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Student Life and Culture in Alberta's Normal Schools, 1930-1939

by

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Abstract

Normal schools in 1930s Alberta prepared the province's future teachers. Several hundred students entered normal schools in Calgary, Camrose, and Edmonton every year to complete the one-year teacher preparation course. Student life in normal schools revolved around relationships between faculty and students. Normal school faculty regulated behaviour in and out of the classroom, supervised extracurricular activities, and oversaw off-campus accommodations in fulfilment of academic and social responsibilities to care for students. They aimed to prepare Normalites (as students called themselves) for the teaching profession and so reinforced existing gender and social mores—expectations to which students were largely content to conform. From the perspective of students, faculty were to be respected because of their power over teacher certification and because they demonstrated genuine care for student wellbeing. Faculty involvement in student affairs, more than any other factor, determined the character and course of student experience at Alberta's normal schools.

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To student affairs professionals of the past, the present, and the future.

Your work matters, to the many and the few.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures and Illustrations	vi
Introduction	1
Historiography	9
Chapter 1: The Social World	23
1.1 Institutional Structures	24
1.2 Student Bodies	27
1.3 The Routines and Activities of Student Culture	35
Chapter 2: Relationships	48
2.1 Leaving Home: The Changing Place of Family	48
2.2 Gender and Student Life	55
2.3 “A Happy Degree of Intimacy”: Normalite-Faculty Relationships	61
Chapter 3: Rules and Reasons	72
3.1 Promoted and Permitted Behaviour	73
3.2 Questionable Behaviour	86
Chapter 4: Reactions	94
4.1 Rule Breakers	94
4.2 Circumnavigating the Rules	96
4.3 Conformity Endures	112
Conclusion	119
Bibliography	132
Appendix A: <i>Project Yesteryear</i>	137
Appendix B: Responses to <i>Project Yesteryear</i>	145
Appendix C: Copyright Clearance	148

List of Figures and Illustrations

Figure 1. Students' Council, Edmonton Normal School, first term, 1935-36	56
Figure 2. The Normalite Social Calendar	82
Figure 3. Yearbook Cartoons	102

Introduction

In the midst of economic depression and agricultural disaster, life in the 1930s represented significant transition for Albertans. Markets and investments could no longer guarantee profit, drought and extreme weather made the livelihood of so many untenable, and the populist political coalition was falling apart.¹ Jobs were eliminated, homesteads and farms abandoned, policies redrawn, and relief extended. Uncertainty also characterized social and cultural landscapes, leaving an indelible mark on the people and their province.² As Albertans adjusted to changing financial and environmental realities, some things remained relatively constant. Throughout this period most children attended school and learned from provincially-certified teachers; those children learned lessons both explicit and implicit about how people constructed gender and related to one another in gendered ways. At once, education was a structure to organize the transfer of knowledge, a project to develop citizenship, and a tool for general economic development; it also largely reinforced existing notions of gender.³ The figure at the centre of education in Alberta was the teacher, because the province depended so heavily on one-room (and one-teacher) schools to teach children scattered over a largely rural and isolating territory.⁴ To understand how Albertans experienced the Depression, what Albertans valued, and how Albertans related to one another in the context of gender,

¹ For a vivid historical and lived account of this time, see James Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966).

² Gerald Friesen notes the sense of futility that permeated individuals' correspondence with government officials. See Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 397.

³ Amy von Heyking, *Creating Citizens: History and Identity in Alberta's Schools, 1905 to 1980* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).

⁴ Gidney and Millar include a detailed description of a schoolhouse typical of the rural Prairies; the description happens to be quoted from the 1937 inspector's report on the Camrose area. See R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *How Schools Worked: Public Education in English Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 100-101.

exploring students and teachers becomes critical. But how did the former become the latter? Why was the process important? And what does student life at normal schools have to say about gender?

Students became teachers in depression-era Alberta through certification from either the University of Alberta's new School of Education or one of three provincial normal schools.⁵ "Normal schools" take their name from the French *les écoles normales*, institutions established to prepare teachers in the standards, or norms, of a profession that supposedly represented the liberal values of revolutionary France.⁶ Normal schools were a global phenomenon and some institutions of teacher preparation remain known as normal schools outside of North America.⁷ In the Canadian context, however, normal schools were institutions of the mid-nineteenth century that began in the east with Egerton Ryerson's reforms and moved west following Euro-Canadian settlement patterns.⁸ From 1893 to 1905, residents of the North-West Territories (including what is now the province of Alberta) pursued teacher certification at the Regina Normal School.⁹ Upon becoming a province, Alberta established its first normal school in 1906 and opened two more in 1912 and 1920.¹⁰ During the forty-year period of preparing teachers

⁵ Opened in 1929, the University of Alberta's School of Education certified secondary and high school teachers. See Herbert J. Coutts, "From Normal Schools to Universities: How teacher education found a new home," *The ATA [Alberta Teachers' Association] Magazine*, January 1982, 14-15.

⁶ Samuel E. Staples, "Normal Schools and Their Origin: A Paper Read at a Regular Meeting of the Worcester Society of Antiquity, June 5th, 1877" (Worcester, MA: Tyler and Seagrave, 1877), 3.

⁷ For historical normal schools, see French colonial normal schools in Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *French West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 524-525. For an example of modern normal schools, see Nanjing Normal University (<http://www.njnu.edu.cn>).

⁸ While she does not devote many words to normal schools, Alison Prentice's pathbreaking work on schooling in Upper Canada and Ontario provides context for the social and political environment in which normal schools arose in Canada. See Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 18.

⁹ Irene A. Poelzer, "The Catholic Normal School Issue in the North-West Territories, 1884-1900," *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions* 42, no. 1 (1975): 20.

¹⁰ Alberta, *Annual Report of the Department of Education – Normal Schools*, 1906, 36; Alberta, *Annual Report of the Department of Education – Normal Schools*, 1912, 42; Alberta, *Annual Report of the*

at normal schools, some teachers from other jurisdictions (chiefly other Canadian provinces, but also the United Kingdom and the United States) could write a special examination in order to earn certification in Alberta. But in the main, normal schools controlled the pathway to teaching, a situation that remained through World War II. In 1945, the Department of Education transferred responsibility for teacher training to the provincial university and closed all three normal schools.¹¹

As students completed coursework at Alberta's normal schools in Calgary, Camrose, and Edmonton, they matured in a particular socio-cultural milieu. Most were adolescents during their course of studies, a phase of life that bridged childhood and adulthood.¹² For Normalites, adolescence entailed spending much of their time with others of similar ages, learning the social expectations of adulthood, and remaining largely under the direct control of mature adults. Many moved away from their parents' homes for the first time, paid for tuition on their own or with government assistance, and visited family only occasionally. Separation from familial structures—and familial certainty—allowed the students to form new social relationships and cultural practices even as they joined the existing educational structures of normal schools. I argue that this separation from family was the most important feature of adolescence in the 1930s because removal from direct parental observation led to new behavioural and social

Department of Education – Normal Schools, 1920, 55. Referred to hereafter as *Normal School Annual Reports*.

¹¹ *Normal School Annual Report*, 1945, 60.

¹² While Cynthia Comacchio conceives of “adolescence” as ages 13 to 19, I use the term to mean the ages 16 to 22 for two reasons. First, I argue that 16- and 20-year-olds had more in common with one another than 16-year-olds shared with 10-year-olds and 20-year-olds shared with 30-year-olds. Second, this age range captures nearly all Alberta Normalites of the 1930s. Leslie Paris uses the transition from childhood to adulthood to advance the argument for age as a unit of historical analysis. See Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) and Leslie Paris, “Through the Looking Glass: Ages, Stages, and Historical Analysis,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 106-113.

possibilities.¹³ As the province and, indeed, North America, were experiencing drastic changes in the economy and agriculture, students at normal school were experiencing their own transitions both as a group and individually. Together, “Normalites,” as the students called themselves, were growing physiologically and socio-culturally. From what Neil Sutherland calls the “culture of childhood,” with all of its accompanying constructs of play, paradox of freedom and constraint, self-image, and uncertainty in identity, students started normal school and there began in earnest the process of transitioning to adulthood.¹⁴ Just as students reformed the patterns of their lives in the midst of change, so too did they participate in changing Alberta.

Normal schools were important historically and warrant further consideration due to their status as gatekeepers to the teaching profession and the social consequences of certain policy decisions. Prospective teachers, government officials, and the general public understood that attending normal school was the primary route to certification and thus a job. By virtue of legislative authority over the pathway to teaching, normal schools erected certain barriers to admission, to progression through the program of

¹³ Writing in the midst of an academic turn toward utilizing science as the foundation for advancing human knowledge and human societies, psychologist G. Stanley Hall suggested in 1904 that adolescence was a time of life centred on non-linear transition in biological, sociological, and educational factors. Hall did not specify an age range in his definition, arguing that adolescence depended on the individual, but frequently included tables of data referencing ages 8 through 15. Part of his landmark study included criticism of American normal schools in the late-nineteenth century as giving students a “fatal infection” by breaking conceptual wholes into elements. G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1904), vol. 2, 495-503. For a discussion of Hall’s work in the larger view of the social milieu and psychological profession of the early twentieth-century, see Hamilton Cravens, “The Historical Context of G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* (1904),” *History of Psychology* 9, no. 3 (2006): 172-185. Historian Lester Goodchild provides useful analysis of Hall’s arguments on “improving” humanity in “G. Stanley Hall and an American Social Darwinist Pedagogy: His Progressive Educational Ideas on Gender and Race,” *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (February 2012): 62-98.

¹⁴ Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997): 222.

study, and to certification.¹⁵ Limiting admission with academic requirements paralleled the ability of the provincial university to set similar rules and thereby influence the composition of the student body. However, normal schools—unlike the University of Alberta—did not charge tuition fees until 1924.¹⁶ In 1919, the province introduced a loan program that covered tuition fees and living expenses for normalites, but not for university students.¹⁷ Thus teaching certification was much more accessible to the working and middle classes than pursuing a baccalaureate degree, accessibility that was critical to the largely rural areas from which the normal schools drew their students (and where they would eventually send many of their graduates).¹⁸ Normal schools thus reflected the values of government officials and educational staff, and, to a certain extent, the values of the general public. As institutions designed to prepare teachers and assist in the development of Alberta, accessibility to teaching for a wide swath of the population was important.¹⁹

Much of normal schools' importance as historical institutions stems from their relationship with people. Free and low tuition increased the number of applicants from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and locations in Calgary, Camrose, and Edmonton brought certification geographically closer to many Albertans. Once students enrolled at normal school, the differences continued but in subtler ways. For adolescent women in

¹⁵ For example, Alberta initially required only a Standard XI (from 1912, Grade XI) certificate for admission to normal school until 1925; afterward, Grade XII was required. See Nick Kach, "The Emergence of Progressive Education in Alberta," in Nick Kach and Kas Mazurek, eds., *Exploring Our Educational Past: Schooling in the North-West Territories and Alberta* (Calgary: Detselig, 1992), 151.

¹⁶ Robert Stamp, *Becoming a Teacher in 20th Century Calgary: A History of the Calgary Normal School and the Faculty of Education, University of Calgary* (Calgary: Detselig, 2004), 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸ Department of Education statistics note that 64% of normal school students in 1937-38 were from rural locations. See *Normal School Annual Report*, 1943, 41.

¹⁹ von Heyking, *Creating Citizens*.

early twentieth-century Canada, teaching was one of a handful of socially-acceptable outlets for work outside the home. Teaching young people to become teachers was a job available to women; many women served as faculty members in normal schools across Canada in the early twentieth century.²⁰ In addition, women faculty members at Alberta normal schools were not confined to home economics or art; throughout the 1930s, women taught mathematics, history, literature, and science. Students came into contact with, learned from, and developed relationships with instructors of both sexes—a situation that was quite different from academic realities at the university in Edmonton. For women students to see women faculty members in an environment dominated numerically by women students invites many questions about gender and social relationships.

It is therefore surprising to find a distinct lack of work on normal schools at all, let alone studies of their social, cultural, and gendered histories. For being institutions that prepared the bulk of Canada's teacher corps in the first half of the twentieth century, we know surprisingly little about them other than the functional role they played in teacher training. Student life at these institutions is nearly invisible in the literature, representing the dearth of scholarly work on student affairs more generally.²¹ Normalites and the normal schools existed at the confluence of learning and teaching, gendered identities, childhood and adulthood, and urban and rural locality. The connecting points

²⁰ It is important to note, however, that women rarely earned positions as principals or senior administrators through the 1930s. See John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools," *BC Studies*, no. 61 (Spring 1984): 30–63.

²¹ In the words of Nancy Sheehan, universities and colleges were "social gatekeepers." I would add normal schools to that group and submit that while Sheehan correctly acknowledges that "little is known about the students who attended institutions of higher learning in Canada," even less is known about Normalites. See Nancy M. Sheehan, "History of Higher Education in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (1985): 25–38.

of these areas played out in dynamic and temporally-contingent ways, yet most work has addressed factors that framed the academic structure. More importantly, studies of normal schools implicitly conceive of Normalites as future teachers rather than (contemporary) students.²² Doing so misses an opportunity to know and understand normalites in moments of transition.

The documentary evidence of life in normal schools is useful for historians of social, cultural, intellectual, and gender histories defined broadly. Normalites, like their peers in college and university, produced documents representative of their activities, their hopes and fears, their values, and how they related to the world outside the walls of the institution.²³ Administrators and government officials were also responsible for a raft of evidence that survives, although the utility of such evidence is tempered by their focus. Correspondence between principals and ministers, catalogs and calendars, reports of annual health inspections, grade reports, appeals for financial assistance and reconsideration of dismissal, and textbook orders contribute much to historians' study of the time period. The richness of available sources related to normal schools across Canada and the potential for insights into larger social questions support the calls of both Nancy Sheehan and Robert Patterson to investigate normal schools further.²⁴

²² This tendency likely arises from situating normal schools on the periphery of teaching histories and explaining the conditions and experiences of teachers by way of teachers' preparation in normal schools. Even Robert Patterson, the foremost expert on normal schools in Alberta, did so. See Robert S. Patterson, "Voices from the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural School Teachers" in *School in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones, eds. (1986): 99.

²³ In particular, yearbooks, newspapers, theatre programs, magazines, and alumni letters are rich sources from which to interpret the lives of normalites.

²⁴ Robert Patterson argues that "teachers—their thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and challenges—remain relatively unknown contributors to prairie social life and growth." See Robert S. Patterson, "Voices from the Past," 99 and Nancy Sheehan, "History of Higher Education in Canada," 35.

The unrealized potential of normal school history led historian Robert Patterson, in a lecture given to the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Education, to call for historical work that would redraw the map of the educational landscape.²⁵ In the metaphor developed by Richard Selleck in his work on primary education in Britain, maps both constrain and free the historian to explore a given subject (or landscape). Maps highlight the existence of certain features—like institutions, classes, genders, and people—in ways that limit a historian’s movement but also make such movement possible. Without landmarks and existing pathways, the possibilities of exploration become so numerous as to paralyze.²⁶ This thesis addresses Patterson’s call to reconsider the perspective we take on the history of teacher education—to redraw the map of what happened in our educational past.

I start from the position that student life is worthy of study on its own merits. The landmarks associated with students’ lives therefore constitute the major navigating features of this map of the educational landscape. I identify several kinds of landmarks in this study related to gender, communities and relationships, and transitions. As mentioned, we know very little about how individual students constructed their social worlds and how they perceived student life as a totality. What did “student life” mean to students? To what extent did an identity as students affect their thoughts, feelings, and actions in the walls of the classrooms, in the normal school building, and in the larger community? How did students characterize their experiences and did a common thread exist among most students’ lived experiences? Investigating relationships invariably

²⁵ Robert Patterson, “Go, Grit, and Gumption: A Normal School Perspective on Teacher Education,” McCalla Lecture at the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1983, 33.

²⁶ Robert J.W. Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives: 1914-1939* (London: Routledge, 1972).

calls into question gender, especially in the preparation for a career so clearly defined by gendered dynamics. But we still do not have a solid grasp on how normal school students' constructed their own understanding and performance of gender. In what ways were students' experiences gendered? To what extent was gender salient for women students, men students, and for the student body as a whole?²⁷ Was gender ever-present, intermittent, or not present in how students described their world at the time? What evidence exists of students upholding and/or challenging gendered roles and expectations? As Canadians' understandings of gender changed in the twentieth century, other socially-constructed ideas changed. And while those ideas will be addressed in this thesis, the broader concept of transition as an important force in normalites' lives also emerges for questioning. We have much on children and youth, school administration, and teachers, but not the critical moment of change for teachers both individually and historically: the normal school. However, existing studies in a variety of historical fields provide a strong foundation from which to investigate normalites' lives.

Historiography

Seventy years after the closure of Alberta's normal schools, the state of research into their history begs reconsideration. Analysis indicates a marked uncertainty on the part of historians on how to treat normal schools. Are they most appropriately categorized replacements to the last year of high school, extensions to high school, or junior institutions that fed into universities? Should histories of teaching or histories of

²⁷ It is worth noting that I use a gender binary while recognizing that it is likely some normal school students identified as transgender. However, lack of primary and secondary evidence prevents me from drawing substantive conclusions regarding transgender students.

schooling include normal schools? This uncertainty is shown in the fragmented ways in which historians have treated normal schools. A number of studies have been published on normal schools in Canada, but few could be considered comprehensive. Most of the extant literature reflects the focus of histories of education written in the 1970s and 1980s: analyses of administrative frameworks, questions of social composition and relations, and explorations of gender in a profession with obvious gender disparities. Administrative and curricular explanations of how students became teachers address that process in ways that fail to take students' perspectives into account, however. Despite the quantity and quality of some administrative works—especially those by John Calam and Robert Patterson—the field has so far not addressed what I consider to be fundamental to understanding how normal schools related to broader trends in education and society: the lived experiences and memories of normal school students.²⁸

Reviewing the indices of monographs in education history may lead one to the conclusion that normal schools have been thoroughly studied. Further exploration reveals, however, that many education histories reference normal schools in passing with only a handful of studies focusing on the institutions.²⁹ They therefore appear as institutions warranting *comment* in almost all of the major subfields of education, yet only rarely appear at the *centre* of scholarly work.³⁰ History of education entered an

²⁸ See John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers," 30–63 and Robert S. Patterson, "History of Teacher Education in Alberta," In *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, 192–221 (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1979).

²⁹ Alison Prentice's *The School Promoters* devotes some attention to normal schools in Upper Canada and Ontario, but is clearly focused on discussing the development of public schooling. See also Amy von Heyking's *Creating Citizens* for a study on how teachers implemented a social studies curriculum that attempted to inculcate particularly Canadian values; she includes normal schools, but they are also background actors.

³⁰ I identify the major subfields of education history as those that address the questions of who is taught (students, childhood and youth, adulthood), who teaches (teachers, professors, administrators), what is

exciting and prolific era in the late 1970s and 1980s when historians seized upon the fields of social and women's history and brought their methodologies to bear upon a mix of administrative and social structures.

Robert Patterson was—by far—the most important historian of normal schools in Alberta.³¹ His work on progressive education (a movement championed in Alberta by many educators associated with normal schools) began in the late 1960s with his doctoral dissertation and continued through the mid-1980s, spurring additional studies on the curricular approach also known as the “enterprise method.”³² Patterson began a long-term research project in 1982 entitled *Project Yesteryear* that centered on collecting and analyzing the experiences of teachers across western Canada.³³ Through detailed questionnaires mailed to thousands of former teachers, all of whom were educated at provincial normal schools from 1905 to 1945, Patterson inquired after facets of the normal school curriculum, student activities and relationships with peers and faculty, student demographics, characteristics of practice teaching, and assessments of preparedness for teaching in rural schools. In short, this valuable source has much to offer historians of gender, society, and culture. Despite this, Patterson published only one study from the questionnaires, and it focused on teachers' experiences after they had left normal school:

taught (curriculum and textbooks), and where teaching takes place (schools, colleges, universities) in addition to allied histories of women, gender, society, culture, and politics.

³¹ After serving as dean at the University of Alberta and Brigham Young University, Patterson died in 2010.

³² See Robert S. Patterson, “The Establishment of Progressive Education in Alberta,” PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 1968; Robert S. Patterson, “The Implementation of Progressive Education in Canada, 1930-1945,” in *Essays on Canadian Education*, 79–93 (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1986); and Amy von Heyking, “Implementing Progressive Education in Alberta’s Rural Schools,” *Historical Studies in Education* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 93–111.

³³ See Robert S. Patterson, *Project Yesteryear* Questionnaires, hereafter *PYQ*. See Appendix A.

An effort could be made to derive from the hundreds of questionnaire responses and interview transcriptions a variety of historical topics including the ethnic and socio-economic origins of western Canadian teachers, their reasons for choosing teaching as a career, the nature of their teacher preparation programs, their employment opportunities, instructional problems, working conditions, and community and professional help. As interesting as these observations might be, they are not the substance of this chapter.³⁴

Patterson bequeathed the files of *Project Yesteryear* to the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education and they constitute a key body of evidence for this thesis.

In answering Patterson's implicit call for analysis of the questionnaires from Project Yesteryear, it is important to note that other sources on Normalites exist, however few and far between. John Calam studied the normal schools of British Columbia with a focus on how the province settled on Vancouver and Victoria as sites for the institutions.³⁵ His administrative approach contributes to important discussions over how postsecondary education developed more than thirty years after British Columbia achieved provincial status, but it does not assist historians in understanding student life. Rather, "Teaching the Teachers" offers insight into how communities related to the agents of government and the famous *Putman-Weir Report*.³⁶ Kelvin Hollihan departs from Calam's structural study and utilizes Foucault and van Gennep in his dissertation on power relations at the Alberta normal schools. An interesting exploration of relationships and the pressure on students to conform to faculty demands, Hollihan tends to make unsubstantiated conclusions and depends on straw man arguments about "traditional

³⁴ Robert S. Patterson, "Voices from the Past," 101.

³⁵ John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers," 30-63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

histories.”³⁷ In an article on teacher identity, Hollihan ignores clear examples of humorous writing and the possibility that faculty acted as emotive humans.³⁸

Somewhat in between Patterson’s and Hollihan’s approaches lies Robert Stamp’s work celebrating the centenary of the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Education.³⁹ In 1945, upon ministerial action, Calgary Normal School became the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Education in Calgary. The school would later become the University of Alberta, Calgary, and, in 1966, the University of Calgary. To his credit, Stamp includes a few details on student life in the form of diary excerpts and photographs centred on one student.⁴⁰ No systematic analysis of student experience or viewpoint appears in this work, however.

Although normal school studies are minimal in their breadth, the literature on kindergarten to grade 12 schools is abundant. The 1980s heralded a rush of scholarship on education and schools benefitted tremendously. Most importantly for Alberta, David Jones, Nancy Sheehan, and Robert Stamp edited a collection of essays in 1979 called *Shaping the Schools of the West*.⁴¹ Historians explored the rural-urban divide and how different upbringings affected schooling, classic questions related to language, nationality, and ethnicity, and the changes in curriculum from late-nineteenth to early-

³⁷ K.A. Hollihan, “Deconstructive Reconstruction: An Institutional Critique of the Alberta Normal School,” PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 1995, 10.

³⁸ For example, Hollihan argues that welcoming picnics reflected the principal’s view that students were homesick and that homesickness represented an “undue” connection to home. See K.A. Hollihan, “‘Making us do the things we ought to do’: Constructing Teaching Identity in Alberta Normal Schools,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 13, no. 2 (2000): 176.

³⁹ Stamp, *Becoming a Teacher*, chapter 3: “A Modern Marriage.”

⁴⁰ Much of the first chapter of *Becoming a Teacher* comes from Robert Stamp, “Through the Eyes of Students: A Learner-Centred Approach to Educational History,” *History of Intellectual Culture* 2, no. 1 (2002): 1–11.

⁴¹ David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp, eds., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1979).

twentieth centuries. A sequel of sorts followed in 1986, addressing gender and class more distinctly. Normal schools made their first appearance with an article by John Calam and David Jones that investigated how schools related to social cohesion in 1920s Alberta.⁴² Throughout, both studies weave a growing consciousness of the importance of gender and normal schools, but an explicit connection is not made. In 2006, Amy von Heyking published her study of the social studies curriculum in the province from 1905 to 1980, in the process discussing the place of normal schools in promoting the changing citizenship agenda of the Canadian state and exploring the impact of that curriculum on students.⁴³ Gidney and Millar's *How Schools Worked* provides an important national contribution to educational history given the tendency of studies to be regional.⁴⁴

All of the consulted histories of schools include children as important players in schooling, but leave detailed discussions of what it meant to be a child and the importance age played in the educational system to other historians. Neil Sutherland and Mona Gleason stand out as historians who have done much to historicize childhood and youth, including bringing cultural meanings and practices to the forefront of how we perceive the world of children.⁴⁵ As the historiography has increasingly complicated historical intersections of identity, status, and culture, acknowledgement of students' unique position in society remains common, if understudied.

⁴² Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones, eds., *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1986).

⁴³ Amy von Heyking, *Creating Citizens*, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *How Schools Worked*.

⁴⁵ In particular, Neil Sutherland provides important cultural context for students' lives before they attended normal school. See Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up*. Mona Gleason and Tamara Myers are editing a forthcoming collection entitled, *The Difference Kids Make: Bringing Children and Youth into Canadian History*.

Literature on cultural history grew in parallel with education history during the 1980s. Known widely as “the cultural turn,” works in this vein draw considerably upon literary and discourse analysis, reconstructing worlds and perspectives of ordinary participants, and assume the ever-changing meaning and ever-constant power of language. For the purposes of this thesis, Paul Axelrod’s pathbreaking *Making a Middle Class* informs much of my strategy for exploring the culture of student life.⁴⁶ He invests considerable energy into uncovering the characteristics of student life in Canadian universities and connecting their academic and extracurricular (“associational”) activities with the development of class. It is a significant work from which to draw a theoretical approach and research questions and against which to compare how university students’ peers at normal school may have experienced life. Closer to the demographics of normal schools and closer in geography than the many studies of Ontario, James Pitsula’s “Student Life at Regina College” investigates the claim that students in the 1920s were wild, especially in the United States.⁴⁷ He finds that students at Regina College were far more concerned with what might be termed small rebellions rather than instigating large social changes. For both Pitsula and Axelrod, students take centre stage and command most of their analytical attention.

Understanding student life is incomplete without also looking at instructors and principals.⁴⁸ As normal school students were preparing to become teachers, the actions of the faculty took on added importance. In addition, histories of normal schools have

⁴⁶ Paul Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada During the Thirties* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ James M. Pitsula, “Student Life at Regina College in the 1920s,” in *Youth, University, and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education*, Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, eds., 122–39 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

⁴⁸ For the purposes of this study, instructors and principals are often referred to together as “faculty” because both groups taught classes.

more often been included in studies of the teaching profession's development than in any other subfield of education history. John Chalmers' twin works on schools and teachers in Alberta are among the earliest attempts at a synthesis, but each ignores normal schools in the development of teaching. *Teachers of the Prairie Province* is not a history of teaching *per se*, but a history of the Alberta Teachers' Alliance/Association (ATA, the teachers' union).⁴⁹ Chalmers implies that the normal schools played no role in teaching other than to establish junior chapters of the ATA; the institutions disappear entirely from the narrative.⁵⁰ The hagiography of *Teachers of the Prairie Province* is toned down quite a bit in *Schools of the Prairie Province*, but an overall positive and positivist approach remains.

Patterson, Sheehan, and Calam all wrote on teachers in western Canada, but Paul Stortz and J. Donald Wilson's notable article on teachers in rural British Columbia provides the best analysis of rural and social factors in the lives of teachers.⁵¹ While Stortz and Wilson were exploring rural teachers' identities and lives, Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald looked at teaching from a gendered lens. As they wrote, "feminism taught us to explore the history of teachers from the point of view of the women who taught school and to look for the structures that subordinated and exploited women in

⁴⁹ John W. Chalmers, *Teachers of the Prairie Province: The Story of the Alberta Teachers' Association* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

⁵⁰ Chalmers, *Teachers of the Prairie Province*, 137.

