

In the Palm of God's Hand? The Irish Catholic Experience in Mid-Nineteenth Century Guelph

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May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your
face, the rains fall soft upon your
fields and, until we meet again, may
God hold you in the palm of his hand.

An Old Irish Blessing.

Emigration to Upper Canada offered most Irish Famine immigrants little of the optimism and warmth expressed in the Old Irish Blessing. Overall, the lack of capital, absence of employment skills, prevalence of disease and the hostility of earlier immigrant groups drew them into a world far beyond the safety of God's hand. Yet in Toronto¹ and other communities the Catholic Church and laity made great strides to offset the double indemnity of being both Irish and Catholic in mid-nineteenth century Upper Canada. In Guelph, the foresight of Rev. Father Holzer and businessman Dennis Coffee actually improved the quality of life for many of the Famine Irish drawn to Guelph by the 1850's railway boom.

Unlike Hamilton, Toronto and Kingston, Guelph did not become an Irish town in the wake of the Famine immigration.² In 1861, the Catholic Irish remained a minority group constituting just 17.4 percent of Guelph's

¹ See Murray W. Nicolson. "The Catholic Church and the Irish in Victorian Toronto." an unpublished Ph.D. thesis. University of Guelph, 1981.

² For an assessment of the mid-nineteenth century demographic and spatial impacts of the Famine Irish in Hamilton, Toronto and Kingston see Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, 1974), Peter G. Goheen, *Victorian Toronto, 1850-1900: Patterns and Processes of Growth* (Chicago, 1970) and Marvin McInnes, "Kingston in the Economy of the Late Nineteenth Century," Discussion Paper No. 132, Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, 1973.

households.³ Engulfed in a decidedly English-born, Protestant community, Guelph's Irish Roman Catholics shared the fate of fellow countrymen elsewhere whose future was threatened by their over-representation in low-paying, low-status occupations. Drawn, primarily, to becoming domestic servants or the day labourers in the construction industry, Guelph's Irish Catholics became particularly vulnerable when the Panic of 1857 threw the community into a prolonged recession. Their plight was further complicated by the enmity of a town in which the founder, John Galt, and his Canada Company employers had inflated land prices and established an economic structure which demanded the expertise of skilled workers and deterred the influx of penniless immigrants. Local sectarian hostility further compounded the forces rendering Guelph an inhospitable settlement option.

Despite these undercurrents, the sense of community and tradition of self-help promoted in the 1850's by Rev. Father Holzer and leading Roman Catholics offered some respite to diseased and destitute Irish Catholic immigrants. Whereas Irish Catholics in urban communities beyond Guelph were crowded into shanty towns or miserable tenements, the majority of Guelph's Famine Irish were initially drawn to the east end of town where Father Holzer and Dennis Coffee were leading landowners. Like Coffee, these Irish newcomers were offered the however fleeting hope of "buying" respectability by becoming property owners or entrepreneurs in a community which prized business acumen and equated self-worth and power with property accumulation.⁴ Ironically, however, the very institutions created within the parish to provide buffers against the ravages of ridicule and powerlessness eventually propelled the local Catholic Church and Irish Catholic laity into a multi-faceted series of controversies. These virulent local disputes threatened to malign the reputations of the educational facilities, the hospital and even the place of worship designed to instill pride and cohesiveness within a beleaguered Catholic community.

The following paper will address the ramifications of being both Irish and Catholic in mid-nineteenth century Guelph. It will also assess the extent to which the increasing presence of Irish Catholic townspeople transformed the relative quietude of ethnic status quo in the community into a series of pitched battles between Orange Lodge supporters and Irish Catholics, which eventually escalated into a widening socio-political impasse encompassing Catholics and Protestants in general. The discussion will focus on the span of time demarcated by the 1852 arrival of Rev. Father John Holzer and the

³ Debra L. Nash-Chambers, "Guelph, Canada West in 1861: Family, Residence and Wealth in a Frontier Commercial City," an unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Guelph, 1981, p. 94.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim* Chapter Four.

establishment of a permanent Jesuit presence in the area, and the year 1877, when the final goal of Father Holzer was realized with a dedication ceremony for the Church of Our Lady. However, the pre-1852 formative years in the establishment of the Guelph Mission will also be outlined in order to prepare a backdrop for the ensuing mid-century dilemmas. Overall, the paper will be divided into two interrelated parts. Part One will delineate the changing composition and institutional needs of the local Catholic community. Part Two will discuss the perils of being Irish and Catholic in a decidedly Protestant Tory community.

By 1881, 1,895 of Guelph's enumerated population of 11,485 were Roman Catholics.⁵ The majority of these adherents were either born in Ireland or could trace their ancestry back to the Emerald Isle. While the ever-increasing native-born segment of the populace reduced the absolute numbers of Guelphites listed in the Census as Irish-born, Irish Catholics retained their 1871 census status of being the second largest immigrant group in a community which at mid-century had been an English town on Canadian soil.

Only a few Irish Catholics made the 1880 published list of Guelph's principal property owners.⁶ Yet local famine immigrants and their families had made inroads which were beginning to offset the stigma of being an Irish Catholic. In 1874, the election of the town's first Irish Catholic mayor symbolized the progress attained since the 1850's when Irish Catholics were easily dismissed in popular opinion as being alien, uncouth, and destined to poverty and criminality.⁷ However, the political affirmation of the rising socio-economic status of the community's Catholic residents was not a return to the Galt years of the late 1820's when Catholics were regarded as a necessary and influential facet of recruitment policies for the Guelph settlement.

In 1827, Guelph was merely a rural village planted by Canada Company officials in a wilderness area sixty miles from York. The founding of the town on April 23, 1827 was the first major Upper Canadian undertaking of the joint-stock land company. The Guelph Block was situated in an area destined to be one of the colony's major wheat producers. After an initial

⁵ Census of Canada, 1880-81 (Ottawa, 1882), Vol. 1, pp. 78-79.

