‘Which nought but the light of knowledge can dispel’:

Experiencing Blindness in Late Nineteenth-Century North America

Joanna L. Pearce

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation contributes to knowledge by expanding our understanding of the way that blindness was defined and experienced in the nineteenth century. Many of our modern ideas of blindness are still shaped by ideas of helplessness and dependency that were described and defined by schools for the blind during their establishment in the late nineteenth century. These schools relied on fundraising that required the posterchild of blindness to be pathetic and helpless without the interventions of school officials and dedicated separate schools for the blind. However, examining the life experiences of blind people counteracts some of this narrative. While those who wrote autobiographies were a minority, they reflect an understanding and lived experience of blindness that is not described in the work of institutions. By examining these autobiographies next to the main narratives of schools for the blind, we raise questions about the effectiveness of dedicated schooling for the blind in the nineteenth century, interrogating and complicating their narratives. By looking at these documents written by the blind themselves, this dissertation also brings to light the community of blind children and adults that has not been well-examined by previous studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT II

TABLE OF CONTENTS III

Chapter One: Introduction: This Afflicted Class **1**
Historiography 5

Sources **16**
Methods 18
Summary of Chapters 21

Chapter One: Children of Darkness: Perceptions of the Blind in the Nineteenth Century **25**
Introduction 25
Attitudes Toward the Blind Before the American Civil War 28
Professional Discussions of the Blind in Ontario 49
Conclusion 61

Chapter Two: Which Nought but the Light of Knowledge Can Dispel: Establishing Education and Creating Networks **62**
Introduction 62
Establishment of Education for Blind Children in the United States 63
Samuel Gridley Howe and the Perkins School for the Blind 64
The New York Institution for the Blind and William B. Wait 66
The Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind and Julius Reinhold Friedlander 68
Blind Education in Ontario 69
Compulsory Education in Ontario 70
Establishing the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) 73
The Networks of Educators of the Blind 86
Conclusion 95

Chapter Three: Fear of the Blind Beggar – Teaching Blind Children to Reject Charity **97**
Introduction 97
Debates about the Purpose of Educating the Blind 103
Fear of the Blind Beggar 114
Associations with the Beggars 118
Vocational Education 121
Acceptance of Poor Workers 122
A Moral Education 125
Nature Study and Faith 126
Methods of Instruction 129
Responses of the Blind 139
Workshops as a Solution 141
Alumni Reflections 149
Conclusion 151

Chapter Four: The Tactile Babble Under Which the Blind Have Hitherto Groaned: Dots, Lines, and Literacy for the Blind in Nineteenth-Century North America 154
Introduction 154
The History of Raised Print Text 155
The Braille System 165
Boston Line Type 170
The Moon System of Embossed Reading 172
New York Point 176
Conclusion 181

Chapter Five: From a Blind Girl's Pen – The Lives of Blind Women and Girls 182
Introduction 182
"A Constant Sunbeam in the House" – Blind Girls as Viewed by Sighted Male Educators 183
Can the Blind Girl Speak? – Writing by Blind Women & Girls 193
Mary L. Day 195
Mary A. Niemeyer 201
Annie Kane 205
The purpose of women's writing 208
Blind Girls as Letter Writers 212
"Of course she is without friends" – Bertha Capps 212
Louise Deschenes – Girls as Poster Children 221
Janet Barr – A Disappointing Girl 227
Relationships Formed at School 230
Conclusion 238

CONCLUSION 241

BIBLIOGRAPHY 247

Primary Sources – Archival Collections 247
Ottawa 247
Philadelphia 247
Toronto 247
Watertown, MA 252

Primary Sources – Medical Reports 253

Primary Sources – Reports from Inspectors, Institutions, and Government Officials 254

Primary Sources – Biographies, Autobiographies, Fiction, and Poetry 261

Primary Sources – Newspapers 262

Secondary Sources (Books and Journal Articles) 262

Chapter One: Introduction: This Afflicted Class

After leaving the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) in 1907, Bertha Capps hoped to become a nurse. Although her education had focused instead on reading, writing, and housekeeping skills, she had spent a few years living in the home of a friend's mother who was ill and required care. Throughout her time at her friend's home, Bertha had been a diligent caregiver, ensuring that Kathleen Wolsey, her friend's mother, was nursed effectively through her illness. As a result, Bertha believed that the Toronto Children's Aid Society (CAS), her legal guardian, should be willing to pay for her to attend nursing school. The CAS ultimately rejected her appeals, not because she was blind, but because of her lack of moral character. Bertha's family, who had abandoned Bertha at a young age due to poverty and her blindness, included her older sister, who was working as a prostitute, and her mother, who had multiple children outside of wedlock. As a result, the CAS limited her contact with her living family and declined to support her going on to further education after leaving the school for the blind.

While the OIEB lost track of Bertha shortly after this rejection, her life story did not follow the expected path of a blind girl. She was neither left in the home of a family member and expected to do simple chores, nor did she end up in a poor asylum. Instead, Bertha, like many of her contemporaries who attended schools for the blind across North America, became a wife and mother, contributing to her own family through the skills she had learned at the school for the blind she attended for five years. While it appears she did not become a nurse, she married Roy Wilson in 1912 and by 1930 was living in Florida, with seven surviving children and two grandchildren. She died at age 78, six years after her husband's death, survived by her children and grandchildren.

Bertha was by no means alone as a blind person seeking a professional career after leaving formal education at one of North America's many schools for the blind. While the common misconception is that all blind people throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lived quiet lives of poverty, with little self-advocacy in the pre-World War One period, examining the lived experiences of blind people make clear that this was not always the case. While it is true that blindness during this period did correlate with poverty, that was often due to the circumstances under which a child or adult acquired blindness rather than being specifically related to their vision. Autobiographies, letters, and reports written by the blind themselves show a variety of skills and occupations that blind people developed both in and outside of the residential schools established for their education. While reports about the experience of blind people written by sighted educators presented the charges in their schools as living lives of darkness (thus justifying the need for both charitable and government funding), blind children were often contributors to their families and blind adults often supported themselves – albeit not without struggle – through means other than through begging or family and government assistance.

This dissertation expands our understanding of the way that blindness was defined and experienced in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North America. Examining the life experiences of blind people counteracts some of this narrative of helplessness and dependency that schools for the blind found it necessary to describe to the public and to governments. While blind people who wrote autobiographies, left behind letters, or wrote about their experiences for publications were a minority, they reflect an understanding and lived experience of blindness that is not described in the work of their educational institutions. As well, while the nature of their disability means that tracing blindness through the census is a challenge, examining census

records still demonstrates the successes and failures of graduates of these institutions beyond what was reported in the annual school reports. By examining these various documents next to the main narratives of schools for the blind, we can assess the effectiveness of dedicated schooling for the blind in the nineteenth century, questioning and complicating their narratives. By looking at these documents written by the blind themselves, this dissertation also brings to light the community of blind children and adults that has not been well-examined by previous studies.

This dissertation highlights the agency of blind people before the establishment of veterans' associations for the blind. Historiography has mostly focused on war-blinded veterans, the establishment of schools and other institutions for the blind, the men who established and promoted these institutions, or famous blind people such as Louis Braille, Helen Keller, and Laura Bridgman, while excluding the daily existence of the blind both inside and outside of schools. This lapse removes civilian blind people as actors or shapers of their own destiny within the historical narrative, instead presenting them as either the recipients of charity through these schools or as exceptional, heroic examples of blind lives. Blind people were actors, not just acted upon by outsiders, and a close examination of their lives makes this point clear.

The key research question of this dissertation is: What shaped the lives of blind people in the nineteenth century? The sub-questions are: How were blind people advocates in their own lives? How were the attitudes towards blindness shaped by the schools? Were the schools correct in their statements about the blind? How were families shaped or unshaped by attitudes towards blindness prior to the First World War? How did the assumptions that the mostly sighted educators made about their charges affect the developments of curriculums at the schools, and how did this in turn shape the experiences of blind people? Throughout this work, I refer to "the

blind" rather than "the visually impaired." While the definition of blindness was fluid throughout the period I examine –being blind could mean total darkness or it could mean a condition corrected with glasses or surgery – both the blind and their sighted family members and educators used the term "blind." As a result, I will use this and similar terms throughout.

Although this dissertation takes a continental approach, this work focuses primarily on the experiences of the students and educators at the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB). It is impossible for any school for the blind during this period to be studied in isolation. The OIEB was established following models developed in the United States, and educators of all schools for the blind reached out to one another in determining the form their curriculum would take. As well, there are limited autobiographical sources written by Canadian blind adults. As a result, this study includes autobiographies written by American men and women, alongside of the records kept by schools for the blind across the United States. In addition to the OIEB, this research includes the foundation and early years of the Perkins School for the Blind in Massachusetts, the New York Institution for the Blind, and the Missouri Institution for the Blind. Each of these institutions contributed to the ways that blindness was understood and discussed across North America through the introduction of techniques for teaching, publications about the experiences of the blind, or through their domination of the discussions of blindness in the public. Records from the American Educators of the Blind annual conventions, which were attended by both Canadian and American educators, and the records from the American Printing House for the Blind reflect the conversations, disagreements, and advancements of the blind during this period. As explored throughout this dissertation, educators of the blind shared teaching techniques, ideas, and complaints across the continent, rather than in isolation.

Historiography

The historiography of blindness, like the broader historiography of disability, can be divided into waves. Often institutions for the blind included in their annual reports or other official documentation related brief histories of blindness that included the biographies of famous blind men. These works would often include stories of the same famous men (and the occasional woman) rather than their own graduates. These biographies included Nicholas Saunderson, a blind mathematician who appeared in the 1833 *Account of the New York Institution for the Blind*[1], the 1842 *Eleventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind*[2], and the 1878 *Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ontario, Canada Annual Reports*[3]; Francis Huber, a blind apiarist who appeared in in the 1854 *A Letter to the President of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind,*[4] and the 1876 *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind*;[5] and John Milton, the English poet who became totally blind by 1652, appears in the 1847 *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind*,[6] and the 1866

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[1] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *An Account of the New-York Institution for the Blind: Together with a Brief Statement of the Origin, Progress, and Present Condition, of the Institutions for the Blind in This and Other Countries, to Which Is Added Biographical Notices of Some of the Most Illustrious Blind* (New York: Press of G. P. Scott & Co, 1833) 5.

[2] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, to the Corporation* (Boston: John H. Eastburn, Printer, 1843) 10.

[3] Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ont., Canada. Annual Reports of Inspector Langmuir; Principal Hunter, M.A.; Dr. W. D. Corson, Physician and Surgeon, for the Year Ending September 30th, 1878* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1879), 18.

[4] Robely Dunglison, *On the Blind, and Institutions for the Blind, in Europe : A Letter to the President of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind* (Philadelphia: John C Clark & Son, Printers, 1854), 18.

[5] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876* (Philadelphia: Culbertson & Bache, Printers, 1877), 15.

[6] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind to the Corporation* (Cambridge: Metcalf & Co, 1847), 12.

Address delivered at the ceremony of laying the corner-stone of the New York State Institution for the Blind at Batavia.[7] Similarly, autobiographies written by blind people to be sold to support themselves and their families also included these sketches of the same men as a means of fleshing out the documentation of their own lives. Saunderson's biography appears in *The True Sphere of the Blind,*[8] Huber's appears in *Beauties and Achievements of the Blind,*[9]and Milton appears in *A Blind Man's Offering.*[10] These stories of famous blind men no doubt shaped the public's understanding of blindness. For example, in his autobiography, examined in Chapter One, Abram Courtney describes how learning of the successes of these blind men helped him recover from the depression he experienced after losing his sight.

Independently published histories of blindness followed this same pattern, although instead of celebrations of the successes of blind men, they turned to hagiographies of the sighted founders of schools or the general histories of the institutions. Harold Schwatz's biography of Samuel Gridley Howe, an early educator of the blind in the United States who established the world-class reputation of the Perkins School for the Blind, describes Howe's destiny being "to bring those deprived of sight, and in some cases hearing as well, into closer relationships with society. Under Howe's direction the Perkins Institutions…quickly surpassed all school in existence…and he the foremost educator."[11] In Canada, Margaret Ross Chandler's *A Century of Challenge: The History of the Ontario School for the Blind* describes the foundation of "Ontario's most remarkable school" in glowing terms, as does Shirley J. Trites' history of the

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[7] Samuel Gridley Howe, *Address Delivered at the Ceremony of Laying the Corner-Stone of the New York State Institution for the Blind at Batavia, September 6, 1866* (Boston: Walker, Fuller & Company, 1866), 19.
[8] E. B. F. Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind* (Place of publication not identified: Printed for the author by W. Briggs, 1896, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.12652), 22.
[9] William Artman and Lansing V. Hall, *Beauties and Achievements of the Blind* (Auburn: Published for the Authors, 1858), 84.
[10] B. B. Bowen, *A Blind Man's Offering* (New York: Published by the Author, 1850), 19.
[11] Harold Schwartz, *Samuel Gridley Howe : Social Reformer, 1801-1876* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 49.

Halifax School for the Blind.[12] Euclid Hérie's *Journey to Independence*, written at the behest of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, describes blind history as "a long journey from the period in Canadian history when blind people were relegated to poverty, derision, pity, abuse, and social conditions that, with few exceptions, left them with a bleak promise for the future."[13] Hérie's study and his sketches of specific residential schools for the blind present the end of that "bleak" future as the creation of whichever institution commissioned the work.[14] In the United States, this pattern is echoed in Francis A. Koestler's *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in America*.[15] Commissioned by the American Federation of the Blind, it too valorizes the importance of individual men – mostly sighted – over the lived experience of the blind that the organization was set up to assist. Similarly, Ishbel Ross's *Journey into Light: The Story of the Education of the Blind* ignores the blind themselves in producing a history of blindness, failing to consider that blind people might have exercised any form of choice, power, or control. Ross's work groups the experiences of "the blind 2650 BC – 1950 AD" into one section, while paying individual attention to many sighted educators or benefactors. The only blind person who is given any voice or agency within the work is Helen Keller, who wrote the forward for the book, and is presented as rising "above her triple handicap to become one of the best-known characters in the modern world."[16] The similarly-sweeping history of the blind outlined in *From Homer to*

[12] Margaret Ross Chandler, *A Century of Challenge: The History of the Ontario School for the Blind* (Belleville: Mika Publishing Company, 1980; Shirley J. Trites, *Reading Hands: The Halifax School for the Blind* (Halifax, N.S: Vision Press, 2003).
[13] Euclid Herie, *Journey to Independence: Blindness, the Canadian Story* (Toronto ; Tonawanda, NY: Dundurn Group, 2005), 15.
[14] For example, Margaret Ross Chandler describes the "happy atmosphere found in the school" at Brantford, Ontario as "a far cry from the situation in which blind children found themselves centuries ago." See Chandler, *A Century of Challenge*, 13. Shirley J. Trites' history of the Halifax Asylum opens with "The history of the blind was long one of sadness." See Trites, *Reading Hands*, 1.
[15] Frances A. Koestler, *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in America* (New York: D. McKay Co, 1976).
[16] Ishbel Ross, *Journey into Light: The Story of the Education of the Blind*)New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 5, 322. As well, despite dedicating a whole chapter to Keller, Ross makes no mention of Keller's politics or activism, instead describing Keller's grace, "agelessness," and book collection. For an in-depth discussion of

Helen Keller describes Keller as standing for "the supreme achievement of education…she is the epitome of all that is best in humanity…." However, Keller only appears on a handful of pages throughout the work, while Samuel Gridley Howe has multiple sections relating to his work, including his description of the "untrained blind" as having "mannerisms that are so repulsive…particularly repulsive [are] the nervous movement of hands and the swaying and reeling of bodies."[17]

The historiography of blindness is part of a larger trend within disability-focused history. In the introduction to *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, historians Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky identified two waves of academic histories of disability. During the 1980s, historians, driven in part by the successes of political activism in both the United States and Canada, worked within the academic framework "for the reform of public policy and professional practices, seeking ultimately to reconstruct society."[18] In 1981 the United Nations launched the "Year of the Disabled Person." ADAPT – initially founded to advocate for accessible public transit but ow focusing on fully funding attendant programs – was formed in 1983. The Society for Disability Studies was founded in 1986, and the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed in 1990. In Canada, advocacy groups successfully advocated to have mental and physical disability included as a protected class in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and eventually were able to pass other rights-protecting legislation in Ontario and

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Keller's complicated public life, see: Kim E. Nielsen, *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller,* The History of Disability Series (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

[17] Richard Slayton French, *From Homer To Helen Keller : A Social and Educational Study of the Blind* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1932), x, 108.

[18] Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, "Introduction: Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream" in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, edited by Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, 1–29 (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 12.

Manitoba.[19] Longmore and Umanksy define the second wave of disability studies that emerged during the 1990s as being dominated by the humanities. New works discussed representations of disability in art, literature, and film, and applied feminist and queer studies lenses to the discussion of disability.[20]

The next wave of blindness-related history has focused on war-blinded veterans. These works, such as Serge Durflinger's *Veterans with a Vision* and David A. Gerber's "Blind and Enlightened: The Contested Origins of the Egalitarian Politics of the Blinded Veterans Association" focus on the establishment and working order of veteran's associations in both Canada and the United States. This work is further expanded by Nic Clarke's exploration of men rejected from service due to disability, including those that had reduced vision.[21] While these works present an important perspective on the history of blindness and the reactions of the public, they overlook the important work done by the "civilian blind" in the decades before. Some of this work on veterans implies or outright states that the civilian blind were passive recipients of whatever aid the government chose to give them.[22] My research makes clear that this is untrue. While the public conscience may not have been as pricked by the civilian blind as

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[19] David Lepofsky and Jerome E Bickenbach. "Equality Rights and the Physically Handicapped" in *Equality Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, edited by Anne F. Bayefsky and Mary Eberts (Agincourt, Ontario: Carswell, 1985).
[20] See: Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Christopher R. Smit, ed., *Screening Disability: Essays on Cinema and Disability* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001); Bonnie G. Smith and Beth Hutchison, eds., *Gendering Disability* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Cultural Front (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
[21] Serge Marc Durflinger, *Veterans with a Vision: Canada's War Blinded in Peace and War*, Studies in Canadian Military History (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); David A. Gerber, "Blind and Enlightened: The Contested Origins of the Egalitarianism Politics of the Blinded Veterans Association" in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, edited by Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, 313–34 (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Nic Clarke, *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force*, Studies in Canadian Military History (Vancouver ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2015).
[22] Durflinger, *Veterans with a Vision*, 48–9.

they were by the veterans of the First World War, the blind themselves were often active in self-advocacy or otherwise involved in broader issues relating to blindness.

Canadian scholarship on disability history is a developing field. In *Untold Stories: A Canadian Disability History Reader*, editors Nancy Hansen, Roy Hanes, and Diane Driedger describe how disability history in Canada has arisen from, but is independent of, Disability Studies. Historians are "peeling back the layers, uncovering disability or putting it back into the historical landscape."[23] One of the earliest works to examine the experiences of people labelled disabled from within institutional walls was Geoffrey Reaume's *Remembrances of Patients Past*, which explores the lived experiences of those deemed mentally insane from the documentation and records left behind.[24] Similarly, Madeline Burghardt's *Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction Intellectual Disability* interviews survivors, families, and staff at the Orillia Asylum to understand how the decision to send a child to the institution affected all members of the community.[25] The editors of *Untold Stories* highlight how work based inside institutions such as these as due to "restrictive public policy and inaccessible housing, transportation, education, and employment, institutions were the only place where most disabled people could be found outside the family home."[26] Jason Ellis' *A Class By Themselves? The Origins of Special Education in Toronto and Beyond* goes outside of institutional walls and into mainstream schools, examining how children deemed feebleminded, mentally defective, or crippled were evaluated and taught during the early twentieth century. Like Reaume, he examines the records left behind to further understand the experiences of these children and the ways they were treated

[23] Nancy Hansen, Roy Hanes, and Diane Driedger, eds., *Untold Stories: A Canadian Disability History Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018), 2.
[24] Geoffrey Reaume, *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, first published by Oxford University Press, 1997).
[25] Madeline C. Burghardt, *Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018, https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/455600).
[26] Hansen, Hanes, and Driedger, eds., *Untold Stories*, 3.

by school officials.[27] My work means to bridge these two types – while much of my research focuses on the lived experiences of blind children within an explicitly-educational institution (unlike the asylums examined by Reaume and Burghardt, as well as many of the asylums for the blind in Europe, the schools for the blind in North America did work to provide an education to their temporary charges), it also carries beyond the institutions, through autobiographies, letters, and census documents that show what the blind did outside of the institutions and beyond the limitations placed on them.

While the "new disability history" described by Longmore and Umanky in 2001 has expanded the research on blindness in twentieth-century North America to include and expand beyond war-blinded veterans, the nineteenth century is still under-studied, with much of this work looking more broadly at cultural ideas of blindness and vision. Mary Klages' *Woeful Afflictions* discusses how "sentimental forms of representation" in the United States during the nineteenth century both influenced and attempted to subvert the general public's perceptions of people with disabilities, most particularly blind women.[28] Sara Spike's dissertation *Modern Eyes: A Cultural history of Vision in Rural Nova Scotia, 1880-1910*, read alongside Peter John Brownlee's *The Commerce of Vision: Optical Culture and Perception in Antebellum America* and Justin T. Clark's *City of Second Sight: Nineteenth-Century Boston and the Making of American Visual Culture*, demonstrate how ideas of vision and seeing were changing throughout the nineteenth century, with each examining how the blind were perceived as part of this

[27] Jason Ellis, *A Class by Themselves? The Origins of Special Education in Toronto and Beyond* (Toronto ; Buffalo ; London: University of Toronto Press, 2019).
[28] Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7.

changing culture.[29] However, these works do not focus on the experience of blindness, but instead on how blindness was experienced by the sighted.

Both the history of education and the history of childhood in Canada have been expanding to include the experiences of children labelled disabled and defective in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Answering Catherine J. Kudlick's call for history to include "another 'other'" as a "useful category of historical analysis," historians have begun to examine the ways that the treatment of these so-called defective children has reflected the attitudes of the Canadian state towards other allegedly defective groups.[30] *Untold Stories: A Canadian Disability History Reader* includes articles that describe the educational experiences of both blind and deaf children in Canada, examining why and how these children were educated in separate residential schools established for them in both Ontario and Manitoba. These articles address the perceived defectiveness of these children and the need to make them productive citizens under the growing Canadian state.[31] The desire to remove other defective children from the population due to their perceived burden on both their families and on society is also explored in Madeline C. Burghardt's *Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability*. Burghardt's work examines the establishment of institutions for the feeble-minded in the

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[29] Sara Spike, "Modern Eyes: A Cultural History of Vision in Rural Nova Scotia, 1880–1910," Ph.D. Dissertation (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2016); Justin T. Clark, *City of Second Sight: Nineteenth-Century Boston and the Making of American Visual Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Peter John Brownlee, *The Commerce of Vision: Optical Culture and Perception in Antebellum America*, Early American Studies. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[30] Catherine J. Kudlick, "Disability History: Why We Need Another 'Other'," *The American Historical Review* 108: 3 (June 2003), 763–93.

[31] Vanessa Warne, "'Blindness Clears the Way': E. B. F. Robinson's The True Sphere of the Blind (1896)" in *Untold Stories A Canadian Disability History Reader*, edited by Nancy Hansen, Roy Hanes, and Diane Driedger, 53–65 (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018); Robinson, *The True Sphere of the Blind*; Alessandra Iozzo-Duval, "The Education of 'Good' and 'Useful' Citizens: Work, Disability, and d/Deaf Citizenship at the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Deaf, 1892-1902" in *Untold Stories: A Canadian Disability History Reader*, edited by Nancy Hansen, Roy Hanes, and Diane Driedger, 66-90 , (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018); Sandy R. Barron, "'An Excuse for Being So Bold': D. W. McDermid and the Early Development of the Manitoba Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1888-1900, in *Untold Stories: A Canadian Disability History Reader*, edited by Nancy Hansen, Roy Hanes, and Diane Driedger, 91-109, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018).

nineteenth century as a means of social control as the state became more concerned with the productivity of its citizens.[32] Jason Ellis' work has continued this examination of the education of defective children, including those who required sight-saving and speech and hearing classes, into the twentieth century. The policies and outcomes affecting so-called "backward" children Ellis outlines are clearly building upon the decisions made in the nineteenth century.[33] These studies demonstrate how children labelled as disabled have been segregated from their non-disabled counterparts in part because of their perceived threats to society, as well as their perceived additional education needs around morality and proper behaviour.

My work is by no means the first to examine autobiographies written by the blind in the nineteenth century. J. Laurence Cohen Jr. examines the autobiography of Fanny Crosby, a blind woman who composed 8,000 hymns and gospel songs, to explore her understanding of education for the blind as a means of illumination.[34] Parts of Fanny's autobiography are used in Chapter Five to examine the friendships of blind girls and women within schools for the blind, which is outside the scope of Cohen's study. Both Vanessa Warne and Janet Friskney use the autobiography of Canadian E. B. F. Robinson in their work on blindness, but their studies are focused exclusively on Robinson's career rather than within the broader experiences of blind men in response to sighted educators that I use his work to examine in Chapter Three.[35] Justin Clark's article, "The Origins of Blind Autobiography in Visionary Antebellum New England" examines some of the same documents that I do here. His focus is mostly on writing by men with

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[32] Burghardt, *Broken: Institutions*.
[33] Ellis, *A Class By Themselves?*
[34] J. Laurence Cohen, "Shining Inward: The Blind Seer, Fanny Crosby, and Education for the Blind in the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 11: 1 (February 2017), 53–68. https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.4.
[35] Janet B. Friskney, "From Gleam of Light to Seedbed of a National Institute: The Canadian Free Library for the Blind, 1906–1918." *Papers of The Bibliographical Society of Canada* 50: 2 (2013), 186-237. https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v50i2.22045; Warne, " 'Blindness Clears the Way'."

little reference to women's autobiographical writing.[36] These works mostly examine one or two autobiographical texts in depth, rather than reading them alongside other documents and the larger context of blind men and women's responses to their sighted educators.

Locating the blind in the history of blindness has been difficult for scholars as compared to other identifiable groups such as the Deaf or disabled veterans. As Mary Klages points out, "scholars have done a magnificent job in recovering the history of the deaf in America," fueled by the acknowledgment of a deaf community, language, and culture, while the blind are mostly studied through the history of blind residential schools. Blind people in history are still mostly represented by works created by the institutions themselves, and the analysis of those works.[37] My own previous work, while focusing on Sir Charles Frederick Fraser, the blind superintendent of the school for the blind in Halifax, is primarily a history of the development and professionalization of the school itself rather than Fraser's experiences as a blind educator.[38] This is a long-time struggle for disability-focused historians, as institutions create a large body of records that can be analysed, and rarely keep the ephemera created by the inmates or students within their care. Reaume, Burghardt, and other scholars such as Darby Penney and Peter Stanstny, whose work examines the suitcases left behind by those who were institutionalised at Willard State Hospital, have successfully analyzed the remains of these institutional settings to highlight how much we can learn from what is left behind.[39]

However, as Reaume has pointed out in his later work, using these left-behind documents and items must be carefully considered by the historians who examine them. In his article

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[36] Justin Clark, "The Origins of Blind Autobiography in Visionary Antebellum New England" *The New England Quarterly* 87: 2 (June 2014), 228–51. https://doi.org/10.1162/TNEQ_a_00368.
[37] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*.
[38] Joanna L. Pearce, "'Fighting in the Dark': Charles Frederick Fraser and the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, 1850-1915," MA Thesis (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 2011).
[39] Darby Penney and Peter Stastny, *The Lives They Left behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*, 1st ed. in paperback (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2009).

"Posthumous exploitation? The Ethics of Researching, Writing and Being Accountable as a Disability Historian," Reaume highlights the exploitative nature of reading documents created by marginalized people, many of which were not intended to be kept by the institutions they are found in.[40] While Reaume is specifically examining the ethics of reading the documents created by those labelled mentally ill, this consideration must also apply to the letters I examine throughout Chapter Six written by or about blind girls and directed to their friends, families, or educators. Some of these letters were never received by their intended recipients due to the institution's concerns about the morality of their charges. Bertha, the girl whose story opened this dissertation, spent most of her time at the Ontario Institution for the Blind believing her family had abandoned her; instead, their letters were kept by school officials and her mother and siblings were told to never write again.

My work aims to build on these foundations of the history of blindness but expand beyond them to encompass the broader experiences of blind children and adults. While sighted educators of the blind still play a role in this study, much of their writing is laid beside that of parents of blind children, blind educators within the residential school system, and blind adults, not all of whom attended these schools. This research is meant to challenge the assumption that schools were accurate reporters on the experiences of the blind both inside and outside of the institutional walls. As well, this work includes blind children and adults, and blind women and men, groups that tend to be examined separately rather than together. As we know, both gender and age are useful categories of analysis; however, disability-status is also a useful category of

[40] Geoffrey Reaume, "Posthumous Exploitation? The Ethics of Researching, Writing, and Being Accountable as a Disability Historian" in *Untold Stories: A Canadian Disability History Reader*, edited by Nancy Hansen, Roy Hanes, and Diane Driedger (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018).

analysis, and while these groups are shaped by gender, age, and class, they are primarily shaped by being viewed as disabled.

Unfortunately, due to the sources available, this work is unable to examine the experiences of blind people "of colour" or "non-white" during this period. While schools for the blind in Canada were not explicitly racially segregated, most students were white, with exceptions often being expelled for "bad behaviour" or discouraged from returning after a short time at the institution. In the United States, while some schools for the blind had integrated classes, separate residential schools for Black children were established as early as 1869. While some of these institutions were invited to the annual conventions of educators of the blind, their work was not highlighted at these meetings. While obviously blind people of all races existed, the expectations of racial segregation of the time affected the education of these children and adults, and their experiences are difficult to find in the existing records as a result. To situate whiteness as one aspect of racialization, this dissertation situates institutions and historical actors in the context of settler colonialism.

Sources

My research looks at a wide variety of sources written by government actors, school officials, doctors, and the parents of blind children. Census-related data was located through Ancestry.ca and supplemented with census reports located at Library and Archives Canada. Additional material locating the blind in Ontario was found at the Toronto City Archives. A rich trove of government documents related to the blind were located at the Archives of Ontario or at the archives of the Samuel P. Hayes Research Library at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA, which houses one of the largest collections of archival records related to the blind in North America. Official school reports, medical records, and letters related to the establishment and running of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, as well as

correspondence between the superintendent of the school and parents of the blind, blind students, and concerned members of the public were also located at the Archives of Ontario, which houses the Ontario School for the Blind correspondence and administrative files. While most surviving medical reports for Ontario's blind children were in these files, supplementary material was found through various medical journals published in both North America and the United Kingdom. Supplementary material related the establishment and running of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind were located at Nova Scotia Archives, which houses the Halifax School for the Blind fonds. Records of the establishment of various schools for the blind across the United States, including the New England Asylum for the Blind (later renamed the Perkins School for the Blind), the New York Institution for the Blind, the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, and other institutions across the United States were also found through the Samuel P. Hayes Research Library. All the records relating to the establishment of the American Convention of Educators of the Blind and the American Association of Educators of the Blind, the establishment of the American Printing House for the Blind, and most of the documents related to debates about raised print text were located at the M.C. Migel Memorial Collection at the American Printing House for the Blind, which has made most of their records available through archive.org.

I examine these official sources alongside various documents written by the blind themselves. These sources include autobiographies by blind men and women, letters written by blind children, and records of alumni debates. These 21 autobiographies – 15 by men and six by women – are housed in the archives at Perkins. Bound records of alumni debates were supplementary material in autobiographies or published separately as part of larger debates around issues related to education and employment of the blind and were located primarily

through the M. C. Migel Memorial Collection. Letters consulted were located in the fonds for either the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, where they were published as part of the official reports of the school, or in the surviving files from the OIEB.

My third set of sources are fictional and non-fictional accounts of the lives of the blind, written by sighted journalists and authors. The fictional stories about blindness were found in scrapbooks, magazine files, or bound collections maintained by the Samuel P. Hayes Research Library archives at Perkins, while newspaper reports were located primarily through online databases. These latter documents established the changing understanding of blindness over the time period under discussion, from before the establishment of the earliest schools for the blind until the beginning of the First World War. This mix of sources allows for a thorough and extensive examination of the experience of blindness, both from within and outside of the growing blind community in the nineteenth century.

Methods

My first goal with my sources was to find the blind of nineteenth-century North America, particularly the blind in Canada. I examined Canada's census records from 1861 to 1921, looking for records of blind people in four Ontario communities: Toronto, Brantford (where the school for the blind would open in 1872), Guelph, and Hamilton. However, as will be explored in Chapter Two, the census was not a reliable source of information on the blind. As a result, I turned to other sources, including records from various charitable organizations, municipalities, and the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, to create a record of blind people in Ontario. While the records I found were still useful – Bertha was not the only graduate whose later life became clear through census documents – the lack of care taken by census enumerators in locating the blind made it difficult to find people outside of the school. The difficulties in being able to create a quantitative analysis of the blind through census documents was also found

to be true in the United States. Even in government documents, the blind were the "unseen minority" Frances A. Koestler described in her 1976 book about the establishment of the American Foundation for the Blind.[41]

As my goal was to find the voices of blind people in the historical record, I next turned to the existing records of the OIEB. Here again, few records of the experiences of the blind within and outside of the school exist, and very little written by the blind themselves was available in the archival record. However, the school records did begin to show how the experience of blindness changed over time. As will be explored in Chapter One, the records of parental responses to the establishment of the school for the blind exist, with many parents arguing against sending their children to such a school. In addition, the experiences reported by the sighted superintendents give some insight into how blindness was perceived by the sighted public, reporting on the public's financial support as well as their willingness to contact the school to reveal the locations of blind people who might be eligible to attend. Later records of the school proved especially useful, as they contained letters written to and from the superintendent during summer break and indicate the growing blind community, mostly made up of women and girls, that formed within the school itself (which is explored in Chapter Five).

Examining the medical records of these blind children led to further comprehension of blindness. Part of understanding blindness is understanding how blindness was treated by medical professionals, especially in light of the growing professionalization of ophthalmology as a specialty in the mid-nineteenth century. Children confined to a residential school provided an opportunity for eye specialists in Toronto and elsewhere to practice their trade on subjects that were deemed worthy by the public. Just as with the history of orthopedics as a specialisation as

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[41] Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*.

described by Brad Byram in “A Pupil and a Patient: Hospital-Schools in Progressive America,” the growing respect towards eye doctors was tied directly to their effectiveness in “treating” blindness.[42] While there is no specific chapter on the treatment of blindness by these doctors, their reports, opinions, and influences are seen throughout this work. Their reports determine who did and did not count as blind for the sake of attendance at the school. Doctors performed experimental treatments and painful surgeries on children and adults that are discussed throughout this work.

My initial focus for my research was on the experience of blindness in Ontario; however, further research made it clear that studying Ontario in isolation would not provide a thorough picture of the blind. Both ideas and people crossed borders easily in the nineteenth century. Decisions about how to best establish a successful school for the blind were made only after extensive consultation with educators in the United States. Teachers and superintendents for schools in Ontario, Nova Scotia, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, to name just a few, were often recruited from one another. The teachers and superintendents brought with them their experiences as both teachers and former pupils. I had expected to find more communication among the three English-speaking schools for the blind in eastern Canada (Ontario, Montreal, and Halifax), but both religious and personal rivalries among schools led to most communication being across both the border with the United State rather than between provinces. Administrators from all three schools corresponded with their American counterparts, particularly those at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston and attended the American Convention of Educators for the Blind conferences. Decisions about raised-print text and best practices relating to vocational

[42] Brad Byram, “A Pupil and a Patient: Hospital-Schools in Progressive America” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, edited by Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, 133–56 (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

training were made relative to similar decisions in the United States. Ontario's blind educators were not isolated, but part of an international network of schools, associations, and publishers.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter One, "Children of Darkness: Perceptions of the Blind in the Nineteenth Century" examines the understanding of blindness in the early years of schools for the blind through fiction and non-fiction. Fictional accounts written by sighted people bring to light the stereotypes of blindness, while autobiographies of blind men show how these stereotypes were experienced by the blind. It outlines the expectations of blindness in the early to mid- nineteenth century by sighted parents of blind children, school officials, government officials, newspapers, and fiction writers, focusing on Ontario. What were the expectations of a blind child at this time? What did blindness mean, and how was it treated by medical officials? Where do the blind appear in census documents? This chapter charts the fears that a blind child would be a life-long dependent, rely on charity and begging to survive, and would otherwise be a burden on society as well as their family.

Chapter Two, "Which Nought but the Light of Knowledge Can Dispel: Establishing Education and Creating Networks" explores the response to the fears outlined in Chapter One. Ontario decided to invest money in a provincial school for the blind, adding to a growing informal network of blind schools in North America. This chapter also outlines how the school for the blind in Ontario was more closely connected to schools in the United States than other schools (Montreal, Halifax) in Canada or in the United Kingdom. It also examines the foundation of the pan-North American organization American Convention of Educators for the Blind and the work done there to standardize education of the blind across North America.

Chapter Three, "Fear of the Blind Beggar – Teaching Blind Children to Accept God and Reject Charity," shows how schools for the blind emphasized that the uneducated blind

child was completely dependent on parents and outsiders for their support, including an inability to feed themselves without assistance. This creation of the blind child as a dependent meant that institutions for the blind could solve this problem by creating independent blind adults. They did this through a variety of means, including through job training and by advocating for or building sheltered workshops for the blind. However, because the jobs that the blind were being taught to do did not earn much money, the blind within schools were taught the importance of rejecting charity and being humble within the Christian faith. Schools emphasized the need for their pupils to learn things like science to combat the fear of the blind atheist, whose rejection of religious faith would cause them to fall into the bitterness that was believed to be a major experience of blindness, as well as the books that were deemed most important for blind readers being religious or otherwise uplifting in nature. Schools also feared that their charges would become atheists. Following techniques developed in schools for the sighted, educators of the blind sought to teach the blind the grandeur of creation through science education to keep them engaged in religious practices. This form of education both reflected the assumptions made about the blind by their educators and the ways that sighted educators continually refused to view the blind as needing strong vocational work after graduation.

Chapter Four, “The Tactile Babble Under Which the Blind have Hitherto Groaned: Dots, Lines and Literacy for the Blind in Nineteenth Century North America,” emphasizes the various interpretations of the needs of blind children and adults through the development of raised print texts. Different interpretations of blindness and the need for the blind to communicate with either other blind people or sighted people, whether independently or through a scribe, is examined in this chapter, detailing out how the blind and the sighted disagreed on these things. This chapter

also sets up how the blind rejected many of the expectations outlined for them by sighted and blind professionals connected to schools and other institutions.

Chapter Five, "From a Blind Girl's Pen – The Lives of Blind Women and Girls" focuses on blind women and girls through letters and autobiographies they wrote during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These documents emphasize the independence and interdependence of blind women and girls, and the formation of a blind community outside of schools for the blind. While these documents must be read in their context, they show a lived experience of blindness that is not addressed in the historiography and must be considered when discussing the history of blindness. These documents show women who advocated for themselves and others, worked in a variety of fields outside of those taught by schools for the blind, and who married and had children despite the fears of this emphasized by schools for the blind.

This dissertation argues that the lives of the civilian blind are worth studying in their own right, both inside and outside of institutions. While these "children of darkness" were disabled by their blindness and the assumptions made about them by their educators, family, and broader society, examining their history in depth shows that they were not as passive as expected. Their autobiographies and letters show their friendships and romantic relationships, their careers and their struggles with depression and other medical ailments. Their responses to the decisions made by their educators on which raised-print text to adopt or which method of instruction to include show that, even as adults, they had an active and ongoing concern in how their younger counterparts were treated within the education system. The letters from their parents to school such as the OIEB show that their parents wanted more for their children than was expected of them, whether that was expressed through keeping them at home as useful members of the household or seeking to have them sent to the school to find a trade to support themselves as

adults. Their history is more than what we can find through the annual reports of their educators. Their self-advocacy and their lives deserve more attention and exploration.

Chapter One: Children of Darkness: Perceptions of the Blind in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

In the introduction to his autobiography, Abram V. Courtney reminds the reader that his simple language and the "roughness of me expression" reflect his disability – as a blind man, he argues, he has no access to books or way of seeing the current means of dress to present himself as a respectable man.[43] He points out that his relatively simple skills of being able to tell distances and distinguish people based on their voices impress the sighted, who have such a low opinion of the abilities of a blind man. The public's low expectations of the abilities of the blind lead people to believe he is faking his blindness in some way, because no blind man could walk across a field without tripping or otherwise lead the life that Courtney leads.[44]

While clearly part of Courtney's motivation for writing his autobiography was financial – his primary mode of supporting himself was selling it and other pamphlets – he argued within that it is important that people realise what blind people are capable of with the benefit of an education. Instead of a life of pitiable darkness, the educated blind could be like the men Courtney encountered and befriended throughout his travels in the United States. Unlike the limited expectations the public had of the blind when he published his autobiography in 1836, Courtney described with glee his friend Mr. Ross, a blind musician who fearlessly led him around Rochester to see plays and walk across dangerous bridges, warning him not to look down lest they fall. Later, when Ross gets married, he describes his wife to Courtney as "*the*

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[43] Abram V. Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind; by Abram V Courtney, Himself Totally Blind. With a Memoir of the Author* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1835), 3.
[44] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 4.

handsomest woman I ever saw" [emphasis in original], encouraging Courtney to seek a similarly beautiful wife.[45]

Courtney's autobiography challenges many of the expectations of blind men that were common in the first half of the nineteenth century in North America, and he uses these expectations to his advantage. As explored below, a sighted audience primarily saw the blind of objects of pity who were unable to care for themselves. They rarely married, as the risk of having a blind child was too great. They did not have many friends, and the ones they did have mostly pitied them rather than enjoyed their company. They did not have friends who were also blind, as the sighted public did not see the blind as having anything to offer to each other.

By reading autobiographies written before the expansion of blind schools across the United States, we can see the difference between the public's perception and the lived reality. Ross was not Courtney's only blind friend, although as explored below he was clearly the one with the best sense of humour about their shared disability. Nor was Courtney the only blind man writing an autobiography that included blind friends, marriages to sighted women, and careers that could support a family. These autobiographical works present a view of blindness in response to the limited expectations of the sighted. These limited expectations were formed in part by the ways that blind people were presented in short works of fiction that were published throughout the period. I have chosen to focus on short works of fiction rather than popular novels due to the extensive work done by Mary Klages in *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America*. Klages examines the sentimental depictions of blind children and adults in novels such as in Maria Susanna Cummins' novel *The Lamplighter*,

[45] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 17.

Charles Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge*, and Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman*. While these novels were clearly well read during the period, I am examining works that were shared in newspapers, magazines, and works published for children as a means of examining commonly-published stereotypes across different media types.

This chapter traces attitudes towards the blind, first broadly across North America before the American Civil War, and then more specifically in Upper Canada/Ontario in the period before government-funded education for the blind in Canada. First, it establishes the attitudes towards the blind in the early and mid-nineteenth century through two sources: fictional works that use the blind as either metaphors or as cautionary tales for the sighted, and the experience of blind men as explored in their autobiographies. The men who wrote these autobiographies mostly did not attend any of the schools for the blind, although each clearly had the benefit of education. Their autobiographies show us their experiences outside of the school and outline the expectations of a blind man's life that schools were established to address. In contrast, the few published autobiographies written by women are dominated by their school experiences. As a result, these appear together in Chapter Five alongside other documents written by blind girls in schools. By examining how the public perceived blindness in their fiction compared to how these men reported their experience of blindness to the reading public, this section seeks to reveal the common understanding of blindness in nineteenth-century North America as schools for the blind were being established across the United States and into Canada. While schools were opened in the United States as early as the 1830s, their professionalization and influence changed in the post-Civil War period.

Second, I examine the circumstances under which Ontario decided to create a school for the blind in the decade following free, compulsory education for its sighted children. In Canada,

the earliest private school for the blind was established by John Barrett McGann in Toronto; however, the school burned down in 1869 and was never re-opened.[46] Later, more successful schools were opened in 1871 and 1872 (in Halifax and Brantford respectfully), with Canadian schools taking advantage of the techniques and curriculums established in the United States. This section also examines official attitudes towards the blind in Ontario by looking at two types of records: medical practitioners' appeals to the public for support for the blind, and government census data that attempted to count the blind. In both cases, the public's reluctance to be associated with blindness is reflected in the struggles to both gain funding treating the blind and to effectively count the blind in the province. To gain funding, the Toronto Eye and Ear Clinic needed to draw on the most pitiable of their patients, children who had been born blind or acquired blindness due to accidents. Census data in both the United States and Canada shows a reluctance to identify members of the community as blind, a census category in both countries that came under the umbrella term of "defectives."[47] These patterns show how much work the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind needed to accomplish in order to attract students and counter-act the stereotypes of blind beggars in the years after its establishment, which are explored in Chapter Two.

Attitudes Toward the Blind Before the American Civil War

How the blind were discussed in fiction and non-fiction for a sighted audience is an indicator of the most prevalent ideas about the blind, particularly the concerns of the sighted about the lives of the blind. In this section I examine two types of works written for a sighted

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[46] Margaret Ross Chandler, *A Century of Challenge: The History of the Ontario School for the Blind* (Belleville: Mika Publishing Company, 1980), 15.
[47] For more about the construction of disability as "defect", see: Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

audience and compare and contrast how they addressed stereotypes and expectations of blindness. The first is widely published short stories written by sighted authors. While many of these works are clearly aimed at treating blindness as a metaphor for a lack of Christian faith, or as an admonishment to sighted children to count their blessings and study the bible carefully, others tell what are meant as entertaining stories with blind characters, both children and adults, without a moral imperative attached. To explore these works, I relied on the collection from the Samuel P. Hayes Research Library located in the Perkins Archives, which includes fictional stories published in newspapers, magazine, and Sunday School publications.

Alongside these works, this section will also examine how the blind wrote about themselves for a sighted audience. A limited number of blind people wrote autobiographies, and most of those were written by white men whose families were wealthy enough to provide for their education. These autobiographies engage with many of the same issues around blindness that are written about in fiction. None of the blind authors who published their autobiographies in this section had the opportunity to attend a school for the blind in their childhood, although some had a few months of education as blind adults. Autobiographies written later make clear the influence of residential school education on their opportunities and their experiences amongst the sighted. While some of these autobiographies do not directly address the stereotypes and limitations of blindness common in fiction, the way they discuss the authors' lived experience of blindness both highlights the difficulties blind adults faced throughout their lives, and the prevalence of a uniform set of stereotypes that shaped how the world treated them. By reading these works together, common ideas of blindness and the capabilities of the blind become evident.

The autobiographies written by blind men tend to fall into two broad categories. In the first, written mostly by men with prominent families or careers, the blind author rarely mentions how blindness affected his life. Instead, he tends to emphasize his abilities to blend in with the sighted population, how often he was mistaken for sighted, and – in his rare mentions of other blind men – how much pity he feels for the unfortunate blind. Within their writing, these men clearly view themselves as members of the sighted community who merely happen to be blind. They assimilate with the sighted community to the best of their abilities, or at least present themselves as having done so.

