

The Feminization of Teaching in British North America and Canada 1845-1875

by Alison PRENTICE*

According to Solomon Denton, the local school inspector for the country of York in New Brunswick, many districts in his area were having trouble keeping schools open in 1856. There were many reasons, but a striking and not uncommon one mentioned by Denton was the failure in certain places to agree "as to what Teacher to employ." The problem, the inspector said, was that "one party wishes for a female, while the other insists upon a male Teacher; the end is, that they engage neither."¹

Though most such disputes probably ended less drastically, it is nevertheless clear that the same debate was taking place in many parts of British North America in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Yet by the end of the century the question of whether to employ a male or a female teacher had become academic, for in most places in Canada, almost the only elementary school teachers available for hire were women. What had happened between 1856 and 1900 to bring about this significant change?

The answer, as in most historical questions, is a complex one, which at once goes beyond either educational or feminine history alone, to a consideration of a series of interrelated developments in the roles played by schools, teachers and women, and in the ideology concerning them, during this formative period in Canadian history. Perhaps the first point that has to be made by way of introduction is the negative one that the "feminization of teaching" does not refer to the entry of women into a role that they had never occupied before. Women had taught school before the middle of the nineteenth century in British North America; what they did not do, in most regions, is teach publicly to any great extent, that is, in large schools outside the home. Our first concern, then, is the making of elementary school teaching into an occupation that was conducted chiefly in non-domestic surroundings.

Though this may seem an obvious point it requires some discussion, largely because the movement of elementary instruction out of the home and into the larger environment of the school has been misunderstood by historians in the past. Students of educational history are now becoming increasingly aware, however, of both how momentous the movement was

* Department of History, Atkinson College, York University. An earlier version of this paper was read at the Tenth Annual Conference, Canadian Association for American Studies, "Women in North America," University of Ottawa, October 1974.

¹ Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1856, p. 71.

in the totality of western social history,² and how rapidly the alteration sometimes occurred in particular places during times of intense economic and social change.³ Equally important too is the growing recognition that the movement of formal elementary instruction into institutions known in Canada as public schools, its extension to greater numbers of children, and, over more years in the lives of individual children, does not mean that, prior to this movement, most children went totally uninstructed. Many, on the contrary, we believe, were exposed to considerable "schooling" in the earlier decades of the century, and many of their teachers, furthermore, were women. How many, in both cases, it is probably impossible to know, for useful statistics did not begin to be gathered before the creation of centralized educational administrations, which, in central and eastern British North America, took place at mid-century. But we do know that before the 1840s there were, in the populated regions, a great many small private schools, that is schools run in their own households or rooms, by both men and women, and sometimes by married couples.⁴ Male teachers were no doubt in the majority in most provinces before the 1840s, and it is also true that the "public" school of that era, or the school that was too large to accommodate in one's home, was probably almost exclusively the preserve of the schoolmaster rather than the schoolmistress. The feminization of teaching which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century was thus, in the first place, a movement of women into *public* school teaching, at a time when elementary education itself was gradually moving out of the household and into the ever growing public institutions that would eventually almost monopolize the name of "schools."⁵

The second and better known aspect of our subject is the fact that in the third quarter of the century in most of British North America and Canada, women became a majority among common or elementary school teachers. Less well known is that fact that this change was closely related to two contemporary educational movements: the first, a campaign to promote the grading of school children, and, as a result, to promote the consolidation of small schools into larger schools and school systems, es-

² Although parts of his thesis have been challenged, the most dramatic general account of this change remains that of Philippe ARIÈS, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1962), trans. by Robert Baldick.

³ For a Canadian example of a sudden increase in the average ages and number of children attending school in a particular locality, see Michael B. KATZ, "Who Went to School?" *History of Education Quarterly*, 12 (Fall 1972).

⁴ The variety of schooling in early Upper Canada is described in R.D. GIDNEY, "Elementary Education in Upper Canada: A Reassessment," *Ontario History*, 65 (September 1973).

⁵ In the absence of statistics it is impossible to estimate the number of women teaching in non-domestic schools before the mid 1840's. Early official encouragement to the idea of employing females may be found in Dr. Charles Duncombe's Report on Education to the Legislature of Upper Canada (1836) and in the Nova Scotia Board of Education's "Rules and Regulations for the guidance and government of the several Boards of Commissioners..." (1841). J. Donald WILSON, "The Teacher in Early Ontario," in F. A. ARMSTRONG, H. A. STEVENSON and J. D. WILSON, eds., *Aspects of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 223 and 229; and School Papers, Halifax City 1808-1845, RG 14, No. 30, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

pecially in urban areas; and the second, a passionate campaign to raise the status of teaching as a profession.

