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“Separate Spheres”: The Feminization of Public School Teaching in Nova Scotia, 1838-1880

IN 1838 THE NOVA SCOTIA ASSEMBLY decided that local school boards could hire women.¹ The Assembly was responding to a shortage of public school teachers and the decision was popular with both school boards and women teachers. Within 40 years women made up two-thirds of the public school work force in the province.² Both the recruitment of large numbers of women teachers and its consequences illustrate the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the 19th-century, middle-class gender expectations usually referred to as the ideology of “separate spheres”.³ The feminization of public school teaching, and the gender ideology that encouraged it, had important implications for the struggle of Nova Scotia teachers to achieve professional wages and decent working conditions. Women were recruited as teachers because school administrators and politicians, persuaded that men and women belonged to separate spheres of activity, believed that women were inherently suited to the care and teaching of young children. But this widely shared gender ideology was inimical to teachers’ claims to professional status, claims based on the possession of a set of acquired and scientifically based skills and knowledge. This contradiction inhibited successful collaboration between men and women within the public school work force and prolonged the struggle for higher wages and professional autonomy.

Women did not begin teaching school in Nova Scotia in 1838; rather, it was from that date that women teachers began to move from private schools to state-subsidized public schools.⁴ Moreover, despite the periodic expression of fears and reservations about the feminization of public school teaching, Nova Scotians appeared to regard the development as a natural one. The feminization of public school teaching accompanied the creation of the reformed, state-supported elementary school

1 *Statutes of Nova Scotia*, 1838, ch. 23, s. VI.

2 *Annual Report of the Common, Academic and Normal and Model Schools of Nova Scotia [Annual Report]* (1880), Table B.

3 For a discussion of the contemporary debate about separate spheres as a conceptual framework see Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore and London, 1989), pp. 5-8.

4 Alison Prentice, “The Feminization of Teaching in British North America and Canada, 1845-75”, in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women’s History, Vol. 1* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 49-69.

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systems in North America and Britain, a phenomenon that has attracted considerable attention from historians in the past few decades.⁵ As David Allison, the superintendent of schools for the province, reported in 1877: "It may be desirable that we should have more male teachers, yet we are not to expect that Nova Scotia will be an exception to...almost every country where common school instruction [is] freely brought to the people".⁶

Contemporary observers believed that women teachers were recruited because they were willing to work for low wages and because, according to the prevailing ideology of gender roles, women had a natural aptitude for working with young children. Women became teachers because they had few opportunities for other paid employment and because they, too, believed that they had a natural aptitude for the job.⁷

Between 1838 and the passage of the Nova Scotia Free School Act in 1864, which eliminated tuition and introduced greater centralized supervision of public schooling

5 In the United States 60 per cent of teachers were women by 1870. David B. Tyack and Myra H. Strober, "Jobs and Gender: A History of the Structuring of Education Employment by Sex", in Patricia A. Schmuck, W.W. Charters, Jr. and Richard O. Carlson, *Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials* (New York, 1981), pp. 131-52. Women formed the majority of the public school teaching force in Quebec and Ontario by 1871. Marta Danylewycz, Beth Light and Alison Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: Nineteenth Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XVI, 31 (mai-May 1983), pp. 81-110. In England women formed 75 per cent of the work force by 1914. Frances Widdowson, *Going Up Into the Next Class: Women and Elementary Teacher Training 1840-1914* (London, 1983), Foreword. In Scotland 70 per cent of teachers were women by 1911. T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1850* (New Haven and London, 1986), p. 220. See also Helen Corr, "The Sexual Division of Labour in the Scottish Teaching Profession, 1872-1914", in Walter M. Humes and Hamish M. Patterson, eds., *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education, 1800-1980* (Edinburgh, 1983).

For a thorough recent overview of the literature on women teachers see Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, "The Historiography of Women Teachers: A Retrospect", in Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., *Women who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 3-36. The editors have also included an extensive bibliography. See also Wendy E. Bryans, "'Virtuous Women and Half the Price': The Feminization of the Teaching Force and Early Women Teacher Organizations in Ontario", M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974. For the British experience see Barry Bergen, "Only a Schoolmaster: Gender, Class and the Effort to Professionalize Elementary Teaching England, 1870-1910", *History of Education Quarterly*, 21, 1 (1982), pp. 1-21; Dina M. Copelman, "'A New Comradeship between Men and Women': Family, Marriage and London's Women Teachers, 1870-1914", in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 175-94; Widdowson, *Going Up*. The American experience is addressed in Tyack and Strober, "Jobs and Gender"; Redding S. Sugg, Jr., *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1978); Madeleine R. Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst, 1988).

6 *Journals of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia [JHA]* (1877), App. 5, Annual Report, xviii.

7 See, for example, Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching"; Tyack and Strober, "Jobs and Gender"; Widdowson, *Going Up*. For a somewhat expanded discussion of the recruitment of women into public school teaching in the last half of the 19th and early 20th-centuries in the United States see Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "'Daughters into Teachers': Educational and Demographic Influences on the Transformation of Teaching into 'Women's Work' in America", in Prentice and Theobald, *Women who Taught*, pp. 115-35.

in the province, the change proceeded slowly. In 1851 just under 20 per cent of Nova Scotia public school teachers were women; in 1861 women formed a third of the public school work force.⁸ Feminization was much more rapid in the decade following the 1864 Free School Act. In less than five years women constituted nearly half of all teachers both winter and summer.⁹ In 1870 the provincial superintendent of schools reported that:

The rapid increase of female teachers, as compared with those of the other sex, is worthy of note. While the former increased 81% in 5 years, the number of male teachers increased only 51%. The proportion of female teachers is greater in summer, 53% of those employed in the summer, 41% employed in winter being female teachers.¹⁰

By the end of the 1870s two-thirds of the province's teachers were women (see Table One).

The relationship between school reform and feminization is obviously an important one. To understand it we must consider both the function of the reformed public school systems and the mid-19th-century ideological concept of separate spheres for men and women. Nineteenth-century advocates of public school reform promised many benefits, but time and again they returned to a single theme: universal free public schooling would provide moral training for the young and produce a generation of hard-working, law-abiding citizens.¹¹ The inculcation of these social and political values was generally more important to the aims of school reformers than the provision of either religious or intellectual education.¹² Reformed public school systems, therefore, required a large work force capable of teaching the values and attitudes deemed appropriate by the school reformers, as well as a smaller number of administrators and teachers with strong academic background for the senior (and especially the male) students. The recruitment of women as public school teachers seemed natural to 19th-century legislators, school administrators and parents who were imbued with the separate spheres ideology.¹³

Reformed public school systems occupied an ambiguous place in the mid-19th-century social landscape. They created institutions in which some of the work of the private sphere — the training of children — was performed in a public arena under the jurisdiction of the state. They attest to the difficulty of applying the middle-class

8 Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching".

