

*Schoolbooks and the Myth of Curricular Republicanism: The State and the Curriculum in Canada West, 1820-1850**

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Accounts of the curriculum in Canada West before 1846 have accepted the views of school reformers that American schoolbooks were politically dangerous and were widely used in the colony's schools. This article draws upon reports of local schoolteachers and officials to suggest that American books were not in general use in Canada West and did not generally contain politically obnoxious statements. The curricular reforms of 1846 cannot, it is argued, be viewed simply as an anti-American drive. On the contrary, the article maintains that the schoolbook acquired a new form and purpose with state control.

Dans les descriptions de programmes d'études en vigueur au Canada-Ouest avant 1846, on a pris pour acquis le point de vue des réformateurs de l'enseignement qui soutenaient que les manuels scolaires américains étaient politiquement dangereux et largement répandus dans les écoles de la colonie. S'appuyant sur des rapports d'instituteurs et d'administrateurs locaux, le présent article tend à démontrer que les manuels scolaires américains n'étaient pas aussi largement répandus qu'on l'a cru et qu'ils ne contenaient habituellement pas de messages politiquement pernicieux. On ne peut pas considérer les réformes de l'enseignement de 1846 simplement comme un mouvement anti-américain. Cet article soutient au contraire que la prise en charge de l'enseignement par l'État a doté le manuel scolaire de nouveaux contenus et de nouveaux objectifs.

The late 1840s and early 1850s were a period of radical transformation in the organization of elementary education in Canada West. In this period, popular education became public education, the education of a population by a state. This transformation involved the disposition of new forms of administration and the creation of what Foucault has called new "technologies of power".¹ The state attempted to put in place new pedagogical practices in an effort to produce intelligent citizens.² Extensive

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1. Michel FOUCAULT, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), *passim*.

2. Neil McDONALD, "Egerton Ryerson and the School as an Agent of Political Socialization", in *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*, eds: Neil McDONALD and Alf CHAITON (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 81-106. Also, Bruce CURTIS, "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846", *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 10 (Spring 1983): 99-121.

procedures for information gathering were devised.³ Systems of bureaucratic responsibility were elaborated.⁴ Plans were propagated for the construction of "improved" schoolrooms and the state sought to influence the training of teachers.⁵

The curriculum of the elementary schools was also transformed in this period. Before the School Act of 1846, school knowledge was a product of the largely European curricular developments of the late eighteenth century, the private book market and the diverse and peculiar nature of local educational interests. With the development of a state educational bureaucracy in Canada West, school knowledge became increasingly synonymous with state knowledge.

After 1846 all "American" schoolbooks were banned in Canada West unless the General Board of Education gave its express written consent.⁶ While not banning the use of any "Canadian" or "British" books, the Board strongly recommended the adoption of the curriculum produced by the Irish Commissioners of National Education. The Board intervened in the private book market by arranging for the cheap importation of the Irish texts under licence and by supervising the quality and regulating the price of domestic reprints.⁷ It sent complimentary copies of the Irish texts to District Councils, and the books of forms sent to local school trustees contained price lists for recommended books.⁸ The Chief Superintendent was tireless in his defence of these books in official correspondence.⁹ By February of 1849, the Irish texts were said to be in use as a series in almost half of the colony's elementary schools.¹⁰

The generalized use of the Irish texts in Canada West transformed the forces structuring school knowledge. State intervention changed

3. Public Archives of Ontario (hereafter PAO), RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C, Circular to District Superintendents of Common Schools, 15 December 1846.

4. See R.D. GIDNEY and D.A. LAWR, "The Development of an Administrative System for the Public Schools: The First Stage, 1841-50", in McDONALD and CHAITON, eds, *Ryerson*, pp. 160-83.

5. For schoolrooms, PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook D, the correspondence between the Chief Superintendent of Education for Canada West and A.S. Barnes and Co., New York, about the reprinting of Barnard's *School Architecture*. For teacher training, James LOVE, "The Professionalization of Teachers in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada", in McDONALD and CHAITON, eds, *Ryerson*, pp. 109-28.

6. This policy was quickly publicized by Ryerson, who was authorized by the Board to encourage the use of the Irish texts in his general correspondence. See, for example, PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to Isaac Connor, 29 July 1846.

7. See V. PARVIN, *Authorization of Textbooks for the Schools of Ontario, 1846-1950*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 24-29. Also, PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Armour and Ramsay to Ryerson, 3 November 1846; E.J. Barker to Ryerson, 13 November 1846; RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C. Ryerson to Armour and Ramsay, 11 and 30 November 1846. This is merely a sample of a larger correspondence between the Education Office and various publishers about the reprinting of the Irish texts.

8. These price lists were also reprinted in the official *Journal of Education*.

9. There are dozens of instances of Ryerson's public defence and encouragement of the Irish texts. A typical example is PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to Joseph Wiltse, 13 January 1846. Wiltse was a member of the Johnstown District Council and one of the author's great-grandfathers.

10. PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Ryerson to A. S. Barnes, 27 February 1849.

the nature of the private market in schoolbooks. Curricular reforms were contained in these texts. These curricular innovations are beyond the scope of the present article, but curriculum became responsive to the interests of the state rather than to those of the local community. The curriculum as constituted by the Irish texts was a systematically designed instrument for the efficient transmission of useful knowledge and for the construction of citizens of the state. The origins of such an instrument lie in the imperatives of colonial rule by the English in Ireland and in the educational responses of English reformers to the class struggle produced by the development of industrial capitalism.¹¹ The generalization of the Irish texts in Canada West thus made Canadians participants in educational processes designed for social circumstances quite different from their own.

Moreover, state control over the curriculum and the general use of the Irish texts changed the relation of teacher, scholar and local community to the schoolbook. School knowledge as state knowledge entailed the transformation of school teaching from a craftlike occupation into a *corps d'État*. Curriculum became less a property of the teacher and more a state property. Similarly, both the scholar and other members of the local community lost a substantial measure of control over the content of education. The development of the schoolbook as a specially designed instrument for the transmission of particular skills under conditions of maximum efficiency created a special class of literature quite different from that hitherto common in the schools and the community at large.

To understand this transformation one has to examine the curriculum in Canada West before the School Act of 1846 and the attempts by the colonial state to control school knowledge in the same period. The present article attempts to do both. First, however, some methodological comments are in order.

I

The few historians who have attempted to explain the curricular reforms in Canada West in the late 1840s have sought the causes in the statements of school reformers, educational commentators and the conservative press. These speakers appear to historians as rational social actors: individuals aware of their social interests, capable of predicting the consequences of their actions and freely expressing the reasons behind their activities. Such an approach has given rise to what I call "the myth of curricular republicanism".

The one continuing complaint about the curriculum in Upper Canada and Canada West from the early 1810s until the early 1850s was the presumed pollution of the Canadian schools by American schoolbooks.

11. For an analysis of the origins and content of the Irish texts, see J. M. GOLDSTROM, "Richard Whately and Political Economy in Schoolbooks, 1833-80", *Irish Historical Studies*, XV (1967): 131-45; and his *The Social Content of Education. A Study of the Working Class School Reader in England and Ireland* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972).

School reformers from John Strachan to Egerton Ryerson justified state control over the curriculum as a necessary protection against "Americanism". Other arguments for state control, such as increasing the supply and reducing the price of books, are much less evident.

