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Pictou Academy: Promoting “Schooled Subjectivities” in 19th-Century Nova Scotia

THE ENCROACHMENT OF STATE POWER on individuals, on public institutions and on civil life has attracted much attention among historians of education, who have been interested in the relationship of schooling to these larger trends in the making of modern society. As Philip Corrigan comments in his preface to *Building the Educational State*, the primary goal of the state in building public common schools was the formation of “schooled subjectivities”: “Here, where schooling was intimately connected with governance and ‘habitude’ as organized moral regulation, was the explicit curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and evaluation”. Bruce Curtis has linked this civilizing project to the Scottish Enlightenment and its concern for a civics of moral economy. Other scholars, such as Robert Gidney and Wyn Millar, have emphasized the growth of individual educational opportunity and the promotion of science within a framework of liberal education; they have also pointed to the strong linkage between educational reform and the growth of the professions. Over the course of the 19th century, the failure of voluntary or private schools to secure adequate financial support led to the establishment of an extensive public system of schooling. In general these scholars describe this process of educational reformation not so much as an achievement of increased social control by the state but as a multifaceted and contested development, with the effects to be found in the transformation of popular character and civic culture. They emphasize the complexity of the modernization process and the degree to which the liberal capitalist project of the 19th century was cultivated from within civil society. In time, the moral and political intent of public schooling became thoroughly normalized within the society, and the control of schooling by local elites was replaced by an array of administrative practices by the provincial state.¹

These influential studies have focused on developments in Upper Canada, Canada West and Ontario in the 19th century, but if these patterns of “schooled subjectivities” were general in modern western culture, could they be applied to a case study in Nova

1 Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont., 1988), especially the preface by Corrigan, p. 9; Curtis, *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto, 1992); R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston, 1990); Gidney and Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1994). See also Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1985). The author would like to thank Eric Sager, Paul Wood, Tom Fleming, Larry McCann, David Wootton and the anonymous *Acadiensis* readers for their constructive criticism of earlier drafts of this article.

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Scotia? This study examines the history of Pictou Academy and its role in fostering an educational philosophy grounded in the Scottish principle of merit. As well it considers the contribution of the Academy, and the educational model it promoted, to the development of a liberal capitalist order in Nova Scotia. The education of an elite cadre of middle-class male leaders was a significant technique used by liberal reformers to disseminate and to institutionalize their cultural programme. In pursuing this goal, the 19th-century Pictou Academy became the flagship of a liberal campaign to modernize Nova Scotia.

In the decades after the American and French revolutions, as large numbers of immigrants began to settle in the Maritimes, Nova Scotia's legislators considered how best to promote education in the colony. One possibility, which drew from the 18th-century English educational model of sponsored mobility, was to maintain King's College, Windsor as the region's only degree-granting institution. Its religious tests for degree candidates barred Dissenters and, by limiting access to higher education, helped to maintain the power of Halifax's Anglican and Church of Scotland merchantocracy. Another possibility, which drew from a Scottish educational model of contest mobility, was to foster higher education that was open to a broader spectrum of the region's population. Under this plan, Dissenters as well as Anglicans and Kirkmen would be able to gain higher education (and its rewards) and access would be determined by merit. Pictou Academy, which was founded in northeastern Nova Scotia in 1816, conformed to this model. Here talented male students might obtain a liberal education that would foster individual independence and promote professional development. The curriculum at the new institution differed from that of King's College, as did its recruitment, and its founders emphasized the distinctions between the goals of the Academy and the conservative orientation of King's College, which sought to educate young men to be like the English and Scottish Georgian gentry.²

There were three stages in Pictou Academy's development as a private institution. In the first, it operated under the paternalistic leadership of Reverend Thomas McCulloch, a Secessionist Presbyterian minister, and Edward Mortimer, the leading merchant of Pictou. In 1832 a rival evangelical Church of Scotland faction forced the Academy to allow its representatives on the Academy's governing board and to add a grammar school to the institution. This was the beginning of the second stage of the Academy's history. By the 1840s feuding between the two Presbyterian groups nearly closed the institution. In 1845 the provincial government stepped in and drafted a Union Academy bill which allowed moderate members of each Presbyterian faction to design a multi-level, co-educational institution offering a broad diversity of subjects. The Academy did not receive a permanent grant, but the finances of the

2 The concept of sponsored and contest mobility is discussed in Gidney and Millar, *Professional Gentlemen*, pp. 6-7, 11, 27, 83. The Georgian character ideal, with ascribed values of service to others, sense of sacred duty and high calling, was supposed to govern the Georgian professional gentleman and justify his sponsored mobility into the ruling class/respectable stations of society. By the mid-19th century this system was contested by the new principle of the career open to talent, thus marking a shift from ascription to equality of opportunity, from sponsored to contest mobility. Merit in the Victorian world was measured by success in examinations, which were considered a fairer and more effective restrictive mechanism for entry to the professions.

Union Academy became more secure. During this third stage of the Academy’s history, enrolments were high. By the 1870s it had become a provincial leader for collegiate (secondary and first-year college) education. Instructors were professionally-trained and primarily Scottish, and paternalistic rule by Presbyterian ministers had given way to management by middle-class business and professional men serving on the board of the Academy. Also, the political contests involved in this acculturation process changed the original college-based design. However, Pictou Academy had served to introduce liberal values and the principle of merit into Nova Scotia education, which in time became the dominant cultural characteristics of secondary schooling in the province.³

The early history of the Academy was shaped to a large extent by its location in Pictou, two days’ journey overland from Halifax and the seat of government. Pictou was a small port, which served primarily as an exporting entrepôt for the timber, fish and agricultural produce of the district. State power was weak in the hinterland communities such as Pictou, and strong paternalistic rule by mercantile leaders was crucial for keeping order. Mortimer provided such rule through his control of credit, road contracts and school grants, acting both as a disciplinarian and as a care-giver. Dubbed the “King of Pictou” because of the degree of power he exerted in the region, Mortimer claimed that the economic development of northeastern Nova Scotia was hampered by the ability of Halifax’s leading merchants to shape provincial policy. In 1799 he took his concerns to Halifax as the first county representative in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. Four years later McCulloch arrived in Pictou en route to Prince Edward Island. Mortimer and other Presbyterians in the community recognized in McCulloch the type of professional leader they needed to bring liberal values to their frontier community.