9 Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching".

10 *Annual Report*, (1870), p. xxi.

11 See, for example, Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters* (Toronto, 1977); and Sugg, *Motherteacher*.

12 Sugg, *Motherteacher*; Grumet, *Bitter Milk*.

13 For a discussion of this idea see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (London, 1977). More recently a debate has arisen about the usefulness of the idea of separate spheres as an analytical approach. See for example, Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History", *Journal of American History*, 75 (June, 1988), pp. 9-39; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender Ideology in Historical Reconstruction: A Case Study from the 1930s", *Gender and History*, 1, 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 31-49; and Ryan, *Women in Public*.

ideal of a division of labour along sexual lines, an ideal that confined male activity to the public world of economics and politics and female activity to the private world of the family and reproduction. While it seemed natural that women, suited by nature to the moral training of children, should be hired as public school teachers, public schools were more than extensions of the domestic sphere. They were also arenas for both collaboration and competition between men and women. The boundaries between the private and the public spheres were not always clearly defined, and were under constant revision. This overlapping of the private and public spheres had important ramifications in the teachers' struggle to gain recognition for their work.

Historians have continued to debate the relative importance of ideology and economics in the recruitment of women to public school teaching.¹⁴ It can be argued, however, that the two were in fact intimately related and mutually reinforcing. Women were paid low wages because they were performing the work of the private sphere, work usually performed outside the formal economy. Women were recruited as teachers because they were believed to have a special aptitude for the job. Concepts of gender were thus central to the 19th-century division of labour. When we remember that the mid-19th century was also the period when professional police forces were first recruited in many parts of British North America it becomes clear that sex and notions of gender played an enormous role in decision making. It was never suggested that women, because they were willing to work for low wages, would make an ideal police force. Reverend Robert Sedgewick, speaking to the Halifax Young Men's Christian Association in 1856, expressed his derision of such an idea when he asked the rhetorical question "What can be more unfeminine than a woman thief-catcher?"¹⁵ While women were certainly attractive employees because of their willingness to work for low wages, ideology played a very large part in their recruitment to public school teaching. The conjunction of public school reform and the idea of separate spheres for men and women was central to the change. As Geraldine Joncich Clifford has argued, the movement of elements of the work of social reproduction from the household to the public school played an important role in turning "daughters into teachers".¹⁶

The ideology of separate spheres had wide acceptance in mid-19th-century Nova Scotia. Reform politician George Young, for example, writing in 1842, described women as "queens of the household" and urged the education of women for motherhood.¹⁷ In 1846 the anonymous author of an essay on the "Improvement of Female Education" argued that women were "admirably adapted to the sacred charge

14 See, for example, Bryans, "Virtuous Women".

15 Robert Sedgewick, "The Proper Sphere and Influence of Woman in Christian Society", in Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society* (Toronto, 1976), p.15.

16 Clifford, "Daughters into Teachers".

17 George R. Young, *On Colonial Literature, Science and Education; written with a view of improving the Literary Educational and Public Institutions of British North America*, v. 1 (Halifax, 1842), p. 126.

of watching the young".¹⁸ Nova Scotians were also well aware of international debates on the role of women. In the early 1850s two Halifax newspapers, both of them published by women, regularly carried items about separate spheres and the mid-19th-century debates about women's proper sphere and women's rights.¹⁹ Reverend Robert Sedgewick tackled these debates directly in his 1856 address to the Halifax Young Men's Christian Association in which he claimed unequivocal support for rigidly distinctive roles and natures for men and women.²⁰

The attitudes of Nova Scotia politicians, school administrators and teachers were imbued with the ideology of separate spheres for men and women. Nova Scotians accepted the idea that women were the queens and moral rulers of the home, but very few advocated the full equality of the sexes. The question of women's equality did, however, emerge several times within the Sons of Temperance. In 1856 the "full and unequivocal membership of the female sex" was proposed at the provincial annual meeting, but it was rejected.²¹ The issue resurfaced in a letter to the order's journal in 1868, when "A friend of the order" asked "Has not God made man and woman equal?" The editor disagreed. He recommended that women should retain their status as "visitors".²² The public participation of women, even in worthy causes, remained troublesome. In 1862, when Mrs. Nina Smith appeared alone on the platform of the Temperance Hall to solicit aid for the poor, she addressed a slim and critical audience. One listener did admit that while he was "utterly opposed to the theory of female oratory", Mrs. Smith had performed so well that it "made his heart bleed" and he moved a vote of thanks to "the lady who had so unselfishly braved the prejudices of society to relieve the destitute".²³

Public school reform and the acceptance of the separate spheres ideology in Nova Scotia help us to understand the general trend toward the feminization of the public school work force, but when we average relative numbers of men and women teaching in the province as a whole we miss some important local differences. There were significant variations in the timing and extent of feminization. The city of Halifax was among the first school districts in which the majority of teachers were women. The predominance of women in urban teaching forces has been widely noted by other historians. Urban areas were the first to develop bureaucratic school systems with large numbers of female teachers in the younger classes of graded schools and a smaller number of men in supervisory positions.²⁴ As Table One demonstrates, Halifax followed the pattern of other urban areas. Very soon after the

18 Anon. "Improvement of Female Education", *Essays on the Future Destiny of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1846).

19 See, for example, *Mayflower*, 1, 1 (May 1851), pp. 6-7; *Provincial Magazine*, March 1852, p. 86.

20 Sedgewick, "Women's Sphere".

21 *Abstainer*, 15 November 1856.

22 *Abstainer*, 25 November 1868.

23 *Acadian Recorder*, 22 February 1862.

24 Danylewycz, Light and Prentice, "Evolution", pp. 82-3.

implementation of the Free School acts of 1864-7, Halifax had a predominantly female work force supervised by a corps of male principals and administrators.²⁵

Table One
Female Teachers as a Percentage of All Teachers (average winter-summer)

School District	1851	1859	1861	1869	1871	1877	1879
Annapolis				38			48
Antigonish				25			40
Cape Breton				24			27
Colchester				60			77
Cumberland				63			80
Digby				50			59
Guysborough				49			70
Halifax Co.				62			81
Halifax City	36	55	52	58	65		81
Hants				59			65
Inverness				13			26
Kings				41			60
Lunenburg				52			76
Pictou		27		45			59
Queens				52			73
Richmond				42			47
Shelburne		64		51			75
Victoria				19			40
Yarmouth				48			69
Nova Scotia	20	39	30	45	47	61	66

Sources: Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching", p. 57; Annual Report (1859), p. 157; Annual Report (1877); Annual Report (1879). Until 1864 School Districts and Counties did not conform. Halifax City remained one school district for statistical purposes throughout the period.

