

The Parish and French Canadian Migrants to Compton County, Quebec, 1851-1891.

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Most of the French Canadians who moved to the Eastern Townships during the nineteenth century did so either as settlers around the undeveloped periphery or as labourers in the Anglo-Protestant south-western part of the region. As a result, three distinctive types of Catholic parishes appeared — the compact colony with a homogeneous French-speaking population, the large rural parish with French Canadian labourers and craftsmen scattered widely among a more firmly established English-speaking majority, and the industrial parish with the French Canadians living in a more or less distinct part of the town. Although the Catholic clergy preferred French Canadians to work for anglophones in the countryside and towns of the Eastern Townships, rather than leave the province, the only action the Bishop of Sherbrooke took to encourage migration into the Protestant area was to circulate lists of land for sale.¹ Some French Canadians bought farms in the older townships, but they were seldom numerous enough to constitute a fourth distinctive type of parish community. Such a development had to await the acceleration of the English Canadian exodus at the turn of the century. The Church consequently devoted most of its energies to the promotion of colonization in areas shunned by the original English-speaking settlers. Its preference for a society of small independent land-owners was powerfully expressed in terms of the agrarian mythology. It has generally been assumed that the clerico-nationalists were simply reflecting the reactionary social philosophy of contemporary Rome when they claimed that a landless, labouring people would eventually relinquish its language and religion. The following article, by examining examples of the three parish types, will attempt to determine whether there was evidence within Quebec itself to support such a theory. The sprawling county of Compton was chosen because, as the last frontier of the Eastern Townships, it had the greatest variety of communities in the region.

1. THE COLONIZATION PARISH. SAINT-ROMAIN DE WINSLOW

Winslow township,² at the northern tip of Compton, was the site of the first French Canadian colony in the county. By 1851, 253 settlers had

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¹ Archives de la Chancellerie de l'Archevêché de Québec, Di. Sh. I — 8a, Mgr. Racine à Grand-Vicaire Cazeau, 23 février 1875; Archives de la Chancellerie de l'Archevêché de Montréal, Sherbrooke 1874-76, 295, 106, Mgr. Racine à Mgr. Fabre, 9 mars 1875.

² During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Compton county was comprised of fifteen townships. The first Roman Catholic parish in each usually took the name of that township.

been lured there by the free fifty acre land grants which the government had offered three years earlier. As in many young parishes, a dispute with the Church authorities developed over the site of the first chapel. The church, presbytery, and cemetery would eventually have to be close to a center of population, so the bishop was careful to choose a strategic location. But the original settlers, realizing that the chapel would often determine the site of the future village, insisted that it be close to them. The Winslow colonists were more adamant than most,³ going so far as to start building on a site of their own choosing after the bishop proclaimed that there would be neither Mass nor Confession in Winslow until a chapel was completed. The bishop reprimanded them, but he eventually appointed a sympathetic curé to find a compromise location.⁴ The matter was settled to everyone's satisfaction, but in 1858 the colonists began to demand that the curé live among them rather than in the less populous parent parish of Saint Gabriel de Stratford. They were rebuked for the tone of their petition,⁵ but the bishop again conceded gracefully. He ordered their priest to spend six months in each mission for the time being, then, the following year, he appointed a new priest to reside in Winslow full-time.⁶ As the bishop no doubt realized, such demonstrations of independence were not a real threat to the traditional authority of the Church. Even when one takes the colonists' materialistic motives into account, it is still significant (and ironic) that the only real resistance to clerical authority arose from a desire to have chapel and priest as close as possible to their homes.

