

From- "The Scottish Tradition
in Canada"
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The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada

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The largest groups of Scottish Catholics settled in the Glengarry district of eastern Ontario, Prince Edward Island and eastern Nova Scotia. Though there were other pockets of settlement in Ontario, Quebec, at the Red River, and other western communities, it was mainly in the above-named regions that their traditions developed. While it may be risky to write on a tradition it must also be borne in mind that history must include attitudes and impressions, the material from which traditions are made.

Canadians have usually referred to the Scottish presence in Canadian history without making any strong distinctions between Highlander/Lowlander or Catholic/Protestant. The general effect of this lack of categorization has been beneficial, for it has largely ignored certain aspects of the Scottish historical past which might possibly have led to a re-opening of old wounds in the New World.¹ For most Scots in Canada it has been sufficient that they be known as Scots or as Canadians of Scottish origin. The common homeland bound them together, regardless of their former geographical or religious situation in Scotland. Yet for anyone who has made any attempt to understand the Scottish-Canadian character it is quite evident that there are definite differences among those of Scottish background and that such distinctions have in part determined their attitudes and roles in Canada. In effect, they have helped to mould views concerning man and his role in Canadian society. They should not therefore be lightly dismissed.

One of the most obvious differences in those with a Scottish background has been the factor of religion, particularly the views held by Presbyterians and by those of the Roman Catholic faith. Those within Presbyterianism have been numerous and have occasioned remarks on the propensity of Presbyterians to dispute fine theological points.² It may also be argued the tensions within this denomination³ have been creative. Certainly there was, in the Presbyterian fold, an opportunity for the concerned individual to express his views. The organization allowed for a greater participation in church affairs through the realm of debate and discussion. Such was not

the tradition in the more tightly-structured church of the Roman Catholics; the hierarchical pyramid distributed authority from the peak downward and assembly meetings were not a part of the system. They were, however, assured of security and therefore had little compulsion for debate and discussion. This basic difference in style and orientation, it is suggested, had a definite influence on the subsequent roles played by Presbyterians and Roman Catholics in Canada.⁴ Often criticized as being motivated by the cult of success, the individual Presbyterian would be described by some as the typical Canadian. This is both unfair and inaccurate, for while Presbyterians have made an enormous contribution to Canada's historical development, other groups of different religious and ethnic backgrounds have counterbalanced this stereotyped Presbyterian projection. One such group has been the Roman Catholic Highlanders.⁵ Like other Scots, they are found in every province and territory of Canada.

This characteristic of mobility has been noted of Scots for centuries and even during the so-called Middle Ages they could be found in many countries of Europe as traders, teachers, religious or soldiers. The urge to move was also common to those who came to the New World and the early records of our fur trading companies reveal the names of many Scots. The voyages of men such as David Thompson, Alexander MacKenzie and Simon Fraser also bear testimony to this fact. Generally, the Scots, including the Highland Catholics, did not tend to remain together in specific geographical areas for long periods of time; though some stayed and carried on their traditional life style, many others moved to compete elsewhere. Largely through the traditions preserved in the regions mentioned above it is possible to discern patterns rather different from those of other ethnic-religious groups. In the changes which occurred between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, we witness the emergence of a sub-culture that had become an integral part of the Canadian mosaic.

By the 1850s these Highland Catholics had well fashioned their own society in the New World and their traditions were solidly established. They were less Scottish and more Canadian or Nova Scotian, or Islanders. Completely at ease in this society, they had been active participants in all religious, economic, educational and political developments. Their life pattern was their own and in the rural areas it was to remain essentially unchanged until World War II. It is true that they were becoming Anglicized and that the Gaelic was losing its grip, but other cultural traits and traditions have survived to the present time. In studying their traditions it is fair to argue that, with the exception of later patterns of outmigration, these were formed by the 1850s.

The most westerly of what may be considered one of the Highland Catholic regions in Canada, Glengarry, is also the most easterly county of the Province of Ontario. Alexandria, named after the first Bishop, Alexander Macdonell (Alastair Mhor), located approximately midway between the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers, is considered to be the centre of the

county.⁶ The Scottish defeat at Culloden and the subsequent economic changes were the remote causes of this Glengarry settlement, for many Scots emigrated to America in search of greater opportunities. Some joined British regiments and fought for the King during the American Revolution, only thirty years after Culloden.

When the hostilities finally terminated in 1783 it was evident that they could not remain in their former locations; British North America would be their new home and thousands trudged northward. The families of many of the soldiers had been departing during the last years of the war, to be reunited later with the husbands and fathers. In 1783 the King's Royal Regiment of New York and the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment were disbanded; the men moved northward in search of a new life.⁷ The Catholics among them asked to be allowed to settle in a body and the government tried to meet their request. As a result several strong Catholic colonies were planted in Glengarry and Stormont.⁸ Other Catholic Loyalists, though not Scottish, were attracted to the region; also among the disbanded members of the Royal Highland Emigrants were many Presbyterians whose chaplain, Reverend John Bethune, acquired a 3000-acre grant near Williamstown where he built the first Presbyterian church in Upper Canada.⁹

The Presbyterians and Catholics in those areas shared many basic traditions; their loyalty to the Crown, their repugnance toward certain aspects of society to the south, and, for many, their common Scottish inheritance. The religious hatreds which had kept them apart in Scotland were largely ignored or sublimated; pioneer conditions and common political problems helped in forcing a greater tolerance.

