BUILDING SCHOOLS, BUILDING SOCIETY:
ACCOMMODATING SCHOOLS
IN MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY AUSTRALIA

Malcolm Vick

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, governments in many western nations and their colonial offshoots established systems of mass schooling, constituting new state authorities, revamping existing ones, or offering new forms of support to non-state public bodies to ensure that a highly specific form of elementary schooling was available to all children. This paper is concerned with the processes of developing such systems and with their effects on the societies of which they come to form a part. It addresses these issues by means of a case study of one aspect of school provision: the systems' attempts to ensure that schools were held in buildings designed and set aside specifically for school purposes. It does so in the context of three Australian colonies: New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria.

The means of securing special-purpose buildings varied widely from country to country, colony to colony. In the first half of the paper, therefore, I outline the means available in the three Australian colonies: the powers of the education

Abbreviations

NSW BNE	Board of National Education, New South Wales
NSW DSB	Denominational Schools Board, New South Wales
NSW Council	Council of Education, New South Wales
SA CBE	Central Board of Education, South Australia
V BNE	Board of National Education, Victoria
V DSB	Denominational Schools Board, Victoria
V BofE	Board of Education, Victoria
NBNE	Records of the NSW BNE, NSW State Archives, series number
NDSB	Records of the NSW DSB, NSW State Archives, series number
NCE	Records of the NSW Council, NSW State Archives, series number
VPRS	Victorian Public Record Office, series number
GRG	Government Record Group, Public Record Office, South Australia, series number
NSW V&P LA	Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, New South Wales
VPP	Victorian Parliamentary Papers
SAGG	South Australian Government Gazette

The title of the annual reports of the boards published in *NSW V&P LA* and *VPP* is abbreviated to "Report" in each case.

boards and their changing policies and procedures for shaping the character of colonial school accommodation. I then offer some brief explanations of the way the Australian systems developed. These address a number of lines of analysis well established in revisionist education historiography.

First, the boards' policies regarding school buildings were premised on their beliefs concerning their importance to both the types of education they wished to promote and the development of their own systems. Architectural semioticians have pointed out that no building can be imagined apart from a symbolic and social/political ordering of the world.[1] Education historians as diverse as Bruce Smith in Australia, James Donald in Britain, and Bruce Curtis in Canada, have argued that the internal organization of school buildings made possible particular pedagogical and disciplinary regimes which were in turn tied to projects of trans/forming social subjects.[2] Here, I outline the boards' views of the purposes school buildings might serve.

Second, I argue that a range of social, economic, and political factors in the original constitution of the boards, and in their ongoing development as parts of the machinery of state, both fuelled and constrained the boards' development. The point of departure here is the revisionist view that education systems were driven by, and suffered from, the contradictions of capitalist and patriarchal societies. Once again, however, there is a concern here with the way the articulations of this dynamic peculiar to these colonies shaped the idiosyncrasies of their education development.

Finally, I argue that the development of both school provision and the boards' policies and procedures were shaped by activity at the local level whereby communities themselves decided what sorts of school buildings they would provide. Many revisionist historians have noted the existence of widespread resistance to the practices the state authorities endorsed.[3] The concept of resis-

---

1.   Umberto Eco, "Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture," in *Signs, Symbols and Architecture*, ed. Geoffrey Broadbent, Richard Bunt, and Charles Jencks (Chichester: John Wiley, 1980); Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Donald Preziosi, *Architecture, Language and Meaning. The Origins of the Built World and its Semiotic Organization* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

2.   Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West 1836-1871* (London, Ont.: The Althouse Press, 1988); James Donald, "'Beacons of the Future': Schooling, Subjection and Subjectification," in *Subjectivity and Social Relations*, ed. James Donald and Veronica Beechey (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984); Bruce Smith, "William Wilkins' Saddlebags: State Education and Local Control," in *Family, State and School in Australian History*, ed. Marjorie Theobald and R.J.W. Selleck (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990).

3.   Pavla Cook, Ian Davey, and Malcolm Vick, "Capitalism and Working-Class Schooling in Late Nineteenth Century South Australia," *ANZHES Journal* 8, 2 (1979); Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

tance, however, tacitly treats local activity as a reaction to central initiative, positioning it as subordinate to and dependent on central activity. Curtis' analysis, and my own account of the development of mass schooling generally in colonial Australia, see local activity in terms which give far more weight to the dynamics of local communities.[4] Both analyses suggest that such local dynamics are intelligible in terms of key structures of social relations such as class but may not be seen as mere reflexes of them. Both also see the aid offered and the regulations imposed by central authorities as important conditions shaping such local activity. However, they insist that local activities in providing education be analyzed in terms of local conditions, local social relations, local interests and goals. Here, then, I note some of the processes at a community level which both shaped the provision of local school accommodation and forced the boards to respond by modifying their own procedures.

In the second half of the paper, I turn to the question of outcomes. The most obvious outcome of the boards' attempts to promote what they saw as "good" school buildings was the increasing incidence of such buildings. However, the results of the school reformers' efforts must be seen in subtler, broader terms. Writers such as Donald have suggested that the imposing buildings provided under the new school systems symbolized both the gap between the schools and working-class communities and the authority and presence of the school in them.[5] Curtis extends this to argue that school building enabled the construction of a particular definition of "public space" articulated with regulatory practices which removed such public space from popular control or use.[6] He also shows that the process of providing schools was inextricably interwoven with the reconstruction of both state and local communities, teaching particular practices of local school governance *as* democratic self-government and re-articulating social relations such as those of class. Following the leads such work offers, I explore a range of effects which followed from struggles over the provision of school buildings.

University Press, 1968); Pavla Miller, "Efficiency, Stupidity and Class Conflict in South Australian Schools, 1875-1900," *History of Education Quarterly* (Fall, 1984).

