

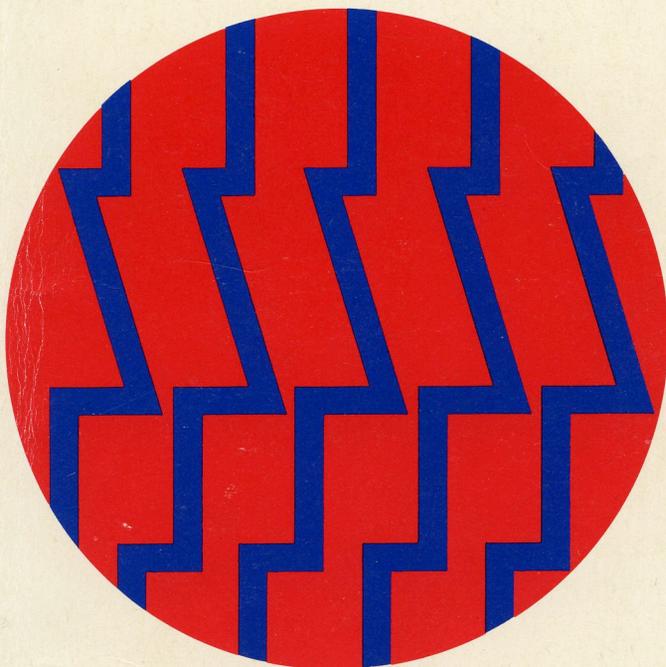
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**PROFILES  
OF  
CANADIAN  
EDUCATORS**



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*Chapter 2* **THOMAS McCULLOCH  
ADVOCATE OF NON-SECTARIAN  
EDUCATION**

**by W. B. Hamilton**

*Dr. Thomas McCulloch, 1776-1843*

A few miles southwest of Glasgow in the parish of Neilston, Renfrewshire, lies the tiny hamlet of Ferenze. Here in 1776 Thomas McCulloch was born the son of Michael McCulloch, master block printer, and his wife Elizabeth Neilson. Little is known of the early years of his life. Following the usual routine of a Scottish parish school, he entered Glasgow University where he studied both arts and medicine. Although he completed course requirements McCulloch did not take his degree; instead he entered the Divinity Hall at Whitburn in West Lothian. Graduating in 1799, he was licensed to preach by Kilmarnock Presbytery of the Secessionist Church.\* A call was extended by the congregation at Stewarton, Ayrshire, and McCulloch was ordained and inducted on June 13, 1799. After four years in this location the young minister (by this time married to Isabella Walker, daughter of Rev. David Walker of Pollakshaws) volunteered for overseas missionary service and was named to Prince Edward Island. In August of 1803 the McCulloch family sailed for their mission field. They landed at Pictou, Nova Scotia, in early November. Fate then intervened and the family was persuaded, because of the lateness of the season, to remain in Pictou for the winter. This decision was to determine their destiny for thirty-five years.

McCulloch was extended an official call by the local Secessionist congregation and inducted into what later became First Presbyterian Church on June 6, 1804. Within a short space of time his learning, preaching and medical knowledge made him known far beyond the confines of Pictou. As McCulloch made his pastoral rounds, the great shortage of clergymen became increasingly evident. He then came up with the obvious solution to the problem—train a native ministry—and immediately proposed a plan for an educational institution aimed at this objective. Lack of both funds and facilities were no deterrents; his first school was a simple log cabin erected near his home. When this crude building was

burned, probably at the hand of an incendiary, a more substantial structure was erected, which served for a number of years as a combined elementary and grammar school.

By the Nova Scotia Grammar School Act of 1811 the school qualified for an annual grant of £150 per year. By this time McCulloch the teacher was beginning to attract widespread attention, and students were coming to Pictou from all sections of the province and beyond. Although the grammar school was proving successful, McCulloch's main ambition to establish an academy or college remained unfulfilled. The need was becoming all the more pressing as graduates of the grammar school, barred by restrictive statutes from attending King's College, (see p. 000) were left with Scottish or American institutions as their only alternatives. In addition, McCulloch's ambitions were broadening, and what was originally visualized as a theological school was enlarged to become an institution devoted to the liberal arts.

Shortly an educational society was formed to raise funds for this objective. Money was subscribed and in 1815 a petition forwarded to the legislature requesting incorporation of an academy. The bill was at first deferred but came up for debate the following year. At this time it was emphasized by McCulloch that the new academy would provide higher education for persons of every religious denomination. Largely because of the spade work of Edward Mortimer, a wealthy Pictou merchant and local M.L.A., the bill passed the assembly. However, for reasons which will become clear later, the legislative council or "Council of Twelve" amended the bill incorporating Pictou Academy. A clause was inserted which required all trustees to subscribe on oath that they were members of the Church of England or professed the Westminster Confession of Faith. A similar oath was mandatory for all masters or teachers. The strategy was subtle; the council hoped to transform Pictou Academy into a denominational institution, thereby robbing it of the support of the other non-Church of England groups. The council was able to place two additional stumbling blocks in the path of Pictou Academy. First, it refused assent to the request of the assembly to make a permanent annual grant to the new school. The uncertainty engendered by the necessity to apply annually for the grant meant that a financial cloud constantly overshadowed the Academy. Second, by later refusing to permit degree-granting powers, the council hoped a further check might be administered. Nevertheless, for a period of fifteen years (1816-1831) the Academy functioned as a college and upon examination a number of graduates were successful in obtaining degrees from Glasgow University. That this was at all possible may be attributed in large measure to Thomas McCulloch.

