

# “Damn TORYISM say I” Dissent, Print Culture, and Anti-Confederation Thought in James Barry’s Diary

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“Damn TORYISM say I”:  
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Should some old pamphlet or bundle of newspapers of the present day find its way into some old chest, packed away and forgotten in some cellar or attic, should its resurrection two or three hundred years hence disclose the truth that there were actually people, in 1867, who poured out their wretched tirades against this Union; and that talked of it as selling the rights and liberties of Nova Scotia, they could scarcely believe their eyes. It is difficult to realize it even now.<sup>1</sup>

Tomorrow we will be swallowed up in the Dominion of Canada. Nova Scotia will become a province of Canada and Canadians will rule and suck the life blood out of it. Damn TORYISM say I.<sup>2</sup>

LATE JUNE 1867 WAS HOT AND DRY. Pictou County had seen only a few dribbles of rain around mid-month. As a miller, James Barry worried about dry spells. His diary entries that summer nervously commented on lack of rain and the low water levels in his mill pond. Poor water levels limited how much grain he could grind and often prevented sawing altogether. His mother-in-law, “Widow McLennan,” was dying, or at least “folks say, for I have not been up there in years.” “Up there” was Roger’s Hill, the settlement his wife Bell came from. It was not far, about two miles from Barry’s house on a route Bell covered two or three times most weeks. The widow’s passing on the 27th drew barely a mention in his diary. Amidst talk of the weather, however, Barry devoted lots of space to lamenting the passing of an independent Nova Scotia. He was not pleased. The “great struggle” for independence, he was sure, would continue, but on 1 July 1867 patriotic Nova Scotians like him would mourn.

Confederation and its baneful impact is the hoariest of tales in Nova Scotian history. While the political history is well documented, there remains little attention to the equally important cultural context. This paper situates the Confederation saga in one man’s immersion into the trans-Atlantic network of book culture. Considering the diary of one very extraordinary, but also quite ordinary, man – James Barry – suggests we have misread part of the Confederation debates. A key aspect of this misreading is religion, which has played a significant role in the Confederation historiography, but usually as a proxy for faction. Barry, however, allows us to see religion as a dimension of critical political culture. I argue here that James Barry’s

1 *Colonial Standard* (Pictou), 2 July 1867.

2 Diary of James Barry (Barry Diary), 30 June 1867, MG1, vol. 1217, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA); see similar comment on 23 May 1867. A very early version of this was presented to the Canadian-American Studies seminar at Brock University. My thanks to Ingrid Makus for her very helpful comments. I tweet daily from Barry’s diary under the hashtag #JamesBarryDiary.

politics closely aligned with a major stream of anti-Confederation thinking in Nova Scotia, and that we can see in his position a rich historical vein of dissenting church opposition to imposition by larger political forces. This was neither factionalism, nor sad rural provincialism. Barry's position was thoughtful, careful, and considered, and it drew on decades of popular dissenting Presbyterian responses to the political and intellectual impositions of powerful state churches.

This essay situates Barry in the wider Presbyterian-colonial networks of the Atlantic world. Following suggestions in the historiography on Scottish Presbyterianism in British North America,<sup>3</sup> I explore the place of Presbyterian print culture in an ordinary man's position on Confederation. Scottish Presbyterianism has a complex history, marked by bitter debate, several major fissures, and often sharply divided congregations. The most basic divide was over the issue of the relationship to the state, where a statist and hierarchical church with Calvinist beliefs contended with opposition from various liberal evangelical groups who were congregational in their views on church governance and liberal democratic in their secular politics. Three key ruptures tore the church apart over the 18th and 19th centuries. The last one, in 1843, saw fully two-thirds of Presbyterians leave the Church of Scotland ("the Kirk") to form the Free (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland. This was particularly true in Pictou, where political divides between conservative "Kirk" and reform "anti-Burgher" Presbyterians marked politics from the 1790s to the 1850s.<sup>4</sup> Significant dimensions of liberal political reform in 19th-century Britain – most notably the great reform bill of 1832 and the abolition of slavery in 1833 – owe part of their success to the efforts of evangelicals like the dissenting Presbyterians and Methodists.<sup>5</sup> Much the same was true in British North America, where major liberal reforms such as temperance, responsible government, support for abolition, public schooling, and institutional reform were all at least significantly advanced by evangelicals.<sup>6</sup>

3 Michael Gauvreau, "The Dividends of Empire: Church Establishments and Contested British Identities in the Canadas and the Maritimes, 1780-1850," in *Transatlantic Subjects: Ideas, Institutions, and Social Experience in Post-Revolutionary British North America*, ed. Nancy Christie (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 199-250; Valerie Wallace, "'Preaching Disaffection' in the North Atlantic: Jotham Blanchard and the Reform Crisis in Scotland and Nova Scotia, 1827-37," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 3 (2014): 377-99.

