

**THE "GUERRE DES ÉTEIGNOIRS": SCHOOL REFORM AND POPULAR
RESISTANCE IN LOWER CANADA, 1841-1850.**

by

Wendie Nelson

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APPROVAL

NAME: WENDIE NELSON

DEGREE: MASTERS

TITLE OF THESIS: THE "GUERRE DES ETEIGNOIRS": SCHOOL REFORM AND POPULAR RESISTANCE IN LOWER CANADA, 1841-1850.

EXAMINING COMMITTEE: CHAIR: DAVID ROSS

Jack Little, Senior Supervisor and
Associate Professor, History Department

Hugh Johnston, Professor
History Department

Rod Day, Professor
History Department

Allan Greer, External Examiner
History Department, University of Toronto

DATE APPROVED: April 12, 1989

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The "Guerre des Éteignoirs": School reform and popular
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Author: _____

(signature)

Wendie R. Nelson

(name)

April 19, 1989

(date)

ABSTRACT

The 1840s were a critical period in the history of Lower Canada, witnessing important changes in the economic, social and political spheres. Successive crop failures, a sharp downturn in the timber and shipbuilding industries, and a commercial crisis combined to make the latter half of the 1840s a time of economic distress. Political tensions created by the Act of Union in 1841, were, to a certain extent, alleviated by the establishment of responsible government in 1848, because it ensured that French Canadians would have an increased voice in the popularly-elected government. The role of the state was heightened; however, and, in response, new political alliances were formed in an attempt to appeal to the populace. In the social sphere, successive governments in the 1840s legislated a host of reforms, one of the most significant being the creation of a system of local government based on new school and municipal laws. The school law of 1846 was particularly important because it imposed taxes, and tightened the mechanisms for collection of those taxes. These measures precipitated a period of wide-spread resistance and revolt known as the "guerre des *éteignoirs*," a phenomenon which has received little attention from historians.

The "guerre des *éteignoirs*", the subject of this thesis, is worthy of a major study for two reasons. The first is the extent of opposition to the school law; resistance, while focussed in the District of Trois-Rivières, occurred throughout Lower Canada, and it persisted from 1846 to the end of 1850. Secondly, an understanding of the causes of resistance to one aspect of the 1840s' social legislation, should shed light on the nature of popular response to the increased role of the state in this critical period of transition.

To give the thesis an acceptable focus, a regional approach was used, analyzing resistance to the school law in the two counties where it was most overt. The thesis finds that the social reforms and political adjustments of the 1840s created tensions

within and between different rural social groups. Specifically, the rural elite split over the issue of school reform. Village notables, such as the clergy and the liberal professionals, supported reform, seeing in it opportunities for employment and an increased role in local affairs. In contrast, the landowning elite vehemently opposed the school law, motivated primarily by a desire to avoid paying property taxes, but also by fear that the nascent state bureaucracy would undermine its local power. Finally, habitants resisted the school law because they resented taxes during a period of economic distress. Habitants were also motivated, however, by their hostility towards the village notables who were exerting increased control over rural society through their participation in the school system.

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DEDICATION

To my family, for their loving support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEN	Archives de l'Évêché de Nicolet
AETR	Archives de l'Évêché de Trois-Rivières
AJTR	Archives Juridiques à Trois-Rivières
AMMASV	Archives de la Maison Mère des Soeurs d'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge
ANQ	Archives Nationales du Québec à Québec
AUQTR	Archives de l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
CGQ	<u>Cahiers de Géographie du Québec</u>
CHA	Canadian Historical Association
CHR	<u>Canadian Historical Review</u>
HS/SH	<u>Histoire Sociale/Social History</u>
JLAC	Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Canada
NA	National Archives of Canada
OH	<u>Ontario History</u>
RHAF	<u>Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française</u>
RS	<u>Recherches Sociographiques</u>
RUO/UOQ	<u>Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa Quarterly</u>
SCHEC	Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église Catholique

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is the *guerre des éteignoirs*, an extended period of revolt against school reforms which were instituted by the government of the province of Canada in the 1840s. The revolts took place during critical years in the history of Lower Canada,¹ which witnessed important economic, social and political changes. Agriculture, reeling from a succession of crop failures and not yet fully integrated into a reliable market for its products, was primarily centred on production for home consumption. A sharp decline in the timber and ship-building industries had disastrous implications for both urban wage labourers and farmers who relied on the income received from part-time work in those industries. Political resentments among French Canadians over the forced union with Upper Canada and Lord Sydenham's heavy-handed governing methods were only partly assuaged by the attainment of responsible government in 1848. That achievement, while giving considerable political power to French-Canadian politicians, also reinforced the growing alliance between the more moderate of those politicians and the Catholic Church hierarchy -- an alliance which, as we shall see, would have repercussions for rural society. As the state was reorganized by colonial officials in the 1840s, its role was enhanced by social legislation which initiated reforms in the judiciary as well as in the municipal and school systems.

The most significant aspect of the new school and municipal laws passed in 1841 was the implementation of compulsory taxation -- a measure previously unknown in Lower Canada. The populace promptly showed its displeasure with this innovation by initiating a passive boycott of the new municipal corporations, one of whose tasks was

¹Lower Canada's name was changed to Canada East after the union with Upper Canada in 1840. The term Lower Canada is used almost exclusively by Quebec historians, even for this period. Thus, Lower Canada will be used throughout the thesis, whether I am referring to the period before or after the union with Upper Canada.

to levy school taxes. This passive resistance by the majority of Lower Canada's population sufficed to undermine the state's plans for tax-supported public schools and municipal government. After a one-year experiment with voluntary contributions proved to be a failure, the government amended the school law in 1846. Compulsory taxes were reimposed and tighter procedures for the efficient collection of school taxes were implemented. The state thus carved out a more powerful role for itself in regulating school affairs.

The response to the 1846 school act was a sharp escalation of the earlier resistance, marked by the use of active as well as passive opposition tactics. Large numbers of petitions complaining about the school law (and often the municipal system as well) were sent to the government in 1847. Elected school commissioners neglected their duties, and property owners refused to pay taxes. Gradually, resistance took on a more aggressive tone, and it became more focussed in one particular region, the District of Trois-Rivières. Those who supported the school system were threatened with violence, and in 1850 many of those threats were carried out, although the targets of violence were usually school buildings or the property of school supporters, rather than individuals themselves.

Apart from further tightening the regulations concerning the administration of the school system in 1849, the government had shown little response to the growing wave of opposition to the school law. The violent behaviour of 1850 precipitated government action, however, and a commission of enquiry, supported by government troops, was sent to the District of Trois-Rivières. Not until the end of 1850 was the region considered to be reasonably subdued. Pockets of resistance, marked by attacks on schools or school officials, would nevertheless persist into the 1850s and 1860s.²

²Jacques Dorion cites several examples of attacks on schools or threats against school inspectors in the 1850s. See Jacques Dorion, *L'École de Rang au Québec* (Montréal: Les Éditions de l'Homme, 1979), pp. 338-40. René Hardy has found evidence of charivaris

This extended period of revolt is known as the *guerre des éteignoirs* (or candle snuffers' war) because the opponents of the school system were thought to be snuffing out the light of knowledge. This phenomenon is worthy of a detailed study for three major reasons. The first of these is the wide-spread nature of the revolt against the school law. While the more aggressive opposition of the last half of the 1840s is the focus of this study, that opposition marked a shift in intensity from the earlier period, rather than the onset of something new. Resistance, escalating from a passive to an active phase, therefore persisted for well over a decade. The *guerre des éteignoirs* was extensive spatially as well as chronologically. The most violent response to the school law occurred in the District of Trois-Rivières, particularly in the two counties of Nicolet and Yamaska. Resistance in the form of non-compliance with the school regulations, petitions asking for their amendment or repeal, and acts of violence against school houses occurred, however, in parishes and townships throughout Lower Canada. Thus, the opposition to the school laws was more than a regional conflict; in both geographic scope and duration, it represented a generalized response to Lower Canada's school reforms.

A second reason why the *guerre des éteignoirs* warrants a detailed study revolves around the crucial changes which were taking place during the 1840s. During a period of economic dislocation and shifting political alliances, the development of a more centralized and intrusive state had profound implications for rural social groups. Social reforms, and the creation of a state bureaucracy to implement those reforms, would inevitably provide employment opportunities for those with close connections to politicians in the central state. For other rural groups, however, those same measures would simply be a bleak reminder that control of local affairs was being wrested from

²(cont'd) against the collectors of school taxes in the District of Trois-Rivières in 1860. See René Hardy, "Le Charivari dans la Sociabilité Rurale," Unpublished paper kindly provided by the author, p. 14.

their hands. An analysis of the guerre des éteignoirs is thus crucial to our understanding of this critical transition period. If we can understand why different rural groups responded as they did to the school law of 1846, then we can attempt a more general statement about the implications of the political and social reforms of the 1840s for rural society.

Given the significance of opposition to the school laws, and the importance of the changes taking place in the 1840s, it is surprising that the guerre des éteignoirs has received so little attention from historians. This inattention is the third reason for the present study. Only two papers have dealt exclusively with the guerre des éteignoirs, and the conclusions in both draw heavily from the opinions of contemporary observers, particularly those of Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, the superintendent of education for Lower Canada during the 1840s. Those conclusions suggest that political demagogues, manipulating the habitants' traditional hatred of taxes and their simmering resentment at Lord Sydenham's arbitrary ruling tactics in the early 1840s, incited the populace into open revolt against the school laws.³

Making use of some of the abundant sources available on the guerre des éteignoirs, a more recent article by Michael Cross connects the school revolt and other episodes of popular violence in the 1840s to the state's efforts at modernization. Cross correctly outlines the significant changes initiated through government reform measures. His argument, however, is flawed in several ways. Firstly, without gathering any evidence from the local level, he assumes that laws passed by governments actually had the effect they were intended to have. He thus claims that the 1846 school law was "modernization with a vengeance, the state reaching into the heart of the community,

³See L'Abbé Édouard Fournier, "La Guerre des Éteignoirs," (Unpublished paper written for the Licence es Lettres, Université Laval, May 1954); and Thomas Chapais, "La guerre des éteignoirs," Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 22 (May, 1928): 1-6.

seizing the people's children and holding them captive in schoolhouses where they were prey to alien ideologies."⁴ Subsequent chapters in the present study will show that the school system of the 1840s was rudimentary at best, and that, while the state was clearly in the ascendant, it did not control the countryside in the way Cross would have us believe. Secondly, Cross accounts for habitant opposition to the school law by simply citing the observations of a member of the landed elite -- and one who had blatant prejudices against the popular classes, as we shall see. Moreover, by suggesting that the popular violence of the 1840s was a reaction to modernization, Cross ignores the tradition of popular protest by Lower Canada's habitants. Finally, Cross contends that all rural classes were equally opposed to the new legislation instituted by the reformers of the central state. In fact, rural society was sharply divided over the issue of school reform.

Nineteenth-century school reform has provoked a considerable number of historical studies. Prior to the 1970s, the historiography of education in Canada focussed primarily on the chronological development of the school system. The approach was generally more narrative than analytical, and school reform tended to be viewed as progressive in nature.⁵ This stance was questioned by the revisionist works of the 1970s, which, like the related work by Cross, speculated on the intent of the state in creating a public school system. Revisionist historians argue that public schools were seen by middle-class reformers as the way to ensure a smooth transition from a rural and agricultural economy to one which was urban and industrialized. Through

⁴Michael S. Cross, "'The Laws are like Cobwebs': Popular Resistance to Authority in Mid-Nineteenth Century British North America," in Law in a Colonial Society: The Nova Scotia Experience, eds., Peter Waite, Sandra Oxner and Thomas Barnes (Toronto: The Carswell Company Limited, 1984), pp. 119-20.

⁵See, for Lower Canada, Louis-Philippe Audet, Le Système Scolaire de la Province de Québec. 6 vols. (vols. 1, 5 and 6, Québec: Les Éditions de l'Érable, 1950-55; vols. 2, 3 and 4, Québec: Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1951-52); Keith D. Hunte, "The Development of the System of Education in Canada East 1841-1867. An Historical Survey," (Unpublished MA Thesis, McGill University, April 1962).

schooling, the working classes would be socialized to accept their limited role in society, and to fulfil their function as docile and efficient industrial labourers.⁶ Proponents of the thesis that schooling was meant as a form of social control have focussed their attention mainly on the school legislation itself and on the ideology of the reformers who shaped that legislation.⁷ Historians such as Nadia Eid and Alison Prentice pay close attention to the rhetoric of middle-class supporters of public schooling. They then argue that schooling took the form that the school proponents wished it to take. Like Cross, however, their failure to draw a connection between the intent of reformers and the reality of what happened in the schools weakens their analysis.

A more recent approach to the history of education is that taken by Bruce Curtis. In his analysis of the reasons for school reform, Curtis looks to the political context in which that reform occurred. He argues that, as the state grew more important in the 1840s, it took over the educational function as a way of reinforcing its role in society and of giving citizens the political socialization necessary in a modern state. Thus, the establishment of public schooling had more to do with state formation than with economic transformation.⁸ Curtis, and his colleague Philip Corrigan, provide a more

⁶For a review and critique of some of the revisionist literature for Upper Canada, see J. Donald Wilson, "Some observations on recent trends in Canadian Educational History," in An Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History, ed., J. Donald Wilson (Vancouver: Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, 1984), pp. 7-21.

⁷For Lower Canada, see Nadia F. Eid, "Éducation et Classes Sociales: Analyse de l'Idéologie conservatrice - Cléricale et Petite Bourgeoise - au Québec au Milieu du 19e siècle," RHAF, 32 (1978): 159-79. A recent article disagrees with Eid's characterization of the school system prior to 1867 as conservative and confessional. Jean-Pierre Charland uses the same methodology as Eid, analyzing the school legislation and the words of the reformers. He suggests, however, that the legislation was liberal in intent. See Jean-Pierre Charland, "Le Réseau d'Enseignement Public Bas-Canadien, 1841-1867: Une Institution de l'État Libéral," RHAF, 40 (1987): 505-35. For Upper Canada, see, for example, Alison Prentice, The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1977).

⁸See Bruce Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Education, Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846," Studies in Political Economy, 10 (Winter, 1983): 99-121; Philip Corrigan and Bruce Curtis, "Education, Inspection and State Formation: A Preliminary Statement," CHA Historical Papers, 1985: 156-71;

nanced approach to the analysis of state control of public schooling than do the social control proponents. For example, they examine the role of school inspectors and argue that the state bureaucracy gained effective control of local institutions through the knowledge state inspectors gathered about those institutions. In a detailed exploration of local resistance to increased state control of schooling, however, Curtis does not pay enough heed to possible disparities between social groups in their response to state reforms.⁹ The divisions created within the rural elite of Lower Canada over school reform is one of the most significant aspects of the *guerre des éteignoirs*.

In studying the impact of school reform at the local level, another group of historians, notably R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, found that school legislation and the actions of state officials were often influenced by the demands of local communities. They conclude that the significance of public schooling cannot be gauged solely by analyzing the motivation of reformers or the bureaucratic structures of the state.¹⁰ Other works that attend to the local community have studied the resistance offered to the dictates of school authorities by parents and students alike, and the importance of economic and cultural factors in determining school attendance and literacy levels.¹¹

⁸(cont'd) Bruce Curtis, Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871 (London, Ontario: The Althouse Press, 1988).

⁹A recent review of Curtis' book also makes this point. See, Jean-Marie Fecteau, Review of Bruce Curtis, Building the Educational State, in RHAF, 42 (1988): 270-72.

¹⁰See especially, R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, "Bureaucracy vs community? The origins of bureaucratic procedure in the Upper Canadian school system," Journal of Social History, 13 (1980): 438-57; and *ibid.*, "Who ran the schools: Local influence on education policy in nineteenth-century Ontario," Ontario History, 72 (1980): 131-42.

¹¹Much more work has been done on Upper Canada than Lower Canada. For the latter, see Andrée Dufour, "Diversité institutionnelle et fréquentation scolaire dans l'île de Montréal en 1825 et en 1835," RHAF, 41 (1988): 507-35; Allen Greer, "The Pattern of Literacy in Quebec, 1745-1899," HS/SH, 11 (1978): 295-335; and Michel Verrette, "L'Alphabetisation de la Population de la Ville de Québec de 1750 à 1849," RHAF, 39 (1985): 51-76. For Upper Canada, see Ian Davey, "The rhythms of work and the rhythms of school," in Egerton Ryerson and His Times, eds., Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (Toronto: Macmillan and Company of Canada, Limited, 1978), pp. 222-47; Chad Gaffield, Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of the French-Language Controversy in Ontario (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987); and, for an examination of local resistance to school reform, see Curtis, Building

The methodology and philosophy which has shaped the work of this latter group of historians is similar to that which lies behind the present study. To understand why habitants refused to pay taxes, why wealthy landowners encouraged open defiance of the school law, and why clergy and village professional men rallied behind the school system, one must examine the significance of school reform for each of these rural social groups. That cannot be done by exploring only the school legislation or the rhetoric of school reformers. While these aspects of the question are important in setting the context, one is required to pass on to the dynamics of rural society to understand why it split over the issue of school reform. To that end, various studies which explore the relationship between habitants, clergy, village notables and the landed elite in Lower Canada have been helpful in determining what impact the social reforms of the 1840s, and notably the school law of 1846, had on those relations.¹²

Because the popular classes do not leave written records, one must surmise their motivation by analyzing their actions. Historians in recent years have provided a wealth of material on popular culture and analyses of peasant riots and revolts.¹³

¹¹(cont'd) the Educational State, chapter 4. For a thoughtful and comprehensive review of the historiography of education in Canada, see Chad Gaffield, "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education," Acadiensis, 15, no. 2 (1986): 169-90.

¹²See, for example, Allan Greer, "L'Habitant, la paroisse rurale et la politique locale au XVIIIe siècle: Quelques cas dans la Vallée du Richelieu," SCHEC, Sessions d'Études, 47 (1980): 19-33; Richard Chabot, Le Curé de Campagne et la Contestation locale au Québec de 1791 aux troubles de 1837-38 (Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, Ltée, 1975); Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century," CHR, 52(1971): 51-91. For a study of the relations between self-sufficient farmers and wealthy planters in Georgia, which has certain parallels to Lower Canada, see Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹³See, for example, E.P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English Crowd in the eighteenth century," Past and Present, no. 50 (February, 1971), pp. 76-136; George Rudé, The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964); Georges Lefebvre, The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France trans., Joan White (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973). For a study of a revolt by subsistence farmers in New England during the rise of merchant capitalism, see David P. Szatmary, Shay's Rebellion: The

Studies such as those by E.P. Thompson and George Rudé have proved useful in explaining habitant opposition to school reform because of the detail they provide on the traditional patterns of peasant resistance in Europe. While fewer studies of popular culture have been done in Canada, recent works by Terence Crowley and Stephen Kenny detail periods of popular protest in New France and Lower Canada.¹⁴ Studies such as these are important because they highlight the fact that violent resistance to unpopular measures was not uncommon in Lower Canada -- a point that Cross neglects in putting so much stress on modernization as the precipitant to the violence of the 1840s. Of particular relevance in refuting Cross is an article by Allan Greer on charivaris in Lower Canada. Interpreting charivaris as a form of community self-management, Greer points out how effectively habitants used them for political purposes during the Rebellion of 1837. The charivaris which took place during the guerre des éteignoirs were thus part of a continuum of traditional culture.¹⁵ René Hardy confirms that charivaris continued to play their part in regulating community affairs in later decades.¹⁶ These works on traditional patterns of resistance in Lower Canada provide us with a sense of the "preexisting culture of protest" among habitants which made them receptive to the anti-tax rhetoric of wealthy landowners.¹⁷

¹³(cont'd) Making of an Agrarian Insurrection (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). For an analysis of a peasant revolt in Brazil against state reforms which had many similarities to the revolt in Lower Canada, see Roderick J. Barman, "The Brazilian Peasantry Reexamined: The Implications of the Quebra-Quilo Revolt, 1874-1875," Hispanic American Historical Review, 57 (1977): 401-24.

¹⁴See Terence Crowley, "'Thunder Gusts': Popular Disturbances in early French Canada," in Readings in Canadian History. Preconfederation, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Canada: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Limited, 1982), pp. 67-88; and Stephen Kenny, "'Cahots' and Catcalls: An Episode of Popular Resistance in Lower Canada at the outset of the Union," CHR, 45 (1984): 184-208.

¹⁵See Allan Greer, "From Folklore to Revolution: Charivaris and the Lower Canadian Rebellion of 1837," Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Social Science Historical Association, New Orleans, 31 October 1987. I would like to thank Professor Greer for kindly providing me with a copy of his paper.

¹⁶See Hardy, "Le Charivari."

¹⁷The phrase is from Robert C. McMath, Jr., "Sandy Land and Hogs in the Timber: (Agri)cultural origins of the Farmers' Alliance in Texas," in The Countryside in the Age

While the present study is concerned primarily with the response of rural social groups to school reform, it is important to have a clear understanding of the nature of those reforms. To that end, chapter two will review school legislation in Lower Canada prior to the 1840s, pointing out in particular that when state-funded schools were made available, parents sent their children to school in increasing numbers. Chapter three will provide the political, economic and social context in which the school laws of the 1840s took place. The adjustments being made in all three spheres exerted pressures on rural society in ways which culminated in the violence of the *guerre des éteignoirs*. Chapter four, which outlines the school laws of the 1840s, will explore the reasons why resistance to those laws occurred so rapidly. The main focus of the chapter will be on the 1846 act which precipitated the most aggressive phase of the school revolt. Considerable attention will be given to the popular grievances against the law as they were outlined in petitions sent to the superintendent of education.

Chapters five through eight will turn to a more detailed analysis of the school revolt in the region which was most affected by it. The counties of Nicolet and Yamaska, in the District of Trois-Rivières, experienced the most persistent and the most violent resistance to the school law. The commission of enquiry established by the government in 1850 to look into the causes of the revolt spent several months in the parishes of Nicolet and Yamaska. The letters and reports they sent to the provincial secretary's office form a large part of the documentation used to analyze the *guerre des éteignoirs*. Chapter five will focus on the landed elite to determine its involvement in stirring up agitation against the school system, and to analyze its motivation for opposing school reform. Chapter six will turn to the village notables (clergy and village professional men) who supported the school law. Because of the availability of sources,

¹⁷(cont'd) of *Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the social history of rural America*, eds., Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 207.

this analysis will focus more closely on St. Grégoire, the parish in Nicolet county where riots against the school law first erupted in 1850. Using correspondence between the superintendent of education and the parish's priests and doctor, as well as the reports written by the commission of enquiry, the important role played by these notables in supporting the school system will be established. Their reasons for approving of school reform will be examined, as will the growing animosity between this group and the landed elite.

As we have noted, the voice of the habitant is not to be heard in the correspondence of officialdom. To ensure that the motives of elite leaders are not wrongly attributed to the habitants, or that the rural masses are not written off as mere dupes of "political demagogues", we must reconstruct the context of habitant life and from that reconstruction read their motives. Thus, chapter seven will examine the social and economic life of St. Grégoire's farmers and will make the following major points: resistance to taxes did not mean the same thing as resistance to schooling, and habitants were experiencing considerable economic difficulties in the last half of the 1840s. To understand more fully the reasons for habitant opposition to the school laws, we turn in the final chapter to the riots in St. Grégoire and neighbouring parishes. The analysis of habitant participation in those activities finds that, while primarily motivated by resistance to taxes, habitants were also driven to oppose schools because they resented the increasing hegemony of village notables over those schools.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL LEGISLATION PRIOR TO THE 1840S

A review of the school laws passed prior to the 1840s will show that problems confronted by school reformers and school users in the 1840s, such as poor teachers, the suspicion of fraud by school trustees, and opportunities for political manoeuvring through the school system, were experienced by an earlier generation. Perhaps the most important parallel between the two periods, however, was the fact that a relatively centralized school system was in place in Lower Canada in the 1830s. While no comprehensive study has been done on the implementation of the school system before 1840, historians tend to see the school laws of the 1840s as a marked departure from the past in terms of their centralizing tendencies. We will see from this and the following chapters that the school laws of the 1840s, while clearly more comprehensive and centralizing than those of the previous period, were still a part of a continuum.

The dawning of the nineteenth century brought with it the first attempt, by the government of Lower Canada, to establish an elementary school system for the province's masses. Prior to that time the schooling of the lower classes had been virtually ignored by the state and was left in the hands of the Church and independent itinerant teachers.¹ Given the reduced number of clerics available for pastoral duties during the British regime, as well as the lack of qualified lay teachers, it is not surprising that estimates of the literacy levels of the general population at the end of the eighteenth century are low.² In answer to a questionnaire generated by Lord Dorchester's Education Commission, for example, the Bishop of Quebec, Mgr. Hubert,

¹Louis-Philippe Audet, *Le Système scolaire de la Province de Québec*, 6 vols. (vols. 1, 5, and 6, Québec: Les Éditions de l'Érable, 1950-55; vols. 2-4, Québec: Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1951-52), 1: 9, 53, 124.

²Ibid., pp. 112-13, 124. Abbé Lionel Groulx, *L'enseignement français au Canada*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Montréal: Librairie Granger Frères, Limitée, 1933), 1: 52-53.

estimated that in 1790 there were approximately twenty elementary schools for every 160,000 habitants, and that only thirty people in the average parish could read and write.³

In 1801 legislation based on the ideas of the Anglican Bishop, Jacob Mountain, empowered the Governor to appoint syndics who would form the Royal Institute, the administrative body of a new school system. The Governor was also responsible for naming the commissioners in any parish or township which wished to establish a Royal Institute school. These appointed commissioners were to oversee the financing and construction of schools and to act as intermediaries between the local population and the Royal Institute. While the government was responsible for appointing and paying the school teachers, the local population was to undertake to pay the costs involved in construction and maintenance of the school.⁴

The French-Canadian populace showed little resistance to this bill at the time it was passed.⁵ However, the hierarchy of the Catholic church, spurred on by the Bishop of Quebec, Mgr. Plessis, soon began an active campaign to oppose the legislation on the grounds that the intent behind the law was to anglicize and assimilate the French Canadians. Plessis objected to the Anglican Bishop's position as president of the Royal Institute, as well as to the fact that school inspectors, appointed by the government, were sometimes Protestant ministers. This anglo-Protestant predominance within the hierarchy of the Royal Institute schools was believed by Plessis to bode ill for the

³ Audet, 2: 161.

⁴ Audet, 3: 71-82; André Labarrère-Paulé, Les Instituteurs laïques au Canada-Français 1836-1900 (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1965), p. 6.

⁵ The deputy for Huntingdon, Joseph-François Perrault, proposed his own education bill on February 21, 1801, the day on which the government's bill was to be voted on for adoption. Perrault's motion was defeated. See Jean-Jacques Jolois, Joseph-François Perrault (1753-1844) et les origines de l'enseignement laïque au Bas-Canada (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1969), pp. 91-93.

survival of French-Catholic culture.⁶ The Bishop thus urged his priests not to participate in the establishment of the state schools. Moreover, when he was asked in 1818 to sit on the newly-formed Board of Trustees, he refused because his position would have been subordinate to that of the Anglican Bishop, Jacob Mountain.⁷

Clerico-nationalist historians such as Lionel Groulx supported Plessis' view-point,⁸ but more recent studies counter the "assimilationist" argument. Louis-Philippe Audet points out that two articles in the 1801 law made it less threatening to French-Canadian cultural survival than the earlier historians suggested. Article four stipulated that the Royal Institute would have no control over private schools or schools established by a religious community, while article eight allowed for the construction of a Royal Institute school only if the majority of the inhabitants of a parish or township wanted one and agreed to pay for it. It should be noted that these articles, while allowing French Canadians to opt out of the Royal Institute schools, do not address the issue of whether the schools themselves were intended as vehicles of assimilation.⁹ Réal Boulianne goes further, however, by stating that French Canadians could have used the 1801 law to establish schools in conformity with their own beliefs and values. Participation in the Royal Institute schools would not have necessitated a loss of control over the content of education to anglo-Protestant bureaucrats. Rather, he contends that the Board of Trustees allowed for considerable local autonomy, and that it encouraged the use of French-speaking Roman Catholic teachers in French-speaking areas as well as the participation of Catholic priests as school visitors in these same

⁶ Audet, 3: 112, 148-49.

⁷ Réal Boulianne, "The French Canadians and the schools of the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, 1820-1829," HS/SH, 5 (1972): 144.

⁸ Groulx, 1: 78-79.

⁹ Audet, 3: 74, 77-79, 113. See also Ouellet, p. 175.

areas.¹⁰

Whatever the potential of the schools of the Royal Institute, they remained largely untapped as an educational resource for French Canadians. In the period 1800-24, as few as thirteen to seventeen French-Canadian localities established a Royal Institute school.¹¹ These figures reflect directly upon the attitude of the Catholic Church hierarchy towards the schools. As the Bishop of Montreal, Mgr. Lartigue, proclaimed in 1822, "Il vaut mieux qu'ils n'aient pas d'éducation littéraire que de risquer une mauvaise éducation morale."¹² While the resistance of the Catholic Church to the state-sponsored schools is cited by contemporaries as well as historians as the major reason for the failure of the Royal Institute, other problems also served to undermine the system. Some contemporaries suggested that parents were unwilling or unable to provide financial support for the schools, while others complained about the incompetence and poor moral standards of the teachers. Audet states that government funding for the schools was, in fact, inadequate, and that this was in part due to the growing conflicts between the Assembly and the Legislative Council over government budgets.¹³

The growing animosity between French-Canadian liberal professionals in the Assembly and the predominantly anglo-Protestant Legislative Council in the early years of the nineteenth century did not initially focus on educational issues; as we have seen, it was the Catholic Church hierarchy which first drew attention to the threats posed by

¹⁰ Boulianne, pp. 144, 149-58.

¹¹ Audet, 4: 127. While Audet lists only eleven schools in his table, he states in a footnote that "il faut en ajouter deux autres dans lesquels la population était surement de majorité canadienne-française." See also Boulianne, p. 158, which indicates that there were seventeen government-supported schools with French-Canadian concentrations in 1818.

¹² Audet, 4: 132.

¹³ Audet, 3: 169, 205-11; 4: 208-14.

state-run schools to French-Canadian cultural survival. As the hostility between the two branches of government increased, however, the nascent Patriote party became aware of the relevance of education as both an important tool in shaping a national identity and a means of increasing its own political influence.¹⁴ In 1814 the Assembly passed a resolution to establish parish schools to replace state-run schools, but this was rejected by the Legislative Council.¹⁵ Then, the following year, the Assembly issued a report on the progress of education since the passing of the 1801 law. The report complained about the centralized control of schools and stated that, "il conviendrait infiniment mieux de laisser le soin de l'Éducation de la Jeunesse, dans les paroisses de campagne, au Curé et Principaux Habitans du lieu, tant pour le Choix des Mâîtres, que pour la Surveillance."¹⁶

With this assessment the Assembly and the Church hierarchy were clearly in accord. Thus, when the government introduced a bill in 1824 to provide for elementary schools directly controlled by the parish fabrique, both the Church and the nationalist party supported the legislation. The fabrique schools established by the new law of 1824, did not replace the state-run royal schools, but created instead a parallel school system which was more in keeping with the needs and wants of French Canadians.¹⁷ The legislation allowed the priest and wardens of a parish fabrique (church council) to use one quarter of the parish's annual revenues to finance an elementary school. If a parish had a population of more than two hundred families, it could establish two schools. The bishop's assent was required before the fabrique could allocate revenues for the construction of a school, but this was never refused since the fabrique schools

¹⁴ See Ouellet, especially pp. 176-77.

¹⁵ Audet, 3: 151.

¹⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁷ 4 George IV, cap. 31. See Labarrère-Paulé, p. 6.

fulfilled the Church's desire to have ultimate control over elementary schooling.¹⁸ Since the fabrique became the parish school commission under the new law, the Church controlled not only the school's finances, but its educational content as well.¹⁹ Allen Greer has argued that, while habitants exercised considerable control over fabrique affairs during the eighteenth century, rural priests increasingly took charge of the management of the fabrique during the early nineteenth century.²⁰

The expectations of the Catholic hierarchy notwithstanding, the fabrique schools law, like the 1801 law before it, had little impact on the lives of most French Canadians. The man appointed as the first superintendent of education for Lower Canada in 1841, Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, suggested that one of the reasons for the slow development of fabrique schools was that parish revenues were, on the whole, insufficient to support a school.²¹ Audet argues instead that the most important factors were apathy, and a lack of awareness about the law on the part of the habitants. These problems were aggravated by a failure on the part of the rural priests to take the initiatives necessary to establish schools in their own parishes. Thus, Bishop Lartigue of Montreal complained in 1826 that "Il faudrait que les Curés favorisassent plus qu'ils ne le font l'érection des écoles de paroisses d'après le nouveau Bill (1824)." In a follow-up letter a few days later he continued: "Je suis indigné de l'insousiance des curés sur ce point."²² Historian Richard Chabot offers one explanation for the curés' lack of zeal for establishing schools: they preferred to spend fabrique revenues on decorations and furniture for their churches. A contemporary, writing on this issue in 1825, is cited

¹⁸ Audet, 3: 221-23.

¹⁹ Groulx, 1: 137.

²⁰ See Allan Greer, "L'habitant, la paroisse rurale et la politique locale au XVIIIe siècle: Quelques cas dans la Vallée du Richelieu," SCHEC, Sessions d'études 47 (1980): 19-33.

²¹ Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, Mémorial de l'Éducation du Bas-Canada, 2nd ed. (Québec: Les Presses à Vapeur de Léger Brousseau, 1876), p. 146.

²² Cited by Audet, 4: 129-30.

by Chabot as stating, "Comment! me disais-je, ils ont réussi, presque partout, à faire magnifiquement dorer les églises, à avoir dans le choeur de superbes Bruxelles ou Turquie, à faire faire aux églises et aux presbytères mille réparations et ajouter mille autres ornements de luxe, et ces mêmes hommes n'ont pu établir une école respectable dans leurs endroits?"²³

The failure of the rural curés to establish fabrique schools in the years following the 1824 law's passage coincided with a growing alienation between the nationalist party and the Church hierarchy. Mgr. Lartigue, the ultramontanist Bishop of Montreal, was growing ever more suspicious of the liberal views expressed by the nationalists, and ever more determined that their ideology should not predominate over his own.²⁴ The nationalists, however, were becoming equally determined to wrest control over French-Canadian society from the Church.

The ideological and political split was exacerbated in 1829 when a new school law, known as the Assembly Schools Act, gave the deputies rather than the curés control over most aspects of the elementary school system. This new school law created a third parallel school system, as both the Royal Institute and the Fabrique schools remained in effect.²⁵ In the new act, however, the government took a new initiative by agreeing to provide funds to support schools. The Assembly deputies would allocate these funds to the syndics, who were responsible for enforcing the law at the parish level. The syndics were elected by an assembly of parish property holders, but this did not guarantee their autonomy since they were required to submit an annual report to the Assembly before funds would be granted. These funds were, as Audet calls them, "un geste princier pour

²³ Richard Chabot, Le curé de campagne et la contestation locale au Québec de 1791 aux troubles de 1837-38 (Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise HMH, Ltée, 1975), p. 149.

²⁴ Fernand Ouellet, Lower Canada 1791-1840: Social Change and Nationalism, trans. Patricia Claxton (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1983), pp. 168-70.

²⁵ 9 George IV, cap. 46.

l'époque," consisting of one-half the costs of a school house, to a maximum of £50, £20 annually for the teacher's salary, and a subsidy to the teachers to compensate them for teaching students of poor families who were unable to pay fees.²⁶

In 1832 the school legislation was renewed, but with amendments which served to increase the deputies' influence over the school system.²⁷ Teachers were henceforth required to submit an annual report to be signed by both the syndics and the Member of the Legislative Assembly. If the signatures were withheld, so was the government grant and, therefore, the teacher's salary. The teacher was also required to obtain a certificate of competence signed by a clergyman, a justice of the peace, and the senior militia officer, or, by at least two of the three. André Labarrère-Paulé points out the potential influence of the deputy over the judgement of these local notables. It would not have been expedient for them to certify a teacher if he or she would likely meet with the deputy's disapproval, thereby putting the government grant in jeopardy. Since the deputies could also be school visitors, they had control over administrative affairs as well, and could regulate conflicts about the location of a school house, or disputes between syndics and teachers. Finally, they could also make decisions about the size and boundaries of a school district.²⁸

The wide-ranging powers granted to the deputies through the legislation of 1829 and 1832 caused considerable resentment in the Church hierarchy. Bishops Panet and Lartigue viewed the centralizing aspects of the legislation with considerable alarm because the Assembly's supervisory role meant that education was no longer exclusively a function of family and parish. Although the legislation did allow a certain amount of local control through the election of syndics, church leaders were not appeased because

²⁶ Audet, 5: 165. See also 4: 106-07.

²⁷ The 1832 law is in the statutes as 2 William IV, cap. 26.

²⁸ Labarrère-Paulé, pp. 95-97.

the democratic election of laymen to act as school officials undermined the curé's position as unquestioned arbiter of all educational matters.²⁹

Two subsequent amendments to the Assembly schools act, however, gave the clergy a more important role in the school system: one permitted clergy to be syndics without being landholders; the second gave clergy the right to act as school visitors and have input into the certificate of morality and competence required by teachers.³⁰ Nevertheless, the Church hierarchy remained adamantly opposed to Assembly schools. In response to the threatening aspects of the 1829 law, Church leaders exhorted parish curés to establish schools under the aegis of the Fabrique Schools Act. They were not overly successful in this regard, in part because government-funded schools were popular among the habitant population, but also because some curés preferred to see an Assembly school built in their parish rather than have to part with fabrique revenues to cover school expenses. Several curés were chastised by Bishops Panet and Lartigue for their lack of zeal in this regard. The lower clergy were also instructed by Lartigue to refuse the sacraments to any teachers known for their liberal tendencies, or to any parents or syndics who sent their children to "liberal" schools.³¹

While some curés did attempt to impose their will on their parishioners in the matter of schooling, the result was not always a happy one. Chabot provides evidence that in several parishes the population showed a marked unwillingness to accept the curé's criticisms of a "subversive" teacher, or to withdraw their children from an Assembly school in favor of one administered by the fabrique.³² Chabot suggests that, in the context of economic distress which had grown out of the agricultural malaise of the 1820s and 1830s, the habitants had become increasingly critical of the ways in which

²⁹ Audet, 4: 102-04 and 5: 133-36.

³⁰ Groulx, 1: 145.

³¹ Chabot, pp. 60-63.

³² Ibid., pp. 56-57.

the curé spent fabrique revenues. In these same years the increased population of rural liberal professionals and merchants provided a dynamic secular élite which began to challenge the curé's leadership role in the countryside over such issues as schools and democratic participation in fabrique meetings.³³ These power struggles, and simmering anticlericalism on the part of the habitant population, presaged the rural reaction to the 1846 school law known as the *guerre des éteignoirs*.

In the context of the 1830s, however, these challenges to the hegemony of the rural clergy served only to harden the Church hierarchy's resistance to the Assembly School bill. The lobbying efforts of Mgr. Lartigue against the legislation met with a sympathetic response from the Legislative Council, which was embroiled in increasingly bitter disputes with the Patriote party deputies during the 1830s. Thus, when the Assembly requested that an amended form of the school law be renewed in 1836, the Legislative Council refused on the grounds that the new bill would prove too costly and that it extended, in an unacceptable fashion, the already considerable powers of the deputies over the school system.³⁴ This rejection of the school bill left Lower Canada without an official school system, a state of affairs lamented by contemporary newspapers such as La Minèrve, which reported on May 1, 1836 that: "C'est aujourd'hui qu'expire une loi vitale et importante pour cette colonie... Le Conseil Législatif dans sa fureur et sa folie a fermé 1665 écoles élémentaires; il en a chassé 40,000 enfants; et nous passerions le jour où ce malheur commence, sans le rappeler avec les larmes d'une juste affliction! C'est donc avec la livrée du deuil qu nous annonçons ce fait."³⁵

³³ Ibid., pp. 77-89.

³⁴ Labarrère-Paulé, pp. 43-44.

³⁵ La Minèrve, 1 May 1836, cited by Groulx, 1: 176.

Like the Legislative councillors, however, Lord Durham did not mourn the demise of the Assembly Schools law. Sent to British North America as governor in 1838, Durham wrote in his report that the Legislative Council had done well to reject the school law because it promoted political patronage. He claimed that the deputies controlled the dispensing of £25,000 annually for the Assembly schools, and that they used this patronage to their own advantage: "Dans son ensemble, le système consistait en un abus politique grossier."³⁶

The extent to which the members of the Assembly abused the political control they held over the administrators and employees of the school system remains under debate. Meilleur, for one, believed that the provisions of the law provided the deputies with a considerable degree of patronage which they used to further their individual self-interest, as well as their party's political aims.³⁷ It must be kept in mind, however, that Meilleur was not a disinterested observer of the relationship between politicians and local school boards. As the superintendent of education throughout the years of the *guerre des éteignoirs*, Meilleur felt it necessary, both during the years of strife and later in his memoirs, to explain the opposition of certain politicians to the school law of 1846. A continuing theme in his interpretation of events (and one which we will return to with the discussion of the 1846 law) was that certain politicians resisted the law because it denied them the opportunities for political patronage which the Assembly Schools Law had afforded them. Thus, Meilleur's analysis of that law's impact on political influence within the school system, while not necessarily inaccurate, must be seen as part of a larger argument.

³⁶ Cited in Labarrère-Paulé, p. 44.

³⁷ Meilleur stated: "Il résultait encore de ces dispositions de la loi que les pères de famille, les syndics d'école et les visiteurs d'école étaient généralement disposés,... à être partisans politiques dans l'occasion,... à maintenir le représentant du comté dans sa position, celle d'être virtuellement le surintendant d'éducation pour le comté qu'il représentait en parlement. L'on sait, d'ailleurs, que certains représentants étaient bien disposés à tirer parti de cette position et du patronage qu'elle leur donnait." Meilleur, p. 328.

