

## “Take this Normal Class Idea and Carry it Throughout the Land”: Sunday School Teacher Training in Ontario, 1870–1890

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### ABSTRACT

By 1874, the interdenominational Protestant Sunday school community in Ontario was well established, with over 4,000 schools and 34,000 teachers connected through the Sabbath School Association of Canada. From private prayer to centralized normal schools with qualifying examinations, various approaches to teacher education were debated and practiced within the Sunday school community. This paper traces the increasingly formal training that Sunday school teachers underwent over the last half of the nineteenth century. This analysis highlights how Sunday schools across Ontario continued to be directed by their workers at the local level, even as there was increasing centralization and standardization over the last half of the nineteenth century. It also suggests that the adult education provided within this community extended well beyond the Sunday school classroom.

### RÉSUMÉ

En 1874, le réseau des écoles du dimanche interconfessionnelles protestantes étaient bien établies en Ontario avec plus de 4 000 écoles et 34 000 enseignants réunis au sein de la Sabbath School Association of Canada. De la prière en privé aux examens de qualification des écoles normales centralisées, diverses approches de formation en enseignement étaient discutées et mises en pratique dans la communauté des écoles du dimanche. Cet article retrace la formation de plus en plus standardisée dispensée aux enseignants des écoles du dimanche durant la seconde moitié du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Notre analyse souligne que les écoles du dimanche étaient toujours dirigées par des travailleurs locaux, malgré les processus de standardisation et de centralisation durant cette période. Nous affirmons également que l'éducation aux adultes dispensée dans cette communauté continuait bien au-delà de la salle de classe de l'école du dimanche.

### Introduction

At Ontario's annual Sunday school convention in 1878 a delegate sought advice on “the best way to procure teachers” for his school.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Daniel McLean, a lay leader in the Sunday school movement and active Methodist from Toronto, was addressing

the crowd when this point was raised. He, like the rest of the Sunday school community, had been dealing with this question for decades. He responded here with two important words: "Make them."<sup>2</sup> Although his words of instruction were brief, they were by no means simple. Heated debates over the best way to "make" effective Sunday school teachers were common at meetings of the Sabbath School Association of Canada, reaching their height in the 1870s. From private prayer to formalized normal schools with qualifying examinations, a variety of methods for preparing teachers were discussed, attempted and practiced by communities throughout Ontario.

This paper traces the increasingly formal training that Sunday school teachers underwent between the 1860s and late 1880s. Informal, personal methods of teacher preparation dominated within this community until the mid 1870s, when the influence of the American Chautauqua movement brought the interest and the resources necessary to implement more formal models. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, normal classes, and the less common teachers' institutes, emerged across the province. These sites provided adult education in teaching techniques not only to Sunday school teachers, but also to adult members of the broader Christian community.

This analysis of the evolution of teacher training within the Sunday school community demonstrates two related points. First, Sunday schools across Ontario continued to be directed by their workers at the local level, even as there was increasing centralization and standardization over the last half of the nineteenth century. Also, the significance of the education provided within this community extended well beyond the Sunday school classroom. At its height in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the Sunday school normal class provided formal adult education in teaching training to hundreds of women and men of various denominations, in their own local communities.

### **Origins and Organization**

Sunday schools, or Sabbath schools as they were frequently called, were one of the first formal institutions where children gathered publically to learn the basics of Protestantism. The first Sunday schools emerged in Britain in the last decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> A number of schools in Canada identify their founding in 1811, although it is possible that a few existed earlier.<sup>4</sup> The Sunday schools that emerged in Canada in the early nineteenth century were based on the British example. The most important distinction was that Canadian schools were usually attended by children of all classes, while those in Britain had a taint of charity which tended to keep middle-class parents from sending their own children.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the British model, the Sunday School Union Society of Canada (SSUSC) was founded in 1822.<sup>6</sup> This central organization was established primarily to distribute funds, keep reports, provide helpful information, and to promote the creation of Sunday schools across Lower and Upper Canada. Although all schools were encouraged to affiliate with the SSUSC, many remained independent, or, in the case of missionary schools, were solely connected with missionary associations. Even when schools were officially organized under the SSUSC, they were not obligated to report

back to the organization. For example, reports of various Methodist circuits that were published in the *Christian Guardian* in 1830 reveal that there were nearly twice as many Sunday schools in operation that year than reported to the SSUSC.<sup>7</sup> Thus, any statistics published by the SSUSC, and its successors, should be considered low estimates of the total number of Sunday schools in the province. Local branches of the SSUSC were also established to identify common goals and create regional constitutions to ensure the most effective ways of running schools were implemented in each particular county. At both the local and provincial level a commitment to interdenominational (Protestant) cooperation was a central value. Even as denominations began to establish their own Sunday school unions, many schools continued to affiliate with the interdenominational groups as well.<sup>8</sup> In rural and isolated communities in particular, the resources and networks provided through these associations were essential to the success of their schools.

