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THE TWO FACES OF BALLSTOWN: RELIGION, GOVERNANCE, AND CULTURAL VALUES ON THE MAINE FRONTIER, 1760-1820

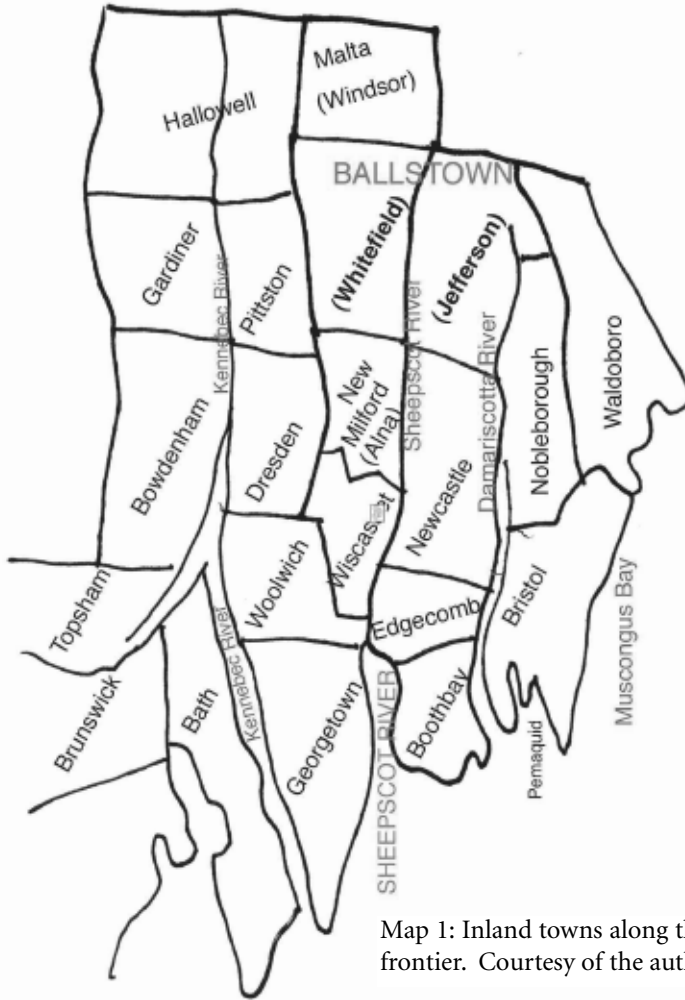
MARIE L. SACKS

As the Maine back country was settled in the late eighteenth century, evangelical congregations were established in the frontier towns. This evangelical religion has been credited with fostering a fiercely independent mind-set that promoted Jeffersonian ideals of governance. This study places the political and social development of two towns, Jefferson and Whitefield, in closer perspective, showing that denominational similarities do not always lead to similar emphases on independent thought and religious diversity. Marie Sacks is an independent researcher, an archivist for the Whitefield Historical Society, and a graduate of the American and New England Studies program at the University of Southern Maine. Before turning to history, she received a doctorate in biology and biochemistry from Brandeis University and taught biology at Simmons College in Boston. She lives in Whitefield with her husband, Julian, whose art is featured in this issue.

THE PEACE OF PARIS that ended the French and Indian Wars in 1763 opened to settlement the Maine back country – the towns inland from the central Maine coast. Although Orthodox Congregational parishes had been organized in the coastal and river-front communities, as required by Massachusetts law, the religious atmosphere in the new interior towns was apathetic, indifferent, or sporadically fervent in response to intermittent revivals. In this official religious vacuum, many frontier settlements eventually formed evangelical congregations. By 1810 more than three-fourths of the churches in mid-Maine towns and townships were evangelical, mainly Calvinistic Baptist, with Congregationalists largely confined to the wealthier front-country towns along the coast. Alan Taylor, in his study of the Maine back country, documents a strong relationship between evangelical religion and a fiercely independent mind-set, which encouraged rebellion against distant pro-

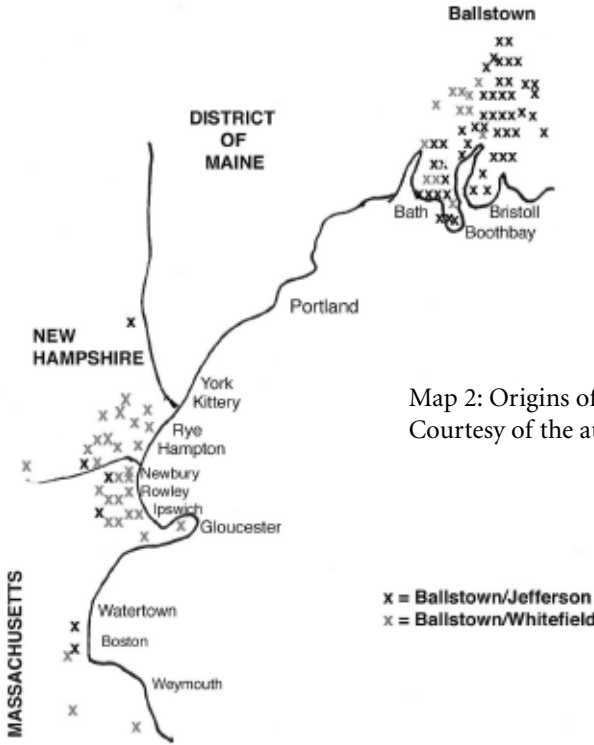


Views of North Whitefield and the Sheepscot Valley. This hill in the top photo was the site of the Centennial Celebration in 1909. The bottom postcard, ca. 1906, shows the bridge over the Sheepscot River. Whitefield Historical Society courtesy of the author.



