

## **Victoria: An American Diocese in Canada**

by Vincent J. McNALLY

*Department of Continuing Studies*  
Simon Fraser University

Victoria has been called Canada's prettiest city as well as "a little bit of old England." It has rarely been examined, however, in the light of its strong American connections. Yet for the first fifty-seven years of its existence, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria was a suffragan See, and thus under the influence of the Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, though it was territorially part of British North America, and ultimately Canada, under canon law it was considered an American Diocese. This peculiar situation was heightened considerably by the significant American influence in the region, especially in Victoria where Americans formed "the influential middle class" during the important years before Confederation.<sup>2</sup> Our purpose therefore is to examine two of the areas affected by this American connection, church-state relations and separate schools, and to inquire how they influenced the earlier history of the Diocese of Victoria.

The threat of American expansionism and ultimate annexation or, what came to be termed, America's "manifest destiny" was a major factor that ultimately led to Confederation.<sup>3</sup> American influence in the area became very significant in 1858 after gold was discovered on the Fraser River and turned Victoria overnight into the San Francisco of the north. In fact the enormous American presence there was forever underscored in 1858 when Queen Victoria, in establishing the mainland as a Crown colony, and as a sign of

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Portland either directly appointed or had considerable influence over the appointment of the first seven bishops of Victoria, only one of whom, Demers, was a Canadian.

<sup>2</sup> Stella Higgins, "British Columbia and the Confederation Period" in W. George Shelton, ed., *British Columbia and Confederation* (Victoria: Morriss Press, 1967), pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Willard E. Ireland, "British Columbia's American Heritage," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1948), p. 67. Governor Douglas warned London of the threat of annexation by the United States six years before the 1858 Fraser River gold rush.

royal concession, deliberately chose the title *British Columbia* because, she said, the “citizens of the United States call their country also Columbia, at least in poetry.” It was a concession which her Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle, no doubt reflecting the growing American threat there, considered as neither “very felicitous” nor “very original.”<sup>4</sup>

American influence also affected the development of organized religion in the region. Until the boundary settlement in 1846, the Oregon Territory, as it was then termed, had been claimed and occupied jointly by Britain and the United States. Spain had introduced the first Christian clergy to the area in 1775, but established no permanent missions. The United States supplied the first Protestant clergy in 1834, when several Methodist clergy arrived at the Hudson’s Bay Company fort at present-day Vancouver, Washington. While American settlers were gradually arriving in the region, most of the whites were then French Canadian Roman Catholic employees or retirees of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Still, relations were quite cordial, and the Canadians and Americans worked and worshipped together.<sup>5</sup>

Tensions, in the form of denominational rivalry and prejudice, began when the first Catholic priests appeared in 1838. Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers, priests of the Archdiocese of Quebec, had come at the request of the French Canadian inhabitants, and they lost little time in establishing their authority among the Catholics, insisting, for example, that any baptisms or marriages performed by the American Protestant clergy had to be repeated. The Protestant clergy responded by denouncing the priests as “foreigners ...[in] opposition to ...all the American people.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite such disagreements, Blanchet appears to have been deeply influenced by his experience of living among Americans, especially by the

---

<sup>4</sup> Victoria *Gazette*, 28 August, 2 November 1858. Speaks of San Francisco as Victoria’s only rival on the west coast of North America; Kenneth McNaught, *The Pelican History of Canada* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982) p. 145; Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia, A History* (Toronto: MacMillan Co., 1958) p. 151. The equivalent of Great Britain’s Britannia, Columbia graces the dome of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Zephirin Englehardt, *The Missions and Missionaries of California* (San Francisco: The James H. Barry Co., 1912), vol. II, p. 157; “Diary of Jason Lee,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 17 (June 1916), pp. 142, 247, 261-65. The Catholics attended Protestant services and hired a Protestant teacher for their children.

<sup>6</sup> Oregon State Historical Society, Manuscript Division, “Petition of Willamette [Catholic] Settlers [for a priest] to the Bishop of Juliopolis,” i.e. J.N. Provencher, Vicar Apostolic for the District of the Northwest who resided at present-day St. Boniface, Manitoba, and was under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Quebec, 8 March 1837; F.N. Blanchet, *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon* (Portland: Sentinel Press, 1878) pp. 64-65; Harvey K. Hines, *Missionary History of the Pacific Northwest* (Portland: H.K. Hines; San Francisco: J.D. Hammond, 1899) p. 258.

“think-big” mentality often associated with the American entrepreneurial spirit. By 1846, the year of the boundary settlement, and eight years after the arrival of Blanchet and Demers, the Catholic Church in the Oregon Territory could claim only a few hundred white adherents and a few thousand native converts who were mostly nominal.<sup>7</sup> During a trip to Rome in that year, however, Blanchet convinced the Holy See, by means of written and verbal exaggeration that would have impressed P.T. Barnum, to establish an entire ecclesiastical province in the Pacific Northwest with himself as its first Archbishop. Thus, because of Blanchet’s determination, Portland, Oregon, can claim to be, after Baltimore, Maryland, the second oldest Roman Catholic Archdiocese in the United States. Although his ambitious plan called for ten suffragan sees, initially Blanchet settled for two, with his brother Augustin as suffragan Bishop of Walla Walla (later Seattle), and his missionary colleague Demers as suffragan Bishop of Vancouver Island (later Victoria).<sup>8</sup> As small as the white settlements were south of the new border, they were virtually nonexistent to the north of it, prompting Demers to fear that he had only “poverty,” if not “destitution,” to look forward to as the first Bishop of Victoria.<sup>9</sup>

After travelling around Europe and North America for four years in a largely unsuccessful search for funds and clergy to assist him in his Diocese, a greatly frustrated Demers finally arrived in his episcopal See in the autumn of 1852. There he found only a handful of whites, mostly Protestants; and as for the general condition and attitude of the native peoples, he had few initial expectations. Coupled with all of this was the very high cost of food and land, and the refusal of the Hudson’s Bay Company to give him or his few clergy free passage. At the same time, they treated the Anglicans as if they were a state church, which prompted in Demers an early dislike of Governor

---

<sup>7</sup> Adrian G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia Formerly New Caledonia* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), p. 234.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Landholm, ed., *Notices and Voyages of the Famed Quebec Missions to the Pacific Northwest* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, Champoeg Press, Reed College, 1956), p. 212 et seq. contains extracts of the most interesting parts of Blanchet’s enormous *Memoriale* to Propaganda Fide in Rome; Gilbert J. Garraghen, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States* (New York: American Press, 1939), vol. II, p. 287. States that the huge new ecclesiastical province contained “a mere handful of Catholics”; Baltimore Archdiocesan Archives [hereafter BAA], Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore to Bishop Francis Kenrick of Philadelphia, Baltimore, 18 August 1846. Eccleston knew nothing of Blanchet’s plan and expressed shock when he heard of its “extravagance”; Portland Archdiocesan Archives [hereafter PAA], Blanchet to Eccleston, Oregon City, 16 September 1846. “Explains” that if he had stopped at Baltimore to tell Eccleston of his plan, it would have “delayed” his journey to Rome.

