# Parading the Children: The Leisure Activities of Ontario's Protestant Sunday Schools, 1840-70

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Nineteenth-century Protestant Sunday schools offered early Ontarians charity, literacy education, and religious instruction. Sunday schools also provided a number of leisure events for their students and supporters to enjoy.[1] These sites of rest and recreation were an important part of the history of the Sunday school and of religious history more generally. As Lynne Marks explains, "religion and leisure are particularly valuable for exploring questions of identity because they were spheres in which late nineteenth-century Ontarians had the widest latitude of choice about their lives."[2]

This was also the case in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although children may have had less power than adults in the choices of recreation they engaged in, a close look at the social activities that were common across Ontario provides important insight into how families chose to spend their leisure time. The shifting patterns in the leisure activities of Sunday schools over this period also reveal the changing role of religion in the everyday lives of Protestant Ontarians. As a site of popular and regular engagement of lay women, men and children, the extra-curricular aspects of Sunday schooling provide a window into how the routine experiences and activities of the laity evolved at this time.

As early as 1840, Sunday school communities in Ontario were holding regular extra-curricular, leisure activities along with their weekly classroom lessons. From nature excursions to parades and picnics, these activities were enjoyed not only by the young pupils, but also their teachers, friends, fellow church members, and other Sunday school

supporters. Between 1840 and 1871, Sunday school groups enjoyed two main types of leisure activities. From 1840 until the late 1850s, nature exploration, primarily through steamboat excursions, was the main activity for groups of all denominations. By the 1860s, however, new activities had surfaced. The Sunday school festival, a daylong event that could include a parade, picnic, speeches, and an outdoor party, was among the most popular. At this time, picnics and parades also became prevalent across the province and across denominations. This paper explores the festivals, picnics, and parades hosted by Sunday schools between 1840 and 1870. It examines how lay participants made sense of these events within the context of a changing Protestant culture.

Historians of Christianity in Ontario have recognized the period between 1840 and 1870 as especially significant in shaping the general Protestant consensus that characterized English-Canadian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his study of this cultural shift, William Westfall demonstrates the divisive sectarianism that defined Upper Canada before cooperation replaced conflict among Protestants, giving rise to what he identifies as a unified Protestant culture.[3] As the Church of England lost its privileged legal position and the evangelical sects became more institutionalized, a consensus emerged and these previously diverging sects came to share an increasingly common ground.

Westfall and others have traced the theological, institutional, intellectual, and even architectural implications of the new Protestant culture that emerged in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[4] Significantly fewer historians have been concerned with how lay people made sense of these cultural changes.[5] Even the changes that affected the religious practice of the laity, the decrease in revivals being one example, continue to be studied from the perspective of the clergy and the institutional churches. Lay people were not only the participants, but also the key organizers of Sunday school leisure activities during the mid-nineteenth century. The particular activities and environments they chose for recreation reflect their understandings of the religious society and culture in which they lived. Whether children were gathered on a steamboat absorbing the landscape of the Great Lakes, or marching with banners in the streets of their neighbourhoods, these rituals were rich with cultural symbols and meaning. This discussion of the changing patterns of Sunday school leisure activities provides insight into how lay women, men, and children experienced the shift towards a unified Protestant culture that occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century.

A survey of fifteen newspapers from across Ontario reveals that the most common Sunday school leisure activity in the 1840s was the steamboat excursion.[6] While a detailed analysis of these outdoor excursions is beyond the scope of this paper, a few observations are important to note here. Sunday school pupils, their teachers, families, and friends, all participated in Sunday school excursions. These trips were organized by individual schools as well as by groups. Schools of a particular region frequently came together for an annual steamer ride in support of their schools. Fundraising was almost always a goal of these excursions and nearly all of the announcements examined identify the purpose of the trip as a way to earn financial support for the host school. An 1841 announcement in Kingston's *Chronicle and Gazette* provides a typical example, promoting a Sunday school excursion to "Lake on the Mountain" on the "elegant and spacious" steamer Brockville. Tickets for the trip were five shillings for adults, which included the passage as well as dinner on board. Children from the hosting Wesleyan Methodist Sunday school rode for free, and children from other Sunday schools were admitted for half the price of an adult ticket.[7]

It is hard to determine the actual number of participants in these excursions as the majority of details come from announcements for upcoming trips, rather than reports following the actual events. However, the reports that do reveal these details can provide some insight. The fewest number of participants on a Sunday school steamer excursion was 100, made up of children, teachers and friends, at the Knox Church Sabbath school excursion and picnic in 1854.[8] The largest group recorded was 660, reported at a Universalist excursion at Collingwood Harbour.[9] In general, it appears these steamers were quite full on the days of the Sunday school trips, with the average number of participants ranging between 300 and 400. Even at reduced rates for adults and visitors, the profits made at these benefit rides had the potential to be quite substantial.

