James Dawson of Pictou and *The Harmonicon*: Sacred Music
for Victorian Maritimers¹

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In 1831, in the space of a few months, notices appeared in several Nova Scotia newspapers announcing proposals for the publication of two new collections of church music. One called for a "Collection of Hymns, to suit the taste of enlightened and intelligent Christians...[which would include] the favorite, the best, and most unexceptional of those already published, with a few original ones," all of which would avoid a lengthy list of errors.⁴ The second aimed to be "as extensively useful as possible" by requesting "all those who...[were] interested in its appearance, to send...[in] a list of the Tunes they would wish to appear in it."⁵ The first, possibly because

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the "Scotia and Nova Scotia" conference at St. Mary's University, Halifax, 26-29 September 1996. We wish to acknowledge the often detailed assistance we received from professional staff of numerous libraries and archives in Canada and the United States where we have sought copies and information related to the *Harmonicon*. Very capable graduate students, Mark Bartlett, Justin Fox, and more recently Anne MacKinnon, helped us to track down a wide variety of relevant data. The initial research for this paper was made possible by the Bernard Amtmann Fellowship awarded to Bertrum MacDonald by the Bibliographical Society of Canada.

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4 "Proposal for Publishing a Collection of Hymns," *Novascotian*, Wednesday, 13 July 1831, p. 219. Among the errors which were "intended to be avoided" were 1) "All familiar and mawkish expressions such as 'sweet Savior,'..."; 2) "All low and improper terms; as God governing 'with a nod,'..."; 3) "All bad grammar; as God 'forms His vessels as he please,'..."; 4) "All unscriptural phrases; as 'blessed the wine,'..."; 5) "All bad rhymes; as 'pursued' rhyming with 'blood'..."; and 6) "All preaching Hymns, in which doctrines and not praise are most prominently brought forthwith."

5 "To be Published," *Colonial Patriot* 4, no. 49, Saturday, 3 December 1831. The same advertisement was placed in subsequent issues of the *Colonial Patriot* through early 1832, and in other Nova Scotian newspapers such as the *Yarmouth Telegraph*, 20 January 1832, p. 4.

it had restricted its choice of suitable hymns, was never realized.⁶ The second, however, was destined to become the first printed music in Nova Scotia, and for over three decades was the music book of choice for Scottish Presbyterian communities in eastern British North America. That these proposals for new music books appeared in Nova Scotia in 1831 was not unusual. As in many other colonial settings, the publishing of music in Nova Scotia followed the introduction of other forms of indigenous printing by several decades. More importantly, however, the proposals were a reflection of the “intellectual awakening” that D.C. Harvey claims the colony experienced in the 1820s and 1830s,⁷ and, in the case of the second, represented the dominance of Scottish culture in the eastern part of Nova Scotia.

Music, a feature of cultures everywhere, was an integral element in the life of early European settlers in North America. Scots, for example, who arrived in the Maritimes in the thousands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,⁸ created a rich legacy that today is found in the remarkable renaissance of musical talent and interest in Celtic music. Singing had long been an important element in the life of Scottish people; whether in the form of “wauking” songs, traditional ballads, or psalms and hymns sung at religious services, Scots assimilated music into their lives with enthusiasm. Early Scottish settlers in British North America brought this love of

6 The advertisement did not identify an editor or publisher, and we have not been able to locate a music book that fits the description of the advertisement.

7 D.C. Harvey, “The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia,” *Dalhousie Review* 13 (1933): 1-22. Other papers which expand on this theme include: A.G. Bailey, “Creative Moments in the Culture of the Maritime Provinces,” *Dalhousie Review* 29 (October 1949): 231-244; Kenneth Donovan, “May Learning Flourish’: The Beginnings of a Cultural Awakening in Cape Breton During the 1840s,” in *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton’s History, 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Fredericton; Sydney: Acadiensis Press; University College of Cape Breton Press, 1990), 89-112; and Daniel C. Goodwin, “‘The Very Vitals of Christianity’: The Baptismal Controversy and the Intellectual Awakening in Nova Scotia, 1811-1848,” *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (1995): 72-87. See also, Charles H.H. Scobie and George A. Rawlyk, *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997).

8 See Stephen J. Hornsby, “Patterns of Scottish Emigration to Canada, 1750-1870,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 18, no. 4 (1992): 397-416.

music with them.⁹ Though far from their former homeland, they relied on aural transmission as well as imported song books to fill their desire for familiar music. These sentiments were voiced explicitly in the following ballad:

The Auld Scotch Sangs

O sing to me the auld Scotch sangs,
I' the braid Scottish tongue,
The sangs my father wished to hear,
The sangs my mither sung,
When she sat beside my cradle,
Or Crooned me on her knee,
And I wadna sleep she sang sae sweet
The auld Scotch sangs to me.

Sing ony o' the auld Scotch sangs,
The blithesome or the sad,
They make me smile when I am wae
And greet when I am glad;
My heart gaes back to auld Scotland,
The saut tear dims my e'e,
And the Scotch blood leaps in a' my veins,
As ye sing the sangs to me.

Sing on, sing mair o' these auld sangs,
For ilka ane can tell,
O' joy or sorrow o' the past,
Where mem'ry loves to dwell;
Tho' hair grow grey, and limbs grow auld,
Until the day I dee,
I'll bless the Scottish tongue that sings
The auld Scotch sangs to me.¹⁰

When music works published in the region seemed scarce, one enterprising Scot by the name of James Dawson sought to remedy the problem by publishing a book of music. Although it was the first book printed with a music type font in Nova Scotia and was popular

9 See Charles W. Dunn, *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), esp. 54-57 and 96-97; D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto: MacClelland and Stewart, 1974); and Margaret MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience: Songs of Highland Emigrants in North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

10 J. Douglas Borthwick, *The History of Scottish Song* (Montreal: Murray & Co., 1874), 4.

enough in the Victorian period to warrant publication in three editions, *The Harmonicon*, “a collection of sacred music, consisting of psalm and hymn tunes, anthems, &c,” first published in 1838 is little known today.¹¹ In this paper we set out the history of *The Harmonicon* for the first time and establish its importance in the print culture of the period.

The Nova Scotia Context

As Phyllis Blakeley has pointed out: “Unlike the first attempts at literature and painting which have survived for the judgement of posterity, we have no way of evaluating early musical efforts” in British North America.¹² In part because this is the case, historians of print culture have tended to overlook the place of music in

11 The only extant copy of the first edition seems to be a microfilm of a fragmented copy, which was filmed by the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (now Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management) in 1973. No information is given concerning the location or ownership of the book, and as yet we have been unable to locate another copy. This may help to explain the reason for the numerous errors concerning the publication date of the first edition and also the fact that although the *Harmonicon* was the first printed music in Nova Scotia, it has been relatively neglected in discussions of music in the Maritimes. Writing long before the microfilm of the first edition, Phyllis Blakeley gave the publication date as 1836 (See “Music in Nova Scotia, 1605-1867,” *Dalhousie Review* 31, no. 3 (autumn 1951): 228), and this has been repeated in the literature for many years, including Stanley L. Osborne’s and John Beckwith’s article on “Hymn and Hymn Tunes” in the *Encyclopedia of Music of Canada*, ed. Helmut Kallmann and Gilles Potvin, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), as well as in volume 5, entitled *Hymn Tunes*, of the Canadian Musical Heritage Society series edited by John Beckwith (Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1986). Margaret A. Filshie wrote that the *Harmonicon* was published “possibly in 1831,” in “Sacred Harmonies: The Congregational Voice in Canadian Protestant Worship, 1750-1850,” *Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens* 7 (1985): 294. Barclay McMillan included a description of the second and third editions of the *Harmonicon* in his “Tune-Book Imprints in Canada to 1867: A Descriptive Bibliography,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 16 (1977): 31-57. Maria Calderisi Bryce’s brief article “Music Publishers in the Maritimes: 1801-1900,” *APLA Bulletin* (September 1985): 10-11 gives the correct date of 1838 for the first edition as does Nancy F. Vogan’s short article “*The Harmonicon*,” in *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, ed. Helmut Kallmann and Gilles Potvin, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 582. Yet, even the recent Nova Scotia Museum Curatorial Report Number 85, makes no mention of the *Harmonicon* (see Paul Martell, *Music in Nova Scotia — The Written Tradition: 1752-1893* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1998).

