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Industrialization and the Transformation of Public Education in New Bedford, 1865-1900

THOMAS A. McMULLIN

As late as the Civil War, New Bedford was a mercantile seaport specializing in the whaling trade, and it had little industry. After the war the immensely profitable whaling trade went into decline, and the cotton textile industry slowly began to replace it as the economic mainstay of the city. In the 1880s local textile production increased dramatically, and by the early twentieth century New Bedford had become one of the two centers of American cotton textile production, having one of the highest percentages of its work force in industrial labor of any American city. This essay examines the evolution of the response of the public schools of New Bedford to these economic changes.¹

In the two decades after the Civil War, New Bedford's school system paid minimal attention to the nascent industrial transformation of the community. Rather the school system had a reputation for broad pedagogical reform backed by liberal educational expenditures. In 1875 New Bedford's school system, along with Boston's, represented the vanguard of Massachusetts' public education in displays at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Three years later, a commission of the French government found the New Bedford school manual to be among the ten best in the United States. One of the reasons for the schools' reputation was the generous expenditures of the community for education. Until the 1890s, New Bedford usually ranked among the top Massachusetts cities in education expenditures per resident between the ages of five and fifteen.²

Another reason for the school system's reputation in the post-Civil War years was the superintendency from 1864 to 1887 of Henry F. Harrington. A graduate of Phillips Exeter and Harvard, Harrington came to New Bedford in 1864 after a long career as a Unitarian minister. His last pastorate had been at Cambridge, and Harrington was a friend of Horace Mann, Elizabeth Peabody, and others in the Transcendentalist and educational reform circles.³

Harrington's goal in New Bedford was to introduce and implement what one historian has called the "soft-line" education reforms of the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Although the movement differed in various cities, in New Bedford these reforms strove to "make school a happy place" where the educational process would teach students "to think" rather than "cramming a certain modicum of

facts about this, that and the other, into children's passive brains."⁵ The new method of education de-emphasized or in some cases eliminated the old stress on rote learning. One of the new thrusts was in the direction of what was known as "object learning." Education was to come not just from textbooks but from objects and drawing in the schools. Also central to the new pedagogy was the concept that students learned through the senses as well as the mind.⁶

In the early 1870s, at a time when the transformation of New Bedford into an industrial mill city was just getting underway, Superintendent Harrington's enthusiasm for educational reform did not extend to the new manual training movement. He claimed that advocates of "handicraft" programs hoped to "filch away half the ordinary school hours to give them to industrial training" Such a program would "cramp education into starving, paralytic impotence."⁷ In his next annual report, the superintendent complained that the public increasingly was perceiving education as a method of producing "better workmen for our mills and machine shops."⁸ By the early 1880s, however, Harrington's attitude had changed. The superintendent convinced a reluctant School Committee that sewing was a valuable addition to the school curriculum, and he also began to talk of other programs such as woodworking. There were several reasons for Harrington's shift in attitude: one was the realization that manual training fit in with his other educational reforms, particularly the emphasis upon sensate learning. Manual training also served as a "positive object lesson of the most excellent description because it combines so many points of instruction."⁹ While denying that specific trades would be taught in the schools, the superintendent and School Committee noted the practical benefits of manual training. Skills learned in drawing and sewing classes in particular would be helpful in some cases in earning a living when the student left school.¹⁰

Harrington also saw manual arts as an effective method of character training. During the same period in the early 1880s that the educator became a strong advocate of manual training, he also began to place a stronger emphasis upon the role of the schools in character building. Although Harrington did not articulate clearly why he began to emphasize character training at this time, he did speak of a general moral decline.¹¹ The superintendent also mentioned an increase in crime among all levels of society, stressing, however, what today would be called "white-collar crime."¹² Harrington's change in attitude toward manual training and his increased emphasis on character training in the early 1880s came in a period of greatly intensified industrialization and immigration in New Bedford. Historians have argued that education reforms in the middle and late nineteenth century were attempts to control what reformers considered the problems caused by industrialization and immigration. There is little evidence that this was the case during the Harrington superintendency. Harrington never discussed a relationship between industrialization and the changes, such as the soft-line educational reforms, that dominated his years as superintendent. The evidence indicates that school officials in New Bedford in the two decades after the war saw these reforms as ends in themselves, not as methods of control. Harrington's fears about a decline in character seem to have been more the result of events outside of the city, such as the political corruption of the Gilded Age, than responses to industrialization in New Bedford.¹³

Neither was the introduction of manual training specifically an attempt to impart proper skills and values to the immigrant workers in the city. Superintendent Harrington did hold prejudices about immigrant children and believed these students presented problems for the schools. Yet in twenty-two annual reports in which he devoted an average of one hundred pages to his own philosophy and programs, only once, in 1875, did he mention specifically the "problem" of immigrant children. And at that time he made no reference to New Bedford or its educational programs. Indeed, in 1883 the *Journal of Education* criticized Harrington for his lack of concern for the problems of immigration.¹⁴ If fears and concerns about immigrants and industrial workers did not dominate school policy in the years of the Harrington administration, in one area school officials did have to deal with the impact of industrialization. The Wamsutta Mills, New Bedford's first textile factory, employed a large number of children and a state law required that all children under age fourteen attend school for thirteen weeks of the year. The law, however, had no enforcement mechanism, and it was not until 1867 that the School Committee and the superintendent seriously concerned themselves with the matter of specifically educating the mill children. The planned doubling of the size of the Wamsutta Mills increased the urgency of providing for child workers. Striking workers at the mills in March of 1867 demanded an improvement in educational opportunities for their children. Yet the city's schools had been graded in 1866, making extremely difficult the smooth entry into the regular schools of students who only attended classes for thirteen weeks.¹⁵

