

# ARTS, CRAFTS, AND RURAL REHABILITATION: THE SISTERS OF CHARITY, HALIFAX, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN TERENCE BAY, NOVA SCOTIA, 1938-1942

*Artesanías, oficios y recuperación rural:  
las Hermanas de la Caridad, Halifax, y la formación  
profesional en la Bahía de Terence,  
Nueva Escocia, 1938-1942*

Sasha MULLALLY  
*University of New Brunswick*  
Correo-e: sasham@unb.ca

Heidi MACDONALD  
*University of Lethbridge*  
Correo-e: heidi.macdonald@uleth.ca

Recepción: 5 de agosto de 2015. Envío a informantes: 15 de agosto de 2015.  
Fecha de aceptación definitiva: 2 de octubre de 2015

**ABSTRACT:** Responding to rural poverty associated with the declining fishery, the rise of industrial capitalism, and the impact of the Great Depression, the Sisters of Charity, Halifax, implemented a vocational training program in weaving and carpentry in the small community of Terence Bay, Nova Scotia in 1938. Senator William Dennis, a proponent of the New Democracy Movement, financed the program. Because the Sisters based their claims to success on observed behavioural changes among the residents of Terence Bay, the program can be seen as an example of liberal therapeutics in education, a model that placed emphasis on achieving social goals rather than transferring discrete skills and capacities to pupils. Focusing on the years 1938-43, this paper outlines the rehabilitation efforts at Terence Bay, describes the programs the Sisters implemented, and evaluates the definitions of success ascribed to their training school just a few years later.

KEY WORDS: Vocational training; Nova Scotia education; Sisters of Charity; Halifax; social rehabilitation; William H. Dennis; therapeutic craft.

RESUMEN: En respuesta a la pobreza rural asociada al declive de la pesca, el ascenso del capitalismo industrial y el impacto de la Gran Depresión, las Hermanas de la Caridad pusieron en marcha un programa de formación profesional de tejido y carpintería en la pequeña comunidad de Terence Bay, Nueva Escocia, en 1938. El senador William Dennis, un defensor del Movimiento de Nueva Democracia (New Democracy Movement) financió el programa. Debido a que las hermanas basaron sus reclamaciones en el éxito que observaron en los cambios de conducta entre los residentes de Terence Bay, el programa puede ser percibido como un ejemplo de terapia liberal en materia educativa. Un modelo que enfatiza el logro de objetivos sociales en vez de la transferencia de habilidades y capacidades diferenciadas para los alumnos/as. Este artículo, que se centra en los años 1938-1943, señala los esfuerzos de rehabilitación en Terence Bay, describe los programas que implementaron las hermanas y evalúa las definiciones de éxito atribuidas a su escuela de formación sólo unos pocos años más tarde.

PALABRAS CLAVE: formación profesional; educación en Nueva Escocia; Hermanas de la Caridad; Halifax; rehabilitación social; William H. Dennis; Artesanía terapéutica.

## i. Introduction

IN 1941, ON A SHORT TOUR OF CANADA, the Archduchess Adelaide von Hapsburg visited the village of Terence Bay, a small fishing hamlet at the end of the Chignecto Peninsula on Nova Scotia's south shore<sup>1</sup>. What drew the Archduchess to the community, an area with less than 1000 inhabitants, was an innovative handicrafts program, begun in 1938, where a secondary school curriculum combined with manual and vocational education training. Over the intervening three years, the school and handicrafts workshops had grown into a site for community craft industry. The girls and some of the young women of the area had learned the basics of hand weaving, while the boys engaged in carpentry. The *Halifax Mail-Star* reported at length on the Archduchess' visit, noting how she expressed the «keenest interest» in the handicraft centre, where «beautiful light wool scarves and ties [were] being woven by the young girls of the village on wooden Norwegian-type looms, which are made by the boys»<sup>2</sup>. The Archduchess, guided on her tour of the school and the handicraft centre by the local parish priest and members of the Sisters of Charity, who

<sup>1</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge funding for this project from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, as well as support from the Office of Research Services, University of New Brunswick.

<sup>2</sup> TUFTS, Evelyn: «Terence Bay Progress Studied by Archduchess», *Halifax Mail*, 19 May 1941, p. 15.

described the «economic and social rehabilitation» of the area as a result of the handicraft programs. The Archduchess observed and learned «of the beneficial effect of the community centre in improving health standards and effecting other changes by its vital services, which among other lasting benefits has helped train a number of the young people in achieving skills by which to make a better living»<sup>3</sup>.

Having studied social work in Belgium, the Archduchess was seeking models to bring back to Europe, in order to assist similarly-distressed communities by introducing handicrafts industry to offset rural poverty that she and others anticipated would follow at war's end<sup>4</sup>. Small fishing villages in Nova Scotia had required revitalization, not from war, but from the precariousness of the fishery in late-industrial capitalism. Settled in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Irish and German immigrants, Terence Bay was well-placed for the fishery and for transatlantic shipping for most of the age of sail. But the transition to steam travel undermined the shipbuilding industry, and those who remained to fish saw their livelihoods fluctuate with the unstable commodity markets at the turn of the century. In the wake of World War I, a drop in the price of fish products dramatically undermined the local livelihoods<sup>5</sup>. Many young people left for better opportunities in western Canada and the northeastern United States<sup>6</sup>. Those who stayed faced, by the interwar period, great hardship, poverty, and want. On this part of Nova Scotia's south shore, therefore, manual and vocational training was being advanced as a panacea for not only economic, but social distress. And these promised not only a better standard of living for individual Nova Scotians, but an improved quality of life for entire communities.

