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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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H.H. Pitts and Race and Religion in New Brunswick Politics

Throughout the 1890's the secular institutional expressions of Canada's cultural and religious duality came under severe attack by substantial elements of its British Protestant majority. The activities of the Equal Rights Association in Ontario, the abolition of the dual school system in Manitoba and the removal of French as an official language of the Northwest Territories all manifested a desire for a culturally homogeneous state on the American model. Michel Brunet has described the result of this thrust for cultural uniformity as "Canada's emergence as the British-American fatherland,"¹ a process he saw culminating in its participation in the Boer War. Such tendencies were by no means confined to Ontario and the West. They made their presence felt in New Brunswick as well where, under the leadership of the man who is the central figure of this paper, Herman H. Pitts, a concerted effort was made to divide the province politically along racial and religious lines in order to legislate British cultural hegemony. At first this policy had a measure of success but by 1902 it lay in ruins, spurned by the electorate and abandoned by its exponents as New Brunswick returned to the politics of consensus.

Racial and religious conflict was not new to New Brunswick. In the early 1870's the province's social fabric had been rent by a long and bitter dispute over the adoption of a free non-sectarian public school system in 1871 — a dispute settled only after it led to disturbances in Caraquet, Gloucester County in January 1875 which resulted in the deaths of two men.² That settlement consisted of a series of interpretations of the Common Schools Act

1 Michael Brunet, "The French-Canadians' Search for a Fatherland" in Peter Russell (Editor), *Nationalism in Canada*, (Toronto, 1966), p. 56.

2 For a good brief account of the New Brunswick School Question of the 1870's see Katherine F.C. MacNaughton, *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick 1784-1900* (Fredericton, 1947), pp. 195-221.

adopted by the provincial government in 1875 which "legalized within the non-sectarian system of the province schools of a sectarian bias."³ These "interpretations" were never published in the regulation manual, a fact which lent credence to charges of secret deals by the advocates of completely non-sectarian schools in the 1890's,⁴ but they were printed in several provincial newspapers.

Although the schools question of the 1870's was one of religion rather than ethnicity the issue of language rights was intimately involved in the Acadian minority's opposition to the Common Schools Act. Prior to its adoption teaching in French had been allowed in the predominantly Acadian school districts;⁵ after 1871 English became the *de facto* language of instruction except in the primary grades.⁶ Not until 1878 was any provision made for the training of Francophone teachers at the provincial Normal School at Fredericton and as late as 1889 only twenty-nine Francophone students were enrolled there. Forced to learn in a language other than their mother tongue and instructed for the most part by ill-qualified local license teachers hired by boards eager to hold down salary costs, most Acadian students left school after completing the bilingual primary course. Efforts by the Acadians to have the course extended beyond the primary grades were gathering momentum, however, and in the 1890's a dispute over the administration of the Bathurst schools not only made that demand a political issue but reopened the racial and religious divisions in New Brunswick which had been papered over by the 1875 compromise.

In the interval between the two controversies much had changed. Perhaps the most significant developments were some marked shifts in the province's demographic makeup. In 1871 only 33.6 percent of its population had been Roman Catholics and only 15.7 percent were of French origin. By 1901, however, 38.0 percent were Roman Catholics and 24.2 percent were of French origin. In the same period the Acadians became the dominant element in New Brunswick's Roman Catholic minority comprising 63.6 percent of all Catholic communicants in 1901, up from 46.8 percent in 1871.⁷ Nor was the Acadian upsurge in numbers alone. The years from 1875 to 1890 had also witnessed significant growth in their political importance and national con-

3 MacNaughton, p. 22.

4 For example see the speech delivered on March 27, 1893 by Herman H. Pitts (M.L.A. - York) in *Synoptic Reports of the Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick*, 1893, (Fredericton, 1893), pp. 55-62.

5 Omer Le Gresley, *L'Enseignement Du Français En Acadie: 1604-1926* (Bathurst, 1926), p. 116.

6 MacNaughton, p. 232.

7 See Tables I, II and III.

sciousness.⁸ In 1878 P.A. Landry became the first Acadian provincial cabinet minister; four years later Pascal Poirier became the first Acadian senator. By 1890 there were five Acadians in the New Brunswick Assembly and Kent County was represented by an Acadian M.P. at Ottawa. Equally significant was the Acadian National Convention of 1881 at Memramcook where the Acadians of the three Maritime Provinces had formed their counterpart to the French Canadian St. Jean Baptiste Society, La Société Nationale d'Assomption (S.N.A.). Pascal Poirier was elected the society's first president and August 15 was chosen as its feast day. Later in the decade the S.N.A. adopted a national flag (the Tricolor with a gold star in the corner) and a national anthem. The increased Acadian population and national consciousness also spawned two new French-language weekly newspapers, the Bathurst *Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, founded in 1885, and *L'Évangeline* which appeared in 1887 and was published at Weymouth, Nova Scotia to compete with the established *Moniteur Acadien*. *L'Évangeline* soon began a quarter-century campaign, against the opposition of the Irish-dominated New Brunswick church hierarchy, for an Acadian bishop. On both the political and religious fronts the Acadians were seeking positions of power and responsibility commensurate with their numbers.

