A Study in Early Problems and Policies in Adult Education: the Halifax Mechanics' Institute

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The first large-scale attempt at popular adult education may be discerned in the mechanics' institutes which originated in early nineteenth century Britain, and soon spread to English-speaking communities across the globe. Adult education was then being advocated on three main grounds — moral and religious, social and political, and utilitarian and technological. The content of the education proposed in each case varied and even conflicted. The first motive was concerned with spreading a knowledge of the Bible, and inculcating morality, piety, and respect for established society. The second motive was concerned with the emancipation of the working classes, with a committment to democracy and progress, rather than to the established order. The third motive reflected a desire to spread knowledge of the new scientific principles, in the hope of promoting industrial progress and economic improvements. While the moral and religious motives involved very limited educational objectives, and might therefore prove acceptable to the ruling classes, the social and political ones were so far-reaching as to incur almost certain enmity. On the other hand, the utilitarian and technological motives implied at least some community of interests between management and skilled labour, if not between the middle and working classes they represented.

The British urban craftsman had, indeed, few alternatives to assimilation into a society dominated by middle class ideals. The old popular culture of his rural past had disappeared, or had been ridiculed, and the paternalistic state regulation of apprenticeship had been repealed in 1814, leaving his hard-won skills at the mercy of every economic misfortune. Some determined and exceptional workmen were to persevere in the face of many hardships, and establish mutual-improvement societies as indigenous attempts to solve their own identified educational needs.[1] Yet others were to undertake demanding programs of self-education, relying on the chance availability of suitable books in a period antedating public libraries.[2] While great status might be accorded such self-educated working men as the radical journalist, William Cobbett, or the trade union leader William Lovett, relatively few artisans had the stamina or the dis-

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[1] See Archibald E. DOBBS, *Education and Social Movements, 1700-1850* (London: Longmans, 1919).

[2] Research suggests that by the 1830s most of the "respectable adult poor" possessed some degree of literacy. See Robert K. WEBB, "Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England," *English Historical Review*, LXV (1950), 333-351.

position to emulate them. Returning from a day of long and arduous toil, to the often ill-lit, insanitary, and overcrowded slum dwellings that constituted their homes, only the dedicated few could disperse the clouds of physical and mental exhaustion sufficiently to apply themselves with any regularity to independant study. Indeed, one student of this period concluded that "it would take a type of literature especially suited to men and women with dulled minds and tired bodies to turn manual workers into habitual readers."[3] Such literature had, in fact, already begun to proliferate. A variety of "almanacs, ballads, last dying speeches, broadsides, flyers, and chapbooks", typified by *The Newgate Calendar, or Malefactors Bloody Register*, saw the vast majority of the literate poor "drawn to these crude productions of a pre-industrial press."[4] Insofar as the large and amorphous group, termed the working class, shared any common aspiration, it was probably to escape from the squalor and drudgery of its everyday existence. The lack of any public recreational facilities saw all too many seek solace in the drunkeness and sexual promiscuity of the age. Others found salvation in a growing number of adult schools, founded to teach the basic principles of Christianity by imparting a limited knowledge of reading, and perhaps writing.[5] However, particularly among the literate and skilled tradesmen (the labour aristocracy) were those permeated with a desire to improve that "station in life" against which the unstamped press continually inveighed. Many would decide to emigrate to the colonies, in the hope of realizing ambitions denied at home. The group which gave most concern were those who remained at home to absorb the heady and growing literature of social protest, and to alarm a society demanding due subordination to rank and tradition.

The widespread circulation of literature deemed "seditious" alarmed tories, whigs, and radicals alike.[6] *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* commented in 1825 that "whenever the lower orders of any great state have obtained a smattering of Knowledge, they have generally used it to produce national ruin."[7] A growing concensus of opinion favoured the sponsorship of some form of "useful knowledge" for the craftsmen and apprentices on whom the coming industrial society would depend. What was contemplated was not some broad community association appealing to the discursive and recreational interest of the adult masses, but a specialized institution intended to promote selective utilitarian aims of assumed common interest among employers and employees. This constituted a compromise between the many who opposed educating the working classes at all, and some workmen's demonstrated interests in a

[3] Richard D. ALTICK, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 94.

[4] Robert K. WEBB, "The Victorian Reading Public," in *From Dickens to Hardy: A Guide to English Literature* (London: Cassell, 1963), VI: 210-211.

[5] Coolie VERNER, ed., *Pole's History of Adult Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1967).

[6] Robert K. WEBB, *The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955; reprint ed. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), chap. 3.

[7] *Blackwoods Edinburg Magazine*, XVI No. C (May 1825), 535.

wider world, particularly current issues in economics and politics, but not forgetting literature and recreation. In the political circumstances of the period, this limited commodity of "useful knowledge" was about as much as middle class philanthropy would countenance. Despite the altruism and sincerity of many promoters, the overall emphasis clearly implied some form of social control, in that working class energies were to be attracted to an area of education considered potentially supportive rather than disruptive of the *status quo*. The great merit of the undertaking lay in it being a useful starting point, which captured an international imagination, and which attracted manifold energies and finance to a hitherto neglected field of social endeavour. These resources were chanelled into the uncharted land of adult learning, with the result that many basic hypotheses were to be tested by a process of trial and error. This paper will examine the particular circumstances attending the first two decades in the existence of Halifax Mechanics' Institute, Nova Scotia. The enquiry is intended to illustrate the policies adopted by, and the problems associated with, a pioneer institute as being representative of general developments affecting the early mechanics' institutes of British North America.

The attachment felt by departing Britons towards their mechanics' institutes is perhaps classically demonstrated in the case of two groups of emigrants to Nelson, New Zealand. In 1841 and 1842 respectively, institutes were actually established to function on board vessels carrying the migrants to their new homes.[8] While no parallels to such cases have so far been documented for British North America, this country shares in the international development of these bodies. Mechanics' institutes were to be established from Nova Scotia,[9] to British Columbia,[10] with about three hundred existing in Ontario alone.[11] While each institute was unique to some extent, the early foundations at least showed some unity of purposes and faced a number of common problems in seeking to reach their novel objectives.

That Halifax should inaugurate a mechanics' institute in 1831 was not surprising. The town was the capital of a growing province, a major naval and military base, and an important commercial centre. A Halifax editorial of 1831, in noting the rapid development of wharves, warehouses, and private homes in the capital, commented that "at no time since its first settlement did the province present an aspect of so much promise as that which it now wears."[12] In Halifax resided the governor

[8] David O. W. HALL, *New Zealand Adult Education* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), 31.

[9] See Charles Bruce FERGUSSON, "Mechanics' Institutes in Nova Scotia," *Bulletin of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1960). Mention is here made of such institutes in Halifax, Sydney, Antigonish, Liverpool, Windsor, Dartmouth, Guysborough, St. Andrews, Pictou, and Truro.

