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The Teaching of History in the Elementary Schools of Canada

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THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF CANADA

By WALTER N. SAGE

The Canadian Historical Association is now a member of the International Committee of Historical Sciences and as such has greatly increased its sphere of influence and activity. The sub-committee or commission on the teaching of history of the International Committee has asked for a report on the teaching of history in the elementary schools of Canada to be followed later by a report on the teaching of history in the secondary schools. Since Canada has no national system of education and each province controls its educational policies it was thought best that the question of the teaching of history in Canadian schools should be discussed at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association at Montreal before any reports were sent in from Canada to the commission on the teaching of history of the International Committee.

So far twenty reports on the teaching of history have been sent in to the commission and twenty countries have not replied. M. Capra, Inspector-General of Public Instruction in France has issued a summary of the first sixteen of these national reports setting forth in detail the content of the history courses and the aims and "spirit" of the instruction provided in these courses. As a rule national history is taught in the lower grades and general history is introduced later. In some countries, e.g., Brazil and the tiny principality of Lichtenstein little attention is given to general history, but in most cases much time is devoted in the higher grades to the history of other nations. In Holland the history of civilization is stressed and in most of the European countries the activities of the League of Nations are emphasized. As might be expected the teaching of history in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (Russia) prominence is given to Marxism and the class war.

Unfortunately no reports have yet been received from Great Britain and the Dominions, including, of course, the Irish Free State. The correspondent from the United States of America has submitted a brief statement of seven type-written pages setting forth the methods and procedures and the aims or objectives of history teaching in the Great Republic. He points out the great differentiation in the teaching of history in the various states and localities but states that "No school confines its instruction to American history" and that "every school provides some instruction in the European background of American history" and "some schools teach more European and world history than American history".

In dealing with the teaching of history in the elementary schools of Canada it is well first to recall the obvious facts:—

(1) That under section 93 of the British North America Act education is a provincial matter.

(2) That each province has worked out its own system to meet local needs.

(3) That in Quebec there are two systems of education suited to the confessional requirements of the population.

(4) That "separate schools" exist in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

(5) That aid from the Dominion Government is given to agricultural and technical education.

(6) That British Columbia has inaugurated a system of Junior High Schools.

Information regarding the courses of study, the aims, objectives and methods in history has been obtained from the printed curricula issued by the various provincial departments of education, by the Catholic Committee of the Council of Public Instruction of the Province of Quebec, and by the Protestant schools of that province. No attempt is here made to go behind these printed statements although it is to be suspected that in some provinces at least the course of study outlined is, to quote an experienced teacher, "away ahead of practical usage". This is especially the case where text-book teaching is to be discarded and "laboratory methods" are to be employed. School boards are very slow in building up school libraries, and one reference book among forty pupils does not tend to develop "modern methods". It leads inevitably to oral teaching and the dictation of notes which are to be learned by heart. In the western provinces, especially in Alberta and British Columbia, modern psychological methods learned in post-graduate, and sometimes undergraduate, courses in American universities are being introduced into the schools. History is regarded as a branch of Social Studies in the Junior and Senior High Schools of British Columbia and of the course in citizenship in the elementary schools of Alberta.

It will be well to outline the curricula in history of the various provinces from east to west. Details of the courses not given in this paper will be found in the announcements issued by the respective Education Departments.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

History is first taught in Grade III and is continued to Grade VIII of the elementary schools. In grade III stories are told of the explorers of North America and of Canada and of certain of the great men and legendary heroes of history. The latter list is rather peculiar and runs thus "Caesar, Arthur, Augustine, Alfred, Canute, William the Conqueror, Laura Secord, Madeleine de Verchères, etc." These stories are continued in Grade IV and some elementary civics is taught. In grade V, the requirements are British History to 1154; Canadian History to 1663 and some more civics. This course is continued in Grades VI, VII and VIII and in this way all Canadian history, British and Canadian civics is supposed to be covered. There is no statement of the aims and objectives of teaching.

