

# REVIVALISM REJECTED: PROTESTANTISM IN SHERBROOKE DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

After the War of 1812, and continuing beyond the mid-century mark, British missionary societies made a concerted effort in the largely American-settled Eastern Townships. As a result, the Church of England emerged as the region's largest, and the more radical American sects failed to gain a strong foothold there. This development was particularly marked in the town of Sherbrooke despite problems with the early Anglican appointees. The American-born entrepreneurial elite's affiliation with the Congregationalist Church, and the rapid expansion of the Catholic Church in the 1840s, only strengthened the conservatism of the region's growing political and economic centre.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Aux lendemains de la guerre de 1812, et bien après 1850, les sociétés missionnaires britanniques firent un effort concerté dans ces régions des Cantons de l'Est habitées par des colons américains. L'émergence de l'Église anglicane comme la dénomination la plus importante de la région, et l'échec des sectes américaines les plus radicales, se font ressentir particulièrement dans la ville de Sherbrooke, en dépit des difficultés des ministres anglicans de la première heure. L'affiliation entre l'élite entrepreneuriale américaine et l'Église congrégationaliste, ainsi que l'expansion rapide de l'Église catholique, dans les années 1840, donnent plus de vigueur au conservatisme de ce centre économique et politique en pleine croissance.*

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When the young non-affiliated preacher, Joseph Badger, returned home after fleeing to New England during the War of 1812, he was not prepared for what he found among his former fellow-worshippers in Ascot Township. Badger wrote that they now recognized one of their members as “Apostle and Prophet,” whose

“authority was equal to anything in the Holy Scripture.” His memoir continued:

*He had revelations concerning all the business to be done by his followers; also his pretended illumination extended to marriages and to the intercourse of the sexes, and when his ipse dixit was given on these points, immorality was unblushingly practiced. Pretending to have personal interviews with angels he had six followers, who, at his command, would fall upon their knees, lie prostrate upon the floor, or walk in a pretended labor for souls. Sometimes he kept them walking for several days and nights without eating or sleeping, when they would frequently faint and fall upon the floor. They often screamed, howled, and barked, making various strange noises, and bending themselves up into many shapes.<sup>1</sup>*

After eighteen hours of debate with his old friends, led by Isaac Bullard, Badger was unable to shake their newly acquired beliefs.

It may not be coincidental that this cult, known as the Pilgrims, emerged in 1816, for the June snows that destroyed crops in many areas of the world (including the Eastern Townships) that year helped stimulate a widespread religious revival.<sup>2</sup> Bullard soon led his followers to Vermont, and from there to Missouri,<sup>3</sup> but their emergence in the Eastern Townships would hardly reassure the governing authorities about the social and political stability of this American-settled frontier. With the war over, they could no longer close the border to travelling Yankee preachers, so the obvious recourse was to encourage British missionary efforts in the region, as they were doing in Upper Canada. Contrary to what most Canadian historians have claimed, that imperialist effort was quite successful. The Church of England soon became the largest Protestant denomination in the Canadas, and even in the predominantly American-settled Eastern Townships.<sup>4</sup> As befitted the town of Sherbrooke’s emerging status as the region’s governing centre, British influence was stronger there than in the surrounding townships. Religious dissenters would remain a distinct minority in Sherbrooke, and the local British elite would encourage the establishment of the Catholic Church to serve the growing population of French-Canadian factory workers.

In 1831, 41 percent of the town’s residents were Anglicans and 20 percent were Catholics, with another 24 percent claiming no religious affiliation. By 1852, the Anglican ratio had declined to 31 percent, but it was still larger than all the other Protestant denominations combined (at 27 percent). Nor did the town’s “dis-

senting” churches reflect the tumultuous religious culture that characterized nearby Vermont, which, according to Roth, had become “the symbolic fount of the young nation’s truculent egalitarianism, militant faith, and crusading idealism.”<sup>5</sup> While the Freewill Baptists, Universalists, Latter-Day Saints, and other radical sects were well represented in the neighbouring state, Sherbrooke’s 297 families at mid-century included only three Universalist household heads, one Baptist, five “Independents,” and five who were free-thinkers or did not claim religious affiliation. The twenty-seven Methodist families (9 percent of the town’s population) were served by the conservative British Wesleyan Missionary Society, and twenty families (7 percent) adhered to Congregationalism, which was the old established church of New England. The doubling of the Catholic population ratio to 40 percent since 1831 further reflected the dominant position of the mainstream churches in this burgeoning industrial centre.<sup>6</sup>

But these statistics must be approached with a certain degree of caution, for one could easily claim religious affiliation to a census enumerator without being a committed member of the church in question. Furthermore, the census tells us nothing about the tactics of the mainstream clergy in a town where radical American influences, poverty and mixed cultural origins presented formidable obstacles. The missionary reports on which this paper is largely based reveal that even those churches with strong external bases of support found it difficult to establish a solid footing at this crossroad of American, British and French-Canadian settlement.

### **Church of England**

In 1816, when Buller’s Pilgrims were still in the area, the site that would become Sherbrooke was merely a hamlet, though it already boasted several small mills, two general stores, a tannery, and a distillery.<sup>7</sup> And a new era was about to begin with the arrival of William Bowman Felton, a former British naval officer who was seeking to establish his extended family as landed gentry on this colonial frontier. Felton acquired the mill sites and much of the remaining crown land in Ascot and Orford, using his influence as the region’s Legislative Councillor to make Sherbrooke the site of the newly-established Judicial District of St Francis in 1823. The men associated with the court were mainly of British background, and, as Commissioner of Crown Lands, Felton was also able to attract a number of English gentry settlers to farms in the immediate area. As a result, Sherbrooke would become an imperial outpost on a largely

American-settled colonial frontier.<sup>8</sup> The court and jail were instruments of legal authority in a region where counterfeiting American bank notes and smuggling stolen American livestock were particularly common, but Felton realized that imperial hegemony ultimately relied on acculturation to conservative social and political values. He was instrumental in the planting of the two “established” churches, the Church of England and the Church of Rome, though his generosity would prove to be tempered by his own material self-interest.