The first of these movements, the physical separation of children into classes or grades within each school or school system, was undertaken largely in the name of efficiency. The chief goal was an efficient division of labour, with the more experienced teachers taking the advanced grades and the less well trained, engaged at lower rates of pay, taking the younger children or beginners. The end result of organizing schools in this way, it was claimed, was that larger numbers of pupils could thus be more cheaply and effectively taught.⁶ At the same time, however, higher salaries were energetically pursued by schoolmen of the same era, as an essential part of their campaign to make the teaching profession respectable and to induce well qualified people to remain in it as a lifetime career.⁷ Clearly the two goals were to some extent incompatible, as cheapness was promoted on the one hand and higher salaries and respectable careers were touted on the other. The gradual introduction of more and more female teachers at least partially solved the problem, for the employment of growing numbers of women in the lower ranks of expanded teaching staffs made it possible for school administrators to pursue both goals at once. Relatively higher salaries could be made available for male superintendents, inspectors, principal teachers and headmasters, yet money saved at the same time by engaging women at low salaries to teach the lower grades.⁸

As the dilemma reported by school inspector Denton illustrates, all of this could not have taken place without considerable discussion of the pros and cons of admitting women to public school teaching in the first place. Was it respectable for women to teach outside the home? More pertinent to school authorities was the question of feminine ability. Were women capable of governing large numbers of pupils in the not always comfortable environment of the public school? These questions were raised again and again among educators and laymen. The idea of a predominantly feminine elementary teaching force was one which only gradually gained acceptance in British North America.

The feminization of teaching was made possible by three conditions. One was the eventual acceptance and promotion of the idea by leading educational administrators and propagandists of the day. Another and probably more basic condition was the growing tendency on the part of money-conscious school trustees to see women as having an increasingly useful role to play in their rapidly expanding schools and school systems.⁹

⁶ This point is examined more fully in my doctoral dissertation, "The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada," (University of Toronto, 1974).

⁷ "The School Promoters," chapter 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-310.

⁹ In "The Education of Females in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ontario," (to be published in *Histoire sociale — Social History* in November 1975), Ian Davey notes the extent to which the expansion of schooling was associated in that province with an increase in the enrollment of girls. But I have found no evidence of school authorities relating the hiring of more female teachers to this trend. On the other hand, the two factors were

Between 1845 and 1875, relatively more and more women were hired, and by the latter date they had become the majority among common or elementary school teachers in most provinces. Equally basic to all of this was, of course, the interest in and acceptance of their changing role by the women themselves, and the society that financed and used the schools.

What was the reaction of the educational administrators, a new and increasingly powerful breed during our period, to the proliferation of women teachers in the common schools? The most pressing issue as far as most of them were concerned was the question of discipline. The relative "mental ability" of females was a consideration with some concerned educators, but most nineteenth century critics of "female teaching" were far more worried about how school children could be governed by women.¹⁰ Supporters of women in the schools also felt that the question was a crucial one. Edmund Hillyer Duval, who was principal of the Provincial Training School for teachers in St. John, New Brunswick, put forward what was to become a leading argument for feminization, when he claimed in 1855 that women might actually be better than men at schoolroom discipline. The supposition that females were "not so capable of maintaining government in Schools," he said, was a sentiment with which he could not concur, since he believed that they usually maintained "as efficient order" as did their male colleagues, and "often by gentler means." Duval pointed out that this opinion was supported by evidence not only from the province of New Brunswick, but also from England and from the New England states.¹¹

If the question of school government was the chief debating point, the question of cost was the more telling factor. For Duval, and for many other school authorities, the main reason for engaging female teachers was less their real or imagined qualifications, than the fact that they could be obtained relatively cheaply.¹² That this was the essential motive emerges from the literary as well as the statistical records of Upper and Lower Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Over and over again local as well as provincial officials explained that female teachers were not only as good as male teachers but could be had "at a saving of 50 per cent."¹³ J.B. Meilleur, who was the first Chief Superintendent of Schools for Lower Canada, reported as early as 1850 that the number of schools taught by females already slightly exceeded, in that province, "the half of the whole

associated in early rural schools in the common practice of hiring women to replace the male teachers during the summer, when there were undoubtedly fewer male students at school, and in a reference to the need for female teachers if girls were to be educated in separate classrooms or separate schools, from boys. On the latter point, see *Remarks on the State of Education in Canada by "L"* (Montreal, 1848), pp. 129-30.

¹⁰ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada for the Year 1858*, Appendix A, p. 5; "The School Promoters," p. 299.