<sup>9</sup> *Rapport sur les missions du Diocèse de Québec qui sont secourues par L’Association de la Propagation de la Foi* [hereafter *Rapport*] (Quebec: L’Association de la Propagation de la Foi, 1849), pp. 96- 97.

James Douglas and the Company he represented. All of this left Demers wondering, even hoping, that the rumours of 1854 were true: that the United States would soon acquire Vancouver Island from Britain.<sup>10</sup>

During most of the period before Confederation the Roman Catholic Church in Lower Canada and the Anglican Church in Upper Canada were recognized respectively as semi-established and established by the British Government, a fact evident in their large land endowments.<sup>11</sup> Reflecting this policy, the Hudson's Bay Company maintained official or company chaplains in most of their trading forts, and Victoria was no exception. Of course, profit from furs was its main interest, and the Company learned very early that religious rivalry and the disputes they generated, such as those in the Oregon Territory, were a potential threat to business.<sup>12</sup> Even so, as a British firm the Company had usually favoured the appointment of Anglican clergy as chaplains, whether or not their employees were Anglicans. In most cases, including Fort Vancouver, they were not. As official appointees, the chaplains often expected special recognition for themselves and the Anglican Church. This had been the case in Fort Vancouver, and it was also true at Fort Victoria where the Reverend John Staines and his successor, the Reverend Edward Cridge had received an endowment of one hundred acres in addition to their annual salary. Both considered themselves the representatives of a paradox: an unofficial state church.

Such a situation was bound to lead to feelings of jealousy among the clergy of other denominations, especially those who were either American or had experienced American ways, such as pluralism, religious voluntarism, and especially the constitutional separation of church and state.<sup>13</sup> Demers had experienced these American attitudes while living in the Oregon Territory and appeared to approve of them. As a French Canadian, however, he was also accustomed to state support for the Catholic Church. In line with this in 1850 he had attempted, though unsuccessfully, to obtain an annual pension for himself from the British government. The failure no doubt contributed to

---

<sup>10</sup> Quebec Archdiocesan Archives [hereafter QAA], Demers to Archbishop Turgeon of Quebec, Victoria, 26 October 1852; *ibid.*, Demers to Archbishop's Secretary Cazeau, Victoria, 10 February 1854; All Hallows College Archives, Dublin [hereafter AHA], Demers to Rev. Dr. Woodlock, Rector, Victoria, 19 March 1854.

<sup>11</sup> John S. Moir, *The Church in the British Era: From the British Conquest to Confederation* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill/Ryerson, 1972), pp. 36, 62, 115, 180-81.

<sup>12</sup> Frank A. Peake, "From the Red River to the Arctic," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Association* 31, no. 2 (October 1989), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas E. Jessett, ed. *Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver 1836-1838* (Portland & San Francisco: Champoeg Press, 1959), pp. xix-xxi. Like Staines in Victoria, Beaver considered himself the leader of an established church at Fort Vancouver; G. Hollis Slater, "Rev. Robert John Stains: Pioneer Priest, Pedagogue and Political Agitator," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 14 (October 1950), p. 212 et seq.

his developing hostility towards the privileged status of the Anglican Church. In 1855 Cridge replaced Staines, and, like his two predecessors, considered his position superior to the clergy of other denominations at Victoria. Demers confided to a colleague that Cridge, by his air of superiority towards other churches, was “raising strong feelings against himself in the public.” Reflecting on his own experiences of pluralism and religious voluntarism in the Pacific Northwest, and contrasting them with the prerogatives of an established church, Demers concluded that “such bigotry ... will not do in a country like this.”<sup>14</sup> Since the Anglican perception of being an unofficial state church was supported by some in authority, it was anything but an illusion; but it was very soon to be tested by others, especially Demers, and found wanting.

George Hills, the first Anglican Bishop of British Columbia, having just arrived from England, wrote in the *Columbia Mission Report* in June 1860, the organ of the London-based Anglican *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*, that Bishop Demers had “not seemed pleased” at Hills’ “cordial reception” and, consequently, had voted against the Government at a recent election and “incensed” Catholics against Hills. Hills assured his readers, however, that Demers’ efforts had resulted in no more than a few “trivial” inconveniences. Besides revealing the early tensions between Demers and Douglas and Demers and Hills, such public statements demonstrated Hills’ naive notion that his position as the leader of Vancouver Island’s and British Columbia’s supposed “established church” would render him immune from similar criticisms. He soon learned that he was no longer in the Old Country.<sup>15</sup>

In October 1860 the *Colonist*, a stout opponent of any notion of an “established church” in British Columbia, published Hills’ letter.<sup>16</sup> In an apparent attempt to pour oil on troubled waters, Hills immediately issued an *Occasional Paper*. In it, he assured Demers that the critical letter had been published in the *Report* “without... [his] knowledge.” In the offending letter, Hills had also lambasted Victoria’s growing American population as “racists” for their attitude towards the native peoples and Blacks. Now he expressed his “sincere regrets” to any Americans who might have been “annoyed” at his observations. Nevertheless, the *Paper* stopped short of

---

<sup>14</sup> QAA, Demers to Cazeau, Fort Vancouver, 10 October 1845. Expresses his appreciation of the American spirit of being open to what is new and different; British Columbia Archives and Records Service, Victoria [hereafter BCARS], Colonial Correspondence [hereafter CC] E/B/D39C, Demers to Benjamin Howe, Colonial Office, London, 26 August 1850; AHA, Demers to Dr. Woodlock, Victoria, 18 June 1855.

