

**EDUCATION OF THE BLIND IN THE
ATLANTIC PROVINCES**

**Thesis written in partial fulfillment
of requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.**

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PREFACE

On the first of August, 1958, the Halifax School for the Blind completed eighty-seven years of educational training with the youthful blind of the Atlantic Provinces. One of the first services inaugurated by this Educational Institution, and one which has continued to the present with increasing scope and recognition, is that of the instructional care of those deprived of sight. Now, at the end of almost nine decades of useful and appreciated instruction, it is well to review the aims, history and accomplishments of this school.

The basic problem in the education of the blind person is to elevate his intellectual level above his surroundings so as to make it easier for him to obtain employment and gain the respect and esteem of his fellow citizens. The following exposition, then, presents the history of this struggle in the education of the blind in the Atlantic Provinces. The study will also record the educational methods employed and the many financial difficulties overcome.

The study brings together into one document the diffuse story of the pioneer efforts of Sir Frederick Fraser, K.B., M.A., L.L.D., D.C.L. and other trained blind teachers who ministered to their fellow blind. Such a record should be of worth to the Halifax School for the Blind because the pertinent information has not been previously compiled; it should also be a memorial to the labor, inspiration and loyalty of those who worked so diligently for the educational needs of the blind in the Atlantic Provinces.

The material upon which this thesis is based has been collected from Annual Reports, convention meetings, periodicals, books, personal interviews and correspondence with former graduates of the school.

My thanks are here tendered to those who have helped me, especially Mr. E. Chesley Allen, M.A., Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind; Mr. Lowell Legge, M.A., Principal of the Literary Department of the Halifax School for the Blind; Miss Mary J. Rhind, a member of the Administrative Staff of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of the blind has ever been one of sadness. Among the highly civilized peoples such as the Greeks and the Romans, we find complete indifference and at times actual cruelty and severity being meted out to these unfortunates. Even in modern times, we frequently find the opinion that this affliction is the result of some divine visitation which could be traced back to their sins or those of their parents. The question has often been asked: "Who did sin, this man or his parents?"

In ancient times no attempt was made to educate or adjust these sightless souls. Their lot in life was primarily that of beggars roaming about the city in the hope that they might stir the hearts of some kindly and charitable people. The fruits of their day were often harshness and ridicule.

This attitude towards the blind seemed to exist until the Christian era. With the teachings of the church, "Love God above all things and the love of our neighbor as ourselves" we see the first great change in the attitude of people towards the blind. It was quite

natural therefore to expect these afflicted mortals to congregate about the doors of the churches where they could expect not only kindly treatment and understanding but often relief from their pains of hunger.

Not all of the blind of those early days were able to share in the choice locations sanctioned for begging or benefit by the compassion of the seeing for the sightless. The great majority had no occupation and no source of income. Many were estranged from their families and rejected by mankind. They were forced to live out their lives in loneliness and wandering. During the Middle Ages these wanderers became a scourge in Europe and Asia. From this group, however, there emerged some who made such a deep impression on society that their names are still remembered for their achievements in various fields of endeavour.¹

Outstanding were the wandering minstrels or the blind bards who went from country to country; from court to court, singing "strains divine"² as the blind Homer indicates in his poem *Odyssey*, featuring the

¹Harry Best, The Blind (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p.254.

²Homer, The Illiad and Odyssey trans. William Cowper, (Boston: 1814) III, pp 185-86.

blind singer, Demodocus, who seems to reflect his own feelings regarding blindness. Ossian, another well known minstrel, the son of the Caledonian hero, King Fingal, who lived about A.D. 300, is said to have lost his sight in battle and thereafter wandered about the countryside playing a harp and singing songs of battle and of man's freedom.¹

I often fought, and often won, in
 battles of the spear,
 But blind and tearful, and forlorn
 I walk with little men:
 O Fingal, with thy race of war,
 I now behold thee not.²

Even in the seventh century, it is recorded that the Chinese blind were referred to as the men with "gong and song". While at about the same time in Japan the blind were recorders of the past. They were the reciters of history and verse. In France the bards sang in the public houses and in Spain they gained fame as singers at church and religious ceremonies. With the publication of books and the increase of travel, this way of life for the blind bards became limited since

¹Gabriel Farrell, The Story of Blindness, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1956), p.5.

²The Poems of Ossian, trans. James MacPherson (New York: 1810) II, pp.78-79.

the people lost interest in their entertainment and their lore.¹

From the fourth to the thirteenth century, the only relief afforded the blind was in the form of hospices. In 1260 there was established the most important institution for the blind so far brought into existence. This was at the time of the Crusades when a number of the Crusaders returned to Western Europe with their sight destroyed either as a result of punishment inflicted at the hands of the Saracens or as the result of diseases contracted in their expeditions. For these an asylum was created by Louis IX at Paris, known as the Hotel des Quinze-Vingts, in which several hundred blind persons found a refuge. It was not long after the commencement of this institution that women who had lost their sight by various causes were admitted. To support this asylum, begging on the part of the inmates was encouraged. This, together with charitable gifts or donations were their only means of preservation.²

During all this time, there is little reference to any attempt to attack the problem of educating the blind. Since most of the people at that time were il-

¹Gabriel Farrell, The Story of Blindness, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1956), p.5.

²Harry Best, The Blind (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), pp 254-55.

literate, any form of education that might have been ventured was purely by word of mouth. It is not until we reach the sixteenth century when learning was receiving attention on all sides that, so far as we have recorded accounts, the light of knowledge really begins to dawn for the blind.

The first real effort to bring formal instruction to the sightless was made by Giralimo Cardano (1501-1576), an Italian physician of Pavia. He had become interested in the education of the deaf and conceived the idea that the blind might be taught to read and write by means of touch. This was the first attempt to bring the sightless out of their world of darkness and ignorance.¹

Through the seventeenth century, we find instances where various efforts and experiments were made to contrive a device whereby printed words could be made known to the blind. Yet it was not until towards the close of the eighteenth century when a philanthropist, Valentine Haüy established the first school for the blind in the world, that the education of the blind was begun in earnest. His interest was first aroused in this field when by chance he noticed how the blind were ridiculed and abused in Sainte Ovidi's Market in Paris.

¹Harry Best, The Blind (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p.255.

Moved with pity at their fate, he said to himself "I will substitute truth for this mocking parody. I will make the blind to read, and they shall be enabled to execute harmonious music."¹ Haüy collected all the information he could gain about any previous attempts to give them instruction. Since the material available was scant he determined to begin his instruction the best he could with the hope new measures would turn up.²

The school was given the name of Institution National des Jeunes Aveugles and was under the patronage of the Societe Philanthropique. Haüy was entrusted with twelve blind children whom the society agreed to support. He achieved such miraculous results by the first printing of raised characters that Paris was overjoyed and donations poured into the institution. News of his results finally reached the court of Louis XVI, where he was summoned in 1786 to exhibit the attainments of his pupils in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and music. In the same year this apostle of the blind published an account of his methods entitled Essai sur l'Education des Aveugles. For a few years the institution

¹"Blind" Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed. Vol. IV, p.61.

²Harry Best, The Blind (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p.258.

seemed to flourish. Soon the novelty wore off and so did the contributions. In 1791, after the outbreak of the Revolution the school was taken under the protection of the state and continued thereafter to be a public institution.¹

The Emperor of Russia and later the dowager Empress, having learned of Hauy's work invited him to visit St. Petersburg for the purpose of establishing a similar institution in the Russian capital. On his journey Hauy was invited by the King of Prussia to Charlottenburg. He took part in the deliberations of the Academy of Sciences in Berlin and as a result a school was founded there.²

In the same year as Hauy's school was taken over by the state in France, a blind man, Edward Rushton together with noted and industrious blind individuals of England had Hauy's work on the Education of the Blind translated and circulated throughout the English cities. This aroused so much interest that in a very short time a School for the Indigent Blind was established in Liverpool. The concern for the blind continued to increase and it was not long before instructional schools sprung up in Edinburg, London, Dublin, Norwich and other cities.

¹Harry Best, The Blind (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919) p.257.

²"Blind", Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., Vol. IV, p.62.