Map 1: Inland towns along the Kennebec frontier. Courtesy of the author.

prietors and which promoted a democratic society. But Taylor paints with a broad brush, treating the vast back country as a single unit. A closer look at the plantation of Ballstown, a settlement about fifteen miles inland from the mid-coastal towns of Wiscasset and Newcastle, provides a better perspective on the evolution of religious practice and its relationship to civil governance on the Maine frontier (Map 1.) Settled in the 1760s, Ballstown was divided to form the towns of Jefferson and Whitefield in 1808. While both towns organized Baptist congregations, their definitions of democracy and their ideologies of governance



Map 2: Origins of Ballstown residents. Courtesy of the author.

were radically different. This study examines the divergent cultural values beneath their Baptist façade.¹

Cultural Origins of Ballstown Settlers

Although the towns of Jefferson and Whitefield had been bound together as a single civil and political entity for over 30 years, after separation they revealed very different faces. Muted by the bland language in the plantation clerk’s report, the differences appear striking when the records of the two towns are compared. Jefferson eagerly submitted to the centralized authority of Massachusetts, voted Federalist in the 1812 election, and strictly enforced the ministerial code, which required everyone to pay a tax for the maintenance of a minister and a meeting-house. The town elected a committee to choose a minister and raised taxes for his support. Whitefield, named for the eighteenth-century English evangelical minister George Whitefield, was wary of Massachusetts law, voted overwhelmingly Republican in the 1812 election, never im-

posed a ministerial tax, and tolerated a variety of religious expressions, including a large Irish Catholic community when Popism was still anathema.²

It was not unexpected to find that the roots of this diversity lay in the origins of the migrants to the two settlements. While mid-coastal communities served as the entry points for both settlements, 87 percent of Jefferson's population in 1790 actually had migrated from the mid-coastal communities of Newcastle, Nobleboro, Boothbay, Edgcomb, Wiscasset, and Alna, where their families had been settled for a long time. They, or their forebears, had experienced the disorder of unorganized townships under the control of weak local government and had participated in building towns, organizing churches, and serving in the government. Thus they brought with them to the wilderness a conviction that civilization required an ordered society in the Massachusetts mode. In spite of their Baptist conversion, Jefferson settlers brought the Federalist-Congregationalist mind-set of the coastal towns to the frontier and remained connected to that tradition by the proximity of their families.³

In contrast, while some mid-Maine coastal residents did migrate to Whitefield, the coastal communities served rather as a temporary stopping place. Sixty-seven percent of Whitefield's population in 1790 came from southern New England communities, a majority from the northeastern corner of Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. Plotted on a map, the towns of origin form a semi-circle with Newbury/Rowley at its center (Map 2). This area was strongly affected by the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century. Many immigrants or their families had been touched by George Whitefield himself and brought to Whitefield their experiences as dissenters to the Standing Order, a system put into law by the Massachusetts General Court whereby every town was required to levy a tax to maintain a meeting house and an orthodox minister, by whom was meant a Congregationalist. Thus when they set up their government, having confronted Federalist and Congregational rule in Massachusetts, they were not eager to be subjected again to civil or religious orthodoxy. They brought a fiercely independent spirit and a tolerance for individual rights from their past lives.

Yet if place of origin suggests the roots of the political and civil differences between Jefferson and Whitefield, questions remain. Why would Jefferson, with its very strong Congregationalist background, incorporate a Baptist church? How could Whitefield, so admiring of George Whitefield, who never intended that his emphasis on liberty of



Clary Mill in the 1890s and an overview of the mill. Built in the 1890s by Henry Clary on Pleasant Pond (now Clary Lake) in North Whitefield, the mill complex is currently under restoration. Collections of Stephen and MaryLou Smith and Whitefield Historical Society, courtesy of the author.

conscience should be extended to the Papists, welcome Irish Catholics? Did the façade of common Baptist identities conceal deeper issues that governed church-state relationships and cultural tolerance in Jefferson and Whitefield? To answer these questions, it is necessary to look more deeply into the religious histories of Ballstown settlers, the nature of the Irish community that developed in Whitefield, and the perceptions of Roman Catholicism that Ballstown settlers brought with them.

