

# Serving “the North East Corner of Creation”: The Community Role of a Rural Clergyman in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, 1829–1870

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*Ammi Parker, a nineteenth-century Congregational minister in Danville, Quebec, was the only clergyman in his community for many years, as well as senior representative of a church which had begun to decline just as American settlers were moving onto this northern frontier. As elsewhere in the Eastern Townships, the Congregational Church in Danville was caught between the growth of aggressively revivalistic denominations, on the one hand, and the well-endowed Church of England on the other. Given the additional impact in later years of the growing English-Canadian exodus from the region, Reverend Parker’s pragmatism and resourcefulness were essential to the survival of his family and the endurance of his congregation. Viewed from a broader perspective, Parker was a somewhat belated transitional figure, combining aspects of New England’s community-tied pastorate of the eighteenth century and its more professional ministry of the nineteenth century.*

*Ammi Parker, un ministre congrégationaliste du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle de Danville, au Québec, fut longtemps le seul membre du clergé de sa communauté et le représentant principal d’une église dont le déclin s’était amorcé au moment même où les colons américains avaient commencé à franchir cette frontière septentrionale. Comme ailleurs dans les Cantons de l’Est, l’Église congrégationaliste de Danville était coincée entre les confessions farouchement revivalistes, en pleine expansion, d’une part, et la bien nantie Église anglicane, d’autre part. En raison de l’impact additionnel qu’eut plus tard l’exode grandissant des Canadiens anglais de la région, le pragmatisme et la débrouillardise du révérend Parker furent essentiels à la survie de sa famille et à l’endurance de sa congrégation. Dans une perspective plus large, le révérend Parker fut une figure de transition quelque peu tardive, dépositaire d’éléments du pastorat communautaire de la Nouvelle-Angleterre du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et du saint ministère, plus professionnel, de celle-ci au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

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WHILE WILLIAM WESTFALL'S major study has revealed the crucial importance of religion to the social, political, and cultural development of Upper Canada, and a new generation of religious historians has been examining the lives and ideas of Canada's leading evangelical spokesmen, relatively little is known about the ordinary clergymen who lived and worked outside the main urban centres.<sup>1</sup> These individuals nevertheless assumed important leadership roles in nineteenth-century rural society, and the records they left could provide important insights into the dynamics of local community development from a social as well as a cultural perspective. One such figure, the Reverend Ammi James Parker, served as a Congregational minister in the Eastern Townships parish of Danville throughout his lengthy professional career.

New England's once-dominant Congregational Church was in decline by the 1790s when the American settlement frontier extended northwards across the Lower Canadian border.<sup>2</sup> Congregationalism therefore failed to gain a strong foothold in the region that became known as the Eastern Townships, where the main struggle for religious dominance was between the evangelical Methodist Church and the conservative Church of England. Significant numbers of the population did belong to other denominations, however, including the Congregationalists, and Parker's local role was probably similar in many respects to that of his counterparts in other churches. Certainly, it is reminiscent of his eighteenth-century predecessors in New England who, like him, remained tied to their congregations for life. It therefore appears that, in moving to the Canadian frontier, Parker was actually perpetuating the traditional, community-oriented role of the New England clergyman during an era when the American ministry was becoming increasingly professionalized and mobile. Parker was not entirely untouched by this transition, as he travelled widely in his role as the leading representative of his church in the region, but his persistence in the somewhat isolated settlement of Danville illustrates how cultural traditions might be deliberately sustained by those who chose to remain in the rural hinterland.

Parker left no diary to provide insights into the daily life of a rural clergyman and his family, but he did write two memoirs-cum-history, one

1 William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989); Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathaniel Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989); Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

2 See Patricia U. Bonomi, "Religion in the Aftermath of the American Revolution" in Jack P. Greene, ed., *The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits* (New York: New York University Press, 1987); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

around the time that he retired from the ministry in 1870 and the other in 1875; he also left a sizeable collection of other papers.<sup>3</sup> These documents, and the correspondence preserved in the Canada Education and Home Missionary Society collection, are the main sources from which to explore Parker's career as the most active Congregational cleric in the region, as well as his social role as a community leader.<sup>4</sup>

Meant to serve as a record of how he had responded to God's call to be one of his servants, Parker's memoirs follow a somewhat formulaic pattern, but they also provide a useful outline of the career and *mentalité* of a country cleric. Like any missionary account, Parker's 1870 manuscript describes how, when he had first entered the Eastern Townships over 40 years earlier, the inhabitants were largely indifferent to religion and ignored by the various churches. But this claim is not greatly exaggerated, for the 1831 census for Lower Canada recorded that a remarkable 35 per cent of all Townships residents professed no creed whatsoever, while an additional 14 per cent belonged to none of the denominations listed.<sup>5</sup> In Parker's words, the settlers were in a sort of limbo, "too far away from the land of their fathers" to be served by the American Home Missionary movement, which was then in its infancy, but too close to New England and "too distinct from heathendom" to qualify for foreign mission support. As for the British-based churches, they ignored the residents of the Eastern Townships as untrustworthy "strangers and foreigners".<sup>6</sup> Parker might have included the British branch of his own Congregational Church since its Colonial Missionary Society was not established until 1836, and it does not appear to have paid much attention to the region thereafter.<sup>7</sup> In short, by the time Parker was ready to begin his ministry in 1829, "the mass of the people" in the Eastern Townships "had not assumed any decidedly religious character".<sup>8</sup>

Ammi Parker, later described as tall, thin, and slow-spoken, was born in

3 The 1870 typescript is identified for our purposes as "Church History" and is catalogued in the United Church of Canada Archives (hereafter UCA), Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery, Eastern Townships Research Centre, Bishop's University (hereafter ETRC), as Ammi Parker Papers (hereafter APP), 5/Par/4. This manuscript is discussed briefly in Douglas Walkington, "'To Prevent the Heathening of Christians': The Memoirs of Rev. Ammi James Parker", *Bulletin of Congregational History*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1980), pp. 4–13. The 1875 manuscript is entitled "Memories of Life in Canada" and is catalogued as 5/Par/1.

4 Parker's religious ideas are examined in J. I. Little, "'On the Borders of the Kingdom of the Beast': The Religious Ideas of a Nineteenth-Century Congregational Minister in the Eastern Townships" (paper presented at the Douglas Walkington Memorial Lectures on Congregational History, Montreal, September 25, 1994).

5 Françoise Noël, *Competing For Souls: Missionary Activity and Settlement in the Eastern Townships, 1784–1851* (Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke, 1988), p. 235.

6 Parker, "Church History", p. 24.

7 Earl B. Eddy, "The Congregational Tradition in Canada" in John Webster Grant, ed., *The Churches and the Canadian Experience: A Faith and Order Study of the Christian Tradition* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1963), pp. 34–35.

8 Parker, "Church History", p. 32.

Cornwall, Vermont, in 1802.<sup>9</sup> At this time his father, James, was about to become a Congregational minister in the town of Underhill, near Burlington. An older brother would also become a clergyman, serving in Maine.<sup>10</sup> When the onset of the War of 1812 exacerbated political tensions between the senior Parker, who was a Federalist, and his principal deacon, who was a Democrat, the former headed further north to Enosburg in Franklin County. James Parker was not only typical of the Congregational clergy in his political affiliation, but he is an example of how, according to Donald Scott, the rise of organized political parties in the 1790s destroyed New England's traditional public culture and fundamentally altered the place of the clergy in public life.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, James Parker would be more geographically mobile than his son, Ammi, moving again several years later to nearby Troy, in Orleans County, where he would finally settle for the remainder of his life.<sup>12</sup> In addition to serving his congregation, the elder Parker was paid by the Connecticut Missionary Society to introduce the gospel "into the new settlements of northern Vermont", an area which he would interpret to include part of the Eastern Townships, since he lived a short two miles from the Canadian border.<sup>13</sup>

Without any sense of irony, Ammi writes that his father "solemnly devoted me to the Lord, to be a business man". From the age of 15 until he was 22, the younger Parker served as an apprentice and store clerk in the village of St. Albans, Vermont, 20 miles from his parental home. He would later claim that it was "a part of my education, which to this day, I have been led to appreciate with a measure of satisfaction, as having aided to fit me for services which otherwise I could not have rendered".<sup>14</sup> When he was ready to start a business of his own, according to Parker, he heard the Lord's call to enter into "the work of the Christian ministry". He studied theology "in the wood-house chamber" of Reverend Josiah Hopkins of Newhaven, which then served as the Congregational Theological Seminary of Vermont. In the autumn of 1828 he was "approbated to preach the gospel". Parker added that the "remainder of my education, whatever it may be, has been acquired on horseback, and amid the various toils of the field into which the Lord sent me."<sup>15</sup>

9 "Rev. A. J. Parker", *The Canadian Independent*, March 1894, pp. 55–56. A photograph of the bearded Parker as a young man also reveals that he was strikingly handsome. *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, May 3, 1978.

10 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/18, Rev. R. S. Storrs to Rev. J. A. [sic] Parker, Braintree, Mass., June 7, 1834. Most of New England's Congregational and Presbyterian clergymen of the early nineteenth century would be followed into the ministry by at least one son. Donald Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), p. 55.

11 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, pp. 18–31.

12 Parker, "Church History", pp. 32–33.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

14 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/3, A.J. Parker, "History of the Congregational Church of Danville, Shipton, C.E. up to Nov. 1857, Being the 25th Anniversary of said church".

15 Parker, "Church History", p. 33.

Before accepting an invitation to serve in a nearby community, the newly consecrated Parker “mounted the horse I had procured, and which I had mentally baptized, the ‘Lord’s horse’, and set myself northward”. His aim was to “visit a few relatives, reconsecrate myself upon my father’s grave, and try to get my exhausted physical system into tune”. A few miles from Troy, he visited a friend who informed him that a deputation seeking a minister for Stanstead in Lower Canada had just left his house.<sup>16</sup> No Congregationalist had served the community since the controversial Thaddeus Osgood’s departure nine years earlier, in 1819.<sup>17</sup> Parker had some misgivings about going to a British colony, even 15 years after the war had ended, but “I was assured that there would be no danger.” Having “made the venture”, Parker “found the deacons, and the school house where they held services, to be less than two miles from Vermont, and in sight of her hills, and so felt myself safe”.<sup>18</sup>

Parker had planned to return to Vermont after the Sabbath, but the deacons asked him to remain one more week to attend a gathering of seven Sabbath schools “in a large building called a ‘Union Church’ standing on a high elevation, two miles from the village”. Approximately 300 people arrived in carts and lumber wagons, as well as riding bareback and on foot. While encouraged by the numbers, Parker felt that “their outfit, and general manners, indicated isolation and a lack of those refining, social influences which are legitimate, or indirect, but salutary results of the Institutions, and attendance on the institutions, of the Christian religion.”<sup>19</sup> Parker was obviously unimpressed by the meeting, for the only detail that he recorded concerns “an unpremeditated dog-fight” which was “not particularly instructive to those outside, or inside” and which “provoked some queer remarks from the newly arrived Englishman who was at that moment the speaker”.<sup>20</sup>

The young preacher nevertheless agreed to remain an additional three months, for he was favourably disposed toward the two deacons and the Massachusetts-born majority of the congregation who “were not the refuse cast off from churches there”.<sup>21</sup> Parker also felt he had been guided by the hand of providence when he learned that his father had been one of the three Vermont ministers who had taken the risk of organizing the Stanstead church in 1816, only two years after the cessation of hostilities between Britain and the United States.<sup>22</sup> Ammi recalled that when he was a youth

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> ETRC, UCA, APP [no call number], A.J. Parker, “Congregationalism in the Eastern Townships”. [1875]. On the early history of the Congregational Church in Stanstead and Osgood’s tenure there, see Earl B. Eddy, “The Beginnings of Congregationalism in the Early Canadas” (Ph.D. dissertation, Emmanuel College, 1957), pp. 164–174.

