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Florence O’Neill (1905-1990) played an important role as an adult educator in Newfoundland. Using her extraordinary ability to lead others and her unrelenting energy she dedicated her adult life to the field of adult education. O’Neill, in 1944, was the first person to earn a doctoral degree in adult education in what is now Canada. Later, as an administrator in the Department of Adult Education in the Newfoundland government, O’Neill sought to implement her vision of an integrated system for providing adult education programs to the people of Newfoundland. She developed that vision through the writing of her doctoral thesis entitled: “A Plan for the Development of an Adult Education Program for Rural Newfoundland.” O’Neill’s personal struggle to become educated and later her struggles to see her “Plan” implemented adds to the body of knowledge about adult education in Newfoundland at an embryonic time in its development and to the knowledge of the field of adult education in general.
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My six year adventure discovering Florence O’Neill involved a great many people. The adventure began with Professor Gordon Selman and his course about the history of adult education in Canada. Gordon’s enthusiasm for my interest in O’Neill stimulated further interest which was then supported by the late William Griffith, my graduate supervisor at the time. When I became certain that O’Neill would become the focus for my thesis research, Professors Jean Barman and Neil Sutherland agreed to become members of my committee and made it possible for me to return to Newfoundland to “look for” Florence O’Neill while still fulfilling my UBC requirements. Over the years my thesis committee: Professors Barman, who became my thesis supervisor, Neil Sutherland, Tom Sork, and Jim Overton remained supportive and encouraging. Professor Barman’s confidence that I would finish and her unflagging enthusiasm for my research were undeniably my greatest support. In Newfoundland, Linda Cullum and Professor Emeritus Phillip McCann came to my aid more than once with suggestions and feedback. Other support and welcome advice came from Elayne Harris, who had met O’Neill, and from Les Hutchison, O’Neill’s husband, and David Malcolm, a family friend. Finally, throughout the whole adventure the support and encouragement of my husband, Gary, and my daughter, Elizabeth, helped to keep me determined to bring the story of Florence O’Neill into the public arena.
INTRODUCTION

As a child, Florence O’Neill had an ambition to see the world and meet people. As a middle-class woman, her ambition could be realized by choosing among the very few career paths open to women at the time such as teacher, nurse, librarian, or secretary. O’Neill chose teaching. Her experience as a teacher awakened her curiosity about people’s lives and awakened a desire in her to help cure the social problems that plagued Newfoundland. Curiosity and a desire to help people to “improve whether they wanted to or not” seemed to have been all that was necessary to prompt O’Neill to return to school every few years until she, at the age of thirty-nine, had earned a doctoral degree from Columbia University in adult education.

O’Neill became an adult educator in Newfoundland at a time when Newfoundland had very few adult educators and when even fewer were women with college degrees. While O’Neill’s unique life is a compelling study on its own, I have focussed on the years she spent pursuing a career, first as a teacher, then as an adult educator. Her experiences as an adult educator contribute to the body of knowledge about the early years of the field in North America and to an understanding of the evolution of adult education in Newfoundland. O’Neill’s experiences while becoming educated, and as a teacher, and finally as an administrator, illuminate both the practice of adult education at a specific time in history and the difficulties adult educators experienced when attempting to find funding and resources for educational programs aimed at adults. It is the purpose of this research to explore the field of adult education

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through O’Neill’s experiences, memories, memos, and notes. Through her experience, it is possible to gain an understanding of the policies, politics, and cultural influences that affected the growth and development of adult education in Newfoundland.

I have come to some understanding of Florence O’Neill’s life and work through a circuitous route. I first stumbled across O’Neill’s name when reading Selman and Dampier’s *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*: “During the 1940s, at least three Canadians earned doctoral degrees in adult education in the United States --Roby Kidd, Florence O’Neill, and John Friesen.” Roby Kidd and John Friesen were names familiar to nearly all students taking adult education foundation courses. I had heard about their work many times, but I had not heard of Florence O’Neill. Later, Gordon Selman informed me that O’Neill was a Newfoundlander when, as a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, I enrolled in his course in adult education history. I found that information astonishing. I had been working in Newfoundland for twenty years and had been involved in adult education there. I felt I had a good sense of the province’s adult education history which I believed, as many in Newfoundland do, began in 1958 when Memorial University opened an Extension Division to its range of departments. Florence O’Neill, it seemed, had disappeared from recorded history about adult education in Newfoundland. My research project began with three simple questions: Who was Florence O’Neill? What kind of adult education program was she responsible for creating in Newfoundland? How had she become the first Canadian to earn a doctoral degree in adult education from Columbia University?
My search for answers to these questions uncovered what I found to be a rich and exciting history of programs and activity in the area of adult education for both rural and townsfolk in Newfoundland. As I began to dig into the provincial government records, I was surprised to discover a wealth of activity in the area of adult education prior to the Memorial University of Newfoundland’s involvement. To my surprise, I discovered that as early as 1920, individuals had actively campaigned to bring adult education to Newfoundland. As I pieced together O’Neill’s story I found that she had taken a path that had given her exposure to adult education ideas and experiences from nearly the beginning of her adult life. For example, she had been influenced by J.L. Paton, the first President of Memorial University College, as it was called before it became a university, when she became a student there in 1926. Paton, as it turned out, was a strong advocate for adult education. Later, she was hired to teach miners at night through the Dominion Oil and Steel Company’s own program to educate its workers. She discovered that she truly enjoyed the experience. Finally, after many years of teaching children and after she had earned a bachelor’s degree from Dalhousie University, Halifax, O’Neill became, in 1936, an “itinerant,” or travelling, adult teacher through a program supported by the government to develop “opportunity” schools in every community in Newfoundland that requested one. O’Neill’s adult career, and the fact that she had been introduced to adult education by those who had been the first passionate devotees of adult learning, confirmed for me the importance of exploring her life. Her life experiences would reveal much of the story of adult education in Newfoundland.
This thesis explores stages in O’Neill’s career and education. Chapter 1 contains contextual information about Newfoundland’s past in order to establish some salient features of the political and cultural terrain O’Neill negotiated. I also provide the reader with a literature review that provides the foundation for my ‘touchstones’: those files and archival collections that formed the basis for finding information about adult education and O’Neill. The story of both lay well covered in old files, newspaper articles, and archival documents.

From Chapter 2 through 6, I follow O’Neill’s career and education. Since O’Neill alternated her working years with ‘stop-outs’ to attend university, it became a natural progression in the thesis for me to follow her path. While following O’Neill’s movement toward adult education, I discovered that I was also following the emergence of adult education in Newfoundland. O’Neill’s life, it seems, intersected with the development of adult education at important moments in the development of both.

Throughout my research I have been aware of, and troubled by, the problem of finding an appropriate manner to foreground issues relating to gender as they may have affected O’Neill. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to explore O’Neill’s work because she is a woman, people do not live in a gender-less context. O’Neill’s life experiences, those within and beyond her control, formed her impression of the world and her knowledge of it as a woman. Her impression of her world is something the reader must struggle to imagine because O’Neill did not point to any decisions about her career or life as having been limited or defined by her gender. However, she perceived the world in a certain way and it is through her perceptions of that world that she
navigated “the weave of relationships and structures which constituted [her] world.”

O’Neill had few female role models who were educated women with professional careers to whom she could look for guidance. Certainly, she had female teachers as a child, but they had been nuns, and O’Neill did not seem interested in living life as a nun. Memorial University College had no female professors in its early days, but by the time she had reached Columbia University, O’Neill was able to take courses from, and be advised by, Mabel Carney, a professor within the adult education program at Columbia who could serve as a role model for O’Neill. Within Newfoundland’s government, while O’Neill was the Director of Adult Education in the Department of Adult Education, from 1949 to 1957, she had the highest position a woman had attained at that time. As a female government employee, according to provincial government rules, O’Neill would have had to leave her position if she had married. If she intended to follow her desire to work in adult education, she was cut-off from having a ‘normal’ family life with a husband and children. If she remained single in order to maintain her career, or simply because she preferred to be single, O’Neill would have been seen as defying the norms of Newfoundland society. O’Neill’s position and her level of education served to further complicate her relationships with other women and with men in Newfoundland, making it difficult for her to have any typical circle of friends to whom she could look for support and encouragement.

I endeavoured, as I constructed O’Neill’s career history, to keep in mind that expectations surrounding lifestyle and life pursuits have changed a great deal since O’Neill was a young woman. I did not feel it was appropriate to attribute to O’Neill a
sense of outrage at discriminatory practices she may have experienced, or discriminatory attitudes she may have endured, because she was a woman. I don't feel that O’Neill would have reacted to discrimination in the same manner that women do today. Also, I felt strongly that I wanted her career history to have her voice and to be her story. I collected those pieces of evidence that told her story most effectively for that reason.

O’Neill was, in many ways, a remarkable woman, but not a super-human one in the sense that she was neither born to riches nor extreme poverty, she was not a monster nor a monarch. Her very ordinariness seems to require more explanation as to why her story might be worthwhile. Yet in the field of education, both policy and tradition have been created by scores of ordinary individuals whose only legacy is a program or a method for teaching, but whose names have been lost through time. Through the process of this research I have been able to reconnect O’Neill’s name to a program that she established as well as reconstruct a history of adult education programs and individual’s efforts that gave Newfoundland an early start toward developing a system of adult education well before 1958.
1. Nancy Forestell, “Times Were Hard: the Pattern of Women’s Paid Labour in St. John’s Between the Two World Wars,” in *Their Lives and Times: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed. Carmelita McGrath, Barbara Neis, and Marilyn Porter (St. John’s: Killick Press, 1995) 81. Forestell found that “middle-class women living at home were more likely to be employed as teachers, nurses, stenographers, and saleswomen.” Women who did not live at home tended to be teachers. It was not common to find a single woman living by herself in the same town or community as her family lived.

2. Newfoundland was a country until 1932; then it was in a kind of ‘economic receivership’ from 1932-1949 when it was neither nation nor colony but its economic and political affairs were handled by a Commission of Government made up of British and Newfoundland members; then it became, in 1949, a province of Canada. See Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988) 39-43.


4. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 28-50. Scott wrote that “to pursue meaning, we need to deal with the individual subject as well as social organization and to articulate the nature of their interrelationships.” She continued by explaining: I do not think we should quit the archives or abandon the study of the past, but we do have to change some of the ways we’ve gone about working, some of the questions we have asked. We need to scrutinize our methods of analysis, clarify our operative assumptions, and explain how we think change occurs. Instead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled.” p. 42.

5. Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of ‘Women’ in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) 1-17.

In 1922, at the age of seventeen, O'Neill began a teaching career in a one-room school on the now deserted, very small island of Oderin, in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. The next fifteen years of her life were shaped by experiences as a school teacher which were interspersed with years as a student, first at Memorial University College in St. John's, Newfoundland (in 1926 and 1928), then at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (in 1932 and 1935), and finally at Columbia University in New York (in 1938 and 1942-44). Her experience as a teacher and as a student slowly shaped her interest in adult education. She was drawn to adult education more as a leaf follows a current than as a moth is drawn to a flame: slowly, with many stops in the eddies.

Prior to O'Neill's decision to pursue a degree in adult education, two specific experiences in her life guided her toward that field. The first, in 1928, was an opportunity that she had to teach literacy skills to adult miners in a night school that was started at the request of the management of the Dominion Steel and Coal Company, a mining company operating on Bell Island. O'Neill taught the miners for about five months. The second, in 1933, was an experience that gave O'Neill a good understanding of the problems caused by poverty and illiteracy. Through her months of teaching at the Blackhead Road school, (original name of the school which is now known as the St. John Bosco School in Shea Heights) O'Neill began to believe that teaching children did not help them to have better lives. She realized that the greater need was to teach adults (the children's parents) practical skills and give them practical information so that they would
Figure 1: Florence O'Neill, 1944 (photo: Chidnoff Studio, New York, NY).
know how to feed their children healthy meals and would know how to grow crops that could nourish their families. It became apparent to her that this approach would have a more profound effect on the children.

O’Neill did not seem to want to leave her ability to do this work to ‘chance,’ however. Not long after her 1936 entrance into adult education, she sought out specialized training. She wanted to improve her background in adult education and this desire eventually took her to Columbia University where she was able to take courses specific to the field. While at Columbia, she began to reflect on Newfoundland’s need for a better system of providing services to adults in isolated communities. She chose the redesigning of Newfoundland’s adult education program as her thesis topic.

While O’Neill was an extremely important figure in Newfoundland’s adult education history, she remains relatively unknown to educators, adult educators, and to women’s organizations in Newfoundland. While other educators with whom she worked, such as V. P. Burke, W. W. Blackall, J. Paton, and others, have had buildings dedicated to their memory on the Memorial University of Newfoundland campus, O’Neill has enjoyed no such honour. Residents of Newfoundland are, for the most part, unaware of her existence.

As well as her obscurity in her home province, O’Neill is equally unknown as an adult educator in Canada. Even though she accomplished such ‘firsts’ as earning the first doctoral degree in adult education in Canada, and being the first woman to head a government department in Newfoundland, she has not been remembered by the field of adult education either in Newfoundland or in Canada. Discovering that she existed as a
leader in adult education, and piecing together the path she travelled and the impact she made on those with whom she came in contact, has been a process that has included accidental discovery, personal stories I have heard from others about encounters with her, archival digging, and a thorough search of St. John’s newspapers during the 1930s.

When I began to explore O’Neill’s educational and career accomplishments, I first discovered that very little information about adult education in Newfoundland existed prior to 1958 when community development and outreach became the domain of the University. In historical texts and articles tracing the development of education in Newfoundland, where adult education was mentioned briefly, O’Neill’s name generally did not appear. The first verification that O’Neill was the Assistant Director of Adult Education that I was able to find was in a newspaper clipping from a 1944 issue of The Evening Telegram shortly after O’Neill returned from Columbia. References to her, or her work during the years 1944-1949 while she was Assistant Director, are extremely rare, even in the archival files of the correspondence of that office.

Through conversations with individuals who were old enough to have heard of O’Neill, I began to learn about “Florrie”-- as everyone called her. While few people seemed to know details about the adult education program she led, or even know that she was its Director, most seemed to know that she was exuberant, sociable, and fun.

It is easy to know, or know about, a large number of people in a small social community like St. John’s, so the many stories about O’Neill were not surprising. I was nevertheless perplexed by the lack of knowledge in the community about the program she had created. It had disappeared from the ‘community memory.’
Was O’Neill a hopeless administrator or a visionary who was ahead of her time? Did adult education as a program or ‘movement’ reflect too much or too little of the social and political issues of the time? Was it politics or personality, or some blend of the two that erased the program O’Neill created? It would seem that O’Neill’s own personal achievements, the caliber of her education, and her careful implementation of many projects over more than a decade would have been sufficient to have earned her a place in educational history in Newfoundland.

Newfoundland Context

Newfoundland’s history does not follow the same pattern of settlement, growth and development that characterizes the settlement history of most of North America. Settlement began because there was an abundance of fish. Newfoundland’s first ruling class, the ships’ captains, had supreme authority over a bay or cove the moment they guided their ships into a safe harbour for the summer fishery. Under Admiralty Law, as it was called, the first ship to moor in a bay in the spring controlled that bay and the ship’s captain represented the law. Since ship’s captains were accustomed to keeping their crews in order this form of “law” worked well. The use of the island by the British, from its discovery in 1497 until 1832, was predominantly as a fishing station. Therefore, it was unnecessary, and even unlawful, to create the more permanent forms of a legal and justice system. In fact, in Britain, Newfoundland was thought of merely as a “great English Ship moored near the Banks, a nursery of seamen for the navy and a convenience for the West Country migratory fishery.” Newfoundland’s status-less position and Britain’s desire to prohibit permanent settlement fuelled a certain kind of
development that profoundly affected its future. Since there was no mechanism for raising taxes or providing services, there was no mechanism for the development of systems of education, health, or road building.

The next phase of development occurred after 1832 when "Representative Government" affirmed much of what already existed in practice, e.g., settlements, marriages, and births, but also entrenched the authority of the merchants who bought and traded fish and goods. The period of Representative Government was a transitional one for the island population. Their right to settlement had become legitimate, but there was no 'national' sense of identity or tradition in a place where each individual community had operated as its own entity, or 'kingdom.' The British government attempted, by organizing "patriotic" or "nativist" organizations to address the problem of a non-cohesive populace that had to begin to act cohesively.

The Church of England was established as the lawful church and education was organized according to church guidelines. A majority of the St. John's population, which happened to be Roman Catholic, was outraged that a Protestant education system and British law were to be imposed on them. Sectarian strife resulted and spread to larger communities where Protestants and Catholics lived near each other. In short, Representative Government created new problems rather than solved them in Newfoundland.

In 1855, Newfoundland gained Responsible Government and its first elected government (complete with a Prime Minister and cabinet). Creating government in the midst of a population where a legacy of battles for power between the Protestants and
Catholics thrived, and where the traditions of a class-based society were embedded in the creation of the new government, presented large and unavoidable difficulties. Approximately two percent of the population made up the upper and middle class. The remainder of the population were fishers, or other workers who were, for the most part, illiterate.

With Responsible Government, the upper and middle class were successful in entrenching a system that allowed merchants to monopolize the buying and selling of fish in communities. From this period into the twentieth century merchants literally had the power of life and death over the fishermen and their communities because their purchase of a season’s catch meant the families in the community would have other goods such as flour, sugar, tea and other necessities of life. The “result was an isolated and dependent outport population that in good times was controlled by the merchants of Water Street [St. John’s] and in bad times relied on government to stave off disaster.” The credit system that evolved between the merchant and fisher became known as the “truck” system: “whereas the merchant had come in the seventeenth century to exploit the fish population of Newfoundland, he or his agent came now [in the eighteenth and nineteenth century] to exploit the human population.” Supplies that were advanced by the merchants to the fishermen each spring were deducted from the fisherman’s “earnings” in the fall, largely eliminating cash in favour of barter as a medium of exchange.

It was, however, through the systems and structures created within Responsible Government that Newfoundland began to develop an education system. As schools were built, a problem emerged of finding well-educated teachers for each and every small
community and of overcoming the problem of providing schools in remote and isolated settlements with only one or two dozen children. School attendance varied from community to community, but overall, up until 1942 when the Commission of Government enacted compulsory attendance, half of the children of school age regularly stayed away from school.¹¹

Responsible Government lasted until 1932.¹² Newfoundland survived through good and bad years of the fishery and other economic or social disasters such as World War I, to which Newfoundland sent 5,482 men, more than half of whom were killed or wounded.¹³ But the world-wide depression and a myriad of other factors influencing Newfoundland’s exports and imports finally brought the Government to its knees in 1932¹⁴. By 1934, Canada and Britain came to Newfoundland’s aid, paying its debts. Aid came with a price, however, and a system of government was again imposed on Newfoundland from Britain.¹⁵ This time a Commission of Government was created. The Commission consisted of three Newfoundlanders, three British, and, once more, a British Governor.¹⁶ The Newfoundland bureaucratic structure remained intact, but there was no longer a parliament. Decisions were made by the six Commissioners, government money was spent as they dictated. Government spending on many projects and in many areas was severely reduced or halted; but spending in other areas expanded. The first three British Commissioners were ‘liberal-thinking’ men who set out to “improve” social services, including the education system. They emphasized the need to abolish the denominational school system and to teach adults methods of farming and basic reading and arithmetic. Their aim was to lessen Newfoundlander’s need for
government support or relief. The Commissioners neglected, however, to consult the Newfoundland centres of power (the merchants and clerics) about their plans and ideas. Church leaders and merchants ensnared the Commission's plans in layers of reaction and non-action making it impossible for the Commission to make progress in many areas it had targeted.17

In general terms, the stage upon which social, economic, and cultural traditions emerged supported many players by the early decades of the twentieth century. A government that changed forms regularly, coupled with centuries old outport settlement patterns and the influence of a conservative St. John's social hierarchy collided to create a strange mix of need and privilege. Outports were reputed to be populated by starving, lazy people and members of the St. John's ruling class responded by both bemoaning the awful state of the outports and creating service agencies that would go into the wilderness and teach people skills and attitudes.18 There were so many methods to help people during the late 1930s that Robert Lester of the Carnegie Corporation on a visit to St. John's reported that it was a veritable "jigsaw puzzle of uplift forces."19 But little of this activity was noticed in most of the isolated outports scattered along Newfoundlands six thousand mile coastline.

Literature Review

A few available texts provide an historical record of the beginnings of adult education in Newfoundland. Kevin Tracey's M.A. thesis (1968), "The Development of Adult Education in Newfoundland Since Confederation in 1949,"20 is the single comprehensive secondary source exploring adult education in Newfoundland prior to
1958. It focuses on the creation of a “Rural District Plan” to promote community leadership and initiative. The plan Tracey describes clearly originated in O’Neill’s doctoral thesis “A Plan for the Development of an Adult Education Program for Rural Newfoundland,” but Tracey did not connect O’Neill’s thesis to the “Rural District Plan.” Since Tracey also neglected to include O’Neill’s thesis in his bibliography, he may have been unaware of her earlier graduate work and research. No other comprehensive analysis exists about the organization of adult education, its scope, or success prior to 1958.

Published histories of education in Newfoundland containing a significant discussion of the education system prior to 1958 (including some information about adult education) have been written by Frederick Rowe in his three books: The History of Education in Newfoundland (1952),21 The Development of Education in Newfoundland (1964),22 and Education and Culture in Newfoundland (1976).23 Phillip McCann has more recently contributed to that body of knowledge with his books and articles. His most recent, Schooling in a Fishing Society (1994), provides vital specific information about what was taught, how many children attended school, how many teachers were hired, and other similar facts regarding the schools from 1836 to 1986.24 McCann’s articles: “Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education: 1836-1901”(1989), “Culture, State Formation and the Invention of Tradition” (1988), and “The Educational Policy of the Commission of Government”(1987)25 also provide background to the social and political history that have shaped Newfoundland’s education system.
Malcolm MacLeod's *A Bridge Built Halfway: A History of Memorial University College: 1925-1950* (1990) provides details about the college in relation to its community outreach (adult education) as well as a discussion of the students it attracted. There have been many student papers and theses focusing on aspects of the history of education, especially the denominational nature of the system and the effect of the Commission of Government's reorganization plans on education as a whole.26

A handful of texts have recently been written exploring the role of women in Newfoundland's culture. Phillip McCann has suggested that issues surrounding gender have been neglected in all areas of research from ethnographic studies to historical ones.27 While the number of texts and articles about women's roles is not large, those that do exist have begun to construct how women's roles and lives differed from those of men in this society. Many of these have focussed on the role of women in the fishery. A growing body of information has also begun to emerge about women's roles, work, and education in St. John's.

Current research suggests that urban working-class women had fewer choices than their middle- and upper-class counterparts. There were, however, two activities closed to nearly all women: voting and full-time employment after marriage. Women were not granted the right to vote in Newfoundland until 1929. On the employment front, as a matter of custom, married women were not generally hired as full time employees. After Newfoundland joined Canada, married women were not hired in the provincial government. The lives of middle- and upper-class women appear to have been often devoted to volunteer organizations.28
Young, single women’s lives differed from their married counterparts. Young women in working class families often had to work to supplement the family income because during the 1920s and 30s work was more abundant for women than men:

An increase in work-force participation by women occurred in most North American urban centres during the 1930s because so many men, especially those of the working class, received such small wages, or could not find any steady work. This made it imperative that their daughters and wives engage in some type of paid labour. In fact, women sometimes found it easier to secure waged employment than the men in their families because of the greater availability of jobs that were stereotyped as women’s work.

Working class women in St. John’s found employment as domestics, tailors, salesclerks, or in the manufacturing plants in the city, until marriage. Women often crept back into the workforce a few years after marriage, however, for a variety of reasons, such as the husband’s inability to find permanent work, or because of his illness, injury, or death.

In St. John’s, women born into the upper class, whether they were Roman Catholic or Protestant had the fewest barriers. These women were well-travelled, generally well educated if they chose to be, and many became leaders of volunteer associations. Many belonged to charity organizations, as well. There were schools in the city that catered to the girls of upper class families. Women’s organizations, such as the Ladies Reading Room with their newspaper The Distaff, were strong voices in the community. Even the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union supported women’s voice and provided a place where women could gather to talk, read, and debate. Prior to
marriage, upper and middle class women who were college educated, or who received some training in a profession, were free to seek employment or to run businesses. Generally, work for these women was a matter of choice, as was their freedom to spend their earnings.  

Several recent texts have begun to explore these urban women’s roles within the social structure. Among those most helpful to this study were Nancy Forestell’s articles about the world of paid employment for women during the 1920s and 1930s. As well, a compendium of articles, excerpts from novels, poems, and essays reviewing and re-telling women’s stories, has been collected under the title: *Their Lives and Times: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador, a collage*. Women’s suffrage in Newfoundland has been given attention in Linda Kealey’s *Pursuing Equality*. In addition, Margot Duley’s research on women’s suffrage in Newfoundland has helped create a ‘social map’ that explores the connections women in upper-class St. John’s enjoyed among themselves and, as a group, within the political power structure of the day.

Another text that also allows the reader a glimpse into the priorities and activities of upper class women in St. John’s is Agnes M. Richard’s description of the history of the Jubilee Guilds in Newfoundland: *Threads of Gold*. Through her history of the events and activities of the Guilds it is possible to see connections between St. John’s and the outport communities. While Richard’s description of the Jubilee Guild’s work is descriptive rather than reflective or analytical, it does convey the enthusiasm and sense of community concern of the Guild’s women.
Women's roles in various kinds of Newfoundland communities have been the focus of Marilyn Porter's *Place and Persistence in the Lives of Newfoundland Women*. Porter has noted that feminists researching the contribution of women in the Atlantic region to their environment have found little or nothing in past research that addresses the contribution of women to the community. Much of the work that has been done concentrates on women's role in the fishery. Current research in this area has begun to piece together an understanding of women's roles in their society. Porter has found that while it is traditionally accepted that outports exude a kind of "maleness" in the rugged fishing, hunting, wood cutting ethos of the members of the community (we are told by those who write about the fishery and logging industries), women, it is being discovered, have had a voice in the matters affecting the community. As Marilyn Porter has noted: "My own observations and other feminist studies found outport women to be relatively independent, politically and economically, and moreover, to be in possession of a vibrant and positive women's culture." The fact of a life lived where men were absent for most of the hours of the day while fishing, and often were absent for days at a time if they fished off-shore, women had the responsibility of keeping the family together and keeping the roof overhead, as well as clothing and feeding the children. Porter's study of several outport communities led her to conclude that "there are variations in the division of labour." Men and women work together for their own survival and the survival of the community. Within this kind of culture, "power" is more fluid, shifting between men and women depending on the context of the moment. She suggests that the balance of power between genders in maritime societies may be fluid because the isolation of
communities, requires all residents to contribute equally to the community’s survival.

A foundational and important text about women’s roles in one outport community is More Than 50%: Woman’s Life in a Newfoundland Outport, 1900-1950. Hilda Chaulk Murray tells the story of women’s lives in the community where she was born, Elliston, Bonavista Bay. It is a detailed and very personal story of the contributions of men and women to the daily work that was necessary to survival.

Personal stories told by women who had careers as teachers helped to broaden my understanding of the life of a teacher who moved from one community to another with each school. Grace Layman’s That Part of My Life provided a lively description of both her childhood years and her years as a teacher in the K-11 system. Ms. Layman also spent a brief, and unhappy, period working as an adult educator under Florence O’Neill.

Another teacher, who turned librarian, Jessie Mifflin travelled over most of the island as well as Labrador. Her book, Be You a Library Missionary, Miss provided a vivid description of the perils and pleasures of travelling on coastal boat and dog sled to communities to bring library services to remote regions. Mifflin had been recruited along with six other women to be the first “professional” adult educators in Newfoundland, and as such had also travelled to many remote communities as an “Opportunity School” teacher prior to becoming a librarian. Her knowledge of Newfoundland proved invaluable to me as I struggled to understand something of the context within which the “itinerant” teachers worked.

Understanding community structures from the stories told by women writers about their geographical and social communities provided me with a background to
understand O’Neill’s experience as an adult educator in many of the remote communities where she worked. Discovering why some communities seemed to participate in every possible opportunity for additional educational and economic growth while others did not proved to be a more elusive enterprise, however. A community’s activities seemed to have to do with the kinds of values it held as well as with the strength of the social structure within the women’s community. Marilyn Porter’s research about women in rural Newfoundland has illuminated the importance of connections that women in some communities enjoy that give the communities a “formidable strength, organization, and persistence.”

In addition to Porter’s research, many communities in Newfoundland have had a history written about them. While community histories are not necessarily well researched, they can still offer a sense of the values and structure of Newfoundland outport life. Among the community retrospectives that informed this research was Trail Wanderings: A Folk History of Bay Bulls, by Queen Maloney. Bay Bulls is a predominantly Roman Catholic community very near Witless Bay. Maloney’s folk history includes information about education and community structure similar to that which O’Neill knew.

It is evident from histories that have been written about communities by people who lived in them that women in rural Newfoundland played a large role in education, yet there is almost nothing about outport teachers. In both Mifflin’s book and Layman’s, their experiences as teachers are re-told. Other than these sorts of autobiographical works, there is little to guide one’s research about the environment, difficulties, or even practices of the typical teacher prior to confederation. Some community teachers, it
seems, were simply local individuals who had received the most schooling and so
became the teacher; others migrated from St. John’s to outports to teach.46 The
circumstances surrounding a young girls’ right or ability to attend school long enough to
be considered a teacher have not been researched; nor has the impact of becoming a
teacher at 16, 17, or 18 years of age and possibly having to work a great distance from
family and community. Whether these young women were good teachers, or even
adequate teachers, under the circumstances of their employment, is another question
within the larger issue of young women as teachers in rural societies.

One other variable to consider while assessing women’s place in Newfoundland
society is the role of the church. Religion in Newfoundland is one strand of the fabric
that is the island’s culture. There is no political or economic event or activity in
Newfoundland that is denomination-free. For instance, in St. John’s, Catholic and
Protestant women could both seek employment as shop clerks, but not in the same stores.
Catholic women knew that they should apply at the Royal Stores, while Protestant
women applied at Bowring Brothers or Ayre and Sons.47 Knowledge of where one’s
application would be seriously considered, or which society or club one might join, was
simply taken for granted. Similarly, entire communities existed as homogenous religious
entities. O’Neill lived in Witless Bay, a community with one church and school, both of
which were Roman Catholic. In communities where two religious denominations
happened to exist, generally the population of each denomination clustered together.
Each denomination would have its own school, or it would have attempted to have
convinced ‘the government’ to build separate schools. Fisherman often would cluster
their stages and wharves together within their denomination. In many outports neither adults nor children ever needed to mix with those from the other denomination. Since religious affiliation plays so important a part in the everyday life of every Newfoundlander, it is often difficult to "see" its affect. Like gender-roles, religious affiliation is so close to the individual's entire personal and world view that we can assume its presence while not always being able to assume its affect. In this thesis, I have attempted to focus on religion when I could locate a specific incident or activity that allowed the reader a brief glimpse of an ever present factor in decisions that O'Neill, and others in her life, made.

In addition to these sources, the daily newspapers such as The Evening Telegram and the Daily News, and the St. John's Roman Catholic paper, The Monitor, provided contextual as well as specific information about people and events. The Commission Government paper, the Newfoundland Government Bulletin, contained a large body of information about programs that the Commission supported or enacted. The Atlantic Guardian (whose offices were located in Ontario) was a periodical that existed during the late 40s and 50s and provided information and opinions about Newfoundland's future, the economy, education, and general interest articles. The Newfoundland Quarterly, a publication that has reflected Newfoundland to Newfoundlanders since 1904, gave insights into educational and political issues. As well, Newfoundland Studies offered a wealth of background information about Newfoundland's culture and history. The Centre for Newfoundland Studies in the Queen Elizabeth II Library at Memorial University of Newfoundland houses a collection of census, biographical, and town data,
files, and indexes that were invaluable as a source of general information about Newfoundland during the mid-century decades.