The situation in rural areas must be examined more closely, and with careful attention to local conditions. The retention of male teachers in the eastern counties is particularly significant. All four Cape Breton counties still had more men than women teaching in public schools in 1879. In Antigonish County 60 per cent of the teachers were male. The only exception to this pattern was Pictou County, where women constituted 59 per cent of the teachers, still below the provincial average of

25 *Annual Report*, (1870), Report of the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Halifax for 1870, pp. 9ff.

66 per cent women. Although other factors may have played a part in this trend, the influence of Scottish educational traditions, including that of the male teacher, is a useful point of departure. Traditional sexual divisions of labour played an important role in the timing of the feminization of public school teaching. Danylewycz, Prentice and Light have argued that the tradition of female teaching orders in Quebec hastened the acceptance of women teachers in the province.²⁶ While John Reid, in his study of Scottish influences on higher education in the Maritimes, reminds us of the need for careful attention to the transmutation of Scottish traditions, it can safely be argued that the Scottish parish school system did not foster the acceptance of women teachers.²⁷

The Scottish immigrants to northeastern Nova Scotia brought with them the tradition of the parish school system, established in the 17th century. This system had two characteristics that would preclude women teachers. One was the religious duties performed by many parish schoolteachers. The parish teacher usually doubled as the session clerk and often led the reading of the psalms at Sunday services, public tasks that could not be performed by a female teacher.²⁸ The second was the role of the parish school in preparing its students for further intellectual training at the burgh schools, or county academies, and at university. Unlike the situation in either North America or England and Wales, provision was made for some students to progress from the parish elementary schools through to the burgh secondary schools and then to university. It is significant that the feminization of the Scottish public school teaching force did not really begin until after the passage of the British 1872 School Act. This act, by providing funding only for primary schools and not for secondary schooling, changed the orientation of the Scottish school system and eliminated the link between primary education and the universities.²⁹ The persistence of male teachers in counties with high proportions of Scottish immigrants and their descendants owes some debt to the legacy of the parish school system.

Further research is needed to reach firm conclusions on the matter of recruiting women teachers, and other factors must be weighed. Prentice and Theobald, in their recent review of the historiography of women teachers, emphasize the complexity and local variation in the recruitment of women teachers to public school teaching.³⁰ At this point any conclusions about the reasons for the regional variations within Nova Scotia in the rate of feminization are premature, but the rich literature in the

26 Danylewycz, Light and Prentice, "Evolution", p. 94.

27 John G. Reid, "Beyond the Democratic Intellect: The Scottish Example and University Reform in Canada's Maritime Provinces, 1870-1933", in Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, eds., *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Montreal, 1989), pp. 275-300. See also R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities* (Oxford, 1983).

28 Bruce Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment and Industrialization: Scotland 1746-1832* (Toronto, 1981), p. 12.

29 Helen Corr, "The Sexual Division of Labour in the Scottish Teaching Profession, 1872-1914", in Walter M. Humes and Hamish M. Paterson, eds., *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education, 1800-1980*, (Edinburgh, 1983); Smout, *Scottish People*, pp. 221-2; Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, (London, 1976), p. 127.

30 Prentice and Theobald, "The Historiography of Women Teachers".

field suggests a number of interpretative approaches. Strober and Tyack, in their study of American teachers, argue that it was only in the areas that rejected other educational reforms that large numbers of male teachers remained in the public school system.³¹ This interpretation flies in the face of the conventional Scottish reputation for a love of learning, and further research on the public schools of Cape Breton would be needed to test it. However, the willingness of Pictou County school boards to hire women in the 1870s is interesting, as that county maintained a reputation for the quality of its schools.

A further line of inquiry presented by Danylewycz, Light and Prentice must also be explored. They argue that the presence of other more lucrative opportunities for paid work for men was an important variable in their participation in public school teaching.³² This factor may have been of considerable importance in mid-19th century Cape Breton. It is interesting to note, however, that counties on the south shore of the province, especially Queens and Shelburne counties, which also experienced poor economic conditions in the 19th century, were much more likely to hire women. By 1879 three-quarters of the teachers in both counties were women (see Table One). Variations in attitudes toward female teachers among Protestant denominations may have played a role in these counties. Baptists and Methodists, in contrast to Presbyterians, sometimes had less rigid views of women's role in education.³³ A number of questions about the local contours of feminization in Nova Scotia remain unanswered.

Attitudes to the general process of feminization in the province varied considerably throughout the period. Politicians appeared to have very little difficulty accepting the idea of women teachers in the public schools of Nova Scotia. The idea of free schools supported by local property assessment was a controversial issue from the late 1830s to the mid-1860s, and denominational education remained contentious throughout the period.³⁴ The subject of women teachers paled in comparison to these thornier subjects. In 1837 the Education Committee of the Nova Scotia Assembly prepared a package of school reforms. Among the recommendations was a somewhat grudging acceptance of women teachers. The committee recommended that "Female Teachers, who are often the most valuable that can be obtained" should be entitled to a share of the provincial education grants.³⁵ Both the Assembly and the Legislative Council accepted the recommendation without debate. It was agreed "that where a female Teacher can be more advantageously employed than a male teacher", the local school board could hire a woman.³⁶

The change was totally ignored in the local press. The *Novascotian* published three letters in early March supporting the Assembly's other school reforms. A letter

31 Tyack and Strober, "Jobs and Gender", p. 137.

32 Danylewycz, Light and Prentice, "Evolution".

33 I would like to thank one of the anonymous *Acadiensis* readers for raising this important point.

34 For a discussion of education debates in Nova Scotia see Janet Guildford, "Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870", Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1990. The Nova Scotia government passed free school legislation in 1864. *Statutes of Nova Scotia*, 1864, ch. 58.

35 *JHA* (1837-8), App. 72, p. 161.

