

Socio-economic Factors in the Great Awakening: The Case of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

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GORDON STEWART

Socio-Economic Factors in the Great Awakening: the Case of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

Perry Miller's long ascendancy as an authority on religion in colonial New England still has many ramifications for present scholarship in the field. Not the least of these is that the Great Awakening is still treated in general histories as an intellectual crisis rather than a manifestation of underlying social tensions in colonial society. Miller's masterly analysis of Jonathan Edwards, his carefully argued case, rooted in his unsurpassed familiarity with Puritan theology, that the Awakening was most significant for its adaptation of a European-originated theology to American conditions, have been the twin bases upon which rests the interpretation of the Awakening as primarily an intellectual watershed in colonial life. Summarising his position in 1949, Miller wrote that "the hysterical agonies of the Great Awakening [meant] the end of the reign over the New England and American mind of a European and scholastical conception of an authority put over men because men were incapable of recognizing their own welfare Americans . . . were discovering, especially on the frontier . . . that they rejected imported European philosophies of society".¹ In 1967 Professor Alan Heimert re-emphasized this interpretation of the Awakening by repeating that the revivals of 1739-42 "marked America's final break with the Middle Ages and her entry into a new intellectual age in the church and in society" and put the case even more concisely, if somewhat crudely, by concluding that "what was awakened in 1740 was the spirit of American democracy".²

In adopting this approach to the Awakening Miller, and later Heimert, rejected the possibility that other more materialistic interpretations of the revivals might be possible. Miller explicitly dismissed social analyses of revivalism, insisting that social historians if they keep "strictly within the limits of [their] commitment, [have] difficulty in dealing with the Great Awak-

1 Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956, reprinted New York, 1964), p. 166.

2 Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and its Consequences* (Indianapolis and New York, 1967), pp. xiv-xv, lxi.

ening". Miller then ridiculed such attempts, noting that "efforts have been made to identify the commotion with agrarian protest, with an uprising of debtors against creditors, of the common man against the gentry, or even with the sheer panic resulting from a sore throat epidemic. None of these accounts offers an 'explanation' either of the causes or consequences, that strikes one as more than peripheral".³ Heimert in his major study of the period did attribute manifold political and social consequences to the Awakening, particularly in encouraging the popularity of a revolutionary ideology, but all his evidence was based on analyses of sermon literature.⁴

Such dismissals of any significant social dimensions to the Awakening seemed all the more reasonable in the 1950's and early 1960's since even John C. Miller, the one colonial historian who had attempted a specific socio-economic analysis of the revivals, had been undermined by critics and had himself apparently abandoned his earlier position.⁵ In fairness to Miller, whose thesis is frequently misrepresented, he did not argue that the revival was the result of class tensions. Indeed he presented evidence to show that in its earliest stages the Awakening actually moderated some of the bitterness engendered by the Land Bank controversy in Massachusetts and that only gradually did the "upper classes" draw away from the Awakening as the evangelists became more levellist in principle and organization. It was, according to Miller, at this advanced stage of the Awakening that "hostility between rich and poor took on a pungent religious flavoring and the enmity that the Land Bank had stirred up was carried by the Great Awakening deep into the lives of the common people".⁶ Thus, by the 1960's, with Perry Miller's authority still strong and John C. Miller's socio-economic approach discredited, historians were left with no meaningful socio-economic approach to the Great Awakening.⁷

In the past decade, the work of several historians, particularly J.M. Bumsted, Richard Bushman, Philip Greven and Kenneth Lockridge, has reopened study of the Great Awakening as a social phenomenon. Greven's researches are especially useful in this regard although he is scrupulously careful of making definite connections between his demographic data and the emergence of revivalism in the 1740's. In the concluding chapter of his study of

3 Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, p. 153.

4 Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966). For criticism of Heimert's methods see Edmund Morgan's review in the *William & Mary Quarterly* [hereafter cited as *WMQ*], XXIV (1967), pp. 454-459.

5 Compare John C. Miller, "Religion, Finance and Democracy in Massachusetts", *New England Quarterly*, VI (1933), pp. 29-58 with his *The First Frontier: Life in Colonial America* (New York, 1966), pp. 266-279. Also see J.M. Bumsted, "Religion, Finance and Democracy in Massachusetts: the Town of Norton as a Case Study", *Journal of American History*, LVII (1971), pp. 817-831.

6 Miller, "Religion, Finance and Democracy", pp. 34-35, 37-39, 42, 48, 56.

7 See Bumsted, "The Town of Norton as a Case Study", pp. 817-818.

generational change in Andover Greven speculates on the significance of his evidence in relation to the Great Awakening. He suggests that, just as in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England the emergence of Puritanism coincided with a period of rapid population growth, extensive population mobility and large numbers of nuclear families, so in mid-eighteenth century New England there might be a connection between the insecurity of the fourth generation and the outbreak of revivalism. As Greven postulates this possibility, the increasing scarcity of land in New England, the consequent breaking of traditional patterns of filial dependence and the increasing number of nuclear families created an insecure generation more likely to respond to the evangelical appeal.⁸