The course in this province seems to be quite traditional and conservative. This conviction is strengthened by a perusal of the history paper set in the matriculation examination for entrance to Prince of Wales College and Provincial Normal School.

NOVA SCOTIA

Geography and history are combined in Grades IV and V; history alone is taught in Grade VI, and history and civics in Grades VII and VIII. Teaching is oral in Grades IV and V, in Grade VI the Text-books in Canadian and British history are to be on the teacher's desk and one text-book entitled the "*History and Geography of Nova Scotia*" is to be in the pupils' hands. In Grades VII and VIII text-books are used. Starting from local geography the pupil in Grades IV and V is taught the geography of Nova Scotia, Canada, The British Isles, the United States

and the "outer world." There are stories of explorers, heroes and early settlers in Grade IV and an account of the leading events of Nova Scotia history in Grade V. In Grade VI the study of history begins in earnest with lives of great Canadians, the chief migration to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Canada; French, English, German, Scottish, Loyalist. The story of the American colonies and the American Revolution and of France and her colonies is included in the requirements for this grade as are also the story of England to Cromwell's time and rudimentary notions of obedience to authority." Nova Scotia history is stressed in this grade. The course in Grades VII and VIII carries the story of Canada from 1713 to the present day and British history from Cromwell up to the present. There is reference in Grade VII to "ancient peoples and Bible lands." Civics is stressed in these grades.

This curriculum contains diverse elements and it must tax the ingenuity of the teachers especially in Grades VII and VIII to present it as a coherent whole to their pupils. But it is evident from the Journal of Education published by the Education Department of Nova Scotia that an attempt is being made to keep the teachers of that province abreast of the latest developments in educational theory and practice. The question of school libraries is discussed and a central library has been established at the Education Office for the use of the school inspectors and the teachers in the public schools. The list of books in this library shows that Nova Scotia is endeavouring to keep up-to-date.

NEW BRUNSWICK

History teaching begins in Grade IV and continues until Grade VIII. In Grades IV and V history and geography are taught together. The emphasis in Grade IV seems to be on geography and in Grade V on history. In Grade IV stories are told of the early discoverers of America, of "persons famous in the early history of Canada and New Brunswick in particular," and of famous people in early British history. The life of the early settlers is described and local historical incidents are recounted. In Grade V the instruction is still oral. The teachers are to discuss with the aid of text-books or reference books, the leading events of British and Canadian history. Some elementary civics is taught in Grade V.

In Grade VI, VII and VIII text-books are used and courses are given in British and Canadian history, from the earliest times to the present day. Civics is included in Grades VII and VIII. Instruction in history in Grade VI is mainly oral but after that the pupils are expected to use the text-books.

There is no statement in the printed outlines regarding the aims and objects of history teaching but it is evident that the whole curriculum is along traditional lines. It must be admitted that the outlines suggest that modern methods are not being employed to any great extent.

QUEBEC

(a) *The Catholic Schools.*—In the Catholic primary elementary schools the history of Canada is commenced in the *inferior course*. In the first year the period is from Jacques Cartier to the foundation of Montreal and the Jesuit missions and in the second year from Dollard to the Fall of New France and the dispersion of the Acadians. Teaching is oral. In the *intermediate course* which follows instruction is oral during the first year and from the text-book in the second year. French Canadian history is

taught in more detail from Jacques Cartier to Confederation. In the first year of the *superior course* the French régime is again studied, in the second the British régime with special reference to the constitutional development of Canada.

The objects of the teaching of history are carefully set forth in the School Regulations. The following paragraph is typical:—

“The pupil of our schools should *learn* our History that he may speak of it with *pride*; he should love it, that he may, so far as in him lies, preserve and defend the inheritance received from his ancestors.”

As one reads through the requirements one is struck by the devotion of the framers of this program to their native land and its history. The story of French Canada is stressed, the exploits of Jacques Cartier are studied by the pupils no less than four times. In the inferior course there is no mention of the British régime. In the intermediate course the British régime is mentioned but there is little mention of Upper Canada. In the superior course the Canadian West is listed as a topic and the constitutional development of Upper and Lower Canada and the Maritime Provinces is discussed.

