

‘FIGHTING IN THE DARK’: CHARLES FREDERICK FRASER AND THE  
HALIFAX ASYLUM FOR THE BLIND, 1850 - 1915

by

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for the degree of Master of Arts

at

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**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY**

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER 1        INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2        FOUNDATIONS: HALIFAX AND ITS RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, 1850 – 1872 .....	36
CHAPTER 3        NOT FOR ALMS BUT HELP: FUNDRAISING AND FREE EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND 1873 - 1882 .....	59
CHAPTER 4        BEYOND EDUCATION: 1883 - 1912 .....	82
CHAPTER 5        CONCLUSION.....	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	115

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 4.1 Grants from the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland 1900 – 1915 ..... 108

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 2.1 Enrollment at Halifax Asylum for the Blind 1871 - 1885.....	80
Figure 2.2 Sources of Funding for the Halifax Asylum for the Blind 1871 - 1883.....	81

## **ABSTRACT**

The Halifax Asylum for the Blind, the first residential school for blind children in Canada, opened its doors in 1872 as a charitable institution with educational goals. This work explores the foundation of the Asylum in light of Halifax's religious, economic, and educational history in the mid-nineteenth century. It highlights the influence of local personalities and the fight for financial stability that led to a changed understanding of educating blind children and adults from that of charitable need to philanthropic right.

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I had a variety of people attempt to teach me how to use a semi-colon correctly. They included G.T., S.E.S., K.S., and J.W. I do not know where their boundless patience came from. I was also supported through by a cheerleading squad both online and off. Thank you, FWD, LJ, DW, and K.M. and E.F. for all looking politely interested when I spoke endlessly about my thesis.

To my husband, Donald Monsma.

During the course of the writing of this thesis, two of the people whose works I discuss in Chapter 1 died. Dr. Paul Longmore (July 10, 1946–August 9, 2010) was an historian and a disability rights activist. His work had a profound influence on my own, and we are all lessened by his death. I recommend “Why I Burned My Book” as an introductory essay into his work. Laura Hershey (August 11, 1962–Nov 26, 2010) was a poet, a parent, a public speaker, a feminist, and a disability rights activist. She stood up proudly against poster children campaigns that diminish people with disabilities to objects of pity. I recommend her work “From Poster Child to Protestor.” Her most famous poem is “You Get Proud By Practicing.”

*Remember, you weren't the one  
Who made you ashamed,  
But you are the one  
Who can make you proud.  
Just practice,  
Practice until you get proud, and once you are proud,  
Keep practicing so you won't forget.  
You get proud  
By practicing.*



## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

At the celebration of his 50 years of service at the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, Sir Charles Frederick Fraser was praised by the *Morning Chronicle* as being the reason that Halifax, in 1923, enjoyed an international reputation as being at the “very forefront of education for the blind.”<sup>1</sup> The *Morning Herald* described him as a “crusader and pioneer who had pointed the way and brought happiness to hundreds of handicapped men and women.”<sup>2</sup> The Board of Managers of the Asylum expressed their pleasure at his “far reaching influence... Under [his] sympathetic guidance and inspired by [his] example [the pupils] have gained the confidence and courage which has enabled them to become useful and independent members of society.”<sup>3</sup> Both the newspapers and the Board of Managers made mention of Fraser’s campaign for free education for blind children across Nova Scotia through tax-based funding, similar in style to the funding available to

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<sup>1</sup> “Honoured on his Golden Jubilee,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 20 June 1923, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> “Fifty years of great service recognized at Golden Jubilee Night,” *The Morning Herald*, 20 June 1923, 1, 3.

<sup>3</sup> “Address Presented to Sir Frederick Fraser on his Fiftieth Anniversary as Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind”, The fifty-third report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax School for the Blind [hereafter *Annual Report (School)*] (Halifax: The School, 1923), 3.

educate sighted children; his development of a free circulating library for blind people across the Maritime provinces; and his campaign to give all blind children and blinded adults access to the tools and education necessary to become self-supporting. Fraser, as Superintendent of the Asylum, was specifically credited for its success while the Board of Managers was cast in a supporting role.

Fraser's Asylum for the Blind was just one of many institutions built in Halifax during the nineteenth century as part of the city's progressive era. In the decades before Confederation, the charitable public and the provincial government raised funds to build a variety of institutions with both educational and moral reform-based goals, including industrial schools for delinquent boys and a variety of missions to aid the deserving poor.<sup>4</sup> The Asylum was also not unique in being a school aimed at educating children with sensory-disabilities, having been built 15 years after the foundation of the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. As citizens of a bustling port city with strong ties to both the United Kingdom and the United States, Haligonians were aware of the ways in which problems presented by children with disabilities were addressed in those countries, and the politically-connected merchant class and growing middle class both supported institutions and education to solve social ills.<sup>5</sup>

Part of what makes the Asylum unique in the Haligonian institutional landscape is its foundation story. Unlike the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, the Asylum for the

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Guildford, "Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870" (PhD, Dalhousie University, 1990), 1-322.

Blind had a well-funded beginning as a result of the large financial legacy left by sighted merchant and noted philanthropist William Murdoch. However, Murdoch's legacy required that an equal amount be raised from the charitable public before the funds would be released; as a result, the elected Board of Managers of the Asylum found it necessary to reach across denominational lines in order to raise the large sums required. In contrast, the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb began at the instigation of two deaf men, and was taken over by a hearing Board of Directors; it was a strictly Protestant endeavour explicitly boycotted by Catholic authorities and families. Thus, although both institutions appealed for charitable funds in order to teach their similarly-disabled students, their pedagogical and fundraising approaches were quite different.

The second factor in what makes the Asylum's history unique, both in Halifax and across North America, is the lifetime involvement of Sir Charles Frederick Fraser. Like many leaders of institutions in Halifax in the nineteenth century, Fraser came from a wealthy, politically-connected family. His father, Benjamin DeWolf Fraser, was a well-respected doctor in Windsor, Nova Scotia; his mother, Elizabeth, was the daughter of Joseph Allison, a successful merchant and member of the Nova Scotia Council of Twelve. His family home is described in one biography as being "noted for its hospitality," while another highlights the family's social class and political connections by describing a visit from the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII) and the Marquis of Lorne.<sup>6</sup> Having been brought up in a family with such political connections, Fraser was

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<sup>6</sup> McNeil, Mary A. E. A., *The Blind Knight of Nova Scotia: Sir Frederick Fraser, 1850-1925* (Washington, D.C.: The University Press, 1939).; David Allison, *History of*

well able to negotiate for his students with the political and religious leaders of Halifax and across the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.

In addition, Fraser, like his students, was blind. This distinguishes his tenure at the Asylum not only from that of J. Scott Hutton, the hearing principal of the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, but also from superintendents of other blind asylums, such as Samuel Gridley Howe in Massachusetts and John Barrett McGann in Ontario. As a blind adult, Fraser was aware not only of the capabilities of other blind men, but also of the struggles they would face in gaining employment and respect. As the child of two wealthy Nova Scotians, he could speak effectively to the politicians and wealthy donors who would financially support the Asylum. As a successful educator, he could stand as an example of what educated blind adults could achieve. As the superintendent of the Asylum for the Blind, he successfully campaigned for government-funded free education for blind children, arguing that their rights to education were the same of those of sighted ones. Fraser, like many of the blind teachers he hired, was also able to stand as a role-model to his students, demonstrating for them and their families that targeted blind education could lead to a successful adult career.

In order to highlight the importance of these differences, this thesis will examine the foundation of the Asylum for the Blind and the work of its long-term superintendent, Sir Charles Frederick Fraser, from the earliest funding drive for the Asylum in the mid-1860s through its development into a respected educational facility by the beginning of

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*Nova Scotia: Biographic Sketches of Representative Citizens and Genealogical Records of the Old Families*, Vol. III (Halifax: A. W. Bowen & Co, 1916), 470.

the First World War. It will also show the influence of Fraser on both the sighted members of the Board of Managers and on the political leaders in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland. Under Fraser's guidance, the Asylum moved beyond its initial charitable aims to become a thriving school with students between ages six and twenty-one learning reading, math, history, and geography in addition to trades such as piano-forte tuning, music teaching, cane-chair seating, and massage. Fraser also developed an extension program for the Asylum that included a raised-print lending library for blind readers throughout the Maritime provinces of Canada; a loan fund to enable graduates to start their own businesses; and a Home Teaching Society to aid blinded adults.

In addition, this thesis will focus on the development of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind as an educational institution and a philanthropic project. It will address questions such as where the Asylum received its funding from and how that changed over time. It will also address how the managers of the Asylum convinced the provincial governments that education for blind children was a right, rather than a charitable project, what impact this had on the way blindness was discussed by politicians, religious leaders, and the press in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland, and how the representation of blindness as a worthy need altered as a result of the changes in public finance and the donor environment in the early years of World War I. By answering these questions, this thesis will contribute primarily to the history of disability, specifically the history of North American residential school education of children with sensory disabilities.

Disability has developed over the past several decades as a category for historic analysis. In 1982, Henri-Jacques Stiker wrote, "At the present time a historicist history

of disability is not possible; there are too few in-depth studies. There are only surroundings....”<sup>7</sup> If such a history of disability is to feature people with disabilities as actors, rather than as patients, subjects, or special cases, then it is true that many historians have neglected disability as a focus of inquiry. Instead, they have produced medical histories, works focusing on cures for certain illnesses, or the valorisation of specific individuals with disabilities, such as Helen Keller and Franklin D. Roosevelt. What existed prior to Stiker's 1982 *Corps infirmes et sociétés*, in English just as much as in the French literature to which he referred, presented disability as a tragedy, a problem to be solved, and a static entity, unchanging through history.<sup>8</sup> Recent historians of disability have worked to challenge all of these perspectives.

Disability historians today are working in concert with other academics and with disability rights activists to bring more attention to disability-related issues, in academia, in politics, and in popular culture. Since Stiker's work, studies of disability in the humanities and social sciences have increased dramatically, so much so that historians Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky have been able to identify two waves of academic inquiry. The first, emerging in the United States during the 1980s, worked within the academic framework “for the reform of public policy and professional practices, seeking

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<sup>7</sup> Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability [Corps infirmes et sociétés]*, trans. William Sayers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Henry Best's *The Blind*, published in 1919 (see further discussion below) opens with “At the story of those who sit in darkness, of the lot which they endure, and of the things which they have overcome, a sigh of compassion has risen to many a lip, a tear of sympathy to many an eye, a glow of admiring pride to many a cheek. It is perhaps well that this should be.” The first section of Ishabel Ross's *Journey into Light* (published in 1951, see further discussion below) describes the blind experience from “2650 BC to 1950 AD”.

ultimately to reconstruct society.”<sup>9</sup> These social scientific works came at the same time that political activism by people with disabilities in the United States was beginning to see concrete results. The United Nations marked 1981 as the official “Year of the Disabled Person,” the advocacy group ADAPT<sup>10</sup> was formed in 1983, and Irving Zola, a medical sociologist with a disability, founded the Society for Disability Studies in 1986. In the United States, the activism of the 1980s led to the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and the establishment of more advocacy groups, such as the American Association of People with Disabilities and Not Dead Yet.<sup>11</sup> In Canada, advocacy groups – including the Coalition of Provincial Organisations for the Handicapped (COPOH, now the Council of Canadians with Disabilities), the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded, and the Canadian Mental Health Association – successfully lobbied to have mental and physical disability included as a protected class under Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, “Introduction: Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream” In *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 1-29, 12.

<sup>10</sup> At that time, ADAPT stood for American Disabled for Accessible Public Transport. In 1990, it changed to American Disabled for Attendant Programs. Their current website does not indicate what the acronym stands for, and in light of their activities now focusing primarily on housing programs, it may stand for nothing save their history.

<sup>11</sup> Not Dead Yet is an anti-euthanasia group that formed in response to the work of Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Porter, "Twenty Years of Equality Rights: Reclaiming Expectations," *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 23, 1 (2005), 154, 163. Porter discusses the campaign by these groups in more detail on pages 162-164.

Longmore and Umansky describe the second wave of disability studies that emerged during the 1990s as being dominated by the humanities. New works adopted techniques from literary theory and rhetorical studies to discuss the importance of representations of disability in art, literature, and film, and applied feminist and queer studies lenses to the discussion of disability.<sup>13</sup> This wave went beyond discussing disability as a disadvantaged state to including disability as “subject important to, indeed essential to, wide-ranging intellectual inquiry.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite this growing body of literature, historical studies of disability are hardly common. Disability historians continue to write articles calling for more research into the field, justifying their own works through articles with titles such as “Why we need another ‘Other’” and “Where are the disabled in the history of education?”<sup>15</sup> Writing 19 years after Stiker's work appeared in French, Longmore and Umansky point out that the

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<sup>13</sup> See: Martin F Nordon, *Cinema of Isolation: a history of physical disability in the movies*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Christopher R Smit and Anthony Enns, ed, *Screening Disability: essays on cinema and disability*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001); Bonnie G. Smith and Beth Hutchison, eds., *Gendering Disability* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 314; Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, "Introduction: Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream," in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Kudlick, “Disability History: Why we Need another “Other”,” *American Historical Review* (June, 2003), 763-793; Richard J. Altenbaugh, “Where are the Disabled in the History of Education? the Impact of Polio on Sites of Learning,” *History of Education* 35, no. 6 (November, 2006), 705-730; Douglas C. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History” In *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 33-57.



work of disability historians has “appeared less frequently and more haphazardly than it should.”<sup>16</sup> There is, however, a growing historicist history of disability. Historians of disability have deepened understanding of how disability has changed over time, how the label of disabled has been applied to groups in order to justify discrimination, and the changes as well as the continuities in the ways people with disabilities have been treated.

This work has been influenced by the development of disability rights activism, as historians have periodised disability-related change and identified key factors in creating group experiences of disability. As disability rights activists have raised concerns about education and citizenship in the modern United States, disability historians have focused on the United States between 1880 and 1930 as an era when, according to Longmore and Umansky, “the institutions ... created either questioned the competency of people with virtually all types of disabilities for full citizenship or declared them disqualified,” and have focused attention on the educational institutions that were formed or altered during this period.<sup>17</sup>

The relationship between disability-related activism and historical study has also influenced the conceptions of disability that historians have chosen to examine. Mary Klages' *Woeful Afflictions* discusses how “sentimental forms of representation” in the United States during the nineteenth century both influenced and attempted to subvert the general public's perceptions of people with disabilities, most particularly blind women. Klages cites both the influence of her sister, who is a disability rights activist with Down

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<sup>16</sup> Longmore and Umansky, *Introduction: Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, 1-29, 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Syndrome, and the work of disability rights activist Laura Hershey, in challenging the “poster child” phenomena, as influential to her work:

Starting with the premise that disabled people have always functioned as “posters” that generate a particular response in able-bodied [sic] viewers, I argue that Victorian portrayals of disability worked to expand and rewrite that function, insisting that disabled people could be more than just bearers of cultural meaning.<sup>18</sup>

Historians have argued that studying the history of conceptions of disability is an important part of understanding other marginalized bodies, specifically those of white women and people of colour. In the introduction to the anthology *Defects: Engendering the Modern Body*, Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum argue that their aim is “to ally deformity, disability, and gender studies” in the early modern period, pointing out that “since the female condition would seem to be aligned with natural defect, men fear that ‘defect’ is an emasculating construction....”<sup>19</sup> This work is well-supplemented by Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon’s essay “‘Dependency’ Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State”, which describes how dependency became both a derisive and feminizing term during industrialization and the development of the welfare state. Together, these works describe the mechanisms and processes by which the terms “disability” and “dependency” have changed in both meaning and content over time.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *“Defects”*: *Engendering the Modern Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 10, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “‘Dependency’ Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An*

Douglas C. Baynton has added to this analysis by demonstrating how describing certain classes of people as being disabled allowed for them to be excluded from both public life and immigration to the United States.<sup>21</sup> According to Baynton, disability history is following the same path as that of other minority groups, and that, while this work is “necessary and exciting,” it is time for disability, like gender, to move “from the margins to the center of historical inquiry.”<sup>22</sup>

However, despite Baynton's claims that “disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it,” certain types of disability have still received far more attention from historians than others.<sup>23</sup> Institutions that have housed people with disabilities – be they residential schools or asylums – have attracted particular attention due to the existence of large numbers of records kept by administrators. The development of separate residential schools for deaf<sup>24</sup> and blind children in many English-speaking countries allows for historical interpretations to be applied to both groups far more easily than those with mobility-related disabilities or epilepsy, amongst others. The study of both deaf and blind people does have historiographical trends: comparing them to each other shows both the development of theories and practices in disability history, and how

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*Anthology*, eds. Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 618-633.

<sup>21</sup> Baynton, *Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History*, 33-57

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Although modern convention is to use “deaf” to describe the medical condition, and “Deaf” to refer to those who are culturally Deaf and primarily use Sign Language to communicate, I have chosen to use “deaf” throughout this essay, except in quotations.

modern group identity and dynamics influences the study of the past. As Klages points out, “scholars have done a magnificent job in recovering the history of the deaf in America,” fueled by the acknowledgment of a deaf community, language, and culture, while the blind are mostly studied through the history of blind residential schools, and are still mostly represented by works created by the institutions themselves and the analysis of those works.<sup>25</sup>

Deaf-focused historical inquiry began in North America as early as 1869 with the history of the institutions and the work of hearing educators. Individual residential schools for the deaf produced histories of deafness in an effort to interest the public – and by extension, financial donors and political patrons – in the work being done.<sup>26</sup> Many of the works presented the life of deaf people before the institutions as being filled with pain and misery, lacking the presence of religion, the loving words of a mother, or the sound of music to off-set a dreary existence. The authors of these works then presented the institutions as being the remedy for the misery of deaf people, bringing the Christian religious faith into the lives of deaf children. This narrative was often presented as part of

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<sup>25</sup> Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Examples include Thomas Widd, *The Deaf and Dumb and Blind Deaf-Mutes: With Interesting Facts and Anecdotes, a Short History of the Mackay Institution, an Easy Method of Teaching Deaf Mutes at Home, the Audiophone, etc* (Montreal: F. E. Grafton, 1880), written about the Mackay Institution in Montreal; Joseph Gordon, *Education of Deaf Children: Evidence of E. M. Gallaudet and A. G. Bell Presented to the Royal Commission of the United Kingdom on the Condition of the Blind, the Deaf and Dumb* (Washington: Volta Bureau, 1892).; and Lewellyn Pratt, ed., *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, Vol. XIV (Raleigh: Press of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, 1869), 286-1 which included articles by J. Scott Hutton on the history of the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and Reverend Collins Stone on the history of deaf-mute instruction.

the Annual Reports of the residential schools and thus of primary interest to potential donors.

In supplement to these officially-produced works, individual deaf adults also wrote accounts of their education and sold them for profit. For example, one of the original founders of the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb wrote *The Autobiography of George Tait, a Deaf Mute, Who First Gave Instruction to the Deaf and Dumb in the City of Halifax*.<sup>27</sup> Cashing in on the success of the Institution, Tait wrote his autobiography in order to support himself after he left Halifax, and the short pamphlet presents the history of deaf people prior to the founding of the first educational institutions in a similar fashion. Even much later, such works continued to be produced in Halifax. At its 100-year anniversary, the school produced *The School for the Deaf: Halifax, Nova Scotia: 100 Years of Service*. This short work was not meant to analyze the school's place in history, but instead to allow interested outsiders a glimpse into what work the school was doing, and had done in the past, again asserting that prior to the Institution's foundation, deaf people in Nova Scotia were miserable and unable to communicate at all.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of more general histories of deafness, what little was written tended to be from the point of view of deafness as a medical condition, one that needed to be overcome. A prime example of this is the work of Ruth E. Bender, who in 1960

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<sup>27</sup> George Tait, *Autobiography of George Tait, a Deaf Mute, Who First Gave Instruction to the Deaf and Dumb in the City of Halifax*, Seventh ed. (Halifax: James W. Doley, 1884).

<sup>28</sup> *School for the Deaf: Halifax, Nova Scotia: 100 Years of Service* (Halifax: Privately published, 1956 [?]).

published *The Conquest of Deafness: A History of the Long Struggle to make Possible Normal Living to those Handicapped by Lack of Normal Hearing*.<sup>29</sup> The title makes clear Bender's thesis: that the experience and education of the deaf had historically been working towards “breaking the barrier of silence” in the twentieth century. Her primary focus is on the development of the oralism method of teaching, with little attention paid to American Sign Language.<sup>30</sup> As well, Bender's work had little historical analysis, being in the same vein as many meliorist works – past deaf experiences, according to Bender, were ultimately about teaching deaf people to speak, and thus become acceptably integrated into hearing society.<sup>31</sup>

These works contributed to, and were a part of, the dominant cultural narrative of deafness as something that deaf people did not want to be, something they should work to hide. This narrative is still part of the dominant culture, but deaf people and other disability rights activists have worked to fight this perception and present deafness as not a medical condition but as a cultural experience, one that includes a shared language,

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<sup>29</sup> Ruth E. Bender, *Conquest of Deafness: A History of the Long Struggle to make Possible Normal Living to those Handicapped by Lack of Normal Hearing* (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1960).

