

## THE HIGH SCHOOL AND THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY IN WORKING-CLASS HAMILTON, 1890-1940

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The material existence of the working class has always depended on two focal points of economic activity—the waged workplace and the family household. Capitalists provided wages, but workers organized themselves in small family units to share that income and arrange the necessary paid and unpaid labour—a process that has come to be known as a family-wage economy. Within this system of domestic economic co-operation, the distribution of work responsibilities and economic benefit was far from equitable, principally because of male privilege and the subordination of females and the young. But it remained an elemental form of working-class survival within industrial capitalist society for several generations after the onset of industrial capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century.

In recent years, we have learned a good deal about how family-wage economies worked in Canada, as urban working-class families lost their ability to support themselves through agricultural and household production and had to put together their own combination of material and human resources to survive with no regular income but wages.<sup>1</sup> Typically, the male head of household would find a wage-earning job in the industrial capitalist labour market, while his wife performed unpaid labour in the household. Yet the increasingly potent ideology of the male breadwinner earning what we now call a “family wage” (that is, one capable of supporting the whole family) flew in the face of reality for countless working-class families. Low wages, unemployment, illness, injury, or death regularly taxed the ingenuity of working-class housewives to economize and improvise or to find some new sources of income. Equally important was mobilizing the wage-earning capacities of the children in the household. The growth of new industrial capitalist enterprises in Canada in the 1860s and 1870s allowed urban working-class families to send out their young adolescent children, especially their sons, in much larger numbers to seek full-time waged work.<sup>2</sup> By

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1. See, in particular, Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age and Gender in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); and B. Bradbury, ed., *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992).
  2. Ian Davey and Michael Katz, Chad Gaffield and David Levine, and Bettina Bradbury all found that the percentage of boys over age twelve attending school in Hamilton,

the time the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour passed through central and eastern Canadian cities in the late 1880s, workers and their bosses had plenty of stories to tell about the use and abuse of this juvenile labour in the heart of the new industrial economy.<sup>3</sup>

We know far less about what happened to this kind of household economy in Canada in the new age of monopoly capitalism and mass production that began to take shape after 1890. There is now a considerable literature on working-class incomes in the early twentieth century, but most of it has focused on the highly controversial issue of the real wages of individual workers, usually heads of household, and the standard of living that resulted from such meagre earnings.<sup>4</sup> Within that debate, scant attention has been paid to the notion that workers were grouped in household units that co-operated to some degree in assuring their economic survival and material progress (such as building or purchasing a house). This article, then, has two purposes. First, it will outline the persistence of a late nineteenth-century form of working-class household economy until at least 1920

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Montreal, and Orillia was lower in 1871 than in 1861. Ian E. Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class: School Attendance in Hamilton, Ontario, 1851-1891" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975); Michael Katz and Ian E. Davey, "Youth and Early Industrialization in a Canadian City," in *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family*, ed. John Demos and Sarane Spende Bouccock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 93-98; Chad Gaffield and David Levine, "Dependence and Adolescence on the Canadian Frontier: Orillia, Ontario in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *History of Education Quarterly* 18, 1 (Spring 1978): 42-44; Bettina Bradbury, "Women and Wage Labour in a Period of Transition: Montreal, 1861-1881," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 17, 33 (May 1984): 118-20.

3. Greg Kealey, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (Abridged) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).
4. See Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), and "Urban Working-Class Incomes and Real Incomes in 1921: A Comparative Analysis," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 16, 31 (May 1983): 145-67; Eleanor A. Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," *BC Studies* 51 (Autumn 1981): 3-62; Gordon Bertram and Michael Percy, "Real Wage Trends in Canada, 1900-1926: Some Provisional Estimates," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 12, 1 (May 1979): 229-312; Edward J. Chambers, "New Evidence on the Living Standards of Toronto Blue Collar Workers in the Pre-1914 Era," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 19, 38 (November 1986): 295-314; Ian Drummond, *Progress Without Planning: The Economic History of Ontario from Confederation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 224-31; David Frank, "The Miner's Financier: Women in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917," *Atlantis* 8, 2 (Spring 1983): 137-43.

in one of Canada's leading manufacturing centres, Hamilton, Ontario. For such an analysis, we are fortunate in being able to build on rich studies of family patterns in that city in the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup> and on a major oral history project on the years after 1900.<sup>6</sup> Second, the paper will examine the ways that those patterns of working-class survival changed in the period between the World Wars in response to new developments in the public school system, particularly the emergence of vocational education and the raising of the school-leaving age to sixteen. At the centre of this discussion will be the relationship between work and school for Hamilton's working-class teenagers and their families.

### Work and School Before 1920

By the close of the nineteenth century, a childhood in Hamilton had come to involve considerable time in a schoolroom. The opening of the publicly supported Central School in 1853 and the Roman Catholic separate school system in 1856 had launched a new era in mass institutionalization of children. By 1871 the great majority of the city's children between ages five and twelve were enrolled in city schools. At that point, they often did not show up every day, but daily attendance increased. Twenty years later, three-quarters of public-school students were in a classroom more than 100 days a year and 58 percent more than 150 days.<sup>7</sup> That year, when asked to explain why 12 percent of those aged seven

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5. Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class."
  6. The project was undertaken by Jane Synge, whose publications based on the research include "Young Working Class Women in Early Twentieth Century Hamilton—Their Work and Family Lives," in *Proceedings of the Workshop Conference on Blue-Collar Workers and Their Communities*, ed. A.H. Turritin (Toronto: York University, 1976): 137-45; "Immigrant Communities—British and Continental European—in Early Twentieth Century Hamilton, Canada," in *Oral History* 4, 2 (Autumn 1976): 38-51; "Self-Help and Neighbourliness: Patterns of Life in Hamilton," in *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Irving Abella and David Millar (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978): 97-104; "The Transition From School to Work: Growing Up Working Class in Early 20th Century Hamilton, Ontario," in *Childhood and Adolescence in Canada*, ed. K. Ishwaran (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979): 249-69; and "Work and Family Support Patterns of the Aged in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Aging in Canada: Social Perspectives*, ed. Victor W. Marshall (Don Mills, 1980): 135-44.
  7. Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class"; Hamilton Board of Education,

to thirteen years had not attended 100 days, Hamilton's teachers reported that a mere 16 percent had left to work for wages (a roughly equivalent number could not be traced).<sup>8</sup> Most parents of all social classes had evidently chosen to keep their younger children in school more or less regularly.

A growing thicket of provincial legislation was making it harder for parents to do otherwise. The Ontario Factory Act that had come into force in 1886 had outlawed the employment of boys under the age of twelve and girls under fourteen years in factories, and nine years later the age for boys was raised to fourteen. That act and parallel legislation governing work in shops also limited the hours per day and per week that young workers could be employed. The 1893 provincial Children's Protection Act also put tighter restrictions on children working in such "street trades" as selling newspapers and in amusement places, and authorized local Children's Aid Societies to intervene where parents were not controlling such children.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly the weak provisions for inspection or prosecution in these acts severely limited their effectiveness in eliminating child labour. In 1891, however, the state pressure on parents increased when the provincial government made school attendance compulsory for children up to age fourteen and empowered municipalities to appoint truant officers to keep the youngsters in the classroom. In Hamilton this official was expected to follow up reports from teachers who were not satisfied with explanations for students' absences and eventually got regular weekly reports on absentees from the principals of all the city's public and separate schools.<sup>10</sup> Thereafter the Department of Education's figures for both public and separate schools showed more students attending classes each day and for more days each year. In 1901 the federal census-takers found 92 percent of the school population attending for more than seven months in the year. These statisticians also continued to report

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*Minutes* [hereafter HBEM], 1892, 35. Calculations of percentages are mine.

8. HBEM, 1891, 9-10. For a survey of the employment patterns of children in nineteenth-century Ontario factories, see Craig Heron, "Factory Workers," in *Labouring Lives*, ed. Paul Craven (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).
9. Canada, Department of Labour, *The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Canada* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1930): 106-32; Lorna F. Hurl, "Overcoming the Inevitable: Restricting Factory Labour in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail* 21 (Spring 1988): 87-123; Eric Tucker, "Making the Workplace 'Safe' in Capitalism: The Enforcement of Factory Legislation in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *ibid.*, 45-86; Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In the Children's Aid: J.J. Kelso and Child Welfare in Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).
10. Ontario, Department of Education, *Report* [hereafter ODER], 1891, 62-64; HBEM, 1900, 62; 1921, 67-69. For some time, the city's truant officer was also the custodial officer of the local Children's Aid Society; *Hamilton Times* [hereafter HT], 27 Apr. 1910.

a decline in wage-earning children under the age of fifteen—from 335 in 1911, to 239 in 1921, to 8 in 1931, then rising slightly to 46 in 1941. These figures were undoubtedly somewhat low, since misrepresenting the age of young workers had a long history in Canada, but the trend was evident.<sup>11</sup>

Working-class parents evidently believed that their young children needed and deserved a basic education. The local school board did not always make that choice easy for the city's working-class parents. Despite repeated petitions by the local trades and labour council and efforts by Independent Labor Party school-board trustees during World War I, students had to pay for their own school books, and school fees of ten to twelve cents a month per child prevailed until 1919, in contrast to schooling in Toronto, Ottawa, and London. As a trades council delegation argued in 1907, "while the amount might not seem to be much to members of the board it meant a good deal to the working classes where the large families were found." Those in desperate need could apply to the board to have their fees waived, but, as the trades council argued, "that looked too much like beggary and the other children in the schools would soon know of it and point their fingers at the poor ones."<sup>12</sup>

There was often also a serious shortage of classroom space. The tight-fisted board of education pursued a cautious building programme that resulted in overflowing classrooms. For intervals before and after World War I, overcrowding in the public schools of the city's fastest-growing neighbourhoods, particularly in the heavily working-class east end, resulted in half-day schedules to accommodate all the school-aged children.<sup>13</sup> The anger of working-class parents that erupted when the frequent overcrowding threatened the quality of their children's schooling points to the depth of their commitment to a basic education for their children. In 1913 a public health nurse warned the school trustees that she had encountered considerable hostility to the half-time schooling on her visits to workers' homes. "The feeling of dissatisfaction is so strong that something

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11. ODER, 1890-1940; Canada, *Census*, Vol. 4 (1901), 303, 311; Vol. 6 (1911), 307; Vol. 4 (1921), 400; Vol. 7 (1931), 180; Vol. 7 (1941), 190. For the failure of school attendance laws to keep students out of the workforce, see Ontario, Legislative Assembly, *Journals* 41 (1907): Appendix 1, "Report of Committee on Child Labour, 1907."

12. In 1907, as a serious depression settled over the city, the fee structure was simplified to ten cents a month for city residents. In Dec. 1914 fees were waived for the war period but then reimposed two months later by the new board of education. *Hamilton Spectator* [hereafter *HS*], 8 Dec. 1906; 8 Mar. 1907; HBEM, 1907, 11, 92, 93; 1909, 10, 20; 1914, 121, 169, 170; 1916, 8, 231, 233; 1917, 7; 1919, 8; *HS*, 12 Feb., 9 Apr. 1915; *Labor News*, 11, 18 Dec. 1914; *Industrial Banner*, 26 Mar. 1915; L.T. Spalding, *The History and Romance of Education (Hamilton), 1816-1950* (Hamilton, 1950), 30.

13. *HT*, 2 Nov. 1911, 15 Feb. 1913; *Hamilton Herald* [hereafter *HH*], 6 Sept. 1912, 14 June 1918; *HS*, 9 Sept. 1921; HBEM, 1919, 9, 48; 1922, 55, 164.

should be done in haste to avert open objection," she warned.<sup>14</sup> A decade later the complaints got louder. In September, 1922, a small delegation of women from the east end marched angrily into a board of education meeting to protest the continuation of half-time schooling for their children. According to the *Herald*, Mrs. Burtick, the group's spokesperson, "complained bitterly that children of ten years of age should not be more advanced than to be able to spell words of one syllable. 'I scrubbed floors last year to pay my taxes, and I demand that my children be educated as they should be,' she declared." Her wrath continued to spill out over the expensive frills in schools that did not provide more classroom space. "I'll tell you what you've done. You've built auditoriums for entertainments that we poor people, who pay the money you spend, cannot go to. Cut out entertainment auditoriums and give us schools," she demanded. Before departing, the delegation suggested temporarily cancelling kindergarten classes so that older students could attend school more regularly.<sup>15</sup>

In many working-class families, the move into more or less full-time work, paid or unpaid, was determined by family need rather than legislation. Since the city had only one truant officer and no centralized record-keeping in the school system, it was not that difficult to circumvent the school-attendance law quietly. Some local employers evidently had no qualms about hiring under-age child workers. A Hamilton-born woman later remembered starting work at age ten as a doffer in a local cotton mill in 1902; and in 1910 a twelve-year old girl just off the boat from England similarly landed a job in a textile plant.<sup>16</sup> It was most likely children close to the legal school-leaving age who kept the truant officer busy. In 1903 he sent 350 notices to parents and by 1910 twice that number, but he must have had trouble keeping up with the mushrooming population in the years before World War I. A few dozen of these parents appeared before the magistrate each year before 1914, though only a tiny handful were ever convicted. On the eve of the war, more than 1,500 students were still reported as "not attending school," an administrative category for suspicious absences. The wartime economic boom drew more children out of the classroom into the workforce, as truancy notices sent to parents jumped by more than 50 percent, from 769 in 1913 to 1,271 in 1916.<sup>17</sup> A major textile firm was convicted of illegally employing child labour in 1916, as were tobacco, clothing, and soap manufacturers two years later.<sup>18</sup> By 1920 the truant officer was still investigating

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14. HBEM, 1913, 115.

