

Early Struggles for Bilingual Schools and the French Language in the Windsor Border Region, 1851–1910

Jack D. Cécillon

ABSTRACT

In 1910, Bishop Michael Fallon of London called for the abolition of the bilingual schools of Ontario because of their inefficiencies. Concerns about the value of a bilingual education and the French language in particular predate Fallon and go back to the 1850s in the Windsor border region. These concerns were voiced by both francophones and anglophones, and illustrate that the struggle for the survival of the French language in the churches and schools of the area predated the arrival of Fallon and the Ontario government's imposition of Regulation XVII.

RÉSUMÉ

En 1910, l'évêque de London, Michael Fallon, demanda l'abolition des écoles bilingues ontariennes en raison de leur inefficacité. Les inquiétudes au sujet de la valeur d'une instruction bilingue et de la langue française, notamment, précédaient Fallon puisqu'elles remontaient aux années 1850 dans la région frontalière de Windsor. Exprimées par les francophones et par les anglophones, elles mettent en lumière le fait que la lutte pour la survivance de la langue française dans les églises et les écoles de la région précédait l'arrivée de Fallon et l'imposition du Règlement XVII par le gouvernement de l'Ontario.

Introduction

In 1912, the Ontario government, in response to an influx of unilingual French-speaking migrants from Quebec, introduced Regulation XVII, which effectively restricted French instruction to one hour a day in the province's bilingual schools. This provincial policy triggered considerable reaction from Ontario's French-speaking or francophone population. The French Canadian Educational Association of Ontario (ACFEO) helped to organize province-wide resistance to the government interference in the bilingual schools. This struggle over the French language eventually came to affect much of Ontario. This epic battle was not the first francophone struggle over language in the province. Robert Choquette and Chad Gaffield have provided examples of nineteenth century conflict in eastern Ontario.¹ The Windsor border

region also hosted incidents of public conflict over language and schools in franco-phone communities that predated Regulation XVII and the arrival of Bishop Michael Francis Fallon of London, the sworn enemy of the bilingual schools.²

Historical Overview

In 1701, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded a French fortress and trading post on the Detroit River, a strategic point on the Great Lakes.³ By 1748, the Crown had granted land on the Canadian side to habitant farmers to support the soldiers, trappers and traders with a reliable food supply.⁴ The first record of schooling for franco-phone children in the Windsor border region appeared in 1782 after the British takeover, when Sulpician priest François Xavier Dufaux began teaching a few boys at a church rectory in the fledgling town of Sandwich. In 1786, British Governor Frederick Haldimand sent two young women from Montreal named Adémard and Papineau to the region to work as teachers. Five years before the creation of Upper Canada, Sandwich hosted a French school with thirteen students.⁵ In 1816, the Upper Canadian legislature established a budget to fund common schools at no cost to residents. By 1830, officials reported that two French schools were in operation in the area: thirty-seven pupils studied at Sandwich and a similar number could be found at Amherstburg.⁶ In the 1840s, Jesuit Fathers Pierre and Nicholas Point of France established “canoe schools” without teachers in the vast parish of Assumption, stretching from Sandwich in Essex County to Chatham in Kent County. After teaching the rudiments of reading and writing, the priests entrusted a few books to local students for the purposes of study,⁷ returning a couple of years later to collect the books and redistribute them elsewhere. A tradition of French language education was thus established in the area.

When Egerton Ryerson became Chief Superintendent of Schools for Canada West (Ontario), the legal status of French in the province’s schools was unclear. A conflict in the Windsor border region compelled Ryerson to address the issue. On April 5, 1851, Julien Parent of Sandwich and sixteen French-speaking ratepayers petitioned the Essex County Board of Public Instruction protesting against the employment of a unilingual Frenchman named Gigon as teacher at their common school. The parents argued that their children had the right to receive an education in the English language: “French instruction alone availeth them next to nothing at all, being an ornamental rather than a useful acquirement for the inhabitants of this country.”⁸ When the Essex Board of Examiners refused to grant Gigon a teaching certificate, the Sandwich Board of Trustees, all of whom were also French-speaking, contested the decision by appealing to the Provincial Council of Public Instruction. The trustees argued that the town had repeatedly attempted to find a bilingual schoolmaster to no avail. They noted that in spite of Gigon’s inability to speak English, he was still a competent educator who could reopen a school in a district where most people spoke French.⁹

At its meeting on 25 April 1851, the Provincial Council of Instruction discussed the issue, and inserted the following clause in the qualification guidelines for teachers.

In regard to teachers of French or German, that a knowledge of French or German grammar be substituted for a knowledge of English grammar, and that the certificate of the teacher be expressly limited accordingly.¹⁰

The Council then informed the County Boards of Canada West that no guidelines in the School Act could deny employment to such a qualified teacher. This intervention served as a precedent for the recognition of French as a legal language of instruction. Gigon was subsequently hired as the teacher for Sandwich.¹¹ The Sandwich school controversy was significant, for it exposed divisions among the area's francophones over the merits of an education for their children in the mother tongue.

Francophone Settlement Patterns in the Windsor Border Region

Francophone migration to the Windsor border region that had begun during the French regime ended after the Conquest in 1775. The first settlers and their descendants spread out on the Detroit River from the village of Petite Côte to what would become the border cities of Sandwich, Windsor, and Walkerville (modern-day Windsor, Ontario).¹² In 1820, fewer than four thousand francophones lived in Upper Canada, with the majority residing in Essex and Kent counties.¹³ A second wave of francophone migration began modestly at the end of the 1820s,¹⁴ and accelerated with the expansion of the logging industry and construction of the Great Western Railway in the early 1850s. Windsor emerged as the chief urban center after the railway selected the town as its depot.¹⁵ Migrants came from rural Quebec, and settled on lands stretching from Tecumseh to Paincourt on the coast of Lake St. Clair, or moved to the border cities to find wage labour in factories and construction.¹⁶ Francophones moving to the border cities of Windsor, Walkerville and Sandwich began to integrate into an English-speaking work world. By 1901, Essex County's French-speaking communities had grown to more than sixteen thousand out of a total population of nearly fifty-nine thousand.¹⁷