Born in 1776 at Renfrewshire, Scotland, McCulloch had undertaken medical studies at the University of Glasgow and later had graduated from Secession Divinity Hall, Whitburn. He was ordained and had worked as a Presbyterian minister before coming to Pictou. McCulloch never arrived on Prince Edward Island. In 1804 he was called to the Harbour Church in Pictou, later known as the Prince Street Church. Two years later he drafted an essay which outlined reasons for establishing a “Pictou College”. In it McCulloch highlighted the liberal promise of social peace and economic growth that would emerge in Nova Scotia if principles of virtue and rational knowledge were inculcated in the hearts and minds of youth.⁴

Implementing McCulloch’s plans proved difficult. McCulloch had to win support from a majority of the population in the district before he could assume a role as an educational and social leader. He and his Secessionist Presbyterian supporters also

3 Previous literature on Pictou Academy and on the contributions of McCulloch to the educational system of Nova Scotia is discussed in B. Anne Wood, “Meanings of Schooling: Cultural Interpretations of Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century”, M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1995, Chapter II, especially p. 92, fn. 36. Additional studies are also cited in the footnotes to this article.

4 “Essay putting forth reasons for the establishment of Pictou College”, draft manuscript, 1806, in MG1, Vol. 554, No. 1, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS], Halifax. See also the biography by Susan Buggie and Gwendolyn Davies, “Thomas McCulloch”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VII (Toronto, 1988), pp. 529-41.

had to contend with opposition from Halifax merchants. Provincial Treasurer Michael Wallace was particularly important in this regard as he had lost the 1799 election to Mortimer and deeply resented this. As well, he was distressed by the increasing political influence of Secessionist Presbyterianism in Nova Scotia. Wallace belonged to the Church of Scotland and was a Loyalist. In 1809 McCulloch found it necessary to write a letter to the new Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir George Prevost, defending himself against a disloyalty charge. The charge was, supposedly, the work of Wallace and several disgruntled Pictonians who were jealous of McCulloch's growing influence and their loss of standing. His defence appears to have been effective, for in 1810 he was appointed as Treasurer of the Pictou District Court of Sessions and as a justice of the peace. McCulloch gained status as a new type of authority figure in Nova Scotia, the professional leader who was educated and highly literate.⁵

McCulloch's grammar school began to gain an important reputation, and after the passage of the provincial Grammar School Act in 1811 his annual school salary of £150 was assured. The school was built on the northwest corner of Mortimer's lot, and students came to it from all parts of Nova Scotia, as well as from other Maritime provinces and from the West Indies. It included a dormitory for 16 boys at the back of McCulloch's house. All members of McCulloch's family aided in the enterprise. His eldest son, Michael, assisted as a teacher, as did a cousin from London, also named Michael. According to William, another of McCulloch's sons, the institution primarily offered education at the level of a common school although it did provide some of the levels found in a grammar school. Reverend McCulloch, however, sought permission from the government to add subjects he considered important for his projected higher institution.

Discipline at the school was firmly enforced. McCulloch addressed students as young gentlemen and promoted habits of self-respect as well as obedience. Like schools in Upper Canada, McCulloch's grammar school mimicked the character of a Christian family: it was small and intimate, allowing for constant supervision; teachers were often relatives or friends, who depended on a clergyman to establish the reputation of the school; and it cultivated family values and characteristics.⁶ The school's goal was character training in Christian values. The effect of McCulloch's teaching, though, was to promote a new paternalistic order in which McCulloch drew students away from allegiance to family, clan or community, and into a life of intellectual development. As a number of McCulloch's successful students noted in retrospect, the school promoted other values as well, such as self-reliance and the merits of effective problem-solving and delayed gratification. William McCulloch later noted, however, that some parents saw McCulloch's schooling as diversion from more useful pursuits and blamed it for "exciting desires never to be gratified".⁷

5 Copy of letter [Thomas McCulloch] to Lieutenant Governor, 1809-10, MG1, Vol. 554, No. 3, PANS.

6 Gidney and Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*, p. 26. See also George W. Spragge, "John Strachan's Contribution to Education, 1800-1823", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXII, 2 (June 1941), pp. 147-58, on the Cornwall Grammar School in Upper Canada, which operated in similar style.

7 William McCulloch, *The Life of Thomas McCulloch, D.D.* (n.p., 1920), p. 47.

In January 1815 the grammar school burned to the ground. William McCulloch described the loss as “unquestionably the work of an incendiary”. In his opinion “party spirit, taken in connection with strictness of discipline in the Church” had aroused the opposition of some of the very men whose sons were benefiting by its training. Thomas McCulloch had noted earlier that he was being criticized by new inhabitants who, in his opinion, were friends neither of religion nor of good order. These were probably working-class and rural people of Highland background whose allegiances were with the more evangelical wing of the Church of Scotland which was at that time gaining influence in Scotland. He considered them to be men whom no clergyman could acknowledge as friends or acquaintances without, in Thomas McCulloch’s words, “lessening himself in the esteem of every person valuing purity of religious character”.⁸ McCulloch’s responses provide evidence of the role he was assuming in the construction of a definition of the respectable citizen. Christian character, as defined by clerical authority, would be a central quality of these elect. These citizens would in turn aid in legitimating McCulloch’s leadership, which was grounded in his role as a trained Presbyterian minister and as an educator.

By 1817 McCulloch’s grammar school had an enrolment of 53 boys. The total enrolment of the other 11 grammar schools in the province was only 78. The population of the Pictou district by this time had reached approximately 8,737 people and would increase to 13,949 by 1827, and to 21,499 by 1838, as Scots continued to populate the region.⁹ A bill to provide provincial support for the Academy received unanimous support in the Nova Scotia Assembly in February 1816, but was condemned in Council by extreme Tories, who feared Pictou Academy would jeopardize King’s College’s monopoly on higher education. The Pictou Academy bill was passed later in the year after an amendment was included requiring all trustees and masters of the Academy to swear that they were members of the Church of England or professed the Presbyterian religion. The Council refused requests for a permanent grant and for degree-granting status. What McCulloch had planned as a non-denominational college, catering to all Dissenters or Nonconformists, became a Presbyterian academy.¹⁰ The Halifax merchantocracy had safeguarded their Windsor college. Although the political leadership of northeastern Nova Scotia, representing Pictou’s Secessionist Presbyterians, had presented their interests as the general interest of all Nova Scotians, provincial authorities had insisted on restricting the scope of the claim.

