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Disfranchised but not Quiescent: Women Petitioners in New Brunswick in the Mid-19th Century*

CANADIAN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL life of their society is usually dated from their struggle for and achievement of the vote.¹ Yet denial of the franchise had not prevented women from being actively involved in the political life of their communities. Indeed, from the earliest times, women had found ways to influence their government.² In the period prior to the introduction of manhood suffrage — a period characterized by deferential

*This paper builds on a data base that was created while I was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of New Brunswick. This particular study is part of a much broader project dealing with political culture in mid-19th century New Brunswick.

1 Although New Brunswick women were not disfranchised by statute until 1843, historians have found no record of even propertied women in the colony voting before that time. John Garner, *The Franchise and Politics in British North America, 1755-1867* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 155-6. While it is true that in debates on franchise extension in later years politicians claimed that women of the province had voted before their specific exclusion in 1843, the only evidence that has been found to support their claims is a single letter to the editor that appeared in the *Gleaner and Northumberland Shediasma* in 1830, cited in Elspeth Tulloch, *We, the undersigned: A Historical Overview of New Brunswick Women's Political and Legal Status, 1784-1984* (Moncton, 1985), pp. 3-4. Garner argues that exclusion by statute did not represent a new restraint on the franchise. For centuries, women in Great Britain had not exercised the franchise despite the lack of a formal legal restraint, having, as one judge argued, "always been considered legally incapable of voting for members of Parliament". This exclusion by convention had been accepted by the colonies as part of their legal heritage. Garner, *The Franchise and Politics*, p. 156. Indeed, evidence from extant newspapers suggests that the purpose of the 1843 statute was mainly to clarify the law in order to "promote the public peace at elections". By giving convention the weight of law, the revised statute provided county sheriffs with clear guidance in deciding whether a demanded scrutiny should be carried out. The disfranchisement of women was quite incidental to the amendments and went unnoticed by the newspapers of the day and, apparently, by their readers as well. See "The Election Law — The Loan Bill — And the Legislative Council in a Ferment", *The Standard or Frontier Gazette* (St. Andrews), 6 April 1843; "Prorogation of the Legislature", *ibid.*, 20 April 1843; *Weekly Chronicle* (Saint John), 31 March 1843 and "House of Assembly", *ibid.*, 14 April 1843; "Provincial Legislature", *The Gleaner and Northumberland, Kent, Gloucester and Restigouche Commercial and Agricultural Journal* (Miramichi), 14 February 1843, and "Editor's Department", *ibid.*, 13 March 1843; "The New Election Law", *The Loyalist* (Saint John), 23 March 1843; and "Parliamentary", *St. John Morning News and General Advertising Newspaper*, 31 March 1843.

2 For example, following a long-established European tradition, the women of New France took to the streets during the late 1750s to protest food shortages. Terence Crowley, "Thunder Gusts: Popular Disturbances in Early French Canada", Canadian Historical Association, *Historical*

politics — distinctions between men's and women's political behaviour were often blurred. Women, as well as men, regularly participated in politics by petitioning legislatures to achieve specific political goals.³ Women, like men, were involved in creating the political culture of their society.

Political culture, which involves much more than participation in the formal political system, is shaped by those values and attitudes that are so widely accepted they are taken for granted. Such values provide the underpinnings for the development of formal political institutions and structures.⁴ The role of women both in maintaining and in shaping societal values requires further investigation. While women undoubtedly had a significant indirect impact on government and politics through their influence within their own families and as members of voluntary groups and organizations within their communities, this paper will focus on women's direct political participation by analysing the nature and extent of political lobbying by women from three New Brunswick counties, as measured by the number and content of their petitions to the Legislative Assembly during the mid-19th century. In political terms, the decade selected for analysis — 1846 through 1857 — was a highly significant one. Political parties emerged during this period. Those great moral questions, temperance, and then prohibition, became, for a time at least, the major political issue. And it was on the moral issue that women began to petition the Legislature in numbers during the decade.

While petitions do not represent a new source for the historian, researchers have not normally attempted to identify petition signatories unless they happen to be active members of a specific organization. Often researchers have been satisfied to count the number of petitions, identify the specific sponsoring group

Papers (1979), pp. 19-20. And evidence from the pre-history period strongly suggests that Iroquois women, at least, had enormous political influence in their society. See especially Judith K. Brown, "Economic Organization and the Position of Women Among the Iroquois", *Ethnohistory*, 17 (1970), pp. 153-6.

- 3 In an article discussing the role of women in American political society, Paula Baker has made this argument very effectively. Of course, the political transition which separated male and female politics occurred much earlier in the United States where the introduction of manhood suffrage (demonstrating definitively to women that their disfranchisement was based solely on sex) and the rise of mass political parties dated from the early 19th century. Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920", *American Historical Review*, 89 (1984), pp. 620-47. For a review of the literature concerning the role of deference in male political behaviour during the antebellum period, see Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture", *American Political Science Review*, 68 (1974), pp. 473-87.
- 4 For similar definitions of political culture, see Robert R. Alford, *Party and Society: The Anglo-American Democracies* (Chicago, 1963), pp. 2-6; Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr., *Comparative Politics: System, Process, and Policy* (2nd ed., Boston, 1978), ch. II, pp. 25-30; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York, 1983), p. 4.

and note the number of signatories.⁵ In the past, then, petitions have been used only as supplementary evidence. Yet for those who wish to analyse the nature and significance of women's political role in the 19th century, petitions provide the key. Only through the medium of petition could a woman gain official access to her government or express her views about policy to the legislators. Thus, the petition provides a useful measure of the signatory's knowledge of the way government worked, her degree of interest in the issues of the day, and her attitudes concerning those issues.

Petitions and petitioners can be divided into two discrete categories. The first category includes petitioners seeking to use the law in some way: to apply for a government subsidy to which they were legally entitled, to redress a grievance, to appeal for aid at a time of personal distress, or to request a grant from public monies to carry out a worthy public project. Individual petitioners normally fall into this first category, and while such petitions do not reveal the petitioner's opinions on the issues of the day, they do suggest the extent to which she both understood the system and was able to use it to her advantage. The second category includes petitioners seeking to change the law in some way. Through the medium of the petition, they sought to influence their government, to persuade the legislators to accept their view. Occasionally such people petitioned as individuals, but usually they petitioned in concert with others. Legislators would, after all, be more inclined to take a petition seriously if they could be persuaded that a majority of their constituents supported it. Regardless of the success or failure of the petition, such documents can provide important insights concerning societal attitudes. Whether the signatories were members of an organized group with a specific platform and goals, or a group of unorganized individuals who coalesced around a specific issue, an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the supporters of the issue can enhance our understanding of political attitudes and political culture.

The petition process was a popular political strategy used by men as well as women. During the ten-year period from 1846 through 1857, between 400 and 500 petitions to the New Brunswick Legislature were received annually. On average, between 25 per cent and 30 per cent of these were rejected and approximately 50 per cent were granted, while the remainder were tabled or sent to Committee. However, if they persisted in their petitions, even those who had initially been rejected could eventually achieve their goals. Moreover, legislators

5 See, for example, Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto, 1982), pp. 34, 38, 75, 82, 143; Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 23-110, 160-220; Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth Century Feminism", in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880-1920s* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 155-6.

did not prove more responsive to petitions from men whose votes they might risk losing at the next election.⁶ Although a minority among petitioners, women demonstrated their ability to use the strategy effectively.

This study is concerned with the women petitioners of the counties of Charlotte, Sunbury and Albert in the mid-19th century. All three counties are in the southern half of the province. Charlotte is a large, economically diverse county in the south-west corner. Sunbury is an agricultural county in the central region, just east of Fredericton; and Albert is in the south-east region between Saint John and Moncton, on the Bay of Fundy. Although originally selected because of the richness of their sources for the study of political history, Albert, Charlotte and Sunbury proved typical in many ways. Thus, while these three counties cannot be considered a microcosm of the province as a whole, they did encompass a broad spectrum of 19th century anglophone New Brunswick society, including areas of pre-Loyalist, Loyalist and post-Loyalist settlement and encompassing rural communities, villages and even large towns. Moreover, one-fifth of New Brunswick's petitioners came from one of these three counties.⁷

Together the three counties included over 30,000 people at mid-century, nearly half of them female. A large majority of those people (over 80 per cent) lived in nuclear families, although a small minority of such families (perhaps as many as 10 per cent) included one or more single or widowed relations, apprentices, boarders or servants. Over 80 per cent of the inhabitants had been born in New Brunswick of American or British stock. Of the immigrant population, nearly 70 per cent had been born in Ireland. Although the three counties included substantial numbers of Episcopalians, Baptists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics and Methodists as well as a few Universalists and Congregationalists, among others, in both Albert and Sunbury the Baptists were stronger by far than any

6 Although these figures represent the average yearly percentages, the success rate varied significantly from year to year, with legislators proving decidedly more sympathetic some years than others. But in no case did male petitioners prove more successful than their female counterparts. Even election years did not necessarily bring a greater likelihood of success than other years. Petitions to the New Brunswick Legislature are located in Record Group 4, Record Series 24, 1846-57/Petitions [RG4, RS24, 1846-57/Pe], Provincial Archives of New Brunswick [PANB]. It is also possible that the success rate of certain types of petitions varied over time. In her analysis of the WCTU and its impact, for example, Wendy Mitchinson has suggested that the petition campaign was not a particularly effective strategy and that women were naïve in their belief that they could achieve legislative change through the medium of petition. Mitchinson, "The WCTU", p. 156. If women were naïve in this belief, however, they were certainly not alone, for the majority of petitioners were men.