Bishop Mountain of Quebec reported to London’s Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) as early as 1816 that Felton had promised to build an Anglican church at his own expense.<sup>9</sup> Five years later, however, Felton and the leading local merchant, Charles F.H. Goodhue, reported that a subscription had only recently been started for that purpose, and they applied for a grant from the Anglican building fund. They understood that £100 would be available if there was one church, and £75 if there was also one constructed in Lennoxville. Pointing out that many subscribers were “emigrants,” they asked that “some preference may be shewn to them on that account.” The plan was to complete the church in October 1822,<sup>10</sup> but a minister was already appointed in March. Reverend Charles Stewart, the region’s leading Anglican missionary, stated that this was sooner than he had expected, or the people deserved, because there were doubts about the contractors fulfilling their engagements. Felton was also hesitating about giving sufficient land for the church and burial ground.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, the twenty-five-year-old Reverend Clement Fall LeFevre held his services in the court house on Sunday mornings, and in the Lennoxville schoolhouse in the afternoons. He thanked Bishop Mountain in July “for your remarks on the condescension, forbearance & compliance with ideas & manners necessary for a Canadian missionary,” adding that “I have observed that such dispositions are necessary for every settler from England, who would wish to succeed in his calling whatsoever it might be. To a minister, then, who would gain the attentions of his people, they must be *indispensable*.”<sup>12</sup> LeFevre would ultimately prove to be all too accommodating to American religious ideas, but in the meantime Mountain could not help but feel confidence in a minister with such an impressive background. The son of a cleric attached to Pembroke College, Oxford, LeFevre had reportedly served as chaplain to the British embassy in Paris.<sup>13</sup> He made steady progress in Sherbrooke, for in 1828 (six years after his arrival), he reported that there were

twenty Anglican families in the town and an average congregation of seventy people. Only twenty-six were communicants, but ten of these had not previously belonged to the Church of England. Also, LeFevre reported that of the thirty confirmed at the Bishop's last visit, twelve were from non-Anglican backgrounds. He estimated that a third of the population were still not attached to any denomination and declared that the main obstacle preventing more people from joining the Church was the "form of prayer," an objection which he considered to be "of a transient nature." LeFevre concluded: "I really believe this & other prejudices are subsiding and I find that when this is the case a decided preference is manifested towards the Church."<sup>14</sup>

This optimism would be shattered by LeFevre himself, for he embraced Universalist teachings within the following year. He initially promised Charles Stewart, who was now bishop of Quebec, not to discuss those beliefs further in the pulpit, but he was soon arousing "spirited opposition" from his "brother clergymen." LeFevre subsequently informed Stewart that if he preached at all he was determined to defend his ground.<sup>15</sup> But the Sherbrooke clergyman was apparently not anxious to engage in a damaging controversy with his colleagues. He volunteered to resign and leave for the United States if the Bishop would take his property off his hands for £1000. This the wealthy Stewart readily agreed to do with his own funds, reasoning that "it was on all accounts desirable that he should not remain as a degraded clergyman in the scene of his former labours, & especially in the character of a preacher of heresy."<sup>16</sup>

Stewart was unlucky in his Sherbrooke appointees, for LeFevre's replacement, Edward Parkin, appears to have suffered from cyclothemia (manic depression). In December 1829, the Bishop reported to the SPG that Parkin was "so far deranged in his mind that he is projecting schemes & making purchases of various kinds" paid for with drafts on friends in England. Stewart attributed his state of mind to the "very high excitement of body & mind subsequent to a very low & debilitated state under which they suffered last winter" in St Catherine's, Upper Canada.<sup>17</sup> According to the petition for a writ of lunacy submitted by Reverend Adam Hood Burwell of Lennoxville, Parkin's visionary plans for "improving the country" included "making the River St Francis navigable — Building three huge Brick buildings in Windsor — establishing and endowing a College at Sherbrooke on a scale equal to colleges in England." Burwell also claimed that Parkin had claimed to have "obtained a good knowledge of the French Language almost entirely without

apparent means, as it were miraculously," and that he had not sought permission to publicize the names of several individuals as subscribers to copies of a book he intended to publish. Finally, the Lennoxville minister had heard that Parkin had purchased a factory on the Magog River and tracts of land "at most exorbitant prices without any knowledge of their value, nature, or description," drawing large sums of money from individuals in Montreal on the basis of projected profits of £5000 from his planned publication. Burwell may have become a little carried away himself, for the local court dismissed his petition on the grounds of insufficient proof of insanity.<sup>18</sup> The following July, the Bishop reported that the Sherbrooke minister had recovered. Though Parkin's "extravagance during this derangement has been ruinous to him and his family," Stewart was recommending that Parkin remain in Sherbrooke.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the 1831 census recorded 134 Anglicans in Sherbrooke, which was two-fifths of the total population.<sup>20</sup> But matters took a turn for the worse again in 1832 when Stewart reported of Parkin that "a return of his extravagance has since manifested itself in a manner which leaves me little hope of his ever being useful as Missionary." Parkin claimed that his expenditures were aimed at "meeting the erroneous and heretical publications so generally circulated here,"<sup>21</sup> but the result, according to Stewart, was that his family had been reduced to "absolute indigence." Since Parkin had once been "a zealous, laborious and acceptable Missionary," Stewart recommended a gratuity (to be deducted from the next Sherbrooke minister's salary) to enable the Parkin family to return to England where a small retirement allowance would enable them "to exist."<sup>22</sup>