8 Ibid., pp. 44, 33. McCulloch’s provincial reputation was earned with his publication of *Popery Condemned by Scripture and the Fathers* (1808), *The Prosperity of the Church in Troublous Times* (1814) and *Words of Peace* (1817). These works, as Gwendolyn Davies writes, “not only confirmed McCulloch’s reputation as a church scholar but also revealed the unrelenting religious conviction that informed his battle for educational and social rights for the province’s dissenters”: “Editor’s Introduction”, in Thomas McCulloch, *The Mephibosheth Stepsure Letters* (Ottawa, 1990), p. xx.

9 Douglas Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto, 1974), p. 46, fn. 50.

10 “An Act for Founding, Establishing and Maintaining an Academy at Pictou, in this Province”, 56 George 3, Chapter 29, *Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1816*. See also Nora Story, “The Church and State Party in Nova Scotia, 1749-1851”, *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 27 (1947), pp. 33-57. For details of the 39 subscribers of the 1806 petition and the later 1814-16 society, see B. Anne Wood, “Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century” (unpublished manuscript, 1997), pp. 3-6, copies available at the Hector Centre, Pictou, N.S.

Symbols of the new disciplinary order McCulloch wished to foster began to appear in Pictou's landscape. In November 1818 a handsome, two-storied building with a prominent bell tower was in operation.¹¹ Its four classrooms with single desks and a raised dais for the professor marked the individualized, deferential culture McCulloch advocated. Students were required to wear red gowns, in imitation of those worn at the University of Glasgow. George Renny Young, who was a student at the Academy in the early 1820s, described the role McCulloch assumed within the institution: "He sits in an elevated seat above the class & wears now a black silk gown similar to those in which our attorneys appear at the bar. [He] has really a very imposing & respectable appearance".¹² A fenced-off green marked the boundary between the rational order of the Academy, which was training the souls and minds of a new elite and the spaces appropriate for unschooled members of the community. The school bell marked the regular routines of the day, accustoming students to the discipline of clock time. Students were being prepared for the approaching industrial era and the demands of professional careers.

How was McCulloch's new order received? Townspeople responded to the new gowns by calling students "clowns". Others showed their contempt for McCulloch's Academy by dumping garbage on the green.¹³ McCulloch's "Stepsure Letters", which were published in the *Acadian Recorder* in 1821, provide a sense of the opposition he faced. The industrious Mephibosheth Stepsure's "ordered" vision of society is opposed by the materialistic, intemperate and irrational behaviour of Nova Scotia's adolescents. Hob Gosling, a "cute" young man, aped the genteel respectability of his father by riding races, playing cards or drinking a glass of grog at Mr. Tipple's. His sisters were taught to paint flowers and to play upon the pianoforte, but the meat at the Goslings was always ill-cooked and the puddings and pies "mere dough".¹⁴ McCulloch's satire no doubt offended many Nova Scotians. It reflected also his sense of embattlement, as he struggled to promote a new liberal order.

Even within his own denomination, McCulloch encountered opposition. He faced problems maintaining membership in his Harbour Church congregation and he also faced resistance in the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia. When the (Secessionist) Synod was established in 1817, McCulloch assumed a prominent position within it. Soon after its establishment, the Synod appointed a "Ways and Means" committee that recommended more stringent tests for Presbyterians wishing to take communion. As a result, a number of members of Harbour Church were barred

11 Photographs of the first (1818-80), second (1880-1895), third (1896-1938) and fourth (1940-99) Pictou Academies are in the *Journal of Education [JE]*, 11 (January 1940), pp. 136-7; a lithograph of the second Academy is in RG14, Vol. 54, No. 1, PANS.

12 George Young to Father [John Young], 2 December 1821, MG2, Vol. 719, F1/10, George Young Papers, PANS.

13 Excerpt from letter, John MacKinlay to George Smith, 30 March 1825, Micro: Places, Pictou Academy, Reel 1, PANS.

14 McCulloch, *The Stepsure Letters* (Toronto, 1960), p. 15. Northrop Frye explains in his introduction, p. v, that "cute" then meant "crafty". For additional evidence of indiscipline, including drinking, see George Patterson, *A History of Pictou, Nova Scotia* ([1877], Belleville, 1972), p. 247-9. For the conflict between McCulloch's more Calvinistic, disciplined Presbyterianism and numerous charismatic rivals, see Patterson, *Memoir of the Rev. James MacGregor, D.D. . . .* (Philadelphia, 1859), pp. 417-18.

from taking communion. Some left and attempted to form an Anglican church in Pictou. Others gave their support to the newly arrived evangelical Church of Scotland minister, Reverend Donald Fraser, who was joined in 1823 by Reverend Kenneth John MacKenzie. These ministers allied themselves with Reverend John Martin of Halifax and Reverend Hugh MacLeod of West River to form a rival Church of Scotland Presbytery of Halifax.¹⁵ Another Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia committee, co-chaired by McCulloch, asked the Synod to appoint a Committee on Statistics that would collect annual returns from all ministers. This type of intelligence-gathering technique, typical of inspectors or census-takers, was an extension of the bureaucratic “gaze” and a precursor to normalizing regulation by centralized authorities. Its political intent, to identify problems in the performance and behaviour of ministers, was quickly detected by members of the Synod, and the committee’s work was brought to a close.¹⁶

McCulloch, however, won support for establishing a divinity class at Pictou Academy. It began in 1820 and operated outside regular class time, usually on weekends. As well, he secured increased Presbyterian support for his institution. This represented a step toward professionalization of the ministry. He served as moderator of the Synod in 1821 and when he left his post in 1822 he created a sensation by delivering a sermon that was sharply critical of ministers who engaged extensively in farming, as many did in order to supplement the infrequent contributions of their congregations. Secessionist ministers had no other means of remuneration, unlike Church of Scotland ministers who received financial support from the Glasgow Colonial Society (GCS) as part of its missionary work in Nova Scotia. McCulloch sought to curtail this unprofessional behaviour and was highly resented for his efforts.

