



# Equity and History: Vermont's Education Revolution of the Early 1890s

*Beginning in 1890, the Vermont state legislature decided on a new path to improve the education of their young people under what Vermont Governor William P. Dillingham described as “the broad proposition that the education of the masses is absolutely essential to the safety of the State and the United States.”*

By JOHN A. SAUTTER

**I**n 1890 Vermont's public education system confronted a series of problems, including great disparities among school districts in their ability to fund adequate instruction. The costs of education were exacerbated by the fragmentation of school administration among thousands of local school districts. In response the State enacted a state-wide property tax for the equalization of school funding and passed companion laws aimed at consolidating school administration and improving teacher training. Under the apportionment system then in place, with each municipality accorded one representative in the Vermont House regardless of town population, the small, rural, property-poor towns were able to enact this redistribution scheme at the expense of the state's population centers. The statewide property tax remained in

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JOHN A. SAUTTER graduated *cum laude* from New York University, received his M.A. from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and his Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. He currently attends Vermont Law School in South Royalton and is a First Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. Dr. Sautter has research interests in late nineteenth-century reform movements.

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effect until 1931, when it was replaced by a state income tax, with educational costs largely reverting to municipal property taxes.

During the 1990s Vermont again confronted disparities among the ability of municipalities to fund adequate education and a need to contain educational costs. In 1997, in the wake of a Vermont Supreme Court ruling, the legislature reestablished a statewide property tax to equalize education funding. The 1890 funding bill, as well as Vermont's historic reliance on statewide property taxes, were largely forgotten by 1997 and many of the new law's opponents charged that it was a violation of local control.

This article looks at the first ten years of operation of the 1890 education tax.<sup>1</sup> During that period the tax appears to have achieved its goal of equalizing educational funding by redistributing revenue from property-rich to property-poor towns. The law also had unintended consequences that frustrated other goals, such as creating an incentive to artificially expand the number of schools in the state to be eligible for more state funds. Understanding the 1890 law provides context for understanding the use of property taxes to fund education and is thus germane to current public dialogues on achieving equality of educational funding and opportunity.

The centerpiece of the 1890 legislative education changes was a new law that levied a five-cent per dollar property tax upon all property listed on each town's grand list.<sup>2</sup> The law represented a fundamental shift in the manner that Vermonters paid for their education system.<sup>3</sup> Until 1890, all local districts provided for their schools, and local district boards exercised nearly unlimited power over school property taxes, instruction, and employment matters. However, the old system led to great disparities in the tax rate among districts within a town and between different communities in the state and retarded the ability of towns to provide the best education possible. Therefore, beginning in 1890 the Vermont state legislature decided on a new path to improve the education of their young people under what Vermont Governor William P. Dillingham described as "the broad proposition that the education of the masses is absolutely essential to the safety of the State and the United States."<sup>4</sup>

The 1890 statewide property tax to equalize educational spending was especially important and had notable effects. First, it represented a great advancement in progressive taxation that redistributed money from wealthier urban areas to poorer rural communities.<sup>5</sup> Towns and cities that held greater wealth and prosperity than rural areas were by and large net losers under the law and essentially subsidized education in more sparsely populated areas. Second, the new law accentuated the differences between urban and rural Vermont. Most of the major cities (including

Burlington, Rutland, and Montpelier) were hubs of economic activity and gradual population growth.<sup>6</sup> However, in the late nineteenth century, rural Vermont was in economic and population decline.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the law affected the manner in which education was conducted in the state.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE NEED FOR CHANGE: VERMONT EDUCATION PRIOR TO 1890

Prior to 1890 each school district provided funding for its own schools. A 1782 statute provided that towns should either create single school districts or divide the township into several districts to “enable [Vermonters] to instruct youth at low prices.”<sup>9</sup>

All areas of the state opted for the multiple district option. Individual districts were organized along neighborhood lines and levied fees on a per-student basis to those families that had school-age children.<sup>10</sup> In an effort to assist a struggling educational system, the 1864 Vermont legislature made the payment of taxes to the local school compulsory for all land owners regardless of whether or not they had students in the school district.<sup>11</sup>

However, money was not the only issue. Inefficiency and population decline also contributed to dissatisfaction with public school funding. In 1860 Vermont had 239 incorporated towns, but contained 2,591 school districts. These numbers average out to over ten school districts per town. Furthermore, between 1850 and 1860 Vermont school enrollment fell from 99,110 to 75,691 students. The drop in students amounted to a decrease in the statewide average from 38 to 29 students per school. By 1884, rural parts of the state supported 103 school districts with six or fewer students and 420 districts that enrolled between six and eleven.<sup>12</sup>

In his farewell address praising the new law, Governor Dillingham summarized the problem caused by the discrepancy in the amount of taxes between different districts. In many towns the geographic make-up of the districts did not match the tax needs. This resulted from the diffuse nature of the districts, which had been created decades earlier when the population densities of rural areas were higher.<sup>13</sup> In some cases there were great discrepancies in property tax rates in the same town. For example, an 1889 comparison of the school districts in the town of Bennington reveals one with a property tax of six cents on the dollar and a nearby district with a tax of over sixty cents. In Brattleboro, a similar situation existed between two neighboring school districts, where one paid ten cents on the dollar and another paid a hundred cents.<sup>14</sup>

In short, the locally based Vermont education system that existed prior to 1890 was unconsolidated and inefficient. Rural taxpayers paid

exorbitant amounts of tax dollars annually for schools that were not providing a modicum of educational value compared to those schools in cities. Indeed, an account of one small district school of the time remarked on the condition of the school in the following way:

Going to exchange with a neighboring minister not long ago, I met him on the way, and in answer to inquiries as to the most direct road, I told him to turn to the "right at a certain schoolhouse," a mile or two ahead. He drove straight by the schoolhouse, a mile or two out of his way, very much to his inconvenience, especially as night overtook him before he reached the village. He told me afterwards that he saw the schoolhouse, but decided it was a pig pen or sheep barn, or something of that kind. Now, we don't want schoolhouses for our children that will be mistaken for pig pens. We are thankful that the schoolhouse mentioned burned down last winter.<sup>15</sup>

What is more, the plethora of small school districts gradually cultivated a class of substandard teachers in rural areas. Limited property tax revenues in rural areas worked as a cap on the amount that small districts could pay their teachers. Consequently, the low teaching wages in existence in the "back" towns and districts tended to attract poorly educated and unlicensed teachers. As Governor Dillingham noted in his 1890 farewell address, "the State never could rise to a proper degree of excellence until the teachers should, as a class, reach a higher standard, both in scholarship and in a knowledge of teaching, and that this standard could only be reached by those who look upon teaching as a profession."<sup>16</sup> Governor Ebenezer Ormsbee emphasized the failure of the localized school system in 1886 by noting that "the people of our commonwealth are increasing in illiteracy."<sup>17</sup>

#### NEW SOLUTIONS: THE 1890 PROPERTY TAX

To tackle these problems in education the Vermont legislature instituted a statewide property tax on November 26, 1890.<sup>18</sup> The tax levied a five-cent property tax upon every dollar contained on the grand list of all real estate and property in a town. The grand list does not contain farm chattel or personal property, but focuses upon the fair market value of each property listed.<sup>19</sup> For example, if a farmer owned \$100 of land, he would have had to pay \$5 in taxes on the land. As Governor Dillingham hinted, the grand list was a major point of contention between individual districts because "[i]n the villages where the grand list is large, the taxes are light; while in the hill districts where the grand list is small, they are almost uniformly burdensome."<sup>20</sup>

Prior to the institution of the statewide property tax, school districts set property tax rates and were solely funded by that income.<sup>21</sup> The new

law did not prevent local school districts from levying local property taxes to fund their schools.<sup>22</sup> Rather, its purpose was to ensure that all Vermonters paid equal amounts for education and received instruction on par with other school districts.<sup>23</sup>

The new law required towns to report the grand list to the Vermont state treasurer's office each spring. Each town was then assessed an amount according to its grand list. After receiving the funds from individual towns, the state treasurer calculated the portion of the general school fund (composed of all of the state property taxes collected) each school district was to receive on a "per school basis." The treasurer then returned the money to each school district by July of the same year. It is important to note that this determination did not take into account the number of students enrolled in each school. Therefore, the law in effect rewarded rural towns with small schools that had low numbers of students but a high number of schools.<sup>24</sup>

There was substantial debate about the form that the new law should take. At least one bill brought forth in the legislature during the fall of 1890 called for a statewide tax based on an 8.5-percent tax rate.<sup>25</sup> Representative Joseph K. Darling of Chelsea introduced the proposed law in October, 1890. Under this version half of the money would go to schools based on town population, with the other distributed based on the number of legal schools in operation during the previous year.<sup>26</sup>

The need for education reform was also debated. Governor Carroll S. Page (1890–1892) argued that education was necessary to control the increasing number of immigrants pouring into Vermont.<sup>27</sup> During the late nineteenth century Vermont's factories and cities were being flooded by French-Canadian, Irish, Italian, and other European immigrants seeking jobs in the state's expanding industrial sector.<sup>28</sup> Governor Page suggested that it was every Vermonter's patriotic duty to support education reform because unassimilated immigrants threatened to bring anarchy and the end of America's republican institutions.<sup>29</sup>

However, some Vermonters were interested in reforming the state's education system in order to equalize costs and educational opportunities. The Vermont State Teachers' Association adopted a resolution at their annual meeting on October 26, 1890, calling upon the state legislature to pass a law that equalized the burden of taxation for schools.<sup>30</sup> The *Burlington Free Press* editorialized in support of the new school law. It noted the importance of the State Teachers' Association's support for reforming education and offered its own praise for the equalizing effect of the new law.<sup>31</sup>

The Vermont State Legislature also enacted a new law to address the problem of substandard teachers. This law created an office of county

examiner for each county and ordered the state superintendent of education to develop statewide educational standards.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the new county-level office had the role of overseeing the implementation of “teacher institutes,” whereby local teachers could garner certification through examinations that tested their knowledge of individual subjects. An editorial appearing in the October 13, 1890, issue of the *Burlington Free Press* quoted an anonymous letter to the editor that summed up the changes to education policy including the new property tax law and the new teaching standards.

