

The Significance of Evangelical Presbyterian Politics in the Construction of State Schooling: A Case Study of the Pictou District, 1817-1866*

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B. ANNE WOOD

The Significance of Evangelical Presbyterian Politics in the Construction of State Schooling: A Case Study of the Pictou District, 1817-1866*

CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL HISTORIANS HAVE ABLY DOCUMENTED the process by which mid-19th century reformers established state schooling in Upper Canada.¹ Yet while recognizing the importance of evangelical religion in the construction process, they fail to explain precisely how it was linked to schooling. In the Maritime context, the role played by evangelical religion in defining the urban community has been perceptively analysed by T.W. Acheson in his history of Saint John.² But there is little literature concerning the way in which rural attitudes were influenced by evangelicals who were promoting state schooling.

Nor have Maritime religious historians adequately explored the significant links between evangelical religion and the development of state schooling. Although they have paid a good deal of attention to the religious ideology of some evangelical groups, especially those influenced by the radical Henry Alline, they have concentrated on the Baptists.³ Other Protestant denominations, notably the dissidents, have received far less attention. Only Laurie Stanley's work on the Glasgow Colonial Society [GCS] in Cape Breton has dealt with the important link between evangelical Presbyterianism and the promotion of state schooling.⁴ It is unfortunate that other scholars have not taken up this very

*The author would like to thank Phillip Buckner, Gail Campbell and the *Acadiensis* readers for their constructive criticism, as well as Allan Dunlop for finding particularly apt diary references from the manuscript files of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

- 1 Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West 1836-1871* (London, Ont., 1988); R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston, 1990); Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1988).
- 2 T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto, 1985).
- 3 Terrence Murphy, "The Religious History of Atlantic Canada: The State of the Art", *Acadiensis*, XV, 1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 152-77. Judith Fingard adds that the religious ideology promulgated by George Rawlyk and his "disciples" has defined evangelicalism in an individualistic, narrow manner with no social implications. See, Judith Fingard, "Ideas on the Periphery or Peripheral Ideas?: The Intellectual and Cultural History of Atlantic Canada", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 24, 3 (Fall 1989), p. 37.
- 4 Laurie Stanley, *The Well-Watered Garden: The Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton, 1798-1860* (Sydney, 1983), especially Chapter 6.

significant theme, for the evangelical Presbyterian influence on education in Nova Scotia was arguably greater than that of the Baptists during the formative period.⁵

The origins of this evangelical Presbyterian influence were in Scotland. In his seminal study of Mount Allison University, John Reid notes that parent missionary societies regularly used their colonial missionary activities to unify divided congregations at home.⁶ This theme should be further developed in connection with Maritime schooling. Evangelical church and school policy in British North America needs to be examined in relation to the parent church. In the case of Presbyterianism, the struggle between Moderates (Kirk) and Evangelicals for control of the Scottish General Assembly was critical in the years leading to the Disruption of 1843, when Thomas Chalmers led a substantial minority of ministers and lay people out of the Established Church of Scotland [C of S] to form the Free Protestant Church of Scotland. The Free Church, which was formed in British North America [B.N.A.] in 1844, included many leaders who had been missionaries in the colonies since 1817.

Although all Presbyterian groups subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the evangelicals had always been more concerned about the importance of social activism than about doctrinal issues. Their missionary activities were successful from the beginning because evangelical C of S leaders realized that the whole church, including all classes, native people and immigrants, and not just the clergy, should be involved.⁷ From the 1820s, evangelical activists had regarded politics and political confrontation as a legitimate sphere of religious activity. This attitude led evangelicals, both in Scotland and in British North America, to become involved in public education as well. In Scotland, for instance, in 1820, the evangelical leader Thomas Chalmers opened two sessional schools in the east end of Glasgow in an attempt to transfer the social relationships of a rural parish to an urban context. David Stow, a Glasgow merchant, worked closely with Chalmers and, in 1837, founded the Glasgow Normal School, whose teaching methods would be brought to Nova Scotia by Alexander Forrester in the 1850s. Meanwhile, George Lewis, whose *Scotland a half-educated nation* (1834) also focused attention on the urban poor, strongly advocated a national system of schooling, embracing all classes and directed by the state.⁸ Nova Scotian educational

5 Margaret Conrad, "'An Abiding Conviction of the Paramount Importance of Christian Education': Theodore Harding Rand as Educator, 1860-1900", in Robert S. Wilson, ed., *An Abiding Conviction: Maritime Baptists and Their World* (Hantsport, 1988), p. 164: "Baptists... harboured a grudging sense that Presbyterian influence had undue weight at provincially funded institutions such as the Normal School and the recently resuscitated Dalhousie College".

6 John Reid, *Mount Allison University: A History, to 1963, Vol. 1: 1843-1914* (Toronto, 1984), p. 8.

7 Richard William Vaudry, "The Free Church in Canada, 1844-1861", Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1984, p. 148.

8 R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland* (Oxford, 1983), p. 12.

reformers looked to these evangelical Scottish examples in developing their own ideals and goals. Ironically, the Scottish evangelical leaders who fostered the belief in popular education were political conservatives. Reformers like Chalmers argued that common schooling, by providing the basis for a controlled upward mobility, would help to ensure social harmony. In an era before the new factory proletariat had appeared to challenge their values and lifestyle, Scotland's traditional social authorities found this argument attractive, fully endorsing the implied ethic of individual achievement upon which it was based. Essentially, then, "this Tory-clerical ideal...evoked a hierarchical paternalistic society innocent of modern ideas of class [and] bound together...by relationships of a personal, organic kind".⁹

This ideal of a parochial community grouped around the church was shattered by the Disruption of 1843. Once competing churches had come into existence, the transfer of authority from the church to the state and from parochial to public schooling was accelerated. This transfer of authority represented, as well, a response to the demands of the growing middle class that schools and universities should come under closer public (i.e. middle-class) control, and that "their teaching should cease to be attuned to the training of the clergy".¹⁰ Classical academies offering professional training, which had marked secondary education during the first half of the century, gave way to English and commercial schools teaching modern subjects. Instead of academies competing with universities in higher level subjects, the tendency in the early 19th century was for burgh (town) schools and academies to merge, in effect putting grammar school and college level education under one roof. All these Scottish educational trends were promoted in Nova Scotia, from the moment of their arrival, by evangelical C of S clergy.

This paper will demonstrate that the internal politics of the Church of Scotland, its missionary policies and the social reformist agenda of its evangelical leaders, both in Scotland and in Nova Scotia, were important factors in the shaping of public opinion in support of state schooling in Nova Scotia. The primarily urban Scottish leaders used sophisticated social activist strategies to create a demand for state schooling in Pictou County. There were three phases to this political campaign. At the beginning of the first phase, the evangelical activities of the C of S in British North America included the promotion of common schooling as well as the provision of missionaries (ministers and catechists) to remote settlements.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

10 *Ibid.* As an example of the rigorous standards set for this professional first phase of academic education and the importance of science in the Scottish system of education, see, B. Anne Wood, "Thomas McCulloch's Use of Science in Promoting a Liberal Education", *Acadiensis*, XVII, 1 (Autumn 1987), pp. 56-73; and, "Schooling For Presbyterian Leaders: The College Years of Pictou Academy, 1816-1838", in William Klempa, *et al*, eds., *The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture* (forthcoming).

