

## **“Erasing forever the brand of social inferiority”: Saint Francis Xavier University and the Highland Catholics of Eastern Nova Scotia**

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In 1936, Robert M. Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, lamented that “The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is being rapidly obscured in universities and may soon be extinguished.”<sup>1</sup> His lament expressed an idealist myth about the real function of universities. In Canada, universities have never primarily served the goal of the disinterested pursuit of truth. Nineteenth century Canadian universities promoted things such as “respectable” culture, loyalism, patriotism, religion and denominational expansion.<sup>2</sup> One key function served by the Catholic College of Saint Francis Xavier [St.F.X.] in eastern Nova Scotia during the 19th century was the social advance and cultural integration<sup>3</sup> of its large Highland Catholic constituency.<sup>4</sup>

The Scottish Catholics who clambered onto the rugged shores of eastern Nova Scotia during the late 18th and early 19th centuries hailed from the western islands and counties of Highland Scotland. For centuries they had lived a spartan existence among the rocks and heather as an oppressed minority,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada during the Thirties* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, this is not to deny the fundamental religious aim of St.F.X. to produce a native priesthood, but only to claim that another, less explicit goal was also pursued.

<sup>4</sup> St.F.X., as a diocesan Catholic college, also served Irish and Acadian Catholics in the region, but their numbers were much smaller; the Scots predominated in the Church hierarchy and in the College. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on the Scots, their college at Antigonish, and its relation to Nova Scotia society.

marginalized by their Gaelic language and Roman Catholic faith.<sup>5</sup> Most Highlanders were impoverished tenant farmers and farm labourers who nonetheless possessed a rich oral culture and clan tradition. Since the tumultuous 16th century, when the Reformed faith had replaced Catholicism as the established religion of Scotland, the Catholic remnant had lived in peril. From 1560 prohibitory legislation threatened the Catholic faithful with severe civil disabilities, punishment, and even execution. Persecution against Catholics, commonly led by rabid anti-Catholic Presbyterian ministers, waxed and waned through the centuries. Hence Catholics were disposed to support the ill-starred Jacobite cause during the 17th and 18th centuries which tried to restore the Catholic Stuarts to the throne. After the final defeat of the movement at Culloden in 1746, the British government acted immediately to pacify the Highlands and eradicate Jacobitism. Clans were disarmed, the ancient juridical rights of the chiefs were lost, Catholic estates forfeited and alien factors installed to administer them, Highland dress and bagpipes forbidden, and Catholic homes and chapels burned. Relief for the Catholic minority (they probably composed no more than three percent of the population) from the trial of religious intolerance eventually arrived.<sup>6</sup> The British government passed a Relief Bill in 1793 which allowed for freedom of worship, the right to inherit and purchase property, and access to employment in the public service. However, a residue of discrimination, abuse, and mistrust remained; it even greeted the Highlanders again when they crossed the Atlantic and settled in British North America. Catholics were not granted full political rights until 1829 when Parliament passed the Emancipation Bill.

The culturally-rooted subjugation of Catholics in Scotland made them nearly invisible in the educational and intellectual life of the nation.<sup>7</sup> Educational opportunities for them were few in a country which became known, ironically, for its democratic system of schooling.<sup>8</sup> In some cases Catholic parents were content to have their children educated in the Protestant schools as long as their young were not forced to imbibe Protestant doctrine.<sup>9</sup> Covert or undercover

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<sup>5</sup> This description of the position of Highland Catholics is based on Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), pp. 1-31.

<sup>6</sup> Bonnie and Vern Bullough, "Intellectual Achievers: A Study of Eighteenth Century Scotland," *American Journal of Sociology* 76 (1970-71), p. 1052.

<sup>7</sup> Roman Catholics are rarely mentioned in R.D. Anderson's excellent study, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> George E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

Catholic schools were at times operated. Native Catholics who wanted to serve the Scottish Catholic mission as priests had few higher educational opportunities; most had to attend seminaries on the continent, usually at the Scots colleges in France, Spain, or Rome.<sup>10</sup> Since Catholics had such meagre access to education, few of them contributed to the astounding intellectual achievements of 18th century Scotland.<sup>11</sup>

The grim social, religious, and economic outlook for 18th and 19th century Scottish Catholics rendered emigration to the New World an attractive prospect. Those who opted to leave joined a massive westward movement of population – nearly one million emigrated from the British Isles to British North America between 1800 and 1850 alone.<sup>12</sup> Large numbers flocked from the western Highlands and islands.<sup>13</sup> Of these, a “vastly disproportionate” number were Roman Catholics, frequently with a clergyman at their head.<sup>14</sup> For a time in the late 18th century the Roman Catholic Church appeared ready to develop St. John’s Island (renamed Prince Edward Island in 1798) as a refuge for Scottish Catholics; however, from 1790 the Church became more passive toward emigration and, at times, outright resentful and hostile.<sup>15</sup> Despite the hierarchy’s attitude, the Catholic exodus to the New World continued, and its substantial size was confirmed by later census figures; these reveal the large proportion of Scottish Catholics who, by mid-century, composed a majority of the population of eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>16</sup> Passenger lists show that most emigrants were farmers,