⁶ "Real Estate Assessment, Some Interesting Features from the Roll of 1880," *Guelph Herald* clipping, n.d., in the Weaver Scrapbook of the Verne Mellwraith Collection, Guelph Public Library.

⁷ Michael B. Katz, Ian Davey and Bruce Stem, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 372.

assessment of the block's agricultural and milling potential,⁸ Galt, the Company Superintendent, his Warden of the Forests, Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop, and a small party of men proceeded through the bush to the junction of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers. There the men ceremoniously felled a maple tree to officially mark the founding of the new company town.⁹ Galt was confident that the local availability of prime land and the townsite's proximity to the immigration ports and trading centres of Hamilton and Toronto would foster rapid and sustained town growth.

Yet Galt was not content to trust fate. Within the first year, a road construction venture linked Guelph to the market centre of Dundas. The settlement's Waterloo Road was extended to Galt, formerly Shade's Mill, to tap a circuitous but well established accessway. Within the next two years roads were under construction to the north of the townsite and south through Puslinch township, creating an alternate route to Dundas. These road-building schemes had far more significance than merely improving local communications. They were a feature of a larger plan designed to attract artisans and skilled workers to the Guelph Block. The ready, lucrative employment made available by Company-sponsored road construction and house-building projects was intended to provide the capital necessary for settlers to purchase Company lands in and around the settlement. In time, local land prices became the leverage used to ensure that only the "right" type of immigrant was lured to the area.

In the spring of 1827, John Galt faced the perplexing dilemma of accommodating penniless refugees despite the Company Directors' disdain for any obstacles impeding the Company's profits. Upon their arrival in Philadelphia, a destitute group of British emigrants appealed to the British Consul for aid following a disastrous settlement foray in Caracas, Venezuela. Disregarding the strictly commercial orientation of the Guelph settlement scheme,¹⁰ the British Consul sent the La Guayran settlers on to John Galt in Guelph. Galt, the Canada Company Superintendent, addressed the impoverished newcomers' immediate needs for medicine, food and shelter and then arranged employment for any able-bodied males among them. Both the flexible land payment terms Galt implemented for the La Guayrans and the costs born by the Company due to his humanitarian gesture created a feeling of ill will between Galt and the Directors in Britain.

In an effort to curb future charitable impulses, the Directors issued new,

⁸ Letter from John Galt to Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop, March 19, 1827, John Galt Papers, P.A.O. The letter sends instructions for Dunlop to proceed with the townsites of Guelph and Goderich.

⁹ John Galt, *The Autobiography of John Galt*, II (London, 1833), p. 59.

¹⁰ Leo A. Johnson, *History of Guelph, 1827-1927* (Guelph, 1977), p. 20.

stringent terms for the sale of parcels of Company land. Even though free land grants were available in Upper Canada until 1841, and land in neighbouring clergy reserves had an assessed value of just one shilling and three pence per acre,¹¹ as of October 1827 Guelph town lots sold for forty dollars cash and township lands demanded \$2.50 an acre on credit or \$2.00 per acre for cash sales.¹² Within the first twelve months, farmers were required to improve their lands and the purchasers of town lots were bound to complete the construction of a dwelling. The new regulations did not impede Galt's attempts to attract immigrants to the settlement and by January 1828, 453 people resided in the village.¹³

Several Catholics were among the early Canada Company personnel helping John Galt to implement his early development plans. Christopher Keogh, Bernard McTague and Thomas Kelly were three of the more notable Roman Catholic employees. Keogh's presence at the town-planting ceremony of 1827 took local Catholic involvement in the development of the village back to its beginning. Keogh also achieved distinction by being the first Guelphite married by Father Campion after the Father's premier Guelph Mass.¹⁴ The ceremony, like the Mass, was held at the log home of John Lynch. Guelph was a mission post serviced by the Church at Niagara in its early years and it lacked a resident priest until 1844. The first visit by Father Campion was, therefore, in itself quite memorable. Consequently, the union of Keogh and a Miss Kitty Kelly served to enhance an already festive occasion.

Although it was a remote missionary outpost, in the autumn of 1827 the local Catholic community was visited by the Rt. Rev. Alexander Macdonell, first Bishop of Kingston. However, Macdonell's personal interest in the fledgling community actually predated John Galt's arrival at the junction of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers. Bishop Macdonell was Galt's trusted friend and advisor. In 1825, Galt and Macdonell met at Eskgrove in England to discuss the future settlement strategies of the Canada Company.¹⁵ The Bishop's influence and advice had been instrumental in determining the choice of lands purchased. Consequently, he received a grant of fifty shares

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹³ As of January 18, 1828 there were 241 males and 212 females residing in the village of Guelph. See the 1828 manuscript census roll for Guelph Township, P.A.O.

¹⁴ *Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington, Ontario* (Toronto, 1906, reprinted 1972), p. 4

¹⁵ Galt, *Autobiography*, I, p. 294.

of Canada Company stock in 1825¹⁶ and two years later the Catholic Church in Guelph received a gift of land. Like the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, the Roman Catholic Church received an elevated Church site. However, the Catholic grant was the most magnificent of all. John Galt once wrote to a friend in England that

Desirous of seeing the effect of a rising ground at the end of a street where a Popish Church is one day to be built, I collected all the choppers in the settlement to an open vista, and in exactly two hours and ten minutes 'by the Shrewsbury Clock', or my own watch, an avenue was unfolded as large as the long walk in Windsor Park and the trees, by their stature, reduce to pigmies all the greatest barons of the English groves.¹⁷

The relative poverty of the parishioners was augmented by the arrival of the destitute Highland Scots among the La Guayran refugees; yet, local contributions made it possible for a painted frame Church to grace the hill by 1833. St. Patrick's was later succeeded on the hill by St. Bartholomew's in 1846 and the Church of Our Lady in 1878. The vista which became Macdonell Street remained an awe-inspiring focal point of the growing townscape.