7 Of the 5,081 petitions considered, 1,029 originated in one of the three counties. This suggests that the people of Albert, Charlotte and Sunbury were slightly over-represented among the colony's petitioners, comprising 20.25 per cent of petitioners as compared to 16.3 per cent of the total population of the province. (The discrepancy is not statistically significant, however, as differences of plus or minus five per cent could occur entirely by chance.)

other denomination, comprising almost 62 per cent of Albert's population and one half of Sunbury's population in 1861.⁸

In both Albert and Sunbury counties, the farm sector accounted for more than half the workers. Even in Charlotte County, which contained very little good agricultural land, over one-third of the population were engaged in agriculture, providing for the needs of the fishery and the lumbering industry. Fifteen per cent of Charlotte's families were employed in the fishery while one-quarter of that county's population depended on the lumbering industry for their livelihood. In each of the three counties 17 per cent of those whose occupation was listed were skilled artisans; a further 15 per cent listed their occupation merely as labourer; and approximately four per cent of all families were headed by merchants and professional men.⁹ While the men were occupied in the farming, fishing, and lumbering industries, or as skilled artisans or professionals, the women were scarcely idle. Approximately one in every four women of child-bearing age actually bore a child in 1851 and, aside from running their households and caring for the needs of their 14,600 children, the 6,289 women of the three counties churned 689,363 pounds of butter and wove 94,019 yards of cloth on their hand looms.¹⁰ Yet, despite the demands of their busy and productive lives, hundreds of women in the three counties found the time to petition their government.

A wide variety of motives persuaded these women to put their names to petitions. Many of the women in the first category of petitioners — those who sought to use the law in some way — were widows seeking financial compensation or support which they knew was their due. A cursory examination of their petitions would seem to give credence to the common notion that women were "forever dependent" on men, and that women who lost their husbands were left destitute, dependent on their sons, family or the charity of the

8 Information on denominational affiliation is not available for 1851 and therefore the 1861 census was used in this case. See *The Census of the Province of New Brunswick, 1861* (St. John, 1862).

9 Unless otherwise noted, all information contained in the demographic profiles provided for the three counties under study is drawn from *The Census of the Province of New Brunswick, 1851* (St. John, 1852).

10 The 6,289 figure refers only to women over the age of 20. For a discussion of women's role in the dairying industry in British North America during this period, see Marjorie Griffin Cohen, "The Decline of Women in Canadian Dairying", in Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History, Volume 2* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 61-70, and *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 59-117. While the 1851 census does not specify who the weavers are, the manuscript census of manufacturing for 1861 indicates that virtually all of the hand loom weavers engaged in this cottage industry were women. The manuscript census of manufacturing for 1871 also supports this assumption. See Manuscript Census for Charlotte County, 1861 and 1871, PANB.

public for support.¹¹ A more careful reading of the individual petitions leads to quite a different interpretation. Unless their husbands had been soldiers, widows did not generally petition the Legislature for support and those rare women who did appeal to their government for aid at a time of personal distress were not begging for charity or long-term support. In fact, most such petitioners were following an accepted and established formula used by men as well as women, to request compensation for the sacrifices they had made for their country and their community.

In 1848, for example, Margaret Baldwin, widow of the late Thomas Baldwin, of St. Andrews Parish in Charlotte County, petitioned the Legislative Assembly for help. Her husband had been employed in the early part of the previous summer by the medical attendant at Hospital Island to help with the care of sick and destitute 'emigrants'. He proved so satisfactory in the discharge of his duties that when a second group of 'emigrants' arrived later in the year he was employed a second time. This time, however, he contracted typhus fever and died, leaving his wife destitute with no means of support for either herself or their two children.¹² Margaret Tufts faced a similar situation. Her husband, Benjamin, had also been employed on Hospital Island. He had been contracted to erect the pest house and repair the public buildings. While he was so employed, a large number of sick 'emigrants' were landed on the island and Benjamin "devoted all his spare time in administering to the wants of the sick". While so engaged, he was himself taken ill with typhus fever of which, in a few days, he died, leaving his wife destitute, with "a large and helpless family" to support. In petitioning her government for help, Mrs. Tufts pointed out that she had, since her husband's death, subsisted on the meagre sum of £10, the balance owing to him at that time. At the time when she filed her petition, she had no visible way of making a living and feared that she must, for the coming winter at least, be dependent on the sympathy of the public.¹³

Both Margaret Baldwin and Margaret Tufts received grants from a sympathetic Legislature. On the surface, these two petitions, which were the only petitions of this general nature to be submitted during the entire decade, appear

11 This view of women as forever dependent on men is argued by Rosemary Ball, " 'A Perfect Farmer's Wife': Women in 19th Century Rural Ontario", *Canada: An Historical Magazine* (December 1975), pp. 2-21. And even historians like David Gagan, who recognize that "the fact of subordination was partially, if not wholly, mitigated by environment which cast women in a central role in the farm family's struggle to improve, and endure" often conclude that "for those women who outlived their partners, widowhood...was a calamity the consequence of which clearly troubled even the stoutest hearts". David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 89-90.

12 RG4, RS24, 1848/Pe 4, PANB.

13 RG4, RS24, 1848/Pe 5, PANB.

to be the kind one might expect from women. However, although these petitions do point out these women's potentially destitute condition, that is not the focal point of their arguments. Margaret Baldwin and Margaret Tufts were not asking their government for charity: they were demanding, in very proper and formulaic terms, money they believed to be their just due in consideration of the services their husbands had rendered to their community. Having received their grants, neither woman saw fit to petition for money a second time. Margaret Baldwin and her family soon left the parish, while Margaret Tufts managed by sharing a house with another family and taking in a lodger.¹⁴

A more unusual widow's petition came from Mary Ann Storr. Mrs. Storr and her family had made their entry into the province in April 1854, by way of Partridge Island. Her husband had died there, a victim of the cholera epidemic. In 1855, Mary Ann and her children were living in St. Andrews Parish in Charlotte County. In that year Mrs. Storr petitioned for, and was granted, compensation for the clothing and bedding of herself and her children which had been destroyed by direction of the authorities at the Quarantine Station in an effort to prevent the spread of cholera. Mrs. Storr was not asking for charity, only for just compensation.¹⁵

The majority of widows who petitioned the Legislature were the widows of 'old soldiers', men who had fought in the American Revolution. The "Act for the Relief of Old Soldiers of the Revolutionary War and their Widows", passed on 28 March 1839, entitled widows of veterans to an annual pension of £10. Despite the formulaic nature of their petitions, it would seem that the women themselves initiated their petitions, and continued to press their claims against apparently deaf officials until they were satisfied. Many such petitions referred to the women as indigent, if not destitute, and assured the Legislature that the petitioner had insufficient property to support herself and had not divested herself of any property in order to be eligible for a pension under the terms of the Act. Most of the women who applied for the widow's pension reported that their husbands had, in the past, been recipients of the pension.¹⁶ An analysis of the

14 New Brunswick Manuscript Census, 1851, PANB. Not only were women less likely to petition their government for charity than were men, the Overseers of the Poor in each parish, in requesting reimbursement for monies expended on poor relief, more often listed men than women as recipients of that relief. On the rare occasions when individual men and women did petition their government for help in times of distress, they pressed their claims in very similar ways.