⁵¹ Paul J. Stortz and J. Donald Wilson, "Education on the Frontier: Schools, Teachers and Community Influence in North-Central British Columbia," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 26, no. 53 (November 1993): 265-290.

education.”⁵² This study heeds the advice of feminist historians in its exploration of students’ gendered lives.⁵³

Similar to the work on teaching and teachers, scholarship on gender history now commands several journals and many monographs, and has become a standard undergraduate course topic, as well as filling myriad bibliographies. Joan Scott’s foundational work establishes a base from which to move forward, but Joy Parr’s article “Gender History and Historical Practice” provides particularly useful theoretical and methodological guidance.⁵⁴ She reminds historians to embrace multiple narratives and come “to believe in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world...without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm.”⁵⁵ How, then, can historians posit characteristics or generalizations that provide useful information on how life might have been for many people without imposing a norm? Parr offers a solution in her assertion that experience and identities were, indeed, settled—but they were settled in “contingency rather than certainty.”⁵⁶

Nancy Sheehan also offers guidance on gender and teaching. In doing so, however, she unintentionally perpetuates categories of “student” and “teacher” that prevent analysis of normal school students. Her contribution to Kach and Mazurek’s *Exploring Our Educational Past* deftly treats the ways in which education was not the

⁵² Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 4.

⁵³ Kristina Llewellyn analyzed the ways in which women teachers were gendered in the World War II-era. See *Democracy’s Angels: The Work of Women Teachers* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) and Joy Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” *Canadian Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (September 1995): 354–76.

⁵⁵ Parr, “Gender History,” 361.

⁵⁶ Parr, “Gender History,” 375.

cure-all for gender inequity and, in important and unexpected ways, perpetuated inequity.⁵⁷ This thesis will address Sheehan’s implicit claim that normal schools were training women students for a professional “ghetto” in part through an investigation of what women students saw and how they acted within the normal schools.⁵⁸ If we are committed to furthering the voices of historically disadvantaged actors, amplifying their perspectives is an important part of that aim.

So where does the historical literature stand? While we have work on the history of teaching, we have not yet focused on how students became teachers. Histories of schools abound, but histories of normal schools constitute a disproportionately small number of studies in comparison to K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. Children and youth are increasingly represented within the literature, but few of those studies outside of psychology delve into how children became adolescents and adults. As educational institutions were and remain intimately connected to society and culture, approaches focused on those questions might provide a new perspective and offer fresh research and analyses on student cultures. Locating normal schools within the historiography has been a challenge and the institutions remain somewhat “ghosts in the machine” among education histories—they were present in the background and affected the lives of children, professional status of teachers, constructs of gender, and shaping of communities, yet rarely secure contemporary scholarly focus. Discussions of teacher training, culture, gender, and schooling are common areas for research, but no one has yet brought together those lines of inquiry in a study of student life at normal schools.

⁵⁷ Nancy Sheehan, “Women and Education in Alberta: The Rhetoric and the Reality,” in *Exploring Our Educational Past: Schooling in the North-West Territories and Alberta*, Nick Kach and Kas Mazurek, eds., 115-130 (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1992).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

Reconstructing student life at the Alberta normal schools—in all of its rich complexity—is a significant challenge. Such a task has been both the mission and the challenge of social historians for decades and despite advances in the techniques of the field, it remains so. The lives of students were bound together more by shared experience than similar backgrounds or aspirations. What they did together, rather, held just as much as importance as who they were individually. Together they forged what I describe as “student life.” The singular does not imply all students led the same life. Instead, it is meant to represent the key characteristics of the normal school students’ experiences in 1930s Alberta.

“Student life,” for the purposes of this study, includes those times and places in which students’ roles as students affected individual choices. Time spent in the classroom and on the grounds of the normal school obviously takes a central role in such an analysis, but activities outside of the normal school in which student status was a significant factor are also included. Given the requirement for Normalites to board only with their own families or in approved boarding houses, time spent in such places was affected by their status as students.⁵⁹ Essentially, when the formal and/or informal structures of the normal school influenced the students, I take this as part of student life. In addition, seemingly unimportant activities like traveling to and from the normal school and getting a treat from a soda fountain downtown comprised parts of student life.

I analyzed documents secured from various archives assuming that student life matters to understanding how normal schools functioned pedagogically as well as socially. The attitudes, behaviours, and choices of students at normal school reflected a

⁵⁹ Occasionally “action was taken by staff” regarding living conditions. See *Normal School Annual Report*, 1929.

particular way of life at a turning point in the educational, political, and cultural history of Alberta. What was true in 1930 was no longer by 1939. While normal schools had matured in terms of policies, curriculum, facilities, traditions, and faculty by the onset of the Great Depression, that stability would be successfully challenged by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Significant decreases in male student enrolment, departures of faculty members, introduction of new, shorter programs, and the military takeover of normal school buildings represented a break with the previous decade.

Much of the extant documentation privileges an administrative perspective of legal requirements and educational practices that concerned logistics, finances, facilities, and staffing. It is therefore notable that principals mentioned student life in their annual reports at all. The province's decision to absorb the normal schools into the University of Alberta in 1945 and subsequent transfer of teacher education from the Department of Education to the University meant an end to the impetus to preserve documents related to the normal school. After all, the normal schools no longer existed and had no advocates.⁶⁰ Robert Patterson concludes in his research on Alberta's normal schools that much of the administrative records were destroyed before any historical analysis could be conducted, leaving the principals' annual reports and various letters to the minister as the only official documentation of what happened in the normal schools.⁶¹

Capturing aspects of student life becomes even harder, as little trace of student-produced newspapers remain. Unique among the normal schools in Alberta, students at

⁶⁰ The lack of advocacy is evident in the scattered nature of documents. For example, yearbooks from the Calgary Normal School are located at the University of Calgary Archives, Camrose and District Centennial Museum, University of Alberta Archives, Glenbow Museum and Archives, and the Provincial Archives of Alberta. No single archive contains every yearbook.

⁶¹ *PYQ*, 1. See Appendix A.

Camrose produced a weekly column for the local *Camrose Canadian*, but those columns are inaccessible. What do remain are most of the yearbooks from the era and a reflective document specific to Calgary, *The Chronicle*.⁶² Yearbooks commit to the collective memory an image of the superlative: activities that exceeded expectations, students who excelled in class, events that stood out. Only by reading against the grain can we gain some sense of ordinary life; that is, routines and commonalities that more closely characterize what might be termed “student life.”

What did it mean to be a Normalite in Alberta during the 1930s? It meant being perpetually in transition. Normal school was an unsettling experience for students because it meant unlearning and relearning curriculum, and ways of teaching. Things that had been assumed were now uncovered and discussed. Social relationships were unsettled as adolescents pushed at the boundaries of acceptable behaviour regulated by faculty and community. Women and men took actions that both demonstrated their recognition of changing gender roles and contributed to those shifts, subtle as they may have been. But all of these changes took place in an era of distinct uncertainty for society as a whole and a time of transition in the lives of adolescents. This environment contributed to a generally-accepted social world based on conformity, because violating community standards meant risking opportunities to improve one’s life.

Formal, systematic education (i.e. schooling) was the chief way Albertans consciously fostered and perpetuated their cultural standards.⁶³ Exploring the intricacies of relationships among actors in the educational landscape, therefore, helps us understand tensions of society, urban and rural cultures, gender, and community. Administrative and

⁶² *The Chronicle* is located at the University of Calgary Archives.

⁶³ Amy von Heyking, *Creating Citizens*, 153.

curricular records play an important role in reconstructing those relationships but they are insufficient to explain how and why students experienced life at normal schools in the multitude of ways they did. Yearbooks, newspaper columns, records of alumni reunions, and *Project Yesteryear* questionnaires provide glimpses into the worlds of normal school students and a foundation from which to analyze the effect of normal school on students and communities in 1930s Alberta. Stories of students matter. They matter because they represent how students saw themselves, their peers, the world around them, and how their world intersected with their future.

Chapter 1: The Social World

For most prospective teachers in 1930s Alberta, the first step toward their profession of choice began with an application to a normal school in Calgary, Camrose, or Edmonton. But these future educators became Normalites when they walked through the front doors of the impressive purpose-built structures and registered for the course. A sense of importance permeated this step across the threshold. As the yearbook editorial board of Calgary wrote in 1931, “When God writes *Opportunity* on one side of the door, He writes *Responsibility* on the other.”⁶⁴ For many Normalites, life became more complicated from the first day of school. Students entered the world of the normal school with expectations of the upcoming year as well as with impressions and experiences of their own life courses before. Many left rural areas of isolated farms and small towns for the comparatively large cities of Alberta. Differences among people, possibilities, and opportunities for the future multiplied in the urban environments.

Normal schools’ social worlds could be explored without addressing gender, but such an exploration would downplay the importance of gender to everyday experiences and long-term social status of Normalites. Students entering the teaching profession were well aware of society’s expectations of them as women and as men. Those expectations were culturally and temporally contingent. As we will see in the following chapters, those expectations also varied based on faculty member and institution. Gender will be considered throughout and all three campuses and activities that took place inside and outside the classroom walls will be analyzed together to reflect the gendered ways students experienced normal school.

⁶⁴ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1930-31, 3. Capitalization and emphasis in original. Yearbook titles varied by school and by year, but for the purposes of this study, the general term “yearbook” is used.

A key question emerges upon review of the primary documents: to what extent was gender salient for women students, men students, and the normal school student body as a whole? Historians recognize the importance of gender and students at the time did as well. But how often did students reflect on the role their genders played in affecting their personal and academic choices and activities? Evidence suggests that gender was important to all—students and faculty, men and women—but for different reasons. For women, gender remained in the front of their minds because of the different treatment they were accorded even as they largely conformed to expectations and because of the obvious imbalance in the ratio between men and women students. For men, gender primarily played a role in dating and romance. *Project Yesteryear* confined its questions regarding gender to whether classes were separated or co-educational, but a close reading of the responses to other questions illustrates the small yet pervasive and significant ways gender affected student life. Was gender ever-present, intermittent, or not present in how students described their world at the time? What evidence exists of students upholding and/or challenging gendered roles and expectations?

Institutional Structures

To understand how individuals inhabited and associated with provincial normal schools, discussion of institutional structures provides an appropriate point for departure. From before the moment that students entered the normal school to the day they left, structures constrained the actions of students and faculty. The organization of normal schools' curricula, the schools' physical plants, and the academic policies were frameworks within which the people affiliated with normal schools acted. In 1906, Alberta's Department of

Education established its first provincial normal school.⁶⁵ The province wanted teachers to grasp the fundamentals of teaching while taking the initiative to work on self-improvement while in the profession. Most importantly, provincial leaders expected teachers to represent a pinnacle of citizenship which children and communities would emulate. In the midst of the economic upheaval of the early 1930s, teacher candidates and teachers encountered the widespread expectation of being role-models for children and society at large.

Time spent in school is of particular importance for pedagogical, practical, and cultural reasons. Before the 1910s, normal schools in Canada prepared teachers over the course of only four months, a situation reflective of the urgent need for additional teachers in the West.⁶⁶ Even as normal school principals noted the need for more teachers, Calgary Principal George Bryan wrote in his report to the education minister in 1906 that “it [was] impossible in a four months’ course to deal with...subjects in a thorough and systematic manner.”⁶⁷ His plea for more time was echoed in nearly every annual report until the course was lengthened to eight months beginning in September 1918.⁶⁸ By the late 1920s, education administrators across the country sought to improve the qualifications of teachers and took advantage of teacher oversupply by increasing entrance requirements and program length. Western provinces resisted this process; Alberta normal schools never operated programs longer than nine months.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Alberta Normal School (ANS) opened in Calgary. When the second normal school opened in Camrose in 1912, ANS was renamed Calgary Normal School.

⁶⁶ *NSAR*, 1906, 37.

⁶⁷ *NSAR*, 1906, 39.

⁶⁸ *NSAR*, 1919, 38.

⁶⁹ Introduction of longer programs in Alberta came with the establishment of the University of Alberta, Calgary Branch in 1945.

Pedagogically, one academic year resulted in a dense curriculum that demanded faculty members focus on only the essentials and move quickly from subject to subject, assigning reams of homework. The order of the academic day was regimented and unchanging: classes began at at 9:00am and ended by 4:30pm Monday through Thursday, with Friday afternoons set aside for all-school gatherings. Normalites spent much of their time outside of school working on assignments and studying for exams, connecting in-class with out-of-class experiences. Work kept Normalites busy on a daily basis; it also occupied much of their weeks and a significant portion of their year in the program. A vast majority of alumni reported in *Project Yesteryear Questionnaires* (hereafter *PYQ*) that they visited home only during scheduled breaks at Christmas and Easter.⁷⁰ Most felt compelled to stay in the city of their normal school to save time for school work and because the distance from home was great. Life for students was centred on the place and the people of the institution—but what kept them going through the hard work and uncertain outcomes?

One possible answer lies in how teacher candidates viewed the teaching profession itself. Staff at Camrose surveyed the students in the fall term of 1929 on whether the students intended “to make teaching their life work.”⁷¹ Of the 195 respondents, only 39.0% replied “yes” with another 39.5% replying “no” and 21.5% “undecided.” Details of this survey are lost so we cannot know if students responded

⁷⁰ In part, this reflected the time and money required to get home. One student at Camrose shared that “there was a local train from Camrose to Vegreville (known as the ‘Hog Special’). As it stopped for freight at each station, the trip took about 5 hrs. We had supper in Vegreville and sat through a movie twice while waiting to catch the main C.N. at 1am.” See *PYQ*, C38-336, woman, 1. Following the style of citation written on the *PYQ* documents, citations in this thesis with “CL” refer to Calgary, “C” to Camrose, and “E” to Edmonton. The two-digit number following indicates the year the respondent graduated.

⁷¹ *NSAR*, 1929, 28-29.

verbally to an instructor or a peer or how the design of that survey might have affected the results. Despite the rhetoric of teaching being a special calling and the memories of people “always knowing” they would be teachers, teacher candidates were unsure. Many likely expected to marry, a process that would remove women teachers from the classroom. No extant records indicate that the survey was repeated at Camrose or the other normal schools after the full impact of the Depression was felt. Young people made the decision to leave their homes and families on the promise of better days.

What kept Normalites committed to the hard work was, in part, the practicality of a one-year program, the fulfillment of social life, and what they envisioned lie ahead. Faced with diminishing options for staying in or joining the middle class, the Normal course offered a relatively quick pathway to respectable work. As well, time spent with peers and faculty created shared experiences that fulfilled social needs and fostered optimism about the future. Faculty involved themselves in many areas of student life and largely perpetuated the distinct world of normal schools by “carrying” traditions from year-to-year. The length of the program affected the culture of Alberta’s normal schools in that the overlap from one cohort of students to the next was nearly non-existent. Unlike multi-year programs in high school, college, and university, students rarely remained to pass along elements of culture. Faculty played a critical role in mitigating this disconnect.

Student Bodies

Prospective teachers in the normal schools of Alberta reflected the population of the province as a whole in terms of occupation and religion, as many Normalites came from

farming households and practiced the Christian faith.⁷² Most obviously different from provincial statistics was the ratio of women and men students at normal schools. In 1931, 45.3% of Albertans were women and 25% of University of Alberta students were women.⁷³ In contrast, about 79% of normal school students in 1930 were women; this decreased to 73.7% by 1939.⁷⁴ Identifying race or ethnicity is exceptionally difficult, as neither the annual reports nor *PYQ* included such information. However, *Project Yesteryear* did ask respondents to indicate the birthplace of one's parents, giving a rough idea of the nationality of many students. 34.0% of respondents who attended Calgary had at least one parent born in the United States, a much higher percentage than Camrose or Edmonton.⁷⁵ While high, this figure likely reflects the close proximity of Calgary to the Canada-US border.

Occupational information for students' fathers is also available through *Project Yesteryear* and by far the most common response was farming.⁷⁶ More than 77% of Camrose students grew up with parents who farmed, far more than the 55.3% of Edmonton students and 47.2% of Calgary students.⁷⁷ Fathers of students who attended normal school in Calgary and Edmonton who did not farm filled a diverse array of middle-class positions, with very few in lucrative professions. More than a dozen fathers

⁷² Of 731,605 Albertans in 1931, 176,816 (24.2%) were members of the United Church, 168,408 (23.0%) were members of the Roman Catholic Church, and 112,979 (15.4%) were Anglican. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Year Book, 1934-35*, 128-129.

⁷³ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Year Book, 1934-35*, 112 and Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 21.

⁷⁴ *NSAR*, 1930, 25-28 and *NSAR*, 1939, 30.

⁷⁵ N = 144.

⁷⁶ *Project Yesteryear* did not ask respondents for the occupation of their mothers, but a handful chose to include that information anyway.

⁷⁷ I recognize that in the absence of other information, when a father was a farmer, both parents were farmers. The work of a father on a farm intertwined with the work of a mother on a farm. For Camrose, see *NSAR*, 1934, 29 and for Edmonton, see *NSAR*, 1937, 42.

worked for the railroad, some sold cars or real estate, and a handful worked in the civil service.⁷⁸ Using Axelrod's classification of occupations, I found that no more than 4% of the respondents to *PYQ* had fathers who worked in the professions.⁷⁹ The individuals who attended normal school constituted a homogenous group based in the social and work ethic of rural farming communities in Alberta—a background that would contribute to how they built their social and cultural world at normal school.

Students at Calgary, Camrose, and Edmonton Normal Schools came from moderately similar backgrounds and recalled similar motivations for pursuing a career in teaching. Mostly anglophone, White, and Christian, Normalites in Alberta differed most significantly from one another in terms of socioeconomic and rural/urban background. The location of the normal schools in two large cities and a middling hamlet drew thousands of students from across the largely rural province, bringing together students from rural and urban backgrounds. The “average” Normalite in 1930s Alberta came from a social environment in which any other Normalite would have likely felt comfortable.⁸⁰ This similarity in background directly contributed to a sense of shared identity that was strongly reinforced by the experiences shared across the province and throughout the period.

One experience shared by every Normalite in this period was attending school during the Great Depression, a constant backdrop against which their actions and

⁷⁸ The following number of students had fathers who worked on the railroad: 12 at Calgary, 3 at Camrose, 2 at Edmonton; students with fathers who worked in real estate: 1 at Camrose and 2 at Edmonton; students with fathers in civil service (any level of government but not including teaching or elected office): 3 at Calgary and 1 at Edmonton.

⁷⁹ Analysis shows the following distribution: 1 (medical) doctor, 1 lawyer, 3 accountants, 3 engineers, 2 clergy, and 1 Member of the Legislative Assembly. For Axelrod's classification scheme, see *Making a Middle Class*, 174-177. His work focuses on Canada in the 1930s and provides a useful framework.

⁸⁰ Some demographic distinctions stand out, however: Calgary had the highest percentage of students with American parents and Camrose had the proportionately largest group of ethnically Ukrainian students.

decisions played out. The era's uncertainty was by no means limited to financial matters, but money was certainly a salient and tangible aspect of this difficult decade. Normal school was not free for students to attend—nor were the institutions free for the province to operate. Tuition fees began at \$25 per annum in 1924, doubled to \$50 in 1932, and rose to \$100 per annum by 1934.⁸¹ The provincial government subsidized the costs to students with a loan program from 1930. For one student, the loan of \$400 allowed him to send \$25 back to his parents, indicating the hardship his family was experiencing.⁸² However, government loans fell victim to austerity measures and starting in the fall term of 1932, students no longer had access to this vital financial lifeline.⁸³

Payment presented an obstacle to students, who were largely from working and middle classes.⁸⁴ Students relied heavily on parents and family members to either pay tuition on their behalf or provide loans. Older siblings—often teachers—who were established in careers frequently assisted by sending money from paycheques every month. By supporting younger siblings in pursuing a teaching career, the older siblings served as both familial and professional role models—a tradition that many Normalites continued upon graduation. Several *PYQ* respondents mentioned helping their younger siblings meet the costs of normal school.⁸⁵ One young woman at Calgary paid for school with \$300 from her father and saved \$100 by cooking for local miners. While she had hoped to save money for university to become a physician, her participation in *Project Yesteryear* indicates she remained a teacher for the rest of her career.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Robert Stamp, *Becoming a Teacher*, 31 and 36.

⁸² *PYQ*, C31-211, man, 2.

⁸³ *NSAR*, 1932, 34.

⁸⁴ Reports indicate that only 16% of Camrose students' fathers worked in business or professional occupations mid-decade. See *NSAR*, 1934, 29.

⁸⁵ "My parents paid my way. I helped my sister later." *PYQ*, C37-323, woman, 2.

⁸⁶ *PYQ*, CL34-299, woman, 2.

While training to become a teacher was a pathway open to more young adults than enrolling in the university in Edmonton, costs associated with moving to the host city, paying tuition fees, and providing room and board ensured the continuing influence of families through their relative financial stability. Financing the cost of normal school gives evidence of strong kinship ties—many students borrowed money from extended family members when community connections in the form of government loans failed. Parents, aunts, and uncles often took out loans from banks on their own credit, borrowed against insurance policies, and sold machinery or livestock.⁸⁷ These decisions were not entered into lightly and demonstrate the significance of family bonds. They also show the importance of succeeding at normal school. Investing in their children by way of paying for normal school meant less money for other things in a devastated economy, placing added pressure on students to complete and do well in their program. Lara Campbell and Neil Sutherland both note the importance of children’s labour to the family during the Depression.⁸⁸ For most families of Alberta Normalites, the parents and children often sacrificed to make normal school feasible.

One way of reconstructing the world of Alberta’s normal schools is to explore the experiences of students before they arrived at normal school. As individuals carry significant moments, general feelings, and emotional memories from childhood throughout their lives, over time those fragments of the past become personalized and

⁸⁷ “My father borrowed on an insurance policy” (*PYQ*, C32-252, woman, 2); another student paid for school “through my mother who saved some money through cream sales and eggs” (C32-355, man, 2); “loan of \$100 from a relative” (E39-177, man, 2); and “\$300, about 2000 bushels of my father’s wheat crop” (CL33-283, man, 2).

⁸⁸ Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario’s Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 84 and Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up*, 114. In her discussion of families in Ontario, Campbell devotes significant attention to rural families and their tension-filled relationships.

integrated. They affect how one perceives the world. In the case of the Normalites, this study looks at student experiences while keeping age cohorts in mind: what did the young adults of the 1930s likely encounter when they were children?⁸⁹ An 18-year-old in 1930, for example, was born in 1912 and therefore would have been a small child during the Great War, gone to elementary school in the post-war recession, and started high school during Alberta's relative boom years of the mid- to late-1920s.⁹⁰ Beyond the political and economic context, this age cohort witnessed the introduction of radio, widespread adoption of automobiles, and accessible movie theatres. The students who finished high school in 1929 and 1930 were the last cohort to graduate into relative prosperity. Most entered normal school when the significance of the Great Depression was already clear.

Socioeconomic class played an important part not only in the backgrounds of the Normalites, it also guided their decision to attend normal school at all. Some alumni described their decision to attend normal school as directly resulting from being unable to afford the tuition fees of the provincial university. For one daughter of a farmer, "normal school was [a] 'last resort' as I wanted to be a dress designer but could not afford to go to London or New York."⁹¹ Becoming a teacher was not the student's first choice, but she recognized the limited options available to her. Normal school was an option for more Albertans because the province offered loans to offset the cost of attending but did not offer a similar program for university students. With the majority of Normalites raised on

⁸⁹ Since 1998, Beloit College in Wisconsin has released an annual list that seeks to represent significant social and cultural milestones for young adults entering college and university. See <https://www.beloit.edu/mindset/>.

⁹⁰ Palmer and Palmer, *Alberta: A New History*, 198.

⁹¹ *PYQ*, C33-266, woman, 2.

farms and the prices of crops falling to historic lows in the early-1930s, the Alberta government's loan program for normal schools was a critical, but temporary support.

When the provincial loan program ended, students financed their tuition in ways that reflected both the tight kinship networks of which they were part and the inventiveness made necessary by economic realities. In fact, it is far more descriptive and accurate to say that families financed students' tuition through an impressively diverse array of strategies. Some alumni reported that their parents simply "took care of it," but whether this response indicates their families had adequate funds, their parents hid the sacrifice from their children, or something else is unclear.⁹² A far more typical situation was that parents did indeed pay for normal school, but that, as one student recalled, "It was during hard times and it was difficult for them."⁹³ Normalites were aware of the sacrifices their families made to put them through school and vividly remembered the details of such assistance decades later. One student's sister cleaned rooms at a local hospital and sent along the paycheque to cover tuition; another student's parents sold cream to pay the fees.⁹⁴ They also recalled their own work: cutting hair in normal school bathrooms for 10¢, selling beloved horses after a father's death, and working at Hudson's Bay Company on Saturdays for \$1.50 per day.⁹⁵

The sacrifice of families and the work of students themselves makes clear that Normalites did not attend without good reason—but why attend normal school at all? Young adults in the 1930s faced a bleak job market with far too many qualified individuals for available work. Conventional historical scholarship has agreed that if an

⁹² *PYQ*, C33-258, woman, 2.

⁹³ *PYQ*, E32-113, woman, 2.

⁹⁴ *PYQ*, C34-282, woman, 2 and *PYQ*, E32-100, woman, 2.

⁹⁵ *PYQ*, CL34-310, man, 2; *PYQ*, C35-297, woman, 2; *PYQ*, CL32-280, woman, 2.

individual had a job during the Great Depression, her or his financial situation was relatively stable.⁹⁶ With falling prices, wages went further.⁹⁷ However, this argument assumes a direct relationship between having a job and receiving payment for work. Teachers in rural Alberta during the 1930s found this connection to be tenuous at best. Many farming families could afford to pay their rates (taxes) to the rural school boards only intermittently and as a result, many school boards could not afford to pay teachers in cash. Grants from the Alberta government to backfill the gap between expenditures and revenues were stretched thin and teachers sometimes went years before receiving the full amount of their first year's salary. Given the numbers of Normalites who reported in their questionnaires receiving aid from older siblings who taught before them and having friends who also taught, it is reasonable to assume that teacher candidates knew the difficulty of the situation they were entering.

Normalites took the considerable challenge despite the long odds of securing a teaching position for two intertwining reasons. Normal school represented a pathway to socioeconomic stability. Even if the short-term news about teaching was poor, it was better than the prospects in agriculture (occupations that were the background of many students).⁹⁸ However, the classes of 1930 through 1932 had the additional burden of repaying government loans. Their ability to do so was predicated on the assumption that loan recipients would have jobs from which to pay back the principal amount—a tall order when the province had hundreds of teachers in excess of demand. Outmigration

⁹⁶ Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens*, 5-8 and Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 15-17.

⁹⁷ Alumni recalled drastically decreasing rent and owners' scramble to keep tenants. "After Christmas prices were falling all over the city," *PYQ*, CL31-253, woman, 2.

⁹⁸ One teacher remembered an ominous figure: 1,700 teachers unemployed in Alberta in 1930. See *PYQ*, CL31-248, woman, 5.

from the Prairies grew as drought and depression devastated the region, but students maintained hope that Alberta's population would grow, schools would be built, and teachers would be needed.⁹⁹ The source of this hope is not clear and observers might have called it a form of denial. Even the yearbook editors warned students about the difficult job market, but their warnings were couched in long-term optimism: "Just as there have been 'depressions' in the past, so in the future there will be periods of unemployment—and discontent...On them [schoolchildren] depends whether or no [sic] the next economic upheaval will be attended by the sufferings and miseries which have characterized this one..."¹⁰⁰ But more likely than denial was Normalites' fundamental hope and passion for teaching. Dozens of respondents, when asked by *Project Yesteryear* about their reason for attending normal school, simply responded that they had always wanted to be teachers—to make a difference in the lives of children. However unstable the income, teaching was a service position and came with the both the opportunity and obligation to serve communities.

The Routines and Activities of Student Culture

Schools of all kinds are inherently dynamic institutions because the people that embody them come to teach and learn, bringing unique perspectives to their work. The same can be said of cities, which Stephan Thernstrom described as "breathing, pulsing entities" that are alive in a collective sense with the lives of the individuals.¹⁰¹ This study sees normal schools in a similar way: each September, the institutions drew in a new cohort of

⁹⁹ About 250,000 people left the region during the Depression. See Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 388.

