

Myth and Migration: Unpicking the Career of the Reverend John Sprott

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Article abstract

The Scots appear to possess a particular flair for the creation, transmission, and mutation of myths, and while modern scholars have attempted to deconstruct such myths it is clear that they have been of substantial importance in the making of local and national identities. This article uses one Scottish emigrant to Nova Scotia as a test case. It unpicks the Galloway background of the Reverend John Sprott's first four decades and the assembling of his cultural baggage, and it follows him for 50 years in his adopted homeland. A map of his mental journeyings is the result.

Myth and Migration: Unpicking the Career of the Reverend John Sprott

BARBARA C. MURISON

Les Écossais semblent particulièrement doués pour la création, la transmission et la transformation de mythes. Bien que des chercheurs modernes aient tenté de déconstruire de tels mythes, ceux-ci ont manifestement été d'une importance considérable dans la construction d'identités locales et nationales. Cet article examine la vie d'un émigrant écossais en Nouvelle-Écosse comme un cas type. Il décortique les quatre premières décennies du révérend John Sprott passées en Galloway et la formation de son bagage culturel, et il le suit pendant 50 ans dans son pays d'adoption. Le résultat est une carte de son parcours mental.

The Scots appear to possess a particular flair for the creation, transmission, and mutation of myths, and while modern scholars have attempted to deconstruct such myths it is clear that they have been of substantial importance in the making of local and national identities. This article uses one Scottish emigrant to Nova Scotia as a test case. It unpicks the Galloway background of the Reverend John Sprott's first four decades and the assembling of his cultural baggage, and it follows him for 50 years in his adopted homeland. A map of his mental journeyings is the result.

IN 1818, AT THE AGE OF 38, THE REVEREND JOHN SPROTT left Scotland for British North America. Or did he? Physically, to be sure, he reached Saint John, New Brunswick, safely; and soon he moved on to Nova Scotia where, after serving briefly in the pastoral charge of Windsor, Newport, and Rawdon, he became, in 1825, minister in Musquodoboit, some 40 miles east of Halifax. Although he visited Scotland three times – in 1826, 1834, and 1844 – he remained the minister of the Musquodoboit congregation until 1849, and thereafter continued to live on his farm in Middle Musquodoboit from where he embarked on numerous preaching tours in rural Nova Scotia. He died in Musquodoboit in 1869 and was buried there.¹ However, his mental horizons were arguably somewhat different from his physical ones; in many important ways he never left his native land. As he himself once stated: “We sleep in Nova Scotia but our dreams are all in Scotland.”² Sprott was very much the

1 His grave is in the Pioneer Cemetery in Middle Musquodoboit. The author would like to acknowledge generous support of this research from the Agnes Cole Dark Fund, Faculty of Social Science, University of Western Ontario.

2 Undated letter (c.1840?) to the *Galloway Register*, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management (NSARM).

product of his Galloway upbringing. Distance from his homeland, of course, lent enchantment to the view, and there was a certain sentimentalism in much of his correspondence to his family and friends in Scotland, India, the South Seas, and North America in the many letters and articles published in newspapers and magazines on both sides of the Atlantic, including the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, the *Pictou Colonial Standard*, the *Presbyterian Witness*, the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, and the *Galloway Register*. There was an idealized re-creation of the scenes, places, and people of his youth and early manhood, a longing for the “green hills and blooming heather” of home, the “sweet streams of Galloway and the mountains of Minnigaff.” Knowingly or not, he was participating in a mythologizing of Scotland and its past. Sturdy Scottish peasants possessed of “canny foresight and gude common sense,” pious and inspiring Scottish ministers, and the Covenanting martyrs of southwest Scotland populate his reminiscences.³

Recently scholars have attempted to deconstruct such myths while simultaneously emphasizing their importance in the making of local and national identities. Ted Cowan, for example, has pointed out, although myths have been seen as something untrue, they are also “a codification of historical experience.”⁴ Certainly myths, particularly the Highland myth, has been of prime importance in shaping our understanding of the relationship between Scotland and Nova Scotia, as the editors and contributors to two recent books have suggested.⁵ Although connections between Scotia and Nova Scotia were originally a Lowland affair in the main, from at least the time of the '45 it has been the Highland heritage that has received overwhelming attention and has hijacked historical representations of the area's past.⁶ There are other myths, however, that also need to be considered in any investigation of the Scottish emigrant experience in Nova Scotia, and other strands of what one writer has referred to as the “Scottish Discursive Unconscious,” with its “limited and repetitive repertoire of images and utterances relating to Scotland.”⁷ Those images and utterances include the excellence of Scottish education, the heritage of Calvinism and of the 17th-century Covenanting movement, kailyard literature with its sentimental and nostalgic

3 George W. Sprott, ed., *Memorials of the Rev. John Sprott* (Edinburgh, 1906), 102, 45, 54. This work consists of a selection from Sprott's voluminous papers by his eldest son. My comparison of the materials with the originals (where available) indicates judicious editing, with matters of controversy largely excised.

4 Edward J. Cowan, “The Myth of Scotch Canada,” in *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia c.1700-1990*, ed. Marjory Harper and Michael Vance (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing; Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), 56.

5 Harper and Vance, *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*; Celeste Ray, ed., *Transatlantic Scots* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2005).

6 Harper and Vance, “Introduction,” *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*; Cowan, “The Myth of Scotch Canada,” 49-72, passim. There is a large and ever-expanding literature on the myth of the Highlands. See, for example, Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) and Charles Withers, “The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands,” in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, ed. Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whitley (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 143-56. The 1715 and 1745 Jacobite rebellions have been much romanticized.

7 Colin McArthur, “Transatlantic Scots, Their Interlocutors, and the Scottish Discursive Unconscious,” in Ray, *Transatlantic Scots*, 340.

treatment of parochial life, and hostile attitudes to the Irish and other non-Scots not lucky enough to have had this history.⁸ All of these were of profound significance to the Presbyterian Sprott. The importance of Scottish emigrants in the life of Nova Scotia in the early-19th century is obvious; between 1815 and 1839, they accounted for 21,833 of the 39,243 known arrivals at Nova Scotian ports. As for Presbyterianism, it was the largest religious denomination in the province, its adherents comprising roughly one-third of the population in 1817 and identified in the 1827 census as some 37,650 out of a total population of 123,600. Presbyterian ministers, then, proved vitally important as cultural carriers and intellectual leaders in late-18th and early-19th century Nova Scotia.⁹

This article uses the career of one Presbyterian minister, John Sprott, as a means of understanding something about the construction, transmission, and mutation of the myths alluded to above. It will unpick the major elements of his life in Scotland and see how they influenced his actions and experiences across the Atlantic Ocean. It will also show that the flow of influence was not just in one direction. Sprott was an acute observer. His writing frequently focused on descriptions of life in Nova Scotia during the half-century of his residence there while his journeys back and forth – his aim, although not quite met, was to “see the playground of my infancy and the sepulchres of my fathers once in the seven years” – enabled him to analyze changes in Galloway society.¹⁰ In the end, Sprott was both consumer and producer of myths.

He is, on many counts, a good choice for this exercise. Sprott came from a geographic area, Galloway, which is difficult to assign within the usual Highland or Lowland divisions and which possessed its own particular culture. He did not leave his native land until he was in early middle age; there had been ample time, then, for the formation of strongly held views. Sprott’s career did not begin only when he set foot in British North America, and an understanding of the Scottish emigrant experience requires analysis of origins as well as destinations.¹¹ Moreover, enough materials by and about him survive to make this a plausible exercise. To be sure, he did not possess the outstanding intellectual abilities of the “learned and talented” Thomas McCulloch of Pictou or the reputation of the revered James MacGregor of East River, Pictou County.¹² Nonetheless, he was confident that his letters would be

8 The Covenanters, so named because of their support for the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, fought to preserve the spiritual independence of the Presbyterian Church. They strongly opposed Crown interference in church affairs and this led to bloody clashes with government forces during the 17th century.

9 Harper and Vance, *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*, 28, citing the work of J.S. Martell; John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Hamilton, ON: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1974?), 61, 79. For further discussion of this type of influence in the context of America, see Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1971), 40.

10 Sprott, *Memorials*, 102.

11 On the propensity of biographical dictionaries to sustain interest in emigrants only while they are actually living in the geographical area covered by the dictionary, see Barbara C. Murison’s review of vol. 8 of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (DCB) in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19 (1990): 95-7.

