



# *The History of Education* *in* Sackville Schools

*Written by Michael D. Smiley*





# *The History of Education in Sackville Schools*

*Written by  
Michael D. Smiley, B.A., B.Ed.*

*In cooperation with  
The Sackville Heritage Society and  
The Fultz Corner Restoration Society*

*Edited by  
Ron Fifield*



*Sackville Heritage Press  
Sackville, Nova Scotia  
(c) 2003*

# The History of Education in Sackville Schools

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a history on Sackville's education system has proven to be a task worth taking on. As there was no one source of information on the Sackville school system, the need for a short history on Sackville schools and the early history of its founding has been absent for far too long. It is for this reason that I took on the task of writing this history. With pen in hand, I began and finished writing down the stories of Sackville schools gone by, and Sackville's education system from the 1800's through to the late half of the twentieth century.

My profound thanks go to Ron Fifield who suggested that I look into writing a short history on Sackville's early education system. He had a good idea, and over the course of the last year, a brief history has been written. A talented writer and editor in his own right, Ron spent many hours providing me with information and encouragement, while all the time juggling his own deadlines in order to help me meet mine. His commitment to the project along with his incredible patience and fastidiousness in rereading and making notes on different pages made it possible for me to live my life and write this history at the same time.

Going through the files and records of the Sackville Heritage Society proved to be a good beginning point, but in finding records and stories in this folder and that folder, I decided that there was a definite need for a report to be written detailing Sackville's past with regards to the system of education. It is my hope that this brief history on Sackville schools and the education system will bring new insight to those who read it. The opinions expressed and any errors of tack or omission are, of course, entirely my own responsibility.

*Michael D. Smiley*  
*July 2003*

# ***The History of Education in Sackville Schools***

## **Table of Contents**

<b>An Introduction on Early Education: Schools through the 1800's.....</b>	<b>5-7</b>
<b>The History Behind Sackville's Education System.....</b>	<b>7-11</b>
<b>A Selected History of Some of Sackville's Oldest Schools.....</b>	<b>11-19</b>
• <b>The Story of the Grove School.....</b>	<b>11-12</b>
• <b>A Brief History on the Lower Sackville School.....</b>	<b>12-13</b>
• <b>The Life of the Middle Sackville Schoolhouse.....</b>	<b>13-17</b>
• <b>The Maxwell School Story.....</b>	<b>17-19</b>
• <b>The Maroon Hill Children Education Story.....</b>	<b>19-23</b>
<b>A Contemporary Perspective on Sackville Area Schools.....</b>	<b>23-27</b>
<b>A Concluding Thought on the History of Sackville's Schools.....</b>	<b>27-28</b>
<b>Sources of Information.....</b>	<b>29</b>

(Page numbers and punctuation updated in May of 2022)

# The History of Education in Sackville Schools

## An Introduction on Early Education: Schools through the 1800's

Thirty years after the founding of Halifax in the 1700's, a debate waged over who should receive an education. The upper classes naturally favoured educating the more well-to-do families, as they felt that if the lower class youths were educated, it would cause a greater financial burden on the upper class. In paying for the education of their own children in private academic institutions, the wealthy felt they were doing their part for the education system and in educating society. The upper class minority felt there was no need for the lower classes to be schooled. Even the poorer citizens of Nova Scotia were not always overwhelming supporters of compulsory education.

Poorer families feared that if they accepted the idea of their children going to school, they themselves would have to shoulder the burden of the cost. For many families this was not a possibility, as many families of that time were hard pressed for cash, and school was not a luxury most families could afford. In part, this is why the politicians were apprehensive in taxing citizens for the impartation of knowledge.

