

# School Reform and Community Control in the 1840s: A Case Study from the Eastern Townships

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Despite many recent studies of the establishment of a modern Canadian school system in the 1840s, historians have paid little attention to the local operation of that system. To understand whether education reform constituted a major step toward social control and/or state formation, it is essential to gain insight into reform's impact on communities served by the schools. Inspectors' reports are an excellent and underutilized source for this question. However, there were no such officials in Canada East (generally known as Lower Canada) until 1852, more than a decade after reform began. Furthermore, these reports are the voice of state officials rather than of communities.<sup>1</sup> Local voices are more audible in reports and petitions sent to provincial superintendents, and several historians have used them to gauge public response to reform legislation.<sup>2</sup> Petitions became increasingly episodic, however, and reports became routine as adjustments were made to the new school system. For a fuller understanding of those adjustments at the local level, as well as the longer-term effect of reform legislation, we must turn to the records of individual school districts. Although little of this material has survived, at least in the Eastern Townships,<sup>3</sup> the following case study is based on the school commission record books of the parish of St Armand East, in the south-west corner of Quebec's Eastern Townships.

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<sup>1</sup>See Bruce Curtis, *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, R. D. Gidney and D. A. Lawr, "Who Ran the Schools? Local Influence on Education Policy in Nineteenth Century Ontario," *Ontario History* 67 (1980): 131-43; and Andrée Dufour, "Financement des écoles et scolarisation au Bas-Canada: une interaction état-communautés locales (1826-1859)," *Historical Studies in Education* 6, no. 2 (1994): 219-52. This is also the approach taken in chapters 6 and 7 of J. I. Little, *State and Society in Transition: The Politics of Institutional Reform in the Eastern Townships, 1838-1852* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>Apparently this is also the case for Upper Canada. See R. D. Gidney and D. A. Lawr, "Bureaucracy vs Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System," in *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives*, ed. J. K. Johnson and Bruce G. Wilson (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), 372.

Such documents are particularly valuable to historians because of the crucial role of elected school commissions in reform. Furthermore, the taxation authority the commissions gained was the main coercive element introduced by the reform movement prior to compulsory schooling in Ontario (1871) and Quebec (1942). Although locally elected bodies known as "syndics" (or "boards of trustees" in English) had been established in Lower Canada in 1829, their only role was to report to the Legislative Assembly on schools which received government grants. It was the subsequent rapid proliferation of publicly funded schools, accompanied by a serious drain on the provincial treasury, that eventually led the government to turn to the expedient of taxation by locally elected bodies.

The 1841 School Act, which applied to both Upper and Lower Canada, gave ultimate responsibility for the schools to the Executive Council through the newly created office of the Superintendent of Education. It was the superintendent's duty to apportion monies from the public school fund to the recently established district councils which, in addition to their municipal responsibilities, were to act as boards of education. There were only twenty-two of these bodies in Lower Canada, and their school-related duties were essentially financial. They were to levy property taxes and to distribute the proceeds, along with the government subsidy, to school commissions elected at parish level in the seigneurial zone, and the township level elsewhere. The superintendent of education's office provided the annual grant based on the number of school-age children in each district, and required that matching sums be raised at the local level.

As recipients of school funds, school commissioners were responsible for overseeing the construction of schoolhouses, examining teachers whom they could also hire and fire, regulating the course of study, approving the textbooks, visiting the schools each month, and reporting to their district council.<sup>4</sup> As the Sherbrooke District Council quickly pointed out, this was an impossible workload for five unpaid officials, especially in thickly settled townships with large numbers of schools.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the following case study will illustrate how a deeply entrenched sense of localism would ensure that rural commissions generally avoided interfering as a body in the management of individual schools.

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<sup>4</sup>Louis-Phillippe Audet and Armand Gauthier, *Le système scolaire du Québec: organisation et fonctionnement* (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1967), 16–17; and André Labarrère-Paulé, *Les instituteurs laïques au Canada français, 1836–1900* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1965), 109.

