

**GENDER AND STATUS:
THE FOUNDING MEETING OF THE
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF CANADA WEST,
JANUARY 25, 1861¹**

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Introduction

On October 13, 1858, Robert Alexander, a teacher from the village of Newmarket, wrote to Egerton Ryerson, the Chief Superintendent of Education for Canada West (now Ontario):

As I intend bringing before the "County of York Teachers' Association" at its next meeting...the propriety of trying to establish a Provincial Teachers' Association, in which all the Teachers of the Province might meet and cheer each other while at the same time they could hear the views of the best Educationists of the Province...I write to know, whether you have any directions or plans, which you would like us to follow (if we attempt its formation). And if in the event of the establishment of such an Association...[do] you think the Legislature would aid the undertaking, by making a grant for the establishing of a Library and Museum, in connexion therewith?²

Three days later, Ryerson replied to Alexander. That he even did so was somewhat unusual, given that he rarely responded to letters from teachers expressing interest in forming their own associations.³ His answer, however, continued to reflect his overall position on this issue. "Unfortunately," he replied,

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1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association, Lethbridge, Alberta, October 1992.
 2. Archives of Ontario, Record Group Two (hereafter RG2), Series C-6-C, Incoming Correspondence to the Department of Education (hereafter C-6-C), Alexander to Ryerson, 13 Oct. 1858.
 3. See, for example, C-6-C, Goodwin to Ryerson, 10 June 1850; RG2, Series C-6-A, Incoming Correspondence to the Department of Education (hereafter C-6-A), Oxford Teachers' Institute to Ryerson, 11 June 1850; C-6-C, McClelland to Hodgins, 31 Dec. 1858.

“the nature of your request lies outside the realm of my power, and there is very little I can do.”⁴

Alexander was not to be daunted for long. Two years later during the summer of 1860, he travelled to Buffalo, New York to attend the annual conference of the National Teachers' Association of the United States,⁵ as a representative of his local organization. On his return, his local association struck a committee “to call the attention of teachers and others interested in education to the desirability of such an association,” appointing Wm. Henry Irwin as chair and Alexander as secretary.⁶ By December, a circular over their signatures appeared in Ryerson's *Journal of Education*, exhorting teachers to attend an organizational meeting, to be held in the Court House in Toronto on Friday January 25, 1861.

We are convinced that these unions of teachers cannot fail to be beneficial in keeping teachers alive to the great importance of their calling, the tendency among the members of which, unhappily, is to contract a routine and mechanical method of imparting instruction.

This arises, we believe, in a measure from the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed as a profession—our calling separates us from each other—we are professionally isolated...

But yearly conferences of teachers, if properly sustained and managed, are admirably adapted for the purpose of awakening our flagging zeal, and for bringing before the teachers the best methods of instruction.⁷

The circular ended with a call for delegates to a preliminary organizational meeting, to be held in the Court House in Toronto, on January 25, 1861. Teachers were urged to attend as individuals, even if they were not chosen as delegates of their local groups.

In the words of the official historian of the Teachers' Association of Canada West,⁸ Edwin Guillet, the actual meeting began after the “proprieties were

4. C-6-A, Ryerson to Alexander, 16 Oct. 1858.

5. Founded in Philadelphia in 1857 and renamed the National Education Association in 1870. In the 1970s it underwent a major reorientation, and remains today the largest teachers' union in the United States: see for example, Allen West, *The National Education Association: The Power Base for Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1980).

6. Robert Alexander, “Some Recollections of the Early History of the Ontario Educational Society,” *The Educational Monthly of Canada* 27, 5 (May 1904): 197.

7. *Journal of Education* 13, 12 (Dec. 1860): Supplement.

8. This organization assumed a number of different titles over the nineteenth century, partly as a result of shifts in the perceptions of the members over an appropriate role/image for such a group. Its original title was first changed in 1865 to “The

observed by allowing the males, who predominated, to sit in the body of the courtroom, while the females were segregated in the jury box."⁹ T.J. Robertson, principal of the provincial government's Normal School, nominated the Reverend John Jennings, a member of Ryerson's Council of Public Instruction,¹⁰ to chair the session. Jennings responded by congratulating the participants for their "foresight" in planning such an organization, and according to two different newspaper reports of the day,

assured them that they had his entire cooperation in the organization of a Teachers' Association, and said that he felt it would be productive of much good....He then drew a comparison between the position and the character of the teachers at the present time with what they were before the amended school act went into operation some sixteen or seventeen years since. He alluded to the progress the teachers had made, not only in knowledge but in moral character and social status, and said this should prove an incentive to future action.¹¹

After some discussion a motion was passed, stating "that the interests of the profession render it necessary that we form ourselves into a teachers' provincial association."¹² Following a recess to allow a committee to work out the details,¹³ the meeting reconvened with Robertson, and later, Archibald McCallum, principal of the Hamilton Central School, in the chair. A draft constitution was presented, discussed in sections, and finally adopted. The four objects of the new organization were:

1. To secure the general adoption of the most approved systems of imparting instruction.

Teachers' Association," and then in 1873 to "The Ontario Teachers' Association for the Advancement of Education." This lasted until 1881, when it became "The Ontario Educational Association"—the name it kept until its demise in the mid-1980s. For sake of continuity, the original title, and its abbreviation TACW, will be employed throughout this paper, except where a different title is quoted in context, or where the historical context of the text suggests that its contemporary title might more appropriately be cited.

