

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

ONE HUNDRED YEARS IN THE HISTORY OF  
THE RURAL SCHOOLS OF MANITOBA:  
THEIR FORMATION, REORGANIZATION AND DISSOLUTION  
(1871-1971)

BY

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

APRIL, 1978.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express sincere appreciation for the encouragement and stimulating suggestions received from her advisor, Dr. J. Anthony Riffel. She also wishes to thank Dr. Keith Wilson for his interest, support and valuable criticism as a member of the writer's thesis committee. The author is grateful, too, to the third committee member, Dr. Philip Husby, for his constructive and practical comments and advice. Sincere thanks are extended to Mr. R. W. Dalton, Deputy Minister of Education, for his enthusiasm and generously given assistance and to officials of the Administration Branch of the Department of Education, especially Mr. Norman G. Harvey, Director of Administration, and Mr. C. M. Bridle, Official Trustee, for their patience and cooperation. Thanks are also offered to the librarians of the University of Manitoba and the Provincial Library of Manitoba. Finally, the author wishes to express sincere appreciation to her friend, Mrs. Betty Henley, for her gracious assistance and untiring efforts in typing this thesis manuscript.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to present and to preserve, in an accessible form, certain pertinent data concerning the formation and major changes which took place in the organization of the rural school districts of Manitoba between 1871 and 1971. During that century, the original districts were established, dissolved or reorganized into one or more of a variety of administrative units before becoming indistinguishable parts of school divisions. A brief survey of the history of education in the Red River settlement and Manitoba is first presented, providing the background necessary for an account of the development of rural educational facilities within the province.

The author was granted access to the formation files of the school districts of Manitoba. She also had several informal discussions with officials of the Administration Branch of the Manitoba Department of Education. Although there are some empty formation files and several which contain a minimal amount of information, the author, taking into consideration the frontier and pioneer conditions which existed in various sections of the province for many years following 1871 and realizing the difficulties and human frailties involved in setting up the original system of collecting data, was surprised to note, not how little, but rather how much information has been recorded and preserved.

The data presented consist of the names and numbers of the districts, sites of their school buildings and their formation, reorganization and dissolution dates along with indications of the administrative means used to effect those changes. These devices, created by the government and authorized for use through the Statutes of Manitoba, have been identified and illustrated. The table in Chapter IV in

conjunction with its index is the compilation of data which shows that the original 24 public school districts changed and expanded in number to more than 2400 before disappearing or being amalgamated or dissolved into 48 school divisions.

Although much of the material in the formation files deals with transfers of parcels of land for municipal taxation purposes, some of the files contain correspondence which may have influenced some decisions made by the central authorities. Certain geographic and religious factors as well as local and community antagonisms were voiced in the letters and copies of municipal by-laws. The stamps and seals of several rural municipalities and a few school districts are also to be found on those communications and appear, to the author, to be interesting reinforcements of some facets of what may have been the early agriculture-based philosophy of rural Manitobans.

During the last century, changes in the number and sizes of the educational administrative units in Manitoba often appeared to be dependent upon the large measure of local autonomy which existed in rural school districts. Successive governments, even though they had at their disposal the means of reorganizing school units, were usually politically adroit enough to proceed with such changes slowly and with a minimum of direct intervention. By late 1972, the whole province was divided into 48 separate highly centralized school divisions. The records show this to be the smallest number of administrative units in Manitoba since February, 1878. However, by 1976, two divisions had already felt the effects of changes towards decentralization again. As a result, seven smaller units called areas now operate within those divisions. By the beginning of the next century, school records may reveal many more such cyclical changes.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### NATURE OF THE STUDY

During the past twenty years, most of the rural school districts of Manitoba have disappeared. To date no study of their establishment, reorganization and dissolution, together with the administrative devices used to facilitate these changes, has been written. Certain unofficial reasons for the metamorphosis of Manitoba's rural schools are of more than casual interest and often appear to be closely related to early settlement patterns and attitudes.