<sup>5</sup>Petition of the District Council of the District of Sherbrooke to Sir Charles Bagot, 1 March 1842, vol. 9, p. 3624, Governor General's Correspondence, RG7 G14, National Archives of Canada (hereafter, NA).

Surrounded by the seigneurial zone of the Richelieu and Yamaska Valleys to the west, the St Lawrence to the north, and the Chaudière to the east, the freehold territory of the Eastern Townships became a northward extension of the New England settlement frontier during the 1790s. Relatively small numbers of British immigrants began to settle in the peripheral townships to the north and east during the 1820s, soon to be surrounded by French Canadians migrating southward as well as into the westernmost townships bordering their seigneuries.

At mid-century, the southern heartland of the region remained largely American in origin, as well as in many of its social ties and cultural traits.<sup>6</sup> An increasingly conservative political ethos had nevertheless begun to develop there due to the successful missionary campaign of the Church of England, dependency upon access to the Montreal market, and a growing fear of French-Canadian nationalism. The land-locked region's long-standing desire to break out of its economic isolation helps to explain why, for the most part, it welcomed a more active role for the state, particularly in the establishment of a municipal system during the 1840s. Similarly, the general accommodation to school reform revealed a desire to ensure that children would be prepared to play a role in the broader society. My case study shows, however, that increased state authority in public schooling was recognized and accepted only when that authority was decentralized to a much greater degree than Durham, Sydenham, and the other initiators of modern state formation in the Province of Canada had envisioned.<sup>7</sup>

A small number of Loyalists settled on Lake Champlain's Missisquoi Bay, in what would become St Armand West, but the pioneers of St Armand East, just as in the border townships to the east, were a northern extension of the post-Loyalist settlement frontier.<sup>8</sup> By 1842 the relatively flat and fertile parish of St Armand East was a well-established community of 251 households and nearly 1,500 people, 830 of whom were of English-Canadian birth. In addition to this largely American-origin group, 278 had been born in the United States, 110 were British-born, and 235 were French Canadians who as Catholics were evidently outside the commission's control. Despite the Puritan heritage of the American-descended majority, only 25 Congregationalists and 14 Presbyterians were listed in the 1842 manuscript census for St Armand East. The Church of England was the largest denomination, with 431 adherents; the Roman Catholics were second, at 280; and the Methodists and Baptists were nearly

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<sup>6</sup>See J. I. Little, *Ethno-Cultural Transition and Regional Identity in the Eastern Townships of Quebec* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>For a fuller treatment of these themes, see Little, *State and Society*.

<sup>8</sup>C. M. Day, *History of the Eastern Townships* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1869), 315-23.

equal in numbers, at 214 and 189, respectively. In addition to smaller denominations, and the 24 who declared they had no religion, this left 207 unaccounted for. In the 1852 census this slightly larger surplus population was lumped together as "Protestants," but there had been little change in the size or structure of the parish. As a township in which the Anglican Church's social and cultural influence had long dominated, St Armand had a stronger Tory tradition than the region generally.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, no reason to believe that it was exceptional in its resistance to the centralizing impulse of the school reforms.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its name, the "Register and Rect.[sic] Book of the Corporation of School Commissioners for the Municipality of Frelighsburg" is principally a record of minutes, though supplemented by proper minute books after 1849. Nomenclature is initially confusing, but even though Frelighsburg was a village, the municipality had the same boundaries as the parish of St Armand East, which was a township in all but name.<sup>11</sup> In January 1842 the annual parish meeting dutifully elected five school commissioners, as required by the 1841 School Act, but the early minutes state that because the district council had failed to levy taxes, "the Commissioners were of the opinion that they could not comply with the requirements of the Act for the encouragement of Education, and consequently did nothing of much consequence during the year."<sup>12</sup> As a result, even though the superintendent of education for Lower Canada, Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, was generous in interpreting the conditions of the grant to each school district—funding independent as well as conforming schools—St Armand East did not receive a subsidy in 1842.<sup>13</sup>

The parish's school commission clearly had not anticipated that, with all the other district councils refusing to levy assessments, Meilleur was in no position to insist on the strict letter of the regulations if he wanted the Legislature to renew Lower Canada's school grant. He therefore had little choice

<sup>9</sup>Little, *State and Society*, 39, 46, 53.