4 Barbara C. Murison, "The Kirk versus the Free Church: The Struggle for the Soul of the Maritimes," in *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada*, ed. Charles Scobie (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 19-31; Alan Wilson, *Highland Shepherd: James MacGregor, Father of the Scottish Enlightenment in Nova Scotia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

5 Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

6 Gail Campbell, "Disenfranchised but not Quiescent: Women Petitioners in New Brunswick in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Acadiensis* XVIII, no. 2 (Spring 1989), 22-54; B. Anne Wood, "The Significance of Evangelical Presbyterian Politics in the Construction of State Schooling: A Case Study of the Pictou District, 1817-1866," *Acadiensis* XX, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 62-85; Janet Miron, *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public: Institutional Visiting in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). More generally, see Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Language of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

Evangelicals' liberal-reform politics stemmed from their theology. While some Presbyterians adopted Calvinist notions of "partial atonement" (that is, that Christ died for the sins of only the elect – those predestined for salvation), dissenting evangelical Presbyterians argued in varying degrees that Christ died for all sin and all sinners. Humans thus had the freedom – the will – to accept or reject salvation. All people then were offered the hope of salvation, a position that held great appeal among the poor and more generally across a dynamic and changing society. More radical evangelicals, as well as Congregationalists, found common cause in forging connections between theology, church governance, and politics. The choice of salvation highlighted the voluntarist basis of real Christianity. Strictures imposed from above, be that the state or state-supported hierarchies, were oppressive. Faith, and the struggle for salvation, required resistance. These themes emerge clearly in Barry's rejection of the politics of Confederation.

James Barry (1822-1906) was a miller, printer, fiddler, iconoclastic dissenting Presbyterian, and a man who read a lot of books. The child of dissenting Presbyterian immigrants from the early 1800s, he described himself as a Morisonian, a still more radical Presbyterian sect. Such extreme dissent marked much of his activities. Barry was born, lived, and died on Six Mile Brook, a stream off the West River in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. He never travelled further than Truro (less than 20 miles west). Locally, Barry consistently lived his life outside the dominant circles of his devout Presbyterian neighbours; he never attended "preaching," and many scornful Sunday entries record dozens passing his house, sheep-like to his mind, to services in nearby Salt Springs or Durham. He never joined the many church-based temperance, missionary, or literary groups that marked Presbyterian life in Pictou County.<sup>7</sup> He lived a devout life of regular Bible-reading, theological debate with his neighbours, and persistent criticism of what he deemed their hypocrisies and their erroneous beliefs and practices. Despite this apparent isolation, books and newspapers allowed Barry a cosmopolitan view of the centres of religious and broader intellectual debate through the middle of the 19th century.

Confederation marked a period of sustained political engagement for Barry. In his diary, he regularly commented on the major figures of the debates. Joseph Howe (the "great moving object" in the resistance to Confederation) and Charles Tupper (the "servile Tory") figured most commonly, but other provincial and local figures were also noted.<sup>8</sup> He also subscribed to two newspapers – the *Eastern Chronicle* (New Glasgow) and the *Halifax Citizen* – both decidedly liberal-reform and anti-Confederation. Over the course of the Confederation debates, and then the Nova Scotia government's efforts to repeal, Barry attended numerous meetings, read much of the anti-Confederation literature (including William Garvie's satirical account of the Quebec meetings: *Barney Rooney's Letters on Confederation, Botheration, and Political Transmogrification*<sup>9</sup>), and discussed the issue with his neighbours and with

7 Much of the Presbyterian literature I cite in this essay supports this point, but a particularly useful contrast to Barry is offered in Allan C. Dunlop, "George Patterson: Presbyterian Propagandist", in Scobie, *Contribution of Presbyterianism*, 79-89.

8 Barry Diary, 1 March 1867.

9 William Garvie, *Barney Rooney's Letters on Confederation, Botheration, and Political Transmogrification* (Halifax: Citizen, 1865).

others when out on shopping trips in Pictou, Truro, New Glasgow, and Durham. And he was not alone. “Confederation is the great talk,” he observed in August 1867, while also noting that many were busy with haying. “Nothing talked about now but Confederation and the Canadians.”<sup>10</sup>

When the Confederation campaign was underway, Barry and others from Six Mile Brook attended debates in Mount Thom, Pictou, and as far away as Truro. Howe was impressive, and Barry thought Wilkins an effective speaker. At Mount Thom, Barry was pleased with the speakers, save for Pro-Confederate James McDonald’s “blithering.”<sup>11</sup> After attending several meetings in the summer and fall of 1867, Barry declared that “was enough for me. The antis had the best of it anyway.”<sup>12</sup> Reading Barry’s diary during these months, one emerges with a sense of a vibrant political culture marked by engaged discussion and a variety of viewpoints. The frequency with which he denounced his Tory neighbours makes clear that there was no local consensus.<sup>13</sup> One evening he assuaged an angry customer whom Barry “soon got to forget his troubles by talking to him about the bright prospects of the Liberals” in the upcoming elections in the fall of 1867.<sup>14</sup> Other neighbours supported Confederation. Barry and his neighbour Murdoch McKay “got pretty hot” while discussing “Confederation and other damnable Tory doings.” His neighbour was a “damned Tory” and, if that was not enough, Barry felt he had overpaid McKay for the work he had done.<sup>15</sup> McKay perhaps needed that employment; similarly, as a miller Barry needed customers and risked displeasing them. “Some Tories,” he reported on the eve of the September 1867 election, were saying that if I went out to vote that they would not give me their custom – they be damned!”<sup>16</sup> The truth is that there were other mills not too far away, but distance would have prevented many from following through on that threat.