12 The description is Sprott’s. See letter to the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 23 March, 1848. These were two Presbyterian ministers who, like Sprott, were not connected with the Church of Scotland.

read “after the dust of years has rolled over my grave.”¹³

It is also important to note that McGregor and McCulloch, the most famous Presbyterian ministers in the early history of Nova Scotia, undoubtedly benefited from the hagiographical approach taken to them in works composed, respectively, by a grandson and a son, and that there were some who felt that the accolades were inappropriate. An anonymous review of George Patterson’s *Memoir of MacGregor*, for example, in the *Monthly Record of the Church of Scotland in Nova Scotia and the Adjoining Provinces*, commented on its “almost idolatrous reverence for the memory of a distinguished relative” while the Kirk minister from East River, an admittedly biased Donald Fraser, remarked in 1829 that the story of all Presbyterians in the province being united into one church was “just about as true as that Dr MacGregor and Dr McCulloch merit all the praise . . . lavish[ed] on them.”¹⁴ Sprott also had reservations. In a review of James Robertson’s *History of the Mission of the Secession Church* (1847), a work that incorporated MacGregor’s own account of his work verbatim, Sprott pointed out that it was “fortunate for the Rev. Mr McGregor’s fame that his labours were written by himself” and that MacGregor had benefited from arriving in the midst of Scottish Highlanders in Pictou who had a “strong attachment to our church.” Perhaps, suggested Sprott (who himself received scant attention from Robertson), the “mine of research” on the colonial vineyard was not yet exhausted; the manuscripts and journals of other labourers “*who have traveled further*” (Sprott was clearly referring to himself) could easily furnish another volume.¹⁵ An analysis of Sprott should help in the construction of a more nuanced picture of Scottish, and more specifically, Presbyterian, influences in Nova Scotia.

A good place to begin to examine how myths were constructed, transmitted, and became mutated is to look at some of the prominent attitudes towards non-Scots – specifically the Irish – as demonstrated in the Galloway of Sprott’s youth. Galloway,

13 Sprott, *Memorials*, 196. The fissile nature of Presbyterianism should be noted. Secessions from the Kirk (the Church of Scotland, the established church in Scotland in this period, although not in Nova Scotia) were frequent. To the modern eye (but not to the 18th- and 19th-century eye) the differences in belief of the various groups may seem trifling. It is worth noting also that since the Church of Scotland was for many years uninterested in colonial missions, it was Secession Presbyterians who took the lead in Nova Scotia in the late-18th and early-19th centuries.

14 George Patterson, *Memoir of the Rev. James McGregor, D.D.* (Philadelphia, 1859). The review is to be found in *Missionary Record of the Church of Scotland in Nova Scotia and the Adjoining Provinces* 6, no. 5 (1860), 109 and see also William McCulloch, *Life of Thomas McCulloch, D.D., edited by his granddaughters* (Truro, Nova Scotia, 1920). In contrast, George Sprott’s *Memorials* of his father consist of a brief introduction followed by excerpts from his father’s letters and notes. Fraser’s letter is in *Records of the Glasgow Colonial Society*, 2:9, cited in John Moir, “To Fertilize the Wilderness: Problems and Progress of the Synod of Nova Scotia in its First Quarter Century,” in *Early Presbyterianism in Canada, essays by John S. Moir*, ed. Paul Laverdure (Gravelbourg, SK: Gravelbooks, 2003) 67.

15 Review of Robertson’s *History of the Mission of the Secession Church to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island since its commencement in 1765* (Edinburgh, 1847), in Sprott’s letter to the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 23 March, 1848 (emphasis added by author). The Rev. John McKerrrow’s *History of the Foreign Missions of the Secession and United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh, 1867) did not mention Sprott at all, although it mentioned Musquodoboit and again made copious use of MacGregor’s own narrative. Sprott’s own brief studies of Presbyterian pioneer ministers in Nova Scotia can be found in the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 1853.

comprising the counties of Kirkcudbright and Wigtown, was neither the Highlands nor the Lowlands; it was *sui generis*, its character formed by its particular geographical situation. At the time of Sprott's birth (1780) it had few contacts with other parts of Scotland; the main land routes from Scotland to England also bypassed the area, apart from the direct road that ran between Carlisle and Dumfries to connect with Portpatrick for the Irish packet service.¹⁶ Only 32 kilometres separated the Rhins of Galloway from Ulster; in 1798, at the time of the Irish rebellion, Sprott heard the guns at the battle of Ballynahinch across the water.¹⁷ The aftermath of the rebellion brought over many Irish people to Galloway and seasonal work and cattle drives also increased Irish familiarity with the area. Local reaction was frequently hostile; here, then, are some of the origins of Sprott's anti-Irish prejudices. The author of the *Old Statistical Account* entry on Portpatrick, for example, four-and-a-half kilometres distant from Stoneykirk (the village of Sprott's birth), pointed out under the heading "Influence of Local Circumstances on Morals" that Irish sailors were riotous in his parish, the quantity of whisky brought there was "amazing," and "almost every house is an inn." Similarly, the author of the account of Stranraer (another important port eight-and-a-half kilometres from Stoneykirk and a place where Sprott for a time attended school) also alluded to the presence of "too many retailers of whisky" and the "pernicious habit of dram-drinking"; the town was "oppressed with Irish vagrants."¹⁸ Stoneykirk itself had "a regular set of drouthy neighbours . . . who often met at the tavern to discuss the politics of the parish."¹⁹ Undoubtedly these things left their mark on Sprott. Years later in Nova Scotia, in an address on temperance, he recalled how, at the communions of his youth, "Satan had planted his garrisons, and booths were set up for the sale of ardent spirits."²⁰ Two temperance societies were set up in Musquodoboit during his ministry and the local Mi'kmaw chief, a neighbour of the Sprott family, greatly resented the fact that he no longer received his welcoming dram when he called at the manse.²¹

Gallovidian anti-Irish prejudices certainly crossed the Atlantic successfully with Sprott. The editor of the *Galloway Register* was firmly informed that the "descendants of Saint Patrick" living in Nova Scotia were "less fortunate, less thoughtful, less reflective" than the Scottish settlers, and this view of the Irish as "feckless" was no

16 Proximity to the English border, however, did allow for substantial cattle exports along drove roads. See John R. Hume, "Introduction" to *Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and Wigtownshire*, vol. 5 of the reprint of the *Statistical Account of Scotland, 1791-99*, ed. Sir John Sinclair, and now known as the *Old Statistical Account (OSA)*, ed. Donald J. Withrington and Ian R. Grant (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1983), xi, xii. Sinclair invited every Church of Scotland parish minister in late-18th century Scotland to contribute an account of his parish.

17 Sprott, *Memorials*, 156. A scheme for constructing a bridge from Galloway to northern Ireland was unveiled in 2007.

18 *OSA* 5:494-5, 524.

19 See Sprott's letter to the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 14 July 1848.

20 Sprott, *Memorials*, 125.

21 Mrs. Sprott's letter to her brother, Rev. Mr. Neilson, February 1841, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. The Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance was organized in 1845 and the Rising Sun Division, Middle Musquodoboit, opened in 1849; see Jennie Reid, *Musquodoboit Pioneers* (bound typescript, undated: 1980?), CS88M988, NSARM. Sprott also refers to two temperance societies existing some years earlier than this.

doubt gratifying to much of the newspaper's readership.²² In Sprott's opinion the Catholicism so common among the Irish was another mark against them, but Irish Protestants also incurred his displeasure: he referred to some Irish missionaries in New Brunswick as "the spawn of the Irish secession" and suggested that their chief difficulty was not, as the *Belfast Covenanter* suggested, because of political agitation, but rather because of their "indifference to Divine things."²³ Such views, however, were mainly for consumption by correspondents in Scotland; many of the families in Sprott's own congregation in Musquodoboit originally came from Londonderry, New Hampshire, a town founded by immigrants from the Irish town of the same name. They were Ulster Scots, mainly Presbyterians, some of whom had settled in Truro, Nova Scotia, before moving on to the Musquodoboit Valley in the late-18th century. Towards them and towards other Nova Scotian Ulster Scots a more sympathetic attitude was to be expected.²⁴

An analysis of Sprott's education in Galloway and in other parts of Scotland can help us to understand another part of the cultural baggage with which he crossed the ocean. He himself was convinced of the excellence of his Scottish education and, particularly, of the outstanding quality of Scottish parish schools. The idea that Scottish education was for centuries superior to that of England and elsewhere has been a long-lasting one. In company with other "myths," however, this belief has come under criticism in recent years.²⁵ But in Sprott's writings it is readily apparent. He began his education in the parish school of Stoneykirk, later noting that "our class books . . . were the Bible and the Catechism. We knew nothing of English grammar, geography, mental arithmetic, history or composition." Elsewhere, he states that the chief books available in his area of Galloway in his youth were the Bible, Boston's *Fourfold State*, *Confession of Faith*, *Scottish Worthies* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that if additional reading was required it was necessary to send to Glasgow for it.²⁶

22 Mr. Sprott's letter to the *Galloway Register* (undated copy: 1845?), Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM.

23 Letter to the Rev. Robert Burns, 20 November, 1826, *Records of the Glasgow Colonial Society* 1, no. 31, United Church Archives, Toronto; for a modern edition of a selection of the society's records see Elizabeth McDougall and John S. Moir (eds.), *Selected Correspondence of the Glasgow Colonial Society, 1825-1840* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994). See also Sprott's letter to Mr. Neilson, December, 1840, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. Northern Irish Presbyterian ministerial candidates normally attended Scottish universities and Scottish divinity halls, although often for shorter periods of study than Scottish candidates. Their commitment and standard of training could therefore be attacked.

