

Trends in Female School Attendance in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ontario

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INTRODUCTION¹

One of the most extraordinary gaps in the writing of social history in general and educational history in particular is the lack of studies of school attendance patterns.² Our understanding of the profound changes in childhood experience resulting from the expansion of schooling in the nineteenth century remains minimal because we have little information on who actually attended school, the number of years devoted to schooling and the regularity of attendance. The aim of this paper is to suggest ways of remedying this situation. It focusses on changes in female school attendance patterns in Ontario during the 1850's and 1860's — the years when Egerton Ryerson's free school programme brought an increasing number of children into the schools. The paper surveys overall attendance patterns in the province, quantitatively analyzes the social structure of female students in one community, Hamilton, and examines the changing function of the private academy for girls in the period.

THE CHANGING PATTERN OF FEMALE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, 1847-71: AN OVERVIEW

From 1846 each local superintendent of schools in the province was required to submit an annual report listing the number of children of school-age in his area, the number of pupils, male and female, enrolled in the schools and the average attendance of these pupils at school. From this information it is possible to construct a composite picture of the extent of and changes in female school attendance in Ontario. There is, however, one major limitation regarding the figures. The reports list the number of males and females enrolled in the various common schools in each year, not the number regularly attending. In consequence, they exaggerate the actual number of pupils found in the schools in any one

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² Examples of some recent studies in school attendance patterns in North America include Micahel B. KATZ, "Who Went to School?," *History of Education Quarterly*, 12, No. 3 (1972), 432-54; Maris A. VINOSKIS, "Trends in Massachusetts Education, 1826-1860," *HEO*, 12, No. 4 (1972), 501-529; Selwyn K. TROEN, "Popular Education in Nineteenth Century St. Louis," *HEO*, 13, no. 1 (1973) 23-40; Carl F. KAESTLE's excellent study, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) analyses attendance pattern in the 1790's and 1850's; Alison PRENTICE, "The School Promoters" (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1974, Ch. 7) discusses trends in attendance in Ontario in the Mid-Nineteenth Century.

Table 1. — NUMBER OF FEMALES ATTENDING COMMON SCHOOLS 1847-71

YEAR	ONTARIO		COUNTIES		CITIES*	
	Number	% of Students	Number	% of Students	Number	% of Students
1847	55254	44.3	—	—	1268	40.2
1848	57714	44.1	—	—	1086	35.8
1849	61929	44.7	—	—	1619	44.5
1850	66173	43.6	61197	44.0	1601	34.9
1851	75815	44.5	68679	44.8	2322	43.7
1852	80323	44.7	71790	44.8	2782	45.1
1853	87344	44.9	77578	44.9	3028	44.3
1854	91283	44.7	80022	45.3	3691	43.3
1855	102186	44.8	90652	45.3	4899	41.0
1856	113725	45.3	98864	45.3	6616	45.8
1857	122608	45.0	104437	44.9	8688	47.5
1858	133050	45.3	111828	45.2	9059	47.4
1859	135904	45.1	114231	45.1	8687	45.6
1860	143708	45.5	119869	45.5	9106	46.0
1861	151483	45.9	127196	46.0	9343	47.3
1862	158292	46.1	132280	45.9	9839	48.3
1863	167818	46.5	139079	46.3	10792	49.1
1864	173671	46.7	143920	46.6	10711	48.3
1865	179332	46.7	148576	46.7	10815	46.8
1866	182306	46.6	150619	46.6	10700	46.9
1867	188642	47.0	154789	46.8	11238	49.1
1868	198092	47.2	161690	47.0	12007	48.8
1869	202745	46.9	164955	46.7	12649	48.7
1870	209137	47.3	169198	47.0	13081	48.6
1871	211260	47.3	168708	47.0	13913	49.0

*Toronto, Kingston and Hamilton until 1855 when Ottawa and London added.

Source: *Annual Report of the Normal, Model, Grammar and Common Schools, 1847-1871.*

month or on any one day. Yearly enrolments included all of those who entered the school regardless of their length of stay in the school and in the area. As it is becoming increasingly clear that geographic mobility in the period was immense, a considerable number of children must have moved from one area to another and from one school to another during each year, thus inflating the actual number of pupils.³ Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that the overall enrolment pattern is seriously distorted or that the yearly male — female ratio among pupils is inaccurate.