Labarrère-Paulé suggests that while contemporaries such as Lord Durham and his secretary, Arthur Buller (in his report on education in Lower Canada), exaggerated the extent to which the system functioned through patronage, abuses did occur. His examination of the report written in 1836 by the Assembly's Permanent Committee for education and schools reveals that there were twenty-five "phantom" schools which received government subsidies. Labarrère-Paulé concludes: "Ne pouvons-nous pas voir dans ces différences statistiques une autre preuve des abus commis par certains députés avec les fonds de l'éducation?"³⁸ Like the accusations surrounding the use of political patronage, this suggestion that funds were at times used fraudulently by school administrators foreshadows claims that would be made against school commissioners under the system established by the 1846 law.

Another problem which was to resurface in the 1840s was the frustration experienced by both users and administrators of the school system concerning the large numbers of unqualified school masters and mistresses teaching in the elementary schools. We have already touched on the ways in which the Assembly's deputies could ensure that syndics hired teachers with "acceptable" political beliefs. This, coupled with the probability that the local curé would see morality as a more pressing requirement than competence in the hiring of a teacher, helped create a teaching corps in which political and religious beliefs took precedence over the ability to teach. Prior to 1836 there was no government support for normal schools and those rare institutions which were established for the purpose of training teachers were run privately or by religious communities. Most graduates of these schools were employed in Quebec or Montreal where wages were higher than in rural areas. The country schools were thus staffed by teachers with little or no training who were desperate enough to work for the paltry wages granted to school masters and mistresses. Thus, syndics did not have a large pool

³⁸ Labarrère-Paulé, p. 18. See also pp. 26-32.

of qualified teachers to choose from when establishing an Assembly school and, as noted, the influence of both deputy and clergy tended to undermine any efforts the syndics might have made to assign priority to competence above other considerations.³⁹

These factors ensured a poorly-qualified teaching force in the countryside. Not able to command respect as a professionally-prepared group, the teachers had, as well, to suffer the disdain of the rural population because of their low salaries and their dependence for those salaries on the syndics, the local notables who signed the competency certificate, and, ultimately, the county representative. Groulx claims that the sorry state of the teaching profession during this period had much to do with eroding the habitant population's faith in the education system: "Il faut l'admettre: la triste condition de ces incompetents misereux sera cause, pour une bonne part, du degout des habitants pour l'ecole de ce temps-la. A les voir si prompts a mendier et d'une utilite si douteuse, le peuple en arrivera a considerer la fonction de pedagogue comme un sot metier, indigne d'une personne de bonne education."⁴⁰

Table 1.1: Elementary Schools and Students in the Counties of Nicolet and Yamaska and in Lower Canada

	<u>No. of Schools</u>			<u>No. of Students</u>		
	<u>1833</u>	<u>1834</u>	<u>1835</u>	<u>1833</u>	<u>1834</u>	<u>1835</u>
Nicolet	<u>24</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>832</u>	<u>1115</u>	<u>990</u>
Yamaska	14	17	20	456	455	526
L. Can.	905	1103	1202	30,158	35,230	38,377

Source: Audet, vol. 6: 9-12.

In spite of Groulx's assessment, however, there is evidence that reveals considerable support for the Assembly schools on the part of the French-Canadian population. In 1833, the earliest year for which statistics were published, there were

³⁹See *ibid.*, pp. 92-105.

⁴⁰Groulx, 1: 167.

950 schools and 30,158 students. The Assembly's Permanent Committee on education reported that in 1835-36 there were 1,202 rural elementary schools receiving government subsidies, and that 38,376 students attended these schools.⁴¹ The two counties which would be most actively involved in the *guerre des éteignoirs*, Nicolet and Yamaska, showed a similar growth rate in their respective school systems. Nicolet expanded from twenty-four schools and 832 students in 1833, to thirty-two schools and 990 students in 1835, while Yamaska's schools increased from fourteen to twenty in the same period, and the students attending those schools went from 456 to 526 (see Table 1.1). Labarrère-Paulé has pointed out, however, that teachers were required, under an article of the 1829 school law, to have at least twenty students in order to receive the government subsidy which comprised their salary; he goes on to claim that this requirement gave rise to "la tentation de falsifier le journal d'école ou d'échanger les élèves, ou de les prêter à un collègue malheureux."⁴² While he provides no source to substantiate these claims, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that teachers might well have falsified enrolment figures. This possibility suggests that the attendance figures provided by the Assembly Committee might be inflated. However, the steady growth in both schools and numbers of students recorded between 1833 and 1835 must attest to the popular support for education that existed during the 1830s.

This support becomes even more apparent when one considers the non-compulsory monthly fees paid to augment the teachers' wages by the parents of some elementary students. Labarrère-Paulé, apparently using Buller's report as evidence, states that "les enfants ne paient pratiquement jamais la cõtisation pourtant minime de deux chelins par mois,"⁴³ but elsewhere he has compiled a table which shows that by 1835 fee-paying students comprised two-thirds of the total number. The Canadien article on

⁴¹ Labarrère-Paulé, Appendix B, pp. 464-65.

⁴² Labarrère-Paulé, p. 97.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 98.

which this table is based also stated that this proportion represented a considerable increase over the 50 percent of students who paid fees in 1829.⁴⁴ Audet confirms this assessment of the earlier period when he reports that in the period 1829-32, 18,053 students paid fees, while 23,805 did not.⁴⁵ This voluntary financial support by the majority of parents, coupled with the steady increase in the number of schools established in almost all the counties of Lower Canada,⁴⁶ indicates a willingness on the part of the habitant population to educate its children and to shoulder some of the burden for doing so.

The impact of an educational system of such brief tenure as that inaugurated by the Assembly Schools law is difficult to measure. Allan Greer's study of literacy in Quebec does give some indication, however, that literacy levels increased as a result of the Assembly schools. Using statistics gleaned from Arthur Buller's Commission on Education, Greer shows that adult literacy (ability to read and write) in French-speaking communities, averaged 14.3 percent in 1838-39. The level for rural francophones was slightly lower, at 12.0 percent.⁴⁷ Then, using the 1891 census, Greer has established literacy levels for Quebec adults educated before 1841. The rate for men was 39.1 percent, while that for women was 36.5 percent.⁴⁸ In the absence of other explanatory factors, one can only conclude that the Assembly schools established in the 1830s were responsible for the marked increase in literacy rates prior to 1841. In contrast to Greer's work, Michel Verrette has found that adult literacy declined in

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁵ Audet, 5: 152.

⁴⁶ Using information taken from the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada 1835-36, Appendix Oo, Audet has created a table to show the number of schools and students for each county for the years 1833, 1834 and 1835. Out of a total of forty counties, five showed the same or a lower number of schools in 1835 as compared with 1833; the remaining thirty-five counties showed an increase.

⁴⁷ Allan Greer, "The Pattern of Literacy in Quebec, 1745-1899," HS/SH, 11 (1978): 314-15.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 326-27.

Quebec City between 1830 and 1850. To account for the decline he points out that Quebec's population was swelled by European immigrants and uneducated rural people looking for work after 1820. Verrette makes little connection between literacy and the availability of schools; one could hypothesize that Assembly schools had a greater impact in rural areas which were not disrupted by immigration in the way that Quebec City was.⁴⁹

In more general terms, the 1829 legislation can be said to have had an impact on Lower-Canadian society in that it acted as a harbinger of the school laws to come in the 1840s. The Assembly Schools Law established a system in which the state played a key role, both through the granting of funds to support schools, and through the supervisory role played by the Assembly's deputies. It is important to note this centralizing aspect of the law because it suggests that those who see the "modernizing" legislation of the 1840s as the principal cause of the *guerre des éteignoirs* do not fully appreciate the on-going nature of Lower Canada's educational experiments.⁵⁰ Certainly, the state would play a more significant role in the administration of the school system of the 1840s than it had previously done. This should be viewed as the acceleration of a process begun in the 1830s, however, rather than as a radical departure from the past.

Although the financial and administrative control of the Assembly schools lay in the hands of the deputies, the 1829 law did set the precedent of requiring local populations to elect syndics to oversee the daily management of the schools. Thus, while the structure of the school system was relatively centralized, it also required a certain amount of popular participation in school affairs. As noted earlier, it was this local participation which caused conflict in certain localities between the *curé*, the local *élite*,

⁴⁹See Verrette, "L'Alphabetisation," pp. 68-69. According to Verrette's statistics, there was a much greater disparity between the literacy of men and women in Quebec City than there was in rural areas.

⁵⁰See especially, Cross, pp. 104-07, 119-23.

and the habitant population. While the turbulence of the Rebellion and post-Rebellion years would serve to diminish the relevance of local disputes, they certainly were not extinguished, and the tensions created by the 1846 law would serve to rekindle them once again.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DURING THE 1840S

Developments in the immediate post-Rebellion period

The events of the Rebellions of 1837 and 1838 are too well known to bear repeating,¹ but one should note that there is evidence of considerable sympathy for the revolutionary cause among the population of Nicolet and Yamaska counties. Large crowds turned out in the summer of 1837 in both counties to hear speakers revile the British government, and to claim rights on behalf of the habitants to lands held by absentee proprietors. While these two counties remained mostly quiescent during the insurrections, seven men from Nicolet and eighteen from Yamaska were implicated as participants in the Rebellions. The numbers might well have been higher had there been more effective local leadership and less counter-revolutionary activity on the part of the region's curés.² Indeed, the habitants of St. Grégoire objected to the pro-government stance taken by a priest at the Nicolet Seminary. The grand vicar of Trois-Rivières, Thomas Cooke, described their behaviour to Bishop Signay: "Les paroissiens de St. Grégoire semblent être les plus mutins. Ils se sont dernièrement effarouchés d'un discours de monsieur Charles Harper sur l'obéissance aux autorités au point que des principaux ont été se plaindre à monsieur Bouchette."³

Habitant sympathy for the anti-English and land-rights aspects of the Patriote cause was anything but dampened by events following the suppression of the Rebellions.

¹See, for example, Fernand Ouellet, Lower Canada, chapters eleven and twelve; and Jean-Paul Bernard, Les Rébellions de 1837-1838: Les Patriotes du Bas-Canada dans la Mémoire Collective et chez les Historiens (Montréal: Les Éditions Boréal Express, 1983).

²Ouellet, Lower Canada, pp. 289, 297, 318; Bernard, p. 311; Chabot, p. 125.

³Cited in Germain Lesage, Les Origines des Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge (Nicolet: Éditions A.S.V.-Nicolet), p. 63.

The suppression itself generated considerable hostility amongst French Canadians in Lower Canada because of the violence with which government troops attacked the insurgents' villages after the rebels had been defeated.⁴ Once the military manoeuvres were over, and the political consequences of the unrest were made known, that hostility was magnified and focussed on the governor general. The Colonial Office suspended Lower Canada's constitution in 1838, and gave governing authority until the Act of Union was ratified in 1841, to the Special Council, made up of the governor general and his appointees. Furthermore, following the recommendations of Lord Durham, Upper and Lower Canada were to be united in an attempt to anglicize and assimilate the French-Canadian population. When Governor Charles Poulett Thomson (later to be made Lord Sydenham) used his executive powers to pass numerous ordinances which were to have a strong impact on Lower-Canadian society, resentment manifested itself in passive resistance to his arbitrary measures. The reaction to the sleigh ordinance is one example. Stephen Kenny has described how the great majority of Lower Canadians simply refused to comply with Thomson's detailed rules about sleigh construction, in part because they were inefficient, but in large measure also because of resentment against their author.⁵

A similar reaction occurred in response to Thomson's Municipal Ordinance of 1840.⁶ This law was important for two reasons: it was the first attempt to establish municipal government in Lower Canada; and, it would impinge on the new elementary school system enacted in 1841. The municipal act created two new levels of

⁴Jacques Monet, The Last Cannon Shot: A Study of French-Canadian Nationalism 1837-1850 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 20. See also, J.M. Fecteau, "Mesures d'exception et règle de droit: Les conditions d'application de la loi martiale au Québec lors des Rébellions de 1837-1838," McGill Law Journal, 32 (1987): 465-95. Fecteau describes the extraordinary measures taken by colonial authorities, such as the imposition of martial law, to suppress Patriote activities.

⁵Stephen Kenny, "'Cahots' and Catcalls: An Episode of Popular Resistance in Lower Canada at the Outset of the Union," CHR, 65 (1984): 184-208.

⁶4 Vict., cap. 3 and 4.

government.⁷ At the local level, municipal corporations based on existing parishes or townships of at least 300 inhabitants became municipal corporations. Administrative powers resided in an annual meeting of those male residents who satisfied certain property qualifications. The nature of these meetings was monitored closely by the governor's representatives, and in fact the assembly had little power other than that of electing local officials and one or two representatives for the regional council.

The regional municipal corporations were based on districts (twenty-two initially, but in 1842 the number was enlarged to twenty-four) created by the governor; he had the power to modify these districts at any time. The district council was composed of a warden appointed by the governor, and councillors elected for a three-year term by the parish assemblies.⁸ A parish or township with a population between 300 and 3,000 could elect one councillor, while those with a population greater than 3,000 elected two representatives. The district councils met quarterly, and decisions were made on the basis of a majority vote of the councillors. The warden cast the deciding vote in the case of a tie. The district councils had more wide-ranging powers than the local corporations, the most important being that of levying taxes for municipal projects. The councils, however, were closely supervised by the warden, and could be dissolved at any time by the governor.

⇒ These basic features of the municipal law drew rapid fire from the members of the Legislative Assembly for Canada East during the first session of the Parliament of the United Province in 1841. Particularly galling to the former Patriote, Denis-Benjamin Viger, was the governor general's power over the district councils: "First, the Governor divides the Province according to his own will; he parcels it out in to [sic] a district; he

⁷The following description of the municipal law is from Jacques L'Heureux, "Les premières institutions municipales au Québec ou 'machines à taxer'," Cahiers de Droit, 20 (1979): 331-56.

⁸The councillors had to meet a property qualification of £300; see *ibid.*, p. 344.

appoints certain of the officers of the councils; he controls the meeting of the councils, and he has the power of dissolving them at pleasure and these are called the municipal corporations, institutions for the people's government!"⁹ Sydenham's goal, however, was not popular self-government; he hoped to establish a framework whereby "the people may control their own officers, and the executive at the same time [may] obtain some influence in the country districts."¹⁰ Thus, men of a liberal persuasion could not simply hold sway over the rural areas as they had done prior to, and during, the Rebellions. Henceforth, their influence would be constrained by popularly-elected councils which would be under the direct control of the executive.¹¹

Resentment over this executive control was felt not just by MLAs, but by the people they represented throughout Lower Canada. Some MLAs forwarded petitions which complained about appointed officers being granted the power to tax the population. The control exercised by these officials was resented all the more by the French-Canadian population because the majority of the appointees were anglophones. The municipal district of Nicolet, for example, had anglophones in the three appointed positions of warden, district treasurer, and district surveyor.¹² Moreover, certain of these officials had been members of the hated Special Council.¹³ One MLA, Robert Christie of Gaspé, described the massive unpopularity of the municipal ordinance in his District, concluding that "It is pregnant with evil, and if persisted in, will produce, and

⁹Debates of the Legislative Assembly of United Canada, ed., Elizabeth Nish (Montréal: Presses de l'École des Hautes Études Commerciales, 1970), 1 (1841): 495.

¹⁰Cited in Adam Shortt, Lord Sydenham (Toronto: Morang and Co., Limited, 1910), p. 273.

¹¹L'Heureux, pp. 354-55.

¹²JLAC, 5 (1846), Appendix K. William Pitt was appointed warden in August, 1844; it is not known who held the position before him. See NA, RG4 C2, Quebec, Lower Canada and Canada East Provincial Secretary's Letterbooks, 1763-1866, Vol. 30, p. 622, 15 August 1844, and p. 651, 26 August 1844. G.L. Marler was the district treasurer for an unknown period of time and Patrick Daly was the district surveyor from 1841 to 1845. See Appendix K.

¹³Meilleur, p. 190.

in the opinion of the world justify, resistance."¹⁴

Thus, French Canadians had much to despair about in the years immediately following the Rebellions. Representative government had been suspended and temporarily replaced by an appointed Special Council dominated by anglophones; the governor general and his council passed a series of ordinances which most French Canadians perceived as both senseless and arbitrary; and, in 1841, Lower Canada was forced into a union with Upper Canada which seemed expressly designed to annihilate French-Canadian culture. Although there is no written record from which one can assess popular reaction to this climate of repression, Kenny's work on response to the sleigh ordinance seems to confirm the "nagging suspicion of widespread hostility" in the early 1840s.¹⁵ Certainly the people of Nicolet County indirectly showed their disapproval of Sydenham by refusing to offer him the kind of welcome normally accorded to a governor general, when he visited the Nicolet Seminary in 1840. Charles Harper, one of the seminary priests, contrasted the flat reception received by Sydenham with the enthusiastic response to Lord Gosford's visit in 1836. When Sydenham left the seminary, Harper reported that only a half-dozen people were present to see him off and "il laissa nos rivages sans entendre un seul hourra, une seule acclamation, hors celle des écoliers, lorsqu'il leur accorda une journée de congés."¹⁶

¹⁴Debates of the Legislative Assembly of United Canada, 2 (1842): 380; see also p. 385 for the reaction of Gaspé residents. Unlike Lower Canada, Upper Canada had previous experience with local government, but Sydenham's District Councils Act of 1841 established new corporations, the district councils, which were under the direct control of the executive. Reformers in the upper province were incensed with this constraint on local autonomy. William Baldwin wrote to his son, Robert, in August, 1841 describing local opinion of the Act: "The Municipal Bill is very much disliked in the north riding [...] they say all the Bills add more and more power to the Gov'r & take away from the people." See L'Heureux, pp. 353-54. See also, C.F.J. Whebell, "Robert Baldwin and Decentralization 1841-9," in Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario, eds. F.H. Armstrong, H.A. Stevenson, J.D. Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 52.

¹⁵Kenny, p. 188.

¹⁶Cited in L'abbé J.A. Ir. Douville, Histoire du Collège-Séminaire de Nicolet 1803-1903, 2 vols. (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1903), 1: 255.

When representative government was restored in the Legislature of the United Canadas in 1842, French Canadians could entertain some hopes that their concerns would be addressed. Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, the former Patriote who had become the main political spokesman of the French-Canadian people, had concluded that the forced union with Upper Canada, while highly unpopular with French Canadians, could not easily be undone. By uniting the French-Canadian party with the Reformers in Upper Canada, LaFontaine believed there was a chance of forcing the executive to address the concerns of the majority in the Assembly. Governor-General Bagot was, in fact, receptive to the Reform alliance. Acknowledging that the leaders of the majority group in the Assembly should act as his advisors, he appointed LaFontaine to be Attorney General in September, 1842.¹⁷

Bagot's tenure as governor general was brief, cut short by his death in May, 1843. He was followed in office by Charles Metcalfe, who proved to be much more conservative in his conception of responsible government. When Baldwin and LaFontaine, as leaders of the majority party, insisted on their right to control patronage appointments, Metcalfe refused, claiming that privilege for himself. The Reform leaders consequently resigned from the Executive Council in November, 1843, and they remained out of the executive for the next five years.¹⁸ Finally, in 1848, the new governor general, Lord Elgin, entrenched the principle of ministerial responsibility by asking LaFontaine and Baldwin to form the administration following their Reform victory in the election of 1847-48.¹⁹

¹⁷Monet, pp. 78-104.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 137-44.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 262-67.

Once in power LaFontaine quickly moved to consolidate party solidarity through the judicious use of patronage appointments. The number of potential appointments was swelled by reforms he instituted in the judicial and electoral systems as well as by the creation of registry offices. With a multitude of salaried posts to be filled, LaFontaine ensured that positions went to those individuals who had supported the Reform party throughout the 1840s.²⁰ Many of those chosen were French-Canadian members of the liberal professions. The fields of medicine and law had become notoriously overcrowded in Lower Canada; patronage appointments provided an outlet for their practitioners and, at the same time, they ensured the professional class's loyalty to LaFontaine and his party.

Political and social role of the Catholic Church

The Catholic clergy had also become allies of the LaFontaine party by the late 1840s. Earlier in the decade the Church hierarchy had shunned LaFontaine and his fellow Reformers, in part because of their support for the proposed school law of 1841. The Church, headed by Bishop Bourget of Montreal, was appalled by the fact that schools would be non-sectarian under the proposed education system. Anti-union politicians such as Denis-Benjamin Viger and John Neilson supported the Church's call for legislation which would guarantee a French and Catholic school system.²¹ The alliance was to be short-lived, however. In 1845, Denis-Benjamin Papineau, Louis-Joseph's brother and a political ally of Viger, introduced a new education bill which Bourget found disappointing because of its failure to accord an important role to

²⁰For a discussion of the importance accorded to patronage by LaFontaine, see *ibid.*, pp. 275-81; Gordon T. Stewart, The Origins of Canadian Politics: A Comparative Approach (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), pp. 52-56; and Fernand Ouellet, Economic and Social History of Quebec 1760-1850 (Ottawa: Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1980), pp. 543-44.

²¹Monet, pp. 85-88; Marcel Lajeunesse, "L'Évêque Bourget et l'Instruction Publique au Bas-Canada, 1840-1846," RHAF, 23 (1969): 38-42.

clergy in the school system. Over the next year Bourget voiced his disapproval through the religious newspaper Les Mélanges Religieuses, and lobbied various politicians to work for the law's amendment. The support he received from Augustin-Norbert Morin, a Reformer and close associate of LaFontaine, helped forge friendlier ties between the Church and the LaFontaine party. These were strengthened when Papineau succumbed to Morin's pressure in 1846, and amended the school law in ways which gave the Church a greater role in the school system.²² In contrast with the growing anticlerical and republican tone of the Viger-Papineau group in the latter part of the 1840s, Bourget found LaFontaine's pragmatic politics and willingness to work closely with the Church increasingly appealing.

After the granting of responsible government brought LaFontaine to the leadership of the government, anglophone Tories, enraged at passage of the Rebellion Losses Bill, rioted and burned the Montreal Parliament Buildings in April, 1849. The Catholic clergy gave full support to LaFontaine and urged the population to sign petitions of loyalty to the government. The Viger-Papineau group, known in the later 1840s as the Rouge party, found this clerical intervention in politics to be intolerable. Consequently, it stepped up its attacks on the Church, calling, among other things, for abolition of the tithe.²³ By the autumn of 1849 the Rouges had formed an incongruous alliance with the embittered Montreal Tories, supporting the latter's call for annexation to the United States.²⁴ But the links forged between the LaFontaine party and the Catholic Church came out of a common understanding of the nature of French-Canadian society - and their alliance proved to be much stronger than that of

²² Monet, pp. 241-43.

²³ Jean-Paul Bernard, Les Rouges. Libéralisme, Nationalisme et Anticléricalisme au milieu du XIXe siècle (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1971), pp. 75-79.

²⁴ The Viger-Neilson group had found common cause with the Tories of Upper Canada in the early 1840s over the issue of the Union. See Monet, p. 104.

the more expedient one between the Tories and the Rouges.²⁵ The Church and government party press mounted a strong attack against the annexation movement. The effectiveness of their critique and the appeal of the newly-established system of responsible government, with a French Canadian as the chief minister, ensured that the annexationists were routed by early 1850.²⁶

One reason that the Church was such an important ally to LaFontaine was its growing influence in French-Canadian society during the 1840s. That influence was created largely through the efforts of Bishop Bourget. Impressed by the renewal of Catholicism in Europe, Bourget had determined in the post-Rebellion period to increase the Church's presence in the social and political spheres as part of his campaign to strengthen French-Canadians' faith and willingness to adhere to Catholic doctrine.²⁷ By recruiting among religious communities in France, Bourget was able to bring considerable relief to the over-extended clerics of Lower Canada. In the 1830s there was one priest for every 1,800 Catholics, whereas by mid-century, one priest served only 1,000 Catholics.²⁸ This expanded clergy was exhorted by Bourget to make the Church's presence felt more closely in the daily lives of parishioners. To accomplish this, priests became more involved in charitable works, education, and the organization of religious processions, retreats and temperance societies.²⁹ One of the best known priests in these years was abbé Chiniquy, famed for his campaigns against alcohol. Les Mélanges Religieuses estimated that 200,000 Catholics had converted to the temperance

²⁵Ibid., 363-74

²⁶Ibid., pp. 375-91. See also Jacques Monet, "French Canada and the Annexation Crisis, 1848-1850," CHR, 47 (1966): 249-64.

²⁷Jacques Monet, "French-Canadian Nationalism and the Challenge of Ultramontanism," in Canadian History Before Confederation, ed. J.M. Bumsted (Georgetown: Irwin-Dorsey Limited, 1972), pp. 384-90.

²⁸Serge Gagnon and Louise Lebel-Gagnon, "Le milieu d'origine du clergé québécois 1775-1840: Mythes et réalités," RHAF, 37 (1983): 377.

²⁹René Hardy, "Note sur certaines manifestations du réveil religieux de 1840 dans la paroisse Notre Dame de Québec," SCHEC Sessions d'Étude, 35 (1968): 81-93.

movement following the Chiniquy crusade of 1848-49.³⁰

Increasingly too, the church concerned itself with nationalist issues. In the political realm it did this through its support of responsible government, believing that LaFontaine had found the best way of assuring that control over French-Canadian concerns remained in French-Canadian hands. However, like other elite groups, the Church was becoming concerned about cultural survival because British immigrants were pouring into Lower Canada at the same time that French-Canadians were beginning to emigrate to the United States in large numbers. The Church responded to this problem by promoting the colonization of new lands within Lower Canada. In 1848, Bishop Bourget joined forces one last time with the Rouge party to throw support behind a project to colonize the Eastern Townships with French Canadians from the seigneuries. In subsequent years, the church would expend considerable energy in promoting the colonization of northern Quebec as well. One benefit of these projects foreseen by the Church was that the Catholic religion would flourish in colonization settlements where French Canadians would not be exposed to the undermining influence of anglophone Protestants.³¹

Thus, the Catholic Church of the 1840s was making a concerted effort to solidify its presence in French-Canadian society. In spiritual terms it was invigorated by the Catholic revival in Europe and Bourget's close links with the papacy in Rome. This sense of renewal at the level of the church hierarchy made itself felt at the popular level through the priests' structuring of religious practises and their more disciplined interventions in social issues such as charity, education and temperance. At the political level, Bourget forged an alliance with the LaFontaine party in the second half

³⁰ Marcel Trudel, Chiniquy (n.l.: Éditions du Bien Public, 1955), pp. 87-98.

³¹ See J.I. Little, "The Catholic Church and French-Canadian Colonization of the Eastern Townships, 1821-51," RUO/UOQ, 52 (1982): 151-52; Ouellet, Economic and Social History, pp. 484-88.

of the 1840s in recognition of the new power structures that were emerging as a concomitant of responsible government. Those new structures gave a stronger voice to the people since their elected representatives were now ministers within the Executive Council. Thus, Bourget's emphasis on the spiritual revival of the masses was linked to his political agenda, for the Church would have more influence over a population whose lives were being structured and monitored by the Catholic clergy.

Economic Development

As we have seen, emigration by French Canadians was of increasing concern to Lower Canada's elite during the 1840s. In 1849 a legislative inquiry was created to investigate this problem, and it estimated that 20,000 people had left Lower Canada since 1844.³² There were several factors involved in creating this outward movement of the population. Arguably, the most important was the tenuous state of agriculture in the two decades before mid-century. Historians continue to debate the extent to which there was an agricultural crisis centred around a decline in wheat production in Lower Canada.³³ Recent studies, however, suggest that habitant farmers chose to produce crops such as oats, barley, and peas in order to satisfy the demands of the local market.³⁴ While wheat was still grown for home consumption, crops such as oats could be sold for cash to meet the demands of the increasingly important timber industry.³⁵

³²JLAC, 8 (1849), Appendix 2.

³³See Fernand Ouellet, Lower Canada, chapters two and five; for the opposing view see G. Paquet and J.P. Wallot, "Crise agricole et tensions socio-ethniques dans le Bas-Canada, 1802-1812: éléments pour une réinterprétation," RHAF, 26 (1972): 185-238. For a discussion of the viability of Lower Canadian farming techniques, see R.M. McInnis, "A Reconsideration of the State of Agriculture in Lower Canada in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," in Canadian Papers in Rural History, ed. Donald H. Akenson (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1982), 3: 19-24.

³⁴Serge Courville, "La Crise Agricole du Bas-Canada, Éléments d'une Réflexion Géographique," CGQ, 24, no. 62 (1980): 193-224.

³⁵Courville, "La Crise Agricole," pp. 201-06.

Even if we assume that habitants had been able to meet their economic requirements through agricultural diversification in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it must be acknowledged that their position became much more tenuous in the 1830s and 1840s because of a succession of crop failures. Wheat was attacked by insects in the mid-1830s and again in the 1840s; as a result, wheat constituted only 4.4 percent of crop production in 1844, whereas in 1831 it had made up 21.3 percent of that production.³⁶ Oats production in Lower Canada had soared in the 1830s after the wheat crops were devastated.³⁷ Cash obtained from the sale of oats to the timber industry was probably used to purchase wheat or flour from Upper Canada.

Potatoes, which were grown primarily for home consumption, formed about 46 percent of crop production by volume in the 1830s and early 1840s.³⁸ Production in the mid-1840s, however, was severely reduced when potato crops were ruined by blight. Harvests decreased from 120.3 minots per farm in 1844 to 46.1 minots in 1851.³⁹ The Journal des Trois-Rivières summarized the extent of the crop failures in that district in its September 25, 1847 edition:

D'après tous les renseignements que nous avons pu recueillir, la récolte est mauvaise et très mauvaise dans ce district. Les patates sont pires qu'elles n'ont jamais été et dans plusieurs endroits, il n'y en a pas un huitième de la récolte ordinaire. L'orge et les pois ne valent rien, l'avoine ne vaut guère mieux. Le bléd [sic] est cependant généralement bon; mais malheureusement il n'en a été semé que bien peu. La paille de tous les grains est bien courte ainsi que le foin, ce qui fait une diminution importante dans les fourrages.⁴⁰

With both wheat and potato production almost eradicated in the 1840s, habitants

³⁶Courville, p. 204.

³⁷Oats production more than doubled between 1831 and 1844; while oats had constituted 19.9 percent of total crop production in 1831, they took up 44.9 percent of production by 1851. See W.H. Parker, "A New Look at Unrest in Lower Canada in the 1830s," CHR, 40 (1959): 210. See also, Courville, p. 204.

³⁸See J.I. Little, Habitants and Crofters, (forthcoming), p. 28.

³⁹Ouellet, Economic and Social History, p.459. See also Courville, p. 204. One minot is equal to 1.107 Winchester bushels.

⁴⁰Journal des Trois-Rivières, 25 September 1847.

clearly were very dependent on cash crops for survival.

Added to the difficulties created by crop failures in the 1830s and 1840s, was the problem of overcrowding faced by habitants in the seigneuries. Population pressure not only decreased the amount of cultivable land; it also added to the value of that land. The importance of the timber trade in the first half of the nineteenth century had also made land a more valuable commodity. One consequence of increased land values was that seigneurs increased the number of charges placed on farmers using the land.⁴¹ The combination of crop failures, population pressure, and increased rents, forced many people off the land, and swelled the ranks of Lower Canadians who were emigrating to the United States. While these events were causing economic distress in rural Lower Canada, the province's industries suffered a blow with Britain's repeal of preferential tariffs in 1846. The repeal caused stagnation in both the timber trade and ship-building, precipitating a commercial crisis which peaked in 1848 and 1849. As merchants began to call in their debts, habitants and rural professional men began to feel the effects of the crisis as well.⁴²

Habitants displaced from the land by the economic difficulties of the late 1840s would find little solace if they sought work as labourers. Threshing machines slowly started to infiltrate the countryside in the 1840s, and where they were present they deprived farm workers of employment.⁴³ Moreover, the sharp downturn in the timber trade and shipbuilding industry meant that both urban and rural workers would have

⁴¹See Allan Greer, Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes 1740-1840, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 122-33. See also, Robert Armstrong, Structure and Change: An Economic History of Quebec (Toronto: Gage, 1984), pp. 81-83.

⁴²Monet, The Last Cannon Shot, p. 273.

⁴³Claude Blouin, "La mécanisation de l'agriculture entre 1830 et 1890," in Agriculture et Colonisation au Québec, ed. Normand Séguin (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1980), pp. 94, 96-97.

difficulty finding employment as woods workers or shipping labourers.⁴⁴ The Journal des Trois-Rivières thus reflected on the consequences of unemployment in the forest industries in 1847: "cet hiver même, combien de centaines de familles de ce district qui dépendaient entièrement pour leur pain de tous les jours des chantiers que l'on vient de fermer de toute part, vont éprouver les horreurs de la plus affreuse misère?"⁴⁵

The sense of vulnerability created by the tenuous economic conjuncture of the 1840s was heightened by the arrival of tens of thousands of Irish immigrants who were fleeing from economic distress in Ireland. Although the new arrivals were not the dregs of society that contemporaries often characterized them as being, the Irish were seen by many as a disruptive influence on the province's population.⁴⁶ In Upper Canada the Irish were arrested for public disorder charges in numbers disproportionate to their numbers in the population, and, in Lower Canada, the Superintendent of Education was quick to blame the Irish for resistance to school taxes, claiming that "Chez les Irlandais, le préjugé contre la taxe est inné, fort et invincible."⁴⁷

While the belief held by certain authorities that the Irish were violence-prone paupers does not indicate what the masses thought of the new arrivals, the Irish did present a threat to Lower Canadians in the form of competition for land and all-too-scarce jobs.⁴⁸ Furthermore, those Irish disembarking in Quebec City often

⁴⁴Ouellet, Economic and Social History, pp. 483, 512.

⁴⁵Journal des Trois-Rivières, 4 December 1847.

⁴⁶Donald Harman Akenson, The Irish in Ontario. A Study in Rural History (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), pp. 32-33; John Weaver, "Crime, Public Order, and Repression: The Gore District in Upheaval, 1832-1851," OH, 78 (1986): 189-92; Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," Labour/Le Travailleur, 7 (Spring, 1981): 9-39.

⁴⁷Weaver, pp. 191-92; Meilleur, p. 390.

⁴⁸See, for example, Bleasdale, p. 23; Ouellet, Economic and Social History, p. 480; and, Michael S. Cross, "Stony Monday, 1849: The Rebellion Losses Riots in Bytown," OH, 63 (1971): 177.

brought disease with them. In 1845 there was a cholera epidemic which, while not as deadly as those of 1832 and 1834, nonetheless caused sickness and death among French Canadians.⁴⁹ In 1847, newly arrived Irish immigrants again brought disease - this time it was typhus. While the Irish themselves were the hardest hit, with 13,000 deaths, thousands of Lower Canadians contracted the disease and many of those died.⁵⁰ Once again, in the summer of 1849, cholera erupted. The total deaths in Montreal and Quebec were over 1,500; simmering anger and fear about the epidemic broke out when the population of Quebec City rioted against the proposed cholera hospital in that port city.⁵¹ These relentless epidemics could only serve to rekindle some of the fears expressed in the early 1830s when it was thought that the British government was attempting to extinguish the French-Canadian presence in Quebec by swamping Lower Canada with disease-ridden British immigrants.⁵²

Thus, the 1840s were years of considerable insecurity for the population of Lower Canada. Material existence was threatened by crop failures, lack of credit, unemployment and yearly epidemics. Violence, or the threat of it, escalated. Sectarian violence among the Irish was common in the 1840s (as well as in subsequent decades), and there were episodes of ethnic conflict between the Irish and French Canadians.⁵³ Strikes by canal workers for better wages and working conditions sometimes escalated

⁴⁹The 1832 epidemic killed more than 5,000 people in Quebec and Montreal and there were more deaths in rural areas through which the immigrants passed. See Louise Dechêne and Jean-Claude Robert, "Le Choléra de 1832 dans le Bas-Canada: Mesure des inégalités devant la mort," in Les grands mortalités, eds., Hubert Charbonneau et André Larose (Liège: Ordena, 1979): 229-56.

⁵⁰Monet, The Last Cannon Shot, p. 263.

⁵¹See Geoffrey Bilson, A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 114-31. Bilson does not indicate how many deaths there were in rural areas, but he states that the improved transportation networks in 1849 facilitated the disease's rapid spread.

⁵²See Dechêne and Robert, pp. 250-51.

⁵³See, for example, Cross, "The Laws are like Cobwebs," pp. 107-09; and Bleasdale, p. 23.

into rioting, and several deaths occurred when the troops were called in.⁵⁴ Reflecting the general discontent of the times, and probably following upon the example of the burning of the Montreal Parliament buildings, arson became a common form of violent expression in 1849. The Sulpicians of Montreal felt they were on a "smoking volcano" and were forced to guard their properties against arsonists throughout the summer of 1849.⁵⁵ Rural areas did not escape the work of arsonists: the parish of Ste. Marguerite de Blairfindie in the county of Chambly, to cite one example, witnessed the burning of seven barns between August and October of 1849.⁵⁶ While these and other episodes of violence had their origin in the social and economic context of Lower Canada,⁵⁷ it must be kept in mind that Europe's social order was profoundly shaken by the Revolutions and political activities of 1848. To what extent the general population of Lower Canada was aware of Europe's revolutionary mood is difficult to know, but the fact that the newspaper in Trois-Rivières carried several reports on the Revolution in France, suggests that there was a fairly high level of interest in those events.⁵⁸

In the political sphere, the simmering hostility against the Union had been alleviated considerably by the granting of responsible government in 1848, which promised to provide French Canadians with increased autonomy over their own affairs. Responsible government was also a portent, however, of a more complex state of affairs in Lower Canada, and one in which new alliances would be formed and class

⁵⁴ Bleasdale, pp. 30-39.

⁵⁵ Brian J. Young, In its Corporate Capacity: The Seminary of Montreal as a Business Institution, 1816-1876 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), p. 169.

⁵⁶ No reason for the violence is given in the report of the arsons; see NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 267, no. 2811 of 1849, W. McGinnis to James Leslie, Christieville, 15 October 1849.

⁵⁷ Monet describes the riot against the proposed cholera hospital in July 1849 which involved 2,000 Quebec City residents. Of course the most violent and protracted riots were those over the Rebellion Losses Bill; see Monet, The Last Cannon Shot, pp. 272, 337-43.

⁵⁸ See Le Journal des Trois-Rivières, 24 March 1848, 6 May 1848, 13 May 1848, 20 May 1848.

antagonisms would be exacerbated. One aspect of this transition was the threat to local autonomy posed by state and Church intervention in local matters. Reforms in education, in the judicial system and in municipal legislation meant that the state could potentially exercise much more control over the population of Lower Canada. The Church, in turn, supported government policy and reform measures and imposed more discipline and structure in parish life by increasing religious observances and by organizing temperance societies and confraternities. The level of violence in Lower Canadian society suggests, however, that the impact of the Church's activities was less than what Bishop Bourget might have hoped for. An examination of the *guerre des éteignoirs* at the local level will offer more evidence of this. It will also provide insights into habitant response to the turbulent and often threatening context of the 1840s. Before proceeding with that analysis, however, the schools legislation of the 1840s will be examined to shed light on some of the reasons for subsequent discontent with the school system.

CHAPTER IV

SCHOOL LEGISLATION 1841-1849

We learned in Chapter one that the refusal of the Legislative Council to renew the Assembly Schools Act had left Lower Canada without a public school system. The Fabrique Schools Law continued in force, however, and thus some parishes supported a school through fabrique funds. Moreover, parents in some areas continued to make voluntary contributions towards a teacher's salary, in order that their children would receive some schooling. Governor Sydenham believed that a comprehensive public school system was just as important as local municipal institutions. He therefore initiated legislation to establish government-supported schools for the United Province of Canada in 1841. That law would prove ineffective for a number of reasons, one of which was the lack of power given to the superintendent of education to enforce its implementation. To overcome that problem, the government passed a new school law in 1846, which would form the foundation of Quebec's school system for the next century. The law gave more powers to the state to implement the unpopular aspects of the public school system - primarily the compulsory school taxes. These taxes, and the state's increased ability to enforce their collection, would precipitate the more aggressive phase of the guerre des éteignoirs.

The School Laws of 1841 and 1845

The Common School Act of 1841 was designed to create a more orderly and comprehensive public school system than that which had existed under the school laws of the 1820s and 1830s. The control over schools which had formerly been vested in the Assembly politicians was henceforth to be assumed solely by the office of the superintendent of education. While the school act created the post of a single

superintendent for the United Province, Governor Bagot appointed an assistant superintendent for each of the two sections of the province, to avoid ethnic and religious tensions between Upper and Lower Canada. These officials were responsible for administering all aspects of the school system, while the provincial superintendent remained no more than a figurehead, responsible only for answering questions related to education in parliament.¹ Governor Bagot appointed Jean-Baptiste Meilleur to be superintendent of education for Lower Canada. Meilleur, a doctor by profession, was a former Patriote deputy who had taken a keen interest in education. In spite of his radical past, Meilleur had close links with the Catholic clergy, and Bishop Bourget was very pleased with his appointment.²

The superintendent was responsible for apportioning monies from the public school fund to each district council, ensuring, in return, that each council raised an equal amount of money for school purposes from its inhabitants. The school act further stipulated that each of the twenty-two district councils was to act as a board of education for its own district.³ The boards' duties were to divide their parishes and townships into school districts; to apportion to each of these districts its share of the common school fund, based on its population of school-age children; to ensure that each school district raised a sum of up to £50 for the costs of erecting a school house; to

¹ Marcel Lajeunesse, p. 43. The assistant superintendents were referred to simply as superintendent by contemporaries in recognition of their administrative responsibilities. In the text when I use the term superintendent, I am referring to the assistant superintendent of education of Lower Canada, unless otherwise stated. Robert Murray was appointed by Bagot to be superintendent of education for Upper Canada.

² Ibid.