¹¹ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1855*, p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada for the Year 1860*, Appendix A, p. 190; *Report... for Ontario for the Year 1869*, Appendix D, p. 86.

number of Schools." The reason, he explained, was simply that the service of female teachers could be obtained more cheaply than those of males.¹⁴

At first this fact was clearly received by educators with mixed feelings, and criticism of the iniquitously low salaries paid by many school trustees was the stock in trade of educational officials in every province. According to one critic, a school inspector for the New Brunswick counties of Sunbury, York, Carleton and Victoria, writing in 1867, the result of women accepting low salaries was that many of the best qualified men left the teaching profession.¹⁵ In Nova Scotia, ambivalence regarding female teachers came out in expressions of official concern about seasonal alterations on school personnel. Two provincial superintendents of schools, J. William Dawson in 1851 and Alexander Forrester in 1859, deplored the constant changing, "from males to females, and from females to males, every half year—the males teaching in winter and the females in summer." The practice, which was widespread in other provinces, was considered "in every way injurious to the cause of education." In 1851, the argument went that a good teacher, of whatever sex, should be retained. But in 1859, by referring to the ideal teacher in the masculine gender throughout his report, Alexander Forrester left no doubt about which sex he wished to see more permanently established in the schools.¹⁶

Forrester's views may have softened somewhat by the late 1860's, but by 1871 Nova Scotia's new Superintendent of Schools, J.B. Calkin, expressed grave misgivings once again about what he called the increasing "disproportion in numbers" between male and female teachers. Convinced that the cause was "the unreasonable desire of many sections to have cheap Schools," Calkin believed that the inevitable result of the trend would be a deterioration in education, as few women either reached the

¹⁴ PROVINCE OF CANADA, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, 1851*, Volume 10, Appendix 2, K.K. "Report on Education in Lower Canada, 1849-50." In *Les Instituteurs laïques au Canada Français, 1836-1900* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, 1965), André Labarrère-Paulé notes that the first Lower Canadian statistics giving the sex of teachers appeared in the annual education report for 1853-54, when there were already 1,404 female teachers compared to 808 males or a ratio of 63.5% to 36.5% (p. 179). *Les Instituteurs laïques* traces the gradual increase in the number of women teaching in Quebec schools to the end of the nineteenth century, but, as the title suggests, is essentially concerned with the history of the French Canadian male lay teacher. In the context of the search of this group for professional status and better pay, the feminization of teaching is portrayed as no less than a disaster. For example, with respect to the mid-1850s, Labarrère-Paulé asks: "La profession d'instituteurs va-t-elle au Bas-Canada dès sa naissance devenir la proie des infirmes, des incapables et des femmes? Va-t-elle tomber en quenouille?" (p. 181). The church, he states, favoured feminization: "Les jeunes filles sont plus maniables. Leur incompétence même est un gage de tranquillité" (p. 459). Because of clerical influence and feminization, Labarrère-Paulé concludes, the early promise of a competent male teaching profession was virtually crushed by the end of the nineteenth century.

¹⁵ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1867*, p. 34.

¹⁶ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia for the Year 1851*, p. 29; *Report... for Nova Scotia for the Year 1859*, p. 253.

higher ranks of the profession, or were capable of taking charge of the more advanced pupils.¹⁷

In Upper Canada the Chief Superintendency was retained for more than a quarter of a century by one man, the dynamic Methodist propagandist, Egerton Ryerson. Political to the core, Ryerson's approach to the question of female teaching was circumspect. He stated as early as 1848 that women teachers should be "encouraged" and even went so far as to say that it might well be an "advantage" to employ females to instruct younger pupils,¹⁸ but not until 1865 did he go into the matter fully and even then his statement was less than a complete commitment. In the annual superintendent's report for that year, official support was given to the view that female were as good as male teachers in some areas. Ryerson said he agreed with American educationists that females were "best adapted to teach small children, having, as a general rule, most heart, most tender feelings, most assiduity, and, in the order of Providence, the qualities best suited for the care, instruction and government of infancy and childhood." At the same time, however, he insisted that as many male teachers were "as painstaking to instruct, encourage, govern, and secure the attention of little children" as females. Clearly in 1865, Ryerson was still reluctant to commit himself to the view that women were in some areas superior to men. But by the following year the Chief Superintendent had capitulated. Women, the 1866 report announced, *were* best suited to teach the young; therefore the fact that proportionally more and more women teachers were to be found in the common schools of Upper Canada, was to be considered progress in the right direction.¹⁹

Ryerson's new opinion was cited in at least two provinces shortly after this as important evidence that the trend to feminization was a desirable one. In New Brunswick, where the reception of female teachers was still far from enthusiastic, it was nevertheless pointed out in the School Superintendent's Report for 1867 that many sister provinces did not share New Brunswick's aversion to female teachers, and that in Upper Canada, moreover, official opinion regarded "the increase of these Teachers as a circumstance favourable to the diffusion of good elementary instruction."²⁰ In British Columbia, official opinion allowed itself true enthusiasm. Quoting *verbatim* much of what Ryerson had said on female teaching, British Columbia's Superintendent of Education claimed in 1872 that it was "gen-

¹⁷ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia for the Year 1871*, p. xii. The evidence for a change in Forrester's attitude is to be found in his 1867 *Teacher's Text-Book* (Halifax: 1867), pp. 565-66. For another negative statement from the 1870's, see the *Journal of Education for the Province of Nova Scotia*, No. 48 (April 1873), p. 18.