9. Edwin Guillet, *In the Cause of Education: Centennial History of the Ontario Educational Association, 1861-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960): 21.
10. A nine-member board, consisting of the province's religious and political elite, appointed by the government to oversee many aspects of the schooling system.
11. First quotation from the *Toronto Globe*, 26 Jan. 1861; latter two sentences from *Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861.
12. Alexander, "Recollections," 197.
13. Guillet, *Cause*, 21.

2. To secure improvement of our text-books, or the adoption of others more suitable to the wants of the community.
3. To enlarge the views of the teachers and stimulate their exertions for the advancement and diffusion of knowledge.
4. To encourage the frequent interchange of ideas and kindly intercourse among the members of the profession throughout the country.¹⁴

Membership fees of one dollar per year were approved, and the name of the new organization was agreed upon: "The Teachers' Association of Canada West."

There was not unanimity on all matters that day. Controversy developed over who should be allowed to join the new organization. Some of those present were very interested in seeing not only teachers, but members of other sectors as well, in the new organization. After some discussion, the majority agreed that membership could also be extended to "members of the Council of Public Instruction, members of county boards of education, superintendents of schools [and] editors of educational journals."¹⁵ On the other hand, the suggestion that locally elected school-board trustees also be considered eligible for membership certainly exceeded the bounds. Considerable argument ensued, resulting finally in the defeat of the motion. Late in the meeting, after another recess for supper, differences again arose when it came time to select a president for the new organization. At that point, a number of people had been nominated from the floor. However, the "propriety of unanimously electing Mr. Robertson" was advocated by one participant and after some discussion, "he was therefore duly elected."¹⁶ The rest of the executive and district councillors were then chosen, including McCallum and James McLellan, a school inspector, as first and second vice-presidents respectively. The executive was charged with the responsibility of organizing the next event, the first annual summer convention, to be held the following August. Finally, the meeting was adjourned with McCallum's comments that "he sincerely trusted that before the August meeting the great majority, if not all the teachers of Upper Canada would be members of the Association."¹⁷

In many ways, the events at this founding meeting foreshadowed the values, forms, and functions which the new organization was to assume, and maintain, throughout the nineteenth century. It is the purpose of this paper, then, to provide a deeper understanding of this founding meeting, and to examine the ways in which it set the stage for a provincial teachers' association which soon came to

14. Alexander, "Recollections," 199.

15. Guillet, *Cause*, 21. The "county boards," officially entitled County Boards of Public Instruction, consisted of all of the government-appointed grammar school trustees and township superintendents of schools in each respective county. One of the main tasks of the county boards was to examine and certify teachers.

16. *Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861.

17. *Toronto Globe*, 26 Jan. 1861.

mirror closely the larger provincial schooling system within which it was embedded—centralized, hierarchical, status-ridden, and male-dominated.

Gender Relations

It certainly can be argued that the “proprieties” of gender division observed at the outset of the founding meeting, exemplified by the manner in which women were seated in the Court House, foreshadowed their treatment during the meeting itself, as well as in the historical record of the day. For example, among the contemporary documents extant today, the only concession which even acknowledged their presence at the event (other than the comment about the seating arrangements) was the notation in the *Toronto Leader* that a “Mrs. Clark, of the Model School”¹⁸ had been selected, along with seven men, to form the committee which drew up the draft constitution during the recess. By comparison to the lengthy descriptions which newspapers afforded the numerous male speakers, no record appears of any contribution which women may have made to the day-long discussions and debates—an interesting fact in itself, whether or not any of the women present did actually find it possible, or worthwhile, to break through this recorded silence.

To be sure, the newly approved constitution stated clearly that “any lady or gentleman” in education could become a member.¹⁹ Again, however, the historical record is unclear as to whether this issue (as compared to status relations, to be described below) occasioned any debate at the founding meeting—either within the committee which met during the day to draft recommendations for a constitution, or at the subsequent plenary session. No mention is made in either newspaper report, or in any other account of the event. However, this silence may also not accurately reflect the events of the day, for there is considerable evidence to indicate quite clearly that women’s membership in the TACW was a problematic matter during many years of its existence. For example, the earliest official minutes extant, covering the 1865 annual meeting held four years later, make it obvious that women’s membership in the organization was an issue for many. At that time “considerable discussion ensued”²⁰ over amendments to the constitution, including a motion that women should be allowed only “Honorary Member” status. Eventually an alternative motion was passed, allowing women to join “without payment of the ordinary fee.” At the same time however, the constitution was changed to read that “all persons engaged in any department of

18. *Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861. In the *Globe* report, she was simply “Mrs. Clark.” In fact, she was Mrs. Dorcas Clark, Headmistress of the girls’ Model School which formed part of the provincial Normal School establishment (Guillet, *Cause*, 21).

