

FREEBORN GARRETTSON AND NOVA SCOTIA

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A little more than a year after Henry Alline's death in New Hampshire on February 2, 1784, an intense religious revival swept through many of the Yankee settlements of Nova Scotia. It was a revival which owed a great deal to an extraordinarily able Methodist preacher from Maryland, Freeborn Garrettson. And it was a revival, moreover, which energized a largely moribund radical evangelical movement by, among other things, providing it with a coterie of new, young, energetic, and remarkably gifted leaders—the most outstanding of whom were Edward Manning, Joseph Dimock, Harris Harding, and Theodore Seth Harding. The revival not only left in its wake a post-Alline leadership elite, but it also, almost as an afterthought, significantly exacerbated the tensions existing between the Whitefieldian orthodox elements of the radical evangelicals and Alline's mystical heterodoxy. The Garrettson revival played a key role in polarizing Alline's followers into a small anarchic Antinomian sect, on one extreme, and what eventually evolved into an evangelical Calvinist church, on the other. It is ironic, therefore, that a staunch Arminian from the United States should be involved in the transformation of Alline's free-will anti-Calvinist "ecumenical movement" into what was destined to become a "closed" Baptist Calvinist church.¹

Henry Alline was a man almost larger than life, and he has cast a long shadow over the religious development of the New England–Nova Scotia region until the present day. His contemporaries regarded him as Nova Scotia's George Whitefield—as a powerful instrument of the Almighty, charismatic and uniquely spiritual. Historians in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have been, almost to a person, impressed by Alline's mystical theology, his creative powers, and his unusual ability to communicate to others his profound sense of Christian ecstasy. Some scholars have regarded him as the "Prophet" of Nova Scotia's First Great Awakening and as a "flaming evangelist" who channeled the religious enthusiasm he had helped to create in Nova Scotia during the American Revolution into "neutrality."² Others have seen him as an "intellectual and literary giant"³ who significantly affected the Canadian pietistic tradition

¹I have developed this theme in much greater detail in my book *Ravished by the Spirit: Revivals, Maritime Baptists and Henry Alline* (Montreal, 1984).

²See, for example, M. Armstrong, "Neutrality and Religion in Revolutionary Nova Scotia," G. A. Rawlyk (ed.), *Historical Essays on the Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto, 1967), 40.

³J. M. Bumsted, *Henry Alline* (Toronto, 1971), 78.

and as a charismatic preacher who provided confused, disoriented Nova Scotians a sense of collective identity and a powerful “sense of mission” at a critical time in their historical development.⁴

Those Nova Scotians who were converted under Alline’s preaching or by his disciples wished to replicate all aspects of Alline’s own transforming religious experience. They, too, wished to see Paradise; they, too, wished to “taste but one glimmering ray” of the “Eternal Now.”⁵ And they yearned for Alline’s Christ to ravish them to make them one with him. They sought the mountain peak of religious ecstasy but naively underestimated how difficult it would be for them to remain there. Many would tumble to the depths of despair soon after Alline’s death. But most would never forget that magic New Light moment when they, like Henry Alline, had experienced Jesus Christ and had become part of his pristine spirituality and perfectability. They had reached out, and Christ had touched them. They were certain that it could happen again — and it did, only a few years after Alline’s death — as periodic revivals became a distinguishing feature of Nova Scotia’s religious culture.

Freeborn Garrettson, who would trigger one of these revivals, and his American Methodist associate, the frail James Oliver Cromwell, sailed from New York in the middle of February 1785. After a particularly stormy passage they finally arrived in Halifax. The two young American Methodist itinerants had been “set apart for Nova Scotia” by the leaders of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, who had been under considerable pressure from John Wesley and William Black, the Nova Scotia Methodist leader, to provide missionary assistance at a critical time in the colony’s history.⁶ The death of Alline had created a religious vacuum in Nova Scotia. The sudden arrival of approximately 20,000 Loyalists, some of whom were Methodists, provided both a new mission field and also the means whereby Black, in particular, hoped the Yankee New Light hegemony over much of the colony could finally be broken.

It should be kept in mind that during the years immediately following the end of the American War of Independence, much of Nova Scotia was experiencing yet another profound, and for many disconcerting, collective sense of acute disorientation and confusion. As was the case in neighboring northern New England, hundreds of “common people were

⁴G. Stewart and G. A. Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God* (Toronto, 1972).

⁵H. Alline, *The Anti-Traditionalist* (Halifax, 1783), 62–63

⁶See T. W. Smith, *History of the Methodist Church . . . of Eastern British America* (Halifax, 1877), 150–151; G. French, *Parsons and Politics* (Toronto, 1962), 33–39; N. Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson* (New York, 1830), 150–158; W. C. Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769–1844*, Vol. I (New York, 1949), 166–171; N. A. McNairn, “Mission to Nova Scotia,” *Methodist History*, Vol. 12 (Jan. 1974), 3–18; R. D. Simpson, “Freeborn Garrettson: American Methodist Pioneer” (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Drew Theological Seminary, 1954).