¹⁰⁰ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1932-33, 5.

¹⁰¹ Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 85.

students and each June, exhaled a new cohort of teachers. What happened in the nine months between breaths was a dynamic process of identity reformation, socialization, and challenge. Contemporaries might describe the daily routines of Normalites as “ordinary” given the continuity of general patterns from high school. Most students attended normal school classes from the morning through late afternoon, completed homework in the evening, and participated in recreation on the weekends and in free time. Normal school did indeed represent continuity in broad strokes, but students adopted new habits to fit their circumstances. These habits stemmed from the complexity of faculty involvement, student motivation, and the adjustments involved in the separation of young adults from their families. Normalites encountered and experienced change in a variety of contexts, not the least of which was new-found freedom to make decisions and form interpersonal associations of their choosing. For many students, the social world of normal school involved exploring boundaries but ultimately conforming to educational, social, and gendered norms.

Life in normal school was a flurry of activity, but one constant remained: the importance of the school itself in fostering relationships among individuals. As one alumna recalled:

We were all, I think, naïve and short of money so the school was the centre of our life—the only source of entertainment. So we formed close friendships and enjoyed a bit of freedom away from home. It was a growing up time. And we were allowed to wear shorts in the gym instead of those terrible gym bloomers. Our ideals were high and we were so optimistic.¹⁰²

Students navigated an intricate web of social relations in the seemingly-rigid routines established by faculty and administrators. As students hurriedly took notes from

¹⁰² *PYQ*, C35-304, woman, 5.

traditional lectures, only to race the clock to change in time for physical education, and then shower and put on proper attire for afternoon classes, faculty fought to keep their students awake, monitor student clubs and activities, and deal with increasing demands on their time.¹⁰³

Being at Normal held the promise of new-found freedom to make decisions, but challenges remained. Students began their days away from school. The reality that all students lived away from the institution and had to gather on its grounds had important implications for students and student life. None of the normal schools ever built on-campus residences for students and therefore all students had to find accommodation through family or a privately-run boarding house.¹⁰⁴ In both scenarios, students were bound by the intimate ties of authority: either the continuing watchful eye of their parents or the extension of faculty authority through the owner of the boarding house. The normal schools required students to secure off-campus accommodation only in approved residences, which tied together the students, the owners, and the institutions.¹⁰⁵ Students provided desperately-needed income to the owners (who in many cases were older, widowed women). Principals retained the authority to take action in these residences, and while it is unclear what actions those might have been, one can assume the owners took their responsibility to watch the students seriously.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ As Calgary Principal Coffin noted in his report, “the extra-curricular enterprises of the students kept both staff and students very busy.” See *NSAR*, 1933, 26.

¹⁰⁴ One student recalled “Board and room names of prospective landladies [were] supplied by the school” (*PYQ*, CL34-304, man, 2). It is worth noting that while universities in Canada almost always built on-campus residences, normal schools rarely did so. Axelrod explores the differing treatment of university students via institutions’ enforcement of rules more casually for men and more strictly for women living on-campus. See *Making a Middle Class*, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Evidence of this requirement survives not in official documentation, but in the *PYQ* and the *NSARs*.

¹⁰⁶ Principal Lord of Edmonton reported, in the context of student health, that “boarding places have been visited, and in some cases action has been taken. Living conditions here are generally very good indeed.” See *NSAR*, 1931, 32.

Exploring how students traveled to normal school exposes several important features of the social world they created. Proximity to the institution was highly valued by students because travel by foot was free and meant easier journeys during the severe winters of the early 1930s. Cost of travel was on the minds of most Normalites and influenced their choices of where to live. One student noted that he walked to Edmonton Normal School most days “to save bus fare—6 tickets for 25¢...”¹⁰⁷ and another remembered walking back home for “noon hour meals” before returning for afternoon classes.¹⁰⁸ Both the Calgary and Edmonton campuses were located at the top of steep hills near major rivers. Recollections by alumni contain a mythic quality when describing the treks up North Hill (in Calgary) or across the North Saskatchewan River (in Edmonton): “we always walked the 2 miles (across High Level Bridge) nights and mornings.”¹⁰⁹ While many students walked to normal school, the streetcar provided a more convenient and comfortable, if costly, alternative for students in Edmonton and Calgary. Since Camrose did not have a streetcar, those students most often walked to campus. Out of hundreds of respondents, only one referenced any students coming from families with automobiles.¹¹⁰ For Normalites, travel was not simply a routine aspect of their lives—it reflected their socioeconomic status and provided both opportunity and time to develop peer relationships outside the direct gaze of authorities.

Once on the grounds of the normal school, academic matters dominated students’ routines but did not erase social concerns. Efforts to succeed in the classroom were

¹⁰⁷ *PYQ*, E32-099, man, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *PYQ*, CL33-283, man, 2.

¹⁰⁹ *PYQ*, E32-103, woman, 2. See also *PYQ*, E38-160, woman, 2.

¹¹⁰ *PYQ*, CL31-263, woman, 6. This student also took “summer-long trips to Europe in 1936 and 1938,” an unusual occurrence, suggesting a measure of familial wealth.

balanced by time and energy spent socializing. Faculty divided students into classes based first on academic standing (at least grade XI) and second based on gender, with co-educational classes emerging as a result of too many women and too few men.¹¹¹ For example, Camrose in 1934-35 had five classes, three first-class and two second-class. Class IA was a group of students pursuing first-class certification that included only women students.¹¹² Class IB was similarly all-women and Class IC was all-men.¹¹³ However, Class IIA was co-educational while Class IIB was all-women.¹¹⁴ Classes were the smallest unit of organization and students spent much of the academic day with each other in their own class, although accounts of socialization during passing periods and in student societies indicate the widespread intermingling of students. Despite the tendency of the institutions to group the Normalites by academic standing and gender, students were admitted without regard to gender.

Most students sat through classes with others of the same sex. This situation largely went unnoticed and unchallenged, although a few would have welcomed the “distraction.” In 1933, one Edmonton student opined at length that classes were:

Segregated by sex, ostensibly to convenience Sergeant Barker, the Physical Education Instructor, thus better able to select exercises, gymnastics, and other activities more suited to each sex. Naturally we were disappointed and appeased ourselves that limited distractions enabled greater concentration on less delectable subjects. That made class change periods very popular and contributed substantially to tardiness and the success of some joint classes (Dr. Dunlop’s lessons on Western Canadian Indians) and numerous co-curricular social activities.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Normal schools in the province required only grade XI standing for admission throughout the 1930s, except for Calgary. Starting in September 1937, that institution required grade XII for admission. See *NSAR*, 1937, 34.

¹¹² Camrose Normal School yearbook, 1934-35, 23.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 34 and 41.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50 and 60. This pattern was replicated throughout the period of study and by all three schools.

¹¹⁵ *PYQ*, E33-124, man, 3.

This situation remained relatively static throughout the period, although some students noted their preference for separation from students of another sex: “I considered the arrangement 100% okay since I felt much less self-conscious in a purely male, chauvinist environment and I think most of my classmates felt the same way, although a few wondered how it would be in a mixed class.”¹¹⁶ For the students who learned in co-educational classes, the situation was generally satisfactory and did not trigger much of a response at all. As one Camrose student put it, “I was one of [six] girls who were put into the boys’ class. There was nothing in any of the classes at anytime that made us feel we should not be in that class.”¹¹⁷

For such a fundamental distinction, one might expect a more significant reaction and this might have been the case if the barriers between women and men were higher and consistently enforced. Students were well-aware of the permeability of the divisions between men and women. Having co-educational and separated classes demonstrated that the separation was a constructed, moral decision—not a natural one. Students noticed this and took advantage of other opportunities to socialize with the opposite sex. Passing periods provided a prime opportunity to speak with each other, exchange rumours, and flirt. Although the time between classes was short, probably five minutes given the difficulty of athletic students to change clothes in the allotted time, it was enough to maintain social connections.

Lunchtime, however, was the second-longest and most consistent period of time during which most students mingled on the grounds. Called “noon hour meal” by some

¹¹⁶ *PYQ*, E39-165, man, 3. Note the neutral-to-positive connotation of “chauvinist.”

¹¹⁷ *PYQ*, C34-278, woman, 3.

students, lunch was held in the cafeterias of each normal school.¹¹⁸ Most students brought their lunches to save money and bought only soup or dessert on occasion. During this important hour, students developed close relationships, swapped stories (and sometimes sandwiches), and crossed the gendered boundaries established by custom and enforced by faculty.¹¹⁹

Outside of lunches, the most obviously social time of the formal normal school schedule was the “Friday Lit.” Held at the end of the day at the end of the week, assemblies for the literary advancement of Normalites represented one highlight of widespread faculty involvement in student activities.¹²⁰ Each class was responsible for organizing, rehearsing, and performing a dramatic act for the benefit of the entire school—class honour and pride was at stake. Yearbook editors included reflections on the relative success and virtue of each presentation.¹²¹ Friday Lits prepared Normalites for their responsibilities as teachers in rural areas to put on a Christmas concert as well as forcing reluctant or shy students to interact with one another.¹²²

Peer interaction and dramatic arts played a vital role in the social life of Alberta normal schools. In fact, principals noted that “students [were] not encouraged, unless their class work is of a very high order, to take part in more than one or two of these voluntary activities.”¹²³ The statement was couched in negative terms but it illustrates that extra-curricular activities formed not something outside the curriculum, but

¹¹⁸ For example, “[At] noon hour I would go to the cafeteria and supplement my packaged lunch with a bowl of soup.” *PYQ*, CL36-342, woman, 2.

¹¹⁹ Miss Hastie at Camrose advised students to only butter one side of sandwiches to save money. See *PYQ*, C34-273, woman, 3.

¹²⁰ *PYQ*, E38-163, woman, 6.

¹²¹ Calgary Normal School yearbook 1933-34, 59.

¹²² Robert Patterson, “Voices from the Past,” 108.

¹²³ *NSAR*, 1939, 37.

something parallel to it and with many connections. In modern terms, these activities would be considered a part of the co-curriculum.¹²⁴ Surviving official documents and alumni recollections support the voluntary nature of participating in extra-curricular activities, but social pressure was intense. Not participating would put one at a distinct disadvantage when trying to make friends or find a partner, and some who did not participate later thought that they should have participated:

I can't remember anyone suggesting that I should participate. I know now that I would have enjoyed Normal School much more had I been active in these things. But I was a slow reader and had formed poor work habits—e.g. stay with it until finished. I was socially backward so did not feel inclined to try to become more involved.¹²⁵

Despite the incentives to participate and the consequences of not, some students did not spend time on extra-curricular socialization. Lack of money for non-essentials played a part in deterring students from taking an active role in activities, with stories of economic hardship common: “I was not able to participate too much, because I was working for part of my board. The principal of the Normal School knew why I did not participate too much.”¹²⁶ As this student’s reply indicates, keeping a job to pay for one part of normal school led to her exclusion from another. She was concerned enough about the importance of activities and possible repercussions to have either informed the principal or checked with him to make sure he understood why she did not participate often. Another replied “I was very hard up at the time. A few of us were not accepted into the groups. Our social life was four hours of movies at the Isis for 10¢ each and a

¹²⁴ Birgit Schreiber, “The Co-Curriculum: Re-defining Boundaries of Academic Space,” *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 2, no. 1 (2014): 76-77.

¹²⁵ *PYQ*, C31-227, woman, 6.

¹²⁶ *PYQ*, C33-261, woman, 6.

10¢ bag of peanuts.”¹²⁷ While this student mentioned being “hard up”—a phrase that often meant being in a precarious financial position—as a reason for not participating, the fact that the same student spent money on movies and snacks indicates the underlying reason was feeling left out. Entertainment was important, but not being socially accepted dealt a blow to the student that remained for decades.

Financial resources, or their absence, dictated important features of Normalites’ lives. Having money to spend on trips, materials for events, and eating out limited participation somewhat, although it is impossible to know exactly how much. What is knowable, however, is that living arrangements in general, and distance of residence from the normal school in particular, had the single-most identifiable impact on student extra-curricular activities of the 1930s. Analysis shows a distinct correlation between Normalites who lived away from their families but close to the normal school and Normalites who reported participating in multiple school-sanctioned clubs. One alumna wrote quite clearly: “I may have been more active and enjoyed student activities more if I had boarded in a residence closer to the school, instead of living at home so far across the city. Older friends who were forced to leave Edmonton for teacher-training (before our Normal School was built) found this to be the case.”¹²⁸ Another Normalite explained that living far from the school made travel back-and-forth prohibitive.¹²⁹

Determining what characterized routines and common experiences is difficult, but not impossible. Most students attended the nearest normal school to their family homes and most grew up in the precarious social and financial environments of Alberta’s

¹²⁷ *PYQ*, CL32-270, man, 6.

¹²⁸ *PYQ*, E31-070, woman, 6.

¹²⁹ *PYQ*, E36-128, woman, 6.

farming communities.¹³⁰ Living in a boarding house meant adjusting to new rules, new diets, and the excitement of living away from home for the first time. Normal school itself contained a bevy of familiar experiences and spaces such as class lectures, homework, and lockers as well as novel experiences in the form of Friday Lits, field trips, and being treated like adults. All of these characterized an increasingly homogenous group of students. If such a thing as an “average” student experience existed, it was richest for students who lived close enough to the normal school to regularly participate in after-hours activities, who did not live with family members but who lived with other students, and who had some amount of spending money. The combination of proximity, money, and closeness with faculty had a tremendous impact on how alumni recalled their experiences decades later.

But what did student life mean to the students? Were extra-curricular activities simply another means for faculty, who were immensely influential on student experiences and are a major topic of exploration in this thesis, to further their control over student lives, as Hollihan has argued?¹³¹ Or were activities simply something to pass the time and keep students from boredom, as a utilitarian argument might suggest? The totality of student life meant a great deal for most Normalites and touched upon their past, their present, and their future. By keeping students busy with lectures, homework, fieldtrips, physical education, and student clubs, faculty helped address their homesickness. Making friends came after spending time together and crafting stories from lived experiences. One Calgary Normalite was “homesick until I began to make friends with some of my classmates. It was not long until I was involved in sports and social events

¹³⁰ *NSAR*, 1934, 29.

¹³¹ Hollihan, “Deconstructive Reconstruction.”

within and outside the Normal School...¹³² By thinking of all that was going on in their new world, students had less time to dwell on their old worlds.

Distractions provided in and by the normal schools also helped mitigate the outside concerns of students. As the slow-motion disaster of the Great Depression accelerated, set in, and remained stubbornly present, Normalites could spend their energies on activities that brought humour and levity to a somber social milieu. Faculty were pivotal in keeping students focused on the task at hand, which included practice teaching, crafting lessons, and developing skills to negotiate community relations. Students and faculty both knew that normal school was many students' one chance to "make it" and worries about the future remained subtle, but ever-present, companions of the Normalites.¹³³ Faculty felt a responsibility to lift the spirits of students. The 1933-34 yearbook for Calgary recounted the opening event:

With the help of the staff he [principal Dr. Coffin] succeeded in arranging for us a 'Get-Together Picnic.' At eleven-thirty on the morning of September 14th, three street-cars were hurriedly packed with laughing, boisterous Normalites. To St. George's Island they travelled and there unloaded their passengers. Lunch (a popular pastime for Normal students) was then served. This was followed by sports and games. Under the outspreading branches of a huge poplar, the classes entered in a stunt contest won by IB. 'Mr. Weather' then put the damper on some exciting games of soft-ball. Everyone flocked to the street-car line, where they patiently waited for a conveyance. Our spirits were upheld for we were to celebrate that night in the first dance of the Normal School Year.¹³⁴

Faculty involvement in student life is clearest in the classroom, but their actions out of the classroom deserve attention in part because of the impact of faculty members on students. Because normal school did not carry over significant numbers of students from year-to-year (as the program was designed to be completed in one academic year),

¹³² *PYQ*, CL32-277, man, 6.

¹³³ *PYQ*, CL31-248, woman, 5.

¹³⁴ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1933-34, 41.

faculty had to step in to create and mould an acceptable and welcoming culture.¹³⁵ By comparison, colleges and universities maintained control over curriculum and standards of student conduct, but older students returning to the institutions helped perpetuate a particular social world by way of rituals and initiations.¹³⁶ Normal schools in Alberta did not have an older, upper academic class who would exercise the social power to initiate younger students—every year began anew except for those activities sanctioned and sponsored by faculty. Historians have noted the power of initiations to mould and enforce gendered norms at universities and the consternation instilled in faculty by these actions.¹³⁷ Without the class of older students to instill norms, faculty remained the most powerful group to shape what was considered to be proper values and behaviours of their charges.

Faculty served as advisors to student clubs and organizations, principals were “honorary” presidents of the student councils at each normal school, and both faculty and administrators spent a significant amount of time with students. The memories of one Edmonton alumna recall some of the social spaces faculty inhabited: “Student activities were supervised by at least two or three instructors who seemed to enjoy these duties. I recall that Mr. Dunlop and Mr. Balfour were usually present at the dances and both did a considerable amount of dancing. It was most flattering to dance with an instructor.”¹³⁸ Not only were faculty physically present in social situations, they influenced the behaviours of students in attendance. In most cases, faculty worked to ensure adherence

¹³⁵ *PYQ*, C31-244, woman, 5.

¹³⁶ Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 101-103.

¹³⁷ E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz, “Feverish Frolics of the Frivolous Frosh’: Women’s Cultures of Initiations in Western Canadian Universities, 1915-1935,” in *Women in Higher Education, 1850-1970: International Perspectives*, eds. E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz (New York: Routledge, 2016), 184-185.

¹³⁸ *PYQ*, E32-098, woman, 5.

to conservative social values like modesty—work that would prevent students from embarrassing themselves or the institutions. But occasionally, faculty themselves brought some shame to the students. In one situation, Edmonton played host to Camrose for a basketball tournament. Principal Lord caused “considerable embarrassment by failing to finalize banquet arrangements. Our ‘sumptuous’ banquet therefore was confined to pea soup, tea, coffee, and packaged cookies.”¹³⁹

The strange trails that students followed in their daily and yearly routines, and tension among every person at normal schools gave space for students to form relationships that fostered challenges to the status quo. Multiple pathways also represented the transitory nature of normal school. As students moved from childhood to young adulthood, adolescence—a concept that has changing meanings itself—was a time of emerging possibilities in the midst of gradually lessening control by elders. Normalites were preparing to become teachers as they were leaving behind behaviours that identified them as students.

¹³⁹ *PYQ*, E33-124, man, 5.

Chapter 2: Relationships

Relationships were central to the normal school social world. Women and men students sought one another's company (and admiration), mixed and mingled, and interacted with one another in almost every aspect of life. For Normalites, the relationships they built while at school were the first formed outside the direct influence of their families and also be the first as part of their future careers. Marking the transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood was the changing nature of relating to family, friends, and faculty. More than other educational experiences of students, Normalites encountered a world predicated on the assumption that relationships between students and instructors would be close and mentoring. Faculty and students alike participated in the creation of educational kinship networks that took the place of families.

Leaving Home: The Changing Place of Family

Families played a critical part in the identity and social formation of children. Those intimate kinship networks provided a foundation upon which children built their worldviews. Tied up in notions of love and power, obligation and possibility, families have long provided a structure that organized and controlled the lives of children. By influencing what happened in ordinary day-to-day activities, families sculpted how children saw their worlds and what meanings children associated with what they observed. Not only did families ensure a “generational transmission of values, mores, and culture,” families also ordered life “hierarchically and generationally.”¹⁴⁰ For a large sector of the Canadian population, transmission of particular values remained

¹⁴⁰ Cynthia Commachio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 45.

uninterrupted through childhood because children remained physically proximate during primary and secondary schooling. The strength of familial ties was not only found in proximity—genuine feelings of love and care surely made such connections resilient—but closeness played a role in the relationships children maintained with their families.

Leaving home was therefore momentous for Normalites. It entailed excitement, anxiety, and, for some, fear. Bonds of family were stretched and changed as students adjusted to life away from their mothers, fathers, and siblings. Not all students at normal school moved away from their childhood homes, but most did. By the 1930s, thousands of primary and secondary schools, but only three normal schools, had been established in the province.¹⁴¹ The fact that prospective teachers had three locations at which to earn teacher certification meant that the vast majority of Normalites attended an institution far from home. While administrative records related to how students applied to normal school—and which schools they applied to—are missing, a number of *PYQ* respondents indicated that the Department of Education organized Alberta into normal school districts, removing any choice for applicants. Principal G.S. Lord of Edmonton noted in 1930-31 that his school was allocated 240 of the 700-student quota for 1931-32 owing to lack of jobs for teachers.¹⁴² Even if prospective teachers had a choice of normal school, they would have been forced to live in an urban centre distinct from the rural character of most of Alberta. *PYQ* support this claim; only 11.8% of respondents indicated they lived with their families while attending normal school.¹⁴³ The remaining 88% made the

¹⁴¹ Of the 3,708 schools identified by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1933, 85% (3,167) were considered “rural schools.” Albertans were familiar with rural life, as even those in urban centres likely had social relationships with individuals from rural areas. See *Canada Year Book, 1934-35*, 1043.

¹⁴² Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1930-31, 5.

¹⁴³ 45 of 380 respondents (9.0% of Calgary respondents, 4.9% of Camrose respondents, and 26.2% of Edmonton respondents) reported staying with family when asked, “If your parents lived outside the city where you attended normal school, how frequently did you visit at home with them?”

significant decision forced by circumstance or otherwise to leave home—a moment that would take them away from what and who they knew to a place and a people unknown.

We have no way of knowing for how many Normalites this was the first time they left home. Given the high percentage of *PYQ* respondents who came from farming families, however, this was likely the case for most. Students, once established at normal school, recognized the importance of this year being the first outside the familiar social environment of childhood. A young man at Edmonton recalled that he “stayed with friends as that was [his] first time away from home.”¹⁴⁴ By choosing to live with, and therefore spend a significant amount of time with, people with whom he had previously formed relationships, this student would likely have recognized both the uncertainty and anxiety of forming all-new relationships.¹⁴⁵ This example was not exceptional by any means. Descriptions of living arrangements abound with references to choices about staying with friends, acquaintances, and relations.¹⁴⁶ For one student, living arrangements facilitated a close relationship: “I lived with well known friends so [I] felt and acted as a member of the family.”¹⁴⁷ Parents extended their influence beyond the home, with some giving advice and securing “suitable” locations for Normalites to live.¹⁴⁸ While students embarked upon an adventure, many sought to recreate or continue the stabilizing relationships they had left.

¹⁴⁴ *PYQ*, E32-099, man, 2.

¹⁴⁵ It is also possible that it was less expensive to stay with his friends.

¹⁴⁶ See also “roommate a high school friend” (*PYQ*, E32-111, woman, 2); “boarded with friend of my mother” (E38-154, woman, 2); “boarded with a woman from my home town” (*PYQ*, C35-292, woman, 2); “another girl from my district and I shared a room” (C36-341, woman); and “lived with my sister and [her] husband” (*PYQ*, CL38-364, woman, 2).

¹⁴⁷ *PYQ*, C32-276, man, 2.

¹⁴⁸ *PYQ*, C37-317, man, 2. It is notable that this student was male.

Changing relationships affected every student, even those who stayed at home. Spending a significant amount of time at normal school meant the institution exerted a powerful influence on relationships. This impacted Normalites, to a greater and lesser extent, whether they lived at home or batched with peers in the city. Gender did not seem to affect the decision to move away from home, but gendered differences become clear when analyzing how parental reach followed students. Parents were more likely to intervene in the lives of daughters than sons and this intervention often occurred when selecting a place to live. In a particularly vivid episode, one Calgary student recalled that she moved from one place to another because the boarding family could not afford to host her (“actually I think their only daughter was jealous”).¹⁴⁹ It is not clear from the evidence whether the daughter was envious of parental affection being shown to the student, of the student supposedly drawing the attention of young men in the neighbourhood, or perhaps something else. The same student, when selecting a new place to live, encountered a parental “veto” due to what was seen as a lack of supervision at the new accommodation. “There was a seventeen-year-old boy son...that had a ‘crush’ on me. I could only be kind to such a baby!”¹⁵⁰ Her parents continued trying to protect their daughter from afar. She presumably needed protecting in a way a son perhaps would not have needed. The values inscribed upon children at home regarding gender continued to be written after they left.¹⁵¹

How students adapted to new relationships is important to consider as well as how family members, specifically parents, were affected. Relationships were fluid constructs

¹⁴⁹ *PYQ*, C34-299, woman, 2.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The student was 18 years old at the time.

¹⁵¹ Sutherland, *Growing Up*, 58.

that required at least two parties. Similar to how students longed for “independence” and a “chance...to live in the city for a year,” parents had desires as well.¹⁵² Parents could be obstinate in how they constrained certain choices their children made even after they left home. Young people had the difficult task of taking this moment of transition and using it to establish youth as “their own dominion.”¹⁵³ Students took the first of many steps from childhood to adulthood by registering for the normal school course. This step was soon followed by participating in classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and living with adults outside their families. However, students readily accepted continued parental authority.

Why, when Normalites seemed keen to exercise new-found freedoms, would students acquiesce in this manner? Students depended on their families, not only for financial support as discussed previously, but also for emotional support. Living and studying away from home required renegotiating emotional connections. In contrast to early-twenty-first century trends at Canadian colleges and universities, in which visitation between parents and postsecondary students is quite common, the continued physical separation between families and Normalites in the 1930s was quite distinct. Reunions among students and their families usually happened in one direction: that of students returning home.¹⁵⁴ Only on rare occasions did parents travel to the normal schools. Such visits were unusual and/or important enough for the principals to include them in annual reports, but apparently did not warrant the same attention from students. Known as “At

¹⁵² *PYQ*, CL33-286, man, 2.

¹⁵³ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 214.

¹⁵⁴ Camrose students devoted a page of their yearbook to a piece called “Home With Me.” In it, the author reflected on the apparent quick passage of time but the reassurance that not all has changed—Fido the dog was still alive. Velma Bishell, Camrose Normal School yearbook, 1936-37, 17.

Home” annual events, students would produce theatrical or musical shows of creativity designed both to entertain and to assure families of the students’ success.¹⁵⁵ Faculty understood that the strain of leaving did not only affect the students.

Far more frequently, however, students made their own way in the normal school while struggling with homesickness. Communication with home in the form of written letters and telephone calls seems to have taken up a rather significant portion of their mental energies. One particularly poignant account demonstrated the depth of the challenge many Normalites faced: “It was difficult as I was very homesick, and money was so scarce. I cried over letters I received from home, and cried over those I failed to receive.”¹⁵⁶ In these two sentences the intersection of emotional isolation and financial instability becomes quite vivid. Most students at normal school could not avoid leaving home to train for teaching and as a result were more exposed, alone possibly for the first time, to the unstable world of young adulthood.

When both familial ties and financial resources were uncertain, students responded. Writing home was typical and seems to have established a pattern with families to shore up a sense of normalcy. One student recalled writing home every week, but “one week I forgot and my parents telephoned!”¹⁵⁷ Another shared that:

Being the ‘baby’ in a family of six and the only one who received any formal training, I appreciated the sacrifice made by my family. One sister made over dresses for me; my mother’s letter always arrived Tuesday and on one occasion because of a blizzard they were unable to get to town to church on Sunday, my letter didn’t get mailed and I shed ‘homesick’ tears.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ “At Home” events happened no more than once per year. *NSAR*, 1937, 41. Not all such events were called “At Home”—Edmonton tended to refer to its events by the name of the musical performance at the centre of the event. See “H.M.S. Pinafore” in *Edmonton Normal School yearbook*, 1931-32, 14.

¹⁵⁶ *PYQ*, E32-098, woman, 1.

¹⁵⁷ *PYQ*, CL34-299, woman, 1.

¹⁵⁸ *PYQ*, CL34-309, woman, 5.

From this we can see relationships among people who prized frequent communication. While these examples cannot represent the experiences of all Normalites in the period, they do highlight the continuing relationships that students attempted to maintain with their families. Accounts like these also demonstrate an awareness on the part of Normalites about the changes taking place in their families, their environments, and themselves. As the students were moving from youth to adulthood, they took time to remember what had made that path possible. Editors of the Edmonton yearbook dedicated an edition “to our mothers and fathers, in grateful appreciation of their devotion and self-sacrifice.”¹⁵⁹ Sacrifice was to be accepted and recognized, to be faced head-on as they grew up.