15. *HH*, 15 Sept. 1922.

16. Syngé, "Transition from School to Work," 257; *Labour Gazette* 2, 8 (Feb. 1902): 443; see also *ibid.*, 3, 5 (Nov. 1902): 306.

17. HBEM, 1900, 62; ODER, 1895-1920; *HT*, 12 Feb. 1913.

18. Ontario, Trades and Labour Branch, *Report*, 1916, 10; 1918, 54; *HH*, 4-5 July 1918. Years later a Proctor and Gamble employee recalled starting work that year at age twelve. *Galaxy* (Hamilton), 1975.

1,625 cases a year and issuing warning notices to 705 parents.<sup>19</sup> Yet, despite this regular slippage, most children under the age of fourteen were under the daily custodial care of schoolteachers after the turn of the century. Work might still take precedence over school if an individual family needed the extra income from children under fourteen,<sup>20</sup> and some unruly children might continue to escape the control of parents and school officials. But in the early 1900s these were becoming exceptions to the general pattern of keeping young children in school on a regular basis.

**Table 1: Average Earnings of Wage-earners' Families in Hamilton, 1911-41**

	Resident children 15 and over	Percentage in school	Percentage working for wages	Average earnings	Percentage of family income
1911	6,967	n.a.	75.4%	\$372.40	34.3%
1921	9,270	12.9%	78.0%	\$629.63	15.4%
1931	15,090	28.9%	59.1%	\$ 56.07	8.1%
1941	20,736*	26.8%	64.1%	n.a.	n.a.

\* 15-24 years only

Sources: Unpublished census data in Jane Synge, "The Transition from School to Work: Growing Up Working Class in Early 20th Century Hamilton, Ontario," in *Childhood and Adolescence in Canada*, ed. K. Ishwaran (Toronto: 1979), 254; and Canada, *Census*, Vol. 3 (1921), 468-89; Vol. 5 (1931), 842-43; Vol. 5 (1941), 100-1.

At some stage, however, working-class children were definitely expected to start contributing full-time to the household economy. In the 1860s and 1870s, as jobs had opened up in the first wave of industrialization, teenagers from working-class households, especially boys, had been increasingly likely to move into wage labour after age twelve in order to contribute to the family income.<sup>21</sup>

19. HBEM, 1921, 69.

20. The 1921 census statistics on school attendance suggest that immigrants might have had more reason to pull their children out of school than Canadian-born parents: 93.5 percent of Canadian-born children aged 7-14 attended school, as contrasted with 89.5 percent of British-born and 86.3 percent of other "foreign born"; *Census*, Vol. 2 (1921), 742-43.

21. Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class."

By the early 1900s the only change was the roughly two-year delay before starting work at age fourteen that the province's 1891 legislation required. "As soon as you got the rudiments of schooling, it was up to you to start working," one man raised in a working-class family told Jane Synge. "I was getting to the age where I would be expected to work and everybody had to bring home their share of the bacon, no matter what family they belonged to," another explained. "If you could afford more or less it made no difference. You had at a certain age to go off and earn your living."<sup>22</sup> In 1911 children's earnings comprised a third of the average yearly income of Hamilton families reported to census-takers (see Table 1). In white-collar occupations and several skilled trades, the share was much smaller, but, among skilled metal workers, moulders still relied on their children for a third of their families' earnings and machinists for a fifth, while the children of labourers contributed 44 percent.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, only regular employment at good craftsmen's wages allowed a working-class family in early twentieth-century Hamilton to come close to relying completely on one breadwinner.

It is difficult to determine precisely how many teenaged boys and girls were working for wages in Hamilton (or any other Canadian city) in the early twentieth century. The decennial censuses are the most thorough sources, but they can be misleading both because in 1921 and 1931 they fell in the depths of economic depressions and because they missed part-time or seasonal jobs.<sup>24</sup> The 1911 census, the first to provide detailed occupational information by age, lumped together all full-time workers between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, but, in the more subtly detailed 1921 report, we can see a pattern in which full-time employment among Hamilton's adolescents became increasingly common as they passed the age of fourteen. Even in that economically depressed year, 44 percent of fifteen-year-old boys were working full time, 68 percent of sixteen-year-olds, and 77 percent of seventeen-year-olds, while the comparable figures for girls were 37, 56, and 64 percent. These rates were well above the provincial average and above the rates of all other Canadian cities with populations over 30,000, especially among girls.<sup>25</sup>

For all this teenaged labour, local labour markets were changing by World War I. The numerous light manufacturing industries that had hired so many young workers at the turn of the century were being eclipsed by metal-working plants demanding the heavy labour of more mature adult males. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, work processes and employment practices in many factories were undergoing major changes, as employers eliminated opportunities for apprenticeships, mechanized much of the fetching and carrying work formerly

22. Synge, "Transition from School to Work," 257.

23. Unpublished census data in Synge, "Transition from School to Work," 254-56.

24. On the weaknesses of the census for studying youth employment, see Canada, Department of Labour, *Employment of Children*, 11-14.

25. *Ibid.*, 27; *Census*, Vol. 4 (1921), iii.

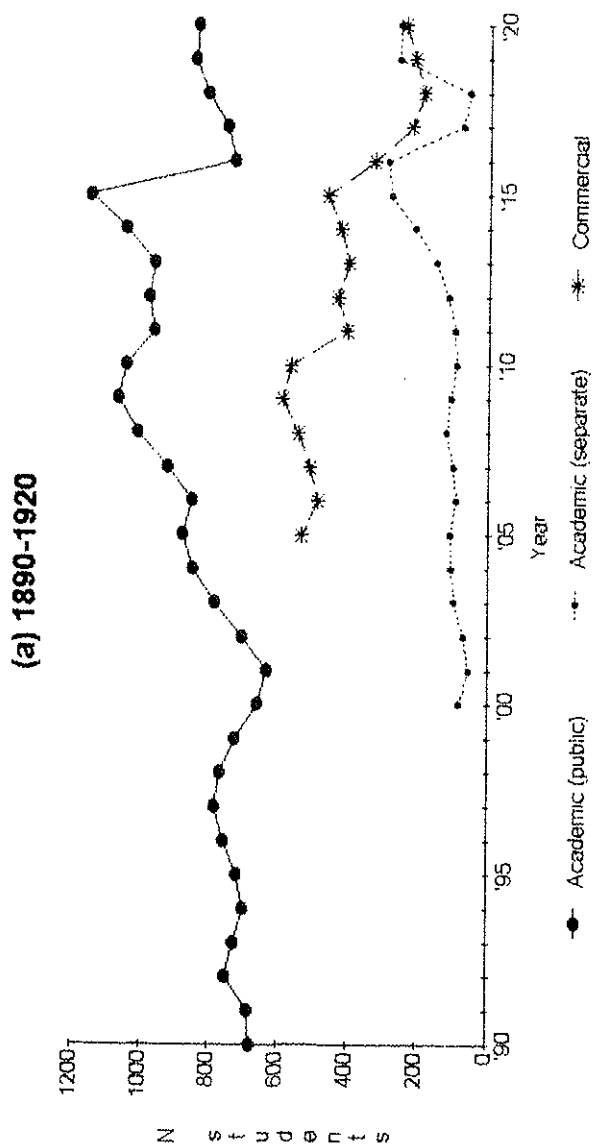


done by young workers, and recruited from a new pool of cheap, unskilled labour—the city's new male European immigrants.<sup>26</sup> Yet factory jobs for boys and girls had by no means disappeared, and two-thirds of workers aged fifteen to seventeen still earned their wages in factories in 1921. The percentage of wage-earners' children working had not dropped, but, probably because of the depression, which hit them much harder than adults,<sup>27</sup> their contribution to family income had fallen to only 15.4 percent (see Table 1). Perhaps the explanation for this continued use of juvenile waged labour lies in the relatively slower arrival of Canada's Second Industrial Revolution and the relatively smaller numbers of European immigrants available, especially for the textile industries (both in comparison with the United States).<sup>28</sup>

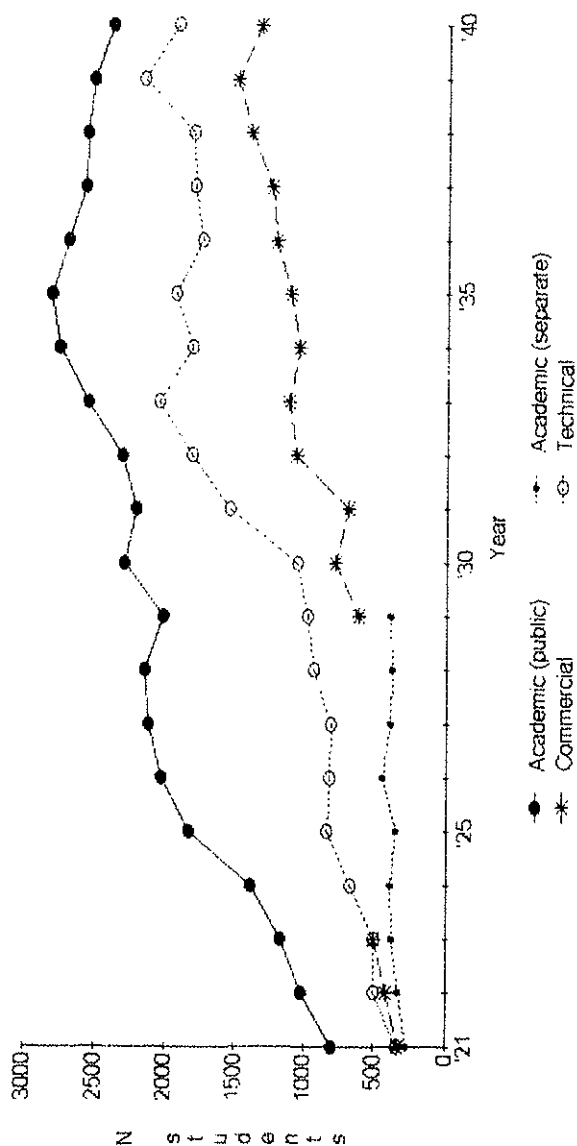
This pattern of wage-earning clearly left little room for high school education. In 1901 only 663 of the city's 5,500 young people aged fifteen to nineteen were enrolled in the Hamilton Collegiate Institute, the city's only academic high school until 1924, and only fifty-six more in the "Fifth Book" classes (later

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26. Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 33-72; and "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930" (Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1981). See also Selwyn K. Troen, "The Discovery of the Adolescent by American Educational Reformers, 1900-1920: An Economic Perspective," in *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education*, ed. Lawrence Stone (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 241-43; Paul Osterman, "Education and Labor Markets at the Turn of the Century," *Politics and Society* 9, 1 (1979): 108-15; and Joel Perlman, "After Leaving School: The Jobs of Young People in Providence, R.I., 1880-1915," in *Schools in Cities: Consensus and Conflict in American Educational History*, ed. Ronald K. Goodenow and Diane Ravitch (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983): 3-43. In 1921 census-takers identified only 163 apprentices in factory crafts among the more than 2,000 factory workers under age eighteen; just over half were in printing and another 28 percent were learning the machinist's trade. *Census*, Vol. 4 (1921), 400-9 (calculations are mine). These factors may help to explain why in 1921 only 14 percent of boys and 11 percent of girls had full-time jobs in 1921 among fourteen-year-olds, who were still not forbidden by law from taking full-time employment (the census was taken in June, and Ontario's new legislation that raised the school-leaving age to sixteen did not come into effect until September).
  27. In 1921 wage-earners under age twenty reported almost nine weeks of unemployment, compared to only six-and-a-half for all ages. *Census*, Vol. 3 (1921), 128.
  28. Arguably, this prolonged use of juvenile labour made Canada a little more like Britain than the United States. On the general patterns of industrial change in Canada in this period, see my "The Second Industrial Revolution in Canada, 1890-1930," in *Class, Community, and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930*, ed. Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey (Aberystwyth: Llafur and Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1989), 48-66; and "The New Factory Regime and Workers' Struggles in Canada, 1890-1940" (paper presented to the Australian-Canadian Labour History Conference, Sydney, 1988).