36 *Statutes of Nova Scotia*, 1838, ch. 23, s. VI.

writer from Musquodoboit apparently did not expect to see large numbers of women enter the occupation. The writer hoped for other reforms that would “raise the character of this class of men, by increasing their means; and making their profession an object of ambition to men of talents and acquirement”.³⁷ The lack of interest in the question of women teachers was strikingly apparent in the one statistical survey of the Nova Scotia school system in the 1840s. In 1842 the report of the short-lived Nova Scotia Central Board of Education presented a multitude of tables, but it did not provide an analysis of male and female teachers. While the language of the report assumed that teachers were male, it is impossible to determine whether or not the members of the board strongly preferred male teachers in the common schools.³⁸

Considerably more light was thrown on attitudes to women teachers during the 1850 session of the Legislature. In the course of the general debate on public schooling, female teachers and the education of women were discussed a number of times. Practical approval of female teachers was expressed in the form of a grant to the Amherst Female Seminary, which trained female teachers.³⁹ While members on both sides of the House expressed general approval for educating girls and hiring women as teachers, apprehension and ambivalence also emerged, and the discussion of women teachers was always couched in the language of separate spheres.⁴⁰ Reform leader Joseph Howe hoped that local school boards would be unrestricted in hiring women teachers, but he believed that any Nova Scotia woman would rather be married to a yeoman than “head the best school in the country”.⁴¹ The member for Hants County “highly eulogized the character and acquirements of the female teachers” in his riding, claiming that there was a “kindliness in female teachers which was of utmost value to children”. His attitude, however, revealed inconsistencies. Despite his apparent approval for women as teachers he argued, without explaining why, that school boards should not hire only female teachers if men applied.⁴² The politicians’ attitudes toward women were perhaps best revealed by their humour. During one debate a member earned “roars of laughter” when he commented about women, “I love them, sir, as I would love my mother, and I could stand here and plead all night for them”.⁴³ On another day Conservative leader J.W. Johnston evoked a good response when he reminded his fellow members that it was dangerous to introduce the subject of ladies into the debate because “they have already thrown us off our track”.⁴⁴ Talking about women in the Assembly elicited laughter because women were not part of the public sphere of politics, but belonged in the private sphere of the household.

37 *Novascotian*, 1 March 1838.

38 *First Annual Report of the Nova Scotia Central Board of Education* (Nova Scotia, 1842).

39 *JHA* (1851), App. 51, Report of the Education Committee, p. 185.

40 *Novascotian*, 6 May 1850.

41 *Novascotian*, 6 May 1850.

42 *Novascotian*, 6 May 1850.

43 *Novascotian*, 6 May 1850.

44 *Novascotian*, 2 February 1850.

Education administrators, on the other hand, never made jokes. They were an earnest breed, dedicated to fighting ignorance and vice wherever they found it. Unlike the situation in Upper Canada where one man dominated the educational affairs of the province for 40 years, Nova Scotia had six different senior education administrators in the 30 years between 1850 and 1880.⁴⁵ To varying degrees all the Nova Scotia superintendents of education expressed qualified support for hiring women teachers, and all did so in terms of the special abilities of women in caring for young children. Certainly the superintendents of education in Nova Scotia discussed the situation in ideological terms. All, with the possible exception of J.W. Dawson, had some misgivings about the feminization of public school teaching, and all endorsed a strict division of male and female labour within the school system.

Nova Scotia's first school superintendent, J.W. Dawson (1850-3), a young Pictou County geologist and bookseller, actively promoted the recruitment of female teachers.⁴⁶ His own formal education had begun in a "Dame School", a small private school for young children run by a woman.⁴⁷ In 1850, after a trip to Massachusetts, he reported very favourably on the number and ability of women teachers in the state.⁴⁸ As a patriotic Nova Scotian Dawson saw a further advantage in training his countrywomen as teachers. He believed that it would stem the out-migration of Nova Scotia women.⁴⁹

About 20 per cent of Nova Scotia teachers were women during Dawson's brief regime as superintendent, but he noted that they were usually hired only for the summer term, and replaced by men, who during the summer may have been drawn into agricultural or other work. He felt this practice was "injurious" to the state of education, and advocated the retention of good teachers, whether male or female, during the whole year.⁵⁰ Dawson was impressed with the quality of some of the women teachers he found at work in Nova Scotia. He singled out the women teachers of Barrington, in Shelburne County on the province's south shore, for special praise. They were "especially deserving of credit for their knowledge of the branches required in their schools and of improved methods of teaching".⁵¹ Dawson's superintendency was a brief one; he resigned from the position after just two years. For the next two years educational affairs in the province were overseen by two regional inspectors. Hugh Munro, the inspector for eastern Nova Scotia, made no comment at all on women teachers; no doubt he encountered very few.

45 Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters* (Toronto, 1977).

46 J. William Dawson, *Fifty Years of Work in Canada: Scientific and Educational* (London, 1901).

47 Dawson, *Fifty Years*. For a discussion of dame schools see E. Jennifer Monaghan, "Noted and Unnoted School Dames: Women as Reading Teachers in Colonial New England", Conference paper for the 11th Session of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education, Oslo, Norway, 1989.

48 *JHA* (1851), Annual Report.

49 Out-migration from the province was female led. See Patricia Thornton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look" *Acadiensis*, XV, 1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 3-34.

50 *JHA* (1851), App. 53, Annual Report; *JHA* (1852), App. 11, Annual Report, pp. 72-3.

51 *JHA* (1852), App. 11, Annual Report, p. 67.

Charles D. Randall, responsible for western Nova Scotia, was a strong supporter of female teachers and argued that it was not sex that mattered in a teacher, but qualifications. This kind of comment must always be regarded with suspicion. The sex of the teacher obviously did matter to Randall because he noted that women were “natural guardians of the young”.⁵²

Alexander Forrester (1854-64), a Scottish-trained minister and zealous educational reformer, was Nova Scotia’s second superintendent of public schools.⁵³ His attitude toward female teachers was considerably more ambivalent than either Dawson’s or Randall’s, and his support was dependent on the conventions of a rigid delineation of separate spheres for men and women. He spelled out his approach in the teachers’ textbook he published in 1867. He noted that “both by the law of nature and revelation” there was a “position of subordination and of dependence assigned to women”, and thus there ought to be “situations in educational establishments better adapted to the one sex than the other”.⁵⁴ In other words, women were acceptable as teachers of young children, but men should retain their jobs as the teachers of older children and as supervisors.

In 1864 Forrester, a long-time Liberal partisan, was demoted by the Conservative government and replaced by Theodore Harding Rand (1864-70), an Annapolis Valley Baptist who had been a teacher at the Normal School in Truro.⁵⁵ Rand, too, endorsed the idea of separate roles for male and female teachers. Addressing the Provincial Education Association in 1870 he tried to reassure the male teachers who wanted to “throw a shield around male teachers, lest their lady associates drive them all out of the province”.⁵⁶ Rand did not believe that male and female teachers were in competition for the same jobs. While men lacked “maternal sympathies so requisite for the conduct of the lower grades...[w]e must retain a certain proportion of the masculine element” for more advanced students.⁵⁷

Rand was fired as superintendent of schools in February 1870 because he bucked the Council of Public Instruction (CPI) during a separate school dispute in Cape Breton.⁵⁸ He was replaced by Rev. A.S. Hunt (1870-7), a successful Baptist minister who lacked any experience with the public school system of the province. Forrester and Rand had demonstrated that professional educators were independent and obstructive, and the CPI chose Hunt because its members felt he would support their political policies and smooth over the separate school question, which he did until

52 *JHA* (1854), App. 73, Report of the Education Committee, p. 374.

