“Never Been a Very Promising Speculation”: Requests for Financial Assistance from Authors of Non-Fiction Books to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, 1800-1850¹

William H. Laurence²

In March 1837, two authors awaited word on their requests for funding from the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. Each had sought financial assistance for the publication of his respective manuscript. Each was a native-born Nova Scotian, with an established professional reputation known to members of the Assembly. Legislative committees entrusted with the manuscripts' review reported favourably on both texts in the same week. One of the texts under consideration was a guide for the province's justices of the peace (JPs), as well as for certain local government officials. The review committee concluded that the text would be “a valuable aid to Magistrates in the discharge of their duties.”³ The second text under review was a manual on land surveying. The review committee also reported favourably, noting that the author paid “particular attention to the practical part of the science, with a view to correct the errors that so often occur[red],” and agreeing that “many of his suggestions would doubtless be an improvement on the ... practice” of land surveying.”⁴ Although both texts received favourable reviews, their respective treatment by the entire Assembly was quite different. The Assembly agreed to fund publication of 500 copies of the legal manuscript, but chose not to provide any aid for publication of the land surveying text, which ultimately never appeared in print.

Can one account for such different treatment of two contemporaneous requests for financial assistance, relating to two texts which were both written by authors of established professional reputation,

1 An earlier version of this essay was presented in November 2000 at the History of the Book Volume I Open Conference in Toronto.

2 William H. Laurence is Legal Research Counsel at the Law Reform Commission of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

3 Nova Scotia, *Journal and Proceedings of the House of Assembly* [hereinafter *JHA*], 1837, App. 55, 79.

4 *JHA*, 1837, App. 56, 79.

and which had both received favourable reviews? By examining the fate of all recorded requests for financial assistance made by authors of non-fiction books⁵ to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in the first half of the 19th century, this essay will seek to identify those factors which may have been at work in legislators' decisions. Little has been written on this aspect of Canadian book publishing history.⁶ In particular, this essay will consider whether or not there was any consistency in the Assembly's approach to funding proposals. More generally, this essay will add to what is known about the types of non-fiction manuscripts being prepared for publication in the first half of 19th-century Nova Scotia, the authors who created those texts, the authors' efforts at self-promotion, as well as the motivation for their work.

I. Local conditions

Regardless of the means chosen to finance their publications, in 19th-century Nova Scotia, authors did not work with much expectation of earnings. In 1824, Thomas C. Haliburton, an author and lawyer from Annapolis Royal, described Nova Scotia as "far from being a reading society."⁷ This is attributable to a number of factors. The range of local publishing was limited, with most materials printed in the province taking the form of almanacs, legislation, sermons, and trial accounts.⁸ Much of the province's publishing resulted from the needs of government, rather than the demands of

5 This essay focuses on books, rather than other types of published materials, such as newspapers or maps. It also only considers situations where authors requested aid, rather than examples of texts commissioned by the Assembly.

6 George L. Parker, in *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), 84-87, provides a few examples of requests for financial assistance around this period by non-fiction writers in the Province of Canada, and more recently, Bertrum MacDonald, in "Getting the Books Published: The Instrumental Role of Governments and Their Agencies," *Facsimile 19* (May 1998): 13-18, mentions certain mid-19th-century petitions sent to the Joint Committee of the Library of Parliament in Ottawa. Olga Bernice Bishop, in *Publications of the Governments of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, 1758-1952* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1957), provides a comprehensive catalogue of government involvement in publishing, but does not mention authors' petitions.

7 Thomas C. Haliburton, *The Letters of Thomas Chandler Haliburton*, ed. Richard A. Davies (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988), 15.

8 For the early years of the 19th century, see Patricia Lockhart Fleming's *Atlantic Canadian Imprints, 1801-1820: A Bibliography* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991).

individual readers.⁹ The province's population was rather small and scattered,¹⁰ as was the reading audience. The majority of Nova Scotians could expect at most only a few years of rudimentary education.¹¹ Compulsory tax assessment for public schooling did not occur until 1864, and in the meantime, "it was recognized that two-thirds of Nova Scotian children were growing up in ignorance."¹²

To illustrate the smallness of the local non-fiction market, using the example of legal texts, in 1834 there were about 100 lawyers in the province. Even with the inclusion of some dozen JPs, a number of judges, as well as some senior officer holders who might be interested, the provincial demand was at most in the low 100s.¹³ To foster their financial survival, those involved in the book trade often sought reimbursement of customs duties paid on imported books, as well as on printing and papermaking equipment. Publishers' costs of obtaining their supplies were nonetheless passed on to customers, resulting in Haliburton's 1824 complaint that printing costs at Halifax were "beyond all reason."¹⁴ Even if a work was published and was well-received, non-existent or ineffective copyright laws fostered pirate editions.¹⁵

Some local conditions did not remain unchanged during the first half of the 19th century. During the period 1835 to 1848, Nova Scotia experienced an intellectual awakening, which was marked by a greater number of publications, not only books, but also pamphlets and newspapers.¹⁶ A greater interest in cultural pursuits could not change, however, the reality of the province's small population and

9 Aegidius Fauteux, *The Introduction of Printing into Canada* (Montreal: Rolland Paper Co., 1930), 52.

10 In 1817, the population of Nova Scotia was a little over 80,000. This increased to some 200,000 by 1838 and slightly exceeded 275,000 by 1851: Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Censuses of Canada: 1665 to 1871* (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1876) [hereinafter *Censuses*], 82, 125, 232.

11 Brian Cuthbertson, *Johnny Bluenose* (Halifax: Formac, 1994), 21.

12 Cuthbertson, 310.

13 Philip Girard, "Themes and Variations in Early Canadian Legal Culture: Beamish Murdoch and his *Epitome of the Laws of Nova-Scotia*," *Law and History* 11 (1993): 131.

14 Haliburton, *Letters*, 15.

15 H. Pearson Gundy, *Book Publishing and Publishers in Canada Before 1900* (Toronto: Bibliographical Society of Canada, 1965), 13-14.

16 D.C. Harvey, "The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia," in G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Historical Essays on the Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), 99-121.

rudimentary public education system. As late as 1863, out of a total population of some 330 000, there were still 50 000 children in Nova Scotia not receiving any formal education.¹⁷ The small number of subscription libraries in the province, as well as agricultural and literary societies, would not have represented a large market for sales of non-fiction books, and it was only in the 1850s that efforts would be made to create libraries for public schools.¹⁸ In 1849, an Assembly committee conceded that given "the paucity of [Nova Scotia's] population Authors cannot expect any sufficient remuneration for the publication of their works."¹⁹

Publishing in Nova Scotia during the first half of the 19th century was therefore a precarious business. In the preface to his three-volume work, *On Colonial Literature, Science and Education*, published in 1842, George R. Young, a Halifax journalist and lawyer, explained that his text was published with "no expectation of pecuniary profit;" rather, "books published in the Colonies have never been a very promising speculation."²⁰

II. Options for authors

An author with a planned or completed manuscript could pursue a number of routes to publication in the first half of 19th-century Nova Scotia. The simplest route was through self-financing. An author of sufficient financial means could avoid having to convince publishers or investors of a text's merit and could make it available directly to readers. Less risky financially was the use of a prospectus to appeal for subscriptions. A notice detailing the manuscript would be placed in newspapers, with the author promising to have the manuscript published upon the receipt of subscriptions sufficient to meet expenses. Rather than the publisher, the author usually placed the advertisements and arranged with bookstores to maintain subscriber lists.²¹ This approach could appeal to readers' vanity, as generally the text included a list of subscribers. In 1836, *The Bee*, a Pictou newspaper, featured a notice concerning a text on land

17 *Censuses*, 344; D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), 131.

18 Campbell & MacLean, 140.

19 *JHA*, 1849, App. 58, 397.

20 George R. Young, *On Colonial Literature, Science and Education* (Halifax: J.H. Crosskill, 1842), ix.

21 Gundy, 10-11.

surveying that was planned by William MacKay, whose stated goal was "to place within the reach of every class in the country—a plain, yet comprehensive Treatise, embracing every thing which a Land Surveyor require[d] to know." His notice added that "the public must [then] decide whether or not his labours [should] appear in print."²² A prospective author could also seek the financial support of a publisher or of an organization. For the author who did not have sufficient personal wealth, who lacked connections among publishers or institutions, or who was not an adept marketer, another source of financial assistance was available. Such an author could petition the Legislature for a grant. In light of a lack of support for local publishing, a grant from the Assembly could often determine whether or not a manuscript would appear in print.