In addition to being principal, McCulloch taught logic, moral philosophy, science and theology. He developed a museum, a labo-

ratory and a commendable library. Students flocked to Pictou, and their scarlet gowns (modelled on those of Glasgow) became a common sight in the town. Outside recognition came in 1821 when McCulloch was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Union College, Schenectady, New York. Until 1824 he simultaneously pursued three careers. As principal of Pictou Academy the burden of organizing the new institution fell on his shoulders. He also gave frequent public lectures and demonstrations of scientific apparatus. Secondly, he was appointed by the first Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Nova Scotia as professor of divinity. In 1824 the first graduates in theology were ordained. Lastly, until 1824 he served as minister of the local church. In the midst of these duties McCulloch found time to pursue his two main avocations—writing and natural science.

One measure of his success may be found in the increased tempo of opposition both to McCulloch personally and to Pictou Academy. Further, during the 1820's and early 1830's the issue of financial grants to Pictou Academy became a focal point for the embryonic reform movement in Nova Scotia. On the surface the anti-McCulloch forces triumphed. By 1832 Pictou Academy was reduced to the status of a grammar school, but six years later McCulloch left Pictou to become the first president of Dalhousie College. Taking a longer perspective, it is clear that the forces of reform (both political and educational) unleashed by "the Pictou Academy Question" were not to be submerged by the downfall of one institution. McCulloch had helped lay a foundation for overall political reform and eventually responsible government. McCulloch's tenure at Dalhousie was brief, for he died on September 9, 1843. Yet it was sufficient time to launch what had always been his dream—an open university devoted to the principles of a liberal education. This concept coupled with an unshakable regard for academic excellence were to constitute McCulloch's greatest legacies to Dalhousie.

\*In 1733 the Church of Scotland split into two factions—the "official" church and the Seceders. Later, in 1747, the Seceders became divided (into Burghers and Antiburghers) over the question of the Burgess oath. During the early part of the nineteenth century in Nova Scotia there was co-operation between the two factions. In 1817 the Burgher Presbytery of Truro and the Antiburgher Presbytery of Pictou united to form the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia. Meanwhile the arrival of the "Kirk" supporters of the Church of Scotland was destined to fan the flames of animosity between Seceder and Kirkman. For detail on this question see: Ferguson, C.B., "The Sequicentennial of the First Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Canada", *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. XL, 2 (Summer, 1968), pp 215-21.

## THOMAS McCULLOCH ADVOCATE OF NON-SECTARIAN EDUCATION

### THE RISE AND FALL OF PICTOU ACADEMY

Two events, each with portent for the future, occurred in Nova Scotia during 1803. The first was the proclamation of a series of statutes governing King's College, and it attracted considerable attention. The second, the arrival at Pictou of yet another Scottish immigrant, Thomas McCulloch, went practically unnoticed. The previous year had seen the granting of a royal charter for King's College and a committee was subsequently established to "prepare rules and statutes as nearly conformable to the University of Oxford as local circumstances will permit."<sup>1</sup> Instead of adapting these statutes to meet the needs of Nova Scotians the newly proclaimed regulations followed rigidly the suggested model. Of particular note was the section which read:

No member of the university shall frequent the Romish mass, or the meeting houses of Presbyterians, Baptists or Methodists or the conventicles or places of worship of any dissenters from the Church of England, or whose divine services shall not be performed according to the liturgy of the Church of England, or shall be present at any rebellious or seditious meetings. . . . No degree shall be conferred until the candidate shall have subscribed to the Thirty Nine Articles, and the three articles of the Thirty-Ninth Canon of the Synod held in London in 1603.<sup>2</sup>

In a colony where members of the Church of England were in a minority these restrictive regulations invited challenge.

The man to accept this challenge and initiate the struggle for reform was Thomas McCulloch. Although McCulloch's prime motivation in founding Pictou Academy was ecclesiastical, his educational views were both liberal and non-sectarian. Any school with which he was associated would never impose religious tests upon entrants. This was made clear in the later regulations adopted for Pictou Academy. "The design shall be . . . to provide the means of a liberal education for persons of every religious denomination who wish to improve their minds

by literary studies.”<sup>3</sup> When this viewpoint is contrasted with the exclusiveness portrayed by the statutes of King’s College, the battle lines of the future are apparent.