<sup>18</sup> Parker, “Church History”, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Badger’s memoirs describe how, as an independent evangelical preacher, he was persecuted

his father had returned from what he now realized was this same missionary tour to relate “what was deemed to be a wonderful feat”. This was the very exploit “which my boyhood days had cherished and which gave additional zest to the earliest days of my ministry”.<sup>23</sup>

After learning that the Stanstead congregation, which had recently broken from the local Union church, had already issued a call for another minister, the zealous Vermonter set out on his own missionary tour.<sup>24</sup> Parker’s experiences on this adventure would convince him that his calling lay north of the international boundary. On the fourth day, after several emotional meetings with isolated settlers, Parker discovered a small Congregational settlement and “saw with my own eyes the nakedness of the land, in reference to the stated ordinances and Institutions of religion”. It was here that he heard his “Call” to remain in Canada, though “I knew of no friend in all New England who would approve my choice of such a Field, nor any Society ready to give me any appointment in such territory.”<sup>25</sup>

His tour completed, Parker rode the 200 miles back to Burlington, where he met the secretary of the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society. The theme of providence once more comes to the fore at this point, for the secretary excitedly informed Parker that he had recently received a letter from a newly formed missionary society in Montreal asking his association to send missionaries to a little-known section of the country where there resided a considerable New England population. Because Parker had been “upon the very ground”, he was “the very man” they needed.<sup>26</sup> Parker then had to travel a further day’s journey southward to be ordained as an evangelist at the quarterly meeting of the Addison Association. The young minister’s next step was to present his credentials in Montreal to the officers of the Canada Education and Home Missionary Society (CEHMS), recently founded by the pastor of that city’s American Presbyterian Church. Parker received the first commission issued by that society to a missionary, and he was given free rein to choose a specific field of operations.<sup>27</sup>

Parker did not return to the village of Stanstead, but decided initially on

by local officials during and after the war even though he had been a resident of the Eastern Townships since he was a youth. E. G. Holland, *Memoir of Rev. Joseph Badger* (New York: C. S. Francis and Co.; Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1854), pp. 67–85, 127–132.

23 Parker, “Church History”, pp. 35–36.

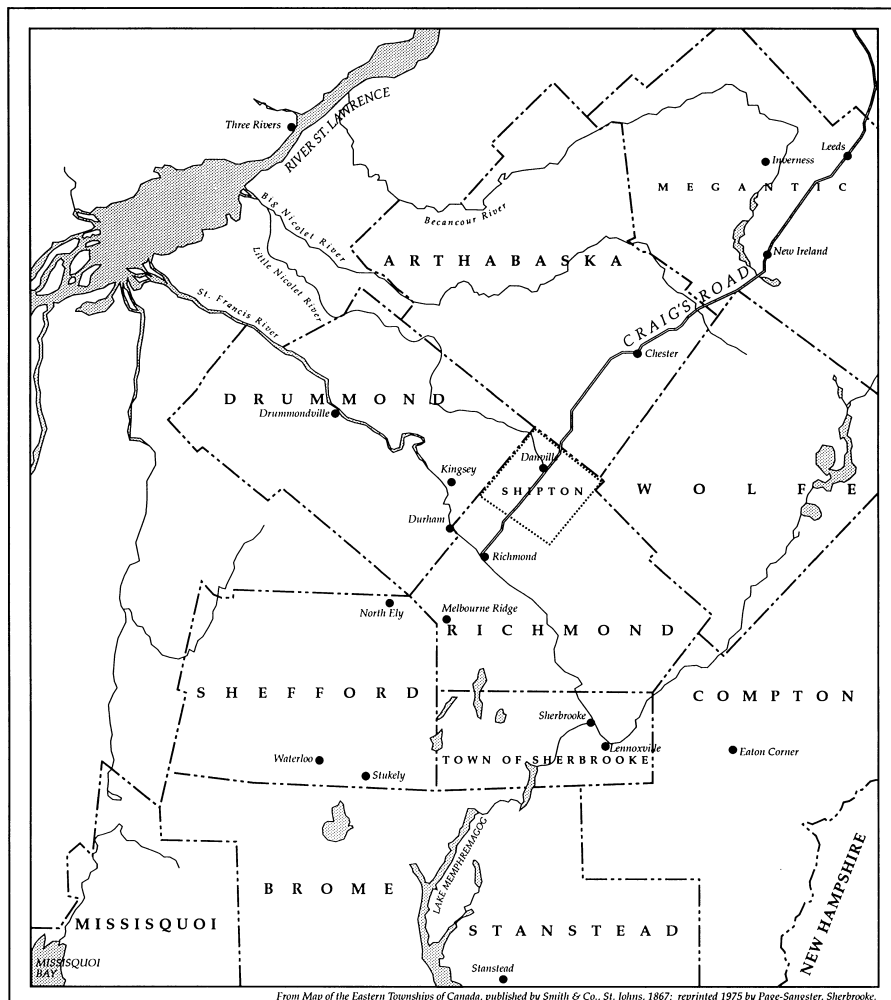
24 Parker, “Congregationalism in the Eastern Townships”; B. F. Hubbard, *Forests and Clearings: The History of Stanstead County, Province of Quebec* (Montreal: Lovell, 1874; reprinted Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1988), p. 94.

25 Parker, “Church History”, p. 38.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 40. For a brief history which stresses the educational role of this organization, see John Irwin Cooper, “The Canada Education and Home Missionary Society”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 26 (1945), pp. 42–47. Eddy (“The Congregational Tradition”, p. 34) claims that the CEHMS was linked to London’s Colonial Missionary Society, but it actually became affiliated with New York’s American Home Missionary Society.

### AMMI PARKER'S EASTERN TOWNSHIPS



**Figure 1** Ammi Parker’s Eastern Townships, from *Map of the Eastern Townships of Canada*, published by Smith & Co., St. Johns, 1867; reprinted 1975 by Page-Sangster, Sherbrooke.

the Lake Memphremagog area a few miles to the northwest, including the communities of Georgeville, Brown’s Hill, and the Outlet (Magog). But here competition from Baptist and Methodist ministers soon caused him to investigate the outermost frontier of New England settlement. He was directed to Shipton Township, about 70 miles to the north, by a man who had sold “Whiskey, Codfish & Tobacco” there in a log store. The reformed merchant informed Parker that in this isolated location he would find some

hard-working former Congregationalist families from New Hampshire and Vermont. Parker was destined to spend the remainder of his life among these people, in what would become the village of Danville, about 14 miles to the rear of the St. Francis River and near the headwaters of the Little Nicolet River.<sup>28</sup>

If the young minister was retreating in the face of the more aggressive evangelical churches to an area he later called “the North East corner of Creation”, it was at least in part because he believed that his services could best be put to use in a community deprived of any religious institutions.<sup>29</sup> Thus he reported in the summer of 1829 that up until six months previously the Sabbath in Shipton Township was devoted to “excursions for fishing, gaming & caballing”. Every family included members “who habitually profaned the name of Jehovah. The few who professed religion slept with the world or like the Ishmaelites had ‘their hands ags’t every man & every man’s hand ags’t them’.”<sup>30</sup> The fact that many of these people had once been practising Congregationalists was probably crucial to Parker, however, for American Congregational and Presbyterian missionaries generally showed little interest in converting a cross-section of frontier society where they apparently expected to find few of the elect in any case.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Parker later claimed that by establishing himself on the outer edge of American settlement he had hoped to attract more New England Congregationalists northward to take land in the intervening townships.<sup>32</sup>

Parker’s first sermons attracted large crowds, though “there were few praying ones among them”.<sup>33</sup> There had once been a Methodist church in the settlement, whose membership had included some former Congregationalists, but it had collapsed with the withdrawal of the Methodist Episcopal ministry from the Townships.<sup>34</sup> There was also a “Romish” chapel close by, “and a runaway New Hampshire boy was the priest who some-

28 Parker, “Church History”, p. 40; ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/21, A. J. Parker, “For 35th Anniversary of my Introduction to the field, thru back of Shipton now Danville, C.E., March 8, 1864”. The son of one of the pioneer families later wrote that most of Shipton’s first settlers came from Vermont and New Hampshire between 1800 and 1804, with Danville being established in 1811. The Craig Road from Quebec to Boston would pass through the village site that year, but it would rapidly deteriorate due to the break in communications during the War of 1812. ETRC, UCA, Danville Parish Records (hereafter DPR), F. P. Cleveland to Rev. E. C. Woodley, Lorne, February 7, 1910.

29 Parker, “For 35th Anniversary”.

30 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/15, Report to Directors of Can. Ed. & H.M. Society, Shipton, July 20, 1829.

31 William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765–1840* (1952; Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), p. 259.

32 Parker, “Congregationalism in the Eastern Townships”.

33 Joseph Badger claimed to have enjoyed considerable success as an independent anti-Calvinist preacher who visited the Shipton area several times in 1813, 1815, and 1816. Holland, *Memoir*, pp. 81, 86, 91, 127, 154–155.