III. The petition process

The 19th century has been described as the "heroic age of the petition."²³ In the first half of 19th-century Nova Scotia, petitions tended to seek such remedies as investigations of disputed elections, money for road improvement, relief for imprisoned debtors, drawbacks of customs duties, and grants to businesses. Like any other petitioner, an author seeking financial assistance would set out his request in writing. Nova Scotia had a bicameral legislature, but all money grants originated with the lower House, the elected Assembly.²⁴ A member of the Assembly would have to rise in the House to read aloud a suppliant's petition or letter, which would then be tabled, that is, entered into the business of the House. The Assembly could decide upon the matter immediately. More commonly, however, when manuscripts were involved, the matter would be referred to a committee, either standing or special. The committee would consider the request, as well as any supporting materials, before reporting back to the House. At that point, a member could propose that financial assistance be provided, upon which a vote would be held. It was also possible that no action would be taken on a committee report. When votes were held, often

22 "Prospectus of a Work to be Entitled the Memorandum Book, or Land-Surveying; by William McKay [sic]," *The Bee*, 31 Aug. 1836: 117.

23 J.M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: E. Arnold, 1986), 9.

24 Beamish Murdoch, *Epitome of the Laws of Nova-Scotia*, vol. 1 (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1832), 68.

only the result, not the number of votes cast or the names of participating legislators, was recorded. Any resolutions adopted by the Assembly concerning financial aid to authors would also have to be approved by the upper House, the appointed Council.

IV. Individual petitioners

From 1833 to 1849, nine authors petitioned the Nova Scotia Assembly for financial assistance. Only two of these petitioners were successful, with one of the fortunate authors not even able to attribute his grant to a petition.

1. Joseph Bouchette (1833)

The first author to seek financial assistance from the Assembly for publishing was not a Nova Scotian. A native of Quebec, Joseph Bouchette had been a land surveyor, as well as an officer in the militia and navy, prior to his request for financial assistance.²⁵ In 1804, he became Surveyor General of Lower Canada. In 1816, Bouchette became a special surveyor to the King, to help settle a disputed boundary between New Brunswick and the United States. Bouchette was a published author. In 1815, he had published a topographical map of Lower Canada, accompanied by *A Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada*.²⁶ At that time, Bouchette had secured a promise from the Lower Canada government of £1500 to assist in the publication of the map and topographical guide, though he would receive only £500 in his lifetime.

The British Dominions in North America, the text which Bouchette brought to the attention of the Nova Scotia Assembly in 1833, was a description of the British North American territories and their resources. According to the book's preface, a sense of duty and patriotism motivated Bouchette to write the text. He wished to be "useful" in communicating to the world details about the British North American territories, in particular to point out the "almost

25 The biographical details in this paragraph are from Claude Boudreau & Pierre Lépine, "Bouchette, Joseph," in Frances G. Halpenny, ed., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* [hereinafter *DCB*], vol. 7 (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988), 96-98.

26 Joseph Bouchette, *A Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada* (London: W. Faden, 1815).

exhaustless field offered ... for fresh colonization."²⁷ Bouchette included a section on Nova Scotia, though for the most part, his information was neither new nor first-hand. For a general description and history of the province, Bouchette depended on Thomas C. Haliburton's *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia*,²⁸ as well as the Nova Scotia government's public returns and statistics. Bouchette did add, though, that during an 1816 trip to Nova Scotia, as well as on other visits made during his military service, he had compiled notes on the province's soil, surface, and climate. In addition, he had relied upon a report which a British army officer, one Colonel Cockburn, had prepared in 1827 as part of a study concerning immigration to Nova Scotia.²⁹

Bouchette sent his memorial concerning financial assistance to the Council. In a cover letter for his request, dated November 11, 1832, Bouchette could not resist mentioning that he had recently described his book to the Lord Bishop of Nova Scotia, while on a trip to London, England.³⁰ The petition was forwarded to the Assembly, along with the written recommendation of the Council's President. On March 19, 1833, the Speaker, Samuel G.W. Archibald, presented Bouchette's memorial to the Nova Scotia Assembly. The request was supposed to be accompanied by a set of maps and two volumes. Bouchette claimed that his text, a revision of his 1815 effort, contained a "full account of Nova-Scotia," and stated that the Lower Canada Assembly had subscribed for a "considerable amount" of the set. He suggested that aid from Nova Scotia could take the form of purchase or of other means.³¹

On April 15, 1833, Bouchette's request was referred to a select committee, which recommended the purchase of 25 copies and proposed a scheme for their distribution among government officials, a number of libraries, and the counties.³² On April 19, 1833, the

27 Joseph Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America* (London: Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, 1831), xix, xi.

28 Thomas C. Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia* (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1829).

29 Bouchette, *British*, xiv-xv, xvii-xviii; for details about Cockburn, see J.S. Martell's *Immigration to and Emigration from Nova Scotia, 1815-1838* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1942), 22.

30 Bouchette to Charles F. Aylwin, RG 1, vol. 292, #19, reel 15377 (mf), Nova Scotia Records and Archives Management [hereinafter NSARM].

31 *JHA*, 1833, 402-403.

32 *JHA*, 1833, 491, 498-499.

Assembly provided its response. Although the Assembly “highly appreciate[d] the past literary and scientific researches and services of [Bouchette],” it was unable to judge the work’s merits, as the two volumes mentioned in Bouchette’s request had not been received.³³ The problem with the missing volumes seems to have been resolved, however, as on February 13, 1834, it was agreed, following a vote of 20 to 15 in favour, to form a committee to study the Bouchette text and maps. On March 31, 1834, that committee reported favourably on the volumes, which it deemed “replete with useful information.”³⁴ The committee recommended that the Assembly purchase five copies. The matter was then referred to the Committee of Supply. No further action, though, appears to have been taken. The Assembly records of proceedings seem to provide no additional information about the fate of Bouchette’s request.

Bouchette died in 1841, at the age of 67. His obituary in *The Royal Nova Scotia Gazette* stated that his maps and book had been published “at great Sacrifices, which [had been] but poorly rewarded.”³⁵

2. William MacKay (1837)

Born around 1789 in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, William MacKay was a member of a prominent landowning family. As a land surveyor, in the 1820s he had done work in surveying and drawing plans for the Shubenacadie Canal Company. From 1830 to 1835, MacKay had been engaged in drawing maps for the province. In 1834, his efforts resulted in the first printed Nova Scotia map, compiled from actual surveys, to be published. In 1833, Charles R. Fairbanks, Assembly member for Halifax Township and chairman of the Assembly Map Committee, reportedly spoke “in high terms” of MacKay’s “competency and ability.”³⁶ An Assembly committee, formed in 1836 to study the maps prepared by MacKay, expressed its “entire approbation of the manner and ability with which the Provincial Maps [had] been executed.”³⁷

³³ *JHA*, 1833, 507.

³⁴ *JHA*, 1834, 547, 643.

³⁵ *The Royal Nova Scotia Gazette*, 28 Apr. 1841: 3.

³⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, biographical details concerning MacKay are from Walter K. Morrison’s “William MacKay, the Invisible Mapmaker,” *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 6, no. 2 (1986): 24, 27, 31–32, 34.

³⁷ *JHA*, 1836, App. 80, 156.

During his career as a land surveyor, MacKay claimed to have become aware of many disputes between landowners over property boundaries. MacKay attributed this problem to surveyors who did not apply themselves properly, or who did not have adequate knowledge of theory, "occasioned, perhaps in the majority of cases by [their] inability to procure access to the necessary sources of information."³⁸ MacKay considered his manuscript, in his petition referred to as the "land surveyor's memorandum book," to be useful for those who did not have an intimate knowledge of surveying. The manuscript provided guidance on completing field operations, making plans, and doing calculations. It included tables and diagrams. MacKay estimated that when published, his text would be about 240 octavo pages and would sell for 10s. a copy.