Sunday school excursions were both popular and successful. Schools often made the steamboat ride a regular, annual fundraiser, which indicates that they were profitable events. The majority of mid-century Sunday schools in Ontario would not have been in a financial position to continue these efforts if they were not gathering considerable funds from the proceeds. In the 1840s and 1850s, leadership and management of Sunday schools were in the hands of lay managers and superintendents. Given that the numerous religious organizations competing for financial donations at this time, the commitment that the laity demonstrated in supporting their

Sunday schools, and the creativity they used to gather continued financial support, are especially striking.[10]

Evidence of lay leadership continued with the excursions themselves. There is no evidence of ministers participating in the steamer excursions of the 1840s and 1850s. Not only was the clergy missing from these events, but also absent were any explicit religious practices. These were common pleasure excursions, very similar to what tourists would enjoy. There appear to have been no singing of hymns, or public prayers, or stories of missionaries. If any explicit religious rituals did occur on these excursions, they were not advertised or celebrated.

Children played a particular role on these Sunday school day-trips. They were positioned as observers, viewing and exploring the natural world that surrounded them as they travelled through a waterway or a park. The children were participants, in the same way as the adult guests. Unlike the later Sunday school socials of the 1860s and 1870s, on outdoor excursions, children's behaviour was not evaluated, and there was no element of performance or entertainment that was expected from the children. On these trips the children were the observers rather than the performers.

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s excursions on steamers were the most popular activities for Sunday school groups in Canada West. Although these steamer trips occasionally included a picnic in a nearby park, the main focus of the activity was the trip itself and the enjoyment and exploration of the landscape. A shift to more local social activities, such as parades and outdoor parties, had occurred by the early 1860s. The first year that advertisements for Sunday school parties and picnics outnumbered those for Sunday school excursions was 1859. In the newspapers that were examined here, the number of steamboat excursions reported or announced decreased from fourteen between 1843 and 1850, to five between 1863 and 1870. The details of the specific events help explain this shift in leisure activities, from the water to the land, and provide some insight into what led to this transition, as well as how it was connected to broader changes in the Protestant culture.

The most common social event after 1859 was the Sunday school festival. The festival was a daylong occurrence that could include a parade, picnic, entertainment, and lectures. Occasionally these specific activities happened individually, but the norm was to celebrate them all together.

Parades and processions in public streets were increasingly common in mid-nineteenth century North America. Workers, fraternal orders,

religious groups, ethnic groups, civic leaders, and the military each marched through the streets. Public processions were a chance for early Ontarians to demonstrate their citizenship and claim their presence in public space. Whether it was Catholics making their presence known through a St. Patrick's Day parade, or solemn processions for politicians' funerals, public parades through the streets of a large city or small town were more than simply entertainment.[11] Messages, images, and symbols were communicated through the interaction between performers and spectators.

Parades were an opportunity for disenfranchised minorities, whether working-class or Irish Catholics, to become the public majorities for an afternoon, demonstrating the size of their community and proudly displaying their collective identity. Other times, parades were used to reinforce traditional discourses of British loyalty and imperialism, such as those that took place during the Prince of Wales' visit to Canada West in 1860, when the celebrations extended beyond the physical procession and across the province through frequent published reports on the events.[12] Performers and organizers of nineteenth-century parades had intentional messages to present to their audiences. The parades may not have always been effective in getting their message across, but they were always an exercise in putting one's identity on display.

This was also the case with Sunday school parades. Across Ontario, annual Sunday school parades gave communities a chance to put their local Sunday schools on display. Children marched with their teachers, while parents and others watched from the side.[13] The Sunday school parade was a chance for young people to demonstrate their character for all to see.