The most obvious feature of female enrolment in the province's common schools during the period of the free school campaign from the late forties to 1871 was the steady increase in enrolment from 55,254 in 1847 to 211,260 in 1871 (see Table 1). This increase reflected not only the rise in population in Ontario but also the increasing proportion of girls at-

³ For a discussion of geographic mobility in a Canadian city, see Michael B. KATZ, "The People of a Canadian City: 1851-2," *Canadian Historical Review*, 53, No. 4, 1972, 402-426. See also David P. GAGAN and Herbert MAYS, "Historical Demography and Canadian Social History: Families and Land in Peel County, Ontario," *CHR*, 54, No. 1, 1973, 27-47, and Stephan THERNSTROM and Peter R. KNIGHTS, "Men in Motion: Some Data and Speculations about Urban Population Mobility in Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1, 1970, 7-36.

tending the schools. Moreover, the increase in common school enrolment accounted for most of the increase in girls' attendance as the enrolment at the private schools and academies, both male and female, only increased from 6,753 in 1850 to 8,562 in 1870. Thus, Ryerson's school reform program had the effect of bringing large numbers of girls into contact with the schools for the first time. Although, throughout the period, there were always more boys enrolled than girls, the disparity between the sexes steadily diminished. Whereas in 1850 only 43.6% of those enrolled in the common schools were girls, by 1871 the proportion had steadily increased to 47.3%. If, as Ryerson claimed, there were more girls attending private schools than boys, the proportional gap between the sexes must have been even narrower.⁴

The most spectacular advances in female attendance occurred in the province's cities. In 1848, for example, only 26.2% of school-age (five to sixteen) children in Toronto, Kingston and Hamilton attended the common schools and of these only 35.8% were girls. By 1871 over 85% of the school-age children of the province's cities were enrolled in the public schools and 49% of them were girls. In the rural areas, where the majority of the population lived, the influx of girls to the common schools was less spectacular. Although, by 1871, a similar proportion of school-age children were enrolled in the public schools, the proportion of girls was only 47%. In both rural and urban areas, the period of most rapid increase in female enrollment was the commercial boom years of the early fifties. However, the female enrolment figures were far more volatile in the urban areas than in the rural sections where the increase, both numerically and proportionately, was more of a steady upward trend.

In the cities, the rapid increase in enrolment in the fifties was brought to a halt by the onset of the depression. Although the numbers of both male and females enrolled were affected, reflecting the net loss of population from some of the urban areas, the proportional disparity between the sexes widened indicating that in times of hardship parents were more likely to dispense with their daughters' education. The comment of the local superintendant for Beverly Township in Wentworth County is instructive on this point. After noting that almost four boys to every three girls attended the schools in the township, he continued that "one must infer from this fact that the opinion seems yet to prevail that girls need less Common School education than boys. The natural disparity between the sexes does not justify the above disproportion."⁵

If the trend throughout the period was towards increased enrolment in the common schools, the picture of educational progress in Ontario was muddled by the low average attendance of those enrolled. The proportion of those on the rolls who attended for 100 days or less (out of a

⁴ See, for example, *The Annual Report of the Normal, Model, Grammar and Common Schools in Upper Canada* (Hereinafter referred to as *Annual Report*) 1851, 4. Ryerson states that a "much larger number of girls than boys attend private schools, as the law makes no provision for the higher class of girls schools."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1867 Appendix, 41.

possible 260) hovered around 55% from 1856 through 1871. Unfortunately, the reports only give a sex breakdown on average attendance in the early years although the comments of the local superintendents throughout the period suggest that the patterns evident in those years remained constant to 1871. The most important feature of the summer and winter attendance patterns was the seasonal variation in the rural areas (see Table 2). In each of the years between 1850 and 1854, more boys than girls attended in both summer and winter but in the season of greater attendance, winter, the discrepancy between the sexes was approximately twice that of the summer. That is, many more boys and less girls attended in winter. In the cities it seems that the seasonal pattern was reversed for, apart from 1854, attendance was notably higher in summer than winter. As in the rural areas, however, in winter the proportion of boys was higher than in summer although they remained in the majority in both seasons.

Table 2.—AVERAGE ATTENDANCE AT COMMON SCHOOLS, 1850-54

YEAR	UPPER CANADA			COUNTIES			CITY		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
1850-Summer	76824	41784	35040	70844	37940	32704	2248	1495	753
-Winter	81469	48308	33161	75215	44385	30830	2163	1375	788
1851-Summer	83390	44647	38743	74438	39541	34897	2581	1423	1158
-Winter	84981	49060	35921	76389	44076	32313	2376	1377	999
1852-Summer	85161	45409	39752	75762	40253	35509	2730	1482	1248
-Winter	86756	49867	36889	77656	44620	33036	2580	1448	1132
1853-Summer	90096	48668	41428	78046	41955	36088	4391	2337	2054
-Winter	90659	52252	37407	78830	45380	33450	3919	2259	1660
1854-Summer	91880	49475	42405	78682	41859	35823	4368	2615	1753
-Winter	92925	52696	40229	79306	44694	34612	4441	2671	1871

Source: *Annual Report ... Schools 1850-1854*.

The factors affecting school attendance in mid-nineteenth century Ontario were many and varied. Commercial depressions resulting in high unemployment in the urban areas and increased transience affected school attendance. Similarly, in rural areas, bad crops and prices meant fewer children were sent to school: "as soon as farmers are blessed with better harvest and more remunerative markets, the children will be more regular in their attendance, they will be sent longer to school, and far more attention will be given to furnishing the school houses."⁶ The pronounced seasonal pattern of attendance in the farming areas was similar to that noted by Kett in rural New England for a slightly earlier period.⁷ As one of the local superintendents in York County pointed out, "in summer seasons those children who are too young to labour are sent to school, and those whose labour is valuable are kept at home: in the winter this order is re-

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1861, 180.

