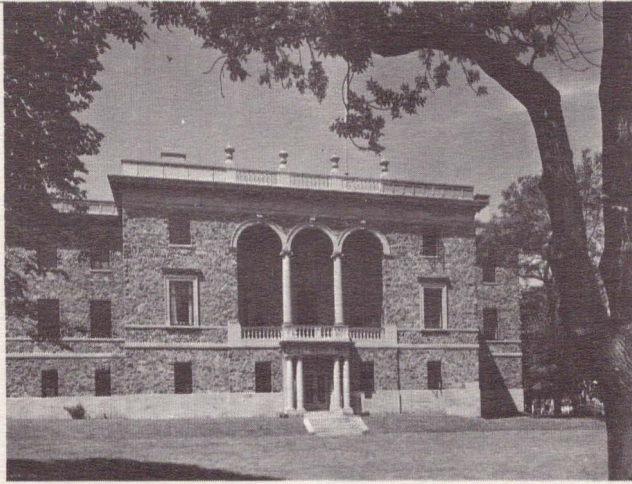


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NO. 21



THE INAUGURATION OF THE FREE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN NOVA SCOTIA

BY

CHARLES BRUCE FERGUSON

PROVINCIAL ARCHIVIST

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HALIFAX, N. S.

1964



Hon. Charles Tupper (1821-1915)
Premier of Nova Scotia, 1864-1867

The Public Archives of Nova Scotia

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When, on May 10, 1864 the Lieutenant-Governor assented to an Act to amend the law relating to education, a system of free schools was inaugurated in Nova Scotia. "All common schools shall be free," according to section 29 of Chapter 58 of the Revised Statutes of that year, "to all the children residing in the section in which they are established."¹ Thenceforth, after trustees were appointed on the last Tuesday in October, the amount required for the salaries of teachers was to be procured from the people by voluntary subscription or assessment, and not by fees per pupil. This free school legislation was the first great public achievement of Dr. Charles Tupper.

EARLY SCHOOLS

The need for free schools had long been felt, but effective action was only now being taken. However, interesting developments in education had occurred prior to this time. Beginnings had been made by the French at La Have and Port Royal before the middle of the seventeenth century and at Louisbourg in the fourth decade of the eighteenth. English pioneer efforts in education, sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, began at Annapolis Royal before 1730 and spread to other parts of the province, particularly after the founding of Halifax. The Board of Trade in London had invited that society to appoint schoolmasters, as well as ministers, not only for Halifax, founded in 1749, but also for any other settlements that might afterwards be formed in the Province. Accepting this challenge, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel performed a useful service in education at a time when newly established communities had few financial resources to devote to it. But schools of this sort did not appeal to Congregationalist New Englanders, several thousands of whom migrated to Nova Scotia in the 1760's. They quickly proceeded to engage teachers of their own choice—itinerating schoolmasters, many of whom were disbanded soldiers, not ideally suited to their new calling, who nevertheless helped meet a clamant need and eked out a tolerable existence with their small fees.

EARLY LEGISLATION

It seemed that the Legislature of the Province, when it first showed an interest in education, desired to preserve the favoured position of the Church of England. The statute of 1766² prescribed the manner in which teachers for grammar schools throughout the Province and for all schools in Halifax County were to be licensed. Licenses were to be secured from the local clergy who were clergymen of the Church of England, or from justices of the peace, who were appointees of the governmental authorities at Halifax. Encouragement was also given to the cause of education in that grants of land were to be used for the support of schools in each township, and boards of trustees were to administer and improve these lands.

Early in the nineteenth century the Legislature recognized the necessity for general education and approved the principle of free schools. It did so in 1808³ in an Act for encouraging the Establishment of Schools throughout the Province. Freeholders in townships or districts of fifty families were empowered to meet annually for the purpose of voting money for the establishment and support of schools. As soon as it was certified that a school-house had been built or provided, a schoolmaster appointed, and money voted, assessed and collected for its support, to the amount of fifty pounds, there should be allowed for the further support of such school the sum of twenty pounds per annum, and a like proportion for any larger sum, from the Treasury of the Province. At schools so to be established scholars were to be taught free from all expense whatever, other than their own books and stationery and their individual proportion of food. But three years of trial disclosed little public approval for this measure. During that time only one township qualified for a bounty from the Provincial Treasury. Clearly direct taxation even for schools was very unpopular in Nova Scotia at that time.

The statute of 1808 was a forerunner of compulsory assessment for the support of schools, but its failure to secure general acceptance prevented it from being the foundation of a system of free schools financed in that manner. Something more palatable had to be devised before any progress whatever could be made. Accordingly the School Act of 1811⁴ offered additional financial encouragement from the Provincial Treasury and provided for raising local revenue by subscription or bequest, as well as by assessment. Districts of thirty families, instead of fifty, were now entitled to receive £25, instead of £20, for each £50 raised locally by subscription or assessment, up to a maximum of £200, as compared with £150 under the previous statute. Whenever any of the schools so to be established were in part provided for by assessment, the scholars were, as under the previous Act, to be taught free from all expense whatever, other than their books

and stationery, and individual portion of fuel. This Act continued a system of administration directed by the Court of General Sessions in each County, with each district having its own trustees.

Eight years later the defects of this measure were evident. It offered encouragement to districts or settlements of thirty families, whereas the rural or smaller districts were excluded. Even for the larger settlements it was not compulsory to establish schools. The poor were still neglected and some townships were drawing more than an equitable share of Provincial aid. An amendment was considered desirable. Passed in 1819,⁵ it provided that before a school could draw its allowance from the Treasury it would be necessary for the Court of General Sessions to certify that a stated number of poor children had been instructed gratis. It also provided that no township could draw more than £100 from the Treasury and that if there were more than four schools in any township the grant should be divided among them equally.

The next year (1820) a committee was appointed to investigate the state of the schools. It reported that 167 schools had drawn £2,000 from the Treasury, but that the spirit of the Act had been generally evaded. No assessment was made; sums were subscribed by individuals who seldom paid but generally commuted their share in board for the schoolmaster or in kind. Only the equivalent of the minimum £50 was raised. The committee concluded that many schools were established in places where the majority ought to have been above seeking public aid for the education of their children. It recommended that aid be restricted to the new and poor settlements. It suggested that the Act be so modified as to require the assent of the Lieutenant-Governor before any school could be entitled to receive the bounty.⁶

In 1820 an amendment to the Act⁷ lessened the amount of aid available from the Provincial Treasury to any school. The sum was reduced from £25 to £15. Another amendment⁸ in the following year required the trustees to forward to the Provincial Secretary a list of scholars, with a report on their attendance, and a certificate relating to the sum of money received from the district and applied in accordance with the Act.

Still the poor were excluded from the benefits of the Provincial grant. On this account the Legislative Council refused to agree to continue the bounties from 1822 to 1824. This made it imperative for the Assembly to formulate a plan of assistance for the poorer children. The result was that in 1824 the sum of £120 was voted for each county or district to be expended for the education of the poor by commissioners appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor.⁹

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Meantime there had been some achievement in secondary education. King's Collegiate School and the Halifax Grammar School survived from the eighteenth century. By the Grammar School Act of 1811¹⁰ encouragement was given to the establishment of Grammar Schools in counties and districts, other than Halifax and Hants. A Provincial allowance of £150 per annum for seven years was made available for each such county or district, on certain conditions, and trustees were empowered to procure sites, accept donations for the erection of buildings, and select eight orphans or children of parents unable to pay for their education to be taught gratis. Three years later this Act was amended¹¹ so that no such grammar schools should be entitled to the Provincial allowance unless the number of male scholars taught therein should be ten at least. In 1818 the Act was continued for another seven years. Between 1811 and 1822 twelve grammar schools were established in the Province.