After the beginning of the nineteenth century institutions for the blind were established in practically all the larger cities of Europe. It is interesting to note these early institutions were considered by the public as asylums rather than educational establishments as they were nearly always connected with workshops. By the time the task of instruction was to pass on to America which was towards the close of the second decade of the nineteenth century, the work was already upon an established footing in the old world.¹

The first school for the blind established in the new world was founded through the efforts and influence of Dr. D. Fisher. As a young physician, he visited many of the blind schools in Europe and became intrigued with their methods and brought back to Boston accounts of their programs for the blind and exhibited specimens of embossed books printed for their use. A committee was appointed to promote the establishment of an institution for the blind in New England. It applied to the Legislature for an Act of Incorporation which was passed March 2, 1829 and the name given to

¹Harry Best, The Blind (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p.258.

the corporation was the New England Asylum for the Blind now known as the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind.¹

In the next thirty years, there were approximately twenty-three schools, public or private, established for the education and care of the blind in the United States. This movement of concern for the sightless was to continue to grow until it pushed its way across the boundaries into Canada. So, in 1861, the first school for the blind the Nazareth Institute was established in Montreal by the Grey Nuns. Six years later in 1867, an asylum for the blind was established at Halifax.

¹Paul A. Zahl, Blindness (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p.4.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE HALIFAX ASYLUM FOR THE BLIND (1867-1884)

The founding of this institution for the blind in the province of Nova Scotia was due to the generosity of a successful Halifax merchant, the late William Murdock, Esq., who died in London in 1867. In his will, he bequeathed, in addition to various other charities, the munificent sum of five thousand pounds towards the endowment of an asylum for the blind, on condition that a suitable building would be secured at a cost of not less than three thousand pounds.¹

As soon as the conditions of the legacy were made known, interested citizens of the city immediately set about the raising of the additional money by subscription. When the sum of twelve thousand dollars was gathered, application for incorporation was in order and on the 7th day of May, 1867 A.D., an act to Incorporate the Halifax Asylum for the Blind was passed. On the 11th day of April, 1868, His Excellency Colonel J.H. Francklyn declared the following proclamation:

Whereas, the provisions of the first section of the Statute of the 30th Victoria, Chapter 50, entitled "An Act to incorporate the Halifax Asylum for the Blind", have been complied with, I do declare the said

¹First Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.4.

Act to be in operation, according to the intent and meaning of the said first section of the said Act, whereof all persons will take notice and govern themselves accordingly. And I do hereby order that the first election of Managers and officers of the Company, by the said Act declared to be a body corporate by the name of the "Halifax Asylum for the Blind", shall take place at the City Council Chamber in Halifax on the 27th day of April inst., between the hours of eleven o'clock in the forenoon and one o'clock of the afternoon of that day.¹

The first meeting under the Act of Incorporation to elect a Board of Managers and Officers was held at the City Council Chambers on the 27th April, 1868. His Worship Mayor Tobin was in the chair, when the following gentlemen were elected as the Board of Managers for the following year:

Hon. M.B. Almon	J.S. McLean
Chief Justice Young	John Duffus
Dr. Avery	M.A. Richey
John Tobin	Charles Murdoch
His Worship Mayor Tobin	S.A. White
W.C. Silver	W.A. Neal ²

The City of Halifax having agreed to transfer to the Corporation a certain portion of the South Common containing three acres, known as Carey's Lot and an arrangement having been made with Mr. Carey, the leasee to surrender his lease for the sum of five hundred

¹First Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.7.

²Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers for the Halifax School for the Blind, p.8.

dollars the proper deeds were executed and recorded, and thus the Corporation became possessed of the property on which the buildings now stand.

The building was contracted for by Mr. H. Peters in the summer of 1868, and was completed in the fall of the following year, at a cost of \$14,027.08. During the year 1870, the outhouses were erected, the property fenced in at an additional cost of \$1068.00 and an additional \$356.75 was expended in improving the grounds.¹

The total amount of subscriptions towards the building including a grant of \$2,000.00 by the Provincial Legislature was \$15,557.38. The securities for the bequest of the late W. Murdoch, Esq., five thousand pounds were handed over by Charles Murdoch, Esq. in October which brought the total amount of investments to \$24,000.00.²

By the Act of Incorporation the School was placed under the control of a Board of Managers, consisting of twelve members who were elected annually by the members of the Corporation. The officers of the Board of Managers and the officials of the School were appointed by the Board.

¹First Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.8.

²Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers for the Halifax School for the Blind, p.8.

As soon as the building was ready for occupation public notice was given in the newspapers and a resolution was passed by the Managers that, as soon as the number of applicants amounted to five within the ages of eight and eighteen years the institution would be opened. So it was on the first day of August, 1871, that the school was officially opened with two male and two female pupils together with the late arrival of an additional two pupils which brought the total enrollment up to six.¹

According to the first By-laws of this institution young blind persons of good moral character, between the ages of eight and eighteen were to be admitted to the asylum by paying one hundred and twenty dollars per annum, the payments being made in advance in half-yearly installments. This sum of money was to cover all the expenses of board, washing, tuition and medical attention. The pupils were expected to furnish their own clothing and pay their own fares to and from the Institution. The Board of Managers was permitted to give special consideration to applicants in indigent circumstances with due regard to the state of the funds of the school. Also, the Board, at its own discretion, was given the privilege of receiving

¹First Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.9.

day scholars upon such terms and conditions as they might prescribe.¹

The corresponding secretary for the Board of Managers was able to obtain from Mr. Chapin, Superintendent of the Asylum in Philadelphia, a blind woman, called Miss Dwyer, to act as an assistant teacher at this school. She was fully trained in this work and was able to bring to Halifax from the United States books and other material which were necessary for the commencement of instruction. The Board subsequently engaged the services of Miss Reynolds who had just completed her Normal School Training at Truro. She accepted the position as the first Superintendent teacher. During the first five months of instruction the Board appeared to be quite satisfied with the progress and interest of pupils in their studies. Their only dissatisfaction was the amount of money the pupils were able to pay. The highest rate that any pupil was able to contribute was \$80.00 per annum while one had to be taken free. The difference of \$40.00 plus the expense of maintenance of \$140.00 per month had to be made up from the interest of \$24,000.00 and the \$1000.00 voted by the Legislature in 1869.²

¹By-Laws of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, 1871, Section IX entitled "Admission of Pupils".

²First Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.9.

In 1872, Miss Reynolds retired and was replaced by Miss Catherine Ross who came as an experienced teacher with natural talents which helped greatly in the efficient discharge of her duties. In addition to the academic teaching, two hours a day were spent by the pupils in bead and wool work and cane seating chairs which training it was felt would possibly serve a useful purpose in the future as a means of helping them make a living. During this year, a start was made two evenings weekly in cultivating musical talent through vocal and instrumental instruction.¹

At the end of the school year 1872, the teachers of the institution put on a public display of the pupils' work. In this demonstration, the teachers questioned the pupils on the subjects of geography and mental arithmetic and showed the public the advancement made in reading, spelling and writing as well as the progress made in the musical field. The display was received by the public with surprise and it showed that although deprived of one of God's choicest blessings, the blind are largely compensated in other ways, such as a stronger power of memory and in the quickening of the other senses.²

¹Second Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.7.

²Third Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.7.

In the Annual Report of 1873, James F. Avery, President, announced with regret, the resignation of the blind teacher Miss Mary Dwyer due to illness but he was also able to report a fortunate replacement in the person of C.F. Fraser. He was the son of Dr. Fraser of Windsor, and had been thoroughly educated at the Perkins' Institution for the Blind at Boston. He had proved himself during the first few months of the school year to be a well qualified teacher and a man of exceptional musical talent. Already, he had taught the pupils self-reliance by permitting them to find their own way through the city. This enabled them to attend places of worship alone which added much to their enjoyment and independence.

In 1874, applications were received and accepted for the admission of pupils from the Provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and the Board of Managers of that year applied to the Government of these Provinces to join with Nova Scotia in helping to maintain the Institution by annual appropriations towards its support. The Legislatures of the two provinces named responded liberally to the request for assistance and thus the school became maritime and provincial in the extent of its usefulness.¹

¹Fourth Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.7.