From the earliest years of Sunday school education in Ontario, these institutions were primarily lay initiatives. The evangelical revival, known as the Second Great Awakening, that occurred across North America in the early decades of the nineteenth century led many newly converted Christians of various evangelical persuasions to take up the cause of Sunday schools in their communities. Sunday schools were one of many crusades that this new generation of Evangelicals used in their efforts to live a dedicated life of Christian work, and actively encourage the conversion of others. It was in this context of evangelical revivalism that Sunday schools flourished across Ontario in the first half of the nineteenth century. As a result, the foundation of Sunday schooling in Ontario was evangelicalism, and Sunday school education was primarily intended to prepare children for conversion. This involved teaching children to read, the memorization of vast amounts of scripture, and stressing the urgency of conversion.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1850s and 1860s the focus of Sunday schooling in Ontario had shifted. As attendance in common schools increased during in the middle of the century, it became no longer necessary for Sunday schools to teach literacy. Even more significantly, this period brought about new theological views on childhood conversion, and more modern approaches to childhood religious education were gaining increasing acceptance. Horace Bushnell's 1847 book *Views of Christian Nurture* introduced the theological concept that if children were appropriately raised and nurtured within a Christian environment, they would develop into Christian adults without the need for a particular conversion experience.<sup>10</sup> Historian Neil Semple has traced the influence of 'Christian Nurture' theology in Canadian evangelicalism. He found that while much debate over childhood conversion occurred over the 1850s and 1860s, by the 1870s Bushnell's theory had become firmly established within Canadian Methodism.<sup>11</sup> Sunday school literature of the 1870s reflects that this shift occurred within the broader evangelical community as well, and reveals that the goal of Sunday school education had evolved from preparing children for conversion, to nurturing young Christians, and preparing them for a lifetime of loyal Church membership.<sup>12</sup>

Central associations were crucial in the development of Sunday schools over the nineteenth century. The SSUSC became the Canadian Sunday School Union in 1838.

The Sabbath School Association of Canada (SSAC) was established in 1863 and evolved into the Sabbath School Association of Ontario in 1885, which endured until the early twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> A provincial Sunday school community was evident early and remained an important network for Sunday school workers. The annual meeting minutes and reports of these organizations were published and widely distributed throughout the province. These records are the main sources used in this paper as the discussions and debates surrounding issues of teacher training were quite extensive. Textbooks, tracts, and other published normal class material are also explored.

Like the SSUSC in the early nineteenth century, the SSAC was a network through which the majority of Sunday schools were at least nominally connected, yet their published statistics reveal only a portion of the schools that existed at the time. An analysis of the issue of teacher training through these records provides interesting insight into the role of these central organizations as well as the dynamics between their official leaders and their many local volunteer members.

### **Early Training: Meetings, Conventions, and Personal Piety**

The earliest form of teacher preparation was local teachers' meetings, where teachers would (ideally) meet once a week to pray for their school together and discuss the Bible passages they intended on teaching that Sunday. Personal spiritual and moral improvement were the primary concerns. Clergy and official Sunday school leaders stressed the importance of these meetings in running a successful school, but records show that attracting teachers was a struggle for many superintendents throughout the century.<sup>14</sup> While teachers meetings were often sporadic and poorly attended, they remained an important site of prayer, fellowship, and Bible study for Sunday school teachers where they did exist. These meetings were believed to help with spiritual development. Until the 1870s the basic expectations for teachers were to be a prayerful, devout and encouraging Christian, teachers' meetings were established to encourage this.

Teachers' conventions were also used to help educate and prepare teachers for their weekly duties. The first teachers' convention held in Ontario took place in Kingston in 1857, and a tradition of annual meetings for Ontario's interdenominational Sunday school community continued until the end of the century.<sup>15</sup> While the major American Sunday school associations experienced division and decline in the period leading up to and surrounding the Civil War, Canadian conventions during the 1850s and 1860s helped strengthen and solidify the interdenominational nature of the Sunday school movement in Ontario.<sup>16</sup> While members of various Methodist and Presbyterian Churches were the majority of convention delegates well into the 1880s, Baptists, Congregationalists and members of the Church of England also frequently attended.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the 1870s and 1880s members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and Mennonite Churches also regularly appear on the delegates list of these Sunday school conventions.<sup>18</sup>

Conventions served practical functions including providing information on running schools, distributing literature, collecting and presenting reports, and time for

communal prayer, worship and devotion. Although these meetings may have resembled the Methodist style of camp meeting revivals, they were much more formally structured and, because of their interdenominational focus, dedicated little to no time for revivalist activities. Most of the information provided to delegates at conventions before the 1870s focused on establishing a school, recruiting students and teachers, and the role of the Sunday school in the wider Christian community. Very little practical or pedagogical advice was given to teachers, but like the teachers' meeting, communal prayer and Christian fellowship were seen as essential to creating a strong teaching force. Until the early 1870s, conventions and local teachers' meetings were the main method of teacher preparation across Ontario.

The annual reports of the Belleville and Brantford Sunday School Unions for 1871 are typical in their attitudes and practice, and demonstrate some of the important transitions that occurred over the early 1870s. In their report, the representatives from Belleville boasted that of the town's population of 8,500, over 1,300 were attending Sunday school. Monthly teachers' meetings were held "in all schools," and county conventions occurred annually.<sup>19</sup> It was noted that "our greatest difficulties are *sloth and lack of earnestness* in our teachers." The establishment of a provincial normal school was raised as a possible suggestion along with what probably seemed to be an easier solution, "more earnest prayer from those who are leaders and workers."<sup>20</sup>