Very likely there is room for improvement in the law, but just the same, we cordially approve of the principle and general working of the law. It purifies and elevate[s] the profession of teaching by considerably increasing the necessary qualifications and with them consequently the salaries. One principle objective of the law is that small districts can hardly afford to hire a teacher. The standard and profession of teaching are elevated, and we get vastly better work for a little more money.<sup>33</sup>

#### CHANGES AND REACTIONS: 1891 TO 1892

In 1891, the first year of the statewide property tax, the state collected \$89,029.<sup>34</sup> Vermont towns could be divided up into those that were “net gainers” and those that were “net losers.” By far the greatest net losers were Vermont’s largest cities, which saw vast sums of money leave their communities to fund other communities’ schools. The City of Burlington paid \$5,371 into the state property tax fund in 1891. However, the city only received \$624 in return—a difference of \$4,747 lost to the state fund.<sup>35</sup> The City of Rutland paid in \$4,190 but only received \$1,616, a difference of \$2,574.<sup>36</sup> To put this amount of money into perspective, the new 1890 property tax law took the equivalent of \$3,822,086 from Burlington and \$2,072,477 from Rutland, in 2005 dollars.<sup>37</sup>

The problem for the larger cities and population centers was that the 1890 statewide property tax law distributed funds according to the number of schools in each town, not according to the number of students in each school.<sup>38</sup> Each town received \$36.72 to be distributed to each school in 1891. Burlington for example, only maintained 17 schools. Rutland, on the other hand, listed 44 schools in the state treasurer’s report for 1891, thereby allowing it to retain more money.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 1 shows how the variables of population density and number of schools affected whether a county was going to be a net gainer or a net loser under the 1890 law. Notice that Chittenden County (where the City of Burlington is located) is in the lower corner to the right. This county generally had a higher population density and a smaller number of schools. Orange County is in the upper left corner of the chart. This county was

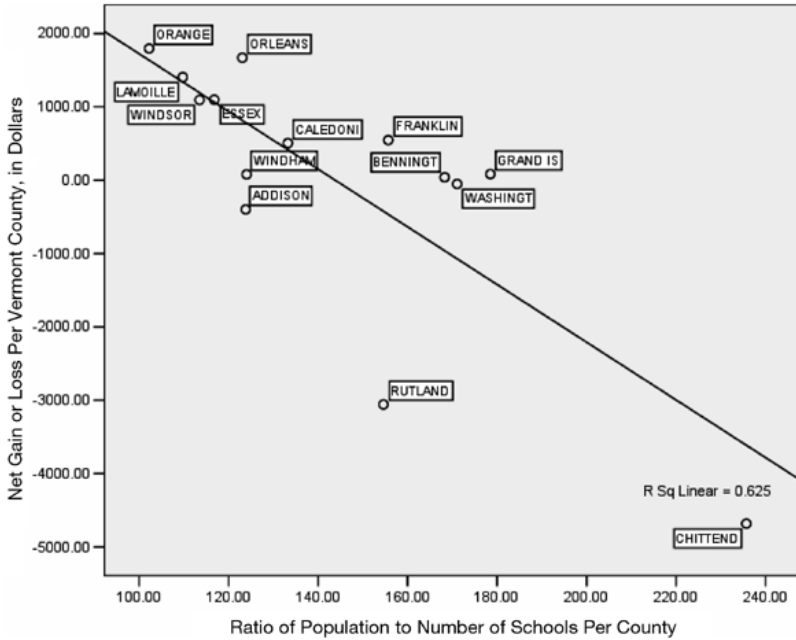


FIGURE 1. Effect of 1890 Property Tax Law: Comparison of Financial Gain or Loss and Population per School in Each Vermont County in 1891 (data from the 1900 U.S. Census for population)

composed of rural areas, with Randolph the largest town. The diagonal line in the chart is a regression line that estimates the correlation between these two variables. The closer the  $R^2 = 1$ , the more closely related these two variables will be. An  $R^2 = .625$  indicates a strong correlation between the two variables.

Two things can be said with confidence about the relationship between tax benefits and schools during the first year of the law's operation. First, the lower the ratio of population to the number of schools in a county, the more likely the county was to be a gainer instead of a loser of state tax funds. Second, the gainers tended to be rural counties with numerous schools but smaller student populations. In effect, the law distributed the funds to those schools that were most likely to be inefficient and costly to run.

These lessons were not lost on the state of Vermont. During the next year after the implementation of the state tax, districts added a total of 156 new schools around the state.<sup>40</sup> Burlington expanded from 17 to 41 schools in just one year. All of Vermont's fourteen counties, except Grand

Isle and Orleans, increased the number of schools (Grand Isle County retained the same number of schools and Orleans County decreased its number of schools by one). All told, Vermont counties averaged a 6.5 percent increase in the number of schools during 1891, at a time when rural populations were in decline.<sup>41</sup>

GAINERS AND LOSERS:  
EFFECTS OF THE 1890 PROPERTY TAX LAW

In much the same way that Vermont's present-day statewide property tax has created two distinct classes of towns, so did the 1890 law. To investigate the differential effects of the 1890 property tax law between gaining and losing towns, I conducted a statistical analysis of three Vermont counties. The counties—Addison, Chittenden, and Rutland—were chosen so the analysis could lend some historical insight into Vermont's contemporary experience with Act 60, the current statewide property tax law, and because they represent different population models.

The financial information used in the analysis was gathered from the biennial Vermont State Treasurer's Report for the years 1891 through 1900.<sup>42</sup> Population information for each town was researched at the Vermont Historical Society. The material gathered included the amount of tax paid by each town per year, the number of legal schools operated in the town, and the amount of money received by the town for the number of schools it operated. Other variables were derived from this basic information, including the net gain or net loss in dollars per year for each town (denoting "Gainers" and "Losers"), the number of schools per capita in each town and the annual per capita tax paid by each town.