The third Anglican minister, Lucius Doolittle, was a much more suitable choice, for he had been born in Vermont and trained with the Anglican minister in Charleston (Hatley). But Doolittle would not reside in Sherbrooke for he had actually been assigned to neighbouring Lennoxville a year earlier, in 1831. Even though Sherbrooke's status would soon increase with its choice as the local headquarters of the British American Land Company, the town's population growth remained remarkably slow, increasing from 391 in 1831 to only about 600 in 1844. During these years its Anglican Church would be relegated to satellite status. The rather relaxed attitude of Sherbrooke's Anglicans at this time is reflected in the September 3, 1835 diary entry by one of the parishioners, Lucy Peel: "Mr. Doolittle is indefatigable in his duties as a Clergyman, he calls on the families before the Sacrament requesting their attendance and last Sunday in his discourse, he hoped all would remain, even if

they did not partake of the Holy communion, hoping that the solemnity of it would induce many to wish to prepare themselves to partake of it the next time. I am sorry to say many persons left notwithstanding all he said."<sup>23</sup> By the early 1840s, however, the local Anglicans had a flourishing Sunday school and a new church under construction, largely due to the generosity of the SPG and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. Bishop George J. Mountain, who disapproved of the American vernacular style of the earlier Anglican churches in the region, was pleased with the new Sherbrooke church. He reported that the brick building in a "plain gothic" style "with tessellate windows," was "a very respectable structure and well placed."<sup>24</sup> Challenging the American custom of private property claims to their meeting houses, Reverend Doolittle took steps to discourage pew holders in the old Sherbrooke church from transferring their occupancy rights to the new one. He declared that any claim to pews would henceforth be subject to all assessments for repairs and other church expenses. The result, he felt confident, would be that a good number of pews would be secured to the Church.<sup>25</sup>

Bishop Mountain had announced his intention to make Sherbrooke a distinct mission in 1841,<sup>26</sup> but it was still served by Doolittle four years later when he finally decided that the Lennoxville minister's failing health made it necessary to assign Sherbrooke to its own minister. Mountain reported that Reverend Wait was "a most particular friend of my own, whose services I was so fortunate as to secure for the trifling compensation provided by the congregation." The Anglican influence in Sherbrooke had evidently been waning, for the Bishop added that "Extraordinary efforts have been made by other parties to plant their own standard in the village, since the appointment of Mr. Wait and a good deal of religious excitement prevails, in a certain circle of the population, of a nature, however, which is likely to subside." But this was yet another false start to a settled Anglican ministry, for Wait soon returned to England because of his health.<sup>27</sup>

The following year, in 1847, Sheriff G.F. Bowen reported as church warden that the Sherbrooke congregation had subscribed £50, as required, in order to qualify for a ministerial grant from the SPG.<sup>28</sup> The new appointee was Isaac Hellmuth from Berlin who had studied under A.N. Bethune in Cobourg, Upper Canada, after several months enrolled in the "Institution for inquiring and converted Jews at Liverpool."<sup>29</sup> Hellmuth had been recommended for deacon's orders upon completion of three months further study at the recent-

ly established Bishop's College in Lennoxville, where he became Professor of Hebrew and Rabbinical Literature.<sup>30</sup> In 1848, Bishop Mountain noted that Hellmuth was "very deservedly popular" among his Sherbrooke parishioners.<sup>31</sup>

Hellmuth's appointment to Sherbrooke was timely, for the approach of the St Lawrence and Atlantic Railway from Montreal stimulated local industrial activity and rapid population growth. Between 1844 and 1852, Sherbrooke's numbers more than tripled to 1903, not including the 703 transient railway construction workers enumerated within the town limits.<sup>32</sup> Hellmuth reported in 1851 that there were approximately 400 people attached to his ministry, of whom sixty were communicants. In conformity with the agreement reached with the Bishop five years earlier, the congregation contributed £50 a year to the minister's maintenance. The church had all the required articles for the services, but it was still unconsecrated owing to a debt of nearly £400. While, as a student, Hellmuth had rebelled against A.N. Bethune's Tractarian (Anglo-Catholic) tendencies,<sup>33</sup> he introduced chanting and psalmody as well as monthly Communion services to the Sherbrooke church. There was one Sunday school with 150 scholars in 1851, but Hellmuth was evidently too busy with his large congregation to preach in outlying areas. He reported that there were "many scattered settlements in this vicinity who are living like heathens 'without God in this world' for want of being told that there is a God to whom they are amenable, or a Saviour ready to save them."<sup>34</sup> Within Sherbrooke itself, there were evidently many for whom religion was simply a matter of convenience, for the 1852 census recorded 560 Anglicans, or 160 more than Hellmuth had recognized. Why this was so will become clearer when we examine the development of the other Protestant denominations in the town.

### **Methodists**

The American-based Episcopal Methodist circuit riders appear to have confined most of their efforts to the townships closest to the border, and, even though they were replaced by British Wesleyan missionaries in 1821, it would be many more years before Sherbrooke became a circuit centre. When Reverend Thomas Turner of the Stanstead circuit preached in Sherbrooke in 1827, he found only twenty-two Methodists, mostly from Ireland.<sup>35</sup> According to the census published four years later, the number was still only twenty, or 6 percent of the town's population.<sup>36</sup> In 1837, the Methodists' District Meeting recommended that the town of



Sherbrooke become a separate station because "It has been made the principal place of business of the British and American Land Company and is now rising into importance very fast. A petition from our people in this place has been sent earnestly requesting an appointment as the most vigorous efforts are made to crush our cause into the dust, and we are unable with our present strength to afford them the necessary aid."<sup>37</sup> Sherbrooke was finally "supplied" from 1838 onward,<sup>38</sup> but only as part of a much larger larger circuit whose travelling missionary resided elsewhere.