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church*, and Alexander Stuart MacWilliam, “The Highland Seminaries” (thesis, n.p., n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> Only three Catholics were represented in Bonnie and Vern Bullough’s sample of 375 intellectual achievers in 18th century Scotland. See “Intellectual Achievers,” pp. 1048-63.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Hornsby, “Scottish Emigration and Settlement in Early Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton,” in *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Fredericton and Sydney: Acadiensis Press and the University College of Cape Breton Press, 1990), p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> See J.M. Bumsted, *The People’s Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America 1770-1815* (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg Press, 1982), Appendix A, Table II.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> J.M. Bumsted, “The Scottish Catholic Church and Prince Edward Island, 1770-1810” in *Religion and Identity: The Experience of Scottish and Irish Catholics in Atlantic Canada*, eds. Terrence Murphy and Cyril J. Byrne (St. John’s: Jesperson Press, 1987), pp. 18-33.

<sup>16</sup> See Andrew H. Clark, “Old World Origins and Religious Adherence in Nova Scotia,” *The Geographical Review L*, no. 3 (July 1960), pp. 323 and 327.

labourers or tradesmen, who came with their wives and children.<sup>17</sup> The economic lot of the pre-1815 emigrants was, in general, better than that of the emigrants who came afterwards. A complex interplay of social and economic trends – the dissolution of the clan system, clearances of land for sheep grazing, increasing rents, overpopulation, famine, and the collapse of the kelp industry – fuelled the emigration.<sup>18</sup> The promise of the New World, often inflated by self-interested emigration agents, ironically exerted a strong pull on those who wished to preserve their traditional way of life or to take advantage of expanded opportunities in British North America.<sup>19</sup>

The main British North American destinations for migrating Highlanders were Glengarry, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>20</sup> Catholic Highlanders began landing on the shores of northern Nova Scotia from 1791; commonly they trekked eastward along the Gulf Shore, some even crossing over to Cape Breton Island before finding an attractive place to homestead. Settlement edged inland along rivers and intervaleas as the superior shore lands were filled up.<sup>21</sup> The arduous task of pioneering began. The earliest settlers had the best choice of land; this advantage probably contributed to differences in agricultural prosperity, but proximity to markets, background agricultural experiences, and cultural traditions also played their part.<sup>22</sup> In con

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<sup>17</sup> Bumsted, *The People's Clearance*, Appendix B.

<sup>18</sup> James Hunter, *The Making of a Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1976), pp. 6-14.

<sup>19</sup> See the reasons given for emigrating in the passengers lists cited in Bumsted, *The People's Clearances*, Appendix B, in the emigrant poetry in Margaret MacDonnell, *The Emigrant Experience: Songs of Highland Emigrants in North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), and in Marianne MacLean, *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745-1820* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), pp. 5 and 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> A helpful overview of the settlement, early development and cultural characteristics of these three Scottish Catholic enclaves is given in Raymond MacLean, "The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada," in *The Scottish Tradition in Canada*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 93-117.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>22</sup> Hornsby, "Scottish Emigration," pp. 59-60, Rusty Bitterman, "The Hierarchy of Soil: Land and Labour in a 19th Century Cape Breton Community," *Acadiensis* XVIII, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), p. 34, Neil MacNeil, "A Reconsideration of the State of Agriculture in Eastern Nova Scotia, 1791-1861," (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1985), Charles W. Dunn, *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Cape Breton and Eastern Nova Scotia* (Wreck Cove, Cape Breton: Breton

trast to Scotland, the farms were larger, the standard of living higher, and the houses more substantial. Generally, a nuclear family worked the land within a homogenous ethnic and religious community with kith and kin located nearby. At first, church and government structures were weak and roads non-existent. But a new society was in the making.