Religious Histories of Ballstown Settlers

Religion was in a precarious state in most mid-Maine coastal communities during the second half of the eighteenth century. Still recovering from the devastating effects of the Indian Wars, and with land-holdings plagued by ill-defined royal patents, Indian deeds, and the aggressive demands of the Kennebec Proprietors, the townships were relatively disorganized settlements, with neither well-defined boundaries nor strong town governance. Without the authority of the Massachusetts General Court to raise taxes and maintain order, unincorporated townships found it difficult to guarantee support for a suitable minister and a meetinghouse or to control the unruly behavior of their inhabitants. Many petitions for incorporation from mid-coastal towns, such as Boothbay, Nobleboro, Bristol, and Newcastle, included as a reason for incorporation their inability to “procede (sic) to the Calling and Setelling (sic) and Supporting a Gospel Minister.”⁴

Even after incorporation, a town’s unwieldy size and awkward dimensions often led to disagreements as to where the meetinghouse should be built. The citizens of Bristol (which consisted of the entire Pemaquid peninsula between the Damariscotta and Muscongus rivers, including what is now Bremen) vacillated between establishing one or three parishes for six full years before three meetinghouses were built. Moreover, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, who came originally from Ireland to the mid-coast in 1729 as part of Colonel David Dunbar’s colony, often clashed with English Congregationalist migrants from southern New England, who began arriving in large numbers after the Peace of Paris in 1763. Dissension over whether to establish a Presbyterian or a Congregational meetinghouse so paralyzed town meetings that often no action at all was possible, even though in matters of doctrine, they were nearly identical. It is not surprising that educated ministers did not willingly choose to relinquish their comfortable lives in the more civilized towns of southern New England for the inconveniences of crude and contentious Maine settlements. Thus the preaching was sporadic and often

the frontier coastal towns had to make do with ministers discarded by other places for unsatisfactory conduct.⁵

The doctrine preached by the clergymen who did come was almost uniformly the evangelical, or New Light Calvinism of the Great Awakening, either Congregational or Presbyterian. Although the awakening itself had not reached beyond Saco, New Light ministers carried its message to mid-coastal towns. Among these was Reverend John Murray, a Scots-Irish émigré with family ties to Boothbay, whose credentials as an important New Light minister include a short residency as successor to Gilbert Tennant in Philadelphia and a call to the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport. In Boothbay, Murray became the minister of a Presbyterian congregation. His enthusiastic evangelism inspired a major revival in Lincoln County in the spring and summer of 1767, resulting in a very large number of conversions. Another New Light minister with ties to Gilbert Tennant's church in Philadelphia, Reverend Alexander McLean, a Scots-born émigré educated at Kings College in Scotland, was settled as pastor of three Presbyterian meetinghouses in Bristol in 1773. When declining health forced a curtailment of his pastoral duties in 1795, he preached as a missionary in neighboring towns, including Jefferson, which had no settled ministers, under the auspices of the Society for Propagating the Gospel.⁶

Thus, settlers to Jefferson from mid-coastal communities brought a solid New Light evangelical Calvinism to the frontier, but without the experience of having participated in the upheavals that confronted the Standing Order during the Great Awakening. Dissent to them was largely a matter of polity, not doctrine, a parochial affair, squabbling among townspeople about where to build a church. They never had to challenge the Massachusetts law mandating religious conformity and public support for orthodox religion. In fact, Jeffersonians carried with them the conviction that without the law, there would be no churches or ministers at all.

On the other hand, Whitefieldians or their immediate ancestors from the Newbury/Rowley semi-circle experienced the force of the Great Awakening directly. The ferment engendered by the preaching of George Whitefield and other evangelists often resulted in reformation of church practices to conform with evangelical or New Light doctrine (New Light Congregationalists). When more zealous parishioners became dissatisfied with instituted reforms or when they were forced out by decision of the parent church, they formed into separate congregations (New Light Separatists). Other churches, designated "Old Lights,"

defended the Standing Order. When New Light Separatists formed their own congregations, they were still subject to the system of compulsory religious taxation, and vehemently opposed paying taxes to support a church they felt was corrupt. In this they allied with the Baptists, who had been struggling for liberty of conscience and separation of church and state for many years. At first, Baptists did not respond to the Great Awakening, considering it a reform movement within the ranks of their Congregationalist opponents. Eventually, however, the evangelical message created schisms in the Baptist churches as well. Many New Light Separatists joined these Separate-Baptists, and the evangelical Baptist movement grew rapidly.⁷

Whitefield settlers certainly experienced these upheavals and realignments. The father of Abraham Choate, the largest mill-owner in Whitefield, had been a founder and deacon in a Separate Church in Ipswich led by John Cleveland, a preacher expelled from Yale for the Separatist sentiments of his parents. Ebenezer Stearns, a small-mill owner, had been pastor of a Separate Baptist Church in Massachusetts. John Woodman from Rowley had a sizeable library, including a biography of George Whitefield and two books of his sermons. Settlers such as these were not only comfortable with the pietistic teachings of evangelical revivalists, but as dissenters they had chafed against Massachusetts religious laws.⁸

