

# *Regional Complexity and Political Behaviour in a Quebec County, 1867-1886*

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## I

During the past fifteen years, several works dealing with nineteenth century Quebec political behaviour have appeared whose distinguishing characteristic has been their examination of this behaviour in a regional context. This tendency is particularly evident in the 1959 study of Quebec political behavior on the provincial level by Jean Hamelin, Jacques Letarte and Marcel Hamelin. In regard to the distribution of political support during the first thirty years of confederation, they noted, « Durant la période 1867-1896, la province de Québec a connu huit élections provinciales. La comparaison des résultats de ces huit scrutins fait surgir des zones politiques bien précises. »<sup>1</sup> In fact, the authors found the regional nature of political support to be so striking that the conclusion of their work was entitled, "Plaidoyer pour des études régionales globales."<sup>2</sup> They suggested that to understand why a particular political party was strongly supported by a given region it was first necessary to understand the sorts of cultural values and economic pressures that were dominant in the region.

Since the publication of the pioneering study by Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin, several other works have appeared which have also viewed the regional nature of political support. The most striking example of such an approach is found in Jean-Paul Bernard's *Les Rouges*.<sup>3</sup> When presenting tables indicating the amount of support for each of Quebec's political parties between 1854 and 1867, Bernard divides Canada East first into the *Grandes Régions* of Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Quebec and then into the smaller regions found within these subdivisions. Similarly, in a recently published study concentrating on the behaviour of the members of the Quebec Legislative Assembly between 1867 and 1878, Marcel Hamelin has found that a recognition of the regional nature of support for the various Quebec governments during that period is essential to an understanding of the policies proposed by those same governments. "La politique provinciale reflète les régionalismes profonds qui caractérisent le Québec du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La province est composée de plusieurs régions qui entretien-

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<sup>1</sup> Jean HAMELIN, Jacques LETARTE et Marcel HAMELIN, "Les élections provinciales dans le Québec," *Cahiers de Géographie de Québec*, 1959, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul BERNARD, *Les Rouges : libéralisme, nationalisme et anticléricalisme au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Montreal, 1971).

ment fort peu de contacts entre elles... Le régionalisme influence la plupart des politiques gouvernementales."<sup>4</sup>

It is certainly encouraging to see that the regional nature of Quebec politics is finally being recognized. However, while there is clearly a benefit to this approach, there lurks a potential danger as well. Just as at an earlier point in time, analysts of nineteenth century Quebec political behaviour saw the province as a Conservative stronghold, devoid of regional differences, the danger now exists that by emphasizing certain regional characteristics, the varying levels of support for the parties within a region may be lost. Thus, for instance, the Eastern Townships and the Trois-Rivières area have been seen as Conservative strongholds, while the area surrounding the town of Saint-Hyacinthe has been described as "la Mecque du libéralisme."<sup>5</sup>

Once the assumption is made that there was only a single dominant form of political behaviour within a given region, little effort is then put forth to consider the possibility that different forces may have influenced the political behaviour of certain parts of the region. Thus, after depicting the Saint-Hyacinthe area as "la Mecque du libéralisme," Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin did not go on to ask if there were different economic pressures at work in different parts of the area or if the church played a different role in different parishes. Rather, they looked for values that may have been held throughout the region. "Quels sont les facteurs déterminants du vote? souvenir de 1837 et des années envirantes des 1848? aisance de la population rurale qui peut se passer d'octrois? influence de la vallée du Richelieu qui a été la voie de communication des armées et des idées américaines?"<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the sorts of questions asked by Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin, this paper will address itself, first, to describing the intricate pattern of political behaviour that can emerge within a region and, then, to indicating the factors responsible for the emergence of one such pattern.

## II

The city of Saint-Hyacinthe was seen by Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin as a Liberal stronghold. However, that city had additional significance to these authors as it stood at the center of a substantial region which also consistently supported the Liberals. "Dans l'orbite de Saint-Hyacinthe gravitent les comtés de Saint-Jean, Châteauguay, Iberville, Verchères, Drummond-Arthabaska, Rouville et Napierville."<sup>7</sup> However, the most consistently Liberal of all the ridings in this region was the county of Saint-Hyacinthe. In the eleven general elections on both the federal and provincial levels held between 1867 and 1886, Liberal candidates were victorious on ten occasions. The sole Conservative elected, Louis Tellier in the 1878 fed-