In spite of acrimonious debate the struggle to maintain Pictou Academy should not be interpreted solely as a conflict between McCulloch and the “Council of Twelve.” It was more than this. McCulloch was a product of the democratic tradition in Scottish education. He had his share of prejudices and foibles, but on one point he never wavered; namely, that education was not something to be prescribed for a chosen few, but should be within the reach of all. McCulloch’s philosophy of education was best enunciated on the occasion of the official opening of the new Academy building in 1818. The keynote of his address entitled “The Nature and Uses of a Liberal Education” was that a liberal education was essential not only for those in learned professions, but for everyone—a doctrine not calculated to win support from the council. McCulloch made it quite clear that he did not object to the traditional classical curriculum (in fact he argued for it). At the same time he asserted that philosophy, mathematics and the natural sciences were subjects best calculated to enable the student to understand man, nature and society.<sup>4</sup> From the beginning, two principles were clearly evident in McCulloch’s thinking: (1) that education must be non-sectarian; and (2) that education must be truly liberal in scope. To these principles he would remain faithful until his death in 1843.

During this period McCulloch became involved in public debate through an article published in the *Acadian Recorder*. In commenting on the call of President Madison of the United States for the establishment of “national seminaries for the purpose of diffusing knowledge”, McCulloch pointed out the possibility that Nova Scotians might become merely “hewers of wood and drawers of water” and that they must resist “the encroachments of a nation which rests its aggrandizements upon the increase of intelligence.” McCulloch posed the essential question: “Is it consistent with the honour and even safety of government that any inhabitant of this province should be forced to seek his education in foreign countries?” The answer, as he saw it, was “the enlargement of our present educational institutions”... [they are] “the only safeguard against the intellectual imperialism of the Americans.”<sup>5</sup> Nationalism in academic circles is not peculiar to the 1960’s and 70’s!

Despite mounting opposition, the work of the Academy went ahead. In the year 1818 the trustees requested Lord Dalhousie to recommend to the legislature the passage of a grant to the new institution. The governor complied and the assembly sanctioned, with only four dissenting votes, a grant of £500.<sup>6</sup> This grant was rejected by the council, and again the trustees appealed to Dalhousie.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most telling point of their memorial concerned the amount of money awarded by the assembly and council to King’s College. This institution received an initial grant of £5000 from the Imperial Government, supplemented by an annual grant of £1250. In addition, it received £500 each year from

the province, while Pictou Academy might or might not receive an annual subsidy. With the establishment of the Academy the previous yearly grant of £150 reverted to the grammar school which now functioned as a separate entity.

In addition to the opposition of the council, McCulloch's plans were thwarted by two further complications. First, the governor of the province, Lord Dalhousie, sought to establish a non-sectarian college in Halifax. Second, a split occurred within Presbyterian ranks which denied McCulloch the full support of his constituency. In 1818 Dalhousie announced that the £11,000 in customs revenue taken at Castine, Maine, during the War of 1812 would be applied toward financing a new educational institution. Thus, a new college "on the same plan and principle as that at Edinburgh was launched."<sup>8</sup>

Of more immediate concern to McCulloch was the opposition which began to mount from within Pictou County. The first clergy to settle in the area belonged to the Secessionist branch of the Presbyterian Church which had separated from the Church of Scotland (see footnote page 1). After the rival Secessionist groups had united to form the Presbyterian Church in Nova Scotia, one of the first acts of their new synod was to appeal to Dr. McCulloch to give instruction in theology to the students who had completed their education under his direction. McCulloch had always separated theological studies from general education; now this duality led to the founding of a theological seminary apart from the Academy. After moving to several locations the seminary, later known as Pinehill Divinity Hall, settled in Halifax. Space was rented in the Academy building for divinity classes. This imparted in the eyes of many a sectarian flavour to the institution, thereby undermining the liberal approach of McCulloch. In the same year, 1817, there arrived in Pictou Rev. Donald F.A. Fraser, minister of the Church of Scotland. Much to the disappointment of the pioneer Presbyterian clergy, Fraser organized a Gaelic Kirk congregation in direct opposition to the United Secessionist Church.<sup>9</sup>

With the establishment of a rival church, the bitterness which had divided Presbyterians in Scotland was transferred to Pictou County. The Kirk supporters, representing the Church of Scotland, rallied to sustain the council's stand concerning Pictou Academy. They regarded McCulloch with the utmost suspicion and were fearful that Pictou Academy might become "perverted" by the Secessionist denomination. More than this, Fraser and his leading supporter Rev. K.J. McKenzie (who arrived in 1824) came directly from Scotland and tended to hold in contempt anything colonial. McCulloch's idea of training "backwoodsmen" for the ministry appeared to them ridiculous. Eventually, McKenzie, much more aggressive than Fraser, was to provide the Kirk party with vigorous leadership.