The 1870s and 1880s were years of stabilization in Winslow, whose population ceased to grow. Not only were there no more major disputes, but the \$3,200 debt incurred for the presbytery and chapel was quickly and quietly paid. In 1871 the parishioners spent \$400 for additions and repairs to the presbytery, and between 1875 and 1883 church improvements cost them an additional \$5,755.⁷ The 1873 Parish Report records an income of \$274 for the *fabrique* (vestry), plus \$250 in tithes and \$190 from other sources for the curé. By 1878 the *fabrique's* revenue had increased

³ Their resolve was strengthened by the fact that they were placed in the new Diocese of Trois-Rivières in 1852, while the better-established colonies to the immediate north remained under Quebec's direct authority. They not only continued to attend services at Saint-Vital de Lambton, but also seemed to feel that they could rejoin that parish if they failed to get their way. Archives de la Chancellerie de l'Archevêché de Sherbrooke [hereafter ACAS], Papiers paroissiaux, Saint-Romain de Winslow, Duhaut à Mgr. Cooke, 26 mai 1856; Archives de la Chancellerie de l'Évêché de Trois-Rivières [hereafter ACETR], Registre des lettres, II, p. 43, Mgr. Cooke à Duhaut, 5 juin 1856; pp. 52-53, 14 juin 1856; p. 68, 1 sept. 1856.

⁴ ACETR, Registre des lettres, II, p. 77, *Aux fidèles du township de Winslow*, 9 sept. 1856, p. 104; Mgr. Cooke à Duhaut, 6 nov. 1856, p. 153, 12 août 1857.

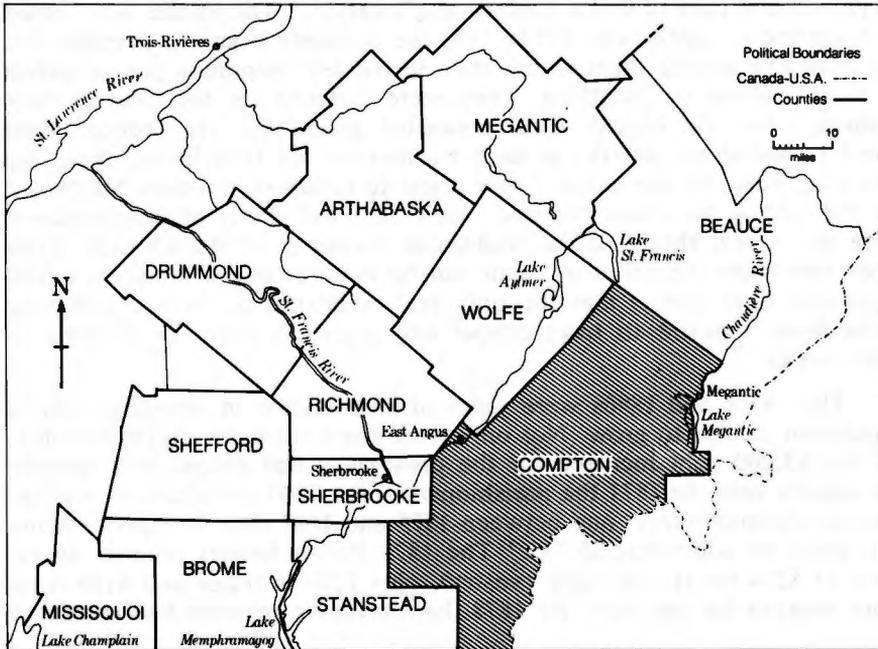
⁵ The colonists had again threatened to join Lambton and the Quebec Diocese. *Ibid.*, III, no. 38, Mgr. Cooke à P. Gagné, Capt., et autres, 26 sept. 1862; no. 37, Mgr. Cooke à Bouchard, 26 sept. 1862; no. 61, 8 nov. 1862.

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 50, Mgr. Cooke à Bouchard, 30 sept. 1863.

⁷ *Annuaire de Séminaire Saint-Charles Borromée* (Sherbrooke, 1885-95), pp. 120-22.

to \$405 and the tithes to \$311.⁸ It is possible that such model behaviour was prompted by Saint-Romain's elevation to a canonical parish in 1868, thereby giving the Church more clearly defined legal powers,⁹ but the inhabitants do not seem to have felt unduly burdened by ecclesiastical fees during the following two decades. Like the other Compton parishioners, they were in a better position than the colonists of Notre-Dame d'Hébertville, near Lac St.-Jean. Though Saint-Romain was one third to one half as populous as Hébertville, during the 1870s and 1880s it paid only one-quarter the tithes to its curé.¹⁰