<sup>30</sup> In short, the oralist method of teaching focused on having deaf children read lips and “speak.” Although this is possible with some deaf people, for most, Sign Language is the preferred method of communication. Historically, the oralist method was promoted by hearing educators and hearing parents of deaf children, while deaf adults advocated for the Sign Language method of communication. Despite a ban on Sign Language in many schools for the deaf after the 1880 Milan Conference, it continued to be used by students, often taught to others by the deaf children of deaf parents. Presently, the oralist method has mostly been phased out of schools, although some use the “combined” method of teaching both oralism and Sign Language.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth E. Bender, *The Conquest of Deafness: A History of the Long Struggle to make Possible Normal Living to those Handicapped by Lack of Normal Hearing* (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1960).

history, and understanding of the world. William Stokoe began this campaign in 1960 with his study *Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication System of the American Deaf*, which was the first widely accepted paper to argue that American Sign Language was a distinct language rather than a visual form of English.<sup>32</sup>

However, it was not until the 1980s that several events brought widespread attention to deafness and deaf cultural identity. In 1984, Harlan Lane, a hearing psychologist and linguist, wrote *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*.<sup>33</sup> Lane's work attacked both previous histories of deafness and the medical model of treating deaf people.<sup>34</sup> He described the treatment of deafness and hearing people's reaction to it as “fear of diversity lead[ing] majorities to oppress minorities” and pointed out that histories of deafness had, with one exception, been written by hearing people.<sup>35</sup> He asserts that

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<sup>32</sup> William C. Stokoe, “Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communications System of the American Deaf,” *Studies in Linguistics: Occasional Papers* 8 (1960), 7-75.

<sup>33</sup> Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*, reprint ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

<sup>34</sup> The medical model of disability presents disability as an individual problem, rather than a societal one. From the medical model, deafness is a medical condition that should be “cured,” whether through medical intervention or through oralist education. Disability rights activists have developed a social model of disability which views the difficulties that come from disability as being societal. In this case, deaf people are disabled because hearing people do not use Sign Language. Deaf activists have highlighted experiences at Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, where there was a genetic predisposition to deafness. In response, everyone there learned Sign Language in order to communicate with both hearing and deaf individuals, to the point where it is difficult for town histories to pinpoint who was deaf and who was hearing. In this case, deaf people were not in any way disabled, as everyone could communicate with everyone else. See: Nora Ellen Groce, *Everyone here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

<sup>35</sup> Lane is referring to Jack R Gannon's *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* (Silver Spring: National Association for the Deaf, 1981).

“with the recent evidence from linguistics that American Sign Language is a natural language, the signing community is revealed to be a linguistic minority, and this history interprets the record of their struggle in that light,” as do the histories written since Lane's work.<sup>36</sup>

Two highly publicized events in the United States in the late 1980s also contributed to the growing awareness of deaf culture. In 1986, Marlee Matlin, a deaf actress, was the youngest woman to receive the Academy Award for best actress for her portrayal of Sarah Norman in the critically acclaimed movie *Children of a Lesser God*. Two years later, Gallaudet University garnered international attention when the student body protested the hiring of a hearing woman as president, arguing that her lack of knowledge of American Sign Language made her inappropriate for the president of a university for deaf students. The Deaf President Now! protests lasted for eight days, and participants received media attention, once again bringing the concerns of deaf people in the United States to a broader audience.<sup>37</sup> Events at Gallaudet spurred the deaf community to become more active, and the following year saw The Deaf Way International Conference and Festival. Participants described the week-long event as a “celebration of the language, history, culture and arts of deaf people around the world,

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<sup>36</sup> Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*, reprint ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xv.

<sup>37</sup> Carol J. Erting, "Introduction," in *The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture*, eds. Carol J. Erting and others (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), xxvi. For a further discussion of the Deaf President Now! protests, see Mary C. Malzkuhn and others, "Deaf President Now," in *The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture*, eds. Carol J. Erting and others (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 829-837..



attract[ing] in excess of 6,000 people from 81 countries.”<sup>38</sup> Lane's book was re-released in paperback in 1989, and, over the next 20 years, several major and minor works on deaf history were written, refining Lane's work and further exploring the experiences of deaf people in the United States. Like Lane, the authors of these works focused on deaf residential schools and the suppression of American Sign Language as key experiences.

In 1998 deaf history took a new turn, launched by Douglas C. Baynton's work *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language*. Baynton offered a deeper criticism than the works written by historians inspired by Lane. Where Lane and others were quick to ascribe prejudice and fear to the motivations of those who opposed American Sign Language, Baynton argues that this point of view was far too limited, and that the fears in question connected deafness to other, wider fears. His work explores reasons why manualism was used in the antebellum United States, contrasting this with the reasons for the change to oralism.<sup>39</sup> Baynton argues that the push for oralism was heavily influenced by the growing Americanisation movement:

Rather than treating manualism as merely sensible and oralism as an unfortunate aberration, seeing both as part of movements embedded in particular historical moments and expressing historically situated constructions of deafness can illuminate both them and the reform eras of which they were part.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Clifton F. Carbin, *Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture*, ed. Dorothy L. Smith (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Manualism refers to teaching done using manual English, a form of Sign Language that transliterates English using Sign. American Sign Language has its own grammar and syntax, unrelated to American English.

<sup>40</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.

He compares the cultural experiences of hearing manualists and oralists, demonstrating that oralism was motivated by fears of diversity of language, rather than of fears of deaf people, and explores the gender differences among teachers. While men were the primary teachers of the manual method, women – influenced by the growing women’s suffrage movement and first wave feminism – were far more concerned about giving people a “voice” in public affairs. Yet Baynton’s work still concentrates attention on hearing educators, viewing their reactions as being the most important factor in the treatment of deaf students.

R.A.R. Edwards, however, finds the periodisation that centres on the Civil War too simple, arguing that it attributes to generational change what was, in fact, a continuous path from manualism to oralism.<sup>41</sup> Edwards draws attention to Horace Mann, an educator for the United States who visited Germany’s deaf schools in 1843. After his visit, Mann argued that oralist methods were the best for deaf students, and his arguments were invoked by the Clarke School for the Deaf when it opened in 1867. Edwards asserts that educators of deaf children in the United States did not see a generational change but, as men “extraordinarily interested in the history of their profession,” educators of deaf children were aware of arguments that had been made for both manualism and oralism in the past and considered them in making decisions about pedagogy in the present.<sup>42</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> R. A. R. Edwards, ““Speech has an Extraordinary Humanizing Power”: Horace Mann and the Problem of Nineteenth-Century American Deaf Education” In *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 58-82.

<sup>42</sup> R. A. R. Edwards, ""Speech has an Extraordinary Humanizing Power": Horace Mann and the Problem of Nineteenth-Century American Deaf Education," in *The New*

addition, Edwards describes the context of the change to oralism as being part of a large discussion in the nineteenth century about language and language acquisition, and the importance of assimilation and understanding of written English. While Baynton argues that motivations for teaching the deaf are important, Edwards argues that the manualism and oralism debates amongst educators had the same aim – to eliminate deaf culture, and encourage deaf people to think like English-speaking people.

Inspired by Baynton, Susan Burch continues his examination of the gender-related aspects of the oralism debate, but focuses away from the hearing population and towards the behaviour of the deaf community. She argues that the growing number of women in the United States (many of whom attended the Clarke school's teaching training program from 1892) who taught using the oralism method were resisted by deaf men by "employ[ing] the same gender stereotypes as the oralists who championed a maternalist approach to deaf education."<sup>43</sup> Burch demonstrates the effects of the feminisation of teaching on both deaf men and women, in terms of gender stereotypes and the growing idea of the residential school as "family" with a male administrator as head of household and the female teaching staff in the maternal role. Burch's underlying argument is even more basic: in order to understand deaf history, historians must pay far

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*Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 60.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Burch, "Reading between the Signs: Defending Deaf Culture in Early Twentieth-Century America" In *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 214-235, 215.

more attention the experiences of deaf people themselves, rather than the reactions of the hearing administrators of the institutions.

As historians have done further research on the experience of deafness, their interest has broadened, and their focus has moved away from the residential school experiences of children to deaf adults. Burch's *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to 1942* follows Baynton's lead on issues of Americanisation, but is much broader in the scope of the deaf experiences it discusses. While Baynton focuses on hearing adults in residential schools, Burch looks at publications (including Deaf newspapers, memoirs, films, and 'oral history' interviews) produced by deaf adults, using their own words to discuss the fight for American Sign Language and cultural recognition. Burch also discusses the socially conservative focus of deaf leaders – mostly male and all white, able-bodied, and middle class – during the Americanisation period of the early twentieth century. She described these leaders as “fashion[ing] an image of the capable, able-bodied Deaf citizen. At the same time, the fear of being too different led many to discriminate against their own: Deaf African Americans, Deaf women, and Deaf people with multiple disabilities.”<sup>44</sup> Again, Burch acknowledges Baynton's important work, while calling for a richer understanding of the deaf experience by focusing on deaf people as actors, rather than people acted upon, as well as further examination of people marginalized by deaf leaders.

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<sup>44</sup> Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 5.

By adding a gender-based component, Susan Burch and Brenda Jo Brueggemann increase the intersectionality of both historical and contemporary analyses of deaf culture. Within their anthology focusing on deaf women's experiences, Jessica Lee argues that a gender-based analysis of deaf experience in residential schools is necessary for a fuller understanding of both the schools themselves, and of the differences of experience between hearing and deaf girls. Lee's work asserts that deaf girls were being set up for marriage during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the same years in which their hearing counterparts were increasing their opportunities outside of the home before marriage. Lee discusses attitudes towards deaf girls in the deaf press, as well as within the schools themselves, showing that the primary intention for girls was for them to seek marriage with a deaf man, while male pupils were encouraged to learn trades.<sup>45</sup>

Other writers have also challenged the works of Lane and Baynton as having too narrow a focus. Sociologists Jan Branson and Don Miller enlarge the history of changes in deaf education by showing how those changes were related to other contemporaneous pedagogical and philosophical movements. They assert that the focus on both the history of deaf education and present textual studies of literature, arts, and cinema has been too narrow, and that it has failed to relate the discriminatory experiences of deaf people to those of experienced by people discriminated against on the basis of "ability, gender, race, ethnicity, or social class." In addition, they draw on studies of the exclusion of other

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<sup>45</sup> Jessica Lee, "Family Matters: Female Dynamics within Deaf Schools," in *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*, eds. Susan Burch and Brenda Jo Brueggemann (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2006), 5-20.

linguistic minority groups as a point of comparison.<sup>46</sup> Branson and Miller show that the development of a deaf culture in the United States in the nineteenth century, as indicated by the founding of deaf churches and associations, demonstrated an early willingness by hearing people to accept deafness as a cultural identity; they argue that this was halted by the increased professionalism in the teaching, not only of deaf students but also hearing ones, which led to the re-definition of deafness as a disability.<sup>47</sup>

The historiography of deaf residential schools in the United States follows trends in the historical literatures about other marginalized groups, and has been influenced by developments in modern deaf culture and disability rights activism. Compared with the early institutional histories, the well-developed literature on deaf history discusses in a nuanced way the historical roles of both hearing and deaf actors, and takes into account the role that gender has played, and continues to play, in how deaf and hearing people are perceived. There are still, however, areas left to be explored. As well as obvious avenues, such as further exploring race and geographic location in deaf educational experiences in the United States, there has been comparatively little scholarship regarding deaf experiences in Canada. The only book-length study is Clifton F. Carbin's *Deaf Heritage in Canada*, written at the behest of the Canadian Cultural Society for the Deaf. Like the earlier histories created by deaf residential schools, Carbin's work does not aim for historical analysis. In addition, it does not contrast the Canadian experience with that in

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<sup>46</sup> Jan Branson and Don Miller, *Damned for their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), ix.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

the United States, neglecting an essential tool of historization. Although Carbin was obviously aware of the historiographical work being done elsewhere, he does not apply any of this analysis to Canada. Instead, his aim is to foster “a greater pride and interest in the history of deaf Canadians.”<sup>48</sup> As it is written with the goals of the Canadian Cultural Society for the Deaf in mind, namely to “instill a sense of pride and understanding in our roots – our Deaf heritage,” it is also meliorist.<sup>49</sup> However, the sheer breadth of the research Carbin did should not be dismissed. Carbin's study includes information from every province in Canada (including a 19 page chapter on Atlantic Canada), and every residential school founded, regardless of length of tenure, as well as discussing the contributions of deaf Canadians in war, in sport, and in the visual arts. Although it may not contribute much to an historicist history of disability, its contribution to further research in the deaf experience of Canadians cannot be ignored.

Like Canadian deaf studies, the study of blind residential schools is lacking a groundbreaking work such as Lane's. This is influenced by a number of factors, both within the general population and the blind population. Unlike deaf people, blind people do not self-identify as having a unique culture. Braille does not serve in the same capacity as Sign Language, nor do blind people typically understand Braille to be its own language. While deaf people have an immediately-recognizable public face in Marlee Matlin, there are no world famous blind actors for the public to be curious about, and no groundbreaking movie starring a blind actor to watch and comment on. Although

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<sup>48</sup> Carbin, *Deaf Heritage in Canada*, xix.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, “Family Matters,” viii.

historians have begun to apply some of the same analysis that has been applied to deaf experience to the experience of blind people in the United States, no single work or series of works has demanded a refocusing of blind history.

That linking the two literatures together is possible is suggested by the fact that the existing works on the blind follow some of the same trends as those in deaf history. Like works commissioned by deaf residential schools, the histories that have come out of the blind schools – both residential and day schools – and lobby groups such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) present a meliorist narrative. Euclid Hérie's *Journey to Independence*, written at the behest of the CNIB, describes blind history as “a long journey from the period in Canadian history when blind people were relegated to poverty, derision, pity, abuse, and social conditions that, with few exceptions, left them with a bleak promise for the future.”<sup>50</sup> As with the works about deaf residential schools, Hérie's study and studies about particular residential schools for the blind present the end of that “bleak” future as the creation of whichever institution commissioned the work.<sup>51</sup> Without the paradigm-changing influence of a study like Lane's, many works on blindness in the United States have been written from similar points of view. They position blindness as a pitiable condition, and with a focus on the perceived bravery and effort of sighted professionals who work with the blind.

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<sup>50</sup> Euclid Hérie, *Journey to Independence: Blindness ~ the Canadian Story* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2005), 15.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Margaret Ross Chandler describes the “happy atmosphere found in the school” at Bellevue, Ontario as “a far cry from the situation in which blind children found themselves centuries ago”. Shirley J. Trites' history of the Halifax Asylum opens with “The history of the blind was long one of sadness.”



Trends in the historiography of the blind can be traced through the changes in how historians have viewed the education of Laura Bridgman, a deaf-blind woman, by Samuel Gridley Howe, the first principal of the New England Asylum for the Blind.<sup>52</sup> Howe learned of Bridgman in 1837, five years after scarlet fever rendered her blind and deaf. Interested in testing hypotheses about the true nature of humanity, he decided to teach her as an experiment “to determine which aspects of moral, spiritual, and intellectual knowledge were innate to human nature and which came from experience.”<sup>53</sup> Howe had Bridgman brought to the New England Asylum and worked with her and her private tutor to teach her how to communicate through both finger-spelling and reading raised letters. As Bridgman settled into the New England Asylum and quickly learned to communicate, Howe was celebrated as an excellent educator, using Bridgman’s growing skills to attract more people to support the New England Asylum and its goals. However, as Bridgman grew older, she was less tolerated and accepted by both Howe and the public in the United States, until she was supplanted by the much younger and more adept Helen Keller. Bridgman died in 1889.

Published 30 years after her death, Harry Best's *The Blind: Their Condition and the Work being done for them in the United States* made no mention of Bridgman, and hardly any mention of the work of Howe other than to note his time at the New England

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<sup>52</sup> Despite being deaf-blind, Bridgman is discussed in blind literature, when she is discussed at all. Howe was firmly opposed to Sign Language, and thus Bridgman was never taught it, which is why she is grouped in with blind students instead of deaf ones. In comparison, Helen Keller is often discussed in blind history rather than in deaf due to her ability to speak and use her hands to lip read.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, “Laura Bridgman and the History of Disability,” *Reviews in American History* 30 (2002), 227-235, 229.

Asylum. Best theorized that the most effective way to write about blindness was “from the point of view of the social economist,” and the goal of his work was to explore the history of blindness in order to explain why the previous century's focus on education of blind children left blind adults with few resources after leaving the asylum. While his work is remarkably thorough, its agenda allows little analysis of the agency of blind adults.<sup>54</sup> That the next major work on blindness was Ishbel Ross's *Journey into Light: The Story of the Education of the Blind*, produced over 30 years later, indicates how little attention had been paid to blind issues in the interim. Like previous works, Ross, too, fails to consider that blind people might have exercised any form of choice, power, or control. Ross describes Howe as having “breathed life into a blind, deaf and dumb girl,” and uses only Howe's annual reports about Bridgman and the biography written by his daughter to create a history of both Howe and Bridgman, despite the fact that Bridgman left behind letters and a half-finished autobiography. As well, Ross's work groups the experiences of “the blind 2650 BC – 1950 AD” into one section, while paying individual attention to many sighted educators or benefactors. The only blind person who is given any voice or agency within the work is Helen Keller, who wrote the forward for the book, and is presented as rising “above her triple handicap to become one of the best-known characters in the modern world.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Harry Best, *The Blind: Their Condition and the Work being done for them in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919), xx – xxi.

<sup>55</sup> Ishbel Ross, *Journey into Light: The Story of the Education of the Blind* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 5, 332. As well, despite dedicating a whole chapter to Keller, Ross makes no mention of Keller's politics or activism, instead describing Keller's grace, “agelessness,” and book collection.

More recent scholarship challenges the focus on Howe's work, instead looking at the effects of his behaviour on Bridgman herself. Two biographies of Bridgman, published in 2001, have explored *her* history, as opposed to his, looking at her letters and autobiography for insight into Howe.<sup>56</sup> While both these biographies acknowledge the work that Howe did in educating Bridgman, they also discuss the abusive nature of the relationship and Howe's rejection of Bridgman when she was no longer a suitable subject for his theories on faith. At the same time, however, both books lack the analytical framework that has been developed in general disability studies and the more robust deaf historic literature. This is perhaps because neither author has any particular tie to the disability rights movement or to disability-related history.<sup>57</sup>

As Klages points out, there are still very few book-length studies on blindness, and what exists is still heavily influenced by the general population's perception of blindness as a lack. However, blind residential schools produced as much material as deaf residential schools did, and there are still studies to be done that incorporate more of the analytical framework that Longmore, Umansky, and Baynton discuss in relation to disability history. There is also the need to explore more of the writings of blind people themselves, moving attention further away from sighted benefactors. Like deaf people, blind people need to be put front and centre in their own history. As part of that project,

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<sup>56</sup> Ernest Freeburg, *The Education of Laura Bridgman: First Deaf and Blind Person to Learn Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Elisabeth Gitter, *The Imprisoned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, the Original Deaf-Blind Girl* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> Freeman is primarily an historian of religious movements in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States, while Gitter's specialty is Victorian literature.

while this thesis will primarily deal with the administrative history of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, it places Sir Charles Frederick Fraser at the centre of the narrative as a blind man whose work on behalf of his students influenced the political and financial experiences of blind people across Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland.

Disability historians have the opportunity to draw on a diverse literature in order to demonstrate the changing notions of disability and dependency. Discussions of the welfare state, including Fraser and Gordon's "'Dependency' Demystified" and the work of Mariana Valverde, Paula Maurutto, and Shirley Tillotson have described both the processes and mechanisms used in the creation of dependent and independent individuals and classes of people.<sup>58</sup> Applying this analysis to projects such as the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Asylum for the Blind demonstrates how these mechanisms affected both institutions, and the resulting change over time in how the students were discussed by the government, by the Boards of each institution, and by potential charitable contributors. In addition, studies of successful and long-running residential schools for children with disabilities – which were, as highlighted by Burch, primarily for white, Christian children in North America – can be compared with schools

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<sup>58</sup> Fraser and Gordon, *'Dependency' Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State*, 618-633.; Mariana Valverde, "The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition," *Studies in Political Economy* 47 (Summer, 1995): 33-60.; Paula Maurutto, *Governing Charities: Church and State in Toronto's Catholic Archdiocese, 1850-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).; Shirley Tillotson, *Contributing Citizens: Modern Charitable Fundraising and the Making of the Welfare State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

for non-disabled white, Christian children to highlight the purposes of both types of schooling. In Halifax, the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb came into existence before free education for non-disabled Nova Scotian children, while the Asylum for the Blind came after the development of these common schools, and analyzing the foundation of both residential schools provides insight into the purposes of common school education. Works by Paul Axelrod, Ronald Manzer, Alice Prentice and Janet Guildford address how common schools across British North America were influenced by funding and taxation questions, religion denominational debates, and political rhetoric, with Guildford's work exploring Halifax's middle class's response to these debates.<sup>59</sup> These debates were also reflected in the development of the Asylum for the Blind as both Fraser and the Board developed its funding and purpose.

This thesis will draw upon the work by Valverde, Maurutto, and Tillotson on the mixed social economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using Ontario's government funding for institutions such as asylums, orphanages, and residential schools for children with disabilities as an example, Valverde shows how various types of funding grants, from variable grants that were to be voted on yearly to per-diem funding with rewards for collecting donations from non-government sources, reflect beliefs about an institution's role in Ontarian society, both pre- and post-

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<sup>59</sup> Ronald Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas: Canadian Education Policy in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Allison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914*, eds. Craig Heron and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Guildford, *Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870..*

Confederation.<sup>60</sup> Following Valverde's example, this thesis explores changes in funding of the Asylum in order to investigate changes over time in how the newspaper-reading public perceived it, initially as a charity and finally as an education institution, funded mostly by provincial governments. Evidence for the association between changes in funding and in public perceptions comes from the press and from municipal and provincial government officials.

Paula Maurutto further develops the history of the mixed social economy by describing the mechanisms by which the Ontario provincial government regulated those charities that were ostensibly not under government control. Maurutto focuses on "administration techniques" – yearly reports, regular inspections, and usage statistics – and how these can "shed much light on shifts in policy and programming."<sup>61</sup> This thesis looks specifically at the administrative records of the Asylum and uses them to trace changes in administration and techniques which, in turn, reflected and influenced changes in government perceptions of the work that Fraser and the Board of Managers were doing. The Annual Reports' lists of students, their ages, and their home towns illustrated both the Board's desire to present the Asylum as an institution that transcended geographic boundaries and demonstrated to municipalities and the provincial governments why their funding dollars were necessary. The Asylum was not only providing services to children of Halifax, but also to children of Cape Breton, Pictou

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<sup>60</sup> Mariana Valverde, "The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition," *Studies in Political Economy* 47 (Summer, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Paula Maurutto, *Governing Charities: Church and State in Toronto's Catholic Archdiocese, 1850-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 8.