Reverend John Rain of Hatley began to preach every second Sunday in Sherbrooke and Lennoxville, but he felt that this was not frequent enough to overcome the influence of the resident Congregational minister.<sup>39</sup> As purveyors of British influence, the Wesleyan missionaries generally did not consider their Anglican counterparts to be rivals. Their self-perceived role was to reach the evangelical sector of the population that would never convert to the Church of England. The Methodist District Meeting again urged the appointment of a missionary to Sherbrooke in 1842, when it was still served only once every two weeks, and on a week day rather than a Sunday.<sup>40</sup> But the recommendation fell on deaf ears, and Reverend Benjamin Slight noted in 1846 that there were only three or four church members left in the town.<sup>41</sup> The first surviving report for Sherbrooke (later known as Sherbrooke and Eaton) as a distinct circuit was not submitted until the following year. Reverend John Douglas then wrote that, "notwithstanding the operation of many circumstances of a discouraging nature, God has been pleased to vouchsafe a measure of prosperity, which is indicated, both by the deepening of the piety of our people and by the increase in the number of members." Douglas also claimed that the "congregations at *all* the appointments are large and attentive." Ten had been dropped for non-attendance at class meetings, and fifteen had moved away, but forty-five had been added and five new members had arrived, resulting in a membership of 115, though this number also included Eaton Township.<sup>42</sup>

There was still only one small Sunday school in Sherbrooke in 1849, and, while mainstream Methodists in the Canadas were now placing more emphasis on instilling religion in the youth than on revivalism,<sup>43</sup> this was a year of revival in Sherbrooke. As a result, sixty people were added to the Methodist Society. Reverend Gifford Dorey's report was short on specifics, but it claimed that "The Spirit of the Lord has been poured out upon us and the result has been peace within our walls and prosperity within our palaces. Sinners

have been awakened, backsliders have been reclaimed, penitents have obtained a sense of pardoning mercy and believers have been established in their most holy faith."<sup>44</sup> Reverend Benjamin Slight was much more pessimistic after being assigned to the circuit in June 1851. His report stated: "Prayer meetings nearly deserted; spiritual feeling & enjoyment at a low ebb; & the zeal & energy put forth in furtherance of the cause exceedingly deficient." Slight's annual report for 1852 nevertheless suggested that progress had been made, for there were 113 church members in Sherbrooke alone. He added that while this was only a small increase from the previous year, the size of the attending congregations had grown substantially, and subscriptions throughout the circuit were "considerably in advance of former times." According to the official census of the same year, 171 of the townspeople identified themselves as Methodists, which was 9 percent of the population.<sup>45</sup> And Sherbrooke's Methodists remained within the Wesleyan fold, in contrast to the border townships of Stanstead, Bolton and Potton where many had deserted to a more radical branch of the church. The Sherbrooke Methodists would soon stop meeting upstairs from a shop and build their own chapel, but the town still had only one Methodist Sunday school in 1852.<sup>46</sup>

### **Congregationalists**

Recalling Sherbrooke as it had been at mid-century, Mary Brooks Graves wrote in 1901 that the old Congregational Church was "a house dismal enough, far enough from most of the people to satisfy the most rigid Puritan. The bleak, discolored walls, the smoky stoves, the rain-streaks on the curtains, and the rectangular, high-backed seats haunt me still."<sup>47</sup> Even though American Congregationalism had jettisoned much of its predestinarian Puritan heritage in order to survive the rise of evangelicalism, its sharp decline after the Revolution was reflected in its failure to gain a strong foothold among the New England settlers of the Eastern Townships. There were still no Congregationalists reported in Sherbrooke by the 1831 census, and, in searching for a place to settle two years later, Reverend Asa Ware of Vermont decided to avoid Ascot on the grounds that the American-born Anglican minister, Lucius Doolittle, would be too formidable an opponent.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the Congregationalist Reverend Ammi Parker of Danville suggested in 1834 that "The fact that a more evangelical Churchman is stationed here may operate as a partial hindrance."<sup>49</sup>

A year later, however, Parker presided over a meeting in the home

of Mary Brooks Graves' grandfather, Samuel Brooks, to consider organizing a Congregational Church for Sherbrooke and Lennoxville.<sup>50</sup> The meeting admitted by letter five married couples, four women and two men from sister churches in Stanstead and Granby in Lower Canada, and the towns of Montpelier, Castleton, Woodbury, Lunenburg, Peacham and Charlotte in Vermont, as well as Plymouth, New Hampshire. Admitted on profession of faith were six men and four women, making a total congregation of twenty-six.<sup>51</sup> According to a history of the Sherbrooke church, Samuel Brooks — who was the town's leading merchant and politician — remained nominally connected with the Methodist Church in Stanstead, where he had once lived. However, his wife was a Congregationalist and Brooks himself was "the most liberal contributor to the support of the gospel and all religious and benevolent enterprises we had amongst us during his lifetime."<sup>52</sup> Brooks' political ally, Joseph S. Walton of the conservative *Sherbrooke Gazette*, was one of the church's founding members, and the manufacturer, William Arms, served as deacon until his death in 1853. Another deacon was Brooks' son-in-law, John S. Sanborn, who became the town's MLA after moving from New Hampshire to establish a school in Sherbrooke in 1843. Beyond the town's leading American-born entrepreneurs, the Congregational Church was also supported by the first commissioner of the British American Land Company, John Fraser, despite his Presbyterian background, and the mother of Fraser's successor, Alexander Tilloch Galt. Galt was himself a generous benefactor, and Joseph Gibb Robertson, the son of the first Congregational minister, became one of the region's leading entrepreneurs and politicians.<sup>53</sup> To some extent, the establishment of Sherbrooke's Congregational church represented the rise of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie at a time when the British office-holding elite was about to lose its political influence, but the ties with the British American Land Company ensured that the imperial influence remained strong.