53 Judith Fingard, “Alexander Forrester”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. IX (Toronto, 1976), pp. 270-2.

54 *The Teachers’ Text Book*, (Halifax, 1867), pp. 565-6 cited in Prentice, “The Feminization of Teaching”, p. 61.

55 Margaret Conrad, “Theodore Harding Rand”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. XII (Toronto, 1990), pp. 879-84.

56 *Journal of Education*, 29 (February 1870), p. 450.

57 *Journal of Education*, 29 (February 1870), p. 450.

58 Conrad, “Theodore Harding Rand”.

his death in 1877.⁵⁹ But Hunt's lack of experience with the public school system left him unprepared for the extent of feminization in the early 1870s. He also had to contend with the fact that some people complained about the increasing numbers of women teachers, while others "had a very decided preference" for them.⁶⁰

Hunt's own attitude to women teachers was complex. While initially he deplored the feminization of the public school work force, he gradually changed his opinion. Although there were echoes of the separate spheres ideology in his thinking, he was not entirely confident of the natural ability of women to exercise a good influence on children, and his approval for women teachers was closely tied to their educational attainments. Hunt's thinking on the question is most interesting because it contains elements of both older ideas about the depravity of women and newer ideas about the need for specialized training in the making of an effective school system.

In his first report Hunt commented that the "evil" of large numbers of female teachers was "operating unfavourably upon the public welfare".⁶¹ And he may have been one of the few Canadians to take satisfaction in the depression of the 1870s, because it dried up new work opportunities for male teachers and kept them in the school system.⁶² These denunciations reflect only one facet of Hunt's complex attitudes toward women. Although he was imbued with the separate spheres ideology, Hunt was not persuaded of the value of women's natural aptitude for mothering or teaching, and he was apprehensive about the effect of "ignorant" women on the development of children. He advocated the introduction of more rigorous training for girls in the public school system and hoped that women teachers would also receive better training.⁶³ He explained his thinking to the provincial Education Association in 1872:

Our common schools are open alike to the sexes, and I am of the opinion that our colleges and academies also ought to be, and in a few years, I think will be, open to females...[T]he most highly cultivated intellect is requisite to train a child in his early years. It is most unsafe for the moral and intellectual, as well as for the physiological welfare of a young child, to trust it to the keeping of ignorant and uncultivated persons. Here is at once a reason why mothers should have the best education that the country can afford, for mothers must have charge, some of them exclusive charge, of

59 For obituaries of Hunt see *Christian Messenger*, 31 October 1877; *Acadian Recorder*, 24 October 1877. It is probably a comment on Hunt's lack of professional credentials that no biographical work has been published on his career. For a brief discussion of his appointment see Conrad, "Theodore Harding Rand".

60 *Annual Report* (1876), pp. ix-x.

61 "Our Public Schools", *Journal of Education*, 37 (June 1871), p. 573.

62 *Annual Report* (1876), pp. ix-x.

63 "Our Public Schools", *Journal of Education*, 37 (June 1871), p. 573; Superintendent's Address to the Education Association of Nova Scotia, *Journal of Education*, 44 (August 1872), p. 50.

the earlier years of their children — an ignorant woman in such a position is a sad object to contemplate.⁶⁴

With longer experience in the public school system of Nova Scotia Hunt did moderate his position on women teachers. He felt that the complaints about feminization would dissipate as the level of training among women teachers improved.⁶⁵ By the time David Allison, a classical scholar and the president of Mount Allison College, assumed the superintendency 1877 feminization was a fait accompli and no longer the source of much discussion.⁶⁶

Feminization and the separate spheres ideology that promoted it had important ramifications for teachers' efforts to improve their wages, working conditions and political power. By 1870 Nova Scotia school administrators were speaking confidently and optimistically about the "dignity of the teacher's profession". An editorial in the provincial *Journal of Education* claimed that

Teaching is no longer an ignoble pursuit, nor a field for scholastic ambition, but a profession engaging the public confidence, demanding great talents and industry, and securing great and satisfactory rewards.⁶⁷

These claims must have read like wishful thinking to the teachers of Nova Scotia. The struggle to achieve professional status was long and difficult, and teachers had made little progress by 1870. There has been debate among historians about whether "professionalization" is the most accurate description of teachers' efforts to improve their situation, but the term has been adopted for this study because it was used by contemporary education administrators and teachers in their struggle for improved wages, working conditions and status.⁶⁸ References to teaching as a profession began to appear in the Nova Scotia press as early as the 1830s and continued to be used throughout the period.⁶⁹ Alexander Forrester, for example, asked in a pamphlet promoting the Normal School, "Would it...not prove of incalculable service to the cause of education to have the business of teaching exalted to the rank and dignity of one of the learned professions?"⁷⁰ In 1870 the *Journal of Education* used the

64 Superintendent's Address to the Education Association of Nova Scotia, *Journal of Education*, 44 (August 1872), p. 50.

65 *Annual Report* (1876), pp. ix-x.

66 "David Allison", in Henry James Morgan, ed. *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1898), p. 18. For Allison's initial impressions of feminization see *JHA* (1877), App. 5, Annual Report, p. xviii.

67 *Journal of Education*, 32 (August 1870), p. 498.

68 For a discussion of recent approaches to the history of teachers efforts to improve their situation see Wayne J. Urban, "New Directions in the Historical Study of Teacher Unionism", *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 2, 1 (Spring/printemps 1990), pp. 1-15. Also useful is Jennifer Ozga and Martin Lawn, *Teachers, Professionalization and Class* (London, 1981).

69 See, for example, *Novascotian*, 1 March 1838; *Provincial Magazine*, 2, 2 (February 1853), p. 52.

70 *Register and Circular with Brief History and Condition of the Normal School of Nova Scotia 1862* (Halifax, 1862), p. 12.

teachers' claims to professional status as the basis for higher wages for teachers.⁷¹ The professionalization model is helpful in understanding the position of teachers if we adopt Barry Bergen's approach to the question. He argues that professionalization must be examined as "the process of constituting and controlling a market for special services, expertise or knowledge".⁷²

A second useful point can also be drawn from the literature on the professionalization of teaching. Ozga and Lawn point out that claims for professionalization played an ambiguous role in the teachers' efforts to improve their conditions. The state could and did use professionalism to control teachers, by encouraging them to tie their aspirations very closely to the level of service they provided to the community, thereby discouraging unseemly demands for personal gain. However, teachers also used their claim to professional status in order to assert their right to higher wages and greater control of the conditions of their work, to which they felt entitled by virtue of their specialized knowledge and skills.⁷³

There can be little doubt that Nova Scotia teachers, like their counterparts in other places, failed in their early bids for professional status. While wages did improve for a few men in senior positions, most male teachers continued to earn a wage comparable to that of labourers, and women were paid on a scale very similar to the wage rates of domestic servants.⁷⁴ Even the most senior male education officers in the province were powerless to assert their claims to professional control against the interference of elected political officials. The demotion or firing of three well-qualified senior officials in the decade following the passage of the Free School Act in 1864 made this point very clear. Alexander Forrester was demoted to principal of the Normal School in 1864 by the Conservative Nova Scotia government because of his long-time support for the opposition Liberals.⁷⁵ At the same time the provincial government stripped the Normal School of its right to confer teaching licences on its graduates and instituted a new licensing examination system. In 1867 F.W. George, an experienced educator, was fired as inspector of schools for Cumberland and replaced with a political appointee.⁷⁶ And in 1870 superintendent T.H. Rand was fired for opposing the government's separate school policy.⁷⁷ By 1880 Nova Scotia teachers did not control access to the profession, wages or the conditions of their work.

