

The MacPherson-Tompkins Era of St. Francis Xavier University

by

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A paper read at a previous meeting of this association dealt with the history of the first fifty years of St. Francis Xavier University. I would like to deal, consequently, with the next main segment of our history. It is the period from 1906 to 1922 which may appropriately be labeled the Mac. Pherson-Tompkins period. During these years the University progressed from its first awkward stages to an institution of reasonable physical facilities and sound academic achievements. This was the work of two priests: Dr. Hugh P. MacPherson and Father James J. Tompkins. Vastly different in personality and outlook, these two men were able to harness their combined energies to the task in hand, a task which today would seem to have required Herculean energies. The biggest problems were, of course, financial: the college had no endowment, its constituency was small and poor. Professors, moreover, had to be recruited from a small band of diocesan clergy who could ill be spared from parish work. In 1910 the *Casket* estimated there were 80,000 Catholics in the diocese served by 83 priests.¹ In the years which followed at least four large and comfortable buildings were added, astoundingly large sums of money were raised in the diocese by the working people of the area, several benefactors were found to contribute rather large sums individually, professors were well trained at the best universities in the world for their work here. In the whole process of change it is almost impossible to determine exactly the parts played by either Dr. MacPherson or Father Tompkins. It was a process of mutual hard work, open discussion and oftentimes open dispute. Even at that only the hand of Providence will explain the continued existence of the institution in those days, let alone the transformation effected by these two men. In the end the two fell into such divergent ways of thinking that one of them had to leave the University, but contemporaries say they remained good friends even in spite of their disagreement.

It was in early November, 1906, that Hugh P. MacPherson entered on the rectorship that was to last for thirty years, the longest in the history of the institution. His predecessor as rector, Dr. Alexander MacDonald Thompson, was named pastor of St. Anne's Parish, Glace Bay, and Dr. Mac. Pherson was relieved of his duties as parish priest at L'Ardoise, Richmond County.² Bishop Cameron in various letters to the new rector before the actual appointment admitted that the new assignment was not an easy one. There had been criticisms of Dr. Thompson for his handling of financial and of disciplinary affairs at the college; he "had long

¹ *Casket*, April 14, 1910, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, November 15, 1906, p. 5.

been a victim of persecution,” the Bishop says. Continuing this particular letter, Cameron points out to Dr. H. P. that “you are a *persona grata omnibus*,” therein emphasizing a trait which was one of the most dominant in the personality of the new rector and which probably made for the greater part of his success in his long career.³

The new rector had been ordained in 1892 from Laval Seminary in Quebec. He had not been able to finish his course there but had been called home to be ordained several months before the normal time because of the shortage of priests in the diocese. On September 18, 1906, the Secretary of the Laval faculty had notified Father MacPherson that the faculty had determined to confer an honorary doctorate in theology on him as one of the three or four of the seminary’s most brilliant students.⁴ Bishop Cameron himself had brought the degree from Quebec and presented it in a fitting ceremony in the parish church of L’Ardoise.⁵

The *Casket* on November 15 paid this tribute to the new head of St. Francis Xavier’s:

He (Dr. Thompson) has found a worthy successor in Dr. H. P. MacPherson who resigns the care of the excellent parish of L’Ardoise to take up the work which, if it is the most arduous, is also the most glorious in the diocese, since it involves in large measure the moulding of the characters of our future parish priests.

The emphasis placed here on the training of priests is an evidence that the college was still apt to be considered under the guise of a seminary. Some theology was, as a matter of fact, still taught at Antigonish at times. Supporting evidence to this fact is a section of a letter written to the new rector while still at L’Ardoise by Father J. W. MacIsaac who for some time had been Acting Rector during the absence of Thompson on a trip to Rome. Father MacIsaac was pointing out to him some of his new duties:

I think however that you must take the class in Dogmatic Theology. There are two or three ecclesiastics here this year. Dr. Thompson has been teaching them Dogma but he gave it up some time ago. Fr. Gillis is teaching them Moral. I think that the treatise they were taking up in Dogma was *De Gratia*.⁶

Dr. Nicholson, the present Rector of the College, has pointed out to me that this was a temporary revival of an old custom — that of teaching theology to men who were teaching or prefecting.

