

The Margaret Eaton School (1901–1941)

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The Margaret Eaton School (MES), according to Gurney and others, played an important role in Canada in the development of physical education for women. Yet no comprehensive analysis of this school exists. This study intends to provide such an analysis from an historic perspective.

Research concerning MES is scanty. The only exception is a small 33 page booklet by Dorothy Jackson, a graduate and faculty member of this School. Others, writing about this School, most often quote Jackson. However, this booklet is not only brief, but does not make use of important correspondence, minute books, and financial records. Furthermore, it glosses over some difficulties MES experienced. This paper combines the results of Jackson and existing research on MES with the previously untouched archival material.

Explored in greater detail are four areas. First, the mission and curriculum of MES. In its formative years MES focused on elocution which was based on a threefold philosophy of mind, heart, and body. Physical education represented one aspect of the curriculum. However, over time students found employment more readily in physical education than in elocution, and consequently more students began specializing in the physical education option within the School's curriculum. By 1926, MES only offered physical education.

Second, the School's government, in particular the Eatons' family, friends and employees, played an important role in the development of MES. Especially important is the role of Margaret Eaton, wife to the wealthy Toronto businessman Timothy Eaton. Reflecting the changes in governance the School's name changed three times. From 1901-1906 it was called the School of Expression, and was governed by the School's founder and first principal, Emma Scott Raff; from 1906-1926 it was known as the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression, a period when Margaret Eaton was to have considerable influence, financially and otherwise; and finally it was simply called the Margaret Eaton School (1926-1941), a period when Margaret Eaton discontinued financing the School's constant deficits and the School returned to self-governance.

Third, individually MES's faculty made important contributions to the School and to the larger community of women in physical education. The most notable women are: Emma Scott Raff-Nasmith, Mary G. Hamilton, Florence Somers, and Dorothy Jackson.

Fourth, the student's tended to come from established Canadian families. Their life as students at MES was physically vigorous, demanding of time, and meant to encourage a feminine character. Many of the approximately 450 graduates found positions of leadership, especially in YWCA's and in private schools.

Since the Ontario Ministry of Education did not recognize the MES two year diploma, the public school act prevented these women from teaching in the public schools. In 1941, when the University of Toronto began offering a degree in physical education, MES, rather than compete with the University, amalgamated with the new school.