The second group of autobiographies emphasize the abilities of the author as a blind man. These works often reflect on the experience of blindness and discuss various ways the author's life has been influenced by their lack of sight. These works discuss prejudices that the authors have experienced from the sighted population and decry stereotypes. In addition, these men often present themselves as part of a larger blind community, sometimes within the residential school system, but most often outside of it. These works also often included mini biographies of blind men, either famous or unknown, to further highlight the abilities of the blind. Men in this group seem to feel a responsibility to speak for the blind as a whole, and clearly consider themselves part of a blind community that exists alongside, but separate from, the sighted one.

Abram V. Courtney wrote the earliest autobiography of a blind American, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, which he self-published in 1835.[48] Courtney, who lost part of his sight due to a childhood illness, became fully blind after an injury in 1825 when he was sixteen years old.[49] He had spent several years prior at several schools for sighted children, but also spent time as a child

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[48] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*.
[49] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 12.

and youth learning his father's trade as a seafarer before apprenticing at a printing business.[50] Courtney lost his sight after some wood he was chopping to heat the printing shop flew into his unprotected eye. Following his injury, Courtney received no formal schooling save for a few months much later in life at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. Throughout his autobiography, Courtney contrasts himself with the uneducated blind, clearly considering the years of schooling he received as a sighted child as being of benefit to himself after the accident.

For Courtney, as well as his family and friends, his sudden injury was devastating. The following six months were bleak, which he described as filled with "sadness and gloom…. I felt myself of no use to anyone, not even myself." Visitors made clear how much they pitied him. According to Courtney, they visited out of curiosity, and "…expressed their sympathy, by dwelling on my great loss, and telling me they should think I had rather die than live."[51] It was only with his mother's support, particularly her reading to him about blind men and "how much in some cases they had done" that Courtney was able to recover from his depression and attempt to build a new, self-sufficient, life.[52] His book is clearly meant to be part of the tradition of passing along the stories of great blind men, as the last half of the book included "anecdotes of the blind" – brief biographies of blind men and women including Nicolaus Sanderson, John Milton, and Julia Brace.

According to Courtney, writing his autobiography served two purposes. The first, and the one he emphasized throughout the work, was to combat the stereotype that blind people were helpless. In particular, he wanted to overcome the idea that a blind man was the same as a

[50] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 5, 12.
[51] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 13.
[52] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 14.

sighted man wearing a blindfold – a common "disability simulation" still in use today.[53] In describing how ineffective this blindness simulation was, Courtney wrote, "Take a man who can see distinctly, and blindfold him, and he is almost perfectly helpless. He stumbles upon snares and into pits, he runs against obstacles. I do no such things."[54] Courtney makes clear the ways he can easily navigate the world, even describing dangerous activities such as climbing the rigging of ships similar to those his father piloted when Courtney was a child. He wrote that he could "explore the rigging of a vessel as well as any person who can see. Perhaps it is because, seeing no danger, I fear none."[55] While Courtney does discuss being injured when travelling alone, the main purpose of his work is to emphasize his independence and that of other blind people, explaining to the reader how he "found many people, who were utterly ignorant of the capabilities of the blind, who thought that they could not know day from night...that they must be perfect idiots."[56] Clearly this was meant to challenge the reader's own beliefs about the blind.

As part of combatting stereotypes of the blind as being helpless by nature, Courtney discusses the importance of an education for blind men, particularly those who were blind from birth. He describes the uneducated blind as "...utterly helpless. They could not believe how many miles I had traveled, and what power I had of knowing things."[57] He uses these "unfortunates" to argue of the necessity of special schools for the blind, pointing out that "If there is any one who doubts the value and utility of the efforts now making, here and elsewhere, on behalf of these unfortunate persons, I wish he could only meet with some of those uncared-for individuals whom I encountered, and compare their condition with that of the educated blind. There is almost as

[53] For further discussion of the questionable usefulness of such simulations, see: Arielle Michal Silverman, "The Perils of Playing Blind: Problems with Blindness Simulation and a Better Way to Teach about Blindness" *Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research* 5: 2 (2015), https://doi.org/10.5241/5-81.
[54] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 3.
[55] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 11.
[56] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 7.
[57] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 15.

much difference between them, as between that of those who see and those who cannot."[58] The attitude that the uneducated blind were helpless compared to those who benefitted from targeted education was shared by educators of the blind as well.

Courtney is also clear that he wrote his autobiography to support himself and his family without reliance on charity. In his book he explains that "[o]thers have rebuked me for using my humble means of gaining an honest livelihood, saying that the public have made provision for the support of those who are made more or less helpless by the visitation of God. They seem to forget, or not to reflect, that the extinction of one faculty does not injure the others. If you prick a blind man, does he not bleed? ..."[59] Throughout, Courtney describes various jobs both he and his fellow blind men have taken on to support themselves and their families, discussing both successes and failures. Before the publication of his autobiography, he had been peddling various other magazines and pamphlets to the sighted public, but found "...whenever I traveled, that the novelty presented in the person of a blind man, acting for, and taking care of himself, would attract more custom at first than after the edge of curiosity was worn off."[60] He also describes himself as working as a coffee grinder, working at a press in Boston, and even as a guide for sighted men, and he supplements these stories with tales of the various jobs held by other blind men of his acquaintance. While none of these men are described as living middle class lives, it is clear that Courtney finds their ability to support themselves very important to communicate to the public.

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[58] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 15.
[59] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 4. Educators of the blind will later argue that selling pamphlets is subsidized begging and attempt to address the state of the blind to prevent this from continuing. See Chapter 3 for more exploration of this idea.
[60] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 19.

In contrast to Abram Courtney, Timothy Woodbridge did not struggle to find a job appropriate for a blind man. Published in 1856, Woodbridge's *Autobiography of a Blind Minister* described both his education and his practice as a minister throughout Ohio. Woodbridge was also born sighted to a family with strong religious convictions. His grandfather was Jonathan Edwards, an important minister during the Great Awakening and president of Princeton University, and his father was well-respected in the community of Berkshire. Woodbridge was attending boarding school when an inflammation of his eyes eventually led to his complete loss of sight.[61]

As with Courtney, Woodbridge's friends were quick to pity him, feeling his life was ruined; however, Woodbridge does not describe a similar period of despair as that of Courtney, but instead feelings of disdain towards any that pitied or doubted him. He writes of his belief that "a great many paths of honorable business were, in my judgement, within my reach…" and that his blindness "…would prove to be a golden link in the chain of God's providences in regard to me."[62] Initially Woodbridge intended to become a lawyer, following in the footsteps of his father and brother, and he spent some time calling on their law clerks to help him prepare. However, he left law to pursue a religious vocation, entering Andover College to become a Presbyterian minister in 1810.[63]

The bulk of Woodbridge's autobiography concentrates on his time as a minister in Green River and Spencertown, describing his leadership both within the church and within the communities. As well, he emphasizes his skills as an orator, his teaching of English grammar, and his appropriate household management as a man of thrift and wisdom. He eventually marries

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[61] Timothy Woodbridge, *The Autobiography of a Blind Minister; Including Sketches of the Men and Events of His Time* (Boston: J. P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 47. Woodbridge is not clear how old he was when this happened.
[62] Woodbridge, *The Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 49.
[63] Woodbridge, *The Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 49, 58, 72.

the young, sighted daughter of his housekeeper and continues his habits of thrift to support their household and children. For Woodbridge, his independence is less a reflection of the abilities of the blind, and more a commentary on his own skills and talents. Woodbridge does not discuss other blind men's accomplishments in his text.

Like Courtney, Woodbridge's autobiography is in part an attempt to support his family, albeit under much different circumstances. Courtney's autobiography was published while he was in his thirties, and he describes selling it and similar pamphlets as part of his overall income strategy for his family. In contrast, Woodbridge published after his retirement from the Presbyterian church, in part because some of the communities in which he had worked did not pay him. As a result, Woodbridge's book is much longer and mainly focused on his ministry, his concerns about the direction of the church, and his accomplishments within it. However, for both men, the financial hardships of being blind are part of their reason for writing.

Woodbridge and Courtney take very different approaches to discussing their blindness. While Courtney makes clear to the reader how being blind affected his life and the lives of his blind friends and acquaintances, Woodbridge rarely discusses either his blindness or the blindness of others. Instead, *Autobiography of a Blind Minister* focuses on how similar, and even superior, Woodbridge is to sighted men of similar backgrounds. While Courtney clearly longs to challenge stereotypes of the blind for both himself and his blind community, Woodbridge only discusses his blindness when making it clear that it was no handicap to his abilities. "From the first loss of my sight," Woodbridge wrote, "I had bestowed some pains upon my attitudes and movements, that I might avoid any awkwardness which might spring from blindness…I have often preached in congregations, particularly in cities, where I happened to be a stranger, without

the least suspicion of my blindness."[64] Woodbridge longed to be treated exactly as a sighted person who merely happened to be blind, while Courtney wrote with the intention of challenging the stereotypes that Woodbridge was attempting to avoid.

A third blind autobiographer, James Wilson, was a British man born in the United States prior to the American Revolution; however, his book was widely available in North America. Published in 1856, *The Autobiography of the Blind James Wilson* has two parts.[65] The first, an introduction by John Bird, reflects on "the present state of the blind", while also describing Bird's experience of ostracism after he became blind later in life. James Wilson, who came into prominence after publishing *The Lives of the Useful Blind* in the 1830s,[66] begins with his family's fall from grace after supporting the British during the American Revolution. His parents both die on the ship returning them to England, leaving Wilson an orphan at age five. He is left in Ireland with enough money to support his care for five years, during which Wilson – blinded in the same attack of smallpox that killed his mother – learns to whittle toys for the local children's amusement, run errands for his friends, and even guide sighted men around the city.

Wilson's autobiography is similar to that of Courtney's in that he also discusses how being blind has affected his life and the lives of others. In both books, as well as in the introduction to *The Autobiography of the Blind James Wilson*, the authors emphasize the importance of blind children receiving education, despite not having attended a school for the blind as children themselves. Both also reflect on the difficulties blind men face when travelling between cities, each describing an incident in which they were injured or almost killed after

[64] Woodbridge, *Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 101.
[65] James Wilson, *The Autobiography of the Blind James Wilson: With a Preliminary Essay on His Life, Character, and Writings, As Well as on The Present State of the Blind* (London: Ward and Lock, 158 Fleet Street, 1856).
[66] The only evidence I can find of James Wilson's *The Lives of the Useful Blind* is mentioned in James Wilson's autobiography. No copy seems to exist in archives, libraries, or reprints.

travelling without assistance. While Bird suggests that blind people should wear a badge to alert others in the crowd to their status, Courtney and Wilson both suggest means by which blind men can be more careful in travelling alone, specifically by using sticks to guide their way. Again, both men seem concerned about the stereotype that the blind are helpless in a sighted world, and their autobiographies seek to combat those stereotypes.

In contrast, fiction published in the United States about blind characters tended to rely on these same stereotypes to connect with the sighted reader. For the sighted authors of these stories, blind people, particularly blind beggars, are helpless and entirely reliant on the sighted.[67] In addition, these stories rarely portray blind people, even those who are the protagonist in the story, as acting on their own volition. The blind in these stories rarely have any access to formal education, and their parents often chose to leave them in ignorance. If the blind in these stories have any form of income (and mostly they do not), it is through busking, often playing the violin or fiddle.[68] Only in one of the stories that I examined from this time period portrays a blind person not knowing any other blind people – for the most part, they are blind alone in a sea of sighted family members, concerned neighbours, or potential romantic partners.

Blind children play a large role in fiction about the blind, aimed at both children and adults. Many of these stories clearly contain a religious message or admonishment for sighted children, reminding them to count their blessings. These vary from the "Poor Blind Girl of Varany," a heathen who was introduced to Christianity by missionaries forced to leave the fictional region of Varany after teaching her about their religion.[69] Her family and community

[67] One of the autobiographies points out that you can't judge the blind based on blind beggars because beggars are deliberately playing up being helpless to gain more money.
[68] The connection between blindness and the violin was so strong that most schools refused to teach their students the violin because it was associated with begging. This is explored more in Chapter Three.
[69] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *The Youth's Dayspring*, "The Poor Blind Girl of Varany," September 1851.

demanded she renounce her conversion and refused to read the bible to her, but she remained steadfast. At the end of the short story, she had died having refused to give up her faith, and the author assures the reader that her eyes had been open in heaven and she could now see Jesus.[70] In "The Blind Girl That Can See," two blind girls learn of a miracle healer who can cure their blindness. Only one is willing to make the difficult journey to the physician. Her new eyes are spiritual, rather than physical, and the physician is Jesus who has cured her of her metaphorical blindness.[71] In another story, "Truman Foster: The Blind Sunday School Scholar," Foster is presented as a model pupil who memorizes bible verses and clearly understands their meaning. It ends with "Oh what a blessing is our sight! How good is God to you, that you are not blind."[72]

In other stories, blind children's goodness leads to an unexpected change in their fortune. For "Blind Walter," a poor blind boy who struggles to support himself through busking, his strength of character indicates his suitability to inherit a large fortune and marry a suitable middle-class woman, despite his lack of education.[73] In "Blind Bentie," the blind son of an accused murderer makes his way across country on foot to his father's trial. He plays a borrowed violin pitifully outside of the courthouse to support his father, who is found innocent of the crime. Bentie's playing was so sorrowful that a rich man bought him a new violin and arranged for his education. Thus, Bentie "became one of the greatest violinists of the era in which he lived." His father is also completely exonerated by the actual murderer's deathbed confession.[74]

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[70] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *The Youth's Dayspring*, "The Poor Blind Girl of Varany," September 1851, 132.
[71] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *The Youth's Dayspring*, "The Blind Girl That Can See," April 1852, 56.
[72] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; N. A. De Pew, "Truman Foster, The Blind Sunday-School Scholar," *Sunday School Advocate* (November 1851), 20.
[73] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *Waverley Magazine*, "Blind Walter, A Tale for Young People," February 7, 1852.
[74] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Ada Prescott, "Blind Bentie," *Ballou's Dollar Monthly Magazine* (February 1859), 186.

The message to sighted children is clear – be a good boy, demonstrate your strength of character, and you will be rewarded. (Messages for girls are discussed later in this chapter.)

While each of the autobiographies also presents the authors as having the strength of character to overcome the difficulties blindness causes them, they have a far different approach than the moralizing fiction told to sighted children. Courtney in particular writes against the idea that blind men are primarily virtuous and work towards goodness. His autobiography is filled with glimpses of his sense of humour, both about the situation of the blind and the assumptions made of them. He describes several meetings with Mr. Ross, a blind violinist from Rochester, New York. Ross, like Courtney, was completely blind, and clearly delighted in showing Courtney around his community. Courtney cheerful describes Ross' tours, explaining how "...he conducted me all over [Rochester], telling me about the various parts, and the building."[75] These tours also included jokes about their lack of sight, such as discussing how "...we walked together over the aqueduct of the canal, where there was no railing, -- he sportingly telling me, occasionally, to look down, and see what a dangerous place was beneath us. We returned from our ramble in perfect safety, thereby illustrating, that though true in a moral, yet it is not in a literal sense, that 'if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.'"[76] Courtney clearly viewed his own independence as being far from unique, but as the typical behaviour of blind men with the benefit of some education.

While fictional stories about boys tended to focus on their strength of character, stories about blind girls were about their goodness – goodness that was often rewarded by having their sight restored in heaven. In "My Blind Sister," sighted Cara's casual cruelty towards the blind, beautiful, and kind-hearted Lilly is discussed in detail, including Cara's refusal to teach Lilly

[75] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 15.
[76] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 15.

how to play the harp. Her cruelty eventually leads to Lilly's accidental death by drowning after Cara, frustrated and angry at having to care for her blind sister, abandoned Lilly near a lake. The story ends with Cara lamenting that "My blind sister was no longer blind. Her blue eyes were open in heaven. The angels were teaching her to play upon the harp!"[77] In "Over the River," the author describes Carrie as blind from birth because "God saw how few flowers grew along her pathway, so he mercifully sealed up her eyes that she might not look on the dark...[and] opened her eyes first in heaven."[78] While Carrie is adopted by a loving family, she dies soon after this change in her fortune. The story is published alongside a poem about how much better things are for her now that she is in heaven where she can see.[79] Unlike fictional blind boys, blind girls are rarely actors within the story; instead, they are rewarded after death for their docility.

This repeated theme in fiction of blindness being worse than death is rejected in each autobiography. As discussed above, Woodbridge is disdainful towards those who pitied him, and immediately set to planning an active life filled with public service.[80] While Courtney acknowledges his initial despair, his book is filled with the ways in which the blind can be independent, both on their own and with the support of others.[81] Bird rails against both poets and romance writers who introduce a blind character, as their object "is that of producing an effecting picture, by working up into misleading predominance helplessness, dependence, and incapacity,"

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[77] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Mary A. Townsend, "My Blind Sister," 1856. The title of the magazine was not recorded in the magazine file, and the page numbers refer to the magazine file's pagination rather than to the original document.
[78] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Emily C. Huntington, "Over the River." *The Ladies' Repository* (November 1857), 646.
[79] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Emily C. Huntington, "Over the River." *The Ladies' Repository* (November 1857), 647.
[80] Woodbridge, *Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 49.
[81] In *Anecdotes of the Blind*, Courtney not only describes the various ways his friend Ross supports himself throughout the book, but also describes the successful lives of a blind cabinet maker, a blind farmer with seven children, and various self-supporting blind musicians, ending the book with a list of successful blind men similarly to the ones describes in the Introduction.

while still acknowledging some of the depression that can be produced by “the objectless state of vacuity in which we exist and move.”[82] Each man is clearly frustrated that blindness engenders pity in the sighted, but still acknowledges that it is a difficult condition in which to live without assistance.

The sorts of necessary assistance are rarely discussed in fiction -- while childhood is a common topic, school rarely plays a significant role in the lives of the fictional blind. In “The Blind Girl,” published in 1852, youngest daughter Florence’s family had sent her “to an institution where she could learn the various employments and amusements of the blind, and where she would be less conscious of her calamity than at home.”[83] When she returns for the summer vacation, neither she nor her family discuss her experiences at the institution, perhaps because the author was unsure of what occurred at residential schools for the blind. The 1853 story “Mittie the Blind Child” also describes going to an institution, although in this case it is because she is believed to have been abandoned by her family. In the story, the person she was abandoned with eventually sent her to a retreat for the blind in an unnamed southern city in the United States, where she, like non-fictional blind children, learned to read raised print, sew, braid, and play music. She is joyously retrieved by her family almost a decade later and Mittie leaves the school forever.[84] No other works of fiction that I was able to locate address education for the blind, despite blind schools spreading across the United States during this period.

How blind people should be educated is addressed repeatedly throughout the autobiographies written by blind men. Courtney opens his autobiography by pointing out “...the

[82] Wilson, *Autobiography of the Blind James Wilson*, xlvi.
[83] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Herbert Linton, “The Blind Girl,” *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* (1852), 11.
[84] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Mary Irving, “Mittie, The Blind Child,” *The National Era* (June 29, 1854), 1.

study of the means whereby persons so deprived gain knowledge, cannot be indifferent to anyone who wishes to know and understand his own mind."[85] He argues that targeted education for the blind is of utmost importance, and he considers the life of the uneducated who were blind from birth as needlessly tragic.[86] Woodbridge had been at boarding school when he went blind, and while he continued his education, he did not attend any schools for the blind. Like Courtney, he never learned to read raised print text, and relied on others, particularly his wife, to both read and write on his behalf.[87] While Bird describes how James Wilson was saved through residential school education—a point Wilson's actual autobiography only touches on briefly—he argues vehemently against "exile schools" for the blind. Instead, he believes that blind and sighted children should be educated together, as a means of demonstrating to sighted children what the blind are capable of and allowing blind children to become accustomed to the habits and behaviours of the sighted.[88] For these blind men, education is the difference between being isolated and helpless, or being part of a community and successful.

The fiction written about blind children indicates that the sighted were not familiar with the capabilities of the blind during this period. Fictional blind children instead stood in as lessons for the sighted to count their blessings. They were often uneducated and were tragic figures of pity. The published autobiographies of this era seek to overturn these stereotypes of helplessness that affected the lives of the authors. Even Woodbridge, whose personal morality he believes is beyond reproach, rejects these moralistic and simplistic ideas of blindness. However, each author expresses concern that a lack of education can lead to a pathetic life for blind children and adults.

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[85] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 3.
[86] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 15.
[87] Woodbridge describes "…I commonly kept a young man with me, who was well-educated and skillful in reading and writing." Later, he explains that "the ladies of my family were an unspeakable blessing to me. They read and wrote for me without stint and complaint." Woodbridge, *The Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 206, 224.
[88] Wilson, *Autobiography of the Blind James Wilson*, xiii.

Like fictional blind children, fictional blind adults are occasionally inserted into stories to be an admonishment for the sighted to count their blessings. Often these characters have much more limited roles than child characters, coming into the story to allow a sighted main character – often a child – to demonstrate their concern for those less fortunate. In "Letters from Europe," the author writes of seeing a blind man begging in London but having no luck until a "beautiful" young girl with no shoes took pity on him, crying out "I am poor, but you are poor and blind! You cannot see this beautiful sun, no, nor ever did, nor can –poor old man!"[89] In "The Kind Hearted Boy," an old and infirm blind "negro" wanted to attend church, but no one would take him. A young white boy decides to lead him the six miles to church every week. The story ends admonishing the reader that "Oh, if only all were so kind."[90] In "The Picnic, or the Blind Musician," most of the sighted children at a picnic decide to taunt a blind beggar for sport. Only Fanny and Julia defend him from their cousins. The blind man turns out to be their older cousin Frank in disguise, who was testing to see which of the children deserved the fine doll he'd brought home with him. The story ends with the reminder to treat others, "even beggars and deformed persons" well, as the reader may be "entertaining angels unaware."[91]

Some fictional blind adults were allowed romantic relationships, albeit in this period only within the confines of a cure narrative. Florence, mentioned before as the titular character in "The Blind Girl," is presented as a possible romantic match for the point of view character, an unnamed doctor living with her family. Intrigued by her beauty, kindness, and grace, he becomes desperate to save her vision. With the aid of an oculist friend of his, he is able to do so. However,

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[89] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; D. W. Bartlett, "Letters from Europe," *Woodworth's Youth's Cabinet* (February 1851), 43.
[90] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *The Presbyterian Family Almanac*. "The Kind Hearted Boy," (1851), 31.
[91] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *Student and Schoolmate and Forrester's Boys & Girls Magazine: A Reader for Schools & Families*, "The Picnic or, the Blind Musician" (July 1859), 5.

it is only after she is cured and able to see his face that he decides she is a suitable partner for marriage.[92] An 1859 short story, "The Blind Girl's Love," follows a similar idea of a male boarder's romantic interest in the blind daughter of the family, although in this case beautiful and delicate Emily is less interested in the male protagonist than his best friend, Frank.[93] Her feelings lead her astray, as Frank spends months "stringing along" the young blind girl while in fact courting her older sister. (How both sisters were unaware of this situation while all three were living in the same small house is unclear.) When her sister announces her engagement to Frank, Emily becomes ill and refuses to leave her room. It is only after she not only confesses the entire story to her family but admits that she should have pursued a relationship with the protagonist, that she is cured of her blindness. Just hours later, Emily dies of a broken heart, having been granted sight just long enough to say goodbye to her family.[94] As in the stories featuring blind girls, blind women are acted upon, rather than actors, and rewarded with sight for their virtuous behaviour – albeit in most cases moments before death.

Very few of the fictional stories feature a blind potential or actual husband, despite the reality that blind men were far more successful in finding marriage partners among the sighted than were blind women.[95] Within the few stories about blind husbands, there is no miracle cure brought about by the work of their potential or actual wife. Instead, these stories focus on how the women show their romantic support for their blind husband. In "The Blind Man and the

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[92] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Herbert Linton, "The Blind Girl," *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* (1852), 11.
[93] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Emily A. Dennett, "Blind Girl's Love" *Ballou's Dollar Monthly Magazine* (February 1859).
[94] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Emily A. Dennett, "Blind Girl's Love" *Ballou's Dollar Monthly Magazine* (February 1859), 120.
[95] For a discussion about the "sexless" ways that blind girls were presented to the public, see Catherine J. Kudlick, "Modernity's Miss-Fits: Blind Girls and Marriage in France and America, 1820–1920" in *Women on Their Own*, edited by Rudolph Bell and Virginia Yans, 201–18 (New Bruncwick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813544014-010.

Blind God," published in 1851, Charles's cousin Maria falls in love with him after he is blinded during a war.[96] At first, he was unwilling to marry her due to his inability to work. Maria successfully argues that her small inheritance is enough to begin their lives together, and in the long term she supports them by hand-making dolls while he plays music for her to work by. The story ends with the author reflecting on the romantic and supportive nature of their marriage.[97] In "Blind Walter," Walter's good breeding shines through despite his poverty.[98] While supporting himself and his mother playing the violin, he meets Alice, the daughter of a middle-class family who wishes to learn violin. While he does not at first intend to marry her, still believing himself to be unacceptable, he unexpectedly is the last male heir to a British noble title and estate worth £25,000 per annum, which enables him to support himself, his new bride, and their children. The story closes describing Alice as having "children, but her blind husband is her first child."[99] In neither of these stories is there any discussion of a cure, or any suggestion that there should be.

In comparison, each autobiography discusses the importance of the author's wife, as well as the wives of any other blind men mentioned. Courtney describes not only his own marriage to a sighted woman, but also the marriage of one of his many blind friends to another sighted woman. Mr. Ross announces his marriage after he and Courtney had not visited each other for some time, stating, "I am happy enough, *for she is the handsomest woman I ever saw*, and I advise you, as soon as you can, to get one, too."[100] [emphasis in original] Another blind friend, a farmer named Hooker, is described as married with seven children. Courtney describes Hooker's

[96] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Miss Reamer, "The Blind Man and the Blind God" *North American Miscellany* (June 14, 1851).
[97] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; Miss Reamer, "The Blind Man and the Blind God" *North American Miscellany* (June 14, 1851), 324.
[98] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *Waverley Magazine*, "Blind Walter, A Tale for Young People" (February 7, 1852).
[99] Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; Magazine File: 1851-75; *Waverley Magazine*, "Blind Walter, A Tale for Young People" (February 7, 1852).
[100] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 17.

wife as "a very amiable, excellent woman, [who] treated me with all possible kindness. Indeed, I never knew the wife of a blind man, chosen after the loss of his vision, who was not of this character. Depending more upon the kindness of a companion than others, they are more careful in their choice, and are often better judges from the voice, than persons who have more extensive sources of information."[101] These anecdotes make clear that Courtney viewed the character of his blind friends' wives to be of particular importance.

While the blind minister, Woodbridge, does not discuss the lives of any blind men save himself, he does discuss his choice of bride and her importance in his life. His wife - unnamed throughout the narrative - was the daughter of a woman he hired to keep house for him, and he had been directly involved in her education as "my situation was peculiar, and I wanted a wife of peculiar aptitudes for that situation."[102] He describes the importance of the women in his family to his work as a minister, describing them as "an unspeakable blessing to me. They read and wrote for me without stint and without complaint."[103] Woodbridge also makes clear that he is completely able to support himself, his wife, and their growing family, albeit only when he is being properly paid by the towns to which he ministers. Much of the later part of his autobiography describes his lengthy struggle to be paid for his ministry, although he does make clear that his own thriftiness as well as that of his wife ensured that they did not lack for important things.

James Wilson describes resisting finding a wife because of his fears of being unable to provide for her and a family, due to "…the precarious manner of earning my subsistence…it was enough for me to suffer alone—I could not think of entailing misery upon others." However, his

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[101] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 17–18.
[102] Woodbridge, *Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 232.
[103] Woodbridge, *Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 224.

friends were insistent that a "sober steady woman...." would ensure his long-term support, arguing that "no one required the kind assistance of an affectionate wife more than a blind man…." He settled on a woman living in his neighbourhood who had been very supportive to her ailing mother.[104] While he does not describe her as assisting in his work as Woodbridge does his wife, he makes clear that her loyalty and support was of great consequence to him and his career as a writer later in life.

In each of these autobiographies, the importance of a wife's support to her husband cannot be understated; however, unlike the stories written for a sighted audience, the blind authors do not describe relying on their wives for an income. Instead, each man describes throughout his autobiography the lengths to which he goes to ensure some income to his household. Courtney continues to sell pamphlets, including the autobiography, to bring in an income, and his blind companion, Mr. Ross, supports himself and his wife through his music. He also describes the working life of several other blind men, such as a cabinetmaker named Lysander, the blind farmer in Syracuse with his seven children, and a "blind Indian" in Clinton who performed various musical instruments to make a living.[105] While their families struggle due to a low income, Courtney makes clear that these men were not relying on charity, a stereotype of blindness he was determined to combat. Throughout his autobiography, Courtney assures the reader he does not rely on charity but his own ingenuity. Again, the desire is to make clear that these men - whether in general, as for Courtney, or in specific, as for Woodbridge - can properly support a family without being a burden to their family or to society at large.

During this period, disabled men were frequently viewed as belonging to a category "distinct from manliness and masculinity," often feared as being too feminine or at risk of being

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[104] Wilson, *Autobiography of the Blind James Wilson*, 72.
[105] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 15, 17, 20.

impotent and thus unable to be a father.[106] Both Christian pastors and medical authorities spoke of the importance of "true manhood" only being achieved through fatherhood.[107] As examined in Stephen M. Frank's *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North*, an ideal man was one who was able to "earn the money needed to support married life," and each of these men were eager to demonstrate how they fulfilled that task as part of their masculine role within the family.[108]

Fictional stories relied heavily on a cure narrative for potential romantic partners – implying that the best way forward for the blind was to become (again, or for the first time) one of the sighted. While each autobiography discusses the possibility of a cure, each of them also barely touches on it for the author. Courtney goes the furthest in seeking a cure and visits a doctor while in Boston who performs an operation on him; however, while his sight was temporarily restored, he is soon completely blind again and no further mention is made of it.[109] Woodbridge mentions that he had considered going to England "for the benefit of my eyes," but he quickly dismisses this idea. No reason is given for his change of plans.[110] (Similar attempts at seeking a cure for blind women are discussed in Chapter Six.) For the sighted, clearly the blind must long for a cure to their darkness; for the blind, the reality is that cures are difficult to find, painful to experience, and rarely successful. It is more important they have the social supports they need.

Read together, autobiographies of blind men and the fiction written about blind adults and children show the societal stereotypes of blindness as blind residential schools were being

[106] Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *"Defects": Engendering the Modern Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 12.
[107] Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 46
[108] Frank, *Life with Father*, 86.
[109] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 21–2.
[110] Woodbridge, *Autobiography of a Blind Minister*, 127.

established in the United States during the 1830s and beyond. Stories often depicted the blind as helpless, often without any form of income and often with few friends. They are isolated within the sighted community, without any connection to other blind people. Blind people who behave appropriately are rewarded, either through surprising financial gains for men, or romantic partners and a cure to their blindness for women. In fiction, blind people serve the important role of reminding the sighted of their blessings, encouraging pity for those who are so cursed.

The autobiographies show that these stereotypes affected their lives. Each of their works, regardless of their motivation in writing them, describes responses to these ideas of blindness. Each man describes how he has accepted his blindness, and how he seeks to overcome its limitations. Each man shows how he, and in some cases his fellow blind men, have found marriage partners who have helped them in their lives. Each man rejects the idea of accepting charity, making clear that the blind only need to rely on it if their education is stinted or they are not respected as capable of supporting themselves. As institutions for the blind sought to gain both funding and support across North America, it was necessary for them as well to combat these stereotypes. If their blind charges were to grow into successful adults, unencumbered by the fears that the sighted public held about blind adults and the concerns about blind beggars, the institutions would need to use all of their resources. They needed to lobby government officials, use the press, their annual reports, and public demonstrations of their students' skills. How effective these were will be examined in later chapters.

Professional Discussions of the Blind in Ontario

While the previous section of this chapter has explored attitudes expressed in American publishing, this section focuses instead on medical doctors, specifically those in Ontario, and the challenges they faced in both treating the blind and in raising funds for their clinics. The attitudes

expressed in both fiction and in the autobiographies focused on above reflect that the public was more inclined to see blind children as being proper recipients of charitable care. However, as clinics were established to attempt to cure blindness, it became clear to doctors that far more of the blind were adults in need of surgical interventions after accident or illness had led to their blindness. This section first examines how doctors in the region that became Ontario learned to treat blindness, and their ultimate connection with the establishment of schools for the blind. Examining the attitudes expressed towards the blind in Upper Canada (later Ontario) in the decades before the establishment in 1871 of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind can show how these stereotypes held throughout North American played out within a smaller community. I will first examine how doctors understood and treated eye diseases and blindness, starting with medical texts and moving through to the establishment of specific eye clinics across what would become Ontario.

For doctors, the professionalization within the field led to oculists and ophthalmologists publishing their findings in medical journals to legitimize their work, expanding it to include new equipment and professional methods of evaluating visual acuity and visual loss. To establish professional legitimacy, blindness and other diseases of the eye began to be treated separately from other maladies. After exploring this pattern, I will then discuss the provincial government's treatment of blindness, specifically how the province's interpretation of both the needs of doctors and reports generated by census workers, municipalities, and provincial committees led to a governmental understanding of blindness that was instrumental in the establishment of the first provincial school for the blind in the 1870s. This school, in turn, required the provincial government to improve its enumeration of the blind to establish both its minimum and maximum population and keep costs within reason. With the rise of common schools and the extension of

mandatory education throughout Ontario, educators and families were confronted with the need to educate blind children - a need that, it was argued, was impossible to meet in the common schools.

Early to mid-nineteenth century ophthalmology in North America was limited. The primary teaching text, published in 1823 by Dr. George Frick, aimed to encourage American medical students and practitioners to pay more attention in their practices to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the eye.[111] Frick divided the text by changes in the texture of the eye – the forms of inflammation; the effects of inflammation; diseases of the appendages of the eye; and diseases that attacked the tissues of the eye.[112] Throughout the discussion on both the results of and the treatments for these ailments, Frick at no point discussed the loss of visual acuity or a reduction in eyesight as a symptom. Even when specifically discussing myopia (near sightedness), Frick's definition is vague – myopia was "when this punctum [the point or distance from the eye that a person can see an object clearly] approaches very near the eye, or the person sees but indistinctly at a small distance from him…"[113] Without any widely-accepted and practised form of checking visual acuity, it was impossible for doctors, whether they were eye-specialists or not, to fully discuss the range of possible diseases.

Even when specifically discussing blindness, Frick's work makes clear that oculists and ophthalmologists did not have a clear, verifiable medical definition of the condition. (Currently for medical professionals, the North American standard for blindness is a visual acuity test of 20/200 or worse, which indicates that the patient must come within 6 meters of an object to see

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[111] George Frick, *A Treatise on the Diseases of the Eye : Including the Doctrines and Practice of the Most Eminent Modern Surgeons, and Particularly Those of Professor Beer* (Baltimore: Fielding Lucas, Jun, John D Toy, 1823), viii.
[112] Frick, *A Treatise on the Diseases of the Eye*, x.
[113] Frick, *A Treatise on the Diseases of the Eye*, 304.

it.) Instead, treatment for blindness was hardly touched on in Frick's work. While Frick discusses some situations that may bring about blindness, such as the development of cataracts, amaurosis, or diseases of the eyelid, his only suggestion on direct surgical intervention to cure blindness was to perform it as early as possible in young children. This was both because a younger eye "has not become so tough and flexible as it does at a later period," and because of the "well known" understanding that "persons born blind, or who have remained in this state for any considerable time, acquire such an inveterate habit of rolling the eye, that it is impossible for them even after the vision is again restored, to control it…. And he is entirely deprived of all useful vision."[114] Without a clear definition of blindness, it was difficult for eye doctors to know for certain the effectiveness of their treatment.

Frick's text predates the development of the ophthalmoscope, an instrument (still in use today) which allowed doctors for the first time to examine the back of the eye and thus gain a more thorough understanding of how diseases of the eye affected vision. Hermann von Helmholtz invented the earliest ophthalmoscope in 1851, combining "a source of illumination, a reflecting surface to direct light toward the eye, and a means of correcting an out-of-focus image…" in a single instrument.[115] As the instrument came into widespread use throughout the British empire, further diseases of the eye, their causes, and their treatments were discussed in medical texts, but again, these did not include the amount of vision loss or a measurement of visual acuity in their diagnostic criteria.[116] Instead, sketches of the damaged eye were exchanged in medical textbooks and journals, meaning doctors could see the results of diseases of the eyes,

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[114] Frick, *A Treatise on the Diseases of the Eye*, 207.
[115] C. Richard Keeler, "The Ophthalmoscope in the Lifetime of Hermann von Helmholtz" *Archives of Ophthalmology* 120: 2 (February 1, 2002), 194. https://doi.org/10.1001/archopht.120.2.194.
[116] See, for example: "A System of Surgery, Theoretical and Practical; in Treatises by Various Authors" *The British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review* 33: 66 (April 1864), 302–24.

but not yet fully measure their effects. Vision loss and blindness were still not clearly defined for the sake of medical diagnosis.

As the ophthalmoscope opened new vistas to doctors in examining the eye for disease and defect, doctors in Canada wrote of their own experiences and patients to a growing audience of their peers. For those who wrote about blindness in Canada's early medical journals, it was mostly a trait acquired in adulthood. In both statistical analysis and when discussing specific cases, these doctors focused on adults who required surgical intervention to correct eye damage caused by accident, illness, disease, or aging. Treatments included Bowman's Operation (which requires slitting open the tear ducts next to the eye), iridectomies (the removal of parts of the iris to treat cataracts caused by glaucoma), and Streatfield's Operation (slicing and repairing of the eyelid to correct entropion, which is when the eyelids fold inward - this caused blindness because the eyes could not open and close properly.)[117] These treatments illuminated the sort of patients a doctor was likely to examine during the course of their general medical practice in Canada West/Ontario in the 1860s, as well as the expected levels of intervention required to repair damaged eyes. In all cases examined in the *British American Journal*, which was "devoted to the advancement of the medical and physical sciences in the British American Provinces," patients were only discussed in terms of the surgical intervention. In none of the cases the journal published prior to 1875 was the eyesight of the patient measured and reported, either before or after surgery. Instead, patients were either described as cured or incurable. While doctors in the community would follow up with their own patients, these follow-ups were not published for the wider medical audience.

[117] For a discussion of these surgical techniques, see: Eugene Smith, "Lachrymal Affections-Clinic at St Mary's Hospital" *The Medical Age: A Semi-Monthly Journal of Medicine and Surgery* VII: 2 (1889), 28–9; George A. Berry, *Diseases of the Eye: A Practical Treatise for Student of Ophthalmology* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers & Co, 1889), 596.

Canada's doctors had many concerns about how damaged eyes should be treated, with several developing a reputation for their interest in eye treatments and surgeries. As a respected physician at Montreal's Saint Patrick Hospital, Dr. Robert L MacDonald published several reports in medical journals on the surgical intervention for epiphora, describing it as one that "should not be attempted by anyone who is not familiar with the anatomy of the parts [of the eye and the tear ducts], and who is not in the habit of performing delicate operations upon the eye and its appendages."[118] Similar expertise was displayed by Dr. A. M. Rosebrugh of Toronto, who went on not only to found the Toronto Eye and Ear Clinic in 1867, but was also on the original provincial committee that planned the Institution for the Blind in the 1870s.[119] Rosebrugh published several articles in Canadian medical journals on blindness, which again focused on either specific surgical treatments or on gathering of statics for analysis. When treating patients in Hamilton, Rosebrugh generated a list of diagnoses of 100 cases of diseases of the eye, which he argued "will give at least an approximate idea of the percentage in which the various diseases of the eye exist in Canada West."[120] Again, this listed merely diseases and injuries to the eye, without discussing the degree of vision loss or the possible amount of vision that could be regained with surgery or other interventions.

Canada's medical journals also commented on the treatments for vision loss discussed in medical journals published elsewhere, particularly in England and the United States. In 1862, the *British American* reported that a surgical treatment for myopia had been undertaken that

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[118] Robert L. MacDonnell, "Contributions to Clinical Surgery and Medicine" *British American Journal* 1 (January 1860: 1–8), 8.

[119] Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, *Sixth Annual Report, With the Constitution and Act of Incorporation of the Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary* (Toronto: The Infirmary, 1873); "Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary" *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* 3: 3 (March 1878): 102; Watertown, MA; Samuel P. Hayes Research Library; J. B. Fuller, "The Institution for the Blind of Ontario, and Its Proposed Location [Handwritten Copy]," n.d. https://archive.org/details/annualreportofon1318onta/page/n5/mode/2up.

[120] A. M. Rosebrugh, "Analysis of 100 Ophthalmic Cases, Showing the Comparative Frequency of the Various Diseases of the Eye in Hamilton" *British American Journal* III: 10 (October 1862), 294–5.

"tends to render the myopic eye more healthy by improving the nutrition of the choroid, retina, and vitreous humour" in Ireland. In response, the unnamed author scoffed that the suggested surgical treatment "does *not* tend to render the myopic eye more healthy by improving its nutrition, for this plain reason that there is no defect of nutrition at all."[121] The British American Provinces were part of the overall conversation about eye treatments and eye surgeries held throughout the British Empire. Within only a year of the invention of the ophthalmoscope, it was being reviewed and discussed in Canadian medical journals, while medical texts published in England were regularly reviewed in the pages of Canadian medical journals. Although they were on the far-flung frontier of the empire, Canadian doctors were well aware of research conducted in London, as well as France and Germany.

It is thus not surprising that Dr. Rosebrugh, along with several of his colleagues, established the Eye and Ear Clinic in Toronto, following in the footsteps of similar endeavours in London and across Europe. Initially funded through charitable donations and a small grant from the provincial government, the directors of the clinic soon began generating reports that would ingratiate their work to the provincial and municipal governments.[122] These reports followed in the footsteps of the medical journals, as both the director and surgeon wrote reports that discussed patient care in terms of treatments and surgeries performed on patients, as well as the diagnoses for various conditions. There was no discussion of the degree of vision loss in adult patients or a clear dataset to describe the amount of improvement after either surgery or long-

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[121] Dublin Medical Press, "The Cure of Short Sightedness, or Intra-Ocular Myotomy" *British American Journal* III: 2 (February 1862), 54–5.

[122] In addition to the published annual reports of the Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, see: Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Eight Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, 1875* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1876), 1-4; Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Tenth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, 1877* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1878), 102; Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, 1878* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1879), 166-171.

term care of the patient. Instead, patients were reported as "cured," "improved," "relieved," "nearly cured," or "incurable."[123]

As with discussions in medical journals, these reports also revealed that the majority of patients requiring care or surgery were adults. In the sixth annual report of the Toronto Eye and Ear Clinic, published in 1873, the director outlined the importance of the charitable work undertaken for "the dependent poor afflicted with diseases of the eye and ear": not only was this work relieving the state of the burden of supporting a blind individual, but in many cases the individual was the breadwinner for the family, and their care ensured the entire family's survival. The report continued: "But when it is considered that very many of those so treated are the heads of families having others dependent on them, but who, by reason of their affliction, have themselves become dependent, a more adequate estimate may be formed of the wider range of benefits the Charity confers."[124] The annual report does not list the age of patients, but instead groups them according to their marital status and then their location within the province. Of the 510 patients seen for both eye and ear complaints, 239 (forty-seven percent) were either married or widowed. The remaining were grouped together as either children, or as bachelors and spinsters - indicating that they were of marriageable age and perhaps, with the treatment provided at the Clinic, would soon be married themselves. While the numbers for this latter group are unclear, it is likely that more than fifty percent of the people treated by the clinic would not be considered children.[125]

However, when attempting to appeal to the public for charitable funds, these same reports drew not on cases of adults restored to sight, but of children. The director's report included an

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[123] Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, *Sixth Annual Report*, 8.
[124] Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, *Sixth Annual Report*, 5.
[125] Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, *Sixth Annual Report*, 7.

extract of a gushing letter received from a parent, thanking them for "a great change for the better in Billy's eyes, and we again send our grateful thanks for the kindness you have all shown to my son." The following page included a letter from St Joseph's Convent in Hamilton, thanking the clinic for improving Mary's sight: "We shall not soon forget the interest you have taken in our poor orphan child."[126] As in Klages' *Woeful Afflictions*, these "poster children" for blindness were seen as more legitimate than similarly-afflicted adults in seeking charity.[127] Perhaps this is because they are clearly not the victims of their own mistakes, and that this opportunity for treatment could be a potential new start to a child's life, one away from poverty and dependency. For adults, however, blindness was repeatedly described as being contracted through vice, poverty, or carelessness.[128]

The understanding by medical and charitable authorities of blindness as being related to both poverty and adulthood is supported in other sources as well. However, tabulating exact numbers of the blind or partially blind in the nineteenth century would be impossible; the various sources available reflect those who sought charitable aid, ignoring the wealthy (who would not need to rely on public hospitals for medical treatment) and those whose needs were met by family members - whether immediate or extended. This difficulty is not only faced by historians, but also by government officials. These officials needed to tabulate the working capabilities of the Canadian public, as Bruce Curtis has outlined in his work on the nineteenth-century censuses in Canada.[129] As adult blind were believed unable to work, and thus unable to contribute to Canada's prosperity, the government felt it necessary to have an accurate count.

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[126] Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, *Seventh Annual Report with the Constitution and List of Subscribers of the Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary* (Toronto: The Infirmary, and Guardian Book and Job Office, 1874), 5-6.
[127] Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7.
[128] Toronto Eye and Ear Infirmary, *Seventh Annual Report*, 5.
[129] Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada: 1840-1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

The classification of people required for the census led to official labelling of certain types of people - the blind, deaf and/or mute, and lunatic and/or idiotic - as defectives. However, the documents produced by both the government of Canada West and, after Confederation, the government of Canada, did not define what these specific classes of defectives meant in practical terms. For enumerators, the need to accurately count defectives led to a series of delicate enquiries. Instructions to enumerators did not call any special attention to the definition of blindness or the other defective classes save for those who were labelled lunatics or idiots, or (in later years) of unsound mind. In those cases, enumerators were reminded in their official instructions that "if he [the enumerator] is acquainted with the fact beforehand, [he] must approach it with great delicacy, taking care, however, not to omit the entry of any such case. No attempt is made to distinguish between the various maladies affecting the intellect; as experience proves that the result of such enquiries made under such circumstances is perfectly worthless."[130] However, this method of enumerating the blind was clearly ineffective. According to the 1861 census, enumerators counted only three blind people in Toronto living outside of residential homes set up by charities for other purposes, all of whom were over the age of 21. Inside the Lunatic Asylum, the Boys' Home, the House of Industry, and the House of Providence, enumerators reported ten blind residents, again all over the age of 21. Other than one blind girl, eighteen, living with her family at the Garrison, the average age for blind residents of Toronto was 48 - hardly the age to justify the foundation of a school for the blind within the next ten years. In the same census year, Brantford reported twelve blind people, two under the age of 21; Guelph reported only one blind person, Mary, aged 45; and Hamilton's census indicated that no

[130] Canada, Department of Agriculture, Census Branch, *Manual Containing the "Census Act" and the Instructions to Officers Employed in the Taking of the Second Census in Canada, 1881* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlin, 1882), 30; Canada, Department of Agriculture, Census Branch, *Manual Containing the "Census Act" and the Instructions to Officers Employed in the Taking of the Third Census in Canada, 1891* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlin, 1891), 18.

blind people lived within its boundaries. In addition, Toronto's House of Industry recorded seven blind adult residents in 1869, eleven in 1870, and fourteen in 1871. Of these, only one appeared in the census as blind.[131]

Families were clearly reluctant to identify their "defective" children to the government. Just two years before the OIEB began accepting pupils, the 1871 census reported only two blind children in Toronto of the proper age to attend. Brantford also reported two blind children under 21, although two more blind residents were under 25. Guelph reported no blind children, although one blind woman (out of seven total blind residents) was 25 years old. Hamilton also only had two blind children of the proper age to attend, having reported seventeen blind residents in total.[132] Later instructions to census enumerators imply that this reluctance to discuss defective children was shared by government officials. While the instructions for both the 1881 and 1891 census advised enumerators that both deafness and blindness were self-evident and thus did not need any further explanation, later census documents chose to give some guidance to enumerators when counting.[133] By 1901, census enumerators were reminded that "It is not necessary that the degree of infirmity should be absolute or total, but that it should be so sufficiently marked in any one of the classes as to have reached the stage of incapacity."[134] As well, in the final results for the 1911 census, the bulletins advised the reader that

> Although the returns for the census of 1911 have been compared carefully with such other data relating to these classes as were available, yet there is always a probability that the full numbers of any class of defectives are never obtained in a census, owing to a

[131] Toronto; City of Toronto Archives, House of Industry, "Register of Aid Recipients from the House of Industry, 1860-1879," n.d. Fonds 1035, Series 802, File 9.
[132] Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, Government of Canada, *Census of Canada, 1871* (Ottawa: n.d.).
[133] Canada, Department of Agriculture, Census Branch, *Manual Containing the "Census Act" and the Instructions to Officers Employed in the Taking of the Third Census in Canada, 1891*, 18.
[134] Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Fourth Census of Canada 1901, Instructions to Chief Officers, Commissioners and Enumerators* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1901), 17.