In September, 1836, the *Acadian Recorder* printed a review of MacKay's manuscript by Titus Smith, a deputy provincial-surveyor.³⁹ Smith claimed to have examined "a considerable portion" of MacKay's calculations, "which [were] very correct." Smith pointed out that the principles of geometry and mathematics discussed in the text could be applied outside of surveying, thereby underscoring the text's educational merit: "the utility of a work like this cannot be doubted, in a province where there are so many districts, in which the persons employed as Schoolmasters *cannot* teach what an ingenious lad might learn from [that] book."

On February 16, 1837, Hugh Bell, a representative for Halifax Township, read MacKay's petition to the Assembly.⁴⁰ In his petition, in addition to summarizing the advantages of his manuscript, MacKay suggested that other land surveying texts were costly, unavailable in Nova Scotia, or were not directed to a local audience and the conditions under which it would have to operate. MacKay did not fail to point out that he was a native-born Nova Scotian. He estimated the cost of publishing 500 volumes at between £90 and £125, an amount which he admittedly had been unable to obtain by subscription. MacKay's petition was accompanied by a copy of the manuscript, by an endorsement from John Spry Morris, Provincial Surveyor General, and by a copy of the *Acadian Recorder* review.

38 Petition of William MacKay, 10 Feb. 1837, RG 5, series P, vol. 42, #108, reel 9782 (mf), NSARM.

39 Titus Smith, untitled, *Acadian Recorder*, 3 Sept. 1836: 3.

40 *JHA*, 1837, 50.

MacKay's petition was sent to a six-person committee, which presented its report on March 25, 1837.⁴¹ The committee suggested that MacKay had "collected together most of the useful problems in question to be found in Books of [that] kind, and [had] added thereto several that appeared to be new." The committee indicated that in some instances, MacKay had simplified land surveying practice. The only deficiency pointed out by the committee was MacKay's failure to emphasise the use of a compass as a source of taking bearings in the woods. The committee noted that MacKay had been born in the province, had prepared maps for the Government, and had devoted much time to his manuscript. Strangely, the committee reported MacKay's estimated cost of publication as being between £150 and £175. The committee did not conclude its favourable report by recommending a specific grant. Rather, it left this to the discretion of the Assembly: "It will be for the House to say how far they may be disposed to encourage the efforts of Individuals who devote their time and attention to the advancement of any branch of Science and Literature in this young Colony."

On April 17, 1837, Hugh Bell proposed a grant of £100 to assist MacKay in publishing his manuscript. Bell pointed to the Assembly committee's favourable report and suggested "that the work [might] be useful to the youth of the Country."⁴² Bell's resolution did not, however, pass.

MacKay's manuscript does not appear to have been published. Apart from subscription notices, references in the legislative record, and one pre-publication newspaper review, there seem to be no other records of the text's existence. MacKay died in 1858, after continuing his work for the Shubenacadie Canal Company and serving as deputy-surveyor for Halifax County.

3. John George Marshall (1837)

Originally from Guysborough County and of a well-established Loyalist family, John George Marshall (see Figure I) followed his father's example in becoming a lawyer, judge, and legislator.⁴³

⁴¹ *JHA*, 1837, App. 56, 79.

⁴² *JHA*, 1837, 214.

⁴³ The biographical details in this paragraph are from Shirley B. Elliott, ed., *The Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia, 1758-1983* (N.p.: Nova Scotia Dept. of Government Services, 1984), 152-153.

Figure 1. – John George Marshall. Oil on canvas painting by William Valentine.
Photo courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

Marshall had served from 1811 to 1818, and from 1820 to 1823, as an Assembly representative for Sydney County. At the time of his petition in 1837, Marshall was Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas for Cape Breton.

In addition to his work as a legislator, Marshall had first-hand experience in petitioning the Assembly for money. In 1826, he had published a digested index to the province's statutes.⁴⁴ Marshall claimed that in 1825, he had been contacted by an Assembly committee entrusted with the task of revising and consolidating provincial legislation. On the understanding that he would be paid, Marshall prepared a copy of his manuscript index and provided it to the committee. In both 1829 and 1830, still not having received any recompense, Marshall unsuccessfully petitioned the Assembly for payment.⁴⁵

In 1837, Marshall petitioned the Assembly anew, not about his index, but about another text, a guide for the province's JPs, as well as for county and township officers.⁴⁶ In the preface, Marshall explained that he had attempted to combine relevant aspects of English common and statute law with details from all Nova Scotia statutes having a bearing on the work of JPs. Marshall explained that as the preliminary steps in any criminal procedure, as well as the enforcement of numerous statutes, tended to require JPs' participation, it was essential for JPs to be aware of relevant laws. Without a complete knowledge of the nature and extent of their duties, Marshall suggested, JPs might be reluctant to act at all or at least to the full extent of their mandate in certain situations. He indicated that few JPs possessed copies of the province's statutes, which in any event were difficult to understand for those JPs without legal training.

In March 1837, *The Bee* informed its readers that Marshall had a work ready for the press. The anonymous reviewer, who claimed to have examined a prospectus, stated that "no work could be more desirable at the present time." Given Marshall's "known acquirements

44 John George Marshall, *A Digested Index to the Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia ...* (Halifax: Phillip J. Holland, 1826).

45 Petition of John G. Marshall, 22 Jan. 1830, RG 5, series P, vol. 41, #116, reel 15614 (mf), NSARM.

46 John George Marshall, *The Justice of the Peace, and County & Township Officer in the Province of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Gossip & Coade, 1837), iii-vii.

and long experience," the reviewer had "every confidence in the ability of the production."⁴⁷

Rather than petitioning the Assembly for funds, Marshall wrote a letter, dated March 11, 1837, to the Lieutenant-Governor.⁴⁸ In the letter, Marshall identified the nature of his manuscript and his willingness to present it gratuitously to the Legislature for publication. His offer was, however, conditional on being able to supervise the text's publication. The Lieutenant-Governor, who approved of Marshall's proposal, asked the Provincial Secretary to have Marshall's letter laid before the Assembly, which was done on March 18, 1837.

Marshall's proposal and manuscript were referred to a committee, which provided its report on March 23, 1837.⁴⁹ The committee indicated that it had only been able to examine the manuscript in part and could thus provide but a "hasty opinion." The content of the work was nonetheless praised. It was deemed to exhibit "in a connected view, the various Statutes of the Province, upon which [JPs were] required to act." Marshall's experience as a judge gave him "qualifications for the preparation of such a Work that few others in the province possess[ed]." The committee suggested that if the cost of publication would be reasonable, the manuscript could "be safely adopted upon the professional reputation and character of that Gentleman." The Assembly voted to accept Marshall's offer and to print 500 copies at public expense, and on March 27, 1837, the Council accepted the Assembly resolution concerning Marshall's text.⁵⁰

Five hundred copies of Marshall's text, *The Justice of the Peace, and County & Township Officer in the Province of Nova Scotia*, were printed in 1837 at a cost of £289, 2s., 3d. Justices of the peace distributed copies of the text outside Halifax. Marshall received £50 for having written the text and for preparing its publication, though an Assembly committee had recommended that he receive £125.⁵¹ Marshall was not pleased with the £50. The manner in which the Assembly had treated him, he complained, would "naturally suppress or damp the desire and exertions of men who [were] capable of benefiting their country by literary endeavours of any kind."⁵²

47 "New Work," *The Bee*, 8 Mar. 1837: 330.

48 *JHA*, 1837, 124.

49 *JHA*, 1837, App. 55, 79.

50 *JHA*, 1837, 137, 144.

51 *JHA*, 1838, 416, 424; App. 34, 97.