A major reason for this missionary activity was to win adherents back to the C of S and away from the United Secessionists, a dissident sect of Presbyterians whose Antiburgher ancestors rejected church establishment in any form.¹¹ Because the Secessionists dominated Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia during the 18th and early 19th centuries, the struggle between the two Presbyterian groups, C of S and Secessionists, became particularly bitter, especially in the Pictou district, the centre of Secessionist hegemony. This struggle, which focused on Pictou Academy, entered a new phase when the Reverend Thomas McCulloch found himself forced to cede to others some of his authority over school affairs. During the second phase, membership on educational boards, commissions and councils led to greater evangelical influence on school policy in the district and in Nova Scotia generally. Secondary school policy underwent a significant shift as a result; by 1832 the Pictou Academy had changed its curriculum from a college-level, professional training programme, to a more broadly practical programme which appealed to a much larger constituency. And evangelical Presbyterians led the provincial campaign of school reformers to replace the subscription method of payment with a state system of compulsory assessment for the support of schools. In the third phase the evangelical school promoters used their rhetorical and social activist skills to bring about a reconciliation of feuding groups. Despite their small numbers in Pictou County (just 3,000 of the 20,000 Presbyterians in the county in 1849),¹² Free Church Presbyterians played a significant role in promoting uniform textbooks for common schools (Chambers series), a child-centred pedagogy based on the Normal School practices of David Stow in Scotland, a Union Pictou Academy and support for compulsory assessment, achieving a state system of schools by 1866. A Pictou Academy graduate, J. William Dawson, and Alexander Forrester, a Free Church minister, became the first and second superintendents of education in Nova Scotia in 1850 and 1854 respectively; both were strongly influenced in their school campaigns by the tactics and ideological assumptions of their evangelical Presbyterian precursors. In explaining the evolution of the political process directed by the evangelical Presbyterian leaders, this paper will concentrate on their tactics and the effects of their policies on the schooling process, using the Pictou district as a case study.

11 As Richard Vaudry points out, the United Secessionist Presbyterians in Upper and Lower Canada argued that Christian and non-Christian magistrates, for instance, had the same responsibilities and both should govern in accordance with natural law. See, Vaudry, "The Free Church in Canada", p. 368; and his monograph, *The Free Church in Victorian Canada 1844-1861* (Waterloo, 1989).

12 In the 1851 census returns for Pictou County, the following numbers were recorded for each denomination: Church of Scotland, 9,886; Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia, 7,665; Free Church, 3,588; Roman Catholic, 2,031; Church of England, 1,105; Methodist, 334; Baptist, 197; Quaker, 37; Universalist, 4; Congregationalist, 1; Other denominations, 56: cited in Pictou Academy, Annual Report to Lieutenant-Governor, Pictou, 27 November 1854, p. 8, Micro: Places, Pictou Academy, Reel IV, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS].

The first C of S missionary to arrive in the Pictou district was the Reverend Donald Fraser in 1817. At this time the population of the district was estimated to be 8,737, largely as a result of the influx of Highlanders to the region.¹³ Like Fraser, the C of S members who arrived in the district during this period had been deeply affected by the evangelical awakening in Scotland, especially evident in the shires of Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, at the beginning of the 19th century. The Highland immigrants left Scotland by choice because of the transformation of traditional Gaelic society under the impact of commercial land development, the rise in tenants' rents and the beginning of land clearances for sheep farming. Their move to Nova Scotia, then, could be seen as a protest against the erosion of their social and economic status, but also as a deliberate choice to preserve the moral fibre of their closely-knit communities. As a result, instead of stopping at the various port settlements, such as Pictou, the settlers and their families moved on to remote, wooded areas where they could continue their subsistence farming and better protect their community and evangelical religious values. Fraser, serving at MacLellan's Mountain, was exactly the type of minister they admired. He was a great Gaelic orator and a charismatic leader. Neither the C of S nor the Antiburgher Secessionists who controlled Pictou Presbyterianism helped these rural settlers. In Scotland the Moderates dominated the C of S General Assembly and sent few ministers to B.N.A. to guide the large number of Scottish immigrants. The Antiburgher ministers in Nova Scotia were scathing in their denunciation of the patronage practices of the Established C of S, thereby offending the Highlanders for whom a "word spoken, not full of esteem for that Church, was to them an insult, difficult to be forgiven".¹⁴ Secessionist sects, confined largely to the towns and cities of the Scottish Lowlands, had been unknown in the Highlands. Moreover most Antiburgher ministers spoke only English, whereas the Highlanders were largely Gaelic-speaking.

The plight of these rural Highland immigrants was broadcast to Scotland by a number of North American Presbyterians. The Reverend James MacGregor, an Antiburgher pioneer, wrote a letter to the journal, *North American Society*, in 1815, requesting more Scottish Gaelic-speaking ministers. Fraser and the Reverend George Burns, who worked in the Saint John area, sent lengthy reports to the Reverend Robert Burns, brother of George and editor of the *Christian Instructor*. Burns and Dr. Andrew Thomson, both leading Scottish evangelicals, used these

13 D. Campbell and R.A. Maclean estimate that between 1815 and 1820 approximately 1,450 Scots had landed at Pictou, that 1,674 Scots arrived in Pictou between 1815 and 1822, and that by 1838, 3,733 Scots had landed there. The population in the district increased from 8,737 in 1817 to 13,949 in 1827 and to 21,449 by 1838. See their monograph, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto, 1974), p. 46. In 1829 the C of S minister, the Reverend Dugald McKichan, estimated that there were 37,225 Presbyterians in the province, 12,429 in the Pictou district: see, Dugald McKichan to Rev. Dr. [George] Burns, Merigomish, 21 August 1829, Micro: Societies, GCS, Reel I, Vol. II, No. 88, PANS.

14 Rev. Alexander Maclean, *The Story of the Kirk in Nova Scotia* (Pictou, 1911), p. 42.

as fuel for their ongoing attack on the Moderates. In an attempt to prod the colonial committee of the Scottish General Assembly into increased missionary activity, and to advance the interests of their evangelical party, they began to publicize these North American reports. Burns also strongly supported the efforts of the Reverend Kenneth John Mackenzie in 1823 to form the Kirk [C of S] party in Pictou, the seat of Secessionism. Together with Fraser, the Reverend John Martin of Halifax and Hugh McLeod of West River, these C of S leaders formed the Scotch Presbytery of Halifax. One of their first policy initiatives was to carry out missionary activities throughout north-eastern Nova Scotia in a bid to win the support of these Scottish settlers for the C of S. They had no compunction about encroaching on Secessionist territory. In July 1824, one of the first divinity graduates of Pictou Academy, Hugh Ross, having been promised a post at the Gut of Canso at the conclusion of the tour, travelled around Cape Breton for four months with the Reverend Thomas Trotter, a Secessionist minister stationed at Antigonish. Not to be outdone, Fraser, accompanied by another C of S minister, the Reverend John MacLennan of Prince Edward Island, quickly followed in Ross' footsteps but made it clear that he had no connection with the ministers in Pictou. According to Ross, Fraser told his audiences

that Dr. McGregor [*sic*] several years ago preached against the Church of Scotland, declaring that the ministers who belong to her are *Thieves and Robbers Whoremongers and Adulterers*. Further he stated, that the pretended Seminary at Pictou was improperly founded; that the Teachers of that Institution were not possessed of sufficient learning and ability to educate ministers; that ministers could not be properly licensed nor ordained at Pictou; that young men who proceeded from the Academy at Pictou had not the requisite learning for ministers, and should therefore be discountenanced by and rejected by every vacant settlement.¹⁵

This much-publicized mission by Fraser, which wrested the allegiance of the Cape Breton population away from the Antiburghers, signalled a turning-point for the C of S and its Nova Scotian Kirk ministers. Henceforth, the Scottish public would redouble its efforts to minister to the educational and spiritual needs of the many Highlanders who had settled in remote communities of British North America. The Scottish evangelical leaders had effectively used

15 H. Ross to T. McCulloch, 20 December 1826, MG1, vol. 553, no. 131, PANS. Underlining in original. Ross lost his post as a result of Fraser's campaign. On the other hand, Fraser's sermons were poor compared to the powerful Norman McLeod who had displaced him in popularity at East River. In 1820, Fraser charged McLeod, who had publicly accused him of being a bigamist, with libel and defamation; but although the court awarded Fraser a settlement of £262 11s 7d, McLeod refused to retract the charge and defaulted in payment, escaping first to Ohio and then, on the *Ark* with his Normanite followers, to St. Ann's, Cape Breton. See, Stanley, *The Well-Watered Garden*, pp. 158-9.

these B.N.A. missionary campaigns to win increased support for their social activist platform.

