

The Common School Amendment Acts of the 1830s and the Re-shaping of Schooling in London, Upper Canada¹

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Over the last two decades or so, historians have shown that elementary education in Upper Canada was far more available than previously thought.² Aside from the small number of grant-aided common schools recorded in government reports, there were large numbers of private (or non-grant-aided) schools for both boys and girls, offering everything from the 3R's to the classics or the female "accomplishments." In the following study of London, Upper Canada, and its surrounding townships, I offer further confirmation of this body of historical work, revise it, and show more precisely how local schools were organized and administered in the years before the landmark school legislation of the 1840s and the early 1850s.³ Although I draw on a variety of sources to make my arguments, one small collection I call the "John Talbot File" is of critical importance.

John Talbot was brought to London Township in 1818 by his father, Richard S. Talbot, the leader of a Tipperary Irish expedition to the area.⁴ After travelling outside the Province and abroad as a young adult and completing short teaching stints in Halifax, York (now Toronto), and London Township, John Talbot presided over schools in London village during 1832–33 and 1834–35.⁵ London's growth had begun in 1826, when it was selected as the

¹I am grateful to the following individuals for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper: Jud Purdy, R. D. Gidney, W. P. J. Millar, and Roger Emerson.

²See, for example, Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); and R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario Education* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990). London was situated in the Province of Upper Canada until 1841, Canada West between 1841 and 1867, and Ontario after 1867.

³Here I refer to the common school acts of 1841, 1843, 1846, 1847, and 1850.

⁴See Daniel J. Brock, "Richard Talbot, the Tipperary Irish and the Formative Years of London Township: 1818–1826" (master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1969).

⁵*History of the County of Middlesex, Canada* (hereafter, *History of Middlesex*) (London: W. A. & C. L. Goodspeed, Publishers, 1889; reprint, Belleville: Mika Studio, 1972), 179. See also Daniel J. Brock and J. J. Talman, "John Talbot," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 10: 671.

administrative and judicial centre for the London District, an area that stretched south from Georgian Bay and Lake Huron to Lake Erie, east nearly to Brantford, and west to the present-day Lambton-Kent boundary.⁶ Except for a cholera scare in 1832, and a rebellion and a depression in 1837, this predominantly Anglo-Irish community⁷ experienced steady urban growth, as its population rose from about 400 in 1831 to just over 1400 by the end of the decade.⁸ At any given time, roughly 20 to 25 percent of these inhabitants were of school age (5 to 16).⁹

While teaching in London village, Talbot became profoundly aggrieved over his teaching salary, and laid his case before Upper Canada's Lieutenant-Governor, John Colborne, in two angry letters. The local authorities—members of the District Board of Education—responded quickly to his charges with a series of resolutions, pay lists for their teachers, quarterly reports, and attendance rolls to vindicate their actions and their educational

⁶For more information about London's history, see for example, C. O. Ermatinger, *The Talbot Regime or the First Half Century of the Talbot Settlement* (St. Thomas: The Municipal World, 1904); Fred Landon, "London in Early Times," and "London in Later Times," in *The Province of Ontario*, ed. Jesse E. Middleton and Fred Landon (Toronto: Dominion Publishing Co., 1927), 11: 1044–64 and 11: 1065–83, respectively; Frederick H. Armstrong and Daniel J. Brock, "The Rise of London: A Study of Urban Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Southwestern Ontario," in *Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, ed. H. A. Stevenson, F. H. Armstrong, and J. D. Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 80–100; H. A. Stevenson and F. H. Armstrong, *The Forest City: An Illustrated History of London, Canada* (Canada: Windsor Publications, 1986); Orlo Miller, *London 200: An Illustrated History* (London: London Chamber of Commerce, 1992); and Guy St-Denis, ed., *Simcoe's Choice: Celebrating London's Bicentennial, 1793–1993* (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1992).

⁷See Michael F. Murphy, "School and Society in London, Canada, 1826–1871: The Evolution of a System of Public Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1995), chap. 2.

⁸See *The Western Mercury* [Hamilton], 8 September 1831, p. 1 (from the *London Sun*); and Upper Canada, *Journal of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada [JHA]*, 1839–40, appendix, p. 151.

⁹One prominent school official estimated the school-age population to be about one-quarter to one-fifth the total population in 1828; see "Report of the Reverend Doctor Strachan, President of the General Board of Education for Upper Canada, for the Year 1828," in J. G. Hodgins, ed., *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, from the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791 to the Close of Dr. Ryerson's Administration of the Education Department in 1875 [DHE]* (Toronto: Warwick Bros. and Ritter, 1894–1910), 1: 266. On the other hand, education officials at mid-century used a figure of 22.22 percent for similar calculations; see, for example, Archives of Ontario, RG2, F3B, box 40, London Board Annual Reports, 1859 to 1869.

policies.¹⁰ Talbot's tirade would eventually prove his undoing. These men were members of the local "Family Compact," and the primitive state of colonial public administration in those days had allowed them to become oligarchs in their own sphere.¹¹

In the larger scheme of things, this was a minor *contre-temps* and probably common enough in the other parts of the colony. But in this case the correspondence was preserved in the records of the colony's civil secretary. It provides a rare insight into the provision of education in one local community during the 1830s—into the numbers of schools established, their organization and administration, and the salaries paid to teachers. Further, the John Talbot File helps establish the grant-aided status of schools mistakenly identified as private by some local historians, and assumed to be so by other historians who have had at their command only such sources as newspapers, diary entries, and memoirs.¹²

To begin with the sheer number of schools themselves, Glass, in 1889, succinctly summarized the conventional wisdom, which first arose from the

¹⁰See National Archives of Canada [NAC], RG5, vol. 5, nos. 405, 416, 426, 427, 460, 462, 468, 469, 471, 481, 482, 491, 497, and 499.