12 Blakeley, “Music in Nova Scotia, 1605-1867,” 94.

society, or as Dorothy Farquharson has suggested: "The importance of music in the lives of our early Canadians has been given only casual mention in most social histories to date, probably because our settlers played a musical instrument, sang songs of their homeland or danced to 'the instrument of the devil,' but recorded very little."¹³ Thus, until the invention of recording technologies late in the nineteenth century, when musical events could be captured for "the judgement of posterity," historians have had to rely on oral traditions, diaries, letters, newspaper accounts, sheet music, and song books to trace the history of our musical heritage. In recent decades it is these records that have allowed scholars to probe the musical history of Atlantic Canada, difficult as it may be to uncover the place of music in the first two centuries of colonial life after European settlement.¹⁴

In the second half of the eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth century, when large numbers of Scots emigrated to the Maritimes, the town of Pictou became a centre of Scottish

- 13 Dorothy H. Farquharson, "O, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing": *A History of Singing Schools in Early Canada* (Waterdown, Ontario: Dorothy H. Farquharson, 1983), 1. In some communities particular churches frowned upon dancing. In this context, the fiddle was considered the "instrument of the devil."
- 14 In addition to the pioneer work of Blakeley and Helmut Kallmann (*A History of Music in Canada, 1534-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960)), and the Bryce article, noted above, see, for example, Frederick A. Hall, "Musical Life in Eighteenth-Century Halifax," *Canadian University Music Review* no. 4 (1983): 278-307; Frederick A. Hall, "Musical Yankees and Tories in Maritime Settlements of 18th-century Canada," in *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity*, ed. Beverley Diamond and Robert Witner (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. 1994), reprinted from *American Music* 5, no. 4 (1987): 391-402; Timothy J. McGee, "Music in Halifax, 1749-1799," *Dalhousie Review* 49, no. 3 (1969): 377-387; Fred K. Graham, "Methodist Hymn Tunes in Atlantic Canada," in *The Contributions of Methodism to Atlantic Canada*, ed. Charles H.H. Scobie and John Webster Grant (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 257-268; Nancy F. Vogan, "Music Instruction in Nova Scotia Before 1914," in *Musical Canada: Words and Music Honouring Helmut Kallmann*, ed. John Beckwith and Frederick A. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 71-78; Nancy F. Vogan, "The Musical Traditions of the Planters and 'Mary Miller Her Book,'" in *Making Adjustments: Change and Continuity in Planter Nova Scotia 1759-1800*, ed. Margaret Conrad (Fredericton, N.B.: Acadiensis Press, 1991), 247-252; J. Paul Green and Nancy F. Vogan, *Music Education in Canada: A Historical Account* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), esp. Chapter 2, "Maritimes"; and Nancy F. Vogan, "'The Robert Moor Tunebook' and Musical Culture in Eighteenth-Century Nova Scotia," in *Cultural Orientations: Community Building in Colonial Nova Scotia*, ed. Margaret Conrad (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, in press).

influence in the region. By 1803, when the celebrated Dr. Thomas McCulloch arrived, the population of the area had grown to about 5,000,¹⁵ and Pictou rivalled Halifax as a major east-coast port. This town became a focal point for cultural development in the colony, which for Scottish settlers was possibly the most important.

The Dawson Firm

It is in this social and historical context that we find James Dawson, one of the more interesting contributors to cultural life in mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. He was born on 25th March 1789 in Overtown, Banffshire, Scotland, one of ten children of a prosperous farmer. In his early teens he worked as a farm labourer, and when a case of childhood smallpox damaged his eyes, preventing him from going on to university like his brothers, he was apprenticed to a saddler at 17.¹⁶ In 1811 when he was 22, he emigrated with only a guinea in his pocket to Pictou, where he was employed under a three year contract by the self-made merchant, Edward Mortimer.¹⁷ It seems that Mortimer's entrepreneurial talents quickly rubbed off on the young Dawson, for, by 1813, he had negotiated an early conclusion to his contractual arrangements and had gone into business with his brother, Robert, who had also emigrated to Pictou. The Dawsons dealt mostly with saddlery but, in addition, hardware, "soft goods," and stationery were sold.¹⁸ The inclusion of stationery at this stage of James Dawson's business career may have been an

15 Margory Whitelaw, *Thomas McCulloch, His Life, and Times* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1985), 12.

16 B. Anne Wood, *God, Science, and Schooling: John William Dawson's Pictou Years, 1820-1855* (Truro: Nova Scotia Teachers College, 1991), 4-5.

17 With frugality and good business acumen, Dawson still had a portion of that guinea in his pocket at the end of his first year of employment in Pictou and £20 as well. See Margory Whitelaw, "Recollections of His Life, by James Dawson. From a Family Scrapbook in the Papers of Sir William Dawson, Special Collections, McGill University," *Dalhousie Review* 53, no. 3 (Autumn 1973): 507.

18 S.B. Frost, "A Transatlantic Wooing," *Dalhousie Review* 58, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 458. Frost wrote: "In 1813 he [i.e., James Dawson] compounded with his master and went into business with his brother Robert. 'Jas. and R. Dawson' dealt mostly in saddlery but also in 'Hardware, Soft Goods and Stationery.'" See also, Whitelaw, "Recollections," 509.

indicator of a more deep-rooted interest.¹⁹ Three years later, in 1816, the Dawson brothers chartered a ship to handle their business and shortly thereafter they were building their own vessels. After working together for five years, the brothers dissolved their partnership and each struck out on his own with individual lines of work, both located in Pictou.²⁰ Late in that year, i.e., 1818, James married Mary Rankine of Lonerig, Scotland.

James Dawson was a successful businessman, and the context of Pictou in which he worked enhanced his business vision. He seems typical of numerous enterprising Scots who entered the book trade throughout British North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Fiona Black's research has shown.²¹ His location in Pictou put him in a position to serve his fellow Scottish expatriots with greater attention than could the merchants of Halifax, and he undertook this role with the diligence of an astute businessman, demonstrating firm religious and Scottish values.²² A

19 In a letter to his father dated, 16 November 1814, James Dawson noted that "we are now begun Business [sic] for ourselves and I think we will do as well as any other tradesmen in the place..." James Dawson papers, McGill University Archives, MG 1022, container 45.

20 James Dawson had put up all of the original capital for the business and when the partnership was dissolved he seems to have bought out his brother. The Dawson papers contain two deeds dated 27 October 1819 which transferred to James property jointly owned by the brothers valued at a total of £170.00.

21 Fiona A. Black, "Book Availability in Canada, 1752-1820, and the Scottish Contribution" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Information and Library Science, Loughborough University, 1999). See also her "'Adventurous Merchants and Atlantic Waves': A Preliminary Study of the Scottish Contribution to Book Availability in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1752-1820," in *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia c. 1700-1900*, ed. Marjory Harper and Michael Vance (Halifax: Published for the Gorsebrook Research Institute for Atlantic Canada Studies by Fernwood Publishers and John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1999), 157-188, and "Book Distribution to the Scottish and Canadian Provinces, 1750-1820: Examples of Methods and Availability," in *The Reach of Print: Making, Selling, and Using Books*, ed. Peter C.G. Isaac and Barry McKay (Winchester; New Castle, DE: St. Paul's Bibliographies; Oak Knoll Press, 1998), 103-120. Details of other expatriot Scots involved in the British North American book trade can be found in George L. Parker, *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

22 In autobiographical musings, written a few years before his death, Dawson claimed that his life mirrored that of the Biblical Job, and his accomplishments came about "by a Steady adherence to habits of Industry and Perseverance, and a firm dependence on the Divine Providence." "Incidents of a Life," James Dawson Papers, McGill University Archives, MG 1022.

centre of ship building, the timber trade, and later, coal production, during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Pictou saw exports averaging £100,000 annually, and some years exceeding £300,000.²³ Dawson thrived in this vigorous economic climate. As he would later write, by 1823 he was

at the head of a Business, second to none in Pictou, shipping yearly from 10 to 15 cargoes of Timber to G Britain—3 to 4 Cargoes of Fish &c to the West Indies, and receiving in return as many cargoes of W India Produce,—fitting 10 or 12 vessels annually to the Gulf and Labrador fishery, and building a vessel yearly for the British market, so that, had any person at that time offered me £10,000 for my property and Business, it is not at all likely I would have accepted it.²⁴

But prosperity was to be short-lived. By the mid-1820s Dawson found himself seriously in debt as a result of significant losses at sea, largely related to misfortune and unreliable ships' captains. When he took stock of his business in 1826, he calculated that his obligations to creditors amounted to over £4,000. He was a highly principled individual, however, for whom bankruptcy would have been a supreme embarrassment (see Figure 1). So, governed by a moral stamina that is impressive, he returned to the U.K. late in 1826 to sell one of his ships and meet with his creditors.²⁵ There he negotiated a long-term payment scheme using a promissory note and mortgages on all his real estate in Nova Scotia as surety. In the spring of 1827 he returned to Pictou with "a small stock of books and stationery" to undertake a bookselling enterprise in earnest.²⁶ Dawson was the first in the colony to operate a dedicated bookstore outside of the capital, Halifax, and for the next thirty years he conducted the business (later in conjunction with his son) extending its reach throughout eastern Nova Scotia, into the neighbouring colony of Prince Edward Island, and to a lesser extent into New Brunswick,

23 See George Patterson, *A History of the County of Pictou, Nova Scotia* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1877), 244f; also Whitelaw, *Thomas McCulloch, His Life, and Times*, 18.