For Normalites, leaving home was about establishing themselves as adults and enjoying the associated social freedoms. Tensions between the maintenance of familial ties while simultaneously distancing themselves from childhood activities become evident in both the yearbooks and *PYQ*. The editors of the 1933-34 yearbook at Calgary began their valedictory address with this declaration: “We have all lost something by coming here—youth.”¹⁶⁰ Going on to depict their year at normal school as one spent building a “House of Character,” the authors implicitly connected youth with flawed and imperfect decisions. The struggle of being away from home, spending an immense amount of time studying under the guidance of faculty, and being in the school with others dedicated to the same endeavour—these were the experiences that forged the Normalites into stalwart teachers. At the same time, the lessons of teacher training, independence, and maturity were compressed into nine months. It felt like, for the

¹⁵⁹ Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1932-33, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1933-34, 5.

students in charge of Edmonton's 1936-37 yearbook at least, that they had to change "overnight, from the role of student to that of teacher."¹⁶¹ Not everyone could be expected to enjoy such a transition. A young man at Camrose reflected that: "I felt over worked and under big pressure—mixed [feelings] about becoming an adult too fast—made some good friends, basketball and boxing [were] enjoyable. The faculty impressed us with the fact [that] we were expected to be mature adults when we got to our schools."¹⁶² Ties with family members and the memories of their childhood undoubtedly played a role in shaping the actions of Normalites. Given the importance of family, what happened when distance and time attenuated familial relationships? Students sought new relationships that would take the place of what they had known.

Gender and Student Life

Normalites had known similar worlds before entering normal school. As discussed in Chapter 1, most students were of white British- and French-Canadian ethnicity, grew up on farms, shared Christian religious convictions, and spoke English as their mother tongue. These factors undoubtedly contributed to the relative ease with which the majority of Normalites seemed to establish peer relationships. Social connections depended heavily on common experiences and/or goals. Of course the students who shared many personal characteristics did not automatically form close relationships or live conflict-free lives. The nature of living with fellow students, sitting in classrooms together, and spending time in social activities outside the classroom in groups of various size had an impact on the ways in which students formed relationships that assisted them

¹⁶¹ Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1936-37, 29.

¹⁶² *PYQ*, C35-298, man, 5.

in their transition to adulthood and the teaching profession. This section focuses on what Paul Axelrod termed “associational life”—the students’ academic and extracurricular activities—doing so for two reasons.¹⁶³ First, the web of relationships that students formed in voluntary organizations had a significant impact. Second, although administrative records are largely missing for the Alberta normal schools and locating evidence, such as diaries and wills, of intimate decision-making and the lived personal experiences of the students from such records is difficult, in contrast, the *PYQ* could be revealing in this case.¹⁶⁴

Students at normal schools had a variety of opportunities to practice leadership and social organization skills while training to be a teacher. As Stortz and Wilson have noted, the life of rural teachers—the destiny of many Normalites—was part teacher and part community event planner.¹⁶⁵ One activity gave a select number of students social status and influence: participation in the students’ council or executive. Analysis of the composition of the students’ councils across campus and by year indicates a relative conservatism. Men completely dominated the ranks of student body president at all three normal schools, winning 44 of the 48 (92%) total elections.¹⁶⁶ The first woman president was Alice Garrett at Edmonton, elected in the fall term of 1935 (see Figure 1).¹⁶⁷ She was followed at Edmonton by one woman in each of the two following years and at

¹⁶³ Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ *PYQ* provides substantial evidence on associational life, but respondents knew that their answers would be read. That knowledge may have prevented some respondents from answering in ways that might draw scrutiny or from answering at all.

¹⁶⁵ To say nothing of community relations manager. See Stortz and Wilson, “Education on the Frontier,” 280-285.

¹⁶⁶ Calculated from one election per term from fall 1930 through winter 1939 at three campuses, factoring in the closure of Camrose in 1938-39 and Edmonton 1933-35. This dominance paralleled that of universities in Canada at the time. See Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 117-121.

¹⁶⁷ Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1935-36, 38.

Calgary by one woman in winter 1936; students at Camrose never elected a woman president.¹⁶⁸



Figure 1. Students' Council, Edmonton Normal School, first term, 1935-36.

¹⁶⁸ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1935-36, 24; Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1936-37, 28; and Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1937-38, 16.

Officer positions like vice-president, secretary, and treasurer were routinely filled by women and men alike. Notably, however, the administrative separation of each normal school along gendered lines actually contributed to an increased number of women on the students' council. Because the councils included both school-wide positions and class representatives, an all-women class could only send a woman to the council. Meeting minutes of the councils would be invaluable for an insight into the gendered relationships, but the existence of this source remains unknown. The nature of discussion and power dynamics appears plainly in at least one account in the Edmonton yearbook: "The year was noteworthy in that the debating in business meetings was dealt with almost solely by male members and the ladies would not, under any circumstances, air their views. This is contrary to their usual attitude as to be almost remarkable."¹⁶⁹ Differentiating sarcasm from serious thought is difficult under the best of circumstances, let alone yearbooks. However, the inclusion of this story at all says that women participated, vocally and frequently, at other business meetings of the council. Student council presidents depended on the actions of other officers and volunteers to enact programs. Interdependence of the council members would have mitigated some—but by no means all, or even most—of the bureaucratic power differential between the president and the rest of the council. Having men so consistently inhabit positions of power in the midst of supposedly-equal women indicates the depth and persistence of social expectations that men should lead—even when preparing for a profession long-dominated by women. As other historians have noted, education in Canada prior to World War II had informally guided women to teach and men to administer.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1929-30, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Sheehan, "Women and Education in Alberta," 119-121 and Patterson, "Voices from the Past," 101.

Within this gender-biased institutional culture, the social lives of women and men played out. Academic classes included both co-educational and single-gender classes and students demonstrated a strong awareness of gender in their memories decades later. Presentations reflected how students saw and literally performed gender. As briefly discussed in Chapter 1, literary programs (“Lits”) and dances formed a cornerstone in Normalites’ interactions. Students at all three normal schools were responsible for the creation and implementation of Lits, ensuring that the programs would blend academic and social life. Lits and dances occurred together on a regular basis throughout the school year, often monthly on Friday afternoons and evenings. Faculty likely coordinated the timing of the programs, but seem to have only been significantly involved when Lits included a musical.¹⁷¹ Plays and musical numbers were common and cross-dressing and playing with gender happened with surprising frequency. From get-togethers and picnics in the fall to themed dances, students took advantage of relative freedom to craft programs that would be fun and foster a sense of school spirit. Since that school spirit was dedicated to a noble professional vision, students generally conformed to the gender expectations of faculty and society.

On February 29, 1936, Calgary students held a “formal dance for the second term [that] took the form of a Spinsters’ Ball...Reversal of the ladies’ parts made the men the weaker sex, and the Normalites were in their glory.”¹⁷² Most dances at the normal schools marked holidays like Valentine’s Day, or seasons, like winter. By naming a dance “Spinsters’ Ball,” these students advertised the event as a celebration of being

¹⁷¹ Although administrative evidence is minimal, the persistence of Lits throughout the decade at three different normal schools in consistent formats indicates a more stable directing force than student bodies, whose composition changed annually.

¹⁷² Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1935-36, 67.

single and acknowledged the slim possibility of heterosexual women finding a partner while at normal schools. Drawing attention to this reality could have been an intentional act by the new student body president to skewer stereotypes of women teachers. Fay Wood was the first woman student body president elected at Calgary and her position would have been noticed as a first—was this dance a humorous reference to the idea of women who taught beyond their youths? By implying that women were the “weaker sex,” were the students reinforcing the position of women as dependent on men, or was it a statement of feminine power where the women co-opted a disparaging term that was usually reserved for women unsuccessful in finding a husband? Or does the conclusion that “Normalites were in their glory” indicate that students—especially women—were fully aware of gender archetypes and intentionally cast light upon them in order to illuminate the inequity? Despite uncertainty surrounding the motives for naming a premier social event with a highly-gendered reference, its very use indicates the gender norms in the minds of students.

Dances were institutionally-sanctioned activities that explicitly reinforced gendered expectations through bringing together Normalites for entertainment and socializing in a setting that highlighted appropriate opposite-sex relationships. Surely many platonic relationships were forged among the students at the dances, but romance would be on the minds of many. While Robert Patterson did not include an explicit question about Normalite peer relationships in the *PYQ*, some respondents—nearly all men—referred to situations that allowed a general picture of the gendered environment to emerge.¹⁷³ Dating was assumed to occur between heterosexual students and included the

¹⁷³ Of the total *PYQ* respondents (n=380), 6 made reference to romantic relationships. Only one of those respondents was female.

man's responsibility to provide for the woman through paying for activities.¹⁷⁴ While this expectation might have fit in with the model of a wage-earning man and non-wage-earning domesticated woman, students at normal school did not fit that model as a whole. Reliable statistics of how many Normalites worked while in school are not available, but the *PYQ* suggests that a quiet majority of students—men and women—worked in the 1930s: “I was awed at how hard some my classmates worked to pay their way through normal school. Some of them did [hard] work for room and board.”¹⁷⁵ The Depression meant that wage work for students was limited, but payment in-kind widespread; most Normalites who worked received room and board in return.¹⁷⁶ This limitation on finances and time reinforced the tendency of students to consider the school the centre of their social worlds and conform to its mores: “Our whole life was centered around the Normal School. All the parties, all the games, all the dances took place there...”¹⁷⁷

“A Happy Degree of Intimacy”¹⁷⁸: Normalite-Faculty Relationships

Lits and dances illustrate two important venues for relationship-building; they also suggest the important role faculty played in constructing regulations on student life. Students faced constraints in their choices for extra-curricular activities due to limited funds and available time, but those students also saw opportunities to make friends and

¹⁷⁴ One alumnus bemoaned his lack of money and luck in securing a relationship: “Didn’t have funds to date a girl if I did meet one that I cared for!” (*PYQ*, C34-284, man, 2).

¹⁷⁵ *PYQ*, CL36-345, woman, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Jobs for wages included housekeeping (*PYQ*, CL31-245, woman, 2), cooking in a restaurant (*PYQ*, CL35-326, woman, 2), farm-work (*PYQ*, CL36-337, woman, 2; CL36-343, man, 2; CL39-376, man, 2; C36-310, man, 2), babysitting (*PYQ*, CL36-337, woman, 2), retail (*PYQ*, CL32-280, woman, 2; CL39-382, woman, 2), and hired hand (*PYQ*, C34-287, man, 2)—among others.

¹⁷⁷ *PYQ*, C31-226, man, 5. See also: “I enjoyed the Companionship of favorite Classmates (girls) and dating male Classmates. The formal dances held at the School were highlights” (*PYQ*, CL36-349, woman, 6, capitalization in original).

¹⁷⁸ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1932-33, 5.

spend time with others of romantic interest. Relationships formed through the school tended to implicitly acknowledge the heterosexuality of students, the role of men in providing for women, and the appropriate place of authority figures in regulating student life.

Given the inherent power dynamic present in faculty-student relationships, exploring the facets of those connections in the normal schools addresses a fundamental driver of student life.¹⁷⁹ How Normalites related to the faculty—those people who not only directed their studies, but also represented the possible (and expected) academic and personal successes—to the curriculum and to the rules provides insight into the role that gender played for students. It was far more likely for students to push boundaries of gender with and among their peers outside of the presence of their instructors. Those peers had little official authority over the most important academic aspect of normal school: teacher certification. Upsetting faculty or openly violating rules established by administrators and faculty endangered Normalites in their pursuit of this certification. Anxiety about failing normal school permeated students' minds and gave further impetus to respect and obey their instructors—an instinct created and fostered by the familial and social mores in which they grew up.

Faculty observed and participated in social trends just as much as students did, but instructors and administrators understood changes in society in ways that reflected their status and experience. In 1932, the Calgary principal noted that:

The rising generation has always been a problem, even when it did not rise as fast and furiously as it does now. This used to be chiefly a male problem; the girls had their destinies pretty well marked out for them. But nowadays they are

¹⁷⁹ Robert Patterson asked normal school alumni to share their “memories of the faculty” (*PYQ* question #12). The responses to this question form the basis for much of this section.

asserting their right to be problems just as well as their brothers. And they are into everything, except, perhaps, railroading and polar exploration.¹⁸⁰

Ernest Coffin was not just responding to gradually shifting social mores among the Normalites, he was also commenting on the apparent speed with which students were making the transition to adulthood and the difficulty that some, especially women, were having with that transition. Faculty members at normal school saw it as their responsibility to mould the next generation of teachers through active participation in the lives of Normalites beyond the classroom. What faculty may not have realized, however, was how important the seemingly insignificant moments and off-hand remarks would be to relationships with students.

Faculty exercised their authority over students by advising student organizations, the Students' Councils, and the yearbook editorial staff. Chaperoning events allowed the faculty to watch over students, ensure policies were followed, and facilitate the continuity of certain gendered traditions.¹⁸¹ While the exact nature of influence is unclear from the available evidence, faculty certainly contributed to student life by their presence, inevitably influencing the conduct of extracurricular activities. An Edmonton student recalled that:

Faculty members skated with students, they extended dances with students, etc...I recall dancing with Dr. Dickie. Another pleasant experience was a bus trip to Camrose against whom we played softball. My uncle gave me ten dollars to play for that tour. This fair included a girl partner [coming] home. Dr. Lord ordered lights on all the way.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1931-32, 5.

¹⁸¹ For example, "Miss Hastie chaperoned [the] basketball team [and] took [the] team to luncheon near the end of the year." *PYQ*, C31-207, woman, 3. See also *PYQ*, CL31-261, woman, 3 and *PYQ*, CL31-244, man, 3.

¹⁸² *PYQ*, E33-116, man, 3.

In this student's world—and in the worlds of many students—the very fact that instructors spent time with students, had physical contact with students, and (presumably) laughed and enjoyed time with students resonated strongly.¹⁸³ One student remembered these activities as when “faculty became real people to me,” demonstrating the long-term importance of faculty-student involvement outside of the classroom while simultaneously showing the perhaps stilted relations that existed in the classroom.¹⁸⁴

Normalites remembered their interactions and relationships with faculty to a surprising degree. It was not uncommon for *PYQ* respondents to share fine details of faculty members' actions, illuminating the various ways in which instructors influenced the students. At the same time that the faculty often relished their interactions with students, both faculty and Normalites understood the expectations of faculty towards students. Drs. Lord, Haverstock, and Coffin, the principals of Edmonton, Camrose, and Calgary, respectively, had a social responsibility to ensure the moral development of future teachers. Once again, the multifaceted nature of relationships, especially those that crossed gradations of power, came to the fore.

For many normal school alumni, two complementary concepts best described their relationships with faculty: kindness and sternness. The actions of faculty intersected with numerous aspects of student life and student lives. While some alumni recounted instructors giving them a ride to school on particularly cold winter mornings, others remembered principal Coffin “dancing with wallflowers” and, attending basketball games, “[moving] from bench to bench to get to know students.”¹⁸⁵ Normal schools were

¹⁸³ No evidence remains detailing which activities were truly voluntary, which were mandatory, and which were covered by professional standards for the faculty.

¹⁸⁴ *PYQ*, C35-303, woman, 3.

¹⁸⁵ *PYQ*, CL31-253, woman, 3; *PYQ*, CL34-316, woman, 3; *PYQ*, CL31-256, woman, 3.

fairly small institutions compared to universities at the time and so personal relationships were more likely to flourish among a small group of people who shared experiences more frequently than at larger institutions. But small size does not explain a teacher who spent time to assist a student with a speech impediment or, much more profoundly, attend the funeral of a student's parent.¹⁸⁶ These generous moments did not characterize every student's relationship with every faculty member, and the meaning of these kinds of interactions was contested by students for years afterward.¹⁸⁷

Normalites, as discussed previously, were continually thinking about their own journey through adolescence. Their relationships with faculty played a role in self-perception and socialization. Reflecting upon his feelings and memories of normal school overall, one student said that "I believe this school [Edmonton] touched me more, as well as most instructors in it, than any other school I had attended in the past. Here you were looked upon as an adult... With very few exceptions the instructors and students were like one big family."¹⁸⁸ How this individual remembered student-faculty relationships brings to the fore an interesting conception of family. For this student, a Normalite was seen as an adult as sanctioned by his or her peers but especially by faculty who were seen as learned and insightful—not unlike a patriarchal head analogous to a father figure.

In the absence of the immediate presence of his biological family, this student recreated parental approval with his instructors in a way that allowed him to

¹⁸⁶ *PYQ*, C31-218, woman, 3; *PYQ*, C31-238, woman, 3.

¹⁸⁷ In one extreme example, an alumna reported that "Mr. McGregor...took us on nature study hikes. On one of these hikes he rescued a student who had fallen on the railway track and a train was coming." *PYQ*, CL31-235, woman, 3. Whether this student remembered the details of the situation accurately is immaterial—the event solidified in her mind the importance of the instructor's actions as a positive force in the lives of students.

¹⁸⁸ *PYQ*, E31-085, man, 5.

metaphorically join the instructors. Another student at Edmonton disagreed, however, saying that “I sometimes thought then and even more so later, that there was an imbalance here in relation to the time spent in learning and trying to acquire the skills we were really going to need as teacher.”¹⁸⁹ Contested understandings of the purpose of normal school affected the meanings that Normalites gleaned from faculty relations, but despite the variation in response, overall students remembered that faculty set the standard to which students attempted to rise: “Faculty members were friendly and helpful but dignified. No first names were used where faculty members were concerned nor were students addressed by first names by the faculty. Faculty members were always dressed in suits with ties—for men—and dresses (no slacks) for the ladies.”¹⁹⁰ Instructors and principals worked to establish academic, social, and gender norms for the students to abide by. By referring to students as “Miss” and “Mister” and dressing in dresses and suits—clothing that fit a specific gender—faculty set a certain social distance between themselves and students. However, this distance was not far. Students and faculty continued to have close relationships and students generally remembered faculty for kindness and assistance.

The most enduring and powerful moments in the Normalite-faculty relationship were those that faculty did not intend to be significant. Small actions, slips of tongue, and minute failures and victories—these things defined the character of the most important relationships of the Normalites. Students looked to faculty for answers to questions (sometimes asked and many more times unasked) on the meaning of being an adult and a teacher, and, importantly, of being women and men. In part, students learned

¹⁸⁹ *PYQ*, E32-097, woman, 5.

¹⁹⁰ *PYQ*, CL38-368, woman, 3.

some of the answers to their questions from observing the faculty. Surprisingly, women and men comprised approximately equal parts of the faculty at each normal school in the early period, but women declined from 45% of faculty to 40% by 1939.¹⁹¹ Some deviations occurred from year to year, but students could be sure of a few things: the principal and physical training instructor would be men, and the nurse, secretary, and librarian would be women. Women Normalites therefore always had women role models in positions of authority, but those role models always reported to a man—setting up the social pattern they were to recognize and replicate.

Many students, especially at Calgary, recalled faculty and principals fondly as upstanding individuals. Faculty performed the familiar roles of authority figures who seemed to know what was right and demonstrated by their actions how to properly comport themselves as adults. Much of the surviving documents bear out a generally positive assessment of how the faculty acted in their positions of power. However, several cases of discordant, ambiguous, and frankly troubling relationships demonstrate that human foibles and caprice affected the normal school faculty and students.

D.A. McKerricher taught history at Calgary Normal School. Evidence indicates he was a veteran of World War I who suffered from shell shock.¹⁹² Alumni recalled behaviours such as repeatedly buttoning his vest, swinging his watch in elaborate patterns, and pacing back and forth, likely from trauma he was experiencing. In any other context, some of these actions would not elicit a strong response or remain in

¹⁹¹ In 1930, 19 women and 23 men served on the faculty and in 1938 (the last year all three schools operated), 17 women and 25 men constituted the faculty.

¹⁹² *PYQ*, CL31-240, woman, 3. Searching the files of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on the Library and Archives Canada website has so far failed to produce a service record to corroborate the details of his service.

someone's memories, but Mr. McKerricher was normally a quiet man with a distinct gravity about him. In short, he commanded attention. Many students "felt sorry for him and sometimes someone would imitate him."¹⁹³

The cruelty inherent in mimicking someone's assumed disability was not unique to the Normalites, but such behaviour was unusual at the school. In a surprising confession, one alumna wrote "[Mr. McKerricher] often wondered why our class would break out in laughter for no apparent reason—and it was me mimicking him (while he was using blackboard, of course!)"¹⁹⁴ In this scenario of adolescent behaviour, a temporary reversal of social power took place. A strong and well-respected man who literally stood uncontested at the head of the classroom was momentarily brought to earth by the actions of a young woman. Evidence suggests McKerricher knew this was happening. In the early 1930s, Calgary faculty took turns writing staff biographies for the yearbook; it was McKerricher's turn in the 1930-31 edition. The entry he wrote for himself:

Mr. McKerricher, the person assigned to the role of history, continues to hold a place in the cast. He still wrinkles his brow, still plucks at his watch chain and mumbles away in an undertone about something nobody considers important and nobody is interested in. You may not believe it, but he really aims to help. *Optamus Juvare* [We wish to help], the motto of the school, he yearly resolves to adopt as his own.¹⁹⁵

Despite his knowledge of what was happening to his own mind and body and what others were saying about him, he remained on staff until 1939.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ *PYQ*, CL33-284, woman, 3.

¹⁹⁴ *PYQ*, CL32-269, woman, 3.

¹⁹⁵ Calgary Normal School yearbook 30-31, 11.

¹⁹⁶ *Annual Report*, 1939, 37. It should be noted that one alumna remembered being admonished by Principal Coffin for "snickering at Mr. McKerricher's speech." *PYQ*, CL33-290, woman, 3.

Where the relationships between Mr. McKerricher and the students at Calgary appeared to have soured due to youthful cruelty and general misunderstanding of trauma, other relationships involved deeper issues of trust, of power, and of appropriate behaviour. At all three normal schools, students clearly recalled, even decades later, that various instructors sometimes acted in ways that bothered them. As mentioned above, faculty who owned automobiles could be a godsend during a blizzard—it could, however, also mean that instructors were occasionally alone with Normalites. Certainly most of these trips in faculty cars passed without incident. Adventures with faculty were often remembered fondly by the students involved and yet they included a gendered aspect. One student at Calgary reported:

Two of the male staff members took about [six] of us girls on a picnic to Banff [National Park] one Saturday. It was the first time any of us had visited the park. That was a really special occasion. The rapport between teachers and students was good. There was always a teacher-student difference, however.¹⁹⁷

From this we can see a measure of trust between the students and the teachers that stemmed from shared experiences, cultures, and goals. Instructors were expected to act appropriately because they were in positions of power and mentorship. Yet the situation involved two men in authority transporting six young women students away from the city. This invites several questions of how comfortable the students were with the situation, if the trip was sanctioned by the principal, if and how students described the outing to their friends and family, and why those particular individuals were invited by the faculty. The answers to these questions may never be determined, but the circumstances themselves illustrate the closeness of faculty-student relationships for at least some students.

¹⁹⁷ *PYQ*, CL39-377, woman, 3.

Regarding the unsettling experiences of students with normal school teachers, the most troubling surrounds Sergeant P. Sutherland, physical training instructor at Calgary. Described as a handsome and vivacious young instructor on loan to the normal school from Currie Barracks, Sutherland was flashy. He owned a silver coupe and showed off for all the young students. His behaviour earned mention in the same edition of the yearbook that McKerricher used to defend himself. McKerricher described Sutherland as:

Altogether too good looking to be entrusted with the training of young ladies at an impressionable age. Evidences of this fact continue to be observed...by such folks the Sergeant is heard, at times, humming to himself this well-known ditty: 'When I go out on promenade, I look so fine and gay, / I have to take my dog along to keep the girls away.'¹⁹⁸

It would be one thing for a young faculty member to develop strong rapport with students close in age, but the number of alumni who recall feeling unsettled, uncomfortable, and avoided spending time alone with him is notable.¹⁹⁹ One student in 1934 remarked:

Sergeant Sutherland was an example of what teachers should not be. He was neither admired nor respected by the circle in which I moved. He was sarcastic, conceited, made crude remarks to and about students, ogled the girls, and blatantly flirted with the chosen few who were on teams whether capable players or not.²⁰⁰

Another student from the same year shared that Sutherland had "a reputation for making passes at the girls so I was wary of him."²⁰¹ Possible explanations for his behaviour abound while details of his actions remain hidden. McKerricher's mention of Sutherland could be a playful reference to young students having a crush on a slightly

¹⁹⁸ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1930-31, 11.

¹⁹⁹ Sutherland and all physical training instructors were considered faculty by the principals and students alike.

²⁰⁰ *PYQ*, CL34-316, woman, 3.

²⁰¹ *PYQ*, CL34-307, woman, 3.

older, handsome man who probably seemed physically strong. It could have also been a public warning to Sutherland that McKerricher had heard rumours and was watching him. In any case, sufficient evidence exists to argue that Sutherland acted in ways that took advantage of his station and his gender. He was not the only faculty member to do so. Students at Camrose remembered the favouritism of Ms. Twomey toward young men; their peers at Edmonton noticed Sergeant Barker “leering” at some women.²⁰² The complicated nature of gender impacted by unequal shares of social and professional power was not imperceptible in the normal schools—at times they may have seemed been implicit in the daily lives of the Normalites, at other times more blatant—but they worked to define student lived experiences and life on and off campus.

Normalites cultivated many personal connections during their time in school. Pre-existing relationships with family and parents changed quite a bit as students left home and struggled to find secure social places in the midst of so many transitions. The interpersonal networks that Normalites formed among themselves and with faculty were highly gendered and students experienced and performed gender in ways specific to the context of normal schools. Even after fifty years, students recalled the myriad acts of kindness, malice, and indifference that punctuated normalite-faculty relationships, showing quite thoroughly the lasting impact of those relationships.

²⁰² *PYQ*, C33-264, woman, 3 and *PYQ*, E37-150, woman, 3. See also Camrose instructor Mr. Shane’s offer to drive a lone young woman because he needed to “unwind” (*PYQ*, C36-354, woman, 3) and Calgary nurse Ms. Chittick’s alleged flirting with young men (*PYQ*, CL36-343, man, 3).

Chapter 3: Rules and Reasons

Rules crossed and re-crossed the lines of Normalites' academic and personal lives, drawing students ever closer to one another as well as to their goal of becoming the ideal teacher. From the start, normal schools in Alberta explicitly promoted a vision of teaching as a noble profession.²⁰³ The model teacher was nurtured in the aspirations and actions of students, forged by the strong but caring hand of faculty, and eventually settling in communities that needed stability in the midst of the Great Depression. The rules that were put in place to bring order and maintain high standards of academic and personal behaviour, however, carried an implicit possibility that Normalites could falter in the process of becoming a teacher. The possibility of missteps and the chance to mould choices hinged upon decisions made by both students and faculty sometimes separately and sometimes in tandem. And rules influencing students' daily and long-term decisions looked very different based on one's gender and what was normalized by the faculty.

Those who crafted the guidelines that defined behavioural boundaries and social values for Normalites were not only found among the ranks of the faculty; rule makers were present among most groups with which students interacted. Instructors and principals were identified by policy of the Alberta Department of Education, by student perception and recollection, and social tradition to be the primary rule makers. As employees of the province and subject to the authority of the normal school principal, the deputy minister of education, and the minister of education, instructors carried both obligation to implement ministerial directives as well as social responsibility to prepare

²⁰³ School inspectors in both Alberta and British Columbia considered strong "character" to be a key element of ideal teachers. See Calam, "Teaching the Teachers," 42-43.

future teachers. Rules often transcended space. Where faculty established clear boundaries on behaviour and crafted and oversaw the normal school system of rules, landlords monitored the behaviour of Normalites off-campus and reported some of the violations to the institution. The institution's authority was significant and permeated not only the school but the lives of students away from the classroom. Students also faced the influence of their peers in both informal situations and the formal settings of the students' councils.