cut loose from all sorts of traditional bonds and found themselves freer, more independent, more unconstrained than ever before in their history."⁷ The coming of the Loyalists to peninsular Nova Scotia at the end of the Revolution accelerated a process of social disintegration already underway. The Loyalists, according to Edward Manning, had a "bad and . . . dreadful" effect on the colony, and they "corrupted" societal values and made many Nova Scotians "adepts in wickedness."⁸ Thus, as Gordon Wood has argued, "traditional structures of authority crumbled under the momentum of the Revolution, and common people increasingly discovered that they no longer had to accept the old distinctions" that had driven them into a widely-perceived subservient and vulnerable status.⁹ And, as might have been expected, sometimes "bizarre but emotionally satisfying ways of relating to God and others" became increasingly widespread phenomena as many Nova Scotians sought a renewed sense of "community-belonging" in order to neutralize the powerful forces of alienation then sweeping the colony. It was a period when, it has been perceptively observed, "everything was believable" and "everything could be doubted."¹⁰ "Radical enthusiasts and visionaries," regarding themselves as the disciples of Henry Alline and as propagators of his tradition, became the "advanced guard" of the renewed "popular evangelical movement with which they shared a common hostility to orthodox authority."¹¹ By 1790 these New Lights, as they were spitefully referred to by their enemies, were a people in a delicate state of spiritual tension "poised like a steel spring by the contradicting forces pulling within it."¹² There was a mystical quality, but there was also a secular one; there was a democratic bias but also an authoritarian one together with individualism and a tendency towards communitarianism. For some, it seems clear, the seemingly contradictory forces within the New Lights would soon neutralize one another, producing apathy, indifference, and disenchantment. For others, a not insignificant number, the dynamic tension would result in a renewed pietism which would become a crucial link in the chain connecting Henry Alline's First Great Awakening with Nova Scotia's Second Awakening, in which New Lights and Methodists were particularly active. But for an influential minority, known as the "New Dispensationalists" by friends and enemies alike, the state of spiritual tension brought about by the coming of the Loyalists, the Garrettsonian revival, the continuing influence of Alline's

⁷G. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism" (Paper presented to the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association, May 1980), 2.

⁸Acadia University Archives, Wolfville, N.S. (A.U.A.), J. M. Cramp's "History of the Maritime Baptists."

⁹Wood, "Evangelical America," 7.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 10

¹¹*Ibid.*, 12.

¹²G. A. Rawlyk, *Champions of the Truth* (Montreal, 1990), 17.

legacy, and growing American sectarian influences, provided a heaven-sent opportunity to stretch Alline's gospel to and beyond the Antinomian breaking point, especially in the early 1790s.¹³

Soon after landing in Halifax, Garrettson elbowed Black aside and became the most influential Methodist leader in Nova Scotia. Garrettson was regarded, with some justification, as a "man of varied resources, a powerful preacher and capable organizer, of genuine piety and holiness of life, who left an abiding impression on the whole life of the province."¹⁴ His influence in Nova Scotia, according to J. M. Buckley, author of *A History of Methodism in the United States*, "was almost equal to that of Wesley in Europe and Asbury in the United States."¹⁵ "It may be fairly questioned," claimed his biographer, Nathan Bangs, "whether any one minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, or indeed in any other Church, has been instrumental in the awakening and conversion of more sinners than Garrettson."¹⁶ Garrettson was, without question, an unusually gifted minister; he was a powerful, some would say charismatic, preacher; he was, moreover, an indefatigable itinerant, a man almost obsessed with—as he once cogently expressed it—"rising higher and higher in the divine image."¹⁷ Though he spent only twenty-six months in Nova Scotia, Garrettson, it has been persuasively argued, "left an abiding impression on the whole life of the province."¹⁸ Next to Henry Alline, the evidence suggests, the Maryland Methodist was the most able and influential preacher in eighteenth-century Nova Scotia.

Like Alline, Garrettson had a traumatic conversion experience, an experience he too wished everyone he met could enthusiastically emulate. This would help to explain the kind of impact Garrettson had on Alline's followers in Nova Scotia. After listening to a Methodist itinerant, and under intense conviction, Garrettson, in the prime of life (in his early twenties), became, as he expressed it, "for the first time, reconciled to the justice of God." According to the young Marylander,

The enmity of my heart was slain, and the plan of salvation was open to me. I saw a beauty in the perfections of the Deity, and felt that power of faith and love that I had been a stranger to. My soul was exceeding happy that I seemed as if I wanted to take wings and fly to heaven.¹⁹

Garrettson became a Methodist circuit preacher in 1775, and only his death on July 26, 1827, brought an end to what has been called the

¹³See my *New Light Letters and Songs* (Hantsport, 1983), 37-63.

¹⁴Barclay, *Early American Methodism*, Vol. I, 171.

¹⁵New York, 1897, Vol. I, 369.

¹⁶Quoted in Smith, *History of the Methodist Church*, 193-194.

¹⁷Quoted in Bangs, *Garrettson*, 154.

¹⁸Buckley, *A History of Methodism*, Vol. I, 171.

¹⁹Quoted in Smith, *History of the Methodist Church*, 152.

glorious "story of his long, heroic, and successful services in the itinerant ranks."²⁰

Garrettson was a man of amazing energy which, together with his remarkable missionary zeal, helps to explain the impact he had on Nova Scotia in the 1780s. He once described to Bishop Francis Asbury a "typical" week spent in Halifax:

Sunday eight o'clock preach in our little chapel, which will hold about four hundred persons; ten o'clock preach in the poor house, where there are about a hundred people . . . at twelve o'clock in the preaching house; four o'clock in a private house by the dockyard; and by candlelight in the chapel. I preach every night in the week: Friday visit the prisoners.²¹

Garrettson did not mention his frequent house visits; the time spent in keeping up his correspondence with fellow Methodists in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Great Britain, and the United States; his "diligence and zeal" in studying the scriptures; and his exemplary "prayerfulness and watchfulness." He was, according to his biographer, the antithesis of "the slothful servant."²²

During his brief sojourn in Nova Scotia, Garrettson visited virtually every settlement, apart from Pictou. A year before his death, Garrettson described his Nova Scotia experience in the following manner.