County, Lunenburg and elsewhere in Nova Scotia. The Annual Reports also detailed not only the funding the Asylum received, but also how that funding was spent, which in turn was part of the argument that was used to gain additional donations and government financial support, an interconnected system that is also discussed in Tillotson's work on charitable fundraising and the welfare state in twentieth century Canada.<sup>62</sup>

This thesis uses two of the administrative reports created by the Board of Managers for the Asylum, the Annual Reports and the Minute Books of the Board to examine the history of the Asylum. The Board presented the Annual Reports at yearly meetings that were open to the public, as well as delivering copies to the interested governments and press. The Minute Books were a record of the monthly meetings of the Board of Managers. It also examines some of the written fundraising material created by the Board, although, as is described in later chapters, much of the fundraising came about through public lectures, teas, and direct solicitation by sighted women on behalf of the Asylum.

The Annual Reports, as a regularly produced public document, present the public face of the Asylum, and show the change in arguments presented over time regarding funding. In addition, examining the language used in these Reports can give insight into how the Board of Managers and Fraser asserted both the needs and rights of blind people. The Annual Reports included financial information about the Asylum, listing donations from individuals and churches as well as the direct financial outlay of the governments. Examining these reported financial records not only shows why the Board of Managers

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<sup>62</sup> Tillotson, *Contributing Citizens*.

and Fraser may have found it financially necessary to argue for the right of blind children to a publicly funded education, they also show how this funding led to an increase in enrollment and gave the Asylum the financial stability it needed to extend its services beyond basic education within its walls. They also serve as an accountability report, in that they highlight the successes of graduates in addition to the successes of services such as the Circulating Library for the Blind and the Home Teaching Society.

These Annual Reports are supplemented by the Minute Books, a private report intended to be read only by a select few. The minutes give a clear idea of how little of the Board's attention was given over to the day-to-day running of the Asylum, such as determining appropriate class work. Instead, the Board was involved mainly in the logistics of funding and raising awareness of the Asylum's work for blind children, and later blind adults, across the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland. Reading the minutes in conjunction with the public-facing Annual Reports makes it possible to trace how these campaigns went from concept, to delivery, to outcome. The Minutes also demonstrate the immediate results of these campaigns: they include the record of funds raised during tours as well as describing the outcomes of meetings with government officials.

In addition, this thesis examines two outside sources of information about the Asylum in order to explore the effectiveness of the Board's campaigns: press reports and discussions about the Asylum's campaigns and public meetings, and provincial government reports regarding the Asylum and its work. Press reports about the Asylum were almost universally positive and supportive, crossing political, religious, and



geographic lines. By informing their readers about the work of the Asylum in this way, the press participated in the arguments presented by Fraser and the Board of Managers for government financial support. In addition to the financial support publicly reported in the Annual Reports of the Asylum, the Nova Scotian legislators – both in the Legislative Council and in the House of Assembly – discussed the Asylum’s work and its funding mandate, and the Legislative Council included the Asylum in its report on “Humane Institutions” from 1879 to 1891.

While these sources are useful for discussing funding, the Asylum’s programs within and outside of its walls, and the perceptions of the press and government about both, they do not give any direct insight into the opinions of two important groups: the students who attended the Asylum and their parents. Inferences can be drawn from how the Annual Reports discuss parents and the need for teachers, clergy, and neighbours to advise the Asylum of any potential students that parents may have been unwilling or unable to send to Halifax; however, no letters from parents have survived, and the minutes do not record any contact from parents. Likewise, students are talked *about*, either as success stories in the Annual Reports or as employees of the Asylum after graduation, but rarely talked *to*, except when addressed *en masse* by religious leaders or politicians during public meetings where they are reminded to be grateful for their opportunities. Thus, while this thesis is presented as part of disability history, it is not a history of the experiences of the majority of blind people in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland, but a history of how elites, primarily those within Halifax, perceived the

place of education for blind children: first as a charitable impulse, then as a right offered to them as citizens.

Chapter 2 discusses the foundation of the Asylum, comparing and contrasting it with the earlier foundation of the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. It discusses the financial circumstances under which the Asylum was founded, as well as placing its foundation in the context of politically fraught discussion of free primary school education for non-disabled children across Nova Scotia. At this stage the Asylum was a charitable project, though relying in part on yearly government grants in order to operate; it needed to appeal to the broadest base possible in order to recruit both students and donors. This chapter discusses the ways that the Board of Managers, to some fundraising success, presented the Asylum as reaching beyond denominational lines, in contrast to the explicitly Protestant Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, and the sectarian splits regarding public education.

Chapter 3 focuses on the move from broad-based charitable appeals to the rights-based appeal that Fraser began in the 1880s, when he argued that blind children had equal right to a free education as sighted ones. This chapter explores how the fundraising appeal that was first used to encourage charitable donations from individuals and churches was used to successfully argue for government per-student funding. Fraser contended that funding the education of blind children was a sound fiscal move on the part of the provincial and municipal governments, as well as individual and church donors, as it would eliminate, or at least decrease, the far greater expense of caring for unemployable, despondent blind adults. This chapter also demonstrates the importance of

the local and provincial press, both in supporting Fraser's aims and in carrying this support beyond Halifax and throughout the province.

Chapter 4 discusses the programs that Fraser and the Board of Managers were able to undertake once the Asylum's funding was, at least temporarily, secured. The Asylum, by then properly called the Halifax School for the Blind, became a center of blind advocacy across the Maritime provinces and into Newfoundland, developing a circulating library, a home teaching society for those who were blinded in adulthood, and a loan fund that gave worthy male graduates an opportunity to start their own businesses. This chapter also discusses the difficulties that Fraser encountered in attempting to make his financial arguments beyond Nova Scotia, and demonstrates that the School suffered financially in the pre-War years.

Overall, the goal of this thesis is to contribute to the growing historicist history of disability by explaining the religious, economic, and regional factors about the development of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It contributes to our knowledge of Halifax's humane institutions, as well as the history of free education for Nova Scotians. Following Valverde, Maurutto, and Tillotson, it provides further evidence of government financial support and intervention in charitable institutions prior to the development of the welfare state. This thesis also aims to draw attention to the under-developed history of residential schools for children with disabilities across Canada, and highlight the influential work of Charles Frederick Fraser across the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.

## **CHAPTER 2      FOUNDATIONS: HALIFAX AND ITS RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, 1850 - 1872**

In the nineteenth century, two residential schools for children with sensory-related disabilities were founded in Halifax. These schools were separately founded with the intention of aiding deaf and blind children in communication: the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb taught children Sign Language, while the Halifax Asylum for the Blind taught children to read and write a variety of raised-texts prints, including Braille. With this common purpose, it would seem reasonable that the two schools' pedagogy and curriculum and overall regime of care would have been very similar. However, each residential school was shaped by the specific circumstances of its conception, resulting in characteristics that reflected educational issues that were especially salient in the immediate context of their founding. The Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, founded in the 1850s (when education in Nova Scotia was primarily driven by religious instruction, and funding of education was strictly denominational), was run by evangelical Protestants who emphasized biblical teachings. Twenty years later, Nova Scotia had implemented free schools acts (including the 1850 Act for the Encouragement of Education and the 1864 Free School Act) that provided province-wide funding for education for all non-

disabled children, and was “non-sectarian in law.”<sup>1</sup> This change fostered a different set of priorities for the Asylum for the Blind, which began instruction in the 1870s. Fundraising for the Asylum needed to appeal across denominational lines, thus curriculum and pedagogy emphasized technical training and job skills that would be made available to students. The Board of Managers of both residential schools presented the institutions to the Haligonian and Nova Scotian public within the framework of educational priorities at the time of their foundations. These different starting points would have considerable impact on long-term goals and outcomes. Comparing and contrasting the foundation years of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Asylum for the Blind will show the historical specificity of the Asylum’s framing of disability, its treatment of denominational concerns, and its place within the institutional and educational framework of Halifax. Due to the Asylum being founded after the successful passage of the 1864 Free School Act, the Board of Managers chose to present it as non-denominational, and thus needed to address funding concerns differently than the Board of Directors for the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb had.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas: Canadian Education Policy in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 58. While the common schools in Halifax were technically non-denominational, some schools were Catholic schools that followed the province-wide course of instruction during school hours and had after-hours classes in Catholic religious instruction. See Janet Guildford, “Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870” (PhD, Dalhousie University, 1990); William B. Hamilton, “Society and Schools in Nova Scotia,” in *Canadian Education: A History*, eds. Donald J. Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 102-105; Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 31.

The 1850s have been described as a “golden age” of the Maritime provinces. The overall population of the region rose dramatically, with Nova Scotia’s increasing 19.5 per cent from 1841 levels to 276,900 people in the 1851 census.<sup>2</sup> The economy was booming, in part because of Nova Scotia’s diversity of industries (shipbuilding, shipping, fishing, and coal mining), and the inter-colonial railway was started. Haligonian elites, mostly white men who presided over a racially mixed city, were the primary benefactors. According to Ian Ross Robertson, this led to “a sense of security that in turn nurtured self-confidence and faith in the future.”<sup>3</sup> This was also a time when many ideas about progress and humane institutions were developing in Halifax. Judith Fingard describes it as a period when “the forces of Protestant evangelicalism and Catholic social action, closely followed by more secular urban reformism, descended on the areas of the city inhabited by outcasts...”<sup>4</sup> The Halifax City Mission was established in 1852, and the House of Refuge (a prostitute rescue effort) in 1854.<sup>5</sup> In addition, it was a time when education reform was developing: John William Dawson, a Presbyterian born in Pictou,

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Fingard, Janet Guildford and David Sutherland, *Halifax: The First 250 Years* (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 1999), 7; Margaret R. Conrad and James K. Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A History*, Second Edition ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Ross Robertson, “The 1850s: Maturity and Reform,” in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, eds. Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 340.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, 127.

was appointed the province's first Superintendent of Education in 1850; he established the Journal of Education in 1851 and the Truro Normal School in 1855.<sup>6</sup>

The school that became known as the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was founded in 1856. Tracing the exact details of the foundation of the Institution from its humble beginnings in the backroom of a boarding house to its prestigious building on Gottingen Street is difficult due to the paucity of records, but some events are clear from contemporary newspaper reports and pamphlets. Later reports credited several upper middle class Protestant men for the Institution's initial founding; however, what became the Institution actually started when two working-class deaf men came together to remedy a lack of educational opportunities for deaf children in Halifax.<sup>7</sup>

The official story, as related in both the early Annual Reports of the school and in a 1956 commemorative work *The School for the Deaf, Halifax, Nova Scotia: 100 Years of Service*, describes William Grey, a deaf tailor, as being the impetus behind the first class of students at the encouragement of an unnamed friend.<sup>8</sup> The Annual Reports and histories present little biography for Grey beyond his former occupation and his education: he had been a pupil at the Edinburgh Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and used the techniques that he learned there to teach his new pupils. There is no indication that he had any formal training as a teacher, and very little indication of why he would

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<sup>6</sup> William B. Hamilton, "Society and Schools in Nova Scotia," in *Canadian Education: A History*, eds. Donald J. Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 100.

<sup>7</sup> *School for the Deaf: Halifax, Nova Scotia: 100 Years of Service* (Halifax: Privately published, 1956[?]), n.p.; Janet Guildford, "Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870" (PhD, Dalhousie University, 1990), 68.

<sup>8</sup> *100 Years of Service*, n.p.

take it upon himself to educate the students. There are no reports written by Grey during his time with the Institution, none of the newspapers from the time quote him, and even the Annual Reports written while he was still teaching make little reference to his involvement, his educational background, or his goals for the Institution. Within a few years of the formal foundation of the Institution, he was dropped from the teaching roster without comment.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, another deaf adult associated with the Institution wrote his own foundation story for it, emphasizing his role in its success. In *The Autobiography of George Tait*, Tait relates how, as a graduate of the Edinburgh Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, he was approached by the father of a deaf girl while staying in a boarding house in Halifax. At her father's request, Tait took on the teaching of Mary Anne Fletcher, presumably teaching her the formal signed language the Edinburgh school used. After Mary Anne became fluent, she suggested to Tait that he begin a school for other deaf people in Halifax. According to Tait, he suggested that Grey, whom he had met at the same boarding house, take over the teaching duties, while Tait himself took on the task of fundraising and getting the school off the ground. As in the Annual Reports, Tait

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<sup>9</sup> The last Annual Report Grey is mentioned in is the Eleventh Annual Report of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1868. Although most of the staff of the Institution to that point were named and thanked within the Report of the Board, written by James Cochran, or the Report of the Principal, written by J. Scott Hutton, Grey is not mentioned in either this report, or the one following, a telling omission in light of the usual attention made to praising teachers of the Institution who left. Grey does not appear in the McAlpine's City Directory for Halifax in 1868-69. While a death record does exist for a William Gray who died in 1868 in Halifax, the biographical details do not appear to match the William Grey who taught at the Institution. See: Death Records, Halifax County, Registration Year: 1869 - Book: 1808 - Page: 182 - Number: 232.



describes the school formally starting in a back room on Argyle Street, with only two pupils under Grey's instruction. He does not discuss leaving the Institution or Halifax in any detail.<sup>10</sup> Tait's autobiography implies that his background as a labourer was uncongenial to the wealthy and influential Haligonians who formed the Board of Directors.<sup>11</sup> How much of his story is accurate is unclear, although nothing in his autobiography explicitly contradicts what is in the Annual Reports, and some aspects are supported by contemporaneous newspaper reports.<sup>12</sup> Tait was likely Grey's unnamed friend, but had left the school by the time the first Annual Report was published.<sup>13</sup>

The first hearing person to be credited with the founding of the Institution was Reverend James C. Cochran, a university-educated Anglican minister from Windsor, Nova Scotia.<sup>14</sup> Cochran's actual involvement with the founding is unclear; it was only in the outpouring of praise after his death in 1880 that he was credited with being the

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<sup>10</sup> George Tait, *Autobiography of George Tait, a Deaf Mute, Who First Gave Instruction to the Deaf and Dumb in the City of Halifax*, Seventh ed. (Halifax: James W. Doley, 1884).

<sup>11</sup> Early members of the Board of Directors included former mayor Andrew MacKinlay, Reverend James C. Cochran, Doctor J. H. Anderson, and John Naylor. The Institution was under the patronage of the then-Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, George Phipps, Earl of Mulgrave, and his wife, Laura Russell, Countess of Mulgrave. See: Annual report of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb at Halifax, Nova Scotia for 1857-8 [hereafter *Annual Report (Deaf)*] (Halifax: The Institution, 1858), n.p.

<sup>12</sup> *Halifax Chronicle*, September 18, 1856.

<sup>13</sup> A "George Taite, carpenter" does appear in McAlpine's Directory for Halifax in 1868, but there's no mention of William Grey under any spelling.

<sup>14</sup> Cochran is sometimes spelled "Cochrane" in Annual Reports and newspaper articles. See William B. Hamilton, "Cochran, James Cuppaidge," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ed. Marc La Terreur, Vol. X (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 177-178 for more details about Cochran's life and work.

school's founder.<sup>15</sup> While this does not necessarily indicate that Cochran was not an important actor in the establishment of either the Board of Directors or the Institution itself, it does imply that the laudatory reports after his death may instead be related to his later involvement, which was extensive.

Each of these stories presented a view of the founding of the school to appeal to different audiences and thus emphasized different things. Written by the Board of Directors, the Annual Reports were aimed at potential and current donors, government officials, professionals such as teachers or members of the clergy who were asked to recommend potential students for the school, and parents of potential and current students. These Reports emphasized Grey's status as a deaf man who wanted to educate deaf students in his new homeland. Tait's autobiography, written for profit, was aimed at an audience who may have been looking for something more sensational. In it, Tait included details such as his description of leaving England disguised as a deckhand on a ship, flouting the ban against "a person infirmed in any way" being taken out of the country without proper authorisation, and his activities in a variety of North American ports.<sup>16</sup> Cochran's obituaries were aimed primarily at either an evangelical Protestant audience or at potential donors who were familiar with his years of service to a variety of Haligonian institutions and came well after anyone would be likely to remember Grey or Tait.

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<sup>15</sup> See: Board of Directors' Minutes [Hereafter *Minutes (Deaf)*], 1880, Halifax School for the Deaf fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, Accession 1990-205\002 (part). *Nova Scotian*, 26 June 1880; Twenty-Third Annual Report (Deaf), 17; "Obituary for James Scott Hutton," *Presbyterian Witness & Evangelical Advocate*, 28 February 1891.

<sup>16</sup> Tait, *Autobiography*, 10.

Despite these conflicting reports, what is clear is that the initial education of deaf children in Halifax grew out of the efforts of deaf adults who had benefited from a targeted residential school education themselves. Newspaper reports praising Tait's fundraising activities indicate that there was some support for his initiative to educate deaf children; however, what became the Halifax Institution for the Deaf and Dumb did not gain the required financial and government support until hearing, elite members of Halifax society became involved. These men, most of whom were evangelical Protestants, formed a Board of Directors and took over managing the Institution's educational and financial goals.<sup>17</sup> Soon after the formal establishment of a Board of Directors, the Institution began negotiations for a hearing teacher to take over the primary role of educating students, appointing William Grey as Assistant Teacher. The Minutes of the Board do not make it clear whether either Grey or Tait was ever considered as a potential Principal or First Teacher for the Institution.

The Board's chosen Principal, James Scott Hutton, a Scottish-born Presbyterian, had been Second Teacher at the same Edinburgh school that had educated Tait and Grey.<sup>18</sup> Hutton brought with him a wealth of experience, several dozen textbooks, and his father, who had also been a teacher in Edinburgh. His three decades at the Institution would profoundly influence the course of education there. In continuing to teach the

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<sup>17</sup> MacKinlay, Anderson, and Cochran were all evangelical Protestants of different denominations, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, and Anglican respectively. Naylor was non-evangelical Anglican. First *Annual Report (Deaf)*, n.p.; Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 173.

<sup>18</sup> There is no indication that Hutton knew Tait or Grey, although it is possible as Hutton's father, George Hutton, also taught at the Edinburgh Institution.

signed language used in Edinburgh, Hutton and his teaching staff (which included both his father and wife in unpaid positions) created an enclave in English-speaking North America of what became known as Maritime Sign Language (MSL), which differed from the French-influenced American Sign Language used elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

Under Hutton's tutelage, the primary goal of the Institution became ensuring that the pupils received adequate Christian religious instruction. While religion was not the only subject taught (instruction also included astronomy, history, technical training for both boys and girls, etc.), the Annual Reports of the Institution emphasized the class time spent on Christian themes and published writing samples often focused on students' understanding of biblical passages, and public demonstrations of Sign Language always included the Lord's Prayer. Even in discussing the death of a student while at the Institution, Hutton focused on her understanding of the Christian faith.<sup>20</sup> As Baynton outlines in his study, this was not uncommon amongst early hearing educators of deaf children: Thomas Gallaudet, who founded the first school for the deaf in the United

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond G. Gordon Jr., "Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth Edition," <http://www.ethnologue.com/web.asp> (accessed April 20, 2009). See Judith Yoel, "Canada's Maritime Sign Language" (Ph.D., University of Manitoba, 2009). for a further discussion of the development of Maritime Sign Language and its relationship to both British Sign Language (BSL) and American Sign Language (ASL).

<sup>20</sup> The student was Ann Forrest, who had been at the Institution for six months at her death. "We would cherish the humble hope that the religious instruction imparted to her...and the efforts made during her last hours, to prepare her... were blessed by the Spirit of God, so that she was enabled...to discern the way of salvation." *Sixth Annual Report (Deaf)*, 12.

States in 1817, found it “essential” to be able to pray with his pupils, and many other early educators of deaf people were evangelical church leaders.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of the involvement of the Board of Directors, The Institution for the Deaf and Dumb took its place amongst the humane institutions that were supported by charitable donations from Halifax’s growing middle class. Janet Guildford describes this period and the decades following it as being fundamental to the development of the “emerging value system of the middle class,” one that was concerned with moral improvement of the “deserving poor” through increasing state intervention and supporting the work of trained professionals. In order to guarantee the moral improvement that would, in turn, lead to a more progressive society, the middle class supported the creation of institutions, such as poor asylums and houses of refuge.<sup>22</sup> The Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was designed by Hutton to bring deaf children into the Christian faith and thus fit perfectly into these goals. Guildford describes Hutton’s pupils as having “been scientifically judged to be deserving of public charity and capable of being helped to lead productive and morally upright lives.... However, having been designated as deserving, [they] forfeited much of their right to independence...”<sup>23</sup>

Halifax was home to a number of humane institutions in the 1850s, most of which were concerned with educating the “poorer classes,” made up of people who lacked the religious and secular instruction that city missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, felt

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<sup>21</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18-20.

<sup>22</sup> Janet Guildford, “Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870” (PhD, Dalhousie University, 1990), 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 64

was necessary for moral improvement. The City Mission, a Presbyterian-run organisation, founded a day school aimed at slum children, 100 of whom had previously received no education at all. Guildford describes this “ragged school” as working to address illiteracy, specifically to ensure the children who attended would be able to read the Bible and attend to their spiritual needs.<sup>24</sup> Even though the ragged school, and the Sunday school that followed in 1858, was run by Protestant volunteers, about 50 per cent of the children who attended were Catholic.<sup>25</sup> In comparing the City Mission’s school to the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, it is obvious that the primary concern of educators was that both hearing and deaf students receive moral and religious instruction through studying the Bible. For deaf students, religious instruction would continue to be the focus of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb until Hutton’s death in 1891.

