

# Methodism and the Education of Women in Nineteenth Century Ontario

by Marion Royce

## Part 1

### The Methodists Enter the Field of Women's Education

#### 1

In Upper Canada it was the Methodists who first responded to the challenge of "the higher education of women." The Upper Canada Academy, opened in June 1836 under the auspices of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada, was designed to admit students of both sexes. Although early records of planning for the institution contain no reference to co-education, it appears to have been taken for granted from the beginning that, in contrast to the practice of Upper Canada College, the student body would include

both girls and boys--"young ladies" as well as "young gentlemen." (1) Advance notice of the opening of the Academy solicited applications for a staff to consist of two male teachers, a preceptress and a steward and asked the preachers "to exert themselves to ascertain how many pupils male and female, will be sent from their respective circuits." (2) It soon became evident, however, that, in keeping with the social standards of the day, the male and female students would not be allowed to associate freely.

The decision to establish a "Seminary of Learning" had been taken in 1830 by the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada. (3) A com-

mittee was appointed "to fix upon" a suitable location for the institution, which was to be under the direction of the Conference. Directives for the Constitution were uncomplicated. It was to be "a purely Literary institution."

No system of Divinity shall be taught therein, but all students shall be free to embrace any religious creed and attend any place of worship which their parents or guardians may direct.  
(4)

The site chosen for the Academy was in Cobourg:

. . . a beautiful and flourishing village on the shore of Lake Ontario [with] a harbour that renders it accessible by a steam communication from every part of the Province. . . . It contains a Wesleyan Methodist chapel, and a large and respectable Methodist Society with a resident Wesleyan minister, a Protestant Episcopal church . . . and a Presbyterian church . . . belonging to the Kirk of Scotland, . . . with occasional services by ministers of other denominations.

The buildings are erected on a gentle elevation of ground, which secures at all times a free circulation of air, and commands a most delightful prospect of the village, the surrounding country and the Lake. They have been

erected, and the institution brought to its present state of preparation for receiving pupils solely by the private subscriptions of the friends of education and improvement, chiefly in this Province. (5)

The same issue of the Christian Guardian announced the opening of the Academy, which was to take place on the 18th of June, and detailed the "Terms":

It will be expected that each Student will furnish two sheets, two pillow cases, and towels, and that payment for board and tuition will be made in advance.

There are to be two Students in each room, occupying the same bed, and any Students furnishing their room with bed and bedding shall have £1 each or £2 between them deducted from their board.

These terms were supplemented in a statement dated June 28, 1836, signed by Ephraim Evans for the Board of Management:

Each room will be furnished with bed, table, stove, chairs and other necessary furniture, also with one light and with wood. The wood will be furnished in the yard, and the males are to prepare it for their rooms, unless directions are given by their parents to the contrary; in which case an extra charge of 5s per quarter will be

made. . . . For the female department the wood will be prepared and carried to the rooms and charged for as above.(6)

Shortly after the opening of the Academy, a petition for public subsidy was presented to the Provincial Parliament. The Report of the Select Committee of the House of Assembly to which the Petition was referred contained detailed information about the Academy and its operation based on the testimony of the Rev. Matthew Richey (the Principal) and others.

. . . the Building consists of a Centre and Two Wings,--the former four stories in height, and the latter each three stories--all of brick, excepting the basement, which is of stone throughout. The Centre Building is one hundred and forty feet in length by forty feet in width, and the Wings each fifty feet by twenty-five; the whole roofed with tin. About seven thousand pounds has been expended in its erection and seven hundred pounds for furniture.

. . . the Trustees have raised, by voluntary contributions, about four thousand seven hundred pounds, leaving a debt upon them of about £3,000;

The finishing of the building still requires an expenditure of about

	350
The furniture . . . . .	300
The necessary Apparatus . .	500

Making a total of . . . £4,150  
There is no provision for the expenses of the Institution except that to be derived from boarding and tuition fees. The annual expenditure, including salaries to principal, professors, teachers, servants, boarding, repairs, etc, is estimated at a sum of not less than four thousand pounds. The present charge for board is twenty-two pounds per annum for each pupil. Tuition fees will average about four pounds each.