I began to visit the towns, and to traverse the mountains and valleys, frequently on foot, with my knapsack at my back, up and down the Indian paths in the wilderness, when it was not expedient to take a horse; and I had often to wade through the mud and water of morasses, and frequently to satisfy my hunger from my knapsack, to quench my thirst from a brook, and rest my weary limbs on the leaves of trees. This was indeed going forth weeping; but thanks be to God, he compensated me for all my toil, for many precious souls were awakened and converted.²³

Garrettson took full advantage of the earlier assiduous missionary labor of William Black and also that of Henry Alline and his itinerating disciples, men like John Payzant, Joseph Bailey, Thomas Handley Chipman, and Ebenezer Hobbs, a teenage New Light exhorter. But the Methodist itinerant did more than this. He not only cultivated the Yankee New Light heartland stretching from Falmouth, down the Annapolis Valley to Granville, to Yarmouth and then up the southern shore to Argyle, Liverpool, and Chester, but he also broke new missionary ground in the Loyalist center of Shelburne.

Despite the opposition of some of the "Allinites," whom Garrettson called "as deluded a people as I ever saw,"²⁴ the Methodist preacher

²⁰Quoted in Smith, *History of the Methodist Church*, 152.

²¹Quoted in Bangs, *Garrettson*, 177.

²²*Ibid.*, 172.

²³*Methodist Magazine* (1827), 672.

²⁴United Church Archives, Toronto (U.C.A.), "Freeborn Garrettson Journal."

attracted large attentive audiences in the spring of 1785. At Horton, on Sunday, May 22, over 100 people turned out to hear him — “the General Cry was after preaching — if this is Methodist Doctrine, it is agreeable to truth.”²⁵ Later that same day, in the New Light center of Cornwallis, there was, according to Garrettson, “a Considerable moving on ye hearts of ye people.” And on the following day, after a particularly emotional meeting, there was a universal “cry . . . if this is Methodist doctrine, I will be a Methodist.” Scores of people, some of whom had first been awakened by Whitefield and others by Alline, “after meeting . . . Continued some time hanging round each other, inquiring what they should do to be saved.” Garrettson hoped that the revival would give the Allinites (those followers of Alline who were pushing his gospel towards Antinomianism) a fatal and what the Methodist preacher termed a “wonderful Stab.”²⁶

Preaching at a minimum three sermons each Sunday, in barns, private homes, and Baptist and Presbyterian churches, and once each day of the week, Garrettson throughout June and July continued to itinerate up and down the Annapolis Valley from Windsor to Annapolis. Then in late July he visited Liverpool, and a month later he made his way to the Loyalist center of Shelburne. In the early autumn he returned to Halifax. He took charge of the extensive Halifax circuit, which included regular visits to Windsor, Cornwallis, and Horton. In the spring of 1786, Garrettson once again visited Liverpool, where he observed to Wesley that though “Alline’s small party oppose us warmly, . . . the greater part of the town attend our ministry, and the first people have joined our society.”²⁷ After this success Garrettson made his way to Shelburne, now a town in serious decline, and on to Barrington. At first, the people of Barrington were unresponsive, having been warned by Thomas Handley Chipman, the New Light and Baptist minister located at Granville, that Garrettson was “a dangerous ‘Arminian.’” Despite Chipman’s warning, however, hundreds turned out to listen to the visiting Methodist from Maryland. “Between two and three hundred were awakened in a greater or less degree,” reported a delighted Garrettson, and “their shyness and prejudices were all removed.”²⁸

Scores of people in settlements along the south shore, in places like Barrington and Cape Negro, were converted, Garrettson was certain. And because of what he called “this visitation of the Spirit,” Methodist churches were organized on what was then called the “Arminian plan.”²⁹ The stress placed on “free grace,” the possibility of the “second blessing,” and the warm fellowship of the “class meeting” all appealed to those Nova Scotians

²⁵U.C.A., “Freeborn Garrettson Journal.”

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Quoted in Smith, *History of the Methodist Church*, 166.

²⁸U.C.A., “Freeborn Garrettson Journal.”

²⁹*Ibid.*

who wanted Alline's evangelical Christianity but not the excesses of some of his followers.