They solidified their gains in 1825 through the formation of The Society (in connection with the Established Church of Scotland) for Promoting the Religious Interests of Scottish Settlers in British North America, which became known as the Glasgow Colonial Society [GCS]. Its patron was George Ramsay, Earl of Dalhousie, the Governor-General of British North America and a former Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia (1819-1828). The formal title of the new society, reinforced by its exclusivist statutes, specifically limited helpers, catechists, teachers and ministers to members of the established church. Burns directed his Nova Scotian triumvirate (Fraser, Mackenzie and Martin) to collect statistics on Secessionist Presbyterian activities, on the number of missionaries and teachers in remote settlements, and on the state of Pictou Academy.¹⁶ The GCS widely publicized this information across Scotland and in the colonies. In Cape Breton, the GCS missionary campaign proved highly successful, and Presbyterianism there "would henceforth be relatively homogeneous, free from the polarities of Kirkman and Secessionist which bedeviled the religious scene in Pictou".¹⁷

Ironically, the Secessionists themselves were also an evangelical sect of Presbyterians. Antiburgher ministers, mainly Thomas McCulloch and James MacGregor, had long promoted the establishment of common schools, libraries, agricultural societies, Bible Societies and Sabbath Schools.¹⁸ McCulloch and Edward Mortimer, the leading timber merchant in Pictou,¹⁹ considered it imperative that the largely dissident population of Nova Scotia gain more representation in the Legislature in order to wrest control from the Anglican and Halifax-based "merchantocracy" which dominated provincial politics. In their provincial political campaign they alienated extreme Tory members of the Council who feared the potential threat to their hegemony from a coalition of dissident

16 In a letter to Burns, Mackenzie reassured him that despite his low stipend of £120 per year, "in the name of your Triumvirate...all within our power shall be done to meet your wishes and expectations". Kenneth John Mackenzie to Robert Burns, Pictou, 8 November 1825, *Micro-Misc., Societies, GCS, Reel I, vol. 1, no. 27, PANS.*

17 Stanley, *The Well-Watered Garden*, p. 47. By 1838 the evangelicals had won control of the General Assembly in Scotland.

18 In 1808 MacGregor persuaded the Foreign Bible Society to send 500 Gaelic Bibles to Pictou. The next year he organized an auxiliary and raised £25 to purchase Bibles and £50 for the general work of the Society. In 1814 James and Robert Dawson of Pictou began the Pictou Sabbath School and in 1827 the Society had 77 schools, 2,335 pupils and 198 teachers. By this date it had imported books to the value of over £100 sterling, of which 6,950 had been circulated.

19 At the height of the timber trade during the Napoleonic Wars, Mortimer had a monopoly of most commercial enterprises in the region. From 1799 to 1819 he represented the County of Halifax (in which the Pictou District was included) in the House of Assembly and allied himself with several other "country" representatives to promote their interests and wrest some control of government and commerce away from the Halifax merchant-oligarchy.

Protestant groups under the leadership of McCulloch. Seeking to create divisions within the coalition, these extreme Tories engineered significant changes in the Pictou Academy bill of 1816; for example, the stipulation that its trustees had to be either members of the established churches of England or Scotland or subscribers to the Westminster Confession served, in effect, to make the Academy a Presbyterian institution. Because a previous bill had been defeated, McCulloch reluctantly agreed to the changes. In 1819, however, he sought an amendment to the bill, to give the Academy degree-granting status. The Council rejected this amendment, thus leaving the Anglican King's College at Windsor in control of higher education. Dalhousie, and other C of S leaders did not, in any case, support the educational thrust of the Secessionists in north-eastern Nova Scotia. They feared that the Academy was educating Scottish Presbyterians away from their established church, which, in 1820, had neither status in the colony nor Scottish support for expansion. As well, Dalhousie did not want McCulloch's college to interfere with his plans for a non-sectarian university in Halifax. Significantly, the C of S proposed that the 1821 Dalhousie College bill include a chair in theology. The affinity between C of S leaders and the Anglican establishment was revealed in 1823 when a formal proposal calling for the affiliation of Dalhousie College with King's College was put forward by the Dalhousie Board of Governors. Although this proposal was defeated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, it would have greatly increased the prestige of both colleges, and enhanced the status of the C of S in the colony at the expense of Pictou Academy.

The success of Pictou Academy exacerbated the concerns of C of S leaders in Nova Scotia and in Scotland. By 1822 the Academy had 39 students and was strongly supported by the dissident population of the colony and by their representatives in the House of Assembly. Three graduates, after an oral examination, had been awarded Master of Arts degrees by the University of Glasgow. The Reverend John Waddell, in 1820, had praised the Academy's rigorous programme noting that he had questioned students

extensively in the Latin and Greek classics, Logic, Mathematics & Moral & Natural Philosophy and in every department [deemed that they] reflected much honour upon themselves and credit upon their instructors.... The decent and orderly demeanour of the students connected with their proficiency in learning inspires a fervent hope that they will adorn Society and afford experimental evidence of the value of the Institution in which they have received their education.²⁰

20 Testimonial of John Waddell, A.M., *et al*, 2 August 1820, RG14, vol. 51 & 52, Pictou Academy: no. 11 & 12, PANS. In 1821 members of both branches of the Legislature and Lord Dalhousie also visited the Academy and pronounced themselves very pleased with its programme, which was nearly identical to the Bachelor of Arts programme of Glasgow University:

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Students came from the West Indies and from all parts of Nova Scotia to attend the Academy; of the 27 males in the class of 1828, for instance, 18 were from Pictou, four from Truro, two from Onslow, two from Halifax, and one from New Annan. In succeeding years, the Academy attracted students from as far away as Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. And not only Presbyterians, but also Episcopalians, Methodists and Baptists sent sons to Pictou, although, naturally, Presbyterians predominated. Graduates pursued careers in teaching (eight of 22 teachers in Pictou Township between 1824 and 1826), the legal profession (two by 1822) and the Presbyterian ministry (seven in 1824). By 1831 Jotham Blanchard, editor of the *Colonial Patriot*, in his petition to the Colonial Secretary, Viscount Goderich, could boast of the widespread success in attaining leadership roles achieved by 50 young Pictou Academy graduates with whom he was acquainted:

One was formerly Member of the Assembly in Nova-Scotia [*sic*], a situation which he resigned for a more profitable one, under His Majesty's Government, in Newfoundland [Charles Archibald]. Another [Edward Archibald] also holds high Government situation in Newfoundland. One is High Sheriff in the County of Halifax [John Sawyer]. One is Member of Assembly for the County of Halifax [Jotham Blanchard], and...eleven are enrolled Barristers in the Courts of Nova-Scotia, and eleven are Presbyterian Clergymen, now labouring most acceptably for the religious improvement of His Majesty's Subjects in all the Lower North American Provinces, and several are employed in the instruction of youth.²¹

A number of Pictonians were equally upset by McCulloch's rise to power and the growing Secessionist hegemony over town institutions. As early as 1809, several former town leaders, who resented McCulloch's success, had attempted to ruin his reputation by spreading the rumour that his Secessionist form of Presbyterianism fomented disloyal sentiments.²² McCulloch had successfully countered this slur by having his loyalty certified by the local justice of the peace. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed Treasurer of the Pictou District, Court of

Pictou Academy

Year 1 Latin & Greek
Year 2 Logic (including Grammar & Rhetoric),
Latin & Greek
Year 3 Moral Philosophy, Math (with practical
applications), Algebra
Year 4 Natural Philosophy, Math,
Algebra

Glasgow University

Year 1 Latin I & Greek I
Year 2 Latin II, Greek II, Math I
Year 3 Math II, Logic (including Rhetoric)
Year 4 Natural Philosophy, Moral Philosophy

- 21 Petition of Jotham Blanchard to the Right Honourable Viscount Goderich, London, 20 May 1831, *Journals of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly* [JHA] 1832 (Halifax), Appendix 1, p. 5.
22 Thomas McCulloch to Sir George Prevost, 1809-10, MG1, vol. 554, no. 3, PANS.