For the trustees of Pictou Academy and for Thomas McCulloch each session of the legislature during 1820-32 entailed a pilgrimage to Halifax. The refusal of the legislative council to grant a permanent endow-

ment (such as had been accorded King's College) forced an annual application for renewal of the provincial grant. In 1824 a committee of the House of Assembly formed to investigate the question suggested that a fixed "permanent allowance" be made.<sup>10</sup> This recommendation was approved by the assembly only to be vetoed in the legislative council. An annual grant of £400 for the fiscal year 1824-25 was, however, approved by both houses. Later, the council became more obdurate and all financial aid to the Academy was denied. The mere survival of the institution was something of a miracle. Even the rival King's College, with a guaranteed annual income of £500 from the legislature, supplemented by a yearly grant from Imperial funds, was in continual financial difficulty. That the Academy remained alive was largely due to support received from the Pictou area and the boundless energy of Thomas McCulloch in fund raising. During the 1820's approximately £5000 was raised locally, of which £3000 was spent on the building, library and scientific apparatus. Always resourceful, McCulloch developed an ingenious method of supplementing his finances. On February 18, 1830, the following advertisement appeared in the (Halifax) *Acadian Recorder*:

On Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> inst., Dr. McCulloch will commence in the Exchange Coffee House, a course of lectures upon Natural Philosophy in which principles of the science will be illustrated by experiment. The course will contain 20 lectures to be delivered weekly Monday, Wednesday and Friday at eight o'clock in the evening.<sup>11</sup>

This venture in adult education was warmly supported by Joseph Howe in an editorial in the same issue. Later Howe was able to report that "Dr. McCulloch's lectures continue to be numerous and respectably attended." Buoyed by this initial success McCulloch literally "took to the road" as an itinerant lecturer. Usually assisted by one of his sons, he traveled widely in the Maritime colonies—from the Miramichi to the south shore of Nova Scotia and to Prince Edward Island.

Space does not permit chronicling the tortuous "Pictou Academy Question" during the period 1825-32. It will be sufficient to point out that eight bills were passed by the assembly granting financial aid to Pictou Academy only to be rejected by the legislative council.<sup>12</sup> Even the veto of the upper house was by no means unanimous—on several occasions it was sustained solely by the vote of Rev. John Inglis, Bishop of the Church of England. Inevitably the controversy coalesced on a broader issue. Did the upper house have the constitutional right to continually block money bills passed by the lower house? The emerging reform movement was greatly assisted by the founding in 1827 of the newspaper the *Colonial Patriot*. Published in Pictou and edited by Jotham Blanchard, a lawyer and early graduate of Pictou Academy, the

paper gave the movement that which it had lacked previously—a journalist voice. As Pictou Academy fell into eclipse, the *Colonial Patriot*, devoted to the principles of political and educational liberalism, provided a fresh rallying point for the increasingly vocal reform movement. Its critics accused Thomas McCulloch of writing the fiery editorials for which the *Colonial Patriot* became noted; however, there is no evidence that this was the case. Blanchard, when not languishing in jail, was a thorough master of acid prose.

Eventually, the opponents of Thomas McCulloch and Pictou Academy (to the critics, the institution and its principal were synonymous) gained their way. Despite a last ditch effort on the part of McCulloch and his supporters to gain redress from the British government, the institution could no longer exist in the face of mounting debt. In 1832 a bill designed to regulate the affairs of the Academy was introduced in the legislature. It called for a repeal of the tests imposed on trustees by the charter of 1816 (that they be members of the Church of England or subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith). A new board of thirteen trustees was to be established to include seven of the existing trustees (chosen by themselves), five to be named by the governor with the Catholic Bishop as the final appointee. The institution was to be supported by an annual grant of £4000 of which £250 was designated as the principal's salary.<sup>13</sup> Had this bill passed without amendment Pictou Academy might have survived as an institution of higher learning. Its main object was to gain a permanent endowment and to broaden the board of trustees to include all denominations. If these two objectives were obtained, Academy supporters felt that the matter of degree granting powers might be postponed for future action.

This scheme did not meet with the approval of the Kirk faction led by Rev. Kenneth J. McKenzie and a lengthy petition against the legislation was prepared. Briefly stated, objections centered on two major points: (1) Provision was not made for instruction of "the lower branches of education within the four walls of the academy building." McKenzie suggested that £100 or £150 should be allocated to provide a teacher for this purpose. (2) The principal's salary should not be guaranteed in the legislation and thus placed beyond the control of the trustees.<sup>14</sup> McCulloch appeared before the legislature and presented a counter petition. He pointed out that within a few steps of the Academy a grammar school was in operation teaching the "lower branches . . . which Mr. McKenzie appears so eager to introduce into the Academy building." McCulloch indicated his willingness and that of the trustees to superintend the grammar school. He would not agree to the inclusion of these classes within the Academy building as space was already at a premium. McCulloch concluded: "Mr. McKenzie it appears is dissatisfied with that clause of the Bill which relates to my salary. About the Bill I was not consulted; I never saw it; nor did I know that it contained such a clause . . . For the relief of Mr. McKenzie's conscience, I pray your honours to strike the clause from the Bill."<sup>15</sup>

Eventually, amendments to the original bill were passed which met the Kirk objections with one exception; the amount of £250 was retained as the salary for the principal. Unfortunately for the cause of higher education it was decreed that £100 of the grant must go to a teacher for "the lower branches" and that these classes must be taught within the Academy building. The final draft of the bill passed the assembly on March 26, 1832, and the same day the council gave assent.<sup>16</sup> For the first time in nearly a decade the two houses were in agreement on a matter relating to Pictou Academy!