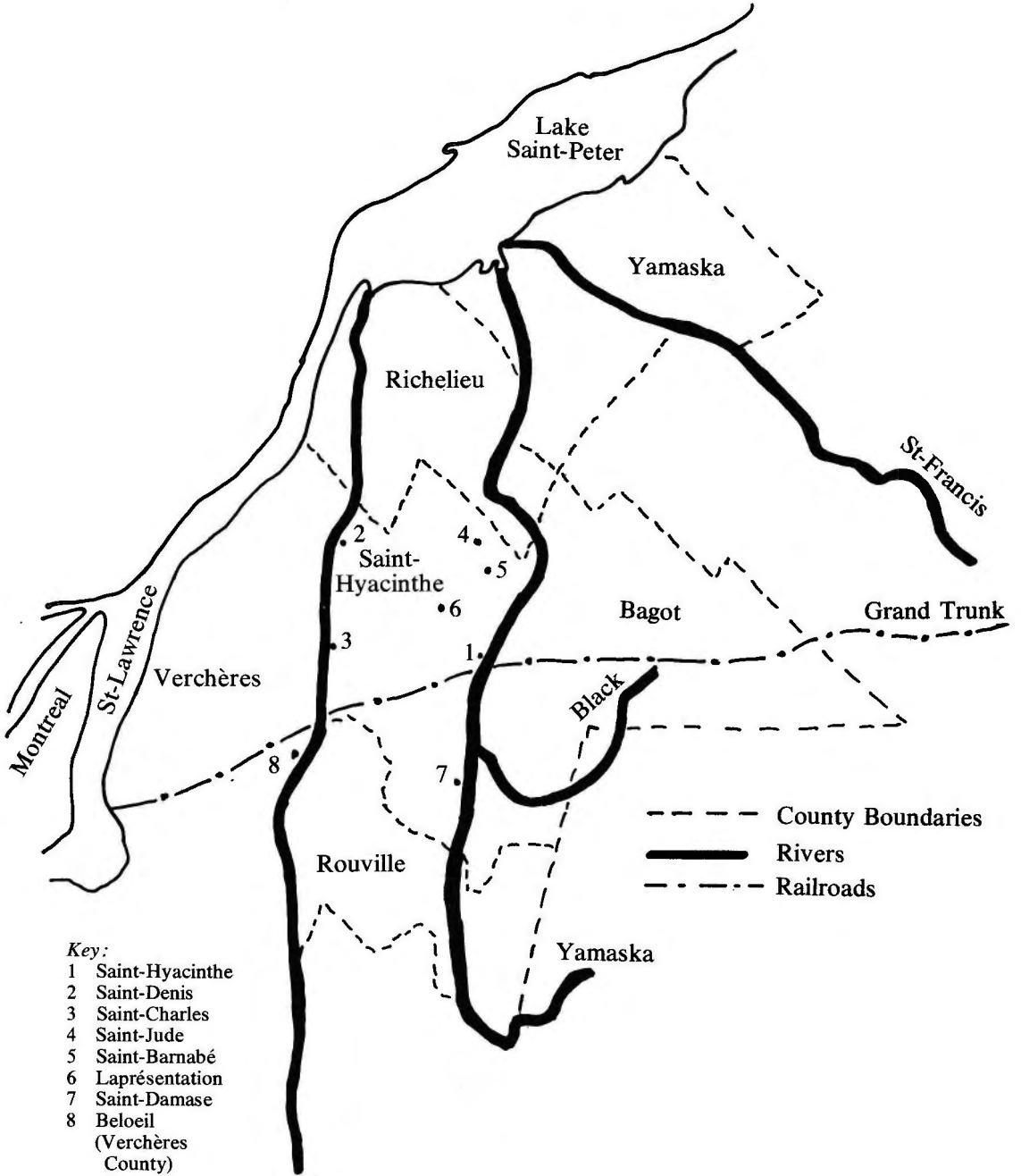
<sup>4</sup> Marcel HAMELIN, *Les premières années du parlementarisme québécois, 1867-1878* (Québec, 1974), p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> HAMELIN, LETARTE et HAMELIN, p. 190.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

SAINT-HYACINTHE COUNTY



eral election, won by a mere six votes. Accordingly, if there ever were justification for labelling a particular area with a particular political label, Saint-Hyacinthe County would seem to qualify for such consideration.

In the analysis that follows, the political behaviour of Saint-Hyacinthe county will be considered on a parish by parish basis from 1867 to 1886. Thus, political behaviour will be analyzed over the first twenty years of confederation, a period during which the Liberals had considerable difficulties in Quebec on both the federal and provincial levels. In this study, political behaviour will be examined on both of these levels with little distinction being made between the two. As Jean Hamelin, Marcel Hamelin and John Huot have found, "Le parti provincial et le parti fédéral s'identifient au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle dans le Québec."<sup>8</sup> They go on to note that "cette identification des partis fédéraux et provinciaux avait de mauvais côtés. Très souvent, les électeurs ne distinguaient pas très bien entre l'attitude d'un parti fédéral et celle de son correspondant provincial sur une question particulière. La protestation contre un gouvernement se manifestait à la prochaine élection, fédérale ou provinciale."<sup>9</sup>

However, the best proof of the appropriateness of such an approach comes from a comparison of returns from federal and provincial elections held within a short period of each other. Between 1867 and 1886, this situation arose on two occasions. In 1867, the first federal and provincial elections under confederation were held on the same day. In Saint-Hyacinthe County, there was not a single parish in which the percentage of the vote for the Liberal candidate on the provincial level differed from the percentage for the same party's candidate on the federal level by more than two percentage points.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in four of the eight parishes in the county, the level of support was identical in each instance. Similarly, in 1878 the level of support for the Liberal candidate in the provincial election held in May and the federal election of September was approximately the same in each parish of Saint-Hyacinthe County.

While there were eleven general elections on the two levels of government between 1867 and 1886, in four of these cases there was no contest as a Liberal candidate was acclaimed the victor. Acclamations present a problem for any study such as this one, which seeks to manipulate voting returns over a number of elections. Ideally, one would like to see the percentage of votes received by each party in each election as well as the share of votes received for all elections considered together. As no votes are really cast in the case of an acclamation, such elections complicate the issue. Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin and Jean-Paul Bernard, whose studies have already been mentioned, agree that in cases of acclamations one should see the acclaimed victor as having received 100% of the votes.

<sup>8</sup> Jean HAMELIN, John HUOT et Marcel HAMELIN, *Aperçu de la politique canadienne au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Québec, 1965), p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> The sources for all electoral data are the sessional papers of Canada and those of Quebec with the exception of the 1871 provincial election, the returns for which could only be found in *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe*, 22 June and 4 July, 1871.

Table I

LIBERAL SUPPORT, SAINT-HYACINTHE COUNTY  
FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, 1878

	<i>Federal</i>	<i>Provincial</i>
Saint-Hyacinthe (City)	69%	71%
Saint-Hyacinthe (Parish)	68	69
Saint-Barnabé	46	47
Saint-Jude	54	54
Saint-Damase	39	46
Laprésentation	40	41
Saint-Charles	51	47
Saint-Denis	10	9
County	50	52

They disagree, however, as to how many votes should be considered to have been cast in such cases. The question is an important one if one is to include acclamations when attempting to arrive at the percentage of votes received by a given party over a number of elections. While it may be agreed that an acclaimed Liberal candidate received all of the votes that would have been cast, the difference between assigning him 500 or 1000 votes may be the difference between seeing his party as the recipient of 60% or 70% of the votes over a number of elections. Since it is agreed that each voter that would have appeared at the polls would have voted for the acclaimed candidate, it is only necessary to devise a scheme to show what the turnout would have been, had there been a real contest. Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin equate the hypothetical turnout rate with the average rate of turnout in ridings where there were contests, while Bernard gauges the assumed turnout rate as the average rate of turnout in the two previous contested elections in the riding under study.<sup>11</sup> Once having arrived at this hypothetical turnout rate, it is a simple matter to take the appropriate percentage of the number of electors on the voters' list to see how many votes would have been cast for the winner.