By the 1850s, this transplanted Highland community, the major part of the future constituency of St.F.X., had experienced considerable demographic, economic, social, political and religious development; its pioneer phase was fading into the past.<sup>23</sup> It was scattered through the seven counties of eastern Nova Scotia – Pictou, Antigonish, Guysborough, Richmond, Inverness, Victoria, and Cape Breton – embraced by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arichat. The diocesan population had reached nearly 105,000 and most were native born.<sup>24</sup> A substantial majority were Gaelic-speaking Scots: 66.7 percent by 1871.<sup>25</sup> But other ethnic groups were also part of the St.F.X. constituency: 14,989 Acadians (10.7 percent of the Diocese), 14,977 Irish (10.6 percent), 11,835 English (8.4 percent), and 735 natives (.5 percent).<sup>26</sup> Catholics composed 44.7 percent of the population and formed majorities in Antigonish, Inverness, Richmond, and Cape Breton counties.<sup>27</sup> Most people inhabited the countryside and farmed or fished; domestic production and small manufacturing had begun to grow as millers, craftsmen and merchants appeared. Mining in Cape Breton and Pictou counties was increasing in significance, and shipbuilding throughout the colony was the most important manufacturing industry.

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Books, 1991), pp. 108-111, and 114, MacLean, "Highland Catholic Tradition," pp. 104-5, and R. Louis Gentilcore, "The Agricultural Background of Settlement in Eastern Nova Scotia," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* XLVI (December 1956), pp. 378-404.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond MacLean, "The Scots – Hector's Cargo," in *Banked Fires: the Ethnics of Nova Scotia*, ed. Douglas C. Campbell (Port Credit, Ont.: Scribbler's Press, 1978), p. 118. The colony itself had by this time reached a level of overall development sufficient to produce an "intellectual awakening." D.C. Harvey, "The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review* 13 (1933), pp. 1-22 and Kenneth Donovan, "'May Learning Flourish': Beginnings of a Cultural Awakening in Cape Breton During the 1840s," in *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Fredericton and Sydney: Acadiensis Press and University College of Cape Breton Press, 1990), pp. 89-112.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, "Old World Origins," p. 322.

<sup>25</sup> *Census of Canada 1871*, vol. 1, pp. 328-33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Developments within the colony overall benefitted its eastern inhabitants. A staples-based export trade thrived as a large merchant fleet maintained links with Britain, New England, and the West Indies.<sup>28</sup> Reciprocity with the United States, the Crimean War, and the American Civil War in the 1860s, collectively furthered “an inflationary spiral that bestowed a period of prosperity on the [Maritime] colonies.”<sup>29</sup> Political reformers had won responsible government in 1848. As early as the 1820s, Catholics were sitting in the provincial legislature, by 1830 the British penal laws which had restricted the rights of Catholics since the Reformation had been completely dismantled, and by mid-century more equitable numbers were receiving appointments as Justices of the Peace in local communities.<sup>30</sup> In spite of the continuing thorn of anti-Catholicism, which at times was pressed deep by militant Protestants threatened by the growth of “Popery” in Nova Scotia, Catholic prospects brightened.<sup>31</sup> By 1860 the Bishop of the Diocese was optimistic: “The growing importance of the Catholic body in numbers and influence is sure to tell upon, and command, the respect of the Protestant government under which we live.”<sup>32</sup>

Since the Highland descendants who founded St.F.X. were Roman Catholics, the development of their denomination was critical to the history of the College and its constituency. By mid-century Maritime Catholicism had emerged from an earlier stage of organizational infancy and dependence on Quebec to become “one of the region’s major social institutions.”<sup>33</sup> The Diocese of Arichat had been carved out of the Halifax Diocese in 1844 because of population increases and ethnic tensions; by 1852 the new Diocese embraced

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<sup>28</sup> John Reid, *Six Crucial Decades: Times of Change in the History of the Maritimes* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1987), pp. 97-117.

<sup>29</sup> E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> John Garner, “The Enfranchisement of Roman Catholics in the Maritimes,” *Canadian Historical Review* XXXIV, no. 3 (September 1953), pp. 204, 206, and 215-18 and Ronald A. MacDonald, “The Squires of Antigonish,” *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 10, no. 1 (1990), p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> A.J.B. Johnston, “The ‘Protestant Spirit’ of Colonial Nova Scotia: An Inquiry Into Mid-Nineteenth Century Anti-Catholicism” (MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> Archives of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, Rome [hereafter APF], Scrittura Riferite nei Congress, [hereafter SRC], vol. 7, Bishop MacKinnon to the Propaganda Fide, 12 January 1860.