19. Whatever implication or values may have been embedded in these two terms during that time period.

20. *Toronto Leader*, 9 Aug. 1865.

Education" were eligible for membership—a distinct shift from the original wording, which clearly spelled out that both males and females could join.²¹ It is perhaps informative that Mr. J.B. McGann, who moved the "Honorary Members" motion in 1865, also was present at the founding meeting in 1861, and in fact served on the committee which drafted the initial constitution. Alexander himself, another member of the original committee, certainly held very specific views about the matter. At the 1865 TACW convention, a delegate, who earlier had been sent to the National Teachers' Association's annual meeting in the United States, reported that, as compared to the Ontario gathering, he had observed "much larger numbers of ladies" at the American event. Alexander's response to this observation, as reported in the *Toronto Leader*, was clear: "As to lady teachers, he believed there were enough of them in Canada, but as they could only be expected to devote a small part of their lives to teaching, they could not therefore be expected to acquire that experience necessary to successful teaching."²²

In any event, it is hard to imagine that gender relations were not a dominant issue on that founding day, and/or in the events leading up to it, whether or not they were discussed explicitly at any given point in time. Perhaps one could

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21. *Constitution, By-Laws, and Rules of Order of the Teachers' Association of Upper Canada* (Toronto: T. Cuttell and Son, 1865). Whether or not "persons" was considered, by those voting in favour of the change at the meeting, a more inclusive term than "lady or gentleman" is very much a matter for historical debate. It can certainly be argued that, for the general population in Canada, the term "persons" has often encompassed gender dominance, as the "Persons' Case" of the 1920s amply demonstrates. For female teachers in the nineteenth century, this distinction should certainly not be underestimated. See for example, a letter written by Normal School Principal Robertson to Ryerson ten years earlier, explaining that a rural teachers' institute was not well attended because of "most of the schools being in charge of female teachers who were apparently under the impression that they could not be admitted," even though nothing in the actual wording of the official announcements advertising the institute explicitly suggested this (C-6-C, Robertson to Ryerson, 10 June 1850; *Journal of Education* 3, 8 (Apr. 1850). For further discussion of language, labelling, and power in the nineteenth century, see Joan Scott, "On Language, Gender and Working-class History," *International Labour and Working Class History* 91 (Dec. 1985).
 22. *Toronto Leader*, 9 Aug. 1865. For Alexander at least, it would appear that "experience" wrought by time would do little to alter his values on gender. Forty-three years after the founding of the TACW (and forty-nine years after he had begun teaching), he was to conclude a personal retrospective of the organization by stating that teachers' perpetual low salaries and insecure job tenure were due to one particular "weakness that needs a remedy"—the feminization of teaching; Alexander, "Recollections," 201; see also *Canada School Journal* 6, 51 (Aug. 1881): 173; Ontario Educational Association, *Souvenir Volume, Jubilee Banquet* (Toronto: O.E.A., 1912), 40.

speculate on how the constitution committee might have reported differently, but for the presence of Mrs. Clark during its deliberations.

Clearly, few women teachers chose to attend either the founding meeting of the TACW or the annual conferences of the organization during its first decades of operation.²³ In addition, the apparent lack of voice from those women who did attend the founding session was also a phenomenon which continued for some time, if one were to judge from the extensive local newspaper coverage and official minutes of these annual events (leaving aside the possibility that women did indeed speak out on occasion, but were left invisible in both the contemporary and historical records). In fact, as compared to numerous and often lengthy newspaper reports on male contributions to conference discussions throughout the early years of the organization, there is only one instance during this entire time which suggests any female contribution. As the reporter from *The Toronto Leader* saw it,

It is well worthy of remark that a lady teacher from Toronto, a Mrs. St. Remy, entered into the discussion of the motion with an amount of intelligence and a facility of expression which astonished all present—her demeanor was modest and respectful.²⁴

Given the tenor of this solitary, brief report, one could imagine why the social relations of these events (as well as the newspaper's role in reporting them) might have discouraged more equal involvement between the sexes.

In any event, it would seem that the "lady or gentleman" clause was the only concession to any pretence of gender equality, either at the founding meeting of the Teachers' Association of Canada West itself, or in the historical record of the event. In addition to the total lack of acknowledgement of female contribution to the discussion or debate that day, not one woman's name appeared among the list of twenty-seven executive members and district councillors selected to lead the association in its inaugural year. In fact, many more years were to pass before women—who already dominated numerically the teaching staffs of some of the larger urban centres, and were soon to form the majority across the province²⁵—

