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Planters, Rebels and Loyalists

Settlement and Presbyterianism in early Nova Scotia

During Queen Anne's War, or the War of the Spanish Succession as it was called in Europe, British forces captured Acadia from the French in 1710 and three years later the Treaty of Utrecht gave the Maritime mainland region to Britain. Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton were, however, retained by France, and France's construction of the great fortress of Louisbourg on the latter island beginning in 1719 is the key to the history of the whole area in the next forty years. By the terms of the peace treaty the several thousand French farmers around the Bay of Fundy became British subjects with the promise of freedom to practice the Roman Catholic religion. Nevertheless, the Acadians' refusal for decades to take the oath of allegiance to the British Crown and their proximity to the French strong point of Louisbourg made them in the eyes of the other British colonies a serious threat to security. For a brief moment that threat seemed to be removed when an English colonial force captured Louisbourg in 1745, but the fortress was unaccountably returned to France by a peace treaty in 1748.

To counter Louisbourg's strategic location and any influence it might have on the loyalty of the Acadians, the British government founded Halifax as a naval base in 1749 and settled twenty-seven hundred "foreign Protestants" — French and German-speaking refugees from the religious wars in the Rhineland — at Halifax and Lunenburg. These two measures reduced but

did not remove the French threat to Nova Scotia's security, and when another Anglo-French war seemed imminent in the early 1750s, the local governor hastily revived a plan to remove the Acadians to the older British colonies along the Atlantic and give the Acadians' farms to New Englanders. The expulsion of the Acadians was carried out in 1755 and 1756 just as the first battles of the Seven Years' War were taking place in America. Only half of the thirteen thousand Acadians were actually rounded up and deported; the remainder fled to Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, and to present-day New Brunswick which was claimed by both France and Britain. In 1758 British forces ensured the safety of Nova Scotia by again capturing Louisbourg, and amid the ruined fortifications Robert McPherson, the Church of Scotland chaplain to Fraser's Highlanders, performed the first Presbyterian service of worship ever to be held in English within the territory of modern Canada.¹

That same year, 1758, Governor Lawrence of Nova Scotia convened the province's first legislature which immediately passed laws to protect the British and Protestant character of the young colony. Roman Catholics were forbidden to hold land and their priests if found in the province could be sentenced to "perpetual Imprisonment." At the same time the Church of England was declared to be the state church, but dissenters, "whether they be *Calvinists*, *Lutherans*, *Quakers*, or under what Denomination soever," were guaranteed "free Liberty of Conscience." An invitation to settlers was also published in the New England colonies and early in 1759, perhaps because the expected "planters" from New England were not arriving in sufficient numbers, a second invitation was issued stressing that religious freedom was guaranteed in Nova Scotia "to persons of all persuasions, Papists excepted ..."

In the next four years about seven thousand New England planters came to Nova Scotia. The majority were Congregationalists but some fifty Presbyterian families of Scotch-Irish background took up lands around Truro and Onslow in 1762, at the same time that a party of Ulstermen led by their countryman, Colonel Alexander McNutt, a colonizer with wide experience in North America, arrived at neighbouring Londonderry directly from Ireland. During the following dozen years several hundreds of settlers from Ulster came to Londonderry, but no clergyman accompanied any of the groups. The honour of taking the first steps towards providing for Presbyterian worship in Nova Scotia belongs to the planters from New Hampshire who, just eight days after their arrival at Truro, organized a congregation and began building a log church. With support from McNutt's Ulstermen their congregation petitioned the Presbytery of New Brunswick (New Jersey) in the Synod of New York early in 1764 for a minister.

That Synod responded by appointing the Rev. James Lyon who probably arrived in Nova Scotia about the beginning of 1765, and after preaching in Halifax served for seven years at Onslow and at Truro.

Even before this request to the New Brunswick Presbytery, the same settlers had sent two similar petitions to the Associate (Burgher) Synod of the Secession Church in Scotland. In view of later events it is probable that these earlier petitions originated among the Ulster Presbyterians at Londonderry from a feeling that the American Synod was lax regarding the Westminster standards.³ The aggressively mission-oriented Secession Church answered their appeal by sending the Rev. Samuel Kinloch to Truro in 1766. A census of Nova Scotia taken the following year reports only one hundred and fifty Scots in a population of almost twelve thousand, indicating that the vast majority of Presbyterians in the colony must have been of Scotch-Irish origin. The people of Truro were so pleased with Kinloch that they soon asked the Associate Synod to appoint him as their regular supply. At the same time the settlers at Londonderry also asked the Synod to send them a minister of their own. Kinloch, however, would not stay in Nova Scotia and after his return to Scotland in 1769 the Synod sent out the Rev. Daniel Cock who had originally been designated for Nova Scotia in 1767.

Cock visited Truro, accepted the call, and returned to Scotland for his family. Before he actually got settled at Truro in 1771, a second minister, David Smith, arrived from the Associate Synod to fill the permanent charge at Londonderry. In later years the two men not only served their own congregations but as often as possible visited such neighbouring settlements as Tatamagouche, Shubenacadie, Cornwallis, and Pictou, where the first contingent of the great migration of Highland Scots arrived on the *Hector* in 1773, to offer spiritual comfort to Presbyterians who had no minister of their own. In recognition of his work Cock received a grant of land from the government in 1778. He laboured alone at Truro until 1798 when at the age of eighty-one he got an assistant to help him through the remaining seven years of his life and ministry. Smith was still preaching at Londonderry when he died in 1795 at the age of sixty-three, "worn out in a service in which he had exerted himself above many."