Historians have tended to accept that curricular reform was motivated by fears of "Americanism" in the schools and to accept these fears as an accurate assessment of the nature of the elementary school curriculum in Canada West. The official historian of education, J. G. Hodgins, credited the School Act of 1846 with removing American textbooks from the schools.¹² Parvin, in an account of the curricular reforms of 1846, writes that "almost all the available books in some schools before 1846 were American textbooks which were strongly anti-British". There were "constant complaints" about these books, and their displacement was "another motive in the introduction of the Irish texts".¹³ More recently, James Love argues that curricular reform in Canada West "was largely concerned with counteracting pro-American attitudes".¹⁴

The methodological issue concerns in part the status of public pronouncements as elements of historical explanation. Even if one accepted that educational reformers regarded "Americanism" in the schools as a pressing political issue, and that some or even many schools in fact used American books, seeking the causes of curricular reform in such expressed concerns would be extremely limiting. In the first place, historians have been noticeably lax in interrogating concepts such as "Americanism". An acceptance of this concept at what historians have taken to be "face value" has meant the reading of curricular reform as a nationalistic endeavour. On the contrary, "American" and "democratic" were synonyms for state educational reformers in mid-nineteenth century Canada West. By underestimating the political stakes involved in curricular reform, historians have tended to miss key changes in the nature of the state.

Furthermore, solutions to the danger of "Americanism" differed dramatically. John Strachan, for instance, sought to overcome the danger by distributing Bibles and Church of England catechisms throughout the colony while Egerton Ryerson intervened in the private book market to encourage the use of non-sectarian works full of useful knowledge.¹⁵ Again, the range of socially possible responses to "Americanism" in the curriculum changed dramatically in the period from 1820 to 1846. In the late 1810s for instance, no systematically designed elementary school

12. J. G. HODGINS, ed., *The Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada*, 28 vols (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, 1894-1912), III: 3n.

13. PARVIN, *Authorization of Textbooks*, p. 29. Parvin merely paraphrases Ryerson's *Special Report on the Common School Act of 1846*.

14. James LOVE, "Cultural Survival and Social Control: The Development of a Curriculum for Upper Canada's Common Schools in 1846", *Histoire sociale—Social History*, XV (November 1982): 373. The reader might compare Love's analysis with this one. Many of the sources for these two articles are the same, but the analyses differ radically.

15. The difference between these two attempts signals the transition from loyalty as membership in the state church to loyalty as informed citizenship in the national state. The denunciations of "Americanism" seem to be identical.

curriculum was popularly available; by 1846 there were several. The possibilities for curricular reform were further enhanced by the rapid development of paper making and steam printing. Seeking the logic of social transformation in a body of public statements about "Americanism" may thus lead to the neglect of the changing social context.

Another serious methodological problem is raised by the contradictory statements of social actors. The argument that school reformers were motivated by a fear of "Americanism" is convincing only to the extent that these reformers had a more or less consistent position on the question. However, reformers were noticeably *inconsistent* in their statements on this subject. Egerton Ryerson, for example, argued that American books were in general use in politically unstable regions of the colony but then stated that he had no real information about books in use in the schools.¹⁶ He denounced the influence of American books but at the same time presented himself to American publishers as a champion and leading defender of American innovations.¹⁷ At one moment he claimed that the scattered irreligious remarks in American texts constituted a clear danger to the youth of Upper Canada, and the next moment argued that similar remarks in the Irish texts were of no importance.¹⁸ Indeed, after the passage of the School Act of 1846, Ryerson justified the presence of the American Declaration of Independence on the walls of classrooms in the Niagara District.¹⁹

Such contradictions cannot be resolved in the discourse of school reform itself. They signal the existence of interests not immediately obvious in public statements and demand that historians both interrogate the concepts used in such statements and closely examine changing social contexts. My position is that the debate over the curriculum should be read in terms of the changing character of the colonial state. While school reformers may well have believed that books of American origin filled the elementary schools, I will argue that these beliefs were mistaken. The significance of the transformation of the curriculum in Canada West in the late 1840s lies not in the expulsion of American books, but in the "statification" of school knowledge. This transformation has been disguised by the "myth of curricular republicanism".

16. For the use of books, Egerton RYERSON, *Special Report on the Measures which have been adopted for the Establishment of a Normal School* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847), p. 15. For the absence of information about the use of books, PAO, RG 2, Letterbook C, Circular to District Superintendents of Common Schools, 15 December 1846.

17. RYERSON, *Special Report on the Measures*, p. 15; PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Ryerson to A. S. Barnes, 27 February 1849.

18. RYERSON, *Special Report*, p. 15; The insignificance of scattered irreligious remarks in the Irish texts is in PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook E, Ryerson to the Editor, the *Examiner*, 16 August 1850.

19. PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook E, Ryerson to Leslie, 29 July 1850.

II

Elementary education in Upper Canada was governed by the School Act of 1816. This Act, written by John Strachan, remained in force with modifications until 1841. Under it, any group of resident property holders capable of providing a school of a certain size was empowered to assemble for educational purposes and to elect three school trustees. These trustees were to manage local educational matters, hire teachers and prescribe the course of study. The Act also created a small legislative grant-in-aid of teachers' salaries. Supervision of local educational matters was to be exercised by District Boards of Education appointed by the executive government. These bodies were to oversee the course of study in the schools, examine and certify teachers, and regulate the conduct of the schools. The Act also created a small schoolbook fund which it placed at the disposal of the District Boards.

John Strachan expected that with this Act the Executive Council would "obtain the power of directing the books to be used" in the schools and the power of "directing the qualifications of masters".²⁰ In practice this was not the case. Appointed District Boards of Education remained socially and physically distant from the conduct of local education. The power of the Boards to examine teachers was employed cursorily, if at all, and in fact the conduct of local education, including the provision of the curriculum, remained largely under the control of local residents and trustees.²¹ Disappointed by this outcome, Lieutenant-Governor Maitland, Strachan, and other members of the Executive Council increasingly came to see the Act as a means of support for the "democratic apparatus and republican mischief" of itinerant American schoolmasters.²²

To colonial Tories, control over education by the executive branch of the colonial state was a matter of importance. In the hands of the executive, education could produce a loyal population; in the hands of local residents and trustees, education could produce democracy and disloyalty.²³ To some the danger was pressing. Bishop Macdonell wrote to the Colonial Secretary in 1817,

The education of the youth of Upper Canada is in the hands of Americans, and consists in the perusal of works artfully tintured with the principles of their Government and Constitution and holding up their own worthies as perfect patterns of every moral excellence, whilst our public and private characters are presented in the most odious and disgusting light. The danger is of a serious and alarming nature.²⁴

20. J.L.H. HENDERSON, ed., *John Strachan: Documents and Opinions* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 87.

21. J.D. WILSON, "The Teacher in Early Ontario", in *Aspects of Nineteenth Century Ontario*, eds: F.H. ARMSTRONG et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 221.

22. WILSON, "The Teacher", p. 221; G.M. CRAIG, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. 97.

23. G.W. SPRAGGE, "The Upper Canada Central School", *Ontario History*, XXXII (1937): 172; R.D. GIDNEY, "Centralization and Education: the Origins of an Ontario Tradition", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, VII (1972): 34.

24. SPRAGGE, "Central School", p. 173.

To counter the danger, Lieutenant-Governor Maitland embarked upon a plan in the early 1820s to place a school on the model of the English National Society in each of the main colonial towns. To this end, John Strachan and several other Executive Councillors were named to a General Board of Education for Upper Canada and were vested with control over the school lands set aside in 1797. In writing to the Colonial Office for approval of these actions after the fact, Maitland stressed again "the mischiefs which may result from the introduction of Schoolmasters and Schoolbooks from the United States".²⁵ The Colonial Secretary's approval of the plan included the promise of a shipment containing a "due allotment of Bibles and Prayer Books".²⁶

The School Act of 1824 gave legislative recognition to the General Board of Education and its investiture with the school lands. Under this Act as well, the Board received an annual appropriation of £150 currency for the purchase of schoolbooks to distribute to local schools. The Board undertook to displace the supposedly common American books by supplying books of its own choice.