¹¹For more information, see Colin Read, "The London District Oligarchy in the Rebellion Era," *Ontario History* 72 (December 1980): 195–209. Also see J. E. Hodgetts, *Pioneer Public Service: An Administrative History of the United Canadas, 1841–1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955); George W. Spragge, "The Districts of Upper Canada, 1788–1849," in *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario*, ed. Edith G. Firth (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 34–42; and Bruce Curtis, *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

¹²These errors are understandable because London District officials submitted returns to the Legislature only for the periods ending 1 June 1828, 1829, 1838, and 1839, and no common schools were reported for London village. See *JHA*, 1829, appendix, "General Report of Common Schools Reported to the Board of Education in the London District . . . on the First Day of June, 1828," pp. 15–16; *JHA*, 1830, appendix, "Report on Common Schools . . . for the Year Ending the First Day of June, 1829," pp. 203–4; *JHA*, 1839, vol. 11, "Abstract of Common Schools . . . in the District of London . . . for the Year Ending the First Day of June, 1838," pp. 283–85; and *JHA*, 1839–40, appendix, vol. 1, "Report of Common Schools in the London District for the Year 1839," pp. 426–30. Moreover, most observers have claimed that no records of organized common schools for the community existed before 1848. See, for example, C. B. Edwards, "London Public Schools, 1848–1871," [London and Middlesex Historical Society] *Transactions* [hereafter *LMHS Transactions*], Part 5 (1914), p. 15.

recollections of four nineteenth-century commentators and was then incorporated into local histories of London:¹³

The [London village] schools were opened . . . as a private enterprise, without government or municipal aid. The usual charge was from \$1.25 to \$1.50 per quarter. It will be readily seen that the probable return was not such as to command the best talent, and this will also account for the rise and fall of so many schools in so short a time.¹⁴

These early observers collectively identified fourteen “private” schools and seventeen teachers in London village between 1828 and 1837.¹⁵ Many more teachers than these, however, practised in London village. Two English ladies conducted an expensive and private girls’ boarding school there in 1833, and two young American women established an infant school in May 1835.¹⁶ Mrs. John H. Miller ran a children’s school in October 1835, while her husband operated a senior school in the same building.¹⁷ Schools were also kept by a Mr. Gallagher, a Miss Merrill,¹⁸ and a Henry Rigney.¹⁹ Private tutors may have

¹³The four commentators were teacher Nicholas Wilson, sheriff William Glass, doctor Clarence T. Campbell, and Mrs. Gilbert Porte. See, for example, Nicholas Wilson, “Early Schools of London: Reminiscences of the City’s Pioneer Teacher,” *London Free Press*, 5 May 1894, p. 17. Also see the following three pieces by Clarence T. Campbell: “The Settlement of London,” *LMHS Transactions*, Part 3 (1911), pp. 9–51; “The Village of London,” *LMHS Transactions*, Part 9 (1918), pp. 5–25; and “The Founding of London,” in *Centennial Review 1967* (London: London Public Library and Museums, 1967), 4–19. Contrary to the others, in Harriet Priddis, “Reminiscences of Mrs. Gilbert Porte,” *LMHS Transactions*, Part 4 (1911–12), pp. 62–69, Porte states, “There were plenty of good private schools in London from the earliest days.”

¹⁴*History of Middlesex*, 288–89.

¹⁵The ten male teachers were Peter Van Every, James Routledge, John Hawkins, Edward Allen Talbot, John Talbot, Shubal Waterman, William Taylor, Leonard Bisbee, the Reverend William Proudfoot, and Francis Wright. Mrs. Phoebe Talbot, Miss Kezia Stimson, Miss Grannis, Miss Cronyn, Miss Mary Proudfoot, Mrs. Pringle, and Miss Elizabeth Dyer were the seven female teachers.

¹⁶See Patrick Shirreff, *A Tour through North America, Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and United States. As Adapted for Agricultural Emigration* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1835), 190; and University of Western Ontario, Weldon Library, J. J. Talman Regional Collection [hereafter, Talman Collection], box 4273, journal no. 23, 8 May 1835, Papers of William Proudfoot, 1808–56.

¹⁷*History of Middlesex*, 288.

¹⁸Archie Bremner, *Illustrated London, Ontario, Canada* (London: London Lithography Co., 1900), 74.

¹⁹See Willard Francis Dillon, “The Irish in London, Ontario, 1826–1871” (master’s thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1963), 86; *JHA*, 1839, appendix, p. 284; *JHA*, 1839–40, appendix, p. 401; and *History of Middlesex*, 180.

existed as well.²⁰ London's known pioneer teachers, therefore, consisted altogether of thirteen males and thirteen females (hereafter called the designated London village teachers) who taught twenty "private" schools in or near the village between 1828 and 1837.

These remembrances should be treated cautiously. A promissory note signed by twenty prominent, mainly upper-class, Anglo-Irish Londoners reveals that an expensive private school was taught by Trinity College Dublin graduate (Francis) Henry Wright in 1831–32. This testimonial revises the recollections of many nineteenth-century observers, who have claimed that Wright started teaching in the village in 1835. Since only fifteen pupils attended his first school, Wright would not have received a government grant, only fees from parents and supporters, who, based on their names and occupations, comprised London's small but growing social and administrative elite.²¹

Moreover, an abstract of the London District common school report for 1832 shows that of the forty-seven grant-aided schools listed thereon, at least two London Township schools served London villagers.²² Although identified as a private school teacher, Kezia Stimson ran a grant-aided common school just north of London's Old Town Plot boundary from April 1831 to May 1832.²³ Similarly, John Hawkins, another "designated" teacher, operated a grant-aided common school in the village across from the market between September 1831 and March 1832.²⁴

This mix of private and grant-aided common schools foreshadowed the future configuration of educational arrangements in London village, and thus the social structure and gender sensitivities of the community.²⁵ One

²⁰Weldon Library, Talman Collection, box 4181, Papers of John Harris, Treasurer for London District and Commissioner of Rebellion Losses Claims Commission, London, 1808–50 [hereafter, John Harris Papers], James Fitzgibbons to John Harris, 9 February 1836. Fitzgibbons recommended a Miss Jane Steers as a governess to Harris.