In 1835, the Scottish-born and ordained James Robertson, who was serving in nearby Derby, Vermont, accepted Sherbrooke's offer of £112 a year, an amount which was doubtless enticing to a man with nine children to support. Sixty-two pounds were raised locally, leaving £50 to be donated by the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS). Robertson, who came highly recommended, would serve his Canadian congregation for the rest of his career, dying in Sherbrooke in 1861.<sup>54</sup> In 1901, Mary Brooks Graves would recall that "Father Robertson, as he was called [...] was a man of vigorous intel-

lect, of strong reasoning powers and wonderful memory. His long sermons, reduced to short-hand writing on a piece of paper were memorized. Possessed of great physical endurance, he preached three times every Sabbath, year in year out, and scorned a summer vacation."<sup>55</sup>

Robertson's first annual report, submitted in October 1837, expressed cautious optimism. He preached twice each Sabbath at Sherbrooke, and once at Lennoxville, and the congregations had increased to the point that the Sherbrooke school house was no longer large enough. Robertson claimed that there was "a very visible difference as to the observation of the Sabbath," though "still there is much room for improvement." Twelve members had been added to the church, and Robertson felt that "several, old and young, are under serious impressions," though only time will "discover the truth." Robertson seldom made a positive statement without qualifying it. Thus, he reported that the Sunday school was well attended, but added that "we have few capable of teaching." And, while a considerable number had been added to the temperance society, "still there is a great waste of money on spirits in this village."<sup>56</sup>

Robertson was particularly sensitive to the latter subject because he found himself facing serious financial difficulties. The AHMS was reducing its grant from \$200 to \$150 due to the economic crisis which was also hurting business in Sherbrooke where \$1200 had been pledged for construction of the bleak meeting house referred to above by Mary Brooks Graves. Robertson hoped that in the future he would be able to grow enough food to become less dependent on support, but he insisted that he needed more money, rather than less, in the coming year.<sup>57</sup> Robertson's plea was obviously heard, for he reported in March 1839 that he had continued to receive \$200 a year from the missionary society. But he was not satisfied with the \$250 provided by the local congregations, which numbered 150 to 200 in Sherbrooke and approximately 150 in Lennoxville. The problem was that "our principal people are so intent on serving the *Queen* that every thing else has given way to this object." Robertson stated that the Rebellions of 1837-38 had interfered with any prospect of promoting spiritual good. Many young men had spent the winter on military duty at Stanstead, and "the people have been so engrossed with reports of depredations on the Line etc., that there has been little [...] inclination to attend to the things which belong to their peace in the view of an eternal God." The temperance cause had suffered considerably, as had "the morals of the young."<sup>58</sup>

The next surviving report from Robertson is dated over four years later, in April 1843, when he wrote that the church consisted of about fifty-six members and the congregation of about 150. He also preached every Sabbath in Lennoxville, where "the congregation is much dependent on the weather & roads, as the greater part come from the surrounding country." Both towns had Sunday schools, and he held Bible classes for the young people at each church. A young man's temperance society had been formed in Sherbrooke, and Robertson claimed that "I find the young in general, to be the most active." Still, there was "a considerable degree of drinking in Sherbrooke, principally among the French & by travelers." As for Millerism, the millenarian movement then sweeping the north-eastern States and southern townships, "There has been considerable excitement & noise in Compton & Hatley, [...] but we have had little or none of it in this place."<sup>59</sup> Robertson concluded that "The attention paid to the Gospel is encouraging," but "We greatly need the enlightening & quickening influences of the spirit to bring sinners to Christ."<sup>60</sup>

Robertson's reports unfortunately end in 1843, with the cessation of AHMS funding in the region, but the visit of a charismatic American temperance promoter named Cole launched an enthusiastic anti-alcohol movement in 1845. The Sherbrooke Total Abstinence Society was dominated by members of the local Congregational elite. Its preamble announced their desire to suppress "the poverty, disease and crime" which intemperance had introduced "into our otherwise peaceful town ... thereby not only hindering the growth and improvement of this town, but counteracting the protecting influences of virtue, morality, and religion."<sup>61</sup> The temperance crusade, which enlisted 1211 members (many were obviously from beyond the town's boundaries), took on the characteristics of a religious revival, with meetings featuring the singing of temperance hymns, readings from tracts, and public testimonials of salvation from formerly dissolute ways. Not surprisingly, the crusade was reportedly followed by "a revived state of religion,"<sup>62</sup> and there are indications that it escaped the control of the local elite, but popular enthusiasm began to wane as early as March 1846. The association was effectively moribund by that summer.<sup>63</sup>

The Congregational church failed to grow with the town's population during the remainder of the decade. According to the 1852 *Census Report*, there were only 133 Congregationalists in Sherbrooke (not including the 102 who were transient railway construction workers), or about 7 percent of the population.<sup>64</sup> Presumably, most

of the ninety-five people identified as Presbyterians (and some of the fifty-seven in the Free Church of Scotland) also attended Robertson's church, since they had none of their own. It would appear, however, that support by some of the town's leading American families was not sufficient to compensate for the lack of external assistance.