> natural aversion on the part of parents to, as they think, advertise the presence of a defective in the family, particularly if the infirmity dates from childhood, and on the part of the enumerator to enquire for such infirmities.[135]

In 1921, the government chose not to count defectives.

Problems with enumerating the blind were also experienced in the United States. American census takers attempted to count the blind as early as 1830.[136] However, these numbers were easily debunked as further studies were undertaken.[137] In *The Story of Blindness*, Farrell speculates that the difficulties were caused by the lack of a consistent definition of blindness, while in *The Unseen Minority* Koestler instead suggests that parents "forgot" to tell enumerators of blind children, while enumerators "forgot" to ask.[138] Even as late as 1920 the American census reported 57,444 blind people, while a special report that attempted to only enumerate blind people arrived at a figure between 74,5000 and 76,500.[139] The United States stopped enumerating the blind in the census in 1930.[140]

The difficulties in capturing the blind in the census reflect the private concerns of parents about their children's "defective" nature. The public attitude that the blind were doomed to a life of pitiable begging and charitable support made it difficult for parents to label this children in this way. As well, the idea that census takers could identify the blind by their appearance alone indicates further stereotypes about what being blind looked like to the general public. This difficultly would later be reflected in the reluctance of parents to send their children to a school

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[135] Canada, Census and Statistics Office, Department of Trade and Commerce, *Bulletin XVII Fifth Census of Canada* (Ottawa: Department of Trade and Industry: Census and Statistics Office, 1912-1914), 1.
[136] Gabriel Farrell, *The Story of Blindness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 212.
[137] Frances A. Koestler, *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in America* (New York: D. McKay Co, 1976), 48.
[138] Farrell, *The Story of Blindness*, 212; Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 48.
[139] Farrell, *The Story of Blindness*, 212.
[140] Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 49.

that further labelled its pupils as blind – and thus in need of charity – before the schools were able to demonstrate their worth.

Conclusion

Attitudes towards blindness in Ontario were representative of those across North America. The blind were viewed as pitiable and pathetic, unable to properly support themselves, and often at fault for their afflictions. They were presented in fictional literature as morality tales, either admonishing the sighted to behave lest they be hosting angels unaware or reminding the sighted to count their blessings. While blind adults rejected these stereotypes and decried how they affected their lives, parents of blind children feared the consequences of the label of "blind." To side-step these stereotypes of blind adults as undeserving, medical professionals in Upper Canada/Ontario focused on the image of the pathetic blind child to appeal to the philanthropic public. These stereotypes of blindness led to difficulties with the establishment of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind. Chapter Two explores how parents reacted to invitations to send their children to the school once it opened in 1872. The difficulties in enumerating the blind also affected the school's early years, as locating age-appropriate blind people proved difficult.

Chapter Two: Which Nought but the Light of Knowledge Can Dispel: Establishing Education and Creating Networks

Introduction

Schools for the blind, including Ontario's, created an international network to discuss shared concerns, work on definitions of blindness, and debate solutions to the issues facing blind children and adults. Ontario's blind cannot be discussed in isolation from the blind in other cities across North America; comparisons to schools in Canada, such as the Halifax Asylum for the blind in Nova Scotia, are not sufficient. Much more communication occurred across the border with established schools in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia than with other schools for the blind in Canada.

Examining the establishment of various schools for the blind in the United States before the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) was founded by the Ontario government shows the different ways that education was approached in Ontario. Although Ontario-based educators looked to these early American schools as models, the majority of the schools in the United States were created by philanthropists and often struggled for money in their initial years. The OIEB, in contrast, was established with the full backing of the provincial government with expectation that it would be a professional school for children, preparing them for lives after graduation. Instead of struggling to build an early curriculum from guesswork, the founders of the OIEB were able to draw on the successful schools in the United States to build their programs and courses. Schools for the blind in North America were part of a network that shared information, resources, teachers, and textbooks, and understanding the American schools and the earliest work of these educators is important to understanding the history of the OIEB as an educational institution.

Establishment of Education for Blind Children in the United States

The earliest schools for the blind in North America were created in the United States. The foundation of these schools shared several common traits, despite being established independently of one another. Each school was founded in part by a philanthropist (universally male and white) who saw specific blind children in need; most schools had one strong principal or superintendent in its earliest years who took a firm hand in creating the nature of the school; and each school's officials were determined that they would focus on the needs of children rather than considering how to incorporate blind adults into their curriculum. The superintendents who established these schools intended that they would be unlike the ones they examined in Europe, which they perceived as being warehouses for blind adults rather than useful sites of education.

Three schools were founded in the United States at roughly the same time – the New England Asylum for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts in 1829, the New York Institution for the Blind in 1831, and the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind in 1832. Examining these three schools together reveals the pattern that was followed by later successful schools in the United States. As well, the principals of these three schools would have an influence on the educational goals and curriculum of other schools across North America, both due to their age and the personalities of the men who founded them. From Boston, Samuel Gridley Howe's work with deaf-blind Laura Bridgman and his development of the Boston Line type (examined in more detail in Chapter Four) demonstrated his commitment as an educator. In Pennsylvania, Julius Reinhold Friedlander joined Howe in producing books of the Bible in raised print, eventually establishing his own raised print text. In New York, William Bell Wait's appointment as superintendent in the 1860s established the New York school as a place of innovation both in terms of raised print text and in terms of publishing books for the blind.

However, many of these men's legacy were fragile and did not lead to lasting legacies. Howe is the only male founder whose influence lasted through the decades. Indeed, the OIEB did not have the male founding father that most other institutions did. But in every other respect, the OIEB strove to mimic the schools in the United States.

Samuel Gridley Howe and the Perkins School for the Blind

Early 20th-century scholar of the blind Richard Slayton French observed that the trajectory of development for the early residential schools for the blind were similar in the United States.[141] With the successful establishment of the American Asylum for the Deaf in 1817 and having heard of successfully-run schools for the blind in Europe, male philanthropists and social reformers in the United States began to consider establishing a blind asylum.[142] In 1829, Dr. John D. Fisher investigated the possibility of founding such a school in Boston, and quickly struck a committee of like-minded men to help him do so. This committee in turn appealed to the Massachusetts Legislature for funding for such an endeavor, and without debate in either House or Senate the Legislature agreed to do so, as well as commissioning a census of the blind.[143] This was the beginning of what would eventually be named the Perkins School for the Blind, first called the New England Asylum for the Purpose of Instructing the Blind.

After some investigation, Fisher realized that he was not prepared to establish and run the school himself, and in 1831 the committee appointed war hero and noted reformist Samuel Gridley Howe to the position.[144] Howe immediately set off to tour schools in Europe; however,

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[141] Richard Slayton French, *From Homer To Helen Keller : A Social and Educational Study of the Blind* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1932), 109–10. French describes a period of personal leadership of one great man who realizes the needs of the blind, followed by collection of funds from both the public and local governments (usually the state, although municipalities may contribute as well), experimentation on a small number of pupils, a demonstration of success that in turn leads to more stable funding from the government, followed by the formal establishment of a school complete with a permanent home.
[142] Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 29.
[143] French, *From Homer To Helen Keller*, 111.
[144] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 29.

he was disappointed in what he saw. The school in France, he believed, taught students to either be dependent or to be a public spectacle that could perform amusing tricks rather than a school that encouraged self-reliance and proper education. Other schools in Europe he found to be useless at best and damaging to the pupils at worst.[145] Howe rejected this outcome: he was "determined to alter the equation between blindness and dependence…" and instead encourage blind children to self-sufficiency. It was essential "not to protect them…but to let them stumble and fail."[146]

After returning from Europe, Howe sought out suitable pupils to experiment on how to best educate the blind. He hired two blind educators from Europe to assist him and began work on what would eventually become Boston Line Type, pasting bits of string in the shape of letters to paper.[147] (The development of this and other raised print texts for the blind is discussed in Chapter Four.) He and Fisher located two blind girls, sisters Abby and Sophie Carter, to be his first pupils, and the fledgling school opened with seven pupils in 1833.[148] Within six months, the school had run out of money and was in desperate need of funding. Howe decided to have his students demonstrate what they had learned in front of the Massachusetts Legislature. Impressed with his success, the Legislature granted the school a $6,000 annual grant, as long as it would take on 20 students for free every year.[149] Colonel Thomas Perkins offered his mansion as a

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[145] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 29.
[146] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 29. Elaine Showalter, *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 33.
[147] Showalter, *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe*, 34.
[148] Showalter, *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe*, 34. Three schools for the blind were established in the United States almost simultaneously, in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. However, the one given the most attention in the historiography is Boston's school under Howe. Whole chapters are given over to its foundation, with only cursory mentions of similar achievements in New York or Philadelphia – both schools were raised print texts were developed and innovations were made. Howe's work with Laura Bridgeman, and Keller's eventual time there with Anne Sullivan, may account for Perkins' over-representation in the historiography.
[149] French, *From Homer To Helen Keller*, 116.

home for the school, should the public donate $50,000 to the project; the public instead raised $61,000 to establish the school.[150]

The New York Institution for the Blind and William B. Wait

As with Boston's school, New York also had a leading philanthropist who took an interest in the experiences of the blind. Initially, philanthropist Samuel Wood took the lead in caring about blind children, reaching out to Dr. Samuel Akerly in 1831.[151] Akerly was involved with the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, being both the official physician for the institution as well as having written an elementary textbook for the pupils there.[152] The two men petitioned the state legislature for funding, much as Fisher had done in Massachusetts, with the institution being formally incorporated as the New-York Institution for the Blind in April.[153] Shortly after, Dr. John Dennison Russ also became interested in the needs of blind boys due to his work with the city almshouse. Hearing of this, Akerly and Wood approached Russ, who became the first teacher of the school in 1832.[154] Three blind children were moved into the first home of the institution, with Russ attempting to teach them based on a letter of instruction he had received from the Edinburgh school.[155] There is no reference to a similar tour of schools in Europe that accompanies the foundation of Perkins, which may explain

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[150] French, *From Homer To Helen Keller*, 116; Showalter, *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe*, 34.
[151] Gabriel Farrell, *The Story of Blindness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 49.
[152] Samuel Akerly, *Address Delivered at Washington Hall: In the City of New-York, on the 30th May, 1826, as Introductory to the Exercises of the Pupils of the New-York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, with an Account of the Exercises, and Notes and Documents, in Relation to the Subject* (New York: E. Conrad, 1826), http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/60530610R; Samuel Akerly, *Elementary Exercises for the Deaf and Dumb* (New York: E. Conrad, 1821) http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/60530620R.
[153] Phillip M. Hash, "Music Education at the New York Institution for the Blind, 1832–1863" *Journal of Research in Music Education* 62: 4 (January 2015), 362–88 (https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429414555983), 365.
[154] Farrell, *The Story of Blindness*, 50.
[155] Ishbel Ross, *Journey into Light: The Story of the Education of the Blind* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 152.

why the New York institution had difficulties in establishing itself as an educational institution for the first several years of its existence.[156]

As with Perkins, the institution did receive a large donation of space to build the school, this time from James Boorman.[157] Russ also followed Howe in having public demonstrations of the students' learning in an effort to raise awareness and funds.[158] Akerly, familiar with the fundraising efforts needed for schools that educated children with disabilities, had three baskets constructed by the students presented to the board as evidence of the school's initial success.[159] A second demonstration was made at the City Hotel in December 1832, which generated enough public support through both donations and the purchase of the students' work to achieve financial security.[160] However, the institution struggled to find appropriate men to be on the Board of Managers, in part because of the difficulty in people believing that it was not meant as an asylum for adult blind but instead as an educational opportunity for blind children.[161] Despite this, New York approved funds of $130 per each impoverished pupil educated at the school, initially only for four pupils per Senate district, but increased by 1839 to sixteen per district. By 1840 the school had 69 pupils and by 1863 it had 145.[162]

The most influential superintendent of the New York institution was William Bell Wait, who joined the school in 1863. Similar to Howe, Wait became interested in developing his own raised print text for the blind, and innovations in printing, education, and apparatuses happened as frequently at the New York institution as they did at the Perkins school.[163] However, Wait has

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[156] Farrell, *The Story of Blindness*, 50.
[157] Ross, *Journey into Light*, 152.
[158] Ross, *Journey into Light*, 152.
[159] Hash, "Music Education at the New York Institution for the Blind, 1832–1863," 365.
[160] Hash, "Music Education at the New York Institution for the Blind, 1832–1863," 365.
[161] Farrell, *The Story of Blindness*, 50.
[162] Hash, "Music Education at the New York Institution for the Blind, 1832–1863," 366.
[163] Ross, *Journey into Light*, 153.

not received as much attention as Howe has in exploring the history of blind education. Before teaching the blind, Wait had been a lawyer who had also taught sighted children the subject of English before being recruited to the New York Institution.[164] While there, Wait undertook many exacting studies of the blind, particularly of how to best teach reading. While Howe tended to focus on his influence on individual blind people, Wait was more inclined to explore how effective a raised-print text could be at conveying information quickly and easily to a reader by ensuring that the most common letters used a minimal number of dots and thus took up less space in a book.[165]

The Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind and Julius Reinhold Friedlander

Blind education in Philadelphia strove to copy the experiences in Boston and New York. Local politicians recruited German educator Julius Reinhold Friedlander (or Friedlaender), who had been trained to work with the blind, to establish the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind in March 1832 in Philadelphia. Friedlander only lived until 1839 and so did not lead the school for very long. He was able to create a lasting impression through his publications on teaching the blind and in raised print.[166] Working with Howe, Friedlander published embossed versions of the Book of Ruth and the Book of Proverbs. In addition, his address to the public at the first exhibition of his blind pupils in 1833 was published, along with

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[164] Ross, *Journey into Light*, 153.

[165] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 60.

[166] Obituary from the *United States Gazette*: "Julius R. Friedlander: Late Principal of the Philadelphia Institution for the Blind." *The Friend*, vol. 12 (1839), 244; Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society Library, William Henry Furness, *Our benevolent institutions: A discourse occasioned by the death of Julius R. Friedlander, principal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind, and delivered, Sunday, March 24, 1839* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Co., 1839) PAM. V991, NO. 2; Elisabeth D. Freund, *Crusader for Light: Julius R. Friedlander, founder of the Overbrook School for the Blind, 1832* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co, 1959).

his observations on the instruction of blind persons.[167] His legacy was ignored in later debates of raised text. However, his students certainly cherished his work. After his death, his blind students prepared an obituary for him.[168] Several male leaders followed Friedlander. One was William Chapin, who became principal in 1849 and stayed until 1890. He started a kindergarten, opened a store to sell goods produced by the students, and published the first embossed dictionary for the blind.[169] It was re-named the Overbrook School for the Blind once it was relocated to the city's Overbrook neighbourhood. The school was redesigned in 1896 in a Spanish Renaissance style with impressive architectural features, and has continued to the present, surviving a 1960 fire. It followed Friedlander's vision by continuing to publish *Lux in Tenebris* ("Light in Darkness), the first magazine for the blind.

Blind Education in Ontario

The Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, while based on the American education model, had a different background than those schools. The OIEB did not have a philanthropist founder, but was instead established in response to compulsory education in Ontario. As common schools were forced to educate all children, they became more aware of the number of children in Ontario who were blind and thus needed the help that a specialized school would provide them. While Egerton Ryerson did follow in Howe's footsteps and tour various schools in Europe, the curriculum development and consultations were almost entirely with the

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[167] Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society Library, Julius Reinhold Friedländer and Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind | Overbrook school for the blind, Philadelphia. *Proceedings of the association for establishing a school for the education of the blind, in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, under J. R. Friedlander* (Philadelphia: James Kay, Jun. & Co., 1833), PAM. V.960, NO. 15; Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society Library, Julius Reinhold Friedländer, *An address to the public, at the first exhibition of the pupils of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind: at the Musical Fund Hall, Thursday evening, November 21, 1833* (Philadelphia, 1833), PAM. V.972, NO. 3 and NO. 5; Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society Library, Julius Reinhold Friedländer and Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind Committee of Admissions, *To the inhabitants of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Overbrook School for the Blind, 1834), PAM. V.972, NO. 11.

[168] For an overview see Edith Wiloughby, *Overbrook School for the Blind* (Arcadia Publishing, 2007).

[169] Overbrook School for the Blind Website, https://www.obs.org/who-we-are/museum-and-history.cfm (accessed August 29, 2021).

earlier-established American schools. In addition, the OIEB cycled through several principals in its early years, with none having the outstanding influence of Wait, Howe, or Friedlander in the school's reputation or future.

This section examines the foundation and early years of the OIEB. While Chapter One traced the understanding of blindness before the school was founded, this section demonstrates how these various understandings of blindness influenced the response of educators, governments, and parents to the idea of what it meant to be blind as a child. Parents often resisted sending their blind child to the school, whether because they did not want their child to be so far away or because their child was an important part of the family economy. Municipal governments believed that the OIEB should take in blind adults and frequently asked to have their poor blind housed at the school. As the school was established much later than the American schools, the OIEB was able to benefit from the growing network of schools for the blind as it established its curriculum and attempted to convince parents to send their children to the school despite their reservations.

Compulsory Education in Ontario

Compulsory education for children in nineteenth-century Canada arose in part out of a need to form a stable country built on common Christian values that could be taught in schools. Through education, citizens could be taught proper respect for government authority as well as morality, piousness, and strength of character.[170] Egerton Ryerson, who became Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada in 1844, argued that a system of education that was both free and compulsory would ensure that citizens would learn their "proper duties" within

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[170] Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914*, Themes in Canadian Social History 1 (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 30.

the community.[171] Ryerson and other school promoters in Upper Canada feared that lack of education led to a life of crime and vice for the poor, with the *Journal of Education* claiming a direct correlation between lack of educational achievement and time in Toronto's jails.[172]

For both education reformers and the broader public, having compulsory education would achieve three key goals: it legitimized the common school system broadly, as more children and families would make use of it; it made the educational aspect as compulsory as was property tax; and it completed the important social reform mission of keeping urchins off city streets, particularly in Toronto.[173] Historian of education in Canada Paul Axelrod also points out that farming families in Upper Canada realized the economic benefits of an education for their children. While previously there had been enough land to ensure that children would be taken care of after their parents' death, larger family sizes meant that there were economic benefits to children going to school to learn enough to get jobs in the city.[174] It also began the process of defining what a neglected child might look like – a neglected child was one who was not in school when they should be.[175]

Ryerson argued that schooling for non-disabled children needed to prepare them for their roles in society as Christians.[176] As a Methodist minister, Ryerson believed that religious instruction was the path to moral improvement.[177] Denominational disputes about how to educate children to become proper God-fearing citizens led to the compromise under Ryerson of non-

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[171] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 24–5.
[172] Alison L. Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 51.
[173] Susan E. Houston, "Social Reform and Education: The Issue of Compulsory Schooling, Toronto, 1851-71" in *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*, edited by Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton, 254-76 (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1978), 255.
[174] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 28.
[175] Houston, "Social Reform and Education," 256.
[176] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 25.
[177] Goldwin S. French, "Egerton Ryerson and the Methodist Model for Upper Canada" in *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*, edited by Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton, 45–58 (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1978), 50.

denominational Protestant common schools.[178] Ryerson argued that a Christian-based education that included biblical scriptures would ensure that boys would grow into good men who understood their purpose within Upper Canadian society.[179] Basic Christian morality taught in every school, through the use of the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, ensured a common spiritual basis to education that would help ease some of the sectarian tensions of the period, as all children would have been educated with a "common spiritual message."[180] As well, common schools would raise the poor and teach them their proper roles in society by educating them in how to best behave in similar ways to their more civilized betters.[181] Children, even the poorest, would become more respectable if they learned, in the words of historian Alison Prentice, "refined manners and taste, respectable religions, proper speech and...the ability to read and write English."[182] This concern for a religiously-based education would also be reflected in schools for disabled children.

Enumerating and caring for these defective classes fell instead on municipalities, which may account for the growing desire to educate the blind under the auspices of the province. Medical reports and government enumerating do not make clear why Egerton Ryerson began to advocate for a school for blind children; however, his report on the subject of schools for both deaf and dumb and blind children makes clear that he viewed these institutions as a necessary part of the educational reforms he was implementing throughout the province.[183] Ryerson clearly

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[178] Prentice, *The School Promoters*, 60.
[179] Albert F. Fiorino, "The Moral Education of Egerton Ryerson's Idea of Education" in *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*, edited by Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton, 59-80 (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1978), 66.
[180] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 30.
[181] Prentice, *The School Promoters*, 67.
[182] Prentice, *The School Promoters*, 68.
[183] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*.

believed that the "intellectual powers" of these "unfortunates" were "unmaimed," and that as a result they required an education - albeit one separate both from sighted and deaf children.[184]

Ryerson's beliefs about the purpose of educating the deaf and blind are unclear. The three schools he visited (one in France, one in England, and one in the United States) provided different amounts of literary and industrial training to the pupils, with only the Imperial Institution in Paris explicitly providing some classes in "superior instruction (intended for the children of the wealthier classes)." The Paris institution's inclusion of the children of the wealthy was compared to England's example of an institution meant for indigent pupils.[185] Ryerson was very explicit that a similar blind institution purpose-built in Ontario must be part of the educational apparatus of the province, arguing that it "cannot be otherwise so efficiently and economically accomplished as by the Council and Department of Public Instruction (as in the case of the Normal School), where the machinery of administration…exists, and where are the best experience and facilities for providing all the requisites of such an establishment…."[186] As will be seen throughout the discussion of educating the blind, the proposed institution for education of the blind was not to be a warehouse, but a school.

Establishing the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB)

To gain support for the establishment of an educational institution for the blind, a committee was struck with the goal of bringing municipalities on side. This provincial committee, which included Dr. Rosebrugh of the Toronto Eye and Ear Clinic and two other doctors, contacted every municipal council across the province, seeking their support. To each of

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[184] Egerton Ryerson, *Report on Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in Europe and in the United States of America: With Appendices and Suggestions for Their Establishment in the Province of Ontario* (Toronto: Daily Telegraph Printing House, 1868), 28–9.
[185] Ryerson, *Report on Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb*, 29–30.
[186] Ryerson, *Report on Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb*, 27.

these councils they sent a letter and petition "…and in nearly every instance they were endorsed and forwarded…to the Legislative Assembly."[187] While these endorsements indicate that the need was felt throughout the province to provide services for the blind, the committee was confronted with the need for services for adults - services the proposed institution would clearly not provide.

In their report asking the provincial government to consider placing the institution in Toronto, so it would have all the educational and cultural advantages of the city, the committee again reminded readers that the institutions for the blind "…are not designed to be asylums for the maintenance of the blind, as many seem to suppose, but rather schools for the education of the young…receiving instruction in literature and music and also in learning some useful employment, so that… they may be self-sustaining, useful, and happy members of society."[188] While the municipalities may have been seeking to reduce the burden of the adult blind, for the provincial committee, the purpose of the institution was clearly to ensure that the newly-educated children did not become part of the same dependent class. The school was ultimately founded in Brantford, 100 km west of Toronto.

Despite the efforts of both Ryerson and the Provincial Committee, the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind was not kept under the control of the Department of Public Instruction, but was instead placed under the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities. John Woodburn Langmuir, the inspector, was likely given its mandate due to the proposed institution being fully funded by the province and thus completely under provincial

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[187] Watertown, MA, Samuel P. Hayes Research Library, J. B. Fuller, "The Institution for the Blind of Ontario, and Its Proposed Location [Handwritten Copy]," n.d., https://archive.org/details/annualreportofon1318onta/page/n5/mode/2up.
[188] Watertown, MA, Samuel P. Hayes Research Library, J. B. Fuller, "The Institution for the Blind of Ontario, and Its Proposed Location [Handwritten Copy]," n.d., https://archive.org/details/annualreportofon1318onta/page/n5/mode/2up.

control, as was true of all of the other institutions under his supervision. Following the work of the provincial council, and accepting that the census was at best flawed, Langmuir turned to the municipalities to determine the locations of blind children. In contacting them, Langmuir was clear in his guidelines: both the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind were to be educational and provide "instruction in some professional or manual art that will enable the pupils to contribute to their own support… these institutions are to be entirely educational in their character and may properly be regarded as part of the great educational system of the province and not as a hospital or asylum."[189]

Again, the institution was to be for children, not adults, and was explicitly not to merely house the blind. Municipal authorities were not only to provide detailed information on the appropriate blind but were expected to be responsible for the cost of board, clothing, and transportation of any children whose parents were unable to pay. In light of the public understanding of blindness as an affliction of the poor - an understanding increasingly supported by evidence gathered by the government - it is not surprising that this search for additional appropriate pupils was not as successful as Langmuir had hoped. In his first report on the progress of the OIEB, before the building was complete, he stated that only 113 municipalities had returned information on their blind children, with only fifteen in total of the correct age. "I am inclined to believe that the number of Blind in the province has been altogether overstated," he wrote; however, he expected approximately 60 potential pupils.[190]

By the beginning of 1872, Langmuir was prepared to appoint a superintendent with the goal of both further study of blind institutions in the United States and the recruitment of

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[189] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Circular to Municipalities," April 1, 1870.
[190] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Third Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1869-70* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1870), 63.

potential pupils from across the province. Ezekiel Stone Wiggins was appointed to the post, and immediately set about establishing the rules of admission to the OIEB.[191] The first term opened in May 1872, much to both Wiggins's and Langmuir's regret due to the incomplete construction of the building. As only eleven pupils attended, Wiggins realised that further outreach was needed to gain a respectable number of pupils. Having seen the weakness of both the census and the Langmuir's attempted outreach to municipalities, Wiggins supplemented these with street-level searches for eligible blind children - clearly, none of the levels of government involved had been able to properly communicate the desires of the OIEB to the parents of blind children. As part of this search, Wiggins spoke to "no less than several hundred people and the result was that I found out the names of fourteen hitherto unknown [pupils]" in London, Ontario, having begun his search in the train station.[192] Even after the institution had been open for several years, this street-level search for suitable pupils continued. A recruiter, Mr. Brown, was sent to explore the Ottawa counties after escorting several pupils home following the end of term in 1875, seeking students whose names had been gathered by the new superintendent from "carefully tabulating and classifying information extracted from a great variety of sources." In addition, W. G. Raymond, a successful pupil "who is pretty above average in education" agreed to spend part of his vacation searching for appropriate blind pupils near the towns of Brockville and Cornwall. The superintendent was particularly keen on these searches as "this exploration work… afford[ed] particular facilities for reaching individuals of the province which are ordinarily rather inaccessible to us."[193] Parents were seemingly reluctant to trust their children to the OIEB -

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[191] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Fourth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1870-71* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1871), 33.
[192] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from Ezekiel Stone Wiggins to John Woodburn Langmuir," April 1, 1872.
[193] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from J. H. Hunter to John Woodburn Langmuir Re: Admission," June 24, 1875.

perhaps because the understanding of blindness meaning helplessness and an institution for the blind meaning a long-term home rather than for education continued to dominate. Parents wanted to keep their blind children at home.

Understanding the motivations of parents is difficult in light of the sources available. Due to his outreach into the family home, Wiggins is the primary reporter of the attitude of families toward the OIEB, and his discussion of parents who declined to send their children reflects his frustration with them. He repeatedly wrote of his anger and disappointment to Langmuir, describing mothers in particular in negative terms. Even in writing for the public, Wiggins refused to temper his disdain, describing children as "fast falling into idiocy" after their mothers refused to allow them to travel to the OIEB.[194] Parents either agreed to send their children to Brantford for an education, and thus did not merit further discussion, or had refused for some reason that Wiggins found unacceptable. Of the few letters from parents that have survived from this early period in the institution's existence, their concerns focus on practicalities such as clothing and transportation for their children rather than any discussion of their children's lives before or after arriving at the OIEB. Because of this scarcity of sources, what does exist must be carefully considered in light of Wiggins's clear bias.

Parents' desire to see their children educated was often at odds with the financial needs of the family, thus thwarting Wiggins's and Langmuir's recruitment. While sighted children's education was paid for by taxes[195], parents of blind children needed to either find the money or petition their municipality to pay - something that Ryerson had previously discussed as being a

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[194] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Third Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1869*-70, 181.

[195] See: Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*.

barrier to education throughout the province.[196] In seeking out potential students for the 1872 opening, Wiggins found that the families of 29 potential students were "poor" while an additional eleven were "very poor." Only ten families were in a "fair" financial situation and three were "good." (Wiggins's notes do not make clear how he was determining each family's financial situation.) Of parents who both explicitly declined to send their children and explained why to Wiggins, many reported difficulties in getting their council to contribute, or else gave reasons why they could not ask their council to do so. For others, the financial situation was more complicated. When Lizzie Kenton's mother sent her to the institution, she left behind two blind siblings as (according to Wiggins) "she cannot send all." As blindness continued to be associated with poverty, the inability to pay tuition could not have been a surprise to Wiggins or Langmuir, but it was still several years before the barrier of expense was properly addressed by the province.

Parents who kept their children home for non-financial reasons rarely explained their reasoning to the government or the management of the institution, many being reported by Wiggins as having been contacted but (despite his best efforts) never responding. Of those who did respond to his inquiries during the first years the institution was open to students, he wrote to Langmuir complaining of mothers who coddled their children and refused to let them leave the house. "Their mothers hang upon their children with a foolish terrible tenacity," he wrote in August 1872, after reporting that his greatest success in getting parents to send their children was

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[196] J. M. Bruyère, *Controversy between Dr. Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Education in Upper Canada, and Rev. J.M. Bruyère, Rector of St. Michael's Cathedral, Toronto, on the Appropriation of the Clergy Reserves Funds: Free Schools vs. State Schools, Public Libraries and Common Schools, Attacked and Defended, Rev. J.M. Bruyère for the Prosecution, Dr. Ryerson for the Defence ; to Which Is Appended a Letter from the Right Rev. Dr. Pinsoneault, Bishop of London, C.W., to Rev. J.M. Bruyère, on the Subject of the Late Controversy with Dr. Ryerson* (Toronto: Leader and Patriot Steam-Press Print, 1857).

in "scaring them" regarding their child's possible future without an education.[197] For Wiggins, refusing to send a child to the OIEB was sentencing them to a life of idleness, poverty, and ultimately degeneration into idiocy, which he found unacceptable.

However, some parents were very explicit in their need to keep their female children at home and participating in the family economy.[198] These children were clearly valued as ways of relieving the workload on their mothers or other female relatives, regardless of the overwhelming image of these children as useless or in need of charity. Wiggins reported that Rose McCormack's father refused to admit her because "she is useful at home and does all the churning and knitting… they don't care to send her," while Mary Carver's grandmother "does not wish her to leave." Eliza Hodge's family reported that "she is very useful at home" while Elizabeth Morgan, an orphan, was kept home by her aunt "to do housework which occurs in many cases."[199] Wiggins positioned the institution as providing children useful skills that would allow them to become self-supporting adults, but the parents of blind children viewed the education provided by the Institution as unnecessary – their children were already contributing to the economy of the household. Despite the perceived burden of blindness, the children were useful and productive.

Similar parental rejection of disabled children as burdens during this period is also seen in asylums for idiots. In her work *No Right To Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s-1930s*,

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[197] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "List of Pupils Who Have Applied for Admission," April 20, 1872.

[198] For a discussion of the family economy, please see: Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal (Canadian Social History Series)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Bettina Bradbury, ""Gender at Work at Home: Family Decisions, the Labour Market and Girls' Contributions to the Family Economy" in *Canadian and Australian Labour History: Towards a Comparative Perspective*, edited by Gregory S Kealey and Greg Patmore, 119–40 (St John's and Sydney: Canadian Committee on Canadian Labour History and Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1990).

[199] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "List of Pupils Who Have Applied for Admission," April 20, 1872.

Sarah F. Rose describes how parents would remove their children from such asylums after a few years of training as "useful laborers".[200] However, the founders of these asylums – including Samuel Gridley Howe, who founded the New England Asylum for the Blind as well as Massachusetts School for Idiot and Feeble-Minded Youth in 1848 – shared Wiggins' concerns about the degeneracy of their inmates without the assistance the asylums would provide. Rose places these examples in the broader context of both familiar and societal acceptance of a "broad spectrum of productivity" that included not only disability as a limitation but also gender and age.[201] Even parents who agreed to send their children to these asylums would bring them home because they were now seen as "useful."[202] Parents of these "defective" children viewed their usefulness in different terms than asylum superintendents did.

For some parents, however, the burden of their child's blindness was overwhelming. James Graham Cooper wrote seeking admission for his girl, Mary, "in hir [sic] thirteenth year of age… I am anxious to have hir [sic] there but circumstances prevent me from doing anything for hir [sic] out of my own family."[203] The Elliot family had two blind children but could only afford to educate their son. Wiggins wrote to Langmuir on their behalf, arguing "[i]f leniency is to be shown the parents who have two of this afflicted class then their family are clearly the subjects of it." Jacob Cronk also had multiple blind children in his family but could only afford to send one - "his wife is grieving greatly to think he won't apply to the council for the other."[204] While these families were suffering from the financial burden their children represented, they also

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[200] Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s – 1930s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 15.
[201] Rose, *No Right to be Idle*, 15.
[202] Rose, *No Right to be Idle*, 36-48.
[203] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from James Graham Cooper to John Woodburn Langmuir," May 18, 1872.
[204] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from Ezekiel Stone Wiggins to John Woodburn Langmuir Re: Various Items Including Admission of Pupils and Provision of Light," June 21, 1872.

sought out what was best for the child. They hoped that the OIEB would provide them the means of being productive members of society, even as their parents could not.

In some cases, the guardians of children were not immediate family members, but representatives of the institutions in which they lived. Officials of these institutions, including orphanages, boys' homes, and churches, wrote to Langmuir or Wiggins pleading for a place so that their charges could learn to be self-sufficient, preferably at no additional cost to the charity. In all of these cases, the good moral character of the child was extolled, and no mention made of the child's degree of blindness or usefulness. The Orphan Home in Kingston wrote looking for a placement for Louisa Anderson, stating, "she is about twelve years of age and we are most anxious she should be placed where she can be properly taught."[205] The Boys' Home in Toronto begged for a placement for Henry Bayliss, "a bright and amiable lad" of thirteen, writing to both Langmuir and to the city government seeking assistance.[206] The letter writer hoped that the Institution would give him "a way of earning a livelihood for himself in after years." His English immigrant parents were still alive but unable to support their blind son. For Charles Carr, his abandonment at the Montreal Ladies Benevolent Institution by his father in 1863 meant he had received no proper education - he was "kept for want of a more proper place to send him." They applied directly to Langmuir for a placement "to save time." [207] The officials of various other charitable institutional viewed these children as being difficult - if not impossible - to make self-

[205] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from Lucretia Gildersteve to John Woodburn Langmuir," February 3, 1872.
[206] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from Anna Mulholland to John Woodburn Langmuir Relative to the Admission of a Blind Boy at Present in the Boys Home," May 7, 1872.
[207] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from Agnes King to John Woodburn Langmuir Relative to Admission of Blind Boy, 16 Years Old, Charles Carr," April 5, 1872.

sufficient without the specialized work of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind due to their blindness.

These charitable groups did not only write on behalf of blind children; these same charitable groups often wrote to Langmuir or Wiggins seeking admission to the institution for adult blind. Some viewed the institution as a long-term solution to the charitable problem that blind adults presented. Hamilton's House of Refuge wrote asking for admittance of Margaret Porteous, whom they described as "hopelessly blind," seeking "a life long home in the asylum," while the corporation of Nelson (now the city of Nelson) wrote seeking a place for "three blind indigents two of whom I think are incurables."[208] The Poor Asylum in Hamilton also sought refuge for Mary Harrigan, "the blind girl who has lived at the asylum thirty years." By January 1873, Langmuir's responses to these frequent requests became rote, writing "I beg to refer you to a copy of the bylaws…the Institution is intended solely for educationalist purposes and not as an asylum or refuge for the blind."[209]

Other non-family members also wrote to the Institution seeking places for those they felt worthy - often as a way of helping the recently blind acquire a new trade despite being adults. A merchant wrote to Langmuir promising payment to cover the education of John French, 24, having been blinded just the year before: "He is now reconciled to his care and he is anxious to be taught whatever would seem best for him at the Institute at Brantford…."[210] Others sought

[208] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from A. S. Simpson to John Woodburn Langmuir," April 9, 1872; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from the Corporation of Nelson to John Woodburn Langmuir Relative to the Admission of Three Indigent Persons," May 9, 1872.
[209] For two examples, see: Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from John Woodburn Langmuir to James Sharpe," January 31, 1873; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from John Woodburn Langmuir to Wm Gibbon," February 1, 1873.
[210] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from Jas Cameron to John Woodburn Langmuir Re: Admission of John French, a Blind Adult," February 13, 1873.

admission for blind adults who had been blind for some time, arguing that their character should be enough to gain them admittance to learn a trade. In these cases, the Institution was viewed not as an asylum but as a way of ensuring these adults could gain the same advantages as the children, and thus it was necessary to show that they had not succumbed to the poor character often ascribed to the adult indigent blind. J. Scanlon, a Wesleyan Minister in Park Hill, wrote asking for admission of "a blind girl in our village above age … she is a person of good moral and religious character."[211] Again, these interveners sought the OIEB out as a way of ensuring the worthy blind would not fall into the same poverty and vice for which blind adults were most known.

Very few of the adults who were referred to the institution discussed their degree of vision loss. Homer Lewis applied at least twice to the Institution, finally being accepted to a workshop place after a visit from "two gentlemen" (unnamed) who asked for a "reconsideration" of his situation. Lewis's reconsideration also included a re-statement of his blindness - while his previous application had apparently listed him as "partially sighted," the unnamed gentlemen now argued that "he has at no period of his life been able to do more than distinguish light from darkness."[212] Mathew McCarthy's application described his blindness as "total," the "supposed" cause being a severe cold.[213] Alison Thom's total blindness at the age of two had been caused by "wrong treatment by a Doctor."[214] In all of these applications, there was no reference to a consultation with an ophthalmologist, oculist, or other medical practitioner in confirming the loss

[211] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from J. Scanlon to John Woodburn Langmuir," March 8, 1872.
[212] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Correspondence from J. H. Hunter to Langmuir Re Admission of Homer Lewis 25/30 Nov 1874," November 26, 1874.
[213] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Admission of Michael MacCarthy," February 15, 1873.
[214] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities Fonds, "Application for Admission-Alison Thom," 1873.

of sight - or that the loss of sight was permanent. The necessity of medical involvement to confirm or comment on blindness would only come later.

From the referrals to the OIEB, it is apparent that the public of Ontario, and even the parents of blind children, had a clear understanding of what blindness looked like. Blindness was an affliction of the poor, one that needed long-term care to prevent the afflicted from becoming beggars. Admitting children to the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind could benefit them, as many parents and leaders of charitable establishments revealed in their letters to the institution. However, for some parents, their children did not need an education - they were not helpless and were perfectly able to contribute to the family economy.[215] Others refused to send their children for other reasons, characterized by the superintendent as foolish and condemning their child to a life of idiocy. As blindness continued to be primarily experienced by those of adult age, caused mostly by accident and requiring painful medical treatment, parents had no role models to consider for the future of their children. Without a clear definition of blindness as anything other than a dependency that relied on charity - charity similar to that received by inmates in asylums and prisons - it is not surprising that some parents were reluctant to accept the government's interference in the lives of their children at this early stage of the OIEB.

Even as blindness and diseases of the eye became a topic of concern for medical practitioners, governments, and educators in the mid-nineteenth century, it was difficult for these separate groups to agree on a clear definition of blindness, and what it meant for the people of Canada West/Ontario. Before the establishment of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, these groups had less of a need for a clear definition of blindness and partial blindness.

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[215] See also: Rose, *No Right to be Idle*.

For medical doctors, the most important thing was the treatment of blindness, and the growing professionalization of oculists and ophthalmologists meant that they would continue to develop tests and treatment for blindness caused by disease and injury. As the profession became more significant, more of their work was discussed in North American medical journals. As with the professionalization of other medical groups during the nineteenth century, doctors of the eye would need to further establish their authority over blindness, low vision, and other causes of poor eyesight. To exert this authority, they would need to work with governments and educators to properly define blindness for the public.

Even as the OIEB became more settled in the public discussion of blindness, there were still struggles to properly enumerate and classify the blind. By 1874, the OIEB had overcome some of the hurdles to gaining acceptance by parents. Over 100 pupils entered the institution that year, an increase of 101 percent according to new superintendent John Howard Hunter. Of these new students, eight were from Toronto - although according to census reports only three blind children of the proper age lived in the city.[216] While Hunter viewed this increase in students as a success, student numbers grew primarily because the provincial government decided to extend free education to blind children whose parents were unable to pay. The success of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind in this regard entailed a greater expense to the provincial government - one that would prove difficult to meet in future years. It was only after the OIEB offered free education that the institution acquired the services of an oculist - one who examined all of the pupils' eyesight in September and reported to Langmuir and Hunter on his findings. After the establishment of the authority of the OIEB, oculists and ophthalmologists

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[216] Ontario Legislative Assembly. *Seventh Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1875-76*. Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1876.

joined forces to further professionalize the definition of blindness, regardless of the needs of the blind and their families.

The Networks of Educators of the Blind

With residential schools for the blind in the United States being established decades before similar schools in Canada, it made sense for Canadian schools to look to them for models of effective education for the blind. As more schools for the blind were established across North America – for example, Ohio in 1837, Virginia in 1839, Indiana in 1847, Illinois in 1848, and Missouri in 1851 – educators of the blind looked to the successes and failures of the previous schools, as well as looking to recruiting teachers and graduates of these older schools to administer the newer ones. William H. Churchman, a graduate from the Philadelphia school (which opened in 1832) taught in Ohio, Tennessee, and Kentucky before becoming superintendent of the Indiana school when it opened.[217] Charles Frederick Fraser, who was superintendent of the school in Halifax for several decades, was a graduate of the Perkins school and relied on his experience as a student there when establishing the curriculum for Halifax.[218] Schools received donations of books or apparatuses from other institutions upon opening.

This informal network attempted to become formalized as early as 1853, with the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind held at the New York Institute. Fourteen[219] institutions were represented out of the sixteen American institutions existing at the time, a feat that impressed the educators as "these States were new and thinly settled, and only a few years

[217] Elizabeth M. Wishard, "History of the Indiana State School for the Blind," MA Thesis (Butler University, 1951), 1.
[218] Joanna L. Pearce, "'Fighting in the Dark': Charles Frederick Fraser and the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, 1850-1915," MA Thesis, (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 2011), 55.
[219] Representatives were from Perkins, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Illinois, Virginia, Tennessee, Indiana, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Iowa, Georgia, Maryland, and Missouri.

since the scenes of savage life…."[220] (Both the Ontario and Halifax schools would join the Convention shortly after their foundations.) While the majority of the men at the convention were sighted, the report explained that "many of the gentlemen having charge of these young establishments are themselves blind," having attended either Perkins, New York, or Philadelphia before going west.[221] These blind men were noted in the convention report as taking "prominent parts" in the debates that took place, as a way of giving "proof of their talents and achievements."[222]

This early convention expressed many of the same concerns that would be repeated throughout future conventions of educators. Educators and superintendents were concerned about funding for effective education, particularly the need for a printing press that would produce raised print texts for institutions that could not afford their own press. The men present hoped to lobby the federal government to fund the endeavour.[223] They also hoped to lobby the federal government to provide endowments for the financial support of institutions across the country, "a portion to be equitably applied to all the States for the education of the blind…"[224] As each school had learned that having a public exhibition of their students' learning was

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[220] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853* (New York: Bradstreet Press, 1872), 3.
[221] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853*, 3.
[222] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853*, 5.
[223] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853*, 3–4.
[224] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853*, 5.

effective in opening purse strings, it was further resolved that a delegation of students from the oldest schools was sent along to Washington to best demonstrate their students' skills.[225]

The topic of how to address the number of raised print texts in use across the United States and Europe was also debated at this convention, a topic that would be debated at every meeting of educators of the blind throughout the century. While the notes on this debate do not survive, the two resolutions passed give indication that it was impossible to settle on one solution. While the convention would "not discourage the use of any type of character now in existence", it encouraged the adoption of "Boston letter" (later called Boston Line Type) as the standard. Further, a committee would be appointed to examine Boston letter to determine if it could be approved.[226] This debate is explored in more detail in Chapter Four, as the contentious nature of it affected the education of the blind across North America well into the twentieth century.

The formalization of the meetings of educators of the blind occurred in 1871 (six years after the conclusion of the American Civil War), one year before the Ontario Institution opened. Unlike the eight-page record of the first convention, published decades after its conclusion, the records for the *Second Convention of America Instructors of the Blind*, held in Indianapolis, ran 136 pages, including a detailed index, a formal constitution, and by-laws indicating who could attend and what constituted quorum for a meeting, and was published and distributed within months. A formal invitation to the convention was issued to the now-existing 27 American

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[225] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853*, 6.

[226] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853*, 6.

institutions, with 18 institutions sending representatives, as well as a representative from the American Printing House for the Blind in Kentucky.[227]

The proceedings from this convention indicate that the formalization of ties among institutions did not lead to harmonious discussions. The arguments about which raised print text to adopt became more acrimonious rather than less, despite the creators of new prints meeting on an annual or bi-annual basis. Other arguments among educators included whether or not a separate university should be established for the blind;[228] whether blind children should be segregated into separate schools or be included in classrooms with sighted children; whether blind children should be educated alongside deaf children; what housekeeping skills to teach to blind girls; what vocational skills to teach to blind boys; and how much of the educational time of the institutions should be dedicated to vocational skills versus academic pursuits and music.[229] These same debates would be taken up by the attendees at the convention for the next three decades.

This second convention of educators of the blind established what became known as the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, which began counting their conventions again

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[227] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 5, 7–8. Attendees were from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, North Carolina, Illinois, Wisconsin Missouri, Georgia, Maryland, Iowa, Arkansas, New York State (there were two institutions in New York, one in New York City and the other in Batavia), Kansas, and West Virginia. Unrepresented were Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, California, and Louisiana.