<sup>33</sup> Terrence Murphy, “The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830,” *Acadiensis* 13 (1984), p. 29.

nineteen large parishes and as many missionary priests who served a flock of about 50,000 faithful.<sup>34</sup> As the pioneers prevailed in their fight for survival and security, the literate element of the population, notably the clergy,<sup>35</sup> promoted learning; formal educational institutions (common schools, academies, grammar schools, and a normal school at Truro) gradually developed within an emergent state educational system administered centrally at Halifax by a council of public instruction and a superintendent.<sup>36</sup>

The Diocese acquired its first permanent institution of higher learning in 1853, when the Bishop established St.F.X. at Arichat on Isle Madame, located just south of Cape Breton Island. Two years later he transferred it to a permanent location in Antigonish on mainland Nova Scotia. The Bishop-founder was Colin F. MacKinnon, a native of Antigonish County and a graduate of the Urban College in Rome. His predecessor, Bishop William Fraser, had died in 1851 and Rome had appointed MacKinnon in his place.<sup>37</sup> The Bishop, a son of Highland immigrants, had two motives for establishing St.F.X.: first and foremost, to form a body of “efficient and pious native priests” for the Diocese, and; second, to give the “vast number” of Highland youths an opportunity to acquire a good preparation for service in the “various grades of civil life.”<sup>38</sup> Catholic parents valued their Bishop’s new educational project; they saw the College as a means for some of their children to gain access to the learned professions.<sup>39</sup> From the College’s start to the close of the 19th century, people of Highland stock predominated in the administration, faculty, and student body.

Bishop MacKinnon aimed to produce a native Catholic leadership for eastern Nova Scotia which would preserve the faith and elevate the religious tone, educational level, and social standing of his flock. He planned to achieve

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<sup>34</sup> Rev. Anthony A. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia*, vol. II (Antigonish: St.F.X. University Press, 1971), pp. 346-50.

<sup>35</sup> Lilian Toward, “The Influence of the Scottish Clergy on Early Education in Cape Breton,” *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* 29 (1951), pp. 153-77.

<sup>36</sup> For an overview of this process in eastern Nova Scotia, see D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 120-168.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond MacLean, “Colin Francis MacKinnon,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, X, pp. 479-80.

<sup>38</sup> Saint Francis Xavier University Archives [hereafter STFXUA], Rev. A.A. Johnston Collection, Bishop MacKinnon to James W. Johnston, 19 March 1855 and Bishop MacKinnon to Joseph Howe, 5 February 1855.

<sup>39</sup> Some Catholics expressed the hope explicitly. See a letter to the editor of the *Casket*, 16 July 1857.

this goal through a classical curriculum with English, not Gaelic, as the central language of instruction, and in a safe Catholic atmosphere, where the doctrinal purity and moral rectitude of his scholarly charges could be carefully protected. The Bishop hoped that an educational program that stressed the unity of knowledge, high academic standards, discipline, and character formation would produce the kind of Catholic graduate best equipped to pursue the middle class professions – the priesthood, medicine, law, and teaching.<sup>40</sup> Admission to St.F.X. was highly selective and was often determined by a combination of family finances, preparatory education, scholastic ability, religious and moral conformity, and aptitude for the classical languages. Frequently, recruitment and support by parish clergy also affected the selection process.

The absence at St.F.X. of the Highland descendants' native tongue of Gaelic reveals much about the Bishop's vision for collegiate education and his social aspirations for his youthful countrymen. In colonial Nova Scotia, English was the language of commerce, politics, education and the professions; hence, expert facility in its use was essential to the preparation of socially mobile graduates. Highland culture was not a priority; social advancement and integration were.<sup>41</sup> Bishop MacKinnon apparently shared a wide-spread attitude; in general, the Gaels of eastern Nova Scotia did not want their children to "waste time" on their

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<sup>40</sup> The aims of education at St.F.X. – character formation, mental training, and social utility and uplift – were common to all 19th century Canadian colleges. The main features of the colleges' programs were also similar, such as a prescribed curriculum, a general rather than specialized approach, an emphasis on the classic languages and literature, a focus on mental training based on the assumptions of faculty psychology, and the view that moral and spiritual formation were as important as the mastery of content. See Chapter One of Patricia Jasen, "The English-Canadian Liberal Arts Curriculum: An Intellectual History From 1800 to 1950" (PHD thesis, University of Manitoba, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Gaelic language and literature were not taught at St.F.X. until 1894 and thereafter they always remained an insignificant part of the College's educational program. Proponents of Gaelic studies based their case on its literary rewards, not on its practical usefulness. *Casket*, 29 November 1894 and *Excelsior*, November 1897, p. 4. A recent study of the fate of Scottish Gaelic in Eastern Canada overstates the importance of "pressure directed from above" by the Anglophone majority and understates the willingness of the Scottish descendants to relinquish their language and culture in exchange for material and social advantages. See Gilbert Foster, *Language and Poverty: The Persistence of Scottish Gaelic in Eastern Canada* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1988), p. 8. For a useful discussion of Gaelic in Nova Scotia, see John Edwards, "Gaelic in Nova Scotia," in *Linguistic Minorities, Society and Territory*, ed C. Williams, (Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1991), pp. 269-297.