One of the most notable consequences of the 1890 property tax law is that by all accounts it did what it was supposed to do: take money from wealthier areas of the state and redistribute it to poorer rural areas. Figure 2 shows the results of a difference of means test comparing the annual amount of tax paid per capita by each town for those towns that were Net Losers and Net Gainers. The distinction between losers and gainers was calculated by averaging the difference between the amount that a town paid into the state property tax fund and the amount that it received between the years 1891 and 1900. The appendix contains information about population, schools, and taxes for each town in the three counties, including the average amount of dollars that a town lost or gained per year. Net Losers paid nearly double the amount of dollars per capita that the Net Gainers paid, at forty-seven cents and twenty-four cents respectively.

Figure 2 also informs us on the relative value of the property located in each type of town. Taxes were paid according to the grand list of each



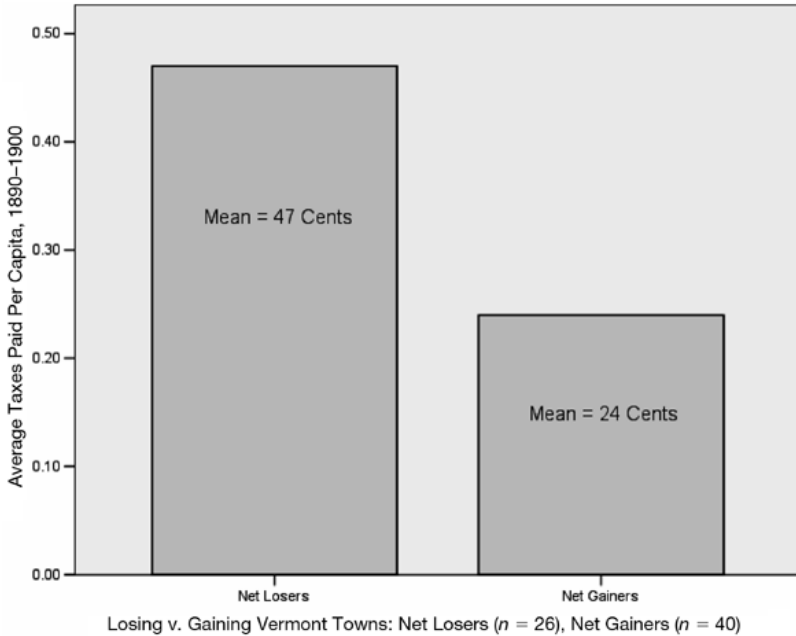


FIGURE 2. Comparison of Means: Average Taxes Paid Per Capita for Net Losers and Net Gainers, 1890-1900 ( $N = 66$  Vermont towns; difference of means test significant at  $p < .10$ ,  $t = 1.774$ )

town, and taxes per capita reflect the disparity in value between the grand lists of those towns that were Net Losers and Net Gainers. Those towns that had less value, but high numbers of schools were rewarded by the 1890 property tax law.

Generally, Net Losers were three times as large, with an average population in 1900 of 2,786 people; whereas Net Gainers were smaller, with an average population of 834 people in 1900.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as Figure 3 demonstrates, the population decline during the decade was far more precipitous for Net Gainers. While the larger towns that were Net Losers saw an average population decline of .19 percent, those towns gaining from the 1890 property tax law experienced a population loss of 5.53 percent during the 1891-1900 decade. Thus, the law truly was a subsidy to those towns that were smaller, less wealthy, and in population decline.

Finally, a regression analysis was used to test some of the relationships initially investigated using difference of means tests to evaluate how much different variables contributed to a town's status of being a Net Loser or a Net Gainer. For example, are taxes per capita an important

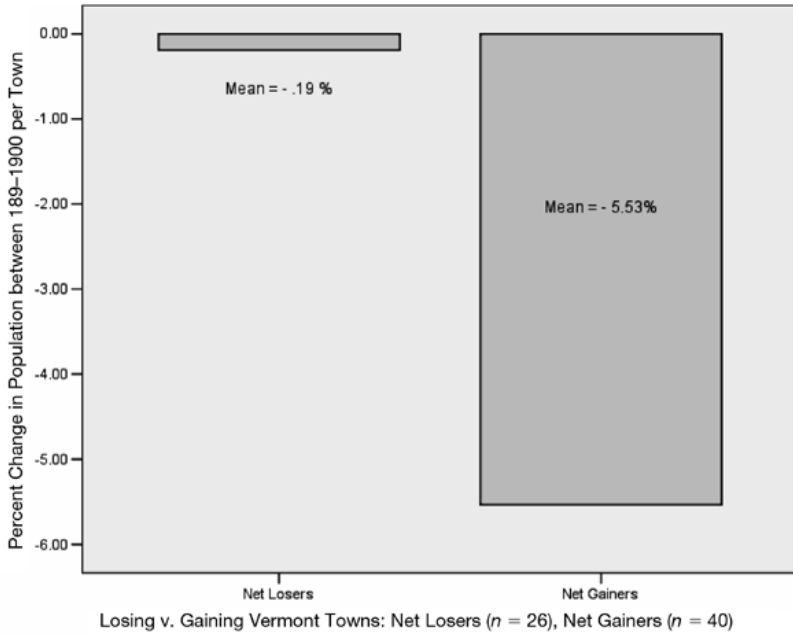


FIGURE 3. Comparison of Means: Percent Change in Population Per Town for Net Losers and Net Gainers, 1890–1900 ( $N = 66$  Vermont towns; difference of means test significant at  $p < .05$ ,  $t = 2.058$ )

predictor of being a Net Gainer or Loser if you control for population and number of schools? To assess this question, the model used predictors such as “average taxes per capita,” “population per number of schools in the town” and “population of the town in 1890.” The dependent variable was dichotomous (0,1), with 1 = Net Gainer and 0 = Net Loser.