²¹Talman Collection, Middlesex County, Ontario, *Clerk of the Peace*, Quarter Sessions Records, London District, 547A, box 1, London District Quarterly Session Papers, 1832. Also see Murphy, "School and Society," 91, 412–13.

²²Talman Collection, Dr. Fred Landon Papers, box 4215, item 31, "Abstract of the Common Schools . . . for the London District, for the Year Ending the first day of June, 1832."

²³Edwin Seaborn, *The March of Medicine in Western Ontario* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1944), 110–11.

²⁴Campbell, "The Settlement of London," 43.

²⁵The *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, nineteenth-century newspapers, church and land records, city directories, and census data were used to establish socio-economic profiles of Londoners (upper, middle, and lower classes) during the years 1834, 1842, 1852, 1861, and 1871. See Murphy, "School and Society."

newspaper, for example, boasted at the end of 1833 that the community had one school for boys and two for girls, "not inferior to many in the Province," and a school house.²⁶ The first three schools were likely operated by certain of the designated teachers, whereas the "school house" was the building on the courthouse square used by John Talbot to teach upper- and middle-class boys and girls in 1832–33.²⁷ Similar articles run in Cobourg, Brantford, and Montreal newspapers in 1834 recorded that Londoners had "3 Public Schools" in that year as well.²⁸ One of these latter schools was an expensive grant-aided institution taught by George Boyce, also an individual not recollected by the early commentators. The number of schools is remarkable considering London's reputation as lacking in schools, not to say good schools, during this era.

But what of the other schools? Were they private schools in the modern sense? And were there so few grant-aided schools as government returns suggest? The John Talbot File lays to rest the contention that London village lacked grant-aided common schools in the pioneer period. Seven teachers' names in the File match those remembered by the four commentators. John Talbot, George Boyce, John Hawkins, Kezia Stimson, William Taylor, Elizabeth Dyer, and Francis Wright taught in 16 six-month grant-aided common schools, not private ones, in or near London village between 1832 and 1835 alone. Six to 8 of these institutions, it is important to note, were in operation in any given year. Indeed, 88 six-month grant-aided London District common schools were not mentioned in returns to colonial officials in 1834, 110 in 1835.²⁹

The reason for not reporting these grant-aided schools remains a mystery. Was it because each had fewer than the twenty pupils required by law to receive government funding? No, for data in the John Talbot File show that enrolments exceeded the minimum number. Was it because the reports were lost, because the commissioners forgot or did not bother to submit them, or because of the ineffectiveness of the pre-1840 central administration generally? Whatever the reason, reports were not submitted for almost a decade.

Some teachers of these schools, moreover, were remarkably well paid. Boyce, for example, earned \$459 for his efforts in 1834, and Wright was paid \$192 for six months' teaching in 1835, stipends double or triple those of their

²⁶"Town of London," *Montreal Gazette*, 18 March 1834, p. 2 (from *The True Patriot and London District Advertiser*).

²⁷These were probably the schools run by Edward Allen Talbot, Phoebe Talbot, and the two English ladies.

²⁸"The Town of London," *The Cobourg Star*, 13 August 1834, p. 1, and *Montreal Gazette*, 4 September 1834, p. 2.

²⁹NAC, RG5, B11, vol. 5, no. 471.

contemporaries in the London District.³⁰ But payment of these high salaries in turn raises the question of where the money came from. In other words, how did parents and trustees raise these large sums?

The common school acts of 1816, 1820, and 1824 gave parents and trustees broad rights and duties in school management. The act of 1816, for instance, enabled inhabitants of towns, villages, or townships to provide for common schools with a minimum of twenty pupils per school by erecting a school building and establishing subscriptions or fees to support a portion of the teacher's salary.³¹ The state delegated substantial control of common schools to district and local officials. Each school was administered by three elected trustees, whom the state empowered to hire and fire teachers and to make rules and regulations for the school's good government. Trustees were also required, within certain guidelines, to make quarterly and annual reports respecting the state of their schools to a district board of education. Those boards were composed of up to five people (school commissioners) appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor.

Financial arrangements for common schools were reasonably straightforward. The Receiver General paid out the designated legislative grant to the district treasurer. With the exception of \$400, which a district board might spend on textbooks, all monies were apportioned to teachers on a half-yearly or yearly basis as determined by the trustees. Teachers collected their salaries from the district treasurer upon submitting a certificate signed by their trustees indicating that all the conditions required for government support had been met.

So far the stipulations are clear. However, two sections of the act had potential for misinterpretation or manipulation. Section 10 required that government monies for teacher salaries be distributed according to student numbers, whereas section 13 specified that the district board had "full power and authority" to apportion the money, and after "proportioning the same each of [sic] to the said Schools," were to provide the Treasurer with a list of the apportioning so that he could pay the respective teachers. An annual salary cap

³⁰The currency references here are in dollars rather than pounds, for the reader's convenience and because Talbot used both in his letters to Colborne. It is difficult to find information about teacher salaries in the Province before the 1840s, but most common school teachers probably received a small government grant which they supplemented with fees (money, in kind, or both); see Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 47-48.

³¹"An Act Granting to His Majesty a Sum of Money, to be Applied to the Use of Common Schools throughout this Province, and to Provide for the Regulations of said Common Schools," *DHE* 1: 102-4.

of \$100 per teacher was imposed, although most teachers supplemented the government grant with tuition fees.

The common school amendment act of 1820 reduced the government grant to the London District from \$2400 to \$1000.³² It sought to clarify teacher salary policy by specifying that government monies released under this act were to be divided equally among the teachers, half-yearly or yearly, at the trustees' discretion. It also limited teacher salaries to \$50. Whether the salary cap was for six or twelve months' work was not stated.