³ The school law of 1841 applied to both Upper and Lower Canada. The law remained in effect in the upper province for only a short time; it was replaced by a new act in 1843. Henceforth, the two sections of the province developed their own school systems. For a review of the development of school legislation in the 1840s in Upper Canada, see R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, "The Development of an Administrative System for the Public Schools. The First Stage, 1841-50," in Egerton Ryerson and his Times, eds. Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1978): 160-83.

apportion monies for school books; and, to report annually to the superintendent. School commissioners were to be elected at parish or township meetings. They were responsible for the more immediate tasks of overseeing construction of the school house, hiring and firing teachers, visiting schools, and regulating the course of study. The school commissioners were to make an annual report on their activities to the district council.⁴ Because the superintendent had little in the way of regulatory powers, the school system was, in fact, relatively decentralized. Locally elected school commissioners administered all aspects of schooling in their own communities without the interference of external authorities.⁵ The only exception to this was the taxing powers vested in the district councils; while the school commissioners decided how much money was needed for local school expenses, the councils were responsible for ordering that the required amount be levied.⁶ Given this structure, the co-operation of the district councils was obviously crucial to the success of the new school system. That co-operation, however, was not forthcoming.

While no detailed study has been made of the implementation of the municipal system created in 1841, available studies suggest that the district councils did little to exercise their mandate to administer local affairs, and that they simply refused to fulfil their responsibility to tax the population.⁷ Jacques L'Heureux contends that the passive resistance of the French-Canadian population was responsible for this state of affairs; they would elect only persons who would promise not to impose taxes.⁸ Meilleur's

⁴4 and 5 Vict., cap. 18, sect. 4, 5 and 7. The Act came into effect on January 1, 1842.

⁵See Pierre Carignan, "La Place faite à la religion dans les écoles publiques par la loi scolaire de 1841," Revue Juridique Themis, 17 (1982-83): 9-78; see especially pp. 24-43 regarding the decentralized character of the law.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Many of the district councils in Upper Canada also refused to levy the school taxes in 1842. See Gidney and Lawr, "The Development," p. 165.

⁸L'Heureux, p. 356. See also Alfred De Celles, "The Municipal System of Quebec," in Canada and its Provinces, eds. Adam Shortt and Arthur Doughty (Toronto and Glasgow: Brook and Company, 1914), 15: 292-93.

Annual Report on Education for 1843 makes this same point. In the report, Meilleur suggested that the councils did not act because "their Constituents" did not wish them to act. Meilleur explained that one reason for the population's resistance to the councils' taxing power was that any sums levied were sent to the district treasurer, which raised the suspicion that local monies were to be used for other than local purposes: "I know the invincible repugnance of the people to having the power of taxing them confided to persons who might make use of it for other purposes than those of education without their consent, as also their strong objections to have their money carried out of their usual place of residence."⁹ A petition sent to the governor general from the inhabitants of several Vaudreuil County parishes reflected this concern about centralized taxing authorities; the petition asked that parish municipalities be created so that local officers could administer parish affairs and oversee "la dépense de leur argent."¹⁰ In his Annual Report of 1843, Meilleur cites from dozens of letters sent to him by school commissioners, members of the clergy, and wardens reporting on the progress of the school system in 1842. Most claim that the habitants believed that taxes collected by the municipal council went towards the salaries of municipal officers; the letters further state that this belief had hardened the population's resistance to taxes. Almost all those who wrote to Meilleur recommended freeing the school act from all connection to the municipal councils, and empowering the school commissioners to levy taxes locally. Meilleur also provided extracts of letters from forty-six clerics and the overwhelming majority of these supported the principle of a tax-supported school system which would be independent of the municipal councils.¹¹ Meilleur made the point elsewhere that the taxes were resented because the school law's link with the anglophone-dominated municipal councils was perceived as Sydenham's attempt to anglicize the French

⁹JLAC, 3 (1843), Appendix Z.

¹⁰NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 121, p. 2288, 15 January 1845.

¹¹JLAC, 3 (1843), Appendix Z.

This connection between the municipal and school acts seems to be the main cause of the failure of the school system enacted in 1841. In the hostile climate of the early 1840s a system which called for appointed and salaried officers to impose both municipal and school taxes was destined to be unpopular and, in the end, ineffective. Meilleur claimed that "the spirit of dissension and opposition which is unhappily still prevailing in some part of the Province" was one of the factors which rendered "the connection of the Common School Act with the Municipal Institution morally impracticable."¹³ But even had the school commissioners been empowered to act independently of the municipal council, there were other factors which dictated against a successful outcome. Because there was no literary qualification for school commissioners, for example, many were uneducated and proved incapable of fulfilling their official duties.¹⁴ Moreover, the law's lack of precision allowed school commissioners to abuse the system. Thus, these officials could appoint their relatives to a teaching post, and they could, in fact, be teachers themselves. Since the school commissioners were required to report on how well classes were conducted, the validity of their reports was called into question.¹⁵

¹²See Meilleur, pp. 189-90.

¹³JLAC, 3 (1843), Appendix Z.

¹⁴For example, one petitioner wrote to LaFontaine outlining his concerns about the proposed new education bill. He particularly lamented the lack of an educational qualification for school commissioners, claiming that, if a literary qualification were required, "on évitera par là les intrigues qui sont [sic] été mises en jeu dans certaines paroisses pour faire [...] nommer Commissaires des personnes nullement qualifiées & parfaitement ignorantes, à la place d'autres plus instruites & mieux qualifiées sous tous les rapports." NA, MG24 B14, LaFontaine Correspondence, P.T. Filiatrault to LaFontaine, 17 February 1845. Filiatrault's complaint would be heard repeatedly during the guerre des éteignoirs.

¹⁵JLAC, 4 (1844-45), Appendix Z. Donald Wilson notes that in the period of time when the 1841 school law applied to Upper Canada, complaints of incompetency against the school commissioners were common. See J. Donald Wilson, "The Teacher in Early Ontario," in Aspects of Nineteenth Century Ontario, p. 235.

The school commissioners were further hindered by the fact that copies of the education act were not sent to them by the government. Thus, simple ignorance of the mechanics of the school system proved to be a major obstacle to its development. Meilleur concluded, in 1843, that "The evil which...ignorance of the law has caused, this year, is incalculable."¹⁶ Moreover, the lack of a census since 1831 made the organization of school districts in 1841 very difficult.

Poverty proved to be another problem in implementing the law; certain parishes were simply unable to afford school taxes. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that parents who were able to, were required to pay a monthly fee in addition to the annual tax. In Meilleur's eyes this created a two-tiered system in which poor children were stigmatized for their inability to pay fees.¹⁷

In spite of the prejudices of Lower Canadians against the school law of 1841, and notwithstanding its many flaws, some progress was made in the establishment of elementary schools during the early 1840s. In 1843 Meilleur reported that 1,298 schools were functioning well enough to claim their share of the school grant, and that these schools were attended by 39,397 students.¹⁸ If one compares these figures with those for 1835, that is, 1,202 schools and 38,377 students, it becomes evident that the first two years under the system established in 1841 were spent recuperating from the non-renewal of the 1836 school law. This is not to suggest that all schools had closed down after 1836. Audet contends that probably half of those operating in 1836 continued to function, largely due to the efforts of the parish clergy.¹⁹ This seems a reasonable estimate given that in 1842 little had been accomplished under the new school system because of problems in disseminating the act and confusion about its

¹⁶ JLAC , 3 (1843), Appendix Z.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ JLAC, 4 (1844-45), Appendix Z.

¹⁹ Audet, 6: 14-18.

requirements, and yet Meilleur was still able to report that 661 schools received the grant in that year.²⁰

Clearly, some inhabitants of Lower Canada, encouraged by their curés, had voluntarily supported schools in the absence of government assistance. Judging by Meilleur's Annual Report for 1843, the clergy continued to play an important role in education during the early 1840s.²¹ According to the superintendent, "their efforts to give impulse to the Act have been so much the greater in proportion as the obstacles were every where [sic] more invincible, without the effective co-operation of the Municipal Councils." In that same report, Meilleur summarized the letters of twenty-four wardens and MLAs who were reporting to him on compliance to the school act in their municipal districts. Of these summaries, more than half reported that, while no taxes had been raised for education, schools were nevertheless maintained through voluntary contributions by parents and the assistance of church funds.²²

Thus, in spite of the population's hostility to the municipal system on which the school law of 1841 was based, schools did slowly increase in number during the early 1840s, apparently because parents and the Church were willing to provide some financial support on a voluntary basis. Marcel Lajeunesse, who has explored the reasons for the Church's support for the school system in these years, concludes that Bishop Bourget was satisfied with the provisions for separate Catholic and Protestant boards of examiners in the cities of Montreal and Quebec, and the right of minority religious groups to establish tax-supported dissentient schools.²³ Moreover, the

²⁰JLAC, 3 (1843), Appendix Z; 4 (1844-45), Appendix Z.

²¹The Bishop of Quebec, in a mandement of 30 December 1841 urged curés to support the school law. See H. Têtu and C.O. Gagnon, Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des Évêques de Québec (Québec: Imprimerie Générale A. Côté & Cie., 1888), vol. 3, p. 407.

²²JLAC, 3 (1843), Appendix Z.

²³Lajeunesse, "L'Évêque Bourget," pp. 41-4.

Christian Brothers teaching order, newly-arrived from France, was exempted from the requirement that all teachers be British subjects.²⁴ Bourget continued to lobby for amendments, however, including the right of the religious teaching orders to be exempted from certain requirements which applied to teachers generally.

Because of the flaws in the 1841 law, and the population's resistance to it, the government planned to pass new school legislation for Lower Canada in 1843, but the attempt was aborted by the political crisis between Governor Metcalfe and the Reform leaders. It was not until 1845, therefore, that a new school system was inaugurated. Bourget's lobbying efforts had borne some fruit: under section 15 of the new school act the curé or resident minister of the most numerous religious denomination was automatically to be a school commissioner.²⁵ As noted earlier, Bourget was not content with the new legislation, however, and worked with Reform politicians for further amendments.

To address the criticisms of the 1841 law, the school legislation of 1845 granted taxing powers to the locally-elected school commissioners rather than to the municipal corporations.²⁶ The separation of the municipal and school systems was not completed under the 1845 act, however, because section 37 did not specify which of these two bodies was responsible for authorizing a property assessment if one had not been

²⁴ 4 and 5 Vict., cap. 18, sect. 3, art. 7. Both Both Lajeunesse and Labarrère-Paulé suggest that these accommodations prefigure the control over education which the Church would gain in the last half of the nineteenth century. See *ibid.*, and Labarrère-Paulé, p. 109. A recent article suggests that the exemption for the Christian Brothers was a practical measure and had no significance as far as the Church's influence over the school system was concerned. See Carignan, "La Place," pp. 24-25. Carignan's comprehensive article makes it clear that the 1841 school law did not create a confessional school system. See also, Charland, pp. 505-22. For an opposing view, see Eid, "Éducation et classes sociales," pp. 161-62.

²⁵ 8 Vict., cap. 41, sect. 15. Cross mistakenly suggests that the clergy were first allowed to be school commissioners in 1849; see "The Laws are like Cobwebs," p. 121.

²⁶ The new municipal law of 1845 did away with the district councils and gave considerably greater powers to local municipalities based on parishes or townships; see L'Heureux, p. 356.

previously ordered. According to Meilleur, each body preferred to avoid any association with the levying of taxes, and would thus not order the necessary property assessments.²⁷ Under the 1845 school law, school commissioners could accept voluntary subscriptions before levying taxes; this was an attempt by the government to increase the popularity of the school system.²⁸ Funds generated by voluntary contributions, however, quickly proved inadequate. That fact, coupled with confusion over taxing responsibilities, resulted in the rapid repeal of the 1845 law, and the promulgation of a permanent act "to make better provision for Elementary Instruction in Lower Canada" in June of 1846.

✓The School Laws of 1846 and 1849

The most significant aspect of the school act of 1846 was the return to compulsory school taxes. In addition to annual school taxes, parents of all children aged from five to sixteen years were required to pay a monthly fee (the amount to be determined by local school commissioners), whether or not their children attended school. Presumably, the monthly fees were seen as a way of pushing parents into sending their children to school.²⁹ Both the annual taxes and the monthly fees could be paid in produce, at the discretion of the school commissioners and the secretary-treasurer, and at a price fixed

²⁷ JLAC, 5 (1846), Appendix P. See, for example, the petition of 25 December 1845 from the school commissioners of Varennes complaining that the municipal council had not done the assessment and that the parish was thus deprived of the government's school grant. NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 142, no. 13 of 1846.

²⁸ 8 Vict., cap. 41, sect. 20. As noted earlier, the 1845 school bill was written by Denis-Benjamin Papineau. It was, however, based on the drafts of 1843 which were composed by A.N. Morin and Meilleur. Monet, The Last Cannon Shot, p. 209.

²⁹ 9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 21. Meilleur had proposed a policy of compulsory education; however, he did not believe monthly fees served a useful purpose, believing that parents and school commissioners felt "harassed" by them. See JLAC, 3 (1843), Appendix Z and ibid., 5 (1846), Appendix P.

by them.³⁰

The return to compulsory taxes and the imposition of mandatory monthly fees were symptomatic of the more centralized school system created by the act of 1846. For example, an appointed board of examiners was established to determine, among other things, which textbooks should be used in the schools, and to examine teachers who wished to receive a certificate of qualification.³¹ Moreover, school commissioners were required to be more scrupulous in fulfilling their duties. They were to make visits to each school every six months and send a report on its progress to the superintendent. If the school commissioners failed in their duty to order a property assessment, they could be fined. If any fraud was committed by a school corporation, its members were to be prosecuted, and school commissioners were to initiate prosecution of any individual who refused to pay the school taxes.³² It seems clear that the more centralized system legislated in 1846 resulted from the government's desire to ensure that the population would comply with school regulations. In his Annual Reports, Meilleur frequently lamented the ease with which the population could avoid taxes by electing school commissioners who would boycott the system. The tighter regulations in the 1846 act were designed to thwart that kind of resistance.

There was one element of both the 1845 and 1846 acts which was a response to local demand, however, and that was the separation of the school and municipal systems. Reference has been made to the numerous letters and petitions which

³⁰9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 39. Keith Hunte is in error on this point. He states that cash payments were required and that the lack of cash in the county districts was a factor in opposition to the school law. See Hunte, p. 121.

³¹Teachers could, if they wished, be examined instead by local school commissioners until July of 1856. After that date they would be required to be examined by the board of examiners. See 9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 50.

³²Ibid., sect. 21, 28, and 38. The article stipulating that school commissioners should prosecute persons not paying their taxes was first included in the 1845 school act.

complained particularly about the taxing authority of municipal councils. The 1845 law attempted to address this problem by granting taxing powers to parish- or township-based school commissioners. The 1846 act refined the procedures further, making it incumbent on the school commissioners to order a property assessment and, as noted above, leaving them open to being fined if they neglected this duty. In making local officials responsible for raising taxes, Meilleur hoped to overcome the perception that the money raised would not benefit the local community. Thus, he stated: "The inhabitants of a Parish or Township will always be reluctant in carrying the amount of their taxes, sometimes a considerable distance, in order there to deposit it in the hands of a man they hardly know, and over whom they have no control... The people there are accustomed to transact their business 'en famille', and an order of things so natural ought not to be done away with."³³ In accommodating to traditional patterns of behaviour, Meilleur thus hoped to accustom the population to taxes and regulations imposed by the central government.

An unofficial ally in the superintendent's efforts was the Catholic Church, and Meilleur ensured that measures giving that body indirect influence over the school system were included in the 1846 law. Clerics were named as school visitors, and as such they were to arbitrate disputes between teachers and school commissioners and receive all information generated about the school system. The curé or minister had the right to choose books which would deal with religious or moral issues, and teachers were required to obtain a certificate of morality from the clergy in their school district before they could request to be examined by the board of examiners.³⁴ While clerics were no longer school commissioners automatically and, in fact, would have had difficulty meeting the new property qualification of £250, this was not considered to be a drawback by the Church. Meilleur reported that the clause which had appointed clerics

³³ *JLAC*, 4 (1844-45), Appendix Z; see also *ibid.*, 5 (1846), Appendix P.

³⁴ 9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 21, 33, 50.

to the school corporations in 1845 had been resented by both the population and the clerics:

This enactment of the Law has excited many appeals, partly from the people whom, in certain cases, complained of being disfranchised by the imposition of men who were made School Commissioners without their concurrence, and partly from the members of the clergy themselves, who, under certain disagreeable circumstances, complained that the Law imposes on them, without their consent, a charge, the duties of which are difficult, sometimes even impossible to fulfil usefully.³⁵

A more important reason for the Church to be relieved that curés were no longer school commissioners was that outlined by Bishop Bourget:

Dans le moment actuel, cette disposition est pour nous providentielle: car il va falloir, cette année, de toute nécessité, que les Commissaires d'Écoles imposent la taxe prescrite par la loi. Le peuple qui déteste cette taxe va s'élever contre ceux qui vont la prélever. - Si tous les curés étaient commissaires, on en jeterait sur eux tout l'odieux.³⁶

Three other clauses in the 1846 act attested to Bourget's lobbying efforts and Meilleur's belief that the Church was a useful ally in helping to impose the new school system. Two of these measures had been promoted by Meilleur in his Annual Report of 1846: one exempted religious buildings from school taxes; the other exempted teachers in religious orders from undergoing a qualifying exam by the board of examiners. The third clause stipulated that half the appointees to the board of examiners were to be Catholics.

Thus we have the major provisions of the 1846 school law - the law which would form the basis of Quebec's school system for the next century.³⁷ No sooner did the law

³⁵ JLAC , 5 (1846), Appendix P.

³⁶ Cited by Lajeunesse, p. 51. In spite of Bourget's approval of the new law some curés resented being virtually excluded from the school corporations. Meilleur suggested to a friend, who was also a priest, that they should be content with the influence he believed they could exercise as school visitors. See NA, Manuscrits Dr. J.B.Meilleur. Succession Bois V1-1 (1840-1846), Meilleur to Bois, 15 June 1846; Meilleur to Bois, 7 July 1846.

³⁷ Guy Houle, Le Cadre Juridique de l'Administration Scolaire Locale au Québec. Annexe au Rapport de la Commission Royale d'Enquête sur l'Enseignement dans la Province de Québec (Province of Quebec, 1966), p.50.

come into effect, however, than complaints about it began to pour into the offices of the provincial secretary and the superintendent. These complaints took the form of letters from individuals or petitions from entire communities. The petitions did not represent a new form of resistance to government-imposed school legislation, for we have seen that petitioners had made their grievances known since the early 1840s.³⁸ What changed in 1846 was the magnitude of the response and the way in which a particular group of rural notables used the petitions to wage war on a measure which threatened their position in society. We will examine this process more closely in the following chapter. Here, it is necessary to determine what aspects of the 1846 law generated the most complaints.

By far the most common theme in the letters and petitions was opposition to compulsory annual taxes and monthly fees. Some petitioners objected to taxes on the grounds that they had been imposed without the people's consent and that the imposition of taxes should be a local decision.³⁹ Other petitions, such as that from the Municipal Council of Rimouski, reflected on the poor harvests of the preceding years and stated that the habitants simply could not afford taxes.⁴⁰ Taxes and monthly fees were thought to be unfair by many because children were needed at home to work on the farm; moreover, girls often married before the age of sixteen, but their parents would have to continue to pay monthly fees.⁴¹ The petitions objecting to taxes argued that the population wanted to educate their children but that they preferred to do so through voluntary rather than compulsory contributions. Thus, the Municipal Council of St.

³⁸ John Weaver states that in Upper Canada, petitioning the government about grievances had declined by the 1840s. Certainly this was not the case for Lower Canada. See Weaver, p. 204.

³⁹ See, for example, NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 152, no. 1141, pp. 6301-05. Petition from the inhabitants of Ste. Geneviève, 28 March 1846.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol. 192, no. 1698, Petition from the Municipal Council of Rimouski, 7 June 1847.

⁴¹ Ibid., no. 1683, Petition from the Municipal Council of St. Roch des Aulnets, County of l'Islet, 15 April 1847.

Roch des Aulnets stated that: "depuis la passation de cet acte coërcitif, plusieurs chefs de familles ont retiré leurs enfans des Écoles ne voulant pas faire par contrainte ce qu'ils ont toujours fait volontairement et regardé comme un devoir essentiel."⁴²

Another common theme in the correspondence relating to the 1846 school legislation was the confusion created by the law itself. Meilleur claimed that problems with the translation of the school act accounted for some misapprehension about its requirements.⁴³ Some of the queries, however, did not reflect true confusion so much as an attempt by opponents of the law to resist its implementation. Thus, school commissioners wrote to Meilleur asking for clarification of certain clauses in the act, or about how to solve hypothetical problems or settle conflicts between various members of the school corporation.⁴⁴ Apart from confusion, real or feigned, however, local school officials and taxpayers alike were confronted by substantial problems created by the law.

One of the more significant of these was the high property qualification and absence of an educational qualification for school commissioners. Meilleur, who was opposed to the high property qualification, stated that this requirement prevented the population from electing the best qualified men to act as school commissioners; in fact, householders in newer settlements could sometimes find no one who had sufficient property to stand for office.⁴⁵ Although Meilleur was sympathetic to the plight of curés who wished to be school commissioners but had insufficient property, he pointed out to his friend, the curé Bois, that educated laymen were at an even greater disadvantage:

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Meilleur, p. 339.

⁴⁴See, for example, ANQ, E0013, Instruction Publique, Éducation, Lettres Reçues, Box 295, File 1006, School Commissioners of Nicolet to J.B. Meilleur, 17 August 1846; *ibid.*, Box 300, File 1279, School Commissioners of St. Pierre les Becquets to Meilleur, 11 October 1847.

⁴⁵*JLAC*, 7 (1848), Appendix P.

"Le mieux pour le clergé serait de ne pas faire grand cas de la qualification et ce d'autant moins qu'il n'est pas le seul frappé, et que les laïcs le sont bien d'avantage, puisque leur mobilier, à la campagne, est généralement moins considérable que celui de M.M. les curés, lors même qu'ils seraient jeunes."⁴⁶ Thus, liberal professionals who were economically-pressed, would be excluded from sitting as school officials. The property qualification had been inserted into the 1846 act just before its passage by the Legislative Council,⁴⁷ it seems, with the intention of excluding the rural petit bourgeoisie (who tended to be LaFontaine supporters) from positions which could strengthen their influence in the countryside. That body seemed unaware that the wealthy landowners who would be eligible to act as school commissioners, would do the most to sabotage the tax-based school system in subsequent years.

The absence of an educational qualification meant that the wealthy men elected as school commissioners were often incompetent and illiterate.⁴⁸ The 1853 Sicotte Enquiry into Education reported that of 1,025 school commissioners, only 502 could read and write. Certainly, in Nicolet and Yamaska Counties this literacy rate held true: letters sent to Meilleur by school corporations were signed off with an X by about half of the school commissioners.⁴⁹

⁴⁶NA, Manuscrits Dr. J.B. Meilleur. Succession Bois V1-1 (1840-1846), Meilleur to Bois, 7 July 1846.

⁴⁷Ibid., Meilleur to Bois, 15 June 1846.

⁴⁸Hunte states that the purpose of the property qualification was to give "some guarantee that the office of school commissioner would not be too easily accessible to the irresponsible and illiterate." Certainly it did not achieve that end, and it seems clear that Meilleur did not see the property qualification as beneficial, as Hunte implies. See Hunte, p. 118. Meilleur recommended an educational qualification several times. See *JLAC*, 3 (1843), Appendix Z; 5 (1846), Appendix P; 11 (1852-53), Appendix JJ. In the latter report Meilleur links the lack of educated men acting as school commissioners to the high property qualification.

⁴⁹*JLAC*, 11 (1853), Appendix JJ. The letters from the school commissioners are found in ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues; see, for example, Box 315, File 1349, Commissaires d'École de St. Grégoire à Meilleur, 10 August 1850, where three of the four school commissioners signed with an X.

This lack of educated school commissioners increased the population's apprehensions about its tax money being misused, whether through incompetency or conscious fraud. Thus, the inhabitants of Beauharnois complained in a petition of 1849 that "a large proportion of the revenue raised in this Vicinity, for Educational purposes, has been squandered in Law Suits - whereby Teachers have been and yet remain unpaid - and many Districts are yet unprovided with Houses wherein to teach a School - while some Teachers are over paid."⁵⁰ Certain "ratepayers" in Hemmingford complained to Meilleur about the sloppy way in which the school commissioners kept their account books. Having examined those books, the ratepayers could not, "through the irregularity and carelessness of the way in which they are kept, form an idea of, or strike a balance, in fact, we have not an acknowledgement of the receipt of the Gov't. grants."⁵¹ The anxiety apparent in these petitions about the careless and/or fraudulent use of tax money by poorly qualified school officials would become a factor in creating the violent reactions against the school law in the late 1840s.

The unpaid teachers referred to in the petition from the Beauharnois residents points to another problem experienced by communities in their attempts to implement the school act of 1846. A common theme in the letters received by Meilleur from those communities was that the government grant had not yet been received, and that, in consequence, the teachers could not be paid and were in great distress. This problem illustrates the many obstacles which prevented the functioning of the school system in its early years.

Before the government grant could be released to a school district, a report was to be sent by the school corporation's secretary-treasurer, indicating that an equal sum in

⁵⁰NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 245, no. 335 of 1849, Petition of the Inhabitants of Beauharnois for repeal or amendment of the School Act.

⁵¹ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 309, File 1323, Certain "ratepayers" of Hemmingford to Meilleur, 4 September 1849.

taxes had been collected.⁵² Given the incompetency and ill-will of many school commissioners, the assessment of properties and the levying of taxes was frequently neglected or improperly done, ensuring that the superintendent often did not receive the necessary report in an expeditious manner. In turn, however, Meilleur's office was often late in sending out the government grant. Thus, the secretary-treasurer of the St. Grégoire school corporation wrote to Meilleur in November, 1847 questioning why he had not received the second installment of the government grant: "Je suppose que l'expédition ma [sic] été retardée pour quelques raisons que je ne puis prévoir; dans tous les cas, j'espère que vous voudrez bien l'envoyer aussitôt que possible, car l'année scolaire [sic] est expirée depuis près de cinq mois, & les Instituteurs commencent à trouver le tems long."⁵³ Even when the government grant did come there were often problems converting it into cash because of the commercial crisis which had caused merchants to call in credit. Thus, a school official in Gentilly complained to Meilleur in 1848 that the cheque sent by his office could not be cashed in Gentilly; officials in Hemmingford and Hatley echoed this refrain in 1848 and 1849.⁵⁴ The immediate consequence of this cash shortage and the tardy arrival of the grant was that teachers could not be paid. Their misery, readily apparent to tax-paying parents, made rural communities question what benefits had accrued to them from the school system.⁵⁵

That questioning became more intense when squabbles over school-related issues caused disharmony within local communities. Occasionally the conflict could be between different classes as it was in Beauharnois County in 1849. The inhabitants of that

⁵²9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 21, art. 10.

⁵³ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 300, File 1355, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, 6 November 1847.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Box 304, File 1126, Joseph Genest to Meilleur, Gentilly, 6 September 1848; Box 304, File 1191, John Milton to Meilleur, Hemmingford, September 1848. NA, MG24 B14, David Connell to Meilleur, Hatley, 6 March 1849.

⁵⁵ Calixte Marquis claimed that the teachers "crient misère" and could no longer get any credit in the parish. See ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 311, File 1701, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 14 November 1849.

county petitioned against the section of the school law which related to the taxing of seigneurial property. The petition complained of "the exemption made in favour of Seigniors... by which the Seignior is taxed at only 1/40th and the inhabitant to the full value of their rateable property."⁵⁶ More frequently, disputes centred on the location of school facilities - an important consideration for parents during an era when good roads were the exception rather than the rule.⁵⁷ A petition addressed to Meilleur by the householders of one school district in the parish of St. Pierre les Becquets reflected these concerns. In it the habitants complained that the school commissioners had recently abandoned the district's school house, which had been in constant use for twenty years. These officials had then installed the students in a new building which also served as a place of business, and was thus considered to be unsuitable for students. The petition also stated that by a new division in the school district, certain families were forced to send their children to a school in a more distant location, causing difficulties "dans la nécessité de faire journellement le passage de deux côtes ardûes, et de difficiles accès, et de franchir un espace de chemin considérable et généralement mauvais."⁵⁸

⁵⁶NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 279, no. 695 of 1849 (filed with no. 1352 of 1850), Petition by the inhabitants of the County of Beauharnois, n.d. The clause regarding taxing of seigneurs stated: "unconceded lands in Seigniories shall be free from assessment..., but that all Seigniors shall pay, on account of their lucrative rights, one-fortieth part of the sum assessed in the Municipality or Municipalities, or portions of Municipalities of which they are Seigniors, in proportion to their Seignior in the same." Complaints like those made by the Beauharnois residents were not common in the petitions.

⁵⁷These disputes are remarkably like the frequently noted conflicts among parishioners over location of the church. See, for example, J.I. Little, "The Parish and French-Canadian Migrants to Compton County, Quebec, 1851-1891," *HS/SH*, 11 (1978): 135, 140; Terence Crowley, "'Thunder Gusts'," p. 76. See, also Claude Baribeau, *La Seigneurie de la Petite-Nation 1801-1854. Le rôle économique et social du seigneur.* (Hull: Éditions Asticou, 1983), p. 132. Bruce Curtis notes that disputes occurred in Upper Canada in the 1850s over the location of school houses. See, Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, p. 152.

⁵⁸ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 304, File 1140, Petition from certain inhabitants of St. Pierre les Becquets to Meilleur, n.d. (probably September 1848). These inhabitants reiterated their complaints to Meilleur the following year; see *ibid.*, Box 310, File 1385, 17 September 1849. See also the complaints of poor roads addressed to Meilleur by inhabitants of Ste. Monique; *ibid.*, Box 323, File 228, 7 February 1852.

The township of Hemmingford experienced disputes over the division of school taxes. Ratepayers from more developed areas of the township paid higher taxes than elsewhere; consequently, they believed that more money should be spent on schools in their area. Other disputes arose over whether the whole township should be taxed for a school for individual districts. Resentment over these issues spilled over into the meetings of the school commissioners, where people came forward, "treating the Board with the greatest insolence, and in fact, seriously impeding the progress of business."⁵⁹

Thus, problems experienced by the population as a result of the 1846 school act were plentiful, and serious in nature. As a result, in May of 1849 an act to amend the school law of Lower Canada was passed by the Legislature. The characteristic feature of the amendments included in the act was that they tightened the regulations which governed the school system and, by so doing, they gave the central government more control over that system. It is important to point out, however, the extent to which these measures were a response to the complaints raised by local communities. This is significant because it relates to the issues raised by Gidney and Lawr in their article about the origins of a centralized bureaucracy. These historians have suggested that, in Upper Canada "the growing body of laws and regulations did not necessarily or always consist of remote or alien rules removed from the needs generated by local circumstances."⁶⁰ Very much the same statement could be made about the amendments of 1849 to Lower Canada's school act - as we shall see upon closer examination.

While school taxes and monthly fees remained compulsory under the 1849 legislation, adjustments were made in response to the complaints raised locally. Thus,

⁵⁹Ibid., Box 305, File 1406 & 1/2, J. Wilton to Meilleur, Hemmingford, 20 November 1848; *ibid.*, Box 306, File 139, J. Wilton to Meilleur, 22 January 1849; *ibid.*, Box 306, File 169, J. Wilton to Meilleur, 3 February 1849.

⁶⁰Gidney and Lawr, "Bureaucracy versus Community?" p. 453.

section two stated that monthly fees were demandable in future only for children aged seven to fourteen years, but all children aged five to sixteen years could attend schools if they paid the fees. Moreover, individuals could contribute on a voluntary basis, between July and September, towards school maintenance; if they had not done so by September 10th, the school corporation was to levy taxes in the usual manner. Municipalities which found themselves unable to pay sufficient taxes due to indigence, could be exempted from such payment for the year; under the 1846 act, only individuals had been exempted from payment of taxes. Thus, while the population was still obliged to pay taxes, the system of payment was adjusted to reflect the reality of both poverty and child farm labour.⁶¹ Section 19 also acknowledged that children were required at home to work on the farm: whereas previously fifteen children were required to be in regular attendance in a school district before that district could receive the government grant, under this amended section children were not required to attend on a regular basis.⁶²

In an attempt to make the system more effective, however, the government instituted amendments intended to ensure that taxes, when required, would be paid. Henceforth, any individual whose taxes remained unpaid would be banned from voting in elections for school commissioners; if that person voted anyway, he was to be fined. The new act also provided more detail on steps the school commissioners should take to prosecute those owing taxes or monthly fees; it increased the fines to be paid by school commissioners who neglected to order a property assessment; and, it instituted penalties against anyone who prevented the taking of a property assessment.⁶³

⁶¹ 12 Vict., cap. 50, sect. 4 and 5.

⁶² Cross states that the government eased the tax burden in 1849; this is true only insofar as the monthly fees did not have to be paid by as many parents; see section 2, and see Cross, "The Laws are like Cobwebs," p. 121.

⁶³ 12 Vict., cap. 50, sect. 9, 16, 24, 25.

Many of the other amendments reflected government attempts to ensure compliance with the law; however, they must also be seen as an accommodation to local concerns about fraud and the unfair distribution of government funds within the community. Thus, section seven stipulated that the secretary-treasurer of the school corporation was to provide security to the school commissioners, and it explained in detail the manner in which this was to be done. Section twelve specified that in the event of disputes between the school commissioners and the secretary-treasurer, the superintendent could examine the account books and arbitrate the dispute.⁶⁴ Finally, section fourteen stated that the government grant, instead of being distributed equally to each school district, should be divided in proportion to the number of children between seven and fourteen years of age residing in each district.

The only other significant amendment arising out of the 1849 legislation was that pertaining to the clergy's involvement in the school system. As we have seen, the property qualification of £250 instituted in 1846 prevented most clerics from being elected to the school corporations. We have also noted that this satisfied the Church hierarchy, if not all parish priests. In 1849, the clergy were exempted from the property qualification and could thus be elected as school commissioners if the householders favoured their candidacy. The impact of this amendment should not be exaggerated, however.⁶⁵ Michael Cross suggests that, because of the "greater role" the amendment permitted the clergy in the school system, the Church made a greater effort to "endorse

⁶⁴This section tends to undermine Meilleur's statement in the 1848 Annual Report in which he denies emphatically the rumours that some school commissioners and secretaries-treasurer had handed in false reports; see JLAC, 7 (1848), Appendix P.

⁶⁵Clergy could act as school commissioners under both the 1841 and 1845 school laws. In 1830 an amendment to the Assembly Schools Act had permitted clergy to act as syndics without being property holders. Thus the pattern prior to 1849 had been that clergy could participate in school affairs in an official capacity. This counters the arguments of those who see the 1840s as the beginning of an era of Church dominance in the school system. See Eid, "Éducation et classes sociales," especially, pp. 161-62.

the School Act, and urge the people to accept it."⁶⁶ As we have noted above, the parish clergy had supported the school system throughout the 1840s. Furthermore, what influence that body exerted on the system tended to be indirect rather than direct, both before and after 1849. In St. Grégoire, for example, the curé Jean Harper had the means to sit as a school commissioner and he did so between 1845 and 1847.⁶⁷ After that time, neither he nor his vicar, Calixte Marquis, became school commissioners, but both played very active roles in the parish's school affairs. After 1849, Marquis held the position of secretary-treasurer of the school corporation; while in theory this position carried little power, we shall see that in fact, Marquis had considerable influence over school affairs.⁶⁸ Thus, while the 1849 amendment did accord a special privilege to the Church, the impact of that privilege must be gauged by studying events at the local level - which is where we will now turn.

⁶⁶ Cross, "The Laws are like Cobwebs," p. 121.

⁶⁷ AUQTR, Registre des délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 14 July 1845, 20 July 1846, and 27 June 1847.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 23 July 1849, 23 July 1850.

CHAPTER V

THE RESPONSE OF THE RURAL LANDED ELITE TO THE SCHOOL LAWS

The previous two chapters highlighted the fundamental changes which were taking place in Lower Canada during the 1840s. Preeminent among these was the shift towards responsible government which generated new political alignments and the transfer of patronage from governor general to Reform leaders. Another important aspect of this transition period was the new social legislation enacted by both the governor general's party and the Reform ministry. This decade of change saw the central state and its political agents taking control of institutions which had formerly been more under the sway of local communities, and creating new institutions or activities which had previously not existed. Municipal and school laws created "local structures of governance" which were to be regulated by the central state.¹ The relatively decentralized school system created in 1841 was modified by legislation in later years to give the state more control over local school officials. The revised judicial system and new land registration laws augmented the state's regulatory role and created new bureaucratic posts which, following the granting of responsible government, could be filled by Reform leaders through their control of patronage. The political and social reforms of the 1840s thus generated a whole range of new opportunities in the countryside, from popularly-elected positions which could heighten the incumbent's visibility, to patronage appointments which could in fact be quite lucrative. C.F.J. Whebell points out that the county registrar in York in 1849 made about £2,000 annually. While this clearly represented one of the higher-salaried appointments, Whebell suggests that, "there was at least a measure of financial

¹Philip Corrigan and Bruce Curtis, "Education, Inspection and State Formation," p. 168. For a discussion of state formation in Upper Canada, see Bruce Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian state," pp. 99-121; and Curtis, Building the Educational State.

security even for the customs collector at some tiny port in an economy that was very short of ready cash."²

This gradual shift towards a more interventionist state in the 1840s would have a profound impact on social relations in the countryside. Little work has been done on this topic, but the battle over school taxes in Lower Canada provides us with some indication of how these changes affected the fortunes of the rural population. This and the subsequent chapter will focus on the elite members of that population in an attempt to show that a rough division between large land holders on one side, and priests and liberal professionals on the other, was created by an aspect of the state's social legislation: the school and municipal systems. Attention will centre on reaction to the school law of 1846, but it will become clear that the rural elite did not make a clear distinction between school and municipal reforms. The conflict would centre on access to patronage, and opportunities to satisfy political ambitions, both of which were linked to the desire for influence over the local community. An equally important element in the struggle was the property taxes required by both school and municipal institutions.

This chapter will examine the opposition of the rural landed elite to the school reforms of 1846 and 1849; indirectly, it will also discuss their objections to the new municipal system. Firstly, the two men who led the resistance to taxation in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska will be introduced. Then the motivation of these elite *éteignoirs* will be determined by examining the petitions they organized and sent to the government in opposition to the school law. Their on-going political aspirations will then be discussed in light of their actions after the petition campaign died down. It will become apparent that the landed elite, while actively opposed to state taxation for its own reasons, also made use of popular hostility to property assessments to further its political ambitions.

²See Whebell, p. 52.

The rural elite landowners

Petitions sent to the government to complain about the school law in 1847 are remarkable not only for their numbers (thirty-five have been noted in the Civil Secretary's correspondence), but equally for the orchestrated manner in which they were written and expedited. Two-thirds of the petitions are duplicates of one of three standard formulas. Moreover, Luc-Michel Cressé, a large landholder from the parish of St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet (in Nicolet County), forwarded several of these petitions to the government although they originated from a variety of parishes in different counties. That the petitions represented the manoeuvrings of an elite group which opposed the school law, rather than the spontaneous outpouring of popular feelings, was suggested in a letter received by Jean-Baptiste Meilleur in September, 1846. The letter was sent by J. Olivier Arcand, a former Patriote and a Justice of the Peace in St. Michel d'Yamaska. Arcand complained to Meilleur that men such as Cressé, in the effort to "dépopulariser les membres de la Chambre et particulièrement ici ceux des Comtés de Nicolet et d'Yamaska, exploitent de leur mieux tout ce que le mot taxes a de choquant à l'oreille de la partie la moins instruites des habitans de nos Campagnes. Ils leurs ont fait entendre que les cotisations des écoles n'étaient que le prélude d'impôts plus pesants." According to Arcand, this local elite had led the population to believe that the government itself had been ambivalent about imposing taxes, and would likely rescind the school act if the population showed its disapproval through petitions.³

This campaign to deluge the government with petitions got under way in the fall of 1846 and was centred in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska. By winter, however, petitions were being sent from the Districts of Quebec and Montreal, as well as elsewhere in the District of Trois-Rivières. Cressé sponsored most of the petitions sent

³NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 171, no. 1163 of 1846 (filed with no. 3174 of 1846), p. 16244, J. Olivier Arcand to Meilleur, St. Michel d'Yamaska, 23 September 1846.

from the latter district, although not from the other two. As noted, however, the fact that the majority of the petitions mimicked a standard formula suggests that the activity was being organized by a few individuals. The petition sent in from St. Félix de Valois, in the District of Montreal, provides further evidence of this manoeuvring; it is a typed version of one of the three formula petitions, and there is a blank space where the name of the petitioning parish was to be filled in.⁴

Just who were the men behind these petitions and what motivated them in their resistance to the school law? Because of his sponsorship of several petitions and his persistent opposition to the school legislation in subsequent years, Luc-Michel Cressé is suspect as the chief organizing force. The Cressé family had been seigneurs in Nicolet County since 1673, owning Nicolet seigneurie and, for a period of time, the neighbouring Courval seigneurie. In an effort to enlarge the size of the Nicolet seigneurie, Luc's father had embroiled himself in a number of legal suits, all of which he lost. As a result, he was forced to sell the seigneurie in 1819, "au grand chagrin de sa famille et surtout du jeune notaire Luc-Michel, qui voyait s'évanouir ses ambitions et rêves d'avenir."⁵ The younger Cressé had to content himself with acting as notary to the new seigneur between 1821 and 1844. Then, he became the agent for the Nicolet seigneur and took complete charge of the seigneurie's administration, until he was fired in 1851.⁶ Cressé was a wealthy man in his own right, however, owning land in the Nicolet area as well as large tracts of wild land in the township of Acton.⁷

⁴Ibid., Vol. 184, no. 808 of 1847, Petition from the Inhabitants of St. Félix de Valois, 13 March 1847. One of Cressé's allies, William Vondenvelden, was elected as municipal councillor of this parish in September of 1847; see *ibid.*, Vol. 205, no. 3254 of 1847, Report on Municipal Election, St. Félix de Valois, 14 September 1847.

⁵L'abbé Joseph Elzéar Bellemare, Histoire de Nicolet 1669-1924. Première partie: La Seigneurie (Arthabaska: L'Imprimerie d'Arthabaska, Inc., 1924), pp. 178-95.