¹⁸ Egerton Ryerson to Mr. Benjamin Jacobs, 1 February, 1848, Education Papers (Record Group 2), C 1, Letterbook D, p. 151, Public Archives of Ontario; "Proceedings of the Board of Education of Upper Canada, 29 February, 1848," J.G. HODGINS, ed., *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Warwick Bros. & Ritter, 1894-1910), 7: 276.

¹⁹ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada for the Year 1865*, Part 1, p. 7; Report... for the Year 1866, Part 1, pp. 4-5.

²⁰ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1867*, p. 8.

Table 1

SEX RATIOS AMONG COMMON OR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN LOWER AND UPPER CANADA, NOVA SCOTIA AND NEW BRUNSWICK, 1851-1871

		Lower Canada		Upper Canada		Nova Scotia		New Brunswick	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1851	males			2,251	77.8	662	80.2		
	females			726	22.2	163	19.8		
1856	males	892	32.2	2,622	71.1			485	56.0
	females	1,877	67.8	1,067	28.9			381	44.0
1861	males	1,270	29.9	3,031	69.9	649	69.6		
	females	2,980	70.1	1,305	30.1	283	30.4		
1866	males			2,925	61.1	603	62.6	422	52.5
	females			1,864	38.9	361	37.4	382	47.5
1871	males	1,115	21.8	2,641	49.8	806	52.6	402	44.2
	females	4,005	78.2	2,665	50.2	726	47.4	507	55.8

Females already a majority according to the Annual Report for 1850

From the *Annual Reports* of the Superintendents of Public or Common Schools for the various provinces, and the *Nova Scotia Journal of Education*, No. 19 (July 1868).

erally conceded" that most women teachers possessed "greater aptitude for communicating knowledge," and were "usually better disciplinarians, especially among younger children, than males." Woman's mission, he went on to say, was "predominantly that of an educator."²¹

Thus in the three decades between 1845 and 1875, chief superintendents in at least three provinces had joined J.B. Meilleur of Quebec in accepting female teachers in public schools. Their acceptance, however, was clearly qualified by the tendency, in at least two cases, to stress woman's special suitability to instruct the very young. And in Nova Scotia, J.B. Calkin still refused to adopt the new stance.

Whatever their private or public opinions on the subject, however, educational administrators were having, by the late 1860s, to face the truth that the feminization of the teaching force was fast becoming a reality. In the case of Upper Canada, Ryerson's 1866 statement anticipated by only three years the point at which women teachers in fact became the majority in the province, for this occurred in 1869. A look at comparative data for the provinces of Lower Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick reveals slightly different patterns of feminization in each, but that only Lower Canada departed radically from the experience of her sister provinces. Her departure was in having a majority of female teachers two decades earlier, reaching this state as early as 1850, and in the rapid movement of women to a position of numerical dominance. (Table 1.) No

²¹ *Report of the Superintendent of Schools for British Columbia for the Year ending July 31st, 1873*, p. 7.

province could match Lower Canada in this respect, but slowly in the other three provinces feminization was clearly taking place. Most similar to each other were the provinces of Upper Canada and Nova Scotia, which despite the far greater total number of teachers employed in the former, exhibited almost identically changing sex ratios over the two decades. In New Brunswick, the transition appears to have been less dramatic, but there too, the balance was gradually shifting.

If the provincial superintendents were accepting a trend, it should be pointed out that there were also a number of ways in which they were actually promoting it. The first and most obvious encouragement given to female teachers was the opening of the early normal schools to women. In Upper Canada, male students were in the majority when women were first admitted to the provincial Normal School soon after it opened in the 1840s, and remained in this position throughout the 1850s, but by the end of the 1860s female students became numerically dominant, reflecting their position in the profession as a whole.²² In Quebec too, sex ratios among Normal School students seemed to reflect the provincial situation, with women in the majority at McGill Normal School when it opened in 1857, and becoming the majority provincially as soon as Laval opened its new normal school to women in the session of 1857-58.²³ In some cases, prospective women teachers received special consideration. In Upper Canada, for example, they continued to be admitted to the Normal School at the age of sixteen when the minimum age for men was raised to eighteen. According to the instructions of the Chief Superintendent of Schools in that province, also, restrictions on the employment of aliens in the 1840s were not, after 1847, to be applied to women teachers. Finally, regulations of the Upper Canadian Council of Public Instruction for 1850 exempted women who were applying for first and second class teaching certificates from examination in a small number of specified areas.²⁴ In Lower Canada, in 1852, female teachers were to be examined by School Inspectors, but were excused from the usual examinations before Boards of Examiners.²⁵