[228] This discussion would also continue into the twentieth century, with both blind and sighted men on both sides. See Catherine J. Kudlick, "The Outlook of The Problem and the Problem with the Outlook: Two Advocacy Journals Reinvent Blind People in Turn-of-the-Century America" in *New Disability History: American Perspectives*, edited by Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, 187–213 (New York: New York University Press, 2001). The 1872 convention voted that such an institution was "unnecessary, and even prejudicial" to the interests of the blind. See American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872* (Boston: Rand, Avery & Co, 1873), 30.

[229] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*.

in 1872.[230] However, the formal structures of the convention were struck in 1871 and continued throughout the century. All institutions for the blind, including Ontario (which attended for the first time in 1872, despite the institution having only been open for a few months) and Halifax (invited in 1872, and sent in a report to be read in 1878, but did not attend)[231], were invited to participate and send both their superintendent and one teacher from their school to the convention. Officers, including a president, two vice-presidents, a corresponding secretary, a recording secretary, a treasurer, and five executive committee members, were to be elected at each convention. Quorum was set at 8 attending institutions. At the end of every convention, the proceedings were to be printed and distributed to all institutions for the blind, institutions for the deaf, the Congressional Library, and to state libraries.[232] Clearly the participants believed that their work was important and professional in nature.

The importance of the work undertaken by the convention was a constant refrain of the meetings. In the 1874 meeting, Dr. A. D. Lord, president of the organization as well as superintendent of the school in Batavia, New York, suggested that no similar meeting of representatives of educators of the blind had ever happened – the "civilization which dates far back into antiquity, have, for such a purpose, erected no such structures as those which we and our pupils inhabit."[233] This grandiose representation of the regular meetings of educators of the blind and of the association itself was repeated in 1876 (Alfred L. Elwyn of Batavia described

[230] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*.
[231] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind at Columbus, Ohio, August 21st, 22nd, and 23rd, 1878* (Columbus, Ohio: G J Brand & Co, Printers, 1878), 97.
[232] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 128–31.
[233] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Association, *Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the New York State Institution for the Blind, Batavia, N. Y., August 18, 19, and 20, 1874* (Batavia, N. Y.: Spirit of the Times, 1875), 4.

how "Nothing shows more strongly the…readiness with which our citizens adopt and adapt themselves to the requirements of civilization, than the creation of such institutions as this, and their excellence"[234]), 1878 (John T. Morris of Maryland asked attendees to consider that "As you look…over the country at large, you can see that this class are accomplishing high and noble purposes."[235]), 1880 (T. S. Bell of the Kentucky school described the "sacred duties before us in teaching these unfortunate pupils…"[236]) and 1882 (Mrs. Asa D. Lord asked the delegates "Let us pause and look about us for those self-sacrificing, earnest, faithful laborers, who have been sowing the seed from which we are gathering such an abundant harvest."[237]). These educators presented themselves as doing more than merely housing the blind or teaching them basic skills but changing their material reality in ways that had never before been imagined by other educators.

As part of this mission, the members of the convention often shared teaching techniques and successes across the schools. These included ongoing discussions about how to best educate blind children in music, literacy, mechanical work, and domestic occupations[238]; discussions of how long students should receive instruction in the various types of employment available to

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[234] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 4.

[235] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind at Columbus, Ohio, August 21st, 22nd, and 23rd, 1878*, 74.

[236] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Kentucky Institution for the Blind at Louisville, KY. August 17, 18, and 19, 1880* (Louisville, KY: John P Morton and Company, Printers, 1880), 3.

[237] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Seventh Biennial Convention of The American Association of Instructors of The Blind, Held at the Wisconsin Institution for the Blind, at Janesville, Wisconsin, August 15, 16 and 17, 1882* (Janesville, Wisconsin: Gazette Printing Co., Printers, 1883), 43.

[238] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 69.

them (particularly how much should be spent on musical education)[239]; and new and engaging techniques for teaching specific skills. Members debated how to best discipline blind children, discussing if it were better to send children to bed without a meal, send them home to parents if they were unruly, to use the same corporal punishment used in schools for sighted children, or to rely entirely on moral suasion to keep the children behaving.[240] This debate also included how many rules to set within a school and who should be the primary disciplinarian – the superintendent or the teachers.[241]

Educators also shared with one another their concerns about employment opportunities for their graduates. Discussions included warnings against certain avenues of education or employment. Mr. Chapin warned against teaching basket-making, knitting, or the making of hats, as the results were both slow and poor, thus wasting the students' time and the institution's money.[242] Instead, he encouraged taking up broom-making.[243] Other possible new employment opportunities for the blind included selling insurance, selling musical instruments, or employment at stores.[244] They advised one another of blind men who, like Woodbridge, Courtney, and Wilson from Chapter One, had found successful employment independent of an

[239] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 71.
[240] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 116, 121.
[241] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 118.
[242] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 119.
[243] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 120.
[244] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 116.

education. Mr. Patten of the Arkansas school described a man with "habits that made him rather disagreeable" who ran his own boarding house after being rejected from their school, while Mr. W. H. Churchman of Indiana described declining to take in a potential student who had been running a bookstore as "it would be better for him to remain where he was. I thought a course in the Institution would rather damage than benefit him."[245]

Part of the mission of the convention was also lobbying governments for more funding for blind education. This included regular attempts to collect statistics about blind people across the United States (including employment, following the appointment of a committee to do so in 1872[246]); discouraging governments from establishing joint institutions for blind and deaf children (in 1872 they resolved that this was "not expedient" for a variety of reasons and encouraged states where there was not enough students to justify the establishment of a dedicated school for the blind to send their blind children to neighbouring states instead);[247] and the establishment of a printing house for the blind with funding from both state and national American governments.[248] They also debated whether children who were deaf-blind should be educated at schools for the blind or schools for the deaf. The issue was first raised in 1871, with reference to Laura Bridgeman at the Perkins school. The attendees agreed that schools for the

[245] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 117.
[246] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 41.
[247] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 87.
[248] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 110.

blind were the best place to address the “difficulty presented” by deaf-blind children and resolved to encourage governments to pay for their education within their schools.[249]

The sharing of resources and communication among members of the American Convention of Educators of the Blind makes clear that no school for the blind can be studied in isolation – to get a thorough understanding of the decisions made regarding the recruitment, education, and employment of blind children means understanding the discussions happening during and between the regular meetings of the convention. Schools regularly sent their current and previous Annual Reports to one another as a way of furthering the discussions started at the conventions and to explain how they were addressing a specific problem as, according to Churchman “in every report of the various institutions, the superintendent…feels himself called upon to give all the information he has upon that subject…”[250]

The OIEB regularly sent the superintendent to the meetings, and the records show consistent input and engagement from Superintendent J. H. Hunter. Hunter regularly participated in the discussions held at the convention, arguing against the installment of the cottage system, used at the Perkins school (and described in more detail in Chapter Six) in 1876,[251] and in 1878 gave a speech describing how important the work done by the American institutions represented by the convention were when establishing the OIEB in 1872.[252] He was also active in the various

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[249] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 85, 115.
[250] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 96.
[251] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 93.
[252] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention. *Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind at Columbus, Ohio, August 21st, 22nd, and 23rd, 1878*, 76.

debates about raised print text that dominated the discussions at the conventions and discussed the uses of having a knitting machine installed at the OIEB. Ontario’s participation in the network was expected rather than as an afterthought, as Hunter was appointed to various committees and his opinion was sought out in various debates.

The networks of schools across North America allowed and encouraged schools, including the OIEB, to adopt and adapt the teaching techniques from different schools, to share information about effective fundraising and job training opportunities, and to build up a base of knowledge on how to most effectively run a residential school for blind children. The conventions became the main mechanism for making connections, sharing information, generating innovations, and finding solutions to ongoing problems. The detailed reports of the conventions, in addition to the annual reports of the schools, created a substantial record of the schools’ workings, successes, and failures.

Conclusion

The creation of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind was part of a network of schools for the blind across the United States and Canada. National borders were not particularly important as the OIEB looked mainly to schools in the United States for inspiration, design, and information to innovate and problem-solve. Indeed, its connections to U.S. schools were far more important and profound than its connections to other schools in Canada, even though its funding came from mainly government sources. This building of an international network had a long history, as the initial U.S. schools looked to Europe to adopt, or usually reject, models of how to set up schools for the blind. Two features of the schools were common across the Western world: a reliance on philanthropy to help support the school and the emergence of a personality cult of strong men to lead the schools (like most social reform movements of the

nineteenth century). What made North America distinct was the focus on educating children and not on housing the adult blind. In addition, what made Ontario distinct was increasing reliance on provincial funding, although this did not diminish the connectedness of the OIEB to schools in the United States.

Definitions of blindness varied throughout the nineteenth century among different groups, who included medical professionals, educators, government official, parents of blind children, and the blind themselves. OIEB records reveal the understanding of blindness by family members and guardians of blind people across the province, albeit through the lens of their interactions with the OIEB. For educators of both blind and sighted children, an expanded definition of blindness to cover as many potential pupils as possible was a boon - educators of the blind wanted more pupils to establish their necessity and build a wide applicant pool, while educators of the sighted wished to focus on students easier to educate. In contrast, the provincial government, tasked with paying for increasing services to blind children and eventually, albeit much later, blind pensions, worked to limit the definition of blindness as much as possible. Torn between these expanding and contracting definitions of blindness were parents of blind children, and blind children and adults themselves, forced to navigate the changing landscape of blindness while advocating for both services and employment opportunities. Throughout, the largest need for services for the blind was felt by adults, while by far the largest amount of funding and services were provided to children. The next chapter explores these questions in detail.

Chapter Three: Fear of the Blind Beggar – Teaching Blind Children to Reject Charity

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, three blind boys at the Perkins Institute gave a short demonstration to the public of the botany and zoology they had been learning in school.[253] Despite not being able to see the plants or animals they were describing or the models they were using for their demonstration, the boys were able to explain the various skeletal parts of an owl and the stages of growth in a bean plant. They were followed by three blind girls who described "the nature of the human nervous system" with wooden tablets that had the parts of the body molded in clay. These were not famous blind children, like Helen Keller or Laura Bridgman, or blind people who went on to careers in the sciences, such as pulmonary doctor Robert H. Babcock, apiologist Francis Huber, or mathematician Nicholas Saunderson. The reports of the event did not even list their names. Rather, these children were representative of a movement within residential schools for the blind across North America to include a nature-based curriculum for their pupils. These children were a few of the hundreds of students who, despite not being able to see, were taught physics, geography, geometry, zoology, botany, and other sciences — just as their sighted counterparts were in public schools.

It is difficult to estimate how successful this expanded curriculum was in teaching blind children basic facts about the natural world that surrounded them. Much of the work that examines the history of blindness in education in the nineteenth century focuses on the aims and goals of superintendents and educators of the blind, examining the overall curriculum of the

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[253] Parts of this chapter appeared in Joanna L. Pearce, "'To Give Light Where He Made All Dark': Educating the Blind about the Natural World and God in Nineteenth-Century North America" *History of Education Quarterly* 60: 3 (2020), 295–323.

various residential schools built for blind children or the funding models that schools developed over time. Educators of the blind in North America prided themselves on founding schools that were meant to raise their blind students out of dependency and despondency, rather than institutions or asylums that were meant to keep the blind out of sight. In particular, founders of blind schools wished to demonstrate their ability to eliminate the "blind beggar" that was the most common perception of blind people throughout North America and Europe. Educators rejected the model that had been followed in Europe of creating institutions where blind people would remain mostly uneducated, working within the institution to earn their keep.

Instead, schools in North America presented their students as graduating after completing a curriculum, prepared to be contributing members of society. However, North American schools were not nearly as successful at this project as they presented in their annual reports and their claims to governments and to the public. Despite using these claims of successfully educating the blind to be independent as a fundraising tool, administrators of schools for the blind across North America were well aware that their graduates rarely could achieve the self-sufficiency that was advertised. Vocational training provided for the blind in schools relied far too much on jobs that could not possibly pay a blind man enough to support a family or a blind woman enough to support herself or contribute to her family.

The spectre of the unproductive blind man presented difficulties for educators of the blind – how could they continue to bring in the necessary funding to support their institutions when they could not guarantee the results they claimed? Educators responded by inculcating in their pupils both a disinclination to accept charity and the knowledge that they must live as frugally as possible due to their disability. Annual reports continued to focus on the most successful graduates of the schools, with little mention of the outcomes of most students. Any

inclusion of the uneducated blind in these reports emphasized their pitiable nature and their reliance on charity, while educated blind men could get jobs and were content with their lives. These reports presented a mostly optimistic look at the success of schools for the blind in meeting their goals. While most of these jobs were not well paying, they did keep the blind out of the alms house and away from begging.

Educators of the blind argued that these low-paying jobs were a natural outcome of the situation with which they were presented – most of their students were from poor households, and blind people were often deemed incapable of competing with the sighted for well-paying jobs. Not all blind people agreed with them. Some graduates of schools for the blind went on to careers well outside what the schools had trained them for during their education. Other blind men, who did not attend the residential schools, took on other types of jobs to support themselves and their families, and were reported on in newspapers or published their own autobiographies that emphasized the work they did to be self-supporting. While clearly not all blind people could have taken on any job available to sighted people, the success of these blind men demonstrate that the educators of the school were more focused on the appearance of success for their graduates than conquering the stereotypes that held blind men back from certain careers.

As it became more apparent to educators of the blind that their graduates could not become effectively self-sufficient, their tactics changed. Instead of emphasizing the successes of a limited number of graduates in the annual reports, educators began to call for the formation of sheltered workshops for the adult blind. These workshops were initially presented as a way of helping those who acquired blindness as an adult and were unable to take advantage of the full curriculum offered by the schools. Later, these workshops became a way to support those blind graduates who were unable to support themselves, and the public was encouraged to buy the

handicrafts and other products that were made there. The blind workers were paid a set rate for their production, regardless of how much the work sold. These workshops, mostly built as an addition to an already-existing school for the blind, were often financially supported by school funds, demonstrating how the education of the blind changed to include them.

This chapter examines how concerns about idleness and degeneracy in blind children and adults was addressed through the development of a curriculum that included not only vocational training and moral training, but also nature studies, object studies, and learning the contours of the natural world. As outlined in works such as *No Right to be Idle* and *A Disability History of the United States*, various disabled children, including the blind, were enrolled in institutions across North America to address the social problems they were believed to present to both their communities and to their parents.[254] While blind children were deemed educable and were sent to special-built residential schools, it was rare for graduating pupils to become self-sufficient. In some cases, students returned to their families and were integrated into the household economy; however, many pupils were forced to rely on charitable aid despite their years of education. It was less likely that students would be self-sufficient after graduation, with many students ending in up sheltered workshops created by institutions to provide work for the adult blind. This raised questions about the efficacy of schools in addressing the problem they were built to alleviate.

[254] Kim E. Nielsen, *Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012); Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s – 1930s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Parents were often resistant to this characterization of their blind or otherwise disabled children, with some refusing to send their children to institutions outright or only sending them for limited amount of time due to their being needed at home; see Rose, *No Right to be Idle*, 14-48, for a discussion of how this applied to children labelled as imbeciles; similar parental concern was noted by superintendents of schools for the blind, who viewed these parents with disdain. One example of this can be found in Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Third Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1869-70* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1870); however, this was far from unique, with similar sentiments expressed in American schools as well.

In this chapter, I argue that educators of the blind were concerned about the civilizing aspect of their schools and ensuring that the blind were perceived as being lifted from their reliance on charity rather than ensuring the blind could take on well-remunerative work, despite evidence that some blind people were more than capable of it. The blind beggar was a common sight in the nineteenth century and earlier, and schools in North America were mostly concerned with assuring the public that financially supporting the schools would eliminate this scourge from the streets. This concern about the disabled beggar was codified in law in some American cities, including New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, as outlined in Susan M. Schweik's *Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*; while no similar laws have yet been located in Canada, concerns about their presence was expressed in both newspapers and in the annual reports of schools.[255] In this chapter I show how schools responded to the image of the blind beggars by attempting to inculcate in their students a strong reluctance to accept any charitable aid or be viewed in any way as a financial burden. I also explore the two types of vocational training the institutions did offer: mechanical and musical. These were repeatedly presented by educators as the best way for the blind to gain self-sufficiency. However, as I demonstrate, educators of the blind understood the vocational training they chose to emphasize in the schools would not ensure their graduates could be self-sufficient, but instead would keep them as part of the working poor – unable to support a family, but at least not relying on charity. As part of this, I show how the educators of the blind primarily thought of their students as being from the poorer classes, and thus incapable of rising out of poverty. This in turned led to many – if not most – schools for the blind beginning to either establish or advocate for the establishment of sheltered workshops for their graduates, arguing that these ensured that blind people could work for a living without

[255] Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University, 2009).

relying on charity. Finally, this chapter explores the responses of the blind themselves to this situation, showing how some students followed the paths set for them by educators, how others rejected these paths and in many cases advocated for better job training and preparation for their fellow blind people, and how blind men who did not attend schools preferred to support themselves. As educators believed that there was no way that vocational training would be enough to lift the blind out of poverty, they instead aimed to discourage them from accepting charity through instilling self respect through academic education. This had the added benefit of them being more appreciative of the miraculous nature of creation and more grateful for their education.

Examining how and why nature studies and other scientific concepts were taught to these children demonstrates both how educators viewed a nature-based curriculum as part of a broader civilizing process for the blind, and how the curriculum was adapted to accommodate disability during this period. While some — perhaps even most — graduates of residential schools for the blind ended up in sheltered workshops or supporting themselves at subsistence-level jobs, schools not only provided these courses but expanded the curriculum available at the end of the nineteenth century. This mirrored the expansion in science education for sighted children but was not for identical reasons. While sighted children began to be taught science in schools due to the push by American scientists and educational reformers in both Canada and the United States to build a "literate and numerate citizenry,"[256] educators of the blind were concerned particularly about their charges falling into atheism. Developing a science curriculum for blind children that was similar to the one developed for sighted children was to teach them the grandeur of God's creation, necessary for making them good Christians and in turn good citizens.

[256] Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Nature, Not Books: Scientists and the Origins of the Nature-Study Movement in the 1890s" *Isis* 96 (2005: 324-52), 326.

This chapter begins by briefly outlining the formation of common schools for non-disabled children, to establish what was considered the standards of education.[257] This includes a brief discussion of reform movements within the common schools at the end of the nineteenth century as these clearly had some influence over the debates held by educators of the blind during the period. It then addresses the perception of blind children as being particularly in need of moral and religious education due to their blindness. Sighted children were admonished to count their blessings as they were lucky to not be blind themselves; blind children were admonished to learn to be grateful to the opportunities given to them through their education and to not rely too much on charity. It then describes the debates about educational reform held amongst educators of the blind. These debates were held across North America, rather than being specific to either the United States or Canada, and thus this section examines schools in both countries. As with sighted children, educators of the blind across North America questioned how to most effectively ensure their pupils would graduate as productive citizens and Christians. Should they be educated in the same way as sighted children were, or should the curriculum instead focus on correcting the moral and physical defects blind children were perceived to have? The final section of the chapter addresses the response of the blind themselves to these debates. Far from being the passive recipients of education, blind adults responded to the debates held by educators of the blind, using their own experiences to address the questions raised.

Debates about the Purpose of Educating the Blind

School attendance became normalized for non-disabled children before the passing of the 1871 Education Act made all schools in Ontario free and compulsory; in turn, education reformers attempted various improvements to the curriculum. In *Children in English Canadian*

[257] The earliest school for the deaf was established in the United States in 1817 and in Canada in 1831; the earliest schools for the blind were established in the 1829 and 1871 respectively.

Society, Neil Sutherland outlines debates between two groups of educators about how to best ensure the success of education across Canada during the late nineteenth century. These groups followed similar debates in the United States, as both countries grappled with how to best address educational outcomes. Sutherland describes how one group argued that education must be more child-centered and focus on helping children develop skills that mirrored their physical development. This included "object teaching," which became popular in North America after its introduction by Edward Austin Sheldon at the Oswego Primary Teachers' Training School in New York.[258] This group argued that education should move away from recitation and rote memorization, and instead encourage children to develop their observational skills and to "educate the hand."[259] These reforms were meant to move education away from creating "untrained" minds filled with repeatable knowledge, but instead train children's mind to think clearly with the specific knowledge being incidental.[260]These principles were introduced into the Canadian school system by the 1890s, with the youngest children making objects out of clay, then drawing the objects, and then describing the objects through writing.[261] By developing these skills, children would cultivate their senses rather than learn to merely communicate information.[262]

The second group of educators that Sutherland describes instead wanted education to be more focused on teaching students the vocational skills they would need to be successful later in life. This was seen as a more practical form of education, with classes including agricultural

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[258] Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Kitchener: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2000), 160.
[259] Mary W. Boyle, "Edward Austin Sheldon and the Oswego Movement: A Model of Innovative Administration," Master's Thesis (Chicago: Loyola University, 1972, https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/2557), 65.
[260] Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 51.
[261] Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society*, 161.
[262] A discussion about the development of the senses in education is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For more on how sensory input, including touch, has been studied in the history of education, see: Ian Grosvenor, "Back to the future or towards a sensory history of schooling," *History of Education* 41:5 (2012), 675-87.

skills and manual training and the establishment of industrial schools for delinquent boys to learn trades.[263] Ideally, these educational opportunities would inculcate in students an "increasing respect for honest labour," ensuring that they would become productive members of society regardless of their experiences in the family home.[264] Only some of these reforms remained in place long-term in schools across North America. Middle-class parents rejected the idea of vocational training in schools, instead feeling that these types of classes were only meant for poor and delinquent children.[265] However, many of these reforms were also attempted in schools for the blind.

Schools for the blind in North America were established in part to address the perception that these children were of a dependent class that would ultimately rely on charitable support rather than being productive members of society. Sarah F. Rose describes the industrialization of North America throughout the nineteenth century as contributing to this concern, as those deemed disabled were increasingly unable to participate in waged work due to the need for interchangeable workers on the factory floor and the decreased ability of families to support "partially productive" members.[266] Blind children were unable to attend the common schools to learn even basic skills; however, educators such as Samuel Gridley Howe in Boston, Egerton Ryerson in Toronto, and Sir Charles Frederick Fraser in Halifax argued that providing instruction to blind children would lead them out of poverty and sin and into productive work and a moral life. A large part of their education would include Christian beliefs, as blind children were believed to be more susceptible to moral degeneracy due to their disability.

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[263] Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society*, 178-9.
[264] Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976*, 58.
[265] Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976*, 60-1.
[266] Rose, *No Right To Be Idle*, 2.

Sighted people believed that the blind were ignorant to the beauty of the world around them. Sighted children were admonished in morality tales to think of the suffering blind when they enjoyed "the bright flowers and fair skies of summer", and poets described the blind as longing to see the light.[267] As described in Chapter Two's discussion of fictional depictions of the blind, in the story "Truman Foster: The Blind Sunday School Scholar," Foster is presented as a model pupil who memorizes bible verses and clearly understands their meaning. It ends with "Oh what a blessing is our sight! How good is God to you, that you are not blind." On seeing blind children at a fundraising event for the Boston school, one journalist described the grief he felt that they could not see (and thus enjoy) the flowers they carried or garlands they wore as they passed each day "in total darkness!"[268] This sentiment was also expressed by learned men: in his *Lettre sur les aveugles*, Denis Diderot argued that the blind were incapable of feeling pity in the way their sighted counterparts did, since they were unable to see the visible signs of suffering such as facial expressions or body language.[269] Even educators of the blind would turn to this focus on the overwhelming darkness which left them unable to be as engaged with the world as the sighted: when seeking funds to support the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, Sir Charles Frederick Fraser (who was blind himself) described the uneducated blind as living in a physical, mental, and moral darkness that left them discontented and depressed.[270] This pitiable experience of the world could only be lifted by the light of education.[271]

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[267] Justin T. Clark, *City of Second Sight: Nineteenth-Century Boston and the Making of American Visual Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 145.
[268] Clark, *City of Second Sight*, 146.
[269] Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 22.
[270] Charles Frederick Fraser, *Fighting in the Dark* (Halifax, NS: n. p., 1879).
[271] Unsurprisingly, the ability to raise the blind out of their moral darkness through education was a common theme in annual reports of schools for the blind. See also: J. Laurence Cohen, "Shining Inward: The Blind Seer, Fanny Crosby, and Education for the Blind in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 11: 1 (2017), 55-68; Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*; Clark, *City of Second Sight*; Joanna L. Pearce, "Not for Alms but

The most commonly cited reason for believing in the atheism of the blind was related to the rejection of religious faith by blind eighteenth-century mathematician Nicholas Saunderson. Aside from Howe's reference, Saunderson's rejection of faith was also described in Charles Bowen's essay on the education of the blind, published in the *North American Review* in 1833. Bowen described Saunderson's rejection of the comfort of a clergyman while dying, explaining that the man's wonder at Saunderson's abilities as a blind man were absurd to him. "How often have I heard you express your wonder at my performing things which are to me perfectly simple; how then do I know that your wonder is more reasonable in the one case than in the other" Bowen quotes Saunderson as saying.[272] Reverend B. G. Johns also describes Saunderson's atheism being related to his blindness in his 1867 book *Blind People: Their Works and Ways*. He describes part of Saunderson's rejection of Christian faith as asking why he had no eyes, asking "what had either you or I done to God, that one of us should have that organ and the other be without it?" Johns describes Saunderson as being haunted by this question his whole life.[273] With this concern being expressed in the annual reports of various schools in addition to in the debates held at the various conventions of educators of the blind, it is clear this fear of atheism preoccupied superintendents and teachers alike.

These concerns often directly contradicted what the blind themselves had to say about the lives and experiences, including those who did not receive the benefit of an education. Maurice de la Sizeranne, a blind Frenchman, described how "sight is not indispensable for us to feel ourselves in contact and communion with creation," describing in detail the joy he and other

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Help: Fund-raising and Free Education for the Blind" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, New Series, 23: 1 (2012), 131-56.

[272] Charles Bowen, "Education of the Blind" *North American Review* XXXVII (reprint) (London: Sampson Low Marston and Company, 1895), 32.

[273] B. G. Johns, *Blind People: Their Works and Ways; with Sketches of the Lives of some famous blind men* (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, 1867), 52.

blind people felt when being able to fully immerse themselves in nature.[274] Fanny Crosby, who became known as the Queen of Gospel Song Writers, described how her blindness did not prevent her from experiencing natural beauty or perceiving the inner meaning of things.[275] Alexander Courtney, who published the earliest autobiography of a blind man in North America, reminded the reader that the sighted seem "to forget, or not to reflect, that the extinction of one faculty does not injure the others. If you prick a blind man, does he not bleed? ..."[276] Despite this evidence of the blind themselves that they were not as concerned about losing faith or missing out on the glories of the sighted world, educators and the public were still concerned and argued that this must be addressed directly through education.

The purpose of educating blind children was the subject of much contention, both among the blind and their educators (which included both blind and sighted teachers and administrators) throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Debates with no clear victor were held at conferences for educators, within the annual reports of institutions that assisted the blind (including schools, libraries, and work homes), and at alumni gatherings for residential schools from the establishment of the earliest schools and into the twentieth century. Educators argued for and developed different ideas at different times in their career, making a clear chronology of the growth of these ideas difficult.[277] These debates included if and how the blind should be taught to read, if it was necessary to include musical education in the curriculum, and if those who acquired blindness as adults should ever be admitted to schools for blind children. While

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[274] Maurice de la Sizeranne, *The Blind Sisters of Saint Paul*, translated by L. M. Leggatt (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1907), 3.
[275] J. Laurence Cohen, "Shining Inward: The Blind Seer, Fanny Crosby, and Education for the Blind in the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 11: 1 (2017: 55-68), 56.
[276] Abram V. Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind; by Abram V. Courtney, Himself Totally Blind. With a Memoir of the Author* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1835), 183, 4.
[277] At one point these debates were so contentious that certain subjects were banned from further discussion.

some argued that the purpose of an education for blind children in particular was to ensure they were taught to be moral, clean, and practicing members of a (likely Protestant) church, others felt the purpose was to prepare them for self-sufficiency — in the words of one educator, "…to lift them above the pauper class, and place them in the industrious class."[278] Those in this latter category tended to fall into three groups, differing in their beliefs on how to best ensure the success of their graduates, and also what success looked like for the blind.

The first group argued that it was best to educate blind children in the same way, or as nearly as possible, as sighted children. The strongest early advocate for this system was Samuel Gridley Howe, of the Perkins Institute in Boston. Howe, considered the leading educator of the blind in the United States and consulted by educators in Canada prior to the foundation of the schools in Ontario and Nova Scotia, argued that graduates from Perkins were better equipped to "earn their own livelihood" than, for example, their British counterparts.[279] While the British prepared their students primarily for a trade, graduates from schools that followed the Perkins example were "[e]ducated up to a level with [their] fellow [sighted] men." This, according to Howe and his allies, allowed them to either build their own businesses from the ground up, or fall back on whatever trade they had learned if necessary.[280] The British method, according to Howe, created a dependent class that relied primarily on workhouses and other charitable means for support, while graduates from schools with a broader curriculum were far more independent

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[278] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind*, *October 1873* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1874), 11.
[279] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind*, *October 1873*, 11-12.
[280] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind*, *October 1873*, 18-19, 35-6.

and self-reliant.[281] Schools that followed Howe's model often gave public demonstrations of their students' work (this is discussed further in Chapter Five). The message was clear – their schools were not warehouses for the blind, but true educational institutions on par with the best schools for the sighted in their city.

The second school of thought, championed by Waring H. Wilkerson of the California Institution, argued instead that giving students a curriculum similar to that of sighted children, rather than an apprenticeship that prepared them for manual labour, was a mistake. Blindness was often acquired in childhood due to unsanitary conditions, accidents, or untreated illnesses, and children who attended the residential schools came mostly from poorer families – families that administrators often looked down on for either coddling their blind children or not prioritizing their education.[282] Wilkerson and his allies worried that these children would grow into dependant adults, and focused much of their attention on growing their self-sufficiency at a working-class job such as broom-making or cane-chair seating. By not preparing students to be strong workers, Wilkerson argued, educators of the blind were letting their students down. As Wilkerson pointed out, few graduates of schools for the blind became fully self-sufficient in a trade and struggled to find any paying work. Far too many were relying on selling pamphlets or songs — what one educator called "a polite way of begging" — the very lifestyle education for

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[281] *Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, Forty-Second Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, October 1873*, 33-4.
[282] There are examples of this disdain towards parents in the annual reports from all schools for the blind during the nineteenth century. In Ontario, mothers were blamed for their children "fast falling into idiocy" while Missouri's school prayed that blind children should be preserved from "a mother who does everything for it." Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Third Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1869-70* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1870), 181; Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Second Biennial Report of the Trustees Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-First General Assembly* (Saint Louis, 1860).

the blind was supposed to prevent.[283] Students whose education prepared them for anything other than the working-class jobs Wilkerson believed they were more likely to get were just made more aware of their failure to find work. "If they are going to graduate from the classroom to street corners and the alms-house," he argued, "do not bring them into institutions, do not teach them the intellectual instrument by which they will measure their own inferiority. Let them go to the street corners and the alms-house without education."[284]

Wilkerson and his allies argued that the residential schools established for blind children were expecting too much of their pupils. Not only were they expected over the course of ten years to learn how to dress, clean, feed, and otherwise care for themselves — which, according to superintendents in need of funding, many students arrived at school unable to do[285] — they were also expected to learn to read using one of (or even all of) half a dozen tangible prints in use in North America (see Chapter Four for further discussion of this), some music, the rudiments of a job in the workshop or the crafts room, and a full curriculum. Rather than expanding the curriculum beyond these student's abilities, they argued, it would be far better to focus their education on what would be best for their future. These men argued that students should learn the basics of a trade, and the ability to run their own business rather than all that was

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[283] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, (Boston: Rand, Avery & Co, 1873), 89.
[284] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 87.
[285] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fourth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind* (Saint Louis: Geo. Knapp & Co., 1855), 11. It is worth recalling here that these reports of blind children being unable to do rudimentary self-care were presented by the superintendents as arguments for why their schools continued to need funding. These anecdotes may not have reflected the bulk of the student body, nor the experiences of blind children and adults who did not attend schools. See further my discussion in Chapter Two.

taught in common schools.[286] Ensuring graduates could be employed immediately after leaving the institution, or even before they left, was the way to lift them out the poverty.[287] In the Annual Reports from these institutions, administers would list jobs that successful graduates had found, whether in factories tuning pianos, selling books, or repairing cane-seated chairs and making brooms and mattresses.

A third school of thought rejected the focus on industrial-class jobs outright, instead asserting that all education of the blind should focus on the mind rather than on manual labour. E. B. F. Robinson, a blind Canadian who attended the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind and graduated with a degree in Philosophy from Trinity University, argued that it was the types of jobs the blind were taught at school that set them up for failure. Cane-chair seating, broom-making, and even piano tuning could be done much faster and at a better profit by sighted men. Robinson instead wanted education for the blind to focus far more on science and literature, for the true sphere of the blind — the title of his book on the subject — was in these "mental arts". Blind people, he argued, were not as easily distracted as the sighted, as "from the nature of their limitation they are peculiarly adapted to follow the intricate windings of a mental labyrinth. The blind are undistracted, undisturbed in the midst of the varying petty details of the visible world."[288] Teaching blind children the sciences opened the possibility of them attending university, just as Robinson himself had. Through this extension of their education, Robinson argued that more blind people could become journalists, pharmacists, teachers, lawyers, or clergy

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[286] Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind*, *Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 126.
[287] Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind*, *Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 91-3.
[288] E. B. F. Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind* (place of publication not identified: Printed for the author by W. Briggs, 1896, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.12652), 21.

members, and even enter general medicine, veterinary medicine, or dentistry.[289] Other supporters of expanding the curriculum argued that the blind were excellent teachers to the sighted, and by ensuring their pupils understood the sciences they were ensuring further career options for them in schools or as tutors.[290]

Underlying each of these arguments was the expectation that the uneducated blind were particularly prone to falling into moral decay or atheism. As early as 1833, the New York Institution for the Blind released a report that described the uneducated blind as sitting in "listless vacancy at home, a prey to never-ceasing regret." Due to this pitiable lifestyle, the blind were "charged with atheism and infidelity…[as] a natural result of their ignorance."[291] Here, their ignorance was of the works of nature, for "to [the sighted], each tree, each plant, each flower contains a god."[292] Howe also reported on this concern in his 1843 annual report, describing the "ingenious objections of blind Saunderson to the truths of religion…"[293] This concern continued to be discussed by educators of the blind for the next several decades, with Alfred L. Elwyn of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Education of the Blind describing the life of the blind in 1876 as being in such darkness that "the whole majesty of eternal power be an idea impossible to him, and all God's work as nothing." For Elwyn, the lack of sight that

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[289] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 195.

[290] See, for example: New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *An Account of the New-York Institution for the Blind: Together with a Brief Statement of the Origin, Progress, and Present Condition, of the Institutions for the Blind in This and Other Countries, to Which Is Added Biographical Notices of Some of the Most Illustrious Blind* (New York: Press of G. P. Scott & Co, 1833), 33, although this is also discussed by the blind themselves as a possible career path.

[291] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *An Account of the New-York Institution for the Blind: Together with a Brief Statement of the Origin, Progress, and Present Condition, of the Institutions for the Blind in This and Other Countries, to Which Is Added Biographical Notices of Some of the Most Illustrious Blind*, 32.

[292] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *An Account of the New-York Institution for the Blind: Together with a Brief Statement of the Origin, Progress, and Present Condition, of the Institutions for the Blind in This and Other Countries, to Which Is Added Biographical Notices of Some of the Most Illustrious Blind*.

[293] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, to the Corporation* (Boston: John H. Eastburn, Printer, 1843), 11.

prevented the blind from seeing Niagara Falls, the flash of lightning, or the source of bird song made it impossible for the blind to even conceive of a creator without the intervention of education through residential schools.[294] By introducing nature study programs supplemented with Christian religious instruction, blind children would be exposed to the true grandeur of creation and thus be saved from the tragedy of rejecting the dominant faith.[295] Elwyn's arguments were further expanded by other educators of the blind. Henry Snyder, superintendent of the Ohio school, argued that science cultivated in the blind both greater knowledge of the world and a keener intellect. This in turn would encourage the blind towards "higher and holier ambitions."[296] In response to this, Mr. Couden of Ohio further argued that only by fully unfolding the capacity of the minds of blind children would the powers of their soul be developed "to their fullest capacity."[297]

Fear of the Blind Beggar

As explored in Chapter One, fictional depictions of blind people in the nineteenth century often showed them as solitary beggars who relied on the charitable impulses of the public to survive. Even non-fiction accounts of blind men frequently described the blind as beggars or otherwise reliant on charity. The commonly-told foundation story of the Institut des Jeunes Aveugles in France described Valentine Haüy's discovery of some blind men playing music as a form of begging – the men had music scores in front of them that they clearly could not see and deliberately played poorly to the amusement of the crowd. Haüy was both disturbed and inspired

[294] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876* (Philadelphia: Culbertson & Bache, Printers, 1877), 7

[295] I have yet to come across a school for the blind that acknowledges students from non-Christian backgrounds, instead focusing on their acceptance of different Christian denominations.

[296] James W. Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind* (Columbus, Ohio: Fred J. Heer, 1905), 230.

[297] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind,* 235.

by the sight of their antics and decided to dedicate his life to teaching the blind.[298] Many of the autobiographies that blind men published were done so explicitly to deal with the shortfall of funds from other employments, such as Timothy Woodbridge's struggle after his church refused to pay him for his work, or Abram Courtney's description of how he was frequently rebuked "for using my humble means of gaining an honest livelihood" by selling his autobiography, since "the public have made provisions" for the support of the blind.[299] In *Beauties and Achievements of the Blind*, written by two graduates of the New York Institution for the Blind – William Artman and L. V. Hall – the authors describe blind men who "beg without shame or compunction of conscious, and advert only to their sightless eyes as an excuse for choosing this disgraceful method of protracting life…"[300] Throughout their introduction, Artman and Hall focus on how blind men who cannot find work or support are behaving shamefully, especially compared to the great blind men and women whose lives their work describes.[301] This divide between the appropriately-behaved (and better educated) blind and the shameful behaviour of the uneducated is also reflected in other autobiographical writing. Blind men who supported themselves through their work often rejected any connection to the blind beggar, reflecting classicism within the blind community. In the autobiography *McCullin's Works,* T. J. McCullin, who attended the New York Institution at Batavia (New York state's second institution opened in 1866)[302] explained how his decision to sell his life story was "trying to make an honest living and keep out of the poor house or any asylum…"; he complained that when sighted men wrote similar

[298] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *Account of the New-York Institution*, 5–6.
[299] Timothy Woodbridge, *The Autobiography of a Blind Minister; Including Sketches of the Men and Events of His Time* (Boston: J. P. Jewett and Company, 1856); Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 5.
[300] William Artman and Lansing V. Hall *Beauties and Achievements of the Blind* (Auburn: Published for the Authors, 1858), 11.
[301] Artman and Hall, *Beauties and Achievements of the Blind*, 10.
[302] Samuel Gridley Howe, *Address Delivered at the Ceremony of Laying the Corner-Stone of the New York State Institution for the Blind at Batavia, September 6, 1866* (Boston: Walker, Fuller & Company, 1866).

autobiographies they did not face the scrutiny that blind men did.[303] Similar examples of works published to support blind men included "The Blind Man's Appeal" which encouraged the reader to pay "what you please", and again emphasized the hard work of the blind seller: "His lot is hard. He cannot work / As in the days gone by; / Yet, still must be his home support / and all their wants supply / God knows he would not shrink from work / Nor hardships would he mind; / but ah! Alas! Hope's star has sunk / He's blind! He's blind! He's blind!"[304] Similarly, a tract titled "The London Disaster" (in this case referring to the wreck of the ship Victoria in London, Ontario) was attributed to "Blind Bill, the Fiddler, well known over the Dominion of Canada."[305] Here, "Blind Bill" was supporting himself as a fiddler rather than in a more acceptable occupation.

Some sighted men feared that the blind were congenitally predisposed to becoming beggars. In a 1902 article for *The Pedagogical Seminary*, Arthur R. T. Wylie, a teacher at Clark University, suggested that it was a blind boy's physiology that led to begging. Wylie argued that parental permissiveness led to blind boys who were "anemic, lean, and his muscles are flabby. Their joints are flexible so that the hand can be bent back to touch the fore-arm [sic]. This is one reason…that they become beggars."[306] Similarly, in his autobiography mentioned earlier, McCullin describes how many sighted people believed that the blind needed to rely on begging, which meant that buying anything from a blind man was viewed as a charitable act, "…instead of buying according to merits or value, they say they buy it to help a blind man."[307] Abram

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[303] Thomas J. McCullin, *McCullin's Works* (Hamilton: McKay Printing Company, 1880), 4.
[304] Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Canlit pam 03660, "Blind Man's Appeal - Eight Stanza Poem Beginning with 'O, Ye Whose Eyes Are Open to / the Glorious Light of Day.'"
[305] Artman and Hall, *Beauties and Achievements of the Blind*, 10.
[306] Arthur R. T. Wylie, "On the Psychology and Pedagogy of the Blind" *The Pedagogical Seminary* 9: 2 (June 1902: 127–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1902.10534175), 143.
[307] McCullin, *McCullin's Works*, 41.

Courtney affirmed this in his autobiography, describing how the pitiable way that sighted people reacted to a blind man "acting for, and taking care of himself" would ensure the public would come to buy his wares, at least at first, as he was seen as a novelty. Later, "the edge of curiosity was worn off" and it was difficult for him to continue in the same location.[308] He described being thought an imposter and ordered to stay at the pauper's asylum rather than be allowed to pay for his own lodgings – the sighted owner believed him incapable of paying.[309]

Concerns about beggars using disability to garner pity from the public were common in the last half of the nineteenth century. In *Ugly Laws*, Susan M. Schweik explains the impetus behind these "unsightly begging ordnances", detailing their passage across the United States. Schweik describes the political and economic factors that led to the development of ugly laws following the United States Civil War, specifically focusing on the post-war depression and large numbers of people with disabilities begging on the streets of urban centers.[310] Schweik also connects the earliest of these laws to the building of poorhouses in the urban centers which enacted them: these laws often waived fees or jail time for "unsightly beggars" if they were perceived as too disabled to work. Instead, they were sent to the poorhouse where they could be "cared for."[311] While similar laws do not appear to have been passed in Canada, concern about people with disabilities, whether real or faked, using their deformities to play on the public's pity were not uncommon. In Toronto's *Evening Star*, editors called for an end to supporting "professional mendicants" who use "the exhibition of deformities" to "seek a living by making piteous appeals to the charity of the public."[312] The *Globe* published ads including anecdotes

[308] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 19.
[309] Courtney, *Anecdotes of the Blind*, 18.
[310] Schweik, *The Ugly Laws*, 30.
[311] Schweik, *The Ugly Laws*, 34.
[312] Toronto's *Evening Star*, "Child Beggars" (October 15, 1894).

about blind beggars being wealthy men in disguise, with one "blind old beggar" turning out to be crying in the street because "one of my tenants told me…that the water pipes in my best apartment house had busted."[313] One reporter in the *Toronto Daily Star* assured the public that a common figure seen begging "between Eaton's and Gough's" was truly blind and not one of the "innumerable fakirs that infest the city."[314]

Associations with the Beggars

When establishing schools for the blind in North America, leaders wanted to distance themselves as much as possible from this image of the blind beggar, and even from the image of the blind needing alms at all. T. H. Little of the Wisconsin Institute for the Blind described the European schools as concentrating too much on manual labour and not enough on intellectual stimulation, creating blind adults who were incapable of independence: "Careful inquiry as to the success of graduates of those Institutions, proves that the number of those who have become self-supporting is very small… no more than one per cent, of the blind in England can support themselves at any occupation."[315] In his work *True Sphere of the Blind*, E. B. F. Robinson describes the schools in England as "asylums" prior to the foundation of the British and Foreign Blind Association in 1868.[316] This was not what Samuel Gridley Howe, Egerton Ryerson, or Charles Frederick Fraser wanted for blind people in North America. They wanted blind adults to no longer be reliant on charitable impulses of the public but contributing members of society.

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[313] Toronto's *The Globe*, "A Blind Beggar" (November 30, 1899).
[314] *Toronto Daily Star*, "This Blind Man Is Tot[Sic] Faking: A Little Talk with Archibald McGregor Macdonald of Eaton's Lane" (June 27, 1908).
[315] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 35.
[316] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 164.

Even schools for the blind discussed the common image of the blind beggar, describing them as a danger to the success of their graduates. In an early Annual Report, the Perkins Institute Board of Directors described with distaste the common sight of "itinerant blind musicians" in Great Britain, which had "become a nuisance, for they are in reality vagabonds and beggars, and their peculiar infirmity procures them exceptions from the treatment which others of that class would receive at the ends of the police."[317] The report went on to describe the fear that a growing number of institutions for the blind might lead to more blind men attempting to support themselves as itinerant musicians, and the fear that "…they are apt to degenerate into mountebanks."[318] Administrators of the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind described how the sighted who have "showered gold into their tattered hats" have not "done all that either justice, humanity, or society demands of him" as he has left the blind beggar as an object of pity rather than helping him become a productive member of society.[319]

Schools were so concerned about being related to blind beggars that this affected the curriculum. Schools would resist teaching the blind how to play the fiddle or violin because of its association with begging.[320] Schools would also get offended if anyone implied that their graduates were relying on begging. When a newspaper in Nova Scotia reported on a blind beggar

[317] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind. *Eleventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, to the Corporation*, 15.
[318] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, to the Corporation*, 16.
[319] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *Account of the New-York Institution*, 35.
[320] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 74, 76, 77. This issue was first raised by William Wait of New York. A. Wilhartitz of Missouri responded by saying that he had allowed four of his pupils to learn the violin but insisted that they had to learn other musical instruments as well to avoid the risks associated with the violin. "If the pupil is properly warned in due time, there will be little danger of his dwindling down into a strolling fiddler." H. S. Hall from Kentucky's American Printing House for the Blind argued that "the majority of blind fiddlers are dissipated characters....educate your pupils above this idea of getting a livelihood by fiddling on the street corners."

who claimed to be a graduate of the school, Fraser wrote the newspaper to complain, arguing that no graduate of the school would need to rely on begging.[321] The risk of being associated with begging was too great to ignore rumours of this nature.

However, administrators of the schools also knew that they could not allow graduates to leave school and either become beggars or end up in alms houses. The funding for the schools – both that provided by the government and that provided by charitable members of the public – relied on being perceived as a public good that eliminated blind beggars from the streets of North America. These schools were much more expensive to run than those for sighted children. In 1875, the OIEB estimated the cost of educating just one student was "slighting exceeding $200 per head", and the cost in Halifax in 1880 was $150.[322] Missouri's School for the Blind described how teaching the blind could be "perhaps not less than ten times as expensive" as teaching the sighted, not only due to the higher number of teachers needed per class, but the special apparatuses that needed to be developed to teach in workshops. Since the blind could not be trained in workshops the way sighted people could, educating them was even more expensive than educating the deaf.[323] The deaf could learn how to perform many tasks by watching others, while blind children needed to have every action explained. Without the willing support of the public, schools could end up struggling for money and even closing their doors.