Between 1812 and 1818 the Provincial grants for both Common and Grammar schools increased from £1500 to £4375. During that period, however, the larger and more prosperous settlements derived more benefit than the poorer and more sparsely populated ones. Taking cognizance of this situation, the Legislature, by amendments to the Common School Act, attempted to equalize the benefits. Despite these efforts, however, the number of schools decreased and the Provincial allowances for the two types of schools declined from £3481 to £1383 between 1819 and 1824. Meantime, strongly opposed to the restrictive policy practised at King's College, Rev. Thomas McCulloch succeeded in establishing Pictou Academy, of which he became the first Principal in 1818.

DEFICIENCIES AND PRESCRIPTIONS

The lamentable state of education in Nova Scotia was disclosed by the report of a joint committee of the Council and the House of Assembly in 1825.¹² Devoting its attention to the primary schools in the Province, this committee presented a condensed view, from the available records, affording an approximation of the situation. It inferred from the statistics of 1824 that (excepting the town and district of Halifax, for which no returns were made) there were 217 English schools, in which the average number of 5514 children were instructed, at an expense of between £8,680 and £11,000 per annum. It also concluded that children to the number, certainly of 4377, but probably to thrice that extent, did not attend any school, either from the lack of buildings or the poverty of their parents. These results demonstrated, the committee declared, "that barely the fourth part of the children of a rapidly increasing population are taught at all; . . ." They

also disclosed "a deplorable disproportion between the demand for instruction and the means for supplying it; and justify the conviction the Committee entertain—that, under the present circumstances of the Province, and while, in its less cultivated parts, the settlers are left, as they now are, to act upon their individual sense of their obligations to afford instruction to their Children, it will be vain to expect any improvement in the actual condition of Education among them—any increase of their common Schools—or the dispersion of that cloud of ignorance which is yearly darkening over their neglected families. It is evident also from the Reports, that, in most of the Settlements, some Families, and in a few places the whole number, are, from various causes, perfectly indifferent to the duty of instructing their offspring, or regardless of its imperious urgency" Consequently, the committee concluded that the present establishment of English schools was altogether defective and totally unequal to the demand for tuition.

There was a deficiency not only in the number of schools but also in the degree and the quality of instruction. "By the pittance which the greater part of the Settlements raised for the remuneration of the Teacher," the committee stated, "none of respectable abilities or character can be induced to accept the office—In some the salary is below the wages of a daily labourer; and hence it is that persons altogether destitute of every qualification for a Schoolmaster have been found in several places entrusted with the charge of the Schools; and that these have derived little or no benefit from their attendance"

Having described the actual state of the common schools of the Province, the joint committee was of opinion that the circumstances warranted the adoption of "another and better system." It declared that additional schools to the number of 210 were indispensable for furnishing the rudiments of education, that the fair average price of schooling for each child might be estimated at forty shillings, and that a teacher should receive enough salary to elevate the status of the profession.

This committee prescribed the qualities which the proposed system ought to possess and the conditions under which it should go into operation. "It ought," the committee reported, "to be general through the Province; in order that none, even in the remotest and poorest settlement, may be without some provision for the instruction of their youth. It should be compulsory, in every place; because too many are found insensible of the just value of education, and will use no exertion for having their children taught; nor can comprehend how knowledge operates upon and elevates the character and condition of the poorer classes. It should not be gratuitous, because what costs nothing is generally valued at nothing. It

cannot be supported from the Provincial Treasury; because the expense, at the most moderate computation would surpass the disposable income of the Colony. It ought to be maintained by the People themselves; because they, and they alone, are the parties upon whom rests the obligation to provide Education for their offspring, equally with that of their support. Its funds should be raised by a general and equal assessment on the whole population, according to each man's ability; because thus, and thus only, can a sufficient amount be raised to defray the expense of so extensive yet indispensable [sic] an Establishment,—while the charges to each individual is brought within his means, and reduced far below what those who now support schools, are obliged to contribute. Lastly the plan should secure the respectability and talents—and consequent usefulness—of the Teachers, by the adequateness and permanency of their Salary.”

Conformably to these general principles this committee made a number of specific recommendations. One was that each township and settlement should be subdivided, under the direction of the Court of General Sessions, into convenient school districts. Another was that an adequate school-house should be provided in each school district. A third was that where a sufficient number of families was not found in any one district permission might be granted to them to combine for the purpose of maintaining a school. Another was that all children be taught free except for fuel. Still another was that teachers should be licensed and should be entitled to receive from the district or combined districts not less than £60 per annum. It was recommended that the salary of the teacher, together with the expense of the building and maintaining the school-house, should be levied upon every inhabitant of the school district or combined districts by an equal rate of assessment upon each person, provided always that if the inhabitants raised the required amount voluntarily they should be free from such assessment. It was proposed that trustees for these district schools should be appointed and chosen by the people and that there should be a board of three commissioners, appointed by the Governor, for inspection and superintendence of the schools in each county and district.

The joint committee of 1825 recommended compulsory free, universal education based, if necessary, on assessment. Its report prompted a heated debate in the House of Assembly. Some members regarded direct taxation and compulsion as dangerous. If a measure of this sort were passed, it was stated, the country would be in a state of rebellion. New duties on such articles as rum and wine, it was suggested, would be preferable to direct taxation. On the other hand the supporters of the report defended it on the grounds of equity and justice, as being the only logical way to have a general system of education established. The expense, they said, would not be too burdensome since £11,000 of the required £26,000 was already being raised

annually. But when it was moved and seconded that the report be agreed to by the House, the motion was defeated 24 to 12, after which the report was ordered to be published in *The Royal Gazette*.¹³ Thus it was that in 1825 a joint committee of the two houses of the Legislature recognized the need for compulsory education based, if necessary, on direct taxation, but the majority of the members of the Legislative Assembly was unwilling to acknowledge and act upon this principle at that time.

Later in the session the House of Assembly, in an effort to make provision for common schools, agreed to appropriate £150 for each county and district in the Province to be applied only to the education of poor children, and £100 each to the Acadian, National and Catholic Schools in Halifax for their support. But the Council, unwilling to act until a satisfactory system had been approved, rejected this resolution, and consequently no financial aid was provided from the Provincial Treasury for schools at that session.

The following year the House of Assembly took up the matter again. This time, by a vote of 15 to 11, it resolved that the principles contained in the report of the joint committee of 1825 be generally adopted, "subject to such modification in the details of the system . . . , as will render its adoption in each and every School District altogether dependent upon the concurrence of the majority of two thirds of the rateable inhabitants. . . ."¹⁴ This action, helpful as it might be to the continuance of schools, was, in the state of public opinion at the time, hardly favourable to the adoption of a free school system.

THE STATUTE OF 1826

Provincial allowances for the support of schools were, however, provided by statute in 1826¹⁵. According to this Act, Justices of the Peace could order school districts to be defined and a school to be established in any such district at the request of two-thirds of the number of rateable inhabitants in it. Three trustees were to be nominated by the inhabitants in each school district, while in each county there was to be a Board of Commissioners, comprising three persons, named and commissioned by the Lieutenant-Governor, who were to superintend and inspect the schools. Children were to be taught without charge, except for fuel. Teachers were to be licensed, and each teacher was to receive a salary not less than £50 currency per year, "or such lesser amount as the Commissioners shall establish for each School District, upon consideration of the ability and situation of the Inhabitants." School districts might be united whenever the number of inhabitants in each was insufficient to maintain a school. The expense of building and maintaining the school-house, paying the salary of the teacher and looking after other necessary charges was to be covered

by a levy or assessment upon the inhabitants, provided that if the inhabitants voluntarily raised and paid that amount they would be exempt from the school rate. So that the education of the children of the poor might be duly provided for the Legislature made available £2500, to be divided among the eleven counties and districts, each to receive no more than £180 except Cape Breton Island (then one county) which was to receive a sum not exceeding £220, and the Town of Halifax, which might receive £300.