Soon after Lyon and Kinloch came to Nova Scotia a third strand of Presbyterianism entered the province in the person of Irish-born James Murdoch, a minister of the General Associate Synod (Anti-burgher). His interest in Nova Scotia had been awakened during his student days at the University of Edinburgh by accounts of Anglican missionary work with the Micmac Indians, and in 1765 he was ordained in Ireland, but not salaried, for "The Province of Nova Scotia, or any other part of the American Continent

where God in his Providence might call him." Murdoch arrived at Halifax in 1766 but finding no opening for work among the Indians preached for a while to the predominantly Congregationalist Dissenting Church before taking up a forty-acre grant amidst the former Acadian farms in Horton Township. There he was joined by his parents and he married a daughter of Malachy Salter, a prominent merchant, member of the legislature, and leader in the Halifax Dissenting Church who, like James Lyon, found nothing incompatible between his religion and the owning of slaves. Although Murdoch suffered from epileptic fits he undertook frequent ministerial tours of several weeks duration to other parts of the province where Scotch-Irish had settled. Eventually he left Horton and spent his later years in the Musquodoboit valley where he seems to have had a larger following, but he was still carrying on his itinerant mission when he drowned in 1799 at the age of fifty-five, leaving his widow and ten children virtually penniless.

The fact that Murdoch was welcomed by the Halifax Church and that a majority of his scattered flock, at least in Horton Township, were Congregationalists testifies to the spirit of co-operation between Presbyterianism and Congregationalism in that period of Nova Scotia's history. Another example of this close relationship can be found in the peculiar ordination in 1770 of Brun Romkes Comingo, a forty-six year old fisherman, to minister to the Dutch Reformed congregation at Lunenburg. Some sixty Germanspeaking families among the "foreign Protestants" in that settlement had separated from the Church of England and built their own house of worship in 1769. When they were unable to obtain a minister from Germany or from Philadelphia, they simply chose one of their own members, Comingo or "Mr. Brown" as he was commonly called, to serve as pastor, and asked Murdoch, Lyon, and two Congregational preachers, John Seccombe and Benajah Phelps, to ordain him. These four men agreed and formed themselves into an ad hoc presbytery on 3 July 1770 in the Dissenting Meeting Place at Halifax where, before an audience that included the governor, members of his Council and leading citizens of Halifax, they proceeded with the examination and ordination of Comingo.9

The officiating clergy announced that they had found Comingo's moral character "fair and unblemished" and that he had given "ample Satisfaction" of "his knowledge of Speculative religion and practical, his ability in rightly dividing the Word; the Articles of his faith, etc." Aware, however, that objections had been raised to Comingo's lack of formal theological training, the four men cited similar historic "Cases of necessity," both in Europe and America, where ordinands "who had not a Liberal Education, or even the knowledge of the Latin tongue" had been "Instrumental in turning

many unto righteousness." As to the suggestion that his ordination would be a sectarian act they replied that "this Charge is groundless" — these Lunenburgers had "in their native Land been brought up in the Calvinistic Presbyterian Religion; and do still....continue of the same Sentiments." To clinch this legal argument the members of this presbytery cited the Nova Scotian law decreeing liberty of conscience, then proceeded to the ordination of Brun Romkes Comingo "to the office of the holy Ministry over the Dutch Calvinistic Presbyterian Congregation of Lunenburg."

This self-appointed presbytery was certainly unprecedented in Nova Scotia's history. The validity of its action has been disputed by some scholars yet the justification for it was expressed by the words, "Cases of necessity." No system of church courts existed in the colony — and no appropriate religious body in the other colonies or in Europe had shown any interest in the religious needs of the settlers. Under such circumstances this first presbytery might well have compared the challenge and their position to that of the Christian church in its earliest days. The laying of hands on Comingo in 1770 by two Presbyterian and two Congregational ministers constituted, despite the peculiarities of circumstances, the first Presbyterian and perhaps the first Protestant ordination in Canadian history. As for Comingo himself, he certainly fulfilled the pious hopes that he might be "Instrumental in turning many unto righteousness" for he served the Dutch Calvinists of Lunenburg as their respected and loved pastor until his death in 1820 at the age of ninety-six.

This affinity and co-operation between Presbyterianism and Congregationalism in pre-Revolutionary Nova Scotia was based on factors that were both historical and accidental. The fundamental connection had been established during the period of the English civil war when common objectives had brought Scottish reformers and English Puritans into a co-operation which, if temporary, had at least produced the Westminster Confession. During the eighteenth century Congregationalism in America had become so latitudinarian and doctrinally vague that when carried to Nova Scotia in the 1760s by the planters it "ranged from a sober likeness to established Scottish Presbyterianism to something almost indistinguishable from the emotional abandonment of a Baptist or Methodist camp-meeting." The very use of the nondescriptive title "Protestant Dissenters" suggests a common awareness of "doctrinal variety and mutual tolerance within their general nonconformity."