The financial terms of the Pictou Academy Act left the institution vulnerable to the attacks of critics. Between 1820 and 1832 the Nova Scotia House of Assembly passed eight money bills requesting grants to Pictou Academy to alleviate its debt, which by 1832 amounted to £973, but all were vetoed by Council. Members of Council expressed fears about the effect of McCulloch’s liberal programme and about the political overtures he was making to Annapolis Valley Baptists for a union of provincial Dissenters against the Halifax oligarchy.¹⁷ The fate of Dalhousie College

15 For details on their evangelical activism against Pictou Academy and its elitist policies, see B. Anne Wood, “The Significance of Evangelical Presbyterian Politics in the Construction of State Schooling: A Case Study of the Pictou District, 1817-1866”, *Acadiensis*, XX, 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 62-85, and Wood, “Schooling for Presbyterian Leaders: The College Years of Pictou Academy, 1816-1832”, in William Klempa, ed., *The Burning Bush and a Few Acres of Snow: The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture* (Ottawa, 1994), pp. 19-37.

16 Precedent for this was established in Scotland with the publication of *Statistical Account of Scotland, Drawn Up from the Communication of Ministers of Different Parishes* (Edinburgh, 1798). See Curtis, *True Government*, pp. 176-7. Michel Foucault suggests that the “gaze”, allied with the 18th-century corpus of disciplined writing and which by the 19th century comprised a permanent archives of knowledge, was designed to focus attention on the subject/patient in his individual features, particular aptitudes/inaptitudes and abilities/disabilities: see *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1979), p. 190.

17 See letters to Edward Manning, 17 April 1821, 2 August 1822 in Scrapbook of Dr. George Patterson, MG9, Vol. 553, No. 42, PANS. In July 1824 McCulloch proposed to Manning that a united board be formed, in imitation of English Dissenters, which would press for provincial rights. He asked Manning to meet with representatives of Methodist and Baptist groups to prepare a general plan

was of concern as well. Lieutenant Governor George Ramsay, ninth Earl of Dalhousie, had laid its cornerstone in 1818, and the Church of Scotland and the Anglican Halifax merchantocracy sought to make it the major provincial university. By 1823 there was a handsome stone building and a board of governors, but neither principal, staff nor students. As well, there was a £5,000 debt and this, coupled with financial requests from King's College, made Sir James Kempt, Lord Dalhousie's successor, nervous. The Archbishop of Canterbury blocked a bill of 1824 which sought to unite King's College with Dalhousie. This might have been a blessing for the Academy, but McCulloch was aware that in an era of strong clerical influence in education his plans for a liberal, non-denominational college remained vulnerable.¹⁸

In 1825 McCulloch went to Scotland to try to gain support for the Academy and for the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia. There he soon became involved in an ugly controversy with Reverend Robert Burns, secretary of the GCS. McCulloch alienated him by insisting that clergy be trained in Nova Scotia rather than be sent from Scotland. In the ensuing battle of words, Reverend Burns impugned McCulloch's character and discredited his Academy programme to such an extent that McCulloch suffered a nervous breakdown. Burns' successful newspaper and missionary journal campaign against him cost McCulloch prestigious supporters, such as George Baird, principal of the University of Edinburgh, who began to view McCulloch as selfish and unfair to Highlanders. McCulloch retained the support of Scottish Secessionists, but was able to raise only £584 in subscriptions.¹⁹

What was the effect on Pictou Academy students of these very public denominational and political battles for legitimate authority? Students had little time outside their school work in the early years of their college programme.²⁰ McCulloch deplored the "monkish" boarding-school practices at King's, which he judged to be harmful for the character of its students. Mirroring Scottish practice, McCulloch stressed the importance of professors living exactly as a member of the community would live; they should not be specialists nor have too much division of labour. Classes were small and there were frequent oral presentations. These enabled the

before the next session of the House of Assembly. Before leaving for Scotland in 1825, McCulloch published a *Memorial on Behalf of the Literary and Philosophical Institute at Pictou, Nova Scotia*. In it he summarized the chief scholarly and non-sectarian advantages of Pictou Academy to the province, particularly in contrast to the lavish subsidy granted King's College despite its limited appeal to the majority of inhabitants due to its restrictive statutes. Because no fees had yet been charged Pictou students, and only £400 per year granted by the province, a debt of £800 had accumulated. See *Memorial*, MG1, Vol. 554, No. 29 and letter to Manning, n.d., Scrapbook of Dr. George Patterson, No. 42, p. 2.

- 18 P.B. Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University, Volume One, 1818-1925: Lord Dalhousie's College* (Montreal and Kingston, 1994), p. 35. The 1821 Dalhousie College bill, however, included a chair in theology. This would have given greater prestige to the Church of Scotland Presbyterians and would have jeopardized the Secessionist theological training programme at Pictou Academy.
- 19 List of subscriptions to Pictou Academy from Scotland [1825-6], MG1, Vol. 554, No. 24, PANS. For full details of Pictou's "petty feuds", see Wood, "Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century", pp. 51-63.
- 20 In contrast to King's College, modelled on Oxford University, whose curriculum emphasized the classics, the programme at Pictou Academy was modelled on that of the Scottish universities, where science, logic and moral philosophy were given equal weight with the classics. The Bachelor of Arts degree programme at Glasgow University in 1826 was very similar to that of Pictou Academy at the same time:

professor to establish a competitive atmosphere and to closely monitor the students’ understanding of lectures and texts. McCulloch was particularly concerned to foster student interest in improving their mental faculties and participating in the development of society.