The decade following the foundation of the Institution included a number of education-based sectarian conflicts in Halifax and across Nova Scotia. It was in the 1860s that the decades-old fight for educational reform in Nova Scotia was finally successful, although it required compromise between Catholics and Protestants. Prior to the 1864 Free School Act, formal education had been a sporadic affair: most schools of any size charged tuition for students, which could put education out of financial reach for families; in addition, children were often needed at home, either to assist parents with the family trade or to care for younger siblings while their parents worked.<sup>26</sup> Walking to school

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<sup>24</sup> Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Allison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 16.

could also be difficult for children, especially during the harsh Nova Scotian winters. Rural areas often struggled to attract and retain teachers, due to low pay and the often poor condition of the schoolhouse.<sup>27</sup> There had been some attempts at educational reform and improving the conditions of schools, such as the 1826 act that required a school to be built in any district where two-thirds of the ratepayers voted in favour, and the 1850 Act for the Encouragement of Education that created a provincial superintendent of education.<sup>28</sup> Despite these, the 1861 census indicated that the illiteracy rate across Nova Scotia was quite high and that 50,000 children were receiving no education at all.<sup>29</sup> Social reformers argued that education was necessary for all children in the region in order to have a progressive society. Educating students, it was argued, would “promote the inseparable goals of material and moral progress.”<sup>30</sup> In 1864, the Nova Scotian government under Charles Tupper was determined to pass an education act that would allow for free schooling for all children, paid for by compulsory assessment.

Common school legislation was controversial throughout the Maritime provinces, due to denominational conflicts. The Catholic minority in Nova Scotia was disinclined to support a common, allegedly non-sectarian, school system that would be mostly Protestant in nature. Prior to the 1864 Free School Act, Catholics, like other religious denominations, had funded their own schools. They feared that a mandatory assessment

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914*, eds. Craig Heron and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Guildford, *Public School Reform*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 13. Hamilton, *Society and Schools in Nova Scotia*, 101; Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland, *Halifax: The First 250 Years*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Guildford, *Public School Reform*, 9.

for a common school system would amount to double-taxation, as they would pay a school tax to support common Protestant schools in addition to financing separate Catholic schools.<sup>31</sup> Archbishop Thomas Connolly had advocated a separate school system for Catholic children, but this was rejected by Tupper. Tupper argued that the Catholic minority would always be represented on the Council of Public Instruction, thus their concerns would always be taken into account. When the idea of a separate school

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<sup>31</sup> Hamilton, *Society and Schools in Nova Scotia*, 103. According to Hamilton, the acrimony over the 1864 act erupted into violence, with two school houses being burned down in Annapolis Valley, although he connects it to concerns about political patronage. In New Brunswick, the 1871 Common Schools Act made forbade the use of religious symbols in the classroom, which made it illegal for Catholic clergy to teach. When Catholics refused to pay the school tax, the government seized goods owned by Catholic clergy in 1874. This was followed in 1875 by a riot in which two men were killed in Caraquet, New Brunswick. See *Ibid.*, 101-102; George F. G. Stanley, "The Caraquet Riots of 1875," *Acadensis* II, no. I (Autumn/Automne 1972, 1972), 21-38. In Prince Edward Island, the 1852 Free Education Act passed to limited controversy; denominational disagreement was over the use of the Christian Bible in the classroom. The issue was controversial enough that it dominated the election campaign of 1859, and was a constant source of ire in the province's newspapers. It was finally considered resolved in 1877 when the Public School Act allowed teachers to read parts of the Bible without comment to students at the beginning of school day, while parents were allowed to refuse to send their children to class until after the reading was complete. William B. Hamilton, "Societies and Schools in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island," in *Canadian Education: A History*, eds. Donald J. Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1970), 121-125. In Newfoundland, the first educational system, begun in 1836, was non-denominational, with religious instruction provided outside of school hours. However, this proved unsatisfactory to religious authorities, and both Protestant and Catholic religious leaders protested by quitting school boards and encouraging families to keep their children at home. In 1839, Protestant religious authorities had effectively lobbied for the Protestant-approved Authorized Version of the Bible to be included in the curriculum. This was unacceptable to Catholic religious authorities. The result was the 1843 Education Act, which provided for separate schools based on denomination, and made school funding dependent upon population. See Phillip McCann, "Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education: 1836-1901," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'Histoire De l'Éducation* 1, no. 2 (Fall/automne 1989, 1989): 179-200.



system was brought up again in 1865, Tupper went so far as to threaten to withdraw the planned amendments to the act entirely rather than include a separate school provision in it.<sup>32</sup>

In Halifax, the results of the 1864 act were more complicated than in the rural areas of the province. While rural districts could typically only support one school, with the district defined as the distance children could be expected to walk to get to there, parents had more denomination-based options in Halifax. The application of the 1864 act was delayed in the city for one year, with the intention that the city would work out the question of funding for Catholic schools.<sup>33</sup> The amendments to the act required a mandatory, rather than voluntary, school tax, which Halifax City Council initially refused to collect; it took three years of negotiation between the city and the province before free public schools supported by city taxes became a reality.<sup>34</sup> However, the provision of free education for the children of Nova Scotia did not extend to children with sensory-related disabilities: the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb still relied on a variable provincial grant in addition to tuition fees and donations, and there continued to be no provision for educating blind children.

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<sup>32</sup> Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas: Canadian Education Policy in Historical Perspective*, 58-59.

<sup>33</sup> See Guildford, *Public School Reform* for further discussion of Halifax's public school debates, specifically Chapter 3. *Ibid.* 134-136

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 163-164. Even as late as 1886, Halifax mayor J. C. Mackintosh met complaints about high taxes by pointing out the expense of the act. *Annual Report of the Several Departments of the City Government of Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the year 1885-86*, Halifax: James Bowes & Sons, xxxii.

During these debates William Murdoch, known as the “father of philanthropy” in Halifax, began the process that would lead to the foundation of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind. Murdoch was a generous philanthropist during the decades he lived in Halifax, focusing both his money and his attentions on progressive works throughout the city. He had emigrated to Nova Scotia from Scotland in 1820, joining his brother as a merchant. Once firmly established, Murdoch, a Presbyterian, involved himself intimately in the affairs of the city, including being a city auditor, a city alderman, a fire warden, and a commissioner of public property. In addition, he supported the intellectual life of the city, promoting the Halifax Botanical Gardens, the Royal Acadian School Society, and the horticultural society. Murdoch was also directly involved in health-related activities in the city, such as the Halifax Visiting Dispensary, and campaigned unsuccessfully for a hospital in the city prior to the founding of the City Hospital. Murdoch’s charitable works were well known throughout the city, and he was amongst “the first generation of Nova Scotians to practise a public stewardship of his wealth.”<sup>35</sup> Perhaps because he was impressed with the successes of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Murdoch made a provision in his will that granted £5000 in Nova Scotian currency towards the foundation of an Asylum for the Blind. When he died in 1866, his bequest was carried out, with one of the requirements being that an equal sum – the equivalent of \$12,000 in Nova Scotian

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<sup>35</sup> Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland, *Halifax: The First 250 Years*, 68. K. G. Pryke, “Murdoch, William,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ed. John English, Vol. IX (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

dollars – would need to be raised by the public before the money would be given to the Asylum’s Board.<sup>36</sup>

The Murdoch legacy fell on fertile ground in Halifax. The 1860s saw an economic boom in the city due to the American Civil War. Increased sales of coal and an increase in trade due to the closing of various US ports brought more money into the city. There was also a short-term population boom with the addition of 5,000 soldiers to the Halifax garrison.<sup>37</sup> Humane institutions continued to flourish, going beyond missionary and education work to more explicitly interventionist aims. These included the building of Rockhead City Prison in 1860, the foundation of a boys’ industrial school as a reformatory in 1864, and the rebuilding of the county jail in 1865.<sup>38</sup> They also included the St. Paul’s Alms House of Industry for Girls, founded in 1867, and the Temporary Home for Young Women Seeking Employment as Domestic Servants, founded in 1869.<sup>39</sup> An Asylum for the Blind was an extension of this institution-building, albeit with an explicitly educational goal.

The fundraising and subsequent management of the Asylum for the Blind attempted to reach across denominational lines. Few records of this early fundraising effort survive; however, both Archbishop Connolly and Anglican Bishop Hibbert Binney

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<sup>36</sup> The first report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind [hereafter *Annual Report (Asylum)*] (Halifax: The Asylum, 1872, 8; Board of Managers Minute Books [hereafter *Minutes*], March 24, 1868, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series ‘S’, vol. 161.

<sup>37</sup> Conrad and Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A History*, 130-131.

<sup>38</sup> Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 128, 140.

unsuccessfully ran for the initial Board of Managers after the majority of the fundraising was complete, indicating interest in the Asylum from both Catholic and Protestant religious authorities. Those who were successfully voted onto the Board on March 24, 1868, included William Chamberlain Silver, an Anglican businessman and noted philanthropist whose daughter married a Presbyterian missionary; John S. MacLean, a Presbyterian businessman; and also the Catholic Lord Mayor of Halifax, Stephen Tobin.<sup>40</sup> Once funds raised were within \$800 of the target amount, a committee was appointed to select a site for the building, with a report due ten days later. By 1870, construction had begun on the building in the Halifax South Commons, to be facing Morris Street.<sup>41</sup>

In later decades, the Asylum would continue to be perceived as non-denominational, or at least accepting of Catholic doctrine, in sharp contrast to the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. During Hutton's tenure at the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, the Catholic hierarchy considered it to be anti-Catholic, despite the Board's later attempts to present it as "strictly non-sectarian".<sup>42</sup> When Archbishop Cornelius O'Brien first came to Halifax in 1883, he not only questioned the validity of this claim of

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<sup>40</sup> Terrence M. Punch describes the Tobin family's Roman Catholicism as "not in such a way that they offended the sensitivities of others." Terrence M. Punch, "Tobin Genealogy," *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (September 1975, 1975), 71.

<sup>41</sup> *Minutes*, March 24, 1868.

<sup>42</sup> *Thirty-first Annual Report (Deaf)*, (Halifax: The Institution, 1888), 14. These often included students writing that only through prayer to Jesus, and *no one else*, could Christian salvation be attained. Catholic religious practice includes prayers to saints and other religious figures. See: *Third Annual Report (Deaf)*, (Halifax: The Institution, 1860), 29. *Thirty-first Annual Report (Deaf)*, (Halifax: The Institution, 1888), 14. The first Catholic member of the Board of Directors was added in 1884. "Deaf and Dumb Institution" *Daily Recorder*, 13 November 1892, 3.

a non-sectarian education at the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, but also advised Catholic parents not to send their deaf children to be “indoctrinated with Protestant religious principles.” At the same time, public meetings held in support of the Asylum included “representative clergymen of almost every denomination,” and O’Brien himself often attended the Asylum’s events and meetings.<sup>43</sup>

Without a strong denominational pull, the Asylum had difficulties initially attracting pupils: the Board had intended to open only after five students had registered, but the Asylum actually opened on August 1, 1871, with only four.<sup>44</sup> The Board attempted to allay parents’ potential fears through the Annual Reports, using these to assure parents that their children would not be proselytised to by clergy from an unacceptable Christian denomination. While initially the Annual Reports mentioned weekly religious-based classes held by Major Theakston of the North End Mission “and other friends,” these mentions were dropped by the third Annual Report, and religious instruction of any kind was only occasionally mentioned thereafter.<sup>45</sup> In its place, the Board offered students technical training, albeit of a limited nature.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “The Education of the Blind,” *Morning Chronicle*, 18 June, 1881, 1. O’Brien was listed in attendance at the presentation of a portrait of Murdoch in 1886, as well as the annual general meetings of the Asylum. See: “School for the Blind: Presentation of the late William Murdoch’s Picture Last Night,” *Morning Chronicle*, 16 November, 1886, 3; *Minutes*, 14 December, 1891; *Minutes*, 12 December, 1892; *Minutes*, 11 December, 1893; *Minutes*, 9 December, 1895.

<sup>44</sup> *First Annual Report (Asylum)*, 8 -9.

<sup>45</sup> *Second Annual Report (Asylum)*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> In the Second Annual Report, the Report of the Managers highlighted the addition to the curriculum of “cane seating chairs” and “the advantages of lessons from Mr. Jaffery, teacher of music”. *Minutes*, 10 May 1870.

Having blind teachers at the Asylum was also a potential assurance for parents. Unlike at the Institution, the Board of Managers for the Asylum adopted a long-term policy of hiring graduates of residential school education as the main part of their teaching staff. This began in January 1871, when the Board instructed the Secretary to write to the Principal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind and request a suitable “Lady Superintendent” for their new Asylum. Miss M. Patterson was offered \$250 per annum to be the Asylum’s Superintendent in March, and shortly afterwards another graduate of the Pennsylvania Institution, Miss Mary “Minnie” Dwyer, was accepted as an assistant teacher at \$60 per annum.<sup>47</sup> The Board did not record the reasons for their decision to hire blind women as teachers, although it is notable that sighted female teachers were quite common in Nova Scotia, making up nearly half of all teachers by 1869; they were also consistently paid considerably less than their male counterparts.<sup>48</sup> It may simply have been less costly to hire an inexperienced blind graduate rather than a sighted person, with or without previous experience teaching the blind. However, a blind graduate was likely to know the most effective techniques currently in use, which he or she could in turn demonstrate to any sighted teachers that were hired. Presumably this is what happened when the newly hired Superintendent, Miss Patterson, for un-noted

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<sup>47</sup> *Minutes*, 30 January, 1871; 29 March, 1871; 24 April, 1871. While this sum is very low, even for a single woman teacher of the day, Dwyer also received room and board from the Asylum. The generally-low wages for single women teachers in Nova Scotia is discussed in more depth in Janet Guildford, ““Separate Spheres”: The Feminization of Public School Teaching in Nova Scotia, 1838-1880,” in *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes*, eds. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton, N.B.: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 119-143..

<sup>48</sup> Guildford, “Separate Spheres”, 120.

reasons, did not arrive to teach in Halifax, and the Board hired in her place Miss Hattie Reynolds, a recent graduate of the Truro Normal School, at a much lower salary of \$160 per annum, to work with Dwyer.<sup>49</sup>

The Board of Director's decision to employ mostly blind teachers had long-term effects on the educational outcomes of the Asylum. When Dwyer left Halifax because of her health, the Asylum accepted the application of another blind graduate, this time Charles Frederick Fraser, who was a graduate of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts. Fraser became Superintendent (following Reynolds's replacement, Catherine Ross) and, like Hutton, took the lead in shaping the pedagogical approach taken. However, while the Presbyterian Hutton focused primarily on religious instruction, the Anglican Fraser focused on preparing blind children to become self-supporting adults with job training in a variety of trades.

Fraser was born on January 4, 1850, in Windsor, Nova Scotia. He was the fifth child of Benjamin DeWolf Fraser, a physician in Windsor, and Elizabeth Allison, the daughter of prominent provincial politician Joseph Allison. Both of his parents' families had emigrated from Scotland; his father's family was descended from Thomas Fraser of Beaufort, the twelfth Earl Lovat of Scotland.<sup>50</sup> At around age six or seven – reports vary – Fraser injured one of his eyes while whittling. Despite at least one attempt at corrective surgery, his eyesight continued to deteriorate; at 13 he was sent to the Perkins Institute for further education. By the time Fraser graduated at 22, he was considered completely

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<sup>49</sup>*Minutes*, 14 July 1871.

<sup>50</sup> "Sir C. F. Fraser passed away yesterday," *The Morning Chronicle*, July 6, 1925, 1.

blind.<sup>51</sup> He returned to Nova Scotia, single and looking for work, and wrote to the Board of Managers in August 1872, offering his services as Superintendent.<sup>52</sup> His first communication with the Board appears to have been ignored; the following April, the Minutes indicate that “no action” had been taken regarding his communication with them.<sup>53</sup> However, on July 9, 1873, the Board wrote back to “C. F. Fraser of Windsor,” requesting that he meet with them.<sup>54</sup> The following week the Board Minutes note that Fraser had been hired for one year at \$200; in June of 1874 they formally recognized him as Superintendent of the Asylum.<sup>55</sup>

At the time of his retirement in 1923, and again at his death in 1925, Fraser was lauded as one of the first – if not *the* first – blind person in Nova Scotia to be self-sufficiently employed.<sup>56</sup> While it is impossible to judge the validity of this statement,

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<sup>51</sup> Janet Guildford, “Fraser, Sir Charles Frederick,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ed. John English, Vol. XV (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> *Minutes*, 5 August 1872

<sup>53</sup> *Minutes*, 7 April 1873.

<sup>54</sup> *Minutes*, 9 July 1873

<sup>55</sup> *Minutes*, 14 July 1873; 1 June 1874. Note that later biographers of Fraser, such as Mary MacNeil and Shirley Trites, claim that Fraser refused to accept pay for his work with the Asylum until it was profitable. This idea appears to have developed after Fraser’s death. There is no mention of it prior to MacNeil’s biography, and the Asylum’s records make it clear that Fraser not only was paid for his services, he was paid far more than the woman he was hired to replace. MacNeil, Mary A. E. A., *The Blind Knight of Nova Scotia: Sir Frederick Fraser, 1850-1925* (Washington, D.C.: The University Press, 1939); Shirley J. Trites, *Reading Hands: The Halifax School for the Blind* (Halifax: Vision Press, 2003). The myth is reproduced in one of the Annual Reports for the Asylum decades after Fraser’s death. See: Hilda A Tyler, “The Dauntless Knight,” in the ninety-third report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax School for the Blind [hereafter Annual Report (School)], (Halifax: The School, 1963), 6.

<sup>56</sup> “Honored on his Golden Jubilee,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 20 June, 1923, 1; “Our Debt to the Late Sir Frederick Fraser,” Fifty-fifth *Annual Report (School)*, 7 – 11.



employment issues were at the forefront of the concerns of the Board of Managers, even before Fraser arrived. In the Annual Reports, published from 1872, the Managers of the Asylum emphasized the technical training and preparation for gainful employment that the pupils, both male and female, received.<sup>57</sup> It was not to be asylum where blind children would be left to live out their lives but an educational facility where those children would learn a trade.

Comparing the foundation of the Asylum for the Blind with that of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb demonstrates how educational facilities for children with sensory-related disabilities were affected by the economic and religious environment in which they were founded. Despite being in the same city, with the same surface goals of teaching children with disabilities how to communicate effectively, the pedagogy and curriculum varied. Unlike the Board of the Institution, the Board of the Asylum deliberately sought out teachers who were like their charges, thus providing adult role models for students and demonstrating the success of education for the blind to concerned parents. Fraser, who would be superintendent until his retirement in 1923, supported the establishment of a formal curriculum that focused on employment skills. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, the Asylum would excel at demonstrating the variety of employment options that blind adults could undertake and would even create employment opportunities for graduates. In later years, the Board of Managers and Fraser focused the Annual Reports and fundraising

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<sup>57</sup> For boys, this included cane seating chairs by 1873, while girls were learning bead work and wool work. In 1874 the girls gained access to a sewing machine. As well, both boys and girls were offered music lessons from the first year the Asylum opened.

requests on the importance of providing those referred to as the “worthy” blind with the opportunity to be self-sufficient and went on to establish a loan fund to assist graduates in starting their own businesses in communities across Nova Scotia.

For the first decade of the Asylum’s existence, Fraser and the Board of Managers presented it as a place that blind students could attend to graduate as capable, self-sufficient workers. This contrasted sharply with the tactics of the Directors and Principal of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, who emphasized their school’s religious instruction. While both residential schools relied on charitable donations to provide their services during this period, this income would prove to be insufficient within a few years. As a result, Fraser and the Board of Managers would successfully argue that the Asylum was an educational facility that deserved to be funded through taxation, using the technical training offered as part of their argument.

### **CHAPTER 3 NOT FOR ALMS BUT HELP: FUNDRAISING AND FREE EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND 1873 - 1882**

During the foundation and early years of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind<sup>1</sup>, the Asylum's Board of Managers and, after 1875, Superintendent C. F. Fraser competed with a variety of charity and philanthropic causes for funds from private individuals, churches, and the provincial government. To increase the likelihood of receiving sufficient funding and donations, the Board of Managers and Fraser worked in tandem to develop the image of the Asylum as a public good, one that would be the best application of donations for the long-term betterment of society, not only in Halifax but across the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland. However, there was a sharp decrease in funding from the Nova Scotia government just as the Asylum was gaining more students in the late 1870s, from a high of \$1,250 per annum to only \$800.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the Board of Managers and Fraser redoubled their efforts, determined to demonstrate that investing in the education

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<sup>1</sup> For consistency purposes, the term "Asylum" will be used for the Halifax Asylum for the Blind throughout this thesis, except within quotations.

<sup>2</sup> See Figure 2.2, below. 1877 was the first year that the Nova Scotia government provided only \$800 in funding. That same year, New Brunswick provided its first funding grant of \$240, but the following year did not provide any money at all. Regular grants from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island began in 1879.

of blind students was also a “public good” that should be paid for through taxation, as was already true for non-disabled students in Nova Scotia, in addition to donations from the general public to support specific goals. This campaign succeeded in 1882, with the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick agreeing to pay all expenses (save travel and clothing) for students from their provinces attending the Asylum, in turn gathering half of the required grants from the students’ home municipalities. This lengthy campaign also increased charitable giving to the Asylum, as well as increasing the number of students that attended and the distance from which they came.