Table 1 contains the results of the regression estimation. The regression model sheds light on the significance of each of these variables in predicting whether a town was a Net Gainer or Net Loser, while controlling for each. The first thing to notice is the statistically significant and negative coefficients corresponding to each of the predictors for Tax Per Capita, Population in 1890 and a Town’s Population Per School; all of these were significant at the  $p < .01$  level. The low “ $p$  value” means that each variable correctly predicted whether the town was a Net Gainer or Net Loser 99 percent of the time. This indicates that those towns that were Net Gainers, on a statistically significant level, tended to have a lower tax per capita, were smaller towns in 1890, and had a lower population per number of schools. These are all signs that a town was

TABLE 1 Dichotomous Logistic Regression—Gainers v. Losers\*

<i>Variables</i>	$\beta$ ( <i>unstand</i> ) <sup>†</sup>	<i>S.E.</i> <sup>‡</sup>	<i>p value</i> <sup>§</sup>
Constant	16.459	4.645	.000
Tax per capita	-36.956	11.637	.001
Population in 1890	-.003	.001	.001
Population per school	-.015	.005	.004
Chittenden dummy	.856	1.169	.464
Addison dummy	-.974	1.068	.362
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> <sup>2¶</sup>	.74		
Total observations	66		
Dep = 0	26		
Dep = 1	40		

\* Dependent variable is a binary (0,1) variable. Towns that averaged an annual net gain from 1891 to 1900 were categorized as “Net Gainers = 1,” and towns that averaged an annual net loss from 1891 to 1900 were categorized as “Net Losers = 0.” Analysis was run on SPSS 13.

<sup>†</sup> Unstandardized beta, or the real value of the variable coefficient in the regression estimation.

<sup>‡</sup> Standard error, or the average amount of difference between the regression line and each observation, across the entire sample.

<sup>§</sup> Probability that the variable does not fit within the hypothesized relationship. Thus, the lower the *p* value the higher the statistical significance of the variable, i.e., the more explanatory power it has in predicting the outcome on the dependent variable.

<sup>¶</sup> An estimate of the variation that this combination of independent variables explains.

smaller and poorer than those towns that were Net Losers. The dummy variables present in the regression were used to control for a town being in a particular county. However, there was no significant regional effect associated with being in a particular county.

#### WORKING TOWARD EFFICIENCY: THE VICIOUS ACT OF 1892

In 1892, the Vermont Legislature enacted a new law to consolidate all of the smaller school districts in a township under one “town district.”<sup>44</sup> Known as the “vicious Act of 1892,” the law forced all towns to buy the property of the school districts, pay off the districts’ debt and create a town level board of governors.<sup>45</sup> The act reduced the number of school districts from over 2,000 in 1891 to 251 in 1892.<sup>46</sup> Hundreds of school districts that had existed for over 100 years were wiped out and usurped by town government.<sup>47</sup> This reorganization effectively consolidated the tax base of towns into one district so that the local property tax burden of rural areas would be shared by the whole township.

Vermont's cities and larger towns had the resources available to implement a consolidated teaching model and were little affected by the 1892 act.<sup>48</sup> An earlier 1885 law allowing towns to vote on the issue of whether to consolidate resulted in only sixteen towns adopting the town system.<sup>49</sup> However, while cities were able to adapt to the 1892 law, rural areas of the state still clung to the one-room schoolhouses that had been a cornerstone of the community for generations. Legislators and other political leaders hoped that the 1892 law would spur consolidation, provide a larger tax base, and allow school districts to adopt "a graded system based on age and skill levels that was not possible in the one-room schools."<sup>50</sup> In 1892 many people were also worried that Vermont was falling behind other states in New England, which had already adopted town-based school systems. As Governor Carroll S. Page noted in an address to the legislature in the fall of 1892 before the act was adopted, Vermont should

[B]uild a new system based upon the idea fast being adopted by our sister States, that the only true plan is one that is predicated upon town rather than district supervision. The general trend of thought in all advanced educational work seems to favor the town system of schools, and I believe that the time is not far distant when it will be adopted in Vermont. Although involving a greater outlay, it certainly means better teachers and better schools.<sup>51</sup>

In many respects the new law represented a concerted effort by state officials to reform education from the bottom up. The 1890 property tax and the teaching standards laws were efforts on a macro level to deal with problems of inequity and academic quality. Neither of these laws forced schools to consolidate or alter their structure on the local level. The 1892 act was as revolutionary on the local level as the 1890 laws were on the state level because it altered the governance structure of the local districts. Ultimately, the new town-based school districts led the way toward consolidation into larger more efficient schools.

