

# Early Education in Upper Canada

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Education in Upper Canada became a priority in the 1840s with the appointment of the First Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe and came into effect due to a wide range of influencing factors such as political influence, educator input, religious influence and external factors such as the Industrial Revolution and local political influence. All of these factors played a role in the development of the educational system and laid the groundwork for the current system Canadians enjoy today. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century it was not priority to deliver high quality public education to the children of Upper Canada. Although there were many forms of early schooling in Canada, education wasn't consistent for all families throughout Upper Canada. Egerton Ryerson once stated, "On the importance of education generally we may remark it is a necessary as the light; it should be as common as water, and as free as air."<sup>1</sup> A lot of effort and time went in to creating a fair education system in which people could enjoy and thrive in. In order to achieve this and produce smart, successful adults, the education had to be at a high standard. At the time there were many different ideas on what children should be taught in school to produce the most knowledgeable people. The idea was that children were to be enrolled in schools, which used a common curriculum and were taught by government-trained, certified, and supervised teachers.<sup>2</sup> The public education system in Canada was created to ensure these standards were being met to produce strong workers for the Industrial Revolution, teach children the importance of Christianity and provide education to all classes of society.

The concept of free public schooling first came to the forefront of politician and educator's minds in Upper Canada during the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The issues surrounding

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<sup>1</sup> John Putman, Egerton Ryerson and Education in Upper Canada (Toronto: Williams Briggs, 1912), Project Gutenberg Canada Ebook, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Burke and Patrice Milewski, Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 24. Carl, Jim, International

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia, "History of Education," <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-education/>.

financing, administration of education and participation in the proposed education system of Upper Canada were thoroughly thought out and debated.<sup>4</sup> John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, was a well-educated man; he received formal education from several educational institutes including Eton and Merton Colleges, as well as the British Military.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that his extensive education played a role in his belief that success was linked to education; by offering free education for all, this would ensure the success of Upper Canada as a colony. As a supporter of continued colonialism, he measured his personal success as a reflection of the colony; therefore if education would help Upper Canada to be successful as a colony, it made sense to support free education for all.<sup>6</sup> According to Egerton Ryerson, the Superintendent of Education in Canada in 1844, the branches of knowledge which are essential that all understand should be provided for all, and taught to all; should be brought within the reach of the most needy and forced upon the attention of the most careless.<sup>7</sup> Educators throughout Upper Canada supported public education because it was an agency to promote good citizenship, throughout Canadians.<sup>8</sup> People like Ryerson and Simcoe were key aspects in the formation of the public education system in Canada.

In spite of all the debate on how to best develop the education system, it was in fact the Industrial Revolution that really forced the education system to develop.<sup>9</sup> In order for the Industrial Revolution to be successful, workers would have to be well educated, as many of the jobs required specific skills and training. The Industrial Revolution would help create a bigger

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> S. R. Mealing, Simcoe, John Graves, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto, 2003–, accessed November 21, 2016, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/simcoe\\_john\\_graves\\_5E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/simcoe_john_graves_5E.html).

<sup>6</sup> John Putman, *Egerton Ryerson and Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Williams Briggs, 1912), Project Gutenberg Canada Ebook, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jim Carl, *International Handbook of Comparative Education: Industrialization and Public Education Social Cohesion and Social Stratification* (New York City: Springer Netherlands, 2009), 32.

country with more promising economics, a far-reaching education system looked like the way to ensure growth by providing a large pool of skilled and competent workers.<sup>10</sup> By the 1840s, after much thought and discussion, the concept of public education became an official policy of the colonial government.<sup>11</sup> From there, schools quickly spread through Upper Canada. However, in order to ensure a successful system, leading educators had to overcome the challenging task of making the school system consistent and effective throughout the province.

During this period, the focus of the education system was to prepare men for their duties in life this included: preparation and discipline of the mind in order to be contributing members of colony in the Industrial Revolution.<sup>12</sup> This required a lot of hard-working and well-educated people to be successful; men in particular were to bear the success of the Industrial Revolution on their shoulders. Ryerson wanted to strengthen and promote the development of both the intellectual and physical powers of men.<sup>13</sup> Wage earning, and subsequently education were directed at men due to social normality of the time; during the 1800s women were expected to bear children and run a successful household. In light of this, there was no need for women to get an education, as they were to spend their lifetime raising children.

Aside from the focus of producing high quality workers for the Industrial Revolution, religion played a significant role in shaping the education system. In 1847, the Superintendent of Education in Canada, Egerton Ryerson, travelled to Europe to observe the public education system in order to make improvements to the system in Canada. After examining the education systems in Europe, Ryerson got a taste of a very religious education system. Upon his return to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John Putman, *Egerton Ryerson and Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Williams Briggs, 1912), Project Gutenberg Canada Ebook, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847), 145.