Even if the Greven thesis must remain tentative at this stage, other local community studies have revealed the complex social ramifications of revivalism. While at the level of general interpretation it may be legitimate to talk in terms of intellectual crisis or basic changes in theological positions, at the local level revivals were frequently bound up in parochial power struggles either between personalities or economic groups or, most often, geographical sections of one township. In his detailed studies of revivalism in Barnstable County, Norwich, and Norton, J.M. Bumsted has carefully and clearly shown the significance of local tensions, local financial squabbles and local struggles for status and power, as basic determinants in bringing about, sustaining and giving particular form to separatist or revivalist groups.⁹ In Barnstable County Bumsted concluded that "dissent and dispute . . . were personal and structural, rather than theological in nature. The main emphasis of Puritan studies on the mind of Puritanism has tended to obscure the fact that personality clashes, local political issues and geographical factors connected with the expansion of settlement in the eighteenth century were the operative components of most local ecclesiastical divisions and schisms".¹⁰ In his study of Norton, Bumsted's solid evidence lends support to Greven's hypothesis that the Awakening may have been connected with the emergence in the mid-eighteenth century of a more unsettled and independent fourth generation. Bumsted noted that Norton had "experienced a sharp natural increase in population beginning around 1711, an increase which meant that around 1740 a disproportionately large number of young people were coming of age, seeking to acquire land, marrying and rearing families, and trying to establish themselves in the world".¹¹ The convergence of Bumsted's specific evidence and Greven's hypothesis is an encouraging sign that community studies, while revealing

8 Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), pp. 214-215, 221, 275-279.

9 J.M. Bumsted, "A Caution to Erring Christians: Ecclesiastical Disorder on Cape Cod, 1717 to 1738", *WMQ*, XXVIII (1971), pp. 588-612 and Bumsted, "The Town of Norton as a Case Study".

10 Bumsted, "A Caution to Erring Christians", p. 438.

11 Bumsted, "The Town of Norton as a Case Study", p. 820.

local idiosyncrasies and diversities, are also building up evidence that will support some broad generalisation on the social origins of the Awakening.

Bumsted's concentration on local community studies was duplicated by James Walsh in his study of the Awakening in the First Church of Woodbury, Connecticut. Walsh dismissed the possibility that revivalism in Woodbury was a form of social protest, and therefore economic in origin, by showing that the town was "experiencing a period of prosperity".¹² Walsh's evidence demonstrated that the operative conflict generating revivalism and separatism was between newly settled areas and the central, more populous areas where power had traditionally been located. "The conflict", wrote Walsh, "between the periphery and the centre is clear. The First Society opposed its own subdivision and the peripheral areas objected to the absentee landlordism of the centre. The relation to the Awakening is seen in the geographical peculiarities of the revival which affected the periphery much more than it did the centre".¹³

Thus, in the past few years, there has emerged an alternative hypothesis to the one of intellectual crisis advanced by Miller to explain why the Awakening occurred at that particular period in the eighteenth century. On the one hand, at the level of generalisation, the demographic studies of Greven and Lockridge and the socio-psychological case presented by Richard Bushman for Connecticut, suggest some relationship between an insecure, unsettled fourth generation, looking for land and social status, and the Awakening. The members of this generation, discovering it more difficult to follow traditional paths to economic security and stability of status, were susceptible to revivalism and separatism as one means of asserting autonomy or of seeking status outside established structures.¹⁴ In the New England colonies with their strong religious traditions such means had great historical sanction and were not the tools of outcasts or the underprivileged. As Bumsted shows in one of his studies participation in the revival, particularly by young males, was often a precursor, a jumping-off point as it were, to political office or other positions in the established order of the township.¹⁵ Complementing such general studies are the local community case studies of Bumsted, Walsh and others which show that at the local level the Awakening must be viewed in terms of financial squabbles, geographical conflicts and status tensions. Such studies, by their meticulous explanation of the importance of local issues, show that no explanation of the Awakening can be adequate which

12 James Walsh, "The Great Awakening in the First Congregational Church of Woodbury, Connecticut", *WMQ*, XXVIII (1971), pp. 551-555.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 559.

14 Greven, *Four Generations*, pp. 275-279; Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York, 1970), pp. 160-164, Richard L. Bushman, *Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut 1690-1765* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 267-288.

15 Bumsted, "Religion, Finance and Democracy: The Town of Norton as a Case Study", p. 828.

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does not encompass as many of the local variations as possible. It is, in short, necessary to analyse the local dynamic whenever the evidence makes this possible. Like much community study work in colonial history the results are often frustrating in that more local studies, by revealing diversity, appear to lead even further from useful generalization. But there are signs (such as the convergence between Bumsted and Greven) that the case study approach along with the general and demographic monographs can permit at least some tentative observations about the Awakening and its social roots.