This paper investigates the unusual vocational training program undertaken by the Sisters of Charity, Halifax, in the community of Terence Bay. Supported by a wealthy and well-connected Canadian Senator, William Dennis, and encouraged by the Rev Moses Coady, founder of the Antigonish Movement, the Sisters developed training programs in weaving and carpentry in

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> The classic study of interwar decline of Nova Scotian economy as part of the regional decline of the Maritimes is FORBES, Ernest R.: «Cutting the Pie into Smaller Pieces: Matching Grants and Relief in the Maritime Provinces in the 1930s», *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* [hereafter referred-to as *Acadiensis*], 17, 1 (1987), pp. 34-55. For details about the social and political responses to the decade's disparity, see FORBES: *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927*, Fredericton, Acadiensis Press, 1979.

<sup>6</sup> The contours of regional outmigration are well established in the historical literature as a rural to urban stream, focussed on Boston and New England as primary destinations. See BROOKES, Alan A.: «Out-migration from the Maritime Provinces, 1860-1900: Some Preliminary Considerations», *Acadiensis*, 5, 2 (1976), pp. 26-55. THORNTON, Patricia A.: «The Problem of Outmigration from Atlantic Canada: A New Look», *Acadiensis*, 15, 1 (1985), pp. 3-34. BEATTIE, B.: «The "Boston States": Region, Gender and Maritime Out-migration, 1870-1930», in HORNSBY, S. and REID, J. G. (eds.): *The Maritimes and New England: Connections and Comparisons*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, pp. 252-263.

an attempt to diversify the economy of the coastal community, and provide a template for the survival of coastal fishing villages elsewhere. While Terence Bay was not the only coastal community in Nova Scotia, or the Atlantic region, to experience particularly difficult times in the 1920s and 1930s, the plight of the people of Terence Bay became emblematic of a broader struggle of rural fishing communities in early 20<sup>th</sup> century North America. Faced with an accelerating outmigration of the young and the strong, and the prospect of cyclical dependency, the people of Terence Bay cast about for a new economic lease on life as the economic crisis of the Great Depression made a bad economic situation worse.

In the pages that follow, we outline rehabilitation efforts at Terence Bay, describe the programs the Sisters implemented, and evaluate the definitions of success ascribed to their training school just a few years later. Records are scarce and must be cobbled together from disparate sources from the Sisters and from William Dennis himself<sup>7</sup>. While our investigation focuses on the early formative years of this program, 1938 to 1943, we note that the program's claims to success sustained the endeavour well into the 1970s. With this paper, we expand the traditional historiography of vocational training, highlighting the malleability of vocational education as a concept, and underscore its perceived utility to serve rural communitarian ends in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We argue that by basing their claims to success on observed behavioural changes among the residents of Terence Bay, the program can be seen as an example of liberal therapeutics in education, a model that placed emphasis on achieving social goals rather than transferring discrete skills and capacities to pupils.

These social goals, however, were not designed to deliver docile or quiescent citizens to an industrial employer, neither were they offered as a means to cultivate nascent creativity in the local population they came to serve, or to establish craft cooperatives and educate workers on new modes of productive organization. Instead, the Terence Bay handicraft workshops were designed to foster new liberal order frameworks and sensibilities among residents. These twentieth-century craft-centered vocational training programs encouraged residents of Terence Bay to continually think of their labour and their work as part of a larger open marketplace for goods. This reorientation, the Sisters and their patron William Dennis both hoped, would allow residents to respond dynamically to changing economic and industrial conditions of the late-Depression and early-wartime economy. Unfortunately, the liberal order response fell short of community needs and failed to alter the systemic roots of rural poverty for the residents of the area. That would, instead, require the large scale social investment of the mid to late century welfare state.

<sup>7</sup> Few records are available on the Sisters of Charity, Halifax, before 1951, when the motherhouse was destroyed by fire. MCKENNA, Mary Olga: *Charity Alive: Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Halifax, 1950-1980*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1995, p. xvii.

## 2. Siting Vocational training at Terence Bay

The history of the Stella Maris initiatives in Terence Bay offer important insights into an under-explored area of the history of education: rural vocational training programs. Vocational training historiography is dominated by work on «industrial schools» which sprang up in the North American urban landscape at the turn of the century. As Kliebard has argued, vocational education gained the approval of educational reformers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because it appealed to two audiences who were sometimes in conflict. Firstly, with its references to the «mechanical arts», it spoke to those who valued traditional skilled craftsmanship, something many thought was being lost in a rapidly industrializing nation where work meant, increasingly, submitting to dehumanizing factory routine. But it also appealed to proponents of practical education, those who believed the public school system should do more to prepare workers to engage in industrial capitalism. Public schools, vocational advocates believed, should perform the role previously supplied by apprenticeship models of training<sup>8</sup>. The major proponents of vocational education were proponents of Frederick Taylor, and promoted vocationalism in public school education to promote workplace efficiency through scientific management of the labour force<sup>9</sup>. Thus, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, «vocational education» embraced industrial education, technical education, commercial/business education, and domestic science or home economics<sup>10</sup>.

Vocationalism has a rich historiography in both Canada and the United States. Early writers have examined the relationship between Progressive education and the vocational ethos<sup>11</sup>. Writers in the later 1980s and 1990s increasingly turned

<sup>8</sup> KLIBARD, Herbert M.: *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876-1946*, New York, Teachers College Press [Reflective History Series], 1999.

<sup>9</sup> See TAYLOR, Frederick Winslow: *Shop Management*, New York, American Society of Mechanical Engineers, 1903; and *The Principles of Scientific Management*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1911. Taylor emphasized that vocational-industrial teachers must know the techniques of the trade to command the respect of employers and foremen and this notion influenced the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education as they moved their agenda for a national program of vocational education forward. For a detailed biography of Frederick Taylor and an analysis of Taylorism, or the scientific management principles he advanced, see also KANIGEL, Robert: *The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency*, New York, Penguin/Viking Press, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> This definition of vocational education is used by Rebecca Priegert Coulter and Ivar Goodson and works well to describe common usage in the historiographies referenced. «Introduction», in COULTER, R. P. and GOODSON, I. F. (eds.): *Rethinking Vocationalism: Whose work/life is it?*, Toronto, Our Schools/Our Selves Foundation, 1993, pp. 1-9.