native tongue, but to learn English so “they could succeed in the world.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, there is evidence that Highland Catholics, remembering their recent poverty, illiteracy and oppression, felt a sense of social inferiority when they compared themselves to their Presbyterian neighbours in Pictou County<sup>43</sup> or to those living in the urban centres of the province and New England.<sup>44</sup> Long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century some Highland descendants remained ashamed and embarrassed by the memory of the economic and social plight of their forebears.<sup>45</sup> This was surely a measure of the extent to which the contemporary social and cultural standards of the dominant society had been internalized by Highland progeny. Bishop MacKinnon established St.F.X. to help at least some of these descendants to achieve those standards, and thus to elevate the social standing of the entire ethnic community. The College was both a tool and a symbol of an emerging “culture of aspiration” among the Highland Catholics in eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>46</sup>

For the Highland Catholics in eastern Nova Scotia, Bishop MacKinnon’s experiment in higher education symbolized their rising standard of economic and social maturity, and marked a turning point for them. Barely a century separated the Highland progeny from the hopelessness and despair of defeat at Culloden; fewer years lay between the painful Highland emigrations and the arduous work of pioneering in the New World. A people once subjugated by religious intolerance, racial bigotry, and economic oppression, now had their own college, a promising means to further advance their religious, social, and economic interests in a new and more hospitable land.

Bishop MacKinnon’s episcopate came to an end almost twenty-five years after the founding of St.F.X. By then, the College had been successful in

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<sup>42</sup> Dunn, *Highland Settler*, p. 146.

<sup>43</sup> A disproportionately large number of notable Canadians have come from Pictou compared to other counties in Nova Scotia. Douglas F. Campbell and Gary D. Bouma, “Social Conflict and Pictou Notables,” *Ethnicity* 5 (1978), pp. 76-88.

<sup>44</sup> Raymond MacLean, *Bishop John Cameron: Piety and Politics* (Antigonish: The Casket Printing and Publishing Co., 1991), p. 70.

<sup>45</sup> See the following for perceptive comments on this: STFXUA, President Alexander Thompson Papers, RG5/8/3407, Thompson to R.S. Conage, 30 October 1900 and President H.P. MacPherson Papers, RG5/9/12467, Commencement Exercises Address, c. 1919, and Rev. H.P. MacPherson Personal Papers, MG1/1/1,820, MacPherson to Neil McNeil, 20 May 1948.

<sup>46</sup> This is a phrase used by David O. Levine to characterize the American drive for economic and social mobility in his study *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986).

supplying the rapidly growing Diocese with Catholic leaders and in advancing the social standing of his flock. In 1852 MacKinnon had begun his administration with eighteen priests; nine were native born. In 1877 he left behind fifty priests of whom forty-six were born in Nova Scotia.<sup>47</sup> And there were other graduates, many of whom had entered the secular professions. In his sermon at MacKinnon's funeral in September 1879, Rev. Ronald MacGillivray underscored the Bishop's contribution to his flock of Scotch, Irish, and Acadian settlers: "They belonged chiefly to the poor and illiterate class. At the time Catholics had but few, if any representative men. But the reproach has been removed from us by the educational zeal of Bishop MacKinnon." In MacGillivray's judgement, Catholic education and social advance were the Bishop's "most noble and enduring" work for the Catholics of eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>48</sup> The College at Antigonish, which he had founded, staffed, chartered, and fostered, had been the main instrument for his "most noble and enduring work."

In spite of the substantial growth of the Diocese during MacKinnon's leadership, critical developments were under way in the region which would deeply affect the Highland descendants. As a result, the professional opportunities of St.F.X. graduates would expand and many alumni would be drawn far beyond the boundaries of their native diocese. In 1866 Reciprocity with the United States was abrogated; in the following year, Nova Scotia, amid wide-spread controversy, joined Confederation, and in 1876 the Intercolonial Railway which connected the Maritimes with central Canada was completed. In 1879 the federal government's national tariff policy, combined with the irreversible decline of British markets for lumber and ships, began to alter substantially the economic structure of the Maritimes.<sup>49</sup> During the final two decades of the 19th century dramatic industrial growth occurred in Halifax, Yarmouth, New Glasgow, Amherst, and Sydney.<sup>50</sup> This development stepped up urbanization in the region, altered the material appearance of the growing towns, and created new institutional demands and social problems.<sup>51</sup> By 1900, Sydney,

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<sup>47</sup> Johnston, *History of the Catholic Church*, II, p. 497.

<sup>48</sup> STFXUA, President Hugh J. Somers Papers, RG5/12/25194, Rev. Ronald MacGillivray, "Remember Your Prelates: A Sermon, Preached at the Solemn Requiem of Colin Francis MacKinnon, Archbishop of Amydo," pp. 4-5, St. Ninian's Cathedral, 30 September 1879.