The building will accommodate one hundred and fifty boarders. It . . . has now eighty boarders.(7)

To conduct this establishment efficiently will require the services of a Principal, two Classical, one Mathematical, one French and three Female Teachers . . . salaries in the aggregate £ 1,500 per annum.

#### Prospectus

In addition to the Ordinary Branches of an English Education, there will be taught: Geometry - Euclid and Legendre. Trigonometry - Plane and Spherical. Algebra - Mensuration, Surveying, Navigation and Flexions. Latin - Adams' Grammar, Jacob's Reader, Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Justin, Sallust, Caesar, Cicero's Orations, Tacitus. Greek - Moor's Grammar, Jacob's Reader, Greek Exercises, New Testament, Zenophon, Homer.

Rhetoric, Logic, Intellectual and Moral Philosophy.

In the Female Department, which is perfectly distinct, instruction will be given in all constituent parts of a superior English Education, and in French, Drawing and Embroidery.

Besides the ordinary routine of tuition, Lectures on the Sciences and on other subjects of general utility, will be delivered; to which all Students susceptible of benefit from them will be admitted. (8)

The Bye-Laws for the Regulation of Students were strict:

1. The hour of rising is, in summer, 5, and in the winter, 6 - of retiring, 9, in the summer, and 10 in the winter. Morning and Evening Prayer in the Lecture Room, to be regularly attended with becoming reverence by all the Students.
2. As the foundation of that order is so essential in an Institution for the intellectual and moral training of youth, due respect and subordination to the Teachers and Officers of the Institution are imperative upon all placed under their tuition and care.
3. It is required that the conduct of the students be in all

respects distinguished by moral propriety. All profane, obscene and indecent language; games of chance, and fighting or wrestling are among the grosser violations of the law.

4. All indecencies, such as writing upon the walls, loud speaking, whistling, or laughing within doors, playing in the halls or rooms, entering the house with dirty shoes, slovenliness of person or dress, rushing to or from meals, unbecoming conduct at table, and the odious practice of spitting on the floor, are strictly prohibited.

5. All who board in the Institution shall retire to their respective apartments immediately after tea, and occupy the evening in preparing their lessons for the subsequent day, or when these are despatched, in improving reading or conversation. Permission will be very rarely granted to any to spend the evening out, and that only when it is known where and how they will occupy it, in which case they must always return before the 9 o'clock bell rings.

6. Each student will be held responsible for the appearance and furniture of his apartment, which he is to sweep out and clean every

morning, before breakfast, and in which he shall, at no time, indulge in or permit any boisterous or disorderly proceedings. No gossiping, unnecessary visiting, or assembling in groups in each others rooms, will be, by any means, tolerated.

7. The front of the edifice is appropriated as a place of exercise for the females - the rear, and playground, for the males. And more effectually to preclude all intercommunication between the sexes, their corresponding, conversing, or in any way, associating together, save in the case of brothers and sisters (and that by permission of the Principal or Preceptress) is expressly interdicted.

8. The Students shall all be present in their classrooms and under the eye of the Teachers during the hours of school, unless those, who, in consideration of the peculiar nature of their studies, obtain from the Principal, on the recommendation of the Teachers, the privilege of prosecuting them in their own apartments - a privilege, however, which will be accorded only to such as are known to be distinguished for habits of application and general good conduct.

9. None of the young ladies or gentlemen, entrusted by their

parents to the care of the Institution, are at liberty to go to the village, or to take excursions in the neighbourhood, to contract debts or to dispose of anything in their possession, without the concurrence of those upon whom its superintendence and direction devolves. It is confidently believed that it will be in perfect accordance with the views of the parents who send their sons to this Institution, to treat as an offence, peculiarly revolting and ominous in youth - their using ardent spirits, or visiting taverns.

10. All letters to whomsoever written, by such as are placed here by their parents or guardians, must pass, on the female side through the hands of the Preceptress, and on the other through the Principal, for examination and approval. The first Monday in each month is the time appointed for writing letters - but whenever circumstances render a deviation from that time really necessary, an exemption will be readily granted.