Brantford's report indicated that there were thirteen Sunday schools serving 2,000 students with about 1,500 attending regularly. County and town associations were noted as having played an important role in "stirring up zeal" in local teachers.<sup>21</sup> Like Belleville, Brantford reports also mentioned the challenge of finding quality teachers, explaining their main "difficulties are lack of interest on the part of churches and parents causing scarcity of teachers of suitable age and experience." They supported the idea of teachers' institutes to serve the province's needs in this area. The Brantford report also suggested that materials for teachers, including American periodicals, be made available more cheaply, as they were too expensive for most local teachers.<sup>22</sup>

The examples of Belleville and Brantford provide important insight into a significant period of transition that occurred over teachers' education within the Sunday school movement. Local and county conventions were occurring regularly and teachers' meetings existed but were usually less frequent than weekly. The scarcity of teachers was identified as a problem but the quality of teachers was becoming an increasing concern. Communal and personal prayer were encouraged, and an evangelical tone is evident in the search for more "zeal" and passion. Along with this, however, there was also an increasing interest in more practical solutions such as establishing normal schools and teachers' institutes to improve quality and to make teaching aids more accessible. The formal training of teachers increasingly became a topic of discussion at conventions, and no issue caused more debate than teachers' examinations.

### **The Debate Over Teacher Examinations**

The idea of establishing a system of qualifying examinations for Sunday school teachers in Ontario came from two influences. Sunday school leaders in Britain claimed

that they had implemented these types of exams in their system and had very positive results in improving the quality of both the teachers and the schools. Many Canadian leaders also deemed that the increased certification requirements had led to a great improvement in the public school system and desired similar results in the Sunday schools. In both cases, the model exams evaluated the teachers' knowledge of both curriculum and pedagogy, an approach that was intended to be brought to the Sunday school community.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of the praise that these models received from international and educational 'experts,' Ontario's Sunday school workers were resistant from the start. Rev. D.H MacVicar, an educator and leader in the Canadian Presbyterian community, addressed the delegates of the 1872 convention on this topic in his lecture, "Competitive Examinations of Teachers." His address consisted of an overview of how teacher examinations functioned in England's Sunday school system and in Ontario's public system. MacVicar concluded by asking the delegates "to consider the propriety of instituting regular written examinations for Sunday teachers."<sup>24</sup>

It seems that consideration was too much to ask as MacVicar's address was immediately met with opposition from various representatives. Mr. Wallbridge, a Wesleyan Methodist delegate from Newcastle, expressed a common concern when he explained that teacher examinations "might work very well in the cities and towns, but [...] did not think it would suit in the rural districts."<sup>25</sup> A delegate from Beverly agreed with Wallbridge and continued to explain that rural schools already "experienced great difficulty in getting suitable teachers." Another added that "to get schools thoroughly equipped with teachers, even of the ordinary run, was a difficult matter," and stated that he had no doubt "there was a many a one teaching who would be unable to pass a satisfactory examination, yet was very successful as a teacher."<sup>26</sup>

Practical concerns such as the scarcity of teachers in rural areas and the potential ineffectiveness of the examinations were raised by many, but Presbyterian minister Gavin Lang believed that the damage flowing from the implementation of this strategy would be even greater. His response to MacVicar's request for consideration was that "[implementing examinations] would kill all life in the Sabbath Schools." He felt that the very foundation of the institution was under attack, explaining that "if they introduce anything like a day-school system, [he would] say farewell to the true spirit of Sunday schools."<sup>27</sup> His comments were met with support from other delegates who believed that a desire to live out one's Christian duty through Sunday school work should not be evaluated or measured by man as their true intentions could only be judged by God. An "earnest" heart for teaching was all that was required.<sup>28</sup> Even as the idea of examinations was being introduced in Ontario, the local leaders, delegates, and workers who attended these conventions were committed to the traditional, spiritual training of their teachers over the more formal methods of pedagogical instruction.

After the longwinded debate that extended over the two day meeting in 1872, the discussion was not resolved and resumed at the convention the following year. In 1873, the issue was raised at the onset of the convention by David Fotheringham, a lay delegate from Aurora who was a graduate of the Provincial Normal School, and

would later become a public school inspector.<sup>29</sup> Fotheringham proposed a motion to establish a committee charged with considering the creation of a normal school program within the Sunday school association. This committee would investigate three possible areas: training classes for teachers, a standard series of textbooks, and a “uniform set of examination papers [...] and issu[ing] diplomas of various grades according to the merits of the papers of the candidates.” Rev. Lang rejected this idea again in 1873 with as much fervour as he had the previous year. He expressed, “this idea of the examinations of teachers and the granting of diplomas as a result of that examination contains a very vicious principle, which the convention should not endorse for one single moment,” and contended that “the best teacher and the best normal school examination a teacher can have is the Holy Spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

Lang moved that a committee be appointed to consider the first two areas of Fotheringham’s motion, normal classes and standard textbooks, but rejected the final recommendation of examinations. The motion was seconded by a delegate and was carried by an unspecified majority. Those at the convention had generally agreed that in regards to examinations “we do not see our way to act upon it now.”<sup>31</sup>

By the end of the 1873 convention the issue of teacher examinations had been voted down, but it had been decided that a Committee on Normal Schools would be established. At this point, the issue of teacher training had been identified as a priority within the Sunday school community. The shape that this process took was a direct result of the local delegates who displayed their objection to examinations through their words and their votes. Regardless of the arguments put forth by educational and international leaders, the decision making power was in the hands of the delegates who had attended on behalf of their local Sunday schools. The complete rejection of qualifying examinations for teachers demonstrated more than dissatisfaction with this issue. It indicated that the majority of participants continued to view the Sunday school system as ‘divinely unique’ from that of the public school. It also revealed that although new theological approaches to childhood were emerging, evangelical interpretation of the power of the Holy Spirit in discernment and personal improvement was still a dominant ideology. Additionally, the very survival of the local Sunday school was the main priority for many, especially in rural areas, and they were not willing to risk the potential loss of their school over the enforcement of formal qualifications of teachers.