[10] See Gordon SELMAN, "Mechanics' Institutes in British Columbia," *Continuous Learning*, 10, No. 3 (May-June 1971), 126-130.

[11] See Foster VERNON, "The Development of Adult Education in Ontario, 1790-1900" (Ed. D. thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1969).

[12] *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), cit. G.F. BUTLER, "The Early Organization and Influence of Halifax Merchants", *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, 25 (1942), 15.

and his executive council, many of the elected assembly, a wealthy and influential merchant class, a growing professional class, many substantial storekeepers, and numerous artisans.[13] Some consideration for useful knowledge had been shown in the curriculum of late eighteenth century Halifax night schools, which offered instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, architecture, bookkeeping, dialing, gauging, mathematics, and navigation. Here, enrolments had been sought from "such youth or apprentices as may be allowed schooling by their parents or masters."[14] By 1805 the range of evening classes embraced:

> reading, writing, English grammar, arithmetic, bookkeeping, geography with the use of globes, geometry, trigonometry, altimetry, longimetry, mensuration, surveying on a modern and highly proved plan, navigation, gromonics, natural philosophy, astronomy, elocution, composition, etc.[15]

For nearby rural dwellers, scientific advances in agriculture were to be demonstrated, following the establishment, in 1815, of Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane's model estate at Shubenacadie.[16] A pressing advoicy of scientific agriculture had them come from the Scottish immigrant, John Young. His newspaper articles (under the pen name "Agricola") stimulated the formation of a provincial agricultural society in 1818, with the support of the governor, Lord Dalhousie, and with a grant from the legislature.[17] The Halifax middle class appear to have shared few of the philosophical aspirations or pretentions that in Upper and Lower Canada gave birth to the formation of such bodies as the York Literary Society (1820), the Quebec Literary and Historical Society (1824), or the Montreal Natural History Society (1827). It was in the period 1800-1830 that Halifax merchants were considered "probably more prominent, more active, and more influential than at any other period in the city's history."[18] Able to determine local commercial policy, to induce other colonies to cooperate with them, and to influence British policy, their vitality found expression in the Nova Scotia Commercial Society, established in 1822. The society not only attracted participation from the city's prosperous and influential citizens, but was to be help up as something of a model to follow in developing another "useful" society — a mechanics' institute.[19] To the glimmerings of the new scientific age possessed by some urban

[13] The census of 1817, 1827, 1838, and 1851 gave the population of Halifax as 11,156; 14,439; 14,422; and 20,749. The adjoining county populations were then 5,341; 10,546; 14,148; and 19,165; The population of Nova Scotia was 81,351; 123,630; 202,575; and 276,854. — *Censuses of Canada, 1865-1871* (Ottawa: J. B. Taylor, 1876), IV: 82, 94, 125, 232.

[14] *Nova Scotia Chronicle and Weekly Advertizer*, October 10-17, 1769; *Nova Scotia Gazeteer and Weekly Chronicle*, 9 October, 1779; and *ibid.*, September 26, 1780; quoted by James BINGAY, *Public Education in Nova Scotia: a History and Commentary* (Kingston: the Jackson Press, 1919), 20-21.

[15] *Nova Scotia Royal Gazette*, June 6, 1805. Quoted by Bingay, *op. cit.*, 21.

[16] G. G. CAMPBELL, *The History of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1948), 209.

[17] *Acadian Recorder*, July 15, 1818. Duncan CAMPBELL, *Nova Scotia in its Historical, Mercantile, and Industrial Relations* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1873), 228.

[18] BUTLER, "Halifax Merchants", 1.

[19] *Novascotian* (Halifax), 13 December 1829, 422, cols. 1-3.

and rural dwellers, must be added a climate of opinion not unfavourable to modest innovation. Changing imperial policies were to leave the colony with more responsibility for local revenues and expense, and so developed a growing assertiveness and a more critical perspective of problems and possible solutions. In an age of "intellectual awakening", a platform for criticism and innovation came to be provided by a growing number of local newspapers.[20] Their editors kept readers advised of developments in other parts of North America, and in Britain, while exploring possibilities of spiritual and material improvement at home.

Elementary education had frequently received the attention of the provincial legislature in the early nineteenth century. A joint report of the Council and the House of Assembly in 1825 had concluded that there was "a deplorable disproportion between the demand for instruction and the means of supplying it."[21] As this disproportion was a longstanding one, many adults had clearly not completed formal schooling. Recent immigrants from Britain might have testified to a similar situation in the land of their birth, and they could also testify to a growing eagerness there to learn something of modern science and to enjoy the benefits of a library.[22] Indeed, the first recorded library in Upper Canada was the outcome of such an expressed interest by British immigrants. In 1800, fourty-one of them had resolved to establish a library in Niagara:

> Sensible how much we are at a loss in this new and remote country for every kind of useful knowledge, and convinced that nothing would be of more use to diffuse knowledge amongst us and our offspring than a library.[23]

In Nova Scotia, it was the early nineteenth century immigrants, largely from Scotland, who were "to be credited with introducing new concepts in education and politics."[24] In August 1827, the Scottish born editor of the *Novascotian*, George Young (son of "Agricola"), discussed the subject of adult education. He concluded that mechanics' institutes were then relevant to countries more highly industrialized than Nova Scotia. He doubted if the latter yet possessed either resources to sustain them, or outlets for talents they might develop. Of the "simpler manufactures" of Halifax, he concluded that:

[20] See D. C. HARVEY, "The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review*, XII (1933), 1-22; and J. S. MARTELL, "The Press of the Maritime Provinces in the 1830s," *Canadian Historical Review*, XIX (March 1938), 24-49.

[21] *Journal of the House of Assembly* (Nova Scotia), 7 March 1825.

[22] Perhaps the most celebrated case of such mechanics' interest is that recorded by Dr. George Birkbeck, the first president of London Mechanics' Institution. While having a model of a centrifugal pump constructed by some Glasgow tradesmen in 1800, he became so impressed by their interest that he secured their admittance to some of his regular science lectures at Anderson's Institution. Thereafter, he delivered a special evening course intended solely for mechanics, and the attendance increased from 75 to 500 by the fourth meeting. — *Mechanics' Magazine* (London), V (15 November 1823), 178-191; and Thomas KELLY, *George Birkbeck; Pioneer of Adult Education* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1957), 27-34.

[23] Cit. Edwin A. HARDY, *The Public Library: Its Place in Our Educational System* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 27.

[24] William B. HAMILTON, "Education, Politics, and Reform in Nova Scotia, 1800-1848" (Ph. D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1970), 65.