### Conclusion

The frontier American influence that Bullard's Pilgrims represented was short-lived in Sherbrooke where the British administrative elite soon ensured that the Church of England would establish a dominant position. In 1843, while Millerism was raging in the surrounding countryside, the local notables contented themselves with the new fads of "tea and mesmerism."<sup>65</sup> Those "dissenting" Protestant denominations that did manage to gain a foothold in the town were themselves relatively conservative in nature, and it is telling that the radical revivalist peddler, Ralph Merry IV of nearby Magog, confided to his diary on June 19, 1855 that this was the first day he had been in Sherbrooke during the past twenty-four years.<sup>66</sup> The limitations of religion as a cultural force in Sherbrooke were also reflected in the local Anglican Church's subordination to Lennoxville for many years, and its ongoing dependency on British financial support.

Sherbrooke did serve as a central location for the Catholic Church because of the town's rapidly growing French-Canadian population, but the local priests were unable to gain more than a tenuous foothold there prior to mid-century. The first curé, John Baptist McMahon, complained to his bishop in 1835 that "c'est un péché pour un jeune prêtre de dépenser ses meilleures années ainsi, il aurait plus de succès en allant prêcher à des protestants du Vermont qu'en demeurant avec des indifférents à Sherbrooke."<sup>67</sup> McMahon was finally granted his long-awaited *exeat* in 1840, when he left Sherbrooke disgraced, broken in health, and £200 in debt to the British American Land Company.<sup>68</sup> By 1843, his successor, Peter Harkin, was in turn threatening to leave of his own accord, forcing the Bishop to grant him an extra £25 from the funds of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.<sup>69</sup> Five years later the next curé, Bernard O'Reilly, wrote to his bishop that: "la triste expérience de six ans de troubles et de misères lui [himself] ont acquis la certitude qu'il ne fait plus de bien."<sup>70</sup> By June 1848, when he received his discharge, O'Reilly's finances were in such a state that he had to consider selling his library in order to pay off his debts.<sup>71</sup> A year later, Reverend Bernard McGauran's debts in turn forced him to sell his horse, lead-

ing Archbishop Signay to declare that in order for the priest's services to continue each communicant would have to subscribe one dollar. The more wealthy would be forced to make up for those who could not afford to meet the contribution.<sup>72</sup>

It would appear that, apart from a brief outburst of temperance enthusiasm which apparently had little impact on the French Canadians, Sherbrooke remained largely untouched by the millenarian Protestant and ultramontane Catholic revivals of the 1840s.<sup>73</sup> The local elite's support for the Anglican and Congregational Churches in particular had kept at bay the waves of radical revivalism that swept across many of the neighbouring townships during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Churches of England and Rome together represented nearly three-quarters of the local population, but the evidence suggests that, as of mid-century, religion did not exert a particularly strong influence upon the growing labouring population.

## NOTES

- 1 E.G. Hubbard, *Memoir of Joseph Badger* (New York: C.S. Francis; Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1854), 154–5.
- 2 Randolph A. Roth, *Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 81.
- 3 See Zadoch Thompson, *History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical* (Burlington, VT: Chauncey Goodrich, 1842), 203–4; Donal Ward, "Religious Enthusiasm in Vermont, 1761–1847" (PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1980), 43–5; and David Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York: AMS Press, 1966, 1939 reprint), 23–4.
- 4 See the tables in Françoise Noël, *Competing for Souls: Missionary Activity and Settlement in the Eastern Townships, 1784–1851* (Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke, 1988), 236–9.
- 5 Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 12.
- 6 See the tables in Jean-Pierre Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke, Tome 1: De l'âge de l'eau à l'ère de la vapeur (1802–1866)* (Sherbrooke: Productions GGC, 2000), 65 and 221. Kesteman (p. 198) excludes the 703 railway construction workers who were enumerated in Sherbooke in 1852.
- 7 Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 35–7, 45.
- 8 See Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 37–48; J.I. Little, "British Toryism amidst 'a horde of disaffected and disloyal squatters': The

- Rise and Fall of William Bowman Felton and Family in the Eastern Townships," *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, 1 (1992): 13–42; J.I. Little, ed., *Love Strong as Death: Lucy Peel's Canadian Journal* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001).
- 9 Ernest Hawkins, *Annals of the Diocese of Quebec* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1849), 28.
  - 10 Bishop's University, Quebec Diocesan Archives [hereafter QDA], B22, 1, W.B. Felton and C.F.H. Goodhue (Committee) to Bishop Quebec, Sherbrooke, 7 Oct. 1821. Felton promised the following month to make a floor of the court house then under construction fit for church service by January 1, to repair a house for use as a parsonage by the same time, and to complete the church by June 1. Stewart, however, was doubtful that all this would be possible. QDA, Mountain Papers, vol. 80, 125, C. Stewart to Archdeacon Quebec, 7 Nov. 1821.
  - 11 QDA, B22, 3, C. Stewart to Archdeacon of Quebec, York, 8 May 1822.
  - 12 QDA, B22, 2, C.F. LeFevre to Rev. Dr Mountain, Long Island, N.Y., 12 March 1822; 4, C.F. LeFevre to Rev. Dr Mountain, Sherbrooke, 3 July 1822; Stuart, "Episcopate of Jacob Mountain," 363.
  - 13 *Universalist Magazine*, 12 Sept. 1829, 42; 7 Nov. 1829, 74; 26 Dec. 1829, 103; Philip Hewett, *Unitarians in Canada* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1978), 74; Elizabeth Hearn Milner, *Huntingville, 1815–1980: A Story of a Village in the Eastern Townships of Quebec* (Sherbrooke: René Prince, 1981), 25. A rather different biography is supplied by Stuart ("Episcopate of Jacob Mountain," 303), who does not mention Oxford or Paris, but states that LeFevre read for the ministry in Kingston in 1820, received deacon's orders in England in 1821, married in Long Island, New York in 1822, and was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Mountain in 1823. See also Thomas R. Millman, *The Life of the Right Reverend, the Honourable Charles James Stewart* (London, ON: Huron College, 1953), 206.
  - 14 QDA, B22, 11, Sherbrooke Report, 21 Feb. 1828.
  - 15 QDA, B22, 14, A.H. Burwell to Venerable Sir, Lennoxville, 6 July 1829; 16, C.F. LeFevre to Rev. and Dear Sir, Sherbrooke, 31 July 1829.
  - 16 QDA, Series D, folder 92, Bishop Quebec to Archdeacon Hamilton, Quebec, 10 Dec. 1829. Universalism would be adopted by a second Anglican clergyman, W.L. Thompson of Stanstead, in 1861. QDA, B22, 144, W.L. Thompson to C.P. Reid, Stanstead, 8 Nov. 1861.
  - 17 NA, SPG Papers (Reel A 203), box 4, folio 370, no. 60, C.J. Quebec to Dear Sir, Quebec, 23 Dec. 1829.