#### NEW AND OLD:

#### SALIENCE OF THE 1890 PROPERTY TAX LAW

In 1997 Vermont passed Act 60, a new statewide property tax for the equalization of educational spending. Designed to equalize the amount of dollars spent per pupil in Vermont, Act 60 was created in response to a Vermont Supreme Court ruling in *Brigham v. State*.<sup>52</sup> The Court held that under the Vermont Constitution's "common benefits" clause, each student was entitled to an equal opportunity to education.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the Court ruled that "Children who live in property-poor districts and children who live in property-rich districts should be afforded a substantially equal opportunity to have access to similar educational revenues."<sup>54</sup>

Educational and property tax rate inequities were important to the Court's decision. In its findings the Court noted disparities such as existed between the towns of Stannard and Sherburne. In 1995, while a resident in Sherburne paid \$247 in property taxes on an \$85,000 home, those in Stannard were paying \$2,040 on a home with the same appraisal value.<sup>55</sup> Using statistical analysis, the Vermont Department of Education came to the conclusion that spending per pupil in schools was highest in wealthy areas where residents paid lower taxes, and that in poorer areas of the state less money was spent per pupil with higher property taxes for residents.<sup>56</sup>

Many towns and cities with large amounts of wealth were upset by the new law. Essentially, Act 60 created towns that were either net losers or net gainers, depending upon whether they paid more or less money to the state via the statewide property tax than their schools received.<sup>57</sup> One of the most notorious cases of a net losing town is Killington. In 2005, Killington (formerly Sherburne) paid \$10 million to the state property tax fund, but only received \$1 million in return for its own schools.<sup>58</sup> This loss of funds prompted the town to petition to secede from Vermont and join New Hampshire in 2003 and again in 2005.<sup>59</sup>

#### EQUITY AND HISTORY: THE RELEVANCE OF THE 1890 PROPERTY TAX LAW

The institution of the 1890 property tax law has relevance to Vermont's current debate over Act 60. The most striking finding in this context is that a place like Killington (formerly Sherburne) was a Net Gainer under the old law. According to the Appendix, the town averaged an annual gain of over \$83 from the property tax law. Furthermore, the town paid one of the lowest amounts of tax per capita annually into the state fund. Sherburne averaged a payment of 20 cents per capita while the average for all Net Gainers was 24 cents. Sherburne was not only a Net Gainer, but as far as receiving towns go, it also contributed one of the smallest amounts on a per capita basis.

There is important historical irony in Killington's story that adds a new dimension to the current debate. Underlying the education debate both today and in the 1890s are the issues of funding and equity—is it fair to mandate that wealthy towns subsidize poorer ones? The same town that was one of the most subsidized out of those surveyed in the 1890s is today a wealthy area adamantly opposed to statewide funding equity. Indeed, one of the town's political arguments against the contemporary statewide property tax is the unjust nature of the redistribution by the state. However, Killington shows that equity in education funding is not merely about current geographic redistribution, but about

intergenerational equity as well. When Vermont next considers whether it will keep its statewide property tax it should remember Killington's example of how long term economic trends can alter wealth distribution patterns. What seems unfair at the present moment might be dramatically different over long periods of time.

Another practical insight into Vermont's contemporary debate over the state-wide property tax has to do with the reasons for passing each law. Very similar concerns motivated legislators in the 1890s and the 1990s: equal opportunity for all students, overall quality of education throughout Vermont, providing for the state's future generations, and inequities in funding the state education system. Furthermore, it is instructive that the 1890 law worked the way it was supposed to work. Data analysis has revealed that the law accomplished its main goal of redistributing funds to provide education, while equalizing the burden for all Vermonters during the late nineteenth century.

However, it should also be remembered that the law had unintended consequences as well. One consequence was increasing the number of schools in Vermont. The 1890 property tax law created an incentive to expand the number of schools because more schools meant more state funds. In contrast, the so called Vicious Act of 1892 sought to consolidate school districts to make them more efficient and lower costs. These two laws were to some degree pulling school districts in opposite directions. While it is not completely certain, the 1890 law may have been one (of many) element that precipitated the passage of the 1892 act toward consolidation. Vermonters kept the statewide property tax until 1931, when the state legislature voted to repeal the law and go back to local provision of funds for schools.

## CONCLUSION

Both the reorganization plan of 1892 and the statewide property tax of 1890 were manifestations of state power as a solution to the problems of local inefficiency and changing demographics. The Vermont Legislature took action to control the growth of school districts in order to limit local property taxes that were burdensome to small farmers. However, the resulting effect of both laws was a redistribution of wealth from cities and towns to the less populated, agriculturally based rural areas of Vermont.

APPENDIX

<i>Town, by county</i>	<i>Average Change in Dollars Appropriated 1891-1900</i> %	<i>Change in Population 1890-1900</i> %	<i>Annual Average Tax per Capita 1891-1900</i> \$	<i>Annual Average Population per School 1891-1900</i> n	<i>Annual Average Gain/Loss 1891-1900</i> \$
<i>Addison County</i>					
Addison	-2.44	-5.44	0.33	97.28	35.47
Bridgeport	6.87	-5.91	0.36	108.35	-29.20
Bristol	6.69	12.75	0.28	160.70	-100.21
Cornwall	0.54	-8.31	0.30	125.14	-9.47
Ferrisburg	1.80	7.86	0.34	107.59	-4.01
Goshen	-2.23	-14.47	0.18	82.43	75.35
Granville	3.86	-14.60	0.17	95.24	125.42
Hancock	-3.31	-10.60	0.25	127.62	9.66
Leicester	-1.04	-9.43	0.26	99.17	55.33
Lincoln	-1.05	-8.21	0.17	133.72	127.44
Middlebury	1.08	9.02	0.34	201.31	-458.64
Monkton	16.83	7.67	0.26	123.87	29.34
New Haven	1.29	-9.56	0.33	122.68	-38.01
Orwell	0.02	-9.09	0.40	127.11	-133.25
Panton	0.07	7.07	0.33	98.88	15.60
Ripton	-1.19	-7.57	0.13	81.57	171.67
Salisbury	2.19	-6.49	0.31	106.87	21.24
Shoreham	1.27	-3.79	0.36	105.78	-17.25
Starksboro	-1.09	-15.70	0.19	88.83	214.40
Vergennes	7.30	-1.41	0.23	339.52	-220.18
Waltham	21.98	3.53	0.30	99.81	15.83
Weybridge	-4.34	-4.60	0.32	117.89	-9.47
Whiting	0.83	1.69	0.32	76.17	55.18
<i>Chittenden County</i>					
Bolton	-1.43	-9.32	0.18	98.40	97.77
Burlington	18.45	27.76	0.36	371.70	-4296.60
Charlotte	1.07	1.13	0.36	98.97	7.67
Colchester	-0.23	4.06	0.14	301.58	-108.45
Essex	3.38	9.44	0.23	157.31	10.40
Hinesburg	0.53	0.91	0.32	109.05	20.38
Huntington	-5.83	0.69	0.22	136.89	31.39
Jericho	-3.80	-6.02	0.29	134.95	-28.82
Hilton	0.31	13.10	0.23	127.78	92.52
Richmond	1.19	-5.20	0.32	105.44	22.63
St. George	0.74	-15.09	4.47	10.32	-91.89
Shelburne	2.61	-0.62	0.19	227.37	-34.67

