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## Louis-Philippe Audet and His Work

It is difficult to appreciate the current state of Québec society without understanding its past. Perhaps the idea of the past has dominated Quebec more than any other province in Canada. Indeed, the preservation of institutions and of a culture deeply rooted in hundreds of years of history seems to have been one of the major determinants in the evolution of Quebec society. Because education reflected this pre-occupation with the past, it is important to view its current development in the perspective of history. Unfortunately, until very recently there was really no comprehensive and objective survey of the history of education of Quebec, and much of what French-Canadian historians had written was, as Marcel Lajeunesse has suggested, “. . . pour glorifier leur ‘alma mater,’ ajouter un argument à la mission essentiellement civilisatrice en Amérique du Nord ou élargir le champ des luttes nationales.”<sup>1</sup> Clearly there was need for a well documented and objective history of education in Quebec and in this context the publication of Louis-Philippe Audet's *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec, 1608-1971* (Montréal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, Vol. I, 432 pp., Vol. II, 496 pp., \$24.95) marks a milestone in Quebec historiography. It marks a milestone also in Audet's own career. While this book fulfills a vital need, it reflects also the author's own considerable contribution to the history of education in the Province. Furthermore, *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec* is the product of a historian who, for more than half a century, not only experienced the agonizingly slow development of Quebec education but also, as Secretary to the Parent Commission, witnessed directly the birth of the recent educational reforms associated with the “Quiet Revolution.”

Audet's own career has been a varied one — teacher, school administrator, civil servant, and scholar with numerous publications to his credit. From 1921 to 1939 he was a teacher in elementary and secondary schools, a high school administrator, and a normal school professor. In 1939 Audet shifted his activity away from the classroom. After working for a short time in a laboratory as a biologist,<sup>2</sup> in 1940 he began his long career in the Quebec civil service. For twenty-one years he worked in educational capacities for a variety of ministries and in 1961 he retired from his civil service position as *Directeur de l'enseignement* for all schools coming under the Ministry of Youth (special and technical education). However, Audet never left teaching entirely. For twenty-six years he taught, on a part-time basis, at Laval and at the Université de Montréal. Furthermore, he maintained his contact with education in other ways. For thirty-two years (1932-1964) he edited a weekly column on natural history in *l'Action Catholique* and for twelve years he edited a daily column in the same paper on education and guidance. In addition, he delivered numerous radio lectures on education for *Radio-Canada*.

Audet's appointment as Secretary to the Parent Commission in 1961 marks another turning point in his career. He worked for the Commission from 1961 to 1964. This experience was undoubtedly valuable for the historian, and *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec* is richer for it. Audet went from the Commission to become a director of the *Centre de Psychologie et de Pédagogie* (1964-1966), and from there he returned to full-time teaching and writing as a professor at the Faculté des Sciences de l'Éducation, Université de Montréal. He retired as *professeur titulaire* in May, 1970, and is now living in Sillery, Quebec, where he continues his research.

Of all Audet's many activities, his major contribution has been as an historian. His interests in the history of education in Quebec are varied and he has written widely on topics ranging from aspects of education during the French Regime to contemporary school organization. He has published a number of biographical works on prominent Québec educators including Mgr. de Laval, Dr. Jean-Baptiste Meilleur and P.-J.-O. Chauveau.<sup>3</sup> He has written also on such controversial issues as the problem of the Jewish schools in Quebec, the attempts to restore the ministry of education in 1897, and the long struggle to establish compulsory education.<sup>4</sup> Audet has been interested likewise in the history of particular institutions, and has written articles dealing with some schools under

the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, the Collège de Québec, and l'École polytechnique de Montréal.<sup>5</sup> He has done a great deal of work also on what seems to be his particular interest - school organization and structures, the Council of Public Instruction, the Ministry of Education, and school reforms during the crucial decade, 1959-1969.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these specialized studies, Audet was also a collaborator on publications of a more general nature. In 1967, he wrote with Armand Gauthier *Le système scolaire du Québec, Organisation et fonctionnement*,<sup>7</sup> an outline history of education in Québec combined with current educational structures. Three years later he contributed, with J. Donald Wilson and Robert M. Stamp, to a survey of the history of education in Canada, *Canadian Education: A History*.<sup>8</sup>

Audet's major work until now, however, is his well known six-volume history of education in Quebec, *Le système scolaire de la province de Québec*.<sup>9</sup> This work covers the period from 1608 to 1840. Volumes III and IV in particular were a valuable contribution to historiography in as much as they presented a new and more objective interpretation of the work of the much abused Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, which was responsible for Lower Canada's first attempt at establishing a school system. Currently Audet is writing Volume VII of this series, a biography of Dr. Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, Québec's first superintendent of education.