The schoolbook appropriation was spent in 1825 and 1826, and probably each succeeding year until the disbanding of the Board in 1833.²⁷ The appropriation for 1825 and 1826 was paid to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK),²⁸ the missionary and publishing house of the Church of England and the supplier of books to the National Schools.²⁹ The SPCK specialized in the production of highly religious tracts for schools, catechisms, and cheap Bibles.³⁰ In return for the £300 currency in the schoolbook appropriation, the SPCK sent books valued at almost £500 currency.³¹

The General Board of Education kept no records of the books it received, nor of where and when they were distributed. However, the number of books distributed was probably quite large. The average early nineteenth-century schoolbook of 170-odd pages cost about 5*d.* in England, and Bibles were at least as cheap. At this rate, given the generosity of the SPCK, the Board of Education would have been in a position to

25. PAO, RG 2, A, Minutes of the General Board of Education, 1823-33, n.d.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid. The record keeping is sloppy at best and non-existent at worst. The Report signed by Strachan for 1829 states that the fund was expended for 1825 and 1826 and would be expended for 1827 and 1828. The expenditure for 1825 also appears in the Board's account book. The minutes of 28 July 1832 read: "The Treasurer was ordered to apply for the annual appropriation for the purchase of books to be furnished for the common schools."

28. For the SPCK, see Alec ELLIS, *Books in Victorian Elementary Schools*, (London: The Library Association, 1971), p. 15; W.K.L. CLARKE, *A History of the SPCK* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1959).

29. For a good brief account of the National Schools, J.M. GOLDSTROM, "The Content of Education and the Socialization of the Working-class Child, 1830-1860", in *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. P. MCCANN, (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 93-109.

30. ELLIS, *Victorian Elementary Schools*, p. 15.

31. PAO, RG 2, A, Minutes of the General Board of Education, 1829.

distribute fifteen to eighteen thousand books with the appropriations for 1825 and 1826 alone. While it is probable that many of the books distributed were Bibles, the Board was denounced in print for distributing a large number of copies of Andrew Bell's *Experiment in Education*.³²

This did not exhaust the General Board's attempts to provide "suitable" books for the schools. In 1829, claiming that there was no suitable arithmetic book in existence, Strachan himself was charged with composing "a short manual on the Subject, sensible to the state of the Country, with a key for the advantage of teachers".³³ In fact, Strachan had already composed such a book during his earlier career as a schoolmaster. Whether or not a new book was produced is not known, but no arithmetic book by Strachan enjoyed a wide circulation. More significant was the Board's handling of Mavor's *The English Spelling Book*. The Board reported in 1829 that it had sent donations of Mavor's "excellent work" to the various districts. Moreover, the Board contracted with Kingston printer James McFarlane to print two thousand copies of this book on large cardboard sheets for use in the schools. The cost was to be defrayed by selling off some of the school lands. When McFarlane ran into financial difficulties, the Board came to his assistance with a subsidy of £50 and the promise of possible future orders.³⁴

None of these cardboard sheets has survived from Upper Canada (nor from England) although occasional mention of them was made in the early 1840s.³⁵ Their publication and the distribution of Bell's *Experiment in Education* indicate the connection of this attempt at curricular reform with the work of the English National Society. The printing of books on cards around which large groups of children could gather was a pedagogical device pioneered in Bell's system of rote learning. In England, the practice was related to the suspicion that the ruling class had of the dangers of popular acquaintance with books and reading.³⁶ While the Board may not have shared this prejudice, its curricular reforms anticipated the spread of monitorial schooling and rote learning on the model of the York Central School.³⁷

It is difficult to assess with much precision the consequences upon the curriculum of the Board's activities. The school curriculum seems to have changed relatively little from 1820 to 1846, and no publications of

32. J. D. WILSON, "Common School Texts in Use in Upper Canada Prior to 1845", *BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA, Papers*, IX (1970), p. 38. Bell's book was a manual for the monitorial schools.

33. PAO, RG 2, A, Minutes of the General Board of Education, 1829.

34. *Ibid.*, 6 May 1829; Annual Report, 13 May 1829.

35. For example, PAO, RG 2, F 2, Miscellaneous School Reports, Mich. Bartley, No. 3 Maidstone Township, 18 October 1842. Bartley described his books in part as "Elementary Spelling Books and Alphabetical Cards".

36. The political struggles over literacy in England are discussed in R. D. ALTICK, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), Brian SIMON, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974) and R. K. WEBB, *The British Working Class Reader: Literacy and Social Tension, 1780-1848* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971).

37. For the history of the school, SPRAGGE, "Central School".

the SPCK seemed to have been generally used in the common schools, at least in the long term. While the Board supplied large numbers of books to the schools at least in 1825 and 1826, the average life of school-books in this period has been estimated at four years. Nonetheless, throughout the period before 1846, Bibles and Testaments were common class-books and it is entirely possible that the supply of these books was influenced by the General Board. Moreover, Mavor's *Spelling Book* does not appear in the scattered curricular reports made before 1825, yet by 1830 it was used quite generally and remained so until the reforms of 1846. Since, as I argue below, the majority of Upper Canadian scholars read the Bible or Testament and a speller at school, one might conclude that the Board of Education influenced the curriculum in a major way.

The Board failed nonetheless to gain effective control over the curriculum of the common schools. It came under considerable criticism in the late 1820s and early 1830s from Reformers for its "plundering" of the school lands and for its handling of the Central School at York.³⁸ William Lyon Mackenzie's "Articles of Impeachment" of 1832 denounced the Board's distribution of "large quantities of Church of England Catechisms and other School Books" and its failure to account for its expenditure of public funds on books.³⁹ The Board was disbanded in 1833 and the curriculum was once again left to the influence of teachers, parents and the private book market.

Despite the general use of the Bible and Mavor in the common schools, conservative criticism of the pollution of the schools by American texts continued in the 1830s. Dr Thomas Rolph, an English tourist, claimed that the common schools were taught by American adventurers. The curriculum was said to contain,

false accounts of the late war in which Great Britain was engaged with the United States; geography setting forth New York, Philadelphia, Boston, &c, as the largest and finest cities in the world; historical reading books describing the American population as the most free and enlightened under heaven . . . and American spelling books, dictionaries, and grammars, teaching them an Anti-British dialect and idiom.⁴⁰

This sort of criticism doubled in force and volume after the Rebellion of 1837. R. B. Sullivan, later President of the Legislative Council, claimed in a report on the causes of the Rebellion that the lack of "Government superintendence" over the schools created real political dangers. The youth of the colony was exposed to teachers who could not, had they wanted to, instruct it in its political duties.

The books they use are all American filled with inflated accounts of American independence and the glorious wars with England. The exploits of General Jackson and the heroes of 76 fill the youthful mind to the exclusion of every thing glorious or interesting in English history.⁴¹

38. HODGINS, *Documentary History*, I: 174-79; SPRAGGE, "Central School".

39. HODGINS, *Documentary History*, II: 58.

40. *Ibid.*, III: 3.

41. "Mr Sullivans Report on the State of the Province 1838" in *The Arthur Papers*, ed.: C. R. SANDERSON, 4 vols (Toronto: Toronto Public Libraries and the University of Toronto Press, 1943), I: 151.

Lieutenant-Governor Arthur shared this assessment as did the Education Commission of 1839. The latter recommended the establishment of a central body with control over the school curriculum.