<sup>10</sup>The records of the Farnham East school commission, located in the archives of the Brome County Historical Society, reveal a similar dynamic. See School Commission Minute Book, Municipality Township of East Farnham, 1845–53.

<sup>11</sup>St Armand was originally granted to a seigneur, but, except for token seigneurial dues of 1 s. per hundred acres, he sold the lots outright to American settlers (Day, *History*, 312–13).

<sup>12</sup>Register and Rect. Book of the Corporation of School Commissioners for the Municipality of Frelighsburg in the County of Missisquoi, p. 1, vol. 1 (1842–57), no. II-3, Missisquoi County Historical Society. In the interest of brevity, there will be no further references to this document in the footnotes.

<sup>13</sup>*Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada* (hereafter, *JLAC*), 3 (1843), appendix Z.

but to accept voluntary contributions in lieu of local taxes in his distribution of the matching school funds. Aware of their error in judgment, the St Armand East commissioners became more active the following year. They visited the eight schools in their district, reporting an average of twenty-one students, an average operating period of eight months, and an average sum of £25 contributed voluntarily towards the operation of each school.

The district did not receive the equivalent sum from the government because the grant was based on the out-dated 1831 census, leaving the Municipal District of Missisquoi with only £942 for its ninety-seven schools, or an average of less than £10 per school. The £85 6s. 2d. sent to St Armand East was distributed by the school commission according to the number of months each school had operated and the salary paid to each teacher. This amounted to considerably less than half the average amount collected locally for each school, but the commission was able to recoup part of the grant it had forfeited in 1842 by taking advantage of Meilleur's offer to make this unclaimed fund available for new school construction.<sup>14</sup>

The promise of these funds provided enough incentive for the householders of each local school district in St Armand East to meet with the school commissioners early in 1844 in order to choose a clerk and committee of three to manage their school. The meetings of these localized sub-districts, known as school sections in Upper Canada, also selected the teachers and fixed their salaries for the winter term, even though this duty was supposed to be in the hands of the school commission alone. However, the commissioners did examine the schools once again at the end of the year, reporting an average enrolment of thirty-seven boys and thirty girls in six of the schools, but less than the required attendance of fifteen students per day in the seventh, which therefore received no grant.

There were loud protests throughout the region about this attendance requirement, which was finally dropped in 1849,<sup>15</sup> but in the meantime there remained a good deal of incentive for teachers to inflate their rolls. And, although official regulations required schools to remain open at least nine months a year, the three in St Armand East that operated for shorter periods in 1844 received their grants. Bowing to popular pressure, Superintendent Meilleur agreed to ignore this regulation until the 1845 School Act reduced the term to eight months.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>James Reid et al. to Sir [J. B. Meilleur], Frelighsburg, 6 January 1845, no. 1113, 1845, *Lettres Reçues*, Fonds Éducation, E13, Archives Nationales du Québec à Québec (hereafter, ANQQ).

<sup>15</sup>*Statutes of the Province of Canada*, 12 Vict., cap. 50, sect. 19.

<sup>16</sup>André Dufour, "La scolarisation au Bas-Canada, 1826-1859: une interaction état-communautés locales" (Ph.D. diss., Université du Québec à Montréal, 1992), 225, 228.