In 1969, Audet delivered his *leçon inaugurale* upon his appointment as *professeur titulaire* at the Université de Montréal, *Bilan de la réforme scolaire au Québec, 1959-1969*. In his introductory remarks he mentioned that the history of education in Québec still had to be written.

. . . trois provinces canadiennes seulement possèdent leur histoire de l'enseignement dûment publiée, la Colombie britannique, l'Alberta et Terre-Neuve: celle du Québec reste encore à écrire. J'entends ici une histoire solide et scientifique qui ne soit pas une simple énumération de faits ou de dates, mais une synthèse vivante de l'évolution des structures scolaires et des modifications de la société politique, religieuse et économique.<sup>10</sup>

This is the task that Audet set for himself when he wrote *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec*.

The 363 years of Quebec education covered by this book are divided into five chronological periods. The first period, 1608-1760, is itself divided into two sections, the French heritage and education in New France; the second, 1760-1840, is divided into the Anglo-Saxon heritage and the evolution of

education from the Conquest to the Union; the third covers the development of the basic structures in education from 1840 to 1875; the fourth, 1876-1959, deals with the evolution of the school system into two separate confessional systems and traces this development to the eve of the "Quiet Revolution;" the final period, 1959-1971, covers the recent reforms in Quebec education.

The author has achieved good balance in his overall presentation in as much as he gives each period the attention it warrants without being unduly dominated by chronology. For example, although chronologically the period 1959-1971 is relatively short, Audet gives it considerable attention since this period covers the introduction and implementation of fundamental changes in Quebec education as well as the current educational structures. The historian has managed to link the past to the present successfully.

One of the key sections of this book is that covering the period 1876-1959. These chapters present a graphic description of a school system that had so stagnated for eighty-three years that it had become virtually unmanageable and badly in need of reform. The contrast between this period and that of 1959-1971 is so vivid as to make one wonder how the old system had managed to survive so long. The reforms of the Parent Commission would be difficult to understand adequately without knowledge of the dire conditions prior to 1959.

Although the general orientation of this book seems to favour educational legislation, structures, organization and institutions, it does not do so at the expense of other important aspects of education. Some of these reflect Audet's previous work. There is an entire chapter devoted to the pioneer work of the first two superintendents, Meilleur (1842-1855) and Chauveau (1855-1867). There is also reasonable coverage of some of the more controversial issues associated with Quebec education: Mgr. Ignace Bourget and ultramontanism, the 19th century university quarrel, the crisis over the Jesuit Estates (1888). In fact, there are few topics that are not given the attention they deserve.

Each major section of the text has an introduction which outlines the political, religious, social, and economic context of the period. In addition, the content is supported by sixty-two tables and charts dealing with data such as demographic evolution, school population, legislation, and the financing of school boards, and by a collection of 110 original documents. These tables, charts, and documents in themselves make the

book a useful reference work.

It must be remembered however, that despite its scope and thoroughness, *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec* is still essentially a survey and a synthesis of the development of education in Quebec. There are many topics introduced by Audet which require further research. For example, although there are some articles and theses written on certain aspects of classical colleges, a history of these colleges remains to be done. When one considers the generations of the leading classes of Quebec educated in these institutions (including the current élite of French Canada) the need for this kind of study seems more imperative. There is also little done on the work and influence of the religious orders in education. What is needed is a parallel history to the one Labarrère-Paulé wrote on the lay teachers of the 19th century.<sup>11</sup> The education of minority groups in Quebec has received only cursory examination. Historians would find a rewarding field in the development of English (Protestant and Roman Catholic) and Jewish education. The écoles normales, of which there were hundreds, deserve some attention, as does teacher education in general. Little has been done on university education as well as professional and technical education. Other topics linking education to social development, such as the effects of urbanization on education need further exploration.

Although a great deal of basic research on Quebec education remains to be done, Louis-Philippe Audet's *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec* in its objectivity and comprehensiveness, must be recognized as a major contribution.

## references

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