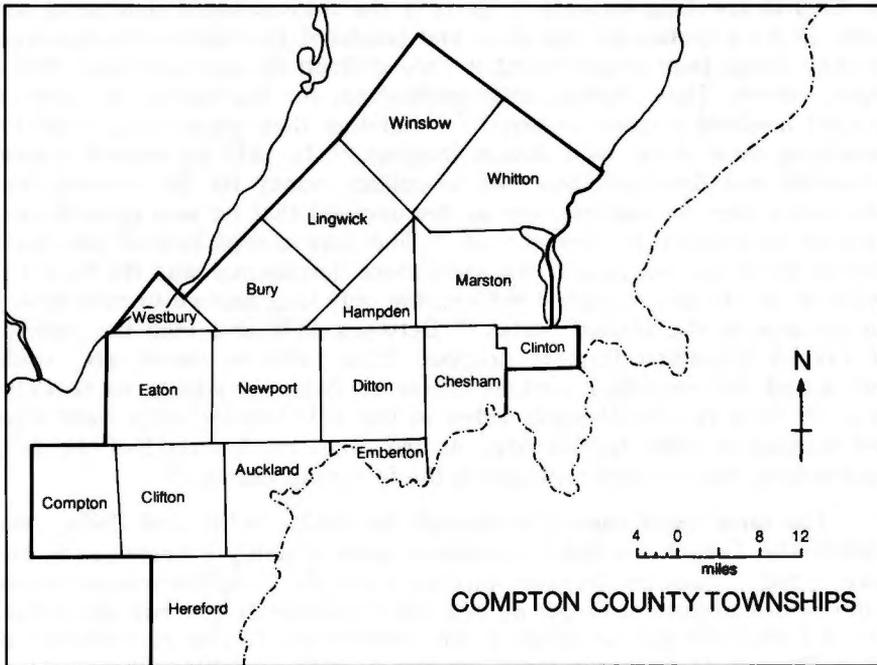
COUNTIES IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS - 1890



⁸ ACAS, *Rapports sur les Paroisses et Missions, Saint-Romain, 1873, 1878*. The parish reports were not regularly submitted in the Diocese of Sherbrooke before 1878.

⁹ P.-B. Mignault and S. Pagnuelo claim that by Quebec law ecclesiastical taxes were legally enforceable even in unincorporated missions, but some priests were under the impression that the Church's position was not totally secure until a parish had been civilly, as well as canonically, incorporated. P.-B. MIGNAULT, *Le droit paroissial étant une étude historique et légale* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1893), pp. 17, 19, 25, 181, 221; S. PAGNUELLO, *Études historiques et légales sur la liberté religieuse en Canada* (Montréal: C.O. Beauchemin & Valois, 1872), pp. 357-61; ACAS, *Fonds Antoine Racine, Pétition à Mgr. Racine, mars 1879*. At least one modern expert inclines toward the latter view. See Louis-Philippe PIGEON, "Législation civile des paroisses," SCHEC, *Rapport*, 1947-48, p. 98.

¹⁰ Normand SÉGUIN, "Notre-Dame d'Hébertville, 1850-1900. Une Paroisse de Colonisation au XIX^e Siècle" (Thèse de doctorat, Université d'Ottawa, 1975), p. 209. The curé of Saint-Romain was also relatively poor in comparison to his confrères in the Montreal Diocese, for their average income in 1864 was \$740.30. However that of a country curé in the province was only \$600 in 1900. Serge GAGNON, "Le diocèse de Montréal durant les années 1860," in *Le Laïc dans l'Église Canadienne-Française de 1830 à nos jours* (Montréal: Fides, 1972), p. 121; Pierre SAVARD, "La vie du clergé québécois aux XIX^e siècle," *Recherches Sociographiques*, VIII (1967), p. 270.