The new Rector of the College soon began to make changes in his staff. The

³ Archives, Vol. 9, letter of Bishop Cameron to Dr. MacPherson, October 19, 1906.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, letter of September 18, 1906.

⁵ *Casket*, October 4, 1906, p. 1.

⁶ Archives, Vol. 2, letter of Rev. J. W. MacIsaac to Dr. MacPherson, November 9, 1906.

Casket of January 10, 1907, announced that the above mentioned Father MacIsaac was appointed curate at Glace Bay, his place as Vice-Rector for the moment being filled by Father J. J. Tompkins. Father D. J. Macintosh was brought in from Baddeck to fill the post of Bursar and Manager of Mount Cameron.⁷ This was purely a temporary arrangement for when the college opened in the fall of 1908 Father James Kiely, the pastor of Mulgrave, became the new Bursar. Father Tompkins at the same time became Vice-President and Prefect of Studies, and the newly ordained Father John Hugh MacDonald became Vice-Rector and Prefect of Discipline.⁸ Apparently the tradition had been that the Vice-Rector should be in charge of discipline and, not wishing Father Tompkins to have charge of discipline and not wishing to demote him, the Rector had created the new post of Vice-President for him. As a consequence it was not long before the head of the institution began to be referred to as the President Rector. This title gained official recognition in the consolidation of the Acts relating to the College, passed by the Provincial Assembly on April 23, 1909.⁹ It went out of usage completely only in 1944 with the appointment of a new President.

No sooner had the reorganization been completed than a new spirit began to show itself. The college authorities apparently had decided that St. Francis Xavier should be a college second to none in the land and began at once on various improvements. The *Casket* of June 20 reported that at a recent meeting of the St. Ninian's Council of the Knights of Columbus a sum of \$250 was voted for a fund to be set up to provide means for professors of the college to undertake further study at one of the great universities of Europe or America. A committee was appointed to work with the college faculty in the selection of the students, their courses of study and the universities to be attended. A broad hint was thrown out at the same time that support from other Catholic societies in the diocese would be gladly accepted in the furthering of this project. Apparently one of the first things to be tackled by the new authorities of the college was the improving of academic standards and the furnishing of first rate professors. The Reverend C. J. Connolly went to Munich in the fall of 1907 to study biology. Having obtained his doctorate, he was for years engaged in teaching and research at the college.

Later in the summer of that year at the regular meeting of the priests at retreat Dr. MacPherson made the announcement that the college had purchased the estate of Ernest Gregory, K. C., known as Fernwood and located at the opposite end of the town of Antigonish.¹⁰ This announcement of the purchase elicited great praise from the assembled priests and they at once came to the aid of the college authorities. After a great deal of discussion it was decided that a formal agreement be drawn up between the College and the Episcopal Corporation. The priests pledged themselves to give in the next few years a sum of forty thousand dollars

⁷ *Casket*, January 10, 1907, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, September 10, 1908, p. 8.

⁹ Archives, Vol. 21, Copy of Act of April 23, 1909.

¹⁰ *Casket*, August 15, 1907, p. 1.

to the College, and in return they asked that facilities be provided at the new property for the board and lodging of retired priests. The name of the estate was changed from Fernwood to Mount Cameron in honor of the Bishop who seemed very prominent in all of the proceedings. It was further agreed that a yearly collection would be taken up in every church and chapel of the diocese to help in the support of the old priests' home.¹¹

The enthusiasm of this meeting apparently was not shared by the various priests as they came to retirement age for very few of them seemed willing to take up residence at the farm. However, the support of the clergy went on and greatly aided the college authorities in the liquidating of the debt incurred in the purchase. In later years when dormitory space at the college was overtaxed, a few students were housed for a short time at Mount Cameron. The produce of the farm, moreover, has always been welcome in the college kitchens.

In the August 22 issue of the *Casket* there appeared the following note:

To the Alumni and Other Friends of the University of St. Francis Xavier. At the late annual meeting attention was called to the regulation or by-law, which required every member to make an annual contribution to the Library, or to the Museum, or to the Gymnasium. A live committee was appointed, consisting of the Reverend Doctor Thompson, the late Rector of the University, Mr. MacEchen, the President of the Alumni Association, and Mr. Boyd, the Secretary, to remind the members of this by-law and its obligations.