> a blacksmith can heave a sledge without being able to calculate its momentum — that a carpenter can drive a nail, although he is ignorant of all the doctrine of direct and oblique forces — and the tailor may cut a "Blucher coat" to please a sixthfitted dandy, although he has never heard of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle, or learned to ascertain the quality of cloth contained in a circle of any given diameter.[25]

Nevertheless, Young was to favour the establishment of a library of "useful knowledge" for the mechanics of Halifax,[26] contending that the town's existing three libraries lacked any introductory works in the natural sciences.[27]

Both Phillip J. Holland, editor of the *Acadian Recorder*, and Joseph Howe, Young's successor as editor of the *Novascotian*,[28] were also to show concern with the availability of "useful knowledge" for the Halifax mechanics. Of the latter's own feelings in this matter, there is scant evidence.[29] Indeed, this phase of adult education was characterized by the overriding assumption that the middle classes knew best what the working classes needed. The Halifax venture was thus to solicit the support of "the rich, the intelligent, and the influential," even if one liberal supporter might hint that they were not absolutely essential.[30] One must, however, conclude that in the circumstances of the time, such "a meeting of influential citizens" as those who inaugurated Toronto Mechanics' Institute in January 1831, were certainly necessary for ventures of this kind.[31] Mechanics' institutes were conceived as something more than the typical associative activities of the period — intended largely to mitigate the worst excesses of social and economic injustice. The institutes indeed reflected middle class hopes of moulding the growing urban communities in their own image, but in venturing to facilitate systematic study by the more capable treadsmen, the middle class were opening a potential "pandora's box" insofar as the *status quo* was concerned. Despite patrons' reassuring words that mechanics' institutes would promote sobriety, industry, and respect for the social norms, the archetype mechanics' institute in Glasgow was itself the forerunner of several British attempts to place adult education under the democratic management of working class

[25] *Novascotian*, 16 August 1827, 274, col. 3.

[26] *Ibid.*, 23 August 1827, 283, col. 4.

[27] The three libraries named were the Halifax Library, a Mr. Martin's Library, and the Methodist Library.

[28] Joseph HOWE, self-educated son of a Boston loyalist, was to become the great orator of reform in Nova Scotia. See James A. ROY, *Joseph Howe; A Study in Achievement and Frustration* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1935); and J. Murray BECK, ed., *Joseph Howe: Voice of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964).

[29] See, e.g., a letter to fellow apprentices, *Acadian Recorder* 18 January 1834, 2.

[30] See Patrick KEANE, "Joseph Howe and Adult Education," *Acadiensis*, III, No. 1 (Autumn, 1973), 35-49.

[31] For a list of the founders of Toronto Mechanics' Institute in 1831, see Samuel THOMPSON, *Reminiscence of a Canadian Pioneer for the Last Fifty Years*, (Toronto: Hunter Rose & Co., 1884), 377. The same calibre of influential leadership is indicated in the first Montreal Mechanics' Institution of 1828 — *Atwater Library of Mechanics' Institute of Montreal* (Montreal, 1973), 4.

students.[32] Insofar as the mechanics' institutes represented a community of interests between members of the middle and working classes, this would seem to have been no more than a working compromise involving some mutually questionable hypotheses. The novelty associated with early popular science, and the unbounded enthusiasm of early promoters, proved euphoric enough to be conveyed across the globe by emigrants, travellers, and the popular press. Few could foresee the kinds of stress that would arise in a period of social and economic change, and in a venture of such an experimental nature.

In October 1831, sufficient support was obtained for the foundation of Halifax Mechanics' Library Association. Management of this institution was vested in a body of shareholders, and within two months one finds a scathing public criticism. The association was described as being "formed *professedly* for the benefit of mechanics,"[33] and the latter were urged to combine and establish their own organization. Instead of this happening however, library shareholders convened a public meeting on 27 December 1831, at which a separate Halifax Mechanics' Institute was born.[34] The event was noteworthy in the development of adult education, for this was one of the first mechanics' institutes to be established in British North America.[35] The Halifax body had for its objects:

> the accumulation of models and apparatus, the introduction of such mechanical improvements as have been discovered in other countries, or the diffusion of knowledge of such as may be invented here, and the procuring of lectures on scientific and other subjects.[36]

There was mention of individual and community benefits, of intellectual and material rewards, and of comparable institutions in Britain and the United States. Though a few of the audience proved somewhat cyni-

[32] A clash between the administration and the adult students of Anderson's Institution led to the formation in 1823 of Glasgow Mechanics' Institution, and to its subsequent working class management — Alexander H. SEXTON, *The First Technical College* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1894). Thereafter, attempts were made to establish a number of British mechanics' institutes either with a majority of the management drawn from the working class, or even with non-mechanics specifically excluded from management. However, the demands of time, money, and expertise militated against the successful development of an avowedly working class adult education movement.

[33] *Acadian Recorder*, 3 December 1831, 2 col. 1. The italics in the above quotation are mine.

[34] Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax Mechanics' Institute. M. S. Journal of Minutes, 27 December 1831. All subsequent quotations not otherwise identified are from this journal.

[35] St. John's Mechanics' Institute, Newfoundland, was established in 1827 — Sybil GRIMSON, "Mechanics' Institutes," *Encyclopedia Canadiana*, VI (1965), 416; the Montreal Mechanics' Institution, in 1828 (refounded in 1840 as The Mechanics' Institute of Montreal) — *The Mexhanics' Institute of Montreal, 1840-1940* (Montreal: the Gazette Printing, 1940); York Mechanics' Institute, Upper Canada, in 1830 — J. Donald WILSON, "Adult Education in Upper Canada Before 1850," *Journal of Education*, (University of British Columbia), No. 19 (Spring, 1973), 45; and Toronto Mechanics' Institute in 1831 — Samuel Thompson, *Reminiscences*, 377.

[36] Supplementary to the Journal, see also Public Archives of Canada, John S. Thompson Papers (hereafter cited as JSTP), "An Opening Address Delivered to the First Meeting of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute, on Wednesday January 11, 1832, by Joseph Howe."

cal, the venture was launched successfully. While the library and institute were separate entities, membership of the library was made a prerequisite for membership of the institute, thus testifying to their complementary nature. Subsequently, when the library declined to amalgamate with the institute, this restriction was removed.