In the spring of 1867, the school committee responded to the various demands by opening an evening school in the area of the Wamsutta Mills. Hoping to use the facility to comply with the state law, the superintendent opened the new school to child laborers as well as adults. He appeared before the legislative education committee to suggest a change in the law that would allow six months of evening school to be accepted as the equivalent of three months in day school. The legislature refused to accept the revision, and by 1869 local pressure emerged in New Bedford for full compliance with the law. The final blow to the short-lived experiment of using the evening school to educate child workers came with the realization that the children were driving adults out of the school. In 1870, the School Committee forbade youths under the age of fifteen from enrolling in the evening school.¹⁶

Harrington then turned to the idea of a mill school. Officials in nearby Fall River and several of the other textile centers of the state had established similar institutions. These schools ran year-round, with four sessions of three months each. Workers between the ages of ten and fourteen attended school for one thirteen-week session and worked in the mill the rest of the year. The School Committee opened such a school in 1871, but the first effort was unsuccessful because of a lack of cooperation from the mill officials.¹⁷ Late in 1871, the mill officials agreed to cooperate with the School Committee as long as the corporation did not have to accept any financial responsibility for the mill school. In January of the next year, the New Bedford mill school began operation with forty-two students. School officials soon labeled the school a success. At the end of the first year of operations the principal declared that "all such manifest an earnest desire to learn, and it is a real pleasure to teach them."¹⁸ Harrington was

also optimistic about the future of the mill school.¹⁹ Yet the mill school and the education of young mill workers was to remain a dilemma for school officials until the turn of the century. The most immediate problem in the early years of the school was the need to depend on the mill owners' good will for enforcement of the law. "An officer having charge of neglected children" reported to the School Committee in 1873 that when he went to interview the head overseer of the Wamsutta Mills, he "was treated with marked discourtesy."²⁰ School Committee members were also disturbed to find children as young as age seven appearing at the mill school in violation of the state law that forbade the employment of children under ten.²¹

The state legislature in the late 1870s strengthened the laws governing employment of workers under the age of fourteen. The period of education was extended to twenty weeks a year, and each child had to have a certificate signed by the superintendent of schools indicating that the young worker was attending school for the requisite period. Mill rooms and records were open to examination by school officials and enforcement was backed up by inspections by the state police and the levying of fines on overseers.²² While by the late 1870s the resistance of mill owners had ceased to be the major obstacle for school officials in educating child laborers, other problems remained. Many parents, dependent on their children's wages, were reluctant to take them out of work for either thirteen or twenty weeks. Others remained unconvinced about the benefits of public education. School officials claimed that parents falsified work certificates and, more commonly, lied about the date of the children's birth. Many, if not most, of the children in the mill school were foreign-born, and precise dates of birth were hard to ascertain. Frequent moves of mill workers' families made the situation more difficult. Although mill children never constituted even eight percent of the students in the school system, the reports of truant officers suggest that these children represented the most important segment of their work.²³ The large increase in the early 1880s in the number and size of the textile mills in the North End of the city created new problems. Not only did the number of child operatives increase in that district, but the development of the area meant that many were living a great distance from the center of the city where the mill school was located. Also school officials noted that an increasing number of mill families in this area did not send their daughters to the regular schools. The operatives claimed their daughters had to stay home to serve as housekeepers for the rest of their families.²⁴

The superintendent and the School Committee decided that the opening of a second mill school in the heavily industrialized North End might make it easier for these young workers to go to school. The plan was to give several rooms in the new Cedar Grove primary building to the mill school. Yet when the building was completed in 1883, a bitter fight developed over whether the mill schools should enter the new building. One problem was that the new school was located in an area where several mills had been built, and the superintendent argued that the edifice was needed for primary classes for the growing population. The debate over relocation of the mill school, which dominated School Committee meetings for six months, brought to the surface growing divisions within the community and problems with the mill school concept. In some of the most heated personal fighting in the School Committee in years, several members

argued that some parents of primary school students objected to their children associating with the mill school children.²⁵ The debate dragged on from February to June when it was decided by a seven to five vote to have several classes of the mill school moved to the new building. Still, unwillingness of some members of the community to have the mill children mix with primary school students remained a factor in the continuation and location of the mill school for years.²⁶

The mill school was the most direct response of the School Committee to industrialization during the years of the Harrington superintendency. Its role in the city's school system in this period, however, could be easily overestimated. The school never even enrolled eight percent of the total school population and in most years less than five percent. One could also oversimplify the motives of the superintendent and the School Committee in establishing the school. Without doubt there was class prejudice against the predominantly immigrant mill children and pressure to keep them segregated from other students. And school officials never questioned an economic system that forced families to put children to work. But within the context of nineteenth-century American education, it is unclear just what would have been a workable alternative to the mill school. Because the mill scholars attended school for a much shorter time than other students, with long gaps between sessions, and because the graded school system was based on the principle of a progression of studies, school officials could not place young mill workers in a grade where others of their age were found. The class prejudices of school officials exaggerated the "moral" dangers of placing these students with children several years younger, but putting twelve and thirteen year olds in the same class with primary school children of seven and eight would hardly have been a better method. Indeed, the State Bureau of Statistics of Labor reported in 1873 that young factory operatives were receiving an education only in the four cities in the Commonwealth with mill schools.²⁷ Neither was the mill school of the 1870s and 1880s a place where the school system could educate immigrant workers' children cheaply nor where a special curriculum would inculcate proper values. The mill school consistently cost more per pupil than any other elementary school in the city because of its small classes.²⁸