However, the question of whether Bernard or Hamelin, Letarte and Hamelin have a better scheme is irrelevant since the premise upon which both are operating is false. Elections by acclamation are a special breed of elections and cannot be incorporated into a series of returns based upon contested elections. In fact, Bernard, himself, indicated a certain lack of certainty about his scheme when he noted, "Cette méthode, qui n'est pas sans arbitraire, a l'avantage d'être simple et commode."<sup>12</sup> The assumption that all of the voters would have voted for the acclaimed candidate had there been an election is groundless. In Saint-Hyacinthe County, the residents of Saint-Denis never gave more than 15% of their votes to the Liberals in any contest between 1867 and 1886. Accordingly, it is absurd to assume that these people would have voted unanimously Liberal had there been contests in place of the four acclamations over the first twenty years

<sup>11</sup> HAMELIN, LETARTE, et HAMELIN, p. 164; BERNARD, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> BERNARD, p. 8.

of confederation. Acclamations are a unique type of election and will not be considered in this study.

Having considered these technical problems it is now possible to examine political behaviour on the parish level within the county of Saint-Hyacinthe. While Liberals were regularly returned by this county to both federal and provincial legislatures, on the local level support for the Liberals was far from universal. Patterns of support not visible on the county-wide level are evident upon studying the parish. A similar discovery was made by Lee Benson in his study of nineteenth century political behaviour in New York State:

Depending upon whether we take the state or the county as the unit of analysis, voting in New York appears to have followed markedly different courses between 1826 and 1900. Compared on the basis of statewide returns, the two major parties experienced little change in relative strength throughout the entire period... When the county returns are used to measure party strength, voting changes of great magnitude show up between 1826 and 1900.<sup>13</sup>

In the Saint-Hyacinthe context, a relatively stable pattern of political behaviour appears whether one examines the area on the county or the parish level. The difference is that varying levels of support for the Liberals in certain part of the county become evident from the analysis on the parish level.

In terms of political behaviour, Saint-Hyacinthe County can be divided into three sections. First, the city and the parish of Saint-Hyacinthe, both located on the western bank of the Yamaska River, constitute a distinctive section because of the degree to which the residents of this area supported the Liberals. In the seven contested elections between 1867 and 1886, the city gave 76% of its votes to the Liberals, while the neighboring parish provided 72%. (For election by election returns for each parish, see the appendix.) Truly, the city of Saint-Hyacinthe deserved the title of "la Mecque du libéralisme." The county of Saint-Hyacinthe was bounded on the east by the Yamaska River and on the west by the Richelieu. Those parishes located between the two rivers, Saint-Jude, Saint-Barnabé, Saint-Damase and Laprésentation, as well as the parish of Saint-Charles located upon the Richelieu exhibited a second type of political behaviour. These five parishes gave approximately half of their votes to the Liberals. Finally, the Parish of Saint-Denis, also situated upon the east bank of the Richelieu, was in a class by itself as only 11% of the votes cast there between 1867 and 1886 went to the Liberals. So persistent was the opposition of the Saint-Denis residents to the Liberals that support for that party failed to exceed 14% in any election.

Clearly, any attempt to explain political behaviour in Saint-Hyacinthe County must cope with these pronounced intra-county differences. However, attention must also be paid to the persistence of these differences across the period under study. The persistence of anti-Liberal feeling in

<sup>13</sup> Lee BENSON, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case*, (Princeton, 1961), p. 126.

Saint-Denis has already been noted. Stable levels of support also emerged in the other two sections of the county. Thus, in each election approximately 75% of the votes in the vicinity of the city of Saint-Hyacinthe went to the Liberals, while that party's support in the remaining five parishes was confined to a range between 40% and 60%. Accordingly, in order to find the reasons for the existence of this pattern of political support, it is necessary to seek out factors that were prevalent throughout the period.

In the following section, two different types of factors will be considered in order to explain the emergence of the pattern that has been observed. In the discussion of these possible explanations, attention will be paid primarily to two of the three areas of Saint-Hyacinthe County that have been identified. The most striking contrast was clearly that between the city of Saint-Hyacinthe and the parish of Saint-Denis. Therefore, while some attention will be paid to the other parishes of the county, most concern will be directed towards explaining how a situation arose whereby two areas within a single county, only fifteen mile apart could arrive at such differing political positions.

### III

Probably the most commonly employed explanation for nineteenth century Quebec political behaviour has been that relating behaviour at the polls with the dictates of the church.<sup>14</sup> Much attention has been paid to the problems of the Liberal party caused by the eagerness of certain bishops to encourage their priests to take active roles in politics and by the willingness of the curés to declare to their paroissiens that "L'enfer est rouge et le ciel est bleu." This obvious reference to Quebec's major political factions of the pre-confederation period supposedly conditioned people to oppose the Liberals. The traditional explanation goes on to see Laurier's speech on political liberalism as the start of that party's freedom from the yoke placed upon it by the church. This liberation was fully achieved with Laurier's own victory in 1896.

However, while the assumption has been made that the church played an important role in determining voting behaviour, there has been little effort to clearly show that in specific instances the clergy did in fact greatly influence behaviour at the polls.<sup>15</sup> As Marcel Hamelin notes, "Les textes officiels ne nous permettent pas de percevoir l'influence réelle de l'intervention cléricale en période électorale; seule une étude au niveau des circonscriptions, à l'échelle des paroisses pouvait nous faire apprécier la force des pressions religieuses."<sup>16</sup> In the case of Saint-Hyacinthe County,

<sup>14</sup> Such an explanation can be found in older histories such as Robert RUMILLY, *Histoire de la Province de Québec* (Montreal, 1940-1968), and Mason WADE, *The French Canadians* (Toronto, 1955), as well as in more recent publications such as H. Blair NEATBY, *Laurier and a Liberal Quebec* (Toronto, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> One work that has looked at the role of the church in politics more closely is Paul Crunican's Ph.D. thesis, "The Manitoba School Question and Canadian Federal Politics, 1890-1896, A Study in Church-State Relations," University of Toronto, 1968.

<sup>16</sup> Marcel HAMELIN, p. 216.

it is necessary to study the role of the church in the development of a strong pro-Liberal tradition in the city of Saint-Hyacinthe and a decidedly anti-Liberal one in Saint-Denis.