If the foundation for a system of free, general education were to be effectively established, however, public interest and public action were required. These were too weak to be very efficacious. At the end of 1826 returns were received from only five Boards of Commissioners. These disclosed that 158 school districts had been laid off in their counties and that only 20 schools were in operation in them.¹⁶ In the other counties attempts to establish schools had been unsuccessful or the Commissioners had been negligent in making returns. Actually the Act encountered apathy or hostility in some areas. Alexander Stewart, a member of the Legislative Assembly, made the following comment: "In the County of Cumberland in which under the late Act, I have been appointed Commissioner, not one school has been erected under it, not one voice was raised in its favor, but the outcry against it was loud and general."¹⁷ T. C. Haliburton, another member of the House, declared, early in 1827, that "assessment is impracticable, opposite to the feelings of the people, and ill-suited to the state of the country."¹⁸

Disappointed by the meagre results, the Lieutenant-Governor was not certain how much of the indifference was the result of dislike of the principle of assessment or how much it was owing to a lack of information concerning the main principles of the Act. He urged the Commissioners to acquaint the ratepayers with the details, particularly with those relating to the Provincial allowances. It seems clear, however, that the public was not generally favourable to assessment and not ready to assume the obligations required to sustain a proper system of education. By the end of 1827 only seven Boards of Commissioners had reported, only 44 schools were in operation, according to these reports, and nearly all the schools maintained that year were supported by subscription rather than by assessment.¹⁹

ADDITIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

By an Act for aiding and assisting Common Schools throughout the Province, additional encouragement was provided in 1828.²⁰ This raised the amount of the Provincial Allowance from £2500 to £4000 and specified the sums available for each county or district. Each poor school district could receive £50 under this statute and the remainder of the Provincial aid

for the county or district was to be distributed by the Board of Commissioners, provided that no school of 30 scholars or more would receive more than £20, and provided that there should be taught in every such school as should receive any share of this money at least as many poor scholars free of expense either in whole or in part, as the Commissioner should direct. When the inhabitants of a school district were able to maintain and keep a school without any participation in the Provincial aid, no sum from the Provincial grant was to be given to it, unless as an allowance for the teaching of poor children, and not more than 20 shillings annually for each poor child or more than £10 in all. No school with thirty or more scholars was to receive aid unless the teacher actually received £40 per annum, exclusive of his boarding, washing and lodging. Nor should any school with fewer than thirty and more than fifteen scholars receive any share of the grant unless the inhabitants had actually raised for the use of the school, either by subscription or assessment, the sum of £25 per annum. Uniformity in proceedings was to be ensured through instructions from the Governor-in-Council to Commissioners, Trustees and Teachers.

This Act was followed by some improvement. By the end of 1828, 204 schools were in operation, with an enrolment of 6639 pupils, of whom 1584 were taught gratis.²¹ Additional schools were established in 1829 and the attendance almost doubled.

THE STATUTE OF 1832

Encouragement to schools was continued by a statute of 1832.²² The Provincial grant was still to be £4000, but the sum of £70 was now to be available to the inhabitants of any district as might otherwise be unable to keep a school with at least fifteen scholars. Additional allowances were also provided for combined Grammar and Common Schools—£25 or £35, according to the number of scholars instructed in the higher branches of education. The minimum salary for teaching at least eight advanced students was set at £100; for fifteen students or more it was to be £120.

Further progress was now made. In 1833, five academies, three Halifax schools, 23 combined schools, and 414 common schools received allowances from the Provincial Treasury. The total number of scholars was 13,161, of whom 1250 were taught gratis. The Province spent over £4157, while the people raised and expended over £14,000.²³

Although the situation had improved, it was still far from ideal and much remained to be done. Until compulsory assessment was invoked there would be many weaknesses in the system.

THE POSSIBILITY OF ASSESSMENT

Ever since 1825, when the joint committee of both houses of the Legislature had recommended assessment for the maintenance of schools, there had been some advocacy of that means of support. But the majority of the legislators was convinced that the public was not ready for it. In 1836 a teacher at Musquodoboit contended that the best method of supporting schools was by assessment,²⁴ and the inhabitants of Middle Musquodoboit urged the House of Assembly to impose an educational tax on means and property.²⁵ The committee on schools in the House of Assembly was of opinion that such a public expression of these sentiments could not fail to be regarded as "the dawning of a better and more liberal tone of thinking, which must extend and propagate among all classes, when the superior advantages of this plan are contrasted with the dubious and uncertain means which have heretofore been adopted for the support of common education; and a hope is entertained that, during the next two years, the liberal minded . . . will exert themselves to place their Schools on such a footing . . ."²⁶ Consequently the committee of the House not only recommended the continuance of the Act of 1832 for two more years, "not because they entirely approve of the principle on which it is constructed, but because they reckon that the Province is not yet ripe to assume the burden of maintaining a system of Elementary Education, by an equitable assessment on the population, according to their ability," but in order to facilitate that end it recommended a modification in the Act so that assessment might be adopted by a majority rather than by two-thirds of the ratepayers. After analyzing the systems of assessment in Scotland and in the United States, several members of the committee were of opinion that something approaching to the Scottish system should be grafted on the present system in Nova Scotia, so that a feeling of security would be possible for the teacher and for the parents.

The Act of 1836²⁷ not only continued but amended the Act for the Encouragement of Schools. The amendment made possible the adoption of assessment by a majority instead of two-thirds of the ratepayers in any school district. It also gave the Commissioners authority to use a portion of the £70 placed at their disposal for the assistance of poor districts in establishing schools for coloured people, even if a common school may have already been established in the district.

During the ensuing two years the number of schools increased only slightly, but the number of pupils reached 20,000. This was an increase of over 4,000 since 1835 when the number had been 15,292.²⁸

Again in 1838 a committee of House, of which Joseph Howe was chair-

man, discussed the propriety of introducing the principle of compulsory assessment and a uniform system for the instruction of the children of the whole population. "In favor of that principle and of its immediate application to Nova Scotia," it declared, "many Members of the Committee entertain a very strong opinion, and others, while they admit its value, are only deterred from recommending such application, by doubts as to whether the Country is sufficiently advanced to justify the experiment."²⁹ It stated that the experience of Scotland, of the New England States, of Prussia and of many of the smaller states of Germany furnished evidence of the most decided and encouraging character to sanction the principle of assessment. But it pointed out certain differences between the position of Nova Scotia and the circumstances of these countries. The parochial schools of Scotland were fostered and sustained by the pastors of a national religion, whereas the population of Nova Scotia was divided into "numerous denominations of Christians." The first settlers of New England had been educated men, whereas a large proportion of the population of Nova Scotia, "from their very ignorance are incapable of appreciating the value of Education, and cannot be relied on to sanction and enforce compulsory provision for its extension." To the despotic power of the sovereign of Prussia must in great measure be ascribed the success of that measure in that country, but "A free people will not consent to be benefitted without the concurrence of a vast majority of their numbers, and a people whose whole revenues are raised by duties upon imports, must have their feelings deeply interested, and be firmly convinced of the necessity for direct taxation—even for an object of the highest importance—or else they will resist and defeat a measure, however wisely and accurately framed."

Having expressed these views, the committee frankly explained the difficulties confronting it and left it to a majority of the House to decide either for or against assessment for the ensuing year. It estimated the population to be 180,000 and assumed that the children of school-going age amounted to 26,000, to educate all of whom would require 886 schools, for which such a considerable amount of money would be required, "that public opinion should be fully prepared for its imposition before such a law was passed." "Should it be determined to continue the present law," it added, "the Committee recommend that an additional £1000 be added to the amount now granted under it—that a new and more equitable distribution of the whole sum be made, and that such improvements be carried out in the details as will make it more efficient, among these the Committee recommend the introduction of itinerating Schoolmasters in scattered Settlements; and the admission of Female Teachers, who are often the most valuable that can be obtained, to some participation in the benefits of the law."