### **The Influence of the American Chautauqua Movement**

While Ontarians were considering the best methods of training for their Sunday school teachers, an important movement in adult Christian education was flourishing in the United States, one that would have a great influence on the Canadian Sunday school community. The Chautauqua movement was fundamental to the increased formalization of Sunday school teacher training in Ontario.

What became known as simply “Chautauqua” began as a summer assembly for Sunday school teachers at Chautauqua Lake in New York State beginning in 1874. As historian Anne Boylan explains in her study of the American Sunday school

movement, the establishment of Chautauqua represented a new direction for the Sunday school community in the United States. When the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) re-established itself in 1869, after a decade of inactivity caused by tensions surrounding the Civil War, the Sunday school community "had seen the emergence of new leaders, new forms of organization, new programs, and new periodicals, all of which had reinvigorated and transformed their work."<sup>32</sup> The most significant leader in this transformation was Rev. John Vincent, the founder of the Chautauqua institute, whose work as a Methodist minister over the 1850s and 1860s led him to promote evangelicalism through education, rather than revivals. Vincent was representative of a generation of evangelical Protestants whose interest in revivals was declining, in favour of life-long, self-education.<sup>33</sup>

Based on the principles of interdenominational cooperation and adult Christian education, Vincent, along with lay businessman Lewis Miller established the summer institute with the hopes of creating a strong community of well-educated lay Christians promoting formal knowledge over emotional revivalism.<sup>34</sup> The summer sessions were attended increasingly over the 1870s and 1880s, with over two hundred participants in the first year alone. Assemblies included addresses by Vincent and other leaders on a wide range of subjects including Biblical knowledge, teaching techniques, and the importance of local Sunday school normal classes.<sup>35</sup> Attendees could also expect times of worship, music, prayer and support-raising for temperance and missionary causes.<sup>36</sup> Teacher education was central to these meetings, especially in its earliest years, and participants were encouraged to take what they learned at Chautauqua and bring it with them to their local communities. Canadians not only attended the summer meetings at Chautauqua, but also promoted it throughout the Sunday school community back home.

Rev. John Castle, a Baptist minister from Toronto, was quite accurate when he noted in an 1874 convention address that "the Chautauqua Assembly was an experiment in [the] Sunday school working on a grand scale."<sup>37</sup> As an active leader in the Baptist community, and future principal of Toronto Baptist College, Castle was well respected among both educational and religious leaders in the province.<sup>38</sup> Castle had attended the summer program at Chautauqua that year and came back motivated and inspired to get his Canadian colleagues as passionate about Christian education and Sunday school training as those he had befriended in the United States. He reported on his experience to those in attendance at the provincial convention, "I came away from [Chautauqua] with the profound impression that I could not devote my life probably to anything that would tell me more in the end than to take this normal class idea and carry it throughout the land, and cease not till in every church there was a normal class established." His comments were met with applause from the crowd.<sup>39</sup>

The influence Chautauqua education had on Canadian Christianity in the nineteenth century has yet to be fully explored, but its reach went beyond the Sunday school movement.<sup>40</sup> As historians of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union have noted, the founding of the organization's Canadian branch resulted from Letitia Youmans' experience at a women's temperance meeting that took place during the

Chautauqua summer assembly.<sup>41</sup> As an active Sunday school teacher in Picton, Ontario, Youmans' reflections on her experience at the 1874 Chautauqua provide some insight into how Canadian teachers perceived the summer institute. In her autobiography, she remembers, "Bible reading and prayer commenced and closed the exercises of each day. Normal Bible-classes met for drill each forenoon. The afternoons were set apart for lectures on different topics. The speakers were among the most eminent of the United States. [...] It was indeed a 'feast of reason and flow of soul.'"<sup>42</sup> Like Youmans, a number of Canadians who attended Chautauqua became part of an international, interdenominational community that provided support, resources and encouragement. It is not surprising that this network had an impact in Ontario.

According to Castle, Youmans was in good company, as Canada had been well represented at the Chautauqua summer institute in 1874. Castle's address and his commitment to establishing normal classes in Sunday schools across the province was very well received at the 1874 convention and initiatives were immediately taken to implement his recommendation. The Committee on Normal Classes, which included such educational leaders as John Hodgins, James Hughes, and Samuel Nelles, was instructed to prepare a report for the following year's convention and they had unanimous support.<sup>43</sup> The Chautauqua example was extremely valuable in their efforts. It not only provided a successful model in interdenominational institutes and assemblies for teachers, but also created and supplied practical resources accessible to Ontarians. The Chautauqua teacher training curriculum was easily available to leaders and workers in Ontario's Sunday schools, providing a basic lesson plan to those interested in starting normal classes in their county. American publications, including Sunday school periodicals and teacher aids, were also distributed through Chautauqua to schools north of the border. Equally important, networks were developed and strengthened through the summer meetings, and American Sunday school leaders, including John Vincent, became more frequent guests at Canadian events as a result of the cross-border gatherings.<sup>44</sup>

