

OUR NEW BRUNSWICK EDUCATION  
*One book, one pen, one child and one teacher can change the world!*

**Kaye Lister**

When the first settlers arrived in New Brunswick, some of the children would have been of school age. Often the children were taught by a schoolmaster who travelled from place to place, staying a little while in each settlement, sometimes taking room and board among the farmers in exchange for teaching. In some cases, the teacher conducted classes in his own home. A teacher could be anyone who could read and write, do a little arithmetic, and have a slight knowledge of grammar and geography, using a few dog-eared books made available.

By 1784 orders were issued from Great Britain that teachers in New Brunswick were to be licensed by petitioning to the Lieutenant Governor for a license giving them permission to teach.

By 1802 change was in the air. Little one-room schools began to appear in a few areas in the province. The Parish Schools Act was passed, granting the sum of 10 pounds to each NB parish to assist in the establishment of schools. However, it was not until 1845, following inspection of some of the schools receiving money from the public purse, that something had to be done to improve the quality of teaching throughout the province. Thus, in 1848 two Normal Schools were established, one in Fredericton and one in Saint John. "Norms" to be taught included social values and curriculum demands.

At first, male students made up the entire Normal School enrollment until a brave young lady made application to be trained as a teacher. In 1849 Martha Hamm Lewis, born in Saint John in 1831, was at first denied admission but was admitted following the intervention of the Lieutenant Governor. However, she had to follow particular rules: to remain seated at the back of the classroom, to wear a mask and a dark veil to conceal her face, and not to leave the room at the end of the day until after the male students had been dismissed. With her determination, Martha Hamm Lewis had paved the way for females to be accepted in the teacher training program and within three years 49 of the 92 students in the Saint John Training School were female.

The Common Schools Act of 1871 laid the foundation of our present school system, granting that a school be built in each settlement of any size. Additional one-room schools began to appear in the province. The cost of construction and additional pay for each teacher was covered by subscription among the local families. Although some of the little schools were well constructed, others were crudely put together. Some were too small, and were merely roughly boarded in and not shingled. Some had no yard and the buildings were poorly ventilated. Even necessary teaching aids such as books, blackboards, paper and pencils were lacking as well as furniture and apparatus. And the rush to the "outdoor plumbing" made a chilly run on a winter's day!

At one time these were 1500 little one-room schools in our province. Some were eventually in such disrepair, they had to be demolished. By 1967 they were no longer used for education in the province. Other than a few which have been converted into other uses, the one-room schools, the backbone of New Brunswick education, are now just a memory. Larger, well-equipped schools have replaced them, including modern junior and senior high schools.

To lead to a more efficient supervision of the teacher training program, it was decided to move the Saint John program to Fredericton which was housed in a new Normal School on the corner of Queen and York Streets. In 1947 the name of the Provincial Normal School was changed to the New Brunswick Teachers College.



It closed in 1973, with its staff being integrated into the faculties of education at the Université de Moncton and the University of New Brunswick. And the next chapter in the history of NB education had begun!

Today, the New Brunswick Teachers College building has been remodelled to house the law courts and has been renamed the Justice Building. In its annex we can still find a touch of early NB education within the walls of 'The School Days Museum'. Displays of once-used school artefacts and a replica of the interior of a one-room school help refresh visitors' memories as they stroll through their school years of yesterday.