

“Catholic Schools for Catholic Children”: The Making of a Roman Catholic School System in London, Ontario, 1850 to 1871¹

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By 1871, the year of Egerton Ryerson’s last great public school act, the city of London, Ontario, had not only a well-developed system of public elementary and high schools but also generous provision for Catholic education. Twenty years earlier, this had not been the case. Most Catholic children had attended the Central School, the same institution as their Protestant peers, where teachers offered a program of study that ranged from the 3Rs to a superior education. This school was the pride of the city and a model for other urban communities across the province. Furthermore, it was attended by the vast majority (about 90 percent) of school-age children in the municipality regardless of faith or wealth² – a phenomenon reflecting the broad-based social and cultural support for this flagship institution. Few private schools existed in the early 1850s; and about the only alternative to the Central School, and to some extent overshadowed by it, was the small, non-denominational grammar school.³

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² Canada West, *Annual Report of the Normal, Model and Common Schools, in Upper Canada [sic], for the Year 1852: with an Appendix by the Chief Superintendent of Schools* (Toronto: John Lovell, 1853) [hereafter *Annual Report of... Schools*], p.40.

³ For those unfamiliar with the terms used in this article, some explanation may be in order. “Common schools” refer to those institutions which received state as well as local tax support; any pupil could attend a common school. “Separate schools” mean those schools which after 1850 were reserved for Protestants, Roman

This amicable arrangement would be shattered over the next two decades. Fundamental social and economic changes in the city led to substantial modifications in the pattern of school provision, including the evolution of distinctive forms of schooling for Catholics.⁴ Like their Protestant neighbours, Catholics developed two discrete forms of schooling after mid-century – private institutions, for those who could afford them, and public (in their case, called “separate”) schools, which since the early 1840s had been eligible for government education grants. During this period of reorganization, Catholic education emerged as an alternative system of education in London. That transition is examined here.

As the administrative centre for the district since its incorporation in 1826, London generally experienced moderate growth until the coming of the railway in December 1853, which dramatically transformed the community’s economy and demography and consolidated its position as the metropolis for the southwestern part of the province. Railways initially created good times. Owing to a number of factors, however, not the least of which was the financial depression of 1857, the economic boom quickly turned into a bust, leaving many Londoners in dire circumstances and forcing thousands to leave the city. By the end of the decade, a general upturn in international trade and an oil boom in nearby Lambton County led to London’s economic recovery.

Railways promoted dramatic demographic growth too. The number of London residents swelled from approximately 7,000 in 1852 to 15,000 three years later. The population reached 17,000 in 1858 before dropping to just over 11,500 in 1860.⁵ More important than the sheer increase in population,

Catholics, or Blacks; they received a government grant but did not share in the municipal assessment. Common schools in London, as of 1852, were free to pupils, as were separate schools beginning in 1858. “Grammar schools” were given state financial assistance for the teacher’s salary only; and fees, usually expensive, were charged on a per pupil basis. The primary function of these institutions was to provide a liberal (classical) education, although most also offered some elementary schooling until the 1860s and 1870s, when they were reorganized. London’s Union School, erected in 1849 and opened in 1850, and not long thereafter called the Central School, was a graded school, offering what would now be defined as both elementary and secondary subjects. Ward (common) schools, located in other parts of the city, provided only the 3Rs. London’s first ward school was opened in 1851, its second in 1857. By 1861, the city’s common school board operated five ward schools; a decade later it ran six such institutions, as well as two Intermediate Schools and the Central School.

⁴ See Michael F. Murphy, “Unmaking and Remaking the ‘One Best System’: London, Ontario, 1852 to 1860,” *History of Education Quarterly* (forthcoming, Fall 1997).

⁵ Canada, *Census of Canada, 1851-52 [Census of 1852]* (Quebec: John Lovell, 1853), vol. 1: 68; Archives of Ontario [AO], RG2, F3B, box 40, “Annual Report of the Board of School Trustees for the City of London in the County of

however, was the recasting of its social character. During the mid-1850s, a wave of Famine Irish – most of whom were Catholic and working class – and of fugitive slaves flooded into formerly white, British, Protestant, respectable London. The impact on the common schools was profound. The population boom precipitated an immediate scarcity of teachers and school places; and it fundamentally altered the sexual, racial, religious, and class composition of the student population, leading to significant discipline problems and discriminatory attitudes. In reaction, many parents removed their children from the common schools and sent them to other institutions. This action fragmented the student population and removed these state-supported schools from their position of dominance (see Tables 1 and 2).

Where did these pupils go and why? One alternative used by wealthy middle- and upper-class Catholic and Protestant families, riding the crest of the economic boom, was to enroll their children in London's expensive grammar and private schools. Enrollments at the grammar school, a male-only preserve, almost doubled in the mid-1850s, while the number of private schools for boys and girls soared from a handful in the early 1850s to about forty-five during the second part of the decade.⁶ According to contemporary commentators, "aristocratic feelings" were so strong amongst London's most respectable families that they refused to seat their children, especially their adolescent girls, next to black students. This group, moreover, also believed it "wrong" to educate their progeny with those of the middle and lower classes.⁷ Assisted by their religious leaders, wealthy Catholic parents developed a slightly different alternative than Protestants for their girls, sending them to a series of schools run by Religious Sisters who had been brought to London to offer them a separate Catholic education.

In November of 1855, Father Thadeus T. Kirwan, the head (Rural Dean) of the Catholic church in the London area, invited the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, known as the Loretto Sisters, to establish a private boarding school for young ladies in the city. He temporarily donated his rectory for their school and it prospered beyond expectations.⁸ This arrangement was

Middlesex to the Chief Superintendent of Schools for Upper Canada, for the Year ending 31st December, 1855" [hereafter ARBCST]; and *Ibid.*, 1858, 1860.

⁶ Enrollment at the grammar school rose from forty-eight in 1853 to eighty-seven the next year before declining to fifty-eight in 1860 – see *Annual Reports of... Schools*, 1853-60.

⁷ "Union School Soirée," *Canadian Free Press*, 15 April 1852; and *London Free Press*, 22 July 1861.