24 "I love the Irish because they love their religion and their ministers," Jubilee speech for Mr. Brown of Londonderry, Nova Scotia, in Sprott, *Memorials*, 77. The first minister of Musquodoboit was an Ulsterman, James Murdoch. He attended the same divinity hall as MacGregor and McCulloch.

25 See, in particular, R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity, Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); R.A. Houston, "Scottish Education and Literacy, 1600-1800: an International Perspective," in *Improvement and Enlightenment: Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar, University of Strathclyde, 1987-88*, ed. T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989), 43-61; and D.J. Withrington, "Schooling, Literacy and Society," in *People and Society in Scotland, Vol. I, 1760-1830*, ed. T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 163-87.

26 Sprott, *Memorials*, 171; "A Glance at the Rhins in Olden Times," letter to the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 22 January 1846.

The brief list is instructive. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* had obvious appeal to pious Scots anxious to tread the true Christian path. The Bible and *Confession of Faith* were, of course, the bedrock of Presbyterian belief. *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, by the Reverend Thomas Boston (1677-1732), was a staple in Presbyterian households; it was the most frequently reprinted Scottish book of the 18th century and hugely influential over the religious life of Scotland for over a hundred years.²⁷ Spratt later noted that a "better class of emigrants," the Scots, brought with them to Nova Scotia their Bibles, their Catechisms, and Boston's *Fourfold State*.²⁸ The *Scots Worthies* (Spratt's *Scottish Worthies*), or the *Biographia Scoticana*, published in 1775 through public subscriptions by the pious, contained inspirational biographies of Reformation and Covenanting heroes. Cowan is doubtless correct in suggesting that, at the popular level, Howie's book "probably had a greater impact than all the works of Enlightenment philosophers put together."²⁹

While Spratt wrote affectionately of his schooling and his schoolfellows, we gain a different perspective from the minister of Stoneykirk, who observed in the early 1790s that the buildings were wretched and the schoolmaster's stipend not such as to attract the talented. The Scottish parish school system implemented in the 17th century was, to be sure, the first truly national one in Europe, but the funding of it rested with the local landowners who were required to pay – *if they could*.³⁰ Moreover, although for four months of the year more than 130 children attended the Stoneykirk school, after the first of March "the number dwindles down to twenty or thereabouts."³¹ Spratt was the son of a tenant farmer and probably among those whose services were needed on the family farm in the spring and summer months. Nonetheless, he was from a literate and devoutly Kirk background: in later life he wrote of his father's admiration for the printed sermons of Robert Walker, who had lived in Galloway for a time before becoming one of the two ministers of the High Church in Edinburgh (located in St. Giles), as well as for the 17th-century Puritan divine Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus*.³² He was also clearly a determined lad.

27 The four states were innocence, nature, grace and eternity. See P.G. Ryken, "Thomas Boston," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6:723 as well as D. C. Lackman's article on Boston in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1993), 89.

28 Letter to Rev. P. McGregor (1853), in Spratt, *Memorials*, 135.

29 Edward J. Cowan, "The Covenanting Tradition in Scottish History," in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, ed. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2002), 125-6.

30 Houston, "Scottish Education and Literacy," 46 (emphasis added by author).

31 OSA 5:517. School attendance was not made legally compulsory in Scotland until 1872. For a general discussion of parochial education in Galloway in this period, see the "Introduction" to this volume, xxi-xxiii.

32 On these reminiscences see Spratt, *Memorials*, 134, 23. Houston suggests that Scottish tenant farmers, a large and heterogeneous group which formed the backbone of rural society, had a literacy rate of about 65 per cent in the period 1700-70 and cites remarks by George Robertson in his *Rural Recollections* (1829) to the effect that tenant farmers generally had Bibles and "other more substantial books" in their possession; see Houston, "Scottish education and Literacy," 53, 54. On Ambrose, who played a prominent part in establishing Presbyterianism in Lancashire, see Roger Pooley's article in the *ODNB* 1:921. On Walker, see Stewart J. Brown, *ODNB* 56:889.

We do not know when he decided to enter the ministry – perhaps he had been pledged to it at birth, as was the custom in many pious Scottish homes and as had been the case with James MacGregor – but at the age of 18 he began to learn a little Latin, the main entry requirement for university. When the teacher moved away within a year, he started to travel the five miles to the school of the Inch, on the outskirts of Stranraer, where he “planted some Greek and Latin roots” under a Mr. Wallace.³³ During the Irish rebellion, when the Galloway countryside needed to be searched for Irish refugees and there were fears of a French invasion, a reluctant Sprott, compelled to volunteer in Captain Maitland’s Company of Foot, mounted guard (as he tells us) with his Virgil in one hand and his musket in the other.³⁴ Having obtained, then, some knowledge of the classics, he entered the University of Edinburgh at the age of 20 – quite late by the standards of the day.³⁵

The lasting results of his school years were made clear much later in Nova Scotia. Sprott became a member of the Halifax Board of School Commissioners and an examiner of teachers. When the board wished to introduce a “uniform and superior series” of class books for the schools, it was to Scotland he turned for information on what he considered the superior – and cheap – class books recently introduced there in the parish schools, the “pride and ornament of Scotland.” Although some fellow board members had suggested using American books Sprott quickly brushed this aside, suggesting that they contained not only Republican principles but also “a total want of the beautiful morality of the gospel.”³⁶ He clearly held firm views concerning the superiority of Scottish education. Moreover, Sprott himself provides some backing for the existence of that character so beloved of the later Scottish kailyard novelists and by a generation of earlier historians – the “lad o’ pairts” – who through his own drive and ability and perhaps the support of a local dominie makes good and achieves a university education.³⁷

33 Sprott, *Memorials*, 157; Sprott to Mr. John McCaig, April 1845, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM.

34 See *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 14 July 1848, where Sprott is reminiscing about 1798.

35 D.D. Ormond, *A Kirk and a College in the Craigs of Stirling* (Stirling, 1897), 67. The usual age of entry was younger than this; the Reverend Robert Burns, for example, later minister of Knox Church, Toronto, entered the University of Edinburgh at the age of twelve-and-a-half, although he later suggested that this was “too young”; see Robert F. Burns, *The Life and Times of the Reverend Robert Burns* (Toronto: James Campbell & Son, 1873), 14. Burns, the product of a town school in Borrowstounness, rather than a rural school in Galloway, was reading Juvenal and Livy and the gospels in Greek by the time he went to university.

36 Letter to Mr. Welsh, Edinburgh (undated: 1840?), Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. Many years later, in 1865, he objected to Dr. Tupper’s “School Bill” because it made no provision for religious instruction; see letter to the Honourable Dr. Tupper [later Sir Charles Tupper], *Memorials*, 207-8.

37 “Dominie” is the Scots word for teacher. On the lad o’pairts idea see Ian Donnachie, “The Enterprising Scot,” in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, 95-6. The highly popular kailyard novelists of the late-19th century sentimentalized the Scottish rural past, as Sprott in an earlier period had sentimentalized his own. For a useful discussion of their work see Ian Campbell’s article in *The New Companion to Scottish Culture*, ed. David Daiches (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993), 169-70. For evidence of continued uncritical belief in the glories of the Scottish educational system, however, see J.M. Bumsted, “The Scottish Diaspora: Emigration to British North America, 1763-1815,” in *Nation and Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800*, ed. Ned C. Landsman (London: Associated University Press, 2001), 142-3.

Sprott also took care to ensure that his five children received the best possible education. Daughter Jane, who reported frequently to her relatives in Scotland, proudly announced at the beginning of 1838 that the report in the *Novascotian* of the Musquodoboit school described it as exhibiting “force and brilliancy.” “George and I,” she continued, “have finished English Grammar, and though I am little more than 10 years old I have reached Compound Interest in ciphering.” Elsewhere she told her cousin in Galloway of the large number of newspapers and magazines that came into the Sprott household: “We can sit here by the fireside and learn what is going on all over the world,” she wrote, adding a little wistfully, “There are few who can receive the honours of the college but all are graduates of the hearth.”³⁸ Certainly her brother George’s future academic achievements at the University of Glasgow and the quality of the works he wrote on the history and liturgy of the Church of Scotland during his distinguished ministerial career were a tribute to the intellectual vigour of the Sprott hearth and the quality of Mr. McDonald’s and later Mr. Watson’s teaching in Musquodoboit.³⁹

The University of Edinburgh, which John Sprott entered in 1800, was not at the summit of its reputation. The glory days of the Edinburgh literati were largely over.⁴⁰ To be sure, there were still some outstanding professors, although we note that Sprott’s memories of some of their teachings are highly critical. In an address to the Young Men’s Christian Association in Halifax in 1863, Sprott reflected that he was old enough to remember the lectures of Dugald Stewart and John Leslie. But what most struck Sprott about these teachers of moral philosophy and science was their

38 1 January 1838 and 2 January 1840, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. On the circulation of second-hand newspapers in Musquodoboit, see Matthew George Burris, *My Pioneer Ancestors: The Burris Family of Musquodoboit, Nova Scotia* (n.p.: privately published, undated: 1950?), 110, citing the daybook of Samuel Fisher Archibald.