These goals were achieved in the case of 16-year-old George Young who, in 1821, reported to his father that he was working hard with MacKinlay on his Virgil in Latin class, on the Aeneid in Greek class and on Euclidean geometry and trigonometry problems in his mathematics class. He also attended McCulloch’s moral philosophy class, which he enjoyed. Although he had arrived after classes began, Young was quickly catching up to the rest of the students by dint of private lessons. Young’s correspondence reveals the effect McCulloch’s teaching had on students.²¹ Young believed the moral philosophy he was learning would “be of great use . . . to me not only by giving me a deeper insight into human nature [a normalizing concept which McCulloch was defining] but also by enabling me to regulate my own conduct”. McCulloch’s lectures were supplemented by readings from Scottish Enlightenment sources: “Stewarts Outlines & the last volume of Reid on the Mind”. These were part of the extensive library the Academy was assembling for students.²² Young felt he was doing well in moral philosophy, and he credited McCulloch’s clear, rational exposition: “His lectures are to me a treat. They are delivered in plain almost homely language but at the same time display an intimate acquaintance with his subjects. He

	Glasgow University	Pictou Academy
Year 1	Latin and Greek	Latin I and Greek I
Year 2	Logic (including General Grammar and Rhetoric), Latin and Greek	Latin II and Greek II
Year 3	Moral Philosophy, Math (with practical applications), Algebra	Math I
Year 4	Natural Philosophy, Math, Algebra	Math II, Logic (including Rhetoric)
		Natural Philosophy, Moral Philosophy

In Jotham Blanchard’s letter to the Speaker of the House of Assembly, 9 March 1827, he enclosed a class list of 20 students for that year giving their ages, place of residence and courses pursued: see Micro: Places, Pictou Academy, Reel 1, pp. 1-2, PANS.

- 21 George Young to Father, 2 December 1821. In similar manner a decade later Mary Lyons at Mount Holyoke College disciplined the minds of her female students into the new requirements of an urban industrial order; see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (Boston, 1984), pp. 11, 12, 15. Horowitz emphasizes the evangelical influence on the seminary which turned external authority into inner discipline. McCulloch appears to have used the same style.
- 22 On the library, see John Irving, “The Achievement of Thomas McCulloch”, endnote in McCulloch, *The Stepsure Letters* (1960). Irving listed many books from this library which he saw in an upstairs attic of Pictou Academy in August 1959, including “beautifully bound copies of such books as Cudworth’s *Intellectual System of the Universe*; Stewart’s *Outlines of Moral Philosophy*; Burke’s *On the Sublime*; Horne Tooke’s *Diversions of Perley [Purley]*; Monboddo’s [*Of the] Origin and Progress of Language*; Kames[’s] *On Morality*; and Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*” (p. 152). There were also editions of Hobbes, Descartes, Malebranche, Berkeley and Adam Smith. McCulloch also bought a second-hand scientific laboratory from a Scottish professor in 1825 and built three extensive museum collections, one of which John James Audubon pronounced of world class when he visited McCulloch in 1833; see “Audubon and Dr. McCulloch”, *JE*, 5 (April 1934), pp. 348-51, and Wood, “Thomas McCulloch’s Use of Science in Promoting a Liberal Education”, *Acadiensis*, XVII, 1 (Autumn 1987), pp. 56-73.

takes a clear view of everything — sees the very bottom of his question & illustrates it so fully that if a due attention be paid it is impossible that you can leave the room without understanding clearly his elucidation. His examples are all taken from nature — they are strong but I must confess that to me they sometimes appear coarse”.²³

Young quickly absorbed the competitive, individualistic stance encouraged by McCulloch and rendered critical assessments even of older students. In a letter to his brother he remarked, “You would be surprised to see the ignorance of some of the young men who have attended college these three years & in August next will have finished their education. They write poorly — the sentences sometimes not marked out & the rules of grammar greatly violated”. He attended the debating society — “but ye gods what speaking. Five minutes was the full length of any of their orations. None of them saw the subject clearly & I speak the truth when I say neither argument nor fact was brought forward which had anything to do with the subject under discussion”.²⁴

Despite Young’s criticism, McCulloch’s liberal programme had important effects on this elite group. Seven of the 32 students attending in 1820 became divinity students — and the first graduating class of native Presbyterian ministers. Others, such as Jotham Blanchard and Charles Archibald, became lawyers. As of 1822, eight Pictou Academy graduates were teachers in the District of Pictou.²⁵ Three Pictou graduates, Robert Patterson, John McLean and John Murdoch, undertook oral examinations by professors at the University of Glasgow and so impressed them that they were granted the Master of Arts degree. By 1831 Blanchard, now editor of the *Colonial Patriot*, was able to boast of the widespread success of 50 young Pictou Academy graduates who had assumed leadership roles in the lower British North American provinces.²⁶ Students obviously benefited from the intellectual skills they acquired at the Academy. As well as inculcating them with McCulloch’s liberal ideals, their schooling gave them a new form of patrimony.

In Nova Scotia the shift from sponsored mobility to contest mobility and the establishment of the Scottish principle of merit was occurring 20 years earlier than it would in Upper Canada.²⁷ Students were prepared for the competitive world they were entering by the rigorous testing of their professors at the Academy, as well as by their

23 George Young to Father, 2 December 1821. The assigned readings would have been those from the works of Dugald Stewart, the greatest exponent of the common-sense school, who resigned his Edinburgh chair of moral philosophy in 1810, and from the works of Thomas Reid, the founder of the same school, who wrote *Enquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764); Reid opposed both the idealism of George Berkeley and the skepticism of David Hume and emphasized the common consciousness of mankind as the basis of a moral economy.

24 George Young to William Young, 3 December 1821, MG 2, Vol. 719, F1/11, George Young Papers, PANS.

25 See D.C. Harvey, “English Schools in Nova Scotia, 1811-25”, *JE*, 5 (May 1934), p. 475, and Wood, “Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century”, pp. 83-107.

26 *Journals of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly [JHA], 1832*, Appendix 1, p. 5. See also Wood, “McCulloch’s Use of Science”, Wood, *God, Science and Schooling: John William Dawson’s Pictou Years, 1820-1855* (Truro, 1991) and Wood, “Schooling/Credentials for Professional Advancement: A Case Study of Pictou Presbyterians”, in Charles H.H. Scobie and G.A. Rawlyk, eds., *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, 1997), pp. 54-69.

27 Gidney and Millar, *Professional Gentlemen*, p. 83.

exposure to the Pictou feuds. Their newly cultivated individuality, coupled with their character certificates and intellectual self-confidence, enabled many to establish successful professional careers beyond Pictou. They formed part of an emerging group of middle-class liberals who pioneered the modernization of the Maritimes in the 19th century.