<sup>49</sup> Forbes and Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces*, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> T.W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes," *Acadiensis* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 3-28.

<sup>51</sup> Del Muise, "'The Great Transformation': Changing the Urban Face of Nova Scotia, 1871-1921," *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 11 (1991), pp. 1-42.

with its new steel plant, was the most important town in the Diocese of Antigonish. But economic growth and its benefits were unevenly distributed in the region; coastal and rural areas dependent on traditional resources remained economically stagnant. Moreover, because of the region's traditional trade links with New England, many Maritimers became aware of attractive employment opportunities there, especially in the economically expansive Boston area. Thus, by the 1880s, large numbers of the population began moving to the favoured destinations of New England and later western Canada. The Scots and Irish, and particularly the young and active among them, were prominent in the migration.<sup>52</sup> In 1884 a newspaper correspondent wrote in the Antigonish *Aurora*: "Natives of Cape Breton are becoming as ubiquitous as the black crow of common nationality."<sup>53</sup> The two trends of urbanization and out-migration quickened the movement of St.F.X. alumni to the towns and cities both inside and outside the Diocese.

The growth of towns and cities in Nova Scotia produced increased social differentiation and institutional development. Urban expansion created a "more complex social structure to encompass the various gradations of life and work within such towns."<sup>54</sup> New churches, schools and hospitals were required along with an expanded coterie of new professional administrators, financial experts, clergy, lawyers, doctors, and engineers.<sup>55</sup> In 1861, the *Census of Nova Scotia* reported 385 clergymen, 147 lawyers, 205 physicians and surgeons, 86 engineers, and 864 teachers. By 1911, the numbers had vastly increased: 652 clergymen, 249 lawyers, 408 physicians and surgeons, 279 engineers, and 3,423 teachers.<sup>56</sup> Such growth in the professions province-wide was paralleled by higher enrolments at St.F.X. and expanded program offerings. Sixty-one students were registered at the College in 1885-86; by 1904-05 the number had nearly

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Brooks, "Out-Migration From the Maritime Provinces 1860-1900: Some Preliminary Considerations," *Acadiensis* V, no. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 26-55 and Patricia Thornton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look," *Acadiensis* XV, no. 1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 3-34.

<sup>53</sup> *Aurora*, 28 May 1884. See also Stephen J. Hornsby, *Nineteenth Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 186-200.

<sup>54</sup> Muise, "The Great Transformation," p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> The process of professionalization and its relation to the universities in the United States has been examined by Burton Bledstein in *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976).

<sup>56</sup> *Census of Nova Scotia 1861*, pp. 190-199 and *Census of Canada 1911*, VI, pp. 154-6, and 249.

doubled to 115.<sup>57</sup> President Alexander Thompson (1898-1906) diversified the curriculum beyond the classical into professional and commercial programs. In 1899 he established both a one-year law program and a Faculty of Applied Science for students interested in the fields of science, engineering, and technology.<sup>58</sup> Three years later he initiated a Department of Commerce in the St.F.X. High School.<sup>59</sup>

The expansion of professional opportunities and the growth of the College occurred during the tenure of Bishop MacKinnon's successor, Bishop John Cameron. Like MacKinnon, the new Bishop was a son of Highland immigrants and a native of Antigonish County who had been educated in Rome. He was dedicated to the advance of the standing of his people and did everything in his power to achieve his ends; his primary means were educational and political. From his accession to the episcopal see in 1877, Cameron worked to establish St.F.X. on a more stable financial basis, to renew the faculty, to expand and upgrade the College facilities, and to provide higher educational opportunities for Catholic women in the region.<sup>60</sup> He succeeded, largely because he had the necessary vision, the contacts, the authority, the administrative skill and the will.

By 1900, St.F.X. had prepared substantial numbers of Highland descendants for the professions and for further professional training. An incomplete alumni list for the institution's first fifty years appeared in 1905; it recorded 1238 names. Of these, at least 58 percent were of Highland descent.<sup>61</sup> One hundred and eighteen had entered the religious ministry,<sup>62</sup> sixty-two had become lawyers and seventy-five had established medical practices.<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>57</sup> STFXUA, *St.F.X. College Calendars*, 1886, pp. 6-7 and 1905-06, pp. 57-59.

<sup>58</sup> *St.F.X. Calendar 1899-1900*, pp. 46-47 and the *Casket*, 13 July 1899.

<sup>59</sup> *St.F.X. Calendar 1903-04*, pp. 41-45.

<sup>60</sup> See MacLean, *Bishop John Cameron* for an insightful biography of the Bishop and an account of his outstanding contribution to the development of the Diocese.

<sup>61</sup> A comparison of student lists found in the St.F.X. calendars of 1876-77 and 1911-12 show that, as a proportion of the student body, the Scots steadily declined from 70 per cent in 1876 to 51 per cent in 1911.