It must also be remembered that the absence of any organized presbyteries in the colony meant that nominally Presbyterian congregations existed as independently as any Congregational church, exercising in practice the Congregational principle that every congregation has the authority to call ministers without reference to any other church court. In time the similarity of their theology and actual organization might have led to the absorption of Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia by Congregationalism which was numerically stronger. Certainly the Church of Scotland showed little interest in the religious welfare of the emigrants to Nova Scotia or elsewhere, and the Secession bodies who did possess a sense of overseas mission were relatively so weak that it is questionable if they could have mustered enough support of both finances and ministerial manpower to sustain a prolonged competition with Congregationalism. No such competition developed, however, thanks to the almost total disappearance of Congregationalism in Nova Scotia under the impact of two related movements — Newlightism and the American Revolution.

The Impact of the Revolution and Newlightism

Because the New England colonies were foremost in promoting the American Revolution and because Congregationalism was the dominant religion in New England, the political loyalty of Congregationalists in Nova Scotia was suspect during the revolutionary wars. A considerable number of Congregationalists and at least five Congregational ministers who were sympathetic to the Revolution did in fact leave Nova Scotia and return to New England, but the general feeling of loyalty among Nova Scotians for the British cause was strengthened by Britain's naval control of the Atlantic and by the presence in Halifax of a British garrison that was an economic as well as a military advantage to the colony. To protect Nova Scotia against sedition the provincial council required an oath of loyalty from all persons arriving from the Thirteen Colonies. A Presbyterian minister named Howard who came to Annapolis was allowed to remain after he took the required oath, but nothing more is known about him. 11 James Lyon, the only one of the four Presbyterian clergy in Nova Scotia who had American connections, was a known supporter of the revolutionary cause, and his outspoken political opinions so alienated the Ulster Presbyterians around Londonderry that he seems to have withdrawn from the province even before the War of Independence began. The Presbyterians of Nova Scotia did not, however, share the political viewpoint ascribed to other American Presbyterians, probably because of their closer contacts with British Presbyterianism and because of the influence and example of Cock, Smith, and Murdoch who exhorted their flocks to remain faithful to the mother country. The traditions of loyalism and conservatism that were founded in Nova Scotian Presbyterianism during the Revolution became their distinguishing characteristics for all time.

Coinciding almost exactly with these revolutionary years the Great Awakening or Newlightism arrived in Nova Scotia to complete the destruction of an already weakened Congregationalism. In 1775 Henry Alline, a resident of Falmouth since his family settled there in 1760, began preaching his own revival throughout the settlements. 12 His emotion-packed message was the age-old call to repentance, but his home-made theology was so basically anti-Calvinistic that he got no support from the Presbyterians and little from the doctrinally rigid minority wing of Congregationalism. Nevertheless in the space of an eight-year ministry, before his death at thirty-five in 1784, Alline was responsible for the disruption of nearly every Congregational church in Nova Scotia — only four claimed to have survived this separatist New Light movement intact. The net result of Alline's efforts was the transformation of most Congregationalists into Baptists, or in a minority of cases into Presbyterians. It has been suggested that Alline's deeply troubled spiritual life was the result of listening to James Murdoch's disturbing sermons on man's depravity. There is no record of Murdoch preaching in Falmouth but this connection between himself and Henry Alline is not impossible in the light of Murdoch's habitual wandering and of the proximity of Falmouth to Cornwallis.

The end of the war in 1783 meant the arrival almost overnight of some thirty thousand Loyalists (about twice the pre-Revolutionary population of the colony) and the division of old Nova Scotia into three colonies — Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Cape Breton (which remained separate until 1820). Few of the refugee Loyalists were Presbyterians, but some twenty disbanded Highland soldiers and their families did settle in Pictou during 1783 and 1784. 13 The only Loyalist Presbyterian minister who came to Nova Scotia was Irish-born George Gilmore, Gilmore, a member of the Church of Scotland, had been about fifty years old when he sailed to America in 1769, and after several appointments in the colonies was residing with his family of seven in Connecticut when the revolutionary war began. Because of his support for the loyalist cause he was attacked by mobs and forced to abandon his belongings and flee to a British-controlled area in the interior of New York. After the American victory at Saratoga in 1777 Gilmore took refuge in the colony of Quebec where he became garrison chaplain at Sorel. At the end of the war he could find no employment and so in 1784 he moved once more, this time to Windsor, Nova Scotia, from where he occasionally assisted at the Halifax Protestant Dissenting Meeting House. Seven years later the final stage of Gilmore's odyssey took him to Horton which Murdoch had recently left, and there Gilmore remained until his death in 1811 at the age of ninety-one.14