Sunday school parades included between 100 and 500 children, depending on the number of schools involved. These events were frequently joint efforts and it was quite common for one school to host the event, while other schools were invited to join. A typical example is the 1861 parade hosted by the Wesleyan Methodist Sunday school in Buttonville. The two neighbouring schools joined their parade. This cooperation between the schools was reported as being "a very pleasant feature" that was "in every way commendable."[14] An ad for the 1859 Sabbath school festival in Richmond Hill, hosted by both the Methodist and Presbyterian churches in that area, was equally optimistic, noting "we earnestly hope that all will give to this soiree their earnest support; for if there is one thing more than another that we delight to see, it is the

different denominations of Christ's church, united together as they will be on this occasion."[15] A tea meeting in the same town later that year also promoted this sentiment: "we hope this union tea [ . . . ] will not be the last, but that other villages, where there are two or more branches of Christ's church, will unite together in fellowship and show the world that they 'love one another.'"[16]

This cooperation across denominations was commonplace within the Sunday school community. In fact, it was quite representative of the broader North American Sunday school movement. Ontario's Sunday schools, particularly before 1850, were often founded by groups of laymen of different affiliations. Even as denomination-specific schools increased, most Sunday school workers remained connected through a local Sunday school union, usually a branch of the Canada Sunday School Union. Sunday school workers of different denominations all made use of the agents, resources, tracts, and conventions that served the general Protestant community. The parades, along with the festivals, were more often interdenominational, and inter-congregational, than not.

As with the Buttonville example, marching with banners was the common sight; and music from a local band was the common sound of Sunday school parades. Girls usually marched ahead of the boys and, occasionally, the children were arranged by age, with the oldest at the back of each gender's group.[17] Teachers marched alongside their classes and were especially welcome. One report of a parade in Goderich in 1851 explains "we felt extremely happy in seeing so many of the teachers in the procession."[18]

The main banners carried by the children indicated the name of their Sunday school. Acting as such clear representatives of their school, not just any pupils were chosen to carry the banners. A parade in Aurora in 1860 consisted of three schools, and the children who carried the school banners were those who had won prizes at the public examinations held earlier that day.[19]

Along with the Sunday school or church name, banners in parades also bore various "Scriptural mottoes," including "faith," "hope," "charity," "love."[20] Other common messages on banners were "God save the Queen," the popular "Lord remember us in the days of our youth," and "temperance."[21] The messages that these banners presented to the children and the crowd were similar to those of the Sunday school classroom: general Protestant and scriptural messages, British loyalty, character building, and temperance. All of these were lessons that were understood

by the dominant culture of nineteenth-century Ontario to be desirable and respectable.

In addition to the words on banners, the behaviour of the participants also demonstrated their appropriate character and respectability. These processions were "marshalled" in order and marched in an organized fashion through the "principal streets in the village," usually ending at the picnic location near the hosting church.[22] Parades were an important part of Sunday school festivals and usually the only part that spectators could watch for free. Organizers used the parade to demonstrate the admirable qualities in their pupils in hopes of attracting others to their schools, attaining continued support from families and friends of the pupils, as well as more general evangelical goals.

After a parade through the town, Sunday school pupils, along with their parents, teachers, and friends, returned to the grounds of the host church. Often the entertainment continued for the guests, performed by the students of the host school. Public examinations of the Sunday school pupils were occasionally held as part of the summer festivals, but some schools held the exams on other occasions and most Sunday schools did not examine their pupils at all.

More common than examinations were dialogues and recitations performed by the young pupils. Mid-century Sunday scholars were quite familiar with reciting scripture. This activity occurred weekly, as pupils demonstrated their memorization of a selected Bible passage in their classrooms. Sunday schools used the number of verses recited weekly, and annually, to measure the success of their school. Given the pride connected with a pupil's memorization skills, and the credit this gave to the school, it is not surprising that the best students were presented to the crowd at Sunday school social gatherings.