The insidious feature of such concessions of course was that they helped to ensure both the lower pay and status of many female teachers. Yet it is also true, as has been suggested, that low pay and status were probably a condition of female employment in the first place. In New Brunswick, the Chief Superintendent associated the introduction of increasing numbers of women teachers into the schools, in 1865, with two factors: the low wages offered by rural trustees on the one hand, and the

²² *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Ontario for the Year 1869*, Part II, Table K.

²³ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Lower Canada for the Year 1858*, Normal School Reports. On the interest of women in the McGill Normal School, see Donna Ronnish, "The Development of Higher Education for Women at McGill University from 1857 to 1899 with Special Reference to the Role of Sir John William Dawson," (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1972), pp. 15-19.

²⁴ "The School Promoters," pp. 301 and 305.

²⁵ PROVINCE OF CANADA, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, 1852-53*, Volume 2, No. 4, Appendix J.J., "Report of the Superintendent of Education for Lower Canada for 1852."

Table 2

SEX RATIOS OF COMMON OR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN URBAN AND PROVINCIAL SETTINGS

		1851		1861		1871	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Toronto</i>	male	12	75.0	20	33.0		
	female	4	25.0	41	67.0		
<i>Upper Canada</i>	male	2,551	77.8	3,031	69.9		
	female	726	22.2	1,305	30.1		
<i>Halifax</i>	male	9	64.3	12	48.0	27	34.6
	female	5	35.7	13	52.0	51	65.4
<i>Nova Scotia</i>	male	662	80.2	649	69.6	806	52.6
	female	163	19.8	283	30.4	726	47.4

From the *Annual Reports* of the Superintendents of Common or Public Schools, Upper Canada and Nova Scotia, 1851-1871, and the *Reports of the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Halifax*

classifying and grading of schools in villages and towns on the other. In the latter case, he judged, "nearly three-fourths of all the teaching could be most economically and satisfactorily performed by females."²⁶

The association between feminization and the expansion of graded schools in the urban centres can be seen when the sex ratios among the teachers of Toronto and Halifax are compared with the provincial ratios of Upper Canada and Nova Scotia, respectively. (Table 2.) While feminization took place more slowly and a little later in Halifax than in Toronto, by 1861 in Toronto and 1871 in Halifax, women outnumbered their male colleagues in the neighbourhood of two to one. In Ontario and Nova Scotia, however, the proportion of women teachers remained far lower, with only a slight majority in Ontario by 1871 and remaining still a minority in Nova Scotia in that year. Thus in both provinces, the chief urban centres were very much in advance in the process of feminization. A comparison of the city of St. John and the province of New Brunswick in 1871 gives similar results, with 52 female to 19 male teachers reported for the city, or a ratio of 73.2 percent to 26.8 percent, and a total of 507 female to 402 male teachers in the province as a whole, creating a much closer ratio of 55.8 percent to 44.2 percent.²⁷

That the more rapid feminization of urban centres reflected the development of graded school systems and professional hierarchies within the school emerges clearly from a look at salary scales in Toronto and Halifax. In the former, a hierarchical pattern was in evidence as early as 1858 in the non-Catholic schools of the city. Headed by a superintendent

²⁶ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1865*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Report... for New Brunswick for the Year 1871*.

Table 3

TEACHERS EMPLOYED IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF HALIFAX, 1870

		<i>Number with this Status</i>	<i>Salary Range</i>
<i>Principals</i>	male	7	\$600. — \$800.
	female	2	400. — 500.
<i>First Class Teachers</i>	male	13	400. — 600.
	female	43	250. — 400.
<i>Second Class Teachers</i>	male	4	360. — 400.
	female	2	160. — 300.
<i>Third Class Teachers</i>	male	2	160. — 320.
	female	2	160. — 240.
<i>Not classified</i>	male	2	300. — 700.
	female	0	

"List of Teachers Employed in the Public Schools," *Report of the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Halifax for Year 1870*, pp. 33-36.

Table 4

TEACHERS OF THE ALBRO STREET SCHOOL,
HALIFAX, 1870

<i>Principal</i>	Mr. McLoughlan	1st class	\$800. <i>per annum</i>
<i>Teachers</i>	Mr. Sterns	1st class	600. " "
	Mr. Daker	1st class	600.
	Mr. Smith	1st class	600.
	Mr. McLean	1st class	600.
	Mr. Artz	1st class	440.
	Miss Graham	1st class	360.
	Miss McCloskey	1st class	330.
	Miss M.L. Johns	1st class	330.
	Mrs. Payne	1st class	330.
	Miss Caldwell	1st class	250.