By the end of the campaign for free education for the blind, the Asylum was receiving students from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. Fraser and the Board of Managers used nearly identical arguments on both the charitable public and the philanthropic governments of the Maritime provinces to gain funding, to great success. The core of these arguments was that providing charitable support was not as effective in meeting the long-term needs of blind children and adults as philanthropic support would be; individual charitable support, described by Marianna Valverde as “impulsive” and focused on the immediate needs of the recipients, was too variable to provide a solid platform for the Asylum’s mission, whereas ongoing philanthropic support would be organized, consistent, and aimed at ensuring proper education and technical training for recipients.<sup>3</sup> By providing funding for the Asylum for the Blind and

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<sup>3</sup> “Charity, the traditional means of relieving poverty, was largely individual and impulsive, and its purpose was to relieve the immediate need of the recipient while earning virtue points for the giver. Organized charity or philanthropy sought to eliminate both the impulsive and individual elements of giving.” Mariana Valverde, *The Age of*

supporting the aims of Fraser and the Board of Managers, neither the governments nor the general public would be subjected to continual sentimental charitable appeals on behalf of blind adults. In addition, the arguments used by Fraser and his supporters in Nova Scotia also described the “rights of all Nova Scotians,” including blind children, to free education, emphasising not their difference but their similarity to children across the rest of the province.

The early Annual Reports emphasised the distinctive forms of training that the Asylum offered to the blind children in its care, a strategy that marks this as a charitable-style appeal. The President of the Board of Managers, James F. Avery, used his Manager’s Reports to advise current supporters and potential new donors of the technical training provided to students. These demonstrated that the Asylum was meant as more than a warehouse for blind children. Rather, it was meant to be an educational facility that prepared students for work – either domestic or technical – after leaving. In the second of these Reports, Avery noted that the girls were continuing to learn bead and wool work, while the boys were learning how to seat cane chairs. As well, the report advised readers that the Asylum had hired a vocal and instrumental music teacher, as educated blind people often became organists in churches. Avery also highlighted the potential for the students to become music teachers themselves. Over the next three years, corn broom making and piano-forte tuning were added to the industrial training for boys, while learning how to use a sewing machine was added to the domestic training for girls.

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*Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991), 19.

The Annual Reports advised when additional tools for this training were purchased, such as when the pipe organ and piano were purchased in 1873. Avery also used the reports to encourage the people of Halifax to take advantage of the students' training; for example, the price of getting a cane chair repaired was set at 50 to 60 cents, which was lower than the cost of having the same work professionally done.<sup>4</sup>

After the Board of Managers hired Fraser as Superintendent, he advised the Board that they needed to broaden their efforts to reach out to potential new donors. In 1872, the Board of Managers had agreed the best course of action in gaining government grants was to send copies of the Annual Report to the Provincial Secretary when making the request. Fraser's proposal in March 1874 of holding an exhibit at the Legislature – likely inspired by Samuel Gridley Howe's similar demonstration to the Massachusetts Legislature in 1832 – was quickly accepted and arranged for the end of the month.<sup>5</sup> That same year, Fraser led the first of many concert tours around Nova Scotia, visiting 27 cities and towns. Accompanied by teacher Catherine Ross, steward W. J. Dilworth, and six students, he used the opportunity not only to raise awareness of the Asylum and its goals, but also to gain additional charitable donations from the public. Fraser reported

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<sup>4</sup> The second report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind [hereafter *Annual Report (Asylum)*] (Halifax: The Asylum, 1872), 6; Third *Annual Report (Asylum)*, 1873, 7, 8; Fourth *Annual Report (Asylum)*, 1874, 6; Fifth *Annual Report (Asylum)*, 1875, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Board of Managers Minute Books [hereafter *Minutes*], 5 February, 1872, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series 'S', vol. 161. *Minutes*, 2 March, 1874. Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 112. Howe's demonstration led to an annual grant of \$6000 for the Perkins Institute for the Blind.

revenue of \$413, enough to pay every member of the concert tour (including the students) as well as put \$200 toward the purchase of a new organ for the Asylum. The success of this tour was replicated many times, with Fraser reporting to both the Board of Managers and the readers of the Annual Reports the number of towns visited and the amount of money collected in each.

In 1879, Fraser reported having visited every county in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, as well as most of Newfoundland, giving concerts in 75 towns and cities. This method of raising public awareness, both of the existence of educational institutions for disabled students and the methods used in teaching there, was common. The Institution for the Deaf and Dumb also used public demonstrations for fundraising and awareness-building, as did many residential schools for blind and deaf children in the United States. These tours gave proof of the successes discussed in the Annual Reports, allowing people to see for themselves what the institutions were accomplishing.<sup>6</sup> A typical demonstration, again inspired by Howe, would have students perform a variety of vocal and instrumental pieces, answer “the most complicated questions in mental arithmetic,” and read aloud from raised-print books, all demonstrating the efficiency of the education offered at the Asylum.<sup>7</sup> In four years, the Asylum consistently had marked increases in charitable donations from private

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

<sup>7</sup> “The Blind Asylum: Exhibition at Argyle Hall,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 1 April 1874, 3; “Institution for the Blind: Closing Exercises on Tuesday,” *The Morning Herald*, 23 June 1881, 1. Klages, *Woeful Affliction.*, 112

individuals (the Annual Report for 1879 reported \$1,161.27 in donations that year, up from \$698.44 the previous one), as well as an increase in students the following year.<sup>8</sup>

Fraser's first tour had also made him aware that there were many potential students who were not being sent to the Asylum. In 1875, he requested that the Board seek out more information about the status of blind people throughout the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.<sup>9</sup> During his next tour he sought out potential students and directly evaluated their eligibility for enrolment. That year's Annual Report included Avery's admonishment that parents were not doing enough to ensure their children were receiving a proper education: while there was room for 50 students that year, only 18 were in attendance. Fraser's Superintendent's Report was more direct: he pointed out that there were 15 students in Nova Scotia and 35 students across New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland who should have been attending the Asylum but were not.<sup>10</sup>

Having identified the potential for recruiting more students, the Board of Managers and Fraser began a multi-pronged plan to increase awareness of the Asylum as an educational institution. This included presenting a variety of arguments in the Annual Reports, increasing the tours throughout the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland, and direct lobbying of the provincial and dominion governments. Fraser also began to

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<sup>8</sup> The ninth report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax Institution for the Blind [hereafter *Annual Report (Institution)*] (Halifax: Nova Scotia Printing, 1880), 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Minutes*, 3 March 1875.

<sup>10</sup> Fifth *Annual Report (Asylum)*, 7, 12-13. Fraser does not seem to have made a report to the Board of Managers that included the names or locations of these potential students.



encourage the public, especially clergy, doctors, and teachers, to report the existence of suitable students who had not been sent to the Asylum yet, despite being of age. These campaigns were successful, although not immediately.

Fraser and the Board believed that part of the reluctance of parents to send their children to the Asylum was fear that it was not an educational facility but a hospital or even a sanatorium. In 1876, Fraser wrote in the Annual Report that calling it an “asylum fails to set forth the educational character of the Institution,” while the Manager’s Report (that year written by Vice President of the Board, John S. MacLean) reminded readers that the Asylum was really a school.<sup>11</sup> However, changing the name was not simply a matter of their will alone. An act of the Nova Scotia government was necessary, as the Asylum’s funding came from the Act to Incorporate the Halifax Asylum for the Blind. Changing the name was finally successful in 1879, with the passing of the Act to Incorporate the Halifax *Institution* for the Blind; that same year, both Fraser’s and MacLean’s report made certain to remind readers that the Asylum was open to students throughout the region.

After the Asylum's formal name change, the next step in attracting new students was to show that the technical training students received had enabled both male and female graduates to gain employment, the latter necessary as marriage rates for blind

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<sup>11</sup> Sixth *Annual Report (Asylum)*, 1877, 15. Stigma around the term “asylum” as a descriptor was a factor in name changes of other institutions in Canada. In 1908, C. K. Clarke, the director of the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, described the term asylum as “‘repulsive’ to family and friends” due to the “public prejudice” against the term. See: Geoffrey Reaume, *Remembrance of Patients Past : Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940* (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press Canada, 2000), 183.

women were very low.<sup>12</sup> MacLean described the Asylum as “gradually taking [its place] in usefulness amongst the benevolent Institutions of the country,” while Fraser reported that many graduates of the Asylum were fully supporting themselves as piano-forte and cabinet organ teachers, as well as piano-forte tuners; he also reported that the students were beginning to receive awards for their work, such as a Certificate of Merit awarded for a rattan mat sent to an exhibition in Truro.<sup>13</sup> Attending the Asylum, Fraser wrote, “enable[d] graduates to get jobs, while at the same time reliev[ed] the country from the support of a non-working class.”<sup>14</sup> Two years later, Fraser reported that four of the students had received their tuning certificates and were now regularly working as piano-forte tuners.<sup>15</sup> According to Fraser, graduate R. M. McLean was the first of many students reported as teaching large music classes across the province, while Ainsley Shaw was a successful entrepreneur, running a small general store in Musquodoboit. Some other graduates engaged in activities such as managing a grist mill or manufacturing venetian blinds.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Fraser and the Board repeatedly chose to hire male graduates of the Asylum as educators, demonstrating to the public the employability of their graduates, as well as ensuring that blind students would know that blind adults could have successful

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<sup>12</sup> In 1901, Fraser revealed that only 4 per cent of female graduates were married, compared to 20 per cent of men. *Thirtieth Annual Report (School)*, 1901, 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Sixth Annual Report (Asylum)*, 7, 10, 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Seventh Annual Report (Asylum)*, 1878, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Eighth Annual Report (Institution)*, 1879, 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Thirteenth Annual Report (Institution)*, 1883, 11; *Sixteenth Annual Report (Institution)*, 1886, 8, 9.

careers. The first of these was David Baird, who attended until 1878 and was hired as a Trades Instructor in 1879. Daniel M. Reid, who attended until 1875, was hired as a piano and piano tuning teacher in 1885, after six years working in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.<sup>17</sup> Arthur Chisholm left the Asylum in 1878 to pursue further education at the Berlin Conservatory of Music; he returned to teach in 1886.

In addition to the campaign to increase the public's awareness of the Asylum and its usefulness as a public good, the Annual Reports also began the process of enlisting the public in finding and alerting the Asylum to potential students who were not sent to Halifax to take advantage of the opportunities there. MacLean's 1875 Manager's Report called on "members of the Legislatures, clergymen, medical men and merchants to help us in our good work, and whenever they find a blind child to use every exertion to have him or her forwarded to us."<sup>18</sup> MacLean further admonished parents for letting their children grow up ignorant out of misguided kindness and a desire to keep them close at home. The best way to ensure blind children could grow into self-sufficient adults was to send them to Halifax, regardless of their parents' fears.<sup>19</sup>

These efforts, spearheaded by Fraser, were very successful, both in terms of increasing numbers of students and in increasing the amount of charitable donations from the general public the Asylum received. Between 1872 and 1882, enrolment more than doubled, with students coming from all three of the Maritime provinces (see Figure 2.1). Donations and grants to the Asylum more than trebled over the same period of time (see

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<sup>17</sup> Fifteenth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Fifth *Annual Report (Asylum)*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Eight *Annual Report (Institution)*, 10 - 11.

Figure 2.2). In addition, sources of donations and grants broadened. While funding in 1872 came almost entirely from a grant of \$1,000 from the Nova Scotian government, with smaller amounts from church collections and charitable donations from other sources, in 1882 funding sources included these in addition to grants from the governments of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and numerous legacies from private individuals. In the ten years between, the Asylum also held successful targeted campaigns to raise funds for an organ (1874), a gymnasium (1877-78), renovations on the workshops (1878), a piano (1879), and the Circulating Library for the Blind (1880), as well as raising funds in three concert tours.

Despite these successes, however, the Asylum continued to struggle for enough funding to cover the full cost of educating the students.<sup>20</sup> Even though the Asylum was attracting more students, there was not always a comparable increase in the funds available, as is apparent in comparing Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2. In 1877, the Nova Scotia government reduced their regular grant from \$1,000 per annum to \$800; in that same year Fraser wrote that in Ontario and in several other countries, blind and deaf students were included in free education acts.<sup>21</sup> The impact of this cut in funding would likely have been greatest in 1878: while the Asylum had more students that year than ever before, it had over \$1,000 less in charitable donations and grants from 1877. By 1879, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island had begun to provide regular grants; however,

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<sup>20</sup> MacLean wrote in 1880 that the cost per pupil was \$150. Funding from all sources that year totaled only \$110 per registered pupil. Tenth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 7, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Seventh *Annual Report (Institution)*, 13.

Fraser reported that the grant from Prince Edward Island only covered one-third of the cost of educating the students from there.<sup>22</sup> While the Board and Fraser regularly targeted the Newfoundland for both recruitment drives and fundraising drives, neither had been very successful: donations did come in from charitable Newfoundlanders, but no students arrived for education at the Asylum.

In response to the lack of dependable government grants and the difficulties in raising sufficient charitable funds from individuals, Fraser and the Board refocused their efforts, this time on campaigning for free education to be extended to blind students. They used many of the same arguments that had been successful in encouraging private individuals to donate to the charitable cause of the Asylum, but included further arguments to present the Asylum as a philanthropic cause worthy of the same guarantees in funding granted to education for non-disabled students. In December, 1879, just before the Board and Fraser expected the Free Education for the Blind Act to be presented to the Nova Scotia Legislature, Avery wrote that both the Asylum for the Blind and the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb should be “moved from the list of charitable Institutions to that of the Public Educational Schools of the province,” while Fraser published a collection of essays on the importance of education for blind students.<sup>23</sup> The collection included an essay from Samuel Gridley Howe on the impact of education on Laura Bridgman and Oliver Caswell, both of whom were deaf-blind; an essay on the attainments of educated blind people by the director of the New York Institute for the

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<sup>22</sup> Ninth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Tenth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 6; C. F. Fraser, *Fighting in the Dark* (Halifax: The Asylum, 1879).

Blind, Stephen Babcock; an article about the impact of musical education for blind students reprinted from the *London Mirror*; details on employment opportunities for blind adults trained in piano-forte tuning; and two articles by Fraser himself about the positive impact education had on blind pupils, one comparing educated and non-educated blind people, the other discussing the importance of physical education in keeping blind adults independent. This book furthered the message that educating blind youth had long-term benefits, both to students and society. Uneducated blind men and women were mean, depressed, and poor; educated ones could support themselves and contribute to society.<sup>24</sup> The Asylum, went the separate arguments presented by Avery and Fraser, was no more a charity than was any other educational institution in Nova Scotia.

The government of Nova Scotia had already begun to receive arguments that the Asylum was an educational institution rather than a charitable one. The 1878 Report from the Committee of Humane Institutions, presented to the Legislative Council of Nova Scotia on March 26, 1878, argued that the Asylum was “purely of an educational character, having for its object the imparting to the blind such instruction as that given in common schools of the province.... The Committee are of the opinion that the Institution has a just and urgent claim upon the funds of the Province.”<sup>25</sup> Yearly, the Committee on Humane Institutions praised the Asylum as an institution, including describing the

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<sup>24</sup> Fraser, *Fighting in the Dark*.

<sup>25</sup> *Journals and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Province of Nova Scotia* [Hereafter *Legislative Council*], *Session 1879*. Halifax, N. S.: Robert T Murray, Queen’s Printer, 1879, Appendix 22, 3-4.

Asylum and its managers as “giv[ing] satisfaction to the general public” or “enabling [the pupils] to obtain a comfortable living and become useful members of society”.<sup>26</sup>

In 1880, Fraser wrote that the government had listened to their requests, and planned on discussing an act to give free education to blind students in 1881. To support this, he detailed two arguments in the Annual Report that year. First, he discussed the impact of charity on both the public perception of blind people and on blind people’s perception of themselves, saying that charity denied blind people “the exercise of that self-reliance in the blind so essential the development of true manhood.” Second, he pointed out that the wealth in Canada was too diffuse for “comparatively few benevolent men” to support blind people financially. As a result, he argued, it was in the best interests of the blind to remove the dependence on charity and instead have government support for the education of blind students assessed in the same way that the costs were assessed for educating sighted students.<sup>27</sup>

The Proceedings for the Nova Scotia Legislature for both 1880 and 1881 do not indicate that any discussion or debate regarding free education for blind students took place in the lower chamber. There are references to a petition from the Asylum in the 1879 proceedings, although the text of the petition is not included. The petition itself is discussed by both representatives from Inverness county, Doctor Duncan J. Campbell (Liberal) and Alexander Campbell (Conservative). Dr. Campbell summarized the petition

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<sup>26</sup> *Legislative Council, Session 1883*, Halifax, N. S.: Robert T Murray, Queen’s Printer, 1883, Appendix 19, 6; *Legislative Council, Session 1884*, Halifax, N. S.: Robert T Murray, Queen’s Printer, 1884, Appendix 17, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Tenth Annual Report (Institution)*, 12.

as “the petitioners ... desired that the government or some hon [sic] member of the government or legislature would introduce a bill to compel every county in the province ... to tax the county for the maintenance of such pupils...” who had been sent to the Asylum. Like Fraser, Alexander Campbell found it “strange that the house should have forgotten these poor sufferers, while ... incurring so much expense in the education of those who had all their faculties.”<sup>28</sup> Doctor Campbell referred to the matter being put before the Committee on Humane Institutions; however, there was no follow-up in the Legislature.

Fraser and McLean both reported in the next Annual Report that the bill had not been presented to the Legislature. According to Fraser, the primary obstacle had been the municipalities of Nova Scotia:

From personal knowledge the favourable view taken of it by a majority of the representatives and feeling certain that a wise and judicious Act to provide free education for the Blind would be cordially supported by every humane and right-thinking man in the Province, we felt certain that the Government would bring forward some measure that would secure to the Blind equal educational advantages to those enjoyed by their more fortunate brothers and sisters. That they did not do so is attributable to the fact that some of the Municipal counties objected to the introduction of any Bill for this purpose which would necessitate an increase being made to the Municipal taxes. This we consider was a reasonable objection on the part of the Municipalities, but we cannot but think that if the Councilors had thoroughly understood the question and considered it in all its phases, they would have recognized the principle of equal rights which it involved, would have waived their objection, and would have mainly supported the Government measure. As it was the Government did not deem it expedient to bring forward the Bill. In view of this fact, I resolved to publically advocate the claims of this class in every part of the Province, and endeavour if possible to obtain the sense of the people upon this question, with this end in view.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nova Scotia, *House of Assembly Debates and Proceedings* (27 March, 1879), 83 (Doctor Duncan J. Campbell, MLA and Alexander Campbell, MLA).

<sup>29</sup> *Eleventh Annual Report (Institution)*, 1882, 15.



Fraser approached the Board of Managers about his proposed speaking tour on June 6, 1881. He suggested the first speech be given in Halifax, at the Academy of Music. The Board readily agreed to the proposal, forming a special committee to plan the first event. The Committee was to arrange any necessary details for the speech and subsequent formal resolution regarding educational funding in Halifax.<sup>30</sup>

MacLean, Fraser, and another member of the Board, W. H. Neal, arranged for the public meeting to be held on June 16, 1881. Fraser arranged printing and distribution of 1,000 invitations to the event, while MacLean arranged for A. G. Archibald, the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia; Stephen Tobin, the Mayor of Halifax (and former member of the Asylum's board); and John Y. Payzant, the Warden of Dartmouth, not only to appear as part of the proceedings but also to present and second the resolution they wished passed. Invitations also went out to the military command at the Halifax Garrison, members of both the provincial and dominion Legislature, and clergy to appear on stage in support of the resolution, alongside the Board of Managers.<sup>31</sup>

The meeting also garnered attention in the press. The *Morning Herald* discussed the upcoming meeting multiple times in the week and a half before it was to be held, describing it in one column as “a presentation of the claims of the blind to the same privilege of free education, which is now the birth right of every Nova Scotian, but which has not yet been extended to those deprived of sight... the lecture will be of very great

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<sup>30</sup> *Minutes*, June 6 1881, Halifax School for the Blind fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series ‘S’, vol. 162.

<sup>31</sup> *Minutes*, 9 June, 1881.

interest....”<sup>32</sup> Both the *Morning Herald* and the *Morning Chronicle* announced the meeting, albeit emphasising different aspects: while the *Herald* announced on June 9, 1881, that a “public meeting for the purpose of considering the education of the blind...” was to be held, the *Chronicle* described it on June 14, 1881, as a lecture from Fraser “in which he will discourse on the cause and effect of blindness, eminent blind men, etc.”<sup>33</sup> The newspapers carried identical announcements indicating that, “in consequence of an important gathering...in the interests of the Institution for the Blind,” a planned Temperance lecture was postponed to the day after Fraser’s presentation.<sup>34</sup> The weekly *Presbyterian Witness and Evangelical Advocate* also “heartily endorse[d] any movement that would promote the welfare of those deprived of sight.”<sup>35</sup>

While previously Fraser’s arguments in favour of education for blind children had focused on the benefit to the community that educating these students provided, his speech at the public meeting took a different direction: Fraser argued that blind children had the same right to education “as their more fortunate fellows who were not deprived

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<sup>32</sup> “Fighting in the Dark,” *The Morning Herald*, 6 June, 1881, 3.

<sup>33</sup> “Education of the Blind” *The Morning Herald*, 9 June 1881, 3; “Public Meeting in Aid of the Blind,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 14 June 1881, 4.