Other non-scriptural dialogues (i.e., recitations) were also performed. While sources are extremely vague on the specific pieces, it is likely that they were moral poetry or literature, commonly found in Sunday school classrooms, periodicals, and libraries. A successful performance by the children could gain great praise. *The York Herald* reported on a Sunday school festival in 1861, noting that "the effective manner in which the children recited their pieces and dialogues was of the very first order, as if such a thing of preference, in any of the doings of the children, this part of the entertainment certainly deserves it."[23]

An equally glowing report was given in 1859 following a similar Sunday school festival in Richmond Hill. It read: "[there were] several

dialogues recited by the children, they were very amusing and reflect the greatest credit on the children."[24] The quality of the teacher could also be measured by how the children performed. A report on the Sunday school festival in Vaughan in 1861 recalls that, "after eating and drinking, the children and friends retired to the chapel, where several pieces were recited by the children, in a manner that reflected great credit to the teachers."[25]

For many parents and other adult community members, these recitations and exams were a rare look into the Sunday school classroom. Their continued support of the local schools could potentially be won or lost based on the success of the children's performance. It appears, however, that these performances were almost always displays of the top students, and the published reviews were unanimously positive.

These demonstrations were not just for the adults in the crowd. Children would watch their peers perform to applause and praise as well.[26] The model students chosen to perform or recite publically were just that – models. Behaviour, as much as skill, was on display; and the lessons on how to behave were just as clear.

One hundred and thirty children, along with their families, attended the 1861 examinations in Aurora's Anglican Trinity Church as part of a daylong festival. In each class two prizes were awarded, one for "best answerer" and another for most regular attendance.[27] Punctuality and regular attendance were key social values promoted through Sunday schooling. They were highlighted here, at the Sunday school festival, in front of a large crowd.

Guests at Sunday school festivals and parties could also expect to be entertained by music. Local bands frequently accompanied children's parades through the town. Even more common, however, was the singing of the children themselves, once the group was gathered after the parade.[28] The songs performed by the children tended to be about their love for the Sunday school. For example, the children of a Toronto Methodist Sunday school sang "I Love the Sabbath School" at their annual festival in 1867 – which included the following lyrics:

I learn my duty there, my cross to bear,
And in its pages bright and fair
I learn to raise my heart in praise,
On these precious, precious Sabbath days
I love my teacher dear,
I'll treasure what I hear,

The Sunday School to me a guide shall be,
A comfort o'er troubled sea;
How sweet to raise our cheerful lays
On these precious, precious Sabbath days.[29]

Newspaper accounts of the singing were not as exciting as their reports on the dialogues and other performances. The former tended towards short and simple commentary: "the singing by the scholars was very melodious" or "the children [. . . ] sang very sweetly."[30] In 1866 attendees at the picnic of St. Paul's and Christ Church's Sunday schools in London were entertained by the 60th Rifle Band, who "performed a well selected program of enlivening airs."[31]

From tea, to a picnic, to a feast, food and drink were always part of Sunday school festivals. Eating sweets and drinking tea were important to Sunday school social events. Picnics included various cakes and tea was served at almost every social, whether it was a picnic or party. Tea parties were very common Sunday school social events, as they could be held year-round, unlike the outdoors activities in summertime. For example, "friends of the Sabbath school" in Markham celebrated New Year's Day together in 1859 at an event where over 400 people "sat down to an excellent tea. And after that was over, the children belonging to the schools recited several amusing and instructive pieces."[32]

Whether a tea party in the winter, or part of an outdoor festival in the summer, serving and drinking tea was a highly structured event to be taken very seriously. Advertisements and notices for upcoming events always noted the time tea was being served and encouraged those invited to be "precise" if they were to join.[33] At most parties where tea was served, the children were served first and the adult guests followed. A report from Sunday school festival in 1859 notes that 200 children from local Wesleyan and Presbyterian Sunday schools enjoyed their tea, after which "about 300 visitors and friends of Sabbath schools partook of same."[34]

Along with tea, cakes, tarts, and pies were often served. Baking was the main way that women contributed to Sunday school social events and the description of their participation is very revealing about their place in the Sunday school community, at least from the perspective of those doing the reporting. For example, the *Young Churchman* printed an article about an 1851 festival in Kemptville that described the preparations in a typical way: "for many days previous to the one fixed upon for the festival, signs of preparation were seen going forward [ . . . ] mothers and sisters busily

employed in baking cakes, pies, tarts, and other good things."[35]

Good food could reflect positively on the women of a church. A festival in Markham in 1861 was remembered as having food that was "of the very best quality" which "reflected great credit of the mechanical skills of the ladies in connection with the church."[36] In 1860 an account of a Sunday school party in the *York Herald* similarly noted the work of the women, reporting that the treats were "prepared by our Canadian mothers and daughters."[37]

These reports illustrate the position of women at the social events. Women who participated were seen as ideal Canadians. This included being members of, or having close connections with, a church. They were also consistently relegated to the periphery – they were always "sisters," "mothers," or "daughters." The food was always at the center.