34 During the early 1820s Shipton was visited only one Sunday in four by the Methodist appointee to the Melbourne circuit, then not at all when this circuit became vacant later in the decade. John Carroll, *Case and His Contemporaries* (Toronto, 1867–1877), vol. 2, pp. 269, 347, 388–389; vol. 3, pp. 140, 209, 275.



times came to say Mass”, but the local Irish Catholics and French Canadians did not interfere with Parker’s work nor he with them.<sup>35</sup> More troublesome was a Universalist preacher who would post challenges on the door of the meeting-house or even take over the old square-timber building on a Sabbath morning before Parker’s congregation could assemble.<sup>36</sup>

It is rather surprising that Parker does not mention the Millerites, also known as Adventists, who swept into the Eastern Townships with their predictions of the apocalypse originally fixed upon April 1843.<sup>37</sup> The movement lost many of its adherents when the Second Coming failed to materialize again in October 1844, but a local historian states that Elder John Porter of the Advent Christian Church held outdoor meetings in Danville around 1846 and that he was the pastor of the township’s Second Advent Church from 1851 to 1879. Parker refers to the Adventists only in documents written in the 1850s, where he notes their belief that “we hold to such errors that they can’t fellowship us”.<sup>38</sup>

A Wesleyan Methodist preacher based in Danville for a time had also displayed a distinct “want of Christian charity”, but there would be no serious challenge to Parker’s role as Danville’s only religious leader prior to 1860 when the Methodists finally established a permanent base there. It is not surprising that Parker would tend to assume the role of pastor for the community as a whole, given the historic status of the Congregational Church in New England and the fact that it distinguished between fully converted church members and those in the church society who were not eligible to take communion. One would have to go no further than the village boundaries, however, to witness the weakness of the Congregational Church and the wide diversity of denominational membership which characterized the Eastern Townships. The 1861 census records that Danville was populated by 87 Congregationalists, 54 Universalists, 39 Methodists, 19 Second Adventists, 14 Presbyterians, and two persons who were without religious affiliation. Most notably, the Congregationalists were significantly outnumbered by the 149 Anglicans, who would not have a minister in the

35 Parker mentions only one almost accidental convert from Catholicism. ETRC, UCA, *Report of the Canada Education and Home Missionary Society*, 1834, p. 10. The priest he refers to was clearly the Vermont-born John Holmes who had been studying to become a Methodist minister before he fled to Quebec because his father had withdrawn him from college to help with the farm work. Appointed curé of Drummondville in 1825, Holmes became the first resident priest in the Eastern Townships, and his mission field extended over 60 miles to include Ascot Village (Sherbrooke). J. I. Little, “Missionary Priests in Quebec’s Eastern Townships: The Years of Hardship and Discontent, 1825–1853”, *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions*, vol. 45 (1978), pp. 22–25.

36 Parker, “Church History”, p. 43.

37 “Armageddon in the Townships”, *The Outlet* (published by St. Luke’s Anglican Church, Magog), October 1963; Denis Fortin, “‘The World Turned Upside Down’: Millerism in the Eastern Townships, 1835–1845”, *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, no. 11 (Fall 1997), pp. 39–60.

38 ETRC, APP, 5/Par/22, Speech on the history and doctrines of the Congregational Church, 1850; Parker, “History of the Congregational Church”.

**Table 1 Religious Affiliation and Place of Birth of Danville Family Heads and Independent Individuals, 1861**

	Canada (French)	Canada (English)	U.S.	Ireland	England	Scotland	Totals
R.C.	33	17	–	11	–	–	61
Anglican	–	13	2	5	5	–	25
Congregational	–	10	8	–	–	1	19
Universal	–	7	5	2	–	–	14
Methodist	–	10	–	1	1	–	12
Adventist	–	5	1	2	–	–	8
Presbyterian	–	1	–	–	–	5	6
No religion	–	1	–	–	1	–	2
Totals	33	64	16	21	7	6	147

Source: Canada, *Census Reports*, 1861.

village until 1862, as well as by the 174 Catholics whose first priest would only arrive in 1865.<sup>39</sup>

Commenting on the number of denominations in the area, another Congregational clergyman, Edward Cleveland of Richmond, wrote in 1856: “It might be inferred that the people are very quarrelsome or very devotional.” In his opinion, however, “they are not distinguished in either way”, the wide diversity simply reflecting their various origins.<sup>40</sup> Table 1 reveals that religious affiliation in Danville did tend to be tied to national origin in 1861. As one would expect, all the French Canadians were Roman Catholic, as were about half the Irish-born, but there was also a considerable number of English-speaking, Canadian-born Catholics, clearly the offspring of Irish families who had immigrated earlier in the century. The majority of the adult Congregationalists and Universalists were second-generation Canadians, obviously of New England origin, while none of the Methodists were American-born, suggesting that the Canadian-born membership of this church was mostly of British origin. The small number of Presbyterians (divided between three sub-groups) was virtually all Scots-born. Though at opposite ends of the religious spectrum in most respects, the Anglicans and

39 Parker, “History of the Congregational Church”; “Danville”, *Annals of Richmond County and Vicinity*, vol. 2 (1968), pp. 165–166. The published *Census Reports* also state that there were two “Protestants”, but these do not appear in the manuscript census. Despite the appointments of the Methodist, Anglican, and Catholic curates, as well as that of the Presbyterian minister in 1870, the changes recorded in the 1871 census are minor, aside from a near doubling of the Catholic population and a halving of the Anglican numbers. These changes clearly reflect the broader population movements in the region.

40 Edward Cleveland, *A Sketch of the Early Settlement and History of Shipton, Canada East* (Richmond: Richmond County Advocate, 1858), pp. 72–73.

Adventists had in common somewhat heterogeneous memberships, reflecting the fact that many of the adults in the former church, and all those in the latter one, were converts from other denominations.

Parker himself had been rather slow to attempt a formal establishment of the Congregationalists. He wrote in his detailed report to the CEHMS, submitted in July 1829: "I cannot say that any powerful revival has been produced, but I must say that already Society wears a very different aspect from what it wore when I commenced here. If there has been no revival of *religion* I hope there has been a revival of *morals*." Each Sunday 250 or more gathered to worship, and there were over 100 in the Sabbath school, many of them older than 15.<sup>41</sup> The Sunday school ultimately replaced revivalism as the primary vehicle for evangelicalism in the United States,<sup>42</sup> but the initial enthusiasm must have been waning by 1831, two years after Parker's arrival in Danville, for that year he organized a four-day outdoor prayer meeting with the assistance of a number of outsiders. These included Stanstead's Methodist minister, John Hick, and a Congregational clergyman from Irasburg, Vermont, named O. T. Curtis, and they were joined by four or five "lay brethren" from various localities. As a result, the long-awaited religious revival finally took place, with results that did not entirely reassure the rather cautious Parker. He later claimed that the "feelings of some became so excited that at times, it was not easy to control, so as to have that order which we desired."<sup>43</sup>

As John Webster Grant has pointed out, the evangelical Presbyterians were caught in the same theological double bind:

As evangelicals they were convinced that it was not only legitimate but necessary to employ means for the cultivation of piety. As Calvinists, however, they believed that only the Holy Spirit could bring about a revival and looked upon attempts to work up "physical excitement" through manipulative techniques as close to blasphemy.<sup>44</sup>

41 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/15, Report to Directors of Can. Ed. & H.M. Society, Shipton, July 20, 1829. In 1871 Parker's wife wrote that the Sabbath School embraced all but the elderly, and that it had never been closed, even in winter. UCA, APP, 5/Par/23, E.S.P. to Miss Hazelton, Danville, February 7, 1871.

42 Leonard I. Sweet, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism" in Charles H. Lippey and Peter W. Williams, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1988]), pp. 884–886. See also Allan Greer, "The Sunday Schools in Upper Canada", *Ontario History*, vol. 67 (1975), pp. 169–184.

43 Parker, "History of the Congregational Church"; "History of Danville Church, Que.", *The Canadian Independent*, p. 20, undated clipping in ETRC, UCA, DPR, 10/Dan/14; B. F. Hubbard, "Materials for Our Church History, no. III, Danville and Eaton, C.E." [1866], p. 326.

44 John Webster Grant, "Burning Bushes: Flames of Revival in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Presbyterianism", *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* (1991), p. 98. On the revivals among the Free Kirk Highland settlers of the upper St. Francis district during the 1840s, see J. I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848–1881* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), pp. 184–186.

Most of New England's Congregational and Presbyterian ministers had apparently overcome such qualms by 1815, so that it was becoming possible to speak of a "morphology of conversion" or a "spiritual economy of revivals", but two of Parker's sermons which have survived from his early years reveal a preaching style that was much more formal than personal or emotional.<sup>45</sup> Significantly enough, Parker appears never again to have sponsored a religious revival, nor does he provide further details on what was perhaps the pivotal event in his local church's history. Fortunately, his wife, Eveline, had fewer reservations, for she wrote an evocative account of this "socially engineered" event nearly 40 years after it had taken place.<sup>46</sup>

Because it rained the first day, the meeting opened in the log school house, which could seat 100. At the end of the day's exhortations, "meetings of prayer and enquiry" were held in the evening. With the second day opening bright and sunny, the congregation moved to the nearby maple grove in which seats and a platform had been built. According to Mrs. Parker, the sermons of the Methodist Reverend Hick, who did most of the preaching during the first two days, "were plain and pungent, destroying the sinner's hope and refuge, only as he rested on Christ for his hope and Salvation". The Congregationalist Reverend Curtis had a different style, for he was "persuasive and earnest", though apparently no less effective. Finally, two deacons went from house to house, "confirming the words of the preacher and entreating the parents and children to become reconciled to God". The week culminated with the Sabbath when as many as a thousand met "in this wilderness" which had been made "to bud and blossom as the rose".<sup>47</sup>

According to Donald Scott, while the complete process of conversion at the turn of the nineteenth century still took place over a period ranging from several months to two or three years, during the mid-1820s many evangelical youths in New England began to experience conversion "as an abrupt, cataclysmic, and deeply transforming event". The emphasis was no longer on private devotion and individual consultation with the pastor, but on "prayer, exhortation, song and confession" to meld the entire congregation into "a fervent community of feeling".<sup>48</sup> The Danville revival clearly took

45 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, pp. 36–37; Danville United Church, Dissert. no. 19, Mark 2, verses 27 and 28, E. Shipton, December 20, 1829; and Rev. 12, verse 16 [?], Shipton, May 1830. On the evolution of sermon styles into the 1840s and 1850s, see Scott, *From Office to Profession*, pp. 143–145.

46 The phrase is from Sweet, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism", pp. 886–887.

47 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/23, E.S.P. to Miss Hazleton of Sherbooke, Danville, December 7, 1871. An account written in 1892 claims that the prayer meetings in the surrounding countryside resulted in eight family altars being erected and eight men speaking "for God in public for the first time" in the various churches the following Sabbath. "History of Danville Church", p. 20.

48 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, pp. 77–84. On the prominent role played by youths and women in Nova Scotia's "Second Great Awakening" from the late 1790s to approximately 1810, see G. A.

on many of these characteristics, and, even though Ammi Parker claimed to be convinced that the “spirit of God moved upon the hearts of the people”, his reservations about quick conversions prevented him from establishing a church in 1831.