The common school act of 1824 further modified schooling in Upper Canada by introducing the notion of merit into teacher salary policy.³³ To obtain public monies, teachers had to be examined by their respective boards of education, or certified by at least one commissioner, indicating their "ability and fitness to teach the same due regard at all times being had to the degree of education wanting, or to the branches necessary to be taught."

Although this legislation is familiar to any student of the subject, what nearly all historians have failed to recognize is that a series of additional statutes (hereafter called amendment acts) made much larger amounts of state money available to parents and trustees. These amendment acts, all passed in the 1830s, are significant because they had the potential to revolutionize the quality and quantity of grant-aided common schools.³⁴

³²"An Act to Amend [sic] Continue, under Certain Modifications, an Act Passed in the Fifty-Sixth Year of His Majesty's Reign (1816) intituled, 'An Act Granting to His Majesty a Sum of Money, to be Applied to the Use of Common Schools Throughout the Province, and to Provide for the Regulation of the Said Common Schools,'" *DHE* 1: 172-74.

³³"An Act to Make Permanent and Extend the Provisions of the Laws Now in Force for the Establishment and Regulation of Common Schools Throughout This Province, and for Granting to His Majesty a Further Sum of Money to Promote and Encourage Education within the Same," *DHE* 1: 197-98.

³⁴See Upper Canada, "An Act for Granting to His Majesty a Certain Sum of Money in Aid of the Funds Already Granted for the Support of Common Schools in this Province [Passed 13 February 1833]," *Statutes, of His Majesty's Province of Upper Canada, Passed in the Third Session of the Eleventh Provincial Parliament of Upper Canada* (York: Robert Stanton), chap. 56, 179-80; Upper Canada, "An Act to Provide Additional Aid in Support of Common Schools in the Several Districts in this Province [Passed 16 April 1835]," *Statutes, of His Majesty's Province of Upper Canada, passed in the First Session of the Twelfth Provincial Parliament of Upper Canada* (York: Robert Stanton), chap. 29, 113-14; Upper Canada, "An Act to Provide Additional Aid in Support of Common Schools in the Several Districts of this Province [Passed 28 November 1836]," *Statutes, of His Majesty's Province of Upper Canada, passed in the Second Session of the Twelfth Provincial Parliament of Upper Canada; Being Reserved Acts to which the Royal Assent was Subsequently Promulgated* (Toronto: Robert Stanton), chap. 52, 28-29 (also

Seven amendment acts were passed between 1833 and 1839, providing \$22,600 annually to be divided among districts that participated in the new scheme. This money was in addition to the state funds guaranteed under the acts of 1820 and 1824. Until 1838, London District received one of the largest annual grants (\$2400) awarded under the new legislation. After the district grammar school was moved to London village in 1837, the grant was gradually reduced so that by 1840 it was only half the original amount. Nonetheless, prior to 1839 the effect of the amendment acts was to triple government monies to London District and almost triple the number of grant-aided schools.³⁵

The amendment acts would change the shape of educational provision in London village in three important ways. First, trustees were required to guarantee to their commissioners that they had obtained a sum of money for their teachers at least double the government grant. Accordingly, rich parents could obtain significantly more state financing for their grant-aided common schools than poor ones.

Next, the commissioners were provided a great deal of latitude: they were permitted to allocate funds for teacher salaries based on student numbers, examination results, academic credentials, curriculum taught, and public support. In other words, wide discretion was given to these officials.

Finally, the amendment acts allowed local authorities to create a system of schools in the village far more sophisticated than is normally associated with grant-aided common schools of the 1830s—one that catered to the entire community. Here the John Talbot File is most illuminating, since an assess-

in *DHE* 2 [1831–36]: 344]; Upper Canada, “An Act Granting a Sum of Money for the Support of Common Schools, for the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Seven [Passed 4 March 1837],” *Statutes, of His Majesty’s Province of Upper Canada, passed in the First Session of the Thirteenth Parliament of Upper Canada*, chap. 55, 399–400; Upper Canada, “An Act Granting a Sum of Money for the Support of Common Schools, for the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Eight [Passed 6 March 1838],” *Statutes, of His Majesty’s Province of Upper Canada, passed in the Third Session of the Thirteenth Provincial Parliament of Upper Canada*, chap. 60, 187–88; Upper Canada, “An Act Granting a Sum of Money for the Support of Common Schools, for the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Nine [Passed 11 May 1839],” *Statutes, of His Majesty’s Province of Upper Canada, passed in the Fourth Session of the Thirteenth Parliament of Upper Canada*, chap. 62, 122–23; and Upper Canada, “An Act Granting a Sum of Money for the Support of Common Schools, for the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty [Passed 10 February 1840],” *Statutes, of His Majesty’s Province of Upper Canada, passed in the Fifth Session of the Thirteenth Provincial Parliament*, chap. 68, 163–64.

³⁵Government grants rose from \$1000 to \$4000, while the numbers of schools increased from 47 to about 115.

ment of the information contained in this source clarifies how the respectable classes in London village manipulated the amendment acts of the 1830s to institutionalize their view of social relations in a newly created hierarchy of grant-aided common schools.

The stage for significant educational change was set just after the 1832–33 school year, when London village community leaders met to create a special kind of common school in their municipality. Unable to secure a grammar school in the short term, and anxious to avoid the burden of private school fees, upper-class parents led by Hiram D. Lee, Thomas Parke, John Scatcherd, the Reverend William Proudfoot, and John B. Askin seized the opportunity presented by the new legislation to install a classics master (George Boyce) in one of their grant-aided common schools.³⁶ This move was astute, because under the terms of the law about one-third of Boyce's salary was paid for by the government. Had the school been private, the parents would have borne all costs.

