

Bruce Curtis — *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871*. Sussex, England, and London, Ontario: Falmer Press and Alhouse Press, 1988. Pp. 450.

The history of education in Ontario has traditionally centered on Egerton Ryerson as the principal builder and servant to the state in a school system honoured as the best *national* system of education at the 1893 Chicago World' Fair. While formally true, this has, even where approached critically, enhanced Ryerson's status without substantially questioning the effects of his efforts. Increasingly, historians and sociologists are asking different questions about education that decentralize the great men and illuminate the responses of young beneficiaries or victims of their systems. In *Building the Educational State*, Bruce Curtis asks different questions and, to a large extent, allows people of the last century to respond.

In his introduction, Curtis promises three areas of concentration on: "the translation of a specific class and gendered understanding of the nature, purposes and occasions of education into a system of state schooling; the emergence, stabilization and normalization of techniques, practices and devices of schooling; and the management of the persistent popular opposition which public schooling provoked" (12).

To accomplish these goals, the book examines two approaches to the formation of education in Canada West and in Ontario. There are interdependent approaches, outlining and contextualizing at two levels the struggles of state servants with and against the population.

Part I traces a number of commissioned reports on the need for and the means by which to form an educational system; this is followed by a discussion of the *School Acts* from 1841 to 1850, the legislative embodiment of struggles in the emerging Canadian state over educational reform and regulation. For the most part, these struggles illustrate a colony in transition toward a political state worthy of reflecting a continuum of British politics and culture. But Curtis' approach to this is significant. The intentions of a developing bourgeoisie and the manifestations of these intentions in the legislation is shown to be ever more sophisticated as it stretches outward to the real political space of education. The formation of systems and the personnel of educational intelligence-gathering increasingly allowed the central authority to monitor and regulate "what actually went on in the classroom itself — and the local reaction to these activities..." (114).

Through these reports and the Common *School Acts*, Curtis makes visible the working relationship between the structure of educational administration and the agency of its personnel and pupils. What is shown by more than simply explicating these formative documents is the connection between Ryerson's plan "to stud the land with appropriate school houses" (99), the creation of "an emotionally forceful terrain" to produce in children a system of self-government (104), and the claim of R.B. Sullivan "that governmental forms congenial to the colonial connection could be sustained in the Canadas, only if the character structures necessary for their sustenance were implanted in the body politic through education" (41). Proposals and reforms of possible structures of administration consistently centered on the formation of selves, and, thus, the development of a national character as the essence of a system of schooling.

In Part II, the second approach to understanding the forming of the educational state rests in the attitudes, needs and responses of the population. This larger part of the book constitutes a new chapter in the history and sociology of education in Canada. Curtis has immersed himself in the mass of correspondence of the Education Office, a resource which has been underused by historians of education. The result is sometimes repetitive, reflecting to some extent the character of these types of collections, but it shows as well the difficulties of trimming down such a volume of primary historical record.

To the author's credit, what emerges is a textured account of teachers, pupils and families trying to come to grips with a highly centralized effort to regulate significant aspects of their lives. Curtis relates, for example, refusals of pupils to be promoted from Common to Grammar School. At issue was a belief that the "lock-step", linear advancement model of schooling, created artificial

distinctions between children and denied families the choice of school, teacher and course of study, the latter often illustrating popular bias against higher education for girls.

It is the systematization of education as a way of life that comes into focus against the now normal practices of schooling, those accepted as the expected routines of a complex and legitimate bureaucracy. Explaining absence from school, being subject to expectations of dress and behaviour are still resisted. Going beyond the administrative structure, Curtis describes the discourse and regulations that channeled specific social practices into normalized activities.

Resistance to these norms took several forms: school burnings, revenge against cruel and de-meaning teachers, and legal action. One can hardly speak of a province-wide organized resistance to schooling; even on the local level, strategic and collective actions were few. But this is not the essential point. Parents resisted schooling partly because they needed child labour for their agrarian survival, but many also refused to send their children because the control of behaviour, the teaching of different social roles and the potentially different determination of occupational goals were out of the hands of the family. Such authority comes under scrutiny, but Curtis permits it also to portray the need for cultural security at the level of the majority of the population.

Throughout the book, he makes a case for a form of repressive tolerance by the Education Office with regard to some of these local resistances. Ryerson was willing to allow local determination of the severity of punishment against pupils in exchange, implicitly, for the smoother running of the system as a whole.

The chapter on teacher training demonstrates how the occupation became increasingly defined and professionalized as central authority became more entrenched. While many teachers were obliged to board-around to obtain food and a place to sleep, the systematization of cash payment allowed them to abandon this mode of living. They understood, as did Ryerson, that they "could not 'civilize' and 'humanize' a population to which they were socially subordinated, or with which they lived on conditions of moral equality" (224). Teachers learned the importance and mechanisms of these tasks in the Normal School, a "total institution" in which every aspect of life — from religious worship to conversation — was centrally regulated. As Curtis points out, it was this form of subordination as a route to moral authority and relative autonomy that gave teachers such direct power over their students and provoked much of the resistance.

Since the mid-1970's, a significant and large body of work has provided an historical narrative of educational development in Ontario. But we are in need of a shift in emphasis, which Bruce Curtis has begun. *Building the Educational State* contains a wealth of anecdotes from the correspondence which many readers will find amusing, provocative or infuriating. These bring to life the other side of Ryerson's system. The interested social historian, however, will want to follow Curtis' suggestive leads that break the narrative history and reveal a more intense pursuit of the experience of time, space and the discourse of schooling — the conditions for the making of selves — in the last century.

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Natalie Zemon Davis — *Fiction in the Archives. Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987. Pp. ix, 215.

In an essay which appeared in *Past and Present* (n° 85, November 1979, pp. 3-24) several years ago, Lawrence Stone called for a restoration of narrative as a historical genre. In *Fiction in the Archives*, Davis has, in a way, attempted to heed the appeal of her colleagues. In so doing, she has produced a gleaming jewel of a book which throws a fascinating light on the legal, social and literary history of the sixteenth century.