In the English-speaking counties the winds of change were also blowing. Moral reform, a cause spurred by the idealism of the Imperial Federation movement and an emerging concern in the province's evangelical Protestant churches with social evils as well as the sins of individuals, was challenging the easygoing political and social morality which had flourished during the 1870's and 1880's and was now a political force to be reckoned with. By 1890 the provincial Sons of Temperance alone had 6120 members.⁹ The coercive power of the state rather than the persuasive power of the church was regarded with increasing favour by prohibitionist advocates as the most efficacious remedy for society's evils and by 1892 the Reverend George Campbell, a Saint John Methodist minister, was asserting that "The state has a right to prohibit anything and everything that adds unnecessarily to the burdens of the people."¹⁰

Epitomizing this movement for moral reform, political purity and the use of the state as an engine of social control was the thirty-two year old editor of the influential weekly newspaper, *The New Brunswick Reporter and Fredericton Advertiser* Herman H. Pitts, Presbyterian in religion, a federal Con-

8 The following summary of the highlights of the "Acadian Renaissance" is taken from Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens* (Ottawa, 1955), pp. 772-809. See also H.G. Thorburn, *Politics in New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1961), chapter I, and C.F. MacRae (Editor), *French Canada Today* (Sackville, 1961) particularly M.A. Savoie, "The Acadians, A Dynamic Minority", pp. 79-88.

9 *New Brunswick Reporter and Fredericton Advertiser*, July 23, 1890.

10 Quoted in *Ibid.*, March 2, 1892.

servative in politics, an ardent imperialist and Grand Worthy Associate of the New Brunswick Sons of Temperance. As early as February, 1890, Pitts has urged moral reformers to shift their emphasis from the goal of reforming the conduct of individuals to that of reforming society itself.¹¹ Chiding the Christians of York County for their reluctance to enter the sordid political arena, he called for "more religion in politics, more Christian men in public offices" and declared that "Just as the gospel permeates our politics will the evils of politics decrease."¹² However, as Grand Master of the New Brunswick Loyal Orange Association, he was an equally sincere advocate of a unilingual Canada, something which he believed would eventually become a reality "notwithstanding Quebec is largely French."¹³

Pitts' commitment to cultural uniformity was not an aberration in his character, inconsistent with his reformist tendencies. Rather, it enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with them. For the basis on which Pitts wished to reform New Brunswick was his version of the moral and social code of evangelical Protestantism. The society he envisaged was one purged of alcohol and patronage, respectful of the Sabbath and governed by men of principle who would erase what he considered to be the special privileges of its racial and religious minorities from the statute book. To implement this programme he evolved a political strategy admirable in its simplicity and iron logic. It was nothing less than the creation of a new reform partly mobilized through the political realignment of the province on the basis of race and religion. This new party, he believed, would win the bloc vote of New Brunswick's British Protestant majority and impose its values on the province by force of law. To achieve this polarization Pitts required an issue to dramatize his conviction that New Brunswick's existing political system with its pragmatic and parochial temper was a stumbling block impeding necessary reform. Not only did he deplore the tendency of the politicians it spawned to coalesce around the poles of government and opposition on the basis of patronage, personal animosity and sectional rivalries rather than political principle, he contended that it had been manipulated by the seven-year old coalition government of Andrew Blair to extend unwarranted special treatment to the Acadian and Irish Catholics.

The dispute at Bathurst began innocently in September, 1890 with the decision of the Catholic-dominated local board of trustees to bring a hitherto private girls' school at the local convent under the public school system by

11 All biographical information on Pitts is from *The Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1895 (Ottawa, 1896), p. 340.

12 *The New Brunswick Reporter*, February 8, 1890.

13 *Ibid.*, March 1, 1890.

invoking the terms of the 1875 compromise.¹⁴ This transaction substantially increased the school rates and the Protestant minority petitioned the provincial Board of Education to intervene. Satisfied that what had been done was in accordance with the 1875 settlement the Board rejected this request out of hand. In 1891, however, the Bathurst trustees began to abuse the terms of the settlement.

Roman Catholic students were transferred from the old public schools to the convent school — a step which resulted in severe overcrowding at that institution while the old public schools were left with half-empty classrooms. Some Sisters of Charity were assigned to teach Protestant children in the old public schools and at the convent school religious instruction was permitted during noon hours although the 1875 compromise had limited such instruction to a period at the end of the school day. Under pressure from the Chief Superintendent of Education the Sisters of Charity were transferred back to the convent school but that was not enough to prevent a protest petition to the House of Assembly by the Bathurst Protestants in 1891 demanding that the Catholic students be returned to the public schools and that the extension of time allotted to religious instruction be revoked. Both government and opposition members were anxious to avoid the explosive issue, however, and although the petition was tabled it was neither read aloud nor debated.

In September, 1891 the affair ceased to retain the obscurity of a local dispute when it was injected into a Kent County by-election by C. H. LaBil-lois, Minister without Portfolio in the Blair government, and by the young Acadian nationalist editor of the Bathurst *Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, Peter Veniot.¹⁵ Veniot cited Blair's refusal to intervene in the controversy as evidence that he was the friend of the Acadians and charged that the Conservative Party was dominated by ultra-Protestant elements. To clinch this argument Veniot issued a pamphlet during the latter stages of the campaign which featured a remark allegedly made by A.A. Stockton, leader of the opposition, to an Acadian M.L.A. to the effect that French should no longer be permitted as a language of instruction in the primary grades. The pamphlet concluded with an impassioned appeal to "Support the government if you

14 The following summary of the background of the Bathurst Schools Question is taken from MacNaughton, pp. 222-223 and from a speech delivered by Reverend Sellers, the Bathurst Village Methodist Minister to the Grand Orange Lodge of New Brunswick at Fredericton on February 21, 1893 which was reprinted in the March 8, 1893 issue of *The New Brunswick Reporter*.

15 Veniot became the first Acadian Premier of New Brunswick in 1923 and in 1926 became the first Acadian appointed to the federal cabinet.

wish to preserve your language, your Religion and your customs."¹⁶ Although these tactics helped elect the government candidate, *L'Evangéline* voiced the sombre prophecy that "in raising the imprudent cry of religion and nationality"¹⁷ Veniot unwittingly had opened the door for an English Protestant backlash which would threaten all the hard-won gains the Acadians had made since Confederation.