The Catholic settlers received their first Gaelic-speaking priest in 1785:

Sir:

Having laid before the King a memorial of Mr. Roderick MacDonell, stating that at the solicitation of a considerable number of Scots Highlanders and other subjects of the Roman Catholic persuasion who, prior to the last war, were inhabitants of the back settlements of the Province of New York, and to whom, in consideration of their loyalty and services, lands have lately been assigned in the higher parts of Canada, he is desirous of joining them in order to serve them in the capacity of a clergyman, in the humble hope, that on the arrival at the settlement, he shall be allowed by Government an annual subsistence for the discharge of that duty.¹⁰

The priest was Reverend Roderick Macdonell of the family of Leek, the man who was to make possible the success later enjoyed by Bishop Alexander Macdonell. Though his territory extended south to the Mohawk Valley and westward to Illinois, he thoroughly enjoyed working with his Gaelic-speaking Scots in Glengarry and Stormont. With the assistance of kinsmen in the North West Company, most of whom were Catholic, he

completed the first stone church, St. Andrew's, Stormont, in 1792.¹¹ Presbyterian Scots also made contributions to the building of the edifice; the frontier was doing what post-Reformation animosity had made impossible in Scotland.¹² Reverend Roderick Macdonell was joined by Reverend Alexander "Scotus" Macdonell¹³ who led the entire parish of Knoydart in Glengarry, Scotland, to the New World.¹⁴ Some passengers disembarked at Ile St. Jean but the great majority continued on to the Glengarry district. "Of those who came, not all were Catholic, but the Catholic settlers, as a rule, banded together and formed groups where, later on, missions were opened or parishes were formed - thus St. Andrew's, thus St. Raphael's, thus Alexandria, etc."¹⁵ During the decade of the 1780s others arrived from Scotland and as the population west of the Ottawa River increased, largely through Loyalist migration, there began an agitation for a separate province for those of British extraction. Partly as a result of such agitation the Constitutional Act of 1791 was passed in the British Parliament; among its provisions was one creating two provinces, Upper Canada for those generally west of the Ottawa River, Lower Canada for the French Canadians to the east. On June 16, 1792, Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe issued a proclamation dividing the province into counties, the easternmost of which were styled Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas.¹⁶

The people of Glengarry remained isolated during the early decades of settlement and as a result the oral culture remained strong. "It was the old man's delight to take me on his knee, while he sat on the old log bridge, and tell me of times gone by, of strange adventures, of giant men, of haunted hills, of blessings and of curses."¹⁷ As with their fellow Scots in Nova Scotia, the bard held an important cultural ranking:

The bard is old but tall and of a dignified bearing. His long flowing white beard gives him almost a venerable look, his memory is unbelievably retentive; the unwritten songs and tales which entertained our grandfathers, and their grandfathers before them, he still remembers word for word . . . his marvellous memory has permitted him to retain almost everything of interest in genealogy, history and folklore.¹⁸

As early as the 1790s the Glengarry Scots were making their presence felt in other avenues of Upper Canadian life.¹⁹ The influence of the Catholic Highlanders was to find its fullest expression under Reverend Alexander Macdonell, an astute cleric who cultivated the lines of civil and ecclesiastical power very shrewdly in efforts to advance the welfare of his religious followers. Not only was he the first Roman Catholic bishop of Upper Canada but he also led the way in promoting the temporal advancement of his people. In education, and particularly in aligning the faithful with the British connection, the man showed strong qualities of leadership. "An ardent patriot and Conservative, he saw no inconsistency in defending Catholicism and British interests, at a time when Catholics were not admitted to full citizenship in the British Empire."²⁰ It has also

been said that support of Tory rule was secondary to his desire to extend Catholicism; McGee is reputed to have called him "the greatest old Tory in Canada."²¹ In addition to building schoolhouses and churches, he supervised the training of native clergy and more than 40 were trained during his tenure, with much of the expense borne by himself.

Appointed a bishop in 1819, he was also made a legislative councillor in 1831; he shrewdly used both positions to advance the interests of his people, for he realized that concessions to Catholics were made for political reasons. Constantly, and sometimes successfully, he sought government aid for Catholic schools and teachers.²² In return he gave the government of the day strong support and was outspoken in his views on American republicanism and the radicalism of William Lyon MacKenzie.²³ By 1828, there were at least 36,435 Catholics in Upper Canada²⁴ and their growing numbers forced the government to listen to requests.²⁵ Macdonell cultivated good relations with the Protestant population and a healthy rapport existed between him and his non-Catholic friends:

A tablet was set up to his memory in his church at St. Raphael's by the Highland Society of Upper Canada. It is not without significance that the motion for its erection was made in the Society by the Rev. Hugh Urquhart, Presbyterian and late Headmaster of the Grammar School at Cornwall. While Roman, the Bishop's work and approach had always been Catholic.²⁶

Bishop Macdonell had no problem in being accepted as a Scot and in his way he made many friends among his Presbyterian countrymen. Along with William McGillivray of the North West Company, he was one of the founders of the Highland Society in Canada.²⁷ Religious differences that may have existed could often be sublimated under a common sense of ancestry and tradition. In 1852 there were 3,228 Macdonells or MacDonalds in Glengarry and thirty other clans numbered from 50 to 545 each.²⁸ It is hardly surprising that their Scottish ancestry should be a relative source of unity.