Saint-Hyacinthe County was situated within the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe whose headquarters were in the city of the same name. In the conflicts between liberal and conservative elements that racked the church during the second half of the nineteenth century, the bishops of Saint-Hyacinthe generally allied themselves with the liberal elements opposing the involvement of the church in civil matters. There were two bishops of Saint-Hyacinthe during the period under study. The first, Charles Larocque, has been given the image of one who was quite involved in politics by several articles noting his public support for confederation.<sup>17</sup> In fact, however, Larocque generally opposed clerical intervention in politics. Thus, in 1871 he refused to support the Catholic Programme which laid down clear guidelines for the way that Catholics should vote. Similarly, in 1874, Larocque wrote to his clergy, "Je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire ici ce que je pense de l'intervention personnelle du prêtre dans les élections; vous savez que je vous ai recommandé l'abstention absolue, comme une règle de conduite."<sup>18</sup> Larocque was bishop from 1866 to 1875. His successor, Louis-Zéphirin Moreau, similarly rejected clerical intervention during his reign from 1875 to 1901. Moreau found that such behavior created "un malaise entre le curé et un certain nombre de ses paroissiens."<sup>19</sup> As Philip Shea has accurately observed, the Liberals in Saint-Hyacinthe must have been aided by the "benevolently neutral position of the church."<sup>20</sup>

A distinction must be made, however, between the role of the bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe in influencing political behaviour in the city of Saint-Hyacinthe as opposed to the parish of Saint-Denis. Since the bishop did reside in the city, one might expect the impact of his decision to keep hands off of politics to be the greatest there. The strong Liberal showing in the city may well have been due in part to the bishop's influence. However, for the bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe to make his feelings known to the residents of Saint-Denis, an intermediary, the local parish priest, entered the scene. With the introduction of this new character, the possibility must be considered that while the bishops were opposing clerical intervention at Saint-Hyacinthe the curés of Saint-Denis may have been practicing such intervention. Certainly, the consistently anti-Liberal behaviour on the part of the Saint-Denis residents forces one to consider this possibility.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Walter ULLMAN, "The Quebec Bishops and Confederation," *Canadian Historical Review* XLIV (Sept., 1963), 213-234, and Lucien LEMIEUX, "Monseigneur Charles Larocque, évêque de Saint-Hyacinthe et la Confédération," *Société canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église catholique* (1967), 55-61.

<sup>18</sup> *Mandements, Lettres pastorales et circulaires des évêques de Saint-Hyacinthe* (hereafter *Mandements*), IV, p. 354.

<sup>19</sup> Letter of 31 March 1880, *Registre des lettres des évêques de Saint-Hyacinthe*, X, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Philip SHEA, "Electoral Practices in Quebec, 1867-1882," (unpublished M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1968), p. 7.



In order to have the feelings of the bishops regarding the role of the church in politics passed along to the curés, a situation had to exist in which the curés respected their superior. Without this respect, it would have been a simple matter for the curés to ignore this particular policy. In the case of the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe, there is some question as to whether this respect actually existed. Problems with the clergy of the diocese marked the reign of Charles Larocque. When Larocque took control of the diocese in 1866, he found himself to be the inheritor of a substantial debt. Accordingly, he imposed a tax of 10% upon the parish treasuries. However, by the end of 1866, Larocque reduced this tax to 8%.<sup>21</sup> Larocque's lowering of this assessment may have been caused, not by any easing of the diocese's financial difficulties, but rather by the unwillingness of the curés to comply with his earlier 10% request. Thus, in May 1867, Larocque was having difficulty in even collecting the 8% tax. "Il ne peut plus être possible d'envisager le huit par cent que j'ai accepté à la place du dixième auquel l'évêque a incontestablement le droit, comme une simple dette d'honneur, mais que ce huit par cent doit être considéré comme une dette de conscience, de même que la dîme que le paroissien est tenu de payer à son curé."<sup>22</sup>

By the fall of 1868, Larocque's financial problems had become so serious that he was forced to evacuate the évêché at Saint-Hyacinthe in order to cut costs. He noted that it was necessary "de renoncer à cette demeure elle-même et aux avantages auxquels on visait en la bâtissant, si l'on veut parvenir à liquider la lourde dette de près de onze mille louis qui pèse sur la Corporation épiscopale de Saint-Hyacinthe."<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the same bishop, who had found it possible to reduce the tax on the parishes from 10% to 8% in 1866, remarked in 1868 that the evacuation was necessary because, "Nous ne voyons plus où nous pourrions la [somme de onze milles louis] trouver!"<sup>24</sup> However, the most significant aspect of Larocque's seemingly self-less move was the contempt with which it was met by some of the curés of the diocese. Larocque was not seen as the bishop who had sacrificed his own comfort to take up residence at the presbytère at Beloeil. Rather, he was seen as a financially ambitious man whose actions were governed by a desire to gain the salary of the curé of Beloeil in addition to his own pay as bishop. Undoubtedly hurt by such an accusation, Larocque responded:

J'insiste d'autant plus fortement sur ce point que je n'y met aucune intérêt personnel. Car dans ce que j'ai fait aussi bien que dans que je médite, j'ai en vue mes successeurs et le bien du diocèse et nullement moi-même! En sortant de l'Évêché, j'ai formellement averti Monsieur le Procureur de la mense que j'entendais bien ne pas lui demander un seul sou pour mon usage personnel.<sup>25</sup>

Bishop Larocque spent the rest of his days as leader of the diocese in exile at Beloeil. Throughout his stay there, he continued to be beset by an

<sup>21</sup> *Mandements*, II, p. 382.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

unwillingness on the part of his curés to aid in paying off the diocese's debt. The following appeal to the curés is representative of many that Larocque was forced to make from Beloeil.

J'espère que ceux qui se trouvaient ici en arrière de leur devoir ne méconnaissent pas leur obligation; et que c'est le manque de moyens, et non pas de volonté, qui les a empêchés de s'en acquitter; je me borne pour aujourd'hui à les supplier de ne pas négliger de s'en acquitter au plus tôt.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Larocque's very presence at Beloeil impeded the degree to which the curés and the bishop might work together. Traditionally, the bishop had brought together all of his curés at the évêché on an annual basis. The lack of facilities at Beloeil prevented such meetings from taking place between 1868 and 1875. Thus, Larocque was denied a tool by which he could have met with his curés in order to secure their co-operation. When Bishop Moreau, Larocque's successor, found himself in a position to reoccupy the évêché in 1876, he emphasized the importance of being able to entertain his priests there. Thus, Moreau announced, "J'éprouve un véritable plaisir à vous annoncer que je me suis déterminé à reprendre la maison. [pour] y exercer l'hospitalité comme autrefois."<sup>27</sup>

The problems that Larocque encountered in commanding the respect of his curés suggest that his orders forbidding clerical intervention in the political realm may well have been ignored by the curés. Of primary importance here is the question of the degree to which the curés of Saint-Denis complied with the bishop's orders. Thus, it is necessary to know if the curés of Saint-Denis did in fact deliver instructions to their *paroissiens* as to how they should vote.