(continued)

APPENDIX (*continued*)

<i>Town, by county</i>	<i>Average Change in Dollars Appropriated 1891-1900</i> %	<i>Change in Population 1890-1900</i> %	<i>Annual Average Tax per Capita 1891-1900</i> \$	<i>Annual Average Population per School 1891-1900</i> n	<i>Average Gain/Loss 1891-1900</i> \$
<i>Chittenden County (continued)</i>					
S. Burlington	0.07	14.91	0.03	908.00	5.61
Underhill	1.92	-12.38	0.20	85.35	271.34
Westford	-2.47	-14.04	0.23	104.40	113.75
Williston	-0.72	6.81	0.40	115.00	-93.50
<i>Rutland County</i>					
Benson	1.49	-4.09	0.32	95.78	49.05
Brandon	-2.25	-16.65	0.34	173.40	-382.63
Castleton	-0.97	-12.81	0.19	179.40	16.70
Chittenden	8.68	-14.93	0.21	100.82	98.58
Clarendon	-1.31	-1.40	0.39	118.14	-72.42
Danby	-4.20	-11.88	0.24	103.94	112.52
Fair Haven	1.02	7.45	0.21	203.87	-78.75
Hubbardton	1.20	-3.56	0.33	72.03	87.76
Ira	2.21	-16.86	0.24	94.02	55.79
Mendon	-4.54	-31.23	0.19	87.45	109.14
Middletown Spgs	4.62	-1.32	0.27	220.88	-76.44
Mount Holly	74.41	-17.71	0.19	124.33	111.55
Mount Tabor	-1.79	13.30	0.12	172.22	43.02
Pawlet	31.78	-0.80	0.26	149.83	-28.73
Pittsfield	-4.86	-7.05	0.18	161.25	19.64
Pittsford	-0.46	5.13	0.34	146.81	-166.36
Poultney	-1.45	2.54	0.20	149.73	123.75
Proctor	3.52	21.50	0.30	190.88	-204.36
Rutland	3.32	7.21	0.37	248.65	-2760.15
Sherburne (Killington)	1.28	210.86	0.20	90.74	83.59
Shrewsbury	-1.78	-4.00	0.25	90.90	138.98
Sudbury	0.07	-5.58	0.30	97.60	34.50
Tinmouth	-0.94	-7.13	0.30	97.56	30.67
Wallingford	-1.77	-9.12	0.36	146.37	-183.71
Wells	2.18	-2.42	0.23	107.63	66.48
West Haven	2.59	-13.83	0.37	58.11	99.45
West Rutland	4.33	-20.82	0.30	214.09	-412.17



## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup>No. 6 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont* (Burlington: The Free Press Association), 23.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel B. Hand, *The Star that Set: The Vermont Republican Party 1854–1974* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2002), 63–65.

<sup>4</sup>Farewell Address of Vermont Governor William P. Dillingham, *Journal of the Vermont Joint Assembly 1890* (Oct. 2, 1890), 6, available at <http://vermont-archives.org/govhistory/gov/govinaug/farewells/pdf/Dillingham1890.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>*The Vermont State Officer's Report for 1891–92* (Rutland: The Tuttle Company, Official State Printers), 45–51. The report lists the total amount of money paid by each town into the state fund and the amount that the town subsequently received during the same tax year. Without exception, cities paid in more than they received, whereas rural townships generally received a net gain from the tax.

<sup>6</sup>Comparison of the 1880 and 1900 census figures shows economic and population growth in all of the counties containing major cities. However, in those counties without major cities, especially in eastern and northern Vermont, there were general declines in population and economic production per capita. No comparison can be had for the 1890 census in Vermont, as it was destroyed in a warehouse fire before it could be reported. Census of the United States, 1880 and 1900.

<sup>7</sup>Hand, *The Star that Set*, 62–63; also see Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions and P. Jeffery Potash, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* (Barre: Vermont State Historical Society, 2004), 309, who posit that late-nineteenth-century rural Vermont was not stagnant and has been mislabeled. Sherman et al. argue that it was not a period of decline, but rather a period of stabilization during which communities became close-knit. The population decline of the period they attribute to the loss of skilled labor from small towns to larger cities in Vermont.

<sup>8</sup>Hand, *The Star that Set*, 62–63.