II

While there has been considerable activity and a major shift in focus in the past decade in studies of the New England Great Awakening there has been no similar movement in the study of the Great Awakening in Nova Scotia. Even in recent works, in so far as the Nova Scotian Awakening has been interpreted in social terms, it has been seen in the old-fashioned way as a manifestation of the frontier, levelling spirit. In the authoritative work on the great revival in Nova Scotia, Maurice V. Armstrong, while concentrating mainly on theological and institutional aspects, did mention frontier levellism as a factor. According to Armstrong the New England Awakening was conditioned by the frontier and the "class struggle" which developed over the Land Bank and was partly the result of "a desire for social equality". It was this spirit of frontier equality in religious affairs that crossed the sea and "blazed again on the Canadian frontier".¹⁶ Ten years later in one of his pioneering interdisciplinary approaches to Canadian history S.D. Clark concluded that the revival in Nova Scotia was "an expression of the levelling forces of the frontier".¹⁷ Even more recently this approach was partially maintained as J.M. Bumsted in his biography of Henry Alline, the leader of the revival, saw an egalitarian message in the sermon literature.¹⁸ As one reviewer commented, this portrayal of Alline's theology is one of the least convincing parts of an otherwise fine study,¹⁹ which has quickly established itself as the standard work on the evangelist.

Such an interpretation of the Nova Scotian Awakening is particularly open to question in view of the recent researches into revivalism in New England. Walsh, in his study of Woodbury, completely discredited any levelist analysis by showing that "the revival drew from every economic class".²⁰

16 Maurice W. Armstrong, *The Great Awakening in Nova Scotia 1776 to 1809* (Hartford, Conn., 1948), pp. 1-17.

17 S.D. Clark, *Movements of Social Protest in Canada 1640-1840* (Toronto, 1959), p. 73.

18 J.M. Bumsted, *Henry Alline 1748-1784* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 64, 93. It ought to be emphasized here that Bumsted does not present egalitarianism as a major factor in the revival. Indeed, he cautions against taking a social or political approach and emphasises the theme of piety.

19 James W. Davidson reviewing Bumsted's *Henry Alline*, *WMQ*, XXX (1973), pp. 526-528.

20 Walsh, "The Great Awakening", p. 553.

In the case of Norton, in which Bumsted tested the theory that revivalism appealed to the economically underprivileged, the evidence revealed that most of those who became Church members during the Awakening subsequently became high status members of the local community. Bumsted summed up his findings: "... responding to the Awakening was not an action of the permanently disinherited, but of the temporarily frustrated. It was all a matter of timing. The Awakening arrived in Norton ... at a particularly propitious moment: when a combination of developments, especially the suppression of the Land Bank, seemed to be arresting the ambitions and expectations of the younger generation".²¹

The discrepancy between recent case studies of the New England Awakening and the traditional view of the Nova Scotian revival is one of the reasons for undertaking a community study of Yarmouth — to investigate to what extent it is accurate to see the northern revival in terms of frontier egalitarianism. While one case study proves nothing either way, it is essential that the local dynamic of revivalism be analysed whenever possible before valid generalizations can be attempted. Unfortunately, the Nova Scotian Awakening, especially in its earlier, formative stages during the war years, is less amenable to the community study approach than its New England counterpart. In contrast to such cases as Norton the researcher is dealing with a very brief period in which patterns have failed to develop with any firmness. Yarmouth received its first New England emigrants in 1762 and was still receiving some in the early 1770's. In such a short, unstable period of population movement it is not possible to talk in terms of generational conflict or tensions over land divisions. Extending the study beyond 1783 does not help much, as the situation was so drastically altered with the creation of the United States and the influx of about 30,000 loyalists into the colony. The revival after 1783 operated in a quite different social context compared with the pre-war period. Furthermore, in these pre-loyalist years the church and township records, if extant, are fragmentary compared to records used in New England studies.²²

Yarmouth is unusual in this latter respect since there is a very full and detailed set of Church records running from 1766 to 1789.²³ Yet even these records are not as useful as they might be, because of the peculiar circum-

21 Bumsted, "The Town of Norton as a Case Study", pp. 828-829.

22 For example, the local records located in the Public Archives of Canada [hereafter PAC], Ms. Group 9, Nova Scotia Local Records, 1783-1920, particularly the broken runs for Truro and Cornwallis.

23 "The Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth ... together with an Historical Account of the First Settlement of Yarmouth by the English. The First Ministering of the Word. The Erection of the First Meetinghouse. The Coming of Mr. Henry Alline and other Preachers to Yarmouth and the Effects which followed, etc., etc.", Ms. in Public Archives of Nova Scotia [hereafter PANS].

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stances of the revival in the township. Jonathan Scott, the Congregational pastor, was opposed to the revival and, therefore, no new communicants are listed in the records. At the same time no formal separation from the Congregational Church occurred because both Church and Society believed the Church had always been committed to revivalism. The minister was severely criticized for opposing the revival and lost the support of both Church and Society. It was believed that if anyone should go it should be Scott and thus in a town in which the revival was a complete success no New Light Church was founded.²⁴ Walsh discovered a similar phenomenon in his study of Woodbury where the revival also operated without breaking up the Congregational establishment.²⁵ Such examples are indications that separation alone may be a misleading guide to the extent of revivalism in the colonial period.