Compulsory assessment was not adopted in 1838, but the previous Act, so amended as to increase the Provincial allowance to £5,000, to provide for itinerating schools and to bring female teachers under it, was continued.³⁰ The next year, in accordance with the recommendation of the committee on education, the Act was amended so that the allowance to combined Common and Grammar Schools might, at the discretion of the Commissioners, be applied to Common Schools or to one school.³¹

Between 1838 and 1841 some improvement was made in the state of education in the Province, but many were still deprived of educational advantages. In 1839 there were 20,189 pupils attending school, for whose schooling £13,470 was raised locally by subscription.³² In 1841 there were 22,622 pupils in the Common Schools and Combined Schools of the Province, 1991 of whom were taught free of charge, with £19,311/1/0 raised locally and £7,254/13/5 granted from the Provincial Treasury.³³ In 1839 the cost of educating each child was 19s.9d., whereas in 1841 it amounted to £1/3/6.

It was recognized by many that public money for schools should be distributed more equitably and that the children of the poor should be placed on an equal footing with the children of the rich. The Lieutenant-Governor, in the Speech from the Throne in 1841 used these words: "In recommending to your regard a subject of such momentous interest, I consider it my duty not to withhold the expression of my belief, that any Legislative Act in reference to it, to be satisfactory in its operation, must be based on the principle of general assessment, . . ."³⁴

HOWE'S SPEECH OF 1841

Jospeh Howe, then Speaker of the House, agreed with this statement. Aware that the subject was likely to be raised in the House, he seized the opportunity while the House was in committee to deliver an eloquent speech in favour of common schools supported by assessment. This, he declared, was the only principle which could lead to a sound system. The question was whether the people should be universally educated or one-third be allowed to remain in lamentable ignorance. "Under the old system, or that proposed [to continue the School Acts]," he stated, "the entire population cannot be educated; nothing but assessment will be effectual." He dealt with some of the objections to assessment, reminding his hearers that he had been on the committee of education for four years and that when he had been on it for the first time the committee had concluded that the country was not prepared for the principle of assessment. But one difficulty which existed then—the state of conflict between the Assembly and the Executive—had since been removed. Another objection which pressed

on many minds was the unpopularity of direct taxation. "But," he added, "for the sacred purposes of education, for founding a Provincial character, for the endowment of common schools for the whole population, no hesitation need be felt at coming to direct taxation. . . . Petitions have been presented against assessment and a large portion of the people may be opposed to the principle; but if the Legislature devises and enacts a good measure, clamours will subside, and ultimately the Act will be hailed with thanks and praise from one end of the Province to the other. . . ." ³⁵

But neither eloquence nor the possibility of future praise for present action was enough. Even W. A. Henry's resolution for the principle of assessment to a limited extent, that a sum equal to that annually granted by the Legislature for common schools should be raised locally by assessment, was defeated 33-12. ³⁶ Those opposed to complete or partial assessment considered such a scheme obnoxious and contrary to the free will of the people. They declared that some settlements were too poor to pay even a small share, that it would be unjust to enforce it since two-thirds of the people were averse to the principle, and that it would be more advantageous to appoint a Superintendent of Schools to foster improvement and encourage the building of new schools.

THE STATUTE OF 1841 AND A CENTRAL BOARD

Compulsory assessment was again rejected, but the Act of 1841 ³⁷ provided for improvements. The Act increased the Provincial appropriation from £5000 to £6000. Any school, wherein ordinary instruction might be in French, Gaelic or German, was also to be entitled to a portion of the public money. A Central Board of Education was to be established for the purpose of making rules and regulations for the guidance of the Boards of Commissioners, so that greater uniformity might be promoted. Prior to this time there were eight academies in the Province, several of which were denominational in character. The new Act authorized grants to academies. This effort to promote academies was not as fruitful as anticipated and in 1850 grants to academies were discontinued, with the exception of one in Colchester County. Assistance to grammar schools was, however, continued.

The Central Board of Education, comprising Hon. J. W. Johnston, Hon. Joseph Howe, Hon. Michael Tobin, Jr., Beamish Murdoch and Dr. Charles Cogswell, was formed on April 15, 1841. ³⁸ When it prepared its first annual report on February 4, 1842, it commented on the Act of 1841: "The Central Board have every reason to believe that the great liberality evinced in the grants for Schools and Academies in the Act of 1841, and the care

which has been exercised by the Government in the appointment of the present Boards of Commissioners and Trustees of Academies, have in general given a new and favourable impulse to the Education of the Province, which if followed up for a few years by the continuance of Legislative favor, and the attention of the Executive, cannot fail to improve materially the condition of all the Schools in Nova-Scotia, and to influence for good the moral and intellectual character of the rising generation."³⁹ The Act of 1841 was also regarded with a measure of satisfaction by the committee on education in the House of Assembly. It "seems to have been well devised," this committee stated, "and ought not be tampered with upon any theoretic or slight expectation of improvement."⁴⁰

During the next two years there was such an increase in the number of common schools that the Central Board of Education regarded it as a clear indication of a steadily advancing interest in the minds of the people in favour of general education. There were 624 common schools in 1841; 789 in 1842, and 878 in 1843. The number of scholars in the common schools in 1841 was 20,734, of whom 1822 were taught free; in 1843 the number was 26,778, of whom 2514 were taught free. The total enrolment in common schools, combined schools, academies and colleges in 1841 was 29,382, with £9,030 expended from the Provincial Treasury and £20,993 raised locally by subscriptions and fees. For 1843 the corresponding figures were 30,658, £9,201 and £23,053.⁴¹

NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT

Notwithstanding this increasing interest, however, the educational requirements of the Province were not being satisfactorily met. The situation on the Eastern Shore, between Halifax and Canso, was described as deplorable, with few schools and with many men, women and children unable to read or write. In every section of the country there was need for improvement in the poor or remote settlements. The Central Board of Education reported as follows in 1845: "The spread of Education may be considered almost universal in the rural districts. There being above 30,000 of the youth of the Country actually receiving instruction at the different Schools; being nearly one-seventh of the whole population; a proportion that in a young country where the inhabitants are scattered over a large surface can rarely be exceeded under any system of education that could be adopted."⁴² But it added that much of the education so bestowed was conducted on an inferior system, by teachers not trained or habituated to their calling, and slenderly recompensed for their exertions. The press was at times critical: "no one in the Legislature," the editor of *The Acadian Recorder* stated, "seems to have sufficient hardihood or patriotism . . . to propound any scheme of Common School Education. . . ."⁴³ The legislators

still shrank from assessment and the system of education still had its deficiencies.

THE STATUTE OF 1845

A new Act was passed in 1845.⁴⁴ It retained the principal features of former Acts and added a few new ones. The Provincial grant was increased from £6,000 to £11,170. Out of the money granted to counties or districts, the Commissioners might appropriate a portion for the support of schools in poor or thinly peopled settlements and for people of colour and for the education of Indians. As was the case previously, no school was to receive aid unless a school-house had actually been provided. By 1847 it was evident that the provisions of this Act were being imperfectly carried into effect, and the committee on education in the House of Assembly recommended the appointment of a Superintendent of Education with a view to improving the situation.

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

During the election of 1847 the Reformers advocated common school education for every child in Nova Scotia, and in the first session thereafter the Reform administration heard the committee on education urge the establishment of a Provincial Normal School and the appointment of a Superintendent of Education. But the Reformers seemed too busy with other matters to make major changes in education one of the first fruits of responsible government. Only one minor amendment was made in 1848⁴⁵—that of permitting voluntary assessment for the purchase of land on which to erect a school-house, or for building, repairing or maintaining school-houses.