Though the Hébertville *fabrique's* debt was still climbing at \$18,000 in 1891,¹¹ that of Saint-Romain was reduced to \$500 by then. In his annual reports to the bishop, the Winslow curé generally expressed satisfaction with the contributions and moral behaviour of his charges. The only vices to be repeatedly noted were drunkenness and dancing, common enough sins in the old parishes as well.¹² In the final analysis, Saint-Romain's parish priest could boast that "*Ma paroisse est une paroisse modèle; elle est composée en entière de canadiens-français venant des paroisses qui avoisinent Québec, et cette population se fait remarquer par son union et sa soumission.*"¹³

2. THE MIXED RURAL PARISH. SAINT-THOMAS DE COMPTON AND SAINT-RAPHAËL DE BURY

At the southwestern end of the county, Compton Township had been settled by late Loyalists fifty years before Winslow was opened. Though there were French Canadians among the population as early as the 1820s, they long remained transient tradesmen or labourers employed

¹¹ SÉGUIN, p. 212.

¹² ACAS, *Rapports sur les Paroisses et Missions, Saint-Romain, 1883-91.*

¹³ ACAS, *Papiers paroissiaux, Saint-Romain, no. 3, Brassard à Mgr. Racine, 27 nov. 1874.*

by English-speaking farmers.¹⁴ In 1851 the francophones numbered 478 (18% of the population); but poor and scattered throughout the township as they were, their priest found it very difficult to organize them into a viable parish. They showed little enthusiasm for liquidating the debt of several hundred pounds incurred for building their church, or even for supplying their priest with decent lodgings.¹⁵ In 1857 he visited several Canadian and American dioceses to collect money for his mission, but two years later he had become so discouraged that he was granted permission to transfer to Connecticut.¹⁶ The curé complained of the harm caused by mixed marriages, but even more detrimental was the fact that many of his charges remained in Compton only long enough to earn money for passage to the United States.¹⁷ Between 1851 and 1860 the number of French Canadian farmers dropped from forty to twenty-six, while the skilled and unskilled workers increased from sixty-three to seventy-two. Of forty-two landholders listed in the 1851 census, only eight were still present in 1860. In Winslow, on the other hand, over half the 1851 landowners' names were repeated in the following census.¹⁸

The same trend continued through the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, even though the French-speaking population grew steadily¹⁹ because, as the curé noted: "*Tous ou presque tous les biens de Compton appartiennent à des riches propriétaires qui ne peuvent être achetés que par des colons très à l'aise. Ce qui se présente très rarement.*"²⁰ The parishioners of Saint-Thomas de Compton remained reluctant to pay their tithes, seldom contributing more than two-thirds of the allotted sum (\$400). The threat that the curé would be withdrawn if they did not show more generosity was to no avail.²¹ A considerable number failed to complete their annual Easter Confession and Communion duty,²² so that as late as 1891 the curé reported that over a fifth of his charges were not practicing Catholics. That same year the bishop attempted to augment the income of the hapless

¹⁴ Demand for agricultural labour remained high in the more prosperous districts of the Eastern Townships throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. See for example, PAC, R.G. 17-I, Canada, Department of Agriculture, Correspondence no. 2055, Report of George Lanigan, 1866.

¹⁵ ACAS, Papiers paroissiaux, Saint-Thomas, Daly to Mgr. Prince, 10 Oct. 1856, 16 Feb. 1858.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 7, Copie d'une lettre de recommandation donnée à Mr. Daly, Missionnaire de Compton, pour faire une quête en faveur de son Église, 9 jan. 1857; Daly to Mgr. Prince, 20 July 1858, 30 Sept. 1858.

¹⁷ Stanislas DRAPEAU, *Études sur les développements de la colonisation du Bas-Canada depuis 10 ans: (1851 à 1861)*. (Québec: L. Brousseau, 1863), p. 184.

¹⁸ Province of Canada, Manuscript census reports, 1851-52, 1860-61.

¹⁹ Compton township's francophones increased as follows: 1860, 575 (6%), 1870, 687 (24%), 1880, 773 (26%), 1890, 834 (35%).

²⁰ ACAS, Papiers paroissiaux, Saint-Thomas, LeBlanc à Mgr. Larocque, 30 avril 1871.