Whatever religious preferences the settlers brought with them to Ballstown, their choices were limited to what was available on the frontier. The scarcity of college-educated Congregational ministers was so alarming that in 1786 the General Court of Massachusetts directed the Committee of Unappropriated Lands in Lincoln County, the state agency on the frontier, to act quickly to provide a “discreet and suitable” Congregational minister for the infant plantations, the cost to be borne by plantation taxes, in order to promote the interest of society. The directive likely was a reaction to the steady advance of evangelical Baptists in the province. One reason for Baptist success was the availability of Baptist preachers. Itinerant Baptist evangelists roamed throughout the new settlements. Coming from nearby communities and ordained on the frontier, they were valued for their ability to arouse Calvinistic ardor rather than for their formal education. In Ballstown, Isaac Case, a Separate Baptist, and James Potter, a prosperous farmer from Bowdoin, organized frequent revivals. Their association with the Separate Baptists linked them to Hezekiah Smith and Isaac Backus and the mainstream of the Separate Baptist movement in southern New England. For many

years, Smith and Backus fought in the courts of Massachusetts against compulsory taxation.⁹

The Baptist revivals brought familiar messages to the Whitefield side of Ballstown, where the first church was organized as a Calvinistic Baptist congregation in 1788. Joseph Bailey, an immigrant from Rowley, was ordained as the first settled minister. While a few Jeffersonians also became members, the New Light Presbyterian minister from Bristol, Reverend Alexander McLean, was still making his missionary calls in Jefferson for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. It was McLean who suggested in 1804 that Jefferson build a meetinghouse without specifying the denomination, remembering, no doubt, the paralysis in coastal communities unable to decide whether the church should be Presbyterian or Congregational. It is not likely that he envisaged a Baptist church, but when the town was incorporated in 1808, no reliable Congregational or Presbyterian minister was available, McLean having died before the meetinghouse was finished. A town committee chose a Baptist licentiate, William Allen, who with the help of Isaac Case succeeded in converting the former Congregational/Presbyterians during a series of revivals in 1808. Except for the question of infant baptism, Allen's theology would have been familiar New Light Calvinism, although no doubt more dramatically expressed. The new meetinghouse was consecrated as an evangelical Calvinistic Baptist church with Allen as pastor.¹⁰

Thus, while both communities eventually settled evangelical Baptist ministers, the history of the Baptists in Jefferson was missing the long chapters on efforts to separate church and state and to guarantee liberty of conscience. Despite this Baptist identity, Jefferson's filial attachment was to the Federalist, Congregational/Presbyterian coastal communities, not to the Separate Baptists in western Maine or Massachusetts. In setting up their new government, they simply followed the familiar patterns they had known. For Whitefieldians, becoming Baptists was a natural progression from their former lives. While Separatist activity in the Rowley/Newbury semicircle engendered a great deal of controversy in these towns, it also produced multi-religious communities where residents were accustomed to living among people of different beliefs. Thus Whitefieldians set up a church that was financially independent and a government that did not legislate either religion or behavior. Descendants of Quakers and Methodists already lived in town; the arrival of Irish Catholics simply added one more group to the mix.

The Irish Catholic Community in Ballstown

Irish Catholics, mostly single male immigrants, found their way to the Maine coast during the eighteenth century. Coming to Maine ports as fishermen from Newfoundland or Boston, Catholic men found themselves isolated in communities where Catholicism was proscribed and there were no Irish women; most acquired Protestant wives and assimilated into colonial society. After the Revolutionary War, New England experienced an increase in Irish Catholic immigration, now including families. Catholicism was “tolerated” under the Massachusetts Constitution, although Catholics were barred from public office and forced to pay the ministerial tax. Among these newcomers were James Kavanagh and Matthew Cottril. Both from Boston, they joined forces in Newcastle to establish a thriving shipyard and mill complex. Eventually both became wealthy merchant traders, their elegant Adams houses testifying to their upper-class status. Their enterprises attracted more Irish Catholics from Boston and Ireland, resulting in a sizeable Irish Catholic community in the Newcastle area, close to the mills on Kavanagh land.¹¹

Not all of the immigrants remained in the Newcastle area. The town, complete with a landlord’s manor house, tenant housing, and a company store, too closely resembled the English estates they had left behind. These early Irish immigrants were not desperate exiles driven out by famine or war. Like their Scots-Irish and English predecessors, they migrated to America for reasons of economic and professional advance. Land ownership, not wage labor, was the key to fulfilling their ambitions, and land in the thriving coastal village was both expensive and scarce. The back country offered greater opportunity, and thus the Whitefield Irish community continued to grow. The religious center remained in Newcastle where a chapel, St. Mary’s of the Mills, was constructed in 1798. One of three French priests from the Boston community served at the masses.