In the autumn Garrettson returned to Halifax, and in the winter months of 1786 and 1787 he was largely responsible for coaxing into existence yet another revival in Horton and Cornwallis. "I have had a blessed winter among them," Garrettson observed to John Wesley on March 10, 1787. "If the work continues much longer as it has done, the greater part of the people will be brought in." In Horton, especially, there had "been a divine display; many convinced and converted to God." Garrettson also noted:

God is carrying on his work in a glorious manner in Barrington; the people flock from every quarter to hear the word: many have been convinced, and about fourteen have been set at liberty, some of whom were famous for all manner of wickedness. The fields here seem white for harvest.³⁰

Despite the Nova Scotia "white fields" all "ready for harvest," Garrettson left the colony one month later for the United States. He would never return — not only because of his strong sense of being and wanting to remain an American, but also because, as he once cogently put it, "I was not clear that I had a call to leave the United States."³¹ Nova Scotia Methodism would suffer greatly because of this decision. When Garrettson left the province, there were almost 600 Methodist church members out of a total population of more than 40,000. The Methodists had not only made inroads in the Yankee settlements, but they had been particularly successful among the Yorkshire immigrants and among the Black Loyalists. There were, in fact, ten times as many Methodists as there were Baptists and probably three times as many as there were actual New Light Congregationalists in their two organized churches, Chipman's at Granville and the Reverend John Payzant's at Horton and Cornwallis. Indeed, Payzant had been ordained minister of Alline's old church on July 3, 1786, largely, it seems, in order to neutralize the impact of Methodism in the region.

Garrettson's quitting Nova Scotia on April 10, 1787, did not, it should be stressed, bring to an end the Methodist plan to assert their spiritual hegemony over the colony. Though not yet ordained, William Black and James and John Mann (Loyalists from New York), William Grandin (a New Jersey Loyalist), and "Old Moses" (the Black Methodist preacher at Shelburne), continued to preach Wesley's gospel, supported briefly by James Oliver Cromwell, whose poor health compelled him to leave Nova Scotia in May. A year later two new Methodist missionaries arrived in the colony, William Jessop, the saintly Delaware itinerant, and James Wray, a somewhat stiff, austere, and, some would say, overly caustic Englishman.³²

³⁰Quoted in Bangs, *Garrettson*, 171.

³¹Quoted in Barclay, *Early American Methodism*, Vol. I, 171.

³²See Smith, *History of the Methodist Church*, 200-209.

Wray was appointed by Wesley as "Superintendent" of the work in Nova Scotia. It was a mistake. Within a year Wray, who was incapable of understanding North American Methodism, had resigned. In May of 1789 the Mann brothers and Black were ordained in Philadelphia. Black's ordination prepared the way for his being appointed Wray's replacement. Moreover — and this fact is extremely important, — the three newly ordained Methodist ministers could now baptize and administer communion and thus compete effectively with the two ordained New Lights Payzant and Chipman as well as with the more numerous Anglican ministers.

Jessop could almost fit Garrettson's shoes. He was a man "of powerful eloquence," who both preached and experienced sanctification.³³ But he lacked Garrettson's energy and his enthusiasm for itinerating. This significantly limited the impact Jessop had on late eighteenth-century Nova Scotia. Nevertheless, Jessop effectively built upon Garrettson's work in the Barrington area and firmly established the Methodist cause there before his premature death in the United States in 1795.

By the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century, the Methodists had four ordained ministers and a number of unordained itinerants in Nova Scotia. Five hundred ten members were reported³⁴ from the colony in official records — unofficial records provide a somewhat higher number, — and it seemed that the Methodists were on the verge of becoming the largest and most influential Protestant denomination in Nova Scotia and the organizational means whereby Aline's New Light movement might have been channeled into oblivion. In New Brunswick, there was Duncan McCall, with hundreds of Methodist supporters desperately looking for leadership and direction. But the Methodists had failed to take into account one important fact — the revival Garrettson had helped both to inspire and to shape had not only significantly revived the New Light movement but had also pushed to the surface a remarkable group of young, dynamic, committed, and, some would say, "inspired" preachers. These men, men like Harris Harding, Joseph Dimock, James Manning, and Theodore Seth Harding, would become the so-called "Patriarchs" of the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Baptist church. According to the 1827 Nova Scotia census, the New Light Baptist counteroffensive had been amazingly successful. The total population of Nova Scotia in 1827 was estimated at 142,548. This included 31,199 Anglicans, 42,060 Presbyterians, 31,882 Roman Catholics, 19,846 Baptists, 9,567 Methodists, 2,970 Lutherans, and 5,042 others. The Baptist percentage in 1827 was 16.0, and the Methodist 7.6. By 1871, there were 73,295 Baptists, 18.9% of the total Nova Scotia population of 387,800, and 40,345 Methodists, 10.4% of the total. In New Brunswick, in 1861, 23% of the population was

³³See Smith, *History of the Methodist Church*, 197.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 99.

Baptist—almost 60,000 of the total population of 252,047, while 25,600 were Methodists—10%. Ten years later, in 1871, 25% of New Brunswickers were Baptists and still 10% Methodists.³⁵ Alline's disciples, in their nineteenth-century Baptist manifestation, had obviously won a decisive numerical victory over the Wesleyan Garrettsonians. And they had done so in an extremely difficult demographic environment. The Wesleyans should have done better.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, especially Yankee Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, had in a religious sense been assiduously cultivated by Alline and his disciples during the period immediately preceding Garrettson's arrival in the colony. Though most observers agreed with Alline that by early 1781 the "Great Awakening" had lost much of its earlier momentum in the Yankee heartland of the colony, he, Chipman, Bailey, and Payzant continued to preach the evangelical gospel in the more peripheral regions such as the Saint John River Valley and the South Shore. After Alline's death, his three disciples did not stop preaching, of course. But because each was now married, with family responsibilities, and lacked Alline's example and inspiration, they began to limit somewhat their itinerating. But the Methodist offensive, organized by Garrettson, forced them to defend the Allinite New Light legacy, and in the process, it should be stressed, their subsequent activities helped in bringing about the transformation of Alline's disorganized sect into the Baptist church. Garrettson, it may be argued, did far more than any other individual in bringing about this transformation.