15 RG4, RS24, 1855/Pe 162, PANB.

16 See *Acts of the General Assembly of Her Majesty's Province of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1839-45), 2 Victoria, Chapter 27; amended 4 Victoria, Chapter 16 and 6 Victoria, Chapter 36. Under the terms of the Act widows were eligible for the same annual pensions their husbands had received. Moreover, the eligibility clauses in the oath drew no distinction between veterans and their widows: the formulaic wording for initial applications, as set out in the 1839 Act, was the same for both.

content of their petitions indicates that these were not desperate and destitute women begging for charity, but, rather, capable and competent women claiming and, if necessary, persisting in claiming pensions as their right. And they needed to be persistent. Although widows' pensions were routinely granted by the Legislature, some such petitions were rejected. Seven of the women who applied for the pension received at least one rejection by the Legislature. Jerusha Black, who was living in Pennfield Parish, Charlotte County at the time of her husband's death in 1846, left that parish after his death and her first petition was filed from St. George Parish in 1848. She was granted her pension that year, but the following year, when she applied from St. David Parish, she was denied support. Back in St. George in 1850, she received her pension once more. The following year, at age 79, she returned to her childhood home, Campobello Island, where she and John Black had married in 1793. There is no record of her application in that year, but in the following year, 1852, she was receiving her pension in Campobello.¹⁷

Of the 23 women who petitioned the Legislature for pensions as the widows of 'old soldiers', only six were able to sign their own names. But, illiterate or not, these women were apparently responsible for initiating their own petitions. Thus, in 1852, Nancy Leonard, of West Isles in Charlotte County, requested that she be granted her pension for the previous year as well. She noted that "on account of ill health and great infirmity your petitioner neglected to furnish the usual petition as she had previously done for these nine years".¹⁸ Ruth McFarlane, of St. Patrick Parish in the same county, had been receiving the allowance of £10 by annual application since her husband's death in 1841. However, as she explained in her petition of 1849, in 1848 she had been told by county officials that there was no need to petition each year. As a result of this misinformation, she had not petitioned and she had not received her pension for 1848. Mrs. McFarlane, at 82, may have been "infirm and poor", but she knew her rights; she requested, and was granted, £20.¹⁹ Martha Pendleton, of West Isles, was equally annoyed with the apparent incompetency of local officials. Her husband, who had regularly received a pension as an 'old soldier', died in 1845, leaving her with no property or other means of support. According to her petition of 1849, she had filed petitions each year following his death but had received no pension. Upon inquiry, she was informed that her petitions had been mislaid.²⁰ By the winter of 1849-50, she had reason to believe that her persistence

17 RG4, RS24, 1848/Pe 152; 1849/Pe 13; 1850/Pe 56; 1852/Pe 67, PANB.

18 RG4, RS24, 1852/Pe 68, PANB.

19 RG4, RS24, 1849/Pe 39, PANB.

20 Nor has any earlier petition from Martha Pendleton been found among the petitions to the Legislature.

had finally been rewarded, for the Legislature awarded her £30 for the three years she had been without support. She was informed that her application had been granted and that payment would be made through the Clerk of the Peace. Mrs. Pendleton's triumph proved short lived, for, as she reported in her petition of 1850, the Clerk had only agreed to certify her petition for £10, thereby depriving her of the retroactive award.²¹ Petitioners, even elderly and infirm ones, could not count on local officials to look after their interests, since the officials were not always cooperative or even very well informed.

That women were aware of their rights, and counted on their government to uphold and protect those rights is nowhere more evident than in the case of the large group of young single women who fall within the first category of petitioners. Teachers, regardless of their sex, were required to petition the Legislature in order to receive the provincial school allowance. The licensing procedure was the same for both men and women, and only licensed teachers were eligible to receive the provincial subsidy. Although the criteria changed somewhat during the decade, as the Normal School was established and became generally accepted, the change was gradual and the basic requirements remained consistent until 1853, when the requirement that teachers petition the Legislature directly was dropped. Women remained at a disadvantage throughout the period. The School Act of 1837, which eliminated the previous distinction between a grant issued to a female teacher and one issued to a male, also stipulated that not more than three women teachers per parish were eligible for certification by the trustees in their semi-annual reports. Moreover, the School Act of 1852 restored the distinction between grants issued to male and female teachers. Women teachers holding a third class certificate were to receive £4 less than their male counterparts while grants to women who had attained a first class certificate were a full £10 lower than those received by men who held first class certificates. The community also had a significant responsibility in the process, for the school proprietors were required to provide a building and to match the amount paid by the province and teachers' petitions had to be certified by the local trustees.²²

For Alice Thomson of Charlotte County, the fact that only three female teachers per parish could apply for the provincial allowance meant that although she had taught in St. Andrews for 18 months, she received the provincial allowance for only the first six. In her petition of 1847, she informed the legislators that the trustees had refused to report her for the last 12 months "by reason of the too great number of female schools in the parish at that

21 RG4, RS24, 1850/Pc 42, PANB.

22 Katherine F.C. MacNaughton, *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick, 1784-1900* (Fredericton, 1946), pp. 89, 149.

time".²³ This was a not infrequent occurrence in St. Andrews, which was a large parish. In 1849, both Lydia Thomson and Mary O'Neill reported that, although they had been certified by the trustees, their petitions of the previous year could not be returned to the Legislature "as the number of female schools allowed by law had already passed".²⁴ Nor was the problem confined to large and populous parishes. Susannah Rogers of Coverdale, the smallest parish in Albert County, reported in 1850 that she could not be certified in the usual way for 1849 because the parish had exceeded its allotment of female school teachers.²⁵ These four young women, faced with an obstacle their male counterparts did not have to deal with, persisted in pressing their claims and all four eventually received their allowances, delayed by a full year in each case.

Nonetheless, the legal restriction did have the desired effect: significantly fewer women than men applied for the provincial subsidy each year. In Sunbury County only two of the 15 petitions from teachers were from women, and one of those was requesting remuneration not for her services, but rather for the services of her late husband. In Albert four of the 28 petitioning teachers were women. But in Charlotte County 45 of the 96 teachers who petitioned the Legislature for remuneration were women, and, although one of the female petitions was from a woman requesting the school allowance due her late husband, one of the male petitioners was requesting payment for the services of his late wife, while another was claiming the school allowance of his late daughter.

In some cases teachers counted on the good will of their employers when accepting teaching positions. When they responded to 'emergency' situations, teachers recognized that they were taking a risk which would make them vulnerable to rejection. This is clearly evidenced by the cogent arguments such teachers developed in their efforts to convince legislators to grant them an allowance to which they were not legally entitled. Women were more likely than men to respond to 'emergency' situations, and occasionally they suffered as a result. Isabella Fogg, of St. Patrick, a licensed teacher of the third class, agreed to step into the breach while the man who had been teaching in her district went off to attend the Training School in Fredericton. When he returned she was obliged to close her school. Six months of continuous teaching were required in order to be eligible for the provincial subsidy and Isabella's school had been open for only three months. She argued her case so effectively, however, that the legislators granted her petition to be paid for those three months.²⁶ Other

23 RG4, RS24, 1847/Pe 471, PANB.

24 RG4, RS24, 1849/Pe 91; 1849/Pe 209, PANB.

25 RG4, RS24, 1850/Pe 21, PANB.

26 RG4, RS24, 1851/Pe 35, PANB.

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women were not so lucky. Sophia Flagg of Campobello lived in a district which had been unable to attract a licensed teacher. When approached by the local trustees, she agreed to help out in the hope that, allowing for the circumstances, she might be granted the usual subsidy. She taught for six months but her petition for the provincial school allowance met with rejection.²⁷ Mary Hitchings of St. Stephen taught in a remote district of that parish for nine months in 1845. She did not apply for a licence because she "did not contemplate pursuing the business of teaching but was induced to teach as long as she did from the solicitation of a number of inhabitants in the district and from its destitute condition as to the means of education". Her application for the provincial allowance was rejected because she did not have a licence.²⁸ Rebecca Pratt of St. George agreed to teach on Pleasant Ridge in St. Patrick Parish despite the fact that the few poor inhabitants could not afford to remunerate a teacher. She taught for six months in the hope of receiving the provincial allowance, but her petition was denied.²⁹ Male teachers rarely put themselves in such vulnerable situations.³⁰