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23. Unfortunately, no precise numbers are given for any meeting held during the first decades of the TACW. However, the inference is clear from the record. For example, at the first meeting, according to one newspaper report, a "few ladies" were in attendance (in any event, apparently no more than what a jury-box would hold); at the 1865 session, "240 teachers, a few of whom were ladies": quoted in O.E.A., *Souvenir Volume*, 43; *Toronto Leader*, 9 Aug. 1865.
24. *Toronto Leader*, 6 Aug. 1862. This, as compared to the way in which debate by males was recorded in newspapers of the time, always in the context of an explanation of the issue to which each was speaking, the position each quoted speaker took on the matter, and why.
25. Officially, women teachers were to form the majority in Ontario by 1871: *Annual*

were to take on even token roles in the leadership circles of “their own” provincial organization.²⁶ To be sure, throughout the history of the organization, a number of instances suggest that the more percipient of the association’s leadership saw the advantage of giving women at least the appearance of being integrated into the structures of the organization. For example, the journalist covering Mrs. St. Remy’s remarks concluded the paragraph in the report by stating that, after her “modest and respectful” remarks, she was “offered” a position on the executive—a gesture which she rejected outright, perhaps quite understandably given the paternalism shown at the meeting.²⁷

A comment is perhaps in order at this point. One could argue that gender relations within the Teachers’ Association of Canada West only mirrored those of society at large, and that given this “reality,” things could not be different, whether or not individuals wished (or attempted) otherwise. However, the opposite could as easily be argued—that it was precisely through ideological institutions like school systems (in all their complexity, including teachers’ associations) that these societal “norms” were (and are) established and maintained. To begin with, Ryerson himself, in many ways at the centre of this normalization process in Canada West, clearly saw “proper” gender relations as a foundation of civilization, and continually emphasized the overall importance of “manly virtues” in the development of his schooling system.²⁸ It is no surprise then, that even one hundred years after its founding, the female president of the Ontario Education Association should have found it necessary to comment on this issue, in a volume marking the centennial of the organization.²⁹

Report of the Ontario Minister of Education (hereafter *Annual Report*), 1871.

26. In fact, the only female president of the OTA during the first eighty years of its existence was Mrs. Ada Marean Hughes, very much a school promoter in her own right, who served in 1901. See for example, Kari Dehli, “Women and Class: The Social Organization of Mothers’ Relations to Schools in Toronto, 1915 to 1940” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1988).
27. Needless to say, in addition to the paternalistic gender relations, the “double duties” of women in paid employment have always served to limit their involvement in outside activities such as unions.
28. See for example, Egerton Ryerson, “Circular to The Teacher of each Common School in Upper Canada on his duty under the new Common School Act of 1850,” in *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada*, ed. J.G. Hodgins (Toronto: 1894-1910), 9: 216.
29. Jean Watson, “For Advancement of Knowledge,” *O.E.A. Centennial Book* (Toronto: Ontario Educational Association, 1960).

Status Relations

In addition to gender, status also figured prominently, both in the school system at large, and in the ongoing activities of the Teachers' Association of Canada West. Events which transpired at its founding meeting were also to foreshadow, indeed set the stage for, this continued dominance by status relations for decades to follow. For example, the selection of the principal of the Normal School as the first president of the Teachers' Association of Upper Canada established a pattern which was to continue long afterwards. School superintendents (later to be entitled school inspectors), university leaders, and government officials were almost invariably selected as presidents for at least the ensuing forty years. Other executive positions as well were filled predominantly by those in authority in the various structures of the larger school system.³⁰ To be sure, some classroom teachers (to the extent any were involved in the organization) may have believed that having a prominent person as titular head would give the organization more legitimacy, status, and/or clout. However, this feeling certainly was not shared by all members of the organization, even, as has been shown, during the presidential nominations at its founding meeting. In actuality, status differences on that day were so dominant that, the official history notes, not only that the meeting sustained "difficulties and sectional jealousies," but that this "antagonism...lasted for some years."³¹

For Guillet, these "antagonisms" stemmed from the fact that some of those attending, mainly those from the Toronto area, were teachers and principals who had not attended the Normal School, but rather had earned their certificates by passing County Board examinations. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this particular division among the province's teachers. As matters stood at that time, differences in certification resulted in very different material conditions for teachers. Those teachers who could afford the time and expense of attending the Normal School in Toronto were given, on successful completion, a certificate which licensed them to teach anywhere in the province, in some cases for the rest of their lives. Most teachers, however, were not in a financial position to undergo such training.³² Instead, they earned their certificates through self-study, fol-

30. Twenty years were to pass before Alexander, the official "founder" of the organization, was to be selected president, and then only after he had become a supervising school principal.

31. Guillet, *Cause*, 20-21.

32. Of the 3,830 teachers employed in the common schools in the province in 1861, only 304 had Normal School certificates (*Annual Report*, 1861, 30-31). In addition to financial concerns, some may simply have been unwilling to put up with the general routines established for students attending the institution: see for example, Alison Prentice, "'Friendly Atoms in Chemistry': Women and Men at Normal School in Nineteenth Century Ontario," in *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless*,

lowed by examinations which were offered by the "County Boards" or local examiners. For the most part these certificates allowed them to teach only in certain geographic areas, and/or for certain fixed periods of time, after which another round of study and testing was required. Continued employment was dependent upon passing these exams each year. As Alexander himself explained, there was a "large class of teachers" who were permanently subjected to "repeated and unnecessary examinations."³³ Members of this group attending the founding meeting may have harboured, in Guillet's words, "sectional jealousies"³⁴ against the more advantaged Normal School students present (not to mention the Normal School principal himself—very much in evidence, and in charge, that day). These divisions, Guillet suggests, were to enmesh the organization for many of the ensuing decades as well.³⁵