There is no European history as such taught in this course, its place is taken by sacred history which is taught in connection with Catechism. The absence of British history from the curriculum for English speaking schools is rather noteworthy but there is a provision for the teaching of Irish history in Irish schools.

In the primary vocational schools Canadian history and church history are taught. These schools specialize in technical education but teach some “academic” subjects. The Canadian history course is the same as that given in the *superior course* in the primary elementary schools. The Church history course covers the period from the establishment of Christianity to the Great War.

These courses in the Catholic schools of Quebec have been carefully worked out in accordance with the religious, political and cultural traditions of French Canada.

(b) *The Protestant Schools.*—The Protestant schools of Quebec have a separate curriculum of which the courses taught in the high School of Montreal may be taken as typical. In this high school seven years are devoted to elementary and four to high school work. In the sixth year of the elementary course Canadian history is taught for one hour a week and in the seventh year for two hours a week. The course is very similar to those taught in Ontario and the Maritime Provinces.

ONTARIO

The course of study in the public and separate schools of Ontario is taken up in five forms, of which Form II may be completed in one year, but the others require two years. The Entrance examination for high schools comes at the end of Form IV. History is commenced in Form II and continued until the end of Form V.

In Form II stories from local history are taught also “stories of famous people, stories of child life in other lands, and Bible stories.” These stories are told by the teacher and reproduced orally by the pupils. In Form III instruction is still mainly oral and the pupils are given “stories of famous people and important events in British and Canadian history.” Stories of pioneer life in Ontario, stories associated with historical places

in the neighborhood and "elementary lessons in local municipal government and in the duties of citizenship" complete the requirements in this form. In Form IV text-books are used and the course for the junior grade comprises an outline of British history, current events, and the elements of the civil government of Ontario and the duties of citizenship. In the senior grade, Canadian history, current events, the elements of the civil government of Canada and the duties of citizenship are studied. The Entrance paper in history is set on the work of the senior grade.

Form V is the equivalent of the Lower School course, i.e., the first two years, in the high schools or collegiate institutes of Ontario. It, apparently, has taken the place of the "continuation classes" of a generation ago. The course in history is the same as that in the Lower School of the high school course and consists of a course in British history to 1920, including the geography relating to the history prescribed.

The aims and methods of history teaching are set forth in the Ontario announcement. The aim of instruction is "to interest the pupil in historical reading, to give him a knowledge of his civil rights and duties, to enable him to appreciate the logical sequence of events, and eventually to give him the power to interpret present conditions in the light of the past." The imperial note is struck in the following sentence. "The teacher should not fail to emphasize the extent, power and responsibilities of the British Empire, its contributions to the highest form of civilization, the achievements of its statesmen and its generals and the increasingly important place that Canada holds among the overseas Dominions."

MANITOBA

In the curriculum of studies for Grades I-VI of the Manitoba schools history is classed as part of Social Education. The child is to be initiated into the group and is to be trained to play his part in life of the community. In Grades I, II and III the spirit of co-operation and good will is to be fostered. Instruction in history begins in Grade IV under the three following heads: "the story of the district; the story of some primitive peoples; the story of changes in living." An outline of the history of Winnipeg is given as a model for the first section, in the second section the pupils read books from the school library "in their spare moments," and the teacher talks to the children about "changes in agriculture, in lighting, in manufacture, in houses, in schools, in modes of travel, etc." In Grade V the topics for discussion are the story of early days in Canada and the explorers of the West. The supplementary reading in this grade deals with world history. The regular subjects in Grade VI are the story of Canada and the government of Canada. Supplementary reading is based on stories from English history including historical novels. In the Canadian history course "social and industrial history should be emphasized and not too much attention devoted to constitutional changes and the controversy over these." The course on the Government of Canada is very inclusive and deals with federal, provincial and municipal institutions, and the duties of citizenship.