The institute's inaugural meeting agreed unanimously that Dr. William Grigor (a Scottish-born local physician) was to be president. John Leander Starr, (a Halifax merchant) and Joseph Howe became first and second vice-presidents respectively; and John S. Thompson (a magazine editor and president of the library) became the institute secretary. Despite his frequent attempts to resign, Thompson was persuaded to hold this office for two decades, and this period was to represent the most active years of the institute. A management committee was formed, including an artist, a cabinet maker, a newspaper proprietor (the aforementioned Phillip J. Holland) and a surveyor. To encourage the committee members, it was ruled that any of them being absent at the commencement of meetings "be fined 7½ d. except good excuse be given," and for absence throughout the meeting a fine of 1s. 3d. was to be levied.[37] However, these rules were being relaxed already by July 1832, despite repeated difficulties in convening sufficient attendance. A 'subcommittee to solicit donations' was appointed, and the lieutenant governor's patronage was obtained. The influential shipowner, Samuel Cunard, was enrolled,[38] and through Cunard's influence, Henry H. Cogswell, president of the Halifax Banking Company, donated N.S. £25.[39] Provision was then made for a class of honorary members, to which donors of N.S. £5 or more might be admitted.[40] A more substantial bid for financial support was made in January 1832, when the institute appointed a committee to petition the legislature for a grant from public funds.[41] Unlike British contemporaries,[42] the institute and library were not to be disappointed. A grant of N.S. £75 was made to them jointly in 1833, and annual but smaller ones thereafter until 1840.[43]

[37] In this, and subsequent references to monetary units in Halifax, the currency involved was the Nova Scotia pound.

[38] Halifax Mechanics' Institute, membership list, 2 January 1832. For a biography, see A. M. PAYNE, "The Life of Sir Samuel Cunard," *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, XIX (1917), 74-91.

[39] *Acadian Recorder*, 14 January 1832, 2, col. 4.

[40] Unlike some British contemporaries, the Halifax Mechanics' Institute afforded no special privileges of management to those subscribing more than the standard membership fees.

[41] The committee included Joseph Howe, John Leander Starr, and the institute curator, R. LAWSON.

[42] Glasgow Mechanics' Institution petitioned the British parliament unsuccessfully for a grant in 1833 and again in 1834 — Glasgow Mechanics' Institution, Minutes, 3 April 1833; 27 January 1834; 31 March 1834. Quoted KELLY, *Birkbeck*, 191.

[43] Similarly in Upper Canada, provincial grants were first made in 1835 to the mechanics' institutes of York and Kingston — Foster VERNON, "Adult Education", Abstract, 17; while in British Columbia, a government building and an initial grant of $300 were given to the British Columbia Institute, New Westminster, in 1865 — SELMAN, "Mechanics' Institutes", 127. An article by the present author, entitled "Colonial Government Support of Adult Education in Nova Scotia" is to appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly*.

At its inauguration, the institute enrolled 52 members at an entrance fee of 2s. 6d. and a subscription of ten shillings annually or 2s. 6d. quarterly. This was a lower enrolment than the institute's enthusiastic promoters might have wished for, but as Dr. William Grigor was later to recall, the early members included "many experienced and well-educated mechanics."[44] This was precisely the group for whom the international movement had been intended, and for whom such scales of fees were established, rather than for the poor and unskilled labourer, or for the middle classes. Increasingly, however, institutes were to seek a larger, and consequently broader membership, in order to finance their activities. In February 1833, a membership promotion committee was appointed in Halifax, and the enrolment reached 210 by the end of that year, in addition to many youths and apprentices who were being admitted to lectures at reduced rates.[45] The composition of the original membership was soon being enlarged both by inducements offered to prospective younger members,[46] and by a decision to admit women.[47] Socially, the early membership ranged from officers of the armed forces,[48] to a "poor lad" admitted without charge. After November 1833, when library membership was no longer a prerequisite for institute membership, a substantial number of people merely purchased a series of tickets to lectures, rather than pay a quarterly subscription, and then expected to have all the benefits of membership. By October 1841, this had become the officially accepted mode, after the secretary had repeatedly failed to enforce payment of full fees.[49] Institute membership climbed to 213 in 1837, 249 in 1840, 249 in 1844, and then dropped to only 140 in 1849. Its rise and fall had been accompanied by an increasingly middle class composition, as mechanics and apprentices expressed their dissatisfactions by leaving.

To counter this dissatisfaction by the original target audience, formal class provision, as distinct from lectures, was to be advocated. George R. Young had returned in 1833 from what was to be the first of a series of visits to British mechanics' institutes. He was enthusiastic about the progress made there by mechanics in formal classes and he recommended that Halifax Mechanics' Institute inaugurate such classes in mathematics, natural philosophy, history and geography. The management were also,

[44] JSTP, 1832-1844. Letter from Dr. William Grigor, dated 23 September 1836, to John S. Thompson.

[45] *Novascotian*, 25 December 1833, 2, col. 2.

[46] In February 1832, it was proposed to issue half-price junior tickets for lecture attendance, and though the matter was deferred for some months, it was adopted subsequently, and from January 1834 members were each permitted to hold more than one such ticket.

[47] *Novascotian*, 25 December 1833, 2, col. 2. In 1836 Joseph Howe was to address the institute on "The Moral Influence of Women." — Joseph A. CHISHOLM, ed., The Speeches and *Public Letters of Joseph Howe* (Halifax: The Chronicle Publishing Co., 1909), I: 89-103.

[48] E.g. the first membership book listed the Hon. Colonel Cathcart, Colonel Marshall, and Lieutenant Watson.

[49] This meant that entrance fees of 2s. 6d. were not enforced, but that income was derived from members' tickets at 7s. 6d., minors' tickets at 3s. 9d., and ladies' tickets at 2s. 6d. Initially, a subscription of 10s. 0d. annually or 2s. 6d. quarterly had required.

no doubt, aware of Montreal Mechanics' Institution starting evening classes in January 1834.[50] The Halifax management however proved dilatory in the matter, and in September 1836 a strong criticism of their policy came from Dr. Grigor.[51] As one concerned intimately with the education of apprentices,[52] he was very much in favour of the early vocational emphasis of the promoter. Recalling the stimulating scientific discussions once initiated by "mechanic-members", Grigor condemned both the formality and the content of the present program. A reliance on formal lectures, prefaced by unnecessary introductory addresses, and with discussion limited to points of information, were said to have bored mechanics who already had little interest in some of the diverse topics presented.[53] Certainly they might have resented a resolution of the previous year "that the chairman be directed to suppress and prohibit noisy expressions of approbation or disapprobation on lecture evenings."[54] Grigor appealed to "mechanic-members" on the management committee to ensure that adequate instruction was provided in "the foundation of mechanical knowledge, both in theory and practice." Such "mechanic-members" were doubtless small employers rather than journeymen, and while a subcommittee of inquiry was appointed, it rejected Grigor's plea. It contended that not only were competent instructors lacking, but there was a want of "public taste" for scientific and technical education. To this, Grigor replied at length, condemning the sub-committee for "opinions so opposed to the principles of science and the ostensible purposes of the institute."[55] Successive management committees had become attached to a philosophy of adult education which reflected the broad, general interests of a growing and evolving membership, rather than the assumed and difficult-to-satisfy needs of one group.