The extraordinary presence of a priest in the Province of Maine in the 1790s, which certainly was a factor in luring Irish immigrants to the mid-coastal region, can be traced to the Peace of Paris in 1763. England promised to permit Catholicism in Canada, explicitly among the remaining Maine Indian tribes, the Penobscots and the Passamaquoddies, who had been converted by French priests. Confirmed in 1774 in the Quebec Act, the agreement was condemned in Boston where Catholic worship was still illegal and where Catholic priests were excluded under a sentence of exile or death. The Indians, whose repeated requests to the Massachusetts General Court for a priest had been ignored or answered

by Protestant missionaries, found themselves in a bargaining position as the rift between the colonies and England reached war stage. Fearful that the Canadians and the Indians would fight on the British side, especially after the capture of Castine in 1779, Massachusetts reluctantly agreed to send a priest to Maine. After the war, in negotiating a reduction in the size of Indian lands, Massachusetts promised a more permanent Catholic presence among Maine Indians.¹²

But where would Catholic priests be found in anti-Papist Boston? Again the political necessities of the Revolutionary War provided a pragmatic, if not philosophic, solution. Publicly insulting France and preventing her ambassadors and military personnel from practicing their religion would have been a huge political blunder. George Washington, in Cambridge to take command of the Continental army, ordered an end to the "ridiculous and childish" custom of burning an effigy of the Pope in celebration of Pope Day, an annual anti-Catholic festival dating back nearly two centuries. Massachusetts reluctantly gave permission to celebrate the Catholic mass, but only on board the French ships. The Revolutionary War thrust Massachusetts officials onto a much wider stage, where they came in contact with cultures not commonly encountered in Congregational circles. Massachusetts leaders were forced to make common cause with Catholic colleagues in Pennsylvania and Maryland. At last convinced that anti-popery was a hindrance, they began promoting religious toleration in their own state. However, while one article in the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780 guaranteed universal religious freedom, two others required public support of Protestant worship and restricted important political offices to Protestants. Thus post-war religious freedom in Massachusetts amounted to nothing more than toleration of Catholic worship and permission for priests to come into the state. This small victory, however, allowed the growing Irish community in Massachusetts to organize the first white Catholic congregation in New England in 1788. It was from this community that Kavanagh and Cottril emigrated to Maine and from which priests were dispatched to the Indian missions.¹³

During its first years, the Newcastle Irish settlement enjoyed only the irregular presence of a priest as he traveled to and from the Indian missions. Not until 1798 did Massachusetts fulfill its promise to the Indians and provide a stipend for the support of a resident Catholic priest. Three priests, refugees from the French Revolution, shared the missionary assignment that included the Newcastle congregation, spending the summers in the Indian villages and the winters in Newcastle at the Ka-

vanagh mansion. The priests were also circuit riders, administering to Catholics in scattered villages. Many Irish fishermen who had earlier converted to Protestantism now rediscovered their Catholic roots. Their children were baptized, and their Protestant wives converted. As the Catholic congregation grew, the little chapel of St. Mary's of the Mills became inadequate, and the elegant brick church named in honor of St. Patrick, built on land donated by Kavanagh, was consecrated in 1808. It is today the oldest surviving Catholic Church in New England.

In 1818 the Newcastle congregation received its own pastor, an Irish immigrant named Dennis Ryan. Unlike the contemplative and aristocratic French priests who felt quite comfortable in the elegant Kavanagh mansion, Father Ryan, son of a tenant farmer and pursuing his own ambitions to be free from aristocratic governance, chafed under Kavanagh's control and moved to Whitefield. He immediately began building a wooden meetinghouse, which was consecrated in 1822 as St. Denis, named for the patron saint of France in honor of the French priests who had ministered to the fledgling community. He also acquired land for his own farm and a mill site just below the church. Although ambitious, Ryan did not carry with him the pretensions of the upper class. He worked alongside his farm and mill hands, eating the same food from the same table.

Dennis Ryan provided the Protestant community with an image of a Catholic priest different from that generated by centuries of Protestant rhetoric that equated the Roman prelate with Satan or with aristocratic and hierarchical power. As one of the Irish farmers, he demonstrates how the Catholic Church could fit so easily into the English rural culture of central Maine. In Whitefield, the Irish adjusted to the rhythms of the rural community, skillfully adapting their traditional stone masonry and open-field, single-crop farming to English timber-frame designs and the dispersed, mixed agriculture of their neighbors. Ryan and his countrymen transformed the forest into productive and well-tended farmsteads that could not be distinguished from those of their Protestant neighbors. The original St. Denis Church was built as a vernacular wooden Protestant meetinghouse, without steeple or ornamentation. The Irish shouldered their civic responsibility by sharing in the work of building roads and overseeing education. Ryan was elected selectman and school board chairman. Others showed their loyalty to local civil authority by supporting popular political moves. The heads of all Irish households signed the petition for the incorporation of Whitefield. Thus they earned the respect of their neighbors and were accepted into the rural



St. Denis Church, Newcastle. The brick church replaced a wooden structure dedicated in 1822 by Jean Cheverus, Bishop of Boston. Counties of birth carved on the gravestones – Tipperary, Clare, Tyrone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford Cork – identify the original Irish immigrants from southern Ireland. Celtic symbols are evident on many gravestones. Photos by the author.

and civic network. Social interaction, however, seems to have been confined to the Irish community. Few, if any, marriages were recorded between Catholics and Protestants. Common language encouraged this social insularity, as many of the immigrants still spoke Gaelic. Moreover, Irish homesteads (and an Irish tavern) were concentrated within a relatively small radius around the church, at some distance from Kings Mills where the Protestant church elite lived. Romanization of their sons and daughters was not a threat.