Though rather isolated at Glengarry, the Highlanders, Catholic and Protestant, soon made themselves known in every area of provincial life, even to becoming members of the "Establishment." Alexander (Sheriff) McDonell represented Glengarry in the House of Assembly;²⁹ his brother Angus represented York; another Angus McDonell (Sandaig, Glengarry) was also in the Assembly in 1804. All were Catholics and Alex (Sheriff) was elected as Speaker in the session which opened in 1805.³⁰ Two other brothers, John and Hugh Macdonell, were members of Simcoe's first Parliament in 1792-96.³¹

Were not Glengarry's men, even within that generation, to take their places among the country's leading citizens? In law there was Angus Macdonell, member and first president of the Law Society of Ontario, 1792; in commerce, Alexander Macdonell, Greenfield, and Finnan

Macdonell, chief factors of the Hudson' Bay Company; in exploration, Simon Fraser, discoverer of the Fraser River, whose remains lie buried here at St. Andrew's; in politics, Colonel John Macdonell, M.P., first Speaker of the House of Assembly, 1792; in war, Colonel Macdonell, A.D.C. to General Sir Isaac Brock, the hero of Queenston Heights; in education and religion, the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell, first Bishop of Ontario; in diplomacy, Hugh Macdonell, consul-general in Algiers. But enough; these and the Colonel Chisholms, the Colonel Frasers, the Sandfield Macdonalds, and a host of others, have their names written on the pages of Canadian history for all to read.³²

The society of Glengarry was rapidly maturing in the 1820s; the log cabins of the original settlers had almost completely disappeared and were replaced by frame, or occasionally brick, structures. Properties were being improved or enlarged; those not wishing to remain in agriculture were seeking opportunities elsewhere. By 1824 there were 7,084 people in Glengarry alone.³³ This had increased to 10,333 by 1831;³⁴ coach roads, though not always providing comfortable rides, were common, and informed discussion on public issues in Upper Canadian society was quite noticeable.

As one might expect from the foregoing the Macdonells were the most prominent of all the Glengarry settlers. "Of the members elected to the Assembly from Glengarry from 1791 to 1840, all were connected either by blood or marriage with the Macdonells who came to America on the *Pearl* in 1773, except Alexander McMartin and John Cameron."

Generally, it appears that the Highland Catholics accepted the existing political situation partly out of self-interest, partly from deference to those in authority. If any of them thought along radical lines there is little evidence to suggest that they so acted. Bishop Macdonell even cautioned those of his followers who supported the Reformers instead of Lieutenant-Governor Bond Head.³⁵ For such loyalty to established authority he was praised by the Orange Order although he also had his differences with members of that body.³⁶ The same loyalty was given to the government during William Lyon MacKenzie's efforts towards abrupt changes in the political system. Generally, he reflected the views of his people. They and their ancestors had supported British institutions and causes at Quebec in 1759, during the American Revolution and in the War of 1812. They were not about to change drastically for William Lyon MacKenzie.

The expansion of the settlement was steady, without dramatic changes. The decade between 1841 and 1851 represented the period of fastest growth, for the population rose from 12,546 to 17,596.³⁷ The highest population figure in the history of the district was reached in 1891 with 22,447. Thereafter there was a slight decline in each decade as out-migration continued to other parts of Ontario and the western provinces.³⁸ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the population

was heavily Scottish and approximately 50% Catholic, the latter figure increasing throughout the twentieth century.³⁹

The value of farm produce had increased by mid-century to the point where it was estimated at \$4,006,952 in 1861, with the value of livestock at \$660,548.⁴⁰ This expansionist trend continued through to the last decade of the century, but with increasing farm mechanization and a diminished demand for such skills as blacksmithing and carriage-making, the non-farm dweller dependent on such trades moved elsewhere. Out-migration had been a fact of life with the Glengarry Scots almost from the beginning. As in Nova Scotia, the attractions of family life were not irresistible to people with a marginal agricultural background. Moreover, the district had developed into a comfortable routine; like others in Canada West they had adapted to the Act of Union and responsible government, though not entirely without complaints. Through a combination of older cultural traits and adaptation to New World conditions, these Catholic Highlanders had fashioned their own society.

There are certain differences, as well as similarities, to be noted in the conditions of the Highland Catholics in Prince Edward Island, even in a brief treatment of their story. The first significant settlement began with the Glenaladale pioneers in 1772, though some Highlanders, "Scots by Montgomery," and others, had come earlier.⁴¹ As in the Glengarry district the name of one priest stands out strongly in memory: this was Reverend Angus MacEachern, who arrived in 1790 and who remained to become the first Bishop of Charlottetown. During the pioneer period he, more than any other, provided leadership and spiritual guidance to the Highland Catholics of Prince Edward Island and eastern Nova Scotia. His tenure corresponds roughly to that of Bishop Macdonell in Glengarry;⁴² their contributions were similar, for they firmly established both Catholicism and an ethnic influence in their respective areas.

Organized by Captain John Macdonald, the Laird of Glenaladale, a group of 210 Highlanders left Scotland aboard the ship *Alexander* on May 1, 1772, intending to improve their situation on the Island of St. John. Captain Macdonald's attention had been drawn to the island by letters received from its earliest Scottish settlers, a party of disbanded Fraser Highlanders who had settled there after the fall of Quebec.⁴³ Approximately 100 of the group came from Uist, while the others, among whom were many Macdonalds, came from the mainland of Scotland.⁴⁴ Their departure differed from the majority, for they left for religious⁴⁵ as well as economic reasons. Settling initially at an area where Captain Macdonald had originally purchased lands, they gave it the name of Scotch Fort. With them was the Reverend James Macdonald, a cousin of Captain John, who had chosen to accompany his countrymen; he spoke Gaelic, English, Italian and French, having learned the last two languages while studying in Rome. His ability in French was appreciated by the Acadian families already on the island and living around Malpeque.⁴⁶ Father Macdonald remained there as a missionary with the Acadians and Highlanders until

his death in 1785. Also with the immigrants was Doctor Roderick Macdonald, another cousin of Captain John.