<sup>34</sup> “Lecture Postponed,” *The Morning Herald*, 15 June 1881, 3; “Lecture Postponed,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 15 June 1881, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Lecture on the Blind,” *The Presbyterian Witness and Evangelical Advocate* (hereafter *Witness*), 11 June 1881, 1. While it is possible that the weekly Catholic newspaper published at this time, *The Casket*, also commented on the Halifax lecture or any of the following lectures around the province, little of the paper for the summer of 1881 is available. What exists does not mention the Asylum for the Blind in any capacity.

of sight.”<sup>36</sup> While some of the speech dealt with the successes of educated blind men and women in the United States and England, the importance of early intervention in ensuring blind children gained independence and self-sufficiency, and the high standards of education offered by the Asylum, Fraser’s primary argument was that the time for effective charitable fundraising had passed: “[T]he funds are limited, the limit has been reached, and the question now is: How can the education of the blind be provided for?”<sup>37</sup> Fraser asked those present to endorse the Board’s plea to the Government of Nova Scotia, making it clear that he would be conducting similar public meetings in as many Nova Scotian counties as possible; without the political support of the counties and a commitment to paying part of the cost directly, the Act to properly fund the Asylum would not be passed.<sup>38</sup>

Halifax newspapers wrote positively of the event, expressing support and enthusiasm for the idea of free education for the blind. The *Morning Herald* report underscored Fraser’s appeal to universal rights and his rejection of the charity mode of funding for blind education:

Mr. Fraser, in closing, said that sympathy might be aroused by his making an appeal on the ground of humanity; that, he did not intend to do but would make the call on the ground of justice and right. It was not too much to ask for the blind the same opportunities given to others. He asked not for alms, but help; not for charity but for that which is the birthright of every Nova Scotian.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “The Education of the Blind: Public Meeting in Academy of Music,” *The Morning Herald*, 17 June 1881, 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Morning Chronicle* echoed the support, with its report on the meeting being front page news the Saturday following the event. Describing the “benefits of special education” for successful blind adults, the *Chronicle* argued that, without this benefit, society would be left with “the burden of their support.” It described the potential act as an extension of the Free School Act of Nova Scotia, arguing that direct taxation for education was already a reality and this was a logical extension:

The principle of giving free education to the young of our land had been years ago established in this Province. The common schools did not afford such facilities as to give education to the blind hence a class of the community were deprived of that which the law said all were entitled to.... As it was impossible to educate each blind person in his or her own district, it was only fair to ask the rate payers to contribute a small percentage of the cost per head of educating the blind at a central institution... He didn't ask for charity for the blind, but for justice...<sup>40</sup>

The *Witness* echoed the same language of help over alms and justice over charity. This represented a significant change from the newspapers' presentation of the Asylum only seven years earlier. Whereas the newspapers used to present the Asylum as a charity, they were now echoing the arguments of Fraser and the Board that the Asylum was an education facility with an important philanthropic purpose. As expected, the resolution in support of Free Education for the Blind, moved by Mayor Tobin and seconded by Warden Payzant, passed unanimously.

Fraser delivered a version of his speech in 44 other communities throughout Nova Scotia during June and July. The *Herald* reproduced his itinerary and made follow-up reports on some of his meetings, describing them as “enthusiastic,” with resolutions being

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<sup>40</sup> “The Education of the Blind,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 18 June 1881, 1.

“heartily endorsed” and collections being taken up.<sup>41</sup> Both secular papers also reported on the graduation exercises of the Asylum held at the end of June, and each took the opportunity to remind readers of the importance of the movement for free education for the blind. “Ex-Mayor Dunbar... endorsed the movement now being made by the Principal to secure to the blind a free education, and felt confident that the movement would be successful” appeared in the *Morning Herald*; “The gathering was addressed by Rev. Messrs Simpson and Smith, Hon. Samuel Creelman [a member of the Committee on Humane Institutions], and ex-Mayor Dunbar, all of whom expressed their hearty endorsation [sic] of the movement now on foot to give the blind a free education, as is given to other children,” reported the *Chronicle*.<sup>42</sup> The *Witness* went further still, praising Fraser’s work as “truly Christ-like.”<sup>43</sup>

In March of 1882, the Provincial Secretary of Nova Scotia, Simon H. Holmes, formally introduced the Act in Relation to the Education of the Blind, describing it as “the result of a consultation that had been held between the Managers of the Institution for the Blind and the Government.” The act granted \$120 per Nova Scotian pupil who attended the Asylum, with \$60 coming from the province and the other \$60 from the county that the student could claim residence in. The Act passed unanimously through

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<sup>41</sup> “Education of the Blind,” *The Morning Herald*, 24 June 1881, 1; “Free Education for the Blind,” *The Morning Herald*, 29 June 1881, 1; “Education of the Blind,” *The Morning Herald*, 25 June 1881, 3.

<sup>42</sup> “The Institution for the Blind,” *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 June 1881, 1.

<sup>43</sup> “The Blind,” *Witness*, 16 July 1881, 229.

both Houses, with no debate recorded.<sup>44</sup> “[O]ur pupils have now attained a legal status in the community, they are no longer waifs to be looked after by the charitably disposed, but are ... entitled to participate in the educational advantages of the country,” MacLean wrote in the following Annual Report, a sentiment echoed by Fraser.<sup>45</sup> New Brunswick, Fraser advised, also continued to provide an equal grant to the Asylum, although this was not enshrined in law as it was in Nova Scotia.

The Asylum’s successful petition in Nova Scotia did not lead to successes in the other provinces. In the same Annual Report that Fraser wrote about the Nova Scotia Act and support from New Brunswick, he complained bitterly that the Prince Edward Island government continued to underfund their students, sending only \$200 when \$240 was needed. He called upon “the philanthropists of Charlottetown” to lobby the government there to “afford [the blind] some chance of raising themselves from helpless dependence.” For Newfoundland, however, the situation was more complicated. Despite several students applying and being accepted at the Asylum, no student had actually entered. Fraser blamed this on both the distance from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia (a journey of more than 1,000 kilometres) and his inability to meet in person with the parents of potential students. He did not raise the obvious issue of Newfoundland being a separate dominion that might be unwilling to send students or educational funding to Canada. In both cases, Fraser expected no less than the grant given by Nova Scotia, for the same reasons: education of the blind was as much a right as education for the sighted.

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<sup>44</sup> Nova Scotia. House of Assembly. Bill 62, *An act in relation to the education of the blind*, 27<sup>th</sup> Assembly, 1882 (assented to 10 March 1882).

<sup>45</sup> Twelfth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 1883, 6.

By using a rights-based argument for education funding, Fraser was in turn asserting that blind children were exactly like sighted children, just lacking in the ability to see. This was further reinforced through the public demonstrations of what the children were learning at the Asylum, which was very similar to the curriculum for sighted children.<sup>46</sup> By turning away from the charitable model, Fraser also presented graduates of the Asylum as competent, educated adults, rather than as life-long dependents. Blind men and women, like sighted ones, were citizens of Nova Scotia, and thus should have access to the education rights that sighted people enjoyed.

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<sup>46</sup> Again, Fraser was following in Howe's footsteps. See: Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 112.

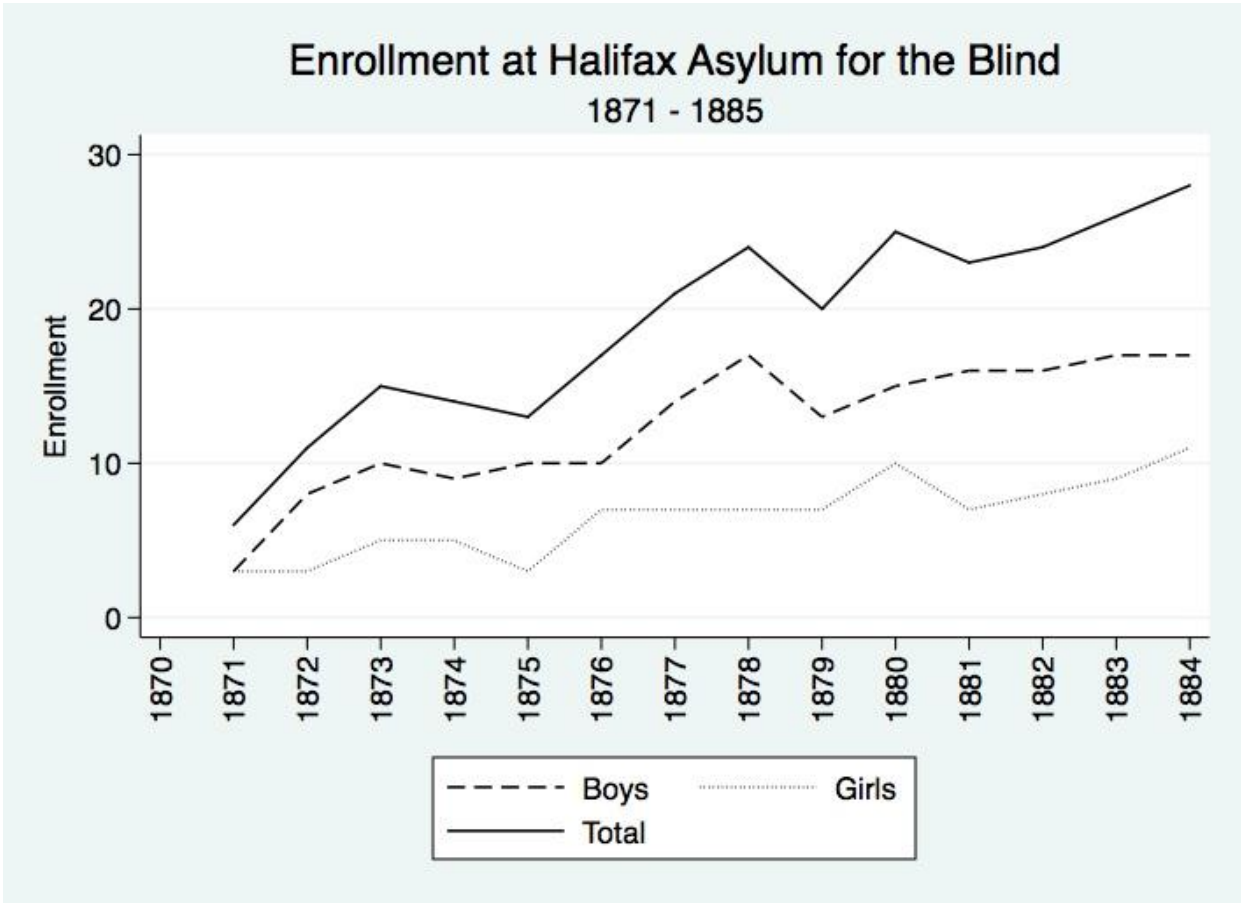
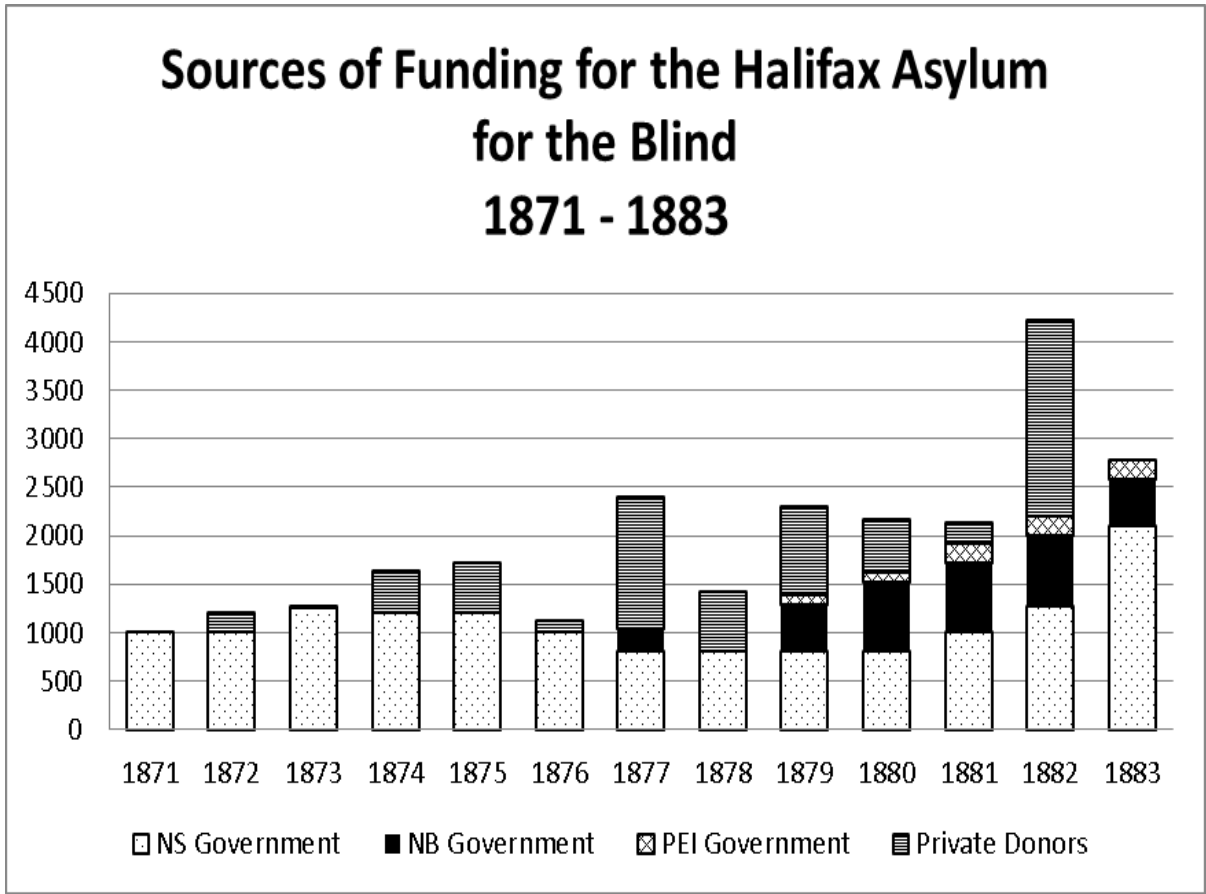


Figure 2.1: Source: *The Board of Managers' Reports for the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, 1871-1884 inclusive.*





*Figure 2.2: Source: The Board of Managers' Reports for the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, 1871-1883 inclusive. This excludes church collections, tours, and funding drives.*

## **CHAPTER 4**

## **BEYOND EDUCATION: 1883 - 1912**

With the immediate funding needs of the Asylum having been met with the passage of the Free Education for the Blind Act in Nova Scotia, Fraser and the Board turned their attentions to extending free education to the other Maritime provinces and Newfoundland. In addition to this, Fraser also began to extend his advocacy work beyond the education of blind children, to encompass both the educational and employment needs of blind adults. However, the changing economic landscape of the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland meant that blind adults who graduated from the Asylum faced additional difficulties in gaining employment in urban centers. As these difficulties became clear, Fraser joined the newly-formed Maritime Association for the Blind in advocating for sheltered workshops to guarantee employment, going against his previous stance that blind people did not need this form of assistance. This chapter addresses Fraser's advocacy work, and the reasons for his changing stance on sheltered workshops and employment issues for blind adults. The legacy of his work in this period would ultimately extend beyond the Maritimes.

Immediately following the passage of the Free Education for the Blind Act in Nova Scotia, Fraser's standing with the Board of Managers and the press improved. Prior to the Act's passage, Fraser's opinions were rarely noted in the Minutes of the Board meetings. Often he was not noted as being present at all. By 1883, Fraser regularly attended the meetings, giving monthly reports to the Board about the running of the Asylum, in addition to his opinions

regarding the overall direction it should take politically.<sup>1</sup> At 33, Fraser would have been one of, if not the, youngest person attending the Board of Managers meetings (Fraser did not become an official member of the Board until 1892). Other Board members at this time included John S. MacLean, businessman and president of the Bank of Nova Scotia; future mayor of Halifax James C. MacKintosh; and prominent Haligonian businessman W. C. Silver. In addition, Fraser was frequently lauded in the Halifax press. While in 1874, Fraser had hardly been mentioned in the *Morning Chronicle's* report on the closing ceremonies for the Asylum, it described him as “talented” and “able” in 1881, while the *Morning Herald* described him as “noble” and “a genius” in 1889.<sup>2</sup> Fraser was the only blind adult who participated in the Board’s decision-making and appears to be the only one who was regularly celebrated in the press for his career-based achievements and his political activities.

As a result, Fraser became the public face of the Asylum, and was thus keenly aware that it was viewed as a mixture of humane and educational facility. On the one hand, beginning with the April, 1883 edition of the *Journal of Education for the Province of Nova Scotia*, the Asylum was included in the County Fund lists (“In Aid of Public Schools Appropriated to the Trustees of School Sections for the Term...”) as a public school, entitled to funding. On the other hand, the Asylum continued to be included in the Nova Scotia Legislative Council’s *Report of the Committee of Humane Institutions*, alongside the Asylum for the Poor, the Hospital for the

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<sup>1</sup> In the Minutes for 1876, for example, Fraser’s primary contributions are reports about the day to day running of the Asylum. In the Minutes for 1886, Fraser reports on his meeting with the Provincial Secretary and requests leave to go on tours to other provinces.

<sup>2</sup> “The Blind Asylum - Exhibition at Argyle Hall”, *Morning Chronicle*, 1 April 1874, 3; “Benefactor of the Community: The noble and the successful work for his fellows that has been done by Charles Frederick Fraser, in the Halifax School for the Blind: A Tribute to his Genius”, *Morning Herald*, 15 July 1899, 7, 9.

Insane, and the Provincial and City Hospital, as well as the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Even after the successful passage of the Free Education for the Blind Act and the Asylum's official name-change to the Halifax School for the Blind, Mayor Mackintosh referred to the Asylum as a one of the city's public charities, "supported mostly by the free gifts of the public," in an address in November, 1886.<sup>3</sup> The Asylum was a government-funded institution that still required donations from individuals and churches to run at its best, and as such it was vital that it be seen as properly fulfilling its role and ensuring blind children would not end up a financial burden on their families or communities. With this fundraising object in mind, Fraser used his influence to present the Asylum in the Annual Reports, the press, and to the governments of the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland as an educational institution rather than a humane one; as such, it would receive guaranteed per-student funding from all the governments, just as was provided to sighted students.

In order to support the Asylum's claim to being a school, Fraser kept well aware of educational debates in Nova Scotia and expressed his opinions and suggestions about them in the Annual Reports. For example, as Halifax's economy became more dependent on manufacturing industries, scientists, both amateur and professional, argued that the public school system should offer technical training for students in both the public schools and universities. This education, they asserted, should also be extended to adults that were already working in mining.<sup>4</sup> In 1881, the Director of Art Education for the State of Massachusetts, Walter Smith, delivered two

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<sup>3</sup> "Mayor's Address", *Annual Reports of the Several Departments of the City Government of Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the Municipal year 1885-1886*, (Halifax, NS: James Bowes & Sons), 1886, xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Janet Guildford, "Technical Education in Nova Scotia, 1880 - 1930" (MA, Dalhousie University, 1983), 18-19.

lectures in Halifax about the importance of technical training and industrial development.<sup>5</sup> School officials, including Halifax School Supervisor Alexander McKay and chairman of the Halifax Board of School Commissioners Rufus Sweet, suggested in 1886 that it was important to offer technical education to non-disabled male pupils to ensure that they would have employment opportunities after graduation.<sup>6</sup> The process of technical training was one that the Asylum's teachers were familiar with, as such training had been offered at the Asylum since it first opened. In addition, adults had been returning to the Asylum for further technical training as new options, such as basket-weaving, were introduced.<sup>7</sup> The 1885 President's Report invited educators to come to the Asylum and view the methods used by the teachers there and adapt them to their own schools, while Fraser's Superintendent's Report discussed the current technical training offered at the Asylum and reminded the reader that blind adults were often admitted or re-admitted for additional education when appropriate.<sup>8</sup> The subtext of these reports was clear: The Asylum was a school, and part of Nova Scotia's education options. Fraser and his fellow teachers were providing education, not charity, and preparing their students to be self-sufficient after graduation.

A similar point was implicit the case for a circulating library for blind adults. Fraser and President of the Board James C. MacLean wrote of the need for a library of this sort, similar to the ones being set up for sighted adults across the province. Both wrote about the cost of

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Minute Books [hereafter *Minutes*], 1 October, 1884, 9 June, 1884, 2 November, 1885, 10 December, 1885, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series 'S', vol. 162.

<sup>8</sup> Fifteenth *Annual Report (School)*, 7, 12, 10.

individual books with raised print, which were so expensive as to put books out of financial reach for many individual blind people. The initial nucleus of the library was the donation of six New Testaments from the British Bible Society; after receiving them, Fraser wrote that he hoped that many more people would support the library through financial donations.<sup>9</sup> The Circulating Library for the Blind was founded at the Asylum during a time when libraries for sighted adults, such as the Citizens' Free Library, were being established in Halifax.<sup>10</sup> Establishing a library for blind adults demonstrated that they were interested in continued education, just as the libraries established for sighted adults did for that group.<sup>11</sup> Within seven years of its founding, Fraser wrote that the library was in constant use, noting that almost 50 new books had been added and were available in Braille. If books had not yet been published by one of the few raised-text printers, sighted adults would dictate them to blind students who transcribed the books into Braille for others to enjoy.<sup>12</sup> While religious books dominated the available titles, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Life of Napoleon*, and *Shakespeare's Works* were also available, and were much in demand.<sup>13</sup> In later decades, the success of libraries such as the Citizens' Free Library was viewed as an indication of the success of public education.<sup>14</sup> The reported usage statistics of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ninth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Piers, *Catalog of the Citizens' Free Library, Halifax, Nova Scotia*, Halifax: W. M. MacNab, 1894, iv.

<sup>11</sup> See Nora Bateson, *Library Survey of Nova Scotia*, Halifax: Department of Education, 1938 for further discussion.

<sup>12</sup> Twenty-third *Annual Report (School)*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Thirty-first *Annual Report (School)*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Bateson, *Library Survey*, 25-27.