<sup>15</sup> *Report of the Columbia Mission* [hereafter *Report*] (London: Rivingtons, 1860), pp. 14,27-32.

<sup>16</sup> *Colonist*, 13 October 1860.

apologizing to Demers, and Hills reminded his American readers that while he had the “deepest interest” in American institutions, they were “not free from criticism,” which Hills concluded even Americans accepted as obvious. Such left handed compliments and halfhearted apologies seem to demonstrate again that Hills still did not realize that the Pacific Northwest was not the United Kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

Demers, however, now made a serious challenge to Hills’ assumptions. In the same issue in which it published Hills’ controversial letter, the *Colonist* also reported that Bishop Demers was suing Bishop Hills for refusing to allow other denominations easy access to a local cemetery, since the most direct roadway to it passed through what Hills viewed as church reserve land. Of course the cemetery issue was quite secondary to the central one: namely, whether the Anglican Church could claim through its possession of church reserves in Victoria that it was the state or established church on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia. It was a crucial issue for all concerned.<sup>18</sup>

Hills continued to have a strong ally in Governor Douglas. By virtue both of his office and his own convictions, Douglas persisted in his support of an unofficially established church in the colony. Until Demers’ case reached the courts in May 1861 both Douglas and Hills privately attempted to convince Demers to drop his claim of access to the cemetery.<sup>19</sup>

At the trial Demers’ defense asserted that though Hills was not “a wicked man,” he was “misguided” and “badly advised” thinking, as he did, that since his church was “*the Church*” in England, the “same rule applied” in Victoria. Hills’ lawyer attempted to prove that Demers, in insisting that he had a right to enter the cemetery by means of the church reserves, was trespassing. The jury disagreed with Hills, awarded the case to Demers, and assessed damages to Hills. Much worse, however, was the implication that the Anglican Church had no claims to hold church reserves.<sup>20</sup> The *Colonist* called it an “important suit”, declaring that the “verdict for Demers” was “generally regarded as virtually settling the vexed question of...the reserved lands of ... [the] Colony for all future time.”<sup>21</sup> Hills also realized the consequences, for he noted two months later that there was a “wide-spread and

---

<sup>17</sup> George Hills, *Occasional Paper* (Victoria, 1860), pp. 3-6.

<sup>18</sup> *Colonist*, 13 October 1860.

<sup>19</sup> BCARS, CC, F/4534, Demers to Douglas, Victoria, 8 November 1860; *ibid.*, F/340/ 3a, Hills to Douglas, Victoria, 24 November 1860; *ibid.*, F145316, Demers to Douglas, Victoria, 20 December 1860. Demers expresses “shock” that Douglas is so strong in his defense of the Anglican claim; *ibid.*, F/340/4, Hills to Douglas, 4 March 1861. Hills’ plan of settling the issue out of court.

<sup>20</sup> *Colonist*, 3-11 May 1861 (Full report of “The Church Reserve Case”).

<sup>21</sup> *Colonist*, 11 May 1861.

deeply rooted objection in the community” against the notion of church reserves, and that any attempt by his church to acquire additional reserve land would only create more public “irritation and contention.”<sup>22</sup> Still for the next three years Hills continued to press his case in an attempt to retain the reserves that his church already claimed.

While these maneuvers were occurring in the background the *Colonist* and Bishop Demers kept the issue of the special treatment already accorded to the Anglican church before the public. Writing to Hills in an open letter in October 1861 entitled: “The Church in British Columbia,” Demers again attacked Hills’ *Occasional Paper*, and expressed his resentment of Hills’ reference to Catholics as “Romanists” and to Demers as a “foreigner.” In July 1862 in the same newspaper Demers championed the right of native peoples to receive financial support from the state. For the whites in the colony, however, he favoured “non-sectarian principles” as long as “they be fairly carried out.” It was clear to both Demers and the *Colonist* that the issues of church reserves or an established church in the colony must be settled on the same “non-sectarian” principles.<sup>23</sup>

By May 1863, except for Governor Douglas, Hills had lost local government support for his claims to church reserves.<sup>24</sup> Finally in May 1864 the British Government reached an historic decision by which the original one hundred acres were reduced to twenty-two, constituted as a Trust in which the colonial, and later provincial, government was designated a major trustee.<sup>25</sup> Thus ended the Anglican Church's attempt to gain quasi-established status on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia, the major result of which was that the principle of strict church-state separation was recognized, at a very early stage in the history of British Columbia. The strong American presence, especially in Victoria, played an essential part in helping to move

---

<sup>22</sup> Frank A. Peake, *The Anglican Church in British Columbia* (Vancouver Mitchell Press, 1959) pp. 48-49. Hills to Church Committee’s, Douglas and Lillooet, 31 July 1861. Peake does not examine the church reserves issue.

<sup>23</sup> *Colonist*, 14-15 October 1861; *ibid.*, 25 July 1862.

<sup>24</sup> BCARS, CC: F/62/2b, George Cary, Attorney General to Earl Grey, British Colonial Secretary, Victoria, 18 May 1863. Cary, who had supported Hills claim in 1861 (see *ibid.*, F/ 49/22, Cary to Grey, December 1861), now advised against it.

<sup>25</sup> British Columbia Diocesan Archives [hereafter BCDA], “Christ Church Trust Deed,” manuscript, 6 May 1864; and J.H. Hinton, “Account of History of Christ Church Trust,” unpublished manuscript, 1937. Relates that in 1914 the local Anglican Synod became the sole trustee; however, by 1937, due to mismanagement and financial defaults, the actual value of the Trust had fallen to less than forty-three thousand dollars. Ormsby, *British Columbia, A History*, pp. 168-69. Ormsby, still a major survey history of the Province, incorrectly states that Demers, in her only reference to him, played no role in affecting the outcome of the church reserves/established church controversy, and gives most of the credit for defeating it to Amor de Cosmos and the *Colonist*.

public opinion in that direction.

By 1854 church reserves had been abolished in Upper Canada, but the Anglican Church received enormous financial commutations in exchange for their loss, and retained in perpetuity the land and rectories that were originally attached to the reserves. Thus while in 1854 church-state separation was recognized in Upper Canada, unlike British Columbia, it was only nominally so.<sup>26</sup> And while Canadian and British influence cannot be discounted in helping to mould public opinion on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia on the church-state issue, the extremely significant American presence was crucial. It could be argued that without it Vancouver Island and British Columbia would very probably have reflected the attitude of Upper Canada on this issue.