24 Whitelaw, "Recollections," 516. Whitelaw retained the spelling and punctuation found in the Dawson manuscript, on which her article is based.

25 As Dawson wrote to his wife on 28 February 1827: "The Times are hard, Trade is Dull, Meat is Dear. Money is Leaner and we have had a very unsteady winter." James Dawson to Mary Rankine Dawson, 28 February 1827. James Dawson papers.

26 "Incidents of a Life," James Dawson Papers, and Whitelaw, "Recollections," 512.

Figure 1 – James Dawson ca. 1850 (“Mr Dawson, father of J. William Dawson, ca 1850,” reprinted with the permission of the Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal, accession no. MP-0000.505)

thereby serving the Scottish communities in the region. His Pictou shop was well-stocked with books and periodicals, at first imported principally from the warehouses of Oliver & Boyd, a large publishing and wholesale establishment in Edinburgh; but as the century unfolded American publishers were also represented on Dawson's shelves.²⁷ Beginning in the 1830s he expanded his business into publishing as well, and over the next twenty-five years he brought out a weekly newspaper, the *Bee* (which lasted for three years), and a number of pamphlets and books, primarily works by his son, John William, who rose to become the most widely-known and respected Canadian scientist of the century.²⁸

For the next three decades the Dawson family maintained a thriving book and publishing business.²⁹ All of the old debts were paid off with interest, and when James retired in July of 1857 to move to join his son and family in Montreal, where John William had become the principal of McGill University, the firm was sold for a sizeable gain to another Scottish-Nova Scotia company, Murdock McPherson and Son, which carried on the business.³⁰ James Dawson died in Montreal on 7 January 1862.

27 In introducing his newspaper the *Bee*, Dawson stated that he had "some thousands of Volumes of reading at...[his] command, comprising many of the most popular Literary Periodicals of the day." See, "Prospectus," *Bee* 1, no. 1, Wednesday, 17 May 1835, p. 1.

28 Over the past twenty years, scholars with a variety of research perspectives have "mined" the extensive records of John William Dawson held principally at the McGill University Archives. Numerous theses, dissertations, books, papers, and reports have been brought out. For example, see Susan Sheets-Pyenson's recent biography *John William Dawson. Faith, Hope, and Science* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

29 There were some lean years, particularly in the early 1840s; but generally the business was a profitable one. John William, in his autobiography, commented about his experiences as a young man working for this father's business. He noted, too, that in 1841 "it became imperative for me to leave Edinburgh [where he had gone the year before to study]..." This necessity has been attributed to a downturn in his father's business, although it is not evident from the records of the firm. See, John William Dawson, *Fifty Years of Work in Canada: Scientific and Educational* (London and Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson, & Co., 1901), 47.

30 Murdoch McPherson purchased the firm for his son James, who conducted the business for a couple of years but then seems to have failed at the enterprise. James Primrose, Dawson's agent in Pictou, wrote to him "in confidence" on 13 August 1861 that "James McPherson turned out a debauchee—his father has sent him away from home & put the store in charge of Mr. Grant, formerly a bookseller in Halifax." James Dawson papers.

Dawson's Interest in Music

It is clear that from the earliest days of his bookselling business, Dawson catered to the musical needs of his customers. The first printed catalogue of his shop, listing possibly that "small stock of books and stationery" which he brought from Scotland to Pictou in 1827, shows the following among a variety of titles: "Galic [sic] and English Song Books," "*Buchannan's* [sic] *Hymns*," and the "*Inverness Collection of Songs*." Dawson also listed "violin strings" in his inventory, an item his Scottish fiddling customers could purchase whenever they visited his store over the next thirty years.³¹

In almost every catalogue of Dawson's bookselling business, song books show up. One early list, published in two lengthy columns in the *Colonial Patriot* in December 1829, carried the vague notice "Song Books variety." That same advertisement also demonstrates that Dawson had his ear to the needs of his Scottish customers, for he included: *M'Farlane's Songs*, *M'Donald's Songs*, *Campbell's Songs*, *Cameron's Songs*, *Grant's Songs*, *M'Gregor's Songs*, and *Buchanan's Songs*.³² This practice of offering "song books" for sale characterized Dawson's operation throughout the history of the firm. In December 1832, he announced that he had "just received from Edinburgh and London, an extensive assortment of books and stationery," which included the complete *Grant's Hymns* in Gaelic for three shillings.³³ Later in the decade, in 1837-38, he itemized the titles in his shop from A to Z in his own newspaper, the *Bee*.³⁴ Here one finds items from both Britain and the United States:

31 "Catalogue of Books & Stationary [sic], For Sale at the Store of James Dawson, Pictou," John William Dawson Papers, McGill University Archives, file "J.W. Dawson—Lectures, Religious, Temperance." This broadside catalogue is undated. It may have been a catalogue of Dawson's 1827 stock; however, at the bottom of the recto is written "Printed 1816, at Aberdeen," and on the verso is written "J. Dawson's first catalogue."

32 "Catalogue of Books, Stationery, & Other Articles for Sale at the Store of James Dawson, Water Street, Pictou, for Sale Only," *Colonial Patriot* 2, no. 5, Wednesday, 9 December 1829, 201.

33 "Books and Stationery," *Colonial Patriot*, Saturday, 8 December 1832, 195.

34 Dawson began to publish the inventory of his stock in the 1 November issue. See "Books for Sale at the Store of James Dawson," *Bee* 1 November 1837, 187. The list continued in 8 November 1837, 197; 22 November 1837, 210; 29 November 1837, 223; 6 December 1837, 231; 13 December 1837, 236; 27 December 1837, 255; 10 January 1838, 268; 31 January 1838, 295; and 7 February 1838, 300.

<i>Baptist Hymns</i>	4/6
A continuing supply of books in Gaelic including:	
<i>Inverness Collection of Songs</i>	5/—
<i>McFarlane's Songs</i>	3/6
<i>Monroe's Songs</i>	—/9
<i>Campbell's Songs</i>	2/—
<i>Matheson's Songs</i>	1/2
<i>McDonald's Hymns</i>	2/6
<i>Grant's Hymns</i>	3/—
<i>Buchanan's Hymns</i>	1/—
<i>McGregor's Hymns</i>	1/6
<i>Handel & Hayden</i> [sic] <i>Collection of Church Music</i>	7/6
<i>Little Warbler</i> (songs) 6 vols.	7½d
<i>Nova-Scotia Songster</i>	—/6
<i>Popular Songster</i>	—/9
<i>Sacred Minstrelsy</i> , 24 parts, each	2/6
<i>Violinist's Companion</i>	2/—
<i>Wesley's Hymns</i>	3/6

Since Dawson's principal supplier was Oliver and Boyd, the list of most music titles in the *Bee* can be matched in contemporary catalogues of the Edinburgh firm.³⁵ His business records show that throughout the 1840s he continued to order music books from Oliver & Boyd and other Scottish firms, such as Francis Orr & Sons of Glasgow.³⁶ But invoices at the end of that decade and throughout the 1850s exhibit a growing American influence in the book trade.

35 See, *Catalogue of Books, Offered to the Trade Only, by Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh*, 1 January 1836, and *Catalogue of Books, Offered to the Trade Only, by Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh*, 1 April 1837. Oliver and Boyd papers, National Library of Scotland, ACC 5000/1400.

36 See an invoice dated 31 December 1849 from Oliver & Boyd, which lists *Wood's Songs* among numerous other titles. See also, invoices dated Glasgow, 24 March 1849 and 23 August 1850 from Francis Orr & Sons which list in March: "*National Songster* (cloth), *British Songster* (cloth), *British Minstrel*, *Popular Songster*, 3 gross of 'Song Books,'" and in August: "*Davidson's Musical Miscellany*, *Davidson's Instrumental Lines*, and *Davidson's Music Tunes*." James Dawson papers.