Intermarriage and Language Transfer Rates at the Turn of the Twentieth Century¹⁸

The census provides evidence that francophones and anglophones were intermarrying in the Windsor border region by 1901. In rural communities, 7.5 percent of 1,421 families sampled hosted mixed marriages with at least one francophone parent, but the 1901 census rolls still indicated a French retention rate of more than 98 percent (Table 1.1). In the border cities of Sandwich and Windsor, by contrast, while a majority of francophone couples reported passing French on to all their children as in rural areas, noticeable signs of language transfer correlated directly to the number of mixed marriages. In the city of Windsor, where 12.3 percent of the population was francophone in 1901, there were ninety-three mixed marriages; English became the sole medium of expression for sixty-one of these relationships (Table 1.2).¹⁹ Only thirteen mixed families (14 percent) reported that all of their

children conserved the mother tongue of their French-speaking parent. Eight francophone couples opted not to raise their children in French. Windsor also had the lowest French language retention rate, with nearly 30 percent of residents of French descent speaking only English in 1901. This might be attributable to the scattered settlement pattern of this population among non-francophones. The rate of French retention was somewhat higher in the town of Sandwich, at 84.8 percent where francophones made up 40 percent of the population, and clustered together in neighbourhoods (Tables 1.1, 1.2). Of the twenty-nine mixed marriages, fifteen indicated retention of the French language among all of the children. In essence, all francophone communities exhibited high rates of French language retention except Windsor.

1.1. Francophone Community Samples for the Windsor Border Region, 1901				
	Windsor	Sandwich	Rural²⁰	Total
Total population	12,153	1,450	10,810	24,413
Total population of French descent	2,133	714	7,949	10,796
Total francophone population ²¹	1,498	582	7,801	9,881
French language retention rate	70.2%	84.8%	98.1%	91.5%
% francophones/total population	12.3%	40.1%	72.2%	40.5%
Canayens ²²	787	200	3,208	4,195
French Canadians	629	245	4,667	5,541
French	41	137	71	249
Undetermined franc.	41	56	0	97

Source: Canada Census, 1901

1.2. Mixed Marriages and Language Transfer Rates among Families with one or more Francophone Parents in the City of Windsor and the Town of Sandwich, 1901			
	Windsor	Sandwich	Total
Total families with at least one francophone parent	337	141	478
Mixed marriages/families	93	29	122 (25.5%)
Mixed families with all children retaining French	15	15	30 (24.6%)
Mixed families with some children retaining French	17	7	24 (19.6%)
Mixed families choosing English	61	7	68 (55.7%)
English households with 2 francophone parents	8	1	9

Source: Canada Census, 1901

1.3a. Illiteracy Rates Among Francophones in Rural Communities, Essex and Kent Counties, 1901										
	Mac-Gregor	River Canard	Petite Côte	Sandwich East	Rochester	Tilbury North	Tilbury West	Paincourt	Dover District	Total
Total francophone population	420	468	600	2,306	1,194	947	444	245	762	6,786
Total # of illiterates	30	22	23	131	95	66	102	31	175	675
Total # of francophone illiterates	27	17	21	115	94	66	102	31	175	648
Francophone illiteracy rate	7.1%	3.6%	3.5%	4.9%	8%	7%	22.9%	12.7%	23%	9.5%
Age group	Mac-Gregor	River Canard	Petite Côte	Sandwich East	Rochester	Tilbury North	Tilbury West	Paincourt	Dover	Total
10–19	0	2	4	33	11	30	30	9	71	190
20–29	9	5	7	34	31	19	37	13	49	204
30–39	12	12	5	48	41	10	21	5	41	195
40–45	9	3	5	16	7	6	14	4	11	75
Canayens	14	11	13	69	20	21	11	15	11	185
Fr. Canadians	13	6	8	46	74	45	91	16	164	463
Anglophones	2	4	1	6	1	0	0	0	0	14
Other	1	1	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	13

Source: Canada Census, 1901

1.3.b. Illiteracy Rates among Francophones and Non-Francophones in the City of Windsor and the Town of Sandwich, 1901			
	Windsor	Sandwich	Total
Total francophone population	1,498	582	2,080
Total # of illiterates	N/A	47	N/A
Francophone illiteracy rate	6.1%	7.2%	6.4%
Total # of francophone illiterates	91	42	133
Age group	Windsor	Sandwich	Total
10–19	24	10	34
20–29	24	20	44
30–45	43	17	60
Canayens	38	21	59
French Canadians	53	17	70
French	0	4	4
Anglophones	N/A	5	5

Source: Canada Census, 1901

Illiteracy Among Essex and Kent County Francophones

Perhaps the most controversial issue involving francophones in the Windsor border region related to rates of illiteracy. In 1910, during his crusade to eliminate what he perceived to be inefficient bilingual schools, Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Fallon of the London diocese deplored what he considered to be a largely ill-educated population incapable of speaking adequate English or French. Census records suggest that Fallon's concerns regarding the state of bilingual education held some validity.²³ All francophone communities in the Windsor border region reported cases of illiteracy.²⁴

Francophones fared better in the border cities and the long-settled villages on the Detroit River where access to schooling was relatively easy.²⁵ In the city of Windsor, the illiteracy rate for 1,498 francophones was 6 percent in 1901; nearly half of that total were between thirty and forty-five years of age, which suggests that the problem may have been declining among the younger generation (Table 1.3.b). The neighbouring town of Sandwich posted an illiteracy rate of 7.2 percent with forty-seven cases out of a total francophone population of 582. Here, thirty of the forty-seven cases were under the age of thirty.