The archival papers of Florence O’Neill within the Centre for Newfoundland Studies also allowed me some access to O’Neill’s private life. Her thoughts and opinions, as expressed in letters to colleagues and as essays for courses at Columbia, and in an interview (transcribed) which she gave to John Hewson (a nephew by marriage), helped to add the dimension of ‘personality’ to the administrative correspondence between O’Neill and others while she was Director of Adult Education. The latter correspondence was available in the Provincial Government’s archives (PANL).

Archival papers of another figure central to O’Neill’s story, G. Alain Frecker, also helped reveal something of her relationships with those who meant a great deal to her success or failure. Frecker was born in 1905 (the same year that O’Neill was born) in the French colony of St. Pierre, an island off the south coast of Newfoundland, educated in Nova Scotia, and came to Newfoundland in 1934 as head of the new engineering department of the Memorial University College. In 1939 he became an executive officer within the Department of Education as their Roman Catholic representative. As such, he was O’Neill’s supervisor. Frecker stayed in the Department of Education, eventually in 1944, becoming Secretary for Education, a role equivalent to Deputy Minister. Throughout his career in Education, he was O’Neill’s superior officer. Frecker’s relationship with O’Neill is a vital piece of her story, both its bleak moments and its successes. Through correspondence in Frecker’s archival collection, it was possible to extract something of the relationship and the difficulties of the work they shared.
Other archival documents were those held by the Carnegie Corporation. Among these documents were numerous letters between Vincent Burke of the Newfoundland Department of Education and Frederick Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation. There were also many letters between Keppel or others at Carnegie with both Father J. J. Tompkins and Father Moses Coady of the Antigonish Movement. Once I was able to arrange the letters in a chronological history, they told the story of many of the dramatic events during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Finally, informal conversations and correspondence with those who knew O’Neill helped me to understand something of how others reacted to, or remembered, O’Neill. I gained a sense of the professional O’Neill from P. J. Murray who had been the Deputy Minister of Agriculture during the early 1950s and with whom O’Neill worked closely, and from Henry Best who had instigated O’Neill’s hiring by the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa after she had lost her position as Director of Adult Education. Teresa MacNeil, who had worked under O’Neill while she was Director of Adult Education, also provided insight into O’Neill as a supervisor of staff. From others, such as Jessie Sharpe who had shared a residence floor with O’Neill as a graduate student at Columbia, to O’Neill’s nieces and grand niece and others who had met her casually, I gained some understanding of this lively, energetic, and somewhat non-conforming person.

The thesis explores the career history of Florence O’Neill. It is organized around O’Neill’s experiences as a teacher and adult educator rather than around the highlights of a developing adult education program. O’Neill’s experience as an adult educator
corresponded with the beginnings of formal programs in adult education and continued until there was no longer a Department of Adult Education. O’Neill’s memories as an adult educator provided an insight into the organization of the program, the principles upon which such a program was built and the assumptions of at least one very dedicated adult educator. In order to bring Florence O’Neill and her involvement in adult education to life, I used O’Neill’s own reflections on her past experience to focus my research and explorations. Using both O’Neill’s reflections and other evidence of the program gathered through the many sources I’ve described, I constructed a history that has been absent from the larger story of Newfoundland, and specifically from its education history.

2. Ibid., 2-4.


4. Ibid., 42-44.

5. Ibid., 42.


16. Ibid.


18. *The Evening Telegram*, articles on November 1, 1933, “Collection of Clothing Proceeding Apace” and “Countryside Movement to Provide Clothing for Destitute,” and an article about the Women’s Service League on November 10, 1933, and finally an article on October 4, 1933, “Comparative Mortality Rates” all relate to the state of need of those in the rural areas. These are a mere sample of the many such articles that urged St. John’s people to be generous in helping, but also assured them that each receiver of the donations had been assessed as to whether they were among the legitimately needy. As well the article on infant mortality stated that the cause was dirt.


26. There have been several student explorations of education history in Newfoundland, most notable include: Geo. Hickman, “The History of Education in Newfoundland,” unpublished thesis, Acadia University, 1941; Arthur Barnes, “The History of Education


29. Ibid., 149.


40. Ibid., 51-52


46. Community histories and autobiographies provide some information about women as teachers. Wilfred B.W. Martin’s *Random Island and Beyond* (St. John’s: Creative Publishers, 1991) provides lists of teachers and brief biographical paragraphs about them. It is a good place to begin to find women as active members of a community. On the other hand, it is more typical for a community “history” to contain little or nothing of the lives of individuals except those who became famous or infamous. In Robin McGrath’s *A Heritage Guide to Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s* (Pouch Cove, Nf: Oceanside Press, 1996) schools are not mentioned at all and only “prominent citizens” enjoy mention.


52. Personal correspondence with Jessie Sharpe, Bayfield, N.B. 1 October 1997.
Born in Witless Bay, Newfoundland, on January 11, 1905, to Maud and Nicholas O'Neill, Florence could be described as “frail,” and ‘bookish.’ Witless Bay, a small outport community, lies approximately forty kilometres south of St. John’s (see Figure 2). It is one of several communities that stretch along the coastline known as the Irish shore, or the “southern shore” on the eastern side of the Avalon peninsula. According to geographer W. Gordon Handcock, the “shore” has a predominantly Irish Catholic population descended from servants brought to Newfoundland during the eighteenth century. The English ships filled with “Irish Roman Catholic servants,” tended to settle in “plantations” south of St. John’s. These immigrants were brought to St. John’s but many migrated south of the city to live in communities where they were able to continue to practice their religion even though no Catholic clergy were allowed on the island. In modern times, Witless Bay has remained a small outport community predominantly populated by Catholics, the descendants of those early settlers.

Outport communities such as Witless Bay evolved from settlement by a very small number of families, sometimes as few as two or three households. The variety of work that needed to be done by individuals in the community in order to survive necessitated the learning of a broad range of skills. The skilled person, such as a mason or a blacksmith, needed to learn to fish, hunt, and build. In this ‘pioneer’ setting, remnants of the British social class structure dissolved. "The traditional class of
Figure 2: Map of the Island of Newfoundland showing places mentioned in the text.
indentured servants disappeared and the planter [settler] was gradually reduced to the status of an ordinary fisherman largely dependent on family” for the processing of a catch of fish. “Whenever labour was recruited outside the family, it was usually in return for a share of the catch, and not for wages as in the case of the 18th century servants.”

Families became the locus of production. Each family member had duties, tasks, and responsibilities geared toward ensuring survival: economic and material. Women’s work included usual housewifery tasks such as feeding the family and animals, raising crops, making clothes, and harvesting the garden, as well as helping with fish processing. Children were expected to help with berry picking and fish processing as well.

Until a modern roadway was constructed beginning in the late 1960s, most outport fishing communities on the island of Newfoundland were geographically distant from St. John’s, which has always been the centre of political and social power. Before travel and commerce between the city and the hundreds of outports was made easier by roads, St. John’s social life and the possibilities for work, education, and travel that urban residents enjoyed was little known to residents in small communities. However, for twenty years Witless Bay and other communities along the Southern Shore enjoyed a railroad connection to St. John’s that opened their world by making it possible for residents to regularly travel from St. John’s to the outports along the eastern Avalon peninsula coast. Between 1914 and 1934 a connector line of the Newfoundland railway ran between St. John’s and Trepassey at the southern tip of the Avalon Peninsula, connecting all of the communities along the line. The opening of the branch line brought Witless Bay much closer to St. John’s, making it possible for day trips into the city.
Without the railway, few people ventured over the cart track into St. John’s. According to Frank Galgay, a journalist and resident of the Southern Shore, “by 1909, the Southern Shore road was passable by car, but it was extremely rough in places, and few cars attempted it.” The railway also made it possible for businesses in the city to organize “company outings” for employees, bringing city people into the country for a day at the beach or for a picnic. The convenience of the railway would seem to have brought communities along the line closer together and would have allowed the residents of each community to enjoy a less isolated and insular existence.

O’Neill’s childhood in the small community of Witless Bay occurred during this period when the railway connected Witless Bay to a larger world. But it was also influenced by the traditional closeness of a small community. The O’Neill’s would have known everyone in the community, and would have been related to some members of it. They, along with most other residents, would have attended the Roman Catholic church. These aspects of their life would have united them to the community.

Other aspects of O’Neill’s family and life separated her from the community. O’Neill’s father, Nicholas, was a carpenter rather than a fisherman. He had a specialized trade which meant he was paid in cash rather than in credit from the merchant’s store. In order to make a living for his family, Nicholas had to find work wherever his skills were needed. As a result, he was often away from home working in St. John’s. His trade, however, provided the O’Neill’s with a comparatively comfortable life by Witless Bay standards. According to Florence’s niece, Nicholas built a “large imposing house overlooking the community and the bay.” It contained a formal foyer and was, in
general, designed to "imitate the larger houses in St. John's." Another aspect of their difference was that the O'Neill's were also a small family. Florence had only one brother, who also became a carpenter. Small families, those with fewer than three or four children, were rare during the first half of the century. As well, the O'Neill's seemed to participate less in community life than was typical. One of the reasons, according to Florence, was that her mother, Maud, was a "small, frail woman," and this fragility of her mother seems to have kept the O'Neill home quiet and relatively free from visitors. Another reason may have been Florence's fragility caused by a childhood battle with rickets, a disease that left her legs short and bowed. As an adult she successfully hid her legs under long dresses of her own design and making.

O'Neill said of her childhood that "being the only daughter of a delicate mother" meant that she lived a "particularly sheltered life." Presumably she meant she was not able to invite many friends to her home for active play; but she said that instead of "mixing freely" with school friends she lived "in [her] own private dream world: my world of fantasy enhanced by the varying enchantment of a picturesque rural seacoast community, in which Shelley, Byron, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Dickens, Jane Austen, yes and Shakespeare played a major role." When not at home, she remembered having spent "the greater part of my day-time activities confined to the environment of a convent country school and the normal activities of any country girl--choir practice, participation in school drama and the innocent enjoyment of youth."

The "country convent school" O'Neill attended was organized by the Presentation Order of nuns, an order that had originated in Ireland. The community of Witless Bay

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had the luxury of a school from 1836 onward. The Presentation Sisters had been invited to the community in 1860. They built a convent and school and began teaching young girls. Boys attended school in the building that had previously served as a school, prior to the Presentation convent, and were taught by “lay” teachers. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, boys and girls both attended the convent school.

By 1911, the year that Florence O’Neill started school, there were approximately 150 pupils in the school. By this time boys under the age of ten were allowed to attend the convent school with girls. In addition to the usual reading, writing, and arithmetic, O’Neill would have been expected to also learn bookkeeping, algebra, drawing, needlework, vocal music, French, and Latin. The nuns taught Latin, French, and algebra to the very brightest students and these students were then examined for their mastery of the subjects through a Council of Higher Education exam which was read and graded in England. Nuns in most convent schools also taught music and drawing to students who showed some promise in these arts. O’Neill seems to have been one of those who excelled in piano. She often played during concerts and dramas she organized for, and with, her students.

By the time O’Neill finished her schooling, she recalled that she had “an increasingly compelling restlessness” to see the world and to meet people. O’Neill had few examples to turn to in order to imagine a path that would take her from Witless Bay into the wider world as a single, young woman. In order, perhaps, to appease her “restlessness,” she accepted a position as a teacher in a one-room school. She later described her feelings about this period of her life by saying: “A few months would bring
me to the successful completion of high school, I hoped. I was ready to translate into action that strong, though undefined desire to share in some small measure in Newfoundland's development."

In her recollections, she believed that even at the age of sixteen or seventeen she already possessed a strong ambition to participate in the development of her country. She also expressed the desire to have an "opportunity to make my favourite poets come to life for other boys and girls, an opportunity to help in the moulding of character, in developing future citizens."

O’Neill’s desire to leave Witless Bay and to experience something outside of it first took her to a teaching position on Oderin Island which is a very small island in Placentia Bay. Oderin was also settled by Irish Roman Catholics and was, at the time of O’Neill’s stay there, a community of not more than 150 households. In 1923 O’Neill taught forty-seven children, in a one-room school. During her first year she earned $23 a month, $20 of which she remembered having to pay for her room and board. O’Neill knew that she had not been prepared for teaching. Her method was to “remedy the way [she was] taught” and to “get across as best as you could the things you could teach.” O’Neill’s particular interests in music and drama, however, helped her to communicate some enthusiasm for learning within her young charges, and helped her to survive her career. She remembered: “I liked music then, I used to play a bit, to sing a bit and so we had a lot of fun.”

O’Neill recalled that “my one ambition was to get into homes and know the people and know what made each of the youngsters tick, why little Johnny did not operate in school and so forth.” As a young woman of seventeen or eighteen, she may
not have imagined the reality of teaching in a “sole proprietor” school where she alone was in charge. Later, when she remembered her first teaching experience, what stood out was:

I was terrified (with all the ambitions of being a wonderful teacher and saving the world) and I was terrified when some of the boys who came to school were as tall as you, almost as tall as you are now [her interviewer] and they carried their guns, they had been up at about 5:00 a.m., shooting.\textsuperscript{23}

O’Neill’s sheltered childhood had not prepared her to interact with children who had not received the same kind of upbringing she had.

O’Neill’s experience of having all ages of children, including older boys, in her classroom was fairly typical for teachers until after 1942, when the school attendance act ensured that children were enrolled every year.\textsuperscript{24} Even though the first school had opened in 1726, in Bonavista, in 1923 schools still were not commonplace in Newfoundland communities.\textsuperscript{25} Many communities had long periods when no teacher was available, thus necessitating a multi-age classroom when a teacher was found. In a few of the more fortunate Catholic communities, convents had been built and Irish nuns imported to teach in the schools that were often attached to them. Witless Bay had the good fortune of having a convent school from the turn of the century; Oderin had not. It is possible that Oderin had not had any school or teacher until shortly before O’Neill began teaching there.\textsuperscript{26}

By 1921, when O’Neill entered the teaching profession, the proportion of female teachers had reached its highest point of 76.2%, and Catholic schools had historically
tended to employ a higher proportion of female teachers than Protestant schools, which may have been due to the number of nuns teaching. Catholic women teachers were paid less than their Protestant counterparts, although women teachers in all religions were paid less than men. Since there were no 'public' schools (all schools were run by Christian religious sects) there was no standard by which all teachers and all schools were measured. The Catholic and Protestant School Boards made independent decisions about hiring and salaries. It is possible that O’Neill was paid a different salary each time she taught and it may not have always been a higher salary each time she was hired.

Many teachers travelled long distances to teach in schools far from home. When O’Neill was offered a position at Oderin she accepted its distance from home and the difficult mode of travel as normal and even exciting. Through her youthful eyes she anticipated “the journey by coastal boat to the scene of my future endeavours” to be “an exciting experience.” She used the opportunity to satisfy her curiosity by “making acquaintance with a group of teachers en route to their respective schools along the coast.” O’Neill’s recollection of her first ‘new home’ was that it had an important place in Newfoundland’s history. She said of it: “Oderin Island--that little fishing settlement lying off the east coast of the Burin Peninsula on the west side of Placentia Bay, French possession from early times to 1713, the birthplace of some of the outstanding leaders in Newfoundland’s public affairs.”

Details about O’Neill’s experiences as a teacher at Oderin are unknown. Other than her own recollection that she was terrified by the ‘strapping young fellas’ who were her charges, many of whom may have been nearly her own age, she left no other record
of that experience. It may have been that while her first teaching position had been challenging and exciting, it had not been intellectually rewarding. She had left her world of literature and comfort for a life of hard work and small comforts. At any rate, after two years at Oderin, O'Neill left the outport and moved to St. John's to attend college.

O'Neill began a long relationship with post-secondary education in 1926. She enrolled in Memorial University College when it was in its second year of existence as a college. The College emerged from what had been a Normal School. It opened as a non-denominational college after much debate on the part of those who argued against this. Those who were in favour of a non-denominational college argued that because it was intended to be a memorial to all those who had fought in World War I, it had to be equally welcoming to all those who populated the island. College status was conferred on Memorial after the Carnegie Corporation, in 1924, contributed enough toward its funding to expand the offerings and teaching staff of the school. She had earned enough through teaching, it seems, to have given her an opportunity to live for a year without working. City directory records show that O'Neill may have lived with a relative which would have reduced her expenses to an affordable level. She may also have received some financial help from her family.

O'Neill registered for courses in English, mathematics, Latin and history. She joined 68 other students who were fortunate enough to be among the first students able to access post-secondary education without having to leave Newfoundland. Opportunities for Newfoundlanders so radically changed with the opening of the college that it has been stated that the college “altered society” by “completely redirecting lives.” For
O’Neill, it meant that she could act upon her dream to experience “the world.” She did not have to either teach or stay in Witless Bay. The existence of the College was the single most important agent helping O’Neill to keep her ambitions alive. It accepted students from all backgrounds and religions, mixing students from diverse social, geographic, economic, and denominational groups. It was the first and only educational institution in the country to accept students based solely on their preceding academic record, and in so doing, “even in its immature pre-confederation phase,” Memorial “acted as an important agent of change for the country and its people.”

Another important agent was one of the individuals O’Neill met through the College. Dr. J. L. Paton was one of O’Neill’s professors. He was the first president of the College and the man hand-picked by Vincent Burke. Burke was a Newfoundlander who became an ardent supporter of adult education. He used his high position within the Department of Education to influence others in the Department as well as the general public that Newfoundland’s adults needed opportunities to improve their skills.

Burke had come from a small community, St. Jacques, in Fortune Bay, but had been sent to St. John’s for most of his education. This was a fairly common practice among merchant or sea-captain families living in remote communities. Burke attended the most prestigious Catholic boys school, St. Bonaventure’s, in St. John’s and, once schooling was completed, immediately began teaching. In a meteoric rise, he then became Superintendent of Roman Catholic schools, followed by Secretary for Education and finally, Director of Adult Education. While it is difficult to know what influenced Burke’s ideas about education, it seems that he may have been influenced to some degree
by his wife, Margaret Mulcahy, who was an ardent suffragist. According to those who knew them, they both ‘pushed’ each other to continue learning and in that spirit, they both travelled to New York in 1919, he to attend Teachers College (Columbia) and she to immerse herself in the “intellectual and political life of New York.”

Once Paton, a Protestant, became comfortable in his role as President of Memorial University College, with Burke’s support, he began to shape the College program so that it offered not only an academic program, but a community-minded one as well. Paton and Burke made a forceful combination when it came to finding ways to have the college respond to the town’s population.

Paton was sixty years old and a retired headmaster of England’s Manchester Grammar School, a publicly funded school with a superior reputation. When he arrived at Memorial University College he came with strong views about education. Under Burke’s protection, Paton was able to be a strong leader and to act on some of his slightly less conservative notions about education. Many of Paton’s notions, however, did not ‘play well’ to the ruling classes of St. John’s. Paton’s idea of education was that it should not be restricted to those who could pay, or who wished only for an ‘academic’ education. He opened the college to non-academic courses for the general public. He intended for the college to contribute to the community and encouraged community residents to take courses in marine navigation, agriculture, or household science. By encouraging and allowing the scheduling of both academic and non-academic courses at the college, Paton broke ‘rules.’ St. John’s residents were accustomed to an educational snobbery inherited from a system that separated the more wealthy children from the
poorer children and that recognized excellence if it could be measured by tests created and graded in England. They expected the college to offer courses in Latin and literature, not agriculture, nutrition, or navigation. Paton was adamant that Memorial respond to as broad a cross-section of needs as possible and that it should help Newfoundlanders to find solutions to their very real problems. During an address he gave to an interested group in England, Paton said: “I found a man who was troubled about the grub on his cabbage. It was quite news to him that this green caterpillar eating the cabbages he meant to eat himself had any connection with the white moth that was flying around.” His ambition seems to have been to enlighten as many Newfoundlanders as possible to the wonders of the caterpillar (and other troublesome aspects of survival in a hostile environment) as well as to the wonders of academic subjects such as Greek and Latin.

O’Neill reported that upon entering the College she “came under the influence of Dr. Paton.” She later praised him as the “first great man -- the only great man I’ve ever met,” and one who had “a tremendous influence” on her life. She took every course that he taught to the extent that she altered her courses to coincide with what he taught. She wanted to take French, but he taught German and Latin, so O’Neill took Latin. He also taught her history course. He was more than simply a good professor from whom O’Neill could learn subjects, however. Paton was an unusual teacher for the 1920s for encouraging young women to obtain degrees as wholeheartedly as he encouraged young men. O’Neill’s assertion that Paton had a “tremendous influence” on her life may also attest to his manner and his method as a teacher. In Paton, students found a teacher who
"never talked down to us" and who "let us glimpse realms of the spirit into which we must exert ourselves to enter."43 One of his methods for helping students to stretch beyond what they felt they could stretch was to insist on high goals. O’Neill stated that "he would introduce me as being a person who was going for a B.A., but at that stage I wasn’t quite sure how a lady could have a B.A."44 But the seed had been sown and O’Neill began to work toward a goal at which she could barely imagine herself succeeding.

First, however, before finishing more school, O’Neill had to earn more money. She accepted a teaching position on Bell Island, in 1928. It was another small island in a large bay; but this time she was nearer to St. John’s. Bell Island lies approximately eight miles west (across land and water) from St. John’s. The population of Bell Island had been drawn to that place because of immense iron-ore deposits. In 1892 mining began on Bell Island.45 By the 1920s The Dominion Oil and Steel Co. (DOSCO) had purchased the mines that employed several thousand men. Bell Island contained several small communities, all of which were fairly prosperous because of mining. The residents of Bell Island were not the typical homogenous group that comprised the population over most of Newfoundland, however. All denominations, as well as residents from other countries made their home on Bell Island, attracted by good wages and abundant work. One of the small communities on the island, Lance Cove, was principally Catholic though, and it is to the school in Lance Cove that O’Neill journeyed.

Shortly after O’Neill began the school year as the teacher of an all-grade school in Lance Cove, she was offered a new opportunity. She was asked whether she would be
interested in teaching adults at night, after teaching during the day. A committee
organized by the mine management approached both the Church of England day-school
teacher, Elizabeth Northover, who worked in the neighbouring community of Wabana,
and O’Neill, asking them to teach the miners so that they would “at least be able to read
and write.”
Both women agreed to teach. O’Neill recalled that very “bravely” she said
“sure, I’d love to” but she realized that “I didn’t know how to teach adults... and we
didn’t have any adult education materials. I wonder how I held them one night.”
O’Neill also recalled having sixty or seventy students, but a newspaper account of the
first adult education classes on Bell Island recorded that “forty students” attended the
course in Lance Cove.

Without training to teach adults and without special materials and resources to
aid them, O’Neill and Northover began teaching adults. O’Neill used only her own
intuitive abilities to create a program for the adult miners. She seemed to instinctively
understand that adults needed to be involved in their learning. She produced plays that
included both her day-school pupils and her adult miners because she felt that drama was
a good avenue to learning. The *Daily News*, a St. John’s newspaper, informed readers
that a play, “An Irish Eden” was “staged in the R.C. school at Lance Cove under the
direction of Miss Florence O’Neill.”
The challenge that faced O’Neill in the
production of this play is only hinted at in the newspaper account when it told readers
that “the road had to be shovelled to let cars through [due to snow]” and that “electric
light was first used in Lance Cove for that performance generated by a set of batteries in
the school.”
Undaunted by the difficulty of mounting school plays in Lance Cove, the
following year O’Neill directed another play that called on the talents of both her young and her adult students. The second play was the “Limerick Boy.” The newspaper report of this play informed readers that both during and after the play there were several vocal numbers, “including one by Miss O’Neill.”

O’Neill seems to have accepted the challenge of teaching miners with more pleasure than with a sense of duty. She joined the Wabana night school teachers to form an adult education study group. This study group was the first Newfoundland association of teachers coming together for the purpose of discovering methods and techniques for teaching adults to learn. Presumably this group would have provided much needed moral support for their efforts with the miners as well as provided a vehicle for the exchange of ideas.

For O’Neill, the experience of teaching the miners seems to have assuaged both her romantic as well as her curious tendencies. She was both shocked by what she saw: “they often came to class a little inebriated; they liked beer,” and accepting: “when I went down in the mine and saw them slaving with water pouring off their bodies, . . . covered with ore, I understood.” She was also moved: “They hadn’t seen the day, the light of day for hours and hours, from early dawn to dark, but they came to night school.” Rather than the “terror” that she felt when she taught at Oderin, on Bell Island O’Neill seems to have begun to find her place as a teacher. She recalled that from her experience on Bell Island she “learned a lot about people.” She said: “I found that the need for adult education was pretty terrific.” She also discovered that those activities that she enjoyed, her adult students also enjoyed: “We used to throw in a little dancing.
They loved that; they knew how to do the dancing. But then we’d bring the ladies in for this -- that would be Friday night, they’d bring their wives and we’d have a little party." They loved that; they knew how to do the dancing. But then we’d bring the ladies in for this -- that would be Friday night, they’d bring their wives and we’d have a little party. Drama, dancing, and music combined to make teaching adults fun and challenging for O’Neill.

Rather than continue teaching, however, O’Neill responded to what seems to have become a fairly insistent urge in her own life. She returned to college. O’Neill’s return to Memorial University College for the academic year 1929-1930 might have helped to increase her interest in adult education. During the Fall Semester she again took courses from Paton. She may have also had an opportunity to listen to Albert Mansbridge talk about adult education.

Mansbridge, a British adult educator, had been invited to give a lecture tour in Newfoundland during October, 1929. Mansbridge’s message, in brief, was that education for all people and all ages was the key to a healthy society. He brought to Newfoundland the philosophy of the Worker’s Education Association (WEA) that had grown to enjoy a healthy following in England. Mansbridge had led the WEA and believed strongly in continuing education of the working classes. Mansbridge’s visit was an important milestone for adult education in Newfoundland. The local newspapers wrote about each of Mansbridge’s lectures as he toured from St. John’s to several small communities. The articles praised adult education and attempted to convince readers that it was a movement that was “sweeping the civilized world.” The author of one article asserted that adult education was so important that “religious denominations are increasingly coming to see the significance of the [adult education] movement.” While
religion resides as an element of "culture" in Newfoundland, the article’s author may have missed the essence of Mansbridge’s sentiment about learning and spirituality. Mansbridge asserted that for learning to occur “it was necessary to go straight to their [adults'] whole hearts,” for the process to become, “in reality, spiritual.” He believed that a “spiritual dynamic” between the teacher and students was necessary, but it had little to do with religion, or a specific denomination.60

Information about the Mansbridge lectures and about adult education seemed to have succeeded in creating only a small amount of interest from the public. In one letter to the editor of The Evening Telegram a citizen complained that the “outstanding educationalist,” Mansbridge, “has held several daily and nightly sessions lecturing to us and trying to instill into our minds the benefits [of adult education]” but that he had received less than capacity attendance:

I venture to bet that the promoters of Housie-Housie [a bingo-like game] had, to use a homely expression, capacity houses compared with the attendance of the session of the above gentleman. On one occasion at least I know he had not a corporal’s guard [six people].”61

The sparse attendance for Mansbridge’s lectures did not seem to dampen his supporters’ enthusiasm, or his own. Mansbridge reported in his memoir that he and his wife found “Newfoundlanders ready to receive our message, and ever since our visit we have had inspiring reports from time to time.”62 He toured many small communities on the Avalon Peninsula including Bell Island (where O’Neill had taught the miners) and some larger and more prosperous communities such as Harbour Grace and Bay Roberts. He then
travelled by train to Bonavista, again a large and prosperous fishing community at that time, and Twillingate. Finally, he travelled to the west coast town of Corner Brook. While he was touring, his supporters were working to establish something lasting from his visit. As Mansbridge returned to St. John’s from his journey to Corner Brook, he was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the Newfoundland Adult Education Association (N.A.E.A.), reputed to have been the first such organization, not only in Newfoundland, but in Canada.  

Mansbridge’s followers, a small group of St. John’s upper class, formed the N.A.E.A. in order to begin to bring adult education programs to rural Newfoundland. Educators, lawyers, politicians, and others came together to develop a group of programs or activities as opportunities for those who craved education. Their belief was that “until we can remove illiteracy from our midst, until we can give to all, access to books and the ability to reap from them, until we can give to every man and every woman the mind to do and the determination to win, until, in a word, we can make our people buoyant” the country and the people would not “get the best out of life.” The programs envisioned by the N.A.E.A. included study circles, reading groups, correspondence lessons, and women’s clubs. Members of the N.A.E.A. were enthusiastic and energetic about their cause. They aimed to ‘heal’ illiteracy by replacing it with ‘culture’ and by teaching those who could not read and write. Their list of activities closely followed those of other organizations such as the Workers’ Education Association, and other similar organizations that were linked in spirit to Mansbridge’s influence.
O’Neill’s name does not appear among the list of those who became the first members of the N.A.E.A. While O’Neill seemed to have been deeply affected by her experience on Bell Island teaching miners, and also clearly looked upon Paton as a mentor. For reasons that are not apparent, she seemed to have dissociated herself from the N.A.E.A. One possibility may have been that Paton’s confidence that O’Neill could become a person with a B.A. degree may have set O’Neill’s course so that she entertained no other possibilities that could interfere with that goal. Her seemingly focused approach to working just long enough to earn a year’s worth of education at a time reinforces a conclusion that it was O’Neill’s plan to continue to go to school every time she had saved enough money to afford a year in school. O’Neill may have been interested in the N.A.E.A., but realized that the program they operated, the “Opportunity Schools,” paid low salaries to their teachers compared to day-school teachers. If she became an Opportunity School teacher she may not have been able to continue to return to her own post-secondary education. Or, it may have been that O’Neill felt she was not suitable because she was Catholic. Most of the women recruited as teachers during the early years of the program seemed to have been Protestant. O’Neill may have felt unwelcome. She may also have felt unwelcome because the N.A.E.A. was organized by people of St. John’s. The divisions between ‘town’ and ‘bay’ were so great that even though O’Neill had attended the College, she was still from Witless Bay and she may have felt that she wouldn’t be accepted among the ‘townies’ of St. John’s.

After O’Neill’s second year of college she had gone as far as she could at Memorial University College because it offered only a two-year program. She then
returned to day-school teaching. From 1930-1932 she taught in the community of Mt.
Carmel, at the north end of St. Mary’s Bay on the Avalon Peninsula. It was a
homogenous community settled mainly by Roman Catholics. O’Neill does not seem to
have had any experiences teaching adults while at Mt. Carmel. Immediately after another
two years of teaching she left her work life to return to school: she entered Dalhousie
University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

For O’Neill, for any Newfoundland woman, entrance into a “mainland” university
would have been a tremendous step. While O’Neill’s courses at Memorial prepared her
to continue as an “Arts” student, O’Neill’s island life isolated her from the larger world.
For any young Newfoundlander, crossing the Gulf of St. Lawrence is not only a journey
from one location to another, it is also an emotional leap across open water: from a safe,
secure, known environment into an unknown environment. Both Paton and the
government of Newfoundland attempted to make the journey easier for students by
ensuring that agreements were in place to accept Newfoundland students at Dalhousie
and ensuring that Memorial’s program adequately prepared students to be successful at
that institution.