That backlash began with the "Macedonian cry"¹⁸ given by the Reverend A.F. Thomson, the Presbyterian minister at Bathurst, in a series of addresses to various Orange Lodges in the province during the winter of 1891-1892. During the latter stages of his tour he was provided with fresh ammunition when the Bathurst trustees hired a female Acadian teacher whose license was valid only in French-speaking districts to become superintendent of the primary schools. Protestant parents responded by withdrawing their children from the schools under her direction, establishing a private school and refusing to pay their school taxes until she was fired. Reluctantly the trustees decided not to renew her contract but not before the outraged Protestants had addressed a second petition to the legislature. However, both sides of the House of Assembly were now so fearful of the threat the dispute posed to their prospects in the upcoming provincial election that no member even dared to table it.

Apparently Pitts was not fully aware of the situation at Bathurst during most of 1891. At least there are no direct references to it in the issues of the *Reporter* available for that year. In 1892, however, it became the staple fare for the readers of his columns. In fact, by the time the legislature met Pitts was almost chomping at the bit in anticipation of exploiting the government's indifference to the grievances of the Bathurst Protestants and its indiscreet appeals in the Kent by-election. Disgusted by the timorous policy of the heterogeneous collection of disaffected Liberals and hardcore Conservatives who comprised the opposition, he did not seek a nomination on their ticket but instead ran as the independent candidate of the York Orangemen and Sons of Temperance. Advocating total prohibition and promising "to strenuously oppose any government or party giving special favours to any religious

16 A translation of this pamphlet was published in the *Reporter* on November 16, 1892. Stockton and another Saint John M.L.A., Silas Alward, had broken with Blair in 1889 over the Premier's appointment of an Irish Catholic as Police Magistrate for the newly-amalgamated city of Saint John. They headed a six-man ticket in Saint John city and county in the provincial election of 1890 which rode "the Protestant horse" to victory. See Michael Gordon, "The Andrew G. Blair Administration and the Abolition of the Legislative Council of New Brunswick, 1882-1892." (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick 1964), pp. 150-156.

17 *L'Evangéline*, December 3, 1891.

denomination",¹⁹ he set himself the herculean task of unseating Blair in the Premier's own constituency.

It was a no-holds-barred campaign. Pitts showered the county with translations of the pamphlet printed for the Kent by-election and accused Blair of complicity in the campaign of the Bathurst trustees to subvert the non-sectarian character of the local public schools. Blair responded by denouncing Pitts as a bigot in the Catholic sections of the county and employing the bogey of prohibition against him — a tactic which Pitts interpreted as an effort to ensure the political and financial support of the Fredericton tavern keepers and their suppliers. When the votes were counted on October 22, 1892 Pitt's design seemed on the way to fulfillment. Not only had he been elected, carrying three oppositionists to victory on his coatails, but Blair was at the foot of the poll! Results elsewhere in the province had kept the government in power with a healthy majority, but Pitts had demonstrated the political potency of the non-sectarian school issue and had persuaded the English-speaking members of the opposition that it was the key to unseating Blair. His post-election editorial jubilantly proclaimed "The fact has been demonstrated beyond peradventure that such open catering to the Roman Catholic vote as was made by Mr. Blair throughout his political career must in the end bring its own reward."²⁰

In November when Blair sought to enter the Legislature through a by-election in strongly Protestant Queen's County Pitts, now supported by the *Saint John Sun* and the *Presbyterian Witness* confidently employed the same tactics.

Significantly, however, this time such appeals proved ineffective and Blair won an easy victory. An efficient government organization and the prospect of being represented by the Premier partially explain the result but the fact that these traditional influences were allowed to operate revealed that in poor rural constituencies like Queens, heavily dependent on government largesse, propaganda promoting a militant moral crusade lacked the appeal and the relevance it had demonstrated among the more affluent and independent voters of York. Although surprised by this setback, Pitts was oblivious to its significance and remained confident of ultimate success. He was encouraged in late 1892 by the government's decision to reveal the terms of the 1875 compromise and the outrage its exposure aroused in ultra-Protestant circles. To fan the flames of indignation he used his influence as Grand Master of the Provincial Orange Lodge to ensure that the schools issue was the main item on the agenda of its annual meeting in Fredericton on February 21, 1893.²¹ Proceedings began with a highly subjective account

19 *Reporter*, October 26, 1892.

20 *Ibid.*, October 26, 1892.

21 The following account of this meeting including the summary of the petitions adopted by it is taken from the March 8, 1893 issue of the *Reporter*.

of the Bathurst Schools affair by the Methodist minister of the Gloucester community, the Reverend Mr. Sellers, and quickly moved on to the unanimous adoption of several petitions calling for the revocation of various alleged special privileges enjoyed by the Catholic minority in the field of education and demanding redress for the grievances of the Bathurst Protestants. These, as well as the Reverend Mr. Sellers' speech, were circulated to every Orange Lodge in New Brunswick.

L'Évangéline and the *Moniteur Acadien* responded cautiously to these events. Aware that intemperate outbursts would only play into the hands of the ultra-Protestants, they adopted a moderate stance typified by the March 14 editorial of the *Moniteur* which described the Bathurst school situation as "an unhappy misunderstanding", expressed the hope that the harmony established between the two ethnic and religious groups by the 1875 compromise would not give way to "fanaticism and bigotry" and concluded by urging that any abuses existing at Bathurst be rectified without animosity.²² This caution was not unwarranted. By the time the Legislature convened in mid-March 10,000 signatures had been gathered on the various Orange Lodge petitions.²³ On March 23 Pitts laid them triumphantly on the table of the House of Assembly and four days later moved that a select committee be appointed to investigate their demands and recommend remedial action.