There were, however, other status differences among those who attended the founding meeting of the TACW. These divisions became most transparent in the debates over who should be allowed membership in the new organization—in reality, a fundamental disagreement as to the basic *raison d'être* of the overall venture. Generally speaking, one camp envisaged an all-inclusive "friends of education" organization to promote the "development" of the larger schooling system. As such, they argued that membership should be extended to school trustees, "ex-teachers," and officials at all levels of the provincial schooling hierarchy, claiming *inter alia* that teachers alone could not sustain such an organization. In addition, some even wanted to include a "test of membership" in the constitution, and suggested a provision to expel members found guilty by the Board of Directors of "criminal or dishonorable [sic] conduct."³⁶ Other

ed. David Keane and Colin Reid (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990); Donna Varga-Heiss, "Gender Differentiated Teacher Training; The Toronto Normal School, 1847-1902" (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1987); Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), chap. six.

33. Alexander, "Recollections," 198. For a close look at the trials and tribulations of one exceptionally active and creative teacher who nevertheless suffered for years over his inability to complete successfully the "Boards," a situation which was eventually to drive him from teaching altogether, see Gerald Killan, *David Boyle: From Artisan to Archaeologist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).
34. Guillet, *Cause*, 20; see also J.G. Althouse, *The Ontario Teacher: A Historical Account of Progress, 1800-1910* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1929; reprinted, Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1967), 30.
35. Guillet, *Cause*, 20; see also Harry Smaller, "Teachers' Protective Associations, Professionalism and the State in Nineteenth Century Ontario" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1988); Nancy Christie, "Psychology, Sociology and the Secular Moment: The Ontario Educational Association's Quest for Authority, 1880-1900," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25, 2 (Summer 1990).
36. *Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861.

participants, however, as reported in the *Toronto Leader*, argued vehemently that “every member should be an actual teacher (Hear, hear),” and claimed that “if they admitted a number of persons who were not teachers, they destroyed that great and essential element to union of actions by which they would be able to carry any point required for the protection of their interests (Hear, hear).”³⁷

In the end, while some compromise was reached, it would appear that those wanting a broader organization which incorporated the educational elite were able to dominate both the wording of the constitution, and the general directions which the new organization would assume—at the expense of those who desired strictly a teachers’ association for “the protection of their interests.” To be sure, after lengthy discussion school trustees were excluded from the list, but membership was otherwise open, not only to classroom teachers, but also to school superintendents, teacher examiners, and members of the ruling Council of Public Instruction.³⁸

Given these basic differences among the participants, it is perhaps useful to speculate a bit on who really did attend the founding meeting of the Teachers’ Association of Upper Canada. Official historian Edwin Guillet states that the meeting “attracted about 120 teachers and Normal School students, seventeen counties being represented,”³⁹ numbers which approximate the figures given in the *Toronto Globe*, the *Toronto Leader*, and those remembered by Alexander and another charter member, Robert Doan, in subsequent reflections.⁴⁰ Clearly, however, this overall count of 120 persons includes those other than actual classroom teachers. In fact, with the exception of Alexander, almost every participant identified in the two newspaper reports as taking part in the discussions, debates, and committee work that day occupied positions as school superintendents, Normal School faculty, and school principals. How many actual practising classroom teachers were present for the founding of “their” association? While there is no “hard” evidence in this regard, one very intriguing fact pertains here. As it happened, the meeting was not arranged to take place during

37. Ibid.

38. *Toronto Globe*, 26 Jan. 1861. In the end, no mechanisms to weed out the “dishonorable” were established—if only because of the expressed fears of libel suits, concerns that such a provision might have “cast an imputation upon the standing and character of the teachers,” and assurances that school trustees in “every neighborhood were sufficient security that every teacher possessed a good general character” (*Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861). Another schooling group which played a strong role in status politics during this time and well into the twentieth century (but which is not dealt with here for lack of space) consisted of the principals and teachers in the province’s grammar (later secondary) schools (see for example, Alexander, “Recollections,” 198).

39. Guillet, *Cause*, 21.

40. *Toronto Globe*, 26 Jan. 1861; *Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861; Alexander, “Recollections,” 197; O.E.A., *Souvenir Volume*, 43.

a period of school holidays—a logical time if teacher participation really was desired by those in charge. For that matter, it did not even occur on a weekend. Instead, as unbelievable as it might seem, the founding meeting of the Teachers' Association of Canada West was called in the middle of school term, in the middle of winter, and on a regular school day! Clearly, very few practising teachers, other than those working nearby, would have been able to travel to Toronto to attend the event, even assuming they were interested in doing so, with the possible penalty of missing a day's work. In fact, the teachers of Toronto were given the day off for the event, but their numbers were relatively small—twenty males and forty-one females.⁴¹ Considering that there were “few ladies,”⁴² including those studying at the Normal School, present at the meeting, and even assuming that all twenty male Toronto teachers attended, then it would appear that the vast majority of those present at the meeting were in fact school officials and Normal School students themselves, including many or most of the “representatives” of the seventeen counties.