²¹ ACAS, Registre de Lettres, I, no. 486, p. 363. Aux Fidèles de la paroisse de St. Thomas de Compton, [1885].

²² In Winslow there were seldom more than half a dozen absentees, whereas in Compton the number often reached one hundred. In the Diocese of Montreal in 1864 the average number who did not attend Confession at Easter was fifty-seven per thousand. GAGNON, p. 119.

priest by initiating proceedings to make Saint-Thomas a canonical parish. This prompted a howl of protest from the small Irish minority who claimed that the French parish system would infringe upon their liberties as British subjects. More than the coercive powers of the curé, they seemed to fear French Canadian dominance through an elected *fabrique*.²³ Nevertheless, as the refrain of the more fanatical Protestants of Quebec,²⁴ this was a much more serious threat to the institutional authority of the Church than had ever taken place in a colonization parish. No doubt, it strongly reinforced the conviction of the priests that contact with anglophones was the chief cause for their troubles in the mixed townships.

This was not entirely fair, however, for few French Canadians stayed in Compton township long enough to be assimilated by the English Canadian majority. Intermarriage may have been a problem, but of the small number of Protestant converts among the francophones, nearly all had been residents of the United States for a time.²⁵ In fact it was the very mobility of the French Canadians which was the real problem for the Church. North of Saint-Thomas, Saint-Raphaël de Bury never had more than 115 French Canadians (seven percent of the population) during the nineteenth century, yet the missionary became more and more pleased with their behaviour.²⁶ The reason seems to have been that there was a considerable proportion of farmers among them, for Bury was a relatively poor township where the demand for seasonal labour was not as great as in Compton.²⁷ If the priests in Saint-Thomas de Compton tended to exaggerate the dangers of anglo-Protestant contamination it may well have been because they associated any falling away from the institutions of the Church with Protestantism. The curé of Saint-Camille de Cookshire (located between Saint-Thomas and Saint-Raphaël) made a telling comment: "*La population qui n'est pas catholique, est infidèle-paienne, adorant leur bien-être et leur corps. De là, difficulté pour les catholiques de vivre de la vie de la foi. — De là indifférence pour la pratique de la Religion.*"²⁸

²³ ACAS, Papiers paroissiaux, Saint-Thomas, no. 7, J.B. Watts to Mgr. Racine, 23 Nov. 1890; Choquette à Racine, 27 dec. 1890. Though it was technically possible to have a *fabrique* in an unincorporated parish (i.e. a mission), it could administer only the ordinary revenues (not the actual property) of the church, before canonical incorporation. Jean-François POULIOT, *Traité de droit fabricien et paroissial* (Montréal: Wilem et Lafleur, 1956), pp. 787-88.

²⁴ During the 1880s Robert Sellar of the *Huntingdon Gleaner* began his long crusade against the civil status of ecclesiastical taxes on the grounds that it encouraged the Catholic Church to promote the purchase of Protestant farms by French Canadians. See Robert SELLAR, *The Tragedy of Quebec, The Expulsion of its Protestant Farmers*. 1916 reprint (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).

²⁵ The manuscript census reports show that most of the French-speaking Protestant families had at least one member born in the United States.

²⁶ ACAS, Rapports sur les Paroisses et Missions, Saint-Raphaël, 1878-91.

²⁷ Because Bury was largely ignored by the original American settlers of the Eastern Townships, part of it was included in the St. Francis tract of the British American Land Company in 1836. Though the company established its headquarters in Bury, it soon lost interest in the area. Until the 1880 manuscript census becomes available, it will be impossible to state for certain whether or not the Saint-Raphaël French Canadians were a relatively stable, land-holding population. However it seems to come closer to the fourth type of parish outlined in the introduction to this article than any of the others in Compton county.

²⁸ ACAS, Rapports sur les Paroisses et Missions, Saint-Camille, 1878.

