

**Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice.** *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. Pp. xiv, 418.

When future historians review the historiography of Canadian education I suspect that they will undoubtedly shake their heads in admiration and sagely conclude that 1988 was truly a banner year. And they will reach that conclusion because in the same year that Bruce Curtis published a remarkably good book—*Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871*—Susan Houston and Alison Prentice also published a superbly executed study of the development of public education in Ontario from the pioneer days of the 1830s through the resignation of Egerton Ryerson as Chief Superintendent of Education in 1876. I can think of no comparable year in the historiography of American, British, or Australian education that produced two works of such importance and finesse.

Houston and Prentice organize *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* around a particular ontological focus and a specific methodological principle. On the one hand they describe *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* as an “investigation of schooling itself—a phenomenon of both private and public life long predating the legislative enactments of the mid-Victorian decades that have so preoccupied historians of education in

the past.” They do not dismiss the importance of efforts to investigate “the relationship of public school systems to capitalism” or to “themes of social discipline and moral regulation,” but they are concerned with “the limitations of too broadly conceived explanations” of educational change. In particular, such investigations tend to ignore or downplay the “multiple intentions and effects” that either informed or followed educational policy decisions. On the other hand, by paying “careful attention to words, to their shifting meanings over time” rather than employing the “more abstractly defined analytic categories” of most critical historical studies, they promise to reveal the ways in which “language” served as “battlegrounds for competing interests” and to point to the “gradations of social class and the relations between class, power and education in nineteenth century Ontario” (pp. xi-xii).

Houston and Prentice divide *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* into three parts. Part One surveys the history of “pioneer schooling” from around 1800 through the late 1830s in Upper Canada. Here they develop three arguments. First they find that pioneer Upper Canadians developed and vigorously used a wide variety of informal forms of education—apprenticeships, home education, tutors, and governesses—and more formal forms of schooling—private-venture schools, religious schools, industrial schools, monitorial day schools, charity

schools, Sunday schools, proprietary academies—decades prior to the onset of systematic provincial legislation in the 1840s. Second, they argue that school attendance was periodic, irregular, and determined by the seasonal rhythms and needs of the family economy and by individual idiosyncrasy rather than by the demands of the state or the school itself. Third, they argue that, prior to the development of a system of public schools after 1840, little distance separated the culture of the school and the culture of the family and local neighbourhood.

Parts Two and Three examine the educational reforms of the mid-nineteenth century under the aegis of Egerton Ryerson and the ambitious programme of systematization that the reformers subsequently pursued. Houston and Prentice eschew an analysis of the political and “legal intricacies of mid-nineteenth century educational reform” in favour of one that focuses on the “flavour and significance” of the reforms, and in that spirit, they develop four main arguments.

First, unlike Bruce Curtis, who, they suggest, identified “governability”—“the creation of subjects who were capable of being governed” and hopefully of learning the capacity for “governing themselves”—as the “the central focus of mid-nineteenth century school reform,” Houston and Prentice claim that the ideology of school reform encompassed both “socio-economic” as well as “political” issues and that, in fact, the two strands “were part and parcel of contemporary perceptions” that were

“inseparable” (p. 100). (However, it should be noted that Houston and Prentice seem to move very close to Curtis’ position in identifying “governability” as the key concern of the reformers. See, for example, pp. 103-5.) In addition, Houston and Prentice demonstrate that the differences between Tories and Reformers mostly came down to differences over appropriate means rather than objectives (pp. 106-7). Furthermore, Houston and Prentice conclude that the reformers persistently lamented and occasionally excoriated the quality of teaching, the character of teachers, and the lowly social status accorded teachers in most communities.

Second, Houston and Prentice systematically describe the “systematization” of schooling that began with the legislation of 1841 and continued on for the next thirty years: the creation of a central bureaucracy run by a powerful superintendent; the integration of local school administration into a centrally controlled system of inspection and control; the extension of an intricate and elaborate web of rules, regulations, and accountability mechanisms over the most minute details of local schooling; the halting displacement of a stratified system of independent common schools and grammar schools by a clearly articulated and integrated system of graded public schooling that extended from elementary schooling to high schooling; the carefully controlled state-sponsored professionalization of teaching through the creation of a Normal School, new certification