Under the superintendency of C.F. Fraser the school was divided into departments under the headings of school, music, piano tuning, boys manufacturing and girls work departments. The commencement of a new department to learn piano tuning was a very important addition to the institution. It had proven itself in the United States to be a comparatively lucrative business so it was thought advisable to give the pupils an opportunity of acquiring knowledge in this field. Mr. Fraser also adopted a system of marking similar to that used in some of our Public Schools and a record was kept of the standing of the pupils in their various studies. The highest number attainable was ten, and first class certificates were given to those whose average was above nine. In addition to these administration changes, Mr. Fraser during the summer months accompanied by six pupils, visited twenty-seven cities and towns of the Lower Provinces in each of which he conducted a concert and a short school exhibition. The object was to make the Institution better known and understood as well as to make the pupils self-reliant men and women. Besides fulfilling this purpose, it served as a reminder to the parents of blind children of their obligation to help their unfortunate offspring to find a useful place in society. With the money raised from

the tour the school was able to acquire a new piano and organ.¹

In 1876, two important items were discussed. One was the changing of the name of the institution from the Halifax Asylum for the Blind and the other was concerned with additional facilities for the physical development of the children. With respect to the name it was generally felt by the Superintendent and the Board of Managers that the word Asylum was a misnomer as it signifies a "refuge" or "home" and therefore could not be applied to a school where pupils were only admitted for a limited period. Again, the name asylum failed to set forth the educational character of the Institution. At this time a definite desire had arisen for application to be made to the Provincial Legislature to change the name for one more expressive of its object. The Managers also warmly endorsed the efforts of the Superintendent to provide a Gymnasium for the pupils. They based their reasoning on the fact that for at least three months of the year during the winter season the pupils were prevented by the depth of the snow from taking active outdoor exercise. The effect of this confinement was evident towards the spring when studies, which in the autumn had been pursued with vigor, were then approached with comparative

¹Fourth Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.10.

reluctance. It was realized that physical and mental training were equally important but it was also appreciated that the proposed building of a gymnasium could not be achieved until the funds were subscribed.¹

The following year, 1877 saw the gymnasium and workshop completed at a cost of \$1,450.00. Of this sum \$600.00 was appropriated from funds under the Managers' control. The balance was made up from donations and the money raised on the summer vacation concert tour of twenty-eight of the cities and towns of the Maritime Provinces.²

With the additional workshop space, Mr. Fraser added three new trades to the mechanical department, which now included chair seating, mat making, broom, basket brush and mattress making. The girls were given the usual instruction in sewing, knitting, use of the sewing machine and an additional skill in the use of a knitting machine. The whole program in this department was built with the Superintendent's conviction that every blind person can earn a reasonable independent living if given the opportunity and taught the proper kind of skills.

¹ Sixth Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.11.

² Seventh Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.8.

The workshop was placed under the charge of Mr. David Baird, formerly one of the pupils of the school, who was sent to the Philadelphia Institution to be perfected in the various trades taught the blind.¹

In 1879, Mr. Fraser once again showed his farsightedness in establishing at the school a free circulating library for the blind of the Maritime Provinces. The comparative costliness of raised print books made it most desirable that a circulating library be established for use of the school graduates and for all those blind persons in the Maritime Provinces who had learned to read. With the establishment of this library one copy of the same work could be read and enjoyed by many individuals. Besides this, the reader would still be maintaining his sensitiveness of touch which he had labored so diligently to develop. In order that the library be complete and bear its maximum fruit, Mr. Fraser solicited contributions of either money or books from the various societies and the general public.²

During the summer vacation of 1879, the superintendent, accompanied by a small group of pupils, gave concerts and demonstrations of the work accomplished at the institution in seventy-five cities and towns in the

¹ Seventh Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.11.

² Eighth Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, p.12.

provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the greater part of Newfoundland. While visiting this latter province Mr. Fraser met several blind children whose poverty stricken parents could not possibly afford to pay the tuition fee. Yet they were not educated and would eventually require an annual pension from the government of that colony. The Board of Managers agreed therefore to admit indigent pupils from Newfoundland free of expense. Even with this generous offer no pupils arrived. This was blamed on the lack of money for travelling expenses, suitable clothing and the opinion many people had of the Institution as an asylum for the blind, and not as a school in which they were educated and trained for lives of usefulness.¹

It was found after ten years of operation, with the rise in the cost of living, the increase of expenditures and the increase of enrollment, that it would be almost impossible to maintain and develop the school without governmental assistance. Mr. Fraser, realizing the seriousness of the situation, proceeded to do something about it. In 1881, forty-five public meetings were held throughout Nova Scotia for the purpose

¹Ninth Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, pp13-14.

of presenting to the people the need for increased support for the education of the blind and for the advocacy of action being taken by the government and Legislature of the Province to place the education of the blind on the same footing as that enjoyed by the boys and girls with sight. As a result of this campaign a widespread interest in the welfare of the blind was developed and the resolutions calling upon the Government to enact legislation favorable to the free education of the blind were warmly supported by the leading men of Nova Scotia.¹

In 1882 the Nova Scotia Government presented to the Legislature an Act Relating to the Education of the Blind and by its passage free education was secured for every child in Nova Scotia who be reason of blindness or insufficient sight was not able to attend public schools. Clause 3 of this Act states:

For every blind person received into the Halifax School for the Blind pursuant to this Act educated and boarded therein, the Board of Managers of the Halifax School for the Blind shall be entitled to receive from the Provincial Treasury at the rate of sixty dollars per annum payable half yearly and also to receive at the same rate from the County School Fund of the Municipality to which the said blind person

¹Eleventh Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, pp. 15-16.

belongs. When such Municipality shall not comprise an entire county, the last-mentioned grant of sixty dollars shall be charged against the County School Funds of both Districts included within the County in proportion to the amounts of their respective school allowance derived from the County School Fund.¹

In 1884, it was decided by a vote of the members of this Corporation to ask the Legislature to change the name of the Institution to one more in keeping with its educational character, and in accordance with this request an Act was passed changing the name of the Institution from the Halifax Asylum for the Blind to the Halifax School for the Blind.² At last, the only institution upon this continent that retained this undesirable name "asylum" was changed in keeping with its true character; thus the Superintendent Mr. Fraser made one more stride towards the fulfillment of the aims and purpose of this truly educational institution by putting it upon an equal footing with the other educational institutions of the Province.

For some years, Mr. Fraser was interested in starting a loan fund to assist the graduates in establishing themselves in business. The Board agreed with the usefulness of such a fund but felt the institution could not contribute financially to such an effort. The Managers however

¹ Thirteenth Annual Report of the Managers of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, pp.15-16.

² Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.14.

gave their consent for the Superintendent to begin raising the necessary money for the establishment of such a fund. It was felt that before the loan fund could be operable one thousand dollars would have to be raised. This sum was finally realized in 1884, through the use of concert tours and the generosity of interested people in the Maritime Provinces. The management of this fund rested in the hands of the President of the Board and the Superintendent of the School and the disbursements were to be made with due regard to the wants of the graduates and the preservation of the fund.¹

The period of the Halifax Asylum for the Blind had ended and during those past seventeen years many obstacles had been overcome. The school had established a worthwhile and efficient curriculum, added a gymnasium to look after the health needs of the pupils, and extended its interest in the blind from the city of Halifax throughout the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland. The battle for government assistance had been won so that now every blind child in the province could enjoy the same free educational opportunities as the normal child. The institution, with the establishment of a circulating library and a loan fund, was now able to satisfy the educational needs of the blind and equip them for a useful place in society.

¹Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.14.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE HALIFAX SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND (1885-1958)

In 1885, the Halifax School for the Blind, as it is now called, had an enrollment of twenty-eight blind persons. These pupils came from all parts of the Maritime Provinces to attend this educational institution. Even though great progress had resulted since the Act to Incorporate in 1867, a cloud of financial difficulty threatened to limit the sphere of operations and curtail the usefulness of the Institution. An appeal for assistance was sent to the Provincial Government of Nova Scotia which prompted immediate action in the change of the annual grant from \$120.00 to \$150.00 per pupil. This extra revenue enabled the school to discharge its duties in a more efficient manner for the education of the blind.¹

Mr. C.F. Fraser, the superintendent, continued to administer the school in the literary, musical and work departments. The classes of instruction in the literary department were geography, reading, spelling, braille writing, pencil writing, grammar, composition, literature,

¹Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.7.