In order to ensure the latter, upon becoming President of Memorial, Paton wrote
to the registrar at Dalhousie to request advice and guidance. He then endeavoured to “set
standards to match” those of Dalhousie. O’Neill would have been one of the early
recipients of Paton’s efforts to help Newfoundlanders achieve dreams of a Bachelor’s
degree. While O’Neill relates little about her experience at the university, she did
succeed in graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in 1936. Between her first year at
Dalhousie and her second she again returned to Newfoundland to work so that she could continue toward her goal of earning a degree.

Upon O’Neill’s return to Newfoundland in 1933, after one year in Halifax, she, for the first time, was not able to secure a teaching position. Control of the Newfoundland government had come under the Commission Government, which was organized and controlled from England, in 1932. In order to bring government expenses under control, the Commission decreased the number of teachers. Life in Newfoundland was entering some of its most severe days. O’Neill, undaunted by this type of obstacle, managed to find work as a stenographer for several months until she was offered a position to teach at a school that was newly created.

The new school was in the community of Blackhead, isolated from St. John’s by poor roads and steep terrain, but which overlooked the city of St. John’s. The community was comprised largely of Catholic “squatters,” people living in shacks and on relief, or the “dole.” Many of the families depended upon the woman’s wages because the job of “charlady,” for St. John’s families, was easier to come by than many other kinds of employment. Children from Blackhead did not attend school in St. John’s because the distance to travel for young children was too great and too difficult. In 1936 the first school opened in the community and O’Neill was hired as its only teacher.

O’Neill’s experience as a teacher in the Blackhead school included difficulties and challenges that were nearly greater than she could endure. Travelling to the school from St. John’s each day was in itself a challenge. She remembered having to take the streetcar to the end of the line which was at the bottom of “this terrible hill.” Then she
followed “just a little cow path” up the hill to the community where “all of the houses were made of tarpaper.” The families, O’Neill remembered, had more than a few problems as well: “the fathers and mothers didn’t always get along so well, so we had problems; the children were hungry and poor.” On the first day of school O’Neill entered a new building that was “28 ft. wide and 50 ft. in length [with] day-lighting of the class-room secured from Eastern and Southern aspects.” An article in the Catholic newspaper, *The Monitor*, reported that “Mass was celebrated in the new school on Wednesday morning. Miss F. O’Neill has been appointed teacher and classes have already been formed.”

On that first day, after Mass had been celebrated, O’Neill remembered that the priest turned to her and said: “I’d sooner that you stay here than that I should,” and he left. O’Neill found herself faced with “forty, fifty youngsters” whom mothers had pushed inside the door. Her reaction was once more one of terror: “I was scared of them all.”

The Blackhead Road school was O’Neill’s first experience with extreme poverty. While all of Newfoundland often appears to a visitor to contain extreme poverty, there are great variations in the kinds of poverty that exist. Through O’Neill’s childhood she was probably exposed to little real poverty because Witless Bay had been a successful fishing community. Most families would have had food and clothing as well as shared community goals emanating from a few hundred years of family generations living in the same place. Other communities where she had worked such as Oderin and Mt. Carmel were similar to Witless Bay. Bell Island was slightly different because the mine had
attracted people from many places, but it was a successful working community when O’Neill was there. Blackhead, on the other hand, was a community of paupers. People migrated to Blackhead because they could not afford to live elsewhere. Work was difficult to find in 1933 so often there was not enough of anything for family members. In addition, until the school was built, children had no school to attend and there was no culture of school attendance in the community. In short, O’Neill’s experience at the Blackhead Road School was different from any experience she had to that time. It caused O’Neill to consider her life and her future. She said: “I wanted to know what made people tick”:

I knew about the outports, and rural communities, I knew what made people tick there, but I didn’t know what made people tick on Gower Street, let’s say in the slums, and I think it was, I was prompted, this thinking was prompted, probably, from my experience on the hill, where I knew there was so much to be done. And that was at first a very, I don’t know, very different experience.72

O’Neill’s thoughts about her future probably also received a gentle push from her own physical collapse from exhaustion and a poor diet. She reported having given her lunches to the children while teaching at Blackhead Road.73 Her collapse caused her to realize that it was “about time that I knew what I wanted to do with myself, permanently, careerwise.”74

The idea of a career in law appealed to her. It is at this point that it seems O’Neill, in her thinking about what she could do, had gone well beyond the traditional boundaries of a woman’s education and even beyond the expectations that Paton may
have had of a Memorial College student. In Newfoundland, women had not begun to push the boundaries of work traditionally done by men. The first woman admitted to the Newfoundland Bar was in 1929, a few scant years earlier. It appears, however, that O’Neill had begun to realize that she could do with her life whatever she could imagine. So, with a pragmatist’s approach to decision-making, O’Neill set out to see what a law career looked like before beginning the schooling for it. She recalled that she “got a shorthand book, stenobook, rented a typewriter and gave myself a commercial course in a few months.” She then found a job as a secretary to the judge of the Central District Court. Again O’Neill worked only long enough to earn enough money to support another year at Dalhousie, after which she would have accomplished her first goal, to be able to be introduced as someone with a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her experience as a clerk of the court (which is what her duties as the judge’s “secretary” actually comprised) does not seem to have drawn O’Neill to a career in law, however.

At the end of O’Neill’s final year of her undergraduate degree in 1935-’36, she did not seem to be drawn to teaching. She asserted several times that her education had not given her an opportunity “to learn anything about teaching.” Through her first years as a teacher, and through her experiences as a student, O’Neill seemed to have been swept along in a current that led her to teaching because it was an avenue open to her. Teaching offered a way to go beyond Witless Bay and to satisfy some of her curiosity about people. Whether O’Neill truly enjoyed teaching or truly enjoyed school is difficult to determine from her own recollections. She did seem to have enjoyed some parts of her teaching, such as those moments when the students responded or when she could put
on a play. She also seemed to have enjoyed some aspects of the academic world, such as Paton's teaching. What seems most plausible is that her thirst for learning and her curiosity about "the world" were best satisfied when she was in school. Her desire to help people, however, was satisfied when she taught.

O'Neill's early years of work and school took place between 1923 and 1936. O'Neill, through her reminiscences, seldom referred to the political and economic realities of the day. She was affected by the poverty on Blackhead Road and by the miners who worked hard during the day and then went to school at night. An opportunity to witness the way others lived seemed to fuel her interest and curiosity to continue to experience life as others did. Through her thesis one finds something of her own distress about conditions people endured. According to O'Neill, the impact of Newfoundland's bankruptcy, and the "great depression" caused severe hardship to a country that had always suffered from a low standard of living. "During the depression," she wrote, "houses [that had been] poorly planned and built became dilapidated, a lack of clothing necessitated the use of flour bags for every conceivable purpose—oil clothes, overalls, sails, sheets, shirts, and dresses."78 She had also observed that "a continuous diet of bread and tea with little variation broke down all resistance and serious health conditions followed in certain sections of the country. Under-nourished, almost naked children could not attend school regularly. Tired, worn-out mothers continued to give birth to sickly babies and thus increased the worry and anxiety of both parents."79 She asserted that while it was not true that the whole country suffered from such numbing poverty, it was a true picture of many regions and that the economic collapse of the rural areas led,
inevitably, to a collapse of the economic system for the whole country. She wrote:

Even a sudden cure of our economic ills by some magic could not alone undo the mental, moral, and physical degeneration caused by gradual decay. Attitudes, habits, motives of a lifetime are deeply rooted and the change must necessarily be gradual. In a situation of this kind a program of constructive adult education which calls for patient spade work over a long period in hundreds of communities is necessary if we really desire to bring about a positive social change.

During the years when O’Neill was swept along the current as a teacher, she saw many areas of Newfoundland and came to know the people in those areas because it was her nature to be curious about others. With her bachelors’s degree in hand, O’Neill returned to Newfoundland, but this time she began to work as an adult educator. Rather than helping her fellow Newfoundlanders through the field of law, she seems to have chosen education, not as a teacher of the youth who always seemed to “terrify” her, but of adults.
1. Florence O’Neill, Memorial University College student records, 1925. From Memorial University of Newfoundland, registrar’s office. Information regarding O’Neill’s family members from Government of Newfoundland 1920 census records for Witless Bay.


10. Ibid.

11. It seems to have been common knowledge that O’Neill had rickets as a child and that she was careful to hide her legs beneath long skirts. Many people also seemed to know that O’Neill made most of her own clothes.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


26. Phillip McCann describes the expansion of education between 1861 and 1916 as uneven and slow. In 1916, according to McCann, there were a mere 102 schools in a very large region of the south half of the Avalon peninsula and the Burin peninsula, and area that would have contained several hundred small communities. Since Oderin was a very small community on an island in Placentia Bay, it is likely that it received a school and the allocation of a teacher after the turn of the century. See McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society* (St. John’s: I.S.E.R., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1994), 51-53.


28. Ibid., 198-200.


30. Ibid.


32. *Newfoundland Directory*, 1928. In the CNS, QEII, MUN shows a Florence M. O’Neill living at 76 Pennywell Rd. in a house owned by Mrs. B. O’Neill, widow. While
this is later than O’Neill’s first year at MUC, it is possible that she returned to live at this address each time she enrolled in university in St. John’s.

33. Florence O’Neill student file, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Registrar’s Office.


35. Ibid.


39. Author unknown, “History of John Lewis Paton at Memorial University College,” in CNSA, QEII, MUN: collection 212, file 2.08.


42. Ibid.


44. Ibid.


46. Addison Bown, ed. and compiled, *Newspaper History of Bell Island* (St. John’s: self-published, no date), 21: in CNS, QEII, MUN.


48. Addison Bown, 21.

50. Addison Bown, 21.

51. Ibid. 22.

52. Ibid, 25.

53. Ibid.


55. Ibid.

56. References to Mansbridge’s lectures in various communities appear in *The Evening Telegram*, St. John’s, from September 30, 1929, to October 25, 1929.


59. Ibid, 5.


63. Ibid., 112. and Newfoundland Adult Education Association, “What is it? What are its Aims? [pamphlet] (St. John’s: Advocate Publishing, 1930) CNS, QEI, MUN. Also see, Gordon Selman, “Early Adult Education Associations in Canada: Short-lived Experiments in the 1930s and 1940s” in *Proceedings* of the Canadian Association of the Study of Adult Education, 1992. Selman asserts that the N.A.E.A. “may have been the first such association” in Canada.


67. The community that O’Neill describes as Blackhead is now known as Shea Heights. Blackhead continues to exist as a community but, in O’Neill’s day it was the generic name for a large area.


72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.


77. Ibid.


79. Ibid., 33.
CHAPTER 3
A SOLDIER FOR ADULT EDUCATION

The years 1936-1942, were pivotal ones for Florence O’Neill. In 1936, after returning to Newfoundland from Dalhousie University with her Bachelor of Arts degree in hand, she began teaching as an adult educator in Newfoundland’s Opportunity Schools. In O’Neill’s own reminiscence, she says: “I went back to Dal [Dalhousie] and finished my year and came home and went into adult education.” Whether it was by accident or design O’Neill does not explain. What is apparent, however, is O’Neill’s satisfaction with her work in adult education as she became more involved with people and communities.

Between 1929, when Mansbridge had visited, and 1936 adult education in Newfoundland had grown and matured. It had become a collection of programs rather than just the Opportunity School. The NAEA had been absorbed into the government in 1936, and had become the Department of Adult Education, providing both community teachers who travelled and adult education literacy and numeracy classes to people in some of the larger towns and in St. John’s. Within the Commission Government, a Department of Rural Reconstruction had also been created and it encouraged the development of cooperatives, and also engaged in a Land Settlement scheme to locate families on land that could be turned into farms. A component of Land Settlement was re-education for the settlers about farming.

Many of the ideas about what could be provided to adults to help them be better fishers or farmers came from Mansbridge and Paton who were involved in the Worker’s
Education Association in Britain. Another important influence became the Carnegie Corporation which, in addition to making a grant available to the College, also provided the funding to send one person for training at Clemson College in South Carolina. Burke had also absorbed American ideas while at Columbia in 1919.²

Mansbridge’s and Paton’s grounding in adult education principles were acquired from England’s lengthy experience with adult education which could be traced back to eighteenth century.³ Three currents, or trends, within English society and education gave impetus to organized forms of adult education: first, the desire to spread religious teaching far and wide; second, an increasing belief that the physical sciences held the key to an improved society; and third, widespread political agitation produced a fertile environment for adult education.

The first “trend” toward a general education of society came in the form of religious education provided by missionaries. Missionaries eagerly attempted to teach reading to any and all who showed interest in order to teach people to read the word of God. One church rector in Llanddowror, Wales, developed a system of “circulating schools” using “itinerant teachers” who taught mainly reading as they moved from place to place.⁴ Educating the poor was thought to be important for the well-being of society because through the teaching of reading even the lower classes could learn to read the lessons of the Bible. The appeal to those who might support adult education was to “give liberally because adult education will put an end to existing crimes and encourage the principles upon which society depends for its security.” It was also thought that through learning the virtue of self-reliance “the lower classes will not then be so dependent on the
more provident members of society as they are now." Teaching adults to read so that they could become more "self-reliant" seemed to have two benefits: it gave the poor the means to know what sorts of behaviour was expected of them through the teachings of the Bible; and two, it gave them a tool to help themselves, thus the more privileged could avoid the responsibility of helping the poor.

The second "trend," during the eighteenth century began as a popularization of science and the use of science to make new machines and tools. The development of the industrial age contributed to a further shift in society. As machines were built and used in the production of goods, workers had to learn about the machines they used. The rise of the Mechanics Institute which provided the opportunity for working men to receive a "social and civic education" in a club-like atmosphere popularized non-school learning, and represented the first form of technical education for adults.

Finally, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a small backlash against those who bowed before the "temples of science" began. A reform movement that sought both political reform and economic reconstruction found a home within adult education. Through reformers such as Robert Owen, whose philosophy embraced the notion that 'man' was a creature of his environment and that he could improve only if his environment improved, the first programs in "community development" were attempted. Owen is thought to have been the first to espouse a type of "self-help" philosophy that was meant to improve the quality of life within a community structure.

Adult education as a program to stimulate individuals to self-improvement crossed the Atlantic by the mid-nineteenth century. Again, the impetus for self-
improvement seems to have come first from educators with strong religious affiliations, such as William Ellery Channing, a Unitarian scholar. Channing believed that what was important in an adult’s education was the process of “self-improvement by mental elevation, rather than the acquisition of specific information or bodies of doctrine.”

Channing and others believed that the existence of lyceums, public libraries, and literary societies would offer to adults the necessary resources for liberal self-education to take place. By 1890, the working-class public began to demand educational opportunities that could not be met through mere “self-improvement.” In response, correspondence study, which began to be offered by colleges and universities, emerged as a more formalized opportunity for learning. In addition to correspondence study, a multitude of programs under a general category of “workers’ education” and “industrial education” proliferated in American cities.

World War I in the United States stimulated a new wave of interest in adult education. Rising rates of immigration during and following the war raised concern about a de-stabilized social order. The National University Extension Association (NUEA) in 1915 formed as a response to increased interest in ‘democracy’ education and English language courses for new immigrants. As a national organization, NUEA represented national interests in adult education which tended toward adult programs and courses in English language training and “citizenship” as much, if not more than, job training. Adult educators responded to what seemed to them to be a call to bring order to the chaos of the war and the economic turbulence that followed it. This period was also one of great growth and innovation in adult education. Those involved in citizenship
education argued that “education for democracy” was the key to helping the masses of immigrants learn to live as good American citizens, while those involved in job training found eager students both from the immigrant groups and American citizens who were wanting to secure better employment in an industrial society.¹²

By the time that adult education had its ‘foot-hold’ in Newfoundland in 1929, it had inherited both British and American ideas about its aims and purposes. Through Mansbridge’s visit and Paton’s influence British notions of a workers’ education approach strongly influenced what was offered. Before either Paton or Mansbridge, Newfoundland had already inherited organizations such as the Mechanics’ Institute and other associations which had existed in the city of St. John’s from the mid-nineteenth century.¹³ American influence came through Vincent Burke who had attended courses at Columbia University around 1919. There he formed some early associations with individuals who were later able to help him make successful applications for funding through the Carnegie Corporation.¹⁴

When O’Neill began to work for the Department of Adult Education, upon her return from Dalhousie, she entered a program that had been developing from 1929 and was quickly expanding. By 1936, at O’Neill’s entry into the Department, she remembered: “the demand for the services of itinerant teachers became so great that they, in any one year, couldn’t fill one quarter, so they increased the staff up to maybe ten, twelve, fifteen.”¹⁵ As an itinerant teacher she was sent to communities all over the island. From 1936 to 1942 she spent time in Twillingate, in Conception Bay communities, in outports on the Northern Peninsula, as well as on the Port-au-Port
peninsula and along the southwestern coast below the Port-au-Port. In each community she stayed two or three months and then she would be sent somewhere else: “we went with a little box of books that looked like a little grey coffin. We went out to isolated communities and stayed a month, stayed two and a half months, or three.”

The program the department had developed was one borrowed from the United States called Opportunity Schools. In 1930 Burke was successful in obtaining a grant of $6,000 for set-up expenses and teacher training for the operation of an Opportunity School program in Newfoundland. At the suggestion of the Carnegie Corporation, one Newfoundland woman was chosen, Mrs. Farwell, to travel to Clemson College in South Carolina to be trained in the Opportunity School system. Following her return to Newfoundland, six other women were chosen to be the first trained by Mrs. Farwell. The following summer the Newfoundland Adult Education Association (N.A.E.A.) invited Wil Lou Gray and Erin Kohn of Clemson College to Newfoundland to facilitate a summer school for Opportunity School teachers. According to Vincent Burke, “their visit put the Adult Education Movement on a practical basis.” After the summer visit of Gray and Kohn, Opportunity Schools began to appear both in and near St. John’s as well as in more isolated areas such as Bonavista, Trinity, and Conception Bays.

Opportunity School instruction tended to be direct rather than the more indirect learning for self-improvement that might have been achieved through a “study circle” or libraries program. The idea for an Opportunity School originally came from an educator, Emily Griffith, in Denver, Colorado, who had noticed, while visiting children’s homes in poorer areas of town, that most of them lived in homes where “fathers and older brothers
untrained for their jobs, mothers unfit to manage their homes, older sisters struggled to make a living wage." Griffith reasoned that if parents “improved” their children would also improve. The school, under Griffith’s direction, adopted a “you can do it” attitude in order to support adults, no matter what they wanted to learn. The thought was that if men and women were given an opportunity for self-development they would do a great deal with that opportunity.

While the philosophy around which the Opportunity School created its programs was eagerly accepted by those who organized the N.A.E.A., there were many differences between the program that had developed in the United States and the one in operation in Newfoundland. The N.A.E.A. had to meet the needs of a thin and widely dispersed population. The teachers had to go to the students because the students most in need were in some of the most isolated communities on the island and they could not leave their homes to come to St. John’s. Teaching and learning had to fit around the seasonal but intense work periods of the fishery and pulp-and-paper industry. The model the N.A.E.A. used in order to develop a well-attended Opportunity School was more similar to the “itinerant teacher” model from nineteenth century Wales. Opportunity School teachers travelled from community to community teaching reading, and other things, so that adults could become more ‘civilized.’

Outport people were encouraged, through the Opportunity Schools, to change their own habits, their preferences, and their community’s structure. These schools represented a shift in education in Newfoundland. For the first time, adults were being targeted for their lack of education. The education that was being exported from St. John’s to the rural
areas was one that focussed on child care, agriculture, and nutrition along with the basics of reading and writing. Typical of the emphasis placed on (what must have seemed like) the luxuries of life to someone from an outport community, the 1933 April Opportunity School newsletter, distributed to all students, greeted the adult participants with:

We have all had such a busy time since September. . .it is difficult to believe that spring, with its inviting sunshine and rippling brooks, is calling us into the open to enter into the joy of living which nature provides. . .The brooks seem to murmur a song of gladness and the breezes may be heard to whisper the secrets of the woodlands. Nature is calling us to learn from her the great truths of Life in the birth of the flowers, the budding of the trees, and the mating of the birds.\textsuperscript{23}

Along with the birds, trees, and flowers adults were encouraged to keep orderly garden beds, and plant “lettuce, onions and other small greens” in order to not only enjoy eating these vegetables but also because gardening is “an excellent means of training in the value of care and interest in work.” According to the newsletter, the Opportunity Schools had competitions between communities for obtaining reading certificates. Students competed to have the highest grades and the winners were announced through the newsletter. Some communities organized debating teams, while others organized community clubs.\textsuperscript{24}

The philosophy of the Opportunity School program suited O’Neill because, through her experiences as a teacher (especially at Blackhead), she had formed the idea that family and community were vehicles for children’s education. Through the Opportunity School she could help people of all ages to “improve.” She taught two or three nights a week and also organized day groups for women to come together to do sewing and knitting “or
whatever they would like to do.” O’Neill knew that neither she nor any of the teachers were “that well equipped to [teach], by the way of training for this specific job” but she felt that they truly wanted to do good things for the people in each community. In her view they were “fine people, dedicated people, with experience in homemaking in their own lives” as well as “common sense.”

The spread of Opportunity Schools between 1929 and 1936 was as much by accident as by design. Since the entire enterprise was a project of the N.A.E.A., which was still a small, St. John’s based organization, support and organization necessary to spreading Opportunity Schools across the island was nearly impossible. In order to compensate for its narrow base as a St. John’s organization, the N.A.E.A. used the contacts of its members, who were predominantly Protestant, and used the newspapers to announce itself and its Opportunity Schools to the island population.

O’Neill remembered that there were a few problems with getting the entire notion of an Opportunity School accepted by communities. She said that “the people were against it, they were suspicious.” The Opportunity Schools came into communities through the contact of the clergy, either Catholic or Protestant. The N.A.E.A. executive committee invited communities to request a teacher by contacting the clergy of the community. The necessity for making this contact was somewhat due to the high level of illiteracy in most communities. Other than the clergy in the community, it was very likely that no one else would have been able to read about the Opportunity Schools, or read a letter from the N.A.E.A. President. Another reason for contacting the clergy first was that it was the clergy who had to be convinced, according to O’Neill, at the very beginning of the project. She
said, “they were reluctant to have anything to do with this strange thing, they didn’t believe in it. It was by the grace of God that you got into a community.” She thought that the reaction of the clergy was a result of their perspective on the potential and needs of the community as a whole as well as of the individuals within it. She said: “they didn’t think it would catch on, . . . they thought it was a waste of time.”

By 1936, however, that response to Opportunity Schools had changed somewhat and the demand for teachers became greater than the number of teachers available. A combination of factors probably changed the public view of the Schools. The slow but persistent growth of the number of Opportunity Schools no doubt created interest, and then demand, as neighbouring communities became aware of what was happening in the community ‘down the coast.’ As well, the government of the day (which was a Commission of Government) became more involved in the support and stabilization of the rural population. The Commission’s recognition of the N.A.E.A. by giving it funding, and therefore supporting the Opportunity Schools may have been the result of the government’s recognition that its own programs were not very effective and had not gained public support. By 1936, the Commission realized that its resettlement program aimed toward moving Newfoundlanders out of the most isolated and difficult environments was not popular and was not working. Some evidence of the Commission’s capitulation to the clergy and the St. John’s ruling elite may have taken the form of providing funding for the adult education association. Many members of the N.A.E.A.’s executive board were either clergy or from the ruling elite and the Commission may have recognized an opportunity to appease them. Whatever the reason for sudden recognition of the N.A.E.A., the
Commission provided funding in 1936 to the Opportunity Schools and created a Department of adult education with Vincent Burke as its head.³⁰

O’Neill, in her assignments to work in various communities, remained committed to learning what made people “tick.” She especially sought postings to communities that were different from her own community of Witless Bay, especially those where “denominational bigotry” existed.³¹ She recalled that when she went to communities such as these she “had to be very careful to make the right approach” in order to “break down this bigotry.” In one such community, which was predominately Salvation Army, O’Neill was the only Roman Catholic “for miles around.” She recalled that, upon arrival, she visited every home there “as usual.” After her introduction of herself to the community, O’Neill generally encouraged community leaders to call a meeting. She said: “We called a big meeting and, oh, it was terrific, and in this particular place they didn’t know I was a Roman Catholic and I didn’t bother to correct that, for a while.”³² O’Neill got on well with the members of the community and she began to go to the day school to help out the teacher there.

I liked to sing and play in those days and I used to go down to school and we used to sing “Three Blind Mice” in rounds, you know, and all that for the kids, because they never did have any fun like that and we borrowed an organ from the United Church and had it in the school for night school purposes and so the kids and I could play a little bit and, oh, the youngsters loved it, and that was after school hours. And the little kids made a wee, little sled, out of wood, with little wooden wheels on it and they would come and get me and I would have to wear a leather
coat for I would be covered with mud because they pulled me on it.\textsuperscript{33}

In this case, all of this fun abruptly ended because the teacher asked O’Neill not to come to the school anymore. The parents had complained that she was corrupting the children by teaching them songs and playing with them.

Although she had been banned from playing with the children, O’Neill was not banned from continuing her work with the adults in the night school. The adults had continued to work very hard and O’Neill finally “decided that I was going to let them know” that singing songs was not harmful. She said: “We used to work very, very hard and we had to have a closing, . . . at the end of three months we had to have a concert.” In her determination to have some sort of transformative impact on the community, she decided that they would learn to sing hymns: United Church hymns. Finally, one night four of her best students did not come to night school. When she wanted to know what happened, one of the other students told her that they had just discovered she was Roman Catholic and some of the men thought it was a sin to go to school and learn from a Catholic. O’Neill said she decided it was time to make a speech because she “couldn’t stand it anymore.” She told them that “before I start tonight, I want to have a little talk with you.” She said: “I told them I was Roman Catholic, was born and raised one, but that most of my friends didn’t happen to be and that was why I was in this community.” She told them that it was important to her to go to communities that were not Catholic because “I liked people of other denominations and I thought I should get to know what they believed, what their churches were like in their services, (because I used to go to their services).”

O’Neill then felt that in order to make some sort of lasting effect on them as far as their
rejecting her because she was Catholic she told them that she was “very, very sad, because I had such a wonderful opinion of other denominations, and now I didn’t like them anymore.” She admitted that she “made the story as appealing, sentimentally appealing to their level. . .I used every trick in the trade” in order to make them feel that they had made a terrible error in reacting to her because of her religion. In the end, the students came back to class. They even learned to sing the United Church songs so that there could be a closing concert for the Opportunity School.

O’Neill’s recollection of her experience in this community gives evidence of a particular urban view of the work to be done in rural communities. It brings into question the idea that people from urban areas, or merely different areas, are the best ones to educate. Adult educators of O’Neill’s time generally did not question their ability to “improve” conditions in rural areas and did not question their right to try to shape or change ideas. O’Neill entered communities with the intent to change people’s habits and their views, such as those regarding religion. O’Neill believed that “denominational bigotry” was a harmful aspect of Newfoundland rural life, even though the residents of a particular community would seldom, if ever, be in a position to meet someone of another religious denomination since most community residents did not travel far from their community and very few outsiders travelled to the outports. As an outsider, O’Neill’s views may have been considered ‘worldly’ by community residents and therefore better than community members’ views, as it appears was the case with the night school students who, O’Neill said that after her speech to them, told her that they would “sing any songs” she wanted them to sing. In other aspects of O’Neill’s experience in the community, she
may not have been directly changing behaviour, but she can not be looked upon as a neutral or unimportant force. In other words, she was not neutral to their environment; instead, she influenced the environment and her learners simply through her presence. O’Neill articulated the effect of her presence and her own goals as an “awakening” of the people. She said that what adult education was “all about” was “changing attitudes, motivating people, and reaching little goals.”34 The adult education she brought to communities was education for the purpose of social change. While it is difficult to say whether changes that occurred were always those that created ‘improved’ social conditions within a community, improvement (as defined by the teachers) was the objective.35

Between the years of 1936 and 1942, O’Neill had many experiences similar to the one related above. Typically, in each community she would encourage community members to create committees (through an election process) in order to establish goals for specific kinds of improvement needed in the community. She would then teach night school three nights a week and encourage and facilitate women’s groups and afternoon classes during the day.36

In 1937 or 1938, O’Neill was sent to the west coast of the island to work in communities along the Port-au-Port peninsula. The unique challenge that this area presented for a teacher seemed to be just the sort of teaching that O’Neill found immensely interesting. The communities along the western coast of the Port-au-Port in the 1930s and ‘40s, namely Lourdes, Mainland, and Cape St. George, were generally homogenously both Catholic and French. Many of the French settlers had come from Cape Breton, St.Pierre (a French island south of Newfoundland), and a few “had come as deserters from French men
Traditionally life along the coast had been hard. The Port-au-Port Peninsula juts out into the St. Lawrence. At its western extreme it is a high barrens with a rocky steep range from north to south. The only ‘easy’ access to the communities on the west side of this rock barrier (the communities along the coast) is along the north edge of the peninsula, past the community of Piccadilly. Until the 1950s the unpaved road ended at Piccadilly. During the period when O’Neill taught on this coast, the next community of some size beyond Piccadilly, which was Lourdes, could be reached by a rutted track.

The importance of Lourdes was that it was a fairly successful fishing community. J.H. Gorvin, in his report to the Commission Government on Rural Reconstruction wrote that Lourdes held some promise in the area of agriculture and land settlement, if it could be “joined by road to the Piccadilly area.” Gorvin and Richardson had visited regions of Newfoundland during the 1930s and produced separate reports regarding the needs and strengths of regions. They both identified Lourdes as a site on the Port-au-Port where growth and progress could be made to the economy and social structure. According to both reports, much of the western region of the island held great promise as an agricultural area and roughly half of the Port-au-Port peninsula, specifically, had some tillable areas. In an effort to stimulate an improved economy, the Co-operatives Division of government had sent field workers and established the first credit union on the Port-au-Port at Lourdes. It was during this same time that O’Neill was sent to Lourdes and Three Rock Cove (a neighbouring community) as an Opportunity School teacher.
The Newfoundland government had not successfully established schools on the Port-au-Port up to this time. School was often not in session partly because it was a very small and extremely isolated population, geographically, and partly because, in order to be effective, a teacher would have to be bilingual in English and French. Both Gorvin and Richardson, through the Department of Rural Reconstruction, sent field workers to help people to use what they had, but found that in general the level of education was so low that it impeded any progress being made. The impetus to send adult education teachers to the area can probably be attributed to the Rural Reconstruction reports. Education itself suddenly became a priority and the Port-au-Port began to receive not only field workers from Agriculture but also the Opportunity School teachers.

The very isolation and the unique culture of the area initially attracted O’Neill, who then discovered, while working in the communities of Black Duck Brook, Winterhouses, Lourdes, and Cape St. George that there was an eager adult population anxious to learn and to attend night school.

After a successful year of working on the west coast of the island, O’Neill decided to return to school. This time she enrolled in a summer school program for adult educators at Columbia University. She went to New York to “find out who up there knew something about adult education, there were no adult education centres in Canada, that I knew.” She said: “I went there for the summer...saw the skyscrapers and got lost, and I was late for classes and did all the usual things. I took a few courses which whetted my appetite. Then I came back to Newfoundland.”

When O’Neill returned from Columbia she began her second year in the Port-au-
Port area. After the previous year's posting to the community of Lourdes, she asked to be sent to a neighbouring community, Mainland, because it had a reputation for being particularly difficult: both to reach and to teach. Mainland is a community that had not even a passable cart track connecting it to its nearest neighbour. It is nearly at the midway point (north and south) along the western coast of the peninsula. The community spread out along a rocky coast that received no protection from on-shore winds. Houses faced the sea or each other and behind them was a steep cliff rising to the high barrens. Mainland was connected to nothing and because of its isolation it seems to have been missed by Gorvin and Richardson as well. Its French-speaking population had not had success in the fishery, it seems, and land around the community was either rock or bog and not tillable. It was a forgotten place.