III

The Congregational Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth was formally organized in December 1767. At its founding it consisted of 27 full members and was responsible to a Society of about 70 families in the Jebogue region of Yarmouth.²⁶ From the Church records it seems that most of the heads of the 50 or so heads of families in the Society interested themselves in Church affairs. At some stages, particularly in the period from 1769 to 1772 when there was debate over choosing a minister, it was the committee of the Society which took the most active role.²⁷ In Yarmouth, then, the Church was not composed of an active minority operating more energetically than, and independently of the larger Society.

From the outset the Church was revivalist in character. Although members believed their Church to be a part of the regular Congregational order and although they tried to follow established practices as closely as possible (they refused, for example, to admit to membership those who had been full members of Churches in New England until such persons could provide official written dismissals from New England — an almost impossible requirement given the remoteness of Yarmouth), it was, by public practice, a Church explicitly aiming to encourage conversions through evangelistic preaching —

24 See Gordon Stewart and George Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God: The Nova Scotia Yankees and the American Revolution* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 98-139.

25 Walsh, "The Great Awakening", pp. 561-562.

26 "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", pp. 14-17; Stewart and Wawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God*, pp. 98-100; C. B. Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", *PANS Bulletin* no. 15 (Halifax, 1960), pp. 9-10.

27 "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", pp. 29-37; Gordon Stewart, "Religion and the Yankee Mind of Nova Scotia during the American Revolution: A Study of Religious Values and the Ideological Foundations of a Loyalist Colony" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1970), pp. 300-310.

it was in short a non-separating New Light Church.²⁸ It is also worth noting that, although the Alline-inspired revival did not begin to affect the Church and Society until 1781, there had been several local awakenings or, as the records put it, "there appeared extraordinary concern and Engagedness on the minds of Some".²⁹ Such a pattern of small revivals, internal debates and schisms in Yarmouth bears out evidence produced by Bumsted and Walsh in their community studies that the Great Awakening was not an unexpected outburst in the midst of a general decline of interest in religion.³⁰ In Yarmouth there was constant concern and debate about religion throughout the 1762-1781 years. The Great Awakening was unusual in its size, duration and intensity and produced an unusual number of separations, but revivals were not novel experiences for colonists either in Cape Cod or the outsettlements of Nova Scotia. Such patterns also are a warning that revivals cannot easily be seen as unusual manifestations of group discontent in colonial society.

Later developments in Yarmouth further illustrate how normal a part of local life revivals had become. Although Alline began preaching in the region in October 1781 and soon attracted large numbers of Church and Society members to his meetings it was not until a full year later that the first publicly acknowledged conversion took place.³¹ The revival in Yarmouth was not the occasion for mass hysteria nor for the appearance of mass conversions, but took the form of week-day meetings in local houses. At such meetings the revival gradually won adherents until by October 1782 the minister had lost the support of the Society and nearly all the Church members (managing to retain only three declared supporters).³² For the inhabitants of Yarmouth the revival was a sober and socially restrained affair.

In New England communities questions of local church financing and personal rivalries frequently determined the nature and timing of dissent. Similar factors were present in Yarmouth, although for contemporaries such matters were inextricably bound up with doctrinal positions. The minister in Yarmouth, for example, had had since 1772 a series of squabbles with Church and Society, primarily over his remuneration, and had been accused of being too worldly and grasping. When the revival arrived, he was then criticized on theological grounds and his earlier money troubles cited as an example of his lukewarmness as an evangelical. For opponents the squabbles were merely surface examples of a deeper failing in their minister. But it is still necessary to analyze these internal disputes for so bitter had they been in Yarmouth that Scott had lost much of his support even

28 "Records of the Church of Jeboque in Yarmouth", p.32; Stewart, "Religion and the Yankee Mind of Nova Scotia", pp. 301-306.

29 "Records of the Church of Jeboque in Yarmouth", pp. 9-10.

30 Bumsted, "A Caution to Erring Christians", p. 414; Walsh, "The Great Awakening", p. 547.

31 "Records of the Church of Jeboque in Yarmouth", p. 143.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 153; Stewart, "Religion and the Yankee Mind of Nova Scotia", pp. 384-385.

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before Alline first preached in the town.³³

The most serious incident in which Scott appeared in a bad light and alienated both Church and Society, took place between June 1778 and July 1779. Since assuming the work of the ministry in 1772, Scott had continued to run his small farm as the Church and Society were too poor to pay him any regular salary. Attempting to fill the two roles, minister and farmer, naturally presented difficulties. He was anxious to "give [himself] to Sacred Work" but feared his family would suffer if he neglected the farm thereby bringing both himself "and Religion . . . to Reproach and Contempt Together".³⁴ Such "Worldly Cares" were "very perplexing" to Scott but he laboured hard to make ends meet. The situation worsened in December 1777 when his wife died, leaving Scott to cope with six children, all under ten years of age.³⁵ In view of these difficult circumstances Scott decided to persuade the Church to give him more financial support. He pointed to the various problems he faced, particularly since the death of his wife, and drew attention to the decline of his farm because of his time-consuming ministerial duties. The request for more support seemed reasonable but Scott presented it in a clumsy manner, giving the impression that people were deliberately withholding provisions, clothing and labour, by which means he was normally paid. He later admitted that "some Expressions" in his representation were "too strong and sound harsh" and revealed some lack of "divine Temper".³⁶