British History, natural history, arithmetic, geometry and theory of music. The music department continued to develop the talents of the pupils by giving instructions in vocal, piano and the instrumental arts. This department contributed much towards securing for the graduates employment as music teachers. They had on many occasions demonstrated to the public that their ability to teach this subject was comparable to any of the normal instructors in this field. The work department developed the pupils' skill in various trades such as the manufacture of baskets, chairs, brooms, mattresses etc. and through the efforts of this department many graduates were trained to earn their livelihood. The courses of instruction in all departments were directed towards the developing of all the potential talents of the blind child so that he would not be a burden on society but a self-sufficient citizen.¹

In 1887, two pupils were received from the Territory of Newfoundland and in that year for the first time pupils from all three Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland were in attendance at the School. All of these provinces have made some provision for the education of

¹Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 13-16.

the blind.¹

In 1888, several new studies were taken up in the school, but the principal new departure was the introduction of Froebel's Kindergarten method of instruction which adapted itself particularly well to the needs of the very young blind. The mat-weaving, modeling in clay, drawing and peg boards and the Kindergarten games all served to improve the sense of touch by training the hand and developing the mental perception of the pupils. In order to further this development Mr. Fraser established a workshop for the training of the boys in the use of saws, planes and other carpenter tools. Because of these new developments and with the increase of pupils, Mr. Fraser found it necessary to resign his position as instructor in the musical tuning department in order that he might devote his time and energy in the performance of administrative and supervisory functions.²

This institution, when originally constructed was to accommodate thirty pupils but now in 1889 had an enrollment of eighteen boys and twelve girls with several applications for the forthcoming year filed. It was obvious to the Board of Managers that additional accommodations had to be found, so it was decided to assume

¹ Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.17.

² Eighteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.17.

this responsibility by extending the present building. The Board relied largely on the generosity of the Legislature of Nova Scotia and of the public of the Maritime Provinces for additional funds for this expansion program. In 1890, a contract was entered into with Samuel A. Marshall to construct the new wing and make certain alterations in the main building at a cost of \$12,975.00. This together with the cost of the heating apparatus, the services of an architect and the furniture and fittings brought the total cost of the new building, when ready for occupation, to about \$16,000.00. The Legislature of Nova Scotia answered the appeal for financial assistance in this project to the extent of \$4000.00. The late S.A. White bequeathed \$1000.00 and \$3000.00 was appropriated from previous bequests. The Superintendent, Mr. C.F. Fraser, raised \$5000.00 by subscription and felt the remaining \$3000.00 would be raised in a similar manner.¹

The new building or east wing of the school was completed and occupied in 1891. It had a culinary department in the basement; on the ground floor two fine sitting rooms and a commodious assembly hall; on the first floor, six music rooms, two dormitories, and a hospital room;

¹Twentieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.8.

On the second floor, teachers' sleeping rooms and seven dormitories. This addition provided accommodations for two teachers and thirty-two pupils.¹

The following year, 1892, Mr. C.F. Fraser and a representative party of the School visited St. John, Moncton, Fredericton and Sackville with the object of holding meetings to stimulate the enthusiasm of the people towards free education for the blind in the Province of New Brunswick. These public meetings met with such a response that the Legislature of New Brunswick passed an Act which endorsed free education as a right of the youthful blind. These pupils were now admitted to the Halifax School, on the same footing as those of their sister province of Nova Scotia and no longer had to depend upon annual appropriations of their legislature as did Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. This was a tremendous step towards the unification of the education of the blind in the Atlantic Provinces.²

Although Mr. Fraser recognized his first responsibility was for the students of the School for the Blind, his work was not confined to the blind of school age. His work with the blind students prompted his

¹Twentieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.8.

²Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp.20-21.

interest in the problems of the blind who were not in attendance at the school, the blind pre-school children and adults.

On many occasions this superintendent had frequently observed these blind children, when they first came to school and noticed how retarded they were in all aspects of their development. Even though some parents showed great wisdom in teaching the blind child to do as much for himself as possible, the majority of parents needed guidance from people more familiar with the problem. Many blind children, moreover, were not allowed to attend the residential school because the parents were afraid to send their children away from home.¹

So in 1893, Mr. Fraser organized the first Extension Service in Canada to prepare the blind children for the residential school. He selected one or two of the senior students of the school who had poise and an understanding of human problems as well as academic ability. These young people although they had no special training were hired by the school for what would now seem a pittance, to visit the homes of the blind pre-school children. It was their duty to advise the parents about methods of teaching the child, and at the same time to explain to the parents about the school for the Blind at Halifax and the

¹Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 19-20.

opportunities that were there available to blind children. Their own cheerful, intelligent conduct probably proved their most convincing argument.¹

The other group of blind about whom Mr. Fraser felt concern was the adult blind who had lost their sight in more advanced years and had, therefore, never attended a school for the blind. To help meet the needs of this adult group Mr. Fraser further developed the School Extension Service. For them he felt a social rehabilitation service was necessary.

For many years those interested in the welfare of the blind in the Maritime Provinces had felt that an effort should be made to relieve the monotony of the lives of those who were deprived of sight after reaching manhood and womanhood. The youthful blind were well cared for at the central school in Halifax, where exceptional educational advantages were given them, but until 1893, no special provision had been made for the adult blind. In that year by the united efforts of a number of ladies and gentlemen throughout the province a sum of \$3,656.61 was raised for the purpose of sending a competent teacher to instruct adult blind persons in their homes and also to visit the parents of young blind children in order to give them practical instruction with regard to bringing up their little ones.²

As the Superintendent of the School continued his educational interest in the blind of what are now the four Atlantic Provinces it is interesting to review how

¹Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp 19-20.

²Report of the Home Teaching Society for the Blind of the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland, 1895.

the former graduates who were alive in 1893, are presently engaged. The following summary from the Twenty-Second Annual Report will give some indication of what had been accomplished by the school in preparing these individuals for a place in society:

Twenty-eight percent were engaged in teaching music.
 Twelve percent engaged in concert companies
 Eight percent in piano forte tuning
 Eight percent in business
 Four percent in manufacturing
 Twelve percent were giving instruction in, or working at, trades
 Two percent as agents
 Two percent in farmwork
 Two percent in literary callings
 Twenty-two percent resident at home - of these latter, a large proportion helped in the household and partially maintained themselves by the work of their hands.¹

This certainly is a creditable testimony to the accomplishments of the teachers who labored so patiently and perseveringly with these handicapped youths at this school.

Even though satisfied with the progressive steps made in the interest of the blind, this energetic and humanistic Board of Managers wanted to relieve not only those totally blind but also those regarded by the public as sighted children but who did not have sufficient sight

² Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.19.

to enable them to attend the public schools. They made a strong appeal to the public school teachers, clergymen, physicians and the press to send them the names of the handicapped children in order that they might correspond with and visit the parents so that the facilities and advantages of the School might be made known and enjoyed before the best years for educational work and development were lost. Most of the pupils entered the school at ten years of age and prior to that, they received no training what so ever, and many of them were victims of indulgence, ignorance or neglect which was needlessly responsible for retarded progress.¹

These appeals and publicity campaigns soon bore fruit and in 1895, the number of pupils increased to seventy. The existing buildings were planned for the accommodation of sixty pupils, but by utilizing the music rooms for bedrooms and making other changes, accommodations were made available for all the pupils. Under these circumstances an extension of the present building became an urgent necessity, so it was decided during the coming year to present the matter fully to the Government and Legislature of Nova Scotia and to the friends

¹ Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 13-14.

of the school in the Maritime Provinces. This seemed to be the only solution for the continuation of looking after the physical, moral and intellectual needs of the blind in the four Atlantic Provinces.¹

When in 1896, the enrollment reached eighty-six pupils a deputation of the Managers waited upon the Executive Council of Nova Scotia and presented the claims of the School and urged the Government to recommend a grant towards the proposed new building. On February fourteenth a minute in council was received to the effect that a special appropriation of \$6000.00 for this purpose would be recommended. With this sum reasonably assured and supplemented by subscriptions to the amount of \$4000.00 the services of Architect J.C. Dumaresq were engaged to draw up plans and specifications of the new building and alterations in the main building.²

With the addition of the west wing of the building, which was formally opened by His Honor Lieutenant Governor H. Daly on February 4, 1897, the accommodations for the blind were raised to one hundred and twenty pupils. This section of building cost approximately \$23,000.00;

¹Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.15.

²Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.7.

of this amount there was subscribed, including \$6000.00 from the Province of Nova Scotia, \$21,293.96, of which \$19,509.03 had already been paid in. It was expected at this time, judging from the number of pupils entering during the past two years, that these accommodations should meet the needs of the Atlantic Provinces for at least ten years to come.¹

The marked feature of the year 1898, so far as the education of the blind of this country is concerned, was the action of the Canadian Parliament in authorizing the Honorable William Mullock, Postmaster General, to allow raised print books for the blind to be transmitted through the mails free of cost. This new authorization cannot be fully appreciated unless one realizes that the postage cost of sending twenty-five volumes of the bible printed in Braille to and from the blind person's home, amounted to \$9.60. Freedom from this expense was a great boon to the blind.²

This year marked an important departure from the ordinary routine of the school's curriculum with the introduction of the teaching of typewriting. The manufacturers of standard typewriters decided to use one

¹Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.14.

²Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.18.

keyboard, known as the universal keyboard. A pupil or graduate who received instructions could thus write with ease upon any make of typewriter. This introduction of typewriting on the curriculum opened up tremendous possibilities for the occupation of those who were deprived of sight. Mr. Fraser, recognizing the potentialities of this course, immediately purchased two New Century Caligraphs for the Institution. The other departments of the school, literary, musical, workshop, tuning and technical departments continued to progress both in methods and techniques so that the blind pupils might better fit themselves for a happy, useful and successful life.¹

For many years the school suffered from the lack of suitable text books, which had to be obtained at a great deal of expense from the British and Foreign Blind Association Press of London. Even then, though the books were excellent in their own way, they were limited in number and not altogether adapted to the requirements of a Canadian School for the Blind. This lack of suitable text books in raised print had hitherto been overcome by the pupils writing from dictation such matter as their teachers desired them to study. It can readily be understood that the writing out by hand of these texts books

¹Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.11.

had been a slow and labourious process and had absorbed a larger measure of the time than was at all desirable.¹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, this difficulty was overcome when Mr. Henry M. Whitney of Boston, the successful organizer of the Dominion Coal Company and subsequently of the Dominion Iron and Steel Co., having had his attention called to the need of the School for an up-to-date method of producing suitable literature, kindly purchased and presented to the School an inter-pointing Braille stereotyper and point print press. These machines, which were manufactured by Harrison and Seifried of Chicago were of the very latest and most improved pattern. With these machines, the teachers or pupils could stereotype upon thin brass or zinc plates the subject matter which they wished to reproduce and from these plates could produce expeditiously up to a thousand copies in raised print at a comparatively low cost.²

Since 1871, not only had the pupils' enrollment increased from six to one hundred and seventeen but the

¹Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.10.

²Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 10-11.

teaching staff had increased from two qualified teachers to twenty full time instructors in the five departments. The literary department of the school in 1900 consisted of Miss C.R. Frame, Miss B. Cummings, Mr. S.R. Hussey, Professor Lenos and three assistants, who were doing most effective work. Miss Josie Howe, the Kindergartener, and Misses Campbell and Callanan, discharged their duties very satisfactorily on behalf of the pupils between the ages of six and ten years.¹

The Music Department under the guidance of Professor A.M. Chisholm, a former graduate of the school, assisted by Miss B. Studd and Mr. T.A. Hubley, piano forte teachers; Miss Corbin, vocal teacher; and Messrs. Covey, Hanson and Ivimey, teachers of special instruments, directed the musical talents of the pupils. When one considers the numbers of graduates engaged in the teaching of music, piano, vocal and instrumental music, the results certainly speak well for the efforts of these individuals.²

Mr. D.M. Reid, tuning master, Mr. D.A. Baird, trade instructor, Miss Allison, Girls' Work Teacher and Mr. James Scrimmgeous, Physical Education Instructor, all contributed a great deal to the complete development of

¹Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.11.

²Ibid.

the blind. It was through the patience and sacrifice of people like these, that the blind were able to face the world with confidence and a sense of independence.

All of these teachers were thoroughly qualified to discharge their respective duties. They were earnest, energetic and enthusiastic and sought by intelligent application to lead their pupils to higher planes of thought and industry. It must be born in mind that the musical and technical education of the pupils was carried on side by side with their academic school work, and to achieve success in these several departments involved more hours of study and persistent effort than was required of sighted children taking the regular course in the public schools.

The course of instruction in the School was arranged to meet as far as possible the requirements of the boys and girls of different ages and varied tastes and abilities. The younger children in kindergarten and the primary courses were given special care in developing the sense of touch and hearing, so as to compensate in some measure for the loss of sight. These pupils also received a careful training in the rudiments of music, including time, pitch, etc.¹

¹ Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.12.

The older pupils were graded in five divisions. The work of the first four divisions included all the branches of study carried on in the eight grades of the public schools with the addition of Typewriting and French. The fifth or preparatory division was intended for pupils who entered the school after they were fifteen years of age. Their work was confined almost exclusively to reading and writing in the Braille Point System and to the study of arithmetic.¹

Music, both vocal and instrumental, was studied by the majority of the pupils and those who displayed a natural talent or aptitude received a thorough and careful training as teachers of voice or pianoforte. When you consider this extra training in music and technical studies such as basket and brush making, and cane seating for the boys; knitting, sewing, crocheting, the use of the sewing machine, weaving and cooking for the girls, it is not difficult to see that Mr. C.F. Fraser's arrangement of the course of study involved a great deal of thought and consideration. The School's aim as far as possible was to train the pupils in becoming useful and active men and women. While all

¹Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.12.

the pupils benefitted by their academic training, it is obvious that were this instruction not supplemented by a special training, many would, at graduation, be unable to support themselves. This education and training outlined above was responsible for at least eighty percent of graduates being able to support themselves while the remaining twenty percent were partially self-supporting or at the very least helpful in their own homes.¹

In addition to the formal education and technical training the health needs of the pupils were well cared for at the School. They had the benefit of medical care from three physicians: Doctors Lindsay, Kirkpatrick and Cogswell who gave their professional services gratuitously. Preventive medicine was practiced in the form of physical training. The importance of physical exercise to those deprived of sight was recognized from the very beginning of the institution. The older boys were instructed to take part in many athletic activities, in addition to regular daily drills. The younger boys and girls were taught to swing, tilt, run and skip about the playgrounds with ease and fearless-

¹Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 12-13.

ness. On this spacious property there was a small lake measuring one hundred and twenty feet by sixty feet, which afforded the pupils a fine opportunity to paddle in the summer and learn to skate in the winter season. This undoubtedly did much to promote their health and happiness.¹

The work of the Halifax School for the Blind was becoming more and more known throughout the Atlantic Provinces, so much so that, in 1901, the enrollment, including staff, had increased to one hundred and forty-four persons.² Public recognition of the driving force behind this progress was attributed to a great extent to its Superintendent, Mr. C.F. Fraser. In this year, Dalhousie University, in recognition of the tremendous services rendered by him to the Blind of the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws.

In presenting Mr. Fraser to the President of the University, Doctor MacMechan, on behalf of the Senate, said:

Mr. Charles Frederick Fraser, M.A. has been principal of the School for the Blind twenty-eight

¹ Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.13.

² Thirty-First Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.6.

years. Through his personal exertions the number of pupils in that period has risen from less than ten to more than one hundred and the methods employed for their education have been of the most modern and scientific kind. Mr. Fraser has led the way in an important reform. Through his untiring efforts the education of the blind has ceased, in this Province, to be regarded as a charity and is looked upon as a necessary public charge. The Government of this province was the first on this continent to recognize its duty in this respect, and grant to the blind and deaf a free education. As a teacher, Mr. Fraser has been very successful in developing in his pupils a self-reliant and hopeful spirit. They have been made to feel that success in almost any calling is within their reach. This spirit, called out and strengthened by sound practical courses of training, is proving efficient in making those who, under less happy circumstances were doomed to life-long dependence, into successful and useful members of the community. In this, the direct outcome of Mr. Fraser's gifted and buoyant personality and of his unceasing efforts, our Halifax School is recognized as one of the very best Schools for the Blind to be found anywhere. Mr. Fraser's efforts are not confined to the work of the School. For the benefit of the Blind, who through age or other causes, cannot attend the School, he has organized a staff of itinerant teachers and a circulating library. The beneficent plan which Nova Scotia had the honor of originating has been adopted in several places elsewhere.¹

In 1901, the Board of Managers of the School under the presidency of W.C. Silver, unanimously agreed additional accommodations would have to be secured if the institution was to continue to satisfy the needs of the young blind in the Atlantic Provinces. It was decided a

¹Thirty-First Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.9.

new building should be erected distinct from the present building and connected to it by a covered way. This new building would serve as a school house for the pupils, in which special provisions should be made for recreation rooms during inclement weather. Under this arrangement the present buildings were to be utilized for residence purposes, and the pupils after their work was done would come to their respective departments each of which would have ample reading rooms, sitting rooms, dining room and dormitory accommodations.¹

Mr. J.C. Dumaresq was then asked to prepare plans and specifications in accordance with the foregoing ideas, and these plans, with few alterations, were finally adopted by the Board.