Meilleur had strongly hoped the 1845 School Act would also solve the problem of dependency on the municipal councils for tax revenue, but an apparent oversight left these bodies with the continuing responsibility of authorizing all assessment lists. Even though new legislation had made the municipal councils more practicable by decentralizing them to the parish/township level, their school-related authority was effectively negated by a last-minute alteration to the 1845 school bill which permitted the option of voluntary collections. Although such contributions were supposed to be submitted by 1 August each year in order to avoid assessments, few school commissions in the Eastern Townships would attempt to interfere with the traditional voluntarist principle without more forceful pressure from the central state to do so.

One might not have expected outspoken support for voluntarism on the part of those who adhered to the state-subsidized Church of England. Yet the influential local Anglican minister himself opposed school taxes. Reverend James Reid wrote in 1845 that—although he favoured more state control over the schools—he was adamantly opposed to compulsory assessment:

I have known the Townships for 33 years, and during the whole of that long period . . . I have had something to do with the superintendence of common schools, and therefore can testify from my own personal knowledge that coercive taxation for the maintenance of schools is both uncalled for and deplorably injurious. The people can, and are willing to, support their schools in the usual way. If our fellow subjects of french extraction require that method, let them have it, without putting us under the same yoke.<sup>17</sup>

Reid had, indeed, chaired the local school commission for several years, and in July that body resolved that in order to avoid taxation each commissioner should circulate a subscription list for voluntary contributions in his own sub-district. When the subscriptions fell short by more than £10 at the end of the month, the commissioners extended the deadline, with the result that commitments were made to pay the required amount by 1 September.

It is difficult to understand widespread anti-tax sentiment without appreciating the degree to which entrenched localism persisted throughout the largely rural region. Because the alternative to local property taxes was not student fees, as in Upper Canada, the main issue was not whether parents rather than the community as a whole should bear the burden of educating their children,<sup>18</sup> but whether funds would be raised on a school district basis or a strictly local

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<sup>17</sup>James Reid to Edward Hale, St Armand East, 13 February 1845, Hale Papers, McGill University.

<sup>18</sup>School fees were strictly limited in Canada East, and were not supposed to be counted toward qualifying for the government grant.

(sub-district) one. Although the protest petitions gave no reasons for opposing school taxes, apart from invoking the moral superiority of voluntarism, the chair of the Stanstead school commission pointed in 1847 to “a strong and settled dislike amongst the people to direct taxation upon real property alone—connected with a reluctance to give up old habits of supporting and managing schools where they have existed.”<sup>19</sup> These may well have been important factors, but the general population had, by this time, accommodated itself to the same land-based taxes for municipal purposes.<sup>20</sup> And the implication that there was simply an atavistic repugnance to change in the support and management of schools was unfair, for the new system challenged certain implicit assumptions about the nature of community.

The standard definition of localism as “the proliferation of parochial meanings and customs”<sup>21</sup> is probably not very useful for new areas of settlement. Rather, the localism of the Eastern Townships was based on the community’s perception of its own interest against perceived threats from the outside world. School taxes challenged the local communities in two ways. First, because the more affluent and socially prominent families had traditionally provided most of the funds for the schools in their neighbourhoods, which generally bore the name of prominent local residents,<sup>22</sup> one may assume they had also dominated the management of those schools. Thus, even though the taxed-based system promised to spread the financial burden more broadly, it would also detract somewhat from the status of the leading families in each localized community. These families probably felt somewhat reassured once it became clear, as we shall see, that control over each school would be effectively exercised through the closest resident commissioner and the board of trustees or managers.

The second and related issue concerned control over assessments. It had been implicitly assumed that voluntary contributions would be targeted only to the donor’s neighbourhood school, whereas taxes were to be distributed on the same student-based formula as the government grant system. Thus more affluent sub-districts would subsidize their poorer neighbours, a goal the education bureaucracy favoured, but which the superintendent for Upper Canada,

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<sup>19</sup>Marcus Child to J. B. Meilleur, Stanstead, 12 January 1847, no. 81, *Lettres Reçues*, E13, ANQQ.