However, the commissioners' decision to issue large sums of grant money to Boyce in 1834, and to several other teachers in the next year, resulted in the *contre-temps* with which this paper began. But Talbot's complaints extended far beyond his salary allocation, for he labelled the commissioners' new teacher classification scheme, which grouped teachers into four classes, a "system of favouritism."³⁷

Were Talbot's allegations correct? Did the commissioners' scheme reward merit, as they claimed, or favourites, as Talbot contended? The John Talbot File helps answer that question. According to the commissioners' salary lists, which were contained in the File, annual parliamentary grants to the London District totalled \$1000 under the act of 1820 and \$2400 under the first amendment act, which covered the period from 1 June 1833 to 1 June 1835.³⁸

³⁶Journal no. 16, 13 November 1833, Papers of William Proudfoot. Lee was a doctor, Parke a gentleman, Scatcherd a merchant, and Proudfoot a Presbyterian clergyman. Askin, the district clerk, placed an advertisement for a classics teacher in London, St. Thomas, and York newspapers. See, for instance, "Notice," *Christian Guardian* [York], 27 November 1833, p. 4. In the contemporary context, a grammar school was a "special-purpose classical school [usually expensive] that took boys immediately after they had learned the rudiments and gave them both an 'elementary' and 'secondary' education"; see Gidney and Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*, 4.

³⁷NAC, RG5, B11, vol. 5, no. 460, John Talbot to Sir John Colborne, 19 August 1834; and *ibid.*, no. 497, John Talbot to Sir John Colborne, 28 August 1835.

³⁸"Payments on Behalf of Education in Upper Canada from 1830 to 1843," *DHE* 5: 256–57. For a summary of the annual grants, fees, and salaries paid to the designated London village teachers in selected years between 1831 and 1839, see Murphy, "School and Society," Table 18, 420.

The public money allocated under the former act was divided equally among the teachers, whereas the grants approved under the amendment act were distributed according to the commissioners' new criteria. Two significant points emerge from these lists. First, the commissioners' claim that their new scheme had improved the schools can be verified, at least to the extent that considerably more teachers attained the top three salary levels in 1834–35 than in the previous year.³⁹ Second, in each year under scrutiny the top salary category was dominated by a few highly qualified teachers in London village, suggesting that the commissioners who lived there must have controlled the decision making.

Sufficient data are available in the John Talbot File to reconstruct the basic organizational and administrative principles of the commissioners' plan during the 1833–34 and 1834–35 school years. In the former year, local trustees operated eighty-eight six-month grant-aided common schools in the district. This large number, almost twice that reported in 1832, reflected the financial boost from the first amendment act and the swelling numbers of teachers who had flocked to the area to take advantage of the new jobs. Furthermore, the commissioners, exercising the discretion allowed by this new legislation and their own bias for highly qualified instructors, paid first-class teachers (classics masters) \$90 each in government grants for a six-month school; second-class teachers, \$64; third-class teachers, \$41; and fourth-class teachers, \$32.

Of the designated London village teachers, six taught in these grant-aided common schools. Boyce was the sole first-class teacher, the only one in the district. John Talbot and William Taylor, Sr., another Trinity College Dublin graduate, were in the second group.⁴⁰ Miss Stimson, along with thirty-three additional teachers, was a third-class teacher, whereas Hawkins was in the fourth category, with fifty-one others. All five were registered as London Township teachers. Miss Dyer, then a teacher in the adjacent Westminster Township south of the village, was, like Hawkins, placed in the lowest class.

³⁹NAC, RG5, B11, vol. 5, no. 497, London District commissioners to Sir John Colborne, 18 September 1835. From 1833–34 to 1834–35, the number of first-class schools rose from one to five; second-class schools from two to eleven; and third-class schools from thirty-three to fifty-eight. Over the same period, the number of fourth-class schools declined from fifty-two to thirty-six. Also see Murphy, "School and Society," Table 17, 419.

⁴⁰Although most commentators claim that Taylor was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, it may not be true. Unfortunately, the official register for that institution does not fully clarify the matter. See George Dames Burtchaell, ed., *Alumni Dublinenses: A register of the Students, Graduates, Professors and Provosts of Trinity College, in the University of Dublin* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1924), 803.

Collectively, the six designated London village teachers received \$364 in government grants, considerably more than the \$25.50 paid to Hawkins and Stimson in 1831–32. The salary differential, however, was even greater than these figures indicate. Since the amendment acts required trustees to guarantee a salary at least double the government grant, this group actually received about \$728 in fees, for a combined total salary of at least \$1092. Individually, Boyce earned about \$270 for his first six months of teaching;⁴¹ Talbot and Taylor, \$192 each; Stimson, \$123; and Hawkins and Dyer, \$96 each.

The number of grant-aided London District common schools rose to 113 in 1834–35, although the government grant portions for the four classes of teacher salaries were decreased to \$63, \$41, \$27, and \$21.⁴² The gross annual salary for the six designated London village teachers (Boyce, Taylor, Wright, Talbot, Stimson, and Dyer) was \$1290, remarkably more than that earned by the two designated London village teachers in 1831–32. Three of the five first-class district teachers that year—Boyce, then Wright, and Taylor—taught schools in or near London village. Considering their earlier distributions, the commissioners paid these men handsomely, granting them \$189 for teaching from July through December in 1834. With fees, their half-yearly salary was \$567; their annual salaries totalled \$756 (\$252 in grants and \$504 from fees). In 1834–35, therefore, the commissioners' scheme had produced three classics teachers in the village area for what had previously been the price for one.

This decision came at a heavy cost. Hiring these highly qualified masters meant substantially less money for Talbot, Stimson, and Dyer, who retained their salary classifications from the previous year.⁴³ Moreover, the commissioners' decision to spend 11 percent of the district's money on 3.5 percent of its teachers and a small number of students likely enraged Talbot, because he had taught most of the favoured pupils previously and the new money was not ending up in his pocket. Not surprisingly, therefore, his second letter to Colborne was sent shortly after the board's annual meeting, when teacher salaries were appropriated.⁴⁴

⁴¹Interestingly, when doubled to \$540 to represent an annual salary, Boyce's projected salary is similar to that paid Wright (\$520) in 1831–32. Perhaps this rate of salary was standard for a teacher of this calibre, or maybe it was just a coincidence?