Figure 1: Full-Time Student Enrolment, Hamilton Secondary Schools



(b) 1921-1940



Sources: Ontario, Department of Education, *Reports*, 1891-1921; Hamilton Board of Education, *Minutes*, 1920-40 (statistics from the latter are for average attendance during May of each year; totals are mine.)

Grades 9 and 10) offered by the separate school board within their primary-school buildings (a separate Catholic high school would not open until 1928).<sup>29</sup> The public board of education had certainly never provided classroom space for many young people in this age group over the next quarter-century. The collegiate institute was stretched to the limit when its enrolment climbed over 1,000 in the five years before World War I, and presumably the 100-odd students in the Catholic system created similar problems in this period (see Figure 1). The census figures, published at ten-year intervals, give an impression of steady growth in the high school population, but the statistics published annually by the provincial Department of Education and monthly by the local board of education reveal a much more complex pattern of attendance at the Hamilton Collegiate Institute.

First, few working-class parents in Hamilton apparently saw secondary schooling as a valid avenue for upward mobility for their children. The Hamilton Collegiate Institute (and the separate school classes) had a narrowly academic curriculum that was intended to prepare students for university or professional training, especially teaching, but offered no direct preparation for work on the shop floor in the city's factories or other work sites.<sup>30</sup> The tiny proportion of working-class teenagers who passed the difficult entrance examination and arrived at the collegiate's door indicates how few of Hamilton's working-class families aspired to push their children into a professional world. The Department of Education's crude breakdown of the occupations of students' fathers reveals that there was always a substantial minority of young people from families headed by skilled workers in the school, but the great majority of the students came from what the educators described as commercial, agricultural, and professional backgrounds (see Figure 2). "If you went to school after you were 14, your old man was either a banker or a brewer or he owned a store or was quite wealthy," a

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29. Since the provincial Department of Education's enrolment figures for the separate school students were grouped with those in the elementary grades and were never subjected to the same statistical analysis as those at the Hamilton Collegiate Institute, it is not possible to comment on the gender or occupational background of these Catholic secondary students. Moreover, since the Catholic high school was run by the diocese, not the separate school board, no enrolment information appeared in the Department's reports. There were also a small number of secular private schools in the city, about which little statistical information is available, that apparently enrolled scores of boys and girls from the city's wealthiest families. *Census*, Vol. 4 (1901), 10; ODER, 1901; Marjorie Freeman Campbell, *A Mountain and a City: The Story of Hamilton* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 160-61, 225-29.

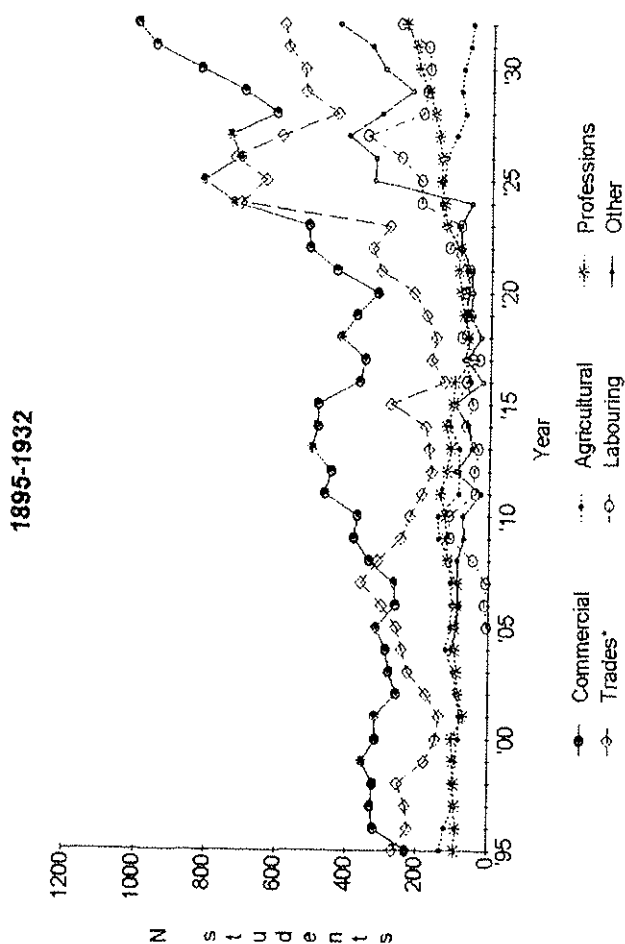
30. See R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), esp. chap. 13, and 308-12.

former student at Hess St. Public School later recalled.<sup>31</sup> On average, in each of the thirty years before 1920, only a quarter of the city's academic high school population came from homes with fathers working at a trade, and less than 6 percent had fathers working as labourers.<sup>32</sup> During these first two decades of the twentieth century, then, the percentage of Hamilton adolescents at school still dropped off sharply at the end of elementary school.<sup>33</sup> Within the Hamilton Collegiate Institute itself, few students completed the six-year programme; generally about half were found in the "Lower School" (the equivalent of what would become Grades 9 and 10).<sup>34</sup>

Other patterns of attendance point to the ways that working-class families viewed the secondary school system. Many commentators then and now assume that prosperity encourages parents to keep their children in school.<sup>35</sup> In early twentieth-century Hamilton precisely the opposite happened. The patterns that emerge in Figure 2 suggest that, in general, young people left the collegiate if there was a more pressing need for their work or wages and returned when the job opportunities in the waged economy had dried up.<sup>36</sup> Annual high school enrolment declined absolutely both at the turn of the century and just before the war, in close parallel with new bursts of economic activity, better job prospects

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31. Donald M. Oliphant, *Hess Street School, 1882-1974: A Pictorial History* (Hamilton: Aggus, 1974), 38.
  32. These calculations are based on the statistics reported in ODER, 1890-1920. In 1911 the board of education authorized "night matriculation classes" for those working during the day, but weekly enrolment hovered around only twenty students. By 1922 these numbers had risen to 250, but the appeal was predominantly to white-collar workers with their eyes on university; the collegiate principal reported that two-thirds were clerks, teachers, stenographers, and book-keepers. HBEM, 1912, 58-59; 1920, 268-69; 1923, 14.
  33. In 1916 school officials estimated that eight out of ten children who entered the city's public schools left before reaching high school (*JIT*, 31 Aug. 1916). Five years later, the census-takers found 78 percent were enrolled at age fourteen, but only 47 percent at age fifteen, 31 percent at age sixteen, 18 percent at age seventeen, and 8 percent at ages eighteen and nineteen (*Census*, Vol. 4 (1921), iii).
  34. ODER, 1891-1921; calculations are mine.
  35. A federal labour official writing in 1930 incorrectly assumed that the higher rates of school attendance in 1921 reflected the increased prosperity of the war period when families had decided to keep their children in school; as we will see, precisely the opposite happened. See Canada, Department of Labour, *Employment of Children*, 15.
  36. Pamela Barnhouse Walters discovered the same pattern in the United States; see "Occupational and Labor Market Effects on Secondary and Postsecondary Educational Expansion in the United States: 1922 to 1979," *American Sociological Review* 49, 5 (Oct. 1984): 659-71.

Figure 2: Occupations of Fathers of Students in Public Academic High Schools in Hamilton



Note: \* From 1895 to 1910, "Mechanical Occupations."

Source: Ontario, Department of Education, *Reports, 1897-1934*. These statistics were not published after 1932.

for young teenagers, and rising costs of rent, food, and other necessities. In 1899, as the local economy began to lift out of the deep depression of the 1890s, working-class enrolment in the collegiate fell by 30 percent over the previous year and continued to slide to nearly half its previous proportion by 1901. In 1907, in the face of another serious crisis of unemployment, enrolment climbed again but dropped away swiftly with the return of prosperity after 1909. Between that year and 1913, the enrolment of collegiate students with fathers employed as tradesmen and labourers plummeted by 43 percent, reaching a low for the post-1890 period of 21.1 percent. During that same pre-war interlude of prosperity, the cost of providing food and shelter for a family of five in the city jumped by nearly 16 percent.<sup>37</sup> Then the severe 1913-15 depression pushed many young workers out of wage labour and back into the collegiate classroom. Working-class enrolment jumped by nearly two-thirds during that period. This pattern of movement in and out of high school must have been primarily a working-class experience, since, in each boom period, most of the students who left the collegiate were from working-class families. The contrast with other occupational groups was most striking in the four years of steady working-class withdrawal from the high school before the 1913 depression set in, when the number of students from professional families held steady and those with fathers in "commerce" increased by over 30 percent.<sup>38</sup>

The local high school inspector's monthly attendance reports suggest similar patterns of adjusting to the rhythms of the local economy. Although these statistics do not specify which students were coming and going, they reveal a familiar variation in times of boom and slump. In prosperous years, annual enrolment peaked in the late fall, as students apparently dribbled in after the annual seasonal layoff of less-skilled workers, and declined abruptly in May and June when the hiring of adolescent labour presumably picked up again. For example, the June enrolment in 1905 had dropped to 77 percent of the number on the books the previous September, and in 1912 to 84 percent. In gloomier times, the enrolment fluctuated much less. In 1908 the high school lost less than 7 percent of its students, and in the economically troubled spring of 1914 less than 6 percent. The monthly attendance patterns of those enrolled showed some

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37. This and all subsequent figures on retail prices are based on indices for a weekly family budget of staple foods, fuel, lighting, and rent that I calculated from the December data in the *Labour Gazette* between 1911 and 1940.

38. As Figure 1 indicates, Catholic secondary school enrolment in Hamilton followed a similar pattern. It peaked first at 121 in 1908, in the depths of the two-year slump, then fell by 19 percent over the next three years; the lack of jobs in the pre-war depression pushed enrolment up to 282 by 1915. The lack of occupational data for these students' fathers prevents any tracking of the working-class proportions. ODER, 1909-17.

similar fluctuations that suggest perhaps part-time or seasonal employment. Not only did high school students stop attending as regularly in the spring, but considerable numbers disappeared briefly in December, probably to work in the Christmas retail boom.<sup>39</sup> According to Department of Education annual statistical returns, between a third and two-fifths of enrolled high school students would be absent on an average day before 1920, in contrast to the level of around 75 percent average daily attendance in the elementary schools.<sup>40</sup> It seems likely that the labour of these teenagers might be needed from time to time at home or in the paid workforce.<sup>41</sup> Such irregularity must have affected academic performance: by the early 1920s a school board committee found more than two-fifths of the 3,500 students aged fourteen and fifteen still in the city's elementary schools.<sup>42</sup>

As the wartime boom took off after 1915, high school enrolment tumbled again. By 1917 there were one-third fewer students in the collegiate than in 1915 and 41 percent fewer working-class youths. In fact, students with working-class fathers accounted for roughly half the fall in enrolment over that period. The high school inspector reported with relief that the recent problem of overcrowding in the collegiate classrooms had evaporated. Attendance also dropped off much more drastically each spring in the later years of the war. By 1918 Catholic secondary school enrolment had similarly plummeted to sixty-one, a mere one-fifth of the depression-related peak.<sup>43</sup> Along with the increase in wage-earning among children under fourteen years of age that we have already noted (including the child-labour convictions), these trends indicate that the family economy was apparently still alive and well in Hamilton's working-class households. As the cost of living in the city soared after 1917 and labour shortages continued in local industries, these families were evidently mobilizing the earning capacities of their children to the fullest. The end of the war brought no quick return to the classroom. Academic high school enrolment remained at pre-1908 levels until 1922. Indeed, federal census officials noted after their survey of the city in June 1921 that Hamilton had a far lower percentage of school attendance among fifteen-to-eighteen-year-olds than any of the other fourteen largest cities in Canada.<sup>44</sup>

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39. Calculations based on average monthly attendance figures reported in HBEM, 1890-1920.

40. ODER, 1891-1921.

41. Synge discovered through her interviews that irregular attendance was common. "They were helping mother with a new baby, they were working until it was discovered they were under age, or they were simply staying away, either with or without their parents' consent." Synge, "Transition From School to Work," 264.

42. HBEM, 1923, 252.

43. HBEM, 1917, 126; see also *HH*, 27 Jan. 1917; ODER, 1918-19; calculations of attendance based on average monthly attendance figures reported in HBEM, 1915-20.

44. *Census*, Vol. 4 (1921), iii.



Why did this old working-class household economy survive so long in Hamilton, and why did so few working-class parents choose to push their children into secondary education? And why was this pattern so much more marked in Hamilton than other Canadian cities? It would be difficult to argue that these parents were abnormally greedy for their children's wages or had unusually low interest in schooling, since they did send their teenagers to school when they had little chance of earning wages or helping out at home. The answer seems to lie instead in the continuing availability of teenage jobs, and also in the chronic insecurity of income within the city's working-class households. Various pre-war and post-war government investigations revealed that Hamilton's preponderant iron and steel production was among the most vulnerable to deep and prolonged unemployment in the Canadian manufacturing sector.<sup>45</sup> Since the male heads of household who worked in these metalworking industries could not always bring home a reliable "family wage," their teenaged children were expected to help.<sup>46</sup> Swinging between inflation and unemployment, Hamilton's wage-earning families struggled to stay afloat.