⁷ Joseph KETT, "Growing Up in Rural New England," in Tamara K. HAREVEN (Ed.), *Anonymous Americans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 1-14.

versed, thus making two distinct sets of pupils in the year.”⁸ The shortage and high price of agricultural labour necessitated children, particularly boys, working on the family farm in the busy seasons, and many local superintendents reported that the schools were virtually emptied “at the times of hay, wheat, oat, apple and potato harvests.”⁹ Whereas large numbers of rural boys attended only in the winter months, it would seem that many of the girls were kept home in winter to care for the younger members of the family who were unable to attend because of the distance from the school house and the severity of the weather.

Distance from school, inclement weather and quagmire road conditions also were reasons for non-attendance of pupils in certain seasons in the cities. Other reasons for variable attendance patterns that were shared by both rural and urban areas of Ontario were the incidence of epidemics like smallpox and measles in particular areas, dissatisfaction with the local teaching standards and the parents’ inability to provide adequate clothing and footwear for their children, especially in winter. This latter reason, a consequence of poverty, was almost certainly a major contributing factor to the fall off in attendance in the urban areas in winter for, as we shall see, there was an inverse relationship between poverty and school attendance.¹⁰

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF URBAN ATTENDANCE: THE CASE OF HAMILTON

There are basically two ways of approaching the quantitative analysis of the social structure of school attendance. One is to use the school registers which were routinely generated by the public schools from the mid-nineteenth century and list such information as student’s name, age, sex, date of entering and leaving the school and occupation and address of parent. The major problems associated with the use of registers is that rarely have complete sets of them survived, especially those from the earlier years, and consequently, it is often impossible to construct a complete picture of school attendance patterns in any one community at any one time. The second method, using the information contained on the manuscript census records, allows the researcher to analyse the pattern of attendance across the whole community and to relate the information about individual students to the wealth of socio-economic data about their parents. A major drawback of this approach is that it is not possible to distinguish between the types of school, be they public or private, that the students attended. Nor, is it possible to analyse the regularity with which students attended. In this paper both types of records

⁸ *Annual Report*, 1859, 167.

⁹ See, for example, *ibid.*, 1861, 176.

¹⁰ Poverty affected both the likelihood that children would attend and the regularity with which they attended. Seasonal and cyclical unemployment and employment by the week or day meant that economic insecurity was a basic fact of working class life in the period. For a discussion of these factors and their relation to school attendance, see Ian E. DAVEY, “Education Reform and the Working Class: School Attendance in Hamilton, Ontario, 1851-1891” (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, in progress), Ch. 3.

are drawn on, but the basis for the study is the manuscript census records for the city of Hamilton in 1851 and 1861.¹¹

In 1851, 1226 of the 4339 children between three and twenty-one listed on the census were recorded as attending school in Hamilton (see Table 3). Of these, 683 or 55.7% were boys and 543 were girls. The vast majority, over 96%, of both the male and female students fell within Ryerson's definition of school-age, five to sixteen. However, it is significant that those recorded as attending school accounted for only 39% of those five to sixteen and 28.3% of those between three and twenty-one. Remarkably, of the 3113 children not in school, only 287 listed an occupation, of which only 75 or 26.1% were girls. That is, only 4.6% of the 1617 girls who lived at home and did not attend school in Hamilton in 1851 were gainfully employed and more than a dozen were employed in only two types of occupations, dressmaking and millinery and domestic service. Of course many more girls lived in other households as domestic servants, but the fact remains that over 1500 girls helped their parents at home or work by running errands, doing housework or minding younger children or else wandered the streets of the city.

Table 3.—SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN HAMILTON, 1851

Age-Group	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL	
	In School	Total	In School	Total	In School	Total
3-21	683	2179	543	2160	1226	4339
%	31.3		25.1		28.3	
5-16	657	1563	525	1464	1182	3027
%	42.0		35.9		39.0	
7-12	444	821	368	792	812	1613
%	54.1		46.5		50.3	

Source: Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1851.

What then was the social structure of those attending school? First, if you were a child, male or female, of wealthy parents then you were more likely to attend school. Whereas barely more than 25% of the children from the poorest forty percent of the city's households attended school, well over 50% of children whose parents were in the wealthiest twenty percent did. Moreover, it helped if you were a boy. For at no one age did more girls than boys attend school, nor in any age group did a majority of girls attend. Even in the years of heaviest school attendance, ages seven through twelve, only 46.5% of the girls attended compared to 54.1% of the boys. An examination of the age-sex structure of school attendance by parent's occupation illuminates this imbalance between boys and girls.