⁸ The Rev. John F. Coffey, M.A., Priest of the Diocese of London, *The City and Diocese of London, Ontario, Canada: An Historical Sketch: Compiled in Commemoration of the Opening of St. Peter's Cathedral, London, June 28th, 1885* (London: Thomas Coffey, Catholic Record Office, 1885), p. 9; and John Kevin Anthony Farrell, "The History of the Roman Catholic Church in London, Ontario,"

ended when Bishop Pierre-Adolphe Pinsoneault arrived in the city during June of 1856 to take charge of the newly created diocese of London.⁹ A fervent French-Canadian nationalist who had been educated in Montreal and Paris, Pinsoneault dismissed the predominantly Irish Sisters of Loretto, probably for racist and personal reasons, in favour of the French-speaking Sisters of Charity of Providence from Montreal.¹⁰ Using a residence leased for them by the Bishop, they ministered to indigent and orphaned children in the parish from September 1856 to January 1858, and also ran the select academy previously operated by the Loretto Sisters. From the outset, however, the Bishop warned the Sisters of Providence that, owing to the language incompatibility, they would soon be subordinated to another group of Religious whom he expected to bring to the city to instruct girls from wealthy families and that they would likely receive a strained reception from most Londoners.¹¹

Pinsoneault's decision to bring the Sisters of Providence to London was but the first step in his master plan to construct Catholic educational institutions in his diocese, one which relied heavily upon the participation of religious orders. His vision is contained in a pastoral letter in February of 1857:

Ah, happy days, in truth, those in which the eyes of the faithful in this Diocese will be gladdened by the cheerful sight of ... numerous schools spread all over the Missions, wherein secular learning will be rooted in religion: of those great institutions for both sexes under the guardianship of those admirable religious orders – to which Catholic Europe owes its regeneration up to the present time¹²

The implementation of Pinsoneault's plan did not begin auspiciously. London's wealthy, Irish, English-speaking Catholics, embittered by the

(M.A. thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1949), pp. 32-3.

⁹ See J.E. Robert Choquette, "Pierre-Adolphe Pinsoneault," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography [DCB]* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), XI: 692-5; and John Robert McMahon, "The Episcopate of Pierre-Adolphe Pinsoneault: First Bishop of London, Upper Canada, 1856-1866" (M.A. thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1982).

¹⁰ See Bishop Ralph Hubert Dignan, *History of the Diocese of London*, unpublished type-written manuscript (c. 1917-1925) with later handwritten addenda and corrections (Diocesan Archives at London [D.A.L.], p. 164; and Farrell, "The Roman Catholic Church in London," pp. 33-4.

¹¹ Dignan, p. 120. Also see D.A.L., Pinsoneault Correspondence, vol. 1, Pinsoneault to Mother Caron, 19 August 1856; *Ibid.*, Pinsoneault to the Mother Superior of the Sisters of Providence, Montreal, 21 July 1856; and *Ibid.*, Pinsoneault to the Sisters of Providence, 27 August 1856.

¹² *The Changing Face of Catholic Education in London 1858-1963* (A Study Prepared by the Sisters of St. Joseph for the Separate School Board London, Ontario, 1963), p. 8.

transfer of their compatriot priest, Father Kirwan, and by the replacement of the Loretto Sisters by these French Religious, initially sent only fifty-six girls to their select academy, a far cry from the 200 or more students promised by the Bishop. By the end of October, however, the number of pupils had risen to 136.¹³ This increase likely reflected Pinsoneault's efforts to reconcile his differences with London's leading Irish-Catholic families¹⁴ and the preference of many of his parishioners for the education of their daughters in a Catholic environment, even if it was in French.

Pinsoneault's attempts to appease his wealthy parishioners included appeals to the Christian Brothers in Ireland and to a branch of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Sandwich (Windsor), to instruct Catholic boys and girls respectively.¹⁵ Although the former group was unable to help at the time, the latter order, most of whom were also Irish, agreed to do so. London's Catholic males, therefore, lacked a classical college of their own during this period, with the only alternatives being the grammar school, the private schools, and the senior classes at the Central School.¹⁶

The Sacred Heart Sisters, on the other hand, reopened in their own convent on September 1, 1857, the select school previously managed by the Sisters of Providence. By the end of the year, probably much to their surprise, only twenty-six pupils were in attendance; and a destructive combination of high fees, low enrollments, and depression conditions led to a decision to

¹³ Dignan, p. 120.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204. According to Dignan, Pinsoneault's bias for favouring education over charity was contrary to the usual policy of the church.

¹⁵ For the Christian Brothers, see D.A.L., Pinsoneault Correspondence, vol. 1, Pinsoneault to Charbonnel, 23 November 1856. For the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, see, for example, D.A.L., Pinsoneault Correspondence, vol. 1, Pinsoneault to Madame Hardey, 12 July and 22 August 1856; *Ibid.*, Pinsoneault to Mother Madelaine Sophie Barat, 22 August 1856; *Ibid.*, Pinsoneault to the Mother Superior of the Sacred Heart, Sandwich, 18 September 1856; and *Ibid.*, vol. 2, Pinsoneault to Madame Desmarquet, 4 February 1857.

¹⁶ AO, RG2, F3F, box 1, "Annual Report of the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Separate School in the city of London ... for the Year ending 31st December, 1858" [hereafter SSBAR, 1858]. In the mid-1860s, the Christian Brothers were again approached to teach Catholic boys in London; but once more they had to decline the – offer see Farrell, "The Roman Catholic Church in London," p. 61. Nineteen Catholic families sent twenty-five to thirty boys to the grammar school between 1855 and 1867 – see AO, RG2, GIB, box 10, "Half-Yearly Returns of the Board of Trustees of the London County Grammar School, in the County of Middlesex, to the Chief Superintendent of Schools." For the Central School, see AO, F551, container MU1720, "School Days of 1866-1870," Lesslie Family Papers (although this document refers to Catholic boys who attended the senior classes at the Central School during the 1860s, it is likely, based on an article which appeared in the *London Free Press* on 12 September 1857, that they also attended this institution in the 1850s).