In the old villages of Petite Côte, River Canard and McGregor, illiteracy rates in 1901 were also modest, claiming mainly adults. Out of sixty-five reported cases, only six were under the age of twenty, suggesting the problem here was in decline. In Petite Côte and River Canard, the total francophone illiteracy rate was about 3.5 percent (Table 1.3a). In River Canard, most cases in the community could be found among families that owned their own farms or market gardens, and two-thirds of the cases were over the age of thirty. The village of McGregor had a higher rate of 7.1 percent, but again, two-thirds of those reported to be illiterate were over the age of thirty. Only in Petite Côte, did research reveal that half of all illiterates were under the age of thirty. All of these communities had well-established bilingual schools. To the east of Windsor, in Sandwich East Township, however, youth illiteracy remained a problem, especially among poor families who relied on fishing or itinerant farm labour for their livelihood.²⁶

The most alarming rates of illiteracy could be found in the rural French Canadian settlements east of Windsor and near Lake St. Clair. French Canadian communities with a longer history of settlement like Belle River and St. Joachim in Rochester Township and Stoney Point in Tilbury North Township registered illiteracy rates slightly below the provincial rate (Table 1.3a). However, farming communities in Tilbury West and Dover Townships posted much higher rates, in excess of 20 percent. All of these communities had experienced relatively recent settlement from Quebec, and youths under the age of thirty constituted 77 percent of the illiterate population (300 out of 390)! Such high rates of youth illiteracy were alarming, but in fact a phenomenon not uncommon to recently-settled rural communities.²⁷ Many children in these areas worked in the barrel stave industry or on the farm at planting and harvest time. In spite of these grim numbers, the actual total rural francophone population sample of Essex and Kent Counties posted a combined illiteracy rate of 9.5 percent, just above the provincial average. Out of 9466 rural and urban francophones

surveyed in the tables above, the census reported 781 cases of illiteracy, or a rate of 8.3 percent, below the provincial average. Still, rates of illiteracy were considerably higher than among the area's anglophone population. Bishop Fallon's vocal concern regarding the need to provide more rigorous schooling for francophone children held credence in two rural townships populated by recent Quebec migrants. His sweeping generalization that all of the bilingual schools were sub-standard, however, is not borne out by these statistics.

Bilingual Schools in the Nineteenth Century

Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century the bilingual schools of Essex and Kent struggled to combat the stigma of illiteracy. In 1882, two Quebec missionaries suggested one reason for the problem.

Trente-cinq écoles dans lesquelles on enseigne le français aussi bien que l'anglais; une demi douzaine ont deux maîtres. Les écoles sont fréquentées par environ 3500 enfants canadiens français, qui se servent des livres en usage dans la province de Québec.²⁸

This account underscored the onerous student-teacher ratio, which stood at close to 90 to 1. Poor pay and unattractive work conditions made it hard to find first- and second-class certified instructors. To make matters worse, women educators often stayed in the profession for only a few years until they married. All of these schools were characterized by an abnormally high number of third-class teachers.²⁹ Crowded classrooms and unqualified teachers hardly provided the necessary atmosphere to combat illiteracy.

The issue of quality instruction erupted in Belle River in 1882 when the school board trustees, some of whom were French, introduced an English-only curriculum. *Le Progrès*, Windsor's French language newspaper, deplored the fact that the new schoolmistress could not speak a word of French in a school that hosted a substantial French-speaking majority.³⁰ Parents were slow to respond to this significant change in school policy, raising questions as to whether this population associated a quality education with English; was discouraged from seeking French instruction by school officials; or was simply indifferent to the issue of school altogether.

Not all francophones accepted the disappearance of French from the schools quietly. In 1883, militants organized the first Essex County chapter of the St. Jean-Baptiste Society (SSJB), and immediately hosted a regional conference for members from Essex and Kent counties in Windsor to discuss the concerns over the decline of French instruction in the area's schools. They passed the following resolution:

Que vu que la langue française est la langue de nos ancêtres, et que sa conservation parmi nous est une des principales sauvegardes de notre religion et de nos traditions nationales, le plus grand encouragement lui soit accordé surtout dans nos écoles et de la part de nos hommes d'État de notre origine.³¹

As early as the 1850s, attitudes towards the English language had divided area francophones. The editor of *Le Progrès*, Gaspard Pacaud³² criticized the growing rate of anglicization among francophones.³³ The school inspector for Paincourt and Kent County suggested that the reasons for the rate of anglicization could be found in attitudes towards French-language schooling. He noted in his report the eagerness to learn English among the francophones of Kent County and their essential ambivalence towards French: "Certains parents se plaignent que dans les écoles on n'enseigne pas assez d'anglais..."³⁴ The desire to learn English appeared to be an on-going concern for some parents who sought to offer their children better job prospects.³⁵ Public calls for French-only schools failed to elicit much support from the local population.³⁶

The struggle to maintain French instruction resurfaced in 1885 following a decision by the Windsor Separate School Board to eliminate the language from the curriculum at St. Alphonsus School. The local pastor, Theodore Wagner, a secular Belgian priest admitted that the board, dominated by anglophone trustees, had erred in leaving the school without a single francophone teacher. Wagner attributed this oversight to his recent absence due to illness. In a sermon on 16 March 1885, he assured the congregation he would restore French instruction at the first opportunity. However, Wagner actually blamed francophone parents for the deteriorating situation, for many had sent their children to English schools. Aside from mixed marriages, most francophone couples in Windsor passed French on to their offspring. Militants looked upon Fr. Wagner with suspicion.³⁷

During the nineteenth century, harmony on the education front was easy to maintain in most francophone farming communities in Essex and Kent counties given their relative isolation. Poor roads, the slow nature of horse power, and the high cost of transportation on the new railroads made it easy for these relatively homogeneous rural enclaves to preserve their language. Nevertheless, the presence of the railways did emphasize the need to do business in English when selling agricultural goods. In areas where the two cultures coexisted, tensions occasionally flared.³⁸

The issue of bilingual schools eventually came to the provincial stage when Conservative Opposition leader William Meredith, deploring their standards, called for their abolition in the 1887 and 1890 Ontario election campaigns. In response, Oliver Mowat's Liberal government tightened regulations for bilingual schools, prescribing a well-defined list of French books for all students. The Ministry of Education also established the second-class certificate as the minimum teaching requirement, and launched an education commission in 1889 to investigate the state of English in these schools with an eye to improving standards.³⁹ This new policy had implications in the Windsor border region as elsewhere, since school boards frequently hired third-class teachers and candidates with temporary certificates due in part to a shortage of certified francophone educators, and as a means of keeping wages low. Some school boards even hired English teachers for bilingual schools, on the pretext that there was a lack of qualified francophones. According to the editor of *Le Progrès*, the real reason behind this move was a prevailing belief among some Irish and French Catholic trustees that bilingual schools were inferior to English-only schools.⁴⁰

While opposition pressure mounted on the Mowat government to abolish the bilingual schools, Inspector Théodule Girardot released his report for the Windsor border region. He noted that nearly 60 percent of the bilingual schools were achieving satisfactory results.⁴¹ While pedagogical weaknesses persisted, parents and students enthusiastically accepted English instruction.⁴² In many cases, the calibre of spoken and written English was already noteworthy. Mowat's 1889 education commission also reported,