The timing of Scott's request also left his motives open to suspicion. In June 1778 the Church and Congregation of the Cornwallis Congregational Church had written to Yarmouth to ask that Scott be permitted to visit Cornwallis, at that time without a Congregational minister. Elkanah Morton, who wrote the Cornwallis letter on behalf of the joint Church and Society committee, promised that all of Scott's expenses would be paid. In July, a Church meeting in Yarmouth agreed to let Scott proceed to Cornwallis. It was at this moment that Scott chose to publicize his difficult circumstances. A suspicion was created that Scott was trying to make it easy for himself to spend a few months in Cornwallis preaching and that he was even using the Cornwallis offer to raise more money out of the Yarmouth Society. No settlement was reached at this time but Scott left his children with neighbors, leased his farm for a year and eventually, on October 27, set out for Cornwallis.³⁷

While Scott was away, the Church and Society in Yarmouth made a substantial effort to organize larger and more secure support for their minister.

33 "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", pp. 54, 64-67, 71, 76; Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", p. 35; Stewart, "Religion and the Yankee Mind of Nova Scotia", pp. 320-330.

34 Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", p. 35.

35 "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", pp. 85-87.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

37 Elkanah Morton to Jonathan Scott, Cornwallis, 16 June 1778, *ibid.*, pp. 82-88.

They obtained a grant of 150 acres for Scott to build a new home, nearer the meeting house, and raised a £ 50 subscription for its building. They also agreed to collect, by assessment, £ 50 to be a regular annual salary.³⁸ When Scott returned to Yarmouth in May 1779 the committee responsible for making these arrangements formally presented them. Scott replied bluntly that the £ 50 salary "will half support my family". Although Scott tried to moderate this response the committee assumed he had become too self-seeking and passed "some Reflecting Words upon Mr. Scott". After this altercation with the committee, "the Report spread abroad was 'that Mr. Scott was after money' ".³⁹

Just over a month later further developments transpired which finally convinced both Church and Society that Scott was too secular and self-interested. On June 17, a Mr. John Porter arrived in Yarmouth from Cornwallis carrying a letter inviting Scott to return to that township. This seemed an extraordinary situation to the Yarmouth people. Scott had been back for only about a month after a six month absence in Cornwallis and now Porter turned up officially requesting his return. The whole matter seemed prearranged and the report was "widespread" in Yarmouth that Scott had been offered a salary of £ 100 if he moved to Cornwallis. Scott's own bearing encouraged the notion of advanced planning when he told a joint meeting of the Church and Society that Cornwallis "had both Ability and Disposition to contribute to his support", that "he stood in Need of their Help", and that "he desired therefore to go for his own personal Relief, Satisfaction and Comfort".⁴⁰ In such circumstances, notwithstanding his genuine financial needs, Scott was seen in Yarmouth as a plotting minister trying to squeeze more money out of the township by playing them off against the more wealthy township of Cornwallis. Scott never recovered the allegiance of either Church or Society after this time.⁴¹ Alline's immediate success on coming to Yarmouth must be seen against this recent inner history of the Church, which effectively undermined Scott's religious leadership.

The impact of such issues in Yarmouth indicates the relationship between crude money matters and doctrinal positions. Because of his role as minister Scott found it difficult particularly after 1778 to convince the town that he put the spiritual concerns of the people before his own well-being. The itinerant evangelist, on the other hand, costing the town nothing and asking nothing, with no children to support or farm to work, could easily pose as a pious, sincere and unselfish messenger of God. In such poor communities

38 *Ibid.*, p. 90; Council Meeting, 22 December 1778, Council Minutes 1776-1783, Ms. Docs., Vol. 212, p. 357, PANS.

39 "Records of the Church of Jeboque in Yarmouth", p. 91.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-96.

41 Scott retained his position as a minister in Yarmouth but was frequently criticized and during the revival was socially ostracised. For more details see Stewart, "Religion and the Yankee Mind of Nova Scotia", pp. 320, 330.

as Yarmouth, given appropriate conditions such as Scott's squabble with the Church, getting a preacher on the cheap could become an important factor in encouraging the popularity of the revival. The significance of such a factor will, of course, vary with conditions in each community but in Yarmouth the problem of ministerial salary was of major importance. Scott had always been regarded as a revivalist minister and had the better of Alline in terms of theological expertise, as he criticized the revival from a well-argued, Edwardsian and new divinity position. Yet, because of his alleged desire for money and his reputation as a schemer, Scott could rally no forces against the revival, no matter how correct he was theologically.⁴²

Scott's isolation during this period, 1778 to 1784, was so complete that he had, within a year of the revival's beginning, lost the support of all the Society and all the Church members apart from three, one of whom included his brother.⁴³ In analyzing, as far as the evidence will allow, the opposition to Scott it is clear that in Yarmouth at least the Nova Scotia revival was not a levelling movement of those hitherto excluded from local status. Indeed, the evidence leads to the more positive statement that in Yarmouth the opposition to Scott was led or encouraged by the wealthiest and most influential Church members. The evidence on this point is too fragmentary to be completely satisfactory, but it is adequate to show that in Yarmouth a number of well-established members of the community, leaders in Church and public affairs for over a decade, took a major role in encouraging the revival. The Church records name five individuals from within the Church who openly supported Alline and it is on this group that evidence has been gathered.