More time was dedicated in published accounts to celebrating the food than any other aspects of these activities. For example, a report of a picnic in Newmarket explains that, "the tea and refreshments were excellent – much better than usual on such occasions."[38] Another report of a festival in 1851 describes the picnic as a feast where "the whole village seemed to be taking a holiday."[39]

It is clear, however, that the "whole village" did not take part in a day of socializing with the local Sunday school community. Although reports leave no explicit description of who was absent from these festivals, some inferences can be made. The vast majority of Sunday school festivals and tea parties were fundraisers and required guests to purchase a ticket. The usual cost was twenty-five cents (one shilling) for adults and twelve cents (six pence) for children. While this was not an outrageous price for many, working-class people would have had to make a serious effort to attend.[40]

Parades were often the only part of the daylong festivities that were available for spectators to watch at no charge. Money raised at these events was often used for one particular part of the Sunday school, which was usually identified in the ad. One successful festival reported that, "the result financially, was quite satisfactory, and no doubt, will be of great use by way of purchasing a new library for the school."[41] Some schools used the funds raised for items that were not provided by the church or Sunday school union. For example, St. Andrew's Sunday school in Maple used the proceeds from their Sunday school soiree in 1861 for rewards for the children.[42]

Aside from the ticket costs, other factors could limit participation.

These events were held on weekdays, usually Thursday or Friday, in the early afternoon. More cultural constraints existed as well – the need to arrive in proper attire or for women to bring food. As Lynne Marks explains for small town Ontario later in the nineteenth century, these social pressures often kept working-class women in particular away from mainstream (middle-class) church social life.[43] This was likely also true in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario. Even if the children of working-class parents attended the school on Sunday, their parents may not have been part of the social community surrounding it.

At these festivals, women appear in the historical record as baking and bringing the food and tea to share. While the "ladies" were busy preparing the cakes, the gentlemen were given their own task. These events almost always included a lecture, speech or sermon. Men always gave these addresses.

At festivals where congregations of different denominations gathered, often two or more men spoke, reflecting the diversity of the crowd. For example, when Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians gathered for an outdoor Sunday school party in Thornhill in 1860, one Methodist and one Presbyterian minister addressed them.[44] At a Sunday school party hosted by both the Methodists and Presbyterian schools in Richmond Hill in 1859, there were "addresses [delivered] by ministers and gentlemen of both denominations accompanied by recitations by the children."[45]

On other occasions, the host school arranged the speaker. Reverend Thomas Baker spoke at an 1859 Sunday school picnic in Newmarket, hosted by his Congregational church's Sunday school – even though supporters, and likely pupils, of a nearby interdenominational school were in attendance.[46] Church of England Sunday schools often brought a bishop to speak. The *Young Churchman* reports the Bishop of Toronto attending a Sunday school festival in Goderich in 1851, where he "addressed [the children] on the lawn, in the most impressive yet simple language."[47] Similar details are revealed in a report of an 1859 picnic in Newmarket that explained "we have not room for speeches; but suffice it to say, they were of a truly Christian character, while friendship and goodwill everywhere manifested itself."[48] Addresses from these men were intended for the children as well as adult guests, and covered topics including the duties of Sunday school teachers, the history of the Sunday school, and the success of Sunday schools internationally.[49]

From 1859 to 1870, picnics, parades, and festivals outnumbered all

other Sunday school events. These events increased rapidly throughout this period and were widespread across the province by the 1870s. Like the steamer excursions of the 1840s and 1850s, Sunday school parades, picnics, and parties were popular events across Ontario. Both the growing urban centres and more rural communities hosted these types of events regularly and success was achieved when they raised financial support and provided social engagements to members of the Sunday school community. In fact, these events persisted into the twentieth century, and although church picnics have moved under the authority of specific congregations, rather than a community Sunday school, similar leisure activities are important parts of church communities even today.[50]