Much debate continued on the topic of education in Nova Scotia up until the middle of the 1800's when Joseph Howe, the father of responsible government spoke on the issue of educating the masses. He stated:

...The subject of education in a province like Nova Scotia is one of the most important which the legislature can be called upon to consider. Compare with it questions of roads and fisheries, and of politics sink into insignificance. Or as the member of Yarmouth who sits beside me has just suggested, these are intelligent – if they are educated – they will not

be without the means of raising money, of making roads, of forwarding enterprise and regulating matters of trade. Among the uneducated nothing is established or firm, and the spirit of self-sacrifice-so necessary for the wise management of public affairs-is wanting.

Howe was correct in pointing to the obvious, that an education is the foundation for a prosperous society. Joseph Howe's speech opened the eyes of many Nova Scotians in realizing the importance of an education for every child.

Whether the public was ready or not, in 1865 a law was passed taxing lands to support staffing, instructional aids, and the construction, restoration, and maintenance necessary for schools to exist in populated and remote areas.

Schools in the 1800's were reasonably sized. The structures ranged from 30x30 frames to 10x16 log cabins. There could be as many as 140 students in a school with just one teacher. A community's inability to sustain more than one teaching position resulted in the large class sizes. In years gone by schools were really community places, with students of all ages mixed together in a positive learning environment.

A typical mid-1800's schoolhouse in Nova Scotia would be filled with iron and wood two-seater desks. The teacher's desk would most likely be at the centre of the room, and may have even been a rolled-top desk. Near the teacher's desk would be the dreaded strap, much feared by rowdy tots. The stove was usually near the rear of the building, and besides keeping the pupil's toasty, it sometimes provided delicious treats like hot cocoa. Subjects studied would have included spelling, reading, arithmetic, geography and grammar. Electricity was still not available to schoolhouses, and therefore when light became insufficient, classes were periodically cancelled to the delight of the children.

The curriculum, unlike in the schools of today, did not occupy a lot of the teacher's time. Teachers chose simply what would be taught, when, at what level and how. With schools spread over such large distances, education officials would not make regular rounds to every school.

The annual Christmas pageant was always popular in communities, and especially popular in the smaller ones. In late fall classes would be cancelled so that rehearsals could begin for the Christmas festivities. In most cases the annual event would be held in the school. In Sackville, Acadia Hall showcased the annual pageant of Christmas melodies. To help defray costs fudge was sold to those people in attendance. Few people could resist the sweet taste of a treat during intermission.

Students always had time off, but it was not during set periods such as today's March Break. Whenever there was work to be done at home, parents simply had to send in a note to excuse a child's absence from school. Such unpredictable attendance made students fall behind, but the school schedule was adjustable and a child did not necessarily have to complete a grade in one year. At times some children finished more than one grade in a year. Overall, the system of schooling was very flexible and regularly met the needs of the community. There were schools that even had a yearly Arbour Day, whereby the students gave back to nature by planting a tree or trees in their community.

### **The History Behind Sackville's Education System**

Sackville reportedly had a school in the area in the early 1800's. At that time the operation of schools in the province fell into the hands of the different religious denominations. There are many references to the community's first school associated with the history of the St. John's the Evangelist Anglican Church, whereby

missionary priests who came to the area provided a teacher, and looked after the pastoral duties of the community. Obviously at a later time schools were built in different areas and some references are occasionally taken from other writings of schools and their locations.



**The St. John's Anglican Church**

The Reverend G. Gray, and wardens George Fultz and Thomas Mitchell of the St. John Evangelist Anglican Church in 1809 requested that the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir George Provost, provide for a grant of land to be set aside in Sackville for the construction of a school and glebe. The petition had the support of Bishop Charles Inglis on July 3, 1809. Provincial government official Charles Morris surveyed the land and approved a lot in September of 1810. The original location of where the school was to be built is a little questionable. Records at the Nova Scotia Public Archives provide the following information on Sackville's first school:

The Court of General Sessions of the peace for the County of Halifax certify to your Excellency (Rt. Hon. George Earl of Dalhousie, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia) that a schoolhouse has been actually provided in the township of



Sackville in the County of Halifax and that Stephen Blair a schoolmaster duly licenced is appointed thereto, and the sum of fifty pounds has been actually raised for the support of the said school. The court further certify that James Fenerty, Andrew Blair and William D. Hamilton have been duly appointed by the said court of sessions, the trustees of the said school which commenced on the first day of November, one thousand eight hundred and fifteen and has been regularly continued ever since.