Sessions, and a justice of the peace. Yet resentments continued to smoulder, and when his grammar school began to attain provincial pre-eminence in 1815, it was set on fire and burnt to the ground. As his son, William McCulloch, observed, "Party spirit, taken in connection with strictness of discipline in the church, aroused the opposition of some of the very men whose sons were benefitting from its training".²³ By 1824, in order to dissociate the Academy from resentment over his ministry, McCulloch felt obliged to resign from his post at Harbour Church. But the town malcontents were not to be appeased. They joined Mackenzie's newly-formed Kirk party in Pictou. And, encouraged by Mackenzie, they petitioned the Legislature, opposing the rigorous admission standards of the Academy, its philosophical and scientific curriculum and the pretensions of its students, who, in imitation of the University of Glasgow, paraded around the College Green in their scarlet gowns. As one anonymous writer protested to Council in 1825, the institution was "unpopular in this place, and...attended only by 'clowns'".²⁴

Taking advantage of this climate of discontent, evangelical leaders in Scotland and in Nova Scotia joined forces in a concerted effort to discredit McCulloch's leadership. Fraser complained that McCulloch and his disciples had strayed far from their evangelical roots: "the amalgamated Burghers and Antiburghers of these colonies are no more like the Erskines and the Fishers of former days, than the generality of modern Scotch pulpits are to such as Knox and Cargill".²⁵ Burns and Martin began a newspaper war against McCulloch in Scotland and in Halifax. Despite his immediate, razor-sharp response, McCulloch, unable to retain the support of the moderates in both countries, who had previously proved sympathetic to the Pictou Academy cause, subsequently lost the battle.²⁶ Lord Dalhousie now considered McCulloch a man "little to be fathomed or trusted".²⁷ Even McCulloch's wife was impugned. In an 1829 letter to Burns, the Reverend Dugald McKichan, sent to Merigomish by the GCS, alluded to "an idea which dropped from you when I had the honour [of] being entertained at your table" about bringing the Pictou Academy under the wing of the C of S. But he added, "I regard Dr. McCulloch's avarice as the greatest barrier to an accommodation. His wife is extravagant, and he consequently must be avaricious".²⁸ Pictou

23 William McCulloch, *The Life of Thomas McCulloch, D.D.* (n.p., 1920), p. 44. By 1814 there were 43 boys attending the Pictou Grammar School.

24 Excerpt in letter John MacKinlay to George Smith, Pictou, 30 March 1825, Micro: Places, Pictou Academy, Reel I, PANS.

25 Donald Fraser to Dr. Scott, Saint John, 29 June 1826, Micro: Misc., Societies, GCS, Reel I, vol. I, no. 56, PANS.

26 See, *Edinburgh Star* (Edinburgh), 23 June and 5 August 1826; and, Rev. John Martin to Burns, Halifax, 24 April 1827, pp. 1-2: "in endeavouring to assist you...we have drawn upon ourselves the indignation of one of the most abusive writers that ever lived". *Ibid.*, no. 88.

27 Copy note Dalhousie to Michael Wallace, Halifax, August 1826, *Ibid.*, vol. II, no. 104.

28 Dugald McKichan to Burns, Merigomish, 4 November 1829, *Ibid.*, no. 95.

Academy graduates were also being tarred with the same brush. Writing to a friend in New Lairg, Sutherlandshire, Robert MacDonald of Pictou claimed that Academy teachers only worked for “the richest and ablest of the inhabitants in different parts of the district”.²⁹ They might have literary ability, but, in his judgment, they lacked good moral conduct and social principles. More than the future of the Academy was at issue however: underlying such critiques was the struggle among Presbyterian groups for control of the affairs of the Pictou district.³⁰

Moreover, the attack on Pictou Academy was motivated by economic as well as by religious differences. The opponents of the Academy put forward an astute criticism of the elitist policies of the Secessionists and the effect of these policies on the ordered evolution of the whole district from an economy dependent on the traditional trading of staples (fish and timber) to one dependent on coal-mining and ship-building. In 1829, the General Mining Association [GMA] commissioned its first two steam vessels. Four years later the *Royal William* left Pictou Harbour to make the first Atlantic steam crossing, in part fuelled by coal from the New Glasgow (Pictou County) area. A regular packet service opened up between Pictou and Liverpool, England, in 1835, and a Cunard liner, the *S.S. Unicorn*, began a fortnightly service between Pictou and Quebec in 1840. The GMA thus opened up communication and transportation links between the Pictou region and other parts of B.N.A., as well as the United Kingdom. By 1851 the industrial population of Pictou County was estimated to be 26 per cent of the work force; although comprising only 11 per cent of the population of the province, the county contributed 13.5 per cent of the value of the Nova Scotia economy.³¹

In the light of these structural transformations, Mackenzie and his Kirk followers considered the rigorous professional standards of Pictou Academy particularly inappropriate. They sent lengthy petitions to the Nova Scotia

- 29 Robert MacDonald, Pictou, 23 July 1829, in Appendix III, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Glasgow Society (in connection with the established Church of Scotland) for Promoting the Religious Interests of the Scottish Settlers in British North America* (Glasgow, 1830), pp. 31-2. MacDonald, whose evangelical C of S beliefs approved of state support of schooling, described the subscription method of support for schools in Nova Scotia as an “evil”, since it provided no permanent salary for teachers and resulted in schools being open one year and closed the next. He recommended increased government funding and centralized control of all schooling to counter the prevalent practice of salaries being paid in country produce, almost worthless in settlements which were far from any market.
- 30 Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College, American Presbyterian Higher Education 1707-1837* (New York, 1976), pp.5-7. As Miller explains regarding Presbyterian theology, because it vacillates between evangelical and rational strains, numerous schisms are produced. When one camp is represented as the champion, such as McCulloch was of the “rational”, it is exposed to undue vituperation by the other party in order to defeat its allies.
- 31 Rosemary E. Ommer, “Anticipating the Trend: The Pictou Ship Registry, 1840-1889”, *Acadiensis*, X, 1 (Autumn 1980), pp. 73-4. Sixty-five per cent of the labour force in Pictou County, however, was involved in agriculture in 1850.

Legislature requesting that a more practical curriculum be implemented, along the lines of the newer Scottish academy model of a merged college-grammar school. They argued that courses such as arithmetic, navigation, book-keeping, geography, geometry and French would comprise a more suitable programme for a commercial community such as Pictou. Many of these courses, they charged, had been excluded by Academy trustees because they were not considered suitable as college courses. They further pointed out that only potential lawyers and preachers, a group that included very few local students, benefited from Pictou's annual bounty from the Legislature.³² As a result of these petitions and C of S pressure, the Council appointed a commission, under the chairmanship of Judge Chipman, to look into the affairs of the Academy. James Munro added further charges in his brief to the commission on 20 July 1827. He claimed that parents had been forced to set up their own more practical form of higher education in the town. Both sexes, Munro asserted, should be allowed access to this form of schooling. He disapproved, as well, of the mounting debts and inefficient operation of the Academy.³³ In 1828 when Michael McCulloch left the Pictou Grammar School to teach at the Academy, the grammar school was forced to close, adding more weight to the petitioners' claims.

The GCS political campaign resulted in the withdrawal of Baptist support for Pictou Academy and the establishment of their own Horton Academy in 1828. Two years later in an election marred by riot and bloodshed, the controversy reached a turning point with the victory of Lawrence Hartshorne, the Council candidate. Hartshorne's success in the Pictou district was due largely to Mackenzie's blatant haranguing of his Highland followers.³⁴ During this period, eight money bills for support of Pictou Academy had been defeated by Council and, in 1832, the evangelical C of S leaders forced through a new Academy bill, which changed the composition of the trust, allowing Mackenzie and several Kirk supporters to gain appointment to the Board.³⁵ The Academy now became responsible for grammar school subjects. Although this merged academy faltered, particularly

32 James Skinner and others, copy of Petition to the Legislature (20 July 1826), pp. 3-4, in *Micro: Places, Pictou Academy*, Reel 1, PANS. Two more petitions were presented in 1828 and 1829, the latter mounted by Fraser and Mackenzie and signed by over 2,000 people.