Establishing the extent of clerical intervention is not a simple matter, however. There are three sources from which one can draw references to clerical intervention in Saint-Hyacinthe County. In the first two sources, Louis-Antoine Dessaulles' private papers and the letters written to and by the bishops of Saint-Hyacinthe, one is confronted primarily with complaints from disgruntled Liberal candidates that may or may not have had any factual basis. Dessaulles, a Liberal leader of Saint-Hyacinthe from the days of the Rouges in the 1850s, presented a blanket indictment of most curés in most elections.<sup>28</sup> Dessaulles' anti-clerical feelings were probably a factor in his making these accusations. Just as Dessaulles' evidence is less than objective, the letters written to and by the bishops of Saint-Hyacinthe provide a poor source for gauging the extent of clerical intervention, as references to such intervention appear only when a defeated Liberal candidate is found complaining of the actions of a particular curé.

The third source of references to clerical intervention appears to be considerably more objective and, accordingly, more informative. During the fall and winter of 1867, the Liberal journal, *Le Pays*, published a series

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, p. 318.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, V, p. 72-73.

<sup>28</sup> *Cahiers de notes de Louis-Antoine Dessaulles*, Public Archives of Canada, MG24

of articles discussing the political activities of most of the curés of the area to the southeast of Montreal during the 1867 elections. Significantly, *Le Pays* did not hand down a blanket condemnation as had Dessaulles. In fact, the newspaper had praise for the restraint exercised by certain curés. One of the curés singled out for praise was M. O'Donnell of Saint-Denis. "M. O'Donnell est en politique, un conservateur, ce qui augmente encore à nos yeux son mérite comme pasteur puisqu'il a eu assez de jugement et de vraie compréhension de ses devoirs pour ne pas permettre à ses opinions de fausser ses notions de vrai prêtre catholique."<sup>29</sup>

*Le Pays's* comment says a great deal about the role of the church in the development of a solidly anti-Liberal tradition in Saint-Denis. M. O'Donnell was the leader of the church in Saint-Denis from 1862 to 1897. Accordingly, if his behavior in 1867 is any indication, then throughout the period under study there was no attempt on the part of the curé of Saint-Denis to prejudice his *paroissiens* against the Liberals. Despite O'Donnell's restraint, however, the residents of Saint-Denis still rejected the Liberals giving that party only 11% of their votes in 1867. Clearly, if *Le Pays* were seeking a scapegoat for the Liberals' poor showing in 1867, the curé of a parish such as Saint-Denis was an ideal target. In this light, the praising of M. O'Donnell becomes all the more striking. Even more significant, however, is the fact that the Liberals failed to do well in Saint-Denis despite the fact that the element of clerical intervention was absent. Quite clearly, then, the strong anti-Liberal vote in Saint-Denis was not related to the influence of the church.

More attention must be paid, however, to the role of the church in the city of Saint-Hyacinthe in aiding the development of a Liberal tradition there. The presence of bishops in that city who did not condemn the Liberals was certainly a factor in this tradition's development. However, the role of the priests associated with the Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe must also be considered. Marcel Hamelin finds that one of the factors in the growth of Liberal strength in the city was "un enseignement libéral dispensé par quelques prêtres du Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe."<sup>30</sup> The liberal tendencies of those connected with the Séminaire were evident quite early in that institution's history. Charles Choquette found that while the church generally condemned the rebellions of 1837 there were certain elements within the Séminaire that aided the forces of Papineau. "Plusieurs jeunes professeurs y aient coopéré jusqu'au point de se compromettre aux yeux des autorités religieuses et civiles"<sup>31</sup> This political orientation extended into the period under study in this paper. Robert Cox finds that not only did these priests tolerate the city's Liberal politicians but seemed to encouraged them.

Early in the 1860's, a new generation of politicians were entering on the political scene at Saint-Hyacinthe. Honoré Mercier, Pierre Boucher de la Bruè-

<sup>29</sup> *Le Pays*, 30 November 1867.

<sup>30</sup> Marcel HAMELIN, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Charles CHOQUETTE, *Histoire de la ville de Saint-Hyacinthe* (Saint-Hyacinthe, 1930), p. 116.

re, Paul de Cazes, Esdras Bernier and Raphael Fontaine were among them. [This group] focussed around the Seminary of Saint-Hyacinthe... The leadership of the town, social, intellectual and political, passed to this younger Liberal school... [which] was not characterized by the older anti-clericalism of the Des-saulles [Rouge] stamp. In December 1872, the Superior of the Seminary avowed, 'Dans notre pays, il n'y a pas de libéralisme dans le sens condamné par l'Église.'<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the church may provide an explanation for the type of political behaviour evident in Saint-Hyacinthe. In a sense, there was clerical intervention within the city of Saint-Hyacinthe. This intervention's unusual feature was that it was in support of the Liberals, not the Conservatives. As Confederation approached, the group of men that would largely direct Liberal fortunes in Saint-Hyacinthe between 1867 and 1886 were being supported by the Séminaire. While the position of the church towards the Liberals in the city of Saint-Hyacinthe aids in explaining the city's political behaviour, its role in Saint-Denis does not provide an explanation. The church was clearly tolerant of Liberals, and yet the Liberals still fared poorly in Saint-Denis. Nevertheless, an examination of the relationship between the residents of Saint-Denis and the church in another context may provide a key to understanding that parish's political behaviour.