The mill school thus represented only a very small part of the education efforts in New Bedford in the 1870s and 1880s, and there is little evidence that even in this problem-ridden institution, the school authorities had a dominant goal of specifically controlling the social problems of industrialization. Other programs of the period such as "soft-line" education reform did not develop as a response to the economic changes that had by 1884 placed New Bedford third in the United States in cotton textile production. This is not to say that Harrington and the School Committee did not see value inculcation as a primary function of the schools. They clearly did. But their concept of value inculcation was a traditional one that predated industrialization and large-scale immigration. Political leaders and educators had long believed that the school should encourage the values held dear by the dominant groups in the society.²⁹ The actions of school officials, like those of the leaders of other social institutions in New Bedford during the early stages of industrialization, were not primarily centered on the "social control" of problems created by the factory system and by immigra-

tion. There were, of course, signs of change. Superintendent Harrington by the early 1880s had rejected his earlier position of opposition to manual training. The desire to use the mill school to segregate working children, present from the beginning of the school, became clearer during the debate over the location of the institution in the early 1880s. Yet it was only in the late 1880s and the 1890s, years when New Bedford had become a mature industrial city, that the school system emphatically responded to the impact of industrialization. These were the years of great growth of the local cotton textile industry. The number of operatives in the local mills increased from 1,983 in 1875 to 10,258 in 1895. The percentage of the population that was foreign-born increased from 22.1 percent in 1880 to 41.1 percent in 1895.

Upon the death of Harrington, the signal for change was the appointment in 1887 of William E. Hatch to the superintendency of schools. Hatch, a professional educator who at the age of thirty-six had already served as superintendent of schools at Milford and Haverhill, presented a marked contrast to Harrington. The new superintendent, like others of his generation, placed a much greater emphasis upon professionalism and bureaucratic efficiency than had his predecessor. Hatch immediately raised the professional standards for teachers. Within a year the school system opened its own training school and insisted that high school teachers have a college degree and experience or professional training.³⁰ In his first annual message, Hatch told the School Committee that "my report will differ much in character from that to which you have been accustomed." The superintendent's report over the years would deal with "facts rather than with theories."³¹ Signifying the new professionalism and bureaucratic centralization of power, beginning in 1890 the superintendent wrote the entire school report, and the members of the School Committee no longer submitted reports of their own. One of Hatch's first projects was to implement an annual school census, an irregular and sporadic undertaking during the Harrington years. He also tightened up requirements for promotion between grades, abandoning the blanket promotion policies of his predecessor. Hatch did not place the emphasis upon educational innovation that marked Harrington's superintendency. After seven years as superintendent, Hatch recalled that he had done "little pioneer work" in New Bedford. "The paths have been well cleared and defined by others before we have entered upon them. When music, drawing, and sewing were introduced in the schools, New Bedford became nearer being an educational pioneer than she has been since." "A wise conservative spirit" governed all new departures in the school system.³²

Hatch's model for the efficient bureaucratic school system was the industrial factory. In several annual reports just after the turn of the century, the school head made the analogy explicit between management of schools and industry. "Imagine if you can a successful industry managed on the plan that schools are run. As competition grows stronger in this country of ours some of our ideas will greatly change in regard to the administration of our schools."³³ In his 1903 report, the superintendent related in detail the conditions that made for success in a large manufacturing plant and he said they applied to schools as well. "The comparison of a school system to an industrial plant may seem altogether too materialistic for many, but the same elements that combine for the success or failure of one, combine for the success or failure of the other . . ."³⁴ In a

previous report he had noted that "a new expert has come into the business world within a few years known as a 'Productive Engineer' who instills Economic Methods. It might be well if schools in our cities could have the application of such methods to them."³⁵

The application of industrial methods of efficiency and bureaucracy to the school system was not necessarily a specific response to the industrialization of New Bedford, for educators were appealing to the same techniques elsewhere. But Hatch was much more concerned with the industrialization of the city than was his predecessor. He geared the school program more directly to the changes brought about by the factory economy. This was not unexpected, as the *Evening Standard* would recall upon Hatch's death: "He came here at a time when the city was about to undergo its greatest industrial expansion, and when a rapid growth in population was to bring with it new educational problems."³⁶

In the annual reports issued during the early years of his superintendency, Hatch emphasized the need for the school system to respond to the industrialization of the community.

When the decay of a former industry, in which this city was *facile principis*, called for a change in the business pursuits of her citizens, it was made and with such wisdom and energy that New Bedford is becoming as famous in her new industries as she was in her old. And she must not be mindful that as the success of her whaling fleet depended on the seamanship of her captains and sailors, so must the success of her manufactures depend on the mechanical skill and ingenuity of her artisans. Her schools should supply her skilled labor, and if they are to do it, they should excel in those lines which will make it possible.³⁷

The "lines" of education that would prepare students for life in the industrial world were the several areas of manual training. The superintendent wrote in 1892: "Can New Bedford, a city whose growth and prosperity is due to its industrial pursuits, afford to be a laggard in providing for her youths the kind of instruction which pertains to her very life?"³⁸