Other Canadian institutes were then having little success with class programs. York Mechanics' Institute indeed pioneered a discussion class in 1831, but its attempt to provide a class program for neighbouring store clerks foundered in 1840, largely on financial grounds. It was not until the late 1840s that Toronto Mechanics' Institute was able to establish some successful classes in drawing,[56] and the previously mentioned Montreal

[50] See the report in the *Acadian Recorder*, 18 January 1834, 2 col. 5: The pioneering work of Montreal Mechanics' Institution ended with a final meeting on 24 March 1835. After the abortive rebellion of 1837, one leading member of the institute's executive, Louis-Joseph Papineau, fled to the United States. Not until 1840 were economic and political conditions sufficiently settled for a reinauguration of the classes. — *Atwater Library*, 4-7.

[51] JSTP, letter dated 23 September 1836 from Dr. Grigor to John S. Thompson.

[52] E.G. Grigor advertized for two or more medical apprentices who had a classical education, and promised strict attention to their medical education — *Acadian Recorder*, 27 August 1831.

[53] The same situation had indeed occurred in the short-lived Boston Mechanics' Institution, Massachussetts. Established in 1826, "it failed to realize its potentialities because its program consisted of nothing but lectures," and it developed an "unsocial character" — Carl BODE, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 121.

[54] While the resolution of 19 February 1835 was however withdrawn a month later, its introduction can not but have acted as something of a deterrent.

[55] JSTP, letter dated 10 October 1836 from Dr. Grigor to John S. Thompson.

[56] Foster VERNON, "Adult Education," 23.

venture lapsed during the political troubles of 1835-1840. Thereafter, a new start was made, and for a few years the new Mechanics' Institute of Montreal even conducted a day school for the sons of members.[57] The generality of British mechanics' institutes, as surveyed in 1839, were also found to have correspondingly limited progress in establishing class programs.[58] The mechanics' institutes visited by Young constituted, as he himself recognized, some of the most successful ones, and it required particularly fortuitous circumstances in this early period to sustain graduated class instruction for adults. In Halifax, as elsewhere, it was relatively easy to persuade "friends of the institute" to give occasional and usually free lectures on topics of general interest. It was a different proposition to enlist and support competent teachers prepared to hold regular weekly classes of vocational relevance to working men. Correspondingly, sustained evening study after long and arduous employment was unlikely to attract a large and stable enrollment from the Halifax mechanics, particularly if one accepts George Young's conclusion that Nova Scotia offered few outlets for skills acquired in the process.

Sufficient concern however, was manifested for the establishment of a new committee in October 1836, charged with establishing some evening classes. It advertised for a teacher of practical geometry at a salary of N.S. £20 per session, plus students' fees. The person appointed would be required to teach a course which would "enable a young artist or mechanic to apply his knowledge to any of the arts in which drawing is generally considered an advantage."[59] This was a more modest beginning than either Young or Grigor had advocated, but only three applicants came forward. From these, the committee chose the institute secretary, John S. Thompson. The class commenced in November, and Thompson reported to the chairman of the initiatory school committee that his students were working out problems in practical geometry, with the object of gaining "a very useful body of facts, a mass of scientific terms, a facility in describing a great variety of figures, and of habits of close thought and of accuracy."[60] By December of that year, fifteen students were enrolled, and the class was in operation. The management committee considered the venture only "a partial success-- and regretted the low enrollment.[61] It nevertheless looked to additional enrolments in January, and contemplated the inauguration of further classes.[62] George R. Young, now president of the institute, emphasized again the value placed on class instruction by British mechanics' institutes, and contended that it was in such

[57] *Atwater Library*, 4, 8.

[58] Thomas COATES, *Report on the State of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions* (London: Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 1841), 96-105.

[59] JSTP, advertissement by George L. O'Brien, Chairman of the Initiatory School Committee, 1836.

[60] JSTP, letter dated 29 December 1836 from John S. Thompson to George L. O'Brien.

[61] JSTP, Halifax Mechanics' Institute, Papers and Proceedings, 28 December 1836.

[62] A new set of institute rules, proposed on 12 February 1836, and adopted at the annual meeting on 28 December 1836, included the management committee's responsibility to provide for "the establishment and continuance of the education classes."

classes that science was really being taught, "and not, as supposed in the lectures delivered to mixed audiences." However, by February 1837, instead of there being additional classes, the geometry class itself was in danger of being suspended. It nevertheless managed to survive a little longer, and in May a number of its students sent a letter of appreciation to the president and committee.[63] In 1839, the question of class instruction was raised again, with the object being to "ensure efficiency and satisfaction, without taking too much from the funds of the institute."[64] The following year saw no progress in this direction, and the committee contended themselves by reporting that any action might have been "premature and less effective than all should wish an experiment to be."[65] Clearly with the cessation of the annual grant from the assembly in 1841, the likelihood of reintroduction classes with a paid teacher diminished. In 1846, the annual report was to comment on the desirability of emulating other institutes in the provision of classes, and in 1851 the management committee were still advocating, but not implementing, this measure.[66] Obviously there was a gulf between such assumed needs of the mechanics and the institute's willingness or ability to meet them. That this same gulf existed in the many institutes of Upper Canada is some measure of this contemporary problem of adult education. There, although some provincial grants to mechanics' institutes were first made in 1835, it was not until 1851 that grants became generally available. A government Board of Arts and Manufactures was appointed in 1837 to promote the work of the institutes. It asked them to elect delegates "being actual working mechanics or manufacturers", to participate in its activities.[67] This belated attempt to involve working class members in policy decisions came too late to stimulate any radical transformation in class provision. In 1858, grants were discontinued, largely because of the failure of the classes, and no further public support materialized for a decade.[68]

The lecture program, on which so many had been based, was also the subject of criticism. Denounced by Dr. Grigor for its diversity and formality, and by others for its lack of coordination, the program's contents were yet thought worthy of publication by the lecture subcommittee in 1836. Rebuffed in this, the committee resigned. The annual report for the following year noted criticisms and pledged a "better connected and more scientific course" in future. However, the management committee insisted on the value of "general subjects interesting to a mixed audience,"[69] thus clearly rejecting notions of a program dependent on the vocational interests of Halifax mechanics. Even so, neither the lecturers

[63] The letter dated 1 May 1837 will be found in JSTP. Of the original fifteen students only five are here mentioned by name — Charles E. Patterson, Alex W. McLean, Alex H. Findlay, William C. Blackaddar, and William J. P. Crawford.

[64] JSTP, Halifax Mechanics' Institute, Paper and Proceedings, 2 June 1839.

[65] *Ibid.*, 6 May 1840.