Both the colonial and British home governments were intent on establishing the Church of England in fact as well as theory as the official religion in the post-revolutionary remnants of the empire in North America. The absence of a proper establishment, and particularly the lack of bishops to promote political loyalty to Britain, had been cited as a major factor among the causes of the Revolution. Sir Guy Carleton, reputed author of the Ouebec Act, commander-in-chief of the British forces in North America and organizer of the great Loyalist migration from New York city to Nova Scotia, reported in 1783 that since most Loyalists were Anglicans and very few were Presbyterians a bishop should be appointed at once to superintend the Church of England in the remaining British American colonies. "The Plan of this Episcopate is indeed so unexceptionable, that many of different Sects... are known to have professed their approbation of it even in times of greater Jealousy; and its principal opposers, I am credibly informed have been in a great measure confined to the Presbyterian Dissenters of whose decided unanimity in the late Revolution their Synod have made their public boast on several occasions."15 Pre-revolutionary Presbyterians in America had certainly been agitated by the so-called "Episcopal Plot," but in Nova Scotia their loyalism, tested during the revolutionary years, their smallness of numbers, and their willingness to acknowledge the political supremacy of the Church of England, explains their silence when Charles Inglis was appointed Bishop of Nova Scotia in 1787.

Despite this insignificant increase in numbers from the Loyalist migration, Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia can look back to the period of the American Revolution as a turning point in its history. The possible rivalry from Congregationalism had been removed for all time and Presbyterianism was now irrevocably oriented toward Britain and away from American influences because of the Revolution — henceforth the way was open in the colony for increased Presbyterian influence and the organization of presbyteries. The years immediately following the Revolution saw the arrival of more Scottish Presbyterian clergy in Nova Scotia. Cock and Smith, the two representatives of the Associate (Burgher) Synod were joined in 1785 by the Rev. Hugh Graham who came to Cornwallis in response to a petition from that settlement for a minister. A year later an Anti-burgher minister, the famous James MacGregor, was sent to Pictou by the General Associate Synod as a result of a similar petition that had been drafted by Cock. 16 The Church of Scotland had still not entered the province directly, but one of its ministers, Thomas Russell, had accepted a call in 1783 to the Protestant Dissenting Church at Halifax where he soon acquired Gilmore as an assistant.

During the war the Halifax congregation, whose religious complexion

was described as "Congregationalism flavoured with Presbyterianism," 17 had lost some members who were rebel sympathizers, and the return of peace was the signal for an internal struggle for control between the remaining Congregational and Presbyterian elements of its membership. A compromise over the form of worship was reached in 1787 when the Presbyterians conceded the use of Isaac Watt's hymns (which they considered "unscriptural") in return for agreement by the Congregationalists that future ministers would, for political rather than religious reasons, be recruited in Scotland. Outwardly their church remained Congregational — independent of any higher ecclesiastical authority — but step by step Presbyterian practices were quietly introduced into its religious life. In 1786 its communion wafers were stamped with the symbol of the burning bush, ¹⁸ and thereafter the church records began to refer to the "Presbyterian Church" of Halifax until finally in 1815 the variety of unofficial names by which it had been known — Protestant Dissenting, Mather's, St. Mather's, and St. Matthew's — was displaced by St. Matthew's Presbyterian Church.

The eventual entry of St. Matthew's into the full stream of Presbyterianism in the colony was undoubtedly facilitated by the call to the Rev. Andrew Brown of the Church of Scotland in 1787, for he proved himself a capable diplomat in smoothing over the congregation's internal divisions. Despite its acknowledged connection with revolution in the Thirteen Colonies to the south, Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia was soon able to establish its firm claim to loyalism. Brown's successful application in 1791 for a government salary of £75 "in a province originally a fief of the Scottish Crown" was supported by Bishop Inglis, but both men insisted that the grant would not form a precedent — government aid was given to Brown as an individual and not to the Church of Scotland.

No detailed description of a rural church or its worship service remains from this period but it can be fairly assumed that they were similar, if more simple, than the form and practices of St. Matthew's, the more sophisticated church in the capital city. Where country churches were rough log or clapboard structures, St. Matthew's boasted a tower outside, and on the inside box pews along the walls for rent to the wealthier members, long benches in the centre to accommodate the "poorer classes," a rear gallery nicknamed the "Devil's playboy" because it was the usual haunt of restless and somewhat unruly boys, and a high pulpit reached by winding stairs and surmounted by a sounding board. Until 1795 St. Matthew's was unheated in winter so the minister often appeared wearing a heavy cloak, skullcap or hood, and knitted gloves or fur mittens. The congregation dressed appropriately for the inside weather and carried heated stones or boxes of live coals to warm their feet.

Dogs could also serve as footwarmers but they had a tendency to wander and quarrel with others of their kind which did nothing to increase the decorum of the occasion.

Morning service began at nine with the reading of "bills"—requests for remembrance in prayer. The rest of the order of service was not dissimilar from modern practices except that worship went on for hours. Scripture reading was always accompanied by exposition which was a popular form of religious education. The lengthy sermon served the same purpose but the excessive longwindedness of St. Matthew's ministers finally produced a silent protest in 1795 — a clock mounted on the gallery in full and unavoidable view of the pulpit. Congregational singing in that day was notable more for the enthusiasm than the skill of the singers. In the absence of any choir or instrumental music, musical portions of the service were led by the precentor (often the local schoolmaster) who sat directly below the pulpit and started the singing of the announced tune by giving the key on a pitch pipe or tuning fork. Each member then roared out his own version of the chosen tune, of which there were, fortunately or unfortunately, only about a dozen in use. Because books were scarce and reading a rare accomplishment the Psalms were "lined" — each line being read out in turn by the precentor and then sung by the congregation. The Bay State Psalm Book used in St. Matthew's contained some psalms one hundred and twenty lines long which, when "lined," could occupy half an hour.