Perceptions of Roman Catholicism in Ballstown

Thus the Irish Catholic presence in Whitefield was both non-competitive and cooperative. But if the benign nature of the Irish community facilitated toleration, the English Whitefield residents accepted Catholics as neighbors in the first place because of the intellectual independence they developed in the Essex County towns in the Newbury/Rowley semi-circle. When a draft of the first Massachusetts Constitution restricted religious freedom to Protestants, a convention was called at Ipswich in 1778 to consider it. Theophilus Parsons, a Newburyport judge, authored the document, "Essex Results," which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the voters in the county towns. It stated in unequivocal terms that although "free exercise and enjoyment [of religious freedom] is said to be allowed to the protestants of this state by the constitution,...we suppose it to be an unalienable right of all mankind which no human power can wrest from them." Moreover, Essex County was the destination for about 200 Catholic Acadians when they were deported from Nova Scotia. Reduced to paupers, these French neutrals, as they were called, were redistributed in the 1760s to various counties in Massachusetts in order to dilute their presence with good English Protestants. While this contact may not have offered an ideal opportunity to erase old Catholic stereotypes, at least the Acadian presence provided a human face, and it was not threatening.¹⁴

For the Jefferson settlers, the encounter with Catholics was not so benign. During the French and Indian Wars, they or their families along the Sheepscot, Damariscotta, Dyer, and Muscongus rivers, and on the Bristol and Boothbay peninsulas, had been the victims of attack by Indians loyal to the French. Many had been killed or taken in captivity to Quebec; others were forced to leave their farms in ruins. It was not so much Protestant rhetoric (although that would have reinforced their personal experiences), but tales of war that informed the Jeffersonian mind-set. They would not have welcomed Catholics, no matter that they were not French, into their midst.¹⁵

If Jeffersonians were wary of Catholics, Catholics were equally uneasy about living in a town with a Federalist/Congregational government. While two of the first Catholic families to come to Ballstown were listed in the 1810 Jefferson census, there were no Irish names in 1820. Newcastle Catholics would have been alert to the fact that Federalists would strictly enforce Massachusetts law. In 1797 when the Newcastle Catholic community was served by two priests from Boston, the town refused to exempt James Kavanagh and Matthew Cottril from paying ministerial taxes, although the selectmen had approved the exemption. Francis Matignon, as Kavanagh's minister, filed a claim for the recovery of taxes paid in Newcastle. Losing in the Court of Common Pleas, he appealed to the Supreme Court and lost. The judge reminded him that only Protestant dissenters could claim a share of the ministerial taxes, and that "Papists are only tolerated, and as long as their Ministers behave well, we shall not disturb them. But let them expect no more than that."¹⁶

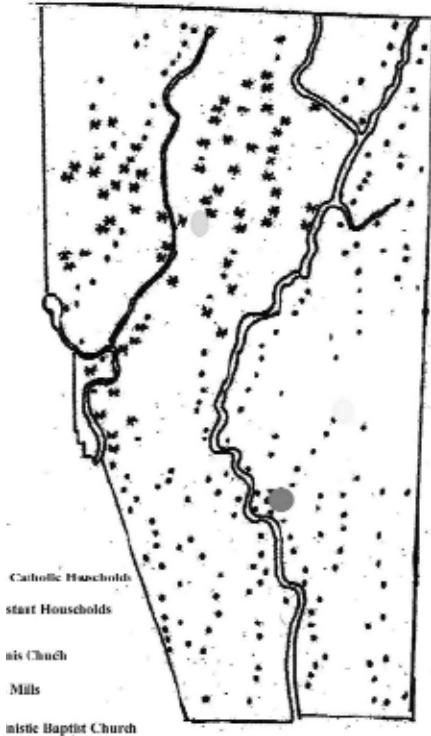
In a second case, attorney general James Sullivan, on complaint of the town, had Jean Cheverus, the other priest, arrested for performing a marriage. The town maintained that he, as a circuit rider, had not been properly ordained over a settled parish and thus could not legally perform marriages. Released on bail, he faced a criminal charge that would have placed him in the pillory, and a civil charge that imposed a fine. The Superior Court reluctantly agreed that he had been properly ordained as a Catholic priest and dropped the criminal charge. The civil charge never was heard because of what Matignon called "an action of Divine Providence": the anti-Catholic judge fell from a horse and nearly lost his life. Experiences like these no doubt impressed the Irish immigrants, encouraging them to search out a more hospitable venue. The priests, in their extensive travels as circuit riders, knew that it was a matter of local politics. Father Matignon, writing to his bishop in Baltimore after the loss of the Newcastle tax case, noted that Catholics had been deprived of a right that, "in a number of places, no one even thought of denying us." Irish immigrants, he suggested, should choose their settlement place wisely. The evidence is that they took his advice.¹⁷

Cultural Persistence

The Ballstown example confirms other studies that have shown how community experiences from mother towns colored the lives of migrants to the frontier. But it also reveals how compelling and how persistent these cultural roots were. For nearly thirty years, Jeffersonians and Whitefieldians jointly governed the plantation of Ballstown; in that



Postcard image of Kings Mills, ca. 1909, site of the first mill built on the Sheepscot River in 1774, and a watercolor painting of the Kings Mills community. The Whitefield Union Church, built in 1870 by the Whitefield Methodist-Baptist Corporation, included descendants of the First Baptist Church organized in 1789. Photo courtesy Lucy Martin and Herb Hartman; watercolor by Julian Sacks (1998).