Vehemently urging the necessity of applying the principle of "Equal Rights for all — special privileges for none" he declared the concessions made to the Catholics in the 1875 settlement and in later administrative rulings by the government to be special privileges which "taking the view of the greatest good to the greatest number" should be voluntarily renounced.²⁴ He then went on to present the accumulated grievances of the Bathurst Protestants and concluded by defending himself against the charges of opportunism and bigotry which had been levelled by the government. In a passage which sheds a great deal of light on his approach to politics, he stated:

I know I shall rest under the accusation of being a stirrer up of strife in communities, that I have done this for political capital and all such arguments, but sir, I repudiate all this. It is one of the great disadvantages any person in the temperance or any other reform labours under, that he is obliged to appear to the world to be ultra and extreme in his views simply to get justice, and to bring the reform before the country.²⁵

Blair responded with an equally uncompromising defence of his policy.

²² *Moniteur Acadien*, March 14, 1893.

²³ James Hannay, *History of New Brunswick*, II, (Saint John, 1909), p. 362.

²⁴ *Synoptic Reports*, 1893, p. 57.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

He reminded the Assembly that prior to the 1875 settlement the situation in the province had reached the point that "It seemed as though the well being of the community was imperilled and not only the public but the social and business relations of the people were about to be rent asunder."²⁶ Stressing that the agreement had been made by the "very framers of the law, those who . . . were responsible for its non-sectarian character,"²⁷ he warned that its repeal would shatter the harmony which had been restored in 1875.

The lines of conflict had been drawn. Both Pitts and Blair had clearly revealed that they regarded the Bathurst controversy as merely a test case for determining the validity, justice and necessity of the *modus vivendi* of 1875. To Pitts the arrangement made a mockery of a Common Schools Act which professed itself to be a non-sectarian. For Blair, it was both a realistic solution to the problem of harnessing the Roman Catholics to the public school system and the bulwark preventing a renewal of the sectarian conflict which had nearly destroyed the province between 1871 and 1875. The conflict between Pitts and Blair was one between rigid adherence to principle and easy-going tolerance, between uniformity and diversity. At root it was the politics of confrontation versus the politics of accommodation.

It was a polarization welcomed by Pitts. Having forced Blair to endorse the 1875 compromise and the quasi-sectarian practices which had flourished under it, he now attempted to convince the Premier's Protestant supporters that on the schools issue "There is no hope for justice from any government in which Mr. Blair is. He was sold himself out to the Roman Catholics and dare not budge from the place he is cornered in."²⁸ When, early in April, Blair won a formal vote of confidence for his schools policy on a straight party vote Pitts, unconcerned by the fact that the Premier had kept his Protestant supporters in line, was positively jubilant. "From a political standpoint Mr. Blair has signed his own death warrant; a little temporary advantage may accrue to his party, but he has played right into the hands of those who are promoting the "equal rights" movement."²⁹

Then, on April 18, Blair moved to steal Pitts' thunder by appointing Judge J.J. Fraser of the provincial Supreme Court to conduct an independent investigation of the complaints of the Bathurst Protestants. A prominent Presbyterian, Fraser was acceptable to the ultra-Protestants and, as a member of the government which had negotiated the compromise of 1875, he was well-qualified to decide if its terms had been violated at Bathurst. Before his report was issued, however, Blair again acted to consolidate his moderate Protestant support by amending the school regulations to limit religious instruc-

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

28 *Reporter*, April 5, 1893.

29 *Ibid.*, April 12, 1893.

tion in the public schools to a period at the end of the school day and prohibit the leasing the new school buildings while unused space remained in existing facilities.³⁰ Finally in April 1894 Judge Fraser issued his report. It rejected the specific grievances submitted by the Reverend A.F. Thomson on behalf of the Bathurst Protestants as well as his allegation that the local trustees had been "motivated by a desire to promote the Catholic Church and to injure the Protestant Ratepayer."³¹ Judge Fraser conceded that there had been grave mismanagement on the part of the local board. Nevertheless, he went on, there was no evidence of clerical interference in the schools or that the Sisters had forced Protestant students to kneel or cross themselves, and he concluded that the local board had sought to operate the conventual school under the schools act. Both the *Moniteur* — which had opposed the government in the 1892 elections because of its patronage excesses when the religious issue had been raised only in York County — and the pro-Blair *L'Évangéline* hailed the report as a complete vindication of the Premier's policy.³² The latter went on to pose the pointed question, "Can the Acadians of New Brunswick do anything other than unite to give their full support to the Blair government?" In the Acadian parishes, at least, Pitt's design had been realized. Party lines had been superimposed on those of race and religion as the Irish and Acadian Catholics buried their differences to meet the common threat. It remained to be seen if the same realignment could be brought about in the Protestant counties.

When Fraser's report was submitted to the Legislature Pitts immediately forced a test of strength by moving a resolution on April 26 affirming the justice of the complaints of the Bathurst Protestants and urging the implementation of the principle of the equality of all classes and creeds before the law. The government responded by introducing an amendment welcoming the conclusions of Fraser's report, and with Blair declaring he regarded it as a motion of confidence it was passed by a straight party vote.³³ Once more the Premier's supporters had toed the party line on the explosive issue of religion in the schools. The crucial question now became whether Blair could also prevent the defection of his English Protestant supporters in the constituencies.

Pitts and his cohorts at Bathurst were by no means discouraged by their defeat in the assembly. Immediately following the vote the five directors of the Bathurst Orange Lodge launched a suit against the local trustees challenging their right to levy school taxes on the lodge's property on the grounds

30 MacNaughton, p. 227.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 224-225.

32 *Moniteur*, April 13, 1894, *L'Évangéline*, April 12, 1894.