On 17 July 1850, for example, Dawson was billed for one gross of the vague item, "Song Books," by Benjamin B. Mussey & Co., of Boston.³⁷ Until he sold his business in 1857, Dawson continued to import music books for his customers from Scottish and American firms. By way of illustration, on 27 March 1856, R. Murray of 128 Barrington Street, Halifax, secretary of the YMCA, wrote to Dawson to order a copy of *Dr. McDonald's Gaelic Songs* "bd in cloth," and Dugald Buchanan's *Spiritual Songs* "cheapest ed."³⁸

The Harmonicon

Although Dawson offered a variety of music books at his shop, including those containing religious music, by the beginning of the 1830s he reached the conclusion that his largely Scottish clients, who either visited his bookstore or purchased items through the mails, were in need of a locally published volume of sacred music.³⁹ Late in 1831 he placed the previously-mentioned advertisement (see Figure 2) in the *Colonial Patriot*: "TO BE PUBLISHED," it read, "as soon as a sufficient number of Subscribers shall offer [for] a new selection of Church Music, to be called The Harmonicon."⁴⁰ Dawson claimed that another tunebook, the *Union Harmony*, which had been published in Saint John by Stephen Humbert earlier in the century, was "long out of print...[having] become exceedingly scarce." Whether this was actually the case is uncertain, but it seems likely since the second edition of Humbert's work was published in 1816⁴¹ and

37 Invoice dated Boston, 17 July 1850 to Messrs J. Dawson & Son from Benj. B. Mussey & Co. James Dawson papers.

38 R. Murray to James Dawson, dated 27 March 1856, 128 Barrington St., Halifax. James Dawson papers.

39 Dawson was an active member of the Pictou community, including the Prince Street Presbyterian Church, where Thomas McCulloch, founder of Pictou Academy, had served as minister from 1804-1824.

40 "To be Published," *Colonial Patriot* 4, no. 49 Saturday, 3 December 1831.

41 Stephen Humbert, *Union Harmony, or British America's Sacred Vocal Music*. 2nd ed. (Saint John: Published by Stephen Humbert, 1816). Although this work was compiled by Humbert who lived in Saint John and is listed as "published" in Saint John, New Brunswick, the printing was done in Exeter, New Hampshire. Since no copy of the first edition, published in 1801, has yet been found, this 1816 work is usually considered to be the first tunebook published in English-speaking Canada. For a detailed analysis of the music in the 1816 edition, see Nicholas Temperley, "Stephen Humbert's *Union Harmony*, 1816: 'Sing Out Glad News,'" *CanMus Documents* 1. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987).

TO BE PUBLISHED
 As soon as a sufficient number of Subscribers
 shall offer,
A NEW SELECTION OF
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THE HARMONICON.

THE collection of Church Music, call-
 ed the **UNION HARMONY**, having
 been long out of print, is now become exceed-
 ingly scarce. The Subscriber, under the im-
 pression that a new Publication, embracing all
 the best Tunes of that excellent Collection;
 together with a judicious selection from the
 other Books of a similar character—is much
 wanted, proposes publishing such a work, as
 soon as the number of Subscribers shall be such
 as to indemnify him for the expence.

The work will contain from 250 to 300 tunes,
 in about 350 pages, and will be delivered to
 Subscribers in boards, at Seven Shillings and
 Six-pence each copy.

The Subscriber, being desirous of making
 the **HARMONICON** as extensively useful as
 possible, requests all those who are interested
 in its appearance, to send him a list of the
 Tunes they would wish to appear in it, and
 state the collection from which the selection
 is made; and, as no agents will be appointed,
 he farther requests the friendly offices of
 such individuals, in taking lists of subscribers
 names in their respective places of abode, and
 forwarding these to him (post paid) with the
 least possible delay; and for every 12 subscrib-
 ers, guaranteed by such Correspondent (if re-
 sponsible) one copy will be given gratis.

A further allowance will be made to the
 trade, whose friendly co-operation is hereby
 respectfully solicited.

JAMES DAWSON.

Pictou, Dec. 8, 1831.

*Editors of Papers friendly to the
 work, are requested to give this notice in-
 sertion.*

Figure 2 – First advertisement for the *Harmonicon*, placed in the *Colonial Patriot*
 3 December 1831.

Dawson was certainly a careful businessman who would avoid undue risk. As the advertisement further stated, he proposed “publishing such a work, as soon as the number of Subscribers shall be such as to indemnify him for the expense.”⁴² Bringing a book out by subscription was not uncommon in the nascent publishing industry in the British North American colonies, so Dawson was not at odds with the strategies of his contemporaries. He was, however, proposing an ambitious venture; the book was to contain upwards of 300 tunes and run to about 350 pages.⁴³ Even more interesting, he invited his customers and others to suggest tunes that should be included in the book. While Dawson’s method of preparing the book was certainly inviting, it seems that the readers of the proposal were not swift off the mark.⁴⁴ Four years were to pass before the public was once again encouraged to become involved in the project. It is possible that Dawson may have delayed publication of the *Harmonicon* because a third edition of *Union Harmony* was published in 1831, the same year in which he first placed his advertisement. Since he was already aware of the second edition of this work, he may well have learned about the third edition of *Union Harmony* after making his proposal public, and therefore decided to put his project on hold.

In 1834 Dawson purchased the press and printing materials of a bankrupt Pictou newspaper, in part so that he could “advertise largely and cheaply and keep the same advantage out of other Peoples’ Hands, who might be disposed to oppose...[him] in...[his] Line of Business,” and in May of the next year he launched his own newspaper, the *Bee*.⁴⁵ Late in the summer of 1835 he once again placed his idea for the *Harmonicon* in the public arena. On 12 August the *Bee* announced: “TO BE PUBLISHED As soon as a sufficient number of Subscribers shall offer, A NEW SELECTION OF CHURCH MUSIC, to be called THE HARMONICON.”⁴⁶ The first part of this notice is no different that the one that had appeared four years earlier. Although Dawson was still convinced that his proposed music book was needed, as one reads further it is

42 “To be Published,” *Colonial Patriot*.

43 Humbert’s *Union Harmony* contained 229 tunes in 317 pages.

44 A list of subscribers has not survived. The James Dawson papers contain a sheet in the file for 1835, which is headed: “Subscribers to the Harmonicon to be published by James Dawson, Pictou according to Prospectus dated 12 Aug. 1835”; but no subscribers are listed.

45 “Incidents of a Life.” James Dawson papers.

46 “To Be Published,” *Bee* 1, no. 12, 12 August 1835, 95.

clear that parts of his idea had changed. Whereas earlier he had planned to publish a volume of 350 pages that would have cost 7s.6d, he had discovered "the general opinion to be that the size was too large and expensive." So, he scaled back his plan and now proposed a volume of 250 pages to be sold for 6s. More significantly, he had "imported a Fount of Music Type," thus, as he stated, "removing the difficulties which formerly stood in his way of getting it printed in the Province."⁴⁷ This advertisement also informed readers of the minimum number of subscribers he felt he needed for the venture to be viable. "The printing will positively be commenced as soon as 300 subscribers shall offer," he assured "those friendly to the proposed work." He continued to entreat readers to "to send him a list of the Tunes they would wish to appear in it, and state the collection from which the selection is made." As an incentive, he offered to provide a free copy to anyone who obtained twelve subscribers for the volume.

Over the next year this notice appeared in the *Bee*, first weekly, then about every two weeks, after which time once again the project disappeared from the public view.⁴⁸ In the interim, Dawson advertised

47 Surviving records of the Dawson firm from the 1830s do not allow determination of where Dawson obtained the music type font. While he applied for drawbacks on the duty applied to other imports, a search of the *Journals and Appendices of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia* has not turned up any record of a petition for a drawback on duties on type. We are grateful to William Lawrence for suggesting this source of information. Dawson's son, John William, noted in his autobiography that he had travelled to Boston in the mid-1830s, soon after the printing equipment had been purchased, "in connection with one of my father's publishing ventures." John William Dawson, *Fifty Years of Work in Canada*, 31. It is possible that John William went to Boston on matters related to the *Harmonicon*, but neither he nor his father in the latter's autobiographical notes wrote anything about publishing the *Harmonicon*.