Until 1864, Barry had had little active engagement with politics. He did, however, have connections to the broader worlds of politics in James Dawson, James Patterson, and most notably Martin Wilkins, who was one of the leading anti-confederate figures on the province. A former Tory, and an Anglican, who converted religion and politics some time just after 1860,<sup>17</sup> Wilkins and Barry did not often travel in the same circles; but Barry notes the lawyer-politician came by the mill a few times to purchase oats for his horses. Little more is revealed, except for one occasion on the eve of the September 1867 elections: “Martin I. Wilkins called here this evening for feed for a horse and we had some conversation of Confederation. He is a first rate man.”<sup>18</sup> That is a small comment, to be sure, but frankly it is one of

10 Barry Diary: 2 August 1867, 23 August 1867.

11 Barry Diary: 23 July 1867, 7 August 1867.

12 Barry Diary, 31 July 1867.

13 Barry Diary: 29 October 1867, 11 November 1867.

14 Barry Diary, 14 September 1867.

15 Barry Diary: 26 August, 27 August 1867. See a similar entry on another neighbor on 10 February 1867.

16 Barry Diary, 17 September 1867.

17 R.A. MacLean, “Wilkins, Martin Isaac,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/wilkins\\_martin\\_isaac\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/wilkins_martin_isaac_11E.html).

18 Barry Diary, 3 September 1867.

the few times Barry said anything positive, much less laudatory, about anyone. His reading of the *Eastern Chronicle* and the *Citizen* no doubt offered him a good sense of Wilkins's position. Barry also seems to have read Wilkins's anti-Confederation pamphlet, *Confederation Examined in the Light of Common Sense*.<sup>19</sup> Though not wholly adopting Wilkins's position, which was largely an argument on the unconstitutionality of the British North America Act and a criticism of the un-British character of the federal arrangement, both men highlighted the "tyrannical" matter of Britain forcing Nova Scotia to join the Canadian colonies. Both men also saw parallels between Nova Scotia and the southern Confederacy being deprived of their liberty by a despotic force. And both saw, too, that separation from the British Empire was a possible response to Britain's heavy hand.<sup>20</sup>

Discussions of both sacred and secular matters animated everyday life in Six Mile Brook. As an avid participant in the trans-Atlantic world of letters, Barry's greater influences came from the booksellers James Dawson and James Patterson, and thus of course ultimately from the Presbyterian literary world with which they connected him. Even in his local community, the ideas of the Atlantic world circulated widely and fostered discussion. Barry bought a lot of books, and he loaned them to his friends. He also borrowed books from others. These often formed the basis of discussions far more sophisticated than we might imagine in such an apparently remote locale. April 1864 was the warmest spring anyone in the area could recall, but the major topic on two days was the writings of "Baron Swedenburg" [Emanuel Swedenborg], the Swedish philosopher, theologian, and mystic.<sup>21</sup> Barry had little good to say – he does not tell us why, though the mysticism and prophetic dimensions are likely – but his neighbour Roderick MacKenzie defended his position. We do not know the details, but such discussions continued in subsequent weeks – Barry having loaned McKenzie Jean-Anthony Llorente's *History of the Inquisition in Spain* (Madrid 1822, trans London 1826) and Archibald Alexander's *Universalism: False and Unscriptural* (Philadelphia, 1851).<sup>22</sup> Discussions such as these appear to have been common, and while Barry, typically, was harshly critical of his neighbours' views on these and other matters it is clear that he relished the engagement and so it appears did they.

Religion and history were the two most common themes evident in Barry's reading. Religion, particularly the many fine strands of Presbyterian sectarian dispute, was by far the largest. There was a significant range here, but most were mainstream works on Protestantism and Presbyterianism in particular. He referenced a range of works from classic 17th- and 18th-century evangelical texts such as Robert Fleming and Jonathan Edwards to major 19th-century American

19 Barry Diary, 24 June 1865. See also Martin J. Wilkins, *Confederation Examined in the Light of Common Sense* (Halifax: Hall, 1867).

20 Wilkins, *Confederation Examined*, 7, 42, 47; Barry Diary: 11 Nov 1867 (tyrannical), 30 June 1868 (separation).

21 Barry Diary: 10 March 1864, 9 April 1864.

22 On Alexander see, Michael J. Paulus Jr., "Archibald Alexander and the Use of Books: Theological Education and Print Culture in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 4 (2001): 639-99. On Llorente, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan\\_Antonio\\_Llorente](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Antonio_Llorente).