In February 1902, the Board approached the members of Government of Nova Scotia for a special appropriation towards the erection of the proposed new building. Subsequently, the Legislature of the Province appropriated \$20,000.00 towards this new addition. Tenders were immediately called for and the contract awarded to S. Marshall and Son early in the year of 1903, for the sum

¹Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.7.

of \$54,506.00. This new building was to contain four stories including the basement and was to be one hundred and thirty-one feet in length by seventy-one in width. It was anticipated that this would be one of the most modern school buildings for the blind on the continent, and would be able to receive and educate forty more pupils.¹

Dr. Fraser, the energetic superintendent, assumed the arduous task of raising the additional money necessary for the payment of the new structure. Pamphlets were prepared and widely circulated throughout the Maritime Provinces. Schools, Sunday Schools, and other organisations were asked to assist through brick buying or collecting cards. Many benevolent persons obtained subscription books and were active in soliciting contributions. The results of these personal canvassers and twenty-four public meetings held in the eastern and western portions of Nova Scotia netted the School Building Fund \$12,057.65.²

At the time of the opening, the cost of construction and new equipment exceeded the previously stated amount and now stood at \$64,990.96. The grants of the

¹Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 7-8.

²Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.15.

Government of Nova Scotia with the building subscriptions received totalled \$36,532.60. The balance of \$28,458.36 was met by a temporary loan.¹

Eighteen months after construction was begun, the new building was formally opened by the Honorable A.G. Jones, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, on the evening of April 19th, 1904. The Lieutenant Governor made a strong and informative speech. He said that the people of the Maritimes and Newfoundland had every reason to be satisfied with the great work which the School for the Blind was accomplishing. He congratulated the Board of Managers, Officials and the friends of the School upon the place that the School had won in the hearts of the people of these Provinces. He concluded his speech by formally declaring the new building opened for the use of the blind.²

Although the facilities of the school had been expanded in accordance with the steadily increasing enrollment, the current expenses had mounted, resulting from the advance in prices paid on provisions, fuel, wages, etc. so that in 1905, the cost per pupil was about \$200.00

¹Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.14.

²Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.6.

per annum. President of the Board J.C. Mackintosh, in his annual report for that year states:

The cost cannot be reduced without impairing the efficiency of the School. Our annual expenditure on each pupil is less than two thirds of that in the School for the Blind at Brantford, Ontario.¹

Even though, during the last session of the Legislature of Nova Scotia, the "Act Respecting the Education of the Blind" was amended so as to provide for the annual payment of \$180.00 per pupil by the Province and Municipalities, an increase of \$30.00, the School would have to face a deficit. There seemed to be only one solution to this financial difficulty and that was to appeal to the other Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland to increase their annual contributions to the School. As it now stood, New Brunswick was contributing \$150.00 per pupil, Prince Edward Island \$75.00 per pupil and Newfoundland \$150.00 per pupil. It was not until 1909, that all the Maritimes increased their grants to \$200.00 and Newfoundland still had it under consideration.²

Besides this financial problem, the Board felt there were many more children suffering from the loss of

¹ Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.6.

² Ibid.

sight for whom they would like to do something educationally; but they were not able to get sufficient co-operation from the officials by way of names and other data. This problem was placed in the hands of the Education Department and now all teachers were required, in their semi-annual returns, to send the names of those children in their area or section handicapped in this way. Clergymen, doctors and others interested in the welfare of the blind were requested to send to the Superintendent of the School full information with respect to any blind child in their respective localities.¹

Despite these financial and enrollment problems, Dr. Fraser forged ahead, utilizing the latest methods of blind instruction and ever searching for new courses that might aid the blind in finding their way in society. It was with this thought in mind that he established a Business Course at the School in 1908. Before this time, there had existed a practical course in business instruction; but the new commercial training covered a period of two school years and embraced bookkeeping, business methods and commercial law. The aim of the business

¹Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp.6-7.

course was three-fold:

First: To enable the pupils to keep in Braille clear and concise records of their own business transactions.

Second: To give them an accurate knowledge of book-keeping entries, business forms, letters etc. as they appear for the use of persons with sight.

Third: To familiarize them with the ordinary mercantile laws of Canada.¹

Dr. Fraser, in inaugurating this course, realized that fifteen percent of the graduates of the Halifax School for the Blind were engaged in business pursuits and in order to achieve success in the commercial world, they needed and must have specific business training. This course proved to be such an extremely successful venture that it still operates with the same enthusiasm as in 1908.

The following year, 1909, was eventful for two reasons. First, the grants from the Maritime Legislatures and Municipalities were increased to \$200.00 per pupil per annum,² and secondly the Maritime Association for the Blind was formed. Its purpose was to assist graduates of the School by providing them with tools with which to

¹Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 40-41.

²Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.8.

follow the particular trade or occupation in which they had been trained and from time to time to give such monetary assistance as was needed. Although the formation was spearheaded by the energetic Dr. Fraser, the actual establishment of the association came from the most successful and enterprising graduates of the school. This organization proposed to work in conjunction with the institution to forward the interests of the blind of the Atlantic Region. Under the prudent leadership of Dr. John A. MacDonald, the association erected a workshop for the vocational education and employment of men deprived of sight.¹

This work was pursued by this independent Maritime Association until the Autumn of 1918, when the Canadian National Institute for the Blind was organized with its head office at Toronto. Since the aims of this national organization were generally the same as that of the local association it soon affiliated and became a division of the Canadian National Institute, which still carries on this essential work in the interests of the blind.²

¹Thirty-ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 18-20.

²Fortieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 12-14.

The Board of Managers of the Halifax School for the Blind was not only interested in the educational care of those deprived of sight but also the prevention of blindness. The Superintendent called the attention of the Board, in 1910, to the fact that twenty-five percent of the existing blindness was the outcome of carelessness or indifference upon the part of those who had charge of young infants. It was his opinion that blindness as a result of Ophthalmia Neonatorum was needless and could easily be avoided. His statements awakened a strong public interest in the prevention of blindness. The matter was ably discussed in the leading Halifax and Provincial papers, so that when prevention legislation was sought, the members of the Legislature were fully conversant with all phases of the question.¹

In 1911, the Legislature of Nova Scotia enacted a law making it compulsory for physicians and nurses to promptly report all cases of infantile ophthalmia to the local Board of Health. Failing to do this they made themselves liable to a fine of from ten dollars to one hundred dollars.² As a result of this initiative

¹Fortieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 25-30.

²Forty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.13.

in the prevention of blindness it will never be realized just how much suffering has been spared countless souls and how many children have been saved from life-long blindness.

During the next three years the financial status of the school remained relatively stable except for a noticeable increase in the cost of upkeep, which was relieved somewhat by an increase in the per capitem grant per pupil from the Governments of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island from \$200.00 to \$250.00, in 1914.¹

The Governments and Legislatures of New Brunswick and Newfoundland in 1915, amended their Acts respecting the Education of the Blind and increased their grants to equal those of the other provinces. This action enabled the School to operate slightly in excess of the current expenditure and was greatly appreciated by the Board of Managers.²

Dr. Fraser continued to see that the blind pupils of the Halifax School had the benefit of all the latest methods of instruction and were prepared as far as it was possible to take their places as

¹ Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 6-7.