39 It was Sprott who persuaded James Watson, a graduate of Glasgow and a minister in the Relief Church, to come to Musquodoboit [see n.49]. His school soon received the status of academy. Greek and Latin were taught and boarders came to it from Truro and elsewhere in the province. See Jennie Reid, *Musquodoboit Pioneers*, 777. On George Washington Sprott, see D.M. Murray’s article in the *ODNB* 51:1003-4.

40 On the timing and intensity of the Edinburgh Enlightenment, and the rather different intellectual climate of Glasgow University in the late-18th century, see Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1985) and Andrew Hook and Richard B. Sher, eds., *The Glasgow Enlightenment* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1995). Thomas McCulloch, who graduated from Glasgow University in 1792, was most certainly influenced by the burgeoning interest in science there at that period, although it is hard to think of him as a typical product of the Scottish Enlightenment as do Susan Buggey and Gwendolyn Davies in their article in *DCB* 7:529. Certainly the evangelical McCulloch was hostile to some of the theological and other views of the Enlightened literati. On the other hand, Ned Landsman argues that evangelical Presbyterianism was an alternative form of the Enlightenment rather than anti-Enlightenment; see his “Liberty, Piety and Patronage: The Social Context of Contested Clerical Calls in Eighteenth-Century Glasgow,” in Hook and Sher, *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, 214-26. James MacGregor matriculated at Glasgow in 1779; see Barry Cahill’s reconstruction of some of his cultural baggage in “Mediating a Scottish Enlightenment Ideal: The Presbyterian Dissenter Attack on Slavery in Late Eighteenth-Century Nova Scotia,” in Harper and Vance, *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*, 189-201 and “The Antislavery Polemic of the Reverend James MacGregor: Canada’s Proto-Abolitionist as Radical Evangelical,” in *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada*, ed. Charles H.H. Scobie and G.A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 131-43.

irreligion: they “kept as great a distance from Christianity as possible.” A student of Sprott’s background could hardly come to terms with the views of suspected atheists, and one should, of course, be wary of assuming that attendance at lectures involves approval of ideas presented. Sprott was also, naturally, highly critical of the ideas of David Hume, and he was calmly confident that the most famous Scottish atheist of the 18th century would soon be forgotten together with other “unprincipled writers” such as Byron and Voltaire.⁴¹ Although he undoubtedly adhered to some of the values that Richard Sher has recently identified as the common core of Enlightenment ideas, he was no uncritical purveyor of Enlightenment thought to Nova Scotia.⁴²

Critics of the University of Edinburgh were numerous. There were no yearly examinations and few students actually bothered to take degrees; Sprott, for example, did not.⁴³ It was also a rarity for divinity students to study Hebrew, for attendance at the class was recommended and not mandatory. Sprott, again demonstrating his intellectual commitment, was one who did; years later he reminded the Reverend Robert Burns, at that time secretary of the Kirk-connected Glasgow Colonial Society, that they had once stood side by side in the Edinburgh Hebrew class.⁴⁴ Following his studies at Edinburgh, Sprott spent four sessions at the Reformed Presbyterian Divinity Hall in Stirling (1804-1807). The classes were small (no more than half a dozen or so students, so that lasting friendships were made), and the professor was the Reverend John McMillan, grandson of John McMillan of Balmaghie, the first minister of the Cameronians (Covenanters who had remained aloof from the Church of Scotland after the Revolution Settlement of 1690 had restored Presbyterianism as the established church in Scotland). McMillan of Balmaghie’s followers were often called McMillanites, and they formed the basis of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.⁴⁵ Sprott, then, although he wrote affectionately of the parish church in Stoneykirk and had been baptized and brought up in the Church of Scotland, had by this time committed himself to the somewhat uncompromising principles of Reformed Presbyterianism, with its exacting ideal of a covenanted nation and a constitutional

41 Sprott, *Memorials*, 189, 129. For information on Stewart see Michael P. Brown’s article in the *ODNB* 52:656-61; for information on Leslie see John Morrell’s article in the *ODNB* 33:462-4.

42 Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish authors and their publishers in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

43 Doubtless at Edinburgh, as at Aberdeen at the same period, actual graduation with an M.A. was “a sort of literary masquerade for the pecuniary benefit of the College”; see Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica; or Parish Life in the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1889), 141. On the weaknesses of Edinburgh see D.B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh, 1556-1889* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1967), 115. Furthermore, although Church of Scotland law required regular attendance at divinity classes for intending ministers, there was something called “irregular attendance” where a student simply enrolled his name in classes for six years but might never attend a lecture; see Alexander Morgan, *Scottish University Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 94.

44 Sprott, *Memorials*, 36. The Glasgow Colonial Society’s aim was to promote the moral and religious interests of the Scottish settlers in British North America. Its formation in 1825 indicated the (belated) full engagement of the Kirk in the British North American colonial field. While Sprott initially welcomed the society, fellow ministers such as McCulloch did not.

45 For a brief summary of the history and doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, see Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 698-9.

government under a covenanted king.⁴⁶ He nowhere states why he joined the Reformed Presbyterians; perhaps it was a reaction against the “enlightened” views of his Church of Scotland university professors.

Sprott was licensed to preach by the Reformed Presbytery in 1809. His ultimate aim was ordination and settlement over a Reformed Presbyterian congregation in Galloway, but this did not occur. “I received call after call to congregations,” he later wrote, but “was repeatedly disappointed.”⁴⁷ What had happened? In 1810, he received a call from Water of Urr in Galloway, a difficult congregation that contained other dissenters from the kirk besides Reformed Presbyterians, including 30 families of Antiburghers.⁴⁸ He accepted this call, but the source becomes deliberately vague at this point: “Difficulties emerged. . . . Much that could not be supported was advanced and considerable wrangling” took place. Sprott gave up the struggle in 1811. However, the presbytery censured the proceedings and the call was renewed. Sprott was once more chosen, 81 out of a congregation of 185 having signed the call, but more problems occurred as “the same contentious spirit manifested itself and the starting of a new cause was threatened.” In July 1815 Sprott finally withdrew from this contest and joined the Relief Church, another Presbyterian group outside the established Church of Scotland, “on the ground of change of views.”⁴⁹ He emigrated three years later, sailing from Kirkcudbright in the brig *Nile* on 8 August 1818. His motives, as with other emigrants, were clearly mixed. If there was something of a “push” factor here, with Sprott’s career obviously not progressing and serious economic problems existing in Scotland in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, there was also a clearly identifiable “pull.” It was not just the fact that the Church of Scotland Presbyterian minister at Saint John, New Brunswick (Sprott’s initial destination), was the Reverend George Burns, brother of the Reverend Robert Burns and another fellow-student of Sprott in Edinburgh.⁵⁰ In

46 These principles also included an obligation not to vote or to hold public office. For lists of students at Stirling from 1805-19, see Ormond, *Kirk and College*, 60-3. The curriculum consisted entirely of the study of systematic theology. J. MacLean’s entry on Sprott, in *DCB* 9:738, wrongly places him in the Relief Presbyterian Divinity Hall.

47 Letter to one of his daughters, 1859, in Sprott, *Memorials*, 157. The Reformed Presbyterian Church had only one court, a presbytery, at this time.

48 Entry on the parish of Water of Urr, *Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and Wigtownshire*, in *OSA* 5:77. The Original Seceders from the Church of Scotland, who had left in 1733 over the patronage issue, themselves split in 1747 into Burghers and Antiburghers, the latter challenging the lawfulness of a burghess oath, which involved acknowledging “the true religion presently professed in this realm”; this they interpreted to mean acknowledging the Church of Scotland as authorized by law.

49 No details are given in the source; see William J. Couper, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, Its Congregations, Ministers and Students* (Edinburgh: United Free Church of Scotland, 1925), 37-8, 162. The origins of the Relief Church lay in a secession from the Church of Scotland in 1761. As with the Original Secession, the issue was patronage – the question of who should have the power to choose the minister. The 1712 patronage act had restored that power to lay patrons, who frequently overrode the wishes of congregations.