Presbyterians such as Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller.<sup>23</sup> It is fair to say, however, that the broadly disputatious dimensions of Presbyterianism in general, and dissenting Presbyterians in particular, lent a decidedly reformist, sometimes anti-statist, dimension to his reading. The most notable work of history, and one he alluded to several times in his diary, was Macaulay's *History of England*. Here, too, we no doubt see the influence of James Dawson, the Pictou newspaper editor and bookseller whose evangelical Whig-reform ways connected Barry to other prominent dissenting Presbyterian Pictonians such as Thomas McCulloch, John William Dawson, James Patterson, and Jotham Blanchard, as well as to the publishing worlds of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Philadelphia.<sup>24</sup> This was a world of men who believed in the Word of Christ, reform, and, less comfortably, in British progress. The last point might seem to contradict their dissenting Presbyterian beliefs, but certainly does not preclude a view that broad British principles allowed sufficient freedom for a dissenter's place in society.<sup>25</sup>

These liberal-reform views are evident in Barry's positions on two of the major issues of the mid-century Atlantic world: abolition and the US Civil War. In both cases we can see a pattern of siding with the oppressed. Barry only addressed slavery twice, and while in neither case did he say very much in both instances he expressed clear sympathies for the enslaved.<sup>26</sup> Such sympathy, however, only went so far and, like many Maritimers,<sup>27</sup> Barry sided with the South in the Civil War. "Not that I approve of slavery," he wrote, seemingly to reassure himself, but "my sympathies are with the South." Invoking biblical language, he condemned the northern United States as a

23 Robert Fleming, *The Fulfilling of the Scripture in three parts*, two vol. (Glasgow: Stephen Young, 1801 [1671]); Jonathan Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (Boston: Kneeland, 1754); Samuel Miller, *An Essay, on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831); Archibald Alexander *Universalism: False and Unscriptural* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851). I am maintaining a complete list of the titles noted in Barry's diary on my blog at <http://danieljosephsamson.com>.

24 On purchasing books from James Dawson, see Barry Diary: 22 June 1850, 23 December 1853, 23 February 1854. James Dawson's papers are part of his son's papers. See John William Dawson Papers, MG 1022, James Dawson, 1800-1861 (c.45-c.47), McGill University Archives, Montreal. Most of these papers are bills and letters between Dawson and Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Boston publishers and book distributors, as well as correspondence with dealers in northern Nova Scotia (Parrsborough, Tatamagouche, Antigonish, and Plaster Cove). Dawson also advertised books for sale in *The Bee*, which he edited in the late 1830s.

25 All of these men were dissenting Presbyterians and all were critical of undemocratic practices; Dawson clearly supported the cause of responsible government in British North America, when he was editor of *The Bee* (see, for example, 22 June 1836). Blanchard produced the liberal-reformist newspaper, the *Colonial Patriot*, during the 1820s and 1830s, while Dawson and Patterson edited *The Bee* (1830s) and the *Eastern Chronicle* (1850s and 60s). On Blanchard, see Wallace, "Preaching Disaffection."

26 Barry Diary, 31 May 1865.

27 Greg Marquis, *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998). Marquis makes it clear that while most Nova Scotians supported the north, there were not only mixed feelings but also what can only be described as inconsistent views on the place of slavery and freedom in their understandings of the war.

“proud, boastful, and wicked nation.” Apparently unaware of the irony, he concluded, “I say Lord confound the OPPRESSORS wherever they may be found and let the oppressed go.”<sup>28</sup> This theme of siding with the oppressed, as we will see, was central to Barry’s politics. And, while consistent, it meant Barry often found himself aligned with foes. The *Colonial Standard*, the conservative Pictou County paper of which Barry had nothing good to say, took very much the same position of the Civil War.<sup>29</sup>

Such positions on slavery and political oppression were common in dissenting Presbyterian circles, but particularly so in the radical Morisonian sect to which Barry claimed adherence. Morisonians’ belief in universal atonement emphasized free will, individual autonomy, and minimal government. They were so autonomist in their congregational governance that they were denied entry in the breakaway Free Church Presbyterians when they left the Church of Scotland in 1843.<sup>30</sup> Rejecting any kind of centralized authority in church governance, they were radically democratic in both spiritual and political spheres. Only congregational elders were allotted any special influence, and these too were subject to criticism. James Morison, breaking with the Calvinist tradition of even the secessionist churches, emphasized free will, maintaining that the Atonement offered motives to virtue. Much like the Princeton Theological Institute fellows, Morisonians maintained that these dimensions of faith also extended to the secular world. Human government, like church membership, had to be by consent.<sup>31</sup>

Barry frequently reasserted his Morisonian ways, but it is hard to find their Congregationalist tendencies because he rarely went to church. He was deeply devout, discussing his faith regularly in the diaries and in conversations with his neighbours; he reflected on theological questions, including the question of Atonement, and offered damning criticisms of Catholicism and of his wayward Presbyterian neighbours. Evangelicals generally emphasize a direct relationship with God and understand the Bible – or more precisely the Word of God – as the direct route to God’s Kingdom. Evangelicals’ rejection of intermediaries, be they states, bishops, or state-supported bishops, was core to their thinking. Salvation came through encounters with God via God’s word in the Bible, not from on high – not even from the local preacher: “There is preaching at Salt Springs today . . . many folks passing to it. I think they will not be much better of it.”<sup>32</sup> Always determined to set himself apart, Barry emphasized his place outside his fellows’ lives: “Sacrament at West River [today]. . . . And where did you go Mr James Barry? I staid at home reading the Bible like a Christian.”<sup>33</sup> Reading, and reading the Bible in particular, was Barry’s metric of intelligence and religiosity. This was his major critique of Catholics (that they did not read the Bible) and Catholicism (that its leaders presumed to explain the Bible to its adherents). If, as we will see, Barry was

28 Barry Diary: 9 October 1864, 28 December 1864.

29 *Colonial Standard* (Pictou): 6 August 1861, 7 January 1862.