Parker later wrote that he had been concerned that too many people had been “merely awaken<sup>d</sup> & excit.<sup>d</sup> without much knowl.<sup>g</sup> of truth — or of steady Chr.<sup>n</sup> purpose, or example”. They would “need to consider & pray & learn before they c.<sup>d</sup> safely assume the responsibility of taking lead in such an association as a Ch.<sup>n</sup> Church”. The Methodists had obviously decided to leave the field to Parker for the time being, but his hesitation nevertheless provided the opportunity for “opposing influences” to arise, especially from “some earnest & rabid Universalists”. The process of “weeding & sifting” finally came to an end a year later in 1832, when Parker decided that the time was ripe to establish a church.<sup>49</sup>

The first meeting was attended, in Parker’s words, by only three “feeble & faint-hearted” men. But there was also present a “Mother in Israel” who asked

Couldn’t we have a *female* church? Don’t you think the Lord would approve of it, if the men were not willing to come? For one I have been starving without the Gospel ordinances, till gray hairs are upon me, and if the Lord will grant me such a privilege, I desire to sit down at his table, at least once before I die.

This speech proved to be the turning point, for the decision was then made to proceed with the formal organization. Session after session was held until 12 men and 23 women were “approved and accepted” in true democratic fashion by others who would later join the church “according to Cong.’l Church usage”.<sup>50</sup>

The two nearest “sympathizing ministers”, one from Montreal and one from Vermont, were invited to attend the formal ceremony organized to establish the Danville church. When neither did so, there were more adjourned meetings, but finally “we decided to act upon the true Congregational principle, ... and go alone if we must.” Parker proceeded to baptize seven persons by immersion and two by sprinkling, for he regarded “either model” to be valid, declaring them to be members of “a *Church of Christ*

Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1984), pp. 120–132.

49 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/25(4), November 11, 1866; Parker, “Church History”, pp. 41–42, and “History of the Congregational Church”. Scott (*From Office to Profession*, p. 119) notes that ministers frequently fell into difficulty with their congregations after revivals because they could not meet the preaching standards that had been established by the visiting clergy.

50 Parker, “Church History”, p. 43, and “History of the Congregational Church”; “History of Danville Church”, p. 20.

duly constituted”.<sup>51</sup> The following year, in March 1833, Parker reported that the “political & irreligious excitements” of the era were not disturbing his congregation, which was “gaining ground gradually”.<sup>52</sup> A few months later, however, the local church committee reported to the CEHMS:

[F]ew of the independant [*sic*] Farmers are pious; & [a] universalist Preacher, (like Rubshukah of old) has been in this place a portion of of [*sic*] the time, for 2, years past, Opposition to the preaching of Mr Parker has been waged with some violence by the more irreligious & a numb[er] who were among the most liberal at first, now find an excuse for doing nothing.<sup>53</sup>

Parker himself later admitted that his church remained in a somewhat “languid state” but the temperance movement would soon renew local religious enthusiasm. In a sermon preached in 1830 Parker had made the extravagant claim that an “intemperate man reclaimed seems almost a Saint & there is great probability if men can be induced to repent & reform *that* sin that they will renounce all *others*.”<sup>54</sup> The Danville minister’s message was clearly heard, for he recorded four years later:

Intemperance appears to have received the stamp of reprobation in our community. Buildings are raised and farm work prosecuted, without the monster’s aid, except as a few of the more worthless perpetuate the curse upon themselves.

Temperance meetings were held during the months of November and December 1834, resulting in the conversion of a couple of young liquor traffickers, as well as two or three heads of “respectable families who had gone far in ruin’s road, but now assume an entirely new aspect”. Parker estimated that the amount of ardent spirits being consumed in the parish was four-fifths less than a year earlier.<sup>55</sup>

The temperance cause clearly benefited the Danville clergyman, for the church committee reported in 1834 that it “has served, more than any one

51 Parker, “Church History”, p. 43, and “History of the Congregational Church”; “History of Danville Church”, p. 20; ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/16, A. J. Parker to Com. of Can. Ed. & H.M. Soc’y, Shipton, July 31, 1833.

52 Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal (hereafter ANQM), UCA, Montreal-Ottawa Conference, Canada Education and Home Missionary Society Papers (hereafter CEHMS), A. J. Parker to G. W. Perkins, Shipton, March 26, 1833.

53 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, Geo. Bangs *et al.* to Directors of CEHMS, Shipton, September 1833.

54 Danville United Church, Rev. 17, verse 16 [?], Shipton, May 1830. On the temperance movement as a whole, see J. I. Little, “A Moral Engine of Such Uncalculable Power: The Temperance Movement in the Eastern Townships, 1830–52”, *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, no. 11 (Fall 1997), pp. 5–38.

55 ETRC, UCA, *Report of the Canada Education and Home Missionary Society*, 1834, pp. 8–9. For a brief description of the local taverns and distilleries, see Cleveland, *A Sketch*, pp. 34–36.

thing else, to do away prejudice from the minds of unreasonable men against him who is set over us in the L<sup>d</sup>’.<sup>56</sup> But his strongest support, according to Parker, came from the women’s prayer meetings which were more fully attended than those of the men: “some of the sisters felt almost unwilling to have them close.”<sup>57</sup> Women continued to dominate in terms of numbers throughout Parker’s tenure in Danville, for they still outnumbered the male full members by 68 to 26 in 1850, and by 43 to 25 in 1872.<sup>58</sup>

Further research will be needed to determine how typical this female preponderance was in other Protestant churches within the Eastern Townships of this era, but recent studies have demonstrated that it was a strong characteristic of evangelical religion in another settlement frontier of New England, upstate New York. Mary Ryan notes of the Presbyterians in Oneida County that by the 1820s there existed “a new species of women’s influence, the right to hold forth on religious subjects from a position of apparent weakness”.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, in his study of Cortland County, Curtis Johnson states that because the mainstream evangelical churches were not particularly well endowed in the early nineteenth century, they needed women’s organizing skills and financial resources. Evangelical religion provided farm women who lacked significant economic or political decision-making power with the opportunity to improve their community by promoting the salvation of neighbours and kin.<sup>60</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that Parker should choose, as the theme of one of his first sermons, the Church as woman whose husband was Christ and whose children were the congregation.<sup>61</sup> Yet Parker provides no information on the subsequent religious role of the women in his congregation, perhaps because of their diminished status within the evangelical churches by the time he was recording his memoirs. His reports to the CEHMS during the early 1840s nevertheless reveal that there was a Ladies’ Home

56 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, Report of W. C. Lord *et al.* to Montreal Ladies’ Sewing Society, Shipton, August 18, 1834.

57 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/17, A. J. Parker to Montreal Ladies’ Sewing Society, Shipton, February 18, 1834.

58 Of the nucleus of 25, only six of the men and six of the women had died or “removed” by 1850, whether from the area or the church is not clear. ETRC, UCA, DPR, 10/Dan/20, Names of Church Members from Nov. 11, 1832 [...] to Nov. 11, 1850, Danville Congregational Church; *The Canadian Independent*, vol. 19 (July 1872–June 1873), p. 201.

59 Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 77–80.

60 Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790–1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 9, 55–60, 112, 148–155, 160–163, 168–169. See also Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), chap. 11; and, on the South, William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 132–133.

61 Danville United Church, Rev. 12, verse 16 [?], Shipton, May 1830.

Missionary Society in Danville and that women were more successful than men in teaching Sunday school.<sup>62</sup> We can presumably also assume that the local women played an important role in the temperance movement which, as noted above, gained an early foothold in Shipton.

Meanwhile, because Parker had been forced to act as his own bishop (to use his words) when he established the local church in 1832, he was formally installed by three Congregational missionaries and a deacon two years later. This procedure may have been stimulated by the fact that the provincial government had recently removed the civil disabilities of the dissenting churches, for the transcriptions of the ordination ceremony carry the signature of the judge of the Judicial District of St. Francis.<sup>63</sup> Parker would be the first minister from a non-established church in the district to take advantage of the new legislation by applying for the credentials which would allow him to register baptisms, marriages, and burials.<sup>64</sup>

Parker later recalled that, after reading his certificates, Judge John Fletcher of Sherbrooke “threw them back with a contemptuous sneer”, stating that they should be printed on parchment rather than on common paper, and that he had no proof that the signatures were not forgeries. When the young clergyman submitted a four-page affidavit testifying to the authenticity of the signatures, Fletcher announced that the new legislation simply permitted dissenting ministers to record the acts in question, not actually to perform them. Parker reportedly replied that such prerogatives came from a higher source than civil government, but he was forced to find two influential Congregationalists in Sherbrooke who would provide security for 200 pounds each. Finally, after further interrogation and another ten days’ delay, Fletcher provided Parker with the authorization for which he had applied. Such arbitrary and officious behaviour was typical of the English-born judge, who single-handedly did much to alienate the local American-born population from the colonial administration.<sup>65</sup>

During the 34 years which followed his accreditation, Parker performed 393 marriages, 446 burials, and 431 baptisms.<sup>66</sup> The low ratio of baptisms to marriages during an era of high birth rates is striking, and it suggests that Parker continued, for some time at least, to follow the American Congregational practice of distinguishing between “church” and “society”, that is, covenanting and non-covenanting members. While the Puritans’ “Half-Way

62 See, for example, ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to Montreal Ladies’ Sewing Society, Shipton, August 1835; A. J. Parker to C. Strong, Danville, September 8, 1841.

63 ETRC, UCA, Danville, Civil Registers, vol. 1 (1834–1852), August 20–21, 1834.

64 Parker had already baptized 38 infants and attended 40 funerals, but he did not dare officiate at marriages. “Church History”, pp. 46, 48.

65 See Christine Veilleux, “John Fletcher”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, p. 300; J. I. Little, “British Toryism amidst ‘a horde of disaffected and disloyal squatters’: The Rise and Fall of William Bowman Felton and Family in the Eastern Townships”, *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, vol. 1 (Fall 1992), pp. 13–42.

66 Parker, “Church History”, pp. 46–47.



Covenant’’ permitted the children of full church members to be baptized and the Danville parish registers reveal that Parker baptized many infants, those of non-covenanting members would presumably not have qualified. The Canadian churches which followed the British Congregational tradition never adopted this division; Congregational historian Earl B. Eddy claims that it soon ceased to be more than a nominal distinction even within the American-founded churches of the Eastern Townships, but he also notes that it was not formally abolished in the Stanstead parish until 1912.<sup>67</sup> Given Parker’s conservatism, it is likely that his congregation also perpetuated the distinction throughout much — if not all — of his career, though his popularity presumably reflects a reasonably tolerant approach towards church discipline.<sup>68</sup>

Another reason for the low ratio of baptisms to marriages in Danville must have been the ongoing departure of young married couples. Surrounded by French-Catholic majorities to the north, east, and west, the English-speaking population of Richmond County actually declined in numbers between 1861 and 1871, while the French-Canadian population nearly tripled in size, to reach one-third of the county’s residents. Furthermore, in Parker’s township of Shipton (where the Catholics were already one-third of the population at mid-century), the Congregationalists ranked fifth among the Protestant denominations in 1871. Parker’s own congregation was still limited to 128 church members (presumably covenanting members) four years before his retirement in 1870, though the number of adults and children in Shipton Township who claimed affiliation with the Congregationalists had increased slowly to 501 by that date.<sup>69</sup>

Table 2 provides some idea of the socio-economic status of Parker’s congregation when compared with the other Danville churches in 1861. To focus on the more established families, it includes only the 62 heads of household (a household being a group within a single house), rather than the 147 individuals who were heads of other families in the household or unmarried boarders/employees. The table reveals that, while most of the Catholic cohort were labourers, each Protestant denomination tended to be of a rather mixed composition. Skilled tradesmen as well as businessmen (traders, millers, and innkeepers) could be found in nearly all the churches, though the Congregationalists tended to be somewhat underrepresented in the artisanal category when compared with the other Protestant denominations. As for the village’s eight professionals, seven were distributed among the Congregationalist, Anglican, and Universalist churches.<sup>70</sup>

67 Eddy, “The Beginnings of Congregationalism”, pp. 164, 182–185.

68 Eddy (“The Beginnings of Congregationalism”, p. 313) claims that a lack of strict discipline characterized all Canadian Congregational churches.