The most outspoken critic of Scott was John Crawley who had moved from Marblehead to Yarmouth in 1761. In the Church Records Crawley was the only individual in the whole 1766-1783 period who always had "Esquire" attached to his name — one sign of his local importance. In the mid-sixties Crawley was the second most wealthy individual in the township in terms of stock and land ownership.⁴⁴ Other evidence, from the minutes of the colony's Executive Council meetings in Halifax, confirms that throughout the pre-Revolutionary period Crawley was regarded as a high-status individual in the township.⁴⁵ In 1761 he had been appointed a member of the committee for dividing town lands and Justice of the Peace; in 1763 he was

42 See Stewart and Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God*, p. 120.

43 "Records of the Church of Jeboque in Yarmouth", pp. 132-157.

44 He owned 14 cattle, 3 hogs, and possessed six cleared acres. See "A Return of the Settlers with their stock of the Township of Yarmouth", June 1764, Ms. Docs., vol. 222, Misc. Papers 1753-1781, no. 23, PANS.

45 "List of Commissioners appointed for . . . implementing the Act for raising a Tax on the inhabitants of the Province for maintaining and supporting the Militia", Council Minutes 1766-1783, 5 December 1775, Ms. Docs., Vol. 212, pp. 289-299, PANS; "Report of Commissioners appointed to farm the duties of Import and Excise in the Outports of Nova Scotia", Legislative Council 1760-1790, # 101, *ibid*.

appointed as Collector of Customs; in 1774 he was appointed as Registrar of Deeds. In 1772 he had been elected by the township as their member of the colonial Assembly.⁴⁶

James Robbins, a Deacon in the Church, was less enthusiastic than Crawley but he was regarded by Scott and the town as a committed supporter of the revival. He refused to criticize Alline and permitted evangelistic meetings to be held in his house. Robbins told Scott that he "entertained favourable Thoughts of the Effects of Mr. Alline's Preaching and that a good Work of Reformation was begun".⁴⁷ In the mid-sixties Robbins was the wealthiest individual in the township in terms of stock and land.⁴⁸ Both Crawley and Robbins had also been original grantees, receiving 1436 acres and 1262 acres respectively.

Cornelius Rogers, another active supporter of the revival, while less wealthy than Robbins or Crawley, was still in the upper 30% in terms of visible possessions.⁴⁹ On the other two in the group of five, Amos Hilton and Daniel Crocker, no comparable evidence exists although the fact that Crocker was, along with Robbins, a Deacon and that the church covenant had been signed in his house, suggests that he too was a local influential.⁵⁰ The ages of all five show that the revival was not led by the young men facing economic difficulties in establishing themselves. Hilton and Rogers were 43 and 42 respectively, when Alline first visited Yarmouth. Robbins was 54 and Crocker 58. Crawley's date of birth is not known but he must have been somewhere in his fifties in 1782.⁵¹ All five were also family men; indeed, four of them had larger than average families for the township. Robbins and Crocker each had 6 children under twenty-one, Rogers and Hilton 5 each, and Crawley 3.⁵² In Yarmouth, then, the revival leaders were substantial members of the local community, all over forty years of age, all with several children, two of them the wealthiest individuals in town, two of them Church Deacons.

IV

That such men were active supporters of the revival suggests some conclusions about the social context of evangelicalism during the Nova Scotian

46 Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", p. 24n.

47 "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", p. 137.

48 He owned 21 cattle, 22 sheep, 5 hogs and 5 cleared acres. See "A Return of the Settlers with their Stock of the Township of Yarmouth".

49 He had 7 cattle, the twelfth largest number in town, and 38 others had less. He had 9 sheep, the eighth largest number, and 47 had less. He fared worst with hogs, possessing only one, which placed him twenty-fifth, but 15 inhabitants had none at all. In cleared acres he came fourth with 42 individuals holding fewer. See *ibid.*

50 "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", pp. 13-17, 22, 28.

51 Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", pp. 22n, 23n, 24n, 39n, 56n.

52 Early Census Rolls of Nova Scotia, A Return of the State of the Township of Yarmouth, 1773, PANS *Annual Report* (1935), appendix B. The average family size in the 1773 rolls was 3.8.

Great Awakening. In his investigation of Norton, Bumsted pointed out that property ownership (particularly land) and election to political office were basic distinctions marking men out as local worthies. Beyond possession of land and election to office Bumsted included admission to the ranks of visible saints as another publicly recognized status — in communities believing that society had a religious basis, believing in a moral order in which sinners were damned and the godly saved, then a genuine conversion, an outward sign of salvation was a normal and sought after experience which gave prestige to the individual.⁵³ Salvation in itself was, of course, not enough. No one in Norton could achieve social status without some more material attributes in terms of property, but conversion was an important part of the status system in such New England communities. In the case of Yarmouth, the evidence leads to the conclusion that during the war years there was instability in normal status symbols — land and office-holding — and, consequently, status through conversion became more sought after than usual.

