

The Macdonald Robertson Movement 1899-1909

by

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ABSTRACT

Between 1899 and 1910 Sir William Macdonald, tobacco millionaire and educational philanthropist and James W. Robertson, agriculturalist and educator, conducted a seed grain competition across Canada to teach new agricultural practices, and founded manual training centres to teach physical skills and aid moral development. Through the Macdonald Rural School Fund, Macdonald and Robertson established school gardens and supported nature study in eastern Canada, combining with manual training to make a useful elementary curriculum for rural children. To support these pedagogical ideas they pressed, with limited success, for rural school consolidations. Finally, they established an agricultural and teacher training college in connection with McGill University.

The Macdonald-Robertson movement drew on borrowed ideas, but also trained teachers, persuaded school boards, managed costs, and held to a consistent pedagogy through specialized object lessons. Because it treats the Macdonald-Robertson reforms together, this thesis provides a viable explanation why these two men took up the cause of reform and why the various elements of the movement succeeded or failed. I claim the reforms grew up in the first place because the Macdonald-Robertson pedagogical ideas were in the wider interest of social reformers and of the two founders. The ease with which each reform could be controlled by central administrators and implemented in a standard way from one district to the next meant Robertson would achieve "success" on some publicly believable criterion, however variable in extent, yet maintain central control. Robertson found it necessary to dedicate time and energy in persuading local districts and teachers to take up the work. Yet were it not for local autonomy, schools would have been an even easier target for a parade of politically-motivated programmes.

Macdonald and Robertson's experience shows that reform must be popular and workable at the local level. Administrative talent and sound pedagogy cannot overcome local resistance if

school boards, parents or teachers do not value, or cannot afford, reform. The inherent paradox of standardization and autonomy deserves to remain a hypothesis in research on educational reform. My account shows how Macdonald and Robertson sought to standardize autonomous school districts and teachers, in order to preserve the rural lifestyle, in order to help Canada on her way to economic growth and social order in the face of immigration and urbanization, and the varying extent to which regions benefited economically from industrialization.

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DEDICATION

It is with fond memories that I dedicate this work to my friend Teresa Jemenez who passed away during the early stages of this project just as she was starting on her own intellectual journey into graduate school. Teresa loved life and ideas, and had a beautiful vision of the path she was taking. Her beauty, enthusiasm and fearlessness, even in the face of death, were an inspiration to all who knew her. Her memory has kept me moving forward when feeling frustrated and grateful when feeling inspired because she reminds me that the opportunity for education and intellectual freedom cannot be taken for granted. She said she wanted to be somebody – and she was.

Abbreviations

<i>BC/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia</i>
<i>Man/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Report of the Department of Education for the Province of Manitoba</i>
<i>NB/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Schools of New Brunswick</i>
<i>ON/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Report of the Minister of Education, Ontario</i>
<i>PEI/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Chief Superintendent of Education, Prince Edward Island</i>
<i>SK/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Saskatchewan</i>
<i>NS/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Public Schools of Nova Scotia</i>
<i>AB/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta</i>
<i>Que/AR-ED, 19XX</i>	<i>Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Quebec</i>
Robertson Papers, X, X	James Wilson Robertson Papers, Special Collections, University of British Columbia, box X, folder X.
Macdonald College	Macdonald College Records, McGill University Archives
AC	Records of Agriculture Canada, National Archives of Canada
Robertson-Currier	Ishbel Robertson-Currier, <i>Canada's Chore Boy: James Wilson Robertson 1857-1930</i> . 2 vols.
RCITTE	<i>Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education</i>
OAC	Ontario Agricultural College

INTRODUCTION

The content of the curriculum is never fashioned by educational theorizing alone but also reflects the knowledge esteemed by those groups and institutions that have the power to influence what gets taught in schools.¹

On 31 December 1909 James W. Robertson, president of Macdonald College of McGill University, abruptly resigned. With his resignation the Macdonald-Robertson movement—arguably one of the most influential, most visible, and best-funded public education reform movements in Canada to that date—came to an end.² During the preceding ten years Sir William Macdonald, Canadian-born tobacco millionaire and philanthropist, funded five educational schemes which Robertson, Scottish-born agriculturalist turned educator, planned and implemented. These programs ranged from a simple seed grain competition for school aged children to an internationally-recognized agricultural college and normal school. In the interim they created manual training centres across Canada, school gardens and consolidated schools in Eastern Canada, to improve the educational experiences of elementary school-aged children.

The geographical reach of the reforms and the public attention they received warrant attention to the Macdonald-Robertson movement. Macdonald and Robertson implemented their ideas at a time when numerous proponents of change sought to attract public attention and private support. Educators, policy-makers, social organizations, business leaders and local school districts worked to create more kindergartens, introduce domestic sciences classes, build school libraries, provide physical education, health instruction, encourage military drill, and

¹ R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) 317.

² George S. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1986) 109. The term *movement* here refers to an active and extended organization, run by two men, but whose activities directly touched the lives of several thousand persons, and were indirectly important in the educational lives and work of English-Canadian educational planners before, during, and immediately after the Great War. The term has its justification partly in the fact that so many participants in courses and workshops, provided under the Macdonald-Robertson plans and programmes, were attended *voluntarily*. In that sense, it may be said that these plans and programmes were attractive to various clienteles, and gathered a kind of educational-social

stimulate technical and vocational education. Macdonald and Robertson worked just as the state began systematically to assert detailed control over localities. Meanwhile some regions prospered more than others and all regions of Canada grew socially, politically, and financially interdependent. These factors weighed on the minds of local trustees and reformers as they debated administrative and pedagogical change and the desired character of Canada's children. Such efforts were features of broader social reform in response to industrialization, urbanization, rural depopulation, immigration, and economic growth and in reaction to the formalism of Canada's schools. Some reformers were more successful than others at keeping change in the classroom in line with pedagogical theory, as teachers often found the "advice was good...but hard to follow."³ For example it was difficult, if not impossible, to teach many of the new subjects in multi-age one-room schools with minimal resources and erratic attendance. Amid rapid change in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the struggle to adapt Canadian society to these changes, the Macdonald-Robertson movement is notable for the publicity and measurable success of some schemes, but notable failures as well. Macdonald and Robertson deserve attention because the changes they implemented exemplify a methodical attempt at social

momentum as the years passed..

³ Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers' Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Central Canada," in Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 143. Education reforms were many and varied, but shared many common goals. For informative discussions on some of the various reform efforts contemporary to Macdonald and Robertson such as industrial schools, health education, and the kindergarten see Paul Bennett, "'Turning Bad Boys into Good Citizens': the Reforming Impulse of Toronto's Industrial School Movement, 1883-1920s," *Ontario History* 78.3 (September 1986): 209-32; Kari Dehli, "'They Rule by Sympathy': Pedagogy and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Kindergarten," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 19.2 (1994): 195-216; Timothy A. Dunn, "Work, Class and Education: Vocationalism in British Columbia's Public Schools, 1900-1929," (M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978); Ivor F. Goodson and Ian R. Dowbiggin, "Vocational Education and School Reform: The Case of the London (Canada) Technical School, 1900-1930," *History of Education Review* 20.1 (1991): 39-60; Suzanne Zeller, "Roads Not Taken: Victorian Science, Technical Education, and Canadian Schools, 1844-1913," *Historical Studies in Education* 12.1/2 (2000): 1-28. Several reform movements took place in the general community, not limited to schools. The motivations of such reformers were similar to Macdonald and Robertson's. For critical narratives on health education see Kari Dehli, "'Health Scouts' for the State? School and Public Health Nurses in Early Twentieth-Century Toronto," *Historical Studies in Education* 2.2 (Fall 1990): 247-64; Helen Lenskyj, "Raising 'Good Vigorous Animals': Medical Interest in Children's Health in Ontario, 1890-1930," *Scientia Canadensis* 12.2 (Fall/Winter 1988): 129-4.

change illustrating a conflict between central and local authorities, pedagogical theory and teacher practice, and the personal goals of educational reformers themselves. Their experience shows that reformers required more than popular ideas if they were to succeed. They also have to find ways to standardize the implementation of those ideas, and in this case to standardize the autonomy of teachers and local districts. An historical account of these events increases our understanding of contributing individuals' and groups' more subtle and personal interests in reform and throws light on contradictory objectives of public schooling. This account shows how standardized teaching and administrative practices came to be implemented at the local level.

To assess the importance of Macdonald's and Robertson's educational reform three elements are helpful. First, one wishes to know why Macdonald and Robertson sought to reform education in Canada with these new practices, their reasons for choosing the subjects or institutional designs over others, and why they carried out their reforms as they did. Second, a detailed description of the events will establish of what the entire Macdonald-Robertson movement consisted. Finally, it will be useful to estimate the effectiveness and impact of these schemes on public schools in classroom implementation, in subsequent replication of the ideas and to explain which were most successful, and why, thus rounding out an historical understanding of this movement. These elements—description, explanation and judgment—begin where historians have so far left off. They offer a starting point for assessing the role of the movement in Canadian education after the turn of the last century and show the purposes and logistics of these and similar educational reforms and the difficulty of sustaining pedagogical and administrative changes even with adequate funding. This study emphasizes the dynamic

relations between Robertson, his colleagues, policy makers, local school districts, and to a modest extent Macdonald.⁴

I limit most of this explanatory assessment to 1899-1910, the years Macdonald and Robertson worked together, because once Robertson resigned as president of Macdonald College he began to advocate additional reform ideas while Macdonald returned to supporting higher education. In addition World War I dramatically changed the circumstances of educational reform in Canada and abroad. For these reasons it is difficult to attribute educational change to Macdonald and Robertson after their participation in the movement. This study does not examine Robertson's role as Commissioner of Agriculture and Dairying, Macdonald's record as philanthropist, or related educational reforms in domestic science, nor does it assess the impact of the movement after 1910. It does not account for all attempts to change teaching methods or administration of public education between 1899 and 1910. Nor does it examine the whole of Macdonald's and Robertson's lives. Instead it tells the story of their "movement" and illuminates a part of Canada's educational, economic, regional, social and political past.⁵ This thesis argues the Macdonald-Robertson movement sought not only to implement individual programs but more generally to standardize public schooling in rural, autonomous school districts through the implementation of new content, new subjects, and new administrative structures designed to meet needs produced by changing economic and social circumstances. The extent to which each of the schemes was implemented and perpetuated was decided by the ease with which the new subject or institution could be standardized and centrally controlled in the face of difficulties and varying public support at the local level.

⁴ Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) viii.

⁵ Chad Gaffield, "Two Steps Back: Reflections on the Search for Synthesis," *Historical Studies in Education* 5.1 (1993) 118.

In the constant competition for space in the public curriculum, Macdonald and Robertson had distinct advantages: Macdonald's money and Robertson's relative freedom from administrative control as compared to his colleagues in departments of education. The fact that schools needed funds taxpayers were unwilling or unable to provide accounts for much of the success and publicity of the Macdonald-Robertson movement. Indeed, these reforms were not successful because of their educational merit, or Robertson's administrative skill alone, nor were they necessarily the choice of school administrations. There were demands for educational change, there were new educational theories upon which to justify change, and there was the partnership of Macdonald and Robertson. Certainly, public schools were scarcely well off and thus one may argue the merit of what the two men did is only as significant as Macdonald's willingness to pay for it and Robertson's interest in doing it. Neither explains the various successes or failures, however defined, of the several Macdonald-Robertson schemes. Diligence, hard work, and funding were not enough to produce widespread adoption of the educational practices Robertson wanted. It took the rare benefit of generous and enthusiastic funding, administrative skill, and centralized control through standardization – a core element of which was efficiency. Latter-day accounts correctly note the general enthusiasm for such reforms among social reformers in general, but popularity alone does not account for the successful implementation of the movement, even when the individual reforms were directly funded by Macdonald. To be an educational innovator is to have more than an educational theory, a policy or funding. Change must be workable, affordable, accepted by teachers and, because education is publicly funded, it must be popular with ratepayers.

Consider compulsory attendance laws in the decades preceding the Macdonald-Robertson movement. The laws did not bring the children to school. The logistics of applying the laws including record-keeping, enforcement procedures, correlating child-labour laws, and general

popular support, led to widespread attendance. Without such logistics “a compulsory attendance law is a sham, unenforceable and ultimately meaningless.”⁶ Educational innovators bring *both* the borrowed and adapted ideas *and* the administrative and leadership abilities, which they apply over extended periods of time to create actual change. In an effort to win popular support and persuade local ratepayers to accept responsibility after Macdonald funding ended, Robertson was disingenuous in his portrayal of the difficulties involved in implementing or maintaining the new subjects and new schools. Although he might have claimed the schemes would succeed on merit alone, they in fact required more: more money, more problem solving, more luck, more diplomacy and reformist enthusiasm. Additionally, local support often meant playing to local jealousies or local pride to overcome reluctance to pay higher taxes.

The movement began partly because both men had an impulse to social reform, but they acted on their reform interests in different ways. Robertson had ample leadership experience including subject knowledge, bureaucratic experience, and public speaking ability. As Commissioner of Dairying and Agriculture he had worked to update and standardize farming practices across the Dominion, learning new agricultural methods and personally teaching them to groups of farmers. Macdonald had ample money, a history of educational philanthropy and an interest in shaping Canada’s future. For personal reasons they both now turned their attention to children. Their backgrounds, resources and their choices of reform ideas alone assured at least modest success with or without ratepayer willingness to pay. But success, defined as implementation according to Robertson’s plans and continuation of the reforms by local districts after initial funding ended, was determined by other factors.

⁶ Lawrence Cremin, *Transformation of the Schools* (New York: Random House, 1961) 127. I have accounted for the development of ideas within an organization in a similar fashion to Cremin’s account of the Progressive Education Association in the United States.

All five programmes were based on the teaching of Protestant work ethic, application of Darwinian science, and a notion of the rural ideal, itself rooted in ideas of political autonomy and local democracy. Macdonald and Robertson assumed the rural lifestyle ought to be preserved in the face of rural depopulation, urbanization and rural poverty. Their strategy, however, drew on urban models of standardization and bureaucratization even when the curriculum was rural. Similarly, the schemes were designed for the benefit of the child, not only for the child's sake but for the benefit of society. Just as Mann found "progressive" educators to be essentially conservative in nature, Robertson sought educational *change* in order to *maintain* certain features of Canadian society.⁷ Once implemented in rural districts, ratepayers were expected to assume financial and administrative responsibility for continuing the reforms. The ideological tension between the rural ideal and the urban administrative model played out in debates over content and method, with some parents and trustees wanting a literary curriculum based on rote learning and some wanting a practical curriculum based on child-centred learning. The conflict played out to an even greater extent over debates about how much rural ratepayers were willing or able to spend and how much control local trustees would continue to have in the face of standardization. As was the case over the next few decades in the United States, "...progressivism in education has represented either the ideal implementation of democratic values in the schools, or the height of paternalistic and bureaucratic control of children."⁸

The liberal constitution of local educational authorities in the nineteenth century thus incorporated a severely restricted conception of local democracy, which gave priority to efficiency and effectiveness of school boards as administrative agents of provincial departments rather than democratic participation of citizens in their

⁷ Jean Mann, "Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, 1980) 95. In this case, conservative means educators who preferred schools "lead the way" to industrial expansion and help children develop moral habits to "think straight," but not produce radical social change. Conservative educators believed social inequalities were the result of a lack of vocational guidance in the schools, not problems inherent in Canadian society or economics.

⁸ Ronald D. Cohen and Raymond A. Mohl, *The Paradox of Progressive Education: the Gary Plan and Urban School*, (London: National University Publication, 1979) 4.

local self government. In the twentieth century administrative efficiency and effectiveness would be the motives for reorganizing small rural school districts into larger school divisions. That reorganization would also expose the tension between local administration and local democracy inherent in liberal theories that combine parliamentary and local governments.⁹

Predictably, Macdonald and Robertson were generally successful at implementing what they paid for. It was certainly more difficult to inspire districts to continue the work on their own. But more important to Macdonald's and Robertson's success than funding was how well each scheme lent itself to standardization and centralization. The more a subject or institution lent itself to these two things, the easier it was to control the reforms at each location, predict costs, measure their value, and use that value to convince local districts to continue the work. The seed grain competition for example was simple, and evaluation was done at a central location using weights and measures. The results were visible and meaningful to the parents of the participants and an organization was quickly established to encourage farmers to continue seed selection. The manual training centres used standardized tools and series of lessons given on a regular schedule. The teachers had the same training and the success of the course was not subject to the elements. In addition, the centres were created in towns and cities where the cost to the individual ratepayer was less than it would have been in a rural area. Success with manual training was limited to urban areas, but the courses did spread across Canada and increased in number rapidly in the years immediately following Macdonald's funding.

Robertson could not, however, impose uniformity and consistency with all his pedagogical ideas. School gardens were not at all standardized mainly because of variety in weather, soil quality, pests, local interest, and varying degrees of teacher enthusiasm. The traveling instructors were trained together, but implemented their courses and gardening depending on circumstances at each school and their own personal subject knowledge. They

⁹ Ronal Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas: Canadian Educational Policy in Historical Perspective*

were united in their enthusiasm and dedication, and had ample funds from Macdonald, but in the end school gardening escaped standardization and bureaucratization and therefore widespread implementation. Consolidated schools eluded centralized control partly for intensely practical reasons—because road conditions varied, as did ratepayer willingness and ability to pay for something lavish in comparison to the schools they already had, to dissolve small school districts to create larger ones and to give up local control. On the other hand the common training of principals and teachers worked in favour of the schools and made possible the continuation of Macdonald Consolidated Schools to a limited extent, but they did not inspire a notable number of new consolidations before World War I. There were too many variables for which administration could not compensate without increased expenditure. Macdonald College on the other hand was administered by Robertson on the campus and much of the governing power as well as Macdonald's funding remained in Montreal. The programmes that served changing educational priorities and lent themselves to standardization and centralized control, then, were the most successful as defined by goals set by Robertson.

Based on urban models but imposed on rural communities, the assumptions and theories behind the schemes meant they were destined to have limited impact. Urban schooling, itself characterized by standardized curriculum designed for children who would have industrial or professional jobs, and by centralized control, was designed for large numbers of students, a large tax base to support the school, and an adequate supply of well-trained teachers. Rural schools on the other hand were small and the teacher often minimally trained. The Macdonald-Robertson reforms were also based on the notion that a rural life was the ideal life. Rural life was not always ideal. Their ideas for change were institutionalized and bureaucratized, two elements

which were not part of the ideal rural life. At the heart of the rural ideal Robertson wrote of was not only attachment to the land, but also small-scale, autonomous democracy.

The centralized, bureaucratic structure of the Macdonald-Robertson movement, then, eclipsed the original pedagogical ideas of the reforms. The structure of the movement contradicted the experiences and circumstances of the people for which they were designed in an attempt to standardize schooling in these small, autonomous, democratically governed school districts. Some rural residents supported these urban-oriented reforms, but that did not lessen the conflict over reform between centralization and rural autonomy. Ideas from urban-oriented reformers were handed down to be happily accepted and funded by all rural ratepayers whether or not they could work in the day to day reality of rural schools—a persistent theme in the history of Canadian educational reform.¹⁰ Reforms were someone else's ideas, but farmers were supposed to foot the bill. Robertson claimed to be responding to rural needs, but he did so as an urban-oriented, middle-class reformer.¹¹ The movement, then, was limited by logistics and ideology, and these limits and conflicts are visible in the debates over how much local districts should spend on these educational changes and whether they had value for the sons and daughters of farmers.

Robertson downplayed the logistical difficulties of his plans and tried to persuade local districts to take them over based on the merit of the idea alone, knowing full well that administrative and political difficulties lay in the way. This sometimes disingenuous work of persuasion highlighted the tension between outside forces and local control. Robertson assumed

¹⁰ For a critical historiographical discussion of the dynamics of reform, particularly on research of the rise of mass public schooling and the relationship between urban and rural schooling see Bruce Curtis, "Policing Pedagogical Space: 'Voluntary' School Reform and Moral Regulation," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 13.3 (Summer 1988): 283-304. For a general and discussion of urban educational models imposed on rural communities in the United States see David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) 60.

¹¹ This was also often the case in government sponsored education of farmers. Michael R. Welton, "Dangerous Knowledge: Canadian Workers' Education in the Decades of Discord," *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 23.1

and asserted his ideas could and would remedy physical conditions in schoolhouses, conditions resulting from local economics, decision making, or apathy. In Robertson's mind the primary factor standing in the way of improvement was lack of local support, not difficulties inherent in his ideas. His campaign for standardization in local districts was carried on in the media, in public speeches, and in official reports, always on the assumption he was promoting a greater good and that opponents were few and selfish.

This study considers the five Macdonald-Robertson plans separately and together. They displayed common elements: practical, child-centred curricula; a limited period of funding by Macdonald or limited but endowed funding in the case of Macdonald College; and eventual local control and financial responsibility. Each scheme, however, led to particular difficulties—whether they be scarcity of specialized manual training teachers, pests in school gardens, or transportation problems at consolidated schools. Macdonald College faced the biggest difficulty, a fundamental difference between Macdonald and Robertson as to how much and in what way money was to be spent. Although they found common ground for ten years the partnership between Macdonald and Robertson itself was limited by their divergent purposes.

The Macdonald-Robertson movement comprises a set of historical events to which educational historians make reference or which they describe within the context of other studies. Few, including Sutherland, Tomkins, Pavey and Stamp have offered detailed explanations of how the individual schemes were implemented, how the movement as a whole developed, or how Macdonald and Robertson sought to standardize autonomy by their particular practice of object lessons and limited funding. Sutherland and Tomkins offer comment on the general consensus-building work of the movement and how ideas developed about what schools should do. Although these two works are valuable as companion pieces, we have no close studies of the

day-to-day logistics of the movement, local debate concerning it, and immediate outcome at the local level.¹²

The disciplinary context supports a more critical analysis of the movement as well. There has been a vast output of scholarship on social and educational reform—the majority of which are urban based. Most scholars approach analysis of reform with detailed explanations of social or educational needs as perceived by communities and authorities, and the perceived value of given reforms as solutions to those needs. Although the argument here cannot be generalized onto all social reform efforts taken with existing scholarship it can help us to further understand the complexity of those efforts and perhaps reconsider the goals of the reformers. In this case the goal was preserving rural Canadian culture by standardizing autonomous districts and farms through the implementation of these reforms. Although Macdonald and Robertson were urban based at the time, and manual training was implemented in urban areas, their primary goal was reform in rural locations. An account of their work provides an important example of rural reform to balance against the multitude of urban studies. This study demonstrates how these ideas took shape in the small, isolated schools which was different from the experiences of graded, large urban schools with administrators.

In assessing the significance of Macdonald's and Robertson's work I have drawn from several historiographical fields. Traditionally-oriented studies of intellectual history, especially those that have paid close attention to the ideas and actions of individual leaders and the spread of their educational ideas, have played their part in my examination of Robertson's pedagogical and administrative schemes.¹³ Meanwhile, I have attended to detailed chronological institutional

¹² Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 109-138, 169; Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 181-201, 215; Edwin John Pavey, "James Wilson Robertson: Public Servant and Educator" (Masters Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1971) 37-110; Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 51-73.

¹³ Accounts of influence from one country to the next methodically similar to elements of my own analysis are W. H. G. Armytage, *The Russian Influence on English Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) and Alison

history, particularly where it suggested believable explanations of the course of events with which I am concerned, or where it helped to clarify the precise meanings individuals gave to various educational theories and practices of the day.¹⁴ Besides these two older approaches to the field, I have drawn liberally on varieties of social history. On this approach, it made sense to consider the historical accounts of people not in elite positions, the very people for whom Robertson and Macdonald actively promoted “change,” at the local district level.¹⁵ The work of recent culturally-minded historians on the opinions and resistance of these same people offered a useful critical perspective on reform.¹⁶ These several kinds of historical argument, combined with a wealth of information from primary sources led me finally to adopt a somewhat eclectic method, rather as Allen, Axelrod, Berger, Cuban, and Kleibard have done in their work on a broad range of Canadian and American topics. The example I follow from these scholars is their combination of intellectual, social, political and institutional history in writing analytical empirical histories.¹⁷

Mine is not laudatory, “great man” history that would explain school reform as the natural result of political action narrated without reference to social and intellectual history, although the decisions and actions of men with influence and funding must be detailed and explained to help our understanding of the past. Nor do I propose a revisionist history, at least not in the meaning

Prentice, “The American Example” in J. D. Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 41.

¹⁴ Lawrence Cremin, *Transformation of the Schools* (New York: Random House, 1961).

¹⁵ R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990); Michael B. Katz, *Irony of Early School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

¹⁶ Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, ON: Falmer Press & Althouse Press, 1988).

¹⁷ Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890-1980* (New York: Longman, 1984); Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

of those terms that acquired popularity in the 1970s, often referred to as radical revisionists.¹⁸ That older revisionism argued men in power sought to control or impose reform on the majority of the population who were guinea-pigs for bureaucratized policy-making experiments. Instead, as does Kleibard in regard to progressive reformers in the United States, I emphasize that Macdonald and Robertson, in competition with other groups and conscious of socio-economic conditions, worked to gain influence over curriculum reform.¹⁹ The two men wanted schools to remain autonomous, with the implication that local communities would remain financially and administratively responsible for their schools. Macdonald and Robertson did indeed want everyone to adopt their ideas, but through a process of imitation and adaptation, helped along by financial assistance and persuasion rather than by enforcement of centralized provincial government policy. Macdonald and Robertson did not seek "reform by imposition," nor were their reforms purely "voluntary." As Curtis argues, reform is better viewed as a contradictory process.

It is tempting to provide a social control analysis in light of Robertson's many references to social efficiency, productivity, and Empire. But such an analysis would be inadequate since Robertson did not question the work ethic or capitalist attitudes of farmers and urban workers. He questioned whether or not their schooling was providing them sufficient information and skills to be prosperous. Macdonald and Robertson were not imposing, they were offering and persuading with the hope schools would adopt reforms in a standardized way, even though they were sometimes disingenuous about the difficulty of their plans. Districts weren't always

¹⁸ For an example of such research see Michael B. Katz, *Irony of Early School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) and *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools* (New York: Praeger, 1971). For commentary on radical and moderate revisionists see J. Donald Wilson, "The History of British Columbia Educational History," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980) 11.

¹⁹ Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) ix; see also Bruce Curtis, "Policing Pedagogical Space: 'Voluntary' School Reform and Moral Regulation," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 13.3 (1988) 285.

reluctant, although they were sometimes unable. In addition rural families used schools as part of their own strategies so perhaps supported change out of self-interest.²⁰ Sweeping generalizations about educational reform are not helpful unless balanced against hugely various local conditions. Local accounts demonstrate that reforms could not be simply imposed and local initiative accounts for much educational decision-making. Therefore a closer look at Macdonald and Robertson which includes regional economics, local circumstances and initiative, and the logistics of the reforms themselves in each location supports generalizations about educational reform in Canada.

My account, then, is mainly institutional, as I organize the thesis according to the structures and activities of the Macdonald-Robertson movement. But it is also intellectual, cultural, and social because the account perceives Macdonald and Robertson in light of work in and out of public schools and in the context of the work of their social reform minded peers. I move beyond description of the new subjects and schools to the dynamics among reformers and the local school districts, and between them and the economic and social circumstances in which Macdonald and Robertson set about educating children. Historians interested in the dynamics between urban and rural areas, private philanthropy and public institutions, and central administrations and local districts will find this present account provides new grist for their several mills.

Robertson's personal papers are comprised of his publications, speeches, unpublished letters, accounts books, numerous memoranda, and a short biography written by his daughter, Mary Ishbel Robertson-Currier.²¹ Robertson-Currier also wrote, but did not publish, a two-volume biography that includes transcripts of official documents interspersed with her own

²⁰ Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 32.

²¹ Robertson Papers, housed in Special Collections, University of British Columbia. See bibliographic reference page 204.

recollections and opinions.²² To verify the accounts in these sources I examined closely the annual reports for all the provinces from 1898 to 1910, as well as the records of Macdonald College.²³ Although these sources are necessarily partial, taken together they provide reasonably consistent information on the events and expressed purposes of individuals.

In Chapter 1, I examine the circumstances of the Macdonald and Robertson partnership and the purposes of their first step—a seed grain competition to encourage the selection of improved seed to reap a larger harvest. Although each man had his own reasons for participating in the movement they were both part of and influenced by the larger social reform movement in Canada. The seed grain competition was administratively simple, inexpensive compared with the other schemes, and agricultural. Because of its simplicity, centralized administration, and evaluation through weights and measures to determine success, the seed grain competition lent itself easily to standardization. Measured results were publicized in a campaign to persuade farmers to select seed for planting, and later to found the Canadian Seed Growers Association.

I turn then to manual training, the conflicting purposes held by advocates, the specific training program Robertson supported, and the rapid spread of manual training centres across Canada. Manual training was valued for a broad range of reasons. Its outcomes were measurable, the considerable initial costs were paid by Macdonald, and most significantly the learning environment was easily controlled. For these reasons it had the most success in standardization and in convincing local districts to accept responsibility for funding. It did not, however, take place in rural districts despite Robertson's general preference for rural-based innovation. It was a compromise Robertson made only once. Manual training inspired local

²² Robertson-Currier. Ishbel Robertson-Currier's recollections are understandably biased in favour of her father. Her recollections and selection of materials are nonetheless helpful. They are used throughout this thesis with the understanding that they are necessarily biased, at times exaggerations, but often the single source of information or personal opinions.

²³ *BC/AR-ED, Man/AR-ED, NB/AR-ED, ON/AR-ED, PEI/AR-ED, SK/AR-ED, NS/AR-ED, AB/AR-ED, Que/AR-ED*; Macdonald College.

initiative, but because initial costs were higher these centres appeared mainly in urban centres and not in rural schools. Although the greatest difficulty was still public willingness to pay for the centres, Macdonald and Robertson more than met their goals.

It is a small step from manual training to Macdonald's school gardens and nature study classes, for the solution of problems at each of the twenty-five gardens was administratively and politically similar to that in manual training centres. My discussion gives a glimpse into the day-to-day difficulties of starting and maintaining a new educational program, and shows the value of clever leadership and of local public support. School gardens, subject to pests, weather and weeds were difficult to maintain especially over the summer break. Besides, it was hard to convince local ratepayers to fund a program that built up skills many believed children were learning at home. This new subject was furthermore at the mercy of the elements and partly for this reason, despite enthusiastic leadership, escaped standardization and centralized administration. Administrative authority and centralized control alone, even with ample local support and student interest, cannot will into existence a lush school garden.

My fourth chapter shifts from new curriculum to new administrative structures created for the sake of making the new subjects affordable. The cost of a consolidated school was governed not only by the number of teachers and the expense of providing the subjects, but also by the cost of transportation which often exceeded the cost of teacher salaries. Robertson was far less successful at convincing local ratepayers to assume the cost of the consolidated school than he was with manual training and school gardens. The schools, although popular, were not within the limits of what rural ratepayers could or would pay. When five or six formerly autonomous districts came together, local jealousies arose, as did fear of losing control over tax-rates, and argument about whose children would be transported.

I end with discussion of Macdonald College, an institution designed to perpetuate the earlier reforms indefinitely through education for rural leadership. Seeking to make the earlier schemes affordable and standardized, Robertson designed a teacher training program at Macdonald College to supply specially trained teachers to districts. Robertson conjoined teacher training, agricultural education, and domestic science in an institution illustrating his notion of the rural ideal. He and his faculty demonstrated his administrative, standardizing methods to preserve rural life by training future teachers, farmers, and the wives of farmers in the newest methods for profitable rural living. The first three years of this institution also saw the end of the Macdonald-Robertson movement. The divergent purposes of the two men, ironically combined with their centralizing impulses caused the end of their working relationship.

Together these chapters detail the Macdonald-Robertson movement and explain the outcomes of the movement as a whole. They demonstrate that success was not based on merit alone, but on the ease with which the ideas for change could be implemented and controlled in a way that standardized autonomous districts. Incidentally, they suggest the utility of eclectic historical method on a topic whose social and intellectual circumstances defy easy generalization.

1. THE PHILANTHROPIST, THE AGRICULTURALIST, AND THE SEED GRAIN COMPETITION: THE BEGINNINGS OF A "MOVEMENT"

Farmers and their families may fail to appreciate the educational advantages of a plan or scheme set out in a written statement, but here is something which would be so helpful and instructive to boys and girls that they would go with it, and the habits of observation and thought and study would go with them.¹

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century Canada was experiencing economic and social change so profound historians have described the time as one of transformation. Several factors combined to create a general economic upturn across Canada. Resource industries such as fishing, lumbering, and mining were booming, in turn spurring the construction of roads and of the transcontinental railways: the Canadian Pacific, Canadian Northern, and Grand Trunk Pacific/National Transcontinental. The railways in turn promised greater exploitation of these same resources and became "...paths to power and wealth" for cities. Immigration filled much of the agricultural land in the west, satisfied the labour requirements of the factories, and created a larger market for manufactured goods. As the west was settled and developed wheat production and export blossomed. Business was generally free to operate as it wished. When government did get involved in business it was in aid of commerce, as for instance protective tariffs and national strategic plans. Canadian markets were attractive for investment, particularly to British and American investors. Industrial activity and population growth stimulated

¹ James Robertson, *Macdonald College Movement: An Address Before the National Education Association of the United States at Denver, Colorado, July 7, 1909* (Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Association, 1909) 93. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

urbanization and an overall increase in standard of living—but not everywhere and not for everyone.²

In 1896 Canadians elected the Liberals and a French Canadian Prime Minister after almost thirty straight years of Conservative rule. His heritage a source of controversy, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was characterized within the Ontario Liberals as "...a man of pure French ancestry who was spiritually an Englishman."³ This new government had to contend with rapid and profound demands. "Indeed, the Laurier-Borden years [1896-1921] should be seen as the history of a people attempting to bring its institutions into conformity with the demands of a new, unfamiliar kind of society."⁴ Canadian schools responded with changes in school administration such as consolidation of rural schools, the introduction of new subjects such as health and technical education, and educators' adoption of new theories regarding children and learning such as Froebel's ideas about childhood which inspired widespread adoption of the kindergarten. Although new ideas and subjects were prominent in the rhetoric the schooling experiences of many Canadian children did not change substantially from the classically-minded curriculum based on mental discipline.⁵ Bringing Canada's institutions into conformity with these new demands also consisted of government-sponsored agricultural education administered by the Ministry of Agriculture. For example, in 1886 the Federal Government established experimental farms and illustration stations in response to a perceived need for

² ; J. M. S. Careless, *The Rise of Cities in Canada Before 1914*, (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1978) 15, 20; R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald B. Smith, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1996) 122-27.

³ J. W. Dafoe, *Laurier: A Case Study in Canadian Politics* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publisher, 1922) 33.

⁴ Ramsay Cook and Robert Craig Brown, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 2.

⁵ George S. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1986) 102.

improvement in agricultural practices, and development of farming techniques suited to regional growing conditions across Canada.⁶

Macdonald and Robertson conducted a seed grain competition that drew attention to the merits of a new agricultural practice based on Darwinian science, and demonstrated how children could be taught to farm differently than their parents.⁷ The competition, administered from Ottawa through mass media and post was simple and produced measurable success great in comparison to the cost of the scheme. But more arresting are the reasons they conducted it and continued on in their partnerships. Robertson publicized the successful results of this competition along with the merits of seed selection and the teaching of scientific agriculture to children to garner support for the reforms that followed.

The Seed Grain Competition as Experiment in Merging Agriculture and the Elementary School

In fall 1902 Robertson wrote a congratulatory letter to a boy in Smith Creek, NB:

My dear young friend:- I have pleasure in sending you enclosed herewith cheque for \$25.00 for fourth prize in the oat class of the Main Competition of the Macdonald Seed Grain Competition for the Province of New Brunswick. I congratulate you on winning this prize. I trust that you now recognize more fully the benefits to be derived from the use of seed grain that has been improved by careful growing and by selection by hand from seed grain plots year after year continuously...I hope that you or your parents or guardian are in a position to use the hand selected seed which was gathered from your seed plot of last season and to join with us and others in the Macdonald-Robertson Seed Growers Association.⁸

⁶ W. Leland Clark, "The Location of Experimental Farms and Illustration Stations: An Agricultural or Political Consideration?" in John E. Foster, ed., *The Developing West* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1983) 214.

⁷ There is a noticeable and interesting lack of reference to Charles Darwin in the primary evidence on seed selection. L. H. Newman, *The Canadian Seed Grower's Association and Its Work: Evidence Before the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization 1911-1912* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912) 28.

⁸ James Robertson to Kenneth King, n. d., Robertson Papers, 1, 33. As a comparison, the average monthly wages (not including boarding) for a male farm labourer in Canada was \$34 in 1909 (the earliest year for which there was data) F. H. Leacy and M. C. Urquhart, eds., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, second edition (Ottawa: Canadian

This letter, and dozens like it, signaled the successful culmination of Macdonald's and Robertson's first reform initiative. As indicated in the letter the competition was intended for children with the hope adults would use selected seed. As Commissioner of Dairying and Agriculture Robertson had previously tended exclusively to the education of adults. With the seed grain competition, however, he began his work with children as a new avenue for persuading adults to adopt such agricultural practices as seed selection. Robertson-Currier offers a possible explanation for Robertson's important shift in emphasis from agricultural education intended for farmers to that intended for the children of those farmers:

...[Although] he had up until this time persuaded Canada's rural families...to improve not only their farms but the quality of their life, he now transferred much of his emphasis to the improvement of all the conditions surrounding the children of the country...he was thinking what the lot of these children would be when they reached manhood and womanhood, fighting an unequal battle on the prairies and in the bushlands, clearing the land, plowing, sowing, and, in many cases, reaping a scanty harvest. He had studied the seed improvement systems of Europe, and had come to the conclusion that some definite plan or method for the improvement of crops must be introduced into Canada..."⁹

According to his daughter, Robertson was aware that larger economic and social problems and international models were driving his choice of reform ideas, and his shifting attention to children was deliberate as well. He wanted not only to influence children but to influence adults *through* children.

Agriculturalists like Robertson encouraged farmers to use seed improved through selection. This was in contrast to practices advocated by Robertson's former boss, Dr. William Saunders, at Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm, but was gaining popularity throughout Europe and North America along with the new scientific theory of the day based largely upon Darwinist theory and

Government Publishing Ctr., 1983) M78-88.

⁹ Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 232-3.

the scientific method.¹⁰ Robertson also wanted farmers to use seed for crops which had a high market value. The use of selected seed increased yield per acre and the quality of the product as demonstrated in Canada's experimental farms, making the work of the farmer more profitable, the farmer more prosperous, farming more attractive and hopefully stem the flow of rural migration to urban areas. Robertson wanted to demonstrate seed selection for farmers in Canada. He thought it would be difficult to persuade farmers to change their practices through a scheme set out in writing, and that perhaps it would be easier to persuade the children of farmers to try something new and demonstrate seed selection to their parents. Robertson used \$100 of his own money to begin a seed grain competition.¹¹ In the first of the seed grain competitions children selected the best one hundred heads of grain from their fathers' crops of wheat or oats and mailed them postage free to Robertson at the Department of Agriculture. The best seed grain in both size and number of kernels from each province determined the winner. Robertson remembered the "bags containing those selected heads coming in almost like a deluge..."¹²

Robertson wanted to enlarge this successful competition. In December 1899 Robertson telegraphed Macdonald that he was "coming to take tea," which was the signal Macdonald had given Robertson if he wanted a meeting. They discussed a larger competition that required more prize money and someone to take charge of it. Robertson estimated \$10,000 was required. After first opposing the idea, Macdonald asked Robertson when his train was leaving, to which

¹⁰ Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) 9; Suzanne Zeller, "Roads Not Taken: Victorian Science, Technical Education, and Canadian Schools, 1844-1913," *Historical Studies in Education* 12.1/2 (2000) 1; Although he never intended it to be used to examine human society, Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest was applied to society in the form of Social Darwinism. This theory which is heavily criticized today as a justification for class and race discrimination, was used as the basis of biological determinism. This theory rationalized decision-making on the basis of intelligence testing or academic aptitude, among other things. Therefore, some educators argued, it was just to decide whether a student would receive an academic or technical education based on his or her ability to perform within the formal structure of schools. For a detailed critique of biological determinism see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 52.

¹¹ Herbert Francis Sherwood, "Children of the Land: The Story of the Macdonald Movement in Canada," *The Outlook* (New York. April 23, 1910) 899; Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

¹² Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 233.

Robertson replied he had fifteen minutes. Macdonald told him he could have the \$10,000 if he caught his train, which he did.¹³

Although the Macdonald Manual Training Centres were already being planned and discussed with school boards, the second seed grain competition, now with Macdonald's financial help, was the first scheme to be implemented. The second seed grain competition was based on the same agricultural practice as the first. In this competition however the children planted their seed grain. Children chose the best heads of grain from their fathers' crops and used those to seed their own ¼-acre crop the following year. At the end of the first growing season students selected the best heads for planting their second crop. This continued for three growing seasons. At the end of the third season students mailed their best seed grain to Robertson. George H. Clark, a recent graduate of the Ontario Agricultural College, was hired by the Department of Agriculture to take charge of the competition at \$700 per year.¹⁴ The children who sent in the best heads from each type of grain from each region received a prize. In addition, children mailed samples of their seed-grain during the intervening three years when small prizes were offered to keep the children's interest in the project. During the intervening years first, second, third and fourth prizes of \$25, \$20, \$15, and \$10, respectively, were awarded to children in each province for both wheat and oats. At the end of the three years the first through fourth prizes for each crop in each province were \$100, \$75, \$50, and \$25.

Fifteen hundred entries were received. Eight hundred children stayed with the program for the first year and 450 stayed with it to the end. The parents of these 450 children "...were found, as a rule, to be among the best farmers in the localities where they resided." Perhaps, then, Macdonald and Robertson were "preaching to the converted" and this limited the amount

¹³ T. Passingham, "A Large Purse and a Generous Purpose," *Toronto Saturday Night*, (9 March 1907) Macdonald College, RG 43, c234, file 1035; Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 243.

¹⁴ Clark's help was necessary because Robertson was off to the Paris Exhibition in April 1900 when the second and

of actual change inspired by the scheme. Nevertheless, 92% of these parents reported that their children's ¼-acre plots were more "vigorous and heavy" than non-selected plots. When the yield from the spring wheat crops of 1903 were compared to the original crops of 1900, an increase of 18% in the number of grains per hundred heads, and an increase of 28% in the weight of grains per hundred head were observed. For oats, 19% and 27%, respectively, were observed.¹⁵ This meant an overall increase in crop of 40% for wheat and 36% for oats.

The seed grain competition itself was a simple idea, easily implemented, inexpensive and almost guaranteed to succeed because it was administered from a central location where logistics and expenses could be controlled and only required modest participation to produce winners. More historically interesting than the competition are the reasons why a philanthropist and an agriculturalist sought to introduce and spread a particular farming practice across Canada through the children of farmers in 1899. This question is all the more pertinent because the seed grain competition served as the start of the Macdonald-Robertson Movement, a movement that consciously gave local and national publicity to several new pedagogical and institutional ideas and is credited with inspiring the replication of these ideas across Canada. Sutherland also associates this competition with the beginning of the broader "New Education" as an organized movement in Canada because it gathered "...a heterogeneous collection of people and ideas into an organized movement."¹⁶ Stamp offers a comparison of the "new" and the "old" education, citing an address made by J. E. Wetherell, principal of Strathroy Collegiate. The old education:

'stored the mind with knowledge, useful and useless, and only incidentally trained the mind,' while the [new] 'puts training in the first place and makes the acquisition of knowledge incidental.' The Old Education was devoted to the

larger competition was getting underway.

¹⁵ Robertson, *Macdonald College Movement*, 94.

¹⁶ Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 109; Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 182.

study of books while the New Education 'is devoted more to things than books.' The old approach 'was eminently subjective, dealing largely in abstractions' while the new 'employs objective methods, preferring the presentation of truth in the concrete.'¹⁷

Although Robertson's reforms drew on popular contemporary ideas, Sutherland perhaps overestimates the consolidating and organizing effect the Macdonald-Robertson movement had on other school reformers. Macdonald and Robertson were certainly organized and received a great deal of publicity, but their movement did not include all aspects of the new education such as technical education and kindergarten and they did not spend much time or energy reaching out to achieve consensus with other reformers on how to collectively make change. Instead Macdonald and Robertson concentrated on trying to reach consensus with the local districts in which they worked concerning the schemes they had chosen. If they had a consolidating and organizing effect it was at the local level more so than with contemporary reform groups.

Sir William Macdonald

Sir William Macdonald was one of Canada's most successful capitalists and most generous philanthropists. In fact he was the greatest single educational benefactor in Canada during his lifetime. Macdonald (spelled McDonald until 1898) was born in Prince Edward Island in 1831 to a Catholic father and Protestant mother. Macdonald was the sixth child of seven in a prominent but religiously divided family. Macdonald and his six siblings were raised Catholic, but Macdonald renounced Catholicism when he was sixteen. Although considering himself a Christian he had no sectarian loyalties, nor would he for the rest of his life. In a society centred around religious practice Macdonald was indifferent toward Protestantism and suspicious of Catholicism. His bias was obvious in his funding. All of his educational efforts in Quebec were clearly intended for English-speaking Protestant students. He was generally

¹⁷ Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 51.

close to his Protestant mother but quarreled for long periods of his adult life with his Catholic father. Although not an overtly religious man the new agricultural practices, school subjects and schools he would fund were not value neutral. They were based on a Protestant work ethic and Darwinian science. His funding of practical education and schemes which would enhance efficiency and self-reliance for children in Protestant schools illustrates his views clearly.

