Local Church and School History

These write-ups and resource links are intended to serve as the meat on the bones of the lecture outlines and PowerPoints of the Local History Teaching Aids (LHTA) materials. The goal in composing them has been for clarity, which is a key part of making the material interesting and inspiring. The material below is presented as a resource for the teacher, rather than for the students.

I. Overview of Local Church and School History

*The centre of life in the Red River Colony was the local church. People met to worship and fellowship, and also to provide education for their children. When Manitoba became a province the government began regulating education, eventually leading to compulsory schooling in 1916. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many churches accepted modernist doctrines and their influence declined. In the 1960s, Premier Duff Roblin instituted major reforms to the public education system that sought to make schools the centre of society in a similar way to how the church had been in the past. The history of churches and schools in Red River North is an intertwined story displaying a trend away from church and individual leadership to state control.*

**A) Colonial Times,   
1825-1870**

Without a permanent settler population, churches and schools were of little concern in Red River during the fur trade area. When the Selkirk Settlers came, however, this changed. The Selkirk Settlers were intent on establishing houses of worship in the colony.

The Hudson Bay Company (HBC) governed Red River and controlled access to the entire northwest until Manitoba entered Confederation. It therefore had say over whether ministers would be allowed in, and who they would be. As the **Anglican Church** was the established or state church of England, it had precedence. The company wanted to make sure religion in the northwest would not interfere with business, but rather help it by promoting a more moral and peaceful society among trappers. Violence and alcoholism were major concerns in the aftermath of the fur trade wars with the Northwest Company. The HBC decided to allow small numbers of **missionaries** to come in.

Anglican Archdeacon **William Cockran** came to Manitoba in **1825** and moved to the Lower Church at the St Andrews Rapids in 1829. He built a new church nearby in 1831, and finished the stone edifice of **St. Andrew's On-the-Red** in 1849. He was also responsible for the erection of **St. Peter's Church** at the experimental Indian farm settlement of Dynevor, north of Selkirk.

**The first churches**

Unfortunately, many people in the Red River settlement were **Presbyterians** who had been promised a Presbyterian minister. This was no small inconvenience, but rather part of principles at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther stood up to protest (*Protest*ant) against the Church of Rome after studying the Bible for himself and finding that many of the Church's teachings were not found in Scripture. The Church of Rome taught salvation by works, rather than by faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice. It kept the **Bible** and its truths from the common man. Though not originally intending to, Luther and his followers eventually broke away from the Church of Rome and founded the Lutheran Church in Germany. In England, the Anglican Church became the national church after the break with Rome under Henry VIII. In Scotland, however, John Knox's fiery opposition to the Church of Rome led to the founding of the Church of Scotland, which was presbyterian in governance. Each Protestant church kept certain **traditions** from the Church of Rome, but some did so more than others. The Presbyterians became known for refusing the unbiblical model of **episcopacy** (rule by bishops instead of **presbytery**/elders) that the Anglicans continued to use. Scotland's opposition to Charles I's attempt to impose episcopacy on the Church of Scotland led Scots to sign the National Covenant and take up arms against the king in the English Civil War.

Local Presbyterians finally welcomed their first ordained minister, **John Black**, to the colony in **1851**. They built their first church on **Donald Gunn**'s land at the St. Andrews rapids the next year. It was called "**The Meeting House**" because it functioned as a church, school, and library. The Presbyterians replaced it with the current stone church of Little Britain. In both cases, the churches were the centres of the communities that grew up around them.

**John Black, Donald Gunn, and the Presbyterians**

**The Bible and episcopacy**

Education was traditionally a matter conducted by families, churches, and private individuals or academies. Different families with different goals and diverse religious beliefs satisfied their wants through these private institutions. The inklings of public education were beginning in parts of the English world like Massachusetts in the 1830s, but the government generally did not play a large role in education in the nineteenth century. In Red River this was even more the case because the colony was so small. Schools were almost entirely a church matter. Cockran, his wife Ann, and William Garriock taught a school in the **St. Andrews Rectory** starting in 1829. Cockran built a school nearby two years later. Joseph and Catherine Sinclair Cook taught agriculture and weaving at **St. Peters** in the 1830s. Black got involved with education shortly after his arrival. The **school at the Meeting House** functioned until 1878. From 1858, Girls had the option of attending **Miss Matilda Davis's** school at **Oakfield**, south of Lower Fort Garry. Davis taught pupils French and Mrs. Kennedy taught music.

**The first schools**

Manitoba's entry into Confederation in **1870** brought changes in politics, society, and religion. The increased population brought increased religious diversity. The solidly Anglican and Presbyterian church landscape began to change as dissenters and foreign groups arrived. Dissenters did not adhere to the official state churches in England and Scotland. They tended to retain fewer traditions from the Church of Rome than did the Anglicans. They were also more **evangelical** in practice. The Methodists built their first church in Selkirk in 1877. Plymouth Brethren believers erected the Balsam Bay Assembly in the east beaches of Lake Winnipeg in 1890. Selkirk also got its first Lutheran church in 1897 and the Pentecostal Bethel Mission in 1918. The Roman Catholic **Notre Dame Parish** was founded in **1874**.

**B) Churches and Schools in a New Province**

Traditionally, immigration to British North America came from northern and western Europe, and particularly from the British Isles. At the end of the century, however, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe started arriving in large numbers. The first **Ukrainians** came to East Selkirk in **1898**. Over the next two decades, they built Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Greek Orthodox churches in places like Gonor and East Selkirk. Schools like Donald School served the wants of the new settlers. In 1913, Donald School started catechetical teaching for Ruthenian (Ukrainian) and Polish pupils. The Polish and Ruthenian languages were taught after school hours starting in 1917.