Along with the more tangible influences that the Chautauqua movement had on the Ontario Sunday school community, such as providing resources and networks, it also had an important ideological influence. From its inception, the summer meetings at Chautauqua had intentionally moved away from a revivalist tone.<sup>45</sup> This dissatisfaction with revivalism was much of the motivation behind the adult education system Vincent developed and greatly influenced his involvement in Sunday school teacher education. While Methodism, and evangelicalism more generally, were moving away from revivalist attitudes towards a more practical understanding and practice of Christianity, Vincent was central in applying this ideal to Sunday school education in America, and ultimately in Ontario as well.<sup>46</sup>

The support that normal classes received, beginning in 1874, reflected the desire that Ontario Protestants had for self-improvement in both the spiritual and practical aspects of Sunday school teaching. This marks an important transition from the earlier period when purely spiritual habits and character were idealized. The ideological shift represented through the Chautauqua approach provided Ontario teachers and

leaders with a new sense of excitement for the formal, practical training of teachers, which would include pedagogical techniques and self improvement as much as Christian piety and devotion.

### **Normal Classes**

By the end of the 1870s normal classes had become common in most of Ontario's counties and by this time they were well supported by the Sunday school community. A number of schools submitted reports to the provincial association, yet many more handled matters on a local level. Denominational and local newspapers reveal that these classes were much more widespread than those that were accounted for in published reports.<sup>47</sup> In 1877, eleven schools submitted full reports to the provincial association on the status of their normal classes. In addition, a number of schools published the activities of their local normal classes in denominational periodicals and local newspapers. While records from these normal classes are scarce, these types of reports, combined with other discussions of teacher training, and the curriculum used, begin to reveal the significance of these classes.

The majority of normal classes across the province were intentionally nondenominational in principle and practice. Reports indicate that classes in most counties were attended by "various church members."<sup>48</sup> The class in Weston alternated its location between the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in the area, encouraging attendance from both congregations.<sup>49</sup> Others were held at interdenominational sites, such as the YMCA meeting rooms.<sup>50</sup> These classes all appear to have been free of charge.

In the 1870s most schools followed the Chautauqua curriculum, outlines produced for the summer meetings in New York and also distributed there. In response to the demand, by the 1880s, Canadians began publishing their own books and tracts for normal classes. The standard Chautauqua, as well as the Canadian, normal class program consisted of twelve sessions, usually offered once a week for three months. Occasionally the whole series would be run consecutively for three or four days in what was referred to as a normal school, teachers' institute or a "Chautauqua."<sup>51</sup>

The goal of these normal classes was to provide practical teacher training and not spiritual development. While personal, spiritual development was certainly stressed in these communities, the textbooks and instructors made it clear that other avenues such as the Bible Class, prayer meetings, or Class Meetings, were available to meet these spiritual needs and it was expected that those would also be attended by normal class participants.<sup>52</sup> Because spiritual lessons were meant to occur elsewhere, the normal class curriculum was almost entirely made up of secular, pedagogical lessons. The absence of any doctrine also made these classes appropriate for members with different denominational affiliations. One Chautauqua textbook by John Vincent explains, "the Sunday school normal class is [...] based upon the same theory as that which establishes the secular normal school, and it aims at the same worthy and much-needed practical results."<sup>53</sup>

The normal class curriculum covered both subject matter and pedagogical training. On subject matter, normal class students would study lessons on the history of

the Bible, biblical geography and the language of the Bible. These subjects were intended to provide a strong knowledge to teachers in the areas of their weekly lessons. Sessions on teacher training included topics such as “the government of the class,” “securing the attention of the class,” and units on preparing weekly lessons.<sup>54</sup>

The most popular programs of study used in Ontario’s Sunday school normal classes were written by Presbyterian minister John McEwen. McEwen was a leader in the Canadian Sunday school community from the mid-1870s, and, much like John Vincent, McEwen actively promoted an interdenominational Sunday school community that was built upon a foundation of formal teacher training. In addition to McEwen’s work with his local Sunday school in Ingersoll, he also served as Secretary of the Canadian Sabbath School Association from 1883, and later, became Chief (President) of the Chautauquas in Canada in 1890.<sup>55</sup>

From 1878 to 1884, McEwen travelled across the province teaching normal classes and teachers’ institutes for Sunday school teachers. Teachers in Waterloo County, Brampton, Halton County, Toronto, Huron County and Oxford County, all had a chance to take a normal class from McEwen. Many more Ontarians listened to his lectures at local and provincial Sunday school conventions, or read his columns in *The Canada Presbyterian*.<sup>56</sup>

During the late 1870s and early 1880s, McEwen published a number of books for use in normal classes, as well as other resources for teacher preparation. McEwen’s most popular Canadian normal class curriculum was the nondenominational *Normal Class Teacher*, first published in 1879. This lesson plan demonstrates how a typical twelve week normal class program was structured.<sup>57</sup> The first week was an introduction to the course, and the final week was a voluntary examination. Of the remaining ten weekly lessons, seven covered pedagogical techniques, two dealt with issues of personal morality and spirituality and one focused on the best “methods of study of the scripture,” covering both spiritual and practical classroom preparation.<sup>58</sup> While it is hard to determine exactly how many schools used this model, McEwen’s normal class textbook was widely advertised in Sunday school publications for purchase at a cost of 30 cents and “mailed to any address free of postage.”<sup>59</sup> It was endorsed by the Ontario Sabbath School Association, and would have been within reach of most established Sunday school communities across the province.