4. Curtis, *Building the Educational State*; Malcolm Vick, "Community, State and the Provision of Schools in Mid-Nineteenth Century South Australia," *Australian Historical Studies* 25, 92 (1992) and "School Communities and the State in Mid-Nineteenth Century New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria" (Ph.D. diss., University of Adelaide, 1991).

5. Donald, "'Beacons of the Future'."

6. Bruce Curtis, "Policing Pedagogical Space: 'Voluntary' School Reform and Moral Regulation" (Unpublished paper, Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, 1985) and *Building the Educational State*.

Powers, Policies, and Procedures

The first half of the nineteenth century saw a range of moves to provide forms of state support and regulation of elementary education. By 1852, the governments of the three colonies had introduced schemes to place their involvement in education on a systematic basis. In South Australia, from 1852 to 1875, there was a single board committed to non-sectarian education. In New South Wales, from 1848, and Victoria, from 1851, there were dual systems, each comprising a Denominational board funding church schools and a National board dealing with secular schools. From 1866 to 1880 and 1862 to 1872 respectively, they were replaced by single boards which inherited and administered both systems through single bureaus.

The instruments establishing the dual systems in the eastern colonies made no mention of school buildings. The National boards were empowered to support and regulate schools on the Irish National model. The Denominational boards were instructed to superintend the secular aspects of schools established in conjunction with the churches, in terms which left considerable powers over aided schools in denominational hands. The South Australian board was empowered to subsidize local contributions towards the costs of erecting schoolhouses, but was explicitly required to await local initiative, and was precluded from initiating the erection of buildings.[7] These loosely defined powers provided considerable scope for the boards to promote the building of schoolhouses, through both what they said and what they left unstated. However, to have any practical implications, they required translating into detailed policies and procedures.

From the outset, the boards began to define their approaches to the question of school buildings. No board precluded the use of buildings not designed and built specifically as schools. The National board in New South Wales immediately formulated regulations requiring all National schools to be held in premises which it had approved and which were vested exclusively for school purposes. Its Victorian counterpart, in contrast, also allowed for "non-vested" schools— schools operated along National lines and governed by the board but held in privately owned premises. The Victorian Denominational board's initial regulations defined the minimum standards of accommodation necessary for any school

---

7. An Act to Incorporate the Board of Commissioners for National Education, NSW, 1848; Colonial Secretary to C.D. Riddell, 4 Jan. 1848, NDSB 2; An Act to Promote Education in South Australia, by Aid Towards the Erection of Schools and the Payment of Stipends to Teachers, 1852; Port Phillip [Victoria] DSB, Report, 1848, *NSW V&P LA*, 1849: 1, 2; An Act to Incorporate the Board of Commissioners for National Education, Victoria, 1852.

to receive funding from it. The South Australian board and the New South Wales Denominational board left school accommodation formally unregulated.[8]

The National boards set aside a substantial part of their budgets to subsidize the erection of schoolhouses. The South Australian board and the Denominational boards in the eastern colonies expressed their desire to fund buildings, but were unable to do so. Even later, when they were able to afford it, the Denominational boards devoted only a relatively small part of their budget to this purpose.[9]

Each board, when it made funds available, determined that the communities in which the buildings were to be provided should contribute a substantial part of the cost. The South Australian board limited its contribution to a maximum of £200. No other board formally defined any general limit, although the Victorian Denominational board set a formula based on the number of pupils and type of building materials. The South Australian board declared that all maintenance costs must be met locally. The New South Wales National board also determined from the outset that maintenance was a local responsibility, but made no mention of funding. The Victorian Denominational board, in contrast, while affirming that maintenance was a local responsibility, decided to subsidize costs of repairs and enlargement where necessary.[10]

The Victorian Denominational board was the only body to institute formal regulations defining the standards school buildings must meet. They were to be solidly constructed, spacious, airy, well lit, and capable of being warmed in the winter. The National boards provided no such formal definition, but had model plans and specifications drawn up to send to applicants for building subsidies. The National boards also decreed that they would not contribute to the costs of ornamentation or elaborate designs. Finally, to secure the secular character of their schools, they insisted that all their schools bear a "National School" nameplate and that they include a separate classroom for religious instruction.[11]

The secular boards also acted to ensure that the buildings they subsidized remained available for school use in perpetuity. The South Australian board did this by framing the trust deeds for vested schools, while the National boards ruled

8.   *NSW Government Gazette* [hereafter *NSW GG*], 1848: 606-7; NSW DSB, Report, 1848, *NSW V&P LA*, 1849: 2; V BNE, Report, 1852, *VPP*, 1853: 12; Port Phillip [Victoria] DSB, Report, 1848: 4.

9.   NSW BNE, Report, 1849, *NSW V&P LA*, 1850: 1, 5-14; NSW DSB, Report, 1850, *NSW V&P LA*, 1851: 2; 1857, *NSW V&P LA*, 1858: 7, 8; *SAGG*, 1854: 815; 1855: 119, 409; V BNE, Report, 1852, *VPP*, 1853: 9; V DSB, Report, 1852, *VPP*, 1853: 3, 11-12; Pohlman to LaTrobe, 10 Apr. 1849, VPRS 62; V DSB, Minutes, 25 Feb. 1851, VPRS 63.

10.   *NSW GG*, 1848: 606-7; *SAGG*, 1855: 376; 1865: 497; V BNE, Report, 1854-1855, *VPP*, 1855-56: 15-17; V DSB, Report, 1852: 12, 23.