⁶Ibid., pp. 223, 261.

⁷Ibid., pp. 262-63; see also, NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 130, no. 1860 of 1845, pp. 9018-21, Luc-Michel Cressé to Provincial Secretary's Office, 23 and 30 June 1845.

The historian of the Nicolet seigneurie, J.E. Bellemare, portrays Cressé as a proud and hot-tempered man who made many enemies because of his undisciplined nature. Bellemare reports that Cressé was: "un être le plus singulier, le plus bizarre, le plus excentrique qu'on puisse imaginer, ce qui en faisait un comique achevé, quand ses bizarreries ne tournaient point au tragique." Moreover, according to Bellemare, Cressé "prenait les allures d'un grand seigneur, et alors ce n'était plus la comédie, c'était la terreur. Il ne souffrait pas le moindre manque de considération."⁸ A review of the provincial secretary's correspondence files lends support to Bellemare's claims, for Cressé was frequently embroiled in one kind of dispute or another. Some of these were concerned with land deals, often reflecting Cressé's belief that he had suffered a loss of land or money through the actions of someone else.⁹ Still more of the correspondence related the details of Cressé's conflicts with various members of the community, whether it was the registrar and justice of the peace, J.O. Arcand; the priest of St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet; or a group of notables from St. Grégoire.¹⁰ Still other letters were written by Cressé in an official capacity: at various times Cressé was a justice of the peace, the mayor and post-master of St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet, and a commissioner of the

⁸Bellemare, Histoire de Nicolet, pp. 219-20.

⁹See, for example, Cressé's request for an explanation as to why land patents he had paid for were being advertised for sale: NA, RG4 C4, Canada East: Provincial Secretary's Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1838-1885, Vol. 1, Michel Cressé to Dominick Daly, 10 February 1841; and Cressé's request for compensation for loss of part of the Seigneurie of Isle à la Fourche (probably as agent to the Nicolet seigneur). NA, RG4 C2, Quebec, Lower Canada and Canada East Provincial Secretary's Letterbooks, 1763-1866, Vol. 27, no. 1071, Reply to Luc-Michel Cressé, 27 July 1842.

¹⁰See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 176, no. 3736, Cressé to Provincial Secretary, 19 December 1846, pp. 18552-54, in which Cressé complained that Arcand lived too far away from the parish for which he was the registrar and that this caused much inconvenience to Cressé; AEN, St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet (1620-1861), Cartable 1, no. 35, Cressé to Mgr. Signay, 11 February 1847, in which Cressé described how the priest, Fortier, insulted the parishioners and did not repair the church - Cressé continued this refrain in two other letters: no. 48 and no. 49, not dated; NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 232, no. 2203, Dr. Fortier, MPP, to Provincial Secretary, Gentilly, 15 July 1848 and 29 August 1848, in which Fortier claimed that at the time of the Rebellion in 1838, Cressé "calomnia tellement les notables auprès du gouvernement, que Mr. Stayner supprima le bureau de poste" at St. Grégoire.

parish's school corporation. In this official correspondence, Cressé was sometimes critical of officials (such as Arcand) from neighbouring parishes. More often his letters contained requests that the government do something for his parish, such as allocating to it more of the money derived from the issuing of tavern licences.¹¹

Cressé was unique among the opponents to the school law by virtue of his high visibility and his seemingly endless capacity for becoming embroiled in public disputes. While we must not be led astray by the force of Cressé's personality in our attempt to analyze the motivation of elite resistance to the school law, his extreme behaviour can provide us with clues to how a certain rural class perceived the social and political changes being wrought during the 1840s. This will become apparent as we examine the continued battle against the school legislation after the petitions failed to achieve its repeal. The petitions themselves, however, will provide some indication of why Cressé and his allies so vehemently opposed the school law.

One of Cressé's key allies was William Vondenvelden, a lawyer and merchant who lived both in Kingsey Township and Berthier. The son of the former assistant surveyor-general of Lower Canada, Vondenvelden was undoubtedly proprietor of some part of the large tracts of land his father had accumulated during his life-time.¹² Like Cressé, Vondenvelden seemed to thrive on controversy; the provincial secretary's correspondence is peppered with his missives, most of which are full of complaints about various local officials. In 1841, Vondenvelden described a dispute with another merchant, J.B. Blanchard of Kingsey, claiming that Blanchard had organized a charivari in which Vondenvelden was threatened by men with blackened faces and

¹¹Ibid., RG4 C1, Vol. 155, no. 888 of 1846 (filed with no. 1462 of 1846), pp. 7694-98, Petition from the municipal council of St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet, 16 March 1846; and no. 1744 of 1846 (filed with no. 1462 of 1846), pp. 7699-7702, Petition from same, 7 May 1846.

¹²In 1807 Vondenvelden, Senior, acquired most of remote Lingwick Township essentially as a free grant. See Little, Nationalism and Colonization, Appendix A.

disguises. Lt. Colonel Hanson, the police magistrate sent to investigate this matter, concluded that Vondenvelden was, in fact, a "troublesome characterless scamp" and that he had been driven from Kingsey by "decent farmers", "in consequence of his having married his [...] woman to his Farmer and afterwards continued to be intimate with her."¹³ Vondenvelden sponsored one of the 1847 petitions, but it is to an earlier letter and petition which we will first turn, as they are instructive in revealing Vondenvelden's conservative attitude towards politics and social change. Decidedly in Governor Metcalfe's camp in the struggles over ministerial responsibility, Vondenvelden ran in the 1844 election for the County of Berthier against David Armstrong, a LaFontaine supporter. He lost the election, and much of his letter to the governor, written in November, 1844, was spent explaining that his loss was due to Armstrong's manipulation of the campaign, and criticizing the politics of the Reformers. Vondenvelden described the latter as "a party in Montreal whose chief object is to degrade the Crown and subjugate the people by the operation of a combined system of agitation, deception and intrigue," and he lamented "the forbearance of the Crown in tolerating its officers' conduct when they publicly pursue a line of politics subversive of the true principles of subordination to the fountain power." In the petition which accompanied this letter Vondenvelden pursued these themes, stating that the political representatives of Lower Canada were "men who entertain the opinion that their interest is to make experiments on our social condition, who wish to turn the uses of our territorial resources to their own private behalf."¹⁴

¹³NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 67, no. 2142 in 1842, pp.16897-98, Affidavit of Wm. Vondenvelden of Kingsey, 13 September 1841; *ibid.*, pp. 16900-02, Memorial of Wm. Vondenvelden of Kingsey to Lord Sydenham, 14 September 1841; *ibid.*, pp. 16904-06, same to D. Daly, Three Rivers, 24 October 1841; *ibid.*, p. 16922, same to same, Berthier, 24 June 1841; Lt. Colonel Hanson to C. Dunkin, Nicolet, pp. 16947-51, 14 August 1842.

¹⁴NA, RG7 G20, Canada, Governor General's Office, Civil Secretary's Correspondence, 1841-1867, Vol. 412, no. 415, William Vondenvelden to Governor Metcalfe, no date (probably November 1844).

The "experiments" which were of concern to Vondenvelden were the new Registration Law, changes in the judicial system, and the land tax which was intended to support public education. Specifically, he objected to the requirement that land registry fees be paid in cash (which was in short supply in the countryside), to the necessity for habitants to travel a considerable distance to serve as jurymen for criminal trials, and, of course, to the property tax. What seems to have precipitated Vondenvelden's specific concerns, however, was the threat posed by an increasingly activist government, which was willing not only to impose taxes, but to disturb the status quo in local communities. Reforms in education, land registry and the judicial system were portents that the state was in the process of carving out a role for itself in local affairs - a development which could undermine the influence of rural notables such as Vondenvelden. That Vondenvelden wished to maintain control over affairs in his community, and keep the habitants in a subservient role, is evident in remarks made to Metcalfe in the petition and accompanying letter. In that correspondence he suggested that public schools should be run by the "Frères Ignorantius" with the support of the local clergy.¹⁵ This would allow the habitants to be under the direct supervision of their priests, and would prevent "disaffected school masters" from instilling "the poisonous doctrine of rebellion in the school boy's mind." He indicated how little he believed the habitant should aspire to improve himself through education by stating that the current school system:

is unsuited to our way of living because the Canadian peasant can attain affluence only by denying himself every comfort, the severity of the climate and the hardships attendant on the cultivation of a wet soil making that in general he has neither money nor leisure to reach the advantages of the United States in point of Instruction.

That Vondenvelden was a reluctant witness to the gradual democratization of Lower-Canadian society becomes more apparent in two letters directed to the governor

¹⁵ Presumably, Vondenvelden was referring to the Christian Brothers, a French teaching order.

in 1845. The first consists of verses "composed on the elevation of the Governor General to the Peerage", an awkwardly written prose poem which extolled the virtues of Metcalfe and decried, in rancorous tones, those who attempted to undermine his position. He wrote:

Instead of honestly rejoicing at beholding the elevation of the Metcalfe name, an elevation which is the reward wholly due to merit too true not to shine even on this hapless soil, those hearts so disloyal towards their own calumny ... the land is covered with audacious reptiles who throw out wily imposture on every side as their venom. They have enraged every heart and poisoned the mind of every agriculturist.¹⁶

In a letter written two months later, Vondenvelden took up this same refrain, claiming that Lower Canada's "Representatives deliberately throw them [the electors] into Helotism under colour of democratic institutions totally repugnant to their nature and that they would repudiate were they even as enlightened as the most generous philanthropy would make them."¹⁷

Clearly, Vondenvelden felt threatened by the gathering momentum of the drive towards responsible government. That event would confer the responsibility of choosing the state's chief ministers on an unenlightened electorate. Moreover, it would undermine the role of local notables, such as himself, who had previously brokered directly with the governor in matters of concern to the local community, and, more importantly, in matters of patronage. Vondenvelden's concern about the question of patronage is reflected in a statement to the governor in the same letter: "My arduous exertions during last summer and fall have impaired both my health and pecuniary concerns only to have the table of the political game turned over my head and I am cut off from the chance of holding any office even quite subordinate under their Ministry, being likely here, as a dissenting friend to prove more annoying than a positive

¹⁶NA, RG7 G20, Vol. 413, no. 3628, Wm. Vondenvelden to Metcalfe, Montreal, 11 March 1845.

¹⁷Ibid., no. 767, Wm. Vondenvelden to Captain Higgins, Montreal, 7 May 1845.

enemy."¹⁸

In January, 1847 Vondenvelden addressed some of these same points in a petition which he claimed represented his own views as well as those of Cressé and André-Benjamin Papineau, a member of the Papineau-Viger clan from St. Martin in Terrebonne County. As one who believed himself "to exercise an unusual share of individual influence over a considerable part of the Districts of Montreal, Three Rivers and St. Francis", Vondenvelden thought he could provide the governor with an "insight" into popular response to the school law.¹⁹ In keeping with his criticism of the LaFontaine party's social "experiments" in 1844, Vondenvelden accused them of holding republican ideas and of enacting municipal and school laws which were entirely opposed by rural proprietors. It is interesting to note that while the LaFontaine opposition gave full support to the 1846 school act, the legislation had, in fact, been written by Denis-Benjamin Papineau and introduced by the governor's party.²⁰ Vondenvelden's comments were precipitated by his perception that the French-Canadian representatives as a body held too much power, and that they were acting on "political principles" which differed radically from those held by their electors. Vondenvelden claimed that the habitants were "by nature purely monarchical and conservative their sole desire being to remain well as they are and never to trespass on the limits of their present condition." This conservative peasantry would be at odds not only with their MLAs, according to Vondenvelden, but also with "men of note in every village" who supported the new laws and the Reform party. As we shall see in later chapters, there would be a rift between habitants and village notables over the school question, but it would be

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ NA, RG7 G14, Governor General's Office, Miscellaneous Records, 1774-1913, Vol. 19, pp. 10452-61, Wm. Vondenvelden to the Governor, 31 January 1847.

²⁰ See Monet, The Last Cannon Shot, pp. 209, 243. For a summary of the parliamentary speeches on the 1846 act see Hunte, pp. 119-25.

preceded, and somewhat overshadowed, by a bitter conflict between those notables and members of the land-owning elite such as Cressé and Vondenvelden. The latter referred to an important aspect of that conflict in the petition. There he suggested that the compulsory school tax was "calculated to raise funds for the support of numerous hirelings," an indication that he feared that new social legislation would interfere with the previous patronage system and would present village notables with lucrative bureaucratic posts.

These concerns are reflected clearly in one of the standard petitions sponsored by Cressé in 1847. In it, the petitioners claimed that "ils sont sous l'impression que cet acte n'aurait été demandé et passé que sur les fausses représentations de certains individus qui cherchaient plutôt des situations lucratives que les intérêts de leur compatriotes;" furthermore, "il n'est aucun besoin de Surintendant, de Commissaires, de Régisseurs, de Cottiseurs, de Collecteurs, de Trésoriers, dont les honoraires absorbent plus d'argent qu'il n'en faut pour le soutien de toutes les écoles."²¹ This suggestion that the bureaucrats created by the school system were handsomely paid is misleading; of the positions listed in the petition, only that of superintendent and secretary-treasurer of the school commissioners were, in fact, salaried.²² What lay behind the criticism was the fear that the popularly elected school commissioners (who would then appoint assessors and collectors) would provide competition in the bid to retain influence over the local community.²³

²¹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 192, no. 1649 of 1847, Petition of the inhabitants of St. Grégoire through L.M. Cressé, Nicolet, 10 June 1847. The same petition was forwarded by Cressé on behalf of the parishes of Nicolet, Ste. Monique, Ste. Ursule, La Baie du Febvre, and the Township of Arthabaska in 1847. See *ibid.*, no. 1606; Vol. 193, no. 1794; Vol. 195, no. 1907 and no. 1973.

²²See 9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 31 and 34.

²³There is some evidence that the remuneration of the secretary-treasurer was resented by tax-payers, because it was linked to the amount of taxes raised. Under section 31 of the 1846 school act, secretary-treasurers were to receive "a sum not exceeding two and a half per cent on all monies by him received, but this allowance shall cover all his contingent expenses." Cressé's ally in the parish of St. Martin, André-Benjamin

Thus, measures introduced by the state served as a catalyst to polarize members of the rural elite. In a discussion of factionalism in the local politics of nineteenth-century France, one author has written that:

Factional leadership was generally exercised by the members of prominent families - bourgeois landlords, professional men, merchants - who functioned as cultural brokers between local communities and the central bureaucracy. Through a combination of intrigue with state officials and services to local residents, these notables aspired to occupy appointive or elective positions in local administration - municipal councils, departmental councils, justices of the peace, etc. Naturally, the larger the number of potential competitors to these positions, the greater the likelihood of local factionalism.²⁴

This statement could well summarize the situation in Lower Canada: men such as Cressé and Vondenvelden feared that village notables, who were often LaFontaine supporters, would be the benefactors of the new social legislation.

Of the new legislation, it was the school law, and to a lesser extent the municipal law, which generated the most hostility from the Cressé-Vondenvelden faction. The reason is quite simple: property taxes. As significant landholders, these men (and others who would soon join the battle) were simply unwilling to have their property assessed and taxed. All of the three standard petitions forwarded by Cressé or Vondenvelden to the government pinpoint compulsory taxes as one of the key problems with the school law. One of the formula petitions simply states that the tax was "odious" to the population, which had willingly supported the previous voluntary subscription.²⁵ The second formula petition describes the tax as unconstitutional: "Un peuple, jadis heureux, se trouve accablé par l'infortune et trahi par ses propres Représentans, le Sol

²³(cont'd) Papineau, referred to this salary in a letter to the provincial secretary's office. He complained that Louis Bélanger "avait un intérêt direct dans la dite mesure [the assessment] comme devant avoir une part dans les fonds en qualité de secrétaire-trésorier des Commissaires d'école." See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 203, no. 2937 of 1847, A.B. Papineau to Provincial Secretary, St. Martin, 24 August 1847.

²⁴Ted W. Margadant, French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 148.

²⁵NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 191, filed with no. 1545 of 1847, Petition of the inhabitants of St. François de la Beauce, St. Henry, February 1847.

est soumis à une taxe dont la collection sera la cause d'un pillage universel, en faux-frais de toutes espèces, et cette taxe a été imposée sans l'aveu et à [illegible] du peuple."²⁶ The third of the formula petitions was that which was forwarded most often by Cressé (five times), and which came from parishes in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska. It is more explicit in its criticism of the tax, and surely reflects the interests of Cressé and his allies. Thus, it complains that "ceux qui ont fait faire instruire leurs enfans, ou qui font donner une éducation chez eux, dans les Séminaires, Collèges, Académies, couvent [sic]" were forced to "paier [sic] injustement pour le soutien d'école dont ils ne retirent aucun avantage."²⁷ This was the argument of the prosperous, rather than of the average habitant, for only relatively wealthy individuals could afford to educate their children privately and turn their backs on publicly-funded schools. Much to the regret of large landholders such as Cressé, the 1846 school law demanded that all property holders support public education, whether or not it served their own children.

To support the thesis that one of Cressé's main objections to the school law was its taxing powers, we need only consult the provincial secretary's correspondence for 1845. In June of that year, Cressé forwarded a petition from "the inhabitants of Acton requesting their recent annexation to the township of Grantham be dissolved and they be re-united with the township of Wickham." Only five people had signed the petition and three of those bore the Cressé name. In an attached note to the governor commenting on Cressé's petition, Christopher Dunkin, the provincial secretary, suggested that Cressé's object was a plain one:

As the principal non-resident proprietor in the Township, it is not to his interest that the Municipal Act should go into real operation in Acton. If joined to Wickham (or at present recognized as a separate Township) the Act

²⁶Ibid., Vol. 180, no. 474 of 1847, Petition of the inhabitants of St. Barthelémy through Wm. Vondenvelden, Berthier, 4 March 1847.

²⁷Ibid., Vol. 192, no. 1649 of 1847, Petition of the inhabitants of St. Grégoire through L.M. Cressé, Nicolet, 10 June 1847.

would be practically nullified; as in either case the people of Acton could do nothing under it. Joined to Grantham it is probable they will take part in its Municipal proceedings and the result may be a little taxation upon Mr. Cressé's wide tract of land.²⁸

Thus, the taxes required by the municipal law were as abhorrent to Cressé as were those instituted by the school law. A year later, the vicar of St. Grégoire came to the same conclusion as Dunkin. In a letter to Meilleur he claimed it was Cressé "qui n'ayant pas donné le sou pour les écoles, se voit forcé de contribuer à leur soutien par une somme respectable, vû qu'il a des propriétés assez considérables, c'est ce Mr. Cressé qui a soulevé les masses, et qui est le grand mobile de l'opposition à la loi."²⁹

As we noted in the previous chapter, the petitions sent to the governor in the late 1840s demanding amendment to, or repeal of, the 1846 school law often cited important flaws in that law. They also revealed how those flaws made it difficult for local communities to implement the school act. It seems clear that the formula petitions of 1847, in contrast, primarily expressed the concerns of the propertied elite who organized and undoubtedly wrote them. An examination of the text of these petitions, as well as earlier letters written by Vondenvelden, expose the major concerns of wealthy landowners such as Cressé and Vondenvelden: resentment that their extensive land-holdings would be taxed to educate peasant farmers who were better off unschooled; and, fear that an activist central state would undermine their dominant position in the countryside.

Both these concerns were responsible for heightening the political aspirations of many of the landed elite. Given that the petitions were not successful in achieving a

²⁸ Ibid., Vol. 130, no. 1860 of 1845, pp. 9015-20, Petition from the inhabitants of the township of Acton, 23 June 1845.

²⁹ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 295, file 1220, J.C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 30 September 1846. Groulx describes the opponents of the school law as "grands propriétaires de terres incultes, hostiles à l'impôt scolaire comme à toute contribution pour utilité publique,...exploiteurs de surenchère électorale." See Groulx, 1: 240.

reprieve from property taxes or in eliminating the bureaucracy created by the new school system, this group needed a new forum from which to address these issues. Moreover, being elected as an MLA at a time when responsible government seemed increasingly inevitable, meant an opportunity to gain local influence and power. It also would provide a means through which to resist the strengthening alliance between the LaFontaine party and village notables such as the clergy and professional men. To further their own economic self-interest, the wealthy *éteignoirs* made common cause with the *habitant* population to defeat state taxes; this tactic would also serve their political ambitions by giving them the popularity necessary to get elected. The petitions had been one way of showing sympathy for popular fears about taxation; they also were a means of keeping the school law issue uppermost in the popular consciousness. To further take advantage of *habitant* opposition to property assessments, the wealthy landowners participated in local government. This gave them a means of obstructing the functioning of both the school and municipal systems, thereby satisfying popular sentiment. This local forum could then act as a stepping stone to election to the Legislative Assembly.

A close ally of Cressé and Vondenvelden was Michel Fourquin (dit Leveillé), one of the wealthiest farmers in the parish of St. Michel d'Yamaska in Yamaska County.³⁰ His activities provide us with a good example of how the wealthy *éteignoirs* used an anti-tax platform not only to further their own economic self-interest, but also to help fulfil their political aspirations. Fourquin first comes to our attention in September, 1847, after an attack on a school house in St. Michel d'Yamaska. Léon Rousseau, one of the school commissioners for that parish, reported that, "le soir du jour que nous avons engagé nos maîtres et maîtresses nous avons eu la douleur de voir des éteignoirs briser

³⁰The provincial secretary described Fourquin and his ally Paul LaFleur as two of the wealthiest proprietors in the parish. See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 199, no. 3858 of 1847 (filed with no. 2411 of 1847), Léon Rousseau to Provincial Secretary, 30 October 1847.

les chasis [sic] à une des maisons d'école, aussi ils ont brisé les chasis [sic] chez trois des instituteurs."³¹ One of the suspected *êteignoirs* was Michel Fourquin, a wealthy and committed opponent of both school and municipal taxes. According to J.O. Arcand, the justice of the peace in St. Michel, Fourquin had links with both Cressé and Vondenvelden; he had presided over an *êteignoir* meeting the previous autumn which had been organized by Cressé, and, he had canvassed the county in an effort to gather signatures for some of Vondenvelden's petitions against the school law.³² Given Fourquin's known opposition to compulsory taxation, Arcand was exceedingly displeased when the government appointed Fourquin as municipal councillor for St. Michel. To illustrate the inappropriateness of the appointment to the provincial secretary, Arcand described Fourquin's activities in the summer of 1847. Elected as a school commissioner, "dans le but avoué de paralyser [sic] la loi d'éducation", Fourquin opposed payment of the school tax for 1847, and had induced "la majorité des autres commissaires d'école à passer une résolution qui en décharge les habitans, et par ce moyen les a soulevé au point de leur faire commettre une émeute à l'élection municipale." Arcand concluded that Fourquin's appointment as a municipal councillor would have a pernicious effect on the parish because "ceux qui s'opposent au fonctionnement de l'acte d'éducation triomphent en voyant leurs chefs dans les faveurs du gouvernement."³³ Arcand's comment on the government's somewhat ambiguous role in supporting school and municipal laws would be reiterated by other local officials in subsequent years. Fourquin's own activities are noteworthy, however, in supporting the thesis that wealthy landholders were the instigators of much of the resistance to the school system. Moreover, his attempts to thwart the functioning of the municipal system suggests that

³¹ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 300, no. 1356, Léon Rousseau to Meilleur, Yamaska, 10 November 1847.

³² Ibid., Memorial of Jean Olivier Arcand to Provincial Secretary, St. Michel d'Yamaska, n.d.

³³ Ibid.

his opposition was generalized to include any taxation legislated by the state.

In the letter cited above regarding Fourquin's activities, Arcand made a telling statement, suggesting that if Fourquin and his ally Paul LaFleur exercised any local influence, "elle n'est principalement due qu'à l'opposition constante qu'ils ont apporté au fonctionnement des lois d'école et de municipalité." An anti-tax position was one which guaranteed a sympathetic response from the mass of Lower-Canadian farmers. And in this transitional phase in the province's political life, the popular support which could win an election became essential to men with political aspirations. That the wealthy *éteignoirs* discussed above had those aspirations is undeniable. Vondenvelden ran in the elections of 1844 and 1847, and Cressé was a candidate in 1847. Fourquin was the most active, campaigning in 1844, 1847 and 1851. André-Benjamin Papineau was involved in the 1844 election, and ran again in 1851. An ally of these men was Joseph-Édouard Turcotte, a justice of the peace and the chairman of Quarter Sessions at Trois-Rivières. Turcotte was another large landholder,³⁴ and was clearly associated with the elite *éteignoirs* in both their opposition to the school law, and their political ambitions, running in all four elections between 1841 and 1851.

The extent to which popular resistance to taxes shaped the campaign platform of politicians is difficult to determine. Clearly, the activities of Cressé and his colleagues immediately after the law's passage did much to heighten popular awareness of the implications of the law; they also did much to spread fear among the population based on misperceptions about the law. It is presumably for this reason that politicians who supported school taxes in the early 1840s were vocal in their call for the repeal of the school law by 1850. LaFontaine acknowledged in July of 1850 that "la grande majorité des membres du Bas-Canada" wished the law to be revoked; this was a marked shift

³⁴ According to *La Minerve*, Turcotte was "un grand propriétaire qui pouvait répandre d'argent à pleines mains" in the 1845 by-election campaign, in which he supported Viger. Cited in Monet, *The Last Cannon Shot*, p. 211.

considering that support for the passage of the 1846 school act had been almost unanimous among those same members.³⁵ One can only conclude that a group of politically ambitious landowners, who wished to avoid having their own properties taxed, tapped into the current of popular hostility towards school and municipal assessments. The elite *éteignoirs* thus found an agenda which served their own self-interest, and, in the pursuit of it, they helped to fan the flames of popular resistance. The growing tide of popular opposition in turn made an anti-tax agenda not only expedient, but essential, for politicians who had previously supported the law.³⁶

In the period immediately following the enactment of the 1846 school law, Cressé and his allies relied, for the most part, on legal means to gain support for their position. After circulating the petitions protesting the legislation in Nicolet and Yamaska counties in 1847, Cressé continued his efforts to show the government that popular feeling was against the law. In July of that same year, Georges-Allan Bourgeois, the secretary-treasurer of the St. Grégoire school corporation, wrote to Meilleur complaining about Cressé's activities in the district. Travelling from parish to parish, Cressé had announced that the protest petitions had been well-received by the governor. Moreover, Cressé had let it be known that the governor wished to meet with representatives from each parish to discuss ways in which the law should be amended. Much to the chagrin of Bourgeois, Cressé was expected momentarily in St. Grégoire to choose the delegation from that parish. In St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet, according to Bourgeois, "les gens sont monté d'une manière alarmante et n'ont plus de respect, ni pour leur Curé, ni pour les autres personnes respectables de la paroisse. Cressé y est adoré comme un demi-dieu."³⁷

³⁵ NA, MG24 B158, Joseph-Amable Berthelot, 1745-1890, LaFontaine to Berthelot, 30 July 1850, p. 209; Hunte, p. 119-26.

³⁶ Hunte points out that the call for 'No taxation' was a "useful and easy political tool" even during the 1844 election. See Hunte, p. 119.

³⁷ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 210, filed with no. 3990 of 1847, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St.

Bourgeois further reported that Cressé had involved himself in the school commissioner elections in St. Grégoire. The president of the school commissioners (the priest, Jean Harper) and other "friends" of education had decided privately not to hold the annual election which would replace two retiring members. Their decision was based on evidence that "l'intention de la grande majorité de la paroisse était de choisir deux hommes qui sont, non seulement ennemis déclarés de tout plan d'éducation quelconque, mais encore destitués de tout bon sens, et de bonne volonté."³⁸ The priest and his allies planned that, after the date for the election had passed, they would nominate two acceptable men as school commissioners, who would then be approved as such by Meilleur and the government. However, the plan went awry. The éteignoir group held its own election, and, on the advice of Cressé, sent the names of its two choices to the government, which accepted them. The enormous correspondence precipitated by these events highlights two significant points. The first, as noted, is Cressé's interference in St. Grégoire affairs. The other is the implication made by one of the "friends" of education in that parish, that the Tory-dominated government accepted the results of the "illegal" election because it was hoping thereby to gain political support for J.E. Turcotte, a conservative candidate in the upcoming election. The parish vicar thus wrote in November, 1847 to Meilleur:

Si par malheur le ministère se fait éteignoir, son exemple sera suivi dans St. Grégoire; et au lieu de 25 on y en comtera 200 - [...] On soupçonne qu'il y a là dessous un espoir de faire élire M. Turcot dans le comté. Cette espérance est bien vaine à mon humble opinion; et dans tous les cas il faudrait employer des moyens plus honnêtes que ceux-là.³⁹

Marquis proved correct in his prediction - Turcotte lost the 1848 election.⁴⁰

³⁷(cont'd) Grégoire, 27 July 1847.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., C. Marquis to Meilleur, "Privée", St. Grégoire, 17 November 1847.

⁴⁰Turcotte ran in Chambly and St. Maurice rather than in Nicolet County. Perhaps his loss in the election can be attributed to the perception that he was a 'vendu'. In December, 1847, he had accepted the post of Solicitor-General from Elgin's first ministry. He had to give this up in March of 1848 when LaFontaine was given responsibility for forming the ministry. See Paul G. Cornell, The Alignment of Political

Vondenvelden and Cressé also lost their elections in 1848, while Fourquin won.

According to one source, the reason that Cressé was not successful was his anticlerical stance. He not only chose to be critical of some of the county's clergy, he also attacked the colonization priest, Bernard O'Reilly, and his scheme to colonize the Eastern Townships with French Canadians.⁴¹ Cressé's anticlerical stance in the election probably reflected his own personal attitudes as well as resentment against Signay for not promising his support in the election. If Cressé was holding his lands in Acton for speculative purposes, his criticism of O'Reilly might have arisen from the fact that the colonization project with which O'Reilly was associated chose to settle colonists on crown lands in the Bois Francs region rather than on land held by private speculators. Moreover, priests like O'Reilly and the vicar Calixte Marquis of St. Grégoire were highly critical of speculators, seeing them as an obstacle to the colonization of French Canadians in the Eastern Townships.⁴² Whatever the reason for Cressé's anti-clerical stance, however, it is difficult to believe that it was entirely responsible for his electoral defeat. As we will see in subsequent chapters, many priests suffered indignities at the hands of the *éteignoirs* and the evidence suggests that there was popular, as well as elite, support for the anticlerical activities.

⁴⁰(cont'd) Groups in Canada 1841-1867 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 21, 88.

⁴¹Bellemare, Histoire de Nicolet, p. 223. Cressé had written three letters to Archbishop Signay in 1847 complaining about curé Fortier, the parish priest, claiming that he insulted the parishioners and that he would not repair the church. He also wrote Signay requesting his support in the upcoming election and promising that he would support the clergy. See AEN, St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet 1620-1861, Cartable 1, no. 35, L.M. Cressé to Signay, Nicolet, 11 February 1847; *ibid.*, no. 47, Cressé to Signay, probably 28 December 1848; *ibid.*, no. 48, Cressé to Signay, undated; *ibid.*, no. 49, Cressé to Signay, undated.

⁴²Little, "Colonization and Municipal Reform," pp. 98-101. For a detailed discussion of Marquis' activities as a colonization priest, see Michel Morin, "Calixte Marquis, missionnaire colonisateur du canton d'Aston (1850-1867)," Les Cahiers Nicolétains, 3 (1981): 42-51; *ibid.*, "La pensée colonisatrice de Calixte Marquis," Les Cahiers Nicolétains, 3 (1981): 78-111; for Marquis' criticisms of speculators, see especially pp. 87-90.

Anticlericalism had become an important element of the Rouges party platform by 1849. In the summer of that year the party newspaper, L'Avenir, took up the cause, denouncing the privileged position of the clergy, and calling for the abolition of the tithe. One specific criticism of the tithe was that only farmers were required to pay it, while village notables were exempted. Thus, one reader of L'Avenir commented:

On sait que dans toutes les paroisses il y a un village plus ou moins grand, plus ou moins riche;- que souvent la population de tout le village égale, si elle ne dépasse pas la population du reste de la paroisse ... La population de ces villages est généralement en état de vivre aussi bien que les cultivateurs. Il y a des marchands, des rentiers, des notaires, des avocats, des médecins, des commerçants etc. Toutes ces différents classes de personnes ne paient rien au curé et ne sont pas plus privées des soins religieux du curé de la paroisse, et même on pourrait dire que le pauvre payeur de dîme n'est pas toujours salué de son curé qui bien souvent, n'a d'attention et de politesse que pour la bourgeoisie du village qui ne lui paie rien.

Another correspondent in the same issue suggested that, in the countryside "nos hommes éclairés qui sont docteurs, des notaires, des instituteurs, etc., sont généralement dans les bonnes grâces des curés et ils n'osent point écrire pour l'abolition des dîmes tant ils craignent de perdre cette amitié curiale."⁴³ This comment is significant in light of the clear alliance between priest and village notables which developed around the issue of the school law. It also suggests a motivating factor for Cressé's actions in 1850 when he took up the campaign raised in L'Avenir.

Given that Cressé was on the opposing side in the battle over school taxes, it is not surprising that he would resent the apparent quid pro quo between clerics and village professionals. Equally important, however, was his status as a landholder and farmer - one of those who was forced to support the priest's livelihood. Fuelled by those resentments, but cognizant of the impact the anti-tithe message could have on potential electors, Cressé apparently tried to instigate a riot at Bécancour in March, 1850. As a member of the Nicolet municipal council, Cressé knew that the council was expected to order a new property assessment for the levying of school taxes at its trimester meeting

⁴³L'Avenir, 5 July 1849; cited in Bernard, Les Rouges, p. 78.

in Bécancour. A group of about 400 habitants from the parishes of St. Grégoire, Ste. Monique and Nicolet gathered there to thwart the activities of the municipal council and to attempt to burn its papers. According to one of the councillors, G.A. Bourgeois of St. Grégoire, Cressé had instigated this and previous riots: "le grand moteur de tous ces mouvements et ces émeutes, dans le Comté de Nicolet, est Luc Michel Cressé."⁴⁴ Alerted in advance of the impending riot, the other councillors had decided not to hold the meeting, and had removed the corporation's papers to a safe place. Cressé thus had to content himself with making a speech to the crowd, in which, according to Bourgeois, he attacked the government and the Legislative Assembly:

qui a-t-il dit est toute composée de taxeurs à l'exception de deux ou trois seulement. Il attaque de la manière la plus brutale le bleyé [sic] à qui dit-il il faut ôter les dîmes pour nullifier son influence et lui ôter le traître dessein de taxer le peuple!! Et mille autres sottises et abominations du mêmes genre, toutes calculées et arrangées pour se faire un chemin à la représentation du Comté.⁴⁵

As a wealthy landowner, Cressé had personal reasons to resent taxes and to feel threatened by the wholehearted support shown by village notables and priests for the school law. These reasons coalesced nicely with popular opposition towards both state- and church-generated taxes. Through the exploitation of these common interests, Cressé and other elite *êteignoirs* hoped to amass the electoral support necessary to win a seat in the Legislative Assembly.

As suggested by the planned riot at Bécancour, the methods of the elite *êteignoirs* had taken on an increasingly aggressive and often violent form by 1850. The violent episodes of the *guerre des éteignoirs* which were instigated by the wealthy landowners, can give us an insight into the insecurities of that group in this transition period. The

⁴⁴NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, Bourgeois to Lafontaine, St. Grégoire, 14 March 1850.

⁴⁵Ibid. Léon Pouliot suggests that the anti-tithe campaign initiated by the Institut Canadien in 1849 was intended to attract "la sympathie de la population rurale." See Léon Pouliot, Monseigneur Bourget et son Temps, 5 vols. (Montréal: Les Éditions Bellarmin, 1976), 4: 18.

state's regulatory role was gradually increasing. Local communities were being made more and more aware of that fact as municipal government and school corporations were established and attempted to fulfil their tax-collecting function. Political parties, not yet the discrete units they were to become in the following decade, scrambled to find electable candidates because election victory carried with it the plum of patronage. While other factors were involved at the popular level, it seems clear that the anxiety created by these political transformations was responsible for the escalation of the resistance by the elite *éteignoirs* at the end of the 1840s.

Arson or vandalism of schools was a common aspect of this growing tension. This phenomenon was not restricted to the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska or, indeed, to Lower Canada.⁴⁶ Parishes or townships in other counties which experienced attacks on their schools in these years include: Arthabaska and St. Anicet in 1847; Dundee in 1848; Hinchinbrooke and Hemmingford in 1849; and St. Jean de Chrysostôme in 1850.⁴⁷ The main arena of violent resistance provoked by the elite *éteignoirs*, however, was in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska. School houses were either vandalized or burned in St. Michel d'Yamaska (every year between 1848 and 1850), St. François d'Yamaska (twice in 1850), and in St. David in Yamaska County (once in 1850). While there is no concrete proof that the elite *éteignoirs* were behind all these attacks, Fourquin and four other wealthy farmers were charged with the November 2, 1850

⁴⁶For examples of this kind of violent response to school reform in Upper Canada, see Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, chapters four and seven.

⁴⁷See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 177, no. 103 of 1847, Petition from School Commissioners of Arthabaska, 5 January 1847; *ibid.*, Vol. 178, no. 299 of 1847, John McGibbon of St. Anicet to Provincial Secretary, February 1847; *ibid.*, Vol. 218, no. 843 of 1848, L.H. Masson to Provincial Secretary, March 1848; *ibid.*, Vol. 242, no. 41 of 1849, Theft of School Register and other documents belonging to the School Municipality of Hinchinbrook, January 1849; *ibid.*, Vol. 270, no. 20 of 1850, School Commissioners of Hemmingford to Provincial Secretary, January 1850; *ibid.*, RG4 C2, Vol. 43, no. 7, Governor General to Meilleur, 3 January 1851, in which the governor told Meilleur that a reward could not be offered because there was insufficient evidence to show that the school house was burned by arson: "une pareille mesure, dans les circonstances actuelles, pouvant avoir l'effet de faire supposer l'existence d'une opposition à l'Acte des écoles plus étendues qu'elle n'est véritablement."

arson in St. Michel. This fire had been set in a building owned by Fourquin, and which he had subsequently offered as a schoolhouse. Deeming it unlikely that a person would burn his own property, one of the commissioners charged with investigating the violence in Nicolet and Yamaska decided initially that Fourquin could not have been responsible and reported this to LaFontaine. Less than two weeks later, however, he again wrote LaFontaine to report that he had been duped:

M. Leveillé [Fourquin] is the most accomplished villain and hypocrite I ever met with. You will see by the depositions that he did all but hold the torch ... The breaking of his own House was a mere sham to veil his iniquitous conduct. Immediately after this fire emissaries came to him from St. François du Lac the adjoining Parish daily and a few days after a School House there was broken and attempted to be burned. Mr. Lebrun, the Curé of Yamaska... told me that he had letters from Curés who told him that they were already beginning to feel the effects of the burning at Yamaska... You are aware that Mr. Leveillé is a man of large means and that it may be difficult, if at all possible, even in the clearest evidence, to convict him before a T. Rivers Jury.⁴⁸

Just as Cressé had been involved in advising the éteignoir school commissioners in St. Grégoire, and in organizing the riot against the municipal council at Bécancour, Fourquin was implicated in events in parishes other than St. Michel. Those events included the burning of school houses as well as the 1847 riot against the municipal council of Yamaska described above by J.O. Arcand.⁴⁹ In 1850, the municipal council of Yamaska was again prevented from sitting. On March 11, a group of about one hundred individuals assembled and threatened violence against the mayor and municipal councillors,

who were then and there in Session... and further then and there did break and destroy... some of the furniture in the said Council room; did attempt to take forcible and violent possession of the books, records and papers of the said Mayor and Municipal Council, and by means of such threats and violence... did hinder and prevent the said Mayor and Municipal Council...

⁴⁸ NA, MG24 B14, A. Delisle to Lafontaine, Sorel, 15 November 1850.

⁴⁹ Fourquin was indicted for riot and conspiracy on 14 October 1848; in February, 1849 a Nollé Prosequi was filed on the indictment. See NA, MG24 B14, Divers 1851-1863, no. 001182, E. Barnard to L. Drummond, Three Rivers, 22 July 1851.

from proceeding to any business.⁵⁰

Although not directly implicated in these events, Fourquin was probably involved behind the scenes. As a school commissioner, Fourquin had continually thwarted the functioning of the school system in St. Michel. He had encouraged habitants not to pay their taxes in 1847, and had refused to pay his own; moreover, he had neglected to carry out the duties of a school commissioner.⁵¹ Noting his participation in the 1847 riot against the municipal council, it seems reasonable to assume that Fourquin was just as eager in 1850 to undermine its activities. R.B. Johnson, one of the magistrates sent to investigate the riots, suggested that some members of the municipal council in both counties had been loathe to carry out their duties - duties which included holding a property assessment for municipal taxes. Given his other activities and his known opposition to the taxing powers of the municipal and school corporations, it is likely that Fourquin (elected as a municipal councillor in 1849) was one of those members to whom Johnson referred.⁵²

Further evidence that the elite *éteignoirs* were instigators of much of the violent resistance to the school law in 1850 is found in a Special Report sent by R.B. Johnson

⁵⁰NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, filed with no. 750 of 1851, E. Barnard to Provincial Secretary, Three Rivers, no date.

⁵¹See, for example, ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, L. Rousseau to Meilleur, St. Michel, 16 October 1847.