- 18 NA, SPG Papers (Reel A 204), box 34, folio 373, no. 44, Petition of the Rev. Adam Hood Burwell of Lennoxville to the Provincial Court of the Inferior District of St Francis, Sherbrooke, 18 Jan. 1830; no. 45, In the Matter of the Petition of the Rev. Adam Hood Burwell, Judgement rendered 21 Jan. 1830.
- 19 Parkin had submitted his resignation in March, but it was obviously retracted. NA, SPG Papers (Reel A 203), box 4, folio 373, no. 46, Edward Parkin to Rev. & Dear Sir, Quebec, 23 March 1830; no. 78, Bishop of Quebec to Archdeacon Hamilton, Quebec, 2 July 1830.
- 20 Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 65.
- 21 QDA, Series D, folder 93, Extract from a letter to the Lord Bishop of Quebec from the Reverend Edward Parkin late Missionary at Sherbrooke, Lower Canada, Sherbrooke, 7 June 1832.
- 22 QDA, Series D, folder 93, C.J. Quebec to Archdeacon Hamilton, Quebec, 9 April 1832.
- 23 Little, ed., *Love Strong as Death*, 161.
- 24 QDA, Series D, G.J. Mountain to A.M. Campbell, Quebec, 23 March 1843, 44, 47–51; *A Journal of Visitation to a Part of the Diocese of Quebec by the Lord Bishop of Montreal in the Spring of 1843*, (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1846), 56.
- 25 QDA, B22, 21, L. Doolittle to My Lord, Lennoxville, 20 Jan. 1843.
- 26 NA, SPG Papers (Reel A 201), box 4, folio 368, no. 228, G. Montreal to Rev. A.M. Campbell, Quebec, 7 April 1841.
- 27 QDA, D18, folder 99, Journal by the Bishop of Montreal to the Rev. E. Hawkins, 5148/46 (359), 44. The man in question was probably William Wade Wait, who had been ordained to Portneuf and Bourg Louis in 1840. M.E. Reisner, *Strangers and Pilgrims: A History of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec, 1793–1993* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1995), 340.
- 28 QDA, B22, 37, G.F. Bowen to Bishop Montreal, Sherbrooke, 5 May 1847.
- 29 QDA, B22, 35, Testimonial by ministers from Liverpool to Bishop Toronto, 25 Sept. 1844.
- 30 QDA, B22, 29, A. Bethune to My Lord, Cobourg, 6 Oct. 1845; 31, Testimonial from J.H. Nicolls, L. Doolittle, and minister of Sherbrooke to Bishop Montreal, 26 April 1846; 33, 14 Aug. 1846; NA, SPG Papers (Reel A 202), box 32, folio 368, no. 376, G. Montreal to Rev. E. Hawkins, Quebec, 22 Feb. 1847.
- 31 QDA, Series D, 1848, Bishop Montreal to E. Hawkins, Quebec, 17 July 1848.
- 32 Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 198.

- 33 Curtis Fahey, *In His Name: The Anglican Experience in Canada, 1791–1854* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 262.
- 34 QDA, B22, 39, Sherbrooke Report, 1851.
- 35 Victoria University Library, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Correspondence [hereafter Wesleyan Correspondence], box 11, file 70, no. 9, Tho. Turner to Rev. Mason, Barnston, 8 May 1827.
- 36 Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 65.
- 37 National Archives of Canada, Methodist Missionary Society, Synod Minutes, Lower Canada / Canada East [hereafter MMS, Synod Minutes], 1837. What is mistakenly identified as the Synod on the microfilm is actually the annual District Meeting.
- 38 John Carroll, *Case and his Cotemporaries*, vol. 4 (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1874), 236.
- 39 Wesleyan Correspondence, box 22, file 145, no. 5, John Rain to Rev. Alder, Charleston Village, 28 July 1838.
- 40 Wesleyan Correspondence, box 26, file 178, no. 18, John Tomkins to Secretaries, Compton, 19 July 1842.
- 41 Victoria University, United Church Archives, 89.067c, Journal of Benjamin Slight, vol. 2, 72.
- 42 MMS, Synod Minutes, 1847.
- 43 Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 367–72.
- 44 MMS, Synod Minutes, 1849.
- 45 Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 221.
- 46 MMS, Synod Minutes, 1852; Journal of Benjamin Slight, vol. 2, 1852 entry. On the Methodist churches, see Mary Brooks Graves' memoir in *Sherbrooke Examiner*, 18 Feb. 1901, reprinted as J.I. Little, ed., "Sherbrooke a Century and a Half Ago: The Reminiscence of Mary Brooks Graves in 1901," *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, 17 (Fall 2000): 51.
- 47 Little, "Sherbrooke," 55.
- 48 Archives Nationales du Québec à Montréal, United Church Archives, Montreal-Ottawa Conference, Canada Education and Home Missionary Society Papers [hereafter CEHMS], Asa Ware to Perkins, Ascot, 13 Jan. 1834.
- 49 CEHMS, A.J. Parker's Report of Agency for CEHMS, 11 Feb. 1834.
- 50 On Samuel Brooks, see Charlotte Thibault, *Samuel Brooks, entrepreneur et homme politique de Sherbrooke, 1793–1849* (Sherbrooke: Département d'histoire, Université de Sherbrooke, 1985).