How could it happen, then, that the founding meeting of a provincial teachers' organization would be held at such an inopportune time for classroom teachers? A brief examination of the historical relations of local teachers' associations to the provincial government, and the events leading up to this founding meeting, may help to shed some light on this puzzle.

Early Teachers' Associations

Local teachers' associations first appeared in Ontario, not coincidentally, with the passage of the first state legislation regulating common schools in 1841. For the most part these groups were formed for the express purpose of lobbying the newly created Department of Education over failures to honour the grant payments to which teachers felt they were entitled under the new School Act.⁴³ Robert Murray, the first Superintendent of Education in Canada West, who himself often felt trapped by the inadequacies of this initial schooling legislation,⁴⁴ actively encouraged these organizations, and urged teachers “to unite as a body, to protect each other,...to bear each others' burdens as they have long done in Scotland...and exert their proper place in Society.”⁴⁵

41. *Annual Report*, 1861, 30-31, 71.

42. O.E.A., *Souvenir Volume*, 43.

43. See for example, Smaller, “Teachers' Protective Associations,” 61ff.

44. See for example, R.D. Gidney, “The Rev. Robert Murray: Ontario's First Superintendent of Schools,” *Ontario History* 63, 4 (Dec. 1971).

45. RG2, Series C-1, Outgoing Correspondence of the Department of Education (hereafter C-1), Murray to Macleod, 2 Apr. 1844.

Unfortunately, for teachers at least, Murray was to last in office for only two years. His successor, Egerton Ryerson, held very different views about the worth of teachers' associations. On the one hand, his 1846 "Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction" included several comments in support of such organizations. Only through associations, he declared, could a teacher feel "that he was not solitary and unconnected, but a member of an important body."⁴⁶ In practice, however, there is no indication that Ryerson took any formal steps to help promote such associations in Upper Canada. Furthermore, on a number of occasions when teachers had written him inquiring as to the propriety of establishing such groups themselves, he went so far as to instruct his clerk specifically not to respond to these requests for information.⁴⁷

At issue were Ryerson's very specific beliefs about how teachers' associations should, and should not, behave. During his European tour in 1844-45, he claimed he had observed personally the "happiest effect" of teachers who came "together at proper intervals, and under judicious arrangements." Further, according to a report he quoted, "the most accomplished minds would give a tone to the others; roughness and peculiarities of manner would be rubbed off." As a result, "men would learn...the manner of keeping their position in society."⁴⁸ By 1850 he was to inform teachers, in a province-wide circular, that a proper teachers' organization was a body of "intelligence and virtue" which would be able to promote "mutual improvement" through "professional zeal and emulation." Teachers themselves would assume responsibility for the "purg[ing]," from among their own ranks, "of every inebriate, every blasphemer, every ignorant idler, who cannot teach and will not learn."⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, then, where it was absolutely clear to Ryerson that an association was being formed on such principles, especially under the direct supervision of an education official, he expressed satisfaction: "I am glad to learn that you have got the teachers in your great township to form an association for their mutual improvement," went one such response to a local school superintendent's report.⁵⁰ By contrast, what apparently did not find favour with Ryerson were organizations such as the Eastern District Schools' Association, consisting solely of common school teachers, who stated firmly that "the members of this association are fully competent to manage their own affairs." Along the margin of a series of resolutions which the group had sent to the Education Department in the hopes

46. Hodgins, *Documentary History*, 8: 92.

47. See for example, C-6-C, McDonald to Ryerson, 9 July 1850; McNabb to Ryerson, 12 Aug. 1850.

48. *Annual Report*, 1846, 209-10.

49. *Journal of Education* 3, 8 (Aug. 1850): 121.

50. RG2, Series C-2, Drafts of Outgoing Correspondence of the Department of Education (hereafter C-2), Letter Book E, Ryerson to Thornton, 22 July 1850.

that they “may be published in the *Journal of Education*,” Ryerson had written instructions to his clerk: “No answer needed.”⁵¹

The Chief Superintendent of Education certainly had good reason to fear the activities of teachers’ organizations left to their own devices, rather than being operated under “judicious arrangements.” Ten years earlier his School Act of 1850 had significantly and adversely affected teachers in a number of ways, including changes in their certification procedures. As a result, the number of local teacher associations taking issue with the work of the Chief Superintendent increased dramatically⁵²—a factor which may help explain why, during the entire ensuing decade, only the most “positive” of reports on the activities of these groups were to appear in Ryerson’s *Journal of Education*,⁵³ along with the perpetual litany of articles extolling the virtues of the teacher’s calling,⁵⁴ and professionalism in general. It may also explain why Ryerson chose to ignore, or respond negatively to, teachers such as Alexander who wrote to him during the decade of the 1850s, requesting advice and/or help with establishing new local or provincial associations.