The course for Grade VII is British History and the syllabus for this grade is comprehensive and covers the whole of British development from the dawn of civilization in early Britain to the modern British Commonwealth of Nations. It is a very full outline and one wonders how the average teacher can cover it in one year. In Grade VIII the subjects for study are Canadian history and civics. The development of Canada from the

earliest times to the present is studied in a recently published text-book entitled "The Story of Canada." The teacher is expected to make use of McCaig's Studies in Citizenship.

The Manitoba curriculum is still being revised but when completed should be one of the most up-to-date in Canada. The objects of history teaching are clearly defined, history is closely connected with social studies and is treated in its broadest aspects. The interest of the pupil is gained by the stress on local history in Grade IV, but he is not allowed to be narrow in his point of view. World history is stressed from the commencement of the course and Canadian history does not stop at the Great Lakes.

SASKATCHEWAN

Instruction in history and civics begins in Grade IV with "stories the early discoverers and explorers in America," followed by "short sketches of persons famous in the early history of Canada" and "stories of people famous in early British history." Some elementary civics is also taught in this grade. In Grade V the topics in history are "the early explorers of the North-West and what each accomplished," "stories of pioneer life in Canada and in the North-West more particularly," and "stories of outstanding events in Canadian and British history." The training in civics takes the form of "elementary lessons in local municipal government and the duties of citizenship." The Grade VI course deals with the following topics: important events in the history of Canada to the end of the French period; the story of the Selkirk Settlers, the Red River Rebellion, 1870; the Royal North-West Mounted Police, the Saskatchewan Rebellion, 1885; outlines of English history prior to the Tudor period; current events and "talks upon our system of provincial government." In Grade VII the topics are: "main facts in the history of Canada from the fall of Quebec to the Union of the two Canadas"; "important events in the history of England; current events and "talks upon federal system of government and the relation of the Provinces to the Dominion." The course in Grade VIII completes the history of Canada from the Act of Union to the present time including the "rivalry of the British and Americans on the Pacific coast" and the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It includes also British history since the accession of the House of Hanover, current events and "the system of government in Canada with emphasis on provincial affairs."

The aims and objectives of history teaching are set forth. The teacher is warned against making history "a mere exercise of memory," "a mass of useless and unrelated facts." "History is a continuous narrative of events closely linked together, and efforts should be made to give the pupils vivid impressions of the conditions of living and the customs held in other ages." The study of history is held to be "a valuable instrument for moral training in the school."

No text-books are listed but many reference works are suggested. The inference is that reference books in fairly large numbers are to be provided for school libraries.

The Department of Education in Regina reports that the courses in history and civics will shortly be revised. The new curriculum is awaited with interest.

ALBERTA

In Alberta history is taught as part of the course in citizenship. In Grades I and II the training is chiefly by "direct experience." The child

is taught to respect school property, to be punctual, neat and clean, to avoid waste and to do his part as a member of a group. History talks on "the story of Alberta and its inhabitants before the period of active settlement" are given in Grade IV. In Grade V the general topic in history is "Romance and Adventure in the Settlement of the Old North West." The formal teaching of history begins in Grade VI and the course deals with "the different organizations through which our ancestors passed before modern times," e.g., English manorial life, feudalism robber bands, Scottish clans, Parliament and merchant adventurers. It is pointed out that Grade VI pupils are at an age when organization appeals to them and so organizations are stressed in their grade. The course is chiefly on British history from Saxon times to the Tudor Period (inclusive), but also includes explorations of eastern and western North America and civics.

Text-books are just placed in the pupils' hands in Grade VII and the course is based on the prescribed texts. The subjects for study are: Feudal England, Tudor England, Stuart England, Age of discovery and colonization, Exploration in America, the French Period in Canada, Early British Period, later Immigration and Settlement and in Civics "Social relationships based on 'making a living'". In Grade VIII the work in the text-books in British and Canadian history and civics is completed. In British history the story of the Motherland and the Empire is traced to the present day. In Canada the achievement of responsible government is studied, followed by the struggle for national unity, the relations between Canada and the United States and Canada's part in the Great War. The course in citizenship which was commenced in Grade I and has been continued throughout the grades is brought to a conclusion in Grade VIII by the comprehensive review of the forms of municipal, provincial and federal government.