III

Criticism of the common school curriculum continued throughout the 1840s. Claims of Americanism were made in support of state control over the curriculum, but there was surprisingly little discussion of the actual books in use in the schools. Not all parties to the debate supported reform through state control. Several of the independent teachers' associations which came into existence in response to the School Act of 1841 argued for teachers' control over the curriculum.⁴² Some teachers called for the state to encourage the production of books in areas where they found the curriculum weak, and urged the awarding of prizes for the writing of schoolbooks.⁴³ Such American schoolbooks as Kirkham's *Grammar* and Daboll's *Arithmetic* were sometimes described as the best available.⁴⁴ Other teachers declared themselves prepared to use any books at all, provided these be numerous, durable and well-printed.⁴⁵

The positions taken by elected Township School Commissioners were mixed. Some, like John Burns of Esquissing Township, called for the creation of "a convention of learned Men" to prescribe a course of study and for the Provincial Superintendent of Education to publish suitable texts.⁴⁶ The Commissioners of Township Schools had the power to prescribe the books for township schools under the School Act of 1841. The Commissioners in Sidney Township seemed quite content with existing schoolbooks and with the opportunities for the development of the curriculum offered by the Act. In their instructions to local teachers in 1842 they wrote:

The low price of Murray's *Epitome of English Grammar* is such as to offer every facility for studying the rudiments . . . As common spelling books now in use (Mavor's) contain the outlines of Geography you are desired as soon as your scholars are qualified to require them to commit those outlines to memory. By this means, the principles of Geography will be inculcated, without any additional expence to parents, and a taste for the Study diffused through Society.⁴⁷

42. PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Robert Spence, Sect'r, on behalf of school teachers and school commissioners assembled at Hamilton, 14 January 1843, to Murray, 1 April 1843; Nicol Nicholson and John Ross on behalf of the Teachers of the District of Brock met at Woodstock, to Murray, 17 June 1843.

43. PAO, RG 2, C-6-2, R. R. Mackie of Richmond to Murray, 1 November 1842.

44. *Ibid.* This letter contains a lengthy evaluation of the existing schoolbooks commonly used in Canada West and the author praises the works by Daboll and Kirkham in particular.

45. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Report of a Common School Established on Lot N. 17—Township of Gloucester, District of Dalhousie.

46. PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, John Burns of Esquissing to Murray, 19 January 1843.

47. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Rules, Township of Sidney, 1842.

Denunciations of American texts are noticeably lacking in the accounts of these elected officials. Indeed, while many Commissioners stressed the importance of the school as a means of fostering loyalty and morality, they often recommended the use of American texts at the same time.⁴⁸ This suggests that American texts were not objectionable in many localities, or at least that Township Commissioners did not draw a connection between these texts and faulty political socialization.

For his part, the Rev. Robert Murray, Assistant Superintendent of Education in Canada West until 1844 (and no relation to Murray, the author of schoolbooks), regarded the schoolbook situation as unsatisfactory. Murray claimed that elected local officials were not exerting the influence they might over the curriculum,⁴⁹ while he also opposed the principle of local control. Because of local control, schoolbooks were scarce, "miserably got up, and double the price at which they might be sold under a general Provincial system".⁵⁰ More importantly, the fact of local control limited the use of education as an instrument of state policy. To Murray the problem was that there was "no general system of books in use". Power over the curriculum was "so divided in the hands of those who hold it, that it cannot be made available to the advancement of any great Provincial Scheme of education."⁵¹ This concern with the social uses of education appears at the heart of the position favouring state control over the curriculum. State control was a pre-condition of the education of the population by the state. The development of a state-directed political socialization was an important part of attempts to reconstruct the colonial state and the character of political rule in mid-nineteenth-century Canada.⁵² The debates over the curriculum cannot be separated from larger questions of political organization and the nature of the state.

While the School Act of 1841 had removed control over the curriculum from local school trustees and had vested it in elected officials at the township level, Murray hoped that the School Act of 1843 would create more centralized control.⁵³ In fact, this Act of the Reform ministry restored the powers over the curriculum which local trustees had enjoyed under the School Act of 1816.⁵⁴

However, this extension of local control was short-lived. Egerton Ryerson and the Tory administration brought to office by the political crisis of 1843-44 transformed the organization of the school system with the

48. For example, PAO, RG 2, F 2, Osnabruck Rules and Regulations. The Commissioners in Osnabruck urged teachers to "sow the seeds of Genuine Loyalty to our Sovereign, Attachment to the Constitution" while prescribing Olney's *Geography*.

49. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly*, Third Session, 1843, Appendix 2, Annual Report of the Deputy Superintendent of Education on Common Schools throughout Canada West.

50. PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook A, Murray to Boulton, 22 March 1843.

51. *Ibid.*, Murray to Thornton, [?] February 1843.

52. This question is addressed at length in CURTIS, "Preconditions".

53. PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook A, Murray to Walker, 28 February 1843.

54. *Ibid.*, Murray to Craigie, 5 December 1843, for Murray's disclaimer of responsibility for the Act.

School Act of 1846. Ryerson sought quite explicitly to make the school system into an instrument for the preservation of the colonial connection.⁵⁵ The Act of 1846 placed control over the curriculum in an appointed and extra-parliamentary General Board of Education. The Board was empowered to publish a list of authorized books for use in the schools, from which local officials were to select books for local use. In principle, the Board could withhold the legislative school monies from any locality not using authorized texts. In practice, this power was not initially invoked, both because the Board feared local opposition and because arrangements for the publication of recommended texts demanded some delay.⁵⁶ The books in common use in the schools in 1845 were almost entirely excluded from the list of books recommended in 1846. The recommended books were taken from the series of texts published by the Irish Commissioners of National Education, with a few additions, such as Lennie's *English Grammar* (an English book). Approved books included two American publications: Morse's *Geography* and Kirkham's *Grammar*.⁵⁷

The School Act of 1846 and the new Irish texts elicited serious opposition from the Reform press and from some organs of local government. Cries of "Prussian despotism" were directed at Ryerson,⁵⁸ who defended the new School Act and his plans for political socialization by pointing to the necessity of eliminating American texts. Indeed, in his *Special Report on the Common School Act of 1846*, Ryerson went so far as to claim that the public opposition surrounding the Act was entirely about schoolbooks. He stated that the schools had been flooded with American schoolbooks after 1835, and a large number of Canadians had an economic interest in this trade. These people, Ryerson claimed, were the opponents of the Act and they pretended to object to government control over the curriculum because they were not honest enough to advocate openly the use of American books.

The exclusion of American books was a pressing necessity "not because they are foreign books simply", but rather "because they are, with very few exceptions, anti-British, in every sense of the word." The books were said to "abound in statements and allusions prejudicial to the institutions and character of the British nation." While some people might pretend these allusions were "few and far between", Ryerson argued that no one would accept statements directed against "our common

55. CURTIS, "Preconditions", p. 106.

56. Local reaction to the Act was mixed. In some localities, local government moved to introduce the texts recommended by the Board. Several District Superintendents of Education reported strong local opposition both to the Act and to its textbook clauses which were regarded as arbitrary. For instances of both positions see PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Memorial of the Colbourne District Council, 8 February 1848; Hamnett Pinhey to Ryerson, 7 February 1847; D'Everado to Ryerson, 19 October 1846; and W. Elliot to Ryerson, 18 July 1846.

57. PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C, Circular to District Superintendents of Common Schools, 15 December 1846.