11. All regular Students are required regularly to attend public worship on the Lord's Day, under the Ministry their parents may prefer. To prevent disorder, those attending the Wesleyan Chapel will walk together, the young gentlemen preceding the ladies,

going and returning. Neither riding nor visiting for pleasure on the Sabbath, making the slightest disturbance within doors, nor lounging about the premises, in a word, no species of conduct by which that hallowed day would be desecrated, will be connived at.

12. Day Scholars are not permitted to linger in, or about the Institution, after the regular hours of School. During the time of recess at noon should they not be required by their parents to go home to dinner, they may remain in their class room, or take exercises on the premises, but they are not to enter the rooms of resident Students in their absence. In case of their staying away, or attending irregularly, they will be required to produce a written apology from their parents.

13. It is expected and required of all that board in the Institution, that they will render the situation of the Steward and Stewardess, whose ordinary duties demand such unceasing labor and attention, as comfortable as they can, by studiously avoiding giving them any trouble additional to their daily operations, except in cases of extreme necessity. None of the Scholars are allowed to visit the Steward's residence, unless invited by him or the Stewardess, or sent by one of the Teachers. Immediately after

meals all are to leave the Dining Hall.

14. As a cautionary expedient against fire, it is deemed highly necessary to require, that during the time fires are allowed in the rooms, the doors be left unlocked in the night, that the stove may be inspected by a person appointed for that purpose. Any Students detected in kindling fire, after the stove shall have been inspected, unless it be required by sudden indisposition, will forfeit by the first offence the comfort of fire in their rooms for one week, and by a repetition of it, the use of stoves altogether.

15. It is earnestly recommended to all within these walls, to read a chapter of the Bible and offer prayer every morning and evening to Him who by his Apostle has said, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and unbraideth not, and it shall be given him." N.B. Minor violations of these laws, all of which it is believed are salutary and reasonable, will elicit rebuke, or receive appropriate degrees of correction - grosser infractions of them, especially if persisted in after admonition, will subject the delinquent to the disgrace of expulsion.

A copy of these Regulations will be given to each Student on entering; the acceptance of which will be considered as a pledge of compliance therewith.(9)

Later in the year a statement of the Principal regarding the courses of study in various departments included further information about the "Ladies' Department." (10)

The course of instruction in the Female Department includes English Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic and Astronomy, and when required, Belles Lettres and Natural Philosophy, as also, French, Music and Drawing. The young ladies are under the constant inspection of the Preceptress, and occupy a considerable part of the evening in the presence of an efficient mistress in preparing their lessons for the following day.

Admiration for the academic achievement of the young ladies is evident in reports of the official examination of Academic students in May 1838. There is, however, no sense of incongruity in the fact of a distinct female curriculum. The Cobourg Star, for instance, after reporting the progress of the Mathematical and Classical departments, commented:

Corresponding improvement was manifest in the Ladies' Department both in French and English classes. The astronomical class was listened to with indication

of peculiar interest and satisfaction; the young ladies evincing that they had applied themselves with more than ordinary assiduity and enthusiasm to the cultivation of a science, which, from the grandeur of the ideas which it unfolds is so eminently fitted to enlarge the faculties of the mind; nor could anyone be surprised to hear the Principal intimate, as this interesting class retired, that the young ladies were frequently taken from their books in fine evenings to decipher the same lessons emblazoned in the volume of nature. With the examination of classes were interspersed performances on the Pianoforte, which imparted an agreeable animation to the scene, and which, with the drawings that were exhibited, showed that whilst the essential branches of education are carefully taught, the importance of appropriate female accomplishments is not overlooked.(11)

The Principal, in a "communication" addressed to the Editor of the Christian Guardian, (12) wrote of "complete and universal satisfaction" with the young ladies' classes in Mathematics and Astronomy and expressed his own "high degree of pleasure in listening to their performances on the Pianoforte," a reaction that reflected not only his own "sentiments" but also "those of the

connoisseurs in the art" who had been present. He had been further charmed by "the juvenile appearance of the performers" which "materially heightened the effect of their admirable execution."