30 “James Morison,” *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XXXIV (London: MacMillan, 1894), 57-8.

31 William Adamson, *The Life of the Rev. James Morison, D.D., Principal of the Evangelical Union Theological Hall, Glasgow* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898); Kenneth B.E. Roxborough, “James Morison,” Scottish Church History Society, 2002, <https://archive.org/details/rschsv032p1roxburgh;Paulus,ArchibaldAlexander>.”

32 Barry Diary, 13 Feb 1854.

33 Barry Diary, 26 June 1858. See similar comments on 24 September 1865 and 21 March 1869.



inconsistent on many matters, he was completely consistent in this belief: he would find salvation on his own, and he would find it in the Word of God.

In this sense, Barry was very much like Mephiboseth Stepsure, Thomas McCulloch's fictional Pictou County settler who was, he often reminded his readers, "always at home looking after my affairs."<sup>34</sup> Like Stepsure, Barry was devout and tended to his own affairs; he was privately engaged with God, and sought revelation in the Word of God. Again, much like McCulloch, he was deeply critical of those whose pretenses suggested a sense of Christian superiority, like the local church-going women whose "Black dresses is their great religious flags."<sup>35</sup> This view of pretentious leadership seems to have extended to politics. Until the Confederation moment, when many of the anti-confederates drew his praise, there was not a single moment when he spoke well of any political figure, be they local road or school commissioners, members of the Legislative Assembly, or imperial political figures. His descriptions of major anti-confederates like Joseph Howe and Martin Wilkins thus stand in sharp relief against his broader view of elites. Those men, like Thomas McCulloch, stood against the Tory oligarchy.

Barry discussed Confederation forty-six times in the five years between the Charlottetown conference and Joseph Howe's eventual accommodation. These were diary entries, and thus not very detailed, but we get a clear sense of his thinking from those entries and from the broader context of both his life and what we can see around him along the West River. On two occasions, he offered what we might call "Presbyterian" observations in that they emphasized the exercise of free will. Barry always had between one and three men working in his mills, at least one housekeeper (though often two), and one or two men working general labour around the house (anything from painting and landscaping, harvesting hay or repairing the mill pond). In late July of 1867, however, he could not find any men to work, a condition he attributed directly to the bribes offered to local workers by Conservatives attempting to buy votes for Confederation. Corruption generally, and bribery particularly, offended Barry's sense of free will. This was not petty political corruption, but the kind of soul-destroying corruption that always attended such "scheming plans." Later, in September and following the crushing defeat of the pro-confederates in the provincial election, Barry knew why Confederation had lost so decisively: "Let them take that as a lesson for their trampling of the Rights of Nova Scotia, and selling them off to Canada against their will." Here too Barry framed the issue in terms he understood best, that of a true Protestant – a dissenting Presbyterian: "Toryism," he continued, "is a curse in Politics, just as Catholicism is in Religion. They both want to rule independently of the people."<sup>36</sup>

34 Thomas McCulloch, *The Mephiboseth Stepsure Letters*, ed. Gwendolyn Davies (Ottawa: 1990 [serialized 1821 to 1823]). Barry did not note Stepsure's "letters" (they were not available in book form in his lifetime), but he did read McCulloch's *Popery Condemned by Scripture and the Fathers: Being a Refutation of the Principal Popish Doctrines and Assertions* (Edinburgh: Pillans, 1808).

35 Barry Diary, 20 October 1867. On McCulloch, see Susan Buggey and Gwendolyn Davies, "McCulloch, Thomas," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003-, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcculloch\\_thomas\\_7E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcculloch_thomas_7E.html).

36 Barry Diary, 30 July 1867.

Such voluntarist themes were at the core of Barry's critique of Confederation. This sense of Catholics and Tories imposing rule on the people, of denying their free will, was the key point for Barry. Most of his major criticisms related to the general injustice of Nova Scotia being forced "against their will" to join the new country. While subscribing to the *Citizen*, listening to Howe, reading several anti-confederate pamphlets, talking to Wilkins, and going to at least three political meetings, what mattered was that Nova Scotia had been wronged, made to act against its will, and was now engaged in a "great struggle" to retain its rightful place. On seven separate occasions, Barry decried Confederation as being imposed "against our wills." In some cases, depending on the circumstances, it was Britain imposing, in others Canadians; but in all cases it was Tories acting. Barry railed endlessly against Tories, be they Britons, Nova Scotians, his neighbours, or, as we will see later, his wife. The language he employs is of servility, slavery, and persecution. It was the language of a dissenting Presbyterian decrying unduly hierarchical government.