33 MacNaughton, pp. 225-226. Judge Fraser was later appointed Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick.

that the district schools did not comply with the non-sectarian provisions of the Common Schools Act. This suit received the financial support of the New Brunswick Grand Orange Lodge and, as "Rogers *et al* versus the School Trustees of District Number Two of Bathurst", was brought before Judge Barker of the Equity Court.³⁴ With the Bathurst Schools Question now submitted to the courts for final settlement interest began to mount regarding the parallel controversy in Manitoba. Up to this point it had been practically ignored by Pitts and the Acadian newspapers. By 1894, however, the *Moniteur*, which supported the federal Conservatives, was pressing for a remedial bill and after the Privy Council ruled early in 1895 that the Dominion Parliament had the power to pass remedial legislation, the Manitoba controversy became a major issue in New Brunswick. In February the annual meeting of the provincial Grand Orange Lodge unanimously adopted a resolution pledging to oppose any candidate not committed to vote against remedial legislation³⁵ and three months later a Moncton Presbyterian minister, the Reverend J.M. Robinson, denounced separate schools from his pulpit.³⁶ Soon several other Protestant ministers in the province were following his example.

Meanwhile Pitts had moved yet another resolution regarding the Bathurst Schools affair in the spring session of the Legislature which urged the abolition of the dual system of grading there. Treating the motion as one of lack of confidence in the government and pointing out that the case was still pending before Judge Barker, Blair had no difficulty securing its rejection on a straight party vote.³⁷ Pitts, however, remained confident of ultimate success. A provincial election was in the offing for October and he was convinced that while Blair might be able to exert sufficient pressure to retain the support of his Protestant followers in the Legislature he could not prevent a mass desertion of the Protestant rank and file in the constituencies. Blair, however, had some aces remaining up his sleeve. The first was a redistribution bill passed in March, 1895, which granted three additional seats to the predominantly French counties of Kent, Gloucester and Madawaska.³⁸ Then, only a week before the balloting, he announced that a compromise settlement of the school difficulties at Bathurst had been reached which he misleadingly claimed was acceptable to the Orange Lodge.³⁹ It was in essence a power-sharing arrangement by

34 This account of the circumstances of the suit is taken from C.B. Sissons, *Church and State in Canadian Education* (Toronto, 1957), p. 246.

35 *Reporter*, February 27, 1895.

36 *Ibid.*, May 22, 1895.

37 MacNaughton, p. 226.

38 *Moniteur*, March 19, 1895.

39 This assertion was made more credible by the fact that a past Grand Master of the Orange Lodge and Opposition M.L.A., George Fowler, ran on a compromise ticket with a Blair supporter in Kings County. See John I. Little, "The Federal Election of 1896 in New Brunswick" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1970), p. 17.

which responsibility for the various schools in the district and the tax dollars required for their support were divided proportionately between the Catholic and Protestant trustees.⁴⁰ Thus, the Premier had enhanced the voting strength of his most fervent supporters, conciliated moderate Protestant voters *vis-à-vis* the situation at Bathurst, and sown dissension among the militant Protestants.

Now committed to Pitts' strategy, the opposition responded with renewed demands for a purely non-sectarian school system. On October 16 their hopes were shattered as Blair's supporters won thirty-seven of the forty-six seats. To embitter their defeat, seven Acadians, the most ever,⁴¹ were elected as supporters of the government. Moreover, although the opposition ticket was returned intact in York County, again denying Blair a seat, its percentage of the vote was substantially reduced and Pitts fell to third place on the four-man slate.⁴² Blair's gamble that the solid Catholic support his opponents had conceded him could be augmented by a sufficient number of moderate Protestant voters to enable him to obtain his majority had been totally justified. His astute political gambits and his rigid enforcement of party discipline had maintained the unity of his omnibus party, confounded Pitts, and won him a strong new lease of power. The politics of accommodation had defeated and discredited the politics of confrontation. New Brunswickers had demonstrated that they had no desire to see a renewal of the sectarian conflict of the 1870's.

Just how discredited Pitts and his brand of politics had become in New Brunswick in the aftermath of the 1895 election was revealed on February 26, 1896 when he moved a resolution in the Legislature urging the federal government not to proceed with its remedial bill for Manitoba and then was forced to withdraw it after nine different members refused to second the motion. Since only four newspapers in New Brunswick — the *Moniteur Acadien*, *L'Évangéline*, the *Moncton Transcript* and the *Saint John Sun* — supported the remedial bill⁴³ and even the *Saint John Globe*, which vigorously supported the Catholic position in the Bathurst dispute, opposed coercion,⁴⁴ the lack of support for Pitts' resolution must be interpreted mainly as a calculated insult to him.⁴⁵ Less than a month later on March 17, Judge Barker added injury to insult by dismissing the suit of the Orange Lodge trustees.

However, Pitts and his fellow advocates of cultural uniformity were still undaunted. Now focusing their attention on the Manitoba schools issue they were dumbfounded to find themselves allied with the French Catholic leader

40 *Moniteur*, October 11, 1895.

41 *Ibid.*, October 18, 1895.

42 *Reporter*, October 23, 1895.

43 *Moniteur*, July 12, 1895.

44 *L'Évangéline*, February 18, 1896.