The afternoon service, starting at two p.m., was the occasion for admitting new members and publicly chastizing known sinners. Baptisms were performed exclusively in the church usually in the first week of an infant's life with no exceptions made even for the winter's chill that might pervade the building. Communion service, held only two or three times per year, was the most solemn function in the life of the congregation. On those occasions the benches were removed from the centre of the church to accommodate one long continuous table. The communion service began with the minister inviting communicants to sit at the table to receive the elements and then the table was "fenced" by the rigorous exclusion of all nonmembers or members in bad standing. In rural communities, where a church building was small or nonexistent, the communion table might be set in the open air if the weather permitted. In all these aspects of worship and in the sacraments, Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia conformed closely to the practices long established in Britain, so that the church in the colony provided a vital link between life in the Old World and the New to relieve the immigrants' feelings of loneliness and exile.

One prerequisite for the future growth of Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia

had to be the creation of a presbytery that could claim the adherence of all branches of the church. When sending Graham to Cornwallis, the Associate Synod had authorized him along with Cock and Smith to form a presbytery for Nova Scotia. After a preliminary meeting held at Truro in June, 1786, by these three ministers and the elders of Truro, they met again in the same church with one elder from Londonderry early in August to inaugurate officially the Presbytery of Truro. Although their authority came from the Burgher Synod in Scotland, it was hoped that the ministers of the other Presbyterian bodies in the colony would support this presbytery from a realization that the issues dividing Scottish Presbyterianism had no validity in a land where the immensity of the challenge was a more divine imperative than denominationalism. Gilmore was present at this presbytery and was accepted as a corresponding member, but MacGregor, the Antiburgher minister of Pictou who attended this and a few subsequent meetings, refused to join, and St. Matthew's Church in Halifax was not yet ready to surrender its autonomy to any presbytery.

Despite these weaknesses the Presbytery of Truro was a bold undertaking for so small a company in a day when the primitive conditions of communications in Nova Scotia required that ministers have rugged bodies as well as dedicated hearts in order that the Word of God might be heard in all corners. To leave one's parish and visit other settlements imposed long trips, often on foot, in the most inclement weather, to preach in rude churches or more often in private homes. The need was great and growing with each passing year, but the labourers in this vast vineyard were few. The passing of another generation would be required before the old world differences were sufficiently reduced by the realities of colonial life to permit the emergence of a truly Nova Scotian presbytery embracing all traditions of Presbyterianism.

The Beginnings of Presbyterianism in the Canadas

After the capture of Louisbourg the British conquest of the remainder of New France was completed by the surrender of Quebec City in 1759 and of Montreal, the last French stronghold one year later. Until the Treaty of Paris confirmed the transfer of Canada to the British crown in 1763, the conquered lands of the St. Lawrence Valley — Great Lakes basin were technically under military occupation, but there was never any serious doubt that the French territory and its seventy thousand inhabitants would be retained by Great Britain after the war. The fact that these "new subjects" of King George III were French-speaking Roman Catholics presented both political and religious problems because the practice of the Roman Catholic religion was proscribed

by English law. In 1763 the stated intention of British policy was to resolve these difficulties by assimilating the French Canadians to English culture, English language, English laws and the faith of the Church of England. That church was declared the official religion of Britain's newest North American colony, and English common law, freehold land tenure, and an elected legislative assembly were promised in an attempt to encourage English-speaking settlers to migrate there from the other British colonies along the Atlantic seaboard.

This policy of assimilation was quickly abandoned in the face of the realities of the situation. The colony of Quebec received so few settlers that virtually every aspect of pre-Conquest life was simply allowed to remain intact. A decade after the Peace of Paris the only English-speaking Protestants in the province were civil servants and merchants, and most of the latter group were engaged in the management of the fur trade. Perhaps ninety-nine per cent of the population was still French-speaking and Roman Catholic. Thus the Quebec Act passed in 1774 merely recognized unavoidable facts when it guaranteed to French Canadians the French civil law, the traditional seigneurial system of landholding, and the virtual recognition of the Church of Rome. Despite government support for the Church of England, that body had not been able to win the allegiance of the French Canadians. Neither had it gained the adherence of the Scottish and American merchants who made up most of the tiny English-speaking community in the colony.

Two Scottish regiments, the 42nd Murray Highlanders — more popularly remembered as the Black Watch — and the 78th Fraser's Highlanders, both of which had been present at the capture of Louisbourg and Quebec, provided the seed for the growth of Presbyterianism in the new colony. McPherson, chaplain to Fraser's, had held services for his men during their first winter in Quebec, and after their tour of duty some officers and men decided to remain there when peace was restored.²¹ Taking advantage of the disruption in the fur trade, several of these disbanded soldiers joined with American colonists to take over control of that lucrative business and in so doing made the Canadian fur trade for all time into a predominantly Scottish enterprise. This group, along with Scottish garrison troops, provided the nucleus for Presbyterian worship in Ouebec City after the Rev. George Henry, a minister of the Church of Scotland and former army chaplain, organized in 1765 a small congregation that met in part of the former Jesuit College and continued to worship in those borrowed quarters for the next forty years. In 1784 the Rev. Alexander Spark, a recent graduate from Aberdeen, arrived in Quebec as private tutor to a wealthy family and soon after began to assist Henry who was now seventy-five years of age. Within four years Henry's health failed and although he lived until 1795, his religious duties had to be assumed entirely by Spark.