### The Rise of Vocational Schooling

By the early 1920s, this household economy was facing external challenges that threatened to deprive families of the wages of young adolescent workers. The nose-dive of the business cycle and the ongoing changes in the labour processes that reduced the need for juvenile labour were bad enough, but there were also new initiatives from the state. Confronted with new minimum wage

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45. See Ontario, Commission on Unemployment, *Report* (Toronto: King's Printer, 1916), 89-100; *Labour Gazette* (Ottawa) 29, 1 (Jan. 1929): 52-67; 39, 1 (Jan. 1939): 66-68; 40, 1 (Jan. 1940): 33-36; 41, 1 (Jan. 1941): 42-44; National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], RG 27, Vol. 1 (Unemployment 1914), Hamilton; *Census*, Vol. 3 (1921), 128, 136; Vol. 6 (1931), 1268; *Unemployment Among Wage-earners, Bulletin No. VI: Hamilton*, Ontario (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1933). On the city's general economic structures, see John Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1982); and Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton," chap. 1.
46. Wives and mothers were seldom the chief secondary wage-earners. In 1921 three out of four Hamilton women in the marriageable age bracket of 25-34 were not counted in the paid workforce, nor were seven out of eight among those aged 35-49. Federal statisticians considered wives' wages so insignificant that they omitted these figures from their tables on wage-earners' family income in the 1911 and 1921 censuses; and in 1931 their reported earnings amounted to less than 1 percent of total family income in Hamilton. No doubt, much more income generated by wives through such activities as keeping boarders, taking in laundry, or cleaning other families' houses went unreported, but the general pattern is clear. Canada, *Census*, Vol. 3 (1921), 469; Vol. 4 (1921), 401; Vol. 5 (1931), 843 (percentage calculations are mine).

rates for women set under the 1920 provincial legislation, some employers began dispensing with their youngest female help in favour of more mature, efficient workers.<sup>47</sup> Far more important was the growing competition for teenagers' time from the city's school system. The war years saw two important new initiatives in secondary education in the city that would have major consequences for working-class families after 1920—the large-scale expansion of a new stream of schooling eventually known as “vocational education,” and the raising of the legal age for leaving school. These were distinct projects, but they came to be closely related.

The first major change could be traced back to the early 1900s, when serious debates first began in Hamilton and the province generally about connecting the high school curriculum and commercial and industrial labour markets.<sup>48</sup> The most important, but least discussed, step in this direction came in 1905, when, without much fanfare, the board of education opened a three-year, post-elementary programme in commercial education. Ontario high schools had offered such commercial subjects as bookkeeping and penmanship since early in the nineteenth century, but these new classes were intended to train the more narrowly specialized stenographers and typists needed in the city's expanding offices.<sup>49</sup>

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47. Margaret E. McCallum, “Keeping Women in Their Place: The Minimum Wage in Canada, 1910-25,” *Labour/Le Travail* 17 (Spring 1986): 29-56.

48. This discussion does not address the introduction of two different “practical” subjects into the public and secondary schools. In 1903-4, with the help of the local Young Women's Christian Association and the Macdonald Manual Training Fund (a national philanthropic organization for promoting these changes), the local board of education first authorized the regular teaching of “domestic science” for girls and “manual training” for boys in the collegiate. Well more than half the collegiate student body was enrolled in this programme each year. But these classes had no direct connection with industrial jobs. They took up only one to two hours per week within the general curriculum and were intended to provide a more balanced mental and cultural development rather than training for specific industrial occupations. HBEM, 1895-1907; ODER, 1904-20; Terry Crowley, “Madonnas Before Magdales: Adelaide Hoodless and the Making of the Canadian Gibson Girl,” *Canadian Historical Review* 67, 4 (Dec. 1986): 520-47; Diana Pedersen, “The Scientific Training of Mothers: The Campaign for Domestic Science in Ontario Schools, 1890-1913,” in *Critical Issues in the History of Canadian Science, Technology, and Medicine* ed. R.A. Jarrell and A.E. Roos (Ottawa: HSTC Publications, 1978), 178-94; Robert M. Stamp, “Teaching Girls Their ‘God-Given Place in Life’: The Introduction of Home Economics in the Schools,” *Atlantis* (Spring 1977); Cheryl MacDonald, *Adelaide Hoodless: Domestic Crusader* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1986); Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 57-59.

49. Gidney and Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*, 155, 291; Nancy S. Jackson and Jane S. Gaskell, “White-Collar Vocationalism: The Rise of Commercial Education in Ontario and British Columbia, 1870-1920,” in *Gender and Education in Ontario:*

The roughly four to five hundred students attracted each year to this new commercial programme comprised a remarkable departure in new post-elementary education. Yet they were scarcely acknowledged by school authorities at all levels. They were tucked away in several public schools and never counted as part of the high school system in the city until the mid-1920s. No information has survived on the gender or occupational background of those enrolled. We can only speculate that young women probably made up a growing percentage, as they did elsewhere. An unknown number also filled the classes of private business schools in the city.<sup>50</sup> As Figure 1 makes clear, the enrolment patterns mirrored those we have noted already for academic students in the public and separate systems, namely, increases in times of economic depression and sharp declines during booms, notably in the last years of the war, when the number of commercial students declined to only 190 in 1918, only a third of the pre-war high.

There was far more public concern and discussion in Hamilton about "technical" education. By 1905 Hamilton's manufacturers were becoming the dominant voice in a small but growing chorus that included educators and craft unionists in pressing the board of education to establish a programme of technical training more directly related to industrial life in the city than the existing high school curriculum. As they successfully drove out craft unions and their apprenticeship systems,<sup>51</sup> the city's factory owners became increasingly concerned about the scarcity of skilled workers, especially those with the broad knowledge to take up the duties of foremen. In 1909, after three years of investigation and lobbying,<sup>52</sup> the board built a spacious new two-storey building adjacent to the

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*An Historical Reader*, ed. Ruby Heap and Alison Prentice (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1991), 165-94; and Ivor F. Goodson and Christopher J. Anstead, *Through the Schoolhouse Door: Working Papers* (London: RUCCUS and Garamond, 1993), 115-43.

50. ODER, 1905-20; *HT*, 15 Feb. 1913; *HH*, 18 Feb. 1924. Everywhere, it seems, these commercial courses took off without much promotion; see Albert H. Leake, *The Vocational Education of Girls and Women* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1918), 336-37; John L. Rury, "Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women's Education in the United States, 1880-1930," *History of Education Quarterly* 24, 1 (Spring 1984): 29-33.
51. Craig Heron, "The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton's Metal Workers in the Early Twentieth Century," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 6 (Autumn 1980): 7-48; "Hamilton Steelworkers and the Rise of Mass Production," Canadian Historical Association *Historical Papers* (1982), 103-31; and "Working-Class Hamilton," 77-192.
52. NAC, MG 26, G (Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers), Vol. 383, 102116 (Hamilton Board of Trade to Laurier, 13 Oct. 1905); Vol. 458, 123243-47 (J.M. Gibson to Laurier, 27 Mar. 1907); Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Whitney Papers, MU3116, J.M. Gibson to Whitney, 17 May 1905; HBEM, 1906, 41-42; 1908, 4, 61-63, 77; ODER, 1908, 571-78; *HT*, 7 Oct. 1905; Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections, Hamilton Board of Trade Minutes, 25 (2 Apr. 1906); 183 (7 Oct. 1907).

collegiate—the first separate technical school building in the country—and installed well-equipped workshops with a handful of specially qualified teachers for the technical subjects, one of them Westinghouse's plant engineer.<sup>53</sup> Soon after the school opened, the board of education also managed to negotiate the integration of the Hamilton Art School to provide instruction "in almost every branch of Pure and Applied Art." The school's name was promptly changed to the Hamilton Technical and Art School. This whole new departure in high school education was guided by a special new committee of the board of education known as the "Industrial Technical Committee," which had unprecedented power to hire and fire and set general policy for the new school with virtually no constraints or guidelines from provincial education officials.

That fall the new school offered two new streams of technical training.<sup>54</sup> During the day, public school graduates were offered a three-year programme providing the broad training needed for skilled work and eventually lower-level supervisory jobs, including both academic and technical work. The second group of students were apprentices and other youths and men employed during the day, who could take most of the same courses up to three nights a week "with a view to being more efficient workmen."<sup>55</sup> Night classes for girls in cooking and, later, dressmaking and millinery were also available, although the course descriptions suggest that the careers for which these young women were being trained were in the home and not the world of paid work.<sup>56</sup> These part-time students could win a diploma for completion of a cluster of related courses over a two-year period.

Despite all the hoopla that greeted this first independent technical school in Ontario, the Hamilton Technical and Art School never captured the imagination of many working-class families before the war. School officials complained

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53. Hamilton Technical School, *Preliminary Announcement, 1909-10* (Hamilton 1909); *Canadian Machinery* 5, 12 (Dec. 1909): 29-31; *HH*, 4 Nov. 1910.

54. Hamilton Technical School, *Preliminary Announcement, 1909-10*, 8.

55. *Hamilton, The Manufacturing Metropolis of Canada* (Hamilton: Ontario Engraving Company, 1910), 44.

56. The provincial director of technical education explained in 1914 the difference in the women's classes in Ontario's technical schools: "Strictly speaking the instruction cannot be characterized as instruction in trades. Outside of Toronto there has not yet been an urgent demand for a training for women in industrial work for the purpose of earning wages. The classes for women are attended almost exclusively by those who are preparing themselves for the industries of the home." ODER, 1914, 694. See also Leake, *Vocational Education of Girls and Women*; Rury, "Vocationalism for Home and Work"; and Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "'Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse': Educating Woman for Work," in *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education*, ed. Harvey Kantor and David Tyack (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 223-68.

regularly about low enrolments,<sup>57</sup> and by 1915-16 only forty students were enrolled full time in the day courses, one hundred more part time, and 480 at night—hardly a major breakthrough into the ranks of the city's wage-earning teenagers.<sup>58</sup> Hamilton's workers left no record of the reasons for their indifference, but besides the usual conflict between the classroom and the need for juvenile wages in the household economy, it seems likely that the school's programme appeared too abstracted from the real world of work and the familiar opportunities for getting ahead that lay in experience and social relations on the shop floor, not in a classroom.<sup>59</sup> In 1916 the board's Industrial Technical Committee finally realized "that they had never been able to induce the public to appreciate the class of education given at the technical school," and hired an American efficiency expert with experience in industrial education, G.L. Sprague, to revitalize the programme.<sup>60</sup>

The board had found its man. Sprague immediately presented a plan for reorganizing the school's curriculum along more businesslike lines and launched a major publicity effort to increase the appeal of this form of technical training among local businessmen, journalists, and workers.<sup>61</sup> Concerned to make the school's curriculum more directly relevant to the work experience in the city's factories, the new principal organized classes around productive assignments rather than abstract lessons and set the school running on the principles of a modern, scientifically managed factory.<sup>62</sup> He also re-organized the curriculum into several different programmes. For full-time education for boys, he introduced two distinct options (in addition to the three-year art programme). The "General Industrial Course" spanned two "pre-vocational" years in senior public school (the "Fourth Book") and two years of special trade training in the technical high school, leading to thirteen distinct blue-collar occupations. Alternatively, at the end of public school, boys could enrol in a more general technical course

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57. *HH*, 8 Oct. 1910, 14 June 1913; John Seath, *Education for Industrial Purposes: A Report* (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1911), Appendix: J.G. Witton, "Hamilton Technical and Art School," 380-81; NAC, MG 28, I, 230 (Canadian Manufacturers' Association Records), Vol. 16 (Hamilton Branch Minutes), File 1911-12, Technical Education Committee, 25 Sept. 1911, 2.

58. HBEM, 1918, 170.

59. Principal Witton reported "a good demand for instruction in those subjects which promise immediate benefit to the pupil...and very little interest in the academic branches...whose value, though no less real, is less apparent"; see "Hamilton Technical and Art School," 381. On the recruitment process, see the comments of International Harvester's superintendent in *ibid.*, 365; and Heron, *Working in Steel*, 74-98.

60. *HH*, 22 June 1916. For a biographical note on Sprague, see *Canadian Machinery* 25, 2 (13 Jan. 1921): 39.