The compositions of the young ladies read at the closing exercises of the second day of the examinations, he said, "were marked by a diversity of style corresponding to the mental character of the writers; but a refined taste was an attribute common to them all." And he added:

Nor was it their least excellency that they abounded in pious sentiments enchased in language and imagery at once beautiful and appropriate.

Subjects in which these "pious sentiments" found expression, with the respective writers, were:

"On Female Education" by Miss Jane Beatty; "The Heavens" by Miss Amelia Houghton; "The Frailty of Human Life" by Miss Mary Jane Beatty; "The Pleasures of Hope" by Miss Mary Ann Brock, and "The Pursuit of Happiness" by Miss Sarah M. Archibald.

During the period of the examination, "the young ladies" held a bazaar in order to promote one of their extra-curricular interests. The Cobourg Star reported that, having been "very liberally patronized," it had yielded forty pounds to be used for "the maintenance and education of a young Indian fe-

male." (13)

Shortly the Christian Guardian published "a Card" expressing appreciation of the assistance received through the bazaar:

A card: The Ladies of the Upper Canada Academy present their warm acknowledgement to their numerous friends for the distinguished liberality with which they have been supported in their missionary endeavours. They trust the period is not distant when these philanthropic exertions will be appreciated by the (yet) untutored children of the forest, through the instrumentality of the female Indian who is at present receiving instruction that will qualify her to become a teacher among her own tribes. The consciousness of having endeavoured to promote the temporal and spiritual improvement of our fellow beings, and the tribute emanating from hearts thus enlightened will more than compensate all who have so disinterestedly aided them in their feeble efforts.

Signed, M.E. Boulter, Sec'y.  
Cobourg, May 9, 1838. (14)

Life in the Academy had its moments of excitement. One of these, in the autumn of 1839, was exploited by a disgruntled member of the staff, with concern for the reputation of the Institution. The Cobourg Star had published

a letter written by R. Hudspeth, Master of Classics, in which he referred to "the detection of two young ladies concealed, delicacy forbids him to say where, in a young man's apartment." In publicly replying to the letter, Principal Richey expressed concern that the allegation "would present a very ominous aspect to the public." Moreover, he felt that the insinuations of the letter would "deeply implicate the character" of the Academy and by inference his own. He, therefore, described what had actually happened:

One evening between the hours of seven and eight o'clock, a young lady accompanied by her inseparable companion went to the room of HER OWN BROTHER.

On hearing of this breach of rules, Dr. Richey had immediately gone to investigate and on hearing his approach the girls had been induced to conceal themselves as best they could.

The Principal believed that Mr. Hudspeth had been displeased on account of a delay in the payment of his salary caused by "pecuniary embarrassments which this Institution has unhappily had to struggle." There had been "no internal indifference" to Mr. Hudspeth's claims; indeed, the Committee had added £ 25 per annum to his salary. Dr. Richey, therefore, "questioned his motive for communication in the matter of the young ladies." (15)

Early in the new year a letter from Professor Hurlburt assured readers of

the Christian Guardian(16) that the incident of the previous session had had no "lasting effect on the reputation of the Academy."

The community view the vindictive attack, recently made on the Academy, too contemptible to be regarded.

As for the atmosphere within the institution,

All are peacefully and diligently pursuing their various studies with that arduous and innocent mirth so natural to the youthful mind, when first exercised on new and engaging subjects. The number of students is increasing; there being in the Female Department above 20 boarders, more than there were at this time last year.

Less than a month later Rev. A. McNabb, one of the official visitors of the Academy wrote in highly favourable terms about its "operations": (17)

. . . this institution is succeeding beyond what its most sanguine friends could have anticipated.

There was "due observance of the Sabbath."

A portion of the afternoon of the Lord's Day is devoted by Mr. Hurlburt to the religious instruction of the young gentlemen, and a similar course is adopted by the Preceptress in the ladies' department.

Regarding recent examinations, he wrote:

Two classes under the instruction of Miss Barnes, who, I believe, is succeeding well in her new situation, passed a very creditable examination in Geology and History . . . two classes under the effectual instruction of our excellent preceptress, Miss Boulter, made an interesting exhibition of their advancement in Astronomy and the French language.