However, in spite of earlier misgivings Ryerson may have had about teachers’ associations, it would appear that by 1860 these concerns had been overridden. Two reasons are suggested. First, given the failure of the Normal School to train even a significant minority of the province’s teachers, Ryerson increasingly looked toward these local associations and institutes as a possible vehicle through which to expand “in-service” programmes for the thousands of untrained

51. C-6-C, McDonald to Ryerson, 9 July 1850.

52. See for example, petitions presented by the County of Middlesex Teachers’ Associations to the Provincial Legislature in 1850: “the Chief Superintendent[’s]...Office is not necessary, as the duties may be performed at much less expense to the Country, by clerks connected with some other Department of the Government”; and by Patrick Thornton “on behalf of the Teachers in the Gore District,” in *Documentary History*, 9: 65-66; see also Smaller, “Teachers’ Institutes.”

53. For example, in 1855, when Ryerson reported on the meeting of a local group which had assigned “various teachers to write and read essays, to teach lessons and give lectures at the next meeting”: *Journal of Education* 8, 6 (June 1855): 94.

54. Two examples, of a multitude: “The Dignity of the Teachers’ Work...It is not easy to account for the fact that the calling of the teacher is generally ranked, not only below the other professions, but even below some of the more common industrial pursuits. The origin of this preposterous notion may be found far back in some barbarian feudal age, when all peaceful occupations were held in contempt.” *Journal of Education* 7, 6 (June 1854): 94. “The German and Swiss Teachers...These are learned men, who would do credit to much higher situations; but whose habits of thought and life have been so carefully disciplined, as to make their work in the classes, otherwise so irksome, really a pleasure to them.” *Ibid.*, 7, 8 (Aug. 1854): 130.

teachers in the province. The number of *Journal of Education* articles promoting such activity increased significantly during the year,⁵⁵ even though it must have been apparent to Ryerson that these locally initiated, but officially controlled, groups were not experiencing the kinds of successes he would have desired.⁵⁶ Second, 1860 had ushered in new regulations which further tightened the certification process for teachers who had not attended Normal School.⁵⁷ Ryerson may well have anticipated (or already experienced) further reaction from teachers on this count. Having a provincial "teachers' association" in place—that is, one in which the educational elite and Normal School-trained teachers maintained the upper hand—might help to provide further legitimation in favour of "professional" training.⁵⁸

For their part, it would appear that by 1860, Alexander and his colleagues in York North had clearly learned a lesson from Ryerson's earlier rebuff, and had devised new tactics to gain the Chief Superintendent's support for a provincial association. Alexander had been a student at the provincial Normal School in Toronto during 1854 and 1855, and he used his contacts with officials there to promote the plan. A meeting was arranged between Robert Doan,⁵⁹ a York North teacher who was attending Normal School at the time, and Robertson, the principal, to discuss the scheme. Following this meeting Doan visited Ryerson, "presenting the request of T.J. Robertson,"⁶⁰ to publish a circular advertising the founding meeting—a document which Robertson himself had some role in

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55. "Teachers' Associations Necessary Where Normal School Training Cannot Be Had," *Journal of Education* 13, 11 (Nov. 1860): 156; see also the June, July, Oct., and Nov. issues for that year.
 56. See for example, the report of the 1855 meeting of a Wentworth/Halton group, where "the attendance was not so large as was expected": *Journal of Education* 8, 6 (June 1855): 94. Indeed, at the TACW founding meeting held at the Court House in January of 1861, York County school superintendent Nixon argued that a provincial organization was crucial, because his local teachers' association had "had a struggling existence for three or four years, and at the meetings of which it was frequently impossible to obtain a quorum": quoted in *Toronto Leader*, 26 Jan. 1861.
 57. "Act to Amend the Upper Canada Common School Act," *Journal of Education* 13, 7 (July 1860).
 58. In fact, certification remained a dominant and contentious issue at meetings throughout the first decade of the organization, and on many occasions rancour surfaced at annual sessions over classroom teachers' perceptions that, in the words of one, "the Normal influence was predominant": *Toronto Globe*, 7 Aug. 1862. See also *Toronto Leader*, 6 Aug. 1862; Hodgins, *Documentary History*, 22: 132, 154; Alexander, "Recollections," 198.
 59. Subsequently to become a Toronto school principal, and to serve as executive secretary of TACW for 44 years, from 1880 to 1924.
 60. Guillet, *Cause*, 20.

editing.⁶¹ Doan also visited Reverend James Porter, the Superintendent of Schools in Toronto, "with reference to our meeting place."⁶²

It is almost certain that Ryerson knew Alexander personally, from the time when the latter had been a student at the Normal School.⁶³ Robertson certainly knew him; according to one report, a short biographical sketch of Alexander printed in the *Canada School Journal* in 1881, Robertson and Archibald McCallum (at that time principal of the Model School attached to the Normal School) "bore unequivocal and unstinted testimony" to Alexander's "diligence and success, both as a student and a teacher." In fact, they had offered him a job at the Model School, shortly after he graduated from the Normal School.⁶⁴ To this extent, then, there appeared to be little problem with having his name appear on the circular as the person behind the idea. Creating the perception that a classroom teacher was promoting this plan was probably seen by the educational elite as being a good thing.