<sup>20</sup>See Little, *State and Society*, 127–30.

<sup>21</sup>Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order and Authority in British Columbia, 1821–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 64–65.

<sup>22</sup>See Little, *State and Society*, 189; and Bruce Curtis, “Mapping the Social: Notes from Jacob Keefer’s Educational Tours, 1845,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1993): 62–63.

Egerton Ryerson, never dared to attempt. Indeed, with township boards still optional in Ontario at the end of the century, most schools in that province continued to be strictly locally supported.<sup>23</sup> It was only by virtue of an informal version of that localized system being tolerated by the authorities in Lower Canada that school taxes were ultimately accepted in much of the Eastern Townships.

School commission records for St Armand East reveal that the public schools system actually became more explicitly decentralized as the 1840s progressed. In 1845 the commissioners showed support for local control by resolving that "this Body deem it expedient that each school District in this parish may as far as is consistent wit [sic] law, manage their own internal affairs." It was now officially resolved that each commissioner and the two elected trustees from his home sub-district would hire the local teachers and approve their wages. New teachers would still have to be approved by the chair and secretary-treasurer, who would serve as the examining committee, but local control was reinforced the following year when a resolution stated that henceforth prospective teachers could be examined by any commissioner alone.

The commissioners' annual report for 1845–46 admitted there had been no public examination, though they had occasionally visited the schools. This was so through the decade, although the local clergyman, mayor, and justices of the peace also became official school visitors. The commissioners also confessed they had been unable "to prevail on the people yet, to adopt system in books." They hoped to accomplish this "before long," but the most they were able to claim by mid-century was that the books in use had been "approved of under the Elementary & Royal Institution Schools."

Another way in which the St Armand East commissioners maintained an arms-length relationship with the schools in 1845 was by simply dividing the grant equally among the sub-districts rather than applying the government formula. They ended this questionable practice the following year, when the subsidy was distributed according to the basis on which it was granted, namely the number of children in each sub-district aged five to sixteen. This step was not willingly accepted by all, however, for the smallest sub-district sued the commission for an equal share of the grant.<sup>24</sup>

The inadequacy of voluntary contributions in much of the province, coupled with confusion over assessment responsibilities, resulted in the rapid repeal of the 1845 Schools Act and the ratification of the first permanent legislation in June 1846. This law, which formed the basis of the Quebec public

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<sup>23</sup>Gidney and Lawr, "Who Ran the Schools?," 137–38.

<sup>24</sup>A. Knap to Dr Meilleur, Frelighsburg, 18 January 1847, no. 135, 1847, E13, ANQQ.



schools system for more than a century, declared for the first time that school commissioners had to order property assessments, and that they were liable to fines of up to £5 for failure to do so. They were also legally required to initiate prosecutions against any proprietors who refused to pay school taxes.

Not surprisingly, there was considerable resistance to this move in the Eastern Townships, where official enrolment in the six counties consequently dropped from 9,017, in the scholastic year ending in July 1846, to 6,964 during the following term. The number of conforming schools declined by 26 percent, from 316 to 234, which was a more marked downward movement than in Canada East as a whole, where schools receiving grants declined by 21 percent. But the situation remained stable in Missisquoi County, where the decrease was only from 61 schools to 58, and in St Armand East the number remained constant at 7. Furthermore, the number of students in the parish increased slightly from 359 to 373, and during the following six months, from January to June 1847, there was another slight increase to 382 students in 8 schools.<sup>25</sup> In sharp contrast to other American-settled townships, such as Stanstead and Barnston, St Armand East's commissioners appointed three assessors in August 1846, only two months after the controversial school bill became law. And even though one of the appointees refused to act, the assessment was completed by October, as ordered.