Promoted and Permitted Behaviour

The focus in this study so far has remained on students' activities, behaviours, and perspectives of their sociocultural and education world. Transition defined this world. But considering the space of control, mentorship, and power within which the faculty existed and worked is particularly useful when analyzing the rules of student life. Faculty clearly wanted their students to become educators-as-community-role-models and knew that both government and community members expected this as well. Instructors served as advisors to all student clubs and even participated in student council debates (sometimes vociferously).²⁰⁴ Certain activities were promoted as means to perfect the teacher inside each Normalite, even going so far as to take potentially dangerous or risky behaviours and transform them into refining experiences. Actions inside the classroom, at school-sponsored events, and even outside the walls of the institution were subject to varying levels of faculty intervention. Regardless of the setting, faculty spent significant time and energy on moulding Normalites to be

²⁰⁴ PYQ, E39-172, man, 3.

educational and community leaders, and perhaps as important, ideal and respectable men and women.

From the start of their studies, women and men at normal school faced different expectations and rules. As discussed earlier, classes were divided to reflect gender and eventual first- or second-class certification.²⁰⁵ Little archival evidence remains to indicate that division by gender and by academic class was a strictly-followed formal policy. Indeed, the existence of coeducational classes at all three institutions throughout the period of this study as well as the recollections of alumni support two conclusions about classroom arrangements. First, separating women and men students stemmed from the social order of Alberta in the 1930s. As one alumnus described, separation by gender was a “a custom of the times in the so-called Bible belt. I accepted the segregation as being normal procedure.”²⁰⁶ To have single-gender classes reflected an educational continuation of a natural social division. Second, the minority of classes that were coeducational were due to practical limitations on the number of faculty and a pressing need for efficiency in challenging economic times.

While single-gender classes were the preferred organization, alumni recalled the adjustment they needed to make from attending rural schools—most of which had few students by urban standards and therefore were coeducational by necessity—to normal schools with separated classes. One student tried to rationalize the separation, which she found strange, by reflecting on the embarrassment that “boys might [have felt]...by

²⁰⁵ *NSAR*, 1931, 27. In 1931, first-class students at Calgary outnumbered the second-class students for the first time.

²⁰⁶ *PYQ*, CL32-277, man, 3.

carrying out primary techniques in front of” the girls.²⁰⁷ Overall, however, students noted the difference but did not find the formalized separation to be an absolute barrier between men and women. Stories abound of relationships made and unmade within and across academic classes, and between genders. In the simple words of one alumnus, “...there was plenty of contact with girls,” an experience that exceeded his expectations.²⁰⁸ He did not go on to explain the venues in which that contact occurred, but likely he meant both inside and outside the classroom. As another student noted, coeducational classes bothered a Camrose science instructor because it induced “giggling and inattentiveness”—a sure sign of adolescent relationship-building.²⁰⁹

Faculty seized the opportunities to prepare Normalites for future teaching roles by reinforcing gender roles. Domestic science courses in particular saw women students completing coursework that taught skills intended specifically for them in or outside their eventual classroom as teachers. This separation also reflected an assumption that women teachers would be single and thus had to prepare meals and maintain a living environment for themselves, but men teachers would have wives who would take care of domestic chores. At Edmonton, Dr. Donalda Dickie reflected in the yearbook:

Miss Hastie gallantly agreed to have her Domestic Science classes provide a ‘hot dish’ for each lunch. How she managed to carry out that promise nobody can say but carry it out she did. Every day, the girls cooked, every day the men set up temporary tables and served. The gayest memories of the alumni of those days are centered about those ‘hot lunch’ tables.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ “Primary techniques” here referred to teaching techniques aimed at young children in primary grades. Such techniques included playing games, singing, and speaking in simplified English. See *PYQ*, CL32-280, woman, 3.

²⁰⁸ *PYQ*, CL36-347, man, 3.

²⁰⁹ *PYQ*, C31-213, man, 3.

²¹⁰ Dr. Donalda Dickie, Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1935-36, 12.

Students played roles specific to their gender. While this is not a new assertion, separation of duties and opportunities by gender has been commonly analyzed through a framework of exclusion—how women were prevented from entering certain career fields, how they could not cast votes, and how they struggled to fully participate in the corridors of power.²¹¹ It is useful, however, to interpret the separation of certain activities by gender in terms of positive rather than negative action. Miss Hastie, through her actions as faculty, established and reinforced a system that provided a defined social place for students. Everyone fit in somewhere at normal school—even if this meant preventing transgression of gendered lines—and this was critical to preparing teachers.

That relationships formed among the Normalites despite the prevalence of separated classes might indicate an important side of social maturing: the prevention or shunning of certain behaviours. Physical separation was also designed to solidify particular ways of growing into adulthood and the teacher role. By grouping young men into classes and young women into others, faculty members could more easily act as role models based on actions expected of each gender, including certain tempered mannerisms when standing in front of a classroom and dress codes. Men wore ties, buttoned shirts, and slacks; women wore dresses or skirts. Those who crossed lines of acceptable attire were punished: “I remember a girl in my class being severely reprimanded in the presence of the whole class for wearing a skirt that was too tight. The skirt was slit on each side. The slits were too high and the skirt too tight; I always smile when I think of

²¹¹ Rebecca Priegert Coulter studied the ways in which power and leadership were simultaneously denied to, yet exercised by Donalda Dickie. “Getting Things Done: Donalda J. Dickie and Leadership Through Practice,” in *Women Teaching, Women Learning: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Elizabeth M. Smyth and Paula Bourne (Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2006), 23-44.

this because of the fashions I've seen worn since.”²¹² Regulating what students wore in the classroom was a way of limiting certain actions and promoting others. Since teachers needed to have the broad support of their school’s community members, conservative dress—especially for women teachers, the vast majority of whom were single while teaching—signalled to local residents that the teacher would eventually integrate into and support the community.²¹³ A kind of reciprocity emerged out of this tacit acknowledgement in that communities funded teachers’ salaries but teachers influenced the education and by extension the future career prospects of area children.²¹⁴

Lines of gender separation in the classroom extended to athletic events and physical education in more overt ways. Most sports had teams for each gender and most Normalites participated in physical education classes in gendered divisions. Saturday drill practices with the PE teacher (always a member of the Canadian military until 1938) happened at all three institutions.²¹⁵ While it might have been acceptable for a minimum number of women and men students to be in the same social studies, pedagogy, and reading classes, physical education classes were consistently separate.²¹⁶ This way of faculty managing physical education probably arose out of accepted practice in other educational institutions and again reflected social expectations around gender difference. Of note, no instructors in physical education were women. Most of the Normalites would

²¹² *PYQ*, C36-314, woman, 2. Another student at Camrose recalled a faculty member criticizing “some of the girls for poor posture and unladylike mannerisms.” See *PYQ*, C37-317, man, 2.

²¹³ Gidney and Millar, *How Schools Worked*, 274.

²¹⁴ The Department of Education set the salary schedule for teachers, but taxes paid by community members (specifically “rate payers”) funded teacher salaries. During the Depression, communities frequently struggled to pay these taxes, and the province attempted to backfill the amount owed to teachers. This rarely worked. By 1936, teacher salaries were \$304,000 in arrears. See Gidney and Millar, “The Salaries of Teachers,” 20.

²¹⁵ Correspondence between W.H. Swift and Robert Patterson, no date. RPPA, Box 17.

²¹⁶ A majority of normal school students in the 1930s were in separate academic classes, but some were in co-educational classes due to imbalance in the gender ratio. See Chapter 1.

have found jobs in rural areas—places where co-education was a necessity. Yet principals highlighted the gendered physical education activities in their annual reports, going so far in at least one instance to note that “a particular feature of this [athletic exhibition] program was the part taken by women students.”²¹⁷ Women were included and expected to participate and their success in such activities may have surprised administrators. From the perspective of faculty, normal school students were preparing to be teachers and needed guidance on how to appropriately act in ways that were patently gendered.

Expectations of the faculty—those that informed both written policies and unspoken rules—extended outside the classroom, reflecting the pervasive influence of the faculty. Students were expected to be punctual and take their responsibilities seriously, even in the midst of larger uncontrollable obstacles. Southern Alberta in the 1930s experienced severe drought, compounding a devastated rural economy and leading to widespread dust storms.²¹⁸ While students at Edmonton or Camrose did not recount stories linked directly to drought, at least one student at Calgary did:

I got home for Thanksgiving with some new-found friends from the Coronation area. Unfortunately, we were engulfed in a terrible dust storm near Olds on the return trip to Calgary and didn't arrive in the city until 4:00am. We stayed at our boarding place to rest until noon and then attended afternoon classes. However, Dr. Coffin called us into his office to remind us that we had better ‘grow up’ as were no longer little homesick girls.

Principal Coffin's reaction to their absence, in contrast to the memories of many other students, seems insensitive and overblown. He may have been exasperated at the

²¹⁷ NSAR, 1930, Camrose, 27.

²¹⁸ “The dust storms. No one is ever going to write truly what a dust storm was like. We had them, I've seen them when you couldn't see the front of your car. Millions of acres just blowing away...and [dust storms] would come again.” Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years, 1929-1939* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1973), 41. See also Gray, *The Winter Years*, 105.

situation, he may have lost his temper, or he may simply have worried about the missing students; in any case, his motives remain unknown. What is clear is that the principal, in this moment, communicated an expectation to the students that teachers adapt to trying circumstances. Normal school faculty would not always be around and in fact, many Normalites were bound for isolated schools in which there would be no other recourse but to get through the difficulty. For the students, transitioning from protected childhood to responsible adulthood required a rapid and non-linear development path. Students had to learn the mindset, expectations, and values of the teaching profession in addition to the intricacies of the content and practices of pedagogy. As Edmonton principal Lord said to the students on opening day: “‘We are here to show you how, but the onus is on you,’ ‘What you learn and put to good use is for you to do,’ and ‘You are starting your life in the adult world today.’”²¹⁹

As Robert Patterson argues, extracurricular activities were critical to understanding the gendered nature and use of relationships.²²⁰ Normal schools, like their college and university counterparts, offered a wide array of programs and events in which students could get involved.²²¹ Some activities were created by students; some by faculty. But all activities considered to be “extra-curricular” retained some connection to the normal school itself, regardless of location or involvement of faculty. Two kinds of activities stand out among the archival evidence and alumni questionnaires as being highly salient for Normalites during their studies and for decades after: sports and dances.

²¹⁹ *PYQ*, E31-079, woman, 3.

²²⁰ Robert S. Patterson, “Go, Grit, and Gumption,” 13-14.

²²¹ For a discussion on the origins of the extra-curriculum in North American universities, which certainly influenced and were influenced by other educational institutions, see Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 98-101.

Both activities resonated with expectations of gender and gave rise to growing exploration and, in many cases, solidification of what it meant to be women and men. Faculty recognized the importance of student life outside the classroom—it is no wonder that they desired “that much of the social life of the students centre about the school.”²²² More importantly, the students themselves thought of dances and sporting events as warranting absence from visits home or excursions out of the city.²²³

Under faculty supervision, dances provided a means of facilitating social interactions, social development, and welcome and deserved entertainment. Occurring at all three institutions throughout the period, dances also played an important role in the making of memories about normal school for students. Normalites held regular dances, almost always on Friday evenings after Lits, every few weeks over the course of the academic year. Faculty encouraged student attendance at school dances in place of dances in the city and, in the case of Camrose, outright forbade students from “Jitney dances” downtown.²²⁴ By restricting a coveted social event to the school, faculty were able to monitor dances and in so doing, reinforced their own authority. Students decorated the largest assembly rooms in their school while faculty serves as gatekeepers and icebreakers. Edmonton alumni recalled that instructors would stand in a line at the entrance. Ostensibly forming a receiving line to greet students, this also had the benefit of allowing faculty to detect alcohol on students’ breaths.²²⁵

²²² NSAR, 1930, Edmonton, 31.

²²³ “[I] sometimes stayed in town Friday evening for . . . dances and sports events.” *PYQ*, C37-237, man, 1.

²²⁴ *PYQ*, C38-355, woman, 2 and *PYQ*, C38-336, woman, 2.

²²⁵ “We used to be amused at the ‘Receiving Line’ of faculty at dances—but felt it was all part of polishing us up.” *PYQ*, E38-160, woman, 2. Capitalization in original.

Once inside, students were free to mingle with one another all the while knowing that faculty were watching. No evidence remains of any restrictions on which Normalites could attend, but alumni recall a circumstance unique to Calgary: the shared physical space of the building on North Hill.²²⁶ Because the CNS shared its building with the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA, today called SAIT), and because “Tech” had many more men than women, the gender order at normal school was challenged. Normalites were not permitted in the east wing (home of Tech) and Tech students were not permitted in the west wing (home of CNS). Even a pair of sisters, one enrolled at CNS and one at PITA, were told to remain on their respective sides of the building. “We explained we were sisters and [that her sister] went to Tech. Mr. Coffin’s reply was, ‘I cannot separate you as sisters but as students I can.’”²²⁷ In addition, women students at CNS were not permitted to date the men at Tech. For dances, however, PITA students balanced the gender numbers and were given special permission to attend Normal dances. The Calgary yearbook tells the story: “October 29th. Well—here it comes—the first Formal. What’s the matter with the men? There was a severe shortage and no excuses for it was free. A few ‘Techsters’ were roped in and the dance went on” (see Figure 2).²²⁸ When this option did not result in gender parity, women were allowed to ask other women.²²⁹ The practical realities of dances intruded on the gendered order desired by faculty. Whatever the relative successes of allowing Tech students to attend Normal dances, the faculty seemed to have failed at maintaining separation outside of

²²⁶ Edmonton Normal School also shared its facility (with Garneau High School), but given age difference and the future careers of Normalites, this appeared to play a smaller role than Calgary-PITA. See *PYQ*, E36-139, gender unknown, 2.

²²⁷ *PYQ*, CL31-241, woman, 2. Regarding dating, see *PYQ*, CL34-310, man, 2.

²²⁸ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1937-38, 29.

²²⁹ *PYQ*, CL31-241, woman, 6.

those dances: “We were not supposed to associate with the Tech students but we certainly ignored that one!”²³⁰

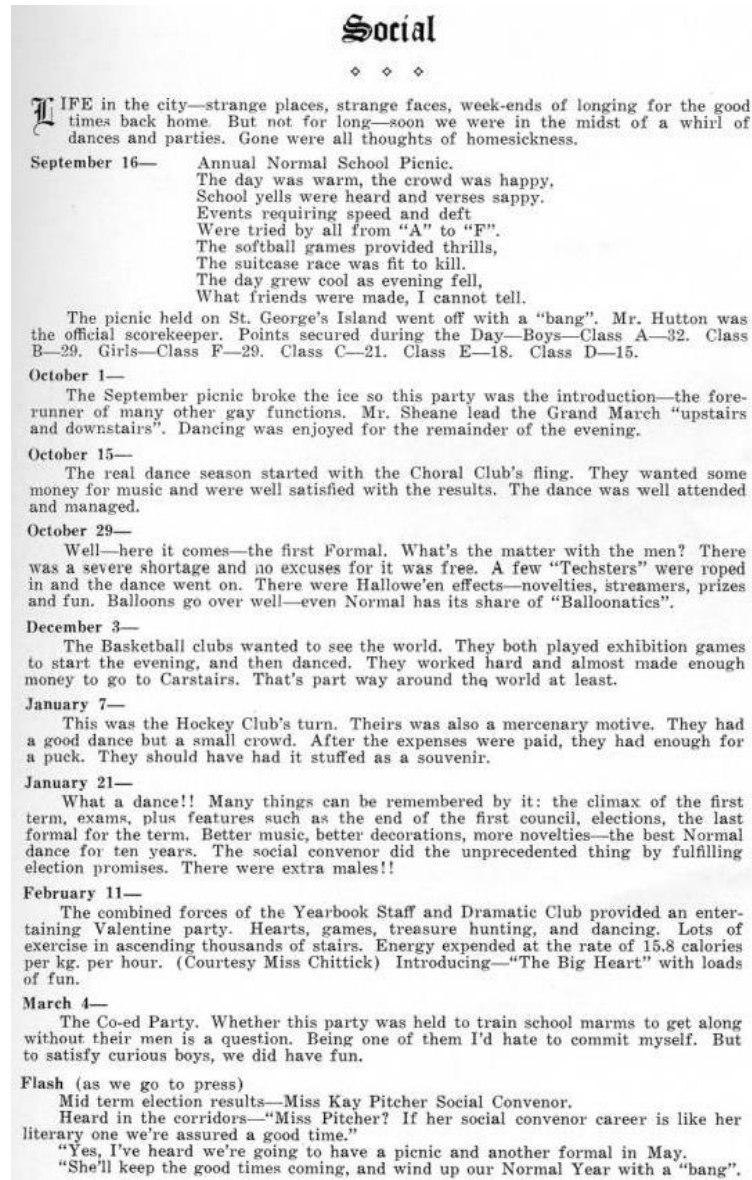


Figure 2. The Normalite social calendar focused on opportunities to mingle with peers.

²³⁰ PYQ, CL37-357, woman, 3.

Sometimes, faculty recognized the issue of undeveloped social skills compounded by what one student described as “skewed gender ratios” and stepped in to dance with students who lacked partners (or the courage to find a partner).²³¹ In a year packed with social activities, success in those social activities was important to the Normalites. Faculty-student interactions on the dance floor did not simply replicate what happened in the classroom. As one student noted: “Dr. Lord [was] a very private person. Once his teen-aged son attended a dance and got a crush on my friend, Edna. That’s the only time I saw Dr. Lord beam—when she agreed to dance with the boy.”²³² Alumni remembered that Calgary principal Dr. Coffin took special care to dance with “wallflowers” and spent basketball games moving “from one bench to another to get to know students.”²³³ Dances, along with other extra-curricular activities, fostered more intimate relationships, ones that allowed instructors and principals to lower their professional walls temporarily. This closeness was more than social pleasantries—it became instrumental to how students experienced their year at normal school and had an indelible impact on their formation as future educators.

Faculty exerted the most control over activities that took place in the classroom, but their influence carried beyond the walls of normal school and the bounds of institution-sponsored events. While sports and dances primarily addressed social needs, health promotion drew the eye of faculty beyond the normal schools. Students, as discussed in Chapter 2, could not live on the grounds of their normal schools and so lived

²³¹ “There were dances but there was always a shortage of males so that wallflowers were numerous.” *PYQ*, E31-083, woman, 6.

²³² *PYQ*, E31-086, woman, 3.

²³³ This alumna went on to recall that Dr. Coffin “made a great impression on me.” *PYQ*, CL31-256, woman, 2.

in surrounding communities. Common practice across postsecondary educational institutions in the 1930s was the need for institutional approval of boarding locations. Details concerning who approved boarding arrangements, who had final authority, or any appeals of denial are lost due to lack of documentary evidence. But we know through alumni that faculty did have say over where Normalites could live.²³⁴ In this role, faculty exercised authority *in loco parentis*, meaning “in the place of the parent.” As students had moved away from their families, instructors, represented in one person by the principal, took responsibility for their wellbeing.

In the educational culture of the time, faculty could not reasonably allow adolescent students to live wherever they wished. By funneling inquiries and approvals for boarding houses through the school, faculty ensured that students could actually find a place to live in a new city and also monitor who was feeding and housing the students. Local residents were under enormous pressure to earn extra income in whatever ways they could; hosting Normalites was a relatively stable and welcome source of income. Following the dictates of the normal school faculty and earning institutional approval was instrumental for those families seeking additional income. Home owners enforced codes of conduct somewhat similar to the normal schools and were responsible for student welfare in within their walls.²³⁵ “Health” thus expanded to include physical, practical, and social considerations.

²³⁴ *PYQ*, C38-334, man, 2.

²³⁵ Infractions as minor as noise could result in punishment: “I boarded with a family in the Garneau area, along with several other students. At times, after study sessions, we ‘blew off steam’ by playful ‘roughhousing’ which was too noisy for the proprietor. I was asked to find a new boarding place!” *PYQ*, E39-172, man, 2.

Normal school faculty did not only rely on communication from landlords regarding students' health. In an interview with Robert Patterson, Rae Chittick, a registered nurse and the nursing instructor at Calgary, described some of her duties: "And I looked after sick students—there was a class monitor who turned in a list to me of the people who were away, and if they were away more than a day or so I phoned them or went to see them if they didn't have a phone, to see why they were sick or what was wrong."²³⁶ In this example, faculty control was related to academics and class attendance intertwined with the institution's concerns about student health.²³⁷ To suggest that this kind of monitoring and follow-up meant that students inhabited educational prisons, as K.A. Hollihan asserts, however, is to misunderstand the obvious emotional and responsible motivations of the faculty.²³⁸ Faculty had a clear responsibility to the Normalites. Instructors and principals also created intimate relationships with the students that carried significant emotional weight. When Chittick was made aware that a student was absent for several days without explanation, her roles as faculty and nurse and her feelings of compassion urged her to check on that student. Normal school was not a prison and faculty actions were not outside the realm of reasonable human care—they simply followed from family-like networks that students and faculty forged together.

²³⁶ Nurse Rae Chittick, interview with Robert S. Patterson, no date or page, RPPA, Box 17.

²³⁷ The Alberta Department of Education was highly vested in the health of students, dispatching doctors for regular examinations at each normal school and requiring detailed reports of the status of student health, including "defects" in eyes, teeth, tonsils, weight, thyroids, heart (VDH), and posture. While an in-depth discussion of these records is outside the purview of this study, the Provincial Archives of Alberta has several of these reports. See PAA, Accession 78.92, Boxes 1, 2, and 3. In addition, one alumna recalled "The school nurse made medical examinations and threatened to withhold my certificate unless I had my tonsils extracted and my teeth fixed. I resented this since being depression times I did not have two nickels to rub together." *PYQ*, CL32-372, woman, 2.

²³⁸ K.A. Hollihan's work on the Alberta normal schools will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 4.

Questionable Behaviour

Faculty knew well that students would break the unwritten social rules and explicit institutional policies. Responses to the rules themselves, how faculty viewed the rules that dictated student behaviour, and student responses to these rules provide a lens through which to understand the tactics and motivations of the faculty. They also shine light on student experience and how women and men navigated rules and regulations differently.

Returning to the building on Calgary's North Hill allows a closer look at the gendered divisions as not just constructing a certain way of being teachers-in-training, but also of *not* being something else. Regulations on contact between CNS and PITA students illuminate a multitude of faculty concerns, but those concerns centred on distraction that would impede students' studies, not sexuality. Faculty recognized that their control had limits and students knew that. Alumni from 1935 remembered the prohibitions on unsupervised contact that might lead to inappropriate behaviour, with one saying: "We were not to associate with 'Tech' students. Some of them had cars (jalopies) and offered us rides when we were walking to school which we never turned down."²³⁹ Origins of this rule are cloudy at best and apparently ended once the students had left campus, because several Normalites recall boarding with Tech students and going to campus together.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ *PYQ*, CL35-323, woman, 2.

²⁴⁰ "One was a Tech student, three of us Normalites" (*PYQ*, CL31-240, woman, 2); "Our 4 bachelors, 3 at Normal School and 1 at Tech, ate our AM and PM meals at home" (*PYQ*, CL36-343, man, 2); and "There were three girls at the rooming house on 19th Ave NW. I attended Normal, the other two went to Tech" (*PYQ*, CL36-337, woman, 2).

But while faculty strove to keep distinct student bodies apart, students forged relationships anyway, declaring in their yearbook that:

The Normalites do not shine alone in their glory in the long red building on the top of the hill. We have with us for eight months of the year—more or less, the students of the Institute of Technology who supply us with sufficient knowledge of electricity and dressmaking to meet our present needs. They also aid us in keeping some of the Normal girls interested. With us they have undergone the same privileges. They have toiled up the same hill in the morning, stormed the same cafeteria at noontime and slipped in the same mud going home in the evening. Last but by no means they danced as much as we did. Long live the Techs!²⁴¹

If the rules, which explicitly separated CNS from PITA, failed to prevent relationships, how could rules also prevent relationships from forming between men and women who were in frequent physical and social contact with one another? Students crossed certain social lines imposed by faculty, but, as the above passage indicates, students subscribed to other social lines. The image of normal school as essentially feminine comes through the yearbook's reference to dressmaking, but is complicated in the next line by acknowledging the Tech students' assistance with "keeping some of the Normal girls" interested presumably in the Normalite boys.

Sexuality and gender were on the minds of students—and clearly the minds of faculty—but how Normalites understood either concept is difficult to determine. Analysis of class biographies indicates a widespread assumption of heterosexuality and cisgender identity, with many individuals described in terms of their physical appearance but also popularity with members of the opposite sex and success in romantic liaisons, or,

²⁴¹ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1931-32, 17.

due to its unusual character in the eyes of the yearbook staff, a lack of interest in the opposite sex altogether.²⁴²

Biographies often described men in terms of their preference in women: “Phil. A. Clarke, Calgary—Has no preference in girls, likes both blondes and brunettes with impartiality.”²⁴³ Women were frequently depicted as attractive and ideals to be admired: “Norma Thomson. A hot-house flower born and bred in Edmonton—therefore, one of Mr. Newland’s ‘fine specimens of Canadian girlhood.’”²⁴⁴ Athleticism and academic accomplishment also appeared regularly. Grace Golightly, a Camrose student, warranted both a physical description and accolades for her achievements: “Black hair, hazel eyes, a good sport, and a real pal—that’s Grace. Her favorite pastimes are singing and riding the bike. She will be remembered as an excellent athlete.”²⁴⁵ The nature of the biographies changed from year to year and varied by campus. Often, editorial staff intended for each entry to be poetic, for the students to answer a short list of prompts for their entries, and to include something humorous. The humour evident in many entries makes interpreting authorial intent more difficult, but the overall effect is quite clear: Normalites were quite aware of sex and gender roles. Yearbooks became a way of pushing the boundaries and memorializing how those lines had been crossed in their year at normal.²⁴⁶

At 11:00am on Thursday, September 15th, 1932, the students and faculty of the Calgary Normal School gathered at St. George’s Island in the Bow River for the annual

²⁴² It is unknown who authored biographies in yearbooks, but it is likely that the yearbook editorial staff wrote them.

²⁴³ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1931-32, 27.

²⁴⁴ Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1930-31, 13.

²⁴⁵ Camrose Normal School yearbook, 1936-37, 16.

²⁴⁶ As Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz noted, yearbooks are critical to understanding university student cultures. I submit that these written memorials cast equal light on normal school student cultures. See “Visual Interpretations, Cartoons, and Caricatures of Student and Youth Cultures in University Yearbooks,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 19, no. 1 (2008): 201.

welcome picnic. This picnic paralleled those occurring at Edmonton and Camrose—except for one detail. Women students had been asked to bring old clothing “to assist in an old stunt.”²⁴⁷ After filling the streetcars on which the students travelled to the island with yells and other signs of youthful exuberance while enjoying refreshments served by faculty, each class presented a sketch to the school. Following all of these activities:

Girls were then requested to choose a member of the men’s classes, and dress him in the old clothes they had brought to the picnic grounds. After a period of hilarious merriment, various dames of fashion sauntered past the judges’ bench. The judges decided unanimously in favor of Fred Fisher, sponsored by the IIB class.²⁴⁸

This semi-official account comes from Calgary’s yearbook. It presents an image of cross-dressing that is hilarious largely because of its absurdity—no Normalite boy would otherwise wear “women’s” clothing. Notably, faculty seem to have arranged this activity and, at the least, actively participated in its execution. What appears to be an interesting, if not ground-breaking, activity sponsored by faculty, becomes more nuanced when alumni were asked to recall memories of codes of conduct. One alumna remembered the cross-dressing not in terms of its merriment, but in light of faculty response to student behaviour. She wrote: “One boy’s class modelled clothes [of] (girls’) past, present, and future. A skimpy bathing suit was modelled for the future. The faculty took that class and the boys participating to task for indecent exposure.”²⁴⁹ When faculty opened a social door for students by arranging a cross-dressing activity, they clearly did not anticipate the ways in which students would pass through. This event underscores

²⁴⁷ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1932-33, 37.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* This was at least the second school-sponsored cross-dressing event at Calgary. In 1931, the yearbook described a similar happening as the “famous Normal School drag.” See Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1931-32, 59. No evidence indicates that cross-dressing or drag shows occurred at Camrose or Edmonton.