48 The ad appeared in: Wednesday, 26 August 1835, v. 1, no. 14, p. 105; Wednesday, 2 September 1835, v. 1, no. 15, p. 113; Wednesday, 9 September 1835, v. 1, no. 16, p. 121; Wednesday, 16 September 1835, v. 1, no. 17, p. 129; Wednesday, 23 September 1835, v. 1, no. 18, p. 137; Wednesday, 30 September 1835, v. 1, no. 19, p. 145; Wednesday, 7 October 1835, v. 1, no. 20, p. 155; Wednesday, 14 October 1835, v. 1, no. 21, p. 165; Wednesday, 21 October 1835, v. 1, no. 22, p. 173; Wednesday, 11 November 1835, v. 1, no. 25, p. 197; Wednesday, 18 November 1835, v. 1, no. 26, p. 203; Wednesday, 9 December 1835, v. 1, no. 29, p. 231; Wednesday, 6 January 1836, v. 1, no. 33, p. 263; Wednesday, 13 January 1836, v. 1, no. 34, p. 267; Wednesday, 23 March 1836, v. 1, no. 44, p. 349; Wednesday, 30 March 1836, v. 1, no. 45, p. 356; Wednesday, 6 April 1836, v. 1, no. 46, p. 363; Wednesday, 30 April 1836, v. 1, no. 48, p. 383; Wednesday, 4 May 1836, v. 1, no. 50, p. 399; Wednesday, 1 June 1836, v. 2, no. 2, p. 15; Wednesday, 8 June 1836, v. 2, no. 3, p. 19; and Wednesday, 13 July 1836, v. 2, no. 8, p. 61.

another volume, *The Nova-Scotia Songster*, “a selection of Scotch, English, Irish, Love, Naval, and Comic Songs published in February 1836.”⁴⁹ More pertinent to his putting the *Harmonicon* project aside, however, may have been the tragic death of his teenage son, James, from scarlet fever, an event that left Dawson and his family in shock.⁵⁰ Eight months passed before he was able to announce that the *Harmonicon* was finally “in the press.” On 15 March 1837 he declared that the presses had been at work and close to 80 tunes had already been printed. To prove the point (and maybe to convince long anxious customers), he included two tunes in the *Bee* (see Figure 3). Once again he sought new subscribers, for as he stated “as but a limited number of Copies are printing, those wishing to become subscribers to the Work will please hand in their names without delay.” The volume was still not finalized, however, so he continued to encourage “contributions of favorite and popular tunes.”⁵¹ Seeing this volume through the press continued to be a slow process for Dawson; it was not until February 1838 that the long-promised *Harmonicon; A Collection of Sacred Music, Consisting of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, Anthems, &c., Selected from the Best Authors; with a Copious Introduction to Vocal Music* finally appeared (see Figure 4). On the 28th of that month the *Bee* announced that the book was “Just Published,” and for sale at Dawson’s shop and the establishments of two booksellers in Halifax. Besides these outlets, Dawson engaged agents to market the volume in Guysborough, Antigonish, New Glasgow, Truro, Wallace, Tatamagouche, and River John.⁵² In addition, agents for his newspaper were located even further afield in the Maritimes, as far away as Charlottetown,

49 The volume was announced in a small advertisement on 10 February 1836 (see *Bee* 1, no. 38, 10 February 1836, p. 299), and repeated in subsequent issues until 30 April 1836. There are no known extant copies of the *Nova-Scotia Songster*, but like similar American publications it was probably “an anthology of song lyrics” without musical notation. See Irving Lowens, *A Bibliography of Songsters Printed in America Before 1821* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1976).

50 Both Dawson and his son, John William, wrote in later life about the trauma of James’s untimely death. See, “Incidents of a Life,” James Dawson papers, and John William Dawson, *Fifty Years of Work in Canada*, 20–21.

51 “In the Press, and Shortly to be Published,” *Bee* 2, no. 43, 15 March 1837, p. 343. This advertisement appeared in several issues throughout the remainder of 1837.

52 The agents are listed in the ad which appeared in *Bee* 3, no. 47, 11 April 1838, p. 371.

Figure 3 – Specimens of tunes published in the first edition of the *Harmonicon*, first printed in *The Bee*, 15 March 1837.

Figure 4 – Title page of the first edition of the *Harmonicon*, published in 1838, from the microfilm copy held at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

Miramichi, Saint John, and Arichat. In short, sales of the *Harmonicon* were promoted throughout the region where his Scottish compatriots were concentrated.⁵³

The *Harmonicon* contained 219 tunes and numbered over 220 pages; Dawson sold it for six shillings. It was oblong in shape like the “longboy” or “open-ender” tunebooks from New England, measuring 15 cm. by 23 cm.⁵⁴ In the preface, Dawson declared that “some explanation may be deemed necessary respecting the length of time which has elapsed since the work was first advertised. Upon this point we only plead the uncertainty of remuneration for the expense which must necessarily be incurred, and the difficulties arising from the *Harmonicon* being the first musical work published in this Province, and the consequent want of music type and composers by whom it could be used.”⁵⁵ He also acknowledged the help he received: “The Publisher begs leave thankfully to acknowledge the aid which he had received, in the execution of this plan, from those gentlemen who have furnished him with selections, and especially Mr. Charles Robson, of this town, to whom he is peculiarly indebted.”⁵⁶ Robson, the son of the Presbyterian minister, Rev. James Robson, first ran a dry goods business in Pictou, but later moved to Halifax, where his store on Granville Street was located next door to the bookselling and publishing establishment of A. & W. Mackinlay. A founder of the Poplar Grove Church, Robson was an elder and the leader of the choir for many years.⁵⁷ No other identity is given for “those gentlemen” who assisted Dawson in this project, but in the preface to the third edition Dawson names another, his nephew, James Hepburn, also of Pictou. Hepburn

53 The agents for the *Bee* included: Dennis Reddin in Charlottetown; Rev. John McCurdy in Miramichi; A.R. Truro and Messrs. Ratchford & Lugren in Saint John; Messrs. A. & W. McKinlay in Halifax; Charles Blanchard in Truro; Robert Purvis in Antigonish; Robert Hartshorne in Guysborough; James Campbell in Tatamagouche; Daniel McFarlane in Wallace; and John S. Ballaine in Arichat.

54 Measurements are given on the microfilm of this edition located at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

55 *The Harmonicon; A Collection of Sacred Music, Consisting of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, Anthems, &c., Selected from the Best Authors; With a Copious Introduction to Vocal Music* (Pictou: Published by James Dawson, Bookseller, Printed at the Bee Office, 1838), preface.

56 Ibid.

57 “Death of Charles Robson, Feb. 18, 1886,” *Morning Herald*, 19 February 1886, p. 3.

operated a business as a "saddle, harness, and trunk-maker" from at least 1830, a line of work similar to Dawson's first undertaking, and was a member of the Prince Street Presbyterian Church, where Dawson was a long-time elder.⁵⁸

The music in the first edition of Dawson's *Harmonicon*, as indicated in his advertisements as well as the complete title of the work, was drawn from a number of different sources. The 219 items included psalm tunes, hymns, fusing tunes,⁵⁹ and anthems, beginning with the psalm tunes *Wirksworth*, *Walsal*, and *St. Mark's* and ending with *Doxology*, *Anthem for Easter*, *Anthem: "Hear My Prayer O God,"* and *Dying Christian*. Seventy-five of the selections are found in either the 1816 or 1831 editions of Humbert's *Union Harmony* but only one, *Nativity*, is an original composition by Humbert. Several of these items are also found in Zebulon Estey's *New Brunswick Church Harmony* published in Saint John in 1835. Most works are in four-parts, written in octavo style with no accompaniment. Texts for only one stanza are included, written above the third vocal part (or tenor), which had the tune. Many of the composers are acknowledged, but the only source identified is *Wesley's Hymns* (a

58 "James Hepburn, Saddle, Harness, and Trunk Maker," *Colonial Patriot* 3, no. 2, 9 January 1830. The same advertisement was printed in subsequent issues of the newspaper that year, and read in part, "James Hepburn...Most respectfully acquaints the inhabitants of Pictou and the public, that he has commenced business in the above branches..." A photograph of the choir of the Prince Street Presbyterian Church in Pictou in 1865 shows James Hepburn holding a flute. See, Judith Hoegg Ryan, *The Birth of New Scotland: An Illustrated History of Pictou County, Canada's Cradle of Industry* (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 1995), 34.