"List of Teachers Employed in the Public Schools," *Report of the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Halifax for the Year 1870*, p. 34.

whose annual salary was \$1,200 and six headmasters who were paid \$700 each, the city's teachers were ranked according to function, training and sex, and were paid accordingly, with two male assistants at \$520, four headmistresses at \$400, seven variously titled female teachers at \$320, four headmistresses at \$400, seven variously titled female teachers at \$320, six female assistants at \$280, seven other female assistants (usually titled junior) at \$240 and three female monitor teachers at \$170 each.²⁸

²⁸ *Report of the Past History, and Present Condition, of the Common or Public Schools of the City of Toronto* (Toronto: 1859), pp. 108-25.

The city schools of Halifax were organized in a similar way. Seven male principals earned an annual salary of between \$600 and \$800 each, while the two female principals were paid between \$400 and \$500; although the thirteen first class male teachers made between \$400 and \$600 a year, the annual salaries of the forty-three first class female teachers ranged from \$250 to \$400 — and so on down the line. (Table 3.) In one school which employed only first class teachers, all but one of the men earned \$600 a year and the principal \$800, while none of the women were paid more than an annual salary of \$360. (Table 4.)

In 1850 a trustee from Hamilton, Upper Canada, listed the benefits of centralized graded school systems as follows: (1) the attraction of more children into the school system because higher classes could be provided; (2) an improvement in the status of teachers; and (3) provision for the instruction of larger numbers of children at less cost.²⁹ The trustee did not elaborate further, but as has already been suggested in a general way, the second and third goals could only be achieved at the same time through the creation of hierarchies based on sex, with male teachers receiving higher salaries as principal and teachers of the upper grades, while females taught the lower grades at lower rates of pay.

In Toronto between 1851 and 1861, the relative salaries of female teachers, compared to those of their male colleagues, declined and the decline was dramatic, from 69.9 percent to 41.4 percent. In the province of Upper Canada as a whole, where hierarchical patterns had not yet made as great an impact, relative female salaries also dropped, but only from 60.3 percent to 50.1 percent.³⁰ It is interesting to observe that during this decade the relative salaries of female teachers who boarded with their employers, or "boarded around" as the expression went, actually went up from 67 percent to 71.4 percent of the salaries of male teachers who boarded around. Only salaries "without board" worsened in comparison with men's salaries, suggesting that in Upper Canada the old rural communities where the teacher was an itinerant who boarded with the local inhabitants, treated male and female teachers more equally than the urban centres that were coming into being.³¹

This did not hold true for New Brunswick, however, where in 1855, at least, male teachers were paid an average, semi-annually, of £26.16.2, without board, compared to the £20.19.8½ paid to women. Their salaries were thus closer, with women earning about 78 percent on the average of what was earned by men, than were the salaries of male and female teachers who boarded around, at £17.8.3½ and £10.13.5¼ respectively, for in the latter case women earned only 61 percent of what was earned by men.³² It would be interesting if statistics could be found to show how the New Brunswick pattern developed during the decades that

²⁹ D. Legge to Egerton Ryerson, 31 October, 1850, Education Records, (RG 2) C-6-C, Public Archives of Ontario.

³⁰ "The School Promoters," p. 307.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-05.

³² *Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1855.*

followed, or what the pattern was in other provinces for teachers who boarded, compared with those who did not. Statistics comparing urban and provincial salaries generally for the Maritime provinces and Lower Canada would also illuminate the results that we have for Upper Canada and Toronto, and Nova Scotia and Halifax, cited above.

Certainly there is no doubt that in the city of Halifax, hierarchical patterns not only were emerging, but were deliberately based on sex. A directive attached to the Halifax salary list, published in 1870, noted that from that date salaries in the city were to be rationalized so that eventually teachers in all schools would be paid on the same scale, at first appointment. The scale provided that first and second class male teachers would start at \$400 and \$350 respectively, while first and second class females would begin at \$250 and \$200.³³

In the light of these differences, why were women willing to take on the job of teaching in city schools? Part of the answer to this question is of course the shortage of employment available to women other than domestic work. But one must add to this, first of all, the very desire to work outside the home, as the household became less and less the centre of industry and as the domestic employment which had for so long claimed large numbers of women clearly began to lose whatever attraction it may have had. Evidence from Upper Canada in the 1840s suggests, indeed, that to some observers there was little to choose between domestic service and teaching in the early years. The two occupations were frequently compared, and in tones of considerable disparagement, with some holding that female teachers were on the same (low) social and educational level as "spinsters and household servants," while others noted that teachers in general were no better than the "lowest menials."³⁴

If domestic work and teaching commanded similar wages in the 1840s, any improvement, however little, in the salaries or status of the latter would be bound to make teaching seem an attractive possibility. The salaries of female teachers in Halifax and Toronto, furthermore, were so much higher than the provincial averages for teachers in Nova Scotia and Upper Canada, that they must have held a special allure for women coming from outside these cities, in spite of the fact that they compared so poorly with the salaries of urban male teachers. For many women, then, even the lowest ranks of city school hierarchies may have provided opportunities for respectable independence, and as time went on, both a higher status and higher wages than had been available to them in the past.