Stephen Blair, the man referred to in the above document was sent to Sackville by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts to be the first schoolmaster. This organization was connected with the Anglican Church. He reported in 1828 that the school was eighteen feet by fifteen feet. The school had seventeen children in all, but a chronic attendance problem existed with the older boys who were always out in the fields. The school remained open until 1899 when a new school was established at the opposite side of the school grounds, that being the Lower Sackville School.



**The Lower Sackville School in the mid-1900's**

The community of Beaver Bank followed Sackville's need for a school and received it in 1865. Beaver Bank grew to need a second school by 1886. Lucasville required a school as well, and one was opened to meet the community's needs in

1876. By the middle of the 1830's Sackville needed two schools, one for the lower half of Sackville, and another in what was to become Upper Sackville.

The area of Middle Sackville today was much like the other areas in the community; residents there also desperately needed a school in which their children could attend. One early report suggests that a school was most likely located in Middle Sackville near the site of today's Sackville United Baptist Church. There is also reference made to the Bambrick residence. The times in which the family lived at select dwellings varied over the years making it difficult to pinpoint the exact location of the residence, which may have served as a school.

With the uproar over the compulsory education system in Nova Scotia, Sackville residents were worried about financial costs associated with the government's plan on education in the mid-1800's. Area residents decided to take matters into their own hands; Sackville parents (for the most part) wanted an education for their children, but worried about the potential costs.

A meeting was held in 1864 to elect a board of trustees, plan the construction of a schoolhouse and lay the groundwork for employing a teacher. A man by the name of Jacob Shonamon was chosen to be the chairman of the school committee in Sackville, in addition to being a school trustee. David A. Nicholson and Donald McKenzie were also named as trustees. In all there were five trustee positions to be appointed. The *Number Nine School District*, which consisted of North Beaver Bank, voted on building a school, maintaining a schoolhouse and on supporting the hiring of a teacher in a unanimous vote. Mr. MacKenzie was contracted to build the schoolhouse for the sum of forty-seven dollars. The completion date for the project was scheduled for May 1865.

During the construction phase of the school project in Beaver Bank, a Mr. T.W. Nicholson was hired for five months to teach the children. Trustees agreed to pay Nicholson fifty dollars, meaning ten dollars a month for the whole term, lasting five months. MacKenzie was not able to make the deadline set for the school building, as a result Mr. Shonamon offered the use of one of his barns for forty cents a month until the school could be finished. After much coaxing the money to pay the bills to meet expenses were eventually collected from area residents.

The stories surrounding Sackville's education system are widespread, from travelling in the nippy days of February to recalling the memory of hearing fingernails scrape across blackboards. It is in hearing these types of stories and the histories of the schools themselves that one realizes how Sackville schools have been rather special and different from the rest in the province.

### **A Selected History of Some of Sackville's Oldest Schools**

Sackville schools have always been filled with exceptional teachers and capable students. It is through hearing the stories of some of Sackville's oldest schools that a greater appreciation can be found for the education system that exists today. It took the educators of the past to help shape the minds of future academics to teach the pupils of contemporary Sackville.

### **The Story of the Grove School**

In addition to the typical grade schools in Sackville a finishing school was situated in Beaver Bank. Four sisters operated the Grove School, originally located in Halifax, sometime before 1840. The oldest Grove child, who was the head of the school, died

in 1879. A year later the school closed. A short time after the three remaining Grove sisters moved to Beaver Bank to re-establish the school.