<sup>11</sup> LAZERSON, M. and GRUBB, W. N. (eds.): *Work, Youth and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism: A Documentary History*, New York, Teachers College Press, 1974. KANTOR, H. and TYACK, D. B. (eds.): *Work, Youth and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1982. DUNN, T. A.: «Teaching the Meaning of Work: Vocational Education in British Columbia, 1900-1929», in JONES, D. C.; SHEEHAN, N. M. and STAMP, R. M. (eds.): *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, Calgary, Detselig Enterprises, 1979, pp. 236-255. MORRISON, T. R.: «Reform as Social Tracking: The Case of Industrial Education in Ontario, 1870-1900», *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 8 (1974), pp. 76-110. LAZERSON, M. and

historiographical attention to the class and gender prescriptions built into vocational education programs<sup>12</sup>. Recent work in Canada draws attention to intersecting agendas of vocational educators and period social reformers. For instance, Paul Bennett's work on industrial schools in late-Victorian Toronto shows how boys were the targets of child welfare advocates, who used vocational training as a way to restrain the supposed delinquent tendencies among the male children of the urban working poor<sup>13</sup>. Because of their long tradition in both education and serving impoverished populations, women religious feature prominently in this new literature. According to Dale Gilbert, vocational training was embraced by various congregations of women religious in Quebec, who managed reformatories in the province as a tool of social rehabilitation for women and girls<sup>14</sup>. Often, Catholic dioceses' vocational training activities in Canada have captured the attention of historians for their role played as purveyors of assimilation programs among aboriginal populations<sup>15</sup>. Far from seeing it as a form of progressive education, most Canadian scholars, particularly those examining western Canada, have studied episodes of vocational curriculum advancement as formation undertaken in the interests of industry or the colonial state, rather than formation to enhance the social or cultural life of the individual or the community.

Examining the Terence Bay initiative allows us to explore the history of such training in rural context and see whose interests these ultimately served. Gidney and Millar have argued that, throughout urban Canada, «working class children were streamed into dead-end programs and hence into subordinate roles in the occupational and social order»<sup>16</sup>. Likewise, Nova Scotia historian George

---

DUNN, T. A.: «Schools and the Work Crisis: Vocationalism in Canadian Education», in STEVENSON, H. A. and WILSON, J. D. (eds.): *Precepts, Policy and Process: Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Education*, London, Alexander Blake and Associates, 1977, pp. 285-304.

<sup>12</sup> KANTOR, H. A.: *Learning to Earn: School, Work and Vocational Reform in California, 1880-1930*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. POWERS, Jane B.: *The «Girl Question» in Education: Vocational Education for Young Women in the Progressive Era*, Washington, Falmer Press, 1992. JACKSON, Nancy S. and GASKELL, Jane: «White Collar Vocationalism: The Rise of Commercial Education in Ontario and British Columbia, 1870-1920», *Curriculum Inquiry*, 17 (1987), pp. 177-210. ATTAR, Dena: *Wasting Girls' Time: The History and Politics of Home Economics*, London, Virago Press, 1990. DUNN, T. A.: «Vocationalism and its Promoters in British Columbia, 1900-1929», *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 14, (1990), pp. 91-107.

<sup>13</sup> BENNETT, Paul W.: «Taming “Bad Boys” of the Dangerous Class: Child rescue and Restraint at the Victoria Industrial School, 1887-1935», *Social History/Histoire Sociale*, 21, 41 (1988), pp. 71-96.

<sup>14</sup> GILBERT, Dale: «Assister les familles de Québec», *Revue d'histoire de L'Amérique française*, 61, 3/4 (2008), pp. 469-499.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, SMITH, Derek G.: «The “Policy of Aggressive Civilization” and Projects of Governance in Roman Catholic Industrial Schools for Native Peoples in Canada, 1870-95», *Anthropologica*, 43, 2 (2001), pp. 253-271. See also the work of ENNS, Richard: «“Then Shall the Wilderness be Glad and Blossom as the Rose”: Presbyterian Hopes for the Regina Industrial School (1891 to 1910)», *Prairie Forum*, (Fall 2010), pp. 43-78. «“But what is the Object of Educating these Children, if it Costs their Lives to Educate them?”: Federal Indian Education Policy in Western Canada in the late 1800s», *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 43, 3 (Autumn 2009), pp. 101-123.

<sup>16</sup> GIDNEY, R. D. and MILLAR, W. J. P.: *How Schools Worked: Public Education in English Canada, 1900-1940*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012, pp. 340-360.



Perry sees most public educational institutions, including Nova Scotia's normal schools, as institutions designed and redesigned to suit the class stratification in society. The curricula assigned to rural and working-class students in particular, he argues, was always oriented to workplace needs<sup>17</sup>. While urban schools, with their superior resources (including vocational training initiatives), were normally the place to test innovations in school architecture, pedagogy, and administration during the Progressive Era and into the twentieth century, we will show that rural education was also a site of experimentation. We take cues from Gidney and Millar who believe historical understanding of Canadian school systems is best accomplished by observing the «routine practices» of the daily delivery of education<sup>18</sup>. The routines of learning in Terence Bay show how the village was not only a site of innovations in vocational education in Canada, the work of the Sisters of Charity foreshadowed new ideas about the role of craft-making in rural education, as well as rural economic and social rejuvenation<sup>19</sup>.

### 3. The Sisters of Charity, Halifax

The Sisters of Charity, Halifax, were founded as an independent congregation in 1856 (an offshoot of a New York congregation founded in 1812), and were part of a much longer and broader tradition that began in Canada with the establishment of four French congregations of women religious in Quebec in the mid-seventeenth century<sup>20</sup>. Most associated with education, healthcare, and social services (including orphanages and homes for unmarried mothers), many congregations of women religious also provided craft education, which went hand-in-hand with their more academic curriculum. As Ellen Easton MacLeod has noted, by the end of the nineteenth century, Canadian women religious across the country «offered instruction to women and girls in embroidery, lace and some china pottery»<sup>21</sup> with the strongest emphasis on First Nations handiwork and French Canadian artisanship, seen as evocatively «primitive and characteristic of

<sup>17</sup> PERRY, George D.: *The Grand Regulator: The Miseducation of Nova Scotia's Teachers, 1838-1997*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> GIDNEY and MILLAR: *op. cit.*, p. xix.