- 51 Eastern Townships Research Centre, United Church Archives, Quebec/Sherbrooke Presbytery, UC001, Plymouth United Church fonds, Hon. J.G. Robertson, *Sketch of the Formation of the Congregational Church at Sherbrooke and Lennoxville* (Sherbrooke: W.A. Morehouse, 1890), 1. Samuel Brooks, Hollis Smith and five others had met a year earlier offering to subscribe £25 towards the half-time services of Rev. Joseph W. Curtis. CEHMS, Inhabitants of Lennoxville and vicinity, 26 Dec. 1834.
- 52 Robertson, *Sketch*, 3.
- 53 Robertson, *Sketch*, 3–5; Marc Vallières, “Robertson, Joseph Gibb,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, 901–4.
- 54 CEHMS, Report of W.F. Curry from 12 Nov. 1835 to 11 May 1836; J.S. Walton to Curry, Sherbrooke, 21 March 1836; W.F. Curry to Rev. A. Peters, Sherbrooke, 27 March 1836; Robertson, *Sketch*, 2.
- 55 Little, “Sherbrooke,” 55–6.
- 56 CEHMS, James Robertson to Curry, Sherbrooke, 16 Oct. 1837.
- 57 CEHMS, James Robertson to Curry, Sherbrooke, 16 Oct. 1837.
- 58 CEHMS, James Robertson to Curry, Sherbrooke, 8 March 1839.
- 59 See Denis Fortin, “‘The World Turned Upside Down’: Millerism in the Eastern Townships, 1835–1845,” *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, 11 (Fall 1997): 39–59; and J.I. Little, “Millennial Invasion: Millerism in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada,” forthcoming.
- 60 CEHMS, Jas. Robertson to Strong, Sherbrooke, 27 April 1843.
- 61 Société d’histoire de Sherbrooke, Minute Book, Sherbrooke Total Abstinence Society, 10 May 1845.
- 62 *History of the Temperance Cause in Canada ... Being Part of Wadsworth’s Temperance Manual* (Montreal: J.C. Becket, 1847), 44.
- 63 For more details, see J.I. Little, “A Moral Engine of Such Incalculable Power: The Temperance Movement in the Eastern Townships, 1830–52,” *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, 11 (Fall 1997): 17–20.
- 64 Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke*, 198, 221.
- 65 McCord Museum, Hale Papers, Andrew Robertson to E. Hale, Montreal, 11 March 1843.
- 66 Merry’s diaries are in the archives of the Stanstead Historical Society. On his life, see J.I. Little, “The Mental World of Ralph Merry: A Case Study of Popular Religion in the Lower Canadian – New England Borderland, 1786–1863,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 83 (2002): 338–63.

- 67 McMahon to Archbishop Signay, 28 March 1835. Quoted in Albert Gravel, *Messire Jean-Baptiste McMahon, Premier Curé-Missionnaire de Sherbrooke, 1834–1840* (Sherbrooke, 1960), 9
- 68 Archives de la Chancellerie de l'Archevêché de Québec [hereafter ACAQ], Registre des Lettres [hereafter RL], XVIII, 471, Signay to McMahon, 26 Feb. 1839; 568, 15 June 1839; XIX, 31, 12 Nov. 1839; 86, 9 Jan. 1840; 109, 1 Feb. 1840; 122, Signay to Robson, 29 Feb. 1840; Gravel, *McMahon*, 7, 13, 31; Maurice O'Bready, *De Ktiné à Sherbrooke. Esquisse historique de Sherbrooke des origines à 1954* (Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke, 1973), 82, 85
- 69 ACAQ, RL, XX, 98, Signay to Harkin, 15 July 1842; 270, 21 Feb. 1843; 283, 7 March 1843.
- 70 ACAQ, PP.J., I-82a, O'Reilly to Signay, 13 Feb. 1848; RL, XXI, 509, Signay to O'Reilly, 22 Oct. 1846, 521, 5 Nov. 1846.
- 71 ACAQ, RL, XXII, 343, Signay to O'Reilly, 19 June 1848, ACAQ, D-3, R.B.-102, J.B. Robillard to Cazeau, 6 Sept. 1848.
- 72 ACAQ, RL, XXIII, 228, Signay to McGauran, 30 March 1850; 341, 5 Aug. 1850. For more details on the Catholic Church in Sherbrooke during this period, see J.I. Little, "Missionary Priests in Quebec's Eastern Townships: The Years of Hardship and Discontent, 1825–1853," *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Study Sessions*, 45 (1978): 27–34.
- 73 See Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades Before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), chpt. 11.