close the institute during the summer of 1860.¹⁷ The ruling was reversed during the next year when the prospect of a civil war south of the border made the London House a potential place of refuge for the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in the nearby states.¹⁸ Although the “accomplishments curriculum” was taught at their academy, the moral and religious curriculum, as revealed by the following newspaper advertisement in 1857, was probably at least as important:

... propriety of Deportment, Politeness, Personal Neatness, and the principles of Morality, will form subjects of particular assiduity... [and] ... the knowledge of Religion and of its duties will receive that attention which its importance demands, as the primary end of all true Education, and hence will form the basis of every class and department.¹⁹

In the final analysis, the decision by the Sacred Heart Sisters to remain in London was a good one, both for them and for the community. Enrollments at the Sacred Heart Academy rose from fifty-five girls in 1861 to about seventy annually over the next few years; and in 1865, when the number of pupils exceeded the capacity of the institution, Pinsoneault procured another, expensive property to accommodate the increased demand.²⁰ Within two years, the new residence housed a day school for about 200 children, sixty boarders, and a small orphanage. Though all of the social groups in London’s Catholic community were served by these new provisions,²¹ the very wealthy and the very poor benefitted the most. The great bulk of the Catholic population, which fell between the two extremes, needed other arrangements.

As previously described, most school-age children in London at mid-century had attended its one or two common schools, which were a model of religious toleration and efficiency, according to the Board of Trustees:

... whilst efforts have been made in different parts of the Province to

¹⁷ Dignan, pp. 160-61. Tuition for boarders at this institution was \$100 annually, and for day students it was \$25 per year—see “Mount Hope Institute for Young Ladies,” *London Free Press*, 24 August 1857. Also see D.A.L., Pinsoneault Correspondence, vol. 3, Pinsoneault to Gilluly, 2 October 1857; and Mother Jennings to Pinsoneault, London, 1860 (cited in Dignan, p. 161).

¹⁸ Mother Sarah Jones to Pinsoneault, 3 July 1861 (cited in Dignan, *History of the Diocese of London*, p. 161).

¹⁹ *London Free Press*, 24 August 1857.

²⁰ Dignan, p. 161; and Jerome Terence Flynn, “The London Episcopacy, 1867-1889, of the Most Reverend John Walsh, D.D., Second Bishop of London, Ontario” (M.A. thesis, The Catholic University of America, 1966), p. 72.

²¹ See Louise Callan, R.S.C.J., *The Society of the Sacred Heart in North America* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), p. 471.

establish Sectarian Schools, no such demand has been made in London, and no evidence manifested that any section of inhabitants would desire thus to impair and destroy the efficiency and uniformity of our present system, which is a conclusive proof of the general satisfaction felt with the manner in which this Board has administered the important trust committed to its charge by the people, and with the general management and character of our public schools.²²

This attitude of denominational cooperation had characterized educational relations in London for more than twenty-five years. Protestants and Catholics had worked together as trustees, teachers, councillors, committee members, and auditors to develop a system of free common schools that was admired throughout the region.²³ Indeed, even in 1849-50, while London's Blacks operated their own separate school, Father Kirwan served on a selection committee created by the common school trustees to hire a headmaster for the Central School; and he performed a similar function a year later when the board opened a second school in the northern part of town.²⁴ Kirwan's significant influence is reflected in the denominational affiliations of London's ten common school teachers in 1852 – three were Roman Catholic, two each were Methodist and Church of England, and the remainder were Christian Disciple, Free Church, and Baptist.²⁵

Although religious differences were causing some educational discord in London, as in other large urban centres, the establishment of free schools in London in 1851 was unique in that it was not met by an immediate demand for Catholic separate schools.²⁶ It would take another seven years for that to materialize.²⁷ How does one explain this long delay in establishing a separate school? A partial answer can be found in the slowly developing school law on the subject. Although it had been legally possible for Catholics to establish separate schools in the province since 1841, several terms in the succeeding acts would have made it difficult for London's Catholics to open such a school. Until 1855, for example, Catholics were required to obtain the sanction of mostly Protestant school officials before creating a separate school, and no such institution could be opened in districts where Catholics

²² London, "Report of the Board of School Trustees of the Town of London, for the Year 1852" (London, 1852), p. 2 [hereafter London Board Annual Report].

²³ See Murphy, "Unmaking and Remaking."

²⁴ London, The University of Western Ontario, D.B. Weldon Library, J.J. Talman Regional Collection, "London Board of Education Minutes, 1848-1922" (microfilm no. M317), 12 February 1850 [hereafter London Board Minutes]; and *ibid.*, 24 February 1851.

²⁵ ARBCST, 1852.

²⁶ See, for example, Walker, vol. 1, chapters 5 to 8.

²⁷ London Board Minutes, 22 January 1858.

were common school teachers. In addition, until 1863 separate school boards had no legal right to a share in the municipal taxes; and separate school supporters were annually compelled to declare their financial backing for these schools to local authorities, a requirement that caused Catholic school officials a great many problems.²⁸

Many in London and elsewhere wrote to newspapers about these contentious school acts.²⁹ Peter Murtagh was one such correspondent. His letters to *The Mirror* (Toronto) in October 1851 offer an explanation for the relative calm in London's denominational relations at mid-century. Murtagh, a Catholic, was a Central School teacher, a graduate of a Normal School in Ireland, and the secretary of a local teachers' association.³⁰ With some adjustments, moreover, he was an advocate of "mixed schools." If, for example, religious instruction were given outside the schools; if unacceptable texts were removed from the curricula and replaced by the Irish National School books; if religious bigotry were minimized; if Catholics were given a "fair share" in school management; and if Catholic instructors were not overlooked for teaching positions solely because of their religious affiliation.³¹

These guidelines probably represented Murtagh's view of educational relations in London, where the community's long history of religious cooperation would suggest that his assessment was reasonably accurate.³² Nevertheless, another important reason existed for this arrangement. Poor lower- and middle-class Catholic families in London lacked the critical mass to sustain a separate school. They had no alternative in these years but to

²⁸ The first common school act (1841) to contain provisions for separate schools was framed to meet the different religious, educational, and linguistic needs of school children in both Canada East and Canada West. Between 1841 and 1867, government, church, and other educational leaders took steps to clarify further the positions of the separate and public school systems in the two parts of the province. Canada East members (most of whom were Roman Catholic and French) often voted against the wishes of the majority in Canada West (most of whom were Protestant and British). For the pertinent legislation, see John George Hodgins, ed., *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: various publishers and years).