In some cases the trustees themselves proved peculiarly lax, often at the expense of female teachers. In St. David Parish in Charlotte County, women teachers frequently found themselves at the mercy of seemingly incompetent trustees. In 1845, Mary Jane Perkins, a native of the parish, completed her education and applied for her teaching licence. She filled out all the necessary papers and paid the 30s fee. Then she accepted a job teaching school in the parish. However, when it came time to certify her for the provincial allowance, she was told her papers had been lost.³¹ Susan Rogers was also teaching in the parish in 1846. She had passed her licensing examination in 1839 and had been duly certified as qualified to teach spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic and English grammar. When her licence was cancelled, she had immediately applied for a new one but had been told that renewal was unnecessary. Since then the trustees had apparently changed their minds, for they refused to certify her petition in the usual manner because her licence had not been renewed.³² Just two years later Rachel Hawes faced a similar problem. An 18 year old native of the parish, Rachel had been employed to teach for a six month period. Yet she was discouraged from applying for her teacher's licence. She was told not to go to the expense because "licences would soon be cancelled and issued only from

27 RG4, RS24, 1849/Pe 95, PANB.

28 RG4, RS24, 1848/Pe 158, PANB.

29 RG4, RS24, 1848/Pe 131, PANB.

30 Two per cent of male teachers as compared to 10 per cent of female teachers fall into this category

31 RG4, RS24, 1846/Pe 60, PANB.

32 RG4, RS24, 1846/Pe 261, PANB.

the Training School".³³ In order to grant the petitions of these three young women, the legislators were required to exhibit extraordinary flexibility in their interpretation of the law. The women had understood the provisions of the law and had attempted to comply with them, yet had been prevented from doing so by the trustees, the men who should have understood the School Act better than anyone else, since they were responsible for its enforcement. In the end, not one of the women involved was denied her allowance. Yet it is perhaps significant that no male teacher in any parish reported having been told by the trustees not to bother applying for a licence.

Some of the reasons for rejection were, of course, common to both men and women. Young single teachers of both sexes proved very mobile. One of the most common problems encountered by both men and women involved their failure to transfer their licences when moving from parish to parish. Fortunately the legislators proved flexible concerning this rule, often allowing teachers to renew their licences 'after the fact'. Yet whether the problems they faced were shared by both sexes or clearly gender related, women teachers demonstrated their superior skill in the petitioning process. Three of Sunbury's 15 teachers received rejections from the legislators: all three were male. Rejection was rare for Albert County petitioners with only two of the 28 petitions being turned down by the Legislature, both of them from men. In Charlotte County, 18 male petitioners and seven female petitioners were rejected. In general, it appears that women were not more likely to be rejected than were their male counterparts.³⁴ Moreover, as in the case of soldiers' widows, it was the women themselves who pressed their claims and ultimately, sometimes through sheer doggedness, gained their allowance.

Married women did not typically petition the Legislature as individuals.³⁵ Nor did they sign petitions calling for the building of roads, wharfs, bridges and other public works. They did not petition for the incorporation of either the Roman Catholic bishop or the Loyal Orange Order. Nor did they join in requests for the division of parishes or the creation of free ports. Their husbands, in contrast, did all these things. The failure of women to become involved in such lobbying campaigns can cause historians to draw misleading conclusions about women and their role within the broader society. Because 19th century women were denied the vote and because they did not lobby their

33 RG4, RS24, 1848/Pe 162, PANB.

34 RG4, RS24, 1846/Pe; 1847/Pe; 1848/Pe; 1849/Pe; 1850/Pe; 1851/Pe; 1852/Pe, PANB.

35 There were four exceptions to this general rule in the three counties during the twelve year period under study. They include a woman who had been named executrix of her father's estate and three married teachers. One of the latter had continued to teach after her marriage while the remaining two were applying for allowances earned prior to marriage. See RG4, RS24, 1851/Pe 239; 1852/Pe 25; 1849/Pe 84; 1850/Pe 49.

34 *Acadiensis*

Legislature as part of an organized group, it has been assumed that women were not knowledgeable about political issues and that they were not active politically. Politics has been regarded as an activity outside the 19th century woman's 'proper sphere', as defined for her by a patriarchal society and women's political involvement is usually dated from the rise of provincial and national women's organizations in the late 19th century. The political awareness evinced by the women who joined such organizations is viewed as a new departure which saw women becoming active outside the domestic sphere for the first time.³⁶ Yet there was a far greater degree of continuity than such interpretations would lead one to expect. At least some married women in mid-19th century New Brunswick understood the system and quickly learned to use it effectively. These women had stepped beyond the domestic sphere long before the advent of national, or even provincial women's organizations.

Take the case of John and Alice Wilson of St. Andrews Parish in Charlotte County. John was a highly successful merchant. In 1851 he was 64 years old. Alice, his American-born wife, was 58. According to the census of that year, their household also included a hired man, two female servants, and an errand boy. John and Alice had sundry relatives living in the parish including their married son Thomas, a lawyer, and John's two younger brothers who were also merchants. Between 1846 and his death in 1855, John Wilson petitioned the Legislature no less than 21 times. Some of the petitions he initiated involved lobbying for parish improvements, while others were more personal in nature. In 1847, for example, he petitioned for and received a grant of money to improve Dark Harbour, Grand Manan. In 1849 he asked to be reimbursed for the money he had expended in the care and maintenance of 'emigrants' from Ireland brought over to work for the St. Andrews and Quebec Railroad Company, of which he was president. His petition was rejected. In 1851 he requested a further

36 For a discussion of women's lack of power within the family, see Margaret Conrad, "Sundays Always Make Me Think of Home": Time and Place in Canadian Women's History", in Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds., *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 69, 75-7. For examples of the view that the rise of provincial and national women's organizations signalled a 'new day' for women in terms of political activity, see Deborah Gorham, "Flora MacDonald Denison: Canadian Feminist", in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, pp. 48, 58-64; Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU", pp. 152-4, 166-7; and Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage': National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century", in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 87-103. Historians have not altogether ignored women's political activity during this period, but in general women's participation in the petitioning process has been characterized as exceptional rather than normal. For the best discussion of women's political activity during this period, see Alison Prentice, Paula Borne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 105, 174-5 (for references to petitions and petitioners, pp. 70, 81, 102, 105).

grant to deepen the channel at Dark Harbour, which was, he argued, the only safe harbour in the area in the event of a storm. Once more the Legislature granted his request. In 1855 he requested yet another grant for the purpose of further improvements at Dark Harbour.³⁷

During that entire decade, Alice Wilson did not sign a single petition to the Legislature. But there is every reason to assume that she understood precisely what her husband had been doing. In his will, John named his “dear wife Alice” his sole executrix, leaving her all his “real estate viz. land, buildings, mills, wharfs, stores” as well as all his “personal estate of every description consisting of household furniture, all my books, debts, notes of hand, bonds, bank stock, bridge and steamboat stock, money, vessels and of all description property termed personal estate”.³⁸ John’s obvious faith in the abilities of his ‘dear wife Alice’ proved fully justified. Less than a year after his death, Alice petitioned the Legislature for the first time. She asked to be reimbursed the amount expended by her late husband in opening and improving Dark Harbour, Grand Manan. The following year she petitioned for the appointment of a person to look into the expenses incurred by her late husband in constructing a breakwater at Dark Harbour. That same year she requested that the government suspend the issue of debentures to the New Brunswick and Canada Railroad and Land Company until reparation had been made her for the claims of her late husband. When that request was tabled, she followed it up with a second petition.³⁹ Clearly Alice Wilson was a force to be reckoned with. Indeed, her immediate facility with the petition process makes one wonder if perhaps Alice had not always been the ‘petitioner’ in the family. Whatever her role may have been in the process while her husband was alive, after his death she quickly proved herself fully capable of handling his affairs. While Alice Wilson is undoubtedly the best example of a widow who used petitions to promote her business interests after the death of her husband, she was by no means the only example.⁴⁰

Custom — and perhaps some husbands — prevented married women from signing more petitions dealing with individual and family affairs, but one should not assume either a lack of knowledge about or a lack of interest in the political system and the way it worked, on the part of such women. Moreover, starting in 1853, married women began to sign petitions in numbers. The petitions they signed were qualitatively different from the petitions women had signed up to

37 RG4, RS24, 1846/Pe 285; 1847/Pe 67, 116, 154, 313, 402; 1848/Pe 365, 389; 1849/Pe 7, 89, 355; 1851/Pe 333, 334; 1852/Pe 320, 321; 1853/Pe 260; 1854/Pe 37, 105, 354; 1855/Pe 291, 292, PANB.