Beyond the surface appearances, however, it is clear that the preparations for the founding meeting were not those of Alexander and his colleagues alone, and for good reason. Given the new tightened certification procedures, Ryerson and Robertson would certainly have realized that any organized meeting of teachers might have provided the possibility for affected teachers to dominate a founding meeting of a new organization, and create an instrument which, among other things, might lobby on their behalf.⁶⁵ For their part, Egerton Ryerson and the educational elite in general had struggled for over a dozen years to establish and maintain the Toronto Normal School as a cornerstone in the overall development of a centralized state schooling system—an institution which was under consid-

61. O.E.A., *Souvenir Volume*, 43.

62. *Ibid.*

63. Ryerson's involvement with the Normal School, like many other aspects of the provincial schooling system, was always very close. Even four years after its founding, he was to comment that "the Masters have, ever since its establishment, had almost daily consultations with me respecting occurrences and matters connected with the operation of the Institution": RG2, E-1, Box 1, Folder 1, draft of circular, 22 July 1850. As late as 1865, almost twenty years after its founding, Ryerson mentioned at a meeting of the Ontario Teachers' Association that he had been up "since six o'clock in the morning in examining and admitting new students to the Normal School": quoted in *Toronto Globe*, 9 Aug. 1865.

64. Something that surely would not have happened without Ryerson's knowledge and consent: *Canada School Journal* 6, 51 (Aug. 1881): 173. According to the article, the only reason that Alexander did not take up this position at the Model School was that his "trustees in the township of York that year found out his value as a teacher and held him to his conscientious engagement": *ibid.*

65. In fact, the issue of certification was to be vigorously debated at a number of annual conventions during the 1860s.

erable public scrutiny and attack.⁶⁶ In this light, having a organization of teachers develop with an express purpose of lobbying against the very *raison d'être* of the Normal School (that is, in favour of alternative methods of permanent certification for teachers) was not something this group would relish.

Given this situation, it is understandable then why Robertson, as principal of the Normal School, would have good reason for wanting to arrange that the meeting would take place on a day when Normal School students would be in the city, and when they could be "encouraged" to attend the meeting under his watchful eye, as an officially sanctioned alternative to regular classes. As potential teachers who would stand to benefit from an organization which promoted "professional" training rather than county board examinations, Robertson probably reasoned (correctly, as it turned out) that he could count on them for support at the meeting. Indeed, it is not unrealistic to speculate that the organizers were quite aware of the differences between these two groups of teachers, as they scheduled its founding meeting to take place on a regular school day, in the middle of a school term, in the middle of winter. When Robert Doan visited Toronto School Superintendent Porter, he was told that "the city teachers should have taken the initiative in the movement."⁶⁷ Porter even went to the lengths of arranging for the Toronto School Board to close the schools for the day, so that local teachers (representing a different viewpoint) might attend "and take part in the proceedings."⁶⁸ However, given the fact that there were 161 students enrolled at the Normal School that term,⁶⁹ the Toronto teachers would have been clearly outnumbered, even in the unlikely event that all of them (20 males and 41 females) had attended. Not surprisingly then, Doan could later report that the directions which the organization adopted were based on the "large number of Normal students present" at the founding meeting, as well as the fact that, at the meeting, they "found the city teachers not so sympathetic as we hoped."⁷⁰

Generally speaking, the meeting went as Robertson, Ryerson, and others would have hoped. A new provincial association of "teachers" was established, one which adopted a largely "professional" orientation from the outset, but one whose founding members in no way reflected the relations of gender or status (or possibly the interests) of the vast majority of the teachers of the province. For

66. In addition to the concerns given in footnote #32 above, the references listed therein also comment on public outcry about overall costs, the regional, gender, and religious disparities in enrolment practices, and the relatively high number of drop-outs.

67. O.E.A., *Souvenir Volume*, 43.

68. Minute Book of the Toronto Board of Education, 16 Jan. 1861.

69. *Annual Report*, 1861.

70. O.E.A., *Souvenir Volume*, 43; the inclusive/exclusive "we" is particularly informative—all the more so as it was enunciated fifty years after the fact.

the remainder of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, the educational elite was to continue to dominate both its internal workings and debates, as well as its outward public representation of “progress” and professionalization.⁷¹

71. See for example, J.M. Paton, *The Role of Teachers' Organizations in Canadian Education* (Toronto: W.J. Gage Limited, 1962); Christie, “Quest for Authority”; Smaller, “Teachers’ Protective Associations.” In relation to the first images which classroom teachers across the province might have received of this event, it is interesting to note that Ryerson chose to reprint, in his widely circulated *Journal of Education*, the *Toronto Globe’s* account of the founding meeting, rather than the *Toronto Leader’s* much more complete and comprehensive coverage. As compared to the latter, the former contained not one mention of any of the controversy, debates, or opposing motions which transpired at the meeting, and left a very distinct impression of total unanimity of purpose among the “teachers” who attended this founding meeting of “their” association: *Journal of Education* 14, 2 (Feb. 1861): 31.