The other major theme, and the more concrete of the two, was "damnation taxation."<sup>37</sup> Fear of increased taxation was a common concern among the Maritime anti-confederates. Historians have typically portrayed this as either a cost-benefit analysis of what would be obtained for the feared increases, or of "classical liberal values such as free trade and low taxes."<sup>38</sup> Neither view captures Barry. Part of his objection to taxation was a simple reluctance to part with money. "The collector of county rates was round today and I had to fork out £2-9-1½," he moaned in the spring of 1867; he repeated a similar complaint on numerous other occasions. But taxation for him was a peculiarly Tory imposition, and thus too he came to associate it with Confederation. Barry was particularly ornery in the fall of 1867, as he himself admitted, and "part of the reason is the damnation Confederation and taxation." Barry resented paying poor rates, road rates, and while he always paid, in cash, he had no shortage of enmity for those tax-enforcing "Tory oppressors."<sup>39</sup>

Barry's passionate defense of Nova Scotia's autonomy effectively disappeared by the spring of 1868. In part this fit the broader pattern of the larger political environment. The anti-confederate campaign remained alive between 1868 and 1870, but failed to maintain any momentum. Its leaders were for the most part accommodating themselves to the new order, and even the movement's greatest figure, Joseph Howe, joined Macdonald's Tories in Ottawa.<sup>40</sup> Locally, on-going

37 Barry Diary, 19 June 1868.

38 P.B. Waite, *The Life and Times of Confederation, 1864-67: Politics, Newspapers, and the Union of British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 207-8; Phillip A. Buckner, "The 1860s: An End and a Beginning," in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, ed. Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 378; Andrew Smith, "Toryism, Classical Liberalism, and Capitalism: The Politics of Taxation and the Struggle for Canadian Confederation," *Canadian Historical Review* 89, no. 1 (2008): 1-25.

39 Barry Diary: 6 May 1867, 5 November 1867, 19 June 1869.

40 Kenneth Pryke, *Nova Scotia and Confederation, 1864-74* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 74-83. Beck defends Howe as being committed to political views, not parties, but it is really hard to see consistent politics in Howe's move into Macdonald's Tory government; see J. Murray Beck, *Joseph Howe*, vol. II, *The Briton Becomes Canadian, 1848-1873* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 248-50.

debate in the *Eastern Chronicle* and *Colonial Observer* suggests that the issue was alive in Pictou County, and one of the strongest remaining opponents was Barry's representative, and occasional customer, Martin Wilkins.<sup>41</sup> Barry was quieter. While he continued to disparage Tories and Confederation, and renewed his subscriptions to anti-confederate newspapers (including the *Halifax Citizen*, not a local paper),<sup>42</sup> he became much less actively engaged on the topic and appears not to have attended any more anti-confederate political meetings. He said nothing on Howe's shift, but it is hard to imagine he was pleased that the man he referred to as "the patriot" and the "great moving object of reform" had joined the Tories.<sup>43</sup>

Why had Barry eased his criticisms? The diary suggests that other issues were occupying Barry's attention. Beyond the quotidian matters of weather, the level of the mill-dam water, and his work activities, poor economic conditions dominated Barry's diary entries between 1867 and 1870. These concerns were evident early in the winter of 1867, but multiplied the following year. In part, this appears as a general economic downturn, and throughout 1868 and 1869 Barry frequently lamented the "devilish poor times."<sup>44</sup> Part of the issue, too, was local, related to agricultural conditions from the previous summer. The growing season for 1867 does not appear to have been bad, but the grain harvest was poor and the yield after milling was unusually low. Where normally it took about five bushels of oats to produce one hundred pounds of meal, Barry complained that the harvest from the previous year was taking over 10 bushels.<sup>45</sup> The summer of 1868 was a very good growing summer, but the economy did not pick up and spring and summer 1869 were poor: "I DID NOT MAKE ONE POUND THIS WINTER!!!" he shouted into his diary in April of 1869. "All complain of hard times," he also observed, reiterating once again the point he had been making for two years now: "I have never seen anything equal to it."<sup>46</sup>

Economic concerns had not been the basis for Barry's opposition to Confederation. And for the most part he remained consistent on that point. Almost all his economic laments in this period were general – "very dull times" – or related to the poor yields. Indeed, it is hard to say how much Barry was truly suffering. In the midst of all this fretting, he does not appear to have been tight for cash. He purchased goods in Pictou typically about once per week and paid most of his bills in cash, something of which he was clearly quite proud. He also paid his employees in cash (men were earning between £5 and £10 per month, boys and the house servant "girls" much less, 17s6 to £1 per month), paid his taxes in cash, and several times during 1868-1869 lent money to neighbours and his brother Anthony (as much as £5).<sup>47</sup> We cannot generate anywhere near a complete list of what he bought – he