⁴²Perhaps this salary cut explains why Boyce left London village at the end of 1834?

⁴³Talbot, Stimson, and Dyer earned only \$534 in 1834–35, as compared to \$822 the previous year.

⁴⁴The District Board met on 6 August 1835, and Talbot sent his second letter to Colborne on 18 August 1835.

Talbot's distress is understandable. Despite teaching substantially more pupils than Boyce and Wright, he was paid considerably less money.⁴⁵ Furthermore, if Talbot had aspirations for a well-paying grammar school headmastership, they must have been dashed by the head-to-head competition in 1834–35. In 1832–33, his institution had been the premier one in the village. Two years later, however, most of the community's leading families had rejected it for the more prestigious schools run by Boyce and Wright.⁴⁶

The commissioners' bias for classical instructors was also paralleled by curricular developments in London village grant-aided common schools. Although data are sparse until the latter part of 1832, evidence in London and Westminster Township annual reports for the late 1820s indicate that common school teachers there taught mainly the 3R's in those years. Wright's private school was certainly the exception.⁴⁷ If this preference was the case in London village as well, then the curriculum's character began to change significantly in 1832. John Talbot, for instance, boasted to Colborne of his "superadded" common school in 1832–33, where he taught Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, and Grammar. And although Talbot offered the same program of studies in 1834–35, London's respectable parents clearly supported the very expensive Boyce and Wright schools because these instructors also introduced their pupils to Latin, French, Greek, Bookkeeping, and Mensuration.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding this trend, one repeated in other colonial communities,⁴⁹ few London village students ever studied the classics. For example, Wright wrote in 1835 that "it is much to be regretted that the advance in classics is yet very limited"—only one of his students, Sarah Harris, the district treasurer's daughter, studied Latin and Greek in 1834 and 1835.⁵⁰ Indeed, of the 184

⁴⁵Talbot taught forty-six students in 1832–33 and thirty-seven in 1834–35. In comparison, Boyce taught twenty-nine pupils in 1834, whereas Wright had thirty-five students in the first half of 1835. Talbot argued, however, and with some justification, based on the evidence, that Wright did not have the required twenty students in the first quarter of 1835.

⁴⁶In Talbot's first school, 56 percent of his pupils had upper-class backgrounds and 44 percent came from middle-class families. In his second school, however, the corresponding figures were 41 percent and 56 percent. See Murphy, "School and Society," chap. 2.

⁴⁷See *JHA*, 1828, appendix, pp. 15–16; and *JHA*, 1829, appendix, pp. 293–94.

⁴⁸No information is available about the curriculum followed by the other designated London village teachers in these years.

⁴⁹See, for example, Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 44.

⁵⁰NAC, RG5, B11, vol. 5, no. 491, "Half Yearly Report of the London Classical and Mercantile School from the 14th January to the 14th July 1835."

students recorded on the Talbot, Boyce, and Wright quarterly reports, only 7 percent took Latin. Most pupils studied Spelling (98 percent), Reading (96 percent), Writing (71 percent), and Arithmetic (56 percent), the staples of common schooling. An advanced few took Geography (32 percent), Grammar (20 percent), and Mensuration and Bookkeeping (2 percent each). Only 3 students studied Euclid.

Who then benefitted from these new arrangements? Or viewed through a slightly different lens, was the commissioners' plan a "system of favouritism" as alleged by Talbot? The answer to these questions is both yes and no. Despite the classification scheme's hierarchical nature, most London village children attended a school in the mid-1830s.⁵¹ This accomplishment was achieved because the new plan facilitated discrete family educational strategies—that is, a relatively small group of wealthy, respectable parents, seeking a superior education for their children, paid the highest fees. According to the Boyce and Wright attendance rolls, children from only fifteen to twenty primarily British, Protestant, rich families were exposed to these instructors.⁵² A significant portion of this group included sixteen sons and daughters of the trustees (Lee, Parke, and Scatcherd) and eight of the commissioners' children—those belonging to John B. Askin, the district clerk, and John Harris, the district treasurer. Mid-range fees were paid by families desiring a good English education for their boys and girls, whereas lower-class parents paid the lowest or no tuition for their children to receive the rudiments. It is noteworthy that the commissioners' decision to place the village's female teachers in the two lowest salary classes, which also reflected the inferior status of women at the time, increased the number of less expensive schooling options available to middle- and lower-class families.

Although the annual common school report for the London District in 1835–36 is missing, additional evidence shows that a small cadre of wealthy village families continued to make special arrangements for their girls. This pattern was first observed in the schools run by John Talbot in 1832–33 (twelve girls), the two English ladies, Phoebe Talbot, and possibly Kezia Stimson and Miss Grannis. Moreover, seven females from respectable families attended Boyce's school in 1834; twenty-eight were enrolled in Talbot's second school; and ten were taught by Wright in 1835. Many of these young women (from the Askin, Harris, Lee, and Parke families, for example), and others, were then sent to an expensive private boarding and day school which

⁵¹See Murphy, "School and Society," Table 24, 438.

⁵²Taylor's attendance rolls were not found at the National Archives, probably because his school at this time was just outside the village boundary.

was taught by Miss Mary Proudfoot, daughter of the Reverend William Proudfoot, between August 1835 and April 1837.⁵³

Another trend is also visible at this time—that is, private schools for very young upper-class children. As described above, two American women started a private school for infants in May 1835; and Mrs. John H. Miller ran a private children's school for about two years commencing in October 1835. In addition, Miss Proudfoot also taught a handful of young boys from wealthy families along with her girls.

Most of the patterns identified above continued in 1836–37. Seven of the designated London village teachers—Henry Rigney, John H. Miller, Taylor, Shubal Waterman, Stimson, James Routledge, and Wright—taught twelve six-month grant-aided common schools in that year. Trustees were the usual leading citizens, and teacher salaries continued the decline begun earlier.⁵⁴ Unlike earlier trends, the number of grant-aided schools fell slightly to ninety-eight.⁵⁵ Not one of these schools was reported to the Legislature.