**The new immigration**

Confederation and immigration introduced a new philosophy of education to Manitoba. No longer a tiny colony, Manitoba could follow trends set in older areas of North America towards public education. The province passed the **Public Schools Act** and inaugurated a Board of Education to control curriculum requirements. The board chose the text books to be used, although churches retained authority over the choice of books touching on morality. A number of early schools in St Andrews, St Clements, and Selkirk formed under the new setup in the **1880s** and **1890s**.

**Public schools**

The Public School Act did not make school attendance compulsory, nor did it mean the end of the Bible's influence in texts and teaching. What it did mean, however, was that the role of schools in the minds of Manitobans was changing. The primary purpose of schools was shifting from building faith, morality, and knowledge for raising civilization in the northwest, to **acculturating immigrants**. Its centre was moving from individuals and churches to the state.

**Shifting purpose**

Nevertheless, the one room school house still dominated education and compulsory attendance was a controversial issue. Proponents of it argued that it would help make Canadians out of the diverse mass of settlers that was streaming into the province. In **1916**, the legislature amended the Public Schools Act to implement **compulsory school attendance** for children up to the age of 14. Most of the schools in the Red River North Area were formed during these developments in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

At the same time as public education was being implemented, major shifts were occurring in Canadian religious and political thought. The major religious changes concerned modernism or theological liberalism, Darwinism, and the Social Gospel. **Modernism** grew out of German universities that denied that the Bible was the word of God and sought to identify numerous errors in it. **Darwinism** was the culmination of a century of evolutionary ideas that proposed that all life had evolved by means of natural selection ("survival of the fittest"). Darwinism built on long age geology to deny the Genesis account of creation. In an age of astounding scientific accomplishment, many churches accepted the theories of the liberal theologians and evolutionists and began to doubt the Bible. No longer confident in what could be known about spiritual things and saving souls, many turned to the social gospel. The **social gospel** taught that the churches should focus on "**social regeneration**," or saving society from its material problems.

**The churches accept theological liberalism**

The impact of theological liberalism and the social gospel was felt in Red River North by the formation of the **United Church of Canada** in **1925**. The new body united Canada's Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists. Presbyterians and Methodists were able to set aside their formerly sharp doctrinal differences in the environment of the social gospel. For many **Presbyterians**, however, uniting with churches of different beliefs was still unacceptable. While a large number of congregations in Red River North voted to join the United Church (including **Little Britain** **Presbyterian** and the **Selkirk Methodist** church), others, like **Knox Presbyterian** in Selkirk, stayed out.

The other major shift was the increasing impact of socialism in Canada. This was closely related to modernist theology's gains. Social gospellers found the use of government as a tool to reform society to be in line with their views. They were actively engaged in **progressivist politics** and even socialist groups. The **Great Depression** served as a forum in which to win countless new supporters of government intervention in the economy and society. Prime Minister **R. B. Bennett**'s government passed legislation resembling U.S. President Roosevelt's New Deal in **1935**. The Second World War was followed by considerable growth of government. During the 1960s and 1970s in particular the tendency was towards a more pervasive role for government in society.

**C) Society from church to school**

**Social Gospel and Socialism**

The modern school system in Manitoba and Red River North is largely the result of sweeping changes introduced by the government of **Duff Roblin** **(1958-1967)** in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Roblin led his Progressive Conservatives to victory in the provincial election of 1958. As a **'Red Tory**,' he favoured the "**Progressive**" part of his party's title, believing interventionist government was the solution to society's problems. Roblin supported the concept of "**social investment**," which meant government-led training programs to improve and shape business and society at large. At this time, Manitoba was seen as a backward province. Roblin was determined to change this, and his first priority in doing so was the public school system. Education was the prime means of shaping society, and the size of the maturing **baby boomer generation** was putting pressure on Manitoba's existing schools. Roblin was also influenced by **Robert Owen**, the utopian socialist who was known for founding communes with revolutionary schools in Scotland and the United States.

**Progressivism and the solution to man's problems**

Roblin's government made sweeping changes to Manitoba's school system and ended the era of the one room school house. In 1958, it passed legislation that let it create **public high schools.** On 1 April 1959, it formed the Lord Selkirk, Interlake, and Aggasiz School Divisions. On 1 April **1967**, the **Lord Selkirk School Division** absorbed most of Red River North's school districts. A few schools in St. Clements were put under the Agassiz School Division, and a few in western St. Andrews became a part of the Interlake School Division. All these organizational changes had the goals of systematizing and centralizing the public school system and increasing attendance. Older children were transported to the new provincial high schools provided for each district. The schools were to be centres not only of academic education, but also for learning trades and participating in community activies. Roblin's new school system assumed roles formerly occupied by churches or smaller and private school institutions.

Roblin's reforms benefited from Dominion subsidies through the Federal Rural Economic Development Agreement (FRED), signed in 1967 with Manitoba. The program poured money into the Interlake for development that went "far beyond public works and into the realm of social change," recognizing "the close relationship between education of youth and programs for social and economic development." The FRED program paid for hundreds of miles of roads and hundreds of schools. The roads were necessary for **school bus programs** for busing rural students to the new high schools.

The school came to be the central institution of society at the same time Manitobans were deserting traditional churches. Widespread rebellion against traditional culture and institutions included a hostile spirit against Christianity. Continuing to be influenced by modernist theology, many churches were influenced by **New Evangelicalism**, which taught that churches should adapt to society in order to appeal to more people. Doctrinal issues and moral principles were not to be placed ahead of unity. **Ecumenical/non-denominational** **churches** became increasingly common, including in Red River North. At the same time, evangelical churches were founded in the local area after the war. Selkirk's first Baptist church formed in 1956. The Mennonites also established a congregation.

**Ecumenism and evangelicals**