50 Sprott stayed with Burns initially, and remained on excellent terms with him, visiting him in Scotland, to which Burns had returned permanently in 1831. On Burns’s ministry at St. Andrew’s see David Russell Jack’s *History of Saint Andrew’s Church, Saint John, N.B.* (Saint John, NB: Barnes & Co., 1913) while on Presbyterianism in New Brunswick see F.E. Archibald, “Contribution of the Scottish Church to New Brunswick Presbyterianism from its earliest beginnings until the time of the Disruption, and afterwards, 1784-1852” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1933).

emigrating, Sprott was fulfilling a dream of his youth. He had been caught up in that “dance called America,” as James Boswell termed it, which swept Galloway as it did other parts of Scotland in the late-18th and early-19th centuries. Over 30 years after he sailed for British North America, Sprott reflected that “a splendour had been thrown around the undertaking which concealed the difficulties of the case” and that “flaring accounts” were published regarding the beauty and fertility of the New World and the happy lot of the settlers. Sprott never regretted his translation to the New World, but time gave him a sharper view of the realities of pioneer life and a more accurate perception of the “emigrant myth” of the instant wealth and independence to be acquired across the Atlantic.⁵¹

The events of Sprott’s boyhood and early manhood are highly instructive in any assessment of his later career. Both physically and mentally, his first 38 years had shaped his behaviour in Nova Scotia. Physically they made the rigours of life as a pioneer minister not only bearable but even attractive. Here was a man who had spent the first 18 years of his life on a farm, who had each year for four years walked to the University of Edinburgh and back (150 miles each way), and who had criss-crossed Galloway for a decade as an itinerant preacher before he emigrated, often taking services in barns or in the open air.⁵² It was an excellent preparation for his missionary labours in Nova Scotia and the stories of his journeys there are legion: crossing rivers on ice floes, meeting bears in the forest, being pursued by wolves on the Sheet Harbour Road.⁵³ Clearly he generated a mythology of his own.

So much for the physical response to the pioneer environment. What of the religious, social, and political responses? Sprott was certainly no narrow-minded religious fanatic (except where the Catholics, especially Irish Catholics, were concerned). He admired the Church of England, writing warmly of such men as the Right Reverend James Stewart, who for many years worked as a missionary in Lower Canada, and Dr. John Stevenson, professor at the Anglican King’s College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. Of course, both of these men were from Galloway.⁵⁴ He also retained a life-long affection for the Church of Scotland and had many friends within it. He reacted very favourably to the formation of the Glasgow Colonial Society and, as already noted, corresponded with its secretary, his fellow-student at Edinburgh, the Reverend Robert Burns. He was not amused, however, when during one of his visits to Scotland a Kirk minister from Halifax, the Reverend John Martin of St. Andrew’s Church, seemed to be poaching souls in the Musquodoboit area.⁵⁵ Perhaps there was a certain piquancy here. Martin, like Sprott, had for a time been a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and had attended its divinity hall for one session. After

51 Sprott, letter to the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 25 February 1847.

52 The sands at Girvan were one location Sprott later reminisced about. See Sprott to the Reverend Mr. Rogerson (a fellow student at the divinity hall at Stirling), 1839, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM.

53 See Sprott, *Memorials*, xi.

54 Stewart was a son of the Earl of Galloway while Stevenson was a native of Stoneykirk, Sprott’s birthplace, and the Sprotts named one of their children after him.

55 Sprott to Reverend Robert Burns, 20 November 1826, *Records of the Glasgow Colonial Society* 1, no. 69; Sprott to Reverend Robert Burns, *Records of the Glasgow Colonial Society*, February 1838, 6, no. 221. St Andrew’s had originally (if briefly) been a Relief Church. When George Sprott returned from his divinity studies in Glasgow in 1852, he was for a time assistant minister there.

Martin's death in 1865, Sprott reflected that he had known him in Scotland and that he was waiting for Martin on the wharf at Halifax when he landed. Despite their occasional differences, they were friends for 40 years.⁵⁶ As for the Reformed Presbyterian Church, that had been the church of his youth and training and of his early missionary work. As a fellow minister from Nova Scotia observed, Sprott always spoke of it "with the fondness and fervour of a first love."⁵⁷

He had little patience, however, for Presbyterians who remained separated from other Presbyterians by "certain invisible points which can only be seen by very sharp-sighted people," and he frequently called for a union of all Presbyterians.⁵⁸ Again, the impact of his Galloway upbringing is apparent. Perhaps it was disputes of this type that had split the congregation at Water of Urr and had helped to drive Sprott out of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Sprott's wife, Jane Neilson of Kirkcowan, Galloway, shared her husband's reservations on these matters and had doubtless reinforced his views.⁵⁹ Although both Sprotts clearly admired the piety of "good Mr Reid," the minister of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation at Newton Stewart, Galloway (of which the Neilson family were at one point members), it was hard to forgive his uncompromising rigidity when he drove Jane Neilson's parents from the communion table because they did not agree with him on the knotty matter of the Auchensaugh Covenants. "Contending about miserable cobwebs" was Mrs. Sprott's verdict on this narrow-mindedness.⁶⁰ We should note, however, that one person's "miserable cobwebs" might be someone else's shield and support and that Sprott had also caused dissension in 1836 within his own Musquodoboit congregation by holding a closed communion; the excluded members wrote to Pictou, requesting and then receiving a minister to dispense the Lord's Supper. The ritual of fencing the table, and the lengthy recital of sins that accompanied it, reminded participants at these solemn occasions that communion could just as easily exclude people and bitterly divide communities as it could foster solidarity.⁶¹

Of course, there were also Reformed Presbyterians in Nova Scotia. Two Irish

56 Sprott, *Memorials*, October 1864.

57 Appreciation of Sprott in the *Galloway Advertiser and Wigtownshire Free Press*, 28 July 1864.

58 Sprott, *Memorials*, 60. Perhaps this attitude, and his strong friendships within the Kirk, were the reasons that Rev. Alexander Maclean, in a work written c.1876 in the aftermath of Canadian Presbyterian union, gave Sprott – who had died only a few years previously – a whole chapter. See Reverend Alexander Maclean, *Story of the Kirk in Nova Scotia* (Pictou, NS: *Pictou Advocate*, 1911). I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers for *Acadiensis* for this reference.

59 This was his third wife, the first two having died as a result of childbirth. Sprott had known Jane Neilson before he emigrated; his first return to Scotland in 1826 was probably prompted by the fact that she, too, was now widowed. He married her at this time.

60 Mrs. Sprott's letter to her sister, Mrs. McGill, May 1840, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. The renovation of the Covenants at Auchensaugh in 1712 had involved changes that included substituting for the word monarch the phrase "the lawful supreme magistrate when obtained" as well as forbidding the payment of taxes to what was regarded as a corrupt and sinful government. In 1822, when the Reformed Presbyterian Synod removed the reference to the renovation at Auchensaugh from the terms of communion, Reid objected and thereafter regarded himself as separated from the synod.

61 Reid, *Musquodoboit Pioneers*, 800, citing a letter from some members of the Musquodoboit congregation to the Rev. Donald Fraser of Pictou: "Some people were refused admission to the Lord's table, as they belonged to a different denomination, a denomination with a slight difference." Obviously there were limits to Sprott's tolerance. On the famous long communions of Scotland and North America see, in particular, Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and*

missionaries, the Reverend William Sommerville and the Reverend Alexander Clarke, lived within a day-and-a-half's ride of Sprott's house in Musquodoboit. He recognized their "talent and acquirement" but, as he confided to his brother-in-law, the Reformed Presbyterian minister of Rothesay in 1840, he had never met with these brethren; he had refused to ask them to assist at his communion services because although they would doubtless have agreed, they would not of their own accord, on principle, come to the communion table of Presbyterians not of their stripe.⁶² Nor did Sprott believe that the restless, floating population of Nova Scotia could be brought to a consistent support of Reformed Presbyterian ideas.⁶³ James MacGregor, as a strong Antiburgher, had had similar problems when he confronted, in 1786, what Susan Buggey refers to as "the fluid North American religious frontier."⁶⁴

Sprott had arrived in British North America in 1818, the year after the formation of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia, which originally contained both Church of Scotland ministers (there was no Kirk Presbytery until 1823) and ministers from the Secession (see n.48). He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Truro in 1819 and later ordained to the ministry. However, whatever talents Sprott possessed – and they were many – he was not a committee man; his relationship with the courts of the church was frequently difficult. As an obituary of him carefully noted: "We cannot say that he took a prominent part in Church Courts, or in promoting what may be called denominational advancement" – surely a rather bland summation of the sometimes tempestuous relationship of Sprott with presbytery and synod.⁶⁵ Perhaps here lie the roots of the neglect of Sprott in the pages of those narrowly denominational volumes of Robertson (1847) and McKerrow (1867) on the missionary work of the Seceders (see n.15). At the time of the bitter conflict between the Church of Scotland and the Secession over the best ways of supplying ministers to Nova Scotia, for example, it was quite clear that Sprott wanted "no part in the bitter controversy" between Dr. McCulloch, the founder of and advocate for Pictou Academy, with its home training for Presbyterian ministers, and the Secretary of the Glasgow Colonial Society Reverend Robert Burns, who felt, as did Sprott, that Scottish-trained ministers should be sent over. The influential McCulloch resented Sprott's attitude, which he felt inimical to the continued success of the Presbyterian

American Revivals in the Early Modern Period (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); for a discussion of the inclusive and exclusive aspects of communion specifically see pages 107-14. In fencing the tables before communion was dispensed, the minister warned all unworthy to receive it (drunkards, profaners, etc.) not to come forward. As the era of the long communions waned, Sprott waxed nostalgic about their passing, both in Galloway and in Nova Scotia, producing idealized accounts of these events. See, for example, Sprott, *Memorials*, 60-4. For a puncturing of this particular myth see Robert Burns's poem "The Holy Fair."