The final act in the destruction of the institution had now begun. McCulloch might have made some temporary arrangements to include grammar school classes within the Academy building, yet he could not hope to accomplish anything after the composition of the new board was announced. Four of the five trustees named by the governor (Rev. K.J. McKenzie, Rev. Donald Fraser, John McRae and David Crichton), instead of being broadly representative of non-conformist denominations were members of the Kirk of Scotland and violently anti-McCulloch. External conflict which had characterized the Academy during the first fifteen years of its existence was now exchanged for internal strife. Meetings of the board became such a verbal battleground that "Dr. McCulloch ceased to attend except when his presence as Principal was a necessity and then waited only long enough to answer questions put to him."<sup>17</sup>

To make matters worse enrolment dropped and funds from tuition fees and personal donations practically ceased. Notwithstanding the preoccupation of the Kirk party with "education for the lower branches", it was obvious that they were not interested in promoting the interests of the Academy so long as McCulloch remained principal. Obviously two conditions were necessary before peace could come to Pictou Academy; namely, the removal of Thomas McCulloch and discontinuance of "the teaching of the higher branches." Since the second would follow the first, McKenzie and his followers concentrated their fire on McCulloch. Their objective was not attained until 1838; however, in the interim the internal conflict brought effective teaching in the Academy to a slow and grinding halt. The legislature, thoroughly tired of the petitions and counter petitions emanating from Pictou, procrastinated and no further action was taken.<sup>18</sup> All the while the Academy sank lower in public esteem. McCulloch lacked his old enthusiasm; financial worry, family tragedy<sup>19</sup> and religious infighting had taken their toll.

## THE MOVE TO DALHOUSIE COLLEGE

Following implementation of the Act of 1832 Pictou Academy existed merely in name. McCulloch drew his salary (guaranteed by legislative enactment and beyond control of the trustees) but internal strife frustrated all plans for development. By 1835 McCulloch felt that he had no alternative "but to lay the state of the Academy before the Governor."<sup>20</sup> In his memorial to Sir Colin Campbell McCulloch emphasized that the institution could no longer operate in a useful manner and that it was his desire to "be enabled to derive a subsistence from the education of youth". The governor urged McCulloch to remain at Pictou since no other "practicable mode of employing [his] services... could be devised".<sup>21</sup> It is obvious that McCulloch was beginning to cast about for a new position. In his own words "If the doors of the Academy be closed, I cannot expect the Government to support me in idleness".<sup>22</sup> As early as 1835 overtures were made to McCulloch to consider the presidency of an independent Dalhousie. In a letter to his son William he wrote "My friends are eager to get me into Dalhousie College and I have said to them—make anything like a reasonable offer and Michael and I [his son Michael assisted him at Pictou Academy and taught the grammar school classes] will carry on the whole system."<sup>23</sup>

In 1837 friends of Pictou Academy made one last attempt to rectify the damage done by the legislation of 1832. A bill was introduced in the assembly to repeal the section of the Act which placed grammar school classes in the Academy building and thereby restored the institution to its former status. Memories of past controversies were too strong and the bill died on the order paper. In 1838 a novel approach to the problem was fostered by S.G.W. Archibald and his son Charles, a graduate of Pictou Academy and close confidant of McCulloch. This took the form of a new bill introduced to "Alter and Amend the Act to Regulate and Support the Pictou Academy."<sup>24</sup> By this legislation £200 of the grant then allotted to Pictou Academy would be transferred to Dalhousie and Thomas McCulloch would be named president of the latter institution.

Predictable criticism of the move came from the Kirk party in Pictou. Typical was the comment of the *Pictou Observer*, journalistic mouthpiece for the anti-McCulloch faction. It called the legislation "the unseasonable iniquity and mischief of Dr. McCulloch... the measure of the debt of execration which he owes this province is as yet untold... the man who has wriggled himself into the Presidency of our metropolitan seminary was not long since its persevering antagonist when he thought his hornet's nest in Pictou in danger from rivalry."<sup>25</sup> Little other opposition developed, for even McCulloch's opponents, outside the Kirk, recognized his unique qualifications for the post. Perhaps then McCulloch can be forgiven his proud boast in a letter to a friend in Scotland, Rev. John Mitchell:

My removal [to Dalhousie] has been accompanied with so many strange circumstances that even individuals who do not often recognize the hand of Providence account it an extraordinary event. God has given me to possess the gate of my enemies, he has covered for me a table in their presence, and made even those who afflicted me come bending to me. Lord Dalhousie, who for the sake of his college, hated me, built it for me. Our Bishop, in the expectation of making it his own, was the principal means of preventing it from going into operation till I had need of it . . . As long as there was the least prospect that the Academy could be carried on I hung by it . . . .<sup>26</sup>