Irish Households in Whitefield.

Location of Irish Catholic and Protestant Households, ca 1830
Adapted from McCarron, *Kavanaugh*, p.310

time, neither group compromised its belief in the relative benefits or disadvantages of submitting to the law of Massachusetts. In the face of repeated failures to convince Whitefieldians to incorporate as a Massachusetts town, Jeffersonians simply separated from them. When frontier expediency forced Jeffersonians into Baptist conversion, their new religion was quickly subsumed into their Congregational/ Federalist mindset. When Catholics arrived two generations after the violence ostensibly instigated by French Catholics was over, they were not encouraged to stay, thanks to the ministerial tax. Jeffersonians recreated the religious homogeneity of their coastal towns of origin so completely that there were only Baptist churches until 1950, when the Episcopal church was organized.¹⁸

Whitefieldians, with their experiences of persecution under Massachusetts religious laws, remained vigilant against the intrusion of distant government or outside values into town affairs. Civil decisions reflected



The Irish presence in Whitefield is suggested in the Celtic gravestone images and the Field stone house, built in the Irish tradition in the 1830s by John Field or his son Thomas, who emigrated from Ireland in 1822. Photos by the author.

the will of local farmers. The Baptist church in Whitefield, as in Jefferson, closely monitored the moral conduct of its members, but in Whitefield it was not an arm of the law. While George Whitefield might have reviled Popism, the liberty of conscience and fierce independence spawned in the Newbury/Rowley hometowns led to a cultural heterogeneity in Whitefield that fostered religious diversity and discouraged moral righteousness.¹⁹

These cultural profiles of Jefferson and Whitefield were still recognizable in their centennial observances in 1908 and 1909. While both events exuded pride of place, honored local achievements, and exhibited a strong patriotic fervor, the messages communicated by their respective celebrations were decidedly different. In the Jefferson centennial, the

coupling of morality and religion to a public, political event and a homogeneous religious presence echoed the traditional values of Jefferson's founders. Baptist ministers enjoyed prominent roles both in delivering benedictions and as principal speakers, warning the crowd of the curse of the dram shop and reminding them of Maine's prohibition laws. More revealing was the keynote speech by a learned professor descended from an early settler. Addressing himself to "intelligent Anglo-Saxons" like himself, he warned of the tide of immigration bringing the "degenerate races of the south of Europe," mainly Roman Catholic. Although the menace to the small rural community by poor Italian Catholic immigrants was nonexistent, the public endorsement of his message, along with prohibition, was consistent with the Jefferson founding fathers' concerns for social order and cultural homogeneity.

Whitefield celebrated its diversity. Its parade was participatory theater, with the whole town marching behind a Catholic boys' band, war veterans, senior citizens, and school teachers. The parade ended at a field, where a Baptist invocation was followed by speeches from a Catholic priest, a state senator, and the school superintendent. The discourses were on farm policies and local history. The democratic impulse of the community was evident as one speaker extolled Jackson, Grant, and Lincoln. Whitefield, true to its founding practices, celebrated itself, not the intellectual or political imperatives from outside.²⁰

Ballstown's history illustrates the difficulty of extrapolating about the political and social values of a community from its religious identity. The broad evangelical Baptist canopy that engulfed the Maine back country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may have encouraged independence from vested authority and provided the language of rebellion, but it also obscured cultural differences among the many townships founded in this era. Early settlers wove their family traditions and local values into a much richer tapestry than heretofore realized.

NOTES

1. Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and the Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier: 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), especially Chapter 5, "Searchers and Preachers," pp. 123-153.
2. See Linwood Lowden, *Ballstown West, 1768-1809: An Introduction to the History of the Town of Whitefield* (1984; rpt, Whitefield Historical Society, 1999); *Jefferson, Touchstone of Democracy* (Jefferson: Jefferson Historical Society, 1976); Ballstown Plantation Records (hereafter BPR), 1791-1808, Whitefield Historical Society; Jefferson Town Clerk's Record Books (hereafter JTCR), vol.