58. PARVIN, *Authorization of Textbooks*, p. 36.

Christianity", no matter how few and far between; "our common country" was equally sacred.⁵⁹

And as to the influence of such publications, I believe, though silent and imperceptible in its operations, it is more extensive and powerful than is generally supposed. I believe such books are one element of powerful influence against the established Government of the country. From facts which have come to my knowledge, I believe it will be found on inquiry, that in precisely those parts of Upper Canada where United States School Books had been used most extensively, there the spirit of the insurrection of 1837, and 1838, was most prevalent.⁶⁰

IV

Any attempt to determine the extent to which American books were actually used in the common schools of Canada West in the period before 1846 is made difficult by the scarcity of reliable local educational reports. Only after the passage of the School Act of 1846 did systematic educational information-gathering begin in Canada West. The information which Ryerson considered "absolutely necessary" for a "full and comprehensive view of the State of Elementary Education" and even the information "needed to form an adequate and safe opinion as to all the precise measures demanded for its improvement and extention" was, he pointed out in his circular to District Superintendents in 1846, simply not available. While I will suggest that Ryerson did not make use of some of the information available in the form of local school reports for the year 1842, the subject of schoolbooks was open to impression, opinion, and of course, interest. For the most part, participants in the debate over the content of the curriculum could only base their claims of republicanism on scattered or fragmentary information, reports in the public press and personal observation.

Whatever the influence of the policy of the General Board of Education in the 1820s, and despite Ryerson's claims of a sudden influx of American books after 1835, the common school curriculum in Upper Canada seems to have remained remarkably constant from the late 1810s to the reforms of 1846. The total number of titles on the market was large. At the same time, the number of new books appearing and of old books falling into disuse was quite small.

Most Upper Canadian schoolbooks were products of European educational developments. European curricular development in the late

59. RYERSON, *Special Report*, pp. 14-15. It is interesting to note the connection Ryerson makes between religion and citizenship. A large part of Ryerson's activities can be read as attempts to construct civil society by translating earlier conceptions of political loyalty as loyalty to the state church into conceptions of loyalty as membership in the national state. It is important to remark that the state is merely in the process of construction in this period.

60. *Ibid.*

eighteenth century produced the first grammar books for schools and provided the essential forms assumed by spellers, readers and arithmetic books. A second wave of European curricular reform in the 1830s, which coincided with internal developments in the publishing industry and with attempts by states to control popular education, altered the social and physical form of the schoolbook.⁶¹ Schoolbooks became larger, thicker, and the type they contained improved in quality. They also tended to be directed more closely to the achievement of state or state-inspired educational objectives. Subject specializations became more marked, and schoolbooks tended to lose their character as general compendia.

Until the spread of "useful knowledge"⁶² began to be felt in Canada in the late 1830s (especially through the use of McCulloch's *Readers* and the early Irish texts), the books in common use in Upper Canada were those written in Europe and to a lesser extent America in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Change in schoolbooks in Canada in the 1820s and 1830s was limited to the appearance of a few new and improved versions of established books. The form and content of schoolbooks remained remarkably constant.

The more or less free market in books produced a typical school curriculum. Reports of the curriculum before 1840 consistently point to the existence of a variety of texts in use in the schools, and frequently point to the existence of several texts for the same subject in individual schools. Nonetheless, the same sources indicate that the school curriculum was by no means composed of a random mixture of texts. A core of books appeared in the vast majority of schools. This typical curriculum consisted of the Bible and Testament, Mavor's *The English Spelling Book*, Murray's *English Reader and Introduction*, Walkingame's *Arithmetic*, and far less frequently, a grammar by Lennie, Murray or Kirkham, Olney's *Geography*, Goldsmith's *History of England or Rome*, and Walker's *Pronouncing Dictionary*.⁶³ Only Kirkham's *Grammar* and Olney's *Geography* were typically used American books.

61. Scattered material on this question may be gleaned from ALTICK, *The English Common Reader*, GOLDSTROM, *Social Content of Education* and ELLIS, *Books in Victorian Elementary Schools*.

62. "Useful Knowledge" and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge arose as an attempt by various members of the bourgeoisie and landed property owners in England to stem the tide of working-class radicalism by providing workers with information about the benefits of capitalist accumulation and the rule of the bourgeoisie. A short account of the Society is in SIMON, *Two Nations and the Educational Structure*, pp. 159-63. For working-class reactions to these educational tactics, see Richard JOHNSON, "'Really useful knowledge': Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790-1848", in *Working-Class Culture: History and Theory*, eds: John CLARKE *ie* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp. 75-102.

63. There is a wealth of material in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, consisting of accounts of local schools and teachers' reminiscences listing books, as well as such things as the Education Commission Report for 1839, all of which contain lists of books in use. See I, p. 182; III, pp. 132, 136-38, 253; IV, pp. 134, 138. Also J. A. BANNISTER, *Early Educational History of Norfolk County* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1926), *passim*.

School reports filed by teachers directly with the Education Office in 1842, and apparently neglected by Ryerson in his account of the curriculum, provide the first possibility of a systematic assessment of the curriculum in general use in Canada West in the 1840s. The chaotic operation of the School Act of 1841 led teachers to file these reports, which range in length from a few lines to a few pages. The reports contain a wealth of information about local educational practices, including curricula, and a large number of them have been preserved in the records of the Education Office. A sample of reports also exists from Township Commissioners of Common Schools who were vested with the power to specify the curriculum on a township-wide basis.⁶⁴

This material allows a limited assessment of the curriculum in Canada West in 1842. The reports seem to be representative. They deal with town and country schools, with large and small schools, with schools taught by men and less often by women, and with schools in various parts of the colony. To some extent, schools in the Prince Edward and Johnstown Districts, where the District Councils refused to enact the provisions of the Act of 1841, are over-represented, but it is not clear that this distorts the results. What emerges clearly from the reports is that most teachers and commissioners made no distinction between American and non-American books. Many teachers mention the use of one or more American books, but few give any indication that they were aware of or concerned about Americanism in their schools.⁶⁵

These reports are limited by the absence of detailed information about the numbers of books in use. Most of them list titles, beginning usually with the elementary branches of instruction, but rarely do they state which books are most numerous. This is a problem where more than one book is used in a subject, or where an American book is in use at the same time as a British or Canadian book of the same sort. The problem arises primarily with spelling and arithmetic books. Rarely did

64. A discussion of the administrative chaos provoked by the Act may be found in GIDNEY and LAWR, "The Development of an Administrative System". The School Act depended for its successful operation on the existence of District Councils, yet the Act establishing such Councils was passed only after the School Act. For this reason, the mechanisms for information-gathering contained in the School Act did not operate. Yet both teachers and Township School Commissioners were required to report to the Education Office in order to receive shares in the government school fund. They tended to do so directly. The material on which most of the remaining sections of the article are based was either mailed to the Education Office directly or delivered to Robert Murray by hand during his educational tour of the colony in 1843. These reports are contained for the most in PAO, RG 2, F 2, Miscellaneous School Reports. The reports are not always dated, nor are they titled in any uniform fashion. They are arranged alphabetically by town or township of origin. Citations hereafter of the material in F 2 will give the place of origin of the reports cited.

65. It might be argued that the reports in question are biased by the fact that teachers were reporting directly to the Education Office in the hope of sharing in the school fund; teachers would thus present the best (and hence a pro-British) account of their schools possible. If this were indeed the case, the inclusion of large numbers of American titles in the school reports would suggest that Americanism was simply not an issue of educational importance to most teachers.

schools use more than one reader or geography, and only slightly more often more than one grammar. I have therefore assumed that the books named most frequently in the School Reports for 1842 were also the most numerous. If this assumption does not obtain, American spellers and arithmetic books were perhaps more common than is estimated here. However, the significance of such a possible under-representation will become apparent in a later section of the article dealing with the content of American schoolbooks.