Whether it amounted to the rationalization of what had already happened, or a prediction of things to come, the portrayal of women as

³³ *Report of the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Halifax for the Year 1870*, p. 33.

³⁴ W.H. LANDON, *Report of the Superintendent of Schools for the Brock District* (Woodstock: 1848), pp. 3-4; The Colborne Memorial, 1848, RG 2 C-6-C, pp. 3-4, Public Archives of Ontario.

ideally suited to the instruction and government of the very young must also have had an impact on prospective teachers. In the inspirational text for teachers published by Alexander Forrester in 1867 when he was Chief Superintendent of Schools in Nova Scotia, the author noted that while formerly, "female teaching" had been "confined to private families, or private schools, or matrons' village schools," it had now become prevalent in public schools in both the old world and the new. The superintendent was not anxious to discuss the prejudices that existed against women teachers, but to make a point regarding their "qualifications and position." It was sufficient, he claimed, to note that "both by the law of nature and revelation," there was "a position of subordination and of dependence" assigned to women, and that thus there ought to be "situations in educational establishments better adapted to the one sex than the other." Accordingly, it was generally admitted that the infant and primary departments were "best fitted for the female," while "the head masterships, and the more advanced sections" ought to be reserved for the male teachers in schools.³⁵

If elementary school teaching, even at comparatively low rates of pay, nevertheless opened up opportunities to work outside the home for women who, before, had largely devoted their lives to the domestic sphere, and if the propaganda and discussion of the period also helped to steer women into subordinate positions in urban school systems, a third force helped to ensure that they would remain in the lower ranks. This was the reputation, deserved or otherwise, that women had for retiring from the profession after a few years, just as experience was "beginning to make them really efficient" as the Superintendent of Schools for New Brunswick put it. The problem, in this administrator's view, was that their places were then filled by "younger and less experienced recruits from the Training School," the ultimate effect of which was to lower the reputation of all female teachers, whether they were experienced or not.³⁶ Men too, however, were accused of treating the profession as temporary employment, undertaken only for quick money during bad times, and there seems, at this stage of the research, no way of knowing whether or not the tendency was really more pronounced among women. For our purposes it remains sufficient to know that at least one influential superintendent thought this to be the case, for, once again, the spread of such opinions was bound to suggest to women as well as to their male colleagues that the lower salaries for female teachers were justified.

So far this essay has cited the views of men on the subject of women teachers. What were the opinions of the women themselves? As might be expected, statements by women teachers are hard to come by, but the few that are to be found suggest that, if the majority accepted their low status and low pay, some women at least were far from satisfied with their position.

³⁵ *The Teachers' Text-Book*, (Halifax: 1867) pp. 565-66.

³⁶ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for New Brunswick for the Year 1867*, pp. 8-9.

Elizabeth Ann Inglis, a teacher who wrote complaining of her lot to the Chief Superintendent of Schools for Upper Canada in 1849, blamed her male colleagues and their poor opinion of women for the low status of female teachers. Although, according to Inglis, some of her school trustee employers had candidly admitted that her work was superior to that of most men, her salary, in the course of a ten year career, had never reflected this fact.³⁷

A "female teacher" writing anonymously for the *Journal of Education for the Province of Nova Scotia* several decades later, also felt that instruction by women was "undervalued." Basing her opinion on what she believed to be woman's dominant role as educator within the home, this teacher claimed for women superiority not just as instructors of the very young, but of all ages of children, typing them "natural educators." Female teachers were, in far larger proportion than men, "suited to the work, and from a consciousness of their adaptation to it" continued "to teach and love the profession, while by far the greater number of males, conscious of their want of adaptation to the work they have assumed" left the profession "for something more congenial." The fact that women received less pay for the same labour was, in the view of this writer, "a sad commentary" on the chivalry and gallantry of male Nova Scotians. Although women's claim to equal pay for equal work was the chief message that the *Journal's* anonymous correspondent wished to convey, she also wanted to see women promoted to positions of leadership in the schools. In her view, it could only be to the benefit of schools in Nova Scotia if, in some cases, "active, energetic female teachers were placed over them."³⁸

It could be said that the leap to leadership had already been made, for there were of course female principals in public schools where the school population was divided according to sex. Thus two of the public schools in the city of Halifax boasted women teachers at the top by 1870.³⁹ But mixed schools rarely if ever had female principals in the 1870s. Futhermore, it was not really until the end of the century that Canadian women teachers felt secure enough in the profession to speak out strongly on the subject of their inequality.