<sup>19</sup> Recent and important books on aspects of education in Nova Scotia include BENNETT, Paul: *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities: The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada, 1850-2010*, Black Point, NS, Fernwood, 2011, which argues that one-room schools in smaller Nova Scotia communities supported and cultivated a democratic, engaged society; and LAFFERTY, Renee: *The Guardianship of Best Interests: Institutional care for the Children of the Poor in Halifax, 1850-1960*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013, which complicates the depictions of industrial schools as simply archaic, harmful, and unmitigated failures by insisting that industrial schools must be understood as a part of a larger effort to construct social welfare systems in Nova Scotia.

<sup>20</sup> MAURA, Sister: *The Sisters of Charity, Halifax*, Toronto, Ryerson, 1956, p. xxii, 8. CLIO COLLECTIVE: *Quebec Women: A History* (R. Gannon and R. Gill Trans.), Toronto, Women's Press, 1987, pp. 32-33.

<sup>21</sup> MCLEOD, Ellen Easton: *In Good Hands: The Women of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999, p. 75.

national work» in the northern and western reaches of the country, as well as in the province of Quebec<sup>22</sup>.

When the Sisters of Charity, Halifax, began their work in Terence Bay in 1939, they had almost 1300 members who lived in 67 convents, including 16 in the Northeastern United States, nine in Western Canada, one in Quebec, and one in Bermuda<sup>23</sup>. They operated several hospitals, two seniors' homes, an orphanage, and dozens of schools, including residential schools in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, and Creston, British Columbia<sup>24</sup>. They also ran a normal school for their own sisters and secular Catholic women through Mount Saint Vincent Academy, which earned college status in 1925, «the first and only independent degree-granting college for women in Canada and the British Commonwealth»<sup>25</sup>. As Sheila Andrew has observed of another congregation of women religious in the region, «the survival and growth of the schools into the mid-twentieth century indicate that the Sisters... gave many of their pupils the skills they needed to cope with a rapidly changing society»<sup>26</sup>. However, the inclusion of higher academic subjects was sometimes controversial; a New Brunswick congregation of women religious came under fire for «producing girls unsuitable for farm life»<sup>27</sup>.

The Sisters of Charity, Halifax, received dozens of requests a year to staff various institutions and projects in Canada and the United States, and they had to decline more than they accepted, usually because of insufficient human resources or because the invitation did not fit their mandate. Their acceptance of a school and adult education project in Terence Bay in 1939 was unusual for a few reasons: the community was significantly Protestant<sup>28</sup>, the invitation came from outside the usual church channels, and the Sisters had not engaged in formal adult occupational training previously and would require additional training in weaving before they could start teaching. However, the potential for improving the lives of the people of Terence Bay captured the attention of the congregation's leadership, who were aware of other congregations' involvement in similar work among New Brunswick Acadian girls<sup>29</sup>, and saw

<sup>22</sup> McLEOD: *op. cit.*, p. 203. See also PAGET, A.: «Report of Mrs. Paget's Trip to Indian Reserves in Saskatchewan», Annual Report of the CHG 1912, in FORESTELL, N. M. and MOYNAUGH, M. (eds.): *Documenting First Wave Feminisms, vol. 11: Canadian, National and Transnational Contexts*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2014, pp. 257-259.

<sup>23</sup> *Canada Ecclesiastique*, Montreal, 1932; MAURA, Sister: *op. cit.*, pp. 267-68; and «Novitiate Register», Sisters of Charity Halifax Archives [SCHA].

<sup>24</sup> MAURA, Sister: *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268.

<sup>25</sup> CORCORAN, Theresa: SCH, *Mount Saint Vincent University: A Vision Unfolding, 1873-1988*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1999, p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> ANDREW, S.: «Selling Education: The Problems of Convent Schools in Acadian New Brunswick, 1858-1886», in BURKE, S. Z. and MILEWSKI, P. (eds.): *Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012, p. 299.

<sup>27</sup> ANDREW: *op. cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>28</sup> The Protestants tended to be residents of German descent.

<sup>29</sup> The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception, Saint John, operated a successful convent school in Memramcook in the later decades of the 19th century, and in Buctouche they operated a farm, their pupils winning prizes in annual agricultural shows. See ANDREW: *op. cit.*, p. 293.



the expansion of social horizons and widening economic participation of rural populations (including girls) as relevant to their founding mission to provide education for the poor.

#### 4. Stella Maris, A Rising Star

William C. Dennis, a newspaperman and member of the Canadian Senate, became interested in Terence Bay following a series of *Globe and Mail* reports on the dire state of seaside communities in the late years of the Depression<sup>30</sup>. For Dennis, the answer to this poverty lay in fostering a sense of capacity among the fishers, and so he decided to make the community a model of self-help and rural agency. Dennis was interested in setting up a «New Democracy movement» to advance the cause of free market liberalism among struggling communities of coastal Nova Scotia<sup>31</sup>. But he could not effect this himself. He hired a young member of the *Halifax Herald* staff, John Fisher, as a Nova Scotia organizer<sup>32</sup>. It was Fisher who suggested working with the Sisters of Charity, Halifax, to initiate the manual and vocational training program. With their vast experience in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in Canada and the United States, which included service focusing on rural poor and underprivileged Nova Scotians, they seemed the perfect choice of collaborators.