² Ibid, p.7.

independent men and women in society. The school curriculum at this time continued to follow pretty well the same lines as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Since 1873, Dr. Fraser had labored untiringly to improve the education, economic and social conditions of the blind in the Atlantic Region. His work had not gone unnoticed and on June 3rd, 1914, he received the order of knighthood as a token of the value attached to his achievements by the King and by the nation. In his forty-fifth annual report to the Board of Managers Dr. Fraser humbly expressed his delight in the following words -

I might say that the honor recently conferred on me by His Majesty, the King, while personally pleasing to me, was doubly pleasing because it was a recognition of the Halifax School for the Blind, towards the success of which the members of the Board of Managers are so fully giving their time, thought and means. It is likewise a recognition of the individual effort of each member of the teaching staff and of each student and graduate who has made intelligent use of his opportunities. Under these circumstances I have gratefully accepted the honor of Knighthood and trust that it may prove an inspiration to me and to others to be still more zealous, more energetic and more effective in promoting the welfare of those deprived of sight.¹

¹Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 21-23.

Since these were war years the School was affected very little by loss of attendance, as unfortunately the young men, owing to their physical disability, were unable to show their loyalty to King and Country by enlisting in the Canadian regiments going overseas. At the same time, the spirit which animated the boys was strong and patriotic. The handicap of blindness in those days of stress and strain had hit home to them with a poignancy more keen than they had ever before experienced. However the boys and girls of the school were determined to contribute their share in furthering the cause of the war effort. This they did by gladly giving concerts and other entertainments organized to raise money for the Patriotic Fund, the Belgian Relief Fund and the work of the Red Cross Societies.¹

As the pupils of the school engaged their extra hours in contributing towards the war effort, the graduates from the technical and trades departments of the school were finding it increasingly difficult to obtain employment due to the Employers' Liability Act. This Act made the employers of labor unwilling to risk extra hazards by employing persons deprived of

¹Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.6-7.

sight. When the Union of Municipalities was fully informed of the existing situation by Sir Frederick and the Board of Managers, protests were immediately made to the Legislature of Nova Scotia. On May 17th 1916, His Honor the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia signed an Act respecting the employment of the blind.

Be it enacted by the Governor, Council and Assembly as follows:

1. Any city, town or municipality shall have powers to vote, collect, receive, appropriate and pay all sums of money required for the following purposes, that is to say:

(a) The purchase and leasing of lands and buildings and the establishing, equipment and maintenance of local workshops and factories for the employment of persons who are totally or partially blind, and the payment of salaries and compensation to those employed therein, and the disposal and sale of the output of such workshops and factories.

(b) The aiding by way of grants, concessions or otherwise, of any organizations or associations, within the confines of any city, town or municipality, formed for the purpose of employing those who are totally or partially blind.¹

The consequence of this Act enabled the pupils trained at the school to engage actively in occupations at any organized local workshop. Needless to say, everybody interested in the welfare of the blind rejoiced at the progressive spirit of the Legislature of Nova Scotia

¹Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 14-15.

shown by the enactment of this new law.

In the year 1917, the Halifax School for the Blind, besides serving the educational needs of those deprived of sight in the Atlantic Provinces, was also used as a rehabilitating centre for war veterans who lost their sight in action. These men were first instructed in reading and writing in the Braille System. Many of them took advantage of technical and workshop facilities that they might develop their sense of touch, which would ultimately help them to adjust to their new world of darkness. Others used the school as a stepping stone that they might attend the school of Physical Education, Royal Victoria College, McGill University, where they won diplomas as competent masseurs.¹

On December 6th of this same year, the work of the School for the Blind was interrupted by the great explosion which destroyed two fifths of the city of Halifax and damaged almost every building within a radius of ten miles. Owing to the urgent demand for hospital accommodations in the city on the day of the explosion, temporary hospital wards for injured children

¹Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.17.

and adults were opened in the school building. Upwards of fifty patients were tenderly cared for and, for more than a week, the members of the staff and pupils of the school aided the volunteer nursing staff in comforting and aiding the injured.¹

The buildings of the school were damaged to the extent of \$25,000.00 and it took two years to have the repairs completed. Since that disastrous date a number of men and women, as well as children, blinded by the explosion received training in the school.²

In the following years, 1918-1919, owing to non-attendance of pupils due to the explosion, and the high cost of maintenance, the school was obliged to incur a heavy overdraft at the bank. This was partially offset by special grants of \$25,000.00 from the Province of Nova Scotia and \$1500.00 from the Government of Newfoundland and also an increase in the annual grant per pupil from \$300.00 to \$400.00. This action was soon followed by equal increased from the Governments of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.³

¹ Fiftieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p.10.

For some years, the Board of Managers had been endeavouring to secure an assistant for Sir Frederick, so that he might be relieved of some of his more arduous duties. Finally in 1919, the Board was very fortunate in acquiring the services of Mr. E. Chesley Allen, who was a teacher of extraordinary ability and experience. He was to take over the supervision of the various school departments and assist Sir Frederick in the administration of the other functions of the School.¹

Although the school considered its first duty to be that of providing each pupil with the very best scholastic instruction, it also recognized the need of supplementing this training with more practical training for some profession or handicraft which would enable the blind student when he graduated to be wholly or partially self-supporting. Mr. Allen followed this philosophy but recognized the need of grading the literary department into classes more closely corresponding to the grade system used in the public schools. This, he did by weekly meetings with the teaching staff, where they discussed and classified each pupil. This graduating of the school program had no actual effect on the curriculum but rather

¹Fiftieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.12.

put each pupil in his proper class. The pupils now could be compared grade-wise with the other students attending the Halifax Public Schools.¹

The Institution was to experience another change when on June 30th, 1923, after fifty years of service from 1873 to 1923, Sir Frederick Fraser, K.B., M.A., LL.D., D.C.L. resigned as Superintendent. On his completion of service the Board of Managers, in presenting him and his wife with a departing gift, expressed their gratitude for his faithful service in the following words:

As a result of your energy, capacity and enthusiasm, the school, which was started on the most modest scale, has steadily extended its work and widened its influence, until today it has a reputation equal to that of any similar institution on this continent.²

With the retirement of Sir Frederick, the Board appointed Mr. E. Chesley Allen as Superintendent of the School on June 27th, 1923. Little did he realize he would once again work in close relationship with his former friend and superior as Sir Frederick was appointed to the Board of Managers in September of the same year.

¹Fifty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.22.

²Fifty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.3.

Thus, the School still enjoyed the benefit of his sound judgement and wide experience until his death on July 5th, 1925.¹

At the annual closing of the School on June 7th, 1926 the assembly hall in the School building was dedicated to the memory of Sir Frederick Fraser and a solid bronze memorial tablet placed upon the wall was unveiled by His Honor Lieutenant Governor H. Torey. This tablet bears the following inscription:

This Hall is Dedicated
to the Memory of
Sir Charles Frederick Fraser,
K.B., M.A., L.L.D., D.C.L.,
As Superintendent of this School (1873-1923)
Will Remain an Invaluable Contribution
To the Cause of the Blind and to
Public Welfare in the Maritime Provinces and
Newfoundland.²

For the next five years (1926-1931) the Superintendent, Mr. E. Chesley Allen, administered the school along the same lines of his predecessor without any drastic innovations. The curriculum and methods

¹Fifty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.13.

²Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.11.

utilized seemed to serve the wholly and partially blind with satisfactory results. The financial assistance given by the Maritime Provinces, Newfoundland, municipalities and voluntary contributions provided the board with sufficient funds to carry on this adequate program of instruction.

In 1932, a special effort was made to familiarize the parents in the various provinces with the special classes being offered at the School for those with defective vision. Such children although not blind were known as sight conservation pupils. They were given the advantage of an unusual amount of individual attention, a great deal of oral instruction, the use of books and exercises printed in large type and on cloudy or dull days, the benefit of generous artificial light. In addition to these obvious advantages the eyes of such children were watched with care by oculists and school nurses. Regular treatments, daily or more often, were given in many cases. The school authorities felt that, if these children could be given a common school and, quite frequently, a high school education without the destructive eye-strain, then the school was performing a valuable social service.¹

¹Sixty-First Annual Report of the Board of Managers, and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.15.