Kirk attacks on this new form of subjectivity and on the programme of McCulloch's college became increasingly virulent in the late 1820s and early 1830s. These attacks launched the second stage of the academy's history. From Scotland, Reverend Burns of the GCS orchestrated a campaign to discredit McCulloch. Reverend MacKenzie, one of McCulloch's most outspoken evangelical opponents, successfully appealed to the fears of the Tory Council in Halifax. Baptist support for McCulloch's plans waned, and in 1828 Horton Academy was established in Wolfville. In 1832 a Council-sponsored bill forced amendments to the Academy's original charter, allowing MacKenzie and several other Church of Scotland supporters on the Board.²⁸ When Pictou's grammar school was closed in 1828, MacKenzie successfully argued that the Pictou Academy should become responsible for grammar school subjects as well as its college programme. The reconstituted institution suffered major financial problems because of a lack of support from the Church of Scotland and because of a decline in enrolment, especially after McCulloch left to become president of Dalhousie College in 1838. Nonetheless, in 1845 the Academy provided the basis for a renovated Union Academy.²⁹

In this third stage of its history, the policies of Pictou Academy were controlled by people other than McCulloch or those associated with the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia. Provincial authorities now began to dictate the financial terms of the institution. The need to attract students and to compete with other schools made trustees attentive to the public's ideas concerning an appropriate curriculum. In 1846 the Assembly passed a resolution that the Pictou Union Academy, having largely paid off its debts, be granted £250 for four years provided that the institution's trustees raise an equal amount by subscription. There would be local accountability, monitored by provincial authorities, and Pictou's feuding Presbyterian factions would have to cooperate. The Union Academy broadened its curriculum to include practical subjects such as book-keeping, navigation, geography and land surveying at the lowest level. French, universal history, Latin and Greek were added to the second level, and mechanical and natural philosophy, agricultural chemistry and practical mathematics became part of the highest level. This programme attracted 95 students in its first year, and for the first time they included females.³⁰

The Synod of the Presbyterian Church viewed the rise of the Union Academy as a defeat. They responded by expanding their theological college, which was moved

28 “Act to Regulate and Support the Pictou Academy”, IV William, Chapter 5. For details of this period see Wood, “Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century”, Chapter V.

29 VIII Victoria, Chapter 34, “An Act to Amend and alter the Act to Regulate and Support the Pictou Academy”. On the Union Academy regime, see Wood, “Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century”, Chapter VII.

30 Although one free scholar, Margaret McLean, was listed in the Minutes of 25 July 1846, the earliest class lists date from 1848. The first department in 1851 had 34 students, 15 girls and 19 boys; the second department had 17 students, 5 girls and 12 boys; the third department shared 27 students with

from Prince Edward Island to West River in 1844. There they offered logic and a philosophy programme to non-theological students in an effort to discredit the continuing college-level programme at Pictou Union Academy. The changing needs of an increasingly complex commercial-industrial community undercut the effectiveness of this strategy. The diverse denominational background of students at the Pictou Union Academy reflected the new demographic reality. They belonged to the Church of Scotland (31), the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia (40), the Free Church of Scotland (14), the Church of England (4), the Society of Friends (2), the Baptist Church (2) and the Roman Catholic Church (2). Religious cooperation and a more utilitarian school policy had been brokered by moderate local leaders and by provincial authorities.³¹

The Academy's subsequent history provides insight into how its efforts to acculturate students into middle-class forms of discipline were pursued within the precincts of the school and were also resisted by an emerging collegiate culture. The appointment of Alexander Howard MacKay as principal of Pictou Academy in 1873 was a significant development. MacKay was the epitome of the professional administrative expert. He had obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Dalhousie College in 1873; prior to this he had attended the Normal School at Truro and, in 1866, had earned a Grade A teaching licence. MacKay was a born organizer and business manager.³² Using the structures established by Nova Scotia's Free School Acts (1864-66) and his increasing influence within the provincial teachers' association and with the superintendents of education, MacKay made Pictou Academy a model of educational excellence.³³ In 1874 he worked with the trustees of the Academy to block an attempt by the newly incorporated town council of Pictou to run its own common schools and take over management of the Academy. MacKay engineered instead his own administrative takeover of town schools and, by 1877, organized them into grades. He assessed the qualifications of the teachers — six female and one male — and vetted the entry of their students in Pictou Academy. MacKay obtained an increased annual provincial grant of \$400 for the Academy in 1875, as growing numbers of free students were attending the institution on the basis of successful completion of provincial entrance examinations. Three years later David Allison, provincial superintendent of education, commended Pictou Academy as a

the first department and five others were in this department alone. See Minutes of 25 July 1846, Report of Examination, 28 June 1851, Micro: Places, Pictou Academy, Reel 4, PANS. By 1853 only four female students were in attendance, ostensibly because of rival female private institutions and the implementation of increased competition with prizes awarded at Pictou Academy in 1848. See Wood, "Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century", pp. 145-7, 205-9.

- 31 List of pupils of different denominations attending Pictou Academy during July-December 1848, Micro: Places, Pictou Academy, Reel 2, PANS.
- 32 N.M. Sheehan, "Alexander H. MacKay, Social and Educational Reformer", in Robert S. Patterson et al., eds., *Profiles of Canadian Educators* (n.p., 1974), pp. 253-70.
- 33 Superintendent A.S. Hunt in 1871 identified the six special academies in the province as institutions which afforded "highly satisfactory evidences of progress and of increased claims upon the good will of the people". Each received an annual grant of \$1,000 from the province. Pictou Academy was the only special academy which did not charge fees to county students and which was increasingly tied in with the graded schools of the town. Pictou Academy was also treated as Pictou County's major high school. Because of its status, Pictou Academy prevented the new New Glasgow High School from receiving a county grant of \$600. See *JHA*, 1871, Appendix 21, pp. 1-3.

model that should be emulated by other schools. The Academy had attracted the majority of its students from the county at large — 71 of 138 students — and the quality of instruction generated enrolment figures that were three times the average of similar institutions in the province.³⁴ Using Pictou Academy as a model, Allison began a seven-year campaign to change the provincial schools into one integrated system under centralized control. To that end, Allison asked MacKay to develop a curriculum for public schools in the province. Standardization would, as MacKay explained to teachers at their annual association meeting in 1881, allow students to transfer their credits and encourage adoption of a standard graded system for the whole province.³⁵ He noted that this uniformity would be useful to administrators as a basis of classification and that it would affect the inspection and examination of teachers as well.