Craft industries were seeing a heyday in Canada and the United States at the time, drawing momentum from the arts and crafts movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup>, but also rising in status for their inclusion in vocational and manual training programs<sup>34</sup>. Dennis and Fisher were aware of several local precedents where nuns were associated with rural uplift and handicraft promotion programs in interwar Nova Scotia. The Antigonish Movement, a well-known cooperative movement in the rural and mining areas of the province, had actively engaged the

<sup>30</sup> The Toronto *Globe and Mail* sent Harold Dingman to the province in 1936-37, where he reported on widespread destitution among the seaside communities, including that fishermen on the south shore made less than \$0.75 a day. Interviewing Protestant clergy, Dingman also collected reports of endemic tuberculosis, made worst by chronic malnourishment. «Nova Scotia Poverty No Myth», *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 September 1938, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> BOWMAN, Charles A.: «Marxian Zealots Tried to Mislead Fishermen», *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 September 1949, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> ALFOLDY, Sandra: in *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, pp. 15-18.

<sup>34</sup> As Ian MacKay has noted, the enthusiasm for handicrafts and their potential to revolutionize the rural economy and advance development of the Nova Scotia tourist state culminated in the hiring of a designated craft specialist by the Department of Industry and Publicity by the end of World War II. See MACKAY, Ian: *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, especially chapter 3, pp. 152-213. For a cultural studies analysis of Black's work with arts and crafts see MORTON, Erin: «Not A Vacation, but a Hardening Process: The Self-Empowerment Work of Therapeutic Craft in Nova Scotia», *Culture Unbound*, 6 (2014), pp. 1-17.

Sisters of St. Martha on similar terms. Over the course of the 1930s, Sister Irene Doyle successfully created a series of study groups fostering handicraft production throughout eastern Nova Scotia, enterprises that attracted the attention of the provincial Minister of Industry and Publicity, Harold Connolly<sup>35</sup>. It is therefore unsurprising that, as the Marthas cast about for like-minded community workers interested in coordinating efforts in this area, they singled out the Sisters of Charity's small industries work in Terence Bay as an allied initiative. When they held a conference on arts and crafts in Nova Scotia in the spring of 1942, the Sisters of Charity were present. But whereas the Marthas abandoned the handicraft components of the Antigonish Movement, passing on leadership to the new Director of Handicrafts, Mary Black, the Sisters of Charity and their work in Terence Bay continued well into the 1960s.

According to reports in local newspapers, retrospective accounts in both religious and lay circulars, and some materials from the Sisters of Charity archives, the handicraft programs were quick to establish themselves and met with enthusiastic uptake among local youth. After being approached by Senator Dennis in the summer of 1938, the sisters soon undertook a house-to-house survey of the residents of Terence Bay, commuting from a nearby convent. Once they moved into their new convent (funded by Dennis) in January 1939, Sister Eucharia, a particularly talented educator, and two other Sisters from the Halifax mother house, supervised the construction of a community hall next door to the convent, which would house the handicraft centre, and the first handicraft classes for girls were held in March, 1939 (see Figure 1)<sup>36</sup>. While the sisters focused on teaching «weaving and other remunerative work», they soon established a carpentry shop for boys as well. The carpentry class quickly expanded to the manufacture of items such as stepladders, ironing boards, birdhouses, and other wooden objects for use in domestic environments<sup>37</sup>. Seven factory-built looms were purchased but never used, as the girls who came to the handicraft centre to learn weaving preferred the lap looms from Norway, fashioned by boys in the carpentry studio from patterns the Sisters procured through their contacts in Scotland<sup>38</sup>. While the sisters' main work was teaching handicrafts, as was the custom, they provided other community services as needed, including basic health care and emergency first aid. They also set up a credit union in the fall of 1939 and arranged for 25 Terence Bay homeowners to receive five dollars to «beautify and repair» their

<sup>35</sup> Key to the creation and expansion of these programs was Sister Mary Anselm (Irene Doyle), who worked out the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier University. She was the point of contact between the provincial government and the community organizations using handicraft as a rural uplift program for women. See, for instance, his calling a meeting and inviting the Marthas to offer support for a League of Arts and Crafts in Nova Scotia. St. Francis Xavier University Archives, Antigonish, NS, Harold Connelly to Sister M. Anselm, 1 September 1941, Extension Department fonds, RG 30.5/30/357.

<sup>36</sup> Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Halifax, NS, «Shine a Light», 3 January 1957, n. p. MG 100 001.237 # 8B; SCHA, Terence Bay Annals, January 1939, 6 March 1939.

<sup>37</sup> TUFTS: *op. cit.*, p. 15; and SCHA, Terence Bay Annals, 15 May 1940.

<sup>38</sup> «Shine a Light»; and SCHA, Terence Bay Annals, 14 October 1939, 5 January 1940.

homes<sup>39</sup>. They invigorated participation at the local church organizing processions on special feast days, confirmation classes, and a children's rhythm band<sup>40</sup>.



Figure 1: Sisters of Charity in the Crafts Building, 1941. Terence Bay, Community Centre Buildings, 22 July 1941, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, NS, ACC 1975-305, E. A. Bollinger Collection 1941 #457 G.



Figure 2: Sister Mary Eucharia Franklin at Star of the Sea Convent, Terence Bay, NS, 1957. Sisters of Charity Halifax Archives #1648B.

<sup>39</sup> «Shine a Light».

<sup>40</sup> SCHA, Terence Bay Annals, 28 May 1939, 14 March 1939, 24 Oct 1942.



Figure 3: Weaving at craft shop, Star of the Sea, Terence Bay, NS, 1941. Sisters of Charity Halifax Archives #5166B.