In 1842, there were reported to be 2,245 school districts in Canada West, of which only 1,169 contained operative schools. For 128, or 10.9 percent, of these schools, reports have been preserved which contain information about curricula. In 1842, School Commissioners had been elected in 245 of the 315 townships in Canada West. Reports from 36, or 14.7 percent, of these Township School Commissions have been preserved which contain information about curricular prescriptions. Table 1 presents the national origin of schoolbooks named by teachers and prescribed by Township School Commissioners in Canada West in 1842.

The School Reports for 1842 indicate the existence of a typical and typically British school curriculum in Canada West. This curriculum was more or less the same as that mentioned in the scattered reports from the 1820s and 1830s. It generally consisted of the Bible and Testament,⁶⁶ Mavor's *Spelling Book*, Murray's *Reader*, Walkingame's *Arithmetic*, Olney's *Geography* and Goldsmith's *History* with one of the grammars by Murray, Lennie, or less commonly, Kirkham. Only in geography did an American text predominate in the reports of local teachers, and as I will show below, few students studied geography. Township School Commissioners tended to replace the American Olney's *Geography* by that of the Scot Stewart.

While these books were the ones most commonly used, not all students were exposed to all of them. The impact of a typical curriculum upon students depends on the degree to which they are exposed to its various branches. The fact that a school used an American geography book, for instance, can lead to conclusions about the impact of Americanism in the curriculum only if one knows who studied geography, how they did so, and what they made of what they studied.⁶⁷

Not all branches of the typical common school curriculum were taught in all schools. The schools grouped under the Act of 1841 were diverse in the extreme. The noun "school" applied indiscriminately to infant schools, female schools, quasi-classical academies and schools for various religious denominations. Curricula were equally various. In

66. Of 128 teachers reporting, 104 mentioned the use of the Bible and/or Testament. 28 of the 36 Township School Commissions prescribed their use as classbooks.

67. It should be noted that even the presence of American material in the schools does not preclude teachers taking a critical attitude towards it. Similarly, even if teachers had preached democratic values, the mere fact of their doing so would have been no guarantee that students acquired such values. It is very difficult to reconstruct pedagogy, and accounts of students' reactions are even more elusive.

Table 1 National Origin of Schoolbooks in Canada West, 1842
(Percentage Written by Authors of Different Nationalities)

	Nationality of Authors				N
	British %	American %	Canadian %	Origin Unknown %	
A. Books Named by					
Common School Teachers ^a					
Spellers	72	17	6	5	149
Readers	86	—	—	14	126
Grammars	77	18	—	5	92
Arithmetics	48	13	—	39 ^b	163
Geographies	10	62	—	21	48
Histories	53	—	—	47	19
B. Books Recommended by					
Township School Commissioners					
Spellers	63	10	25	2	41
Readers	91	—	—	9	33
Grammars	82	15	—	3	39
Arithmetics	47	8	—	45	38
Geographies	24	32	—	44	25
Histories	100	—	—	—	9

Source: Public Archives of Ontario, RG 2, F 2, Miscellaneous school reports.

^a Since in most subjects more than one book was named by some teachers, the number of books named is larger than the number of teachers reporting. For example, the 149 spellers were named by 114 teachers.

^b These 64 books included 21 different titles. One of these books, Gray's *Arithmetic*, was named nine times.

Isaac Denike's school in Huntingdon Township students were restricted to reading and spelling.⁶⁸ Francis Owens in Wellington Township taught reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography and a bit of Virgil for the more advanced.⁶⁹ From Patrick Lynch in Gloucester a scholar could learn to read, write, do arithmetic and also acquire some "Mensuration, Gauging, Trigonometry, Navigation, Surveying, and Dialing".⁷⁰ Teachers taught by methods they described as "analytic", "interrogative", "inductive", "Lancasterian", "monitorial" and "intellectual", methods learned in the Edinburgh Normal School, the Kildare Place Society, the Royal Naval School and elsewhere.⁷¹ They practised these methods on groups ranging in size from fewer than twenty to as many as one hundred and fifty scholars.⁷²

In fact, as Robert Murray remarked, there was no general system of education in Canada West. Schools were not linked to one another in any systematic fashion, and this indeed meant that no systematic curriculum was in place. The schools could no more be used for systematic American political propaganda than they could for propaganda encouraging "loyalty" or sympathy for British imperialism. In the 1840s a free market in education was only in the process of coming under the systematizing influence of the state. In this market, at least 20 percent of the active teachers were not in fact capable of teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography and book-keeping.⁷³ Most students did not study grammar or geography. They were content, as Haight remarked, "if they learned to read and write, and to wade through figures as far as the Rule of Three."⁷⁴

Most schools were classified internally, the number of classes ranging from two to eight, with four being usual. The first of these consisted of students just beginning to read who spent most of their time working in a primer of some sort or other, often under the supervision of an older student monitor. The second class progressed to the Bible and Testament, a speller, elementary writing lessons, and sometimes a catechism. By the third class, students encountered a reader and the first three rules of

68. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Huntingdon Township.

69. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Wellington Township.

70. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Gloucester Township.

71. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Nichol Township, school of George Elmslie (educated at Edinburgh); Smith Township, school of Patrick Wood (educated at Kildare Place Society); PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Foley to Murray, 17 May 1843 (Foley educated at Royal Naval School).

72. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Ahira H. Blake, Picton, among other things Secretary of the Prince Edward District Common School Teachers' Association, had 148 students on the roll of his school in the Picton town hall.

73. PAO, RG 2, F 3-A, Annual Reports of Common Schools, 1842. The reports from the Eastern, London, Ottawa, Wellington and Bathurst Districts provide information about 250 teachers. District Councils were asked to rank teachers in a four-term hierarchy. Category "1" was the lowest, and in it teachers were supposed to be able to teach reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic for commerce, geography and book-keeping. 48 teachers were returned as "0", as "1/2" or as a blank space.

74. Canniff HAIGHT, *Country Life in Canada Fifty Years Ago* (Toronto: Hunter Rose & Co., 1885), p. 157.

arithmetic: notation, addition and subtraction. The fourth class was usually quite small, and here the truly arcane branches of instruction were presented: arithmetic to the rule of five, grammar, geography and history. In a number of schools the course of study went far beyond this, but such schools were rare.⁷⁵ In Henry Graham's Trafalgar Township school, for example, there were thirty-four regular scholars, nineteen boys and fifteen girls. All of the scholars spelled and read at some level, nineteen of them wrote, eight did arithmetic, three did grammar, and two geography.⁷⁶ John O'Donnele's Picton academy had sixty scholars, forty males and twenty females, "of whom are classical students 5, 12 Arithmetics, Geographers and Grammarians, 23 readers and writers, and 20 spellers."⁷⁷ Francis Freeman's scholars in Smithtown Township were "young in their courses of learning". Each of these students had an "English spelling Book, for spelling in", but there were no grammar, arithmetic or geography books.⁷⁸

The scattered evidence concerning numbers of books in the schools further points to the importance of reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic and to the marginality of grammar, geography and history in the education of most scholars. Malcolm Campbell of Ekfried Township had twenty-five scholars and seventeen books in his school. He had one copy of Pinnock's *Catechism of Geography* (an English text) but no history books. "Of class no. 4", wrote Campbell, "6 or 8 are fit for a history book but cannot easily be formed into another class on account of the highness of price and scarcity of books in these backwoods markets."⁷⁹ In Binbrook Township, William Mitchell's school possessed eight Testaments, seven *English Readers*, seven arithmetic books, seven spellers and eight copy books. There were no grammar, history or geography books.⁸⁰ Robert Thiaren's school in Mosa Township contained four *English Readers*, twelve Testaments, and ten copies of Mavor's *Spelling Book*.⁸¹ In Nelson Township, Samuel Morrison's twenty-odd students had a total of fifty-one books. They used twenty-one spellers, twelve arithmetics, six Testaments, five copies of the *English Reader*, five copies of Kirkham's *Grammar* and one copy each of the grammars by Lennie and Murray.⁸² Finally, in the Township of Athol, Henry Dyre's class of about thirty had thirty-seven books, including twelve copies of Cobb's *Spelling Book*, five Testaments, five *English Readers*, four copies of the *Introduction to the English Reader*, three copies of Cobb's *Juvenile Readers*, two copies of Willett's *Arithmetic* and one copy of Prugar's *Arithmetic*. Dyre had no grammar, history or geography.⁸³

75. See note 73. Nine of the 250 teachers were returned as "4", as "able to prepare young men for entering the University".