Thus far, the nature of the relationship between the church and the *paroissien* that has been described has pertained to the direct impact that the church might have had on the Québécois' voting behaviour. However, the church sought more from its followers than mere obedience to its orders. It also sought members of the community to join its ranks as priests. Like any institution, the church would cease to exist without the regular infusion of new blood. Thus, when the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe added three new parishes to its territory in 1854, it announced with great joy to the *paroissiens* who were now tied to a new diocese, "Vos chers enfants qui entrèrent dans l'état ecclésiastique augmenteront (et Nous espérons que ce sera en grand nombre) les rangs de notre pieux clergé."<sup>33</sup> Obviously, the church was not subtle about its need for new recruits.

All sections of a given diocese did not respond with equal enthusiasm to the needs of the church. In his study of the diocese of Trois-Rivières, Louis-Edmond Hamelin has shown that one section of the diocese, while possessing only 18% of the diocese's population between 1850 and 1950, provided over half of the diocese's priests. On the other hand, a second area contributed only 28% of the diocese's priests, while containing 63% of its population. Thus, there are obvious regional differences in the provision of priests. To measure these differences more precisely, Hamelin has developed an "index de fécondité sacerdotale des garçons."<sup>34</sup> This index can be computed in the following manner. First, for the period under consider-

<sup>32</sup> Robert Cox, "The Quebec Provincial Election of 1886," (unpublished M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1952), pp. 170, 173.

<sup>33</sup> *Mandements*, I, p. 242.

<sup>34</sup> Louis-Edmond HAMELIN, "Contribution Aux Recherches Sociales du Québec Par Une Étude des Variations Régionales du Nombre des Vocations Sacerdotales," *Cahiers de Géographie de Québec*, 1957, p. 17.

ation, one takes the number of priests provided by a particular area to the church. Then, it is necessary to count the number of male baptisms for the same region twenty-five years earlier. Hamelin suggests that most priests were ordained near the age of twenty-five. Thus, for instance, the males baptised in 1925 were eligible for ordination in 1950. Finally, by dividing the number of baptisms by the number of ordinations, it is possible to arrive at a figure which would indicate the number of baptisms which are required before a future priest will be found. Quite simply, if during a given period there were ten baptisms and if twenty-five years later there were two ordinations, Hamelin's index would indicate that for the given locale every fifth baptised male was likely to become a priest.

Data exist to attempt to employ this index for certain parts of the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe. These data indicate the number of baptisms between 1840 and 1860 and the number of ordinations between 1865 and 1885, a period that roughly coincides with the era under study.<sup>35</sup> Striking regional differences appear when Hamelin's index is computed from these data, as Table II indicates. The clearest contrast is that between the parish of Saint-Jude which saw only one out of every 372 baptised males become priests and the east bank parishes of Saint-Charles and Saint-Denis where one out of every 94 sought the clergy as his life's work. The three parishes on the west bank of the Richelieu, Saint-Marc, Saint-Antoine and Beloeil, all in Verchères County, indicated only a slightly lower level of *fécondité sacerdotale* than the parishes on the opposite bank.

Table II

"INDEX DE FÉCONDITÉ SACERDOTALE DES GARÇONS"

<i>Region</i>	<i>Baptisms 1840-1860</i>	<i>Ordinations 1865-1885</i>	<i># Baptisms Needed for 1 Ordination</i>
West bank of Richelieu	5077	46	110
East bank of Richelieu	5840	61	94
Saint-Jude	1486	4	372

However, not only is the contrast between the region including Saint-Denis and the parish of Saint-Jude significant because of the huge difference between each locale's production of priests, but also because these differences coincide with wide divergences in political behaviour. Thus, while 59% of the voters in Saint-Jude were Liberal supporters between 1867 and 1886, only 11% of the Saint-Denis residents supported that party. One is then forced to ask how Saint-Denis' tendency to send a large number of its sons into the priesthood was related to its disdain for the Liberals. If the church in Saint-Denis were openly in support of the Conservatives, then it would be possible to argue that the devotion to the church that was evident in sending sons into the priesthood might also have manifested itself in consistently voting Conservative. However, since the bishops of Saint-Hyacinthe and the curé of Saint-Denis during this period consistently took the po-

<sup>35</sup> These data are from the histories of the parishes of the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe compiled by Abbé Desnoyers. These volumes, available in the archives of the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe, were not published and there is no indication as to when they were written.

sition that a good Catholic could vote for either of the two parties, such an argument cannot be employed. Clearly, factors not related to the role of the church must be introduced to make this connection.

An explanation for Saint-Denis' high *fécondité sacerdotale*-anti-Liberal position can be found by studying the economic position of this parish in the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to the rebellions of 1837, Saint-Denis was the major center of this region. As J.-B.-A. Allaire recorded.

Saint-Denis était devenue à cette époque une petite métropole. C'est à ses quais que l'on embarquait une grande partie des grains de l'intérieur de la région, c'est aussi là que l'on venait s'approvisionner. Ensuite, au commerce, se joignirent les industries, et tout alla grandissant jusqu'à la crise de 1837... On croyait à la fondation d'une florissante ville en peu d'années. Sous ce rapport, on a certainement présumé, mais on calculait sans le soulèvement de 1837, qu'il était difficile de prévoir.<sup>36</sup>

During this era of prosperity, Saint-Hyacinthe was only a small hamlet, clearly of lesser importance than Saint-Denis. When the rebellions came, however, and most of the town of Saint-Denis was destroyed, the proprietors of many of the town's establishments chose to rebuild elsewhere. One town in particular benefited from Saint-Denis' crisis. Allaire noted, "Le souffle révolutionnaire qui passa sur ce coin du pays fut un coup fatal pour sa prospérité; tout se trouva alors désorganisé. Saint-Hyacinthe recueillit les unes après les autres les forces vives de son aîné et ce fut l'origine de sa suprématie."<sup>37</sup>

The process by which Saint-Hyacinthe drained Saint-Denis of its prosperity continued into the 1840s and 1850s. An important event for both towns was the opening of the Saint-Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad, later the Grand Trunk, from Longueuil to Saint-Hyacinthe in 1848. For Saint-Denis, this event meant that the pace of its decline would be accelerated. Its earlier prosperity was based upon its location along the Richelieu. However, as Allaire found, "La construction des voies ferrées a malheureusement dérangé bien des plans d'autrefois, et Saint-Denis pour sa part, en a été une des victimes. Aujourd'hui c'est Saint-Hyacinthe qui possède ce dont Saint-Denis a connu les brillants débuts."<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the clearest expression of Saint-Hyacinthe's rise at the expense of Saint-Denis can be seen in the behavior of two prominent Saint-Denis residents in the 1850s. John Chamard was one of Saint-Denis' leading merchants. In *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe* of 3 August, 1854, an advertisement appeared which asked farmers to sell their crops to John Chamard "à Saint-Denis sur le Richelieu." However, on 13 June, 1856, Chamard purchased an advertisement in the same newspaper to thank the people of his new location, "Saint-Hyacinthe, pour la grand part de leur patronage." Chamard realized that greater opportunities existed in thriving Saint-Hyacinthe than in stagnating Saint-Denis. In 1862, Chamard once