41 MacLean, "Wilkins."

42 Barry Diary, 29 March 1869.

43 Barry Diary: 13 March 1867, 30 July 1867.

44 Barry Diary: 18 May 1868, 27 June 1868, 16 August 1868, 14 February 1869, 1 September 1869.

45 Barry Diary: 18 May 1868, 5 Jan 1869, 5 June 1869.

46 Barry Diary: 2 January 1869, 1 September 1869.

47 Barry Diary: 18 November 1864, 7 January 1865, 30 March 1865, 5 November 1867, 9 July 1868, 17 September 1868, 19 September 1868, 26 January 1869, 29 March 1869, 22 April 1869, 15 June 1869, 24 July 1869.

typically noted purchases only as “too numerous to mention” – but the evidence points to many non-necessities like wallpaper, a new fiddle, gifts for his daughter, occasional bottles of alcohol, stoves, house paint, and ornamental trees. And that is not even mentioning the many mechanical purchases he had to make for the mill. Indeed, he built an entirely new house during this period, as well as a small blacksmith’s forge for his own use. Compared to the railways, coal mines, and iron foundries just a few miles away, these were not major investments; but for a backcountry miller they certainly speak to a certain prosperity. But of course none of this really matters. What matters is that Barry felt he was suffering. And while the narcissistic curmudgeon often felt aggrieved, it was nonetheless true that a pronounced economic downturn overtook the region following the end of the Reciprocity Agreement with the United States in 1865.<sup>48</sup>

Barry tied part of the economic downturn directly to Confederation, but the specific connections were not made clear. Business, as he noted often in this period, was in the midst of “most infernal dull times . . . and I verily believe some of it is owing to that cursed Confederation.”<sup>49</sup> He also tied the downturn to “oppressive taxation,” and maintained that Confederation had brought with it “a scarcity of provisions at home . . . stagnation of trade and more sharks hanging on to the resources of the country than it can bear.”<sup>50</sup> Here, echoing Martin Wilkins, Barry’s image suggests a “denuding” of one region by another, much as many critics imagined in a relationship with Canada. Like Wilkins, Barry had seen this in the US Civil War and imagined a similar stripping away of rights and resources in British North America.<sup>51</sup>

Probably what most distracted Barry in these years, however, was the near break-up of his marriage, a story that began to unravel, entirely coincidentally, on 1 July 1867. Barry, we can see by now, was not a pleasant man. He complained about everything, but he complained about women even more than he did the weather. Barry married Bell in 1859, after a short and what his diary suggests was a lovely courtship. Tensions were evident on occasion in the early 1860s,<sup>52</sup> but came to a head when Barry did not attend the 1 July funeral of his mother-in-law. Sounding very McCullochesque, the miller determined that he could be “better employed at home and done more good to myself and others than I could there.”<sup>53</sup> Over the next few months tensions mounted, but got much worse a year later when Barry struck his wife after quarrelling about which gates should be opened for their cows. Within days Bell had testified to the sheriff, and Barry had been apprehended and required “to sign a security to be civil for two years.”<sup>54</sup> From May 1868 until the summer of 1870, Bell, and their daughter Josephine, spent far more time in Bell’s father’s house

48 The still standard account is S.A. Saunders, “The Maritime Provinces and the Reciprocity Treaty,” *Dalhousie Review* 14 (1934): 355-71.

49 Barry Diary, 27 June 1868.

50 Barry Diary, 1 September 1869. See also 19 June 1868 and 15 June 1869.

51 Wilkins, *Confederation Examined*, 11, 45-6.

52 Bell spent much time with her parents in Roger’s Hill, less than two miles away. She very often stayed two or three nights per week, sometimes for a week or ten days. Barry noted the absences, but rarely commented on them. For one comment, see Barry Diary, 9 December 1864.

53 Barry Diary: 14 June 1867, 1 July 1867.

54 Barry Diary: 27 May 1868, 1 June 1869.

in nearby Roger's Hill than they did in the Barry homestead at Six Mile Brook. Barry emerged a very bitter and angry man. Seldom one to suffer any kind of female independence, his tirades increased, his ability to keep house servants declined, and he began to reacquire a taste for independent male life. There is no doubt Barry committed a crime against his wife that day; and there is no doubt, too, that as in so many facets of his life he felt he was the one who had been persecuted.<sup>55</sup> By September 1868, Bell and not Confederation was the "damned Tory curse, she is indeed."<sup>56</sup>

If Barry was at all typical, then the erosion of opposition to, and the eventual accommodation with, the politics of Confederation were no doubt rooted as much in the travails of everyday life as they were the on-going failed debates and petitions. The combination of the economic downturn and his family breakdown, perhaps combined with his additional health issues,<sup>57</sup> weighed heavily on Barry. So, if we ask why this passionate critic of Confederation gave up so quietly, we can see that unlike a politician or a globe-striding merchant-businessman, and however extraordinary Barry may have been, the ordinary affairs of life overtook his political concerns. This last feature was undoubtedly a common story.