²⁴⁹ *PYQ*, CL33-293, woman, 2.

both the complex relationship between faculty and students in terms of humour and authority, and also the differences between gender expression and sexuality. Open performance of sexuality through the exposure of the human body, even in parody, seemed to be a threat to the shaping of the ideal teacher in the eyes of the faculty.

Vice, specifically smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol, occupied a level of lesser importance for the faculty and students. Possession of alcohol was forbidden at all three schools, as was observable intoxication at the schools.²⁵⁰ But the means implemented to watch over such behaviour, including receiving lines at dances and communication with landlords, failed to stop the behaviour.²⁵¹ Normalites across Alberta “knew that a teacher had to be respected not only for ability to teach but for her moral standards as well. Students were spoken to, if at a dance they appeared to be affectionate. No alcohol, no smoking, no loud laughter, etc.”²⁵² For the most part, rules related to vice applied equally to men and women, even if the social implications of a young woman caught drinking were more severe than those for a young man. Some rules differed obviously by gender. At least one alumna remembers that the men were provided with an indoor smoking area, but the women had to go outside—quite the different treatment in a region with long, cold winters.²⁵³ Calgary seemed to have a stronger tendency for students to break rules around smoking, with several alumni reporting that women used the washroom or basement to smoke.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ For example, “No drinking at Normal affairs—or evidence of alcoholic beverages having been consumed” (*PYQ*, C33-258, woman, 2).

²⁵¹ As one Edmonton alumnus noted, drinking was frowned upon but happened with surprising frequency (*PYQ*, E37-150, man, 2).

²⁵² *PYQ*, E32-096, woman, 2.

²⁵³ “Can’t recall any [rules about student conduct] except that boys were provided with a smoking area, but girls weren’t. (I’m not a smoker.) And no girls objected!” (*PYQ*, E38-156, woman, 2).

²⁵⁴ *PYQ*, CL37-359, woman, 2; *PYQ*, CL39-378, man, 2; and *PYQ*, CL39-380, woman, 2.

Breaches of institutional rules held varying consequences for students; analysis of how faculty responded provides insight into how students experienced their year at normal and the ways in which gender did or did not influence those experiences. The scope of policies, informal and formal, however, cannot be fully known through available documentary evidence. Even more challenging to illuminate are the many moments of faculty disciplining students in one-on-one settings, for example in verbal encounters in front of the classroom that did not leave strong or lasting impressions.

Some of the slights distanced students from faculty in damaging ways. Sometimes instructors exercised their authority by pulling a student out of class and sending them to the principal for correction, a course of action that reinforced faculty power and social norms.²⁵⁵ Perhaps unsurprisingly, words held greater influence over students than actions alone. A Calgary alumnus from 1931 shared a hurtful encounter:

I was rebuked once by Mr. Loucks for asking about the instrument the bow man was carrying in a picture in the reader—it was a crossbow—but I had never seen one or used one. The scathing reply I received left a scar I still remember.²⁵⁶

His pain is palpable decades later and powerfully signals that he, along with his peers, cared what faculty thought about students. If faculty established rules for behaviour outside of class, they certainly did so in the classroom as well. Mr. Loucks taught another lesson than the one he intended that day: to admit one's ignorance—to be vulnerable in front of friends and teachers alike—risked pain. Regular compliance with the social and academic expectations of normal school undoubtedly could help promote a more pleasant and conducive experience for students as they completed their studies.

²⁵⁵ “Students whose dress was not acceptable were expelled from class by Madame Browne” (*PYQ*, CL34-299, woman, 2).

²⁵⁶ *PYQ*, CL31-243, man, 3.

Unfortunately, most of the *Project Yesteryear* respondents did not include many accounts of the lived experience in the classroom. Alumni overwhelmingly reported, however, close and affectionate relationships between faculty and students. The power dynamic that existed between faculty and students is useful to consider. Relations delineated the ways in which student life was guided or indeed controlled by faculty, which in turn aids understandings of teacher development and the places of teachers in communities. K.A. Hollihan has made the most concerted effort among historians of Alberta's normal schools to uncover power relations and institutional dynamics, but his conclusions are too heavily based on theory. He argues that instructors and principals sought to "engender bewilderment, for a confused state of mind promoted submission."²⁵⁷ He marshals little evidence to support this point, and evidence gathered by the material in *Project Yesteryear*, in combination with other archival documents, makes it plain that faculty laboured to create certainty—not confusion—among students. The faculty was not a monolithic group, devoid of compassion or humanity. This characterization would surprise the alumni who were arrested for shoplifting while at normal school and whose bail was paid by Calgary principal Dr. Coffin.²⁵⁸

Principals and instructors wanted to foster the moral, social, and intellectual development of Normalites along a defined pathway. In many ways, faculty sought to make future teachers who would faithfully serve and be "of assistance." Faculty motivations centred on trying to ensure students would fit into their future communities

²⁵⁷ K.A. Hollihan, "Constructing Teaching Identity in Alberta Normal Schools," 178. Paul Axelrod's description of university student life is helpful in this regard: "Universities were agencies of social control, but they were not prisons, and students found ways of shaping their own culture while participating—not merely as passive objects—in the socialization process" (*Making a Middle Class*, 1990, 172).

²⁵⁸ Dr. Coffin "was strict, but he had a soft heart. It was rumored that when two boys were expelled for shoplifting, Dr. Coffin paid their bail" (*PYQ*, CL31-241, woman, 3). See also *PYQ*, CL31-243, man, 3.

by understanding and acting out acceptable behaviours themselves to prevent future interpersonal conflicts among students and between faculty and students. Many of the regulations served to keep students in a close orbit of the normal schools. And it seems likely that faculty also kept students intentionally busy with school-related activities intended to distract the students from homesickness and from the dangers of the outside world. As one Edmonton alumna noted, “Well I was certainly lonely in the evenings and on weekends as I missed the folks back home. I thoroughly enjoyed myself during school hours and never was tempted to drop out.”²⁵⁹ Expectations accompanying extracurricular activities intertwined the social and educational goals of faculty.

Normal schools constructed idealized images of the schoolteacher from the social values of the surrounding communities, and that meant largely reinforcing existing personal and professional expectations of the Normalites. Preparing adolescents to be ideal teachers required both faculty and the students to jointly construct the model against which teachers would be measured. Rules constrained the personal conduct choices available to Normalites and were intended to be guidelines that refined students on their way to a teaching career. Faculty were not alone in focusing on the future career of their charges; students also cast their eyes high:

The ideal teacher is —
As wise as Solomon
As impartial as a telephone directory
As untiring as a steam engine
As tender as a sore throat
As patient as a glacier
As immovable as truth
As alert as a mongoose
And as rare as the ideal pupil.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ *PYQ*, E32-098, woman, 2.

²⁶⁰ A.F. McQuarrie (student), Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1930-31, 48.

Chapter 4: Reactions

This study has thus far explored the foundations of the normal school world that include its demographics, administrative framework, and major identifiers of its cultures, along with the character of its social world such as interpersonal relationships, expectations, and rules in and out of the classroom. What happened, however, when those connections and kinship networks were stressed and strained? Further, what led to social and interpersonal conflict and what were the consequences of those conflicts? A number of alumni, when asked what they remembered about discipline and punishment, responded that “students didn't ‘challenge’ things in those days.”²⁶¹ But available evidence suggests that students broke institutional rules and community rules far more often than the above would suggest. Students at normal school were not wild or uncontrolled; their rebellions were for the most part small and represented challenges to perceived faculty overstepping the line between instructors and staff.

Rule Breakers

When considering how social conflicts arose and in what ways those conflicts were manifested, it is instructive to return to the idea discussed in Chapter 3 of normal schools being a mutually constructed social space between the two primary historical actors: faculty and students. Neither the students nor the faculty as a group were antagonistic towards each other, but incidents arose where, due to the explicit rules regarding attendance, course requirements, and living arrangements, as examples, students and faculty found themselves at odds. But instructors and principals were prepared to violate

²⁶¹ *PYQ*, C32-252, woman, 2. See also *PYQ*, E31-082, man, 2.

institutional expectations on occasion as well. Many of these conflicts occurred when students would break or resist the rules, but, holding the greatest share of power, faculty members sometimes bent the rules themselves. As Cynthia Comacchio argues, faculty, as adults, sought “dominion over successive generations of youth,” and that effort extended to the normal schools.²⁶² This is important because it demonstrates interpersonal and gendered factors that played out in real ways for students and faculty alike.

Few administrative records of the normal school survive; those that do focus on registration, enrolment, and logistics. No official records of student conduct, in terms of formal policies or lists of students who violated those policies, exist. References to official rules and the students who may have violated those rules can be found in a small number of letters between the principals and the Department of Education, but none of the matters contained transpired in the 1930s. Robert Patterson addressed this significant gap in documentary evidence by asking participants in *Project Yesteryear* two questions related to the disciplinary life of the normal schools: “Do you recall any special school rules governing student conduct that were in effect at normal school which were questioned or challenged by students?” and “Were students ever disciplined for such things as misbehavior [sic], improper conduct or poor performance? If so what were some of the offenses and punishments?”²⁶³

Conflicts would have occurred frequently for a multitude of reasons and on a daily basis among the many members of the normal school—and most of these conflicts were addressed without written record. When conflicts arose between students and

²⁶² *The Dominion of Youth*, 214.

²⁶³ *PYQ*, 2 and 3.

faculty in the context of social and educational expectations, however, they were more likely to survive in the historical record as violations of formal rules of comportment and behaviour. Why did some individuals violate rules? This question hinges on evidence that must be acquired through close reading of textual sources. Issues related to adherence or violation of formal or informal rules often involved privacy and possibly embarrassment of the participants; the documentary evidence is rarely obvious on the intricacies of the incidents when people found the rules difficult to follow. Even though respondents to *Project Yesteryear* rarely shared explicit details of incidents, for example names and exact dates, their responses were sufficiently thorough to allow corroboration and, in a few situations, verification through ministerial correspondence.

When researching through the documents, establishing that rules were violated is relatively easy, but determining the motives for violating the rules is far more difficult. In the main, Normalites broke the rules that were easy to transgress and had low risk of discovery. Some students were guided by different moral codes than their peers and faculty. When students perceived rules to be antiquated, unnecessary, or inappropriate, they reacted by challenging those rules and the individuals who enforced them.

Circumnavigating the Rules

According to the responses to Patterson's questions, a majority of alumni either did not remember violations of any rules and, if so, the related feelings and lived experiences of the students, or chose not to include such responses.²⁶⁴ For example, a Calgary alumna said that rules were "never ever challenged" while a Camrose alumna recalled that

²⁶⁴ A few dozen respondents wrote "-" in the area for response to questions about conduct and discipline.

“students didn’t challenge things in those days.”²⁶⁵ Some patterns are clear, however. Despite the impression of many Normalites that their generation followed the rules of acceptable behaviour at all times, evidence of disregard exists. Student reactions to rules and what was considered oppressive policies covered the gamut from behaviours in view of the faculty (overt) and those actions away from the prying eyes of authority (hidden). Behaviours also ranged in severity, from minor infractions to significant breaches. Certain patterns of behaviour were recalled repeatedly by alumni, namely those that were both overt and minor, as they were more associated with memories of daily life at the school. In the view of the faculty, students understandably felt freer to violate minor expectations than major ones and evidence suggests a shared understanding of which actions would be considered by faculty as significant or insignificant. In this framework, Normalites of the Depression-era Alberta understood and accepted an academic and social framework that privileged conformity in thought and behaviour but tolerated relatively minor violations.

Students talking back to faculty was not a new phenomenon in 1930s Alberta, but it was certainly something that risked bringing down the ire of faculty. *PYQ* included incidents of verbal disagreements between the faculty and students with some details on how certain behaviours happened and as well as the responses of the instructors and principals. One example at Calgary in 1938-39 stands out for its level of detail and its corroboration by two students: “Our class president once criticized the principal...in a

²⁶⁵ *PYQ*, CL33-289, woman, 2 and *PYQ*, C32-252, woman, 2.

Literary program because he [Principal Coffin] always used Lit time to make announcements. The student got away with it and was not reprimanded in any way.”²⁶⁶

The tone of the criticism directed toward Principal Coffin seemed to a classmate to be shockingly “disrespectful.”²⁶⁷ It is easy to imagine why the student would have been shocked: by challenging the principal in public, the student forced him to deal with the matter in full view of the student body and the principal’s faculty colleagues. Coffin seems to have preferred to deal with conflict in private, as doing so would allow all parties to save face and cause as little disruption as possible, and therefore uphold a positive reputation. In a time and profession in which reputation played a key role, this public challenge would have been a test of Coffin’s ability to command respect. Regardless, Calgary students overwhelmingly thought highly of Coffin and his social skills, perhaps skills embodied by his measured responses to public and possibly private confrontations.

Alumni have made it clear that instructors who responded to challenge or failure with sarcasm or verbal broadsides were remembered for being poor role models and teachers. Memories of instructors’ hurtful classroom management skills are clustered in the early decade. Camrose instructor Ms. Twomey was remembered for being “prone to sarcasm if students couldn’t follow music with correct sounds” and several Calgary faculty members were so consistently sarcastic that they “made some students feel very cheap and the hurt inflicted on sensitive souls was very deep indeed.”²⁶⁸ One Edmonton

²⁶⁶ The class president was male (*PYQ*, CL39-369, man, 2). We cannot know for certain what “got away with it” meant—whether the principal spoke in private with the student later, whether the principal saw this reaction as indicating the student’s growth into adulthood and so let it be, or something else.

Nevertheless, this encounter reflected a softening of faculty action toward students who might have challenged their authority.

²⁶⁷ *PYQ*, CL39-373, woman, 3.

²⁶⁸ *PYQ*, C31-243, woman, 3 and *PYQ*, CL33-294, woman, 3.

student recalled that her “psychology and science teachers seemed to enjoy embarrassing the students.”²⁶⁹ These interactions resonated with emotion and impacted what students sometimes thought about the normal school faculty. Taken together, recollections of such negative experiences suggest the power of relationships, in both individual and group settings, to shape the experiences and memories of student life.

Students also enacted small rebellions that served to represent the voice of the group as a whole and define the Normalite lived experience. Many of these were recounted in an important surviving artifact and powerful legacy of the time: student yearbooks. Crafted by students but monitored by faculty, the normal school yearbooks contain a raft of creative expressions, from poetry, class biographies, and news stories to joke columns. Humour was an outlet particularly suited to the aims of students who wished to support or reject, or to simply comment on, prevailing social mores. As humour depends on figurative speech and multiple meanings, if ever challenged by instructors or principals, students could more readily express themselves through satire. Each yearbook contained a handful of obviously bawdy jokes, including this example from Camrose: “Small boy: ‘My father has a wooden leg.’ // Second small boy: ‘That’s nothing, my sister has a cedar chest.’”²⁷⁰ Given the close familial relationship, this was clearly not meant to be a sexual joke, but nonetheless allowed students to laugh at the human body—a subject of much regulation. Most jokes were wordplays on an individual’s name or position, while most of the other text in normal school yearbooks was devoted to student organizations and class biographies.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ *PYQ*, E32-103, woman, 3

²⁷⁰ Author unknown, Camrose Normal School yearbook, 1936-37, 24.

²⁷¹ Due to the small sample size, identifying change over time is difficult. In fact, there appears to be no clear pattern in the tone of jokes and references based on school or year.

Christine Ogren notes in her study of Normalites in the United States that students often used drama and writing to express “affectionate humour” as they played with gender norms.²⁷² The Calgary yearbook for 1931-32 exemplified the overt, but ultimately minor, rebellious behaviour of Normalites:

Restricted Whoopee

Girl to her ‘one arm driver’: ‘Why don't you use two arms.’

One arm driver: ‘I can't, I have to drive with the other.’²⁷³

This submission reflects the unsettled nature of femininity and masculinity, sexuality, and relationships of normal school. Through the title and play on words, the author drew attention to the possibility that the driver assumed the girl wanted him to embrace her with both arms.²⁷⁴ However, the intentions of the girl were unknown; she could have meant for him to steer with both arms, only to have him misunderstand her request. The author also implies that a request by the girl for him to embrace her would not be unusual, as the driver has no obvious reaction of surprise. By including this story in the yearbook, the Calgary editors were at once recognizing standard tropes of male and female roles—men drove and claimed women as theirs through physical touch—and played with the idea that men were more clearly sexual in their behaviour and desires.

Normalites in southern Alberta were not alone in using printed words to skewer and poke fun at established social norms; their peers at Camrose and Edmonton did likewise. Dating other Normalites was relatively common (at least for the men) and so faculty took pains to remind students of standards of respectability. The Edmonton

²⁷² While this comment centres on the 1900s, analysis from Alberta in the 1930s supports extending her framework. See *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 182.

²⁷³ Calgary Normal School yearbook, 1931-32, 50.

²⁷⁴ While not stated, the gender of the driver is presumed to be male given the overwhelmingly heteronormative character of normal school yearbooks.

yearbook included commentary and columns that delineated and illustrated the unique place that students inhabited—a confluence of study and academic knowledge with the social pressures presented by gender relations:

Before I heard Miss Hastie tell
The dangers of a kiss,
I had considered kissing you
The nearest thing to bliss.

But now I know Biology
And sit around and moan;
Six million mad bacteria—
And I thought we were alone.²⁷⁵

This poem reflected a mixture of anticipation and anxiety that youthful desire, coupled with faculty instruction, induced in the Normalites. The author admits to kissing her/his sweetheart and then, in light of what she/he learned in biology class, reconsidered the watchful “eyes” of the bacteria. Students probably learned that kissing transferred germs and gave rise to mononucleosis (“the kissing disease”), but this poem does not reference sickness—it references solitude. By casting the bacteria as watchers with the dampening effect of knowledge in the pursuit of romance, the author was able to poke fun at faculty while maintaining the cover of humour.

While humour was overt in the sense that faculty had the opportunity to observe it and humour is often directed intentionally towards a particular audience, jokes occupied a nebulous yet efficacious place in the social world of normal schools. In that humour was obvious to students who experienced the life parodied by it, faculty may not have seen it as a serious challenge to their the social and academic order, and served as a unifying practice for Normalite culture. As seen in Figure 3, students recognized the influence of

²⁷⁵ Author unknown, Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1938-39, 68.

gender on their social experiences by highlighting the struggle among women to find eligible dates among a smaller male population.²⁷⁶ This take on young women's odds of finding a romantic partner is contrasted in the next cartoon by the underlying fear of enduring economic depression. Jokes and laughter, as deployed by Normalites in contrast to other reactions to institutional authority, held the possibility of constructive use—something other options did not.

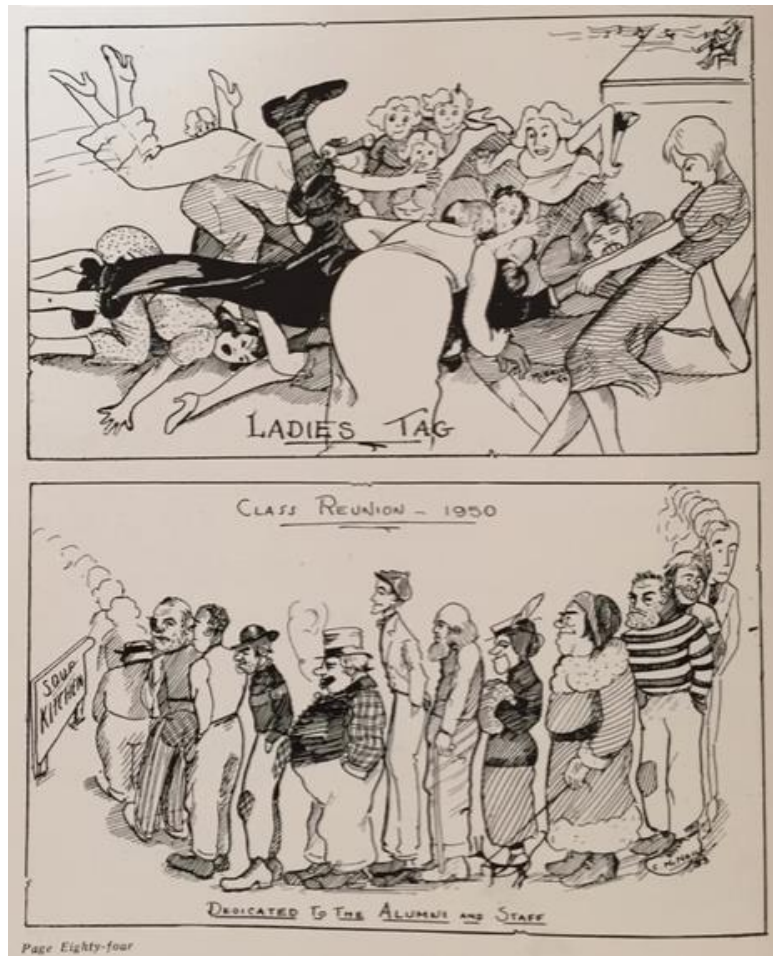


Figure 3. Yearbook cartoons. Normalites used cartoons to lampoon gendered behaviour and their fears of continued economic depression.

²⁷⁶ Authors unknown, Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1932-33, 84.

Another of the students' methods for reacting and sometimes resisting the authority of faculty was to remove themselves physically from the normal school. "Playing hooky" was another overt action by students, but the act of being absent could be ambiguous. While some students "skipped classes, didn't complete assignments, or didn't pay attention during lectures," others did not attend because of illness or family emergency.²⁷⁷ Faculty likely noticed patterns of absence because of their close relationships with and monitoring of students. However, if a student missed school for one or two days and did not have other behavioural issues, despite how nurses would have reacted as discussed previously, the student probably got away with the absence needing little explanation.

How, then, was playing hooky an action of rebellion or resistance? Students had limited options. The exigencies of economic depression and the struggles of local agricultural industries impacted all facets of life and reached into the private and semi-private lives of the Normalites. Because of external pressures, students saw formal discipline by faculty as significant barriers to their success and as a result avoided overt and major rebellions. Choosing to skip class for an entire day could be a marker of independence; it could also be something that built a measure of solidarity among peers, as felt, for example, by those who left Edmonton during warm weather to go swimming.²⁷⁸ While humour played a prevalent role among students in terms of their social world, it primarily served to construct a common culture that parodied and critiqued the rules and expectations of normal school.

²⁷⁷ *PYQ*, E31-082, man, 3.

²⁷⁸ "Many students felt, when it [was] too hot to study, [that] the swimming pool would be a good place to cool off" (*PYQ*, E32-110, woman, 2).

Alcohol played a fairly visible role in the social world of the Normalites. It was the beverage that could harm, could reduce one's stature in the community, and for some had little positive use. As future teachers, Normalites were aware of the importance of reputation. As remembered by alumni, of all the decisions that appeared to have had consequences, alcohol was the most obvious in its challenge. While the decision to have receiving lines at dances, as discussed above, would seem to indicate how seriously the faculty took the role of preventing students from drinking, the consequences for being caught consuming alcohol at school could be subtly influential. Challenges to reputation and embarrassment rather than immediately harsh punishment were remembered by a Camrose alumna: "One of our hometown boys came to a dance and had been drinking BEER [capitalization in original]. [There] was a serious assembly over that and we were embarrassed."²⁷⁹ Responses about alcohol violations were more common from alumni of the early-1930s than later in the decade, but most remembered only cursory warnings for violations, not outright dismissal: "The only...instance that I can recall concerned the use of alcohol [was] at a Normal School picnic. The two male students involved were up on the mat and given a warning."²⁸⁰ At least one woman was also warned, in this case because she and her escort had been drinking.²⁸¹ And while alcohol use and consumption was officially banned, at least one alumna remembered a student who was a "whisky tenor." Faculty allegedly knew of this student's drinking habit and permitted him to continue participating in choir.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ *PYQ*, C31-224, woman, 3.

²⁸⁰ *PYQ*, CL32-277, man, 3.

²⁸¹ *PYQ*, C31-239, woman, 3.

²⁸² *PYQ*, E33-119, man, 3.

Alcohol use, a practice of some controversy in the living memory of the faculty (through lingering debates over prohibition which had ended in Alberta in 1923), warranted an official stance of intolerance but in reality, faculty reacted instead with a measure of resigned tolerance. By warning but not suspending students, faculty may have been acting out of self-interest because a high-profile pattern of student violations in public drinking would reflect poorly in the surrounding community on the instructors and principal. As well, the faculty could have been looking out for the students' best interests, knowing that failure to complete the normal school program would compromise the students' successful path to a profession and way to earn a living. The faculty may have also been resigned to the fact that alcohol consumption was likely to occur in any such dynamic social environment. Whatever informed faculty response, the students who risked drinking were committing an act that faculty ultimately deemed only as a minor offense.

Matters of vice elicited a decidedly mixed response. From students admonished for drinking at Calgary dances,²⁸³ but not expelled, to Normalites expelled for smoking at Camrose, to a student allowed to perform while under the influence,²⁸⁴ implementing rules and regulations depended heavily on subjective interpretation of the violations by the faculty. Alumni recollections do not indicate a stark division of *written* school rules along gendered lines, however, but they do paint a picture of life experiences marked distinctly by gender:

Girls who smoked, were thought to smoke, or even suggested they might smoke were 'asked' to leave. The women students were expected to be models of propriety both in the school, the town and living quarters. Men students were not

²⁸³ *PYQ*, CL32-277, man, 2 and *PYQ*, CL39-376, man, 2.

²⁸⁴ *PYQ*, E33-119, man, 3.

nearly so restricted. As a girl who had one drink was in trouble while ‘boys will be boys.’ I don't recall any challenge to rules, because we didn't dare.²⁸⁵

This Camrose alumna remembered living and studying under a regime that privileged her male peers and allowed behaviours that would have been unacceptable for women, an experience that was shared by to a lesser degree by alumni from Edmonton or Calgary. By virtue of its comparatively conservative principal George Haverstock, Camrose seemed to have implemented a stricter set of expectations on student behaviour, especially any related to sexuality.

Certain behaviours, such as those perceived to be related to sexual licentiousness, were prohibited across the board. Sexual conduct was by far the riskiest of activities for students, especially for women. While Normalites seemed to have felt freer to stretch the less important expectations in view of the faculty, they remained quite aware of the dangers that certain behaviours dealing with interactions between men and women represented. Despite the rhetoric of the new openness in sexuality and the popularity of flapper girls, normal school students adhered to a commonly-understood and shared set of morals that marked premarital and extramarital sex as inappropriate.²⁸⁶ Dating was expected to be a chaste experience, especially when students were outside the walls of the normal schools: “We couldn't have boys in our living quarters even in a mixed group. Our landlord wired the back steps so that when you sat on them, it rang a bell in his quarters. So we stood in the backyard and so did the boyfriends.”²⁸⁷ By spending time and sharing physical space together out of the view of faculty and community members, Normalites were challenging the rules that attempted to enforce a certain decorum.

²⁸⁵ *PYQ*, C33-264, woman, 2.

²⁸⁶ Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 114-116.

²⁸⁷ *PYQ*, C31-229, woman, 2.

Faculty were primarily concerned about the sexual implications of dating, but as pre-emptive steps they regulated other related activities as well. Attending dances downtown and violating curfews were considered to be behaviours that had the potential to lead students toward having sex and, as a result, drew faculty attention and response.

Sexuality was one of the clearest ways in which experiences of Normalite women and men diverged. Having sex before marriage, a major violation of social norms, carried the risk of recrimination and rejection for women more than men: only the woman would face severe consequences if she were found out or if she became pregnant.²⁸⁸

While official records of student conduct are unavailable, and it is doubtful the normal schools kept track of pregnancies, alumni do recall at least three young Normalites who got pregnant. Sometime in the 1930-31 school year, a student at Camrose “was asked to leave,” possibly by a faculty member, due to her pregnancy.²⁸⁹

The circumstances surrounding this student’s departure from the school—did she have the option to return at a later date?—remain unknown. But we do know that the student was not the only young woman to face such veiled hostility. Another alumna from Camrose recalled how pregnancy could endanger young women: “In those days, pregnancy outside of marriage was really frowned on. I recall one girl leaving Normal at [Christmas] for such a misdemeanor and also two left for poor performance. It was stated that they were just not suitable for teaching.”²⁹⁰ Some alumni recollections about pregnancy indicated that a specific honour code related to sexual relationships among

²⁸⁸ Lara Campbell notes the increasing fears of illegitimacy at this time. See *Respectable Citizens*, 101.