The fur trade was centred primarily in Montreal, but the Presbyterians in that city still had no church or minister and showed little interest in obtaining their own religious services. For the most part they were content to worship with the Church of England until the American Revolution brought them the Rev. John Bethune, Church of Scotland minister and distant relative of the famous Cardinal Archbishop David Beaton. Bethune, another graduate of Aberdeen, had migrated to South Carolina with members of his family shortly before the beginning of the Revolution and when the fighting commenced he was appointed chaplain to a Loyalist regiment of Scottish settlers, the 84th or Royal Highland Emigrants. Captured by the rebels in 1776, Bethune spent some time as a prisoner in Philadelphia until he was released in an exchange of prisoners and moved to Halifax. There he was active in recruiting more men for his regiment from among disbanded members of the old 9th and 42nd. In the last stages of the war Bethune was in New York City where he married in 1782, and a year later was serving on Carleton Island where his first child was born.²² It is known that he visited the Loyalist settlers at nearby Kingston on several occasions before his regiment was disbanded in 1784.23 After a year at Oswegatchie Bethune moved to Montreal and immediately formed a congregation of Presbyterians in that city.

With the end of the War of Independence several thousand Loyalists, both disbanded soldiers and civilians, made their way into the "western parts" of the old province of Quebec to settle in small communities along the upper St. Lawrence and the shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. As a former officer Bethune was entitled to land grants and it was probably the receipt of three thousand acres for himself and members of his young family that prompted him to leave Montreal after a sojourn of only one year to take up residence at Williamstown in Glengarry County. The population of the area included Dutch, German, and English settlers but the vast majority were Highlanders from disbanded Scottish regiments, who professed either Presbyterianism or Roman Catholicism. During the remaining twenty-eight years of his life John Bethune ministered to the Presbyterians in Williamstown, Martintown, Lancaster and Cornwall, where his loyalism and his ability to preach in Gaelic made him a particularly popular and respected pastor.

In the old province of Quebec as in Nova Scotia, the arrival of these Loyalists marked the beginning of a new era in colonial history. Soon after their arrival the Loyalists had begun to complain about the terms of the Quebec Act which placed them under French civil law and seigneurial land tenure, and denied them the other basic right of British subjects — to be governed by an elected Assembly. It was to redress these grievances of the

Loyalists that the British parliament passed the Constitutional Act of 1791, providing for Quebec's partition into two provinces; one, Lower Canada, predominantly French and the other, Upper Canada, English-speaking, with English common law, and freehold tenure, and representative assemblies in both. Continuing the religious policy already created for the Maritimes and the old province of Quebec of establishing Anglicanism as the state religion, the Constitutional Act provided explicit means to endow the Church of England. For the "Maintenance of a Protestant Clergy" in the two Canadas, lands "equal in Value to the Seventh Part" of all secular land grants were to be reserved to provide "Rents, Profits or Emoluments" for the support of the Protestant religion. In addition, parsonages or rectories "according to the Establishment of the Church of England" would be created in each township and each rectory would be endowed with its own glebe lands.²⁴ There was no question in the minds of the framers of this law that they were providing for the Church of England and for no other denomination, but the use of the expression "Protestant Clergy" in connection with the provision of oneseventh of the surveyed lands as "Clergy Reserves" became for later generations the most fruitful bone of religious contention in Canadian history.

Despite John Bethune's unquestionable loyalty to the British Crown, he became involved in the mid 1790s in a controversy with Upper Canada's first lieutenant-governor, the determined John Graves Simcoe, who considered any opposition to his policies as virtual treason. Among Simcoe's many ambitions for Upper Canada was the hope that all its inhabitants would universally embrace the Anglican faith, and one measure to promote that end was his Marriage Act of 1793. 25 This law asserted that all church marriages in Upper Canada must be performed by Anglican priests (of whom there were only two in Upper Canada at that time) — weddings conducted by other clergy were invalid and the children of such unions would be illegitimate. This exclusivist law was opposed even by prominent Anglicans but the reaction of Presbyterians was outspokenly hostile. A Presbyterian petition of 1795 against the Act was sidetracked by Simcoe in the provincial legislature but the following year a similar petition for repeal of the obnoxious legislation reached the government from Presbyterians and magistrates in the eastern end of the province.²⁶ Simcoe was so sure that Bethune was the author of the petition that he advised the Legislature and the Colonial Office in Britain that such an improper request was "the Product of a wicked Head and a most disloyal Heart." He warned that, as governor, he would assuredly veto any and every attempt to alter the terms of his Marriage Act.²⁷