<sup>62</sup> Between 1876 and 1911 students who advanced to the priesthood became a smaller proportion of the student body. In 1876, 24 per cent of the study body became clergy; by 1911 the proportion had dropped to seven per cent. Based on St.F.X. calendar student lists and alumni files in STFXUA.

<sup>63</sup> The list was published in the *Golden Anniversary* pamphlet (1905), STFXUA. The sources used to compile it were not cited. In addition, much of the information was incomplete, especially the listing of occupations. Nevertheless, the

College had educated no fewer than eight Catholics of Scottish lineage who served in the provincial legislature; several more had become MPs.<sup>64</sup> Among the elite graduates there were two bishops, three Supreme Court judges, one County Court judge, one Dominion Senator, and more than ten professors.<sup>65</sup> The list shows that the College's work had increased the economic and political clout of Catholics in the Maritime provinces,<sup>66</sup> and had introduced significant differences in economic and social standing into the Highland Catholic community of eastern Nova Scotia. These differences were based largely on "professional occupation rather than entrepreneurial activity."<sup>67</sup> For Canada overall, Catholics were much less likely than Presbyterians to make a name for themselves in industry and commerce.<sup>68</sup> The former most often strove for social advance through the professions.

In the early 1890s, after forty years of educational work in eastern Nova Scotia, St.F.X. began to look at its expanding body of well-placed alumni with both a sense of pride and an eye for opportunity. In 1893 it initiated the formation of an Alumni Association with the hope that the graduates could be enlisted to further the interests of their *alma mater*.<sup>69</sup> The Association's first executive was composed of prominent members of the Diocese – Senator William MacDonald, president, Rev. James Quinan, Vicar General to Bishop Cameron, vice-president, Judge Colin Maclsaac, vice-president, and J.A. Wall,

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list is a reliable indicator of the ethnicity of the student body and the types of occupations that many graduates entered.

<sup>64</sup> Based on a survey of Shirley B. Elliott, *The Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia 1758-1983: A Biographical Directory* (Halifax: Province of Nova Scotia, 1984) and Ronald R. Chisholm, "A Biographical Survey of the Members of Parliament for Antigonish 1867-1982" (BA thesis, St.F.X., 1982).

<sup>65</sup> *Casket*, 28 September 1893.

<sup>66</sup> Roberto Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> This important point is made by Daniel W. MacInnes, "Clerics, Fishermen, Farmers and Workers: The Antigonish Movement and Identity in Eastern Nova Scotia, 1928-1939" (PHD thesis, MacMaster University, 1978), p. 95.

<sup>68</sup> T.W. Acheson's "collective social portrait" of the Canadian industrial elite in the early 1880s revealed that Presbyterians accounted for 36 per cent of the elite while they made up only 16 percent of the population; Catholics represented 42 per cent of the population but only 12 per cent of the industrial elite. See "The Social Origins of the Canadian Industrial Elite, 1880-1885," in *Canadian Business History: Selected Studies, 1497-1971*, ed. David S. Macmillan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), p. 158.

<sup>69</sup> *Casket*, 28 September 1893.

barrister, secretary-treasurer. In 1894, Sir John Thompson, Canada's first Catholic Prime Minister, was elected an associate member. Through its constitution and by-laws the Alumni Association gained the right to elect annually two governors to the St.F.X. Board of Governors.<sup>70</sup>

The Association became a significant auxiliary and advisory body with power to influence the educational policy of the College. Members were beneficiaries of an institution which had conferred on them publicly recognized credentials and had successfully equipped them for positions of leadership in a rapidly developing society. Hence, they were keenly aware of the critical role colleges and universities played in the progress of civilization and in the preparation of an elite coterie of well-trained leaders. Moreover, as members of the expanding middle class, they had internalized its aspirations and interests; therefore, they acted as representatives of this class when advocating changes at the college. The Association believed that St.F.X. had to keep up with social change and developments in the arts and sciences; it pressed for the modernization of programs and teaching facilities. Alumni statements sounded progressive and optimistic about the College's future. They even contained an emergent note of triumphalism: St.F.X. and its alumni had successfully overcome great economic and social disabilities, and they felt well-equipped to meet the vast challenges of a new century.<sup>71</sup> Alumni submissions to the College president in 1897 prompted him to produce a report which advocated St.F.X. become the Catholic University of Liberal Arts for the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland.<sup>72</sup>

The Alumni Association was a key partner with the College in the planning and celebration of its golden jubilee. The grand style of the event, held in September 1905, revealed not only the pride of the Diocese in the College's past achievements, but also its interest in eliciting recognition from leaders in Nova Scotia society and beyond. The town, college, convent and cathedral were lavishly decorated for the benefit of hundreds of enthusiastic visitors and the convivial events – processions, speeches, sermons, receptions, presentations, suppers and entertainments – were planned for September 6th and 7th. The celebration was a marvellous opportunity for all concerned to reminisce, muse,

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<sup>70</sup> The Act to Incorporate the governors of St. Francis Xavier's College was amended in 1894 to accommodate this election of two additional representatives annually to the Board of Governors. *Statutes of Nova Scotia 1894*, CAP 103.