O’Neill first recorded her experience at Mainland (or Land’s End as she called it in her writing) for a Columbia University professor, Ernest Osborne, in 1942, after she had begun a doctoral program there. She submitted a powerful and passionate essay to Professor Osborne for his course on the “The Psychology of Family Relations.” Her essay was part of a journal she wrote for her course. In the essay’s introduction O’Neill explained that she had been doing a “little mental research lately” and that from her reflection on her experiences as an adult educator she had decided to share with others “one of the most thrilling experiences of my life.” She invited Osborne to, mentally, “come with me to the Port au Port Peninsula, on the West Coast of Newfoundland.” She told him that “if I can recapture the spirit of the story, you too, will be thrilled because it is a human interest story.” She explained to him that the experience at Columbia, reading
“incessantly for the past ten months — devouring hungrily everything labelled “Adult Education,” had helped her to reflect on her experiences as an adult teacher. It had all crystallized, “sunshine peeping through for fleeting moments” around her experience at Land’s End. O’Neill cited Mary Mims, Elsie Ripley Clapps, and George Sanchez as adult educators who had “fired” her “with enthusiasm.” In fact, she told Osborne that through her “mental” research she had become so enthusiastic that she was ready to “board the first plane to Newfoundland” and be “dropped by parachute into the most isolated little village.”

O’Neill’s romantic view and passionate enthusiasm about her experience was infectious to those at Columbia, it seems. Osborne responded to O’Neill’s letter with one of his own. He wrote: “I can say most sincerely that I envy you.” He told O’Neill that “in the short time you spent with the folks at Mainland, you have meant more to the life of the whole community, small though it be, than most folks mean to others throughout their life. Yes, I envy you.” Osborne was clearly emotionally moved by O’Neill’s experience. His praise for her work and her ability to “awaken” community residents supported O’Neill’s own views about her work. As well, O’Neill’s experience reflected the philosophy of a particular part of Columbia’s adult education program: the rural sociologists. The group of adult educators explored methods and techniques to “arouse interest, disturb inertia, create a divine discontent, and broaden horizons in social thinking.” Social scientists explored community structures, providing suggestions to educators for ways to create social change.
O’Neill had taken a rural sociology course during her summer session at Columbia prior to her posting at “Land’s End” [Mainland]. She had also, undoubtedly, worked with those involved in the co-operatives office while she had been at Lourdes. The co-operatives field workers had been trained to initiate change and to use methods that would reverse the “social erosion” that infected the outport communities in Newfoundland.49 O’Neill would have been drawn to them to help her in her own attempts to teach.

O’Neill’s essay about Land’s End,50 published with Osborne’s help and encouragement began: “For four years I had secretly desired to work in Land’s End, for to me this settlement connoted all that was hopeless and rotten.”51 The challenge of a community that was ‘beyond hope’ stimulated O’Neill’s sense of drama as well as her desire to do something important. The experience, as well as the support from others, that O’Neill had received at Columbia might have encouraged her to push herself to work in a community that was entirely remote and isolated. Once she became committed to the challenge, and before she mentioned to the “head office” her wish to be sent there, she began making contacts with a man who regularly travelled between Land’s End and the other communities along that coast delivering mail. She wrote: “Once a week I lay in wait for the little man who carried the weekly mail from Land’s End.” After having brief conversations with him, she “decided that I was going, and going within a month, and that I would stay and teach there three months instead of the customary two.”52

Once she had exercised her own self-agency regarding her getting to and staying in Land’s End, it became time to test the community’s readiness to accept an adult educator. O’Neill wrote that to her it was “absolutely imperative that the people of Land’s End prove
that they really wanted my services.” Through the conduit of the mailman, O’Neill was able to communicate with people in Land’s End and they soon sent her a petition with the signatures of forty-nine people who wanted her to go to their community. She told them that she would be happy to go, but they must make it possible for her to live there: “The mailman decided to return to Land’s End, hold a meeting at his house that night and form a committee to build me a place to live.” She soon discovered that the community had come together and cut trees and firewood, and had begun to saw lumber. She wrote: “Adult education had actually begun!” By the time O’Neill was able to begin the trip to the community, it had built a small extension to the chapel/school that already existed. O’Neill had bought, with her own money, some of the materials for the building, such as nails, tarpaper and shingles. All of her other supplies and needs, e.g., a bed, stove, writing materials for students, had been donated by communities in the area where she had worked.  

O’Neill described the trip to Land’s End in allegorical terms: “Two paths lead to Land’s End — one by the seashore, which is dangerous. ‘A man fell over the cliff and was killed a long time ago. They say it’s haunted, Miss. You’d better not try it.’ The other path, cut through the woods and swamps, is difficult to follow.” The path that was chosen for her journey there was the one through the woods and swamps -- the one difficult to follow. While O’Neill in her life’s journey may have often felt that she was lost among the woods and swamps, during her real journey to Land’s End, she remembered being seated “confidently” next to her “trusted drivers” of the horse and wagon team that took her and her assistant, Mary, to Land’s End: “Truly we felt like pioneers.” Whether O’Neill’s
journey resembled anything of the ‘story’ she tells about it or not, it would have been, at
the least, a difficult trip. Considering the extent to which Mainland was isolated from even
its neighbours, there is no doubt that she must have felt like a pioneer as she travelled to
this unknown area.

As O’Neill approached the community, she found it to be “all I had anticipated and
much more.” She saw “broken fences, gates off hinges, pieces of cloth stuffed in broken
window panes, roofs of houses sagging in the middle, dirty back yards, a muddy road” and
other signs of general and specific decay. O’Neill’s seeming enjoyment of the situation she
had gotten herself into, and to which she must respond, reminded me of the sense of
satisfaction one has remembering having survived some particularly arduous, and possibly
dangerous, experience. Her story, written nearly three years after the experience, must be
read, I think, mindful of how the mind changes facts over time and how much more
thrilling an adventure is after one is safely removed from it.

O’Neill’s response to her new home, written in the romantic, adventurous vein of
the entire article, described a small building which had been used as a chapel but had been
added to in order to provide a home for the new teacher. The building remains today, its
size is unchanged but it sports new siding and a good roof. (see Figure 3).

I strained my eyes and soon discerned, standing alone almost on the edge of the
cliff, defying storms, unused for years except for very brief periods, what seemed to
me a skyscraper -- the little school chapel built many years ago by a French priest.57

O’Neill admitted to a moment of panic and despair at the point of arrival at her new
‘home.’ She wrote that she felt, as she entered the little addition that she was meant to
Figure 3: The Mainland school/chapel where O’Neill lived and taught in 1938 (photo: K. McManus, 1996).
occupy with Mary, (a young woman from Lourdes O’Neill brought with her as an assistant) a sense of inadequacy set in. She felt “lost, lonely, [and] helpless.” But in the spirit of the true pioneer, rather than indulge in panic, she set to work immediately, building a big fire in the stove and putting away the things they had brought with them.58

As was her habit, O’Neill arose the next morning with the goal of meeting each one of the twenty-four families of the community by the same evening. Through conversations with members of the community she could discover individual’s needs, and she could also discover the leaders of the community. She felt the key to success was knowing ‘her’ community and each of its members. She also had a sense of urgency with her work because the two or three months that she was allowed to stay in one community meant that each hour of the day should count toward a goal. She expressed her sense of mission by writing: “If I could only convince them of my sincerity, could only awaken in them half the enthusiasm I now felt!”59

Much of O’Neill’s method lay in her pattern of identifying and working toward small attainable goals. As she talked about her method as it pertained to Mainland, she wrote: “Little goals attained must bear fruit and other goals must be made to seem attainable, other interests awakened.” They must be made aware of their potentialities for leadership (already evinced); they must be made to feel that they are worthwhile citizens of Newfoundland.60 Today, adult educators would call this “empowering” the learner, and while there is debate today surrounding the issue of whether it is possible to empower others, O’Neill did not question the power of her method.
As she introduced herself to children, to fathers and mothers in Mainland, she became aware of the problems that isolation and poverty had caused. These were greater problems than she had ever encountered before. She was in a community that endured daily hardship. She wrote: “I must remember that what I saw represented a gradual decay over a long period of years, that extreme isolation and resultant ignorance accounted for the greater part of the present state of affairs.” Her enthusiasm was shaken once when her presence invited what seemed to be a “violent outburst of abuse.” One man, whose broken English made it difficult for him to communicate, began telling O’Neill that she would not be different from others who had come and very quickly given up and gone away again. Once O’Neill understood the source of the man’s anger, she “shook his hand.” Her manner, or her expression must have calmed the man because O’Neill was then invited to sit in the only chair in the “shack” and they had a chat, mostly about the children. O’Neill reported that they “conspired to make the day school a success.”

O’Neill consistently used, in her writing, the words “sleepiness” and “darkness” as metaphors describing the state of the community prior to the arrival of an adult education program. In Mainland she again used the images of dark and sleep to convey the state of the community before it came to life -- “awakened” -- through adult education. In her essay, O’Neill gives the metaphor of “darkness” substance by describing how the community was in reality in the dark because light was an expensive commodity, but then, when she moved into the school, light emanated from it. Education, in essence, lit up the night sky.
It is difficult to paint a realistic picture of just how and why this little sleepy village came to life. Under ordinary circumstances there was an almost perpetual blackout. The majority of the older people went to bed at dusk or sat in the dark (kerosene oil is an expensive commodity when food and clothing are at a premium), while the younger people wandered aimlessly from house to house -- nothing to do -- nowhere to go. Suddenly the school building was ablaze of light. People from far and near had come to our first general meeting.\textsuperscript{62}

O’Neill’s ‘darkness to light’ image effectively captured her belief that the people truly walked from the dark into the light when she brought education to them. From the first meeting she described committees and clubs formed for the purpose of effecting a multitude of changes in the community, from foot-bridge construction to ensure the children had a safe path to walk to get to the school, to table and bench construction for the school itself, to parenting tips. O’Neill also began holding regular night classes three nights a week for adults and taught the children during the day. O’Neill used her constant interaction with either the children or adults as an opportunity to teach “good manners, health habits, and the care and needs of the body.” The people of the community, according to O’Neill, responded to all of her efforts with more than polite interest. She maintained that there was never a moment that the community seemed to lose interest or was “found wanting” in enthusiasm or effort.

The combination of enthusiastic participation and profound need that existed in the community greatly affected O’Neill. She wrote that she was often in “desperation” because the community members needed so much and had so little. She recalled that
“children were undernourished, half naked, and dirty.” Her response, which she felt was minimal but necessary because there was no “free” money available to help them, was to show the women how to sew from material they would have coming into their homes: burlap. O’Neill used skills she had learned from her own childhood in Witless Bay. Using the burlap of flour bags she showed the women how to make aprons. She then ordered a small bit of material (using her own money) from “the Co-op store and [they] made a pair of pants or a dress for each child. Shirts with half-sleeves and fitted collars were made from flour bags.”

When O’Neill’s three months were over the community came together for the closing concert and speeches. O’Neill also invited people from neighbouring communities so that she could prove that the people in Mainland were not “dirty, rotten, and hopeless.”

O’Neill’s story of her experience in Mainland, while written with the linguistic drama, and literary technique of fiction, nevertheless captures something important about O’Neill as well as about adult education. By the time O’Neill had completed her work in Mainland, she had, it seems, experienced something of her own epiphany, to borrow another literary term. She was truly ‘hooked’ on adult education and felt that through it she could do the important thing for her country that she seemed desperately intent on doing. Mainland was real in the sense that it was a community that needed help and she had made a difference there. Adult education at the time, however, was at an infant stage and its resources were not fully developed enough to help O’Neill to establish something that would remain intact after she left. In essence, Mainland enjoyed an adult education moment in time, rather than a permanent change. She closed her story acknowledging that
the people in the community continued to need medical services and habitable houses and enough food; but, one lasting change had been made, they received a teacher who had "community spirit" and, O'Neill wrote: "on the survival of that spirit depends the progress of the people of Land's End [Mainland]."  

Later, when O'Neill was asked to reflect on her experience in that community she admitted that she fed the children every morning at the school, which may have accounted for their near perfect attendance. She also admitted to having paid Mary's salary from her own salary because the adult education teachers were not given assistants. As well, O'Neill had never worked in a community that had needed so much. O'Neill admitted to Professor Osborne, "I had never started quite so much from scratch before."  Nonetheless, the experience remained for her a bright spot in her career. At her retirement she was able to say without hesitation that this particular teaching experience was "the most exciting three months of my life."  

Questions arise from O'Neill's recounting of her experience in Mainland about whether her perceptions of the community could possibly have been accurate. Without a doubt O'Neill has romanticized her adventure in order to make it compelling. She has used, from her love of literature as a child, common literary devices of drama, exaggeration, and mood to engage the reader and to make a point about the circumstances of many communities in Newfoundland at that time. The Gorvin and Richardson reports both identified areas of need within Newfoundland communities as well. On Newfoundland's south coast, an area closer to St. John's and therefore more quickly accessible by boat, Gorvin noted conditions in many communities where, he wrote, "Cause
of distress in fisheries said to be not so much failure of fisheries as deterioration of boats and gear and weak character of many fishermen. A general desire is expressed that work should be substituted for idleness on dole, but enforcement sometimes results in trouble.\textsuperscript{67}

At the same time an outside observer in the person of Malcolm Clark, from Portland, Oregon, wrote an article for Harper’s Magazine in 1941 that created such a bleak picture of the conditions of the population that it sent ripples of reaction throughout the offices of the Carnegie Corporation, which had continued to watch and monitor events in Newfoundland as well as support the work of Rural Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{68} Clark wrote that “a large section of the population is ill-housed, ill-fed, and ravaged by tuberculosis” and that this poor condition was the result of a “culmination of a half-century of social stagnation, economic inequality, and political corruption and inefficiency.”\textsuperscript{69} In essence, Clark, Gorvin, Richardson, and O’Neill saw the same levels of poverty, disease, and decay, their articulation of what they saw and how it should be attended to differed somewhat.

When O’Neill began graduate work at Columbia full-time, her experience in Mainland became for her representative of the kind of change that could occur through community development. As she wrote the story of her experience in Mainland to professor Osborne, she seemed already committed to the idea that she would use Mainland as a model for the development of a rural adult education program for Newfoundland. Her experience there became for her an example of the need for a coherent adult education program built to respond to needs in communities similar to those in Mainland, and to respond for the long term, not just for a few months. In the end, the story about Mainland was a significant part of O’Neill’s thesis: “A Plan for the Development of an Adult
Education Program for Rural Newfoundland.” It also enjoyed a life of its own as an essay entitled “Thou Beside me in the Wilderness” that was reprinted under that title in several texts that explored various kinds of community development work.⁷⁰

Florence O’Neill’s brief summer at Columbia in 1939 where, as she said, she had an opportunity to “see the skycrapers” and take a few courses whetted her appetite for more schooling. She had hoped that after Mainland she would return to Columbia but she could not put the financial resources together. In her attempts to receive financial support she had written to the President of Memorial College, Dr. A. Hatcher, asking him to write, if he thought she deserved it, a letter of recommendation for financial support from the Carnegie Corporation.⁷¹ O’Neill’s request was either passed on by Hatcher to Vincent Burke, or she also wrote to Burke herself to request a letter of recommendation, because it was Burke who then wrote to Robert Lester of the Carnegie Corporation telling him that “Miss Florence O’Neill, of our Adult Education Teaching Staff, will probably apply to you for a scholarship to enable her to attend Columbia University this summer.” Burke told Lester that O’Neill “has done a splendid piece of work with us, and I think she will be just the person to carry out successfully a special project which I have discussed with the Commissioner for Education.”⁷² The project to which Burke referred was one that O’Neill had developed at the end of her work in Mainland. She proposed to either return to Mainland, or go to another community, to set up a long range community development program that, she estimated, would need a commitment from the government of years of stable funding and the help of a small staff so that the community would have the services of not only herself but a qualified teacher, nurse, and someone who could teach building
and carpentry. Burke’s recommendation for O’Neill to receive a Carnegie grant to go to Columbia did not meet with success, however. Charles Dollard, of the Carnegie Corporation, replied to Burke that there seemed little hope for O’Neill receiving a scholarship: “While we should be glad to consider on its merits any proposal which Miss O’Neill may forward to us, the present state of our grants-in-aid fund makes it somewhat doubtful that we shall be able to assist her.”

Meanwhile, O’Neill had also maintained correspondence with Mabel Carney, one of her professors during her first summer school at Columbia. After her initial introduction to O’Neill, Carney attempted to find funding aid for O’Neill so that she could return to Columbia. In a letter to Frederick Keppel in August, 1939, Carney wrote that she wanted to tell him about a “most worthy and exceptional young woman from Newfoundland who was here in our summer session this year.” She described O’Neill’s work in adult education in Newfoundland as “reminiscent of the work of Dr. and Mrs. Grenfell of Labrador.” She suggested to Keppel that it would be “nice” if Keppel, through the Carnegie Corporation, “could do a little for Miss O’Neill in the way of scholarship aid.”

While this particular intercession on O’Neill’s behalf did not result in a scholarship of any kind, it did not curtail Carney’s attempts to find funding for O’Neill. The next spring, in May, 1940, Carney wrote to O’Neill to inform her that “I have just written to Dr. Keppel, the President of the Carnegie Corporation. I have no idea what he will do, but will let you know as soon as I hear from him.” She asked O’Neill for a brief statement about her current activities and for a statement regarding whether she would be able to go to New York or not, even with a scholarship: “I realize that war activities must be absorbing much
time in Newfoundland now, and it may be that you could not come this year even with financial aid.\textsuperscript{76}

By late spring of 1940 O’Neill realized that she would not be able to go to Columbia during the summer of 1940 because there was no financial aid forthcoming and she did not have the financial resources to send herself. At the end of the summer, O’Neill wrote ‘a friendly letter’ to G. Alain Frecker, who was the Secretary for Education within the Newfoundland department of education, about her lost opportunity. O’Neill had known Frecker at least from the time she began working as an adult educator. She may have even known him, or his family much longer because some part of his family had come from Oderin, where she had first worked. She explained to him that for her “the summer has been almost spoiled. I hated coming back to St. John’s and not going to New York. All the year I had lived for it and dreamed of it. I had been corresponding with Professor Carney and between us we had planned what courses I should take.\textsuperscript{77}

In the letter to Frecker, O’Neill revealed how deeply the experience in Mainland had affected her. She told him that her “desire to do something worthwhile for Mainland haunts me.” She told Frecker that with “more capital” a great deal could be accomplished and that the Carnegie Corporation might support her work in Mainland as a special project if she could convince them that she knew what she was doing. She admitted that she needed “more experience and knowledge” and hoped Frecker could, through the Department of Education, send her back to Mainland for a period in order to gain experience there. In O’Neill’s typical manner of agreeing to do everything and anything in order to be able to do what was her goal, she told Frecker: “I am willing to go there for a
year (say) and teach regular day school as any other teacher and do adult work and community work as well. I have done it before and I am none the worse apart from a few more grey hairs.” She added that “Father O’Reilly says a teacher (day school teacher) would die out there or go insane,” but felt this did not apply to her. She told Frecker: “All the misery meant nothing compared to the joy of achievement, be it ever so little.”

O’Neill’s appeal to Frecker, however, did not meet with success. O’Neill spent a further two years as an adult education teacher in Newfoundland. She was able to apply what she had learned from working in Mainland to other postings along the Port-au-Port peninsula, but she was not sent back to Mainland.

O’Neill left the Opportunity Schools in 1942 in order to attend Columbia to receive further training as an adult educator. This time her return to school had purpose and focus. It was not just to earn another degree but to become better able to do the work she seemed to love doing.

2. In 1930 the Carnegie Corporation awarded Vincent Burke, W.W. Blackall, and L. Curtis (as representatives of the Newfoundland government, a grant of $6,000 to organize the Newfoundland Adult Education Association, to develop Opportunity Schools, and to send one Newfoundlander to South Carolina to be trained as an Opportunity School teacher. See V.P. Burke, St. John’s, to F.P. Keppel, Carnegie Corp., “Brief Report of the Expenditure of $6,000 kindly granted by the Carnegie Corporation in September 1931. In MUN archives, file I Keppel, Dr. F.P.


4. Ibid., Final Report, 10.

5. Ibid., 12.

6. Ibid., 16-18.

7. Ibid., 18.


14. Margot I. Duley, Where Once our Mothers Stood, We Stand: Women’s Suffrage in Newfoundland, 1890-1925 (Charlottetown, P.E.I.: Gynergy Books, 1993), 102-104. Duley explores the lives of politically active women in Newfoundland and through her exploration we discover that Vincent Burke was married to Margaret Mulcahy and that they both went to New York: he to attend Teacher’s College, and she to become immersed in the political and intellectual life of the city, where she is reported to have become “greatly influenced by the suffragists she heard.” Also see, Vincent Burke, “Adult Education in Newfoundland,” The Book of Newfoundland, Vol. 1, 1937: 295.


16. Ibid.

17. V.P. Burke, St. John’s, to F.P. Keppel, Carnegie Corp., “Brief Report of the Expenditure of $6,000 kindly granted by the Carnegie Corporation in September 1931. MUN archives: file I Keppel, Dr. F.P.


22. Ibid., 314.


24. Ibid., 2-5.


26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. In 1932 Newfoundland’s status changed from dominion to something between a dominion and a colony. For Newfoundlanders it meant that they could no longer vote for their public officials. From 1932 - 1949, Newfoundland made none of its own laws, nor did it direct its own fate. See, Peter Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 12-43, for a more complete explanation of the necessity for and aftermath of a move to government by commission.


32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.


38. J. H. Gorvin, “Papers Relating to a Long Range Reconstruction Policy in
Newfoundland.” Newfoundland Government. Vol. 1, 1938: 9 (Columbia University Rare
Book and Manuscript Library and also available as a Newfoundland Government
Document).

Department of Agriculture and Rural Reconstruction.” Newfoundland Government.
1940: 4-10.

40. Gorvin, 14-18.


42. Ibid.

43. In both Richardson’s and Gorvin’s reports, communities that they visited in each
region are listed and Mainland does not appear in their lists, nor is it mentioned
anywhere in the text of their separate reports.

44. Florence O’Neill, Columbia University, to Ernest Osborne, Columbia University,
letter 4 May 1943. In CNS, QEII, MUN, collection 212.

45. Mary Mims, Moritz Mims, and Georgia Williams, The Awakening Community (New
York: Macmillan, 1932); Elsie R. Clapp, Community Schools in Action (New York:
Viking, 1939); and George Sanchez, Mexico - A Revolution by Education (New York:
Viking, 1936; and George Sanchez, Forgotten People, A Study of New Mexico
(Albuquerque: The Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1940).

46. Florence O’Neill, Columbia University, letter to E. Osborne, Columbia University,
4 May 1943. In CNSA, QEII, MUN, collection 212.

47. Ernest Osborne, Columbia University to Florence O’Neill, Columbia University,
letter, 12 May 1943. In CNSA, QEII, MUN, collection 212.

48. Jean Ogden and Jess Ogden, “Special Projects in Adult Education: An Experiment in
Community Development,” in Handbook of Adult Education in the United States, Mary

49. Gerald Richardson, “Report of Co-operative Division of the Department of
Agriculture and Rural Reconstruction.” Newfoundland Government. 1940: 27. (See
Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library archive, Newfoundland files).

50. Florence O’Neill, “Thou Beside Me in the Wilderness,” in Citizen Participation:
Osborne can be found in the CNSA, QEII, MUN, collection 212. In this section I use the
pagination from the article for reference purposes. O’Neill’s letter includes an experience that precedes her work in Mainland, but the Mainland story is nearly identical in the letter and the article.

51. Ibid., 215.
53. Ibid., 216-217.
54. Ibid., 215.
55. O’Neill took a young woman from the community of Lourdes (a neighbouring community) to Mainland with her. I have been told that the woman’s name was Marie. In conversations I had with a young woman who grew up in Mainland, community stories about O’Neill’s time there attribute, in part, her success to the fact that she had been the first teacher in the community to understand the necessity of bringing a French speaking person with her to communicate with the residents.
56. Ibid., 218.
57. Ibid., 218.
58. Ibid., 219.
59. Ibid., 219.
60. Ibid., 219-220.
61. Ibid., 220.
62. Ibid., 221.
63. Ibid., 222.
64. Ibid., 224.
Corporation, New York, to F.P. Keppel, Carnegie Corporation, New York, typed memo regarding Clark's article, 26 November 1940; F.P. Keppel, Carnegie Corporation, New York, Record of Interview, 29 November 1940, regarding Newfoundland's importance as a defence outpost which was the underlying point of Clark's article. In Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Archive, Newfoundland File.


78. Ibid.
O’Neill herself posed the question that needs to be asked at this point: “Why did I go to Columbia University, you might ask.” Her answer to her own question was: “Because Dr. Burke got an honorary Doctor’s from there, and I think he got his Master’s from there as well, and the Carnegie Corporation gave some money to Newfoundland.”

While, in itself, her answer does not capture the complexity of decisions and challenges that faced O’Neill while she attempted to get to Columbia, her choice of Columbia does reflect something of O’Neill’s need for a sense of connection even when she travelled away from Newfoundland. Columbia may not have been quite the ‘natural’ step that Dalhousie was for a Newfoundland student, but for O’Neill, who was now in her late thirties, the choice made sense.

O’Neill’s return to Columbia University in the summer of 1942 immersed her in what was the centre of adult education thought and research at that time. As a full-time student she was able to access experienced adult educators and researchers to help her to reflect on her nearly six years of experience as an adult educator in rural Newfoundland. As well, she was able to become involved in an environment within which the study of adult education had become a serious academic field of study.

Columbia University entered into the academic study of adult education in 1930, earlier than other universities. It graduated its first doctoral student, Wilbur Hallenbeck, in 1935 and that student was the first person to receive a PhD in the United States in
adult education. During the mid-1920s Frederick Keppel’s headship of the Carnegie Corporation seems to have been the spark that ignited the Corporation’s interest in adult education. According to Malcolm Knowles, a prominent adult education historian, “when Frederick Keppel came to the presidency of the Carnegie Corporation in 1923, one of his first acts was to persuade the trustees to include adult education and the arts in their list of interests.” By 1926, after committees and groups persuaded Keppel that a national body would be essential to ensure continued growth of the field, Keppel through the Carnegie Corporation’s funding then created and supported the American Association for Adult Education and both organizations supported and guided the Columbia University adult education program.

Through the Journal of Adult Education (American), which was supported by the Association for Adult Education, adult educators found ways to re-focus the purpose of adult education so that it became the path to achieving a “self-reliant culture” which, it was argued, would preserve an individual’s faith in themselves and in their own ability to persevere. Adult education researchers also began surveying adults’ felt needs and preferences, while others argued that adult education should be “pure” in the sense that it should concern itself only with the acquisition of critical thinking skills and the power of discrimination. Meanwhile, outside the universities, public school classrooms filled with immigrants and others who were attempting to achieve a basic education. A segment of the field of adult educators developed around literacy education in order to fulfill more immediate needs.
As the field grew throughout the 1930s in the United States, much of the earlier study club and literary society activity gave way to more “therapeutic” programs to help a nation mired in an economic depression. During this period Columbia’s “Extension” program thrived despite the Depression. An Extension program attached to a university usually functioned as a ‘bridge’ to the community. The program generally consisted of courses that were similar to some of the university’s academic program or were those that could be classified as ‘self-help’ or personal interest. These were non-credit courses that anyone in the community could enroll in for personal enjoyment or fulfilment. Some people took courses to “prepare themselves in one way or another, through university work, for better jobs.” Those who developed the university extension program responded to a perceived need to “assist people to feel better about themselves and their communities.”

By the late 1930s, Extension programs received another burst of interest due in part to a new threat to peace and security. War had broken out in Europe and, while it was not yet drawn into the fire, the United States felt the heat. Concern about war and its impact created at Columbia a “kind of feverish activity” as people adjusted to the war and the new concerns it caused. One concern was the supply of trained workers in a variety of fields in order to fill jobs created by the war effort. Another concern was about the threat of foreign domination, by force, and foreign infiltration, by immigration. All of these concerns added to growth in enrollment in Columbia’s university Extension courses. At the same time there was a dearth of appropriately trained people to organize and teach courses. The Carnegie Corporation in combination with Columbia University responded by adding an adult education program to the post-graduate offerings of the
university in order to provide professional training to those engaged in the practice of adult education.

During the 1930s and early 1940s (prior to O’Neill having arrived on Columbia’s campus to begin her graduate program in earnest) the study of adult education as a field grew and developed in directions arising out of the areas of research and interest held by the first professors who formed the department of adult education. The program of study included courses in the area of psychology, and specifically the psychology of adult learning, rural sociology, field work and research, methods and techniques for teaching adults, educational administration, curriculum and teaching problems in higher education, and family education.12

The number of graduate students who registered at Columbia for a program that was mainly adult education remained quite small during the latter part of the 1930s and throughout the 1940s. When O’Neill graduated in 1944, according to Cyril O. Houle’s research in the area, there were a mere two graduates of doctoral programs in adult education in the United States.13 Even if some graduate students were overlooked because some degrees may not have been, strictly speaking, through a department of adult education, it nevertheless underscores the possibility that O’Neill’s interest in adult education was fairly rare. It is likely that she earned the only doctoral degree from Columbia in the field in 1944. Many of the students who populated, for example, her “psychology of adult learning” may have been those earning degrees in social work, sociology, or agricultural extension and other kinds of programs where an understanding of adults and adult learning was beneficial but was wanted for different reasons.

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Columbia’s program offered to students courses from eminent scholars. For example, E.L. Thorndike pioneered, in the 1930s, studies leading to a better understanding of the psychology of adult learning. It was Thorndike’s work that gave credence to the notion that adults could learn and therefore were worth teaching.\textsuperscript{14} His research became widely known which further helped to establish Columbia as an important place for adult education. Another professor, Edmund de Salles Brunner, researched rural areas and developed theories about community function and dysfunction in farm and other rural settings. His research created a foundation for those who were interested in community development and rural sociology. Another early and well-known member of the faculty was Lyman Bryson who believed that “adult education embraces whatever help in living can be got from the recorded or communicated experience of others. It is education for everybody at all times and in all conditions.”\textsuperscript{15} Bryson also became the President of the American Adult Education Association making him an important contact for students aspiring to have a career in the field. The department continued to grow through the mid-1930's, finally hiring, in 1935, one of its own graduates, Wilbur Hallenbeck. Once Hallenbeck became part of the faculty, he often joined Brunner and Morse Cartwright to teach courses in field work and research as well as courses focused on community development.\textsuperscript{16}

By 1939, when O’Neill began her graduate program, she had the opportunity to avail herself of a unique approach to adult education that had developed at Columbia as the department began to take shape. The graduate program in adult education allowed students, in consultation with an advisor who was assigned to each student, to
individually construct the program of courses that best suited that student's needs. Adult education, as a department, did not yet have enough students to fill classrooms with its majors, so students were assigned to the few professors who were attached to the department, and with their advisor's help, they chose courses in any number of disciplines, depending on the student's stated needs and interest. Once the student had identified the kind of program s/he desired, the adviser planned the student's courses "with a view to relating him to those departments that can best meet" the student's needs. In addition to any courses the students attended, they also met in groups with four to six faculty, "representing various major interests," for the purpose of discussion around main theoretical and practical problems. Students were also 'apprenticed' to an adult education agency in New York in order to blend the practical with the theoretical.17

During her first summer school at Columbia in 1939, O'Neill had enjoyed the guidance and advice of Mabel Carney, whose own area was "rural schools" and "field work." Her interest in O'Neill seemed to help O'Neill remain confident that she would eventually return to Columbia to do graduate work. When O'Neill returned in 1942, although most of her courses were in the area of rural sociology and adult psychology, Professor Carney no longer supervised O'Neill. The rural sociology courses were, in the main, taught by Brunner, Hallenbeck, and Cartwright, and these three men also supervised O'Neill's program and her thesis.