Since Captain John Macdonald owned the lands and was willing only to lease them, some of the settlers left Scotch Fort⁴⁷ within the first few years in an attempt to get land of their own in Cape Breton or elsewhere.⁴⁸ In this way, settlement was dispersed throughout the island with the original settlement, Scotch Fort, becoming a distributing depot. Those who came in the 1790s and early 1800s tended to move to other parts of the island, particularly the area now known as King's County. By the mid-nineteenth century the Scottish-born were heavily concentrated in western and southeastern Queen's County and widely scattered in King's and Prince as well.⁴⁹ Some of the early settlers were recruited for the British Army during the Revolutionary War and in conjunction with a body of Nova Scotia Highlanders, those recruited became the Second Battalion of the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment.⁵⁰ Another well-known group of settlers who came together were those brought over by Lord Selkirk in 1803, settling at Orwell Bay.

The population expanded⁵¹ relatively slowly during the final decades of the eighteenth century, but through natural increase and immigration it increased quite rapidly in the first three decades of the nineteenth.⁵² People on the island had been exporting agricultural goods since the 1790s and their export figures rose dramatically by the 1820s, with significant amounts of oats and potatoes. During the same period the occupied and improved acreage increased considerably, as did the number of livestock.⁵³ Generally, such expansion continued in most categories until the early 1880s;⁵⁴ it was about this time also that the highest population of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries was recorded.⁵⁵ Like their Highland brethren in Nova Scotia, these Islanders were not particularly noted for being, as a group, good farmers. Many combined fishing or lumbering with their agricultural endeavours, often to the detriment of the last-named operation. The routine and drudgery of nineteenth century farming operations appeared to have little appeal when contrasted with the greater freedom to be found in other occupations. Undoubtedly, this was a factor in the high rate of out-migration later in the century; the family farms could accommodate only a fairly fixed population and many people had little desire to remain in the occupation anyway.

As in Glengarry and eastern Nova Scotia, it was the clergy who provided the initial leadership in education. During 1831, in an effort to supply native clergy, Bishop MacEachern used his house as a college. Having been made Bishop of Charlottetown in 1829, hereby gaining greater independence from the Bishop of Quebec,⁵⁶ he was anxious to meet in his way one of his most pressing needs. This venture also marked the beginning of what may be termed higher education in Prince Edward Island. This first institution, Saint Andrew's, was later replaced by St. Dunstan's, founded by Reverend Bernard Macdonald, the first native

Islander to be ordained to the priesthood, and the successor of Bishop MacEachern in 1835.⁵⁷ It was Bishop Macdonald, and Bishop Peter MacIntyre who succeeded him, who bore the responsibility of gaining an educational system suitable to the Catholic population. Scores of priests, many of them descendants of Highland Catholics, received their early training in the above-named institutions and went on to service in other parts of Canada and the United States.⁵⁸ By mid-century the Catholics were receiving the guidance of some of their native clergy and though they were drawn into local religious feuds of the period they were apparently not singled out for criticism as Highland Catholics. Here, as elsewhere, their approach was moderate. However, in issues involving the entire Catholic population, such as separate schools, they generally supported their fellow non-Scottish Catholics. At Confederation, when the school issue was involved, they followed the lead of their bishop and gave it their support through the Assembly.

The evidence of a Catholic tradition is stronger in Nova Scotia than in the other regions. Catholics were present in greater numbers and they occupied larger regions; as in Glengarry and Prince Edward Island, they remained relatively isolated for a long period of time and this enabled them to retain their traditions with some degree of strength.

Economic hardship in Scotland provided the basic motivation for emigration, though some of the early settlers had, like those in Glengarry, a background of military service in British regiments during the American Revolution. One scholar attributes this support of the monarchy to the tenant relationship: "The loyalty of the Highlander in America to the Crown was a logical extension of his unquestioning obedience to his immediate landlord."⁵⁹ It is possible that the close association between the tacksmen and the crofters led to an assumption of obedience which was, upon the disintegration of the clan system, transferred to others in authority. There were several heavy waves in the tides of Scottish immigration, the first large permanent settlement arriving at Pictou aboard the *Hector* in 1773.⁶⁰ The pre-Revolutionary emigration⁶¹ was affected by the events of 1775-1783 in the American colonies, but much the same set of causes was important during the period 1783-1803, which marks another phase. The year 1803 saw the first serious government effort to regulate the emigrant trade to North America.⁶² Generally, those who left during this period were not "the wretched helpless exodus that was to come in the next century." They were of varying trades and occupations, and some of them travelled unassisted.⁶³ During the period 1803-1815 there were more who left Scotland through lack of alternatives than in the preceding decades of the eighteenth century. As the "clearances" intensified, more Scots found themselves forced to emigrate. Following the smashing of Napoleon's delusions at Waterloo, many Highlanders returned home to find glens filled with the bleating of sheep but empty of human voices. Evictions, over-population and widespread economic distress in Britain after 1815 brought on the final and heaviest phase of Scottish emigration

to Nova Scotia. This was the last, and most distressing, major influx of population. Thousands of Scots, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, managed, without government assistance, to survive the "coffin ships," disease and poverty, and to establish themselves in a new land. The immigration of this period shaped the character of Cape Breton.

The great influx of Scottish immigrants (said by some authorities to have exceeded 25,000 souls), gave quite a new complexion to the population of Cape Breton . . . The island is now decidedly "Scotch," with every probability of its continuing so to the end of time.⁶⁴

Population moved from Pictou eastward and thus Cape Breton was the last to be settled. While much of the island was still in the pioneer phase, Pictou was leading in the struggle for educational and political reforms. Heavily Presbyterian, and situated closer to Truro and Halifax, Pictou was the first Scottish community to be influenced by the stronger Anglo-Saxon customs. As a result, Pictou County changed more quickly, and its cultural traditions, particularly the use of Gaelic, were transformed or weakened. The language lasted longer in Antigonish, and maintained a strong foothold in Cape Breton well into the twentieth century.⁶⁵ By mid-nineteenth century the character of the eastern part of the province was definitely Scottish and Nova Scotian in flavour.