45 Some federal Conservatives who were opposition M.L.A.'s may also have been reluctant to embarrass their federal counterparts.

of the federal Liberal Party, Wilfrid Laurier. When he moved the six months hoist for the federal government's remedial bill, Pitts commented incredulously "The remarks expressed sentiments of independence never anticipated of a Roman Catholic."⁴⁶ However, he soon recovered from his shock and by April was urging that all M.P.'s who voted for the remedial bill should be defeated at the polls and that those receiving favours from the government for doing so "ought to be driven out of decent society."⁴⁷ In York the target of this statement was the Honourable George Foster, Minister of Finance in the federal government. For Pitts, however, Foster's stature was overshadowed by his support for the remedial bill despite his efforts to conciliate ultra-Protestant opinion in York County by falsely asserting that the bill provided no money for separate schools.⁴⁸ Despite Pitts' neutrality, however, Foster was elected on June 23 with a 1542 vote majority, more than double that amassed by Pitts in 1895.⁴⁹ Conservative candidates also did well in the province as a whole. In the Acadian parishes the voters found the *Moniteur's* claim that the Conservatives were the party of "Justice to Minorities"⁵⁰ more credible than *L'Evangéline's* argument that Laurier's "sunny ways" would bring more substantial results than the remedial bill.⁵¹ They cast almost a bloc vote for the government and enabled it to carry every constituency with a substantial Francophone population.⁵² Combined with victories in Carleton, Charlotte and York these triumphs gave the Conservatives nine of New Brunswick's fourteen seats.

Nationally, the Liberals carried the day and, to Pitts, the significance of Laurier's triumph was obvious: "The Conservative Party — all politicians will have learned a lesson, and that is that religious appeals and catering will not be supported by the great bulk of the people."⁵³ Seemingly his views had been endorsed by the electorate. So heady was the wine of success that Pitts even greeted the Laurier-Greenway compromise with the astounding assertion that "These are about the lines the *Reporter* had advocated from the beginning of the contention." However, he quickly reverted to form by going on to warn, "Religious instruction after school hours will be found to be a delusion and a snare, and will cause no end of trouble," and concluded "Better to have had strictly national schools on the same lines as New Brunswick was *intended* to have."⁵⁴ Aside from Pitts' predictable reservations the

46 *Reporter*, March 11, 1895.

47 *Ibid.*, April 1, 1896.

48 See Little, pp. 34-35.

49 *Reporter*, 1896. Pitts did not endorse the Liberal candidate.

50 *Moniteur*, June 9, 1896.

51 *L'Evangéline*, April 2, 1896.

52 *Moniteur*, June 26, 1896. These were Victoria, Restigouche, Gloucester, Northumberland, Westmorland and Kent Counties.

53 *Reporter*, June 24, 1896.

54 *Ibid.*, October 21, 1896. Emphasis Pitts.

settlement of both the Bathurst and Manitoba School Questions and the consequent easing of social and religious tensions were almost universally welcomed in New Brunswick. Indicative of the province's desire for ethnic and sectarian harmony was the fact that on March 18, 1896 a Mgr. Doucet in a speech delivered at the University of New Brunswick had been interrupted by hearty applause when he urged the necessity and desirability of conserving both the French and English languages in Canada.⁵⁵ The new mood came to full fruition amidst the flood tide of imperial sentiment which swept the province during the Diamond Jubilee festivities of 1897. So pervasive was it that *L'Évangéline* was moved to hail Laurier's British preferential tariff for drawing more closely together "Our Dominion of Canada to England, *our mother country*."⁵⁶ Even Pitts who had declared that "The conception of Imperial grandeur is not merely commercial in its character, it is essentially national and racial,"⁵⁷ was sufficiently impressed by the Prime Minister's exploits in Britain during jubilee summer to observe:

It is to be said to the credit of Mr. Laurier that he has done more in the last few months to enlighten Great Britain as to the importance of the colony of Canada, and to bring about a closer union of the Colonies, than all the Imperial Federation societies over which Sir Charles [Tupper] has been presiding . . . these past ten years.⁵⁸

Unfortunately but not surprisingly, this almost unnatural state of affairs came to an end in the fall of 1898 when Pitts, angered at the anti-prohibition vote cast by Quebec in the federal government's plebiscite on the question, resumed his campaign against what he considered to be French and Catholic domination of Canadian politics. In the Dominion as a whole 51.3 per cent of the voters supported prohibition. Every province except Quebec, 81.9 per cent of whose voters rejected it, endorsed the measure. Maritimers cast 81.5 per cent of their votes for prohibition and in the temperance stronghold of Carleton County 94.2 per cent of the voters favoured it.⁵⁹ Pitts' analysis of these results was predictable. Contending that the French had "invariably voted rum" while Protestants had overwhelmingly supported prohibition he declared: "Quebec had managed to control the parties, but on a

55 Omer Legresley, *L'Enseignement Du Français En Acadie 1604-1926* (Bathurst, 1926), p. 236.

56 *L'Évangéline*, July 1, 1897. Emphasis mine.

57 *Reporter*, June 23, 1897.

58 *Ibid.*, August 4, 1897.

59 These percentages have been calculated from the "Report on the Prohibition Plebiscite, September 29, 1898" in Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1899, Vol. XXXIII, Nov. 20, pp. 248-264 and p. 312. The results of the plebiscite did not result in prohibition legislation because of the closeness of the overall result and the fact that only 43.9 per cent of the Dominion's eligible voters cast ballots.

question of this kind there would seem to be a time when party lines are shaken up."⁶⁰ It was not entirely accurate, however.

L'Evangéline, in fact, had editorially campaigned for prohibition⁶¹ and, although all three French counties did reject prohibition their turnout was extremely low and a sizeable minority of those voting cast temperance ballots.⁶² Pitts, however, preferred to cling to his stereotypes.