In addition to O'Neill's immersion in the thinking of Thorndike,18 Cartwright, Brunner, and Hallenbeck, O'Neill learned from a few women who had contributed to the field. Women adult educators in the 30s and 40s contributed to the field in a variety of
areas. For example, Ruth Kotinsky, whose area of interest was that of adult education councils within communities, wrote extensively about the use of such councils in the governance of a community.\textsuperscript{19} Another woman, whom O’Neill mentions in her thesis, Elsie Clapp, studied rural “community schools” and likely influenced O’Neill’s thinking about the importance of working with the teachers and children in a community as well as with their parents.\textsuperscript{20} As previously mentioned, Mabel Carney influenced O’Neill’s thoughts about organizing the “Field Work” of a rural program.

Other courses that O’Neill enrolled in, such as “Methods and Materials in Adult Education,” explored the necessity for a student-centred approach in any learning situation. O’Neill was exposed to notions about teaching that must have seemed radical to her, even with her ‘field’ experience. One Columbia professor described teaching materials as mere tools that, if chosen incorrectly, would be no more effective than choosing a hammer when a paintbrush was needed. He advocated choosing resource materials for each student that matched the student’s needs or, he warned, there would be no progress.\textsuperscript{21}

When O’Neill used her own experience to discuss concepts or ideas about education issues in her classes, she probably brought to the discussion a different perspective of these issues. O’Neill’s experience in the isolated outports of Newfoundland would have been unmatched. The isolation of the outports and their homogenous composition contributed to the difference, as did the relationship between government and society. The culture of Newfoundland outports retained so many features of its British colonial past that O’Neill’s teaching experiences, to most students
at Columbia, would certainly have seemed foreign. The Columbia experience for O’Neill would have given her an opportunity to reflect on her work in Newfoundland, as well as expose her to the larger issues of adult education.

One of the issues that seemed to loom large at Columbia was war, since the war in Europe was still raging. War caused adult educators to examine their role in a war era. O’Neill took one course, “Education for War and Peace,” that focused on the unique educational problems caused by war. The war era seemed to prompt questions about democratic processes and the need for an educational system that instilled an understanding of democracy.

In general terms, a 1940 article for the Journal of Adult Education by Columbia professor Morse Cartwright, articulated concerns about society and the field of adult education. Cartwright’s views would have represented the views of the American Association for Adult Education and, no doubt, he would have expressed the same ideas in courses that O’Neill took from him. In his article, Cartwright warned that unless “educators [were] willing to play their part” when the nation faced difficult times, people would become “prey to an insidious propaganda dictated by ignorance and carelessness.” The result, he suggested, was that the United States could come to be ruled by a dictator similar to Stalin. Cartwright reasoned that the Russian people deserved Stalin because he expressed the will of the adult population of the country.22 His warning was that if people do not rise above ignorance, they will be ruled by the propaganda of dictators. Cartwright’s article expressed fear of the social upheaval that war brought to North American shores. It explored issues for adult education that arose due to insecurities
caused by war such as, according to Cartwright, “social change of revolutionary proportions” within the United States which demanded a “defence against the encroachment of destructive ideologies.”

In the article Cartwright also discussed broader issues for adult education such as the lack of definition of the field of adult education which caused “wars” between those who viewed the field as vocational education and those who viewed it as cultural education. Other issues and questions he raised explored whether adult education should be nationally supported or ‘grown’ locally, and liberalism versus conservatism within the field. Cartwright believed that “liberalism” inherently existed within the philosophy of the purpose of adult education. He further argued that “liberalism and tolerance are so intimately related to the question of freedom of teaching in a democracy that they need no supporting argument before those interested in adult education.” A final issue for Cartwright was the rise of the labour movement. He warned against “worker’s, i.e., communist, education” being a thinly veiled vehicle for “propaganda” of all sorts. Cartwright viewed worker’s education as one of those “destructive ideologies.”

Lyman Bryson, another Columbia professor and leader of the American Adult Education Association, articulated his fears in the 1948 *Handbook of Adult Education*, about the definition of, or popular assumption about the purpose of, adult education. He wrote: “just when the early advocates of lifelong learning thought that they were making some gain in the fight for their interpretation of adult education, the economic depression of the nineteen-thirties struck upsetting everything.” Bryson seems to have believed that the literacy education that continued and prospered throughout the 30s created an
image of adult education that was “wrong and dangerous.” He argued that, “once more, the term adult education came to be associated in the public mind with an emergency” because the activity primarily conducted as adult education was to help the “underprivileged.” He warned that in the postwar period “adult education faces grave danger” because it had continued to be seen as a way to deal with social and educational “emergency,” e.g., veteran’s training, immigrant’s basic education, and other training for the purpose of specific tasks, rather than as the simple and important aid to a “better life.”

O’Neill’s two years at Columbia would have immersed her in the views of both these men and their considerable impact on the thinking of all those within the field. She also received generous amounts of practical training. The practical aspects of adult education occurred in her “Field Work” course and her “Psychology of Adult Learning” course. O’Neill also was expected to wrestle with philosophical arguments throughout her program. She and her classmates, through courses such as “Seminar of Policies and Problems in Adult Education” and “Contemporary Education & Conflict of Ideologies” would have had opportunities to explore the sociological and philosophical implications of their ideas about education. The whole of O’Neill’s many courses provided a solid foundation of adult education methodology and philosophy. For her, however, information in many of her courses may have also shown her how difficult it would be to achieve her goals in Newfoundland. A sense of O’Neill’s assimilation of the course work at Columbia can be glimpsed through an essay she wrote for “Rural Sociology,” for Professor Brunner. O’Neill’s essay is entitled: “How course [sic] in Rural Sociology has
helped prepare me to do a better job in Newfoundland.” She began with, “having
attended the lectures...and doing the reading...I feel this course has been a decided
asset...while the study of American sociology, with its innumerable statistics and
fascinating story of social growth, past, present and possible future trends does not bear
direct application to Newfoundland, basically the principles are the same.” As she
discussed various difficulties presenting themselves to the adult educator in
Newfoundland, such as the extreme isolation of the rural outports and a severe lack of
services in many regions of the island that make progress or social change difficult, she
attempted, as she came to a conclusion, to reach for an uplifting ending. She wrote:

Such development is a slow process of evolution plus education and in
Newfoundland it will take a long time to develop leaders, obtain full individual
participation, awaken community consciousness, coordinate the different
agencies sponsored by the Government and raise the standard of living in the
rural country as a whole, yet I feel that it is not now the hopeless task I thought it
to be.26

O’Neill’s sense that the task was not completely hopeless must have begun to surface
fairly early in her program.

O’Neill’s exuberant personality attracted the attention of those she met at
Columbia, both students and professors. Jessie Sharpe, a fellow student at Columbia,
remembers her to have been a “vivacious and friendly” person whose “qualities of
leadership” revealed themselves when O’Neill wanted to do something Sharpe was not
prepared to do. O’Neill was also, it seems, very close to her professors. According to
Sharpe, they were “very much interested in the work she had been doing in the outports of Newfoundland.”

In addition to the support and encouragement O’Neill had received from Ernest Osborne regarding her written reflections about Mainland, Mabel Carney (who had been O’Neill’s first advocate) had written to Burke at the end of summer to express her delight with O’Neill’s “personality and outlook on life.” Carney asserted that O’Neill was “a rare young woman. . .and one capable of doing great things for Newfoundland provided her health can be safeguarded.” Carney seemed to have had many conversations with O’Neill during the summer school session because she was well acquainted with O’Neill’s work in rural Newfoundland. Carney told Burke: “I can see no hope for some of those [people] except for resettlement on better land. Why does Newfoundland not follow President Roosevelt’s example in this, move a couple of the worst communities into better areas and put Miss O’Neill in charge to show what she could do in adult education and economic improvement through cooperatives.” While Carney seemed sure that both resettlement and Miss O’Neill could do great good for Newfoundland, Burke was not prepared to act on the former suggestion, as it was an unpopular one in Newfoundland. As far as putting “Miss O’Neill” in charge of something, it seems that Burke was prepared to do just that, once O’Neill returned from Columbia.

O’Neill’s ability as a student, and her personality, also gained for her the enthusiastic support of Morse Cartwright. As she was finishing her first year of course work and had earned her Master’s Degree in that time, Cartwright wrote on her behalf to Vincent Burke in order to help her to have “an extension of life here of one more year.”
Cartwright told Burke that O'Neill would have “little difficulty in qualifying for the doctor’s degree” largely because she had shown that she was able to do “excellent work.” In order, however, for her to continue at Columbia a source of funding had to be found. Cartwright informed Burke that he had arranged for O'Neill to have an interview with Keppel and with Robert Lester of the Carnegie Corporation. Cartwright wrote that there was “every reason to hope that within the next few weeks the Corporation will make a personal grant-in-aid” to O'Neill. Cartwright also reminded Burke of salary that the Newfoundland government owed to O'Neill. He asserted: “Miss O'Neill tells me that you have encountered some technical difficulty in getting her paid the full sum due her for the present half year.” He continued: “This, I think, is a most unfortunate situation and I quite realize, without any doubt whatsoever, that you personally have had nothing to do with raising the technical barrier.” Whether he was convinced that Burke had not, in some way, raised a barrier to O'Neill’s receiving her pay is not at all clear. Cartwright’s words were solicitous and carefully chosen: “I hope you’ll note the personal character of this letter. I realize that in several cases I have offered unsolicited advice in an official matter, but I think you and I know each other well enough to pardon any possible breach of etiquette, and I think, too, we are both sufficiently interested in Miss O'Neill’s welfare and her potentialities for future service to justify a frank exchange between us.” The tone suggests that Cartwright may have believed Burke had not done everything possible to ensure that O'Neill would be able to stay at Columbia. Before the close of the letter, Cartwright again asserted: “I may add that personally we like her very much and that we are gratified at what she believes she is getting out of her work at
Teachers College."

O’Neill eventually did receive her pay from the Newfoundland government but she did not receive any other financial support from ‘home.’ O’Neill’s difficulties with money prompted her to be resourceful and persistent. In her memory of this period she felt it was a challenging time, but not an unpleasant one. She said: “Sometimes it was difficult to know where I’d get the money to eat. . .so I poured coffee in the cafeteria at International House [at] 7 a.m., and that took care of my breakfast. . .then I assisted in the library.” The jobs she took on in order to survive O’Neill turned into an educational experience. She believed they gave her an “opportunity to meet people.” She said: “Besides, I’d never poured coffee in a cafeteria and I thought it might be nice to know how it felt, to be on the other side of the coffee bar and see how people felt in the morning having their breakfast.” During her last year of study, O’Neill was awarded a Dean’s scholarship and a “full room” scholarship as well as a Carnegie “grant-in-aid.”

O’Neill produced her article about her experience in Mainland while she was at Columbia. She told Ernest Osborne that her imagination and desire to write about that experience had come from her reading of rural adult educators Elsie Clapp, Mary Mims, and George Sanchez, all of whom specialized in adult education in developing or rural communities. While Elsie Clapp and Mary Mims had concentrated on rural community schools in the United States, Sanchez was an adult educator familiar with Mexico and the southwestern United States. He was familiar with a population more closely linked to the Newfoundland population in so far as southwestern America was remote from the centre of power and wealth in the United States at that time, and Mexico, a rural nation
with significant poverty, was similar in those aspects to Newfoundland. Mexico was also a nation with a strong culture of religious traditions and regional differences. These aspects of Sanchez's experience would have been more relevant to O'Neill's experience than to the experience of those adult educators who had worked in the American Midwest, for example. Also, it may have been the very 'foreignness' of O'Neill's experience that attracted her professors to her work. Osborne, for instance, was so overwhelmed by O'Neill's story about Mainland that he wrote to her that "I can't refrain from taking a few minutes to write to you immediately after finishing your letter, no---your poem, your song about Mainland." Others outside Columbia also were captured by O'Neill's story. She received a letter from an adult educator who had been the advisor to the Minister of Education in Chile. He had read her story about Mainland when it was first published in the *Adult Education Journal* in July of 1943. He wrote that those working in the United States "with all their facility (sic) at their disposal do not have any ideas as to the impoverish (sic) conditions in many parts of the world."

During her final year at Columbia, O'Neill also had an opportunity to learn first hand about adult education in other places than New York. She travelled to Wisconsin during the Fall of 1943 in order to learn about the "extension" system that state had developed for co-operative work within its agricultural extension and home demonstration service. She had made contact with Blanche L. Lee, the State Leader of Home Economics Extension, to work out details of a trip that would include travel to several sites within Wisconsin, an opportunity to see home demonstrations and to talk with various groups involved in agricultural extension and home economics. O'Neill
appears to have been very well received during her travels. Letters forwarded back to her through Blanche Lee informed O'Neill that her presentations had sparked a great deal of interest: "She spoke at five centre meetings of presidents and secretaries during the week. At all the meetings the women said they had enjoyed her talk and wished she would have had more time on the program."^37

With the many experiences O'Neill gained from the environment of Columbia University, and the influences of those who taught her classes, as well as from books and articles she read, O'Neill embarked upon a final project for her doctoral degree that was meant to be a practical application of all that she had learned. She had decided upon a project wherein she would develop a plan to create an adult education infrastructure that could service the entire island of Newfoundland. She organized the plan within a community development framework and borrowed from agricultural extension and 'community councils' methodology in order to create an administrative organization. Her project was titled, simply: "A Plan for the Development of an Adult Education Program for Rural Newfoundland."^38

O'Neill's thesis was organized into seven chapters plus her inclusion of her experience at Mainland which was not a chapter but falls between chapter six and seven and was titled: "Land's End Experiment." Through her first two chapters, O'Neill provided the reader with an introduction to Newfoundland geography, population, general history and the various roles of the various types of governments that have existed in Newfoundland since the eighteenth century. From chapter three through six she introduced the reader to her objectives, the focus of her plan, its development and
organization. O'Neill's final chapter provided the reader with a discussion of the necessity of evaluation and some suggestions as to how it might be conducted.

In chapter three, O'Neill revealed that the purpose of the project was "to develop a plan for adult education in rural Newfoundland to develop a program which will work toward reconstruction of economically under-privileged and isolated communities." Her thesis focused on coordinating the many overlapping services that were already available to communities and integrating these services through an organizational plan which would replace the system of ad hoc services that had developed over time. Among O'Neill's objectives were: 1) the development of citizenship and democracy; 2) the improvement of educational and health standards; and 3) the improvement of life, i.e., "by awakening active interest in making homes more attractive, comfortable, convenient, knowing that better homes have a tremendous effect on the physical and mental health of the family."

O'Neill developed the "Plan" so that it would bring together the many bodies, agencies, and committees that had formed over time to provide services to isolated populations. She wrote that "one way of initiating our program is by the formation of an interdepartmental committee whose primary function will be to sit down and look at the whole of Newfoundland, evaluating the actual functioning of the various agencies in the light of their particular aims and in the light of the vast totality of its needs." Once an understanding of what existed had been reached, plans to coordinate and integrate, or develop new programs could be made. O'Neill included in the development of the plan an organizational outline for creating a community development component to the
program, for selecting and training staff, as well as guidelines for the staff's duties.

In addition to developing an outline for a system of organization as it would be seen from the government’s standpoint, O’Neill also included a “plan of operation” at the community level. Her “Plan” was organized around the idea that both a man and a woman would be sent to each community as a field worker, to assess and then respond to the needs of that community. The responsibilities of each worker were assigned according to gender. Female field workers assumed responsibilities for domestic development such as cooking lessons, nutrition classes, child care education. Male field workers were responsible for “boys junior and youth clubs,” as well as the development of agriculture committees and, the establishment of a cooperative for fishers. O’Neill also described the way in which a female field worker might approach her community once she had begun to work:

As an adult educator she is more concerned with what actually happens to people -- she realizes the importance of individual and community-wide participation, she knows that programs must be built around the needs of the community.

O’Neill reinforced the importance of the community’s involvement in the process of change by using her ‘story’ about Mainland as a part of the thesis.

O’Neill concluded her “Plan” with a chapter on evaluation. O’Neill admitted the difficulty of measuring improvement in a community through some quantifiable method. She did believe, however, that within three years of beginning an adult education program in a community, if the field workers were allowed to remain in that community, some improvement would be visible, therefore, evaluation would be possible. O’Neill
also included in the “Plan” objectives articulating the purpose and aim for the program.

Progress made toward reaching those objectives would be included as part of the evaluation measures. O’Neill also included measurements that could be made to determine whether agencies no longer overlapped in their work in each community, whether there were fewer people on government relief payments, whether there was a “healthy, economically secure” population.

In essence, O’Neill’s “Plan” provided the necessary details as well as theoretical foundation for a committee to begin to work. She developed her “Plan” to be flexible so that its guidelines, objectives, and action plan could be stretched to fit the needs of any community. It was also a plan that could be used regionally, nationally, or locally.

It would seem that O’Neill would have been much encouraged by her successes at Columbia over the two years. It may have been from a sense of accomplishment that she wrote to G. Alain Frecker who was still Secretary for Education in the Commission of Government’s Department of Home Affairs and Education that “It is so long since I ‘wasted’ any of your time that I feel doubly justified today.” In her letter she nearly bubbled with enthusiasm as she told Frecker “so many things have happened since you gave me that little pep talk and encouraged me to get busy and leave for New York.” She outlined her progress to Frecker, letting him know about her work and her plans. She told him that “Just now I am overpowered with work -- carrying 16 points [credits] -- a full time load. But she also told him about her thesis “project”: “My project is: ‘A Plan for adult education in Rural Newfoundland’ to develop a program which will work toward the re-establishment of economically underprivileged and isolated communities.
through the co-ordination and integration of the available agencies and services.” She may have been hoping that Frecker would respond with encouragement, support, or congratulations for all that she had managed to do at Columbia. When he did respond, he began his letter with: “I note from your letter that you have not changed one iota. You are still immersed in a thousand-and-one problems.” Frecker, rather than respond to her idea for her thesis, suggested to her: “I often thought of you and your future during the past year and my intuition tells me that it would be in your ultimate interest as well as in the interest of your native land, if, after graduation you could place yourself for a year or two in the Adult Education field in the good old U.S.A.” It is difficult to determine whether O’Neill would have construed Frecker’s letter as a positive and supportive one. Whether it was the kind of response O’Neill hoped for or not, she acted upon the advice contained in the letter. In June 1944, Cartwright wrote a letter for O’Neill to take to immigration officials in order to “facilitate her entry into the United States with a permanent visa” so that she would be able to work for an “adult education agency.”

O’Neill did not remain in New York for the year or two that Frecker had suggested, however. She returned to Newfoundland at the end of the summer and ‘walked into’ a position as Assistant Director of Adult Education. It is not clear whether she knew before she arrived in Newfoundland that this position was being created by Vincent Burke. There had not been an Assistant Director of Adult Education prior to O’Neill’s appointment. Burke had argued for the need for such a position and had been successful. As Assistant Director she began the long task of organizing the existing administrative structures to align more closely with what she believed was necessary for
providing a country-wide program.

O’Neill’s experience at Columbia enabled her to attack the problems in Newfoundland’s education services for adults with both a philosophy of education’s role in Newfoundland and methods to create a new system. As she returned to Newfoundland, empowered by the support and encouragement she had received at Columbia from her professors, O’Neill was determined to enact her “Plan” for adult education in rural Newfoundland.49 She hoped that her broad based plan for the “organization and administration of an adult education program” would be adopted. She wrote that her “Plan” was “inspired and stimulated by six years’ experience as an adult teacher in some of the most isolated sections of rural Newfoundland.”50 From this modest statement of her experience, which omitted her years prior to 1936 as an elementary school teacher, O’Neill set to work.

2. Morse A. Cartwright, “The American Association for Adult Education,” *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States*, Mary L. Ely, ed. (New York: Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1948), 293. Cartwright wrote that in 1941 the Carnegie Corp. shifted away from funding directed toward adult education, but gave $350,000 over a ten year period to Columbia University for support of research in the field.


4. Ibid., 71.


6. Ibid. 192.


14. The foundational text at the time was E.L. Thorndike’s, *Adult Learning* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).


16. Florence O’Neill, “Graduate Courses” placement record from Columbia University shows Hallenbeck and Cartwright and also Hallenbeck, Cartwright, and Brunner team teaching courses.


18. I have had access to O’Neill’s copy of Thorndike’s *Adult Learning* which included some margin notations and a list of chapters to be read.


23. Ibid., 260.


25. Ibid., 4-5.


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.


39. Ibid., 57.

40. Ibid., 60.

41. Ibid., 62-63.


45. Ibid.


47. Ibid.

48. Morse Cartwright, Columbia University, to immigration officials [unnamed], letter 1 June 1944. In CNSA, QEII, MUN: collection 212.


50. Ibid., 55.
By 1944 Newfoundland’s Commission Government had managed to accumulate a small surplus of money in the treasury, largely due to the change of fortune brought about by American and Canadian building of army and air bases in several locations. With somewhat better circumstances caused by more cash circulating in the system, improvements to Newfoundland’s social structure and transportation began to be planned. There were also new opportunities for residents to earn a living. The existence of the large bases created an unprecedented opportunity for employment. In 1942, “at the height of the base building boom, about 20,000 Newfoundlanders were employed in military construction” out of a total island population of approximately 300,000 residents. The significance of this sudden change to Newfoundland and her economy cannot be over-estimated. Suddenly a need for skilled construction workers and for trained equipment operators seemed urgent. The Newfoundland government desperately wanted to respond.

Adult education seemed to be the method to respond to these needs. The adult education department, however, was comprised of a mere handful of teachers in Opportunity Schools. In order to meet new challenges the department had to expand and be re-organized. Vincent Burke convinced H. A. Winter, Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education, to expand the leadership of the Department of Adult Education to include an Assistant Director. Winter agreed and the position was created, in Winter’s words, “because what is more urgently needed than teachers is... a reorganization of the system
and sound plans for expansion.” Florence O’Neill was chosen as the new Assistant Director because no one else on staff was “suitable” and she had just finished at Columbia, which made her “qualified” for the position.³

O’Neill’s appointment was followed by newspaper reports about her. One report described O’Neill as a Newfoundlander who “combines six years of practical experience in adult education work with high academic honours which include the rare distinction of Doctor of Education conferred by Columbia University.” Readers were also told that O’Neill was “one Newfoundlander who has rejected attractive appointments abroad to return to her native land and devote her talents to the improvement of the condition of the people.”⁴

O’Neill came back to Newfoundland prepared to put the thesis project, her “Plan,” into action. She stated that the “purpose of my project is to provide a plan for the organization and administration of an adult education program conceived in the broadest possible terms” for distribution throughout Newfoundland.⁵ In real terms, O’Neill meant to create a “functional relationship” between the government departments of adult education, public health, rural reconstruction, and fisheries, as well as with volunteer women’s groups such as the Jubilee Guilds (similar to the Women’s Institutes) and the Newfoundland Outport Nursing Industrial Association (an organization that combined health education with craft production). They would all work in concert to break down isolation and provide a basic level of education to those adults interested in learning.⁶

She had learned from Edmund de S. Brunner, at Columbia, that an effective adult education program enlisted those agencies already committed to helping people in small
communities. Using Brunner's approach, O'Neill built her "Plan" around the "concept of community development" which she described as "simply a way of bringing together all agencies, individuals, and institutions in the community in order to get the maximum amount of interest and work done most effectively." If a community was organized, O'Neill believed that its people would no longer suffer in poverty and isolation. If they worked together as a community, the people would be able to accomplish several things they could not otherwise accomplish. Among the benefits of a "community" approach were a raised "economic standard" because the community could learn to maximize its agricultural and fishery output through use of better methods and techniques. Other benefits accrued through the community-centred approach included better cooperation and decision-making as a result of "citizenship for democracy" education that focused on democratic process, and an improved "standard of health" by involving the outport nursing association (NONIA) whose travelling nurses were able to talk about nutrition and sanitation. Finally, community cooperation would, O'Neill believed, "raise the educational level" if the day school teacher could be trained, or encouraged, to work with the community to develop community-school activities that would help parents become more involved in the education of their children. O'Neill believed that the result of a partnership between the school and parents helped all community members become more self-aware and proud of themselves and each other. Lastly, O'Neill included, among her goals and objectives, a need to discover "special talent and ability" among outport residents because it was through those folks that adult education ideals and plans would be maintained. O'Neill wrote that while government agencies already in existence
were charged with similar goals and objectives, there was a need to coordinate and organize their efforts with a view to a comprehensive plan that would enable island-wide application.

O’Neill visualized her project including two component parts. First, each organization already working in Newfoundland needed to “look at Newfoundland as a whole” to evaluate its contribution in “the light of this total picture.” Secondly, interdepartmental committees had to be formed whose primary function was to sit down and look at the various agencies at work in the light of their aims. The interdepartmental committee would also need to continue to meet once a year “to take stock of accomplishments and to maintain a cooperative relationship and understanding.”

O’Neill expected the government department of adult education to appoint a coordinator and two assistants, a “man and woman,” to oversee the project from a “headquarters as centrally located as possible.” The office would then break the geographic area of the island into divisions and oversee multiple small units of field workers in each division distributed across the island. The central office would send into each district “two qualified community workers, a man and a woman, permanently employed and suitably remunerated.” O’Neill wrote that the “success of our whole program depends on the wise selection and realistic training of our field workers. Salaries must be adequate if we wish to attract the right type of person.”

In her “Plan” O’Neill addressed the need for a central organization to the entire project and attempted to foresee all of the possible parts of government where such an office might be housed. She wrote that it could reside in a reorganized Department of
Adult Education or as a “subdivision of the Department of Rural Reconstruction, or as a Memorial College extension, or as an independent agency.” O’Neill did not consider the politics of any of these possibilities, she merely concluded that it would not matter whether it was in one place or another, so long as there was a coordinating office. She included with the concept of central organization, specific and detailed responsibilities of that office. O’Neill’s list of responsibilities included:

1. The responsibility of coordination in cooperation with existing agencies.
2. General supervision of the whole field.
3. Training for workers.
4. Building up adult education library.
5. Gathering information and all materials necessary for workers and seeing that it reaches them when needed.
6. Full responsibility for planning and making annual conference of workers constructively educative and pleasurable.
7. Responsibility for the selection of field workers.
8. Responsibility for planning flexible schedule for the year’s work.
9. Responsibility for planning of radio programs which will tie up with field work.
10. Responsibility for making available suitable motion pictures.
11. Maintaining close contact with workers and the field—such contact to be both helpful and constructive.
12. Plan for the building of a national scholarship fund to be used to provide opportunities for developing special talent.
13. Responsibility for the keeping of records showing work done and using those records to plan further developments.

14. Seeing that such records are given due publicity when feasible.\textsuperscript{16}

O’Neill’s compilation of these fourteen items reflected her concern about specific program responsibilities. She showed the importance of cooperation with, and coordination among, existing groups by making cooperation her first point. Other points on the list reflected both O’Neill’s own experience as an adult educator and her training at Columbia. Those items which may have come directly from her student experience, such as planning radio programs and “motion pictures,” or even the need to keep records, were not mentioned by her while she was an Opportunity School teacher. Using information from projects funded through the Carnegie Corporation and whose results were published,\textsuperscript{17} as well as information from other sources, O’Neill conceived a plan that was organized along lines similar to many rural programs of adult education. She planned for a “head office” that would be the heart of a large network. Through the responsibilities she listed for that office, it is evident that her idea of the purpose of the office would be to organize and control information about and for adult learners as well as to choose and train field workers, and keep records for all of the adult education efforts island wide.

To O’Neill, her entire program rested on the quality of the teaching staff. In order to ensure that the staff would excel in their work, she developed a horrendously time-consuming, but thorough, process for hiring. First, she was specific about the attributes of field workers. She realized they needed an appropriate attitude as well as a
good academic background. (See Appendix 1) She wrote: “The success of our whole program depends on the wise selection and realistic training of our field workers. Applicants for the position “will be accepted for training only when a consensus of opinion has been reached by the coordinator and assistants as to his or her suitability for the job.” Second, each prospective field worker, once accepted on the basis of “suitability,” met with one or more members of staff to determine “qualifications”: the prospective worker having made written application for the job will be interviewed by that member of the staff who is best qualified to do the job, who has the most realistic picture of field requirements and their implications in terms of the person to be chosen, and has also the best aptitude for the delicate technique of interviewing. Applicants will be given opportunity to meet other members of the staff incidentally or by appointment. Decision will be reached at conference of the staff, which will meet to discuss qualifications of applicant in the light of total records.”

Third, qualified and suitable applicants were then expected to take a training course. Only upon successful completion of training, would the applicant be offered a permanent position. O’Neill’s plan for training field workers consisted of six months of “intensive formal training” through course work focused on the psychology of adult learning, an overview of nutrition, the development of recreational programs, first aid, the benefits of cooperatives, parent education and family relations, home management, and the foundations of adult education. Resource materials, information, and topic ideas for these “courses” would have come directly from O’Neill’s own learning at Columbia.
O'Neill also differentiated the men’s training and the women’s. In addition to all of the above topics, she suggested that men also be trained to have a “working knowledge of both housing and carpentry” in terms of understanding the local needs and materials available. They would also need to know about the fundamentals of agriculture and be able to apply that knowledge to Newfoundland’s conditions. O’Neill also planned that male field workers would have familiarity with fish processing, handicrafts, and the resources available through various government agencies. While it seems a bit of an eclectic list, it did cover those essential points of the Newfoundland economy, including understanding avenues for using the resources of government agencies.

O’Neill fully expected that once field workers were trained and organization in place, the program would be a responsive one, meeting needs as much as prescribing them. She wrote that a “rigid formula of operation” would not exist because no “two communities are alike in circumstances, needs, customs and habits of action.” She wrote that the program “must start with the people where they are, at their level of awareness, where the need is realized.” She was aware that work done in this way would not produce results quickly and cautioned that “sometimes this will make for a small beginning, seemingly so insignificant as to be scarcely worthy of notice, but a well trained worker knows that even a very small beginning made by the people themselves will in time become much more fruitful than a splendid, heavily endowed, superimposed program which may relieve the economic pressure of the moment but will wither away when the outside support is gone because it has no roots in the life of the country.”

O’Neill would have had an opportunity to develop her own notion about how best an
adult education program might work through her own trial and error in the field. In addition to that, her courses in field work and those that focused on community development provided her with ideas that had been tried elsewhere. The principles of a learner-centred methodology, where learning were organized was on the basis of "the problems of individuals and of society," O’Neill had used intuitively. She had then received further reinforcement of her intuitive approach while a student at Columbia. These programs were sometimes offered in traditional classroom settings, but just as often were not. Whether in the classroom or some other setting, learning was seldom done through traditional method of lectures and testing but rather through methods that "would make greater use of the experience of the adult learners, such as group discussion, role playing, case method, book-based discussion, the unstructured group method, and various combinations of these."  

O’Neill returned to Newfoundland with the hope and intention of beginning to implement her ideas about adult education. In 1944 there were thirty-four Opportunity School-type centres for adult learning across the island. According to G. Alain Frecker, the Secretary for Education within the Commission of Government, approximately 1,235 students participated in some form of adult education program. The program had grown considerably between 1936, when it began, and 1944. Other than the organization necessary to sending teachers out to communities, and providing each teacher with books, no other organization of the adult education program existed.