The administration continued to mark time in education in 1849. In that year, Joseph Howe surveyed the situation. He declared that education was the matter, above all others, pre-eminently demanding the consideration and the united action of the Government. The time, however, was not yet. "But unfortunately," he stated, "at the present moment it cannot be wisely dealt with by any party or set of men that can aspire to conduct an administration. The passions, the prejudices of the past, have not yet subsided, and union of sentiment, in a population so diversified as ours by contrariety of religious opinion, is not easy of attainment. . . ."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there was some common ground. All were agreed that the common schools should be maintained. All were agreed that the people should be left to elect their own trustees. All were equally anxious to elevate the status of the teachers. Howe himself looked upon the appointment of a Superintendent of Education as the next step.



J. W. Dawson, 1820-1899
Superintendent of Education, 1850-1853



Rev. Alexander Forrester, D.D., (1805-1869)
Superintendent of Education 1855-1864

A SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

That step was taken in 1850 and J. W. Dawson was appointed Superintendent of Education. Otherwise, however, the School Act of that year was mainly an adaptation of the previous one. Minor alterations included the provision of £500 annually for libraries and the allotment of £600 annually for the purchase of books, maps, etc. No increase was made in the Provincial allowance. £1700 was authorized for grammar schools only, and the City of Halifax was set apart as a separate district, with an allocation of £700 for its educational needs, in place of the former individual sectarian grants.⁴⁷

Dawson soon realized that common school education in Nova Scotia was "far below the wants of the people and the demands of the age in which they live."⁴⁸ Only about one-half of the number of children were at any one time at school. Very few school-houses were adequate. Most teachers lacked training. Two-thirds of their number had an average salary of only £36. To alleviate the situation Dawson advocated free schools supported by compulsory assessment, in the ratio of £1 from the district for every £1 contributed by the Legislature, and a Normal School. He also recommended the appointment of Inspectors.

His proposal to establish a Normal School was the only feature of his plan to be tested in the House in 1851. It was defeated by a small majority, but Dawson continued his missionary efforts. Local Teachers' Associations were formed; Teachers' Institutes were organized; the need for a Normal School and for compulsory assessment was discussed. Actually, assessment was adopted in a few places such as Baddeck, Coxheath, and two districts in the vicinity of Musquodoboit.⁴⁹ The press warmly supported Dawson in his campaign. In his effort to make a compulsory assessment more palatable, Dawson applied a coat of sugar. He suggested that the Province contribute one-third of the support to schools, that the County contribute one-third by assessment because the wealthiest parts should be interested in the welfare of the poorer ones, and that the District contribute one-third, either by assessment or by subscription, so that it might feel a direct interest in its own school.⁵⁰

Despite Dawson's strenuous efforts little progress was made and the Legislature demurred at taking action in line with his proposals. The cause, some would say, was sacrificed at the shrine of party. Another sentiment was expressed by a farmer in a letter to the press: "I wish your correspondent on Education would continue his letters and try to galvanize those sleepy devils of the Legislature into something like action."⁵¹ Some

of the legislators were ready to pay lip-service, but the majority was not yet prepared to act.

In his last report, in 1853, Dawson expressed his disappointment that the proposals in his draft of a bill for a new school law had not all been adopted. "It was with much regret," he wrote, "that I found that the subject of education could not be satisfactorily disposed of in the past session, and that feeling has been deepened by what I have since learned of the action of the legislatures of other colonies. The law of Upper Canada was taken as a model in the proposals made last winter. The Act of 1851 has given to Lower Canada all the improvements contemplated in our late school bill. New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have also in the past winter advanced beyond our present law in making provision for inspection, training schools and assessment. These facts, so hopeful in their promise of colonial progress, but so humiliating to us as a province, shew that the measures which I had the honor to recommend last year were not eutopian or premature, but on the contrary absolutely necessary to enable us to keep pace with the progress of improvement. Lower ground could not have been taken without imputing to the legislature an unworthy pusillanimity, or to the people whom they represent a degree of backwardness not found in other colonies."⁵²

The state of education was still far from satisfactory. There was little change in the support of schools. The number of pupils had increased very slightly, and there was still a melancholy disparity between the average attendance and the average number of children per district. Many of the schools were of a notoriously inefficient character. The average salary of teachers was about £43. Nevertheless the majority of the committee on education in the House of Assembly was not prepared to recommend the founding and endowing of a normal school at present, "being reluctant to burthen the treasury with such an institution, until the educational fund is recruited by assessment."⁵³ But this committee did recommend that the schools of the Province be visited and inspected by persons competent to explain the working of the assessment principle, so that public opinion might be so moulded as "to make the adoption of an improved system of education by the legislature, at an early period, a comparatively easy task." Action to this end was taken.

A NORMAL SCHOOL

A Normal School for the training of teachers was authorized by statute in 1854,⁵⁴ more than a decade before the educational fund was recruited by assessment. The Normal School, located at Truro, first opened its doors to teachers-in-training on November 14, 1855. Earlier that year

Rev. Dr. Alexander Forrester, who had been appointed the first Principal of the Normal School in 1854, also became Superintendent of Education. The establishment of an institution for the training of teachers was a significant milestone. In the first three years of its existence it granted certificates to over 200 graduates, the majority of whom remained in the Province. To make the work of the Normal School more effective and more practical, model Schools, comprising primary, intermediate, secondary, and industrial departments were instituted in 1856. These were schools in which prospective teachers could practise under the guidance of "model" teachers. The more difficult objective of adequate remuneration for teachers was still to be attained.

THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION

In his educational report for 1857, Dr. Forrester gave a succinct account of conditions.⁵⁵ He pointed out that the boundaries of many school sections were inaccurately delineated and that the lack of precise limits caused confusion and irregularity. To remedy such defects he suggested that the minimum for any section be three miles square, containing fifty or sixty children, with a school-house near the centre. If there were over 75 and fewer than 150 children, two teachers, he thought, should be provided, one for primary, the other for more advanced subjects. Legislative grants for teachers of common and grammar schools amounted to £13,379/16/4½, while the sum raised locally was £32,055/11/1½, making £45,435/7/6 in all, an increase of nearly £6,500 over the previous year. The average yearly salary for teachers was £45, an increase of about £9 during the last five or six years. He strongly advocated direct assessment as the best method of providing for the support of education. It was gratifying to note signs of improvement in school accommodation and furniture, but he declared that there was abundant room for further betterment. There were 976 school-houses, only about 600 of which were comfortable, while 171 were described as bad and 186, chiefly in Cape Breton Island, were log school-houses. Although 38,187 children received instruction, this number represented only one out of seven of the whole population, whereas in New England the ratio was one to three or four.

SECTARIAN OR NON-SECTARIAN EDUCATION

One factor complicating the vexed problem of education in Nova Scotia was the question as to whether it should be sectarian or secular. The obvious deficiencies of the common schools enabled some persons to envisage better results from the sectarian institutions of higher education and to urge that denominational schools were what was needed. Others desired not only to replace those sectarian colleges by one strong Provincial Uni-

versity but also to establish an efficient uniform common school system as well. They had no desire that the divisive effects of narrow-minded denominationalism, with its sectarian segregation as well as sectarian emulation, should lay its heavy imprint upon Nova Scotia. It was illogical to them to say that the absence of sect in schools meant godless schools. The real break between Howe and Johnston, members of the coalition ministry of 1840-1843, occurred when these two men differed over certain aspects of this question. But Provincial aid to the colleges was continued, notwithstanding the arguments of those who pointed out that the sum spent on colleges and academies would maintain 264 schools, in which 7920 children might receive an education.⁵⁶

Great hopes for a change were held when responsible government was inaugurated in 1848. But the majority of the Reformers was small and the administration acquiesced in permitting the denominational principle to continue. The Legislature did, however, show its reluctance to expand it, by refusing to grant aid to a Roman Catholic school in the North End of the City of Halifax in 1849.⁵⁷