Garrettson was directly responsible for the conversion of three of the Nova Scotia New Light Baptist "Patriarchs"—Joseph Dimock, Harris Harding, and Theodore Seth Harding. And these three men, especially Harris Harding, were critically important human agents for bringing Edward Manning into the New Light Baptist fold. Manning, without question, was the most important Maritime Baptist in the nineteenth century.³⁶

Dimock was born in Newport, Nova Scotia, on December 11, 1768. His father was an active Baptist layman, and from his early youth Joseph Dimock received a well-grounded, basic biblical education from a distinctly Baptist perspective. At the age of seventeen, on July 17, 1785, he was, as he put it, "born again" when "God the Spirit was pleased to strike my soul with terrors and amazement, so that I could find no rest until I was by the Spirit presented with the Saviour, his freeness and all-sufficiency to save all that came to him."³⁷ In this manner, while listening to the

³⁵This material is taken from D. Stratas, "A Study of the Historical Demography of the Maritime Provinces, 1763-1901" (Unpublished paper, Department of History, Queen's University, 1981).

³⁶See my *Ravished by the Spirit*, especially Chapter IV.

³⁷A.U.A., Cramp, "History of the Maritime Baptists."

charismatic Freeborn Garrettson — who in so many respects was like Henry Alline — the teenage Dimock found his salvation.

Attracted by Garrettson's emphasis upon "free grace" and the transforming power of "regeneration," Dimock soon felt the need to preach the Christian gospel not only in Nova Scotia but also in neighboring New England and New York. Dimock was indeed a remarkable person. He possessed a "naturally affectionate disposition," and he was "one of the most amiable of men."³⁸ His associates often compared him "to the Apostle John, for his loving temper and gentleness of deportment."³⁹ "There was no lordliness of spirit in him," it was stressed, "no arrogant assumptions and no demand for servile attention and homage."⁴⁰ Dimock was an excellent example for many of his contemporaries of a saintly man who had humbled himself only to be exalted by the Almighty.

In September, 1793, Dimock, after a long period itinerating, was ordained the minister of the Chester New Light church. He would remain a pastor of this church, which eventually became a Baptist church, until his death at the age of 79, in 1846. At his funeral service, Dimock was with good reason described as a "good . . . and wise man . . . where excellent disposition, engaging manner, integrity of heart, humility, and deep-toned piety, peculiarly fitted him for the work for which alone he seemed to live, and in the prosecution of which he died."⁴¹

One of Dimock's closest friends throughout his long life was Harris Harding — one of the most influential New Light Baptists of the 1790s and a person also converted during one of Garrettson's Nova Scotia revivals.⁴² According to one who knew him, the Reverend I. E. Bill, Harris Harding's "pulpit talents . . . intellectually considered, were never brilliant, but they were generally effective and useful."⁴³ Bill went on to describe perceptively what he considered to be the strengths and weaknesses of one of the Baptist "Fathers."

In the strictest sense, he was an extemporaneous preacher. . . . He deemed it of far more importance that the *heart* should be burning with love, than the *head* should be stored with matter. . . .

If, in addressing a congregation, he never dazzled with the splendour of his eloquence, he often touched their sympathies, and moved their hearts as he descanted upon the Savior's love. . . . At times there was a melting pathos in his utterances which was overpowering. While there was little method in his discourses, they were generally

³⁸A.U.A., Cramp, "History of the Maritime Baptists."

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²For a more detailed discussion of Harding's career see G. A. Rawlyk, "From New Light to Baptist: Harris Harding and the Second Great Awakening in Nova Scotia," in B. Moody (ed.), *Repent and Believe* (Hantsport, 1980), 1-26.

⁴³I. E. Bill, *Fifty Years with the Baptist Ministers and Churches of the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (Saint John, 1880), 201.

delivered with fervour, and interspersed with anecdotes illustrative of the topic he was discussing. . . . As regards religious zeal and activity, every day was devoted to God; and in this respect, his long life was one continuous Sabbath.⁴⁴

For the Reverend E. M. Saunders in 1902,

The dramatic power and element of personal magnetism were effective forces in the personality of the Reverend Harris Harding. [He] skillfully spiced his anecdotes and conversation with a touch of comedy as natural to him as his breath. His imitations of people of peculiar speech were the delight especially of children.⁴⁵

But to one who knew Harding at the beginning of his preaching career, there was little of redeeming value either in his character or in his preaching style. It was Simeon Perkins' contention in 1792 that Harding's "Extravagant Gestures & wild motions of his Body & hands, etc., is, to me very disgusting, and the pain he seems to be in Breath, is distressing."⁴⁶ The Liverpool merchant and general factotum and Methodist leader later maintained that "a man of his character and principles"⁴⁷ should never be permitted to preach the Christian gospel. Harding was, in Perkins' eyes, a dangerous Antinomian who practiced what he preached. For example, on September 28, 1796, Harding had been forced to marry—in Perkins' words—"a young woman [Hetty Huntington] said to be pregnant by him."⁴⁸

For his biographer and co-minister at Yarmouth, the Reverend J. Davis, Harding was "an erratic genius."⁴⁹ He was "not in every sense a great man," and the "loftier reaches of argument and eloquence were beyond him."