The prestige of the Catholic hill served to further Galt's attempt to make Guelph a Cathedral town. Galt knew that a strong Church presence would assist his efforts to attract monied Catholics to the Guelph Block. From 1827 to 1829, Galt held the persistent hope that Bishop Weld of England might become a resident of Guelph. The Company Supervisor related in his 1833 *Autobiography* that

I had some reason to hope that Weld of Fulworth Castle (now Cardinal Weld in Rome) would come to Upper Canada and probably make it his residence; being desirous to lure him to Guelph, I had this view in converting the receiving house (the Priory) into a habitation.¹⁸

While Galt's discussions with Bishop Macdonell kept this dream alive for three years, the Priory continued to function as a receiving house for

¹⁶ Canada Company Share Certificate dated January 25, 1825, Bishop Macdonell Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto (in future citations A.A.T.).

¹⁷ The Guelph Mercury clipping dated January 13, 1940, Papers of the Guelph Mission, Archives of the Diocese of Hamilton.

¹⁸ Galt, *Autobiography*, II, p. 115.

immigrants, a store, a school, a library and a post office. Rather than becoming Bishop Weld's habitation, it eventually became the residence of Scots Presbyterian miller and distiller, William Allan.

The state of Guelph's Catholic community before the 1852 arrival of Rev. Father John Holzer would have been a great disappointment to the man who dreamed of creating a Cathedral town. Galt was dismissed in 1829. It is unfortunate, and somewhat ironical, that the unauthorized charity he showed to the sick and destitute La Guayran settlers played a key role in his recall by the Canada Company Directors.¹⁹ In time, the elaborate schemes created to insure that Guelph attracted the "right" kind of settler became an economic encumbrance which further exasperated Company officials in Britain.

When Galt left Guelph, Company attention focused on lands in the Huron Tract and the village's economic fate was cast adrift. The meagre dues collected by priests assigned to the Guelph Mission seldom offset the burden of the miles to be travelled or the monies required to meet the expenses incurred. Even in the wake of the new economic vitality created by the late 1840's improvement of the Guelph road network, adequate funds were not forthcoming.

By 1856, the town of Guelph had 650 Roman Catholic residents.²⁰ They still remained a minority presence as most post-1829 newcomers were Protestants from Ulster or England. The priests who attended this minority lived a spartan existence. The small rectory built next to St. Patrick's Church in 1843 was without luxuries and the lack of funds ended hopes of developing companion institutions on the 16 acres of land deeded by the Canada Company.²¹ On January 11, 1836 Rev. John Cassidy appealed for assistance to Bishop Macdonnell saying, "My Lord you cannot have but some idea of the vices and poverty of my Congregation at Guelph."²² While his charges had money for drink, little heed was paid to the financial peril of the Guelph Mission. Few bills were covered by the paucity of collections from Church rites. For example, in the previous four years just eight marriages had been witnessed by local priests.²³

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁰ James Lawrence Kelly, "Historical Development of Catholic Education in Guelph," an unpublished M.Sc. thesis, School of Agricultural and Extension Education, University of Guelph, 1977, p. 32.

²¹ List of Deeds, May 7, 1834, Papers of the Guelph Mission, A.D.H.

²² Letter from Father Cassidy to Bishop Macdonnell dated January 11, 1836, Bishop Macdonnell Papers, A.A.T.

²³ *Ibid.*

The economic burdens faced by the Guelph Mission reached unparalleled proportions in 1844. The stringency faced since Canada Company financial grants ceased in 1829 was incomparable to the situation created by the necessity of building a new Church. This need accompanied the 1843 burning of St. Patrick's. In 1846 the death of Father Gibney left responsibility for clearing the \$3,000 in debts incurred by the construction of St. Bartholomew's in the hands of Father Sanderl. Unfortunately, Sanderl's attempts to collect the necessary dues led to a series of bitter disputes. Unable to cope with local hostility, Sanderl fled Guelph for the serenity of a nearby island and became the Hermit of Puslinch Lake.

By 1850, the prospect of St. Bartholomew's being relinquished for debts was a nagging possibility. Father Sneider faced the same local obstinacy in the later 1840's. However, new hope for the future of the Guelph Mission accompanied the 1852 establishment of a long-term Jesuit presence at Guelph.²⁴ In 1847, Rev. Father John Holzer took charge of the Jesuit Order's activities in nearby Wilmot township. On January 28, 1852, Father Holzer became the first Senior Jesuit at Guelph. Holzer and his two fellow Jesuits were placed in charge of a vast area stretching out from forty to one hundred miles from Guelph's Catholic hill. In order to rectify the financial instability in the areas in and surrounding Guelph township, their mission encompassed Wellington, Bruce and Grey Counties as well as parts of Perth and Waterloo. The rigour of the mission work launched from Guelph is recalled in Father Matoga's May 17, 1859 letter to Bishop Farrell of Hamilton. Matoga stated that in thirty-four days he had traversed his widely scattered charge hearing 500 confessions and issuing the sacraments to 475 Catholics.²⁵

Although Father Holzer was able to repay the St. Bartholomew debts, two other inherited problems caused continual consternation. In addition to a heightened presence of Orange-based hostility towards Catholics, the growing numbers of Catholic Famine Irish immigrants revealed a pressing need for health services and educational facilities. This problem peaked in the first half of the 1850's when the short-term availability of day and casual labour employment drew many Irish Catholics to a community which had held few opportunities for labouring employment since the close of the Galt years. In the late 1840's, Father Sneider tended the sick who arrived in the first wave of Famine Irish migration to confront the Guelph settlement. Later, in October of 1852, Father Holzer wrote

²⁴ The Jesuit pastoral charge at Guelph lasted until 1931.