62 Sprott, letter to the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* (1865), 328; Sprott, letter to Mr. Neilson, December 1840, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM.

63 On Sommerville, see Eldon Hay, "Cornwallis Covenant: The Reverend William Sommerville," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 37 (1995): 99-116. See also Eldon Hay, *The Chignecto Covenanters: A Regional History of Reformed Presbyterianism in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, 1827-1905* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

64 DCB 6:457. He resolved to visit and to preach to people of all denominations.

65 Obituary from the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, 2 May 1870, reprinted from the *Home and Foreign Record of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces of British North America*, March 1870.

Church of Nova Scotia, and he also resented Sprott's close ties to the Church of Scotland; further friction between the two would occur in later years.⁶⁶

A further source of dispute between Sprott and members of the church courts arose in 1861 when Sprott solemnized a marriage between Mr. Samuel Archibald of Musquodoboit and his deceased wife's niece. The presbytery found this marriage to be contrary to the law of the land and within the prohibited degrees of affinity; equally serious was the fact that in order to solemnize this wedding he had invaded the charge of a settled minister, his successor at Musquodoboit, the Rev. Robert Sedgewick.⁶⁷ Sprott's response to the charges having proved unsatisfactory, the presbytery declared him "no longer a Minister of this Church."⁶⁸ He had bluntly pointed out that since he had taken no part in the 1860 union of the Free Presbyterian and Secession Presbyterian churches in the Maritimes, he owed the presbytery "no canonical obedience" and was entirely beyond their control.⁶⁹ It was not until 1865 that a softening of attitude on both sides allowed the 85-year-old Sprott, now in failing health, to be restored to the ministry. He had never been an avid attendee at presbytery, and indeed the frequency and duration of his missionary tours in rural Nova Scotia would have rendered that impossible. Perhaps these absences from the church in Musquodoboit contributed to those "differences of opinion" with his congregation that led to his resignation from the charge in 1849. His plain-speaking approach was no doubt another reason. As his ten-year-old daughter Jane observed of a sermon he delivered at the communion in Truro in March, 1838: "Father preached with authority and told the wise people what he thought of them." Sprott's obituarist for the *Presbyterian Witness* also remarked on the keenness, even severity, of his criticisms of men and manners.⁷⁰ He had been an opinionated man in Galloway and he remained so in Nova Scotia.

Musquodoboit was not the easiest of congregations. Sprott's predecessor, the Reverend John Laidlaw, a Burgher, was driven to resign in 1822 when accused of breaking the Sabbath: carrying a pound of tea in his pocket, asking the blacksmith to send up the next day the harrow teeth he had ordered, and sending away a tub of butter

66 Rev. Hugh Graham to Dr. McCulloch, no date or place (but context indicates 1826), McCulloch Papers, vol. 553, reel 14927, NSARM. In a fund-raising trip to Scotland in 1826, McCulloch accused Burns and the Glasgow Colonial Society of undermining the work of the Secession in Nova Scotia. A pamphlet war between the two ensued. Sprott was also in Scotland in 1826, and visited his friend Burns. Proof that McCulloch continued to be hostile to Sprott can be found in a lengthy letter of complaint about him written to the Reverend Dr. John Mitchell in Glasgow, June 1838, McCulloch Papers, vol. 553, reel 14927, NSARM.

67 On the prominent Archibald family see, in particular, Burris, *My Pioneer Ancestors*, ch. 8. A Marriages of Affinity bill came before the British Parliament in 1862. For a discussion of some of the issues from the perspective of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, see the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* (1862): 122-6.

68 *Home and Foreign Record of the Presbyterian Church in the Lower Provinces of British North America*, December (1865), 321, quoting the sentence of presbytery of 8 May 1862.

69 The case may be traced in the *Home and Foreign Record*: see July 1861, 193; November 1861, 307; and December 1865, 321. See also the synod minutes of 25 June 1862, 91. The Secession Presbyterian Church is more properly called the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia. I am most grateful to Mr. Michael Millar for these references. There is no reference to this episode in the materials selected by his son for the *Memorials* or in any Sprott obituary. The Free Church was formed when 474 ministers (almost 40 per cent) left the Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843.

70 Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM; *Presbyterian Witness*, 25 September 1869.

by carrier. He departed for the United States and died soon after. Sprott later commented that “Laidlaw’s blood still lies at the door of the Musquodoboit people.”⁷¹ It is clear from local histories of the area that divisions within the congregation resulted in substantial disruptions to Sprott’s ministry in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1836, for example, the proprietors of the Presbyterian church arranged that Sprott and a competing minister should preach on alternate Sabbaths in order to avoid a clash, and Sprott’s resignation in 1849, it has been argued, was related to the re-emergence of “certain Burgher and Anti-Burgher fires which had smouldered underground since 1817 [the year of the formation of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia] and now appeared to fan into flames.”⁷² All the Presbyterian divisions of Scotland had, it appeared, arrived safely in Nova Scotia.

It should by now be obvious that Sprott’s background, especially his Covenanting background, had prepared him to be an outsider. However, it was the Covenanters of old, of the 17th century rather than their spiritual descendants in Scotland or Nova Scotia, whom Sprott truly admired. Furthermore, although the Covenanting tradition still possessed a powerful appeal in Galloway, where so many of the crucial events had occurred, it must be emphasized that a much-embellished version of events had developed there in the 18th century – in part the creation of the Reverend Robert Wodrow, whose *History of the Sufferings of the Church* was published in 1721. Seven years earlier, in 1714, there had appeared a work entitled *A Cloud of Witnesses*, which contained dying testimonies, epitaphs, and other memorials of the Covenanting martyrs – those who had “suffered for the truth in Scotland since 1680.”⁷³ Wodrow used some of the same materials as the compiler of *A Cloud of Witnesses*; he produced an influential and in many ways scholarly work, but in his hands events such as the death of John Brown of Priesthill became, as Ted Cowan has recently stated, more parable than history and the notorious story of the Wigtown martyrs (the women allegedly drowned off the coast of Galloway for their Covenanting beliefs) was transmuted from traditional story into established fact.⁷⁴ John Howie’s *Scots Worthies*

71 Reid, *Musquodoboit Pioneers*, 763; Sprott’s letter to the Reverend Robert Blackwood, 1844, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. Burris, in *My Pioneer Ancestors*, 279, suggests that Laidlaw was defended before synod by Thomas McCulloch. For an American satire on sabbatarianism in Nova Scotia, see the work of the essayist and humorist Frederic S. Cozzens in his *Acadia; or, a Month with the Bluenoses* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859). Cozzens’s hostile description of “a canting, covenanting, oat-eating, money-gripping, tribe of second-hand Scotch Presbyterians” well illustrates strong anti-Scottish stereotyping.

72 Reid, *Musquodoboit Pioneers*, 800, 801, 777-8. Alternatively, the problems may have been connected with the Disruption of 1843; while Sprott initially admired the courage of the Free Church ministers, he was uneasy about the deliberate export of the Disruption to British North America where the patronage problems so significant in Scotland simply did not exist. On this exportation, spearheaded by Sprott’s friend the Rev. Robert Burns, see Barbara C. Murison, “The Disruption and the Colonies of Scottish Settlement,” in *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1993), 135-50.

73 On this work, which had passed through five editions by 1751, see Rev. Matthew Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: Its origin and history 1680-1876* (Paisley, 1893), 173, Appendix IV.

74 Cowan, “The Covenanting Tradition in Scottish History,” 130-7. On the staying power of these traditions see the Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley’s recent comments on how the Wigtown martyrs had influenced his life in a report in the *Scotsman*, 28 September 2007.

added weight to these traditions. Proof of the continued, and indeed expanded, interest in the Covenanters in the 19th century can be found in the large number of martyrs' monuments erected in the period, often through the voluntary contributions of those who revered the memory of these "sufferers for conscience sake" (as the monument in St. Michael's churchyard, Dumfries, describes them). In order to solicit contributions for that particular monument in 1831, the Reverend William Symington of Stranraer had preached a lengthy and moving sermon, retelling yet again the now fully accepted stories of John Brown and of the Wigtown martyrs, and emphasizing the Covenanters' "noble and successful struggle for religion and liberty with the avowed enemies of both."⁷⁵ The stories of the Covenanters were mythologized further by emigrants from the area such as Spratt. For him, Galloway was indeed, as the 17th century Covenanting leader Renwick had remarked, "flower'd with martyrs."⁷⁶ Names such as Renwick, Cargill, Peden, and Cameron – the leaders of the movement – appeared and reappeared in his sermons in Nova Scotia and met, we must assume, with some response. In Musquodoboit itself there were families whose history was directly connected to the Covenanting movement.⁷⁷ Moreover, Spratt's continuing connections with the Symingtons had reinforced his ideas about the Covenanters, which were readily transferred to the next generation. William Symington's published work reached the Spratt household in Musquodoboit, as George's letter to Master Symington demonstrates: "I have just now read your father's sermons on the Scottish martyrs."⁷⁸ The continued fascination in Nova Scotia with the books and authors so popular in Scotland is also evident in Thomas McCulloch's *Stepsure Letters*: there are references to Mrs. Grumble's husband voting for the inclusion in the town library of *The Crook in the Lot*, three sermons of Thomas Boston, and to "Scotch Worthies" wandering "among moors and mosses." Although McCulloch was brought up in Paisley, his family, like Spratt's, was from Galloway; in the *Letters*, Stepsure's neighbour Scanocreech is an admirer of the Covenanters and McCulloch hoped not only to produce and publish a substantial novel set in "the Days of the Covenant" but also to counter the "misrepresentations" of Sir Walter Scott in his *Old Mortality*, a work which presented Covenanters as dangerous fanatics.⁷⁹