At the same time that O’Neill began as Assistant Director of Adult Education, another development occurred regarding schooling. The Commissioner for Home Affairs
and Education submitted a proposal for the “Reconstruction of the Department of Education.” Since earlier attempts had been made by the Commission Government to dismantle the costly denominational school system and these had been rebuffed by the clergy as well as others, the Government proposed a different strategy for tackling the huge problem of providing an education to all children in the thousands of very small communities. The Commission developed a plan to implement regional schooling in Newfoundland. The reasoning behind the regional schools was to bring students together to attend a boarding-type school, or residential school, in order to provide a more comprehensive education for rural children. The proposal stated that there were two major defects in the school system:

The first arises from the wide and thin distribution of the population and consists in the great number (more than half the whole) of small one and two room schools, many of which contain pupils of all grades. The second is the too largely academic nature of the curriculum and the almost total absence of a practical training more suited to the majority of the students.”

While the report itself did not mention adult education, the timing of the proposal would have had some impact on the adult education division. The proposed regional high schools were going to need a sizable allocation of funding for building the schools and would probably have limited any plans in adult education that would have resulted in much higher expenditures. Even though the Commission of Government had, by 1944, reversed the deficits in the Newfoundland economy, there were fears about the future as activity decreased around the American and Canadian bases. O’Neill would have the
responsibility of reorganizing the adult education program to meet the needs of an industrializing Newfoundland, but she would not have a significantly large budget with which to make it work.

O’Neill’s first public statements about adult education occurred shortly after she became Assistant Director. On December 18, 1944, the Daily News, a St. John’s newspaper, reported that Florence O’Neill addressed the Rotary Club in an after-dinner speech. The article summarized O’Neill’s academic achievements and work experience, stressing that she had “lived among the people” and “studied their problems.” In her address to the Rotary Club, O’Neill was reported to have “warned against over-emphasis on the academic side of adult education.” Instead, she proposed that adult education would provide guidance to communities so that “community interests will be developed, cultural activities will be sponsored, talent will be discovered and helped to flower.”

Through these two examples, it appears that O’Neill had begun to pave the way for change. Government policy seemed to be moving in the direction of a community development approach to adult education rather than producing more schools and centres where a traditional classroom approach to adult education would be the focus.

By 1945, changes to the Field Workers’ Manual suggests that O’Neill was able to influence the training and goals of adult education workers somewhat. The manual contains a “Tentative Plan for Application and Development of Adult Education Programmes.” While the list of “general objectives” in this document revolved around the primary purpose of assisting “in the general reconstruction of Newfoundland,” which articulated the government’s interest in “raising the general standard of education of the
adult population" and increasing Newfoundlander's technical competency in order to be able to compete for work in "basic industry," other specific "objectives" seem to suggest O'Neill's influence.  

For example, the third objective, "developing in the people the right attitudes and a spirit of living for each other, helping each other, and working together for the good of Newfoundland as a whole" reiterated, in nearly the same wording, O'Neill's purpose behind her "Plan." Other objectives included in the "Tentative Plan" articulated objectives very similar to O'Neill's, such as "developing in Newfoundlanders a sense of individual and community interest and responsibility," and "spreading culture and enlightenment and an appreciation of proper standards of living including health, nutrition, prevention and cure of disease." These statements carry O'Neill's phrasing as well as reflecting her concerns.

Early in 1945 Vincent Burke showed his strong support for O'Neill's ideas through an attempt to secure funding for publishing her dissertation. Burke appeared to have wanted to use O'Neill's "Plan" for the training of future Field Workers. While it does appear that pieces of her plan did eventually find their way into the Field Workers Manual mentioned above, Burke's idea was to publish her thesis so that it could be available "amongst the thinking people of the country." He first wrote to Morse Cartwright of Columbia University. Burke greeted Cartwright with news of O'Neill's progress: "I know you will be glad to hear that Florence is doing well. We have great hopes for the future." He then told Cartwright that the adult education department intended to use the "sound training" O'Neill received from Columbia by putting into effect the result of her "inspiration." Burke described the situation, telling Cartwright:
"The present position is that after much red tape and many frustrations, we have finally convinced the powers that be of the need for an expanded programme." He went on to describe the planned activities for the coming year. The program he described to Cartwright appears to not only contain the essence of O’Neill’s “Plan,” but to contain the details of it as well. He informed Cartwright that:

Our first move is to find suitable workers in Newfoundland, train them, and initiate our programme. We hope to set up Districts, rural and urban. We are hoping to get three people from the United States of America for our training school, and utilize competent persons in the various Government Departments to balance our training programme. I tried to get the Government to publish Doctor O’Neill’s book, but they refused on the grounds of reluctance to commit themselves to the whole policy at this point.30

In his last paragraphs Burke approached Cartwright for help in publishing O’Neill’s thesis, using as his argument: “You have helped us greatly in the past, and now I am going to approach you again.” His request is specific:

We have carefully weighed the need for this book, and if we had it by August it would be a blessing. We would like it with a hard cover, green outer covering, title in large black lettering:

NEWFOUNDLAND TOMORROW,
preface to be written, if he would be so good, by Dr. Morse Cartwright, dedicated to the adult students of Newfoundland, with perhaps a kind word or two by Professors Brunner and Hallenbeck on the inside outer covering.30
Burke appears to have thought that the request in some way would have been flattering enough to those he asked to write the preface and a “kind word or two” to ensure that Columbia would take on the responsibility of publishing the thesis. He was apparently turned down quite quickly because within a month he wrote nearly the same letter to Robert Lester of the Carnegie Corporation. In this second letter, however, he wrote: “It was the Carnegie Corporation which made it possible for us to launch our programme in Adult Education.” He did not repeat his instructions about how he wanted the book to look and his request for a preface, however. In the end, both organizations were unwilling to pay for O’Neill’s dissertation to be published.

By the end of 1945 O’Neill experienced a reversal in what seemed, at that time, overwhelming support for and encouragement of her “Plan.” Her hopes for her thesis becoming a book placed in the hands of all Newfoundland adult education field workers ended. H.A. Winter, Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education and a lawyer who had been raised within the security and comfort of a St. John’s ruling class merchant family, sent a confidential memorandum to Vincent Burke, Director of Adult Education, and sent copies to all others who might be interested, including O’Neill that, in short, the government could never support the publishing of the document because, he felt, that the document took the worst conditions of poverty, ignorance, and isolation and represented them as typical. In his letter to Burke, Winter wrote that O’Neill made “damaging statements about this country, it’s [sic] people, and some of it’s[sic] institutions.” In closing, Winter wrote that he had extracted “some statements to which I take the strongest exception and attach them hereto.” (See Appendix 2). Several of the excerpts
from O’Neill’s thesis do indeed dwell on the poverty and isolation that she observed as a teacher. Many of the other examples Winter used, however, were about the churches and their control over education. He objected to O’Neill’s observation: “All through the history of the Island both politics and education have been deeply influenced by the three leading denominations.” He also objected to her statement: “It seems to me, as I recall stories told of the olden days, that religious leaders were sometimes a little vague as to their objectives.” As to O’Neill’s opinions about the merchants, Winter objected to sentences from her thesis such as: “Thus the merchant was assured of fish for exportation, and to protect himself against bad debts he charged exorbitant prices for his goods and gave the lowest possible price for fish. This went on until practically every man in the village was under the merchant’s thumb.” Winter’s objections to O’Neill’s statements even included her attempt to clarify the extent to which she travelled the country observing conditions. He singled out her explanation that her observations were a “brief summary of conditions found when visiting 27 settlements in a particularly depressed area” as proof that she was exaggerating. O’Neill had explained that “while this was not typical of the whole of Newfoundland yet I know it was typical of many other sections of the country.” She raised Winter’s ire, it seems, by ending her explanation of the limits of her observations with “this picture of local conditions explains the collapse of the economic system of the country.” Winter warned Burke in his memo that “as Dr. O’Neill is Assistant Director of Adult Education she should not have a document of this kind published without the consent of her Commissioner.” From Winter’s strong memo, it was fairly clear that no such consent would be forthcoming.
from that particular Commissioner. Perhaps if Winter had been British rather than a
Newfoundlander, and/or he had not been a member of a long-standing Anglican
merchant family, O’Neill’s thesis would have seen publication. As it was, she was told
that “apart from the question of publication at this time I may poing [sic] out that the
position is already serious in that this document, which was written for a foreign
university and is persuably [sic] on file there, describes conditions in Newfoundland as
seen by a Field Worker employed by the Newfoundland Government who was at the time
of writing the document, on leave from this Department.” From his tone, Winter seems
to have contemplated some sort of censure of O’Neill, or worse, such as demanding her
resignation. He did neither; but, it is easy to imagine the shock O’Neill felt from
Winter’s response to her work. She had been praised highly at Columbia and her initial
entry into the Department of Adult Education seemed to point to a successful
introduction of her “Plan.” Winter’s reaction and obvious disdain for her work as well as
his caustic remarks would have caused O’Neill great personal distress and may have also
changed relationships between O’Neill and others in the department with whom she
worked.

Events notwithstanding, the year, for O’Neill, was not completely disappointing.
Before the incident over her “Plan,” O’Neill managed to have the role of the adult
education teacher re-conceptualized. In April, 1945, communication between the
Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education (Winter, again) and the Commissioner
for Finance, Ira Wild, showed a shift in the thinking about what was the role of an adult
education “worker,” from civil servant to teacher. It would have been O’Neill’s wish to
see this change made because it meant that a higher standard could be applied to those who would be hired. Once the Field Workers were regarded as teachers, the Department could expect certain qualifications be met. From the memo between Wild and Winter, it appears that the qualification being sought was that of a “U. Grade” which meant that the Field Worker had to possess some university training. Other changes occurred as well with this shift in policy. Adult Education workers would be allowed to have a longer holiday during the summer than a civil servant would be granted, but, it seems, they lost ground in so far as incremental increases over time to their salaries which were reduced and the maximum pay for women was also reduced.35

Another important accomplishment for O’Neill, during the summer of 1945, was her organization of a two week summer school training session for adult education field workers. The summer school took place in St. John’s at the Memorial University College. O’Neill secured the help of Per Stensland, a Columbia University Professor at the time, as well as Mrs. Duffy, a Home Economist from the University of Wisconsin. Both contacts, no doubt, were made while O’Neill was a student at Columbia. O’Neill had returned to Newfoundland with the idea that the training of field workers was the most important first step in the creation of a community development type of adult education program. Also, since 1930 and the training of the first women who became Opportunity School workers, training sessions in August for adult education workers had been more or less regular. The training session in August of 1945 differed from the earlier ones in ambition. The 1945 session included “experts” to facilitate sessions about modern methods of teaching and facilitating community cooperation.
Stensland, in two articles (one written for the *Atlantic Guardian* and the other written for *Food For Thought*) wrote that Newfoundland seemed to be taking "dramatic steps toward a community development approach." During the summer training session twenty adult education field workers were trained so that they could go out to the most isolated areas of the country prepared to help people to learn how to raise their standard of living. According to Stensland, one important tenet of the steps being taken by adult educators in Newfoundland was that they understood "in the final analysis it will be the people in the outports who will shape the program." Stensland described the levels of cooperation that had taken place at the government level. He wrote that representatives of "various parts of the Government (health, agriculture, co-operatives, libraries, film bureau, school and church authorities of all denominations) all looked with more than benevolent grace upon the plans." Included in the training course seemed to be most of those courses O'Neill had outlined in her thesis as necessary for the training of new adult education workers. Stensland reported that the "Foundations of Adult Education, Sociology of the Community, Discussion Techniques, Agricultural Extension, Adult Psychology" as well as "some practical aspects of agriculture, health, co-operatives, recreation and nutrition" were all part of the training. Discussion about the aims, methods, instruments, and objectives of adult education seemed to have been the foundation through which specific courses were investigated. During the period of training, those involved "agreed that if a society was built on the principle of democracy, adult education could never be neutral toward that principle" and they decided that through the organization of a "community council," that principle of democracy would
be kept alive and well. In addition to receiving training and having discussion around aims and methods of adult education, the new field workers were involved in the process of building the new adult education program. They were asked to “concentrate their efforts” on envisioning the organization of the adult education program. The program that the Department of Adult Education had been offering consisted of instruction offered to men in the lumber camps, instruction offered to individuals in the general hospital and sanatorium, and the two-month travelling itinerant teacher program. The group decided to continue the programs offered to those in the camps and at the hospitals, but decided to abandon the travelling itinerant teacher service in favour of the creation of evening schools in urban centres that offered a more formal type of education. They also developed an outline for a rural community education project to be implemented in three regions of the island, each region would be given two permanent workers and they would be responsible for helping communities within their region to develop. According to Stensland, “the ultimate aim for the projects is a revitalization of existing groups in the communities, a closer co-ordination of the efforts under way, and practical projects in the field of housing, public health, agriculture and recreation.”

Stensland’s articles described methods and a philosophy that echoed O’Neill’s “Plan.” She must have enjoyed seeing the initial stages of planning and implementation of that plan come to life. Stensland’s only reference to O’Neill, however, was that “as one of Dr. Burke’s workers, Florence O’Neill set out for the United States to get a professional degree in education and came back with new ideas, and with a draft for an
actual plan." Stensland's second article for the Atlantic Guardian, reiterated much of the sentiment of the first article, stressing that O'Neill's "Plan" embraced the idea that the community needed to find its own solutions.

According to Stensland, the summer training program had achieved all that could be hoped for in so far as it injected the twenty trainees with enthusiasm and purpose. He wrote that "some weeks ago I had a letter from Burin, Newfoundland" and that this letter confirmed for him that the plans made during the summer training program had resulted in transformational change to those involved in adult education. In Burin, two of the newly trained workers "found a vacant house for an office" that with some "scrubbing, painting and repairing was made usable." They then found a "long discarded table" that with paint, a new "canvas" for a top was made into a desk and two "garden chairs the clergyman was about to turn into kindling, made a shelf to put pamphlets on, nailed a chart about communicable diseases to the wall—and our office was ready." The two Burin workers had wholeheartedly moved into the community, established contacts, showed by example that they were prepared to roll up their sleeves and show what was necessary to create change. Stensland applauded their efforts in his article and seemed to believe that it was a sign that the new approach to adult education in Newfoundland would be successful.

At least one of the new adult education field workers who attended the training session and received, at the end of the session, O’Neill’s guidelines was not impressed by what she perceived as a program that was not ‘made in Newfoundland’ but was borrowed from another place. Grace Layman recalled in her book: That Part of My Life,
that in 1945 she became an adult teacher at the request of Florence O’Neill who, Layman wrote, approached her as “a potential Adult Education teacher, suggesting that I was exactly the type of person the program needed.” Layman participated in the training session that Stensland had written about in his article. She explained that she and twenty other people “embarked on a month’s orientation course given by a professor from New York,” to learn a program borrowed from Wisconsin. Layman called the training session “the Wisconsin Program” of adult education. It may be that she was convinced of its being a program borrowed from Wisconsin because Mrs. Duffy, from the University of Wisconsin, played an important role in training the new field workers about methods for home food preservation and other similar topics. So convinced was Layman that she was being forced to promote some foreign program that she became rebellious against the program. She wrote that after the training session she was “sent out, in September 1945, to the Codroy Valley, in the southwest of the island, to set up an Education Program” that included group discussions, library services, and office interviews, and that she was supposed to report these activities back to O’Neill’s office on weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports. Layman believed that what the community seemed to want were night school classes in reading and writing and that, in the end, is what she succeeded in providing. She also, eventually, came to know the community well enough to realize that there were loggers who needed “calculating skills” and a woolen mill owner who “wanted to work out the area of his cylinders on which raw wool was wound and carded.” Layman worked with these people and others and professed to have derived “immense satisfaction” from her work. However, she never managed to submit any
reports to the Head Office in St. John's. Layman's impression was that: "I could not
honestly say that I was setting up the Wisconsin Program, so as the time for each report
form passed and none arrived from me, Dr. O'Neill became increasingly irritated."
Rather than write a description about the work she was doing, Layman finally responded
on one of the designated forms:

Office calls: none... no office

Telephone calls: none... no telephone

Discussion groups: . . . What would we discuss?

Library services . . . . . . no library!

Layman's response caused O'Neill to come for a personal visit:

She came by train, in a mid-winter snowstorm to Doyles in the valley centre.

From there she came to Codroy by horse and sleigh. As Dr. O'Neill got closer to
Codroy she started advertising and promoting the Wisconsin Program, at the same
time trying to estimate to what extent I was teaching it.

According to Layman, O'Neill was adamant that a certain type of adult education be
promoted in the community that did not limit itself to night school classes. Layman
believed, however, that she was giving people what they truly wanted. Layman described
her meeting with O'Neill as a "confrontation." She wrote that at the time of her arrival
the community was meeting to discuss the possibility of setting up a library. O'Neill was
brought to that meeting where "influential people in the community insisted" that they
were getting the program they wanted and that they did not want the "elaborate
Wisconsin plan." After that incident, Layman finished her year with adult education and
then returned to teaching children in elementary school.

Layman seemed to have understood from her training and subsequent interaction with O’Neill that the adult education program was all form and no content. In other words, that O’Neill was more interested in figures and numbers and reports than she was interested in whether communities received what they perceived they needed. From Layman’s reaction to her experience as an adult educator, it is apparent that she believed that O’Neill was concerned about implementing a particular program to an extent that it worked against the ordinary needs of people. This incident is important in another respect as well. O’Neill had outlined an intricate hiring process and had forcefully articulated the need for suitable and qualified staff who would be chosen through a committee. Yet, Layman wrote that O’Neill had approached her because she, O’Neill, thought Layman perfect for the work. O’Neill’s own hiring policy seems to have been ignored in this instance, and may have not ever been implemented in the careful way that O’Neill had originally conceived of it working. Some of the reason for the hiring process to have become one of the first casualties of the program may have been the ceaseless need for new teachers.

The turnover of teachers, such as the vacancy left by Grace Layman, fuelled a need for continuous training of new as well as seasoned adult teachers. After 1945, it appears that summer training programs became a yearly August event. While there is no primary evidence of the training session for 1946, it was mentioned in letters between O’Neill, Carol Stensland (Per’s wife) and C.W. Carter, the new Director of Adult Education, while they were in the midst of planning a third session for August of 1947.
Letters between Carol Stensland, O’Neill and Carter during July 1947 focused on the upcoming ‘summer school’ for adult educators. Carol Stensland told Carter that it would have been ideal to have had the ‘students’ for a longer period of training: “One month training is not too long for anyone, even the old staff. They could all use that much time to good advantage, and it would be much easier to plan for them if you knew you could have them all for that long.” Instead, the length of the program was two weeks. It may have been limited because of cost, or limited resources, or people’s schedules. According to O’Neill’s letter to Carter, the new adult education workers had been enrolled in a course at the “Handicraft Centre” for the full month of July which suggests that O’Neill had found other means to prepare the new workers outside of the formal training program.

Carol Stensland also seemed to believe that an improvement to the previous year would have been to have materials written by Newfoundlanders for Newfoundlanders. She wrote to Carter, “Your people know so much more about the needs, level, and interests of parts of the country than do some of the people who are producing the content material.” Stensland believed it would improve reception of the information if Newfoundlanders wrote the pamphlets. She ended by requesting, “couldn’t you round up some people responsible for writing the pamphlets in health, fisheries, agriculture, etc.?”

While Carter’s response to Stensland was not among department records, his correspondence with Frecker did contain his responses to Frecker about other aspects of planning for the summer training program, most notably his complaint that O’Neill had not been fulfilling her responsibility to keep everyone informed about the plans for the
training program. Carter, who had left Newfoundland for a vacation a month prior to the "summer school," complained to Frecker from New York "It was understood that Dr. O’Neill would write to Mrs. Stensland."47 He maintained that "Mrs. Stensland had not been able to make definite arrangements for a four weeks stay in Newfoundland" and that if "Florence [had] followed up with her letter of course this complication would have been avoided." Carter continued that "I would have written myself, had she not definitely undertaken to do so." Later in his letter he again complained that "I am a little bit afraid sometimes that Florence is inclined to think that we have to work Mrs. Stensland 6 hours a day - 6 days a week in order to get the worth of our money out of her, and Mrs. Stensland also sensed this feeling -- obviously she needs some free periods for her own recreation. Last year she worked all day like a Trojan and spent most evenings preparing the work for the next day." According to the Summer School timetable that seems to have been approved and used for 1947, Stensland was responsible for teaching either new or returning workers from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and again from 2:00 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. six days a week for the two weeks of the summer school. Whether Mrs. Stensland objected to having such a rigorous schedule is not a matter of record.

As a counterpoint to Carter’s complaints about O’Neill’s timing regarding her organization of the summer school, Frecker points out in his response to Carter that O’Neill “is looking tired, and as you know, she has been under strain since joining our administrative staff.” He asked Carter (who was on his annual leave at the time), “what about Dr. O’Neill’s annual leave?”48 Whether Carter had cause for concern regarding O’Neill’s ability to organize the summer school for the second year is not apparent from
the records. He appears to have dealt with his concerns about the way that she organized her tasks by pointing out the problems he encountered to his supervisor rather than to O’Neill.

In addition to the summer training program for the adult education workers, O’Neill also saw two other objectives of her “Plan” accomplished during 1947. Early in the year, she and Carter met with divisional heads from agriculture, co-operatives, handicrafts, and fisheries in order to begin to develop a routine process for sharing information and resources. During the meeting participants explored ways in which adult and visual education could be of greater service to other divisions as well as ways in which other divisions could “assist adult education,” “create a greater efficiency of service” and “effect some cost reductions.” In March, an Act relating to Adult Education councils was drafted and the purpose was stated that such councils should “be made useful to as many departments and groups as possible.”

During 1947 it appears from memos between the Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education and G.A. Frecker as Secretary for Education that the number of students in adult education had outgrown the space originally provided for them in St. John’s. Frecker requested additional space in order to accommodate the 326 students enrolled in night classes and those on a waiting list. The two options appear to have been to hold the classes at the Memorial University College or to purchase the USO building from the Americans. The USO building, which was finally selected, occupied a site adjacent to the college.
As the program continued to grow and adapt to people’s needs, it began to show some wear and tear and problems began to emerge that idealism could not fix. Two of the most pressing problems became space and personnel problems. During 1948 the number of students wanting to enrol in adult education courses at the new Adult Education Centre (the USO building) continued to grow. Even with the additional space gained by occupying the building that had previously been the USO building, Carter and Frecker were having to negotiate with the President of Memorial University College and its Board of Governors for use of the College at night. Once use of that space was granted, there were immediately problems regarding adequate levels of heat in the building at night and adequate cleaning staff for the additional use of the building.

The issue of personnel problems emerged as two separate sorts of problems for Carter and Frecker. One aspect of the personnel problems, low salaries, continually frustrated efforts to recruit adult education teachers. Day school teachers as well as adult education teachers for the most part were still young, unmarried females who had completed high school, but had not completed the requisite two years of university to certify them at a higher salary level. Just as O’Neill had once done, they used teaching as a springboard to something else: either marriage or a different career. The result was a highly transient staff. Evidence of the problem began to appear in 1948 when memos were circulated regarding the budget and staff. In communication between Carter and the Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education, Carter wrote that budget estimates previously compiled were based “on the assumption that the existing staff would not be numerically reduced, and in addition it would be possible to recruit 7 additional
members” but he added that three people had recently resigned, which “has increased the
total vacancies to 10.”53 He did not think that it would be possible to recruit more than
six of the ten that were necessary. The inability to attract and keep workers imposed a
great barrier to the continued success of the “community development” arm of the new
program. The workers who left after a year or two tended to be those who worked in
rural areas, not those who were employed at the Adult Education Centre.

New problems emerged for O’Neill as Newfoundland’s workforce, burdened by
extremely low pay since the 1932 collapse of the economy, became more outspoken.
Adult education was wedded to Visual Education as a single department and the Visual
Education projectionists, usually male, were paid higher wages than the adult education
field workers, usually female. Projectionists were also reimbursed for transportation
costs between communities and adult education field workers were not. The problem had
grown large enough to come to the attention of the Commissioner for Home Affairs and
Education. In a memo between the Commissioner and Frecker, the Commissioner wrote
that he believed the problem of friction between the projectionists and the adult workers
arose “out of the fact that adult teachers have to pay their own expenses while in the field
whereas the projectionists have their expenses paid by the department.” This issue and
others around pay seemed fairly constant in the day to day work of the department.
Many of the memos regarding some issue of salary or reimbursement resulted in negative
responses which may have created tensions in the department between the administrators
and the adult education workers.54 Carter, as Director of Adult (and Visual) Education
took more of the responsibility for the projectionists while O’Neill focussed on adult
education. She received the complaints of the adult education staff and was not able to change the reimbursement policy so that both halves of the department could be equal.

In August 1948 the Department of Adult Education did not repeat its two week training session for new and experienced adult workers that it had held the previous two years. Instead, a slightly different approach was taken to training. Carter and O’Neill planned to hold a “staff conference” in St. John’s during August and then “conduct two regional training courses for local leaders, one at Bonavista and one at Burin,” two regions with large populations. There were again problems because of a difficulty in finding and retaining staff. Carter informed G.A. Frecker about the change in plan and added that: “we have had considerable difficulty in finding an instructor to take care of the sewing course which forms the main part of the programme.” It appears that O’Neill had planned to teach sewing as well as other parts of the course but she could not travel between Burin and Bonavista quickly enough to be in both places. In the end it was necessary to go outside of all of the usual groups that adult education collaborated with to find someone to teach but they had to pay her more than they had anticipated having to pay.

By the end of August, O’Neill apparently began to feel that she too deserved more pay. In a response to her request for the department to review her pay and to give her a raise, she received a memo from Frecker informing her that: “I realize as you know, that you have had very valuable experience in the field of Adult Education in Newfoundland and that your university qualifications are of a high order. Unfortunately, your salary is determined by the post you fill, namely that of Assistant Director in a division of a
Government Department. Until the post of Assistant Director is revised upward there is nothing I can do.” O’Neill, thwarted in her request for recognition of her own hard work by Frecker’s refusal to support her request for a pay increase, continued to work toward bringing change about in whatever ways she could.

From 1944 to 1949, O’Neill had worked in Carter’s shadow. Departmental records seldom document specific work that O’Neill accomplished. In order to find O’Neill’s influence on policy decisions, it is necessary to look for the phrases used in documents, such as the Field Worker’s Manual, or imagine the work she put into developing and organizing the summer training sessions that were entirely her responsibility. O’Neill’s behind the scenes activities were noticed, however, by at least one member of the public who, in March, 1949, wrote to The Daily News under the name “Fair Play” about an annual report of the Department of Education and in particular about the section that covered adult education. The writer observed that s/he “could not help but observe the absence of any mention of the efforts made by the present Assistant Director of Adult Education. I refer to Dr. Florence M. O’Neill, B.A., M.A., Ed.D.” The writer then outlined O’Neill’s career, her education, and recalled the address she had delivered to the Rotary Club, and the work she had done to establish the growth of the adult education program since she had returned from Columbia. The writer concluded: “Surely it cannot be that the individual responsible for the writing of this particular section of the Education Report was ignorant of the facts; so it must be that he intentionally failed to give her the credit due her. I have been in a position to observe the work of the Assistant Director both as a Field Worker as well as organizer and know her
to have sincerely at heart the interests of the people of the country, regardless of class or creed."

O’Neill’s good work, while noticed by at least one casual observer, was not necessarily that part of her activity which was most noticed by those in the government. Between 1944 and 1949 O’Neill had accidentally caused at least some discomfort among those in the Commission of Government with her brutally frank appraisal of some of the social and economic structures obtaining in the country. For those who had supported her “Plan,” the government’s critique may have caused a reassessment of the wholehearted support originally enjoyed by O’Neill.

2. Ibid., 164.


6. Ibid., 58.


10. From adult educators such as Muriel Brown, O’Neill would have learned about the “organization of groups of families for social action” and about discovering the leadership potential within those groups: Muriel Brown, “Education for Family Living” in *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States*, Mary L. Ely, ed. (New York: Teachers College, Columbia Univ., 1948), 81-95. Also see Wilbur C. Hallenbeck, *Community Life in a Democracy* (Chicago: Illinois Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1942).


of a Director and "under him there is often an assistant director, and always there are two state leaders, one for the county agricultural field workers, called agents, and another for the home demonstration agents."


14. Ibid., 68.

15. Ibid., 65.

16. Ibid., 66.


19. Ibid., 71-73.

20. Ibid., 78.


24. Ibid., 4. Winter addresses the problem of the government's need to bear the cost of boarding each child at the regional school because, he surmises, parents would not be able to afford the cost. He also allows for the building of 4 regional high schools in each area in order to satisfy the 4 major religious denominations.

26. Field Workers Manual, Division of Adult and Visual Education, Department of Education, Newfoundland Commission of Government, “A Tentative Plan for Application and Development of Adult Education Programmes.” 1946. [Courage, J. file, Centre for Newfoundland Studies] The above titled document was found in the John R. Courage personal papers collection, but a complete Field Workers Manual was not a part of the collection and could not be found through any other source.

27. Ibid., 5.

28. Ibid., 5.


30. Ibid.


33. Hearsay evidence of deeper reasons for Winter’s negative opinion of O’Neill came from conversations the researcher had with people familiar with O’Neill’s family ties to Peter Cashin. Cashin had been the Minister of Finance in 1932 before the government of Newfoundland officially became bankrupt and he continued in politics as a spokesperson in opposition to confederation with Canada, an issue that also formed along the Catholic-Protestant divide. Cashin was O’Neill’s cousin and it is rumoured that she wrote some of his speeches. Cashin and Winter, an Anglican, were on opposites sides of the debate over confederation to such an extent that by 1946 Winter had taken out a libel suit against Cashin because Cashin had made a statement during the National Convention on the issue of confederation that the Commission of Government had been instituted through “bribery and corruption” meaning that those who served as Commissioners had been promised comfortable lives if they supported its imposition on the nation. Cashin made his speech in the National Convention prior to Canada’s joining confederation and the libel suit was in the making at about the same time as Winter’s opinion of O’Neill’s


35. Ibid.


37. Mrs. Duffy is not identified in the articles as to her specific role in the training session in St. John’s, but it is possible that she was someone O’Neill met when she visited the women’s groups connected to agricultural extension in Wisconsin in 1943.


40. Ibid., 7 & 47-48.

41. According to an article in the government’s publication, the Newfoundland Government Bulletin, August 1947, “Summer School for Adult Workers,” “the leaders of the adult education movement decided two years ago that two months was not long enough for a worker to spend in a community. They also decided that effective work could be done by placing workers in areas where they could reach larger population numbers of people, such as Burin and Bonavista.”:3.

42. Ibid., 48-49.


44. Ibid., 12.

45. Grace Layman, That Part of My Life (St. John’s: Harry Cuff Pub., 1994), 60. Layman’s book is a retrospective of her youth and adult life, especially her experiences teaching in various parts of Newfoundland. A mere 3 pages is devoted to her brief experience as an adult education teacher.

46. Letters and telegrams from C.W. Carter, written from Mackinac Island, Michigan. U.S.A while on vacation, to G.A. Frecker, St. John’s, requesting a timetable for the “summer school” (telegram)14 July 1947; from Carol Stensland, New York, to C.W. Carter (while he is in Manilius, New York) 16 July 1947, from Florence O’Neill, St.


52. Phillip McCann, Schooling in a Fishing Society (St. John’s: ISER, MUN: 1994), 199-201. McCann discusses the increase in teacher’s salaries from a very low average salary of $394 per year in 1936, to $1,015 in 1946, but he points out that this was still an inadequate salary and that more teachers made less than this figure than made more than it because the majority of teachers had not completed enough schooling to certify them at the higher salary levels.