A paper called "The Financial Outlook of the Women Teachers of Montreal," which was published in 1893 by Miss E. Binmore in *The Education Record of the Province of Quebec*, is in sharp contrast with the muted and anonymous statement of "a Female Teacher" and outlines provocative views on the gradually evolving position of women in the teaching profession. At first, according to Binmore, women had worked, as in any new field, virtually "on suffrage," for trustees who could not

³⁷ Elizabeth Ann Inglis to Egerton Ryerson, 29 December, 1849, RG 2 C-6-C, Public Archives of Ontario.

³⁸ "Female Teaching," *Journal of Education for the Province of Nova Scotia*, No. 36 (April 1871), p. 559.

³⁹ *Report of the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Halifax for the Year 1870*, p. 559.

afford to pay the usual salaries, because opportunities for female employment were only gradually thrown open, and because there were always more women seeking work than there were positions. In the long run, however, "efficiency and success" would always be recognized and women paid accordingly. In the light of this situation, the author felt that it was especially regrettable that the city of Montreal had failed either to promote women to principalships or to remunerate them adequately, and that in this respect the city lagged far behind other cities on the continent. Citing a recent petition of Montreal women teachers on the subject of their exploitation, Binmore noted that salaries for women were so low and board and room so high in certain localities of the city, that some of the teachers concerned were unable to pay for basic necessities like clothing or medical care; nor could they afford books, church contributions or further education.⁴⁰

Though the author of this 1893 discussion felt it necessary to disassociate herself from some of the more radical opinions on women current in her period, her analysis of the role of women in teaching nevertheless went far beyond the defensive positions taken by either Elizabeth Ann Inglis in 1849 or the anonymous "Female Teacher" in 1871. The abilities of women teachers are not even discussed; Binmore obviously took them for granted. Equal rights for these teachers were demanded openly and a paper printed, in the author's own name, in a widely circulated educational journal. Another small point that should be noted is that the expressions "female teacher" or "female teaching" do not appear in Binmore's paper. "Woman teacher," furthermore, was deliberately chosen instead of "lady teacher," for, as the author explained, not only had the word "lady" lost much of its original meaning, it also, insofar as it retained that meaning, implied membership in a leisured class. Binmore did not believe that teaching in Montreal in the 1890s amounted to leisure; it was for equal work that she was demanding equal pay for women.

The position of women teachers in the decades between 1845 and 1875 would not have permitted such a strong expression of women's rights or needs. Only just emerging from the world of domestic and private instruction into the world of the public schools, women faced much prejudice. Prejudice was caused by fear of female competition generally, or in particular that women teachers, by accepting low salaries, degraded the profession and drove out competent men. It was caused by the genuine belief that women were constitutionally ill-adapted to the public classroom, either because of inferior mental aptitude or training, or, more often, because the disciplinary and organizational demands of the public school were too great. Prejudice also arose from the belief that many women did not intend to make a life-time career of teaching.

⁴⁰ Miss E. BINMORE, "The Financial Outlook of the Women Teachers of Montreal," *The Educational Record of the Province of Quebec*, 13 (March, 1893), pp. 69-74.

Such prejudice was overcome by admitting women to teaching as assistants, as instructors of the younger children and lower grades, and portraying them as essentially dependent on the guidance of male principals and head teachers. Both women and men were encouraged in this by the perpetration of the myths that the special mission of women was the instruction of the very young, and that nature dictated their dependent status on the one hand, and the male's position of leadership on the other. Prejudice was also overcome by the fundamental fact that women teachers cost less. Expanding school systems could often hire two female teachers for the price of one male; male teachers at the same time could claim as a result of the employment of women, the salaries and status that so many school promoters felt was their due and an essential aspect of educational reform.

The entry of large numbers of women into public school teaching was thus accepted because their position in the schools was generally a subordinate one. Their move into public teaching facilitated — and was facilitated by — the emergence of the public school itself, and in urban centres, of large, graded public school systems, in which hierarchical professional patterns were feasible. To the extent that this pattern persisted and spread, and to the extent that school children absorbed messages from the organization of the institutions in which they were educated, Canadian children were exposed to a powerful image of woman's inferior position in society. One must not discount, moreover, the impact on the women themselves. The experience of public school teaching, the experience of its discipline and of its hierarchical organization, became the experience of large numbers of Canadian women by the end of the nineteenth century.