The report submitted in 1877 by the East Presbyterian Sunday School in Toronto to the Sunday School Association of Ontario provides the most detailed record of normal class attendance. Their class met weekly and followed the 12-week Chautauqua curriculum. The first session was attended by 33 people; 20 women and 13 men. Fourteen of the students were recorded as current Sunday school teachers. The majority, 17, of those attending were potential future teachers who were also participating in the adult and young adult sections of the Sunday school. Two normal class participants were identified as “congregation members,” without indicating any direct relationship with the Sunday school.<sup>60</sup>

Similar details emerge from published reports of normal class graduates. For example, in 1878 *The Newmarket Era* published a list of the “successful competitors” of a local normal class. Of these seventeen participants, eleven were women. The

majority, eight, of the female students were unmarried. One student, Mrs. H.J. Cody, appears to have attended the course with two of her daughters, Hannah and Mary.<sup>61</sup> Upon completion of the class and the voluntary examination, each successful student was awarded a diploma.<sup>62</sup>

These classes were mainly attended by current and future teachers in the Sunday school system, but it is important to note the presence of those who were not teachers. Often, unspecified congregation members also participated. The normal class in Brownsville, for instance, was made up of "principally teachers and parents."<sup>63</sup> Others recorded potential, but not yet current, teachers attending. This indicates that community members were also supporters of normal classes, and took advantage of the opportunity for adult education and self-improvement that was available through this program.

Normal classes were typically led by a senior teacher in the Sunday school, occasionally the head pastor or superintendent. There is no indication that the normal classes were segregated by sex although larger gatherings and teachers' institutes likely followed the Chautauqua model and held both segregated and co-educational sessions throughout the few days of its duration.<sup>64</sup> The co-educational nature of these classes is an important distinction from the Toronto Normal School for the training of public school teachers, which was rigidly segregated by sex.<sup>65</sup>

The implementation of normal classes across Ontario in the 1870s and 1880s was a success. Whether Sunday school teachers were taught by Rev. McEwen as he travelled across the province, attended teachers' institutes following county conventions, or formed their own normal classes in their local communities, lay Ontarians took advantage of this new site of teacher education. These classes were well attended, in both rural and urban schools, with more than 70 people frequently participating in each session. The class in Sarnia served 86 students in its first year.<sup>66</sup> These classes were not only supported in theory by their communities, they depended on their participation to survive. It is clear that across the province lay people were strong supporters of this initiative and took advantage of the free adult education it provided.

The system of normal classes met the needs of many community members including Sunday school teachers, young adults, and parents who felt a desire to receive educational training whether to be better equipped as teachers or for more general Christian self-improvement. It took more than an interest in a program of teacher education for normal classes to become commonplace. The necessary resources were easily accessible through Chautauqua, and a new desire to gain practical religious knowledge was growing among North American evangelical Protestants. Normal classes were both ideologically and practically accepted, as they were based on individual self-improvement. These classes did not have the competitive qualities of the earlier plan of mandatory teachers' examinations, and no debates over the normal class system were ever raised at the major meetings of the Sunday school community.

## Conclusion

Ontario's Sunday schools between 1890 and 1920 have received significantly more attention from historians than the earlier period.<sup>67</sup> These studies indicate some of the major changes that occurred around the turn of the century in terms of teacher training, as well as the organization of Sunday schools more generally. First, from the 1890s on, Sunday schools came increasingly under denominational control. As churches became concerned with decreasing membership, particularly young men, they took greater control of Sunday schools in hopes of creating more permanent church loyalty.<sup>68</sup> Not only did interdenominational groups lose their influence, but the role of teacher was also redefined. For example, the Methodist church delegated most of the teaching tasks to Deaconesses, who had established their own educational institutes for training in Canada starting in 1893.<sup>69</sup>

Fragmentation also occurred in Sunday schools by the end of the century. Both the schools and the preparation of their teachers were increasingly organized by departments including Primary, Infant, Bible School, and Cradle Roll (mother's preparation).<sup>70</sup> This affected teacher training because different levels and types of preparation were desired for each department, and as a result, large meetings for all teachers were no longer necessary. By the early twentieth century, denominational authority had replaced that of interdenominational associations. Consequently, the influence that local, lay workers had on teacher training within the provincial organizations declined significantly as decision-making and implementation were now in the hands of Church leaders and councils.<sup>71</sup>

This study of teacher training, as one aspect of the Sunday school system, demonstrates how shifts in theology were understood and experienced by lay people in Ontario. As the emphasis on emotional, public revivals decreased by the 1870s and 1880s, lay Ontarians continued to practice and participate in their own religious and educational experiences in ways that reflected this theological shift. The Sunday school normal class was one such site of Christian community-building and adult education in a formal setting. The timing and shape that Sunday school teacher training took in Ontario was directed by lay representatives and local delegates who protected the interests of their community by determining which outside recommendations would be rejected and which would be implemented.

Prior to 1870, emotional conviction was central to the preparation of Sunday school teachers, as were the evangelical characteristics of personal devotion and the presence of the Holy Spirit. These ideas were emphasized and practiced through teachers' meetings and conventions, where piety, conversion, and commitment dominated the discussions. These evangelical principles remained strong even as international and educational leaders brought forth recommendations to improve the quality of teachers by instating teacher examinations, as delegates fervently rejected this proposal.