54. Several memos between Carter and Frecker regarding the wages of K. Anderson, memo #47a & 55, travelling expenses of the field workers, memo #32, request for a cost of living bonus from Gladys Parsons, memo 50a & 59, Jessie Mifflin, salary and salary scales, memo #40-43 in PANL, file #7/02, Vol II, August 5, 1948 to August 1, 1949.


On April 1, 1949, Newfoundland became a province of Canada. This milestone seemed to pass without notice in the Department of Adult Education. From the files it is impossible to detect the change of government. During the following months, one change can be noticed, however: people's titles and positions altered. G.A. Frecker's title changed from Secretary for Education to Deputy Minister of Education; C.W. Carter left education altogether to take a cabinet position in government; O'Neill applied to become Director of Adult Education.

In May, 1949, O'Neill officially applied for the position of Director of Adult and Visual Education. From the time that Carter left his position as Director of Adult Education (which was almost immediately following April 1) O'Neill became more visible in the department. Memoranda and letters began to be written to her and issued from her. It was not until August, however, that she was informed by Frecker that she had been appointed Director of Adult Education (Acting), with an annual salary of $3000, which was not an increase in her salary from what it was as Assistant Director. At the same time she was informed that "no appointment has been made for Visual Education so the Minister would like you to continue exercising general supervision over that branch of the Department in addition to your adult education work until otherwise advised." Since so much time had passed between O'Neill's original application letter and her appointment, it is probable that some discussion had taken place about the
wisdom of having combined departments of Adult and Visual Education. It may have been decided during the months when the government was preparing to become a province that discussions about organization and staffing took place.

Once Carter had vacated the position of Director, O’Neill did not wait to find out what kind of department the government was willing to support. She quickly produced two memos that outlined her objectives, and an organizational scheme for the 1949-1950 program.\(^4\) Since the organization for the department’s program and the staff responsibilities were all produced within a few months of her beginning leadership, it is probable that she had been working on the documents for several months. They may have come as a result of departmental discussions.

O’Neill’s two memos are interesting because she included details of her new organizational plan for the department that show some changes to her original thinking about how to achieve the objectives of her “Plan.” She changed her organizational scheme to fit more closely with the hierarchy of the Department of Education as it existed. In the original scheme (Appendix 3) she imagined a Coordinator (probably herself) and a group of administrators and specialists working together to achieve common goals which included helping the field workers to attain their objectives. In her 1949 scheme the Coordinator gave way to a Director and that person had three assistants, each charged with a specific part of the program (Appendix 4). Her past position, that of Assistant Director, did not appear on her chart or in her memo and seemed to be replaced by the three individuals who would fill specific positions: Field Supervisor, Rural Youth Club Organizer, and Materials and Publicity Agent.
The Field Supervisor's role would be chiefly to supervise the district workers. O'Neill described the ideal person as someone “mature. . . between the age of thirty-five or forty, adequately trained and experienced.” It seems as though she was searching for someone very much like herself to send out into the field to work with the district workers. O'Neill knew the constraints of having to be in St. John's, at headquarters, at all times. Her experience told her that to have any success, rural work needed staff who understood rural conditions. In order to ensure that the Field Supervisor would be in the field visiting staff, she specified “50% of the time she will be visiting regions where there are programs.”

A Rural Youth Club Organizer appeared as a new idea for O'Neill. The first mention of such a position occurred in this 1949 memo. She envisioned the need for such a position in order to encourage adults to become leaders. Through the Rural Youth Clubs adults had an opportunity to become leaders, and the youth had an opportunity to learn new skills. O'Neill envisioned the person who filled the position as someone who would “adapt the A.E. Programme of the community to the capabilities and interests of boys and girls.”

The third position that O'Neill created in her new organization of the program was the Materials and Publicity Agent. She apparently felt it important to have someone whose job it was to produce materials for the program. She wrote that “since we have not specialists in our staff who could produce such material and since we plan to work more closely with other field workers, e.g., Agriculture, materials supplied by these Divisions could be adapted to our needs by a trained person.” Adaptation was not her
only goal, however; O’Neill also wanted someone who could write materials, assist with publicity, and help with communications in general.

In O’Neill’s memo about the organization of the program during 1949-1950, she referred to the direction the program had drifted. She wrote that “the initial program was designed for rural areas. Circumstances made necessary the formation of an urban and a rural policy, hence the development of two specific programs.” She then outlined areas to which staff would be assigned for the year. In addition to staff assignments for the St. John’s adult education program, she also assigned staff to the communities of Buchans, Bonavista, Bonavista South, St. George’s Area, Channel-Port Aux Basques, Bay D’Espoir, Burin, Roddickton, and Eastport. This list shows that she remained committed to a strong “rural” component of the program because the communities she selected were small and fairly isolated. O’Neill seemed to believe she could find and keep adequate numbers of staff to expand the program. For each of these areas she included specific responsibilities for creating programs. For example, the worker scheduled to go to Bay D’Espoir was given the following list:

1. First two weeks spent with clubs at Milltown and head of Bay D’Espoir.

2. Proceed to St. Alban’s.
   (a) Night School Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights.
   (b) Tuesday and Thursday, Women’s Clubs at St. Alban’s.
   (c) Organize R.Y.C. at St. Alban’s.


4. Develop clubs in other settlements, operate Night School at Milltown, if
feasible.

5. From Easter to June, concentrate on club work.

6. Projects for clubs:

- sewing, home nursing, first aid, nutrition, bottling, gardening and weaving.

Explicit and detailed expectations such as these accompanied each of the Field Worker’s assignments. O’Neill may have believed that precise expectations would give the Field Workers a more tangible goal for their work. She hinted at such a belief in the memo’s closing paragraph when she wrote: “In order to enable new workers to get off to a good start, the way should be carefully paved and preliminary contacts made personally well in advance.”

O’Neill’s speedy move to give direction and purpose to the program for 1949-1950 may have been to quiet a possible threat to her “Plan.” Prior to his leaving the position of Director, C.W. Carter submitted an article to the Canadian adult education periodical *Food For Thought* and it was published in April, 1949. The article, printed as the first article from the “new” province, described the activities of the Department as far as its successes and failures in adult education. Carter, through the article, painted a fairly bleak picture of the accomplishments of adult education to that point. His opinion was that the experiment that had been unfolding since 1944 had not worked. It seems that this article, a kind of ‘parting shot’ at the adult education program, revealed a frustration that Carter felt about the direction that adult education was going. What would have been worrisome to O’Neill was that Carter was going into a much more
influential role in Premier Smallwood's cabinet. As a cabinet minister he would be able to influence the Premier and others on issues related to adult education. Carter's frustrations with the program seem to have grown out of his discomfort with O'Neill's style of leadership. While the only evidence of an unease between the two exists in the letters Carter wrote to Frecker complaining that O'Neill expected Carol Stensland to work too many hours and that O'Neill did not complete tasks within a time period that Carter felt acceptable, the fact that Carter wrote such letters to his and O'Neill's superior leads one to think that Carter was quite unhappy with O'Neill. As well, it cannot be ignored that Carter was a Major in the Salvation Army and O'Neill was not only a Catholic, but an outspoken single woman with an education. Carter may not have ever met anyone like her before.

Carter began his article by alluding to the article written by Stensland about the first workshops for training teachers during 1945 and 1946. He said of Stensland's article: "he has given a very graphic outline of that course of training, together with a good description of Newfoundland's general economy, and a fine analysis of the economic and sociological pattern of the average Newfoundland community." After that polite beginning about what Stensland had done well, he continued by recounting all of the reasons why Stensland's great optimism for Newfoundland's success with adult education were unfounded. In Carter's view, the entire attempt was "poorly timed" because there were many distractions for Newfoundlanders, some of which had to do with the Confederation issue, but others were entirely external to Newfoundland. For Carter, poor timing caused the project to fail entirely in some regions while other regions
survived. It is interesting to note that “failure” was not necessarily caused by a lack of interest in a community, rather it seems that it grew out of an inability to find enough staff and keep them as adult education workers. Carter wrote that “some twelve of the original twenty members of the field staff resigned” because they “realized their lack of aptitude for the work, which proved to be more difficult and exacting than they had anticipated.” The department’s response to its difficulty in attracting and retaining workers was to retrench. Carter wrote that they began to look at the “problem of adult education from a different angle.” They decided that it would be better to focus on the few areas of the island where more than 50% of the population lived, rather than attempt to service every area and every outport. In these larger areas, he argued, “the worker could find better living and working conditions, where there are greater resources both human and material upon which to draw, and where there are opportunities for the program to achieve some measure of self support.” With this rationale in mind, the department concentrated its efforts on maintaining its adult education centres in St. John’s and Buchans (where a mining corporation, which owned the town, also financially contributed to the adult education program there) and in two rural areas: Burin and Bonavista. This shift in the departmental focus from development to the maintenance of Adult Education Centres was a huge departure from O’Neill’s original intention to put an adult education worker within reach of nearly every community on the island. Carter contended that one of the discoveries made during the years between 1945 and 1949 was that there was a need “for greater stress on the development of good followers as well as good leaders.” “This means, he continued, “greater emphasis on the importance of every
individual so that each may develop to the maximum.” He further argued that overemphasizing the “importance of a few potential leaders often defeats its own ends in that it encourages in the others the attitude of ‘Let George do it.’” One of the results of reorganizing the program according to what, in Carter’s opinion, was a more productive strategy was that the philosophy of adult education would have also shifted away from community development in favour of the encouragement of individual fulfilment or achievement in courses and on examinations. If Carter had remained Director, and had been fully in control of the direction of the program, he would have returned the aim and purpose of it to its pre-1945 emphasis on students’ ability to pass examinations at the end of their term of study.  

As O’Neill took hold of the reins of adult education, she had to quickly and firmly steer the program back toward community development. Carter had been taken into the government as a cabinet minister and his opinions could have stopped O’Neill’s progress. Rather than allow him to have an opportunity to erode her program, her memos show that she re-expanded the rural component of the program from the two rural areas that he had allowed (Bonavista and Burin) back to nine, some of which were very small and remote, such as St. Albans in Bay D’Espoir, and Roddickton on the Northern Peninsula. 

In April 1949, O’Neill was allowed to travel to a conference in Ohio to find out more about the teaching of ‘household science.” While she had been Assistant Director, on Frecker’s approval she had nearly been allowed to attend conferences, but the final answer from Winter, the Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education, to Frecker’s or
O’Neill’s request for her to travel had been negative because there was not sufficient
funding. Frecker, now Deputy Minister of Education within the Province of
Newfoundland, had only to get the Minister’s approval and that was an easier task. On
her return to Newfoundland from the Ohio conference, she stopped at New York to go to
the Carnegie Corporation to see if they would be interested in again assisting
Newfoundland in its continuing development of adult education programs. To this end
she had an “unofficial” discussion with Stephen Stackpole, then the Assistant Director of
the corporation in 1949. O’Neill was unaware that the Carnegie Corporation had
virtually halted its contributions to the development of adult education programs. She
seemed to believe that since they had supported her as a student at Columbia they would
be interested in supporting her efforts to develop her program.

Within a few months of O’Neill’s strong start as Director of Adult Education, she
seemed to have begun to irritate G.A. Frecker. Frecker sent a memo to O’Neill in
October to inform her about certain protocol behaviours that O’Neill had botched. Frecker told her that “in order to avoid any friction or misunderstanding I think I should
make certain observations” concerning the direction and timing of some memos that
O’Neill had written. His first “observation” was that a memo that O’Neill had sent to the
Deputy Minister (Acting) had stated that she intended to be away, visiting a rural
program. He told her that “it would have been more appropriate had you worded your
memorandum so that it indicated that you were proposing to leave Headquarters, to the
approval of the Deputy Minister (Acting).” His second “observation” concerned
O’Neill’s inappropriate routing of a memo. He told her that:
your memorandum concerning the appointment of part-time teachers is addressed to the Minister. It should have been addressed to the Deputy Minister (Acting). It was up to him then to get the Minister’s approval or not. The normal procedure in all Government Departments is for Heads of Divisions to address their communications to the permanent Head of the Department.”

His third “observation” was similar to the previous one in that she had not properly routed her report on her trip to one of the regions. At the end of his memo Frecker assured O’Neill that “I am not bringing these points to your attention in the nature of carping criticisms or to distress you in any way. However, I feel that bringing them to your attention now will avoid unnecessary possible misunderstandings in the future.”

And while it was important for Frecker to work out the details of the ‘chain of command’ with his new Director, he chose what seems to be an odd way to address the problems given the fact that Frecker and O’Neill knew each other well enough for her to have addressed him as “Alain” in personal correspondence written while at Columbia, and he to address her as “Florrie.” Frecker chose to write a formal memorandum that remained on file in government records rather than merely take her aside and give some friendly advice. In addition, his worry that his memo would be taken by her as a “carping criticism” and that it would “distress” her reflects a personal rather than professional relationship.13

In 1950 O’Neill again enjoyed outstanding successes as well as continuing problems. We can observe her successes because there were outside reports about what was happening in Newfoundland from an adult education community that was eager to
know what activities there were in Newfoundland. During 1950, Newfoundland was included in small news items in *Food For Thought.*\textsuperscript{14} Because it was the newest province, there seemed a great deal of interest in the activities of adult education and the kind of program offered. The reports also assured those in the rest of Canada that Newfoundland was also actively involved in the betterment of its society in ways that seemed familiar to mainlanders. *Food For Thought* reported on the annual training session for new adult education teachers in August and informed readers that Premier Smallwood gave the opening address and that Charles Topshee of Nova Scotia, Jessie Mennie of the National Film Board and Floyd Griesbach of the National Farm Forum “assisted” in the training. The annual workshop to train new teachers was an all Canadian event in 1950 with all of the presenters having prominence in the Canadian adult education landscape. O’Neill had again been “responsible for [the] program and arrangements.”\textsuperscript{15}

Newfoundland’s involvement in the Canadian Citizens’ Forum began in 1950 as well. O’Neill travelled to Toronto to attend the Citizens’ Forum annual meeting. The *Food For Thought* writer informed readers that “it was the first Citizens’ Forum Conference for Newfoundland, and everyone was glad to meet Dr. Florence O’Neill,” whose “enthusiasm for Citizens’ Forum is cheering—and it’s contagious.”\textsuperscript{16} O’Neill reported to the group that in Newfoundland there were five registered and reporting groups participating, even though Citizens’ Forum had not been introduced until about five months earlier. O’Neill also planned to introduce another type of Forum, the Farm Radio Forum, to Newfoundland and it was with that intent that she had invited Floyd
Griesbach to the province during the August training session. From reports in *Food For Thought*, O'Neill appeared to have enjoyed continual success and to have been the Director over an ever expanding and growing department. In fact, even the Carnegie Corporation was again providing grant money for new programs. Newfoundland received $14,000 from Carnegie for a two-year project that would bring "new films, radio programs and specially prepared booklets" for use in classes and study groups that deal with "nutrition, home nursing, fishing, gardening and marketing." The money came to Newfoundland through the Canadian Association for Adult Education which would then be the supervisory and advisory body to which Dr. Frecker would have to report.

Although the activities of the department seemed bright and promising, inter-office activities continued along a more challenging path. Beginning in January of 1950 there was clearly a problem between Frecker and O'Neill over the still unresolved dual role O'Neill was expected to fill as Director of Adult Education as well as Audio-Visual Education. Carter, as Director, had been head of both units, but O'Neill had expanded the adult education duties tremendously. As well, she did not have an assistant to whom she could hand some responsibility. By January, 1950, that extra responsibility had been hers for one and a half years. In a letter from Frecker to O'Neill in January, he appears to have been incensed by O'Neill's handling of a matter relating to the issuance of equipment. Frecker's tone is angry and personal. He wrote "I believe you have misunderstood the purpose of my memorandum and instead have explained rather acridly your displeasure..." and later he wrote: "I think it is a great pity that you should get so
annoyed about a matter like this. I am inclined to think that it would be better all around to free you from petty annoyances connected with the running of the Division of Visual Education and merely ask you to keep a friendly eye on things on your floor leaving the general administration of Visual Education to me. It does not help me to have personality clashes to solve.”

The irony is that his solution (to absolve her of the responsibility of that department) merely returned him to his original promise in 1949 that her extra responsibilities to that department would be temporary. In the end, however, he did not relieve her of any of the responsibility toward that department. In his memo to the staff he wrote that “The Director of Adult Education has reported to me that certain members of the staff in the Division of Audio-Visual Education have questioned her authority in matters affecting the administration of that Division.” He then clarified the line of authority: “pending the appointment of an Audio-Visual Education Officer, the Director of Adult Education is the superior officer.”

In addition to the problems she encountered with staff from other units, O’Neill had also to contend with her own staffing problems. In March 1950 she asked Frecker for permission to advertise on the ‘mainland’ in order to cope with requests for workers from an increasing number of communities. At the same time, she told Frecker that it was necessary to increase the salary scale for adult education workers in order to attract people from the mainland to Newfoundland for adult education work. Frecker was not able to do anything about the salary scale and O’Neill’s written response was “Don’t see any point advertising on mainland under existing scale.” O’Neill was not a skilled negotiator and was not able to work out compromises in situations, like this one, that
demanded them.

Denominationalism, although not officially affecting adult education, was always a consideration. Apparently, keeping a denominational balance that reflected the general population was a part of government policy. In a list of twelve adult education workers for 1949-1950, O'Neill had columns for name, district, date employed, and terminated. Handwritten next to their names she indicated the denominational persuasion of each person. The list showed that hiring was practiced along denominational lines: five were Roman Catholic, five were Church of England, and two were United Church. This approximated the percentage of each group in the general population in Newfoundland. There were no Salvation Army or Pentecostal teachers because those religious denominations had almost no representatives in St. John's. In the margins of this list which O'Neill produced for Frecker, and Frecker then shared with Hefferton the Minister of Education, there is handwritten commentary concerning the religious denomination of a new adult education teacher whom O'Neill wanted to hire, but who was Catholic and would tip the balance too heavily in numbers of Catholics employed. Frecker's comment: "It seems that the denominational balance is extremely difficult to maintain. No doubt the fact that the population of St. John's is approximately sixty percent of one persuasion accounts in part for this. No other teacher has applied for the post for which Mrs. Murphy is now recommended" showed the multiple kinds of difficulties the department had when attending to the issue of staffing. Meanwhile, O'Neill dealt with the denominational problem in her own way. She assigned staff to communities where the residents were not of the teacher's "persuasion." O'Neill's careful placement of each of
these teachers was to a community where they would be almost certain to see no one else of their particular religious background. O’Neill’s belief that adult education had to do with broadening one’s experience had led her to go to communities where she would learn about the beliefs and customs and religious ‘culture’ of others, and she seemed to have intended that those who now worked for her would have the same, rich, experience, whether they wanted it or not.

During the summer of 1950 O’Neill again broke all rules of protocol in an attempt to get the attention of both S.J. Hefferton, the Minister of Education, and J.R. Smallwood, the premier. She sent a document entitled “Looking to the Future in Adult Education” to both men wherein she emphasized a need to streamline the services offered to adults so that various agencies supported by government would cease to be duplicating efforts in the rural areas.24 “As I see it,” she wrote, “we have a number of vertical [and here she pencilled in a change to “parallel”] agencies with neither time nor staff to perform their educational functions adequately.” She seemed particularly troubled by the fact that the Jubilee Guilds were looking forward to expansion while the Adult Education division had never been given a budget that would allow for it to fill in missing staff positions in the area of Field Supervisor or Resources expert. She pointed to problems arising from having Jubilee Guild’s field workers working in communities supporting and encouraging skills in areas of arts and crafts when these workers were unskilled in methods used to stimulate community involvement, or to promote overall development of a community. Her suggestion to improve matters was to have a nutritionist from the Department of Health, the Director of Health Education in the
Department of Health, and the organizing secretary in the Jubilee Guilds attached to “the Division of Adult Education as specialists.” She reasoned that this arrangement would help to limit a duplication of services. O’Neill also again argued for more resources, the need for an adult education council to oversee the general distribution of services to rural areas and more workshops so that all civil servants in various departments could become aware of the work of those in neighbouring departments.

O’Neill’s appeal drew criticism from Frecker because she again went around him to try to find an audience for her ideas. Her covering memo read: “Here are a few ideas and suggestions for what they are worth, prompted by existing circumstances and impending expansion of Jubilee Guilds.” The memo came back to her with a handwritten note from Frecker stating: “It would have been more correct procedure if you passed this memo to the Deputy or Acting Deputy for action instead of going directly to the Premier and Minister.” O’Neill replied to his comment with her own handwritten note: “Am afraid Acting Deputy would have been too busy to have been concerned.” Frecker again replied with: “My thought and suggestion was that you should, as Director, have informal interviews with specialists and directors of various services to see if they would support such a proposal in the event of one being brought to the attention of the Department by you and to the government by the department.”

O’Neill produced another draft of her document on August 31, 1950, which suggests that she may have conducted some of those interviews. This next document sported a new title, “The Future of Adult Education in Newfoundland,” and contained more facts about numbers of people in the adult population and numbers of illiterate
people. It also contained, in point form, suggestions for additional staff, an outline for an agenda of a “Joint Planning Committee” meeting, and a suggestion for the formation of a new Newfoundland Adult Education Association. In her last paragraph she added, “Prime Minister [she meant Premier Smallwood] at the opening meeting of our Conference made it clear that he had undefined plans for the development of a University Extension - “School of Revolution.” She then suggested that the government invite Edmund deS. Brunner of Columbia University to Newfoundland to assess the needs and possibilities for a University Extension because, she reasoned, he had “written many textbooks, and most recently a book on Extension Services of Rural America.”

Frecker, for his part, brought the Minister of Education’s attention to O’Neill’s document. At that time his comment to the Minister was: “I would suggest that you re-read Dr. O’Neill[‘s] memo on p. 88 ‘Looking to the Future in Adult Education.’ This memo should be read along with the one on p.29 in Vol. IV (A.E. File).” The file he directed the Minister toward included a memo from himself that had argued in favour of O’Neill’s recommendations and proposals. Frecker wrote that the “time [had] come” for the government to act in so far as its commitments to the education of the adults in Newfoundland. He told the Minister that “I would say that adult education is just as fundamental in its own way as child education” and strongly advised that “Dr. O’Neill’s memorandum be brought to the attention of Cabinet, and that the Government arrive at some decision as to whether it wants the development of a programme of adult education along the lines suggested by the Director.” Frecker, in addition to requesting a final decision about the government’s stand on adult education, also requested a review of
O’Neill’s salary. He wrote: “the Director has suggested a revision of her own salary scale,” and he added, “I must confess that her request seems reasonable. He reminded the Minister that the Director of Co-operatives salary was in the $4500 to $5500 range and that O’Neill’s professional qualifications were at least as good as his. O’Neill at this time was still working under the salary range she had been assigned when hired as Director which reached a top salary of $3500. In all, Frecker’s memo was the type of ultimatum that pushed the Minister to make a decision. Frecker, it seemed, expected that it was a good time to force the issue about the government’s plans regarding adult education.

By February, 1951, the Minister of Education had acted. In a memorandum to the “Executive Council of Provincial Government,” Hefferton attached O’Neill’s outline for the “Future” which included the formation of a coordinating committee. He also recommended the “setting-up” of a “Readability Laboratory” which, he explained, would be used to “re-write certain Government publications, intended for mass consumption, on the level of reading ability of the average citizen. His memo also included a request for increased staff, one of whom would actually be made possible through funding from the Carnegie Corporation that had been secured months earlier. It is in this memo from the Minister that the purpose of the most recent Carnegie funding was made clear. Hefferton informed the Executive Council that “the Carnegie Corporation has appropriated to the Canadian Association for Adult Education the sum of $14,500, payable in two annual instalments of $7,250” and that this money would be used to pay the salary of a highly trained and educated “Field Secretary” who would be lured to Newfoundland from the
United States and who would work with O’Neill for two years. The Field Secretary would also be expected to identify and train a Newfoundlander as an “understudy” so that when the Carnegie funding was gone and they could no longer afford the person from the United States, the Newfoundlander would be capable of continuing the work, at a lower salary. Hefferton was forceful in his assertion that without the addition of the Field Secretary, as well as other well qualified staff, adult education would continue to be “greatly handicapped.” Hefferton closed his argument on behalf of adult education with the view that “if adult education is to be developed with any degree of success...I am convinced that the personnel of the present Division will have to be increased, both as regards headquarter’s staff and field staff.” Hefferton’s memo did not address Frecker’s concerns regarding O’Neill’s salary, however.

By June of 1951 the Executive Council approved many of the changes and additions requested by the Minister of Education. Specifically, they authorized the Minister of Education to secure a “fully qualified” Field Secretary, to “arrange for the setting up of an inter-Departmental Committee to study ways and means of reducing duplication of effort, and of coordinating services, and generally increasing the efficiency of field-work bearing on the social and economic betterment of our people,” and finally to arrange for the Director of Adult Education and the Supervisor of Audio-Visual Education to attend a conference of the Canadian Association for Adult Education.

O’Neill did not waste any time in acting on the Executive Council’s approval of the hiring of a Field Secretary. By September the departmental records show that Constance Cooper from the United States had been found and hired for the position.
O’Neill ensured that Cooper would be given a tour of the island upon her arrival.  

From these events, it appears that O’Neill had won her battle. The elements of bureaucracy necessary to carrying out her proposals for integrating the services of various departments and for adding staff had fallen in place. She had, by this time, abandoned the more ambitious ideas of her “Plan,” attempting in its place merely to have one committee, the Joint Planning Committee, organize the various services into a unit that spread a collection of field workers over as wide an area of the island as possible. In her original organization (Appendix 3) she had conceived of the establishment of a Community Development Service that would act as a coordinating agency bringing together all branches of government that had to do with the education, health, or welfare of the people. In her proposals written to the Deputy Minister and then submitted to the Executive Council, O’Neill had eliminated the Community Development Service. Through the office of Adult Education, with the assistance of a Joint Planning Committee, she hoped to be able to bring together the forces of all those agencies that sought to improve the quality and distribution of services to the people.

O’Neill was not able to enjoy what must have seemed like success for very long before another strain occurred between herself and Frecker. During the summer of 1951 O’Neill realized that she was the only head of a unit who was expected to sign an attendance book to prove that she had been at work each day. Through her letters to Frecker she again pushed the boundaries of protocol and expectations around behaviour. Early in the summer O’Neill began to question the need for her to sign an attendance book when she appeared for work. She brought the matter up with Frecker, stated her
objection to the policy and asked for his "guidance as to what procedure" she should follow to change the situation. Frecker told O'Neill: "You must appreciate the fact that the regulation in question [to sign an attendance book] is one which emanates from the Government through the Department of Finance and not from individual departments." He then explained further that the "traditional practice" of signing the book was brought to the attention of Government and after some discussion the Superintendents of Education were exempted from the practice, but they were the only ones who were exempt. O'Neill replied to Frecker that she had willingly complied with the practice of signing the attendance book until, on July 14, 1951, "it was drawn to my attention that four Division Heads within the Department had [also] been exempt." She continued that "I objected on principle as I felt strongly that it was undemocratic and unfair to exempt 4 Division Heads, and discriminate against the fifth." Frecker had told O'Neill that "the Superintendents are Division Heads but they are also official representatives of their respective denominations on educational matters and they are members of Council of Education." She responded with: "Frankly, I cannot see what religious denominations have to do with the signing of the attendance book. If such is the case, then officially I claim to represent, to the best of my ability, all denominations in the field of my endeavours. Since I was reluctant to believe the Government (which I felt to be a democratic one) would deliberately be guilty of such uncalled for discrimination, I could only conclude that my name had been inadvertently omitted." O'Neill then presented Frecker with more proof of discriminatory practice. She let him know that she knew that other government officials, such as the Deputy Minister within the Department of
Supply, were also not required to sign an attendance book. Sadly, while O'Neill carried on this battle with Frecker, she was also being deprived of her pay. Since she had refused to sign the attendance book, the Department of Finance had withheld her pay cheque. In order to have her pay reinstated she had to ask Frecker to write a letter verifying that she had been at work during the period she had been refusing to sign the book.

During this same period the government in Newfoundland and others who had an interest in the Memorial University of Newfoundland, as it became in 1949, began to dream about a larger university. In order to assess the existing strengths of the university as well as assess its needs, or the directions it should consider embarking upon, the Board of Regents commissioned a survey to be done by Robert Newton as outside consultant who was brought to Newfoundland to survey the university community as to its vision of the university and to recommend changes. The survey included a section on the creation of an “Extension Service,” something Newton probably would not have included had he not been asked by Premier Smallwood, or another member of his government, to explore the possibilities of adding on an Extension Department. In this section of the survey, Newton acknowledged the work of adult education and also noted the various sources through which adult education existed in the province. He listed, in addition to the adult education field workers, the agricultural “field men,” “co-operative educational workers”, health and welfare workers, and Jubilee Guild workers. All of these, in his eyes, were stumbling over each other, carrying on their own work independent of those in other organizations doing similar or the same work in the same communities with the
same groups of people. Newton’s recognition of the problem of duplication no doubt
added credence to O’Neill’s articulation of the problem in her memos to higher
government officials. Newton’s recommendation to improve the situation was for an
appointment to be made of a Director of University Extension Services: “a man of good
education, with broad human sympathies and a deep affection for Newfoundland and its
people. He must also be a good organizing executive, with a flair for getting people to
work together happily.” It is unclear as to whether Newton had been in contact with
O’Neill for his information about adult education. In his survey, he credited the Director
of Adult Education, without expressly naming O’Neill, with having built up “a good
programme which deserves support.” It is interesting, however, that he listed the
constituent parts of that program as including: “evening classes at adult education
centres, urban and rural, preparing students for the public examination in various
grades,” and “rural youth and adult clubs, with projects built around the needs of the
community,” but that he neglected the department’s participation in the Citizen’s Forum
groups nor listed activities of field workers. The last piece of Newton’s chapter on
Extension included a survey of university faculty as to their impression of the offerings
that might be added to a University Extension division. They responded with the
development of “folk schools, study groups, and an information bureau to distribute
additional resources to the educational agencies” across the island. From the opinions
offered by these contributors, it seems that many people were unaware of adult
education’s programs developed between 1945-1949. O’Neill’s success in having
established a number of study groups, having increased the participation of rural
residents in national programs, such as the Citizens' Forum and the Farm Radio Forum, or having established an information resources centre within the Department do not seem well known in the population. In general, however, Newton's assessments seem to have enjoyed a high level of acceptance by the Board of Regents and the Government judging by events that followed over the next five years. After Newton's survey was completed and circulated, Newton wrote to thank O'Neill for her comments on the survey, but these were comments she had not made directly to Newton. He wrote: "Dr. Frecker was kind enough to let me read your comments on my recent report to the Board of Regents. I do want to thank you for the time you gave to this, and I found your comments both comprehensive and stimulating." From this piece of correspondence it is unclear whether Newton had any personal contact with O'Neill, prior to his making his report public. Since there is no other mention between Frecker and O'Neill of Newton's survey, or requests by Frecker to allow Newton to see the program or files, it seems probable that O'Neill was not consulted. Her comments on the survey were not included in the departmental files and were not in her personal collection.

During the following two years there is little evidence of the work of Constance Cooper, the Field Secretary. She reported to O'Neill in October of 1952 that an Adult Education Programme existed in every community on Fogo Island and that the "programme has the backing of all groups: men and women, clergy, teachers, government workers, and community leaders." Frecker, in a handwritten comment to the Minister of Education, said: "You will be pleased with Miss Cooper's report. I believe we should endeavour to retain the services of Miss Cooper. Our present salary
schedules are like a millstone around our departmental neck!"