61. See, for example, *HH*, 16 Dec. 1916.

62. HBEM, 1916, 161; 1918, 173-74; *HH*, 20 Dec. 1919.

leading to either a three-year "Junior Matriculation" or a four-year "Honour Matriculation" that made them eligible for a university engineering course. The local branch of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association began to offer scholarships to encourage these students. At the same time, Sprague also reached out for part-time students. He quickly convinced twenty local firms, including Westinghouse and International Harvester, to link their internal apprenticeship systems with the technical school. The part-time evening classes also were expanded and redesigned to appeal to more wage-earners of all ages.<sup>63</sup> By 1919 his efforts had increased the technical school's enrolment to 634 in full-time and part-time day classes and 2,864 in forty-six night courses.<sup>64</sup> To accommodate these numbers and his ever more ambitious plans, he had won the support of local industrialists and eventually the board of education for a new school building. The first phase opened in September 1919.<sup>65</sup> By the early 1920s the name for this expanded educational programme had been changed from "technical" to "vocational."

Sprague saw his work as central to the efficiency and productivity of Hamilton industry, but he also hoped to tap into the aspirations for upward mobility that he evidently believed existed in Hamilton's working-class households. His school would "hold the door of opportunity open for our boys and girls to give them preparation for their life work," he wrote in 1918, "and it will afford that large number of workers who because of economic necessity or lack of information failed to secure proper preparation for a vocation, some measure of the training which they need to increase their efficiency and better their lot in life."<sup>66</sup> What was the actual impact of these new programmes on Hamilton's working-class families? By 1920 the city had a substantial alternative stream of secondary school education that evidently appealed to many young male workers and their parents.<sup>67</sup> Yet the response was limited in some notable ways. The total enrolment of full-time students had reached only 203 by 1920—a substantial increase over prewar levels but still a small percentage of the city's teenagers, as the 1921 census data revealed. In fact, the combined full-time enrolment in

63. *HH*, 8 Sept., 16 Nov., 16 Dec. 1916; *HBEM*, 1916, 160-64; 1918, 169-176; 1920, 173-80.

64. *HBEM*, 1920, 173-80. Neither the local board of education nor the provincial Department of Education published a breakdown of the 1919-20 daytime enrolment figures, but during the previous year 58 percent of the day students had been full-time; *ibid.*, 1919, 96 (calculation is mine).

65. *NAC*, MG 28, I, 230, Vol. 17, File 1918-19, 20 May 1918; *Made in Hamilton Quarterly* 5 (Jan. 1921): 6.

66. *HBEM*, 1918, 176.

67. As Figure 3 indicates, at least half the day students enrolled in the Hamilton Technical School came from households headed by a father in "trades" or "labouring," while those with "commercial" or "professional" fathers comprised less than 14 percent in 1919.

Hamilton's public academic and technical high schools in 1921 was only 1,139, just slightly higher than the pre-war peak at the collegiate institute. With the addition of the 279 separate school students and 332 commercial students, the city's secondary school system still absorbed only 18 percent of Hamilton's youth aged fifteen to nineteen.<sup>68</sup> As in the past, moreover, it was the children of more highly skilled, better-paid workers who appeared on the rolls. Tradesmen sent by far the largest number of students to the daytime classes.<sup>69</sup> Full-time high school education of any sort was still out of the question for most working-class families. Almost all the technical students had opted for the short "General Industrial Courses," which led quickly to the labour market, where Sprague made great efforts to find them positions as apprentices. Only a tiny handful hitched their stars to the four-year, university-bound programme. The full-time classes also offered little to girls, who numbered no more than a hundred until a new wing known as the "School of Domestic Science and Art" was opened in 1923. A few female graduates found jobs as "apprentices" in millinery shops, but for most the main object of the school's programmes was "to prepare themselves for the important vocation of making a home beautiful."<sup>70</sup> Not only did school officials believe, in their patriarchal fashion, that women should not be employed outside the family household, but they probably also realized how few wage-earning jobs available to women required the extensive preparation anticipated in industrial education.<sup>71</sup>

Far more impressive were the vastly increased enrolments in the night classes. Male and female wage-earners of all ages and occupations signed up for courses that they evidently believed would improve their chances of a promotion or a better job. In the economically depressed winter of 1920-21, the *Labour Gazette* noted that young men were flocking into the technical school's classes to hone their skills for a better chance in the local labour market.<sup>72</sup> As with the many enrolled in commercial courses, a new generation was learning to connect its material aspirations to formal classroom training. In contrast to the full-time

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68. HBEM, 1920; ODER, 1922; *Census*, Vol. 2 (1921), 80 (calculations are mine).

69. ODER, 1917-21.

70. HBEM, 1920, 174; *Made in Hamilton Quarterly* 13 (June 1923): 2.

71. Rury, "Vocationalism for Home and Work," 34-36; Clifford, "Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse."

72. *Labour Gazette* 21, 2 (Feb. 1921): 203. The province's director of industrial and technical education noted in 1918 that a shift was under way in the nationality of night-school students; earlier, 60 to 70 percent had been British-born, apparently because "night schools had been a recognized part of the educational system in Great Britain for many years," but Canadians were now "acquiring the habit of attending." ODER, 1918, Appendix B, "Report of the Director of Industrial and Technical Education," 19-20. It also should be noted that for all the enthusiasm for night classes, they had extremely high absenteeism and drop-out rates; Witton, "Hamilton Technical and Art School," 381; HBEM, 1919, 97; ODER, 1922, 17.

day classes, however, this kind of occupational upgrading did not have to disrupt the household economy. Above all, what had been created in Hamilton's technical school was a large, popular adult-education programme.

## The New School Regime

What threw the domestic arrangements of Hamilton's workers into far more turmoil was the decision of the provincial government in 1919 to raise the school-leaving age from fourteen to sixteen. In contrast to the locally based development of technical education, this was a much more centralized initiative emanating from the provincial Department of Education. For more than a decade, key figures in the department's staff had been following the debate on both sides of the Atlantic, but especially in the United States, on the alleged growing crisis of male adolescence that required the intervention of educators.<sup>73</sup> It was the army of working-class boys who dropped out of school at age fourteen apparently ill-prepared for the labour market who troubled these officials. As the range of jobs available to boys aged fourteen to sixteen dwindled, especially the apprenticeships tied to skilled crafts, it was feared that these young workers would drift aimlessly in low-wage, "dead-end" jobs that could lead nowhere but into unskilled labouring work. The educators worried about the precarious fragility of adolescent boys in the "most critical years of life" and their need for careful guidance in the transition to the adult work world. The Hamilton Technical School's Principal Sprague represented a local voice in this concern about adolescent boys:

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73. See Seath, *Education for Industrial Purposes*; Albert H. Leake, *Industrial Education: Its Problems, Methods, and Dangers* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1913), and *Vocational Education of Girls and Women*; Paul Douglas, *American Apprenticeship and Industrial Education* (New York: Columbia University, 1921). Ontario's director of technical education, F.W. Merchant, also filled his annual reports with references to the latest surveys and reports on youth employment. These discussions typically relied on foreign data and off-the-cuff observations on Canadian experience, since apparently there were no Ontario studies undertaken before 1919. ODER, 1914-19. All this theorizing about adolescence and work is discussed in Timothy A. Dunn, "Teaching the Meaning of Work: Education in British Columbia, 1900-1929," in *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. David C. Jones et al. (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1979), 236-56; Troen, "The Discovery of the Adolescent," 244-49; and Joseph E. Kett, "The Adolescence of Vocational Education," in *Work, Youth, and Schooling*, ed. Kantor and Tyack, 80-113.



These children are poorly prepared for their life's work. When labor conditions are normal they earn but a pittance in the kind of work open to them. They enter factories, messenger and delivery service and domestic service. Very few obtain jobs which offer room for advancement to positions of skill in industry or business. They drift about from one job to another, usually holding two or three jobs in a year. What is the result? After a few years of this shifting process, these children find themselves without a trade or anything approaching the mastery of any particular vocation in life. They land mostly in the unskilled labor class.<sup>74</sup>

These educators actually had a limited understanding of how youth labour markets worked, or even how limited the old apprenticeship systems had been for drawing most boys into men's work. In their eyes, the problem lay not in the shrinking market for young labour power, but in the young worker's failure to prepare himself adequately for a job. Not surprisingly among professionals whose own training had involved prolonged schooling, the solution for working-class boys lay in combining vocational education and a higher school-leaving age. Ontario's director of industrial and technical education, F.W. Merchant, kept up a steady campaign to win support for such changes. He was convinced that existing night-time courses could not meet the problem since, as he noted in 1914, it was older men, not adolescent boys, who were flocking to evening classes in the technical schools. "They drop out of school and wander about for several years before they apply for admission to an evening school," he wrote. Like other educators, he had more faith in compulsory day-time industrial classes, part-time and integrated with wage-earning work, for young adolescents.<sup>75</sup>

The Adolescent Attendance Act that the Conservative government introduced in April 1919 provided for the extension of full-time, rather than part-time, schooling largely because it addressed another set of concerns. The education minister who rose in the legislature to justify the new legislation was Henry J. Cody, an Anglican clergyman, university professor, and recent recruit to the Tory cabinet with broad interests in the political culture of his age. He was disturbed at the widespread evidence of disaffection from the existing social and economic order and saw a role for the school system as a powerful moral force, much as Egerton Ryerson had envisioned the first public schools seventy years earlier. He saw this measure for keeping youngsters in school for two more years as part of a programme to better prepare youngsters for "effective citizenship," by which he meant appropriate moral and occupational training for an evolving industrial-capitalist society within the British Empire. "No State is safe if only some of its social units are educated," he told the legislature. A few years later, at the official

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74. *HT*, 31 Aug. 1916.

75. ODER, 1914, 694-702; 1916, 56-63; 1917, 37-39.

opening of a new high school in Hamilton, Conservative premier Howard Ferguson would similarly defend the legislation as "tending to inculcate a sense of responsible citizenship."<sup>76</sup> Keeping adolescents in school for two extra years, then, was a political project as much as a technocratic adjustment of the relationship between school and labour market.<sup>77</sup>

The Adolescent Attendance Act was to take effect in January 1921. Besides raising the legal age for quitting school, it also contained the often-discussed option of part-time, day-time schooling (at least 400 hours per year, or roughly eight hours a week) for fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds with special permits. These youths had to convince a school attendance officer that their family needed their income and that an employer was ready to hire them. Some of their part-time classes also had to be vocational. (The legislation contained similar provisions for youths aged sixteen and seventeen, but these were later withdrawn.) To ensure that students actually ended up in the classrooms, parallel legislation required school boards to appoint school attendance officers to replace the old truant officers and designated a provincial attendance officer to oversee the enforcement process.<sup>78</sup>

In Hamilton the new legislation was not greeted with universal enthusiasm, and the local school administration was slow to respond.<sup>79</sup> The school trustees

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76. Stamp, *Schools of Ontario*, 107; *Globe*, 16 Apr. 1919; *IHH*, 29 Nov. 1924. By the end of the war, the province's director of technical education also was framing his arguments in the language of "reconstruction" that had gripped public debate. He noted that "the schools are being looked to, on the one hand, for the development of the character of the youth and, on the other, for a training in efficiency," and warned that "if the child's schooling closes at the end of the elementary school period, the chief opportunity for character direction is lost to the school, because the significant aims and purposes of life do not begin to take shape until the youth enters upon the period of adolescence." ODER, 1918, 25-35; see also 1919, 11.

77. A conservative emphasis on the value of vocational education for political order had run through much of the American writing on the subject in the same period; see Kett, "Adolescence of Vocational Education," 85.

78. Stamp, *Schools of Ontario*, 107-9.

79. There had already been a brief flurry of controversy about a higher school-leaving age in 1916, when the board of education's Industrial Technical Committee recommended that compulsory attendance up to age sixteen be imposed under Ontario's existing local-option legislation (at that point applied by no municipality in the province) as a means of promoting technical education. The board of trade and the local branch of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association quickly made their opposition clear. Apparently the city's employers wanted access to some better-trained workers, but balked at losing their ready supply of young labour in the wartime economy. Despite warm support from the local labour movement, the trustees beat a hasty retreat, recognizing, in the words of the board chairman, that such action "might seriously affect local manufacturing concerns wherein the labor problem was at the present time a serious question." HBEM, 1916, 26, 108, 128; *IHS*, 8, 11 Feb.,

grumbled about the costs and in 1922 considered joining the fight against the act that Chatham had begun. Only in January 1923 were the special part-time classes put in motion in a separate department at the technical school. By the end of that year, a special committee investigating the implementation of the act in Hamilton could still conclude that "there seemed to be a leakage of Adolescents, 14-16, from all the schools."<sup>80</sup> Initially, part of the problem was that there were too few classrooms for them all. The two existing academic and technical high schools were already trying to cope with the familiar problem of jobless teenagers flocking into the schools in response to the devastating post-war depression of the early 1920s. There was little room for any others pushed into these institutions by the new legislation. The board of education was thus forced reluctantly into a massive building programme over the next decade. The technical school was expanded, so that by 1925 it was handling more than 1,200 full-time students. As enrolment at the Hamilton Collegiate Institute similarly climbed to 1,300 in 1923 and 1924, the board agreed to build a second academic high school to serve the east end, Delta Collegiate Institute, which opened in 1924. The same year, provision was made for more vocational education for girls when both these colleges began offering commercial programmes for the first time. In 1928, more than 900 students in these programmes (700 of them female) were transferred from their various locations in the elementary schools to distinct wings in the three high schools (and one elementary school) and organized as a single administrative unit known as the High School of Commerce. That school moved into its own new building in 1932. Finally, a fifth high school was opened in 1931 in the west end in the new middle-class suburb of Westdale. This was the city's first composite school, integrating the three distinct streams of academic, technical, and commercial under the same roof. By the mid-1930s, combined enrolment in the city's five public high schools had climbed over 5,500, nearly five times the 1921 total.<sup>81</sup> In addition, after 1928 the new Cathedral High School welcomed close to 400 Catholic students, nearly 50 percent more than in 1920.<sup>82</sup>

Beyond the new buildings and vastly increased student numbers was the qualitative change in technical education. The new term "vocational" suggested how the emphasis had shifted from the adult education that had been so popular

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9 June 1916; *HH*, 11 Feb. 1916.