¹¹ KATZ, "Who Went to School?" contains an excellent discussion of the possibilities and methodology of quantitative analysis of school attendance. The following analysis was made possible by access to the data bank of the Canadian Social History Project, Dept. of History and Philosophy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Of course, the overall attendance pattern for occupation was closely related to that for wealth — many more children from non-manual backgrounds attended school than did those whose fathers were labourers (see Table 4). But the analysis of the occupational background of the male and female students reveals that girls from some occupational backgrounds were much less likely to attend school than their brothers.¹² If you were the daughter of a merchant or professional, a shopkeeper or clerk or a skilled artisan you were more likely to attend school than if your father was a semi-skilled worker or labourer or your mother a widow. However, unless you were the daughter of a labourer or, perhaps, a skilled artisan or widow, your chance of attending school was nowhere near as good as your brother's. This was particularly the case during the years of greatest school attendance, seven through twelve. While merchants and professionals sent more of their seven to twelve year old girls to school (over 58%) than any other occupational group, they sent almost 73% of their sons of the same ages. Only 30.8% of the labourers' daughters of the same ages were in school but, then, only 32.1% of their sons were also. The semi-skilled workers differed from their unskilled counterparts dramatically as, although they sent only marginally more of their daughters to school, they sent about two-thirds of their seven to twelve year old sons, an even greater proportion than the skilled artisans did. The two groups with the proportionately greatest divergence between male and female attendance, the 'petite bourgeoisie' and the semi-skilled workers, may have harboured ambitions for their sons, ambitions they attempted to fulfill at the expense of their daughters.

At the bottom end of the social scale ethnic background reflected the class relationships (see Table 5). The Irish Catholics, many of whom were poor labourers, sent almost the same proportion of boys and girls to school that the labourers did. No ethnic group sent more of their daughters to school than their sons in the years of heaviest school attendance, seven to twelve. However, the Canadian protestants, a very wealthy group, sent more of their school-age daughters to school than sons, suggesting that the lack of suitable employment opportunities for their daughters meant that they stayed in school longer than their brothers. Nonetheless, the overall picture of attendance that emerges from the analysis of the occupational and ethnic background of students in 1851, is one of limited opportunities for schooling for all children in Hamilton and for girls in particular.

At the time of the census in 1851, Hamilton's public schools were not a dominant feature in the city's educational landscape. No less than 25 private schools and the Burlington Ladies Academy competed with the seven public schools for the chance to educate the city's children, and about one-half of those who did attend went to these private schools. In 1853, large-scale public education commenced with the opening of the centralized school system which aimed at providing the city with a sys-

¹² The occupational categories employed here account for over 95% of the children's parents who were heads of households in 1851.

Table 4. — SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY PARENT'S OCCUPATION, HAMILTON 1851

Age-Group	PROFESSIONAL & PROPRIETOR		SHOPKEEPER, CLERK, ETC.		SKILLED ARTISAN		SEMI-SKILLED WORKER		LABOURER		WIDOW, ETC.	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
3-21	162	210	315	280	802	815	122	132	454	439	214	180
Total in School	64	69	143	75	249	223	55	25	80	80	60	38
%	39.5	32.9	45.4	26.8	31.0	27.4	45.1	18.9	17.6	18.2	28.0	21.1
5-16	109	143	235	166	545	560	92	92	353	315	158	111
Total in School	59	66	140	69	241	220	51	25	79	77	58	37
%	54.1	46.2	59.6	41.6	44.2	39.3	55.4	27.2	22.4	24.4	36.7	33.3
7-12	48	77	121	83	283	307	53	52	196	169	88	62
Total in School	35	45	88	47	160	159	35	20	63	52	45	24
%	72.9	58.4	72.7	56.6	56.5	51.8	66.0	38.5	32.1	30.8	51.1	38.7

Source: Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1851.

Table 5.—SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY PARENT'S ETHNICITY, HAMILTON, 1851

Age-Group	IRISH CATHOLIC		IRISH PROTESTANT		SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIAN		ENGLISH ANGLICAN		ENGLISH METHODIST		CANADIAN PROTESTANT		U.S. PROTESTANT	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
3-21	521	469	394	404	268	220	264	284	108	152	148	155	92	105
Total in School	97	82	130	97	114	70	102	67	37	50	49	51	37	36
%	18.6	17.5	33.0	24.0	42.5	31.8	38.6	23.6	34.3	32.9	33.1	32.9	40.2	34.3
5-16	402	324	292	270	191	137	188	199	69	107	105	105	66	73
Total in School	92	80	126	94	111	66	99	67	34	49	48	49	35	34
%	22.9	24.7	43.2	34.8	58.1	48.2	52.7	33.7	49.3	45.8	45.7	46.7	53.0	46.6
7-12	224	178	151	147	98	79	107	95	23	59	51	62	32	37
Total in School	72	53	80	70	71	52	69	40	17	36	30	30	24	20
%	32.1	29.8	53.0	47.6	72.4	65.8	64.5	42.1	73.9	61.0	58.8	48.4	75.0	54.1

Source: Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1861.

tematic, graded education for the majority of school-age children.¹³ The establishment of the new system of public schooling had important ramifications for attendance patterns in the city because it effectively destroyed most of the alternatives to public schooling in the city. Moreover, it removed the stigma associated with attendance at the public schools and, although the number of girls enrolled remained less than the number of boys, their proportionate representation increased. The educational landscape was also altered in the fifties by the establishment of two Roman Catholic separate schools in 1856 which provided an avenue of education for the many Catholic children of the city. Both of these factors influenced female attendance patterns considerably as the analysis of the students in 1861 demonstrates.