The schools already taught manual arts in the form of sewing and drawing. Hatch hoped to expand the programs to include cooking and woodworking, and in general to place a greater emphasis on manual training. After some hesitation on the part of the School Committee, particularly in regard to woodworking, both subjects were added to the curriculum in 1893.³⁹ Obviously the technical skills acquired in woodworking and cooking classes were of little value in a city where the cotton textile industry dominated the economy. Perhaps one of the reasons for the hesitancy of the School Committee in introducing woodworking was an inability to see why the teaching of such subjects was crucial to the industrial prosperity of the community. In his 1892 discussion of the subject of manual training, Hatch made clearer than he had before the connection between manual training and the success of industrial workers. "In closing, I will say that the tendency is towards instruction which is concrete and practical, as opposed

to that which is chiefly abstract. Whatever the future of the schools may be, their product should be wholesome, upright citizens, who shall recognize the value and dignity of honest labor and practice it, in whatever calling they may choose."⁴⁰ Just how woodworking would accomplish these goals was explained by the new instructor in the Sloyd method of woodworking in the schools.

Form study, the cultivation of the aesthetic sense, the forming of the habits of perseverance, order, accuracy in measurements and in workmanship, neatness of person, through honesty in the execution of his work, and including a respect for honest bodily labor—these are a few of the many principles which the Sloyd teacher strives to inculcate by appealing to the natural interest and activities of the pupil.⁴¹

In another report, the instructor argued that the work habits imparted through Sloyd training would be of "inestimable value" to young mill workers.⁴²

Courses that would inculcate the proper values for success in the industrial world were necessary because the textile industry's domination of the city's economy meant that by the late 1890s a majority of the elementary school children were from homes of mill workers. Most of these young people eventually entered the mills themselves, and Hatch had particular reservations about the ability of foreign-born parents from the working-classes to teach their children proper values. Speaking of the problem of the low numbers of New Bedford children who went to the high school, Hatch noted: "High schools in general, situated in cities whose chief industry is textile manufacturers, do not rank in point of numbers with those whose industries require a more intelligent and therefore better paid class of help."⁴³ In other reports Hatch noted that many parents "are ignorant and communication cannot be held with them except through an interpreter." "Many of these children have no refining influences at home, but the contrary. They, in fact, have few if any home advantages."⁴⁴

Through subjects such as manual training, the schools would teach "good habits" that would allow children from "deprived and depraved" backgrounds to function in the industrial economy. Among the most important values the schools would inculcate were punctuality, perseverance, and regular attendance. The superintendent was particularly bothered by what he perceived as the breakdown of these values in the community. Absence and tardiness were increasing in the schools, and Hatch warned: "There is always a large class of people, especially in cities like ours, who place little value upon prompt and efficient service. They do not practice it themselves and cannot be expected to demand it of their children."⁴⁵ Parents who were "ignorant or new to the country" failed to enroll their children at the beginning of the school year. Once in school, children of mill workers had to be dismissed fifteen minutes early to bring meals to their parents at work. "In some of the schools located in the mill districts whole rooms are almost emptied of pupils fifteen minutes each day before the closing hour . . . These same children who are dismissed each day to carry dinners are often absent also, and their continual loss of time has the effect of retarding the work of all those in the schools which they attend."⁴⁶ Mill

workers' families tended to move around frequently and during "hard times" to take their children out of school and put them to work. The foreign-born who by 1900 constituted 40.9 percent of the city's population often celebrated their own religious holidays and festivals that interfered with school attendance.⁴⁷ While Hatch was disturbed about the effects of irregularity of attendance on education, he also suggested long range effects. "Pupils who are frequently absent or tardy are acquiring habits by this neglect of duty which are likely to operate against them injuriously when they leave school. Employers of labor do not excuse laxity of habits in their minions."⁴⁸

Not only would the schools teach proper values for work in an industrial economy, but they would be the crucial institution of medical control of immigrant working-class children. In 1900 the Mothers Club of the New Bedford schools began a successful campaign for school medical inspectors. Mrs. Robert L. Baylis, a member of the Mothers Club subcommittee on medical inspection, explained the Mothers Club's position:

We are a mill city, with a large population living in unsanitary conditions and a condition of ignorance of healthful conditions. Homes where the parents work in the mill and where the children are allowed or forced to look out for themselves all day, naturally have children sadly neglected. Just think of children from refined homes being obliged to sit side by side with those from homes where contagious disease exists or where vermin are allowed to increase without restraint.⁴⁹

Superintendent Hatch, an enthusiastic backer of the program, wrote in support of medical inspection: "In a cosmopolitan city like ours, with many citizens whose poverty or moral conditions makes them indifferent to those things which the better class cannot tolerate, the public must take upon itself certain authority that may not be necessary to a community which is small, more homogeneous, and living on an average higher plane." The supporters of medical inspection were successful, and the program began in February of 1900. The inspectors found hundreds of cases of head lice among the children, and the school board and the board of health began a large-scale program of distribution of health circulars in English, French, and Portuguese.⁵⁰

While the New Bedford school system developed new programs such as medical inspection in response to perceived changes brought about by industrialization, older programs like the mill schools underwent significant transformation during the years of the Hatch superintendency. A state law passed in 1887 forbade the employment of children under the age of thirteen, greatly reducing the prospective clientele of the schools. In response to the decreased need, beginning in the early 1890s, Hatch suggested closing the two mill schools. They would be replaced by ungraded classes in the regular schools that would serve a larger clientele. "Backward pupils from different graded rooms could be temporarily placed in them for special work. Even some of the ambitious and brighter pupils who wished to do special work for extra promotion, might find in such rooms an opportunity to do advanced work."⁵¹ There were other reasons for the desire to close the mill schools. They remained the most expensive of the

elementary schools in the city. Disputes over the location of mill classes in primary school buildings continued. And in a period of intensified social stratification in the city, Hatch admitted the pejorative connotations of the name of the school. "As long as the name Mill school is applied to them, and they have a separate organization, just so long will all but pupils who are to work in the mills decline to attend them."⁵²