As an ethnic group the Highland Catholics in Nova Scotia had characteristics peculiar to themselves and these remained largely unchanged in the new environment for well over a century. Their attitudes on education, their loyalty to the state, to institutions, to individuals, their conception of the role of religion, the maintenance of a folk culture and a strong attachment to their native soil — all these lived on with them and were reinforced in eastern Nova Scotia. Nor did they forget the old: "In pride of origin Nova Scotia Scots are equalled, if that is possible, only by the Norsemen overseas."⁶⁶ In time they came to be recognized on their own merits and weaknesses, through a composition of ethnic and regional traits, as Nova Scotians of Scottish descent. A Nova Scotia society was maturing by the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century. "Nova Scotians as such were emerging, rubbing the sleep out of their eyes and facing their own problems, in various ways, but with discernment and energy. They were conscious that they were Nova Scotians."⁶⁷ "Between 1789 and 1826, when the *Acadian Recorder* began its all-too-brief career, a new generation had grown up, proud of their province and the things that were theirs by right of birth."⁶⁸

The year 1791 marked the arrival of the first large number of Highland Catholics in Nova Scotia. They came largely from the Western Isles and landed in Pictou in September of that year, practically destitute. Forced out by economic conditions in Scotland, their initial period in the province did not constitute much of an improvement:

But the emigrants landed at Pictou in September practically penniless and though that small community, itself containing only seven hundred individuals, made an effort to support the newcomers, eventually it was necessary to appeal for aid to the colonial government.⁶⁹

They were treated as well as conditions would warrant by the people of Pictou, few of whom had any surplus of food to dispense. Upon the urging of Bishop Angus MacEachern of Prince Edward Island, many of them moved eastward.⁷⁰ Reverend James McGregor, an Anti-Burgher cleric and the only minister in the Pictou district, exhorted his people to treat the newcomers with kindness, but he was disturbed by some of their values and his comments illustrate certain differences in attitudes between the Catholics and the Presbyterians:

Much of their time was spent in naughty diversions, jestings which are not convenient nor decent, in telling extravagant stories of miracles done by priests, and absurd tales about ghosts, witches, fairies, etc. The minds of the Protestant Highlanders, being partly tinctured with these superstitions before the arrival of the Roman Catholics, were less prepared to resist their influence than the minds of more reasonable and sceptical Christians. They had been pretty much weaned from the remains which the first settlers brought from Scotland, but we have not got wholly over these bad lessons.⁷¹

Apparently, denominational differences were not yet strong enough to erase the Highland predilection for ghost stories and other elements of their folk culture.⁷²

The first Scottish settlers in Antigonish County came in 1784⁷³ as a result of British imperial policy, and land grants were awarded on both sides of Antigonish harbour, as well as at the eastern end of the present town boundaries. Included in this group, which also had a military background, were a number of English and Irish settlers. The first Highland settler in the area was Angus MacDonald, who acquired 500 acres of land at Arisaig. He had earlier taken up a grant at Merigomish, but fear of the Indians caused him to return there. The honour of being the first permanent settler on the gulf shore goes to John Ban Gillies, who was followed by McAra and former members of the 82nd Highland Regiment.⁷⁴ The last-named settled along the shore and established permanent settlements to which they gave such names as Knoydart, Moidart and Arisaig.⁷⁵ Some had moved eastward from Pictou to settle with their fellow Catholics. By 1820 there was a string of small scattered settlements, populated by Scots from the western Highlands and the Isles, all along the Gulf Shore from Merigomish to Ballantyne's Cove on the eastern side of Cape George. Many came from Barra and they worked at both farming and fishing in their new homes. The vast majority were Catholics who had first landed at Pictou before moving eastward. Subsequent patterns of settlement naturally turned toward the inland parts of the district where initially they

settled along the rivers and rich intervals. By 1817, and certainly by 1820, settlement patterns were following those already laid out.⁷⁶ Like their pioneer countrymen elsewhere in British North America, they faced the formidable task of clearing the forests and establishing homes and though they had very little experience in cutting trees, they seemed to do so with a vengeance in the new environment.

Dorchester Village (Antigonish) developed as the principal trading town of the county because of its central location. It was

one of the prettiest villages in the eastern section of Nova Scotia It has but one principal street . . . and contains about 45 dwelling houses, exclusive of other buildings. The Court House is built on a hill of moderate ascent, and commands a pleasing view of the whole village The Roman Catholic chapel . . . is by much the largest and most respectable looking building in the County . . . not at all disproportioned to the extent of the congregation There is also in the centre of this village a small Presbyterian meeting-house.⁷⁷

By 1827 the total population of Nova Scotia was estimated at 142,548, with 123,848 on the mainland and 18,700 in Cape Breton, giving an increase of 41,795 on the mainland since 1817. Sydney (Antigonish-Guysborough) had increased from 6,991 to 12,760 during the decade.⁷⁸ There were also marked increases in cultivated acreage, in the production of potatoes, hay, wheat and other grains, and in livestock.⁷⁹

Contemporary accounts show certain similarities to other regions populated by Highlanders:

Gaelic is the language of this part of the country – I Mean, it is that tongue which you hear in every cottage, and that which strikes the ear on passing through the street of each little village.