Paradoxically, the main reason for this unusually rapid conformity to the tax system lay in the degree to which the commissioners had broken the centralizing spirit of the reform legislation. In March 1846 the St Armand East commissioners had made it official that the amount of money raised in each sub-district would be returned to it, minus 2½ percent for collection expenses. The following August, while appointing the assessors, the commissioners were careful to announce a public meeting which would "take into consideration the best method of managing the schools for the ensuing year." Although local communities may have lost essential control over the funding process, which now operated according to a government formula, the spirit of voluntarism would survive to a considerable extent through decisions on the level of school fees, construction of school buildings, engagement of teachers, nature of the curriculum, and so on.

All this left the school commission with little to do. The meeting of January 1847, the first held in three months, simply adjourned because there was "no business of importance to transact." Later sessions were concerned mostly with adjusting sub-district boundaries (though the commissioners again basically enacted the wishes of the local people), and with proceedings against

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<sup>25</sup>*JLAC* 5 (1846), appendix P; 6 (1847), appendix FF; 7 (1848), appendix P; 8 (1849), appendix OO.

those who failed to pay the school tax. A motion was passed in November 1848 to prosecute two of these individuals, but a year later their arrears had increased to £2 15s, and twenty-one others owed a total of £3 15s. 5d., which together represented nearly 10 percent of the total assessment. What steps were taken is not clear since no more minutes are recorded in the register and receipt book before 1851, but this gap in itself suggests that the commission's business had become entirely routine.

It was so routine that there is no reference to the controversial bill of 1849, which increased sanctions against delinquent ratepayers and school commissions. Although this legislation sparked the popular revolt known as the *Guerre des Éteignoirs* in a number of French-Canadian parishes, it had very little impact in the older American-settled part of the Eastern Townships. Indeed, when the government responded to the scattered riots and arson by introducing a bill (subsequently withdrawn) to accept voluntary contributions once again, it met only with objections from this section of the province. The *Stanstead Journal* went so far as to proclaim the proposal to be "not only absurd, but unjust."<sup>26</sup> Clearly, the people had generally accommodated themselves to the assessment system after the flurry of protests in 1846–47, and the foregoing examination of St Armand East strongly suggests that they did so because the threat to localism was mitigated by the effective decentralization of the school commissions' authority.

Further evidence to this effect can be found in the reports of the region's school inspectors, first appointed in 1852. Marcus Child, inspector for the St Francis District, was generally optimistic about the operation of the schools, but he complained in 1853 that "there was no part of the school commission's duty well and correctly performed."<sup>27</sup> Much the same opinion was shared by Dr. Rotus Parmelee, the inspector for the western part of the region, which included Missisquoi County, and Parmelee was more specific about what he perceived to be the failings of the school commissions.

While claiming to be reluctant to criticize, since "the faithful discharge of their unpaid duties . . . necessarily subjects them to censure," Parmelee reported that in many municipalities the school commissioners had largely abdicated their collective responsibilities. A school manager, or the commissioner living within or closest to each sub-district, generally hired the teachers and collected a sum from the students sufficient to make up any deficit in their salaries from the government subsidy. Even where the tax was levied, as required by law, the collection and disbursement were carried out at the sub-district level rather than passing through the hands of the secretary-treasurer:

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<sup>26</sup>*Stanstead Journal*, 8 August 1850.

<sup>27</sup>M. Child to J. B. Meilleur, *Stanstead*, 15 June 1853, no. 788, *Lettres Reçues*, E13, ANQQ.

Thus, the Commissioners, in their corporate capacity, throw the responsibility upon the Commissioners, in their individual capacity, or upon the local Managers, as the case may be: they, in turn, perhaps, call for the scholar-tax unsuccessfully, are annoyed by duns from the Teachers, and resolve to give themselves no further trouble in a matter for which they are not paid.

Consequently, according to the inspector, arrears of up to a year were not uncommon.<sup>28</sup> He may have been exaggerating, however, since we have seen that even though a small number of ratepayers in St Armand East did fall behind by a year, their names were presented to the school commission which then resorted to the courts.

