

searching Nuns' Lives," is a cogent challenge to both secular historians and religious archivists. MacCurtain states that "a fresh approach to recording the experience of Catholic nuns is contingent on a number of factors" (p. 136) central to which is the necessary collaboration among community archivists and historians. She cautions historians about asking "the wrong questions" or inaccurately applying techniques or interpretations to the sources they explore. MacCurtain concludes by raising many significant questions which future research should address: internal stratification among communities of religious, work patterns in convents, and the relationship between enrolment in religious communities and political events.

From Dublin to New Orleans is an important and useful work. It serves as a stimulus to further research. When one realizes that a significant percentage of the 229 communities of women religious who made foundations in Canada between 1639 and 1980 had education as their charism, one begins to recognize what fruitful sources of relatively unexplored primary sources are available to those of us engaged in the study of the history of education. *From Dublin to New Orleans* illustrates the potential of these sources and sets an example of how they can be effectively analyzed.

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O.I.S.E.

Susan F. Semel. *The Dalton School: The Transformation of a Progressive School.* New York: Peter Lang, 1992. Pp. xxii, 205. \$18.95 U.S. paper.

It would be a difficult task in the 1990s to write the history of a progressive educational school, particularly if the school were a famous elite independent institution which the author attended, taught in, and subscribed to as a parent. Nothing daunted, Susan Semel chose the history of the Dalton School as her doctoral dissertation and selected Lawrence Cremin, the guru of progressive educational history, to be her mentor. Maxine Greene, in her Introduction, situates the school in cultural terms as "part of the folklore of middle-class, intellectual New York City as it has changed in the past seventy years" (p. xiv) and she terms Semel's story a qualitative study "far beyond an account of an urban, middle-class, private school renowned in popular culture as much as in the academic realm" (p. xiii).

Established as a child-centred institution in 1920 by Helen Parkhurst, Dalton was distinguished from other progressive schools by its Laboratory Plan, the House system of grouping students, and its assignment and contract methods of curricular delivery. While these are described in the early chapters, the reader never fully understands how they were implemented because Semel tells us that the focus of her study is not the curriculum, teaching practices, or school policy. Instead, she argues that leadership style by the school head is the significant, if

not the dominant element, accounting for her central question: why is the Dalton School no longer following its original individual, child-centred model? Semel concludes, following Max Weber's typology of leadership and authority, that the four major school heads were key factors. They personified three leadership styles: the charismatic leader (Helen Parkhurst and Donald Barr); followed, because of these leaders' chaotic management style and their inattention to school accounts, by the rational-traditional leader (Charlotte Durham), and then by the rational-legal administrator (Garner Dunnan), in order to return the institution to stability. While the school changed with the times and with varying parental interest groups, the leadership and personality of Dalton's school heads, who put "his or her indelible stamp on the school" (p. 169), proved critical, according to Semel.

Only in footnotes or tacked on in an Epilogue does Semel hint at important insights and questions that perhaps she dares not feature prominently, given her personal involvement with the Dalton community. For instance, in the early years parents were less concerned with their children's futures, she suggests, because they were affluent and could easily pass on their class advantages to their children, who therefore did not necessarily need an Ivy League education. With the rise of "rampant credentialism" (p. 169), *nouveaux riches* parents became more interested in what a Dalton education could "buy" in terms of future educational choices for their children. Even the early child-centred school, how-

ever, posed the "progressive paradox. Can a school that educates affluent children, however artsy and intellectual their parents, truly educate for democracy?" (p. 173). Semel answers that Dalton as an independent school with a progressive tradition can still provide insight about progressive education. But the reader is left wondering what are these insights and how can an historical account provide guidance for school policy-makers searching for a return to progressive principles?

Cultural, feminist, and social historians in the 1990s seek out a diversity of evidence and hidden voices in order to gauge effects of school policy, discontinuities of school progress, and the influence of hidden agendas/minority groups/silent participants in any story. They search for significance within current practices and they attribute cultural/social meaning to symbolic rites, to material artifacts, and to rhetoric. With respect to Helen Parkhurst's regime, for instance, how could students learn to co-operate in a democracy or improve their critical judgement through the problem-solving process when they and their teachers had little say in school government and were ruled by such an autocratic character? How ironic that Parkhurst kept the ethos of the school informal; neither students nor teachers could plan their programmes adequately and were thus kept subservient to her directions (p. 26). Addressing another hidden level of meaning, how were students disciplined and what purpose did school forms of control, such as house meetings, school clubs, teacher conferences, and graph forms of public

measurement, serve to acculturate them into their parents' wider bourgeois/professional community? Why, for instance, were words such as "jobs," "contract," or "lab time" (pp. 25-26) employed? Throughout the book students are discussed in descriptive, but not in substantive, terms. The reader wonders whether the effect of Dalton's individualistic programme and authoritarian style of leadership rendered them powerless as a group. In a rare but insightful quotation one student draws attention to the contradiction between training for leadership/freedom of judgement and the strict implementation of a school dress code at Dalton during the Barr regime.

Turning to institutional forms of analysis, why did the board of trustees replace Charlotte Durham, during the experimental 1960s, with a conservative, academically oriented head, Donald Barr? Semel suggests that the old Dalton families, who were "very clan-ish" (p. 76), complained about being pushed about by new people who brought money and fund-raising ability to the school. But she provides no financial details nor does she sufficiently explore the issues of dependence of the Dalton School in its early years on key board members and the subsequent effect of financial weakness in tipping the balance of power into new hands. Also, what effect on every principal's authority had influential female faculty, affiliated with prominent New York families?

These types of probing analytical questions would have focused Semel's study more specifically on the important issue of middle-class

power/authority, which was epitomized in cultural institutions, such as progressive schools. Semel should have explored the cultural assumptions of the founders and of subsequent parental supporters, as well as the effect of progressive institutional practices on their offspring. Rather than casting the context as part of the intellectual swings between liberal and conservative in educational history, Semel should have tied the school's fortunes much more closely to the changing constituents in this New York community and to the cultural symbols these constituents constructed at Dalton. One wonders why some upper middle-class parents cling to an idealized myth of a humane, progressive past as the most appropriate form of schooling for their children. How close was this ideal to the "lived experience" of students in different eras? Because Semel fails to provide detailed evidence regarding finances, the political relationship of the head and different boards of trustees, and the effect of each principal's regime on students, it is difficult to determine the reliability of her story and to judge the validity of her conclusion that the head's style and personality were the key factors governing the fortunes of the Dalton School.

As to the future direction of progressive institutions, Semel and her colleagues could well apply Cremin's liberal goal for all students "to give them the intellectual resources they need to make judgments and assess significance" (Preface).

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