A number of factors distinguish these parties and parades from the earlier excursions of the 1840s and early 1850s. These differences point to how the laity understood the emerging Protestant culture that was taking shape in mid-nineteenth century Ontario. The most obvious observation is the increased presence of clergy and church buildings. Although the leisure events remained under the control of the laity, they occurred under the close eye of the minister. Before the 1850s, such surveillance was not possible in most communities, as ministers were overworked, and many areas did not have a permanent minister. The increase in clergymen that occurred in the 1850s was a result of increased immigration and the policies within the evangelical churches to support a more educated and stable ministry.[51]

Along with permanent ministers came more permanent church buildings. Historians have noted the expansion in church membership and church buildings in the late 1850s.[52] These new spaces were noticed by the laity, who no longer had to journey beyond their neighbourhood for Sunday school sponsored events. Both the church-grounds and the interior church space became central to Sunday school leisure activities. In the case of Sunday school events, these church sites became more community and public spaces, as cross-congregational, and even interdenominational, events occurred frequently on their premises.

The role of children at Sunday school parades and festivals was also quite distinct from the period of the nature excursions. Unlike the role of observer that was expected from children on their nature trips, Sunday school parades and parties introduced the children as the performers and they became the entertainment. Whether marching through the streets, singing hymns, or reciting their memorized scripture passages, children were expected to demonstrate their religious, moral, and social character.

While the role of children is notably absent from the historiography of public processions and parades in nineteenth-century North America, their place in these public spectacles is quite significant. As with other parades of the time, teachers, parents, and Sunday school leaders (along with the children who cooperated energetically) had intentional messages to convey through this public display. Through parades in particular, but other activities as well, Sunday school promoters were displaying the respectability of their schools and, by extension, of their churches. They were also offering up a general message of evangelism, hoping to inspire new settlers, "backsliders," and the unconverted with the messages on their signs and in their songs. Equally important was the display of ideal citizenship that children were to embrace as they marched in order through the streets. The parade was usually the only aspect of the Sunday school festival that was free for all to observe. There is little doubt that the organizers used this opportunity to demonstrate the ideal roles of proper citizenship to new immigrants, the working class, and non-British people who may have been in attendance.

The children were front-and-centre at these events in the late 1850s and 1860s, but so was religion. While no evidence of explicit religious activity can be found on the nature excursions of the 1840s and 50s, the parades and picnics of the following decade had plenty. These events included scriptural messages on banners that were carried through parades and performances of Bible recitations and hymns. Even the simplest picnic or tea party included a sermon, an address on a scriptural passage, or a Christian lesson on the work of missionaries or temperance activists. The increased presence of ministers may be part of the reason for this increased religious expression, but the changing patterns of Protestantism and the broader shifts in culture were also at play.

More than a direct Christian message was being promoted at these leisure events. A particular model of social respectability was also constructed and reinforced through these activities. This desired performance of social respectability can be seen in nearly all aspects of the Sunday school parade, party, picnic, and festival. What is most significant about these public displays of respectability is that they differ not only from the leisure activities of earlier decades, but also from the Sunday school classroom.

One characteristic of this respectability was the gender roles assigned to men and women. In Sunday school classrooms women held the majority of teaching positions, as well as a number of other leadership

positions within the school and community. In the early to mid-nineteenth century in particular, women had a good deal of power within their Sunday school communities. Even in schools where older (teenage) boys had their own class, it was not unusual for their teacher to be a woman. While the typical Sunday school classroom featured a woman speaker, the related Sunday school festivals were different. As we have seen, at these festivals it was solely the men who addressed the crowds; women were delegated to baking and bringing the food.

Similarly, gender segregation among children was another issue on which there was a significant distinction between what occurred within and beyond the classroom. Sunday school classrooms were almost always co-educational, particularly before the teenage years, but even sometimes after. Boys and girls sat side-by-side and participated in the same classroom activities. In parades, however, we see that girls and boys did not walk side-by-side; these parades often segregated the children by gender by placing the girls in the front and the boys following behind them. Again, gender roles were not defined in the same way in these two spaces. When on display, gender segregation became a priority as respectability in public became an increasing concern.