[66] *Novascotian*, 7 May 1851, 147, col. 3. John S. Thompson was now the first vice-president and Joseph Howe was again a member of the management committee.

[67] HARDY. *Public Library*, 29.

[68] Foster VERNON, "Adult Education", 19.

[69] JSTP, Halifax Mechanics' Institute, Papers and Proceedings, 27 December 1837.

nor the "mixed audience" were to escape a degree of censure. In 1840 one learns both that a history lecturer was chided for this expressed "disenthralment" with religious changes, and that disparaging comments were made on the abilities of a science lecturer. Younger members still exhibited a degree of spontaneity despite the growing decorum, and the annual report for 1840 commented that "an injudicious habit among the younger part of the audience of making numerous expressions of applause, requires some check."[70] While the limitations of the lecture as a medium of instruction had already been perceived by some members, it had nevertheless provided many of them with an opportunity to participate directly in adult education. While the learned professions of law, medicine, and the church contributed their quota of speakers, so too did members as diverse as an artist, a newspaper editor, a naval officer, and a merchant. Joseph Howe commented, in 1839, on the surprise evinced when the institute president, Andrew McKinley stepped from behind his counter to lecture on chemistry; when George L. O'Brien laid aside his axe and plane to lecture on geometry and geography; when A. McKenzie left the manufacture of sugar plums to lecture on meteorology; and when Mr. Smithers, a housepainter, not only lectured on the rules of perspective, but adorned the walls of the lecture hall with "representations of the great monuments of the arts and sciences."[71] By 1843 Howe was even to compare unfavourably certain professors at the neighbouring Acadia College with lecturers at Halifax Mechanics' Institute.[72] One may thus assume that the latter group, coming mainly from the professions and commerce, included some, at least, who were fairly able and stimulating speakers.

The content of the lecture programs was largely scientific in the early years, ranging from anatomy to navel architecture, but thereafter it ranged over fields as diverse as law, poetry, and the influence of women. Its appeal lay increasingly for those with middle class cultural aspirations, rather than those with the working class vocational aspirations that its promoters had envisaged. As was customary in Britain, politics and controversial theology were excluded from the program, and discussion following lectures was limited to points of information. Dr. Grigor's aforementioned comments suggest that the mechanics expected more from the opportunities for discussion, but, such was the atmosphere that, as early as February 1832, one member was threatened with expulsion for using the discussion period to criticize a lecture. If the mechanics resented the passive role assigned the audience, and grew disillusioned with the content of the program, they were equally unwilling or unable to make their own contribution to that program. Thus Joseph Howe's call in

[70] *Ibid.*, 6 May 1840.

[71] *Colonial Pearl* (Halifax), 15 November 1839, i, cols. 1-3. George L. O'Brien was to be described as "a most intelligent and scientific mechanics" by a later writer — John A. Bell, Dalhousie College and University, typescript, (1887), 74.

[72] The incident arose in connection with Joseph Howe's criticisms of the multiplicity of denominational colleges in Nova Scotia. He referred to Titus Smith's philosophy lectures and Andrew McKinlay's chemistry lectures as of a higher standard than any delivered at Acadia College. — CHISHOLM, *Speeches*, I: 431.

1839 for "occasional lectures from mechanics on the several branches to which they have been bred,"[73] appears to have gone unanswered. Instead the lecture program seems to have continued without noticeable change, though by mid-century attendance had dropped.[74] The management's answer was to propose that the majority of future lectures "shall be of scientific and practically useful character" and to allocate N.S. £40 toward the cost of four courses each of three lectures. To a degree, this policy of 1851 was that advocated by Dr. Grigor fifteen years earlier. However desirable in itself, a more professional and graduated course of instruction in the sciences was unlikely to entice back those large mixed audiences on which the institute's support had rested for so long. Many had no doubt enrolled in the other local adult education agencies which developed,[75] and some doubtless had objections beyond the lecture program of the institute.

The mechanics, in particular, had some cause for misgivings. In 1830, the institute had introduced a system whereby prizes or medals valued at four, two, and one sovereign respectively, were to be awarded "to young persons and others for specimens of art or ingenuity of their own manufacture." While the product of some contemporary over-optimism with the potentiality of mechanics and apprentices as inventors, the scheme nevertheless seemed to offer inducements for some modest practical contributions by working men. Instead, three years elapsed before the scheme was implemented, and successive committees tended thereafter to prescribe learned essays in the competitions, thereby deterring the very group for whom the scheme was intended.[76] Similarly, a plea by Joseph Howe in 1839 that "patriotic members of particular trades" might present medals for award to apprentices,[77]appears to have gone unanswered. What in other institutes constituted their greatest attraction to mechanics — their library — in Halifax remained a separate entity, involving an additional membership fee, and with policy determined by a group of shareholders. Allied to the management's general concern for propriety, was its early suspicion of entertainment and recreation, even when this might help finance such desirable features as the institute's own accommodation. Thus in 1832 a theatre proprietor unsuccessfully offered the net profit of the evening's entertainment, if the institute would patronize the performance. In general, institute financial policy over the years reflected the interests of the large "mixed audiences" who attended the lectures and demonstrations. Thus in 1832 over N.S.£70 was voted for

[73] *Colonial Pearl*, 22 November 1839, 1, cols. 1-3.

[74] *Novascotian*, 17 May 1851, 147, col. 3.

[75] As early as December 1838 there was a proposal before the committee to permit the Halifax Literary and Scientific Institution to use the Institute's accommodation, but it was defeated. Other local agencies of adult education were the Halifax Literary and Debating Society, the Nova Scotia Horticultural Society, and the Dartmouth Mechanics' Institute.

[76] One noteworthy award was the medal presented in April 1839 to Thomas B. AKINS for his *Essays on the History of the Settlement of Halifax* (Halifax: English & Blackaddar, 1847). Akins attempted insuccessfully in 1841 to have the institute establish a Depository of Colonial Records.

[77] *Colonial Pearl*, 22 November 1839. 1. col. 3.

the purchase of scientific apparatus from Scotland[78] — a precedent followed by Toronto Mechanics' Institute, which sent £300 to Dr. George Birkbeck for a similar purpose in 1835, and lived to regret its extravagence.[79] In 1833 Halifax Mechanics' Institute paid N.S.£15 to a person assembling a collection of Nova Scotia minerals, rocks, and botanical specimens. Similarly another N.S.£20 was voted for scientific apparatus in 1836, along with N.S.£5 for saturay casts. Other substantial payments included N.S.£10 for museum cases in 1839, together with N.S.£10 towards a pictorial collection of Nova Scotia wild flowers, while N.S.£40 was to be available for purchase of four portraits at mid-century. Conversely, of the manifold problems of class provision for mechanics, the financial implications mainly merited comment, and this unfavourable. Not surprisingly therefore, the encouragement of such men as Joseph Howe, Dr. William Grigor, and George R. Young proved unequal to the task of sustaining a continuing participation by the mechanics. By 1842 the management committee were to single out the latter for particular criticism in failing to attend meetings or participate in the affairs of an institute said to be intended and adapted for their needs. Here one cannot but regret that some determined mechanic did not trouble to respond to these criticisms.