33 Copy letter James Munro to Commissioners, Pictou, 20 July 1827, MG1, vol. 554, no. 52, PANS. And see, "Pictou", letter to S.G.W. Archibald, Pictou, 24 August 1830: "there is 3 to 1 against you for your damnable pollicy [*sic*] in Forcing an usless [*sic*] Institution on us, my Poor child cannot Read his bible in English when 500 Pounds was Paid to Education of your childrens [*sic*] in Greek and Latin at my Expens [*sic*]": MG1, vol. 550, no. 59, PANS.

34 Gene Morison, "The Brandy Election of 1830", *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 30 (1954), pp. 151-83. See also, J. Murray Beck, *Joseph Howe, Conservative Reformer, 1804-1848*, Vol. 1 (Kingston and Montreal, 1982), p. 78. The *Acadian Recorder* (9 October 1830) described the Kirkmen's conduct as resulting in an "armed mob, a murder, and ministers of Religion...[becoming] political engines, endeavouring to move congregations at the Tavern".

35 IV William, c. 5: "Act to Regulate and Support the Pictou Academy".

after McCulloch left to become President of Dalhousie College in 1838 and after Mackenzie's death in the same year, the restructured institution formed the basis of a renovated Union Academy, which, in 1845, implemented most of Mackenzie's programme and gave the Kirk far more voice on the trust. The 1841 provincial academy bill had stipulated that academy programmes must include mathematics, algebra, geography, English grammar, history, composition and a modern language. Largely as a result of the Pictou Academy strife, however, Nova Scotian academies continued to be sectarian in character.

In contrast, the common schools of north-eastern Nova Scotia were not controlled by sectarian interest groups. Yet in response to the constant lobbying of Nova Scotia's Kirk ministers, the GCS continued to send out ministers and catechists, who occasionally doubled as teachers in the poor settlements of the Pictou District.³⁶ Mackenzie, who took an interest in school affairs on all levels, was appointed to the Board of School Commissioners in 1832 and was probably responsible for the sharply critical report which accompanied the Pictou return of the following year. The commissioners drew the attention of the House to the exceptional educational efforts being made in the Pictou District. There were 59 schools under their charge

in which the amazing number of one thousand, eight hundred and three children are taught, whence it may be inferred the amount of good that might be effected, was the Provincial bounty at all proportional to our population. We would especially submit that even in these Schools, Latin, Geography, English Grammar and Book-keeping are in some instances taught. It is worthy of observation that the Inhabitants contributed towards their Teachers['] salaries the sum of One Thousand, three hundred and forty-two pounds, exclusive of Board and all other incidental expenses. If the Teachers['] board is laid at the low average of [t]wenty pounds each, the contribution of the people amounts to the sum of Two Thousand, Five hundred and twenty-two pounds.³⁷

The commissioners reported that every school that had applied was able to procure a teacher, but that 20 districts were currently without a teacher and that one-third of the children were poor, particularly those in the back settlements. The report had a significant impact: in the following year, out of £203 of the provincial allowance, £178 provided for the support of poor children in the District of Pictou. By 1838 the number of poor children was listed as 125 and £225 was allocated for their relief. Three years later Pictou County received the

36 For example, Joseph Mackenzie, a lay preacher at Earltown, Micro: Misc., Societies, GCS, Reel 1, no. 173; and see, *Ibid.*, no. 96 and vol. 11, no. 104.

37 George Smith and others, Return of Schools in the District of Pictou, 30 November 1833, RG14, vol. 49-50, no. 288, PANS.

highest amount of the government grant, £540, while Colchester, Halifax and most other counties, were allocated only £368 each. Following the activist model of their church leaders, a number of evangelical Kirk professionals (teachers and ministers) in the 1840s sought membership on boards of school commissioners, their nomination justified because of their knowledge of remote settlements.³⁸

After the 1843 Disruption and the formation of the Free Church in Scotland, Burns and his colleagues entered the third phase of their political agenda, the establishment of their own institutions and the fostering of reconciliation among disputing Presbyterian sects. Burns himself moved to Upper Canada in order to lead the Free Church campaign in British North America. He visited Pictou in 1844 and confidently proclaimed "I am sure, that the Free Church of Scotland is the only existing Church which has the power of taking possession of...the town of Pictou". Realizing that the previous blatant party politics of Mackenzie and Fraser were no longer appropriate, he publicly dissociated himself from these men whose activities he had formerly endorsed. He also distanced himself from the C of S, whose synod was to lapse until 1854 because of the departure to Scotland of all but two of its ministers in Nova Scotia:

the Presbyterianism of the Establishment of Scotland has, for twenty years, been little else than the badge of a particular party, and any opposition to the Free Church was from this quarter exclusively. One melancholy result of this strife has been the utter prostration of a valuable literary institution, the academy of Pictou, which, with proper management, in the spirit of love, might become the means of great good both in a literary and theological view. We felt a strong impression, that the Free Church of Scotland was specially called to this quarter, in the character of an angel of peace, to heal divisions, and to unite the Presbyterian body into one firm phalanx.³⁹

Burns played an active role in the establishment of both the Toronto Academy, founded in 1845, and Knox College, incorporated in 1858. The curriculum of the latter institution, which was designed to train Free Church ministers, included

38 William McKay was recommended for the District of Colchester in 1843: Thomas Dickson to John Whidden, Halifax, 5 April 1843, *Ibid.*, vol. 7-8, no. 338. After the Disruption the Reverend Alexander Sutherland was sent to Earltown as its first Free Church minister (1846-53 and 1859-66). He was recommended by Pictou Free Church activists to serve on the Board of School Commissioners as a replacement for the Kirk minister, Rev. Mr. Wilkinson, who left for Scotland in 1844. See, J.C. Blackadore and David Crichton to Joseph Howe, 22 March 1849, *Ibid.*, Vol. 49-50, no. 364, and supporting petitions, no. 383.

39 Rev. Dr. Robert Burns, *Nova Scotian Report presented to the Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, on Canada and Nova Scotia* (Paisley: Colonial Committee, 1844), p. 25. Regarding McKichan, who had been specifically sent by the GCS to gather statistical evidence against the Secessionists, Burns wrote, "Had Mr. McKichan kept steady in his professions of

elements both of McCulloch's 1829 Pictou Academy and of Mackenzie's 1832 commercial academy.⁴⁰ Like McCulloch, Burns was strongly influenced by the Scottish Common Sense philosophers and used their arguments to refute both the philosophical skepticism of David Hume and the critiques of the deists. Like McCulloch, Burns challenged the right of the Anglican King's College (both in Windsor, Nova Scotia, and in Toronto) to control higher education calling instead for the establishment of a non-sectarian provincial institution based on the broadest literary and scientific principles. Both McCulloch and Burns were pioneer Presbyterian theologians in British North America. As evangelical Presbyterians they strongly opposed "Popery" and the expansion of papal supremacy into the area of schools and colleges. Neither educator was a voluntarist; like Chalmers in Scotland, they believed that governments and nations had a responsibility in their legislative decisions and in such public institutions as education. Since both men considered educational quality to be imperative, especially for the training of the Presbyterian clergy, it can only be concluded that the 1826-1843 battles had not been over educational principles, and were, only in the short term, about the direction of public educational policy. As soon as the Free Church leaders came into power, their conception of secondary schooling continued the Scottish 19th-century ideal of meritocracy. Liberal social theory "legitimated a competitive, individualistic society: if the social hierarchy was open to merit, and genuine talent could always reach the top, then middle-class social domination was felt to rest on ability rather than privilege".⁴¹

The schooling experiences of Maclean Sinclair in the mid-1850s give an insight into the processes by which both home and school could foster this individualistic ethic even in the midst of a closely-knit, evangelical Scottish community. He described his rudimentary early instruction partly at home and partly at Beaver Meadow School, three miles from his home in the southern

adherence to the Free Church, or had he stayed aloof of politics, the whole would have been with us. As it is, things are not in a good state; and the sooner that Mr. M'K. leaves the district and the colony, the better. He is the cleverest of all the ministers there, but he has been the least useful". (p. 29) He further noted that "uncalculable evils have resulted from the conduct of Presbyterian clergymen, in becoming professed political leaders of parties" and recommended that, in future, "ministers and teachers sent out should be prohibited from taking part in the squabbles of mere political strife...." (p. 31).