38 Charlotte County Probate Court Records, RG7, RS63B3, 1852, PANB.

39 RG4, RS24, 1856/Pe 5; 1857-58/Pe 7, 9, 164, PANB.

40 For examples of other widows who were involved in the economic life of their communities, see RG4, RS24, 1846/Pe 216; 1849/Pe 195; 1852/Pe 17, 202; 1854/Pe 215, 225, PANB.

that time. Such women fell into the second category of petitioners: those who sought to change the law. The issue that finally mobilized them to take up their pens was, not surprisingly, a reform issue. By the final decades of the century it would be an issue closely associated with the organized women's movement. The issue was temperance.

The temperance movement was well entrenched in New Brunswick by 1853, the first formal temperance organization having been established in 1830. Drawing inspiration and encouragement from both Great Britain and the United States, the New Brunswick movement had gained ground steadily throughout the 1830s and 1840s.⁴¹ Temperance societies were established in Fredericton, Saint John, Dorchester, Chatham, St. Stephen and St. Andrews and temperance *soirées* and teas were very popular.⁴² During the early years, the goal had been to encourage moderation and sobriety but by the mid-1840s many temperance activists were advocating total abstinence.⁴³ As the depression of the late 1840s began, temperance advocates, in their search for explanations, increasingly associated drinking with the broad social problems of crime and poverty.⁴⁴ In 1847, the Sons of Temperance, the most successful of the American total-abstinence organizations, established its first division in British North America at St. Stephen, New Brunswick. The Sons of Temperance and its affiliates, the Daughters of Temperance and the Cadets of Temperance, had

41 For evidence of British and American influences, see J. K. Chapman, "The Mid-Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement in New Brunswick and Maine", *Canadian Historical Review*, 35 (1954), pp. 43, 48-50 and T. W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 140-50. Analysts of the 19th century temperance movements in Great Britain and the United States tend to characterize the movement as an Anglo-American crusade. The American and British campaigns began at the same time and nourished each other. See, for example, Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (Pittsburgh, 1971), pp. 99-103; W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales, c. 1820-c. 1895* (Cardiff, 1983), pp. 59-61; and Ian R. Tyrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport CT, 1979), pp. 135, 299.

42 Chapman, "The Mid-Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement", p. 48.

43 Acheson, *Saint John*, p. 138. The British and American movements had made this shift somewhat earlier. Teetotalism had gained popularity in Britain by the late 1830s while the "Washingtonians" popularized teetotalism in the United States after their inception in 1840. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety*, p. 59; Tyrell, *Sobering Up*, pp. 135-90.

44 While the prohibition advocates of a later period would focus on the effects of drinking on individual families, the women petitioners of this early period, like their male counterparts, regarded drinking as a community rather than a family problem. The petitions that went beyond a formulaic request for the enactment of "a Law to prevent the importation, manufacture and sale of all intoxicating Liquors within this Province", generally decried intemperance as "a great public evil". As the authors of one 1851 petition succinctly put it, "your petitioners are convinced that crime, pauperism and lunacy in nine cases out of ten are the direct result of drinking habits". See RG4, RS24, 1846/Pe 45; 1848/Pe 270; 1849/Pe 87; 1849/Pe 151; 1849/Pe 363; 1851/Pe 228; 1854/Pe 220; 1854/Pe 394; 1854/Pe 395; 1854/Pe 404; 1854/Pe 465.

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widespread appeal. Teas, picnics, and steamer excursions provided family diversions and attracted many to the great crusade.⁴⁵ By 1850 there were branches all over the southern part of the province.⁴⁶

For many years temperance advocates sought to achieve their goals by moral suasion, but by the late 1840s some had become convinced that moral suasion alone was not enough. For a time, they focussed their efforts on gaining control of liquor consumption within their own communities through attempts to secure limitations on the number of tavern licences issued by county and city councils.⁴⁷ But such efforts proved unsuccessful. In Maine, temperance crusaders facing a similar failure had appealed to a higher authority. By 1851 they had gained enough support in the Legislature there to achieve an effective prohibition law. The 'Maine Law', which was the first prohibitory liquor law in North America, had a significant effect on the New Brunswick temperance movement. In 1852, a so-called 'monster petition' calling for the prohibition of the importation of alcoholic beverages was presented to the House of Assembly.⁴⁸ The 9000 signatures on the petition so impressed the province's legislators that they were persuaded to pass "An Act to Prevent the Traffic in Intoxicating Liquors". This act "forbade the manufacture within New Brunswick of any alcoholic or intoxicating liquors except for religious, medicinal or chemical purposes. Beer, ale, porter and cider were excepted".⁴⁹

Women had, of course, been involved in the temperance cause from the time of its first appearance in New Brunswick in 1830. But men had always outnumbered women in temperance organizations and until 1853 the vast majority of temperance petitions were submitted by and signed by men.⁵⁰ Urban women were the first to take up their pens in the temperance cause: the "Ladies' Total Abstinence Society for the City and County of Saint John" submitted the first recorded petition from women on the issue to the Legislature in 1847. Three years later

45 Acheson, *Saint John*, p. 149; Chapman, "The Mid-Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement", p. 50.

46 W. S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867* (Toronto, 1963, 1984), p. 350.

47 Acheson, *Saint John*, p. 141. Similar attempts were made in New England to control licensing at the local level. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, pp. 91, 242-3.

48 RG4, RS24, 1852/Pe 406, PANB. The Maine Law also had a significant impact in England and within the United States. See Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 196; Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, p. 260.

49 Chapman, "The Mid-Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement", p. 53.

50 New Brunswick women were by no means atypical in this regard. Barbara Epstein argues, for example, that during this period American women in the temperance movement were generally relegated to subsidiary roles — influencing sons and husbands. Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown CT, 1981), p. 91.

Woodstock's Victoria Union No. 4 of the Daughters of Temperance submitted a petition opposing the granting of tavern licences. The following year the "Ladies of Woodstock" went even further, calling for "an act to prevent the sale of spiritous liquors". In 1852, the Daughters of Temperance from Woodstock were joined in the campaign by women from Fredericton and the surrounding area.⁵¹ Rural women, including the subjects of this article, in contrast, did not sign temperance petitions to the Legislature before 1853. Yet this cannot be taken as an indication of either a lack of knowledge or a lack of interest. Some, like the women of Albert County, had, for several years, regularly signed petitions addressed to their local county councils opposing the issuance of tavern licences.⁵² Such women signed petitions not as members of any organized temperance group, but rather as members of their local community; and this pattern was to continue when they turned their attention to the Legislative Assembly in 1853. Rural women had not participated in the legislative lobbying campaign that had culminated in the drafting of the Liquor Bill. Yet they were very much in the mainstream of the temperance movement as it gathered force, attempting first to achieve sobriety through moral suasion, then seeking local solutions through no licensing campaigns. And they would soon have the opportunity to demonstrate their support for the new legislation.

The new law was to come into force on 1 June 1853. In fact, it never came into effect. No sooner had it passed into law than the lobby against it began. Petitions calling for the repeal of the new law flooded in from nearly every county in the province. And the legislators were disposed to listen. Perhaps they had, after all, been just a little too hasty. The Legislative Assembly depended mainly on customs duties for its disposable revenue and duties on rum alone represented over one third of that revenue.⁵³ It was at this stage that the women of New Brunswick mobilized for action. Women who had never before signed a petition took up their pens. They begged their legislators not to repeal the new law. Men had achieved the law; the women were determined to keep it.⁵⁴

51 See RG4, RS24, 1847/Pe 465; 1850/Pe 445; 1851/Pe 431; 1852/Pe 348; 1852/Pe 402; 1852/Pe 407, PANB. The early involvement of urban women is not surprising. Harrison argues that the temperance movement in England owed much to industrialization. Led by pioneers among whom doctors, coffee traders, evangelicals and industrialists figured prominently, the movement spread out from the towns (Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, pp. 92-8). Similarly, Tyrrell argues that temperance "flourished in a society in transition from a rural to an urban industrial order", receiving its strongest support from the promoters of that change (Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, pp. 7, 209, 241, 252). A comprehensive study of the New Brunswick temperance movement during this period remains to be done, but the pattern of petitioning is suggestive of the need for a careful comparative analysis.