⁵²NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, no. 1287 of 1850, R.B. Johnson to James Leslie, Ste. Monique, 5 June 1850. Johnson was asking permission to have troops stationed in St. François du Lac and Bécancour to protect the municipal council while they held their meetings. He explained to Leslie: "I have been extremely anxious to display that protection for the approaching session of the Municipal Councils of these two Counties, which should deprive the members of all excuse for non-attendance on the score of personal risk. Thus testing the sincerity of a professed desire to accomplish duties which for some reason, have been hitherto neglected." That Cressé was another of the reluctant members has been shown by his speech to the Bécancour rioters. Further evidence is found in a letter sent to the government by the municipal council of Nicolet on June 17, 1850. This brief memorial acknowledged the council's gratitude for the presence of troops which had permitted them to hold their trimester meeting in peace. The only member listed as opposing the memorial was Cressé. See *ibid.*, no. 464 of 1850, Municipal Council of Nicolet to James Leslie, Bécancour, 17 June 1850.

and his fellow enquiry commissioner, A. Delisle, to James Leslie in November, 1850. In that report they stressed the "evidence of communication, and the unavoidable inference of combination between" St. Michel and the neighbouring parishes. Further, they concluded that:

previous to the attempt to destroy the School House at St. François,... frequent communications were observed between the two parishes, and the emissaries departed from and arrived at one point in the Parish of Yamaska, namely, the house of the County Member [Fourquin]. Early in the last spring, when we went to the River David, the first information we received was that emissaries had visited that Parish whilst we were occupied at Saint Grégoire, and had enjoined some of the inhabitants of Saint David to be careful to give us no information. Accordingly, we never could trace the burning of Mr. Wurtele's Mill. - From all which, we infer that it is not the great body of the people that are combined in a blind opposition to education, but a party, more or less limited in each parish, but holding unity of object, and acting in combination.⁵³

Johnson and Delisle were not alone in their belief in a conspiracy. The doctor from St. Grégoire, G.A. Bourgeois, wrote, in an unpublished letter to La Minerve, that the alliance between Cressé, Vondenvelden and Turcotte extended back to 1846.⁵⁴ And Thomas Fortier, the MLA for Nicolet County, wrote to LaFontaine in 1850 outlining his concerns on the matter. He suggested that Turcotte, as the chief magistrate in Trois-Rivières, was delinquent in his duty of bringing the guilty to justice, and that this would result in anarchy if the government did not intervene. Referring to the negligence of authorities in Trois-Rivières, Fortier went on to say:

Il y a des dépositions de faites contre plusieurs personnes, et ces personnes ne sont pas arrêtées, ce qui est cause que les dégradations nocturnes continuent. Le Conseil Municipal n'a pu siéger lundi dernier, parceque Mr.

⁵³ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 288, no. 505 of 1850, R.B. Johnson and A.M. Delisle to James Leslie, Three Rivers, 23 November 1850. The mill referred to was that of Jonathan Wurtele, a lawyer and seigneur in Saint David. Wurtele was a supporter of the school law; before it was burned, his mill had been the storage place of lumber for the erection of a model school in that parish. This wood, and Wurtele's declared support of the school law, made him an obvious target of those who opposed the model school. See *ibid.*, Vol. 287, no. 2187 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to Leslie, Saint Michel d'Yamaska, 29 September 1850.

⁵⁴ AMMASV, Rapport de l'Archiviste, 1926-27, no. 557, Communication à la Minerve by G.A. Bourgeois, 22 March 1851, p. 250. In an attached telegram, Bourgeois asked that the letter not be published.

L.M. Cressé a fait descendre 150 Irlandais de Ste. Monique, armé de double batons. Il y a une conspiration d'organisé [sic] dans les paroisses, pour détruire les maisons d'écoles et incendier les propriétés des commissaires des écoles qui feront leurs devoirs. Le Comté sera bientôt dans un état d'anarchie, plusieurs personnes pensent que Mr. Turcotte fraternise avec Mr. Cressé; car la négligence de Greffier étant connu, le premier Magistrât [Turcotte] devrait lui faire faire son devoir, et faire émettre les warrants.⁵⁵

Thus, two counties were in a state of near anarchy, and a conspiracy amongst wealthy landholders and certain government officials was afoot to keep it that way until the school law should be rescinded. What, then, was the government's response to such a state of affairs? After the first serious riot, which took place in St. Grégoire in January, 1850, the government took little action. In an apparent response to the criticisms about Turcotte and the fact that the Grand Jury in Trois Rivières found no bill against the persons accused of rioting in that parish, the government became directly involved. It established the Commission of Enquiry, referred to earlier, on April 30, 1850. The commissioners were requested to investigate the "riotous" behaviour in Nicolet and Yamaska, to take depositions, and to bring to justice those responsible for the disturbances. Troops were made available to the commissioners to assist them in their work.⁵⁶ The Commission was kept busy for the remainder of the year, for as soon as peace was restored in one parish, a violent incident would occur in a neighbouring one. The commissioners, however, did achieve some results: Fourquin and his friends were charged with the St. Michel school house fire, and five people from St. Grégoire were indicted for the burning of a barn in that parish. By 1851 the mood in Nicolet and Yamaska was relatively quiescent.

Many incidents were never solved, however, due to the "conspiracy" of silence noted by the commissioners. More significantly, many of those who were brought to trial

⁵⁵ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 1287 of 1850, T. Fortier to LaFontaine, 15 March 1850.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, Attorney General's Draft of the Commission appointment, Toronto, 30 April 1850.

were acquitted. As Delisle had anticipated, this was the case for Fourquin.⁵⁷ Other acquittals included all those indicted for the St. Grégoire arson, and two of the seven charged with the St. François riot. Considering the frequent and often bitter complaints received by the provincial secretary's office about Cressé and his allies, the elite *éteignoirs* experienced little in the way of retribution. Because of his repeated efforts to thwart the school commissioners from fulfilling their duties during 1847 and 1848, the Executive Council fired André-Benjamin Papineau from his positions as justice of the peace and small causes commissioner in May, 1848. Although he was accused by a local justice of the peace of resuming these objectionable activities in 1850, no action was taken against him. In the 1851 election Papineau ran as a Rouge candidate for Terrebonne, but lost to A.N. Morin.⁵⁸ Vondenvelden seemed to distance himself from any direct involvement in the violent actions of 1850, so it is not surprising that he remained unscathed by those events.⁵⁹ Cressé, on the other hand, was pinpointed not only by local notables but also by the Commission of Enquiry, as the "original direct cause of all the resistance and opposition to the School laws, and disturbances which followed." A reprimand by the government was therefore unavoidable, and, in April, 1850 he was discharged from his position as justice of the peace.⁶⁰ Given the seriousness of the claims made against him, however, this was a relatively mild rebuke.

⁵⁷ AJTR, Cours Supérieures 1852-53, Box 106, no.n 254, Michel Fourquin versus Paul LaFleur, Deposition of Paul LaFleur, 8 January 1853.

⁵⁸ NA, RG4 C2, Vol. 37, no. 984, p. 319, Executive Council minutes, 4 May 1848. Ibid., RG4 C1, Vol. 287, no. 2402 of 1850, Louis Bélanger to LaFontaine, St. Martin, 23 March 1850. Bernard, Les Rouges, p. 97.

⁵⁹ In a letter written in June, 1851, Vondenvelden claimed that "whilst exhorting the people to resist [the?] principal of the Law by all legal and constitutional means, I insisted on its being obeyed, practically declaring it to be in full force and there I disagreed with Mr. Cressé and Papineau who thought that its execution could be evaded." See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, no. 425 (filed with no. 750), Vondenvelden to Sir, Kingsey, 20 June 1851.

⁶⁰ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, R.B. Johnson and A.M. Delisle to James Leslie, Three Rivers, 8 February 1851; *ibid.*, James Leslie to L.M. Cressé, 8 April 1850. In a letter written in 1851, Cressé referred to having been acquitted of a criminal charge which was brought in September of 1850. Presumably this was related to the riots. See *ibid.*, L.M. Cressé to Governor General, Nicolet, 23 January 1851.

Cressé was re-elected as a municipal councillor in June, 1850, continuing in that position for the 1850-51 term despite his open opposition to the municipal system.⁶¹

We know that Fourquin did not escape the judicial system, but he was able to avoid a guilty verdict, probably through the intervention of his friend Turcotte. Undaunted by the events of 1850, Fourquin ran in the 1851 election as a Bleu (LaFontaine party) candidate for Yamaska County; he too lost his bid.⁶² Presumably as a consolation, (and as part of an effort to placate the *êteignoir* opposition), LaFontaine appointed the "very unprincipled" Fourquin to the municipal council of St. Michel d'Yamaska shortly after the election.⁶³

Turcotte, while not implicated directly in the violent opposition to the school law, was seen as an *êteignoir* because of his attendance at public meetings held by Cressé to denounce the law.⁶⁴ Moreover, local notables and the Commission of Enquiry claimed that Turcotte had manipulated the justice system in favour of the accused rioters and arsonists by ensuring easy bail conditions and by giving unwarranted recommendations to the juries involved.⁶⁵ No action was taken against Turcotte, however, and, ever the politician, he ran and won as a Bleu candidate in the 1851 election.⁶⁶ The enquiry commissioner, Delisle, repeated the oft-heard claim that Turcotte's pro-*êteignoir* manipulation of the jury was, in fact, a pre-election device: "Tout ceci finira vous faire voir ce que vous avez à attendre de ce coté là. Le fait est que Maître Turcot cherche à

⁶¹Ibid., Vol. 283, no. 1733 of 1850, Municipal returns for 1850-51, June 1850.

⁶²Bernard, Les Rouges, p. 98.

⁶³Lewis Drummond had written to LaFontaine a year earlier claiming that Fourquin "must be a very unprincipled person." See, MG24 B14, no. 653, Lewis Drummond to LaFontaine, 16 November 1850. See also, NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 301, no. 2326 of 1851, Report of the Executive Council, 23 December 1851.

⁶⁴AMMASV, Rapport de l'Archiviste, 1926-27, no. 557, Communication à la Minerve by G.A. Bourgeois, 22 March 1851, p. 250.

⁶⁵See, for example, NA, MG24 B14, LaFontaine Correspondence, no. 681, A.M. Delisle to LaFontaine, Three Rivers, 4 February 1851.

⁶⁶Bernard, Les Rouges, p. 98.

ménager la chèvre et le chou et, je pense, se prépare pour l'élection générale."⁶⁷

Again one sees the importance of political office to men like Turcotte. What is less obvious is the importance of these politicians to the leaders of the LaFontaine party. In the wake of the tumult created by the Annexation crisis, and the clash with Louis-Joseph Papineau, the LaFontaine party had to rally its forces before the election to ensure Papineau and the Rouges did not undermine its newly-acquired position of dominance. In spite of their resistance to government taxation measures, therefore, men such as Turcotte and Fourquin were considered to be an asset if they could rout the Rouges candidates. The St. Grégoire vicar made bitter reference to this state of affairs in a private letter to Meilleur in November, 1850. Stating that he had never met "un être aussi méprisable que cet individu," Marquis suggested that Turcotte was attempting to gain electoral support in Nicolet. He then added, "J'ai de la peine à croire cependant qu'il réussisse à se faire élire ici. Il y est trop bien connu. Néanmoins, quand il s'agit d'une affaire de parti, on oublie bien des peccadiles."⁶⁸ That same month Lewis Drummond wrote to LaFontaine and claimed that Turcotte should have been named as president of the Quarter Sessions at Trois-Rivières. According to Drummond, Turcotte's value lay, in part, in the extent of his "influence... dans cette section du pays - c'est le seul homme qui puisse empêcher les doctrines du parti Papineau d'y prendre racine."⁶⁹ In this period of transition, when the central state was taking on a new and significant role in Lower Canadian society, and political parties were as yet in a state of flux, politicians were clearly prepared to overlook attacks on state laws in order to stabilize party positions.

⁶⁷NA, MG24 B14, no. 681, Delisle to LaFontaine, 4 February 1851.

⁶⁸ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 317, no. 2181, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 16 November 1850.

⁶⁹NA, MG24 B14, L. Drummond to LaFontaine, 6 November 1850.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESPONSE OF VILLAGE NOTABLES TO THE SCHOOL LAWS

In the previous chapter we found that wealthy landowners were opposed to the 1846 school law primarily because they did not want to pay property taxes. They were also motivated by their desire to gain influence and power in the local community. By taking advantage of popular opposition to taxation, the landed elite believed it could achieve political success. Electoral victory would, in turn, help to circumvent the alliance between the LaFontaine party and village notables, and give access to patronage and, thus, local influence. The Reformers, ironically, were forced to treat *éteignoir* opposition to the school law in a fairly benign fashion, given the political challenges they faced from annexationists and the Rouges.

Village notables clearly resented the government's failure to chastise those who would jeopardize the new school and municipal legislation. In 1850, Dr. G.A. Bourgeois of St. Grégoire, expressed his exasperation at the government's inaction concerning Cressé's activities: "Il est étonnant que ce misérable ait pu impunément tracasser le Comté de Nicolet depuis près de quatre ans, sans que le gouvernement ait songé à mettre un frein à son audace, pas même à le déplacer comme juge de Paix."¹ In 1853, J.O. Arcand, who was one of the first to criticize Cressé, singled out government inaction as one of the major reasons for the school system's lack of success. In response to the questionnaire circulated by the Sicotte enquiry, Arcand indicated that schools were not functioning well in St. Michel, and that this could be attributed to the fact that "the Government has voluntarily and knowingly honored the opposition, and humiliated the friends of order and of the working of the law."²

¹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, G.A. Bourgeois to LaFontaine, St. Grégoire, 14 March 1850.

²JLAC, 11 (1853), Appendix JJ.

The indignant tone of these remarks made by the "friends of order" suggests the extent to which they perceived the school law to be in their own best interests. Like the elite *éteignoirs*, village professional men had political aspirations. In contrast, however, the latter group mostly chose the local arena rather than the provincial Assembly as its sphere of influence. Under the Act of Union passed in 1840, it was required that candidates standing for election to the Assembly be in possession of property valued at £500.³ Unless they had inherited property it was unlikely that many rural doctors, lawyers and notaries would be able to meet the property qualification. Even had they been able to do so, these professional men would have required an estate sizeable enough to sustain them while they were absent from home fulfilling the duties of a Member of the Legislative Assembly. More to the liking of the village professionals were positions in the nascent school and municipal systems. The property qualification for school commissioners was £250. Under the Municipal Act of 1847 that for a member of a county municipality was only £150.⁴ Not only did these positions have the advantage of a more easily attainable property qualification; they also enabled professional men to continue their work in the local community while holding office.

Witness the case of Georges-Allan Bourgeois. While he was not the inheritor of the family farm, Bourgeois did receive a good education at the Nicolet Seminary, and he established a medical practise in St. Grégoire, his home parish.⁵ The fact that Bourgeois won prizes for livestock and cheese at the 1851 competition held by the Nicolet County Agricultural Society indicates that he was a man of at least some

³John Garner, The Franchise and Politics in British North America 1755-1867 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 93. Prior to the Act of Union members of the Assembly were not required to meet any property qualification. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴10 and 11 Vict., cap.7, sect. 70. This Act remained in effect until the municipal system was revised in 1855.

⁵Lesage, pp. 175, 179.

means.⁶ Other evidence suggests, however, that those means were insufficient to keep Bourgeois free of financial worries. In 1845 he accepted the position of secretary-treasurer to the school corporation of St. Grégoire, which was a salaried position. He continued to hold that post until 1849, except for a year's absence in 1847.⁷ Although Bourgeois took a keen interest in the implementation of the school law, he never formally held the post of school commissioner;⁸ given his zealous involvement in all matters related to the school system it seems reasonable to assume that he could not meet the property qualification of £250. Bourgeois wrote to Meilleur in 1846 to complain that his support of the school law against the *êteignoirs*' attacks had undermined his financial position. He explained that, "je me trouve obligé aujourd'hui pour subsister, de me livrer à d'autres occupations que ma profession et même à des occupations qui, en quelque sorte, répugnent à l'honneur de ma condition." Bourgeois had been nominated as the secretary-treasurer of the Aston school corporation; in this letter to Meilleur he turned down the position, indicating that it would demand too great a sacrifice to be secretary-treasurer in two communities. At the end of the letter he stated that he would have accepted the Aston position out of financial need, but that

⁶NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 321, no. 1942 of 1852, Annual Report of the Nicolet County Agricultural Society for 1851-52. Bourgeois won first prize for a boar and second prize for a filly; he won second prize for cheese. J.E. Hodgetts, in Pioneer Public Service: An Administrative History of the United Canada, 1841-1867 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), p. 231 makes the point that these early agricultural societies did not serve to enlighten the average farmer; rather, "their practical encouragement to agricultural interests seems to have been confined to a small clique of well-to-do farmers who least needed the support, and most of the prizes to have been distributed for prime beef cattle."

⁷AUQTR, *Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'Écoles de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand*, 14 July 1845, 20 July 1846, 3 November 1847, 17 July 1848, 23 July 1849.

⁸In a letter to Meilleur in November, 1847, Bourgeois resigned from his position as secretary-treasurer and stated that he was also resigning as school commissioner, a position he had held for six months. There is no indication in the records that he was elected or appointed as a school commissioner. I believe that he simply assisted the priest (Harper) in taking control of the school corporation at a time when the election of the school commissioners was in dispute. This disputed election is discussed in more detail below.

the fifteen shillings the post could offer did not make it worth his while.⁹

In January, 1848, Bourgeois again wrote to Meilleur, this time soliciting the superintendent's recommendation for the proposed position of superintendent of schools for the county of Nicolet. In support of his application, Bourgeois explained that "l'échec que ma [sic] causé dans ma pratique mon attachement à la cause de l'éducation et d'ailleurs une santé précaire qui ne me permet pas de sortir la nuit pour les malades, sans inconvénient, tout cela m'a décidé à chercher les moyens de vivre de quelqu'autre manière, qu'en pratiquant la médecine." He went on to request an affirmation that "les honoraires de cette charge seront assez haut pour pouvoir y vivre," suggesting the need for a steady income.¹⁰

Since Bourgeois was only twenty-seven years old in 1848, and since he lived an active life until the age of seventy-two, one must question just how precarious his health could have been. However, there is evidence that supports his claim to having suffered financially because of his efforts to make the school law function. In his letter to LaFontaine of March, 1850, in which he described the riot at Bécancour, Bourgeois revealed that "Mr. Cressé fait venir à St. Grégoire, un médecin de sa recommandation; et suivant les appartenances je ne serai pas longtemps citoyen de St. Grégoire, car il est tout probable qu'il me faudra prochainement émigrer avec ma famille sans savoir où me diriger."¹¹ Lewis Drummond, in a letter written the following month to LaFontaine, described how Cressé, in his position as justice of the peace, had summoned Bourgeois' brother on the "audaciously false" accusation of horse theft. Drummond went on to reveal that Bourgeois had been "stripped of all his practice by the machinations of the

⁹ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 296, no. 1693, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 17 December 1846.

¹⁰Ibid., Box 301, no. 68, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 22 January 1848.

¹¹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, G.A. Bourgeois to LaFontaine, St. Grégoire, 14 March 1850.

same unscrupulous villain." (Needless to say, his brother had also supported the school law, and had sat briefly as a school commissioner for St. Grégoire in 1848).¹² R.B. Johnson, one of the enquiry commissioners, recommended to the government in June, 1851 that Bourgeois receive a sum of money as remuneration for the assistance he had provided to the commissioners. Johnson pointed out that Bourgeois had rendered many services and that he had "lost a portion of his practice, as a Physician, by his efforts to sustain the cause of order and of peace."¹³

Thus, Bourgeois almost certainly did not have the means, whether or not he had the interest, to become involved in politics at the provincial level. But local administration, which clearly appealed to him, was a feasible outlet for his ambitions. As secretary-treasurer to the school corporation, he corresponded with Meilleur on a regular basis and functioned as the intermediary between the school commissioners and the superintendent. Even in 1849, after he had resigned as secretary-treasurer, Bourgeois continued to act as the spokesperson for the school commissioners, divulging to Meilleur that, "quoique je n'appartienne plus à la corporation des Commissaires de cette municipalité... cependant M.M. les Commissaires désirent que, suivant ma coutume, j'entre dans quelques détails sur les affaires de notre triste paroisse."¹⁴ That Bourgeois hoped to benefit personally from this association with the superintendent is evident from the fact that it was in this same letter (in a section marked "Privée"), that Bourgeois applied to Meilleur for his assistance in getting appointed as the county

¹²Ibid., MG24 B14, no. 618, Lewis Drummond to LaFontaine, Three Rivers, 23 April 1850.

¹³Ibid., RG4 C1, Vol. 294, no. 795 of 1851, R.B. Johnson to James Leslie, Montreal, 20 June 1851. The Governor in Council approved the sum of £40 to remunerate Bourgeois. See *ibid.*

¹⁴ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 301, no. 68, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 22 January 1848. It is ironic to note Bourgeois' influence over school affairs in light of the fact that the property qualification, as noted in an earlier chapter, was probably intended as a means of keeping the liberal professionals out of influential positions.

superintendent.¹⁵

In the summer of 1849, St. Grégoire's vicar, Calixte Marquis, took over as secretary-treasurer, and Bourgeois was elected as a councillor to the Nicolet County municipality.¹⁶ As a member of the local government, Bourgeois, along with his fellow councillors, had a considerable hand in community affairs. These councillors were responsible for the construction and repair of roads and bridges, the establishment and control of toll roads and toll bridges, the organization of property assessments and collection of taxes, and the appointing of the officers who would carry out these various tasks.¹⁷ The patronage involved in hiring these officers clearly increased the status of the municipal councillors in the local community. Moreover, the prominence gained through election to the municipal council made men such as Bourgeois more likely themselves to be the recipients of patronage appointments from the provincial government. Certainly, this proved to be the case for the doctor from St. Grégoire; in 1852 he was the successful applicant for one of the newly created posts of school inspector. As inspector for part of the County of Drummond, Bourgeois would receive an annual salary of £125.¹⁸ Thus, his enthusiastic support of the school law, his conscientious correspondence with the superintendent, and his efforts to gain local influence had all paid off. Bourgeois finally received recognition from the government and a secure position in the expanding state bureaucracy.¹⁹

¹⁵The proposed position of county superintendent was not created, as Bourgeois had hoped.

¹⁶AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'Écoles de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 23 July 1849; NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 262, no. 2379 of 1849 (filed with no. 2227 of 1849), Municipal Election Returns, St. Grégoire.

¹⁷10 and 11 Vict., cap. 7, sect. 25 and 33. Municipal officers had much more autonomy over local affairs under this Act and that of 1845 (8 Vict., cap. 40) than they had under Sydenham's two municipal ordinances of 1840. See L'Heureux, pp. 331-56.

¹⁸JLAC, 11 (1852-53), Appendix X.

¹⁹In 1867 Bourgeois was appointed to the important post of assistant commissioner of crown lands. See Lesage, p. 184.

Local politics could thus prove beneficial to village professional men such as Bourgeois. For large landowners such as Cressé and Vondenvelden, however, an expanding state bureaucracy offered more disadvantages than it did advantages. While members of the landed elite were quite willing to stand for local office, and reap whatever benefits in terms of power or patronage that might accrue therefrom, their conservative ideological stance made them disapprove of the more centralized state which was looming on the horizon. Vondenvelden pointedly disagreed with any law which "was enacted on the principle of doing good to one against his own will," because "the best government is that which governs least."²⁰

For village professional men the opposite was true. There was little outlet for their talents in rural areas, given the overcrowding of the liberal professions. But a network of public schools and a system of municipal government provided a great deal of scope; as public administrators these village notables could use their education to take a leadership role in the community. Moreover, administrative positions could be the stepping stones to salaried appointments in the provincial administration, as was the case with Bourgeois. Furthermore, educating the masses did not trouble professional men as it did Vondenvelden. The latter feared the disruption of a more feudal relationship with the habitants; men such as Bourgeois, however, stood to augment their control over the farming population by having a hand in the bureaucracy which would shape the education it received. And, needless to say, the village professionals had much less to lose in the payment of school taxes than did the land-owning elite.

The economic, ideological and political factors which determined that the professional men would support the school system also brought the rural clergy firmly into the camp of those known as the "friends of education." Not usually large

²⁰NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, no. 425 of 1851 (filed with no. 750 of 1851), W. Vondenvelden to J. Leslie, Kingsey, 20 June 1851.

landholders, priests did not have to worry about payment of excessive personal property taxes. Furthermore, parsonage houses and churches were exempt from the school tax.²¹ Thus, in strictly material terms, the law was not offensive to the clergy.

Moreover, on ideological grounds, the school law was seen in a positive light. As noted in the previous chapter, this was a period of renewal for the Catholic Church in Lower Canada. At the parish level, priests were expected to involve parishioners in a growing number of church-related activities such as temperance societies and religious confraternities. This structuring of daily life was intended to strengthen the parishioners' moral resolve, and to enable the priest to observe and facilitate that process. Public schooling presented another means of control, at least for those priests who chose to involve themselves in school affairs. The priests in St. Grégoire were among those who did so; an examination of their activities will shed light on the significance of that participation.

The parish curé, Jean Harper, acted as president of the school commissioners from 1845 to 1847, and his subsequent resignation did not prevent his continuing involvement behind the scenes. He was a frequent correspondent of Meilleur. Perhaps more importantly, though, he worked closely with Bourgeois, who, as secretary-treasurer, played a significant role in the school corporation.²² When Bourgeois stepped down as secretary-treasurer in 1849, the parish vicar, Marquis, took over until at least 1853. Thus, the two clergymen were closely involved in St. Grégoire's school affairs throughout the years of revolt against the school law.

The extent to which the priests attempted to control the administration of the school system is illustrated by two events. The first was the disputed election of school

²¹ 9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 37.

²² Bellemare, in his history of Baie-Saint-Antoine, points out that the doctor and curé of that parish worked closely together in the affairs of the school corporation in 1843. See Bellemare, Histoire de la Baie-Saint-Antoine, pp. 264-65.

commissioners in 1847 in which Cressé was accused of interference. In June of that year, Father Harper and another school commissioner were required to withdraw from the school corporation because of the law's requirement that two school commissioners retire each year.²³ One of the three remaining school commissioners, Joseph Prince, was elected to replace Harper as president. As we have seen, instead of holding the election for new school commissioners in July, as required by the school act, Bourgeois, Harper and the other school commissioners decided to neglect this duty because the electors showed signs of favouring *êteignoir* candidates. Not intimidated, these candidates organized a public assembly for the purpose of holding an election. Bourgeois, in a letter to the superintendent, described Harper's actions when he brought a large number of "friends of education" to join the assembly:

M. le Curé expliqua très clairement aux électeurs qu'ils n'étaient pas en loi parce que la convocation de l'assemblée n'avait pas été faite huit jours d'avance; que le seul moyen d'avoir de nouveaux Commissaires était de recommander deux personnes qualifiées, au Surintendant; et après leur avoir expliqué comment devait se faire cette recommandation, il leur offrit de proposer cinq ou six personnes de leur choix.²⁴

Thus, village notables charged with administering the school law felt justified in using loopholes in the law to prevent unacceptable candidates being elected as school commissioners. The habitant population, however, needed to be reminded of the sanctity of the law, and of the necessity of deferring to the notables in its interpretation.

The *êteignoirs* remained undaunted; they held the election and notified the government of the results. In response, the village notables (ex-school commissioners, church wardens and school visitors) held a private meeting at which time they petitioned the government to accept their nomination of two individuals as school

²³ Ibid., sect. 7: "the School Commissioners... shall remain in office for three years, except that after the first election or nomination of a Board of Commissioners, two of them (to be determined by lot) shall go out of office at the end of one year, and two more (to be determined in like manner) shall go out at the end of two years."

²⁴ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 210, filed with no. 3990 of 1847, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 27 July 1847.

commissioners.²⁵ In the ensuing months a lively and often acrimonious debate raged in the correspondence between St. Grégoire and the provincial secretary's office over who should fill the vacant school commissioner posts in that parish. Harper took a very active part in the dispute, continuing to act as president of the school corporation although he had been retired in June and Prince had been named twice in the school commissioners' minutes as president.²⁶ Harper accused officials in Trois-Rivières of reneging on their duties because they had not prosecuted the officer who had presided over the "illegal" election in July. Moreover, he joined Marquis and Bourgeois in chastising the government for not appointing the notables' nominees as the new school commissioners. Bourgeois wrote to Meilleur in November, 1847 to describe Harper's distress over these events:

M. le Curé qui, jusqu'ici a montré le zèle le plus infatigable pour l'exécution de la loi, vient à l'instant de me dire qu'il apostasie la cause, et ne prétend à l'avenir se mêler d'aucune affaire, si le gouvernement ne prend immédiatement les moyens de rémédier aux maux dont on se plaint depuis si longtemps, sans satisfaction, et il m'a de plus donné permission de vous faire part de sa résolution.²⁷

In a separate letter written five days earlier, Bourgeois had revealed his own disgust with the government: "Pour moi Monsieur, après avoir géré la charge de Commissaire pendant six mois, et celle de Secrétaire Trésorier pendant deux ans, je me retire sous l'intime persuasion qu'il faut autant se défier de la loi d'éducation, comme on le ferait d'un piège que tendrait le gouvernement pour surprendre les honnêtes gens, et les jeter dans l'embaras!"²⁸ The priests and Bourgeois all raised the oft-heard theme of election

²⁵ Ibid., no. 1372 (filed with no. 3990 of 1847), Certain habitants of St. Grégoire to Provincial Secretary, St. Grégoire, 5 August 1847. The notables claimed that, no legal election having been held, they were required, under sections 12 and 13 of the school act, to nominate qualified individuals for appointment as school commissioners.

²⁶ AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 27 June 1847, 16 August 1847.

²⁷ Ibid., Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 11 November 1847.

²⁸ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 300 no. 1355, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 6 November 1847. As suggested above, it appears that Bourgeois was acting unofficially as a school commissioner while the election was in dispute.

campaign tactics to account for the government's inaction. The claim was probably valid, for as soon as the election was over the Attorney-General announced that the government would appoint "two competent persons as School Commissioners in the place of the two illegally elected on the 26 July last."²⁹

From these events, and from the reaction to them, one gets a sense of the extent to which Harper and Bourgeois exerted their control over the school corporation in St. Grégoire. Marquis would become the more active of the two priests after he was elected as secretary-treasurer in 1849 - a post which he was encouraged to accept by Harper.³⁰ Through their domination over the other members of the school corporation, their constant communication with the provincial secretary and the superintendent, and their threats to withdraw their support if not given the control they wished for, these three men made their imprint on school affairs in St. Grégoire. That this monopoly was resented by habitants will be seen in subsequent chapters. That it served to increase the influence of the clergy in parish affairs can be illustrated by examining how they used resources from the school system to establish a convent and a new teaching order of nuns in St. Grégoire.

To satisfy his taste for privacy, St. Grégoire's first priest, Louis-Antoine Desforges, had ordered the construction of a large and expensive house in the early 1800s. This was to take the place of the presbytery, which the habitants persisted in using for social purposes.³¹ This magnificent house, in private hands by the 1840s, was seen by Harper

²⁹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 210, no. 3990 of 1847, W. Badgley's note on first page of file, Montreal, 22 January 1848. This note does not indicate who the appointees were; the file containing Meilleur's annual list of government-appointed school commissioners is missing (RG4 C1, no. 4275 of 1847). The minutes of the St. Grégoire School Commissioners lists Antoine Charest as a school commissioner in June, 1848; he was one of the men nominated by the village notables. The other nominee, François Beliveau, appears not to have been appointed.

³⁰Lesage, p. 75.

³¹The house was two stories high, "aux murs de pierre et aussi grande qu'un château." Ibid., p. 50.

and Marquis as the perfect setting for a convent where nuns could give the girls of the parish a good education. Harper acknowledged that he had always admired the house, and thus, in 1849, he made "un appel à mes paroissiens leur disant que cette maison ferait très bien un couvent de religieuses ou une école modèle, aussitôt une souscription fut ouverte et la somme nécessaire à l'acquisition du dit établissement fut réalisée."³² Bourgeois, in his capacity as secretary-treasurer, informed Meilleur in a private letter of 10 November 1848, that more than £150 had been collected from the parishioners for the purchase of the Desforges home as a model school, and he reminded the superintendent that he had promised £140 of government money to augment the parish funds.³³ In this same letter, Bourgeois warned Meilleur that a representative of St. Grégoire's school district number seven would be visiting the Education office to request government funds for the purchase of a district school house. Bourgeois explained to Meilleur that, in a meeting with the habitants of that school district, he had promoted the use of government funds for the acquisition of the Desforges house as a model school. The residents had confronted him with a telling question: "si au lieu d'appliquer les 140 [livres]...[votés] par la Législature pour l'acquisition d'une seule maison, il ne seront pas plus avantageuse de les employer à aider la construction de plusieurs maisons d'arrondissements?" In his confidential letter to Meilleur, Bourgeois indicated his strong preference that the money be used for the model school; however, he explained to Meilleur that he had not shown direct disapproval of the school district's plans at the meeting, out of fear of raising the ire of the district's population.

The letter provides clear evidence of the alliance between Bourgeois and the priests, and their expectation that the superintendent would follow their lead regarding the management of the parish's school affairs. Bourgeois further explained that he had

³²Jean Harper to C.F.Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 3 May 1849. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 71-72.

³³ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 305, no. 1361, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 10 November 1848.

consulted secretly with Harper and "des Amis de l'éducation" on the matter. He confirmed that they were all of the same mind in thinking that Meilleur should not give funds to the seventh district representative when he appeared in Montreal. Bourgeois clearly stated to Meilleur what his course of action should be: "Je pense que vous pourriez sans vous compromettre donner la même opinion que moi si on vous consulte verbalement, sur cette matière - sans toutefois donner a entendre que c'est une suggestion de ma part et que j'ai communiqué avec vous sur ce sujet." Whether or not the model school had more merit than district school houses, the issue shows the extent to which village notables took advantage of the new bureaucratic structures to ensure their control over the form of the school system.³⁴ The popular voice was being lost in the process.

The purchase of the Desforges house was delayed because of legal problems concerning its ownership.³⁵ In August of 1849, however, the school commissioners authorized their new secretary-treasurer, Marquis, to purchase the house along with its property.³⁶ That the new model school caused resentment among part of the population, at least, is shown in a remark made by Marquis in a letter to Meilleur in May, 1850. Marquis indicated that repairs and changes were being made to the Desforges house: "nous allons en faire quelque chose qui fera honneur à notre village et à la cause de l'éducation." The expense and fuss was obviously an affront to the *êteignoirs* of the parish; according to Marquis they looked upon "l'école modèle comme la ruine de la

³⁴ Citing from Max Weber, Bruce Curtis states that "class power in the bourgeois era increasingly appears as bureaucratic administration." The efforts of village notables to control the school corporation suggests that they were very aware of the power inherent in administrative structures. See Curtis, Building the Educational State, p. 140.

³⁵ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 305, no. 1361, Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 10 November 1848.

³⁶ AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 5 August 1849. The size of the property was 1 arpent by 5 arpents.

paroisse."³⁷ Considering the extra money raised by the habitants to help purchase the house, and the fact that during this same period the church was being enlarged considerably at the expense of parishioners, their reaction was not surprising.³⁸

Marquis and Harper were determined to protect the model school, however, ever-hopeful that it could be transformed in the near future into a convent. Marquis conceived of a plan to keep the house out of *êteignoir* hands. Confident that he could control the *fabrique* more easily than the school corporation, he suggested that the village school, which was owned by the *fabrique*, should be exchanged for the model school, which the school corporation owned. In Marquis' words: "Par là nous serions assurés de conserver une bonne école dans la paroisse, dans le cas où la loi cesserait d'y être en opération, ou dans le cas où des commissaires *êteignoirs* voudraient rendre à peu près nuls les efforts des amis de l'éducation." (The *êteignoirs* had already threatened to burn the model school). Meilleur would not consent to this exchange immediately, but Marquis was not one to give up easily. In July, 1850, he again accepted the position of secretary-treasurer and, according to Harper, the reason was clear: "le désir de conduire à perfection le couvent commencé sous sa direction l'a décidé à accepter cette charge."³⁹ He continued to correspond with Meilleur regarding this matter, and assured the superintendent that, although the model school was worth more than the parish school, the *fabrique* would continue to pay slightly over £43 annually for the support of schools in the parish, just as it had done in the past.⁴⁰ Finally, in November of 1852, Meilleur agreed to the exchange, and the two priests were able to lay the foundation for

³⁷ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 312, no. 432, Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 7 May 1850.

³⁸ Lesage, p. 90.

³⁹ AEN, St. Grégoire-le-Grand (1787-1943), Cartable 1, Harper to C.F. Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 22 July 1850.

⁴⁰ See, for example, ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 317, no. 2173, Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 15 December 1850.

the convent which would open in 1853.⁴¹

Through their assiduous manipulation of the school corporation, the St. Grégoire priests were thus rewarded with the prestige associated with having established a new convent and a new order of nuns, the Soeurs de L'Assomption de la Sainte Vièrge.⁴² They also had the satisfaction of knowing that the girls of the parish would be well-taught and closely supervised by the convent nuns. Georges-Allan Bourgeois, the priests' competent and steady ally throughout these years, must have been equally gratified with the opening of the convent, for his younger sister, Léocadie, became the first director of the new convent. Evidence that the priests acknowledged and appreciated the doctor's support is found in a letter of October, 1851, in which Marquis recommends Bourgeois to superintendent Meilleur as a good candidate for the new position of school inspector.⁴³ As we saw above, Bourgeois was granted this post. Thus, the alliance achieved between LaFontaine and Bourget at the provincial level was being mirrored by events at the local level.

It seems clear that the school law of 1846 precipitated a division in Nicolet and Yamaska counties between wealthy landowners and village notables. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that certain members of these groups had been in conflict long before the school legislation of the 1840s was enacted. For example, the bitter dispute over school and fabrique affairs between André-Benjamin Papineau, the *êteignoir* from St. Martin, and Louis Bélanger, a justice of the peace from his parish, was not a new or sudden development. At the time of the Rebellions, and again after the

⁴¹ Lesage, p. 108.

⁴² There were even rumours at this time that Harper was to be named a bishop; see *ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴³ ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 322, no. 1739, Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 1 October 1851.

1848 election, Papineau was accused of plotting to assassinate Bélanger.⁴⁴ Moreover, Papineau had been in conflict with the parish priest over fabrique matters as early as 1821.⁴⁵ Nor did Luc-Michel Cressé suddenly become the enemy of the St. Grégoire notables in 1846. As we have seen, Cressé had attacked the notables of St. Grégoire so insistently during the Rebellions, that the government had removed the parish's post office.⁴⁶

Thus the often bitter and competitive tone of local politics that we have noted around the issue of the school law was a fact of rural life well before 1846, particularly during the Rebellions. But the evidence suggests that the scale of the conflict increased after the establishment of the school and municipal systems. As Vondenvelden so aptly put it, the "political game" had "turned over" in the 1840s. Real political power had been transferred from governor general to the head of the majority party in the Assembly; henceforth, patronage flowed to those who could muster votes, and "priests and politicians" formed new alliances in an effort to create an enduring hegemony over the society of Lower Canada.⁴⁷ A larger and more centralized state figured prominently in those efforts. Although a framework for local government was established, local officials were more effective at the community level if they cultivated close links with state administrators. These transformations of political and social life in the 1840s threatened the status quo in rural life; new opportunities appeared on the horizon, but so did new competitors. Thus, we see the raw edge to the conflict between two rural elite

⁴⁴NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 287, no. 2402 of 1850, Louis Bélanger to James Leslie, St. Martin, 3 January 1850 (probably 1851); see also, Bélanger to Leslie, St. Martin, 25 November 1850, in same file.

⁴⁵Chabot, p. 84.

⁴⁶NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 232, no. 2203 of 1848, T. Fortier to R.B. Sullivan, Gentilly, 15 July 1848. It is ironic that Cressé and Papineau should have become allies in the fight against school taxes. Papineau was an ardent Patriote during the Rebellions, while Cressé "aurait pendu les patriotes par douzaines." See ANQ, E0013, Lettres Reçues, Box 295, no. 1220, Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 30 September 1846.

⁴⁷The term is Jacques Monet's, from The Last Cannon Shot.

groups over the school law.

CHAPTER VII

THE PARISH OF ST. GRÉGOIRE

Origins

The parish of St. Grégoire encompassed the territory of two seigneuries, Roquetaillade and Godefroy, situated on the St. Lawrence almost directly opposite the town of Trois-Rivières. Both seigneuries date from the seventeenth century, but they remained largely unpopulated until the middle of the eighteenth century.¹ In 1757 a group of Acadians who had fled from the British in Beauséjour arrived in Quebec City, only to be expelled again by the disease and food shortages rampant in that war-torn centre. From Quebec the refugees made their way up river to the Godefroy and Roquetaillade seigneuries and there they decided to settle. During the following decades smaller groups of Acadians, mostly relatives and friends of the first settlers, came to the region from New Brunswick, Boston and the island of Miquelon. By 1783 the population had risen to 400. The Acadians had chosen a relatively fertile region for their new home. The soil was well-irrigated by several small rivers, and, while the concessions along the St. Lawrence were somewhat light and sandy, the soil further back was rich and fertile.²

In light of subsequent quarrels in the 1840s, the Acadians' early relations with the church hierarchy and parish priests is relevant to the study of St. Grégoire's history. Those relations commenced with a conflict over the establishment of a new parish.³ In 1783 the grand vicar of Quebec visited the region and encouraged the

¹The description of the early settlement of St. Grégoire is taken from Lesage, chapter 1.

²Joseph Bouchette, The British Dominions in North America; a Topographical Dictionary of Lower Canada Vol.I (London, 1831), "Godefroi".

³Lesage, pp. 33-37.

Acadians to contribute funds for a new church in St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet, the village in a neighbouring seigneurie. The new settlers refused the application, requesting permission to build a church of their own instead.⁴ The request was denied. Four years later, in 1787, the seigneurs of Godefroy and Roquetaillade petitioned for a church on behalf of their censitaires,⁵ but it was not until 1796 that Monseigneur Hubert, the bishop of Quebec, gave permission for the habitants to cut the wood for a church and a presbytery. There the preparations were to rest, however, with the bishop warning the Acadians "de ne pas commencer à bâtir sans une nouvelle permission." Further entreaties resulted, and later that same year Hubert agreed that they might build the presbytery but stipulated that they could not have a resident priest nor celebrate mass more frequently than four times per year.⁶

Once the presbytery was completed the Acadians made immediate application that a new parish with a resident priest be established. While the bishop was considering the matter, certain eager settlers applied to the Legislative Assembly for civil erection of the parish. Although the Assembly decided to take no action in the affair, the new bishop of Quebec, Denaut, was offended by the habitants' assertiveness. In order to affirm the Church's right to control the erection of parishes, he refused to appoint a resident priest for the settlers of St. Grégoire. In 1801, a young man of the village died without being given the last rites because there was no local priest. Distressed by this event, the settlers again petitioned for a resident curé. This time their efforts bore fruit; permission was granted, and the new parish of St. Grégoire was finally erected on August 18, 1802.⁷

⁴Conflicts between habitants and church authorities over the boundaries of a new parish, or over the location of a church within the new parish, were fairly common in the eighteenth century. See, for example, Greer, "L'habitant," pp. 20-21.