11.   *NSW GG*, 1848: 606-7; NSW BNE, Report, 1849: 4; V BNE, Report, 1852: 9; Port Phillip [Victoria], Report, 1848: 4.

that vested school buildings were not to be used for either public worship or political activities. The Victorian National board, however, deliberately left open the possibility that non-vested premises should also be used for religious purposes. Apart from these conditions, no board framed any regulations governing the use of school premises outside school hours.[12]

These policies were embodied in a range of administrative procedures. The New South Wales National board, for instance, appointed agents to tour the country promoting National schools. The agents were required to give information regarding the board's requirements, to seek out suitable local patrons, and where possible, to organize local support and application for a school, and to submit a detailed report on the application if possible. Correspondence from agents or local committees concerning the establishment of a school or building was noted by the secretary and referred to the board. The board then requested detailed information concerning the proposed school, including arrangement for accommodation and, where a building was to be funded, details of site, plans, and local subscriptions, before it approved the application. Where necessary, it applied to the government for the grant of either the nominated site or one which, on its agent's recommendation, it decided was better. Further, the board required the patrons to deposit all local subscriptions in a bank account in the board's name or submit evidence that they had actually been spent on the school building before it made any payment towards it.[13] In practice, the board pressed for purpose-built schools wherever possible, but often accepted makeshift premises with a view to replacing them later. Moreover, it approved many subsidies for buildings which were relatively unsatisfactory, including rough wooden slab huts with barely adequate lighting or little protection against the elements.[14]

Over the following years, the boards outlined more fully such things as the characteristics of good schoolhouses, and argued for the relation between their form and condition, effective pedagogy, and the moral and social effects of education, publicizing their views through such vehicles as their annual reports and letters to local school promoters.[15] Moreover, they elaborated, revised, and

12. *NSW GG* 1848: 606, 609; NSW DSB, Report, 1848: 2; SA CBE, Minutes, 14, 28 June, 5 July 1854, GRG 50; V BNE, Report, 1852: 12; V DSB, Report, 1853, *VPP*, 1854: 22-3; V DSB, Minutes, 20, 21 June 1853, VPRS 63.

13. 13. NSW BNE, Report, 1849: 14-15. The key source for tracking these developments in detail is the Miscellaneous Letters Received (1848-66) files of the NSW BNE, series NBNE 1 in the NSW State Archives.

14. Statistics of Schools in New South Wales, *NSW V&P LA*, 1859-60. See also the Inspectors' Reports on individual schools in NSW BNE, Reports from 1858.

15. NSW BNE, Report, 1858, *NSW V&P LA*, 1859: 5; 1859: 6; N DSB, Report, 1858, *NSW V&P LA*, 1859: 12; 1861, *NSW V&P LA*, 1862: 5-6; *SAGG*, 1856: 123; 1857: 149; 1858: 606; 1861: 361; V BofE, Report, 1863: 56, 64, 66; 1865, *VPP*, 1866: 59.

sometimes radically extended their general policies regarding school buildings. At times this effectively redefined their priorities or established new fields of intervention in local schooling, as in the case of the New South Wales National board's decision to create the category of "non-vested" schools.[16] And they modified their procedures. In some cases this involved little more than a rationalization of existing rules to eliminate anomalies or unforeseen procedural hitches.[17] In others, it formed part of a far more extensive reconstruction of the boards' administration.

Take, for example, the case of the New South Wales National board by the late 1850s. First, the board had substantially increased its staff. Under the secretary, it employed several clerks to handle the correspondence the system generated. It appointed an architect who routinely examined and approved or modified building plans to suit local conditions, in the case of the standard plans, or to make them conform more closely to the board's standards, in the case of those drawn up by local committees. And in place of the original agents, it now had a chief inspector and several district inspectors.[18] Second, the regulations had changed to allow non-vested as well as vested schoolhouses and to stipulate more precisely such details as the size of rooms in relation to the number of pupils.[19] Third, general circulars had been written for, and sent to, local committees on how to manage and supervise the schools, including the school buildings, under their care. These were complemented by an increasing number of forms specifying in detail the aspects of school accommodation to which inspectors and local committees alike should attend.[20] Fourth, the secretary now referred initial applications to the board in four ways: to the clerical staff for indexing and filing; back to the applicants for completion of a detailed form of application; to the inspectors to provide their own account of the details asked for on the application form and to recommend a course of action; and, once these forms were received, on to the board for its decision. The secretarial staff noted the substance of the board's decisions and noted and indexed further correspondence for subsequent board meetings and other procedures. Where relevant, the secretary forwarded an application for a site to the government, a digest of

16. NSW BNE, Report, 1857, *NSW V&P LA*, 1858: 5-13.

17. SA CBE, Minutes, 23 May, 24 Oct. 1855, GRG 50; Colonial Secretary to Secretary, SA CBE, 1 Nov. 1856, GRG 24/4, SA Public Record Office; V DSB, Minutes, 11 Jan. 1853, VPRS 63.

18. NSW BNE, Report, 1854, *NSW V&P LA*, 1855: 6; 1855: 2, 5. See also Margaret Jean Ely, "The Development of a Centralized Educational Administration in New South Wales, 1848-1880" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tasmania, 1973); Vick, "Schools, School Communities and the State."

19. NSW BNE, Report, 1857: 5-11, 13.

20. NSW BNE, Report, 1854: 6-7; 1855: 5; 1857: 13; 1859: 3-6, 1861, *NSW V&P LA*, 1862: 20-22.

The Acts which amalgamated the rival boards in the eastern colonies in the 1860s confirmed many of the policies thus elaborated under the dual systems, such as the subsidizing of school buildings and the National boards' principle that aided schools should be vested in them. Moreover, the new boards adopted a range of policies and procedures for administering their buildings' schemes from their predecessors. They systematically preferred vested over non-vested schools, and required subsidized buildings to be substantial and plain, built according to plans approved by the board, and specifically not available for public worship or political meetings. However, they continued to allow makeshift buildings for "provisional" schools where circumstances necessitated. In general terms, they continued the procedures for application, approval, joint local-central funding, verification of work done, and subsequent inspection established under the National boards.[24]

WHY did these systems develop in the ways they did? One set of explanations is cast in terms of class, gender, and other power relations structuring patriarchal, capitalist societies. Here, however, I wish to explore the issue in more minute and particular terms, although, as I have argued elsewhere, these can certainly be understood as structured by class and gender relations.[25]

First, the boards developed the policies and procedures they did because they and their supporters were convinced that special-purpose buildings were essential to good education. In particular, they were important to the moral purposes of state schooling, providing the children of the bulk of the population with models of cleanliness and order.[26] This reflected middle-class perceptions of the crude conditions under which the bulk of the population lived and the problems they entailed for "society."[27] While schools *should* counteract such malign influences, many of them were also held in unsatisfactory premises—in barns, lofts,

Education 1978, ed. Stephen Murray-Smith (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978).