<sup>71</sup> See the statements in STFXUA, President Thompson Papers, RG5/8/3590-94 and RG5/8/3606-8, and President MacPherson Papers, RG5/9/27428, St. Francis Xavier's Endowment Fund, February 1905.

<sup>72</sup> STFXUA, Report of the Committee on College Extension.

boast, and affirm their loyalty and enthusiasm for the triumphant College. The campus rink was “festooned with the national and papal colors” for a major event in the afternoon of the 6th, when President Thompson addressed a large crowd of alumni, students, residents and prominent guests. At the conclusion of his speech, degrees were awarded to seventeen graduates; twenty-one honorary doctor of laws degrees were conferred on an elite cast which included Dr. A.H. McKay, the Nova Scotia Superintendent of Education, George H. Murray, the Premier of Nova Scotia, Robert L. Borden, the leader of the federal Conservatives, Rev. Dr. Falconer, Principal of Pine Hill Divinity College, Rev. Dr. Forrest, President of Dalhousie University, Rev. Dr. Emery, Rector of Ottawa University, and the Right Reverend Dr. James Morrison, Vicar General of the Diocese of Charlottetown. The presence of such an august body of administrators and public men surely gratified the aging Bishop Cameron and flattered the college administration; it was a very public stamp of approval on the conquests and victories of their small diocesan College.

Thompson’s presidential address was marked by a spirit of both triumphalism and eulogy. He eloquently underscored the great odds overcome by the College: the penurious circumstances of its birth and its roots among a people who had faced and overcome intense suffering and hardship. “The leaders of this brave and faithful people,” he declared, “saw the necessity of a seat of learning. The marks left by the shackles of oppression had not yet completely disappeared, and no surer means could there be of erasing forever the brand of social inferiority than the college.” It had become their “glory and ...pride.”<sup>73</sup> Thompson was convinced in 1905, that his beloved college had succeeded decisively in overcoming the Highland Catholic legacy of poverty, oppression, and inferiority. Undoubtedly the College, founded and maintained through great sacrifice and effort, had done much for the Highland Catholics of eastern Nova Scotia and had fulfilled, beyond expectation, the hopes and dreams of its founder and supporters. Moreover, it was probably true that the accomplishments of its almost exclusively male graduates redounded to the glory and increased prestige, not only of the College, but also of the entire Diocese. Yet there were likely many Scots Catholics in eastern Nova Scotia who would have viewed with scepticism the golden jubilee celebration of social mobility and broadened influence. Poverty continued to plague many in the farming and fishing communities, as well as those working in the mines and industry; and the flow of migrants away from the Diocese remained unabated. The *forte* of the College’s classical curriculum had been the preparation of a fortunate minority

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<sup>73</sup> STFXUA, Father Edwards Personal Papers, MG45/2/688, box 81/1, "Golden Jubilee Pamphlet, 1905.

for the learned professions. Finally, social advance and respectability had been achieved at some cultural cost. The drive to achieve economic prosperity and social equality had eroded the rich legacy of Highland tradition, the Gaelic language, and the strong sense of ethnic identity among the Scots of eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>74</sup> But in 1905 few descendants of the Highlanders lamented this erosion of their distinct culture; most appeared willing to exchange it for the promises and rewards of assimilation.<sup>75</sup> For in this way they could erase forever “the brand of social inferiority” and become more than mere “hewers of wood and drawers of water for their non-Catholic neighbors.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Scots have been ambivalent about their Highland traditions in eastern Nova Scotia. But like other ethnic groups, they have been caught on the horns of a dilemma. Jack Bumsted describes their predicament, namely a tension between the drive for “a full sharing in economic prosperity and social equality” and the concern to maintain a “separate sense of identity.” See “Ethnic Studies in Atlantic Canada: Or, Some Ethnics are More Ethnic Than Others,” *Acadiensis* XIX, no. 1 (Fall 1989), p. 204.

<sup>75</sup> For a 19th century Maritime example of a quicker and more complete loss of ethnic identity among an immigrant community, see T.M. Punch, “The Irish in Halifax, 1836-1871: a Study in Ethnic Assimilation” (MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 1976).

<sup>76</sup> *Casket*, 14 November 1907, p. 1.