The Grove School operated sometime into the 1890's as a finishing school. A finishing school was a school for young ladies of prominent and well-off families. The cost for children under the age of twelve was sixty dollars and included studying in reading, grammar, arithmetic, history, geography, natural philosophy, English composition and French. For older children to attend the school, parents had to pay eighty dollars. These children ended up taking the same subjects as the younger ones primarily, but also studied such things as drawing, botany, rhetoric (the art of communication in words), algebra and Italian. Music lessons were available for an extra forty dollars a year. This school was just one of several schools in the Sackville area by the 1890's. The Grove School, like the Lower Sackville School, was well known in the community.

### **A Brief History on the Lower Sackville School**

There are some residents in the community who can remember attending Lower Sackville School, which was built in 1899. For many area residents it is this school that many of our older citizens remember as being the school that existed for most of the twentieth century in the community. It was situated on what was once Schoolhouse Lane, now known as the Sackville Cross Road. At the end of its life, the building was a two-room school, with the second classroom constructed in 1929. The entire structure was torn down in 1986. To ease the overcrowding at the Lower Sackville School on the Old Sackville Road, the grade levels had to be split up into two buildings in 1942. Grades one through four stayed at the school, while students in five to eight moved to the Acadia Hall (built in 1923) for their lessons. The Lower

Sackville School operated until 1948, the year the Acadia School was built and opened. The Acadia School was built as a four-room schoolhouse in 1948 as an adequate means to house Sackville children for their studies.



**The Acadia School**

### **The Life of the Middle Sackville Schoolhouse**

The Middle Sackville School was built sometime around the mid-1800's and operated until 1949, when a new school was built for the community of Middle Sackville. The school was used for nearly a century. The building and the teaching that occurred within its walls were of great benefit to the community.



**The Middle Sackville School Class of 1926**

**(In the front row, the fourth child from the right side of the picture is Leslie Thomas)**

The school was built on the Old Sackville Road, snugly put at the foot of Shay Hill, and surrounded with trees and homes on encompassing lots. Like the school, Shay Hill has an interesting history; the hill received its name from an incident with a one-horse shay that had the misfortune of breaking down during a severe winter storm, leaving the driver stranded (often how the students must have felt with little around them at recess).

The Middle Sackville School was able to accommodate forty-five pupils from grades one to eleven in the later years of the school's operation. The strap and the hardwood pointer were prominently displayed at the front of the room, and served as a grim reminder to students of what to expect if they became naughty boys and girls. Minor offences would warrant a student to stand in a dusty corner. Rows of double desks were situated throughout the room. The majority of the desks had the names of former students carved into the wood, leaving their mark in the school so to speak. The older children sat at the back and the younger ones near the front. Typically, on the first day best friends would choose to sit together, and the arrangement usually lasted as long as they behaved themselves. The front and sidewalls of the school were covered in blackboards. The boards were often hard to read, as lighting at times during the school year made it difficult to read and copy notes. Electricity was not added to the building until the mid-1930's.



**The original Middle Sackville School**

At the back of the Middle Sackville School was a large cast-iron stove where hardwood logs would be used to heat the building. The area around the stove would be a place to dry wet clothes on rainy days. On Hallowe'en and Valentine's Day, it would be used to make fudge or molasses taffy, and each child would be responsible for bringing in a contribution for the small snack.

Each school day would start with a devotional period and the singing of "The Maple Leaf Forever," followed by a pledge of allegiance to the Union Jack, personifying a great respect for King and country. The roll call would follow in the daily routine. Sums were then copied from the board, which was then normally followed by a hearing lesson. Teachers over the years stressed an emphasis on good reading; children who failed to meet the teacher's standards would be moved to the foot or front of the class. At times students would frantically wave their arms for permission to go to the outhouse, with the teacher often ignoring calls, leaving some disastrous results to be cleaned.

Periodically clouds of dust could be seen inside the school as the teacher had students do gymnastics. Recess was also a popular time for physical activities. On days when the weather was poor the males in the school would proceed to the coatroom and play games. The girls, who were never invited to ever play with the boys, read old books or asked the teacher to write on the board. On sunny days the girls would indulge in a game of hopscotch, and in the winter the boys would bring their bobsleds to coast on the hill.