40 Vaudry, *The Free Church in Victorian Canada*, p. 82. After the closure of the Toronto College, Knox's pre-arts programme consisted of arithmetic, mathematics, English grammar, civil history, Latin and Greek. The ensuing arts course consisted of a three-year programme which included a Scottish emphasis on physical science and philosophy. In the first year, students were taught classics, mathematics and English composition. In the second year, classics, junior philosophy (logic and metaphysics), physical science (natural philosophy, chemistry or natural history), history and English literature were required. Students in their final year took senior philosophy (metaphysics and ethics), junior Hebrew, physical science (geology), history and literature.

41 Anderson, *Education and Opportunity*, p. 15.

district of Pictou County. He began school when he was eight, but did not attend during the cold winter months. At home he was assisted by his mother who

was an excellent reader of Gaelic, and could also read English. The Gaelic books she read on Sabbath day were the Bible, Boston's Fourfold State, Bunyan's Pilgrims' Progress, Alleine's Alarm, and Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. She had good strong lungs, and always read aloud, even when alone. Through the influence of my mother's reading and Dr. Blair's preaching, it was impossible for me to be anything else than a thorough Calvinist.⁴²

Sinclair's first teacher, Norman Macdonald, was listed in the 1854 returns as teaching in the West Settlement, East River. In a frame school described as "Inferior", he taught 19 boys and eight girls English, writing and arithmetic. Only one of his students (Sinclair?) could read with ease, 15 could read simple lessons and 11 were unable to read. For his labours he was paid £12, half by the parents and half by the province.⁴³ That fall, however, James Nicholls began to teach the young Sinclair. As Sinclair related, Nicholls "was a good English scholar, an excellent reader, a first-class penman, and a very clever mimic. I went to his school about seven months. I studied geography, bookkeeping, and other things under him. I had then all the education that the Beaver Meadow School could give me".⁴⁴

Compounding the problem of inferior facilities was the lack of standards regarding the quality of teaching. Many young men with no teaching preparation were able to obtain their licences merely by visiting a member of the local school board. Sinclair described how he

went to Antigonish to get a license [*sic*] to teach. Dr. Macdonald was chairman of the School Board. He asked me who I was and where I had gone to school. I told him that I was a grandson of John Maclean, the poet, that I received all the schooling I had in the Beaver Meadow School, from Norman Macdonald and James Nicholls, and that the people of the Glen in Lochaber wanted me as a teacher. Without asking me any more questions he wrote out a license [*sic*].... I thanked him...and went away. The Doctor was a good scholar, a thorough Highlander, and a kind and considerate man.⁴⁵

42 Rev. A. MacLean Sinclair, "The Beaver Meadow School", *The Eastern Chronicle* (n.d.), extract in A.M. Sinclair Collection, Scrapbook, MG9, vol. 545, PANS.

43 Return of Southern District, Pictou County, 1854, RG14, vol. 49-50, no. 409, PANS.

44 Sinclair, "The Beaver Meadow School".

45 *Ibid.*

Significantly for a Kirk supporter, after teaching at both Lochaber and at Cross Roads schools Sinclair attended Pictou Academy, now in the hands of a moderate union group, which was beginning the reconciliation process between the warring Presbyterian factions. But he did not remain in the teaching profession. His final calling was as a Presbyterian minister, the continuing goal of many Pictou Academy graduates.

After the attainment of responsible government in Nova Scotia in 1848, highly educated Scottish Presbyterians were able to use their scholastic edge to gain positions of leadership in British North America. Once accepted in public service, these evangelical leaders no longer found it necessary to use radical political tactics to attain their objectives. Their middle-class values permeated the positive state that they began to construct, in which government increasingly encroached on the market-place and into family lives. One major reason for the rapid success of this transformation process was the careful grass-roots work of these evangelical public servants and their successful propaganda campaign, during the 1840s to 1860s, through a variety of media: public meetings, authorized school texts,⁴⁶ newspapers⁴⁷ and journals of education. In the process, these evangelical school promoters developed a world view that was subtly different from that of their predecessors. A more practical, non-speculative ideology, emphasizing human character and conscience, became the chief evidences of Presbyterian religion. The Anglo-Saxon people were depicted as illustrating the triumph of Protestantism in organizing liberal government and in conquering and ruling large expanses of territory. They were exemplars of Christian principles in social life and national culture, in effect “the elect”.⁴⁸

- 46 In 1845 Miss Mary Campbell reported that the trustees of her Earltown school had bought the Chambers Educational Course series, which came from a Free Church publishing house in Scotland. As a result of these standardized texts “the pupils have made more progress in one month than they had formerly made in a month and a half”. See, Return of School District No. 2, County of Colchester, for half year ending 30 April 1845, RG14, vol. 7 & 8, no. 344; and, an account of William Chambers’ visit to Nova Scotia as a result of the extensive introduction of his publications by the Mechanics Institute and by Dawson in school libraries. D.C. Harvey, “A Friendly Scot Looks at Nova Scotia in 1853”, *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 27 (1947), pp. 81-100.
- 47 As The Reverend C.H. Johnson recounts, “From the first the competition [among Presbyterian newspapers] of *The Presbyterian Witness*, the unofficial paper of the Presbyterian Free Church, was deadly. It was published on better paper. There was a lighter touch in the editorials and a better choice of general matter.” See, Rev. C.H. Johnson, “Nova Scotia Under the Eye of The Guardian”, *Ibid.*, 30 (1950), p. 228.
- 48 Michel Gauvreau, “History and Faith: A Study of Methodist and Presbyterian Thought in Canada, 1820-1940”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto 1985, p. 124. In an interesting case study of Pictou County’s continuing religious disputes, Douglas F. Campbell concludes, “The predilection of Presbyterians to intellectual conflict channelled the energies generated by the conflict into the development of those skills most likely to make persons successful in leadership roles in a developing country. Social conflict can, under certain conditions, have both manifest and latent functions for communities and societies. In this case, a long term intense intellectual

J. William Dawson, a Pictou Academy graduate of 1835, provides a good example of this more sophisticated Presbyterian leader. In 1840, as a student at the University of Edinburgh, he “listened to...some of [Scotland’s] greatest orators and teachers, and...had the opportunity of knowing...of the work of Chalmers and his contemporaries, and of witnessing the earlier signs of the national uprising which led to the disruption of the Scottish establishment”. When Joseph Howe, Nova Scotia’s Provincial Secretary in a Reform administration, approached him to serve as the colony’s first superintendent of education in 1850, Dawson was, at first, very reluctant. He knew from his Pictou background the acrimony which school questions aroused. He feared that his youth and lack of teaching experience and mathematical aptitude in comparison with academy teachers would tend to diminish the respect and deference for the office. He was also aware that local control of education was jealously guarded by the commissioners of education who

were men of age, standing, and experience, who...without any remuneration, had managed the local educational affairs, and who might be jealous of a new educational authority tending to unsettle their old ways. Thus, I determined to commence my mission modestly...In convening educational meetings, therefore, ground was usually broken by requesting the commissioners of schools in each of the counties to make arrangements for such a meeting, at which it was my function to preside.... The meeting was opened with a brief explanation of its objects, and the intention of the [education] law, and discussion was invited as to the special needs of the district. This, almost invariably, brought out statements respecting the defects of education in the locality, much stronger than any I could have ventured to make, and gave opportunity...to urge improvement, and to explain the facilities offered for it.⁴⁹

In contrast to McCulloch’s abrasive stance and elitist management methods, Dawson had learned a more sophisticated style of social activism, probably derived from the evangelical leaders who had strongly influenced him during his studies at the University of Edinburgh.⁵⁰ He began to organize teachers’ institutes,

conflict in one county appears to have produced a large number of highly effective leaders for the developing Canadian society.” See, Douglas F. Campbell and Gary D. Bouma, “Pugnacious Pictou Presbyterians Prosper: A Fruit of Religious Conflict”, unpublished paper read at the meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, San Francisco, October 1973, p. 20.