²⁵ Letter from Father Matoga to Bishop Farrell, May 17, 1859, Papers of the Guelph Mission, A.D.H.

I am overpowered with work because of the railroad in attending the sick calls all day and all night. The railroad men give us very much to do.²⁶

The Irish Catholics migrating to the Guelph area posed a perplexing dilemma for the townspeople. The Guelph and Galt Advertiser kept them apprised of the disease and starvation which accompanied the potato blight in Britain. Reprints from British papers chronicled the misery of Ireland as well as the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Local fraternal organizations such as the St. Andrew's Society had famine relief drives. Protestant and Catholic alike were horrified by the death tolls attributed to the potato famine. In March of 1847, the Guelph and area St. Patrick's Society cancelled its annual March 17 dinner out of respect to those who were suffering.²⁷

The lack of adequate charity networking to answer the needs of the increasing numbers of deserving poor in the Wellington District prompted representatives from all denominations to form a subscription charity body known as the Wellington District Benevolent Association. Formal petitions for assistance to the Finance Committee of the Association were assessed according to the depth of a person's need and the money available for disbursement. The notice of the body's second annual meeting on May 21, 1847 advertised that a tea would be held to prepare for the needy immigrants expected over the summer.²⁸

The stigma of disease and the hallmark of poverty which accompanied the Irish Catholics who chose to stay, however temporarily, in the Guelph area quickly alienated them from the existing local population. Their lack of trade skills, consequent over-representation in low-paying, menial occupations and the encumbent low socio-economic status of Irish Catholics made the cost of housing a critical issue. Yet, oddly enough, by 1861 Irish Catholics had the highest per capita Guelph level of home ownership.²⁹ Property ownership became the gambit by which they hoped to win respectability. However, as late as 1881, Irish Catholics had two easily discernable districts which segregated the least affluent Irish Catholics from the rest of Guelph's decidedly middle-class social milieu.

²⁶ Letter signed by Father Holzer, dated October 19, 1852, Papers of the Guelph Mission, A.D.H.

²⁷ See the *Guelph and Galt Advertiser*, March 4, 1847.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1847

²⁹ Nash-Chambers, "Guelph in 1861," p. 157. See Katz, Doucet and Stern, *Social Organization*, p. 143 and Oliver McDonagh, "The Famine Emigration to the States," *Perspectives in American History* 10 (1976), pp. 357-448.

In the 1850's the foresight of Father Holzer and local tavern keeper Dennis Coffee offered Irish Catholic newcomers an escape from the shanty town existence faced by fellow famine migrants in Hamilton and Toronto. Both men had become principle land owners in the sparsely settled southeast corner of town. Rather than being forced into makeshift housing, Irish Catholics found affordable, detached cottages on plots of land large enough to emulate life in the old country. Most of the inhabitants in the Irish District, later known as St. Patrick's Ward, cultivated a vegetable patch to defray living expenses. In time, Elizabeth Street became a dividing line between two extremes. To the north, Guelph's wealthier residents built large estate homes. To the south lay the Irish section where residents waited and hoped they would one day accumulate the capital necessary to move to the more prestigious neighbourhoods circling the town's commercial core.

After Father Holzer's 1859 purchase of 30 acres of land for the proposed St. Joseph's Hospital, a new Irish Catholic enclave began to emerge. The Irish area near Division Street in the northwest corner of town echoed the settlement patterns of St. Patrick's Ward. In St. David's Ward, both town and farm lots became available for rent from the Catholic Church. The Irish communities at opposite ends of town remained somewhat isolated despite the minority presence of other ethnic groups. In 1878, when dignitaries and the general public were invited to the dedication of a new hospital wing, the *Guelph Herald* reported that

Very many of the visitors found themselves for the first time in that section of the town, and expressed themselves surprised at the appearance of the grounds and buildings pertaining to the hospital.³⁰

The spirit of self-help which fostered the development of the town's two Irish Roman Catholic areas was the impetus behind the institutional buffers created by Father Holzer, the Ladies of Loretto and the Sisters of St. Joseph. As Murray Nicolson has noted in his research on the Irish Catholic community in Toronto, the establishment of parallel educational institutions and charity facilities shielded Irish Catholics from the indoctrination of Protestant ideas and values which branded Irish Catholics as inferiors.³¹ Separate schools not only fostered a greater sense of community, they helped to instill cultural pride and kindle hope for a brighter future in a community where education brought social respectability.

³⁰ *The Guelph Herald*, January 24, 1878.

³¹ The development of this concept can be traced in Chapters I, 4, 7 and 9 of Nicolson, "The Catholic Church..." *op. cit.*

Between 1860 and 1870, Ontario became an overwhelmingly literate society. By 1870, ninety percent of adults over twenty years of age could read and write.³² In Guelph, free schools were not available until 1871. However, the special financial considerations offered by the town's new separate schools presented Irish Catholic children, as well as Catholic youngsters from other ethnic origins, a chance to be educated – an opportunity which had often been curtailed by the fee structure of Guelph's multi-denominational stone school and a variety of private day schools.