59 In the preface to a reissue of James Lyon's *Urania* Richard Crawford gives the following description of the term "fusing tune": "The fusing-tune was developed by mid-eighteenth-century British psalmodists and was cultivated by American composers late in that century. While variations in the form occur, it most typically is divided into two sections as follows: The beginning is brief and in block-chord texture; the second section begins with a point of imitation (the 'fuge'), and then returns for its conclusion to the chordal texture of the beginning. The second section is usually repeated. Since the fusing-tune bears no formal relation to the classical fugue, it seems sensible to follow the suggestion put forth by Irving Lowens, that the distinction between the two forms be emphasized by adopting the spelling 'fuging-tune' used by most eighteenth-century compilers (See Irving Lowens, "The Origins of the American Fuging-Tune," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 1 (Spring 1953), revised in his *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: Norton, 1964), 237-248)." Richard Crawford, "Preface," in *Urania* by James Lyon, originally published Philadelphia, 1761 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), xviii, n. 17.

work that was available for sale in Dawson's shop). An extensive 14-page "Introduction to Vocal Music" preceded the music itself; the source for this introduction is not given. An alphabetical index concludes the volume. There is no evidence that Dawson and his collaborators in this venture had any aspirations as composers, for the *Harmonicon* contained no compositions by these men, as was often the practice. The fact that most of the selections can be found in *The Hymn Tune Index* (HTI) indicates that most of the tunes were well-loved favourites, since the HTI only includes publications up to 1820.⁶⁰ On this point, Dawson stated in his preface

While among every Christian people, Sacred Music is an object to which much taste and talent are directed, each country has its peculiar national melodies. From this cause, the inhabitants of Nova Scotia and adjoining Colonies, having derived their psalmody from sources as various as their own origin, are subject to extreme inconvenience, from the tunes generally in use being dispersed through the works of various authors, and thus rendered incapable of being reduced to a convenient form, without great labour and expense. It is therefore the multiplicity rather than the scarcity of musical works, that has suggested the necessity of the present publication, and an attempt has been made rather to cull what is useful and excellent from the mass of materials already existing, than to add anything to the sacred music previously used in the Province; while at the same time it is hoped that every possessor of the work, may find it to contain something new, as well as much which he may have been accustomed to admire.⁶¹

Why Dawson named his book *The Harmonicon* is not known. One of the first long-run music periodicals in England was named *The Harmonicon*. Founded by British musician William Ayrton, it was published in London from 1823 to 1833. Although this journal was not among those sold by Dawson from his shop in Pictou, he may well have been familiar with it from publishers' advertisements or other music books in his stock, and decided to borrow the title. He may also have been aware of two other works that used a similar

⁶⁰ Nicholas Temperley, assisted by Charles G. Manns and Joseph Herl, *The Hymn Tune Index: A Census of English-Language Hymn Tunes in Printed Sources from 1535 to 1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Such was not the case with *Union Harmony*, for in his third and fourth editions Humbert included several newer works that are not found in the *Hymn Tune Index*, including some of his own compositions.

⁶¹ *Harmonicon*, 1st ed., preface.

title, one published in London and the other in the United States. The London title, *The Sacred Harmonicon, No. 1*, was an 18-page music score set for four voices (SATB), similar to the tunes in Dawson's volume.⁶² The American work, *The Sacred Harmonicon: A Collection of Music for Educational and Religious Purposes*, was, like Dawson's *Harmonicon*, a tunebook of religious music, which Thomas Harrison published in Cincinnati.⁶³

Soon after its release the *Novascotian* declared that the *Harmonicon* was the "first Musical Work ever printed in Nova Scotia...got up in a very credible style."⁶⁴ The *Halifax Pearl* was positively glowing in its review. "We have much pleasure in being enabled to speak in the highest terms of this selection of sacred music," the reviewer wrote, and then went on:

The mechanical execution of the work is exceedingly creditable to the press of Mr. Dawson of Pictou, from whence it has been issued, whilst the compiler has evinced much taste in the selection of his tunes and anthems. We have a great variety of Tune Books in our possession, but we have not one of its dimensions, embodying so choice a collection as the Harmonicon. Its value in our estimation, is exceedingly enhanced by the introduction of a greater part of W. Arnold's most admired compositions. These alone are worth the full price charged for the whole collection. To those also who are about to commence the study of sacred music, this work will be found to be of inestimable use, as the directions to learners are remarkable for their fullness and explicitness. The Harmonicon is for sale at the different book-stores in town, and we feel confident that all who examine it, having any knowledge of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, will concur with us in the opinion

62 *The Sacred Harmonicon, No. 1* ([London, 183-]). A copy of this title is held at Yale University.

63 Thomas Harrison, *The Sacred Harmonicon: A Collection of Music for Educational and Religious Purposes*, 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: By the Author, 1843). Although we have made an extensive search of multiple databases and catalogues, we have been unable to locate a first edition. A fifth edition containing about 140 hymns with tunes, published in Cincinnati in 1846, states that "a patent right was...obtained on the 26th of October, 1839, to secure the use of the [musical] system." This statement implies that the first edition was brought out in the late 1830s, however, after Dawson had announced his *Harmonicon*. See the record for the Harrison 5th edition in the Boston University catalogue.

64 "The HARMONICON, the first musical work ever printed in Nova Scotia," *Novascotian* 9, no. 11, Thursday, 15 March 1838, p. 82.

we have expressed, of its great value as a companion of the very best tunes extant.⁶⁵

Dawson, naturally, was very quick to include this praise in his advertisements for the book, and the edition soon sold out. While it had taken seven years to see the first edition through the press, only three were required for the second. By 1841 the accumulated demand for the volume convinced Dawson to bring out another edition (see Figure 5). In the preface to the second edition he stated: "Encouraged by the very favourable manner in which the *Harmonicon* was received on its first appearance, the Publisher has been induced to offer a second, and much improved edition. The whole work has been carefully revised and corrected, and a considerable number of approved tunes added. In other respects the work is the same as formerly, with the exception of a few alterations in one or two tunes. It is therefore hoped that the present edition will fully sustain the reputation acquired for the first."⁶⁶ Except for one tune, the music for the second edition included all the tunes from the first, but as the preface stated they had been "carefully revised and corrected, and a considerable number of approved tunes" had been added.⁶⁷

Over the next few years even the second edition went out of print, and at the end of the decade Dawson contemplated a new one. This time he undertook the project differently. Rather than handle the printing himself, he engaged the firm of George Haszard & Co. of Charlottetown,⁶⁸ and in 1849 the third edition was available for purchase.⁶⁹ Anticipating that demand might outstrip production

65 "The *Harmonicon*," *Halifax Pearl* 2, Friday, 30 March 1838, p. 102. W. Arnold was the choirmaster of a Wesleyan meeting-house in Portsmouth, England. He published a book of religious tunes entitled *Original Psalm and Hymn Tunes* (London: For the Composer, Portsea, 1804-1809).

66 *The Harmonicon: A Collection of Sacred Music, Consisting of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, Anthems, &c. Selected from the Best Authors, with a Copious Introduction to Vocal Music*, 2nd ed. Improved and enlarged (Pictou: J. Dawson, 1841), preface.

67 Eleven tunes from this edition are included in facsimile in *Hymn Tunes*, ed. John Beckwith (Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1986), v. 5.

68 George T. Haszard was the son of James Douglas Haszard, who had established a printing operation in Charlottetown in 1823. See Ian Ross Robertson, "Haszard, James Douglas," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ed. Frances G. Halpenny and André Vachon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 10: 339.

Figure 5 – Title page of the second edition of the *Harmonicon*, published in 1841.
Reprinted with permission from a photograph in *Hymn Tunes*,
ed. John Beckwith (Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1986), v. 5.

Figure 6 – Title page of the third edition of the *Harmonicon*, reproduced from
a copy held in the Department of Special Collections, Killam Library,
Dalhousie University.

of even a third edition, the book was set in type and stereo plates were prepared in Boston by A.B. Kidder (see Figure 6).⁷⁰ While Dawson orchestrated the preparation of the edition from Pictou, Haszard handled printing and binding.⁷¹ A surviving agreement between Haszard and Dawson confirms that 1000 copies were printed in one early press run.⁷² As with the earlier editions, Dawson promoted the volume through agents, one of the more important being A. & W. Mackinlay of Halifax. Others included C.H. Belcher, Halifax; James McGregor, New Glasgow; S. Fenlon, Wallace; and George T. Haszard and H. Stamper, both of Charlottetown.