²⁹ See, for instance, *The Canadian Free Press*, 18 July 1850; *The Mirror*, 7, 21 March 1851; and William Darbey, London, to *The Mirror*, 22 April 1853.

³⁰ AO, RG2, C6C, box 7, Murtagh to J.G. Hodgins, 3 November 1849; and *Ibid.*, C-1, letterbook "F", p. 314, no. 896. Murtagh was the secretary of the teachers' association for the counties of Middlesex and Elgin.

³¹ *The Mirror*, 10 October 1851

³² For a challenge by a contemporary to this perspective, see *The Mirror*, 20, 27 October and 3 November 1851.

send their children to the community's free common schools.³³ That situation would soon change. When the population boom in the mid 1850s threw the common schools into disarray, the children of wealthy parents could flee to the grammar and to the private schools. Less fortunate parents, unable to afford those alternatives, could send their children only to the common schools, or not at all. Then in November 1854, a third option arose for these latter families – a charity school.

Opened by the Colonial Church and School Society under Church of England auspices, and initially taught mainly by black teachers, this school was originally intended for black children; but when London's surging population increased the demand for its services, the Society quickly opened several more schools. With 450 to 500 students in 1855, the mission's schools were second in numbers only to the common schools; and had the Society possessed greater resources, it easily could have admitted more than twice that many pupils.³⁴ Most of the students, however, were white, not black; and a significant number of them were Catholic.³⁵ For about four years, then, the mission schools served three important purposes. They helped to segregate lower-class children from wealthy ones; they provided the basics to some Irish-Catholic, and to some black, pupils when prejudicial attitudes and insufficient accommodation barred their full admission into the common schools; and they attained these ends without a cent of tax money from London's property owners, which would have been the case had these children been educated in the common schools.

Notwithstanding the Society's efforts, over 700 London children went unschooled annually between 1855 and 1857, and about 600 in 1858.³⁶ Many of these boys and girls were from lower-class Catholic families. The large numbers of poor children, and poor families, and the inability to secure access to supplemental government funds help explain why Catholic leaders were unable to generate sufficient financial resources to build their own schools and to hire their own teachers at the time. Change, nonetheless, was in the wind. In 1850, Armand de Charbonnel became the Bishop of the

³³ Akenson also came to the same conclusion in his study of Leeds and Landsdowne township during the same period. See Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), pp. 275-6.

³⁴ London Board Annual Report, 1855; Donald George Simpson, "Negroes in Ontario from Early Times to 1870" (Ph.D. thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1971), p. 767; and J.I. Cooper, "The Mission to the Fugitive Slaves at London," *Ontario History* 46 (Spring 1954), p. 137.

³⁵ AO, RG2, C6C, box 19, Dillon to Ryerson, 18 June 1855, 18 July, 1855. According to Dillon in his second letter, over seventy Catholic families were turned away from his school because of a lack of room.

³⁶ ARBCST, 1855 to 1858.

Toronto Diocese, of which London was a part between 1842 and 1856. During his tenure in the province, he fundamentally reorganized the Church according to ultramontane ideals, of which control of education for Catholics was one of its main objectives.³⁷

Ultramontanism was an international movement of renewal which heavily influenced developments in the Catholic Church in the Canadas during the 1840s and 1850s and reaffirmed its links with, and obedience to, Rome. Its main goals were to consolidate the authority of the bishops, to professionalize the clergy, and to establish a comprehensive network of church-based social institutions to inculcate essential Catholic principles in its members from cradle to grave.³⁸ Beginning in the early 1850s, Charbonnel led a provincial campaign to establish separate schools wherever possible. In 1856, he decreed in a lenten pastoral that Catholic parents had to enroll their children in Catholic separate schools under the threat of the penalties of mortal sin.³⁹ Father Kirwan, in a letter to *The Mirror*, immediately defended Charbonnel. He condemned mixed schools for being “sectarian” and “negative as regards Christianity,” claimed that county councils often appointed “sectarian ministers” as local superintendents, protested that Catholic children were frequently forced by Protestant teachers to read the Protestant Bible, and accused trustees of repeatedly rejecting library books which were written by Catholics.⁴⁰ Despite Kirwan’s aggressive declaration (and Charbonnel’s assessment that the situation in London was “deplorable”), separate schools were not opened in London for another nineteen months.⁴¹ That initiative would await the arrival of Pinsoneault.

After establishing private Catholic schools for rich girls, Pinsoneault provided the less fortunate members of his parish with funding for a “primary” school to be built just north of its namesake, St. Peter’s Church; and coeducational classes were begun there in September 1857.⁴² Since he and his associates in this endeavour would have missed the legally imposed annual deadline for electing trustees (the second Wednesday in January), and since the first instructor was a layman and a graduate of Maynooth College,

³⁷ For more information, see Murray W. Nicolson, “Ecclesiastical Metropolitanism and the Evolution of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto,” *Histoire Sociale – Social History* 15 (May 1982): pp. 129-56.

³⁸ Brian P. Clarke, *Piety and Nationalism: Lay Voluntary Associations and the Creation of an Irish-Catholic Community in Toronto, 1850-1895* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1993), p. 31.

³⁹ Walker, vol. 1, pp. 55, 181.

⁴⁰ *The Mirror*, 8 February 1856

⁴¹ Dignan, p. 120.

⁴² See Willard Francis Dillon, “The Irish in London, Ontario, 1826-1861,” (M.A. thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1963), p. 93; and *London Free Press*, 16, 30 September 1857.

which trained teachers in Ireland,⁴³ St. Peter's School, contrary to public opinion today, likely started as a private enterprise. Nevertheless, sustaining such an institution would have been increasingly difficult as the depression deepened during the fall of 1857. Thus it is not surprising that early in the next year London's Catholics took steps to set their school within the public education framework where their teachers' salaries would be provided through a legislative grant.