Talented students at Pictou Academy began to benefit from MacKay’s uniform and competitive system. In 1882 students won a total of \$2,800 in university prizes, a statistic Allison highlighted in his annual report.³⁶ Prominent people began to donate prizes to the institution. Lieutenant General J.W. Laurie of Oakfield, N.S. provided a \$25 prize and D.H. Smith a \$5 one. As of 1877 a silver cup was awarded the top prize-winner in school examinations. In 1887 a gold medal was awarded to the competitor with the highest marks in the winter term.³⁷ McCulloch’s informal methods of instilling a competitive ethic in his students were now being formalized as part of the educational system. Pictou Academy students, who were well-accustomed to the system, were among the first to benefit, as the Scottish meritocratic background gave them an advantage over provincial rivals.

How did students react to this emphasis on competition and examinations? In 1896 Fred Yorston, president of the *Montreal Standard*, wrote an account of his school experiences at Pictou Academy 15 years earlier. His account of the disciplinary order of the school began by describing the gong outside the principal’s office which “regulated the movements of everyone . . . ‘Little Goosey’ [the nickname given MacKay] would stalk doorward very solemnly and ring it himself”. Occasionally, though, someone would sneak out of class and peel it ten or 15 minutes before the end of class, and “The L.G. would rush about in the midst of the confusion, vainly trying to catch the offender. I may state that upon these occasions the gong was usually rung from the cellar stairs. The risk, however, was considered very great”.³⁸

The layout of the classroom and MacKay’s manner of teaching were consistent with the regime of authority. The principal’s book-covered desk was the most prominent feature in the room and was on a raised platform in one corner. From it MacKay dispensed chalk and bundles of crayons for the school, thereby emphasizing his control of supplies and his authority over the staff. The drawers of his desk were stuffed with mutilated exam papers, damaged scientific apparatus (such as a broken air pump) and a few choice bottled snakes and preserved lizards, “which juniors were

34 *JHA*, 1879, Appendix 5, p. xv.

35 “The Teachers’ Association”, *Morning Herald* (Halifax), 15 July 1881.

36 *JHA*, 1883, Appendix 5, p. AA.

37 See L.G. ‘Bud’ White, *Pictou Academy Gold Medallists* (Pictou, 1985).

38 Fred Yorston, “Academy Memories”, *Pictou Advocate*, 25 December 1896.

encouraged to regard with becoming awe”. Older students disrupted the orderly display of specimens by occasionally removing tadpoles from the experimental tank in another corner of the room and replacing them with a large frog. Students were subjected to MacKay’s manipulative teaching practices on a daily basis. His preferred instrument of torture was the blackboard. Pupils would be called up to the board to work out an algebra problem. If they could not accomplish the task, MacKay would “swoop down” on an offender and “circle round and round his victim, making sarcastic remarks the while, which were hugely enjoyed and rapturously applauded by those who had in the meantime safely gained their seats. After hopelessly confusing the helpless Algebraist, taking him by the ear, the instructor would lead him to his seat with the softly murmured accompaniment of ‘Oh you little Goosey’”.

The power relations between principal and students were never conducted on equal terms. MacKay’s private room was comfortably furnished and suitably appointed with a well-filled cabinet of curios, but it also exuded a subtle threatening aura that prevented students from being at ease. As Yorston recalled, “Here many tangled plots were unravelled, guilty parties ferreted out, and culprits summoned to receive sentence”. A nearby gentlemen’s cloakroom often hid “large bands of truants [who were] frequently caught in this cloakroom. There was no escape from it when the ex-Principal [MacKay] had once left his room on a voyage of discovery”. Upstairs, in the large canvas backdrop of the stage of Convocation Hall, “The Bridge of Sighs” provided another hiding place for truants where “‘Little Goosey’ on his occasional tours of inspection always stopped . . . to listen [for] the anxious wheezing of culprits [which] frequently lead [sic] to their discovery”. A large wooden door led to the tower by means of a spiral staircase. The small cabin at the top was covered with a multitude of carved initials. Legend had it that once when MacKay was chasing a boy from this tower, the miscreant’s foot broke through the ceiling of the Hall in the course of escape and MacKay stabbed at it with one of the school’s Fiji Island battle axes.³⁹

A striking aspect of Yorston’s reminiscences concerns the degree to which the identity of individual students was defined and controlled by school administrators. Academic excellence was not the Academy’s only goal. MacKay set up a fine arts department, affiliated with the Academy, which offered students — primarily female — opportunity to improve their artistic talents while earning accreditation as music teachers from the New England Conservatory of Music.⁴⁰ Concerts and art exhibitions in the magnificent new Academy building, constructed in 1880, served as object lessons in bourgeois respectability. They also raised money to support athletic clubs,

39 This limited evidence indicates the presence of a rebellious collegiate culture at Pictou Academy similar to that described by Horowitz, who dates it in the 1870s, or even the 1900s, at American women’s colleges: see *Alma Mater*, pp. 59, 145. See also Colin B. Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View* (New York and London, 1982), p. 198. Gidney and Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*, pp. 310-11 indicate that “We know almost nothing about the growth of a cohesive sense of identity about being a high school student or of the emergence of a distinct student subculture”.