52 RG18, RS146, B9 (1851), PANB.

53 Chapman, "The Mid-Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement", p. 44.

54 Women from both Charlotte and Sunbury participated in the 1853 campaign against the repeal

After the election of 1854, temperance advocates, many of them women, redoubled their efforts. Through the medium of petitions, they urged their newly elected Assembly to enact yet another law "to prevent the importation, manufacture and sale of all intoxicating liquors within this province". Sunbury prohibitionists, for example, addressed three separate petitions to their legislators in 1854. Those petitions contained no less than 915 signatures and 488 of those names were female.⁵⁵ Three hundred and seventy-five (77 per cent) of these women were living in the county when the census was taken in 1851.⁵⁶ They represented well over 30 per cent of the county's 846 families. One hundred and fifty-five of these women (just over 40 per cent) were married and the majority of them (95) petitioned with their husbands and children. Thus, fathers and sons signed the petition from "the male inhabitants of Sunbury County" while mothers and daughters were signing the petition from "the female inhabitants of Sunbury County". Often fathers signed on behalf of their sons, and mothers on behalf of their daughters. Occasionally parents included the names of very young children on the petition: 16 of the daughters listed were under ten years of age in 1854 (see Table 1). In very rare cases, one parent signed both petitions on behalf of the entire family, but these amounted to less than five per cent of the total signatures.

Typical of those who signed as families were the Carrs of Burton Parish. Free Will Baptists, they were prepared to take a stand on the prohibition issue. Mary Ann Carr who was 44 in 1854, signed the petition on behalf of herself and her daughter Louisa, who was 17; Huldah, at 24, signed on her own behalf. Mary Ann's husband, William, 11 years her senior, a farm owner and operator, also signed the petition, as did their 21 year old son, Alexander. Sarah and Andrew Smith also supported the call for a new prohibitory liquor law. Sarah was 42 in 1854, while Andrew was 49. Like the Carrs, they were Free Will Baptists and farm owners. Their three oldest children, Frances, 23, George, 19, and Abigail, 17, joined their parents in supporting the petition. Similarly, Margaret Nason, a 34 year old weaver, her farmer husband, and her two sons, aged 14 and 15, all signed. Residents of Lincoln, they were, like the Carrs and the Smiths, Free Will Baptists. Augusta Perley's family was less typical. Her husband, George, a 47 year old Maugerville farmer, had signed a petition urging temperance legislation

of the Act. See the index of the *Journal of the New Brunswick House of Assembly*, 1853, which refers to: Petition 366, Lucinda Garcelon, Clara A. McAllister, Margaret Robinson and 300 others, female inhabitants of Charlotte, and Petition 386, Israel Smith, Thomas H. Smith, Esq. and 996 others of Sunbury and York. Other petitions for Charlotte which might well have numbered women among their signatories include: Petition 318 from Charlotte County, Petition 354 from St. Andrews and Petition 355 from St. George. None of the above has survived in the PANB.

55 RG4, RS24, 1854/Pe 394, 1854/Pe 395, 1854/Pe 404, PANB.

56 Manuscript Census for Sunbury County, N.B., 1851, PANB.

TABLE 1
Sunbury County: Women Temperance Petitioners by Signing Category and Age Group

Age	Wives whose husbands signed	Wives whose husbands did not sign	Widows	Daughters signing with one or both parents	Daughters whose parents did not sign	Other women signatories	Totals	% of women petitioners
0-9				16			16	4
10-14				37	11		48	13
15-19				45	13	2	60	16
20-29	14	12		38	20	11	95	25
30-39	28	20	1	8	4	5	66	18
40-49	21	14	1	1			37	10
50-59	20	10	1				31	8
60-69	9	3	3				15	4
70-89	3	1	2			1	7	2
Totals	95	60	8	145	48	19	375*	100
% of women petitioners	25	16	2	39	13	5		100

*Women identified in the 1851 census (77 per cent of all women signatories).

in 1852. In 1854, Augusta, then 38, joined him in his fight for the cause, as did their daughters, Mary Frances, 19, and Charlotte, 17, and their eldest son, Walter, 15. The Perleys, however, were one of only 23 Episcopalian families to sign the petition.

Although 60 married women signed the petition even though their husbands had not, the majority of these women did not sign alone. For example, Gertrude Harris, the wife of a Blissville farmer, signed the petition without her husband, but her three eldest children, Thomas, 17, Mary, 14, and Hannah, 12, signed with her. Like the majority of Sunbury signatories, the Harrises were Free Will Baptists. Mary Glasier, the Irish-born wife of a Lincoln lumberman, signed the petition on behalf of her 13 year old daughter, Melissa, as well as herself; her mother, Catherine O'Brien, also signed. The Glasiers were Methodists, a group that provided close to 20 per cent of Sunbury's petitioners. Some married women signed alone, independent of their families as well as of their husbands. Among them was Ann Tosh, the 26 year old wife of an Irish labourer in Sheffield. Such women were, however, usually strengthened by religious as well as moral conviction. Ann Tosh, for example, like so many other signatories, was a Free Will Baptist.

Almost 60 per cent of the female signatories were not married. Eight were widows, while the remaining 212 were single. Of the single women, 68 per cent signed with one or both of their parents. While the majority of married women who signed were between 30 and 39 years of age, the single women signatories were somewhat younger on average. Typical of the young single women who signed were Alice and Mary Ann Patterson, aged 31 and 27 respectively. Both were dressmakers, living with their parents, a dressmaker and a tenant farmer, and their three younger brothers. All the members of this family signed. Margaret Barker, 24, and her sister Mary, a 21 year old schoolmistress in Sheffield Parish, signed the petition along with their widowed mother and elder brother. A farm family, they were Congregationalists. The five daughters of William Smith, Phebe, aged 30, Mary, 27, Hepzedah, 23, Adeline, 21, and Sarah, 20, all signed, as did their brother Steven, aged 26. Not surprisingly, they were Free Will Baptists. Yet their older brother and their father did not sign.

Denominational affiliation could be determined for only 71 per cent of the 303 Sunbury families.⁵⁷ Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists were slightly over-represented among signatories, while Roman Catholics were significantly under-represented (see Table 2). Thus, women who belonged to Protestant

57 These included 61.7 per cent of Sunbury's 488 women petitioners. Information concerning religious denomination was drawn from the Manuscript Census for 1861, PANB. Thus, almost 40 per cent of all female signatories had removed from their parish of residence by 1861, suggesting that women petitioners were not likely to be more geographically stable than were their contemporaries.

TABLE 2

Sunbury County: Religion of Women Temperance Petitioners

Religion	Blissville	Burton	Lincoln	Maugerville	Sheffield	Totals	% of Identified Petitioners	% of Total in County
Baptist	70	24	37	13	25	169	56.1	51.0
Methodist	2	9	3	8	30	52	17.3	14.1
Episcopalian		10		18	4	32	10.6	11.5
Congregational				4	14	18	6.0	2.3
Presbyterian		2	1	1	4	8	2.7	5.4
Roman Catholic	7	3	4	2	2	18	6.0	15.5
Disciples		3				3	1.0	.1
Covenanter	1					1	.3	.1
TOTALS	80	51	45	46	79	301*	100.0	100.0

*Women present when the 1861 census, which includes religious affiliation, was taken (61.7 per cent of all women signatories).

evangelical sects were more likely to sign temperance petitions than were women of other denominations. However, in Sunbury County, where over 50 per cent of the families were Baptist and the numbers of other denominations were small, patterns among the other denominational groups prove difficult to discern with any degree of precision.

The wives and daughters of labourers were under-represented among petition signatories from Sunbury, but so, too, were the wives and daughters of artisans. In contrast, farm families were significantly over-represented. Thus, while 56 per cent of the workforce classified themselves as farmers in 1851, 71 per cent of the female petitioners were the wives or daughters of farmers (see Table 3). The occupations of some of the women signatories were also listed in the census. These included five weavers, three dressmakers, four schoolmistresses, a trader and four servants.

On the whole, then, the women who signed the Sunbury petitions of 1854 were very ordinary women, unremarkable within their community. The average signatory was relatively young, between 20 and 29 years of age, and was likely to sign with some other member of her family. Like the majority of her contemporaries, she was probably part of a farm family and attended either a Baptist or Methodist Church. Although she had never before signed a petition, she was prepared to stand up and be counted in support of her beliefs or those of her parents or friends. She may not have been either sophisticated or worldly, yet her interests and knowledge extended beyond the domestic sphere. The action she took was a decidedly political one and it would be difficult to argue, at least in the case of any of the 109 women over the age of 20 who signed the petition independent of any husband or parent, that she did not understand the principle behind that action. And, for one brief moment, her action had the desired effect, for in 1855, the Legislature did pass yet another prohibitory liquor act.