For reasons they did not really make clear, the School Committee through the 1890s voted down attempts to change the mill school structure.⁵³ Hatch continued his campaign for the ungraded classes in the late 1890s, although his proposals underwent some revision. Increasingly the superintendent was becoming worried about the mixing of children "from homes of refinement and culture" with foreign children, many of whom were "far from clean . . . suffering with some physical infirmity . . . unpleasant to the sight, and had no refining influences at home." He was beginning to suggest the segregation of students of the "greatest ability" from those of "lesser ability" in separate classes. Significantly at the turn of the century, when the School Committee replaced the mill classes with ungraded ones, the concept of using them for advanced students had been dropped. The ungraded classes were for foreigners whose schooling was not in English-speaking countries and those "whose time is so limited for school attendance that they ought not to undertake regular courses of study."⁵⁴ In the mill and later ungraded classes, particularly near the turn of the century, one sees the beginning of the classification or tracking of students along class lines that would become common in American schools during the twentieth century.⁵⁵

The beginnings of a movement for segregation of students on the basis of "ability," the introduction of medical inspection, and most importantly the emphasis upon inculcation of values needed in the industrial world—all marked attempts by school administrators after 1887 to confront what officials believed were the "problems" of immigrant working-class children. Yet Hatch and the local school system rejected some programs that educators elsewhere touted as beneficial for the education and control of immigrants. The New Bedford officials did so because of declining financial support for the public schools. The sense of community, that grew out of the earlier homogeneity of the city and until the 1890s had made the city a leader in school expenditures, now broke down. New Bedford's rank among the thirteen largest Massachusetts cities in school expenditures per person between ages five and fifteen dropped precipitously from second in 1890 to tenth by 1895. Even if one controls for the great increase in parochial school students, by 1895 expenditures per student in the public schools were relatively low in comparison with other Massachusetts cities.⁵⁶ Faced with the massive influx of immigrant children, the community was unwilling or unable to even provide adequate school rooms and teachers. Overcrowding of schools became common in the 1890s, and city officials were wary of actions that might increase expenses.⁵⁷ The superintendent had to balance his desire to control some of the "problems" of industrialization with the new financial conservatism of the elected officials. His admiration for the industrial system of efficiency and economy also served as a countervailing force.

One of the areas in which financial considerations clearly affected the actions of the School Committee was the kindergarten program. Following the pattern of kindergarten development in Boston and other cities, the originators of the movement in New Bedford were private charity activists led by Reverend Charles F. Hersey of the City Mission. Particularly in the mill districts, kindergarten supporters hoped to combine the desire of young children for activity and play with an introduction to order and proper values.⁵⁸ In 1894 the City Mission opened two charity kindergartens in the mill districts. The Mission, however, was hard-pressed to finance these classes and began to exert pressure on the School Committee to assume responsibility. By 1896 the School Committee had adopted the kindergarten concept and asked the City Council for funds. After a brief struggle with the City Council over funding, the kindergarten opened in 1897. Yet the fears of school officials about a lack of demand for the kindergarten were soon realized when attendance proved to be less than half the numbers that the classes could accommodate.⁵⁹ After the turn of the century the kindergartens continued to fall short in enrollments, particularly in the mill districts, where kindergarten advocates argued they had the most value. In 1902 the superintendent recommended the discontinuance of kindergartens because of greater needs at a time of financial cutbacks on the part of the city. By 1906 the school board agreed with him and voted to abolish kindergartens.⁶⁰

A vociferous group led by the private charity leaders, the Reverends Hersey and Frothingham, fought the 1906 decision. Both men argued that the kindergarten was particularly necessary in a mill city like New Bedford. Frothingham contended that mill workers' children especially needed the "gentleness of treatment, manners, and discipline" found in the kindergarten. Under considerable pressure, the School Committee reversed its position by an eight to seven vote, but a limited program of "sub-primary" classes soon replaced the kindergarten. While the New Bedford kindergarten had never incorporated the more expensive social reform-oriented aspects of the kindergarten movement, such as home visits and small classes, the sub-primary classes were basically just another year of school which would inexpensively introduce children to the routine of school life.⁶¹

Financial considerations also significantly affected the reaction of public school officials to the development of the parochial school system. While serious conflicts arose in other cities between public authorities and the parochial schools, such conflict in New Bedford was minimal. Despite their desire for control of the immigrant population, New Bedford officials made little effort to oversee the parochial schools. Superintendent Hatch noted in 1889 the financial advantages to the school department in not having to provide education for the children in the parochial schools. He stated that school costs would increase by \$33,000 if the parochial schools did not exist. Again in 1897, he reminded the School Committee that the parochial schools saved the city \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year. The addition of the parochial school children to the public school system would have necessitated the expenditure of \$200,000 on buildings at a time when the public schools were already vastly overcrowded. Such costs were not totally hypothetical, for during the 1898 textile strike in the city, the Reverend Charles Gaboury announced the permanent closing of Sacred Heart School because of a lack of funds. While the decision was later rescinded, this

example of parochial school financial instability undoubtedly reinforced the attitude of co-existence on the part of the public school authorities.⁶²