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[321] Halifax Institution for the Blind*, The Thirteenth Report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax Institution for the Blind* (Halifax, N.S: The Asylum, 1883), 14; Halifax's *Morning Chronicle*, "Institution for the Blind – Annual Meeting of the Corporation" (December 10, 1883).
[322] Ontario Institute for the Education of the Blind, *Annual Report of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, 1874-5* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1876), 9; Halifax Institution for the Blind, *Tenth Report of the Board of Managers of the Halifax Institution for the Blind Together with the Acts of Incorporation, and Constitution and Bye-Laws* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1881), 7.
[323] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind. *Second Biennial Report of the Trustees*.

Vocational Education

To emphasize the public good being done by the schools, annual reports focused on the employment opportunities they provided for graduates that would ensure they did not become beggars. In the 1833 report on the New York Institution for the Blind, administrators explained how important it was for a "every true philanthropist to step forward" to fund the institution, as its focus on teaching vocational skills ensured that "society may be relieved from a burden, and a large amount of inert capital be rendered active and productive."[324] Before the location for the OIEB was established, the committee struck to determine its location emphasized that the purpose of the institution was to teach "some useful employment, so upon graduating at the institution, they may be self-sustaining, happy, and useful members of society."[325] Within a few years of being open to pupils, the annual reports of the OIEB described the importance and effectiveness of the workshops and the training offered there, showing how male students were quickly becoming self-sufficient. Within five weeks of the willow workshop being opened, the report for the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Charities described one pupil as getting enough training to earn "a considerable sum at cane seating" while describing the number of orders coming into the institution as "to place the possibility of filling them out of the question."[326] This emphasis on paid employment and self-sufficiency was echoed in annual reports across North America.

However, the types of jobs students were trained for were mostly low-skilled and low-paying. In the early years of the New York Institution for the Blind, administrators described the

[324] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *An Account of the New-York Institution*, 30.
[325] Watertown, MA, Samuel P. Hayes Research Library, J. B. Fuller, "The Institution for the Blind of Ontario, and Its Proposed Location [Handwritten Copy]," n.d. https://archive.org/details/annualreportofon1318onta/page/n5/mode/2up.
[326] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Sixth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1872-73* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1874), 46–7.

need for the blind to be directed "only to the simpler and coarsest kinds of manufactures … our object being not to make blind prodigies, but intelligent and useful members of society – to render individuals who are physically disabled, competent to their own support." They suggested the best work for the blind included chair seating, net making, plaiting straw, mat making, basket making, spinning, rope making, and stuffing mattresses.[327] William Chapin, who argued that schools needed to ensure effective employment of their graduates, described several types of mechanical jobs attempted at his institution: baskets woven by the blind were of poor quality and did not sell; making nets was too slow to earn a profit; shoe-making was similarly difficult and took too long; braiding hats led merely to "a good many hats on hand that we put on the heads of the boys, and that was the end of the matter."[328] Due to their disability, blind men needed to work in a location where everything was always in the same place, and they did not need to worry about supplies being moved around or items being left in their way. When sighted men performed these jobs, they made more money because they could set up a shop with a group of other labourers and create work in piecemeal, as well as purchasing supplies in bulk. This ensured that the work was done faster and cheaper, and blind men could not compete.[329]

Acceptance of Poor Workers

Administrators of schools were aware of the difficulties graduates had in gaining employment that made enough money to be self-sufficient. In 1858, having been open for almost a decade, the Missouri institution's annual reports mentioned some graduates gaining success as broom-makers, although they were unclear as to how much money the men made. They emphasized the teaching of "handicrafts" with the hope of other graduates gaining partially or

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[327] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *Account of the New-York Institution*, 29.
[328] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 119.
[329] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 13.

even fully remunerative work. Women, they admitted, were highly unlikely to gain any employment after graduation.[330] The Perkins Institution reported that the sorts of mechanical labour that the blind could perform were also able to be performed by "iron fingers" and were thus quickly automated.[331] Chapin argued that the blind were incapable of competing with the sighted in most, if not all, jobs, due to the speed at which the sighted could accomplish things. The blind struggled to find work entirely because the public perceived them as incapable of doing the work. Many blind men who gained successful employment after leaving Chapin's school in Pennsylvania found it in group workshops.[332]

This lack of remunerative work was in part because of the perceptions the superintendents had of the blind children in their schools. As described in an earlier chapter, blindness was associated with poverty, as the most common way to acquire blindness was through accidents associated with dangerous labour or illnesses thought to be caused by poor sanitation and lack of care. Administrators of schools for the blind – even those who were blind themselves, such as Fraser in Halifax – tended to come from wealthy families.[333] Thus, the jobs that were most frequently taught to students at the schools were those associated with the lower classes, with no aim of helping them rise out of poverty. Some leaders of institutions despaired for their pupils, believing them lacking in quality. In explaining why he thought blind adults struggled to find employment, William H. Churchman, the blind superintendent of the Indiana

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[330] Watertown, MA, Samuel P. Hayes Research Library, "Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind - Report of the Trustees for 1858 [Handwritten Copy]" https://archive.org/details/biannualreportof16miss.
[331] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 13.
[332] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 78.
[333] Fraser's father was a physician and his mother was the daughter of a prominent politician. Halifax's *Morning Chronicle*, "Sir C. F. Fraser Passed Away Yesterday" (July 6, 1925). Howe's family were "an hold Boston family claiming descent from Abraham Howe, who settled at Roxbury in 1636 or 1638." Harold Schwartz, *Samuel Gridley Howe : Social Reformer, 1801-1876* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 1.

school, complained that "too many of our graduates, male and female, lack the sterling qualities which constitute the true man and woman. Where these are naturally wanting, they can not, of course, be supplied." Those few who had these qualities, "even in the most rudimental condition" should have them as strongly developed as possible.[334] The superintendent of the Maryland institution agreed, describing most of the blind at his school as "…corresponding to that class of seeing persons who do our grubbing and digging…and give us a great deal of anxiety. We want someone to tell us what to do with them."[335] Thus, the administrators did not feel an urgent need to ensure students could take on jobs that might rise them out of poverty more completely.

As it became clear to administrators that their schools could not guarantee that graduates would be self-sufficient, they began the process of inculcating in their students a reluctance to rely on any form of charity or public assistance. Instead, educators suggested that blind men should refuse any alms and attempt to live as frugally as possible, even more frugally than a sighted man in a similar position. Wilkinson further argued that, as blind men were not "a whole man, or able to do the work of a whole man", they should expect to be paid less than other men and should budget accordingly. While whole men might expect to live on "sixpence a day, and earn it," blind men should expect to "live on twopence a day, but earn it."[336] Blind students were encouraged to cheerfully accept their status as "so much less of a man" than the sighted due to their disability; as disabled men, they must "…accept their calamity cheerfully, feeling that it is a

[334] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 118.
[335] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 119.
[336] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 85.

calamity, but determined by pluck, by increased perseverance and energy, to overcome this calamity."[337] There was no attempt by the administrators to insist that the blind could do jobs that paid more, or did not rely on manual labour.

A Moral Education

To supplement this inculcation of their graduates to reject charity, educators of the blind spent much of the curriculum on morality and a strong work ethic. During a debate about what training should be prioritized in institutions — intellectual or mechanical — Chapin argued that occupational training had "a great moral feature…that must not be lost sight of."[338] He described the blind as needing "occupation", as without it "they can not fail to become moralized."[339] The superintendent of the Ohio Institution reminded attendees that the schools were "…to promote the education of the soul. You may educate a man in literature, music or the mechanical arts, but if you do not give them the idea of being an independent man, you do him little good."[340] He also described the three branches of education in the institutions - literary, musical, and mechanical — as "…tending to the elevation of the man or woman in the scale of manhood or womanhood."[341] The Annual Reports for the Missouri institution argued that educating the blind was particularly difficult due to the breadth of what they were expected to teach. While schools for the sighted could prepare their students for further education after graduation or even on-the-

[337] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 86.
[338] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 91.
[339] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 91.
[340] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 94.
[341] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 94.

job training, schools for the blind "…must awaken, develop, and discipline whatever peculiar aptitude the pupil may posses for securing position, career, or maintenance in society."[342]

Nature Study and Faith

Nature study programs were introduced to schools for the sighted in Boston, Massachusetts in the 1850s by Louis Agassiz, a nineteenth-century naturalist, although it did not take root until the 1890s.[343] Agassiz and other nature study advocates argued that teaching sighted children the "fundamentals of scientific investigation," by which they meant direct observation of the natural world, would ensure that they would continue to observe "the subjective, the ethical and the magical that can be found in" nature.[344] Agassiz was not trying to advance scientific investigation – in fact, his work was often dismissed by European-based researchers – but instead was aimed at training teachers in how to best present the natural world to students.[345] He established a field school in 1873 and invited 44 teachers from across the United States to join him in developing new pedagogical approaches with the aim to incorporate studies of nature into the sighted classroom and encourage more natural science into the curriculum overall.[346] Agassiz rejected the use of textbook recitation as a teaching tool, as this did not allow students to experience the natural world as it really existed. His followers argued that his pedagogical approach to nature studies ensured that both the spirituality and moral lessons of the natural world were available to children despite the growing industrialization of the United States.[347]

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[342] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind. *Second Biennial Report of the Trustees*.
[343] Kohlstedt, "Nature, Not Books," 324-5.
[344] Kevin Connor Armitage, "Knowing Nature: Nature Study and American Life, 1873-1923," Ph.D. Dissertation (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 5-6.
[345] Armitage, "Knowing Nature," 10.
[346] Kohlstedt, "Nature, Not Books," 327.
[347] Armitage, "Knowing Nature," 11, 19.

These lessons, where students would carefully examine objects to better understand them, were an obvious way to include nature studies into the America classroom. H. H. Straight, a former pupil of Agassiz and the Chair of Natural Sciences at the normal school in Oswego, argued that nature study helped students to understand their role in creation.[348] Straight and his fellow educators at Oswego believed that a close study of the natural world inculcated in students a clearer understanding of "natural piety." Historian Kevin C. Armitage argues that proponents of the nature study movement emphasized the connections between science and the spiritual, describing the use of nature in the classroom as "baptism of spirit" and connected to the soul of the pupil.[349] The natural world was viewed as a gift from God that needed to be appreciated, and nature study programs within schools would ensure a moral connection to the spiritual world.

These programs were introduced into school systems across North America just as progressive educators were exploring new ways of educating children outlined above, focusing on building a child's "natural curiosity [and]…basic observational skills" and including a heightened piousness.[350] Like Robinson's goals for blind children, part of what drove educators to include more science in the curriculum was the hope that it would allow more sighted children to go on to higher education and become better Christians.[351] Programs designed to help elementary school teachers develop nature study in the classroom were established in New York, Massachusetts, Missouri, Illinois, and elsewhere.[352] Following on Agassiz's work, William T.

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[348] Armitage, "Knowing Nature," 22.
[349] Armitage, "Knowing Nature," 29.
[350] Kohlstedt, "Nature, Not Books," 330.
[351] A sub-group of the Committee of Ten on Secondary Schools debated the best way to approach standardizing education in the sciences in 1892; the Committee of Ten was appointed by the National Education Association with the goal of standardizing education overall across the United States with similar pedagogical goals.
[352] Kohlstedt, "Nature, Not Books," 335-36

Harris (then head of the St. Louis Public Schools before his time as the fourth Commissioner of Education of the United States) wrote a widely-read treatise on the subject, originally published in 1871. Harris argued that the oral method of teaching sighted children encouraged them towards "self-activity" and discouraged learning by rote instead of true understanding.[353] Text-book learning, on the other hand, encouraged students to learn by themselves how to overcome difficulties rather than having the teacher solve all the problems for them.[354] Despite a lengthy list of required texts, Harris encouraged teachers to not only bring in real objects that illustrated what was being taught (similar, one would expect, to the models that were used in schools for the blind), but students were to be encouraged to describe what they had seen or heard in their own lives.[355]

Harris outlined a method of study that began in the first grade with plants, moved on to animals in comparison to humans in the second year, and concluded with the elements of earth (including gravitation), air (including weather), fire, and water in year three.[356] As sighted pupils typically spent less time in education than blind children did (Harris claimed an average time in school of five years for children in the city and only three years for those in the country, while blind children usually spent ten or more years at residential schools), it was vital that this early education focus entirely on "what the pupil is not likely to pick up from intercourse with the family circle...."[357] Sighted students completing three years of education would acquire at least enough to understand the industrializing world in which they would enter the workforce.[358]

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[353] William T. Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science in Public Schools*, Second Edition (Syracuse, NY: C. W. Bardeen, Publisher, 1895), 24.
[354] Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science*, 24.
[355] Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science,* 41.
[356] Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science*, 29-30.
[357] Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science*, 17.
[358] Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science*, 38.

Those that completed more years of schooling would go on to more specialised looks at plants, animals, geology, and physics, including examining which plants were useful in medicine, clothing, and the arts (year four); the circulation and other systems within the bodies of animals (year five); astronomy, microscope work, electricity, and barometric pressure (also year five); the structure of land, water, and meteorology (year six); and "the outlines of natural philosophy (or physics), as illustrated in familiar objects" (year seven).[359] It was the goal of these educators for this to become a universal curriculum for sighted children across the United States. Similar nature studies programs, using science to celebrate God's Creation and encourage students to be devout Christians, were introduced for sighted children in Canada. Educators were encouraged to conduct field studies on local plants, animals, and minerals, with some classes taught in classroom gardens.[360]

Methods of Instruction

Despite lengthy discussions over several years among educators of the blind across North America, a universal curriculum was never developed in residential schools. However, schools that did decide to include the sciences often shared techniques, apparatuses, and textbooks across state and country lines. While discussions about how to develop a science curriculum for sighted children did not explicitly include educating blind children – most of whom were not expected to go on to post-secondary education – educators of the blind were clearly aware of them. The arguments and suggestions on how to teach the blind science drew on similar arguments and suggestions as Harris outlined. Looking at how the blind were taught geography, physics, chemistry, biology, and zoology shows the creativity used by educators to produce apparatuses and tactile models, how these tools could vary in cost and sophistication, and how the ongoing

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[359] Harris, *How to Teach Natural Science*, 28-35.
[360] Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario*, 187.

struggle to settle on one tactile print for use in blind schools limited advancement for students. Financial difficulties were often a factor in how much schools were able to do, and the annual reports of these schools would often feature discussions of how effectively students were learning under difficult circumstances, followed by a plea for more money. Superintendents also would include discussions on how they were adapting the science within the classroom, sharing their knowledge with other schools for the blind and with a public fascinated by the image of blind children learning.[361]

Teaching the sciences often involved creating tactile models with which the blind could interact, whether by running their fingers over the model or by taking them apart and putting them back together. These could be very simple models that were made by hand, ones that could be easily recreated through the use of molds and etchings, or more expensive ones that were specially built for individual schools and in use for decades. The widest variety of models were used in teaching geography. Whether giving students a clear idea of the layout of the school and city they lived in so they would be more confident in navigation, showing how their city or state fit into the overall map of North America, or through demonstrating that the Earth was round, geography was considered by many educators to be essential learning for blind children. Howe argued that the blind needed to be aware of political geography in order to function in the modern world of the late nineteenth century.[362] Blind students also needed to be fully comfortable with the geographic space in which they lived, and models with which students

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[361] For further discussion of the public's fascination with demonstrations of blind children reading, doing science, or creating handicrafts for sale, see: Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*.
[362] Watertown, MA, Perkins History Museum, B. L. McGinnity, J. Seymour-Ford, K. J. and Andries, "Geography," Perkins School for the Blind, http://www.perkins.org/history/curriculum/geography (accessed: January 27, 2016).

could interact in the safety of their schoolroom would ensure that blind students learned about their surroundings and how to navigate through them.

What the material models were made of varied depending on both their purpose and the financial resources available. Some models of the school and surrounding neighbourhood, built by the students as they became more familiar with the space, were made of pins and string stuck into a cushion. As teachers tried to make these maps more tangible, they used clay.[363] These maps gave students, who had often traveled far distances to attend the only residential school in their area, a stronger sense of place and more confidence in navigating the world on their own. For larger maps of the state, province, or country, schools had a few different options depending on cost. Again, some relied on string, pins, and a cushion to give students an idea of the larger map, while other low-cost methods included pin-pricks tracing the edges of the state boundaries and geographic features on a paper map, or using a machine to sew a map onto thick fabric.[364] Schools with more money would commission wooden maps, with states or countries carved like puzzle pieces that could be fit together, and geographical features laid out with tacks or carved into the wood.[365] Howe decided that a globe was necessary, partly for world geography and partly to explain the rotation of the round earth, and commissioned the first tactile globe made in North America. The final product, finished in 1837, was 13 feet in circumference and made out of 700 pieces of carefully glued-together wood, while the landmasses were made out of paper-mâché and emery cloth.[366] While no other institution appears to have commissioned something

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[363] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 153.
[364] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 153; Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Report of the Trustees and Principal of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Second General Assembly* (Jefferson City: W. A. Curry, 1863), 1.
[365] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 154.
[366] Watertown, MA, Perkins History Museum, B. L. McGinnity, J. Seymour-Ford, K. J. and Andries, “Geography,” Perkins School for the Blind, http://www.perkins.org/history/curriculum/geography (accessed: January 27, 2016).

of quite that size and sophistication, many schools did seek out smaller tactical globes, which Howe was happy to sell at a cost between $40 and $75.[367]

As techniques in creating tangible maps improved, schools began purchasing more easily reproducible maps for each student in a class. These maps were created using a carved block of wood that showed the map in relief and printed with the edges raised in a similar manner to books with raised tangible print. While these maps were not for long-time use — one educator complained about how quickly they wore out — they were inexpensive and allowed each student in a class to have a map in front of them to interact with during a lesson.[368] For educators, this was similar to placing a map at the front of the classroom for sighted students, since blind pupils could feel along the map to get a clearer idea of the layout of the area they were discussing. In response to those who doubted the financial cost of what were, essentially, disposable maps, S. A. Knapp of Iowa pointed out that his pupils "have made more progress in the study of geography…than was made before in quadruple the time…" by having the maps in front of them. [369] Without this constant tangible reminder that students could consult throughout the day, they would lose track of the physical spaces they were learning about, and quickly become lost in the lesson.

The best ways to provide something tangible that students could consult, such as textbooks with embossed figures or print, was another heated discussion amongst teachers of the blind. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, administrators and educators

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[367] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Report of the Trustees and Principal of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Second General Assembly,* 14.
[368] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872,* 60.
[369] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872,* 60.

debated at length the best form of tangible print to use for their students, arguing about dot-based texts like Braille versus raised-print texts like Boston Line (this debate is discussed at length in Chapter Four).[370] With limited funds being split between three or four different publishing houses, the translation of texts into a tangible print was slowed to only the most important of books, which were usually religious in nature.[371] As a result, most education for the blind was done orally, with some schools having teachers dictate textbooks to their students while they recorded them in Braille or another dot-based print.[372] Other schools continued to reject the idea of textbooks, arguing that students could rely on them too much rather than developing their own thoughts.[373] Without an agreed-upon tangible print, textbooks were difficult for teachers to bring in to the classroom. Again, teachers needed to rely on various forms of interactive models, even outside of geography – one that could be explained orally while students fiddled with them.

Thus, educators relied on interactive counting boards and movable slates to teach basic mathematical skills, rather than the textbooks that were more common in schools for the sighted. Students in Missouri, for example, learned on a metallic slate "divided into small squares in which [movable] figures [were] placed" that allowed students to perform all common mathematical operations. Once they mastered basics of addition and subtraction, however, students preferred to do their math in their head.[374] This technique continued to be used to teach

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[370] For a brief overview of this debate, see: Robert B. Irwin, *The War of the Dots* (American Foundation for the Blind, 1870). See also: Joanna L. Pearce, "The 'tactile Ba[b]ble under which the blind have hitherto groaned': Dots, Lines and Literacy for the Blind in Nineteenth-Century North America" in *Edinburgh History of Reading: Subversive Readers*, edited by Jonathan Rose, 97-115 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).
[371] With much reluctance I must admit that a discussion of this debate is outside the scope of this dissertation.
[372]American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872,* 59.
[373] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 77-8.
[374] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly [Cut from Original Source and Bound with Other Documents], 1866*, https://archive.org/details/biannualreportof16miss and (Jefferson City: W. A. Curry, 1867), 10.

the youngest pupils the basics throughout the nineteenth century.[375] Other educators looked backwards to the work of the Nicolas Saunderson. Saunderson developed his own "counting board" to work out more complicated math and keep track of more numbers. It used squares that had one hole in the center surrounded by eight other holes. The numbers from zero to 10 were represented by various pins that could be placed and moved around easily as the numbers were manipulated in equations.[376] While it is unclear how widely this board was used in North American schools, students who learned with it or similar slates relied on them, and there was an outcry amongst alumni in Ohio when the institution decided to stop using them.[377]

Educators of the blind felt that geometry was particularly useful to their students, as it gave them a firmer grasp on the physical world. When addressing the Convention of American Educators of the Blind in 1876, W. H. Churchman, superintendent of the Indiana school, described "how limited the horizon of the blind person is; he has no greater radius than the length of his arm." Churchman argued that classes such as geometry and geography heightened the conceptive power of the blind and allowed them to "infer a great deal with regard to external objects", particularly mountains and planetary systems.[378] Mrs. T. H. Little, the superintendent of the Wisconsin school, agreed, stating that "geometry is perhaps the most beneficial study for blind scholars …because it teaches them a conception of outside objects; they can more easily get a correct conception of physical objects from a description after studying geometry."[379] In

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[375] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 151.
[376] J. J. Tattersall, "Nicholas Saunderson: The blind Lucasian professor" *Historical Mathematica* 19:4 (November 1992: 356-70), 358.
[377] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 123.
[378] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 78.
[379] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 77.

order to ensure that students understood shapes and movement in space, George Lindsey, a teacher at the Ohio Institution, argued that it was important they have access to textbooks with "…numerous and well-chosen examples…Definitions and principles might also be introduced, but the demand for examples is special and urgent. Every scholar…should likewise have an example book for that study."[380] The Virginia school rose to Lindsey's challenge and designed and printed tactile books with raised diagrams made using the same embossed printing techniques used for maps. Enough of these were made that they were able to share them with other institutions, although they were likely both expensive and quick to wear out from repeated use.[381] However, students were able to study the figures outside of the classroom, something the blind were rarely able to do — much to the chagrin of their teachers every September.

However, most schools could not afford these specially printed textbooks, and relied on hand-made models. Students again used pins and string on cushions or peg boards to explore shapes, lines, and angles, or read with their fingers diagrams made using a sewing machine on cloth.[382] Some schools used Vitali's ink, a glutinous ink which, after drying, "would give relief enough to be felt by the finger of the blind man" although these needed to be made with care.[383] Unlike the textbooks for the sighted, hand-made diagrams were rarely labelled as the tangible prints in use were either of a difficult size or did not take to the material. Regardless, the students were able to interact in some way with the models and diagrams, and thus were able to gain insight into how the shapes worked. As a result, as Little and Churchman described, students

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[380]American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention. *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871,* 11.
[381] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly, 1866,* 11.
[382] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 160.
[383] Arthur Good, "Writing-Machines for the Blind" *Popular Science Monthly* 33 (September 1888: 643-52), 650.

were able to get a clear idea of how various objects and shapes felt and had a better understanding of objects they had never interacted with but only had described to them. “The more that [conceptive] power is cultivated,” Churchman argued, “the better the pupil will be able to understand.”[384]

By teaching blind children geography and geometry educators believed they were giving their pupils a clearer idea of the physical space they inhabited, as well as the divine glory of the Earth. With this increased awareness of the space around them, blind children would feel more confident while they moved around in the world, and again appear less like lost savages and more like their sighted, civilized, counterparts. This conceptive power that Churchman discussed was also important in ensuring students understood the beauty of God’s Creation. Alfred L. Elwyn described the blind as living in a meaningless darkness. “He may hear the rush of the storm, the singing of the birds - all the poetry of the world may speak in rich and beautiful language, and the effect be as nothing from the source not being seen....How can the existence of a God be introduced in the mind of one who sees no evidence of his power?”[385] This was by no means an uncommon sentiment. Educators of both the deaf and the blind discussed which disability was more of a burden to a child’s development, particularly which left children the most debilitated in their ability to be truly Christian. For the deaf the fear was that they could not learn religious practices or understand the scriptures, but at least they were able to see the

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[384] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876, 78.*
[385] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876, 5.*

majesty of the world.[386] For educators of the blind, they needed to find ways to bring that majesty to their pupils by bringing that majesty to their fingertips.

Work that relied on simple observation, such as zoology, biology, and physiology, was relatively easy to teach to blind students. While, as Robinson explained, the "microscopic work must be taken on trust," most of the work was done by bringing in specimens — live ones, in some cases — for the students to interact with.[387] Della Bennett, a sighted teacher at Boston, discussed how having students observe the months-long metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a moth taught "faith in the stillest and darkest hour." She encouraged her fellow teachers to "put your pupils in direct communication with nature" in order to bring out the best in their minds.[388] Mostly, though, these were either models made of clay, wood, or other material, or stuffed and mounted animals. To best explain the finer differentiations between various species, models would be made larger for tiny fingers to explore. Students were expected to remember the details and associate them with the models, as the three boys did in the Perkins presentation on owls and bean plants.[389]

Educators would often tell anecdotes of the wonder students felt at interacting with models, and their sudden understanding of the greatness of the world they could not see. Henry Snyder of Ohio discussed one of his students interacting with a model of a duck

> "One especially diligent and intelligent girl seemed very much pleased with the plump body and fine plumage of a wood duck. Soon after, her first impressions gave way to more sober thoughts. Then her face was wreathed with astonishment. She declared,

[386] Alessandra Iozzo, ""Silent Citizens": Citizenship Education, Disability, and d/Deafness at the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Deaf, 1870-1914," Ph.D. Dissertation)Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2015), 101.
[387] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 163.
[388] Della Bennett, "Science for our Schools" *The Mentor* 1: 5 (May 1891), 146-7.
[389] Bennett, "Science for our Schools," 165.

> 'Well, what a duck! It has but two legs, and I always thought that all kinds of birds have four legs.' This single incident may bear testimony as to the value of systematic collections of animals, and, in fact, all of the most common things about us."[390]

Other sciences, particularly physics and chemistry, relied on students doing experiments in order to understand them fully. Students used various electrical appliances that were designed to explain the laws of heat, sound, and light. Educators who supported students doing their own experiments in class argued that they were done with "comparatively as few accidents as in schools for the sighted," although details on these accidents were not forthcoming in their reports to donors or other educators.[391]

How effective these methods were at educating the blind is unclear. The annual reports of schools focused on their successes, in part due to their continuing need for funds.[392] The principal of the OIEB described the effectiveness of tactile maps in teaching children the geography of Ontario and the rest of Canada, explaining that students were able to easily trace the railway routes around the province, while the object lessons (recently improved by additions to the curriculum including seals, ducks, and kangaroos) were described as show "a very correct idea of the size, shape, etc of the various animals about which they read…too high praise cannot be bestowed on the pains taken to the instruction of this class."[393] Mary Redick of the Ohio Institution for the Blind described how the inclusion of clay models in her classroom had a

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[390] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Eighth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind held at the Missouri School for the Blind at St. Louis Missouri August 19, 20 and 21, 1884* (St. Louis: Commercial Printing Company, 1883), 44.
[391] Bennett, "Science for our Schools," 163.
[392] For further discussion of the need for institutions for the disabled to show that their pupils were being effectively educated in order to maintain their funding from both the government and the philanthropic public, see Rose, *No Right to be Idle*, 2-48; Pearce, "Not for Alms but Help".
[393] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Ontario Intuition for the Education of the Blind – Brantford, Ontario, Canada Report of Principal Dymond, Dr. L. Secord, Acting-Physician, and the examiners for the year ending September 30th, 1888* (Brantford: Watt and Sherston, 1889), 12, 22-3, 24.

"transforming effect on the pupils…dispelling…the misty shadows which hang over the dark pathway through which they must feel their way to a knowledge of the things around them."[394] This was further elaborated on by Ohio's Henry Snyder, who described the tears of "joy and thankfulness" of a girl whose study of a model of the ear "has taught me the sweet lesson that I can do something for myself. I never felt until now that I could study anything for myself."[395] However, educators' reports of success were not always supported by reports of outsiders. Ian Grosvenor and Natasha Macnab describe how museum curators in New York created handling sessions for blind students in 1909 and found students lacked real knowledge of the appearance of domesticated animals beyond cats and dogs, and often struggled to truly comprehend the size of the actual animals they were examining via model and stuffed version.[396] While these models may have been effective in giving students insight into the breadth of God's Creation, the details may have been lost due to the techniques in use.

Responses of the Blind

Discussions about the proper use of science in schools were not limited to educators of the blind. The blind themselves also debated how to best achieve an effective education that would set graduates up for success after leaving school. While some, like Robinson, argued that the blind needed higher education to be truly successful, others argued it was a distraction. At the 1885 meeting of the Ohio institution's alumni association, several blind graduates spoke against

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[394] Mary S. Redick, "The New Education, or Kindergarten for the Blind" in *Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind held at the Kentucky Institution for the Blind at Louisville, KY, August 17, 18, and 19, 1880* (Louisville: John P Morton & Company, 1880), 43.
[395] Henry Snyder, "A Chip from an Ohio Workshop" in *Proceedings of the Eight Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind held at the Missouri School for the Blind at St. Louis, Missouri, August 19, 20 and 21, 1884* (St Louis: Commercial Printing Company, 1885), 43.
[396] Ian Grosvenor and Natasha Macnab, "'Seeing through touch': the material world of visually impaired children" *Educar em Revista, Curitiba, Brasil* n. 49 (jul./sept. 2013: 39-57), 46, 53. A further exploration of museums and tactile exhibitions for the blind in North America is a fruitful avenue of inquiry but is outside the scope of this dissertation.

science education in their school. Albert Bohrer, echoing sentiments expressed by Wilkinson and other educators, argued that while his scientific education prepared him to be able to identify all the parts of a cow at the butcher, it did not give him the ability to afford to buy beef.[397] Mr. Henderson further expanded on Bohrer's argument, pointing out that the true purpose of educating the blind must be to set them up for independence. "But, if so much of their time is taken up by studies [of literature and science, including nature study programs], which only discipline and develop the blind, it is impossible for them to perfect themselves in those branches where are necessary for the accomplishment of the great object" he argued.[398] His speech, which engendered much debate at the alumni association, described how graduates were still being set up for failure, as the knowledge acquired would not "help a man to make a broom or a girl to sew a hem." The debates held by educators at their various conventions on whether and in what matter to educate the blind in the natural sciences were a waste of time, time that could be better spent on subjects that ensured the success of blind graduates.[399]

However, these were not the only sentiments expressed by alumni. Mr. Bodle pointed out that a scientific education prepared the blind for the changing world outside the institution, particularly for the wonders of the telephone and telegraph. While Bohrer and Henderson argued that a scientific education was a distraction, Bodle argued it enhanced the education the blind were already receiving. He believed that as "the old methods were giving place to the new[,] the institution had drawn a newer life from the old."[400] Others agreed, pointing out that having an education similar to that of the sighted further proved that the blind could be independent and were as intelligent as their sighted counterparts. Without a complete education that included the

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[397] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 190.
[398] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 183.
[399] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 184.
[400] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 187.

natural world and literature, "how can we be men and women among men and women?" asked one graduate.[401] Notably, blind people did not discuss how a scientific education could affect one's religious faith, instead focusing entirely on the practicalities of the education they received.

Workshops as a Solution

By 1871, the lack of jobs for the blind that paid sufficiently for their needs was at a crisis for some educators. At that year's American Convention of Educators of the Blind (ACEB), held in Indiana, William Chapin of the Pennsylvania institution, newly elected president of the ACEB, explicitly discussed how blind graduates lived in deplorable circumstances, despite having received "an expensive course of instruction…. Many of them are not able to support themselves by their knowledge of the mechanical branches."[402] Echoing Chapin's concerns, H. H. Johnson, Superintendent of the West Virginian school expressed his disbelief that any blind man could support himself by any of the popular mechanical trades being taught in the schools, particularly cane seating.[403] Other attendees challenged Johnson, describing two examples of men who were successfully supporting themselves through a combination of trades rather than just one; however, the overall debate focused on the difficulties being experienced by their graduates.[404]

For some administrators, the answer to the problem Chapin highlighted was to move to build sheltered workshops, whether directly tied to the school within the same city or built

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[401] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 188.
[402] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 25.
[403] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 52.
[404] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 52.

someplace else but associated with the school. These workshops frequently employed both graduates of the school and those who acquired blindness in adulthood. The workshops were rarely physically connected to the institutions as the adult blind were viewed as potentially a bad influence on the children. The Annual Report from Missouri described those who acquired blindness in adulthood as a living a "sad and deplorable" life, "with all their hopes suddenly and forever disappointed, their aspirations cut off, ambition crushed, industry and activity exchanged for monotonous idleness, the glorious light of day, for impenetrable darkness…"[405] The fear that this despair would spread to students prompted the separation of the workshops, as "[m]ental diseases are as contagious as those of the body, and the young blind are particularly liable to take them…".[406]

Sheltered workshops were not a new suggestion for the blind in North America. During the 1853 meeting of the American Instructors of the Blind, a resolution was passed that suggested "every Institution should offer employment to all its graduates of good moral character."[407] Sheltered workshops allowed the blind to work but they were not expected to earn a living.[408] Instead, the work was designed to keep the blind from being idle, or from returning to the streets to beg in the gaze of the public. The workshops sold the works created by blind men,

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[405] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Biennial Report of the Trustees and Principal of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, to the Nineteenth General Assembly* (Jefferson City: James Lusk, Public Printer, 1857), 9.
[406] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Biennial Report of the Trustees and Principal of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, to the Nineteenth General Assembly*, 9.
[407] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, New York, August 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1853* (New York: Bradstreet Press, 1872), 7.
[408] For more on sheltered workshops, see: Dustin Galer, "'A Place to Work Like Any Other?' Sheltered Workshops in Canada, 1970-1985" *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 3: 2 (June 17, 2014, https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v3i2.155.): 1.

but the men were paid regardless of how much the work sold. The workshops were supported either through charitable giving or through the school's budget.[409]

The foundation of these workshops sparked lengthy debates at the meetings of the ACEB. Did these workshops merely represent another form of charity, one their graduates should be strongly discouraged from using, or were they a more effect means of providing self-sufficiency for graduates? Chapin argued for the workshops as a positive outcome for the blind, comparing them to giving a man a plank of wood to help in swimming across a river. Merely giving the men money would make them "helpless" and "demoralize" them but providing workshops that gave the men work but didn't require them to purchase materials on their own dime would lift them up without reliance on charitable giving.[410] He favourably compared the workshops to the London Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind, which relied on charity for its members – something Chapin felt was the equivalent of begging. Governments across North America were putting large sums of money into educating the blind, and societies like the London Association were just begging in another form. For Chapin and those who supported him, the development of workshops and other employment opportunities for the blind was the "special mission" of educators.[411] Governments which had kindly provided the blind with an education should, he argued, be equally willing to support sheltered workshops as a means of guaranteeing the blind could receive sufficient work, for "if he cannot obtain sufficient work for his necessary expenses, what is to become of him? He must become a dependent somewhere, or

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[409] Similar issues were found with establishing sheltered workshops for idiots during this period. See: Rose, *No Right to be Idle*, 172-89.
[410] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 79.
[411] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 82.

sink to the condition of a pauper."[412] Otis Patten of the Arkansas Institution described sheltered workshops as being most suitable for the "dependent blind", those who "are willing to work, and are able to earn at least a partial support, but who lack the ability to conduct a business of their own." They should work for their wages, even if those wages were supplemented by charitable donations.[413]

However, not all educators of the blind agreed with the establishment of these workshops. Wilkinson argued against the workshops, stating that any school that did not "make its pupils self-supporting, is a failure," placing the blame for a lack of employment on poor education within the institutions themselves.[414] Wilkinson believed these workshops were the same as charity, since the men employed in them were not working for themselves but still receiving financial assistance. The blind, he argued, needed to be taught that charity was akin to failure, and that any handout they were given was to "sting like the sting of a wasp."[415] S. A. Knapp, superintendent of the Iowa school, suggested instead of workshops that schools should set up "homes" for graduates with a sighted adult that was meant to step into a paternal or mentorship role. Rather than providing a workshop for the blind, these homes would provide guidance in seeking jobs, advice while working, some material assistance if necessary, and, "if they make a mistake or failure, and it becomes necessary for them to fall back to the shelter of

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[412] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 80.
[413] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 34.
[414] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 84.
[415] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 85.

the paternal roof, receive them, push them out again, and so retain them just as short a time as possible."[416]

As examined in Chapter Two, the school in Ontario was very concerned about being viewed as an asylum for the adult blind. In 1875, the principal's report included a reminder that "the massing of adult blind at a central point, even thought it be an industrial home, does not commend itself to my judgement; the experience of every such establishment is, that, as a combination, blind artizans [sic] are apt to do less for their own support than when dependent upon their own individual capital and skill; and every such workshop has a serious annual deficit." The goal of the school was to ensure that graduates would be well trained enough that they "would relieve the municipalities of indigent adult blind."[417] Later, the principal's report expressed both concern and frustration that the British schools for the blind had "taken no higher view of the emergency than to provide some kind of manual employment for the indigent adult blind."[418] For Principal Hunter, the purpose of schools such as the OIEB was explicitly to ensure that "the youthful blind ought not to require continued residence in any special Institution."[419]

However, by 1888 Principal Dymond acknowledged that at least some adult men needed the sorts of training provided by the school. While earlier reports had mentioned the occasional inclusion of one or two adults who had been accepted under exceptional circumstances (one case is discussed in Chapter Five), here Dymond included the importance of accepting "young men –

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[416] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*

[417] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Eight Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, 1875* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1876), 279.

[418] Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ont., Canada. Annual Reports of Inspector Langmuir; Principal Hunter, M.A.; Dr. W. D. Corson, Physician and Surgeon, for the Year Ending September 30th, 1878* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1879), 12.

[419] Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ont., Canada. Annual Reports of Inspector Langmuir; Principal Hunter, M.A.; Dr. W. D. Corson, Physician and Surgeon, for the Year Ending September 30th, 1878*, 15.

some…not very young men either – who have lost their sight after attaining to years of maturity of by some mischance have neglected to join the Institution at an earlier age."[420] While Dymond was willing to have them included in these specific classes to give them the opportunity to learn a trade, they were not to be included in any of the other classes "for reasons which may be easily comprehended."[421] In previous years his report reminded readers that "grave objections will always exist…to the close association in one building of adults with children."[422]

However, Dymond was aware of the successful use of workshops for adult blind in both the United States and Great Britain. While previous principals had decried the practice, Dymond explained that establishing workshops for adults "enabled the inmates to take up industries that it would be difficult for even impossible for them to handle singly and alone." However, he acknowledged that these workshops were rarely "actually self-supporting. They have all more or less to be subsidized by grants from the public exchequer or private contributions. But the good they do there is no question." He suggested that perhaps it was time to establish a similar workshop in Toronto – away from the school itself as the school's purpose was "for learners, not for the permanent support of blind workers."[423] In the following year he again repeated that such a workshop would be useful for blind adults, even graduates of the school with full training in the industrial arts offered at the school. He described how a blind adult leaving the Institution

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[420] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities upon the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, Brantford, Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1888* (Toronto: Warwick & Sons, 1889), 23.

[421] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities upon the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, Brantford, Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1888*, 23.

[422] Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ont, Canada, Annual Reports of Mr. Inspector Langmuir; Mr. Principal Hunter, M.A.; Dr. W. C. Corson, Physician and Surgeon, for the Year Ending September 30th, 1880* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1881), 21.

[423] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report upon the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind Brantford Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1900. Printed by Order of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario*, (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1900), 10.

might be unable to support himself long enough to fully establish himself in a trade, and thus his career "is, for the time being, abruptly terminated."[424]

Dymond's reports began arguing for a sheltered workshop to be opened – just nowhere near the school itself. Instead, he argued, such workshops should be opened "in a population centre where a market, both wholesale and retail, may be found close at hand."[425] A larger city, such as Toronto, would also have more blind adults living there and thus also be a more effective choice for a workshop. This, Dymond added, would also help support the work of the school as it would no longer be asked or expected to teach older blind adults – they could go straight to the workshop to learn new trades rather than take up time and resources in Brantford.

Instead of forming sheltered workshops, some schools broadened their vocational curriculum. A curriculum committee of the ACEB praised the success of harness-making in Arkansas and the development of a more successful means of doing willow work in Ontario that could make willow work remunerative for the blind.[426] Wait suggested that the problem was reliance on mechanical jobs, jobs which clearly would not financially support the blind. Instead of attempting to build sheltered workshops, Wait argued that schools should focus on teaching the blind skills "which seeing people do with the least use of the faculty of sight." He described several graduates finding success in sales on behalf of others, rather than of their own work.[427]

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[424] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Thirtieth Annual Report upon the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind Brantford Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1901. Printed by Order of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario* (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1901), 13

[425] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Thirtieth Annual Report upon the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind Brantford Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1901*, 14.

[426] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Association, *Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the New York State Institution for the Blind, Batavia, N. Y., August 18, 19, and 20, 1874* (Batavia, N. Y.: Spirit of the Times, 1875), 11.

[427] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 90.

Patrick Lane of the Louisiana institution suggested expanding the mechanical trades to include woodwork, arguing that clearly this could be done by blind men since carpenters that became blind were capable of continuing their work: “If such trades cannot be taught in institutions, then provision ought to be made to furnish instruction outside of institutions.”[428] Knapp responded that the problem the blind found in supporting themselves was based on their lack of business acumen. While a sighted man might fail at starting a business multiple times and learn from his mistakes, blind men only had one opportunity to be successful. He began teaching his students the skills needed to run a one-person business, such as trading and negotiation, and found that this improved his students’ chances of success upon graduation.[429]

Other schools emphasized the importance of mechanical training in ensuring graduate success. Wait from New York pointed out that piano factories were happy to hire blind men as tuners, since they were less distracted than their sighted counterparts and thus tuned pianos fasters.[430] He also suggested that this would be good work for blind girls, since their skills at operating sewing machines made clear they were capable of doing mechanical work.[431] Knapp suggested that blind adults be “planted” as teachers of the sighted in various skills. He called for a campaign that would seek out these opportunities for blind graduates so that the public would become familiar with the idea of the blind teaching the sighted. If the blind graduate was unsuccessful as a teacher, Knapp argued that the school should “take him home as a parent takes

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[428] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 137–8.
[429] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 88.
[430] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 73.
[431] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 74.

a child, and start him again in another place"[432] The goal was to find some remunerative work for the blind, trying to demonstrate their skills from the school.

Alumni Reflections

Graduates of the institutions responded to these issues in several ways. Some took on the jobs that were expected of them or joined the sheltered workshops. In 1876, the Ohio institution reported on the outcomes of their 892 graduates, stating that 17 per cent of them (156) were working using the skills learned in the workshop, while another 3 per cent (30) were working at the Pennsylvania Working Home for Blind Men. A further 17 (1.5 per cent) were working as organists in churches.[433] A similar report from Halifax in 1896 claimed that 12 per cent were working at concert companies, 8 per cent in piano forte tuning, and 28 per cent in teaching music – although this latter statistic was unclear on whether this was to sighted or blind students. A further 12 per cent were "giving instruction in or working at trades", which would have included graduates of the Halifax school who were teaching there.

Blind students had a variety of opinions regarding the best way for schools to go forward. In 1876, the ACEB held an essay competition that invited students to write on "Employments of the Blind." In describing the results, Agnanos of the Perkins institution divided the responses geographically. He found that students from older institutions, based in the eastern United States and including his own, were more likely to write about setting up sheltered workshops, as "[t]hey would like to have somebody find work for them and sell it for them." Students in western and southwestern institutions were more likely to recommend more effective training in business, so

[432] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, 88.
[433] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 90.

that students could take up a variety of trades.[434] Robinson, a graduate of the Ontario Institution, believed that more recent graduates from institutions were more likely to find successful employment, because "He is full of enthusiasm, and has not yet learned that he toils in vain."[435]

Other blind men and women continued as educators or administrators within the network of schools themselves. Several schools for the blind were founded by graduates of older schools, while others frequently hired graduates from other schools to start up workshops in their own schools. Of Ohio graduates, 6 had founded or become principals at other institutions, 18 were teaching handicrafts in other schools, and 118 were teaching music, literature, and science.[436] Halifax's Sir Charles Frederick Fraser was a graduate of the Perkins School for the Blind, and Pennsylvania's N.B. Kneass, Jr. attended his father's school before becoming superintendent later in life.

Some men, however, rejected the path set for them by the educators. While it is impossible to tell how frequently men like this were successful, they were often discussed in the annual reports of the institutions or at the ACEB without any mention of how little their education had prepared them for these jobs. However, sometimes educators would respond by learning from these successful, independent blind men and create new curriculums in the schools to teach graduates these new, innovative career options. For example, in Halifax, graduate

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[434] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 83–5.
[435] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 103.
[436] American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 90.

Harrivel (no first name given) made a living building and selling telephones, and offered to introduce into the school a telephone repair course.[437]

Blind men who did not attend these schools also, of course, broke out of these modes of thinking about what blind men were capable of. While some supported themselves by selling pamphlets or other types of "begging", others had successful careers. As discussed in a previous chapter, men like Timothy Woodbridge were not alone in working with the church. As well, many blind men worked on farms or owned farms of their own, running them alongside their sighted children. Churchman described a blind man in Mishiwaka, Indiana who successfully ran a bookstore that he expanded into a three-store chain without any formal education save "learning all the time from conversation and [hearing] reading." It was decided that he should not attend a school for the blind since it would interrupt his business dealings.[438]

Conclusion

Teaching blind children biology, zoology, and natural history was meant to ensure the blind were aware of the beauty of the world and the breadth of God's Creation, despite not being able to see any of it. This reflected the fear that blind were particularly prone to falling into moral apathy and atheism. When describing why educating the blind through nature study was so important, Elwyn ended his speech by praising the men "who are striving as far as is possible to make up for the loss of one of the chief sources of man's intercourse with the world, to give direction to, and make active minds, that else under such loss would be dormant; to place on a level with their fellows, those who cannot feel all the beauty of the world in which they live; to

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[437] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 182.

[438] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 117–18.

carry out the design of the Creator by perfecting that which is imperfect, and to give light where He made all dark—"[439]

Despite the challenges faced by educators of the blind, time and ingenuity was used every year to expand the science curriculum, particularly the nature study programs, for blind students. This ingenuity showed the strong commitment that many teachers of the blind had toward ensuring their students would be as successful as possible, despite mounting evidence that the educated blind struggled to find financially supportive work. However, by demonstrating their students' ability to learn, as much as possible, in similar ways to sighted children, these educators were calling on the public to view their students as nearly equal, rather than inferior. Demonstrations of student's successful nature study in schools for the blind became more common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, showing both how students were learning and that they could be integrated into sighted society. These classes prioritized teaching students about the natural world they could not see, which was meant to made them more independent and gave them more confidence in interacting with people outside of the residential school system in addition to giving them the understanding of the grandeur of God's Creation that they could not see. These were also ways these educators believed would show that a complete education could ensure the blind would not become burdens on society, but could be brought into the proper, civilized, pious sphere of the sighted.