While the Reformers remained in office from 1848 to 1857, the administration, with its small majority, was confronted by problems relating to suffrage, railways and other matters, yet the controversy over sectarianism continued without abatement. It was urged that the Legislature, without encroaching on the rights of conscience, should "endeavor to moderate Sectarian opposition, and if possible, give it a useful direction, by withholding Support from all Sectarian Institutions, whatever, which are in all instances calculated to bias the minds of the young—to foster mutual jealousies and dislikes, and may lead to combinations which are dangerous to both Civil and Religious Liberty."⁵⁸ It was held by many to be wrong in principle to appropriate public funds for the dissemination of religious tenets, since the common schools were neither nurseries for one religious creed nor another, but public institutions designed to bring the rudiments of secular education within easy reach of every youth in the country. If parents wished their children to be taught denominational principles, it was asserted, let them provide for it, not as a part of the instruction provided by the state, nor in the hours appointed for that purpose, nor at public expense. On the other hand, it was contended by some that it was not feasible to commit youth to schools where religious doctrine was forbidden to be taught.⁵⁹

AN UNPASSED BILL

In 1856 an attempt was made to improve the general educational condition of the Province. This was announced in the Speech from the Throne

on January 31st. It took the form of a bill based on compulsory taxation which was introduced by William Young, Attorney-General, and read a first time on March 1st.⁶⁰ Later in the month Young moved a resolution in favor of assessment. This was passed by the House by a vote of 37 to 9, and the bill was referred to a select committee. It was soon evident that Roman Catholic members and other Roman Catholics would refuse to give their approval unless a clause providing for separate schools was incorporated in the measure. Such was the pressure exerted that Young yielded the point and amended the bill.⁶¹ But he soon realized that beneath the surface there was a smoldering fire of discontent and opposition. He decided to postpone action and to await the expression of public opinion. He recommended that one thousand copies of the bill be printed and distributed throughout the Province. This recommendation was approved and the bill was deferred to the next session. When the Lieutenant-Governor prorogued the Assembly, he used these words:

. . . That a bill on the subject of education, introduced, in accordance with an announcement in my opening speech, has not resulted in matured legislation; is to my mind, considering the vast difficulties which surround the question, a matter of regret rather than of surprise, or of disappointment.

The discussion of the assessment principle, its adoption for the first time in our legislative history, and the publication of the bill, which you have wisely ordered, will doubtless elicit an expression of public opinion that will facilitate your renewed deliberations on this important subject, if shall be thought desirable, in a future session.⁶²

Howe and Tupper were both opposed to this particular bill. "An attempt was made . . .", Howe wrote, "to destroy the Common School system of this country—to sow religious dissension—to starve poor schoolmasters, already poorly paid—to break up and remove the common platforms upon which Protestants and Catholics had stood in harmony and good fellowship for years."⁶³ "The common schools of this Province do require improvement," Tupper declared, "but it was not to be accomplished by that bill, and it would have been suicidal to any Government to pass it."⁶⁴

The deferred bill was not taken up in 1857, and after the Reform Government was defeated that year, the Conservatives resorted to the only feasible action—an increase in the Provincial grant for schools.⁶⁵ It was raised from £11,000 to £14,890 in 1857. A year later, however, the amount was reduced to £11,000⁶⁶ and it remained at that figure until 1864. The total raised locally by voluntary subscription for schools was about

\$130,000 in 1861 and also in 1862.⁶⁷ The aggregate of Provincial allowance and local revenue for schools in the latter year was therefore approximately \$200,000. The condition of education was far from satisfactory, but religious and constitutional controversies seemed to be enough to prevent the Conservative Government and the Liberal administration that followed it in 1860 from taking up the matter seriously.

THE CENSUS OF 1861

The deplorable state of affairs was starkly revealed by the census of 1861. 36,430 children between the ages of five and fifteen were unable to read, and above the age of fifteen there were 45,039, making a total of 81,469 unable to read. Unable to write were 49,433 between the ages of five and fifteen, and 65,444 above fifteen, a total of 114,877. These revelations were shocking and shameful. Clearly something needed to be done. Moreover, in 1863, there were 84,965 children between the ages of five and fifteen, but only 33,652 of them were attending school. Thus, 51,313, about five-eighths of the total, were without the benefit of education.

DAWSON AND FORRESTER

Between 1850 and 1864 Dawson and Forrester had striven to awaken the Province to a sense of its responsibilities in the field of education. They had advocated better schools, training for teachers, a system of grading, uniformity of textbooks, and compulsory assessment for the adequate support of schools. Some of these goals were achieved during those years, but the basic element—adequate support by means of assessment—was still lacking, with opprobrious results in the ignorance of a large proportion of the population.

A draft bill for a modified assessment plan, prepared by Dr. Forrester, was presented to the Legislature in 1861⁶⁸ but it failed to command support. A year later Howe proposed that a law should be passed for raising by assessment an amount equal to one-third of the Provincial grant at that time, but he was not prepared to make it a governmental measure and the leaders of the opposition refused to give their support. "Mr. Speaker," Joseph Howe declared in 1863, "among the few things, which, now that my retirement from the Government approaches, I deeply deplore, is the fact that I have been unable to carry out my own views respecting the education of this country. Twice, sir . . . have I asked this Legislature to assume a bold attitude on that subject . . . Twice, sir, have I exerted the full powers of my intellect—the full force of my influence . . . to induce its members with genuine magnanimity to risk probable temporary unpopularity and twice have I failed."⁶⁹

TUPPER'S OPPORTUNITY

The election of 1863, resulting in a sweeping victory for the Conservatives, gave Charles Tupper his opportunity. He seized it when the House next met in 1864 to initiate a signal change in the educational system.

On several occasions in previous sessions Tupper had shown interest in the topic of education. On the last day of February 1856 he had expressed surprise at hearing from the leader of the Government that there was no great question to discuss, for the Speech from the Throne had clearly stated an effort would be made to improve the general educational condition of the Province and no bill had yet been presented. "What has become of the Educational Bill," he asked, "which, in the Speech from the vice regal throne at the opening of the Session, we were informed was to be submitted? a Bill which I have reason to suppose, was to be based on the principle of assessment? Where is this measure, I ask? Is it not important that we should maturely consider the expediency and propriety of adopting that principle?"⁷⁰ He referred to the matter again in 1857 and he called to the attention of the House in 1862 the important facts disclosed by the census.⁷¹ At that time he took the opportunity of declaring that he considered the subject of education of such importance and interest to all classes that members of all parties should unite with the common purpose of improving it.

His party having won a decisive victory in the election of 1863, Tupper's heart, it is recalled, "was set on being able to report when his four years' term of responsibility should end, the accomplishment of two primary vital objects—a system of free non-sectarian public schools for Nova Scotia, and a Corporate Union of the Maritime Provinces."⁷² "Dr. Tupper, forceful and ambitious," J. W. Longley stated, "no doubt wished to do something unusual to mark the administration."⁷³ His Free School Act was to be the first sample of that constructive statesmanship that characterized his career.