Scotch, both from the High and Lowlands, are here [Sherbrooke]⁸⁰ found without intermixture: the former make but indifferent farmers: accustomed to a hard and penurious mode of life, they are too easily satisfied with the bare existence that even indolence can procure in this country In the course of another generation, a very different order of things will prevail, for the sons of these Highlanders, more accustomed to think for and depend upon themselves, and instructed by an occasional excursion to other districts, appear to be a more promising race and to inherit but little of the apathy generally exhibited by their fathers.⁸¹

This apparent lack of ambition among Highlanders was referred to on other occasions but always in the context of agriculture, in which they had no tradition. Upon leaving the farm to compete in other activities they acquitted themselves at least as well as others. There was less criticism of this nature in reference to the Highland farmers of Pictou County, thus suggesting that the hybrid of Highland Presbyterians and Lowlanders were more ambitious. Writing in the late 1820s Haliburton commented:

The Highlanders are not so advantageous a class of settlers as their Lowland neighbours. Their wants are comparatively few, and their ambition is chiefly limited to the acquirement of the mere necessities of life. If in some instances they extend their clearings they derive not so much advantage from them as others. Their previous habits have fitted them better for the management of stock than the cultivation of the soil, and they are consequently more attached to it The Lowlanders, on the contrary, to the frugality and interest of the Highlanders, add a spirit of persevering diligence, a constant desire of improvement, and a superior system of agriculture which renders them a valuable acquisition to the Province.⁸²

While there is justification for such an assessment it must be kept in mind that the habits of the Highlanders were rooted in centuries of tradition. Nor were they to be generally disturbed by appeals to efficiency and progress; this is particularly true of the Catholic Highlander, who was taught that his reward would come eventually. Soon after settlement they were providing for their necessities and for the majority this was sufficient. Never having known prosperity, they did not miss it; thus, they were good pioneers.

There are obvious and understandable differences to be noted between Pictou, with its Presbyterian majority, and Antigonish, with its predominant Catholic population. But the Scottish fact also promoted tolerance in each area.

At the hospitable board of R.N. Henry, Esq., the then postmaster of Antigonish, I met four men, each differing in training, professional character, but each in his own time sufficiently remarkable to make his society very attractive. These were Dr. Fraser, who became Catholic Bishop of the Diocese, Dr. MacDonald, then in full enjoyment of a large country practice, the Rev. Thomas Trotter, Presbyterian pastor of the village congregation, and our old friend, Sandy MacDougall. They were all Scotchmen or of Scotch descent, were fast friends and cronies. Each would stand up for his own Church or his own snuff box, but they would all stand up for Scotland and fight to prove a thistle more fragrant than a rose. I would have given a trifle to have seen and heard our four old friends once more chaffing each other in Latin, English, Greek and Gaelic. With these four men I remained on terms of intimacy and friendship while they lived. Nothing impressed me so much as to hear questions of philosophy, of practical or abstract science or of European politics, discussed in the County of Sydney with the keenest of logic and fullness of information scarcely met with in the capital.⁸³

The above words of Joseph Howe are revealing particularly with regard to the Catholic Bishop Fraser and the Presbyterian cleric, Reverend Thomas Trotter. This toleration of each other's views was not unusual and has also

been noted with the Catholic Highlanders and Presbyterians in Prince Edward Island and Glengarry.

With regard to education, the Scottish Catholics followed the lead of their Presbyterian brethren. Pictou Academy received its charter in 1816 through the leadership of Reverend Thomas McCulloch who became the first Principal of Dalhousie University in 1838. St. Andrew's Grammar School was founded in 1838 by Reverend C.F. MacKinnon, the same man who established St. Francis Xavier University for his Scottish constituents in 1853.

During the peak immigration years of the 1820s, patterns of settlement were established and there were very few who would willingly have exchanged their place for a return to Scotland. Largely Gaelic-speaking, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian, they were laying the basis for a social pattern that lasted until World War II. Their fondness for entertainment changed little in the ocean crossing: "I had to try to abolish dancing and drunkenness, which things the people had been accustomed to. Dancing is rarer now and there is less drunkenness."⁸⁴ Religion would remain a very important part of their social pattern; it was a factor that grew stronger with the Highland Catholics during the nineteenth century. Whether or not the relative isolation sustained this view is worthy of consideration. Certainly, it permitted those of Highland descent to retain their language and customs long after both were weakening on the mainland.

Victoria County, which received its name in 1851, had a majority of Scottish Presbyterians, although the first permanent Scottish settlers there were Catholics from the Isle of Barra who came via Pictou shortly after 1800.⁸⁵ Those from certain districts and of similar religious persuasion tended to settle together and it became possible to distinguish many origins by accent. Because of this pattern of settlement it was somewhat easier for contemporaries to make comparisons:

The Highland Scotch, unless intermixed with other settlers, are not only careless, in many particulars, of cleanliness within their houses, but are also regardless of neatness and convenience in their agricultural implements and arrangements. All this arises from the force of habit, and the long prevalence of the make-shift system; for whenever a Scotch Highlander is planted among a more promiscuous population, no one is more anxious than he to rival the more respectable establishment of his neighbour.