This curriculum was supplemented by encouraging blind graduates to seek out poorly paying jobs to ensure that they did not become blind beggars. Schools debated the form of curriculum that would best achieve this goal, from increasing the amount of vocational training

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[439] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 8.

to providing sheltered workshops were blind graduates were guaranteed to find work. However, the reality of the pupils' disability meant that these suggestions were rarely as successful as the schools wished to present them as. Despite their best efforts, blind adults were frequently in need of continuing charitable aid after graduation.

Chapter Four: The Tactile Babble Under Which the Blind Have Hitherto Groaned: Dots, Lines, and Literacy for the Blind in Nineteenth-Century North America

Introduction

The history of tangible text for the blind in North America has mainly focused on two events: the creation and subsequent introduction to the United States of the Braille system in 1860, and the outcome of the "War of the Dots" in the early twentieth century with the establishment of Standard English braille for all English-speaking countries in London in 1923.[440] However, connecting these two events leaves one with the impression that a dot system of reading and writing for the blind in general, and the Braille system in particular, were an obvious answer to the questions of literacy amongst the educated blind in North America. These works have typically focused on the responses to this debate by sighted educators.[441] By simplifying the battle for a universal tangible print for the blind, historians and other researchers overlook a complicated and rich history of advocacy, literacy, and education within the blind community. The arguments for and against several tangible texts were fought across decades, between blind adults, their sighted allies and educators, and publishing houses for the blind. Far from being easily accepted, dot-based texts such as the Braille system and New York Point were resisted by sighted and blind people

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[440] Parts of this chapter appeared in Joanna L. Pearce, "The 'tactile Ba[b]ble under which the blind have hitherto groaned': Dots, Lines and Literacy for the Blind in Nineteenth-Century North America" in *Edinburgh History of Reading: Subversive Readers*, edited by Jonathan Rose, 97-115 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).
[441] For examples, see: Robert Irwin, *As I Saw It* (American Foundation for the Blind, 1955), 1–56.; Emerson Foulke, "Reading Braille" in *Tactual Perception: A Sourcebook*, edited by William Schiff and Emerson Foulke, 168–208 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Evelyn J. Rex and American Foundation for the Blind, eds. *Foundations of Braille Literacy* (New York: AFB Press, 1994), 15–24; Fred Kersten, "The History and Development of Braille Music Methodology" *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 18: 2 (January 1997), 106–25, https://doi.org/10.1177/153660069701800202; Stuart H. Wittenstein, "A Look Back: 100 Years of Braille and Communication Media" *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 100: 4 (April 2006): 197–202, https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X0610000402; Frances Mary D'Andrea, "A History of Instructional Methods in Uncontracted and Contracted Braille" *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 103: 10 (October 2009), 585–94, https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X0910301003; Molly Stothert-Maurer, Jennifer Arnott, and Jennifer Hale, "Read by Touch: Stewarding the Reading and Writing Collection at the Perkins School for the Blind" *Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture* 45: 1 (April 1, 2016), 17–26, https://doi.org/10.1515/pdtc-2015-0026.

alike due to their incomprehension to the average sighted person. Many blind people instead favoured line-based texts, such as Boston Line or the Moon text, due in part to the ease of learning for those already literate before losing their sight.

This chapter examines the arguments made for and against several options for tangible text in North America, highlighting in particular the comments and concerns raised by the blind themselves. Each tangible text addressed different concerns about the needs of blind readers, and examining these debates allows us to explore the ways both blind and sighted people perceived the purpose of reading for the blind. Both sighted and blind people felt a personal and economic stake in which universal text should be adopted in North America, and wrote impassioned pleas and angry treatises on behalf of their chosen system. By examining this battle between texts more closely, this chapter highlights both self-advocacy amongst the blind and the ways in which the sighted interpreted that advocacy when making policy. Far from being passive recipients of a so-called universal tangible text, the blind continued to argue both for and against their chosen texts into the twentieth century.

The History of Raised Print Text

The earliest forms of tangible text used for the blind were embossed letters — that is, three-dimensional letters which are raised off the page and felt with the fingers — based on the same roman alphabet used in ink-print books. Educators for the blind across Europe and North America developed a variety of these texts, hoping to invent one that would be easy for the blind to read with their fingers, inexpensive to print, and simple to reproduce. These included an italic text that used only lowercase letters, developed in Paris in 1784; an English-created text that also used only lowercase letters, designed in 1831; a similar text designed in Massachusetts at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in 1832; and a Scottish text that used only uppercase letters, developed in 1834. In

the early decades of the nineteenth century, many more texts were invented at several schools and institutions for the blind, varying in their use of italics, fonts, and combinations of upper- and lower-case letters. When deciding how to best educate both blind children and adults, new institutions needed to decide if they would adopt an already in-use text, which might be controlled in some part by another institution but would already have some books published for the blind, or if they would attempt to develop one of their own that they could then use to publish, within their institution, books for their students. These decisions led to a patchwork of texts across Europe and North America, making it difficult for both sighted educators and blind readers to access books in the embossed text they were literate in. The proliferation of texts meant that only limited numbers of books were available and important religious texts were published repeatedly in different embossed prints.[442]

Dr. Simon Pollak, an American eye specialist, wrote about the difficulties the blind experienced in the 1850s in accessing literacy. In particular, Pollak lamented at both the quality of the embossed prints produced for the blind and the myriad problems the vast number of competing prints created for them. He described one embossed text in use in London as "coarse and clumsy and it did not require much tactile culture to read it. It was needlessly large, requiring much space. It was unique, for there was nothing like it in any other school, hence their books were few, entirely of their make."[443] According to Pollak, each of the seven schools for the blind in London had their own tangible text. "All these schools are organized by some charitable body and are entirely independent of each other. Hence the embossed or raised letters in one school are entirely different

[442] For further discussion of the lack of books for the blind in the nineteenth century, see: John Oliphant, "'Touching the Light': The Invention of Literacy for the Blind" *Paedagogica Historica* 44: 1–2 (February 2008), 67–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230701865421.
[443] Simon Pollak, *Autobiography and Reminiscences of S. Pollak, MD, St. Louis, Mo.* (St. Louis Medical Review, 1904), 107.

from those of the other schools. It is inconceivable how such a system could exist in one of the most enlightened cities of the world, and among the most practical people."[444] Pollak, who was writing more than fifty years after his visit to London, may have been exaggerating on how unintelligible each print was to graduates of different institutions; however, his frustration with the number of texts in use is one echoed by others writing at the time.[445]

Pollak's autobiography overlooked the reasons an individual, school, or institution might create a new embossed text in the nineteenth century. Embossed textbooks were extremely expensive to print, not just because of a limited market for the books an embossed printer could produce, but also because of the amount of paper necessary to print books of the size created by embossing. Even publishing a commonly-needed book such as an excerpt from the Bible or other religiously-motivated text would create something too large to be easily portable and too expensive to risk loaning to potential new readers. Graduates of the various institutions could even lose their literacy in a given text, either due to lack of use or because their fingers became less sensitive due to age, injury, or callouses formed through labour. As schools across Europe and North America fought to justify their funding to a charitable public or a government with its eye on the bottom line, being able to produce books for cheaper — whether because the institution had its own text that was smaller than that of other tangible prints, or because they could produce their books internally rather than needing to pay to increase their library — was considered an important contribution to the overall welfare of the blind.

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[444] Pollak, *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, 108.
[445] B. G. Johns, *Blind People: Their Works and Ways; with Sketches of the Lives of Some Famous Blind Men* (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, 1867); Hanks W. Leavy, *Blindness and the Blind: Or a Treatise on the Science of Typhlology* (London: Chapman and Hull, 1872).

Schools in North America followed their European counterparts. The school that became the Perkins Institute and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind (Perkins), founded in Boston in 1829, considered adopting an in-use text from Europe at their foundation. However, director Samuel Gridley Howe ultimately rejected this in favour of designing his own. The Boston Line Type, as he named it, was designed in 1832, and the first printing press for it was created in 1835.[446] When establishing the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) in Brantford, Ontario, Canada in 1873, principal Ezekial Stone Wiggins decided to teach students using the Kneass type, a combination of the Boston Line Type and the Philadelphia (also called Glaswegian) text "with small and capital letters combined as in ordinary reading", arguing it was the best "inasmuch as when a blind person once acquires a knowledge of it he can with very little effort also read the Boston and Philadelphia type….it also gives the blind a greater amount of reading matter than any other system."[447] The hope was that graduates of the OIEB would be able to read books published in at least three different tangible texts as a result. The establishment of the Kentucky-based American Printing House for the Blind in 1858 included lengthy internal debates about which of the many embossed texts to adopt, and even going so far as to suggest developing a new text of their own as "[i]t is thought by some that a new alphabet could be introduced, combining many and important improvements over any now in use, both in the facility it would afford in reading, and in the size of the type, thus greatly diminishing the bulk of the now ponderous volumes, and consequently the cost of such works as may be published."[448] This cacophony of available texts meant that managers of schools for the blind across North America needed to make judgment calls

[446] B. L. McGinnity, J. Seymour-Ford, and K. J. Andries, "Reading and Writing" *Perkins History Museum* (blog) (accessed January 27, 2016) http://www.perkins.org/history/curriculum/geography.
[447] Province of Ontario, *Fifth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c., for the Province of Ontario, 1871-72* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1873), 56.
[448] American Printing House for the Blind, *First Annual Report of the American Printing House for the Blind Including Subscriptions of the Years 1867, '58, '59 and '60* (Louisville, KY: Hanna & Co, Printers, Corner Main and Third Streets, 1860), 7.

on the types of texts they would use, not only as they were being founded but as new texts and innovations were being introduced.

This confusion of embossed texts based on roman characters was the status quo for the first thirty years of education for the blind in North America, in part because the system was considered to be working. E. B. F. Robinson, the blind philosopher who had attended the OIEB, described educators as wanting to conform as much as possible "to the form of the Roman letter, because, as it had been found to be so useful to the sighted, it was thought that it must be equally useful to the blind."[449] Books printed in the various embossed texts could be read by both the blind and the sighted, ensuring that blind people could read together with sighted friends and family members. Educators of both the blind and the deaf were concerned about communication between their charges and the rest of the public, and there was growing resistance to the idea of a deaf- or blind-only language such as a sign language or a tangible text that was incomprehensible to the sighted.[450] In addition, using texts that were easy to read for the sighted ensured that sighted adults could teach the blind to read with relative ease. As teachers for the blind were mostly drawn from the pool of sighted educators, ensuring that any potential teacher would not need additional training before they could work within the classroom was another important financial consideration for schools.[451] Embossed texts were also considered easier for people who were literate before becoming blind to quickly learn, an important consideration as blindness was often acquired later

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[449] E. B. F. Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind* (Place of publication not identified: Printed for the author by W. Briggs, 1896, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.12652), 109.

[450] For further discussion of the campaign against sign language in the United States, see: Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*, The History of Disability (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

[451] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Fourth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c for the Province of Ontario, 1870-71* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1871), 101–2.

in life due to accident, illness, or injury.[452] While these reasons for continuing to use embossed texts mostly reflected the needs of the sighted, blind people also wanted to be part of the larger, sighted community, rather than isolated due to communication issues.

The ability to read embossed text also ensured that the blind would be able to teach sighted children how to read regular ink print text — an argument blind adults continued to make into the twentieth century. When publishing his autobiography in 1905, James W. Welch, a graduate of the Ohio Institution for the Blind, argued that embossed roman text allowed blind adults the option of teaching the sighted as an important path to self-reliance. To ensure this career path, however, blind adults would need to be intimately familiar with the roman text used by the sighted. As well, they would need to be able to use the tools that enabled the blind to write and read this text, including specially designed grids that blind people used to write blocky roman characters. Particularly, he was concerned about blind children no longer learning the use of these slates and grids to write their letters and numbers. "Those who never used the slate cannot comprehend its value, but the older graduates who used it in their early school days know what it was worth to them in acquiring knowledge of Arithmetic," he wrote. "This knowledge I consider to be very essential, for without it it would be utterly impossible for him or her to teach others how it was done. Had I not posses this knowledge I would not have been able to teach school for the seeing successfully."[453] Other alumni of the Ohio institution also raised this concern, viewing the ability to teach the sighted to read as an important possible career path at a time when other jobs for the blind, such as broom-making and basket-weaving, were being taken over by factories and

[452] Leavy, *Blindness and the Blind*; Johns, *Blind People: Their Works and Ways*, 117; Oliphant, "'Touching the Light,'" 75; Stothert-Maurer, Arnott, and Hale, "Read by Touch," 19.
[453] James W. Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind* (Columbus, Ohio: Fred J. Heer, 1905), 123.

machines.[454] Again, a strong connection with the sighted community was considered an important aspect in determining the best way to educate the blind, even by the blind themselves.

However, while some blind adults agreed with Welch, others rejected these ideas as not being of service to the blind. Their concerns about the use of embossed text did not just refer to the confusing number of these texts in circulation, but looked at the difficulties using these texts caused blind people. For example, despite being taught the use of slates and grids for writing, it was very difficult for the blind to write clearly without aid from a sighted scribe. While the apparatuses that Welch and others described did allow the blind to write in pencil or ink after a period of training, they could not read these texts on their own and thus could not take their own notes to refer to later, or even correct their own written work. In describing the problems with students not being able to take their own notes, J. Fleming, then-principal of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind in St. Louis, wrote, "An impression seems to have gotten about that the blind never forget; that their memory is so tenacious and infallible as to reproduce faithfully, after any length of time, subjects entrusted to it. This is a great mistake as any experienced teacher will at once testify; and any who doubt can easily satisfy themselves by questioning a class upon studies of the previous year."[455] This impeded blind children's education, as they could not study during the summer or even outside of school hours without aid.

Other arguments that rejected embossed text pointed out that, despite the experiences of a minority of students, most blind people could not effectively learn to read these texts**.** They argued that the ability of those who were literate before they were blind to easily learn them was vastly overstated. Describing the difficulties that educators found in teaching the adult blind, a biographer

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[454] Welch, *Achievements and Abilities of the Blind*, 164 174–86, 225.
[455] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Second Biennial Report of the Trustees Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-First General Assembly* (Saint Louis, 1860).

of William Moon, who was both a blind man and an educator of the blind, wrote that "[w]ith much perseverance and with more or less success, [Moon] endeavored to instruct his pupils in one or other of the systems then in use. But he found that many of his scholars were quite unequal to the task of…deciphering a type in which the ordinary forms of the Roman alphabet were employed. It is believed that owing to these causes comparatively few blind persons advanced in years or accustomed to manual labour were at that time able to read by the touch."[456] Moon was particularly frustrated with arguments for embossed texts that favoured school-aged readers. "This experience evidently shows that in providing reading for the blind a type should be selected which is universally applicable; not merely one which can be deciphered by the acute touch of…children…to be abandoned…when their schooldays are past, or when their fingers become hardened by manual labour, but one which can be felt and easily read by the multitudes of the adult blind throughout the country."[457] For Moon and others, any text that was to be universally adopted was required to consider needs beyond the classroom.

The third reason that caused some blind adults and sighted educators to reject embossed texts was the size and cost of the books produced using them. In describing the difficulties in settling on a text to use at the OIEB, Wiggins wrote that experienced educators of the blind, including those who were blind themselves, reported that "the books produced in raised type are comparatively few, very clumsy and voluminous, and exceedingly expensive."[458] Even with institutions that had their own printing press, the cost of publishing books for their students and graduates was prohibitively expensive if only for the cost of the paper. This cost prevented the

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[456] John Rutherford, *William Moon, LL.D., F.R.G.S., F.S.A., and His Work for the Blind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 13.
[457] Rutherford, *William Moon,* 47–8.
[458] Province of Ontario, *Fifth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, &c., for the Province of Ontario, 1871-72*, 55.

majority of the blind, most of whom were poor, from buying their own books to read either during school breaks or after graduation. In describing the expense of maintaining the school's lending library in 1894, Sir Charles Frederick Fraser, the superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind wrote "[t]he average cost per volume is about $4.00, and some idea of the expense incurred in maintaining this Library may be gathered from the fact that a single copy of the Bible, which is stereotyped, and therefore may be purchased for less than many other books, costs $25.00."[459] Even maintaining a lending library for the blind, which would allow graduates to borrow books and maintain their reading level, was prohibitively expensive for some schools. If graduates could not continue to read after leaving, some argued that there was no point in wasting school time on reading when it could be better spent on learning skilled trades.

As a result of these limitations on effective literacy, both blind and sighted people worked to develop new tangible texts that would be accessible to the blind, reduce the cost of printing, and still be easy for the sighted to teach. The developers of these texts adopted a variety of different techniques to address these concerns. For example, some designers of tangible text rejected the use of roman characters or the standard English alphabet altogether, relying on symbols that represented phonemes rather than letters. James Harley Frere, a blind man from London, developed a system of phonetic shorthand that was read by the fingers back and forth across the page — that is, the first line was read from left to right, and the next from right to left, and so on.[460] This technique would be adopted by later texts as well, as it was thought to reduce the time it took to read a book. Frere also developed a new method to print embossed books that produced

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[459] Charles Frederick Fraser, *Raised Print Books for the Blind: Origin and History of Embossed Printing, Interesting Facts about the Circulating Library for the Blind of the School for the Blind* (Halifax: Halifax Printing Company, 1895), 11.
[460] Leavy, *Blindness and the Blind*, 94–6; Oliphant, "'Touching the Light,'" 75.

characters there were much sharper and easier for the finger to read.[461] While this text reduced the size of books, and the new printing technique reduced the cost or printing, Frere's phonetic shorthand was not widely adopted outside of England. It was found too difficult for blind students, especially for "the aged and nervous blind" that made up the majority.[462] Others adopted Frere's sharper, more effective, printing technique, attempted to design various systems of contractions using the older, more familiar, embossed texts, hoping this would reduce the size of books; however, students continued to find it difficult to commit the contractions to memory. As well, these complicated, difficult to remember systems of contractions meant that other advantages of the embossed roman text, particularly the ability of the sighted to read along with the blind, were lost. While some attempts were made to develop a text based on pin-pricks through the paper that both the blind and sighted could make on their own, these texts continued to rely on the shape of the roman characters.[463] While each of these texts had some advantage they offered to both the sighted and the blind, they still suffered from the difficulties described by Moon, Robinson, and others.

For a text to be widely adopted, it would need to be satisfactory to both the blind and the sighted educators, be inexpensive to print, and produce an easy-to-read text. As educators in the nineteenth century continued to debate the best texts, three became main contenders in North America. Two were designed and championed by educated blind men from Europe - William Moon, of England, and Louis Braille of France — while the third, called New York Point, was designed in New York by adapting the Braille system to a North American audience. These were by no means the only texts developed and in circulation amongst blind schools in North America

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[461] Donald Bell, "Reading by Touch" *Typographica* 6 (December 1962: 2–26), 9.
[462] Rutherford, *William Moon,* 25–6.
[463] Robinson, *True Sphere of the Blind*, 109.

and Europe; however, they represent three very different ideas of how literacy of the blind should be developed, by whom, and for what purpose. The Braille system, the first tangible text developed using points or raised dots rather than lines, was designed specifically to enable the blind to both read and write without the need of a sighted interpreter at any stage. Moon, who design used a modified roman text, was most concerned with the needs of adults blinded later in life. His Moon text was designed specifically to be easy to read even if the finger was less sensitive due to years of labour. New York Point, most likely created by sighted educator of the blind William B. Wait, adopted Braille's dot system but changed both its assignment of dots and its orientation with the goal of reducing the cost of printing books for the blind. Each text had its champions, and each text represented a different idea of the purpose of education and literacy for the blind.

The Braille System

The earliest of these texts was the Braille system. While Louis Braille was not the first person to develop a dot text — his was based on a code for passing military messages at night designed by a member of the Belgian army — he appears to be the earliest to decide that it could be adapted for the blind. The original night writing had used two vertical rows of up to six dots each, making a total of 12, which represented various syllables and sounds rather than individual letters. As with other tangible texts, this code suffered from a variety of problems that made it difficult for the blind to learn, including both that it was phonetically based and that the characters created were too large to be read with the finger with one pass.[464] Braille, who began to develop his system in the 1830s, reduced the number of dots to two vertical rows of three dots, for a total of six, and used these to represent various letters in the French alphabet. This reduction in size meant that each letter could be read with the fingertip, making it faster and easier for the blind to

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[464] W. H. Illingworth, *History of Education of the Blind* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1910), 16.

read.[465] The dots were assigned alphabetically, with letters in the first part of the alphabet being assigned dots in the upper two sections of the character, later letters using the middle two, and the last letters, as well as special characters in French, including accents, using the lower two. Braille also developed a stylus system to allow the blind to write characters, thus rendering the blind fully able to read and write without assistance from a sighted scribe.[466] However, while Braille's system proved popular and effective amongst the blind of France, and was adopted as France's official language of instruction for the blind in 1854, the text was not adopted by other countries in Europe until decades later.[467]

Despite its lack of early success in Europe, the first North American educators introduced to Braille's system saw potential in it. Simon Pollak, the doctor who wrote disdainfully of the number of texts in use in London during his visit in the 1850s, also visited Paris during his European tour. While examining Paris' Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles, its superintendent, Joseph Gaudet, had students demonstrate both their reading and writing using the Braille system. Pollak, who was one of the superintendents of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, was quickly able to learn the text. According to his autobiography, Pollak "saw at once the great importance of [the Braille system]" and was "determined to introduce it in the United States."[468] Unfortunately, his autobiography does not detail what about the Braille system captured his attention and devotion; his writing decades later focused more on the lack of credit he received for introducing the system to North America rather than the system's merits.[469] According to Pollock, upon the re-opening of the Missouri school after his return to St. Louis (it had been

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[465] Fraser, *Raised Print Books for the Blind*, 4.
[466] Bell, "Reading by Touch," 15–16.
[467] Oliphant, "'Touching the Light,'" 71.
[468] Pollak, *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, 202.
[469] Pollak, *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, 202–3.

temporarily closed due to the American Civil War), he was able to easily introduce the Braille system into the classrooms.[470] It was quickly adopted by music teacher Henry Robyn as a form of musical notation that allowed the blind to both read and compose, and from there adopted by the literary department as a means for students to take their own notes in class. Pollak describe the Braille system as "the greatest boon the blind ever received" — assuring the reader that he feels that the results for the blind are worth the struggle he went through to bring it to North America.[471]

While Pollock's autobiography overlooks the reaction of both the blind students and sighted teachers to the introduction of the Braille system, the biannual reports of the Missouri school sing the praises of both it and him. For then-principal C. M. Fleming, the Braille system opened possibilities not only for allowing the blind to compose their own music or take their own notes in class — both important to creating self-sufficient blind adults — but also of inexpensively printing numerous textbooks for the blind, ones that could be easily recreated through dictation even without a Braille system printing press. Fleming explained in his report that

> "[e]ach lesson, dictated by the teacher, is copied by the pupils and studied at specified times. At the next recitation a careful examination is made of the class, further explanation given if needed, and another portion committed to them. By preserving the sheets, each scholar at the close of his term, is in possession of the entire subject matter of his studies, an advantage that needs only to be mentioned to secure full approval of the system by the blind themselves."[472]

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[470] Pollak is unclear about what year he returned to St. Louis. He implies he returns in 1861, but the Braille system had already been in use at the school prior to October, 1860.
[471] Pollak, *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, 262, 202.
[472] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Second Biennial Report of the Trustees Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-First General Assembly*.

As these reports were written in part to justify further funding for educating the blind, Fleming's focus on the advantages to learning and recall offered by the new system makes a great deal of sense — for the first time in North America, blind children could receive many of the same benefits of public education offered to the sighted through this new system of writing.

The advantages of adopting the Braille system were not limited to improving student performance. The next principal of the Missouri school, Philetus Fales,[473] explained that the system was extremely easy for "the youngest and dullest" pupils to learn and provided skills that they would have no difficulty maintaining into old age "when the touch is becoming less sensitive" — a point that would be disputed as debates around tangible prints heated up in North America. He also argued that the braille system "enables the blind freely to communicate with each other by writing."[474] As the print was easily written by the blind themselves with a simple slate and stylus, they could increase their personal libraries at far less expense than a book printed in any other tangible text with "whatever he can transcribe from our standard literature."[475] As well, as the characters in the Braille system took up less space on the page than both embossed line print and regular type used by the sighted, books could potentially be much smaller, thus far more portable as well as easier to read. Robyn, the music teacher at St. Louis, emphasized this point when writing about the Braille system for the annual report, stating "[t]his fact alone is important; as the blind survey with their fingers, and the less space there is to be gone over, the sooner and the easier will

[473] The Missouri Institution went through a number of principals in the years following the Civil War.
[474] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Report of the Trustees and Principal of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Second General Assembly* (Jefferson City: W. A. Curry, 1863) 7–8.
[475] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Third General Assembly* (Jefferson City: W. A. Cury, Public Printer, 1865), 4.

the work be accomplished."[476] The Braille system, both Fales and Robyn argued, made literacy far easier for the blind to achieve.

Advocates for the Braille system also emphasized that it vastly reduced the cost in the formal printing books for the blind. Robyn invented a press that would enable the production of braille books mechanically rather than through dictation. According to the trustees of the Missouri school, this not only increased the availability of books to blind readers but allowed the printing of these books "with more rapidity and facility…diminish[ing] the expense, and, at the same time, increas[ing] the readableness of books for the blind."[477] Both the cost and upkeep of embossed text books was clearly an ongoing issue for educators of the blind. Not only were embossed books expensive, but wear and tear would often render them unreadable. Robyn's press, the trustees argued, would reduce or even eliminate these problems.[478] The annual reports from the Missouri school emphasized that "…with the simple and very cheap press and types invented by …Robyn, this institution can supply all the schools for the blind in the United States with reading matter and music, at half the cost it is held now for the seeing."[479] If more schools for the blind could be induced to adopt the Braille system, the Missouri school could be the only provider of these books, or at least the provider of printing presses to produce them, and could sell the books at a small profit — a tempting proposition for a school still recovering from financial problems following the American Civil War.

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[476] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Third General Assembly*, 4.
[477] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Third General Assembly*, 4.
[478] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly [Cut from Original Source and Bound with Other Documents]*, 1866 (https://archive.org/details/biannualreportof16miss and Jefferson City: W. A. Curry, 1867), 790.
[479] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly*, 791.

The trustees of the Missouri school began to advocate for other schools to adopt the braille system, to mixed results. Younger institutions, such as the Kansas State Institute for the Education of the Blind, were quick to see the same advantages as Missouri. The first annual report for Kansas, published in 1869 — nine years after Missouri adopted the Braille system — explained that teaching using the system allowed blind children to study at their leisure, just like sighted children. Superintendent H. H. Sawyer wrote that "[i]ts advantages, in my opinion over any of the old systems are obvious, because it enables the blind to communicate freely with each other by means of writing."[480] However, older institutions were far more resistant to change.[481] In alluding to this struggle in their annual reports, the trustees of the Missouri school implied that it was resistance to innovation, brought about by their venerable status, that led to this reluctance. "It is much to be regretted that the older institutions of this country, especially in the East, are so slow, even reluctant, to adopt a system of type which has established its superiority both in Europe and America."[482] The Missouri trustees, alongside those of the other institutions that were adopting the braille system, clearly viewed themselves as the institutions of the future.

Boston Line Type

Older institutions in North America instead emphasized the importance of embossed print and its advantages to both the blind and the sighted. Howe, who continued to advocate for universal adoption of his Boston Line Type, argued strongly against adopting the braille system. In 1835, as Missouri was beginning to encourage other schools to adopt it, Howe argued that as "the grand object in printing for the blind, is to diminish the bulks of the books" the braille system was a

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[480] Kansas State Institute for the Education of the Blind, *First Annual Report of the Trustees and Superintendent of the Kansas State Institute for the Education of the Blind* (Topeka, Kansas: F. P. Baker, 1869), 6.
[481] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly*, 790.
[482] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly*, 791.

failure. He carefully measured both the size of the paper used and the number of letters that could be printed on the page and concluded that his Boston Line Type was far superior. "In the books printed at Paris, there are on a page...408 letters; ...at Boston, 787 letters…our books will give to the blind…nearly twice the quantity of matter which is contained in those of France; and, by using a thinner paper, will give about three times the quantity of reading matter in a book of the same bulk."[483] In the same year that Kentucky adopted the Braille system, Howe wrote of his disdain of having students transcribe their own books. While this might have reduced printing costs for his school in the previous decades, he argued that focusing on these transcriptions would have reduced innovations in printing that were beneficial for all the blind, not just students in classrooms:

> It would have been possible to make a few copies of text-books in raised letters, by pricking the letters through the paper by hand. This would have been sufficient for the absolute needs of a class of pupils, and would have been very cheap. But then the great improvement in embossed printing would not have been made…and the blind of the whole country…would not have had at their fingers' ends…the whole of the Bible, Milton's poetry, and many other valuable works.[484]

Howe was producing books for the blind already and saw no value in a new system regardless of the benefits alleged by Missouri, Kentucky, and the handful of other schools that adopted the Braille system.

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[483] New-England Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Annual Report of the Trustees of the New-England Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Corporation* (Boston: J. T. Buckingham, 1835), 14-15.
[484] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind* (Boston: Weight & Potter, 1869), 4-5.

The Moon System of Embossed Reading

The Braille system was not only competing with established embossed roman texts, but also the ubiquity of another innovative text designed by a blind man — the Moon System of Embossed Reading, also known as Moon type. Like the Braille system, Moon type was invented by a blind man specifically to address issues with embossed print. Unlike Louis Braille, who had been educated in a blind school from childhood, William Moon of England lost sight in one eye at the age of four and did not become fully blind until he was 21. He had been educated in a school for the sighted, relying on his sighted classmates for assistance when his eyesight began failing. After his complete loss of sight, he began teaching a small number of blind adults to read, but soon found the embossed texts available to be too difficult for his students to learn easily. As mentioned earlier, Moon's concern was for the largest group of blind people — adults who acquired blindness too old to attend most schools for the blind — and his rejection of the various embossed prints was that they were easiest only for children to learn. His adult students struggled to comprehend the individual letters, regardless of which roman-based text he used. As a result, he turned his attention to creating a text that labourers, adults, and even the elderly would find easier to read.[485]

Unlike Louis Braille, Moon did not entirely reject the roman text that most embossed print was based on. Instead, he used a simplified version that changed the letters just to be easier for the fingers while still being legible to the sighted, and used the same spelling and punctuation as ink print. One of his biographers described Moon text as "composed of the very simplest geometrical forms, such as the straight line, the acute and the right angle, the circle and the semicircle…. The alphabet consists of eight of the Roman letters unaltered, fourteen others with parts left out, and five new and very simple forms which may be easily learned by the aged and by persons whose

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[485] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 13.

fingers are hardened by work."[486] Moon argued that his text could be taught very quickly — according to him students were able to read the letters after just one or two teaching sessions — which meant literacy was much easier to achieve. Moon argued that this boosted the confidence of his students and led quickly to reading the Bible and other religious works, often within days.[487]

Moon was clearly aware of the vast number of tangible texts, including the Braille system, in use across Europe and North America. He argued competing texts that transliterated English should be rejected because, for the majority of blind, "their sense of touch is far less acute than in early life, so that they fail to distinguish easily the Roman or the dotted types…" while other texts that relied on contractions or shorthand should be rejected because, for the blind, "…their nervous system has oftentimes been so shattered that they are unequal to the task of mastering a system which involves the committing of numerous contractions to memory."[488] In response to concerns that his text, like others before it, made books both heavy and expensive to print, he argued that this concern was, in essence, penny-wise and pound-foolish: "Would it then be wise to choose a system of contractions for the sake of its rendering their books more portable, if they would by this means become unreadable to the great majority of our blind population? Facts confirm this view of the subject."[489] By creating a text he believed was easier for the majority of the blind, Moon saw himself as rendering far more efficient aid to their literacy than the braille system and any other form of point text.

Moon's text had an important advantage that aided its spread to North America — a wealthy patron. Sir Charles Lowther, a blind member of the British aristocracy, supported both

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[486] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 13-14.
[487] Charles Thomas Burt, *The Moon Society: A Century of Achievement, 1848-1948* (Brighton: Moon Works, 1948), 6-7.
[488] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 48.
[489] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 35.

Moon and his text financially. As Moon worked to expand his system throughout England and across the English-speaking world, Lowther supported his efforts by founding libraries of books that used Moon type. At least as early as 1870 — ten years after the introduction of the Braille system to the United States — Lowther was donating libraries of books written in the Moon type to North American cities. A biography of Moon describes one library being setup in Georgia with the aim of teaching recently-emancipated blind slaves to read; a collection of books meant to start the library of the newly-founded school for the blind in Portland, Oregon; and a collection of over 2000 books based in a New York institution but intended to be distributed to schools across North America, in addition to libraries in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.[490] Thus, while other texts, including the Braille system, were struggling to ensure enough books were available for readers, books in Moon's text were becoming available across the entire continent and throughout the English-speaking world, and the newest schools could start out with a small library already in place at little to no expense to themselves.

Moon, with the aid of Lowther, further spread his text by the creation of Home Teaching Societies for the Blind. These were volunteer-run groups, made up mostly of blind people, who sought out illiterate blind adults and taught them to read using Moon type. Moon described giving lessons in his type not only to blind men and women he met in the street, but to sighted people that could then teach the text to any blind person they knew.[491] According to Moon's biography, by 1889 the London Home Teaching Society in England employed 17 blind teachers and one sighted teacher, and had taught 5,000 blind adults to read.[492] This method of spreading Moon's text spread to North America, with the Home Teaching Society of Nova Scotia being

[490] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 107.
[491] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 54.
[492] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 58.

established in 1893.[493] As more adult blind learned to read using Moon's text, the demand for books published in it increased, further spreading the text through lending libraries and other types of reading material.

Teaching institutions in North America struggled with how to best teach adults to read. As in Moon's experience, these institutions found that Moon's text suited the needs of their inmates far more effectively than any other tangible print in regular circulation. Philadelphia, which not only housed a school for blind children but also a House of Industry for the indigent adult blind, emphasized the frustration their inmates felt at the embossed texts still used to publish the majority of books in North America. Moon reported the educators of the blind in Philadelphia describing these texts as "too small and complex for the hardened fingers of adults, few of whom, accustomed to labour, were able to read."[494] Lowther happily founded a library to suit their needs. While Moon's text was never universally adopted across North America, schools and lending libraries still included books published in the text in their collections and it was clearly viewed as serving an importance purpose in ensuring that blind adults could become literate.[495]

Despite the arguments in favour of Moon type for adults, educators of blind children rejected the text due to the difficulty they perceived in its being taught to sighted teachers. In rejecting Moon type for use in the OIEB, Wiggins described it as "almost entirely composed of arbitrary characters, and is not only more difficult to master, but requires teachers specially trained to impart instruction, and therefore tends to alienate the blind from ordinary seeing persons by

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[493] For a discussion on the foundation and work of the Home Teaching Society in Nova Scotia, see: Sara Spike, "Modern Eyes: A Cultural History of Vision in Rural Nova Scotia, 1880–1910," Ph.D. Dissertation (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2016), 253-93.
[494] Rutherford, *William Moon*, 193-4.
[495] Fraser, *Raised Print Books for the Blind*, 9-10.

rendering them dependent upon skilled teachers for instruction."[496] He also argued that its lack of adoption in the United States meant that it should not be adopted in Canada. "[T]he system of education in this Province should assimilate itself as much as possible to that in existence in the United States, if for no other reason than that the blind of Ontario will come more in contact with those of the neighbouring country than any other" — particularly those of England, where Moon type was more commonly used to teach children.[497] Howe in Boston further argued against Moon by again emphasizing the expense and size of books printed in it compared to his Boston Line Type.[498] While Moon's text was viewed as having its place, it was not deemed sufficient for the needs of North America's blind children — still the primary concern of sighted educators, whose voices had the most sway in discussions about the needs of the blind.

New York Point

With neither the Braille system nor Moon's text being universally adopted in North America, educators continued to develop new tangible texts seeking one that would address most, if not all, of their concerns — particularly the cost of printing. The New York Institution for the Education of the Blind began experimenting with another form of dot text, one educators there believed would be more efficient than the braille system for printing.[499] Writing in 1892, William Bell Wait, who is commonly credited with the creation of New York Point, the Braille system was hardly known outside of Paris' Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles when be began

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[496] Ontario Legislative Assembly. *Fifth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums and Prisons &C for the Province of Ontario 1871-72* (Toronto: Hunter Rose & co, 1872), 56 (quoting Wiggins).
[497] Ontario Legislative Assembly. *Fifth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums and Prisons &C for the Province of Ontario 1871-72*, 56 (quoting Wiggins).
[498] Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind to the* Corporation (Cambridge: Metcalf & Co, 1853), , 38.

[499] Exactly who initially developed New York Point was a controversial topic in the 1890s, with both Dr. John Russ and William B. Wait claiming credit and many others expressing opinions on which of the two men should be given credit.

experimenting with text for the blind in the 1860s, but he believed that its success in France indicated that dots were far more effective than roman-based tangible text.[500] In his description on how he created New York Point, he made no mention of Missouri's championing of the braille system throughout the 1860s to other North American schools — including his own. Instead, he emphasized his own creativity and ingenuity, writing that "[h]aving by ample experiment first proved the superiority of dots over lines in tangible power, and seeing also that hand writing could be done in tangible form by their use, I became an earnest advocate of 'points' as constituting the natural basis of tangible writing and printing."[501] According to Wait, he also considered many of the same techniques that had been attempted, adopted, or discarded elsewhere in Europe, such as adapting the alphabet to a simplified version as Moon and others had done, using stenographers' abbreviations or phonemes as others had before in Europe.[502]

Wait's interest in typography and printing made him aware of the frequency of various letters in English, a factor that Braille had not considered when assigning dots to letters in French. After much experimentation and consideration, he settled on adapting the alphabet directly to dots, based on the frequency of each letter in the English language — more frequently used letters were assigned fewer dots, which would make them faster to both read and print, and would reduce the space each one took on the page.[503] He also added the letter "w", which was not in use in French in the nineteenth century. As well, Wait decided to arrange the dots on a horizontal plane rather than the vertical one used by the Braille system, arguing that this was a space-saving technique. In the braille system, all letters took up the same amount of vertical space regardless of how many

[500] William B. Wait, *Origin of the New York Institution for the Blind: The Origin and Development of the New York Point System, the True Structural Basis of a Punctographic System* (New York: Bradstreet Press, 1892), 9.
[501] Wait, *Origin of the New York Institution for the Blind*, 9.
[502] Wait, *Origin of the New York Institution for the Blind*, 9.
[503] Wait, *Origin of the New York Institution for the Blind*, 9.

dots are in the character. In New York Point more frequent letters— which have fewer dots—take up less vertical space.[504] Wait argued that this meant more letters would fit on a page, making the books that were published both smaller in size and cheaper due to using less paper.[505] According to Wait, he tested this text for many years and finally decided to use it exclusively in the New York institution in 1871, eleven years after Braille had been introduced in Missouri.[506] He created printing presses that would produce books in this print for his pupils, as well as an apparatus for his pupils to use to write their own notes and letters, just as happened at Missouri.

Wait sought approval and adoption of New York Point in other schools for the blind. His arguments in favour of adopting his own text as the universal standard included the structural inferiority of the other texts commonly in use in North America. He described the Braille system as "more bulky and hence more costly than the Boston Line…", which in turn he described as "almost prohibitive" in cost to print.[507] The Braille system was also inferior due to the small number of characters the two-dot vertical system could support. "…the number of possible single signs, sixty-three, is inadequate to the requirements of Literature, of Mathematics and of music, so that none of these subjects can be correctly and fully represented by them."[508]

As both a sighted man and as the superintendent of a well-respect school, Wait was able to advocate for his system with educators across the United States at Canada at the newly started

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[504] For example, an "A" in the braille system, which uses a single dot in the cell, takes up the same amount of space as the "Y", which uses five dots in the cell. In New York Point, "A" takes up two dots in the cell, and thus takes up less space than Y, which uses three. E, the most frequent letter in the English alphabet, only takes up one vertical dot.

[505] William B. Wait, *Phases of Punctography: In relation to Visual Typography, Writing, Printing, Bookbinding, and other features* (New York Institution for the Education of the Blind, 1912).

[506] Wait, *Origin of the New York Institution for the Blind*, 10.

[507] William B. Wait, *Key to the New York Point System of Tangible Writing and Printing for Literature, Instrumental and Vocal Music, and Mathematics, Designed for the Use of the Blind* (New York: Bradstreet Press), 5.

[508] Wait, *Key to the New York Point System*, 5.

Convention for American Instructors of the Blind. At the second such convention, in 1871, the assembled principals and superintendents – the majority of whom were sighted – passed a resolution that New York Point "should be taught in all American Institutions for the Education of the Blind."[509] This was later supported by the Committee of the American Social Science Association, primarily due to its usefulness in printing books.[510] As the use of New York Point spread, blind men also wrote in favour of its adoption. In *The Mentor*, published by the Alumni Association of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, H. H. Johnson, the blind director of the West Virginia school, argued that Wait's system needed little to no defense – its wide-spread use throughout the United States was the democratic way of demonstrating the success of the print in comparison to the Braille system.[511] William Gibbon argued that he was easily able to adapt New York Point to learn Greek while attending a class with sighted students due to the larger number of possible characters. With more blind people eager to attend university with sighted colleagues, the versatility of the text was ideal.[512]

However, some blind people rejected Wait's arguments. In his own address to the 1871 Conventions of American Instructors of the Blind, N. B. Kneass, Jr., a blind man who was also an instruction at the Pennsylvania Institution, argued against using any point prints. Kneass argued that point prints were too easily damaged on the page from regular use in ways that erase one of the points. This would render the letter incomprehensible, either changing the meaning of a word

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[509] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 69.
[510] American Social Science Association, *Printing for the Blind: Report of a Committee of the American Social Science Association at the General Session in Detroit, Michigan* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1875), 5-6.
[511] H. H. Johnson, "A Point Neglected" *The Mentor* 1: 7 (July 1891), 215.

[512] William Gibbon, "The Blind Student of Greek" *The Mentor* 3: 5 (May 1893), 179-81.

or making it impossible to read.[513] Any attempt to make the points more durable would require heavier paper, thus eliminating the arguments that Wait made about the books being both lighter and less expensive to print.[514] Further, *The Mentor* regularly published articles about the raised print text controversy, with blind people weighing in on all sides. In the article "Signs of Progress", E. E. K. described the pamphlets written by both supporters and detractors of New York Point across the United States, without discussing the arguments for or against. Instead, the author wanted to draw attention to the controversy, in hope that "[t]his awakening of thought and sifting of systems may result in the evolution of a better system than any now in use."[515]

The publication of these letters in *The Mentor*, along with Wait's publication of several pamphlets in support of using New York Point, demonstrates how the decision made at the 1871 Convention was by no means final. In the decades that followed, the debate continued about how to best ensure the interests of the blind were being met by the raised print texts used by publishing houses and schools. The debates between educators alone became so intense that they at first dominated most meetings of the Convention of American Educators of the Blind and then were banned for several years to allow tempers to cool.[516] The 1892 Convention voted to discard New York Point in favour of a new Braille system, but this seems not to have been universally adopted.[517] In 1909 the New York Board of Education decided that instruction should be made in a modified Braille system, but in 1910 the Kentucky Printing House for the Blind's Annual General Meeting once again debated between the Braille system and New York Point. It was decided there

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[513] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind*, 46.
[514] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind*, 47. Please note that Kneass was publishing using his own line print, similar to Boston Line, at the time of this disagreement.
[515] E. E. K., "Signs of Progress" *The Mentor* 1: 7 (July 1891), 216-20.

[516] Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 9.
[517] Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 7.

that 40 per cent of books would be published in the Braille system, and the other 60 per cent in New York Point.[518] In 1913 the Uniform Type Committee of the American Association of Workers for the Blind argued for scrapping both systems and creating a new one, called Standard Dot, but only on the condition that this same print would be adopted by the British.[519] The matter was not considered settled until 1932, when representatives from the blind in Great Britain and the United States finally signed an agreement for the use of Braille throughout both countries.[520]

Conclusion

The decision on what version of raised print type to use for the blind was by no means an easy or uncontroversial decision. Both blind people and sighted people expressed their opinions about a wide variety of texts in use, with debates that ranged across North America and included Great Britain. These arguments reflected concerns about community and communication, and fears of blind people becoming isolated – whether from the sighted community through the use of a text they did not understand, or from one another through the use of a text that required a sighted scribe or reader through whom to communicate. By examining a wide variety of sources, we can also see how the educated blind advocated for themselves and for their community throughout the nineteenth century. The blind were by no means silent and were clearly not united behind any one way of writing or reading. Their arguments addressed the variety of needs that blind people felt, including employment issues, aging, and the isolation that comes from poverty. They were not passively waiting for a decision to be made by educators, but actively involved in the debates. Any discussion of the controversy around raised print texts must include their voices.

[518] Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 10.
[519] Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 34.
[520] Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 51-2.

Chapter Five: From a Blind Girl's Pen – The Lives of Blind Women and Girls

Introduction

Blind girls and women presented a unique problem to educators of the blind. While boys would grow into men who needed to be self-sufficient (see Chapter Three), girls and women were primarily viewed through the domestic sphere. Should blind girls follow the same curriculum as blind boys in the school? What sort of life would this prepare these girls for? Instead, should they be taught household tasks to make them useful to their families or even future husbands? Would this be an appropriate use of the funds provided for an education when the same tasks could be taught at home? Should blind girls be taught the skills necessary to be a proper wife, or should they be expected to learn to support themselves? Educators of the blind were unsure of how to best proceed to set blind girls up for success after graduation, and debates on this question went on for decades both within the American Association of Educators of the Blind and within individual schools.

While no one solution was ever accepted across all schools for the blind, the nature of this debate makes clear how blind women and girls were viewed by educators. While these debates were clearly important, and every school and convention addressed the important question of how to ensure blind girls would grow up to be helpful to their households, they were given much less attention than the needs of blind boys. Girls were expected to leave school and return to the family home to become a contributor in some small way to the household economy but always as a dependant part of the family. These debates did not consider that blind girls might become wives and mothers or that the girls might become independent and support themselves. While girls were taught some skills that might be useful in supporting themselves

outside of their homes, such as knitting and sewing, the primary focus of these classes was on their usefulness to an already-established family. Blind girls were expected to grow into women who were pleasant and giving, providing limited support and some entertainment (whether as a musician or singer or as reciting from books). Blind girls needing to become self sufficient was seen more as an unfortunate occasional necessity than as part of the necessity of an education.