²⁸⁹ *PYQ*, C31-232, woman, 2. See also *PYQ*, C31-244, woman, 3, which likely refers to the same (unknown) student.

²⁹⁰ *PYQ*, C32-386, woman, 3.

students permeated normal schools in Alberta. In 1935-36, a Normalite dropped out of Edmonton “when she became pregnant, probably because it was expected of her.”²⁹¹

No other institutional documents available from the 1930s indicate any other women found themselves in such a position, but given the severity of the response doled out to the above students and the intensely personal nature of the situation, other pregnant Normalites would likely have left school quietly.²⁹² Since it remains unknown whether the students chose to leave because they knew it was expected of them, to take time to prepare for motherhood, or whether they were forced to leave, the results in doing so could be severe. Withdrawal or expulsion resulted in the same effect: the women were no longer part of the normal school and would not have earned teaching certification.

While expelling a student was the harshest formal disciplinary action that the principal could impart, the possibility that the women were offered a “way out” that was more private illuminates a few important points of the normal school regime. First, withdrawal would have been a way for the students and the institution to save face. For institutions that enforced rules of conduct of the students who were off campus by regularly communicating with landlords, rationalizations could prevent embarrassment and ostracism. An alumna of Edmonton shared that violations of propriety surely occurred, but as the faculty “were the epitome of decorum such incidents were kept private; they were not broadcast.”²⁹³ Second, saving face meant covering up the source of embarrassment seen primarily in women but not in the men who were equally

²⁹¹ *PYQ*, E36-310, woman, 3.

²⁹² Correspondence between school inspectors and the Department of Education indicates increased concern over the moral development of Normalites in the mid-1940s. See letter from Superintendent of Schools L.A. Broughton to Deputy Minister of Education W.H. Swift dated 11 November 1944 (PAA, Accession 78.92, Box 1).

²⁹³ *PYQ*, E36-127, woman, 3.

responsible for pregnancy. Even though alumni recall men being quite interested in breaking some of the rules around sexual propriety, those men probably did not show the same interest in accepting the consequences. No alumni shared stories of men “leaving quietly” or otherwise departing for reasons that could be interpreted to stem from fathering a child before marriage.

Normal school instructors and principals must have known that certain conditions were more likely than others to lead to sexual contact between students. At a time of life when sexuality becomes biologically and socially prominent facilitated by a coeducational setting meant that students had an increased awareness of sexuality—its possibilities and consequences included.²⁹⁴ As discussed previously, Camrose was particularly conservative due to its principal. One alumna remembered that “behaviour in downtown Camrose was expected to be very lady-like.”²⁹⁵ Those who ventured downtown understood that dancing was off-limits—a rule based on the implication that dancing was ostentatious and overly sexual.

The rule also reinforced the ideal place of normal school at the centre of students’ social worlds. Camrose required Normalites to get written permission from the principal to leave town on weekends and have their parents sign the permission slip to prove they had gone home. While this requirement cannot be corroborated by the *Normal School Annual Reports* or the yearbooks, throughout the decade many Camrose students made reference to the rule. Alumni disagree on whether permission came from parents or the principal, but most agree that the principal had final authority and parents had

²⁹⁴ Paul Axelrod describes this phenomenon as an “inevitable consequence of coeducation” and goes on to discuss proliferation of dances and certain music as heralding a change in the sexual mores of youth. See *Making a Middle Class*, 112.

²⁹⁵ *PYQ*, C34-282, woman, 2.

corresponding authority. All agree that the rule existed: “A note from parents had to be presented at Normal asking for permission to go home for the weekend. You received a slip each time which was given to the landlady before going home.”²⁹⁶

On the way home, students occasionally used a weekend pass as cover for an otherwise forbidden trip to downtown Camrose, a particularly risky choice knowing that the normal school was a prominent institution in the town. Other times, students escaped the watchful eye of town residents by attending dances in the country outside of the community. And in one case, a young woman went to a country dance before going home to Wetaskiwin (a town approximately 40 kilometres west of Camrose). She was discovered and expelled.²⁹⁷ Such a harsh response to simply attending a country dance demonstrated the anxiety that Camrose principal Haverstock harboured regarding the morals and reputations of his students—especially the women. Country dances would have taken place in barns, vacant lots, and other locations away from prying or protective eyes. Of course, dancing in a barn was not equivalent to having premarital sex, but the fact that youth danced with one another away from authority figures implied that their behaviour was, or could soon lead to, activities that would be ultimately frowned upon. And again this was the crux of gender-based rules at normal school: they reflected widespread social values that imposed punishments and controls more on women than men.

But what of behaviours not specifically sexual? Students at all three campuses, including Camrose which responded most harshly to Normalite rebellion, had cause and

²⁹⁶ *PYQ*, C31-218, woman, 2.

²⁹⁷ “...later, permission was given to return, but [she] had obtained a job clerking, so [she] refused” *PYQ*, C31-218, woman, 3.

opportunity to violate rules. Throughout the decade and at all campuses, undoubtedly, students snuck downtown to dance, stayed up past curfew, and socialized in mixed company. But evidence indicates that the faculty of Camrose took such activities more seriously than their counterparts at other schools; alumni have clear memories of the strictures. Curfew in particular elicited strong reaction against it from Camrose Normalites. Students could, for the most part, understand and support prohibitions on sex and many respected curfew. As a way of promoting positive behaviours such as studying and to mitigate negative behaviours such as exploring sexuality, faculty limited the available free time of students at night. Some students would have none of that, however:

The Normal School did have rules for the students which the boarding house keepers had to enforce. Failure to enforce these rules was said to result in said landlords losing their permit to keep boarders. The most talked about of these rules was the one regarding a curfew time at night. We did not challenge it—we *found ways to circumvent it*. (The one who was ‘in’ studying would respond to pebbles thrown at the windows, unlock the door that had been secured as per regulations, so that the late-comers could tiptoe up the stair.) After all—our landlady needed her sleep and who wanted to worry about our breaking the rules!²⁹⁸

Rather than outright rebellion, Normalites found inventive ways to obey the letter of the law, but not its spirit. This account reflected a social world at once integrated with the faculty and community yet also set apart from them. Students acquiesced to many rules and regulations, but not all. They craved a measure of privacy; a space for youth and a space for intimacy.

²⁹⁸ Emphasis mine. *PYQ*, C31-206, woman, 3. Peers at Edmonton and Calgary also recall curfews; see *PYQ*, E32-104, woman, 2 and *PYQ*, CL38-368, woman, 2.

Conformity Endures

Despite numerous violations of rules and expectations, Normalites on the whole had been “reared to obey” and they did so in significant ways.²⁹⁹ Out of thousands of students in the 1930s, it seems only a handful left due to pregnancy, perhaps a dozen for other behavioural violations, and about fifty for academic failures. What, then, informed the overall compliance of the Normalites? And what did their compliance mean? The normal school social mores were constructed by faculty dictates and student acquiescence. Students adhered to the rules for fear of the consequences, ranging from damage to their reputations to increased difficulty in finding a teaching position after normal school. They also did what they were told because they believed in the aim of rules: to prepare and perfect them as future educators. The socio-academic regime of Alberta’s normal schools exercised control through a matrix of understood responsibilities shared among students, instructors, principals, families, and community members. This matrix reflected and reinforced the close, personal network of the normal school and made it more likely that most students, when given the chance to rebel in a significant way, would ultimately choose to conform.

A variety of factors influenced the behaviour of Normalites that can be organized into negative influences (those that students attempted to avoid) and positive influences (those that students sought after). The judgement of others played an outsized role in the daily lives of students, from faculty assessments of their fitness to teach to peer assessments of their suitability to date or spend time with. To be embarrassed meant to be isolated in the midst of a tight-knit social and educational community and carried

²⁹⁹ *PYQ*, C35-295, woman, 2.

with it the possibility of enduring shame, alienation, or ostracism. For one student, this was manifested in an unlikely forum: an extracurricular presentation given by a visiting lecturer on temperance. The lecturer (whose identity is unknown) quizzed audience members on the topic. Later, the student recalled, “it was announced [that] I had the highest mark [on the quiz] in the school. Was I embarrassed!”³⁰⁰ She was likely embarrassed because she knew the expectation by her peers that she know about and indeed partake in drinking, a leisure activity of many of the students, and be ignorant of temperance.

While this episode suggests a lurking rebellious streak among the students, in that the student being familiar with the tenets of temperance would have drawn scorn by Normalites, it also suggests the pressure of conforming to the larger hegemonic outlook of students. Being seen as part of the group and adhering to group norms was crucial: “In those days students did not question school rules. We abided by them. To do so otherwise would be considered disgraceful.”³⁰¹ Despite the exaggeration of this alumna’s claims that students did not question school rules, this recollection is useful for what it says about personal reputation and respect at the normal schools. Students were quite aware that they were being watched by peers and faculty alike—violating rules would draw embarrassment and disgrace.³⁰² Such emotional and social states of being were clearly important to students and informed their decision-making.

³⁰⁰ *PYQ*, CL31-259, woman, 3.

³⁰¹ *PYQ*, CL34-307, woman, 2.

³⁰² K.A. Hollihan, “‘Willing to Listen Humbly’: Practice Teaching in Alberta Normal Schools, 1906-1944,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 9, no. 2 (1997): 241.

Academic concerns also kept students in line. Students knew that attendance in class, from 9am to 4pm each weekday, was mandatory and most followed that rule.³⁰³ Being present physically, however, was distinct from being engaged mentally. In an attempt to burn the candle at both ends, many students were busy with homework as well as holding jobs to pay for school. But this did not always work, as one Calgary student remembered: “I was suspended from a class for falling asleep, but was reinstated when I explained that I’d worked my way from Edmonton the night before handling freight and hadn’t been to bed.”³⁰⁴ Occurring in 1934, just after what Palmer and Palmer describe as the “bottom” of the Depression, this student had understandable reason to make ends meet however he could.³⁰⁵ He further wrote: “[My] parents lived in Edmonton. I frequently caught rides with trucks (oil or transport) and helped with driving and handling freight in lieu of money as an incentive for the driver to take me—probably every 2 to 4 weeks.”³⁰⁶ This account does not include in which class this happened or which instructor suspended him, but it does demonstrate the seriousness with which faculty took class participation. By falling asleep, even accidentally, the student violated the norm of respecting instructors and the educational sanctity of the classroom and the faculty member correspondingly responded swiftly.

The story also shows a delayed compassion on the part of the faculty member, who, upon learning of the reason for falling asleep, reinstated the student. Not all faculty acted so severely such as threats of expulsion from class to students who nodded off, as

³⁰³ As one alumna wrote, “Classes at Normal School were from 9am-4pm with no spares that I can remember. It was a busy time” (*PYQ*, E33-117, woman, 5).

³⁰⁴ *PYQ*, CL34-310, man, 3.

³⁰⁵ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), 244.

³⁰⁶ This student mentioned receiving special dispensation to attend Calgary instead of Camrose (as Edmonton was closed in 1933-34). Details of this exception are not available. *PYQ*, CL34-310, man, 1.

an Edmonton student recalled Dr. Tuck's quoting "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to sleepy students ("Oh sleep, it is a gentle thing") while marking a zero in his grade

book.³⁰⁷ History instructor Gerald Manning at Camrose was less punitive:

[Mr. Manning] was rather serious but one day he showed us that he had a sense of humor. It was in the spring, the course was on the west side, it was warm in the afternoon, consequently, some students dozed off. Mr. Manning in a monotonous voice said: 'I think I will apply for a position in a hospital which has restless patients. All I will do will be teaching history and it will calm them down.'

Those who were awake burst out laughing and woke up the sleeping students.³⁰⁸

Sleeping in class may not, at first glance, appear to be an indicator of student behaviour writ large. But analysis of such scenarios uncovers some of the ordinary aspects of normal school life that simultaneously show how students reacted to expectations and how they related to one another and to faculty. Faculty rarely acted in ways that would jeopardize the reputations or careers of their students but at times chose instead to reinforce the teacher ideal by correcting with compassion and humour.

Considering the range of consequences students might anticipate for breaking rules, Normalites were far more cognizant of practices of formal discipline that could lead to dismissal than to comparatively low- and mid-level academic repercussions.³⁰⁹ They had good reason to be aware and trepidatious of the results of misbehaving, for repeated academic offences were seen as high-level breaches of the normal schools' policies.³¹⁰ Removal from the normal school was central to students' fears. "Asked not to return after Christmas" seems to have been the preferred method of dismissing

³⁰⁷ It is unclear whether the zero was for daily participation or for an assignment due that day, but in either case this was less severe than removal from the classroom. *PYQ*, E32-099, man, 3.

³⁰⁸ "Humor" is spelled as in the original (*PYQ*, C31-222, woman, 3).

³⁰⁹ It is worth noting that normal schools in Alberta did not have student government-sponsored discipline processes like in some Canadian universities. See Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 103-4.

³¹⁰ "One student was disciplined for poor performance such as low marks and many uncompleted assignments. The punishment was removal from the complete Normal School program" (*PYQ*, CL37-358, man, 3).

students—a phrasing that was repeated by alumni throughout the period.³¹¹ This would have preserved as much dignity as possible by masking what actually happened, possibly preventing affected students from having to explain face-to-face to their peers what happened, and not forcing families to come pick up students conspicuously outside of regular visiting time (and saving the parents scarce money and time since the student had already travelled home). The content of *Project Yesteryear* and normal school yearbooks did not reveal the perspectives of those who were suspended or otherwise left the institution, as those documents preserved only the existence of students who graduated and those few who died over the years while attending.³¹²

When asked to share any accounts of student discipline, a Calgary alumna wrote: “It was Depression. We had paid our tuition and we were so frightened of being ‘kicked out’ of Normal School that my group at least worked fairly hard and we did a minimum of not following the rules—at least any we were likely to be caught at.”³¹³ Anxiety over what to do if one was dismissed fueled students’ general compliance with faculty and social expectations. That pressure hung over the heads of students throughout the period considering the need to find a teaching position in light of the widespread fear of scarce money and on the impact to their families, many of whom had supported the students financially.³¹⁴ The impact of a suspension from school was that parents had spent money on a wasted endeavour, and the Normalite’s recognition of this could not be underestimated. One alumna powerfully recalled the normal school was their “one

³¹¹ “Another girl did not return for the 2nd term due to poor marks” (*PYQ*, C31-239, woman, 3); “Some students, if I recall correctly, were asked not to return after Xmas break” (*PYQ*, CL33-295, woman, 3); and “Some students were asked to leave at Christmas...” (*PYQ*, E33-119, man, 3).

³¹² Scattered memorials to deceased Normalites can be found in a few yearbooks.

³¹³ *PYQ*, CL34-314, woman, 3.

³¹⁴ “Most of us were there at great sacrifice of our parents” (*PYQ*, C34-279, woman, 3).

chance.”³¹⁵ Normalites needed to make the most of that chance because, as the children of farmers, carpenters, railmen, teachers, and merchants, they were particularly vulnerable to the exigencies of the Depression. And as an overwhelmingly female group, Normalites also knew that few other occupations were open to them.

In the hopes for a prosperous future, students feared what might happen if they failed to live up to expectations. Alumni reflections demonstrated a strong tendency to view instructors and principals as honourable men and women, struggling to refine Normalites into good educators, and as a result many of the rules governing students seemed to make sense. While some of these memories can be explained through a romantic lens fifty years after the lived experience, a genuine feeling seems to have informed much of what was shared within the documents of *Project Yesteryear*. A number of recollections of rules and relationships were unflattering, but many more were nuanced—those, in particular, likely influenced by the fact of many respondents having led long and successful professional lives as teachers and having come to understand what the normal school and its faculty had intended so many years ago. Normalites abided by the rules because those rules were largely crafted by those who they respected and “most of the normal school students instinctively felt unqualified to judge their instructors.”³¹⁶ This feeling stemmed from their close and largely positive relationships with faculty, the age differential which promoted some authority of the faculty over students, the students’ desire to stay in contact with certain faculty members and need for

³¹⁵ *PYQ*, CL34-379, woman, 3.

³¹⁶ *PYQ*, E32-098, woman, 2.

reference letters, and their gaze on their own futures.³¹⁷ As future teachers, Normalites probably put themselves in the positions of faculty more than once, empathizing with their responsible and crucial role in students' lives.³¹⁸ Role modelling was not just something that affected the year-long normal course; its impact reverberated along life paths.

Stories of normal school student conduct cannot be depicted merely as some students in unified opposition to faculty, as all students in addition to faculty were an integral part of the construction and maintenance of the social structures and cultures that kept order in and out of the classroom. Students were obviously not all rule-breakers and faculty, through tolerance of small rebellions, cannot be said to have been all rule-enforcers. Reactions to violations of the social order were dynamic and entirely reasonable by the standards of the time; moreover, those reactions reflected the intimate nature of many faculty-student relationships and the integration of Normalites' personal and professional lives. As one student wrote: "Poor performance was not acceptable—although punishment was not given—help was given."³¹⁹

³¹⁷ "At that time all students I knew were making quite a sacrifice to attend and so worked hard to get good marks and a favorable report, as their future depended on the results of normal school" (*PYQ*, CL32-364, woman, 2).

³¹⁸ As the president of Edmonton's student council, Beth Empey, wrote: "We are abruptly brought to the realization that we must change, over-night, from the role of student to that of teacher. However, a moment's thought will show us that this transformation can never be complete...As long as we teach, we must study. The change then, we may say, is not from student to teacher, but rather from student-teacher to a more and more experienced student-teacher" (Edmonton Normal School yearbook, 1936-37, 29).

³¹⁹ *PYQ*, CL31-255, woman, 3.

Conclusion

Student life in the normal schools was remarkably stable. Normalites in September 1930 registered at institutions that had complete infrastructure, mature academic cultures, and firmly established traditions. Most importantly, the schools had long-term faculty whose personal investment in student affairs led to close student-faculty relationships. These factors ensured that student experiences in September 1930 would remain similar to those throughout the decade up to September 1939, even as the economy made slow progress toward recovery. However, local and international events would change student life in the later years of the decade. Camrose closed its doors on 30 June 1938 due to falling enrolment.³²⁰ Its rural character and influence on Alberta's teachers were lost to the urban centres of Edmonton and Calgary. Turn-over in faculty members accelerated at this time, with Calgary principal Coffin leaving in June 1939 after twenty-eight years of service.³²¹ By 1942, nearly one-third of instructors were new to the normal schools and bringing new ideas to the institutions.³²²

War in Europe began in September 1939; it would not take long for the conflict to reverberate on the home front. Male students and faculty members volunteered or were called up for military service, further disrupting the social fabric.³²³ In the summer of 1940, the Department of National Defence took control of the Calgary Normal School-Provincial Institute of Technology building and, in July 1941, of the Edmonton Normal

³²⁰ NSAR, 1938, 19.

³²¹ NSAR, 1939, 29.

³²² From 1940 to 1942, the number of instructors fluctuated around an average of 30 (20 at Edmonton and 10 at Calgary). Eleven instructors left the institutions and were replaced. See NSAR, 1940, 31; 1941, 37; 1942, 36-37.

³²³ Donalda Lloyd, "Normal School Days," *Edmonton Public Library: Citizen's Stories*, 10 July 2016, <http://www2.epl.ca/EdmontonACityCalledHome/EPLEdmontonCityCalledStoriesSingle.cfm?id=1042>.

School building to train wireless operators.³²⁴ New teacher preparation programs, some as short as three months, flourished as a glut of teachers became a shortage.³²⁵ Amidst changing demographics, provincial educational politics, and major shifts in economic activity, the normal schools would not return to their buildings or their previous status. In 1945, the University of Alberta absorbed the normal schools and they became faculties of education, ending nearly forty years of normal schools in the province.³²⁶

Normalites in the 1930s dealt not with the ramifications of war but instead studied and acted against the backdrop of Depression. The institutions were places of refuge where students, who had so recently left their families, would build relationships, some of which helped form new families of their own. Leaving home meant, in a sense, striking out on their own and taking a risk that becoming a teacher would be worth it. In a different sense, Normalites had exchanged one safety net for another, possibly without knowing it. They left the closely-monitored familial home for accommodations in the communities of Edmonton, Camrose, and Calgary—accommodations overseen by landlords who communicated with and were subject to the faculty. Students sought out the opportunities for socialization that the normal school fostered for it drew together young people from across the region. Extra-curricular activities were strongly encouraged and often regulated by the presence of faculty members. Students were already a relatively homogeneous group of professionals-in-training, and their

³²⁴ *NSAR*, 1940, 31 and *NSAR*, 1941, 36. CNS moved to King Edward School and PITA held classes on the grounds of the Calgary Stampede for the duration of the war. ENS moved to Garneau School.

³²⁵ Known as the “War Emergency Short Course,” these were among the last programs operated by Alberta normal schools. See *NSAR*, 1942, 38.

³²⁶ Stamp, *Becoming a Teacher in 20th Century Calgary*, 42.

experiences at normal school ensured that they would look back on their “normal year” as something that forged intimate relationships based on similarity and conformity.

Faculty members, including instructors and principals, influenced student life far more than might be expected. Students did not blindly follow the dictates of faculty members and faculty certainly did not issue regulations with the expectation of perfect adherence—both groups of historical actors together forged a unique social world that valued reputation, compromise, hard-work, and conformity to a variety of norms. Gendered expectations influenced the associational life of normal schools in ways that alumni would recall fifty years later. When Normalites participated in extracurricular activities like dances, Lits, and student council, they encountered entrenched social mores of how young people should act as women and men. In particular, the fact that they were preparing to become teachers highlighted the honourable aspect of gender in that youth were expected to be chaste, temperate, and diligent in their studies.

While the expectations might have been general, the consequences for violations varied significantly and gender often played a part. For both men and women, open sexuality was frowned upon, but pregnancy meant only the women were dismissed or asked to leave the school.³²⁷ Intoxication was prohibited because of its impact on reputation, but this matter seems to have been less severe in the eyes of faculty than sexuality, which led to dismissal of several students. While gender could operate as a common indicator of which rules would be applied to women vis-à-vis men, evidence suggests that while gender tended to influence expectations, individual faculty-student

³²⁷ And, like universities, “campus sexual life was neither as loose as critics feared nor as pristine as officials pretended” (Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 115). For a discussion of investigations related to pregnancy during the Great Depression, see Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens*, 105-107.

relationships tended to determine which expectations would be applied and which would be ignored.

Relationships among Normalites and between students and faculty were central to student life not only for how those relationships varied according to gender, but also for how the activities and decisions in those relationships structured the formation of Normalite identity as future teachers. Rules established by principals and instructors recognized the intertwined life and career pathways of most students and also the reality that the institution was to introduce and guide the students in developing along certain effective professional standards to succeed. Student-produced documents at the time and those that relied on memories from years later indicate a strong sense of purpose and sacrifice among the students. Students were prepared to work hard and sought inspiration to make it through a difficult curriculum and extraordinarily busy time in their lives.

Faculty became the imagined paragons of stability for their calm influence and steady hand, and one student left normal school believing that “something of their strength is mine.”³²⁸ That influence involved setting an expectation of faculty for students to become community leaders in mostly rural locations, but in urban schools as well, their behaviours closely observed by residents, parents, and children alike. The notion and practice of the ideal teacher model in the normal schools permeated school-sponsored events, including dramatic performances (Lits), student government, physical education, debating clubs, and social dances. While drama and dances may seem to have been purely social occasions, and likely appeared that way to students, they served as refining activities for Normalites. There, students could enjoy one another’s company,

³²⁸ M. Blades, “Mountains Afar,” Calgary Normal School yearbook 1933-34, 40.

have fun in a semi-formal environment, and learn under the tutelage of faculty how to comport themselves as proto-teachers. Rules were meant to mould students into teachers one day at a time.

The act of becoming teachers was not an act at all—it was a complex and subjective process of fits-and-starts that repeated itself with each new student. Normalites transitioned in a variety of ways, not the least of which was mindset. Beginning their studies as recent graduates of Grade XI or XII, through their one-year program at normal school, they had to make, and indeed feel, the transition from student to teacher. It was a startling experience for many, and social comfort and a sense of inclusion among the study body became paramount. Faculty acknowledged this by planning extra-curricular activities such as welcoming picnics with cross-dressing, field trips to natural sites, and various sports activities.³²⁹ As well, these programs highlighted the youthful character of Normalites by harnessing silly, amusing behaviour and youthful energy that could be put to good use as a form of empathy. These teachers-in-training would have gone on to be authorities in schools, and to be effective educators they would also have to remember that their charges were children. From one group of Normalites each year to the next, faculty perpetually role-modelled the path for the students in a way that allowed them to confidently shape their early adulthood while gaining pertinent new knowledge and enjoying the lived experience along the way. The underlying motivation was to refine the Normalites and mould their mindset into future teachers, lifting them out of their identity as being merely students into honed professionals.

³²⁹ *PYQ*, CL34-303, woman, 6; *PYQ*, E31-073, woman, 3; and *PYQ*, C35-301, man, 3.

Students who attended normal school in Alberta during the 1930s experienced an academic and social world that existed at the confluence of youth and adulthood, learning and teaching, personal and professional identities and worlds. As individuals coming of age in the Great Depression, Normalites lived through an incredibly difficult economy and climate while meeting many challenges of their own. They had to prepare for independence from family and financial support as well as for the lifestyle and mental change of living on their own and earning a responsible, professional living as an educational leader to children and community members alike. This dual task—being an adolescent yet expected to act as a mature adult—was integral to student life at Alberta’s normal schools. And students understood what was expected of them:

Next June we shall all return to our homes. At the same time, we shall begin another and much more important journey—the journey of life. For most of us it will be the first time we have travelled without the care and guidance of others, so we know little of what lies before us...Having decided upon the teaching profession, we must not only keep to the path ourselves, but also prepare the children in our care so that they will be ready when they too start the great journey...³³⁰

The personal and professional transition of the students was repeated throughout the 1930s. The nature of human growth, development, and maturity that differed from individual to individual meant that every new class of Normalites was invariably a new and unique group of students to shepherd through the teaching process. Nonetheless, student life at Alberta normal schools retained many key features in 1939 as it had in 1930. Stability derived from the long-serving faculty and their intentional use of traditions like dances and encouragement and support of a consistently-run student government. As a result, while students did not overlap with preceding or succeeding

³³⁰ Fred Tarlton, “The Road Ahead,” Camrose Normal School yearbook, 1929-30, 36.

classes, they encountered similar structures and social worlds across the decade. This study is therefore a story of continuity in education, not a story of significant change often told in histories of Alberta education at this time. While the province implemented the “enterprise” method of instruction in 1936 and one of its champions, Donalda Dickie, was a normal school faculty member, Normalites themselves still participated in largely the same activities and conformed to the same social rules before and after the new curriculum was implemented.³³¹

Not only does this study illustrate the complexity of personal and professional transition, it also highlights the role of emotion as a core feature of identity. Faculty were conscious agents of socialization, informed by their own backgrounds and experiences, as well as by professional opinions, ethics, and guidance from authorities. As residents of Edmonton, Calgary, or Camrose for years at a time, instructors and principal were also influenced by the communities of which they were a part. Faculty built relationships with community members just as they did with students. Those connections undoubtedly informed how they related to students because faculty could better envision and anticipate the impact that Normalites would have on schools, families, and children after graduation. Emotions, ranging from affection and compassion to humour, anger, and pettiness, inscribed the motivations of faculty and students with significant meaning. Their actions cannot be understood without considering the feelings that provided the context for particular individual and group behaviours and practices. *PYQ* provides a

³³¹ The “enterprise method,” as it was known in Alberta, centred on activity- and project-based learning that integrated multiple traditional subjects into one class. For example, students in Social Studies might complete a unit (or “enterprise”) on Japan that included its history, political institutions, economy, and culture. See Amy von Heyking, “Implementing Progressive Education in Alberta’s Public Schools,” *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 24, no. 1 (2012): 93-111.

tremendous amount of material from which to glean information related to emotions and analysis of these documents indicates how emotions saturated the relationships of faculty and students in the normal schools.