Circulating Library for the Blind similarly demonstrated that blind adults benefited as much from education as sighted ones did.<sup>15</sup>

While Fraser's participation in educational debates, in addition to the development of the Circulating Library for the Blind, helped foster the Asylum's reputation as a school, Fraser also needed to combat the idea that his students would need to rely on charity or the assistance of their families after graduation. In 1883, he addressed this directly within the Annual Report (in remarks that were then repeated in the press) by announcing the creation of a Loan Fund for "worthy" graduates that would eliminate the need for them to solicit private charity.<sup>16</sup> The Loan Fund would lend graduates enough money to purchase supplies for either willow basket making (\$75), brush making (\$50), or piano-forte tuning (\$25); this was later expanded to include music teachers. The loans came with "very generous terms," and students were expected to repay them.<sup>17</sup> Like previous fund-raising campaigns for the Asylum, this one relied on charitable donations by private individuals in order to gain the \$1,000 that Fraser felt was necessary to begin the fund; however, this was a relatively small initial outlay of charity in order to prevent a much larger outlay in the future. In this way, the solicitation for the Loan Fund mimicked the successful solicitation for general funding for the Asylum prior to the passage of the Free Education for the Blind Act.

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<sup>15</sup> Fraser reported 71 users borrowing 843 books in one twelve month period, although it's unclear whether this includes students at the Asylum. Twenty-third *Annual Report (School)*, 17-18.

<sup>16</sup> The thirteenth report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax Institution for the Blind [hereafter *Annual Report (Institution)*] (Halifax: The Asylum, 1883), 14. "Institution for the Blind – Annual Meeting of the Corporation", *The Morning Chronicle*, 10 December, 1883, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Thirteenth *Annual Report (Institution)*, 14.

Although none of the administrative records for the fund have survived, it seems clear that the fund was designed primarily, or perhaps exclusively, for male students. Like most middle-class people in Halifax, Fraser subscribed to the idea of “separate spheres”, where women belonged in the private, domestic sphere and men in the public, political one. The impact of that idea meant that female students in the Asylum were not taught any of the technical skills necessary for the occupations that the Loan Fund was initially designed to support. Outside of the regular lessons in reading, literature, music, and math, female students were taught sewing, knitting, and other domestic tasks. As a corollary, female graduates of the Asylum could not have been included among those “worthy” graduates who would have access to the Loan Fund.<sup>18</sup> While the Annual Reports did highlight the business successes of female graduates, such as Jane Atwood who graduated in 1881 with the intention of teaching music in Cow Bay, none were hired on as teachers after graduation, even after the Asylum began routinely to hire sighted female teachers.<sup>19</sup> Even though Fraser did not expect his female graduates to achieve well-paid employment, he knew that they were unlikely to be married.<sup>20</sup> The classes in handicrafts and housekeeping that the girls would prepare them to marry or to assist family members with the

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<sup>18</sup> See “Work Department”, *Annual Reports (School)*.

<sup>19</sup> Eleventh *Annual Report (Institution)*, 11; *Minutes*, 23 June, 1881, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series ‘S’, vol. 163. The earliest mention of a blind female teacher after Fraser’s hiring in the existing Annual Reports is thirty-seventh Annual Report, but there are several years of reports missing. While the Minutes discuss the hiring of male blind teachers, there is no mention of female blind teachers before Una Legg, who was hired in 1904. Legg worked for several years with the Home Teaching Society, then moved to London. After several months of classes in London learning massage, she returned to Halifax and taught massage classes. Thirty-fourth *Annual Report (School)*, 1904, 27; *Minutes*, 5 November, 1901.

<sup>20</sup> In 1901, Fraser revealed that only 4 per cent of female graduates were married, compared to 20 per cent of men. Thirtieth *Annual Report (School)*, 1901, 15.



running of households, both with household labour and small contributions of cash income. It was only after the Loan Fund was extended to include music teachers several years after it was founded that female graduates, frequently trained in this area, would have had access to it.

It is unclear if any specific incident prompted the foundation of the Loan Fund; in the Annual Report that announced its creation, Fraser warned readers of “unscrupulous” beggars who claimed to be graduates of the Asylum, unable to support themselves, but the fund was rarely discussed in the Minutes of the Board. It was, however, established during an era when many cities in the United States enacted what have been called “ugly laws,” or, more accurately, “unsightly begging ordinances.” Susan M. Schweik describes the political and economic factors in the United States that led to the development of ugly laws following the United States Civil War, specifically focusing on the post-war depression and large numbers of people with disabilities begging on the streets of urban centers.<sup>21</sup> Schweik also connects the earliest of these laws to the building of poorhouses in the urban centers which enacted them: these laws often waived fees or jail time for “unsightly beggars” if they were perceived as too disabled to work. Instead, they were sent to the poorhouse where they could be “cared for.”<sup>22</sup> The Maritime provinces also experienced an economic depression in the mid-1880s; the Nova Scotia government refused a grant increase equivalent to \$30 per student in 1885, and Fraser struggled to gain grants from the other provinces and Newfoundland.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the question of how to

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<sup>21</sup> Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 30.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34

<sup>23</sup> Judith Fingard, “The 1880s: Paradoxes of Progress,” in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds. E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993),

“care for” the poor was made more difficult after the destruction by fire of Halifax’s poorhouse in 1882 and its subsequent move to the old Halifax penitentiary buildings until 1886.<sup>24</sup> Several cases of abuse of people sent out to work on rural farms in Nova Scotia had also come to light in 1885.<sup>25</sup> Fraser’s development of the Loan Fund ensured that graduates were not perceived as needing to rely on begging to survive, nor needing to risk abuse or neglect being “cared for” in the poorhouse. He also ensured that, despite the depression, students would still have some financial support post-graduation. By establishing and publicizing the Fund through the annual reports and the collections undertaken by young sighted women throughout Nova Scotia, Fraser ensured that the members of the public most likely to support the Asylum through charitable donations were aware that it was still a worthy investment.<sup>26</sup> In addition, this assured parents that their children would not risk the poorhouse if they were sent to Halifax for schooling. After less than a year, the fund reached Fraser’s target of \$1,000, and by 1885, \$240 had been loaned to graduates.<sup>27</sup>

Within Nova Scotia, the Asylum was increasingly viewed as a school. The 1885 report of the Committee on Humane Institutions referred to it as a school, highlighting that students could

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84-86; Board of Managers Minute Books [hereafter Minutes], May 4, 1885, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series ‘S’, vol. 162.

<sup>24</sup> Fingard, “Paradoxes of Progress”, 109.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 110

<sup>26</sup> *Fourteenth Annual Report (School)*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> The fifteenth report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax School for the Blind [hereafter *Annual Report (School)*] (Halifax: The School, 1885), 13.

apply the trades they were learning “to work and thereby earn a comfortable living.”<sup>28</sup> The *Morning Herald* had been referring to the Asylum as the Institution for the Blind in its reporting in 1883; by December of 1884 the paper called it the School for the Blind.<sup>29</sup> However, Fraser struggled unsuccessfully to gain the same legitimacy outside of Nova Scotia. Although New Brunswick was providing an equal grant to Nova Scotia’s, it was an unlegislated grant, unlike the funding for the education of sighted students, and Prince Edward Island’s grants to the Asylum were sporadic at best. Fraser believed that this lack of support was caused, at least in part, by lack of awareness of the Asylum’s purpose and needs by the other governments. He believed that he could best convince these governments of the Asylum’s claim as a fully funded educational facility through by lobbying those governments himself, in person.

To this end, Fraser asked the Board of Managers to release him from the 42 hours a week he spent on teaching duties. This, he argued, would “enable him the better to further the interests of the Board outside of the Institution.” He also recommended adding three new teachers to the staff for the beginning of the 1888-89 school year, both to replace him and to expand the Asylum’s teaching capacity.<sup>30</sup> All three of the teachers that Fraser suggested were male graduates of the Asylum, and he proposed paying them out of his own salary so as to not add to

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<sup>28</sup> “Report of the Committee for Humane Institutions”, *Journals and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Province of Nova Scotia* [Hereafter *Legislative Council*], *Session 1885*. Halifax, N. S.: Robert T Murray, Queen’s Printer, 1879, Appendix 22, 2.

<sup>29</sup> “Institution for the Blind: Terminal Examinations and Exercises”, *The Morning Herald*, 18 June 1883, 3; “School for the Blind: Annual Meeting of the Institution”, *The Morning Herald*, 15 December 1884, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Minutes*, 1 June 1888.

the Board's financial burden.<sup>31</sup> This gesture undoubtedly made his case persuasive, and helped to build his moral authority with the Board members.<sup>32</sup> He was intent on ensuring that each member understood his goals and plans as a full-time advocate and superintendent for the Asylum, requesting that "each Director should express his opinion upon [the proposal] so that he may feel that they had a full endorsation [sic] of the gentlemen [on the Board] who were without remuneration giving both thought [and] time to matters affecting the education and welfare of the Blind." Fraser even went so far as to get a letter of support from MacLean, who was absent from the meeting, to present.<sup>33</sup> The Board eventually agreed to Fraser's plans, albeit reluctantly; Fraser's yearly salary was already well above that of the other teachers at the Asylum, and the Board may have been reluctant to pay him the full amount when he would not be providing teaching hours.<sup>34</sup> By offering to pay the new teaching staff out of his wages, Fraser alleviated

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<sup>31</sup> This sacrifice of a substantial part of his own income may be the basis for the legend in McNeil's book, and repeated in an essay by Hilda A. Tyler, that Fraser worked without pay. Mary A. E. A. McNeil, *The Blind Knight of Nova Scotia: Sir Frederick Fraser, 1850 – 1925*, Washington: University Press, 1939, 13; Hilda A. Tyler, "Dauntless Knight, The", republished in *Ninety-Third Annual Report (School)*, 1963, 6 - 12.

<sup>32</sup> This financial sacrifice does not appear to have been revealed to the public. The decision was not mentioned in the Annual Report that revealed that Fraser had taken on Superintending full-time and hired three new teachers, nor is it mentioned in the press reports about the Asylum's closing ceremonies in June of that year. *Eighteenth Annual Report (School)*, 1889. "School for the Blind: Closing Exercises Yesterday – A Presentation to Miss McKenzie – The Prize Winners", *Morning Herald*, 21 June 1888, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Minutes*, 1 June 1888.

<sup>34</sup> In 1879, Fraser's salary was \$500/annum, while that of David Baird was \$120/annum plus board, a decrease for Baird from his 1878 salary of \$200/annum. In 1882 and 1886, Fraser received increases in salary, while Baird again returned to \$200/annum in 1883; no subsequent increase in salary for the other teaching staff is noted in the minutes. Fraser also received financial gifts of thanks from the Board, such as a \$100 gift in 1885. *Minutes*, 1 April 1878; 6 January 1879; 2 June 1879; 6 February 1882; 4 June 1883; 3 December 1885; 3 June 1886.

some of this concern, and thus was given the opportunity to advocate to the other governments throughout the school year, rather than limiting that work to his summer breaks.

Fraser's first task as full-time superintendent and lobbyist was to convince the New Brunswick government that the Asylum, as a professionally-run institution, was the best form of education for blind students. In November 1888, shortly after his change of status, the Board was made aware that several students from New Brunswick had not been sent on to the Asylum. A former (unnamed) pupil of the Asylum had begun educating them, and "though not competent it deterred several from coming here which [Fraser] considered very disadvantageous to the pupils."<sup>35</sup> A few months later, the New Brunswick government informed the Board that they would only pay for students to attend the Asylum for three years, rather than the seven or more that was the usual time that students spent there.<sup>36</sup> Fraser visited New Brunswick to petition the government directly; as a result, the Attorney General of New Brunswick, A. G. Blair, visited the Asylum in the summer of 1889. After a tour of the grounds and "fully discussing the matter," Blair agreed on behalf of New Brunswick that supporting the Asylum as a "central institution for the education of the blind" in the "sister provinces" was necessary, as was the extended period of education. In September 1889, a \$900 grant for New Brunswick's 11 pupils was received.<sup>37</sup>

While the amateur school in New Brunswick was never again discussed in the Minutes, it appears to have been the impetus for the Board and Fraser to begin a more direct campaign to ensure the Asylum was the central educational facility for blind students in the Maritime

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<sup>35</sup> *Minutes*, 5 November 1888.

<sup>36</sup> *Minutes*, 2 May 1889.

<sup>37</sup> *Minutes*, 3 September 1889.

provinces and Newfoundland. Following the visit from Blair, the Board passed a motion that made members of the governments of each province ex officio members of the Board.<sup>38</sup> While this was no doubt intended as a symbolic gesture, in the following years the governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick offered further financial and political support to the Asylum. The Provincial Secretary of Nova Scotia attended the final four meetings of the Board of Managers in 1889, joining the building committee.<sup>39</sup> The government of Nova Scotia first committed \$2,000 to building a new wing of the Asylum in March, 1890, then increased this contribution to \$6,000 should the Board succeed in raising an additional \$5,000.<sup>40</sup> The New Brunswick government agreed to increase their previous grant from \$900 to \$1,200 for the same number of students, and Blair found time to visit the Asylum a second time in 1892.<sup>41</sup> By April of 1892, Fraser reported to the Board that “a wide-spread interest had been created in the education of the blind” after his visit to New Brunswick in March. He was also able to report that New Brunswick had finally followed in Nova Scotia’s footsteps and passed legislation explicitly granting free education for the blind at the Asylum at a per-student rate, rather than a grant.<sup>42</sup>

In comparison, Fraser experienced a number of difficulties gaining financial support from Prince Edward Island. In the decades following Confederation, the Island had “the largest per

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<sup>38</sup> *Minutes*, 7 October, 1889. Nova Scotia’s Provincial Secretary had been an ex-officio member of the Board since 1886. Sixteenth *Annual Report (School)*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Minutes*, 7 October 1889; 4 November 1889; 2 December 1889; 13 December 1889.

<sup>40</sup> *Minutes*, 3 March 1890; 5 May 1890.

<sup>41</sup> In 1888, the New Brunswick grant was \$897.75 for nine students; financial and enrolment figures for 1889 and 1890 do not appear to have survived, and enrolment figures from New Brunswick are not available for 1890. Eighteenth *Annual Report (School)*, 17; *Minutes*, 3 March 1890; 1 February 1892.

<sup>42</sup> *Minutes*, 4 April 1892.

capita debt and the smallest per capita income in the country.”<sup>43</sup> In 1882, one of its three banks, the Bank of Prince Edward Island, had collapsed completely while a second, the Union Bank, amalgamated with the Bank of Nova Scotia. The inadequacy of the province’s public revenue in the 1870s, caused in part by the fiscal requirements of the free school system for sighted children, led to the election in 1879 of government sworn to fiscal austerity; as a result, during the 1880s under Premier W. W. Sullivan, MLA’s salaries were reduced and the number of government workers was cut.<sup>44</sup> Although Fraser was likely aware of P.E.I.’s fiscal crisis, he responded as though the lack of monetary support for the Asylum was caused by a lack of faith in its necessity, rather than by budgetary reality. According to Fraser, the Prince Edward Island government did not believe that many children on the Island would be interested in receiving this education, a notion which he publically scoffed at in the Annual Reports.<sup>45</sup> In May, 1899, he visited Prince Edward Island with the intention of convincing the government that the Island’s blind children needed to be educated.<sup>46</sup> The following month, he reported to the Board that the government had “agreed to take into consideration” increasing their grant to \$150 per pupil and up to four pupils at a time.<sup>47</sup> Despite a follow-up letter from Fraser, there is no indication that the grant was actually increased – in 1893 there were two pupils from Prince Edward Island, but the

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<sup>43</sup> Heidi MacDonald, “Developing a Strong Roman Catholic Social Order in Late Nineteenth-Century Prince Edward Island,” *Historical Studies* 69 (2003, 2003), 42.

<sup>44</sup> Fingard, “Paradoxes of Progress”, 97, 99; and Phillip A. Buckner, “The 1870s: Political Integration,” in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds. E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 57-58.

<sup>45</sup> *Seventeenth Annual Report (School)*, 1887, 16.

<sup>46</sup> *Minutes*, May 2, 1889.

<sup>47</sup> *Minutes*, 3 June, 1889.

grant was only \$150.<sup>48</sup> In February, 1894, the Board received a letter from the government advising them that there would be no increase in the grant money.<sup>49</sup> Fraser returned to lobby the government that September, with more success: the Annual Report that followed advised that the grant from Prince Edward Island had doubled from the previous year to \$300 for four pupils.<sup>50</sup> As this was still far below the grants from the other provinces (see Table 4.1), Fraser visited Charlottetown again in February 1895, this time calling on the clergy of Charlottetown to support the School's request. However, the \$300 grant remained the same. This was a worrisome situation: the Board and Fraser felt that the other provinces were "unfairly burdened" with the cost of educating Prince Edward Island's students.<sup>51</sup>

For a time, however, the government of Prince Edward Island was immovable. The resistance was in all likelihood not simply based in extraordinary stinginess with public funds. It may have been that the tactics Fraser and the Board had used to encourage enrolment in Nova Scotia – that is, emphasising the non-denominational aspects of the education provided at the Asylum – were counter-productive in Prince Edward Island. While in Halifax Catholics made up at least 40 per cent of the population, there was a decades-long history of "a generally accommodating attitude" between Catholics and Protestants, despite the conflicts regarding

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<sup>48</sup> The financial records for 1889 do not appear to have survived. Twenty-third *Annual Report (School)*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Minutes*, 5 February 1894.

<sup>50</sup> The financial reports for 1894 do not appear to have survived. Twenty-fifth *Annual Report (School)*, 1896, 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Minutes*, 6 May 1895.



common schools.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, Prince Edward Island's sectarian conflicts were ongoing, driven both by the more equal percentage of Catholics in the province (45 per cent) and by the ultramontane Bishop of Charlottetown, Peter McIntyre.<sup>53</sup> McIntyre worked to create "a strong Catholic subculture" on the Island, which included both education and health care funded and run by members of Catholic religious orders.<sup>54</sup> As such, the government may have been reluctant to directly fund a non-sectarian Asylum that would have been read as explicitly Protestant by powerful Catholic forces in the province. This, in combination with Prince Edward Island's relatively lower public revenues, is more likely to have been the cause of the government's reluctance to provide regular funding than a lack of interest in the needs of blind children.

In April, 1897, Fraser reported to the Board that an arrangement had been made with Premier Frederick Peters, in which he "definitely promised that a satisfactory Act should be presented to the Legislature in the coming session." He confirmed this commitment in September.<sup>55</sup> However, this again failed after Peters left the province and was replaced by Alexander B. Warburton in October. Fraser responded by making his fourth visit to the province in nine years, in April of 1898. This time Fraser brought his best pupils for a demonstration in Charlottetown; while there, he met with 25 members of the government. A unanimous resolution

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<sup>52</sup> Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 27; Terrence Murphy, "Trusteeism in Atlantic Canada: The Struggle for Leadership among the Irish Catholics of Halifax, St John's and Saint John, 1780-1850," in *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930*, eds. Terrence Murphy and Gerald Stortz (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 128.

<sup>53</sup> MacDonald, *Developing a Strong Roman Catholic Social Order in Late Nineteenth-Century Prince Edward Island*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>55</sup> *Minutes*, 6 April 1897; 9 September 1897.

was passed at the public demonstration endorsing free education for the blind and requiring the provincial government to make a statutory provision to pay for it.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, the provincial government was either unwilling or unable to provide an increased grant. However, the mayor of Charlottetown, who had attended the performance and spoke in favour of the resolution, did send \$150 to cover the city's share in educating its two pupils in 1898 and 1899.<sup>57</sup> It was not until 1909, after the 1906 renegotiation of the financial terms of Confederation, that Prince Edward Island was finally able to financially satisfy the desires of both the public and its leading politicians to meet the grant requests of the Asylum.<sup>58</sup>

In comparison, Fraser did relatively little to campaign to the Newfoundland government for funding and students. The first student, Samuel Hussey, arrived from the Dominion in 1887, and the government sent its first grant of \$250 for Hussey and another student the following school year.<sup>59</sup> In February 1889, Fraser reported to the Board that an association had been formed in Newfoundland to advance the cause of educating the blind there, but otherwise rarely discussed either funding or enrolment from the Dominion. The association did have some effect, with both an increase of pupils to 7 by 1893 and a subsequent increase of government funding to \$900. However, Fraser rarely discussed the association, and kept no surviving record of its activities.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "Halifax School for the Blind: Entertainment Last Evening – Strong Resolution Passed", *The Daily Examiner*, 20 April 1898, 6.

<sup>57</sup> *Minutes*, 3 May, 1898; 2 June 1899.

<sup>58</sup> *Thirty-ninth Annual Report (School)*, 1909, 8.

<sup>59</sup> By that time the grant request was \$200 per annum. *Seventeenth Annual Report (Institution)*, 1888, 10.

<sup>60</sup> *Minutes*, 4 February 1889; *Twenty-third Annual Report (School)*, 24.

Despite difficulties in other provinces, Fraser and the Asylum were both well respected across Nova Scotia. Haligonian newspapers dedicated entire pages to praising his work for the school, such as the two full pages in the July 15, 1899 *Halifax Herald* titled “A Benefactor of the Community: The Noble and the Successful Work done for his fellows that has been done by Charles Frederick Fraser in the Halifax School for the Blind... a tribute to his genius”<sup>61</sup> In 1885, he received his first honorary degree, a Masters of Arts from King’s College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. In 1901, he received his second, a Doctor of Laws from Dalhousie College. His third honorary degree was a Doctor of Civil Law, awarded again from King’s College in 1915. On March 27, 1913, the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia passed a resolution “that the thanks of this Honorable House be presented to Charles Frederick Fraser, citizen of Nova Scotia, in recognition of his distinguished services, rendered to the blind in this province during a period of forty years.”<sup>62</sup> In moving the resolution, Dr. Charles Peter Bissett, representing Richmond, said

I would like for a moment to recall the conditions that prevailed forty years ago when Dr. Fraser took charge of the institution for the blind in this city. ... [I]t seems that those who were condemned to blindness, either through accident or disease, were then put within the four walls of some inhospitable building and were looked upon as objects of charity, who could only live in misery and die in despair. Today, what do we see? Under the leadership of Dr. Fraser, light has been brought to those who were in darkness; pleasure and happiness to those who were unhappy; we have a bright intelligent throng of men and women scattered through these Provinces living lives of honourable independence and feeling that they are no burdens upon their families and friends, and all this has been accomplished through the undying efforts of Frederick Charles [sic] Fraser.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> “Benefactor of the Community: The noble and the successful work for his fellows that has been done by Charles Frederick Fraser, in the Halifax School for the Blind: A Tribute to his Genius”, *Morning Herald*, 15 July 1899, 7, 9.