"A Constant Sunbeam in the House" – Blind Girls as Viewed by Sighted Male Educators

When establishing schools for the blind, officials focused their attention on the benefits that would be granted to boys and men, rather than girls and women. In the 1833 *Account of the New York Institution for the Blind*, Samuel Akerly, president of the institution, specified that boys would "in a very short period wholly…support themselves by their own industry… ."[521] When girls were mentioned in annual reports or other writings about the blind, educators described the importance of learning household tasks, such as sewing, knitting, crochet, and taking care of their rooms and of the dishes. Rarely were there mentions of girls graduating from institutions fully able to support themselves or do more than contribute a small amount of labour to a household. Even as the schools expanded their curriculum to include science, math, and other traditional academic skills, girls were considered more ornamental than academic, being described in the Missouri school's Annual Report as "Though they may not be able to provide wholly for themselves from the pursuit of any or all of the acquirements, yet a knowledge of

[521] New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, *An Account of the New-York Institution for the Blind: Together with a Brief Statement of the Origin, Progress, and Present Condition, of the Institutions for the Blind in This and Other Countries, to Which Is Added Biographical Notices of Some of the Most Illustrious Blind* (New York: Press of G. P. Scott & Co, 1833), 15.

them is far more necessary and will contribute more to their happiness than the ability to solve some intricate problem in Euclid, or to repeat the paradigms of the French verbs."[522]

In many ways, this mirrors the treatment of sighted girls in schools, although often the schools for the blind were several years, or even decades, behind in their pedagogical approach to girls' education. Allison Prentice describes how Edgerton Ryerson's school reforms in the 1860s limited girls' access to education in fee-charging grammar schools, excluding girls from classical courses necessary to enter higher education.[523] During the same period, education in the free common schools were gender segregated, with separate entrances, playgrounds, and seating for boys and girls.[524] Prentice explains that much of this concern was about fear that too much interaction with boys would lead girls to becoming coarse or otherwise behaving inappropriately for their gender – a fear echoed by educators of the blind as they debated how to ensure girls would receive proper training.[525] In his examination of the common school curriculum, Paul Axelrod describes how sighted girls were taught the domestic arts in the 1870s and 80s, such as knitting, sewing, and weaving, while sighted boys were taught agriculture and basic bookkeeping.[526] As the Ontario school system expanded to include secondary schools with a common curriculum, girls were also taught the core requirements of English, history, science, the classics, and mathematics.[527] However, various reformers began to push for an extended domestic science curriculum for sighted girls, out of fear that girls would become mothers who

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[522] Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fifth Biennial Report of the Missouri Institution for the Education of the Blind to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly [Cut from Original Source and Bound with Other Documents]*, 1866, (https://archive.org/details/biannualreportof16miss and Jefferson City: W. A. Curry, 1867), 11.
[523] Alison L. Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 111.
[524] Prentice, *The School Promoters*, 112.
[525] Prentice, *The School Promoters*, 113.
[526] Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914*, Themes in Canadian Social History 1 (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 56.
[527] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 61.

did not know proper health and safety for their households and children.[528] By 1904, schools for sighted children in Ontario had introduced a domestic science curriculum for girls, designed to ensure that they were taught home-making skills such as food chemistry, needlework, cooking, and home management.[529] These skills were also taught to blind girls, however without the concern about girls learning proper mothering, as blind girls were not expected to marry or have children.

Exactly how much time at school should be dedicated to the domestic arts was debated by educators of the blind. In 1871, William B. Wait of the New York Institution argued that it was not a profitable use of time for girls to learn things they could learn at home, such as washing dishes or cooking. Their education was being paid for by the state, and the money should be used to set up students, both female and male, to be self-sufficient.[530] William Chapin of Pennsylvania and W. H. Churchman of Indiana, who was himself blind, agreed, arguing that there wasn't enough time in the school year to teach girls everything that blind children were to learn – from how to tie their shoes to how to read – and also expect them to learn housekeeping skills besides.[531] However, Churchman did encourage that girls be taught hand-sewing to repair and make their own clothes, as this made them "self-helpful," which would in turn make them helpful to others.[532] He argued that the goal of the institutions was not teach them household

[528] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 108.
[529] Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling*, 108–9.
[530] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 122.
[531] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 126.
[532] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 125.

tasks, but to prepare them to learn these tasks at home.[533] Other educators, including Otis Patten, Superintendent of the Arkansas Institute, and Michael Anagnos (the son-in-law of Samuel Gridley Howe who replaced him as superintendent of the Perkins Institution), argued instead that these skills were important to the proper development of girls into women. Patten described how girls were taught to make beds, sweep rooms, serve meals, and work in the laundry at his school, skills that were expected of women in the household.

In his address to the 1876 American Convention of Educators of the Blind, Stephen Babcock of the New York Institution extolled the virtues of women who had successfully turned the needlework and sewing they learned at the school into careers, describing how two female graduates were now working, one at the Domestic Sewing Machine Company and the other at the Bickford Knitting Machine Company.[534] Another speaker described how women could support themselves through music and literature, "if she has the necessary qualifications."[535] However, despite the occasional success story, it was clear that blind women could not expect much success in gaining sufficient employment to support themselves. Dr. Thomas Armitage, a British physician who founded the Royal National Institute of Blind People, advised North American educators that blind women "are scarcely ever able to do much towards maintaining themselves unless employed in a special manufactory for the blind...", adding that the very few

[533] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 125.
[534] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876* (Philadelphia: Culbertson & Bache, Printers, 1877), 18.
[535] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 40.

women who were able to gain employment as organists or music teachers were paid poorly.[536] The fact that female graduates of schools for the blind were rarely mentioned as being successfully self-employed in the annual reports, designed to encourage government funding and charitable support for the institutions, shows how rarely this happened.

By the 1870s, girls were being taught how to use sewing and knitting machines, alongside hand-sewing and hand-knitting. Wait of the New York Institution described the importance of this work, despite knowing that few of the girls would go on to be able to make a living from sewing. According to Wait, these tasks would ensure the "intellectual and moral training" of the girls, "the end of which training will not be seen in this world, but will be realized in the next… ."[537] N. B. Kneass Jr., a blind instructor at the Pennsylvania institution (who also developed a raise print text for the blind – see Chapter Four) argued that girls should be taught to make cords and fancy trimmings for sewing, mat making, and sewing machines.[538] While it was possible that some graduates would then go on to support themselves from this work, the majority would instead use it go "go home and occupy useful places in the household."[539] His father, N. B. Kneass Senior (who was a trustee of the same institution) echoed this sentiment, arguing it was the duty of institutions to require girls to do household work as it would make them of "more use to their parents." Some girls, he claimed, felt that they would be

[536] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 65.
[537] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 46.
[538] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 53.
[539] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 48.

degraded to return to the manual labour of the household after leaving boarding school, an attitude he felt was "now too prevalent;" however, he gave no examples to support this claim.[540] This claim again mirrors the concern about girls not learning their proper role in society expressed by educators for sighted children during Ryerson's reforms.

Educators of the blind argued against girls becoming the female heads of household or otherwise entering into romantic relationships. In an essay read at the 1876 ACEB, Otis Patten argued that "the highest and noblest position of woman, that of wife and mother, should rarely be assumed by the blind." Only exceptional women should consider the possibility of marriage and motherhood.[541] Instead, he called on every blind girl to "fit herself" into the only appropriate position available to them – "that of sister and friend."[542] Patton went on to tell the assembled educators that blind girls should only learn the skills necessary for them to "adorn the home circle" as "no blind woman whose cheerful disposition is a constant sunbeam in the house…especially endearing herself to the little ones, need ever want for friends or a home."[543] Even the blind themselves would emphasis the need for blind adults, women especially, to aim to be cheerful and useful rather than self-sufficient. In her autobiography, Mary Day described how at the Maryland Institution she learned the importance of blind adults being "as useful and industrious as those who have not been deprived of their sight…cheerful and happy in

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540 American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 53.
541 American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 40.
542 American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 40.
543 American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 40.

disposition."[544] Girls were clearly not expected to become the wives and mothers of their sighted counterparts, but instead be helpers in the household of their parents, siblings, or friends.

The debates about the education of blind girls occurred in the same period as debates about marriages between adults with sensory-related disabilities, particularly deaf adults, across North America. Historians Brian H. Greenwald and John Vickrey Van Cleve have demonstrated that these debates started within residential schools themselves, showing how William W. Turner at the American School for the Deaf expressed concerns about deaf adults marrying in the late 1840s, as this was, in his experience, likely to lead to the birth of deaf children. He argued that the students at residential schools for the deaf should be discouraged from intermarriage.[545]

These concerns were also expressed by other residential school leaders during the establishment and growth of residential schools for deaf and blind children. In the 1870s and 80s, it was most famously argued by Alexander Graham Bell. Bell, whose wife was deaf, argued that there was a causal link between congenital deafness and inherited traits. He expressed concerns about intermarriage between deaf people leading to a "deaf variety of the human race."[546] While Bell would not argue that intermarriage between deaf people should be banned, he did call for it to be discouraged, explaining that segregated schools for deaf children where they were taught sign language contributed to their isolation.[547] In *Defectives in the Land,* Douglas Baynton explains that marriage laws that would prevent either deaf or blind people from marrying were debated in various American states during the 1890s, which was the period after Bell's initial

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[544] Mary L. Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl* (Baltimore: James Young, 1859), 175.
[545] Brian H. Greenwald and John Vickrey Van Cleve, "'A Deaf Variety of the Human Race': Historical Memory, Alexander Graham Bell, and Eugenics" *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14: 1 (January 2015: 28–48, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781414000528), 32.
[546] Greenwald and Van Cleve, "'A Deaf Variety of the Human Race,'" 29.
[547] Greenwald and Van Cleve, "'A Deaf Variety of the Human Race,'" 31.

concerns were raised, but were never passed into law.[548] These hereditary concerns were a part of the framework within which debates about educating blind girls were held.

Mary Klages examines the concerns about blind people breeding that Samuel Gridley Howe expressed throughout the annual reports of the Perkins Institution. In 1848, Howe argued that it was a moral imperative that blind adults not risk bringing blind children into the world through engaging in procreative sex, which was the only sort of sexual relations that Howe found appropriate.[549] Klages explains how this imperative influenced his development of both the curriculum at the highly influential Perkins school and the architecture of the school itself. As early as the 1850s, Howe began to lobby for government funds to establish separate "cottages" for boarding students to live in on the school's grounds, segregated by sex and headed by a matron that would reproduce the role of the mother in the household.[550] Howe argued that these reproductions of the family home would ensure that blind children would learn proper familial behaviour, and as they were sex-segregated the children would never risk falling in love and getting married.

The cottage system was established at Perkins in the 1870s and went even further in the training of girls in the domestic tasks while keeping girls and boys separate. While boys were not expected to do more than keep themselves clean, Michael Anagnos described how the fourteen girls in each house were expected to keep the house clean and the windows bright, as well as doing the ironing, peeling potatoes, and washing the dishes.[551] These cottages were meant to re-

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[548] Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 13.
[549] Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 52.
[550] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 53.
[551] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8, 9 and 10th, 1871*, 127. During this period this experiment was only for the girls – the ideal outcome for boys, according to Anagnos, was for boys to be boarded in the homes of neighbouring families and ultimately attending public schools.

create the household of a mother with many daughters – the type of household that girls might be expected to return to or enter as sisters to sighted siblings. Again, the expectation was that blind girls would become extra hands within a household, but were not expected to head households, marry, or have their own children to care for.

The principal of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) during the 1880s, A. H. Dymond, was aware of these debates about the education of girls. When he took over the institution in 1881, he was asked by the Ontario government to visit three American schools, including Perkins, to examine their techniques for education the blind.[552] While he did not attend the 1882 convention of educators of the blind, he did send his regrets and would have received the bound proceedings and thus been aware of the ongoing debates about how to educate blind girls.[553] Under his care, the school continued to offer girls (and some boys) access to knitting and sewing class. In 1882 he described how the knitting department had generated 2,800 "pairs of knitted goods" (probably pairs of socks) on order, with pupils collecting a small sum for each completed project. This small sum required him "to impose a check on the eagerness of some to devote too much attention to this work," perhaps because girls knew that this might be their primary form of income in the future.[554] Paying girls for the work was discontinued in 1883 as the nearby Reformatory for Females and Lunatic Asylums had taken up

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The experiment was meant to keep the sexes entirely separate while at school. Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, October 1874* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1875), 97.

[552] Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ont, Canada, Annual Reports of Inspector Langmuir; Principal Dymond.; Dr. W. C. Corson, Physician and Surgeon, for the Year Ending September 30th, 1881* (Brantford: Expositor Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1882), 15.

[553] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Seventh Biennial Convention of The American Association of Instructors of The Blind, Held at the Wisconsin Institution for the Blind, at Janesville, Wisconsin, August 15, 16 and 17, 1882* (Janesville, Wisconsin: Gazette Printing Co., Printers, 1883), 56.

[554] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, 1878* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co, 1879), 22.

the practice as well, undercutting the prices of the OIEB. Girls instead were encouraged to keep hand-knitting to make household goods or gifts for family and friends. Dymond hoped that the school could acquire knitting machines the girls could learn on, as they would "have to earn a livelihood for themselves, either wholly or in part." [555] (He provided no examples of graduating girls who were successfully earning a livelihood from knitting.) He also described the skill girls acquired in machine sewing, although lamented that blind girls were not likely to gain proficiency in the "the art of measuring, cutting-out, and fitting."[556] In the latter case, he later explained that the skills taught in the sewing room were for the "means of domestic usefulness" rather than a means of making an income, again echoing the idea that blind girls should be useful to their households rather than seeking independence.[557] By 1890, he described how female graduated had "all laid the foundation for lives of profitable employment and usefulness" and how girls who had left the school before graduation would prove "I am sure, valuable helpers to those with whom their lot is cast, and do credit to the instruction obtained at this Institution."[558]

Throughout the late nineteenth century, blind women and girls were expected by their educators to learn domestic tasks alongside whatever other classes they took at school. As such, they were expected primarily to be helpful in the homes of their parents or siblings, rather than wives and mothers to their own families. While their skills might generate some self-sufficiency,

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[555] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities Upon the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, Brantford, Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1883* (Toronto: "Grip" Printing & Publishing Co, 1884), 23. For a discussion on unpaid patient labour at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, see: Geoffrey Reaume, *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, first published by Oxford University Press, 1997), 133–80.

[556] Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, 1878*, 22.

[557] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities Upon the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, Brantford, Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1884* (Toronto: "Grip" Printing & Publishing Co, 1885), 19.

[558] Ontario Institution of the Education, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities upon the Ontario Institution of the Education and Instruction of the Blind Brantford Being for the Year Ending 30th September, 1889* (Toronto: Warwick & Sons, 1890), 4.

with the occasional successful girl celebrated in the annual reports of schools, it was understood that they would never be able to truly support themselves. Women and girls were expected to be ornamental within the household and make themselves pleasant and helpful, which not only reflected concerns about the role of women in the household as expressed in schools for sighted girls, but also concerns about blind women as mothers. While inter-marriage between blind adults was never illegal, it was often discouraged out of fear of perpetuating the defective genes.

Blind women and girls did not meekly accept this plan for their future. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, we see examples of blind women seeking their own means of support outside of the schools and family limitations placed on them. While the majority of blind women and girls are difficult to trace through surviving sources, autobiographies and letters written by some of these girls show them finding careers, husbands, and having children. By examining these sources, we can see the ways that girls and women made their own way in the world, rejecting the plans laid for them by sighted educators.

Can the Blind Girl Speak?[559] – Writing by Blind Women & Girls

While few blind women published autobiographies, the few existing works give insight into the lived experience of being a blind woman. Each of the autobiographies examined in this section were published by attendees of the Maryland School for the Blind in Baltimore, with Mary A. Niemeyer and Annie Kane describing how Mary L. Day's *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl* inspired them to publish their own work. While these works are limited, they show the expectations of how blind women and girls should behave for a sighted audience. Each

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[559] Note that Klages uses this title for chapter 7 in *Woeful Afflictions*. The question, "can the blind girl speak" is inspired by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's enormously influential 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan), 271–313.

autobiography is written to show the pathetic nature of the life of an uneducated blind girl, the quest to cure their blindness, and their ultimate acceptance of God's decision to make them blind. Each woman writes about how her ultimate acceptance of her blindness led to her receiving an education, an important turning point in their lives. The women present themselves as pious, accepting of their fate, and eager to support themselves rather than rely on the public purse. Each biography is ultimately an advertisement for the effectiveness of an education in lifting the pathetic blind girl out of misery, encouraging the reader to support educational institutions for the blind.

Reading these autobiographies together shows the ways that the lives of blind women and girls were different than the ones debated for them by mostly male educators. When discussing the effect that going to school had on their lives, the women do not describe classes in knitting, sewing, or music, but instead describe meeting new friends and potential romantic partners, the kindness of their teachers, and the sometimes rude questions of the public. These girls each acquired blindness in their teens, and already knew how to properly manage most household tasks. Each autobiography described the ways in which the girls had attempted to support themselves before coming to the school, including as servants in various households or selling hand-knit goods. For these women, it is important to show themselves as attempting to be self-sufficient, rather than relying on charitable giving or the kindness of their families. As well, by writing and publishing these autobiographies, these women were earning an income – Mary Day even described touring and giving speeches in her second autobiography, *The World as I Have Found It*. The benefit of their education seems to be that they were able to write their own story, both directly through acquiring skills at reading raised-print text, and indirectly through the encouragement of the school itself.

Mary Klages also examines autobiographies written by blind women in *Woeful Afflictions*, comparing them to slave narratives written during the same period. Klages argues that these autobiographies serve same purpose as slave narratives, establishing for the reader the importance of alleviating "the conditions of misery and affliction described" by the authors.[560] Klages' analysis focuses on the sentimentality of the representation of blind women in these works, showing how women presented themselves as both being independent and requiring assistance from a sighted audience. The goal of these works, according to Klages, was to raise awareness of the schools for the blind and their importance in the lives of blind people. My analysis looks at these works as women describing their lived experience, even though they are clearly describing it with an audience in mind. Rather than just as advertisements for the importance of education, these autobiographies were ways that blind women were able to explain their lives in the same ways that blind men did. Later parts of this chapter will go further into discussing the lived experience of blind women into the early twentieth century by examining letters and other documents written by and about blind girls. While these autobiographies are written with an audience in mind, they still show the experiences that were under-represented in the debates held by educators.

Mary L. Day

Mary L. Day wrote two autobiographies. The first, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, primarily focuses on her childhood and early adulthood. The book, first published in 1859, ends with the death of the principal of the Maryland Institution for the Blind in Baltimore, which she had entered at age 19. The second, *The World as I Have Seen It*, published in 1878, describes meeting and marrying her husband, Mr. Arms, and her career as a public speaker after leaving

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[560] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 147.

the Maryland Institution. Day is the only blind person from this period that I have found who wrote more than one autobiography, with her second making clear how important her speaking career was to support her family and herself.[561] According to Klages, Day's autobiography follows a similar layout to those written by former slaves – Klages describes how both types of works include "an elaborate apparatus of authentication…direct appeals to readers to work to alleviate the conditions of misery…[and] insist that the author is trying valiantly to create or assume a form of independence through writing."[562] Day also aims to show the importance of her family and her struggle throughout her childhood to contribute to her own welfare, as well as her pious acceptance of her blindness (despite multiple attempts to seek a cure).

Day opens her first autobiography describing her idyllic childhood, moving from Baltimore (where she was born in 1836), to New York, to Minnesota. Her descriptions of her childhood home in Minnesota focus on the beauty of the landscape and the caring nature of her mother and older sister. However, this idyllic childhood ended when Mary was six years old, with the death of her mother. Her father, overwhelmed by the needs of his six children, sent each of the children away to a different family.[563] According to Mary, she lived with several families after leaving her father, most of which were cruel or neglectful towards her. She describes at various times her anger that such good Christian families used their religiosity "as a cloak to such hypocrisy," describing multiple families that would treat Mary kindly in front of others but beat her behind closed doors.[564]

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[561] Helen Keller also wrote multiple autobiographies, including *The Story of My Life* in 1903 and *The World I Live In* in 1908. I have chosen not to include Keller or Laura Bridgman (who wrote several years of journals available at the Samuel P. Hayes Research Library at the Perkins School for the Blind) as both of these women were deaf-blind. They received very different education than blind girls did, with one-on-one teaching and specific techniques that were not necessary for girls who were either blind or deaf.
[562] Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 147–8.
[563] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 28–9.
[564] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 33.

Mary became blind suddenly at the age of twelve after experiencing a "severe pain in my eyes…the light of the candle caused me great pain, and before retiring I observed the lids were very much swollen…In less than twenty-four hours I was blind! Forever blind!"[565] While at this point she was living with a kind family that had already agreed to care for her until she was 18, she continued to be passed around to other families due to various illnesses. After three months of blindness she settled with the Cook family, whose seven children "kissed me affectionately and divided with me their toys."[566] She stayed with this family for five years, only leaving after her long-missing sister and brother reached out to her from Chicago and invited her to stay with them.[567] Her reluctance to leave, even to be with her original family, stemmed from the overwhelming kindness she experienced with the Cook family and her comfort with the life she had created for herself as a blind girl.

Unlike other autobiographies, Mary describes having known a blind man before her illness. While living with one of the crueler families in her background, Mary met Mr. Lee, a border whose blindness was apparently caused by damage to his optic nerve. Mary described helping him on walks in nature, explaining how he was her "only friend in the world." Despite this, she apparently mocked any of his "mistakes," leading to him to warn her that she, too, may one day become blind and thus should be kinder to him. Lee eventually left for New York for an operation to repair his optic nerve. When next she heard, Lee had died, although it's unclear from her comments if he died due to complications from surgery or from some other cause.[568] Mary's description of Mr. Lee shows her understanding of blindness as being dependant on

[565] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 62–3.
[566] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 71.
[567] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 75.
[568] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 38–9, 44–6.

others – Lee is unable to walk around without a guide – as well as her view of blind people as being of "kind and noble heart," people who would be helpful when sighted people were cruel.[569]

Much of Mary's autobiography describes her repeated attempts to seek a cure for her blindness. The doctor sent for after her initial illness treated her with "a lotion, the application of which caused acute pain, and seemed to afford little or no relief…"[570] This is followed by several attempts at folk remedies, including bathing her temples in cold water and applying a poultice to her eyes; being kept in a dark room for four weeks eating only bread and molasses while receiving daily operations from a physician; a doctor applying a compound of alum and rum to the eyeball with a linen cloth; and a tea made of roots that was to be both drunk and applied to her eyes.[571] She described each new treatment as being both painful and ineffective, but continued to seek out these treatments for most of her life. Yet, Mary wrote repeatedly that her piety led her to "fain would with an unmurmuring heart submit that that which he had seen fit should befall me."[572] Presenting herself as both pious and accepting of her fate was an effective technique for appealing to a sighted audience, but it is clear that Mary always hoped to find a cure for her blindness.

At first, Mary resisted joining her sister and brother in Chicago, only agreeing to leave the Cook family after her sister sent along an advertisement of a "celebrated oculist, said to be performing almost miraculous cures in Chicago."[573] After describing her difficult, often dangerous, journey by train to Chicago, her autobiography again returns to her desire to be cured of her blindness – despite the seeming miraculous nature of her scattered family ultimately all

[569] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 39.
[570] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 63.
[571] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 65–7.
[572] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 69.
[573] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 75–6.

coming together again in Chicago, including her missing father. She visited multiple doctors in Chicago, all of whom agreed they could cure her loss of vision whether through operations, lengthy courses of medication, or other painful treatments.[574] At one point she consulted the "best homeopathic physician" in Chicago, who managed to improve her vision enough that she could "distinguish light and colour," although she does not describe his treatment plan. At least one doctor attempted to sue her for not paying for her treatment, but Mary won the case after another physician testified that the suing doctor's treatment was "the worst piece of mal-practice he had ever met with."[575] After this, Mary continued her quest for treatment, moving first to Baltimore to see several doctors there, then to New York to spend several months as an inpatient receiving regular surgical treatment from Dr. Stephenson, a noted oculist. Again, these interventions failed, with Mary describing herself as having accepted "her duty to submit unrepiningly to His decrees…"[576]

It was after the failed treatment in New York that Mary finally decided, at the urging of friends and family, to enter the Maryland Institute for the Blind in Baltimore at age 19. She described deciding to go to the school as a way to determine "what I might accomplish in self-improvement"[577] The school was still new – it had opened in 1853 and Mary began attending in 1855 - with only eight students. This tiny class size allowed personal attention from the principal, David E. Loughery, who was a graduate from the Pennsylvania Institution and blind himself.[578] Here she made fast friendships, describing the "mysterious tie that makes [the blind] kindred to any who have been denied…the power to *see*…"[579] Mary's time the Baltimore school

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[574] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 93–4.
[575] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 105–6.
[576] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 160–61.
[577] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 164.
[578] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 164–5.
[579] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 165.

included learning to read, sewing lessons, music for public performance, beadwork, and the creation of other "little fancy articles" – the latter of which the pupils sold enough of to buy a present for the superintendent of the school.[580]

Within her second autobiography, Mary continued to seek a cure to her blindness despite claiming that she had accepted her fate as ordained by God. After her time at the Baltimore school, she was encouraged to see Dr. Massey to "try the effect of electricity." However, while the walk to the doctor's office every morning was of "great benefit to my health," her vision was not improved by this treatment.[581] Later she attempted a "most painful operation" in New York, but although she was able to see some objects for a brief period after the surgery, she again returned to "utter and hopeless sightlessness."[582] Another attempt was made with electricity when visiting a doctor in Michigan, which again proved unsuccessful.[583] She alluded to other attempts to cure her vision, but ultimately gave up the quest at the urging of her then-fiancé (identified throughout her work only as "Mr. Arms"), "which gave me assurance that my blindness was no barrier to his love."[584]

Mary spent most of her life struggling to make a living and support herself and her family. Even before deciding to attend the school in Baltimore, Mary learned skills to support herself as part of the Cook family. She learned to knit, and after a year was skilled enough to knit her own stockings. Soon afterwards she took on the "usual winter knitting" for a neighbouring household, earning one dollar a week for the next four years.[585] She eventually sold both of her autobiographies, the second one focusing almost entirely on her travels around the United States,

[580] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 189.
[581] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 180.
[582] Mary L Day Arms, *World as I Have Found It: Sequel to Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl* (Baltimore: James Young, 1878), 11.
[583] Arms, *World as I Have Found It*, 48.
[584] Arms, *World as I Have Found It*, 49.
[585] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 74.

seeking both cures for her blindness and giving public talks. Far from being the ornament in a household, or even a helper to her own family or the families that had taken her in throughout her childhood, Mary became independent in one of the few ways open to her. She used the education she received at the Maryland school in ways educators of the blind did not imagine when debating the proper role of education in the lives of blind girls and women.

Mary A. Niemeyer

Mary A. Neimeyer's autobiography echoed Mary L. Day's work. Like Day, Neimeyer describes an idyllic childhood and loving family before her eventual blindness. She, like Day, chose to write her autobiography in part to support her family and in part, as described by Klages, to raise awareness of the importance of supporting charitable giving for blind schools. Neimeyer also described various attempts to alleviate her blindness, although unlike Day she seems to have stopped seeking cures soon after. Neimeyer does, however, describe in detail the despair she felt at realising she was losing her sight and her fear of what it might mean for her future and her family. As described in Chapter Two, many blind people narrated this despair in their autobiographies. Male autobiography described this despair as only being alleviated as their families told them of successful blind men they might emulate. For Niemeyer, her despair was alleviated by discovering that she could continue her education. By supporting her and institutions for the blind, sighted readers were also supporting an end to the despair felt by the afflicted blind.

In her autobiography, *Light in Darkness*, published in 1873, Mary A. Niemeyer describes first her idyllic childhood in Germany, which inculcated in her a life-long love for learning.[586] Her family's decision to move to the United States was first marred by the death of her youngest

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[586] Mary A. Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness: Autobiography of Mary A. Niemeyer* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1878), 62.

brother in the months before they left, and then almost ruined when Mary herself wandered off the day before the family was to board the boat.[587] Although she was missing for more than a day, she and her family were reunited after Mary's father found her just in time to make the boarding. It was during the weeks-long journey that Mary began to develop problems with her eyes. The ship's physician examined her, claiming she must have bathed her eyes in salt water; later, it is clear that Mary's problems with her eyes had begun earlier in life, but had not been detected until she was on the ship.[588] Once the family settled in Maryland, a new physician examined her eyes and diagnosed her with ophthalmia, a catch-all term for various inflammations of the eyes. He believed that at most she would only lose sight in one of her eyes; however, within eight months of their arrival in America it became clear she was going blind.[589]

Mary described the despair that she felt when she realised she was losing her sight: "I could not bear to talk of my affliction, therefore endured a deal of pain without speaking of it. The grief is heaviest of which we cannot speak."[590] In the years that she was losing her sight she describes attempting to hide her affliction from her family, not wishing to cause them more difficulties. She described struggling with a "pall" over her life, unable to be "light-hearted or gay, as other children were. I would often steal away from my companions, and go off myself to weep."[591] Other autobiographies written by blind women draw on this motif, of being saddened by the loss of vision but attempting to hide their sorrow from family and friends (see below). As well, they frequently describe in detail the beautiful landscapes of their childhood, as though

[587] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 73.
[588] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 82.
[589] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 89–91.
[590] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 92.
[591] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 92–3.

admonishing the reader to both count the blessing of their sight (as with the stories of fictional blind children outlined in Chapter Two).

Despite Mary's attempts to hide her grief, her family was aware of her worsening vision, and it clearly weighed on her parents' mind. Only some of the treatments that Mary received during this time are described in her book, although it is clear that they were painful and ineffective. After two years of doctor's treatments, her despairing parents took the advice of a "stranger who had been overtaken by a storm" who took shelter in their house to make a precipitate of mercury and unsalted butter and place it in Mary's eyes three times a day. This, the stranger claimed, would cure the inflammation.[592] This was not an effective treatment, and shortly after, at the age of twelve, Mary was completely blind.[593]

In the next sections of her autobiography, which Mary described as being written "from a blind girl's pen," Mary alternated between telling the reader of the achievements of blind men, her experiences at the Baltimore school for the blind, and of her family's experiences both before and after the Civil War. Much of this section was not about herself – she described her life as being a "simple story" and rejected the idea of "harrow[ing] the feelings of my kind and sympathetic reader with an attempt to tell how heavily on my heart fell the sad truth that I was blind."[594] She explored the importance of schools for the blind and the men who established them, rejecting mere sympathy in assisting blind children and adults.[595] Only through the support of schools like the one in Baltimore could blind children overcome the despair Mary felt or the challenges faced by being blind.

[592] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 117.
[593] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 118. Mary is quick to assure the reader that her loss of sight "was [not] occasioned by this man's advice, for it had been decided to be inevitable; but all who knew of its use, believed the evil had been hastened." She advised readers to reject quack prescriptions, and instead look to physicians for aid. Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 118–19.
[594] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 124.
[595] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 138.

Mary described her education at the Baltimore school as focusing on learning to read and write, musical instruction, and "many employments useful and ornamental," including making baskets with beads, knitting, crocheting, and "ever so many other handicrafts."[596] While she also described the methods by which blind children learned math and geography explored in Chapter Three, she makes clear that her family was most interested in her abilities to perform traditional feminine handicrafts rather than, for example, cane-seating chairs or rope-making that was often taught to male pupils. Even her description of Mary L. Day, whom she had heard of before entering the school, focused on Day's more feminine tasks, describing receiving from her a gift of a basket alongside Day's autobiography. Mary hoped that her attendance at the Baltimore school would help her to "think of some way in which I could earn a livelihood…I could not bear to think of being dependent upon the bounty of others…"[597] However, at no point during her autobiography does she describe selling her handicrafts, instead using learning how to make the baskets and knit as an entertaining story for her family members.[598]

As with many books written by blind autobiographers, Mary seemed eager to explore the successes of blind men and the ways in which they could become self-sufficient, describing in detail the achievements of "rare and exceptional talents." While she described meeting Day and reading *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl* –which ultimately convinced her to seek out the school in Baltimore as a way of continuing her education and ensuring she would not be a burden to her family – no other blind women are named or described in detail in her work.[599] This may indicate that to Mary, the path for blind women was unclear – she followed the path expected of her by sighted educators far more closely than Day did – while the experiences of

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[596] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 158.
[597] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 135.
[598] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 159.
[599] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 137–8.

successful blind men were easy to describe to a sighted audience. A successful female graduate of a school would be quietly at home knitting or caring for children, where a successful male graduate would be supporting a family through the business endeavours he learned at school.

Annie Kane

Like Mary A Niemeyer, Annie Kane was an immigrant girl who came to the United States with family to seek her fortune. Arriving from Ireland with her aunt when she was 13, Annie soon found herself abandoned in Baltimore. At the behest of her aunt she left behind her parents and siblings with the promise of riches, but shortly after arrival her aunt left the city to find her husband in Pennsylvania.[600] Annie first found work in the city as a maid, but shortly afterwards left the city for a better paying job in the surrounding country. Like Mary Day, Annie reported that the various families she found herself with were often cruel – both books condemn the idea of a false Christian who hides their abusive behaviour behind closed doors – her frustrations led her to run away back to the city with a friend who was also a servant.[601]

Annie's autobiography is much shorter than that of either Mary Day or Mary Niemeyer, with the bulk of her story focusing on her experiences before she became blind. Much of the early autobiography describes the beauty of the Irish countryside and her parents' commitment to her education. Her time in Baltimore and the Maryland countryside is mostly glossed over, although descriptions of "stroll[ing] through the fields, admiring the beautiful of nature, the blue sky, and the golden sunset" and the importance of "the glory and grandeur or heaven" abound.[602] Again, this is meant to remind the reader to enjoy the gift of sight while they still have it. Annie described her immediate family members in glowing terms, but it is clear that her maternal aunt (who convinced her to come to the United States) and her husband were cruel and dismissive of

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[600] Annie Kane, *The Golden Sunset; Or, the Homeless Blind Girl* (Baltimore: J. W. Bond & Co, 1867), 43.
[601] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 59.
[602] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 47.

Annie, seeing her only as a means of gaining money. When Annie returns to Baltimore, her aunt and uncle reunite with her, and pass along to her a letter from her father explaining that the family had lost all its property and that her father was ill. Annie had been considering using her savings to return to Ireland, but instead sent her father the $70 she had saved up for the return journey and ripped up her letter asking to come home.[603] As with Day and Niemeyer, Annie Kane described herself as self-sufficient and eager to work to earn her own way, but with a generosity towards her extended family despite their distance.

Annie acquired her blindness after she "…took a severe cold, which settled in my eyes."[604] She describes the despair she felt as the "inflammation grew more and more severe", explaining that she "could never again gaze into the beautiful blue sky, or behold the beauty of the golden sunset. The things I so much loved were hid from me; my darkened vision could rest upon them no more."[605] She also sought out several oculists for treatment; but unlike Mary Day, Annie did not describe the nature of the treatment she received. Instead, she explains again how she was abandoned by her aunt after she ran out of money, with her aunt ordering her to leave the house. She ended up in the alms-house, despite "the emotions which filled my bosom when I thought of becoming a pensioner upon the bounty of the city. Oh! How it crushed my spirit, and death would have been far preferable."[606] Mary Day had also described her fear of ending up in a poor house, and all three of the women repeatedly make clear in their autobiographies that they did not want to rely on charitable giving to support themselves.

As in other autobiographies, Annie initially described a feeling of despair regarding her blindness. Once her blindness was confirmed by doctors at the almshouse, she "fell prostate upon

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[603] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 80–81.
[604] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 85.
[605] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 87.
[606] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 87–8.

my couch, and such mighty waves of sorrow rolled over my soul that I thought my heart must break and be at rest….All hope was dead within me."[607] She attributed her recovering from this despair to making a friend at the almshouse who was also among the afflicted, a girl with a spinal injury that left her unable to get out of bed. The girl advised Annie that she could "sympathize deeply with me, for once she felt just as I did. She urged me to be submissive to the Divine will- for it was for some good and wise purpose, I had been afflicted…"[608] The girl further comforted Annie by reading to her from the Bible. With the reminder of divine providence, Annie wept, not because of her blindness but "because of the dark thoughts and rebellious feelings, which had found a lodgment in my heart, and torn it by conflicting emotions."[609] As with the other women, Annie accepted her fate and put her trust in God, demonstrating her piety for the sighted audience.

Soon after, Annie was referred to the recently-opened Maryland Institution for the Instruction of the Blind. Her time there overlapped with Mary Day's (although she is not mentioned in Day's autobiography), and, like Mary Niemeyer, she referenced Day's autobiography in her own work. She also praised the work of the school and the various teachers, emphasizing the importance of an education in ensuring the future success of blind adults. She described the school as "among the noblest and best of the institutions of Baltimore – a monument to the triumph of genius over great, almost insurmountable obstacles…"[610] However, her autobiography ends abruptly with the praising of the school, and the last 100 pages are the biography of Joseph Brown Smith, a professor at the Kentucky school.[611]

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[607] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 100–1.
[608] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 93.
[609] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 104.
[610] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 133.
[611] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 147. This biography of Joseph Brown Smith was written by John Heywood.

The abrupt ending to Annie's autobiography makes it unclear what path her life took in adulthood. Even the age at which she acquired her blindness is unclear, as is the year she entered the school. In her autobiography Annie stated that she met and was very fond of David Loughery, the blind man who became Superintendent in 1853 and then died from consumption in 1854, making Annie either 14 or 15 when she entered the school. However, the annual reports from the school indicate that Annie did not become a pupil there until 1855, making her 16 when she entered the school and 24 when she left the school after her term of eight years was up in 1863.[612] She did write to her family in Ireland to tell them of her blindness, and initially received money from her father in a letter reminding her that she should "willingly submit to the Divine hand which has afflicted you, for He never does so but for our own good."[613] While her father encouraged her to return to Ireland, Annie chose to remain at the institution to finish her education. She published her autobiography four years after graduation, mentioning that she never again heard from her family after the final quoted letter.

The purpose of women's writing

These autobiographies included lengthy reflections on the piety of their authors. Mary Day described her recommitment to Lutheranism after a dream in which she regained her vision in Heaven but only after receiving a "ticket from God."[614] She later reflected on how the blind talk "with delight of that land where night cometh not, and where no sorrow entereth," and frequently reminded the reader that her loss of vision was the will of God.[615] Mary Niemeyer turned frequently to both her religious upbringing and her feelings about blindness as it related to

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[612] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 108; Maryland Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, *Third Report of the Directors of the Maryland Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Baltimore January, 1864* (Baltimore: Henry A. Robinson, 1864), 25.
[613] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 130.
[614] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 167–8.
[615] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 177.

the divine plan, opening her autobiography by setting out "to show, though He afflict, how good God is. Truly there has been light in darkness along the way."[616] Annie Kane tells the reader "be thankful and grateful for being so highly favored; employ all of your powers in promoting the honor and glory of God, and He will bless and prosper you yet more abundantly."[617] These women reflect the ideal of Christian piety that school officials had hoped to inculcate in their charges, and thus were appropriate ambassadors to the sighted world.

Obviously, part of the purpose of writing these autobiographies was to financially support the women who wrote them. Mary A. Niemeyer described how Mary Day's autobiography provided "by its sale…a moderate competency" to Day. Niemeyer wrote her own autobiography after the death of both her parents and older brother, while she was living with her spinster sister, in an effort to contribute more to the household.[618] Annie's autobiography does not explicitly state her reasons for writing it, but its subtitle, *The Homeless Blind Girl*, is clearly meant to invoke sympathy in the reader. As described above, each of the women made clear that they were not seeking charitable handouts, but instead seeking to properly support themselves through the publishing of their autobiography. Each woman had supported themselves in the years before entering school, and the education they received increased their abilities to do so.

However, the autobiographies of blind women also served the purpose of calling on the public to support the education of blind girls. Each of these works was written by a graduate of the Baltimore school, as were the other works written by or about blind women and unlike most of the autobiographies written by men. Mary Day rejected the idea that "it is impossible for the blind to be educated…" as "I have acquired quite as much practical information as I could

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[616] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 7.
[617] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 96.
[618] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 138, 218.

possibly have done had I had sight," further describing how the "educated blind in their own home are as useful and industrious" as sighted people.[619] Her autobiography also included several references to the importance of Christian piety in the heart of the reader, including in the preface (written by S. S. R.) reminding the sighted reader that "unto those whom God has seen fit to afflict, is it not our duty to lend a helping hand?"[620] Annie wrote that "language is inadequate to describe the wretchedness, ignorance, and degradation to which the ill-fated blind has, until within a comparatively recent period, been subjected…the poet and philanthropist wept over him, and in sad strains bewailed his fate."[621] This echoes some of the concerns raised by blind men in their autobiographies (see Chapter Two), although again these women all had the benefits of education at a school for the blind.

Another purpose of these autobiographies was to "humanize" blind people in general and blind women in particular. Mary Day described visitors to the Baltimore school as regarding the pupils there "as a race distinct from themselves," asking questions about whether they closed their eyes when they slept and how they went about eating when they could not see.[622] She expressed frustration that the general public seemed to view the blind as "deprived of reason…but moving automata, walking stacks of wood or stone!"[623] Mary Niemeyer described how many people hold "erroneous ideas concerning the blind," finding them as a "separate and distinct class in all their susceptibilities and endowments."[624] She explained that the "resources and abilities" of the blind are far more than the sighted would imagine (and again turned to the importance of education to best draw out these resources.)[625] Fanny Crosby, another blind

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[619] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 175.
[620] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl,* iii.
[621] Kane, *The Golden Sunset*, 114.
[622] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 173.
[623] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 174.
[624] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 129.
[625] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 130.

woman who graduated from New York Institution for the Blind in 1843, told an anecdote of a "large party of ladies and gentlemen" who visited the school and also asked how blind people managed to eat: "I informed them…that we hitched one end of a string to a leg of or chair, and the other to our tongue; and by that means managed to prevent the victuals from losing their ways."[626] These anecdotes are meant to make the reader laugh, but also to remind the sighted reader that blind children were just like sighted ones and capable of self-sufficiency with some assistance.

These autobiographies show us women who were both working within and outside of the expectations set for them by mostly male educators of the blind. While each autobiography demonstrated that the women had acquired the necessary skills to be ornaments in the household who could knit, sew, do beadwork, and other female household tasks, they also represented an alternative way that blind women could seek some financial self-sufficiency. Mary Day's two autobiographies and her speaking series were an important part of the finances of her household, and presumably were used to help fund her ongoing quest to restore her eyesight. Mary Niemeyer's recounted how learning the handicrafts at the school allowed her to entertain her family, but again when she was in financial hardship she published her autobiography to contribute to her household. Annie Kane, the self-described homeless blind girl, reported how her work continued to support her family back in Ireland before she lost touch with them, making clear that blind women and girls could still be useful to their household. Her adult life is

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[626] Fanny Crosby, *Fanny Crosby's Life-Story by Herself* (New York: Every Where Publishing Company, 1903), 59. I have chosen not to include this book in my study as Fanny disputed the publication and authenticity of this work. See: Bernard Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1976), 209–16.

difficult to trace, although records from the Maryland Institution indicate she made a non-monetary donation to the school in 1864.[627]

Blind Girls as Letter Writers

Another way to explore the experiences of blind girls and women is to examine letters written to, from, and about them. The Ontario Institute for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) encouraged students in the early twentieth century to write to the school during summer vacations. While it is unclear how many of these letters were written, the ones contained in the archival record demonstrate how blind girls wrote about themselves and about one another when not seeking a public audience. Through these letters we see a wide variety of experiences by blind women and girls. While autobiographies focused on piety, cure narratives, and the importance of education, these letters show that the girls were invested in their friendships and time at school, their career interests, and their family lives. These letters demonstrate the ways that girls could behave outside the ideals of the "good girl" that they were taught to be at the institution. In this section I will use three case studies of girls from the Ontario institution – Bertha Capps, Louise Deschenes, and Janet Barr – to explore the ways that girls could be identified as vulnerable (with multiple difficulties beyond "just" blindness), girls could be ambassadors to their communities, and girls could be rebellious, defying the expectations placed on them by educators.

"Of course she is without friends" – Bertha Capps

Bertha Capps was sent to the OIEB in November 1902. Prior, she had been made a ward of the Children's Aid Society after "she was abandoned by her mother on the street" according to one letter.[628] The details of why her mother gave her up are unclear, although in a letter to one

[627] Maryland Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, *Fourth Report of the Directors of the Maryland Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Baltimore, January, 1865* (Baltimore: James Young, 1865), 18.
[628] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Kathleen Wolsey," April 25, 1906.

potential carer for Bertha, her mother and sister were both described as "women of the town," (a euphemism for prostitution).[629] Throughout her time at the OIEB, both principals A. H. Dymond (1881-1902) and H. F. Gardner (1903-1916) expressed concern about Bertha being properly raised to prevent her from following in her family's path. In attempting to place her in one home, Gardiner described her as needing to be "surrounded by good influences and located where I need not be anxious about her."[630] Perceived as a friendless girl, Bertha's background meant that she needed protection that other girls in the school did not.

The details of Bertha's eyesight are unclear. Previous to a first attempt at being fostered, Bertha was sent to the Hospital for Sick Children for treatment of her eyes.[631] She was then sent to stay with Mrs. George Spence in Straffordville, Ontario, who reported that Bertha's eyes seemed to be getting worse. She was sent back to Toronto to receive further treatment. An optician in the city claimed her eyes were "beyond treatment for the improvement of the sight…she can barely see by holding a book close to her face."[632] At that point it was decided that Bertha would go to the Ontario Institute for the Education of the Blind and spend her vacation time with Spence.[633] Spence and Bertha seem to have written at least some letters to each other in 1903, as a letter from Spence referred to receiving letters from Bertha. She also

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[629] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Kathleen Wolsey," April 25, 1906.
[630] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Kathleen Wolsey," April 25, 1906.
[631] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from J. Stuart Coleman to H. F. Gardiner," September 3, 1903.
[632] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from J Stuart Coleman to A H Dymond," October 24, 1902. It is difficult to determine the actual state of Bertha's eyes as we have several letters that were written by her that indicate at least some sight as she clearly wrote them herself and they do not require the slate used by other students; however, she also describes her eyes hurting her after writing the letters and frequent visits to doctors hoping for treatment. She states that a doctor told her that her eyes were "ulcerated" after she left the school but does not mention any treatment plan. Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," September 30, 1909.
[633] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mrs. George Spence to J. Stuart Coleman," August 31, 1903.

sent money to Bertha, with ten cents arriving in a 1903 letter.[634] She asked the Children's Aid Society if she could keep Bertha, but then changed her mind after considering the "approach of winter" and the belief that Bertha required the "good education" that would be provided to her at the OIEB.[635]

Despite being abandoned by her mother, Bertha's family did reach out to her repeatedly while she was at the school. According to her file, at least three of her six older siblings wrote her letters. Her brother Charles wrote from Detroit, hoping that both he and their mother would be visiting Bertha in Brantford;[636] however, the Children's Aid Society and Gardiner wrote to forbid any further letters arriving from Charles and any visits from either him or their mother.[637] (Whether Bertha received Charles's letter is unclear, but it seems unlikely as both institutions had already decided to ban contact before the letter was received.[638]) As well, Bertha received a letter from her brother Alfred and his wife, Ida, stating "…we have often spoken of you and wondered were [sic] you were and had we known your mother had left you in the city here we would have hunted you up long ago."[639] Bertha likely did not receive this letter, as Gardiner wrote to Alfred the next day to indicate that Bertha's guardian, J. Stuart Coleman of the Children's Aid Society, "has instructed me not to permit to letters or visits to be

[634] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mrs. George Spence to Bertha Capps," June 1, 1903.
[635] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mrs. George Spence to Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind," September 12, 1903.
[636] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Charles Capps to Bertha Capps," February 19, 1904.
[637] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman," February 19, 1904.
[638] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H F Gardiner to J Stuart Coleman," February 19, 1904.
[639] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Alf Capps to Bertha Capps," March 9, 1904.

exchanged….Give her a chance to forget the troubles and hardships of her infancy…and she will grow into a fine woman."[640]

Bertha's sister, Annie, appears frequently in her files. Annie was the first of Bertha's relatives to reach out to her, and initially was allowed to write, encouraged to contribute to the cost of her clothing, and told the details on how to arrange a visit in January of 1904.[641] However, by February Gardiner expressed concerns about Annie to Coleman, writing that she had passed Bertha's address along to her mother as well as worrying about Annie's current housing situation: "I wish you would ascertain what kind of place 220 Adelaide Street West, in Toronto is."[642] While it seems that at least one letter reached Bertha, he advised Coleman that "I have not let Bertha know either Annie's or the mother's address."[643] In response, Coleman presumably looked into Annie Capps's circumstances – "our inspector made inquiries regarding her, and we have come to the conclusion that she herself is a girl of bad character. We, therefore, willingly authorize you to stop all communication between Bertha and any one [sic] who may wish to write to her or come to see her."[644] Again, Bertha was rendered a friendless girl, despite her family's obvious concern and interest in her whereabouts.