There are thirty schools in the County of Essex in which French is taught, and all were inspected by us. Many of these could scarcely be distinguished from English schools. In twelve schools, English is mainly the language of the school; in fourteen French and English are taught about equally; and in four, French is the language of the school, the teaching in English being limited to reading and translation. The work done in these schools is about equal to what is done in the ordinary English rural school.... Taking the standing of the pupils in English as the basis of classification, seventeen schools may be classed as good, six as fair, and seven as poor...⁴³

The commission report defended the traditional practice in the bilingual schools where the French child acquired some proficiency in the mother tongue before learning English. Two real problems affected these schools, argued the commissioners: when a student body was entirely French, pupils had greater difficulty mastering spoken English; and the onerous student-teacher ratio. The commissioners also noted that twenty-nine of thirty-four bilingual teachers in Essex spoke English with considerable fluency.⁴⁴

In 1889, school inspections of the Windsor border region reinforced much of the commission's report. In Anderdon School No. 6, near River Canard, even though Antoine Vermette had eighty-five students under his charge, the report stated of senior students that "Pupils did exceedingly well in all branches and spoke English well."⁴⁵ The greatest areas of weakness appeared in Sandwich East, Rochester, and Tilbury North Townships in Essex, and Dover Township in Kent, all of which hosted a considerable number of recent Quebec migrants. In rural schools like Sandwich East School School No. 4, John Dugal faced a class of 115 students on inspection day. The inspector reported,

The pupils in the junior division and twenty-one in the senior division do not learn English. All of the above are in the First and Second French readers. French is mainly the language of the school. Pupils are quite backward in English.⁴⁶

Similar reports appeared in Tilbury Township North, where Section Schools No. 1, 6, 8 and 10, and Dover Township School No. 3 were all classified as deficient in English, with many experiencing chronic student absentee rates approaching 50 percent.⁴⁷ In Rochester Township School No. 3, of the seventy students in attendance,

the inspector noted that “19 French [Canadian] pupils in the senior division do not learn French *by request of the parents*.”⁴⁸ Historian Yves Roby noted that a similar parental desire for more English at the expense of French appeared in sections of New England during the same period.⁴⁹ First-generation Quebec migrants like Pacaud seemed most passionate about preserving French and disagreed.

In spite of the commission’s criticisms of the schools and the widespread press coverage, Mowat held off the Conservatives in the subsequent elections, and the bilingual program was not abolished. The Premier cited the Windsor border region in his defence of the standards in these schools

There are some of these schools in which English has been well taught for many years, so that they are practically English schools. This is the case more particularly in the Counties of Essex and Kent.⁵⁰

To tighten overall standards, the government introduced a new school policy, known as Regulation 12, which limited French instruction to one hour in existing schools, and allowed for its introduction in new schools in communities where French was the prevailing language. Officials replaced French with English as the only language for teacher certification. The 1890 Ministry regulation restricted French instruction⁵¹ to schools where students could not understand English. This clause came to serve as a loophole allowing many institutions to continue French instruction as before, and eventually serving as a source for future controversy and conflict.⁵²

Early Disputes in the Francophone Parishes of the Windsor Border Region

The first serious struggle between a Catholic bishop and his francophone faithful in the Windsor border region took place in Detroit long before Michael Fallon’s arrival as Bishop of London. In 1845, Belgian-born Bishop Peter Paul Lefebvre attempted to seize a farm bequeathed to the French-speaking parish of Sainte-Anne to finance diocesan projects. Sainte-Anne’s remained the only civil corporation of its kind and dated back to the old French regime in 1701. Like Catholic churches in Quebec, the Bishop was not the titleholder of this church property. When the church building was demolished to make way for a new structure, the Bishop ordered the church wardens to surrender title to him to secure \$300,000 in parish funds. When they refused, Lefebvre withheld consent for the construction of a new church, and denied the wardens the sacraments until they submitted.⁵³ Just as the wardens feared, more than half of the funds were then used in parishes other than Sainte-Anne’s. In 1886, Bishop Caspar Burgess entrusted the French-speaking parish of St. Joachim’s in Detroit to Fr. Danzelger, an Alsatian German priest who preferred to use English in sermons. The parishioners expressed their displeasure when petitions for his removal failed. One night, four masked men armed with revolvers entered the rectory and ordered Danzelger to depart at once. The priest never returned.⁵⁴

Catholic bishops in Ontario could also prove unsympathetic to the French language cause in the nineteenth century. Toronto’s Archbishop John Joseph Lynch

advocated the integration of all Catholics into Ontario's English-speaking society. An Irishman convinced of the need for ethnic Catholics to follow the example of his countrymen in blending into the dominant anglophone culture, he was a vocal opponent of the French Canadian mantra of intertwining the French language with the Roman faith. Indeed, Lynch accused narrow-minded Quebec clergy of "antagonizing politicians and thereby endangering the rights and privileges of the Catholic church in Canada."⁵⁵ Lynch feared that the Quebec clergy's concern for the French language would eventually undermine the greater interests of the church by angering the English Protestant majority.

Language troubles stirred emotions following a public protest at St. Alphonsus Parish, Windsor in 1899. More than 200 francophones assembled at the church hall to petition for the reintroduction of their language at high mass. They called for the appointment of a francophone to a parish with three Irish priests but a congregation that was 50 percent French.⁵⁶ Journalist Gaspard Pacaud, representing the protestors, argued that an English-only policy endangered the faith of the French Canadians of Windsor, and appealed for fair play. He recalled the generous French Canadian donations of land, labour and supplies for the construction of the church edifice in 1858.⁵⁷ The petitioners proposed that both English and French could be used at each mass, and if this proved unworkable they offered an alternative option to their Irish co-religionists: separation into two parishes. In January 1901, Bishop John McEvey transferred J. Edmond Meunier, a native of Trois-Rivières, Quebec, to the Windsor church along with two bilingual Irish assistants.⁵⁸ The issue of language was settled for the moment.