69 The Canadian *Census Reports* record 270 Congregationalists in Shipton in 1852 and 446 in 1861. There had been a total of 259 church members throughout the congregation’s history, with 81 deceased and 50 “removed”. ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/25 (4), November 11, 1866.

70 The overall picture does not change much when we analyze all 147 individuals who were family

**Table 2 Religious Affiliation and Occupational Category of Danville Household Heads, 1861**

	Artisan	Labourer	Business	Professional	Farmer	Other	Totals
R.C.	1	9	3	1	—	2	16
Anglican	6	—	3	2	1	2	14
Congregational	3	1	4	3	1	1	13
Universal	5	1	2	2	1	—	11
Methodist	2	—	1	—	—	—	3
Adventist	2	—	—	—	—	1	3
Presbyterian	1	—	1	—	—	—	2
Totals	20	11	14	8	3	6	62

Source: Canada, *Census Reports*, 1861.

Since there was no strict socio-economic hierarchy of membership in Danville's three main Protestant churches, it is clear that the principal problem for the local Congregationalists, and for the other Protestant churches as well, was the number of competing denominations. Certainly, Parker was never able to rely entirely on the financial support of his rather small flock. Although the local church formally invited him in 1834 "to settle over us and labor among us in the Gospel Ministry",<sup>71</sup> Parker's contract continued to be renewed annually (at least in the early years) by a committee which declared simply that he would be paid the amount noted beside each of the attached names.<sup>72</sup> Considerable pressure must have been exerted on each church member to subscribe a fixed amount because the congregation had pledged at the start to pay Parker \$200 a year, plus "all that is in our power to collect & obtain" as a supplement for his family's support.<sup>73</sup> The pledge was soon raised to £100 (\$400) a year,<sup>74</sup> which was the sum that the American Home Missionary Society considered necessary for a minister to support a family,<sup>75</sup> but the Danville congregation appears never to have delivered the full amount.

heads or individuals who were not immediate kin of a household head. Many in this expanded category were young labourers and "house maids", most of whom were Catholics — 26 of 36 and 15 of 25, respectively. However, five of the maids were Congregationalists, and somewhat more visible is the tendency of the Methodists to be artisans or skilled tradesmen (eight of twelve individuals) and Adventists to be labourers or maids (five of eight).

71 Danville United Church, Simeon Flint *et al.* to A. J. Parker, Shipton, July 5, 1834.

72 According to Scott (*From Office to Profession*, pp. 120–121), such means to get around the permanence implied by ordination and installation became increasingly common in the early nineteenth century.

73 Danville United Church, Agreement made this 11th day of July 1839 between Rev. Ammi J. Parker on one part & Henry Barnard *et al.* on the other part.

74 ETRC, UCA, Danville, Civil Registers, vol. 1 (1834–1852).

75 Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture*, p. 265.

The agreement signed in August 1832 by a committee of five lists 28 names (one was later crossed out), all male, with promised contributions ranging from \$1.00 to \$10.00 and totaling only \$132.50. However, the deficit was met in part by the CEHMS which arranged for Parker to spend one-quarter of his time serving as its agent in return for a £25 annual grant to supplement his income. Two years later, in 1834, the Ladies' Sewing Circle of Montreal's American Presbyterian Church became Parker's chief source of outside support.<sup>76</sup> A contract signed in 1837 also reveals that Parker was granted \$150 that year from the American Home Missionary Society on condition that he receive no subsidy from any other such organization. This contract was renewed the following year,<sup>77</sup> and the CEHMS records reveal that Danville remained dependent on outside support until at least the mid-1840s. The closest the growing congregation was able to come to the agreed-upon salary during these early years was in 1839, when 50 individuals agreed to payments totaling \$227.50.<sup>78</sup>

The initial contracts had stated that two-thirds of the payments would be in produce of the country and one-third in cash, but Parker later claimed that his early payments were almost entirely in "truck", with the cash being barely sufficient to pay his postage.<sup>79</sup> An examination of Parker's accounts reveals that he was exaggerating to some extent, but that most families did deliver their payments in kind.<sup>80</sup> Thus the 110 entries in 1830 produced \$45.48 in cash and the rest in goods or labour, not all of which was given a monetary value. The most common commodity was wheat, with 18 deliveries throughout the year totaling twenty and a half bushels. Other food items included potatoes (9½ bushels), corn (3½ bushels), rye (2½ bushels), buckwheat (½ bushel), apples (3 bushels), cheese (48½ pounds), butter (37¼ pounds), pork (35¼ pounds), beef (32 pounds), lamb (28¾ pounds), mutton (10¾ pounds), veal (9 pounds and one unspecified amount), maple sugar (51¾ pounds), vinegar (4½ gallons), and an unspecified quantity of cabbages and turnips. A few other food deliveries were recorded only in monetary terms: pork, veal, and beef (\$2.26), pork and lard (\$2.04), potatoes and "goods" (\$3.00).

The six deliveries of oats were recorded in a variety of ways — bushels,

76 "History of Danville Church", pp. 19–20; ETRC, UCA, *Report of the Canada Education and Home Missionary Society*, 1834, p. 6.

77 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/10, Commission to Rev. Ammi Parker from American Home Missionary Society, New York, for missionary work in Danville Congregational Church, August 21, 1837; ETRC, UCA, DPR, 10/Dan/13, Milton Badger to Rev. A. J. Parker, New York, September 13, 1837.

78 Thus, the average payment had actually declined slightly, from \$4.73 to \$4.55. ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/9, Subscriptions for payment of salary to Rev. Ammi Parker at Shipton, 1832, 1834, and undated three items.

79 Danville United Church, Agreement between A. J. Parker and Henry Barnard *et al.*, July 11, 1829; ETRC, UCA, DPR, F. P. Cleveland to Rev. E. C. Woodley, Lorne, February 7, 1910.

80 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/7, Account Book, A. J. Parker, 1829–1847.

bundles, and cash value — while the four hay deliveries were recorded as loads, cash value, and “enough to keep my horse about 11 weeks”. Another payment, valued at \$7.00, was simply listed as being in grain, keeping a cow, and hay. The remaining miscellaneous items included 9½ pounds of wool, 10 pounds plus \$2.00 value in tallow, 1½ gallons plus 66¢ value in soap, one dozen candles, 24 “skns” sewing silk, an unspecified quantity of fulled cloth, one pair of shoes and slippers, one pair of socks, two tumblers, four tin milk pans, 55 bricks, and 95 pine boards. This wide variety of goods presents a striking contrast to the seigneurial parishes, where tithes were paid to the curé only in grain, though in the Catholic parishes of the Eastern Townships there was commonly a supplement of hay, potatoes, and maple sugar.<sup>81</sup>

The fact that these goods were delivered to Parker on a regular basis throughout the year suggests that most were consumed by his family rather than being sold for cash. With 25 entries for July, this was much the most popular month for payments, but September, when Parker could rely on his own small harvest, was the only month in which none were forthcoming. Thereafter, each family appears to have delivered produce or other items as they could spare them or as the minister needed them. Thus, in January, William Lord’s family contributed a half bushel of wheat and a half bushel of rye, in February four pounds of tallow, in May a half bushel of wheat and a half bushel of corn, in June another half bushel of corn and 55 bricks, in July an unspecified amount of veal and 9¾ pounds of sugar, in August one gallon of vinegar and one bushel of wheat, and in November the balance of his year’s subscription in cash for \$1.83. Finally, two men paid with their labour or by exchanging services, such as providing Parker with a cutter to go to Montreal.

The degree to which Parker’s daily material life was tied to his parishioners is remarkable, and much the same pattern can be discerned for the last full year of his account book, 1847. The number of entries had declined to 52, cash payments totaled only \$27.50, and contribution in food items had declined, but labour had become a more important mode of payment than in 1830, perhaps because Parker had his own land to work by this time. This farm was doubtless necessary to feed his growing family, which by 1851 had reached seven children aged five to twenty, plus his mother-in-law and a young servant. Parker wrote in 1850 that his yearly income was less than \$30 per family member and that he had never purchased “a coat for my back from any property or money contributed by the people for my salary”.<sup>82</sup>

Though he fails to mention it in any of his writings, Parker was clearly involved in more than a subsistence agricultural endeavour. In 1851 38 of

81 Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, pp. 205–206.

82 ETRC, APP, 5/Par/22, untitled address, November 1850.

his 480 acres were in crop, 30 acres in pasture, and two acres in garden and orchard. Indeed, Parker's farm was operated on a larger scale than those of nearly all his neighbours, for the average holding in Shipton Township was 109 acres, with 37 acres under improvement. Only 21 of 397 farms were larger than 200 acres.<sup>83</sup>

The 1850s were obviously hard years for the region's agricultural economy, for there were 71 fewer farmers in Shipton in 1861 than there had been ten years earlier. This was not due to a consolidation of holdings since the average farm size and acreage under improvement remained essentially the same, and the number of farms over 200 acres in size dropped from 21 to eight. The Parker farm nevertheless operated on the same scale as ten years earlier, and it was valued at \$4,000, compared to only \$1,402 for the average farm in the township. Parker did not own much more livestock than other Shipton farmers (it was valued at \$336 as compared to the township average of \$277) but, with a hired hand and three sons at home between the ages of 13 and 20, he had a good supply of labour to work the fields. The Parker farm produced 378 bushels of cereal crops and peas and 355 bushels of root crops, compared to the Shipton averages of only 206 and 208 bushels, respectively.