Arbour day (all about paying respect to Mother Nature) was held once a year at the Middle Sackville School. The daily grind of schoolwork was put aside for a thorough cleaning of the school with hot water and soap. The girls were busy in the school scrubbing desks and polishing windows, while the boys would be on the grounds raking leaves and cleaning up the yard. At times a tree was even planted to mark the event in May.

A group of concerned parents formed a Home and School Association for the Middle Sackville School, and accomplished a great deal during their existence. Their work resulted in the introduction of a hot lunch program for the children. A music program was implemented for students to gain a greater appreciation for the arts. Outside of the school's work to promote a music program, extracurricular activities started to develop with the scheduled Friday events of the Junior Red Cross. The female pupils would learn embroidery, while the males would make useful things out of wood. Time was even spent preparing for end-of-year activities, and many eyes were teary during sentimental recitations and in saying fond farewells to the older children.



The Middle Sackville School provided students and staff with a wonderful learning environment in which to grow and be taught. The school served its community for almost a century. Many generations of families attended the school. It was in thanks to the trustee, who acted as secretary that the school was kept operational. It was this person who had to collect the school tax to maintain the building, and was responsible for ensuring the teacher was paid the amount according that their teaching license required.



**The Middle Sackville School in 1956**

The Middle Sackville School was located near the site of the present Lind Forest subdivision and the burial crypt of the Olands family. With Sackville becoming home to so many new families, each year fewer of the community's residents are aware of the site of where the Middle Sackville School once stood. Unfortunately, the history of this school, like so many others in the area, is becoming an unknown quantity to area residents. Another school bearing the same name was opened to serve a whole new generation of residents after 1949 for a much shorter time.

### **The Maxwell School Story**

A man by the name of James Maxwell donated land in 1917 for a school to be built. On the second day of the tenth month in 1918 the Maxwell School opened. Dot

Maybee was their first teacher at the school. Seven Maxwell children attended the school in the initial year of operation. The school year would have lasted from the last week of August to the end of June. The school year usually consisted of two hundred days with the teacher receiving a salary of two hundred dollars for the year.

In most cases, schools like the Maxwell School ended up with what was classed as permissive teachers. This was a teacher who did not finish high school but wanted to teach, and did not have the opportunity to attend the Truro Normal School to obtain a license. Having such teachers meant they were able to teach all grades up to (but not including) the last grade that they passed in school. The majority of permissive teachers functioned well in a classroom setting and knew their material. Once a teacher was hired on, it was left to the community to find a boarding place. In addition to finding a place for a teacher to sleep, a community that ended up with a permissive teacher also had to find someone to educate the students in areas where the teacher was unqualified to teach. For instance, the Maxwell School started in 1943 educating high school students at Bedford and then in the 1950's Bedford became overcrowded and the children in the high school grades attended Armdale School.

The Maxwell School grew in size over the years. The school register of 1934 indicates that fifteen students were enrolled at the school in all grades. Only half of the students would still have been there by the summer. In 1942 the school discontinued offering Grade 11. A year later Grade 9 and 10 students were sent to Bedford for their schooling. The building was desperately in need of being enlarged by the early 1950's; in 1951 the school was given a new foundation and moved to a new location. The total cost of the move came in at sixty-five hundred dollars. This time Neil Maxwell donated the land upon which the school was to sit.



**The Maxwell School**

With the ending of World War II, the growth in the Sackville area led to the school board building new schools even to the point that the Maxwell School was enlarged to accommodate a number of additional students.