Macdonald attended the Central Academy in Charlottetown and was then apprenticed to his mother's cousin in a general store. Macdonald worked in partnership with his brother Augustine in Boston, New York, and finally Montreal from the time he was eighteen until he was twenty-one. The brothers started a tobacco company together six years later in 1858 in Montreal—soon to become an important centre for the manufacture of tobacco in Canada. By 1866 Augustine had left the partnership. The company, simply named "W. C. McDonald, Tobacco Merchant and Manufacturer," purchased tobacco leaf and processed it with the help of a 'secret recipe' into chewing and pipe tobacco. The company employed five hundred labourers by 1871, at least half of whom were women and adolescents as was the case with other tobacco manufacturers at the time. By 1880 he employed 1100 people. He operated his business without unnecessary expense and even after decades of large profits he kept a sparsely furnished, "notoriously plain" office.

Macdonald's business, much like other factories at the time, made large profits by employing workers, including large numbers of young women and adolescents, at the lowest possible wages and the longest possible hours. Macdonald was not often accused of poor sanitation, morals or harsh disciplinary tactics in his factory by comparison to other factories but a deadly fire in the factory brought accusations of poor safety. By the turn of the century his company was reportedly worth ten million dollars, making a profit of \$750,000 each year.¹⁸

¹⁸ Stanley Frost and Robert Michel, "Sir William Macdonald: An Unfinished Portrait," *Fontanus* 8 (1995) 59-63.

Significantly, and as was common in Quebec, most of his labourers were French-speaking while managers were English-speaking.¹⁹ Macdonald's philanthropy in the 1860s was aimed at the education of the English-speaking population in Canada. In later years Macdonald acknowledged that he was not proud of his business because he thought tobacco was dirty, not because he was ashamed of his business practices. He preferred to be known for his philanthropy and chose education exclusively.²⁰ This was in contrast to fellow Canadian philanthropists who tended to support other forms of social reform as well as the performing and visual arts. By the late 1880s he had lost interest in the company except as a source of funding for his donations.

In addition to disliking the product that made him wealthy and living a simple lifestyle, Macdonald was also a life-long bachelor. His mother and sister lived with him for many years in Montreal after his father died and when these women passed away (his mother in 1877 and his sister in 1889) his niece, Anna Rebecca, kept house for him until her marriage in 1894. Macdonald disapproved of her marriage and did not speak to her again. He lived alone the rest of his life.

In the late 1860s Macdonald began donating money to McGill University. The principal of McGill at the time was J. W. Dawson, who befriended Macdonald—indeed Macdonald participated a great deal in the Dawson's family life. The two shared a preference for practical, scientific education and both distrusted Roman Catholicism. Macdonald's philanthropic contemporaries, such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr. also made donations to educational institutions inspired by the institutions themselves as well as friendships with university administrators.²¹

¹⁹ Only 4.2 per cent of Quebec entrepreneurs were French speaking in 1910. Francis et al, *Destinies*, 132.

²⁰ For a discussion of the many individuals who contributed funds, endowed chairs and erected buildings contemporary to Macdonald's efforts see Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning: volume I 1801-1895* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980) 239.

²¹ Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1956) 379.

Macdonald transformed McGill from a primarily medical school and arts college into a university strong in science. For McGill donations, particularly endowments, were essential for growth since petitions to the legislature for increased funding had failed. At first Macdonald allowed Dawson to direct his donations, but after fifteen years of philanthropy, Macdonald developed strong ideas of his own for McGill's development. In the 1890s "Macdonald plunged wholeheartedly" into donations by erecting and endowing three buildings and numerous chairs for physics (1893), engineering (1893), and chemistry with mining (1898). Macdonald helped plan the buildings and manage the funds, and demanded careful management and fiscal accounting in each department. Over the years he also made donations to the schools of arts, law, education, architecture, music, and medicine as well as over 10,000 books and a student union for male students.²²

Dawson retired as principal of McGill in 1895 and William Peterson succeeded him. Macdonald continued to support the arts and sciences during Peterson's tenure as principal. All told, Macdonald donated over \$13,000,000 to McGill, "...a largesse then unparalleled in Canada..."²³ We can only speculate about Macdonald's reasons for his philanthropy. Because it took the form of buildings and institutions with his name, and those institutions were all educational, the most obvious reasons are his probable wish to leave a legacy and his desire for social and economic stability through education in Canada.²⁴

²² Lord Strathcona, who gained his wealth building the Canadian Pacific Railway, and his title by serving as Canada's High Commissioner in London, had provided for the women.

²³ Frost and Michel, "Sir William," 70; Stanley Brice Frost and Robert H. Michel, "Sir William Macdonald," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 689-694; as a comparison Andrew Carnegie provided \$1,400,000 to Canadian Colleges and \$3,082,910 to establish public libraries in Canada before his death in 1919. S. N. D. North, ed., *A Manual of the Public Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie*, (Washington, D. C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1919) 317-9.

²⁴ Theresa Richardson and Donald Fisher, *The Development of the Social Sciences in the United States and Canada: the Role of Philanthropy* (Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing Company, 1999) 4.

James W. Robertson

James Wilson Robertson, the fourth of the ten children born to John Robertson and Mary Wilson, was born November 2, 1857 in Dunlop, Scotland. John Robertson was a farmer and Church of Scotland evangelist and raised his children in an atmosphere of emotional preaching and commitment to social service. James had attended the Dunlop Parish School until age fourteen at which time he was apprenticed to a leather firm in Glasgow. The elder Robertson moved his family to Canada in 1875 when James was eighteen years old, to a farm near London, Ontario. Upon reaching Canada the younger Robertson began work at a cheese factory in Ingersoll, Ontario. Within nine years he was managing eight factories and in 1886 received a position as Professor of Dairying at the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC). His practical, more-than-academic experience made him popular with farmers and with his students. Robertson attended farmers' meetings and they in turn attended his demonstrations. During his time at OAC he introduced the practice of year-round dairying through ensilage. He advocated several such revenue-producing practices, including cold storage to maintain the quality of products during transit to foreign markets. Canadian dairy products had, at this time, a questionable reputation as quality was inconsistent and transport of the products took its toll. Tariffs reduced the commercial viability of export to the United States, thus encouraging Canada to build a market in Britain for dairy products.²⁵

At the beginning of the 1890s, when federal agricultural and immigration policy was geared toward settling the west, Robertson's practices and ideas for development appealed to the Minister of Agriculture, John Carling, and the head of the experimental farm system, William Saunders. Robertson was offered, and accepted, the newly created position of Commissioner of Dairying for the Dominion. Robertson's work as Commissioner of Dairying

²⁵ Francis et. al, *Destinies*, 46-9.

was aimed first at opening up the British market to Canadian goods by improving the quality and reputation of dairy products, second at spreading the practice of winter dairying through ensilage, third at spreading the practice of mixed farming, fourth at building cooperative dairies, and fifth at introducing cold storage. The latter, practices which were the means to opening up the British market and rarely practiced previously, had stunning results for the dairy industry in particular.

In the middle of the century Canada was a net importer of cheese, but by 1900 Canadian cheddar cheese, largely from Ontario's 1200 factories, had captured 60 per cent of the English market, and it achieved this international acceptance in the face of stiff British and Danish competition... The rise of Canadian cheddar cheese to world prominence in the nineteenth century represented a major accomplishment for Ontario agriculture.²⁶

In 1895 his office was expanded to Dominion Commissioner of Agriculture and Dairying, a position he held until he resigned in 1904.

In 1896 Robertson married Jemima Jane (Jennie) Mather, daughter of a prominent politician in Ottawa. The Robertsons had one daughter in 1898, Mary Ishbel (who later became Robertson-Currier) with whom he "...shared a very easy, simple relationship of affection, one so simple and pervading that it rarely came up for consideration." Robertson-Currier was also "aware of [her] own admiration for [her] father" and accepted and took for granted the happiness of their relationship.²⁷

Robertson worked with Macdonald from 1899 to 1910. After resigning as president of Macdonald College, a matter to be discussed at length below, he was appointed chairman of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education which issued its report in 1913. Prime Minister MacKenzie King selected Robertson as chairman of the Commission to Inquire into "The Industrial Unrest Among the Steel Workers at Sydney, Nova Scotia" which

²⁶ Douglas Lawr, "Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario, 1870-1910" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1972) 19

issued its report in 1923. Robertson helped organize the Red Cross Society and became chairman of the Executive Committee. He was a member of the Commission of Conservation, the Agricultural Relief for the Allies Committee (1916), chairman of the Advisory Council of the Food Controller for Canada (1917), and Canadian Director of Food Supplies which made him a member of the Canadian Delegation to Paris for the signing of the 1919 Peace Treaty. Robertson was president of the Proportional Representation Society of Canada (1917); secretary and then governor of the Victorian Order of Nurses (1897), and Chief Commissioner of the Boy Scouts of Canada (1919). The Robertsons were friends with Lady Aberdeen, after whom they named Ishbel, and Robertson participated in the Aberdeen Association which provided books to settlers.

Robertson received numerous awards and honorary degrees. He was made Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1905 after turning down two offers for knighthood. Robertson received honorary LL.D. degrees from Toronto University (1903), Queen's University (1904), University of New Brunswick (1904), and McGill University (1909). He also received an honorary D.C.L. from Bishop's College (1909), and D.Sc. from Iowa State College (1909), and was elected Rector of Queen's University (1917).²⁸

Throughout his career Robertson was careful to base his reputation on his agricultural upbringing and took pride in having the ear of the ordinary farmer. He wanted urban working class labourers and rural farmers to be happy and content, perhaps in the long run for the sake the Canada's place within the Empire, and for his own career aspirations. He enjoyed being powerful in the sense that others would listen to him and follow his advice without being forced. This is evident in the Macdonald-Robertson schemes in which he sought to persuade rather than to control.

²⁷ Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 232.

The Meeting of the Men: Their Time and Place

Macdonald and Robertson met in 1897. Robertson-Currier presumed "...they must have taken each other's measure early in their association for it seems to have been a very evenly balanced collaboration between the money-maker and the spender, between a man of 68 years of age and a young one of 43, between one whose preoccupation was with financial wealth and one whose whole career was based on the ideal of service."²⁹ According to Robertson-Currier, Macdonald sent a letter requesting that Robertson meet with him. He had read about Robertson's agricultural work in the annual reports of the Bank of Montreal because bank branches near the cooperative cheese factories were doing well. Macdonald had a dream to provide better education for the English-speaking population of Quebec in order to "build up the country in its boys and girls." To achieve these ends Macdonald wished to establish an agricultural institution that would "...take in boys at seven years old, and retain them until twenty-one, then [send] them out with the education to become [rural] leaders." This idea was based on the practices of the Roman Catholic church in preparing their leadership. Robertson told him it would not work because, although mothers were willing to give up their sons to the church, they would not give them up for so long to become farmers. In addition, Robertson predicted that after spending fourteen years at this institution these men would not want to go back to the farms.³⁰ Although this idea never became a reality, the two men, different in

²⁸ Pavey, "James Wilson Robertson" 158.

²⁹ Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 233. Robertson-Currier's characterizations of her father and Macdonald, especially where the two men differed, must be interpreted with an understanding of her bias. Obviously favouring her father's personality she none-the-less provides something of the flavour of the differences between the personalities and priorities of the two men.

³⁰ Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 242.

personality but both favouring the practical side of education, found common ground two years later with Robertson's seed-grain competition.

Robertson and Macdonald were prominent men of their time, each in his own way. To understand the motivations and interests of the two men and the significance of their work, a general explanation of changing Canadian circumstances is necessary, for these circumstances combined to make Macdonald and Robertson reform-minded. The significance of the seed grain competition in this context was in the merging of Macdonald's and Robertson's interests, Macdonald's money, Robertson's ideas and organizational skills, and the involvement of school-aged children, all through Canada's dramatic transformation.

Economies varied among and in provinces with different forms of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Most industrial, skill-intensive manufacturing occurred in Ontario and Quebec. In Quebec textile factories, saw and flour mills, tobacco manufacturing, hydroelectric plants, and pulp and paper mills dominated. Quebec was fortunate enough to benefit from the combination of spruce forests and waterpower at a time when demand for newsprint from the United States was increasing. Although the majority of labourers were francophone, the capitalists who owned the businesses were generally Anglophone.³¹ Ontario benefited from the Pennsylvania coalfields and the Minnesota iron deposits, as well as timber and minerals in northern Ontario. Steel products such as engines, farm implements, canned goods and railcars spurred economic growth followed by the necessary offices, banks and warehouses of Toronto. The manufacturing centres in Ontario were small and numerous, while in Quebec they were concentrated in Montreal and Quebec City. By the First World War more than two-thirds of Quebec's population earned their living from non-agricultural work and one-half the population lived in urban areas. The expense involved in large-scale mining and

³¹ Brian Young and John A. Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec: A Socio-Economic Perspective* (Toronto: Copp

manufacturing required large amounts of investment capital, which often led to mergers and monopolies.³²

Even as Ontario and Quebec industrialized Macdonald and Robertson implemented an agricultural reform. This was fitting since Canada remained primarily rural and agriculture was “universally acknowledged as Canada’s leading industry.”³³ Regional economics differed depending upon the viability of local resource-based industry, agriculture, or manufacturing. Agriculture was generally more prosperous in Ontario relative to Quebec and the Maritimes when measured by the marketable surplus produced on family farms. On the prairies, wheat and other agriculture were the basis of the economy.³⁴ In the Maritimes the resource-based economies in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia suffered from decreased British lumber demand. At the same time, however, increased steel production required coal, and coal could be found in great quantity in Nova Scotia. Still, industrial expansion, and subsequent economic growth, were not as great in the Maritimes as in central and western Canada—areas increasingly attractive to investors.³⁵ Maritime cities, therefore, grew slowly. The western economy, meanwhile, grew rapidly when the transcontinental railways were completed. Wheat became the gold of the prairies while the logging industry of British Columbia benefited from the prairie settlers’ demand for housing lumber. Although the lumber industry increased by 400% between 1900 and 1910, distance to population centres raised transportation costs for manufactured goods. The increased cost prevented the development of secondary

Clark Pitman Ltd., 1988) 202-3.

³² Francis, Jones and Smith, *Destinies* 130-2.

³³ Michael Bliss, *The Evolution of Industrial Policies in Canada: An Historical Study* (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1982) 7.

³⁴ Gordon Darroch, “Scanty Fortunes and Rural Middle Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century Central Ontario,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 79.4 (December 1998) 621-2; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 327.

³⁵ Kris E. Inwood, “Maritime Industrialization From 1870 to 1910: A Review of the Evidence and Its Interpretation,” in Douglas McCalla and Michael Huberman, eds., *Perspectives on Canadian Economic History*, second edition (Mississauga, ON: Copp Clark Longman, Ltd., 1994) 140, 144.

(manufacturing) industry on the West coast.³⁶ In British Columbia coal, fish, and extraction of non-ferrous metals also contributed to the economy. Throughout this period of growth the federal government remained most attentive to the needs of central Canada. "The business of Canada was central Canadian business, and social and political practice would turn on this essential recognition."³⁷ Macdonald and Robertson, then, were tending to the continuing needs of agriculture amid changing regional economies and government policies made in the interest of manufacturing. If this caused them difficulty, or made ratepayers slow to change, it also gave greater urgency to their movement.

Manufacturing and resource industrialists generally did not trust the new Liberal government when it came to power in 1896. The party's history of preferring free trade to protective tariffs may have encouraged the farmers in the west, but manufacturers wanted protection. As Cook and Brown argue, "...under Laurier [prior to 1893] the party had adopted the policy of unrestricted reciprocity with the United States, a policy seen not only as dangerous to Canadian business, which feared equal competition from the American enterprises, but also as anti-imperial, continentalist, or even annexationist."³⁸ Although many of Laurier's party believed in free trade in theory they believed it would not foster business in Canada. While business interests pushed for protective tariffs, farming interests pushed for free trade. Laurier's government, "...was characterized by a determination to adopt practical measures which would quicken the development of the country and ensure the renewed election of the

³⁶ Francis, Jones and Smith, *Destinies* 128-30; Martin Robin, *The Rush For Spoils: The Company Province 1871-1933*, (Toronto: MacClelland and Stewart, 1972) 12; Larry McCann, "The 1890s: Fragmentation and the New Social Order," in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 120-1.

³⁷ Brian Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 2nd edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992) 136.

³⁸ Cook and Brown, *Canada* 18.

party. The problems of both finding the formula to get the economy moving, and of restoring religious and ethnic peace were very large.”³⁹

By 1896 Laurier conveyed to the business community that he would make no changes in the tariff policy without first consulting them. At the same time the farmers wanted the tariff reduced to allow for north-south trade, but the farmers were not nationally organized and therefore could not exert as much pressure on the government as the manufacturing community. A tariff that instead favoured trade with Great Britain was likely to be favoured by both groups, and that is exactly what the Laurier government imposed.

After probes and testimonies a tariff commission appointed by Laurier recommended a compromise between the protective tariff and free trade. The new trade policy lined Great Britain up to be Canada’s greatest trading partner—which demonstrated loyalty to the Empire, and made the Liberals more popular with conservatives. This new tariff protected business and satisfied the farmers to a small extent, but “within this perspective the federal government is seen as having viewed the West as a resource frontier which, if properly managed, could insure prosperity for the established commercial and industrial interests in the East.” As Dominion Commissioner of Dairying and Agriculture Robertson was just as interested in the regional prosperity of the West as he was in the status of Canada within the British Empire, and in his mind the two were inextricably linked.⁴⁰

As the Liberals moved into office Canadian dairy and wheat exports were on the increase. Meanwhile, ocean freight-rates fell. All of this made Canada a great place to invest. Laurier wanted cabinet ministers whose reputations and backgrounds would reassure business interests,

³⁹ Cook and Brown, *Canada* 11; Francis, Jones and Smith, *Destinies* 125-7.

⁴⁰ Kenneth H. Norrie, “The National Policy and Prairie Economic Discrimination, 1870-1930” in Donald H. Akenson, *Canadian Papers in Rural History, volume I*, (Ganaque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1978) 14; The tariff was used to encourage secondary industries while state control of resources developed primary industries. The so called “national policy” referred only to the tariff. Bliss, *Evolution* v, 18; Friesen, *Canadian Prairies*, 194.

calm French-English tensions, and garner confidence in the Liberal party so he argued Canada could take advantage of these circumstances. One of the most significant appointments was that of Clifford Sifton, Attorney General of Manitoba and the new Minister of the Interior, now responsible for immigration. Sifton had experience as a lawyer, businessman and land speculator, but no farming experience. He had great faith in the potential of the west. He believed the west was an important part of the national economy and needed to be quickly and efficiently developed to create an economy stretching from the Maritimes to British Columbia, bringing prosperity especially to eastern industry. Sifton was not alone in his enthusiasm. There was widespread belief that rural life provided spiritual renewal and progress for individuals and the country. This myth was the basis of enthusiasm for western settlement and the resulting emigration and immigration. People were lured there by high expectations and the government.⁴¹

Western settlement was necessary for economic growth, immigration was necessary for western settlement, and new policies, procedures and attitudes were necessary for immigration. When Clifford Sifton began as Minister of the Interior he simplified his department making it more efficient and more effective in filling the west with farmers. Sifton's policy was clear. He did not want urban immigrants. Although he preferred British farmers, he believed "...a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality."⁴² Canadian immigration policy "discriminated in favour of rural immigrants to the west who expressed a clear interest in establishing permanent farm operations, and tried hard to keep them white, if possible Anglophone or if it allowed for language differences, restricted them to North

⁴¹ David C. Jones, "The Zeitgeist of Western Settlement: Education and the Myth of the Land," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, Ltd., 1980) 72; D.J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy 1896-1905," in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton, Alberta: Pica Pica Press, 1985) 282. John W. Dafoe, *Clifford Sifton in Relation to His Times* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1931) 131.

⁴² *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 704.

European origins.”⁴³ He believed immigrants meeting these requirements were more likely to assimilate or Canadianize well.⁴⁴ Others were kept from immigrating through special policies such as a Chinese head tax, a “gentlemen’s’ agreement” with Japan to limit emigrants, direct passage restrictions for East Indian immigrants, and immigration restriction administered by physicians and psychiatrists. Although the state tried to attract a permanent agricultural population, many were forced into wage labour or never intended to become farmers at all. This filled the cities with surplus cheap labour.⁴⁵

In spite of efforts at such restrictions the settlement of the west changed the cultural and political make-up of Canada. In 1905 Alberta and Saskatchewan became provinces. At the time the economies of both were dependent on wheat. English Canadians and British immigrants dominated socially and economically while the land was being settled by American, Scandinavian, German, and central- and eastern-European immigrants.⁴⁶ British and American immigrants “Canadianized” with little controversy, but Eastern Europeans with distinctly different cultural traditions and political practices threatened to escape assimilation. This worried many, if not most, English Canadians because, generally, the Anglo-British majority wanted to maintain universal adherence to their own political and social norms. By the same token some French Canadians feared cultural diversity in the west would threaten their special cultural status in Canada. After the resolutions of the school questions in Manitoba in 1896, and in Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, new educational policies placed French on an equal

⁴³ Adelman, *Frontier Development* 184.

⁴⁴ James S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates or Coming Canadians* (Toronto: Fredrick Clark Stevenson, 1909) 289.

⁴⁵ *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* 704; Ian Dowbiggin, “‘Keeping This Young Country Sane’: C.K. Clarke, Immigration Restriction, and Canadian Psychiatry, 1890-1925,” *Canadian Historical Review* 76:4 (December 1995) 599.

⁴⁶ Howard Palmer and Donald Smith, eds., *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980*, 12th *Western Canada Studies Conference* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., 1980) 5-7; Friesen, *Canadian Prairies* 242.

basis with all minority languages.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, immigration swelled rapidly. During Sifton's tenure as minister, 1896-1905, 700,000 immigrants came. In the following eight years 2.3 million came.⁴⁸

During this time of economic and social upheaval, and as novel views of childhood and learning were gaining popularity, Macdonald and Robertson built their movement. They had different backgrounds, different reasons for encouraging educational change, but enough common interests to support a partnership. Once the seed grain competition proved successful, they used that success to influence adults. To encourage farmers to select seed and provide them with official recognition of their selected seed, Macdonald and Robertson announced in March 1903 that the Macdonald Seed Growers Association would be formed. 15 June 1904 the first meeting of the association was held, and the name was promptly changed to the Canadian Seed Growers Association. Robertson was elected president and remained so for twenty years.⁴⁹ The main objectives of the association were to increase yield and quality, while decreasing susceptibility to insects and disease, of Canadian crops by the use of seed improved through selection and to "leave the farmer himself more intelligent and more capable," thus making "...rural occupations more profitable and the people who follow them more prosperous and contented."⁵⁰ To support these objectives the Association developed a scientifically organized system of seed registration for the members. The details of registering seed necessitated regulations regarding growing, selecting and preserving the seed. The association also fixed

⁴⁷ Nick Kach and Kas Mazurek, "Compulsory Schooling as an Instrument of Political and Cultural Hegemony: a Canadian Case Study," in J. A. Mancan, ed., *A Significant Social Revolution* (London: Woburn Press, 1994) 168; Susan Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation* (Toronto: Gage Publishing, Ltd., 1983) 171; Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson, "History of Education in Manitoba: I. Red River to 1879," in Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson, eds. *Monographs in Education IX* (University of Manitoba, 1983) 71-4.

⁴⁸ *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* 705.

⁴⁹ C.A. Zavitz was named vice president, and George H. Clark from the seed division of the Department of Agriculture was named secretary.

⁵⁰ Robertson, Macdonald College Movement, 93; James Robertson, "Report of the President's Address to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Seed Growers Association," (1912) cited in Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 240.

standards for registration such that "hand selected seed or its progeny would be known from other seed." There were three classes for registration: hand selected, improved, and general crop registered seeds. Records on soil conditions, previous use of the land, problems with insects and fungi were kept so the history of any particular seed could be traced. Each member of the association was required to maintain $\frac{1}{4}$ acre of continually improved crop. Members' fields were inspected during the growing seasons "...at a time when the purity of the crop and its freedom from disease were most readily determined." Membership was first offered to participants of the seed grain competitions and their families, and was then open to any resident of Canada willing to abide by the regulations.⁵¹

Another direct outcome of the competition was the Seed Branch of the Department of Agriculture. By 1908 Parliament voted over \$50,000 per annum for the seed branch, which was created for "...the improvement of seed and the securing to the farmers by legislation and inspection of reasonably clean grass seed and clover seed."⁵²

In addition to the Seed Grain Association and the Seed Department, the seed grain competitions proved valuable in Robertson's view for several reasons. First, children demonstrated for themselves and their families that seed selection could improve the quality and quantity of wheat and oats. Second, the competition was organized so the desired results would be continued through local initiative and would be self-supporting, but centrally controlled. This objective of local initiative and control served as a model for the other Macdonald-Robertson schemes. Finally, Robertson credited the competition with the increase in the value of the grain crops of those "directly affected by the seed grain prizes."⁵³

⁵¹ "The Macdonald-Robertson Seed Grower's Association" (from the History of the CSGA) 1925 in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 237-240.

⁵² James Robertson, *Education: An Address Before the May Court Club, Ottawa, 13th March, 1908* (Montreal: The Witness Press, 1908) 8-9. Also printed under title "Education in Relation to the National Heritage," *The (Ottawa) Citizen*, 31 March 1908, 1-6. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

⁵³ Robertson, *Education*, 8-9.

I made inquiries last year from the seed branch of the department of agriculture and from members of the Canadian Seed Growers Association. I gathered from their estimates that one of the direct results from the seed grain competition was an increase in the value of the grain crops of 1906 in Canada to the extent of at least \$500,000...5000 per cent. on an investment of \$10,000.⁵⁴

Robertson's calculation, however, does not account for the investment of time, effort and land by the children and the members of the association. It also assumes that all those who selected their seed did so because of the example set by the children, which may or may not have been the case.

Conclusion

If the seed grain competition was successful in Robertson's terms, it was an easily won success. The competition required few new financial resources or personnel, demanded few participants in order to produce a winner in each region, and was administered from a central location by Robertson so he could maintain standardized practices and control costs. This arrangement helped to standardize seed selection on self-selected autonomous family farms and inspired the foundation of a centralized institution to keep records of the seed and encourage more farmers to adopt the practice. Contemporary economic and social circumstances, and the personal interests of Macdonald and Robertson combine to help explain the beginnings of the Macdonald-Robertson movement. What was to become the most influential educational reform movement of the time began with a symbolically-laden competition based on the idea that from good seed comes a good harvest and once demonstrated many would adopt the practice. Demonstration and adoption formed the conceptual basis for "object lessons" in manual training centres, school gardens, consolidated schools, and the training which would take place at Macdonald College. As with the seed grain competition Macdonald wanted to help communities to get started on one of Robertson's ideas. The three programmes that now followed invited

⁵⁴ Robertson, *Education*. 9.

whole districts to participate, and the centralized control with temporary private funding continued as elements of Macdonald's and Robertson's work.

2. MACDONALD MANUAL TRAINING CENTRES: SKILLS AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE FARM, THE FACTORY OR THE OFFICE

Whether he is to be a farmer, a machinist, a doctor, a lawyer, or statesman, or clergy man, he needs to have his manual training, otherwise his brain is only half developed.

Robertson, 1901¹

Introduction

Manual training was a three-year course, usually for boys, in fifth through eighth grade, but sometimes for high school-aged boys and occasionally for girls. It included a graduated series of hand-work activities, almost always with wood, aimed at the “systematic training of the senses, of the hand and eyes, and of the mind.”² The pedagogical value of manual training was, in Robertson’s view, as much in the boy’s moral development as in his hand-eye coordination. Robertson and many of his contemporaries thought manual training would increase the power of the intellect, encourage desirable work habits, and serve as a practical basis for more advanced agricultural and industrial education in secondary school.³

The variety of its promised benefits meant manual training would help students prepare for any profession, trade, or most significantly in Robertson’s view for an agricultural calling. Robertson’s claims were all the more attractive and persuasive because in public opinion and in point of economic fact agriculture was *the* most important industry in Canada at the time.⁴ Even so, the establishment of manual training required determined effort sustained over several years.

¹ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*: Reprinted from Report of the Ontario Educational Association, 1901, (n.p.: Ottawa, 1899) 7. Robertson Papers 4, 4.

² Robertson, *Manual Training*, 5.

³ T. B. Kidner, “Manual Training,” Dominion Educational Association, *Proceedings* (1901) 121-30. Quoted in Douglas A Lawr and Robert D. Gidney, *Educating Canadians: A Documentary History of Public Education* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, Ltd., 1973) 164-166.

⁴ Douglas Lawr, “Agricultural Education in Ontario 1870-1919,” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1972) 1-26;

Macdonald and Robertson nonetheless established forty-eight manual training centres across Canada between 1899 and 1903 by meeting all initial equipment costs, paying teachers' salaries, and providing for maintenance of these centres for three years (six years for two centres in Quebec) while local districts provided classroom space. The centres were in most cases shared by several surrounding public schools. The creation of Macdonald Manual Training Centres began in fall 1900, and in spring 1903 if they chose to continue the centres the local school districts took possession of all equipment and became responsible for continuance of the centres. In forty-four of the forty-eight locations, the local ratepayers assumed the maintenance of the centres and continued them. After this time Macdonald continued support at two centres in Quebec, and two centres in Prince Edward Island closed. The net effect was a blossoming of manual training across Canada.⁵

This blossoming was due in part to the nature of these manual training courses and the way Robertson organized the lessons and centres. Robertson was careful to spell out exactly the nature of *his* manual training classes as he envisioned them and the values he believed they provided. The courses were conducted with a uniform series of lessons using identical equipment, the teachers had the same training, and the courses were conducted in centres on regular schedules. These characteristics allowed for standardization and centralized control of the courses. The result was greater control over the centres, and greater ease in keeping the centres running efficiently and consistently with predictable costs and results. Robertson achieved success as he defined it—continuation of the courses with local funds. He pointing out that manual training had benefits that other reformers or business interests were looking for. In addition to the training of the mind boys could receive job training or preparation for technical education. These additional promised benefits only increased public support and raised the

Lawr and Gidney, *Educating Canadians*, 162.

likelihood ratepayers would assume financial responsibility of the centres. With manual training Macdonald and Robertson expanded their rural reform by entering fully into the realm of public school reform. Their manual training centres were one element in the response to societal changes and pedagogical theory because the subject promised a diversity of benefits so as to win support of 'mental discipline,' 'learning by doing,' technical education, and agricultural education proponents.

Another reason for the blossoming of manual training was the concurrent blossoming of domestic science. Robertson promoted, but did not implement or fund, domestic science as a companion subject for manual training as both could be promoted for similar moral and practical reasons and together they provided classes for boys *and* girls. Robertson believed improvements could be made through manual training and domestic science such as cultural and economic well being among rural residents. Boys and girls were expected to maintain separate spheres and schools complied with this notion. These two classes were part of perpetuating those separate spheres.⁶ The growth of both subjects at approximately the same time allowed each greater success because domestic science provided a female counterpart with which manual training shared pedagogy and practicality, the courses reinforced the notion of separate spheres and together they accounted for all students in the daily school schedule. Each helped the other to become established in Canadian schools.

Domestic science included a variety of courses, found in varying combinations, aimed at teaching elementary school girls, and sometimes high school aged girls, domestic skills such as cooking and sewing. This expanded to include hygiene, time management, baby care, and other skills for maintaining a home. Domestic science classes were already established to a limited

⁵ *ON/AR-ED*, 1903, 156-163.

⁶ Linda Eyre, "Social Constructions of Gender in the Practical Arts," (Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1992) 18.

extent in Ontario when Robertson began promoting manual training. The domestic science classes in existence were due primarily to the work of Adelaide Hoodless, one of a growing number of primarily middle-class women devoted to social reform and having an influential role in society.⁷ Domestic science, as Hoodless envisioned it, would teach girls such practical domestic skills as cooking and sewing and would help idealize and preserve domestic life, especially in the growing urban slums.⁸ Manual training had practical and moral elements, for proponents of the subject promised it developed hand-eye coordination and moral values such as work ethic. Robertson added that both subjects would save the national culture, particularly if implemented in rural areas because it would help children to become successful farmers and housekeepers and keep them from moving to urban areas. Domestic science would preserve the home while manual training would preserve the farm. Macdonald only funded and Robertson only implemented manual training, not domestic science, but they eventually advocated both. Together, as elements of a more practical public education the two subjects could help preserve the rural lifestyle and with that the national culture. They could also help develop practical work and life skills in urban, but especially rural children.⁹ To do this Robertson shifted the emphasis of benefits others had developed of domestic science to include rural areas and emphasized moral development in the promised values of domestic science. The extent to which the subjects could lead to such improvements depended upon the extent to which ratepayers were willing to support them financially and in principle.¹⁰

⁷ Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 108-9; Linda Kealey, "Introduction" in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Educational Press, 1979) 2-4.

⁸ Robert Stamp, "Teaching Girls Their 'God Given Place in Life': The Introduction of Home Economics in the Schools," *Atlantis* 2.1 (Spring 1977) 20.

⁹ James Robertson, *Education: An Address Before the May Court Club, Ottawa, 13th March, 1908* (Montreal: The Witness Press, 1908) 8-9. Also printed under title "Education in Relation to the National Heritage," *The (Ottawa) Citizen*, 31 March 1908, 9; in Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

¹⁰ The relationship of manual training and domestic science warrants historical interpretation which will not be attempted here because such an analysis falls outside the parameters of this study.

Macdonald's money helped to establish manual training but developing an efficient program in each locale was crucial because the lower and more predictable the cost the greater the possibility each district could afford and would choose to continue the centre indefinitely. Once the centres were operating Robertson persuaded ratepayers that the value of manual training had been demonstrated—enough value to warrant the extra cost to school districts for continuing the centres. The implementation of manual training and domestic science demonstrated that with a little equipment and teacher training skills and values could be taught in public schools which children could take with them into any future occupation including farming, housekeeping, factory and office work.

Economic and Social Strains

Robertson promised manual training would teach work ethic, develop hand-eye coordination, prepare students for advanced industrial and agricultural training and encourage moral development. These promised benefits were direct responses to economic and cultural changes taking place. Business-government relations, urbanization, industrial and agricultural training, and the character of the Canadian population were foremost in the minds of business and community leaders as well as parents and trustees. An explanation of the changes taking place illustrates why Robertson won public support for manual training with the benefits he promised.

Industrializing countries were competing and each exhibited a new national confidence often called the 'new imperialism.' Although Canada was not one of the leading powers, she was closely tied socially and economically to the United States and Great Britain.¹¹ Industry boomed and produced several Canadian millionaires who built industrial empires employing tens of thousands of workers. Power over industry was concentrated into the hands of few

through mergers and monopolies. “[T]he merger movement, then, linked finance and industrial capital, concentrated production, and gave rise to the new strata within the capitalist class.”¹² These businessmen, “owners or operators of enterprises risking capital in the hope of profit,” worked collectively to minimize competition.¹³ They were deeply individualistic and assumed each individual was personally responsible for his or her successes or failures.¹⁴ Sir William Macdonald was one of these men.

Industrialization and agricultural expansion meant that employers required large numbers of employees in central locations to work in factories, mills and foundries in turn located near transportation hubs and financial centres. In 1901 3,381,153 Canadians lived in rural areas with only 1,990,162 in urban areas. By 1911 the difference had decreased substantially with 4,058,346 people in rural areas and 3,147,297 in urban areas. In 1921 there was almost an equal number in each area.¹⁵ By 1900 one-third of Canada’s work force was employed in factories. These employees required service industries, household goods, and living quarters. This increasingly urban population necessitated a large public service sector and governments grew as employers.¹⁶ Cities on the Prairies expanded as supply and transportation centres with the development of agriculture. Eastern cities increased in size and population with industrial growth. In the west on the other hand Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton and Calgary developed as centres for the farming or ranching areas surrounding them. Winnipeg, in particular, became an important city as all three major railways passed

¹¹ Cook and Brown, *Canada* 26-48.

¹² Palmer, *Working Class Experience* 136.

¹³ Michael Bliss, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business, 1883-1911* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979) 136.

¹⁴ Bliss, *Living Profit* 139.

¹⁵ M. C. Urquhart, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1965) 1. Urban areas are defined as incorporated areas with a population in excess of 25,000.

¹⁶ Douglas A Lawr and Robert D. Gidney, *Educating Canadians: A Documentary History of Public Education* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, Ltd., 1973) 158.

through it, creating the largest rail yard in the world by 1904. Agricultural products were processed there and shipped east. Construction materials and manufactured goods were shipped west to the new settlers. The priorities of eastern and western cities differed because of these needs, but trade policy tended to favour eastern cities. Foreign investment primarily from Britain and the United States went mainly to Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia—which did not help ease regional friction, or the friction between agriculture and industry.¹⁷ As these cities grew so too did the need for skilled labour. Just as Macdonald and Robertson had initiated the seed grain competition to improve the profitability of farming they now would initiate manual training to teach skills and moral development for children who might work on the farm, in the factory or the office.

Improving skills and moral development had more than economic appeal for Macdonald and Robertson who witnessed the undesirable results of urbanization. Streetcars and automobiles allowed middle and upper class families to move away from factories and crowded conditions of urban areas. This left the working-class people with polluted, congested neighborhoods, but access to the factories. Many of the social institutions left the downtown areas and followed the wealthier people to the suburbs. Children were often expected to begin working as young as possible so most working-class children received only a grade three education and were exposed to the “vices” of city life.¹⁸ Working conditions in the cities were equally poor. Long hours, low pay, and dangerous tasks that led to accidents and deaths were common, as were layoffs. There was no job security, workers’ compensation or unemployment insurance. As the cost of living increased and surpassed wages most working-class families needed two incomes to meet basic needs.

¹⁷ Graham D. Taylor and Peter A. Baskerville, *A Concise History of Business in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994) 248-51.

¹⁸ Steven Maynard, “‘Horrible Temptations’: Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-

Although Canada was increasingly prosperous the new wealth was not distributed evenly. Labourers were paid the lowest possible wages. Capitalists "...consciously or unconsciously pursu[ed] a ruthless policy of forced capital accumulation..." leaving the majority of Canadians with the minority of wealth.¹⁹ In Montreal subsistence wages remained. In Toronto, which had proportionately greater industrial expansion, the working class achieved no real improvements in working or living conditions. Poverty was a way of life for urban labourers.²⁰ Overall skilled and male labourers had better working conditions and better pay than unskilled and female labour. Industry operated with minimally-skilled workers performing simple tasks at a fast pace with minimal waste of energy and time. They were paid minimally as well. These practices left little room for concern about the quality of the workers' environments or their safety. While industry grew, and work was broken down into mechanized, specialized jobs, the number of (lesser-paid) women employed in manufacturing and clerical jobs increased.²¹ Unless the workers organized effectively, "they could force neither recognition nor consideration of their problems by businessmen."²² These conditions did not go unnoticed by social reformers including Macdonald who lived in Montreal and employed labourers, or Robertson who lived in Ottawa and was responsible for rural development. Manual training was a response that promised to stem rural depopulation and at the same time prepare students who would eventually work in industrial jobs.

The working class became increasingly culturally diverse with immigration from eastern Europe, but labourers' common experiences were distinct from those of the businessmen and

1935," *The Canadian Historical Review* 78:2 (June 1997) 209.

¹⁹ Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Power: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 148; John Bullen, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late 19th Century Urban Ontario," *Labour*, 18 (Fall 1986) 164.

²⁰ Michael Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979) 171.

²¹ Francis, Jones and Smith, *Destinies* 124-8.

created a distinct working-class culture. Class unity was impeded by language barriers, regional tensions, and the willingness of many immigrants to work for less than non-immigrants. When members of the working-class did organize to improve their pay and working conditions they had to contend with the increasing intervention of the state. At the turn of the last century governmental attitude toward business followed social Darwinistic assumptions that the best naturally survive and are the most successful, therefore success in business was an indication of one's moral worth, regardless of labour practices. Government assumed it should indirectly stimulate industrial development and economic growth, and policymakers were willing to adopt interventionist or non-interventionist attitudes when necessary.²³

Unions increased in size and number but had only a small amount of success before World War I, with only 10% of the workforce unionized by 1911. One thousand strikes, sometimes violent, were carried out between 1900 and 1911. Laurier created the Department of Labour in 1900 to prevent and settle strikes because the demands of labour created a crisis for capitalists who, in the interest of order—meaning overall economic growth—encouraged development of labour legislation.²⁴ Laurier's government passed the Conciliation Act and created the *Labour Gazette* that same year. The Act itself was weak, and the *Gazette* was intended merely to aid in the conciliation process. The first editor of the publication, William Lyon Mackenzie King, later became Deputy Minister and finally Minister of Labour. He made the Act work by getting personally involved as mediator in dispute situations. King was a committed social reformer who "saw conciliation as a humanitarian mission to bring industrial peace," and considered conciliation one of his "children." All English-speaking industrial nations evolved distinct legal structures to address labour disputes. If interventionist and

²² Piva, *Condition of the Working Class* 174.

²³ Bliss, *Evolution* v.

²⁴ Palmer, *Working Class Experience* 136-7.

voluntarist approaches defined the opposite ends of a continuum, Canada was in the middle. "Ending strikes took complete priority over any other consideration, and the Department of Labour's own assessment of success or failure reflected only that fact."²⁵ It had nothing to do with justice or honesty for that matter. As Minister of Labour, King drafted the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act in 1907 which provided stronger justification for state intervention. Some improvements in working conditions and pay were made, but generally in the interest of increasing productivity, lowering absenteeism, and forestalling unionism. This general and persistent conflict in urban areas cemented the resolve of social reformers like Macdonald and Robertson to act. Manual training, with its promises of developing mental and physical skills, and therefore profitability and earning potential, had strong appeal for the working class and the captains of industry.

As the population and economy expanded imperialism and nationalism became major themes in Canadian life. Imperialists such as Robertson wanted Canada to honour imperial obligations, as with the Boer War, and to earn more influence within the Empire. Nationalists wanted Canada to have freedom and neutrality, in part to hold the country together as language and cultural diversity increased.

What divided those who called themselves nationalists from those who preferred to be known as imperialists was not the questions of whether Canada should manage her own affairs and have the power to formulate a foreign policy expressive of her interests; what divided them was disagreement over how these powers were to be acquired and for what purposes they were to be employed.²⁶

²⁵ Gregory Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995) 419-440. "The first two decades of the 20th century witnessed both the innovation of a liberal rule of law in labour relations and the largest number of military interventions of any period in Canadian history. Moreover, the recourse to coercion increasingly focused on the elements of the Canadian working class that resisted most strenuously the implementation of the new rule of law..." Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* 419. This legislation forbid strikes of lockouts during compulsory legislation and a cooling off period. This "bureaucratized the labour movement." Joy E. Esbrey, *Knight of the Holy Spirit: A Study of William Lyon Mackenzie King* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980) 196; Paul Roazen, *Canada's King: An Essay in Political Psychology* (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1998) 146; R. MacGregor Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography, 1874-1923* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958) 200-221.

²⁶ Carl Berger ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism, 1884-1914: A Conflict in Canadian Thought* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1969) 5; George Tomkins, "Canadian Education and the Development of a National Consciousness:

Indeed, Canadian imperialism can be seen as one variety of Canadian nationalism.²⁷ In the face of these conflicts Laurier's government found that in addition to fostering industrial development it had to both strengthen ties with the Empire and keep Canadians from dividing along cultural and religious lines as both imperialists and nationalists assumed the Anglo-Saxon race was superior to other races, which created special responsibilities, burdens and destinies. A feeling of Anglo-Saxon superiority gave English Canadians a common bond and a feeling they were part of the great adventure of the British Empire.²⁸

The biggest problem for imperialists and nationalists alike was the character of farmers and urban labourers. "One of the fundamental features of Canadian imperialist social thought was an idealized conception of agriculture and a tendency to regard it as the most healthy foundation of national life."²⁹ Victorians assumed that knowledge of nature and appreciation of God's work "formed part of the intellectual equipment of every educated person."³⁰ It is understandable, then, that a belief that an agricultural life was more stable than the "rootless" urban life, and the potential of the prairies to fill with farmers, held hope for imperialists. As business pushed forward without regard for imperialism, language or culture, businessmen feared the work ethic of immigrant workers. From businessmen's perspectives "...[I]t seemed that most people, particularly workers, were not committed to the success values, that they had to be moulded into suitably self-disciplined, success-oriented ways of behavior...."³¹ Economic

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," in Alf Chaiton and Neil Macdonald, eds., *Canadian School and Canadian Identity* (Toronto: Gage Educational Publications, 1977) 6-28.

²⁷ Berger, *Sense of Power* 9.

²⁸ Nancy Sheehan, "Philosophy, Pedagogy, and Practice: the IODE and the Schools in Canada, 1900-1945," *Historical Studies in Education* 2.2 (1990) 307-310.

²⁹ Berger, *Sense of Power* 177.

³⁰ Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) 9; Suzanne Zeller, "Roads Not Taken: Victorian Science, Technical Education, and Canadian Schools, 1844-1913," *Historical Studies in Education* 12.1/2 (2000) 1.

³¹ Bliss, *Living Profit* 138.

growth, then, in the minds of some businessmen was being held back by cultural values concerning work and discipline.