requirements, and higher salaries in the hope that together they would improve and standardize classroom practices across the province and elevate the social status of teachers in local communities (and thus diminish the degree of parental meddling in internal school affairs) without granting teachers an iota of control over instructional matters; the introduction of graded textbooks (the Irish Readers) in the hope that they would simultaneously eliminate the flood of American textbooks and introduce progressive ideas of graded instruction into Canadian classrooms; the creation of a centrally controlled examination system to carefully regulate promotions into the high school and to provide a further means of controlling classroom instruction; the attempted rationalization of classroom discipline and motivation by the avoidance of corporal punishment and the adoption of progressive ideas about student motivation; the studied extension of public funds to parochial schools in order to eliminate opposition from religious minorities, especially Roman Catholics, to the public school system and to gain a measure of administrative control over curricula matters in these schools; the gradual introduction of a whole new technology of instruction—blackboards, object lessons, proficiency prizes—as funds permitted; and so on.

Third, Houston and Prentice locate the dynamics of systematization in two principal sources. One was the elitist, evangelical, and paternalistic commitment of Ryerson and his backers to create a province-wide

system of carefully controlled schools that would ensure political stability by teaching civility, good manners, Christian respectability, and self-discipline. The second was the growth of local demands for the effective regulation of the schools that followed, rather than preceded, the school legislation of the 1840s, although these demands preceded, rather than followed, industrialization (see in particular, pp. 154-56, 246-47, 272). Following Carl Kaesle's lead, Houston and Prentice thus conclude that school discipline resembled, rather than imitated, the discipline of the factory because both kinds of organization confronted similar organizational problems, and that there was considerable popular sentiment in favour of the new school system.

Finally, Houston and Prentice emphasize that one very important effect of the introduction of free schools and centrally directed systematization was to destroy the earlier mix of informal and formal schooling and replace it with an extensive state-funded and controlled monopoly system of free schooling. As a consequence, pretty much as Ryerson intended, parents found it increasingly difficult to resist the cultural terms on which schooling was offered them, parental control over children's schooling declined, and a gap developed between the culture of the family and the culture of the school that grew larger over time as systematization progressed (pp. 56-57, 274, 344). In addition, family life became increasingly organized around the demands of schooling rather than

the family economy (pp. 343-44). Of course, not everything that Ryerson intended came to pass and a lot happened that he did not intend; all too often, consequences differed from intentions and policies had little or no effect. Central office regulations were often seriously compromised or ignored at the local level; the vast majority of local schools did not bother to hire graduates of the Normal School; school attendance remained stubbornly irregular in rural areas and among the poorer sections of the new urban working class; chauvinistic U.S. textbooks still managed to find their way into Canadian classrooms; even as officials recommended that teachers base instruction on student interests, at the same time the very same officials continued to insist on continuous drill and memorization; etc, etc.

On the whole, *Schooling and Scholars* is exceptionally well written and an immensely impressive work. It is particularly good in describing the character of education prior to the educational reforms of the 1840s and the process of systematization after 1840. Of course, *Schooling and Scholars* does not do everything that other historians might consider important, and it is perhaps worthwhile to briefly consider what it is that Houston and Prentice did not do, although in doing so I do not wish to diminish the contribution that *Schooling and Scholars* makes to the historiography of Canadian education.

First, Houston and Prentice pay a price for focusing so intently on the "internal history" of schooling at the expense of what might be called its external history. While *Schooling and*

*Scholars* does provide a good sense of the "flavour and significance" of nineteenth-century schooling, they fail to develop an explicit and formal account of the dynamics of institutional and organizational change. Such an account requires a focus on the nexus of causal relations that link the school on the one hand and the political economy and the social structure on the other. It is not that Houston and Prentice are unaware of such relations; indeed, *Schooling and Scholars* is full of suggestive hints indicating that the authors are quite aware of their importance (see, for example, 138ff., 154ff., 190ff., 218ff., 232ff., 316ff.). But these hints are never developed into a systematic theory of educational change that links changes in economic life, the process of state formation, and processes of class formation with changes in school organization and control. In particular, while *Schooling and Scholars* provides a wonderfully rich description of "systematization" in the aggregate, it fails to engage available theories of organizational structure—Weberian, institutionalist—that might help frame a systematic explanation of the institutional dynamics responsible for "systematization." Nor do the authors develop a number of detailed case studies that would pin down the particular political context and dynamics of systematization at the local level. In the same vein, although Houston and Prentice occasionally describe and occasionally hint at the dynamics of changes in the social demography of school attendance, their descriptions are limited and partial. Given the