3. THE INDUSTRIAL PARISH. SAINT-LOUIS DE WESTBURY AND SAINTE-AGNÈS DE DITCHFIELD

Given the decline of religious obedience among the rural labourers of Compton township, one might well expect a similar pattern to have developed in the county's two major towns, East Angus and Lake Megantic. Since railroad connections in the late 1870s attracted wood industries, they both grew to centres of approximately a thousand people by 1890. As with other Eastern Township factory towns, the majority very quickly became French Canadian. The East Angus Catholics built a chapel in 1884, and three years later, with the arrival of their first curé, their parish was christened Saint-Louis. In 1889 the curé became involved in a dispute with the English Canadian pulp company owners, claiming that they had forced their employees to vote for a Protestant over a Catholic. This political dispute seems to have caused a division in the parish because in 1890 the priest complained that five heads of family were guilty of insubordination. Soon afterward, eleven men petitioned the bishop to replace their curé on the grounds that he was despotic and viciously critical of his parishioners.²⁹ In addition, delinquency in attending Easter Mass also reached a peak (80 out of 630). However the number was back to normal the following year, and there is no indication of further discord even though the same curé stayed for seven more years. During the later 1880s he had gradually become more pleased with his tithe collections, which increased rapidly (from \$38 in 1885 to \$296 in 1891). In 1891 the *fabrique* still owed \$1,420 for the new church, but it would have little trouble paying this sum, for its income had reached \$600 per year.

The only quarrel to break out in the isolated parish of Sainte-Agnès was whether the church should be in the town of Lake Megantic or further south among the longer established rural population. The bishop enforced his choice of Lake Megantic by decree in 1882.³⁰ In general the town's Catholics were as submissive as those in the colonization parishes, the curé having nothing more serious to report than the customary two or three habitual drunkards. By 1888 he had become satisfied with the tithe contributions — at \$600 in 1891, they were the largest in the county.

In both Westbury and Lake Megantic, most of the French Canadians were newly-arrived labourers who came into frequent contact with English Canadians, yet they were more obedient Catholics than those of rural Compton township. The reason must have been that they lived in a relatively compact and stable community, where the influence of priest and parish could be readily felt. As the dispute with the pulp company illustrated, there were greater dangers to the authority of the priest in industrial

²⁹ ACAS, Papiers paroissiaux, Saint-Louis, no. 7, Boudreau à Mgr. Racine, 18 janv. 1889; no. 9, Pétition, janv. 1890; Rapports sur les Paroisses et Missions, Saint-Louis, 1890.

³⁰ Albert GRAVEL, *Histoire du Lac Mégantic* (Sherbrooke: La Tribune, 1931), p. 87.

centres than in colonization parishes. But clashes were infrequent, for it was in the interest of both employer and curé to define and adhere to their own respective spheres of influence.

CONCLUSION

The evidence found in Compton county suggests that for a French Canadian parish to function smoothly, it did not have to consist of either a homogeneous or a rural landowning population. It could be quite an effective institution where French Canadian farmers were scattered among a Protestant English-speaking majority, or even where a sizable number of French Canadian workers lived in a town. Only where the majority of francophones were both scattered and transitory labourers, as in Compton township, was it impossible for the parish to gain a strong foothold. The agrarian myth would therefore seem to have been somewhat misleading as far as the Church's own interests were concerned. But it is important to note first that the glorification of the soil began earlier in the century, when flight to the city usually meant exodus to New England's textile towns, and second, that East Angus and Lake Megantic were too small to offer the temptations or foster the slums of the large urban centres. Both towns had relatively stable, largely French Canadian populations, the two key elements (though the clergy probably overemphasized the importance of the latter) in the parish's survival as a powerful institution. Nevertheless, rural communities such as Winslow were still more stable and still more homogeneous, so it was only natural that the clergy should be bi-ased towards colonization as the answer to Quebec's surplus population problem.

