

“On the importance of education generally we may remark, it is as necessary as the light – it should be as common as water and as free as air.”

Egerton Ryerson

With the intent of providing education for all children, Ryerson **began lobbying for the idea of free schools** in 1846. In proving his point that free education was a necessity, he was able to show that in Toronto alone, less than half of the 4,450 children were regular school attendees. His arguments were persuasive enough that the principle of free education was embodied into the School Law of 1850.

In 1852 Ryerson’s passion for education led him to establish the **Normal School in Toronto for training teachers**. It included model schools for in-class training and later, fulfilling the dream of Charles Fothergill, **the Museum of Natural History and Fine Arts was established there**. Ryerson developed its collections by acquiring artwork, statuary, and scientific apparatus during several trips to Europe in the 1850s. This was the first publicly-funded museum in Canada, and after Confederation became the Ontario Provincial Museum, **the forerunner of today’s Royal Ontario Museum**.

Egerton Ryerson was something of a renaissance man, including writing, publishing, farming and sports among his other accomplishments. He retired from public life in 1876, and died in 1882 having left an indelible mark on Canada's education system.



Credit: Armstrong, Beere & Hime/Library and Archives Canada/PA-186728.

Ryerson supported free and compulsory education, but he also believed in different systems of education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. These beliefs influenced, in part, the establishment of what became the Indian Residential School system that has had such a devastating impact on First Nations, Métis and Inuit people across Canada. While he did not implement or oversee Indian Residential Schools, his ideas were used by others to create their blueprint.

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Victoria College and Faraday Hall c.1878