Bilingual Schools in the Separate School System

Tension over bilingual schools involved religion as well as language. In 1863, the legislature of the United Province of Canada passed the Scott Act, with the support of representatives from Canada East (Quebec). This legislation granted Roman Catholic ratepayers the right in Canada West to withdraw their tax support from their local public schools and redirect it to establish separate schools.⁵⁹ Prior to the law, Catholic teachers in a number of public schools across the province hosted exclusively Catholic student bodies. Even with the Scott Act, the spread of designated Catholic separate schools was slow. Following the influx of Catholic families into the Protestant cities and a campaign by the press, the Orange Order and the Conservative party against the separate school system in the 1880s, Ontario bishops put a greater emphasis on the foundation of Catholic separate schools.⁶⁰ Between 1886 and 1890, twenty-seven public bilingual schools in eastern Ontario turned into separate schools.⁶¹ The abolition of the bilingual separate schools of Manitoba in 1890 exacerbated fears for the Catholic system. As a defensive measure, in 1893, Bishop Denis O'Connor of London directed all Catholic parents to send their children to Church-operated separate schools.⁶²

Many Catholics did not immediately obey O'Connor's command. In Belle River in 1894, Fr. J. Edmond Meunier directed his parishioners to transform Maidstone

Township Public School No. 1 into a Catholic school. Opposed to paying higher taxes, parishioners uprooted the school building one night and moved it four miles south beyond the parish boundary. From this site, the Robillard school, as it was known, continued to operate as a public school with a Catholic teacher and student body.⁶³

Father Lucien Beaudoin, pastor of Our Lady of the Lake parish in Sandwich East Township near Windsor faced similar difficulties. In 1893, O'Connor directed Beaudoin, a native of Quebec to assemble his congregation and organize a Catholic separate school. Just prior to the scheduled school meeting, parishioner Hypollite Mailloux conducted a door-to-door campaign to sabotage the measure.⁶⁴ Ratepayers voted to reject the initiative fearing that a separate school would result in higher taxes. The following year, O'Connor called upon Beaudoin to rally the parishioners behind his project again.⁶⁵ On 26 April 1894, through quiet diplomacy, Beaudoin had convinced enough parishioners to adhere to a separate school: *École Notre Dame*.⁶⁶ O'Connor then directed all Catholics in Sandwich East to send their children to the school or risk being denied the sacraments.⁶⁷

In 1893, while Beaudoin struggled to get his parishioners to support Catholic education more fervently, Windsor francophones fought to reverse the cancellation of French instruction at St. François and St. Alphonsus schools. *Le Progrès* suggested this maneuver was part of a quiet plot to hire unilingual English teachers for the bilingual schools. When school board president Charles McHugh failed to act on a petition to restore French, tensions mounted between Irish and French Catholics. A special committee was established to study the question. In September 1894, both schools reintroduced French as a result of public pressure by the local SSJB.⁶⁸ This incident provided a glimpse of the Irish-French conflict to come over the existence of bilingual schools within Ontario's Catholic separate school system.

In the more remote communities of Dover Township in Kent County, there existed little tension with the English majority. Here, most of the schools hosting a predominantly French Canadian student body were English-language schools. Robert Park, the Inspector of West Kent County offered this analysis of the problems in 1894:

... Speaking generally, the school work is much better done in those schools where the teacher has a command of both languages than in the eight schools I have referred to where the teacher is unable to speak to the children in French. The French people are most anxious that their children shall get a good command of English. Many of them think it useless for their children to learn French in school, some of them prefer a teacher who cannot speak French. But there is no question that whether bilingual readers be used or not- the proper teacher for these schools is one who has command of both languages.⁶⁹

This report on the bilingual schools reiterated the eagerness of the local French Canadian population to educate their children in English. Park believed that bilingual schools enabled francophone children to embrace English with greater efficacy,

but here was a sympathetic report alleging parental disinterest in French instruction.

The struggle for quality French instruction continued in the Windsor border region in March, 1904, when Inspector David Chenay visited Sandwich East Separate School No. 1 and noted several problems:

the teaching of French in the school has not received the share of attention to which it is entitled—through no willful neglect of course. But the teachers assure me that henceforth they will give the subject their most serious consideration.⁷⁰

Chenay's report diplomatically chided the St. Joseph's sisters, two Irish nuns, for showing a lack of enthusiasm for French instruction. Beaudoin had taught the nuns the rudiments of French in the church rectory. Chenay also deplored the overcrowding in St. Edward's school in Walkerville, noting the presence of sixty-two students in the junior class. Finally, he condemned the school board's practice of paying teachers half of the salary earned by educators at the nearby public school.⁷¹

The bilingual schools issue reemerged on the provincial scene after 1905, when Ontario voters elected James Pliny Whitney's Conservative party. As Premier, Whitney commissioned Chief Inspector F. W. Merchant to conduct a secret study of Ottawa's English-French schools. The 1909 Report claimed that about three-quarters of the children who graduated from the fourth form were bilingual, while only 15 percent of third form pupils could make such a claim. However, Merchant noted that very few students ever reached the fourth form.⁷² In short, most students never acquired a solid grasp of the English language, and thus failed to integrate into English-speaking society. Liberal and Conservative voices alike called on the Whitney government to address this problem.⁷³ It responded by launching a province-wide inquiry to determine the extent of the bilingual school troubles. The struggle for French instruction would take on a whole new meaning with the introduction of Regulation XVII in 1912.

Conclusion

The language and school struggles of francophones in the Windsor border region predated the infamous battles with Bishop Fallon and Regulation XVII. Despite a long tradition of French settlement and schooling, by the end of the nineteenth century, the old Detroit River settlements adapted to a bilingual culture and hosted schools that were largely English in nature. Only a few of the recently-settled French Canadian communities on Lake St. Clair continued to host bilingual schools that remained largely French in nature. In 1901, the family still served as a vital social institution for the linguistic stability of the francophone population in the region. However, urbanization and industrialization placed new challenges on this complex population involving the French language in their schools and their churches, most notably in Windsor.