Certainly the importance of the American influence was acknowledged by Bishop Demers. Reporting the results of his lawsuit against Bishop Hills to a colleague in the fall of 1861, Bishop Demers noted that the Americans formed the majority of the residents of Victoria. Indicating the importance of public opinion in winning his suit, Demers stated that American influence and their strong emphasis on “equality of rights” played a considerable role in determining public opinion in Victoria, and he implied that American bias against an established church in British Columbia was an important factor in his legal victory.<sup>27</sup> Despite what Hills, Douglas, or the British Government might have felt regarding any benefits from such an arrangement, they had to face outright public hostility to the idea of official recognition or support for any single church on Vancouver Island or in British Columbia, be it Anglican or not. While much of the social and political power on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia continued in the hands of the original British establishment, by 1858 they could not ignore the very significant American influence throughout the Colony, especially in Victoria.<sup>28</sup> American residents never presented any real political threat of annexation to the United States. Nevertheless, their influence during the years before Confederation over the social, economic, and political life of Vancouver Island and British Columbia was very important, and this was certainly reflected in the outcome of the

---

<sup>26</sup> Alan Wilson, *The Clergy Reserves of Upper Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1969) pp. 22. Moir, *The Church in the British Era*, pp. 180-83.

<sup>27</sup> *Rapport*, (1863) pp. 76-78

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Baillie Begbie, “Journey in the Interior of British Columbia,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 31 (1861), p. 248. Judge Begbie travelled into the interior in 1859 and commented on the “great preponderance of the Californianized element of the population, and the paucity of British Subjects.”

church reserves issue.<sup>29</sup> Yet the Anglican defeat over the reserve issue was also a defeat for all state support for religion, for in denying a special place to the Anglicans on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia, public opinion was denying a special place to all churches. Such is the price when it is a matter of equality of rights and the genuine separation of church and state. Nowhere was this fact better demonstrated than in the early development of public education in British Columbia.

The Hudson's Bay Company, in traditionally appointing and funding Anglican clergy as Company chaplains in its trading posts, encouraged the notion of an established church. In a similar manner in its usual policy of appointing and funding the same chaplains as schoolmasters, the Company laid the foundation for the concept of a separate schools system.<sup>30</sup> There was considerable support for the public funding of separate schools in eastern Canada. As with the issue of an established church, however, the strong American presence in Victoria before Confederation was one of the major factors that prevented the setting up of a similar system of separate schools in British Columbia.

In 1849, during Demers' absence abroad, Fr. Honore Lempfrit, OMI, had been sent to Victoria by Archbishop Blanchet to care for the pastoral needs of the Diocese, which included the founding of a school for the French Canadian employees of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>31</sup> In the same year the Reverend Robert Staines, the Hudson's Bay Company chaplain, had also established a school in Victoria. Though both were denominational, and thus provided the possibility of a separate schools system in the area, Staines' school was for the better classes, the English-speaking children of the Company's managerial employees. Lempfrit's school was for the "poor children of ... [the] French Canadians," or the Company's working-class employees. Financially, Staines' school was supported by the Company, though it also charged fees; Lempfrit's school depended solely upon parental contributions.<sup>32</sup> In 1855 Edward Cridge replaced Staines as the Company chaplain and the Head of the school for "superior classes," and early in 1856

---

<sup>29</sup> "Naturalization of Aliens Act, November 14, 1861" from *A Collection of Public General Statutes of Vancouver Island: 1859- 1863* (Victoria: Evening Press, 1864) pp. 96-98. Gave Americans the same rights as British subjects.

<sup>30</sup> Donald A. MacLean, *Catholic Schools in Western Canada and Their Legal Status* (Toronto: Extension Printing, 1923) p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Margaret Down, *A Century of Service: A History of the Sisters of St. Ann and Their Contribution to Education in British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska* (Victoria: Morriss Press, 1966), pp. 23-25.

<sup>32</sup> Down, *A Century of Service*, pp. 23-27; Jean Barman, "Transfer, Imposition or Consensus?: The Emergence of Educational Structure in Nineteenth Century British Columbia," in Nancy M. Sheehan, ed., *Schools in The West: Essays in Canadian Educational History* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1988), p. 242.

Cridge was also appointed the first Inspector of the Company schools.<sup>33</sup> Cridge's appointment as school Inspector again demonstrated the Anglican Church's initial assumption of a privileged and dominant position in the colony. The appointment also indicated the growing population in the area, and the Company's attempt to meet the educational needs of its employees' children.

By March 1853 the Hudson's Bay Company Council had established two schools in and near Victoria for its working-class employees and settlers. They were very cheap, which gained for them the damaging reputation of being "charity schools" and hastened their demise.<sup>34</sup> Unlike Staines' school, they gave no formal religious instruction, although there was Bible reading and prayer, and the schoolmasters were all Protestants.<sup>35</sup> This last fact represented a serious danger for Bishop Demers, who in 1853 was trying to re-establish a Catholic school in his Diocese after Lempfrit's departure in 1852.

By the end of 1856 Demers was finally able to open a small school for boys, but due to his continuing problem of obtaining and retaining clergy, especially ones who could speak English, the school had a difficult initial period. With the arrival of the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate and the Sisters of St. Ann in 1858, both of whom had some English-speaking staff, Catholic education in Victoria was finally established on a firm footing.<sup>36</sup>

By 1860 the Anglicans had set about founding their own schools, again for the better classes, one for boys and one for girls. Clearly the recent Catholic success was a major impetus, for Bishop Hills, in recommending their establishment to the readers of the *Columbia Mission Report*, noted that while Catholics were not numerous in Victoria they were "forward in the matter of education, both in the case of boys and girls." Hills was also certain that the Anglicans would attract the children of some of the many Americans

---

<sup>33</sup> D.L. MacLaurin, "The History of Education in the Crown Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1936), p. 25-29.

<sup>34</sup> Barman, "Transfer, Imposition or Consensus?" pp. 242-138. An 1864 census reported that the Company schools enrolled less than a quarter of the areas five hundred pupils.

<sup>35</sup> D.L. MacLaurin, "Education before the Gold Rush," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* (October 1958), p. 251; MacLaurin, "The History of Education in ...British Columbia," p. 22. The Company had also established a school in Nanaimo in 1853.