The second decade of the institute's existence indeed withnessed attempts to overcome some of its problems. Recreation was discussed in 1842, but "friends of the institute" advised against a proposal to hold a bazaar. Recreation, in any form, had indeed formed no part of the original intentions of mechanics' institute promoters, whether in British North America, or in Britain itself. However, of the British institutes visited by George R. Young, those at Edinburgh, Sheffield, and Liverpool had each inaugurated annual exhibitions by 1836. These served as miniature exhibitions of science and technology, combined with sufficient entertainment to attract a growing fee-paying public. The refounded Mechanics' Institution of Montreal also inaugurated the first of a series of Mechanics' Festivals in 1843, as "diminutive industrial exhibitions, with the addition of vocal and instrumental music and addresses."[80] In 1844 Halifax Mechanics' Institute overcame its diffidence sufficently to hold a bazaar in the Masons' Hall, with the assistance of Mrs. Joseph Howe and Mrs. William Grigor, and a net profit of some N.S.£180 was made — the largest single item yet to enter the institute's account. By 1846 it had been decided to emulate the neighbouring Dartmouth Mechanics' Institute, and hold a full day of recreation. P. McNab permitted the use of his island in the harbour as the site for a picnic and a festival in August, and great preparations were made to enlist community support. Arrangements were made for transport by steamboat, and a franchise was awarded for refreshments. Amid the excitement, the management committee decided to enforce a proviso that

[78] Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax Mechanics' Institute Journal, 10 April 1832. This extravagent proposal was later modified.

[79] Samuel Thompson, *Reminiscences*, 378.

[80] *Atwater Library*, 9. Toronto Mechanics' Institute inaugurated the first of several similar and profitable exhibitions in 1848 — Samuel THOMPSON, *Reminiscences*, 379.

the picnic be conducted on temperance principles, and that no platform be provided for dancing — clearly there must be limits to recreation! The community responded well to this opportunity, and a N.S.£200 profit was realized. As finances improved, the realization of another objective — the institute's own building — appeared increasingly possible. Having moved from early temporary accommodation in a local schoolroom into a semi-permanent occupancy of rooms at Dalhousie College, there had been unease that the long dormant college must one day be fully reactivated and oust its tenants. There had also been such unexpected problems as having the accommodation used as a cholera hospital in 1834,[81] and proposed as a new college library and museum in 1840.[82] Constrained in any event by a museum room and solitary lecture hall, institute management had made frequent if ineffectual attempts to obtain their own accommodation. A subscription list had been opened as early as May 1833, and successive building committees appointed in 1836, 1840, and 1844. Unfortunately, assets had never matched aspirations, and this pioneer institute witnessed such later foundations as the neighbouring Dartmouth Mechanics' Institute managing to succeed, where it had failed. By 1851 a building fund of N.S.£428. 10s. 4d. had been collected, due largely to the earlier recreational venture. The management committee thereafter recommended "the erection of a public institute building at a cost of N.S.£800, exclusive of ground purchase."[83] This recommendation was not however implemented, and no building was erected. Elsewhere, the institutes in Montreal and Toronto managed to obtain their own buildings in 1855 and 1861 respectively, while the British Columbia institute of New Westminster was fortunate enough to begin life in publicly provided accommodation in 1865.[84]

Although Halifax Mechanics' Institute continued in operation until the late 1860's, its activities drew less and less notice in the press, and all prospects of broad popular support appear to have vanished. An introductory lecture on the electric telegraph in 1851, demonstrated by telegraphic communication with the Pictou Literary Society, could still attract a "lecture room crowded to excess with a highly respected audience."[85] Nevertheless, the overall picture was of declining attendances ascribed to "other sources of evening amusement having been afforded the community."[86] Though feeling the need for a "higher ground which circumstances seem to demand, concerning additional accommodation, attraction, and more consecutive usefulness," the institute was not to achieve these ambitions. Instead, it seems to have subsided into a centre of occasional middle class entertainment and recreation, belying its title of "mechanics' institute."

[81] JSTP, Central Board of Health Minute, 28 August 1834.

[82] Journal, 28 December 1840. *Novascotian*, 31 December 1840.

[83] *Novascotian*, 7 May 1851, 147, col. 3.

[84] *Atwater Library*, 17; Samuel THOMPSON, *Reminiscences*, 381; Selman, "Mechanics' Institutes", 127.

[85] *Novascotian*, 16 March 1851.

[86] *Ibid.*, 7 May 1851.

What then were the institute's strengths and weaknesses? A basic weakness had been its fundamentally middle class policy, which never really came to grips with the needs and interests of Halifax working men. There was a tendency to delay, to compromise, and to repeat pious declarations of future improvement. The curbs on free discussion, criticism, and recreation, all testify to a social unease that sought security in formality. For a pioneer venture of this kind there were some understandable misconceptions about the suitability of the program for its intended participants — the real nature of working class educational interests had never been explored, and it later became apparent that it transcended "useful knowledge" and moral "improvement." In striving to attract and retain the support of a large mixed enrolment of men and women, of young and old, of mechanics and merchants, of army officers and apprentices, the administration had undertaken a formidable task, well beyond the founders' intentions. Hindsight indicates that it was able to respond effectively to the general interests of the majority only by relative neglect of the mechanics' aspirations — that these had constituted its *raison d'être* admits of an interpretation that Halifax Mechanics' Institute was fundamentally a failure. Lacking a clear formulation and expression of their own educational needs and interests, Halifax tradesmen were persuaded to sample those opportunities proferred by the middle class. This tenuous partnership collapsed in Halifax, as it did in so many other towns, with neither party being able to live up to the expectations of the other. Halifax, as one of the pioneer Canadian institutes, endured many of the inevitable problems of this experiment in adult education. It endured criticism over its educational policies and techniques; it sought to attract the large enrollment needed to finance its program, and then to avoid controversy among an amorphous membership; it attempted to implement its founders' intentions without losing the support of those its founders had not envisaged joining; and generally it attempted to be all things to all people.