In the third edition, a more significant change was made in the music content. Dawson added “more than fifty carefully Selected tunes and pieces...and about half of that number of tunes, which have fallen into disuse” were omitted.⁷³ Many of the new selections were from American publications by Lowell Mason; the sources were acknowledged in each case.⁷⁴ This edition contains over 275 tunes on 272 pages, and both alphabetical and metrical indices are

69 “Just Published by James Dawson & Son, Pictou, The Harmonicon,” *Eastern Chronicle*, Thursday, 6 December 1849, p. 3. Dawson registered the copyright for the third edition on 24 November 1849. See the copyright statement in the “Provincial Secretary’s Letters, 1840-1867, Halifax (copyrights),” Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management, RG7 v. 143c. When he sold his business Dawson’s copy of the copyright record was transferred to Murdoch McPherson on 24 June 1857. McPherson transferred the copyright to his son James on 28 December 1858, and when James failed as a businessman, he transferred the copyright back to his father on 15 June 1861. See copyright statement in Patrick/McPherson Family Fonds, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M941.

70 The statement, “Music typography by A.B. Kidder, Boston,” is printed in a small point font on the front cover of the third edition.

71 Correspondence in the Dawson papers, along with the statement of agreement between the two firms, confirm that Dawson imported paper for Haszard to print the *Harmonicon*. See, George Haszard to James Dawson, 2 May 1851, and 7 May 1851, and Wilkins, Carter & Co. (Boston) to James Dawson, 11 July 1851. It is interesting to note that Haszard’s name is not mentioned on the cover (as was Kidder’s), or the title page, or in the preface to the third edition.

72 “Memorandum of an Agreement Made and Entered Into By James Dawson, Bookseller of Pictou, and Geo. T. Haszard of Charlottetown,” June 1851. James Dawson papers.

73 *The Harmonicon: A Collection of Sacred Music, Psalm and Hymn Tunes, Anthems, &c. Selected from the Best Composers, and Adapted to the Use of the Churches in British North America*. Third edition (Pictou: Published by James Dawson and Son, 1850), “Advertisement to the Third Edition.” The “advertisement” is dated Pictou, 1849.

included. Many of the tunes are still in the tenor voice, but unlike the earlier two editions, some of the works indicate that vocal parts had been set especially for female voices. Texts are included as they had been in the earlier editions, but in several cases more than one stanza was printed. Dawson was aided, as he had been in the first two editions, by his nephew, James Hepburn, and by Charles Robson, who, by the date of the third edition, had moved to Halifax. While the cover and title page noted that the volume had been “published by James Dawson and Son, Pictou,” (rather than “James Dawson, Bookseller,” as seen in the first two editions), it is not clear whether John William Dawson was involved in the project.⁷⁵ A growing American influence is seen in the decision to replace the “Introduction to Vocal Music” included in the first two editions with “Elements of Vocal Music,” which had been taken “by permission” from the Boston Academy’s Collection of Church Music.⁷⁶

Like the earlier editions of the *Harmonicon*, this one was also well-received, as a note in the *Eastern Chronicle* confirmed:

This popular and useful book has now reached its third edition, and reflects much credit upon the publishers and proprietors Messrs. James Dawson & Son of this place, for the neat appearance of the present volume, and the very great improvements which it presents over former editions.—In addition to upwards of fifty new tunes all of the finest character and adapted to psalms and hymns of all metres, it contains an excellent elementary treatise upon the science of music, a careful study of which will give to any person possessing a musical ear, a sufficient knowledge of this delightful science for all ordinary purpose...The stereotype plates

74 These include *The Boston Academy Collection of Church Music*, *Carmina Sacra*, *The Psalter*, and *Church Psalmody*.

75 The name of the firm had changed to “James Dawson and Son” when John William became actively involved in the business in the 1840s, after returning from studies in Edinburgh.

76 *The Harmonicon*, 3rd ed., iv. An examination of *Boston Academy’s Collection of Church Music* reveals that Dawson’s “Elements of Music” is an exact copy but not one printed from the same plates. However, another publication in which Lowell Mason was involved, (G.J. Webb and Lowell Mason, *The Odeon: A Collection of Secular Melodies* (Boston: J.H. Wilkins and R.B. Carter, 1837)), used the same “Elements of Vocal Music.” A comparison of the “Elements” section of the *Harmonicon* with that in the *Odeon* reveals that they were printed with copies of the same plates. The statement, “Boston: Stereotyped and Printed by Kidder & Wright, Congress Street,” is printed on the verso of the title page of the *Odeon*.

for the present edition have been got up with great care and we understand with considerable expense. The typography is clear and beautiful and the paper good. We hope that an extensive sale will reward the publishers for their laudable enterprise.⁷⁷

The decision to prepare stereo plates was a wise one, for throughout the 1850s continuing demand for the volume led to several reissues of the work (which accounts for different dates on the title page of extant copies).⁷⁸ As correspondence between Haszard and Dawson shows, Haszard printed and bound multiple copies as Dawson's sales warranted.⁷⁹ That the reissues were produced in hundreds of copies is evident from the bill of sale of the Dawson firm to James McPherson & Co. in June 1857. Dawson transferred not only 354 copies from his shop to McPherson & Co., and an additional 432 copies, then in the hands of George T. Haszard in Charlottetown, but also the stereotype plates and the copyright for the *Harmonicon*.⁸⁰

Although Dawson sold his business and moved to Montreal, he retained ownership of some copies of the *Harmonicon* which he had placed on consignment with other firms. In the case of most of the copies in the hands of A. & W. Mackinlay, the story ended tragically. On 24 October 1859 the Mackinlays wrote to Dawson:

We are sorry to inform you of the loss, by fire on the night of the 9th September last, of your Harmonicons and a few copies of the Acadian Geology. They were stored in our first loft and totally consumed with all our stock contained in the rooms above the shop.⁸¹

77 "The Harmonicon,—A Collection of Church Music—Third Edition, 1849," *Eastern Chronicle*, Thursday, 6 December 1849, p. 3.

78 Maria Calderisi wrote in 1981 that "there is no evidence of the use of stereotyping for the publication of music in pre-Confederation Canada," i.e., Upper and Lower Canada. Dawson's use of stereoplates in Nova Scotia may, therefore, have been pioneering for the country as a whole. See Maria Calderisi, *Music Publishing in the Canadas, 1800-1867* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1981), 83. Extant copies of the third edition of the *Harmonicon* show dates of 1850 and 1855; we have not yet located a copy with a date of 1849 on the title page.

79 See, for example, George T. Haszard to Dawson, 24 November 1856 in which he wrote, "We have a good lot of Harmonicons ready and will send them by first Sch[ooner]." James Dawson papers.

80 Bill of Sale, Copyright [&] Works from James Dawson & Son to James McPherson & Co., 1857. James Dawson papers.

81 A. & W. Mackinlay to James Dawson, 24 October 1859. James Dawson papers.

Why the Mackinlays delayed a month and a half in writing to Dawson is not known. From later accounting of the firm's ledgers sixty-six copies of the *Harmonicon* were reported as lost in the fire.⁸² Although some copies had been lost, the Mackinlays continued to sell remaining stock of the tunebook and when these sold out, interest in preparing a new music book increased. A decade later, in 1871, the Mackinlay firm was the publisher of *The Choir*, a collection of sacred music that succeeded the *Harmonicon*.

Distribution of the *Harmonicon* in the Maritimes was wide-spread. The customer base of the Dawson firm in the 1850s extended throughout Nova Scotia (especially the eastern sections), Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick,⁸³ and Dawson widely advertised the *Harmonicon* in newspapers, church papers, and Belcher's *Almanack*.⁸⁴ Copies were sold in Nova Scotia from Cape Breton Island in the north to Yarmouth at the southern tip of province.⁸⁵ In Prince Edward Island, copies were available from George Haszard, G.W. Miller, and Harold Stemper in Charlottetown. In the neighbouring colony of New Brunswick, the *Harmonicon* was sold to customers in Saint John.⁸⁶ In his regular business as a bookseller, Dawson supplied books to other smaller firms and general merchants in the region. It was no different with the *Harmonicon*. Basil Bell in

82 A. & W. Mackinlay to James Dawson, 13 April 1860. James Dawson papers.

83 The most complete records for the firm are from the 1850s, which allows mapping the location of customers in the three colonies.

84 Dawson took advantage of his Presbyterian connections and advertised the editions of his *Harmonicon* in church newspapers such as the *Presbyterian Banner* and the *Guardian*. For reference to advertisements in the *Guardian* see C.H. Johnson, "Nova Scotia Under the Eye of the Guardian," *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* 30 (1954): 220-221. Dawson also obtained wide notice for the *Harmonicon* by advertisements placed in *Belcher's Farmer's Almanack* throughout the 1840s and 1850s. See for example, the 1850, 1851 and 1852 issues (*Belcher's Farmer's Almanack* (Halifax: C.H. Belcher, [year])). In addition, the *Harmonicon* was available for purchase at Belcher's Halifax shop.