Parker also engaged in land speculation on a relatively small scale during the latter years of his life when, according to local notary records, various sales totaling 940 acres in Shipton and Brompton Gore were valued at \$2,600.<sup>84</sup> The Danville minister was therefore clearly better off financially than his own testimony would suggest, but he would not have the surplus cash needed to engage in moneylending like some of Quebec's more affluent rural priests.<sup>85</sup> While several of his children had moved away by 1861, there were more mouths than ever to feed in the Parker household, which now included a 27-year-old daughter and her two young children, an unmarried daughter who taught school, the three sons, their grandmother, and the hired man, for a total of 11 people. Ten years later, in 1871, the married daughter's husband, identified as a Congregational minister, was recorded as a member of the two-family household, which now included no unmarried Parker offspring. Given Parker's advanced age and failing health by this time, it was obviously the second generation which maintained the

83 Landholdings under ten acres have been excluded from these and the following agricultural calculations.

84 Parker's sales records reveal that he had purchased several lots in Brompton Gore from the Hon. Malcolm Cameron in 1867, but the price he paid for these and other lots is not known. Archives nationales du Québec à Sherbrooke (hereafter ANQS), Greffe F. X. Brien, no. 989, September 16, 1871; no. 1259, December 30, 1872; nos. 1308–1309, February 25, 1873; no. 1956, March 17, 1875; Richmond, Office of M. Tanguay, n.p., Greffe Charles P. Cleveland, no. 1678, March 13, 1872; no. 1942, October 2, 1872; no. 2161, March 18, 1873; no. 2267, May 16, 1873.

85 See, for example, Normand Séguin, *La conquête du sol au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Sillery: Boréal Express, 1977), pp. 189–191.

family farm at a productive level considerably higher than the township average.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the ongoing poverty of the Danville congregation, its church passed quickly through the primitive pioneer stage. Visiting the area in 1843, the Anglican Bishop of Quebec wrote in his journal: “I passed through the good-looking village of Danville, having a respectable Congregationalist meeting-house, with a steeple, and some houses indicating the possession of substantial comforts.”<sup>87</sup> The memory of F. P. Cleveland, who wrote a brief reminiscence in 1910, went back to this time when he was a young boy in the village. Cleveland mentions the high-backed pews, the “fair library of books for those days”, and “the gallery over the front vestibule which was occupied by the choir”. The 1830s and 1840s had brought the emergence of music as a major component of evangelical devotion in New England,<sup>88</sup> and Cleveland’s most vivid recollection was of the choir, to which he himself belonged. It initially consisted of four sopranos, two altos, three tenors, and five base voices. In 1848 the tuning fork was replaced by a cello, to which was soon added a small reed instrument of about four octaves: “The Keys were upright ivory pegs, the bellows was worked with rocking motion by the forearms.” Finally, a melodeon was introduced in the fifties. Cleveland states that “the hymn” was usually sung to the tune of “Balerna”, but there must have been more music in the service than this statement would suggest since most of the choir members could read music, and there was a “singing school” taught by a qualified instructor every winter from about 1849.<sup>89</sup> In this respect, the Congregationalists contrasted sharply with their more dour Presbyterian brethren, many of whom continued to view the organ as the devil’s instrument.<sup>90</sup>

Cleveland’s description speaks to the well-established nature of the Danville congregation, but Parker himself must have had little time for such cultural pursuits. His 1834 report to the Montreal Ladies’ Sewing Society provides a good description of his weekly routine in the early years. He preached twice on Sundays, and “when weather & health would admit attended a third service in the evening”. Each week he rode from two to eight miles to “attend” lectures, and on Saturday evening he led a Bible class and prayer meeting. During the week previous to the Communion

86 Canada, *Census Reports*, 1851–1871; manuscript census, Shipton Township, 1851, 1861; Danville Village, 1871.

87 Quoted in Noël, *Competing For Souls*, p. 191.

88 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, pp. 142–143.

89 Cleveland to Woodley, February 7, 1910.

90 The Presbyterian Scots of Winslow Township, Quebec, stubbornly adhered to their precentor until their church closed its doors in 1923. Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, pp. 215–216. See also John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Bryant Press, 1974), pp. 131–134.

service, held on the last Sunday of the year, Parker had attended a temperance meeting, a church meeting and “Preparatory Lecture”, a funeral, and a Bible class, as well as preparing for a meeting in Vermont on behalf of the CEHMS. En route to this event the following week, he preached in several “destitute places” where people pleaded for regular religious services.<sup>91</sup> During his many absences from Danville, Parker was replaced by a young teacher who had studied for the ministry.<sup>92</sup>

Parker’s arrangement with the Montreal missionary society was initially to tour New England in order to raise funds and interest American clerics in serving Canadian churches. During his first five-week tour through Vermont in February and March 1833, he collected \$130.22 and interviewed a number of ministers, but failed to exact commitments from any of them.<sup>93</sup> Prior to his second two-month tour the following year, Parker asked for more specific instructions:

Tell me how much you want I should beg for *money*, whether I shall spend much time ... with any ministers in order to get them ousted from their present stations, etc. ... & pray much for success for I feel as tho. you had chosen a poor thing for an agent, & fear that the Tour may not tell upon the interests of Zion as we *wish*.<sup>94</sup>

The society secretary’s only response was to leave “almost everything to your discretion”.<sup>95</sup>

Parker was able to find two or three prospective candidates,<sup>96</sup> but both he and the missionary societies were very selective about the type of men they wanted. The secretary of the Massachusetts Society, R. S. Storrs, wrote in January 1834: “It will be utterly in vain to send men to Canada who will not go from house to house, from village to village, from town to town, and from county to county ‘if by *any* means they may save *some*’.”<sup>97</sup> The following June, Storrs added that several ministers had expressed their

91 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/17, A. J. Parker to Secretary Montreal Ladies’ Sewing Circle, Shipton, February 18, 1834. Also printed in ETRC, UCA, *Report of the Canada Education and Home Missionary Society*, 1834, pp. 8–9. See, as well, ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/15, A. J. Parker to Directors of Can. Ed. & H.M. Society, Shipton, July 20, 1829; 5/Par/16, A. J. Parker to Com. of CEHMS, Shipton, July 31, 1833; A. J. Parker to Montreal Ladies’ Sewing Circle, Shipton, May 21, 1835.

92 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/19(1), A. J. Parker to Rev. G. W. Perkins, Shipton, December 9, 1833.

93 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to Dr Br Perkins, St. Albans, Vt, February 25, 1833; G. W. Perkins to editor of *Vermont Chronicle*, April 30, 1833; A. J. Parker to G. W. Perkins, Shipton, March 26, 1833, April 1833.

94 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/19(1), A. J. Parker to Rev. G. W. Perkins, Shipton, December 9, 1833.

95 ANQM, UCA, G. W. Perkins to A. J. Parker, Montreal, December 23, 1833.

96 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to G. W. Perkins, Newport, Vt, January 20, 1834; A. J. Parker’s Report of Agency to Secretary of CEHMS [February 11, 1834].

97 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, R. Storrs to Rev. C. Perry, Braintree [Mass.], January 21, 1834.

willingness to serve in the Townships, but they were not the “right” men: “You know full well that it is not *every* man who does good in N. Eng. that will do good in C. And we must find *young* men — men of spirit, zeal, and devotedness, who will readily identify themselves with the people — none others can become permanent Pastors.” The rub, according to the Massachusetts spokesman, was that these young men would not go to Canada without their fathers’ permission, and this would never be granted until more was learned of the country. The Townships settlers would therefore have to await the results of temporary missions which would make their region better known.<sup>98</sup> Adopting Storrs’s strategy, the American Home Missionary Society did send two missionaries into the Eastern Townships in 1834, but without any very positive short-term results.<sup>99</sup>

Enticed by the prospect of a \$500 annual salary, Parker somewhat reluctantly agreed to become the CEHMS’s travelling and corresponding agent on a more permanent basis in 1835, but he refused to give up his Danville post and insisted on limiting his absences from home to two or three months per year. Parker added that he would deduct all funds provided by his congregation from his salary.<sup>100</sup> His first assignment was to recruit as many as five short-term missionaries, but he made only a brief foray into Vermont, having decided, in his words, to wait until prospects for success improved.<sup>101</sup>

Not surprisingly, the CEHMS soon offered the position of full-time agent to the more enthusiastic W. F. Curry, though the board did ask Parker to attend the state ministerial meetings of both Vermont and New Hampshire in another attempt to recruit support.<sup>102</sup> Despite his approaches in private to a score of the Vermont ministers, Parker later wrote that he found their watch-word to be “Fortify at home”. He had to admit that the “unhappy failure of some ministers & the political ‘rage’ renders the whole field more forbidding than it was 5 years ago.”<sup>103</sup> As for New Hampshire, after labouring “publicly & from house to house”, Parker did manage to elicit a promise from the secretary of the state missionary society to send and sustain one recruit to Lower Canada. The annual report for that year stated:

98 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/18, R. S. Storrs to Rev. J. A. [sic] Parker, Braintree, Mass., June 7, 1834.

99 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, J. J. Gilberte to A. J. Parker, Phillipsburg, September 10, 1834; Henryville, October 30, 1835; J. J. Gilberte to G. W. Perkins, Phillipsburg, November 8, 1834; Henryville, January 6, 1835; J. W. Curtis to G. W. Perkins, Compton, September 16, 1834; [April 1835]; Lennoxville, January 13, 1835.

100 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to G. W. Perkins, Shipton, January 8, 1835; January 20, 1835, addendum February 14, 1835; G. W. Perkins to A. J. Parker, Montreal, April 1, 1835.

101 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to G. W. Perkins, Shipton, April 14, 1835.

102 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, G. W. Perkins to W. F. Curry, Montreal, May 6, 1835; G. W. Perkins to A. J. Parker, Montreal, May 14, 1835; July 14, 1835; A. J. Parker to G. W. Perkins, Shipton, August 11, 1835.

103 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/19, A. J. Parker to Rev. G. W. Perkins, Shipton, October 5, 1835.



There are few of us who have not some relative, some former acquaintance, or neighbor now living in Canada. Yet it has not been generally known, until of late, that there is a protestant population in Lower Canada of 50,000, and but two ministers of our own denomination. ... Now we are among the nearest neighbours to these our destitute brethren and sisters. Of whom have they a stronger and more reasonable claim!<sup>104</sup>

Parker then broke off communications with the CEHMS for a couple of years, until he was asked in 1837 to keep an eye on the students from the Andover Theological Seminary whom Curry had begun to recruit as temporary workers in the Townships.<sup>105</sup> Parker congratulated Curry on his success in finding recruits, but he was less than sanguine about future prospects:

I am not sure what the results of these things will be. The turmoils that exist, the itch for removal, the jealousy existing, & the prejudice ags.<sup>1</sup> our sort of religion & hatred of all religion & the covetousness & ignorance & dwarfishness of Christians in Canada hardly looks like making a successful onset upon the man of Sin in this province.<sup>106</sup>

The depressed state of mind reflected in Parker's letter stemmed in part from the onset of a prolonged period of debilitating illness which, significantly, he failed to mention in his providentialist memoirs. In August 1837 Parker reported that for the previous six months he had been suffering from a "spinal affection accompanied with nervous debility, loss of appetite & prostration of strength".<sup>107</sup> Perhaps it is coincidental that during this era, according to Donald Scott, "a sense of crisis and depression gripped much of the clergy" in New England, for their congregations had been divided and their authority undermined by the rise of radical abolitionism.<sup>108</sup> It is more than likely, however, that the discouraging circumstances Parker himself faced during this era of economic and political crisis contributed to his illness. After complaining in June that "I can accomplish but little & that poorly",<sup>109</sup> the Danville cleric reported in July that the state of affairs in his parish was unchanged: "most of our church is in depressed circumstances & caring & laboring to get bread for their families. Some of them

104 ETRC, UCA, *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Female Auxiliary to the New Hampshire Missionary Society*, Concord, N.H., 1835, p. 7.