Although the material prosperity of the group of five revivalists can be demonstrated, their superior economic status was insecure. The economy of Yarmouth was so restricted in the whole pre-Revolutionary period that no individual could build up any stable reserves in money or possessions. Farming in the township was at a subsistence level with each family trying to grow its own needs. There was some interchange of commodities but no one became a store-keeper or established any other specialized economic enterprise.⁵⁴ A trained shoemaker, for example, emigrating to Yarmouth in the mid-sixties, had to turn his hand to farming or occasional fishing trips but he could not set up in business.⁵⁵ There was no individual in the township who could be characterized as a merchant — no ships engaged in the West Indies trade or even in regular trips to Boston, Halifax or Liverpool on the South Shore of the colony. Once the war broke out, conditions became even more difficult for those who owned ships and tried to build up some local business. A Yarmouth schooner en route to Halifax in March 1776 was seized by a British man of war and all her crew pressed; in Yarmouth harbour it-

53 Bumsted, "The Town of Norton as a Case Study", pp. 823-824.

54 On the economy of the pre-loyalist outsettlements see J.B. Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia* (1937, reprinted Toronto, 1969), pp. 104-148; Bumsted, *Henry Alline*, pp. 19-22, makes similar observations about Falmouth in the Minas Basin region. Outsiders were struck by the absence of money in the outsettlements. See K.R. Williams, "Social Conditions in Nova Scotia, 1749-1783" (unpublished M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1936), pp. 150-151 where Joseph Bennett, an Anglican missionary, is quoted: "You never knew so great a scarcity of money as prevails in this province . . . a man with great difficulty can get Cash for a Sterling bill". Also in *Journey through Nova Scotia containing a particular Account of the Country and its Inhabitants* (York, England, 1774), reprinted in *PANS Annual Report* (1945), p. 46 where the English travelers note: "Money is indeed very scarce in this part of the world, so that trade is chiefly carried on by the bartering of their goods".

55 Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", pp. 17-21.

self the British navy requisitioned barrels of pitch and tar from a schooner of Seth Barnes, one of the few ship-owners who had kept an irregular contact with Boston.⁵⁶ Thus, with communications to New England subject to constant disruption, with the British navy requisitioning forcibly, seizing ships on occasion and frequently using the press, any seaborne business in Yarmouth became risky in the extreme. There was in the whole 1762-1783 period no elasticity in the local economy, no real possibilities for a small local business or property owning elite to establish itself securely. Even for those who owned a schooner or a small amount of livestock and land there was considerable instability.

Land-ownership is much less useful an indication of local status than it is for the long settled towns in New England studied by Greven, Lockridge, Bumsted and Walsh. All land grants to the settlers were in doubt in the 1760's and in the war period both the British in Halifax and the American privateers threatened to confiscate land from those on the opposing side.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it was always possible for sons to obtain new grants of land from the Nova Scotia Council and fathers could not so easily use land as they did in Andover to maintain their position over the next generation. Certainly by the time the revival came to Yarmouth there was no great pressure on the land as in Andover, and other older New England communities. Holding acreage in Yarmouth did not carry the rewards that naturally came to landowners in the townships from which the settlers had emigrated.

Status derived from office-holding was also in a state of flux in Yarmouth. The New England form of township government was not permitted to function in Nova Scotia and local officials — Justices of the Peace, members of committees to divide lands and so forth — were appointed by the Council in Halifax.⁵⁸ In a township as remote as Yarmouth such appointees were never so sure of their reception in the local community as elected officials had been in the New England towns they had left. This uncertainty about the role of appointed officials and hesitation about granting local stamp of approval was most evident as tensions between England and New England came into the open in 1775 and 1776. In November 1775, for example, a number of men who had been part of an attempt to illegally land corn from a New England vessel were brought by writ before "Esquires Crawley and Durkee", Justices of the Peace. Those charged showed no deference to Crawley but,

56 *Ibid.*, p. 57; "Records of the Church of Jebogue in Yarmouth", p. 103.

57 I have found no direct references for Yarmouth but see cases and comment in Stewart, "Religion and the Yankee Mind of Nova Scotia", pp. 50-57; Stewart and Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God*, pp. 55, 65, 73-76. Also see the Report of Major-General Studholme, 1783, Papers on the River St. John, Ms. Docs., Vol. 409, PANS. Studholme was commissioned to survey the land of suspected 'rebels' for possible confiscation.

58 D.C. Harvey, "The Struggle for the New England form of Township Government in Nova Scotia", *Canadian Historical Association Report* (1933), pp. 15-22.