80. HBEM, 1920, 285; 1922, 223, 229; 1923, 7, 198, 252; *HH*, 14 July 1922. Robert Stamp's discussion of the immediate impact of the Adolescent Attendance Act overlooks this foot-dragging as a factor; see *Ontario Secondary School Program Innovations and Student Retention Rates: 1920s-1970s: A Report to the Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1988), 8-14.

81. ODER, 1920-35. For an insightful discussion of the merging of commercial classes into the "vocational" stream, see Goodson and Anstead, *Through the Schoolhouse Door*, 115-43.

82. *HS*, 4 Sept. 1928.

at the end of the war to adolescent schooling. Provision for evening classes was restricted, and, after a brief resurgence at the end of the 1920s, they were finally cancelled by a budget-trimming board of education in 1933. A year later the special classes for part-time students under the Adolescent Attendance Act were also scrapped.<sup>83</sup> The visitor entering the technical or commercial schools would find the halls filled with teenagers and their activities organized on the same principles as the academic high schools, with cafeterias, student councils, school bands, choirs, and cadet corps.<sup>84</sup> The whole post-secondary system had become an overt streaming system for the city's adolescents, wherein each of the three programmes was intended to feed students into hierarchically structured labour markets and, implicitly, into distinct class positions.

Hamilton's working-class parents greeted this new effort to push their adolescent children into the classroom with mixed emotions. The craft unionists in the trades and labour council had often endorsed legislation to reduce the exploitation of young labour and increase their chances for formal education, and the city's Independent Labor Party representative in the provincial legislature, Allan Studholme, had championed such a measure for years.<sup>85</sup> But many of these men relied less on the wages of young family members than did the bulk of the city's workers. Some of those who needed their youngsters' income expressed their disgruntlement in letters to the local press. One wrote in 1916 that parents had a right to "start to reap a little benefit" when their children reached age fourteen, and thought the school board chairman, who had spoken in favour of the higher age, "would change his tone" if "he was earning ten dollars a week and [had] a home to keep up." Another worker, the father of six children, all under the age of nine, complained that it was "very hard to raise them and clothe them till they are fourteen years, and as they get older they eat more, and need more clothes as they get a little more particular around fourteen years, and before the first one is able to leave school it will be costing me 60 cents a month in school fees." He predicted "race-suicide among the poor classes, who won't be able to afford children." A mother backed him up a few days later. "Education is a fine thing," she wrote, "but it does not fill the stomach." Two years later, a working-class father signing himself "Let Well Enough Alone" defended the notion of the household economy that had been operating in the city for decades. In the face of the high cost of living, he argued, a housewife could not make ends meet on her husband's wages alone, "and a boy of 14 years with a fair education can work and help the home a little and attend technical school at night to complete his education." He also worried that a boy kept in school until age sixteen would

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83. HBEM, 1933-34. The evening classes were revived in 1939.

84. *HH*, 13 Oct. 1923; HBEM, 1920-40; Robert M. Stamp, "Canadian High Schools in the 1920s and 1930s: The Social Challenge to the Academic Tradition," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1978), 83-84.

85. See, for example, *Globe*, 11 and 16 Apr. 1919.

disdain the traditions of mutuality and hard work that kept workers' families going: "A boy going to school till 16 years gets such high notions into his head that he wants to have more of the good time he has had at school, and don't [sic] tackle work then as he should, and if anything is said to him he is off from under the parental roof, and that is the thanks you get for giving him the good education."<sup>86</sup> After five years of administering the act, the new school attendance officer—a one-time broommaker and former Labour school trustee and provincial Cabinet minister, Walter Rollo—believed that "the average parent is desirous of keeping his children at school as long as he can afford to do so and a large number do so when conditions would warrant the exemption of the eldest child." Yet he had also met parents "who apply for exemption as soon as their children reach the age of 14 years whether their circumstances warrant the same or not."<sup>87</sup> This quiet, stubborn determination to hold onto their teenagers' wage-earning power was probably the most common form of resistance to the extended period of adolescent schooling once it was entrenched in law.

Inevitably, however, this shift in requirements for school attendance shook up the family economy in Hamilton's working-class households. In the first year under the new legislation, most of the 900-odd teenagers who applied got an exemption so as not to compel those who already had left school to return. But Rollo was soon rejecting many more applications and within five years had cut their number in half. He also visited employers of adolescents to get their compliance and found that most were choosing older workers: "when there is a surplus of labour, employers prefer to employ those who are over school age." The *Canadian Textile Journal* had already discovered that part-time schooling was unpopular with the city's largest employers of juvenile factory labour, the textile companies. "There is a tendency to eliminate the younger help and employ those who are exempt from the continuation schooling as the half day weekly away from the mills breaks into production," the journal reported. Others noted the trend: "Many of the factories are not taking girls," the Big Sisters' Association discovered. The Ontario Minimum Wage Board reported a drastic decline in the employment of girls under eighteen in Hamilton's textile factories from 28 percent in 1922 to 16.5 by 1925, 9.5 by 1930, and 2.1 by 1933 (there was a modest increase in the proportion of this juvenile labour in the later 1930s).<sup>88</sup> The local employers' unwillingness to employ adolescents enrolled in part-time day classes soon prompted the board of education in 1925 to allow students to take evening classes instead when their wages clearly were necessary for their families. By the early 1930s, the range of jobs for youths had narrowed such that 70 percent of male permit-holders had to find work as messengers. Youths also were

86. HS, 8 Feb., 3, 8 June 1916; HH, 30 Jan. 1918.

87. HBEM, 1927, 61.

88. Ontario, Minimum Wage Board, *Reports* (Toronto, 1922-40).

monitored now through a more highly centralized registry of enrolment to eliminate truancy.<sup>89</sup>

From the mid-1920s onward, then, working-class parents in Hamilton began to lose their younger adolescent children as full-time secondary wage-earners. Between 1921 and 1930 the enrolment of children from blue-collar families in Hamilton's public academic high schools rose from 373 to 719 (peaking at 990 in 1927), while the number of full-time technical students from the same kinds of households soared from 206 to over 1,400. The enrolment of commercial students from similar backgrounds reached 440 at the end of the decade. (See Figures 2 and 3, and Table 2.) During the late 1920s and early 1930s (when the relevant Department of Education statistics stopped appearing), the percentage of high school students whose fathers worked in a trade or labouring occupation increased in the academic schools to between 30 and 45 percent, and in the vocational courses hovered between a half and two-thirds. The substantial increase in the participation of labourers' children was particularly striking. By the early 1930s, two-thirds of the families of tradesmen and labourers were opting to place their young teenagers in the new vocational courses.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, enrolments did not take the dramatic tumble during the brief lifting of the interwar economic gloom that they had in earlier boom periods before and during World War I.

For the most part, working-class families had little choice, since there was hardly any full-time work for their younger teenagers. Few employers had jobs for young adolescents at the best of times, and many of these disappeared in the prolonged interwar slump that was broken only for a few years in the late 1920s, and much more briefly in 1937.<sup>91</sup> It was undoubtedly these grim economic conditions, more than any other single factor, that conditioned the city's working-class families to the new reality of extended schooling for their older children. The relatively lower cost of living in the city in the 1920s and 1930s also probably put less pressure on them than in boom periods. Only sixty-five of the city's 2,600 fifteen-year-olds were reported to be gainfully employed, and only a third of the nearly 6,000 sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds had jobs. Overall, in the families headed by male wage-earners, the percentage of children living at home

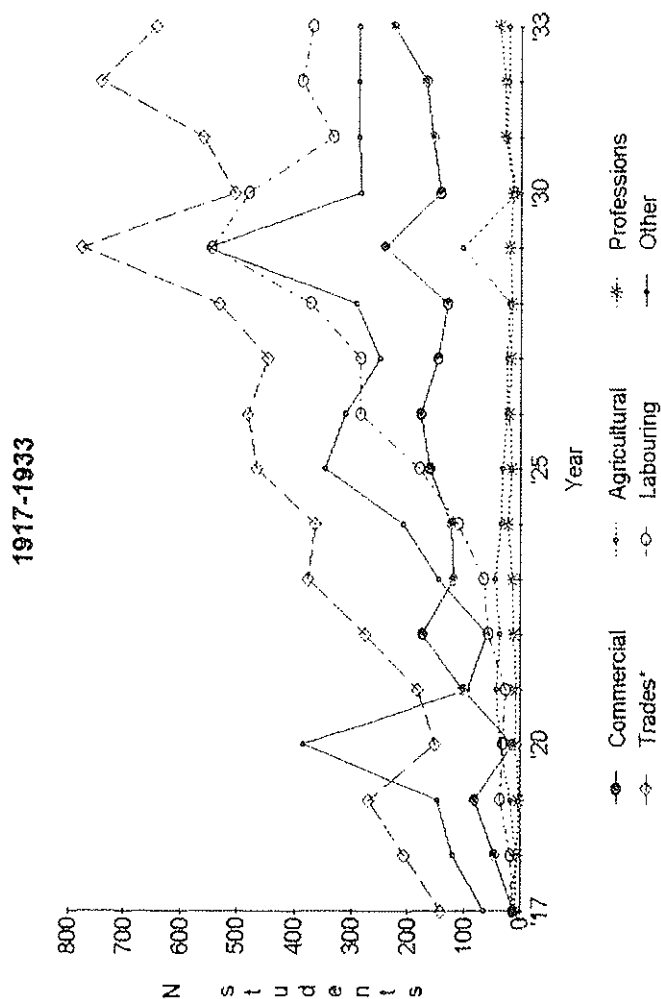
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89. HBEM, 1925, 202; 1927, 61; 1932, 70; "Apprentice Training at Hamilton, Ont.," *Canadian Textile Journal* 39 (19 Dec. 1922): 563; Hamilton Community Fund, *Report* (1928), 17. Part-time schooling for youths aged fourteen and fifteen was never popular among school officials in Hamilton; in 1932 the school trustees convinced a provincial convention of their counterparts to petition the minister of education for either the lowering of the legal school-leaving age to 15 or the granting of full exemptions without part-time classes. *HHH*, 18 June 1932.

90. Calculations based on data in ODER, 1925-33.

91. *Labour Gazette* 29, 1 (Jan. 1929): 52-67; 39, 1 (Jan. 1939): 66-68; 40, 1 (Jan. 1940): 33-36; 41, 1 (Jan. 1941): 42-44.

Figure 3: Occupations of Fathers of Day Students in Hamilton Technical Schools



Note: \* Trades and Industries  
Source: Ontario, Department of Education, *Reports*, 1917-34.

who were in school had risen from 36 percent in 1921 to 44 percent in 1931; the proportion aged fifteen and over living at home and earning wages had dropped from 78 to 59 percent. The wages of family members other than husbands and wives amounted to an average of only 8 percent of family earnings in Hamilton, half their contributions of a decade earlier.<sup>92</sup> In this context, there was a perceptible change in the place of children in the family economy. The birthrate, which had remained quite high until the early 1920s, dropped sharply in the 1930s, as workers became more aware that children were more likely to be dependents than producers of family income.<sup>93</sup> Not surprisingly, working-class families showed considerable interest in the country's first birth-control clinic, opened in Hamilton in 1931.<sup>94</sup>

**Table 2: Occupations of Fathers of Commercial School Students in Hamilton, 1929-33**

	Commercial	Agricultural	Professions	Trades & Industries	Labouring	Other	No Occupation
1930	131	35	9	376	64	295	8
1931	252	25	10	460	78	197	7
1932	148	11	8	400	87	336	61
1933	166	12	12	384	217	372	30

Source: Ontario, Department of Education, *Reports*, 1931-34.