52 John G. Marshall, "To the Editors of *The Times*," *The Times*, 22 May 1838: 164.

In 1846, a second edition of Marshall's text was published.⁵³ At that time, the Assembly passed a resolution thanking Marshall for "his very laudable and laborious effort" to assist JPs.⁵⁴

4. Daniel Dickson (1839)

A native of Onslow, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, where he was born in 1805,⁵⁵ Daniel Dickson came from a well-established family of farmers, merchants, and shipbuilders, from which several also found time to serve as JPs and other local officials. Dickson's relatives were well known at the Assembly. By the year of his petition, 1839, one great-grandfather, two grandfathers, and three uncles had served as Assembly members, and another uncle continued to sit in the Assembly, where he fulfilled the role of Speaker, in addition to serving as Attorney General.⁵⁶ Dickson enhanced the prominence of his family connections by marrying into the Patterson family, one of Pictou's most influential.⁵⁷ He had moved to Pictou around 1835 to study for the Bar, at the office of his uncle, Thomas Dickson, then an Assembly representative for Sydney County. He became a lawyer in 1838.⁵⁸

In 1836, Daniel Dickson had placed a notice in *The Bee*, seeking subscriptions for a planned text on the province's criminal and penal law, but there is no record of that text having been published. Dickson's apparent failure to secure an adequate number of subscriptions in 1836 does not seem to have discouraged him from further writing. In 1837, he published a guide for town officers. In the 19th century, a host of local officials would perform tasks today entrusted to salaried public servants employed by particular municipal or provincial departments. Town officers included such officials as constables, overseers of the poor, assessors of county tax rates, and meat inspectors. Dickson suggested that when people were appointed to some local post, they were "frequently unacquainted with the

53 John George Marshall, *The Justice of the Peace, and County & Township Officer in the Province of Nova Scotia*, 2nd ed. (Halifax: Gossip & Coade, 1846).

54 *JHA*, 1846, 531-532.

55 Unless otherwise noted, biographical details about Dickson are from: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *FamilySearch Internet Genealogical Service*, online: <<http://www.familysearch.org>>.

56 Elliott, 5-6, 56-57.

57 Cuthbertson, 252.

58 "Obituary," *The Colonial Standard*, 31 Dec. 1878: 3.

duties they [had] to discharge, and the liabilities under which they labour[ed]."⁵⁹ The main purpose of the text was to set out the nature of those duties.

In his petition, dated January 18, 1839,⁶⁰ Dickson explained that he owed some £30 for publication costs, which he hoped the Assembly would provide. He added that a grant would also enable him to publish a second edition. Although Dickson's text had already been published in 1837, it is not clear whether he forwarded a copy to the Assembly. He did, however, include a note from the publisher, James Dawson of Pictou, indicating Dickson's indebtedness of £22, 9 s., 2d. for printing and paper costs associated with the book's publication. Dickson explained that he had been induced to write his work "principally from a knowledge of the necessity of something of the kind to enable public officers in the County to discharge their duties with justice to themselves and with benefit to the public." Public officers, Dickson claimed, "repeatedly apprised [*sic*]" him of the book's usefulness.

Dickson's petition, which Pictou County representative John Holmes read to the Assembly on January 18, 1839, was referred to the Committee on the Law on February 16, 1839.⁶¹ In the preface to his book, Dickson stated that the only profit which he "ever expected or wished to derive, he ha[d] already fully realized in the valuable information that he ha[d] acquired in his researches."⁶² Unfortunately for him, Dickson's petition did not result in any financial gain. On February 19, 1839, the committee presented its report to the Assembly. Although the committee "believe[d] the Guide to Town Officers [was] a useful manual," its members regretted that they could not recommend any grant.⁶³

59 Daniel Dickson, *A Guide to Town Officers, Shewing their Appointment, Duties, Liabilities and Privileges: According to the Laws of the Province* (Pictou: The Bee Office, 1837), [iii]. For a discussion of how another type of 19th-century Nova Scotia government official, namely a sheriff, obtained the information needed to fulfil his duties, see William H. Laurence's "Process and Particulars: The Informational Needs and Sources of a Nineteenth-Century Nova Scotian Sheriff" *Épilogue* 12, no. 1 (1997): 1-22.

60 Petition of Daniel Dickson, 18 Jan. 1839, RG 5, series P, vol. 43, #30, reel 9783 (mf), NSARM.

61 *JHA*, 1839, 465.

62 Dickson, *Guide*, 5.

63 *JHA*, 1839, App. 42, 76.

Dickson does not seem to have tried again for financial assistance from the Assembly concerning his town officers text. In his legal career, he went on to serve as a master of the Supreme Court, as well as a probate judge and registrar. He died in 1878 at age 73.⁶⁴

5. William Palmer Moffat (1841)

At the time of his petition, William Palmer Moffat was a teacher at the combined common and grammar school in Amherst, Nova Scotia.⁶⁵ He also served as a member of the Land Commission for Cumberland County.⁶⁶ He knew something of surveying, and the year after his petition, would assist land surveyor William MacKay in laying out a canal.⁶⁷

Moffat had in mind the preparation of a series of elementary school texts, written in the form of questions and answers, on such subjects as geography, natural history, and English grammar. He identified one of his projected texts as "A Catechism of Geography Designed for the Youth of Nova Scotia."

Moffat made his request to the Assembly by petition dated February 25, 1841.⁶⁸ Rather than submitting a copy of a complete draft text with his petition, he provided a few examples of planned questions on geography and English grammar, so that the legislators could derive an idea of his style. Moffat's request was made "with diffidence of his abilities, but at the same time with full confidence of the usefulness of his labour."

On February 27, 1841, Gaius Lewis, a representative for Cumberland County, read Moffat's petition. The petition was referred to the standing Committee on Education. In a report adopted by the full Assembly, the committee declined to offer Moffat any aid and indicated that it could not recommend grants for the publication of elementary school books "unless such cases were distinguished by very peculiar circumstances."⁶⁹

64 Notice of Appointment, 15 Apr. 1862, RG 3, vol. 1, #128, NSARM; 11 May 1864, RG 3, vol. 1, #194, NSARM; 12 Sept. 1868, RG 3, vol. 2, #302, NSARM; "Obituary."

65 Petition of William Palmer Moffat, 25 Feb. 1841, RG 5, series P, vol. 73, #84, NSARM.

66 *JHA*, 1841, 66.

67 RG 5, Series P, vol. 58, #25, NSARM.

68 Petition of William Moffat.

69 *JHA*, 1841, 69; App. 77.

It does not appear that Moffat published any of his texts. Not much is known about his life after his 1841 petition. He did appear, though, to continue his teaching and also served as a JP in Cumberland County.⁷⁰

6. George Wightman (1843)

George Wightman worked as a land surveyor and civil engineer. His services were much in demand and were respected by the Government. In 1843, for example, Wightman prepared and presented to the Assembly five reports on the state of various provincial roads. Wightman's surveying work had also, indirectly, provided him with experience in petitioning the Assembly. In 1834, he petitioned for some £273 in fees owed, and received the amount requested, though the committee which reviewed his claim recommended that he be censured, for "inexcusable delay" in making his application.⁷¹

Wightman's text, which involved road building, was meant to be used by people without a mathematical education. Wightman did not consider using instruments and drawing up plans and sections to be difficult for anyone with ordinary ability and knowledge of common arithmetic. He did believe, however, that the mental part of road building required observation, reading, and study, and he hoped that his text could serve as the required source of this information for the people of Nova Scotia. To this end, he tried to avoid the use of technical language and treated road building as a "mere mechanical art": "Let road engineers become as plenty as builders, and the ideas of the occult and difficult nature of their profession [would] disappear."⁷²

Wightman made his request for funding by letter, accompanied by a copy of his manuscript.⁷³ In bringing his idea to the Assembly's attention, Wightman attempted a number of inducements. He offered the work to the Assembly for free. He indicated that no advance of money for expenses would be required until the work was published and ready for sale. Wightman estimated that 1000 copies, of about 250 octavo pages each, could be printed in pamphlet form for £150.

70 Moffat to Lieutenant-Governor Pentinck, Viscount Falkland, 20 Jan. 1843, RG 5, series P, vol. 73, #98; RG 3, vol. 1, #173, NSARM.

71 *JHA*, 1834, App. 52, 52; *JHA*, 1835, 679.

72 George Wightman, *A Treatise on Roads in Two Parts: Part First. On Surveying and Engineering* (Halifax: The Novascotian, 1845), iv-v.

73 *JHA*, 1843, App. 107, 288.