Of course, the women of Sunbury did not achieve their goal single handed. In 1854, at about the same time as the people of Sunbury were presenting their petitions, a second 'monster petition' was presented to the House of Assembly. It was far longer than the petition that had so impressed the legislators back in 1852; this petition included over 20,000 signatures. Moreover, it suggested more broadly based support. Whereas the signatories of the earlier 'monster petition' had been drawn largely from Saint John City and County, this time they came from at least half of the 14 counties of New Brunswick, although not from Sunbury. Well over half of the 20,000 signatories were women, including 143 women from Hillsborough in Albert County, and 198 women from Charlotte County, 93 from St. Stephen Parish and 105 from the parish of St. Andrews.⁵⁸

58 RG4, RS24, 1854/Pe 465, PANB.

Table 3
Sunbury County: Occupations of Heads of Households of Petitioning Families

Occupational Categories	Blissville	Burton	Lincoln	Maugerville	Sheffield	Totals	% of Families	% of Total in County
Professions	2	1	2		2	7	2.6	1.4
Trade & Commerce		1		1		2	.7	1.7
Agriculture	44	28	40	27	52	191	71.0	55.7
Artisans	6	7	3	5	17	38	14.1	17.9
Fishermen					1	1	.4	.7
Labourers	3	2	7		18	30	11.2	19.2
Miscellaneous								3.4
TOTALS	55	39	52	33	90	269	100.0	100.0

The patterns that emerged in Sunbury were repeated in Hillsborough. Eighty per cent of Hillsborough's women signatories were living in the parish when the census was taken in 1851.⁵⁹ They included representatives of more than one-quarter of the parish's families. Forty-eight were married women, while a further six were widows (see Table 4). The husbands of 28 of these women could be identified as having signed temperance petitions in the past. Elizabeth Steeves was typical of the married women who signed. Her husband George, a Baptist farmer descended from the Pennsylvania Germans who had settled the parish in the previous century, had signed temperance petitions to both his local County Council and the Provincial Legislature in the past. Now his wife, joined by her two daughters and her daughter-in-law (aged 28, 26 and 26 respectively), signed the 'monster petition' of 1854. Margaret Duffy was the wife of the Baptist minister. Although her husband was an Irish immigrant, she was of German descent and had been born and raised in the parish. She and her daughters, Jane, 22, Theora, 12, and Margaret, 10, added their names to the petition. Mary Gross also traced her roots to the original German settlers. She, too, was a Baptist. In the past, her husband Robert had signed temperance petitions and now she and her daughters, Ruth, 18, Hannah, 14, and Anne, 12, took up their pens. Dillah Steeves and her husband shared a common background, but he was not, apparently, as interested in the temperance cause as his wife. While her farmer husband never signed a temperance petition, Dillah, at age 48, signed her first. Her daughters, Elizabeth, 23, and Jane, 17, signed with her.

Of the 61 single women who signed, 48 were the daughters of temperance advocates. Isaac Milton, a Baptist farmer, had signed a petition calling for prohibition in 1851. In 1854, his daughters, Ruth, 21, and Mary, 20, joined the campaign. Elizabeth Steeves, 25, and her sister Permelia, 22, the daughters of a widowed farmer who had, in the past, been a temperance advocate, also added their names. They, too, were Baptists. Occasionally women signed independent of parents or siblings. Twenty-one year old Jane Boyd signed the petition despite the fact that no one else in her large family signed with her, but Jane was exceptional. Only 13 of the 61 single women signatories identified could claim to have taken a stance independent of their parents. As was the case in Sunbury, the wives and daughters of the farmers of Hillsborough were over-represented among the signatories: although only 59 per cent of the parish's families were headed by farmers, 72 per cent of the women signatories came from farm families. The Baptists were again significantly over-represented.⁶⁰ While Bapt-

⁵⁹ Manuscript Census for Albert County, N.B., 1851, PANB.

⁶⁰ Religious affiliation was drawn from the 1861 Manuscript Census for Albert County, PANB. Fully 72 per cent of Hillsborough's female signatories were located in the 1861 census. In this case, marriage records were used to trace those women who may have removed to another parish within the county. This, coupled with the tendency to greater geographical stability within Albert County as a whole, accounts for the high rate of record linkage for Hillsborough.

TABLE 4

Albert County: Women Temperance Petitioners by Signing Category and Age Group

Age Groups	Wives whose husbands had been temperance advocates	Wives whose husbands had not been temperance advocates	Daughters whose parents were temperance advocates	Daughters whose parents had not been temperance advocates	Other women signatories	Totals	% of women petitioners
0-9			5	3		8	7
10-14			12	1		13	11
15-19			15	3		18	16
20-29	8	6	16	3	2	35	30
30-39	7	3		1		11	10
40-49	8	7				16	14
50-59	3	3				6	5
60-69	1	1				4	3.5
70-89	1	3				4	3.5
TOTALS	28	20	48	11	2	115*	
% of women petitioners	24.5	17.5	41.5	10	1.5		100

*Women identified in the 1851 census (80 per cent of all women signatories).

ists comprised 76 per cent of the parish population, fully 92 per cent of the Hillsborough women who signed the 'monster petition' of 1854 were Baptists (see Table 5). Many were descendants of the original German settlers who had begun immigrating to the parish from Pennsylvania as early as 1765. On the whole, then, the Hillsborough women were a more cohesive group than the Sunbury women, although their demographic profile is very similar.⁶¹

The Charlotte County signatories, drawn mainly from the two major towns in the county, were a more diverse group of women. They were also more mobile. Of the 260 women who signed either the 'monster petition' or another petition calling for prohibition in 1854, only 63 per cent had been living in the county when the census taker called in 1851.⁶² The women were older on average than the women in either Hillsborough or Sunbury. Forty-eight percent of the signatories were married, while a further six percent were widows. The majority of the married women ranged in age between 30 and 50, while the majority of single women who signed were in their twenties (see Table 6). In Charlotte County, the temperance movement was clearly a middle class movement, attracting supporters from the families of professional men, merchants and skilled artisans as well as from the most prosperous farm families.

In St. Stephen, many of the most prosperous members of society belonged to the Congregational Church and a high proportion of these were temperance advocates. Mary and Frances Porter, daughters of George M. Porter, one of the wealthiest lumber merchants in the county, signed the 'monster petition'. Mary Ann Murchie also signed: her husband, James, listed himself merely as a farmer in the census, but he was much more than that, controlling nearly 20,000 acres of land. Charlotte Hitchings, another signatory, was the wife of a lawyer. Her daughter Frances, then 17, also signed, as did Mary and Louisa Todd, the daughters of a local merchant. All these women were Congregationalists.

In St. Andrews, the picture proved somewhat more varied. Ann Berry, a Scottish-born Presbyterian, was the wife of a house carpenter. Her husband, Thomas, had signed a temperance petition as early as 1848. In 1854, she and her daughters, Helen, 23, and Isabella, 13, followed his example. Jane McCracken was an Irish-born Presbyterian. A 43 year old widow, she made her living as a dressmaker. Her sister Susan, also a widow, and her niece lived with her: they, too, were dressmakers. Elizabeth Clark, 35, and her daughter Jane, 17, were Methodists, a denomination often associated with the temperance cause; yet

61 It should be noted, however, that the Hillsborough Baptists were quite different from the Sunbury Baptists. While the Hillsborough Baptists traced their roots back to the religious traditions carried as part of their cultural baggage by the original Pennsylvania German immigrants, Sunbury Baptists had been strongly influenced by the New Light movement of the late 18th century.

62 RS 24, 1854/Pe 220 and 1854/Pe 465, PANB; Manuscript Census for Charlotte County, N.B., 1851, PANB.

TABLE 5

Hillsborough Parish, Albert County: Religion of Women Temperance Petitioners

Religion	No. of Identified Petitioners	% of Identified Petitioners	Denomination as % of Parish Population
Baptist	95	92.2	75.6
Methodist	8	7.8	9.8
TOTALS	103*		

*Women present when the 1861 census, which includes religious affiliation, was taken (61.7 per cent of all women signatories).