By 1874, new theological interpretations had become more common across Ontario as a result of a number of influences including the Chautauqua movement. The Chautauqua meetings and their related publications provided many Sunday

school workers with a new passion for education and a successful model of teacher training on an interdenominational yet unified scale. Lay people across the province supported this idea and, as a result, a system of normal classes emerged in Sunday schools, churches and community groups. These classes continued because they met the newly determined needs of an evangelical population exploring the practical methods of teaching and learning about their faith. Normal classes combined both religious and secular knowledge and applied it to the practical space of the Sunday school. Ultimately, as more formal approaches were brought to Protestant church work, Sunday schools became even more standardized and fragmented by department, and the focus on teacher training declined, but this remains an important period in the history of both religion and education in the province.

The normal classes that were established for Sunday school teachers served current and future teachers as well as community members. They provided a number of people with information on different teaching techniques, characteristics of effective teaching and processes of learning. The lack of detailed records of normal class participants makes it impossible to measure the direct impact of this site of adult education, but the parents, teachers, and other community members likely brought the lessons they learned in their normal class to other aspects of their lives.

Historian Sharon Cook has argued that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union used especially progressive educational approaches in their work with children at the turn of the century. She suggests that the WCTU "pioneered pedagogical techniques in Sunday [s]chools and youth groups that were progressive and highly innovative for the time. This was particularly so for the strategies developed to teach working-class children."<sup>72</sup> While she notes the influence of evangelical principles in the work of the WCTU, she falls short of identifying any sites where they may have studied and developed these teaching methods. Given the close relationship Cook identifies between the WCTU and the Sunday school community, it seems likely that normal classes provided by Sunday schools would have been attended by at least some WCTU members.

The relationship between common school teaching and Sunday school teaching has yet to be fully explored, but a few historians have made note of the experience that common school teachers gained through their work in Sunday schools.<sup>73</sup> Traditionally, scholars have suggested that common school teachers were chronically under-qualified in this period, yet a deeper look at some of the unofficial, or unregulated, sites of teacher training may reveal otherwise.<sup>74</sup> The possibility of Sunday school teachers who completed normal classes as preparation for their work in this area but later found themselves in the paid field of teaching also raises some important questions about the quality of the public school teaching force. It is possible that public school teachers who have previously been categorized as 'untrained' could have completed the teacher training program and examinations provided by their local Sunday school normal class.

Not unlike the Sunday school itself, teacher education within the Christian community was a result of the unpaid dedication of lay women and men. These are the people who made decisions by voting on major issues at Sunday school conventions,

attended weekly normal classes diligently, travelled each summer to Chautauqua, returning with new materials and new ideas. Although the historical significance of the Sunday school in Ontario remains greatly understudied, it is clear that this community in the nineteenth century brought together educational and religious ideals through interdenominational cooperation, lay leadership, and local control in ways that extended far beyond their weekly lessons.

## Notes

- 1 Sabbath School Association of Canada, *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Provincial Sabbath School Convention* (Toronto: Dudley and Burns, 1877), 91. Hereafter: *SSAC Proceedings 1877*.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 3 Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 3.
- 4 Mary Dawson, *The First 150 Years: the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Sunday School* (Richmond Hill: J.E Smith, 1961), unnumbered pages.
- 5 Allan Greer, “The Sunday Schools of Upper Canada,” *Ontario History* LXVII, 3 (September 1975): 164–184.
- 6 *The Second Report of the Sunday School Union Society of Canada* (Montreal, 1824).
- 7 *Christian Guardian*, 4 September 1830.
- 8 For example, the Upper Canada Sunday School Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1830, yet Methodists continued to be active in the interdenominational associations throughout the nineteenth century. *Christian Guardian*, 2 Jan. 1830.
- 9 Greer, “The Sunday Schools of Upper Canada,” 164–184.
- 10 Horace Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture* (Hartford: E. Hunt, 1847); portions of the original 1847 book were republished throughout the century, most notably as: Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: C. Scribner: 1860).
- 11 Neil Semple, “‘The Nurture and Admonition of the Lord’: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Methodism’s Response to Childhood,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 14, 27 (May 1981): 157–176.
- 12 Mary Anne Macfarlane, “Gender, Doctrine and Pedagogy: Women and ‘Womanhood’ in Methodist Sunday Schools in English-Speaking Canada, 1880 to 1920” (Ph.D. diss, University of Toronto, 1991), 142–3.
- 13 Patricia Kmiec, “Among the Children: Sunday School Teachers and Evangelical Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,” (MA Thesis: University of Ottawa, 2008), 19.
- 14 SSAC, *Proceedings 1868–1882*.
- 15 *Proceedings of the Sabbath School Teachers Convention, 1857*.
- 16 Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of An American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988), 86.
- 17 Those members of the Church of England who participated in the interdenominational Sunday school community identified with the increasingly evangelical segment of the church. For more on the tensions within the Church of England in Canada see, John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 121–3.
- 18 SSAC, *Proceedings 1874–1886*.
- 19 SSAC, *Proceedings 1872*, 38.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 38. Emphasis in original.