Before Tupper brought in his bill in 1864 the press commented on the educational wants of Nova Scotia and the means by which those wants might be met. "It is acknowledged on all hands," one editor declared, "that the present Common School system in this Province is only a make-shift, which has been continued year after year for the simple reason that no Government was strong enough or at least cared to endanger its position by endeavoring to carry out a sound and satisfactory measure of Common School education. The time has now come when the experiment might be tried, without much peril to the existing Administration; and should they be successful in engrafting upon the country even the elements of

sound legislation in this direction, they will confer upon it a boon greater and richer than that of their predecessors”⁷⁴ No half-way measures would answer the educational requirements of the country—so stated another editor. “We must have a comprehensive scheme which will force the people to provide by means of *fair and equitable taxation*, for the instruction of the youth of the country. Let the assessment principle be carried into operation, and its practical benefits will soon be apparent. Tax the people for the support of schools, and they have the most powerful inducements which operate on selfish men, to take care that they derive an advantage equal to the sum they contribute.”⁷⁵

THE FREE SCHOOL ACT OF 1864

Dr. Tupper, Provincial Secretary, presented his bill—An Act for the better encouragement of Education—on February 15th. In his introductory remarks, he recalled his previous interest in the subject, he referred to the fact that the population and the revenue of the country had very largely increased since the Legislature first dealt with the topic, and he explained that although he favoured compulsory assessment, it would be neither wise nor politic to put it into effect at once. The bill was, however, so framed, he thought, as to pave the way for it. “I am quite aware,” he declared, “that the bill which I have the honour now to introduce will probably disappoint many members of the House, and many people in this country who are sincerely desirous that something important should be done to advance our educational status, and to cause a wider diffusion of knowledge among all classes of the people. I know that the public mind has been directed very much to one especial means—that of compulsory assessment for the support of common schools. This bill does not propose, however, to take that course. I confess that my views have undergone no change on this subject since the first session I had the honour of a seat in this House, when I voted for a resolution approving of compulsory assessment for the support of the common schools of the Province. But after a careful examination of the whole subject, looking at it with a sincere desire to come to such conclusions as would best advance the wide diffusion of education among the people, I have come to the belief that in the present condition of this country, it would not be either wise or politic to carry immediately into effect a system of compulsory assessment. Whilst I have thus hesitated to provide compulsory taxation, the bill which I now introduce is framed with a view to render that system as gradually acceptable to the people as it is possible. Whenever there is a disposition to introduce the system, greater facilities than heretofore are offered and in addition to that it provides inducements to all such sections of our country as shall establish schools open to all. It also provides for the construction of school-houses where it may be found necessary by that system, and

that without being adopted by any vote of the inhabitants. The system will therefore be introduced in such a way as to render it as acceptable as is possible. At present, there are some sections of this country where compulsory assessment could be introduced without difficulty, but there are also many sections where, in consequence of want of markets, and the absence of a circulating medium, and facilities for travel, etc., it would be found difficult to work out the system satisfactorily."⁷⁶

The salient points of the bill may be succinctly stated. The first thing was the establishment of a Council of Public Instruction, which, Tupper thought, should have the confidence of the country and should be directly responsible to the Legislature. It was therefore thought advisable that the members of the Executive Council, for the time being, should form the Council of Public Instruction. Tupper also proposed to separate the duties of Superintendent of Education from those of the Principal of the Normal School and to appoint the Superintendent as Secretary of the Council of Public Instruction. The Council of Public Instruction was to have authority to appoint Inspectors for the Counties. A Board of Commissioners was to be appointed for each of the nineteen counties or districts. The districts were to be divided into convenient sections. The Board of Commissioners was authorized to appoint a Board of Examiners for each school district, one of whom was to be the Inspector, to examine applicants for licenses to teach and to issue licenses. The schools in each rural section were to be placed under the control of a board of three trustees. Increased Provincial aid was provided—\$7,200 annually for county academies; \$7,200 for superior schools; and \$58,880 for common schools. A twenty-five per cent premium was offered to every school founded on the assessment principle and declared free. In order to meet the necessities of the poorer districts, the bill provided that one-fifth of the entire amount placed at the disposal of each Board of Commissioners should be set apart for the purpose of supporting schools in the sparsely settled districts, in addition to the amount to which they were otherwise entitled. Trustees were to determine the amount of teachers' salaries, "which must be procured from the people by voluntary subscription or assessment, and not by fees per pupil." Thenceforth all schools were to be *free* to all children residing in the section in which they were established—hence the popular name of the bill, *the Free School Act*.

In the course of the debate on the bill, members of the Opposition presented criticism as well as praise. "My objection to the Bill," declared the Leader of the Opposition, "is that it does not go far enough . . . I believe that if a system of compulsory taxation was once adopted the prejudices against it would speedily fade away, . . ." ⁷⁷ Several members criticized the composition of the Council of Public Instruction as linking

politics with education and declared that the Council of Public Instruction should be an independent body. William Miller of Richmond, although he had no intention of moving any amendment to the bill, expressed his opinion that the denominational system was the only correct one,⁷⁸ whereas the Leader of the Opposition declared that if he were disposed to attack the bill it would be on different grounds.⁷⁹

Dr. Tupper admitted that no other feature of the bill had given the Government so much concern as the composition of the Council of Public Instruction. He stated that he would have no hesitation in saying that if any member could show any means better adapted to advance the ends of education than the one proposed the Government should give it full consideration.

When the section relating to teachers was discussed, Dr. Tupper announced that the main object he had in view was "to provide such a salary for the school teachers as would command the services of competent persons. The main reason why Education was in such a languishing state was because of the inadequacy of the pay they received for their services The intention was to benefit the teachers, by elevating them from their present anomalous position and guaranteeing to them adequate pay for services given"⁸⁰

The press followed developments with a lively interest. "The subject of education," one editor indited, "has presented its claims to statesmen of Nova Scotia for many years. Each Government has seen the necessity of submitting a bill in amendment of former acts. The equality of parties, and the violence of party spirit by that equality have, however, exerted a far more potent influence over the leaders."⁸¹ He declared that Dr. Tupper deserved credit for the sentiments enunciated in the speech with which he had introduced his bill, and that Nova Scotians had reasons for gratitude to him because of the earnestness he had evinced in dealing with this *bête noire*. He also paid tribute to Howe, Tupper and Dr. Forrester for their efforts in preparing the country for a national system of schools based on compulsory assessment. As spring gave way to summer, some opponents of the Government saw fit to criticize the increased Provincial allowance for education and the appointment of Inspectors of Schools as but a fresh instance of the waste of a "Retrenchment" Government. Such things, one editor commented, "go far to convince us, that of all public measures an educational one is beset with more difficulties than any other." "The old hand to mouth system," he later added, "which paid teachers starvation wages—sinking them in this respect far below the common ditcher had brought about results, which now stared us in the face, and which demanded immediate and imperative reform. For fifteen or twenty years

the Liberal party, who, during the most of that time were the dominant party, had been talking and theorising, ever going to do great things, but never venturing to put a finger on the question. It was by this party chiefly that the principle of assessment was kept prominently before the public eye. Every now and then it received a fresh airing—but still the public mind was being allowed to drift farther and deeper into the abyss of ignorance. No practical step was taken or appears to have been intended to have been taken.”⁸²

Tupper had grappled with the difficult question of education. An advance had been made. The principle of free schools had been clearly embodied in legislation. The foundation had been laid for a Provincial system of education, with the Council of Public Instruction as the agency to provide the necessary direction of it. It was now evident that compulsory assessment would soon be adopted.

But the Free School Act had not been born into a wholly friendly world. The battle over the bill was fought over again in the press, the Province was agitated from one end to the other, and hostility to assessment took form in petitions to the Government.

Tupper was particularly interested in the reaction in the school districts. Opinions were divided. Those who opposed assessment made their opinions known. The principle of assessment was condemned at Margareville in July 1864⁸³ and a petition against it was signed. Prospect did likewise in December.⁸⁴ Early in 1864 similar petitions were received from other areas.