Since the background of a large portion of the population of Manitoba is a rural one, a historical study based on the analysis of primary documents will describe and record some of the early influences on the lives of many present day Manitobans. Manitoba settlers and government civil servants have, for more than a century, left records which reflect some of the events and attitudes which have helped to shape the present educational system in the province. It is possible to foresee that, within the next few years, the complex of information contained in the formation files of the rural school districts in the Department of Education may be stored in a form other than its present one and that, as a result, the original (often hand-written) petitions, minutes of meetings and municipal by-laws concerning many schools may be lost to historians.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the study are: (1) to present and preserve exact information concerning the rural school system while there are yet original sources available,



(2) to identify and illustrate the administrative devices used in the formation, reorganization and dissolution of rural school districts and divisions between 1871 and 1971, (3) to record, wherever possible, one exact location of the school in each district, and (4) to record and attempt to assess some of the reasons given in letters from settlers to the Superintendents of Education for school districts' formations and boundary changes .

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

It is hoped that this study may be of some interest and value to those who may wish, at some future date, to appraise the development of Manitoba's rural school districts from historical, geographical or sociological points of view. It may also be of some practical value to those who desire or require information concerning dates pertinent to an already extinct rural school district or to an exact location of its school. The administrative devices used to establish or reorganize districts are in themselves an interesting offshoot of the evolution of Manitoba's school system. Since many of the school problems in the early settlements have recurred in only slightly disguised forms from time to time, a reminder of some of these problems may give a broader perspective to those attempting to deal with similar situations today. To the writer, the exercise in historical scholarship, consisting of compiling and undertaking to interpret a set of significant facts from the available records is a fascinating and enriching experience.

### SOURCES

The primary sources to be used in this study are: the formation files of school districts and divisions in the Administration Offices of the Department of Education of

Manitoba, the recollections of an official trustee and of a former Deputy Minister of Education in charge of Administration, and the Statutes of Manitoba in the Provincial Library. Secondary sources include The Development of Education in Manitoba by K. Wilson, Manitoba: A History by W. L. Morton, The Centennial History of Manitoba by James A. Jackson, as well as the historical and centennial publications of several districts and municipalities of the province. Upon comparing the statements made by the authors of the centennial booklets with the records found in the formation files of some of the districts, it appears that a surprisingly high degree of confidence may be placed upon the historical accuracy of the information concerning the schools in the afore-mentioned publications.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study will be limited to tracing the establishment, reorganization and dissolution of school districts which resulted from the settlement of rural areas. No attempt will be made to make an assessment of the forces exerted by the original land surveys and grants nor to assess the results of the settlement of urban areas. Private schools, federal schools and colleges, with the exception of those to be mentioned in a brief survey of education in the Red River settlement, will also be excluded from this study. In some cases, the data concerning a school district are not available. Such omissions are to be regretted.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Following the introduction, a brief survey of the history of education in the Red River settlement and Manitoba will be given to provide the necessary background

for the account of the development of the rural educational facilities within the province. This will be considered within the framework of six eras which have been historically identifiable (pre-1871, 1871-1890, 1890-1897, 1897-1916, 1916-1959 and 1959-1971). The settlement of major ethnic groups will be noted during this survey.

Chapter III will define the terms used to describe the types of school districts and divisions found in the study and will enumerate and illustrate the administrative devices which have been used to form and reorganize school districts for one hundred years. An assessment of the circumstances which initiated the use of these devices will be included in this chapter.

Chapter IV will provide a compilation of names, numbers, formation dates (in chronological order), locations of school buildings within the districts, present status of the districts and the administrative devices used in connection with the districts. Data will be supplied concerning more than twenty-four hundred schools--one-roomed, municipal, union and consolidated--up to and including the introduction of unitary school divisions in Manitoba.

Chapter V will attempt to illustrate some of the geographical, religious and local antagonisms in pioneer rural districts which led to their establishment or to their boundary changes. A brief description of some of the original seals and stamps of rural municipalities and a few school districts will also be given to reflect what must have been, at least, the official attitudes to life in many of the early settlements. This chapter will perforce contain some of the writer's own value judgments.

The final chapter summarizes in brief and in general terms the history of Manitoba's rural schools and draws attention to certain significant related factors.

## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN MANITOBA

The purpose of this chapter is to present a brief review of the history of education in Manitoba in order to provide a background for an account of the establishment, reorganization and dissolution of its rural schools.