More extreme than fear of a lack of work ethic was racial hatred toward and within the working class. Racial conflicts increased in the face of cultural and linguistic diversity and economic stress. The basis of this hatred was "...irrational fears and assumptions..." and a psychological need for a homogenous society to perpetuate the values of the white majority.³² Economic strains fostered greater tensions among urban and rural labourers, particularly when immigrants agreed to work for lower wages and displaced non-immigrants. These strains were mediated to some extent—and often unjustly—by deportation, which was used to manage the labour supply, maintain social order, and relieve the government of dependents living in poverty.³³ The intelligence and work ethic of the general population and the subsequent success of Canada as a country, was a central preoccupation for government, business and social interests.

In the face of economic strains, perceived rural decline, social stratification, poor living conditions in Canada's cities and racial tensions middle-class social reformers who desired a more stable Canadian society were inspired to work for improvements.³⁴ These reformers tended to be professionals such as businessmen, lawyers and doctors as well as ministers,

³² W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978) 167-9; Marilyn Barber, "Canadianization Through the Schools of the Prairie Provinces Before World War I: the Attitudes and Aims of the English-Speaking Majority" in Martin L. Kovacs, ed., *Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education* (Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1978) 282; Bill Maciejko, "Ukrainians and Prairie School Reform, 1896-1921: Ethnic and Domestic Ideologies in Modern State Formation," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 22:2 (1990) 19-40; Patricia E. Roy, "Citizens Without Votes: East Asians in British Columbia, 1872-1947," in Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Methuen, 1981) 151.

³³ Barbara Roberts, *Whence they Came: Deportation from Canada 1900-1935* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988) 4-6.

³⁴ For a detailed description of the differences in status and income of the various occupational categories in agriculture and industry, see Leonard Marsh, *Employment Research: An Introduction to the McGill Programme of Research in the Social Sciences*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935) 315-18 and *Canadians In and Out of Work: A Survey of Economic Classes and their Relation to the Labour Market* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940) 25. Although largely descriptive, Marsh provides detailed comparisons of status and income between classes

labour leaders, politicians and “evangelical feminists”—middle class women empowered by evangelicalism to approach social reform as a moral and religious dilemma. Social reform became the vehicle for the middle class to shape Canadian culture and through that the economy. These things they expected to do with the help of the state, and government was listening.³⁵ Efforts at change came in several varieties as reformers attended to various solutions to social dilemmas. Prohibitionists, for example, believed temperance was the best solution, settlement houses were established to provide assistance, entertainment and guidance for working-class neighborhoods in the growing slums, and proponents of mental health believed identifying genetic inferiority could help control the character of the population.³⁶ But the commonalities between them included so-called Christian principles and a desire to improve society without changing its basic structure. Driving many of these schemes and their proponents was one overriding movement: the social gospel. The social gospel, as defined by Allen, was “...part of a widespread attempt in Europe and North America to revive and develop Christian social insights and to apply them to the emerging forms of a collective society.” It was a link between social reform and the religious heritage of Canada, and gave reformers a rationalization for their work that contradicted neither their religious beliefs nor their desires for

in Canada and ranks the farmer and fisherman along side the professional and managerial class.

³⁵ Berger, *Sense of Power* 186; Jean Barman, “Reflections on the Role of the School in the Transition to Work in British Columbia Resource Towns,” in Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland and J. Donald Wilson, eds., *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, Ltd., 1995) 375; During the 1880s daily newspapers chronicled the problems of city life and “popularized the idea of reform long before intellectuals discovered urban problems. By 1900, however, the journalist had been replaced by the expert.” Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis: the Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920,” in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise, *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History* (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1984) 436; Sharon Anne Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow: The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995) 7; Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1967-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 59.

³⁶ Francis, Jones and Smith, *Destinies* 156-75; Sharon Anne Cook, “Educating for Temperance: The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and Ontario Children, 1880-1916,” *Historical Studies in Education* 5.2 (1993) 251; Cathy L. James, “Practical Diversions and Educational Adjustments: Evangelia House and the Advent of Canada’s Settlement Movement, 1902-09,” *Historical Studies in Education* 10.1 & 2 (1998) 48-66; Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990) 28, 37; Lorna F. Hurl, “Restricting Child Factory Labour in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario,” *Labour* 21 (Spring 1988) 87.

their new, more complex society. Proponents of the social gospel ranged from the conservative (traditional evangelicalism and personal ethics) to the radical (social salvation must proceed personal salvation because there was so much evil in society). In the middle were the progressives who advanced a "...broad, ameliorative programme of reform."³⁷

These primarily urban reformers believed not only that they were making needed changes, but that they should be imposing their own values and ideas on the general public.

Marrying a faith in the principles of Christian charity and imperial patriotism to the seemingly progressive impact of modern science and technology, these reformers called for a collective assault on sweatshop conditions, slum housing, child labour, unsanitary dwellings and thoroughfares, alcohol and opium addiction, prostitution, crime and disease. Most believed that religion and science acted inexorably to ensure social improvement.³⁸

When shaping the working class, however, Valverde argues these reformers were in fact shaping themselves as a class and as Canadians. They were not trying to erase class differences by imposing values and habits on the working class. Indeed they were trying to maintain class differences and create a stable industrial society.³⁹

The overall social progress such reforms promised to bring, and the enthusiasm supporters brought to their causes, demonstrated their undying faith in institutional solutions to societal problems. It also illustrates a shift in attention from small, isolated, locally controlled communities to growing, centralized, bureaucratic-minded middle class values which emphasized "continuity and regularity, functionality and rationality, administration and management," to cope with the changes brought about by industrialization, urbanization and population growth. Ironically, these reformers including proponents of industrial training,

³⁷ Richard Allan, *The Social Passion: Religion and Moral Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 3-4, 17.

³⁸ Colin Howell, "The 1900s: Industry, Urbanization, and Reform," in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 155.

³⁹ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991) 16, 29.

domestic science, temperance and health applied modern management techniques and institutional administration to societal ills in urban and rural settings in order to preserve the traditional, rural values of autonomous communities. These reformers "...set out to transform the state from an impassive laissez-faire institution to an interventionist moral watchdog."⁴⁰

The state was able to impose regulations, but regional differences in tolerance for state interference, cost and logistics limited their impact. Reformers were frustrated and impatient, but confident and optimistic.⁴¹

Educational reformers were caught up in larger developments. Inherent in the support for school reform was the belief that formal schooling, as a state activity, could solve social and economy problems. Schools would teach information, but also develop socially valuable beliefs and behaviors. This function was based on the assumption that communities valued some knowledge and character traits over others.⁴² Previously local trustees had administered these values through curriculum and personnel policies. But throughout the 19th century school administrations in each of the provinces were organized, standardized, and expanded. Schools were built and supported with local taxes, teacher training "Normal" schools were created, the teaching force became disproportionately female, and schooling was made compulsory for longer periods of a child's life. Provincial departments of education increased in size and

⁴⁰ Strange and Loo, *Making Good*, 60.

⁴¹ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) 112, 165; Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: a History of British Columbia*, revised edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 203; Kari Dehli, "'Health Scouts' for the State? Schooling and Public Health Nurses in Early Twentieth-Century Toronto," *Historical Studies in Education* 2.2 (Fall 1990) 248; Diana Pederson, "'The Call to Service': the YWCA and the Canadian College of Women, 1886-1920," in Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, eds., *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989) 188.

⁴² George F. Tomkins, "Canadian Education and the Development of a National Consciousness: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," in Alf Chaiton and Neil McDonald, eds., *Canadian Schools and Canadian Identity* (Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing, 1977) 6, 12; Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia, 1900-1929," in *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* eds., J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, Ltd., 1980) 23, 47; Jean Mann, "G. M. Weir and H. B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, Ltd., 1980)

centralizing power, creating a tug-of-war between those departments and local boards of trustees which jealously guarded local control of schooling. Local boards controlled local taxes, hiring and firing of teachers while provincial departments controlled curricula, special grants, and textbook selection and distribution to varying extents across Canada.⁴³

Enforcement of provincial policies was made possible through inspection and "central authorities were increasingly able to monitor the local fate of their policies, to identify conflicts, to capture and disseminate innovation, to translate legal principles into administrative practice," Now, at the turn of the century, a public institution was in place and at the disposal of politicians and social reformers.⁴⁴ Those outside the local boards of trustees and the provincial ministries of education could use this institution to their benefit because the school system was underfunded and reformers such as Macdonald were willing to pay for the changes they desired.

Before mass public compulsory schooling most children's lives consisted of farm work, factory work, or apprenticeship. By 1900 at least minimal schooling was a common experience for most Canadian children.⁴⁵ Urban schools by the turn of the century were usually multi-graded, staffed by highly trained teachers using standardized texts, under the constant

115.

⁴³ Patrick Rafferty Oisin, "Balancing the Books: Brokerage Politics and the 'Ontario Readers Question,'" *Historical Studies in Education* 4.1 (1992) 80; Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ontario: Falmer Press, 1988) 366; Chad Gaffield, "Children, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review* 72.2 (1991) 190-1; David G. Burley, "Administering the Educational State: George W. Ross and the Cultural Achievements of Power in Ontario, 1876-1896," paper presented to the Seventh Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association, 22-25 October 1992, The University of Lethbridge, 14.

⁴⁴ Bruce Curtis, *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 193; Alison Prentice and Susan Houston, *Family, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975) 1-2; Kate Rousmaniere and Kari Dehli, eds., *Discipline, Moral Regulation and Schooling* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997) 3, 273; Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999) 170; Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools* (New York: Praeger, 1975) 56; Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers' Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Central Canada," in Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 137.

⁴⁵ Prentice and Houston, *Family, School and Society* 2; Ian Ross Robertson, "Reform, Literacy and the Lease: the Prince Edward Island Free Education Act of 1852," *Acadiensis* (Autumn 1990) 52.

supervision of administrators in modern buildings, and were considered ideal. In reality, however, schools were often less than satisfactory with inadequate space for students in old buildings lacking hot water, modern heating, adequate ventilation or plumbing.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the traditional rural one-room schools came to be seen as outdated and inadequate. Schools in Ontario and Quebec cities were models for the rest of Canada. Because there was widespread agreement that the rural schools should change, Macdonald and Robertson had an opportunity to design some of that change. They did in this instance with a subject that would teach a child both moral and physical skills for both industrial and agricultural occupations.

Before the rise of factory-based manufacturing, craftsmen were trained through apprenticeship and women in their homes. The apprenticeship system became less viable as skilled labourers moved to factory employment. Farmers, in some ways caught up in similar economic developments, looked for higher revenues using fewer labourers. In the prairies, as elsewhere, farmers had furthermore to adapt to particular growing conditions. The dual evolution of manufacturing and agriculture, and the effects of environmental difference, all raised the question how school should adjust to prepare workers for a newly diverse workplace and for citizenship. Administrators, teachers, business people, and social leaders hoped (and expected) that redesigned vocational and industrial education, for example, would prepare mainly working-class students for industrial employment and social efficiency.

Groups of educational reformers organized themselves into the Dominion Educational Association, formed in 1891 to give educators an institutional structure to help advance their ideas and build consensus among educators across the Dominion. In the 1880s the Ontario Education Association became an avenue for professional educators to redefine public

⁴⁶ Kate Rousmaniere, "Teachers Work and the Social Relations of School Space in Early-Twentieth-Century North American Urban Schools," *Historical Studies in Education* 8.1 (1996) 48.

schooling to include social reform.⁴⁷ Scientific theory and idealist philosophy "...assisted educators in shifting emphasis away from an absolute, essentially personal moral standard to one which was largely social and relativistic."⁴⁸ Once again the social gospel offered a bridge from religious belief to secular state organization which did not offend those who believed moral education was indoctrination of students into a set of "...values with which they might not agree." Moral reform, then, appeared in the form of patriotism, nationalism, and acceptance of social and political institutions. Once moral education took these forms "...their content typically represented a fascinating compromise between the (necessary) altruistic-egalitarian objectives of democratic moral education, and the short-term prudential requirements of the moment..." such as time-work discipline and respect for the law.⁴⁹

Educational reform, then, was intertwined with political and social reform. Educators viewed questions of curriculum and method in light of changing urban and rural culture, economic development, population growth and ideas about teaching and childhood.⁵⁰ To make these changes various individuals such as politicians, school administrators, philanthropists, or social reformers in general, were pulling schools away from a formal curriculum based on 'mental discipline.' They rejected "the rigidity of mental discipline theory, the preoccupation with abstract knowledge, and the drudgery of rote learning allegedly conspired to stifle

⁴⁷ G. E. Malcolm MacLeod and Robert E. Blair, *The Canadian Education Association: The First 100 Years 1891-1991* (Toronto: Canadian Education Association, 1992) 4.

⁴⁸ Robert Bérard, "Moral Education in Nova Scotia, 1880-1920," *Acadiensis* 14.1 (Autumn 1984) 50.

⁴⁹ William A. Bruneau, "Opportunism and Altruism in Official Moral Education, 1880-1939: The Examples of France and Canada," *History of Education Review* 14.1 (1985) 25.

⁵⁰ F. K. Stewart, "The Canadian Education Association: Its History and Role," Masters Thesis, University of Toronto, 1956, 5-8; for a similar discussion on the Progressive Education Association in the United States see Sol Cohen, *Progressives and Urban School Reform: the Public Education Association of New York City, 1895-1954* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College Columbia University, 1964); R. S. Patterson, "Progressive Education: Impetus to Educational Change in Alberta and Saskatchewan," in Howard Palmer and Donald Smith, eds., *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., 1980) 173; National Education Association, "Report of the Committee on the Place of Industries in Public Education," (Washington: the Association, 1910); Timothy A. Dunn, "Work, Class and Education: Vocationalism in British Columbia's Public Schools, 1900-1929 (Ph.D. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978) 189; Nancy S. Christie, "Psychology, Sociology and the Secular Movement: the Ontario Educational Association's Quest for Authority,

children's imaginations, leaving them ill-equipped to navigate their way in a world of change."⁵¹

New ideas about pedagogy combined with a growing need to prepare the next generation for industrial life brought accusations of irrelevance and ineffectiveness against public schools. Educational reformers responded by pushing schools in one or more of three directions: toward learning by playing or doing, toward preparing for employment in industry, or toward preserving agricultural life. This often took the form of new subjects and teaching methods or administrative structures. Subjects such as manual training, domestic science, nature study, school gardening, physical education (which included gymnastics, military drill and 'manly games' for boys and calisthenics and dance for girls), health, and consolidation of schools were advocated by various groups.⁵² Canadian reformers were selective and borrowed and modified ideas from other countries. As Sutherland argues "...they took one idea from here, another from there, and added their own modifications and inventions. They were sure that they knew how each element fitted into the overall and, in their opinion, superior systems they were creating."⁵³ Robertson was one such reformer who tried to preserve rural life. As with other social reformers, many educational reformers wanted to preserve rural values through urban-oriented institutional schemes, replacing local control with centralized administrations.⁵⁴

1880-1900," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25:2 (Summer 1990) 137.

⁵¹ Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc, 1997) 105; David Hogan, "The Market Revolution and Disciplinary Power: Joseph Lancaster and the Psychology of the Early Classroom System," *History of Education Quarterly* 29.3 (Fall 1989) 416.

⁵² Helen Lenskyj, "Training for 'True Womanhood': Physical Education for Girls in Ontario Schools, 1890-1920," *Historical Studies in Education* 2, 2 (1990) 205; Lawr and Gidney, *Educating Canadians*, 158; Morris Mott, "Confronting 'Modern' Problems Through Play: The Beginning of Physical Education in Manitoba's Public Schools, 1900-1915," *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, eds. Nancy Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, 1986) 57.

⁵³ Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 235.

⁵⁴ B. Anne Wood, *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985) 6, xi, 171; Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in*

Popular Ideas, Successful Models

Robertson used internationally popular ideas from educational theorists and successful models of manual training from other countries for his version of manual training. Before and during the Macdonald-Robertson schemes, Robertson traveled to Europe and the United States in search of ideas and methods. He was directly or indirectly influenced by these ideas and they are reflected in his work and public speeches. Robertson was influenced by a mass of educational theories and had multiple goals for education. Macdonald on the other hand had a consistent preference for practical education, as demonstrated by his educational philanthropy. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), and Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) developed ideas widely discussed among Canadian reformers.⁵⁵ Translated into practice, however, these ideas took various forms, at times contradictory to the original ideals. Robertson was exposed to these ideas and drew his programme in part from them.⁵⁶

Pestalozzi, influenced by Rousseau's *Emile*, argued children's potential should be developed in a nurturing environment and that learning should proceed from the known to the unknown. This philosophy of education resulted from Pestalozzi's understanding of the importance of mothering and family nurturing and his concern for the poor and oppressed. Formal education for these children, he believed, should be modeled on the methods of the home. This changed the purposes of schooling from imparting information to developing the

American Classrooms, 1890-1980 (New York: Longman, 1984) 17; S. Alexander Rippa, *Education in a Free Society: an American History* (New York: Longman, 1984) 176.

⁵⁵ Johann Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children: An Attempt to Help Mothers to Teach Their Own Children and an Account of the Method* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1915) and *Leonard and Gertrude: A Popular Story* (Philadelphia: Joseph Groff, 1801); Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Concerning Education* (Boston: Ginn, Heath & Co., 1885); Johann Friedrich Herbart, *The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced From Its Aim, and the Aesthetic Revelation of the World* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1893); Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1887).

⁵⁶ W. E. Marsden, "Contradictions in Progressive Primary School Ideologies and Curricula in England: Some Historical Perspectives," *Historical Studies in Education* 9, 2 (1997) 224-228.

child. Pestalozzi suggests that “the ultimate aim of education is not perfection in the accomplishments of the school, but fitness for life; not the acquirement of habits of blind obedience, and of prescribed diligence, but a preparation for independent action.”⁵⁷ Pestalozzi caused educators to reexamine the nature of their work, especially regarding the poor. He argued all children should be educated and emphasized not subject matter but the child. Pestalozzi, along similar lines as Froebel, emphasized ‘object teaching’ to train the mind, hand, and heart of the child using all the senses. As long as this method did not become too mechanical it provided great improvement over the methods of memorization and recitation.⁵⁸ Robertson’s conception of manual training is set apart from others to a great extent by the same emphasis on mind, heart, and hand.

Herbart in contrast believed that ideas could influence behaviour, therefore education could influence moral character. Educators, then, should enable students to develop and apply sound moral judgment in order to build character. He argued that learning occurs when new information is associated with what is already known—the process of apperception. Teaching methods were crucial if learning was to occur, so Herbart developed four general stages he labeled clearness, association, system and method. He did not intend these to become fixed steps. Nevertheless Herbart’s followers created the “five formal steps” (preparation, presentation, comparison, generalization, and application), attributed this rigid mechanical device to him, and made it the basis for the model lesson plan. The organized knowledge present in the student’s mind was created not only through formal instruction but also through the student’s social and physical environment. “Thus, by its utilization of the pupil’s total

⁵⁷ Pestalozzi cited in Robert Stamp, “Education and the Economic and Social Milieu: The English-Canadian Scene from the 1870s to 1914,” in *Canadian Education: A History*, Eds. J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp and Louis Phillippe Audet (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1970) 308.

⁵⁸ Stamp, “Economic and Social Milieu,” 307-8; Sutherland, *Children*, 160-1.

experiential background, apperception gave scientific, psychological justification for a broader and more flexible school curriculum than was ever comprehended by the literary tradition.”⁵⁹

Herbart’s *The Science of Education* was finally translated into English in 1892, thus furthering his influence in Canada. Because his ideas were based on a scientific theory of psychology his followers had credibility among social and educational reformers. When, at the end of the nineteenth century, teachers were being formally trained in new teacher training colleges, Herbart’s ideas became immensely popular. When English and Canadian teachers were “assailed by conflicting methods and theories,” the Herbartian approach—subject-centred verbal learning emphasizing character development through history and literature taught using five steps—was very attractive.

Froebel’s ‘activity’ method emphasized the importance of the young child, not just the demands of ancient educational practice and social ends. After observing Pestalozzi, Froebel wrote, “It was an altogether new kind of education in which little children held the centre of the stage, in which they were surrounded by kindness and understanding, and in which there were no stuffy, meaningless books, but instead there was the rapture of music, and play, and self-activity.”⁶⁰

Froebel believed the child should develop his or her own personality. Activities should follow the interests of the child, and the child would learn from activities. Froebel taught that the mental, moral and physical elements of the child must be developed “harmoniously.” This required that parents and teachers provide a nurturing physical, spiritual and educational environment. Froebel embodied the principles of self-development, activity and social cooperation in the kindergarten, the first of which he began in 1841 in Germany. In the

⁵⁹ Stamp, “Economic and Social Milieu,” 308-10; Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 105.

⁶⁰ Froebel quoted in Stamp, “Economic and Social Milieu,” 311; Kari Dehli, “‘They Rule by Sympathy’: Pedagogy and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Kindergarten,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 19.2 (1994): 195-21.

kindergarten children would play to learn because in play the child was self-active, combining physical, intellectual and moral development.

Froebel's influence is most easily measured by the implementation of the kindergarten where children could learn through play and activity spontaneously. James Hughes, a leading reformer of elementary education and Toronto's inspector of schools, was the strongest advocate in Canada of private kindergartens. Hughes persuaded the Toronto board of Education to try this in 1883, and within twenty years they were common across Canada, unfortunately with a more rigid atmosphere than Froebel intended.⁶¹ Robertson also believed education should be nurturing, and that education involve the physical, moral and intellectual development of the child. Instead of the kindergarten, he embodied his beliefs in manual training and school gardens (which included seed selection). He took his educational ideas one step further hoping the children would influence their parents with the new information and work attitudes they gained from the seed grain competition, from manual training, and as discussed in the next chapter, in the school gardens.

The Macdonald-Robertson movement began at a time when, having been exposed to these new pedagogical ideas, Canadian educational reformers:

...wanted to shift from the academic universalism of the mental discipline tradition to the more practical particularism of a child-centred program, which was more appropriate to the student's interests, environment, and even his future vocation. This new theory raised relevance to an educational virtue, and allowed educators to promote the new "practical" subjects with enthusiasm and conviction."⁶²

How much change trickled down to individual classrooms is the subject of much historical debate. Sutherland notes the difficulty reformers faced in making change in the

⁶¹ Sutherland, *Children*, 17-9 ; Axelrod, *Promise of Schooling*, 106. Stamp, "Economic and Social Milieu," 318.

⁶² Lawr and Gidney, *Educating Canadians*, 161; Patterson, "Progressive Education," 175; Sutherland, *Children*, 235.

classroom, and in keeping that change aligned with the original ideas. This process was particularly difficult to effect in rural schools.⁶³ This thesis demonstrates concrete change at a limited number of locations but does not attempt to generalize these examples of change.⁶⁴

Robertson was careful to distinguish between the various models for manual training, and to distinguish manual training from technical education or industrial training in his speeches and publications. International influences were an undeniable factor in the spread of manual training in industrialized countries at this time. The relation of education to “national progress” was recognized and “pedagogical innovations associated directly with industrial prosperity had come under the closest scrutiny.” Models were developed in one country and tried in another, usually in a slightly different form.⁶⁵ The most notable are the Swedish and Russian models. Robertson made great use of not only the models but also the records of success. Most importantly, he made rural progress and character development the primary reasons for manual training, and although industrial advancement was mentioned he did not emphasize it.⁶⁶ The origins of manual training in other countries illustrate the use Robertson made of pre-existing courses, as well as the variety in purposes held for manual courses in industrializing countries—variety which was the source of much confusion and debate when the courses were introduced into Canadian schools.

⁶³ Sutherland, *Children*, 241, 187

⁶⁴ Neil Sutherland, “The Triumph of Formalism: Elementary Schooling in Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s,” *B.C. Schooling* (Spring 1986) 175.

⁶⁵ Art education, for example, developed in Canada along similar lines with England because the ideas, such as the South Kensington System “had the aura of the ‘old country’ and did not have strong counter-ideas to challenge them.” Anthony Rogers, “The Beautiful in Form and Colour: Art Education Curriculum in British Columbia Between the Wars,” (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983) 19; The development of technical education for secondary students in Leicestershire developed similarly as it did in Canada with industrial leaders and government commissions as the initial most vocal advocates for such instruction for older boys. Malcolm Seaborne, “Education in the Nineties: The Work of the Technical Education Committees,” in Brian Simon, ed., *Education in Leicestershire 1540-1940: A Regional Study*, (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1968) 178.

⁶⁶ W. H. G. Armytage, *The Russian Influence of English Education* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1969); Cremin, *Transformation*, 23-57. See the series of international educational influences by Armytage, particularly the influence of Russian education.

Sloyd, a system of manual woodwork developed in Sweden, is often considered to be the origin of manual training classes in public schools, yet the idea of manual training did not originate in Sweden. The idea of combining manual work, particularly woodwork, with intellectual development was present as an ideal and as experimental practice in countries such as Finland, which in 1863 became the first country in the world to implement handwork in national schools, as well as Denmark and Norway. Sweden, however, offered a course which was easily replicated and was adopted in modified form in England, the United States and Canada.

During the 1870s Sweden made efforts to revive cottage industries generally through privately financed institutions which taught trades to young students as they left elementary school. This was known as sloyd, which roughly translates as "handwork." In the beginning, then, sloyd was vocational. One of these work schools for boys was established in 1872 by August Abrahamson on his estate at Naas, assisted by his nephew, Otto Saloman. Two years later they opened a similar school for girls. Also in 1874 they began training teachers for the work schools across Sweden. At Naas they developed the concept of educational handwork for public schools which differed from the product-oriented sloyd already present in Sweden as the new educational sloyd was created for the benefit of the child, not the product. Saloman, himself influenced by the work being done in Finland, became director of this school and inspector of sloyd for the schools in his district. "By his methodical, almost pedantic approach, he evolved a technique by which the natural abilities of children could be developed through manual work [with wood] without directly teaching them a trade."⁶⁷

The school developed into a specialized teacher training facility. By 1900 the Sloyd Seminarium at Naas had trained several thousands of teachers, including (beginning in 1882) many teachers from abroad, especially England. Saloman published his ideas in *The Theory of*

⁶⁷ G. Blachford, *A History of Handicraft Training* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1961) 23-37.

Educational Sloyd in 1892.⁶⁸ Sloyd spread throughout the schools of Sweden: In 1876 there were eighty sloyd schools, the following year sloyd became an optional subject in the official elementary program and by 1896 two thousand sloyd schools (half the schools in Sweden) were in operation and it was taught in all the Swedish teacher training colleges. Once Abrahamson and Saloman developed their organized course and the ideas were published and translated other countries acquired an educational model for manual training with a curriculum that promised to not undermine other school subjects. Such success at developing an organized course and spreading the subject throughout the country no doubt inspired Robertson to try a similar scheme in Canada.

The general rules of sloyd required that instruction move from easy to difficult, from simple to complex, from known to unknown, and that the teacher be tactful and 'interesting' in character. Saloman added instruction should be intuitive, and insisted the instructor be an educator rather than a mere artisan. In Saloman's course students created models from wood that a child would find useful and be capable of completing himself, during lessons which had variety and resulted in an object which became the property of the child. Sloyd involved a set number of ninety minute lessons (usually three times a week) in which tools, usually the sloyd knife, and processes, such as cuts and joints, were introduced one at a time and built upon in each successive lesson thereby repeating known skills and use of tools and adding new ones (Robertson, as well, required an exact sequence). Students began all lessons together but worked independently and at their own pace emphasizing the student, not the product. In this Saloman intended to create a system of education which would develop "...pleasure in bodily labour and respect for it, habits of independence, order, accuracy, attention and industry, increase of physical strength, development of the power of observation in the eye and execution in the hand."

⁶⁸ Otto Saloman, *Theory of Educational Sloyd* (London: G. Philip, 1892).

Abrahamson and Saloman offered a form of teacher training as well which was a key element in making manual training possible. Teacher training included not only the manual skills to be taught to children, but also teaching techniques to allow for individual differences in skill and speed among students. Swedish sloyd "...launched the subject well and truly in all the educational systems of the western world."⁶⁹

The series of lessons and the purposes originated in Sweden, and the English version of this same course served as another model which Robertson referenced in his speeches and publications. Manual training in England went through an experimental period during the 1880s, and a period of systematic, widespread implementation in the 1890s. Influenced by the ideas of Pestalozzi and Froebel, English educators were interested in combining practical or manual work with intellectual work in elementary schools. Although the idea was present, the facilities, funding and a specific course of work were missing. A demand for technical knowledge and science gained momentum with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and this led to the founding of the Science and Art Department in 1853. In 1870, after the Paris Exhibition of 1867 reinforced the demand in England for manual work, state schools were established in urban areas to meet the demand for education there which the (generally rural) voluntary schools could not meet. This infrastructure would eventually allow for the systematic implementation of a course of manual instruction in urban areas of England. The City and Guild of London Institute, established in 1880, brought a greater demand for manual work and also provided funds for training. A Royal Commission created in 1881 recommended England's schools experiment with manual training, funded by grants. The Social Science Congress in Nottingham in 1883 also encouraged practical work in the schools. The result of private funding followed by government grants and public endorsement was the rapid spread of manual work in schools after 1890. Handicraft developed

⁶⁹ Blachford, *History of Handicraft*, 23-37.

earlier in the elementary schools than in the secondary schools, and spread throughout the cities and large towns more than in country schools. Throughout the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, and partly due to the popularity of manual education, elementary education in England retained its role in apprenticeship training, or put another way preparation for one's predetermined class status.⁷⁰ The development of manual training in Canada would follow a strikingly similar pattern. Perhaps the experience of England was the inspiration for Macdonald's and Robertson's strategy.

The first workshops for public elementary school pupils were in Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham, England established between 1882 and 1885. In 1885 the Beethoven Street Elementary School in London was established which is particularly significant as it served as a model for the 'centre' system where manual training facilities were separated physically from the regular school and one centre served the students of several surrounding schools. Eventually this system was criticized for separating the intellectual from the physical aspects of education, but at the time it made manual training financially possible in cities in England and the United States, and Robertson would make use of this idea in Canada, too.

The success of the Beethoven school prompted the London School Board to appoint a committee to investigate manual training in school. The report of this committee contained four recommendations: that the practical activity methods of the kindergarten be continued through primary school, that manual instruction be correlated with elementary science and drawing, that this work be conducted by qualified teachers, and that time for this be created by reducing the hours spent on "book subjects." The report had profound influence. In addition to funding from the City and Guilds of London Institute, the School Board also received funding from the Worshipful Company of Drapers. In 1888 six centres for manual instruction were opened in

⁷⁰ John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1973) 331.

London. In these schools Solomon Barter, an educator, worked out a course of instruction which combined drawing, tools, and practical work in a series of class exercises which, like Swedish sloyd, built upon skills from one lesson to the next while making useful articles. Unlike the Swedish sloyd, English sloyd rigidly kept students synchronized which fit the general methods of teaching in England at the time and the desire for workplace discipline among manufacturers. This program became the basis for manual training in England and his program was published in 1892 as *Woodwork—The English Sloyd*.⁷¹

The Technical Instruction Act of 1889 defined manual instruction as "...instruction in the use of tools, processes of agriculture, and modeling in clay, wood or other material" while technical instruction was "...instruction in the principles of science and art applicable to industries" which did not include training for any particular trade. This act encouraged manual training and allowed local school boards to pay for manual instruction and technical education with local tax money in addition to special grants. In 1890 woodwork was recognized by the Education Department as an elementary school subject. This recognition and the simultaneous availability of funding stimulated the rapid spread of manual training throughout urban areas of England and Scotland. In 1891 sixty-three manual training schools were in operation in the two countries combined. By 1896 there were 1,067. The English centre system differed from the Swedish system where emphasis was placed on the training of teachers who could work in urban or rural schools, in fully equipped workshops or in rural classrooms with modest amounts of equipment. English sloyd never reached rural areas because the use of centres shared by a number of neighborhood schools for the purposes of sharing costs caused manual training to be confined to urban areas. Robertson would have to face this same limitation with his own efforts.

⁷¹ Thomas Joseph Durcan, *History of Irish Education* (Bala, North Wales: Dragon Books, 1972) 35. For a detailed discussion of work-discipline in England see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) 267.

In England the cooperation of the teacher training institutions, generally privately run, was not secured at this time and consequently there was always a lack of qualified instructors and many teachers went to Sweden for their training. "It was against this background of varied teacher training, with the artisan-teacher skilled in craftwork and weak academically, together with the professional teacher qualified in a hand skill after a relatively brief training, that the subject began to acquire momentum." In the 1890s, then, handicraft was "[...]established in schools and though [England] had given much previous thought to the matter, the final stimulus undoubtedly came from the Swedish sloyd."⁷² Swedish sloyd had served as a model which was modified to fit the rigidity of British education and to include mechanical drawings of the objects being made, however the capacity for sloyd in rural areas was not realized in England as it had been in Sweden.

Both systems provided Robertson with popular ideas and successful models to try in Canada. He also made much use of the report of the 1896 Royal Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction which looked into "how far and in what form" manual and practical instruction should be included in Ireland's primary schools. Robertson quoted the Report at length in his efforts to justify the adoption of manual training by individual school districts. The Commission regarded Ireland's manual training courses as a failure because they were not "...constructed with any very definite educational aim and seemed to have been a failure from the beginning." They announced their "strong conviction that Manual and Practical Instruction ought to be introduced, as far as possible..." into the schools because manual and practical instruction would develop students' faculties, intelligence, and prepare students better for work.

The Commission advanced three reasons for their recommendation that Robertson adopted and used. First, they recommended children should learn not only from books but also

⁷² Blachford, *History of Handicraft*, 35-55.

from intelligent observation, through habits of correct reasoning in regard to those observations, and they should learn hand-eye coordination in school. The Commission noted that most of the students attending school under the National School Board of Ireland would spend their lives working with their hands in industrial arts and occupations, and they should be trained to use them. Second, the Commission asserted that manual training stimulated intelligence and interest in school, making time spent in school brighter and more intelligent. It also increased attendance and improved the literary side of education. Such results, they argued, caused educators to continue and extend manual training wherever it was introduced. Third, manual training created a basis for technical education. A literary education with manual training would "...lay a foundation for any system of higher education—literary, scientific, or technical—which might afterwards be found suitable to their talents and their circumstances."⁷³

Manual training was also being conducted in the United States, and initially at least, the model used was based on the Russian model of handwork. In 1868 Victor Della-Vos, Director of the Imperial Technical School of Moscow separated the school workshops where students learned the principles of wood turning, carpentering, fitting and forging, from the mechanical works where commercial orders were filled. A systematic, graduated method of teaching which was philosophically and educationally based, efficient, effective and made individual progress apparent, was introduced into the workshops in 1868. In 1870 this method was presented at the exhibition of manufactures at St. Petersburg and quickly spread to all the technical schools in Russia. Six years later the Russian system was presented at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition where it "stole the show" and no doubt gave satisfaction to those attempting to provide Russia with a skilled and literate population, yet a population that would not seek to

⁷³ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 8-12.

change the social and political order of Russia at the time.⁷⁴ It was observed and reported on by Dr. John D. Runkle, Walker Professor of Mathematics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He was looking for a “system of shop-work instruction...of sufficient range and quality which [would] not consume more time than ought to be spared from the indispensable studies.”⁷⁵ Not only did Russia have a system, but it had been successfully implemented. After implementing the Russian system in the Mechanical Engineering course at MIT, which helped reduce the need for apprenticeships upon graduation, he thought it should be made part of public school education.

Although the Russian system was originally designed for boys eighteen years of age entering the Technical School, “...the credit of adapting it to boys of fourteen or even younger belongs to the United States.”⁷⁶ By 1884 manual training in connection with public schools had been introduced in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, California and Maryland. The following year it was in operation at various educational levels in twenty-four states.⁷⁷ The Russian system was the model of choice in these schools, however Swedish sloyd was also being tried. It was not very successful until Gustav Larson who became Principal of the Sloyd Training School in Boston fit it to the American curriculum. In the United States in 1890 there were 37 manual training centres in cities with a population of 8,000 or more. By 1898 there were 146 centres in cities of that size.

The ideas behind manual training, then, did not originate with Robertson. The experiences of other countries did, however, provide Robertson and other educators with examples. As had most industrializing countries, Canadians had long made a habit of adopting

⁷⁴ Cremin, *Transformation*, 24; Allen Sinel, *The Classroom and the Chancellery: State Educational Reform in Russia Under Count Dmitry Tolstoi*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) 262.

⁷⁵ Charles H. Ham, *Mind and Hand: Manual Training the Chief Factor in Education* (New York: American Book Company, 1900) 333.

⁷⁶ *ON/AR-ED*, 1900, 222.

ideas particularly from Britain and the United States and adapting the ideas to Canadian circumstances. Although none of the industrializing countries developed educational programs in isolation from each other and therefore cannot claim their education is unique, the successful experiences Sweden, Russia, England and the United States had with manual training gave Canadian educators reason to believe they had value.⁷⁸ Robertson used these examples, along with the theory and detailed plans, as appeals to authority to convince first Macdonald and then school trustees to try manual training and perhaps domestic science along with it.

Fertile Soil

When the first Macdonald Manual Training Centres opened in January 1901 there was already a call for technical education in the higher grades. However, there was little if any call for manual training in the intermediate grades except in Ontario and Nova Scotia. By 1894 manual training was offered in 30 city schools in Halifax.⁷⁹ In his annual report in 1898 George Ross, the Minister of Education in Ontario, noted the attention manual training was receiving in the US and in Europe. He defined manual training as “a knowledge of the principles underlying the construction of all objects of industrial value.”⁸⁰ In Ross’ opinion it brought variety and interest to the classroom which increased interest in the intellectual side of the curriculum, developed manual dexterity, developed observation skills including accuracy of forms and understanding of dimensions and proportions, taught the properties of various materials, quickened sensibilities and developed the student’s relationship with the world, developed habits of perseverance and attention, and the training in handicrafts was expected to increase the industrial development of the country. Kingston, Ontario had already recognized

⁷⁷ Ham, *Mind and Hand*, 335; Armytage, *Russian Influence*, 25-27.

⁷⁸ Alison Prentice, “The American Example,” in J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1970) 41.

⁷⁹ Paul Axelrod, *Promise of Schooling*, 107; *NS/AR-ED*, 1899-1900, 120-121.

these values and had established the Kingston Manual Training School in 1898.⁸¹ In 1900 manual training was also available at Woodstock College and at the Brantford Technical School. One centre was established in Charlottetown PEI in October 1900.⁸² Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick did not have manual training in public schools prior to those offered by Macdonald and Robertson.⁸³

Richard Harcourt, who became Minister of Education for Ontario in 1899, viewed manual training as a continuation of kindergarten, especially for urban children because rural children already received hand-eye training from the farming lifestyle. He also thought manual training should not be limited to public schools because high school was no longer just for those going on to a profession. Harcourt argued that the rest of the 'civilized' world had embraced manual training, domestic science and technical education. Unfortunately not everyone understood the educational as well as the practical benefits of the subjects, and therefore they were widely considered to be job training. He was adamant that the economic purposes should not overshadow the educational purposes of schooling, and that education should develop the whole child.⁸⁴ When Harcourt became the Minister, manual training became an optional subject for study in the public and high schools.⁸⁵ He asserted "Technical education must, in its more elementary forms such as manual training, be taken up in the Public Schools, if we are to have well-trained mechanics, farmers and merchants."⁸⁶

Robertson, then, was not the only early advocate of manual training in Canada. He recommended to the Ontario Education Association several reports on manual training, including

⁸⁰ *ON/AR-ED*, 1898, xxxviii.

⁸¹ *ON/AR-ED*, 1898, xxxviii-xxxix.

⁸² *PEI/AR-ED*, 1900, 92-94.

⁸³ *NB/AR-ED*, 1900, lvii; *Que/AR-ED*, 1900-1, 72; *Man/AR-ED*, 1900, 470.

⁸⁴ *ON/AR-ED*, 1900, xxxiv-xliv.

⁸⁵ *ON/AR-ED*, 1898, xxxviii-xxxix; *ON/AR-ED*, 1899, xxi-xxv; Lawr and Gidney, *Educating Canadians*, 160-163.

⁸⁶ *ON/AR-ED*, 1899, xxi.

those written by John Millar (Deputy Minister of Education for Ontario), W. S. Ellis (Principal of Kingston Collegiate Institute), James L. Hughes (Public School Inspector, Toronto School Board) and John Seath (High School Inspector, Ontario). These reports illustrate the varying understandings of, and arguments for, manual training when Macdonald and Robertson began their work. The variety in conceptions of and purposes for manual training is significant as Robertson used moral development and practicality, in that order, to promote the subject while most other proponents argued practicality over moral development and Robertson related manual training to wider social problems, not limiting his argument to economic development or physical skill. The differences in the arguments are also significant because public perception and support of manual training were key factors in successfully implementing it.⁸⁷

Millar observed what was referred to as manual training in high schools in Massachusetts—what Robertson would have called technical or industrial education. Many of the schools he visited also provided manual training in the lower grades. Worcester schools, for example, recommended manual training in elementary school because the high school curriculum was too crowded, because it was easier to teach manual training to eleven and twelve year olds, and because there was a moral and intellectual advantage to be gained from hand—eye coordination in the early years. Millar suggested that all public school boards in cities and large towns should “provide instruction in sewing, cooking and manual training of an elementary character in woodwork ” to be taught by regular classroom teachers.⁸⁸

Ellis advocated manual training for educative and vocational reasons. He defined elementary technical education as “...a course of study that is first of all educational, but will at

⁸⁷ Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 179.

⁸⁸ John Millar, Deputy Minister of Education, *Technical Education: Report of a Visit to the Schools of Massachusetts and Opinions on the Subject of Technical Education* (Toronto: Warwick Brothers & Rutter Printers, 1899) 5; Marvin Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870-1915* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971) 76.

the same time tend to fit pupils, both by information acquired and training given, for the practical side of life's duties, whether the student is intending to adopt a professional, a mechanical or a commercial pursuit."⁸⁹ Manual training in elementary schools would be part of this overall course of study, providing teaching of the use of tools and skills so trades might be learned more easily when the student obtained employment in the future. This training would also develop reasoning powers and it would exercise the body and mind. The need for this change in the schools, Ellis argued, was created by the changed industrial and commercial conditions of Ontario: the tradesman and the apprentice were no longer the dominant figures in the economy. Instead, a new type of workman was needed, "...the basis for whose preparation must be laid in the schools, not in the shop."⁹⁰ Ellis did not view this program as trade schooling, but rather a program which would allow students to fit themselves into the new commercial and manufacturing context.

Hughes, who was an advocate of manual training as early as 1886, viewed it as hand-work that continued the ideas of the kindergarten as set out by Froebel. Hughes maintained that manual training was the "...starting point and the perpetual means of all other development."⁹¹ "It cultivate[d] the motor or executive power of the mind" and formed the basis for a system of technical education. This would help students adapt to new working conditions in Canada, whether they chose an occupation in the future or were forced into one.⁹² Hughes offered three guiding principles to the school board as they implemented manual training: do it economically, keep the aim educational and not economical, and correlate the work with the rest of the

⁸⁹ W. S. Ellis, *A Report on Elementary Technical Education for Ontario* (Kingston: Printed at the Daily News Office, 1900) 3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

⁹¹ Robert Stamp, "Evolving Patterns of Education: English-Canada from the 1870's to 1914," in J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada, 1986) 320.

⁹² James L. Hughes, *Report on Manual Training Presented to the Toronto Public School Board* (n. p., December 20, 1900) 14; he also cites the Irish Commission.

curriculum.⁹³ He stressed that manual training was not trade school or something to be taught for its economic value, but a system of "...formative, constructive self expression."⁹⁴

Seath reinforced Harcourt's opinion that the educational should not be overshadowed by the economic purposes of manual training so schools were not reduced to job training. In fact he defined manual training as "...any training in hand-work designed to improve the powers of the mind."⁹⁵ While he advocated manual training for the educational aspects, he took a lesson from the US where manual training had a dual purpose: it was considered to be good for all students because it developed hand-eye coordination, and it was considered to be especially good for those going into industrial pursuits. He suggested that recent attention in Ontario to manual training, and especially to domestic science, came from the general feeling that schooling was not practical enough. Industrial leaders such as the Ontario Manufacturer's Association wanted manual training in elementary school because fewer than five per cent of those students who attend high school go on to manufacturing positions other than clerk. If manual training was provided in elementary school more of the students would receive training in school they could use in their job. Seath concluded his report with the recommendations he was asked to produce: that manual training and domestic science and art be placed "on a par" with other subjects but as optional subjects on the curricula of both the public and high schools, that evening classes be provided for those already in the work force and technical courses be provided in high schools, and that the legislature stimulate manual training and domestic science with special grants.⁹⁶

These were the attitudes among four educational leaders who supported manual training at the turn of the century. All connected manual training directly with economic development while at the same time keeping it subordinate to intellectual development, at least in the rhetoric.

⁹³ Hughes, Report on Manual Training, 14.

⁹⁴ Hughes quoted in Stamp, "Evolving Patterns of Education," 318.

⁹⁵ *ON/AR-ED*, 1900, 216.

This twofold understanding of manual training would remain a source of misunderstanding and debate as educational reformers competed for room in the curriculum. Miller understood manual training as technical and vocational. Hughes was concerned with the developmental benefits. Ellis and Seath were most closely aligned with Robertson as they emphasized the educational aspects over the vocational. All offered vague descriptions of manual training and connected the promised benefits of such a course to changing economic conditions. Robertson's description of manual training differed from the rest in the great detail as he provided when explaining what he meant by a course in manual training. Robertson not only connected his purposes for the course to changing economic conditions, he also tried to answer wider social, cultural and political questions.