76. PAO, RG 2, F 2, Trafalgar Township.

77. *Ibid.*, Town of Picton.

78. *Ibid.*, Smithtown Township.

79. *Ibid.*, Ekfried Township.

80. *Ibid.*, Binbrook Township.

81. *Ibid.*, Mosa Township.

82. *Ibid.*, Nelson Township.

83. *Ibid.*, Athol Township.

The evidence from local schools in 1842 suggests that claims of Americanism in the curriculum made by reformers interested in state control were exaggerated, if not simply false. Only in the higher branches of instruction—grammar and geography—did American books occupy anything like a position of dominance. These were areas of study to which the typical scholar was not exposed and which large numbers of teachers were incapable of teaching in any case.

What of the obnoxious content of American books, those “passages exalting American institutions at the expense of the institutions of other countries” and those “philippics against the institutions and government of Great Britain” so deplored by Ryerson?⁸⁴ An examination of the content of the American books reported to be in common use, and some other evidence, suggests that it was very mild indeed. *Cobb’s Spelling Book*, the only popular American speller in Canada West, offered no remarks on civil institutions whatsoever. The book consisted almost entirely of lists of words divided into syllables, with a few general lessons in Christian morality.⁸⁵ *Daboll’s Schoolmaster’s Assistant*, the only popular American arithmetic book, did offer a few laudatory remarks about the merits of a decimal currency. Yet, unlike its British rival, it introduced the student to the various British North American currencies and presented practical exercises in the translation of various currencies one into another. Indeed, the only popularly available arithmetic book with Canadian content was American.⁸⁶ The popular American grammar—*English Grammar in Familiar Lectures* by Samuel Kirkham—was frequently preferred to the grammar in the Irish series and was authorized for use in the schools by the General Board of Education after 1846. Ryerson himself had no objection to the political content of this work.⁸⁷ As for readers, no American series was widely used in the schools of Canada West. The *English Reader* by the English Quaker Lindley Murray dominated this field.⁸⁸ School Commissioners who sought more modern readers in 1842 did not recommend American books, but rather promoted McCulloch’s British series.

Only in geography books did anti-British material commonly appear. In fact, the descriptions offered of offensive American texts in general by conservative critics seem to have been descriptions of Olney’s *A Practi-*

84. PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to Hendry, 1 February 1847.

85. Lyman COBB, *Cobb’s Spelling Book* (Ithaca, New York: Andrus, Gauntlett & Co., 1825).

86. Nathon DABOLL, *Daboll’s Schoolmaster’s Assistant...* (Ithaca, New York: Mack and Andrus, 1834).

87. Samuel KIRKHAM, *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures...* (New York: Collins and Brother, n.d. [c.1835]). Grammar was a favourite of the nineteenth-century schoolmen and had been one of Ryerson’s during his own school days. The popular texts claimed to be able to reduce all speech utterances in the English language to the operation of one of about forty rules. The appeal of such an illusion of order, tidiness and mastery can only be imagined.

88. Lindley MURRAY, *The English Reader* (Toronto, Upper Canada: Eastwood and Skinner, 1836). A copy may be found in the PAO Schoolbooks Collection.

cal System of Modern Geography.⁸⁹ The book in fact contained a large number of pro-American and anti-British remarks and statements. These ranged from praise of republican institutions to denunciations of British imperialism in Ireland. Even some of the book's illustrations hinted at American superiority. The presentation of the five races of mankind, for example, included a woodcut of George Washington to illustrate the "European race".

Should one regard the curricular reforms of 1846 as a means of expelling American geographies from the common schools of Canada West? In 1842 geography was taught from Olney's text in slightly more than 25 percent of the common schools. Even in these schools very few scholars studied geography. Although the Board of Education used its power over the curriculum to exclude Olney's *Geography*, it did not act against American geography books in general. This was not simply a result of the lack of alternative books. While the Irish series did not contain a geography considered suitable for Canada West, many non-American geographies existed. Stewart's *Geography* was a British work which was similar to the American geographies, yet which lauded the power of England and extolled the virtues of the English merchant. School Commissioners in 1842 prescribed this book almost as often as they did Olney's. Yet Stewart's *Geography* was also discouraged by the General Board of Education, probably because of its characterization of British imperialism in Ireland.⁹⁰ Although the Education Office had been informed of the existence of no less than three Canadian geographies in manuscript by 1850, no Canadian geography was produced by it until the late 1850s.⁹¹ Until 1865, the General Board of Education and later the Council of Public Instruction authorized the use of the American Morse's *Geography*, despite its thoroughly American content and the fact that British North America was covered in one page.⁹² The presence of American geographies in the schools of Canada West was apparently a matter of no practical import to the Education Office once state control over the curriculum was established.

The handling of American geographies by pro-state school reformers suggests that the alleged presence of Americanism in the curriculum was important primarily as a tactic in the struggle for state control over

89. J. OLNEY, *A Practical System of Modern Geography* . . . , 43d ed. (New York: Pratt, Woodford & Co., 1844).

90. Alex. STEWART, *A Compendium of Modern Geography*... (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1835). Surely this suggests that the political content of books, not their "national origin", was what was at issue for the school reformers.

91. Complaints about the absence of a geography with Canadian content were quite common in the 1840s. The Education Office received at least three manuscript geographies, none of which seems to have survived. PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, Thornton to McNab, 30 July 1845; Gouinlock to Ryerson, 17 August 1846; Strachan to Ryerson, 4 December 1849. Hodgins produced a geography which was adopted in 1857.

92. WILSON, "Textbooks", p. 37; PARVIN, *Authorization of Textbooks*, p. 33. Indeed, Parvin points out that the American publisher suggested that he would reprint a section on Canada in this book if Ryerson would supply him with one, but the matter was not sufficiently important to Ryerson for him to do so.

popular education. The changing significance of Americanism in changed political circumstances is well illustrated by a debate over American readers which engaged Ryerson in the first half of 1849 in the Niagara District.

It is possible that American texts were more widely used in this District than in other parts of the colony. The District Superintendent of Education, Dexter D'Everado, a person of whose educational opinions Ryerson thought highly, pointed out in a letter to Ryerson in 1846 that,

the new School Act has been, and is, quite unpopular with a large number of the inhabitants of this District, one of the principal objections being the anticipated prohibition to the use of foreign books. The preference [*sic*] given to school books published in the United States, does not, here, I am inclined to think, arise from any political bias, but from the peculiar geographical position of the locality.⁹³

D'Everado argued that the residents of the District were in constant correspondence with their American neighbours, came to know American books, and could get them more cheaply than others. D'Everado counselled a policy of moderation in acting against American texts.