Frecker's comment about salaries was made in reaction to what appears from the files to be an ever increasing problem within the department. From 1951 until 1958 the files show that salaries, and staffing problems escalated as attempts were made to adequately address the need for field staff in rural areas. As an overview, the problems with hiring and maintaining adequate staff seemed to have been caused by inadequate salaries and an inability to find and train enough people for a growing program.38

In the area of salaries, while there seemed to have been success in 1947 to have the adult education workers recognized as teachers rather than as civil servants in terms of holidays and the language used in their contracts, their salaries were never put on the salary scale for teachers, nor were they given other benefits teachers received. For example, in 1952, day-school teachers received a $120 annual increase in their salaries while adult education teachers were held to a one-time bonus that had been given to civil servants.39 In May, 1952, Frecker simply wrote "more trouble" on the top of one memo, a comment that in many ways captured the tone of what must have seemed to be endless problems regarding complaints about salary and vacation pay and benefits that Frecker and O'Neill had to address.

By December, 1953, the government itself created a new problem for its adult education department. Many of the teachers worked in tuberculosis hospitals either in St. John's or in Corner Brook. Those working in Corner Brook were not from Corner Brook and so had to pay for room and board as well as other living expenses. It came to the attention of someone in the government that these teachers were receiving meals at
the hospital during their work day. In order that the government would not be ‘taken advantage of’ by these teachers receiving free meals, the teachers were notified that they would be charged for the meals they ate while they worked in the hospital. The government instituted a $100 annual fee for meals eaten and this was deducted from the teacher’s already meagre salary. Many of the teachers worked long days and were at the hospital for two meals, meaning their annual salary loss was $200 annually. The teachers were enraged. O’Neill proposed a solution of having the Tuberculosis Association pay the costs for the meals. The department was then informed that government employees could not receive “remuneration” from other “employers,” and a handout from the Tuberculosis Association was seen to be another “employer,” while on duty for the government. When no solution to the problem seemed to be forthcoming, by February of 1954, all of the Corner Brook employees were threatening to quit. Frecker and O’Neill seemed to be, according to departmental memos, engaged in more or less continual battles within the department and with individual teachers over staff salary levels.

In addition to this, the adult education program was suffering, to some extent, from its own success. Requests for additional teachers in lumber camps, the shoe factory, and in mining prompted an endless parade of memos regarding the hiring of staff. Not only was an adult education program being requested for various groups of workers, individual students were asking for additions to the existing program in the Adult Education Centres. Students requested programs such as business training courses and dentistry courses. Because it was already difficult to keep the teachers who had
been trained and were working, it must have seemed an even more formidable task to recruit additional teachers, especially since there were other more lucrative opportunities for individuals in Newfoundland at the time. The province was in a state of constant growth during this period, especially for teachers. Newfoundland began to correct for the lack of educational opportunities for children with even more determination than for its deficits in terms of adult literacy. Numbers of schools increased, and numbers of teachers increased as well. Since teachers were full-time and permanent, there would have been significantly more of an attraction to day-school teaching for any individual who sought teaching as a career. Those left to be adult education teachers were those wishing to be paid less for longer hours or those wishing to teach at night rather than during the day. Only those truly dedicated to adult teaching would have wanted the conditions and the salary of the adult teacher.

The success of the urban program must also have troubled O’Neill whose heart was always more drawn to rural programs that focused on the development of the whole community. Although she continued to find workers to go into communities, those workers seemed to be more and more drawn into teaching literacy type programs such as Layman had insisted on teaching in 1945 when she insisted that adults in the community she was in wanted arithmetic and reading skills, not the “Wisconsin Program.” According to evidence from the departmental records, people who wrote to the Department requested specific skills training programs rather than requested field workers for their community.

In 1956, Frecker submitted a report to government entitled “Developments
Considered Necessary to Raise Newfoundland's Education Services to a Reasonable Basic Level." In it he outlined a number of "needs" in order to bring Newfoundland to a basic level of education provision. Included in his list are some costly changes such as increasing the number of teachers, hiring special education teachers, developing and expanding vocational education, and creating an inspection system that would reach all schools. His report also included the work of the adult education division as it was operating at that time. He listed the Adult Education centres, hospitals, field programs, 4H clubs, and the liaison activities with other groups. He ended by writing: "the university has definite plans for a full extension programme which would absorb the work at present being done by the Division of Adult Education." Shortly after this report was written, the government divided adult education into 2 separate units: Adult Education Centres and Leadership.

It is difficult to determine from the memos whether G.A. Frecker was a willing participant in the dismantling of Adult Education. It does seem that even though he and O'Neill often did not see "eye-to-eye," Frecker was a friend of adult education. He may have believed that the university would expand the role of community development and that it would be better supported within the university than within government. The government was eager to expand the Adult Education Centres because they could be more easily managed than community development. Problems with salaries would also disappear as adult education teachers could come under the same regulations as K-11 teachers, with a similar pay scale and benefits. On the face of it, there was much to gain by this change.
In 1958, F.W. Rowe became Minister of Education. It became his mandate to bring Newfoundland’s education system into line with the rest of Canada. Rowe is quoted in a government publication of the time as having said: “We must recognize this simple fact that the average child in the one-room schools of Newfoundland today is sentenced to semi-literacy unless drastic and radical steps are taken to provide some means of giving a high school education to pupils now in these schools.” He underscored the importance of his statement by adding that of the “2,810 children who were in the second grade in one-room schools nine years before only four matriculated.” With Rowe’s appointment to Education, the department focussed its attention and its limited resources on children’s education.

O’Neill, it is rumoured, did not object to the change in the department’s structure. She believed that she would be chosen to be the new head of the Extension Division of the university. Instead, she became the Director, Division of Community Leadership Development, which was to be the organizing agency for 4H clubs throughout the province. A young lawyer, Gerald Ottenheimer, became the head of Adult Continuing Classes, and the university hired a man from the United Kingdom to be the head of Extension. The era of Florence O’Neill closed.

O’Neill’s life, however, continued. She would toil away for the provincial government in a basement office, “without light, air, or a budget to run her program” according to Henry Best, then a Federal civil servant who met O’Neill for the first time in 1960. Best immediately liked and felt sorry for O’Neill who he believed was being treated badly by the government and who he felt was being wasted in her new position.
He used his contacts within the Federal government to bring her to Ottawa as the head of
the Adult Education Section, Education Services within the Department of Citizenship
and Immigration, Indian Affairs Branch. O’Neill moved “reluctantly,” in 1962 to Ottawa
and remained in her position until 1970, when she retired. After retirement, she would
marry at the age of 69 and continue to live in Ottawa until her death in the Spring of
1990.

2. H.A. Winter, “Proposed Appointment of Assistant Director of Adult Education” in PANL, H.A.E. 61-‘44, September 13, 1944. When O’Neill was appointed Assistant Director in 1944, according to this document, her salary was set at $2,700 annually with a $100 increase per year to a maximum salary of $3,000. By 1949 she would have reached the $3,000 maximum.


7. Ibid., 10-11.

8. Ibid., 12.


10. Phillip McCann, “Denominational Education in the Twentieth Century in Newfoundland,” The Vexed Question: Denominational Education in a Secular Age, Wm. A. McKim, ed. (St. John’s: Breakwater, 1988), 60-79. McCann wrote that the aim of the Council of Higher Education, which was created in 1893, was to “stimulate education over the whole island and place the poorest on an equal educational footing with the wealthiest;”: 61. The proposal was also meant to create a standardized system for evaluating students throughout the country. The 3 denominational heads within the government Department of Education and the heads of St. John’s Colleges sat on the Council.

11. F.O’Neill, St. John’s, to R.L. Andrews, Sect’y for Education (Acting), St. John’s, 08 June 1949, memo. In PANL, file #7/02 Vol.II.

12. G.A. Frecker, St. John’s, to F. O’Neill, St. John’s, memo, 8 October 1949. In PANL, file #7/02, Vol. III.
13. Denise Riley asserts that the moments and places that differentiate men from women must be analyzed in order to understand what is different from "man" in society. This interaction between Frecker and O'Neill is one instance where O'Neill as woman can be found. Frecker would not have treated a male Director the same way and he would not have worried about "distress" in a male Director. He would probably not have used the words "carping criticism." See Denise Riley, *Am I that Name?: Feminism and the category of 'women' in history* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), 1-17.

14. See *Food for Thought* (October, 1950). References to Newfoundland appear throughout the issue.


16. Ibid., 32-33.

17. Ibid., 35.


25. Ibid.


27. G.A. Frecker, Deputy Minister, to S.J. Hefferton, Minister of Education, memo, 8 December 1950, in PANL, file #7/02, Vol. IV.

29. The Executive Council approved a salary level of $350.00 per month, or $4200 annually, for a Field Secretary which would have been more than O'Neill herself made. The Newfoundlander who would be trained by the Field Secretary would carry on her work with a salary of $2500 per year (see Memo from the Minister of Education to the Executive Council, 13 February 1951, PANL, file #7/02, Vol. IV). The Field Secretary was being paid by Carnegie money at a salary level consistent with what she might have earned in the U.S., but the difference between pay scales illustrates the continual problems the government had in attracting and keeping well qualified staff.


32. In Newfoundland, the 3 Superintendents of Education were the denominational heads of the most widely represented religious denominations, e.g., Church of England, Roman Catholic, and United Church.


35. Ibid., 63.


37. Constance Cooper, Field Secretary, to Florence O'Neill, telegram, 4 October 1952. In PANL, file #7/02, Vol V, #58.


39. S.J. Hefferton, Minister of Education, to Exec. Council of Prov. Gov't., 03 October 1952. Hefferton outlined differences between school teachers and ad. ed. teachers: that adult education and visual education were not included in the recent increase to teachers salaries but that they received a cost of living bonus that civil servants received. Hefferton wrote: "I suggest present salary scale be maintained but any increase given to civil servants be extended to them." In a handwritten note on the memo Frecker wrote:
“it would appear to me that the adult teachers should be classified as teachers for purposes of pensionability, salaries, and cost of living bonuses.” In PANL, file #7/02, #57b.


42. Wilmour Trask, student, to G.A. Frecker, January 1955, several letters requesting shorthand, typing and bookkeeping courses at the A.E. Centre and from a student who had been in the Whitbourne Boy’s Home requesting a dentistry program. This latter request came from J.R. Smallwood. In PANL, file #7/02, Vol V, #32 & 33 and Vol VII, #5.

43. Phillip McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society* (St. John’s: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1994), 216-226. McCann wrote: “The Confederation period was a favourable time for teachers.” During the 1950s and 60s teachers salaries rose 387.8% even though a discrimination against women’s salaries remained well into the 80s. The numbers of teachers increased from 2,499 in 1951 to 6,437 in 1971.


45. Ibid.


47. Henry Best, Sudbury, Ontario, to Katherine McManus, Vancouver, B.C., telephone conversation, 18 May 1999. Best informed me that he had been working in Citizenship and Immigration in Ottawa and was introduced to O’Neill by a friend when he had travelled to St. John’s. His general impression of her was that she was “too independent minded for the bureaucracy of the Smallwood era.”
CONCLUSION

Florence O’Neill had been an elementary school teacher, a student, an adult educator, and an administrator during her career. Her years as an adult education teacher spanned the entire period, from 1936 to 1958, when adult education enjoyed department status within the government of Newfoundland. Adult education had gained a ‘foothold’ in Newfoundland prior to 1936, and O’Neill also had early experiences with adult education when she taught miners of the DOSCO mine on Bell Island. O’Neill’s experiences bring to the field of adult education a human dimension. Through her, one gains understanding of the context out of which the program emerged in Newfoundland.

O’Neill was also a significant figure in adult education. She learned about her chosen career through experiences first, rather than from a classroom. She then achieved the highest level of education in the field and she accomplished this before anyone else in Canada. Her combination of education and experience helped her to be chosen for the position of Assistant Director of Adult Education at a time when few women were considered for upper level administrative positions in the government of Newfoundland. When she became Director of Adult Education, she attempted to implement the “Plan” she had developed for adult education in the rural areas of Newfoundland. She had some success with implementing parts of the “Plan,” but the government could not afford a costly, comprehensive plan for adult education.

In the end the government walked away from a community development model for adult education in Newfoundland and O’Neill’s position was changed to Director of Leadership where she was meant to organize the 4H clubs around the province. As the
government moved to other initiatives to improve access to and the quality of education in the K-11 school system, O’Neill’s program and her “Plan” were forgotten.

I chose to sub-title this career history of Florence O’Neill “Alone in the Wilderness,” in order to evoke O’Neill’s own article, “Thou Beside Me in the Wilderness” as well as to represent O’Neill’s journey through her career from 1924, when she began teaching, to 1958, when she was no longer the Director of Adult Education. During that journey she was alone in a variety of ways.

One of the ways that O’Neill first isolated herself within the society where she grew up was through her determination to become educated. O’Neill’s decision to attend Memorial College was a bold one. The College had existed for one year previous to her attendance. O’Neill would have had no one to consult regarding what to expect at the College. Her own account of her college years suggests that she did not have financial help from family or elsewhere. She was able, nevertheless, to work out details about where she would live in St. John’s and how she would pay for her expenses. Her decision to then continue returning to college, first to Memorial and then to Dalhousie, after each two years of teaching was also bold and unique for a young woman. Later, as an adult educator, O’Neill continued to sacrifice comfort and security for education. Without a scholarship or other financial support, she found ways to attend Columbia University and succeeded in completing a doctoral degree. When she returned to Newfoundland, she had become better educated than most of those with whom she worked. Neither G. Alain Frecker, nor Vincent Burke, both of whom had reached the position of Deputy Minister of Education before they retired, had doctoral degrees in
education. 

In her personal life O’Neill was also “alone.” She set herself apart from others through choices that she made about her personal life. What is impossible to know is whether these were truly conscious choices or constraints related to being an unmarried female. For instance, O’Neill’s home in the Hotel Newfoundland (a substantially built and impressive structure in its day) during the time she was Director of Adult Education is construed by those who discussed her life with me as her choice. It is possible that she may have had few choices about where she would live. As a single woman with a professional career, she may have rejected the idea of living in a boarding house. Few other rental establishments were available in the city at that time, especially ones that were within walking distance to the Colonial Building, where government offices were located. Whether O’Neill chose to live in the hotel, or had few other choices, made no difference to those around her. The fact that she did live in the hotel isolated her from society.

O’Neill’s status as a single woman also set her apart and added to rumours about her life, but may also not have been a matter of choice. O’Neill shed no light on this subject herself. When she was interviewed late in her life she was asked why she had not married until she was 69. She responded by saying; “I was too busy getting my doctorate and working to be bothered with marriage.” Yet others, like Teresa MacNeil, a co-worker of O’Neill’s during the 1950s, believed that O’Neill desperately wanted marriage and a permanent home. Why she waited so long to marry may have been because she was unable to find the right partner until she was 69, or it may have had something to do
with expectations around a woman not working if she was married. In Newfoundland a middle-class married woman did not work unless there was some incredibly compelling reason to go against the expectations of that society. Moreover, if a woman was a government employee, after 1933, if she married she was forced to give up her work.\(^5\) O’Neill was determined to have a career, so it seems that any desire to be married would have been carefully weighed.

On the professional side, O’Neill was “alone” because she had no equals. O’Neill’s experience, in addition to her education, gave her a right to feel that she was more qualified to have opinions about adult education than anyone else. Unfortunately, it seemed that she was not able to put that aside and work with people and help them to understand the importance of those things that she felt were critical to the success of the program. Her stubborn insistence on a course of action may have been the cause of friction between herself and Frecker. She seemed to be unaware of the damage she caused her own crusade by irritating those from whom she needed support. Teresa MacNeil described her method as a constant “plea”: “her plea was for attention to what she was trying to do to assist Newfoundland. She would plead for attention to her cause and not herself. But it had the effect of drawing attention to her self. She was the one who knew the plight of Newfoundland (it was what she wanted to convey and in that sense she was like Smallwood).”\(^6\)

O’Neill’s pleas may have interfered with her ability to establish a good working relationship with Frecker as well. Her memos to him and her responses to his memos suggest that there was tension between them, even though Frecker seems also to have
supported many of her ideas. MacNeil remembered O’Neill as not being a good manager, “but she had good ideas.” Her method for getting people’s attention to listen to her ideas was to “cut them down.” MacNeil clarified that what she meant by this was that O’Neill told people what she thought -- without care in the manner of her response. MacNeil wrote that “she cut people down when and as she found them -- often in the office hallways. Hardly the way to treat a deputy minister or minister. I think the Minister’s name was Frecker. She was really hard on him.”

In addition to being “hard” on Frecker, she also irritated others. O’Neill seemed to have an almost overwhelming amount of boundless energy. She frequently worked both day and evening. As an itinerant teacher, she both taught and organized meetings for the residents of an outport to which she had newly arrived. This work often engaged her all day and evening seven days a week. Comments made by MacNeil as well as her responses to Frecker, and the evidence that there was a constant need to replace adult educators who had quit, all suggest that she expected of others the same fierce commitment to adult education that she gave to it herself. All of these attributes and choices separated O’Neill from others, making her career journey one that she travelled alone.

I believe O’Neill’s lonely personal and professional journey was to some measure to blame for the lack of recognition of the entire program. I originally wondered how an entire program in education could be missing from any of the stories about early education in Newfoundland. It is possible that the program she directed was attached to O’Neill’s personality. When the government restructured, leaving adult education
without its own department, memory of O’Neill and her program may have disappeared at the same time.

O’Neill’s standard for “good” adult education became her experience in Mainland. It is evident from O’Neill’s use of her essay “Thou Beside Me in the Wilderness” as the centrepiece to her thesis that she believed she had achieved near perfection with the adult education program she started in Mainland. When she returned to Newfoundland to work in the government as Assistant Director, then as Director of Adult Education, she attempted to develop a community oriented adult education system that would allow adult education workers to do the kind of work she wanted to do in Mainland but could not because of the limited amount of time she was allowed to stay and because she had received very little support in the form of resources from St. John’s to help her to bring materials of any kind into the community. Her “Plan” represented her vision of a system for the provision of adult education on the whole of the island of Newfoundland that would serve communities as O’Neill would have liked to serve Mainland. The significant feature of that “Plan” was that it provided for well-trained adult education workers to be permanently stationed in numerous locations so that there would be enough field workers for every outport resident to be within reach of their services.

From her experience in Mainland, O’Neill believed it was imperative to have knowledgeable, capable workers permanently installed. She envisioned a perfect program. The problem was that she had to communicate the essence of that program to others. She intuitively knew, it seems, how to engage a community in the work of
organizing itself and getting to the basics of what needed to be done. As an administrator it was her job to communicate her vision and intuition to those who were hired. Her expectations of those hired to be field workers proved to be unrealistic in most cases. She believed that with training sessions and support provided each summer to the workers, she would develop insightful and passionately dedicated field workers. She then expected these workers to go out into communities to “awaken” them as she believed she had “awakened” Mainland. What seems to have happened instead is that after each brief training session in August, adult education field workers left St. John’s fired with enthusiasm that more often than not slowly dissolved when they met the realities of living in an outport community. Workers regularly quit and had to be replaced, often the replacements were hired in mid-year and received no training whatsoever. The inexact fit between O’Neill’s expectations of what should be accomplished in the outports and individual workers’ understanding of the task is glimpsed in Grace Layman’s assessment of O’Neill’s expectations and Layman’s belief that those expectations were inappropriate or irrelevant.9

O’Neill likely caused herself further difficulty when she assigned teachers to communities that were of a different religious denomination from the teachers. She, as an adult education teacher, enjoyed going to communities where she would work with people who were not of the same religious background as herself. She believed this was educational. Unfortunately, she also believed it would be educational for all those who worked for her. While this practice is never the subject of any of the letters between Frecker and O’Neill, it is possible that the high attrition of teachers in adult education
may have been exacerbated by O’Neill’s insistence on ‘educating’ the teachers as well as the people of the communities.

How is O’Neill remembered in these communities? Many adults whom O’Neill taught remember her as the person who made a difference in their community. Community residents tend to remember a woman who brought the possibility of education to them. Geraldine Barter, a woman who grew up in Mainland on the Port au Port Peninsula, told me that O’Neill is remembered there as the first person to be successful in bringing education to Mainland. She succeeded because she understood the people of the area well enough to know that bringing the French-speaking “Mary,” of her “Thou Beside Me in the Wilderness” tale, with her would secure their trust as well as help her to understand their needs. Today Mainland proudly supports the only Francophone “public” school in Newfoundland. It was Barter’s opinion that O’Neill had created an environment in her short time there that produced permanent change in that community. While this is but one example, additional studies into community memory of the people or programs that made a difference, or did not make a difference, would help bring an understanding of how small communities receive the outside expert(s) and their attempts to influence the community.

How and to what extent O’Neill’s femaleness organized her life beyond her control can be raised as a question, but not fully answered. There are salient moments in her life when it is possible to affix gender-related importance to an event. For instance, O’Neill received far less pay than did the Director of Cooperatives because she was on a “female scale” for salaries, and the male Director of Cooperatives was on a “male scale.”
The fact that a female and male scale existed was unquestioned during these decades. If O’Neill felt that it was unfair to receive less pay for the same work, she did not articulate her feelings in writing.

The requirement that O’Neill sign-in for work may, or may not, have been gender based. Until more is known about the ordinary activities of civil servants in Smallwood’s government it will not be possible to fully understand the exchange of memos between Frecker and O’Neill regarding the regulation that she sign-in for work. Research that focusses on women’s lives and careers in the civil service in Newfoundland has not been completed. When there is a body of research on aspects of work and work relationships, then it will be possible to better understand the dynamics between O’Neill and those with whom she worked.

Many new questions that have arisen in the wake of this research. One of those has to do with the working environment for both men and women during the early days of Confederation. Until the work that both men and women engaged in has been explored, especially in departments like education, it will be impossible to know how the education system, for both children and adults, came to be as it is. The questions and problems that were allowed to surface within the department, and those that were suppressed, lead to an understanding of the direction the department was forced to follow. For instance, it seems, according to department reports on the need for new teachers and the growth in numbers of schools that adult education lost its budget in order that children would receive an education. Yet, at the same time, Memorial University of Newfoundland probably gained funding in order to develop its Extension
Decisions around the role of adult education and the type of adult education a society should have continue to be hotly debated within university departments of adult education. The schism between those who believe that adult education should be largely for the purpose of an individual’s desire to gain skills or understanding in areas of interest and those who believe that the future for adult education is largely in skills training for the workplace has existed for decades. It was interesting to discover that a similar debate took place during O’Neill’s tenure. The splitting up of the department into two distinct sections: one for “Adult Continuing Classes” and the other for “Leadership” suggests that there had been a debate within the government about literacy and skills learning versus “development” before the department was divided. The Adult Continuing Classes office organized classroom learning that included skills learning. Leadership became ‘development’ work with community groups. The Adult Continuing Classes office appears to have had the larger budget and greater support from the government.

Links between the work that was started by the early adult education program and the community development work done in Newfoundland by Extension field workers also needs further investigation. For example, Constance Cooper reported having witnessed adult education groups in operation in every community on Fogo Island. Several years later, it was Fogo Island that cooperated with Memorial’s Extension Division to use film to record the communities needs and the processes of developing community leadership. Is this coincidence, or is it that Fogo Island had an understanding
of community processes through which the Extension field workers could work? Adult education established successful programs in several rural areas. Many of the more successful community development programs offered by Extension seem to have been located in similar areas. Whether this suggests that the earlier program made success possible for the later program or whether each program had success in a specific area merely says something about the people who settled in these areas is something that wants further investigation.

Another area that needs further research is the group programs offered through the Commission Government as another kind of adult education. It appears that the Commission's efforts to establish folk schools, agricultural education, and co-operatives were all fairly unsuccessful. The reasons for the lack of success needs further exploration. The stimulus to Vincent Burke's interest in adult education in the early 1920s must have come from somewhere. Since it was Burke's rather dogged pursuit of Carnegie Corporation funding that bought books to form a travelling library on the coastal boats that visited communities along the vast coastline of Newfoundland, his part in the adult education story is a large one. Yet, like O'Neill, he is relatively unknown for the visionary work that he accomplished.

There are many more personal stories to be discovered in order to give a more complete picture of adult education between 1944 and 1958. O'Neill insisted that field workers keep journals and logs. I was not able to locate these journals within the Provincial Archives (PANL). It is possible that some may exist as part of the private records of individuals. An important project would be the retrieval of as much of this
Florence O’Neill has once again broken new ground. O’Neill’s history as an adult educator has opened a new area for investigation within the field of education. Through exploring her involvement in adult education, I discovered that there were many people and programs whose impact and contribution to education were not well documented in the historical texts about Newfoundland. Now that the ground is softened, it is my hope that many others will come to dig here.
1. George A. Frecker was educated at Nova Scotia Technical College and St. Mary’s University in Halifax. He was an engineer. His doctorate was an honorary degree. In CNSA, QEII, MUN, collection 193. Vincent Burke apparently received a law degree, but it is unclear from which university. Burke used LL.D. behind his name for articles that he wrote for The Book of Newfoundland, J.R. Smallwood, ed.

2. O’Neill’s hotel room home was described to me by Ann Furlong, a friend to one of O’Neill’s grand-nieces.


4. MacNeil shared with me in her letter, of 24 August 1994, the opinion that “even then I could recognize how much she needed and wanted the love, intimate love, of a man. She didn’t hide that.” In addition to MacNeil, others who knew O’Neill well told me that they believed she desperately wanted to settle down.


8. Ernest Osborne was one of O’Neill’s professors at Columbia and the one with whom she shared the story of Mainland as part of a class assignment. Through Osborne’s support the essay was later published.

9. Grace Layman, That Part of My Life (St. John’s: Harry Cuff Publications, 1994) 58-61. Layman had reacted badly to O’Neill’s insistence on keeping records and sending those to the Head Office as well as to creating committees for establishing the needs of the community. Layman preferred, and believed the people of the community preferred, to learn to read and write and do arithmetic.

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APPENDIX 1:

“Requirements of a Field Worker”

Training:

1. College education if possible, with specialization in the field of home economics.
2. Minimum requirement will be high school diploma plus the one year teacher training as given by Memorial College.
3. Workable knowledge of music while not essential is very desirable.

Experience:

1. Experience of living in rural communities a most desirable qualification.
2. Background of teaching experience while not essential for college graduate is necessary for a person with high school diploma only.
3. Evidence of active participation in community life.
4. Background of work experience – fishing, carpentry, etc. most desirable (for men).

Personal:

1. A sincere interest in the work.
2. Ability to get along with others.
3. Must show potentialities for leadership.
4. Interest in humanity.
5. A critical awareness of social and economic problems.
6. It is most important that applicant be healthy, cheerful, energetic and well adjusted.
7. Mental alertness combined with sound common sense.

Official Government Response to Florence O’Neill’s Dissertation

Confidential

Director of Adult Education

I return herewith document entitled “A Plan for the Development of an Adult Education Program for Rural Newfoundland” which you forwarded to me with your letter of January 2, 1945.

Before you sent this work to me you suggested that it should be published by the Newfoundland Government, and when you requested its return I understood from you that Dr. O’Neill proposed having it published in book form. I have advised Dr. O’Neill that as Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education I cannot consent to its publication by any officer of this department and I have pointed out to her the reasons for this refusal.

As Dr. O’Neill is Asst. Director of Adult Education she should not have a document of this kind published without the consent of her Commissioner. Upon consideration of the contents of this document from pages 22-34, under headings Religion, Education, Recent Developments in Education, the Role of the Capitalistic System and Standard of Living, I cannot consent to any publication, as I consider that the worst conditions found in settlements in the most depressed areas in the country are represented as being fairly general application, and that most damaging statements about this country, its people, and some of its institutions are made.

Apart from the question of publication at this time I may point out that the position is already serious in that this document, which was written for a foreign university and is presumably on file there, describes conditions in Newfoundland as seen by a Field Worker employed by the Newfoundland Government who was at the time of writing the document, on leave from this Department.

I have extracted from the document some statements to which I take the strongest exception and attach them hereto. I am greatly concerned to know that publication of any document containing these statements would be even proposed.

Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education

December 6th, 1945

Copy to Secretary for Education
Copy to Asst. Director of Adult Education
Pages 22 and 23:

“All through the history of the Island both politics and education have been deeply influenced by three leading denominations.”

Page 23:

“It seems to me, as I recall stories told of the olden days, that religious leaders were sometimes a little vague as to their objectives.”

Page 25:

“Schools were sometimes untenable little shacks and the rural teacher due to isolation and lack of supervision in a great many cases became the routine teacher who, lacking economic security and seeing no future for herself as a teacher, either used teaching as a stepping stone or ended her teaching career by marrying and settling in the village. Administration by remote control, a centralized system, communities lacking capable leadership, little or no supervision, poor economic conditions, lack of funds, and a rigorous climate, all tended towards a stereotyped form of education which was neither inspiring nor stimulating. The little school was and still is to a great extent set apart from the community, neither people nor teachers having a voice in planning the curriculum.”

Page 26:

“Parents lacking education feel they need their boys at home, or conclude it is useless to send them to school, and children, finding no challenge in the school experience, are happy to be released. In some very remote sections of the country schools are opened during five months of the year, and in some cases not at all.”

Page 26 (FootNote):

“During 1939-40 the author personally visited two such settlements.”

Page 27:

“Each local community is supposed to have a school board, but very often it is in name only; hence, very ineffective.”

Page 30:

“Thus the merchant was assured of fish for exportation, and to protect himself against bad debts he charged exorbitant prices for his goods and gave the lowest possible price for fish.”

Page 31:

“This went on until practically every man in the village was under the merchant’s thumb.”

“Evil forces worked both ways. All merchants were not dishonest.”

Page 32:

“He is driven to obtain Government relief - dole - the last step in the degenerating process. The merchant who distributes this monthly pittance, which amounts to six cents a day, receives a percentage for his trouble and so he has a vested interest.”

“The standard of living has always been culturally and economically low, due to extreme isolation, inadequate education, and lack of nursing and medical facilities. During the depression years it became gradually lower and lower. Houses poorly planned and built, lacking repair, became dilapidated and even fishing gear needing repair and replacement quickly became inadequate; lack of clothing necessitated the use of flour bags for every conceivable purpose -- oil clothes, overalls, sails, sheets, shirts and dresses. Lack of bad clothing meant real hardship in shell-like homes.”

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"Need for medical and nursing facilities has always been pathetically apparent in rural Newfoundland and though much has been done in recent years much still remains to be done. A continuous diet of bread and tea with little variation broke down all resistance and serious health conditions followed in certain sections of the country. Ignorance and carelessness helped spread the dreaded T.B. and soon whole settlements became infected, while dizziness of the head, stomach trouble, ruptured sides, beri-beri, haemorrhoids, became prevalent. Under-nourished, almost naked children could not attend school regularly. Tired, worn-out mothers continued to give birth to sickly babies and thus increased the worry and anxiety of both parents."

"On the whole, poverty plus enforced idleness, and lack of constructive recreational programs to build and sustain morale were to say the least destructive of initiative and demoralizing."

"During the Summer of 1938 author assisted in making survey."

"The above is a brief summary of conditions found when visiting some 27 settlements in a particularly depressed area. While this was not typical of the whole of Newfoundland yet I know it was typical of many other sections of the country. This picture of local conditions explains the collapse of the economic system of the country."
APPENDIX 3

"Chart - A suggested organization of Community Service Adult Education Program in Newfoundland"

APPENDIX 4

"Organization Community Service Adult Education Programs"