London village teachers (Wright, Taylor, and Miller) again dominated the first-class teacher group.⁵⁶ Their collective salaries totalled \$675, or \$81 less than the sum paid to Boyce, Taylor, and Wright two years earlier. On the other hand, Rigney, Routledge, and Stimson, who were registered as third-class teachers, and Waterman, who was ranked in the last category, received \$1197, or double the amount paid their counterparts in 1834–35.⁵⁷ Perhaps John Talbot's letters had influenced teacher salary distributions after all? The grand total allocated to these seven designated London village teachers in 1836–37 was \$1872, the largest known annual payment to this group during this period.

Thus, between 1831 and 1837 the designated London village teachers taught thirty-one six-month grant-aided common schools. Even this large number understates the situation, however, since the annual reports for 1833 and 1836 are missing. Another ten or so grant-aided common schools probably

⁵³Miss Proudfoot received her education from some of the most outstanding teachers in Edinburgh, and for several years had taught in one of the largest seminaries near there. In all likelihood, her father instructed the higher classes at his daughter's school. See "London Seminary," *The Upper Canadian Times* (London, Ontario), 5 March 1836, p. 4.

⁵⁴Teacher salaries were set at \$45, \$37, \$34, and \$26 respectively.

⁵⁵John Harris Papers, "An Abstract of Common Schools Reported to and Approved of by the Board of Education in the London District for the Issue of an Authority to the Treasurer for the Payment of Teachers for the Year Ending the First Day of June 1837."

⁵⁶Because Miller was paid the same half-yearly rate as Wright and Taylor, he too may have been a classical master vying for the grammar school headmastership.

⁵⁷In actual fact, the figure was higher. Rigney was not paid for a school he ran between 16 December 1836 and 16 June 1837 until the annual report of 1839.

functioned then, bringing the numbers of state-supported schools prior to the rebellion closer to forty.

By the summer of 1837, therefore, school and society in the London village area reflected one another. For the most part, the community's grant-aided common schools received children who were culturally homogenous (British and Protestant) yet streamed along class lines congruent with the society's underlying social divisions. Later that year, however, the inclusivity of the common schools was abruptly shattered. This rupture, the result of rebellion, depression, grammar school relocation, and the arrival of British troops in the next year, accentuated class differences ever more sharply and caused Londoners once again to revise their schooling arrangements.⁵⁸

School governance in these trying times, however, endured unchanged. In 1837, the Lieutenant-Governor appointed as commissioners John B. Askin, John Harris, Mahlon Burwell, John Wilson, and the Reverends Cronyn, Burnham, and Ross, keeping the elitist London village connection on the district school board strong for the remainder of the decade.⁵⁹ Moreover, the number of grant-aided common schools rose once again to about 115 in 1838 and 1839. In London village, the designated teachers operated an additional 13 six-month grant-aided common schools, bringing the total number of these schools established in the 1830s to over fifty. The grand total, however, was probably closer to sixty, since the report for 1840 is missing and grant-aided common schools undoubtedly were open in the 1839–40 school year as well.

Nevertheless, rebellion depleted the ranks of the designated London village teachers. Tory supporters had forced John Talbot to flee his home in late 1837.⁶⁰ His brother, Edward, departed shortly thereafter. For similar reasons, the Millers also left the village.⁶¹ Other people too were no longer welcome—Americans, for example, whose loyalty to the Crown was suspect.⁶²

Moreover, the depression seriously affected the financing of the district's common schools. Government grants for teachers' salaries were set at \$37, \$30, \$24, and \$9 in 1837–38 and at lower amounts the next year.⁶³ First-class

⁵⁸Campbell, "The Village of London," 14; and Priddis, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Gilbert Porte," 66.

⁵⁹JHA, 1839, appendix, p. 282. Askin, Harris, Burwell, Wilson, and Cronyn all lived in or near London village or owned property there.

⁶⁰For the impact of the rebellion on the London area, see Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837–8: The Duncombe Revolt and After* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

⁶¹*History of Middlesex*, 435.

⁶²JHA, 1839, appendix, p. 282.

⁶³The government grant to the London District was dropped from \$3400 to \$2800 in 1839; see "Payments," *DHE* 5: 256–57. In 1838–39, teacher grants were \$32, \$22, and \$18, respectively.

village teachers Wright and Taylor received a total combined salary of \$333 in 1837–38, less than half the sum paid to their three counterparts the previous year. And Taylor, the sole first-class village teacher during 1838–39, was paid only \$192. In comparison, after Wright became the grammar school headmaster in October 1837 he earned \$400 annually; with fees, therefore, his total salary was in the range of \$700 to \$800, explaining why competition for this position was so keen.

The remaining designated London village teachers in 1838 and 1839 also received substantially less money than previously. In each of these years, second-class teachers Stimson, Routledge, and Rigney, and third- and fourth-class teachers Leonard Bisbee and Waterman collectively earned less than half the salary they were paid in 1836–37. By 1838–39, the seven designated London village teachers were allocated about one-third the sum (\$669) they had earned only two years earlier.

The removal of the district grammar school to London village decisively changed the character of its common schools. Wright's transfer to this school, with the loss of the boys who followed him there (most of whom were from the elite families identified earlier) and their replacement by an increasing number of Irish Roman Catholics and Americans (including Blacks), who were relocating to London village, meant a significant decline in status for the common schools.⁶⁴ The degradation of the common schools was further entrenched by the commissioners' decision to ban the classics from those schools and restrict such instruction to the grammar school.⁶⁵ Thus, approximately twenty of London's upper-class boys received a superior education from Wright, including the classics, while many of the village's respectable children were given a good English education in the common schools: the Bible, Reading, Spelling, Arithmetic, English Grammar, History, and Geography.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the two lowest-ranked teachers in the village area (Waterman and Bisbee) provided the 3R's only, presumably to working-class children.