Robertson developed his own conception of manual training for Canadian schools. He learned about the practice of manual training in other countries. He specifically drew on the Swedish example as evidenced by the specific practice he had in mind when he recommended manual training for Canadian schools. That practice, similar to sloyd, included a specific series of activities, a defined teaching style and a complete list of materials. The graduated series of activities in woodwork was generally for boys ten to fourteen years old, aimed at the "systematic training of the senses, of the hands and eyes, and of the mind," directed at developing mental power so the hands would obey the mind.⁹⁷ In this course "...every act [was] a step towards a known end, and that is *mental* training; a definite act towards a definite end, that is a training in logic."⁹⁸ Such training would correct the imbalance in education and, Robertson argued, some informational subjects could be let go to make time for manual training. Manual training was not

⁹⁶ *ONAR-ED*, 1900, 216-250.

⁹⁷ Robertson, *The Macdonald Sloyd School Fund: Manual Training in Public Schools* (Ottawa: E. J. Reynolds, 1899) 7. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

⁹⁸ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 17. Emphasis added.

conceived of by Robertson as an additional subject. Instead, it was a complement to the literary studies, intended to balance out a student's education.⁹⁹

Reporting in 1901 to the Ontario Education Association that "...education in Ontario is eminently respectable...as respectable as regulations about text-books and examinations can make it," Robertson argued there was need for manual training in schools because the curriculum was "overly bookish." He argued educators tended to make schooling almost exclusively literary, thus encouraging students to work in clerical or professional jobs, and to dislike manual labour. Robertson preferred a balance between literary and manual education. Along with the growing preference among young Canadians for clerical and professional occupations was a desire to move to the cities. Macdonald and Robertson, along with other Canadian leaders, worried that these conditions would lead to rural decline as rural leaders left the land and the numbers of farmers decreased. A population shift toward urban areas would weaken the national culture rooted in farming. Without a rural culture to counterbalance the social ills associated with urban development and rural decline, national culture and national development were in jeopardy. Robertson believed the school could be used to counter these trends because, given its new influence, the direction and rate of progress in Canada would be determined more than ever by public education.¹⁰⁰

Robertson reasoned that school life should permit learning through all the senses and should develop the senses. The teacher should impart knowledge and draw mental abilities out of the child. Robertson used Froebel's theory of the kindergarten as an example of this type of schooling. The kindergarten teacher acted as a gardener. A gardener does not give the plants leaves and fruit, for the plant already possesses the potential for these. Instead the gardener

⁹⁹ Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 1-6; Robertson also stated that the four institutions which educated the most were home, church, school and press.

nourishes and draws these out of the plant. "The main endeavour should be to lead out the mind by nourishing ideas, rather than to cram in a knowledge of unprofitable facts." Purely literary instruction left a student knowing much but lacking the ability to solve problems, to accomplish physical tasks, and to "fill a man's or a woman's place in the present."¹⁰¹ A combination of scholarship with manual training, on the other hand, would leave the student with the ability to accomplish tasks. In this conception of manual training, Robertson was in agreement with

Dewey:

The manual training movement has been greatly facilitated by its happy coincidence with the growing importance attached in psychological theory to the motor element. The old emphasis upon the strictly intellectual elements, sensations and ideas, has given way to the recognition that a motor factor is so closely bound up with the entire mental development that the latter cannot be intelligently discussed apart from the former.... [Manual training] enables the child to become conscious of his powers through a variety of uses to which he can put them; and thus to become aware of their *social values*.¹⁰²

Robertson established in his rationale the premise that social ideals shape and control the direction of schooling, that the education system hinges on the desired traits of growing children. If it was desired that students be "happy and capable, in the sphere of life in which they are to live, then the educational process should be directed to attain these ends."¹⁰³ In a comparison with popular attitudes to schooling in Scotland, Robertson argued Canada was "...a tremendously long way behind in the social spirit of the people, in their attitude to education, in their craving for it..." The time was ripe for manual training and he advocated it not as an add-on to address problems, but as a complement to the current curriculum.¹⁰⁴ New courses were

¹⁰¹ Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 6, 19-21.

¹⁰² John Dewey, "The Place of Manual Training in the Elementary Course of Study," *Manual Training Magazine* 2.4 (July 1901) 194-198, emphasis added.

¹⁰³ Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 3-6.

difficult to add to the already full curriculum, but a course which complemented what was already present could aid in the delivery of that curriculum.

Although the terms were often used interchangeably, the practice of manual training, industrial training and technical and vocational education were different in practice and in theory. Robertson was careful to distinguish between these because “[t]he word ‘technical’ has a catchy quality and unless discerning wisdom control it, it too, like the word ‘classical,’ may cover a multitude of shams.”¹⁰⁵ Although some advocated manual training as a form of industrial training or as an alternative for boys who were not interested in book studies or who were delinquent,¹⁰⁶ Robertson thought of manual training as a subject concerned with the student without regard to the objects created in the classroom. He considered “...the things made by a boy in an industrial school, under a system of industrial education, [to be] made for the sake of the ability to make the same or similar things that will sell.” He was quick to point out that industrial education had its place in education, but not the same place as manual training. Technical education was similar to manual training but still concerned with the “...effect of the training on the craft and on the product, not on the person.”¹⁰⁷ Technical, vocational or industrial education prepared students for the repetition of their ‘likely occupations’ and in some cases as an alternative to jail.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Robertson, “Education for the Improvement of Rural Conditions,” 1909 address, cited in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 47.

¹⁰⁶ Sir Joshua Fitch, “Manual Training,” *Canadian Magazine*, 15 (May-Oct 1900) 554. Bernard McEvoy, “Technical Education in Canada,” *Canadian Magazine*, 14 (Nov 1899-Apr 1900) 8-10.

¹⁰⁷ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ For discussion of various plans and purposes of technical education including as a solution to juvenile delinquency, as strictly job training or scientific home management see Paul W. Bennett, “Turning ‘Bad Boys’ into ‘Good Citizens’: The Reforming Impulse of Toronto’s Industrial Schools Movement, 1883 to the 1920s,” *Ontario History* 78.3 (September 1986) 209-211; Timothy A. Dunn, “Teaching the Meaning of Work: Vocational Education in British Columbia, 1900-1929” in David C. Jones, Nancy Sheehan and Robert Stamp, eds., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, 1979) 236-8; Ivor F. Goodson and Ian R. Dowbiggin, “Vocational Education and School Reform: The Case of the London (Canada) Technical School, 1900-1930,” *History of Education Review* 20.1 (1991) 39-40; Nancy S. Jackson and Jane S. Gaskell, “White Collar Vocationalism: The Rise of Commercial Education in Ontario and British Columbia, 1870-1920,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 17.2 (1987) 177; Ruby Heap, “Schooling Women for Home or for Work? Vocational Education for Women

Manual training was designed for students younger than fifteen years and industrial and technical education were generally intended for high school students. Robertson believed "...the motor centres of the brain, which govern the muscular movements, grow between the ages of four and fifteen, and do not grow after that."¹⁰⁹ Manual training with students older than fifteen, then, was really technical education. The difference between manual training, technical education and vocational education was the concern with the child, the craft, or the product. Although they all had their place in the education system, Robertson wanted manual training in elementary education in every province because it was aimed at the whole child. Conveniently, it also served as excellent preparation for industrial and technical education: should students pursue technical training at a later time, manual training would be helpful experience for those students going on to learn a trade. He expected manual training would give boys a "love of manual, industrial and productive labor for its own sake" and would cause them to choose and enjoy jobs which involved physical *and* intellectual work.¹¹⁰ Robertson used this element further to persuade ratepayers of the value of manual training.

In Ontario and Nova Scotia the education departments were familiar with and had already implemented manual training in a few locations, although the value of it, and the purposes for it, differed among various proponents. Until the 1900s, then, few manual training courses were given in Canadian schools, but the idea was widespread among educators.¹¹¹ "...[T]he soil on

in Ontario in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of the Toronto Technical High School: 1892-1920" in Ruby Heap and Alison Prentice, eds., *Gender and Education in Ontario* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1991) 198; Donald Macleod, "Practicality Ascendant: The Origins and Establishment of Technical Education in Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis* 15.2 (Spring 1986) 54-5;

¹⁰⁹ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 13.

¹¹⁰ Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 22.

¹¹¹ Stamp, "Evolving Patterns of Education," 320.

which the seed [of manual training] was sown was not only fertile, but was to some extent prepared and the time ripe.”¹¹²

Domestic science was meanwhile gaining popularity and coincidentally providing an approximate female counterpart to manual training. The spread of domestic science in public schools in Ontario after the turn of the century was due partly to the work of Adelaide Hoodless, an outspoken supporter of the subject. Hoodless defined domestic science as, “...the application of scientific principles to the management of a Home, or briefly—correct living.”¹¹³ Domestic science had pedagogical and social value. In the city it promised to teach women in slums to keep good homes. In the country it promised to slow rural depopulation because it would teach women to love rural life. It also kept women everywhere in the home. Robertson advocated domestic science along the same lines as manual training.

From a course in sewing, properly graduated as an educational process, girls may derive quite as much mental advantage as boys obtain from a course in educational woodwork. The qualities of precision, patience and industry come from it, and it further cultivates good taste, a love of the beautiful, and also of appropriate dress.¹¹⁴

By emphasizing the moral along with the practical value of domestic science, and comparing those values to the values of manual training, Robertson advocated domestic science along side manual training and one benefited from the other's success.

Clearly, Robertson was not alone in his social and economic worries over Canada, nor was he the only one who saw manual training and domestic science as partial solutions to those problems. Although the rationale or perceived value of the subjects varied among proponents of

¹¹² Albert Leake, Inspector of Manual Training and Technical Education, *ON/AR-ED*, 1903, 151.

¹¹³ Adelaide Hoodless, “‘Domestic Science’ in Women Workers of Canada 1902,” 120, cited in Robert Stamp, “Teaching Girls,” 23.

¹¹⁴ James Robertson, “The Improvement of Rural Schools in Canada,” three part article, n. p. [1903?] in Macdonald College, RG 43, C 234, file 1035.

manual training and domestic science, the ideas had gained wide acceptance among educators but lacked enough public support to secure funding.¹¹⁵

Macdonald-Robertson Manual Training Centres

Establishment of the Macdonald Manual Training Centres was politically and educationally appropriate for Robertson and Macdonald. Robertson, who had made his living as a cheese-maker, a businessman, an educator and a government policy advisor was acutely aware of educational demands produced by industrialization, the mechanization of agriculture, immigration, rural depopulation and rapid economic growth. Having managed cheese factories, been professor of Dairying at the Ontario Agricultural College and Federal Commissioner of Dairying and Agriculture, Robertson understood the education of adults on farms and in dairies, and had a detailed understanding of conditions in rural areas, the difficulties of farming, and farmers' inability to solve some problems. Manual training, then, was a practical response to problems of which Robertson had first-hand knowledge. It satisfied the purpose of his government position, it satisfied his personal interest in helping to preserve the rural lifestyle in order to preserve Canadian culture as he understood it, and it was a logical choice for a man who had spent his career thus far in the education of farmers and now turned his attention to the children of those farmers.

One may only infer Macdonald's reasons for supporting manual training specifically as he left no written records and made few public statements, but an extension or application of his educational philanthropy and his business experience as an entrepreneur in Canada. Macdonald had sought to provide extensive educational opportunities for Quebec's English-speaking population, as evidenced by the \$2.5 million he had donated to McGill University by 1899. He

¹¹⁵ Private sponsorship was a common element in the early implementation of Sloyd not only in Sweden but in Europe and the United States as well.

became increasingly interested in Canada's youth and wanted to "build up the country in its boys and girls."¹¹⁶

Macdonald and Robertson first conceived the plan for Manual Training Centres in the fall of 1898. This initiative replaced Macdonald's original proposal to Robertson in 1897 to create a private institution for boys from rural areas from age seven until they were twenty-one to prepare them for rural leadership. Instead they developed a plan for a program of education which was becoming increasingly popular in other countries and was reportedly solving some of the problems which concerned Macdonald and Robertson.¹¹⁷ Their centres would not be "...thrusting on the people a new thing, all uncalled for, and perhaps not needed."¹¹⁸ Instead the plan offered support to educational leaders who advocated manual training and object-lessons in particular. In this the public could observe and, Robertson predicted, be convinced to assume the cost of continuing the centres once the initial expense of materials had been paid and trained teachers were available. Robertson used this reasoning to convince Macdonald and school boards that manual training was a cost-effective and pedagogically sound solution to their problems.¹¹⁹

Because manual training was primarily intellectual and moral education in Robertson's mind, and he was most interested in using it for rural preservation, the most logical location for Macdonald Manual Training Centres would have been rural schools. However, because Robertson wanted manual training to spread through local interests and local funds he convinced Macdonald it would be better to begin in town and city schools, that is, in places where newspapers were published, where people could observe the classes, and where "...the country

¹¹⁶ Herbert Francis Sherwood, "Children of the Land: The Story of the Macdonald Movement in Canada," reprinted by permission from *The Outlook* (New York, April 23, 1910) 892. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

¹¹⁷ Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 242.

¹¹⁸ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 8.

¹¹⁹ Sutherland, *Children*, 183.

people looked for guidance.”¹²⁰ Robertson successfully convinced Macdonald that public opinion of manual training could be more effectively influenced from the cities and towns.¹²¹ In addition, when centres were built they were often used by children from the high schools as well as intermediate grades as planned. Robertson’s first estimates of costs included equipment for only nine centres, salaries for eight teachers and one head teacher (including traveling expenses), and the cost of sending one representative from each of the eight provinces to Britain and Sweden in the summer of 1900.¹²² Robertson estimated that classrooms 24 x 30 feet could accommodate 30 benches, or 300 students per week. Local districts were expected to provide the classroom space. The most economical way to implement the program was for several districts or institutions to combine their resources to run and share one centre. In Stratford, Ontario for example, the manual training room was shared by the public schools, the Collegiate Institute, and the separate school and was run by a joint committee.¹²³ The total outlay was forecast to be \$20,890 for the first year plus \$8,440 per year for the second and third years, totaling \$37,770.¹²⁴

Once Robertson created a plan and cost estimates, and Macdonald was persuaded of the merits of manual training, Macdonald agreed to support the program. On 31 October 1899, Macdonald established the Macdonald Manual Training Fund (also referred to as the Macdonald Sloyd School Fund) with a deposit of \$40,000 at the Bank of Montreal.¹²⁵ Robertson presented to local school boards the plan and the offer by Macdonald to fund the centres until June 1903. In his presentations Robertson reported that Macdonald was interested in the education of

¹²⁰ James Robertson, *The Macdonald College Movement: An Address Before the National Education Association of the United States at Denver, Colorado, July 7, 1909* (reprinted from the Proceedings of the Association, 1909) 92. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

¹²¹ Alison Prentice and Susan Houston, *Family, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975) 2.

¹²² Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 26-28.

¹²³ *ON/AR-ED*, 1902, 150.

¹²⁴ Robertson to Sir William Macdonald, Oct. 14th, 1899. Robertson Papers, 4, 1.

¹²⁵ Macdonald to Robertson, July 11th, 1900. Robertson Papers, 4, 1.

Canada's children and the two had conceived a feasible plan to implement manual training in association with public schools for boys aged seven to fourteen years. He also expressed his wish that something complementary would be developed for girls: foreshadowing his active advocacy of domestic science along with manual training.¹²⁶ The fund would "pay for the equipment required for educational manual training in one place in every province in the Dominion, and also to meet the expenses of qualified teachers and maintenance for three years in all those places."¹²⁷ After three years the equipment would be given to the local school authorities and they could continue the program at their discretion. In Ottawa, for example, such arrangements would allow for the training of approximately one thousand boys each year.

To begin the program immediately, trained teachers were recruited from Scotland, England, and the United States. As local school boards accepted the offer Robertson began creating centres. Robertson's task as administrator of the Macdonald Rural School Fund was not only to efficiently create and operate manual training centres, but also to advocate manual training and domestic science together in such a way as to garner support among the public so these subjects would be supported in all Canadian schools. He combined practicality and 'morality' in his advocacy of the subjects, and by using the new pedagogy of the day hoped manual training and domestic science would improve Canadian schools and eventually social and economic conditions. Robertson pointed out the pedagogical, cultural, and economic results of the Macdonald Manual Training Centres throughout the three years to garner support in order to persuade ratepayers to continue the centres when Macdonald funding ended in June 1903.

The first list of locations for centres was created from recommendations of provincial authorities and from local interest. The first manual training centre funded through the Macdonald Manual Training Fund was officially opened by the Governor General and the

¹²⁶ James Robertson, "The Improvement of Rural Schools" second and third parts.

Countess of Minto in Brockville, Ontario, 19 January 1901, and instruction for three hundred students began 3 April.¹²⁸ Demand for more centres was so great Macdonald and Robertson quickly increased the scope of this scheme far beyond the original nine centres. In 1901 six centres in Ottawa and four in Toronto were opened.¹²⁹ In addition to these schools funded by Macdonald, schools funded through the education department in Ontario continued at the Kingston Manual Training School, Woodstock College and Brantford Technical School (with equipment loaned by the Macdonald Fund) and began in Stratford and at the Renfrew Collegiate Institute (where the teacher was supplied by the Macdonald Fund). A total of sixteen manual training rooms were operating in Ontario during 1901.¹³⁰ In 1902 all sixteen manual training centres operating during 1901 in Ontario were continued with the addition of one school in Ottawa as well as at the London Normal School. The salary of the instructor at the London Normal School was also paid through the Macdonald Fund. In 1903 the number of manual training centres funded by Macdonald or the province grew to twenty-seven. Altogether three-hundred thirty sets of equipment (benches with tools) were left to the school board of Brockville, Ottawa and Toronto in June 1903.¹³¹

In Quebec manual training was funded by Macdonald in 1901 at the McGill Normal School and the McGill Model School, and at the academies in Waterloo and Knowlton. The

¹²⁷ James Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 26.

¹²⁸ *ON/AR-ED*, 1901, 203.

¹²⁹ In Ottawa at Elgin Street, Archibald Street, George Street, Cambridge Street, and Creighton Street schools as well as at the Model School. In Toronto centres were established at Ryerson, Wellesley, Dufferin, and Given Street Schools.

¹³⁰ *ON/AR-ED 1901*, xxxi. The Director of the Macdonald Manual Training Schools for Ontario, Albert H. Leake, was appointed and the following year his position was changed to Inspector of Technical Education for the province, which included manual training, household science and art, and drawing. Leake was also named by Robertson as his first choice to succeed him in the event of an untimely death. Robertson to Macdonald, 3 March 1901, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; *Macdonald 'Manual Training Fund' Receipts and Disbursements from 31st October, 1899 to 30th April, 1909* (Macintosh & Hyde Chartered Accountants, Montreal, 1909) Robertson Papers 4, 2B.

¹³¹ *ON/AR-ED*, 1903, 150. The number of centres grew with another school in Ottawa, two more in Toronto, and one in each of Cobourg, Berlin, Essex, Guelph, Ingersoll and Hamilton. There is some discrepancy between the reports and the account books as to the locations of some of the centres, but all report sixteen centres plus additional equipment or teachers at a few various locations.

following year one centre in Bedford and six in Montreal opened. Funding for the Normal and Model Schools from the provincial government was fixed and administrators at the school could not raise more money for this successful program. Faced with the end of the program when the Macdonald Manual Training Fund expired in 1903, Macdonald chose to continue funding these two centres in Quebec until 1906 when the programs moved to Macdonald College.¹³²

In British Columbia two Macdonald Manual Training Centres opened in 1901 in Victoria at Rock Bay and Kingston Street Schools, and in Vancouver at the Burrard Street old school building and on the top floor of the Strathcona School.¹³³ At the high school in Victoria all male students took manual training. The Vancouver centres served all the schools in the city. In 1902 a third centre was added in Vancouver in Mount Pleasant. Funding continued at these schools where both intermediate and high school boys took instruction until the fund expired. Manual training in British Columbia, then, was provided for intermediate and high school aged boys—another example of Robertson compromising on his original plan for the sake of providing as large and successful a model as possible. The more students who used a centre, the more cost effective that centre would be for local ratepayers.¹³⁴

School districts in Prince Edward Island received two centres early in 1901, and a third in the fall. The first was created at Prince of Wales College where, for the remainder of the school year, manual training was available for male students as an extra, voluntary course. When classes resumed in the fall all first year male and female students were required to take manual training. By the end of 1901 the requirement was extended to second year students.

Summerside also received a centre which served the High, Eastern and Western Schools in town.

¹³² *Que/AR-ED*, 1900-1901, 404; 1902-1903, 113; 1904-1905, 142; 1905-1906, 192.

¹³³ *BC/AR-ED*, 1900-1901, 239, 273, 275-280; 1901-1902, A58, A60.

¹³⁴ Tim Dunn, "Teaching the Meaning of Work: Vocational Education in British Columbia," in David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp, eds., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1979) 239.

In the fall, Queen Square school received a centre to serve the students there as well as students from West Kent Schools. By fall 1902, when Robertson considered the centres to have all been established, the school inspector from Kings County requested a centre. Robertson did not want to set a precedent of establishing centres by county and denied the inspector's request twice. Finally, after Macdonald was contacted directly by the inspector, Kings County was granted a manual training centre at Georgetown. Unfortunately, those who built the needed addition to the school "...[did] not avail themselves of assistance from those whose duty and pleasure it [was] to render such help" and the room could not accommodate all the equipment. The extra equipment was forwarded to Montague school in the same county, and the two schools shared one instructor. This gave PEI the largest proportion of centres to population in Canada.¹³⁵ The last two centres to be established, and therefore the ones that had the shortest time to set an example, were the only two centres not continued after June 1903. The trustees for these schools voted not against manual training, but against funding it themselves.¹³⁶

Manitoba received three centres in Winnipeg, one in the Stovel block for the centre of the city, at the Mulvey schools for the southern portion and at the Machray school for the northern portion of the city. W. J. Warters was superintendent of manual training for Manitoba and oversaw the training of all the fifth through eight grade boys in the city, up to one thousand per week.¹³⁷ Manual training in Winnipeg won the support of the Board of Trustees who provided funding for the courses after Macdonald funding ceased.¹³⁸ Regina and Calgary, then part of the Northwest Territories, each received one centre.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1902, D30, xxiv, B9, D6; 1901, xxxi-xxxv, 118.

¹³⁶ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1903, D-22.

¹³⁷ *Man/AR-ED*, 1901, 516-517.

¹³⁸ *Man/AR-ED*, 1902, 541; 1903, 381.

¹³⁹ Macdonald 'Manual Training Fund' Receipts and Disbursements from 31st October, 1899 to 30th April, 1909, (Macintosh & Hyde Chartered Accountants, Montreal, 1909) Robertson Papers 4, 2B.

The legislature in Nova Scotia began supporting manual training and domestic science, in equal amounts in the form of grants, in 1900. Any school board which implemented manual training or domestic science would receive a very generous grant of \$600. Still, the first manual training centre in Nova Scotia was the one established by Macdonald and Robertson at the Normal School in Truro in 1901. Students from the common schools, the county academy, the School of Agricultural and the Normal School shared the equipment. The supervisor for the Macdonald Manual Training Centre, Thomas Kidner, spoke to school boards across the province trying to persuade the boards to adopt manual training. In 1902 Halifax built a centre as a result of the example in Truro. By 1903 when the funding ended, and the town of Truro along with the Normal School agreed to continue the centre there, eleven other manual training centres were in operation. Kidner credited this growth to both the example given by Macdonald and Robertson and to the legislative grant.¹⁴⁰

A centre was established in Fredericton, New Brunswick in 1901. This centre was shared by boys from the public schools, the Deaf and Dumb School, Normal School students, and teachers who were continuing their training. One of these teachers, who taught in the rural school at Inches Ridge, managed to implement manual training there in her multi-graded classroom—something Robertson wanted very much but never managed to implement systematically. The school board purchased three manual training benches, and the teacher allowed students to take turns throughout the week. This enabled each boy in her class to do the work at some point each week, but never as a group. This example was followed in the school at Musquash. By the beginning of 1902 these were the only three places in the province where boys could receive manual training.

¹⁴⁰ *NS/AR-ED*, 1900-1901, xiv, xix, 89-93; 1901-1902, 143; 1902-1903, 70-1.

E. E. MacCready, Director of the Macdonald Manual Training Centre in Fredericton, lamented the absence of special grants such as those offered in Nova Scotia and Ontario. In April 1902 he got his wish. In an Act of the Legislature, the government agreed to pay for half the cost of benches and tools purchased by any district. They would also pay \$50 to any teacher carrying on the work in addition to his or her regular teaching, and \$200 to any full time manual training instructor. They would also pay for traveling expenses either to Truro or to the OAC for any teacher wanting training. During that same year five school districts took up the work, and an additional five followed suit in 1903. Manual training was also implemented at the Macdonald Consolidated School in Kingston, as discussed in chapter five. The Fredericton School Board voted unanimously to continue funding the centre there when Macdonald funding ceased. Once again, both the example set by Macdonald and Robertson, along with special grants from the province, resulted in a blossoming of manual training in a three year period.¹⁴¹

At these centres each student made thirty to sixty articles over three years, articles which could be useful in the home such as bookshelves, lampstands, and gardening implements.¹⁴² In the Macdonald Manual Training Schools the woodwork courses began by developing simple skills to make simple objects, keeping those skills within the students' abilities. As with Swedish Sloyd, each successive task utilized previously acquired skills and taught one or two new skills. The graduated tasks were designed to challenge each student continually without discouraging the student.

The work conducted through the Macdonald Manual Training Fund expanded to include the training of Canadian teachers from urban and rural schools in Canada during the summer and on weekends at the centres, and at Normal schools. On Saturdays the regular classroom teachers from whose classes boys were taken for manual training could attend classes to become only

¹⁴¹ *NB/AR-ED*, 1901-1902, 158-160; 1902, lviii; 1902-1903; 153-156.

generally familiar with the pedagogy. The weekly classes in Ottawa trained over 90 teachers per term, and in Montreal over 100 teachers. Extensive training for those who would teach the manual training classes to elementary grades was available in Truro, NS and Ottawa, and in Knowlton, Quebec in the summer. In Ottawa a six-month course was held from February to July, 1902, where ten men and five women earned a diploma to qualify themselves to teach elementary manual training. Eight of these teachers received a \$100 government bonus and \$20 from the Macdonald Fund to pay their living expenses in Ottawa during this time.¹⁴³

Ontario also collaborated with the Normal School in Truro, Nova Scotia, the only other course in the dominion offering a diploma for elementary manual training. With the help of the Director of the Macdonald Fund in Nova Scotia, the two courses were made uniform so teacher training could be consistent throughout the Dominion.¹⁴⁴ By the beginning of 1903 training in Ontario to become a manual training instructor was available at the Normal Schools in Toronto, Ottawa and London. The Macdonald Fund supported the work in Ottawa and Toronto and paid the salary of the teacher in London. The Normal College at Hamilton was also beginning to offer training.¹⁴⁵ In Quebec training at the Model and McGill Normal School started in 1901. Students at the Manitoba Provincial Normal School also received training, although the principal of the Normal school warned against this. As there was a scarcity of teachers, a year-long teacher training program was impractical, so there was little time for trying to introduce manual training into the schools "through the medium of the Normal School."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Robertson, *Macdonald Sloyd School Fund*, 13-16.

¹⁴³ Two of these students secured jobs teaching manual training in British Columbia, one in New Brunswick, others went to Calgary, Regina and Quebec. Three students went to the United States but all returned when they were offered teaching jobs in Canada. *NS/AR-ED* 1899-1900, ii-iii.

¹⁴⁴ *NS/AR-ED* 1899-1900, ii-iii, xxviii-xxx.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Man/AR-ED*, 1903, 384; 1901, 518.

Manual training at these schools required, according to Robertson, "...a longer period of training and practice than the courses required for teachers' qualifications by the City & Guilds Institute of London, the Manual Training Course at Leipzig, Germany, and the Manual Training Course at Naas, Sweden all rolled together."¹⁴⁷ These training courses granted a certificate for giving manual training instruction at the elementary level only, and were created to fill the growing number of instructors' positions, and were perhaps an opportunity to spread manual training to the rural schools without a formal program.

Robertson believed the program could only start with trained and experienced men, and to secure the best instructors from Great Britain and the United States for the first year he had to pay the moving expenses of the twenty-seven English manual training teachers and their families.¹⁴⁸ To cover the expense of moving the families, an expense overlooked during the planning, Macdonald deposited on 11 July 1900 an additional \$40,000 for more teachers and materials.¹⁴⁹ In 1901 Macdonald increased the fund by a further \$60,000 to pay for additional schools. In this same year the number of Macdonald Manual Training Centres connected with public schools across Canada reached sixteen, with 5,000 boys attending. Robertson expected that number to increase to 6,000 by the time the schools were fully organized.¹⁵⁰ In 1903 Macdonald donated an additional \$30,000.¹⁵¹ At the end of three years approximately \$170,000 had been spent in the creation and maintenance of 21 manual training schools across Canada as well as manual training at an additional twenty seven schools, and in the training of at least three hundred fifty Canadian teachers. By this time there were forty-five manual training teachers on

¹⁴⁷ Robertson, *Manual Training in Public Schools*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 1901, 18.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. Robertson was intentionally vague here with "fully organized"; Robertson to Macdonald, 6 February 1901. Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.

¹⁵¹ Macdonald to Robertson, 13 February 1901, 1 April 1902 and 2 April 1903. Robertson Papers, 4, 1; *Macdonald 'Manual Training Fund' Receipts and Disbursements from 31st October, 1899 to 30th April, 1909*, (Macintosh &

the salary roll at a total cost of \$3,600 per month, with 7,000 boys in the program. When the program ended in June 1903 the Manual Training Normal Schools were turned over to the provincial governments, the equipment at the Macdonald Manual Training Centres was given to the local school boards and all but four schools continued operating with local funds.¹⁵²

As Robertson hoped, interest in manual training increased during the years Macdonald funded the centres. Industrialized regions, particularly Ontario, received the largest number of Macdonald Manual Training Centres and witnessed the most provincially or locally funded new manual training centres. Prince Edward Island is a peculiar exception because, although not heavily industrialized, the province had the largest number of centres in proportion to the public school populations, perhaps due to the popularity of teacher training sessions there. The number of centres, and the number of children and teachers receiving instruction are early examples of the new education trickling down to the actual schooling experience of Canadian *urban* children, those students Sutherland argues received the most benefit from educational reform, and to a lesser extent rural children. Admittedly these courses do not demonstrate change in instruction or curriculum in the regular classroom, but they were certainly part of the schooling experience of those students.¹⁵³

Reports from the ministers of education give an indication of the value of manual training within departments of education and in local districts at this time, as well as provincial support of centres and teacher training independent of Macdonald funding. In Ontario Harcourt viewed manual training as the link between the kindergarten and the advanced technical schools—a

Hyde Chartered Accountants, Montreal, 1909) Robertson Papers 4, 2B.

¹⁵² Robertson, *Education*; "Macdonald Manual Training Fund, Analysis of Expenditures to Dec. 31st 1902" Robertson Papers 4, 2A; Accountant to Robertson 26 January 1903. Robertson Papers; 4, 2A; "Summary of Expenditure in Connection with the Macdonald Manual Training Fund up to Jan'y 1st 1903." 28 January 1903. Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; Robertson, "Analysis to Dec 31, 1901," Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; "Statement of Salaries for February, 1901," Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; "Summary of Expenditures in Connection with the Macdonald Manual Training Schools up to January 1, 1902," Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.

¹⁵³ Sutherland, *Children*, 215.

different view from Robertson. He supported manual training for the sake of technical or vocational education. Harcourt noted that the number of places where instruction in technical and industrial training were offered in Ontario was growing, and that boys needed to be prepared for this training through manual training in elementary school. Although his reasons differed from Robertson's they both supported the same program.¹⁵⁴

Albert H. Leake, Inspector of Technical Education in Ontario added that implementing manual training ahead of technical education was "...doing well to avoid the mistake of some other countries, in attempting to organize a system without having trained a population to be in a fit state to take advantage of it."¹⁵⁵ Leake traveled throughout rural towns of Ontario during 1902 trying to convince localities to implement and fund manual training. He felt public willingness to pay for the training was the biggest obstacle to its introduction in these areas, and therefore used exhibitions in Ottawa, Toronto and Brockville to demonstrate the value of the course. He also invited parents to observe their children during manual training classes and this worked particularly well at increasing support. At the end of 1903 Leake reported that teachers were enthusiastic and that all manual training instructors in the province, except for one, had been trained through the Macdonald Manual Training Fund.¹⁵⁶

S. P. Robins, Principal of McGill Normal School, wrote "to attempt to teach trades in school would be folly. To leave our children to grow up, without any systematic attempt at teaching them to use their eyes and to compel their hands to do the bidding of their will, is a greater folly and it is, alas, a prevalent folly."¹⁵⁷ Robins, then, held practical and technical purposes for education, another example of support for the courses but for reasons different from Robertson's. In evaluating the Macdonald Manual Training Centres he notes that the training

¹⁵⁴ *ON/AR-ED*, 1901, xxxi.

¹⁵⁵ *ON/AR-ED*, 1902, 147.

¹⁵⁶ *ON/AR-ED*, 1903, 150-151.

received by the children in the Model School and the teachers in the Normal School added to the efficiency of the schools and argued that "more valuable school work of the ordinary type can be done in twenty-five hours per week, if from three to five hours of that time be abstracted for devotion to manual training, whether for boys or girls." Mr. Johansson, the director of Manual Training at the schools, reported that manual training had been very popular with the students and they used much of their own personal time to continue the work from class and to do extra projects. Therefore, manual training continued to be popular for reasons ranging from practical and technical to intellectual and moral.¹⁵⁸

Alexander Robinson, Superintendent of Education in British Columbia, thought the Macdonald Manual Training Centres were a great success, and the enthusiasm of the pupils was due to the tactile nature of the classes, to the active and creative nature of the work, to the independent nature of the projects, and to the specialized training of the teachers. He added "The discontinuance of this important factor in the moral and intellectual, as well as the merely manual, training of boys would be a serious blunder."¹⁵⁹

Teacher training was particularly successful in Prince Edward Island where

Those [teachers] who attended these classes sought more than the novelty or change they might afford. As time went on the reality and value shone clearer, and pointed the way to new possibilities. Several began at the first and continued to the end and would have gone further, for they recognized the educative power of manual training; and once more proved the fact that it is easier to say where education begins than where it ends.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ *Que/AR-ED*, 1902-1903, 113.

¹⁵⁸ *Que/AR-ED*, 1902-1903, 113.

¹⁵⁹ *BC/AR-ED*, 1901-1902, A 58. For a discussion of the controversial career of Robinson, and the uncertain job security of school leaders see Thomas Flemming, "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988," *BC Studies* 81(Spring 1989) 57 and Thomas Flemming, ed., *School Leadership: Essays on the British Columbia Experience, 1872-1995* (Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books, 2001).

¹⁶⁰ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1903, D-25.

In the towns and cities of Nova Scotia manual training was widely accepted and the importance of the courses was little doubted. Halifax became the first city in the Dominion to erect a building for the sole purpose of manual training. Although school authorities were happy with the progress in cities and towns and the increase of manual training students from 952 to 1,321 in two years as a result of the provincial grant and the model set by Macdonald and Robertson, there was not much growth in the rural schools.¹⁶¹

Alexander MacCready, Director of Manual Training in New Brunswick was confident that the steady growth of manual training in that province would continue because the value of the course was apparent to all the districts that implemented it. One teacher noted the value of manual training on the rest of the curriculum. "Having been in this school before and after manual training was introduced, [I am] fully convinced that the energy and zeal with which the pupils entered into all their studies are due to the new interest which the manual training created."¹⁶²

Although the principal of the Normal School in Winnipeg warned against spending too much of the little teacher training time in the term on manual training, the superintendent of Winnipeg schools and school inspectors viewed manual training as "progressive" and "a forward step" which evidenced the desire of trustees in Manitoba to make schools a more efficient agency.¹⁶³

Manual Training from the End of Macdonald Funding to 1910

Robertson was successful in using the Macdonald Manual Training Centres to persuade educators, policy makers and ratepayers not only to support manual training and continue the centres with local funding, but also to increase the number of centres through local initiative. On

¹⁶¹ *NS/AR-ED*, 1902-1903, xiv, 72, 140.

¹⁶² *NB/AR-ED*, 1902-1903, 154.

June 30, 1903 Macdonald Funding expired and all but two centres were continued. Most continued with local funding or through the various education departments, the exception was in Quebec where Macdonald continued his support. Manual training was also taught in the Macdonald Consolidated Schools, as discussed in the next chapter. There was an overall increase in the number of centres across Canada which differed between the provinces due to interest and affordability.

Manual training flourished in Ontario. The number of manual training centres in that province continued to grow with thirty in 1904, thirty five in 1905 and 1906, and forty-one in 1907.¹⁶⁴ In Ontario, in the seven years after the Macdonald funding stopped, the reports of both Pyne and Leake describe the expansion of manual training in the number of schools and the development of the work in each class. Their discussions were decidedly practical regarding manual training during these years. They were concerned with manual training as part of a whole program aimed at hand-eye training beginning with kindergarten and ending with technical instruction. They were also concerned with the cost of implementing new centres, the lack of trained teachers, and the difficulty in getting manual training into rural areas. During 1904 new regulations governing manual training were adopted and implemented, which were intended to make the programs consistent across the province.¹⁶⁵

In 1907 Leake, one of the original manual training instructors hired by Robertson from England, quickly became Ontario's inspector of technical education. He lamented the fact there was no extension of manual training, even basic manual training such as drawing, in rural schools with the exception of the privately funded work at the Consolidated School at Guelph and the Rittenhouse school. He argued that more money had to be spent in rural schools, and

¹⁶³ *Man/AR-ED*, 1903, 381, 393, 384.

¹⁶⁴ *ON/AR-ED*, 1907, 637.

¹⁶⁵ *ON/AR-ED*, 1904, 241-251; Sutherland, *Children*, 184.

spent in a better way, to give rural students the access they deserved to this educational opportunity because experience with manual work on the farm was not equivalent to manual training in the classroom and rural students should not be left out. Extending manual training to these areas, however, was more expensive than in urban centres with larger schools.

The Consolidated School at Guelph had set a good example of adapting manual training to a small district by using local materials and by teaching lessons which required creative use of those materials. "Our rural schools train more than one-half the population [56.93%], and they should boldly grapple with the fact that the majority of those educated in them will continue to live in the country, either from choice or necessity and it will be from choice if the right methods be adopted in their education."¹⁶⁶ Public opinion, Leake said, was of such importance in the spread of this subject that "the moulding and training of public opinion along right lines in educational matters is or should be part of the function of any Department of Education."¹⁶⁷

While manual training flourished in Ontario, it was more modestly successful in the other provinces. The school districts in Quebec could not afford to continue the Macdonald manual training centres, so Macdonald continued his support at the Normal and Model schools until they were both moved to Macdonald College in 1907.¹⁶⁸

New Brunswick had the greatest number of manual training courses out of the Atlantic provinces due to the creation of provincial grants for manual training. New Brunswick was particularly successful at implementing the courses in rural schools. The province provided \$2412.14 in materials and salaries for manual training in 1903-4. This resulted in twelve centres for a total of 990 students. That year the Musquash centre burned with the schoolhouse and was not rebuilt, leaving four rural schools equipped for the subject. At the Normal school

¹⁶⁶ *ON/AR-ED*, 1907, 799.

¹⁶⁷ *ON/AR-ED*, 1905, 300.

¹⁶⁸ *Que/AR-ED*, 1904-1905, 142; 1905-1906, 192.

instructors recognized that “manual training in woodwork [could] have but a limited application in our smaller schools.” Instead, all students at the Normal school received training in paper folding, cutting, colour work and pattern making, among other hand work. This allowed for the unusually high number of rural children receiving some form of manual training in New Brunswick as compared with the other provinces.¹⁶⁹ The subject expanded steadily over the next few years with thirteen centres in 1904-5, seventeen in 1905-6, nineteen in 1907-8, and twenty-one in 1908-9. This growth caused the director of manual training, T. B. Kidner, to conclude “...it seems likely that in a few years no town of consequence in the Province will be without a Manual Training School.” The primary difficulty in increasing the number of centres was securing qualified instructors. The Normal school repeatedly asked for more facilities to provide training in both manual training and domestic science, and those who were qualified often moved to the West or the United States to teach. Although more female teachers became available, there was a constant request during this time for qualified men to serve as role models and disciplinarians for the boys in the manual training classes.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile in British Columbia the cities of Vancouver and Victoria accepted financial responsibility for manual training from June 1903 until funding from the education department began in 1906.¹⁷¹ In 1907 an Inspector of Manual Training, Harry Dunnell, was appointed. He reported that the initial expense was the stumbling block to opening new schools, and if it hadn't been for Macdonald's funding there would not have been any manual training in British Columbia. He strongly urged the education department to give grants to districts so they could get over this stumbling block.¹⁷² In Vancouver during these years some form of manual work

¹⁶⁹ *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-1904, xlv, 4, 153.

¹⁷⁰ *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-1905, xxxvi, 140; 1905-1906, 138; 1907-1908, 144; 1908-1909, 127-129.

¹⁷¹ *BC/AR-ED*, 1906, B-32.

¹⁷² *BC/AR-ED*, 1908, B-32.

was taught in every grade for both boys and girls. "...[B]y 1914 manual training had become a regular part of the senior elementary curriculum in most urban communities."¹⁷³

The remaining two Atlantic provinces experienced more modest success. Nova Scotia continued the manual training at the Provincial Normal and Model schools in Truro. By 1911 approximately 2000 students across the province were enrolled in manual training.¹⁷⁴ In Prince Edward Island, the schools at Georgetown and Montague ceased to exist after Macdonald funding ended as the local ratepayers were unwilling to support it which earned them the distinction of being the only Macdonald centres in Canada to close due to lack of local funding.¹⁷⁵ Manual training continued in Charlottetown, Summerside and at Prince of Wales College. Alex Anderson, Chief Superintendent of Education reported:

But it does not appear that these experiments have produced the desired effect upon the ratepayers of other districts. Not only have no other districts expressed a wish for the introduction of it into their schools, but they have opposed it, or refused to consider it, unless the Department of Education defrayed the expense. Now, instruction in Manual Training is given to all students in training as teachers, and Domestic Science to all young women who attend the Prince of Wales College....The student teachers are taught that they, in turn, may be able to convey the results of their study to the country schools, and give the boys and girls the benefit of their acquirements. But this is not done, and the plan fails in its most important aim....Manifestly something effective must be done to make instruction in these subjects imperative and practical. Legislation is necessary to provide due support for such training, as voluntary action is not forthcoming."¹⁷⁶

It was much the same in Manitoba. In 1904 twelve hundred boys in Winnipeg received manual training, as did students at the Provincial Model School—although this was not the normal course of instruction followed in most centres. By 1909 several smaller districts in the province were considering manual training but could not afford it. "The introduction of manual training and domestic science were heartily approved in principle by the [Brandon] board, but

¹⁷³ Stamp, "Evolving Patterns," 320-321.

¹⁷⁴ *NS/AR-ED*, 1903-1904, xvii; 1910-1911, viii.

¹⁷⁵ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1907, appendix C, 7.

they did not see their way at present to carry out these much needed additions.” Manual training, then, did not increase or decrease after Macdonald funding ended. The initial costs continued to be a stumbling block.¹⁷⁷

By 1910 the practice of teaching manual training across Canada was, “...quite astonishingly similar” because curriculum and teacher education were based on the same conception of the subject—essentially the program implemented by Macdonald and Robertson. Sutherland argues this version of manual training remained unchanged for at least a generation but failed to integrate the curriculum as promised.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

Because leaders, particularly Robertson, advocated manual training for practical as well as moral reasons it appealed both to pedagogically-minded and economically-minded parents, ratepayers and educational administrators. The new economic conditions combined with new ideas about children and education made manual training popular with many people, but popularity was not enough to bring manual training into the schools. Although most of these same people supported the idea of manual training at the turn of the century, few were willing to spend liberally on so radical a departure from the “common” curriculum.¹⁷⁹ The program was implemented in the districts detailed above in large part because it appealed at one and the same time to proponents of the intellectual function of schools *and* to proponents of the economic or practical role of schools in preparing students for jobs during a time of great economic and social change. Robertson advocated manual training in such a way that parents, ratepayers, and educators could support the program without having to choose between pedagogy and

¹⁷⁶ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1909, xxv.

¹⁷⁷ *MAN/AR-ED*, 1909, 351; 1904, 325, 425.

¹⁷⁸ Sutherland, *Children*, 187.

¹⁷⁹ George Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum*, (Toronto:

economics. According to the educational theory behind it, and in light of the practical outcomes, they could have both. Manual training flourished in urban areas because costs were shared among many ratepayers, costs were predictable, and the experiences of all students standardized so districts knew what to expect from their investments. Finally, it succeeded where it did because in addition to widespread appeal Robertson designed his program carefully, convinced Macdonald to fund it, met logistical needs, and promoted the program with educators and the public alike. This project was implemented in more towns and cities than originally planned, and at the end of three years Robertson judged it a great success, as evidenced by the local authorities continuing the program on their own.

Despite his public claims, Robertson's program was only partially successful. Although the centres continued with local money after Macdonald's funding stopped, manual training was never successfully implemented in rural schools even though Robertson had originally hoped that manual training would move from town to country. The centres, which urban areas could and did afford, were not affordable in rural areas. Manual training in rural schools would have been substantially more expensive. Robertson's success in town and city schools came from manual training's intellectual and practical appeal, it fit with contemporary pedagogy, promised solutions to economic and social problems, Robertson successfully implemented and increased the number of classes over three years, and garnered support from educators, policy makers and ratepayers. All this was possible because manual training lent itself easily to centralized control and standardization because the series of lessons were the same, teachers were trained similarly, and costs could be predicted and to some extent controlled by the supply of trained teachers.