McCulloch's entire professional career had been characterized by one basic aim or objective—that education should be available to all and that no sectarian barriers should be placed in the way. Unfortunately, Dalhousie, while open to all faiths, was shackled at the outset by sectarian strife. The Board of Governors (reduced in membership to three individuals—S.G.W. Archibald, Michael Wallace and Sir Colin Campbell) made two far reaching decisions. An academic appointment, promised by Archibald, was denied Dr. E.A. Crawley, a prominent Baptist cleric. The remaining two appointments on the faculty went to Rev. Alexander Romans and Rev. James MacIntosh—both members of the Church of Scotland.

In this choice it was generally believed that Archibald had been overruled and that Campbell and Wallace, whether from policy or conviction, were determined to keep control of Dalhousie in the hands of the Established Church of Scotland. [Lord Dalhousie had died in the meantime and could not be consulted as to his wishes]. Sir Colin and Wallace were able to disguise their preference for Kirk professors as respect for that nobleman's memory.<sup>27</sup>

Considering the unsettled nature of his earlier life, McCulloch's five years as president of Dalhousie were comparatively uneventful. He seems to have had the co-operation of his two colleagues (despite past religious animosity) and students were loyal as before. In fact, McCulloch's return to the classroom heralded the quietest period of his career. Critics have suggested that he accepted the appointment in anticipation of "a good fight." Certainly his conduct during the five years belies this accusation. Beyond teaching and routine matters of administration he was content to do supply preaching on Sundays and to concentrate in his spare time on scientific interests. During the summer months he made frequent excursions to different parts of the province to gather specimens for his collections. One expedition was to Sable Island—no mean feat for a man whose health was at best precarious. In September, 1843, after returning from one such visit to western Nova Scotia, McCulloch fell ill with influenza and died on September 9 of that year.

## McCULLOCH'S ACHIEVEMENTS

McCulloch's deep involvement in political and religious controversy has tended to overshadow major contributions in other fields. In the midst of his other duties McCulloch found time to pursue two main avocations, writing and natural science. Aside from theological works his most significant accomplishment, the "Stepsure Letters," was first published in 1882 in the columns of the *Acadian Recorder*.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Northrop Frye has written of their significance:

Their place is strategic for anyone interested in the origins and traditions of what is now Canadian culture... McCulloch is the founder of genuine Canadian humour: that is humour which is based on a vision of society and is not merely a series of wisecracks on a single theme. The tone of his humour, quiet, observant, deeply conservative in a human sense, has been the prevailing tone of Canadian humour ever since.<sup>29</sup>

Such is the modern view of the "Stepsure Letters"; however, in the Nova Scotia of their day they were regarded as thinly disguised satire on the foibles and fancies of the people of the day. Certainly, they constituted a graphic and humorous description of Nova Scotians and, as such, attracted considerable attention. Although published under the pseudonym, "Mephibosheth Stepsure, Gent," it was soon common knowledge that McCulloch was the author and from this point in some quarters at least, he was a marked man. Two short novels, *William* and *Melville*, published first as newspaper serials in Edinburgh in 1824 and later in 1826 in regular editions, rounded out his literary career during this period.<sup>30</sup>

McCulloch's keen interest in natural science was destined to have two important side effects. Through time, he became an authority on local ornithology and attracted the attention of John James Audubon. The two men carried on an active correspondence and later, in 1834, Audubon, en route to the United States after a summer spent studying the bird life of Labrador, visited McCulloch.<sup>31</sup> Second, much of McCulloch's interest and enthusiasm in natural science was bequeathed to his students, most notably, J.W. Dawson, who was to cap a career in education with a life-long interest in geology. McCulloch's accomplishments soon won outside recognition. In 1823 he was elected a member of the Natural History Society of Edinburgh University. Later he was given membership in both the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle. In total, with the help of his sons, three major museum collections were completed. The first was presented to the Hunterian Museum of Glasgow University. The second, described by Audubon as "the finest private collection in North America", was offered to the government of Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, the offer was

declined and the collection was sold in London. The third, developed while McCulloch was at Dalhousie, comprised in addition to the usual botanical and zoological items, numerous geological specimens. Upon McCulloch's death it was presented to Dalhousie.

How does one assess McCulloch's many sided career? IN EDUCATION: founder of Pictou Academy and first president of Dalhousie University, advocate of a "liberal education" and outstanding teacher. IN POLITICS: a combatant—not by choice but by necessity, for Pictou Academy became the touchstone of political reform in Nova Scotia. IN LITERATURE: predecessor of Haliburton and initiator of what has been described as "the Canadian School of Humour." IN RELIGION: founder of a theological seminary (later known as Pinehill Divinity Hall now part of the Atlantic School of Theology), prolific writer and theological disputant. IN SCIENCE: one of British North America's first instructors of natural philosophy, ornithologist and inveterate collector of botanical, geological and zoological specimens. Certainly, in his lifetime McCulloch had his critics; no one with such wide ranging interests could avoid stepping on many toes. Since his death commentators on McCulloch's life have followed two extremes. Overzealous supporters have masked his weaknesses in an attempt to canonize, while over-anxious detractors have refused to give McCulloch due credit for his many accomplishments. Obviously the truth lies somewhere between, for any man of substance is disliked as well as admired. McCulloch's mistakes do not in any way lessen his importance in history.