Like gender, class-based integration was also practiced in the majority of Sunday schools in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario. Charity was an early goal of Sunday schools and the inclusion of working-class children remained a priority, even as more middle-class children attended in the 1840s. Through providing literacy education or through charity groups distributing clothes, Sunday schools did reach out to working-class children. The festivals and activities, however, were much more exclusive, primarily because of the obligatory ticket to enter. This price was often out of reach to many working-class community members. Other social constraints, described above, also indicate that preparation and participation was limited those in the middle class. Religious identity, along with a social respectability that defined roles according to gender and class, were all on display in the parades, picnics, and parties that Sunday schools hosted in the 1860s. For the first time, the lay participants and organizers saw a need to demonstrate these qualities, along with an explicit evangelism, through their children.

By the 1840s, Sunday schools had become widespread across Ontario. These schools were voluntary endeavours and their leaders needed to be creative in raising financial support from their lay advocates at a time when competing efforts were growing and resources for many

settlers were scarce. However important this financial aspect was, the daytrips and picnics on church grounds were more than simply fundraising efforts; they were cultural events shared between congregations, denominations, and often generations. These activities represent more than the hobbies and interests of the mid-nineteenth-century laity. A close look at the changing patterns in the spaces and practices of these events also demonstrates a changing religious culture.

From 1840 to 1859, the steamer excursion was the preferred activity for Sunday school groups across the province. These pleasure trips focused on nature and the environment, giving both child and adult participants a chance to reflect on the landscape of their colony. While there is little doubt that many participants interpreted this landscape through their Protestant worldview, these excursions were not primarily religious events. There were no ministers present, no hymns sung, no prayers for salvation, and no one distributing tracts or Bibles. This lack of religious excitement is not surprising given the context of Protestant Ontario in the 1840s. Evangelicals preferred outdoor revivals, class meetings, or exchanges with a traveling preacher to meet their religious needs; and the established churches knew their message was being promoted not only through their institutions, but also through the official channels of the state.

The religious culture of the province, however, was in a period of transformation in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Changing patterns of leisure activities provide one avenue through which the experience of the laity during this shift can be explored. Steamboat excursions declined as the option of choice for Sunday school socials. They were replaced by a new set of activities of an entirely different nature. The picnics, parades, and parties of the 1860s brought pupils, religion, and social respectability to the forefront.

As children marched in an orderly and eagerly way through their streets, evangelical banners in their hands, they demonstrated an increasing concern for society's salvation – an increasingly dominant theology of Social Christianity taken up by both the evangelical and more formal churches. As schools displayed the recitation skills of their top young students, they reflected the increasing desire of evangelicals to be seen as rational and intellectual, rather than overly emotional. As Anglican ministers spoke to the members of all the nearby churches while they enjoyed a picnic, they expressed their common Protestant goals for the youth of the nation.

Most significantly, these church communities had become increas-

ingly concerned with their public displays of social respectability. Their children were seen as well behaved and orderly. Men and women, as well as boys and girls, performed clearly prescribed gender roles and middle-class inclusiveness was practiced. This shift to a social Christianity, the disestablishment of the Church of England in Canada West, and the increased institutionalization of the Methodist Church were not theological and ecclesiastical changes that occurred beyond the everyday life of Protestant Ontarians. The emergence of a new and more unified Protestant consensus also shaped the recreational experiences of families across the province.

A boy who enjoyed a Sunday school trip on a steamboat over the waterways of the St. Lawrence River in the 1840s would not share that experience with his own children. Twenty years later, Sunday school events were held on land, and in public, in a province where a new Protestant culture had emerged.

***Endnotes***

1. For purposes of this paper, "Ontario" will refer to present-day Ontario, with the understanding that during the period of study this area was official called Canada West (1841-1867).

2. Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 5.

3. William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

4. Westfall, *Two Worlds*; Micheal Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1769 to 1990*, ed. George Rawlyk (Burlington, ON: Welch Publishing Co., 1990), 88-89; and John Webster Grant, *A Profusion Of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 152-85.