<sup>36</sup> AHA, Demers to Woodlock, Victoria, 8 March 1853. Fears French Canadian children may be taught heresy by Protestant teachers in Company schools. Margaret Whitehead, *The Cariboo Mission: A History of the Oblates* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1981) p. 21; Down, *A Century of Service*, p. 34; BCARS, CC, F139511, Cridge to Douglas, Victoria, 20 November 1856. This is the earliest evidence of Demers' school for boys.

in Victoria: “The Americans think highly of education. It is much valued by them, and our English system is more substantial than [the American] .... Boys of the upper class go at present [June 1860] to the Roman Catholic Bishop’s school .... The case, therefore, is urgent.” In a private letter about this time Hills commented that the Oblate clergy had as their principal teaching “the worship of the Virgin, and hatred of the Americans and English,” while the French, he declared, “are exalted and extolled!”<sup>37</sup>

By 1860 Americans formed the majority of the residents of Victoria.<sup>38</sup> As it had in the church-state issue, the American presence also affected the future of education on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia. In 1860 American influence was again demonstrated in the establishment of the first common school system in Victoria. Though fee-based, and thus private, they were strictly non-denominational in character, thus giving parents the first clear alternative to the private Catholic and Anglican schools.<sup>39</sup>

Due to management and financial problems the common schools closed in 1864, but they had become so popular there was a public outcry for a common or public school system in Victoria that would be free and strictly non-religious.<sup>40</sup> In April 1864 a large public meeting in Victoria supported not only a free public school system in Victoria but also the principle that such schools should be strictly non-religious. At the same meeting it was acknowledged by several speakers that the strong American presence both at the meeting and in the city was a significant factor in influencing the determination to keep all religion out of public education in Victoria.<sup>41</sup> Soon afterwards a delegation of citizens appointed at the meeting presented Governor Arthur Kennedy with a petition demanding the establishment of

---

<sup>37</sup> *Report* (1860) p. 14; BCDA, Hills to Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Victoria, 8 May 1860.

<sup>38</sup> Higgins, “British Columbia and the Confederation Era,” pp. 19-20; *Rapport* (1863), pp. 76-78. Demers noted that the “Americans form the large half of the population” in Victoria, and thus, he indicated, they had considerable influence in shaping public opinion.

<sup>39</sup> Barman, “Transfer, Imposition or Consensus?,” pp. 242-48. As noted, there was little public interest in the Hudson’s Bay Company schools.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-48.

<sup>41</sup> *Colonist*, 11 April 1864. At the meeting, an Anglican cleric, Rev. Mr. Woods, in proposing a resolution supporting the importance of religion in all education, public as well as private, quoted from “the opinions of American writers” in defense of his position, and citing “an American work on education” which praised several European countries where religion was taught in public schools, Woods tried to convince his audience. Woods’ resolution lost “by a large majority.” Even an “American school in Massachusetts,” which taught religion as part of its curriculum, was held up by one unnamed speaker as a proof of the value of religion in school. American authorities on education were the only ones used at the meeting. The defeat of several proposals to include religion in the public schools of Victoria were all greeted by the audience with “loud cheers.”

such a system in Victoria. Kennedy agreed that any future public system should be non-religious and that, to insure class harmony, “religious dissensions,” he said, should not be allowed “to creep into the public schools.”<sup>42</sup> Such official and public feelings also indicated that by 1864 the Catholics and Anglicans in Victoria probably had little hope of gaining either official or public support for the establishment of a separate schools system in the future Province.

While Bishop Demers gave a great deal of thought and concern to the needs of the Catholic schools in his Diocese, he did not expect state support for St. Ann’s Academy for girls or St. Louis’ College for boys, which served mostly “better class” whites and charged competitive fees. In May 1862, however, Demers had requested that the Government pay the costs of supplying books and other educational materials for a church school for native children in the Lake Cowichan area. When the Government indicated that it could only supply funds to strictly non-religious schools, Demers, in an open letter, replied that he had “no objection to non-sectarian principles among the whites, if they be fairly carried out,” but since the native peoples could not be expected to support their own educational institutions, Demers believed that the state was “in justice bound to provide the means of civilizing and educating them.”<sup>43</sup>

It is a very significant irony that Demers’ strong support for equality of rights among the whites was a major factor in helping to defeat public support for Catholic schools in British Columbia. It seems clear that Demers, though quite familiar with the separate schools system of his native Quebec, was greatly influenced by the voluntary and pluralistic spirit of the Pacific Northwest. The result of the church reserves issue had pleased him. Furthermore, as long as no other church received state assistance for its “upper class” or “white” schools, Demers appeared to be prepared to forego such assistance for his own schools. In a few years, however, that same voluntary and pluralistic spirit would be exercised in the establishment in British Columbia of a public system of education that would be totally non-religious and free, much like those already in existence in the United States and very different from the system that then existed in the rest of Canada as well as in the United Kingdom. Both the Catholics and the Anglicans would protest but to no avail.

By the spring of 1865, in the face of strong public support, the Legislature had decided to establish a system of free public education which would be supported by local taxes. The alarm had finally been sounded. In May the Oblate President of St. Louis’ College, Fr. Julien Baudré, asked the

---

<sup>42</sup> *Colonist*, 4 and 13 April 1864.

<sup>43</sup> BCARS, CC, F/453110, Demers to Colonial Secretary William Young, Victoria, 15 May 1862; *Colonist*, 25 July 1862. “Letter to Rt. Rev. Dr. Demers.”

government to exempt his College from property taxation since the future public schools were to be exempt, and like them, argued Baudré, St. Louis' accepted all pupils regardless of race, colour, creed, and financial position. The Attorney General, George Cary, replied that neither St. Louis' nor St. Ann's qualified for tax exemptions. Public schools were exempt because "the public have by law a perceived right to be educated." Baudré was told that any alteration would have to be made by the government or the supreme court.<sup>44</sup>

The Catholics responded in several ways. Fr. Leon Fouquet, OMI, published a pamphlet in 1865 in which he defended the right of the Catholic parents in Victoria to give their children a Catholic education and in which he "set forth the injustice of compelling them to contribute to the support of a system of [public] schools to which they could not conscientiously send their children." At a public meeting some of the leading Catholics of Victoria passed several resolutions requesting that Catholics be represented on any future Board of Public Education. They also asked that their taxes might be applied solely to their own schools. The Government replied that a Catholic layman would be appointed to the forthcoming Board. As to the matter of tax exemptions or state contribution for Catholic schools, it was stated that they would be impossible as such actions would violate the recent School Act.<sup>45</sup>