In general, those critical of McCulloch have fallen into the trap of removing the man from the context of early nineteenth century British North America and have judged him from the viewpoint of a more ecumenical age. Was he, as his detractors suggest "a religious bigot?" The 1820's and 30's were decades of rigid religious views and McCulloch's journalistic jousts with Catholics, Baptists and Kirkmen must be seen in that light. Others of lesser ability and even more inflexible views were wont to express themselves in print, as any bibliography of early nineteenth century religious works will testify. To the end he was totally uncompromising in his antipathy toward the Catholic Church. However, with many Protestant groups, most notably the Baptists, he was on amazingly friendly terms. He might differ with them on such matters as infant baptism and theological interpretation, yet this did not nullify ties of friendship with leading Baptist clerics or prevent him from supplying Granville Street Baptist Church in Halifax or campaigning for funds and books for Baptist colleagues while overseas. The Kirk was another matter. A volume would be required to trace the longstanding feud between Kirkman and Seceder and this remained McCulloch's greatest problem. So ingrained was the animosity that a form of religious apartheid developed which lingered years after his death. George Monro Grant has recorded a description of the long range effect of this feud:

Kirkmen and Seceders hated each other with a whole but unholy hatred. The former were Conservative, the latter Liberals, and I remember the loathing with which a certain man was pointed to as one who, though a Kirkman, had voted Liberal. A veritable Judas and nothing less we all deemed him. Fear God and hate the Anti-Burghers [Seceders] summed up our creed ... Kirk and Anti-Burgher lasted as political terms long after the two had merged in the Presbyterian Church... In the Confederation struggle the Conservative party (for the most part) were for Confederation, the Liberals against it. Hence the Anti-Burghers were also Anti-Confederates. As late as 1871, elections in Pictou County were run between Kirkmen and Antis.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, more than a century later "rival" Presbyterian churches may still be found in Pictou County. This then was the climate in which McCulloch worked and where ultimately he committed his most grievous tactical error. During the early years when the Secessionist Church was in a clear majority and the future reasonably bright for Pictou Academy McCulloch was totally insensitive toward the Kirk. One example will illustrate the point. Only someone oblivious to political reality would have insisted on renting space in the Academy building for theology classes for the Secessionist Church. Although the Academy and the Divinity School were separate entities the presence of the latter in the Academy building was an anathema to the Kirk. Later, after Rev. K.J. McKenzie began to level false charges of incompetence and embezzlement McCulloch became aroused to fever pitch. By then it was too late. The one celebrated attempt at pacification (through an intermediary, Rev. Thomas Trotter) failed—for McKenzie too, could be uncompromising.<sup>33</sup> A man more acutely tuned to political realities would have recognized much earlier what was at stake. Lastly, McCulloch's battles with the Church of England always took precedence as that Church held the reins of power in Halifax. One estimate of grudging respect for McCulloch came in 1809 and again in 1828 when he was invited to join the Church of England. Both overtures were scornfully rejected. Within the Church of England there was a significant amount of support for McCulloch personally and for Pictou Academy. The opposition centered in the person of Bishop John Inglis, a seldom beloved bishop whose enemies were not above championing McCulloch. In the council staunch members of the Church of England openly supported McCulloch and in the assembly a devout churchman, T.C. Haliburton led the attack for Pictou Academy. At no time did McCulloch effectually exploit this support.

It has been suggested that McCulloch blundered badly when application was made for the charter of Pictou Academy. Deliberately he avoided the term "College" preferring instead "the little name" Academy. In retrospect McCulloch's reasoning on this point was sound. Had he applied for a full-fledged college charter with degree-granting powers it would most certainly have been turned down. If not rejected in the council, friends of King's College had sufficient influence to gain an imperial veto. Later, the Kirk opponents of the Academy suggested

that the teaching of "the higher branches" was a violation of the charter. McCulloch's defense was always the same. The "lower branches" were not neglected; a grammar school flourished in Pictou and the "higher branches" were open to all. Rather it is apparent that McCulloch's most serious mistakes stemmed from a complete lack of political finesse, first in dealing with the Kirk and secondly in failing to exploit not only his own advantages but the weaknesses of his opponents. While he may be credited with providing a sense of direction for the reform movement, his contribution to politics stops at this point. He was unwilling to actively engage in the political arena, and seldom well served by those who were his spokesmen in the assembly. Thus, McCulloch was deprived of an effectual base. It remained for others to translate his political ideas into reality.