The Pottier Report of 1955 greatly affected the schools of Sackville. The students of Lucasville, Middle Sackville and Maxwell schools were all consolidated into the Sackville Central School system with single grade facilities. With the construction of Harry Hamilton School, these three buildings were deemed surplus property. To help cover the costs of junior and senior highs, the Maxwell School between 1952 and 1956 served the community in a new way. It became a place for public dances to raise funds to support area schools, in lieu of an increase in the area rate. New life was born in an old and reliable part of the community.

### **The Maroon Hill Children Education Story**

In 1796 approximately five hundred black residents of Jamaica known as Maroons arrived in Halifax. Not having had a school, the Black population who settled in Sackville bought a condemned schoolhouse from Lower Beaver Bank and moved it down in sections and rebuilt the building on a new plot of land in Middle Sackville in 1890.

The school year in the 1890's had two terms. One term ran from May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 30<sup>th</sup>. The other term began on November 1<sup>st</sup> and ended on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The first school term lasted only six weeks, as the school was not ready for the scheduled May 1st opening; the school opened near the first of June. Mrs. Ester Oland taught the initial six-week term of study.

According to the information still available, the school sat vacant after Mrs. Oland taught, until the wife of a missionary volunteered to teach the Maroon Hill children. The wife of Rev. C.S. Freeman taught the white children in the area earlier in the day and spent the late afternoon educating the black children at Maroon Hill School. This lasted from about 1906 to 1909. A short time after Mrs. Freeman worked with the area children, a young lady of the age of fourteen, Ms. Mable Fenerty, instructed students for two years on a permit only.

A school had been built years earlier for black children in Sackville, on land belonging to a black family for one hundred and fifty years. But over the years the influential white citizens wanted no Maroon settlement children attending school with their children, leaving the black students without a school in which to attend. The black students were treated so poorly that they no longer bothered to be present at the school site. With no black children attending school in the area, it gave the white majority the right to deny entry for subsequent generations of black families to be educated.

After the Maroon Hill School was no longer in use by the black children, a fourteen-year-old boy wandered onto the property of a Mrs. Pleasah Caldwell. There he asked if her son was home, and she informed the child that her son was at school in Bedford. The boy remarked that he wished he could go to school. Mrs. Caldwell

could not believe the young man when he informed her that he was not allowed to attend school.



**Mrs. Caldwell's Home, also known as the Maroon Hill School**

Mrs. Caldwell had just returned from Western Canada after having lived there for twenty-eight years. She had returned to live in her grandfather's house, which happened to be situated next to the local school building. Taking to heart what the child had mentioned to her, she offered to instruct the young teen; he was an eager student and quickly learned to read. The mother of the child in question spoke to Mrs. Caldwell to see if she would teach her daughter as well. The black residents spoke to her about taking in more students, and to become a teacher of the province in 1942.

By 1942 Mrs. Caldwell had nineteen pupils. Mrs. Caldwell housed classes in her dining room and kitchen, referred to as a kitchen school. At that time there were two sections of the first grade and one section each of the grades four, six and eight. The students proceeded to learn with great speed and comprehension, and many went home to even teach their parents how to read.



**French Class with Mrs. Caldwell**

One of the charming stories of Mrs. Caldwell's school was when she had four students, just one girl and three boys; they asked if they could have a Christmas concert. The children enlisted the help of fellow family and friends from the ages of five down to three-and-a-half, and proceeded to learn four carols. The children and their parents had heard about such concerts, but never actually saw one. Mrs. Caldwell's kitchen was turned into a concert venue, and a Christmas tree decorated the room. What a splendid Kitchen Concert it was during the war years.

Over the years that Mrs. Caldwell worked with the Maroon Hill children in the 1940's, a number of her students won prizes in contests and competitions. One little girl in 1947 won at a public speaking engagement. By 1949 the children won three first place positions in musical festivals. Mrs. Caldwell's students were an eclectic group of fine young men and women.

B.C. Silver, the inspector of schools for the province once remarked that Mrs. Caldwell's children spoke beautiful English, and that the standard of education in her school were extremely high. She was always pleased at the performance of her students, and flatly dismissed comments that they had no brains.