⁵Lesage, p. 35.

⁶Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁷Ibid., pp. 40-45.

The parishioners were to be sorely disappointed by their first priest, Louis-Antoine Desforges. Possessed of an authoritarian nature, Desforges quarrelled frequently with the parish's one schoolmaster - so much so that the grand vicar was required to intervene to establish peace in the parish. Another source of conflict between Desforges and the St. Grégoire residents was the increasingly contentious issue of control over the physical space within the presbytery. The parishioners were in the habit of spending time in the *salle des habitants*, a practise which greatly displeased Desforges.⁸ He thus required the parishioners to build the expensive and rather ostentatious new presbytery referred to in the previous chapter. Over the years the residents of St. Grégoire found Desforges' behaviour to be increasingly intolerable; they thus petitioned Bishop Plessis to intervene on their behalf. Plessis took Desforges to task over the complaints:

Voilà vos paroissiens qui viennent en avant avec une requête portant 162 signatures dans laquelle ils prétendent que le scandale que vous donnez à un tel point que plusieurs ne veulent plus recevoir les sacrements de vous et sont obligés de recourir aux paroisses voisines. Ils concluent à ce que je le leur donne un autre prêtre qu'ils offrent de loger et maintenir. Que veut dire tout cela mon cher abbé? Comment tenir dans une paroisse dont on a perdu la confiance?

Desforges did not reform his ways, however, and the following year, in 1819, he was removed from his clerical duties.⁹

Desforges' successor proved to be equally unacceptable to the parishioners of St. Grégoire, in part because of his authoritarian manner. Moreover, after the new presbytery was completed in 1821, M. Odelin, finding it not to his liking, refused to move in. After receiving complaints about the curé's stubbornness concerning the presbytery, Bishop Plessis reprimanded the priest:

Une paroisse qui a fait à grande frais une édifice comme votre presbytère doit souffrir de votre obstination à n'y point entrer, et il est ridicule qu'à la porte d'une maison destinée au logement du curé, il faille lui payer un loyer...

⁸Greer suggests that the *habitant* practise of viewing the presbytery as communal property was increasingly challenged by parish priests at the beginning of the nineteenth century. See Greer, "L'habitant," p. 25.

⁹Lesage, pp. 46-52.

Cherchez purement le salut des âmes de ces fidèles, et vous ne vous occuperez pas tant de la crainte d'être dominé par eux, ni des moyens de les réduire dans des choses qui n'intéressent pas leur salut mais uniquement vos commodités temporelles.¹⁰

Given the choice by Plessis of living in the presbytery or changing parishes, Odelin chose the latter option. He was replaced by Francois-Xavier Demers in 1821, only two years after first being appointed to St. Grégoire.¹¹

Demers remained in St. Grégoire until 1831 when he was transferred. His replacement, Jean Harper, was still in office in 1850 when the school riots occurred.¹² Harper was given an assistant, the young vicar Calixte Marquis, in 1845, because the population had grown to over 3,300.¹³ Prior to the late 1840s there seem to have been no obvious conflicts between Harper and his parishioners. The residents did object however, to a sermon preached by his brother, Charles Harper, during the Rebellions; as noted previously, they heartily resented his pronouncements on the importance of submitting to the authorities.

In 1849 a dispute arose between parishioners and the two priests, Calixte Marquis and Jean Harper, over the possible division of the parish. The conflict is particularly significant because the tensions it created in the parish would serve to exacerbate resistance to schooling and, more especially, to school taxes. In the summer of 1849, the parishioners of St. Grégoire had discussed the possibility of splitting off the area known as the Pays Brulé to create a new parish on the southeastern flank of St. Grégoire. Most residents of the Pays Brulé supported the division, but habitants in the adjoining concession of St. Charles opposed the idea, preferring instead to maintain the integrity

¹⁰Cited in Lesage, p. 53

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Born in Quebec City in 1801, Harper was the son of a Scottish father and a French-Canadian mother. His father was at different times a gardener and a tavern operator. Lesage, pp. 137-39.

¹³The son of a merchant, Marquis was born in Quebec City, in 1820. Lesage, pp. 155-56.

of the parish and enlarge the church to deal with population pressure. While Harper and his vicar Marquis acknowledged in private their support for the division, it is not known with certainty what public stance they took in 1849. That Marquis did involve himself in the dispute over the division of the parish is clear, however. In a letter to his friend Cazeau in Trois-Rivières, Harper complained that in regard to the parish issue, "un excès de zèle pour ne pas dire une indiscrétion de Mr. Marquis m'a causé beaucoup de tracasseries."¹⁴

Harper too was to intervene in the matter, at least indirectly. After much heated discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of dividing the parish, the habitants finally decided to enlarge the church in St. Grégoire rather than create a new parish. They therefore sent a petition to Mgr. Signay requesting that £500 of fabrique funds be used to cover the expenses of the church work, because the state of "pauvreté et de dénuement où se trouvent la plupart des soussignés par suite des fléaux dont la divine Providence les a frappés depuis quelques années, les mets dans l'impossibilité de supporter seuls tous les frais de cet aggrandissement."¹⁵ According to Harper, the parishioners had planned to request a much higher amount, but he was able to persuade them to lower their demands. He still found their request to be excessive, and blamed it on the example set in St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet, where the presbytery and outbuildings had been built exclusively through fabrique funds.¹⁶ It is not surprising that the residents of St. Grégoire hoped to pass on expenditures to the fabrique; mired in a depressed agricultural conjuncture, they had been confronted with school and municipal taxes as well as the collections for repairs to the model school which were

¹⁴ AEN, St. Grégoire-le-Grand, Cartable 1, Harper to Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 23 July 1849.

¹⁵ AEN, St. Grégoire, Cartable 1, no. 75, Petition from the parish of St. Grégoire to Mgr. Signay, St. Grégoire, 15 July 1849.

¹⁶ Harper said the example of Nicolet was one "dont on abuse dans le voisinage." See *ibid.*, no. 74, Harper to Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 23 July 1849.

discussed in the previous chapter. Harper's reluctance to have the fabrique assume complete financial responsibility for the church enlargement was not destined to make him popular in the parish, as we shall see in the following chapter.¹⁷

While the residents of St. Grégoire demonstrated some resistance to parish priests over the years, that resistance was not necessarily an indication of a lack of religious faith. Their very insistence on obtaining a church, and their willingness to be critical of "unpriestly" behaviour suggest an attachment to their religion. Moreover, many of the parishioners of St. Grégoire had become caught up in the Catholic revival instigated by Bishop Bourget in the 1840s. In 1841 the conservative Bishop of Nancy and Toul, Charles de Forbin-Janson, visited Lower Canada and made a series of speeches throughout the province which were intended to inspire the religious zeal of its Catholic population.¹⁸ Forbin-Janson's stop in Trois-Rivières caused a stir throughout the district. The city was overrun with visitors from the outlying parishes, including St. Grégoire, all eager to hear the famous orator.¹⁹ Jean Harper's brother Charles wrote to Monseigneur Signay in February, 1840 describing the excitement over Forbin-Janson's visits:

La retraite...remue tout le district. La Foule ne trouve pas de place dans l'église, quoiqu'elle couvre même les marches de l'autel, les avenues, passages, escaliers, etc. Le presbytère se remplit de manière à empêcher même M. le grand vicaire d'y pénétrer jusqu'à son office. Les confessionnaux assiégés jusque très tard dans la nuit.²⁰

¹⁷ A similar conflict between curé and parishioners occurred in La Baie-du-Febvre in 1845-46, although the dispute centred on the parishioners demands that fabrique funds be used to support public schools. See Joseph-Elzéar Bellemare, Histoire de la Baie-Saint-Antoine, p. 259.

¹⁸ See Monet, The Last Cannon Shot, p. 129.

¹⁹ Hervé Biron, Grandeurs et misères de l'Église Trifluvienne (1615-1947) (Trois-Rivières: Les Éditions Trifluviennes, 1947), p. 154.

²⁰ Cited in L'abbé J.-A.-Ir. Douville, Histoire du Collège-Séminaire de Nicolet 1803-1903 (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1903), 1: 256.

René Hardy has suggested that the fervour shown by Catholics during Forbin-Janson's visit was partly a result of the vulnerability felt by Lower Canadians after years of economic and political disasters. Moreover, he has demonstrated that the clergy played on this sense of uncertainty to shepherd their parishioners into a closer involvement in church activities.²¹ In St. Grégoire at least one member of the liberal professions also viewed these activities as a means of monitoring and controlling the habitant population. According to Dr. G.A. Bourgeois, a religious retreat held near St. Grégoire in the winter of 1847 helped to snuff out the agitation stirred up by Cressé and Vondenvelden in their speeches against the school law. He reported to Meilleur, with obvious relief, that the parish at last:

est tombée dans un calme profond, après la rude tempête qui l'a tenu tant agité pendant quelques tems [sic]. Jusqu'à une époque encore assez récente, on apercevait encore quelque marque d'agitation mais une Retraite de huit jours, prêchée par un célèbre prédicateur, (Rev. A. Mailloux), a achevé de ramener les esprits à la docilité et a rétabli cette paix désirée depuis si longtemps par tous les gens réfléchis.²²

We do not know to what extent the habitants' faith was renewed by these religious retreats. It is clear, however, that village professional men such as Bourgeois approved of the Church's efforts to confine habitant behaviour to acceptable norms.

One aspect of this social control was the attempt by the Church in the 1840s to suppress the consumption of alcohol.²³ The ubiquitous abbé Chiniquy was one of the Church's most valuable agents in this regard. This priest was, by all accounts, a spell-binding orator, and he used his rhetorical skills to gather the masses of Lower

²¹Hardy, "Note sur certaines manifestations," pp. 81-99; see also Hardy, "L'activité sociale," pp. 5-32.

²²ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 297, no. 257, G. A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire le Grand, 13 February 1847.

²³For a discussion of some of the possible reasons why the Church became so concerned about the need to deal with alcohol consumption starting in the 1840s, see René Hardy and Jean Roy, "Mutation de la culture religieuse en Mauricie, 1850-1900," in Évolution et Éclatement du monde rural, eds., Joseph Goy and Jean-Pierre Wallot (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986), p. 404.

Canada into the temperance movement during the late 1840s.²⁴ He brought his crusade to la Baie-du-Febvre, St. François and St. David in 1849. Since these were neighbouring parishes, it is very likely that habitants from St. Grégoire were in attendance during his speeches.²⁵ Chiniquy's constant proscriptions against alcohol seem to have had some impact on the parish. In 1853 the priest Harper wrote in his annual report to the archbishop that:

La Société de la Croix a été établie au commencement du juillet dernier, tous les chefs de famille excepté onze ont pris la croix et ont enrôlé leurs familles ce qui porte à 1950 le nombre des associés à la tempérance totale sous la bannière de la croix, tous à une bien faible exception près ont été fidèles à leur engagement. La Confrérie du Coeur immaculé de Marie érigée en 1847 compte dans la paroisse autant de membres qu'il y a de communians moins une centaine; pour devenir membre de la confrérie les hommes doivent être de la société de tempérance et les personnes du sexe doivent renoncer aux bals et aux parures indécentes et trop mondaines.²⁶

In this same report, Harper indicates other ways in which the Church was structuring the lives of its parishioners. In addition to the temperance society and confraternity mentioned above, St. Grégoire had a "société des messes" with which 1,000 parishioners were associated, and 250 residents were members of a group organized to propagate the faith.

While more habitants were being drawn into church-inspired activities such as confraternities and temperance societies, adherence to all the dictates of the Church was by no means unanimous. There are no parish reports for the 1840s, but in 1853 Harper was able to report that only about a dozen individuals did not confess at least once during the year. Significantly, however, over 300 people had not taken Easter

²⁴Trudel, pp. 87-98.

²⁵Lesage, p. 134. Chiniquy's efforts seemed to have had miraculous results. Abbé Ferland of the Nicolet Seminary, reported that: "Chiniquy vient de faire une croisade contre le verre et la bouteille, dans la Baie, St. François, dans deux jours, il recommencera à St. David. Il a tout amené à net. Hier, les marchands de la Baie déposaient [sic], à bord du steamer, des tonnes de rum qu'on renvoie à Montréal." Cited in Trudel, p. 95.

²⁶AETR, Box 1, file 1, no. 13, Annual Report on St. Grégoire, Jn. Harper to Msgr. Cooke, 15 April 1853. Reference kindly provided by Professor René Hardy.

communion, which was a crucial part of Church practice. Recent work on the Mauricie region by Hardy, Séguin and Roy finds that parishes there had high numbers of Easter non-communicants in the late 1850s and early 1860s (though fewer than at St. Grégoire), whereas by around 1890 conformity to this Church practice was almost unanimous.²⁷ They suggest that this later conformity was a result of "la multiplication des institutions d'encadrement," that is, the social and economic institutions which developed as an adjunct to village formation, and which strengthened the hold of clergy, professional men and merchants on the habitants.²⁸ That St. Grégoire had such a high level of non-conformity in the 1850s thus suggests two things: one is the importance of the village institutions - particularly the schools over which the clergy would take increasing control in later decades;²⁹ the other is the importance of the local context. In his 1853 parish report, Harper refers to individuals going to Trois-Rivières for their Easter communion in the early 1850s because they did not wish to receive communion from him. Furthermore, the number of non-communicants at Easter in 1857 was even higher than in 1853. This suggests a certain on-going resistance to the parish curé which must be considered as a factor in analyzing conformity and non-conformity to Church dictates.³⁰

²⁷ Hardy and Roy found that the 115 non-communicants in Cap-de-la-Madeleine in 1857 was a high number. See Hardy and Roy, "Mutation de la Culture," p. 401, Table 1, p. 411. By 1895, an average of only two individuals per parish had not taken Easter communion. See, Séguin and Hardy, Fôret et Société, pp. 205-07.

²⁸ As institutions such as schools and local government expanded, the clergy, liberal professionals and commercial men of the villages would have an increased importance as mediators between cities and countryside and an increased opportunity to exercise control over rural society. See Hardy and Roy, "Mutation de la Culture," p. 406, and Séguin and Hardy, Fôret et Société, pp. 204-07.

²⁹ See Eid, "Éducation et Classes Sociales," pp. 159-79.

³⁰ Harper did claim, in the 1853 report, that "les Grégoriens ont généralement assez de respect et de soumission pour leurs pasteur." AETR, Box 1, file 1, no. 13, Annual Report on St. Grégoire, Jn. Harper to Msgr. Cooke, 15 April 1853; *ibid.*, Report of 24 October 1857. Hardy and Roy note the importance of analyzing comments made about parish morals by priests in their annual reports in the context of the parish's history. See Hardy and Roy, "Mutation de la culture," pp. 404-05. Although I do not have annual reports for every year, those that exist suggest that by the 1880s, the parish of St. Grégoire was coming more under the sway of its priest, as were the parishes in the

The independence sometimes shown by the habitants of St. Grégoire vis-à-vis both Church and political authorities was at times attributed to their Acadian background. For example, when the parish showed itself sympathetic to the Patriote cause in 1837, and complained about Charles Harper's sermon on the need to respect the constituted political authorities, grand vicar Thomas Cooke of Trois-Rivières commented that "Les Acadiens tiennent du gascon, ils sont bavards et poltrons."³¹ An earlier assessment found Bishop Denaut describing the habitants of St. Grégoire as having an "esprit turbulent."³² While the parish was more peaceable in later years, the resident priest in 1872 was critical of his parishioners' inclination to enjoy dancing, which he blamed on their heritage: "La danse nuit un peu à la jeunesse, les acadiens aiment naturellement la danse."³³ The Church might well have found the Acadians' background a convenient way of accounting for their resistance to political or religious authorities. However, the harsh British treatment of the Acadians and their consequent struggle to survive and resettle cannot be discounted as factors in explaining the simmering resentment sometimes shown by the habitants of St. Grégoire towards those in authority.³⁴

³⁰(cont'd) Mauricie. In 1872 the number of Easter non-communicants had fallen to about fifty and by the period 1880-1884 this figure had dropped to thirteen.

³¹Cited in Lesage, p. 63.

³²Ibid., p. 46.

³³AETR, Annual Report on St. Grégoire, 1872. Dancing was pin-pointed by the Church hierarchy as one of the vices for which parish priests should be on the watch. See, Hardy and Roy, "Mutation de la culture," p. 405.

³⁴Biron writes that, during the American Revolution, several parishes in the district of Trois-Rivières showed sympathy for the American rebels. A Commission was created to investigate instances of disloyalty to the British government. Although the reports on parishes west of Bécancour on the South Shore (including St. Grégoire) were reported missing by Biron, parishes closely neighbouring St. Grégoire to the east were implicated in the charges of disloyalty. See Biron, *Grandeurs et misères*, pp. 108-10. Léon Thériault points out that Acadians under the French regime remained relatively independent of the Church. See Léon Thériault, "Acadia, 1763-1978: An Historical Synthesis," in *The Acadians of the Maritimes: Thematic Studies*, ed. Jean Daigle (Moncton: Centre d'études acadiennes, 1982), p. 54.

Economic Conditions

We know that the habitants of Lower Canada were confronted by a harsh economic climate in the 1830s and 1840s. Disease had devastated wheat crops in the mid 1830s. Then potatoes, an important dietary replacement for wheat, were attacked by blight in the following decade. Moreover, the seigneurial farmlands were filling up and employment in the forests was sharply reduced as the timber industry experienced a sharp downturn in the late 1840s.

Table 7.1 reveals the necessary adjustments being made in the farm households of St. Grégoire to these realities. The ravages caused by the wheat midge are clear: production fell to 4.8 minots/farm in 1844 from a relatively high level of 80.2 in 1831. Potatoes, and, to a lesser extent, peas and barley, replaced bread as dietary staples; while wheat crops plummeted, potato production expanded by almost 100 percent between 1831 and 1844. Then disease struck in 1845; by the fall of 1851, the average production had decreased to 28.8 minots, and even peas and barley dipped to previous levels, although wheat recovered to some extent. The combined wheat and potato crops of that year would have satisfied the dietary needs of a family with young children; for a large family with older children, however, the harvest would have proved inadequate.³⁵ Habitants clearly saw oats as an important crop, for production increased steadily in both decades. As there were no oat mills in St. Grégoire, this crop must have been intended as food for farm livestock and for sale on the shanty market.³⁶ Profits made from the oats might well have been used to purchase wheat from Upper Canada to supplement the average farm's meager production, though we have noted that lumber production was in a recession in the late forties.

³⁵ Allen Greer states that an adult consumed about 15 minots of wheat per year. See Greer, Peasant, Lord, and Merchant, pp. 35-39, 206.

³⁶ Robert Leslie Jones, "French-Canadian Agriculture in the St. Lawrence Valley, 1815-1850," Agricultural History, 16, no. 3 (1942): 143.

Table 7.1: Agricultural Production per Farm Family in St. Grégoire: 1831, 1844, 1852.

	<u>1831</u>	<u>1844</u>	<u>1852</u>
Wheat (min.)	80.2	4.8	37.6
Oats (min.)	65.4	128.9	151.5
Barley (min.)	1.0	14.9	1.8
Rye (min.)	0.2	0.1	0.7
Peas (min.)	6.1	16.4	5.9
Buckwheat (min.)	0.7	6.8	8.3
Indian Corn (min.)	0.6	0.6	3.6
Potatoes (min.)	90.2	164.5	28.8
Turnips (min.)	n.d.*	n.d.	1.3
Tobacco	n.d.	n.d.	8.3
Maple Sugar (lbs.)	n.d.	23.0	47.8
Cattle	6.3	6.3	8.5
Horses	1.9	1.5	2.0
Sheep	10.1	9.0	9.3
Pigs	4.9	2.7	2.5
Butter	n.d.	n.d.	119.8
Cheese	n.d.	n.d.	1.5
Fulled Cloth (yd.)	n.d.	8.9	10.6
Linen Cloth (yd.)	n.d.	26.1	21.5
Flannel Cloth (yd.)	n.d.	6.8	12.8
Wool (lbs.)	n.d.	15.1	19.9

*n.d.: no data

Sources: JLALC, 41 (1831-32), Appendix Oo; JLALC, 5 (1846), Appendix D; Canada, Census Reports, 1852.

The average farm had more livestock, especially cattle, in 1852 than it had in 1831 or 1844. This might indicate specialization by certain farmers; an analysis of the manuscript census would be required to determine this. Certainly some farmers had begun to produce butter for the market by mid-century, but if the average individual consumed thirty pounds per year, as estimated by Lewis and McInnis, relatively little could have been shipped from the parish.³⁷ Furthermore, the diversity of the farm production, including a variety of grains, as well as tobacco, maple sugar and homespun, suggests that most habitants remained predominantly concerned with family self-sufficiency. Rural people whose needs could not be met by the family farm, or who

³⁷ Frank D. Lewis and Marvin McInnis, "Agricultural Output and Efficiency in Lower Canada, 1851," (Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, Discussion Paper no. 451), A-10, F-2.

had been pushed off the land, could seek an income from seasonal work as agricultural day labourers. The appearance of threshing machines in the 1840s threatened the livelihoods of farm labourers in the area around St. Grégoire. Commenting to the government Committee on Emigration in 1849, Calixte Marquis claimed that:

for the past seven or eight years... they have gone about our countryside with threshing machines which they take from barn to barn, and by means of which they can do in four or five days the work of two or three months; a mass of poor people who earned their bread at this work are now idle and starving. Tired of leading a wretched life here, without hope of seeing a happier future, our habitants have found themselves forced to give up the soil which saw their birth in order to go and seek elsewhere an existence which has been refused them here.³⁸

French-Canadian families traditionally preferred to settle their sons on nearby concessions. That inclination might have been even stronger in St. Grégoire where the community shared an Acadian heritage. A shortage of land in the seigneuries and the lack of work for farm labourers, however, meant that a certain number of habitants were forced to leave the parish. The fact that St. Grégoire's population increased so slightly between 1844 and 1852 (from 3,337 to 3,449) indicates the emigration of fairly significant numbers of people. The main options for those who left were to emigrate to the United States, or to move onto unsettled lands in the Eastern Townships. We know from a letter written by the vicar Marquis to Archbishop Cazeau that some were choosing the latter option:

Nous avons délivré hier 137 certificats à des personnes qui vont prendre des terres dans les townships. Et nous espérons qu'avant peu nous aurons complété le nombre de 200. C'est une paroisse au complet. Voilà qui s'appelle coloniser, non pas en théorie, mais en pratique. Tous ces colons vont s'établir sur les bords du lac Aylmer, dans le township de Stratford; les paroisses voisines font mine de ne pas rester en arrière de la nôtre.³⁹

Land scarcity, poor harvests, and the lack of rural employment could only mean that the payment of school and municipal taxes in the 1840s would have been an

³⁸Cited in Ouellet, Economic and Social History, p. 465.

³⁹AEN, St. Grégoire-le-Grand, Cartable 1, C. Marquis to Charles-Félix Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 3 Nov. 1848.

onerous additional financial exaction.⁴⁰ That this was the case for the habitants of St. Grégoire is reflected by a comment made by G.A. Bourgeois in a letter to Meilleur in July, 1849. In the letter he stated that, "les affaires de notre corporation sont un peu en arrière. Les contribuables sont pauvres & conséquemment le Bureau l'est aussi."⁴¹ That same month the parish sent its petition to Mgr. Signay requesting that fabrique monies be used to pay for the church enlargement, because of the state of poverty in which habitants found themselves. The economic distress experienced by the habitants of St. Grégoire in the late 1840s would be an important factor in their response to the school law of 1846. An examination of their attitudes to schooling prior to that law, will show that public schooling was, in fact, well received in the parish before school taxes were imposed.

Education

In the very early years of the nineteenth century, the population of St. Grégoire had access to education only through the services of itinerant schoolmasters who might happen upon the parish. Two private schools were established at different times during the 1800s and 1810s, but neither of these was to have a long life.⁴² Then, in 1826, the

⁴⁰The assessment rate for municipal taxes was doubled under the Municipal Act of 1847. See, Little, "Colonization and Municipal Reform," p. 97.

⁴¹ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 308, no. 887, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 17 July 1849. A similar comment was made a year earlier by the secretary-treasurer of the school corporation of Gentilly, a neighbouring parish. Joseph Genest, writing on behalf of the school corporation, asked that Meilleur excuse the tardiness of the corporation's report, and explained that the delay was due to "l'état de pénurie où les populations se sont trouvées réduits et, en conséquence, la difficulté à percevoir les cotisations". Ibid., Box 303, no. 683, Joseph Genest to Meilleur, Gentilly, 4 July 1848. Responding to a questionnaire circulated by Meilleur in 1850 enquiring into the state of schooling, the school corporation in Blandford, a village in the township to the south-east of St. Grégoire, explained that the village's two schools were "en très mauvaise état vue la pauvreté des contribuables." See *ibid.*, Box 316, no. 1748, School commissioners to Meilleur, Blandford, 13 September 1850.

⁴²See Lesage, pp. 47-48, 55.

church wardens decided to establish a school under the provisions of the newly-enacted Fabrique Schools Act, which permitted one-quarter of the annual fabrique revenues to be devoted to the support of a parish school. The school was built near the presbytery, and was furnished with £1,050 annually from 1826 until 1841, the date when the school act providing government funding for elementary schools came into effect.⁴³ The fabrique school was administered by the church wardens; these men hired the teachers and chose the curriculum, which was to consist of writing, arithmetic and catechism.⁴⁴

It was in 1830 that the residents of St. Grégoire witnessed the first signs of a relatively comprehensive school system in their parish. Under the impulse given to elementary education by the Assembly Schools Act, the parish quickly built four new schools, each in a different concession. In the following five years the system slowly expanded to the point where, in addition to the village school, each of the ten districts into which the parish had been divided had its own school. Thus, by 1835, St. Grégoire had eleven schools, and the total student enrolment represented approximately 33 percent of the school-age population. The failure of the Legislative Council to renew the Assembly School Act in 1836 proved to be a real blow to public schooling in St. Grégoire. In that year seven schools were closed, and by 1838 the ratio of children attending school had dropped to only 11 percent.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy, however, that four schools continued to operate in the absence of government funding, and this at a time

⁴³ Pierre-Maurice Hébert, "Jean-Baptiste Hébert (1779-1863): De la fabrique à l'école et à la politique," *Les Cahiers Nicolétains*, 8 (1986): 192. The fabrique continued to donate £43 annually to the school from 1841 until 1855. At that time Msgr. Cooke, Bishop of Trois-Rivières demanded that the payment stop: "Considérant... que les raisons pour lesquelles Monseigneur Jos. Signay a permis, en 1825, à la Fabrique d'employer une partie déterminée de ses revenus pour l'établissement et le soutien des Écoles dans cette paroisse [sic] n'existent plus parce que la loi civile pourvoit suffisamment à cet important objet. Nous ne croyons pas pouvoir continuer la dite permission." Cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-92.

⁴⁵ The information on schooling in the 1830s is from Lesage, chapter 3.

when the country was in turmoil over the Rebellions.⁴⁶ Clearly, a certain **segment of the** population, albeit a minority, believed that education was worth the **financial sacrifice** involved in supporting schools solely through fees.⁴⁷

By 1842 the impact of the school act of the previous year was being felt in St. Grégoire; that year eight schools were put under the control of the local school commissioners. By 1844, the number of schools in St. Grégoire had reached an all-time high of twelve and the 423 students enrolled in those schools represented between 31 and 45 percent of the school-age population. It will be remembered that the government experimented briefly in 1845 with a system of voluntary contributions for the support of schools because of the widespread criticism of compulsory taxation. In July, 1845 the school commissioners of St. Grégoire each agreed to canvass a portion of the parish to collect contributions for the schools. One month later these school officials were able to report the success of their efforts, stating that the amount collected through voluntary contributions equalled the amount of the government grant. They concluded that "il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir recours à une cotisation forcée et... le montant général suffira pour maintenir sur un pied convenable une école dans chacun des arrondissements de la municipalité."⁴⁸ Again, the parish had demonstrated its willingness to pay for its children's schooling.

With one school in each of the parish's twelve districts and the fabrique school in the village, the number of schools plateaued in 1846 and remained at that level, except

⁴⁶Lesage, p. 62. Hébert (p. 192), points out that the Fabrique school remained open during the Rebellions, although in many parts of Lower Canada schools closed during these tumultuous years.

⁴⁷This support contradicts Cross' assessment of the state of the school system during these years: "Lower Canada had been without public schools from 1836 to 1842 because of political disputes between the legislature and the governor, and apparently they were not missed in rural areas." Cross, "The laws are like Cobwebs," p. 120.

⁴⁸AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 14 July 1845 and 3 August 1845.

for slight fluctuations, until 1852. The ratio of St. Grégoire residents to each school in 1851 was 265:1, as compared to 614:1 for Nicolet County as a whole, and 676:1 for Lower Canada. The St. Grégoire ratio was even lower than that of Upper Canada (316:1).⁴⁹

The only interruption in this steady growth of St. Grégoire's network of schools occurred in 1846-47 when the school in one district was closed temporarily. Luc-Michel Cressé and William Vondenvelden had campaigned in the early fall of 1846 throughout Nicolet County, spreading the alarm that school taxes represented only the tip of the iceberg as far as planned state taxation was concerned. They thus counselled the habitants of St. Grégoire and neighbouring parishes to withdraw their children from school as a means of preventing this avalanche of taxes.⁵⁰ Residents of school district number seven in St. Grégoire were apparently receptive to the message. On October 18, the school commissioners passed a motion to fine Julien Vigneau, one of the stewards appointed to manage that district's school, because he refused "sans raison de remplir les devoirs de régisseurs." Apparently in sympathy with Vigneau's boycott, parents in district seven withdrew their children from school. One month later the school commissioners reported that they had successfully pursued Vigneau, and that he had paid his fine of £2.10. They also reported that the school in district seven was to be closed to punish the recalcitrant parents. Upon hearing of Vigneau's fine, the parents "députèrent à M. le Curé pour demander le réinstallation de l'école, confessant leur égarement, et offrant de se soumettre à tout ce qu'on exigerait d'eux." The priest and school commissioners were not mollified, however; they deemed it appropriate to keep the school closed for the remainder of the school year.⁵¹ Perhaps the parents were less

⁴⁹ JLAC, 11 (1852-53), Appendix JJ; Canada, Canada Reports, 1852; Gaffield, "Schooling, the Economy," p. 72.

⁵⁰ ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 295, no. 1220, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 30 September 1846.

⁵¹ AUQTR, Registre des Délibération des Commissaire d'Écoles de la paroisse de St.

eager to see the school re-opened than the school commissioners believed, for it did not recommence operations until June, 1848. Once underway, however, there were no further interruptions in classes in district seven nor any other of the parish's twelve districts. Bitterness over taxes was not profound enough to precipitate a major boycott of the school system.

The numbers of students enrolled in St. Grégoire's schools also rose steadily during these years, so that by 1849, about 54 percent of the parish's youth (641 students) were attending school.⁵² A concomitant of this increase in the student body was an ever-expanding number of students in each school (see Table 7.2). More significantly, this expansion was not halted in 1850, the year in which riots against the school taxes occurred. After commenting on the disturbances in St. Grégoire, Meilleur's Annual Report of 1850 stated that the schools in that parish had always been "maintained on a good footing," and that they had "never ceased being attended by a great number of the children of the resident inhabitants."⁵³ The enrolment rate in St. Grégoire was, in fact, much higher than that found by Chad Gaffield in his study of Prescott County, Upper Canada. He estimates that only one child in ten received any schooling in 1851. For Upper Canada as a whole, Michael Katz has found that 40.8 percent of children aged five to sixteen attended school in 1851.⁵⁴

⁵¹(cont'd) Grégoire, 18 October 1846, 22 November 1846, 28 June 1848. See also ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 296, no. 1432, Jean Harper to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 10 November 1846; and Box 297, no. 257, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 13 February 1847.

⁵²JLAC, 9 (1850) Appendix U; AUQTR, Registres des Délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 30 September 1849. The school commissioners state that there were 1,176 children in St. Grégoire, "en âge de fréquenter les écoles;" they do not specify what the ages were.

⁵³See JLAC, 9 (1850), Appendix U.

⁵⁴Chad Gaffield, "Schooling, the Economy, and Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," in Childhood and Family in Canadian History, ed., Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1982), p. 73; Michael B. Katz, "Who went to school?" in Education and Social Change, eds., Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 277.

Table 7.2: Enrolment in St. Grégoire Schools: 1835-1851.

	<u>Enrolment</u>	<u>Enrolment/School</u>
1835	280	25
1836	no data	no data
1838-41	92	23
1842	no data	no data
1843	402	33
1844	423	35
1845	540	45
1846	473	36
1847*	490	41
1848	563	45
1849	641	49
1850	688	53
1851	677	52

*Starting in 1847, the Annual Reports give figures for the periods January-June and June-December. Since no pattern was apparent which distinguished the two periods, the figures have been averaged to give a total for the year.

Sources: Lesage, chapter 3; 1844 Census, Parish of St. Grégoire; 1852 Ms Census, Parish of St. Grégoire; JLAC, Annual Reports of the Superintendent of Education for Lower Canada, 1843-1850.

In St. Grégoire school enrolment was essentially the same for children aged five to nine, and ten to fourteen years (see Table 7.3). Beyond fourteen years of age enrolment dropped off quickly, although a few students registered in St. Grégoire's schools were in their late teens and early twenties. This fact no doubt reflected the seasonal attendance of habitants' offspring who were needed for farm labour at certain times of the year. The result of this sporadic attendance was that some children continued their schooling over a long period of time.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ There were three students aged twenty-one, and one who was twenty-seven years old in 1851. Ian Davey has found that urban children left school at an earlier age to seek employment. Boys in rural areas were usually restricted in their attendance by work requirements on the farm in spring, summer and fall. Girls more frequently attended in the summers because they were needed at home in the winter to care for younger children who could not travel to school in the severe weather. Ian Davey, "The rhythm of work and the rhythm of school," pp. 239-41. Gaffield finds that youths in the village of Hawkesbury continued part-time studies well into their teens; rural youths usually left school after age 15, but a few continued their schooling into their late teens. Gaffield, "Schooling, the economy," pp. 79-82. For a description of the impact of the family economy on the schooling of youth in nineteenth-century southern France, see Mary Jo Maynes, "Work or School? Youths and the family in the Midi in the early

Table 7.3: School Enrolment According to Age in St. Grégoire, 1852. (Ratio of Total in Each Age Cohort in Parentheses).

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>
5	12
6	45
7	63
8	59
9	74
(Total)	253 (54.3%)
10	62
11	72
12	52
13	30
14	28
(Total)	244 (56.2%)
15	15
16	10
17	4
18	8
19	1
(Total)	38 (9.3%)

Source: Canada, Ms Census, St. Grégoire, 1852.

Girls in St. Grégoire were somewhat less likely to receive an elementary education than were boys. Thus, in 1835, 46 percent of students were girls, a ratio which remained quite constant through 1851, except that girls appear to have suffered more from the temporary closure of schools after 1836 than did their male cohorts (see Table 7.4).⁵⁵ This was by no means an anomaly in the nineteenth century. Andrée Dufour's study of school enrolment on the Island of Montreal shows exactly the same ratio of boys

⁵⁵(cont'd) nineteenth century," in The Making of Frenchmen: Current Directions in the History of Education in France, 1679-1979, Donald N. Baker and Patrick J. Harrigan, eds., (Waterloo: Historical Reflections Press, 1980), p. 120.

⁵⁶It is not known with certainty to what extent the students of St. Grégoire were segregated according to their sex. The Assembly schools created in the 1830s were dispersed among the seigneur's concessions; with only one school to serve each concession, it is likely that girls and boys attended together, although they may have gone to school at different times of the year, as Ian Davey has suggested. See Davey, "The rhythm of work." Lesage states that a school for the poor village children of both sexes was established in 1835. Under the school laws of 1845 and 1846, the parish was divided into twelve districts, each having its own school. Again, these were likely mixed schools. The exception was the district which encompassed the village; here there were two schools segregated by sex. See AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'Écoles de la paroisse de St. Grégoire, 3 August 1845.

to girls in rural parishes in 1835 that later existed in St. Grégoire.⁵⁷ Studies of the history of education in France show a similar trend: fewer opportunities for girl's schooling and thus a lower enrolment rate, especially before mid-century.⁵⁸

Table 7.4: Attendance by Gender in St. Grégoire Schools, 1835, 1838, 1844 and 1851.

	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Boys</u>
1835	130 (46%)	150 (54%)
1838	32 (35%)	60 (65%)
1844	186 (44%)	237 (56%)
1851	240 (45%)	297 (55%)

Sources: Lesage, chapter 3; Canada, Ms Census, St. Grégoire, 1844, 1852.

The minutes of the school commissioners' meetings provide some information on who was hired to teach the youth of St. Grégoire, what subjects the teachers were responsible for, and their annual income. Most frequently the curriculum consisted of French, arithmetic, geography, and history. Occasionally a teacher was hired to teach English only, or one of the regular teachers would teach English and/or penmanship in addition to the regular curriculum. Contrary to what René Hardy and Jean Roy suggest, there is no indication that catechism formed part of the curriculum. In their study of the Mauricie region, these historians claim that "les lois scolaires de 1841 à 1846 confèrent à l'Église du Québec un pouvoir de contrôle de l'appareil scolaire; l'école sera alors autant, sinon plus qu'auparavant, le principal moyen de catéchisation des enfants... Les enfants de cinq à seize ans ont la possibilité d'y faire quelques années d'étude, au cours desquelles le catéchisme est la principale matière d'enseignement."⁵⁹ In St. Grégoire, evidence suggests that catechism was taught in the church. Thus, a

⁵⁷ Andrée Dufour, "Diversité institutionnelle et fréquentation scolaire dans l'île de Montréal en 1825 et en 1835," RHAF, 41 (1988): 523.

⁵⁸ Raymond Grew and Patrick J. Harrigan, "Girls' schooling in nineteenth-century France," Paper presented to the Meeting of the Western Society for French History, Albuquerque, October 24-27, 1983.

⁵⁹ See René Hardy and Jean Roy, "Encadrement social et mutation de la culture religieuse en Mauricie, 1850-1900," Questions de culture, no. 5 (1983): 69-70.

petition from the inhabitants of St. Célestin (a part of St. Grégoire until 1853) to Msgr. Turgeon in 1850 requested that the area be permitted to have its own church given the distance to the church in St. Grégoire. One of the problems caused by this distance was "l'impossibilité pour leurs enfants de profiter des catéchismes et autres instructions religieuses."⁶⁰

There was a marked disparity in St. Grégoire between the salaries paid to male teachers, and those paid to female teachers (see Table 7.5). Female teachers dominated the schools of St. Grégoire, particularly by 1851, when they formed four-fifths of the teaching force. In fact, by 1853, only the model school for boys in the village of St. Grégoire was supervised by a male teacher; the parish's ten other schools all had female teachers.⁶¹ These figures lend weight to studies which suggest that female teachers came to dominate the teaching profession in the later nineteenth century because they could be hired at a cheaper rate.⁶²

The tenuous economic position of St. Grégoire's teachers resulting from their low salaries was exacerbated by the tardy manner in which the government grant was received. This was not a problem unique to St. Grégoire, as we have noted earlier.⁶³

⁶⁰See AEN, St. Célestin Collection, Petition of the inhabitants of St. Célestin to Archbishop Turgeon, St. Célestin, 24 November 1850.

⁶¹See AETR, Box 1, File 1, no. 13, Annual Report on St. Grégoire, 15 April 1853.

⁶²In Lower Canada in 1854 women comprised 63.5 percent of the teachers in Roman Catholic public schools. By 1874 this figure had risen to 81.3 percent. Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher and Jean-Claude Robert, Quebec. A History 1867-1929 (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1983), p. 192. See also Marta Danylewycz, "Sexes et classes sociales dans l'enseignement: le cas de Montréal à la fin du 19e siècle," in Maîtresses du Maison, maîtresses d'école. Femmes, famille et éducation dans l'histoire du Québec, eds. Nadia Fahmy-Eid and Micheline Dumont (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1983), pp. 93-118, especially, pp. 94, 100-01. For Ontario, see Chad Gaffield, Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict, pp. 113-15.

⁶³Michael Piva has noted that the government of the United Province was in a very precarious financial situation at this time largely because of heavy expenditures earlier in the decade for canal construction. The problem peaked in 1849, when the government was so short of cash that it had to pay out military pensions in provincial debentures rather than in cash. This financial crisis might well account for the failure to send out the education grants when they were due. See Michael J. Piva, "Continuity and Crisis:

Table 7.5: Average Salaries of Teachers in St. Grégoire, 1845-1851.

	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>No.of Males</u>	<u>No.of Females</u>
1845	£24.0.0	£19.5.0	5	8
1846	£35.0.0	£21.5.0	3	8
1847	£31.10.0	£25.5.0	3	6
1848	£29.0.0	£24.15.0	4	8
1849	£29.0.0	£24.15.0	4	8
1850	£35.0.0	£19.4.0	2	10
1851	£34.10.0	£20.10.0	2	8

Sources: AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire-le-Grand, 1845-1851.