24. An Act for the Better Maintenance and Establishment of Common Schools in Victoria, 1862; Public Schools Act, NSW, 1866; Public Schools Act of 1866, Regulations Adopted by the Council of Education, *NSW V&P Legislative Council*, 1867; Amended Regulations Under the Public Schools Act of 1866, *V&P NSW LA*, 1868-69: 8-9; Amended Regulations Under the Public Schools Act of 1866, *V&P NSW LA*, 1875: 2, 6; NSW Council, Progress Report, 1867, *NSW V&P LA*, 1868: 4, 9, Appendix: 1-4, 15, 16; Report, Public Schools, 1867, *NSW V&P LA*, 1868: 2-3, 5, 9, 10-11; V BofE, Report, 1863: 12, 14-16.

25. Vick, "Class, Gender and Administration."

26. NSW BNE, Report, 1855, *NSW V&P LA*, 1856: 3; *Australian Journal of Education* 1, 2 (1868): 43.

27. Final Report of the School Commissioners, *NSW V&P LA*, 1856: 4; Select Committee on the Condition of the Metropolitan Working Classes, *NSW V&P LA*, 1860: 34, 68-69.

cellars under churches, halls, disused shops, and, commonly, private dwellings. Many of these latter, moreover, were working-class cottages, poorly-lit and ventilated, crowded, and cramped.[28] The boards and their supporters subjected such schools to the same criticism they levelled at substandard housing.[29] Toilets, in particular, were "abominably neglected" and "calculated to train the children in habits of dirtiness and indelicacy."[30] These considerations gave considerable weight to the concern to provide good accommodation for schools. Further, good school buildings would facilitate the adoption of those methods of teaching most effective for the purposes of trans/forming children's characters. Their dedication to school purposes was crucial to this, as it would allow the furniture and other apparatus to be designed and arranged according to the best pedagogical principles.[31]

And, finally, schoolhouses also occupied a strategic place in the development of state school systems. Pragmatically and economically, the provision of large schoolrooms in populous areas would produce economies of scale by eliminating large numbers of small schools.[32] In rural areas, good schoolhouses with teachers' residences attached would offer powerful incentives—comfort, evidence of social standing, and a useful supplement to their incomes, if offered rent free, and with a plot of land on which to raise a few animals and to grow vegetables and fruit—to good teachers to take up these schools.[33] Schoolhouses also played a role in the rival boards' struggles to secure the dominant position in local educational arrangements. They recognized early that whichever of them was able to offer healthy and convenient school premises in a community first, while competing schools occupied less satisfactory premises, would have an enormous advantage in attracting pupils. The National boards' commitment to funding school buildings from the outset clearly reflected an awareness of this. Equally clear, the Denominational strategy of funding dual-purpose buildings

28. Progress Reports of the School Commissioners, in Report from the Select Committee on Education, *NSW V&P LA*, 1855; NSW BNE, Report, 1855: 2; *SAGG* 1853: 99, 409, 721; H.C.E. Childers, "First Half-Yearly Report of the Inspector of Schools under the Denominational Board," in *The Educational Activities in Victoria of the Rt. Hon. H.C.E. Childers*, ed. E. Sweetman (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1940), 34ff.

29. Final Report of the School Commissioners, 4.

30. Ibid., 5.

31. Ibid., 3, 11-12; *SAGGK*, 1852: 683; 1858: 178; V BofE, Report, 1863, *VPP*, 1864: 51.

32. NSW BNE, Report, 1850, *NSW V&P LA*, 1851: 4; *SAGG*, 1854: 592-93; 1855: 127, 131.

33. NSW BNE, Report, 1855: 3; 1856: 2-3; 1860, *V&P NSW LA*, 1861-2: 13, 16; NSW DSB, Report, 1864, *NSW V&P LA*, 1865: 14; *SAGG*, 1856: 123; 1860: 363; *Australian Journal of Education* 1, 2 (1868): 43.

was designed to appeal to local church communities, undermining the appeal of National schools.[34] And at the level of colonial politics, the decision to fund special-purpose or dual-purpose buildings was important in the struggle for political advantage, especially in New South Wales and Victoria, where support was divided between National and Denominational systems. The secular boards in particular regularly cited the increasing numbers of purpose-built schoolhouses under their respective systems as evidence of their crucial role in the expansion and improvement of colonial education.[35]

Second, the boards developed their characteristic policies and procedures because of more general political and social factors. Their constitutions, themselves a product of the particular balance of power in the different colonies, established different initial strategies, most obviously between the National and Denominational systems. The inevitable rivalry between these systems also generated a dynamic for development absent from the single South Australian system. Changes in legislation, governmental and (in New South Wales and Victoria) denominational scrutiny and pressure, and budgetary restrictions also limited the boards' capacities both to fund buildings and to employ the numbers of staff they considered they needed. These pressures compelled them to compromise their policies and made it impossible to enforce them, and prevented them from capitalizing on opportunities for development which presented themselves. Moreover, periodic depressions limited the capacity both of the state to fund the board, and of settlers to build schools. And the constant shifting of large populations during the alluvial gold rushes during the 1850s, and the expansion of agricultural settlement thereafter, kept the boards under pressure to support new schools, limiting their capacities to reserve funds for buildings.[36]

Some of these developments, in particular the differences between what on the surface appear to have been very similar systems, are perhaps best explained

---

34. Johnson, Inspector's Report on Application for Vested School, Lower MacDonald, 4 Oct. 1865, NBNE 7; V BNE, Report, 1854-5: 11, 13.