Normalites of the 1930s faced an uncertain future. Many had decided to become teachers from a love of education; many more made this decision from a fear of unemployment. When they enrolled in normal school, they found an environment strikingly similar to the families that had raised them: strong authority figures, clear expectations on behaviour, much of the day spent with one another and those in charge, and relationships encompassed by emotions. Instructors and administrators—the authorities of normal schools—played a vital role in student life. Faculty met the task of moulding students into ideal teachers by helping to recreate the intimate relationships of families back home. Extending their influence from the classroom to, for example, extra-curricular activities and off-campus accommodations, faculty exerted a significant amount of control over student life. However, their actions, sometimes contradicting official standards, indicated a strong sense of care for the students that cannot be explained by institutional policy or theories of power dynamics. Instructors and administrators' actions were strongly informed by emotions—emotions that reflected closeness with students. Normalites and faculty were thus bound by ties of purpose, care, and shared experience.

The connections of faculty and students, who spent more than 40 hours each week in direct contact with one another, were strong. Bonds were reinforced by clear lines of authority flowing from the principal to the instructors to students, by shared experiences of dull lectures and hysterical dramatic productions, and by the moments when faculty

overlooked a rule or went beyond their professional expectations to help students. As W.H. Swift remembered, “camaraderie among students, among staff, and between staff and students was high.”³³² In many ways, this study is one of the importance of kinship in shaping the fluid social and educational networks in the normal schools and crucially the meaning of those networks with their numerous intimate connections. These connections, however, were not always facilitative: faculty were in positions of authority and responsibility over students, but at times their power was complicated by emotion and situation. Students depended on faculty for teacher certification and recommendation, but students also enacted small rebellions and circumvented rules when it served their social and idiosyncratic interests. The social and cultural world of Alberta normal schools was a multifaceted dynamic construct that, while most-often trying to enforce conformity in its members’ character, witnessed students and even faculty occasionally acting outside the norms.

This study answers the call of historians Nancy Sheehan and Robert Patterson to investigate further the lives and identities of teachers, especially their “thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and challenges.”³³³ Getting to the centre of teachers’ identities, emotions, and actions requires considering that the nature of their work and who they were as individuals to be particularly fundamental. It also requires expanding one’s view of teachers to include teacher candidates—the people just beginning the journey from

³³² Correspondence between W.H. Swift and Robert Patterson, c. 1981, RPPA, Box 17. Swift had been a student at Calgary in 1924-25, faculty at Camrose from 1935-38, faculty at Edmonton from 1938-40, and principal at Calgary from 1940-42 before becoming Superintendent of Schools and Deputy Minister of Education.

³³³ Robert S. Patterson, “Voices from the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural School Teachers” in *School in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones, eds. (1986): 99 and Nancy Sheehan, “History of Higher Education in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (1985): 35.

learner to teacher. This expansion in the scope of the study is necessary to understand one of the most important origins of teachers' thoughts, expectations, and motivations: the normal school. It was there, more than any other place, that students learned what it meant to be teachers. Without research into the lived experience of teacher preparation, teachers themselves appear in the historiography as timeless and unchanging. Their lives at normal school were built upon significant personal change and challenges, illuminating a critical and underexplored aspect of the history of teaching and teachers.

Turning scholarly attention toward students at normal school means prioritizing their perspectives and recollections. Researchers of the history of student life have to contend with multiple contemporary perspectives of the time and coloured or failed memories when examining the sociocultural and intellectual factors that informed relationships and rules. These histories as garnered from *PYQ* offer insight into the backgrounds of, and opportunities and constraints faced by, individuals affiliated with educational institutions—characteristics that reflect larger sociocultural trends. Experiences and memories of students give historians a multifaceted look at society at any point in history, but particularly in difficult times because of the choices that individuals are forced to make.

Alberta's normal schools demonstrate the importance of analyzing intimate relationships in the context of educational lives and practices. Faculty decisions related to Normalites can only be partially explained by rote pedagogical or professional concerns. Students and instructors developed close relationships at normal school that invariably had an emotional core. It was through the combination of professional and emotional motivations that faculty came to regulate the lives of students in a firm yet

caring manner. Studying faculty involvement in student life matters because without understanding how and why faculty acted in relationship to student activities inside and outside the classroom, the history of an entire profession is compromised. Contemporary student affairs and services at colleges and universities are usually handled by non-academic staff members, but who worked with students before the increasing bureaucratization of institutional policies?³³⁴ Faculty members at normal schools and universities were the first student affairs professionals. That role was central to their work as instructors and administrators.

This study contributes to the broader history of education through deeper evaluation and analysis of the teacher-training institutions that remain understudied despite their great numbers and their place as professional gatekeepers. In that histories reflect at least as much about historians as they reflect about the past, the dearth of research on normal schools possibly suggests a disinterest in examining the teaching enterprise. Moreover, the imbalance in normal school historical research compared to university historical research (not to mention colleges, polytechnics, institutes, and others) reinforces the ahistorical hegemonic idea that universities have always been the dominant and most important forms of postsecondary education. By looking at normal schools, one of the core purposes of this study is to ignite research into such an important socio-cultural and educational institution that helped shape the values and intellectual character of communities and future citizens alike.

Future research will contribute to our understanding of the people brought together in normal schools in the context of transprovincial and transnational social,

³³⁴ Their members are represented by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services / l'Association des services aux étudiants des universités et collèges du Canada.

cultural, and intellectual movements. While this study inquires into the nature of student life and argues that faculty were central to the student experience in Alberta normal schools, it is focused on one province in one particular decade. Expanding the frame of reference to western provinces would allow a regional picture to emerge, a key consideration for eventually writing a history of teaching that takes into account local, regional, and transnational perspectives. As educational trends crossed national boundaries, it would be instrumental to compare student life in both Canada and the United States. The diverging paths of normal schools in both countries provides a fascinating and useful difference with which to analyze the development of the teaching profession in each country. Such investigation would also address whether the border actually mattered to those developments and to the people who lived near it. Boundaries of culture, education, and student life are salient to this study and also to broader histories of the nation and of the teaching profession, as teachers crossed and re-crossed those boundaries in the course of their lives.

Given the location of the normal schools in larger centres (with the possible exception of Camrose) in contrast to the student population who largely came from smaller communities, further study into the nature and impact of the urban/rural lived experience is warranted. Did normal schools privilege urban perspectives and assumptions because of their location and because some faculty had advanced degrees from universities in urban centres? Were students from rural areas as sufficiently prepared for normal school life, and how did upbringing of individual students in sequestered western Canadian communities affect student experiences? Comparison of

student life between normal schools and universities has begun,³³⁵ but such work would benefit from a sustained and systematic, regional approach based on personal and professional gendered lives and identities. This kind of study would stitch back together what the historiography has unintentionally done, which is to separate education into its institutional components and in so doing disproportionately illuminate universities by dimming other important postsecondary institutions replete with the historical agents that were both constructed by these institutions but themselves shaped and informed by them.

³³⁵ Shawn W. Brackett, "Advancing Women in Education: Colorado State Normal School and the University of Colorado, 1870-1920" (M.Ed. thesis, Texas Tech University, 2012).

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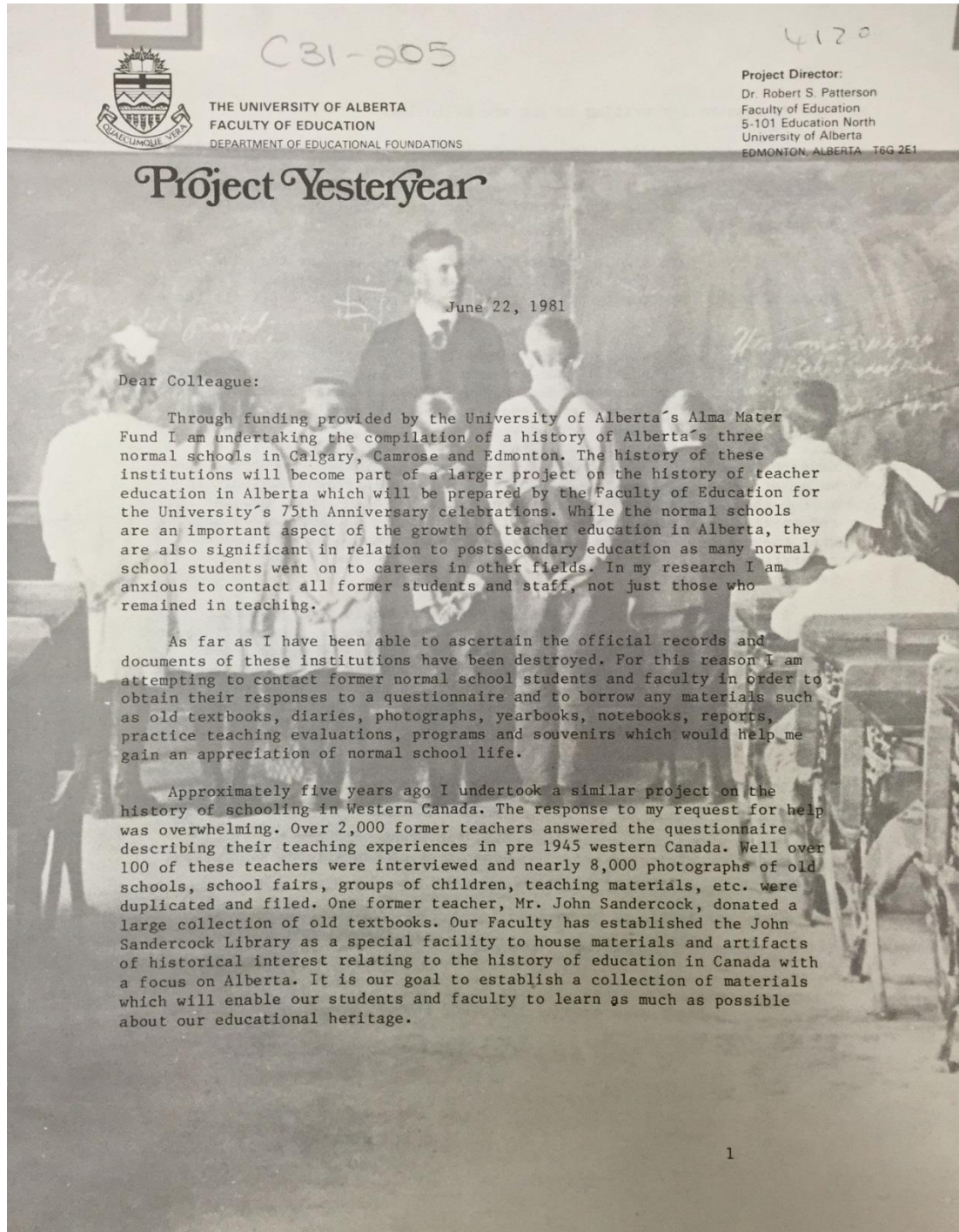
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Appendix A: Project Yesteryear Questionnaires



My reasons for writing to you are as follows:

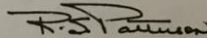
1. If you attended normal school, I would ask your help in completing the questionnaire and in loaning me any materials relating to the normal schools which I described above. (photographs, yearbooks, notebooks, reports, diaries, textbooks, practica teaching evaluations, programs, souvenirs, etc.)

2. If you have similar materials which relate to your teaching experience prior to 1945 and which were not sent to me earlier, I would appreciate the opportunity of being able to borrow and to duplicate these as well.

In order to help me ensure the safe return of any borrowed materials, please be certain that your name and return address are clearly recorded on your envelope. As soon as we open an envelope we create a duplicate picture of everything in the envelope so that the risk of loss is greatly reduced. Your material will be returned by registered mail. The value of these materials is greatly enhanced if you provide names, places, dates or descriptions, even approximations, where you recall them. I realize the value of these items to you personally and for this reason ask only to borrow them for a period of 3-4 months while I process them. However, recognizing that many people are willing to donate such materials knowing that they will be properly preserved and made accessible to future generations, I ask you to consider such a contribution to the John Sandercock Library.

I sincerely hope you are willing to assist me in this important undertaking. Any assistance, whether it be completion of the questionnaire, or loaning or donating of materials, would be valued and appreciated. Please join with me in helping to preserve this facet of our heritage and in making it available for others to enjoy. The perspective of participants in the past is vital to a sound understanding of the past. Your cooperation in this project will benefit many generations of students.

Sincerely,



R.S. Patterson, Professor
Department of Educational Foundations

RSP/s

712

QUESTIONNAIRE

NORMAL SCHOOLS OF ALBERTA

Name: _____ Maiden Name _____

Current Address: _____

Normal School Attended: Calgary
Camrose
Edmonton

Year and Months in Attendance
Sept. 1929 - June 1931

Age: (at the time of entering normal school) *22*

Certificate Received at Graduation: *Standard E & S.*

Months of Training at Normal School Required for Your Certificate: *9 1/2 mo.*

Birthplace of Parents (Country): *Ontario*

Occupation of Father: *Farmer*

Type of Schools Attended Prior to Normal School
Rural Elementary Rural Secondary
Town/City Elementary Town/City Secondary

Amount of High School Education Successfully completed prior to Entrance at Normal School: *4 years.*

If the space left for your answer is too restrictive please feel free to provide more detailed information on additional paper.

1. Were you able to attend whichever normal school you chose or were you assigned to attend the one designated by the Department of Education?
Assigned to attend Camrose. I had wanted to go to Calgary.
2. What were the reasons you had for preferring to attend the normal school of your choice?
It was closer and more direct to home. Also had friends there.
3. If your parents lived outside of the city where you attended normal school, how frequently did you visit at home with them?
Thanksgiving, Christmas & Easter

4. How much did you spend for your normal school training?

Tuition	\$25
School costs (books, etc.)	350
Board and Room	360
Other expenses (identify major ones)	100
Total	535

5. How did you meet the costs of your normal school experience?

Money from home and Normal Govt loan of \$350

6. If you received a government loan, did you have to repay it and, if so, how long did it take you?

I repaid it in about 3 years

7. What expectations did you have for normal school life and education?

I wanted to become a teacher very much

Did you find the experience enjoyable and worthwhile?

Yes.

IN ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, PLEASE INCLUDE ANECDOTES, STORIES, EXPERIENCES AND RECOLLECTIONS THAT WILL HELP PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR A PERSONAL, DOWN-TO-EARTH ACCOUNT OF LIFE AT NORMAL SCHOOL. IF YOU RECALL THINGS ABOUT OTHERS, RATHER THAN YOURSELF, PLEASE INCLUDE THEM.

8. Describe your living and eating arrangements while at normal school. Do you recall any special problems encountered or adjustments made by you or your associates to your accommodation or eating conditions?

A friend got the two of us girls from Dedebury a place to board. There were also four other girls there who were strangers to us. We were all kids away from home for the first time. Our landlady didn't care much for young girls

9. Do you recall any special school rules governing student conduct that were in effect at normal school which were questioned or challenged by students?

10. Were students ever disciplined for such things as misbehavior, improper conduct or poor performance? If so what were some of the offenses and punishments?

11. Were classes co-educational or segregated by sex? If segregated, what reasons were given for such an arrangement? How did you react personally to the arrangement?

Co-educational

12. Do you have special memories of any of the faculty? Please share impressions you recall of how individual faculty members related to students, how effective various staff members were as teachers, extra-curricular involvements of the faculty, personality traits, unique habits or qualities or quirks, main things learned by you (if anything) from each of those instructors, personal impact on you of different faculty members. (Whatever stories, memories, impression that you can share would be appreciated as it is only through such recollections that we will be able to establish what these teachers were like.)

Mr. Haverstock (principal) very encouraging to
Mrs. Hastie - Writing & Health.
Mr. Trout - Language. ~~Great~~ Enjoyed his classes
Miss Burnette - Primary Education - She was a
real primary teacher
Miss Twomey - Art & Music. Her motto make everything
a work of art.
Mr. MacGregor - Geography -
Mr. Ueis - ~~Psychology~~ Psychology - His subjects were on everything
for discussion
Sargeant Hawks - Phys Ed. An enjoyable class

13. What contact did normal school students have with the practice school and the staff of the practice school? Do you recall anything special about your experiences in the practice school?

We had several classes to teach in the Camrose schools. But in a half day on each teaching and watching the practice school teacher. Then we put in the week before Easter, practice-teaching in a rural school. Most teachers were helpful & encouraging.

14. With respect to the curriculum you studied at normal school what subject areas or courses did you find enjoyable and interesting, useful, boring, etc.? Why?

What do you recall about the methodology used by the faculty to teach you?

15. What was your practice teaching experience like?

- (a) Did you practice teach at the normal school's practice school, in a rural school, or in a city school? Normal practice school

- (b) By whom were you supervised and how helpful was their input? Rural School

- (c) How important was the practice teaching experience in your total experience? The room teacher. As a whole it was helpful.

- (d) How long did you practice teach? Was this practice teaching done in a block of consecutive days or in part-day assignments? That is where most of us went.

About eight or nine half days in city school not in a block. A week in a Rural School. We took over the school & the teacher supervised us, said nothing to students.

16. Outline the outstanding impressions, feelings or memories you have and associate with your experiences at normal school. These may be related to feelings such as how lonely you felt or what it meant to be away from home to whether or not you were happy with your decision to attend normal school to how different ideas or faculty touched your life and career.

It was lonely at first but as a whole the pupils were all friendly and the staff friendly and encouraging as a whole.

17. How well did your normal school experience prepare you for the demands placed upon you as a teacher during the first four to five years of teaching? *Not very much, You were on your own and it*

As you answer this question, please include anecdotal accounts from your early teaching experiences which would give a picture of what kinds of problems you faced in any of these or other areas of teaching. For example, did you have fifty or sixty students in eight grades, did you have to teach high school without time or qualification, did you work with large numbers of children and parents who could not speak English?

How were you prepared, if at all, for each of the following:

- (a) the multiple grades of the rural school

Not too well, The rural practice teaching helped but there was a lot of planning to do.

- (b) life in a rural community

The majority of the people were very friendly and understanding. Invitations to visit & parties were frequent.

- (c) boarding out

Was good. People were kind & good food. Some were a distance from school so rode a horse out.

- (d) working with immigrant children

Very little of this. Several years in a teacherage to a horse.

- (e) high school instruction

Grade nine usually & 1 year Grade ten as well.

- (f) discipline problems

There were very few of these.

18. Were extra-curricular activities regarded by the faculty and students as important to your preparation? Were you expected to participate in clubs, sports, student government or cultural events? Did you participate? What value, if any, were such school activities to you?

Extra-curricular activities were not regarded as a necessity. I took very little part.

19. Outline the strengths and weaknesses of normal school in preparing you for your first teaching assignments.

The Normal school classes were very interesting and gave us ideas. But the problem was for us how to get it across to the students in a rural school.

20. If you did not enter or stay in teaching as a career, explain why you made that decision.

I taught four years then got married and was out for 9 years with my family. Went back in 1944. At first mostly part time but then ^{full time} when I retired at 65 had a little over 30 years in.

Appendix B: Responses to Project Yesteryear

Responses by Year of Graduation	#	% of Total	Responses by Campus	#	% of Year	Responses by Gender	#	% of Campus	Notes	
1931	92	24.2%	Calgary	25	27.2%	Women	21	84.0%		
						Men	4	16.0%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Camrose	42	45.7%	Women	27	64.3%		
						Men	12	28.6%		
						Unknown	3	7.1%		
			Edmonton	25	27.2%	Women	18	72.0%		
						Men	6	24.0%		
						Unknown	1	4.0%		
1932	51	13.4%	Calgary	17	33.3%	Women	11	64.7%		
						Men	6	35.3%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Camrose	13	25.5%	Women	10	76.9%		
						Men	3	23.1%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Edmonton	21	41.2%	Women	18	85.7%		
						Men	3	14.3%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
1933	41	10.8%	Calgary	15	36.6%	Women	9	60.0%		
						Men	6	40.0%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Camrose	14	34.1%	Women	12	85.7%		
						Men	2	14.3%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Edmonton	12	29.3%	Women	5	41.7%		
						Men	7	58.3%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
1934	38	10.0%	Calgary	22	57.9%	Women	18	81.8%		
						Men	4	18.2%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Camrose	16	42.1%	Women	10	62.5%		
						Men	6	37.5%		
						Unknown	0	0.0%		
			Edmonton	0	0.0%	Women	0			Closed
						Men	0			
						Unknown	0			

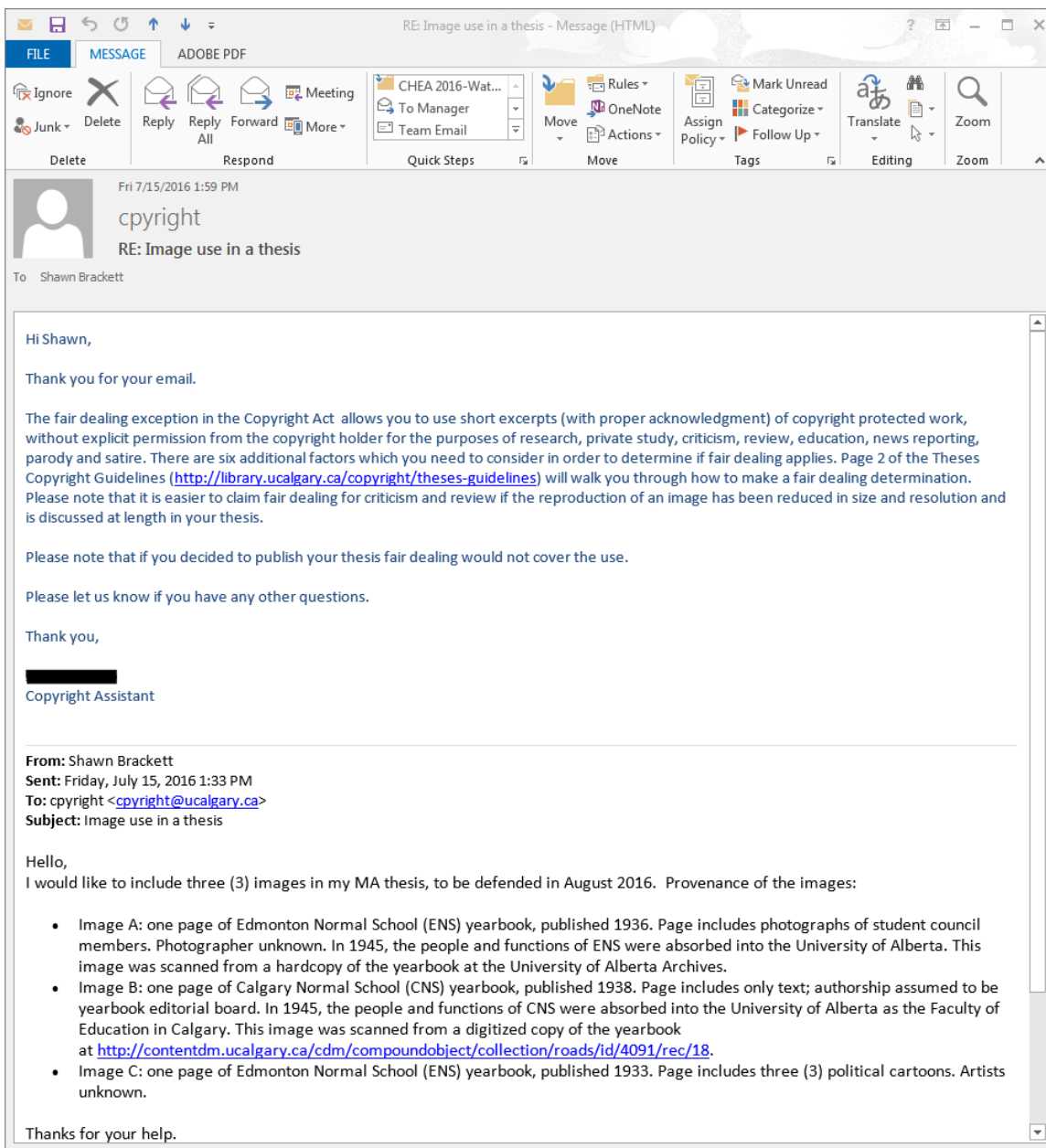
Responses by Year of Graduation	#	% of Total	Responses by Campus	#	% of Year	Responses by Gender	#	% of Campus	Notes
1935	36	9.5%	Calgary	16	44.4%	Women	12	75.0%	Closed
						Men	4	25.0%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Camrose	20	55.6%	Women	15	75.0%	
						Men	5	25.0%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Edmonton	0	0.0%	Women	0		
						Men	0		
						Unknown	0		
1936	38	10.0%	Calgary	19	50.0%	Women	14	73.7%	
						Men	5	26.3%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Camrose	7	18.4%	Women	4	57.1%	
						Men	2	28.6%	
						Unknown	1	14.3%	
			Edmonton	12	31.6%	Women	8	66.7%	
						Men	2	16.7%	
						Unknown	2	16.7%	
1937	27	7.1%	Calgary	5	18.5%	Women	3	60.0%	
						Men	2	40.0%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Camrose	14	51.9%	Women	9	64.3%	
						Men	5	35.7%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Edmonton	8	29.6%	Women	4	50.0%	
						Men	4	50.0%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
1938	25	6.6%	Calgary	8	32.0%	Women	7	87.5%	
						Men	1	12.5%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Camrose	7	28.0%	Women	4	57.1%	
						Men	3	42.9%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Edmonton	10	40.0%	Women	8	80.0%	
						Men	2	20.0%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	

Responses by Year of Graduation	#	% of Total	Responses by Campus	#	% of Year	Responses by Gender	#	% of Campus	Notes
1939	32	8.4%	Calgary	17	53.1%	Women	12	70.6%	Closed
						Men	5	29.4%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	
			Camrose	0	0.0%	Women	0		
						Men	0		
						Unknown	0		
			Edmonton	15	46.9%	Women	10	66.7%	
						Men	5	33.3%	
						Unknown	0	0.0%	

TOTALS

Total Responses	#	% of Total	Responses by Campus	#	% of Total	Responses by Gender	#	% of Total
1931-39	380	100%	Calgary	144	37.9%	Women	269	70.8%
			Camrose	133	35.0%	Men	104	27.4%
			Edmonton	103	27.1%	Unknown	7	1.8%

Appendix C: Copyright Clearance



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Junk Delete Respond


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Translate Editing Zoom

Fri 7/15/2016 1:59 PM

 copyright

RE: Image use in a thesis

To: Shawn Brackett

Hi Shawn,


Thank you for your email.

The fair dealing exception in the Copyright Act allows you to use short excerpts (with proper acknowledgment) of copyright protected work, without explicit permission from the copyright holder for the purposes of research, private study, criticism, review, education, news reporting, parody and satire. There are six additional factors which you need to consider in order to determine if fair dealing applies. Page 2 of the Theses Copyright Guidelines (<http://library.ucalgary.ca/copyright/theses-guidelines>) will walk you through how to make a fair dealing determination. Please note that it is easier to claim fair dealing for criticism and review if the reproduction of an image has been reduced in size and resolution and is discussed at length in your thesis.

Please note that if you decided to publish your thesis fair dealing would not cover the use.

Please let us know if you have any other questions.

Thank you,


Copyright Assistant

From: Shawn Brackett
Sent: Friday, July 15, 2016 1:33 PM
To: cpyright <cpyright@ucalgary.ca>
Subject: Image use in a thesis

Hello,

I would like to include three (3) images in my MA thesis, to be defended in August 2016. Provenance of the images:

- Image A: one page of Edmonton Normal School (ENS) yearbook, published 1936. Page includes photographs of student council members. Photographer unknown. In 1945, the people and functions of ENS were absorbed into the University of Alberta. This image was scanned from a hardcopy of the yearbook at the University of Alberta Archives.
- Image B: one page of Calgary Normal School (CNS) yearbook, published 1938. Page includes only text; authorship assumed to be yearbook editorial board. In 1945, the people and functions of CNS were absorbed into the University of Alberta as the Faculty of Education in Calgary. This image was scanned from a digitized copy of the yearbook at <http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/roads/id/4091/rec/18>.
- Image C: one page of Edmonton Normal School (ENS) yearbook, published 1933. Page includes three (3) political cartoons. Artists unknown.

Thanks for your help.