Increasingly convinced that universal male suffrage was yet another impediment to his programme, Pitts advocated in 1898 an extension of the franchise to women who could meet an educational qualification and its restriction to those men who could meet the same standard.⁶³ This measure was designed to disenfranchise many uneducated Catholics as well as the more corruptible element of the Protestant population while providing a bloc vote for moral reform from the educated women. He proposed such an amendment to the New Brunswick franchise laws in the spring session of 1899 but it was rejected 34-7 on a straight party vote.⁶⁴ This proposal, of course, dovetailed neatly with the goals Pitts had been pursuing since the beginning of the decade: exclusion of the French Canadians and Roman Catholics from political power and the creation of a militant English Protestant majority which would enact the measures he advocated and bring cultural homogeneity to New Brunswick and Canada. His comments on the prohibition plebiscite strongly indicate that these had always been his underlying motivations. Contending that the result again demonstrated Quebec's opposition to "the advancement of morality and social reforms" and citing the danger of Quebec "with its foreign language, foreign interests and foreign laws . . . exercising a continuous controlling influence" on Canada's affairs, he deplored Britain's failure to immediately assimilate the *Canadiens* after the conquest. Such a step, he concluded, would have prevented "many of the difficulties that have since arisen."⁶⁵

Many New Brunswickers shared these beliefs. The Temperance Committee of the 1899 provincial Baptist Convention, for instance, portrayed the prohibition plebiscite as a contest between "moral law-abiding Christian citizens" and "the saloon keeper, the brewer, the fallen inebriate and Rome,"⁶⁶ Yet, even before the gathering, which should have been a hotbed of militant Protestantism the committee's report was sharply criticized for being "too political", revealing the basic flaw in Pitts' grand design, its inability

60 *Reporter*, October 5, 1898.

61 *L'Evangéline*, September 22, 1899.

62 See Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1899, Vol. XXXIII, Nov. 20, pp. 252-253 and p. 261.

63 *Reporter*, November 9, 1898.

64 *Ibid.*, April 19, 1899.

65 *Ibid.*, November 16, 1898.

66 Quoted in the *Saint John Evening Globe*, September 11, 1899.

to win the electoral support of those other than the "true believers" in the Orange Lodges and the Sons of Temperance. Only in the York County election of 1892, when the situation at Bathurst seemed to indicate that the non-sectarian character of the school system was in actual peril, had the pattern been broken. In the absence of such a perceived threat, the great mass of Protestant voters were only alienated by Pitts' missionary zeal. His insistence that prohibition, sabbatarianism, clean politics and the eradication of Catholic domination comprised an integrated programme which had to be accepted *in toto* also hindered his individual causes. Newspapers like the *Moniteur* and the *Saint John Evening Globe*, for example, were equally committed to purifying political life, but shrank from the kind of coercive, interventionist state which Pitts declared necessary for the accomplishment of that goal. The *Globe*, in an editorial opposing sabbatarian laws, admonished, "Let the church teach men by precept and example how the day should be kept; but the church goes further than is necessary when it calls upon the state to punish those who do not listen to the teachings of the church in this manner."⁶⁷ Similarly, many New Brunswick voters who shared Pitts' concern about Catholic domination were put off by his support of total prohibition. In short, Pitts' programme, though logically consistent in his own mind, appealed as a unit only to those whose assumptions and goals exactly coincided with his. Most voters perceived it simply as a hodgepodge of controversial proposals which they might support in part but which, as a package, was unacceptable. A pragmatic politician like Blair could and did thwart it by responding to the most legitimate demands it championed, gaining the support of those segments of the population it alienated, and augmenting this sufficiently to create a majority by shrewd use of patronage and enforcement of party discipline.

In the provincial election of February 18, 1899 these fundamental weaknesses finally led to Pitts' personal defeat in York County, while the Emerson government, the lineal descendent of the Blair administration, was returned to office with thirty-nine of the forty-six seats.⁶⁸ The Acadian population, heeding *L'Evangéline's* endorsement of the government as one "of progress, of justice to Catholics, the government supported by our Acadian contingent in the Legislature,"⁶⁹ again voted almost *en bloc* for the ministerial candidates, and increased their representation in the Legislature to eight from seven.⁷⁰ It appeared that Pitts' political career, and with it the prominence of race and religion as political issues in New Brunswick, had

67 *Ibid.*, September 5, 1899.

68 *Reporter*, February 28, 1899.

69 *L'Evangéline*, February 16, 1899.

70 *Ibid.*, February 23, 1899. One Acadian oppositionist, a M. Melanson, was elected in Westmorland County.

ended. However, the passions aroused by the South African War were to provide him with one final opportunity to sound his favourite tocsin and revive his political fortunes.

At first the war situation seemed made to order for Pitts' design. The outbreak of hostilities evoked widespread enthusiasm in the English Protestant sections of the province with even the autonomist-minded Saint John *Globe* headlining its editorial on the British declaration of war "Advance of civilization."⁷¹ This, combined with the opposition of Bourassa and Tarte to Canadian participation in the war, Laurier's equivocal policy of allowing the formation of voluntary contingents rather than sending a Canadian army to the front, and the hysterical diatribes published in the French Canadian press against the war and Great Britain, created an explosive mixture of ethnic tension which Pitts was not slow to exploit. The Acadians, long-schooled in prudence, quickly made themselves impervious to his attacks. Following the outbreak of the war Senator Poirier proclaimed the loyalty of his people in Parliament and the municipal councillors of Kent County gave tangible expression to his sentiments by voting a subscription to defray the expenses of the local volunteer contingent.⁷² The Acadian press accepted the war as a duty owed to Great Britain and at its conclusion *L'Evangéline* could truthfully state of the Acadian war effort, "We were faithful . . . to the Old Country to the extent of offering her the elite of our young and valiant soldiers."⁷³ Thus denied the opportunity of questioning the loyalty of the Acadians, Pitts concentrated on resistance to the war in Quebec. He was certainly not hampered by lack of material here, filling his columns with the most rabid anti-British editorials produced by the French-Canadian press.