We know very little about how non-elite individuals felt about the major questions of British North American affairs and much less still about Confederation.<sup>58</sup> Social history in Canada generally has been much better at telling us about the patterns of ordinary people's lives than of their individual hopes and dreams, beliefs and prejudices. A fuller sense of Barry's hopes and dreams are beyond this essay, but we can situate his politics in this important moment in Canadian history. We can see that James Barry was an ordinary man, a miller, in a small rural settlement in colonial Nova Scotia. We can see that he lived on a brook, off a river, off a harbour, off a gulf, and across an ocean from the centres of the north Atlantic world. But it also appears that through books, reading, and debate and discussion he actively participated in the major intellectual and political currents of his day. We can see that he formed a small node in a trans-Atlantic religious book culture network, one centred in Edinburgh, London, and Princeton, and linked with Halifax, Pictou, and Six Mile Brook. We can see that he carried its views into discussions that animated the intellectual world of rural Pictou County. We can see that in his reading, in his discussions, and in his views on abolition, the Civil War,

55 Barry Diary: 7 October 1869, 2 August 1868.

56 Barry Diary, 9 September 1868.

57 Throughout this period, Barry complained, endlessly, of his poor physical condition. While we have no reason to doubt his pain and discomfort, we can also note that his medical complaints began almost as soon as he began the diary in 1849, and never really stopped. As early as 1853, he claimed to believe he would die young. He died in 1906, at the age of 84.

58 Some notable, diary-based, exceptions include Elizabeth Vibert, "'Writing Home': Sibling Intimacy and Mobility in a Scottish Colonial Memoir," in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Empire*, ed. Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 67-88; Kathryn Carter, "An Economy of Words: Emma Chadwick Stretch's Account Book Diary, 1859-60," *Acadiensis* XXXIX, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 43-56; and Graeme Wynn, "Ideology, Society, and the State in the Maritime Colonies of British North America," in *Colonial Leviathan: State-Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada*, ed. Allan Greer and Ian Radforth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 284-328.

and Confederation he brought ideas and practices – dimensions of what historian John Fea terms the “rural enlightenment”<sup>59</sup> – to bear in ways that we might miss in the speeches Barry heard at Durham and Mount Thom or that others heard in Halifax or Saint John. And we can see that a critical feature of those ideas and practices was rooted in theological understandings of government and free will. James Barry was a deeply pious Christian man, one with flaws that hurt himself and his family, and he understood virtue to come from reading in general and from the Bible in particular. He was a man who understood that his salvation and his political position were connected through his free will. He was very much in the tradition of radical democrats whose piety and democratic sensibilities were closely entwined.<sup>60</sup>

Barry also can help us think through dimensions of the historiography on Confederation. He undoubtedly would have agreed with Phil Buckner’s suggestions that the “fathers” were not democrats.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, he certainly would have spat fiery words on hearing Janet Ajzenstat’s views on the democratic heart of Confederation.<sup>62</sup> Most importantly, I think Barry also allows us to see that what Buckner terms the “populist dimension” of the Maritime anti-confederate protests was at least in part grounded in what we might term theo-political culture – that this was not merely about railroads, or markets, or tribes. It was also about a powerfully rooted understanding of voluntarism. Modern liberal-democrats might also allow that our sense of liberalism and democracy is no doubt more narrowly conceived than a 19th-century evangelical’s. Barry’s liberalism certainly held the kind of Lockean dimension that Ian McKay suggests defined Canada’s “emerging liberal order.”<sup>63</sup> And yet the miller’s liberalism, his sense of the basis for his freedom, of his free will, stemmed at least as much from his antiburgher church politics as from his emergent bourgeois, property-owning, business orientation. And while it is important to acknowledge that Barry was in many ways atypical, many among Nova Scotia’s broader dissenting evangelical world of Baptists, Methodists, and evangelical Anglicans may have been influenced similarly and thus also saw Nova Scotia’s underdog place in the new federation in much the same way.

We know this because Barry’s diary gives us access to a particular cultural position. For me, reading Barry’s diary has offered an intimate lens on a life in that network. He read and he wrote; thus, I read what he read. His diary, then, is a crystallization of a point in a broader network of ideas. These ideas were specific to their times and places; they were peculiarly Presbyterian, limited in direct engagement to that group. But they were not isolated; these ideas and their proponents engaged with the major political questions of the day. Barry never

59 John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Phillip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

60 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972); George Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

61 Buckner, “An End and a Beginning,” 377.

62 Janet Ajzenstat, *Canada’s Founding Debates* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). A concise offering of her position is available on her 2009 blog posting on Confederation: <https://janetajzenstat.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/ian-mckay-and-confederation/>.

63 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (2000): 617–45.



travelled far beyond Six Mile Brook, but through books he still engaged with the rarefied worlds of graduates of Glasgow and Princeton. He entered their debates, interpreted them, and interpreted part of his world through them. Barry thus offers us a lens by which we might see an ordinary man's understanding of that larger book culture and of particular moments in the history of his day. His daily ruminations illuminate the process whereby large ideas get translated into particular practices, whereby we can better understand one man's "wretched tirades" against Confederation. Barry's diary, an expression of the broader world of Presbyterian book culture, sheds new light on what Confederation meant in a rural, deeply religious part of Nova Scotia.

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