In 1872 and after Confederation a Public School Bill finally settled the separate schools question in British Columbia. It ignored the very existence of denominational schools and carefully preserved the strictly non-religious character of the future public school system.<sup>46</sup> While the separate schools issue had been effectively settled, both the Catholics and the Anglicans continued to object, and they definitely saw the American influence in British Columbia as a major factor in their failure to gain state support for

---

<sup>44</sup> MacLean, *Catholic Schools in Western Canada*, p. 53; AHA, Demers to Bennett, San Francisco, 22 January 1865. Demers was in California for his health; he had recently suffered a stroke. In the letter he indicates that his schools were "as prosperous as ever." Demers' health and his absence in California may explain why he did not become involved in the school issue, though he could certainly have written letters to express his opinion, though none have been discovered; BCARS, CC, B/12307/133, Baudré to Governor Kennedy, Victoria, May 10, 1865; *ibid.*, Cary to Baudré, Victoria, May 12, 1865.

<sup>45</sup> Adrian G. Morice, OMI, *Histoire de L'Eglise Catholique dans l'Ouest Canadien* (Montreal: Granger Freres, 1915), vol. 3, p. 275. Contains the reference to Fouquet's 1865 pamphlet which was published in Victoria; no copy has been discovered; BCARS, CC, GR/1372/B/1364/F/1585, Seghers to Young, Victoria, 19 June 1865. Contains resolutions; *ibid.*, R/103/1756, Young to Seghers, Victoria, 22 June 1865.

<sup>46</sup> *Colonist*, 2 April 1872; *Daily Standard*, 8 April 1872. Contains some final debates on the School Bill and reveals the anti-clerical attitude among many members of the Provincial Legislature.

a separate schools system.

As Confederation approached, Bishop Hills had complained to the readers of the *Columbia Mission Report* in Britain that the many American residents in British Columbia had learned “to despise” the clergy and had imbibed their anti-clericalism in the public education system of the United States. Accusing such schools of spreading “infidelity, crime, and immorality” in the United States, he feared they would now do the same in British Columbia. With the passage of the new School Bill in 1872 Hills expressed the dread that the now “purely secular schools” of British Columbia would soon rival their counterparts in America which were responsible, according to Hills, for the “growing corruption” in the United States, even, he declared, to the “increase and impunity of the crime of murder!”<sup>47</sup>

The Catholics of Victoria also blamed the Americans, though their reaction was not made public until after Confederation. This was probably due to Bishop Demers’ illness and his subsequent absence from the Diocese. Thus the only recorded protest at this time came from Father Charles John Seghers, whom Demers had appointed as the Administrator of the Diocese, and it is addressed to that champion of moderation, Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken.<sup>48</sup>

Seghers began by defending the existence of both the Anglican and Catholic schools in Victoria and thus indicated how crisis situations can sometimes make strange bedfellows. He argued that the Catholics and, by implication, the Anglicans *must* have their own system of education and that it would be *unjust* to expect them to pay for two, and that it was only *equitable* that church schools should have a share of any public education funds. Essentially it was the reasoning upon which rested the separate schools system of eastern Canada. Seghers also stated that the common or public school systems in the United States had been saved from disaster because of the existence there of church schools, especially Catholic schools that were maintained, he said, “at great sacrifice.”<sup>49</sup> Thus as Confederation approached, Seghers, like Hills, was clearly aware of the influence that the United States was having on the school issue, due to the large American

---

<sup>47</sup> *Report* (1866), pp. 27-28; *Report* (1867), pp. 92-93; *Report* (1868), p. 113; *Report* (1872), pp. 48-52.

<sup>48</sup> Propaganda Fide Archives, Rome [hereafter PFAI, Lettere, vol. 350, f. 521, Secretary of Propaganda Fide to Demers, Rome, 26 August 1859. Grieved to hear Demers wants to resign and suggests a coadjutor instead; AHA, Demers to Bennett, Victoria, 9 November 1865. Spoke of leaving Seghers in charge of the Diocese and how much he trusted him. Seghers had only arrived in 1863, and by 1865 he was only twenty-six.

<sup>49</sup> BCARS, CC, Add. Mss. 505, vol. 1, F/18, Seghers to Helmcken, Victoria, 18 February 1869.

presence in British Columbia, but especially in Victoria.

Within a few years after Confederation even the voluntary teaching of religion in the public schools of British Columbia would be removed. The British Columbia School Act of 1872 confirmed that the public schools would teach the “highest morality and no religious dogma.” Under the School Act of 1865 the clergy had been permitted to teach religion in public schools in separate rooms. In 1869, however, religious instruction was relegated to after-school hours. By 1876 provincial legislation had excluded all clergy from holding any position, voluntary or otherwise, in the public system, and religious exercises were limited to the public recitation of the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments.<sup>50</sup>

Responding to this latest threat and to the accompanying new School Tax Act of 1876 Seghers, by now the second Bishop of Victoria, together with sixty-three other Victoria Catholics, signed a petition asking the Legislature not to pass the Act. Referring to other countries, such as the United States, which had public schools, the signers asserted that the experience there proved “that unsectarian schools ... [were] the chief propagators of religious scepticism, unbelief, and infidelity.” “Secular learning,” they declared, was “but an additional tool for the commission of crime” and the spread of “atheism.” The signers then concluded in the now familiar manner: namely, that Catholics should not be required to support with their taxes a system which they “abhorred.”<sup>51</sup>

When their petition failed, Seghers publicly responded to what he considered had become the intolerable interference of the state in the area of education. The state, Seghers believed, should stay out of education all together. If children were to be moral, he declared, you “must impress on them the fear of God,” for, he said, there can be “no morality without religion.” Demonstrating some astute judgement, Seghers asserted that to relegate religious instruction to after-school hours or to Sundays would cause the children to see it as an “intolerable penance.” Seghers then exhorted Victoria Catholics to keep up their own schools, even though they were compelled by the state to keep up “wicked, immoral, and injurious [public] institutions.”<sup>52</sup>

The *Colonist*, which believed in the strict separation of church and state, and the equally strict principle of non-religious and free public schools, charged that Seghers’ deductions could not withstand any serious examination. It claimed that many people in Victoria, probably even a majority, did not support any sect of organized religion, though they were not

---

<sup>50</sup> Charles E. Phillips, *The Development of Education in Canada* (Toronto: Gage, 1957), p. 326.