In an earlier issue of the *Casket* (July 25) there appeared an account of another project of the same meeting of the Alumni. A committee of twelve was set up to devise means for raising \$10,000. to endow a Chair of English Literature. It is hardly unfair to say that this sudden enthusiasm on the part of the Alumni must have been aroused by the new authorities of the college.

It is interesting to note that this Chair of English Literature was occupied in the fall of 1907 by Mr. A. J. G. MacEchen, LL.D., the President of the Alumni Association and one of the chief supporters of the movement.¹² Mr. MacEchen was engaged in the practice of law in Sydney during this first year of his teaching and apparently came to Antigonish for only two days of the week in order to carry on his lectures. The next year he took up residence on the campus where the scholarliness of his lectures did much to inspire students and heighten the intellectual level of the whole college. In the following years he was an important figure in all the attempts to raise money for the college and seems to have been willing to attempt any task which would lead to this end. The Reverend Mr. A. MacLean Sinclair was at the same time appointed to the Chair of Gaelic. According to a note which he has left, he lectured for two hours a week and taught

¹¹ *Loc. cit*

¹² Archives, Vol. 3, letter of A. J. G. MacEchen to Dr. MacPherson, September 1, 1907.

for four more hours.¹³

During the fall of 1907, moreover, the new authorities began a general drive for money. There are constant mentions of the campaign in the correspondence all during the summer. Apparently there was some dissatisfaction with the handling of the financial details of the college and the idea was noised around that it would be more satisfactory to have the Board of Governors take charge, of these details. It seems to have been felt too that the members of the Board were mere figureheads and hence did not serve any useful purpose. These undercurrents among friends of the college were expressed more openly in a meeting held in Antigonish on September 14 and 15, 1907. Delegates from the Sydney and St. Ninian's Councils of the K. of C. assembled in Antigonish "with a view to devising ways and means to provide a sufficient permanent endowment fund for the University of St. Francis Xavier's College." The delegates were: Judge A. MacGillivray, J. S. O'Brien, merchant, E. Lavin Gerroir, Barrister, from Antigonish ; A. A. MacIntyre, Barrister, J. S. MacDonald, Accountant, A. J. G. MacEchen, Barrister, from Sydney. The discussion as revealed in the minutes kept by Mr. MacEchen clearly showed that the delegates felt that the monies of the university should be kept by the Board of Governors itself, through an appointed treasurer. It was further felt that the governors should take a more active part in the running of the university, that they should meet more frequently, and that "any of the Governors who were unwilling or unable to attend the meetings ought to be asked by friends of the college to hand in their resignations." It was finally agreed that a "fund of at least \$100,000. be raised throughout the constituency of the University of St. Francis Xavier's College for the purpose of adequately endowing the institution and placing it on a secure and independent financial footing. It was decided to ask the Bishop to make such an appeal and ask every Catholic society in each parish to name three delegates to a convention to be called by the Rector of the University in the near future in order to discuss the scheme more fully. Dr. MacPherson was called in on the last stages of the discussion to give the meeting his views of the matter. He promised that a full financial statement of the college would be made in the near future and expressed his profound appreciation of the help which the laymen of the diocese were showing in this matter of the needs of the university.¹⁴

The bulk of the criticism of Dr. Thompson's regime, in brief, seems to have been that the Board of Governors was a mere rubber-stamp and took no actual part in the operation of the college.¹⁵ There was also some criticism of the way in which college funds were handled.¹⁶ This seems to have stemmed mostly from the type of investments sometimes taken. It was not unusual for mortgages to be taken

¹³ *Casket*, October 24, 1907, p. 5.

¹⁴ Archives, Vol. 3, minutes of meeting.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, letter of A. J. G. MacEchen to Dr. MacPherson, September 24, 1907.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, letters of Dr. Thompson to Dr. MacPherson, May 16, 1907; January 14 and 15, 1907.

on various farms and other property in the area.¹⁷ By modern standards this would hardly seem to be a recommended form of investment, particularly since this area of the province in these years was on the down-grade. Another criticism of the old regime, however, lay in the new form of discipline which had been introduced. Dr. Thompson had gotten away from the old idea of extremely rigid discipline and put the boys more on their honor generally. The tradition here is that this is the effect of the ideas of St. John Bosco with which Thompson had come in contact while a student in Rome. This change, of course, aroused quite an outcry in some quarters; the older priests of the diocese felt that things were becoming quite degenerate indeed.¹⁸