40 “The Pictou Academy”, *Eastern Enterprise* (New Glasgow), November 1888. This “accomplishment” programme was sought by female students and their parents as early as 1851: see Wood, “Constructing Nova Scotia’s ‘Scotchness’: The Centenary Celebrations of Pictou Academy in 1916”, *Historical Studies in Education*, 6, 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 292-3 and Wood, “Pictou Academy in the Nineteenth Century”, p. 145.

debating and typographical clubs and a school newspaper, *The Academy*, which was established in 1884. MacKay’s own enthusiasm was for the Pictou Academy Scientific Association, over which he presided. The Academy also organized special clubs for ornithology, botany, entomology, chemistry, mineralogy and geology. Each had its officers, record of minutes and school display cases. Visitors who attended concerts or convocation ceremonies could view more than 200 specimens of birds and mammals and more than 2000 specimens of insects of the province which lined one of the halls. The library contained more than 800 books and valuable scientific journals and also had a large herbarium of Nova Scotia plants. Some scholars have suggested that MacKay’s inventory science was constructed as an acceptable substitute for religion in promoting social harmony within an emerging progressive community.⁴¹

Pictou Academy played a significant role in the development of liberal, middle-class values in 19th-century Nova Scotia. The modernization process associated with the Academy assisted impoverished but talented male Pictonians in attaining leadership positions, especially in the professions and in education. Three Pictou Academy graduates became provincial superintendents of education — J.W. Dawson (1850-54), A.H. MacKay (1891-1926) and Henry Fraser Munro (1926-49) — and eight others followed the example of McCulloch in becoming university presidents.⁴² These men helped to construct public policy around the liberal ideals of a social hierarchy open to merit and grounded in the middle-class, male social belief that bourgeois values would promote the progress and efficiency of the economy. Their success in achieving cultural leadership was due in large part to their adroit handling of power, not only in Pictou County but also in the province at large.

Robert Anderson, writing about Scottish educational history, noted that the general level of middle-class culture by the 1870s was higher in Scotland than in England and that a large number of leadership positions were being filled from a wide social range. By the mid-1880s, as a result of the secondary school reforms in Scotland, talented males were most likely to enjoy opportunities for social advancement in small and medium-sized towns where the schooling was likely to be free and elementary schools were not overburdened with the task of delivering basic education to the industrial working class. But Anderson also concluded that liberal social theory, with its myth of the “lad of parts” could be used by educational reformers as a justification for remodelling the school system along class lines that reinforced structural inequalities. He has suggested that “liberal social theory legitimated a competitive, individualist society: if the social hierarchy was open to merit, and genuine talent could always

41 See Carl Berger, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto, 1983), pp. 71, 74-5, and Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto, 1987).

42 McCulloch was president of Dalhousie College (1838-43); James Ross was president of Dalhousie University (1863-85); J.W. Dawson was Principal of McGill (1855-93); George Grant was principal of Queen’s (1877-1903) and was succeeded by another Pictonian, Daniel Miner Gordon; A. Ross Hill was appointed president of the University of Missouri in 1916; Archibald O. MacRae was principal of Western Canada College (1903-22); Frank Parker Day was president of Union College (1928-33); Norman (Larry) MacKenzie was president of the University of New Brunswick (1940-44) and the University of British Columbia (1944-62).

reach the top, then middle-class social domination was felt to rest on ability rather than privilege".⁴³

In Pictou there was a price to pay for this meritocratic Scottish model of secondary schooling. In the 1891 student population at Pictou Academy, for instance, only 16 per cent of the first-year class was promoted, only 21 per cent of the second-year class and only 14 per cent of the third-year class. While brilliant students, such as Henry Munro, took only four years to pass all levels of schooling at Pictou Academy, 41 per cent of the fourth-year students in 1891 took two years to complete the required examination papers. The pattern of providing a way-station for adolescents and of serving as gate-keepers for access to universities and professions was by this time well established.⁴⁴

The democratic Scottish myth of the impoverished "lad of parts" and middle-class fears of the idle adolescent increasingly hid the web of regulations and inequitable power relations which administrators such as MacKay were constructing. A provincial system of schooling was a key technique of spreading their discipline and order over a large segment of society. In school students were classified, examined and labelled. Their individual worth was assessed by their standing or position in the school accreditation system. Expert authorities judged results, gathered statistics and spread this discipline throughout society. Their methodology became the norm for a wide array of social policy initiatives. Individual students, such as Yorston and friends, resisted these powerful administrators by participating in rebellious behaviour, but they also used networking and the credentialing school system to gain status and material ends, like their predecessors, but now without the same ideals of service. Their functionalism would subvert the earlier character-training and moral intent of the original founders of Pictou Academy. Ironically, pragmatic leaders such as MacKay did not recognize that their administrative power and normalizing disciplinary culture would lead their schooled subjects into the hands of a global consumer culture and thus out of their control.

The Scottish moral economy, as promoted by intellectual pioneers such as McCulloch and Dawson and developed by middle-class community leaders and later by administrative experts, was an appropriate model of public policy for small-town communities in the 19th century. Analysis of the three phases of Pictou Academy's history reveals a skilful use of symbols and narrative by its leaders in introducing the new modernizing culture. It also shows how vulnerable early 19th-century leaders were — no matter how talented or professional — to political attack by many interest groups who denounced the new cultural order and its disseminators; there was a direct relationship between the fortunes of the academy and the political and religious campaigns waged by these interest groups. Eventually the state had to step in to

43 Robert Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 15, 249. See also his articles: "Education and the State in Nineteenth-Century Scotland", *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 37, 4 (1983), pp. 518-34; "In search of the 'Lad of Parts': the Mythical History of Scottish Education", *History Workshop Journal*, 19 (Spring 1985), pp. 82-104; "Secondary Schools and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth Century", *Past and Present*, 109 (November 1985), pp. 176-202.

44 Class List, 1890-91, in "Pictou Academy", School Registers, Micro: 1888-1932, RG14, Series R-1, PANS.

mediate these disputes and to provide sufficient financial resources for the Academy to survive; provincial authorities sanctioned, but did not lead, the liberal platform of educational reform that led to the Education Acts of the 1860s. In Pictou County the Academy played an important role in increasing the demand for schooling; its network of alumni successfully spread the new liberal gospel throughout the countryside. Its graduates filled leadership roles in clerical, technical, political, business and professional positions which opened up in the later 19th century. With its constantly evolving programme of studies, the Academy proved itself to be pragmatic and flexible in ensuring the survival of the institution. Student insights into school life reveal another dimension as well. The speed with which talented members of all classes — and rival Presbyterian factions — used their schooling to bridge the gap between their rural past and their urban future and to enter occupations associated with social and economic modernization demonstrated the effectiveness of Pictou Academy’s campaign for the liberal order in 19th-century Nova Scotia.