Robertson compromised on his desire to implement manual training in rural schools because the costs would have been too great, fewer students would have received the training,

and fewer ratepayers and educators would have been able to observe the classes. Once the manual training centres were operating, however, Robertson turned his attention back to the small rural schools and implemented a scheme which had less predictable costs and results, was accessible to fewer observers, but did serve the rural people Robertson was interested in helping. The rural school gardens and nature study classes detailed in the following chapter are examples of educational schemes based on ideas similar to manual training, but which lent themselves less easily to standardization and centralization, and therefore Robertson was not as successful at inspiring districts to try the same.

3. NATURE STUDY AND SCHOOL GARDENS: SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE FOR FARMERS' CHILDREN

The garden is not an innovation, or an excrescence, or an addendum, or a diversion. It is a happy field of expression, an organic part of the school in which the boys and girls work among growing things and grow themselves in body and mind and spiritual outlook.¹

Introduction

School gardens and nature study classes were established at public schools under the aegis of the Macdonald Rural School Fund in 1903 with funding until July 1906. As a reform they were responses to rural problems and elements of the “new education”—which “promised to develop ‘the whole being, the mental, the moral, and the physical.’”² School gardens and nature study lessons were conducted at five rural schools in each of five provinces: Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. Five traveling instructors, chosen and sent for training by Robertson were put in charge of the gardens and of nature study. Each traveling instructor spent one day each week at each of the five schools in his province.

School gardens and nature study were similar to the seed grain competition as they were an expression of Macdonald’s and Robertson’s desire to spread new agricultural techniques. They were also similar to manual training centres as they were implemented in public schools. This time, however, the new subject would be located in rural schools. Macdonald and Robertson hoped school gardens and nature study would be interwoven with other studies, continued by the districts, and implemented in additional schools through local initiative with provincial government support until every rural Canadian student had his or her own plot of ground at school. Robertson and the five instructors successfully established their

¹ R. H. Cowley “The Macdonald School Gardens” *Queen’s Quarterly* 12, 4, (April 1905) 401.

gardens and integrated nature study lessons with curricula at the twenty-five public schools over the three-year period, despite natural obstacles and varying degrees and kinds of community support. This scheme aided the spread of similar gardens and lessons across Canada because Robertson and the traveling instructors not only persuaded the original twenty-five districts to continue the gardens and lessons after the funding ended, but encouraged other districts to implement them as well. Further Robertson and his instructors trained teachers in school gardening and nature study, and helped persuade provincial governments to provide special grants to teachers and districts.

The success they did achieve was due overall to Robertson's ability to centralize the school gardens by choosing, training and directing the traveling instructors. As with the seed grain competition and manual training centres his ability to present the programme in a way that appealed to a wide range of interests among parents, trustees, and ratepayers also aided the success of the gardens. Robertson chose and trained men with rural leadership and agricultural experience who were able to overcome obstacles and increase local involvement in the gardens. He provided for the training of teachers, and worked for financial support from communities and government. These elements of the scheme led not only to success during the three years of Macdonald funding but also made the continuation and spread of gardens and nature study possible. School gardening was limited in the long run because the actual gardening escaped standardization due to the unpredictability of weather, pests, soil conditions, and teacher enthusiasm and community support. School gardening and nature study increased in popularity and then eventually failed in Canada two decades later. Nevertheless the extent to which they were implemented in the first decade of the twentieth-century was due in large part to the Macdonald-Robertson movement.

² Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 51.

Gardens and Nature Study: The "New Education" and Rural Problems

The purposes and methods of school gardening and nature study were in line with the broad purposes of the "new education" because they emphasized the child's curiosities and used the child's environment to teach through experience, activity, and observation.³ Indeed, Froebel's original kindergartens had school gardens which were "...living metaphors of his educational philosophy..." They were also a direct response to rural depopulation and the rural school problem.⁴

Robertson was reacting to the changing living conditions generally as cities grew and rural populations declined. The living conditions of working-class Canadians contrasted sharply with the rural ideal, but even that ideal was in jeopardy. The farming lifestyle—living on a stable, self-sufficient farm run by a family and passed down from father to son—was altered by industrialization and urbanization.⁵ The mechanization of farming through mowers, reapers, threshers and tractors, allowed for fewer labourers on a farm or a larger family farm. Mechanization was particularly important on the prairies where there was a consistent shortage of seasonal labour, "...the overwhelming constraint on frontier development."⁶ The cost of the machinery, however, required revenue from the farm. Large farms and large debts became the norm. Farm work became more specialized and was conducted on a larger scale, so farming became more a business enterprise than a way of life for many rural farmers. As the cities grew the rural population shrank, creating a perceived decline in both the rural population and the moral values associated with rural life. In the Maritimes, for example, twenty-five per cent of

³ Douglas Lawr, "Agricultural Education in Ontario," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1972) 205.

⁴ Susan Herrington, "The Garden in Froebel's Kindergarten: Beyond the Metaphor," *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* (1998) 326.

⁵ R. W. Sandwell, "Negotiating Rural: Policy and Practice in the Settlement of Saltspring Island, 1859-91," in R. W. Sandwell, ed., *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, (Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press, 1999) 84-5.

⁶ Jeremy Adelman, *Frontier Development: Land, Labour and Capital on the Wheatlands of Argentina and Canada*,

the population lived in cities by 1900, twice as many as in 1851. By 1910 thirty-two per cent were urban dwellers. "Once relatively isolated communities, the local settings of most people's lives, felt the impact of wider horizons."⁷ One commonality of rural culture was a "strong emphasis on family, kinship, neighborhood, and parish bonds" which allowed for local interdependence.⁸

Few developments generated more apprehension than the relative decline in the rural population, few themes were as dominant as the vague feeling that Canadian development was unbalanced and unhealthy. The preference for agriculture and the expectation that it would continue to be a dominant factor in Canada, was reinforced and strengthened at the very time when agriculture was rapidly losing its primacy.⁹

This growth of cities at the expense of rural life led to a social crisis which inspired government and social reformers to make agriculture more profitable. Robertson was a member of both groups. Therefore along with settling disputes between business and labour, the government intervened in agricultural affairs. Generally, this took the form of fostering competition through fairs, providing new breeds of livestock, varieties of seed, or new machinery, and education in the form of experimental farms and agricultural colleges. Such systematic dissemination of scientific agriculture had begun in Canada in the 1850s. The Dominion Experimental Farm system, founded in the mid 1880s, sought to advance the productivity and profitability of farming.¹⁰

1890-1914 (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1994) 184.

⁷ Robert MacKinnon, "Agriculture and Rural Change in Nova Scotia, 1851-1951," in Donald H. Akenson, ed. *Canadian Papers in Rural History, volume X* (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1996) 232; Lawr and Gidney, *Educating Canadians* 158; Francis, Jones and Smith, *Destinies* 140-1.

⁸ Chad Gaffield and Gerard Bouchard, "Literacy, Schooling and Family Reproduction in Rural Ontario and Quebec," *Historical Studies in Education* 1.2 (1989) 201-2, 215.

⁹ Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) 191.

¹⁰ Alexander M. Ross, *The College on the Hill: A History of the Ontario Agricultural College 1874-1974* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1974) 1; Richard Jarrell, "Science and Public Policy in Nineteenth-Century Canada: Nova Scotia Promotes Agriculture," in Paul A. Bogaard, ed., *Profiles of Science and Society in the Maritimes Prior to 1914* (Victoria, Canada: Acadiensis Press and Centre for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University, 1990) 223.

But the fine line between offering a service to an industry and beginning to steer it towards preconceived goals was easily, naturally, and often crossed. The activities of the Dominion Dairy Branch in the 1890s for example, consisting of a substantial program of education, incentives, and subsidies to stimulate cheese and butter production, may be seen as an early attempt to redirect farmers into what appeared to be a profitable new agricultural industry.¹¹

Dairying may not have been more profitable, but it was more stable and predictable and Ontario agriculture, for example, did shift from wheat to dairy by 1915 in part because of government support for dairying.¹²

Education was particularly important in the prairies where farmers new to the region, immigrant or not, had to adapt to dry-farming and find a way to generate stable incomes even though most farmed only wheat. The most significant form of intervention was the settling of the prairies with Canadian and selected immigrant farmers.¹³ School gardens were part of this trend toward intervention and a continuation of Robertson's work as Commissioner of Dairying and Agriculture.

Robertson was not alone in his belief that, although they had great educational value, school gardens and nature study would also make rural schooling more relevant to rural children. As more families could afford to spare their children from the farm for schooling for longer periods of time, and as families valued literacy and schooling for economic opportunities and social advancement, schools became a convenient tool for disseminating scientific agricultural knowledge.¹⁴ Rural schools generally did not have a curriculum as diversified as that in urban schools where larger numbers of students allowed for graded classes and

¹¹ Bliss, *Evolution* 7.

¹² Robert E. Ankli, "Ontario's Dairy Industry 1880-1920," in Donald Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History, volume VIII* (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1992) 262.

¹³ Alan Sears, "Immigration Controls as Social Policy: the Case of Canadian Medical Inspection 1900-1920," *Studies in Political Economy* 33 (Autumn 1990) 92.

¹⁴ Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1987) 347.

specialized teachers. More immediately useful rural schooling was expected to help alleviate these rural problems by teaching children to love rural life and farm profitably, which in turn would keep them from moving to the cities and would improve the rural economy. Many educators thought formal education for rural children should be different from that for urban children so farmers' children would not "covet banking or commercial positions" and would instead become intelligent farmers. This, however, conflicts with the wishes of some parents that schooling would help their children to develop careers other than farming.¹⁵ Robertson believed, perhaps idealistically, perhaps naively:

The school garden is one way of making rural life more popular as well as more efficient. It may be the first step toward actuating the people to pay more to make the schools more efficient. The best education in rural schools should make the people like rural life and also enable them to make it more profitable. The best way to make any workman like his work is to make him understand it. The beginnings of all that and much more are laid in the schools.¹⁶

He argued that urban and rural interests would be served by a stable rural economy, and educationally and vocationally minded people could find value in the reform.¹⁷ The possibility of economic benefits through scientific agriculture appealed to vocationally-minded people, whereas the intellectual benefits of learning through studying nature and working in the soil appealed to social reformers. Together the gardens and nature study would make rural life more popular and more profitable, and persuade ratepayers to pay more for rural education to keep rural children from moving to urban areas. The best education for a rural school, in Robertson's opinion, was one which would make these things happen.¹⁸ Although his claims

¹⁵ *Que/AR-ED* 1901-1902, xviii-xix.

¹⁶ James Robertson, *The Macdonald College Movement: an address before the National Education Association of the United States at Denver, Colorado, July 7, 1909* (reprinted from the Proceedings of the Association, 1909) 92-100. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

¹⁷ Lawr, "Agricultural Education in Ontario," 151-152; Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 186-188.

¹⁸ James Robertson, *Education: An Address Before the May Court Club, Ottawa, 13th March 1908* (Montreal: The Witness Press, 1908) also printed under title "Education in Relation to the National Heritage," *The (Ottawa) Citizen*

may have been naïve, even dramatic, they were in line with the widespread belief that schools could be used to shape social order.

Although school gardening and nature study were not complete curricular systems, not a sequence of lessons as in manual training or domestic science courses implemented identically in each location, and they differed according to the choices made by the traveling instructors, all Macdonald rural school gardens were similarly organized. The gardens included individual plots for all the children and larger plots for collective or class experiments and demonstrations. In the school gardens three primary and practical lessons were taught: the selection of seed, the rotation of crops, and the protection of those crops from insects and disease. This, Robertson believed, would provide practical knowledge for students and give them experience with their own plots, thus leading to intellectual and personal development. In his own words:

Children find out something by doing, observing, and recording results themselves, and I say it over again that all worthy progress, in matters that are worthy of thinking about, springs from learning the lessons of consequences. As soon as a child understands that, and governs his life accordingly, he becomes a better pupil and the promise of a better citizen in every sense.¹⁹

School gardens provided practical experience and opportunities for observation and experimentation, and nature study provided gardening theory and an opportunity to integrate the curriculum. Robertson predicted that the integration would make schooling more “relevant” and “interesting” for the students, meaning they could make practical and immediate use at home of what they learned in school, and it would pique their curiosity. He also believed that through their education they would develop into good citizens—law abiding, productive adults. Although nature study was not equivalent to text-book elementary science it did teach the basic facts and principles of agriculture and therefore could also serve as preparation for future

(31 March 1908) 1-6. Robertson Papers, 4, 4; Robertson, *Macdonald College Movement*, 95; James Robertson, “The Improvement of Rural Schools in Canada” (three part newspaper article. n. p. [1904?] in Macdonald College, RG 43, c 234, file 1035.

systematic training in agricultural science. The primary purpose of nature study in the elementary grades was "...training the personal power of the pupil into a condition of symmetry and maturity, through a knowledge of and sympathy with those things acquired by doing something with them."²⁰ In other words it was meant to train the child in light of the knowledge acquired and experience gained in those subjects to understand the relationships between school subjects and his or her own place in the world.

Nature study was not intended to be an isolated subject. Rather its chief function was to teach and to integrate existing school subjects. If observations in the garden inspired lessons requiring mathematics and spelling, for example, Robertson believed the student would acquire a more valuable education than textbooks could provide. Students' experiences and observations, not only in the garden, could be integrated with the curriculum throughout the year following seasons and life cycles.

Objects for study abound without stint in all places and at all seasons of the year—spring, summer, autumn or winter, it is all the same—for Nature itself is the book, and every commonest object inside the school and out is a text for a sermon—the very wood of the school-room floor, of the desks or the furniture, the chalk used on the blackboard, even the speck of dust floating in the sunbeam...the drop of rain, the flake of snow, a stick, a straw, a stone....Everything is worthy of study from many points of view, and has a multitude of mental uses and direct lessons to teach.²¹

Robertson encouraged teachers to lead students to explore and learn for themselves, using examples as they presented themselves as described by other proponents of the subject. Students would thus teach themselves and rely upon observation and skill, and not solely upon knowledge found in textbooks—"...strengthening the mind to act for itself." As Robertson argued, "[t]aught in this common-sense, lovable way, reading, writing, arithmetic, and even

¹⁹ Robertson, *Education*, 11.

²⁰ Robertson, "Improvement of Rural Schools in Canada," third part.

²¹ James Fletcher, "The Value of Nature Study in Education" read before the Royal Society of Canada, May 1901, cited in Robertson, "The Improvement of Rural Schools in Canada," third part.

spelling, as well as geography and history, would become a delight to the so-called dull boys and girls at school.”²²

Besides the general development of a child’s mind, and practical experience in the basic elements of gardening, nature study and school gardens provided sound vocational, intellectual and curricular bases for agricultural education and natural science. Nature study combined with school gardening was expected to develop character, attitudes and observation skills. In this it was expected to aid agriculture because it “...was not regarded as technical instruction but rather as a valuable aid in supplying basic principles and proper attitudes preliminary to an agricultural career” and the attitudes and information acquired would encourage students to choose agricultural careers.²³ Therefore it was preliminary agricultural instruction as well. Robertson reasoned, “[i]n that sense it does for agriculture what manual training does for technical and industrial education, as applied to manufacturing occupations. It gives a wide basis of general intelligence and skill from which to specialize toward a particular industry.”²⁴

School gardens were in use in public schools in European countries since Austria prescribed them “where practicable” and Sweden required them in 1869. Belgium required gardens in 1873, France developed a course of study for gardens in 1882, and gardens increased in number in Germany, Russia and England throughout the remainder of the century.²⁵ In the United States school gardens were in use in Massachusetts and nature study began in New York state in 1897. In fact, the program in New York used traveling instructors, as with Robertson’s plan, to conduct nature study lessons at rural schools. F. Lee Bailey of Cornell University and leader in the Country Life Movement in the United States explained, “The plan of effort in this teaching was to visit two schools during the day...to find out just how the pupils could be

²² Robertson, “Improvement of Rural Schools,” third part.

²³ Lawr, “Agricultural Education in Ontario,” 202.

²⁴ Robertson, “Improvement of Rural Schools,” third part.

reached by means of object-lesson teaching, and just how much interest they would be likely to manifest in agricultural matters, in case it were ever found to be desirable to introduce such teaching as a part of the district school work."²⁶ This plan inspired Robertson as he also employed traveling instructors and sent them to Cornell for part of their training.

Canadian schools tried various forms of agricultural education before Robertson's attempt. New Brunswick began requiring agricultural education in common schools in 1892, and although the course of study was "imperfectly followed by many teachers, especially those who [had] not attended the Normal school in recent years" each year brought more instruction. Those who did attend the Normal school received training from John Brittain, who also prepared a *Manual of Nature Lessons*.²⁷ Educators created school gardens in Nova Scotia before the turn of the century but the summer vacation and teacher transience remained major obstacles. Four years later seventy-nine gardens were nevertheless in operation.²⁸

The Macdonald-Robertson scheme differed from other attempts at agricultural education due to the combination of school gardens, nature study, and teacher training. Robertson made the point, ten years after the start of his programme, that sixty years of various, undefined forms of agricultural instruction in schools had not gone well. "[U]ntil the combination arrived of the School Garden, systematized Nature Study and the Trained Teacher, but little progress was made."²⁹

Beyond their curricular, psychological, and economic justifications, Macdonald school gardens would beautify otherwise dreary rural schools.³⁰

²⁵ *NB/AR-ED*, 1899-1900, xxvii-xxviii.

²⁶ *ON/AR-ED*, 1902, xxxi.

²⁷ *NB/AR-ED* 1898, li-lii.

²⁸ *NS/AR-ED*, 1899-1900, xxvii-xxviii.

²⁹ RCITTE, 306-307.

³⁰ Robertson, Macdonald College Movement, 95.

There are over 100,000 school gardens in use in European countries. These beautify the school grounds and are used for educational purposes as well.... Would it not be a good thing if the bare, neglected, depressing and sometimes hardly decent surroundings of the schoolhouse were improved into gardens, expressing the refined taste and skill of the people of the locality, under the management of their teacher? If unsightly and repellent premises are not in themselves degrading, they have a tendency to dull the taste and the judgment of young persons as to what should be esteemed....³¹

Supporters of school gardens expected as well that neighboring districts would engage in a “healthy rivalry” and improve the school ground even where there was not a school garden.³²

There were also less pleasant features of agricultural education when taught without the aid of a school garden. Tomkins argues “...nature study, as agriculture was often called, was frequently reduced to formalism, taught second-hand from books without the use of real-life specimens.”³³ In English-Canadian classrooms from Nova Scotia to British Columbia students too often memorized information, read simple stories about animals or flowers, and had little experience of agricultural practice. Tomkins, Sutherland, and Lawr all argue that nature study lessons, when taught with examples from a school garden, did indeed dispose of the traditional textbook-oriented approach to agricultural education. Sutherland notes that although nature study was originally intended to introduce elementary science into schools, “until it was combined with the school garden...nature study in the lower grades often consisted of planting a tree or flower bed on Arbor Day or taking a class walk to the woods on a fine spring day.”³⁴ Combined with gardens, nature study connected the lesson with the students’ environment and this was more educationally effective than the text-book oriented approach, however Robertson would find that nature study lessons from a text-book were far easier to standardize than the

³¹ Robertson “Improvement of Rural Schools,” second part.

³² *PEI/AR-ED*, 1903, xx.

³³ George S. Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 121-4.

³⁴ Neil Sutherland, *Children*, 186-187.

experiences of children in the gardens. The difficulties in standardizing gardens would continue to plague Robertson.

Robertson promised that school gardens and nature study would not only relieve agricultural education of its text-book oriented approach, it would relieve the entire school curriculum of dependency upon text-books, memorization and recitation. The "three R's," Robertson argued, were still widely believed to be the most important part of elementary education, and that belief had done much harm to the schools and the students. Instead he advocated that "Nature study should be central, with manual training and domestic economy on either side of it."³⁵ Robertson believed nature study could become the central and supporting framework of schools in addition to being useful in training and strengthening the mind.

Robertson's position drew criticism from Prof. James Cappon, chair of English, then Dean of Arts at Queen's University and editor of *Queen's Quarterly*. Cappon believed a nation rose in the scale of civilization through moral progress and the appropriate morals were "best learned through the study of literature, especially the classics [...and] as each individual attained a higher degree of morality, the collectivity advanced."³⁶ In an article in *Queen's Quarterly* Cappon admired Robertson for his energy, enthusiasm, and organizational skills, although he thought Robertson had taken his educational plan to the extreme by emphasizing practicality, experience and problem-solving to the exclusion of "the more general and literary elements of education." The literary side of education, Cappon argued, was important in preparing future citizens who must deal with political and social problems. "A system of education which neglects this literary side, however excellent otherwise, must have the effect of slowly but surely lowering the standard of citizenship." According to Cappon, then, the fallacy

³⁵ Robertson, "Improvement of Rural Schools," third part.

³⁶ S. E. D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal: Six Canadian Intellectuals and their Convictions in an Age of Transition, 1890-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 68, 73.

in Robertson's theory was setting "'concrete' methods and the object lesson in opposition to literary and abstract methods in intellectual training."³⁷

Robertson replied in the next issue of the *Quarterly* that the overly bookish schools of the past and present failed. He denied supporting the practical to the exclusion of the literary. "On the contrary I have been doing my best to commend, to encourage, and to bring about more effective methods of study in arithmetic, in language both spoken and written, and in literature....It is my belief and hope that Nature Study, Manual Training and Household Science as methods of education will supplement books..." in schooling. He predicted that integrating the several "methods" of education would make schooling more delightful for children otherwise bored by schools. Students would have the opportunity to experience new things and understand their world by identifying problems and solutions. Robertson's notions of education, then, paralleled Dewey's pragmatism which emphasized linking theory with active participation—a popular philosophy during a time of economic and social transformation.³⁸

Trustees were not easily convinced of this. The trustees of St. John, NB, for example, expressed in their annual report of 1899 that thoroughness in spelling, reading, penmanship, drawing, composition and arithmetic should be secured before any nature study lessons were conducted. "The acquisition, therefore, of these subjects should be the principal object of the common school, and nothing ought to be permitted to take their place; for if these subjects are neglected or imperfectly taught, irreparable injury is done not only to the individual but also to the public." Nature lessons and other non-essentials should be taught briefly and only once a week.³⁹

³⁷ James Cappon, "Sir William Macdonald and Agricultural Education," *Queen's Quarterly* 12, 13 (January 1905) 318-319.

³⁸ James Robertson, "Professor Capon's Article in Queen's Quarterly, January, 1905," *Queen's Quarterly* 12, 4 (April 1905) 422; Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995) 21.

³⁹ *NB/AR-ED*, 1899, 84.

In the end Robertson's proposals were unpopular with people favouring a traditional text-book approach, but Robertson's argument in favour of nature study combined with school gardens appealed to rural residents faced directly with solving rural problems and persuaded them of the value in the new practices. Even with a growing number of supporters the actual implementation of school gardens and nature study proved to be difficult.

Traveling Instructors and Spring Planting

The Macdonald Rural Schools Fund was established 1 April 1902 with Macdonald's deposit of \$100,000 in the Bank of Montreal. Macdonald's deposits would total \$254,034.91 over the next six years. Of this amount \$40,611.91 was spent on the establishment and maintenance of rural school gardens and provisions for nature study in selected rural public schools. Expenses included the salary of traveling instructors, the building of a tool shed at each of the demonstration schools, the purchasing of tools, seed and ornamental trees and bushes, the preparation of land, and half the cost of the land itself. Macdonald promised to meet the cost of a rural school garden, the cost of preparing it for educational work in nature study, and the salary and expenses of a traveling instructor to initiate the gardens and train the teachers for a period of three years. If land was needed for the gardens it was purchased in part through the fund and deeded to the local trustees.⁴⁰ After the three years of funding expired the school districts could keep the gardens and the tools and decide for themselves if they wanted to continue the program and to accept the continuing cost.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Macdonald Rural School Fund, "Memorandum of Provisional Agreement," Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; this point is vague in the memorandum of provisional agreement, but reports of the traveling instructors suggest that the cost was divided in half between the Macdonald Fund and the local trustees.

⁴¹ Macdonald "Rural Schools Fund" Receipts and Disbursements from 31st October, 1899 to 30th April, 1909. (Macintosh & Hyde, Chartered Accountants, Montreal, 1909) Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; Macdonald Rural School Fund, "Memorandum of Provisional Agreement," Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

Gardens and nature study required instructors and instructors required training. To implement school gardens and nature study, both at small rural schools and later at consolidated schools, Robertson asked educational administrators in Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to recommend a few of their best teachers. He chose two suitable men from each of the five eastern provinces, plus one extra. Five of these men, Percy Shaw, George Fuller, John Brittain, J. W. Gibson and Theodore Ross became the traveling instructors for the Macdonald School Gardens.

The eleven men were sent in 1902 to the University of Chicago for a course in nature study. Then they moved on to Cornell University where they studied Horticulture, Agriculture and Insect Life with special reference to rural schools. The third part of their training was at Teachers College of Columbia University for special training in the "New Education." Finally they each worked their own garden plots, just as they would be asking their students to do, at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph. These eleven men became devoted followers of Robertson and his educational ideals so much so that they nicknamed themselves the Eleven Apostles.⁴²

These men were not merely gardeners or agriculturalists. As the next three years would demonstrate, these were rural leaders with organizational skills, agricultural and educational experience, ability to solve logistical difficulties, and ability to publicly advocate the program. These characteristics, which they shared with Robertson, helped the Macdonald-Robertson scheme. Their activities help explain the success of the reform because the decisions they made resolved key difficulties in teacher training, soil and weather conditions, garnering public and government support, and of course in the actual gardening and teaching.

⁴² Robertson-Currier, 2, 43-44; the careful training of these men was of particular importance during the initial year of the program as Robertson became ill from the stress of his duties as Dairy Commissioner and Director of the Macdonald Fund, and was ordered overseas for an extended rest. Theodore Ross, R. H. Cowley (PSI) and James F O'Hare were paid \$1,150, \$500 and \$300 respectively to carry on the work in his absence.

The school gardens and nature study classes in Colchester County, Nova Scotia were under Percy Shaw's direction. Gardens were set up at schools in Bible Hill, Old Barns, Brookfield, Belmont and Great Village. Meanwhile John Brittain had charge over the five school gardens in Carleton and Victoria Counties in New Brunswick at the Woodstock Grammar School, the Broadway School in Woodstock, the Hartland Superior, Florenceville Superior, and Andover Grammar Schools. Kensington, Bedeque, Searletown, Tryon and Emerald were the locations of the gardens in Prince Edward Island where Theodore Ross was the traveling instructor. George D. Fuller ran the gardens at the English-speaking Protestant schools in Quebec. These included Knowlton Academy, Brome, West Brome, Iron Hill and West Bolton. Finally, Ontario schools in Galetta, North Gower, Carp, Richmond and Bowesville had gardens under the instruction of J. W. Gibson.⁴³ These schools were chosen, with the help of school inspectors, because of their rural locations, proximity to one another (making it possible for the traveling instructor to get to each school once a week) and the interest of local districts.

⁴³ J. W. Gibson to James Robertson, October 10th 1904. "Brief report of Macdonald School Gardens in Carleton County during recent midsummer vacation," Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; Percy Shaw to James Robertson, 1904. "First annual report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3; Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First annual report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3; John Brittain to James Robertson, 1904. "First annual report," Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

TABLE 1. Expenditures for Rural School Gardens 1903-1906⁴⁴

	Capital	Maintenance	Salaries	Expenses	Total (minus credits to acct.)
Prince Edward Island	\$2389.28	\$372.72	\$4216.55	\$962.29	\$7840.59
Nova Scotia	\$1961.21	\$544.70	\$3899.88	\$587.81	\$6940.00
New Brunswick	\$1738.94	\$413.24	\$5490.37	\$1246.62	\$8889.17
Quebec	\$2038.08	\$498.00	\$3899.88	\$1162.30	\$7598.26
Ontario	\$515.57	\$1192.94	\$4482.44	\$1156.37	\$9343.89
total	\$8643.08	\$3021.60	\$21989.12	\$5115.39	\$40611.91

Before the gardens could be established, land was needed. The traveling instructor worked with local districts to find suitable and affordable land. The ideal place for the school garden was adjacent to the school building. This often created a problem because the land might not be good for gardening or for sale. Owners of land adjacent to the schools were sometimes unwilling to sell because the land was often in a central location. In addition land close to the twenty-five schools was found to be in varying conditions with, more often than not, poor soil quality. Fuller noted in his first report that ironically “[t]he site of the schoolhouse is often fixed by the worthlessness of the land upon which it is to stand for other purposes.”⁴⁵ When constructed, then, the schools were not expected to be sites of agricultural education. He added that moving the school was too political and too expensive in most cases. This set of circumstances created one of the greatest obstacles to successful school gardening in the first

⁴⁴ Compiled from Macdonald “Rural Schools Fund” Receipts and Disbursements from 31st October, 1899 to 30th April, 1909. (Macintosh & Hyde, Chartered Accountants, Montreal, 1909) Robertson Papers, 4, 2B. As a comparison based on total receipts by schools boards (provincial grants and local assessments) and total number of classrooms in operation in each province, in 1905 districts in Ontario spent approximately \$581 per classroom, Quebec \$200, Nova Scotia \$375, New Brunswick \$367 and Prince Edward Island \$276. M.C. Urquhart, ed., and K. A. H. Buckley, assist. ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1971) 596, 599.

⁴⁵ George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. “First Annual Report,” Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

year: obtaining and maintaining suitable land. As shown in Table 1 capital expenses varied widely, Ontario's being only 22% of PEI's, but maintenance in PEI cost only 31% of that in Ontario.

The traveling instructors and the local school boards persevered and land was secured at or near each of the twenty-five schools. In Nova Scotia, for example, where school gardens were not new, Bible Hill ratepayers chose to rent one-half acre next to the present school, as they were planning to move the school in the near future. In Belmont the owner of the land next to the school along the road was unwilling to sell, so the acre of land behind the school was purchased. This land, however, was of such poor quality that it was nearly useless. At Old Barns the property had been in grain the previous year and was easily cultivated, whereas at Great Village the soil was good on top but had a hard and stony subsoil.⁴⁶ In Prince Edward Island trustees planned for future consolidation. The trustees at Bedeque, for example, selected a site which would also be a good site for consolidation in the future. Although this was not adjacent to the school it was a more public location. Searletown also chose a plot suitable for consolidation and located the garden three-quarters of a mile from the school. This did not meet with the approval of all the ratepayers because many feared that consolidation would create too great a financial burden on the area. The majority prevailed and the land was purchased.⁴⁷

In comparison Fuller had fewer problems in Quebec. Brome, Iron Hill and West Bolton each received one acre of land. West Brome received one-half acre which was separated from the school grounds by a public road. The soil at Knowlton and Brome was excellent for gardening while that at West Brome and Iron Hill was fairly good. The only difficulty was at West Bolton. The soil there had an impervious subsoil making it unsuitable. It had never been ploughed, so removing stones and preparing the land took a long time. During the dry season the

⁴⁶ Percy Shaw to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

grading and draining was done, however it was found to be inadequate in Iron Hill and West Bolton when the spring of 1904 was unusually wet.⁴⁸

As these three examples demonstrate, the traveling instructors overcame a multitude of difficulties in starting school gardening at each location. The traveling instructors necessarily took different actions to establish the gardens and improve school grounds as the soil and facilities dictated much of the initial work that had to be done. Preparation of the soil began in most places in the fall of 1903, but most work was done in early spring 1904. The gardens had to be fenced, a tool shed built and trees planted at most locations, and some schools even built hot houses.

The preparation of the grounds was perhaps no where more extensive than in enthusiastic Prince Edward Island. Fencing and grading were done at the five gardens in the fall of 1903. The following May Ross, along with paid labour, planted two hundred hardwood trees and two thousand evergreens, while spruce hedges were used to line the playgrounds. Four of the districts built a tool shed and one had room already. In Searletown almost every man contributed a day's work to stumping the garden and contributed to the building of the shed, keeping the cost to the Macdonald fund under ninety dollars. The community in Tryon was equally involved, donating in kind to build a ten foot by nineteen foot shed. All expenses over the seventy-five dollars of Macdonald money was also paid by the community.⁴⁹

In Nova Scotia the gardens were plowed, harrowed and fenced in the fall of 1903. A 10x15 foot tool shed with a hot house was built at all schools except Bible Hill as it was not a permanent location.⁵⁰ While Shaw built tool sheds, Fuller instead tried to improve existing outbuildings in Quebec. With the cooperation of the local school boards he tried to make the

⁴⁷ Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁴⁸ George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁴⁹ Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

most of the seventy-five dollars allotted to each school for a tool shed, therefore he improved what was there, bought locally, and sought local help. In the spring of 1904 Fuller completed fencing and tree planting. With the help of paid labour the children planted mostly native trees, and some ornamental trees such as Norway spruce and horse chestnut, apple and plum, and currant bushes.⁵¹

Nature study was not a series of prescribed lessons as was manual training, rather it was teaching method and subject matter. Initiative, leadership and creativity on the part of the traveling instructors were necessary to integrate nature study with the curriculum, and therefore these qualities were vital to the success of the scheme. Nature study courses were conducted from September on, preceding the spring planting. Each traveling instructor integrated gardening and nature study with the curriculum in his own way. Gardens and nature study lessons, therefore, were characterized by difference and variety as compared with manual training and domestic science, characterized by consistency and standardized curricula.

...the teacher who fails in independent investigation can never hope to teach nature study successfully...knowledge of the child and sympathy towards all child interests will go far in determining *what* to choose as subject matter for Nature Study, and also the most natural and therefore the *best* method of presenting it.⁵²

The difference and variety of the school garden and nature study classes were appropriate and necessary as the traveling instructors had to accommodate soil conditions, weather, pests, teacher and community enthusiasm and most importantly the interests of the students.⁵³

Examples in class most often came from the garden once spring arrived, although some

⁵⁰ Percy Shaw to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁵¹ George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁵² J. W. Gibson, "Review of 'How to Teach the Nature Study Course'" by John Dearness, in *Queen's Quarterly*, 13, 2 (October 1905) 167-170.

⁵³ Manual training instructors, on the other hand, were trained for only that, and conditions within the manual training rooms remained constant. Nature study was all about integration and taking examples from the immediate environment, therefore different everywhere. Official reports indicate interest and enthusiasm from teachers. If negative evaluations from teachers were expressed they were not recorded.

instructors used field trips to local areas for demonstrations and observations. The nature study classes also depended upon the interest and knowledge of the regular classroom teacher to not only assist the traveling instructor but also extend the lessons. If a teacher was trained and interested he or she could continue nature study throughout the rest of the week and integrate nature study with the rest of the curriculum.

Each traveling instructor, then, conducted nature study lessons in his own way. Shaw taught the germination of seeds, the growth of seedlings and root systems, the structure of the full grown plant, and the flower. His students also studied the effects of weeds, insects and fungi. During the winter months Shaw taught the chemistry of the air and water as well as electricity and magnetism. After the planting in May each day with the traveling instructor would begin with a thirty minute observation tour of the garden before weeding and hoeing, and these observations would often lead to a subject for study. Shaw's understanding of the garden, then, was chiefly as an aid to nature study. "It was 'nature study by means of the school garden' rather than the school garden as an end in itself." Just as the garden facilitated the teaching of nature study, nature study in turn facilitated the teaching of parts of the prescribed curricula such as botany, physics, chemistry, reading, drawing and composition.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Brittain conducted nature study lessons in grades three through eleven. This, he felt, allowed him to gain a sense of what interested children at different ages. He found few students could identify common vegetable seed or the stages of plant growth but they were happy to leave their desks for the garden.⁵⁵ Ross took a more liberal view of nature study: during the weekly visits to each school Ross gave instruction in nature study, music, watercolouring, drawing and sewing. Ross made an attempt at correlating his lessons with those of the classroom teacher, but experienced only

⁵⁴ Percy Shaw to James Robertson, n. d. [1904]. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁵⁵ John Brittain to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 1, 2B.

partial success.⁵⁶ In Quebec, Fuller used slides to deliver a series of lectures that were attended by both pupils and parents. Students were also given bulbs to grow over the winter and were instructed in preparing the soil, planting and caring for plants, germination and development of seedlings. If the classroom teacher had science training these lessons could be continued through the week.⁵⁷

When spring came tree- and garden-planting commenced. In general the gardens had two sections, one with individual plots for children and one with large demonstration and experimentation plots. Shaw allowed each student to choose four types of seed, one being flowers, for their individual plots and the demonstration plots were used for growing vegetables generally grown in Nova Scotia.⁵⁸ In New Brunswick Brittain gave most students 3x5 or 4x8-foot plots, while smaller children shared class plots. Trying to overcome the difficulty of maintaining the garden over the summer, he asked students to come in each week or to arrange for another student to care for their plot. This plan had mixed results. At three of the five schools older students were hired to care for the large plots. While Brittain found this to be less than ideal, he did find it to be the best under the circumstances.⁵⁹

In Quebec students seven years and older were responsible for a 4x12-foot plot. Some young students were given plots half that size. Students could plant what they liked and harvest at will. Fuller used hired labour to cultivate the demonstration plots while the students observed methods and results—an expensive choice when the children could have done for themselves. To teach scientific method, and demonstrate to the parents and other members of these agricultural communities what the agricultural colleges and experimental farms were doing, Bordeaux mixture was used on a different variety of potatoes at each school. One half of the

⁵⁶ Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁵⁷ George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁵⁸ Percy Shaw to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

plants at each garden were sprayed with the copper sulfate, lime and water mixture beginning in the middle of July and repeated every two weeks. In the middle of August unsprayed plots rusted badly and within ten days the tops were dead. The sprayed plots lasted three weeks longer. This increased the yield by 94 to 200 per cent. According to the local papers farmers in the area were thereby convinced this was a cost-effective approach. Fuller continued to visit each school for one half day each week throughout the summer vacation. Students were asked to come for two hours on the days he came. Half of the students came at two of the schools, and less than that at the others.⁶⁰ Gibson found in Ontario that during the summer months attendance was sparse as older students were needed at home due to the shortage of farm labour that year. Families were also traveling over the vacation. Gibson encouraged students to come to school by giving each school credit for student work and then ranking the schools.⁶¹

Ross allowed each student to choose two types of seeds from a selection of vegetable, cereal and flower seeds.⁶² At the beginning of the season in Prince Edward Island the students were enthusiastic to the point of poor discipline. Enthusiasm waned, however, when cutworms destroyed many of the plants. Indeed, at Bedeque almost all of the plants were destroyed. At first the students tried to pick the worms, then poisoned bait was used with greater success, but it was too late. At some schools the gardens had to be re-seeded four times. Understandably, students became indifferent when they realized it was too late in the season to expect a harvest. In addition the summer of 1904 was unusually dry and hoeing and weeding became increasingly unpleasant. Clearly, this made for a disappointing harvest.⁶³

⁵⁹ John Brittain to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 1, 2B.

⁶⁰ George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁶¹ J. W. Gibson to James Robertson, 10 October 1904. "Brief report of Macdonald School Gardens in Carleton County during recent midsummer vacation," Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

⁶² Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁶³ Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

The experiences of the traveling instructors, thus, varied according to the nature study lessons they chose, the gardening conditions, the preferences of the students, the manner in which they chose to conduct the gardens, and other local difficulties. In the fall of 1904 after the first full year of preparation, planting, nature study classes, harvesting, and local fairs, the five traveling instructors offered evaluations of their own work as well as school gardens and nature study in general. One of the greatest difficulties, according the Shaw, was the high turnover rate of rural school teachers. This was particularly difficult because the change usually happened over the summer months when constant maintenance of the garden was necessary. "This unstable tenure of office [was] quite as much due to the morbid desire for change on the part of the average country parent as to the low salaries to teachers... [and] without doubt the most important factor in the success of the garden [was] the local teacher of the school."⁶⁴ If the teacher was interested it was easy to integrate the nature study lessons with the rest of the curriculum. A second significant difficulty was the poor condition of much of the soil. Shaw noted that children need vigorous growth to stay interested, and vigorous growth required rich soil. This was hard to provide and usually cost a great amount of money. School gardens received general community support and had been in practice in Nova Scotia for eighteen years and by 1903 when the Macdonald School Gardens were established fifty two gardens were already in operation in the province. The presence of these gardens, however, depended on the personal interest of individual teachers and local ratepayers who took an interest and could provide the consistency and organization from year to year.

Brittain reported that the classroom teachers at the five schools gave the gardens a generally favourable evaluation and they reported it was easier to lead students to abstract reasoning in physics, chemistry, arithmetic and algebra after visual and tactile learning in the

⁶⁴ Percy Shaw to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

garden. Observation skills developed in the garden helped increase language skills as well. Teachers also found students did not want to be absent on gardening days. Brittain affirmed his belief that the natural surroundings of the student provide the means of intellectual, aesthetic and emotional development, and the teacher can use those surroundings to facilitate that development.⁶⁵

Early on Ross encountered delays when some of those hired in Prince Edward Island to build or work on the land, expected more pay, since Macdonald was funding their work. "It took the people some time to realize that in accepting this gift they had at the same time accepted some responsibility"—exemplifying Macdonald's desire to add only the yeast. Ross also found in his first year that he had attempted to teach and do too much at once and this limited his success. He also concluded that nature study had to be conducted more than once a week. Ross' chief regret of this first year was that he was overly anxious to plant the trees in the spring. Ironically he was of the opinion that the children were more of a hindrance than a help during this time and he generally excluded them from it. The trees took up so much time that garden planting had to be rushed. The gardens were also too large. "There was so much to be done that the education side of our work was almost neglected. We missed the purpose of our work and regarded the children as being there for the sake of the garden rather than the garden as having its very existence for the sake of the children. Perhaps this was to an extent unavoidable the first year."⁶⁶

The four greatest difficulties Fuller experienced in his first year were indifference on the part of parents, lack of scientific training of teachers, teacher turnover, and the long summer vacation. Fuller found at his schools that some parents were interested and involved, some parents opposed it outright, but most parents were indifferent. Lack of training on the part of

⁶⁵ John Brittain to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 1, 2B.

teachers made it difficult for the nature study work to be continued throughout the week, and teacher turnover caused the gardens to be less attended to in the summer. The summer vacation was too long to make the gardens a permanent part of the curriculum. He suggested opening schools on the fifteenth of August and continuing until the end of June.⁶⁷

Gibson's evaluation consisted of suggestions. The first was that all schools should open on August 1st each year to solve the summer maintenance problem. He thought increased parental support and involvement would help solve this problem. Gibson also suggested that the Macdonald Fund present awards to all of the schools, all of equal value, in the form of nature study books.⁶⁸

The experiences of each of the five traveling instructors demonstrates that school gardening escaped standardization. Without standardization, centralized control was made difficult if not impossible because costs and outcomes could not be predicted with accuracy. Pests, weather, soil conditions, community support, and the interests of the traveling instructors and the teachers they worked with combined to create unpredictable outcomes at each school. The variety of results at the twenty-five gardens, and the lack of standardization and centralization these results caused, limited the impact of the Macdonald-Robertson school gardens. Teacher education and publicity were the main tools Robertson had at his disposal to try to overcome these limitations.

Trained Teachers and Government Support

Using school gardens and nature study lessons as examples for other districts was not enough to ensure their continuation and spread. Training regular school teachers and normal

⁶⁶ Theodore Ross to James Robertson, 1904. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁶⁷ George D. Fuller to James Robertson, March 15, 1905. "First Annual Report," Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁶⁸ J. W. Gibson to James Robertson, October 10th 1904. "Brief report of Macdonald School Gardens in Carleton County during recent midsummer vacation," Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

school students in the theory and practice of gardens and nature study, and raising enthusiasm among those teachers, were both necessary. Securing funding from provincial governments and increasing support for school gardens and nature study among parents, trustees and ratepayers were also crucial to the impact of this reform. Therefore, as school gardens and nature study progressed over three years the emphasis of the traveling instructors shifted away from growing plants and conducting nature study lessons, leaving that work to the regular teachers. This was a logical change because traveling instructors were expensive and Robertson did not intend for them to be part of local continuation of the schemes. Robertson, the five traveling instructors, and other educational leaders spent more time and energy making the spread of gardens and nature study possible by directing their efforts to the training of teachers at the twenty-five schools with Macdonald gardens to take over responsibility for the gardens and nature study. They also concentrated on training future teachers in gardening and nature study at provincial normal schools and the Macdonald Institute at OAC, on encouraging provincial governments to award grants to districts and teachers who established gardens, and on increasing public support for the new subject. The training of teachers was crucial because, as Gibson noted in 1904, it was difficult to find a teacher who was willing or competent unless he or she had special training in nature studies.⁶⁹

The traveling instructors began with the five teachers with whom they worked. One of the greatest obstacles to integrating nature study with the curriculum was the short time each traveling instructor spent at any one school. Gardens could be maintained with a few hours' work once a week, but successful integration of nature study required more frequent attention and thus the help of the regular teacher. As Ross stated, "If Nature Study is to have a place in the curriculum, and modify the whole spirit of the school, it must be presented by the regular

⁶⁹ *ON/AR-ED*, 1904, xxxix.

classroom teacher and oftener than once a week.”⁷⁰ During the first year of nature study lessons Ross spent progressively less time with the students and more time developing lessons with the regular teacher which he or she would teach throughout the week. This gave teachers an opportunity to integrate nature study with any subject on the curriculum, and to break up the dull routine at some point each day. In September 1905 the care of the gardens was given over completely to the teachers and the following May Ross met with each teacher to make plans for carrying on the work on their own as Macdonald funding was ending.⁷¹

Brittain was not as quick to turn over the teaching of nature study lessons to the regular teachers at his five schools. He taught lessons to all grades in the first year, asking the regular teachers only to review the lessons throughout the week. During 1903 teachers began to assist in the nature study lessons and management of the gardens. Brittain wrote “During the year 1904, the gardens were conducted under my personal supervision with however some assistance from the teachers; but it has been my policy during the year just ending [1905] to leave as much as possible to the teachers.” During the last year of Macdonald funding the teachers had to take complete responsibility for the gardens and nature study lessons as Brittain was appointed to a Professorship in the Provincial University. Not only did the teachers assume greater responsibility over the years, but Brittain found that it would have been impossible to implement the gardens and nature study at all without the encouragement and help of the regular teachers.⁷²

In addition to training the teachers in the rural schools, some traveling instructors taught short courses at provincial Normal schools. Ross, for example, conducted a ten week course in nature study at Prince of Wales College and Provincial Normal School during the winters of

⁷⁰ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1903, D-33.