Behind some of the criticism too is the change in the point of view of the college officials. The new rector was thinking in more visionary terms than his predecessors. For him St. Francis Xavier stood for something far more than the old standards. He was out to make it a first class college in the modern sense of the term, with the emphasis still placed, of course, on Latin and Philosophy but with ever increasing attention to the relatively new department of engineering and the other science faculties. A number of letters to the editor which appeared in the columns of the *Casket* during the summer of 1907 point up this change in emphasis. "Pilgrim" in a letter in the issue of November 7 argues for the consolidation of all Catholic colleges in the Maritimes under the one roof – St. Francis Xavier. In preceding letters he had been advocating the same idea but in this he calls attention to the fact that Dr. Chisholm then the Rector twelve years ago in a pamphlet urged that St. Francis Xavier be the Catholic University of the Maritimes. It is a foregone conclusion even to "Pilgrim" that it is too late for such an attempt; there is, however, still time to make St. Francis Xavier great as an individual college. "Eastern Clergyman" in the issue of the nineteenth of December differs. "Are the Catholics of the diocese," he asks, "able, singlehanded, to support a university? The question is one which at this moment calls for serious consideration." The obvious implication is: "These fools at the college are getting too big for their britches! The idea of trying to build a university in the woods! What we need is a good advanced high school!"

The issue, however, was settled in the minds of the college officials. A university they would have. In the November 21 *Casket*, Dr. MacPherson published the following announcement:

In accordance with the circular letter of His Lordship the Bishop of the diocese, dated October 28, 1907, I hereby call a meeting of the delegates appointed by the parishes and Catholic societies of the diocese for Saturday, November 30.

The *Casket* of the week previous seems to have expressed the general attitude in the diocese when it had this to say:

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, letter from J. A. Wall to Dr. MacPherson, December 24, 1906.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, letter of A. J. G. MacEchen to Dr. MacPherson, September 11, 1907.

The clergy have made a most handsome contribution for that purpose, larger than could be expected of them ; it is now for the laity to do their share. It has been thought that \$100,000. would not be too much to expect of them and His Lordship the Bishop has approved the proposal that they should be asked to contribute that amount.

The Sydney meeting seems to have been a most enthusiastic one. The delegates heartily agreed with the proposal which the Bishop had presented to them. A special Endowment Fund Committee was set up, and the whole executive was incorporated by an Act of the Nova Scotia Legislature under the name of "The officers of the St. Francis Xavier's College Endowment Fund Association." The question of the administration of the money collected was settled by giving that right to the chancellor acting in conjunction with the Rector and the executive of the Endowment Fund Association.¹⁹

The meeting at Sydney to organize the endowment fund campaign was, generally speaking, a huge success. This was, however, a new undertaking for the college and the new administration at the college, and like most new things it was not an unqualified success. Lack of experience proved a drawback as in most things. The over-all diocesan organization of the campaign was on the whole good; the fault lay with the parish organizations. Some of these came through handsomely, but others failed almost as miserably. Pledges were subscribed that were never actually paid, and there was very little attempt to follow up most of the pledges. At any rate the issue of the *Casket* on March 3, 1910, carried a letter from Dr. MacPherson thanking the donors and giving an accounting of the various amounts that had been received from the various parishes in the campaign. This letter announces that to date the sum of \$16,061.13 had been collected. There was still some work to be done, but it is doubtful that the final total much exceeded this amount.

The year 1908 seems to have been a rather uneventful year except, of course, for the campaign which was then in full swing and was engaging everyone's attention. The following year, 1909, is notable mostly for the fact that it saw the first of the donations to the College of Mr. Neil MacNeil of Boston, who was later to become one of the great individual benefactors of the institution. In August Father Tompkins learned from Mr. E. C. Gregory that he would be willing to dispose of his bungalow at the Jimtown beach at a considerable loss to himself because of financial embarrassments. Immediately Fr. Jimmie began to think in terms of a vacation retreat, as he says in a letter to Mr. MacNeil, "for our hard worked and ill-paid professors." The return mail from Boston brought a letter from MacNeil with a cheque for one thousand dollars (the sum mentioned in Dr.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, letter of H. F. MacDougall to Dr. MacPherson, December 4, 1908; letter of C. P. Chisholm to Dr. MacPherson, March 8, 1909; minutes of Sydney meeting.