105 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, W. F. Curry to A. J. Parker, Montreal, January 27, 1837. Parker wrote that he had approved of the denunciation against the American Home Missionary Society. A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Shipton, July 25, 1837.

106 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Shipton, June 6, 1837.

107 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Danville, August 8, 1837.

108 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, p. 115. On what Scott calls "the crisis of the pastoral clergy", see his chap. 7.

109 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Shipton, June 6, 1837.

have lived for some days in succession without Bread, Meat, or Potatoes.” Parker added that there was no actual physical suffering, and that the approaching harvest would soon bring relief, “[b]ut while the mind is occupied intensely about bread or any thing else. The things of the K.<sup>m</sup> of God are crowded out.”<sup>110</sup>

Parker was contemplating spending half his time in another parish in order to make ends meet,<sup>111</sup> but, with his physician’s warning that further mental effort would lead to paralysis, he was instead forced to arrange with the American Home Missionary Society for an assistant to take over most of his duties in Danville. All he could offer in exchange was food and lodging, the use of his horse, and an attempt “to go about with him more or less”.<sup>112</sup> Parker’s health improved somewhat late in the winter, but in April 1838 he wrote that he had become “unhinged again”.<sup>113</sup> Despite their minister’s forced inactivity, a Danville church committee reported the following December that it had found “the voice of the people to be almost [*sic*] unanimous” in wishing him to remain with them.<sup>114</sup>

Parker recuperated slowly thereafter and in April 1840 he reported that he had been “performing the usual routine of pastoral labor as I had strength to do”. He praised his “attentive & beloved congregation”, but added that “a sort of paralysis” had set in “since the political commotions of 1838 from which they are not yet wholly recovered”.<sup>115</sup> By this time Parker had once again begun visiting other churches in the Eastern Townships on behalf of the CEHMS. The Montreal society had initially given Parker this assignment in the fall of 1833, asking him to “form auxiliary societies, learn their destitution, and procure facts to lay before the public”.<sup>116</sup> In 1841 it again offered Parker \$150 a year to visit “all the churches” in the province in order to collect the Home Mission funds (subtracting his expenses) and ascertain their “pecuniary capabilities”. His report was to include an account of all the property in each church and in its congregation, the amount of religious instruction, the state of the Sabbath schools and Bible classes, the degree of circulation of religious publications, and the religious state of the people in general. Finally, Parker was to “make it a point to bring out their energies both in the support of gospel ordinances and in active benevolence”.<sup>117</sup>

Thus began the Danville minister’s travels to Inverness, Durham, Mel-

110 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Danville, July 25, 1837.

111 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Danville, August 17, 1837.

112 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Danville, November 20, 1837.

113 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to W. F. Curry, Danville, April 10, 1838.

114 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, Simeon Flint *et al.* to W. F. Curry, Danville, December 11, 1838.

115 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, A. J. Parker to Rev. Caleb Strong, Danville, April 27, 1840.

116 ANQM, UCA, CEHMS, G. W. Perkins to A. J. Parker, Granby, November 12, 1833.

117 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/3, Copy of Instructions to Rev. A. J. Parker, January 30, 1841; C. S. to Brother Parker, Montreal, January 30, 1841.

bourne, Sherbooke, Eaton, and other Congregational centres within the region for approximately six weeks each year.<sup>118</sup> Parker is reported to have organized churches in Eaton Township and Sherbrooke in 1835, another in Melbourne and Durham in 1837, and one in the village of Waterville in 1867.<sup>119</sup> His experiences on these often hazardous journeys would make up the bulk of his second major unpublished manuscript, “Memories of Life in Canada”, written in 1875.<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1836 Parker also became a charter member of the St. Francis Association of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers, an organization which was more characteristic of the American Congregational tradition than the English Independent custom of *ad hoc* councils.<sup>121</sup> By taking this step, Parker and his colleagues assumed the power to examine and issue licences to those who were called to preach by local communities within the district. Such associations obviously contributed to the professionalization of the ministry, but they had been established in New England as early as the eighteenth century.<sup>122</sup>

Association meetings were held several times a year (semi-annually by 1842) at the homes of the various members, with one of them preaching the public sermon and each of the others presenting a paper in closed session on a previously chosen topic. Parker’s first subject concerned the best means of promoting spirituality in ministers. At a subsequent meeting he chose to speak “on the spirit we should exhibit and course we should pursue concerning other denominations immediately among us”.<sup>123</sup> This forum was the origin of a number of the essays (including “Why am I a Congregationalist?”) still preserved in Parker’s personal papers.

The aim of the St. Francis Association was clearly to provide the local ministers with a social, spiritual, and intellectual forum, as well as to act as a regulating and lobbying body. It attempted to launch a provincial association of evangelical ministers belonging to various denominations in 1838, but a meeting attended by delegates from Montreal and New Hampshire decided that “it is *not expedient* at present to call such a convention.”<sup>124</sup> Strangely absent from the minutes is any reference to the fact that the Congregational Church established its own governing body in Lower Canada

118 “History of Danville Church”, p. 20.

119 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/6a, Record of A. J. Parker, Danville. The “History of Danville Church” (p. 20) claims that the Melbourne church organized by Parker was Presbyterian. Slightly different dates are given in Noël, *Competing For Souls*, p. 193.

120 These stories are published in J. I. Little, “Perils in the Wilderness: Pioneer Tales from the Reverend Ammi Parker’s ‘Memories of Life in Canada’”, *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, no. 5 (1994), pp. 95–125.

121 Eddy, “The Congregational Tradition”, p. 35.

122 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, p. 2.

123 ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, July 7, 1836, p. 16; December 29, 1836, p. 26.

124 ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, February 13–14, 1838, pp. 39–41; June 14, 1838, p. 45.

that same year.<sup>125</sup> Pressures for a separate denominational identity were evidently stronger outside the Eastern Townships than within it. Other local attempts were made to form inter-denominational associations, but the only concrete result appears to have been the district temperance society launched in 1841.<sup>126</sup>

Parker was the most diligent attender of the St. Francis Association of Ministers' meetings and the one generally chosen to act as agent on its behalf. Thus in 1837 he was appointed to attend the annual conventions of the New Hampshire General Association and its Vermont counterpart.<sup>127</sup> Given his ongoing work with the CEHMS, it was only natural that in 1840 Parker's colleagues would vote him "the most suitable person" to visit the member churches of the Eastern Townships and prepare a report on the same.<sup>128</sup>

The files of several locally based notaries reveal that another of Parker's extra-parish activities was to act as attorney for a number of absentee proprietors selling relatively small amounts of land in the Shipton area.<sup>129</sup> Parker also represented his church in an important legal case concerning a donation of 500 acres in Compton Township by Samuel Hickock of Burlington, Vermont, to that state's Home Missionary Society. When the society was dissolved, it authorized Parker to take over its claim to the land on behalf of his church. Hickock had made the purchase in 1807 from the original grantee, Oliver Barker, but Ezekiel Hart, a large-scale land speculator from Trois-Rivières, had acquired a claim to it at a sheriff's sale of Barker's properties in 1814. Parker started legal proceedings in 1847 to acquire the title, but he lost his case to Hart's heirs in the Court of Queen's Bench at Sherbrooke. "Judicious and distinguished citizens" nevertheless advised the Danville minister to appeal "inasmuch as said decision would involve questions as to title of large quantities of Township lands". When the original decision was upheld with costs of more than £110, exclusive of the fees which the two lawyers agreed to forego, 20 of Sherbrooke's most prominent businessmen agreed to relieve Parker of the burden.<sup>130</sup>

Parker's many absences from home clearly left a considerable burden on his wife's shoulders, particularly given the large number of children she bore. Even though his memoirs show some sensitivity to the role of pioneer

125 *The Harbinger*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1842), p. 4.

126 ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, January 5, 1841, p. 75; June 8, 1841, p. 82; December 27, 1841, p. 84.

127 ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, June 13, 1837, p. 30.

128 ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, June 9–11, 1840, p. 67.

129 ANQS, Greffe George Hope Napier, no. 749, April 13, 1858; no. 1031, March 25, 1859; no. 1962, October 14, 1865; Greffe F. X. Brien, no. 1430, July 17, 1873; no. 1709, June 23, 1874; Office of M. Tanguay, Richmond, Greffe Charles P. Cleveland, no. 1035, March 15, 1870.

130 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/14, Subscription to relieve Rev. Ammi Parker of court costs re property case in Compton County, 1852.

women, and even though women played such an important role in his own church, Parker's patriarchal bias was such that he never mentions the woman he married in Vermont a few months after he had established himself in Danville.<sup>131</sup> Only from a letter by the former Eveline Squier herself do we learn that she initially taught the one school within a ten-mile radius of the village. She wrote in 1871 that three months after her arrival in the community she had set up a room for 25 students, and "as many more would have come if they could have been accommodated". Within two years, however, a number of schools with qualified teachers were opened in the area, an obvious response to the public school funding first provided in Lower Canada by the Legislative Assembly in 1829.<sup>132</sup>

A system of common schools which would teach basic Christian values was crucial to the Canadian evangelicals since, in their view, the state church should be replaced with individual conscience as society's moral rudder.<sup>133</sup> The decade of the 1840s brought major reforms to the provincial school system, with state aid tied to the taxes raised by locally elected school commissions. Ammi Parker writes that, because he was the only local person capable of conducting a business meeting during the early years, he acted as chairman of the Shipton school commission until about 1860. He also served as an official school visitor, going to every school in the township twice a year, and he was instrumental in raising the funds to build the village's first academy in 1854.<sup>134</sup> Finally, as noted above, Parker had initiated the local temperance movement. His papers include no detailed references to it after 1834, but he obviously played a role in the St. Francis Ministerial Association's temperance society launched in 1841, and he was one of Danville's two representatives at the region's first temperance convention held in Sherbrooke in 1846.<sup>135</sup>

Parker had clearly adopted the evangelical ethic of "usefulness" (to use Leonard Sweet's term),<sup>136</sup> but the fact that he spent virtually his whole

131 ETRC, UCA, DPR, F. P. Cleveland to Rev. E. C. Woodley, Lorne, February 7, 1910; "Rev. A. J. Parker", *The Canadian Independent*, March 1894, p. 55; ETRC, APP, 5/Par/6, A. W. Wild, "Churches and Ministers of Vermont, 1762-1830", p. 39.