TABLE 6
Charlotte County: Women Temperance Petitioners by Signing Category and Age Group

Age Group	Wives whose husbands had been temperance advocates	Wives whose husbands had not been temperance advocates	Daughters whose parents were temperance advocates	Daughters whose parents had not been temperance advocates	Other women signatories	Totals	% of women petitioners
10-14			5	1		6	4
15-19			16	11	2	29	18
20-29	3	5	19	12	3	42	26
30-39	10	15	2	3		32	19
40-49	16	15				34	21
50-59	6	4	4			14	8
60-69	2	3	2			7	4
TOTALS	37	42	11	27	5	164*	
% of women petitioners	22	26	7	16	3		100

*Women identified in the 1851 census (63 per cent of all women signatories).

there is no record of Obadiah, the 40 year-old mariner who was husband to Elizabeth and father to Jane, ever having signed a temperance petition. Perhaps he was too much away at sea to find time for such things. Like the Clarks, Christiana Stevenson, an American-born immigrant, was a Methodist. But her husband, Robert, a tanner and currier, and his brother, Hugh, had both signed temperance petitions to the Legislature in 1848. Elizabeth Harvey, the wife of a ship's carpenter, was an Episcopalian who supported the great crusade; she was 33 in 1854. Just 22 in 1854, Mary Stickney, the young wife of a watchmaker, was, like Elizabeth Harvey, an Episcopalian who rallied to the temperance cause. None of these women was unusual among St. Andrews' petitioners, who were drawn largely from among Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians, and represented many of the families of the skilled craftsmen of the parish. Women like Ann Chesty, the 26 year old daughter of an Irish-born Roman Catholic labourer, were rare indeed among the signatories.

The Charlotte County experience raises questions about the role of religion in determining which women would prove most likely to support the movement. The representation of a particular religious denomination among the Charlotte County petitioners seems to have depended on organization (see Table 7). In St. Stephen, Congregational Church women proved the most likely to sign although Congregationalists comprised only five per cent of the total population of the parish. In St. Andrews, Presbyterian and Methodist and, surprisingly, Episcopalian women predominated. The tiny contingent of signatories from St. Patrick were almost exclusively Baptist (nine of 12 families). Were petitions passed around at church meetings? If so, the denominational affiliation of the majority of signatories in any single parish may well be accidental. Nonetheless, in comparing the denominational affiliation of the women who signed petitions calling for prohibitory liquor legislation with the denominational affiliation of the men who signed petitions calling for the repeal of such legislation, clear trends do emerge. Roman Catholics and Episcopalians were over-represented among the repeal petitioners. And while Episcopalians were only slightly under-represented among the women petitioners, Roman Catholic signatories were rare indeed.⁶³

The typical Charlotte County woman signatory was married or widowed and was between 30 and 50 years of age. She lived in one of the two major towns in the county and was solidly middle class, the wife of a relatively prosperous merchant or artisan. Her daughters were likely to sign with her. She might be a

63 Information concerning the religious affiliation of petitioners was drawn from the Manuscript Census for Charlotte County, 1861, PANB. Denominational affiliation was determined for 81 of the 115 families identified. These included 113 women in all, just 43.5 per cent of the county's 260 female petitioners. Charlotte County was characterized by a high degree of geographic mobility during this period and female temperance petitioners were not atypical in this regard.

TABLE 7
Charlotte County: Religion of Women Temperance Petitioners

Religion	St. Andrews	St. Patrick	St. Stephen	Totals	% of Identified Petitioners	% of Total in County
Baptist	1	14	2	17	15.0	22.3
Methodist	18		11	29	25.7	11.9
Episcopalian	14		5	19	16.8	24.1
Congregational			17	17	15.0	1.1
Presbyterian	23	2		25	22.1	19.0
Roman Catholic	5			5	4.4	15.2
Universalist			1	1	1.0	1.8
Totals	61	16	36	113*	100.0	100.0

*Women present when the 1861 census, which includes religious affiliation, was taken (43.5 per cent of all women signatories).

Congregationalist, a Presbyterian, a Methodist or possibly an Episcopalian, but whatever her religious faith, she would be joined in the temperance crusade by other members of her local congregation.

As significant and impressive as the petition campaign was, the petitioners did not comprise a majority of the adult population of the province. And the 1853 act had not proved popular. Thus, it is scarcely surprising that the newly elected government proved reluctant to act. Early in November, however, a vote in the House of Assembly went against the government and the government of the day resigned. The Lieutenant-Governor called upon the Liberal opposition to form a government; and among the leaders of this new government was Samuel Leonard Tilley, a man who had recently been chosen Most Worthy Patriarch of the Sons of Temperance in North America.⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, in the parliamentary session of 1855, Tilley put forward, as a private member, a new prohibitory liquor bill, which passed narrowly in the House of Assembly and in the Legislative Council. Despite personal reservations, the Lieutenant-Governor, John Manners-Sutton, gave his assent on the advice of his Executive Council and the act was scheduled to become law on 1 January 1856.

For a brief moment it seemed as if the fight had been won. But, as was the case in 1853, agitation for repeal began almost immediately. Petitions opposing the new law poured in. No women were among the signatories of these petitions.⁶⁵ After a brief, ineffectual attempt to enforce the act, the legislators gave up. Yet they did not repeal the act. The Lieutenant-Governor demanded that they either repeal it or enforce it and the entire issue became so controversial that the Lieutenant-Governor forced a dissolution of the House and yet another election was called. Shortly after that election, which was held in 1856, the act was repealed. The temperance fight, for the moment at least, was over.

Even though the fight was ultimately lost, the role women played in it is highly significant. The very fact that two prohibitory liquor acts were passed demonstrates the power of the petition as a political tool in mid-19th century New Brunswick. Petitions and petitioners were taken seriously. Nor was it suggested that women had less right than men to petition their Legislature. There is no evidence to suggest that women's signatures carried any less weight than men's.⁶⁶

64 Chapman, "The Mid-Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement", p. 53.

65 This is not so surprising as it might appear. Women were not involved in repeal campaigns in the United States, either. In general, 19th century women saw drinking as a male vice and sought to reform men. Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, pp. 1, 110; Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, p. 181.

66 In discussing women signatories of the 'monster petition' of 1852, Mr. Hatheway, the Representative for York County, argued that women's signatures on petitions were "a sufficient reason" for passing the Liquor Bill then before the House. He believed a politician needed "the good opinion of the fair portion of the community" and declared that he "would always rather have one lady canvasser than a dozen men". *Reports of the Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1852), p. 101. In the 1854

Disfranchised but not Quiescent 53

By analyzing the women signatories, we can gain new insights concerning 19th century politics and political culture. It is true that wives and daughters of men who signed repeal petitions are rarely to be found among the signatories calling for prohibition. At the same time, almost half of the married women who signed petitions were not joined by their husbands in their fight for the cause. Moreover, there is some indication that mothers were more influential than fathers, for sons proved twice as likely to follow their mothers in signing temperance petitions as they were to follow their fathers in signing repeal petitions. But daughters were even more likely to follow their mothers' lead than were sons. More important than any of these considerations, the women's decisions to take up their pens in the cause of temperance when they did, demonstrates that women had followed the political progress of the temperance legislation and were prepared to take a public political stand on an issue they believed to be important. And in many cases their stand was quite independent from that of their husbands.

Of those inhabitants who petitioned the Legislative Assembly during the 12 years covered by this study, women represented only a very small minority. Thus, while female petitioners from each of the three counties numbered in the hundreds, male petitioners numbered in the thousands. Nonetheless, in Sunbury, the county for which the most complete records are available, women from over 30 per cent of the families listed in the 1851 census signed at least one petition to their Legislature during the period. Petition signatories included women of all ages, all classes, all ethnic and religious groups. But no matter what their age, ethnicity, religious denomination or economic status, the very fact that significant numbers of women signed petitions is historically important. Women did not have the right to vote in the mid-19th century. Yet, in New Brunswick, at least, women were not passive and they were not silent. Many understood the law and were determined to make it work for them. They petitioned for pensions and subsidies to which they were legally entitled and, from time to time, they petitioned for redress of personal grievances. Most were successful in achieving their ends. Many more women became politically active during the decade, seeking, through the medium of petitions, to influence their government to change the law. Working in concert with others of like mind, they effectively

debates, while some members questioned the signatures of "children in schools", the right of women to sign was generally accepted. Indeed, the majority of those who rose in the House to comment on the 1854 Bill argued that 30,000 signatures in favour of the Bill, as opposed to 4,000 against, was strong evidence of the public feeling. *Reports of the Debates and Proceedings* (1854), pp. 70-3. Similarly, American and British legislators attacked the validity of children's signatures on temperance petitions but did not question the signatures of non-voting women for, as the women themselves argued, "although they did not themselves vote, their husbands did, and their husbands would be heeding the advice of their spouses". Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 229; Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, pp. 279-80.

demonstrated their power to persuade, although ultimately they failed to achieve their goal. Whether they petitioned as individuals or in association with others, whether they were seeking to change the law or merely to use it, whether they succeeded or failed, these 19th century New Brunswick women had stepped outside the domestic sphere and into the world of politics. Their lives had a political dimension and, by exercising their rights as subjects under the crown, they helped to shape the political culture of their province.