85 James G. McKeen sold copies of the *Harmonicon* at his shop in Plaister Cove, Cape Breton. For example, McKeen noted in a letter to James Dawson on 7 June 1856 that he had two dozen copies on hand. In a letter on 25 May 1857 A. Lawson of Yarmouth expressed the view that because "cheap rate" American music books seem to have been preferred in that part of the province, sales of the *Harmonicon* were hampered. Both letters are in the James Dawson papers.

86 Statement of account between W.H. Crawford of Saint John and James Dawson & Son, dated 26 June 1856. James Dawson papers.

New Glasgow, for example, frequently requested copies of the *Harmonicon* in lots of half-dozen and dozen.⁸⁷

That the *Harmonicon* had wide circulation in Presbyterian circles is attested to by the preface in the *Choir*, which in the 1870s and 1880s became the more common music book in that denomination. The Rev. James Bayne, who was the convenor of the committee that prepared the *Choir*, wrote that the *Harmonicon* had been “extensively used for many years in our [Presbyterian] congregations.”⁸⁸ Both James Hepburn and Charles Robson, who had assisted Dawson in preparing the three editions of the *Harmonicon*, were also engaged in the preparation of the *Choir*, and they included material from the earlier publication.

The title page of the third edition of the *Harmonicon* states the book was “adapted to the use of the churches in British North America.” Even though Dawson did not indicate that his publication was also intended for singing schools and singing societies, there is evidence that such organizations in Pictou and other towns and villages throughout Nova Scotia in the 1840s and 1850s used the *Harmonicon* as their source of instruction and music.⁸⁹ James McKeen, for example, in Cape Breton, ordered twelve copies of the *Harmonicon* for this purpose,⁹⁰ and when Dawson retired in 1857 he donated copies of the *Harmonicon* to a singing society in Pictou.⁹¹ As John Beckwith has commented when speaking about the association of tunebooks with singing schools in colonial Canada: “hymn-singing was cultivated not exclusively for public worship but

87 See, for example, Basil Bell to James Dawson & Son, 24 February 1857 requesting six copies of the *Harmonicon* among other books. James Dawson papers.

88 *The Choir: A Collection of Sacred Vocal Music for the Use of Congregation and Families of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, B.N.A.* Prepared by a Committee Appointed by Synod (Halifax: A. & W. Mackinlay, 1871), preface. Later printings of this work were brought out up until the 1890s.

89 See, for example, a letter from J.C. McKeown to Dawson, 30 October 1856, requesting a copy of the *Harmonicon* for use in the Georgetown school, and a letter from John J. King, Tatamagouche, 2 February 1856, inquiring about “singing books.” James Dawson papers.

90 James G. McKeen to Dawson, 25 January 1856 and 31 January 1856. James Dawson papers.

91 Letter from Howard Primrose to James Dawson, 5 August 1857, in which he wrote “On behalf of Prince Street Church Singing Society, I beg to acknowledge the receipt of twelve copies of the *Harmonicon* for the use of the Society and to tender you the sincere thanks of its members for this generous token of your regard.” James Dawson papers.

often for edification and enjoyment in ordinary social circumstances, and as a simple way of learning to read musical notation.”⁹² Used as a teaching vehicle, the *Harmonicon* was instrumental in promoting singing in the region, particularly in eastern Nova Scotia. Scots would have felt quite comfortable with this volume, because the tunes were familiar.⁹³ Influences from New England certainly shaped the book, as they also marked Maritime society. Dawson’s decision to replace the “Introduction to Vocal Music” in the first two editions with the Boston Academy’s “Elements of Vocal Music” in the third is one obvious example of New England influence. Yet, a British influence was still present, for the works by W. Arnold, which were praised by the reviewer of the first edition, were retained in the third edition.

While the *Harmonicon* has remained in more or less historical obscurity for almost a century, it was a significant music book for several decades during the Victorian period among Scottish communities in Nova Scotia (especially among Presbyterians). Dawson called on his business acumen to publish a tunebook that met the needs of a wide-spread clientele. But being the wily Scot that he was, he produced a music book that could prove acceptable to singers of various denominations. Unlike the editions of the *Union Harmony*, the three editions of the *Harmonicon* are remarkably similar in content. Over 190 works are found in all three editions and the first and last selections are the same in all three.

In the introduction to *American Sacred Music Imprints 1698-1810: A Bibliography*, Richard Crawford remarks that “the early American tunebook as an artifact preserves something of the flavor of the culture that produced it.” As one is “thumbing through” an early tunebook, he wrote, “one finds evidence of a deep and abiding religious faith, a graphic and musical craftsmanship addressed to friends and neighbours, and more than a hint of older customs of expression and design that are often taken as quaint survivals from the past.” “Tunebooks,” he claims, “can create their own spell, confirming many of the images that linger in...collective historical

⁹² Beckwith, *Hymn Tunes*, vi.

⁹³ Dorothy Farquharson quotes from a letter about John MacLean MacDonald, a singing school teacher who lived in Durham, Pictou County, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, who used the *Harmonicon*, among other tunebooks in his instruction. See Farquharson, “O, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing,” 27-28.

memory.”⁹⁴ Crawford’s statement can certainly be applied to the *Harmonicon* which was a product of its time and place. An active member of Pictou society, and widely-known throughout the colony, James Dawson used his bookstore to promote both print and music culture in the region. Through the publication of the *Harmonicon* he helped to spread the knowledge and joy of singing in the Maritimes. Motivated as he was by a strong religious faith, Dawson published a music book that offered singers of many Christian denominations an opportunity to express their own beliefs in song. Dawson’s *Harmonicon* did not die with the third edition, though, since it had a significant influence on the publication of its successor, *The Choir*. Not only were two of the same individuals involved in the preparation of both books, but many selections were copied directly from the *Harmonicon*, including over twenty fusing tunes and even works with the melody in the tenor rather than the top voice, as had become the custom by the second half of the nineteenth century. In this manner the *Harmonicon* was instrumental in preserving a style of music, in part anachronistic, for another generation of the “congregations and families of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, B.N.A.”⁹⁵ Conceived as an idea at the dawn of the Victorian period, Dawson’s *Harmonicon* proved without doubt to fulfil his desire that it be “extensively useful” for several decades of the nineteenth century.

RÉSUMÉ

En 1831 certains journaux de Nouvelle-Écosse firent paraître une annonce offrant deux nouvelles collections de musique d’église. Même si une d’entre elles ne vit jamais le jour, la seconde, l’*Harmonicon*, devait devenir le principal ouvrage de musique imprimé en Nouvelle-Écosse et pour plus de trois décennies elle deviendra la musique favorite choisie par les Presbytériens de l’est de l’Amérique britannique du Nord. À la fin des années 1820, James Dawson, un ambitieux immigrant écossais, mit sur pied une firme de libraire-éditeur dans la ville affairée de Pictou et peu après en vint à la conclusion qu’un

94 Richard Crawford, “Introduction,” in *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698-1820: A Bibliography*, compiled by Allen Purdue Britton and Irving Lowens, and completed by Richard Crawford (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1990), 2.

95 *The Choir*, preface.

livre de musique publié localement était nécessaire, spécialement pour ses clients écossais expatriés comme lui. Après des délais, il publia l'*Harmonicon* en 1838, ayant composé les notes de musique avec des caractères importés spécialement à cet effet. En plus d'une longue introduction sur la musique vocale, l'*Harmonicon* contenait 219 psaumes, hymnes, antiennes et autres chants ecclésiastiques « sélectionnés parmi les meilleurs auteurs ». Après avoir épuisé la première édition, Dawson publia une seconde édition en 1841 et lorsque la demande pour cette édition excéda le nombre d'exemplaires imprimés, il en publia une autre en 1849. Dawson fit imprimer cette troisième édition à Charlottetown à partir de plaques stéréotypées préparées à son intention à Boston. Il vendit les trois éditions à travers la Nouvelle-Écosse, l'Île du Prince Edouard et le Nouveau Brunswick à des particuliers, à d'autres libraires, et à des sociétés chorales. On peut retracer à la fois l'influence britannique et américaine dans les trois éditions de l'*Harmonicon*, et le livre eut une influence importante sur son successeur *The Choir*. Dans cet article, nous retraçons les différentes entreprises de Dawson à Pictou, détaillons l'histoire de l'édition de l'*Harmonicon*, décrivons le contenu des trois éditions et plaçons le livre de musique dans le contexte culturel des Maritimes, qui selon l'historien D.C. Harvey faisait l'expérience d'un « renouveau intellectuel » dans les années 1820 et 1830.