The Report of the Superintendent of Education, which was presented to the Legislature on February 27, 1865, gives an account of developments.⁸⁵ By that time, however, the Free School Act had been such a short time in operation, that its effects are, perhaps, not entirely clear. A revived interest in education seemed to be evident, but the problem of providing proper school accommodation was still acute. Although there were fewer schools in operation, the total attendance was about the same. It is clear, moreover, that notwithstanding the distribution of 5,000 copies of the Act, many school sections still misunderstood its provisions. When the Act went into effect there were no school-houses in 200 of the 1400 school sections. Only 100 of the buildings in the 1200 sections having school-houses were equal to the standard proposed by the Superintendent. However, there were signs of rapid improvement. Of the 1419 sections in the Province, excluding the City of Halifax, reports were received from 1009. 213 sections had held no meetings; 142 refused to organize; and 654 expressed their intention of adopting the principles of the Act. Thus about 46% of

the school districts actively adopted the new measure. Nevertheless, Superintendent Rand regarded the results as encouraging. "When it is borne in mind," he stated, "that two hundred sections were without any school houses; that of the number of houses reported, hundreds were in a bad condition; that nearly all the school houses in the Province were too small to meet the demands of Free Schools, and that there is ever a considerable reluctance on the part of the people to adopt new modes of action, the results of the Annual Meetings cannot but be regarded as highly encouraging . . ."

In order to improve the system, Rand recommended modifications. Since the present system could not, in his opinion, provide quickly enough the required number of schools, the first requisite was assessment for the support of schools.

COMPULSORY ASSESSMENT

Dr. Tupper decided to introduce compulsory assessment in 1865. In the House he indicated that the School Act of 1864 had achieved a measure of success, but privately he was aware of its limitations. He was proud to find, he declared, that the voice of the people in opposition to the Act of 1864 had been very small. Petitions had been received from Annapolis, Antigonish, Colchester, Cumberland, Digby, Inverness, Kings, Queens and Yarmouth Counties, but they contained the signatures of only 2,163 persons, out of an electorate of 50,000 or 60,000.⁸⁶ He now intended to retain the great principle of Free Schools and to put it on a more stable foundation—compulsory assessment. It was time to take another step in advance. To make that step more palatable he proposed to resort "to as large an extent as is possible to indirect taxation for that purpose."⁸⁷ Accordingly he proposed to increase the Provincial allowance to common schools from \$58,880 to \$90,000, almost doubling it. The Counties were thenceforth to supply for the support of common schools sums equal to two-thirds of the Provincial grants, and those sums were to be raised by compulsory assessment. "Did not the law force upon us the principle," Tupper asked, "that the property of those who were rich had to contribute to the alleviation of those who were poor? Did not the responsibility fall tenfold upon every man in reference to feeding the mind?"⁸⁸ By the Education Act of 1865, compulsory assessment for the support of common schools went into effect.⁸⁹

Denominationalism again reared its head in the debate on the bill of 1865, and a resolution in favour of separate schools was presented and discussed but not approved. The leaders of both parties opposed it. "He had no hesitation in saying," Tupper declared, "that the government could not consent to the introduction of clauses into the bill, which, every one must feel, would be destructive to the common school system of this Prov-

ince. The bill had infinitely better be thrown into the fire than that the clauses in question should be incorporated into it. He was not going to refer invidiously to the principles of any one denomination in this country and contrast them with those of any other, but he had no hesitation in saying that the principle that demanded that there shall be no schools except of a denominational character was one that struck at the very foundation of common school education by which the people can have their children educated."⁹⁰ "If such a principle as denominational schools was allowed in this country," A. G. Archibald, the Leader of the Opposition said, "one denomination after another would ask it to be extended to them, and he had therefore heard with great pleasure the remarks that had fallen from the hon. Provincial Secretary on this subject."⁹¹

Compulsory assessment, as provided by the Act of 1865 and extended by that of 1866, served to place Free Schools in Nova Scotia on a stable and solid basis. It enabled Nova Scotia, a Province that prides itself on its brains, to establish a universal system of common school education and to improve its standards. An indication of developments between 1863 and 1870 is seen in the following table.

THE EXPANSION OF COMMON SCHOOLS

1863 - 1870

Year	Total No. of Schools		Pupil Enrolment		No. of Teachers	
	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer
1863	1091	1332	33,311	41,656	1006	1149
1864	935	1166	33,265	37,546	1022	1202
1865	763	989	35,151	43,771	801	1031
1866	907	1170	45,131	56,017	929	1190
1867	1129	1416	61,718	70,075	1161	1459
1868	1281	1458	65,083	72,141	1298	1482
1869	1405	1540	72,756	75,523	1438	1592
1870	1459	1581	74,321	76,237	1514	1625

Aversion to direct taxation, the general lack of municipal institutions, and a variety of political and other factors delayed the introduction of free schools based on compulsory assessment. For his courage and constructive statesmanship in inaugurating such a system in Nova Scotia Dr. Charles Tupper is deservedly remembered.

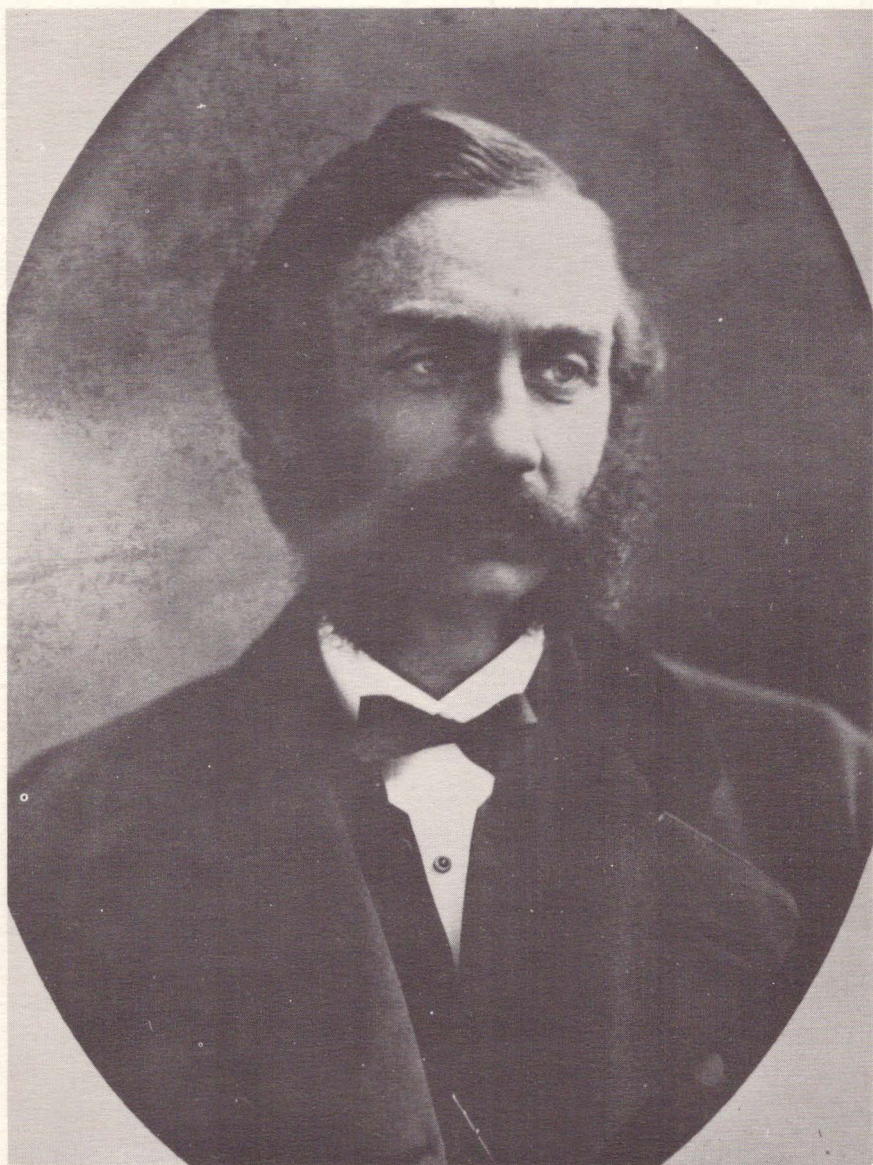
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