Financial considerations also played a role in the decidedly limited enthusiasm New Bedford school officials showed for the state law mandating the education of illiterate minors. Increasingly concerned about the growing numbers of young illiterate immigrants flocking to Massachusetts industrial cities, in 1887 the state legislature passed an education law with two important provisions. One forbade the employment of any child under fourteen who could not read and write simple English sentences. The other stipulation required that illiterates between ages fourteen and twenty-one attend classes. Under penalty of a fine, no employer could grant work to such individuals without receipt of school attendance certificates. The impact of the law was immediate in New Bedford. Over four hundred new students applied for evening classes in 1887, overwhelming the facilities. The next year another five hundred appeared, and in 1890 the committee had to turn away hundreds of students. The composition of the schools also changed overnight. In 1886, before passage of the law, at least sixty percent of the students were either native-born or of English, Irish, or Scottish birth; two years later, seventy-five percent were foreign-born who did not speak English.⁶³

Criticism of the law emerged in the School Committee almost immediately. One school committeeman argued that the law discriminated against minority ethnic groups such as the Portuguese and French-Canadians. Another member said he employed illiterates, and he knew from this experience that the law would not work. Superintendent Hatch, in his first annual report, sounded a pessimistic note: "Very many of the illiterates belong to a floating population; they are here today, somewhere else tomorrow . . . They scarcely get settled to their studies, before they leave the city, and their place is taken by others."⁶⁴ Hatch had reservations about compulsory education and did not agree with the state legislature's decision of 1887 concerning evening schools. "The majority of evening elementary school pupils come to school tired and sleepy when they do attend, are difficult to teach, and scarcely retain any of their knowledge from one year to another."⁶⁵ New Bedford school officials, unlike some other Massachusetts educators, did not stress the importance of the evening elementary schools for teaching proper behavior and American ideals to foreigners. An education program considered an effective method of dealing with "the immigrant problem" at the state level was considered by school authorities to be impractical and a drain on limited financial resources, especially in a city that had one of the highest percentages of foreign-born illiterates in the nation.⁶⁶

With the evening schools, the kindergarten, and the parochial schools, the conflicts in school policy at the turn of the century became clear. Superintendent Hatch and other school officials attempted to use the schools to deal with what they perceived were the most important problems brought by the intensive social and economic transformation of their community. In so doing, the rationale for school programs and policies had changed markedly from what it had been in the early years of industrialization, in the 1865 to 1887 period. Particular emphasis was now placed upon inculcating values that were believed necessary for success in the industrial economy. Yet at the same time, school officials

were unwilling or unable to supply funds to provide even basic school facilities, let alone support several programs of "social uplift" that were touted by reformers.⁶⁷ At the same time school leaders began attempts to minimize the middle class child's "contamination" by the poor through programs such as separate ungraded classes and medical inspection. With the ungraded class, the New Bedford school system stood on the precipice of twentieth century programs of extensive tracking and separate programs for different groups in the community.

Thus while a major thrust of school policies after 1888 was to inculcate a common value system, schools also tended to encourage further division of the community. One-fourth of the children were enrolled in a separate parochial school system, located primarily in the industrial areas. This system was further divided along ethnic lines. In the public schools the children of immigrant mill-workers were primarily enrolled in the overcrowded elementary schools in the mill districts. Few of these children continued to high school. In 1896 Edmund Rodman, a prominent member of an old New Bedford family, noted: "There are at present virtually three New Bedfords. The old town is the feeder of the High School The children of the large mill districts north and south never get as a rule beyond the grammar schools; therefore the High school must draw its scholars almost entirely from the center of the town, exclusive of the mill population."⁶⁸ The schools, the traditional American institutions of assimilation and homogeneity, had become agents of division in the industrial city.

By the turn of the century, the dilemma of education in New Bedford had become apparent. On the one hand, education leaders desired to control what they perceived to be the social problems of their city, and to inculcate values believed necessary for the industrial world. The goals clashed with the reality that schools were dividing and separating people in the industrial city. As industrialization had made the city more diverse, financial support for education dwindled. The dilemma which became evident in New Bedford during the late nineteenth century would persist in urban education in the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. Secretary of the Commonwealth, *Statistical Information Relating to Certain Branches of Industry in Massachusetts, 1865*, p. 100; *Census of Massachusetts, 1905*, III: 102; Melvin T. Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of the United States* (Cambridge, 1912), pp. 28-30; United States Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States* (1920), volume 9: Manufacturing, p. 660.
2. *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of New Bedford Together with the Superintendent's Annual Report for the Year 1878*, pp. 70-71 (hereafter cited as *Annual School Report*); *New Bedford Evening Standard*, 3 December 1875 (hereafter cited as *Standard*). For a comparison

of education expenditures in New Bedford with other cities of the Commonwealth, see, Massachusetts, *Twenty-Ninth to Sixty-Fourth Reports of the Board of Education, 1865-1900*, "Abstracts of the School Returns made by the School Committees of the Several Towns and Cities in the Commonwealth."