35. NSW BNE, Report, *NSW V&P LA*, 1857: 2-3; 1860, *NSW V&P LA*, 1861-2: 1-2; *SAGG*, 1856: 119, 409; 1857: 145; V BNE, Report, 1854-1855, *VPP*, 1855-6: 4, 69; Margaret Pawsey, "Backroom Politics and Educational Reform: The National Board and Victoria's Common Schools Act," *History of Education Review* 12, 2 (1983).

36. Ely, "Politics, Education and Administrative Centralization," and "The Denominational Board in New South Wales"; Denis Grundy, "Public Administration and Education: Early Problems in Victoria," *ANZHES Journal* 9, 1 (1980); "The Political Economy of the Denominational System of Schools in Victoria," in *Melbourne Studies in Education 1981*, ed. R.J.W. Selleck (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981); and "The Schools Inspectorate in Victoria"; Malcolm Vick, "Class, Gender and Administration: The 1851 Education Act in South Australia," *History of Education Review* 17, 1 (1988), and "The Central Board of Education in South Australia, 1852-1875" (M.Ed. thesis, University of Adelaide, 1981).

in terms of the particular composition of the boards and the selection of their staff. Others were clearly the result of differences in the internal structure of the administration—the New South Wales National system installed an educator as its effective administrative head, while the Victorian National board and its amalgamated successor installed its secretary in that position.[37] As well, the boards elaborated their policies and procedures, tightening their regulations and, at the same time, compromising in large numbers of cases in response to the activities of local communities. Many local school committees applied for assistance for schools which they held, or proposed to hold, in makeshift premises, and resisted the boards' attempts to pressure them to provide "proper" accommodation, often threatening to transfer their school to the rival board or withdraw their application altogether.[38] Others agreed with the boards that special-purpose buildings were needed, but disagreed over the character of such buildings and often failed to complete them to the boards' satisfaction, or subsequently, let them fall into disrepair.[39] Some were quick to exploit loopholes in the boards' regulations and procedures, especially concerning the use of school buildings for religious purposes.[40] Finally, many communities were internally divided over school provision in general or school buildings in

37. Denis Grundy, "The Schools Inspectorate in Victoria 1856-1899: Problems of Power and Authority," in *From Colony to Coloniser: Studies in Australian Administrative History*, ed. J.J. Eddy and J.R. Northcote (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1987), and "The Formation of a Disordered Teaching Service in Victoria, 1851-1871," *History of Education Review* 18, 9 (1989). For the Central Board of Education in South Australia, see Vick, "The Central Board of Education in South Australia," chaps. 3, 4.

38. Provisional School at Mutbilly, *NSW V&P LA*, 1873-4; Blain to Secretary, NSW BNE, 22 Feb. 1849; Rusden, Report on Proceedings, 13 Apr. 1851; Secretary, School Committee, St Leonards to Secretary, NSW BNE, 8 Dec. 1863, NBNE 1; Johnson, Inspector's Report on Application for Assistance, Lower MacDonald, 4 Oct. 1865, NBNE 7; Kenny to Secretary, NSW Council, 13 Feb. 1870 and McIntyre, Memo on Kenny to Secretary, 23 Feb. 1870, NCE 1.

39. NSW BNE, Minutes, 26 Nov. 1853, NBNE 24; Mansfield, Memo to NSW Council, 9 Aug. 1873, NCE 1; Stone to Secretary, SA CBE, 11 Nov. 1870, Nottage to Secretary, SA CBE, 30 Nov. 1870, GRG 18/113/91; Sealy to Secretary, SA CBE, 28 Mar. 31, Aug. 1874, GRG 18/113/101; Malloy to Secretary, V BofE, 13 Dec. 1864, VPRS 795; Plan of Proposed School, Doncaster, VPRS 903; Removal of Mr Sanders as Teacher under the National Education Board, *NSW V&P LA*, 1863; Inspectors' Reports, VPRS 1406, eg., vol.1, nos. 3, 4, 5, vol.3, nos. 46, 48, 53.

40. Harris, Report on Application for School, 10 July 1867, NCE 1; Site for Public School at German's Hill, *NSW V&P LA*, 1875; Fox to Wills, 12 Dec. 1861, NBNE 1; NSW NBNE, Minutes, 28 Oct. 1864, NBNE 24; Correspondence Relative to Application for Certificate to Roman Catholic Denominational School, Grenfell, *NSW V&P LA*, 1872.

particular and were unable to concentrate sufficient resources to provide special buildings.[41]

These local activities affected both the overall provision of school accommodation in the colonies and the boards' procedures. Where communities contested the boards' views, or where they were internally divided, they almost invariably delayed the provision of schoolhouses and often ensured that the buildings which were erected failed to conform strictly to the boards' criteria. At the same time, they compelled the boards to generate new means to realize their goals.

These local processes, however, should not be seen simply as responses to central initiatives. Clearly, they were shaped by knowledge of the various forms of assistance available and the conditions attached to such aid. But they also reflected the divergent traditions and experiences the settlers brought with them from England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, and so on, as well as their relative poverty or affluence, the size of their community, and local divisions of religion, spatial distribution, social status, economic interest, and faction.[42] And, crucially, they were directed towards local ends: the provision of conditions which best met their own various needs.[43]

What Was Accomplished?