The course of studies in Alberta has recently been revised and modern methods and ideas are prominent in the work of the early grades. But in Grades VII and VIII the shadow of the departmental Entrance examination is lengthening and instruction is based upon text-books. One feels that the spontaneity of the course is gone.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

In British Columbia two systems are at present in operation, the "old" and the "new." The "old" has been to the present based on eight grades in the elementary and three for the high School with the Junior Matriculation examination at the end of Grade XI. The "new" is based on six grades in the elementary school, three in the Junior High School and three in the Senior High School. Ultimately matriculation will probably be at the end of the twelfth grade, but the new system is not yet worked out in detail. In urban schools the Junior High School movement is making great progress but in all probability the "old" system in its revised form of eight years in elementary and four years in high schools will remain in the rural schools.*

History is first taught in Grade V, although some teachers wish to have instruction commenced in Grade IV. The course is divided into two parts "talks on the early history of British Columbia" and "discoverers and explorers of America." Instruction is oral and although the "laboratory method" is urged in the Program of Studies, it cannot be put into operation in many schools on account of the limited library facilities.

* Since the above was written a *New Program of Studies for the High and Technical Schools of British Columbia* has appeared providing for a four year high school course.

The course in Grade VI is in British history from its origins to the end of the medieval period and in citizenship, local and municipal institutions. In Grade VII text-books are introduced in British and Canadian history. The subject matter in this grade is British history from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth, the French Period in Canada and in citizenship, "organization for provincial purposes." The Grade VIII course is divided into four sections: the history of Canada with special attention to the British period, the history of British Columbia, the Stuart and Hanoverian periods of British history and citizenship, organization for federal purposes.

In the Junior High School the course in history is part of the curriculum in social studies. In Grade VII in the first term the major topic is the development of the Americas 1492-1763; in the second term the development of Canada, 1763-1873. In Grade VIII the first term is devoted to the development of Canada from 1873 to the present and the second term to the growth of the British Empire. The course for Grade IX, which has not yet been fully elaborated, deals with the following topics; "Inter-Empire and world relations of the Empire", "community problems", and "a study of vocations and vocational opportunities in the community and the province". There is at present some overlapping in Grade IX which is also the first grade of the old high school course.

The course in Junior High Schools is along progressive lines. It is not yet out of the experimental stage, but much solid work has already been accomplished.

We have now outlined the courses in history in all the Canadian provinces. The following conclusions may be drawn from the evidence set forth:—

1. There is no real uniformity in the teaching of history, in its content, aims or objects, in the different provinces of Canada.
2. There is as yet no national view of Canadian history in the sense that in each province the same topics are prescribed and instruction is provided on similar lines.
3. The Catholic schools of Quebec have definite objectives which seem to be attained, but the point of view appears to be rather limited and does not extend "from sea to sea."
4. The eastern provinces, on the whole, pay little attention to the development of Western Canada. The western provinces pay considerable attention to the history of "Old Canada" and the Maritime Provinces.
5. British and Canadian history are taught by periods and not "comprehensively". Exceptions to this rule are numerous, especially in Manitoba and the Junior High Schools of British Columbia.
6. General history, including ancient history and medieval and modern European history is not taught to any great extent.
7. There is little attempt to place the local, provincial and national history of Canada in its British Empire and world settings.
8. More attention might be paid to Canada's position in the British Empire and the world in general.

Finally it is submitted that the Canadian Historical Association might consider the following problems:—

1. The definition of the aims and objects of history teaching in Canada.
2. The correlation of the courses in history, and especially Canadian history, taught in the schools of the various provinces.
3. The evolution of a national point of view in Canadian history.

4. Closer co-operation between writers of history teachers of history; also between university professors and teachers in normal, high, and elementary schools.

5. The appointment of a commission on the teaching of history to consider the aims, methods and content of history courses.

The American Historical Association has taken the lead in furthering the study of history in the schools of the United States. The Canadian Historical Association has a golden opportunity presented to it. Will it take advantage thereof?