Following a motion by Joseph Howe, a publisher and journalist by profession, owner of *The Novascotian*, and a representative for Halifax County, a select committee was appointed on March 27, 1843, in order to review Wightman's text. The committee reported favourably.⁷⁴ The text was found to contain "much valuable information," to teach "plain, easy, and practical methods," and to use "means best adapted to the situation and capabilities of the Country." The committee recommended that Wightman receive a subsidy to cover publication costs, but the motion to that effect did not pass.⁷⁵

Despite his setback with the Assembly, Wightman did see his text in print, as Joseph Howe published it in 1845. Wightman continued his career in surveying and engineering, including laying out a railway and designing a covered bridge.⁷⁶

7. Jacob D. Kuhn (1845)

Jacob D. Kuhn was likely born in 1818, at Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.⁷⁷ When he made his petition in 1845, Kuhn was publisher and owner of the Sydney newspaper, *The Spirit of the Times*.⁷⁸ Kuhn in earlier years had published a Halifax newspaper, the *Haligonian and General Advertiser*. He abandoned that effort in 1840, and in 1841 entered the publishing business in Sydney with one Richard Huntington.⁷⁹

Kuhn had in mind the publication of a Gaelic text on agriculture. He suggested that most of Cape Breton was populated by settlers originating in the Hebrides, whom, he claimed, were "ignorant of the most simple modes of Colonial Agriculture."⁸⁰ Compounding the problem, in Kuhn's view, was that 5/6s of the Cape Breton population did not understand English. He explained that other agricultural texts published in Nova Scotia were only in English. To

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *JHA*, 1843, 523.

⁷⁶ Family Papers: Tays, MG 1, #909B, 39, NSARM.

⁷⁷ Community Records: Lunenburg County—Canon Harris's notes, MG 4, vol. 99, #7, NSARM.

⁷⁸ Petition of Jacob D. Kuhn, RG 5, series P, vol. 53, #32, reel 15616 (mf), NSARM.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Donovan, "May Learning Flourish: The Beginnings of a Cultural Awakening in Cape Breton During the 1840's" in Kenneth Donovan, ed., *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton's History, 1713-1990* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990), 89, 92.

⁸⁰ Petition of Jacob D. Kuhn.

remedy what he perceived as the plight of Gaelic-speaking farmers, Kuhn proposed a translation of an agricultural manual, in about 300 pages, to be offered at a low price or distributed for free.

In his petition, Kuhn assured legislators that he did not advocate the co-existence of different languages in Nova Scotia. Nonetheless, he was willing to suggest that those who spoke only Gaelic should not suffer unduly: "though it may be a misfortune, it cannot be a crime, nor should it furnish a plea for their proscription, or for depriving them of their rights in which their English brethren are allowed to participate."⁸¹

Kuhn's petition was referred to the standing Committee on Agriculture. The committee provided a sympathetic, but firm, response: "However desirable it might [have been] that a large portion of [the] population might [have been] enabled to read such works in their native language," the use of public funds for that purpose could not be recommended.⁸²

There seems to be no record of Kuhn having published his proposed translation. Details of Kuhn's later career are not known.

8. Alexander Monro (1846 and 1847)

Alexander Monro was born in Scotland in 1813. While quite young, living at Baie Verte, New Brunswick, Monro took an interest in surveying. By the time of his petition, he had worked as a land surveyor in New Brunswick, including work as a deputy surveyor of crown lands.⁸³

Monro's text on land surveying was published in 1844. In undertaking his text, Monro was of the view that British books on the subject were unsuitable for use in the North American colonies. In particular, this was because woodland surveying differed from that in an open and clear country. Pointing out that numerous disputes about boundary lines resulted in litigation, Monro suggested that a little knowledge of land surveying would have saved many a property owner from ruinous lawsuits. If, however, a dispute did

⁸¹ *JHA*, 1845, 232.

⁸² *JHA*, 1845, App. 64, 191.

⁸³ Eric L. Swanick, "Monro, Alexander," in *DCB*, vol. 12 (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990), 752.

result in court action, then it would be important for one's lawyer to have some knowledge of surveying.⁸⁴

On January 20, 1846, Robert M. Dickey, a representative for Cumberland County, presented Monro's petition, which seems to have been accompanied by a copy of the text.⁸⁵ Dickey later presented a second petition, dated January 16, 1847,⁸⁶ with a copy of Monro's text "presented as a specimen of native talent." He also included copies of "very flattering [sic] recommendations of it both from the Colonial Press and other Literary Institutions in the Province." In the 1847 petition, Monro estimated his publication costs at £200, not including labour. He pointed out that he had paid the entire amount to Nova Scotia printers and bookbinders. Strangely, though Monro had neither been born in Nova Scotia, nor resided there, he mentioned three times that he was a native of Nova Scotia. He also indicated that the New Brunswick Assembly had already awarded him a grant of £50.

Monro's petition of 1846 was referred to a committee, which provided a favourable report, dated February 19, 1846.⁸⁷ In general, the committee "consider[ed] the work of Mr. Munro [sic] an improvement, or rather as rendering Surveying more easy." Nonetheless, the Committee pointed out that prior requests for financial assistance from William MacKay and George Wightman had not been fulfilled, "notwithstanding the known talents and reputation of those gentlemen." The committee left it to the Assembly's discretion whether or not to provide a grant, though £50 or £60 was suggested as suitable. On February 23, 1846, a motion for a grant was not approved.⁸⁸ In 1847, a majority of 18 to 12 voted against referring Monro's second petition to the Committee of Supply.⁸⁹

84 Alexander Monro, *A Treatise on Theoretical and Practical Land Surveying Adapted Particularly to the Purposes of Wood-land Surveys ...* (Pictou: Geldert & Patterson, for the author, 1844), v, ix.

85 *JHA*, 1846, 391; App. 49, 180.

86 Petition of Alexander Monro, RG 5, series P, vol. 45, #6, reel 15614 (mf), NSARM.

87 *JHA*, 1846, App. 49, 180.

88 *JHA*, 1846, 132, 451.

89 *JHA*, 1847, 558.

9. Abraham Gesner (1848 and 1849)

Abraham Gesner (see Figure II) was born in 1797 in Kings County, Nova Scotia.⁹⁰ His father had emigrated to Nova Scotia after serving as a Loyalist officer in the American Revolutionary War. After studying medicine in England, Gesner returned to Nova Scotia where he worked as a physician at Parrsboro, Cumberland County, from 1828 to 1837. It was not a rich practice. Although Gesner's medical practice was not lucrative, it did provide him sufficient time with which to maintain his interest in geology, a pastime which seems to have first attracted him in England. While travelling from house to house in the countryside around Parrsboro on calls, Gesner collected specimens and recorded his observations. He supplemented his first-hand knowledge by collecting geological texts.

In 1836, Gesner published the text, *Remarks on the Geology and Mineralogy of Nova Scotia*. In terms of mineral reserves, he suggested that Nova Scotia possessed "a character unrivalled by any country of the same extent." Although minerals were important to a country's prosperity, he explained, little was known of the variety and amount of the province's mineral wealth. Gesner's main object was "to arouse the attention of the inhabitants of the Province, to a due estimation of the advantages they possess[ed], and the resources Providence [had] placed within their reach." Writing for a general audience, he included an introduction to geology and mineralogy, and a geological map as part of the text.⁹¹

Gesner does not seem to have approached the Assembly directly for financial aid concerning his text on geology. On April 11, 1837, the Assembly decided not to provide £200 for a provincial geological survey, which Gesner would have undertaken. However, members agreed that the "House highly appreciate[d] the devotion of time and labor of Dr. Gesner, to the developement [*sic*] of the Mineral resources of the Country."⁹² Following that resolution, Joseph Howe's proposal that Gesner should receive £100 "as a Testimonial of the value which [that] House set upon his labours as a Geologist, and

90 Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information concerning Gesner is from Allison Mitcham's *Prophet of the Wilderness* (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot Press, 1995), 22, 26-27, 32-33, 38-39, and from Lori S. Russell's "Gesner, Abraham," in *DCB*, vol. 9 (U of Toronto P, 1976), 309-310.

91 Abraham Gesner, *Remarks on the Geology and Mineralogy of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Gossip & Coade, 1836), vi, viii-ix.

92 *JHA*, 1837, 189.

Figure 2. – Abraham Gesner. Photo courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives Records Management.

upon the character of the work ... published by him on the Geology and Mineralogies of the Province"⁹³ passed by 20 votes to 18.