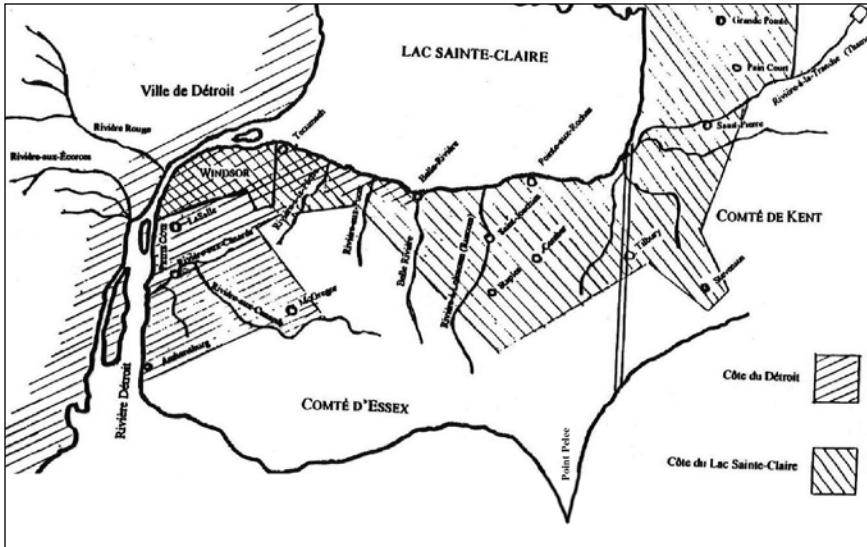
Signs of disagreement among francophones over the merits of a French-language education in the Windsor border region appeared in the 1850s. While many

francophones considered a solid education in English as crucial to success in the work world, some expressed an ambivalence if not outright opposition to French language instruction as ornamental or economically impractical: in Sandwich in the 1850s; in Belle River and Rochester Township in the 1880s; in Windsor from the 1880s onwards; and in Kent County in the 1890s. The region, after all, was a predominantly English-speaking milieu. According to historian Yves Roby, discord over this issue also existed among French Canadian migrants in New England.

This work notes similarities to Chad Gaffield's work on Prescott County's nineteenth century francophones: advocates of French language instruction struggled with parsimonious school trustees in Essex and Kent Counties; bilingual schools also suffered from overcrowded classes, underpaid and unqualified teachers and a chronic rate of student absenteeism. The struggles facing these schools left them to carry a stigma of inefficiency. Unlike the cases explored by Gaffield, however, many of the bilingual schools were in older settlements or the border cities, where English predominated in the classroom and illiteracy rates were lower than in recently settled rural areas. In addition, experienced French-speaking trustees served on local school boards. At issue here was a disagreement among francophones over the merits of French instruction. While Gaffield and Robert Choquette rightfully examine the bilingual schools conflict pitting francophones against Protestants and Irish Catholics, more work needs to be done to determine the conflict within Ontario's French-speaking population.

Clearly, francophones were not the only players involved in the bilingual schools struggle. By the early 1880s, a growing number of anglophones, locally, in Queen's Park, and across the province began to work for the elimination of the "inefficient" bilingual schools. Signs of the ensuing Irish-French dispute surfaced when trustees at the Windsor Separate School Board resisted efforts to reintroduce French instruction where it was removed. Irish Catholic fears for the survival of the Catholic separate school system were rooted in Conservative attacks on bilingual schools and their calls for one English public system. Their fears would only be heightened when Manitoba's English Protestant majority eliminated the province's Catholic bilingual school system in 1890. The Mowat government's introduction of Regulation 12 in 1890, gave credence to the criticisms of Ontario's bilingual schools by establishing a minimum standard for English instruction, and setting restrictions for French instruction.

Disputes over language and schools also involved Catholic Church leaders and their francophone faithful in the Windsor border region. The ambivalence of priests like Theodore Wagner, and the bishops in Detroit, London and Toronto to concerns for the French language began well before Bishop Fallon. Resistance to non-francophone priests in Windsor and Detroit, and incidents of opposition to separate schools and the consequent tax increases indicated the presence of a willful rather than a submissive francophone population, similar to that of Prescott County in Chad Gaffield's work. These protests were a prelude to the opening battles in a language war that would eventually engulf the francophone communities of the Windsor border region and the province of Ontario with the introduction of Regulation XVII and the arrival of Michael Francis Fallon as the Catholic Bishop of London.