The Common School Act of 1841 had made it legal to establish a separate school system.³³ Yet Guelph and many other communities had little hope of separate schools due to financial constraints. In 1844, Bishop Power of Toronto wrote Guelph's Father Sanderl a letter expressing his desire to expand the separate school system. Much to the chagrin of the series of priests predating Father Holzer, it was fiscally impossible to respect Bishop Power's stance that

Catholics have a right to a school of their own and this ought to be the case in every school district where practicable. The trustees must in every case be Catholics, chosen according to the law, and the school master a man of the Catholic Church.³⁴

Guelph's Catholic parish opened its first separate school in January of 1854 and Mr. Patrick Downey, assisted by Miss Gagnier, began to instruct local boys and girls on the sixteenth of that month. The small stone school-house constructed on the Catholic hill glebe lands also housed the locality's first orphanage.

By the 1860's, Guelph had several separate schools whose more than 150 students were predominantly Irish. A major advance in local education occurred in 1855 when Father Holzer was able to make arrangements for the Sisters of Loretto to establish a separate girls' school. The stone school was expanded to accommodate the sisters and the increasing enrollment of their Loretto Academy. Four Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin arrived in 1856 and they taught in the homes of James Harris and Michael Doran until renovations at their residential and day school were completed in 1857.

³² Harvey J. Graff, "Respected and Profitable Labour: Literacy, Jobs and the Working Class in the Nineteenth Century" in *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds. (Toronto, 1976), p. 65.

³³ Kelly, "Catholic Education," p. 24.

³⁴ Letter from Bishop Power to Father Sanderl, June 24, 1844, Bishop Power Papers, A.A.T.

In the interim, Mr. Downey and his boys moved to the rectory and established St. Stanislaus School.

The arrival of the Ladies of Loretto partially relieved the pressure of finding the money for teachers' salaries. Sworn to a vow of poverty, the Ladies of Loretto lived frugally and accepted only £200 per year for their efforts. Despite the fact that a continual threat of closure hung over Guelph's new separate schools, St. Stanislaus School left the rectory for its own building. The Sisters' foray into higher education was, however, more lasting than the ill-fated male St. Ignatius College which regrettably was forced to close its doors in 1864 after one year of operation in the rectory. In contrast, the Ladies of Loretto expanded into an adjacent school, St. Agnes, which allowed the Academy itself to cater to higher education and teacher training. In 1877, the Academy introduced certificate courses. However, neither this venture nor the 1882 commencement of night school education for both sexes would have been possible without local support or lay teachers.³⁵

By 1864, the threat of closure also confronted the Board of Directors of the recently opened St. Joseph's Hospital. In 1864, Father Archambault wrote Bishop Farrell in Hamilton advising against a hospital closure.³⁶ Archambault warned that the Sisters were well liked and had made many friends because of their good work and their visitation among local Catholics. The Guelph priest further suggested that the Sisters receive assistance in making their collection of funds so that it could be carried out more efficiently.

In 1861, three Sisters of St. Joseph had arrived in Guelph to help Father Holzer meet a pressing need for a hospital, new orphanage facilities and a House of Providence. On November 21, 1861 the Sisters pushed the community into a new era in social welfare assistance by opening the doors of a non-denominational, sixteen-bed hospital. From the onset, the Sisters were at the financial mercy of private charity. Yet, in 1862, a new building was completed and in addition to the eighteen-bed hospital, the new structure also housed an orphanage and a House of Providence. In the new facility, as in the old, the Sisters endured increasing demands for assistance and dwindling coffers and in a letter to Bishop Farrell outlining their plight, Father Holzer noted that in December of 1863

³⁵ For a more detailed description of the efforts of the Ladies of Loretto see Catherine Collins, *A History of the Guelph Separate Schools* (Guelph, 1977).

³⁶ Letter from Father Archambault to Bishop Farrell, March 23, 1864, Papers of the Guelph Mission, A.D.H.

The Sisters of St. Joseph have a great many people in their new house – rather more than they can afford to support but then there are too many destitute persons around that the good Sisters can hardly refuse to take them in.³⁷

The precarious economic circumstances of the Holzer foray into institutional development often paled in the wake of virulent local anti-Catholic sentiment. Both the new separate school and St. Joseph's Hospital became catalysts for manifestations of Protestant-Catholic animosity. Contrary to law, Dr. Henry Orton, Chairman of the Trustees of Guelph's Board of Education, pompously refused to accept Father Holzer's 1853 petition to establish a separate school in the recently completed stone schoolhouse on Catholic hill. Bishop Charbonnel responded to Holzer's request for guidance with the suggestion that the priest enlist the support of the Superintendent of Education for Canada West, Egerton Ryerson. Consequently, on December 19, 1853 Father Holzer forwarded a letter to Ryerson which outlined his dilemma of having a school capable of serving the needs of three hundred pupils yet no approval to commence due to Orton's obstinate disregard for the provisions of the Common Schools Act which defined the rights of Catholics to operate separate schools.³⁸ Ryerson answered Holzer's appeal with the terse warning that Orton and the other "members of the Board render themselves liable for prosecution for damages and the violation of the law, if they refuse to do what the law requires" as dictated in Acts 14 and 15, Victoria Chapter III.³⁹ In accordance with Ryerson's ruling, Mr. Downey began classes on January 12, 1854 – the morning after the election of a Separate School Board of Trustees.⁴⁰

The angry outburst of religious intolerance which drew the hospital into a controversy came a decade after the Holzer Era suddenly closed. In 1863, the persistent pressure of balancing underfunding with the needs of his coreligionists, and the mounting antagonism his projects fanned among the Protestant majority, took their toll when Father Holzer suffered a debilitating stroke. His brief return to Guelph in 1874 coincided with a resurgence of Protestant intolerance which propelled St. Joseph's Hospital's Directors and the Senior Jesuit, Father Loyzance, into a heated dispute which began to unfold on the editorial pages of the local press.

³⁷ Letter from Father Holzer to Bishop Farrell, December 30, 1863, Papers of the Guelph Mission, A.D.H.