In following years, Gesner was employed as a geologist by the governments of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, respectively. His geological work was supplemented by an interest in electricity and hydrocarbons. While in Prince Edward Island, Gesner gave a series of public lectures which included a demonstration of his invention, kerosene, thereby marking the beginning of petroleum refining. In 1846, Gesner published a geological map of Nova Scotia. The next year, he served as Commissioner to the Indians in Nova Scotia. Also in 1847, he published a general account of New Brunswick, including its history, topography, ethnology, natural resources, business and manufacturing, immigration, government, and railway potential. In 1848, at the time of his petition to the Nova Scotia Assembly, Gesner was widely known as an author, lecturer, and government official.

Gesner intended his text, *The Industrial Resources of Nova Scotia*, to be an advertisement for the province's merits as a place for investment and immigration. At a time of revolutionary turmoil in Europe, as well as overpopulation and unemployment in the United Kingdom, he suggested that Nova Scotia could serve as recipient of Britain's unused capital and labour. There was, however, a lack of awareness, both at home and abroad, of the resources which existed in the British North American colonies. It was this "imperfect knowledge" which Gesner hoped to remedy in relation to the attributes of Nova Scotia. Gesner included a brief history of Nova Scotia industry, as well as discussion of geography, forests, fisheries, agriculture, manufacturing, geology, mining, railways, and prospects for immigrants. An unapologetic Nova Scotia advocate, Gesner referred to Nova Scotia's "inexhaustible supplies of coal, iron, and other minerals" and described its bays and estuaries as the "most productive fisheries in the world."⁹⁴

On February 8, 1848, John C. Hall, a representative for Kings County, presented Gesner's petition for financial aid.⁹⁵ Along with his petition, Gesner had sent a portion of the manuscript, "devoted to the improvement of the natural wealth and industry of the

93 *JHA*, 1837, 192-193.

94 Abraham Gesner, *The Industrial Resources of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: A. & W. MacKinlay, 1849), i-iii.

95 *JHA*, 1848, 44.

country.” Gesner explained that though the text itself took a year to prepare, it was actually the product of 25 years’ experience and observation. He indicated that he wished to include a map and illustrations, which would greatly increase production costs. Gesner’s petition assured the Assembly that any grant would not pay for his labour, but would merely be for “cost relief,” in order to produce “an object of public importance and value.” To encourage the legislators’ generosity, Gesner suggested that publishing in the colonies was both expensive and unprofitable, as there was “less encouragement for literary pursuits than in older countries.” Nonetheless, Gesner claimed that other colonial legislatures had stepped in to assist authors: “On this account the authors of colonial publications have been cherished by legislative aid, especially when their writings have been calculated to improve the state of society, develop [sic] resources and advance general industry.”⁹⁶

After being read, Gesner’s 1848 petition was referred to a committee. On February 28, 1848, the committee reported favourably on Gesner’s work,⁹⁷ indicating an appreciation of such a text “in a young Country like [that], where the resources [were] so boundless, and yet comparatively so little known.” The committee agreed that a popular work might attract the attention of investors. Despite this, Gesner’s request for aid was not accepted. The committee members pointed out that they had not been able to inspect the entire text. They suggested that with the advent of copyright law in Nova Scotia, the Legislature had chosen not to reward authors with public funds, and added that requests for aid for “scientific” texts from Wightman and Monro had been refused in earlier years. The

96 Petition of Abraham Gesner, 4 Feb. 1848, series P, vol. 45, #84, NSARM. A discussion of government assistance to authors in other British North American colonies in the first half of the 19th century is beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, as suggested by Gesner, legislatures in other parts of British North America were willing to provide funding to certain authors. As mentioned earlier in this essay, Joseph Bouchette and Alexander Monro had received grants from the legislatures in Lower Canada and New Brunswick, respectively. Parker, *Beginnings*, 84-87, provides some other examples from this period. In 1847, the government of the Province of Canada agreed to buy 150 copies of a history of New France, written by François-Xavier Garneau. A reply to Garneau appeared in the form of Robert Christie’s four-volume, *A History of the Late Province of Lower Canada*. In 1853, the Canadian government also purchased 1000 copies of Christie’s fourth volume, and soon afterwards, provided the funds for the publication of 1000 copies of the *Jesuit Relations*.

97 *JHA*, 1848, App. 38, 145.

committee members also pointed to the prospect that year of a budgetary deficit. The committee members did underscore, however, that their decision was not a reflection of the text's lack of quality.

About a year later, in 1849, Gesner felt compelled to repeat his request for financial assistance.⁹⁸ His petition was once again referred to a committee. In a report read on February 28, 1849,⁹⁹ the committee deemed the text "highly creditable to the Author, affording much valuable information." Given the poor state of the province's treasury, however, the committee could only recommend a grant of £50, to be paid when the Governor-in-Council was satisfied that the work was completed and published. The committee sympathized with local authors, who, given the province's small population, could not "reasonably expect any sufficient remuneration for the publication of their works." To prevent the loss of collected information, which could otherwise be used "to improve the state of Society, advance the general industry, and develope [*sic*] the resources of the Province," committee members suggested that greater legislative assistance for publishing was needed. Despite that plea, a motion by Samuel Creelman, a member for Colchester County, to grant Gesner £50 was defeated, by 23 votes to 22.¹⁰⁰

V. Other Nova Scotian authors

Not all Nova Scotian non-fiction authors of the first half of the 19th century relied on legislative support to finance their publications. As a number of examples demonstrate, it was possible to get a text published through other means. In 1829, for instance, Thomas C. Haliburton published *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia*.¹⁰¹ Haliburton relied on self-financing, as well as cooperation with his publisher Joseph Howe. Originally, the work was to be published as a joint venture. Haliburton was to make cash advances, and he and Howe would divide the profits or losses. To simplify matters, Howe chose to assume the entire financial risk, being confident of large sales outside the province.¹⁰² Haliburton nonetheless

⁹⁸ Petition of Abraham Gesner, 29 Jan. 1849, RG 5, series P, vol. 45, #147, NSARM.

⁹⁹ *JHA*, 1849, App. 58, 397.

¹⁰⁰ *JHA*, 1849, 363.

¹⁰¹ Haliburton, *Account*.

¹⁰² V.L.O. Chittick, *Thomas Chandler Haliburton ("Sam Slick"): A Study in Provincial Toryism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1924), 143-144.

agreed to lend £280 to Howe.¹⁰³ The arrangement proved more felicitous to author than to publisher. Howe believed that Haliburton made several hundred pounds through the venture, while the publisher claimed his own loss to be about £800.¹⁰⁴ Howe deemed the project “a ruinous speculation” which “cumbered [his] office for two years, involved [him] in heavy expenses for wages and in debts for paper, materials, binding and engraving.”¹⁰⁵

The Assembly did take notice of Haliburton’s text, though not in a financial sense. On March 27, 1829, by unanimous resolution, it thanked Haliburton for his “very laudable and laborious effort” which it deemed “useful to the Province and honorable” to the author. Haliburton graciously replied that his work would be “more than amply compensated” by the Assembly’s resolution.¹⁰⁶

Haliburton contemplated the prospect of public funding for a second edition, though he did not appear to pursue the matter with much vigour. After unsuccessful efforts to convince his London publisher, Richard Bentley, to fund a second edition, Haliburton turned, not to the Assembly, but to the Provincial-Secretary, Sir Rupert D. George.¹⁰⁷ By letter dated November 18, 1840, Haliburton asked George for £250 in public funding. Haliburton’s request does not seem, however, to have been forwarded to the Assembly.

Another Nova Scotian non-fiction author of this period was Beamish Murdoch, a Halifax lawyer. He used a prospectus to secure advance buyers for his *Epitome of the Laws of Nova-Scotia*.¹⁰⁸ A possible reason for Murdoch choosing the subscription route was that he did not expect a favourable response from the Assembly. From 1826 to 1830, Murdoch represented Halifax Township, losing his seat in the 1830 election as a result of efforts by Halifax mercantile

103 George L. Parker, “Another Look at Haliburton and His Publishers Joseph Howe and Richard Bentley: The Colonial Author and His Milieu,” in Frank M. Tierney, ed., *The Thomas Chandler Haliburton Symposium* (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1985), 88.

104 Chittick, 404; Parker, “Another Look,” 88, suggested that Howe actually made £132 on 1500 copies sold.

105 Quoted in Chittick, 144. As late as 1837, there were still some 1000 copies of the Haliburton text left unsold and offered at half price.