Although popular demand certainly played a key role in creating the city's first separate school, a powerful incentive can also be found in the words of the Bishop. On September 12, 1857, Pineseault told his parishioners that with the establishment of Catholic schools in London "parents were not to consider themselves at liberty to send them [their children] any longer to Protestant schools and academies where many of them had hitherto been acquiring instruction." The Bishop issued this decree because he believed, as did the entire Catholic church hierarchy, that there was an important distinction between "teaching" and "education":

... teaching ... was merely imparting knowledge, and such branches as writing, arithmetic, and the like; whereas education was a much graver matter, and was especially attended to in the Catholic schools and institutions, vis., training the young in morals, in deference to authority, in mutual respect, and in submission to their parents; in fact, forming their characters and regulating their youthful impulses...⁴⁴

Over the next few months, Pineseault must not have been pleased with the reaction of some of his followers, because in December he threatened to excommunicate families who were sending their sons and daughters to Protestant schools rather than the private separate school.⁴⁵ In all likelihood, this more serious intervention by the Bishop was also a response to a school building campaign launched by London's common school trustees during the fall of 1857, and their long-term plan to introduce a free school in each of the city's seven wards. Catholic bishops elsewhere in the province were also attempting to counter similar initiatives during the 1850s.

Pineseault's edict likely caused London's Catholic laity to call seven ward meetings on January 13, 1858, to establish seven separate schools – a right granted under the separate school act of 1855. Several other factors may have made this gathering a necessity. The establishment of the Anglican Diocese of Huron during the summer of 1857 under the aggressive Bishop Benjamin Cronyn, who was "seeking to entrap unwary Catholics," and

⁴³ AO, RG2, C6C, box 74, no. 3288, John Brennan to Egerton Ryerson, 19 April 1865.

⁴⁴ *London Free Press*, 12 September 1857.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 December 1857.

“several intelligent and energetic Protestant ministers ... ever active in the promulgation of their false doctrines,” undoubtedly were critical motivating factors.⁴⁶ Then, too, the city’s population had continued to climb, increasing from approximately 15,000 at the end of 1856 to about 17,000 in 1858.⁴⁷ Since many of these immigrants would have been Irish-Catholics, more, school spaces were needed to accommodate their children. In addition, the use of a library book in their schools called “Near Home” had offended the feelings of Catholics, thereby increasing their resolve to consider more seriously other alternatives.⁴⁸ The plummeting economy, moreover, must have compelled many less wealthy, yet respectable, Catholic families to search out establishments for their children which, unlike the grammar school and the private institutions, required minimal or no fees. In addition, as the CCSS wound down its activities in London during the mid-to-late 1850s, some black,⁴⁹ and probably some Irish-Catholic, students left those institutions for the common schools.

All of these reasons help to explain why Catholics broadened their original notion of a single separate school to one which envisioned one school per ward. Not only did multiple separate schools offset the plan of the common school board, but a more comprehensive scheme also offered Catholics an opportunity to provide a denominational education partly at state expense. It also dealt with the issue of racial prejudice, as most black children would be excluded from the separate schools because almost all of them were Baptists or Methodists.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it placed the cost of education for this racial group, at least those attending the common schools, squarely on the shoulders of Protestants.

Since transcripts of the seven ward meetings in London are preserved in the files of the Public Archives of Ontario, it is possible to reconstruct partially the personal backgrounds of the 130 London males who attended those gatherings;⁵¹ one can also assess the social status of these individuals and the implications of the separate school movement for the entire city. First, the push for Catholic separate schools in London came from the working and probably less wealthy middle classes of that religious commu-

⁴⁶ D.A.L., Pinsonneault Correspondence, vol. 4, “The humble Memorial of the Catholics of London, Canada West, to His Holiness Pope Pius the Ninth, setting forth sundry reasons why the See of London ought not to be transferred to Sandwich,” 10 April 1859. For more information about Cronyn, see James J. Talman, “Benjamin Cronyn,” DCB, X: 205-10.

⁴⁷ ARBCST, 1856, 1858.

⁴⁸ London Board Minutes, 9 January 1858.

⁴⁹ Cooper, “The Mission,” p. 138.

⁵⁰ Only two black pupils were registered at St. Peter’s School in 1858 (see ARBCST, 1858).

⁵¹ AO, RG2, C6C, box 24, 19 January 1858.

nity. About fifty-five per cent of the identified individuals were lower class (most were labourers), thirty-seven per cent were middle class, and only eight percent were upper class.⁵² Second, most of the leaders in this school crusade were literate men. All middle- and upper-class participants signed their own names to the records of the meetings, as did forty-five of the fifty-six labourers. Only ten labourers and one gardener signed with an “X” opposite their name, indicating perhaps that most of these men were members of the city’s “respectable poor.” Third, London’s lower-class Catholics were pro-active agents in this campaign. Of the thirty-seven men to call the meetings, about half were working class, forty-four per cent were middle class, and just six per cent were upper class.⁵³ Fourth, although the drive to create London’s separate schools was dominated by the city’s working class, school management would be the preserve of the middle class. Only sixteen per cent of the individuals to be elected as trustees were lower class, while sixty-three per cent were middle class, and twenty-one per cent were upper class. Finally, London’s separate school supporters educated most of the city’s lower class at their own expense. Of the 258 labourers listed on the 1861 census for London, just over two-thirds were Catholic; and those families undoubtedly enrolled their children in the city’s separate school(s) when they could.⁵⁴

Despite the undertaking to establish seven separate schools in London, economic realities likely caused the community’s Catholics less than two weeks later to settle for just one establishment, St. Peter’s School, under one united school board.⁵⁵ Creating this public school would be one thing, but sustaining it during depression times would be quite another. Because of Pinsoneault’s generosity, and the board’s decision to hire two very inexpensive female lay teachers for the junior pupils, the institution survived its first six months.⁵⁶ However, it almost closed down permanently in the summer

⁵² Of the 130 names contained in these documents, the writer classified 111 persons as either upper, middle, or lower class. Nine individuals were unclassifiable. The occupational classification scheme used here was that developed by Katz and Davey for their study of nineteenth-century Hamilton, Canada West, in 1852 and 1861. Their first occupational group was used here as a proxy for the upper class, while their second and third occupational groups were used to coincide with the middle class. Their fourth and fifth occupational groups were treated as a surrogate for the lower class. See Michael B. Katz and Ian E. Davey, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West, Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 343-8.