³⁸ Letter from Father Holzer to Egerton Ryerson, December 19, 1853, Bishop Charbonnel Papers, A.A.T.

³⁹ Letter from Egerton Ryerson to Father Holzer, December 23, 1853, Bishop Charbonnel Papers, A.A.T.

⁴⁰ *The Guelph Mercury*, January 12, 1854.

What began as an attempt to raise funds for St. Joseph's Hospital left Father Loyzance embroiled in a vindictive tirade which, in effect, alleged the moral turpitude of local Catholics and their spiritual advisors. Plans to allow horse racing and wheels of fortune at the June 1874 St. Joseph's picnic provoked an emotional letter to the editor of the *Mercury* from Presbyterian minister Rev. W.S. Ball.⁴¹ After berating the seduction of such vices, Ball continued that the Romish Church was allowing the end to justify the means – a mistake for which he was holding Father Loyzance personally responsible. The ensuing outcry was countered with a June 18 letter to the editor in which the priest announced the cancellation of horse racing at the upcoming picnic.⁴²

Three years later the provincial grant of funds for St. Joseph's Hospital ignited protestations that public funds should not be assessed for a purely Catholic institution. The editorial column continued to host angry letters despite Dr. Herod's report to the Provincial Hospital Inspector which acknowledged the treatment of Protestants and Catholics alike. Since the General Hospital had opened in 1875, it had become a bastion of the Protestant community; former Protestant gratitude for the early services of St. Joseph's Hospital began to erode.

Both John Harris and William Heffernan denounced the bigotry being manufactured over the hospital grants. Heffernan summed up the Catholic position in a February 1877 letter to the *Herald* in which he argued

There are today under the care of the Sisters of Charity a number of crippled and indigent old men and women, and a number of helpless orphans, who, but for the existence of this institution would be left to the care of the town. And yet, we have within our midst a few chronic fault finders who are allowed to rant and rave and to begin to raise a feeling against the only refuge of charity in our midst.⁴³

Without the House of Providence, which had accepted Catholics and Protestants alike, the indigent who required charity would have been forced to rely on the reticent benevolence of a community where both the local Benevolent Association and the Benevolent Committee of the municipal council administered relief via a protracted, formal application procedure

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, June 14, 1874

⁴² *Ibid.*, June 18, 1874.

⁴³ *Guelph Herald*, February 7, 1877.

which lacked the more discrete assistance of Catholic charity.⁴⁴

The denominational disquietude surrounding the separate school and the hospital controversies was far less thorny than the violent confrontations between Catholic and Protestant secret societies which prompted Bishop Farrell of Hamilton to issue an 1859 warning that anyone suspected of being a member of a Catholic secret society was acting under the threat of excommunication.⁴⁵ The tradition of membership in secret societies was an endemic feature of life in Ireland which had been transported to British North America along with Irish emigrants. The conditions which had once drawn Catholics and Protestants together in secret, underground action had given way to vicious sectarian strife by the nineteenth century.

While both the Catholic United Irishmen led by Wolfe Tone and the Protestant Orange Lodge were outgrowths of agrarian secret societies which had once united Catholic and Protestant tenant farmers in a struggle against landlords, in time, separate, antagonistic secret societies were formed which found Catholics and Protestants on opposite sides with regard to the questions of the 1800 Act of Union and the future of Irish independence. Greg Kealey and Peter Warrian have argued that the Upper Canadian Orange Lodge was initially a friendly society rather than apolitical pressure group.⁴⁶ The charity-related functions of the Order had great appeal and even the secret oath to celebrate the twelfth of July was a diffused threat until the 1840's. A fear of republicanism kept Orange leader Ogle Gowan and Bishop Macdonell in an unlikely conservative political coalition until 1837. However, when the Catholic Church drew away from the conservative faction in the 1840's and Orange celebrations of the twelfth of July and the fifth of November began to get out of hand, a collision course had been set which remained unaltered throughout the nineteenth century.

From their earliest days in Guelph, Irish Roman Catholics had been the victims of religious hostility. Two years before Guelph was founded, Upper Canada's Roman Catholic settlers had already failed in their bid to have the Legislative Assembly declare the Orange Lodge an unlawful association.⁴⁷ Their hopes of curtailing the rise of the Orange Lodge were also thwarted

⁴⁴ The local press and the *Minutes of the Town of Guelph*, 1851-1881 P.A.O., reveal a reluctance among local ratepayers to accept raises in the Guelph assessment rates to defray costs for relief or local improvements.

⁴⁵ Letter to Parishioners at Guelph from Bishop Farrell, December 13, 1859, Papers of the Guelph Mission, A.D.H.

⁴⁶ Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riots and the Working Class" in *Essays in Working Class History*, pp. 14-18.

⁴⁷ Hereward Senior, "The Genesis of Canadian Orangeism," *Ontario History*, June 1978, p. 14.

by the activities of James Buchanan. Buchanan, the British Consul at New York, was largely responsible for directing large numbers of Orangemen from New York to Upper Canada.⁴⁸ Before channelling British emigrants to settlements in Upper Canada, Buchanan often accepted Orange Lodge association as proof of loyalty to the British Crown.⁴⁹ Guelph was one of the places which benefited most from Buchanan's redirection of emigration. Any Orange Lodge roots established in Guelph by Buchanan's tactics were augmented when Protestant Ulstermen began to arrive in the settlement after 1832. By mid-century, Protestant-Catholic disputes were no longer confined to Fair Day brawls between Irishmen and Yankees.⁵⁰ Guelph was only one of many places in Canada West where the arrival of the Famine Irish emigrants in the 1840's increased the number of Irish Catholic inhabitants and the long standing hostility between Protestants and Catholics.