The teachers did try a variety of strategies to improve their lot, and their efforts illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of professionalization as a political tool.

71 *Journal of Education*, 30 (April 1870).

72 Barry H. Bergen, "Only a Schoolmaster: Gender, Class, and the Effort to Professionalize Elementary Teaching in England, 1870-1910", *History of Education Quarterly*, 22, 1 (1982), p. 8.

73 Ozga and Lawn, *Teachers, Professionalization and Class*.

74 *Halifax Daily Reporter and Times*, 12 January 1874; Ian McKay, "The Working Class of Metropolitan Halifax, 1850-1889", Honours Essay, Dalhousie University, 1975.

75 Fingard, "Alexander Forrester".

76 F.W. George to Lt.-Gov. Sir Hastings Doyle, 7 September 1869 Provincial Secretary's Correspondence, RG 7, vol. 69, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS].

77 T.H. Rand to the Provincial Secretary, 5 February 1870, Provincial Secretary's Correspondence, RG 7, vol. 69, PANS; *JHA* (1870) App. 22, Arichat Schools.

Sometimes the actions were short-lived, as was the case when 22 teachers petitioned the Halifax School Board for higher wages in 1855.⁷⁸ Others attempted to improve their skills by attending government-sponsored Teachers' Institutes.⁷⁹ A teacher who attended an institute at Truro in 1852 reported:

I have returned with a feeling of delight...one source of regret alone I feel regarding it, and that is that we continued together for so short a time...I feel happier in my work, because many of the plans I have tried in doubt have been tried by others, and that with success.⁸⁰

Teachers' Institutes could also be adapted to serve more autonomous professional goals. In 1870 nine teachers from the town of Pictou conducted their own Teachers' Institute, holding semi-monthly meetings and operating a library "of the best works on Education and practical teaching".⁸¹

Teachers began to create sustained autonomous organizations in the early 1860s. The Halifax and Dartmouth Teachers' Association was formed in 1862 by 17 men and five women to elevate the status of teachers.⁸² A few months later 14 teachers, ten men and four women, established a province-wide organization. At first the group called itself the United Teachers' Association of Nova Scotia, but six months later the name was changed to the Provincial Education Association (PEA). The change in name suggests a shift in the political orientation of the organization from the elevation of the status of the teacher to the improvement of educational services within Nova Scotia.⁸³ While these two goals were always associated by the teachers' organizations they were not identical, and the contradictions expose the ambiguity of professionalism.

Between 1862 and 1880 the PEA functioned as a combination lobby group and scientific society for the teachers of Nova Scotia. Its membership, open to teachers of both sexes, was dominated by senior male teachers, many of them teachers and principals of academies rather than elementary schools, and county inspectors. With the one exception of Amelia Archibald, a Halifax teacher who served as a member of the Management Committee of the association in 1873, the executive was entirely male.⁸⁴ The PEA was moribund between 1876 and 1879, and in 1880 it was superseded by the Educational Association of Nova Scotia. The change represented a loss of autonomy by the teachers. The new Educational Association was established under the auspices of the Council of Public Instruction, and the membership included all provincial education officials and everyone associated with provincial colleges as

78 *Presbyterian Witness*, 22 December 1855.

79 *JHA* (1851), Annual Report.

80 *JHA* (1852) Annual Report, App. 11, p. 60.

81 *Annual Report* (1870), Inspector's Report, Pictou County, p. 54.

82 *Constitution of Halifax Dartmouth Teachers Association* (Halifax, 1862)

83 Minutes of the Provincial Education Association [PEA], 16 May 1862, 25 September 1862, PEA Minute Book, RG 14, vol. 69, PANS.

84 See PEA Minutes, 1862-80 and Petitions, RG 5, Series P, vol. 77, no. 86, 20 February 1864 and vol. 77, no. 165, 11 February 1868, PANS.

well as teachers. The format of the first convention resembled a teachers' institute rather than the scientific society form used by the PEA.⁸⁵

The records of the PEA are, unfortunately, sparse, but there is no evidence that the association regarded the feminization of public school teaching as a professional or political issue. Although it was open to all teachers in the province, the PEA attracted only a handful of women, and it can be assumed that these women were dedicated professionals. For the most part they were treated by their male colleagues with a protective paternalism appropriate to the conventions of the separate spheres ideology. The association recognized the salary differentials between men and women by collecting lower membership dues from women teachers, and in 1869 it voted to sell Alexander Forrester's *Teacher's Text Book* to "Lady Members" for one dollar instead of two.⁸⁶

Male members also protected women from having to expose themselves to censure by speaking on a public platform. On the few occasions when women teachers prepared papers for meetings the papers were read by men and the writer remained anonymous. In July 1871, for example, Halifax school principal C.W. Major read a "paper by a lady teacher entitled 'Miscellaneous Observations of the Studies of Girls'", and in 1873 F.W. George, principal of the New Glasgow Academy, also read a paper from an anonymous "lady teacher".⁸⁷ The pattern was interrupted in 1874 when Dartmouth teacher Maria Angwin stood on the public platform to read her own paper, ironically entitled "The Old is Better".⁸⁸ Angwin, later the first woman licensed to practise medicine in Nova Scotia, was obviously out of step with her colleagues, and the next year another male teacher read a paper "handed in by a lady".⁸⁹

Although women were clustered at the low end of the occupation and paid considerably less than men at each licence level, the participation of even a few in the PEA demonstrates that some women were ambitious to improve their standing.⁹⁰ In the early 1850s women teachers attended Teachers' Institutes sponsored by the

85 *Report of the First Annual Convention of the Education Association of Nova Scotia* (1880), PEA Minute Book.

86 *Journal of Education*, 25 (June 1869), p. 396; PEA Minutes, December 1873.