I have no hesitation in saying that students can make greater proficiency in one term in this institution than they can in the course of a year in any of the common schools.

The Fourth Annual Examinations, held April 14-16, 1840, marked a high point of achievement for the "young ladies."

It was very properly arranged, in accommodation to that modesty which shrinks from prominent exhibition, that the young ladies by whom compositions were prepared were permitted to read them in the Academy, and thus exempted them the embarrassment of appearing on this (the public) platform. To all who heard them I believe they afforded unmingled pleasure. (18)

A week later the Guardian reported that, on the Tuesday evening, classes of young ladies had been examined in Rhetoric and Universal Geography, and As-

tronomy and Arithmetic. On the Wednesday original compositions had been read, by Miss A. Houghton on "The pernicious effects of Novel reading," by Miss E. Boulter on "Taste," and by Miss Mary Jane Beatty on "The Power and Wisdom of God." In the opinion of the reporter:

Both the sentiments and language reflect credit on the understanding and taste of the young ladies.

The examination had included classes of young ladies in Universal History, Physiology, French and English Grammar.

Justice demands - and we cheerfully pay it - a distinct tribute of praise to the young ladies for their habits of application and study and for their honourable improvement. Under the skilful and faithful tuition of Miss Boulter and Miss Barnes they have been augmenting the means of that influence which so essentially and largely contributes to the refinement, harmony and happiness of mankind. (19)

In the spring of 1840, the curriculum of the Female Department, while remaining totally distinct from that of the Male Department, was somewhat broadened. It was "to embrace all the various branches of a complete system of Female Education, both solid and ornamental!"

Some important changes have been made in the Female Department, principally in the division and arrangement of the studies and the

introduction of a greater variety of topics.

The entire system of the Female Department is divided into four compartments:

In the Fourth Department the rudiments of Education are commenced.

In the Third Department the studies of the fourth are reviewed and Arithmetic commenced.

In the First or Highest Department, the studies of the second are reviewed.

Particular attention is paid to the ornamental branches and the most competent and experienced Teachers are engaged.

Lectures, either formal or in connection with the recitation, will be given on all the more important studies such as Roman History, Antiquities and Literature, and in Style, Imagery, Ethics and Antiquities of the Bible; as also in the various branches of Natural Science and English Literature.

The method of instruction being ANALYTIC, the science itself will be taught and the text book regarded as the basis of instruction communicated.

The Male and Female Departments are kept as distinct as it is possible to have them; and that every precaution may be used, the young gentlemen are prohibited visiting those parts of the

building and premises assigned exclusively to the young ladies, under penalty of dismission or expulsion from the Institution. (20)

Meanwhile the number of female students had increased substantially. During the session ending in April, 1840 there had been 62 "young ladies" out of a total student body of 134. (21)

Perhaps subtly forecasting the future, a new note was struck in a communication signed, E. Ryerson, City of Toronto, April 16, 1841:

The Upper Canada Academy has now been in operation five years; during which period 400 youth of the country have been taught within its walls. . . . Were the Academy properly endowed every part of the building could be filled with male students, so as to render a separate establishment in the neighbourhood of a Female Seminary advisable and necessary. (22)

Then came the denouement:

We are gratified to be able to inform our readers that a Bill has just passed the House of Assembly for incorporating the Upper Canada Academy of the Wesleyan Methodist Church under the name and style of Victoria College. The College Senate is to have power to confer the de-

degrees of Bachelor, Master and Doctor in several Arts and Faculties. . . .(23)

The Female Department of the Academy came to an end with the acquiring of this new status for the Institution.

Thus in 1841, when the Upper Canada Academy was incorporated as Victoria College with Egerton Ryerson as its Principal, it became a wholly male institution. It was not until almost the end of the century that co-educational institutions would again meet the needs for the higher education of women. In the meantime women were served by a number of "ladies colleges," most of which were short-lived.