<sup>13</sup> Neil McDonald, and Alf Chaiton. *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), 70.

Canada, the Governor General, James Bruce, requested Ryerson to construct a report to explain the steps to change the current system into one that would sustainably educate the youth of Upper Canada. The main basis of the education system Ryerson was proposing was based on the Christian religion. Ryerson was careful to recommend subjects that were universal and material that was practical, making connections with duties, relationships and interests of everyday life along with religion.

Ryerson's experience in Europe clearly influenced his idea of Canada's public education system, as one of the core curriculums of the education system that emerged during the 1840s was the subject of Christian instruction; this was mandatory for all students.<sup>14</sup> Christianity and its morals were placed at the base of Ryerson's system of Education.<sup>15</sup> As Ryerson noted at the time, the bible contained the only genuine accounts of origin, early history of the world and the creation and primitive history of man.<sup>16</sup> For a new and developing country to be united and successful it was important that everyone was taught and practiced the same religion. This would ensure that as Canada moved forward, all children would share the same Christian morals and views on the world. Canada was under British rule at the time, and the dominant religion in Britain was Christianity, it was without question that there would be major Christian influences on the education program in Canada in the nineteenth century.

To ensure a broad horizon of education was going to be provided to students, Ryerson stated that there were to be several branches of knowledge taught in schools.<sup>17</sup> The branches of knowledge were made up of the following subjects: Reading, Writing, Drawing, Arithmetic, the

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<sup>14</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847), 145.

<sup>15</sup> Neil McDonald, and Alf Chaiton. *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), 69.

<sup>16</sup> John Putman, *Egerton Ryerson and Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Williams Briggs, 1912), Project Gutenberg Canada, Ebook, 33

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

English Language, Music, Geography, General History, Natural History, Physiology, Philosophy, Agriculture, Civil Government, and Political Economy.<sup>18</sup> All the subjects listed were practical for everyday life in the 1800s and are still relevant today. High importance was placed on the courses such as reading and writing, due to the fact that one must read and write to understand written materials presented in schools. Ryerson stated that all courses were not supposed to be taught formally and separately, but that the simple and essential elements of each branch should be taught substantially- being distinctly and practically understood by the teacher and student.<sup>19</sup> It was important for the teachers to be educated in the different subjects they were going to teach to their students in order to effectively be passed to the students.

In order to have a successful education system, there must be successful teachers. The general public usually did not take teachers' jobs seriously; however teaching might just be the most important job in the entire education system. Employment as a teacher was dependent upon a number of factors: availability of a sufficient number of students, general economic conditions of the community, and parental acceptance of specific teacher's usefulness, among other factors.<sup>20</sup> Considering many of the teachers had little to no formal education, this was a challenge when implementing an education system in Canada. The teacher's certification was placed in the hands of provincially approved districts and township superintendents of education.<sup>21</sup> There were many guidelines to follow for handing out the teaching certificates. It was to be done using a standard form of rules, carefully observing the clarity of teacher's possession of a specialized

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<sup>18</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847), 145.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Sara Burke and Patrice Milewski, *Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 26.

<sup>21</sup> Neil McDonald, and Alf Chaiton. *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), 109.

body of knowledge.<sup>22</sup> When the required amount of knowledge was met, the teacher would be certified to teach in the education system. Many successful people were chosen to be teachers in Upper Canada, providing them with a lifelong career shaping the future generations and providing for their own families.

In order to have a sufficient public education system, it needed to meet the desires of the poorest members of the society and be easy to access for all.<sup>23</sup> Ryerson argued that since the rich can easily look after their educational needs through private and/or boarding schools, the poor are the individuals that deserve special attention by the government.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, he adopted the position that no educational system should be restricted to any particular class, but should include the whole of society, especially the poor.<sup>25</sup> Making education available to all social classes of people meant that there would be a higher student enrollment, which would create a higher demand for school buildings and thus more teachers being employed. Overall, the new public education system would prepare students for the challenges of life and set many up for success.

With the work of Egerton Ryerson and John Simcoe, the education system was aimed at creating successful people to become the workers and creators of a great Canadian economy. The education system provided the Industrial Revolution with skilled and educated workers as well as strengthened Christian morals in young Canadians by making education accessible for all classes of Canadian society. With the influences of John Graves Simcoe and Egerton Ryerson, providing high quality public education for all children has been a top priority for Canadians

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>23</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847), 61.

<sup>24</sup> Neil McDonald, and Alf Chaiton. *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), 67.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

since the mid-1800s and helped lay the groundwork for the educational system that Canadians enjoy today.

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