92. *Census*, Vol. 6 (1911), 306-17; Vol. 4 (1921), 400; Vol. 3 (1931), 29, Vol. 5, 700, and Vol. 7, 180. As in the past, there were variations depending on the insecurities of the father's job. Tailors, blacksmiths, and moulders relied on their wage-earning offspring for roughly a quarter of the family earnings, labourers for a fifth, and weavers, riveters, and machinists for about a sixth, while printers and clerical workers got a mere 6.2 and 7.6 percent from their children respectively.

93. The birthrate that had climbed to thirty-one per 1,000 population in 1921 plummeted to eighteen per 1,000 in the mid-1930s. Hamilton residents under age twenty made up over 35 percent of the population in 1931 but under 31 percent in 1941. The city's families had an average of 1.6 children under twenty-five living with them in 1931 but only 1.3 in 1941. Ontario, Registrar General, *Reports* (Toronto, 1920-42); *Census*, Vol. 2 (1931), 272; Vol. 5, (1931), 1161; Vol. 2 (1941), 252; Vol. 5 (1941), 308; percentage calculations are mine.

94. Dianne Dodd, "The Hamilton Birth Control Clinic of the 1930s," *Ontario History* 74, 1 (Mar. 1983): 71-86.



Wives and mothers also felt extra pressure to take up the slack in wage-earning. Census-takers recorded a slow but steady rise in the percentage of older, presumably married, women in the paid workforce.<sup>95</sup> These figures undoubtedly masked a much larger rate of part-time wage-earning, especially as cleaning women, who gradually were replacing live-in domestics in the households of the middle and upper classes.<sup>96</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the local provincial employment office reported huge numbers of female applications for casual labour. "The casual branch of the work is, without doubt, the busiest," the office's director of women's employment reported in 1923, "and...the general trend of labour conditions can be followed by the rise and fall of the numbers of applicants applying for this class of work." She was pleased the bureau could help the 5,000 women who applied that year to find "a daily wage, a ready means of support for themselves and their families, which tides them over times of stress."<sup>97</sup> The "double day" for wives and mothers was taking shape.

At the same time, however, these efforts to adapt should not blind us to the many ways in which Hamilton families clung to old, familiar survival strategies. When the local economy picked up enough after 1926 to be demanding more labour, high school enrolment dropped slightly, prompting the technical education committee of the local manufacturers' association to blame "the improved business conditions in Hamilton, which has [sic] resulted in a greater demand for young workers."<sup>98</sup> More indicative of the continuing need for teenagers' wages

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95. The proportion of women aged 25-34 in the waged labour force rose from a quarter in 1921 to nearly a third in 1941, and, among those 35-44, the percentage edged up from fifteen to twenty-two. Similarly, the share of all female wage-earners made up of women over age thirty-four climbed from a quarter to a third. This change did not reflect a larger percentage of unmarried women in the local population, since the proportions of married and single women in these age groups remained roughly the same. *Census*, Vol. 6 (1911), 306-7; Vol. 2 (1921), 184-85; Vol. 4 (1921), 400-1; Vol. 3 (1931), 136-37; Vol. 7 (1931), 180-81; Vol. 2 (1941), 252-53; Vol. 7 (1941), 96-97 (percentage calculations are mine).

96. Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), 134.

97. NAC, RG 27, Vol. 1 (Unemployment), Hamilton, 1914-16, Report of William Cooper, 16 Sept. 1914; Hazel McMenemy to Bryce Stewart, 19 Aug. 1914 (see also Commission on Unemployment, *Report*, 189); *HH*, 12 Nov. 1914; Ontario, Department of Labour, *Report* (Toronto, 1920), 26; (1923), 14, 20. By 1926 the office reported on the "casual section": "While there were more orders they were for shorter time, some being only for a few hours where most jobs used to be for the day." Ostensibly the part-time domestics were considered over-priced at thirty cents per hour, the rate they usually demanded. "The women who are willing to go at 25 cents per hour are almost sure of getting fairly steady employment." *Ibid.*, 1926, 14.

98. NAC, MG 28, I, 230, Vol. 18, File 1926-30, 26 Apr. 1927, 1.

was the 50 percent increase in applications for exemptions from the school-attendance legislation that would permit full-time work—from 608 in 1925 to 937 in 1929 (see Table 3), at a time when the Department of Education counted only 2,253 students at this age in Hamilton's public secondary schools.<sup>99</sup> Equally striking were the more than 2,800 absentee notices that the attendance officer had to issue in 1929 to those permit-holders who had missed their part-time classes. When the economy collapsed in the early 1930s, Walter Rollo was convinced "that there are hundreds of girls and boys attending school at this time because there are no positions available but just as soon as there are...there will be an increased demand for permits."<sup>100</sup> A slight improvement in local employment opportunities in 1937 and 1940 also saw applications for these permits climb to over 1,100—more than triple the number of the early 1930s.

Nor is it clear that Hamilton's working-class families had given up all hope that their adolescent children could contribute any wages to the family budget. The census never bothered to record part-time teenage labour after school and during vacations in these years, but, as federal labour department staff concluded in 1930, there was most likely a substantial amount of it. In 1932 a special study of the "street trades" for the Hamilton Children's Aid Society was alarmed at the levels of after-school work for children. The retail industry in particular was coming to depend on part-time workers. In 1931, 17 percent of retail jobs in Hamilton were part-time (22 percent for females). In the various food-retailing stores, the proportion was much higher—30 percent of all jobs and over half of all female jobs. Chain stores were particularly eager to use part-time labour to avoid minimum wage laws. Two-thirds of clerks in the Metropolitan department stores were part-time, according to the Royal Commission on Price Spreads evidence.<sup>101</sup> They were earning less but they were still making some small contribution to the family coffers.

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99. ODER, 1929, 220-25, 318-23.

100. HBEM, 1932, 70.

101. Canada, Department of Labour, *Employment of Children; Census*, Vol. 10 (1931), 614-15 (calculations are mine); Monod, *Store Wars*; *Labour Gazette* 33, 2 (Feb. 1933): 113. Neil Sutherland's study of working-class Vancouver childhood in this period reveals regular part-time youth employment; "'We Always Had Things to Do': The Paid and Unpaid Work of Anglophone Children Between the 1920s and the 1960s," *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990): 105-41.

**Table 3: Exemptions from Adolescent Attendance Act in Hamilton, 1924-40**

	Full-Time Employment Certificates*	Short-Term Employment Certificates	Home Permits	Applications Rejected	Total Full-Time Applications	Absentee Notices
1924**	234	0	63	79	449	475
1925	352	20	131	125	608	1,510
1926	553	115	106	249	908	2,055
1927	473	82	148	237	858	2,375
1928	528	56	147	258	933	2,796
1929	686	76	135	351	937	2,881
1930	162	73	100	184	546	2,145
1931	192	63	97	91	380	1,140
1932	124	50	88	97	309	785
1933	167	19	98	44	309	296
1934	203	57	90	67	360	no
1935	270	56	137	73	480	special
1936	329	62	131	83	605	classes
1937	771	91	162	63	1,144	"
1938	287	49	107	38	481	"
1939	364	56	126	55	601	"
1940	756	73	130	212	1,171	"

\* Includes those "Promised when positions secured."

\*\* Five months only.

Source: Hamilton Board of Education, *Minutes*, 1924-40. Annual totals were calculated from monthly reports. These figures include only new applications, and not transfers of employment certificates to new employers or conversions between those certificates and home permits.

More important, these youths and their parents showed little interest in prolonging the new phase of schooling past the new legal age for leaving. Dropping out at age sixteen was quite common. In 1928 the vocational institute's principal, L.W. Gill, admitted that "the great majority of the boys who take up work in the vocational schools to-day drop out at sixteen years." Seven years later a special committee of Hamilton's school trustees, officials, and high school principals reached the same conclusion. "A large number of students enrolled in the Secondary Schools leave at about the age of sixteen for economic reasons without having completed any course of study," they wrote. "Many of

these constitute a group of students who are merely marking time and are more or less indifferent to a course of study that leads to any definite goal."<sup>102</sup> The available educational statistics confirm these statements. A rare tabulation of students by age, sex, and grade in June 1929 found one-third fewer sixteen-year-old boys in academic courses than fifteen-year-olds; at the same time, 387 boys and 322 girls aged 15 were enrolled in vocational courses but only 108 boys and 122 girls aged 16 and only 39 and 55 aged seventeen.<sup>103</sup> Similar patterns emerged from an analysis of the board's annual statistics for 1933-40 (see Table 4). The academic stream still held onto proportionally more students, but had lost nonetheless roughly a third by the third year and more than half by the fourth. The situation was much more dramatic in the more popular vocational streams. An increasing majority of students opted for technical and commercial courses—rising from just over half of all the city's high school students in Form 1 in 1933 to two-thirds by 1940—but few of them stayed to complete their courses. The drop-out rates in these two streams were consistently and substantially larger than among those in academic courses. The vast majority of technical students were in the three-year course (fewer than 5 percent continued past Form 3), but nearly half left after Form 1 and more than two-thirds by the end of Form 2. In the three-year commercial course, about a third left after the first year and just under two-thirds by the end of the second. Perhaps even more striking were the local school officials' statistics on average monthly attendance.<sup>104</sup> In a pattern quite different from the Hamilton Collegiate Institute, technical-student attendance dropped away quickly whenever job prospects improved slightly. Most noticeably, enrolment in the central technical school that started around 1,600-1,700 each September in the mid-1930s had fallen by about a quarter each spring and average daily attendance by about a third.<sup>105</sup> Despite the creation of a Vocational Guidance Council in Hamilton in 1932 and guidance committees in each school to help connect schooling and later employment,<sup>106</sup> what would become known as "credentialism" for better jobs remained weak.

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102. L.W. Gill, "Specialized Training for an Industrial Life," *Labour Gazette* 28, 8 (Aug. 1928): 873; "Special Committee Re Revision of Course of Study for the Westdale Secondary School," 11 Sept. 1935, in HBEM, 1935, 255.

103. ODER, 1929, 220-25, 318-23.

104. This discussion is based on indices of average monthly attendance at the Hamilton Technical School, derived from HBEM, 1927-40.

105. HBEM, 1933-37.

106. ODER, 1931, 2-5; HBEM, 1933, 7; 1934, 59.

**Table 4: High School Drop-Outs in Hamilton, 1933-39 (Measured by Retention Rate of Form 1 Students in Subsequent Years)**

	Academic					Technical			Commercial		
	No. in	% Continuing to					No. in	% Continuing to	No. in	% Continuing to	
	Form 1	2	3	4	5	Form 1	2	3	Form 1	2	3
1933	807	80.9	65.3	48.5	38.5	600	53.2	31.7	404	55.4	46.0
1934	902	74.7	59.1	42.6	35.1	650	56.9	31.7	428	72.9	38.3
1935	875	77.1	62.2	42.1	39.1	721	51.7	27.5	486	67.3	34.8
1936	784	80.5	63.3	49.4	38.0	707	50.2	30.1	564	66.1	33.3
1937	740	76.2	65.8	51.8	35.5	718	53.1	38.2	590	74.6	47.1
1938	752	84.8	67.7	56.4	35.4	737	65.5	31.5	567	76.2	42.0
1939	686	86.6	65.5	52.9	n.a.	857	51.9	15.8	568	71.8	31.7

Source: Hamilton Board of Education, *Minutes*, 1933-40. Statistics are for average attendance during May of each year. Totals and percentages are mine.

For the great majority of Hamilton students and their families, these figures suggest anything but enthusiasm for the new high school regime. Equally important, they suggest the complete failure of the educators' grand visions for vocational schooling. The 3,000 to 4,000 workers who enrolled in evening classes in the late 1920s and early 1930s revealed the working class had considerable interest in the alternative of part-time technical training after work, but that option was snuffed out in 1933.

For many students, dropping out of vocational courses reflected their frustration with schooling in general. "The majority of boys, when they reach the age of thirteen or fourteen, begin to get restless under the restraint of the classroom," Principal Gill concluded in 1928. "They have little interest in school work and look upon the school as a kind of prison." Yet, they had a practical reason as well—staying in school did not guarantee a more skilled job. Gill admitted this limitation: "Our aim is to give that boy a general education and a good character, to develop his judgment, reasoning powers and manual skill and to give him the fundamentals of some kind of industrial work." Specific, job-related training could be useless in any case: "If [at age sixteen when most drop out] they cannot quickly find a job in the particular line of work along which they have received training at school, they will seize the first opportunity to earn some money. The result is that in many cases the special training is of no value

to them."<sup>107</sup> Employers still had their own misgivings. In 1922, *Canadian Machinery* reported some feeling among machinery manufacturers that "the youth from the technical school cannot always content himself with the position available to him when he emerges from the shell of instruction to make his first scratch upon an industrial pay-roll." One Hamilton factory-owner, P.F. Ford-Smith, admitted to the reporter that technical education "increases a boy's fund of knowledge and improves his usefulness," but he still preferred to have his apprentices start at age fifteen or sixteen to get "the fire of experience and wisely directed discipline." Others preferred to do their own on-the-job training. Principal Gill abandoned plans for an industrial-chemistry class when the city's chemical firms bluntly told him that they did not need highly skilled graduates from his school: "Special skill and knowledge are unnecessary for their purpose." Likewise, textile employers made it clear that "they did not want the beginner given any prior instruction at all. They preferred to train their own help along their own lines."<sup>108</sup> Employers' doubts about the school's role in job-training was evident in the tiny enrolments in the "apprenticeship" programmes arranged between the technical school and several local corporations. Most Hamilton firms seemed to prefer to train their own workers.