49 Sir [John] William Dawson, *Fifty Years of Work in Canada Scientific and Educational* (London, 1901), pp. 49, 75-6. And see, B. Anne Wood, *God, Science and Schooling: John William Dawson’s Pictou Years, 1820-1855* (Truro, 1991).

50 Two works by Chalmers were widely read by middle-class reformers in British North America at this time: *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns* (Glasgow, 1821) and *Essay on the Parochial Schools of Scotland* (cited in Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, p. 37).

again working closely at the grass-roots level. The first one was held at Pictou on 21 December 1850 and was chaired by W.R. Mulholland, Headmaster of Pictou Academy. Forty teachers from the Pictou and neighbouring districts attended. The next year Dawson held five institutes and even convinced the legislature to appropriate £100 to defray the expenses of poor teachers. At these institutes, adult precursors to the normal school, Dawson began to gather support from provincial teachers for a central provincial institution.

At the same time Dawson encouraged teachers to form associations to further improve themselves. One of the earliest to organize was led by William McKay of Earltown. He reported to Dawson in 1852 that the teachers of the Stirling District, with few exceptions, attended the meetings of the Association regularly and received considerable benefit in teaching methods and motivation to improve their “useful stock of literary knowledge”. In an obvious reference to the elitism of Academy graduates, McKay wrote that above all, they enjoyed the opportunity to have social intercourse with their fellow teachers, a refreshing change from the “too-long practised prejudice which characterizes the minds of some teachers to seek and exaggerate the ineptitude of one another, and thereby anticipate[d] laurels of pre-eminence and distinction for themselves, in which case there could never exist any high degree of affection or the least pleasurable enjoyment among teachers”.⁵¹ He urged Dawson to continue his campaign for the advancement of popular education and thanked him for the regular distribution of his newly established *Journal of Education* and for the promotion of general assessment.

On the other hand, Daniel Macdonald, secretary of the Durham Teachers' Association, reflected the more modern outlook of the Pictou teachers. He reported to Dawson that there were 15 schools and 18 teachers connected with his Association in 1852. They had held five meetings at which addresses were given on the advantage of the proposed school legislation, on practical education, on the office of the teacher, on scientific agriculture, on the importance of historical and geographical knowledge and on future prospects in the province. The association had also decided to hold a public meeting in each school after the annual examination in order to promote public interest in education. While MacDonalld agreed with McKay's opinion that the association provided teachers with important social contact, he went further. The professional counsel, the sharing of teaching experiences and the collegial unity fostered by the association made teachers better qualified for their office and secured them “a somewhat more elevated position in the public estimation”. This higher status, in turn, produced “a deeper interest in the cause of education”. He believed the public was becoming more interested in education; more people attended the association meetings, and nearly all the schoolhouses in his district had been improved in the

51 William J. McKay to John W. Dawson, Earltown, 20 December 1852, RG14, vol. 49-50, no. 384, PANS.

last year. Finally, MacDonald summarized the chief obstacles which continued to impede the progress of education. The tendency of young men to move to other positions and or to teach only during their vacation from the seminaries (West River and Pictou Academy) had resulted in a serious shortage of teachers. One school district had had four different teachers within the space of two years, while two others had had three teachers in the same period. The practice of boarding teachers from house to house, which prevailed in nine of the 15 districts connected with the Association, produced "more evils than space will permit to enumerate". Many districts were backward in furnishing schools with suitable books and maps, thus increasing the labour of the teacher. Finally, MacDonald noted the perennial problem of cash payment; "the want of punctuality in pecuniary matters is an evil of no ordinary magnitude".⁵²

In 1853, as a result of Dawson's grass-roots campaign, petitions requesting a provincial normal school, county assessment for the support of free schools, and an annual inspection of schools to improve the efficiency of school trustees began to flood the legislature. These petitions reflected Free Church, Kirk and Secessionist Presbyterian support, among both rural and town subscribers in Pictou County.⁵³ Dawson, however, became discouraged by legislative inaction and resigned that year. Despite substantial support, he had faced lingering resistance to his modernizing school policies; moreover, his own strong suspicion of sectarian control of education and avoidance of any form of religious instruction other than moral education in state schools, a result of his disgust at the Pictou district religious feuds, was at variance with the strongly held views of numerous supporters of the C of S.⁵⁴

Dawson was succeeded by two better trained Free Church leaders, both of whom had received full indoctrination in methods of social activism under the evangelical Glaswegian educator, David Stow. At the time of his appointment as inspector of schools for the eastern district of Nova Scotia in 1853, Hugh Munro already had a number of years' experience with the extremes of educational conditions, first while teaching as a GCS missionary teacher at Boularderie, Cape Breton, in 1837-9, then while working at the Royal Acadian School in Halifax, and finally while operating his own teacher-training seminary, using

52 Report of Daniel MacDonald to the Supt. of Education, 1852, *Ibid.*, no. 392.

53 Petition of Inhabitants of Lower Settlement, West River (60 names), Scotch Hill (20 names), Rogers Hill and Hardwood Hill (41 names), Town of Pictou (78 names), Lyons Brook (26 names), Green Hill (31 names), and the Back Meadows of Cariboo River (12 names), *Ibid.*, no. 403.

54 John P. Vaillancourt, "John William Dawson: educational missionary in Nova Scotia, 1850-1853", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1973, p. 59. Vaillancourt notes, "In Scotland the Church of Scotland had considerable control in such matters as selection of teachers and moral education. During Dawson's term as Superintendent, many Scots would regard the removal of ministerial control of schools with suspicion".

Stow techniques, also in Halifax. In his assessment of schools in the north-eastern part of the province, Munro commended the high energy and scholarship of the 74 superior schools and 15 grammar schools he had visited, but condemned the total lack of any training in teaching methods displayed by all but two teachers (both trained at Stow's school in Scotland). Of the 86 common schools visited, he noted that many teachers were en route to other callings or had chosen the profession by accident, disease, or old age.⁵⁵ He deplored the spartan conditions prevailing in many schoolhouses. The great majority he deemed "extremely ill conducted; both the schoolhouses and the children are unclean — no dep[or]tment cultivated — no fine feelings promoted". With his Stow ideals firmly in mind, he maintained that

Schools should be so conducted as to strengthen the moral sentiments of the pupils and train them to habits of purity and truth; indeed this should be always kept in view, as being the principal object of sound education; but I am grieved to say that there is no one respect in which our schools more generally fail.⁵⁶

Munro did acknowledge that schools should be promoting good intellectual habits and should inspire a taste for knowledge, but learning by rote was pervasive. Because the "common branches" were not thoroughly taught, children did not understand what they were learning. Rather than fostering the reading habit such teaching methods led children into loose, inaccurate habits of thought.

Although a number of other factors would contribute to the success of the free school campaign in the next few years — the Act of Disestablishment of the Church of England in 1851, settlement by 1863 of severe party and denominational differences, and the coming of the railway age — the moral imperative voiced by Munro would play a crucial role in the hands of his successor, the Reverend Alexander Forrester, a Free Church minister who was appointed second Superintendent of Education and Principal of the Normal School in 1854. In his 1853 report, Munro had stated that all children should have access to schooling and be compelled to attend school regularly. Forrester, who had also been strongly influenced by Stow, was to convince Nova Scotians of the need to overcome their religious and ethnic differences and to establish a system of common schooling.⁵⁷

55 Hugh Munro, "Report", in JHA (1854), Appendix 73, p. 386.

56 Hugh Munro, "Appendix 40", JHA (1855), p. 193.

57 Stanley, *The Well-Watered Garden*, pp. 112-3. As Stanley notes, "Stow considered moral and religious training as the principal objectives of any good school of education. Stow was often carried away by his conception of the teacher as a moral instructor, shaping and strengthening religious virtues as well as the mental and physical attributes of his pupils. Stow was more interested in the ideal pupil as 'an infant saint with some knowledge', rather than 'an infant prodigy with some religion'" (p. 113).