⁷¹ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1905, 20-22.

⁷² *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-1905, 70.

1904 and 1905.⁷³ By 1906 his instruction at Prince of Wales had developed into Botany and Physical Geography. These courses were open to all students, but they were primarily intended for those "...who were to teach in the Public Schools to train their pupils in the use of their senses through the acquiring of facts that might be of value to them and lead them to take pleasure in country life."⁷⁴ Brittain had been an instructor in the Natural Science Department at the Normal School in New Brunswick for thirteen years before leaving to work with Macdonald and Robertson.⁷⁵ Having had experience training teachers it was a logical choice to use his experience to train teachers in school gardening and nature study. In 1904 both Brittain and Ross conducted a two week field-study course in plant and animal life.⁷⁶ The following year Brittain and Ross made presentations to the Teachers' Association of Prince Edward Island.⁷⁷

The training these teachers received was crucial to the continuation of school gardens and nature study because it helped to standardize them to some extent. Ironically it was far less training than that given to the five traveling instructors who established the gardens. Tomkins notes the apparent contradiction this created. "The subject was to be taught scientifically but paradoxically...it was thought to be simple enough to be taught by minimally trained teachers."⁷⁸ This contradiction continued as the traveling instructors ended their work at the schools when the three year period of funding concluded, and nature study would have to be carried on by regular teachers.

Although the short courses at provincial Normal Schools helped disseminate information about school gardens and nature study, Robertson's emphasis was placed on getting teachers trained at Macdonald Institute at the Ontario Agricultural College. The Ontario

⁷³ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1904, F-4; 1905, appendix E, 5.

⁷⁴ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1906, appendix C, 21.

⁷⁵ *NB/AR-ED* 1902, 1.

⁷⁶ *NS/AR-ED*, 1903-1904, 64.

⁷⁷ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1905, appendix C, 24.

government, responsible for maintaining the faculty at Macdonald Institute, agreed to allow six female and two male teachers from each of the provinces to attend a three month course tuition-free. Three such sets of teachers were invited each year for three years. Macdonald and Robertson promised to give each of those teachers five cents for every mile between their school district and the Ontario Agricultural College for traveling expenses, plus a twenty-five dollar grant to each.⁷⁹ The Councils of Public Instruction in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick gave each female student fifty dollars and each male student seventy-five dollars (as there was not a male dormitory provided) in the form of scholarships to encourage good teachers to go to Guelph.⁸⁰ In Prince Edward Island at least one public school inspector accompanied the teachers to Macdonald Institute and after completion of the three month course was able to introduce nature study to the teachers in his inspectorate.⁸¹

As a response to suggestions from the traveling instructors, Robertson's advocacy of the idea, and increasing support among educators and the public, provincial governments did their part to spread nature study and school gardens to more rural schools by providing grants to teachers and districts. These grants rewarded teachers who acquired additional expertise to teach the lessons and oversee the gardens, and to cover the actual costs of the gardens. In Prince Edward Island, where Macdonald was helping to improve facilities at Prince of Wales so nature study and school gardening might be taught, the Board of Education in 1906 passed regulations "...that the several districts might be encouraged to keep up the garden already established and that other districts might be encouraged to establish gardens..."⁸² The Province would pay up to ten dollars, or half the amount spent by the district—whichever was less—to

⁷⁸ Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 121-4.

⁷⁹ *NB/AR-ED* 1901-1902, lx.

⁸⁰ *NS/AR-ED*, 1903-1904, xxix.

⁸¹ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1906, 15.

⁸² *PEI/AR-ED*, 1906, appendix C, 22.

purchase or support a school garden. This was under the condition that the school grounds were kept in order and the school earned the recommendation of the Director of Nature-Study or a Public School Inspector.

In New Brunswick, Brittain along with public school inspectors encouraged the government to reward teachers to qualify themselves in nature study and to help districts pay for gardens. Brittain argued in 1903 "...if school gardens and nature study are ever to become factors of any importance in our public schools, some means must be found to induce a sufficient number of teachers to qualify themselves for conducting this work..."⁸³ He recommended that those teachers who would take the course at Guelph, or other approved courses, be given a fifty dollar grant—the same amount given to teachers who qualified themselves to teach manual training in rural schools. This policy, in his opinion, would "...tend to retain in the teaching service men of different tastes and ideals, and to save public education from becoming exclusively formal, bookish and conventional—tendencies toward which are still strong and persistent, as history shows they have always been in the past."⁸⁴ W. S. Carter, Inspector of Schools, lamented the fact that established teachers in New Brunswick had never received training in nature study and were dictating notes to the class without field work or examples taken from the students' surroundings. "The teachers themselves never had this training, and many otherwise good teachers are allowing themselves to become 'back-numbers' in the profession, because they do not attend the Summer Schools, or in some way make themselves proficient in this very important branch of their work."⁸⁵ In August, 1904, the Provincial Government passed an Order-in-Council which provided thirty-dollar grants to qualified teachers who taught nature study and conducted school gardens. Twenty dollars

⁸³ *NB/AR-ED*, 1902-1903, 158.

⁸⁴ *NB/AR-ED*, 1902-1903, 158

⁸⁵ *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-1904, 11.

would be granted to the trustees of those districts to pay for the gardens and maintenance of school grounds. Scholarships would also be provided to those teachers taking the course at Guelph, as mentioned above.⁸⁶ This was certainly an encouragement, but Brittain warned, "...their influence for good will depend on the industry and efficiency of the teacher in charge. A weedy, ill cultivated garden would do harm rather than good, and the time and money spent on it would be worse than wasted. This suggests the necessity for close supervision by the Department of Education."⁸⁷ Ontario offered, in 1903, to give grants of \$100 to school boards to cover the initial costs of a garden. In subsequent years \$10 would be given to maintain those gardens.⁸⁸

After the Funding

Robertson and the traveling instructors were successful with the Macdonald Rural School Gardens they controlled and deserve credit for much of the limited amount of school gardening and nature study in the years following. Ultimately, however, school gardening in general died due to forces stronger than their leadership, skills, and the merits of school gardening.

The Macdonald Fund expired in July 1906. In the years immediately following, school gardens and nature study continued to be practiced in schools and discussed among educational leaders. Sutherland argues "[s]chool gardening gradually became an important aspect of rural education in Canada. For the minority of *rural children* who received any benefits from the new education, it was more likely to take this form than any other."⁸⁹ By 1909 only twelve schools in New Brunswick had school gardens. Ontario had a modest thirty-three schools

⁸⁶ *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-1905, xlv.

⁸⁷ *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-1905, 145.

⁸⁸ Lawr, "Agricultural Education in Ontario," 215.

⁸⁹ Sutherland, *Children*, 187. emphasis mine.

qualify for special grants made available in 1907. The province did, however, appoint a Director of Elementary Agricultural Education that year.⁹⁰ Donald French in an article in *Canadian* magazine suggested in 1910 that there was indifference toward scientific study of agriculture in Ontario's rural public schools because it was not a fixed subject within the curriculum. The three causes for this, according to French, were that teachers were not trained for it, there was no room in the curriculum for it, and most rural school boards were unwilling to provide more than minimal supplies for schools because they did not see school gardens as essential.⁹¹ In PEI the Superintendent of Education lamented that neither manual training nor school gardening were gaining support:

...[I]t does not appear that these experiments have produced the desired effect upon ratepayers of other districts. Not only have no other districts expressed a wish for the introduction of [the new subjects] into their schools, but they have opposed it, or refused to consider it, unless the Department of Education defray the expense....The student-teachers are taught that they, in turn, may be able to convey the results of their study to the country schools, and give the boys and girls the benefits of their acquirements. But this is not done, and the plan fails in its most important aim. And in the same way, Agriculture, which is taught, in theory, and has been on the Curriculum of the Public Schools for many years, has failed to secure the sympathy and support of teachers and people. Manifestly something effective must be done to make instruction in these subjects imperative and practical. Legislation is necessary to provide due support for such training, as voluntary action is not forthcoming.⁹²

Lack of universal support for school gardening, then, continued long after the Macdonald-Robertson scheme, despite efforts to standardize the gardens and nature study classes through teacher education and build support by influencing public opinion. The federal government passed the Agricultural Aid Act in 1912 as a general reaction to demands for rural improvement. This Act provided half a million dollars to the provinces for economic, social and educational improvements in rural areas. The Agricultural Aid Act, along with the

⁹⁰ *NB/AR-ED* 1908-1909, xl; Lawr, "Agricultural Education in Ontario," 225.

⁹¹ Donald G. French, "Teaching the Farmer How to Farm," *Canadian* 36 (Nov.-Apr. 1910-11) 420.

Agricultural Instruction Act of 1913, represented a new effort by the Federal government to promote, in part, school gardens and nature study. The Agricultural Instruction Act came as a response to the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education, chaired by Robertson. In the *Report* of the Commission Robertson himself reported that school gardening was failing and encouraged a revived interest in school agriculture.

Through the Act the Federal Government distributed ten million dollars over ten years to the agricultural and educational departments of all the provinces, based upon population. Each province could decide how to spend the money which was intended to ameliorate rural conditions.⁹³ Sutherland notes Prince Edward Island hired more school inspectors and provided for summer courses in agricultural education at Prince of Wales College as well as bonuses to teachers who conducted gardens. British Columbia, meanwhile, hired J. W. Gibson to be provincial director of agricultural education.⁹⁴ Tomkins argues agricultural education developed the most in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Nova Scotia under this federal funding. All these provinces developed text books, courses and materials. Even in Quebec, where other elements of the new education had little impact, school gardens were increasingly established at first as a result of Macdonald and Robertson's efforts. Later Quebec appointed its first agricultural representatives in 1913 and a superintendent of school gardens in 1915. As a result of teacher training, home gardens and school fairs, school gardens increased in that province from 188 in 1910 to 1,468 in 1920.⁹⁵ In 1911 Ontario appointed a Director of Elementary Agricultural Education. They chose S. B. McCready of the OAC, who increased the number of Ontario schools qualifying for a school garden and nature study grant from 17 in 1911 to 99 in 1913. When money from the Agricultural Aid Act was reinforced with money

⁹² Alexander Anderson in PEI/AR-ED, 1909, xxv.

⁹³ Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 111.

⁹⁴ Sutherland, *Children*, 188.

from the Agricultural Instruction Act summer courses were provided for teachers and public school inspectors and six field agents were hired. By 1921 1,800 schools qualified for the school garden and nature study grant.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Although school gardens were popular in Nova Scotia before the Macdonald School Gardens were introduced, in 1919 they were judged a failure there.⁹⁷ This was the beginning of the end for school agriculture. The Agricultural Instruction Act ended in 1923 and with it enthusiasm for school gardens and nature study. The reasons for the failure of school gardens were the problems which plagued them all along. Teacher transience, the difficulty of training the average teacher in scientific agriculture, the emphasis on impractical or non-verifiable outcomes such as character building, local opposition to an education for rural children different from that for urban children, and logistical difficulties all led to the decline. “[T]he problem and the fate of agricultural education, together with opposition to it, were remarkably similar from coast to coast.”⁹⁸ Since these problems persisted despite funding and teacher training school gardens and nature study could not be standardized with predictable costs. This made implementation too difficult in the face of obstacles.

Robertson had, however, been successful with his gardens during the three years of funding from Macdonald. He was able to gain some interest, particularly from provincial governments in the form of personnel and grants. The results of their efforts at agricultural education in the form of the seed grain competition, school gardens and nature study combined with the success of manual training led to one more experiment along the same lines. Instead

⁹⁵ Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 122.

⁹⁶ Lawr, “Agricultural Education in Ontario,” 226.

⁹⁷ Sutherland, *Children*, 189.

⁹⁸ Tomkins, *Common Countenance*, 123; Neil Sutherland, “Triumph of Formalism: Elementary Schooling in

of a new subject or agricultural practice the next scheme was an institutional structure which would make the previous reforms more affordable to the rural ratepayer: consolidated schools.

Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s," *B.C. Studies* (Spring 1986) 175.

4. CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS: ADMINISTRATION FOR THE SAKE OF NEW SUBJECTS

It was the opinion of Messrs. Macdonald and Robertson that in addition to mechanic and domestic sciences the country schools should give instruction in the natural sciences especially those intended to improve horticulture and agriculture; that such instruction could only be provided at centralized schools; and that consolidation could only be effected by transporting the children.¹

Introduction

Through the Macdonald Rural School Fund, Macdonald and Robertson organized and built four consolidated schools, one in each of Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. A Macdonald Consolidated School was created through the amalgamation of five or more small rural schools including transportation to bring the students to the central location. Consolidating small schools created a larger attendance which made graded classes possible and had the potential to create a more efficient district with better facilities. Combining the resources of several districts also made it possible to implement an extended curriculum, particularly manual training, domestic science, nature study and a school garden. This scheme was also designed to make it possible for rural districts to afford hiring specially trained teachers for the extended curriculum and more highly qualified teachers in general. In essence, consolidated schools were a partial administrative solution to the problems of implementing manual training, school gardens and nature study. Macdonald paid for the new school building, special equipment, establishment of a garden, school vans and a van shed at each location. He also agreed to pay any additional cost above the cost of running the separate schools in the past, for three years. The consolidated schools were under the control of a newly elected local school

¹ No attribution, "Middleton Consolidated School" newspaper article. 2 September 1903, n. p., Robertson Papers, 4,

board created according to provincial school law. Macdonald and Robertson hoped the local school authorities and ratepayers would find value in the quality of education that consolidation provided, especially the educational value of manual training, domestic science, nature study and school gardens, and would continue the schools after Macdonald funding ceased.

Robertson did not author the idea of consolidation nor was he the first to advocate it in Canada. The need for consolidation was based on a judgment that rural schools were lacking in both curriculum and facilities.² Rural schools and urban schools, as defined by their locations rather than their characteristics, served populations with some differing needs. In urban schools a distinct form of administration and curriculum developed to meet the needs of the urban population. As Schults and Kaestle found in the United States under similar conditions to those in urban areas of Canada:

...the development of the urban school system was a response to social problems perceived by urban elites and that among the central functions of nineteenth century urban education were the acculturation of immigrants and the inculcation in the lower classes of values deemed appropriate for urban-industrial society...[and] urbanization led to the peculiar bureaucratic structure and normative content of schools in these cities.³

Urban schooling, then, developed to meet the economic and social needs of crowded, industrial settings. Rural schools on the other hand had developed to meet the economic and social needs of sparsely populated, agricultural settings.⁴

Against the work of districts to maintain local control, twentieth century progressives "...pulled rural schools into a more centralized network by consolidating rural districts and by

2B.

² Douglas A Lawr and Robert D. Gidney, *Educating Canadians: A Documentary History of Public Education* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973) 168; Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 64.

³ cited in Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 103.

increasing state regulation over education in the towns.” This process, labeled by many historians as “urbanization” was based on admiration for the large, graded, systematically-bureaucratized urban schools with curricula extending beyond literacy and numeracy, all at a low cost-per-pupil in comparison to rural schools. Schools in rural areas, however, had different uses for schools and administered those schools themselves. Using an urban model, then, was implementing graded classes, extended curricula, and bureaucratized administration in rural areas. As Kaestle and Vinovskis found in the United States:

Rural areas differed in population density, educational resources, and educational needs; there was no way to homogenize rural and urban education completely...although twentieth-century reformers sought to bring rural education into a centralized framework, they recognized the particular needs of rural communities and endeavored to develop rural curricula appropriate for rural children.⁵

Canada faced similar differences in population density, resources and needs.

Throughout the twenty-five years preceding the Macdonald-Robertson movement tax-supported public schools, with the help of compulsory education laws for the elementary years, became larger and provincial education bureaucracies increasingly centralized. Katz argues that “...securing the regular and punctual attendance of all children at school...” solved the central education problem of the nineteenth century. The central educational problem then turned from attendance to curriculum.⁶

⁴ Ian E. Davey, “School Reform and School Attendance: The Hamilton Central School 1853-1861,” in Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975) 296.

⁵ Using the process of urbanization to explain historical change is problematic because it assumes the same thing was taking place in all urban areas, and requires a definition of urban—a distinction which was not always clear. Urbanization, then, is better seen as using a *model* from a particular *setting* and imposing it in a different setting. Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 101.

⁶ Michael B. Katz, “Who Went to School?” in Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975) 272.

Although compulsory attendance changed the common schools, the number of students attending high school by 1891 was approximately 4.3% of the number attending public schools overall. They were open to all students, but the high schools remained the domain of the select few and provided "...mental culture and a practical education" to prepare them for teaching, the professions, universities or commercial operations. Therefore if the majority of Canadian children were to benefit from curriculum it would have to be delivered to them in the common or elementary grades composing the first seven years of school, or approximately ages seven to fourteen.⁷

Rural communities, however, had different uses for their schools and seasonal demands on their children, and not all rural community members were "...unanimous about the benefits..." of schooling.⁸ Gaffield argues "Rural families actively calculated the ways in which local schools responded to their own needs; parents did or did not send their children for their own reasons and as a result of their own circumstances."⁹ Patterns of attendance differed slightly between urban and rural settings. In the 1911 census Harrigan found the first national glimpse into these patterns. In 1911 83% of urban and 78% of rural seven to fourteen year olds attended school across Canada. Urban numbers from province to province remained within 8% of one another but rural numbers varied by 36% from one province to the next, which demonstrates regional economic and social differences. Mainly this was due to the rural attendance patterns in the four most western provinces. Nevertheless by 1911 80% or more of urban and rural children

⁷ R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) 274.

⁸ Ian Davey, "School Reform and School Attendance" 296.

⁹ Chad Gaffield and Gérard Bouchard, "Literacy, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Rural Ontario and Quebec," *Historical Studies in Education* 1.2 (Fall 1989) 206.

were attending school for at least part of the year in the eastern provinces.¹⁰ Increasing the percentage of days attended during the year remained a challenge for educators.

Robertson advocated consolidation not only for the sake of efficiency and graded classes. He advocated it because consolidation had the potential to bring the “new education” within financial reach of rural ratepayers and hoped that in turn “...consolidated schools [would], to a great extent, help to check the rural exodus.”¹¹ Although the consolidated schools were more efficient than the smaller ungraded schools, the type of education provided at the Macdonald Rural Schools and the transportation required were more expensive than the collective cost of the old schools. One of Robertson’s primary tasks, then, was to convince ratepayers to pay more for this higher quality education along with the transportation necessary to allow for consolidation.

The consolidation was successful in some areas and not successful in others—meaning they were established and then continued by the districts after Macdonald funding ended at some location. Consolidated schools endured a precarious existence which hinged on public opinion and increased cost of schooling, including cost of transportation. Consolidation was successful, as it was in Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, where public support of the idea of consolidation, public willingness and ability to pay more overall for schooling, and relative ease of transportation balanced with the increased cost. Where it was not successful, as it was not in Quebec and in the long run in Prince Edward Island, public support along with willingness and ability to pay more for schooling were not sufficient to match the financial requirements created by the circumstances in those areas.

¹⁰ Patrick J. Harrigan, “A Comparison of Rural and Urban Patterns of Attendance in Canada, 1900-1960,” *CHEA Bulletin* 5.3 (1988) 33.

¹¹ “Macdonald Consolidated School, Kingston, NB,” *The Farmer’s Advocate Home Magazine* 20 July 1905, 1038-1039. Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

Calls for Consolidation in Canada Before Macdonald-Robertson

Although Robertson pioneered consolidated schools in eastern Canada, he did not pioneer the idea. A year before he offered the scheme to the five eastern provinces, the Chief Superintendent of Prince Edward Island, Alexander Anderson, referred to the “amalgamation of contiguous small districts or the merging of small districts into neighboring large ones...[as] perhaps the most pressing necessity of the time” and called for amendments to the Public School Act to facilitate consolidation.¹² In one room schools “...all across the country, the atmosphere was the same, a compound rendolent of dusty floors, chalk, wood smoke and steaming woolen mittens.”¹³ The inefficiency of small rural schools, and the poor quality of education which resulted from multigraded and poorly attended classes in “gloomy and unhealthy” schoolhouses, were the main reasons for the call for consolidation from educational leaders.¹⁴ In New Brunswick, for example, there were in 1897 over 230 schools with fewer than ten students. The number of poor districts continued to increase each year as the Board of Education was continually pressured to divide districts in order to shorten the walk to school.¹⁵ These small schools in all the provinces, in general, were not providing an education “...commensurate with the amount of money expended upon them. In fact, some of them [were] apparently doing very little if any good.”¹⁶ In addition to inefficiency, the multiplication of small, weak districts resulted in little tax money and therefore low salaries for teachers, which in turn resulted in the

¹² *PEI/AR-ED*, 1901, xxii-xxiii.

¹³ Jean Cochrane, *The One Room School in Canada* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, 1981) 17.

¹⁴ Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 205.

¹⁵ *NB/AR-ED*, 1897, lvii-lviii.

¹⁶ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1898, 69-70.

hiring of teachers with "...limited education, training or experience, [or teachers who were] past the age of competition."¹⁷

Teachers are actually offered salaries less than \$20 a month, while the young lads of the section can walk off unlettered to drive a team or trim coal at from \$30 to \$75 a month. The grand and only fundamental defect in our educational system is the small salaries which the small-minded and untutored freemen of the majority of our rural school sections have got into the habit of voting...¹⁸

Educational leaders, including school inspectors and superintendents, believed that consolidation would solve many of these problems. They predicted consolidation would result in better teachers due to the ability of the new districts to afford higher salaries, as well as specialized teachers. Larger schools could support graded classes where students could have more instruction time, companionship, and friendly competition with their peers. Consolidated schools could also create the opportunity for high school education in rural areas. All of these advantages would lead to better attendance because school would be more attractive and more beneficial to the students. A larger tax base could also support better facilities. The transportation required would not only allow for consolidation, but would have the added benefits of punctual starts to the school days and fewer absentees because the children would be dry and warm from the time they left home in the morning until they returned in the evening. The overall influence of such schools would result in greater community interest, which in the long run would lead to greater improvement due to involvement on the part of ratepayers, and willingness to pay higher taxes in support of the schools.¹⁹

There were many arguments against consolidation. Some of these were based on practical or logistical problems while others stemmed from public opinion or fears. The leading argument against consolidation was the (not unreasonable) assumption that a consolidated school

¹⁷ *NB/AR-ED*, 1902, 187-197.

¹⁸ From *The Journal of Education*, Nova Scotia, cited in *ON/AR-ED*, 1902, xxvi.

would cost the ratepayers more than the small schools. The transportation necessary for consolidation would not only cost a great deal, but would not always be possible due to bad roads especially during winter. Ratepayers feared that losing their local school would reduce their property value, that they would have to spend more on clothing for their children to attend school “among strangers,” that small children would be required to go too far from home or that their children would be negatively influenced by children “of all classes and conditions.” Some parents objected that the time the children spent traveling to school would cut into time needed for chores. One school inspector noted the “natural proneness of some people to object to the removal of any ancient landmark, or to any innovation, however worthy the measure or however well received elsewhere” and local jealousy resulting from any acknowledgment that a neighboring district had the better school, as elements of local opinion which impaired efforts at consolidation.²⁰ These arguments against consolidation led another inspector to predict that “[I]t is doubtful if the country is yet ripe for such a change even in part”²¹ while the Chief Superintendent of Education in New Brunswick believed “...the anticipation of difficulties ought not to deter from a vigorous effort to remove a...cause of weakness in our school administration.”²²

Many of these same inspectors and school administrators pointed to American and Australian practices as successful examples of consolidation. Massachusetts began consolidating schools in 1875, and by the turn of the century the two best-known models in the United States

¹⁹ *NB/AR-ED*, 1902, 187-197.

²⁰ *NB/AR-ED* 1902, 187-197.

²¹ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1898, 69-70.

²² *NB/AR-ED*, 1897, lvii-lviii.

were the "Concord [Massachusetts] Plan" and the "Kingsville [Ohio] Plan."²³ Between 1892 and 1902

...all the Northern States, from Maine and Massachusetts through to Minnesota...adopted the plan of centralizing rural schools to a greater or less extent, as a means of improving rural schools. Massachusetts was the pioneer by many years, and [had] very definite legislation on the subject...Ohio [had] long since carried her Kingsville centralized school far beyond the pale of experiment, and made it of national repute. Indiana and Illinois superintendents [made] pilgrimages to Ohio's Mecca, the school at Kingsville, to inspect its workings...²⁴

In fact, Robertson, R. R. Cowley, inspector of schools for Carleton County, Ontario and Prof. Lockhead of Ontario Agricultural College were three educators who visited the schools in Ohio in 1902. They reported that in a district similar in geography and population distribution to Ontario that consolidated schools were less expensive, attendance was greater, and ratepayers were supportive.²⁵

Between 1889 and 1896 Massachusetts increased spending on school transportation from \$22,000 to over \$90,000. These consolidation plans allowed for more extensively-trained teachers, more detailed classification of students, and substantially uniform taxation. James Inch reported that in most instances the overall cost of education decreased, and in his opinion in all cases the "quality of education" increased in these graded schools. Canadian educators also noted that Australia had great success with similar plans.²⁶ It is significant, though, that these simple consolidations were for the sake of reducing spending, having graded classrooms, and increasing attendance, but Robertson was consolidating for the sake of a new curriculum. The

²³ "What the United States Thinks of Consolidated Schools," *The Farmer's Advocate*, 18 May 1916. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

²⁴ *ON/AR-ED*, 1902, xxii-xxiii.

²⁵ "Consolidation of Rural Schools a Great Success in the States," (*The Ottawa Citizen*, n. d.) Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; "Consolidated Rural Schools," (*The [Toronto] Globe*, 16 December 1902) Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.

²⁶ *NB/AR-ED*, 1897, lvii-lviii and 1901-2, lvi-lvii; *ON/AR-ED*, 1900, xvii-xix and 1902, xxii-xxiii.

difference meant overall decreased or increased cost. Robertson's schools would offer graded classrooms, manual training, school gardens, and nature study, and although efficient the cost to the ratepayer would be greater, whereas simple consolidations potentially decreased cost to the ratepayer.

The earliest calls for consolidation came in the form of recommending legislation that would allow for voluntary consolidation. James Inch, Chief Superintendent of Education in New Brunswick, believed that initial offers of financial and moral encouragement would lead to consolidation on a small scale, and these successful examples would induce other districts to do the same. In Ontario Richard Harcourt, Minister of Education, argued "...the most prudent steps towards consolidation for the Province would be for school sections in the neighborhood of a town or village to unite, in the first place so far as concerns continuation classes, and, in the second place, for all classes of pupils." The spread of consolidation would, in his opinion, "revolutionize" the education in rural schools.²⁷

By 1902 "...small, weak school sections, less than four miles in diameter, [were] no longer allowed by law to be put on the poor list" if it were possible to attach them to other school sections.²⁸ Legislation providing for consolidation necessarily involved allowing and funding transportation. In 1898, for example, New Brunswick enacted a law that allowed districts to "...vote an amount of money sufficient...to convey...children living so remote from the school house that they [were] unable on that account to attend such school." The legislation also allowed that when two or more contiguous districts consolidated and provided for conveyance of

²⁷ *NB/AR-ED*, 1897, lvii-lviii; *ON/AR-ED*, 1900, xvii.

²⁸ *ON/AR-ED*, 1902, xxvi.

children, funds from the Provincial revenues would be granted to the new districts amounting to not more than half the cost of the conveyance.²⁹

Despite this and other similar policy, change was frustratingly slow. The conditions in New Brunswick caused James Inch to suggest:

Perhaps it is too early to expect practical results from legislation so recent as that of last winter in reference to a change of usage of long standing. It is a little disappointing to find that...no movement has yet been made by trustees or ratepayers to take advantage of the provisions of the new law. The selfishness and prejudices of a few should not be suffered to defeat a movement which will promote the general good.³⁰

A similar, if more extreme, opinion was expressed by the National Education Association of the United States and quoted in the Annual Report of the Schools of New Brunswick:

Legislation with respect to public education must not wait for public sentiment. It should lead public sentiment when necessary. Experience teaches that what people are compelled by law to do with respect to schools, they readily learn to do without compulsion, but they are usually slow to demand reforms.³¹

There was a general consensus among American and Canadian educators, then, that implementing consolidated schools was a matter of overcoming the practical difficulties as well as the equally necessary and difficult task of educating public sentiment.

New Curriculum and New Administration

Macdonald and Robertson had, by 1902, introduced their pedagogy for manual training, domestic science and nature study. Macdonald Manual Training Centres were still operating under the Macdonald Manual Training Fund, and school gardens and nature study were starting

²⁹ *NB/AR-ED*, 1898, lvii-lviii.

³⁰ *NB/AR-ED*, 1898, lvii-lviii.

³¹ Cited in *NB/AR-ED*, 1902, 187-197.

up under the Macdonald Rural School Fund. Domestic science was being encouraged by this general introduction of the “new education” and all three programmes were helped along through teacher training available at the Macdonald Institute at the Ontario Agricultural College. Now an institutional reform was required to bring these programmes within financial reach of rural ratepayers.

Macdonald’s and Robertson’s earlier experiments had arguable pedagogical value, but consolidation of schools was an administrative device whose value lay only in making the “new education” affordable in rural areas. Consolidation, then, was a means to an end. If enough children could be brought together to a central school, with reasonable cost of transportation, then an object lesson, or demonstration, could be created in which rural students could receive the quality of education received by urban students. As Stamp notes, “the hope here, as with the school garden project, was that the public would be so receptive that provincial and local bodies would assume the financial obligation after three years.”³² The success of the program rested on local ratepayers’ willingness and ability to support consolidated schools through increased taxes so the strong would “bear the burdens of the weak, and so fulfill the law of citizenship.”³³ Robertson’s goals for the consolidated schools went beyond simple efficiency and improved instruction:

I have great faith in the rural school, in its power to mould and build up a national character: but new educational methods must be used in order to secure the best results. In order to compete with our rivals in the worlds’ markets—in order to equalize the advantages of country and city life—in order to make our

³² Robert Stamp, “Education and the Economic and Social Milieu: The English-Canadian Scene from the 1870s to 1914,” in J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp and Louis-Phillippe Audet (eds.) *Canadian Education: A History*; (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1970) 299.

³³ James Robertson, “The Improvement of Rural Schools in Canada” three part newspaper article. n. p. [1903?] in Macdonald College, RG 43, c 234, file 1035; “A New Era For the Province: In the Opening of the Consolidated School at Hillsboro” (*The Charlottetown Herald*, 26 May 1905) 1, Robertson Papers, 4, 4; James Robertson, *Education: An Address Before the May Court Club, Ottawa, 13th March, 1908* (Montreal: The Witness Press, 1908) 8-9. Also printed under title “Education in Relation to the National Heritage,” (*The [Ottawa] Citizen*, 31 March 1908) 1-6. Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

country life attractive enough to keep our bright boys and girls on the farm and thus maintain an intelligent, prosperous, progressive and contented rural people we must give immediate and effective attention to the needs of the rural school. A consolidated school makes it possible to so modify the curriculum that the development of the child is the ultimate aim and not the cramming of the mind with mere facts.³⁴

It was, perhaps, hypocritical on his part to desire the children of farmers to be content with their rural lives when he had left the farm and cheesemaking to live in Ottawa and become a well-known public figure. Nevertheless as he had done throughout his entire career he expressed his utopian hopes for rural schooling and the rural lifestyle.

During December 1901 Robertson presented an offer to each of the five most eastern provinces. If at least five districts would send their school aged children to a central school, create a school board representing all the districts to govern that school, and pay each year the average amount in taxes they paid for the previous three years, then Robertson as trustee of the Macdonald Rural School Fund would provide the facilities. These included renovation or building of a school and van shed, a school garden, manual training and domestic science equipment, and transportation for the students for three years. The headmaster, manual training and domestic science teachers had to be recommended by Robertson and approved by the Department of Education in the respective provinces. The Provincial government was expected to contribute no less than the average of the preceding three years, plus any special grants such as manual training or school garden grants, as well as half the cost of transportation. Each year a new contract would be signed by Robertson and each school board. At that time the previous three year average of taxes would be calculated to determine that year's contribution by the

³⁴ James Robertson to W. H. Jenkins, Esq., Registrar, Dept. of Education, Toronto, ON. Dec. 22, 1905.

ratepayers. After this trial period of three years the school districts would have the choice of continuing their school or going back to separate, small schools.³⁵

The experience of Middleton, NS, shows how a district might choose a location and make an agreement. At the annual meeting of the Middleton Board of Trade in January 1902 a committee was appointed to explore the advantages and possibilities of a consolidation in the area. The committee attended meetings in Middleton and in seven adjoining school districts and persuaded all eight districts to apply for the consolidated school. Middleton was an appropriate site because although it would be a challenge to consolidate and transport the students, there was a good possibility that the consolidated districts would be able to afford the new school when the Macdonald funding ended. In August 1902 a public meeting involving eight districts was held in Middleton. At that meeting Robertson offered the Nova Scotia consolidated school to Middleton and seven surrounding districts, and a new committee was formed to proceed with the arrangements until a board of trustees could be elected. This committee had much of the responsibility of persuading all the districts to enter into the agreement, and all but Brockton agreed with the final arrangements. South Farmington entered into the consolidation in place of Brockton, joining Middleton, Spa Springs, West Brooklyn, East Brooklyn, Nictaux Falls, and Nictaux. An act was passed in the provincial legislature forming the consolidated district for three years. In this act each individual section retained its identity and would continue to elect school boards as in the past for the purposes of representation and collection of taxes. Three members of the Middleton board, along with one

³⁵ "Memorandum of Provisional Agreement," Robertson Papers, 4, 2A. Also, added to successive memorandums: "In the event of any difficulty arising in connection with the management of the school which is not definitely provided for by this agreement, or the Public Schools Act, or the regulations of the Education Department, the matter shall be submitted to the Education Department whose decision shall be final." "Memorandum of Agreement between [Guelph] Board of Trustees and James Robertson," October 10, 1906 [for 6 Sept. 1906 to 29 June 1907] McGill, RG 43, c 1, file 41; Robertson to Deputy Minister of Education, Ontario, 18 October 1906, Macdonald College RG 43, c.1, file 95; Deputy Minister of Education, Ontario, to Robertson, 20 October 1906, Macdonald

member from each of the other boards formed the Consolidated School Board. This board had full control over the school and made the transportation arrangements, although Robertson arranged for the building and the purchasing of the vans. The average amount paid in taxes in each district for the years 1899, 1900 and 1901 were paid for the first year of consolidation. Expenses not covered by those funds and provincial grants were paid by Robertson.³⁶

“With great fanfare” Macdonald Consolidated Schools were opened in Middleton, NS in 1903, Kingston, NB and Guelph, ON in 1904 and Hillsboro, PEI in 1905.³⁷ A Macdonald Consolidated School was never created in Quebec due to the population distribution of rural Protestant school children. The openings of the schools, or the readiness of the school in the case of the Middleton school, were delayed in part due Robertson’s illness. As a consequence of overwork, Robertson’s doctor had ordered him to travel overseas for an extended rest in May 1903. R. H. Cowley, inspector of schools in Ottawa was appointed to act on his behalf.³⁸

The first of the Macdonald Consolidated Schools opened in Middleton on September 3, 1903 with G. B. McGill as principal. The old Middleton school had 130 pupils, and the surrounding seven school districts which consolidated with Middleton each had one teacher and an average of 34 pupils. The consolidated school had eleven teachers including principal McGill and 300 pupils on the first day which increased to 418 during the first year. Due to Robertson’s illness and other difficulties the new brick building planned for the school was not ready, however the consolidation of the districts was in effect so the opening of the school took place in 1903 as planned even without the facilities needed for the new curriculum. In order to temporarily accommodate the students, the old Middleton school building was remodeled and

College RG 43, c.1, file 95.

³⁶ “Middleton Consolidated School.”

³⁷ Stamp “Economic and Social Milieu” 299.

³⁸ “Middleton Consolidated School.”

classes were conducted in rented spaces around town. Because the new facilities were not ready until February 1904 manual training classes were not conducted during the first half of the first year. Domestic science classes weren't conducted at all until the second year. To compound these difficulties the winter of 1903-4 was unusually harsh and "every known infectious disease" broke out during the second year. Despite the weather of that first year the school vans arrived at school on all but two days, so although the first year was not a fair test of the new curriculum, it was a rigorous test of transportation and attendance.³⁹

The second Macdonald Consolidated School opened in Kingston, NB, in September 1904. The principal was D. W. Hamilton, a graduate of the University of New Brunswick, an experienced teacher, and a specialist in nature study. Seven districts, all within five miles of one another, were combined to form this school. This site was chosen by the Education Department and Robertson, in consultation with local school boards, because it represented a typical rural centre in New Brunswick: the population was spread out, the schools were inefficient, and there was a "need of educational and agricultural awakening."⁴⁰ There were few wealthy men, and the roads were hilly. "Considered from all standpoints, perhaps there could not be found a center in New Brunswick which would offer more natural obstacles to the success of a consolidated school than Kingston."⁴¹ A writer in *The Maritime Farmer and Co-operative Dairyman* remarked that if consolidation worked in Kingston, especially the transportation element of it, consolidation could work anywhere in New Brunswick. The

³⁹ "Middleton Consolidated School"; Middleton [N.S.] School Board, "General and Financial Report," 24 June 1905. Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; "The Macdonald School System" *The Maritime Farmer and Co-operative Dairyman* 10.6 (Sussex, NB and Truro, NS, 20 December 1904) 115-6; "The Macdonald and Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia: by A. W. Mackay, Superintendent of Education *The Farmers Advocate* (December 1, 1904) 1631, Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; "The Macdonald Consolidated School Experiment," *The Outlook*, (Friday, Jan 5, 1906) Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

⁴⁰ "Macdonald Consolidated School Kingston, NB" 1038-9; "Macdonald School Formally Opened," [*St. John's Daily Sun*, (September 1904), Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

⁴¹ "Macdonald Consolidated School Kingston, NB." 1038-9.

consolidation replaced seven second- and third-class teachers with five first-class teachers, three of whom held university degrees. The new school building contained six class rooms, one laboratory, a manual training room, and a domestic science room. There was a van shed and, of course, a large garden.⁴² Although the facilities and the general plan for the school met with approval there was criticism of the site. The *St. John Daily Sun* argued the Kingston school had failed as an object lesson because it was not in the line of travel and therefore would not be observed by those it was intended to influence:

Kingston is not in the line of travel. Perhaps no place along the main railway routes would quite fit the bill as a consolidation of the typical rural schools. But an object lesson requires that the persons to be instructed by the lesson should be brought into contact with it. The persons who are to be shown the advantage of consolidated schools cannot obtain an adequate idea of the matter by reading or hearing accounts of it. They should go and see...but without the visits and the investigation by representative inhabitants of the scattered country districts this object lesson fails of part of its mission.⁴³

This was one of the inherent difficulties Robertson faced in his schemes for rural reform: creating an object lesson which was a true test of overcoming rural circumstances, and at the same time conducting it at a location where it could be used to influence others.

The school at Guelph, Ontario opened November 14, 1904 with J. W. Hoton as principal. Four sections consolidated in the fall of 1904, and they were joined the following year by a fifth district. Guelph was chosen because Richard Harcourt, Minister of Education, wanted the scheme to "receive a trial" and thought they could "...only expect it to be taken up, for the present, in populous townships where there [were] good roads" and for this reason he

⁴² "The Macdonald School System"; *NB/AR-ED*, 1902-3, lvii; *NB/AR-ED*, 1902, lxii-lxiii; *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-4, lii-liii; "Premier Offers Prizes for the Consolidated School" *The Daily Telegraph* St. John, NB Nov. 10, 1904, Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

⁴³ "The Consolidated School" *St. John Daily Sun* Nov. 10, 1904, Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

suggested that Guelph was the best location.⁴⁴ This consolidated school was different from the others because, in addition to the elements of consolidation present at the other schools, it was also used in conjunction with the teacher training at the Macdonald Institute at the nearby Ontario Agricultural College.⁴⁵

The Hillsboro Consolidated School, PEI, opened May 25, 1905 with J. Walter Jones as principal. The building of the school was delayed until the summer of 1904 by Robertson's illness and difficulty choosing an appropriate site. Robertson originally proposed a school at Hazelbrook, but after disagreement among the school districts involved over whose children would have to be transported over the hills, Robertson instead recommended two schools: one at Bownal and another at Mount Herbert.⁴⁶ Eventually the plan for PEI was changed again and Hillsboro was chosen. When the Hillsboro school was finally formed Robertson had already learned from his experience with the other consolidated schools. "...Experience at Middleton, Nova Scotia, and other places proved that the area of country included was too large, that consolidation to be successful must not have van-routes longer than five miles and that the routes must be easy to travel." Therefore some of the original districts considered for the consolidation were excluded. After "much opposition," "difficulties all along the way" and many public meetings six districts in the Hillsboro area agreed to consolidate. The delay caused by reluctance and disagreement "...was particularly annoying to Sir. William since he, himself, came from the Island and their failure to approve wholeheartedly of his ideals and his gifts had in it something of the bitterness of a family quarrel."⁴⁷ The area was one of the most

⁴⁴ Richard Harcourt to Robertson, 11 December 1901, Robertson Papers, 4, 1.

⁴⁵ Richard Harcourt to Robertson, 23 December 1901, Robertson Papers, 4, 1; W. H. Jenkins, Registrar, Ontario Department of Education to Robertson, 22 December 1905, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.; "Memorandum of Agreement between the Board of Trustees and James Robertson" Macdonald College, RG 43, C. 1, file 41.

⁴⁶ "Two Schools Instead of One," *The Charlottetown Herald*, [June 1904?] Robertson Papers, 4, 4.

⁴⁷ Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 37.

prosperous farming communities in PEI and five miles from Charlottetown and the Railway. This site was chosen by the Superintendent because although it was a fair test of rural consolidation it was also accessible to visitors. The first year was judged a success including the curriculum and the transportation of the students. The exception to the success were the high salaries of the specialized teachers, a cost which was expected to decrease once the Normal School at Prince of Wales College was established and the availability of trained teachers increased.

Despite Macdonald and Robertson's offer to establish a consolidated school, one never materialized in Quebec.⁴⁸ At a meeting with the Inspectors of the Protestant Schools of Quebec at the McGill Normal school in April 1905 inspectors were invited to speak frankly, not about the merits of consolidation, rather about the possibility of implementing such a scheme in their inspectorates. Several inspectors remarked that "...the single rural schools in poor municipalities were in greatest need of financial assistance; and that the improvement of them was a matter of more importance and greater urgency than the improvement of schools where consolidation was practicable."⁴⁹

The circumstances of Quebec's rural Protestant schools prevented consolidation from being practical at this time. Specifically, the Protestant schools had low average daily attendance—fewer than sixteen students in 1900, and in 1901 there were one hundred schools with fewer than five, and one hundred other schools with fewer than ten students. These schools were also spread out due to the sparseness of the Protestant population—a situation only growing worse because the Protestant population tended to move to the cities or move

⁴⁸ George Parmalee collected recommendations and information on attendance and roads from ten public school inspectors to determine the best possible locations for a consolidated school. The collection of letters and maps are located under a cover letter from Parmalee to Robertson, dated 23 May 1902, Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁴⁹ "Notes of a Meeting Held with the Inspectors of the Protestant Schools of the Province of Quebec at McGill

west. The roads were hilly and rough with deep mud in spring and autumn and snow-drifts in winter, schools were often pocketed in valleys and effectively cut off from one another, and there was also a lack of funds available to cover additional taxation. Even though many of these schools had low attendance and could be combined to save on teacher salaries, the distance created would be too great for the children to walk during the winter.⁵⁰

For these reasons the Legislature in 1899 enacted that if two or more districts united the school boards could provide for the conveyance of students. This caused many school boards to begin considering some small measure of consolidation for the sake of greater “efficiency” and better teachers, but not necessarily a new curriculum. The English Secretary of the Department of Education and the English inspectors campaigned in the rural districts for these small consolidations. Despite their efforts the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Boucher De La Bruere, in 1903, had to report that “[t]here was nothing done last year towards realizing the project of consolidating the schools and conveying the pupils to a central school at the expense of the ratepayers.”⁵¹

The New Subjects, Attendance, and Costs

With four Macdonald Consolidated Schools up and running by the spring of 1905 Robertson was able to demonstrate, for the first time, the combined value of manual training, domestic science, nature study, school gardens, specialized teachers and highly qualified regular teachers “...mak[ing] possible a more complete school life.” “A consolidated school makes it

Normal School in Montreal” 21 April 1905, Robertson Papers, 4, 3.