The Scotch settlers from the Lowland countries, although they generally know much better, yet remain, from a determination first to accumulate property, for some years regardless of comfort or convenience in their dwellings; but they at last build respectable houses, and enjoy the fruits of their industry.⁸⁶

The same author adds:

Few people, however, find themselves sooner at ease than the

Highland Scotch . . . They acquire what they consider an independence in a few years . . . I have observed, that wherever the Highlanders form distinct settlements, their habits, their system of husbandry, disregard for comfort in their houses, their ancient hospitable customs, and their language, undergo no sensible change. They frequently pass their winter evenings reciting traditional poems in Gaelic, which have been transmitted to them by their forefathers . . . At their weddings, and often at their dances, and even at their militia musters, the piper is considered indispensable.⁸⁷

Thus, if the work ethic and progress are to be the historical standards, the Catholic Highlander, at least in agriculture, must be considered a failure. But if one is to judge by the fulfilment of aspirations and the retention of values, they were highly successful. Since their ambitions were few, it is hardly fair to berate them for a lack of ambition. And when the barriers of isolation were broken they showed themselves equal to any intellectual challenge, despite a barren background. Satisfied with little, many preferred not to extend themselves, but as the nineteenth century moved onward they moved with it, though retaining many of their peculiar ethnic, cultural and regional characteristics.

By 1843 the heaviest Scottish immigration was ending in Nova Scotia, and a few people were leaving the province for other parts of Canada, Newfoundland and the United States. The economy was expanding steadily.⁸⁸ Farming was easily the major occupation and in many coastal areas it was combined with fishing. Agricultural societies had been formed but they were carried on by a few dedicated individuals with most of the Highlanders giving only intermittent support.⁸⁹ The number of schools and students was increasing but government support and direction was clearly insufficient.⁹⁰ In eastern Nova Scotia, as in Glengarry and Prince Edward Island, the Catholic Highlanders had established traditions recognized, by mid-century, as being different from those of their fellow countrymen.

The evidence indicates that religion was the most important single factor influencing the lives of these people, for it permeated their homes as well as their churches. Most of their early clergy were educated at the Scots College in Paris or the Royal Scots College in Valladolid, Spain. It was not until the 1820s and 1830s that the Catholic Highlanders began to have native sons as priests. These clergy, often the best educated men in the district, played a role similar to that of the *curé* in rural Quebec. They were consulted on a great variety of matters touching the daily lives of the people and they took the lead in such important areas as education. Thus, they commanded respect and their views were rarely ignored. Usually Gaelic-speaking and deeply concerned for their people, they won and retained their staunch support. Once that support was given, it was rarely changed and the highest ambition of many Catholic families was to have a

son study for the priesthood. The status attached to this has been especially noticeable in Cape Breton, where an unusually high number of priests have had their origin. In addition to his role in the community the priest obviously had the great powers of his ministry, the Mass, the pulpit and the confessional, all grounded in the deep faith of the people.⁹¹ And at the last moment of mortal existence it was the priest who directed the steps of the dying to Heaven. The actions of these men, admirable as they were, also reflected their personalities which were quite often remote and severe. Their views on temperance were closely allied to those of the strictest Presbyterian cleric, and the priests executed their charge with vigour.

A pastoral visit to a household was an occasion of special note; here, the visitor would be nervously entertained by the head of the household and a sense of relief was often felt upon his departure. Since leisure activities were frowned on by some pastors, they tried to discourage fiddling and dancing, which were often associated with drinking and fighting. Despite their position of prestige, the priests were never very successful in these matters for they were trying to change an intrinsic cultural tradition. The approach of some clerics in matters of temperance and entertainment was extremely rigid.

The church structure was usually the most eye-catching building in the community and would appear to set the tone for the daily routine of families, which was interspersed with religious devotions. There would be morning and evening prayer, mealtime blessings, and the family rosary during the weeks of Lent and Advent. On the walls of the house would hang a number of religious pictures, a crucifix, and occasionally a piece of palm. In some homes the use of holy water for protection during times of danger, such as thunder storms, was common. Lending a physical presence and support to the church structure was the "glebe," the dwelling of the priest, usually presided over by a devout and discreet Catholic housekeeper. The "glebe" reinforced the religious atmosphere and kept people mindful of where they were.

The most important events of the community were given "from the altar," usually announced by the pastor before the sermon. Few ever dared to confront the priest, for public support would not be forthcoming and the folklore contains stories of misfortune concerning those who contradicted this part of the social mores.

There were similarities and differences between the priest and the minister, with the most obvious being the fact of one being a celibate and the other usually a married man. The greatest difference was in leadership, which the minister came to share through his body of elders. The wardens of the Catholic parish went along with the will of the priest who was accountable only to his bishop. He was considerably more secure in his position and the Catholic communities acted accordingly. Another important area of difference was in language; the Catholic Highlanders and their clergy retained the Gaelic much longer. This delayed Anglicization and enabled a longer retention of cultural traditions, but it was also a

handicap to economic and social mobility for some people. Generally, Catholic Highlanders were devout in their religious practices and gave strong loyalty to their church and clergy.

In education, the Scots have made noteworthy contributions to Canada and here the Highland Catholics appear to have followed the lead established by their Presbyterian brethren. It was the Catholic Bishops, Macdonell, MacEachern and MacKinnon, who supplied leadership in Glenarry, Prince Edward Island and eastern Nova Scotia.⁹² They were succeeded by clergy who followed in their tradition. The institutions established sent hundreds of clergy, teachers, lawyers and other professional people to all parts of Canada and there is not a Canadian province which has not benefitted from them. This, really, has been the essence of their contribution to the Canadian mosaic. With the Catholic Highlanders, education was necessary to provide priests and teachers, as well as upward mobility in an English-speaking society. The emphasis on the classical system, and the education of the "whole man" underlay what they believed. St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia became the best known institution of the Catholic Highlanders and its administration and faculty still retain a number whose first language was Gaelic.