His utterance was ready, quick, overflowing, apt to be loud and vociferous—in his earlier days accompanied with much gesticulation and movement to and fro. . . . Deep also was his pathos, abundant his unction, while his tears were frequent.

Out of the pulpit he seemed to live by locomotion. Until arrested by his last sickness he was almost always on the road—alike on the move in winter as in summer. . . . His capital was not so large as that of some other men; but he kept turning it over and over perpetually, until it had yielded an ample increase, and made its possessor "rich in good works;" superabundant in the fruits of his godly diligence.⁵⁰

And as far as his close associate the Reverend Theodor S. Harding was concerned, Harris Harding "as a preacher was not methodical."

He dwelt most on the experimental part of religion, and greatly excelled in it. His great forte was 'telling stories.' He was full of anecdotes.

⁴⁴Bill, *Fifty Years*, 201–202.

⁴⁵E. M. Saunders, *History of the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces* (Halifax, 1902), 93.

⁴⁶C. B. Fergusson (ed.), *The Diary of Simeon Perkins, 1790–1796*, 177.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 1797–1803, 18.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 1790–1796, 428.

⁴⁹J. Davis, *Life and Times of the Late Rev. Harris Harding* (Charlottetown, 1860), 26.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 146–148.

He was eminently useful in the conversion of sinners perhaps more so than any man in this country. He would sometimes seem to prophesy, and mark out people that he thought would be converted. He seemed to have an uncommon spirit of discernment that way.⁵¹

Those who perhaps knew him best, the members of his Yarmouth congregation, described in 1854, the year of his death, his long ministry in the community in the following manner:

For nearly Seventy years, Sixty of which were spent in this neighbourhood, he proclaimed the Gospel which he loved with unwearied diligence, and extraordinary success.

“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” Dan. 12:3.⁵²

Harding had been born in Horton, Nova Scotia, on October 10, 1761, of Yankee Planter stock. Soon after his birth, his parents, like many other Nova Scotia Yankees, decided to return to Connecticut. During the early part of the American Revolutionary War, though only a teenager, Harding evidently supported the patriot side. He was arrested for a brief time by the British and imprisoned in a man-of-war. In 1783, despite his patriot wartime activities, Harding (at the age of twenty-two) returned to the Horton region, where he became a school teacher. Though “a stranger to experimental religion” and “famous for his love of fun and frolic,”⁵³ Harding began to attend New Light services conducted by Payzant and Thomas Handley Chipman, the only ordained New Light preachers in Nova Scotia – after Alline left the province in August 1783. It should be noted that Harding, despite the fact that he became Alline’s most enthusiastic advocate, never met the Falmouth preacher.

Harding not only attended New Light services; he also, in 1785, according to his sister, “was much taken up with the Methodists,” especially Freeborn Garrettson. Garrettson, according to Harding’s sister, had stressed that it was necessary for the individual to make “strenuous efforts in seeking the Lord.” “Men must do their part,” he declared, “and [G]od would do his.” Harding, as a result, attempted “to *work hard* for salvation instead of *believing heartily for it*.”⁵⁴ He prayed no fewer than twelve times a day and fasted every Friday, but despite this he could not “find his way into the heavenly kingdom.” Instead of being part of “the great regenerating press,” he found himself “plunged into despair.”⁵⁵ When there appeared to be no hope, Thomas Handley Chipman nudged him in the New Light direction.

⁵¹Quoted in Davis, *Harding*, 168.

⁵²Quoted in *ibid.*, 153.

⁵³Davis, *Harding*, 143.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

One "forenoon" in 1785, on his way to his school house, Harding "seemed all at once to obtain a view of Jesus." He realized—in retrospect at least—that "good works could not save him," but only his surrendering himself "to the Saviour, just as he was, to be saved 'freely by his grace,' and by that grace alone." When he arrived at his school, "Joy and love transported his soul." His sister recalled:

he forgot the children of his charge. Eternal glory was all before him, and he stood bathed in a flood of tears. His countenance was so altered, that the children gathered around him, they likewise in tears, and thought him dying. Truly there he began to live. When he came to his recollection he thought, by the sun on the window, that he must have been standing on one spot nearly an hour.⁵⁶

Like Alline, Harding had been "converted in a rapture" and "ever after he sought to live in a rapture," and he "judged . . . his religious condition"⁵⁷ and that of others by the intensity of their conversion experience. Having had a traumatic conversion, Harding, like Alline, expected that everyone else should share the same emotional ecstasy and "the ravishing of the soul"⁵⁸ which he had experienced. Also like Alline, and most of his disciples, Harding "placed great reliance on impressions, and often regarded them as direct intimations of the divine will, which it was his duty to obey."⁵⁹ For example, in 1790, while at Horton, Harding had a memorable dream "which much affected, and made a singular impression on my mind." "I dreamed," Harding wrote,

I was on board a small sailboat, with deacon Cleaveland, and a number of my dear Christian friends at Horton. Methought I stood upon the gunwale of the boat, having a spear in my hand. The sun shone with peculiar brightness. We were running before a pleasant breeze, at a little distance from a delightful shore. The water also was clear as crystal, and I could see the white and shining fishes at the bottom, while I was continually catching them with the spear. My friends, I thought, were sitting speaking of Christ's love to a fallen world, their cheeks bathed in tears, and apparently filled with peace and joy. I thought the deacon said to me, 'You catch every fish you strike.' I replied, 'I miss none.' Methought I fished until I had got the boat filled and then had a delicious feast with my fellow-disciples. I awoke in a joyful frame. I visited Yarmouth soon after.⁶⁰

The dream, according to Harding, was God's means of directing him to Yarmouth "to fish for men."