<sup>36</sup> J.-B.-A. ALLAIRE, *Histoire de la paroisse de Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu* (Saint-Hyacinthe, 1905), pp. 90, 345.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

more indicated his business acumen when, in the midst of some trying years for the Saint-Hyacinthe commercial community, he moved his establishment to Montreal. Similarly, in 1858, Romauld Saint-Jacques left Saint-Denis in the middle of his term as the town's mayor in order to establish himself as a merchant in Saint-Hyacinthe.<sup>39</sup>

However, not all of the individuals who had become prosperous during Saint-Denis' years as a commercial center left the parish in the 1850s. Nevertheless, those who stayed were faced with the problem of how best to invest their capital now that the local grain trade was no longer thriving. Many of these individuals invested in the growth of Saint-Hyacinthe. Accordingly, when La Banque de Saint-Hyacinthe was formed in 1873 and stock was put up for sale at \$100 per share, 378 shares were purchased by residents of Saint-Denis.<sup>40</sup> Only residents of Saint-Hyacinthe and Saint-Césaire, the latter a rising center in its own right, held more shares than the residents of Saint-Denis.

In addition to deciding how to invest their capital, the residents of Saint-Denis who stayed at home had to make a decision as to the sort of professions towards which they should direct their sons. In earlier days, commerce and industry were both possibilities, but these were both now in decline. Similarly, farmers in Saint-Denis found it increasingly difficult to hand land down to their sons as their farms had become less and less productive. Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand why a Saint-Denis resident might have been inclined to send his son into the priesthood. The situation faced by the Saint-Denis resident beginning in the 1850s and 1860s was not unlike that depicted by Fernand Ouellet in his *Histoire économique et sociale du Québec*.<sup>41</sup> Ouellet found that in an earlier era fathers who saw farming to be unprofitable and commercial and industrial enterprise to be beyond the reach of the French Canadians sent their sons into the *professions libérales*. Thus, prior to the 1837 rebellions, French Canada had a surplus of doctors and lawyers. The Saint-Denis resident found himself in a similar bind. However, due to the earlier boom in the liberal professions, his options were even more restricted than they would have been earlier in the century. He, accordingly, sent his sons into the priesthood. Thus, by understanding Saint-Denis' economic position one can understand why that parish displayed a high rate of *fécondité sacerdotale*.

Saint-Denis' unique form of political behaviour can also be understood in terms of its economic situation. Battles between Liberals and Conservatives not only in Saint-Hyacinthe County but also throughout the whole region surrounding Saint-Hyacinthe were not based on national or provincial issues. Rather, these contests were essentially plebiscites over the question of whether the rural parishes were willing to have their interests in Ottawa and Quebec looked after by Liberal politicians from the city

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>40</sup> *Sessional Papers of Canada* (1875), #22, pp. 268-275.

<sup>41</sup> Fernand OUELLET, *Histoire économique et sociale du Québec, 1760-1850* (Montreal, 1968).

of Saint-Hyacinthe. Thus, the Liberal party machine working out of that city sought to spread its influence, while the Conservatives tried to exploit rural dislike for the city for their own interests. The Liberals certainly had heavy ammunition on their side which they employed successfully, as their ability to win election after election indicates. The major newspapers of the region were located in Saint-Hyacinthe, as were the courts and the most important educational facilities. Most importantly, however, farmers had to come to Saint-Hyacinthe to market their goods. As Robert Cox stated: "The farmers' success depended upon an economic relationship with the town. Frequent contact in a business way with such a centre of activity would likely mean contact with the notaires, doctors and lawyers who formed the political élite of Saint-Hyacinthe."<sup>42</sup> To Cox, contact with these Liberal leaders had clear political consequences. The residents of the surrounding parishes could hardly avoid voting for the Liberals as this élite came to control parish life. "A new supra-parochial leadership in the shape of the élite of a nearby urban community was assuming a good share of the prestige which was falling from the parish leaders themselves."<sup>43</sup>

Obviously, the Conservatives were not going to accept this situation without a struggle and, apparently, in Saint-Denis the Conservatives were able to hold off the influence of Saint-Hyacinthe's Liberal élite. Everywhere in the region the Conservatives tried to stir people up against these invaders from the city. Thus, in the course of an election campaign in Bagot County, just across the Yamaska from Saint-Hyacinthe, the Conservative *Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe* noted, "Voici venu le moment pour eux de s'émanciper de l'influence d'une ville qui enfin de compte ne lui veut aucun bien."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, after the defeat of the Liberal candidate in a Saint-Hyacinthe by-election, *Le Courrier* celebrated the victory of the rural areas over the city. "La ville, avec son organisation permanente et puissante, s'était jetée sur ce comté, pour le gagner à ses idées et lui faire accepter l'homme de son choix. Mais tout a été inutile, la ville a été impuissante et le comté n'a pas accepté l'homme du choix de la ville."<sup>45</sup>

The Liberals identified themselves with the interests of the city of Saint-Hyacinthe, while the Conservatives identified themselves with the interests of the county outside of that city. This situation is made clear particularly by examining the backgrounds of the candidates of each party between 1867 and 1886. With the exception of A. Kierzkowski, the 1867 candidate on the federal level, all of the Liberal candidates were residents of Saint-Hyacinthe. In addition to acting as either lawyers or *notaires*, several of the Liberal candidates were deeply involved in the development of Saint-Hyacinthe. For instance, Michel Esdras Bernier, who was elected to parliament for Saint-Hyacinthe County in 1882, was not only a *notaire* but also a director of La Banque de Saint-Hyacinthe, La Compagnie Manufacturière de Saint-Hyacinthe and the Abel Hosiery Company of Saint-Hya-