<sup>51</sup> *British Columbia Sessional Papers* (1876), p. 725.

<sup>52</sup> *Colonist*, 25 April 1877.

atheists. Then it asked the rhetorical questions: which is the “true church”? which church had the right to dictate to the public? Using the United States as its principal example, the editorial noted that despite some opinion to the contrary there was absolutely no evidence that the moral climate in America had “degenerated” because of the banishment of the Bible from the public schools there. It then concluded that religion, as in much of America, should be taught only in the home or in Sunday school.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the Spring of 1877 the *Colonist* continued to criticize Seghers and the sectarian position. In summary the paper stated that it feared that Bishop Seghers would never be satisfied until Roman Catholicism was the only religion taught in the public schools of British Columbia.<sup>54</sup>

Though Seghers did not publicly respond to these attacks, they must have influenced his thinking when in the following year he was appointed to succeed Francis Norbert Blanchet as the second Archbishop of Portland, Oregon. Throughout his six years in the United States, Seghers continued to condemn the public schools for their lack of religious teaching. If anything, Seghers’ American experience further hardened his feelings regarding the importance of church schools, for he wrote in 1881: “our [American] Catholics ...must build and keep up our schools, and if they neglect to do it, their children will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. I say it without bitterness and without fear.”<sup>55</sup> On at least one occasion he expressed his belief that the Catholics in Victoria were more dedicated to the building and maintaining of church schools than their American counterparts.<sup>56</sup> Such feelings, among others, finally prompted him in 1884 to request and receive permission from Rome to return to Victoria as its fourth Bishop. Seghers did not speak publicly again on the school question before his untimely murder by a deranged Roman Catholic on November 28, 1886, in the wastes of Alaska, which was then under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Diocese of Victoria.

John Baptist Brondel, Seghers’ successor, would be the third Bishop of Victoria for only four years (1879-1883), before becoming the first Vicar Apostolic of Montana and, within a year, the first Bishop of Helena, Montana. He made the last effort by a Bishop of Victoria to obtain a separate schools system in British Columbia similar to that in eastern Canada. Responding to new school tax legislation in the spring of 1881 which was connected to the recent founding (1876) of the first high school in Victoria, Brondel, together with some of the leading Catholic laymen of the Diocese,

---

<sup>53</sup> *Colonist*, 26 April 1877. “Our Secular School System.”

<sup>54</sup> *Colonist*, 27, 28, 29 April 1877; *ibid.*, 16 and 29 May 1877; *ibid.*, 3 June 1877.

<sup>55</sup> PAA, Seghers to F.N. Blanchet, Portland, 20 September 1881.

<sup>56</sup> *Catholic Sentinel*, Portland Oregon, 10 November 1881.

presented a petition to the Legislature. Repeating many of the arguments of Seghers against public education, and, like Seghers, using the United States as an example of what dreadful results could be expected from free public education without the inclusion of religious instruction, Brondel and his co-petitioners repeated the now familiar opinion that the state had no business running schools. They concluded by suggesting the introduction of a separate schools system similar to that in eastern Canada.<sup>57</sup>

By 1883 nothing had been accomplished. Yet Brondel, together with the Vicar Apostolic of British Columbia, Bishop Louis-Joseph D'Herbomez, OMI, again petitioned the Legislature. Repeating the arguments of 1881, Brondel wrote to D'Herbomez soon after the petition's presentation and asserted that Premier William Smithe admitted the "justice" of their cause. In fact Brondel was so enthusiastic after his meeting with Smithe that he was certain that a separate schools system would be a reality "within a year."<sup>58</sup> Within a few weeks of making this remark, Brondel learned of his new assignment in Montana.<sup>59</sup> Thus ended the last serious effort by Roman Catholics in British Columbia to obtain a separate schools system until the last quarter of the present century. The most that would be gained even then was government financial assistance, not a separate schools system as such.<sup>60</sup>

What real influence, therefore, did the American connection have on the history of the Diocese of Victoria and, more broadly, organized religion in British Columbia? In 1881 Bishop Hills, in writing to England, noted that the major social and cultural influences in British Columbia were destined to be both "non-sectarian" and "non-Christian," due, he believed, to the "constitutional religious apathy" which, he declared, marked "the people of the whole Pacific slope."<sup>61</sup> In 1928 Franz Boas, the father of cultural anthropology, was equally impressed, this time with the native peoples of the Pacific slope. Boas, however, came to very different conclusions than Hills. Using the native cultures on Vancouver Island as examples, Boas postulated his theory that with the gradual "increase of knowledge," individuals would free themselves from "traditional fetters" and experience an "emancipation from... [their] own culture," and thus develop a greater appreciation of and

---

<sup>57</sup> *British Columbia Sessional Papers* (1881), p. 517, 20 March 1881.

<sup>58</sup> *Mainland Guardian*, 4 May 1881, D'Herbomez asks that separate schools be established in British Columbia, or he predicts the Government will be judged "oppressive ... unjust... [and] intolerant"; *British Columbia Sessional Papers* (1883), p. 397, 20 March 1883, Brondel Petition; Vancouver Archdiocesan Archives [hereafter VAA], Brondel to D'Herbomez, Victoria, 20 March 1883.

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence B. Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest; or The History of Catholicity in Montana* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1894), p. 361-62.

<sup>60</sup> L.W. Downey, "The Aid-to-Independent Schools Movement in British Columbia," in Sheehan, *Schools in the West*, pp. 305-21.