Harris Harding, if he had become a Methodist preacher, a Garrettsonian rather than an Allinite Baptist, would have significantly altered the shape of popular religion in the Maritimes. In all likelihood, Methodists would have outnumbered Baptists in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia by

⁵⁶Davis, *Harding*, 10.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁸See my *Ravished by the Spirit*, especially Chapter I.

⁵⁹A.U.A., Cramp, "History of the Maritime Baptists."

⁶⁰Quoted in Davis, *Harding*, 206.

the middle of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Methodism would have had at its core an American New Light emphasis rather than a British sense of order and decorum.

Theodore Seth Harding was born in March 1773 at Barrington, Nova Scotia. His parents were Yankee Congregationalists. At the age of eight, in 1781, soon after his father's death, Harding first met Henry Alline when the Falmouth preacher "put his hand upon his head and prayed, May God be a father to this boy!" Apparently, the young Harding "trembled from head to foot, and at once felt deeply impressed with his need of a Saviour."⁶¹ Six years later, in 1787, the fourteen-year-old Harding came under the influence of Freeborn Garrettson. "Liberty came to his soul," as he experienced the profound ecstasy of regeneration. After a short period of backsliding, when he mingled "in vain and worldly society," Harding's faith was revived "under the preaching of Joseph Dimock and Harris Harding"—who also had been brought to Christ largely through Garrettson's preaching.⁶²

Instead of becoming a New Light Baptist, Harding, now in his early twenties, after a long discussion with William Black, resolved to become a Methodist itinerant. Black sent Harding to Horton, the New Light Allinite center, with the following instructions:

You are going to the country to preach. You are a young man. It is a remarkable thing for so young a man to be in the ministry. You will be flattered, but remember, so surely as your pride is kindled, your usefulness is at an end. Besides, much that you hear will not be worth your regard. They will call you an angel to-day, and a devil to-morrow; when they pronounce you an angel, be not inflated; when a devil, be not depressed.⁶³

After spending some two years in the Horton-Cornwallis area as a Methodist preacher, Harding in late 1795 became an enthusiastic convert to the Calvinist-Baptist cause. After his Baptism in Halifax, he was ordained minister of the Horton Baptist Church, and his "connection continued until dissolved by death in 1855."⁶⁴ On hearing of Harding's death, the Reverend I. E. Bill declared:

Father Harding was a brilliant star in the bright constellation. In pulpit eloquence he excelled them all [that is, the so-called Baptist Patriarchs]. In this department he was always popular with all classes, and continued so to the last. His appearance in the pulpit was commanding and dignified, his style bold and nervous, his Scriptural quotations select and impressive, his imagination lively and active, his feelings deep and pungent, and his voice like the sound of a trumpet. For comprehensiveness of expression and readiness of utterance Father Harding was unequalled.⁶⁵

⁶¹Quoted in Bill, *Fifty Years*, 142.

⁶²Quoted in Saunders, *History of the Baptists*, 311.

⁶³Quoted in *ibid.*, 312-313.

⁶⁴Bill, *Fifty Years*, 143.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 151-152.

Yet even more influential than Harding in the religious life of Nova Scotia in the pre-1860 period was Edward Manning, the so-called "Baptist Pope" of the Maritimes. Though not directly affected by Garrettson, Manning was certainly indirectly and profoundly influenced by the Maryland Methodist because of the crucial role that Dimock and Harding played in Manning's conversion, in 1789. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, it should be stressed, until his death in 1851, Edward Manning was the most powerful single individual within the Nova Scotia Calvinist Baptist Church.⁶⁶

If any one individual was responsible for channeling the New Light-Allinite Free Will-Garrettsonian tradition into the Calvinist Baptist church, it was Edward Manning. Reacting violently against his own New Light free will past, Manning did everything in his power to ensure that the New Light legacy of the 1780s and early 1790s would atrophy into dark oblivion. Manning was evidently haunted by his Allinite and his Garrettsonian past, and he was determined to stamp his Baptist and Calvinist mark on his growing denomination.

Manning was indeed a remarkable man. Physically imposing — he was well over six feet in height, — Manning was a powerful and persuasive preacher and a stubbornly determined individual. He was absolutely convinced that he knew what was best for his denomination, and he was determined to force his will upon his fellow Baptists. As the nineteenth century unfolded, especially in the post-1825 period, he pushed his often reluctant Baptist followers both in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, but especially in the latter province, towards Anglo-American Calvinist order and away from New Light enthusiasm. This was, in my view, Manning's most significant contribution to the religious life of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Born in 1766 in Ireland, Manning while still an infant moved with his parents to the Falmouth region of Nova Scotia. A decade before his conversion in 1789, Manning remembered Henry Alline's urging him "to flee from the wrath to come."⁶⁷ Soon after his traumatic conversion Manning began to itinerate throughout New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and northern Maine. A principal participant in Nova Scotia's manifestation of antinomianism, "the New Dispensation movement," Manning became disturbed with the divisive religious forces he had helped to unleash, and by the late 1790s he had become an ardent Calvinist. Gradually, he used his position as pastor of the Cornwallis Baptist Church to assert his authority over the growing Baptist denomination, first in the Annapolis Valley

⁶⁶See Professor B. Moody's important study, "From Itinerant to Settled Pastor: A Case of Edward Manning" (A paper read to the Canadian Society of Church History, Halifax, N.S., June 1984). See also my *New Light Letters and Songs*, 39-66.