Not so with education. From first to last he remained true to his definition of a liberal education enunciated as early as 1806. McCulloch reiterated his views in an address delivered at the opening of the new Pictou Academy building in 1817 and amplified his viewpoint in a lengthy exchange of letters with Dr. William Cochran (vice-president of King's College) in the public press. In his last public utterance before his death in 1843 he returned to the same theme.

... the time has passed when men consider that rank and wealth entitle them to a monopoly of intelligence, and that it is sufficient for the lower orders to read their Bible, obey their superiors and discharge the duties of their several avocations in life—when they were considered by the wealthy and the powerful as merely links in the chain of creation between them and the lowest of animated nature—when the great and the rich thought like those who reared the pyramids of Egypt, to raise a monument of fame, built on the degradation of their fellow men.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the cut and thrust of political battle McCulloch made a name for himself in such widely divergent fields as ornithology, theological disputations and literature. He was first and last a teacher and it is probably in this role that he would prefer to be remembered. The desire to instruct and enlighten inspired all his activities and explains why he was prepared to endure so many tribulations. In considering the wide range of his activities the question naturally arises. "If he had not galloped off wildly in so many directions might he have ridden down one of the foxes?" While the time McCulloch wasted in political and religious controversy may be deplored, it is difficult to see how controversy could have been avoided in the circumstances. A man must act as he is compelled. Indeed, it is doubtful if McCulloch's many talents would have found expression had they not been forged on the anvil of opposition which his philosophy of education engendered.

## Notes

1. PAC MG 11 NS A135, Wentworth to Hobart, October 31, 1802.
2. PANS, Statutes of King's College.
3. PANS, McCulloch Papers, VI, "Regulations Governing Pictou Academy."
4. Thomas McCulloch, *The Nature and Uses of a Liberal Education*, (Halifax, 1819).
5. *Acadian Recorder*, January 24, 1818.
6. *JHA*, March 11, 1818.
7. *Ibid.*, March 23, 1818.
8. PAC, MG 11 NS A157, Dalhousie to Bathurst, December 14, 1817.
9. PANS, McCulloch Papers, VIII, Thomas McCulloch to Dr. John Mitchell, May 31, 1824.
10. *JHA*, February 20, 1824, "Report of the Committee of the House of Assembly on Pictou Academy."
11. *Arcadian Recorder*, February 18, 1830.
12. For a detailed discussion see: W.B. Hamilton, *Educational Politics and Reform in Nova Scotia 1800-48*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1970.
13. *Colonial Patriot*, March 17, 1832.
14. "Objections to the Bill for Endowing Pictou Academy... submitted by Rev. K.J. McKenzie..." *Colonial Patriot*, May 26, 1832.
15. McCulloch's answer to McKenzie is in the same issue of the *Colonial Patriot*.
16. *JHA*, March 26, 1832.
17. William McCulloch, *Life of Thomas McCulloch* (Truro, 1920), p. 138.
18. For a typical petition see: *JHA*, February 15, 1837.
19. In May 1834 McCulloch's daughter, Elizabeth, died a victim of tuberculosis. Earlier, a son, Robert, had died as a result of accidental scalding.
20. PANS, McCulloch Papers, VII, Thomas McCulloch to Rev. James Mitchell, June 10, 1835.
21. *Ibid.*, III, Memorial of Thomas McCulloch to Sir Colin Campbell and answer thereto.
22. *Ibid.*, Thomas McCulloch to Rev. James Mitchell, June 10, 1835.
23. *Ibid.*, V, Thomas McCulloch to William McCulloch, January 13, 1835.
24. *Statutes of Nova Scotia*, 1 Victoria Cap 20.
25. *Pictou Observer*, September 11, 1838.

26. PANS, McCulloch Papers, VII, Thomas McCulloch to John Mitchell.
27. D.C. Harvey, *An Introduction to the History of Dalhousie University* (Halifax, 1938), p. 56. For ramifications of the decision to exclude Crawley see: R.S. Longley, *Acadia University 1838-1938* (Wolfville, 1939), pp. 25-37.
28. *Arcadian Recorder*, December 22, 1821, and successive issues to May 11, 1822.
29. Northrop Frye, Introduction to *Stepsure Letters* (Toronto, 1960), p. iv.
30. Manuscript copies in PANS, McCulloch Papers, along with an unpublished novel, "Auld Eppie's Tale."
31. See D.C. Harvey, "Audubon and Dr. McCulloch," *Journal of Education*, Vol. V (January, 1934), pp. 94-100. Also: M.R. Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals* (London, 1898), Vol. I, pp. 435-36.
32. Quoted in: W.L. Grant, *George Monro Grant* (Toronto, 1905), p. 19.
33. PANS, Manuscript Documents, "Correspondence Between Rev. Thomas Trotter, Rev. Donald Fraser and Rev. K.J. McKenzie relating to Pictou Academy." See also: Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-183.
34. PANS, McCulloch Papers, Opening address Winter Session 1843. Dalhousie College.