<sup>61</sup> *Report* (1882-1883), pp. 18-20.

respect for other cultures.<sup>62</sup>

It is no accident that British Columbia together with the States of Washington and Oregon, which comprise the Pacific Northwest, have the highest unchurched population (less than half the average) in North America. Furthermore, this phenomenon is not of recent origin.<sup>63</sup> The Pacific Northwest has never had the same interest in, much less enthusiasm for organized religion as the rest of North America. This would be described by some as a “constitutional religious apathy” and by others as a relinquishing of “traditional fetters.” The natural barrier of the Rocky Mountains must be considered as a major factor in separating the Pacific coast of North America geographically, socially, economically, politically, and perhaps especially psychologically from the rest of the continent. This natural barrier seems to be a powerful psychological dividing line and appears to influence the way that the people of the Pacific Northwest look upon themselves and their institutions.<sup>64</sup>

All of the early Catholic Church leaders in the Pacific Northwest were influenced by this unique atmosphere. Demers and Blanchet, however, appear to have been more accepting than Seghers, Brondel, and their Anglican counterpart, Hills, who often described the pluralistic and egalitarian spirit in this area of North America with feelings of horror. Unlike Demers and Blanchet, they were all Europeans; as North Americans, Demers and Blanchet were perhaps more comfortable with Northwestern society. Even so, there were differences in British Columbia that also separated it from eastern Canada and instead drew on attitudes peculiar to the United States.

The two major issues that have been examined here – church-state

---

<sup>62</sup> Franz Boas, *Materials for the Study of the Inheritance in Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), pp. 202, 235.

<sup>63</sup> Bob Stewart, “That’s the B.C. Spirit!: Religion and Secularity in Lotus Land,” *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* (1983), pp. 22-35. Reports that the people of the Pacific Northwest have from half to one-third the interest in organized religion as the people in the rest of North America; *Fifth Census of Canada* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1913), pp. 158-59. The 1911 census indicates that Victoria, which was less than one-tenth the size of Toronto, had over ten times as many people reporting “no religion”; in fact, in 1911 Victoria had the highest such figure in Canada. A proportion of the high figure may be explained by the Asian population in Victoria, whose religious beliefs may not have been well recorded. Yet even including this possibility, the figure is still very high. Among the three universities in British Columbia, only the University of Victoria has no department of nor courses in either theology or religious studies.

<sup>64</sup> Pritt J. Vesilind, “Common Ground, Different Dreams,” *National Geographic* 177, no. 2 (February 1990), p. 127. The article, which deals with Canadian-American relations, concludes with a quote by Paul Weeks, an insurance executive from White Rock, B.C.: “My dream ... is taking British Columbia and Washington/Oregon ... and creating our own nation. A west-coast country.”

relations and separate schools – are naturally interconnected. The factor that distinguishes British Columbia from the rest of Canada, and clearly identifies the Province with its neighbours to the south, is that of compromise.<sup>65</sup>

Most of Canada east of the Rockies was willing to compromise in the area of church-state relations as well as separate schools. British Columbia made no such compromises. Almost from the outset, Canada's far western province has been unwilling to bend on these two issues, preferring instead to follow the American model. By the early 1860s, the Americans in Victoria constituted "the influential middle class" as well as the majority of its residents.<sup>66</sup> By the mid-1880s the American presence, while declining relatively, was still significant and they had already played a considerable role during a crucial two decades in helping to shape public opinion on important social and political issues in British Columbia.<sup>67</sup> It seems almost certain that without the American presence the solutions to such issues as church-state relations and separate schools would probably have been more compromising or in short more Canadian.

The American connection has been an important factor in the history of British Columbia as well as in the earlier history of the Diocese of Victoria. Archbishop Blanchet's apparently brash decision to try to convince Rome to establish an entire ecclesiastical province in an almost uninhabited wilderness, and even more extraordinary, his success, seems to belie the sense of a very American Horatio-Alger, "think-big" spirit of rugged individualism. Without Blanchet's seemingly Americanized determination, Victoria could not now claim to be the oldest Canadian Diocese west of Toronto, for given its white population in 1846 the establishment of Victoria as a Diocese was even more incredible than the erection of the Dioceses of Portland and Seattle. And while there was local Canadian as well as British opposition to such issues as church-state relations and separate schools in British Columbia, the spirit of that opposition was very definitely influenced by the majority, middle-class American presence, the reality of which had made a deep impression upon Seghers, Brondel, Hills, and even Demers.

Demers, perhaps because of his earlier years in the Oregon Territory, appeared to be less concerned about, and perhaps even in favour of, the

---

<sup>65</sup> John S. Moir, *Church and State in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 181. Dealing with the issue of church-state relations in eastern Canada, Moir concludes: "the moderation of the majority ... enabled politicians to strike with fair success a compromise in the relations of church and state – that type of compromise so typical of Canada."

<sup>66</sup> Higgins, "British Columbia and the Confederation Period," pp. 19-20; Rapport (1863), pp. 76-78.

<sup>67</sup> *Report* (1884-1885), p. 33. Based on a private census of Victoria, Hills reports that after the English and Canadians, the Americans were the third largest group in the city.

American influence north of the forty-ninth parallel. He certainly played a significant role, in his litigation with Bishop Hills, in helping to bring the issue of church-state relations to public attention and in defeating the church reserves issue and, by implication, the notion of an unofficially established church in British Columbia. Unwittingly, Demers contributed indirectly to the further secularization of Victoria society. It is one of the great ironies that Demers' support of equality for all whites, especially in the area of religion, became the major argument in denying public support to church schools. Although his poor health during the 1860s may have been a factor in distracting him, perhaps because of his experiences in the Oregon Territory Demers also seemed to be more philosophical than either Seghers or Brondel about the impossibility of establishing a separate schools system in British Columbia.<sup>68</sup>

In 1903 Victoria's formal Roman Catholic connections to the United States were ended when it became an Archdiocese, the oldest in far western Canada. It was a distinction that would last for only five years, when that dignity was transferred to the newer, but much larger cosmopolitan city of Vancouver. While British Columbia now had its own Roman Catholic ecclesiastical province, and Victoria was no longer canonically an American Diocese, the American connection had played a significant role in helping to shape the earlier history of the Diocese of Victoria.

---

<sup>68</sup> Canadian historiography on the separate schools issue, while citing British Columbia as unique among Canadian Provinces in its rejection of such a system from the outset of Confederation, appears to make no mention in trying to explain this situation to the early American influence in the Province; e.g., C.B. Sissons, *Church and State in Canadian Education* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1959), p. 371. Referring to British Columbia, he notes: "One searches in vain through the pages of debates in the Commons and Senate for the slightest reference to a matter which for other Provinces of the nascent Dominion had been the subject of much forethought and discussion." It seems clear that the "matter" had been largely decided in British Columbia by the mid-1860s, when American influence in the Province was at its height.