Mrs. Caldwell taught at a time when presumably children were entitled to a free and accessible education system, regardless of gender, ethnicity or cultural background.



**Mrs. Caldwell is pictured above, conducting a geography lesson with two of her students**

The community of Sackville can never forget Mrs. Caldwell, as she was a pioneer in this community; she contributed enormously to the education of Sackville youths. A price cannot be put on the amount of work she did, when bigotry and exclusion was an acceptable practice in educational circles. She was such a fine upstanding citizen to work with children and families in helping black residents to enjoy the rich pleasure of the written word. It is as a result of Mrs. Caldwell work and the determination of her students that Sackville is a little more tolerant, as residents should always be mindful of what was taken away from a group of children years ago. A cycle of history whereby certain groups of people do not receive an adequate, free and accessible education should never repeat itself; the education system to work properly needs to be accessible to each person in the community.

### **A Contemporary Perspective on Sackville Area Schools**

The names of schools changed over the years to reflect the shifting boundaries that formed the Sackvilles. Lower Sackville, in its earliest days, covered an area from somewhere in the community of Bedford (which became its own community in 1856) to what is now the present boundaries of Lower Sackville. The larger land area past

the boundary of Lower Sackville was named Middle Sackville. The Lower Sackville School added an addition onto their school; a need also grew for the Middle Sackville School to add an addition onto their school. The Upper Sackville School also grew by an additional room to meet the demand for increased space. With all the changes happening locally, talk began of the need for providing a high school facility for the area.

School inspector B.C. Silver tried very industriously to have a consolidated school built in the Sackville area between 1947 and 1948. This would encompass all the children attending both the predominately black schools in Lucasville and Middle Sackville, and the other students attending the Lower, Middle and Upper Sackville schools. Nothing came of Silver's many efforts, though many meetings were held. The primary responsibility for raising money for school operations completely rested on the community. A common practice in Maritime communities was to raise taxes locally to cover teacher's salaries. Schools were operating on a pretty unstable basis in many areas.

A member of the area school board in the middle of the 20th century in Sackville had many responsibilities. They included conducting a public meeting of the residents (ratepayers) to discuss and vote on important issues. Discussions would include the cost of carrying water, care-taking duties, whether the older female students in the school should sweep the floor and if the males should carry the water in, who would look after bringing in the wood, who receives the contract for supplying the wood for the school, and other local issues of significant importance. Unless property was actually taxed in a person's name, they had no voting power at meetings. Trustee



members had to be ratepayers in the area, and those non-resident ratepayers owning summer properties were not entitled to vote.

Public meetings were often held at or near the end of June, and a tax rate would be struck to pay all the other operating costs of the schools, with the one exception being the salaries of the teaching staff. It was the duty of the local board of trustees to find teachers for schools and to do the direct hiring. Rural areas like Sackville had some trouble attracting the right calibre of candidates to teach all grade levels, as they were not necessarily able to compete with other areas that may have offered higher wages, better lodgings and benefits. It was the counties that guaranteed the teacher's salary. As a result, the rate of the local area had to bear the expense, and better financial school boards were able to attract the better teachers. Teachers in charge of ungraded schools had a strenuous workload compared to others in the profession who worked in graded classrooms, situated in cities.

The Pottier Report of 1955 changed the system of education in Nova Scotia. Education became a municipal issue, with all the assets and liabilities of the local school boards becoming a municipality's concern.

Over the years how children in schools were punished has changed dramatically. The strap was commonly used. It was not until 1967 that corporal punishments like strapping were banned from public schools. Remote areas were sometimes rebels and used the strap past 1967. Few teachers liked using the strap, but were limited in ways to discipline disobedient students.

