Upper and Lower Canada suggest that others shared his views. The *Patriot*, a conservative newspaper in Toronto, attacked Duncombe's petition as an attempt "to poison the minds of the people of England against his Excellency Sir Francis Head."<sup>24</sup> It deemed Ryerson's letters a "fervid and vigorous" defence of right. It labeled Duncombe's petition incompatible with the interests of ordinary Canadians and begged its subscribers to peruse it: "Read that petition our subscribers; read it every man, woman, and child in the land; read it reformers and non-reformers, constitutionalists and revolutionists, monarchists and pure democracy men, and find us, if it be possible, a single human being with effrontery enough to speak of it approvingly."<sup>25</sup> The editors at the *Montreal Gazette* concurred with the *Patriot* and attacked Duncombe for the inconsistency of his political opinions. The newspaper praised Ryerson's letters in England and claimed that those who supported the constitution in the Canadas "owe much to the activity and perseverance of the author of these letters; for the able *exposé* of Canadian affairs he has volunteered for the information of the British public."<sup>26</sup> The *Kingston Chronicle* praised Ryerson for

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<sup>24</sup> *The Patriot*, 15 November 1836, reprinted in *Affairs*, iii.

<sup>25</sup> *The Patriot*, 15 November 1836, reprinted in *Affairs*, iii.

<sup>26</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 19 November 1836, reprinted in *Affairs*, iii.

“opening the eyes of [British] ministers to the *real* state of our affairs.”<sup>27</sup> Ryerson, who only a few years earlier was attacked in the print media as an anti-British radical, was now, it seemed, the champion of British constitutional rule in Upper Canada.

In this sense, Ryerson might have offered a third model of schooling when he came to office in 1844. This model embraced neither the elitist vision of conservatives attempting to maintain social class divisions within the colony nor the radical vision of reformers attempting to subvert the political order and charter a republican course for Upper Canada. The schools, he thought, should promote a morality favourable to the constitutional link with Britain while allowing for new ideas of self government within the colony. It was a much more complex model than the history typically regards. It was a system, as Garth Lambert has demonstrated, that saw Ryerson partner with Strachan in the promotion of “unmixed” classical grammar schools for boys, while remaining his bitter rival through the promotion of non-denominational common schools.<sup>28</sup>

Such conclusions reflect the value of an analysis of Ryerson’s involvement in the print culture. Ryerson’s ideas responded to, as well as stimulated, public discourse. Ryerson was a public figure who emphasized the need to take into account the views of “the public.” We must therefore situate his own ideas within the print culture discourse in which he took part.<sup>29</sup> The evidence from educational discourse in the early nineteenth century reveals that it was not just “great men” involved in the development of schooling in Upper Canada. They were involved in, and influenced by, a print culture discourse

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<sup>27</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 30 November 1836, reprinted in *Affairs*, iv.

<sup>28</sup> Garth R. Lambert. *Dethroning Classics and Inventing English: Liberal Education and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, focusing in on Ryerson’s writing alone has proven as frustrating as it has revealing. Consider, for example, why he opposed the idea of separate schooling his entire life while sending his own daughter to a Catholic convent school in Quebec.

that affected the social and political development of the colony. Understanding the development of schooling under Ryerson's leadership, then, requires us to understand educational discourse throughout the nineteenth century.

An analysis of print media demonstrates that educational discourse in Upper Canada involved Upper Canadians living in Toronto and Kingston as much as it did those living along the borders of Detroit and Lower Canada. Individuals otherwise geographically isolated from each other could participate in educational discourse as a collective body. Print media brought people together in ways that allowed them to shape and form the social, political, and economic institutions of Upper Canada in a collective way that would have otherwise been impossible given the constraints of time and space. As a result, a much broader population was involved in forging the colony than we have generally assumed.

The most significant event in the history of education in the nineteenth century concerns the rise of mass schooling. Individuals who had mostly never met each other were able to agree upon sending their children to the same schools. For different reasons, different individuals advocated the creation of universal mass compulsory schooling. They did this with different ends in mind. The educational tree in Ontario is old and the roots are many. Moreover, the roots are intertwined, overlapping, and jumbled. Print culture in Upper Canada allowed for different ideas, originating from different places and people, to converge in a central public space that generated discourse that led to a sense of community about children's needs.

What does the future hold for schooling as we have shifted from the print culture epoch into the age of electronic media? With the continuing collapse of space and time

barriers in human communications that connect individuals at all corners of the globe in an increasingly instantaneous discourse, what can the new age mean for our conception of government involvement in schooling? If a system of schooling was designed and centralized in a nineteenth-century geographical wilderness that required days of travel between towns, what are the possibilities in an age of accelerated travel between individuals in countries even farther apart? In this new context, “the public” has taken on new meaning. Transnational studies, digital classrooms across borders, and collaborative research among teams of scholars in different countries are already transforming not only how we acquire knowledge, but also the very lessons we seek. If print culture were successful in collapsing space and creating new public spheres with shared school systems, how will the age of electronic media expand our public spheres to create something new?

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