⁶⁴London village's population increased by almost 160 percent between 1837 and 1840. For more information, see Benjamin Drew, *The Refugees: A North-side View of Slavery* (Boston: Jewett & Co., 1856), 147–88; Fred Landon, "Fugitive Slaves in London Before 1860," *LMHS Transactions*, Part 10 (1919), pp. 25–38; Dillon, "The Irish in London," 52–54; and the sources from note 4.

⁶⁵This decision was deduced after reviewing the textbooks used by teachers in the London village area at this time. See Murphy, "School and Society," Table 19, 421–22.

⁶⁶According to Nicholas Wilson, one of Taylor's former pupils, Taylor also taught Bookkeeping and Geometry. See Archives of Ontario, RG2, E-2, "London Newspaper Clippings," *The London Advertiser*, undated.

In 1838, reflecting the harsh economic and political realities of the previous year, the commissioners introduced free schools for the "children of poor parents."⁶⁷ According to a description written into their annual school report for that year, Waterman probably taught one of these schools. His school went unregistered; his trustees were not leading London citizens; he did not teach the classics; and he was a foreigner.⁶⁸ Certainly, the provision of free schools for working-class children, together with common, private, and grammar schools for the progeny of the respectable classes, would help explain the unexpectedly high literacy rates Harvey Graff found for London villagers in this period.⁶⁹

It also appears that London village's common schools were differentiated by sex as well as by social class, at least to some extent. According to data on the reports for London District in 1838 and 1839, first- and second-class teachers Taylor, Routledge, and Rigney trained mostly boys, whereas Miss Stimson instructed slightly more females than males. On the other hand, Bisbee and Waterman, who were ranked in the lowest categories, taught about equal numbers of boys and girls. Moreover, presaging a dramatic turn of events fourteen years later,⁷⁰ Waterman's free school was one of the largest operated in the village area in 1838, indicating that under the right conditions the community's poorer parents might send their children to school.

These significant changes in the village's public schools further entrenched special arrangements for girls from wealthy families. John Harris, for instance, hired a governess in 1837 or 1838 to teach his daughters;⁷¹ and private schools were opened by Miss Merrill, Miss Cronyn, Mrs. Pringle, and Mrs. Richardson. Little is known about the former two teachers, but the schools operated by the latter two headmistresses lasted into the mid-1840s. Mrs. Pringle taught

⁶⁷JHA, 1839, appendix, p. 281. Insufficient evidence exists to determine whether the fourth-class grant-aided common schools were free before or after 1838.

⁶⁸JHA, 1840, p. 430. Waterman was probably born in Bavaria. See "Personal Sketches of some of the Prominent Men of the County of Middlesex," *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Middlesex, Ontario* (Toronto: H. R. Page & Co., 1878; reprint Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1970), 16.

⁶⁹Harvey J. Graff, "Literacy and Social Structure in Elgin County, Canada West: 1861," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 6 (April 1973): 25-48. In contrast to Graff's argument, however, my own research suggests that literacy was the product of schooling.

⁷⁰Common school trustees in London voted to adopt a free school system in 1851. The next year almost 90 percent of the community's school-age children enrolled in its two common schools.

⁷¹Robin S. Harris and Terry G. Harris, eds., *The Eldon House Diaries: Five Women's Views of the 19th Century* (Toronto: The Champlain Society in co-operation with the Government of Ontario, 1994), xli.

her students to do “very elaborate and quite expensive fancy work” on satin and silk.⁷² She took in boarders, paid strict attention to manners and morals, and her studies included the “Useful and Ornamental Branches now taught in England and Scotland.”⁷³ And in 1838, Mrs. Richardson opened a “fashionable and expensive establishment . . . [which] took away quite a number of pupils [from Mrs. Pringle].”⁷⁴

The common school amendment acts and the John Talbot File, supplemented by several other sources, permit important revisions of conventional thinking about schooling in London village. For example, the community’s grant-aided common school teachers were significantly more numerous and better qualified than suggested by the reminiscences of those who remembered or wrote about them hitherto. Indeed, the number of schools is impressive; and they were a mixture of private-venture, co-operative voluntary effort, and government-funded common schools.

Moreover, from the earliest times wealthy London villagers sought highly qualified instructors to transmit the British cultural heritage to their children and to prepare them for the professions, the higher institutions of learning, and positions of influence at home and abroad. Not surprisingly, then, London quickly became a regional centre of education. This elite group also created a number of private schools, especially for their very young children and their teenage girls. Publicly and privately, therefore, leading families in London village were willing to establish and support a socially, academically, and, when possible, sexually stratified schooling system.

In addition, the state’s enabling role in colonial educational affairs has long been underestimated. In London village, the amendment acts provided commissioners with ways to obtain resources to redesign systematically and comprehensively their common schools. This reorganization was a rational response to the diverse and calculated schooling strategies of the community’s main social and cultural groups and its growing population. Consequently, most village families sent their children to school until the difficult years of the decade. Even then, considering the high enrolments at the Bisbee and Waterman schools, one questions whether attendance was limited more by the lack of school spaces than by the political and economic turmoil of the time.

⁷²Priddis, “Reminiscences of Mrs. Gilbert Porte,” 66.

⁷³“London Seminary,” *London Gazette*, 28 October 1837, p. 3. For more on this theme, see Marjorie R. Theobald, “‘Mere Accomplishments’? Melbourne’s Early Ladies’ Schools Reconsidered,” in *Women who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*, ed. Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 37–70.

⁷⁴Priddis, “Reminiscences of Mrs. Gilbert Porte,” 66.

Finally, the unearthing of these seven forgotten statutes raises serious questions about how colonial leaders in other districts in Upper Canada may have used the amendment acts to re-shape schooling arrangements in their municipalities. Perhaps the London model was the norm, but there may have been other approaches. Only future research will answer this last question, but the possibilities are intriguing.