Map, Windsor Border Region, Essex and Kent Counties, Province of Ontario, 1910

- ////////// Fort Detroit French (Canayan) settlements
- ~~~~~ French Canadian (Recent Quebec migrant) settlements

Notes

- 1 Chad Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of the French Language Controversy in Ontario* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987).
- 2 For a detailed account of Fallon's crusade against the bilingual schools, and the Irish-French conflict within the Catholic Church, see Robert Choquette, *Language, Schools and Religion: English-French Conflict in Ontario* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975).
- 3 E.J. Lajeunesse, *The Windsor Border Region*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), xxxix-xl.
- 4 Téléphore Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Canadiens du Michigan et du comté d'Essex* (Montreal: La Gazette, 1895), 143.
- 5 F.X. Dufaux to Bishop Hubert, 24 août 1787, Archives de l'Archévêché de Québec, v.47, as quoted in Lajeunesse, *Windsor Border Region*, 296.
- 6 Arthur Godbout, *Les origines de nos écoles franco-ontariennes* (Ottawa: Presses universitaires d'Ottawa, 1978), 139.
- 7 *Le Progrès*, 30 March 1882.
- 8 Education Department of Ontario, *Sessional Papers No.7*, 1889.
- 9 C.B. Sissons, *Bilingual Schools in Canada* (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1917), 17-18.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 11 For practical and political purposes, Gigon was hired. Sandwich was an isolated pioneer community and this likely discouraged settlers in an era of slow transportation before the railways.
- 12 Lina Gouger, "Le peuplement fondateur de Détroit, 1701-1765" (Ph.D. thesis, Laval University, 2002), 121-22.

- 13 Cornelius Jaenen, "L'Ancien Régime au pays d'en haut," *Les Franco-Ontariens* (Ottawa: Les presses universitaires de l'université d'Ottawa, 1993): 39.
- 14 Obituaries in the early 1910s commemorate the deaths of certain pioneer families from Quebec who arrived in the Windsor border region in the late 1820s.
- 15 For more on urbanization and industrialization in Essex county, consult John Clarke, *Land, Power and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).
- 16 Madeleine Leal, ed. *La Paroisse Saint-Joachim*, (Windsor: Chamberlain Press, 1982), 220-21. Quebec migrants were from Lotbinière, Rimouski, Beauport, Berthier, Maskinongé, Joliette, Laprairie and Napierville. See also Father A. Gobeil, "Le Passé et l'avenir des Canadiens français d'Essex et de Kent," Unpublished manuscript presented to the ACFEO Regional Congress, Windsor, Ontario, 8 October 1942, 208.
- 17 Canada, *Report on the Census, 1901*, vol.1, Table 4.
- 18 Using census statistics to determine language transfer rates poses problems. For example, the researcher must consider the biases of the enumerator, since they recorded the information rather than each citizen. Some enumerators likely had an agenda to show the "muscle" of the French-speaking community or its weakness. In addition, the respondents' answers may not always have been accurate or honest. Census statistics do not indicate a significant rate of language transfer, in spite of the express concerns of leading francophones in the area. In the census for the language spoken by preschool children, in a truly bilingual household or anglicizing environment, the child would pick up English even before school. The 1901 census numbers indicate that most preschoolers could only speak French, suggesting that in fact, French remained the preponderant language in the overwhelming number of francophone households.
- 19 Of ninety-three mixed francophone-non-francophone marriages with children in Windsor, forty-eight of them were also mixed Protestant-Catholic marriages. Most of these families raised their children in the Catholic faith. Just over half of the mixed Catholic marriages sampled occurred between Irish and French.
- 20 Refers to the sample of old French-speaking Detroit River Canayen communities of Petite Côte, River Canard, McGregor, and Sandwich East township, and the French Canadian communities of Belle River, St. Joachim, Stoney Point, Tilbury North Township districts 2 and 4, Tecumseh, Comber, Staples and the Kent county communities of Paincourt and Grande Pointe, but does not include the entire rural francophone population.
- 21 Denotes the actual number of people identified as "French Canadian" in the 1911 census who specifically indicated an ability to speak French. The census did not distinguish between the Canayens and French Canadians.
- 22 Essex and Kent Counties hosted a unique francophone people that descended from the soldiers, trappers, and traders of Fort Detroit. This population spoke a unique dialect and lived on the coast of the Detroit River in the communities of Petite Côte, River Canard, and McGregor, and Sandwich East township. Those francophones referred to as French Canadians were primarily first- and second-generation migrant families from the province of Quebec. See Marcel Beneteau, "Aspects de la tradition orale comme marqueurs d'identité culturelle: Le vocabulaire et la chanson traditionnelle des francophones du Détroit" (Ph.D. thesis, Laval University, 2001).
- 23 Historian Michel Verrette has challenged the validity of using census data as the basis of determining rates of illiteracy. Since the questions vary from decade to decade, he asserts that in fact other sources, namely, the civil and church marriage registries, offer a better source for measuring literacy. Such sources (registries) required proof of literacy through the signature, which he argues is a method that best holds up to critical scrutiny. He adds that the census statistics probably involved people who did not answer literacy questions honestly and is unreliable. However, if one discards such data on the basis

- that people may not be honest, as Verrette suggests, or that enumerators might tamper with results to serve an agenda, the historian must then demonstrate that this was in fact the case. Census information is self-reported and more directly answers the query regarding literacy than a mere signature. As Harvey Graff argues, while not guaranteeing absolute precision, “self-reported illiteracy and literacy [in the census] in Upper Canada did not form random patterns, solely the result of improper enumeration, internal errors or the inattention of some enumerators.” He adds, that in 1861, the literacy rates in four Upper Canadian cities sampled were similar, varying between 90 and 93 percent among adults, while isolated rural counties with recent settlement or high immigration patterns and poor farming conditions often had substantially lower rates of literacy. The Windsor border region followed this very pattern of similar results in urban and rural areas. Hence, the census should in fact be recognized for its relative reliability, and deserves to be considered as a valid historical source. See Michel Verrette, *L'Alphabétisation au Québec 1660–1900: En marche vers la modernité culturelle* (Sillery, Quebec: Editions Septentrion, 2002); Harvey Graff, “What the 1861 Census Can Tell Us About Literacy: A Reply,” *Social History* VIII, no. 16 (November, 1975): 347.
- 24 This study corroborates Fernand Ouellet’s analysis of the 1871 census for Malden and Sandwich townships which determined that this particular population had a higher rate of illiteracy than either white anglophones or the small black minority of the region. See Fernand Ouellet, *L’Ontario français dans le Canada français avant 1911* (Sudbury: Éditions Prises de parole, 2005), 395-401.
- 25 In order to clarify the rate of illiteracy in the population, only those persons older than ten (having had an opportunity therefore to receive some schooling) and younger than forty-five, were surveyed to determine the extent of the problem among youths and young to middle-aged adults. Many older adults lived in areas that did not have access to schooling until the 1860s. Even the town of Sandwich lacked a school in the 1850s. All cases of illiteracy in all cultures in the districts sampled were recorded.
