

T H E M E

The Multifaceted Work and Influence of Dr. Thomas McCulloch

Before coming to Nova Scotia, Dr. Thomas McCulloch, who was born in Neilston, Renfrewshire, Scotland, in 1776, had studied medicine at Glasgow University and theology at Whitburn. He was ordained as a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ayrshire. After deciding to come to the colonies as a missionary, he sailed with his wife and three children and arrived in Pictou in the late fall of 1803.

No matter what the lifestyle or interests of the guest who comes to McCulloch House, there is always that within the man who was Dr. Thomas McCulloch to arouse their interest. Scholar, writer, nature lover, politician, reader of light and humorous literature, devout Christian and seeker of spiritual truths, farmer, scientist, dedicated family man; no matter what experience or intellectual level of the person meeting McCulloch, always there is that feeling of kinship and appreciation. As this is true today, so was it true when McCulloch spent the most productive years of his life in early nineteenth century Pictou County.

The Reasons he was asked to stay:

The Town of Pictou and surrounding area was just beginning to take on that personality that has always given it a special place in the history of Nova Scotia. The post-war slump was causing an economic depression and the beginning of the intellectual awakening that was taking place throughout the Province, together with the Scottish high regard for education made a combination of needs that the many capabilities of Thomas McCulloch were able to meet. When the town fathers of Pictou saw Dr. McCulloch standing on the wharf with his wife and three children surrounded by his baggage, among which were boxes of books and two large

globes, they recognized him as an educated man and asked him to stay in Pictou instead of going on to Prince Edward Island as he had intended.

II. Medical Practitioner:

Although before leaving Scotland, McCulloch had completed the requirements for a medical degree, he had gone on to study theology instead of graduating. He gave freely of his medical skills and his stock of medicine to the people of Pictou for several years until another doctor came to relieve him of these duties. Because his first commitment was to Christ's work, he did not charge for these services, feeling that to do so would weaken his effect as a clergyman.

III. Theologian:

In 1804 he was inducted into the Harbour Congregation. That same year the construction of the First Presbyterian Church in the Town of Pictou was begun.

None of his many interests and endeavours were ever permitted to detract from the work for which he left his home in Scotland to live as a pioneer minister in a new land. His strong views on matters of theology often put him at odds with leaders of other denominations, as his books, such as "Popery Condemned", make clear. Still his willingness to co-operate with and help those of other faiths is illustrated by his efforts to obtain books for the Baptists when they were struggling to expand their work.

IV. Educator:

For his time, Dr. McCulloch was far ahead in his thinking and tolerance of other faiths and segments of society. The right of each individual to an education and an opportunity to develop to the limit of his capabilities is today taken for granted. When McCulloch first introduced these ideas in Nova Scotia, his little log cabin school was burned and one writer even suggested that he leave the country. The privileged class did not believe that it was either possible or necessary to educate the common people. He was saddened by the lack

of education to be found among young people. The need for ministers was not being met by the clergymen "back Home". Few were willing to face the hardships of pioneer life. Dr. McCulloch decided to meet these needs by providing classes to supplement the teaching being provided by the local schools. His aims of a "native ministry" and "liberal education" caused him to found a college. This work which began in a log cabin school and in this house grew to become the famed Pictou Academy. The West River Seminary, directed by one of his best students, became the nucleus of Pine Hill Divinity College, which is now a part of the Atlantic School of Theology. In 1820 his work as an educator and theologian was so well known that he was granted an honorary doctorate of divinity by a university in New York. In 1838, when he went to fill the position of first president of Dalhousie College, Halifax, he carried on his struggle for liberal education. To raise money for his school, McCulloch went on lecture tours lecturing on natural philosophy.

V. Advocate of Political Reform:

McCulloch, during his early years in Scotland, had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the ^{principles} principals of the British Constitution. He was advocating the political party system for Nova Scotia long before Joseph Howe was, as he said, converted by the "Pictou Scribblers" (McCulloch and one of his first pupils, Jotham Blanchard) to the merits of responsible government.

VI. Naturalist:

Dr. Thomas McCulloch founded, with the help of his son Thomas, the first museum in Nova Scotia. Since it is impossible to be as observant and devout as McCulloch and not learn to appreciate nature, it follows that he should use a collection of birds, rocks, shells and fossils in his classroom. He became one of the pioneers in North America in the use of such a collection to teach Natural History. His collection became so well known that the American naturalist and

artist, Audubon, came to view his work. Mr. J. J. Audubon stated that he considered the collection of Dr. McCulloch and his son, Thomas, the finest private collection of natural history in North America. From this visit there developed a friendship and correspondence that lasted many years.

VII. The Father of Canadian Humor:

Dr. McCulloch saw the economic future of Nova Scotia in the development of mixed farming. The person who stayed on his small farm and provided for his own needs and those of his family he saw as the true builders of the community. To foster this set of values, he wrote a series of satirical columns, first published in the Acadian Recorder 1821-1822. "The Stepsure Letters", as they are known, set forth the ideal life as one of thrift, industry and a desire for education. The satirical style in which they were written made them at the one time both amusing and controversial to such a degree as to insure their being read and discussed sufficiently to become familiar to the general public. McCulloch's humor was quiet, observant and very conservative and has been reflected in the best of Canadian humor ever since. His Stepsure Letters preceded Haliburton's Sam Slick by about eleven years.

VIII. The Far Reaching Effects of the Work of Dr. Thomas McCulloch:

Pictou Academy is still progressive; it has a resource centre which is one of the best equipped in Canada.

The Atlantic School of Theology claims him as one of it's founders.

Prince Street Church still continues to uphold the principals that Dr. McCulloch left his home in Scotland to bring to the New World.

The mission work in the New Hebrides, founded by one of Dr. McCulloch's students, Rev. John Geddie, had such far reaching results that it is the dream of the New Hebrideans to one day have their own university and name it for John Geddie.

Dalhousie University is of such high standard that all Canadians can justly take pride in it's graduates.

J. P. McPhee in his book "Pictonians at Home and Abroad" said of Dr. McCulloch "... (he) was a man of a rare type. He was possessed of fine natural ability, a strong personality, a mind finely disciplined and of extensive literary attainments as his writings show. It is as the champion of liberal and religious education in Nova Scotia that his fame chiefly rests. The country is still reaping the fruits of his intellectual activity and zealous labour..."