July 12 and March 17 became focal points for violent confrontations in mid-century Guelph, Toronto, Hamilton and Bytown.⁵¹ On July 12, 1856 and July 12, 1857 two of Guelph's most colourful Protestant-Catholic confrontations occurred. In 1856, the Guelph militia was called out to rescue Orange Lodge members who were ambushed by Catholics as they returned from a twelfth of July afternoon picnic in Rockwood. Until the militia arrived, the Orangemen remained captive in a hotel where they sought refuge. The Catholics, led by a Mr. Kelly, reinstigated the brawl at midnight. Once again they were subdued by force. However, this time Kelly was arrested and sent to trial where he was convicted of assault and sentenced to a prison term.

In 1857, the Orange Lodge led the July 12 aggression. However, the Orangemen's plans went far beyond simple retaliation. A biographer has noted that

The activities and successes of Father Holzer aroused the enmity of the Orangemen and they sent him threatening letters. They made no secret that they would burn his church and schools.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ C. Acton Burrows, *Annals of the Town of Guelph, 1827-1877* (Guelph, 1877), pp. 91-92.

⁵¹ Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 2 (1965), p. 147.

⁵² "Biography of Father Holzer," Woodstock Council Archives, typescript copy, Jesuit Archives, Regis College, Toronto.

In readiness a canon was placed in the steeple of St. Bartholomew's Church and several hundred Catholics answered Father Holzer's call for defence against the anticipated Orange mob. Early that morning, the Catholics' preparations thwarted the "grim-faced farmers from the surrounding country, armed with scythes, muskets and makeshift weapons of all sorts" who had hoped to ignite the Catholic hilltop in celebration of the Glorious Twelfth.⁵³ Instead, the Orangemen retreated and resigned themselves to offering an idle threat.

Throughout Upper Canada religious antagonism expedited the creation of political factions in addition to recurrent physical confrontations. The traditional Irish Catholic sympathy for the Reform cause of the Catholic rebels in their homeland prompted many of them to transfer their political sympathy to the Reform Party in Canada West. This Irish-Reform alliance strengthened the growing association between the Orange Lodge and Tory politics within the colony. Alarmed by the rising tide of the Reform Party in the 1840's, Bishop Strachan of the Church of England led an anti-Catholic, anti-Reform campaign.⁵⁴

Until the late 1840's, Guelph was a seedbed of Tory politics and Guelph's elite prided itself on its united opposition to the reform sentiments of the 1837 Rebellion. However, the growing number of Irish Catholics in the town set the stage for more frequent brawls between Orange Lodge sympathizers and Catholics when Strachan's campaign began in 1843.⁵⁵ Both arson and physical attacks became more numerous due to the heated political climate as Strachan's campaign gained momentum. In October 1843, St. Bartholomew's Church mysteriously burned to the ground the night after Guelph's Catholics lit bonfires to celebrate the release of Irish Reformer Daniel O'Connell.⁵⁶ In the next few years, Guelphites observed the acceleration of a tragic feud between two families who lived along Eramosa Road. The shared hatred of the Catholic Coghlin family and the Protestant Olivers was fed, in part, by the uneven judicial rulings of a Guelph magistrate, Dr. William Clarke, who not only kept this feud alive but also became Guelph's most stalwart defender of Orange-based Tory politics.

After a brief period of settlement in Erin township, Dr. Clarke arrived in Guelph in 1837 when he fled an investigation of his association with Ulster's outlawed Orange Lodge.⁵⁷ The Lodge had been outlawed in Britain

⁵³ Unsigned, "History of Our Lady's Parish, Guelph, 1827-1937," p. 2, Jesuit Archives.

⁵⁴ Johnson, "Guelph," p. 21

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

for over twenty years but ardent supporters like Clarke helped maintain a thriving underground membership. Once in Guelph, Clarke's immediate attention was occupied by solidifying a business partnership with Dr. Henry Orton and he quickly established himself as one of the town's leading entrepreneurs. However, during the Strachan campaign of the mid-forties, when he was a Guelph magistrate, he allowed his political and religious beliefs to influence his legal judgement.

Regardless of circumstances, Clarke's judicial decisions continually favoured the Olivers when the frequent Coghlin-Oliver assault cases were brought to court.⁵⁸ These decisions fanned the feud which culminated in the March 1847 stabbing death of Richard Oliver. Even though evidence indicated that the accused, Charles Coghlin, acted in self-defence, Clarke and other Protestants insisted that Coghlin be tried for first degree murder for which he was convicted and sentenced to hang by Mr. Justice McLean. Guelph's Catholic population failed in its bid to have his sentence commuted. Before his death, Coghlin rendered an eloquent final statement which denounced Clarke's magistracy as an example of the unfair treatment Catholics received in local courts.⁵⁹ Within the next week Clarke's and Orton's joint investment, Wellington Mills, was one of several Protestant properties put to the torch by unnamed Catholic avengers.

Guelph's newspapers rallied to the support of Clarke. With his reputation among Protestants intact, Clarke pursued his political career at the local and the provincial levels. In the early 1850's while Reformer A.J. Fergusson represented the Guelph area in the Legislative Assembly, Clarke turned his attention to local politics. After a one-year term as Reeve in 1852, he spent two years as a Guelph Councillor. In 1854, he successfully ran as the Tory Candidate for the new electoral district of North Wellington. After his 1858 defeat to Reformer Charles Allen of Elora, he temporarily withdrew from politics but by 1860 he renewed his political career. In August, 1861 he resigned as a Guelph Councillor to resume responsibilities as M.L.A. for North Wellington.