- 26 Fr. Lucien Beaudoin of Sandwich East reported the constant struggle to get poor fishing families to educate their children rather than enlisting them in the family business. See Canada Census, 1901.
- 27 Graff, “What the 1861 Census Can Tell Us,” 348.
- 28 F.X. Chauvin, “Origines de la race canadienne-française dans les comtés d’Essex et de Kent. Essai d’histoire régionale” Unpublished manuscript, ACFEO, 1950; *L’Opinion publique*, tome XIII, 23 février 1882, 86. The two missionaries were Abbé Casgrain and Joseph Marmette of Montreal.
- 29 Gobeil, “Le Passé et l’avenir des Canadiens français d’Essex et de Kent,” 218.
- 30 *Le Progrès*, le 18 janvier 1882.
- 31 “Proposition de Francois-Xavier Meloche, appuyé par Hyppolite Girardot,” as cited in René Dionne’s “Une première prise de parole collective,” *Les Cahiers Charlevoix*1, (1995); 42. Girardot was a bilingual teacher in the town of Sandwich and the son of school inspector Theodule Girardot.
- 32 Gaspard Pacaud, would serve as MPP for Essex North from 1887 to 1890, but lost his Liberal Party re-nomination to an anglophone faction that opposed his overtly pro-French tendencies.
- 33 *Le Progrès*, 20 December 1884. Two local newspapers, one Rouge (*Le Progrès*) and the other Bleu (*Le Courrier d’Essex*) would spar continuously throughout 1885 over the issue of French-language schooling.
- 34 *Le Courrier d’Essex*, 14 February 1885.
- 35 *Le Progrès*, 21 February 1885.
- 36 *Le Courrier d’Essex*, 14 February 1885. Journalist and French immigrant Auguste Bodard of the *Courrier* did not understand this concern. He actually advocated a French-only education until age ten to combat English Protestant ideals. « Nous

- voulons que nos enfants jusqu'à 9 et 10 ans apprennent le français seulement et c'est pour cela que nous demandons dans Windsor des écoles françaises élémentaires. » Bodard left Windsor within the year, to recruit French immigrants to the Canadian west. See Robert Painchaud, *Un rêve français dans le peuplement de la Prairie* (Saint-Boniface: Éditions des Plaines, 1987). Pacaud's *Le Progrès* disagreed and would advocate for the existing bilingual system.
- 37 *Le Courrier d'Essex*, 21 March 1885.
- 38 In Woodslee in 1885, French Canadians clashed with Irish Protestants over a provocative shooting target: a stuffed effigy with the conspicuous label, "Louis Riel." The largest of the French Canadians, named Lupien, boldly walked over to the dummy and carried it off. *Le Progrès*, 8 November 1885.
- 39 Choquette, *Language, Schools and Religion*, 57.
- 40 *Le Progrès*, 14 and 28 February 1889. Pacaud actually wrote that public perception that bilingual schools were inferior compelled school commissioners in Belle River and Windsor to employ English teachers. "Déjà une partie de nos syndics d'écoles les croient inférieures aux Anglais. Je regrette de vous dire que cette année dans deux de nos meilleures écoles françaises, les syndics ont engagé des maîtres anglais, les croyant supérieurs aux nôtres." See also Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict*, 178-79.
- 41 *Le Progrès*, le 19 septembre 1889.
- 42 In 1889, Gaspard Pacaud, appealed to Inspector Theodule Girardot to modify teacher certification exams for the benefit of French Canadian candidates in Essex County. Fr. François Marseille, a member of the Windsor Separate School Board, rejected Pacaud's request warning that such concessions would leave the schools in a permanent state of inferiority vis-à-vis the English language schools. Girardot echoed Marseille's comments stating that he in fact was already granting many teacher candidates latitude in spite of their examination scores. Indeed, Girardot noted that not a single new teacher had earned the minimum score required to pass the certification exams in 1888.
- 43 Ontario Ministry of Education. "Report of Commissioners on Public Schools in Ontario in which the French Language is Taught," 1889; 8. Published government document, on microfilm, RG 2-158, PAO.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 8-9.
- 45 School Inspector's Report, North Essex, Ministry of Education, 1889, PAO, microfilm, RG 2-42-0-1976.
- 46 *Ibid.* In such large classes, older students 'volunteered' as assistants.
- 47 School Inspector's Report, West Kent County, Minister of Education, 1895. PAO, microfilm, RG 2-42-0-1976. In Kent, all teachers held certificates, but little English was taught in Dover no. 3.
- 48 "Report of Commissioners," 30-40.
- 49 Yves Roby, *Les Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre: Rêves et réalités*, (Sillery: Les Éditions Septentrion, 2000), 99. Roby argues that second and third generation families were far more eager to abandon French than first generation migrants from Quebec.
- 50 Oliver Mowat, "Public Schools in the French Districts," *Sectarian Issues and the History of the Present Position of the Public Schools in the French Districts* (Toronto: Hunter Rose and Co., 1890), 21.
- 51 Victor Simon, *Le Règlement XVII: Sa mise en vigueur à travers l'Ontario, 1912-1927*, (Sudbury: Société historique du Nouvel Ontario, 1983), 6.
- 52 Robert Choquette, *L'Ontario français, historique*, (Montréal: Études vivantes, 1980), 170-73.
- 53 Téléphore Saint-Pierre, 262-63. (See footnote #4.)
- 54 *Ibid.*, 265.

- 55 Roberto Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 21.
- 56 *Le Progrès*, le 24 mars, 1899.
- 57 See also Choquette, *Language, Schools and Religion*, 117-34; and Perin, *Rome in Canada*, 203.
- 58 *Le Progrès*, le 17 janvier, 1901.
- 59 For more detail on the history of Catholic separate schools in Ontario see Franklin Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Upper Canada* (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1956), 44, 48; and Franklin Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario* (Toronto: Thomson-Nelson and Sons, 1964).
- 60 Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario*, 173.
- 61 *Report of the Commissioners on Schools in the Counties of Prescott and Russell in which the French Language is Taught*. (Toronto, 1891), 17.
- 62 *The Toronto Mail*, 8 August 1894 and Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario*, 179. Between 1872 and 1894, 159 more schools and 16,000 more pupils entered the separate system.
- 63 *St. Simon and St. Jude Parish, 150th Anniversary Edition* (Windsor: Chamberlain Press, 1985), 130.
- 64 Lucien Beaudoin to Bishop Denis O'Connor, 13 February 1893, CRCCF, C2/93/1.
- 65 O'Connor to Beaudoin, 27 January 1894, CRCCF, C2/93/1.
- 66 Contract between L.A. Beaudoin and Contractors Wm. Dahl and A. Vickerd, 26 April 1894, CRCCF, C2/93/1.
- 67 O'Connor received requests from Sandwich East Catholics for permission to send their children to a closer public school. Joseph Janisse wrote to the Bishop regarding the delicate health of his children. O'Connor to Beaudoin, 26 February 1895. After a period of grace, Janisse and his family were cut off from the sacraments, and only in the fall of 1897 did he send his children to the Catholic school. O'Connor to Beaudoin, 10 November 1897.
- 68 *Le Progrès*, le 31 août, 1894.
- 69 School Inspector's Report, West Kent County, 1 February 1895.
- 70 Report of D. Chenay, Inspector to the Trustees of Separate School No. 1, Sandwich East, Walkerville Ontario, 12 March 1904. CRCCF, C2/ 93/1-10.
- 71 Report of David Chenay, Inspector to the Trustees of St. Edward School, Walkerville, c. October 1905. CRCCF, ACFE0 records, C2/93/6.
- 72 David Welch, "The Social Construction of Franco-Ontarian Interests Towards French Language Schooling" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1988), 90. Schools were broken into four forms, with first form somewhat comparable to today's first and second grades.
- 73 *Ibid.*