3. *Standard*, 19 September 1887; *New Bedford Standard-Times*, 28 January 1945; *New Bedford Daily Mercury*, 20 September 1887 (hereafter cited as *Mercury*); in 1883, the *Journal of Education* noted "We should be at a loss to find a more successful superintendent of schools, or a more effective public school system, than Mr. Harrington and the public instruction in New Bedford." *Journal of Education* XVII (26 April 1883): 264-265.
4. Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 132-153.
5. *Annual School Report* 1879, p. 80; See also *Annual School Reports* 1871, p. 92; 1873, p. 33; 1879, p. 54.
6. *Annual School Report*, 1879, p. 73; See also *Annual School Reports* 1872, p. 27; 1873, p. 33; 1879, pp. 65, 98; 1884, p. 74, Marvin Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870-1915* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 84; "Minutes of the School Committee," January 9, 1871, mss in possession of the Superintendent of Schools office, New Bedford; *Annual School Reports*, 1871, p. 22; 1872, pp. 8-9; 1879, pp. 86-87; *Mercury*, 10 January 1871.
7. *Annual School Report*, 1871, pp. 95-96.
8. *Annual School Report*, 1872, p. 78.
9. *Annual School Report*, 1882, p. 88; see also *Annual School Reports*, 1882, p. 86; 1883, pp. 20-21, 74; "Minutes of the School Committee," August 2, 1880; *Mercury*, 3 August 1880.
10. *Annual School Reports*, 1882, pp. 70-71; 1883, p. 78; 1884, pp. 98-103; 1885, p. 31.
11. *Annual School Report*, 1883, p. 95; See also *Annual School Report*, 1880, pp. 58-59.
12. *Annual School Report*, 1880, p. 59.
13. See particularly Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, pp. 112, 150, 159, 213-218; Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York, 1971), pp. ix-xviii; For discussion of the educational historiography of the period, Marvin Lazerson, "Revisionism and American Educational History," *Harvard Educational Review* 43 (May 1973): 269-283; Lawrence Veysey, "The History of Education," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982), 281-291; Selma C. Berrol, "Urban Schools: The Historian as Critic," *Journal of Urban History* 8 (February 1982), 206-216; Ronald D. Cohen, "Education for Racial and Ethnic Communities," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 5 (Fall 1985), 73-79.

14. *Annual School Report*, 1875, p. 67; *Journal of Education*, XVII (26 April 1883), 281.
15. "Minutes of the School Committee," October 9, 1865; *Standard*, 4, 12 March, 1867; *Mercury*, 4, 7 March 1867; *Annual School Report*, 1869, p. 11. Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves of the General Court, 1866*, Chapter 273.
16. *Standard*, 21 October 1869; see also *Standard*, 12 October 1869; "Minutes of the School Committee," 14 November 1870; *Annual School Reports*, 1867, p. 29; 1868, p. 25; 1870, p. 49.
17. *Annual School Report*, 1871, p. 32; pp. 89-90; *Standard* 2, 9 January 1871; 13 June 1871; *Mercury*, 13 June 1871; "Minutes of the School Committee," June 12, 1871.
18. *Annual School Report*, 1873, p. 15; *Standard*, 16, 28 November 1871, 12 February 1874; "Minutes of the School Committee," October 9, 1871; November 27, 1871; December 28, 1871; January 1, 1872.
19. *Annual School Report*, 1872, p. 64.
20. "Minutes of the School Committee," February 10, 1873; *Annual School Report*, 1873, pp. 14-15.
21. *Annual School Report*, 1873, p. 15.
22. "Minutes of the School Committee," September 11, 1876; *Annual School Report*, 1879, p. 92; for conditions throughout the state that led to changes in the law, see *Report Upon the Schooling and Hours of Labor of Children Employed in the Manufacturing and Mechanical Establishments of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Senate Document No. 50, 1875* (Boston, 1875), pp. 3-5.
23. *Annual School Reports*, 1872, p. 14; 1878, p. 24; 1879, p. 31; 1880, p. 33; "Minutes of the School Committee," November 11, 1878.
24. *Annual School Reports*, 1880, p. 34; 1883, p. 24; 1886, p. 90.
25. *Standard*, 6 February 1883; 19 June 1883. For other episodes of the continuing controversy, see *Standard*, 24 April, 8 May, 5 June, 13 June, 3 July, and 21 July 1883; *Mercury*, 6 February and 8 May, 1883; *Annual School Report*, 1880, pp. 34-35.
26. "Minutes of the School Committee," June 5, 1883; *Standard*, 6 July 1887, 8 April 1890.
27. Massachusetts, *Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor* 1873, p. 381; *Annual School Report*, 1879, p. 89.
28. *Annual School Report*, 1878, p. 23. Per school costs were given in each annual report.

29. See Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools 1789-1860* (New York, 1973). For a differing interpretation of the mill school see Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School*, pp. 88-92.
30. *Standard*, 27 June 1923; *Standard-Times*, 4 February 1945; "Minutes of the School Committee," 9 December 1887; *Annual School Report*, 1903, pp. 124-125.
31. *Annual School Reports*, 1888, p. 53; 1898, p. 57.
32. *Annual School Report*, 1894, p. 54; see also *Standard*, 25 August 1888.
33. *Annual School Report*, 1902, p. 105.
34. *Annual School Report*, 1903, p. 157.
35. *Annual School Report*, 1902, p. 103; See also *Annual School Report*, 1900, p. 151. For the impact of the factory analogy in a much larger school system in a city that had undergone industrialization earlier in the century, see Schultz, *The Culture Factory*, pp. 103-104; see also Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, p. 59.
36. *Standard*, 27 June 1923.
37. *Annual School Report*, 1891, p. 86.
38. *Annual School Report*, 1892, p. 86; for the development and implications of the manual training movement in Chicago, see David John Hogan, *Class and Reform: School and Society in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 152-165.
39. "Minutes of the School Committee," May 3, 1891 and December 7, 1891; *Standard*, 8 December 1891; *Annual School Report*, 1893, pp. 84-85; see also Hatch's remarks in the *Journal of Education* XXVII (21 June 1888): 388-389.
40. *Annual School Report*, 1892, p. 92.
41. *Annual School Report*, 1894, p. 83; New Bedford was one of the first Massachusetts School systems to introduce the Sloyd method of woodworking, which was imported from Sweden. For discussion of the Sloyd method see Ray Stambaugh, *A Survey of the Movements Culminating in Industrial Arts Education* (New York, 1936), pp. 90-102; Gustaf Larsson, *Elementary Sloyd and Whittling* (New York, 1906).
42. *Annual School Report*, 1898, p. 121.
43. *Annual School Reports*, 1894, p. 66; 1902, p. 140.
44. *Annual School Reports*, 1896, p. 57; 1898, p. 69.
45. *Annual School Reports*, 1899, p. 74.
46. *Annual School Reports*, 1894, p. 56; 1892, p. 48; 1902, p. 130.