It is impossible to know just how enduring the localized schools system was in the Eastern Townships, but it was still in effect in French-speaking Winslow North as late as the 1870s.<sup>29</sup> Although students from prosperous sub-districts had the greatest benefit in this system, each family could nonetheless feel a strong sense of "ownership" in its neighbourhood school. The education in such schools may have been rudimentary, but the high rate of student enrolment in the Eastern Townships, and the fact that the localized system could not be tampered with even at the official level in Ontario during the nineteenth century, suggests that it generally met the requirements of the rural population.

Tina Loo has argued that "the key to the liberal state's exercise of power lies in its ability to . . . break down local practices and replace them with a set of common ones defined and mediated by the state."<sup>30</sup> By establishing a complex and comprehensive body of regulations designed to govern everyday practice in the education of children, the school reforms of the 1840s certainly represented a major intrusion by the state into a social activity that had long been organized at the local level.<sup>31</sup> But it is important to remember that the shape those reforms took was strongly influenced by local demands and local reaction. And although Bruce Curtis has argued that local officials such as school commissioners were agents of state power and influence at the local level,<sup>32</sup> they represented the interests and desires of their electors as well.

<sup>28</sup>Reports of R. Parmelee, inspector, 21 July 1852, 10 March 1853, *JLAC* 11 (1852-53), appendix JJ.

<sup>29</sup>J. I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), chapter 8.

<sup>30</sup>Loo, *Making Law*, 65.

<sup>31</sup>On school reform as a crucial aspect of state formation, see Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont.: Althouse Press, 1988).

<sup>32</sup>Bruce Curtis, "Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850," *Studies in Political Economy* 28 (Spring 1989): 63.

It is not surprising that the school commissions' primary loyalty would be to their communities during the early days of state formation, when the sense of localism remained strong. More remarkable, at least some school commissions in the Eastern Townships operated as corporate bodies in name only. Although with more financial resources, local and localized practices in schooling continued much as they always had despite the veneer of state reform and regulation. The most significant step to state coercion was the imposition of compulsory taxes, an imposition to which the people of the Eastern Townships initially objected in strenuous terms. But most soon recognized the merits of a system that distributed the financial burden of school support more equitably and efficiently, particularly when absentee proprietors were brought within its reach, and once it became clear they could subvert the threat the new system posed to local control. Local rural elites may have lost some of their prestige and influence when they no longer provided most of the funds for their neighbourhood schools, but domination by the village notables was prevented by the fact that school commissioners were rotated on a regular basis, as well as residing in dispersed sections of each district.

The contrast with the northernmost French-speaking townships and the south-shore seigneurie of Nicolet is instructive. Here the *petite bourgeoisie* gained control over the parish school system during the 1840s, dominating the school commissions, introducing class conflict into the situation, and producing the violent anti-tax movement known as the *Guerre des Éteignoirs*.<sup>33</sup> Contrary to popular perception, with the crushing of this wave of resistance, Quebec was left with a more centralized public school system than Ontario during the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> As far as state formation in the American-settled Eastern Townships is concerned, however, the foregoing brief analysis reveals how the centralizing forces of the state had to compromise with the deeply entrenched sense of rural localism. Local isolation and solidarity would be gradually eroded with the improvement of the transportation and communications networks, but only when consolidation began at the end of the century would the neighbourhood school begin to lose its role as one of the key social institutions in each rural community.

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<sup>33</sup>Little, *State and Society*, 212–13; Wendie Nelson, "The 'Guerre des Éteignoirs': School Reform and Popular Resistance in Lower Canada, 1841–50" (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1989).

<sup>34</sup>Note, for example, that Ontario's school inspectors remained municipal appointees until the 1920s (Curtis, *True Government*, 99), while those in Lower Canada/Quebec were provincial agents from the start.