While George R. Young had initially doubted whether Halifax could sustain a mechanics' institute, it also should be borne in mind that the weaknesses displayed in Halifax were to be found in some degree among other early institutes in British North America, in Britain, and indeed in Australia and New Zealand.[87] The weaknesses were not therefore attributable so much to the institutes being a product of educational borrowing, as to their being a novel experiment in adult education. In Upper and Lower Canada, where the total annual grant to mechanics' institutes stood at $36,500 in 1858, concern was expressed by the government "that

[87] On the largely parallel course followed by early mechanics' institutes in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, see Derek WHITELOCK, ed., *Adult Education in Australia* (Melbourne: Pergamon Press, 1967), Chap. 1: A. B. THOMPSON, *Adult Education in New Zealand, a Critical Historical Survey* (Christchurch: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1945), Chap, 2; HALL, *New Zealand Adult Education*, Chap. 2; Mabel TYLECOTE, , *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), Chap. 7; John F. C. HARRISON, *Learning and Living 1770-1960: a Study in the History of the English Adult Education, Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), passim.

this amount should be expended for the purpose for which it was designed by the legislature."[88] While "the development of mechanical talent" was the primary purpose here deemed worthy of government support, it was apparent that "the majority of the institutes have devoted their funds principally to the improvement of their libraries."[89]There was thus a continuing interplay of forces between objectives thought most worthy of philanthropic or government support, and those interests and needs which the institutes had proved most capable of meeting. Catering for both implied, according to the Victorian adage, making "the man a better mechanic, and the mechanic a better man." Few institutes proved capable of the first task, and fewer still proved capable of the dual task. The Montreal and Toronto institutes indeed managed to sustain, along with their other activities, a broad program of evening classes, until other agencies took over responsibility for them in 1870 and 1880 respectively. Such success was not typical of the generality of institutes, and Halifax would thus seem to be more representative of the Canadian experience.

On balance, it may be argued that in failing to reach its original objectives, the Halifax Mechanics'Institute had met others of no little consequence. In commissioning a study of British mechanics' institutes, the Halifax institute made a modest contribution to comparative adult education. It also acted as something of a clearinghouse in adult education policies, passing on to other maritime institutes the benefits of its contacts with British and American institutes.[90] Some of its prominent members were to aid newer mechanics' institutes in the province by delivering the occasional lecture. In obtaining grants from the provincial legislature from 1833 onward, the institute may, subject to future research, be found to have obtained the first public money allocated specifically to adult education in British North America.

The middle classes responded only too well to the social norms established by the middle class administration. A background of formal education enabled the middle class to appreciate the type of literary scholarship engendered by the prize system. Such gifted lectures as Joseph Howe, George R. Young, Dr. Thomas McCulloch,[91] Dr. Abraham Gesner,[92] and Dr. John W. Dawson,[93] were socially prestigious men,

[88] HARDY, *Public Library*, 31.

[89] *Ibid.*, 37.

[90] See Patrick KEANE, "George R. Young and Comparative Adult Education," *Journal of Education* (Halifax), Ser. 6, I, No. 2. (Winter, 1973-74): 38-44.

[91] A Presbyterian minister who became principal of Pictou Academy, Nova Scotia, and president of Dalhousie College (1838-1843). In 1833 his collection of specimens was visited by the naturalist, Audubon. — Duncan CAMPBELL, *Nova Scotia*, 237-8.

[92] Dr. Abraham Gesner of Parsboro, Nova Scotia, son of an American loyalist, had studied medicine in Britain under such eminent teachers as Abernethy and Astley Cooper. In November 1835, while employed on a geological survey of New Brunswick, he was elected an honorary member of Halifax Mechanics' Institute. He subsequently contributed lectures on coal mining and geology, and was to accompany Sir Charles Lyell on his geological tour of Nova Scotia. Duncan CAMPBELL, *Nova Scotia*, 429.

[93] Dawson gave three successive lectures on geology in 1844. Six years later, he was to become Nova Scotia's first superintendent of Education; and, in 1855, principal of McGill College, Montreal.

whose didactic or histrionic talents demanded perhaps more understanding and perseverance than could reasonably be expected of those lacking the educational opportunities enjoyed by the middle class. Indeed, the very galaxy of Nova Scotia talent that supported the institute rendered some lecture meetings attractive on social grounds alone.[94] While such liberals as Howe, Young, and Lawrence O'Connor Doyle[95] had been among prominent supporters, the institute had increasingly derived support from a diverse group neither exclusive to one political persuasion nor to one religious denomination. Any initial misgivings about the institute constituting a danger to established society were soon allayed. Dalhousie College not only welcomed the institute as a tenant in its premises, but was only too pleased to utilize the museum and scientific apparatus for its own teaching program. In general, it would seem that the educational potentialities of the institute were utilized rather by those best able to appreciate them, than by those judged most in need of them.

A recognition of the liberal and recreational potentialities of the institutes was reflected in such later foundations as those in British Columbia from the 1960s, which "put their chief emphasis on the development of libraries, plus some lecture activity."[96] The mechanics' library, so unfortunately retained as a separate institution in Halifax, was to become the nucleus of that city's free public library. Elsewhere the library was to remain the most enduring feature of the institutes, whether in Canada or Britain. It frequently survived to be absorbed by the public library service in both countries. In Saskatchewan as late as 1953, one reads of twenty community libraries "formerly called mechanics' and literary institutes."[97]

In general the Halifax Mechanics' Institute, and many of its contemporary foundations, may be said to have identified many diverse needs in adult education, from recreational facilities to public lecture programs, evening classes, libraries and reading rooms, museum, public archives and art galleries. These often conflicting demands generally proved beyond the institutes' resources, and had to await the advent of later and separate publicly established institutions. The term "mechanics' institute" represented an ideal of progress toward a better life which proved so persuasive that it was to be transferred from Glasgow, Scotland (1823) to St. John's, Newfoundland (1827), and eventually to Victoria, British Columbia (1864). Despite widely varying local circumstances and policies, the ideal continued to attract adherents, even when it no longer applied solely to me-

[94] Contemporary American experience rather supports the view "that by 1840 lecture-going had become faschionable. Audiences were no longer composed primarily of eager students and workingmen who had no other opportunities to learn of science." — Margaret W. ROSSITER, "Benjamin Similliman and the Lowell Institute: the Popularization of Science in Nineteenth Century America," *New England Quarterly*, No. 4 (December 1971), 612.

[95] He was an attorney and vice-president of the Charitable Irish Society.

[96] SELMAN, "Mechanics' Institutes", 127.

[97] *Saskatchewan Provincial Library, First Annual Report to December 31, 1953* (Regina, 1954), 8.

chanics or to scientific instruction. The mechanics' institutes must therefore be regarded as a formative influence on the history of adult education in Canada, and it is perhaps ironic that this product of Canada's British heritage survives today only in Montreal. Even there, in 1962, it was found necessary to change the name of the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal to the Atwater Library, since "it was found over the years that the name 'mechanics' institute' was misleading to the present generation."[98]

[98] *Atwater Library*, 49.