⁵³ Thirty-four of these thirty-seven men were classifiable.

⁵⁴ Dillon, “The Irish in London,” p. 111.

⁵⁵ AO, RG2, C6C, box 24, Henry Cassidy to Egerton Ryerson, 26 January 1858.

⁵⁶ AO, RG2, 17317, box 1, J.B. Boyle to Ryerson, undated.

because of a lack of money, a lack of teachers, and anti-Catholic prejudice.⁵⁷ Then the issue took on larger overtones, as the survival of this institution became a test case for the entire province. Many people felt that if separate schools could not succeed in London, the Episcopal See, they would probably be doomed elsewhere as well. The day was saved when creative ways were found to cope with the financial problems; and St. Peter's School was reopened in late September, thereby allowing public separate schools to become a "fixed fact" in London's educational landscape.⁵⁸

One previously overlooked point should be noted. Trustees also opened a second free separate school for ninety-five girls in September of 1858. Taught by three Sisters of the Sacred Heart, this institution retained its public status until the end of 1859, when those Religious converted it to a relatively cheap private school for girls under their auspices.⁵⁹ As a result of these measures, enrollments at London's separate schools rose slowly, from 374 in 1858 to 418 two years later; this small increase is all the more important to acknowledge because it occurred at a time when common school enrollments in numerical terms were decreasing significantly.⁶⁰

Notwithstanding these developments, by the end of 1860 London's embryonic separate school system was not yet the equal of its common school counterpart. It had fewer schools and teachers, although not disproportionately so; it received substantially less money from government sources and fees; its students were concentrated in the more junior levels of studies, pursued a narrower range of subjects, and attended school for significantly fewer days; and its supporters enrolled a much smaller proportion of their teenagers and their youngest girls in school, than Protestants. On the other hand, several signs boded well for its future. Catholics, both clergy and laity, were clearly prepared to fund their own schools, even under very difficult conditions. For the most part, they procured well-qualified teachers; and they demonstrated considerable creativity in devising a practical educational blueprint by using public and private schooling options. Catholic parents, moreover, sent their children to school at a rate nearly approaching that of Protestants: sixty per cent as compared to sixty-four per cent.⁶¹

⁵⁷ The lack of teachers reflected the relocation of the Sisters of Providence and the inability of the separate school board to bring the Christian Brothers to London at the time.

⁵⁸ SSBAR, 1858.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Annual Report of... Schools*, 1858, table F, pp. lvi-lvii; and Ibid., 1860, table F, pp. 56-7.

⁶¹ See ARBCST, 1860, and *Annual Report of... Schools*, 1860, table A, p. 18, and table F, pp. 56-7. The enrollment figures were calculated from the manuscript census of Canada, 1860-61, London, London and Westminster Townships, Canada West.

As for the next decade, in many ways London's economic and social history repeated that of the 1850s. There were economic and demographic booms, followed by a population decline.⁶² The community remained overwhelmingly white, British, Protestant, and respectable. The variations in school attendance trends were linked to the racist, elitist, and sexist attitudes of Londoners and the nature of the economy.⁶³ Coincidentally, London's Catholic clergy and Catholic laity consolidated and expanded upon the network of schools serving their children. Wealthy Catholic families still sent their girls to the Sacred Heart Academy, while their male counterparts attended the grammar school, the private schools and the senior classes at the Central School. Middle-class Catholic children continued to fill the classes at St. Peter's School, where until 1868 all instructors were lay teachers.⁶⁴

This policy would change in the next year, when Pinsoneault's successor, Bishop John Walsh, an Irishman, brought the Sisters of St. Joseph to London to instruct the junior boys, the junior girls, and the senior girls at St. Peter's School. Until 1893, the senior boys' class would always be taught by a male teacher, who was also the principal.⁶⁵ In what appears to have been a raising of teacher standards, the separate school board in 1870 hired a "thorough English and Latin scholar," Samuel R. Brown, as their new headmaster. He remained the principal of St. Peter's School for the next

⁶² The number of London residents climbed from about 12,000 in 1861 to over 18,000 in 1866 before tapering off to 15,826 in 1871. See ARBCST, 1861 to 1869; and *Annual Report of... Schools*, 1870, 1871.

⁶³ In 1871, London had a small upper class (5 percent), a large middle class (56 percent), and a sizable lower class (31 percent) – see Michael F. Murphy, "School and Society in London, Canada, 1826 to 1871: The Evolution of a System of Public Education," (Ph.D. thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1995), vol. I, chapter 5. The writer is indebted to Professor Emeritus Kevin Burley, of the University of Western Ontario, for allowing access to his computer tape which contains the data from the federal manuscript return for the 1870-71 census of London (errors of interpretation of course are the responsibility of the writer).

⁶⁴ Although no separate school board reports or minutes for these years have survived, the names of the students who won prizes or participated in the festivities following the summer exams in 1865 can be found in the *London Advertiser*, 19 July 1865. For a partial list of London's Catholic teachers in this decade, see *City of London Directory, for 1863-4* (London: Thomas Evans, 1863), p. 93; *London General and Business Directory, for 1866-7* (Woodstock: Sutherland & Co., 1866), p. 23; *City of London and County of Middlesex Directory for 1868-69* (Toronto: C.E. Anderson & Co., 1868), p. 114; *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada [History of Middlesex]* (London: W.A. & C.L. Goodspeed, Publishers, 1889; reprinted, Belleville: Mika Studio, 1972), pp. 744-5; and *The Changing Face of Catholic Education*, p. 10.