Forrester reflected a shift of emphasis away from the old school Calvinism of the past and towards not only a more social-scientific approach to education, but also an active ministry. He had no qualms about promoting Protestant ideology through the common schools. At Forrester's instigation, Howe, now the leader of the Reform Party, moved, in the 1858 House of Assembly, that "whereas, christianity [*sic*] is the only true basis upon which a sound system of education can safely repose; *Resolved* that no school within this province shall be entitled to aid from the public funds, until it shall have been made to appear that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are daily read therein".⁵⁸ The Attorney-General, however, moved an amendment to the motion which softened the wording to a general recommendation that the Bible be used in schools. This expression of rising Protestant militancy was directly connected to Nova Scotia's steady economic growth, political maturation and improvements in transportation, communication, agriculture and social life. The repeal of the British Corn Laws in 1846, imposition of timber duties and the Navigation Acts of 1849 heightened Protestant anxiety concerning the colony's ability to maintain its economic progress, particularly in the face of the large influx of Irish Catholics and a much strengthened Roman Catholic episcopal status in the colony. Underlying this Protestant intolerance towards Roman Catholics was "a profound belief that human resourcefulness, determination and Christian faith were responsible for whatever advances had been or would be achieved.... They thought [that] the key to prosperity lay in the ability of the inhabitants to cultivate the virtues of diligence and self-reliance and to adhere to sound religious principles".⁵⁹ Only transformed individuals, committed to these common moral ideals, could achieve a transformed society. This was the same liberal Protestant message that MacGregor and McCulloch had preached years ago, but it now had more urgency, and was being strongly promoted by leaders with different denominational and party affiliations. It was better understood, also, by all types of Nova Scotian Presbyterians, who, by now, were more widely accepted into the seats of power and had reached a more mature level of intellectual understanding and material security.

The state was increasingly to stand *in loco parentis*. Quoting Dr. Guthrie, a Scottish Free Church evangelist and educator, Forrester noted that the ragged schools of Edinburgh had succeeded in returning 530 juvenile beggars to society

58 JHA (1858), p. 528; in numerous issues of the *Journal of Education* Forrester promoted his Protestant form of morality: "Moral Education — What is It? How Great is its Importance?", *Journal of Education and Agriculture* [JEA], I, 7 (January 1859), p. 59; "Moral Education — Imperfections of Natural Theology — Necessity of Bible as an Infallible Guide — How Bible Should Be Used in School", JEA, II, 1 (1859), pp. 2-6; "Moral Education — What Use Should Be Made of the Bible in Schools?", JEA, II, 3 (September 1859), pp. 33-6.

59 A.J.B. Johnston, "The 'Protestant Spirit' of Colonial Nova Scotia: An Inquiry into Mid-Nineteenth Century Anti-Catholicism", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977, p. 45.

at the small expense of £20 to £25 each per year. If they had been thrown in jail by the government they would each have cost £300. It was vastly cheaper to build commodious schoolhouses and to provide a suitable education for each child than to build more jails and hospitals.⁶⁰ The positive state, Forrester also argued, had the right to remove children from parents who did not look after them. Shortly thereafter the Legislature passed an act encouraging communities to set up industrial schools. The Pictou Industrial School received \$100 in support from the government in 1864.⁶¹ In Forrester's view the new economic and social needs of the province in the modern industrial age provided a clear justification for this more intrusive role of the state, aimed at inculcating a common morality and attempting, through the common schools, to promote general literacy. In fact, he wrote, in 1864, that the state's self-preservation depended on the enlightenment and morality of all classes.⁶²

Under the voluntary or subscription method of school support, many children had never attended school. Poverty, large families to care for and the need for their children's assistance in their farming and fishing communities had generally prevented many parents in the Pictou district from either building a school in their neighbourhood or allowing their children to attend regularly. In North Pictou County, as late as 1859, an estimated 1,314 children were not in school and 10 districts were without schools.⁶³ There were great inequities in the disbursement of government funds throughout the colony. The two Pictou Boards of School Commissioners sent a memorial to the House of Representatives in 1860 convincingly arguing that a great injustice had been done to Pictou County schools. Whereas Guysboro County, with only 34 schools in 1857, had been granted an average of £12 9s per teacher and 4s 11d per child taught, Pictou with 113 schools had been granted only £9 18s 9d per teacher and 2s 8d per child taught. Owing to the rapid increase of children and schools in Pictou County, teachers and students were being heavily penalized and the cause of education was severely jeopardized, argued the commissioners.⁶⁴

All of these arguments — for a more moral, literate populace, for increased order in urban-industrial communities, for a more equitable distribution of public funds — did not totally convince the population of Pictou County and elsewhere that the intrusion by the state into what they viewed as a church-family responsibility, the schooling of their children, should be allowed to take place without protest. Local control of school finances was fiercely defended. Few

60 "The Preventative Both Better and Cheaper than the Restorative", *JEA*, II, 2 (June 1860), p. 178.

61 Sara M. Johnston to Receiver General, Pictou, 8 July 1864, RG14, vol. 49-50, no. 437, PANS.

62 Alexander Forrester, "Educational Report for 1863", *JHA* (1864), Appendix No. 20, p. 5.

63 Return of Schools Taught in North Pictou, 31 October 1859, RG14, vol. 49-50, no. 417, PANS.

64 Memorial of the Boards of School Commissioners for the Southern and Northern Districts of the County of Pictou, 10 March 1860, *Ibid.*, no. 418.

school districts voted for the assessment mode of payment; as late as 1861 only in Merigomish was there evidence of a teacher's salary being paid by assessment.⁶⁵ After the Legislature passed the Free School Act of 1864, in at least five counties, including Pictou, schoolhouses were burnt down. Over 40 petitions were sent requesting repeal of the legislation. But Tupper, with a large majority for the first time in many years in Nova Scotia, proceeded confidently with the 1865 Education Act. Passed with minor amendments in 1866, this Act imposed compulsory assessment on Nova Scotians for the support of all schools, common, superior and the academies. With their long history of reliance on customs duties, Nova Scotians detested any government which imposed direct taxation and Tupper's Education Act drew strong public criticism.

But Tupper was not to be deflected from his course. In attempting to prepare the province for its future role in an industrial, rather than a commercial economy, the Conservative administration had become committed to an extension of the parameters of state power. Acceptance of a new directive function for the state, coupled with "a growing belief among Tories that public education was necessary to prepare the population for the age's new imperatives, put a compulsory policy in education on the political agenda".⁶⁶

While Tupper was working on the economic and national front, Forrester was successfully campaigning on the school front at the regional level. Forrester's moralistic rhetoric and the social activism promoted by the evangelical Presbyterians proved critical in defusing the religious and ethnic tensions which had characterized schooling in the various regions of Nova Scotia, especially in Pictou County, up to that time. In 1862 the Legislature had received petitions from over 6,000 people urging the government to adopt compulsory assessment. Tupper recognized that the coming industrial age would require a collective will and a more trained populace to meet its challenges;⁶⁷ Forrester, with his more sophisticated form of Scottish evangelical Presbyterianism, provided Nova Scotians with a moral imperative to justify free and compulsory state schooling.

65 Return District No. 33, Merigomish, 31 October 1861, *Ibid.*, no. 421.

66 Rosemary Langhout, "Developing Nova Scotia: Railways and Public Accounts, 1849-1867", *Acadiensis*, XIV, 2 (Spring 1985), p. 26.

67 Doug Owrain, in a recent review of Curtis' *Building the Educational State*, comments that "If the state was to function with the participation of its citizens, then there had to be certain values and goals established upon which all could more or less agree. It was one of the primary goals of the new system to socialize people at large to accept the norms of this new society. Further, this was a middle-class society that was emerging, and thus middle-class values were inculcated in society at large." See, *History of Education Quarterly*, 29, 1 (Spring 1989), p. 139.