Jimmie's letter) and the remark "I know you'll get it as cheaply as possible."²⁰ In the decade following this Neil MacNeil was to become the main standby of the Rector and the College. His contributions to the growth of the institution cannot even be measured in terms of money; of that he gave a great deal, but he was also the friend and advisor of the college in building and financial troubles all the rest of his days. The contact with Mr. MacNeil seems to have been through Dr. John E. Somers of Cambridge and apparently antedated these events by some time. Certainly the fact that when Tompkins wanted money for the purchase of the bungalow he turned to Neil would indicate that he had already developed his respect and friendship.

During the summer of 1909 the College Library received a large collection of books from the estate of Dr. John Francis Waters of Ottawa. Dr. Waters had left his extremely large and valuable library to St. Francis Xavier "on condition that they be kept together in perfectly good order and marked 'The Dr. Waters' Collection.'"²¹

That summer also saw the first summer school held on the campus. This seems to have been originated purely as a service to its community. During this and the following summers there were, in addition to the regular courses, various series of lectures open to the public at large and given by noteworthy Canadians on different topics.²²

Early in the new year an era came to an end for the University of St. Francis Xavier's College as the official title read at the time. On April 6, 1910, death came to the venerable Bishop of the Diocese, John Cameron. He had been in fairly good health, but he was an old man, quite deaf and growing enfeebled. This was indeed the end of an era, for John Cameron had been the first permanent Rector of the College for a year in Arichat and for some years in Antigonish, and had guided its destinies since as Bishop and Chancellor. As the Halifax *Herald* said in an editorial a few days later: "He was one of its first teachers and he lived long enough to see it expand and develop, under his judicious guidance, into one of the best universities in Canada."²³

The same issue of the *Casket* which carried the news of the death of the Chancellor announced that work had begun at the College on the erection of the new Science Building. This was entirely the gift of Mr. Neil MacNeil and subsequently was named in his honor. The architect was J. A. Schweinfurth of Boston. The superintendent of the work on this and later buildings was a nephew of the donor, Mr. John MacNeil, a graduate of St. Francis Xavier, now employed by the MacNeil Brothers as one of their supervisors in the building business.²⁴

²⁰ *Casket*, August 19, 1909, p. 8; September 23, 1909; October 7, 1909; Dr. Tompkins' correspondence, letter to Neil MacNeil, August 5, 1909; letter from Neil MacNeil, August 9, 1909.

²¹ Archives, Vol. 4, letter from Gemnil and May, Solicitors, Ottawa, July 29, 1909.

²² Cf. *Casket*, summer, 1909, *passim*.

²³ *Casket*, April 14, 1910, p. 1, quoting Halifax *Herald*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, April 7, 1910, p. 1 and 4.

The building went on apace and was completed late in August, 1911. At the formal dedication ceremonies of the new building on August 24, Bishop Casey of St. John presided. Dr. Thompson, the former Rector, preached at Solemn Benediction in the Cathedral. That night a monster rally was held in the old rink at which the main speaker was Dr. James J. Walsh, the famous teacher and lecturer. On the platform with him were Neil MacNeil, of course, and also Dr. John E. Somers of Cambridge.²⁵ That spring Dr. Somers had indicated his desire to provide the College with a new chapel and work had already begun on that building. The cornerstone of the chapel was laid by Bishop Casey on the day of the opening of the Science Hall and the building was officially opened with a Solemn High Mass on February 29, 1912.²⁶ Dr. Somers became the second great benefactor of St. Francis Xavier in our period. I have called this period the MacPherson-Tompkins era, but the names of MacNeil and Somers must rank high as the names of the men who made possible the work of the two priests.