⁵⁰ Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 45-6; The greatest improvement which could be made, suggested one inspector, was not consolidation but the training of young women from the rural areas who would be content to return to these small schools and teach for longer periods. This was the most practical way to get experienced teachers into the rural schools at the salaries which were being offered—and became part of the Macdonald College mandate.

⁵¹ *Que/AR-ED*, 1902-3, xviii; George Parmalee, Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Quebec, “General Conditions of Education in this Province,” Robertson Papers, 4, 3; *Que/AR-ED*, 1898-99, xx; *Que/AR-ED*, 1901-2,

possible to so modify the curriculum that the development of the child is the ultimate aim and not the cramming of the mind with mere facts.”⁵² S. N. Robertson, principal, McGill Normal School agreed and argued the time had come to end abstract teaching based on text books and begin the “humanistic teaching introduced here by Dr. Robertson.” He based his argument on the assumption that children under twelve receive little benefit from the study of books and that children should use all of their senses to explore, observe, experiment and create.⁵³

Although the new subjects were emphasized, the teachers were still responsible for implementing the provincial regulations concerning curricula, “...but the teachers put their own interpretation on them.”⁵⁴ They operated, according to Robertson, under the assumption that they were dealing only with rural children, and that most of these children would spend their lives on the farm. In this Robertson was hoping to stem the flow of rural people to urban areas, and he reported “quite a marked degree of success” including greater parent and community involvement in the school.⁵⁵

Utopian descriptions of the daily activities and student enthusiasm, along with assurances of efficiency and conservative spending, appeared in local papers, annual reports and farmers’ publications such as *The Farmer’s Advocate Home Magazine* and *The Maritime Farmer and Co-operative Dairyman*. The descriptions involved the merits of manual training, domestic science, nature study and school gardens, as discussed in earlier chapters. Much was

xx; Boucher De La Bruère, Supt. in *Que/AR-ED*, 1904-5, xvi.

⁵² J. W. Hoton, quoted by D. W. Hamilton, principal of Consolidated School, Kingston. [written Feb. 6, 1905] in *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-4, lii-liii.

⁵³ “A New Era for the Province.”

⁵⁴ Robertson to W. H. Jenkins, Registrar, Ontario Department of Education, 22 December 1905, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.

⁵⁵ Robertson to W. H. Jenkins, Registrar, Ontario Department of Education, 22 December 1905, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; *ON/AR-ED*, 1905, xxxiv.

made of the environment of the schools, contrasting sharply with the image of the typical small, dark, poorly ventilated and heated rural school.

The building is two and one-half stories high. The general appearance is fine. The roof is steep pitched, terminating with ventilating turrets; the walls are covered with clapboards and fancy cut shingles, painted with pleasing colors. There are many large windows. Surrounding the building are beautiful grounds, laid off in lawns, gravel walks, gardens and playgrounds. Trees, shrubs, hedges and flowers are seen here and there about the grounds, arranged in such a way as to give natural artistic views...All the rooms of the building are spacious, warm, well lighted, with good ventilation, clean and attractive. The school is furnished with all necessary and no unnecessary equipment.⁵⁶

Capitalizing on the concentration of staff and facilities, Robertson tried further experiments. First, he worked with some success to see that domestic science classes prepared hot dinners for the students of the school. Since students and teachers worked "free," lunches were at cost, about two and one-half cents per day per student. Robertson further arranged for the principal and some teachers to be present at the school in Middleton throughout the summer. Each child was allowed to attend for one day each week to maintain her or his own garden plot and to participate in nature study classes.⁵⁷ Although these experiments were successful they were not continued on a regular basis.

This "new education" in the rural schools was intended, in the long run, to make effective rural citizens who would choose to stay in the rural areas. In fact, Robertson directly encouraged students to be content with their rural lives. "...[I]t would not concern [Robertson] if none of them became eminent in public, but he hoped they would behave themselves with dignity and so become *leaders among the people*."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ "Macdonald Consolidated School Kingston, NB," 1038-9; "The Macdonald School System."

⁵⁷ "Premier Offers Prizes for the Consolidated School" *The Daily Telegraph* St. John, NB, Nov. 10, 1904, Robertson Papers, 4, 4; Middleton, "General and Financial Report."

⁵⁸ "Premier Offers Prizes for the Consolidated School" *The Daily Telegraph* (St. John, NB, 10 November 1904) Robertson Papers, 4, 4 (emphasis added).

One of the promises of consolidation was that enrollment would increase as would the percentage of daily attendance. Indeed this turned out to be so. As reported in *The Farmer's Advocate Home Magazine*, "[t]he popularity of the school among parents, pupils and ratepayers is great. It is the truth, in connection with the school, that the great majority of pupils would much rather go to school than stay at home—certainly a new condition of affairs."⁵⁹

TABLE 2. Change in Attendance in Consolidated Sections⁶⁰

	Enrollment Before	Daily Attendance Before	Enrollment After	Daily Attendance After
Middleton, NS	367	54%	418	68%
Kingston, NB	125	44%	166	84%
Guelph, ON	174	66.8%	258	89.66%
Hillsboro, PEI	148	60%	161	74%

The increase in enrollment and average daily attendance was credited primarily to the interest created by the new subjects on the curriculum and by the ease, comfort, and reliability of traveling to school in a van. Principals emphasized the creation of interest in the new subjects as well as the opportunity for students to socialize with a greater number of same-age peers. The improved attendance inspired McGill to conclude "interest is the great incentive to successful school life" and, apparently, in the case of the consolidated schools this was true. In addition, students did not have to walk in the rain or snow, nor did they have to endure long distances and this helped to increase daily attendance—especially in the case of young and

⁵⁹ "Macdonald Consolidated School Kingston, NB," 1038-9.

⁶⁰ Figures calculated for the first three years of each school. *ONAR-ED*, 1905, xxxiv; G. B. McGill, Principal, "Middleton School: The Old and the New" [June? 1903] Robertson Papers, 4, 3; "The Macdonald School System"; Middleton, "General and Financial Report,"; A. W. Mackay, Supt. of Education, "The Macdonald and Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia," (*The Farmers Advocate* 1 December 1904) 1631. Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; *PEIAR-ED*, 1905 and 1906, Appendix B, 1-5 of both reports; worksheet compiled by Robertson from reports by principals at four schools in Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; worksheet compiled by Robertson on Kingston consolidated school, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A; J. Walter Jones, Principal, to Robertson, 13 January 1906, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.

weak students. Attendance was further increased by older students who came back to school after years away, and by students from beyond the boundaries of the consolidated districts. Twenty students at Kingston, for example, were from outside the district and twelve were over the age of twenty. Some of these students drove themselves seven miles to school each day.⁶¹ Although Robertson and his colleagues credit the curriculum, Tomkins and Sutherland credit increased enrolment in Canadian schools generally to compulsory attendance laws, decreased need for children's labour on farms, and an increased belief by parents that schooling would benefit their children.⁶²

The ability of consolidation to lower the cost of education hinged on the cost of transportation. During the first year of consolidation at each of the schools the cost of transportation was high relative to the succeeding years. The cost of transportation in turn hinged on geography, population distribution, competition among van drivers, and rules about which students would have to walk and whether students had to be picked up at their homes.

Robertson at first guaranteed that the children outside the central districts would be conveyed from their homes, as opposed to meeting the van at a central point in the district. When it became apparent at the end of the first year that the cost of transportation could be reduced with such central meeting points, or by dropping the students a mile from the school Robertson refused to change his original agreement with the ratepayers.⁶³ The geographical distribution of the students determined the number of van routes—generally one route for each

⁶¹ "Macdonald Consolidated School Kingston, NB" 1038-9; "Middleton School: The Old and the New"; *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-4, lii-liii.

⁶² George Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum*, (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1986) 111; Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 165.

⁶³ "Memorandum of Provisional Agreement," Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.; "The Macdonald Consolidated School Experiment" (*The Outlook* 5 January 1906) Robertson Papers, 4, 4; *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-5, xlvii-xlviii.

of the original districts. Because of Robertson's agreement, and the choice of districts to consolidate, these costs could not be decreased substantially during the initial three years.

Vans and sleds had to be purchased and many drivers had to buy horse and harness the first year. These initial costs created an unusually high transportation bill which was reasonably expected to decrease dramatically in the second year. It was also hoped that the cost would decrease "...when the drivers with their horses [could] discover some profitable way of passing time between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m."⁶⁴

The cost of transportation did indeed decrease with each year of consolidation. In Nova Scotia for example eleven drivers' salaries totaled \$5,462.40 in the first year. During the second year the salaries of ten drivers totaled \$4,692.00.⁶⁵ This was a decrease from \$26.77 per day to \$23.56 per day for the same students.⁶⁶ In Prince Edward Island where they were able to learn from the first two years in Nova Scotia, only six routes were created. During the first year of consolidation the cost per day was \$10.02, during the second year \$9.34, and during the final year \$8.52.⁶⁷

The cost of transportation, although decreased modestly during the three years of Macdonald funding, was still a large expense for the schools—second only to the cost of teachers' salaries including the principals' and specialized teachers' salaries. Although this high cost was decreasing, Robertson and the other educators involved in this scheme needed to

⁶⁴ *NS/AR-ED*, 1903-4, xxx-xxxv.

⁶⁵ As a comparison teachers' salaries during the first year were \$2,796.28 (without specialist teachers) and during the second year \$4,440. Middleton, "General and Financial Report."

⁶⁶ Middleton, "General and Financial Report,"; "The Macdonald and Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia," 1631.

⁶⁷ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1907 Appendix B, 1-7; worksheets for Middleton, Hillsboro, Kingston, and Guelph compiled by Robertson, Robertson Papers, 4, 2A.

bring the cost down even further by the beginning of the first school year after consolidation to make consolidation affordable to the respective districts.⁶⁸

Simple consolidation of rural schools—conveying children to a central school to save money, to provide graded classes, or to employ a more highly qualified teacher—had great potential for saving money depending on the geographical distribution of the students, and therefore the cost of transportation, relative to the inefficiency of the old schools. Macdonald Consolidated Schools, created in part to allow for special subjects, were reportedly a pedagogical success with the teachers who worked in them and the communities served by them. The schools were, however, criticized for high operating costs compared with the combined costs of the old schools. *The Farmer's Advocate Home Magazine* argued "...the only argument of any weight that can possibly be brought against consolidation of schools in New Brunswick is that in some sections it may cost more to run an up-to-date consolidated school than to run the little schools."⁶⁹

The schools did not result in a lower overall cost of schooling (i.e. cost to the individual ratepayers) because in addition to transportation costs the specialized teachers for the new subjects and the more highly qualified regular teachers created a significantly higher cost. During the first year of consolidation at Middleton, for example, the general running expenses totaled \$10,623.13, while revenue from ordinary sources (taxes and government grants) totaled \$3,957.85—Macdonald making up the difference. This was \$7,000 greater than the combined cost of running the smaller schools in the past. \$5,462.40 of this additional cost was created by transportation, while teachers' salaries were \$2,796.28.⁷⁰ During the second year at Middleton

⁶⁸ Behind all this: grinding poverty, the fear that Macdonald-Robertson was just a way to side-step the regular school board, its bureaucracy, and the provincial inspectorate.

⁶⁹ "Macdonald Consolidated School Kingston, NB," [emphasis added] 1038-9.

⁷⁰ "The Macdonald and Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia."

the general running expenses increased to \$10,815.31, while receipts dropped to \$2,334.78.⁷¹ In Kingston the combined teachers' salaries increased from \$1,750 before consolidation to \$2,500 after.⁷² Such increased cost, however, was not necessarily out of reach of local ratepayers but in many cases it was greater than the amount ratepayers were *willing* to spend on education. In addition, Robertson had from the beginning promised a more efficient school and a more valuable curriculum. He did not promise lower cost to the individual ratepayers. One benefit received by some ratepayers in addition to higher quality schooling was an increase in property value. Between September 1903 and January 1906 the property values around Middleton increased from 5% to 15%, and this increase was credited in *The Outlook* to the consolidated school.⁷³ The shaping of public opinion around the cost of schooling, then, was as great a challenge as the logistics of transportation and facilities. Middleton had:

...a greater number of teachers than the original sections, and they all rank among the best qualified in the profession. The town and the rural sections have more than all the privileges and advantages of the most expensive city school system in the province, where the people pay a high rate for their privileges. But according to the agreement entered into with the ratepayers, they need to contribute no more than 35 cents on the \$100 for three years of the experiment. Not till this term is completed can we be sure of the mettle of the privileged ratepayers...The people are as yet, however, doing nothing more for it than for their old schools. Their leaders, however, are preparing for the time when the complete administration of this model establishment will devolve upon themselves.⁷⁴

Part of this preparation included an evaluation of the Macdonald School and whether changes could be made after the three year contract ended which could reduce costs, or whether similar and less expensive consolidations could be effected in other districts. In Kingston, for example, it was "...admitted that from a financial standpoint the Kingston Consolidated School ought not

⁷¹ Middleton, "General and Financial Report"

⁷² "The Macdonald School System"

⁷³ "The Macdonald Consolidated School Experiment"

to be regarded as a normal example of the cost of consolidated schools established under more favourable conditions."⁷⁵ Lower overall costs could be achieved by requiring children to walk part of the way, or by consolidating small schools so inefficient that transportation of the students to a central location would cost less than keeping the small schools operating.

Subsequent Consolidations

The Macdonald Consolidated Schools were to serve as object lessons. Success, then, meant that other districts would consolidate. Although educators and administrators had little success persuading districts to consolidate before the Middleton school opened,

...it was not until Dr. Jas. W. Robertson, with the aid of Sir William C. Macdonald's generous funds, gave the brilliant object lesson...that the popular fancy was caught to the extent of stimulating some sections to test what can be done under the inducements offered by the Province—inducements which are and must be on a more economical scale for each, than the grand 'coup do theatre' necessary to capture the public attention at first.⁷⁶

Consolidation spread especially in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. In East Bay, Cape Breton, four school sections united under new Provincial regulations. A new school was built and drivers were hired who provided their own carriages. Also in Cape Breton eight school districts were reorganized into five on Boulardarie Island. In other parts of Nova Scotia small sections were consolidating without the need for transportation, which doubled local resources. Although these schools were more efficient, the curriculum was not changed from the old schools. By 1909 twenty-two districts had consolidated schools in them.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *NS/AR-ED*, 1903-4, xxx-xxv.

⁷⁵ *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-5, xlvi-xlviii.

⁷⁶ A. W. MacKay, "The Macdonald Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia," *The Farmers Advocate*, December 1, 1904, 1631. in Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

⁷⁷ "The Macdonald School System"; "The Macdonald and Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia"; *Man/AR-ED* 1909, 391.

In New Brunswick several consolidations took place. Between Albert and Riverside a large school was built to accommodate students from five surrounding districts. This school had the expanded curriculum as at the Macdonald schools, and received a \$5,000 donation from the ex-Lieutenant-Governor, A. R. McClellan. John Brittain worked with F. B. Meagher, PSI, to effect a consolidation in Florenceville. The consolidation was the result of a great amount of work on their part in persuading districts to consolidate. Brittain concluded that personal talks with trustees and ratepayers were the most effective way to spread consolidation through the province. Meanwhile a consolidation attempted at Hampton was not successful because of the fear of increased cost "...and other motives of a lower nature" which created opposition. Hampton finally consolidated in 1907. After these consolidations the larger schools in the province tended to get larger and the smaller schools smaller due to the tendency of the population toward centralization. For this reason larger, better schools began to develop in rural areas without official consolidations.⁷⁸

Although consolidation efforts did not begin in Prince Edward Island for two years, two consolidated schools were built at once. While Macdonald and Robertson were building in Hillsboro, schools at Tryon and West-Tryon (two sites of Macdonald School Gardens) consolidated. In addition Wilmot closed its school in 1904 and used the funds for the teacher's salary to pay a van driver instead. By 1910, however, the Chief Superintendent of Education lamented that in spite of his efforts to increase the number of consolidations he

...failed in all but two cases. The force of custom, alarm lest the proposal should lead to excessive assessment, and the prospect of the loss of prestige, by the sacrifice of their identity as a school district were too powerful to be

⁷⁸ "The Macdonald School System"; "The Macdonald and Provincial Consolidated Schools in Nova Scotia"; *NB/AR-ED*, 1902-3, liv-lv; *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-4, 4; *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-4, 77; *NB/AR-ED*, 1904-5, xlvi; *NB/AR-ED*, 1905-6, 45; *NB/AR-ED* 1905-6, liv.

successfully opposed. Consequently I have made no further effort during the year which has just ended.⁷⁹

Even as late as 1934 British Columbia school inspector William Plenderleith complained that local control gave too much autonomy to rural schools. This was detrimental to equality of opportunity because some districts were willing or able to pay more resulting in disparity in education available to students.⁸⁰ In Ontario there were no consolidations other than the Macdonald Consolidated school in 1904, one other by 1910, and no mention of consolidation in the annual reports of the Minister of Education at late as 1912. The 1919 Consolidated School Act encouraged more consolidations, but by 1925 there were only twenty-seven, effecting about 1% of Ontario schools.⁸¹

After the Funding

As the end of the initial three-year period came at each location it became apparent to Macdonald and Robertson that ratepayers were unable or unwilling to vote the dramatic increase in taxes necessary to keep the schools open. Therefore the Macdonald Consolidated Schools in Middleton, Kingston and Hillsboro all continued to receive some funding from the Macdonald Rural Schools fund for an additional three years. The school at Guelph received special funding from the Ontario government because it was used in conjunction with the Macdonald Institute. The continued funding helped ease the transition and subsequent increase in local taxes. During the crucial years following the initial three years of Macdonald funding changes were made to reduce costs, individual districts opted out of consolidation while others joined, supporters of consolidations continued to build support among ratepayers, and

⁷⁹ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1909-10, xxvi-xxvii.

⁸⁰ Ruth Sandwell, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999) 67.

⁸¹ Stamp, *Schools of Ontario*, 72, 126.

government grants to the schools increased. Eventually the Middleton, Kingston, and Guelph schools managed to thrive, but the Hillsboro school did not.

In Nova Scotia, where the initial funding would end first, prospects for continuation were poor. *The Outlook* commented that "...as far as we are able to gauge the situation the prospects of the different parties interested in the school reaching an agreement are not encouraging." Part of the problem was that rates of taxation differed among the districts, and this was seen as unjust. Nevertheless, the ratepayers of all the districts voted to raise their taxes by 25% and Robertson promised to match the additional amount raised. Although this enabled the Middleton school to survive, other districts were not consolidating. During the 1910-11 school year 360 schools in Nova Scotia enrolled fewer than eight pupils; two of them had only two students, and the ratepayers supported the schools, yet "...some of these small and weak sections resist even with violence any enlargement to give them more wealth to support a useful school."⁸²

When the time arrived for ratepayers around the Kingston school to decide if they would vote an increase in their taxes to support the school there was some doubt the school would survive. *The Sun* reported, "...the gentlemen prominent in advocating the construction of the school building and trying the experiment of consolidating the schools in Kingston parish, [were] much disappointed in the apathy of the parents and the little interest they [had taken] in the school as shown by their unwillingness to rally to its support."⁸³ Supporters noted the financial boon the school brought to Middleton, including money earned by builders, by van drivers, by families who boarded teachers and students, and by local businesses who gained

⁸² Middleton, "General and Financial Report"; "The Macdonald Consolidated School Experiment"; *NS/AR-ED*, 1910-11, xvi-xvii.

⁸³ "Macdonald Consolidated School and what it means to Kingston, NB" Excerpt from *The Sun* 4 April 1907. Macdonald College, RG 43, c.234, file 1035.

from the frequent visitors to the school. Although property values had increased, and the village had become more prominent, farmers complained that the school was a "curse" due to taxes required to support it. Macdonald and the provincial government promised to help the ratepayers if they would vote a "reasonable proper sum."⁸⁴ During this struggle Principal Hamilton commented that "...the hardest of all educational problems is to reach the average farmer and to enlist his active cooperation for the betterment of the country schools. He who enters upon the work must have courage, patience, enthusiasm, tireless energy, and a genius for hard work."⁸⁵ Although the Kingston school continued, there were no new consolidated schools developing in New Brunswick during the time of transition.⁸⁶

The transition in Guelph was much smoother due to more government support. By 1909, when the secretary-treasurer, Zavitz, resigned he wrote to Robertson telling him that at the annual meeting sixty-five ratepayers attended, the largest turnout he knew of. He had waited to resign because he wanted to get the school in good financial shape after keeping the school "from becoming defunct on two occasions."⁸⁷ At the time of his writing the trustees were in complete support of the schools and in their annual report stated they "earnestly believe that the Macdonald Consolidated Rural School offers greater advantages to the children which it serves than those offered by any other Rural School in Ontario."⁸⁸ Although this school survived, consolidation did not spread as quickly as its supporters hoped.

As late as 1915 *The Farmer's Advocate* complained that

"...the greatest difficulty in a Province like Ontario, settled and conservative in its ways, is to create a public opinion in favour of any change, which in the face

⁸⁴ "Macdonald Consolidated School and what it means to Kingston, NB."

⁸⁵ *NB/AR-ED*, 1905-6, 142-3.

⁸⁶ *NB/AR-ED*, 1907-8, li.

⁸⁷ Zavitz to Robertson, 30 December 1909, Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

⁸⁸ "Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Macdonald Consolidated Rural School, 1909" Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

of it, gives any evidence of increased outlay or of the doing away with the old institutions giving place to new. The fact is we dislike to spend the money and we are loath to give up the old school which was good enough for father and which he thinks is good enough for Johnny and Mary.”⁸⁹

They argued the farm problem was a matter of education, and the rural school should “fit the child for rural leadership and rural progress...the old school must go, and a larger and more thoroughly equipped structure must take its place.” In addition “...if value received for money spent is to be the test, as it certainly should be, consolidated schools have proved to be much cheaper.”⁹⁰ For these changes to occur, however, rural ratepayers would have to want the change and improvements from the Education Department.

When the Hillsboro school reached the end of the initial three-year experiment three of the original districts remained consolidated while two opted out due to costs. Macdonald continued to provide financial assistance and the ratepayers increased their contribution. In addition Robertson agreed to pay an amount equal to that raised in fees from students living outside the district. The rearrangements during this year resulted in lower costs because only three vans were needed. This arrangement continued for three years until the 1910-11 school year when Macdonald’s final cheque included the message, “This is my *final* remittance.” When the funding from Macdonald ceased the ratepayers were unable or unwilling to assume the costs and the consolidated school was discontinued at the end of the 1911-12 school year.⁹¹

In the end, the Macdonald Rural School Fund provided \$60,167.87 to Guelph, \$40,363.90 to Kingston, \$44,455.71 to Hillsboro, and \$53,814.09 to Middleton. \$12,716.68 paid salaries, \$73,618.36 was spent on maintenance, and \$114,260.34 for capital expenditures

⁸⁹ “Making a Real School Out of the Rural School.” *The Farmer’s Advocate* [summer 1915?] Robertson Papers, 4, 2B.

⁹⁰ “Making a Real School Out of the Rural School.”

⁹¹ Darin MacKinnon, “Mastery for Service: the Macdonald Consolidated School, 1905-1912,” *Island Magazine* 32

(\$44,700 on the land itself, the rest on the buildings).⁹² This was a total of \$399,369.95 over three years, or \$32,280.83 per school per year—an amount in excess of the funds assessed by those districts and used for the consolidated school. As a comparison, in 1904 the province, counties and districts in Nova Scotia spent approximately \$418 per school. Six districts had been consolidated to form the Macdonald school in Middleton. Nova Scotians, then, would have paid about \$2,508 total for schooling in those districts had they not consolidated, and Macdonald paid an average of \$17,938 per year for the school there. In Prince Edward Island schools cost an average of \$274 in 1904, or \$1,644 for six schools, where Macdonald spent an average of \$17,938 per year. In New Brunswick the average cost of a school was \$366 per year, or \$2562 for seven, and Macdonald spent about \$14,818. Although Macdonald's costs included one-time capital expenses for land and buildings, the maintenance costs would continue. It is understandable, then, that Macdonald's schools appeared expensive, even unpredictably so, because of the maintenance of the large buildings and grounds, the specially trained teachers, and the extended curriculum.⁹³

Alex Anderson, meanwhile, had tried to effect consolidations on other parts of the Island. He was of the opinion that it was wasteful and extravagant to support any school with fewer than twelve students. After public meetings and private consultations with districts he found that “many, all, I may say, were strongly disinclined to resign their rights and powers as separate and independent districts. In the face of such an opposition it was impossible to proceed with any hope of success.” One reason for the resistance, argued Principal Maclean, was the elaborate model provided by the Macdonald Consolidated School. Other consolidations, he added, need not entail any more than the combining of resources between

(1992) 10.

⁹² “Statement of Expenditures on the Macdonald Rural School Fund,” Robertson Papers 4.3.

two neighboring districts. But the idea of consolidation being more expensive had already been set in the minds of ratepayers. Out of frustration with his failure to sway public opinion in favour of consolidation—a failure he shared with Robertson—Anderson concluded that “...the Superintendent of Education be vested with powers, subject to the sanction of the Board of Education, to consolidate, without reference to the ratepayers, such districts as in his judgment ought to be conjoined.” In his plan he would consolidate districts where transportation would not be necessary, thereby increasing the possibilities of realizing a savings in addition to the expected increase in quality of education.⁹⁴

Over the next fifty years most provinces attempted more consolidations. Cost, transportation difficulties and local jealousy continued to be cited as the main obstacles. Saskatchewan had only eighteen consolidations by 1918, but there were no government policies or grants to encourage districts. In 1924 the Report of the Education Commission blamed transportation for only sixteen per cent of the schools being consolidated. British Columbia commissioned two studies into the finances of the school system and both recommended greater incentives be provided by the government for consolidation. Ontario’s Hope Commission in 1950 continued to promote the idea. By this time some progress had been made, “...yet, consolidation proceeded slowly and erratically. Local people remained jealous of local control and the closing of a schoolhouse might deprive a small community of its only public institution.” The depression and W.W. II also hampered efforts at consolidation. As late as 1954 The Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Public School Finance reported that consolidation was moving “all too slowly” despite relative ease of transportation. The Commission blames local jealousy and cost of new schools. New Brunswick followed suit the

⁹³ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1904, xi-xii; *NB/AR-ED*, 1903-4, xix; *NS/AR-ED*, 1903-4, iv.

⁹⁴ *PEI/AR-ED*, 1908, xxvii, xxxi, 2-3; 1909, xxvi; 1910, xxvi-xxvii.

next year and recommended that all consolidations be quickly approved. Over the next five years Manitoba, Alberta, and Prince Edward Island commissioned studies. All three cited local jealousies and "...fear of loss of local autonomy."⁹⁵ Alberta witnessed *disestablishment* of consolidated schools in the 1920s.⁹⁶ Prince Edward Island still had two hundred thirty-six schools with one-pupil classes in 1959. Consolidation, then, continued to be hampered by the same problems encountered by Robertson. Although popular ideas and clearly more efficient, consolidated schools did not become established in rural areas without great effort on the part of provincial governments, if they became established at all.

Conclusion

The consolidation scheme had mixed success. Considered by most educators as a pedagogical success with new curriculum, modern facilities and graded classes, individual schools were not always a financial success. The balance between increased costs for transportation and teachers salaries against the willingness and ability of ratepayers to support the school, was difficult to achieve. In the end Macdonald Consolidated Schools demonstrated what could be achieved in rural areas, but supporters were not able to convince the majority of ratepayers that the increased cost and loss of control over the one room school was justified.

⁹⁵ Explanations of the progress of consolidation in each of the provinces can be found in the original documents commissioned by the various governments. See Vincent Pottier, *Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Public School Finance: Report* (Halifax, NS: n.p., 1954) 43; John A. Hope, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario* (Toronto: King's Printer, 1950) 55; Walter C. Murray, *Report of the Educational Commission* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: King's Printer, 1924) 74-9; H. B. King, *British Columbia Commission on School Finance* (Victoria, B.C.: King's Printer, 1935) 104; Maxwell A. Cameron, *Commission of Inquiry into Educational Finance* (Victoria, B.C.: King's Printer, 1945) 35; William H. MacKenzie, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Financing of Schools in New Brunswick* (Fredericton, NB: n.p., 1955) 95; Manitoba Royal Commission on Education, *Interim Report* (Winnipeg, MN: n.p., 1958) 42-5; M. E. LaZerte, *Report of the Commissioner on Educational Finance and Related Problems in Administration* (Charlottetown, PEI: Queen's Printer, 1960) 61-4. For an historical discussion of the purposes and uses of Ontario's reports see Robert Gidney, *From Hope to Harris: the Reshaping of Ontario's Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 12-3.

⁹⁶ Donald Cameron, *Report of the Royal Commission of Education in Alberta* (Edmonton, AB: Queen's Printer, 1959) 76, emphasis mine.

Three of the four Macdonald Consolidated Schools continued on after Macdonald funding ended, and the example set inspired some other districts to consolidate, but by and large this idea was not popular enough with rural ratepayers and parents to realize the success Macdonald and Robertson had hoped for.

Consolidation was intended to be a means for making pedagogy affordable and although Robertson tried to make pedagogy a driving force behind decision making, pedagogy came second to discussions of finance and taxpayers attitudes toward spending on education. This scheme was an illustration of an attempt to standardize not only teachers but local boards of trustees and even rural ratepayers. Because this was an administrative scheme the problems were not pedagogical. Problems arose from conflicts over control of taxes and more emotional concerns about closing schools and sending children long distances. Success or failure were not inevitable. The continuation or closure of the schools were the result of conscious choice—choice based on opinions of how much to pay for education. This has certainly been a continuing theme in the history of public schooling.

5. MACDONALD COLLEGE: THE CULMINATION OF THE MACDONALD-ROBERTSON MOVEMENT

If the dream belonged to my father, the power to translate it into material form came from Sir William Macdonald's money. Neither force alone could have made the college but though one force was tangible the other, existing only in the realm of thought, they were equally potent, and the dream came first. It was no error that for the first year, or so, it was known as Robertson's College.¹

Introduction

Macdonald College, as part of McGill University, opened to students in fall 1907 with a School for Teachers, a School of Household Science, and a School of Agriculture in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec. The College was erected and endowed by Macdonald for the advancement of education, including research and teacher education, "...all with particular regard to the interests and needs of the population in rural districts."² Until this time Quebec did not have a publicly supported agricultural college, nor a significant Household Science training facility. The Ursuline nuns founded a convent at Roberval, Quebec, in 1882 where they gave girls in the Saguenay region "...a moral and literary education, but at the same time, lessons in housekeeping, spinning, weaving, and sewing by hand or with a machine," but this was not a public institution.³ Teacher training for Protestant teachers until the founding of Macdonald College was conducted at the McGill Normal School, but this program lacked housing accommodations for teachers in training, had an urban orientation, and did not offer training in the new subjects. Macdonald College, then, satisfied several needs.

The College was built on five hundred sixty-one acres in the small village of Ste. Anne twenty miles west of Montreal overlooking the Ottawa River with the Grand Trunk and Canadian

¹Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 89.

² *Provisional Announcement of Macdonald College*. n. d. but before September 17th, 1907, 3, Macdonald College RG 43, c 1 file 70; McGill Annual Reports, 1906-7, 7-8.

Pacific Railways running through the campus. The campus consisted of four classroom buildings, two residences for students, several small buildings for staff, a farm with seventy-four acres of illustration plots, a one-hundred acre small-cultures farm for horticulture and poultry keeping and a three hundred eighty-seven acre livestock and grain farm.⁴ At its opening it was "...probably the best equipped and most advanced institution of its kind in the world."⁵

Robertson-Currier remembers a "certain luxuriance" in the growth of the school and a general feeling that Canada was coming into a golden age of peace and prosperity. High quality and modern facilities, without waste or ostentation, fit the tastes of both Robertson and Macdonald, but, as Robertson would learn, not the financially strained Board of Governors of McGill.

Macdonald College was designed to be the culmination of the Macdonald-Robertson movement, which Robertson characterized as "...attempts and accomplishments... trials and experiments and evidence of progress."⁶ The College gave the movement its legacy in an endowed college associated with a major post-secondary institution, a showpiece for their efforts. Meanwhile, the School for Teachers enabled their previous schemes to continue and to help rural areas with teachers trained in manual training, domestic science, and nature study, and for teaching in rural areas generally. The school embodied Macdonald's and Robertson's overall interests in rural life by uniting teacher training with training for future farmers and the wives of those farmers in one institution. Finally, and unexpectedly, Macdonald College was the culmination of the Macdonald-Robertson movement as it ended the working relationship between the two men when Robertson resigned in December 1909. The experiences of the students were easily standardized at this single institution and the college itself was a lasting

³ *Que/AR-ED*, 1908-9, p.xxi

⁴ John Ferguson Snell, *Macdonald College of McGill University: a history from 1904-1955* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1963) 35-73.

⁵ *Provisional Announcement of Macdonald College* 3.

⁶ James Robertson, "Address Before the Farmers Institute Workers at Washington, 1908," quoted in Robertson-

success, but authority over the college was centralized in Montreal with the Board of Governors of McGill and Macdonald's money, not in Robertson's hands, so he was not entirely able to control the school personally.

Snell and Neilson both document much of the administrative and curricular detail of Macdonald College. Although they describe the preceding schemes as the beginning of Macdonald's and Robertson's working relationship they do not explain the creation of Macdonald College in light of their earlier work as efforts at standardization. Additionally Snell denies the influence of educational theory in the creation of the school.⁷ I have detailed the curriculum below to illustrate the parallels between all of the Macdonald-Robertson schemes as means to the original end: improving rural life. Snell's and Neilson's explanation of Robertson's resignation are also entirely uncritical of Macdonald and unbalanced in their criticisms of Robertson's personality and fiscal decisions. Snell provides a laudatory analysis of Macdonald and dismisses Robertson generally as having a high profile, "unorthodox" leadership style which contrasted with Macdonald's "modest reticence and avoidance not merely of display but even of approbation."⁸ What follows is not intended as a description of Macdonald College as Snell has done. Nor is it an analysis of Macdonald College within the context of higher education in Canada. I have detailed those elements of the college that demonstrate similarities and differences with the details in the previous four reforms and in light of the context provided by recent social, intellectual and educational history. This account highlights the aspects of Macdonald College which were intended to standardize domestic science, manual training, nature study, school gardens and consolidated schools and to support the continuation of the

Currier, vol. 2, 90.

⁷ "From all that has been said, it may be seen that Macdonald College was not the outcome of any transcendental theory of education, but was founded in response to a definite need." Snell, *Macdonald College*, 215.

⁸ Snell, *Macdonald College*, 35-84; Helen R. Neilson, *Macdonald College of McGill University 1907-1988: A Profile of a Campus* (Montreal: Corona Publishers, 1989) 1-18.

schemes through education in response to pedagogical theory and social and economic change. This account also explains the elements of the college which satisfied the interests of Macdonald and Robertson and created the conflict that resulted in Robertson's resignation.

Manual training, school gardening and nature study, and consolidation of schools were an attempt to centralize and standardize rural schooling. In Macdonald College, as with the seed grain competition, Macdonald and Robertson moved beyond the rural school and toward an attempt to standardize autonomous family farms by training future farmers and their wives. Macdonald College was created not only to perpetuate the new practices, subjects and schools put in practice by Macdonald and Robertson in the eight years preceding its opening. It was also intended to match the theory and practice of the educational reforms with what they perceived to be declining circumstances of rural life—perceptions which had inspired them to get involved with the education of rural children in the first place. Through the training not only of teachers, but farmers and the wives of farmers, Macdonald and Robertson sought a solution to the general problem of rural decline in one central institution. This combination of schools in one college, one for each of the three fundamental occupations of farming, mothering, and teaching the young, brought Macdonald and Robertson's ideas together and put them into practice. The School for Teachers was a logical next step in the Macdonald-Robertson movement. The School for Household Science and the School of Agriculture completed the movement. The former continued the pattern supported by Macdonald in Guelph, the latter was an extension of Robertson's life-long work.

A Monument to the Movement

Macdonald College was variously described as "the crown of it all," "...the centre from which radiate[d] plans and labors," "Sir William's greatest yeast cake...the supreme illustration

of Dr. Robertson's methods of leavening," and "...a display advertisement of the first rank."⁹

Although the college had a specialized curriculum the institution was more than a means to deliver that curriculum. It was a legacy to both of these men and a centre for educational ideas. An endowment fund brought permanency to the school, ensuring Macdonald's legacy for generations, and the ideas embodied in the curriculum and the potential knowledge resulting from agricultural research conducted at the college promised to cement Robertson's legacy in history as well.

Macdonald and Robertson built a modern, rural, and noteworthy facility in connection with McGill University—itsself a highly reputed post-secondary institution in Canada. Because the school was to prepare rural leaders it was given a rural site. Yet it was imperative the college be accessible and visible if it were to serve as an example—a hard lesson Robertson learned during the consolidation scheme. At Ste. Anne they found a site close to McGill, yet far enough away from Montreal to be appropriate for the training of rural leaders. The college site was also one of the few places in Canada through which both railways passed—and they came within a few yards of one another in Ste. Anne. This made the college accessible and visible to all transcontinental travelers.¹⁰ The college, built with materials of the best quality, and with modern conveniences to meet student and faculty needs, became a destination for thousands of visitors interested in agriculture and education. The buildings and the grounds were kept, in Robertson's words, in "show condition."

The idea for the college was conceived by Robertson while overseas on his extended rest in 1903 on the Isle of Wight. The plan was both practical and idealistic:

The college crest, a green clover leaf on a golden pyramid supported on one side by a sheaf of wheat tied about with a bean vine and on the other by a stook of

⁹ Herbert Francis Sherwood, "Children of the Land: the story of the Macdonald Movement in Canada," *The Outlook* (New York, 23 April, 1910) 901; RCITTE, 158.

¹⁰ *Provisional Announcement of Macdonald College* 3.

corn and a sunflower plant, the college colours, green for fertility and gold for sunshine, the pyramid for stability and the motto, "Mastery for Service," the emphasis on the threefold nature of the college—agriculture, teaching and the home were all planned and waiting for the college to take shape. These were the symbols of the dream.¹¹

Robertson persuaded Macdonald to support this scheme and on July 18, 1906, Macdonald transferred to the Royal Institution land at Ste. Anne de Bellevue for the college, along with an endowment fund of \$2,002,333.00. At a special meeting of the Board of Governors of McGill the following October Macdonald submitted, and the Board agreed, that Macdonald College would be founded and endowed by Macdonald and incorporated with McGill. The courses given at Macdonald College, then, would lead to diplomas or degrees from McGill.

Although the college was part of McGill, and the Board of Governors controlled the funds. The Faculty of Macdonald College controlled the educational policy and the curriculum with the exception of approval by the Corporation of McGill University of courses leading to a degree, examinations held in connection with those courses, as well as courses and examinations for teacher training which were under control of the Normal Training Committee of Macdonald College.¹² The Board of Governors appointed the principal of Macdonald College, and of course the first was Robertson, appointed April 19, 1907, at a salary of \$5,000 per annum with free residence, light and water.¹³ All faculty appointments were then made by the Board of Governors of McGill in *consultation* with the principal of Macdonald College.¹⁴ Macdonald College itself was governed by the Macdonald College Committee which was composed of the principal, members of the college staff and any appointees selected by the Board of Governors of

¹¹ Robertson-Currier, Currier's personal reflections, vol. 2, 89.

¹² *McGill University Calendar 1908-9*, 4.

¹³ W. Vaughan, Secretary to Robertson, 20 April, 1907 in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 132.

¹⁴ *McGill Annual Report 1906-7*, 6-13; See note from Robertson "This is the draft finally approved and agreed upon by Sir William, Dr. Peterson and me: the word consultation was added by lawyer's advice to Dr. Peterson on Monday June 18, 1906," in letter to Robertson from W. Peterson with last of three drafts of agreement on founding of Macdonald College. Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 140-1.

McGill. The committee decided upon educational policy and curriculum, examinations, admissions, fees, discipline, and internal government. The Committee was, of course, answerable to the Board of Governors of McGill.¹⁵

With the incorporation and endowment of the college during the fall of 1906, Robertson had less than one year to build it before the planned opening in September 1907. The Main Building of Macdonald College faced the Ottawa River and contained administrative offices, class and work rooms for the School for Teachers, nature study, household science and manual training. There was also a library and reading room, a museum and an assembly hall in this building. Connected to the Main Building were two laboratory buildings for chemistry, physics, biology and bacteriology. A fourth structure, the Agricultural, Horticultural and Live Stock Building, contained class and work rooms, a live stock arena, farm machinery hall, dairy work rooms, cold storage and green houses. The Poultry Building was composed of class and judging rooms, incubator rooms, a brooder house and pens for the poultry. Two more buildings, the Women's and the Men's Residences, completed the six main brick and stone structures. The Women's Residence had reception rooms, bedrooms for two-hundred students, a dining hall for three-hundred fifty people, a gymnasium, and a swimming pool. The Men's Residence housed one-hundred fifty students and contained a gymnasium and swimming pool as well. All six buildings were modern for their day, including fireproof construction, roofs of steel, reinforced concrete and red tile, as well as ventilation systems. The campus was completed with various small farm and maintenance buildings, a practice and observation day school, houses for faculty, and an ice rink.

The building of the college took longer than expected due to "hindrances of various kinds arising from the business of construction and equipment" especially obtaining all the necessary

¹⁵ *Minute Book of the Macdonald College Committee, 1907-9*, Macdonald College, RG 43, c.72, file 5. 20 August

materials in such a short period of time, and the loss of the College Barns due to fire caused by lightning.¹⁶ The opening of the college, therefore, had to be delayed. The planned opening was the second Thursday in September 1907. Instead the School for Teachers opened November 5th, the School of Household Science on the 7th, and the School of Agriculture on the 12th, with students from not only Canada, but the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the British West Indies and the United States.¹⁷

That is the way Macdonald College came into existence. It required a founder, a man who was great enough in his intelligence, in his discernment and in his sympathy and love to cooperate with the people and their leaders. It took much money. It is very difficult to spend money wisely, without waste. One of the hard tasks is to spend money so that it will build up and not break down....¹⁸

In this statement Robertson foreshadowed the financial problems that were to plague himself and the college, and ultimately create the official reasons for Robertson's departure from the College.

Perpetuating Macdonald-Robertson Schemes through Teacher Education

The School for Teachers was a crucial feature of the Macdonald-Robertson movement because it incorporated the ideas behind their previous educational reforms into the sole training program for Protestant teachers in Quebec, which further centralized the earlier programmes and standardized the training of teachers for them. Teacher training had been an important element in the manual training, school garden and consolidated school reforms, but before Macdonald College's foundation, there was no mechanism to ensure the standardized training of large numbers of teachers in these new subjects. In general the School for Teachers

1907.

¹⁶ *McGill Annual Report 1907-8*, 47.

¹⁷ Macdonald College Committee, 6 September 1907; Robertson to the Macdonald College Committee, 3 October 1907, quoted in *Macdonald College Committee*, 3 October 1907; Carleton J. Lynde, "Dr. James W. Robertson" 31 January 1955, quoted in *Robertson-Currier*, vol. 2, 97-102.

¹⁸ Robertson, "Address Before the Farmers Institute Workers at Washington, 1908," vol. 2, 91.

was designed "...to provide suitable and effective training for teachers and especially for those whose work [would] directly affect the education in schools in rural districts."¹⁹ Specifically teachers were trained under the same requirements used by the Normal School of McGill, with the addition of training in manual training, domestic science, and nature study. Teachers in training were provided residences, an important element missing from the McGill Normal School. Proponents for the move hoped the location and residences would ease parents' prejudices against sending their daughters to a city where the girls might be exposed to "temptations."²⁰ The college offered this training under the usual authorities with the addition of Robertson.

When the idea to train teachers in Ste. Anne was originally proposed, Robertson suggested the training of Protestant teachers would be so thorough the government would not have to continue funding the Normal School of McGill, already nearly fifty years old. Despite protests from S. P. Robins, principal of the School, the McGill Normal School Committee expressed "great delight" with the plans to connect teacher training with agricultural education. The Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction unanimously approved of the "privilege of moving." Although there was "sadness" at the thought of closing the Normal School, this plan had university and government support from the beginning as it promised better facilities, a "more favorable" situation at Ste. Anne's for teachers who would return to rural districts, training in the new subjects, and badly needed student residences.²¹ The Board

¹⁹ *McGill Annual Report 1906-7*, 6-13.

²⁰ Margaret Gillet, *We Walked Very Warily: A History of Women at McGill* (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1981) 342.

²¹ Government support was contingent upon assurances that legal safeguards were in place such as securing the deed to the property at Ste. Anne which Macdonald still held. William Peterson to Robertson, 15 January 1907 in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 143; S. P. Robins had been principal since 1884. He was originally recommended to Dawson for the position by Egerton Ryerson, all of whom had similar ideas about teacher training. Frost speculates that perhaps this was part of the problem: ideas that had appeared progressive decades earlier seemed outdated and inflexible given the changes in curriculum and theories on childhood. Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning: volume II 1895-1971* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984)

of Governors submitted the plan for training, practice, and observation which, having a rural emphasis, met the approval of the Protestant Committee.²²

The Board of Governors agreed to “provide and maintain at their own expense” through Macdonald funding a teacher training school that met the requirements of the province including training in the new subjects. They also agreed to provide housing for male and female students at no expense to the province and minimal expense to the students, and to charge no fees to “...such pupils as may give to their satisfaction an undertaking to teach in the Province of Quebec.” Practice teaching and observation would be conducted both in urban and in rural schools. The Protestant Committee resolved this proposal was satisfactory. Provided the government consented, the new school would serve the comparatively small Protestant population such that all training of Protestant teachers could be conducted at Macdonald College. As part of the agreement the former government grant to McGill’s Normal School of approximately \$13,000 per year, would be diverted to the Protestant Committee to be spent in poor municipalities and to promote education generally in Protestant Schools.²³ The problem of closing the Normal School at McGill “...which long and deeply exercised the minds of the friends of education in Montreal...” ended in the transfer of the Normal School teaching staff to Macdonald College—now the primary training program for Protestant teachers in Quebec.²⁴ The Principal of the Normal School retired with the closing of the school and George H. Locke, formerly Dean of the School of Education at the University of Chicago, became the head of the School for Teachers at Macdonald College.²⁵ Locke, however, stayed only one year because his

68.