132 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/23, E. S. P. to Miss Hazleton of Sherbrooke, Danville, December 7, 1871. Edward Cleveland (*A Sketch*, pp. 62-66) writes that Danville's first school was kept on the threshing-floor of a barn around 1810, with the first teacher being "a half-crazy man, who was soon dismissed". Several years later the school was located above a distillery. The first proper building was erected in 1817.

133 Michael Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867" in George A. Rawlyk, ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990* (Burlington, Ont.: Welch Publishing, 1990), pp. 90-91.

134 Parker, "History of the Congregational Church"; ETRC, UCA, DPR, F. P. Cleveland to Rev. E. C. Woodley, Lorne, February 7, 1910.

135 Société d'histoire de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke Total Abstinence Society, *Minute Book*, January 8, 1846.

136 Sweet, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism", p. 878.

career based in one parish was highly unusual for the nineteenth century. Certainly, the Danville clergyman had often considered moving to a wealthier community. He wrote in 1833 that he had yet to decide whether or not to remain in his isolated outpost. He was aware that “this people need faithful & constant preaching”, and that the establishment of his church had had an influence on people elsewhere in the region, stimulating a desire for their own churches. But the calls were so pressing from other places “that at times I have thought I ought to quit this for a more extensive field”.<sup>137</sup>

In reply, one of the New England church leaders admonished him (in words that would prove prophetic) to devote his life to Canada: “Suffer and die, if God so order it, for Canada! ... Your Counsel must guide, your smile must cheer, and your patronage must sustain every missionary who shall go there for fifty years.”<sup>138</sup> The following year found Parker considering a move to the more economically promising villages of Sherbrooke or Lennoxville, and in 1844 he spoke to the St. Francis Association of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers about the lack of encouragement he was being given to remain in the region.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, the mid-1840s was another particularly trying period due to renewed crop failures, economic recession, and the fact that many of the Protestant churches in the region were losing members to the Millerites. Noting the low state of religion in the Congregational churches, the St. Francis Association moved in December 1846

that in view of our mournful state, we spend one hour at evening ... in prayer to G. that he wd. pour out his sp. & revive his work in the hearts of the ministers of the chs. ... and that each of the ministry brethren do what he can to interest every member of the ch. in the same.<sup>140</sup>

Parker persevered, however, and local economic conditions improved when the Quebec-Richmond branch of the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway was constructed through Danville in the early 1850s, encouraging manufacturers to take advantage of the village’s limited water power, though not preventing a number of the township’s families from abandoning their farms, as we have seen.<sup>141</sup> Parker hinted at moving again as late as 1864, when the missionary society’s subsidy of \$100 per year had ended and the congregation’s subscription was still only \$270 despite the fact that he now

137 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/16, A. J. Parker to Com. of Can. Ed. & H.M. Soc’y, Shipton, July 31, 1833.

138 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/18, Rev. E. S. Storrs to Rev. J. A. [sic] Parker, Braintree, Mass., June 7, 1834.

139 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/19, A. J. Parker to Rev. G. W. Perkins, Shipton, October 5, 1835; St. Francis Association, August 10, 1844, p. 99.

140 ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, December 22, 1846, p. 116. See also December 28, 1847, p. 121.

141 C. M. Day, *History of the Eastern Townships* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1869), p. 431.

had eight children.<sup>142</sup> He probably realized, however, that he was too old by this time to start anew elsewhere.

Given the unpromising situation for Congregational preachers in New England, as well as the aggressive tactics of the Church of England and the more evangelical churches throughout the Eastern Townships, perhaps it is not so surprising that the rather cautious and conservative Parker would remain where he had managed to establish a secure foothold within the community. By doing so, he perpetuated his church's earlier tradition that the minister's tie was first and foremost to his congregation. In Donald Scott's words, a "call" from a New England church in the eighteenth century was "to be accepted just as one would accept a marriage vow, for better or worse".<sup>143</sup> Despite his outside activities, motivated to a considerable extent by financial necessity, Parker's ministry in many respects represented the continuity of an era when pastors were tightly integrated into the social structure of the communities within which they were more or less permanently settled. The fact that only a minority belonged to his denomination was mitigated by his ecumenical outlook and by the fact that he was the only cleric in the village for over 30 years of his career.

An active community figure such as Parker was doubtless essential to the Congregationalists' survival, for in the nearby mission of Little Warwick several of the Congregationalist founders of 1857 soon joined the more evangelical Methodist, Baptist, and Adventist Churches.<sup>144</sup> Parker even hints at determined opposition to him in the early days of Danville. At one point, "a small deputation of my countrymen" asked an Irish Catholic to "out-root" the Congregationalist minister from the community, but nothing came of the plot. Parker was also twice threatened with personal violence, "once by having a shilalah swing over, and about my head, and once by summary ejection from the house of one of my own countrymen".<sup>145</sup> Finally, he was accused of embezzling school funds on one occasion and of stealing a sheep on another, though affidavits established his innocence before either case went to court. On the whole, however, the Danville minister was probably not exaggerating when he claimed that there had been "very little of discord" or factionalism throughout his lengthy career.<sup>146</sup>

Parker was able to report as early as 1857 that "the Individual greetings, the family welcomes, the public expresses [*sic*] of confidence & good will, which I have shared, have endeared to my heart a kind & confiding

142 Parker, "For 35th Anniversary". The American Home Missionary Society had withdrawn aid from Canada in 1842, and the Congregational Missionary Society had replaced the CEHMS for the Congregationalists in 1845. ETRC, UCA, St. Francis Association, 1836–66, *Minutes*, December 28, 1842, p. 92; Noël, *Competing For Souls*, p. 194.

143 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, p. 8.

144 ETRC, UCA, APP, 5/Par/22, Ammi Parker, "History & Record of the Church at Little Warwick".

145 Parker, "Church History", pp. 42–43.

146 Parker, "For 35th Anniversary".

people.”<sup>147</sup> In 1872, when he was too ill to attend the Danville church’s fortieth anniversary ceremony, members of the congregation went to his bedside where they “gave and received a Christian greeting and farewell”. They also extended “the same cordial greeting and earnest kind wishes” to Eveline Parker “who has ever proved herself a faithful helpmeet during these forty years of ministerial toil and too frequent privation”.<sup>148</sup>

Ammi Parker’s health was not good during his later years, but he survived to the age of 75, dying on October 29, 1877.<sup>149</sup> Written essentially for the edification and encouragement of his congregation, Parker’s various memoirs give little hint of discouragement or the stagnation and decline that his community was undergoing. Nor do the many documents in his personal file provide much insight into the private man or his spiritual odyssey, failing to mention his family, his farm, or his protracted illness in the late 1830s. In short, Parker does not include the introspective descriptions of early struggle and rebirth which Marguerite Van Die has found to characterize the “religious biographies” commonly penned by Methodist ministers at this stage of their lives.<sup>150</sup> Instead, there are only occasional observations about his sense of unworthiness. These may have been *pro forma*, but there is a ring of sincerity to the statement that if the misgivings he felt “have given any one else so much trouble as they have given myself, I pity the man.”<sup>151</sup>

Parker’s lack of evangelical self-confidence, combined with his rather pragmatic outlook, (reflected in his memoirs’ glorification of Canada’s material progress) no doubt reinforced the tolerant attitude which was an important asset in an ethnically and religiously mixed environment. Even though Parker’s memoirs demonized the Catholic Church in order to justify his career in Quebec and to raise American funds for his church, he did not attempt to proselytize, stating that he had not aimed “to attack & controvert other men who differ from us, so much as to inquire after the truth, & sometimes to place the truth in contrast with error”.<sup>152</sup> Parker’s primary role may have been to serve one small remnant of a religious denomination which had been eclipsed in the United States and English-speaking British North America by the rise of a more individualistic ethos, but by training and temperament he was inclined to interpret his community rather broadly.

Even in preparing his last will and testament, Parker adhered to the eighteenth-century ministerial ideal, described by Donald Scott as “the absence of excessive concern about acquiring the material goods and com-

147 Parker, “History of the Congregational Church”.

148 ETRC, UCA, APP, *The Canadian Independent* (July 1872–June 1873), pp. 201–203.

149 ETRC, UCA, APP, “Rev. A. J. Parker”, *The Canadian Independent*, March 1894, p. 56. Parker’s illnesses are referred to in the *Minute Books* of the St. Francis Association, September 13, 1864 [no pagination]; March 10, 1868, p. 36; May 14, 1872, p. 56.

150 Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind*, p. 14.

151 Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, pp. 31–32; Parker, “History of the Congregational Church”.

152 Parker, “For 35th Anniversary”.



forts of the world, the absence of spiritual pride, and most of all the absence of personal ambition for power and fame".<sup>153</sup> Parker asked that "my body may be buried in a plain black Coffin, and that all ostentatious display in connexion with my burial should be avoided; That so my testimony may be perpetuated, that I regard a plain and simple manner of burial as the 'better way'".<sup>154</sup> Parker had obviously played a prominent role as a minister not only in Danville but throughout the Eastern Townships, yet he had not been a true nineteenth-century professional as defined by a classical education, a secure income, and mobility.<sup>155</sup>

While Ammi Parker's public career is much more accessible to us than is his private life, it too could have been described in greater detail had more than a few reports from his voluminous correspondence survived. The Danville minister claimed as early as 1857 that he had 3,000 letters on file, as well as having preached 4,000 sermons.<sup>156</sup> Yet, however small the proportion of records which do remain, they offer us a valuable glimpse at nineteenth-century religion and society in the Eastern Townships. They also suggest that, Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis to the contrary, the settlement frontier did attract individuals who wished to preserve a communitarian ethos rather than flee from it. But further research is needed to determine the type of social role played by other ministers, particularly of the more popular denominations which had different governing structures than the Congregationalists. Only then will we be able to judge the degree to which Parker's role was or was not typical of that played by that most neglected figure in Canadian history, the rural clergyman.

153 Scott, *From Office to Profession*, p. 7.

154 Office of M. Tanguay, n.p., Richmond, Greffe Charles P. Cleveland, no. 1594, November 28, 1871.

155 Gidney and Millar stress the first two requirements, suggesting (unlike Scott) that geographic mobility was actually a detracting element from professional status, but their reference point is the itinerant Methodist preachers of the early nineteenth century. R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 3-12, 16, 27-31, 36, 111, 117-118.

156 Parker, "History of the Congregational Church".