106 *JHA*, 1829, 494-495. It is noteworthy that in 1846, the Assembly used the same phrase, “very laudable and laborious effort” to thank Marshall for the second edition of his JPs text: see *JHA*, 1846, 531-532.

107 Haliburton, *Letters*, III, 119, 121.

108 Beamish Murdoch, *Epitome of the Laws of Nova-Scotia* (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1832-1833).

interests.¹⁰⁹ In *The Novascotian* of February 24, 1831, Murdoch provided a sketch of his projected work. It was meant to "give a brief and clear outline of the elements of English law ... enforced in [Nova Scotia] and to arrange the statute law of the province in methodological order."¹¹⁰ *The Novascotian* was published by Joseph Howe, who would also publish the *Epitome*. On November 30, 1831, *The Novascotian* announced that as an adequate number of subscribers had been found, the work would go to press immediately.¹¹¹ This was not, however, accurate. Howe had to badger Murdoch, who had provided a note to guarantee publication costs, until 1850 about bills relating to the *Epitome*'s publication.¹¹²

A fortunate author was one who could secure the financial support of an organization, such as a church. This seems to have been the case for Silas T. Rand, a Baptist missionary and linguist. Rand became interested in the Mi'kmaw people, and in 1849, he gave public lectures in Halifax on the prospect of establishing a mission to the Mi'kmaq. Rand's lectures were transformed into a text on the history, customs, language, and literature of the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.¹¹³ Rand's text was published with the support of a committee, with representatives from the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations, set up to superintend the mission. The committee provided Rand a salary and funded his travel and other expenses.¹¹⁴ Other examples of institutional funding, though more properly of pamphlets, rather than books, occurred when the Halifax Mechanics' Institute funded the publication of a lecture by Titus Smith on mineralogy,¹¹⁵ and when Pictou Academy sponsored the publication of a lecture on education by Thomas McCulloch, a well-known Pictou minister and educator.¹¹⁶

109 Girard, "Themes," 103.

110 Quoted in Philip V. Girard, *Patriot Jurist: Beamish Murdoch of Halifax, 1800-1876* (Diss, Dalhousie U, 1998), 269.

111 Girard, *Patriot*, 271.

112 Girard, "Themes," 131.

113 S.T. Rand, *A Short Statement of Facts Relating to the History, Manners, Customs, Language and Literature of the Micmac Tribe of Indians in Nova-Scotia and P.E. Island* (Halifax: The Committee for Superintending the Mission, 1850).

114 Dorothy May Lovesey, *To Be a Pilgrim: A Biography of Silas Tertius Rand, 1810-1889* (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot Press, 1992), 50-52.

115 Titus Smith, *Lecture on Mineralogy* (Halifax: J.S. Cunnebell, 1834).

116 Thomas M'Culloch [sic], *The Nature and Uses of a Liberal Education Illustrated, Being a Lecture, Delivered at the Opening of the Building, Erected for the Accommodation of the Classes of the Pictou Academical Institution* (Halifax: The Trustees of the Institution; A.H. Holland, printer, 1819).

VI. What factors may have been at work in the Nova Scotia Assembly's decisions about funding?

Of the nine authors who requested some type of financial assistance from the Nova Scotia Assembly in the first half of the 19th century, only two, Marshall and Gesner, were successful. Of those two successful authors, only Marshall received publication assistance as the direct result of a petition. Why were some authors successful in obtaining financial assistance, while most others failed?

The answer is not to be found in party politics. For most of the first half of the 19th century, there were no formal political parties in Nova Scotia. Voting along party lines only began after the 1847 election; before then, members voted as they wished.¹¹⁷ As the century unfolded, loose alliances did develop among the supporters (Reformers or Liberals) and opponents (Tories or Conservatives) of responsible government. No consistent link, appears to have existed, however, between either group and its members' amenability to vote in favour of funds for petitioning authors. A few examples will suffice. In 1837, when Abraham Gesner received a £100 grant, a Reformer majority prevailed in the Assembly. However, Reformers also enjoyed Assembly majorities in 1848 and 1849, the years of Gesner's unsuccessful petitions. Although willing to recognize Gesner's work, the 1837 sitting of the Assembly was not so generously disposed towards William MacKay's manuscript, even though it had been introduced to the Assembly by Hugh Bell, a Reformer, had been recommended by a six-person committee consisting of equal numbers of Reformers and Tories, and had been favourably reviewed in *The Novascotian*, owned by Joseph Howe, a leader of the Reformers. Moreover, in 1843, committee members Benjamin Smith, a Tory, and Gaius Lewis, a Reformer, both reported favourably to the full Assembly on the merits of George Wightman's text.

Personal preferences and prejudices, which resulted from such influences as community, church, family, and friendship, may have affected the voting choices of individual legislators, rather than political allegiances. These motivations were not, however, identified in the record of legislative proceedings and cannot now be known. In attempting to understand why some authors secured financial assistance, one can, however, identify certain factors common to the

¹¹⁷ Cuthbertson, 26; for the political affiliations of individual members, I have relied on Elliott's biographical directory.

successful authors or their texts. One can also consider any justifications mentioned by committee members during the course of reporting on the merits of a work.

Marshall and Gesner shared a number of personal attributes. Both were native-born Nova Scotians from well-established families. Their fathers had served as officers in the Loyalist forces during the American Revolutionary War. Both Marshall and Gesner were well known and professionally respected. Marshall was a judge, and Gesner's reputation was established as a geologist, lecturer, and government official. The Assembly would understandably be less reluctant to fund an author if his status in the community and the quality of his work were known. In Marshall's case, for instance, the committee which reviewed his text reasoned that the "professional reputation of that Gentleman" would ensure his manuscript's quality.¹¹⁸

In addition to an author's perceived qualities, legislators had to decide on the merits of a proposed text. A text which had been completed and which therefore was available for inspection by Assembly members had a better chance of approval than one which was merely planned. A completed text could also be circulated for review prior to a written application for funding, and copies of favourable written reviews could accompany one's petition. In the cases of both Gesner and Marshall, complete copies of the text in question were available for inspection by the Assembly. Gesner had already published his text by the time he made his request, and given the favourable response to Howe's resolution that Gesner receive a £100 grant, Assembly members were familiar with Gesner's 1836 work. As for Marshall, he had a complete manuscript available for inspection. His manuscript had also been the subject of a complimentary newspaper review.

In terms of content, it was important for the Assembly to identify a need for the text. Gesner's 1836 work was perceived as helpful to the province's mining industry; the Assembly acknowledged the "value" of the text's "character."¹¹⁹ Marshall's text could have been linked to the preservation of law and order, to prevent what he called in his preface "a disregard or contempt for the authority of Magistrates."¹²⁰ The committee which examined Marshall's

¹¹⁸ *JHA*, 1837, App. 55, 79.

¹¹⁹ *JHA*, 1837, 193.

¹²⁰ Marshall, *Justice* (1837), vi.

manuscript pronounced it "a valuable aid to Magistrates in the discharge of their duties."¹²¹

None of the factors shared by Gesner and Marshall or their work seemed to have been enough on their own, however, to secure funding from the Assembly. This is reflected in the attributes of unsuccessful petitioners. MacKay came from an established landowning family, and his respected professional reputation would have been known to the Assembly. Bouchette was a prominent official from another colony, Dickson could point to strong family connections to the Assembly, and Wightman's surveying and engineering work was well known and received. In 1848 and 1849, when Gesner made petitions in relation to his text on industrial resources, he was much better known than he had been in 1836.

By itself, neither the completion of a text, nor its perceived usefulness could guarantee funding. Monro's text on surveying had been published by the time of his petition. The book had been favourably received in New Brunswick, where the Legislature had voted a grant. MacKay's text had been favourably reviewed by an Assembly committee, as well as by Titus Smith, a deputy provincial-surveyor. Assembly committees had described Dickson's text as "useful,"¹²² had found Wightman's book to "contain much valuable information,"¹²³ and had suggested Kuhn's proposal for a Gaelic agricultural text was "desirable."¹²⁴ The Assembly did not question the value of any of the texts, actual or projected, presented for its review. In 1848, for example, when the review committee recommended no assistance for Gesner, it stressed that its decision was not a reflection of the text's lack of quality.¹²⁵ Although acknowledging the merits of such texts, rarely, however, was the Assembly willing to "encourage the efforts of Individuals who devote[d] their time and attention"¹²⁶ to texts which could have inured to the province's benefit.