However, the increasing discontent generated in that parish over the failure of the government to provide the teachers' wages in a timely fashion is significant in light of subsequent resistance to the school system. In 1847 the secretary-treasurer of the school corporation, G.A. Bourgeois, noted that five months had elapsed since the end of the school year, and yet the grant had not been received. The result, reported Bourgeois, was that "les Instituteurs commencent à trouver le tems long."⁶⁴ In 1848 one of the teachers was appointed briefly as secretary-treasurer; he wrote to Meilleur requesting the government grant be sent "car tous les maîtres sont dans un grand besoin d'argent."⁶⁵ By November, 1849, the situation had deteriorated considerably. Again, the grant was late and teachers were without funds. Father Calixte Marquis, the incumbent secretary-treasurer, claimed that they could no longer get credit in the parish, and as a result they "crient misère." One month later Marquis again corresponded with Meilleur regarding the plight of the teachers. He stated:

Nos instituteurs sont dans la désolation. Voilà bientôt six mois que l'année dernière est finie, et puis l'argent ne vient pas. On ne veut plus leur vendre à crédit. Ils sont vraiment dans une position pénible; c'est décourageant. Sous un tel régime la cause de l'éducation souffre nécessairement beaucoup. Le Gouvernement par sa lenteur à payer fait presque autant de tort que les

⁶³(cont'd) Francis Hincks and Canadian Economic Policy," CHR, 66 (1985): 185-210, especially pp. 192-93.

⁶⁴ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 300, no. 1355, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 6 November 1847.

⁶⁵See *ibid.*, Box 302, no. 581, L. Moise Laplante to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, n.d.

Éteignoirs.⁶⁶

Five weeks later, St. Grégoire would erupt in riots against the men who were attempting a new property assessment for school taxes. Surely the failure of the government to furnish its half of the school funds, and the consequent misery of the parish's teachers, was one cause of those riots.

In his Annual Report for 1847 Meilleur pointed out that there were means open to school commissioners to improve the financial lot of the poorly paid teachers.⁶⁷ One of these lay in encouraging parents to take teachers into their homes, thus providing them with free board and meals. In St. Grégoire this practise was not the norm. In fact the housing of teachers in that parish seemed a rather haphazard affair; there was no apparent connection between a teacher's salary level and the school commissioners' decision to provide lodging for that teacher. For example, the school commissioners undertook to procure a house for Louis Laplante, the highest paid teacher in the parish in 1849, at £50 per year. Laplante was required to supply his own fire wood.⁶⁸ One of the more poorly paid teachers was Joseph Prince, who received only £20 per annum in 1849, yet, in contrast to Laplante, Prince was responsible for procuring both his own lodging and wood supply. Only very occasionally were parents expected to supply both house and firewood.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., Box 311, no. 1701, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 14 November 1849; and *ibid.*, no. 1836, Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 19 December 1849.

⁶⁷ *JLAC*, 7 (1848), Appendix P.

⁶⁸ The minutes of the school commissioners meetings do not specify what "logement" meant. Presumably it referred to a house which would be used as both the schoolhouse and the teacher's home.

⁶⁹ See AUQTR, *Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'Écoles de la paroisse de St. Grégoire*, 17 June 1849. Where the minutes indicate who was responsible for providing lodging and wood, the most common arrangement was that the school commissioners would provide lodging and either the parents or the teacher would provide heating wood. See *ibid.*, 1845-51.

Monthly fees were another method of alleviating the financial needs of teachers. The School Act of 1846 required the school commissioners to fix the monthly rate which was to be paid by the parents of all children of age to attend school. The fees were not to exceed two shillings per month, and were "to be diminished at the discretion of the Commissioners, according to the means of the parents, age of the children, and course of instruction, but not to be less than three pence per month."⁷⁰ In his report of 1848, Meilleur was critical of school commissioners who complained of having insufficient funds with which to pay their teachers when these same officials had failed to collect the monthly fees required by the law. St. Grégoire was one of the parishes which did not collect these fees. A letter written by Calixte Marquis to Meilleur in September, 1846 suggests why certain school corporations were reluctant to institute monthly fees. After describing the anti-tax campaign led by Cressé and Vondenvelden in Nicolet and Yamaska counties in the summer and autumn of 1846, Father Marquis asked the superintendent if school commissioners could neglect to collect monthly fees if enough money had been collected through taxes and the government grant to meet school expenses. He suggested that this would be a way to "calmer les mécontents." He went on to ask whether it was permissible under the law, to collect monthly fees from certain school districts where they were required, but to not collect them in districts where they were not needed. Finally, he asked if "dans le cas où on aurait cette liberté, pourrait-on s'en servir pour l'exiger seulement de ceux qui s'obstinent à ne vouloir pas envoyer leurs enfants aux écoles?"⁷¹ Clearly, school supporters in St. Grégoire and neighbouring parishes sensed the habitants' receptivity to anti-tax rhetoric, and feared that the imposition of monthly fees would not be tolerated. The *êteignoirs'* claims that "les taxes ne pourraient qu'augmenter d'année en année," and "dans peu d'années les habitants

⁷⁰9 Vict., cap. 27, sect. 21, art. 12.

⁷¹ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 295, no. 1220, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 30 September 1846.

seraient forcés de vendre leurs terres"⁷² were potent warnings to farmers whose livelihoods had been threatened by crop failures. In this context, school officials believed it expedient to offer teachers a minimal salary rather than incur the wrath of tax payers by collecting monthly fees in addition to property taxes. The fees were seen by Marquis as a potential weapon, however, to be used against those who had made the decision to boycott the schools.

In July, 1849, Dr. Bourgeois wrote to Meilleur to describe the precarious financial position of St. Grégoire's school corporation. He offered his opinion that monthly fees should be collected to improve the situation. The problem, he suggested, lay in the reticence of the school commissioners:

Les Commissaires reculent devant cette tâche lorsqu'on leur en parle, mais pour moi j'irais même jusqu'à conseiller (si l'on me le permet) le Bureau de l'éducation de notifier officiellement les Commissaires d'école de cette paroisse qu'ils aient à prélever le taux du mois, s'ils ne veulent pas être sujets à encourir les pénalités imposées par la 9ième Victoria chap. 27.⁷³

Clearly, the habitants were no more receptive to monthly fees in 1849 than they had been three years earlier, and the school corporation feared the repercussions of ordering their collection.

Monthly fees were not instituted in St. Grégoire until June, 1852. At that time they were set at "trois à six sous ou trois deniers courant par enfant," but parents had the option of paying this amount in cordwood or other products. That the habitants continued to be successful at avoiding the monthly payments is suggested in a letter written by the school inspector, B. Maurault, to Meilleur in November, 1852. Maurault complained of St. Grégoire specifically, that "je ne vois pas pourquoi les maîtresses sont

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., Box 308, no. 887, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 17 July 1849. Bourgeois went on to say: "Vous sentez bien, M. le Surintendant, que c'est une suggestion confidentielle que je vous fait, car l'expérience m'a appris à ne pas me mêler trop ouvertement de ces affaires là." Again we see Bourgeois attempting to influence school affairs although he no longer had an official position in the school corporation.

obligées d'acheter du bois pour chauffer leurs écoles lorsque les gens se sont obligés d'en fournir au lieu du taux du mois. Voyez donc à cela. Il faut de toute nécessité que les gens payent le taux mensuel ou chauffent les Écoles et que les Commissaires agissent pour cela et sans retarder." The teachers thus continued to bear the financial burden caused in part by the habitants' efforts to avoid taxes, and the school commissioners' refusal to enforce the law.⁷⁴

The problem of monthly fees was a minor issue, however, compared with the growing tension over property taxes in the late 1840s. The minutes of the St. Grégoire school commissioners' meetings provide one indication of this. In 1847 and 1848, the president of the school commissioners was authorized by the corporation to "poursuivre tous ceux qui refusent ou négligent de payer leurs cotisations." In July, 1849 a new motion was passed stating that both the president and the secretary-treasurer "soient autorisés à, et même requis de, poursuivre sans délai tous ceux qui sont en arrière dans le paiement de leur cotisation ou qui pourront le devenir dans le cours de la présente année scolaire [sic]." The growing urgency to collect overdue taxes becomes even more apparent in December of 1849 when the school commissioners stated in their minutes that "il est d'une absolue nécessité de faire rentrer sans délai les arrérages dus à la Corporation des Commissaires," and that the president and the secretary-treasurer were authorized to take immediate action.⁷⁵

The school commissioners did act against a recalcitrant property owner in 1847. Showing some frustration, Bourgeois wrote about the case to Meilleur, explaining that the proceedings were causing the school officials considerable problems:

Les Commissaires ont intenté une action devant le magistrat de la paroisse contre un individu qui refuse de payer sa cotisation. La Cour l'a condamné à

⁷⁴See also, AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'École de la paroisse de St. Grégoire, 26 June 1852 and 11 November 1852.

⁷⁵See *ibid.*, 27 June 1847, 3 November 1847, 2 November 1848, 23 July 1849, and 2 December 1849.

payer avec dépens; mais il veut revenir en appel..., et je ne sais quand ça finira. Ceci est un inconvénient, entre plusieurs autres, qui se rencontre dans l'exécution de la loi, et qui peut dans tous les cas mettre les Commissaires dans l'embarras. En effet on devait avoir certain moyen plus court que cela, pour recouvrer les cotisations. Il ya a tant de déprédations à prendre qu'on est obligé d'employer un avocat auquel la loi n'accorde pas d'honoraires; en sorte que les Commissaires sont obligé de faire des dépenses qu'ils ne peuvent recouvrer. Enfin il n'y a pas encore de warrant de saisie d'émané, [sic] la chose traîne, les esprits s'échauffent, un grand nombre de contribuables ne veulent payer leur second semestre que quand l'affaire sera décidée, et pendant ce tems là les Commissaires nont [sic] pas d'argent assez pour payer les Instituteurs, et faire leur retour.⁷⁶

Thus, although the mechanisms were in place to pursue debtors, there were enough obstacles in the process to frustrate school commissioners and to encourage greater numbers of citizens to withhold their taxes. That a significant number of habitants were behind in their payments by 1849 is evident from Bourgeois' push for the collection of monthly fees, and the school corporation's order that the president and secretary-treasurer take immediate action against debtors in December of that year. Moreover, on January 13, 1850, the school commissioners gave a leave of absence to one of the teachers to permit him to act as secretary to the newly appointed assessors. A new evaluation of the parish was to be done and the school corporation clearly wanted it done correctly, "afin d'éviter les difficultés qu'occasionent très souvent les défauts de l'ancienne évaluation."⁷⁷

Thus, by the beginning of the new year of 1850, several factors served to create an atmosphere of tension around the issue of schooling in St. Grégoire. A segment of the

⁷⁶NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 210, filed with no. 3990 of 1847, G.A. Bourgeois to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 27 July 1847. In January, 1848 Father Harper complained to Meilleur that few people had paid their taxes as they were awaiting the outcome of the charge against A. Thibodeau. See ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 301, no. 63, Jean Harper to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 21 January 1848.

⁷⁷AUQTR, Registre des Délibérations des Commissaires d'Écoles de la paroisse de St. Grégoire, 13 January 1850. The school commissioners might have been motivated to order the new assessment, in part, by the fact that the amendments in the school act of 1849 increased the penalties against school commissioners who neglected to order an assessment. Henceforth, they were not only to be fined £2.10 (as in the 1846 act), they would also be fined five shillings "for each and every day that the said Commissioners shall have been in default in causing the said valuation to be made." See 12 Vict., cap. 50, sect. 24.

population was tardy in the payment of school taxes, which caused the school commissioners to threaten prompt action against the individuals involved. Moreover, the difficulty encountered by school commissioners in collecting assessments caused them to discuss the implementation of monthly fees - a measure which could only be viewed with alarm by hard-pressed farmers. The habitants' concern was exacerbated by the government's laxness in providing the school grant, particularly in late 1849 when the teachers were so desperately in need of their wages. Just at this point a new property evaluation was ordered - a chilling reminder to habitants of the drain on their resources caused by the state's new social legislation. It was this charged atmosphere that brought St. Grégoire into open revolt against the school law.

CHAPTER VIII

POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE GUERRE DES ÉTEIGNOIRS

It is clear that, in the late 1840s, tension had mounted between habitants and school promoters in St. Grégoire over the issues of property taxes and tardy government grants. We know too that a group of wealthy landowners, acting in its own self-interest, had fostered feelings of fear and dissatisfaction among the farmers of Nicolet and Yamaska counties regarding the new school system. Through petitions and speeches these men pointed out both real and imagined flaws in the school law. In doing so they particularly stressed the state's intention to institute every conceivable kind of tax once the school taxes had been accepted by the general public.

Did the habitants' growing reluctance to pay those taxes indicate that they had passively absorbed the message and reacted to it - that they were the easily swayed "population aveugle" that many of the bourgeoisie perceived them to be?¹ Or, as Michael Cross suggests, were they destined by their conservative nature to resist any attempt on the part of the government at social reform?² In order to comprehend the nature of popular response to the school taxes we must examine their actions during the turbulent year of 1850. The difficulty of gauging the motivation of a segment of society which rarely leaves a written record of its thoughts is obvious. One solution is to

¹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, no. 1287 filed with no. 1339 of 1850, C. Marquis to [Provincial Secretary], St. Grégoire, 13 March 1850. In a letter to his friend Bois, Meilleur characterized the peasants as "nos habitants égarés par de mauvais sujets qui spéculent sur leur ignorance en revivant leurs préjugés." See NA, Manuscrits Dr. J.B. Meilleur. Succession Bois, V1-4 1850, Meilleur to Bois, Montreal, 21 February 1850.

²Cross, "The Laws are like Cobwebs," p. 120, takes Vondenvelden at face value, and accepts his assessment that the habitants were too conservative to accept school reform. This is surprising, given that Vondenvelden and his allies were clearly the group which wished to maintain the status quo in the countryside. Vondenvelden's conservatism and disdain for the peasantry are evident in a comment made about the habitants to the governor: "Their manner of existing is indigenous; owing to the soil and climate where they labour, any alteration cannot radically be effected without also causing in a certain degree annihilation to take place." NA, RG7 G14, Vol. 19, pp. 10452-61, Wm. Vondenvelden to Sir, Berthier, 31 January 1847.

attempt to read motivation from behaviour. St. Grégoire and its neighbouring parishes experienced the most aggressive opposition to the school law that occurred in Lower Canada. By focussing attention on popular participation in the school revolt in those parishes, we should be able to shed light on habitant motivation, and determine to what extent it was shaped by elite leadership.

Violent Resistance to the School Laws

Dismayed equally by the mistakes in the previous property assessment, and the increasing reluctance of property owners to pay their school taxes, the St. Grégoire school commissioners ordered a new evaluation to be commenced on January 25, 1851. Seemingly, all went well during the first day of the evaluation, and the assessors set about to continue their task the following morning. While evaluating property about three miles out of the village, the assessors were suddenly confronted by dozens of carriages and carts loaded with men. In short order the rioters had surrounded the assessors and demanded in a threatening manner that they not proceed with the assessment. To ensure compliance with their demands, the crowd then removed the assessment roll and all other papers in the assessors' possession.³ The school officials were marched into the village, warned again not to recommence the assessment, and then set free.

The magistrate responsible for acting against these rioters was J.E. Turcotte, of Trois-Rivières. For reasons that he did not fully explain, but which might have been linked to his sympathy for the anti-tax movement, Turcotte chose not to make any arrests immediately after the riot. Instead, he waited for the opening of the Queen's

³NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, with no. 335 of 1850, J.E. Turcotte to James Leslie, Trois-Rivières, 20 February 1850. See also *ibid.*, no. 1287 of 1850, C. Marquis to J. Leslie, St. Grégoire, 13 March 1850.

Bench on February 2, and then charged five men with riot. In what would prove to be a pattern during that year of riots and arson, the Grand Jury promptly rejected the charge and released the accused. To celebrate this victory, sympathizers in St. Grégoire donned masks and paraded through the village the night of their release. Stopping at the houses of assessors and school commissioners, the masked *êteignoirs* ordered the school officials out of their homes, "pour leur faire promettre de ne pas faire fonctionner la loi des Écoles, avec menaces d'incendier leurs propriétés s'ils osaient agir."⁴

This night of protestation was by no means to be the end of the turbulence in St. Grégoire. According to Turcotte, the "scènes de désordre" continued almost every night. Finally, in an attempt to restore order in the village, the magistrate issued an arrest warrant against rioters not charged after the initial disturbance in January. On February 14, the Grand Constable, the deputy Sheriff and one assistant arrived in St. Grégoire to carry out the arrests. Their mission was quickly aborted, however, as they were met by a crowd of two hundred men who had been summoned from the concessions by signal horns. The habitants quickly seized the authorities and took them prisoner, but they later made their escape and fled from the village "poursuivis qu'ils étaient par une vingtaine de voitures chargés d'hommes."⁵

The next night, thirty to forty masked men visited the farm of Norbert Beliveau, one of the assessors and the brother-in-law of the priest, Jean Harper. Before the night was through, Beliveau's barn and all its contents including grain, vehicles and animals, had been consumed by fire.⁶ This escalation of the disturbances, from threats and

⁴Ibid., Turcotte to Leslie, 20 February 1850.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, filed with no. 750 of 1851, Solr. Genl.'s Draft of Unconditional pardon in favour of Jean Sabin Hébert under sentence of two years imprisonment for the crime of Perjury, Quebec, 21 November 1851. The damaged property was valued at £300. On March 1, the Governor General in Council issued a proclamation offering a reward of £250 for the apprehension of the arsonists. See *ibid.*, Vol. 272, with no. 335 of 1850, Extract from a report of the Honorable the Executive

processions to actual destruction of property, prompted Turcotte to take more serious measures against the rioters. After consulting with the other justices of the peace in Trois-Rivières, Turcotte requested that troops be sent to the area from Sorel. The request was short and to the point: "Very serious riots in this District - Great violence and incendiarism committed. The civil authorities set at defiance and unable to execute warrants against offenders. Will the General Commanding order a Company of Soldiers to be sent and quartered here to assist the Civil authorities."⁷ Lt. Col. William Hanson, a long-time resident of St. Grégoire, suggested to Turcotte that troops would not be needed as the riot leaders had promised him that they would surrender themselves peaceably. Hanson's standing with these men might well have been due to his firm stand against taxes in the election campaign of 1848, in which he was a candidate. In a campaign letter, Hanson had proclaimed that he opposed "toute espèce de taxes", and that he would resist "de tout mon pouvoir à leur introduction dans le pays."⁸ Turcotte was quite willing to comply with Hanson's proposal, but certain "personnes respectables" in St. Grégoire urged Turcotte to send troops, claiming that the whole village was to be burned that night by the Irish from Ste. Monique.⁹ While Turcotte found these claims to be rather vague, he nevertheless asked that the troops be sent. Forty-two soldiers, accompanied by Hanson, thus entered St. Grégoire on Monday, February 18.¹⁰ As Hanson had predicted, the village was tranquil and no resistance was offered to the armed force. The next day, as promised, thirty-seven men surrendered

⁶(cont'd) council on Matters of State to the Provincial Secretary, 1 March 1850.

⁷Ibid., filed with no. 334 of 1850, J.E. Turcotte and seven other officials to Lt. Col. Wetherall, Trois Rivières, 15 February 1850.

⁸See Journal des Trois-Rivières, 22 April 1848. An Englishman, Hanson had lived in Lower Canada for over twenty years. He was a stipendiary magistrate during the Rebellions and was praised by an unknown correspondent of the Journal des Trois-Rivières for the "moderation and justice" he showed at that time. See ibid., 18 December 1847.

⁹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, with no. 335 of 1850, W.C. Hanson to James Leslie, Trois Rivières, 20 February 1850.

¹⁰Ibid., Turcotte to Leslie, 20 February 1850.

themselves to the Lieutenant Colonel.¹¹ After paying bail they were released, and Turcotte ordered the troops withdrawn, "malgré de nouvelles et bien pressantes représentations de la part du parti opposé aux émeutiers."¹²

This "opposing party" consisted of men such as the village doctor, G.A. Bourgeois, and the priest, Calixte Marquis, both of whom wrote letters to the government critical of Turcotte's handling of the riots. Bourgeois, for example, found it quite remarkable that Turcotte hesitated to send the troops, and suggested that the delay in their arrival had caused great consternation among the villagers. In consequence, according to the doctor, "pas moins de trente familles avaient abandonné leur demeure pour se réfugier ailleurs." Equally incomprehensible to Bourgeois was Turcotte's rapid dismissal of the troops after the arrests were made - a sure signal to the rioters, he believed, that their activities could continue undiminished: "Les émeutiers, qui ont tout remarqué, se croient certains d'impunité... Dejà il chantent victoire!"¹³ According to Bourgeois, the lack of repressive measures left the rioters feeling free to continue their nightly revellies and threatening behaviour, much to the alarm of the community in general. In mid-March, the doctor reported on the consequences of this state of affairs:

Que de course de nuit mascarades, charivaris, cris, vociférations, insultes, menaces qui n'ont pas manqué d'avoir des suites funestes, en jetant l'épouvante parmi les citoyens pasibles [sic]. Des personnes avancés en âge, mortes en partie par la frayeur; des enfants nés avant terme et morts instantanément [sic]; un grand nombre de maladies sérieuses et dont les causes ne sont autres que la frayeur.¹⁴

Given the conflicts between wealthy landowners, of whom Turcotte was one, and the

¹¹Hanson was thanked by the governor for his "proceedings and interference in restoring Order at St. Grégoire, and using your influence with the people of that place in inducing them to submit to law and justice." See NA, RG4 C2, Vol. 42, no. 366, Gov. Gen. to Lt. Col. Hanson, 5 March 1850.

¹²NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, with no. 335 of 1850, Hanson to Leslie, St. Grégoire, 20 February 1850; and Turcotte to Leslie, 20 February 1850.

¹³Ibid., filed with no. 570 of 1850, St. Grégoire, G.A. Bourgeois to L.H. LaFontaine, 14 March 1850.

¹⁴Ibid.

village notables of St. Grégoire, one can assume that Bourgeois had exaggerated the impact of the nightly revolts on the population of that parish in an attempt to call the magistrate's judgement into question.¹⁵ However, certain "respectable" residents of the parish did feel threatened enough by the popular agitation to sell their property and move away, or to rent it out and settle at a safe distance during the unrest. Ralph Johnson, one of the commissioners assigned to investigate the St. Grégoire riots, confirmed that wealthy villagers felt particularly victimized by the nightly processions. In a report dated September 29, 1850, Johnson stated that in the period after Beliveau's barn was burned, "the most wealthy & respectable inhabitants of the parish seriously contemplated removal therefrom, and did actually sleep away from their domiciles, in concealment, for a fortnight."¹⁶

That the disturbances were maintained on a nightly basis for weeks following the initial riots points out the widespread level of support for the revolt. Another measure of popular sympathy was the fact that only one person from St. Grégoire attended the weekly market in Trois-Rivières the day after Beliveau's barn was burned. As the Journal des Trois-Rivières reported, "ce fait est assez significatif de ce qui a lieu dans cette paroisse, et indique assez la proportion des habitants qui y prennent part aux malheureuses affaires qui s'y passe."¹⁷ The enquiry commissioners, Johnson and Delisle, were later to estimate that three-quarters of the parish were in one way or another

¹⁵In a letter to LaFontaine written on February 16, 1851, Lewis Drummond referred to the complaints of Bourgeois, Marquis and Harper against Turcotte as "une affaire du parti." See NA, MG24 B14, no. 684, Drummond to LaFontaine, Montreal, 16 February 1851.

¹⁶Ibid., Vol. 287, no. 187 of 1850, R.B. Johnson and A.M. Delisle to James Leslie, Saint Michel d'Yamaska, 29 September 1850. One of those who moved permanently was the president of the school commissioners, an obvious target of the éteignoirs: "Le Président des Commissaires d'école a sacrifié pour un vil prix une très belle propriété et est aller chercher ailleurs la paix et la protection." See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, St. Grégoire, Bourgeois to LaFontaine, 14 March 1850.

¹⁷Journal des Trois-Rivières, 16 February 1850.

involved in the various episodes of unrest.¹⁸

In January and February that unrest had consisted of two large riots, followed by the nightly charivaris described above.¹⁹ March was the occasion for yet another riot, this time situated in Bécancour, but with the active participation of large numbers of St. Grégoire residents. The precipitating factor for this riot was the same as that of the first riot in January, for it was the intention of the Nicolet municipal council, meeting in Bécancour for the trimesterly session, to order that a new assessment roll be taken to replace that stolen by rioters in January. On the eve of the meeting, two of the councillors, Dr. Bourgeois of St. Grégoire and J. Jutras of Bécancour, got wind of a plan by Luc-Michel Cressé to gather a large crowd in order to challenge the municipal council. As noted in an earlier chapter, Bourgeois claimed that the object of Cressé and the other *êteignoir* leaders was to steal the council's papers and murder the councillors in order to prevent a new property assessment. With prior knowledge of the plan, Bourgeois and Jutras were able to remove the council papers to a safe place and fortify themselves in Jutras' home. Armed with guns and barricaded in advance, the councillors, along with seven individuals who agreed to assist them, were ready for the expected attack on Monday, March 12.²⁰

Towards nine o'clock that morning, a group of about sixty Irish from Ste. Monique marched slowly into Bécancour. This was the vanguard of the rioters and seemingly it was the Irish who were most agitated in their behaviour. According to Bourgeois, they

¹⁸NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 287, no. 2187 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to Leslie, Saint Michel d'Yamaska, 29 September 1850.

¹⁹Charivari is the term used to describe the ritualized, nocturnal gatherings of masked individuals who threatened school supporters. The charivari will be analyzed in more detail below.

²⁰The details of the Bécancour riot are given in *ibid.*, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, Bourgeois to LaFontaine, St. Grégoire, 14 March 1850. See also *ibid.*, filed with no. 1207 of 1850, Marquis to J. Leslie, St. Grégoire, 13 March 1850.

were "armés de batons criant des porte voix [sic] & poussant de vociférations épouvantables." Following closely behind the Irish came French Canadians from St. Grégoire and St. Jean Baptiste de Nicolet. Although Bourgeois described the habitants as seeming more mild-mannered than the Irish, they too would periodically let out "des hurlements effrayants." The rioters numbered between 400 and 500, and, according to the vicar Marquis, they had been consuming alcohol before their arrival.²¹

The crowd milled around Jutras' house threatening to enter and take the councillors to the council chamber. Aware, however, that the councillors were well-armed, the rioters in the end chose not to make the attack, and the councillors refused to hold their meeting because they did not have a quorum.²² In apparent frustration at this impasse Luc-Michel Cressé made the speech described earlier, in which he criticized the Assembly and the clergy for bleeding the people dry with taxes. Following Cressé's address to the rioters, they left Bécancour without having made any attack on the councillors. As Bourgeois noted, "quoique nous eussions été prévenus qu'ils nous attaqueraient ils se contentèrent, en passant devant la maison, de pousser des cris & des vociférations, en brandissant leurs bâtons."²³

Before dispersing, the rioters marched to St. Grégoire where they set themselves upon the house of Joseph Larivière, the region's bailiff. Because of his official duties, Larivière was known as "l'homme qui prend le monde pour la taxe." Thwarted in their attempt to destroy the municipal council's papers, the rioters turned their ire upon the

²¹Ibid. Marquis stated there were 500, Bourgeois that there were 400. In his study of the charivari, Greer notes that participants often consumed alcohol before starting the ritual. He suggests alcohol served two functions; it helped dissolve inhibitions about victimizing someone known to the participants, and, drunkenness could provide an excuse for their actions if questioned later by authorities. See Allan Greer, "From Folklore to Revolution," pp. 29-30.

²²NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, Bourgeois to LaFontaine, St. Grégoire, 14 March 1850. The councillors and their supporters had twenty-four rifles and fourteen pistols.

²³Ibid.

man responsible for collecting the school and municipal taxes. With the avowed aim "to catch him and kill him," the Irish in the group entered Larivière's house, but they were once again to be disappointed, for Larivière escaped out a back window as they stormed in through the front.²⁴

The crowd disbanded after failing to capture Larivière, but that same night unknown assailants pelted a house in St. Grégoire with rocks. Little damage was reported, but the following night three different houses sustained considerable damage when their window sashes were smashed. Two of these buildings were school-houses - the only attacks on schools reported in St. Grégoire. The other houses belonged to a known anti-*éteignoir*. Apart from these specific attacks the parish continued to experience gatherings of masked individuals who would make threats of physical violence or arson against anti-*éteignoirs*. Father Marquis was visited three times by certain of the rioters who attempted to get the books of the school corporation from him. They were unsuccessful, as he had deposited the papers for safe-keeping at the courthouse in Trois-Rivières. Marquis was not to be left in peace, however. In March he wrote to the government asking that a reward be offered for the capture of "des scélérats qui brisent les châssis & tondent les chevaux." In fact, Marquis was one of those who had been victimized, the *éteignoirs* having cut off the mane and tail of his mare. According to Marquis, this was his reward for "des services que j'ai rendus à la paroisse, comme secrétaire-trésorier des Commissaire d'École."²⁵ This was not, however, to be the final attack on the priest. In May he wrote to Meilleur and described how "les *éteignoirs* m'ont rendu le service d'empoisonner ma jument; c'était trop peu de l'avoir

²⁴ Ibid. Larivière was later charged with the arson of Louis Beaubien's outbuildings on October 2, 1850. A resident of Nicolet parish, Beaubien was a close ally of Luc-Michel Cressé. The arson was probably an act of revenge by Larivière for the threats made against him. See *ibid.*, Vol. 287, no. 2301 of 1850, R.B. Johnson to James Leslie, Nicolet, 22 October 1850.

²⁵ Ibid., Vol. 272, Bourgeois to LaFontaine, 14 March 1850 and Marquis to Provincial Secretary, 13 March 1850. See also *ibid.*, filed with no. 570 of 1850, C. Marquis to [Sir], St. Grégoire, 15 March 1850.

tondue de la manière la plus ridicule."²⁶

While the March riots were the last large-scale episode of popular unrest in which St. Grégoire habitants participated, neighbouring parishes continued to experience outbursts of violence in the ensuing months. Because there is evidence of close communication between some of these parishes and St. Grégoire, one must assume that at least some of its residents were privy to the plans for action elsewhere, and that a few of them might have participated. To accurately assess the nature of popular discontent in St. Grégoire, it is therefore important to sketch out the actions taken in surrounding villages.

The first of these took place the day before the Bécancour riot, on Sunday, March 11. The catalyst, just as in Bécancour, was the trimester meeting of the Yamaska municipal council, which was to be held in the parish of St. François du Lac. The councillors apparently received no early warning of the impending attack, for they were caught by the rioters in the middle of their meeting. Over one hundred individuals burst into the council room, breaking down a partition in the process. The rioters broke some furniture and attempted to "take forcible and violent possession of the books, records and papers" of the council. In order to prevent council business from proceeding, the invaders laid seige to the council room for the next three hours making "a great deal of noise" and threatening the councillors.²⁷

The mayor of the Yamaska council, Moysse Fortier, reported these events to the provincial secretary the following day, and his succinct statement suggests the impotence felt by the councillors who had been confronted by the rioters. It also reveals the generalized resentment felt by habitants about some of the reforms being

²⁶ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 312, no. 432, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 7 May 1850.

²⁷NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, no. 2032 filed with no. 750 of 1851, Draft of pardon for certain prisoners, Solicitor General, Quebec, 22 November 1851.

implemented by local officials. Fortier claimed that if the people of Yamaska did not have a change of heart, there would soon be no need for municipal officials, for in their attack on the council chambers, the habitants had registered their profound disapproval of the activities of local government, "en criant, point de conseil, point d'école, point de cour de commissaires ni même de bureau d'enregistrement."²⁸

The riots in St. François du Lac and Bécancour proved alarming enough to the government that it established the commission of enquiry, discussed above, at the end of April. Two of the commissioners, Ralph Johnson and A.M. Delisle, visited the largely Irish parish of Ste. Monique in mid-May in an attempt to force its citizens to make the school law function. The previous December Calixte Marquis had observed to Meilleur that any attempt to enforce the school law in Ste. Monique would meet with strong resistance. A previous attempt to organize a property assessment there, had ended with the assessors being beaten up and badly frightened.²⁹ Just as in St. Grégoire, the papers and assessment records were a prime target of the attack; these had been grabbed away from the assessors, "thrown into a mud-hole, and jumped upon and destroyed by a portion of the population assembled for that purpose, men, women, & children assisting."³⁰

When the commissioners visited Ste. Monique in May the situation had not changed: no schools had yet been opened and there was firm opposition to the levying of school taxes.³¹ In an attempt to resolve this opposition, Johnson and Delisle spoke to parish residents following the Sunday mass on May 20. They put pressure on the school

²⁸ Ibid., Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, M. Fortier to J. Leslie, St. David, 12 March 1850.

²⁹ ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 311, no. 1836, C. Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 19 December 1849.

³⁰ This is the only evidence in the St. Grégoire Riot Papers that women participated in the riots. See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 286, no. 2187 of 1850, R.B. Johnson and A.M. Delisle to J. Leslie, Saint Michel d'Yamaska, 29 September 1850.

³¹ Ibid.

assessors to carry out a property assessment in order that taxes could be levied. These assessors had evaluated the property of the French-Canadians, but had not attempted that of the Irish, claiming they would be attacked and injured. According to Johnson the latter group had given him repeated assurances "that no opposition would be offered, and that the Assessors were only deterred by their own fears."³²

Bowing to official pressure, the assessors agreed to proceed with the property evaluation the following morning. Two Irishmen, Sullivan and Evers, were to accompany the French-Canadian assessors to act as interpreters and to guard their safety while evaluating the property of the Irish settlers.³³ Once Delisle and Johnson had left the parish, however, Sullivan and Evers both decided to back out of the agreement. Evers reported to the assessors on Sunday evening to inform them of his change of heart and to return his wages, while Sullivan simply did not appear at the assigned meeting place Monday morning.³⁴ Evers had backed out too late, however, for when he returned to his home he discovered that his barn had been burned down. He reported the fire immediately to Johnson and explained that when he arrived home,

they came about twenty two Irish men one of the gang told about having Burnt my Barn. I thought I had not a minute longer to live by there [sic] countenance, I dread to stop there any longer lest they might burn my dwelling House with a Family of twelve ten children my wife and myself, exposed to the mercy of a Lawless mob who has burned my place for no reason, but for having agreed at your request to go with the assessors on Monday morning.³⁵

³²Ibid., no. 1159 filed with no. 570 of 1850, R.B. Johnson to J. Leslie, River David, 22 May 1850.

³³The Irish settlement was spread out over twelve miles and was connected by "exceedingly bad roads". This isolation undoubtedly made the assessors more dubious about accomplishing their task without coming to harm at the hands of hostile landholders. See *ibid.*, no. 1429 filed with no. 570 of 1850, A.M. Delisle to L. Drummond, Nicolet, 14 June 1850.

³⁴Ibid., no. 1159 filed with no. 570 of 1850, Jean René, Hyacinthe Caron and Étienne Beauchemin to R.B. Johnson, Nicolet, 20 May 1850; John Evers to R.B. Johnson, Nicolet, 20 May 1850.

³⁵Ibid., Evers to Johnson, 20 May 1850.

The commissioners returned to Ste. Monique to investigate the arson, but they met with complete non-compliance as they questioned parishioners: "it was impossible to elicit one word that threw any light on the perpetrators of the burning." This solidarity among the opponents of the school tax again confronted the commissioners in mid-June when they decided to accompany the assessors to ensure the property evaluation was carried out. Johnson reported that the assessors were as thorough in their work as could be expected, "but as, in many instances, a man would deny any knowledge of who his neighbor was, and as, in other cases, where the proprietor was hidden or absent, the very wives would deny all knowledge of their own husband's name, it was no easy task, and might well be imperfectly done."³⁶ When Johnson wrote this report at the end of September, taxes had not yet been collected, nor had a school been set in operation.

St. David (or River David), a parish in Yamaska County, had enjoyed more success in establishing a school system than had Ste. Monique. The population, however, was equally opposed to taxes, and by May, 1850 was in a state of "extraordinary excitement" about the school law. Jonathan Wurtele, a prominent landowner in St. David, attributed the increased tension in his community to "the contagion of evil example and influences" from neighbouring parishes. Whatever the cause, the result was "threats of a significant nature against the Schools ... against the S.C. and against the Teachers, rendering it immensely hazardous to the S.C. to resort to compulsory measures for enforcing the payment of the School Assessment." Only £4.2.10 1/2 had been collected for that year's assessment and, as Wurtele reported to Meilleur, "nearly the whole of the parties assessed absolutely refuse to pay."³⁷ Rather than chance the open expression of violence that might follow if force was used to collect the taxes, the school commissioners of St. David closed the schools.

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. 286, no. 2187 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to J. Leslie, Saint Michel, 29 September 1850.

³⁷ ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 313, no. 659, Jonathan Wurtele to Meilleur, St. David, 15 May 1850.

In an apparent misjudgement of the population's mood, Wurtele assured Meilleur that the school closure had immediately decreased the level of excitement and alarm in the parish.³⁸ Within a few days, however, Wurtele experienced at close hand the continuing resentment of the *êteignoirs*: his saw mill, which contained lumber for construction of a model school, was burned to the ground. In the ensuing days he received threats that his grist mill would also be razed, although no further action was taken. Apart from the attack on Wurtele's property, the only other episode of violence in St. David was the vandalizing of one of the parish's school houses at the end of May.³⁹

Johnson caught and fined the suspected vandal, but he and his fellow commissioners were thwarted in their attempts to discover the identity of the arsonists by the non-compliance of the St. David habitants. Johnson reported that, after commencing their investigation, the "first thing we heard was that the people of this parish had been visited by persons from the Parish of St. Grégoire, cautioning to beware of speaking before us - and we, accordingly, could elicit nothing that gave us any insight into the perpetration of this crime."⁴⁰ The result of this pact between the two parishes was that the arsonists were never discovered.⁴¹

Between July and November, 1850, the focus of overt opposition to the school law moved to the parishes of St. Michel d'Yamaska and St. François du Lac, both in the county of Yamaska. There is no evidence of a link between the habitants of St. Grégoire and those in these two parishes. Moreover, wealthy farmers were charged in the school house fires in each of these parishes; the habitant population was not implicated except

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ NA, RG4 C1, Vol.272, no. 1252 filed with no. 570 of 1850, R.B. Johnson to J. Leslie, [no location, probably St. David] 3 June 1850; see also, *ibid.*, Vol. 286, no. 2187 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to Leslie, Saint Michel, 29 September 1850.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol. 286, no. 2187 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to Leslie, Saint Michel, 29 September 1850.

⁴¹ Ibid., Vol. 288, no. 2505 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to Leslie, Three Rivers, 23 November 1850.

in the previous riot against the municipal council in March.⁴²

There is one apparent similarity, however, between events in St. Grégoire and in both St. Michel and St. François. In all three parishes, there were several attacks made on horses; sometimes they were shorn of tail or mane, or more cruelly, their tails might be cut off completely.⁴³ Because the maiming of animals was a traditional form of popular resistance it is important to note its occurrence in association with the revolt against the school laws, and to consider its significance. Allan Greer has noted that Patriotes mutilated the animals of opposition anglophones during the Rebellions, by cutting off their tails and manes. He describes the action as "a kind of symbolic castration designed to make the animal's owner a laughing-stock when he rode it in public."⁴⁴ Certainly, the argument could be made that those responsible for the attack on Calixte Marquis' mare wished to mock the priest. Marquis himself suggested that the horse had been shorn in a "ridiculous" fashion. Moreover, the priest was viewed locally as an audacious and somewhat bellicose character who had provoked the St. Grégoire *êteignoirs* by claiming they were "trop poltron, trop lâche pour mettre à exécution les menaces de vengeance et d'incendie."⁴⁵ Given his overbearing personality and his officious way of handling school affairs in St. Grégoire, it is very likely that the habitants were delighted to see him brought down a peg or two by whoever attacked his mare.

⁴²The farmers were Fourquin and his allies, as noted in chapter five.

⁴³Johnson reported in July that he and Delisle had information against "some of the cutters of horse's tails," but explained that no action could be taken because the three-month term of the commissioners' jurisdiction was about to elapse. (The term was later extended.) See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, no. 1654 filed with no. 570 of 1850, Johnson to Leslie, St. Michel d'Yamaska, 12 July 1850. In a September letter to Delisle, Johnson wrote about someone in St. Michel who "dared not stay or he feels he would have lost his mare's tail." In this same letter Johnson indicated he was hopeful of getting information about "Chevrefils' horses ears." See ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 315, no. 1481, Johnson to Delisle, St. François du Lac, 4 September 1850.

⁴⁴Allan Greer, "From Folklore to Revolution," p. 23.

⁴⁵Cited in Lesage, p. 162. Michel Morin states that Marquis had "une personnalité très forte, voire rebelle face à l'autorité;" Morin, "La pensée colonisatrice," p. 109.

However, the mutilation must also be seen as a veiled threat against those who supported school taxes. As we noted above, the episode did not end with the shearing of Marquis' mare; two months later she was killed by poison. This was certainly more than an attempt at ridicule - it was meant both to intimidate and to punish Marquis.

Another example of the use of this kind of intimidation occurred nine years earlier in Nicolet County, in response to Sydenham's sleigh ordinances. Stephen Kenny writes that a magistrate in Nicolet who was "too zealous in his support of the sleighs, became the target of local discontent and awakened one day to find the mane and tail of his horse cut off and his own sleigh smashed to smithereens."⁴⁶ This event and the action against Marquis carried an inherent warning to the victims to cease their support of unpopular laws.

Allan Greer suggests that the practise of animal maiming may have been learned from British immigrants, and George Rudé sees the activity as a "particularly Irish" form of protest which was used with "savage fury during the post-Famine years of 1848 and 1849."⁴⁷ Since there were Irish settlers living in Nicolet County, the practise was probably picked up from them. While the practise may have been an adopted one, it seems to have taken its own form in Lower Canada, in that horses rather than cattle were the primary victims of maiming.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Kenny, "'Cahots' and Catcalls," p. 203. The punitive aspect of this form of protest is further illustrated in the actions of Patriotes returning from exile in 1839 to their home in St. Pierre-les-Becquets, Nicolet County. On their arrival one of the first things they did was to cut the tails off the horses owned by Joseph Dionne, an official who had opposed the Patriotes during the Rebellions. Hervé Biron, p. 154.

⁴⁷Greer, "From Folklore to Revolution;" George Rudé, Protest and Punishment: The story of the social and political protestors transported to Australia 1788-1868 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 5-6, 150.