Unlike the Marthas of the Antigonish Movement, the Sisters of Charity in Terence Bay largely controlled the day-to-day operation of their program. This included lobbying the provincial government for improved services in Terence Bay, including in the 1940s when the Sisters insisted on a new school building. The Sisters had complained about the school, noting its disrepair and lack of basic resources when they took responsibility for it in August 1941: «Today was the official opening of school. Flake white pails, coal scuttles, brooms, boxes used as benches for the children, broken stoves, no blackboards, no maps, no pictures, and hand carved desks were things that greeted us»<sup>41</sup>. Although the Sisters acknowledged that when the children arrival at school, «their happy, eager faces seemed to make up for everything», they continued to work on securing a more suitable school house. When lower-level officials failed to endorse a new school, the Sister Superior arranged for an engineer to officially condemn the school house, and then took that engineer's report directly to the Minister of Public Health, Harold Connolly. According to the annals of the Terence Bay convent, «At first Mr Connolly declared it did not come under his jurisdiction, that there was nothing he could do about

<sup>41</sup> SCHA, Terence Bay Annals, 5 Aug 1941.



it... Sister replied, she came not to ask any favours, but simply to secure justice for 120 poor children and their teachers and would he not at least read the report. He read it, thought for a moment, then replied, "You have secured an advocate for your cause, Sister"<sup>42</sup>. In fact, the Sisters' integration with the secondary school of the area, where they taught alongside lay public school teachers, deepened their knowledge of the needs of families and was crucial to their development and administration of programs targeted at youth<sup>43</sup>.

But the Sisters' key initiative in Terence Bay was the textile production. Named Star of the Sea Handicrafts, it focused on the sale of various woven items, both directly to tourists as well through such department store suppliers as Simpson's, Eaton's, The Bay, and Mills Brothers (Halifax)<sup>44</sup>. By 1941, just a few years after coming to Terence Bay the handweaving industry became the key venture among all community crafts practiced, and had expanded to the degree that a new building was needed to house the expanded operation<sup>45</sup>. Indeed, a visitor from the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that there were «more orders than looms could keep up with» in Terence Bay, and «no finer work of its kind is done anywhere on this continent or overseas»<sup>46</sup>. Additionally, the reporter noted with approval that the carpentry shop where boys learned skilled carpentry was now focussing on manufacturing chairs for sale to summer tourists<sup>47</sup>. In fact, the Sisters claimed that 500 dozen items, including men's ties, women's scarves and turbans were on order for distribution in sales establishments across Canada. «Here is a lesson», the *Citizen* announced, «in cooperation, industry and self-help»<sup>48</sup>.

The Star of the Sea textiles had remarkable staying power as a fashion item and were, in fact, still in circulation as special couture items at mid-century<sup>49</sup>. By the 1950s, they were producing textiles with gold and silver thread, although many articles were turned out with the Nova Scotia tartan<sup>50</sup>. That the bulk of the items produced went to large department stores was a source of considerable pride, and depicted in news media as a key achievement of the Sisters' work in the community. The Sisters' Star of the Sea enterprise had become a full-fledged economic enterprise drawing in a community-wide social effort.

The Sisters of Charity accomplished their innovative melding of vocational training and arts and crafts revivalism at a moment when the «quest of the folk»,

<sup>42</sup> SCHA, Terence Bay Annals, 1951. (No month or day provided.)

<sup>43</sup> While Nova Scotia public schools were officially non-sectarian, «"gentlemen's agreements" in the Maritime region allowed school boards to organize classes of entire schools that served religious minorities to one extent or another». GIDNEY and MILLAR: *op. cit.*, p. 5. The school in Terence Bay was not a Catholic school but the sister-teachers' salaries were paid by the province.

<sup>44</sup> SCHA, «List of Retailers», Scrapbook, 5, Star of the Sea Convent, Box 1.

<sup>45</sup> SCHA, Scrapbook, 3, Star of the Sea Convent, Box 1.

<sup>46</sup> BOWMAN: *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> «Just a Beginning», *Ottawa Citizen [Evening Citizen]*, 4 July 1941, p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> They featured prominently in a pageant in Halifax in 1955. See HAND, Frances: «Facts and Frills», *The Manitoba Ensign*, 1 January 1955, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> «Shine a Light».

to use MacKay's phrase, was reaching a cultural apogee. During the 1930s, craft revivalism in Canada can be described as promoting the «romantic rural». As the President of the Canadian Craft Guild, famously wrote in 1938, «handicrafts... thrive better in country air»<sup>51</sup>. Craft historian Sandra Flood has argued that handicraft promotion in Canada was tied to the promotion of rural living, and craft making activities, or «cottage industry craft» in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were often designed to introduce rural women into ways to earn a living. These communities, seemingly in constant economic crisis «attracted the interest of the urban, middle-class commentators on the craft scene, causing a shift in the perception of craft, not least by governments»<sup>52</sup>. Craft work was thus culturally privileged but economically undervalued, with a «grossly low price paid for craft work» in this period, rhetoric notwithstanding. This was «justified by such intangibles as its being a good use of time and satisfactory work»<sup>53</sup>. In this way the «privilege» of craft work, or the greater good brought to the individual, the community or both, as a result of this kind of engagement, was often a central argument and precept for their pursuit in interwar Canada.

Handicrafts might also be seen as a panacea for labour unrest. Over the later years of the Depression, the fishery in Nova Scotia was targeted by those invested in the idea and promise of fishermen's unions, and many small towns had established fish cooperatives to help coastal communities exert more control over the price for their catch, and become more involved in, and thus empowered by, the processing industry. One writer in the *Ottawa Citizen* warned that a socialist party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, was becoming active in the area. This offered evidence of the «hidden hand of Marxist class war» at work to «mislead decent steady workers» whose livelihoods were compromised by deflation in the price of fish<sup>54</sup>. By offering economic alternatives to a fisherman's union, and using vocational training to provide additional work for community members, Dennis' «new democracy» movement was in many ways an attempt to «save» an economic order under threat as much as it was an attempt to «save» Terence Bay.

It was unclear, however, how the Sisters fit themselves into this «new democracy». As educators, their political position in the Terence Bay initiatives was mediated by the social welfare focus of their religious work. It is difficult to piece together the Sisters' own position on what the best response to the economic crisis of the depression might be. On the other hand, as has been noted, there was always more demand for their services than they could meet, and they could have declined the invitation to Terence Bay if they did not consider it in sync with

<sup>51</sup> BOREY, William: *Survey of Domestic Art and Craft in Canadian Intellectual and Economic Life*, Montreal, Canadian Handcraft Guild, 1938, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> FLOOD, Sandra: *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice, 1900-1950*, Ottawa and Seattle, Canadian Museum of Civilization/University of Washington Press, 2001, p. 118.