Although the relationship between wealth and school attendance still existed in 1861, it was not as strong as in 1851 because a larger proportion of the school-age children of the city had been drawn into the schools. Whereas in 1851 only about 28% of all children between three and twenty-one attended school, in 1861 the percentage was almost 40%, 2615 of 6577 (see Table 6). Like the students of 1851 though, over 96% of those attending school fell within the five to sixteen age range and only a small number of those listed as not attending, 372, indicated that they had

Table 6.—SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN HAMILTON, 1861

Age-Group	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL	
	In School	Total	In School	Total	In School	Total
3-21	1371	3343	1243	3231	2615	6577*
%	41.0		38.5		39.8	
15-16	1314	2290	1198	2153	2513	4446*
%	57.4		55.6		56.5	
7-12	846	1165	793	1120	1640	2286
%	72.6		70.8		71.7	

*No sex given for 3 children, including 1 in school.

Source: Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1861.

jobs. Similarly, the proportion of girls among those who listed an occupation was very low, 75 of the 372 or just over 20%. However, a much greater proportion of girls attended school than in 1851. While the proportion of boys age five to sixteen who attended school increased from 42% to 57.4% in the decade, the proportion of girls rose from 35.9% to 55.6%. Similarly, the proportion of seven to twelve year old girls attending school rose by more than 24% to 70.8% in 1861 whereas the proportion of boys rose by less than 17% to 72.6%. Significantly, the proportion of thirteen to sixteen year old girls attending school was slightly greater than the

¹³ For an analysis of the impact of the central school on Hamilton's school attendance see Ian E. DAVEY, "School Reform and School Attendance: The Hamilton Central School 1853-61," in Michael B. KATZ (ed.), *Education and History: The English Canadian Experience*, forthcoming (New York University Press: 1975). See also my M.A. Thesis of the same title, University of Toronto, 1972.

proportion of boys. Clearly, a large part of the increase in school attendance between 1851 and 1861 was the result of more girls coming into the schools and staying there longer.

These changes were reflected in the occupational and ethnic backgrounds of the students. Among household heads, only professionals and merchants and widows sent more than five percent more boys of school-age to school than girls (see Table 7). Contrary to the situation in 1851, the small businessmen and the semi-skilled workers sent proportionately as many and more of their school-age daughters to school than their sons. The artisans sent the highest proportion of girls of any occupational group, over 63% of those of school-age, while the labourers were as far behind as in 1851 sending fewer boys and girls than any other occupational group, although the proportion of school-age males in school from labouring homes had virtually doubled and females had increased by 15%. Among the ethnic groups only the blacks and the Irish Catholics sent less than half of their school-age children, male and female, to school (see Table 8). However, the Irish Catholics had increased their attendance dramatically, reflecting the opening of the separate schools. The blacks sent more girls than boys as did the U.S. protestants and the English Methodists who sent two-thirds of their school-age girls, more than any other group. The groups who had sent markedly fewer girls than boys in 1851, sent proportionately equal numbers in 1861: the proportion of students among the school-age daughters of the English Anglicans, for example, increased by 26% in the decade while the proportion of their sons in school only increased by 7%.

Certainly, the most significant feature of the occupational and ethnic distribution in 1861 was the relative balance between the proportion of males and females in school. The establishment of the centralized public school system and the separate schools was accompanied by a rapid influx of girls into the schools. By 1871, proportionately more school-age girls than boys were in school, particularly in early adolescence as many more girls stayed in school into their teen-age years.¹⁴

THE CHANGING FUNCTION OF THE PRIVATE FEMALE ACADEMY

The rapid increase in the proportion of girls attending school in Hamilton in the fifties coincided with the establishment of the centralized, tax-supported public system of education and the subsequent demise of most of the private institutions in the city. That is, most of the new female students attended the common schools and, to a lesser extent, the newly established Roman Catholic separate schools. This had not been the case at mid-century. Then, it was believed, there was a lack of government support for female education as the District Grammar School accepted boys only and the local common schools were not considered the

¹⁴ This conclusion is drawn from the analysis of social structure of school attendance in Hamilton in 1871. See, *Ibid*, Ch. 4.

Table 7.—SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY PARENT'S OCCUPATION, HAMILTON 1861

Age-Group	PROFESSIONAL & PROPRIETOR		SHOPKEEPER, CLERK, ETC.		SKILLED ARTISAN		SEMI-SKILLED WORKER		LABOURER		WIDOW, ETC.	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
3-21	318	298	502	512	1142	1161	141	134	677	617	338	322
Total in School	164	127	225	226	513	513	45	44	208	163	129	104
%	51.6	42.6	44.8	44.1	44.9	44.2	31.9	32.8	30.7	26.4	38.2	32.3
5-16	224	185	343	352	781	788	100	86	469	410	224	214
Total in School	153	113	211	215	494	498	45	43	207	162	123	102
%	68.3	61.1	61.5	61.1	63.3	63.2	45.0	50.0	44.1	39.5	54.9	47.7
7-12	116	93	169	182	409	432	46	40	229	211	115	107
Total in School	96	71	130	145	324	331	28	23	132	114	81	67
%	82.8	76.3	76.9	79.7	79.2	76.6	60.9	57.5	57.6	54.0	70.4	62.6

Source: Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1861.