However, Clarke's Guelph area political influence far surpassed the duration of his political career. The volume of correspondence between Clarke and his friend John A. Macdonald attests to the influence he maintained in determining political appointments in the Guelph area well into the 1870's. But even Clarke was a realist who knew when it was time to mend Catholic-Orange fences in the name of political expediency. In August of 1860, he threatened to resign his North Wellington seat unless Guelph's Dr. Hewat received a political plum. His letter to Macdonald

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

implored him to reward Hewat whom Clarke deemed the main reason for his 1860 election victory.⁶⁰ Hewat, Master of the Orange Lodge, had quelled Orange backlash during and after the Prince of Wales' earlier visit to Canada West when he was accompanied by the Catholic Duke of Newcastle. Clarke believed that without Hewat's solicitations, he would not have been able to rally Orange Lodge support for his 1860 candidacy while still appeasing Catholic voters.

The decade of the 1860's became a difficult time for Clarke. He was no longer able to "handle" Catholic votes as easily as in the years preceding the Catholic-Tory rift.⁶¹ The situation worsened with the abortive Fenian invasions of 1864. The local impact surpassed a resurgence of Protestant mistrust of Irish Catholic loyalties to the Crown when failure of the government to call the Guelph Rifles for active service also outraged local Protestants.⁶² This made Clarke's role as a political manager even more problematic. In an August 19, 1867 private letter to the new Prime Minister, Clarke confided that he was doing what he could to get the Catholic vote for a local Tory candidate but found it hard because of the violent Orangeism which persisted in the area.⁶³

The tide toward the political recognition of Catholics in government appointments received its impetus from a source outside official Conservative circles. When Father Hamel became responsible for the Guelph Mission in 1874, he was determined to affect change. In 1879, he wrote the Hon. Baby, Minister of Inland Revenue to air his displeasure.⁶⁴ He informed Baby that many of the 2,000 Catholic families who resided in Wellington County sent substantial funds to the provincial Treasury because of their ownership of large, prosperous farms. Upon reflection, it was outrageous that from 1829 until 1878 no local Catholic had been appointed to any government department until William Carroll of Guelph became inspector of weights. While Carroll had performed well, Hamel received word that Carroll's \$600 a year post was to be terminated. Father Hamel enlisted the Minister's aid in renewing Carroll's employment. Earlier in the same month the Father had recommended to Hon. Mackenzie-Bowell, Minister of the Interior, that Thomas Heffernan replace Edwin Carthew as

⁶⁰ Letter from Dr. William Clarke to Hon. John A. Macdonald, August 1860, Macdonald Papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

⁶¹ Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-125.

⁶² Letter from D. Stirton to Hon. John A. Macdonald, December 24, 1864, N.A.C.

⁶³ Letter from Dr. William Clarke to Hon. John A. Macdonald, August 19, 1867, Macdonald Papers, N.A.C.

⁶⁴ Letter from Father Hamel to Hon. Baby, Minister of Inland Revenue, April 14, 1879, Macdonald Papers, N.A.C.

customs collector.⁶⁵ Father Hamel assured the Minister that Heffernan was a respected Catholic merchant and that the Protestants would not object.

While the politicians began to pander to the Catholic vote, the scanty recognition of its value did not indicate a major change in public opinion. Just two years earlier, local Catholics and Protestants were placed at odds over the public reaction to a dedication festival for the Church of Our Lady. In July of 1877, the town council accepted an official invitation to the laying of a cornerstone for the Church of Our Lady being constructed to encapsulate St. Bartholomew's Church. A Papal Delegate attended the day's events and on July 5, Guelph's Protestant electorate responded to his presence by calling a public meeting to denounce the municipal council members who had accepted their invitations to attend the festival in a public rather than a private capacity. Although he had not been present at the public meeting, Rev. Dixon of St. George's Anglican Church sent a letter to the editor of *The Guelph Mercury* which affirmed the actions of the irate citizenry and addressed the seemingly audacious behaviour of the councillors.⁶⁶ Dixon's letter to the editor was just one in a series of poisoned-pen tirades that the controversial, easily angered clergyman would author over the next decade as he became a self-styled defender of the "rights" of the town's Protestants.

Despite the continuing contentious opinions voiced in the name of religion, the winds of change appeared to be blowing by 1879. Dr. Clarke lamented the fact that neither Macdonald nor himself could continue to rely on the *Herald* as an official party organ.⁶⁷ The new owner, former Mayor F.J. Chadwick was a Grit who had seriously damaged the Tory campaign of the previous year. The owner refused to reprimand the paper's editor and the *Herald* was becoming Guelph's Roman Catholic voice.⁶⁸ In the next decade, Catholics had a forum for presenting their side in wars of the editorial page initiated by Rev. Dixon.

Guelph's small size and the self-help efforts of both Catholic clergy and laity had kept Orange and Green disputes in Guelph from reaching the proportions experienced in Hamilton and Toronto.⁶⁹ The 1857 abortive

⁶⁵ Letter from Father Hamel to Hon. Mackenzie-Bowell, Minister of the Interior, April 9, 1879, Macdonald Papers, N.A.C.

⁶⁶ *The Guelph Mercury*, July 6, 1877.

⁶⁷ The attempts of C. Acton Burrows to make the Guelph Herald a party organ are revealed in his letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, December 17, 1878, Macdonald Papers, N.A.C.

⁶⁸ Letter from Dr. William Clarke to Sir John A. Macdonald, March 24, 1879, Macdonald Papers, N.A.C.

⁶⁹ Kealey, "Orange Order," pp. 26-34.

attempt to set the Catholic hill ablaze was the final large-scale outburst of Orange-inspired violence. The next two decades saw no occurrence comparable to Toronto's Jubilee or Rossa Riots. Even with the persistence of antagonism towards the Catholic faith, when measured against the experiences of Irish Catholics elsewhere, Guelph's mid-nineteenth century Irish Catholic community may be said to have been held in the safety of the palm of God's hand.