- 1, 1807-1809, and vol. 2, 1809-1819, Jefferson Town Office; Whitefield Town Clerk's Record Book (hereafter WTCL), 1809-1826, Whitefield Town Office.
3. See Vital Records of the various towns, printed family genealogies, published histories of the towns, and the census of Massachusetts, 1766; *Collections of the Maine Historical Society: Documentary History*; *Baxter Manuscripts* (Portland: Maine Historical Society), vol. 13, pp. 448-453. The author would also like to thank Linwood Lowden of Whitefield and Priscilla Bond of Jefferson for their genealogical assistance.
4. David Quimby Cushman, *The History of Ancient Sheepscot and Newcastle* (1882; rpt., Rockland, Maine: Courier-Gazette, 1983), p. 452. See Charles Edwin Allen, *The History of Dresden, Maine* (Augusta: Bertram E. Packard, 1931), pp. 224-226; Robert E. Dunbar and George Dow, *Nobleboro, Maine: A History* (Damariscotta: Lincoln County Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 19-20; Francis B. Greene, *History of Boothbay, Southport and Boothbay Harbor, Maine; 1623-1905* (1906; rpt., Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1992), pp. 133-137; John Johnston, *A History of Bristol and Bremen, including the Pemaquid Settlement* (1873; rpt., Bremen, Maine: Seavey Printers, 1988), p. 337.
5. For background on Scots-Irish settlement in the region, see Dunbar and Dow, *Nobleboro*, pp. 5-8; Greene, *Boothbay*, pp. 167, 175-212; Johnston, *Bristol*, pp. 265-275, 338-344; William Willis, "Scotch-Irish Immigration to Maine and a Summary of Presbyterianism," *Collections of the Maine Historical Society, Series 1* (Portland: Maine Historical Society), vol 6, pp. 1-37.
6. The term "New Light" generally applies to evangelical ministers who responded favorably to the Great Awakening; "Old Light" describes non-evangelical ministers or opponents of the Great Awakening. See Douglas L. Winiarski, "A Journal of a Fug Days at York: The Great Awakening on the Northern New England Frontier," *Maine History* 42 (no. 1, 2004), pp. 46-85. For Murray, see Greene, *Boothbay*, pp. 177-187; for MacLean, see Johnston, *Bristol*, pp. 369-374.
7. See Cedric B. Cowing, *The Saving Remnant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), chapters 2 and 6; William G. McLaughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), especially pp. 360-398, 421-453; C.C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 99-101, 310, 313.
8. Goen, *Revivalism*, pp. 99-101, 310, 313; E.O. Jameson, *The Choates in America* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1876), p. 37; Robert Crowell, *History of the Town of Essex*, (Springfield: Samuel Bowles & Co., 1868), pp. 160-171; John Woodman Estate Appraisal, Lincoln County Probate Records, vol. 13, pp. 187-90, August 29, 1808, Lincoln County Courthouse, Wiscasset.
9. Resolves of Massachusetts, chapter 128, cited in Lowden, "Ballstown," p. 116. For Baptist activity in Whitefield see Henry S. Burrage *The History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland: Marks Printing House, 1904), pp. 90-112; Joshua Millet, *A History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland, Charles Day & Co., 1845), pp. 114-116, 279-282.
10. See Priscilla Bond and Martha Tomkins, comps., "First Baptist Church of Jefferson, Maine, 1808-1983" (1981), 1-3, Jefferson Historical Society; and

Willis Bond in *The Centennial Celebration of the Town of Jefferson, Lincoln County, Maine, USA, Aug. 21, 1907*, Alberto Bennett, comp. (Lewiston: Journal Printing Company 1907), 29-32.

11. Edward Thomas McCarron, "The World of Kavanagh and Cottril: A Portrait of Irish Emigration, Entrepreneurship and Ethnic Diversity in Mid-Maine, 1760-1820," Ph.D dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1992; St. Denis Church, "Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1798-1808"; "The Mission Book, 1808-1823"; "St. Denis, 1833-1983," memorial booklet, Whitefield Historical Society.

12. See Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward T. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston in the Various Stages of Its Development, 1604 to 1943* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1944); William Leo Lucey, *The Catholic Church in Maine* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Marshall Jones, 1957).

13. See Francis D. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995); George Washington in Lord, et al., *Archdiocese*, vol. 1, p. 284.

14. Cogliano, *No King*, pp. 115-116; Lord et al., *Archdiocese*, vol. 1, pp. 195-219.

15. Cushing, *Newcastle*, chapters 10, 14, 15, 24-26; Greene, *Boothbay*, chapters 7, 9; Johnston, *Bristol*, pp. 287-325.

16. See Lord et al., *Archdiocese*, vol. 1, pp. 539, 560-568 (Judge's quote p. 561; Matignon quote p. 567); McLoughlan, *Dissent*, vol. 1, p. 658; McCarron, *Kavanagh*, pp. 275-282.

17. Lord, et al., *Archdiocese*, vol. 1, p. 564.

18. See David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); James H. Eves, "'The Valley in the Mist': A Cape Cod Colony in Maine, 1770-1820," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 32 (no. 2, 1992): 74-107; Cowing, *Saving Remnant*.

19. L.C. Bateman, in Bennett, comp., *Centennial Celebration of the Town of Jefferson*, p. 44.

20. "Whitefield Passes her Hundredth Milestone," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, August 25, 1909.