⁶⁷A.U.A., Manning Papers, "Reminiscences" of Manning's Conversion.

area and then throughout the entire Maritime region. He was an indefatigable "busy-body" interested in every aspect of denominational life and was at the crest of the Baptist wave as it swept across both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the 1820s and 1830s.

By 1799, only two American Methodist missionaries remained in Nova Scotia, and there was little enthusiasm in Methodist circles in the United States to increase that number. For a variety of reasons, the British province was seen in a negative light, as "Nova Scarcity."⁶⁸ Moreover, Bishop Asbury was not eager to send off his young itinerants to an alien land from which, he once noted, they returned to the United States "not so humble and serious as when they went."⁶⁹ Without American assistance, and without evangelical preachers of the Garrettson mold, the remaining Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Methodist preachers proved to be no match for the New Light Baptist itinerants. Native Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Methodist preachers like Black, John and James Mann, and Duncan McCall were no match for the young, dynamic, and for many, charismatic, Edward Manning, the Hardings, Joseph Dimock, and their increasing number of unusually gifted converts. By 1799, the evidence suggests, Black was a largely spent force, a man who had reached the peak of his influence in the 1780s but who experienced a steady but inexorable decline until the 1820s. John Mann, though very committed, was an ineffective preacher, and according to Simeon Perkins his "voice and Manner" were "uncooth."⁷⁰ Mann's brother, James, on the other hand, especially towards the end of his life in 1820, was "chaste, edifying, and usually unimpassioned." But in the 1790s, while still free to itinerate, he revealed a remarkable "lack of responsibility."⁷¹ Duncan McCall, who died in 1830, though very able, seldom strayed from the St. Stephen area of New Brunswick.

The four Methodist Patriarchs shared a number of things in common. They were, according to Goldwin French, "more formal in their religious practice than their American brethren."⁷² Moreover, as the nineteenth century unfolded they also became increasingly obsessed with order and increasingly suspicious of New Light enthusiasm. Consequently, William Black was delighted to report in September 1804 that unlike the Baptist New Lights the Maritime Methodists were much "esteemed by those in authority for their quiet and orderly lives, good morals and strict loyalty."⁷³ The Maritime Methodists, in other words, using the New Light

⁶⁸See N. MacKinnon, "The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783 to 1791" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1974).

⁶⁹Quoted in G. French, *Parsons and Politics* (Toronto, 1962), 34.

⁷⁰Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Ibid.*, 36.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 38.

Baptists as a foil, were underscoring their own respectability and their own British roots. But in the process, and this point needs to be emphasized, they were cutting themselves off from most ordinary New Brunswickers and Nova Scotians who desperately wanted American New Light enthusiasm in their preachers. While the Maritime Methodists became increasingly dependent upon British Methodism for their paradigm of religious behavior, tens of thousands of New Brunswickers and Nova Scotians were looking to indigenous New Light Baptist preachers—people like themselves—who resonated with the popular religious culture of a rural society they knew so well.

For the Methodist élite in the late 1790s and first few decades of the nineteenth century, religious enthusiasm led first to “fanaticism” and then to “infidelity.”⁷⁴ For men like the Hardings, Dimock, and Edward Manning and their growing number of followers, religious enthusiasm, the “workings of the Holy Spirit,” was an unmistakable sign that what they referred to as a “Great Reformation” was actually occurring. It is not surprising, therefore, that one Methodist leader felt compelled to complain in 1822, “because we oppose their enthusiastic excesses I do not permit people to rise up and speak, alias to rant and rave in our solemn assemblies. . . . They [the New Lights] would endeavour to persuade our people that they are in bondage.”⁷⁵ In this one cogent statement, the Reverend Robert Alder, a recently arrived British Methodist, summed up why by the 1820s the Methodists had been displaced by the Baptists as the most influential evangelical denomination in southern Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. By rejecting so much of their Garrettsonian legacy, the Maritime Methodists, at a critical juncture in the history of the region, had enabled the New Light Baptists, both Free Will and Calvinists, to overtake them in terms of numbers and societal influence.

It would be a serious mistake, however, to conclude that the Garrettsonian legacy was of no consequence to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Maritime Methodism. It is noteworthy that Methodism remained relatively strong in those regions of Nova Scotia where Garrettson exerted his greatest influence in his all-too-brief sojourn in Nova Scotia.⁷⁶ There is therefore a sharp ring of truth in the observation made by R. D. Simpson in his biography of Garrettson written in 1954 that the great Methodist preacher “brought form and force to the work in Nova Scotia out of all proportion to the two brief years he spent in the Mission.”⁷⁷ Had Garrettson stayed longer it is certain that the religious landscape of the Maritimes would have been radically different.⁷⁸

⁷⁴Quoted in G. French, *Parsons and Politics*, 65.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶See Stratas, “Study of Historical Demography.”

⁷⁷Simpson, “Freeborn Garrettson.”

⁷⁸McNairn, “Mission to Nova Scotia,” 3–18.