5. The decline of revivals and the removal of class meetings as a requirement of membership in the Methodist Church are the main topics of studies on lay experience. See Marguerite Van Die, "A March of Victory and Triumph of Praise of 'The Beauty of Holiness': Laity and the Evangelical Impulse in Canadian Methodism, 1800-1884," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 73-89; and Marguerite Van Die, "'The Marks of a

Genuine Revival': Religion, Social Change, Gender, and Community in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (1998): 524-63.

6. Unless otherwise indicated, general statements about steamboat excursion activity are based on announcements and reports featured in the following newspapers and periodicals available on the Our Digital World (ourontario.ca) and Early Canadiana Online (eco.canadiana.ca) databases: *York Herald*, *New Era*, *York Commonwealth*, *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette*, *The Watchman*, *Young Churchman*, *Sunday School Guardian*, *Canadian Ecclesiastical Gazette*, *British Whig* (Kingston)*, Canadian Steamboat*, *Argus*, *Daily News*, *Comet*, *London Free Press*, and *Canadian Free Press.*

7. *Chronicle and Gazette*, 21 August 1841.

8. *The Canadian (Steamboat),* 31 March 1854.

9. *Comet*, 9 August 1860.

10. Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 103-7; and Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 116-17 and 146-47.

11. For the meaning of other nineteenth-century parades in Canada see Michael Cottrell. "St. Patrick's Day Parades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto: A Study of Immigrant Adjustment and Elite Control," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 25, no. 49 (1992): 57-73; Peter Goheen, "Symbols in the Street," *Urban History Review* 18, no. 3 (1990): 237-43; and Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, "The Craftmen's Spectacle: Labour Day Parades in Canada, The Early Years," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 29, no. 58 (1996): 357-89.

12. Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

13. *York Herald*, 16 July 1860; *Young Churchman*, 1 September 1851; and *York Herald*, 9 September 1859.

14. *York Herald*, 15 November 1861.

15. *York Herald*, 26 August 1859.

16. *York Herald*, 9 September 1859.

17. *Young Churchman*, 1 November 1851.

18. *Young Churchman*, 1 September 1851.

19. *York Herald*, 16 July 1860.

20. *Young Churchman*, 1 November 1851.

21. *York Herald*, 15 November 1861; *Young Churchman*, 1 September 1851; and *Young Churchman*, 1 November 1851.

22. *York Herald*, 16 July 1860; and *Young Churchman,* 1 November 1851.

23. *York Herald*, 15 November 1861.

24. *York Herald*, 9 September 1859.

25. *York Herald,* 25 October 1861.

26. *York Herald*, 16 July 1860.

27. *York Herald*, 16 July 1860.

28. *York Herald,* 9 September 1859; *York Herald,* 16 July 1860; and *York Herald*, 26 August 1859.

29. *Hymns to be Sung by the Scholars of the Berkeley Street W.M Sabbath School, at Their Anniversary on Sunday and Monday Oct. 14 & 15* (Toronto: Globe Printing Company, 1867), 9.

30. *New Era*, 15 July 1859.

31. *London Free Press*, 10 August 1866.

32. *York Commonwealth*, 7 January 1859.

33. *York Herald*, 13 September 1861.

34. *York Herald,* 9 September 1859.

35. *Young Churchman*, 1 November 1851.

36. *York Herald*, 15 November 1861.

37. *York Herald,* 6 July 1860.

38. *New Era*, 15 July 1859.

39. *Young Churchman*, 1 November 1851.

40. The average wage for unskilled labourers in the 1840s was just over fifty cents (two shillings) per day. Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," *Labour/Le Travail* 7 (1981): 15.

41. *York Herald*, 15 November, 1861.

42. *York Herald,* 13 September 1861.

43. See Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*.

44. *York Herald,* 6 July 1860.

45. *York Herald,* 9 September 1859.

46. *New Era,* 15 July 1859.

47. *Young Churchman*, 1 September 1851.

48. *New Era*, 15 July 1859.

49. *Young Churchman*, 1 September 1851.

50. Twentieth-century church picnics have been especially significant in immigrant communities in Canada. See Joshua C. Blank, "Pitching, Pies, and Piety: Early Twentieth Century St. Hedwig's Parish Picnics," *CCHA Historical Studies* 76 (2010): 61-85.

51. Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 153-69.

52. Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 152-53.