- 21 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 111.
- 29 *Appendix to the Thirteenth Volume of the Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada* (Quebec: R. Cambell, 1855), 400; J. George Hodgins, *Ryerson Memorial Volume* (Toronto: Warwick & Sons, 1889), 6.
- 30 SSAC, *Proceedings 1873*, 81.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 32 Boylan, *Sunday School*, 85.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 35 Sheilagh Jameson, *Chautauqua in Canada* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1979), 9.
- 36 Boylan, *Sunday School*, 92.
- 37 SSAC, *Proceedings 1874*, 69.
- 38 *Canada Presbyterian* 17, 3 (11 Jan. 1888); *Canada Presbyterian* 11, 41 (10 Oct. 1883).
- 39 SSAC, *Proceedings*, 71.
- 40 Jameson, *Chautauqua in Canada*, discusses travelling Chautauqua meetings in twentieth-century Western Canada.
- 41 Sharon Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism and Reform* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), 17-18.
- 42 Letitia Youmans, *Campaign Echoes* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1893), 99.
- 43 SSAC, *Proceedings 1874*, 108.
- 44 For example, both Vincent and McEwen were speakers at the 1882 convention of the Sabbath School Association of Canada. *Canada Presbyterian* 10, 42 (18 Oct. 1882).
- 45 Boylan, *Sunday School*, 92.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 47 For example, local normal classes and teacher institutes were reported in *The Pleasant House*, October 20 1883, 64; *The Canadian Independent*, February 6 1879, 5; *The Presbyterian Record* July 1878, 175.
- 48 SSAC, *Proceedings 1877*, 4.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 51 Advertisements for these institutes and Chautauquas can be found in most Canadian Sunday school publications by the 1880s. Including the published proceedings of the annual meetings of the Sunday School Association of Canada, 1877.
- 52 J. H Vincent, *The Chautauqua Text Books: No. Thirty Nine, The Sunday School Normal Class* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 18-19.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 54 John McEwen, *Presbyterian Normal Class Teacher: or A Preparatory Course of Study Designed to Help the Present and Future Christian Worker in the church to a Larger Grasp of the Word of God* (Toronto: Presbyterian Printing House, 1879), 1.
- 55 *Canada Presbyterian* 11, 38 (19 Sept. 1883); *Home and School* 8, 1 (20 Sept. 1890).
- 56 *Canada Presbyterian* 12, 18 (30 April. 1884); *Canada Presbyterian* 12, 34 (20 Aug. 1884); *Canada Presbyterian* 10, 42 (18 Oct. 1882); "S.S. Association," *Acton Free Press*, 7 February 1884.

- 57 McEwen's *Presbyterian Normal Class Teacher* was republished in 1883 as the nondenominational *Normal Class Teacher* (Toronto: Blackett Robinson, 1883). He also wrote a series of *Normal Class Outlines* which were published by the Ontario Sabbath School Association.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 59 Ads for McEwen's curriculum were published regularly in *The Canadian Presbyterian*, beginning in 28 May 1880. They also appear in *The Rural Canadian* 1, 20 (15 Sept. 1882).
- 60 SSAC, *Proceedings 1877*, 112.
- 61 "Chautauqua Institute," *Newmarket Era*, 8 March 1878.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 SSAC, *Proceedings 1877*, 4.
- 64 Boylan, *Sunday School*, 125.
- 65 While the provincial school had more paternalistic attitudes of protecting their students that reinforced this segregation, this marked distinction between the public system and the Sunday school normal classes could also reflect the power that students had in determining their own rules of conduct in the Sunday school system. The rules of the Toronto Normal School are discussed in Alison Prentice, "Friendly Atoms in Chemistry: Women and Men at Normal School in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Toronto." In *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S Careless*, eds David Keane and Colin Read, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990), 285-317.
- 66 SSAC, *Proceedings 1877*, 6.
- 67 Macfarlane, "Women and 'Womanhood' in Methodist Sunday Schools in English-Speaking Canada, 1880 to 1920;" Lucille Marr, "Sunday School Teaching: A Women's Enterprise: A Case Study From the Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian and United Church Tradition, 1919-1934." *Histoire Sociale* 26, 52 (1993) 329-344; Patricia Dirks, "Reinventing Christian Masculinity and Fatherhood: The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1900-1920." In Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender and Community in Canada, 1760-1969* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 290-316; Susan Reed, "The reform movement of the Sunday school of the Methodist Church of Canada, as it applies to Ontario, 1884-1924" (MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1988); William Lorne Brown, "The Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Church in Canada, 1875-1925" (Th. M. University of Toronto, 1960).
- 68 Marr, "Sunday School Teaching," 333, and Dirks, "Reinventing Christian Masculinity," 299.
- 69 Macfarlane, "Gender, Doctrine and Pedagogy," 348.
- 70 Marilyn Whiteley, *Canadian Methodist Women, 1766-1935: Mary, Marthas, Mothers in Israel* (Waterloo Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 128-9; Macfarlane, "Gender, Doctrine and Pedagogy," 294 and 308.
- 71 Marr, "Sunday School Teaching," 330-3; Macfarlane, "Gender, Doctrine and Pedagogy," 308.
- 72 Sharon Anne Cook, "Educating for Temperance: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Ontario Children 1880-1916," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 5, 2 (1993): 273.
- 73 For example, these connections are raised but not analysed in; Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, *Canadian Methodist Women*, (Waterloo Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 118-129 and Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters: the Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
- 74 In 1871 only slightly more than 10 per cent of teachers graduated from the provincial normal school. Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 185.