87 PEA Minutes, 20 July 1871 and December 1873.

88 PEA Minutes, December 1874.

89 PEA Minutes, December 1875; Lois Kernaghan, "'Someone Wants the Doctor': Maria Angwin, MD, (1849-1898)", *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 43, (1991), pp. 33-48.

90 *JHA* (1869), Annual Report, App. 7, Table 1.

Winter Term.	Acad.	1st class	2nd class	3rd class	Total
Male	13	231	260	290	794
Female	0	232	182	90	504

The salary differentials for 1869 were: Male 1st class: \$397; Female 1st class: \$256; Male 2nd class \$253; Female 2nd class: \$181; Male 3rd class: \$186; Female 3rd class: \$150. RG 14, vol.30, #471, 1869, PANS.

Nova Scotia superintendent of schools, J.W. Dawson.⁹¹ In 1858 Forrester published an essay by a young woman pupil at the Normal School in the *Journal of Education and Agriculture* on teachers' need for special knowledge about the nature of child development.⁹² From the time it opened in 1854 the provincial Normal School at Truro always had a large proportion of female students. It was not until 1869 that female teachers were eligible to take the examination for first-class licences. In October 1869 a 16-year-old Normal School student was the first woman to gain a first-class licence.⁹³ However, the highest licence granted in the province was the academic licence, not the first class. Therefore women were still ineligible for teaching in provincial secondary schools. The two medal winners at the Normal School in 1877 were both women, and the four students with highest marks in the licensing examinations in 1881 were women.⁹⁴

A few women were active in professional activities beyond the PEA and the Normal School, and some won recognition for their efforts. In 1870 Miss H.M. Norris of Cape Canso won a ten-dollar prize from the Provincial Education Association for the best educational tract, "Five Days a Week, or the Importance of Regular Attendance at School".⁹⁵ Letitia Wilson, who taught the school in Doctors Cove, Shelburne County, attained both respect and financial reward. In 1870 the trustees of her school found her services so profitable "both educationally and financially" that they increased her salary sufficient to make her the highest paid teacher in her class in the county.⁹⁶

Such success was unusual, and the PEA did not provide a forum for women's professional ambitions. In the early 1870s two women took their grievances to a wider audience. Both these women were unhappy about the lack of financial remuneration they received as well as their lack of status. The language they employ is as significant as their arguments. They argued their cases explicitly in terms of women's special aptitude for teaching the young, and called on the chivalry of their colleagues and employers rather than demanding recognition of their professional skills. Both women wrote anonymously. Apparently even complaints couched in socially acceptable terms were likely to be met with resistance and criticism.

The first was written to the provincial *Journal of Education* in 1871. The author developed her argument systematically:

Have the friends of right, and the keen discrimination of providential arrangements, considered these conclusions? What place does the woman occupy in the family? Who does not know that in the most important

91 Of 68 teachers attending a Teachers Institute at Truro in November 1851, 24 were female. *Journal of Education*, 3 (January 1852); Five female teachers (Susan Best, Annie Kidson, Esther Gould, Mary E. Troop, C.A. Troop) also attended an Institute at Truro in April 1851. Forty men also attended. *Novascotian*, 28 April 1851.

92 *Journal of Education and Agriculture*, 1, 3 (September 1858), pp. 36-8.

93 *Journal of Education*, 27 (October 1869), p. 413.

94 *JHA* (1877), App. 5, Annual Report, p. xviii; *Annual Report* (1881), App. A.

95 *Journal of Education*, 29 (February 1870), pp. 446-7.

96 *Annual Report* (1870), p. 41.

institution in the world, *Home*, woman's mind is the governing power? Who does not know that all minds receive the first training, the first direction, the first noble, generous pulsation of future ambition, under the moulding and elevating authority of the female? Take from our homes this female training; take from society, generally, this element, and what are our homes or what our country? There is a part of the great system of instruction in which woman towers immensely above man. The teacher's office is specially suited to women — who are natural educators.⁹⁷

She went on:

When it is stated that, for the same labour, females receive less pay, though that labour may be as well, if not better, performed, we are compelled to feel that an aspersion is cast upon our sex, from which our past history and present influence ought to save us, and if it has any meaning at all, is a sad commentary upon the chivalry and gallantry of our countrymen.⁹⁸

The second anonymous woman teacher brought her complaints to a Halifax newspaper in 1874. Her tone was more urgent than that of the letter writer three years earlier, but her argument, that male gallantry ought not to permit the underpayment of women teachers, was similar:

Now, Mr. Editor, when we take into account the time, trouble and expense given in order to obtain a first-class license, and the loss of dignity entailed in interviewing the Commissioners, one by one, and in appealing to every feeling known to humanity (save that of qualification for the office), it will be granted that the salary given is not glaringly liberal....The only remedy for this evil is increase in salary....It is pitiable to reflect that the only city officials so treated are *women*, whom one would suppose the chivalrous instinct of a *gentleman* would lead him to protect, not oppress.⁹⁹

The deeply held gender attitudes of both male and female teachers crippled their ability to address their situation directly and to negotiate collectively with the state. Reformed public schools provided moral training for children, work associated with the unpaid reproductive labour of the private sphere. But that work was performed in the public sphere for wages. The separate spheres ideology could not fully accommodate the novel institutional setting of the public school which did not fit neatly into it. This uneasy fit made it very difficult for male and female teachers to negotiate collectively to improve their working conditions. The gender ideology had special meaning for teachers of both sexes. And it is important to remember that, whatever reassurances were attempted by school administrators such as T.H. Rand,

97 "Female Teaching", *Journal of Education*, 36 (April 1871), p. 559.

98 "Female Teaching", *Journal of Education*, 36 (April 1871), p. 559.

99 *Halifax Daily Reporter and Times*, 12 January 1874.

men and women were in competition for jobs. Rand himself pointed to this competition indirectly in the *Journal of Education* in 1870 in an item on selecting teachers. He complained that when it came to hiring, many local school boards made inappropriate choices, and nearly all those poor choices were women teachers. He said that very few “real Teachers” applied for teaching jobs. Most were “estimable young ladies without money” who were hired because the local school trustees believed that money raised in town should help the poor, or they were untrained school girls hired because they were local or because their fathers were influential in the locality.¹⁰⁰

Superintendent Hunt also tried to reassure male teachers that they need not compete with women for jobs. In 1871 he argued that women teachers simply could not compete with men “in inculcating what we may call the severer studies so necessary to fit young men for the hard, practical duties of life”.¹⁰¹ He believed that it was a false economy for school trustees to take advantage of the supply of cheap female teachers.¹⁰² The report of the inspector for Pictou County in 1870 refers very explicitly to the competition:

Though painful to acknowledge, it is a humiliating fact that too many sections are influenced in their selection of teachers more by dollars and cents than by the merits of candidates. Many young men, holding first-class licenses, experienced difficulty in obtaining situations, because they objected to labour for the paltry salaries offered. Trustees also complain of the scarcity of teachers. The fault and the remedy rest with themselves.¹⁰³

J.B. Calkin, the principal of the Normal School, offered the most modern solution to the competition. In 1874 he argued that teaching salaries should be based on qualifications, not sex.¹⁰⁴ It is eloquent testimony to the durability of the separate spheres ideology that his was virtually a lone voice. The editor of a Halifax newspaper expressed a much commoner attitude in a tirade against equal rights for women when he stated that “a sensible and practical woman can always get her rights”.¹⁰⁵

In reality the separate spheres ideology prescribed the expectations and attitudes of Nova Scotia women teachers in ways that made it difficult for them to bargain effectively in the public sphere. Women teachers, as the two writers quoted above attest, believed that they had a natural aptitude for teaching. A natural aptitude does not constitute a learned skill, or in Bergen’s words, “special service, expertise or knowledge”.¹⁰⁶ Expertise and skill are political constructs; that is, the recognition of

100 *Journal of Education*, 30 (April 1870).

101 *Journal of Education*, 37 (June 1871), p. 573.

102 *Journal of Education*, 37 (June 1871), p. 574.

103 *Annual Report* (1870), Inspector’s Report, Pictou County.

104 *Annual Report* (1875), Report of the Provincial Normal School, App. B, p. 95.

105 *Presbyterian Witness*, 21 August 1869.

106 Bergen, “Only a Schoolmaster”, p. 8.

skill depends on the success of its possessor in persuading society of its value, not on the degree of difficulty or length of time involved in acquiring it. Women have historically been less successful than men in that process because the skills of women have been defined as belonging to the private sphere, outside the economic values that permeate the public sphere. One measure of this difficulty is found in the descriptions of male and female teachers in mid-19th-century Nova Scotia. Male teachers were recognized for their "careful training and ability".¹⁰⁷ Female teachers, on the other hand, were admired for their "affectionate solicitude" and "unimpeachable fidelity".¹⁰⁸ Women were praised for their innate characteristics, while men were valued for their acquired or learned skill.

Because women were performing work that they were divinely called to, and rested their claims for status on God and nature, they lacked a language in which to advance their claims in the public sphere. This is evident in the women teachers' appeals for chivalry, language that carried more weight in the private sphere than in the public. It is very significant that both of these women used the language of chivalry and natural ability rather than that of human rights and acquired skill.

The full extent of these disadvantages can be understood when we take a longer view of the impact of the separate spheres ideology on the life cycle of women. This ideology proposed that marriage and motherhood were the routes to economic security and social influence. More research is needed to determine just how long women remained in the public school work force, but we do know that women teachers in Nova Scotia were not encouraged to remain in their positions after marriage.¹⁰⁹ The inspector for Cumberland County was the only provincial education official to broach the subject of married teachers directly. He wrote:

Married ladies are necessarily unable to give steady attendance to school duties, the higher law of maternity compelling them often to be at home. The law of nature seems to be that ladies should, on entering the married state, devote themselves to domestic and social cares, and not to public duties. The family is the school in which the married lady should teach.¹¹⁰

The inspector from Pictou County simply assumed that women moved out of the work force at marriage, and coyly reported that "Cupid's intrigues have carried off

107 Minutes of the Commissioners, 12 June 1850, Records of the Board of Commissioners of Schools for the City of Halifax, RG 14, no. 29, PANS.

108 Minutes of the Commissioners, 12 June 1850, Records of the Board of Commissioners of Schools for the City of Halifax, RG 14, no. 29, PANS.

109 The experience of Nova Scotia teachers differed from that of their counterparts in London and in France where married teachers were encouraged to remain in the work force. See Copelman, "A New Comradeship", and Leslie Page Moch, "Government Policy and Women's Experience: The Case of Teachers in France", *Feminist Studies*, 13, 2 (Summer 1988), pp. 301-24. Jean Barman has argued that in British Columbia women teachers often had careers at least as long as their male counterparts: Jean Barman, "Birds of Passage or Early Professionals? Teachers in Late Nineteenth-century British Columbia," *Historical Studies in Education*, 2, 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 17-36.

110 *Annual Report* (1876), Inspector's Report, Cumberland County, p. 30.

seven of our female teachers".¹¹¹

The forced retirement of women teachers at marriage again reminds us that public school teaching was conducted in the public sphere. It is oversimplifying a complex process to argue that public school rooms became an extension of the private sphere. The public school system was created by male politicians, administered and supervised by male education officers, and its senior teaching positions were retained for male teachers. The men within the public school system were insistent in their claim to specialized knowledge and their position as professionals. Bureaucratization created career ladders for male teachers, with a few lucrative and socially prestigious positions within their sight, if not their grasp. Yet, unlike medical doctors, who were successful in masculinizing their occupation as part of the process of professionalization, male teachers had to wage their struggle in a field that by 1880 was dominated by women. Pictou County school inspector Daniel McDonald, an active member of the Provincial Education Association, identified professionalization quite explicitly with men. In his report for 1870 he lamented that the number of "professional men is small" and stressed the importance of educating the public "to provide salaries adequate to the comfortable maintenance of a family, and to render the schools permanent institutions before young men can be expected to devote their lives to teaching".¹¹²

While the competition of women in the field may have generated bitter resentment among many men, the separate spheres ideology to which they were committed demanded that they treat their female colleagues with paternalism and chivalry. The strong representation of Scottish-trained academy teachers in the Provincial Education Association in the 1860s and 1870s intensified the dichotomy between elements of the public and private spheres in public education, making it more difficult to negotiate the boundaries within the profession and to present common cause. These men had to press their claims to professional control of a feminized and degraded institution with politicians for whom feminization and the associated low costs were acceptable and even desirable. For male teachers, as for female teachers, the acceptance of a rigid distinction between the public and private spheres inhibited successful collaboration and thus professionalization.

Gender analysis must be applied broadly to the question of public education in mid-19th-century Nova Scotia. Public school reform in the mid-1860s created a demand for a large work force that was capable of providing moral training for young children. The separate spheres ideology accorded women a special role in the nurture of young children, and women quickly became numerically predominant in that work force. They were not hired because of their special training or skills but because they had what were believed to be natural characteristics that they shared with all women. The separate spheres ideology that promoted the recruitment of women teachers thus proved highly problematic to both men and women working within the reformed public schools. Nineteenth-century Nova Scotia teachers were unable to persuade politicians and taxpayers that they controlled the market on a special skill.

111 *Annual Report (1877)*, Inspector's Report, Pictou County, p. 34.

112 *Annual Report (1870)*, p. 53.