Yet despite this public fascination with the Covenanters, an examination of the *Old Statistical Account* indicates that most inhabitants of Galloway were, at the time when Spratt was growing up there, attenders at the parish kirk. In other words, the

75 Alex S. Morton, *Galloway and the Covenanters* (Paisley: A. Gardner, 1914), 281; Rev. William Symington, *The Character and Claims of the Scottish Martyrs* (Paisley, 2nd ed., 1833), 17. Symington was a younger brother of Andrew Symington, a classmate of Spratt at the Reformed Church's divinity hall in Stirling. William Symington was as important a minister in southwest Scotland as Thomas Chalmers was in Glasgow. See R. Blackwood's article in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, 808.

76 Renwick's phrase is quoted in the obituary of William Symington in the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, March 1862.

77 Spratt, *Memorials*, 135; Burris, *My Pioneer Ancestors*, 80-1. Burris specifically mentions John Brown and the Wigtown martyrs and remarks that the story of those times was still retained in the annals of the McCurdy family in particular.

78 Undated letter (1841?), Spratt Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM.

79 Thomas McCulloch, *The Mephibosheth Stepsure Letters*, ed. Gwendolyn Davies (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 58, 94, "Introduction." McCulloch had clearly imbibed the Covenanting myths with the same enthusiasm as Spratt. His schemes for the publication of his works in Britain proved abortive.

Cameronians, or Old Dissenters, or Mountain Men, or Society People, or McMillanites, or Reformed Presbyterians, as they are variously called, together with members of the 18th-century Secession Presbyterian churches, were in fact very much in the minority.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, they were accustomed to challenging established authority, in politics as in religion, and this lent them an importance beyond the numerical.

How did Sprott's Covenanting sensibilities affect his actions across the Atlantic? It might be argued that the nature of colonial society gave less room for challenges to authority since, as he quickly realized, it was far less hierarchical than in Galloway; as he observed, "An absurd equality prevails."⁸¹ His diary jottings and letters confirm the observations of many other emigrants that British North America, while offering much to the hard worker who wished to get on in the world, was "no place for a gentleman": the squire, the army officer, and their spouses were forced into all kinds of demanding physical tasks. For many reasons, then, Sprott found himself welcome in broader social circles than would have been the case in Scotland; his experiences, again, mirror those of Thomas McCulloch, who wrote in 1816 that he enjoyed a degree of respectability "to which I could never have aspired in Britain."⁸² At the time of Sprott's first marriage (1821), those who called to offer congratulations included the Honourable Judge Wilkins, Mr. Haliburton, and the Honourable James Fraser; at the time of his second marriage (1824), Sprott observed that "the influential people called on my wife."⁸³ His many letters to the bereaved also demonstrate the range of his connections. Yet he was not one to curry favour with anyone, as has already been demonstrated.⁸⁴ In common with his heroes, the Covenanters, he profoundly distrusted governments – regarding them as generally corrupt. He was born at a time when memories of the Galloway Levellers revolt of 1724 still persisted, and well understood the frustration of these Galloway objectors to the Enclosure movement, with all that it meant for the commercialization of agriculture and the destruction of the old values.⁸⁵ Like the Covenanters, the Levellers sought refuge in the hills and moors and undoubtedly Covenanting ideas provided some of their inspiration; one report asserts that the Levellers read aloud the Solemn League and Covenant in order to demonstrate the

80 The McMillanites appear to have been the most important dissenting group, although the members were widely dispersed. The authors of the parish accounts, however, were Kirk ministers whose interests would not be served by any emphasis on parish divisions.

81 Sprott, *Memorials*, 2.

82 Thomas McCulloch to Rev. Mr. Culbertson of Leith, 10 July 1816, vertical MS file, "Thomas McCulloch," NSARM, cited in *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots*, ed. D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 47, n.50.

83 Sprott, *Memorials*, 3-4, 16. Sprott's son in a note identifies Haliburton as "the well-known judge and author"; this would be Thomas Chandler Haliburton.

84 See Sprott Letterbook, 23-4, reel 1025, NSARM. An example of the range of connections is that in 1860 Sprott reported having received a very friendly letter from the son of the late chief justice Sir Brenton Halliburton stating the "high respect" his father had had for him and how he had appreciated Sprott's "extended labours" during the early years when roads were so bad." See Sprott, *Memorials*, 166.

85 The arguments for "a radical departure from the patterns of the past in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, particularly noticeable in areas such as Galloway where commercial pastoralism was advancing rapidly," are convincingly presented in T.M. Devine, *The Transformation of Rural Scotland: Social Change and the Agrarian Economy, 1660-1815* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1994), 125.

legitimacy of their actions.⁸⁶ Sprott had also personally experienced what he referred to as the “stirring times” of the French Revolution and the Irish rebellion. The response of Secession and Covenanting ministers and congregations to such events varied, but there was certainly some involvement by these groups in the radical politics of the day, with support being given to the cause of the Friends of the People and criticisms made of the repressive policies of the Pitt government. After all, as Colin Kidd has argued, resistance theory had “long been the marrow of Presbyterian politics” and, among Presbyterians, the Seceders and Covenanters had borne the heaviest burden of potential disloyalty.⁸⁷ However, the response was far from uniform; the Neilson family’s Covenanting minister in Newton Stewart actually excluded from communion “all who united with the friends of the people.”⁸⁸

Sprott’s translation to what he called “the wilds of Nova Scotia” initially seemed unlikely to afford him opportunities to express his political ideas except at the most local of levels. For years – indeed, as late as the 1860s (by which time the phrase was hardly an accurate one) – he headed his letters to the Scottish newspapers “from the backwoods,” perhaps understanding that this touch of exaggeration made them more interesting to a Scottish audience. That description had been appropriate at the beginning of his career in the Musquodoboit valley and along the Eastern Shore. But all was soon to change. In 1833, on one of his famous “rambles” through Nova Scotia, Joseph Howe, editor of the *Novascotian* and advocate of political reform, made his way along the atrocious roads that led to Musquodoboit. There he spent an enjoyable Sunday, attending the Presbyterian Meeting House and making the acquaintance of the Reverend John Sprott, whom he described to his wife Susan Ann as “a rough being, of some education and talent, but wanting . . . polish sadly”; Sprott’s discussions, continued Howe somewhat patronizingly, “were not altogether uninteresting but he every now and then got into the wide ocean of theology without compass or chronometer.”⁸⁹ Howe was introduced to a great many folk, and met several old acquaintances; he found himself “a lion for the day” and noted with interest how populous the settlement was and that it was

86 *Caledonian Mercury*, 14 May 1724, cited in John Leopold, “The Levellers’ Revolt in Galloway in 1724,” *Scottish Labour History Journal* 14 (May 1980): 15.

87 Colin Kidd, “The Kirk, the French Revolution, and the Burden of Scottish Whiggery,” in *Religious Change in Europe 1650-1914: Essays for John McManners*, ed. Nigel Aston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 214, 229.

88 Sprott’s letter to Mr. John McCaig, May 1845 (reminiscing about the 1790s), Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM. The reasoning of the uncompromising minister of Newton Stewart, Rev. John Reid, may have been that one should concentrate on one’s relationship with God, not on the things of this world. Kidd’s suggestion that ministers such as Reid were succumbing to pressures for “an expedient cringe” seems a little unfair; see Kidd, “The Kirk, the French Revolution and the Burden of Scottish Whiggery,” 234. The Friends of the People were themselves wary of association with Covenanters. As Binns has argued, the Scottish democratic movement of the period was an uneasy alliance between Calvinism and rationalism; see John Binns, “The Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s,” in *Covenant, Charter, and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History*, ed. Terry Brotherstone (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 50-9.