Review committees, and by extension, the full Assembly, which voted on committee recommendations, did not always offer reasons for choosing not to support a text financially. When committees did

¹²¹ *JHA*, 1837, App. 55, 79.

¹²² *JHA*, 1839, App. 42, 76.

¹²³ *JHA*, 1843, App. 107, 288.

¹²⁴ *JHA*, 1845, App. 64, 191.

¹²⁵ *JHA*, 1848, App. 38, 145.

¹²⁶ *JHA*, 1837, App. 56, 79.

explain their decisions, the reasons provided could be hollow and inconsistent. One explanation, and a sound one, offered by the Assembly was not having been able to examine a copy of a text under review. It would have been unreasonable for the Assembly to commit public funds when the quality or even the existence of a text could not be verified. The lack of a text to examine slowed the processing of Bouchette's request in 1833, and 15 years later, in 1848, as part of its reasons for declining financial aid, the review committee indicated that it had not been able to examine a complete copy of Gesner's text on industrial resources. It should be pointed out, nonetheless, that only a partial examination of Marshall's manuscript in 1837 had been seen as sufficient to support funding.

Another reason offered was past practice, that financial assistance had not been provided to other authors. In choosing not to recommend funding for Monro's land surveying text in 1846, the review committee pointed out that MacKay's and Wightman's prior petitions "[had] not [been] responded to by the House, notwithstanding the known talents and reputation of those gentlemen."¹²⁷ What the committee failed to mention, though, was that by the time of Monro's request in 1846, the Assembly had undertaken the publication of Marshall's text on JPs and had given money to Gesner. An Assembly committee also relied on precedent in 1848 to explain its decision not to provide any funds to Gesner, even though he had been one of only two authors to benefit from prior Assembly funding.

In 1848, in relation to Gesner's petition, the review committee explained that with the advent of copyright law in Nova Scotia, the Assembly had chosen not to reward authors with public funds. Implicitly, therefore, the marketplace was expected to provide authors with ample earnings. In 1849, however, another review committee, entrusted with the task of examining the same text by the same author, suggested that given "the paucity of [Nova Scotia's] population Authors cannot reasonably expect any sufficient remuneration for the publication of their works."¹²⁸ Putting aside that contradiction, copyright legislation could not change Nova Scotia's small, scattered, and relatively uneducated population, which meant a limited and dispersed market for non-fiction texts on Nova Scotian topics.

¹²⁷ *JHA*, 1846, App. 49, 180.

¹²⁸ *JHA*, 1849, App. 58, 397.

Also in 1848, the review committee, in choosing not to provide funding to Gesner, indicated that it was not aware of any legislatures in other “countries” providing support to authors. This was not correct. Not only had all three of the 1848 committee members been Assembly representatives in 1846, when Monro’s petition, which referred to £50 in financial aid from the New Brunswick legislature, had been discussed, but committee member R.M. Dickey had read aloud Monro’s petition at that time.

A more plausible reason which the Assembly offered, in 1848 and 1849, for declining to provide financial assistance was a lack of funds. Even with respect to this reason, though, the Assembly was not always consistent. The Assembly received a considerable number of petitions in a session and could not respond to all pleas seeking money. In requesting financial assistance, authors had to compete with such distressed persons as shipwrecked sailors, destitute or sick immigrants, and imprisoned debtors. Following wartime prosperity early in the 19th century, Nova Scotia’s economy fell into decline after the defeat of Napoleon. Nova Scotia experienced fluctuations in prices, wages, and trading activity. The mid-1830s was a time of particular economic difficulty in Nova Scotia, with the problem of a depreciating currency compounded by a number of crop failures.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, in the 1830s, funds were found for both Marshall and Gesner. When compared to amounts provided for social assistance at the same time, the Assembly’s grants to those two authors seem quite sizeable. By comparison to Marshall’s £50 and Gesner’s £100, in 1838 the Assembly, for example, approved only £200 for use by the Halifax Commissioners of the Poor, who provided support for the needy in a community of some 14 000.¹³⁰

Conclusion

Publishing in 19th-century Nova Scotia was precarious, and the difficulties experienced by authors in obtaining legislative grants reflected this lack of support. Ironically, even though the Assembly rarely provided individual authors with aid, it was governmental printing which was instrumental in starting and sustaining local

¹²⁹ Cuthbertson, 306.

¹³⁰ *JHA*, 1838, 424; Susan Greaves, “Book Culture in the 1830s: The Entrenchment of the Book Trade,” *Épilogue* 11 (Spring 1991): 2.

publishing.¹³¹ It appears that for an author to have received financial support from the Assembly in 19th-century Nova Scotia, a number of possible criteria had to be fulfilled. Not only did the petitioner have to be a prominent Nova Scotian, but the text had to be complete, judged well-written and of value to the province. Even with these factors fulfilled, there was no guarantee of a grant, as the Nova Scotia Assembly was not consistent in its funding decisions. At various times, but not altogether uniformly, the Assembly used past practice, the lack of a text to examine, the creation of copyright law, the practice in other jurisdictions, and the lack of public funds to justify declining aid to authors. Significantly, the Assembly never questioned the quality of a text or the qualifications of its author.

In relation to writers of legal texts in 19th-century British North America, one historian has suggested that they "did not do so for financial gain." Instead, "they wrote, in spite of probable financial loss, out of a sense of mission."¹³² The same could be said of the petitioners mentioned in this essay. Given the realities of Nova Scotia's weak economy and its small, scattered, and relatively uneducated population, during the first half of the 19th century non-fiction writers did not aspire to large earnings in Nova Scotia. Nonetheless, those writers seeking financial assistance from the Assembly saw the potential to redress local needs and improve local conditions by circulating information and ideas through books. In that way, people within the province could learn such subjects as agriculture, geology, land surveying, and the law, while people outside the province could acquire an awareness of that province's potential for immigration and investment. Efforts at self-promotion ranged from the modesty of Moffat, who made his request for financial aid "with diffidence of his abilities,"¹³³ to the confidence of Marshall, who thought it "no presumption to say, that full reliance may safely be yielded, as to [the] accuracy" of his book.¹³⁴ In all cases identified, the message, regardless of how forcefully it was made, was the same: publishing the authors' work would benefit the province, and writers would find their reward through the attainment of that goal. In 1836, Gesner encapsulated this attitude. Having mentioned the

131 Fauteux. See also generally, Marjory Whitelaw, *First Impressions: Early Printing in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1987); Parker, *Beginnings*, 26.

132 Girard, "Themes," 136.

133 Petition of William Palmer Moffat.

134 Marshall, *Justice*, (1837), ix.

likelihood of incurring a loss through his publishing venture, he suggested that he would "be amply rewarded if his labours [should] in any degree promote the study of Natural History in the Province, or prove useful to his countrymen."¹³⁵ For most of the writers identified in this essay, however, the favourable impression which they and their texts created among legislators was not enough to secure public funding, which would have lessened the financial risks of what, in the words of fellow Nova Scotian writer George R. Young, had "never been a very promising speculation."¹³⁶

RÉSUMÉ

Les lecteurs étant peu nombreux et dispersés, les débuts de l'édition en Nouvelle-Écosse furent précaires et les auteurs travaillaient sans grand espoir de rémunération. Pour aider à financer leurs publications, certains auteurs s'adressèrent à l'Assemblée législative de la province pour obtenir une aide financière. Cet article examine le sort réservé aux demandes d'aide financière faites à l'Assemblée législative de la Nouvelle-Écosse par les auteurs d'ouvrages généraux durant la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle. L'article identifie les facteurs qui auraient pu influencer les décisions des législateurs et en particulier, s'il existait une uniformité dans le comportement de l'Assemblée vis-à-vis les requêtes reçues. De plus, cet article nous renseigne sur les types d'ouvrages généraux en préparation de publication en Nouvelle-Écosse à l'époque, sur les auteurs qui créèrent ces textes, sur les efforts des auteurs pour promouvoir leurs travaux, et aussi sur les facteurs qui motivaient ce travail.

¹³⁵ Gesner, *Remarks*, xiii.

¹³⁶ Young.