The dialectical relations between the boards and local communities constructed around the provision of schools generally and school buildings in particular transformed colonial social life in a number of ways. Most obviously, they led to the increasingly widespread provision of buildings designed, built, and set aside especially for school purposes. While it is impossible to determine precisely to what extent such buildings came to dominate the educational landscape, it is clear that the numbers of purpose-built schools grew significantly over the third quarter of the century. However, the concerns and circumstances

---

41. Application for the Establishment of a Public School at East Dapto, *NSW V&P LA*, 1875-6; Doyle to Secretary, NSW BNE, 21 May 1863, NBNE 7; Fawcett to Secretary, SA CBE, 23 June 1856, Haussell to Secretary, SA CBE, 6 Aug. 1856, GRG 18/113/55; Massie to Secretary, V BNE, 23 July, 15 Aug., 17 Oct. 1858, VPRS 880.

42. The correspondence files concerning the establishment of the schoolhouses at Woodside (GRG 18/113/27) and Oakbank (GRG 18/113/30) exemplify all these points except Irish and German inheritances. For the latter, see Fritschke to Colonial Secretary, 5 July 1853, GRG24/6. See also Vick, "Schools, School Communities and the State," 248-50.

43. Browning to Secretary, V BNE, 26 Mar. 1857, VPRS 880; Cook to Davenport [Chairman, SA CBE], 13 May 1856, GRG 18/113/50.

of many local communities ensured that large numbers of schools, both public and private, continued to be conducted in church buildings and private dwellings. Moreover, large numbers of purpose-built schools were still, from the boards' perspectives, substandard. It is also worth noting, given the boards' concerns to separate school premises from domestic premises, that many schools continued to combine teaching and residential functions, either by operating in private houses or by providing teachers' quarters in school buildings.[44]

As the incidence of purpose-built schools grew, so did the enclosure of school grounds and the marking out of the enclosed space, dividing boys' playing areas from girls' or setting aside portions of the grounds for the teachers' use. Increasingly, too, school grounds were provided with solidly built toilets, with separate provisions for male and female pupils and for the teacher, carefully screened from each other or physically separated and hidden from general view by fences, hedges, or other forms of enclosure. Yet many schools continued to occupy minimal grounds or grounds which were unfenced or only partly fenced, leaving the school boundaries undefined. Some had no toilets, while in others a single toilet served teacher and pupils alike. Some toilets were placed where they were open to view from either school or street. And many were in disrepair, lacked doors, or were overflowing.

The more imposing and substantial purpose-built schools, whether secular, denominational or private, were concentrated in the capitals, their suburbs, and the major country towns. Even there, they were juxtaposed with private and secular schools in widely diverse makeshift premises, notably dwellings, shops, and church halls. In the smaller country towns and villages, especially in the eastern colonies, the incidence of purpose-built schools was smaller, their scale less impressive, and their construction less substantial. In South Australia, in contrast, it was these communities which were best placed to take advantage of the board's building subsidies and in which the majority of the substantial stone purpose-built schools were provided. In each of the colonies, however, even where these smaller communities boasted a purpose-built school, they often supported other schools in makeshift premises.[45]

44. NSW BNE, Report, 1860: 1, 5; NSW BNE, Report, 1866: 5; NSW DSB, Report, 1857: 4; *SAGG*, 1872: 550-59, V BofE, Report, 1869, *VPP*, 1870: xxiv. See also the summary Inspectors' Reports on each school in the NSW BNE's and DSB's reports from 1857 and continued in the NSW Council's reports. For a discussion of the evidence for this and the following two paragraphs, see Vick, "Schools, School Communities and the State," chap. 3.

45. See the Annual Reports of the NSW and SA boards; Statistics of Schools in New South Wales *NSW V&P LA*, 1859-60; Statistics, 1860-61 - School Returns, *SAPP*, 1861, no.8; Statistics - School Returns, 1867, *SAPP*, 1867, no.7A; Census Returns, *SAPP*, 1872, no.9A. These official sources should be supplemented by the more casual, unsystematic impressions from inspectors' reports on individual districts,

The boards' concerns with the character of school accommodation had ramifications well beyond their immediate objects. The outcomes of local struggles over the provision of school buildings to which the National/Denominational rivalry contributed helped shore up or, alternatively, undermine, clerical influence in many local communities. The boards' consistent preference for men of substance, or for clergy or other professional men, and their attempts to secure their control of local committees, contributed to the ongoing process of constructing class and gender relations at the local level. Their increasingly tight regulation of the work of such committees formed one part of a more general shift towards centralized state regulation of social life at the expense of local "self-regulation." Such developments were, in part, constitutive of the state, the relations between the metropolitan centres and local communities, and local communities themselves.

Further, the regional distribution of school buildings, combined with the structures of local control and social division, produced class and gender differences between schools which often reflected the buildings they occupied. Schools located in, or catering to, working-class and poorer farming communities often occupied private dwellings, often of the most cramped, inconvenient, and uncomfortable type. Even where such schools occupied purpose-built premises they were often cheaply and primitively constructed. Middle-class schools, whether state supported or private, in capital cities or country towns, were more likely to occupy purpose-built or extensively adapted premises devoted solely to school business, in particular, the more substantial and expensive school buildings. Not surprisingly, the domestic premises occupied by middle-class private schools were typically more imposing than those used by working-class schools.[46]

This visual class differentiation of schools is well illustrated in the contrast between two schools in the little settlement of McLaren Vale in South Australia. The Tsong Gyiaou school, catering to the daughters of the region's middle class, was conducted in a large two-storied mansion set in spacious, park-like grounds.

diaries and memoirs, and correspondence columns of the metropolitan and regional newspapers.