89 Howe Papers, reel 10327, NSARM. We should note that Howe himself lacked formal education and although an avid reader was largely self-taught; see J. Murray Beck, *Joseph Howe* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1982), vol. 1, ch. 2. In religion, Howe’s family was Sandemanian (Glasgow) and Sandemanian theology was largely Calvinist, with each congregation being essentially self-governing. See D.M. Murray’s articles in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 364, 744.

wholly Presbyterian. The next morning, he breakfasted with the minister at seven o'clock, later remarking that Sprott, poorly paid as all country ministers were, had already been at work on his farm for a couple of hours by then.⁹⁰ Howe shrewdly sensed that he could benefit from the assistance of this Presbyterian minister, just as he had already made use of the talents of Thomas McCulloch of Pictou, and soon the two were corresponding regularly.⁹¹ Musquodoboit became of substantial importance to Howe's burgeoning political career as the Presbyterian minister had an unrivalled knowledge of the local community and, just as significant, Sprott and Howe shared many political ideas concerning the evils of oligarchy and the rights of the people.

By 1835, with Musquodoboit about to become a part of the recently reorganized County of Halifax, Howe was anticipating success as candidate for the county in the forthcoming election: "Musquodoboit . . . will vote for me to a man before any other candidate that may offer."⁹² It was a conviction that John Sprott had helped to foster, and it proved correct in 1836; the poll concluded in Musquodoboit's Presbyterian Meeting House and Howe and his fellow reformer William Annand were declared elected as members for the county. By 1840 Sprott's daughter, Elizabeth, describing the political excitement in the area as another election approached, could announce proudly to her cousin in Scotland that the Honourable Joseph Howe, one of the leaders of the Whigs, was "a particular friend of ours"; it was during that election that a large number of Musquodoboit reformers were brought to the Halifax poll to intimidate electors of a Tory disposition.⁹³ Before the 1843 election, Sprott wrote an analysis for Howe of the political situation in Musquodoboit, informing him that agents of Robert Logan were "beginning to move in the waters" (for there were rumours that Annand would not stand), although only "a fragment of the Tory interest," in addition to "the malcontents in our Church" and Logan's own relatives, seemed likely to support him. The "great battle in Onslow" (the recent confrontation between Howe and the Baptist Edmund Crawley on the subject of denominational colleges) had led the *Baptist Bulletin* to claim that Howe had "promised us all [his ministerial supporters] Chairs in the new college," but Sprott assured the Reform leader that he was clear that Howe had promised him nothing. He also made it plain that he had no intention of traveling to distant counties to attend political meetings in order to "make rough waters among peaceable people" and to allow his clearly restless congregation the opportunity to drive him out permanently.⁹⁴

90 The necessity of farming for pioneer ministers without government allowances was undoubted, but it was unkind of Howe, given Sprott's missionary journeys, to suggest that Sprott spent one day a week on God's work and the other six on his own.

91 McCulloch wrote some editorials criticizing the council for Howe's *Novascotian* and for the *Colonial Patriot*; see Campbell and MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar*, 240. Politicians' recognition of ministerial electoral influence is also demonstrated by the flurry of correspondence between candidates in the 1799 election and the Rev. James MacGregor; it was through MacGregor that the wealthy Pictou merchant Edward Mortimer sent his instructions to his friends to call in voters and provide provisions and rum for distribution at the hustings. See Brian Cuthbertson, *Johnny Bluenose at the Polls* (Halifax, NS: Formac Publishing, 1994), 41.

92 Cuthbertson, *Johnny Bluenose*, 74-5; Beck, *Joseph Howe* 1:146.

93 Elizabeth Sprott to Jane Neilson, 1 November 1840, Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM; Beck, *Joseph Howe* 1:219.

94 Sprott to Howe, 13 October 1843, MG 24, B29, vol. 1, reel C-1829, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). These remarks suggest that he had been asked to do so. The "new college" is now Dalhousie University.

The connection between Sprott and Howe was strengthened further when, in 1846, the Howe family took up residence in Upper Musquodoboit, in an elegant house owned by Annand, and lived there for several months. Whatever else Musquodoboit was, it was far from being a political backwater in the 1830s and 1840s, and it ceased to be a geographical one.⁹⁵ It became a centre of the Reform movement; the rural alienation from the wealthy Halifax oligarchy found its voice and Sprott was at the heart of it all, keeping Howe up-to-date on local affairs and noting with glee, when the provincial governor attacked Howe and his Reform party as they struggled to achieve responsible government for Nova Scotia, that if a man wished to get rid of an anthill “he could crush it by putting a flat stone on top of it,” but it was “a more difficult business for a Tory Lord to get rid of a band of Patriots.”⁹⁶ He remained a lifelong admirer of Howe and of the tenacity with which he pursued “Liberty, Free Trade, Reform and Education.”⁹⁷

Sprott had come by his Reform beliefs honestly. He could summon up the images of the early Covenanters of south-west Scotland, who stood by their principles whatever the cost; he understood the frustrations of the Galloway Levellers of the early-18th century and their resentment of enclosing “improvements”; he had seen first-hand the democratic aspirations of the political reformers of the 1790s; and he applied the understanding of events that he had acquired during his first 38 years, flawed and mythologised in some ways though it was, to his 51 years in Nova Scotia. This is not to suggest, however, that he was untouched by his North American experiences – far from it. He admired what he perceived as the freedom-loving aspects of the United States sufficiently to call one of his sons after the first President (alas, George W. did not appreciate it, lamenting to the son of his father’s old friend Symington that he would rather have been named after “some revered North Briton”).⁹⁸ He had a sharp eye and a ready pen with which to note changes in society and similarities and differences between Scotia and Nova Scotia. He wrote lengthy descriptions of changes in Nova Scotia agriculture and commerce for the Galloway papers. His three visits to his native land, in addition to his breadth of reading in the Scottish press and his wide range of correspondents, allowed him to describe and explain Galloway to the bluenoses and Nova Scotia to the Scots.⁹⁹ In his long life he both absorbed and helped to create and propagate a number of myths in his homeland and his adopted country. In Galloway the Covenanting myth had become a part of his very being. In Galloway, too, he had absorbed ideas regarding Scottish educational excellence and prejudices about the Irish and the evils of drink. In his years in Nova Scotia his laments for “times, places and peoples past” were typical of thousands of Scottish immigrants to Canada, whose imaginings helped to preserve for them a world

95 “Joseph Howe gave roads to Musquodoboit” was the local verdict. See Reid, *Musquodoboit Pioneers* 777. In 1840 the provincial legislature was persuaded, by Howe’s vision of “hundreds of teams . . . com[ing] down from the eastern counties laden with Agricultural products,” to vote 1800 pounds for the Great Eastern Road through Musquodoboit to St Mary’s. See Beck, *Joseph Howe* 1:204. No doubt this was useful in the election.

96 Sprott to Howe, 19 February 1845, Howe Papers, MG 24, B29, vol. 1, reel C-1829, f. 118, LAC.

97 Sprott, *Memorials*, 153.

98 George W. Sprott to Master Symington (undated), Sprott Letterbook, reel 11025, NSARM.

99 A great deal of Sprott’s writing is travelogue; see, for example, his report of a trip to the U.S. in 1850 in *Memorials*, 117-21.

that was passing.¹⁰⁰ His sentimental reminiscences of Scotland and latterly of the early Scottish settlers in Nova Scotia were popular with those seeking an idealized past – he became himself an early exponent of kailyard literature – and his printed letters were read in faraway places, including Ceylon, as his son George found when he was a missionary in Kandy. Sprott, then, contributed to the myth that “the old days were the best days.” Yet he was also a brisk commentator on that which was modern. He made a contribution to the literature of emigration; some of his articles in the Galloway newspapers were undoubtedly useful for those considering leaving Scotland, for he would draw on his personal experiences to explain what was actually involved. Here he was myth-breaking rather than myth-making.

Sprott had an acute eye, a sharp tongue, a ready pen, and the physical constitution to enable him to make good use of them until he was well into his 80s (he died in his 90th year). The length of his career, his frequent crossings of the Atlantic and his extensive travels in Nova Scotia – he once boasted that his horse had been in every stable in the province – afforded ample opportunity for observation and comment. His Gallovidian origins set him apart from any neat categorization as “Highland” or “Lowland” and thus he provides a different perspective from the usual ones in the secondary literature of Scottish emigration. If we are to believe Cowan, the creation and transmuting of myths are a particular specialization of the Scots, who “have perhaps the greatest capacity for self-mythologization of any nation on the planet, outside the United States.”¹⁰¹ Sprott’s experiences give us a vivid picture of the way in which one Presbyterian minister experienced the transition from a particular area of Scotland to Nova Scotia, and of the cultural baggage he carried with him. Drawing the map of the mental journeyings of the Reverend John Sprott, who himself became an object of mythology after his death, can help us to come to some understanding of these processes.¹⁰²

100 Cowan, “The Myth of Scotch Canada,” 49. Another indication of Sprott’s attachment to popular Scottish culture is the fact that he named his manse in Musquodoboit “Tullochgorum.” This was the name of one of the most famous fiddle tunes of 18th-century Scotland.

101 Cowan, “The Myth of Scotch Canada,” 56.

102 On the mythologizing of Sprott see, in particular, the “Mr. Sprott stories” lovingly retold in Burris, *My Pioneer Ancestors*, 110-2.