In order not to disrupt the education of female students, it was decided to retain the "female department" at Victoria College for the year 1841-42. In the autumn of 1842, with the blessing of Victoria College officers, Mrs. J.B. Hurlburt and Mrs. D.C. Van Norman two wives of professors of the College opened schools for young ladies in Cobourg. Both schools offered similar curricula, following the pattern of the "female department" of the Academy, and terms of board and tuition were almost identical.

In September 1844, Professor D.C. Van Norman resigned as Professor of Greek and Latin Language and Literature in Victoria College to give full time to the further development of the school which was known as the Cobourg Ladies

Seminary. In October 1845 the Seminary was moved to Hamilton where it was re-opened as Burlington Ladies Academy.

The Academy flourished, attracting both residential and day students, until 1851 when Professor Van Norman was appointed Principal of Rutgers Female Institute in New York. There appears to have been some discussion of the revival of the Academy in Hamilton but, in fact, it was discontinued at that time. In 1847, Professor Hurlburt, who had had considerable influence in the development of the Female Department of Upper Canada Academy, resigned his position in Victoria College and with his wife founded the Adelaide Academy in Toronto. (Mrs Hurlburt's school had been known as the Cobourg Ladies' Academy.) Some years later, after the demise of the Burlington Ladies' Academy, their school was moved to Hamilton.(24)

In September 1858, still another school for "young ladies," called the Wesleyan Female College was established in Dundas, C.W., with the Reverend Robert McGonegal, A.M. as Principal and Miss M.E. Adams as Preceptress "aided by a competent French teacher, lately from Paris, and other suitable assistants." Shortly, however, it was superseded by the Wesleyan Female College which opened in Hamilton in September 1861, with Miss Adams as its first Principal. (This latter school was later referred to as Hamilton College.) It was closed in 1897,

probably as a result of the increasing acceptance of co-educational institutions.

Meanwhile, in 1857, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada had founded the Belleville Seminary in the town of Belleville. (In 1866 its name was changed to Albert College.) From the beginning the seminary had a "ladies' department," similar to the one that had been part of the Upper Canada Academy. Later known as Alexandra College, the school for "young ladies" was an integral part of Albert College.

In September 1874, the Ontario Ladies College was opened in Whitby and in 1877, the Methodist Episcopal Church established Alma College "for young ladies" in St. Thomas. Although the Charter for Alma College was granted in 1877, the school was not formally opened until October 1881. Both the Ontario Ladies' College and Alma College are still in existence (1977), and Albert College continues as a co-educational school in Belleville.

#### NOTES

1. C.B. Sissons, A History of Victoria University, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1952, p. 23.
2. Christian Guardian, March 30, 1836.
3. In 1833 The Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada had united with the British Wesleyan Methodist to form the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada.
4. Op. cit., March 30, 1836.
5. Ibid., May 11, 1836.
6. Ibid., June 29, 1836.
7. Reported in full in Christian Guardian, February 22, 1837.

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., December 27, 1837.
11. Copied by Christian Guardian, May 2, 1838.
12. Op. cit., May 9, 1838.
13. Christian Guardian, May 2, 1838.
14. Ibid., May 9, 1838.
15. Ibid., December 4, 1839.
16. January 22, 1840, "J. Hurlburt's Letter to the Editor" had been dated at "U.C. Academy, January 11, 1840."
17. Christian Guardian, February 19, 1840.
18. Ibid., April 22, 1840.
19. Article signed by J.G. Manly, Christian Guardian, April 29, 1840.
20. Christian Guardian, May 6, 1840. (J. Hurlburt, Outline of Studies, U.C. Academy, Cobourg, April 25, 1840).
21. Ibid.
22. Christian Guardian, April 28, 1841.
23. Ibid., September 1, 1841.
24. I have never been able to discover the exact date of the removal of the Academy to Hamilton, but it must have been at least by 1856. Its first listing in the Directory of the City of Hamilton was in 1856 and its latest in 1858. After that it was apparently obscured by other schools, e.g., the Wesleyan Female College in Dundas, C.W. (see below) and the college of the same name in Hamilton as well as various other private institutions of which there were several in Hamilton.