While it is difficult to unravel how young workers found their first jobs, the available evidence suggests that extensive schooling would not make much difference for most positions in Hamilton. The scattered evidence drawn from interviews with retired Hamilton workers points to the much greater importance of family or neighbourhood contacts in finding work, often through the patronage networks of the lower-level supervisors in the city's plants.<sup>109</sup> The "Help Wanted" columns in the city's newspapers gave access to few jobs in the 1930s, but a careful examination of the *Spectator's* listings on the last Saturday of each month in 1930 reveals that only five of the 243 advertisements for male jobs included "education" as a necessary qualification for applicants, none of them for industrial positions (two in sales, two for apprentice druggists, and one unspeci-

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107. Gill, "Specialized Training," 874-75. For similar expressions of impatience with schooling in Alberta, see Rebecca Priegert Coulter, "Schooling, Work, and Life: Reflections of the Young in the 1940s," in *Rethinking Vocationalism: Whose Work/life Is It?* ed. R. Coulter and Ivor G. Goodson (Toronto: Our Schools/Our Selves Education Foundation, 1993), 82.
  108. *Canadian Machinery* 28, 12 (21 Sept. 1922): 19-20; Cecil Williams, "Textile Classes for Hamilton in Near Prospect," *Canadian Textile Journal* 47 (4 July 1929): 13-14.
  109. Wayne Roberts, ed., *Organizing Westinghouse: Alf Ready's Story* (Hamilton: McMaster University Labour Studies Programme, 1979), 5-6; and *Baptism of a Union: Stelco Strike of 1946* (Hamilton: McMaster University Labour Studies Programme, 1981), 11; Robert Henry Storey, "Workers, Unions, and Steel: The Reshaping of the Hamilton Working Class, 1935-1948" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1981), 208-12.

fied). Of the 257 ads for female labour, only one clerical position asked for educational background. For the skilled manual and white-collar jobs, it was far more common to demand "experience" and "references." A similar survey of newspaper listings in 1940, a much more economically buoyant year, disclosed that 14 of the 326 positions advertised for male workers required applicants to state their education, including four for skilled industrial work. The single ad that mentioned technical education caught the ambiguities of the period in asking for a "Young man for electric service with practical or Technical school training." Only one of the 259 ads for women mentioned education explicitly as a requirement for application.<sup>110</sup> The major exception was commercial education, where boys and girls learned some skills, such as typing or shorthand, that could make them more employable and that "Help Wanted" ads sometimes named (the number of boys in these courses nearly quadrupled from 98 in 1933 to 368 in 1938). On the whole, however, the promise of vocationalism had not been delivered, at least for working-class boys.

The picture was somewhat more complex for girls (see Table 5). They had never featured prominently in the project to create a stream of technical education. Indeed, from the beginning they had been segregated into courses aimed explicitly at making them skilled homemakers, not wage-earners. By the mid-1920s the girls in the technical programme had been excluded from the "Industrial" stream and confined to a department soon known as "Practical Arts." A few courses offered marketable skills in dressmaking, millinery, laundry, home nursing, power operating, saleswork, and dietetics, but none of these led to major employment opportunities in Hamilton. Small wonder, then, that no more than a fifth of the city's female high school students could be found in these courses in the 1930s and that between one-half and two-thirds of them generally left after the first year (see Tables 4 and 5). The commercial courses proved much more popular, for the simple reason that they provided useful skills for wage-earning in the city. Between 1931 and 1940 the numbers of girls in these course nearly doubled to 1,100—comprising more than a third of female enrolment. Most of these girls did not complete the three or four years necessary to get a diploma, but probably picked up a smattering of office skills, especially typing, that could help them find clerical work in the city. Yet the most popular courses by far remained the academic courses in the collegiates, which absorbed just under half the high school girls through most of the 1930s. In fact, by the end of that decade, females had moved into a slight majority over males in these schools. Perhaps the academic programme gave young women some of the polish necessary to succeed in the particular jobs that awaited them—as secretaries or salespersons, for example.<sup>111</sup>

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110. *HS*, 25 Jan., 22 Feb., 29 Mar., 26 Apr., 31 May, 28 June, 26 July, 30 Aug., 27 Sept., 25 Oct., 29 Nov., 27 Dec. 1930; 27 Jan., 24 Feb., 30 Mar., 27 Apr., 25 May, 29 June, 27 July, 31 Aug., 28 Sept., 26 Oct., 23 Nov., 28 Dec. 1940.

111. Clifford, "'Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse,'" 250-54. Some young women must

**Table 5: Distribution of Hamilton's High School Population by Sex**

	Total High School			Male			Female		
	N	% Male	% Female	% Acad.	% Tech.	% Comm.	% Acad.	% Tech.	% Comm.
1920	938	56.8	43.2	72.8	27.2		85.7	14.3	
1921	1,139	61.6	38.4	60.7	39.3		86.0	14.0	
1922	1,520	60.5	39.5	55.7	44.3		83.9	16.1	
1923	1,670	55.8	44.2	58.9	41.1		84.4	15.6	
1924	2,057	54.7	45.3	56.2	43.8		81.1	18.9	
1925	2,675	54.1	45.9	55.5	44.5		84.0	16.0	
1926	2,853	52.5	47.5	57.4	42.6		86.4	13.6	
1927	2,932	52.8	47.2	59.5	40.5		86.4	13.6	
1928	3,083	53.3	46.7	57.8	42.2		83.5	16.5	
1929	3,609	48.8	51.2	54.3	40.2	5.4	57.4	14.7	28.0
1930	4,138	48.5	51.5	58.4	35.4	6.2	54.9	13.0	32.1
1931	4,444	57.5	42.5	50.5	45.6	3.8	48.8	20.0	31.2
1932	5,205	54.2	45.8	45.1	48.5	6.4	44.1	18.9	37.0
1933	5,742	54.9	45.1	44.5	48.5	6.9	44.9	20.2	34.9
1934	5,639	55.3	44.7	48.9	43.6	7.4	49.5	18.3	32.3
1935	5,893	53.4	46.6	46.5	44.9	8.6	49.9	19.3	30.9
1936	5,684	51.6	48.4	46.7	43.3	10.0	48.7	17.7	33.5
1937	5,658	51.7	48.3	45.0	43.5	11.6	46.6	19.8	33.4
1938	5,805	51.2	48.8	43.5	44.1	12.4	45.6	17.8	36.6
1939	6,216	52.5	47.5	38.5	50.1	11.4	43.2	18.3	38.5
1940	5,678	50.1	49.9	41.3	50.6	8.1	43.4	17.3	39.2

Source: Hamilton Board of Education, *Minutes*, 1920-40. Statistics are for average attendance during May of each year. Breakdowns of commercial enrolments are not available before 1929. Totals and percentages are mine.

Evidently the lack of jobs in the 1930s kept more students in the classroom, but more for the lack of an alternative than from a new commitment to upward

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have tried to enhance their chances of landing a good clerical job: in 1935 the provincial director of technical education reported that many students were transferring to commercial schools as "special" students after a few years in the academic stream. ODER, 1935, 24.



mobility through the school system. Even in 1931, when the public and Catholic boards of education reported fewer than 5,000 enrolled in high schools, census statistics show more than 3,000 of the 14,000 Hamiltonians aged 15-19 were neither at school nor at work, probably helping out at home or simply biding their time. The preference for work over school was once again clear by 1941, as the city was swept up into a war economy. Census-takers found that the percentage of adolescents aged 15-19 in the paid workforce had risen to just over half, up from 29 percent a decade earlier. The country's social workers were soon agonizing over the return of "child labour."<sup>112</sup>

### A New Household Economy?

Working-class families in early twentieth-century Hamilton lived on the edge. Although the city lurched into pre-war and wartime booms, employment was often uncertain for the large proportion dependent on wages from work in factories, especially in the preponderant iron and steel plants. In the face of considerable economic insecurity, they had only the wages brought in by some members of the household and the ingenuity of housewives to keep themselves fed and clothed and to save for such major purchases as a stove or house. In this context, the adolescent members of these households were expected to contribute to the collective survival through either wage-earning or helping out at home. Schooling was important to most working-class families, but not at the expense of much-needed income or household labour, especially among families headed by poorly paid or irregularly employed men or by single women. Most of the city's young adolescents therefore permanently left school close to the legal age of fourteen. After the turn of the century, job opportunities for these young workers slowly were dwindling, but they had by no means disappeared. In fact, the city's bustling wartime economy temporarily drew record numbers of youngsters out of schools and homes and into wage labour.

This household economy was facing two new challenges from the public schooling system by 1920—one long-term, the other more immediate. The first was "vocational" schooling, which had been available in the city for more than a decade but now was reorganized and promoted much more aggressively. Many teenagers, probably mostly girls, had enrolled in commercial courses, but now expanded technical-education programmes attracted more working-class interest.

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112. *Census*, Vol. 2 (1931), 272-73; Vol. 7 (1931), 180-81; Vol. 2 (1941), 252-53; Vol. 7 (1941), 90-91 (calculations are mine); "Child Labor and the War," *Canadian Congress Journal*, Mar. 1942, 13-14. The new surge of youth employment and decline of high school retention rates was general across the province during the war; see Stamp, *Ontario Secondary School Program Innovations and Student Retention Rates*, 40-52.

Workers were beginning to view formal schooling as a means of upgrading their skills for the rapidly changing work world. Yet they still shied away from full-time day classes and opted for evening courses that would not threaten wage-earning. Schooling should mesh with the household economy, not drain it. The second innovation was new legislation to require full-time school attendance until age sixteen. Many families tried to continue using their young teenagers' wage-earning power through the provisions for part-time schooling, but, in a context of prolonged unemployment in the interwar years and employers' growing reluctance to hire them, these youths found few full-time jobs. By the end of the 1920s, several thousand working-class adolescents were attending high school full time. In important ways, their families had to adapt to the loss of full-time juvenile labour. Families got smaller, as children's years of economic dependence on their parents increased and their income-earning potential was delayed. More women beyond the normal marriageable age also were working for wages. Along with increased schooling, we can conclude that, after more than half a century, the distinct phase in the evolution of working-class household economies based in part on the full-time labour of young adolescents wound down in the 1920s and 1930s.

The change was not complete, however. Most importantly, Hamilton's teenagers generally did not enter a vastly longer period of formal schooling. Although the technical and commercial courses proved most popular, they fell far short of the educators' earlier dreams. They did not capture the students' interest and do not appear to have provided the credentials for much upward mobility or even for better entry-level positions in the local factories, since the great majority of these students left school at age sixteen without completing any formal high school programme. Most Hamilton teenagers seemed to attend school not out of a greater enthusiasm for formal schooling and a new commitment to "credentialism," but rather because the state compelled them to and because there were few other options in any case.<sup>113</sup> In most cases, the beginning of the work experience—and the regular contribution to the household economy—had simply been delayed for two years. High school days thus remained a relatively limited phase in a working-class adolescence in Hamilton in the interwar period. With two-thirds of working-class students in the "vocational" programmes, the high school was nonetheless an important device for institutional streaming that reminded working-class youngsters of their origins and ultimate destiny in the capitalist economy.

With some difficulty, then, a collective family economy still survived in the city's working-class households. Perhaps the most appropriate way to view these two decades was as a period of transition rather than of abrupt change. A full assessment of long-term adjustments within working-class families will require a plunge forward into the 1940s. But the admittedly partial and crude evidence

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113. Cf. Walters, "Occupational and Labor Market Effects."

available from the interwar years in one Canadian factory city suggests that the arrival of compulsory high school education did far less to disrupt the prevailing working-class household economy of the first half of the twentieth century than what was still to come—the unprecedented, prolonged economic security for workers that began during World War II, in the form of fuller employment, widespread collective bargaining, and new state social-security measures. In that new context, the high school would loom much larger in the aspirations of Canadian workers and the lives of working-class girls and boys.<sup>114</sup>

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114. Stamp, *Ontario Secondary School Program Innovations and Student Retention Rates*, 53-79; and *Schools of Ontario*, 203-24.