To stimulate these sight conservation classes the Superintendent in company with Mrs. Allen carried on regular summer field investigation work. They travelled throughout the province, visiting the homes of known pupils with partial sight. The parents were given a detailed account of the advantages to be derived as a result of this program. The response was gratifying and in one year fourteen pupils enrolled for these classes.¹

In relation to this Sight Conservation program, graduates of the Sacred Heart Convent and members of the Halifax Chapter of the Junior League of Canada devoted several evenings each week to reading text books and other academic literature to the younger pupils as well as to graduates who were obtaining higher learning at Dalhousie University. Many of the graduates attending university would reside at the school and contribute toward their board and lodging by supervising and assisting the undergraduates. This proved advantageous to all concerned. In 1938, eight of these graduates obtained either an Arts, Commerce or Education degree from Dalhousie University. This appears

¹Sixty-First Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, pp. 17-18.

to be a creditable tribute to the academic foundation they must have received during their high school years.¹

For several years the enrollment had been steadily increasing until the need for increased accommodations for classes, library and recreation activities threatened the efficient operation of the school. In 1939 the number of pupils reached a saturation point of one hundred and seventy-seven blind or partially blind students. The Board of Managers recognized the seriousness of the situation and immediately contracted for the construction of a new wing. This two story high wing was completed and ready for use at the January 1940 re-opening of the school. It was constructed at a cost of \$62,128.21, and provided accommodations for a Braille library, three classrooms, a finishing room for woodcraft and a recreation room for boys.²

Not only was the year 1940, significant by reason of the increased accommodations, but Mr. Allen was able to make special arrangements with the Nova

¹Sixty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.19.

²Seventieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.30.

Scotia Department of Education to have the senior high school pupils write the Provincial Examinations. This was an important step in the unification of the curriculum standards and facilitated entrance to University. For some time, through the generosity of Dalhousie and St. Mary's Universities, all graduates of the Halifax School for the Blind were relieved from payment of class fees. These gratuitous offers enabled many blind students to take advantage of the opportunity of higher education and professional careers which otherwise would have been out of the question.¹

For the next six years the education of the blind at the Halifax School prospered and progressed in all departments without interruption, until the death of the Superintendent Mr. Allen on September 26th, 1946. The students and the Board mourned the loss of this man who gave unsparingly of himself for the betterment of those under his care. Nevertheless the Board considered itself extremely fortunate in being able to fill this vacancy by attaching the services of the son of the late

¹Seventieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.20.

Superintendent Mr. Allen. The new appointment was made on November 21, 1946 and it was felt that the new superintendent, Charles R.K. Allen, with his experience and association with the School would carry out the work of administration in the same efficient manner as his late father.¹

As mentioned previously in this chapter the School's income was derived from three main sources, provincial and municipal grants, income from endowment funds and occasional donations. Even though the Government's per capita grants were increased in 1946 to \$500.00 per pupil, the School's income failed to cover the steadily rising costs of maintenance.² This situation made it increasingly difficult for the School to carry on its valuable work in the educational and cultural fields, and has rendered expansion programmes impossible. The Governments of the Atlantic Provinces were informed of this perilous situation and, recognizing the educational services supplied by the Halifax School, increased their per capita grant

¹Seventy-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.9.

²Ibid, p.7.

to \$700.00 in 1949,¹ and an additional \$200.00 was granted in 1950. Even with this additional revenue, which was utilized principally in carrying out long overdue building repairs and the installation of a sprinkler system and other small improvements, the school authorities were forced to appeal once more for governmental assistance. This request was made necessary in large part by salary increases, particularly those of the teaching staff, which were adjusted to conform to the existing city scale. In 1957, all four governments responded promptly and sympathetically by increasing the per capita grant to \$1200.00. At this writing, this is the current grant under which the Halifax School for the Blind operates.²

The administration of the educational program as it exists today differs very little in principle from that of its early days. In most respects, the course of instruction is similar to that followed in the more advanced institutions for the Blind in Great Britain and the United States.

¹Seventy-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.7.

²Eighty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p.8.

It is based upon the idea that pupils of the school, notwithstanding their lack of sight, are to be educated with the view of becoming self-supporting men and women. To the educated blind person the loss of sight is a handicap but not a barrier to success. His trained senses of touch and hearing and even of smell make up to him in a great measure for his loss of sight. Meanwhile his intellectual powers are none the less strong, keen and effective because he is deprived of vision. Bearing the foregoing facts in mind, the course of study, now followed by the school is the same as the general curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education for the Province of Nova Scotia.

It is the conviction of the Board of Managers that the School functions in close accord with the principle set forth by Mr. H.G. Wells which he called a trial statement of the rights of man brought up to date, and in which he said, as quoted in part in the School's sixty-ninth Annual Report:

Every man is entitled to nourishment, housing, covering, medical care and attention. He is entitled to sufficient education to make him a useful and interesting citizen.¹

¹Sixty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers and Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, p. 8.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1

PRESIDENTS OF THE HALIFAX SCHOOL
FOR THE BLIND
APRIL 27, 1868 - 1958

Almon, Honorable M.B.	1868-1871
Avery, James F., M.D.	1871-1879
McLean, John S.	1879-1889
Silver, W.C.	1889-1903
Mackintosh, J.C.	1903-1909
Archibald, Charles	1909-1920
Campbell, G.S.	1920-1923
Mitchell, G. MacGregor	1923-1927
McInnis, Hector, K.C.	1927-1930
Fraser, Hon. J. Frederick, M.P.P.	1930-1932
Woodberry, W.W., M.D.	1932-1935
Breckfield, John W., O.B.E.	1935-1946
McInnis, Donald, K.C.	1946-1949
MacG. Mitchell, George	1949-1956
Walker, J.A., Q.C.	1956-1958

TABLE 2

SUPERINTENDENTS OF THE HALIFAX
SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Fraser, C.F., K.B., M.A., L.L.D., D.C.L.	1873-1923
Allen, E. Chesley	1923-1946
Allen, C.R.K.	1946 -

APPENDIX A

TABLE 3

 ATTENDANCE AT THE HALIFAX SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND
 1871-1958

Year	Total Pupils	Year	Total Pupils	Year	Total Pupils
1871	6	1901	117	1930	168
1872	11	1902	121	1931	165
1873	15	1903	124	1932	168
1874	14	1904	133	1933	173
1875	13	1905	136	1934	169
1876	17	1906	136	1935	173
1877	21	1907	136	1936	171
1878	24	1908	136	1937	176
1879	20	1909	135	1938	179
1880	25	1910	135	1939	177
1881	23	1911	135	1940	173
1882	24	1912	135	1941	161
1883	26	1913	148	1942	167
1884	28	1914	141	1943	171
1885	24	1915	142	1944	175
1886	24	1916	142	1945	167
1887	27	1917	142	1946	169
1888	27	1918	115	1947	165
1889	31	1919	123	1948	179
1890	31	1920	133	1949	190
1891	39	1921	145	1950	178
1892	46	1922	145	1951	170
1893	47	1923	145	1952	177
1894	52	1924	162	1953	160
1895	70	1925	141	1954	156
1896	86	1926	148	1955	159
1897	102	1927	154	1956	139
1898	106	1928	154	1957	146
1899	112	1929	140	1958	153

APPENDIX B

EXTRACTS FROM THE ACT RESPECTING THE EDUCATION
OF THE BLIND IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

- (1) The parent or guardian of any blind person between the ages of six and twenty-one years, who has, under the provision of "The Poor Relief Act," a settlement in any municipality, city or town, may apply to the warden of such municipality or to the mayor of such city or town, for an order for the admission of such person into the Halifax School for the Blind, which order the said Warden or mayor shall at once grant under his hand and the corporate seal of the municipality city or town, on being satisfied that such blind person is between the ages above prescribed, and has a legal settlement in such municipality, city or town.
- (2) Pupils entering the school between the ages of six and ten years shall be entitled to remain seven years in addition to the time in attendance under ten years of age; those entering between the ages of ten and thirteen years shall be entitled to remain seven years; those entering between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years shall be entitled to remain five years; those entering between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one years shall be entitled to remain three years.
- (3.) For every blind person received into the Halifax School for the Blind under an order from the warden of any municipality or under an order from the mayor of a city or town which contributes to the Municipal School Fund, and educated and boarded therein, the Board of Managers of such school shall be entitled to receive from the Provincial Treasury the sum of six hundred dollars per annum, payable half-yearly, and also to receive annually the sum of six hundred dollars, payable yearly, from the Municipal School Fund of such municipality.

APPENDIX C

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