⁶⁵ See Flynn, "The London Episcopacy," pp. 62-3. After that date, and until the 1960s, the Sisters of Saint Joseph would teach all the departments in St. Peter's School – see *The Changing Face of Catholic Education*, pp. 10-11.

eighteen years.⁶⁶ In all likelihood, a number of respectable Catholic families increasingly looked to him, rather than to Protestant teachers, to teach the advanced subjects to their children with a view to preparing them for business careers, the professions, and the institutions of higher learning.⁶⁷

One group in the early-to-mid 1860s still lagged far behind the others when it came to educational provision, and that was London's poor Catholic children. Nonetheless, their lot was soon improved when two new religious orders were brought to the city. Although it is true the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, in addition to their select academy, operated a relatively cheap primary school for about sixty pupils in those years, they did not possess sufficient resources to educate all of the needy children in their religious community.⁶⁸ Neither did the trustees of St. Peter's School, because apparently there was a constant teacher shortage at that establishment throughout most of this period.⁶⁹ These shortcomings were partially alleviated when the English-speaking, mostly Irish, Dominican Friars were brought to London in 1861.⁷⁰ Although they planned to open an orphanage, a school for poor girls, and a school for boys, it appears they were only successful in achieving the first two objectives, as their efforts to obtain the Christian Brothers to teach pupils at the latter school were in vain.⁷¹

When the Dominicans left the parish seven years later, their educational work was taken over by the Sisters of St. Joseph. These Sisters, in addition to their teaching duties at St. Peter's School, opened an orphanage in October 1869, where they soon offered the same course of study to about fifty boys and girls by the end of the year. Female pupils, moreover, received instruction in knitting, sewing, and other practical skills.⁷² Not all of the laity, however, followed their churchmen's orders. A few, mainly lower- and probably less wealthy middle-class families, sent their daughters and their sons to the common schools and the more junior classes at the Central

⁶⁶ Samuel R. Brown possessed a first-class grade A certificate from the Toronto Normal School. Previously Brown had taught in the city's common schools for eight years – see *History of Middlesex*, pp. 744-5.

⁶⁷ Sister M. Julia Moore, *The Sisters of Saint Joseph: Beginnings in London Diocese, 1868-1878* (London: The Board of Trustees of the London and Middlesex County Roman Catholic Separate Schools), p. 10.

⁶⁸ *The Changing Face of Catholic Education*, p. 9. The Sacred Heart Sisters also took in children from other denominational groups if they were willing to conform to the rules – see *City of London and County of Middlesex Directory for 1868-9*, pp. 117-18.

⁶⁹ Moore, *The Sisters of St. Joseph*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Farrell, "The History of the Roman Catholic Church in London," p. 57.

⁷¹ *The Changing Face of Catholic Education*, p. 9.

⁷² Moore, *The Sisters of St. Joseph*, pp. 12-13, 16-17.

School.⁷³ Perhaps, as one correspondent to the *Canadian Freeman* suggested, they took this course of action because the tuition fees there were cheaper than at the separate school.⁷⁴

After thirteen years of operations London's public and separate school systems were almost evenly matched. Although the latter system possessed fewer schools, fewer teachers, less income, and a more limited program of study, for the most part these differences were related only to the size of the two organizations. In addition, in terms of teacher qualifications, proportional amounts of money raised, and reading levels attained by students, the two enterprises were almost identical.⁷⁵ Moreover, when all the educational options utilized by Catholic families are considered – that is, separate, common and private schools – pupil enrollment patterns for the two religious groups were probably very similar.

Manuscript census data corroborate this last point. Whereas many more London children attended school during 1870-71 than ten years earlier, the rate of increase for Catholic pupils was similar to the one for Protestants. Over sixty-nine per cent of Catholic children between the ages of five and sixteen were enrolled in a school during 1870-71, compared to seventy-two per cent of non-Catholics. In addition, no substantial differences in enrollment rates between the two groups remained for children between the ages of six and thirteen.⁷⁶ The attainment of almost universal enrollment rates for children in London during these years was significant, because it was considerably in advance of the requirements of the provincial school law, passed in 1871, which made schooling compulsory for children between the ages of seven and twelve for four months of the year.

In retrospect, it is evident that separate schools came later to London than places like Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, and Kingston, because of its inland location, its small Catholic population base at mid-century, and its history of religious tolerance. It is also clear that the school attendance strategies of London's Irish-Catholic families, and their clergy, like their counterparts across the province, were shaped by a desire to maintain and transmit their religious and socio-cultural traditions. Catholic schools would be essential institutions in the transmission of the Irish-Catholic heritage

⁷³ London, *Central School Examination Register, 1870-1873* (London Board of Education Archives). Nineteen school-age Catholic girls wrote examinations at the Central School in 1870. Fourteen of these students were in divisions one to three; four were in divisions four to six; and one was in division seven. On the other hand, of the seventeen school-age Catholic boys to take examinations at that school in 1870 eleven were in divisions one to three; three were in divisions four to six; and three were in divisions seven or higher.

⁷⁴ *The Canadian Freeman*, 31 August 1871.

⁷⁵ ARBCST, 1870.

⁷⁶ Census of London, 1871.

across the generations. Separate schools in London would probably have failed had it not been for the exceptional efforts of the clergy, the religious Brothers and Sisters, supported by the laity. Equally notable is the fact that these educational leaders steered a practical course when educating their young, one which took into account socio-economic backgrounds, the state of the school law, and the resources available to Catholics as a whole.