The opening of the new school-year in the fall of 1911 saw two changes in the College faculty. Father John Hugh MacDonald left to become the curate at St. Anne's, Glace Bay, and Father Hugh John MacDonald, who had been ordained in 1910, joined the faculty as Vice-Rector and Prefect of Discipline.²⁷ The faculty was further increased at the end of that academic year when a number of men completed their post-graduate training in other institutions. On June 5, 1912, Father D. J. MacDonald received his Ph.D. in English from the Catholic University of America; on June 8, Father Miles N. Tompkins, who had been studying at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph, Ontario, received his B.Sc.A. from the University of Toronto.²⁸ In February, 1913, Mr. P. J. Nicholson received his doctorate in Physics in absentia from the John Hopkins University in Baltimore. These men all joined the regular teaching staff in the fall of 1912. In the same period Father R. K. MacIntyre took a year's leave of absence from the college to begin the study of Chemistry. He obtained his M.A. in 1919 after many interruptions.²⁹ I mention all of these changes together in order to emphasize the fact that the growing university was not placing all the emphasis on its building program but was clearly at work building the academic standing of its small faculty as well.

This latter aim was principally inspired by the Dean of Studies and Vice-President, Father J. J. Tompkins. During all the years since 1902 when he first came on the staff, Father Tompkins had been urging more and better prepared professors. In May, 1912, he left for Europe to attend the Conference of Universities of the Empire to be held in London towards the latter part of June.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, August 31, 1911, p. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1912, p. 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 7, 1911, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1912, p. 8.

²⁹ Archives, Vol. 28, letter of Dr. MacPherson to Rev. R. K. MacIntyre, October 4, 1912; *Casket*, July 3, 1919, p. 8.

This was one of a number of trips abroad from which he brought back new ideas and, at times, new professors for St. Francis Xavier. During this particular trip he wrote to Dr. MacPherson from University College, Oxford:

I found them (i.e. European educators) always giving the same advice I shall never cease crying to St. F. X. Get the men. Another point is this. Get together and seriously consider what we are in a position to do best or at least well and then push that. We ought not to merely copy because somebody else happens to be doing a certain thing. This matter ought to be considered by everyone of us and a decision come to after viewing conditions internal and external. This I regard as very important. Then I add with all the emphasis I am capable of: *Get the men.*³⁰

A few years later he had evidently decided that the things we could do best had to do with the French and Scottish backgrounds of our community, and these were the things he emphasized in his discussions with the men of the Carnegie foundation in New York when looking for grants. It is hard to estimate the exact role Father Tompkins played in the making of St. Francis Xavier but there is no doubt that some of his greatest work was done in the academic sphere, in raising the whole intellectual tone of the campus.

The *Casket* of August 12, 1912, announced the appointment of the new Bishop of the Diocese and Chancellor of the University, Dr. James Morrison, of Charlottetown, P.E.I. Bishop Morrison was consecrated in St. Ninian's Cathedral, Antigonish, on September 4. Dr. MacPherson thereby relinquished the duties of Administrator of the diocese, which had been a great burden to him, and was henceforth enabled to devote all his energies to the Rectorship.

The registration at the college had increased so much by the fall of 1912 that some of the students were housed at the Mount Cameron house because there was no room on the campus.³¹ A further donation was indicated in August, 1912, when Dr. J. E. Somers announced his intention of endowing a Chair of Latin and Greek. This donation was confirmed by an agreement signed the following year, July 17, 1913, turning over 250 shares of American Telephone and Telegraph stock to be used for the purposes of the endowment.³²

In the new year a general campaign for funds was again projected. This time the aim was for \$300,000. for endowment. A campaign manager was hired and a good deal of work was done³³ but in July, 1914, the whole thing was cancelled because of the general financial situation in Canada at the time and the imminence of war.³⁴

Early in 1914 overcrowding was becoming a real problem, and a new

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, letter of July 7, 1912.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, letter to Ralph Estrade, November 1, 1912.

³² *Ibid.*, Vol. 21, Formal agreement, dated July 17, 1913.