Although Manitoba, as a province, is only slightly more than one century old, its history reaches back into the shadows of several hundred years. Prior to 1870, moundbuilders, Plains Indians, fur-traders, early explorers, Métis, Selkirk Settlers, de Meuron soldiers and a few Canadians had already lived on the land which became Manitoba. As the primitive nomadic inhabitants, whose economy was based on the migration of buffalo herds, gave way to the explorers, fur-traders and wave after wave of settlers, an agriculture-based economy, eventually accommodating a multiplicity of ethnic diversities, caused a unique story of education to unfold.

Indirectly, the fur-trade seems to have been responsible for, at least, the scanty beginnings in education in Manitoba. Jackson states that, by 1821, Red River, the centre of the buffalo hunt for the great trading companies, was provided with the nucleus of a reasonably populous permanent settlement.<sup>1</sup> Schofield tells us that the Hudson's Bay Company sent out three teachers to educate the children of factors and servants employed in its northern forts. He also states that many of the factors of both companies frequently sent their children to be educated in Britain or Canada, with the result that "quite a few of the prairie people, in whose veins French and Scotch blood was mixed with that of the native races, had received a fair education."<sup>2</sup>

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1. James A. Jackson, The Centennial History of Manitoba (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd. 1970), p. 25.

2. F. H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Toronto: S. J. Clarke Co., 1906) I, p. 415.

The Anglo-French rivalry in the fur-trade also may have provided the spark to ignite the explosive situation in education in Manitoba which has flared up from time to time during the last century and which even today lies close to the surface. Morton asserts that although French dominion ended in America in 1760, French achievement, speech and blood remained and that "from LaVerendrye's day there would be men of French race on the waterways and the prairies of Manitoba."<sup>3</sup>

Along with the arrival of the Selkirk settlers, came an impetus for education in Assiniboia. Early provisions made for their own schools failed. Finally in 1847, a school was established in the home of one of the settlers, with John Inkster as the first teacher. Alexander Matheson and the Reverend John Black (1851) advanced the cause of education considerably for the Scottish Presbyterians.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the Presbyterians probably used the educational facilities of the Anglican schools.<sup>5</sup> The Reverend John West (1820) and David Jones (1824) were sent out with the financial support of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Church Missionary Society to establish parishes and to organize Anglican schools for the education of the children of the Hudson's Bay families. Mr. and Mrs. Cockran (1825) included the Indians in their missionary and educational efforts. Red River Academy (1833), both a day and a boarding school, finally developed into St. John's College (1866).<sup>6</sup>

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3. W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 36.

4. K. Wilson, The Development of Education in Manitoba (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1967), pp. 61-62.

5. Ibid., p. 58.

6. Ibid., pp. 55-59.

Morton mentions:

From the schools came a good number of literate and even well-educated men, a few of whom, Indian as well as white, were ordained in the Anglican ministry. These schools were really private ventures,<sup>7</sup> not church schools proper as were those of the Catholic fathers.

Two of these Catholic fathers, Provencher and Dumoulin, had arrived as missionaries on July 16, 1818, and established the first permanent church schools at Red River.<sup>8</sup>

Edge, a gentleman from Quebec, was in charge of a school at the French settlement at Pembina for two years; Legace, also from French Canada, had a school for the children of buffalo hunters some distance west of Pembina.<sup>9</sup>

Under the guidance of Provencher and the Grey Nuns from Montreal, schools and convents were soon established from St. Francois-Xavier to St. Norbert (1858).

By 1868 St. Boniface College was offering advanced work in philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Prior to 1870 there were no statutes or common laws concerning education at isolated Red River, but religion and education were already inextricably mixed. Morton states that the work of the missionaries maintained civilization at that time:

As the proportion of mixed blood increased, its complications were overcome by religion and education. Red River had always a solid core of well-mannered, well-educated men and women, who lacked only a proper field for their talents and accomplishments.<sup>11</sup>

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7. Morton, op. cit., p. 72.