Table 8.—SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY PARENT'S ETHNICITY, HAMILTON 1861

Age-Group	IRISH CATHOLIC		IRISH PROTESTANT		SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIAN		ENGLISH ANGLICAN		ENGLISH METHODIST		CANADIAN PROTESTANT		U.S. PROTESTANT		BLACKS*	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
3-21	710	684	489	522	534	506	516	472	214	234	220	225	118	115	59	55
Total in School	229	194	206	208	246	217	218	201	93	104	103	92	51	47	18	18
%	32.3	28.4	42.1	39.8	46.1	42.9	42.2	42.6	43.5	44.4	46.8	40.9	43.2	40.9	30.5	32.7
5-16	490	458	338	364	362	324	350	330	146	152	155	148	86	76	42	33
Total in School	224	192	199	199	237	210	209	197	89	101	99	86	45	43	18	16
%	45.7	41.9	58.9	54.7	65.5	64.8	59.7	59.7	61.0	66.4	63.9	58.1	52.3	56.6	42.9	48.5
7-12	239	225	164	197	194	169	172	181	75	80	84	77	41	39	21	22
Total in School	148	130	126	134	156	137	130	129	57	64	63	56	27	30	10	11
%	61.9	57.8	76.8	68.0	80.4	81.1	75.6	71.3	76.0	80.0	75.0	72.7	65.8	76.9	47.6	50.0

*In 1851 the number of black children recorded on the census was only 52 and only six were in school.

Source: Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1861.

places to educate your daughters if you could afford otherwise. For example, the editor of the *Hamilton Spectator*, suggesting that the government should give financial support to the Burlington Ladies Academy, declared that "we hope that the government, which provides amply for the education of youth of the rougher sex, will take into consideration the propriety of assisting to train in a suitable manner, those who contribute so much to the happiness, virtue and welfare of mankind."¹⁵

Recently, R.D. Gidney has argued that in the period prior to the introduction of Ryerson's reform programme, numerous private institutions flourished which catered to the educational wants of most classes of society and only from the middle decades of the nineteenth century did private schooling take on its current meaning — denoting "a conscious (and expensive) rejection of the state system."¹⁶ The proliferation of private schools and academies in Hamilton prior to the centralization of the public school system lends credence to his argument for they ranged from large institutions with extensive boarding facilities to groups of children taught by men and women in their own homes. Unfortunately, few enrollment lists appear to have survive making it difficult to discover who actually attended which school. Nevertheless, lists of students are extant for the prestigious and relatively expensive Burlington Ladies Academy.

This institution was the first in a line of Methodist run institutions offering a "solid and ornamental" education to "young ladies". After its demise in the early fifties, it was replaced by its sister school, the Adelaide Academy which removed from Toronto and the latter was succeeded by the Wesleyan Female College which opened in 1861. These schools were not representative of the majority of private institutions in the city in that they were relatively expensive, had large boarding facilities for out-of-town students and offered broad curricula far beyond that found in the common schools. However, a brief analysis of the social structure of the students of the Burlington Ladies Academy in 1849 and the Wesleyan Female College in 1861 indicates the changing nature of their clientele.¹⁷

In 1849 eighty-four of the 197 girls attending the Burlington Ladies Academy were listed as residents of Hamilton, the remainder mostly coming from the southern area of Upper Canada, some from upstate New York and others from Montreal. Forty-five of the eighty-four girls from

¹⁵ *The Hamilton Spectator and Journal of Commerce*, August 21st. 1847, 3.

¹⁶ R.D. GIDNEY, "Elementary Education in Upper Canada: A Reassessment," *Ontario History*, 65, No. 3, 1973, 169-185.

¹⁷ Lists of students are extant for the Burlington Ladies Academy in 1847 and 1849 and for the Wesleyan Female College from its inception in 1861 to its demise in 1897. They are to be found in the catalogues of the schools, located in the Reference Department of the Hamilton Public Library. The following analysis is based on the linkage of those students from Hamilton to their parents on the Census and Assessment rolls. As the latest list of students for the Burlington Ladies Academy is for 1849 and the Census was not taken until late 1851 and as the only information given about each student was her name, the number who could be positively identified was limited. I am indebted to Marion Royce, Research Officer in the Department of History and Philosophy at O.I.S.E., for background information on the schools.