⁴⁸Samuel Clark states that Irish agricultural labourers in the early nineteenth century "houghed" (hamstrung) cattle in their protest against pasture farming. See Samuel Clark, Social Origins of the Irish Land War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 71.

Parish Conflicts

Popular resistance to the school law did not manifest itself only in overt acts of aggression such as riots, threatening charivaris, or attacks on horses. It also was apparent in heightened tensions between habitants and the parish clergy, whose avid support for the school system was noted in Chapter six. In St. Grégoire, those tensions were exacerbated by resentment on the part of habitants about the meddling of both Marquis and Harper in the issue of the division of the parish. Marquis was rebuked through the killing of his mare. Jean Harper, the curé of St. Grégoire, would receive a more publicly humiliating warning about the unacceptable role he had assumed in both parish and school affairs.

It was noted in the previous chapter that both Marquis and Harper intervened when different factions within the parish were in conflict over the possible division of the parish. Simmering resentment about Harper's role in that affair first came to light during the period of open resistance to the school law in the winter of 1850. At that time men known both for their desire to have the parish divided and for their opposition to the school law drew up a petition which called for the removal of Harper as parish priest. The petition was circulated among the habitants of St. Grégoire, but, for the want of a sufficient number of signatures, it was never forwarded to the bishop in Quebec.⁴⁹ A few months later, as the enlargement of the St. Grégoire church was about to commence, some of the residents of the Pays Brulé revived the idea of dividing the parish.⁵⁰ This difficult issue, coupled with lingering resentment about the school laws and the financial burden of the church work, was to precipitate a more overt display of hostility towards the priest. Initially, there were only rumblings of discontent in the community, focussing on the perception that Harper was opposed to the new project to

⁴⁹ AEN, St. Grégoire-le-Grand, Cartable 1, Harper to Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 9 July 1850.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Harper to Cazeau, 8 June 1850.

divide the parish.⁵¹ Then three residents of the Pays Brulé again circulated a petition which expressed opposition to Harper, and apparently asked that he be removed from the parish. This time the petition was delivered to Bishop Turgeon in Quebec.⁵² Harper attributed these tensions in the parish to the reluctance of a few habitants to pay for the church enlargement, but this explanation could not account for the motivation of Auguste Richard, one of the three men involved. Because Richard did not own property, he would be unaffected financially by the division of the parish.⁵³

The petition had no noticeable results, and the parish remained tense but quiet until mid-August. Harper then decided to intervene overtly in the dispute over the parish division in an attempt to force a decision on the community. Rather than call a public assembly, he chose to discuss the issue in the church directly after Sunday mass. This was felt to be an intrusion by some of the parishioners, and one of them challenged Harper's authority by interrupting him.⁵⁴ News of these events reached Msgr. Turgeon in Quebec. He requested an explanation from Harper and an assurance that opposition to him was not general throughout the parish. Harper assured the bishop that "l'irritation et le mécontentement ne sont pas aussi générales qu'on s'est permis de le dire." As evidence he explained that he had called an assembly of all those parishioners who held an official position of any kind.⁵⁵ With an audience of about 140 thus gathered, Harper had proceeded to ask them "qu'a-t-on a me reprocher, qu'ai-je dit au fait pour indisposer la paroisse?" The initial reply was "rien, rien," but after repeating

⁵¹Ibid., Harper to Cazeau, 6 July 1850.

⁵²The petition has not been found, but Harper suggests that it was an attempt to have him removed from the parish. See *ibid.*, Harper to Cazeau, 9 July 1850.

⁵³Ibid., Harper to Cazeau, 6 July 1850.

⁵⁴Ibid., Harper to Cazeau, 12 August 1850.

⁵⁵Harper listed these as: "les marguilliers, anciens et nouveaux, les magistrats de la paroisse, les syndics pour l'agrandissement de l'église, les commissaires d'écoles, les instituteurs, les officiers de milices, les conseillers municipaux et tous ceux qui tiennent d'eux quelque charge comme sous-voyers inspecteurs et enfin les chantres." *Ibid.*, Harper to Msgr. Turgeon, St. Grégoire, 19 August 1850.

his query, Harper was told, "vous vous melez trop de nos affaires." Harper characterized this as a rather vague and general response, and seemed to read it as an adequate proof that his parishioners were not dissatisfied with him. Coming as it did, however, from a group of village notables and officials of Harper's own choosing, the reply suggests underlying resentment against the curé. If parish notables found his actions to be intrusive, then the habitant population of St. Grégoire, known for its occasional demonstrations of independence vis-à-vis authority figures, would surely have found them to be nearly intolerable. Moreover, Harper acknowledged that he had held similar assemblies twice during the previous spring - an indication of the simmering discontent within the parish.⁵⁶

The extent of the dissatisfaction felt by at least some individuals in St. Grégoire was revealed in subsequent events. Rumours began to circulate during August that Harper had attempted to solicit the sexual favours of Julie Carpentier, a woman from Trois-Rivières, who at one time had lived in St. Grégoire. The stories suggested that Harper had raped this woman in the church vestry after she had spurned his advances.⁵⁷ In attempting to explain these rumours to Bishop Turgeon, Harper claimed they were the malicious actions of those who had unsuccessfully petitioned against the curé. He suggested that, in order to gain his removal from the parish, they had offered

quarante piastres à une fille de T. Rivières pour l'engager à déposer contre moi; cette misérable créature qui, à ce qu'il paraît, ne jouit pas d'une réputation intacte, a demeuré à St. Grégoire quelques mois en 1840, aujourd'hui cette pauvre fille est à T. Rivières dans la dernière des misères ... nos misérables agitateurs voyant cette fille dans une si grand dénuement ont cru que l'appas d'une somme assez ronde la déciderait à se rendre coupable d'une calomnie aussi noire que celle qu'ils sollicitaient d'elle."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, no. 2291, with no. 750 of 1851, copy of the indictment in the cases of Alexis Thibodeau, Michel Bourque and Antoine Luc de Courval, Three Rivers, 14 September 1850.

⁵⁸ AEN, St. Grégoire-le-Grand, Cartable 1, Harper to Turgeon, St. Grégoire, 19 August 1850.

The rumours became so well known that the case finally went to court in Trois-Rivières.⁵⁹ On September 14, 1850, Michel Bourque, Alexis Thibodeau and Antoine Luc Poulin de Courval were indicted on charges of conspiracy against Harper, and were brought before the Court of Queen's Bench.⁶⁰ The case did not come to trial until February, 1851, but the outcome proved satisfactory to Harper. Julie Carpentier had apparently divulged the trio's plans to him, although Thibodeau, Bourque and Courval claimed in petitions following the trial that she had never made a sworn statement against them.⁶¹ The jury nevertheless found them guilty on the charge of conspiracy, and sentenced them to one year in prison. In addition, each was fined £100.⁶²

While only a few individuals are known to have been involved either in the conspiracy attempt or in organizing petitions against Harper, their actions are nonetheless significant to an understanding of the issue of popular resistance to school taxes.⁶³ While discontent against Harper had been precipitated in the summer of 1849 by the disputed division of the parish, the issue that fuelled the conflict was the school

⁵⁹Jean-Pierre Wallot indicates that in many parishes in the early nineteenth century "les fidèles s'ingénient à rendre la vie dure à leurs pasteurs: non seulement se font-ils tirer l'oreille pour fournir l'aide matérielle nécessaire; ils n'hésitent pas à calomnier un prêtre s'ils veulent s'en débarrasser." See Jean-Pierre Wallot, Un Québec qui bougeait: Trame socio-politique du Québec au tournant du XIXe siècle (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1973), p. 203.

⁶⁰Courval was listed as a "gentilhomme" in government records, while the other two men charged were called "cultivateurs." See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, filed with no. 425 of 1851, Petition of Alexis Thibodeau, Michel Bourque, and Ant. L. Poulin for free pardon, Trois-Rivières, 11 March 1851.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²All three men were pardoned and released in November, 1851. NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 294, no. 646 with no. 750 of 1851, Draft of Pardon for Alexis Thibodeau, Michel Bourque and Antoine Luc Poulin de Courval, Quebec, 21 November 1851.

⁶³The petition sent to Msgr. Turgeon in June, 1850 has not been found, so it is not known how many signatures were collected. However, Michel Bourque signed an affidavit in Trois-Rivières on August 12, swearing that twenty-one appended names were those of supporters of the June petition. See AEN, Cartable 1, Harper to Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 12 August 1850.

law. At least five of those who criticized Harper for meddling in parish affairs were participants in, if not instigators of, resistance to the school taxes. According to Harper, Auguste Richard was the "premier et principal moteur des troubles de l'hiver dernier, celui qui, pendant deux nuits consécutives, parcourut la paroisse pour convoquer l'assemblée qui résolue d'arrêter les assesseurs."⁶⁴ Jean-Baptiste Hébert was an *éteignoir* school commissioner who boycotted meetings of the school corporation; moreover, he was known as the "chef des émeutiers."⁶⁵ As for the three men convicted of conspiracy against Harper, Alexis Thibodeau was probably the individual sued by the St. Grégoire school corporation for non-payment of school taxes in 1848, and who was accused of hiding rioters from the police during the winter disturbances.⁶⁶ Michel Bourque, who had also spoken up against Harper during church, was closely involved with the *éteignoir* movement. The enquiry commissioner, Delisle, characterized Bourque as "le bras droit des incendiaires de St. Grégoire." Furthermore, Delisle predicted that one of the St. Michel *éteignoirs* would be acquitted of a charge of theft because Bourque was foreman of the trial jury which was to decide his case.⁶⁷

Finally, Bourque's brother-in-law, Antoine Luc Poulin de Courval, had a less obvious connection with the school opponents. A notary and justice of the peace, he had supported G.A. Bourgeois and the priests in their opposition to the election of an *éteignoir* school commissioner in 1847.⁶⁸ But either that support for the school system

⁶⁴ Ibid., Harper to Cazeau, 6 July 1850.

⁶⁵ ANQ, E0013, Lettres reçues, Box 312, no. 665, Marquis to Meilleur, St. Grégoire, 14 May 1850.

⁶⁶ The charge of refusing to pay his taxes was made against A. Thibodeau. See *ibid.*, Box 301, no. 63, Harper to Meilleur, 21 January 1848. In his report on the riots, Turcotte refers to prisoners hiding out in Thibodeau's house. See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, no. 335 filed with no. 570 of 1850, J.E. Turcotte to J. Leslie, Trois-Rivières, 20 February 1850.

⁶⁷ NA, MG24 B14, Delisle to LaFontaine, [no location], 19 January 1851.

⁶⁸ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 210, no. 1391 with no. 3990 of 1847, Petition of School Commissioners and certain inhabitants of St. Grégoire, St. Grégoire, 19 November 1847.

was insincere, or he had a change of heart under the influence of the school law opponents. In a letter to the provincial secretary pleading for mercy for the jailed conspirators, William Vondenvelden claimed that de Courval was the moving force behind the plot against Harper, and he suggested that there was a connection between that action and the revolt against the school law. Vondenvelden stated that "I have been by some considered as having been privy to this conspiracy and all the seditious movements occasioned by the School acts."⁶⁹ Vondenvelden went on to deny any involvement in the conspiracy, but his letter does suggest that the actions against Harper were linked to the general revolt against school taxes. That connection is further confirmed by a remark Harper made in one of his many letters to Cazeau in the summer of 1850. He described the frantic activities of his opponents during August, and indicated that one of Auguste Richard's visits was to Nicolet, "chez le grand chef," a certain reference to Luc-Michel Cressé, one of the élite leaders of the *êteignoir* movement.⁷⁰

That resentment against Harper had links to resistance to the school law is also suggested by the burning of Norbert Beliveau's property. Beliveau was an assessor appointed by the school commissioners, and was thus an obvious target for those who resented the school tax. However, the other property assessors went untouched apart from threats and insults, as did the other school officials in St. Grégoire. What set Beliveau apart was the fact that he was Harper's brother-in-law. Resentment about Harper's role in the planned parish division, and hostility towards those who supported school taxes, could both be conveniently expressed in an attack on the property of the priest's sister and brother-in-law. The fact that so many men were participants, albeit passive ones, in the burning of Beliveau's buildings, further suggests the level of

⁶⁹ Ibid., Vol. 294, no. 425 filed with no. 750 of 1851, Wm. Vondenvelden to Leslie, Kingsey, 20 June 1851.

⁷⁰ AEN, St. Grégoire-le-Grand, Cartable 1, Harper to Cazeau, St. Grégoire, 12 August 1850.

popular hostility against Harper. In his memoirs, Alfred Desilets suggests too that the attack on Beliveau was motivated by the habitant's resentment about Harper's meddling: "Dans l'esprit troublé de ces malheureux, Messire Harper leur apparut, comme l'auteur de leur déconvenue ... Les plus turbulents résolurent de prendre leur revanche contre la personne de son beau-frère, Norbert Beliveau."⁷¹ The depth of feeling against Harper and Beliveau is shown in a letter to La Minerve from "Un qui sait." That individual claimed that a neighbour who had offered to assist Beliveau in rebuilding after the fire was himself threatened with arson.⁷² Moreover, months after his property was burned, Beliveau reported to the Journal des Trois-Rivières that the paper had erred in reporting that the habitants of St. Grégoire had offered to help rebuild his barn and other buildings. In fact, Beliveau reported, "jamais personne ne m'a offert ni fait offrir de rétablir mes bâtiments."⁷³

Harper was certainly not the only priest to be victimized by éteignoirs. One of the more well-known examples was Abbé Leblond, the priest of île Bizard, near Montreal. He exhorted his parishioners from the altar to support the school law; in turn, he received letters threatening that the presbytery would be burned. Leblond refused to acquiesce to these threats initially, but the parishioners persisted in their revolt until he finally fled the parish. The habitants of île Bizard continued their resistance to the school laws until Bishop Bourget intervened personally in the dispute, threatening permanent closure of the church until the laws were obeyed.⁷⁴

⁷¹ See Alfred Desilets, Souvenirs d'un Octogénaire (Trois-Rivières: P.R. Dupont, Imprimeur, 1922), p. 90.

⁷² La Minerve, 14 March 1850. This same letter also claimed that Beliveau had received threats that his house would be burned, and that two of Beliveau's horses had been maimed the night before they were to be sold.

⁷³ Le Journal des Trois-Rivières, 23 November 1850.

⁷⁴ Thomas Chapais, "La Guerre des Éteignoirs," p. 4.

Significance of Popular Resistance

Tensions between priest and parishioners, such as those exhibited in St. Grégoire, were certainly not a new phenomenon in the social fabric of Lower Canada. Nor were outbreaks of violence by the habitants against unpopular government measures unknown. Historians have discovered numerous examples of habitants who were quick to disagree with their priest or even the Church hierarchy about the erection of new parishes, the dividing of old ones, or the location of the church within the parish. Greer has pointed out that "les habitants voulaient des institutions locales qui leur conviennent;" if the bishop or parish priest attempted to ignore their wishes, habitants did not hesitate to register strong protests in order to achieve their aims.⁷⁵ Similarly, outbreaks of violence against unpopular government policies were not unknown. In the eighteenth century, habitants showed their dissatisfaction with government measures by rioting over food shortages, and over imposition of the *corvée*. According to Terence Crowley, these sometimes violent demonstrations were not merely the whim of a mindless crowd, but rather were "requests for official intervention or indignant reactions against what were perceived as unfair practises or unjust impositions by government."⁷⁶

The charivaris which occurred with such regularity in St. Grégoire between January and March, 1850 were a part of popular tradition which dated back at least as early as 1683. Two recent articles on the charivari in Lower Canada speculate on the function of this traditional ritual.⁷⁷ Allan Greer interprets charivaris as a form of

⁷⁵ Allan Greer, "L'habitant, la paroisse rurale," pp.20-21. See also Terence Crowley, "'Thunder Gusts'," p. 76. See, also, J.I. Little, "The Parish," p. 140.

⁷⁶ See Crowley, p. 78, and 70-74.

⁷⁷ See Allan Greer, "From Folklore to Revolution," and René Hardy, "Le Charivari." Charivaris are discussed within the North American context in Bryan D. Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," Labour/Le Travailleur, 3 (1978): 5-62.

community self-management in which habitants exercised "direct regulatory powers." Prior to the Rebellions, charivaris expressed public opinion about social behaviour, particularly marriages. Greer argues that the charivari became "politicized" with the rise of Patriote fervour prior to the Rebellions. Beginning in 1837, habitants began to use the charivari ritual to force government supporters to disavow overt support for the Crown. René Hardy, while dealing with a later period than Greer, also finds that charivaris most often occurred as a festive accompaniment to a marriage celebration. The marriage charivari could be either supportive and amicable or cruel and relentless, depending on whether the community approved of the particular match being made. Like Greer, Hardy argues that charivaris could have a political intent, and suggests that charivaris against tax assessors in St. Grégoire and Ste. Monique in the 1860s could have been an expression of popular dissatisfaction with élite culture. Hardy concludes that the best way to read the charivari is to see its function as multi-faceted: festive, regulatory and political factors intermingling with the local context to determine the character of a particular charivari.

The charivaris which became almost nightly occurrences in St. Grégoire during the early spring of 1850 involved all the elements traditionally associated with the ritual in Lower Canada.⁷⁸ Thus, initiators of a charivari began the ritual by summoning habitants from distant parts of the parish with horns.⁷⁹ Once gathered, participants donned masks and armed themselves with noisemaking instruments. They then visited

⁷⁸Charivaris in New France and Lower Canada differed somewhat from those in Europe; for a discussion of some of these differences see Greer, "From folklore to Revolution;" Palmer, "Discordant Music;" and Hardy, "Le Charivari".

⁷⁹There is no indication in the documents of whether women were participants in the charivaris or the riots against the municipal councils. Crowley has noted the involvement of women in most of the food riots of the eighteenth century. Moreover, in 1796, 500 women demonstrated against the arrest of individuals protesting a new road law. Neither Greer nor Hardy mention the involvement of women in charivaris during the nineteenth century. It would be interesting to know whether women in fact ceased to involve themselves in political demonstrations in the nineteenth century, and, if so, why.

the homes of their victims, usually school commissioners and assessors who supported the school law. The masked habitants would then oblige these men to "sortir de leurs maisons pour leur faire promettre de ne pas faire fonctionner la loi des Écoles, avec menaces d'incendier leurs propriétés s'ils ôsaient agir."⁸⁰ There is no evidence that a fee was exacted from these victims as was the custom in pre-Rebellion charivaris studied by Greer. But like the politicized charivaris conducted by the Patriotes, the fee became symbolic in the form of a promise, extracted from the victims, to conform to the wishes of the participants. As Greer notes, "this forced gift played a role analagous to that of the ordinary charivaris fine in signifying the giver's submission to the authority of the collectivity."⁸¹

In concert with traditional patterns, there were no indiscriminate acts of violence in St. Grégoire. As we noted above, the victims of the charivari were specifically targetted because of their allegiance to the school law. Those individuals who chose not to renounce that support suffered further nights of harassment filled with noise and threats of violence. A few threats were carried out. These were directed at property rather than persons, and most commonly involved pelting houses with rocks and other projectiles. Damage was usually limited to broken windows and frames, although one house was ransacked.⁸² The only serious episode of violence was that directed against Norbert Beliveau's property.

Events arising out of the destruction of Beliveau's barn point out another element common to charivaris and other forms of popular protest. When a neighbour offered to assist Beliveau in rebuilding, he was threatened with arson of his own property.

⁸⁰NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, no. 335 filed with no. 570 of 1850, J.E. Turcotte to J. Leslie, Trois Rivières, 20 February 1850.

⁸¹Greer, "From Folklore to Revolution," p. 32; see also p. 24.

⁸²See NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, Filed with no. 570 of 1850, G.A. Bourgeois to LaFontaine, St. Grégoire, 14 March 1850.

Community sanctions against those who had offended the popular will gained their effectiveness from just this kind of pressure.⁸³ The enquiry commissioners later reported that three-quarters of the St. Grégoire parish was involved in the charivaris and other demonstrations against the school taxes. Moreover, participants spread the word that any breach of the communal solidarity would not be tolerated. Thus the local magistrate complained that "les brigands ont menacé les Commissaires d'école et tous ceux qui ne feront pas cause commune avec eux, de leur faire subir le même traitement."⁸⁴

The effectiveness of this group pressure became readily apparent when authorities attempted to arrest and convict those who had charivaried the assessors and burned Beliveau's barn. As Johnson complained, "the compact subsisting between the offenders (including probably three fourths of the Parish) made it exceedingly difficult to obtain any information, as to the actors in scenes from which the well disposed carefully absented themselves."⁸⁵ While Johnson and Delisle were finally able to make some arrests, most of those charged were acquitted by sympathetic juries. Their dismay that nine men implicated in the burning of Beliveau's barn should have been released is apparent in their report to the provincial secretary: "That these nine persons should have been acquitted by the Petit Jury, in the [illegible] of the clearest evidence and of a very emphatic charge by the Chief Justice, we deeply deplore."⁸⁶

⁸³ See Hardy, "Le Charivari," p. 17.

⁸⁴ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, no. 335 filed with no. 570 of 1850, Petition of Justices of the Peace to Governor General, St. Grégoire, 25 February 1850. This pattern of forced participation in popular revolts was very common in Europe. See, for example, E.P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English crowd," p. 111; and Georges Lefebvre, The Great Fear of 1789, p. 33.

⁸⁵ NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 287, no. 2187, Johnson and Delisle to J. Leslie, Saint Michel d'Yamaska, 29 September 1850.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

This ability to thwart the official justice system reveals the depth of support for *éteignoir* activities in St. Grégoire and neighbouring parishes. While some of that support was probably a product of fear, given the threats against those who refused to co-operate, the fact that three-quarters of the parish was involved in demonstrations against the school law suggests that fear was not the major motivating factor. The pattern of *charivari* activity is another indicator of the degree of popular support for the *éteignoir* movement. Hardy's study suggests that *charivaris* rarely took place during November or March. He attributes this pattern to conformity to the religious proscription against festive activities during the month following All Souls Day, and during Lent, as well as to the fact that marriages occurred only infrequently during those periods.⁸⁷ In St. Grégoire the *charivaris* were reported by authorities as being continuous from late January through March.⁸⁸ This willingness to break with Catholic practise is no doubt linked to the resentment parishioners felt towards their priest during this period. It also suggests the extent of their hostility to the school law, and their desire to punish those who dared to spurn popular opinion through its implementation.

There is no evidence of full-scale *charivaris* in St. Grégoire or elsewhere after March, 1850. There are, however, many reports of houses being stoned and of school houses being burned in the vicinity of St. Grégoire, throughout the rest of the year. These events might well have been part of a *charivari* ritual, although the sources do not let us know for certain. Whether or not these attacks were linked to *charivaris*, it is significant that several of them took place during the month of November. A school house was burned to the ground the night after All Saints Day in St. Michel. While

⁸⁷ Hardy, "Le *charivari*," p. 8-9.

⁸⁸ A political *charivari*, by its very nature, is an attempt to overturn established rules of behaviour. The occurrence of *charivaris* in St. Grégoire during fast periods suggests that habitants were demonstrating their disdain for both political and religious authorities.

Fourquin and his wealthy friends were eventually charged with arson, it seems apparent that there was popular support for the action. Johnson noted that villagers made no effort to save the school, although they were successful in their attempt to "save the contiguous buildings."⁸⁹ Another school house was broken open and damaged on November 7, and, in the neighbouring parish of St. François, the sashes of a school were smashed on November 11.⁹⁰ In St. Martin, where the *êteignoir* André-Benjamin Papineau lived, the barn and harvest of a man who supported the *curé* and the schools in defiance of the *êteignoirs* were burned on the night of November 7.⁹¹

This willingness to defy church custom not only by engaging in overt acts of violence, but by doing so during fast periods, suggests that a well of hostility had been tapped by the issue of the compulsory school tax. Other indicators of the level of popular support are the numbers of participants in the *charivaris* and the riots, and the very use of rituals such as the *charivari*, which were so much a part of traditional popular culture. Such evidence of popular involvement in the *guerre des êteignoirs* suggests that the habitants were not mere pawns of elite leaders. Certainly wealthy landowners, such as Luc-Michel Cressé, instigated many of the popular demonstrations against the school law. Through speeches, petitions and rumours, Cressé and his allies published information among the habitants which was meant to frighten them about the implications of the state's power to initiate new taxes, and to intervene in local affairs through central decision-making. The nature of habitant response to the school laws in St. Grégoire, however, indicates that elite leaders had merely tapped into a profound

⁸⁹NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 287, no. 2374 of 1850, Johnson to J. Leslie, St. Michel d'Yamaska, 21 November 1850.

⁹⁰Ibid., no. 2417 of 1850, same to same, St. Michel d'Yamaska, 13 November 1850.

⁹¹Ibid., Vol. 287, no. 2402 of 1850, Deposition of François Pesant, St. Martin, 8 November 1850. Louis Bélanger, the justice of the peace who took this deposition, reported in his covering letter regarding the arson that there had recently been several incidents of animals being maimed: "ici comme naguère à St. Grégoire, on coupe les queues des vaches, des cochons etc." This is one indication animals other than horses were attacked. Bélanger does not indicate who the owners were.

sense of discontent.⁹²

In many ways, the habitants and the landed élite had a harmony of interest. Taxes were no more appealing to one group than they were to the other. The difference, of course, lay in the ability to pay. In the waning years of the 1840s, the habitants were coming to terms with a painful economic reality. Crops had been devastated by disease in the 1830s and mid-1840s, and commercial stagnation deprived farmers of both agricultural markets and employment opportunities. At the same time, the sons of habitants started the painful exodus out of the seigneuries in search of land. During this period of economic vulnerability, the government imposed both school and municipal taxes. The habitants were thus receptive listeners when men such as Cressé and Vondenvelden began their crusade. When these men argued that taxes were collected merely to support a host of bureaucrats, or that the school commissioners responsible for distributing school funds were guilty of fraud, the habitants did not question the truth of those statements. One historian has pointed out that "the popular memory, especially in pre-literate society, is extraordinarily long."⁹³ Habitants had only to cast their minds back to 1841 to be reminded of government insensitivity to the implications of taxes for the general populace. Sydenham's school and municipal laws of that year had instituted taxes which were to be levied and collected by district officers; the perception at the local level had been that tax money would be used for purposes other than education. Sydenham's arbitrary manner of attempting to collect taxes, coupled with the fact that local taxation had never been imposed in Lower Canada,

⁹²In a discussion of the spread of Populism among Texas farmers, Robert McMath states that the values of Populism existed in rural communities before the organizers arrived to disseminate information about the movement. He then makes the point that there is a need to "examine the resonance between the message of the organizers ... and the preexisting culture of protest within the particular farming communities they visited." Robert C. McMath, "Sandy Land," p. 207. Clearly, the habitants in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska had "preexisting" grievances which made them receptive to the message of elite éteignoirs.

⁹³E.P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English crowd," p. 109.

guaranteed strong popular resistance to the measure. It is hardly surprising, then, that habitants in the late 1840s continued to feel distrustful about the government's motives when it centralized the school system in an attempt to tighten the mechanism for collecting taxes. The landed élite, which resented taxes for its own reasons, was quick to read the hostile public mood and then find the means of channeling it into open expression.

Taxation was not the only issue on which the landed élite and the habitants held similar views. The growing links between liberal professionals and the clergy was seen as a threat by the large landowners, for this alliance within the petit bourgeoisie threatened to take a pre-eminent role in rural society. Habitants, too, looked with trepidation at the growing solidarity between village professionals and parish priests. During the 1830s the liberal professionals had vehemently opposed clerical control over local affairs such as management of the fabrique. In this they were aligned with habitants who had previously exercised a considerable degree of autonomy over parish matters and who thus tended to be sympathetic to anticlerical rhetoric. After the failure of the Rebellions, and following the dark period of autocratic rule in the early 1840s, the liberal professionals tended to opt for accommodation and moderation rather than radical politics. The two wings of the petit bourgeoisie which had done battle in the 1830s embraced each other in the last half of the 1840s in order to solidify their control over local affairs.⁹⁴ And, as we have seen, the new social legislation of that period provided the perfect vehicle for the petit bourgeoisie to exercise that control.

That the habitants perceived themselves as the losers when confronted with this realignment within the petit bourgeoisie is evident from their hostile reaction to the

⁹⁴ When I refer to the clergy being part of the petit bourgeoisie, I am referring to the parish curés, not the Church hierarchy. On the split between the liberal professionals and the clergy prior to and during the Rebellions, see Richard Chabot, Le Curé de Campagne, especially chapters two and three; and, Allan Greer, "L'habitant, la paroisse," especially p. 32.

school and municipal systems in which that group had taken such an interest. Rioters at the Yamaska municipal council meeting succinctly expressed their resentment of the local administration established in the late 1840s: "Point de conseil, point d'école, point de cour de commissaire ni membre de bureau d'enregistrement."⁹⁵ What these bodies of local governance represented to habitants was the increasing hegemony of the village professionals and the clergy - men like Bourgeois, Harper and Marquis who had the education, but perhaps more importantly, the links with the central government which would enable them to shape the school and municipal systems to their own ends. That habitants were fearful of being manipulated by these school officials and other representatives of the nascent state bureaucracy is apparent from their demand, cited above, for an end to newly-created institutions such as schools and municipal councils.

Moreover, when habitants disrupted property assessments or rioted against the municipal councils of Nicolet and Yamaska, one of their first actions was to seize and destroy the record books of the school and municipal officers. The primary motive behind the capture of the assessment rolls was obviously to prevent taxes from being levied. However, the behaviour could be seen as having a symbolic function as well. Assessment rolls and school and municipal registries legitimized the authority of local officials to levy taxes and manage local affairs. The books served as a reminder that the central government had conferred taxing and administrative powers on the men who were elected to school boards and municipal councils. Those powers, when used to collect taxes which could potentially be used for purposes other than the local good, were greatly resented by peasant farmers. That habitants did indeed fear this kind of corruption is evident in the report written by Delisle and Johnson. In September, 1850 they indicated that they had inspected the books of the school commissioners in La Baie

⁹⁵NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 272, filed with no. 570 of 1850, M. Fortier to J. Leslie, St. David, 12 March 1850.

and St. François because of the popular perception that "we are cheated."⁹⁶ In both cases the accounts proved to be correct, but the incidents reveal the current of suspicion among habitants that the books were being juggled to the advantage of school commissioners. It should be remembered, moreover, that Meilleur was frequently petitioned about both incompetent school commissioners who mishandled account books, and fraudulent officials who purposely tampered with the accounts. That assessment rolls and council registers were the first target of rioters in Nicolet and Yamaska suggests that habitants sought to destroy the means by which local officials exercised their control over the community. Without the books administrators could not administer, and certainly they could not levy taxes which could then be used for fraudulent purposes.⁹⁷

In destroying the books, habitants were motivated primarily by their opposition to taxes. Secondly, they were attempting, both literally and symbolically, to disempower petit bourgeois administrators. That they were not ultimately successful in doing so can be attributed to the allegiance of the village notables to the state, and to the state's commitment to stabilize and solidify the new school and municipal institutions. The presence of Johnson and Delisle and the armed troops assigned to escort them brought a wary peace to Nicolet and Yamaska counties by the end of 1850. The following year a new school law was passed which created a body of school inspectors to be appointed by the government. Each municipal district was assigned one inspector who was responsible for making quarterly reports based on his examination of the district

⁹⁶NA, RG4 C1, Vol. 287, no. 2187 of 1850, Johnson and Delisle to Leslie, Saint Michel d'Yamaska, 29 September 1850.

⁹⁷Significantly, the theft and destruction of official books was a pattern in movements of popular protest elsewhere. See, for example, Lefebvre, The Great Fear, p. 12; and, Roderick J. Barman, "The Brazilian peasantry reexamined," p. 416. Bruce Curtis notes that there were numerous accounts of arson of school houses in the 1850s and 1860s in Upper Canada; sometimes the school register was taken and burned before the school itself was burned. See Curtis, Building the Educational State, p. 151.

schools.⁹⁸ Not only did this act provide new opportunities for village professional men, it also expanded the number of state agents in local communities, thereby enhancing the state's ability to ensure that school laws were properly implemented.⁹⁹

It is interesting to compare the outcome of the *guerre des éteignoirs* with that of the campaign against the sleigh laws in the early 1840s. In that episode of popular resistance the habitants were allied with other social groups in Lower Canada, including professional men such as newspaper editors, as well as seigneurs and priests. As Kenny notes, "the people and their leaders were of one mind on the issue." Confronted with the "universal refusal to comply" with the sleigh laws, Union legislators either revised or repealed all of Sydenham's ordinances.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the *guerre des éteignoirs* was fought by habitants and a small number of wealthy landowners. Certain village notables and other members of the *petit bourgeoisie* began to spout anti-tax rhetoric in the late 1840s, but their motives lay in political expediency rather than genuine opposition to school legislation. The majority of village professional men and parish priests saw public schooling in a positive light, believing, no doubt, that it would benefit the popular classes. They also realized, however, that the school system was an avenue for gaining more control over local affairs. Given the growing links between the *petit bourgeoisie* and the central government, it is not surprising that the school legislation was not rescinded, and that the school system was in fact strengthened through the creation of a state inspectorate. The popular will could not hope to topple such a formidable new opponent.

⁹⁸ Hunte, p. 153.

⁹⁹ Guy Houle states that "l'adoption de la Loi des inspecteurs de 1851 permettra à ceux-ci de se joindre aux autorités civiles et religieuses pour apaiser les esprits au moment où la 'guerre des éteignoirs' avait atteint un point culminant." Bruce Curtis and Philip Corrigan draw attention to the importance of school inspectors in regulating local public schools in Upper Canada. Houle, *Le Cadre juridique*, p. 46. Corrigan and Curtis, "Education, Inspection and State Formation," pp. 156-71.

¹⁰⁰ Kenny, pp. 198-207.

CONCLUSION

School legislation passed in the 1840s was intended to create a comprehensive system of public schooling for the mass of Lower Canada's population. Because such an endeavour would be costly, the government instituted compulsory taxes with the school act of 1841. These proved to be very unpopular, in part because there was no precedent for state taxation in Lower Canada, but also because taxes were to be collected by municipal officers who were appointees of the governor, rather than being members of the local community. The failure of the school law of 1841 was ensured by the passive resistance shown by the population of Lower Canada towards the municipal system on which it was based, and by the lack of power given to the superintendent to enforce the implementation of the law.

After a brief and unsuccessful experiment with voluntary contributions, the government passed the school act which would form the basis of Quebec's school system for the next century. Designed to overcome the flaws in the previous legislation, the new school act of 1846 created a more centralized system, with additional powers conferred on the superintendent to ensure that school commissioners would enforce the law's regulations. The most contentious aspect of the school system thus established, was the compulsory property assessments which were to match the funds provided by the government to finance public schools. Adding to the tensions over school taxes was the fact that the municipal system, which was created in the early 1840s, also required the levying of property taxes.

However necessary they were to fund education and local government, school and municipal taxes were implemented at a most inauspicious time. The 1840s were years of considerable economic distress, caused in part by a series of crop failures, and in part by the commercial crisis which resulted in the sharp decline in the timber trade and

ship-building industry. Those events had serious implications for the habitant population, because they decreased the market for their oats crops, and, in addition, deprived the habitants of seasonal employment opportunities. Moreover, thousands of Irish immigrants flooded into Lower Canada during these years, bringing epidemics of cholera and typhus, as well as competition for increasingly scarce jobs.

Political and social developments during these difficult years proved equally disruptive to the rural population. New social legislation, such as that relating to the school and municipal systems and the overhauling of the judiciary, showed that the state was becoming a more important force in rural communities. Much of the legislation, while purportedly intended as the foundation of local government, had other and more negative consequences for some rural social groups. Through the creation of a state bureaucracy which would oversee the implementation of these new social institutions, the central government acquired a more intrusive presence in local communities. Admittedly small in the 1840s, the state bureaucracy foreshadowed a significant realignment among rural social groups, because it was associated with new political structures and alliances at the provincial level. The gradual movement towards responsible government in the second half of the 1840s gave new significance to the position of MLAs, for control of patronage shifted from the governor to the leader of the majority party. Political influence thus became more dependent on election victory than it did on close links with the governor general. In recognition of this new state of affairs, the Catholic Church hierarchy, led by Bishop Bourget of Montreal, developed closer ties with LaFontaine's moderate Reform party. By working together, LaFontaine and the bishops hoped to strengthen their influence over rural society, to ensure electoral victory for the former, and conformity to the Church's dictates for the latter.

This new alliance at the provincial level was reflected in events at the local level. The new social legislation and the concomitant development of a state bureaucracy

through which it would be administered, was looked on favourably by village professional men. That group's opportunities for advancement were blocked by the glut of doctors and lawyers in rural society. Participation in local government and school affairs suggested a means of achieving more status and influence in that society. It also provided a link to state administrators, such as the superintendent of education, who might prove useful in the capturing of lucrative patronage positions. Professional men were joined in their enthusiasm for the school and municipal systems by the parish clergy. Following the lead of Bishop Bourget, the curés were attempting to organize parish life around Church-initiated activities in the 1840s. By involving themselves in school affairs, the curés had found one more way of influencing the lives of their parishioners. Thus, the parish clergy and village professional men fully endorsed the social initiatives taken by the state.

As we have seen in the investigation of the *guerre des éteignoirs*, however, neither the habitant population nor the landed elite were in agreement with the village notables concerning the school and municipal systems. The discussion in the previous chapter of the violent reaction against the school system in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska in 1850 has brought us to a number of conclusions about the motivation of habitants. Primarily, popular participation in the *guerre des éteignoirs* was prompted by resistance to taxes during a period of considerable economic distress. Problems in the implementation of the new school system were also important factors in creating dissatisfaction; incompetent school commissioners, poorly-trained teachers, the fraudulent use of public funds, and government ineptitude could only serve to increase popular hostility towards state-instituted schooling. We have noted, as well, the relevance of underlying conflicts within parishes such as St. Grégoire to the habitants' response to the school system.

The *guerre des éteignoirs* was concerned with something less tangible but ultimately more important, however, than educational reform itself: the realignment of rural social groups. Wealthy rural landholders who had previously brokered directly with the central government about local concerns, saw their control over those concerns being undermined by the state's more interventionist role, and the developing alliance between village notables and LaFontaine Reformers. This traditional rural elite thus banded together with the *habitants* in an attempt to ward off the economic threat posed by state taxes, and the social irrelevance to which they feared being relegated. The *habitants*, in turn, were willing participants in the tax revolt because they perceived the increasingly powerful role exercised by the rural *petit bourgeoisie* over local affairs. One could speculate that the political *charivari* occurred at crucial moments such as this, when the customary social fabric was rent asunder. Allan Greer notes the first occurrence of the political *charivari* in Lower Canada during the Rebellions, when *habitants* allied themselves with professional men, in part out of economic desperation, but also in the hope of wresting local autonomy from the *seigneurs* and the clergy. In the late 1840s, the *habitants* again used the *charivari* for political ends - this time to express their hostility towards the alliance between village professionals and priests, and the growing power of the *petit bourgeoisie* portended by that alliance. In his work on the Great Fear of 1789, Lefebvre has pointed out that, while they could not articulate their thoughts, peasants were acutely aware of who their oppressors were.¹ Similarly, the *habitants* of Lower Canada sensed the significance of the alliance within the *petit bourgeoisie*, especially as it expressed itself through support for the school law. The control exercised by men like Bourgeois and Marquis over the minutiae of local school affairs was a clear warning to *habitants* that local government did not translate as popular government. The hostility generated by that realization provoked the repeated threats of violence witnessed in the *charivaris* of 1850.

¹Lefebvre, p. 24.

To suggest that these charivaris represented a conflict between popular culture, which did not see the value of education, and élite culture, which did, is to oversimplify the issue.² It is clear from the history of schooling in St. Grégoire before the guerre des éteignoirs, that habitants were not flatly opposed to education. Not only did they send a significant number of their children to school, they also supported schools through voluntary subscriptions in 1845. Moreover, although school houses were burned in many villages, the habitants of St. Grégoire left their schools intact except for a few broken windows. Education itself was not the issue; control over the school system was.

The conclusions of this local study could be questioned on the grounds that the parish of St. Grégoire presented a particular set of circumstances which made its population respond in an exaggerated way to school taxes. Certainly, it seems true that resentment over the activities of the two priests, Harper and Marquis, precipitated some of the more violent demonstrations against the school law, although habitants in neighbouring parishes proved to be sympathetic to those activities. Moreover, St. Grégoire was peopled by Acadians who had a reputation for being unwilling to submit to the forceful hand of authority. The population in the neighbouring parish of Ste. Monique was predominantly Irish; this group, too, had a history of opposing both taxes and the officials who would dare to impose them. Perhaps these contiguous and somewhat rebellious parishes had an exaggerated influence on popular response to the school and municipal systems in the counties of Nicolet and Yamaska. To test the hypotheses made in the present study, further work on the guerre des éteignoirs is required, both at the local and at the regional level. While it is important to gauge response to the school system in areas not covered by this study, more work should also

²In a discussion of two charivaris which took place in the 1860s, one in St. Grégoire, and one in Ste. Monique, René Hardy wonders if they were the expression of "la résistance de certaines couches populaires à la pénétration des valeurs des élites laïques et religieuses, la confrontation de la culture populaire à la culture savante?" See Hardy, "Le Charivari," p. 14.

be done on the implementation of, and the response to, the municipal system in the 1840s. The *guerre des éteignoirs* was clearly not a reaction only to school taxes; to understand its full implication, other aspects of the state's new role in rural communities must also be analyzed.

It must be stressed, however, that microstudies have real value. They allow us to see some of the rich detail of habitant life - details which are difficult to get at from a more global perspective. Through this more narrow focus, we can examine the dynamics of social relationships within a given community. The present study of St. Grégoire makes it very clear that there was a close connection between the resentment the habitants felt against the priests over the issue of the parish division, and the hostility they felt about the priests' growing hegemony over school affairs. By showing us the relationship between priest and parish in its most raw state, this study of St. Grégoire has provided us with an insight into what shaped that relationship. And clearly, one of its determinants was the amount of control the priests and their allies, the village professional men, attempted to exercise over local affairs.

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