<sup>53</sup> FLOOD, S.: «Craft in Canada: Overview and Points from Canadian Craft and Museum Practice, 1900-1950», in JOHNSON, J. (ed.): *Exploring Contemporary Craft History, Theory and Critical Writing*, Toronto, Coach House Books of Harbourfront Centre, 2002, pp. 25-31.

<sup>54</sup> BOWMAN: *op. cit.*, p. 4.



their values. There is contemporary and historical evidence that the Sisters were, in fact, very enthusiastic about the potential of the vocational initiative at Terence Bay. In a 1940s pamphlet, «The Story of Stella Maris», the Sisters chronicled the community uplift achieved through the Star of the Sea enterprises. The story of the rural community's climb from destitution to picturesque rehabilitation included such images of industrious inhabitants as women sewing, mending clothes, and, of course, an elder craftswoman engaged in weaving at a handloom<sup>55</sup>. The Sisters sold the pamphlet for 10 cents; those who bought a Stella Maris scarf or other handicraft could consume a narrative as well as a product. They could buy into the idea that vocational rehabilitation was possible in the cultivation of arts and crafts, and the pamphlet is an artifactory reminder of how the narrative and the product went hand in hand as saleable items.

The Sisters' support for Terence Bay has only grown in retrospect, and continues to be a source of pride today. While they had to withdraw from teaching in Terence Bay in 1970 because of their aging membership and new priorities tied to Vatican II, they chose Terence Bay as the subject of one of their reflections at their 2004 chapter meetings<sup>56</sup>. In a story that focused on a teenaged girl's description of Terence Bay before the Sisters arrived and then three years after the handicrafts project began, «Marie» observed that in 1939, «even the most hardy of folks here, accustomed for generations to deprivations and hardships, have begun to lose courage as the struggle to provide even the minimum requirements for their families is becoming more and more difficult». The story concluded with observations of the teenaged girl, two years after the Sisters arrived in Terence Bay: «We were so desperate before, and I for one, was convinced that nothing would change. And now, Terence Bay is actually “on the map” as they say... Our work and creativity is valued. My work and creativity is valued. I feel so good about that!... We are on our way now»<sup>57</sup>. While it cannot be confirmed that the Sisters embraced the ideology of the «new democracy» that Dennis promoted, there is no doubt of their goals for individual and community uplift.

Outside observers similarly depicted Terence Bay in preternaturally grim terms before the Sisters' arrival. A colleague of Dennis' noted in 1938, that the town was marked by desperation, with «[u]npainted shacks without floors, Cemetery railings being burned for firewood. Undernourished, barefooted children, gaunt men and women»<sup>58</sup>. The community was in a passive decline into destitution. Just three years after the arrival of the Sisters, however, the same newspaperman visited and was stunned by the improvements. Everywhere was material evidence of new prosperity, with the small homes seeing new shingles, fresh coats of paint, and new windowpanes to let in the light. Indeed, the small

<sup>55</sup> NSARM, Halifax, NS, Stella Maris [pseudonym]: *Saga of Terence Bay* [pamphlet], Halifax, privately printed, c. 1940, v/F v. 64, number 8.

<sup>56</sup> Chapter meetings are held every four years to elect a new membership team and deal with the business of the congregation.

<sup>57</sup> SCHA, Assembly 2004 Binder.

<sup>58</sup> «New Life in a Fishing Village», *Ottawa Citizen [Evening Citizen]*, 9 June 1941, p. 23.

town appeared «transformed»: whereas formerly the children «ran to hide almost like little wild creatures», now the inhabitants evinced more of a «civilized standard of living»<sup>59</sup>. The mothers of the community emerged from a pall of depression, to «take a more active role in the church, take part on concerts in the community hall, and cultivate little gardens»<sup>60</sup>. The children no longer skulked like shy feral creatures around the corners of buildings, but greeted visitors to the town with confident extroversion. «Terence Bay», *The Citizen* remarked, «is visible evidence of the possibilities of cooperation»<sup>61</sup>.

Whether the shift in attitudes and behaviours of the Terence Bay residents were actually as dramatic as those captured in promotional pamphlets and newspaper articles is unknown. Unfortunately, first-person accounts of the early years of the handicrafts are not extant; there are neither biographical materials nor even quotable interviews with actual people of Terence Bay, who have their narratives crafted for them by the Sisters of Charity, William Dennis, and his fellow journalists, to fit their own purposes and politics. Similarly, while the evidence of civic pride is laid at the feet of the extra cash in the townsfolks' pockets, the role of wartime price increases was downplayed. There was, for instance, no mention of how the price of fish had improved the economic condition of the local people. One report from the *Ottawa Citizen* noted how, in 1941, «current market prices of cod, mackerel, herring –and lobsters during the recent season– make it possible to buy new gear and the necessities of life» in the small village<sup>62</sup>. But rather than dwell on better and fairer prices, the same report quickly shifted focus back to the new spirit of self-help among Terence Bay fishers by recounting how, in order to take advantage of these prices, the fishers «pooled their resources» to purchase a truck so they could more easily reach the city markets offering such prices<sup>63</sup>. This is not to say that a positive transformation did not take place, merely to point out that we do not know how the people of Terence Bay evaluated the success or the failings of the vocational handicrafts training in which so many of them engaged in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Framing the Terence Bay transformation in such terms elides the real impact of the 1930s economic crisis on rural Nova Scotians, truncates the long history of economic precariousness in Terence Bay, and forgets the other political responses that might have been proffered to the residents of Terence Bay.