²² *McGill Annual Report 1906-7*, 9; “Digest of Statements & Proceedings from Feb. 24, 1905 to Oct. 17, 1905, Concerning Proposals to Merge the McGill Normal School into the Macdonald College at St. Anne de Bellevue” in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 108.

²³ “Digest of Statements & Proceedings from Feb. 24, 1905 to Oct. 17, 1905, Concerning Proposals to Merge the McGill Normal School into the Macdonald College at St. Anne de Bellevue,” in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 111.

²⁴ *McGill Annual Report 1906-7*, 9.

academic, and perhaps personality, style conflicted with Robertson.²⁶

Teacher training was governed by the Normal Training Committee of Macdonald College with representatives from the Corporation of McGill University, Macdonald College and the Government of Quebec. The committee included a Professor of Education at McGill, the Principal of Macdonald College, the Head of the School for Teachers, one appointee of the Corporation of McGill University, two appointees of the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction (to which Robertson was appointed when the agreement was struck), and the English Secretary of the Department of Public Instruction. This committee endeavoured “...to work out as thorough-going a system of training as possible...to combine rational theory with effective practice, to stand firmly for all that is implied in sound learning in elementary education, and at the same time to give to the child the fullest possible preparation for the solution of the practical problems of every day life.”²⁷

The Protestant Central Board of Examiners for Quebec would grant diplomas only to students from this school and graduates of British or Canadian universities. Students in this school could receive one of five types of diplomas: Elementary, Advanced Elementary, Kindergarten, Model School or Academy. In addition to the School for Teachers at Macdonald College a Chair of Education was also endowed by Macdonald within the Faculty of Arts as a “...further guarantee that teachers who are in a position to aspire to a University degree before entering the teaching career will continue to find the needed direction and stimulus in McGill

²⁵ “Digest of Statements & Proceedings from Feb. 24, 1905 to Oct. 17, 1905, Concerning Proposals to Merge the McGill Normal School into the Macdonald College at St. Anne de Bellevue,” in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 108-112; J. A. Nicholson, Registrar, McGill, to Robertson March 3, 1905 in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 116; Sydney Fisher, Department of Agriculture to Robertson March 3, 1905 in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 113-115; McGill Annual Report 1906-7, 6-13. Locke remained in this position until December 1908, when he resigned to accept the Chief Librarianship of the Public Library in Toronto. S. B. Sinclair carried on the work with the help of the Professor of Education at McGill (Macdonald’s endowed chair).

²⁶ Helen R. Neilson, *Macdonald College of McGill University*, 7.

²⁷ *McGill Annual Report 1906-7*, 6-13.

College itself.”²⁸ Candidates for the School for Teachers had to be at least eighteen, recommended by the Department of Education or a School Inspector in their home province, and have evidence of good moral character and physical health.²⁹

A practice teaching and observation school was built on the campus of Macdonald College, complete with a school garden. The Protestant Day School of Ste. Anne de Bellevue had, before the establishment of the College, eighteen students and two teachers which increased to ninety-eight students and four teachers after 1907. In 1908-9 one-hundred two students were enrolled in this school. “During the initial stages of the first half of the school year [1908-9] the Macdonald College Day School furnished ample opportunities for illustrative and critical work, but owing to the small number of pupils, it failed to meet the requirements of a Practice School during the latter half of the year.” An agreement was made in which students could observe and practice in Protestant schools in Montreal. The Day School was, at the end of the 1908-9 school year, “comfortably housed in the new building on campus, the staff was reinforced by the addition of the best available teachers and the school was a genuine Model School worthy of imitation by other schools throughout the Province.”³⁰

The School for Teachers opened late in 1907, but the work for the year was completed on time and in June 1908 one-hundred twenty-five diplomas were awarded: 13 Academy, 55 Model School, 53 Advanced Elementary and 4 Elementary. In 1908-9 one-hundred twenty-seven students enrolled in the School for Teachers, three of these students were men. Of the one-hundred twenty-seven diplomas one was for Kindergarten, five Elementary, sixty-four advanced elementary, and fifty-seven Model School. In 1909-10 one-hundred sixty enrolled. 158 Diplomas were granted that year: 84 Elementary and 74 model. Of these graduates, 117

²⁸ *McGill Annual Report 1906-7*, 13.

²⁹ *Provisional Announcement of Macdonald College*, 14-5.

³⁰ *McGill Annual Report, 1908-9*, 46-53.

were soon after engaged in Protestant schools in Quebec. "Taking into consideration those who have returned to the School for another year of training and a few who are unable to teach owing to illness, this accounts for practically all the students of last year."³¹ Moving teacher training to Macdonald College standardized training for Protestant teachers in Quebec and these efforts at standardization were promising because the graduates of the School for Teachers were indeed employed in Quebec Protestant schools.

Macdonald and Robertson embodied their educational ideas for public schools into a single institution by capturing and centralizing Protestant teacher training in Quebec, emphasizing rural educational circumstances and the increasingly popular new subjects in the curriculum, and linking education with scientific agriculture. Certainly the direct influence of this school did not extend substantially outside of Quebec, but the indirect influence as a model for teacher education reached much further. What they had demonstrated and implemented to a limited extent in schools across Canada, they could now encourage in all Protestant schools in Quebec, especially the ever elusive small rural school.

A Modern, Rural Institution

Macdonald and Robertson's primary goal had always been rural improvement. The reforms were means to that end. They began with agricultural education and rural school reform. The curriculum at Macdonald College broadened the scope of their efforts to include changing farming and housekeeping practices, all means toward the original end. Details of the curriculum offered at Macdonald College provide insight into Macdonald and Robertson's vision of rural improvement and the knowledge that would lead to it.

Beginning in the 1890s the "...field of agriculture and domestic knowledge was systematized and professionalized through the emergence of specific disciplines at the college

³¹ *McGill Annual Reports, 1907-8, 46-53, 1908-9, 46-53, 1909-10, 44-53.*

level....”³² Prior to state administered education of agricultural men and women information was spread informally through small organizations. Along with other state bureaucracies, administration of agricultural education emerged in response to Canadian economic needs and rural decline and took the form of agricultural colleges and farmers’ institutes. Difficulty in administering such education had been in “...the conflict of purposes between the improvers and the local farm people, the paucity of agricultural science, and the total lack of experience in organizing instructional programs for large numbers of the adult population.” Farming and the management of the home were becoming professionalized. These professionals were to improve rural life through scientific knowledge and efficiency. Two such institutions were the Manitoba Agricultural College and the Ontario Agricultural College where Robertson had been professor of Dairying. Robertson was establishing an institution for the future farmers and wives of farmers primarily from Quebec but also from across Canada and to a modest extent from other countries. At Macdonald College they received not only new knowledge of scientific agriculture and the scientific management of the home, but also a liberal education.³³

The School of Household Science offered short courses, a one-year home-making course, and a two-year course leading to a diploma. Short courses lasting three months were given in foods, plain cooking, sewing, laundry, home nursing, sanitation and hygiene, home art, and care of the house. This school conducted classes in the Main Building where three kitchens, a sewing room, class laundry, millinery and dressmaking room, and several practice rooms were built for their use.³⁴

The one-year course was practical and theoretical, with instruction in foods, cookery,

³² Jeffrey M. Taylor, “Professionalism, Intellectual Practice, and the Educational State Structure in Manitoba Agriculture, 1890-1925,” *Manitoba History* 18 (1989) 36.

³³ Douglas Lawr, “Agricultural Education in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: An Idea in Search of an Institution,” in Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975) 169.

³⁴ *McGill University Annual Calendar, 1909-10*, 11.

household economics, materials for clothing, dressmaking and millinery, laundry, fuels, ventilation and house sanitation, home nursing and hygiene, and home art. The two-year course was an extension of the one year with advanced laboratory work in chemistry, physics, biology and bacteriology as well as English, mathematics, and history. Students would then choose two specialties from among home dairying, poultry, horticulture, seeds and plant improvement, and wood carving. In the School of Household Science the students had about twenty-five hours of laboratory work and classroom instruction each week. Candidates for the School of Household Science had to be seventeen and have evidence of good moral character and physical health. Those students applying for the two- or four-year course were required to pass examinations in reading, writing and dictation, English grammar, arithmetic, and geography.³⁵ Post-secondary training in household science was offered at few institutions at this time. By 1920, for various reasons of institutional interest, most Canadian universities offered domestic science (often called home economics) as part of a degree program.³⁶

The School of Agriculture offered short courses of two weeks to three months, a two-year course leading to a diploma, and a four-year course leading to a Bachelor's Degree. The short courses consisted of practical instruction in live stock, seed, crops and weeds, poultry, and horticulture. The two-year diploma course included studies in field and cereal husbandry, animal husbandry, poultry husbandry, home dairying, horticulture, chemistry, physics, biology, bacteriology, English, mathematics and book-keeping. The four-year degree course continued the two year program, offering "...opportunity for more advanced knowledge of rural economy, and more thorough and exact acquaintance with the Natural Sciences and their applications to the

³⁵ *Provisional Announcement of Macdonald College*, 12-3.

³⁶ Lee Stewart, "The Politics of Women's Education: Establishing Home Economics at the University of British Columbia, 1914-1949," *Historical Studies in Education* 1.2 (1989) 261.

conditions, processes, and organizations of rural life."³⁷ Candidates for admission to the School of Agriculture had to meet the same requirements as those applying to the School of Household Science, with the additional requirement of one season's experience on a Canadian farm.

In the School of Agriculture students spent about thirty-one to thirty-four hours in classroom and laboratory work each week. During the first year about half of this time was spent in "occupational" subjects (animal husbandry, horticulture, and so on) and half in English, mathematics, history, nature study and science, while during the second year one-third of students' time is spent in occupational subjects and the rest in the remaining subjects. Tuition was free for residents of Canada, \$50 per session for non-residents. This program started in early October each year and continued until late May. At the end of the first two years of this program, students had to pass entrance requirements for the third and fourth years, after which they would receive their degree. At the end of the 1908-9 academic year sixteen students were passed into their third year.³⁸ The School of Agriculture was divided into departments: Animal Husbandry, Bacteriological, Biology, Cereal Husbandry, Chemistry, and Dairying.³⁹ During the summer months student-apprentices could work in the farming departments of the schools, obtain practical training, and earn small wages. Between fall 1907 and spring 1909 approximately four thousand farmers visited the school for demonstrations and observation.

The training and research conducted at Macdonald College promised to increase the profitability of agriculture not only for Quebec, but for the country as a whole.

There is not the slightest doubt that our higher agricultural products, particularly butter and cheese, would benefit vastly in market reputation abroad from uniformity of production. That uniformity of production is only to be brought about by some principle of cooperation, and the natural centre for such co-operation is the school of agriculture at Macdonald College....A right understanding of the aims and purposes of scientific method is what is chiefly

³⁷ *Provisional Announcement of Macdonald College*, 13-4.

³⁸ *McGill Annual Report 1908-9*, 46-53.

³⁹ *McGill Annual Report 1907-8*, 46-53.

needed, and a campaign of education on these lines can hardly fail to be valuable in many ways.⁴⁰

Macdonald was interested primarily in the agricultural future of eastern Canada. Robertson on the other hand had an international perspective and wanted Macdonald College and Canadian agriculture to have international prominence.⁴¹

Students in all three schools received a liberal education, therefore some departments offered courses for students from all three schools. The nature study department, for example, provided laboratory courses to first year students in the school of agriculture, and a series of studies plus a two week summer course for the School for Teachers. Students in the School for Teachers completed the Lecture Course in Bacteriology for Teachers in the School of Agriculture. This course was to give teachers a general understanding of bacteriology in medicine, hygiene, soils, dairy farming and fermentation. Household Science students completed a course in household biology which gave practical instruction on the functions of plants and animals, life cycles, plant products useful to the household such as starch, household pests, and other general information.

Manual training was required for students in all three schools. For agriculture students one and one-half hours per week in the first year and two hours per week in the second year were spent in drawing class. For students in the School for Teachers courses were designed to prepare future teachers to teach "some form of handwork in the ordinary class-room" which would facilitate the spread of manual training into the small rural schools more effectively than the Macdonald Manual Training Centres were able to do.

Those pursuing an Elementary diploma spent three hours per week for one term working

⁴⁰ Macdonald College and the Farmer" from the *Montreal Witness*, quoted in *The Journal of Agriculture and Horticulture*, n. d. Macdonald College RG 43, c.5, file 229.

⁴¹ Neilson, *Macdonald College* 7.

with clay, textiles, paper and cardboard, while those pursuing a model school diploma worked for the same amount of time studying the theory and history of educational handwork, constructing with paper and wood, whittling, and drawing. Special certificates were given to all teachers holding Model School diplomas who completed this course and passed an exam. Students in the School of Household Science took two courses, one per year for three hours a week, in woodwork making simple articles such as shelves and picture frames, working up to finishing wood, relief carving, and making furniture.⁴²

Three to five times each week the entire student body met in the Assembly Hall for announcements, addresses and readings. This element of student life brought the three schools together on a regular basis and helped the "...College body find itself as a whole with all its varying complexities." The College was addressed by the Prince of Wales, Governor Generals of Canada, United States Governors, the United States Secretary of Agriculture, President Russell of Teachers College, and John Dewey then of Columbia University.⁴³ In addition, all but four students were living in the residences, and all ate in the common dining hall. The students had the benefit of supervision, counsel, and the care of a trained nurse and physicians. Students maintained discipline through a Court of Honor chosen by the students in the women's residences, and a Residence Committee elected by the students in the men's residences. Room and board, for those sharing double rooms, was \$3.25 each week. These charges, however, did not meet the actual costs to the College. During the 1908-9 academic year room and board was raised to \$3.50 per week, with an additional charge of \$3.00 per session for doctors' fees.⁴⁴

Two-hundred fifteen students enrolled for the 1907-8 academic year at Macdonald College. One-hundred fifteen enrolled in the School for Teachers, sixty-two in the School of

⁴² Macdonald College Announcement 1909-10 in Minute Book of Faculty of Agriculture, 16 April 1909, Macdonald College, RG 43.

⁴³ Lynde, "Dr. James W. Robertson" in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 99.

Household Science, and thirty-eight in the School of Agriculture. Of these two-hundred fifteen, one-hundred eighty-nine were from Quebec, ten from Ontario, and the remaining sixteen from the Maritime provinces. In addition forty-four students took short courses in Cereal Husbandry, Horticulture and Poultry Keeping.⁴⁵

Thirty-two faculty, plus four teachers in the School for Observation and Practice for the School for Teachers, carried out the instruction in the three schools of Macdonald College during the first academic year, 1907-8. Administrators, librarians, and those in charge of the residences numbered seventeen. Combined with employees involved in farming and the physical upkeep of the college, the total number of employees was about eighty.

During the 1908-9 academic year two-hundred sixty-eight students enrolled: sixty-five in the School of Agriculture, one-hundred twenty-seven in the School for Teachers, and seventy-six in the School of Household Science. Of these two-hundred eleven were from Quebec, twenty from Ontario and the West, and thirty-seven from the Maritimes.⁴⁶ The school, then, served the constituency for whom it was intended as well as the sons and daughters of farmers outside Quebec. During 1909-10 three-hundred ninety-five students enrolled: one-hundred forty-seven in Agriculture, one-hundred sixty-three in the School for Teachers, and eighty-five in Household Science. Of the three-hundred ninety-five students two-hundred ninety-four were from Quebec. One-hundred forty-five were men (2 in Education, one in Household Science) and two-hundred fifty women.

⁴⁴ *McGill Annual Report 1907-8*, 46-53.

⁴⁵ *McGill Annual Report 1907-8*, 46-53; *Macdonald College Committee*, 16 November 1907. [There is a slight discrepancy in the numbers, but only by two or three students in each school.]

⁴⁶ In agriculture 16 were 3rd year, 39 2nd year, 46 first year, two special, and 44 in the winter short courses. In Education 83 were elementary and 80 model. In Household Science 12 2nd year, 47 first year, 1 special, and 25 in short courses. *McGill Annual Report 1908-9*, 46-53; 1909-1910, 46-54.

The End

Centralized control over standardized education was achieved at Macdonald College and wedded to standardization of farming and management of the home, but that control slipped out of Robertson's hands and back to an urban-based administration—the Board of Governors of McGill University. Snell explains Robertson's resignation as a result of "differences" with Macdonald.⁴⁷ The specific differences explained here offer more critical insight into both men. Although disputes over spending and planning led to Robertson's resignation, the divergent purposes of Macdonald and Robertson and the same centralizing impulse they had previously benefited from were underlying factors which caused the end of the movement.

On 10 January 1910, during the third academic year and just before construction of housing was completed, Robertson resigned as president of Macdonald College.⁴⁸ Theories about Robertson's resignation are various. Robertson claimed he was moving on to greater things in the area of agricultural advancement now that the school was established. There was, however, a long dispute over his spending on construction and equipment costs for the college. By February 1908 it became apparent to Robertson and Vaughan, Secretary of McGill University, that the endowment was "quite inadequate for the scale of the establishment at Ste. Anne's"⁴⁹ however Macdonald maintained that expenditure had to come within the existing endowment and any income from fees or the farm. Vaughan warned Robertson the rate of spending in the 1908-1909 fiscal year was too great and that the situation would not likely improve. Vaughan suggested to Robertson that "in calculating your future expenditure, it will be well to bear in mind that your numerous and costly buildings will in a very few years require a substantial annual sum for their maintenance." In June 1908 Macdonald gave \$171,000 for the

⁴⁷ Snell, *Macdonald College*, 62.

⁴⁸ Dr. F. C. Harrison was appointed the new principal.

⁴⁹ Vaughan to Robertson, 10 February 1908, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 138.

building of sixteen residences for staff. In November 1908 Macdonald donated an additional \$10,000 to cover the costs of that session but warned "after that, Dr. Robertson must cut his coat according to his cloth."⁵⁰

A year later the spending from the large building account had created conflict between Robertson and McGill and a special committee of the Board of Governors of McGill was created to examine the finances of the college. The committee questioned Robertson on general spending, and ongoing construction costs, particularly from the construction account of \$171,000.

The cost of maintaining the college exceeded the revenue from the endowment fund. In June 1909, at the end of the fiscal year, the difference was \$24,785.96. Macdonald's donation of \$10,000 covered part of this cost. The remaining sum was promised personally by Robertson—mixing his yeast with Macdonald's. Robertson estimated in a memorandum on spending for the 1909-10 fiscal year, that costs would only exceed revenue by \$7,500. This change in finance would be due to decreased cost in fuel and revenue from the farm, only then beginning to be realized.

Robertson promised to meet personally a deficit up to \$10,000 if the Board of Governors would approve the continuation of the work at the college, particularly the research and extension work on the farms. Without this work important results would not be made available for the good of the country, and good faculty would seek positions elsewhere as their careers depended upon research. This was perhaps an embarrassment or irritant to Macdonald. Frost argues Robertson was intentionally trying to make Macdonald's donation appear inadequate.⁵¹ As the 1909-10 fiscal year progressed, however, it became apparent that the deficit would exceed the estimated \$7,500. Indeed it would exceed \$25,000. Robertson could not find any way to reduce

⁵⁰ Vaughan to Robertson, Nov. 25, 1908, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 139.

costs "...without materially injuring the efficiency and defeating some of the objects for which the College was founded..." Costs could be cut by giving up research "...some of which [had] reached important stages and...[would] be of great benefit and advantage to agriculture in Canada. Robertson preferred to reduce costs by dropping the School of Household Science, which Robertson argued may have been a good idea anyway because the number of teachers in training was increasing and the college needed to accommodate those students. In addition, although it ran contrary to the original plans, Robertson was willing to charge tuition fees for students in the School of Agriculture. Per the agreement with the province fees could not be charged to students in the School for Teachers. Household Science students had been paying fees, but not as high as those charged at Guelph.

The special committee concluded that "...the methods of controlling expenditure at Macdonald College [were] insufficient...there [was] no check upon any expenditure authorized by the Principal, and one should be provided." To this they recommended that a committee be put in place to oversee all spending, and that Robertson not be allowed to spend more than \$100 without prior approval by this committee. Each department at the college would have to make annual estimates for cost, and would be held strictly to those estimates.

Then there was the matter of the construction account. After the six main buildings were paid for, an additional \$342,100 was donated by Macdonald: \$171,000 for sixteen new residences and the repair of eight old residences and \$171,100 for other buildings on campus such as barns and the day school. Shortly thereafter Robertson asked Macdonald if he could divert some of the money from the fund for the faculty residences for the drinking-water system, equipping the agricultural and horticultural building, and other purposes. Macdonald did not disagree, but referred Robertson to the Board of Governors of McGill, who agreed Robertson

⁵¹ Frost, *McGill University: volume II*, 72.

could spend up to \$15,000 (the cost of one double house) for those purposes. If Robertson was willing to do without houses for faculty, he could use the amount saved from each house for use somewhere else on campus. Robertson, however, spent \$47,117.00 originally meant for housing. By June 1909 there were only nine new houses instead of sixteen and the funds were nearly dry. This brought sharp criticism from Macdonald and the Board of Governors of McGill.

Robertson candidly confess[ed] his error in having incurred so large an expenditure...without the sanction of the Board or its Finance Committee....in his judgment the expenditure incurred was urgently required in order to complete the construction and equipment of the College, that he understood Sir William Macdonald's gift to be final, that with it the College was to be completed for carrying on work in all departments, and that he acted at the time with his best judgment in the interests of the College and its Founder.⁵²

In addition there was, in August 1909, an urgent need for more rooms for students in the School for Teachers. This need was met by Robertson by spending \$7,700 creating additional rooms in the top floor of the Main building. This was done with approval from Macdonald and without reference to the Board of Governors, but it had proved impossible to schedule a meeting with the Board at that time. The Committee, in its report on the finances of the College, believed Robertson should not have incurred this expense without approval, but agreed something had to be done, and the course of action he took was probably best. "It is proper to state that Principal Robertson did not assume that the College or the University would undertake this expenditure, and, in fact, neither the University nor the College [had] the funds to do so. He informed the Bursar of Macdonald College that he himself would personally guarantee the cost of these alterations...."⁵³

The report of the special committee was issued in late November 1909. The following

⁵² Report of the Committee of the Board on the Finances of Macdonald College, late Nov. 1909, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 144-165; Vaughan to Robertson, 11 December 1908, in Robertson-Currier; vol. 2, 137; Vaughan to Robertson, 10 February 1908, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 138.

⁵³ Report of the Committee of the Board on the Finances of Macdonald College, late Nov. 1909, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 144-165; Macdonald College Committee, 17 September 1909.

month, on December 15, a letter was sent to Robertson from Vaughan informing him of the recommendations of the report and the adoption of those recommendations. In order to bring the expenditure within revenue a standing committee would be appointed "consisting of two or three members of the Board who can meet fortnightly during the session, in Montreal, to discuss with Dr. Robertson the finances of the College, and to authorise such expenditure as they may approve." The special committee also adopted the recommendation that Robertson be limited to spending \$100 without prior approval, that each department of the college would have to submit and abide by estimates for each term, and that the Bursar of Macdonald College attend the meetings with Robertson. Other action was pending Macdonald's approval.⁵⁴ Two days later Robertson submitted an application for leave of absence for two months and noted in his letter to Vaughan "this is the first step in the course which, you already know from our conferences, I consider it desirable to take in the interests of Macdonald College. I shall follow up by asking the Board to accept my resignation as Principal at the end of February 1910."⁵⁵ By 18 December Robertson had moved his resignation up to 31 December.⁵⁶

His decision to sever his relationship with the College surprised the staff and long-time associates.⁵⁷ In a letter from a faculty member, dated 23 December 1909, it is intimated that Robertson's resignation was the result of a personal conflict with Macdonald. J. Vanderleck's letter merits quoting at length as it is a rare documentation of the relationship between Macdonald and Robertson:

When you left us suddenly last night, after you had spoken to us as you have never spoken before, I had the crushing feeling, that I was unable to show you, how much I, a member of your staff, respect and admire you. Many of us have since passed a sleepless night, with the fact before our eyes, that we were going

⁵⁴ Vaughan to Robertson, 15 December 1909, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 166.

⁵⁵ Robertson to Vaughan 17 December 1909, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 185.

⁵⁶ Robertson to Vaughan 27 December 1909, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 184.

⁵⁷ C. W. Zavitz (Professor, Department of Field Husbandry, OAC) to James Robertson, 5 January 1910. Robertson Papers, 4, 2B; R. H. Cowley to Robertson, 1 January 1910, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 173.

to lose you... Your last wish was to let the matter rest, and I apologize, that I do not obey you... One of the Staff members said last night and I am proud of that statement, that our whole College Staff would fight for you as one man. You are going to leave us, as you told us in your frank sympathetic way. An old feeble man has told you, that your greatness overshadows the College, crushes it down... It suddenly became clear to us last night, that we had not been working for Macdonald College but for Jas. Robertson. It is as if we are starting over again. Macdonald is no longer the centre of education, but is a young college, that has to work hard in its struggle for existence with outside jealousy.... With your depart our confidence in the College is badly shaken. Bitter words were spoken to you whilst you were sacrificing your vitality to serve the College. Our consolation is, that the words were spoken by a weak old man, who is outliving his great plans and tried to tear down with one hand what the other built.... When I came here in 1907 the talk was that you would leave as soon as the College was started, it being too insignificant for your great qualities... you would have stood by us to the very last, until the harvest was safely in the barns. It was impossible, an old man must have his way.⁵⁸

Robertson-Currier notes they were “both men of strong convictions and modest, reserved disposition. They were both animated by a lively feeling of public responsibility and impersonal love for mankind in general and their fellow Canadian citizens in particular. To the extent that these aspects of their association were concerned, their work together was smooth and uninterrupted, but there were bound to be differences between two men of such decided personalities.” Macdonald was willing to spend money for the best materials and workmanship but would not tolerate waste. Robertson, also willing to spend for the best, “was quite prepared for a margin of error.” Although Macdonald was generous in his philanthropy, he demanded detailed records of spending and management, and as he was providing the “yeast” he didn’t like anyone else’s mixing with his. Robertson-Currier also recollected that although the two men were collaborators they “were hardly intimate personal friends.”

They were both proud and independent and neither one could submit to control by the other. When they finally severed their connection, Sir William was close to eighty and was, I suspect, tired of new plans being pressed upon him and uncertain of his response to my father’s continuing projects in the very broad

⁵⁸ J. Vanderleck to Robertson, December, 1909, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 135.

fields of education and agriculture.”⁵⁹

Frost suggests the parting was inevitable. That they collaborated successfully for ten years was more surprising than Robertson’s resignation.⁶⁰

The personal conflict combined with resentment from the Board of Governors of McGill who favoured endowed funds for the rest of McGill University and not for agriculture and teacher education. McGill had experienced financial “disasters” including the burning of much of the Medical Building and had failed to secure additional funding from the government. Most Canadian universities had come to depend upon the philanthropy of wealthy businessmen to remain solvent.⁶¹ McGill, under Dawson, began receiving many donations in the 1860s and 1870s. This new money went to new projects such as buildings and not to increasing salaries. Although McGill was expanding it was financially frustrated. During the 1880s and 1890s, “...the magnitude of the donations began to take on an wholly new dimension.” Dawson, who retired in 1893, and his successor William Peterson, were both successful at securing the donations and the University became dependent upon men like Macdonald for growth.⁶² The serious financial strain on the main campus was a great contrast to the new and endowed facilities in Ste. Anne’s.⁶³ The conflicts probably became too much for Robertson to bear. The Board of Governors adopted a resolution praising and thanking Robertson for the:

...vigorous initiative which he threw into all the preliminary work of the construction and establishment of the College, as well as its great admiration for the forceful qualities which have made him one of the pioneers of scientific agriculture in Canada. They recognize that these qualities, together with the gift of lucid exposition and persuasive argument, have made Dr. Robertson, in the

⁵⁹ Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 245.

⁶⁰ Frost, *McGill University vol. II*, 71-2.

⁶¹ Paul Axelrod, “Businessmen and the Building of Canadian Universities: a Case Study,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 63.2 (1982) 202.

⁶² Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning: volume I 1801-1895* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980) 243-4.

⁶³ *McGill Annual Report, 1906-7*, 6-7.

matters with which he undertakes to deal, a power in the land; and in connection with his intimation that he has now decided to relinquish the administrative duties of an educational institution in favor of the wider work of advancing agricultural interests generally throughout the country—a sphere of activity for which he has so eminently qualified himself by long experience as Commissioner of Agriculture and in other ways.⁶⁴

Although they had expressed gratitude for what had been done at Ste. Anne's they also expressed great concern for the finances of McGill University itself. The Board of Governors noted that due to the financial crisis of McGill very little growth was now possible. Despite the "efficiency" of the University and the dedication of staff and students, opportunities for advancement and growth were being missed. The University had a deficit of \$50,000 and faculty salaries were not keeping up with the increasing cost of living in Montreal. "If the appeal for financial aid now being formulated by the Board of Governors should again prove relatively unsuccessful, there will be nothing for it but retrenchment and curtailment along the whole line."⁶⁵

Robertson himself wrote in a personal letter to his brother, Robert, that he resigned when the construction work was nearly complete because "Sir William's views, and those of some of the governors of McGill, were not in accord with what I preferred to do for myself and preferred to see Macdonald College become. I did not want any quarrel or prolonged tension of any kind, so decided to sever my connection entirely."⁶⁶ Ishbel, who was twelve at this time, remembers that the events "...held more mystery than an open and above board resignation should have had. No reason for it was ever mentioned in the family....A certain academic arrogance."⁶⁷

If I never remember hearing any criticism or disparagement of Sir William by either my mother or my father, nor do I remember any particular expression of

⁶⁴ *McGill Annual Report 1909-10*, 44-53; W. Vaughan to Robertson, 10 January 1910, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 133.

⁶⁵ *McGill Annual Report, 1909-10*, 9.

⁶⁶ Robertson to Robert Robertson, 4 February 1910, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 171.

⁶⁷ Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 174.

obligation to him on their part. After we left Macdonald College, it was as if a balance had been struck and the whole matter was finished and done with. After this digression concerning their personal relationship, when we consider the extent of what they accomplished in that ten years, we cannot but admire the results.⁶⁸

Robertson left his staff with words of encouragement, asking them to keep the needs of the college and the children foremost, and to continue to raise the character of the members of the staff, and not to dwell on the conflict which led to his resignation. As a farewell gift the staff arranged for Wylie Grier to paint a portrait of Robertson for the College, and Robertson along with his brothers in law arranged for Grier to paint Mrs. Robertson's portrait for the College as well.⁶⁹ Robertson even continued making his own financial contributions to Macdonald College in the form of grants for scholarships for Nature Study, and a shield and cup "to encourage the playing of manly games."⁷⁰ The class of 1911 in Agriculture maintained Robertson as their Honorary President and expressed their esteem:

Our regard for you could hardly have been so fully realized had not the present occasion put it to the test. In admitting this we wish to further assure you that your spirit and personality under the present circumstances so strongly appeal to us and so win our admiration that we recognize more strongly than ever that in our "Doctor" the truly heroic spirit prevails.⁷¹

Although "...distasteful to Sir William Macdonald," Robertson was welcomed back on visits by the people who had served under him.⁷² After Robertson left Macdonald provided funds for seven cottages for staff members and instead of leaving the Robertson's former house for the

⁶⁸ Robertson-Currier, vol. 1, 245.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of Macdonald College Staff Meetings*, 22 December 1909 and 6 January 1910, Macdonald College, RG 43; James Robertson to F. C. Harrison, 12 January 1910. Macdonald College, RG 43, c. 7, file 259.

⁷⁰ Macdonald College Committee to James Robertson, 22 April 1910. Macdonald College, RG 43, c.7, file 259; James Robertson to the Macdonald College Committee, 20 December 1909, Macdonald College, RG 43, c.7, file 259; D. M. Brittain to Robertson, 12 May 1910, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, p.175; C. F. Harrison to Robertson, 22 April 1910, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 176.

⁷¹ Class of 1911 in Agriculture to Robertson, 20 January 1910, in Robertson-Currier, vol. 2, 169-70.

⁷² Snell, *Macdonald College*, 62.

men who would succeed him, Macdonald refurbished what he thought too large and imposing a house into a residence for women teachers.⁷³

Conclusion

Macdonald College was both the high point and the end of the Macdonald-Robertson movement. It was the grandest of all the schemes, it promised to perpetuate all the earlier reforms, it embodied a solution to the economic and social worries both men had for the future of Canada, and it destroyed their working relationship.

The College came into existence because Robertson favoured agricultural education, teacher training in the new subjects and as Commissioner of Dairying and Agriculture has found agricultural education to be an effective way to make farming more prosperous. Through the Macdonald Robertson programmes he found teacher training to be an effective way to standardize teaching practice along the lines of the new education. While creating an institution for future farmers and teachers it made sense to also provide for future wives of those farmers. These purposes and the curriculum set out for those students made Macdonald College a significant experiment in education. By detailing the purposes, methods and conflicts in Macdonald College I have illuminated not only the pedagogical innards of the college, but also the distinctly non-pedagogical reasons for the severing of ties between Macdonald and Robertson. Robertson's resignation was not due to a change in opinion by either man about rural education. After ten years of cooperation, including a grand institution, what brought the two men into a working relationship could not keep them together in the face of jealousy and financial disagreements. Although earlier accounts lay blame squarely on the shoulders of Robertson, both men were likely at fault. Even so, Macdonald College continued on after Robertson's departure and Macdonald's death.

⁷³ McGill Annual Reports, 1909-10, 46.

CONCLUSION

By 1910 Macdonald and Robertson had created object lessons in new pedagogy and administration, and built an internationally-recognized agricultural college. They conducted a seed grain competition to teach new agricultural practices, founded manual training centres to teach physical skills and aid moral development. Through the Macdonald Rural School Fund they established school gardens and supported nature study. These, in combination with manual training, would yield an elementary curriculum meaningful for rural children. To support these pedagogical ideas they tried, with limited success, to encourage rural school consolidations. Finally, they established an agricultural and teacher training college in connection with McGill University. Macdonald and Robertson accomplished these things by borrowing ideas, training teachers, persuading school boards to support their ideas, managing costs and keeping pedagogy consistent in the object lessons they created. Thus, those plans most easily standardized and readily controlled were also those that invited continuation and copying.

I have detailed the reasoning behind implementation of each reform, and followed the growth of the schemes from the end of Macdonald funding to the end of the partnership. My account shows how Macdonald and Robertson sought to standardize autonomous school districts and teachers, in order to preserve the rural lifestyle, in order to help Canada on its way to economic growth and social order in the face of immigration and urbanization, and the varying extent to which regions benefited economically from industrialization. New ideas popular with educators and the public about children and learning provided both the demand for change in schooling and the theory upon which to justify that change.

Macdonald and Robertson were aware of relevant social forces and mindful of international pedagogical discoveries. A combination of intellectual, institutional, cultural, and social history, however complicated in practice, is therefore necessary if one hopes to account for

their ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and effectiveness as well as the administrative structures they chose. My thesis, because it treats the Macdonald-Robertson reforms together, provides a viable explanation why these two men took up the cause of reform and why the various elements of the Macdonald-Robertson movement succeeded or failed. I claim the reforms were attempted in the first place because the pedagogical ideas were in the interest of social reformers in general and the two men in particular. The ease with which each reform could be controlled by central administrators and implemented in a standard way from one district to the next meant Robertson would achieve success to varying extents from one to the next, and central control was his very intention.

Ten years ago I began my teaching career in a poor inner-city school. The school district adopted a mastery programme which scripted exactly what the teacher should say, and exactly what the students should say in response. Every lesson was conducted with the use of the overhead projector with no modification for learning styles. This reform programme required teachers to surrender all autonomy and encouraged the absence of critical thinking. The programme was not, however, implemented the way its creators intended. My lesson books, for example, gathered dust while other teachers made use of them sporadically. The programme failed to be implemented because administrators did not check to see if the lessons were being used. Because of this missing link in the chain of accountability the lessons were never conducted with any consistency throughout the school. Probably the programme would have failed pedagogically anyway had it been fully implemented, but the interesting lesson here is that the administration failed to get behind the classroom door and influence teaching practice even though the school board adopted the programme because it promised voters to keep the *teachers* on task. This experience inspired my pursuit of historical study. As a professional I want to understand where reform ideas originate and why they are implemented (or not) the way they are.

I have found through the research and writing of this thesis that the push and pull between teachers and central administrators over autonomy and accountability is a necessary check on both groups. I view teachers as both the most difficult obstacle to school reform and as the final defense against ill-conceived, short sighted, politically motivated reform. The constant tension between teachers and administrators, if conducted professionally, is a healthy state of affairs. Robertson found it necessary to dedicate a great deal of time and energy to persuading local districts to take up the work. Were it not for local autonomy, though, central authorities would find reform too easy to mandate and schools would be an even greater target for a relentless parade of politically motivated programmes. Macdonald and Robertson's experience demonstrates that reform must be popular and workable at the local level. Administrative talent and sound pedagogy cannot overcome local resistance if school boards, parents or teachers do not value, or cannot afford, reform.

The present thesis, which may best be understood as the beginning of various lines of inquiry and research, answers one set of questions about the Macdonald-Robertson movement, but raises others. Much work remains. Future research might, for instance, connect to a greater extent the Macdonald-Robertson Movement with other reform movements over the past century. I have illuminated a paradox within this reform movement: that Robertson saw the standardization of autonomy as necessary for change in schools, but that schools must be simultaneously standardized and autonomous, if only because funding and political governance is centralized yet change must meet local and classroom interests and demand. We know what Robertson did to accommodate this paradox, and this raises the question whether a similar paradox was present in other reform schemes, then or later. One would like to know if Macdonald and Robertson's successes were anomalies, or if we can find commonalities in those reform movements that gained, or failed to gain, support at the local and classroom level. In turn

we would be in a better position to judge the relative importance of Macdonald and Robertson as a model for their contemporaries or for subsequent reform-minded individuals. These general lines of inquiry might be satisfied to a great extent by historical analysis of reform programmes, comparative biographies of reformers and philanthropists, and an examination of teacher education as a method to "standardize autonomy."

To begin with, studies of new subjects such as domestic science and health education would illuminate how other reformers used new subjects as means to larger ends and why new subjects in administratively unchanged school systems were repeatedly hailed as solutions to social or economic problems. Reformers aimed to change society by transforming the next generation and hoping new skills and information learned by children would spread to their families. Schools were broadly "social" teaching devices for these reformers, and connecting one organization or reform idea to another might explain how the new attitudes Sutherland has detailed in his works, took shape and furthermore suggest who imitated whom. By using primary documents including memoranda, memoirs, and media one might examine the actions and reasoning of central and local authorities.

Although I briefly sketched the beginnings of manual training and domestic science, our historical understanding of these subjects as they relate to one another would benefit from a detailed study, not excluding the gendered nature of the subjects. Historians have considered government policy on industrialization, connected social change, and consequent or prerequisite pedagogical theories. Research on "family strategy" has illuminated the ways families used educational choices for their own social and economic purposes. It would be beneficial to sort out family and government choices to see how economics, class, and gender determined why these new subjects were taught in school and who was there to receive instruction. Educational reformers have not wanted for ideas. It is the implementation of change that perplexes. The

ideas behind and curriculum of reform are detailed in the published research in Canadian, not to mention North American and Anglo-European educational history more generally. Even so, new analysis relying on an eclectic empirical approach could help us to “narrate” the mechanisms of curriculum change and institutional transformation, and this in a wide range of organizations not yet adequately researched. This kind of work might well show how reform successes and failures have as much to do with mechanisms of implementation as they do with pedagogical ideas. In my view, the inherent paradox of standardization and autonomy deserves to remain a hypothesis in the research I here propose.

A careful study of Robertson’s life as a whole, his purposes and beliefs, how they were shaped and why he chose prominence over political power and wealth would also provide insight into the standardizing of autonomy on farms and in classrooms. Such a study would also contribute to our knowledge of the relationship and interconnectedness of agricultural education and public schooling. Beyond Robertson, comparative biographies of Putman, Weir, Hoodless and Hughes, to name a few, would detail the attitudes and reasoning behind methods of reform, the professional relationships between these individuals, and how their reform efforts fit into their life’s work and personal perspectives on Canada’s development as a country within the British Empire. Personal papers and professional documents, especially those of professional organizations, would allow us to examine consistency and change in attitudes and efforts in each reform leader as well as illuminate commonalities in rhetoric and action. Such narratives would deepen the published research on related movements, education more generally, and the ways one reformer influenced and supported another.

An analysis of the importance of Macdonald College among schools of agriculture internationally would be of interest, in part to support or refute claims it was one of the most “modern.” Additionally an analysis of the significance of the College in the history of McGill,

particularly the impact of the growth of the college on university governance, funding and development priorities would further our understanding of the motivations of and pressures on the University's Board of Governors. Research could also suggest the significance of the College among Canadian post-secondary institutions and the role of philanthropy in determining institutional growth in the face of limited provincial funding. No doubt provincial educational authorities found teacher education and certification easier to control than re-training practicing teachers. Comparative studies of the use of teacher education programs, and the efforts of provincial policy-makers at controlling such training, would complement studies of reform movements working in a greater number of cities. Specifically, course requirements that grew from reform, as did those at Macdonald College—and a close examination of changing enrolment dynamics and demographics—would provide insight into mechanisms of reform at the provincial level and government efforts to supply rural schools with teachers who intended to remain in rural areas. Annuals from colleges and universities as well as documents from boards of governors and from provincial ministries of education would provide an informative foundation for such analyses.

Historians know too little about Macdonald himself, having relied on media coverage of his philanthropic and business interests, and on official statements from McGill. Source material on Sir William is difficult to obtain as most of his papers were destroyed after his death and those that remain are controlled by his descendants. Therefore most of our knowledge is based on the value of his donations and evidence of the simple lifestyle he maintained. A critical analysis of Macdonald's place among his philanthropic peers, in the context of his career as an Anglophone capitalist employing young Francophone women, would give a much needed and refreshing perspective on the man. Any additional insight into his peculiar spending habits, and his change in favoured types of education from medicine sciences to public education, may provide greater

understanding into the frustrations and motivations of those who funded reform as well as those who depended on the funding. This would necessarily include research into the relationship between Macdonald and Dawson as they were personal friends and worked closely to plan, build and maintain programs and buildings at McGill. Macdonald's motivations for gifts to McGill may have been almost entirely negotiated by that relationship, and it would be helpful to compare such an analysis to other less critical explanations of philanthropy.

I chose for this thesis an analysis based on empirical evidence and a desire to tie together a multitude of explanations for the actions of decision makers not only at the government level but at the district, classroom and family level as well. The explanatory claims in this thesis are necessarily of more than one logical type, as the people in the Macdonald-Robertson movement had mixed motivations changing over time and circumstance. No one person, group or idea alone were adequate to force school reform. I chose not to attribute success or failure of the reforms to any one force, cause, pedagogical idea or person because it is illogical to do so. What happens in a classroom from day to day is largely spontaneous and the multitude of decisions a teacher makes are based on pressures from many individuals and groups as well as the teacher's academic training and perception of the individual needs of the students. Therefore any narrative which does not account for this multitude of influences on classroom-level decision making, and how these influences change over time, would be inadequate to explain educational reform. To begin, I built the foundation for this thesis by showing of what the Macdonald-Robertson movement consisted. I looked for documents that would provide details of the work of Robertson, districts and teachers. I found this information in Robertson's personal and professional papers and in reports to the ministers of education for each of the provinces. Additionally, media coverage of the various programmes and government documents such as royal commissions provided general factual information about, and the education theory behind,

the movement. In particular I examined closely the difficulties involved in each scheme and the modifications by Robertson to alleviate those problems. It was in the analysis of the difficulties that I found an opportunity to narrate the negotiations between decision-makers about the continuance or discontinuance of the various schemes, and if continued, how they would be modified to ease implementation and accommodate district, teacher and family needs.¹ An eclectic empirical analysis of reform plans, their implementation, and various modifications of them, lent itself to a detailed discussion of the constant effort of Macdonald, Robertson and provincial administrators to standardize teaching practice. This analysis also lent itself, but to a much more modest extent, to an examination of the continuing struggle by teachers, families and districts to maintain autonomy in educational decision-making.

¹ Finding evidence of the popular response to Macdonald and Robertson's reforms was certainly a difficult task yielding few comments not summarized and qualified by Robertson or provincial administrators. Still, a detailed summary of testimony by members of the general public can be found in Robertson's 1913 Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education. This source includes synthesized testimony which can at least convey a range of popular opinion on schooling. For example, "One witness stated that the public schools were starved, while another that the results were not commensurate with the taxation." Most of the testimony, however, supports Robertson's opinions that, "Education should give boys and interest in the farm....[and] the rural schools will not be improved until the teachers are better qualified..." James W. Robertson, Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1913: 1804, 2213.

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