After this series of letters, Gardiner became preoccupied with ensuring that Bertha became a 'good' girl, seeking various families to send her to over the holidays and vacation times. In 1904 Spence had moved to Brantford, and Gardiner wrote to Coleman that he believed

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[640] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Alf Capps," May 10, 1904.
[641] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Annie Capps," January 25, 1904.
[642] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman," February 18, 1904.
[643] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman," February 18, 1904.
[644] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from J. Stuart Coleman to H. F. Gardiner," February 24, 1904.

it best for Bertha to be sent to the countryside instead of staying with the Spence family again: "She is at a dangerous age, rather pretty, and requires careful looking after, until she attains discretion."[645] Annie continued to attempt to write to Bertha – Coleman wrote to Gardiner with a clipped letter from Annie in June of 1904, although all that exists in the file is Annie's address and signature rather than the full letter.[646] Gardiner suggested that he would pay for part of Bertha's board to ensure she be "happily and safely located" away from where her family might reach her.[647] That summer was spent with Miss Sarah Farrell by arrangement of the Methodist Deaconess Home.[648] However, Farrell declined to take Bertha the following summer and arrangements were made to again send her away from the city to the McPhater family in Clyde, Ontario.[649]

These three summers of Bertha's vacation time show how concerned the various institutions and individuals involved in her life were about her moral safety. As explored in a previous chapter, educators of the blind were concerned about the religious and moral upbringing of all of their students; however, "friendless" girls such as Bertha received particular attention, with the school monitoring their incoming mail and advising what company they be allowed to keep in addition to their religious education. (School officials read all letters written to student as the students were unable to read the letters themselves; however, these letters seem to have rarely been held back from the students.) The letters back and forth between the OIEB and the

[645] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J .Stuart Coleman," May 10, 1904.
[646] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from J. Stuart Coleman to H. F. Gardiner," June 28, 1904.
[647] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman," May 10, 1904.
[648] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from J. Stuart Coleman to H. F. Gardiner," May 21, 1904; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman," June 3, 1904.
[649] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman," May 29, 1905.

Children's Aid Society discussed Bertha's religious decisions (she attended Presbyterian services while at the Children's home, but asked to be baptized in the Church of England in 1906[650]), which types of homes she be allowed to live in, and with whom she be allowed to keep in contact. Later letters even dictate which friends she was allowed to keep, with Bertha being forbidden to contact Maggie Green, a former pupil, and "other pupils who live in Toronto."[651] In her own letters to the OIEB, Bertha reported on her church and Sunday School attendance, as well as her desire to continue in her religious and household education.

Part of Bertha's moral training focused, as expected, on learning feminine skills. It is not clear how much of this she may have learned at the school, although girls were expected to learn to keep themselves and their rooms tidy and clean up after dinner. While a Domestic Science course was offered during Bertha's time at the school, which included cooking and budgeting courses, only six pupils were allowed in the course at any one time so it is unlikely Bertha was one of the students.[652] Instead, the letters sent to the families asking to care for her over the summer included a request that she would learn housekeeping skills while in their care, for "it is easier to teach these things to one girl in a family than to sixty in a school."[653] In addition, Bertha was taught beadwork of some sort, a proper domestic skill for a girl to learn and one Bertha seemed to think might help her earn some extra money.[654] She also learned some sort of music,

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[650] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from J. Stuart Coleman to A. H. Dymond," November 5, 1902; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Lee Williams," February 12, 1906.

[651] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Kathleen Wolsey," April 25, 1906.

[652] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind Brantford For the Year Ending September 30th, 1906* (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1907), 12–13.

[653] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to J. Stuart Coleman.," May 25, 1904.

[654] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," June 16, 1904. Whether Bertha's beadwork was any good is hard to determine – Mrs. Spence told Bertha she had shown her work to others and "they think them very nice and nicely made", and Bertha mentioned in her letter to Gardiner that she expected to be able to sell some of it to make some spending

although never distinguished herself enough to be mentioned as a musician in the annual reports during her time at the OIEB.[655] In the dozens of letters written about her by the OIEB, the Children's Aid Society, and her temporary guardians, very little of Bertha's work as a student was mentioned, with most letters discussing moral concerns and keeping her from bad influences.

In 1906, Bertha was invited to spend the holidays at the home of one of the other girls at the school, Esta Wolsey. Esta's family lived in Toronto, and her father was a civil engineer while her mother, Kathleen, stayed home with Esta's two younger siblings. Kathleen Wolsey invited Bertha to stay with her family with the intention that Bertha would have a permanent home in the Wolsey household after leaving school.[656] In agreeing to this arrangement, Gardiner made clear to Wolsey that Bertha was not to have any contact with her family as "with such heredity, the danger to be avoided is obvious, and the chief necessity is to guard the child from bad company until she is fortified by knowledge and principle to take care of herself."[657] Wolsey agreed, and for several summer vacations Bertha visited not only with the Wolsey family in Toronto, but stayed with them on vacation in Beamsville, a small town in the Niagara region.[658] There, Bertha was encouraged to continue to learn housework, to attend church services faithfully, and to consider her future after leaving the OIEB. Gardiner suggested she plan to take on some sort of

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money; however, she does not refer to this again in her letters. Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mrs. George Spence to Bertha Capps," June 1, 1903.

[655] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," August 31, 1904.

[656] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Kathleen Wolsey to H. F. Gardiner," April 28, 1906.

[657] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F, Gardiner to Kathleen Wolsey," April 25, 1906.

[658] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," July 9, 1906.

remunerative work in domestic service in 1907, as another year at the OIEB would not be best for her future.[659]

By 1908 the Wolsey family decided that Bertha was no longer an acceptable member of their household because they caught Bertha being "exceedingly untruthful" and "for months has been in constant communication with her own people."[660] How Bertha was caught lying is unclear; Kathleen Wolsey had been ill enough that surgery was suggested, and Bertha had cared for her during the fall of 1907.[661] According to Wolsey, Bertha had "everything she wanted + went to every entertainment that I went to"[662] but this was not enough to keep Bertha away from her family. Again, it was suggested that Bertha would be best off in a home outside of the city, away from any influence of her family.

Instead, Bertha was sent to work in a boarding home as a servant. From here, she wrote Gardiner several letters about her unhappiness, indicating that her family had stopped any contact with her and that she had "learned by experience that relatives…is some are not as good as friends."[663] She also wrote several times asking for further examination of her eyes, some pocket money from the Children's Aid Society who were still her official guardians, and about the possibility of her training to be a nurse, for "I am strong and healthy and my eyes are much better since I left school."[664] Gardiner responded to these letters with encouragement, promising

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[659] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Bertha Capps," July 15, 1907.
[660] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Kathleen Wolsey to H. F. Gardiner," April 21, 1908.
[661] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," November 21, 1907.
[662] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Kathleen Wolsey to H. F. Gardiner," April 21, 1908.
[663] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," July 26, 1909.
[664] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," July 26, 1909.

to write to the Children's Aid Society to see if Bertha could be trained as a nurse and encouraging her to "do your full duty in your present position, which is the best preparation for more responsible duties when the time comes to undertake them."[665] Shortly after this letter, Gardiner was advised by the Children's Aid Society to stop all contact with Bertha, for "your correspondence with Bertha has had the effect of unsettling her in her present situation…."[666] In the last letter in Bertha's file, Gardiner wrote that he had been told not to write to her anymore, and told her to "be a good girl and faithfully attend to the work before you. Everything will come right in the end."[667]

Bertha's final three years of association with the OIEB would seem to have borne out the concerns expressed about her moral character. Despite Gardiner's best wishes and the support of several families in keeping Bertha during the holidays, both her childhood experiences and her contact with her family contributed to her being untruthful – an observation made about her character not only by Kathleen Wolsey but also by Sarah Farrell in 1904.[668] What all she was untruthful about is unclear – the only accusation with any detail was that she was lying about being in contact with her family. However, almost all students at the school were allowed contact with family members, with letters from parents and siblings to students referenced throughout the existing student files from the school.

Bertha received special attention throughout her time associated with the OIEB, with not only her principal but several other student families seeking to keep her from falling into bad

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[665] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Bertha Capps," July 13, 1909.
[666] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from William Duncan to H. F. Gardiner," September 22, 1909.
[667] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Bertha Capps," January 19, 1910.
[668] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Miss Sarah Farrell to H. F. Gardiner," August 15, 1904.

behaviour. Gardiner and other adults in her life justified cutting off contact with her family due to this need, as her family was viewed an unsuitable to her improvement. This example highlights the importance of a blind girl's moral character and echoes the concerns that were expressed by educators of the blind throughout the nineteenth century. Despite the school's best attempts to ensure her proper education, Bertha was rejected from the families attempting to help her due to her "untruthfulness" thus proving the belief in her poor moral character. However, despite the negative beliefs about her future, Bertha continued to seek more than what she was taught at the school with her desire to become a nurse. While tracing Bertha's life through the census implied that she did not ultimately become a nurse, her life did not follow the path prescribed for her.

Louise Deschenes – Girls as Poster Children

Louise Deschenes came to the attention of Principal Dymond in 1900 when a neighbour of her family's in Bonfield, Ontario wrote about her. She was described as "… a very smart girl 14 years old French roman catholic but speaks very fair English. She is not total blind but her eyes are very weak…[she] is afraid she might get blind at any time."[669] Her parents were initially concerned about sending her away to Brantford as they understood it was a Protestant institution. Her neighbour suggested a Roman Catholic teacher be sent up north to meet with the family and assure them that their religion would be respected by school authorities.[670]

As with other places in Canada, education in Ontario was still divided along religious lines. Catholic parents were concerned about their children going to Protestant-based schools, especially if they were residential schools that would be in charge of some of their child's

[669] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from John Tassy to A. H. Dymond Esq.," May 14, 1900.
[670] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from John Tassy to A. H. Dymond Esq.," May 14, 1900.

religious instruction. Under Egerton Ryerson, schools had become a place for developing the moral and civic character of the children of Ontario, with part of his focus being on leading the children away from his perception of the evils of Catholicism and into the Protestant faith.[671] Parents of a French Roman Catholic girl would be rightly concerned that a school run by the government might be attempting to indoctrinate their daughter into a different faith practice, so deciding to send their daughter to the OIEB was a clear indication of their concern about Louise's future in light of her blindness.

Louise's success led to other French-Catholic children attending the institution. Louise herself wrote to the OIEB in 1903, asking them to consider admitting the a partially-blind and -deaf girl, Malvina Amyotte, who also lived in Bonfield.[672] Malvina's parents also wrote to the OIEB, expressing concern that her lack of success in the common school made it difficult for her to learn her catechism, causing problems with her first communion.[673] They suggested sending her to the OIEB along with Louise that fall, and she arrived in Brantford in September 1903. In a letter to her parents, Gardiner assured them that she had settled into the institution and had already begun to make friends with the "few other girls who speak French."[674] He advised them that while his spoken French was weak, he could read to her any letters that her parents sent in that language.[675] In a letter to the parents of the French-speaking boy Ovile Daniels, Gardiner again referred the presence of a small French-speaking contingent at the school to assure parents

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[671] Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan, "Roman Catholic Schooling in Ontario: Past Struggles, Present Challenges, Future Direction?" *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'éducation* 34: 4 (2011: 20–33), 22–3.
[672] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes to W. B. Wickens," August 1, 1903.
[673] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louis Amyotte to W. B. Wickens Assistant," August 10, 1903.
[674] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Louis Amyotte," September 25, 1903.
[675] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Louis Amyotte," September 25, 1903.

that their French-speaking children (naming Louise specifically) would not be alone, "as that he can hear his native tongue sometimes."[676]

The parental concerns about sending their Catholic and French-speaking children to the English and Protestant school cannot be understated. Eva Duciaume's parents needed a year of persuasion before they would allow their daughter to join Louise, Malvina, and Ovile at the OIEB. Eva's father, Solomon, was first approached about sending his daughter to Brantford as early as 1904, although she had come to the attention of the OIEB in 1902 when she was five years old.[677] In July of 1905, he wrote to Father Lennon of the Brantford Catholic Church, asking him to write to the Catholic priest at Rockland to ask him to assure Eva's parents that no "proselysation to the protestant religion" would take place.[678] When her parents initially agreed to send their daughter to the school in 1905, Gardiner wrote to them assuring them that their travelling companions would include four Catholic students from Ottawa, two of whom spoke French. These French-speaking companions would ensure that "there is no danger of Eva being neglected on her journey."[679] However, Eva did not meet this group on the train. Gardiner contacted Father Hudon, the priest in Rockland, to find out if she might instead come after Christmas.[680] Eva was sent to school for the first time in 1906 (perhaps due to the birth of her younger sister, Francine, who was also blind and later labelled an "idiot") and remained there for

[676] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Mrs. Narcisse Daniel," August 11, 1905.
[677] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Solomon Duciame," August 5, 1904; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Note by PJP."
[678] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Reverend P. Lennon," July 1, 1905.
[679] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Solomon Duciame," September 5, 1905. He does not indicate in his letter which of Anna Thomson, Edith O'Reilly, Joseph Boudrault, and William Thompson spoke French.
[680] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Reverend Father Hudon," October 6, 1905.

several years. While it's not clear the exact number of French students that Louise attracted to the school, her presence as the first French-speaking student encouraged parents of other French-speakers to allow their children to attend the English-speaking school.

Louise was a poster child for the institution in other ways as well. Throughout her time at the institution, she developed her skills as a musician. In several of the Annual Reports her musical performances are highlighted, including her involvement in the "Beethoven Club, which is composed of fourteen of the young lady pupils…[who] have of their own accord formed this most helpful little society for the purpose of improving themselves in the general study of musical subjects."[681] In later years she performed piano solos at various concerts and alongside other groups of girls both inside and outside of the Institution.[682] Her skills were such that her parents bought her a piano to both practice on and teach with while she was recovering from the treatment received in Montreal.[683] In her letters back to the Institution during summer vacations, Louise indicated that she wished to pursue a career in music, primarily as a music teacher, and sought out Gardiner's help in achieving that goal. She asked for additional piano lessons as well as lessons in the pipe organ, both of which were granted by Gardiner.[684] Gardiner wrote to the Sheriff of North Bay, describing Louise as fluent in both English and French and describing her abilities in both piano and organ as "above the average." He asked that the sheriff introduce her to people and help her find students to teach.[685] The sheriff responded that he would "do what I

[681] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind Brantford For the Year Ending September 30th, 1904*, (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1904), 31.
[682] Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Blind, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind Brantford For the Year Ending September 30th, 1906*, 18, 19.
[683] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes to H. F. Gardiner," July 28, 1905.
[684] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes to H. F. Gardiner," July 28, 1905.
[685] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to H. C. Varin, Esq," May 6, 1908.

can for the young lady" but there was an abundance of music teachers in the area.[686] She reported teaching pupils during her summers away from the school, including her sister, before graduation from the OIEB.[687]

Louise faced problems in securing the level of instruction she desired. In 1908, a letter from Gardiner indicated that Louise (and four other pupils) failed their third-year piano exam and he encouraged her to return to the OIEB for additional instruction so she could pass the exam.[688] However, Louise was considering not returning to the school after unnamed difficulties with a music teacher who she clearly blamed for her failure to pass the exam, agreeing only to return to the OIEB if "there will be no more of that nonsense which was tolerated last term, for under such circumstances it would be useless to study under such a teacher."[689] Gardiner ultimately consulted with the Minister of Education about the problem that led to several students failing, but was unable to have the teacher replaced; "but I think I can promise you that you will received adequate instruction to enable you to pass the third year examination."[690] She did return to the school, eventually becoming a successful music teacher. As an adult, Louise continued to both teach students and participate in the musical life of her community. She described teaching students in Haileybury and the importance of "studying the latest methods so as to obtain all the best results with my pupils." She also wrote about participating in the newly-

[686] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. C. Varin, Esq to H. F. Gardiner," May 8, 1908. It is unclear when Louise moved to North Bay or if it was related to Gardiner's intervention when she did; her letters to and from Gardiner are addressed as either from Bonfield or Haileybury, but she appears in the 1921 census as living in North Bay. Reference Number: RG 31; Folder Number: 73; Census Place: 73, Nipissing, Ontario; Page Number: 12.
[687] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," August 14, 1908.
[688] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Louise Deschenes," July 25, 1908.
[689] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," August 14, 1908.
[690] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Louise Deschenes," September 12, 1908.

built Cathedral's choir and sent Gardiner a programme of the concert in which she participated.[691]

Louise was one of several students who repeatedly sought out medical treatment for her eye condition, and many of her letters (as well as letters from her parents) reference treatments she received in Montreal. In 1904, Gardiner wrote to her that the school's oculist had described the cornea of her eyes as being "like pounded glass," advising her not to "allow yourself to hope too much from an operation, and then give way to bitter disappointment if the results are short of your expectations." However, he did suggest that the treatment would "cure the inflammation about the eyelids, thus sparing you much pain and greatly improving your looks, which is always more or less an object with a young lady."[692] The exact treatment Louise received is unclear; however, she was still in hospital when school began in September of 1904.[693] By April 1905, she was back at home, although still not attending school as her eyes recovered.[694] After graduation, she continued to receive treatments, reporting in 1909 that she had to postpone beginning her work teaching. Her doctor in Montreal was "the only one who can improve my eyes you know."[695] Her eyes were weak enough that she referred to borrowing point print books from the OIEB's library, and many of her letters seem to have been written by a sighted scribe (likely her sister) rather than written by Louise herself.[696]

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[691] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," May 27, 1912.
[692] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Louise Deschenes," August 1, 1904.
[693] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Antoine Deschenes," November 15, 1904.
[694] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Louise Deschenes," April 17, 1905.
[695] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," November 4, 1909.
[696] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," September 27, 1909.

After graduation, Louise continued to live with family members, partially fulfilling the goal of being a "sunshine in the household" expected for blind girls and women. However, she also continued to work as a music teacher while living with her sister in Haileybury, Ontario, a French-speaking town near the Quebec border.[697] She also moved in as a lodger with a family in North Bay, supporting herself as a music teacher there (presumably with the help Gardiner arranged for her from the sheriff there) in the 1920s as a 35-year-old spinster.[698] She continued to write to Gardiner for several years. Despite her parents' fears, she continued to be identified as a Roman Catholic in the census.

Louise did lead the life that was expected of a blind girl by male educators. While she did live for a few years away from her family, the bulk of her life was spent in the household of either her parents or her sighted sister. Her skills were ornamental in nature – she was clearly a skilled musician and teacher – rather than being ones that would allow her to be independent from her family. She became a poster child for the OIEB, an example of the success that could be obtained by any girl whose parents sent her for education. As a French-Catholic, she was able to convince other parents to send their child without risk of her losing either her language or her faith. As a poster child, Louise directly contributed to the growing success of the school and encouraged more people to send their beloved blind children for the education available to them.

Janet Barr – A Disappointing Girl

Piecing together an exact timeline of Janet Barr's time at the OIEB is difficult – many of her letters have dates but do not indicate the year, and the ones from her mother often do not include the dates at all. As such, it is not clear when Janet first attended the OIEB. Her family was in touch with the school as early as 1902, when Janet was 19. Her mother, Mary, wrote to

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[697] "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," May 27, 1912.
[698] Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*.

the school describing Janet's vision as being able to "see out of her left eye a little she always says she can see a little out of it."[699] She was frequently ill, and many of the letters between Gardiner and her mother indicate either that Janet was too ill to return to school at the end of vacation time or suggesting that she return home at mid-term as the school was a "poor place for a sick person, and she is not fit for work."[700] For example, after being sent home sometime in November, 1905, Janet's mother wrote several notes to Gardiner first asking that Janet return as she was "very anxious" to continue her studies, then suggesting she stay home past the ending of winter break so if she "gets stronger she can return…I don't want her 2 go + come right back," followed by a request for her return in February as the doctor reported "she would be just as well back 2 school as she is here for she would have something 2 draw her attention she would not feel so lonely as she does here" and asking that the OIEB keep her till June.[701]

After initially leaving the school, Janet wrote to Gardiner requesting a return as "the people around Ancaster are telling if they were me they would go back and take another year of music."[702] The letters between her and Gardiner during this time have a pleasant and familiar tone to them, likely in part because she was an "over age" pupil during much of her time at the OIEB. In letters about her return, Gardiner describes her as an "excellent pupil" and that he was "pleased to recommend her re-admission."[703] Gardiner addresses her as "My Dear Janet" in his

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[699] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to A. H. Dymond," January 26, 1902.
[700] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Mary Barr," October 27, 1905.
[701] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to H. F. Gardiner," December 1905; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to H. F. Gardiner," n.d. 1; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to H. F. Gardiner," n.d. 2.
[702] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Janet Barr to H. F. Gardiner," August 13, 1906.
[703] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to A. H. U. Colquhoun," August 17, 1906.

letters to her, signing them "from your friend" rather than his more standard "Yours truly".[704] He shares more intimate gossip with her, describing how he had decided to no longer retain the services of "mine ancient enemy Thomas Truss."[705] Mary Barr's letters to Gardiner describe Janet as having "a very high opinion of you and I am proud she has for I do like to hear a child praise their teachers."[706]

Janet returned to the OIEB in the fall of 1906, having received special permission to do so from the Deputy Minister of Education as she was 23 years old – two years beyond the cut-off date for the institution.[707] She wrote to Gardiner to return to the school to learn more music and knitting, skills that would allow her to be both a sunshine in the household and also help contribute to her family's income after her father's death.[708] A letter from her mother implies that Janet's contributions immediately after her father's death were necessary as "I am in poverty since Mr Barr died that I find I wont [sic] be able 2 [sic] spare Janet just now."[709] It is not clear how Janet was contributing to the family financially, but clearly she was an important part of the family's income.

Whatever relationship Janet had with the school was terminated suddenly in 1910. In December, Gardiner wrote two letters to Janet ordering her to never again return to the school as her behaviour "forfeited the right to courtesies due to ordinary visitors. Some pupils are ready

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[704] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Janet Barr," August 13, 1904.
[705] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Janet Barr," August 15, 1906.
[706] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to H. F. Gardiner," August 20, 1906.
[707] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to A. H. U. Colquhoun," August 17, 1906.
[708] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Janet Barr to H. F. Gardiner," August 16, 1906.
[709] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to H. F. Gardiner," September 1905.

enough to violate rules without being put up to it by outsiders."[710] In a second letter written just a few days later, Gardiner told her "it ill became you to make mischief after you left."[711] Two boys – Tom McAvoy and David McCaul – were also named in the letters, with Gardiner informing her that McAvoy's father had gone so far as to take his son out of school due to her influence.

Not surprisingly, these letters only make allusions to what Janet did that made Gardiner cut off her contact with the OIEB. He describes her as telling McAvoy to "come out spend the evening with you, but be sure not to let Gardiner know where was going" and also a "letter in which you referred to the pleasant evening you had with [McAvoy] and David McCaul."[712] In an undated letter from her mother to Gardiner, Mary Barr defended her daughter's behaviour, claiming she "never done anything there she need be ashamed of she talked to the boys nothing further."[713] Whatever it was that Janet did, it was enough to completely cut off ties between her and her former friend and advocate, and Janet disappeared from the records of the school.

Relationships Formed at School

Gardiner's request that the students write to him during summer vacations leaves a record of at least some of the relationships, both friendly and unfriendly, between girls at the OIEB.[714] This provides a unique opportunity to examine how friendships developed and influenced the lives of girls and women as they left the school. As with Bertha Capps and Janet Barr, we can see that the relationships formed at school could have long-term consequences to a girl's future,

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[710] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Janet Barr," December 13, 1910.
[711] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Janet Barr," December 17, 1910.
[712] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Janet Barr," December 17, 1910.
[713] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Barr to H. F. Gardiner," September 26 (no year).
[714] "I have had letters from nearly all the girls and quite a number of the boys. It pleases me very much to have them remember my request." Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Janet Barr," August 13, 1904.

with Bertha having become quite close to the Wolsey family before being asked to leave, and Janet forming relationships with younger boys at the school that led to some sort of scandalous behaviour. Louise's letters show how important a girl's success could be in encouraging other families to come to the school. Examining letters from other girls in more detail gives us more insight into how female attendees at the school saw themselves and their friends, although none of the other girls who wrote to the school have such extensive collections as Bertha, Louise, and Janet.

Friendships developed at school for the blind have not been as studied as those at schools for the deaf, and we do not have as clear a picture of what occurred between students at blind residential schools as a result. We also do not have insight into how students viewed the school after graduation. While letters from alumni give a view skewed towards those who had fond enough feelings or connections to the school as to choose to continue to write after graduation, they show what mattered to these students long after they left. The letters examined here show the network of relationships among girls, as well as the ways that girls attempted to use the skills they were taught at the school. Many of these girls and women wrote asking for advice, seeking contacts to develop their careers, or requesting books from the growing lending library for the blind that Gardiner maintained.

The networks of friendships become clear when reading the letters written to and about the French-Catholic girls who attended after Louise's journey to the OIEB. Malvina Amyotte, a friend of Louise's, wrote to Gardiner in 1904, describing she was "not lonesome of the school yet…but I think that you'll see me back at school again though next fall for I like youse [sic] all too much to stay away now."[715] Gardiner responded to her letter with updates about repairs to the

[715] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Malvina Amyotte to H. F. Gardiner," June 20, 1904.

school and information about the health of Lily Leonard and Albert Fall, both of whom had operations during the summer, a report on Bertha Capps's summer, and a request to ask Louise Duchenne for a letter as well.[716] Letters the following summer continued the exchange of information on the other pupils, including Malvina reporting that Louise was "big and fat and…very smart" while Gardiner updated her on the health of Alice Stickley and his first meeting with Eva Duciaume, who was also mentioned in Louise's letters.[717] Letters between Gardiner and Louise not only mention the French-speaking girls that she was friendly with, but also Maggie Liggett, Anna Hall, Lily Leonard, Gertie Coll, [etc] and in turn Louise wrote to the OIEB asking for the addresses of former pupils she had participated in musical activities with in 1912.

Bertha's correspondence also show how she made friends at the OIEB. Her own letters mention friendly notes received from or sent to Grace Knight, Maggie Green, Beatrice McCannan, Angelina Prosser, Lily Leonard, as well as visits from Lulu Rennie. Janet Barr mentions hearing from "a great many" of her fellow pupils during the summer of 1906, specifically relaying that Pearl Nevin had married during the summer break, much to Gardiner's surprise. Janet's letters also indicate strong friendships between the girls, as her mother asks that Eva Johnson be allowed to collect a box that she had sent Janet and "let her divide them up with the girls" as Janet had already returned home due to illness. Again, these letters make clear that the girls were involved in one another's lives, not only while at school but at home or on vacation.

[716] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Malvina Amyotte," June 25, 1904.
[717] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Malvina Amyotte to H. F. Gardiner," July 3, 1905; Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from H. F. Gardiner to Malvina Amyotte," July 9, 1905.

In many cases young women continued to write to Gardiner after graduation, whether updating him on their activities, asking for favours from him, or borrowing books from the lending library. Malvina again wrote in 1908 asking for advice on where to source cane for seating chairs, hoping he would be able to simply send her cane himself from the school's supply.[718] Malvina wrote again in 1913 to thank him for the books he had sent her, as well as indicating how much she missed the community at the OIEB, writing "I would like to go to school again to see all the pupils I used to know."[719] Mary Common wrote to the OIEB in 1909 to advise the officials there that she and her sister, who had also attended the school, were "disposing of their home" and sending along some of their music books to be added to the lending library. She also mentioned that she would not be asking for a new book for a few weeks while they got settled, "unless Volume two of Rebecca of Sunnybook Farm happened to be in. We have waited long for that."[720] Of note, Mary Common is listed in the 1921 census as being unable to read or write, likely an assumption about her capabilities made by the census-taker rather than a reflection of Mary's true abilities.[721] In one of her many letters to Gardiner, Bertha Capps described reading through *Nursing at Home*, a book written by an experienced nurse that explained "how to make a bed and different kinds of poultices + different other things"[722] This interest in continuing to read long after graduation is reflected at other schools for the blind as well, with Chapin from the Pennsylvania institute reporting that every female graduate of his

[718] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Malvina Amyotte to H. F. Gardiner," January 3, 1908.
[719] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Malvina Amyotte to H. F. Gardiner," March 1913.
[720] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Mary Common to W. B. Wickens," April 27, 1909.
[721] Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*.
[722] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Bertha Capps to H. F. Gardiner," July 26, 1909.

institution received books from the lending library.[723] Clearly, reading was an important part of the lives of educated blind women, whether by themselves or through others reading to them.

Louise also continued to have contact with the OIEB for years after leaving. In 1912 she wrote to Gardiner thanking him for sending the latest annual report and giving her the latest news about staff members getting married. She asked him to continue to write to her about the pupils at the OIEB and the successes of the school.[724] Girls who left the school without graduating also wrote to report on their activities. Vashti Baldwin, who left the OIEB to attend the New York institution after her mother re-married, wrote several times to ask after school mates Grace Kite and Mildred Miles, adding that she "had some pleasant times" at the school in Ontario.[725] The school became a home base for many of the women after graduation, through letters, the lending library, and Gardiner's providing of the school's annual reports.

The importance of the friendships formed at schools for the blind is also reflected in the autobiographies described earlier in this chapter. In her autobiography, Mary L. Day recalled the pain she felt at leaving behind her school friends the first summer she attended the Maryland Institution for the Blind, as she "could not have realized how attached I should become to those with whom I had been thrown so short a time. It seemed like one harmonious loving family, and I felt loth to leave them for even a brief space."[726] She later described "Sweet friendship, with her fond endearments, is as necessary to the happiness of the blind as to those who can recall glances of fond expression…"[727] Mary Niemeyer wrote about her heartbreak at leaving her

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[723] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Officers of the Convention. *Proceedings of the Second Convention of American Instructors of the Blind Held at the Indiana Institute for the Education of the Blind, Indianapolis, August 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1871*, 114.
[724] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes To H. F. Gardiner," May 27, 1912.
[725] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Vashti Baldwin to H F Gardiner," January 18, 1909.
[726] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 173.
[727] Day, *Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl*, 177.

school friends, explaining how her "heart was deeply stirred for I was sundering relationships not again to be entered into. I was leaving a life behind that had been full of genial incident to take up another that must have sterner experiences in it…."[728]Annie Kane described how she met many kind friends at the Baltimore school, "…but none better or truer than my beloved schoolmates. The blinds of affection are drawn closely around us, and the severing of a single would fill the heart with sorrow."[729] The friendships between blind students deserve move study as they show connections made at the schools that continued into adulthood.

As described above, school officials were often reluctant to allow male and female pupils to interact. The OIEB had separate playgrounds for boys and girls, and often funneled the sexes into separate workrooms when teaching them the skills necessary to support themselves after graduation. However, reading autobiographies and letters written by blind girls and women, as well as examining census records, show that romantic entanglements often began at school. Fanny Crosby, the famous hymn writer discussed above in the section on autobiographies, described how common "'tender attachments' of greater or less duration, were formed…The chapel was a favorite place for short 'spooning' sessions, and several students who could manipulate the piano, had preconcerted chords they struck, or tunes they played, to let others know they were there, and waiting for an interview."[730] Mary L. Day eventually married a businessman, identified in her autobiography only as Mr. Arms.[731] Previously in her autobiography she mentioned the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Mack, "both of whom were blind when married, and who both possess great musical talent…purchasing the home they

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[728] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 186–7.
[729] Annie Kane, *The Golden Sunset; Or, the Homeless Blind Girl* (Baltimore: J. W. Bond & Co, 1867), 143.
[730] Crosby, *Fanny Crosby's Life-Story by Herself*, 46.
[731] Arms, *World as I Have Found It*, 78.

occupied…"[732] Even reports from educators themselves mentioned female graduates forming households of their own, without mentioning the sorts of challenges blind women faced when doing so. Stephen Babcock, the blind head teacher at the New York Institution, described how "a number" of women who graduated from his school were "heads of families…doing their own housework and family sewing."[733] He drew particular attention to a woman who became a teacher at the school, but then left to marry a sighted man; alongside her five children she "cuts and makes her own and her children's clothes, plays well upon their parlor organ, writes long letters to her friends, and still find times to hear her husband read many standard works…"[734] Despite the intentions of their teachers, girls and women were not reluctant to marry, but instead sought it out.

Many of the graduates of the OIEB also went on to marry and have children. In 1912, a few years after Gardiner stopped writing to her at the request of the Children's Aid Society, Bertha Capps married Roy Wilson, an American from Iowa.[735] In the 1920 census, she and her husband were listed as having seven children.[736] Her former friend, Vera Wolsey, married William McKay in 1924.[737] Janet Barr married William Huffman in 1920;[738] however, the 1921 census located her (listed as blind) but not her husband at the House of Refuge in Wentworth,

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[732] Arms, *World as I Have Found It*, 32.
[733] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 18.
[734] American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Proceedings of the Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind Held in the Hall of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Philadelphia, PA., August 15, 16 and 17, 1876*, 18.
[735] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Registration of Marriages, 1869-1928, Canada, Province of Ontario, "Marriage Certificate 027027 Roy Wilson (Husband) and Bertha Capps (Wife)," June 25, 1912.
[736] United States, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Record Group 29, n.d.
[737] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Registration of Marriages, 1869-1928, Canada, Province of "Marriage Certificate 000956 William George McKay (Bridegroom) and Vera Evelyn Wolsey (Bride)," March 24, 1924.
[738] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Registration of Marriages, 1869-1928, Canada, Province of Ontario, "Marriage Certificate 004156 William Huffman (Bridegroom) and Janet Barr (Bride)," June 12, 1920.

Ontario.[739] Louise Deschene reported in a letter to Gardiner that she was able to manage all the housework when necessary in her family home, with her mother seeming "pleased" with her housekeeping skills.[740] She later went on to marry her sister's widower in 1929 at age 43 with her father as witness; her occupation was listed as "music teacher."[741]

Of course, other girls did not marry and remained in the household of their families for decades. Eva Duciaume, the French-Catholic girl whose parents were reluctant to send her to the OIEB for several years, lived with her parents as an adult alongside her siblings.[742] In her application to the school she had been listed as blind since birth, able to discern light and distant objects but unable to read large print.[743] She was not the only blind person in her family – her younger sister, Francine, was also blind.[744] Eva was still single at age 29 when she died of epilepsy on April 5, 1926; shortly afterwards Francine was sent to live at the St Charles' Home in Ottawa where she died at 31 from "acute diarrhea due to idiocy."[745]

What examining these letters and autobiographies together makes clear is how important residential schools became to the emotional lives of blind women and girls. As shown through the letters written back to Gardiner, girls formed long-term friendships at the school, and often continued to be in touch with their educators after graduation. The autobiographies examined here support a similar argument. While the friendships after school are not described due to the

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[739] Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*.
[740] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Correspondence from Louise Deschenes to H. F. Gardiner," August 12, 1907.
[741] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Registration of Marriages, 1869-1928,Canada, Province of Ontario, "Marriage Certificate 078707 Gideon Arthur Bertrand (Bridegroom) and Louise Anna Deschenes (Bride)," December 30, 1929.
[742] Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*.
[743] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Ontario School for the Blind Student Records, RD 2-377, "Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind, Brantford, Ontario, Form of Application for Eva Dusiaume."
[744] Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*.
[745] Toronto, Archives of Ontario, Registration of Deaths, "Province of Ontario - Certificate of Death 011797 - Francine Duciaume," August 15, 1937, collection: MS935; Reel: 583.

purpose of these published works – they were clearly meant to encourage people to financially support the education of the blind – the women who wrote them still described the friendships formed there as being important. In Mary Niemeyer's words, "The years passed [at school] were henceforth to me a memory with a radiant halo round it – 'a joy forever'."[746] While this was obviously not true for all graduates of the institution, such as Janet Barr and the young man who left school as a result of his relationship with her, these connections were an important part of the educational experiences of the women and girls who attended these schools.

Conclusion

As explored throughout this work, sighted educators of the blind felt they had a moral duty to their students to ensure that they would become good Christian members of society. Their educational goals were less about preparing blind children to be successful in the ways their sighted counterparts were, but instead to prepare them to be less of a financial burden on their family or on society. While earlier chapters have explored boys' experiences, this chapter's focus on women and girls examines both the educational and familial goals of mostly male educators. Girls were not expected to be self-sufficient or homemakers, but instead to be reliant on others throughout their lives in ways that boys and men were not. Girls were taught some simple skills that could support them if necessary, such as knitting and sewing, but these were meant as means of girls and women being useful to the household of a sighted woman. While in some cases, such as Bertha Capps', this meant learning to be an effective servant, in others, such as Louise Deschenes', it meant learning to be effective in helping her mother and sister run their households.

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[746] Niemeyer, *Light in Darkness*, 187.

Sighted educators had eugenics-based concerns around blind people having sexual relationships with one another. While some of this mirrored the concerns that were felt by all educators to keep their young charges apart, the majority of the concerns were about the possibility of passing along blindness to their own children. While no similar treatise to Bell's *A Deaf Variety of the Human Race* was published about blind people, these were clearly concerned expressed by educators throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Thus, boys and girls were separated at the school, and marriages between blind people were discouraged.

Examining the writing of blind women and girls, both published autobiographies and the letters written by blind girls for their sighted principal, shows the ways that girls both accepted and rejected these messages from their education. The autobiographies show blind women choosing to support themselves through sales of their stories. While these stories had other purposes, such as encouraging a philanthropic public to financially support schools for the blind, their primary purpose was to contribute to their family's livelihood. Although it is unclear how effective Annie Kane and Mary Neimeyer's work was at supporting their families, Mary Day became a public speaker whose speaking tours were a major source of income for her family. Each of these women's autobiographies made clear the ways they were willing and able to work, each rejecting charity to their best of her abilities.

Supplementing these works with letters written by blind girls gives us more insight into the ways that girls responded to the education they were receiving. These letters show a variety of blind girls – those who were considered in need of saving, such as Bertha; those who could demonstrate the effectiveness of an education, such as Louise; and those who were rebellious, like Janet. These girls each led lives that both included the expectations of educators and rejected them. All three of these women married, with Bertha having several children. While each of

them was trained for some type of paying work that would help contribute to their household (but never make enough to make them self-sufficient), only Louise continued to be a music teacher throughout her life. Their choices demonstrate the ways that the school had a long-term influence on their futures.

These works also show the importance of friendships in the lives of blind women and girls. The ties between blind students have been under-studied – to my knowledge, there are no other works that specifically look at the relationships formed between blind children that mirror the work done on the relationships formed at schools for the deaf. Both the letters and autobiographies demonstrate the importance of these relationships in understanding the residential school experience, with the autobiographies writing in broad terms and the letters going into far more detail. Blind girls cared about one another's vacation plans, sent each other updates about their lives after leaving school, and ensured that their friends were cared for during summer vacations. While it is unfortunate that none of the letters between girls have been located in the archival records, the letters that exist show that these relationships can be studied.

What is clear looking more closely at the lives of blind women and girls is that they did not simply accept the path laid out for them any more than boys and men did. Many blind women became voracious readers, personally invested in the outcome of the "war of the dots" described in detail in Chapter Four. They became wives and mothers, sometimes of blind men and sometimes sighted. They learned the skills required of them at their schools, sometimes using these in their own households and other times using them to support themselves or contribute to their families.

Conclusion

At the time of her death in the late 1960s, Bertha Capps had gone from being a friendless blind child sent to the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind by the Toronto Children's Aid Society to both a mother and a grandmother. While the surviving record cannot tell us the details of Bertha's life after she was forced to cut off contact with Principal Gardiner, we can assume that she was more productive than was expected of blind children at the time of her birth. This dissertation shows that most blind children born in the nineteenth century were capable of more than was expected of them at their birth. Parents found them to be helpful in the home even before they received an education, and many former inmates of the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind (OIEB) were able to support themselves after graduation.

Bertha's story highlights major themes in this dissertation. Wards of the OIEB were taught not only standard provincial curricula, but also were molded to be moral, upstanding, Christian citizens who did not transgress "appropriate" boundaries of gender, class, and ability. Bertha was denied access to her birth family because they did not live up to the social ideals deemed worthy of the OIEB leaders. Although Bertha defied stereotypes, she was subjected to the conventional treatment of all blind children in blind schooling systems. Bertha was groomed to be a helper who could not support herself, could not make her own decisions about her relationships (she was deemed friendless by the OIEB), and certainly should not hope to have a family of her own. Surrounded by mainly white children in the school, she was not exposed to racial and cultural diversity, and instead was educated in Christian, white ideals. She was groomed to be a member of the respectable poor who could not expect to better her

circumstances. And yet she married and had a large family. Bertha had both an exceptional and typical life for a blind girl in the nineteenth century.

This dissertation explores how blindness was both understood and experienced in late-nineteenth century North America, focusing primarily on Ontario, eastern Canada, and the eastern United States. It examines what drove nineteenth-century educators and government officials to assume that specialized and segregated education for the blind was needed and the process of establishing schools meant to accomplish that education. The OIEB was just one school of many, and was part of a larger, North-American wide discussion of how to approach educating the blind and how to ensure blind children grew into successful, industrious, and dutiful blind adults. It draws not only on these education debates, but also the responses to these schools from parents, the government, and the blind themselves. It engages with the broader discussion of class and gender with regards to disability, but unfortunately these sources neglect any discussion of race. Publicly-supported education was meant for white blind children only.

While the general public, the government, and educators of the blind tended to emphasize the helpless and dependent nature of blind children, the autobiographical reports of the blind counter these narratives. Published autobiographies and alumni records, surviving letters written by blind children, and even the words of blind superintendents of schools give us insight into how the blind understood their own lives. Autobiographies written by both blind men and women demonstrated the ways in which they supported themselves, whether through paid work or by being useful companions in the home. Most, although not all, of these documents reveal the community that blind people found in each other. Letters written by blind girls to the OIEB give a fascinating portrayal of the hopes of blind children in both their lives and their friendships. Even simple requests such as for updates on other pupils or the lending of books show the ways

that blind girls felt connected to one another. These documents show the ways that the blind sought to be active, self-sufficient, and contributing members of their families and society.

Despite the evidence that the blind wished to be productive members of society, the annual reports of the schools and the concerns raised by educators of the blind indicate that this goal was difficult to achieve. Educators of the blind were afraid of the spectre of the blind beggar, a stereotype that could undermine the work of the schools and thus threaten their funding. As a result, schools often emphasized the helplessness of the uneducated blind when seeking out such funding, while also inculcating in their students the need to reject charitable support once they were adults. Educators made clear in their discussions with one another that the technical training provided to their pupils was insufficient for their goals. Blind boys in particular were reminded to "live on two pence a day, but earn it." Girls were not taught to be effective mothers, but instead how to be helpful to their sighted family members. Despite this, we see evidence of the various ways that both blind men and women were self-sufficient workers and parents.

The chapters are organized to study particular themes that shaped pupils' experiences at schools for the blind. We learn in Chapter 1 that public expectations of blind children were that they would be a life-long burden on their families and society in general. They could never support themselves or form their own families. Chapter 2 traces the North American network of blind schools and the closer connection of the OIEB had with schools in the eastern United States rather than those in Canada. In Chapter 3, the dissertation shows how schools reacted to public stereotypes of the blind beggar to teach blind children how to be self-sufficient, but within restraints of class and gender. More important than professional skills and knowledge was the curricula to produce Protestant Christian adults who were humble and accepting of their

inevitable poverty. Chapter 4 explores the various systems of writing for the blind were developed at schools and how Braille came to prevail, emphasizing the importance of reading to the educated blind. Here, as in other debates, we find the voices of the blind reflecting their own needs and concerns. Chapter 5 turns our attention to how girls were treated in the schools and gives them voice by reviewing their correspondence with school officials and the limited number of autobiographies written by blind women. These documents show women who advocated for themselves and others, worked in a variety of fields outside of those taught by schools for the blind, and who married and had children despite the fears of this emphasized by schools for the blind.

This dissertation contributes to the history of blindness within North America, particularly within Canada. While other scholars have examined the important contributions of Samuel Gridley Howe and the early educators of the blind, their work has not included the wider context of the discussions across North America and into Canada. This network of educators of the blind is important to understanding the development of these schools and the importance of sharing educational techniques and the challenges faced by blind graduates. In addition, it addresses the debates about raised print text, focusing not on the outcome but on the arguments made both for and against each text. This debate demonstrates that the various educators involved in these discussions had different priorities for their blind pupils than the blind had for themselves in terms of reading and writing independently.

In addition, this work contributes to the broader history of disability in North America. This is not a discrete history, but part of a broader understanding of what disability meant in terms of dependence and independence, sheltered and unsheltered lives, and the means by which those labelled defective by governments, medical practitioners, and educators, sought to make

their way in the world. The treatment of defective children and adults reflects both the hopes and fears of North Americans during the nineteenth century, and the reform movements that led to the establishment of schools to educate the blind also led to schools for the deaf and asylums for those labelled idiotic or insane.

By mostly focusing on the experiences of children and their educators, this dissertation also makes contributions to the history of education, children's history, and, in the final chapter, to girlhood studies. Including the disabled in the history of education and the history of children expands our understanding beyond "normalcy" and "defectiveness," instead showing us the ways that these children were treated similarly to their sighted counterparts. As with other children, the goals of these schools were to graduate productive adults, even if the idea of what productive meant was different. As well, I am one of the first scholars to read the letters written by blind girls to the OIEB, and these are an important trove of information about what blind girls in particular perceived as the most important parts of their education and their lives. Girls are often overlooked in the study of disability as they did not write autobiographies or go on to found their own schools as their male counterparts did; here, we see their lives reflected in their own words.

The lives of the blind, both within and outside schools, are worth studying in their own right. Certainly "children of darkness" were disabled by their blindness. The broad public, their families, and their educations made incorrect assumptions that they were frail, limited, and helpless. Yet, examining their history in depth shows that they were not passive. Their autobiographies and letters reveal their friendships and romantic relationships, their careers, their successes and failures, and their struggles with depression and other medical ailments. Blind children's responses to the decisions made by their educators on which raised-print text to adopt or which method of instruction to include show that, even as adults, they had an active and

ongoing concern in how their younger counterparts were treated within the education system. The letters from their parents to schools such as the OIEB show that their parents wanted more for their children than was expected of them, whether that was expressed through keeping them at home as useful members of the household or having them sent to the school to find a trade to support themselves as adults. Their history is more than what we can find through the annual reports of their educators. Their self-advocacy and their lives deserve more attention and exploration.

Douglas Baynton wrote "Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write."[747] In Canada, this history is conspicuously absent in the histories that we teach as well. Disabled Canadians need to seem themselves reflected in the histories of Canada, beyond heroic narratives or simple stories of the past. Blind children and adults are as important to understanding the full breadth of Canada's history as other groups – not as victims or as heroes, but as people who were both dependent and independent, wealthy and poor, married and unmarried. Many historians in Canada reject the idea of a including disability-focused history in their classrooms. I hope that this dissertation can be one more part of the evidence that this is a history that deserves to be both told and taught.

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[747] Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, edited by Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, 33-57 (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 52.

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