Hamilton were linked to their parents on the 1851 Census of the city. An important insight into the role of this school in the community can be gleaned from the age range of the pupils, this being determined as their census age minus two years. Although the pupils ranged in age from eight to twenty-three, the vast majority of them, almost 78%, were over twelve years old and fully 44.4% were over sixteen years. Obviously, as adolescent students, their educational experience differed dramatically from other girls in the city. They were the daughters of those citizens who could afford, and deemed it desirable, to keep their girls in school throughout their teenage years.

The most significant feature of the parents' social structure is that certain large groups within the city were conspicuously absent — notably semi-skilled and unskilled labourers, Roman Catholics and the poorer household heads of the city (see Table 9). However, the school was not as exclusive as the age structure of the students initially suggests for the daughters of the above groups were largely absent from all schools in the city. The parents' birthplaces reflected the immigrant nature of the city although those born in England and Canada predominated. Moreover, although Methodists made up the largest single group, in keeping with the advertised non-sectarian nature of the school, the parents came from all major protestant denominations. Occupationally, they were evenly di-

Table 9.—SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS AT THE BURLINGTON LADIES ACADEMY, 1849

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Professional & Proprietor Clerk, etc.</i>	<i>Shopkeeper</i>	<i>Skilled Artisan</i>	<i>Widow</i>		
Total	6	10	15	3		
%	17.6	29.4	44.1	8.9		
<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	
Total	13	3	6	7	5	
%	38.2	8.9	17.7	20.6	14.7	
<i>Religion</i>	<i>Anglican</i>	<i>Presbyterian</i>	<i>Methodist</i>	<i>Baptist</i>	<i>"Protestant"</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total	10	4	11	3	4	
%	29.4	11.8	32.4	8.9	11.8	
<i>Servants</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Two or more</i>			
Total	15	13	6			
%	44.1	38.2	17.6			
<i>Property Ownership*</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Renter</i>	<i>Board</i>			
Total	14	12	2			
%	50.0	42.8	7.2			
<i>Wealth*</i>	<i>0-40</i>	<i>40-60</i>	<i>60-80</i>	<i>80-90</i>	<i>90-100</i>	
Total	1	5	6	6	10	
%	3.6	17.9	21.4	21.4	35.7	
<i>Age of Pupils</i>	<i>7-12</i>	<i>13-16</i>	<i>17+</i>			
Total = 45	10	15	20			
%	22.7	33.3	44.4			

*Only 28 of the parents were linked to the 1852 Assessment.

Source: *Catalogue of Burlington Ladies Academy, 1849*, Census Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1851, Assessment Rolls, Hamilton, 1852.

vided between entrepreneurs (be they agents, merchants or manufacturers) and professionals on the one hand and skilled artisans on the other. As a group the parents were much more likely to have servants and own property than Hamilton's heads of household as a whole. And, not surprisingly, they were more wealthy, almost 36% of them being in the wealthiest ten percent in the city. Nevertheless, twelve of the parents fell in the middle income ranks of the city and eight of these were artisans. It would seem that some of Hamilton's artisans must have sacrificed financially to enable their teenage daughters to attend the most prestigious educational institution in the city as tuition for day pupils in the "common English branches" was 6 £ per quarter or four times the amount at the public common schools.

The Wesleyan Female College, a proprietary institution under the auspices of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, opened in September 1861. It was situated in what had been a large hotel, located in the heart of Hamilton's commercial district, the school's proprietors having bought the building during the depression for less than a quarter of its construction price. It flourished for many years offering tuition in three departments, preparatory, academic and collegiate and awarding, to successful students in the latter department, diplomas of Mistress of Liberal Arts and Mistress of English Literature. Like its predecessor, the Burlington Ladies Academy, it charged for basic tuition and levied extra rates for the "ornamental" subjects and board. Also like the earlier institution it was "free from sectarian bias" although under Methodist control. The Wesleyan Female College also attracted large numbers of boarders, seventy-two of the 136 students in its opening year coming from outside Hamilton, including one from Nova Scotia and another from the Hudson's Bay Territory.

Of the sixty-four students listed as residents of Hamilton in 1861, two were boarders, and forty-three of the remaining sixty-two were linked to thirty-three families in the city. The girls ranged in age from four to sixteen with three under seven years, twenty-one between seven and twelve and the same number between thirteen and sixteen. They were, as a group, significantly younger than those in the Burlington Ladies Academy. Thus, unlike the earlier school, the Wesleyan Female College was in direct competition with the public schools in the city.