<sup>62</sup> *Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly during the Second Session of the Thirty-Fifth Parliament of the Province of Nova Scotia* [hereafter *Debates and Proceedings 1913*], Halifax: Chronicle Publishing Company, 1913, 330; See also: Hilda A. Tyler, “Dauntless Knight, The”, republished in *Ninety-Third Annual Report (School)*, 1963, 6 - 12.

<sup>63</sup> *Debates and Proceedings 1913*, 332-333.

In writing to Gilbert Minto, the Governor General of Canada, Alfred Gilpin Jones, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, described Fraser as:

a whole-souled, warm-hearted, devoted man. Very much admired by the entire Community... [A]ny mark of Royal favour, or any medal that could be given him, would not only be richly deserved for his great devotion to his work and to the success that has attended it, but that the people would be much pleased to know that his work and his services had been properly appreciated.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to these accolades, the Asylum received regular legacies from people across the province, varying in their annual total from \$300.00 and \$25,000.00 between 1900 and 1912.<sup>65</sup> Prominent Haligonians from multiple religious groups and levels of government attended the December annual meetings, and newspapers reported that the closing ceremonies held in June were often so packed that “many who sought admission were unable to secure even standing room and were obliged to return to their homes.”<sup>66</sup>

Fraser’s successes in Nova Scotia allowed him to give attention to reaching beyond the needs of his students to the needs of other blind people across the province – something he was less able to do in the other Maritime provinces and Newfoundland. In addition to the Circulating Library for the Blind, Fraser developed a Home Teaching Society, to assist those blinded in adulthood due to accident or old age. Previously, the Board of Managers had been asked to accept students over the age of 21. These adult applicants had been judged case-by-case at Board

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<sup>64</sup> Alfred Gilpin Jones to Gilbert Minto, undated draft, A. G. Jones Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 1, vol. 128C, #89, 1891-1906.

<sup>65</sup> *Annual Reports (School)*, 1900-1918

<sup>66</sup> “Closing exercises, School for the Blind”, *Morning Chronicle*, June 20, 1899, 1.

meetings, although the criteria for acceptance were not recorded in the Minutes. While none of the adult applicants for admission were accepted in the first year the Asylum opened, by 1878 the attendance records included three adult student workers.<sup>67</sup> In 1886, Fraser reported that the three blind adults being educated at the Asylum were receiving an hour of math instruction in addition to their time learning trades in the workroom.<sup>68</sup> By 1887, the School had 5 adult students, including a 38 year old who had been blinded two years earlier, a 27 year old, and a 30 year old, all accepted in 1886, and all from Nova Scotia.<sup>69</sup> With the immediate needs of blind Nova Scotian children being met, Fraser was able to develop a more effective program for adults that would not require them to leave their homes and either live in residence at a school meant for children, or seek residence elsewhere in Halifax. The Home Teaching Society for the Blind was founded in 1893, related to the Asylum but not part of it, with its own Annual Reports, its own funding, and its own staff.<sup>70</sup> Fraser's primary concern may have been that mixing adults and children together in the Asylum was considered a poor approach by many of the other experts on educating blind people; however, this was just one of many projects Fraser participated in to assist blind Nova Scotians beyond the walls of the Asylum.<sup>71</sup> He wanted more than just education, but the opportunity for blind Nova Scotians to interact with sighted ones on their own terms.

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<sup>67</sup> *Minutes*, 29 April 1868, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series 'S', vol. 161; *Seventh Annual Report (Asylum)*, 1878, 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Sixteenth Annual Report (School)*, 1886, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Minutes*, 5 April 1886; 1 September 1886; 4 October 1886.

<sup>70</sup> *Twenty-third Annual Report (School)*, 1893, 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Maritime Association for the Blind*, RG 14, Series S, Vol 6, #1.

However, Fraser's advocacy work did not lead to the respect and independence for blind adults that he sought, as became apparent in the first decades of the twentieth century. As early as 1900, Fraser described difficulties in finding new jobs that blind people could undertake, especially female graduates. He again emphasized that the girls were learning household management and cooking, in addition to music, but felt that the employment prospects for girls were "far from bright."<sup>72</sup> The following year, he described the course of instruction at the Asylum as being designed with the goal of graduating independent and self-supporting men and women, as blindness was "not a barrier to success."<sup>73</sup> By 1908, though, it was clear that the "handicrafts" taught were no longer able to support either male or female graduates. The cane seating and willow work that the boys were learning in the technical department were being replaced by machines, leaving blind men across Canada, the United States, and Europe with newly limited options just as industrialization was increasing urban employment opportunities for non-disabled workers.<sup>74</sup> Compounding this problem was the passage of the 1912 Employers' Liability Act in Nova Scotia. According to President of the Board Charles Archibald, this act created yet additional limits on blind men's employment options. He wrote that this statute, designed to protect able-bodied workers from injury and death, had the unintended effect of

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<sup>72</sup> *Thirtieth Annual Report (School)*, 1900, 15.

<sup>73</sup> *Thirty-first Annual Report (School)*, 12.

<sup>74</sup> *Thirty-eighth Annual Report (School)*, 1908, 14, 15.

reducing the number of Nova Scotian employers willing to hire blind graduates. The result was an employment crisis for blind men.<sup>75</sup>

Those graduates of the Asylum who were not limited to working-class jobs were aware of the growing difficulties of those who were. In 1909 a number of them came together to form the Maritime Association for the Blind; when the group incorporated in 1914, it included independent piano tuner and former teacher at the Asylum Daniel M. Reid, literary teacher Samuel Hussey, music teacher H. Beverly Campbell, and piano teacher Oliver P. Cormier. It later included former literary teacher and current osteopath J. A. MacDonald, clerk at J. E. Morse & Co, T. A. Hubley, piano tuner L. R. Rushton, vocal teacher and future missionary George Theakston, and Evelyn Ellis, another teacher in the literary department of the Asylum and the only woman who sat on the Board of the Association.<sup>76</sup> Following Fraser's lead, the Association intended to help the "less fortunate" blind graduates "help themselves" through immediate financial support for business ventures, and took over fundraising for and managing the Loan Fund.<sup>77</sup> However, in light of the changing labour market in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland, individual blind men could no longer earn a "comfortable living" through independent brush, broom, or willow-basket making, the very jobs the Loan Fund had been

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<sup>75</sup> Forty-fifth *Annual Report (School)*, 1915, 8; Colin Howell, "The 1900s: Industry, Urbanization, and Reform," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds. E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 165-167.

<sup>76</sup> *Maritime Association for the Blind*, RG 14, Series S Vol 10 #47; RG 14, Series S Vol 10 #39; RG 14 Series S Vol 10 #53; MG 20, Vol 97, folder 21; "An Act to Incorporate the Maritime Association for the Blind", 1914; McApine's City Directory.

<sup>77</sup> Thirty-ninth *Annual Report (School)*, 19 – 20. *Correspondence of the Maritime Association for the Blind*, Nova Scotia Archives, RG14, Series S, volume 5, #6. Forty-fourth *Annual Report (School)*, 1914, 18; *Minutes*, 10 December, 1914, Halifax School for the Blind Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 14, Series 'S', vol. 163.

designed to support. Several attempts were made by the Board of the Association to seek out new employment opportunities for both male and female graduates. In 1914 they reported that the only opportunity they had found for girls was as candy wrappers at the Moirs Ltd factory, and speculated that blind men could work operating the machine that put covers on lobster cans. Writing to graduates of the Asylum for further suggestions had been “unsatisfactory.”<sup>78</sup> By 1915 the Association began to advocate for local, sheltered workshops that would guarantee employment for working-class blind adults.

These proposed workshops would be partially funded by the municipalities of Nova Scotia, with the intention of ensuring guaranteed employment for blind adults. In the Annual Reports, Fraser described these workshops as similar to a program in the United States which provided \$100 to \$150 per annum via group workshops to blind workers who earned less than \$300.<sup>79</sup> In the summer of 1915, Fraser spoke to the Union of Municipalities and argued in support of the workshops, telling the Board that “the idea was of special importance at the present time” as he was concerned about the influx of blinded soldiers who would need employment.<sup>80</sup> In the Annual Report for that year, Archibald urged the Nova Scotian government to pass “a permissive act” that would allow the municipalities to administer these local workshops.<sup>81</sup> An

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<sup>78</sup> *Report of the Ways & Means Committee*, RG14 Series S Vol 6 #6, Nova Scotia Archives.

<sup>79</sup> *Forty-fifth Annual Report (School)*, 17-18.

<sup>80</sup> *Minutes*, 4 November, 1915

<sup>81</sup> *Forty-fifth Annual Report (School)*, 1915, 8.



Act Respecting Employment of the Blind, allowing the establishment of these workshops across the province, passed in 1916.<sup>82</sup>

Fraser's support for the workshops is surprising after decades asserting that blind adults, especially men, needed only education and a small loan in order to be self-sufficient. This change in stance reflected the changing economic realities that blind adults faced in the twentieth century as changes beyond the Asylum's power to influence required new responses. At the same time, the Asylum's own capacity to offer new kinds of training must have been limited by the organization's financial difficulties. Enrollments and costs had long been outpacing revenues. The 100-student mark had been reached in 1897, and by 1901 there were 135 pupils, with 71 from Nova Scotia, 32 from New Brunswick, 6 from Prince Edward Island, and 8 from Newfoundland. The cost to educate each student was \$225 per annum, but income for the Asylum that year only amounted to \$146.36 per student.<sup>83</sup> By 1908, the student population was 136, with funding only amounting to \$185.74 per student.<sup>84</sup> The President's Report that year revealed that the cost to educate students had increased 40 per cent from 10 years earlier, but the annual revenue of the Asylum had only increased by 20 per cent.<sup>85</sup> In the decade in between, the regional economy of the Maritime provinces had been heavily hit by the nationalization of the

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<sup>82</sup> Forty-sixth *Annual Report (School)*, 1916, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Thirty-first *Annual Report (School)*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Thirty-eighth *Annual Report (School)*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

banking system and the draining of capital from the region into Ontario and Quebec, meaning there were fewer philanthropic and charitable dollars available to support the Asylum.<sup>86</sup>

In February, 1914, as the campaign for sheltered workshops began to produce results, Fraser announced to the Board of Managers that it was necessary to begin the search for an assistant that he could train to be the next Superintendent.<sup>87</sup> He was by then 64 years old, and his first wife, Helen Hunter, had died after a lengthy illness in 1909.<sup>88</sup> He had remarried in 1910, and he and his second wife, Jane Stevens, had had a son; his personal life no longer lent itself to lengthy summer tours or trips to advocate directly to provincial governments. In addition, many of the Asylum's early Board members, whom Fraser had been working with his entire adult life, had passed away, with W. C. Silver and John Duffus dying in 1903. After decades of touring around the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland, being the face of advocacy work for blind people, Fraser was now willing to look to a different future for himself. The younger men who made up the Maritime Blind Association pressed for sheltered workshops; Fraser was apparently willing now to accept that the next generation should set priorities about what adult graduates of the school needed. They were all his former students, and he had employed many of them at the Asylum. To let them take up the work of policy advocacy cannot have been too difficult.

Fraser did not retire from educating blind children until the Asylum's Golden Jubilee in 1923. However, he withdrew increasingly from the work of advocating for blind people, work

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<sup>86</sup> Colin Howell, "The 1900s: Industry, Urbanization, and Reform," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds. E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 164.

<sup>87</sup> *Minutes*, 5 February 1914.

<sup>88</sup> Tyler, *Dauntless Knight*, 9.

which began to be taken up by the Maritime Association for the Blind. With the return to Canada of war-blinded soldiers in 1917, public concern became less focused on children seeking education, and more focused on adults seeking employment, which was exactly what the Association had been founded to address. Not surprisingly, then, the Association's members played an important part in a new national organization of blind people. In 1918, war-blinded veterans came together to form the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). Seven of their initial twenty-five board members came from the Maritime Association for the Blind and the Home Teaching Society.<sup>89</sup> While Fraser himself was no longer the main advocate for blind people in the Maritime provinces, that many of his former pupils made up the Board of the CNIB was a sign that his legacy continued on the national stage.

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<sup>89</sup> *Forty-ninth Annual Report (School)*, 1919, 6, 13.

<b>Year</b>	<b>NS Government</b>	<b>NB Government</b>	<b>PEI Government</b>	<b>NFLD Government</b>
<b>1900</b>	\$ 9,745.19	\$ 4,906.46	\$ 524.28	\$ 1,200.00
<b>1901</b>	\$ 10,270.11	\$ 4,644.49	\$ 599.19	\$ 1,200.00
<b>1902</b>	\$ 10,757.63	\$ 4,381.63	\$ 599.75	\$ 1,200.00
<b>1903</b>	\$ 10,837.50	\$ 4,490.52	\$ 600.00	\$ 1,200.00
<b>1904</b>	\$ 11,362.50	\$ 4,312.50	\$ 600.00	\$ 1,650.00
<b>1905</b>	\$ 13,363.00	\$ 4,650.00	\$ 675.00	\$ 1,650.00
<b>1906</b>	\$ 14,850.00	\$ 4,785.65	\$ 675.00	\$ 2,340.00
<b>1907</b>	\$ 15,480.00	\$ 5,310.00	\$ 450.00	\$ 1,225.00
<b>1908</b>	\$ 15,705.00	\$ 5,310.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,908.00
<b>1909</b>	\$ 14,310.00	\$ 5,326.00	\$ 960.00	\$ 2,370.00
<b>1910</b>	\$ 16,500.00	\$ 6,100.00	\$ 920.00	\$ 2,304.00
<b>1911</b>	\$ 16,220.00	\$ 6,300.00	\$ 680.00	\$ 2,520.25
<b>1912</b>	\$ 16,960.00	\$ 2,480.14	\$ 800.00	\$ 2,760.00
<b>1913</b>	\$ 16,640.00	\$ 5,770.58	\$ 660.00	\$ 2,943.00
<b>1914</b>	\$ 18,040.00	\$ 5,787.60	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 3,200.00
<b>1915</b>	\$ 22,075.00	\$ 5,506.88	\$ 750.00	\$ 4,000.00

*Table 4.1: Grants from the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland 1900 - 1915. Source: The Board of Managers' Reports for the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, 1900 - 1915 inclusive.*

## CHAPTER 5      CONCLUSION

When the Halifax Asylum for the Blind opened its doors to students in 1872, the sighted Haligonian elites who sat on the Board saw it as a way of filling a perceived lack in the city's charitable institutions. Like the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, its aim was to educate children who were not served by the schools available to the non-disabled. Unlike the Institution, its foundation was not driven by those it would serve. No blind people filled the foundational role that George Tait and William Grey had in 1856. However, also unlike the Institution, the Board of Managers for the Asylum deliberately sought out graduates of educational institutions for blind children in the United States to serve as educators and superintendents. This was not an accidental decision, but a deliberate one, reinforced over time as blind graduates were added to the teaching roster. As a result, the Asylum presented legislators, the press, potential donors, and parents of potential students a number of successful, self-supporting blind men (and occasionally blind women) who, led by Superintendent Charles Frederick Fraser, demonstrated the positive results of targeted education for children with disabilities.

Comparing the foundation of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Asylum for the Blind demonstrates how two institutions with similar goals were influenced in both pedagogical and curricular approaches by the religious and educational situations in Halifax at

the time of their founding. The approach of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was driven by the need to provide Christian religious instruction to children who otherwise would not have access to it, and the evangelical Protestant make-up of the Board of Directors and the staff reflected this. The Asylum for the Blind was not only founded after the successful passage of a free education act in Nova Scotia, but as the result of the Murdoch legacy and its fundraising requirements. With such origins, the initial Board of Managers needed to appeal for both funds and students across denominational lines. The original Board included both Catholic and Protestant members, and the early annual reports emphasized that parents need not fear that their children would be subjected to Christian religious instruction from an unacceptable denomination.

Although its broad-based appeal for funds was successful, the Asylum competed with a variety of charitable and philanthropic causes for donations from private individuals, churches, and the provincial government. Fraser, aware of the successful fundraising techniques employed by educational institutions for blind children in the United States, led a campaign based on those techniques and designed to develop the image of the Asylum as a public good that would lead to the long-term betterment of society. By contributing financially to the education of blind children, Fraser argued, donors were ensuring that these children would become self-supporting blind adults who would not need long-term charity from their families or communities. While this technique was initially successful in increasing both available funds and the number of students, the results were too variable to provide a solid financial platform for the Asylum. As a result, Fraser began a campaign that built on these initial assertions to argue that blind children,

like sighted children, had a right to education paid for through taxation. This campaign was most successful in Nova Scotia, where the Free Education for the Blind Act was passed in 1882.

Fraser continued to advocate for blind people in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland, broadening his appeal beyond education rights for children to include the educational and employment needs of blind adults. Initially, Fraser was successful; he began a circulating library of raised-print books for blind adults and founded a home teaching society that taught those blinded in adulthood how to read raised print. However, the growth of the industrial economy in the Maritime provinces led to long-term employment difficulties for blind adults. As a result, a number of successfully-employed blind adults formed the Maritime Association for the Blind, with the aim of finding appropriate employment opportunities for working-class blind men. Increasingly aware of the financial difficulties faced by both blind adults and the Asylum itself, Fraser joined with the Association in calling for the foundation of sheltered workshops that would guarantee employment for blind men. When this campaign was successful, Fraser returned his attentions to the education of blind children, allowing the Canadian National Institute for the Blind to become the primary face of blind advocacy in the Maritime provinces and across Canada.

Fraser's work in the late nineteenth century had long-term effects for blind children and adults in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland and was much celebrated by politicians and the press of the day. His work in the early twentieth century, however, has left a mixed legacy. Fraser's assertion that educating blind children was not a charitable act but instead one that fulfilled the rights of blind Nova Scotians was so effective that when Halifax's Community Chest was founded, the Asylum was not on the list of organizations in need of a charitable

appeal. However, historians writing about blinded adults in early twentieth-century Halifax have presented Fraser as mostly irrelevant in blind advocacy by the time of the Halifax Explosion in 1917. Serge Marc Durflinger, writing of the foundation of the CNIB by war-blinded veterans, describes Fraser as a “self-aggrandizing attention seeker” who was either unwilling or unable to properly educate war-blinded soldiers, and asserts that only after the war did Canadians embrace the cause of educating blind children and adults.<sup>1</sup> While Janet F. Kitz acknowledges Fraser’s superintendence at the Asylum in the post-explosion care for blinded Haligonians, she credits Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Murphy, both from the United States, with the work of rehabilitating blinded adults.<sup>2</sup> Both Durflinger and Kitz neglect the context of Fraser’s long-term advocacy work in Halifax.

This study gives a broader representation of the experiences of civilian blind people in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland prior to the foundation of the CNIB. The Halifax Asylum for the Blind became a centre of advocacy for blind children and adults, with not only Fraser but also his former students (through the Maritime Association for the Blind) lobbying effectively for government support for educational and employment initiatives. However, the lack of comparative studies of other residential schools for blind children elsewhere in Canada leaves it unclear whether this advocacy work was a result of targeted blind education having created the germ of an activist community or because Fraser, like his students, was blind and thus was advocating not only for them but for himself. While graduates from the Institution for

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<sup>1</sup> Serge Marc Durflinger, *Veterans with A Vision: Canada's War Blinded in Peace and War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 40, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Janet F. Kitz, *Shattered City: The Halifax Explosion and the Road to Recovery* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2004), 131-132.



the Deaf and Dumb under Hutton also formed an association, the Forrest Club, this group was only for social purposes, not advocacy as was the Maritime Association for the Blind. The Association's advocacy led to early state-funded income assistance for blind adults, in the form of the sheltered workshops, before veteran-based advocacy led to income assistance for other disabled adults in Canada.

This study is by no means comprehensive. By focusing on the institutional history of the Asylum, it does not include the experiences of blind children who remained at home, whether to be educated by private tutors or to remain uneducated into adulthood. It also does not include blind children from the region who were educated elsewhere, whether at a similar institution in the United States or Canada, or at the short-lived "amateur" school in New Brunswick. There is also much left to explore about the experiences of the students after graduation, both those who returned to their homes and those who remained in Halifax. There are more places to look for an historicist history of disability in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.

This study has highlighted how denominational conflicts, public opinion, and access to charitable and philanthropic funding have shaped and affected targeted residential school education for children with disabilities. Fraser's successful arguments regarding free education being based on rights rather than charitable impulses highlights a shift in conceptions of citizenship as reflected in educational access. His difficulties in asserting this right in Prince Edward Island reflect how access to education and other aspects of citizenship for people with disabilities are often curtailed by the perceived financial burdens for the non-disabled public that come with them. This fight for equal access continues today, as demonstrated by Donna Jodham's recent Supreme Court of Canada challenge asserting that the government of Canada's

websites must be accessible to screen readers for blind internet users; the Court ruled in her favour, but the Canadian government is appealing that decision.<sup>3</sup>

This study also contributes to the growing disability-focused historiography of Canada. As discussed in the introduction to this work, residential school experiences of blind children have so far been neglected in the literature. By examining and highlighting the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, this study demonstrates that much can be learned about disability experiences in nineteenth-century Canada in the records of these schools and any associated advocacy work done on behalf of blind adults. The fundraising challenges also further highlight the mixed social funding of education for children with disabilities; like other supposedly charitable causes highlighted by Paula Maurutto and Marianna Valverde, the Asylum always relied on government funding to survive.

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Henderson, “Direct Access: Funding Inclusion is money well spent”, *The Toronto Star*, 4 April, 2011.

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