³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, letter of Dr. MacPherson to Captain Mockler, August 12, 1913

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, memo dated July 13, 1914.

dormitory to house students was contemplated. Again Neil MacNeil came to the rescue, promising to put up half of the money required if someone else could be found to furnish the rest.³⁵ Captain Patrick Mockler offered ten thousand³⁶ for the building which now bears his name and work was begun on the new structure in November, 1914. It was ready for occupation the following fall.³⁷

In the meantime the students' Amateur Athletic Association had proposed on April 29 the erection of a new rink.³⁸ During the following years the students themselves were quite successful in raising some of the money needed and interested many of the Alumni in the project. The Rector himself of course, took the most active part and the money was eventually raised. The rink, however, was not erected until after the war and then named the Memorial Rink in honor of the St. Francis Xavier war heroes.³⁹

Bishop Morrison issued a pastoral letter to his people on September 1, 1915, announcing that a collection for the work of the college would be taken up annually in the future. This was the beginning of regular college collections in the diocese; formerly they had been intermittently held.⁴⁰

On December 10, 1915, Dr. Somers suggested to Dr. MacPherson that he would be willing to build a library for the college if other friends could be got to supply a modest endowment for the library plus a new gymnasium. Because it was felt to be easier to raise money for the library, Dr. Somers later agreed to spend \$20,000. for the gym if someone else would build the library.⁴¹ By July 24, 1916, the Rector was able to report to Mr. Neil MacNeil that so far he had been able to raise slightly over thirteen thousand.⁴² By October the rest of the needed money had been raised and work was begun on the new library.⁴³ In April of the following year the footings for the new gymnasium were begun.

The principal other activity of the year 1916 was the recruiting and training of the Canadian Stationary Hospital Unit, No. 9. The Canadian Government had offered to train and equip the unit if the college would supply the personnel. It was proposed that the unit would consist of about twelve doctors, thirty nurses, and one hundred and fifty men. Recruiting for the unit was begun in March, and training went on in Antigonish during the early spring. Graduation was held at an early date that year so some of the seniors could receive their degrees before the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, letter from Mr. Neil MacNeil, June 20, 1914.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, letters from Captain Mockler to Dr. MacPherson, July 16, August 18, 1914.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, letter of Dr. MacPherson to Captain Mockler, May 5, 1915; *Casket*, June 17, 1915, p. 4.

³⁸ *Casket*, May 7, 1914, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, July 22, 1915, p. 8; February 16, 1922.

⁴⁰ Archives, Vol. 8, Bishop Morrison's pastoral, September 1, 1915.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, letter of John E. Somers to Dr. MacPherson, December 10, 1915.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, letter of Dr. MacPherson to Neil MacNeil, July 24, 1916.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, letter to Neil MacNeil, October 4, 1916.

embarkation of the Unit. On May 4, the group broke camp in Antigonish for further training and equipping in Halifax. By late July the unit was in England, under the command of Colonel R. C. MacLeod. The Commanding Officer was the first casualty of the Unit, dying of anthrax while still in England in January, 1917. The Unit served for some time in England, went to France in December, 1917, and served at St. Omer, Etaples, and, as a General Hospital, at Camiens. It was the last hospital to receive patients in France and the second last to leave for England. As a Unit it returned to Halifax on board the *Olympic* on July 8, 1919.⁴⁴

In the meantime the St. Francis Xavier campus was visited by most of the difficulties of war-time. The number of students was depleted because of enlistment and other factors; the faculty, by 1916, had lost three of its members through enlistment: Angus L. MacDonald, Father Miles Tompkins, and H. R. W. Smith.⁴⁵

The years 1917 and 1918 were rather uneventful ones in the history of the institution. In May an honorary degree was conferred on the great benefactor, Neil MacNeil. This was long over-due, but it had been delayed because a more opportune time than the middle of the Great War was looked for. It was finally decided, however, that it should not be put off any longer and the LL.D. was conferred at the regular convocation.⁴⁶ To depart from our chronology, we might note that Dr. MacNeil lived only a year or two longer. On his death he left to St. Francis Xavier almost the whole of his estate,⁴⁷ amounting to about \$600,000. Dr. John E. Somers died on July 4, 1918; he also left a considerable bequest to the university.⁴⁸ It is hard to overemphasize the work of these two men. Between them they made possible the growth of the institution from almost primitive conditions to the rather comfortable physical condition it enjoyed at the time of their deaths.

On September 11, 1919, Father J. J. Tompkins received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws at the centenary convocation of Dalhousie University. The Secretary of the Senate of Dalhousie, writing to Dr. MacPherson notes: "We recognize in him an indefatigable and very efficient worker in the cause of education."⁴⁹ The *Casket* of September 18, 1919, waxes even more eloquent in its praise of Father Tompkins:

The growth of St. Francis Xavier's in recent years is due largely to his enthusiasm and untiring efforts. Higher standards, better methods, bigger and wider ideals in university life are his constant study. He has visited more than

⁴⁴ The principal references to the Hospital Unit appear in the *Casket* of February 10, March 2, March 30, April 6, April 13, May 4, May 25, October 12, 1916, and July 10, 1919; and in the Archives, Vols. 13 and 21.