Bringing up the standard of the school system was a common topic of conversation, including matters of school facility construction and looking at the

incredible growth that took place in Sackville. One solution called for the construction of a high school that would service the western half of Halifax County. At that particular time Fairview, Armdale, Spryfield and Rockingham were all parts of the County of Halifax and they were heavily populated. So, a school needed to be built to include a facility for all high school students from the western side of Halifax County via bussing to one location. Also attending the school would be students from Dartmouth, Bedford, Sackville and even Hammonds Plains. These students were scheduled to attend what was to become the Halifax West High School. The school was completed around 1954 and was overcrowded from the day the school was built.

A group of people got together during that period of time looking for the building of a high school to serve the immediate Bedford-Sackville area. The outcome was the construction of Sidney Stephen High School in Bedford, which was completed around 1959. Sidney Stephen would house all the students down to (and including) Bedford's Prince's Lodge. The boundaries narrowed over time with the annexation of Prince's Lodge area to the capital city.

The building of Sackville Heights Junior High School in 1964 represented the beginning of school construction in the area. Following in the coming years was a tremendous growth of school construction in Sackville. Sackville High School was proposed and tendered in 1970, and the school opened in 1972 with 42 classrooms. Sackville High opened its doors to Sackville youths primarily, taking students out of the neighbouring high school in Bedford, Sidney Stephen. Other schools in the area that were built approximately at the same time and over the next decade included elementary schools and junior highs, which were: Sackville Centennial, Caudle Park School, Sycamore Lane, Gertrude Parker, Leslie Thomas Junior High, Harry R.

Hamilton, A.J. Smeltzer Junior High, Smokey Drive Elementary, Harold T. Barrett Junior High, and Cavalier Drive.

The continued growth of Sackville led to the overcrowding of many Sackville schools. In order to avoid overcrowding at Beaver Bank – Kinsac Consolidated School, Beaver Bank - Monarch Drive Elementary School was opened for classes beginning in 1988. Officials with the Department of Education determined that a new high school needed to be built to relieve crowding at Sackville High. A new high school was planned for the Beaver Bank, Middle and Upper Sackville areas.

Millwood High came into existence after much planning and operated out of Sackville High for two years on split shifts, while the new school was being constructed. The newest high school in the Halifax County – Bedford District School Board opened in the spring of 1989; the school was to become metro's smallest public high school. While Millwood is small in comparison to Charles P. Allen in Bedford and Sackville High, Millwood to this day remains a spirited and close-knit school. In the year 2000, Beaver Bank students who had attended Millwood High were moved to a new P-3 high school in Fall River called Lockview. Great debate waged over the relocation of the Beaver Bank students, but after much campaigning to remain at Millwood, the students were moved to a new state of the art building against most of their wishes in a political decision made by the Halifax Regional School Board.

### **A Concluding Thought on the History of Sackville's Schools**

The community of Sackville has always prided itself on the schools that it keeps. The education of children is fundamental in our nation's growth. Without providing an accountable and just education system, we are doing a disservice to tomorrow's

children. The history profiled here is but a short history on the Sackville school system from the 1800's to more contemporary times. Sackville families over the years have always been involved with the management and operation of the schools. The community has been fortunate to have an unwavering number of teachers to help guide students in their studies. Whether students attended an 1860's Beaver Bank school or a more recently constructed feeder school of A.J. Smeltzer, everything is and was done with the student's best interest in mind.

In preparation for this history of Sackville schools, reading and hearing the stories of children attending to their education is much like taking steps back into time to see how another generation of children were taught, evaluated, and the atmosphere in which they studied.

### **A Note on the Sources of Information Used**

All the information used in this report came from the Sackville Heritage Society Archives. In particular, the following files proved to be useful resources in the research and preparation for this report:

School, Acadia  
School, A.J. Smeltzer  
School, Board  
School, General  
School, Gertrude Parker  
School, Grove  
School, Hillside Park  
School, Leslie Thomas  
School, Lower Sackville School  
School, Maxwell  
School, Middle Sackville  
School, Millwood Elementary  
School, Millwood High  
School, Sackville Heights  
School, Sidney Stephen