## 5. Conclusion

In his invited address to the National Gallery of Canada in the spring of 1943, Allan Eaton, a well-known American champion of craft revival, forecast for his audience how «there will come a time when every kind of work will be judged by two measurements, one by the product itself, as is now done, the

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>63</sup> BOWMAN: *op. cit.*, p. 4.

other by the effect of the work upon the producer»<sup>64</sup>. Focusing on the economic value of hand-made items alone posed a «great obstacle to a full appreciation of handicrafts»<sup>65</sup>. Of at least equal value, he emphasized, were the social, the education, the therapeutic and aesthetic values of craftmaking<sup>66</sup>. Taken up by the community workers in Nova Scotia, such ideas about the value of seeing handicrafts in a holistic framework had a significant impact on the work of community re-education such as those at Terence Bay. But what was the effect on the worker in this case? How can we read the evidence of the community transformation?

The Sisters' Depression-era undertakings at Terence Bay reflect and enhance our understandings of vocational education's evolution in Canada and the United States. The Terence Bay initiative is unusual because it was an outreach initiative. In this case, the women religious were called to live and work *in situ* of rural poverty, and draw in rural clients to their training program – the school came to the pupils rather than the other way around. While initially focusing on youth, local people, particularly women, of all ages were quickly brought into the handicrafts initiative. The idea behind the establishment of the workshops was not to mold the individual to leave the area, and to take up a place in the modern industrial workforce; rather, the goal of the Terence Bay initiative was to rejuvenate a community by creating new communal ways of making a living, activities that would support and bolster the way of life in Terence Bay, and perhaps other fishing villages of Nova Scotia.

Poverty persisted in Terence Bay; the handicrafts program diversified the local economy, but several economic indicators countered the dramatic improvements in the well-being of inhabitants of the small village. The town was the site of several activities during WWII<sup>67</sup>, but the postwar population of Terence Bay continued to stagnate due to the slow decline of the inshore fishery on Chignecto. This is not to say that social investment came to a halt; Terence Bay got a new school in the 1950s and the nearby high school was expanded in the 1960s<sup>68</sup>. But, pernicious poverty dogged the area, and even as late as 1966, St Francis Xavier University was commissioned to do a study for economic development<sup>69</sup>. By the

<sup>64</sup> St Francis Xavier Archives, Antigonish, NS, Allan Eaton, «Handicrafts: Their Social Significance to Canada and to the United States», Address given on the occasion of the opening of the Exhibition of Modern British Craft in Canada at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 3 June 1943, Extension Department fonds, RG 30.3/30/329, p. 7. This observation by Eaton has been paraphrased in several contexts. For the original, see, EATON, Allen: *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1937, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> Eaton was, at the time, head of the Department of Arts and Social work for New York City's Russell Sage Foundation. EATON: *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> EATON: *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> «Activities during WWII», *Halifax Mail-Star*, 19 May 1941, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> «New School Pride of Community», *Halifax Mail-Star*, 16 October 1952, p. 11; and «New School at Terence Bay», *Halifax Mail-Star*, 8 December 1960, p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> «St Francis Xavier to do Study of Terence Bay-Prospect», *Halifax Mail-Star*, 28 September 1966, p. 1.

1970s, the fishery in Terence Bay had declined to the point where «only old men» heard the call of the sea and Halifax migration had eroded the population base so that there were few engaged in the inshore fishery by the mid-1970s<sup>70</sup>. By 1971, the ownership of the crafts buildings and community centre was transferred to lay people, and the handicraft centre was closed<sup>71</sup>. Only the advent of the post-war welfare state had a permanent positive impact on the social conditions of those who were left<sup>72</sup>.

Today, Terence Bay falls within the Halifax Regional Municipality, although much of the area remains a 4500 hectare protected wilderness zone<sup>73</sup>. The only economic or industrial development underway is a proposed wind farm, and the Sisters of Charity have since turned the site of their vocational programs into a spiritual retreat<sup>74</sup>. Thus, the economic transformation of Terence Bay inhabitants, the use of handicrafts to introduce and promulgate free market liberalism, their apparent willingness to engage in more communitarian management of their challenging circumstances, did not yield long-term wealth, or even economic security, for this rural Nova Scotian community. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that the care and training of the Sisters of Charity had a beneficial effect on the perceived capacities of the people themselves, just as the Archduchess and local media observed in 1941. This observation adds to the history and import of handicraft as a part of vocational, manual training and its place in early 20<sup>th</sup> century social rehabilitation efforts. Ultimately, it was beyond the scope of the handicraft training program to elicit the changes that descriptions and plans for community uplift implicitly promised. Only the implementation of a universal welfare state could save the integrity of a community with limited and seasonal resources, but it does seem as though the Sisters of Charity paved the way for local people of Terence Bay to marshal resources that acted as a stopgap during the transitions from industrial capitalism to the free market liberal consensus that followed World War Two.

<sup>70</sup> «Terence Bay Tightly Knit Community», *The Halifax Telegraph*, 10 January 1974, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> MCKENNA: *op. cit.*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>72</sup> According to one resident interviewed that year, «We're getting help in many ways... The sick get disability pensions, the children get family allowance. Things have improved and everybody is more friendly than before». See, «Terence Bay Tightly Knit Community», *The Halifax Telegraph*, 10 January 1974, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> (2014). «Terence Bay Wilderness Area». Website. Province of Nova Scotia. Retrieved 12 December 2014 from: [http://www.novascotia.ca/nse/protectedareas/wa\\_terencebay.asp](http://www.novascotia.ca/nse/protectedareas/wa_terencebay.asp).

<sup>74</sup> See (2014). «Chebucto Terence Bay Wind Farm», *Province of Nova Scotia - Nova Scotia Department of the Environment*. Retrieved 1 December 2014 from: <http://www.novascotia.ca/nse/ea/chebucto-terence-bay-wind-farm-project.asp>; (2014). Seton Spirituality Centre. *Sisters of Charity - Halifax*. Retrieved 12 December 2014 from: <http://setonspiritualityctr.ca/>.