APPENDIX: PARISH REPORTS

(all sums rounded to the nearest \$)

	1873	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891
<i>Saint-Romain de Winslow</i>															
1. No. of communicants	514	586	621	529	533	537	525	540	540	535	516	520		531	534
2. Easter communion	507	582	617	527	532	533	525	538	540	532	514	518		525	520
3. Tithes collected	\$ 250	\$ 311	\$ 434	\$ 295	\$ 278	\$ 357	275 bu. \$	297* 419 bu.	229 bu. \$	282	\$ 286+		436 bu.	410½ bu.	
4. Supplement	—	—	—	—	—	—	grain		\$26						
5. Revenue of <i>fabrique</i>	\$ 274	\$ 405	\$ 269	\$ 269	\$ 290	\$ 277	\$ 270	\$ 300	\$ 300	\$ 235	\$ 268	\$ 250		\$ 330	\$ 360
6. Debt of <i>fabrique</i>	\$ 239	\$ 589	\$ 800	\$ 500	\$ 800	\$ 500	\$2,355	\$2,163	\$1,934	\$1,928	\$1,825	\$1,300		\$ 700	\$ 500
	* 234 equals 344¼ bu.			+ \$221 equals 391 bu.											
<i>Saint-Thomas de Compton</i>															
1. No. of communicants		480	450	350	350	316		430	420	440	449	438	452	434	431
2. Easter communion		380	400	300	300	300		320	300	310	315	380	375	382	392
3. Tithes collected		\$ 260	\$ 150	\$ 210	—	—	\$ 210	\$ 180	\$ 210	\$ 215	\$ 258	\$ 300	\$ 271	\$ 295	
4. Supplement		1½ tax	1½ tax	0	—	—									
5. Revenue of <i>fabrique</i>		\$ 300	\$ 333	\$ 279	\$ 250	\$ 341	?	\$ 320	\$ 275	\$ 250	\$ 300	\$ 300	\$ 300	\$ 300	\$ 300
6. Debt of <i>fabrique</i>		\$ 600	\$ 400	\$ 400	\$ 300	\$ 200				to \$ 300				0	0
							0	—	0	—	—	—	—	0	0
<i>Saint-Raphaël de Bury</i>															
1. No. of communicants		125	127		100	93									
2. Easter communion		80	100		95	75									
3. Tithes collected		\$50 + effets	\$ 50		\$ 54	\$79 + effets		80		72		72	55	75	55
4. Supplement		—	—		—	—		75		65		65	—	70	53
5. Revenue of <i>fabrique</i>		—	\$ 40		\$ 45	\$ 40		—		\$ 50		\$ 60	\$ 40	\$ 47	40
6. Debt of <i>fabrique</i>		\$ 35	\$ 290		\$ 290	\$ 230		\$ 40		\$ 67		\$ 30	—	\$ 23	\$ 23
												to \$ 35			
													\$ 135	\$ 135	\$ 135

Appendix: PARISH REPORTS (continued)

	1873	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891
<i>Saint-Louis de Westbury</i>															
1. No. of communicants									—	355		332	400	350	340
2. Easter communion									150	351		300	320	300	320
3. Tithes collected									—	\$ 30		\$ 285	\$ 260	\$ 294	\$ 296
4. Supplement									\$ 38	—		0	0	0	0
5. Revenue of <i>fabrique</i>									\$ 180	\$ 160		\$ 300	\$ 400	\$ 450	\$ 600
6. Debt of <i>fabrique</i>									\$ 75	—		\$1,175	\$1,470	\$1,470	\$1,420
 <i>Sainte-Agnes de Ditchfield</i>															
1. No. of communicants				124	175	368		424		450	420	668	713	742	842
2. Easter communion				115	166	340		397		440	400	600	700	700	800
3. Tithes collected				\$ 40	37¼ bu.	—		\$ 163		\$ 184	\$ 205	\$ 403	\$ 442	\$ 600	\$ 600
					\$ 27										
4. Supplement					potatoes,	—		—		—	—	hay	potatoes,	potatoes,	potatoes,
					hay							hay	hay	hay	hay
5. Revenue of <i>fabrique</i>				—	\$ 133	\$ 79		\$ 283		—	\$ 540	\$ 750	\$ 800	\$ 900	\$ 900
6. Debt of <i>fabrique</i>				—	—	—		\$ 535		\$1,100	\$1,100	\$ 800	\$ 800	\$ 500	\$1,300