The federal election of 1900 provided the opportunity to bring about a change of government and Pitts was determined to make the most of it. Convinced that the Conservatives should focus their attention on the government's alleged coddling of treason in Quebec while promising total commitment to the war, he used his remaining influence to secure the York Conservative nomination for the Reverend Dr. W.F. MacLeod, a man who seemed to him to be the ideal candidate. A Baptist minister, an Orangeman and the former editor of the *Religious Intelligencer*, MacLeod ran on the alliterative platform of "Patriotism, Purity and Prohibition".⁷⁴ He was opposed by Alexander Gibson Jr., a wealthy Marysville mill owner who extolled the prosperity being enjoyed by the country under the Liberal administration and avoided any reference to the war. On election night Pitts' disillusion must

71 *Globe*, October 16, 1899.

72 Rumilly, p. 833.

73 *L'Evangéline*, January 3, 1901.

74 *Reporter*, October 24, 1900.

have been complete. The seat Foster had won by 1542 votes in 1896 had been lost by MacLeod by 75 votes.⁷⁵ Again a pragmatic appeal based on good times and the lure of being on the government side had been far more effective than a militant call for Pitts' brand of reform. The Conservatives did equally poorly in the province as a whole. Every riding with a substantial Francophone population switched from Conservative to Liberal and the latter party also captured four Anglophone constituencies to give them nine of New Brunswick's fourteen seats. Most of the five ridings held by the Conservatives were strongholds of the Orange Lodge. Counting York, their closest defeat, the six constituencies where the Conservatives ran strongest contained over two-thirds of the hundred plus Orange Lodges in the province.⁷⁶ The party had been reduced to an ultra-Protestant faction.

It was almost the end for Pitts. One final humiliation remained. After a heated battle in the courts the York Conservatives managed to have Gibson's election overturned on the grounds that his agents had engaged in corrupt practices and, in December, 1901, the same candidates met in a by-election. To Pitts' chagrin Gibson was re-elected by an even wider margin.⁷⁷ For Pitts this was the last hurrah. In September, 1902 he resigned as editor of the *Reporter*,⁷⁸ and completely retired from public life. In December, 1902 the paper itself ceased publication. These events, however, were only the last rites for Pitts' twelve-year campaign to make race and religion the overriding issues of New Brunswick politics. As early as March of that year it was obvious the cause had drawn its final breath when at the annual meeting of the Grand Orange Lodge the priority item of discussion had been the explosive issue of an orphan's home for the children of deceased Orangemen.⁷⁹ Death came not with a bang but a whimper.

Why, in a period which saw similar movements in other regions of the sountry substantially achieve their aims and in a province where the situation seemed ripe for similar "success", did it fail? To a large extent, the explanation lies with Pitts' insistence on acceptance of his programme *in toto* rather than concentrating on a single issue. Other contributing factors were the political acumen of Premier Blair, the prudence of the Acadian and Irish Catholic minorities and their sheer numerical strength which put Blair in the happy position of having to retain only a small proportion of the twenty-six Protestant-dominated seats.⁸⁰ Probably the most important single reason for

75 *Ibid.*, November 14, 1900.

76 The Directory of the Orange Lodges used for this calculation is contained in the November 28, 1900 issue of the *Reporter*. The Conservatives gained two predominantly Protestant seats — Kings and Queens-Sunbury.

77 *Ibid.*, January 1, 1902. Gibson's majority in the by-election was 892.

78 *Ibid.*, September 10, 1902.

79 *Ibid.*, March 26, 1902.

80 Defined as constituencies in which more than 60 per cent of the population was Protestant.

the failure of Pitts' campaign, however, was the province's desire to avoid a repetition of the bitter sectarian conflict of the 1870's. In a period of economic stagnation and both absolute and relative population decline for the English Protestant sections of the province Pitts' call for a militant crusade which threatened the social fabric of the province and promised no tangible benefits must have seemed quixotic if not irrelevant. Together these influences prevented New Brunswick from experiencing the worst excesses of the cultural conflict of the 1890's. When the tumult and the shouting of Pitts' editorials ceased the province quickly returned to the consensus politics it found so congenial.

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF THE
POPULATION OF NEW BRUNSWICK BY
NATIONALITY AND RELIGION 1871-1901

(Source: *Census of Canada*)

TABLE I

POPULATION OF NEW BRUNSWICK
BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION (Percentages)

DENOMINATION	1871	1881	1891	1901
ROMAN CATHOLIC	33.6	34.0	36.1	38.0
BAPTIST	24.7	25.2	24.8	24.4
ANGLICAN	15.9	14.6	13.4	12.6
PRESBYTERIAN	13.6	13.4	12.6	11.9
METHODIST	10.5	10.7	11.1	10.9
OTHER	1.7	2.1	2.0	2.2
POPULATION	285,594	321,233	321,263	331,120

TABLE II

POPULATION OF NEW BRUNSWICK
BY NATIONAL ORIGIN (Percentages)

NATIONAL ORIGIN	1871	1881	1901
ENGLISH	29.3	29.1	31.5
IRISH	35.2	31.5	25.2
FRENCH	15.7	17.6	24.2
SCOTTISH	14.3	15.5	14.6
OTHER	5.5	6.3	4.5
POPULATION	285,594	321,233	331,120

TABLE III

ROMAN CATHOLIC POPULATION
OF NEW BRUNSWICK
BY NATIONAL ORIGINS (Percentages)

	1871	1881	1901
ACADIAN CATHOLICS	46.8	51.9	63.6
NON-ACADIAN CATHOLICS	53.2	48.1	36.4
CATHOLIC POPULATION	96,016	109,091	125,698
NON-ACADIAN CATHOLIC POPULATION	51,109	52,456	45,710