46.   Allen to Secretary, NSW BNE, 26 Dec. 1861, NBNE 1; NSW BNE, Report, 1859; 5; Final Report of the School Commissioners: 4; Jan Burnswoods and Jim Fletcher, *Sydney and the Bush. A Pictorial History of Education in New South Wales* (Sydney: NSW Department of Education, 1980), 80, 91; Carole Hooper, "Vision Unrealised: State Secondary Education in Victoria 1850-1872," *History of Education Review* 19, 1 (1990): 2, 4, 9; Geoffrey Sherington, Robert C. Petersen, and Ian Brice, *Learning to Lead. A History of Boys' and Girls' Corporate Secondary Schools in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 6-8, 22-23; Marjorie Theobald, "'Mere accomplishments'? Melbourne's Early Ladies' Schools Reconsidered," *History of Education Review* 13, 2 (1984).

The village school, providing for the children of local small holders, tenants, and labourers, was conducted in Tsong Gyiaou's gate-keeper's cottage.[47]

To some extent the distinction between schools held in purpose-built premises and those housed in private dwellings also reflected the gendered character of school provision. Schools for middle-class boys, whether state supported or private, were more likely to have purpose-built accommodation than those attended by their sisters. The Flinders Street National school at Geelong blatantly excluded middle-class girls as well as working-class children of either sex. Middle-class girls' schools' concern with developing close relationships between teacher and pupils and the modelling of domestic deportment made private homes well-suited to their purposes. Indeed, many of the most prominent "ladies'" schools were housed thus.[48]

The establishment of schools played a significant part in the spatial construction of local communities. They formed social centres to which children came daily, and often accommodated other activities out of school hours, strengthening their position as general community centres. Where schoolhouses were placed in the centre of diffuse farming neighbourhoods, they formed "natural" sites for other developments, such as churches, inns, stores, and other elements of a village. Where they were placed in close proximity to existing dwellings and institutions, they strengthened the position of those sites as local centres. Where there were neighbouring incipient villages or towns, the establishment of a schoolhouse in one village further boosted its standing as the local social centre and contributed materially to the character of local development.[49]

School buildings played an important role in symbolically articulating the relation between the schools and the broader structures of colonial society in which they were placed. Schools conducted in churches and chapels or in their outbuildings clearly declared themselves as religious institutions, symbolically identifying religion and education. Quite apart from the visual relationships, the ownership of schools by churches, and the use of the same buildings for both worship and schooling, announced the close relationship between the two.

---

47.   Annie Pridmore, *The Rich Valley* (McLaren Vale: McLaren Vale Institute, 1949), 49-51.

48.   Secretary, V BNE to Kilgour, 23 June 1859, VPRS 878; Theobald, "Mere Accomplishments?"

49.   Site for Public School, Molong, *NSW V&P LA*, 1878-9; Edwards to Secretary, SA CBE, 28 Apr. 1868, Dutton to Secretary, SA CBE, 25 June 1868, GRG 18/113/79; Smeaton to District Council of Onkaparinga, 9 Feb. 1858, GRG 18/113/27; Moffatt to Secretary, SA CBE, 28 Aug. 1856, GRG 18/113/30; McPherson to Secretary, SA CBE, 27 June 1870, GRG 18/113/97; Orlebar, Report on Proceedings at Kyneton, 2 Aug. 1854, Lavender to Secretary, V BNE, 19 Sept. 1854, Foster to Secretary, V BNE, 7 Nov. 1857, VPRS 880/23.

Where schools were conducted in private dwellings, whether humble working-class or farmers' cottages or the imposing residences of the well-to-do, they constructed a continuity between the "private" sphere of the home and the "public" sphere of the school. This is clear in the case of those schools conducted for young ladies and gentlemen in private homes, where the interaction of "domestic life" and "school life" was a fundamental feature of the curriculum. This interpenetration of public/school and private/domestic was not confined to the overall use of the schoolrooms, but extended to the daily activity of the teachers. However, where schools were conducted in buildings which were set aside for instructional purposes only, as in the larger urban schools and those purpose-built country schools which included no teacher's residence, they marked the sharp separation of the public and private domains.

The character of private residences used for schools also helped mark the social-class identity of the school. Those in workers' cottages were visually and symbolically continuous with the customary characteristics of working-class life, while those in larger, more imposing houses were readily identified with the middle class. Naturally, not all schools in domestic dwellings could be classified this simply. However, what is crucial here is the effect of those schools which *were* visibly identifiable.

The provision of purpose-built "secular" schoolhouses at times produced a similar range of effects. Many had clear visual similarities with churches and chapels, displaying similar dimensions, ground plans and roof lines, arched windows, and even belfries, visually replicating the unpretentious steeples and bell towers of many country chapels. However, not all specially designed school buildings resembled or identified the schools with churches. Many, especially those built of weatherboard or slab, had more in common with surrounding domestic dwellings. Some combined elements of both domestic and public secular or religious building styles; for example, the residential section of some which incorporated teachers' quarters closely resembled private houses, while the schoolrooms attached to them could easily have been plain non-conformist chapels.[50]

Some purpose-built schools were differentiated from all other types of buildings: Cleveland Street National school in Sydney, the Central Model School in Melbourne, and the Flinders Street National school at Geelong, for instance, could not have been mistaken for even the most imposing of domestic residences. Nor, despite the central steeple-like structure of the Flinders Street National school mentioned above, could they have been mistaken for churches. They had

---

50. Stretch to Secretary, V BNE, 14 Feb. 1857, VPRS 880/3; Artist's Impression, Proposed School at Woodside, GRG 18/113/29; Burnswoods and Fletcher, *Sydney and the Bush*, 48, 50, 60, 66, 83, 90; Lawrence Burchell, *Victorian Schools. A Study in Colonial Government Architecture, 1837-1900* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980), frontispiece, 21, 23, 25, 50-52, 63.

nothing in common with commercial or manufacturing buildings. In their scale, they were most like some of the larger secular public buildings such as the Town Halls, hospitals, destitute and other asylums, and the General Post Offices in the capital cities. In their style, they shared certain common ground with both churches and secular public architecture, though the increasing adoption of rectangular windows and doors, whether set in church-like porches or under verandas, marked a clear break from church architecture.[51]