How does the London case fit the conventional interpretations of the origin and development of Catholic separate schools in the province? Franklin Walker's framework for analyzing this question, even forty years later, remains helpful. Walker argued that Egerton Ryerson, Ontario's superintendent of education between 1844 and 1876, and his assistant, John George Hodgins, "distorted the position of the Catholic leaders" by claiming that an "innovating ultramontane priesthood" had pushed for separate schools in the 1850s because of an "enmity" to the common schools; that the goal of "widespread separate education" was an objective that belied traditional Catholic policy in the province; and that the demands for new 'concessions' after the passage of each school act displayed "caprice, lack of good faith and hostility to the education system." In contrast, Walker contended that Upper Canada's Catholic bishops had "always wished Catholic schools for Catholic children wherever possible," and additional concessions were sought only because "each Act as administered was inadequate to meet the needs of Catholic education."⁷⁷

This study indicates that some rebalancing of this account may be necessary. On the one hand, support exists for two of the three points Walker attributed to Ryerson and Hodgins. First, there is no indication that London's Catholics before mid-century ever demanded separate schools as an "abstract right."⁷⁸ In fact, the evidence is to the contrary. Catholics and Protestants in this community worked together in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to build a school system that would prepare their children for their futures. "Protection from insult," in other words, was not a critical factor in determining religio-educational relations in London prior to the mid-1850s.⁷⁹

As for the second point, it is clear that ultramontanism was a crucial catalyst in the development of separate schools in London. Although it is a fact that rich Catholic students left the Central School for the grammar school, for the private schools, and for the Sisters' expensive academies in the mid-1850s, it must be remembered that the separate school movement in London did not gain momentum until late in 1857 – that is, after Pinso-

⁷⁷ Walker, vol. 1, p. vii.

⁷⁸ John S. Moir makes the same point for the province generally in *Church and State in Canada West: Three Studies in the Relation of Denominationalism and Nationalism, 1841-1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 130.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

neault's arrival, after the common school board decided to increase the numbers of free schools, and after the start of the financial depression.

Identifying this temporal sequence is critical to comprehending the volatile school attendance behaviour of Londoners during these years, because the following two important points emerge from that understanding. One, the rejection of the common schools by London's wealthy middle- and upper-class Catholics paralleled a similar move by Protestants – their collective flight to the private schools and the grammar school was for racial and class reasons, not religious ones. Two, the return of those families to the common (now including separate) schools in 1858 was for religious reasons, as well as for economic causes. The “separate school issue” in London, therefore, remained a minor one until Pinsoneault, influenced by ultramontanism, and fearing the loss of Catholic children to the free schools run by the common school board, threatened to excommunicate families who did not send their children to the separate schools.⁸⁰ In a sense, however, the conjuncture of these events was fortuitous for London's new Bishop, because less wealthy Catholic parents, reeling under the effects of the depression, were more inclined than before to support his directive.

On the other hand, although this study of London does not support Walker's claim that the Catholic Bishops of Upper Canada always wanted “Catholic schools for Catholic children wherever possible,” it does support his other argument that school laws at mid-century were “inadequate to meet the needs of Catholic education.” James Egan, the chairman of the London separate school board in 1858, summarized the problem succinctly: “If the law contemplates and makes provisions for the existence of Separate Schools, why does it not afford every facility for carrying them out?”⁸¹

Egan's comment demonstrates that an important transition had taken place in the minds of London's Catholics over the course of this decade. The events of the mid-to-late 1850s had stirred London's Catholic clergy and laity to the point that they would no longer accept the view that separate schools were a privilege; they now considered those institutions an inalienable right. Over the next few years, therefore, they worked in concert, at least on most occasions, to build a school system which by 1871 rivaled its common school counterpart. In the final analysis, their legacy was a lasting one; and it is the principal reason why London has Catholic schools for Catholic children today.

⁸⁰ Other Bishops in the Province used this tactic when they too were confronted with the prospect of losing Catholic children to free schools. See Walker, vol. 1, p. 116.

⁸¹ SSBAR, 1858.

TABLE 1
Numerical and Percent Distribution of London Common School Students
by Age and Sex, and London Population Totals, 1850 to 1860

Year	London Population	Children 5 to 16	Pupils 5 to 16	Children 5 to 16 in School	Total Number of Pupils	Total Number of Male Pupils		Total Number of Female Pupils	
1850	5 124	1 583 ^b	598 ^a	38%	598	331	55%	267	45%
1851	N.D.	1 789	1 143	64%	1 157	703	61%	454	39%
1852	7 035	1 800	1 587	88%	1 617	863	53%	754	47%
1853	10 000	3 000	1 599	53%	1 640	877	53%	763	47%
1854	10 060	3 000	1 577	53%	1 600	892	56%	708	44%
1855	15 000	3 600	1 795	56%	1 823	1 104	61%	719	39%
1856	15 267	3 500	2 192	63%	2 229	1 227	55%	1 002	45%
1857	16 000	3 524	2 704	77%	2 737	1 497	55%	1 240	45%
1858	17 000	3 642	2 789	77%	2 833	1 503	53%	1 330	47%
1859	16 000	3 555	2 664	75%	2 739	1 452	53%	1 287	47%
1860	11 581	2 987	2 678	90%	2 719	1 473	54%	1 246	46%

^a Total number of children of all ages in school.

^b School population 5 to 21.

Sources: Provincial and London annual school reports;

Census of Canada – 1852, 1861.

Newspapers and City Year Books

TABLE 2
Number of London Grammar, Common, and Private Schools by source and number of pupils, 1850 to 1860

Year	Grammar School (Number)	Grammar School (Pupils)	Common School (Number)	Common School (Pupils)	Private School (Number) Prov. Report 5	Private School (Pupils) Prov. Report 6	Private School (Number) London Report 7	Private School (Pupils) London Report 8	Private School (Number) Other Sources 9
1850	1	55	1	598	1	20	1	20	2
1851	1	54	2	1 143 ^c	—	—	—	—	3
1852	1	50	2	1 587	—	—	—	—	4
1853	1	48	2	1 599	—	—	—	—	6
1854	1	87	2	1 577	5	200	5	—	6
1855	1	87	2	1 795	4	593	4	523	11
1856	1	75	2	2 192	5	118	4	265	31
1857	1	79	4	2 704	5	277	3	213	30
1858	1	60	6 ^a	2 789	3	341	3	341	10
1859	1	70	7 ^a	2 664	4	120	4	120	5
1860	1	58	6 ^b	2 678	4	130	4	130	6

^a Includes two Roman Catholic separate schools

^b Includes one Roman Catholic separate school

^c Common school data (except for 1850, which are for students of all ages) are for pupils aged 5 to 16. Private school data include all students. In columns 1 to 4, provincial and annual report data are identical

Sources:

Provincial and London annual school reports; Newspapers; *Railton's City Directory*