From late March until late July of 1849, and occasionally thereafter, Ryerson received a barrage of letters from a teacher in Pelham Township, District of Niagara, named A. W. B. McDougall. McDougall wrote with increasing vehemence to denounce the use of American books and apparatus in the schools in his township and the refusal of the District Superintendent to ban these books, despite the fact that their use contravened the School Act. McDougall objected to *Mitchell's Primary Geography*, to the use of *Sanders Series of Schoolbooks*, and to the fact that "the American Rebel Declaration of Independence of 4th July 1776 is suspended in some Common Schools, with Lexington, Bunkers Hill etc. etc."⁹⁴ McDougall enclosed pages from *Sanders American Spelling Book* which praised the unlimited opportunities for social mobility existing in the United States. "Unfit for a monarchy", McDougall added.⁹⁵

Ryerson initially ignored these complaints. But when McDougall appealed for redress to the Governor, Lord Elgin, Ryerson was called upon by the Provincial Secretary to explain the situation. In this correspondence, Ryerson denounced McDougall as "an insane sort of person". He went on to explain that in some schools, maps of North America were used which were printed in the United States and which contained in one corner a small reproduction of the Declaration of Independence and a brief account of American history. Since, according to Ryerson, the schools were interested in the maps themselves and not their American content, they posed no real threat.⁹⁶ As for Sanders Readers, they

93. PAO, RG 2, C-6-C, D'Everado to Ryerson, 19 October 1846.

94. *Ibid.*, McDougall to Ryerson, 25 May 1849.

95. *Ibid.* He also objected to a positive description of Webster's dictionary.

96. The intriguing, but unfortunately unverifiable, possibility exists that these maps came from OLNEY'S *Atlas of Geography* which was intended to accompany his *Practical System*. If so, Ryerson was here defending the use of one of the most serious examples of "Americanism".

were the “*best series of American Books*” that Ryerson had “ever examined”. He did not comment on the sections quoted by McDougall, but rather contented himself with the remark that these books were gradually being replaced by the Irish series.⁹⁷ Not only did Ryerson downplay the significance of American books in the curriculum, he also suggested an explanation for their presence in the schools.

While engaged in debates to justify state control over the curriculum and the general use of the Irish texts, Ryerson argued that American books were present because local residents were “duped” by the activities of itinerant book vendors or because they were disloyal.⁹⁸ But when his interest in schoolbooks changed—in this instance, from arguing for state control over the curriculum to arguing for a particular means of administering the curriculum within a state system—his conception of Americanism in the curriculum also changed. This suggests that the discourse on school books was a result of the political interests of reformers seeking state control.

The evidence cited thus far points to the inadequacy of seeking to understand the curricular reforms of 1846 by focusing on the statements of school reformers about the dangers of Americanism. These statements were inaccurate and in any case were abandoned or not acted upon once state control over the curriculum was achieved. Earlier accounts of these developments have been insufficiently critical in their scrutiny of the circumstances surrounding curricular reform, and over-enthusiastic in their acceptance of the official view.⁹⁹ The “myth of curricular republicanism” has disguised fundamental changes in the very nature of the curriculum after 1846.

V

The curricular reforms of 1846 transformed the social identity of the schoolbook by making it an instrument of state policy. Through these reforms school knowledge became state knowledge. Through state intervention, the Irish texts came to dominate the elementary school curriculum. The state engaged in a propaganda campaign to encourage a “spirit of improvement” in education: the Irish texts were presented

97. PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook E, Ryerson to Leslie, 21 July 1849.

98. For the disloyalty charge, see PAO, RG 2, C-1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to Hendry, 1 February 1847. For the “dupes” accusation, Letterbook E, Ryerson to Leslie, 12 May 1849. PARVIN, *Authorization of Textbooks*, p. 29, seriously misreads this controversy. In an effort to support the view that curricular reform resulted from nationalistic motives, she stresses that McDougall denounced American texts. She ignores the fact that these denunciations were discounted and their author abused by Ryerson.

99. The leading case is PARVIN, *Authorization of Textbooks*, with her paraphrases of Ryerson’s *Special Report*. LOVE, however, in “Cultural Survival and Social Control”, also implicitly assumes a model of social harmony in which textbook reforms were made for such heartwarming reasons as to bring teaching “into line with the accepted concepts of the time” (p. 364) or to “provide a system of moral and political values appropriate to” something called “the Canadian community” (p. 372).

as the rational means to efficient, effective, moral and "humane" education.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, through intervention in the marketplace, the state sought to undercut existing schoolbooks by lowering the price of the Irish texts and facilitating their distribution.¹⁰¹ Coupled with the power of the state to withhold school grants from areas using unacceptable books, these activities succeeded in expelling most of the pre-1846 curriculum from the schools.

The Irish texts formed a unified series and were tied to a particular "humanistic" pedagogy, explained in the texts themselves and taught in the Provincial Normal School. Their aim was to produce good citizens who would be internally self-regulated, and in part this was to be done by the "diffusion of useful knowledge" combined with a formally universal and non-sectarian morality. The presence of this policy changed the nature of schoolbooks. Before the rise of systematically designed books whose object was the transmission of knowledge and skills under conditions of efficiency, the distinction between the schoolbook and other classes of literature was barely developed. Books used in the schools were often subtitled "for the use of schools and private tuition" and did not bear the stamp of a particular pedagogy.

In some cases, the non-specialized character of books used in schools is readily apparent. The Bible and Testament, of course, are obvious examples of books used for instruction in the schools which also had a much broader audience and social function than that of instruction in the skills of literacy. The *English Reader* is another case in point. This book contained a broad range of eighteenth-century literature and was the sort of book which many residents of Canada West might have carried about with them for recreational reading as well as instruction. The emergence of a state-controlled curriculum probably created a distinction between school and non-school literature and gave to the schoolbook a specialized identity.

One consequence of state control was an increase in the numbers of books in use. In part this came about because of technological changes in the printing industry and innovations in the production of paper and type. Colony-wide buying also allowed economies of scale in schoolbook production. The physical form of books used in schools thus changed with their social identity. They became larger, thicker and more clearly printed.

100. Ryerson outlines his "humanistic" pedagogy in his *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847), and he arranged for the reprinting of this work for the public. A critical analysis of "humanism" may be found in CURTIS, "Preconditions".

101. Evidence of these activities can be found in PAO, RG 2, B-A, Correspondence of the [second] General Board of Education, Ryerson to the Secretaries of National Education, Dublin, 24 July 1846 and 22 March 1847; C-1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to Armour and Ramsay, 11 November 1846, 30 November 1846; Ryerson to R. Brewer, Messrs. Eastwood & Co. and others, 6 February 1847; Letterbook D, Ryerson to W.H. Landon, 12 May 1848; Ryerson to S.S. St. John, 6 April 1848; Ryerson to John Walker, 24 January 1848.

Conversely, the increased availability of books allowed for internal changes in the organization of the schoolroom. Before state control, collective methods of instruction were common in the schools. The physical arrangements of schools reflect these methods. In country schools, most students sat around the walls of the schoolroom and the active pedagogical space was in the centre of the room. The seating of students in individual desks arranged in rows and the changed possibilities for discipline such seating arrangements create were facilitated by increased numbers of books. The practical consequences of the proliferation of books are thus ambiguous. On the one hand, state control probably resulted in a more efficient transmission of "knowledge" and "skill" from teacher to student. On the other hand, it may also have isolated the learner. Curricular development embodied one of the general contradictions of capitalist development: the concurrent psychological enrichment and isolation of the individual.

In sum, one might argue that the curricular reforms of 1846 in Canada West encouraged the generalization in the colony of a new class of literature—schoolbooks. This class of literature was probably restricted much more narrowly to pedagogical purposes than was the case with earlier "schoolbooks". This transformation of the schoolbook was part of a more general transformation of private and community schooling into public education. Education became an instrument of state policy with its object the production of an educated public and a loyal citizenry. The schoolbook became an increasingly specialized and technical instrument of this policy.