47. *Annual School Report*, 1903, pp. 129-130; see also *Annual School Report*, 1895, pp. 4-5; *Ninth Census of the United States, 1900*, vol. I: *Population*, cix, 798.
48. *Annual School Report*, 1904, pp. 125-126.
49. *Standard*, 19 January 1900, 9 and 14 February 1900; *Mercury*, 19 January 1900.
50. *Annual School Report*, 1904, p. 167.
51. *Annual School Report*, 1892, p. 63; see also *Annual School Report*, 1896, p. 64; 1898, pp. 70-71.
52. *Annual School Report*, 1892, p. 63; See also *Annual School Report*, 1899, p. 87; See also *Standard*, 8 April 1890, 3 and 25 February 1891, 5 June 1894; *Mercury*, 3 February 1891.
53. For the text of a long debate on the changing of the name of the mill school, see *Standard*, 3 February 1891; see also "Minutes of the School Committee," February 2, 1891 and March 2, 1891; *Mercury*, 3 February 1891.
54. *Annual School Report*, 1903, p. 148; see also *Annual School Report* 1898, pp. 63-64, 70-71. The mill school had lost any real reason for existence with the passage of a state law in 1898 that mandated that children had to attend school full-time until age fourteen. Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves of the General Court*, 1898, Chapter 494.
55. Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School*, p. 201; see also David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, 1974), Parts IV and V.
56. For the comparison of education expenditures in New Bedford with the other cities of the Commonwealth see, Massachusetts, *Twenty-Ninth to Sixty-Fourth Annual Reports of the Board of Education, 1865-1900*, "Abstracts of the School Returns made by the School Committees of the Several Towns and Cities in the Commonwealth."
57. *Annual School Reports*, 1898, p. 67; 1900, p. 86; "Minutes of the School Committee," January 3, 1902; for newspaper accounts of severe overcrowding in the schools, see *Standard*, 25 April 1892, 23 August 1893, 14 September 1893, 11 September 1895, and 2, 7 September 1898. *Mercury*, 22 February 1898.
58. *Standard*, 5 July 1895. For the origins of the kindergarten movement in Massachusetts, see Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School*, Chapter II.
59. *Annual School Report*, 1897, p. 98, 100-101.
60. *Annual School Reports* 1899, p. 84; 1902, pp. 138 139; 1906, pp. 114-115; *Standard*, 17 October 1898.
61. *Standard*, 20 March 1906; *Mercury*, 20 March 1906.

62. *Standard*, 12 November 1889; *Annual School Report*, 1897, p. 32; Letter of Father Charles Gaboury to the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, and School Committee of New Bedford, reprinted in *Standard*, 7 February 1898; Letter of Father Charles Gaboury to Mayor Charles Ashley, *Standard*, 21 February 1898; *Mercury*, 8 February 1898; Matthew Harkins, Bishop of Providence, to Charles Gaboury, 15 February 1898, Harkins Correspondence, Archives, Catholic Diocese of Providence; for the bitter religious dispute in Boston in this period see Lois B. Merk, "Boston's Historic Public School Crisis," *New England Quarterly* 31 (1958): 172-199.
63. Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves of the General Court, 1887*, Chapter 433; *Standard*, 27 September, 1, 4, 5 October 1887, 16 February 1888, 1 October 1889, 1 October 1890; *Annual School Reports*, 1886, pp. 29-33; 1887, pp. 45-46; 1888, pp. 55-56; Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School*, pp. 214-215.
64. *Annual School Report*, 1888, p. 78; *Standard*, 4 October 1887, 3 April 1888.
65. *Annual School Report*, 1904, p. 152; see also *Annual School Reports*, 1891, pp. 43-44; 1892, p. 64; *Standard*, 8 November 1898. In 1894, the *Boston Globe* criticized New Bedford for its lack of commitment to the evening school program. Reprinted in the *Standard*, 4 November 1894.
66. For attitudes toward evening education in other areas of the state, see Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School*, pp. 219-222. In 1900, New Bedford ranked twenty-first among the 160 largest cities in the United States in the percentage of population age ten and above who were illiterate. *Abstract of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, D.C., 1904), pp. 115-117.
67. Marvin Lazerson has argued that Massachusetts educators between 1870 and 1900 concentrated their efforts on social amelioration of immigrants and after 1900 on the fitting of the child into industrial society. Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School*, pp. x, xxiii, 133, 244. This study of New Bedford has suggested that events in this city before 1900 were more complex and compressed in time.
68. *Standard*, 13 April 1896; high school enrollment actually declined in the 1890s and school officials admitted that the inability to attract mill workers' children was among the causes. *Annual School Reports*, 1889, p. 84, 1894, p. 66.