With regard to the economic sphere, the most distinctive feature of the Catholic Highlanders, which is obvious from the foregoing comments on agriculture, is that they have never fully adopted the "work ethic." In areas where they had to compete with other groups they performed very well but, when left to themselves, they worked only as hard as necessary and left themselves time to enjoy their music, their ceilidhs, and their conversation. Hence, they have often been charged with laziness, at least in eastern Nova Scotia. And while there is some truth in this charge, their scale of values must be kept in mind. The time to enjoy a good conversation with a friend or neighbour, the time to attend a "wake" or wedding, the time for fishing or hunting, were all of high priority in their daily lives. In this respect they were "people-oriented" and therefore anticipated the revolt against the dominance of technological control in our times.

Politically, two factors stand out in their tradition, one following from the other. The most important is that of loyalty; once given to a party or an individual, only an event of catastrophic proportions could shake it. Such loyalty in turn led to conservatism in voting behaviour which has not always worked to their benefit, for the politician could usually count on their support regardless of his record. "I think the Highland people are more traditional. I mean they are more apt to vote the way their parents would."⁹³ "When the family was for one party they didn't want to be turncoats, so they all voted for the one party."⁹⁴ At least some of the Scot's adaptability to any new environment arose from his willingness to give his loyalty to his superiors, in every phase of endeavour. It is far more noticeable among Catholic Highlanders, however, than among their Presbyterian countrymen.⁹⁵ With these people politics may be described as a secular religion, for it has enabled them to have a consistent interest and

has also provided an opportunity for identification and emotional release. When fellow Highlanders, and particularly Catholic Highlanders, were involved in an election contest, the interest and identification were especially strong:

A land of hospitality,
A land of song and story.
A land where everyone you see
Is either Grit or Tory.⁹⁶

Men such as John Sandfield Macdonald of Glengarry and Angus L. Macdonald of Nova Scotia were held in esteem not only for their political views but also because they were Catholic Highlanders and could command support on that basis. The concept of loyalty is most important in any attempt to understand their political behaviour.

Culturally, the evidence indicates that the Catholic Highlanders retained their customs and language longer than their Protestant countrymen. One reason for this is that the Presbyterians turned much more quickly to the use of English in their religious service and Bible reading. However, there has been a steady diminution in the number of those speaking Gaelic in all districts. Out-migration, the pressures of an English-speaking society, and the lack of efforts made to retain the language on the part of the people themselves, are the contributing factors in this decline. Presently, those speaking Gaelic are found largely in a few rural areas and they are predominantly over fifty years of age.⁹⁷

The customs and traditions, especially in music, have lived on with the Catholic Highlanders; in addition to well-known Highland gatherings such as Maxville and Antigonish, there are others held in Cape Breton and eastern Ontario. Outdoor Scottish concerts featuring Scottish violin selections and Gaelic singing have become highly popular within the last decade in these areas also. Former residents flock home by the thousands from other parts of Canada and the Eastern United States during July and August in order to attend such gatherings. The pipe bands, the violin music and the step-dancing are major attractions for these "pariah" people and tourists. Although efforts are being made to revive the Gaelic, it is probably too late. Other cultural activities such as story-telling and certain Scottish sports attractions enjoy but limited participation. The art of story-telling was dealt its final blow through television and the cliché-ridden conversation of people everywhere reflects their lack of imagination.⁹⁸

In the retention of certain cultural traditions the Highland Catholics have shown their strong desire to remain their own people. Though they have all but lost their language, they have not lost their appreciation of other aspects of their culture, and they especially resent being classified as Anglo-Saxons, a term often applied to them by government employees and others for the sake of convenience. There has been a long association between the Scottish Catholics of the three major areas. Scottish Catholic

students from the Glengarry district have often attended St. Francis Xavier University; the Highland gatherings in Glengarry have been attended and competed in by athletes and pipers from Antigonish, all of whom claim that they feel "so much at home" in Glengarry. Scottish Catholic relations between Prince Edward Island and the Diocese of Antigonish have, beginning with Bishop Angus MacEachern, been long and close.

The central theme of their contribution to Canada has been the fact that they have quietly resisted homogenization. Their loyalty has been strong and quickly given, but they want to be recognized for who they are. Their view of Canada is shaped by their origin and by the region in which they live; the constant interplay between the federal and local levels of government and the thousands who have migrated to all parts of Canada have kept the views of these people nationally attuned. Through the federal system and the prism of party loyalties their attention has been drawn to the centre of power; the love of their cultural traditions and the freedom to enjoy them has kept these alive at the regional level. These are the freedoms all Canadians must enjoy.

NOTES

1. For some religious differences in Scotland, see C. MacKenzie, *Catholicism and Scotland* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1936), p. 28; W. Notestein, *The Scot in History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947); J.H. Burton, *The History of Scotland*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Blackwood 1873), vii.
2. W. Gregg, *Short History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto: Robinson, 1892); A. MacLean, *The Story of the Kirk in Nova Scotia* (Pictou: Pictou Advocate, 1911).
3. All of those calling themselves Presbyterians.
4. At this point it should be stressed that the linkage between Scots and religion has greater meaning and accuracy when applied to the post-Reformation period, to Presbyterianism, and largely to the Lowland region and parts of the Highlands. It was the Presbyterianism propagated by John Knox that did so much to create the disciplined Scot who contributed so greatly to the corporate life of Britain and Canada. See J. Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 290.
5. For the remainder of the paper the term Catholic Highlander will be used.
6. J.A. Macdonell, *Sketches Illustrating the Early History of Glengarry in Canada* (Montreal: Foster, Brown, 1893), p. 69.
7. Approximately 1462 Highlanders moved in 1784 to settle the townships of Lancaster, Charlottenberg, Cornwall, Osnabruck and Williamsburg.