On second thought Simcoe suggested that the Anglican bishop of Quebec might be allowed to license dissenting ministers to solemnize marriages, a

procedure that would certainly have given his government considerable political leverage. In part Bethune's actions regarding the Marriage Act may have been complicated by Simcoe's refusal after 1792 to continue to pay him the salary of £50 authorized by the Colonial Office in 1789. No less than one hundred and fifty Presbyterian families had protested Simcoe's decision and apparently the salary was subsequently restored. A partial solution to the claim of non-Anglican denominations to perform marriages was achieved in 1797, after Simcoe had left Upper Canada, by an amendment that extended the right to clergy of "the church of Scotland, or Lutherans, or Calvinists." This compromise, however incomplete in its recognition of religious pluralism, remained unchanged for the next thirty years. ²⁹

A Decade of Disappointments

For the three years following Bethune's departure from Montreal there is no record of any Presbyterian services being held in the city. If his flock still went to church they reverted to their earlier practice of attending at the Anglican church. In 1790, however, Presbyterianism in Montreal was put on a permanent basis by the unexpected appearance of the Rev. John Young. Although Scottish-born and educated, Young had been received as a probationer by the Presbytery of New York in 1785 and three years later was ordained to Schenectady. After two years there Young was charged by his parishioners with some unspecified offence, whereupon he asked to be relieved of his church and without awaiting presbytery's decision he went to Montreal. His conduct was censured by his presbytery but when he professed "his unfeigned sorrow and repentance" Young was readmitted to the presbytery and after a second visit to Montreal in 1791 was permitted to remain there with the congregation gathered by Bethune.

Perhaps as part of Young's price for settling in Montreal the congregation built a church in 1792 to seat six hundred and fifty persons. Until the new structure was completed the congregation worshipped for one year in the church of the Recollets, which the Anglicans had used from 1769 to 1789. When their own church was ready for occupation the Presbyterians wished to show their appreciation by a gift of money to the Recollet friars, but when this was politely refused the congregation presented them with two hogsheads of Spanish wine and a box of candles, worth in all some £14.31 The new Presbyterian church was variously known as the "Scotch Church," "the Protestant Presbyterian Church" and the "Presbyterian Church of Montreal,"



Kirk of St. George 1790



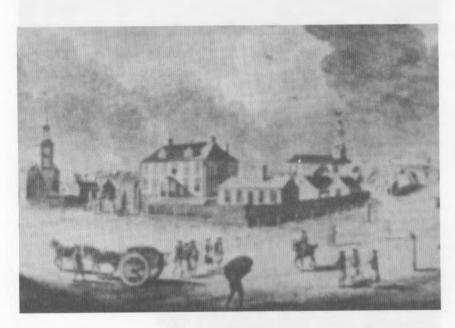
A Communion Gathering in the olden time



Dutch German Church



Brun Romkes Comingo



Halifax Meeting House

but it is best remembered as St. Gabriel after the street on which it stood. The subscription list for the building reads like a who's who of the Montreal merchants of the day, including virtually every nabob of the fur trade — Alexander Mackenzie and Simon Fraser, famous explorers of the Arctic and Pacific regions, James McGill, benefactor of the university that bears his name, the Forsyths and John Richardson, whose trading company still operates in the grain and stock markets, William McGillivray, chief director of the North West Company and opponent of Lord Selkirk's Red River settlement, to name only the most historically outstanding contributors. The Presbyterians of Montreal were proud of their new house of worship and pleased to have Young as their minister, perhaps even more so when the Governor, Lord Dorchester, granted him a government salary of £50.

Ironically, while Bethune, Henry and Spark laboured as essentially independent ministers in Canada without any support or oversight from a higher church authority, Young and his Montreal congregation belonged to a recognized presbytery and that body was part of the American Presbyterian Church. So far the Presbyterian churches of the British Isles had shown little interest in the spiritual welfare of Presbyterianism in British North America. Obviously then, in the two Canadas as in Nova Scotia, any steps towards church organization would have to come from the United States (which was politically undesirable), or from the active concern shown by ministers and laity in the colonies themselves. It is not clear who initiated the idea of forming an indigenous presbytery in the Canadas, but by early 1793 Spark and Bethune had established themselves as "the Presbytery of Montreal" and Young had applied to the American church for permission to transfer his membership to the new body. The Presbytery in New York State, "having taken under consideration the remote and local situation in which Mr. Young was placed,"32 agreed to his request and the newly formed Presbytery of Montreal thereupon gained its third clergy member.

In view of the bitter political antagonism aroused short years before by the American Revolution, the close and friendly relations between American Presbyterianism and the Montreal congregation in the 1790s might seem unusual at first sight. National feelings did not, however, seem to affect the Christian churches in North America during the post-Revolutionary period. Nor was this situation peculiar to Presbyterianism — Anglican clergy in the British provinces continued in friendly and intimate correspondence with their brother clergymen in the new republic, and American Methodist and Baptist missionaries regularly brought the Christian message into the remote and isolated settlements of the provinces now inhabited by men who had opposed the Revolution by force of arms less than a generation earlier.

"The Gospel of Christ knows no political boundaries, as it takes account of no nationality or tongue." At least until the War of 1812, this statement was no pious dream but a fact in the case of British North America.