Less pretentious buildings were often distinguished from domestic buildings by their scale and, in many cases, the provision of two front entrances. While there was certainly no single clear or precisely defined school architectural style, purpose-built schools displayed an array of characteristics which set them sharply apart from domestic, church, and, increasingly, other forms of public architecture, and which began to define a distinctive range of school building styles.[52]

The enclosure of school grounds marked off the school property as separate from both other private properties and the general public domain. This was most marked where high solid stone walls were erected, as was the case in many urban schools. Schools shared with other "public" buildings an ambivalent status as "public" property. They were clearly established by public activity and often, at least partially, with locally subscribed funds. Like other "public" buildings, however, they were not generally accessible to the public at large. The fence line marked the discontinuity between school and community and defined "public" property as the domain of public officials and a handful of leading men. While the school in some sense "belonged" to the community, entry onto its grounds might be construed as trespass.[53] The provision of special school buildings helped define a distance between the parents and community at large and "their" school, and re/constructed the meaning of "public" schooling in particular and perhaps "public" property and enterprise in general.[54]

Finally, the struggles over the provision of schools provided the occasion for the construction of a discourse which tied school buildings to social progress on the one hand and to the necessity of strong centralized state controls on the other. The growing professional literature of education, the reports of school inspectors, the jottings of journalists and travellers "several years resident in the colonies," and the observations of city policemen, poor relief officers and philanthropists, and so on, together articulated a set of discourses which invested school buildings

51. Burnswoods and Fletcher, *Sydney and the Bush*, 66, 72; Burchell, *Victorian Schools*, 39, 45.

52. School Plans, Woodside, GRG 18/113/30, Port McDonnell, GRG 18/113/63, Mitcham, GRG 18/113/88; Burchell, *Victorian Schools*, 80-84; Burnswoods and Fletcher, *Sydney and the Bush*, 67, 78, 91-92.

53. Removal of Mr. Sanders: 30; Anon., *Educational Pamphlets no. VI: Organisation and Management of Schools* (Melbourne, 1857), 69.

54. Cf. Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 371-72.

with social and moral as well as pedagogic value. They constructed chains of images, metaphors, and descriptions of physical environments, including both domestic dwellings and schoolhouses: dirty, decayed, neglected, primitive or barbaric, and poor on the one hand, and clean, well cared for, rational, and progressive on the other. By juxtaposing these terms with others such as disorganized, diseased, unnatural, and evil, and their opposites respectively, these descriptions slipped imperceptibly into moral judgements (where environments were represented as symptomatic or expressive of moral character) and causal explanations (in which environments produced harmful physical and moral effects). In this context, to support the boards' attempts to provide special-purpose school buildings was to promote the cause of individual and social well-being. To oppose them was to fly in the face of progress and goodness.

To some extent each of the boards, but especially the National boards and their successors, argued that the proper development of education, including the provision of good school buildings, required strong central controls. On the one hand, they argued that parents and even well-educated lay people were unable to appreciate the value of proper school buildings and were prone to be swayed by cheapness and other inappropriate considerations when securing school accommodation.[55] On the other hand, they developed the notion that the design of school buildings depended on specialized knowledge, not only of architecture and building but of education. In contrast to lay people's opinions, the professional educational architect was able to understand every detail of school design as related to the needs of school organization, discipline, and pedagogy.[56] This construction of school architectural knowledge as removed from the ken of ordinary people gained strength from its position in a broader critique of lay understandings of education generally and the cognate articulation of a comprehensive professional discourse of schooling which premised educational authority on the possession of a body of esoteric, scientific knowledge of education. In this context there was little place for parental direction of education and the case for central control was self-evident.[57]

---

55. NSW BNE, Report, 1858: 4-5; 1859: 6.

56. See especially, Public School, Springside—Correspondence and Papers, etc., *NSW V&P LA*, 1876-77: 15-21.

57. Final Report of the School Commissioners: 18-22; NSW BNE, Report, 1851: 2; 1854: 3; NSW Council, Report, 1870, *NSW V&P LA*, 1871: 9; *SAGG*, 1856: 134; 1860: 365; V BNE, Report, 1858, *VPP*, 1859: 24; V DSB, Report, 1852: 7; Annotations on Dunn to Secretary, V BofE, 22 Mar. 1869, VPRS 892/151. See also Malcolm Vick, "'Their Paramount Duty': Parents and Schooling in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Family, School and State in Australian History*, 185-91; Smith, "William Wilkins' Saddle-Bags," 79-84.

THE PROVISION of school buildings in colonial Australia, then, was a crucial part of the struggle to provide particular ("liberal") forms of schooling, a struggle which, from the point of view of its supporters, demanded that control be wrested from parents and local communities. Local communities, however, continued to take the initiative in providing the sorts of accommodation they considered appropriate within their varied means. This process was often marked by conflict within the community and/or with the central boards over precisely what constituted proper accommodation and other issues. Consequently, the central agencies of the state were forced to modify their policies and procedures while their efforts continued to meet only limited success. These processes and the diversity of school buildings which resulted from them produced a number of effects beyond the realm of schooling. They contributed to the building of local societies and helped articulate the emerging class and gender relations those societies comprised. They symbolically articulated a range of social relations, including the divisions between public and private and the place of schooling within them, and enlarged the basis of the sharp critique of popular education and family life on which the state's initial involvement in schooling had been founded. Finally, they contributed to the construction of a professional, "scientific" discourse of education which defined schooling as the legitimate domain of specialists and marginalized the role of lay people. The programme of forming good schools involved not simply the erection of school buildings, but the building of the colonial state and society themselves. While the details of this analysis are idiosyncratically Australian, its significance is not. Insofar as Australian developments can be seen as characteristic of those in patriarchal and capitalist societies, it offers one way of reading both the general character and the complexity of their development and their consequences.