importance they assign to popular demand for state intervention in schooling, we might have expected a far more systematic treatment than they provide of changes in, and the dynamics of, the social demography of schooling. I recognize that this is not what Houston and Prentice set out to do, but without it one is left with a lot of unanswered questions about the sources of these changes and thus about the origins of the popular demand for state intervention. For example, to what extent were changes in the social demography of schooling associated with the continuing proletarianization of the labour force, the onset of the industrial revolution and the reorganization of the labour process, the development of strategies of social mobility through credentialling and ambient processes of class formation, and changes in gender relations?

Second, Houston and Prentice do not fully exploit their insight that over the course of the nineteenth century the imperatives of school attendance displaced the demands of the family economy as a primary organizing principle of family life in Upper Canada. I recognize that to have done so would have required a social history of schooling and family life that Houston and Prentice did not set out to do (although Chapter One creates expectations along these lines), but it is an issue that raises some very important questions bearing on their account of the dynamics of systematization. For example, how is this change related to other (sometimes overlapping) structuring principles: in particular, how were

these changes related to the increasing integration of local economies into regional, national, and even international economies, to changes in class and gender relations and processes of class formation, or to the development of a relatively independent mass youth culture outside the control of the family, the church, the neighbourhood, and the school? What role did the school play as a site and organizer of processes of class formation and the production of new forms of class and gender-based inequalities? How important was the extension of schooling as a site of, and mechanism for, the process of state formation?

Third, I have some reservations about Houston and Prentice's claim that the nineteenth century witnessed a growing cultural gap between the school and society. I have no difficulty with their related claim that the systematization of schooling increased the cultural gap between family life and school life, but the corollary claim fails to convince me. As Houston and Prentice themselves indicate in *Schooling and Scholars*, school officials increasingly organized the internal life of schooling around competitive examinations, prizes, and rewards, despite serious misgivings from some parents and commentators. In effect, educational officials, led by Ryerson, organized the classroom into a pedagogical facsimile of the competitive marketplace outside the school. To this extent, therefore, the culture of the classroom did not so much contradict the market culture of the surrounding society as imitate it. And if this is so, how might we

understand the social and organizational processes that constructed these kinds of relationships between the market revolution and the mid-nineteenth-century revolution in schooling, and what connection do they have to what Bruce Curtis called, following the late Michel Foucault, the “disciplinary pedagogy” of Ontario schooling?

None of these concerns detracts in a serious way from the genuine accomplishments of *Schooling and Scholars*. All said and done, Susan Houston and Alison Prentice have published an exceptionally well-researched, tightly organized, lucidly written, and cogently argued work. As they say Down-Under, “Great work, mates!!”

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**William Westfall.** *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989. Pp. xii, 273. \$34.95.

Mindful of conflict of interest, as who isn't these days, I herewith publicly declare that I am among a number of persons thanked by Professor William Westfall in the acknowledgements that head his book, *Two Worlds*: the second in the McGill-Queen's series, *Studies in the History of Religion*, edited by George A. Rawlyk. Yet anyone should quickly recognize that my own role

regarding this work was pretty remote and minimal. It was merely that of a graduate seminar instructor at Toronto who may have helped to bring Bill to religion—as a subject, that is—and hence in a most general way towards a thesis, not done under my supervision, which eventually led to the volume we now have before us. I certainly admired the initial thesis when some years back I shared in examining it. I still more admire the final published product, which goes well beyond. That being said, I have indicated my “interest” and cleared my conscience (to my own satisfaction anyway), and will feel free to present an assuredly favourable review of Westfall's study. For it does appear to me a well-conceived and executed inquiry into the past religious culture of Ontario, of premium value for both Canadian national and regional history; and, considering that educational history is so intimately linked with cultural history, of much significance also to the Canadian concerns of this particular journal.

While a journal review cannot properly cover the full, detailed finding of a substantial book, let it here be noted of the work as a whole that its author traces the mid-nineteenth-century emergence of a widely shared ethos in Victorian Ontario's two cultural worlds, the sacred and the secular. This emerging ethos came powerfully to succeed earlier, much sharper sectarian divisions in the province, chiefly those between Anglicanism and Methodism as leading social and credal components of a predominantly Protestant community: the former testifying to