Soon after the formation of the Presbytery of Montreal, other Presbyterian clergymen appeared in Upper Canada. The first, Jabez Collver, had little formal education but because of his piety had been ordained in New Jersey several years before he settled in Norfolk County in 1783 at the invitation of Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe. Collver immediately organized a Presbyteriantype congregation which he served faithfully until his death twenty-five years later, but because of his remote situation he never belonged to any presbytery and probably never saw another Presbyterian minister in the course of his life in Upper Canada. The second, John Dunn, was licensed to preach by the Church of Scotland and had ministered in Albany, New York, for several years before coming to Stamford near Niagara Falls in 1784. A congregation is believed to have been organized at Stamford as early as 1785 — two years before Bethune settled at Williamstown — and a church was erected there in 1791. Dunn's connection with this congregation ended after two years when he announced that he no longer believed the doctrines of the church and withdrew to become a merchant.

Simcoe's antagonistic attitude towards Bethune was repeated in his comments about Dunn. "Unfortunately the last year a Presbyterian Clergyman having arrived from Scotland the Inhabitants of all denominations [at Niagara] built a place of worship, so that I apprehend very little assistance will be expected from them in the Erection of the Episcopal Church." On the eve of his departure from Upper Canada in 1796 the governor did, however, support the applications of Dunn for twelve hundred acres of land, of Collver for one thousand, and of Bethune for the remainder of his allotment as a military chaplain. He Bethune's case Simcoe's apparent reversal of policy regarding government grants can be explained by the fact that Upper Canada had little cash but seemingly endless quantities of land that could be and were used indiscriminantly to reward friends of the administration or deserving individuals, so that the disposal of a few hundred acres to private persons was a routine matter for the provincial land board.

A considerable number of German-speaking settlers had arrived in the counties of Stormont and Dundas, on the upper St. Lawrence. Most of these people were Lutherans, but the presence of a sizable number of Presbyterians among them attracted the attention of John Ludwig Broeffle, a Dutch Reformed Church minister then preaching close by in New York State. Broeffle settled at Williamsburg in 1785 and served the German Presbyterians there until his death thirty years later, although his annual salary

never amounted to more than £100. The fifth Presbyterian clergyman known to have settled in Upper Canada before the end of the century was the renowned Robert McDowall. Unlike the others who had come to the colony as private individuals, McDowall was the first missionary appointed by any Presbyterian body. Born in New York State about 1768, he was sent by the Albany Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church to minister to the Loyalist settlements around the Bay of Quinte. After arriving at Kingston early in 1798, McDowall travelled as a missionary at large for two years until three congregations were formed and three churches built atBath and in the neighbouring townships. His missionary visitations in later years carried him as far afield as Prescott and London but his primary responsibility was always the Bay of Quinte district where he laboured faithfully until his death in 1841.³⁵

In 1795 the Rev. Robert Addison, Anglican missionary at Niagara, recorded that an unnamed Presbyterian minister was settled among the Mohawk Indians on the Grand River. Addison was disturbed that the newcomer was "much caressed by the common people," but hoped he would nevertheless be "of use since he seems liberal and well informed" and could reduce Addison's travel among the local populace "as the greatest part are Presbyterians." This person could not have been John Dunn who had already been Addisons neighbour for one year, but whoever he was he passed from Canadian history without any other trace. Two American ministers, John McDonald and "Rev. Mr. Mars," visited and baptized at Niagara in 1792 and 1801 but neither remained there. 37

Even without the inclusion of these newcomers in Upper Canada, the Presbytery of Montreal had achieved nothing during a decade. There is no record that it ever met — perhaps the great distances to be travelled by horse over primitive roads were a factor; perhaps the lack of any essential business such as an ordination was another deterrent. In any case by 1800 Young had become an alcoholic and in 1802 the Montreal congregation decided to dissolve their arrangement with him. He had never received a call to Montreal and had never been inducted so that the relationship was a purely private affair — even the New York presbytery had referred to his presence in Montreal simply as a "stated supply." Young served Dunn's former charge at Stamford for only two years before leaving for Nova Scotia where he died some years later, but his name is recorded in the Niagara baptismal register in 1807.

Thus two generations after George Henry gathered the first congregation in Quebec City, the achievements and growth of Presbyterianism in Upper and Lower Canada appeared disappointingly small. The "mother churches" had largely ignored their offspring and responsibilities in all the colonies;

the handful of dedicated clergy had taken up their duties from a sense of personal obligation alone; the faithful still waited patiently for spiritual ministrations or else joined some other Christian denomination that did serve their community. The creation of an indigenous presbytery in Nova Scotia had been a partial success, but the parallel movement in the Canadas must be judged a total failure. Perhaps local initiative had done all that it could, considering the retarded state of communications in the colonies and the isolation of Presbyterians in widely separated pockets of settlement. The first concern of the pioneers was naturally the clearing of land and the building of homes to ensure their very survival. Except for the wealthy merchants of Montreal, Quebec, or Halifax, these people had scant funds available to offer to the support of religion or education. The two most promising sources of hope for church extension had to be the state and the organized churches at home, but the political authorities had given their support almost exclusively to the Church of England and the churches across the Atlantic were dead to their Christian mission. The dawning of the nineteenth century seemingly offered little in the way of promising prospects for the cause of Presbyterianism in British North America.