<sup>9</sup>John A. Williams, ed., *Laws of Vermont 1781–1784* (Montpelier: Vermont Secretary of State, 1965), 137–139; see also 1777 Vermont Constitution, Section XL, which states, “A school or schools shall be established in each town, by the legislature, for the convenient instruction of youth, with such salaries to the masters, paid by each town, making proper use of school lands in each town, thereby to enable them to instruct youth at low prices. One grammar school in each county, and one university in this State, ought to be established by direction of the General Assembly.”

<sup>10</sup>Hand, *The Star that Set*, 62.

<sup>11</sup>No. 61 of the *Acts of 1864 of the State of Vermont* (Montpelier: Printed at the Freeman Printing Establishment), 69.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>13</sup>Williams, ed., *Laws of Vermont 1781–1784*, 137–139.

<sup>14</sup>Dillingham, 1890 Farewell Address, 5–6.

<sup>15</sup>*Fifteenth Report of the Vermont Board of Education* (Montpelier: Freeman Steam Printing House and Book Bindery) (1872): 377, quoted in Andrew E. and Edith W. Nuquist, *Vermont State Government and Administration: An Historical and Descriptive Study of the Living Past* (Burlington: University of Vermont Government Research Center, 1966), 265.

<sup>16</sup>Dillingham, 1890 Farewell Address, 5.

<sup>17</sup>Hand, *The Star that Set*, 63.

<sup>18</sup>No. 6 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont*, 23.

<sup>19</sup>Emily Tartter, Sara Teachout, and Stephanie Barrett, *Grand List Issues Study* (Montpelier: Vermont Joint Fiscal Office) (Jan. 2004), 4; Nuquist and Nuquist, *Vermont State Government and Administration*, 160–164.

<sup>20</sup>Dillingham, 1890 Farewell Address, 5.

<sup>21</sup>No. 61 of the *Acts of 1864 of the State of Vermont*, 69.

<sup>22</sup>No. 6 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont*, 23–24.

<sup>23</sup>Mason Stone, *History of Education, State of Vermont* (Montpelier: Capital City Press, 1936), 97.

<sup>24</sup>No. 6 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont*, 24.

<sup>25</sup>“Bills Introduced and Referred,” *Burlington Free Press*, 14 October 1890, 1.

<sup>26</sup>No. 6 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont*, 23–24.

<sup>27</sup>“Governor Page’s Message,” *Burlington Free Press*, 7 October 1892, 4.

<sup>28</sup>Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 309.

<sup>29</sup>“Governor Page’s Message,” *Burlington Free Press*, 7 October 1892, 4.

<sup>30</sup>“Opinions and Resolutions on the School Law,” *Burlington Free Press*, 27 October 1890, 1.

<sup>31</sup>“Education,” *Burlington Free Press*, 27 October 1890, 4.

<sup>32</sup>No. 5 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont*, 22.

<sup>33</sup>“The New School Law,” *Burlington Free Press*, 13 October 1890, 4.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Vermont State Officer's Report for 1891–92*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Measuringworth.com for an estimation of what the relative share of Gross Domestic Product would be in 2005 dollars, available at <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/compare/>. The GDP is the market value of all goods and services produced in a year. Comparing the relative share of GDP estimates how much money in the base year would be the same percent of all output for the year in question.

<sup>38</sup> No. 6 of the *Acts of 1890 of the State of Vermont*, 23–24.

<sup>39</sup> *The Vermont State Officer's Report for 1891–92*, 45–50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–51.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–51; For evidence of rural decline in Vermont during the late nineteenth century compare the 1880 and 1890 U.S. Censuses.

<sup>42</sup> The biennial Vermont State Treasurer's Report provides the annual amount of tax paid by each Vermont town based on the town's grand list, the number of legal schools operated in the preceding year, and the apportionment of the state funds provided per school. The reports also included information on the amount of dollars collected throughout the state during the indicated years.

<sup>43</sup> A difference of means test revealed this relationship to be significant at the  $p < .01$ ,  $t = 3.035$ . This indicates a statistically significant difference between the averages.

<sup>44</sup> No. 20 of the *Acts of 1892 of the State of Vermont* (Burlington: The Free Press Association), 24.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 25; William J. Mathis, "Education," in *Vermont State Government Since 1965*, ed. Michael Sherman (Burlington, Vt.: The Center for Research on Vermont, 1999), 317.

<sup>46</sup> Mathis, "Education," in *Vermont State Government Since 1965*, 317.

<sup>47</sup> Hand, *The Star that Set*, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 369.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Zinar, "Educational Problems in Rural Vermont, 1875–1900: A Not So Distant Mirror," *Vermont History* 51(1983):197–220, 200.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> "Governor Page's Message," *Burlington Free Press*, 7 October 1892, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 603–604; *Laws of Vermont 1997*, No. 60, sec. 3 (Montpelier, Vt.: Secretary of State, 1997), 279; *Brigham v. State*, 166 Vt. 246, 256 (1997).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 253–254.

<sup>57</sup> Sherman et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 605.

<sup>58</sup> Sherburne voted to change its name to Killington on March 2, 1999. For information on the history of Sherburne, Vermont, see, <http://www.killingtontown.com/index.asp?Type=NONE&SEC={E08355F1-9802-4E47-92F5-7970F438016E}>.

<sup>59</sup> Associated Press, "Secession Plan May Go to Vermont House," *Concord [N.H.] Monitor*, 5 December 2005, 1.