32 *Acadiensis*

in the words of a contemporary, "treated the Justices with much contempt, and refused to give any account of their Proceedings to the Justices; but declared that they would bring them before their Betters for offering to call them to account for any of their Behaviour".⁵⁹

Another institution where confusion over status occurred was the militia establishment. In the 1760's to be an officer in the militia was a mark of distinction,⁶⁰ but in 1775 the Nova Scotia Council, suspecting the loyalty of the settlers, by-passed the existing establishment and created an entirely new military hierarchy. Colonel Arthur Gould was sent out to Yarmouth from Halifax to organize a Company of Light Infantry. The appointed officers in this new establishment were, at their first organizational meeting, kidnapped by American privateers, much to the delight of the people of Yarmouth. "Most People", wrote their minister, "seemed glad at the calamity of the Sufferers; and looked upon it as a good Providence, because thereby the Infantry Company was like to be broken up".⁶¹

In this stage of Yarmouth's development, economic standing, the holding of office or place in the militia establishment were all uncertain bases for social status compared with similar attributes in New England or, for that matter, in Nova Scotia after 1783 as the economies of the outports developed and the province became a loyalist colony within the Empire. In such circumstances, religious affairs were one area of local society which could remain locally controlled, autonomous, and provide, within the community, undisputed status positions. The presence in the vanguard of the revival of five important individuals in terms of wealth and office suggests that they participated in the revival to maintain their significance in the local community. Conversion or even new-found piety was one sign of status, uncontaminated by outside influence, an accepted sign in a community of believers. Esquire Crawley as a Justice of the Peace might be jeered at by members of a mob, but as a leader of the revival he reassumed a position of moral authority and social worth. Deacon Robbins is another example of this social process. Unwilling at first to countenance Aline, he was used by Scott as an ally to discredit the revival, but as Scott lost support and the revival gained in popularity Robbins quietly gave his encouragement, even opening his house for revival meetings.⁶² The alternative facing Robbins was to stick in the anti-revivalist camp with Scott and be left by the wayside along with the minister, without influence in the community. For Robbins, condoning the revival was necessary to remain a local figure of importance.

This search for security in status must also be seen against larger develop-

59 Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", pp. 51-52.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

62 "Records of the Church of Jeboque in Yarmouth", p. 132-138.

ments in mid-eighteenth century New England society. Philip Greven's hypothesis is that the fourth generation showed increased unsettledness, the first break-up of the extended family and kin group system and the emergence of increasing numbers of nuclear families. He suggests that these demographic trends created instability and were factors in encouraging revivalism. The Yarmouth settlers by their acts of emigration had removed themselves more than usual from traditional family and kin relationships as these had existed in New England. Even though the process described by Greven was already well-advanced by the 1760's the physical removal to Nova Scotia made the social isolation of the settlers abnormally sudden and intense. Throughout the 1760's irregular links were maintained with New England but once war broke out even these were broken. At the same time there was no compensatory increase of communication between the settlers themselves in Nova Scotia — no roads, or even tracks linked Yarmouth with any other community.⁶³ When the Nova Scotia Council in the summer of 1775 made any further communication with New England illegal, the sense of isolation was complete. In Yarmouth, Governor Legge's Proclamation "was read to the People" after the Thursday lecture. It forbade "all Commerce with New England either by Word or Letter, or any other way Directly or Indirectly, on pain of being treated as Rebels".⁶⁴ In New England traditional extended families and kin groups were gradually transformed by economic and demographic changes; in Nova Scotia for the first generation of emigrants the process was telescoped into a fifteen year period. A petition sent by the people of Yarmouth to the Governor gives an indication of this sense of isolation, of being cut off from family and kin. "We were almost all of us born in New England, we have Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in that Country, divided betwixt natural affection to our nearest relations, and good Faith and Friendship to our King and Country, we want to know, if we may be permitted at this time to live in a peaceable State, as we look on that to be the only situation in which we with out Wives and Children, can be in any tolerable degree safe".⁶⁵ The final breaking of familial and kinship ties along with the instability of status caused by the peculiar economic, political and social circumstances described earlier helped create a social context in which revivalism flourished. The revival became one solid basis upon which some community solidarity could be re-established and some stability brought into the local social structure.

63 See Stewart and Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God*, pp. 184-186; Bumsted, *Henry Alline*, pp. 19-21; Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees*, pp. 126-127.

64 Fergusson, ed., "The Life of Jonathan Scott", p. 51.

65 Memorial of the Inhabitants of Yarmouth, 8 December 1775, Nova Scotia State Papers, Series a, Vol. 94, p. 300, PAC.

34 *Acadiensis*

V

These conclusions about Yarmouth cannot be considered typical for the Nova Scotian Great Awakening, far less New England revivalism in general. Nevertheless this community study does bring into focus some of the social factors which might encourage the emergence of revivalism. In communities remote from commercial and political centres, with primitive economic structures, with, consequently, small and unstable elites, where status through landholding and officeholding might be insecure, then religious status could become almost autonomously important, thus encouraging large numbers to seek piety and conversion. The areas of New England where the Great Awakening achieved greatest popularity, eastern Connecticut, south-eastern Massachusetts, central Massachusetts, for example, possessed some of these characteristics.⁶⁶ At any rate, in Yarmouth, it was not enough simply to be a Justice of the Peace or Collector of Customs or own 21 cattle — it was also necessary in the unsettled war-time years to be a man of God. That was one certainty left.

66 C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven, 1962), p. 186 and map # 1, "The Extent of Separatism".