The students' parents were not as representative of the household heads of the city as their counterparts in 1851. While their birthplaces still reflected the immigrant character of the community, a much larger proportion of the parents were Methodists, although there were a number of Anglicans and Presbyterians (see Table 10). The parents of the students attending the Wesleyan Female College were also wealthier than their counterparts a decade earlier. A greater proportion of them had servants even though the percentage of households with servants in the city dropped during the decade. Similarly, more of them owned property and fully 62.5% of them (compared to under 36% of the parents of students at the Burlington Ladies Academy) were among the wealthiest ten percent of household heads in the city. The greater wealth of the 1861 parents was

Table 10.—SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS AT THE WESLEYAN FEMALE COLLEGE, 1861

	<i>Professional, Shopkeeper, Proprietor</i>		<i>Skilled Clerk, etc., Artisan</i>		<i>Widow</i>	
<i>Occupation</i>						
Total	15	6	9	3		
%	45.5	18.2	27.3	9.1		
<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	
Total	12	7	4	5	5	
%	36.4	21.2	12.1	15.2	15.2	
<i>Religion</i>	<i>Anglican</i>	<i>Presbyterian</i>	<i>Methodist</i>	<i>Congregational</i>	<i>Other</i>	
Total	5	8	18	1	1	
%	15.2	24.2	54.5	3.0	3.0	
<i>Servants</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Two or More</i>			
Total	13	11	9			
%	39.4	33.3	27.3			
<i>Property*</i>	<i>Ownership</i>					
	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Renter</i>				
Total	18	14				
%	56.3	43.7				
<i>Wealth*</i>	<i>40-60</i>	<i>60-80</i>	<i>80-90</i>	<i>90-100</i>		
Total	2	6	4	20		
%	6.3	18.8	12.5	62.5		
<i>Age of Pupils</i>	<i>Under 7</i>	<i>7-12</i>	<i>13-16</i>			
Total = 45	3	21	21			
%	6.7	46.7	46.7			

*32 of the parents were linked to the 1861 Assessment.

Source: *Catalogue of Wesleyan Female College, 1861*, Census and Assessment Manuscripts, Hamilton, 1861.

reflected in their occupational structure. Twenty-one of the thirty-three parents were in the non-manual categories and fifteen of these were merchants, manufacturers or professionals. The proportion of artisans was considerably less and they only differed from the other parents in that they were less likely to have servants. The majority of them owned property and were among the wealthiest ten per cent in the city. In short, those who sent their daughters to the Wesleyan Female College were drawn from a much more exclusive and wealthy segment of Hamilton society than those whose daughters attended the Burlington Ladies Academy. This latter private institution must certainly have carried with it connotations of wealth and class prejudice in a period when class divisions were becoming increasingly apparent in Hamilton.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The middle decades of the nineteenth century saw a remarkable transformation of female educational opportunity in Ontario. Throughout the fifties and sixties the number and proportion of girls enrolled in school

¹⁸ Michael B. KATZ, *Family and Class in a Canadian City: Mid-Nineteenth Century Hamilton* forthcoming (Harvard University Press: 1975), especially "The Structure of Inequality".

steadily increased so that they approximated those of the boys in 1871. Certainly, their contact with the schools remained limited as average attendance figures remained low, parents dispensed with their daughter's education first in times of crisis and many girls were kept home to mind younger children at certain seasons of the year. But, without doubt, the following lines were less true in 1871 than when they were penned in 1855:

[N]ot a few sisters are depriving themselves of privileges to render possible the education of their brothers. In too many instances are daughters and sisters passing their equally precious years at home amid never ended toils in the nursery, the kitchen and dairy — their mental faculties undeveloped and undisciplined: their opportunities for study few and imperfect...¹⁹

It is important to stress that the influx of girls to the schools coincided with the transformation of public schooling in Ontario spearheaded by Ryerson. Throughout the period the common schools were being welded into a cohesive system of free and non-sectarian schools supervised by a centralized administration. The vast majority of girls who entered the schools enrolled in these public institutions for the number of students at private schools and academies barely increased from 1850 to 1871. Moreover, those private institutions which did survive, or were established, no longer catered to the majority of children. They became more exclusive, providing education for the children of the wealthy and further entrenching the class differential in educational opportunity.

It would appear that the accessibility of free public schools played a significant part in the expansion of female school attendance in Ontario. However, we know little of the effects such exposure to increased schooling had on those girls who did attend, although the values of obedience, conformity and regularity inculcated in the classroom may have been important in shaping the attitudes of female students to their role in society. Certainly, schooling bore little relationship to future occupations outside of the home for girls, because, apart from the traditional jobs in domestic service and dressmaking, teaching provided the only new avenue for employment.²⁰ In Hamilton, most of the girls entering the schools were from middle class backgrounds which probably reflects the congruence of lack of suitable employment opportunities and increased respectability of the reformed public schools. Whatever the reasons for the increase in the proportion of girls in school, the improving sex ratio among students in the fifties and sixties ameliorated one of the two gross inequalities in educational opportunity. The other, class, remained the single most important determinant of school attendance because, although an increasing propor-

¹⁹ From "How Long Shall the Education of the Daughters of Canada be Neglected?" in *The Christian Guardian*, Oct. 31st 1855.

²⁰ For a discussion of the increase in female teachers in the period, see Alison PRENTICE, "The Feminization of Teaching in British North America and Canada, 1845-1875." A paper presented to Canadian Association for American Studies Conference on Women in North America, Ottawa, October 1974. For an analysis of job opportunities for girls in Hamilton in 1851, 1861 and 1871, see Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class," Ch. 4.

tion determinant of school attendance because, although an increasing proportion of both the daughters and sons of the labouring poor attended school, they remained just as far behind the other groups as at the beginning.