<sup>42</sup> Cox, p. 176.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>44</sup> *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe*, 31 July 1863.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 October 1863.



cinthe, as well as a partner in the firm of C. Ledoux et Compagnie, grain and flour dealers.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast, the Conservative candidates had less intimate ties with Saint-Hyacinthe. Six different Conservatives contested elections in Saint-Hyacinthe County between 1867 and 1886. Two of the candidates, A. Casavant in the 1878 provincial election and R. Raymond in the 1867 federal contest, had no ties with the city of Saint-Hyacinthe. In fact, Casavant was chosen explicitly because of his agricultural background.<sup>47</sup> A third candidate, Oscar Dunn, while he received his education in Saint-Hyacinthe and while he edited *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe* in his younger days, spent the better part of his life as a journalist working out of Montreal. While the other three Conservative candidates were Saint-Hyacinthe lawyers, none of them were intimately involved with the development of the city, as was Bernier. Thus, these three candidates, like the other representatives of the Conservative party in Saint-Hyacinthe County, were free of the Liberals' identification with the interests of the city and were able to exploit that identification in the rural parts of the county in order to stir up anti-Liberal sentiment.

Saint-Hyacinthe, which had become the economic center of Saint-Hyacinthe County, also was attempting to dominate the county's political life. The degree to which any parish within the county was willing to submit to the political control of the Saint-Hyacinthe Liberal élite was largely a reflection of the degree to which that parish was satisfied with its position within the regional economy. Saint-Denis, more than any other parish in the county, refused to accept the political leadership of the city of Saint-Hyacinthe. Considering the nature of its position within the Saint-Hyacinthe regional economy, this rejection is not at all surprising. Saint-Denis had once been the center of a large region of which Saint-Hyacinthe was a part. The merchants of Saint-Denis had even located warehouses in Saint-Hyacinthe, which in the 1830s was only a gathering point for grain to be shipped through Saint-Denis. However, by the time of confederation, all of this had changed. Saint-Hyacinthe was now the dominant force in the region and Saint-Denis was the subordinate. It was probably difficult enough for the residents of Saint-Denis to accept their position of economic subordination to Saint-Hyacinthe. To also accept political subordination to Saint-Hyacinthe was asking too much. Between 1867 and 1886, Liberal candidates came away with only 220 of the 2051 votes cast in Saint-Denis during the 1867 election campaign, *Le Courrier* noted, "Il faut le dire, M. Bachand s'est donné le trouble du voyage en pure perte..."<sup>48</sup>

#### IV

A Liberal tradition developed within the city of Saint-Hyacinthe because of the political stance adopted by the leaders of the church in that

<sup>46</sup> *Canadian Parliamentary Companion* (Ottawa, 1885), p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> *L'Union*, 11 April 1878.

<sup>48</sup> *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe*, 6 August 1867.

city. In Saint-Denis, an anti-Liberal political position was held because of that parish's position within the Saint-Hyacinthe regional economy. Neither of these conditions that were instrumental in the establishment of strong political traditions could have been discovered without looking at the workings of the church and the economy within the Saint-Hyacinthe region. Nor, for that matter, could the distinctive political positions of Saint-Hyacinthe and Saint-Denis have been recognized in the first place if political behaviour had not been analyzed on the local level. Certainly, it is important to understand the distinctive characteristics of the various regions of Quebec. However, these characteristics cannot be recognized until the internal workings of these regions are understood.

While this paper has made several suggestions about the relationship between the church, the economy and political behaviour on the regional level, it also had left several questions unanswered. For instance, one would like to know whether there were economic factors which encouraged the development of a Liberal tradition in Saint-Hyacinthe. Families, such as the Dessaulles family, that provided the Liberal political leadership of the city were also the economic leaders of the town, encouraging railroads to pass through Saint-Hyacinthe and seeking industries to locate there. It is hard to see, however, why the economic position of this élite might have led it to adopt a Liberal stance. Since both the federal and provincial governments were controlled by the Conservatives during much of this period, the Liberal position of this élite was probably a liability when favours were required from the higher levels of government to aid in local economic development. Similarly, one would like to know about the relationship between the curé and the residents of the parish. If a curé were strongly in support of the Conservatives, under what conditions would he be able to alter the parish's political behaviour? On the other hand, is it possible that under certain circumstances the political climate of the parish had an impact upon the political activities of the curé?

In each case, more information is required than was available in the Saint-Hyacinthe context. To understand the rationale for the position of the Saint-Hyacinthe élite, it would be necessary to examine letters and other documents pertaining to its members. In regard to the relationship between the curé and the parish, it would be necessary to study both the curé and his parish in depth. However, biographical information about the curés is not extensive and it is difficult to get a feel for the sort of society that existed in each parish from the parish registers that are available. All is not lost, however, just because the best possible data is not available. Suggestions of the way things may have fit together can be made as was the case in the Saint-Hyacinthe study presented here. Moreover, by piecing together the experiences of a number of regions and then comparing them some generalizations can be made. Such a comparative approach for a number of cities might make the position of the Saint-Hyacinthe Liberal élite more comprehensible and the comparison of the relationships of several parishes with their respective curés might clarify that situation. In any event, despite the difficulties involved, such local studies must be carried out to gain a better understanding of nineteenth century Quebec.

## Appendix

% LIBERAL VOTE, SAINT-HYACINTHE COUNTY,  
1867-1886

	<i>1867P</i>	<i>1867F</i>	<i>1872F</i>	<i>1878P</i>	<i>1878F</i>	<i>1882F</i>	<i>1886P</i>	<i>Total</i>
Saint-Hyacinthe (City)	69	67	76	79	71	78	86	76
Saint-Hyacinthe (Parish)	80	80	76	68	69	67	79	72
Saint-Barnabé	68	67	63	46	47	51	54	55
Saint-Jude	64	63	65	54	54	54	56	59
Saint-Damase	44	43	44	39	46	51	53	44
Laprésentation	44	44	45	40	41	38	52	43
Saint-Charles	69	69	59	51	47	41	50	59
Saint-Denis	11	11	14	10	9	10	11	11
County	55	55	57	52	50	53	61	54

- Note: 1) P signifies a provincial and F a federal election  
 2) Elections by acclamation occurred in the following elections:  
     1871 P  
     1874 F  
     1875 P  
     1881 P

Such elections have not been included in any of the calculations.