8. Wilson, op. cit., p. 50.

9. Schofield, op. cit., p. 416.

10. Ibid., p. 70.

11. Morton, op. cit., p. 73.

Concerning this period Wilson states:

In short, education had to contend against pioneer conditions. And yet, despite the many problems encountered something like a regular school system had evolved.<sup>12</sup>

On May 3, 1871, at its first session, the first legislature of the new province assented to the Act to Establish a System of Public Education in Manitoba. It was organized on the model of Quebec's separate schools<sup>13</sup> and "perpetuated the educational scheme of Red River."<sup>14</sup> Half the newly-created electoral divisions were designated to become Protestant school districts with a Protestant superintendent and the other half Catholic with a Catholic superintendent. Public funds were to be used for the support of separate, denominational schools. A Board of Education, half Protestant and half Catholic, was to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council and was empowered to make, from time to time, such regulations as they might think "fit for the general organization of the Common Schools", and "to alter and subdivide, with the sanction of the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council, any School District established by this Act."<sup>15</sup>

Two years later this act was amended:

7. The religion of the majority of ratepayers in any school district shall determine the designation of the District as Protestant or Roman Catholic and any school dissenting from this shall be determined a Separate School.

8. Any ratepayer who is not attached to any denomination shall declare what school he intends to support.

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12. Wilson, op. cit., p. 93.

13. Jackson, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

14. Morton, op. cit., p. 186.

15. Statutes of Manitoba, 1871, Chapter XII, p. 39.

11. The parents of Catholic children attending a Catholic school shall be assessed for the benefit of that school, and the parents of Protestant children attending a Protestant school shall be assessed for the benefit of the Protestant school.<sup>16</sup>

These amendments produced, in effect, a separate school system with separate schools entitled to share in government grants and compulsory local school taxation. Legislation in 1875 reconstituted the Board of Education so that of the twenty-one members to be appointed twelve would be Protestant and nine, Catholic. Also changed was the basis for the distribution of grants. The number of children between the ages of seven and sixteen residing in each district was to be the determining factor. The 1876 amendments brought a beginning to compulsory attendance and also asserted that people who professed to be of neither religious group would be assessed to pay school taxes. It was not until the Public Schools Act of 1879 that the appointment of inspectors was designated as a duty of the Board of Education.<sup>17</sup>

Although it was education at the elementary level that received priority, it was also within the two decades after 1870 that a Collegiate Department<sup>18</sup> and Normal School Departments in Winnipeg and St. Boniface were established (1881).<sup>19</sup> St. John's and St. Boniface Colleges and the Presbyterian Manitoba College (1871) were brought together to form the University of Manitoba in 1877. Wesley College (Methodist) affiliated with the university eleven years later. Brandon College (Baptist) became established in the early eighties.<sup>20</sup>

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16. Statutes of Manitoba, 1873, Chapter XXII, p. 73.

17. Wilson, op. cit., pp. 100-102.

18. Ibid., p. 117.

19. Ibid., p. 103.

20. Ibid., p. 118-119.



During the same two decades, "Manitoba (land) fever"<sup>21</sup> brought a great influx of British and of Canadians from Ontario and the United States to settle south-west and north-west of Red River, of French to the east and south, of Icelanders to the western shore of Lake Winnipeg, of Mennonites to their east and west reserves and a trickle of Russian Jewish to homesteads and towns. With forty thousand immigrants arriving between 1876 and 1881 alone, settlements spread out rapidly from the river lots and often were established ahead of the advent of the railways. While the French and Mennonites were essentially religious groups, the English and Icelandic were essentially secular.<sup>22</sup> "The Protestant schools, being multi-denominational had become in effect secular", while the Catholic schools "remained truly denominational".<sup>23</sup> Morton asserts that by 1890, Ontario democracy had triumphed and Manitoba had become a British and Canadian province.<sup>24</sup>

Against a background of considerable progress in education, the legislation of 1890, which was to precipitate the conflict known as the Manitoba School Question, was enacted by the Greenway government. The first of two acts abolished the Board of Education and the offices of the Superintendents and "put control of the administration of education in the hands of the Department of Education, while control of the academic side of education was given to the newly established Advisory Board which was itself under the direct control of the Department."<sup>25</sup> The second act, the Public

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21. Morton, op. cit., p. 181.

22. Ibid., p. 188.

23. Ibid., p. 190.

24. Ibid., p. 233-234.

25. Wilson, op. cit., p. 105.