⁴⁵ *Casket*, February 24, 1916, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Archives, Vol. 23, letter to Neil MacNeil, April 23, 1917.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, Minutes of Board of Governors' meeting, December 21, 1921.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 26, correspondence with A. J. Daly re Somers' estate; *Casket*, July 11, 1918, p. 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, letter from Howard Murray, August 28, 1919.

once the great universities of Europe and America and understands their spirit as do few students. He believes, too, in bringing the university into close and vital touch with the public life of the country.

Possibly the most tangible of Dr. Jimmie's contributions was yet to come. In December he obtained the promise from the Carnegie Corporation of America to contribute \$50,000. to the endowment of a Chair of French if the University could raise a like sum to provide Scholarships for French Acadian boys and to support partially a Chair of Education.⁵⁰ This money was set aside for the purpose from the proceeds of the drive of 1920 by a formal act of the Board of Governors, and, on December 4, 1920, the Carnegie Corporation presented its promised cheque.⁵¹

The fall of 1919 saw another not quite so pleasant event on the campus. On the night of September 25 a rather serious fire broke out in the main building of the college. Its cause seemed obviously to be arson and students and professors spent a few very uncomfortable days and nights until finally the criminal was apprehended – a disaffected student as one might suppose. The insurance damages eventually came to about \$15,000., in those days a quite considerable sum.⁵²

The biggest financial campaign in the history of the institution up to this time was carried on during the spring and summer of 1920. The *Casket* announced the drive in its issue of February 5:

Funds are urgently needed. During the war period, St. Francis Xavier's like all other institutions of learning, had to face an annual deficit, because of the decrease in the number of students and the increase in the cost of maintenance. Moreover, the central building, damaged by fire last fall, must be repaired and remodelled. Funds are needed too to enable the college to make much needed improvements in courses to meet the needs of the community which the College serves.

Campaign headquarters were set up in the new library building which had not yet been in use as a library because of difficulties in the procuring of proper steel shelving. A large and active committee composed of some of the older members of the faculty and a number of good friends among the laymen of the diocese worked during the whole of that summer. By the November 25th issue of the *Casket*, consequently, the Rector was able to announce that the announced objective of half a million dollars had almost been reached and all the results were not tabulated as yet. The future of the college seemed assured when its supporters could rally such financial aid as this.⁵³

With the task of the 1920 campaign ended, Dr. Tompkins began to turn back

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 34, circular letter from Dr. MacPherson.

⁵¹ *Casket*, January 13, 1921, p. 8; Archives, Vol. 29, Minutes of Board of Governors' meeting, December 17, 1920.

⁵² Archives, Vol. 26, various letters; *Casket*, October 9, November 13, November 20, 1919.

⁵³ *Casket*, February 5, June 10, 1920, p. 8; June 10, 1920.

to an earlier project. One of his many duties from very early in his career at the college had been the financing of new developments. As early as 1905 he had obtained from Bishop Cameron and Dr. Thompson, then Rector of St. Francis Xavier, official letters commissioning him to seek funds.⁵⁴ The Carnegie Foundation had come through so generously in 1919 with the endowment for the Chair of French that he envisioned further support in that direction. A number of colleges in the Maritimes, moreover, had asked the Foundation to survey the whole educational set-up of the area. Apparently under the urging of Tompkins the Board of Governors on December 17, 1920, passed this resolution:

That this Board authorize Dr. Tompkins to get in touch with the heads of the Carnegie Corporation for the Advancement of Teaching to ascertain whether they would be willing to undertake a survey of our college and its constituency with a view to determining its future educational policy.⁵⁵

Dr. Tompkins, thereupon turned all his energies to his new dealings with the Carnegie people in New York. Judging from the correspondence of the period, one can only conclude that he had already won the respect and admiration of these officials who considered him as a trusted friend and advisor in the complicated negotiations which followed.⁵⁶

A survey of the educational facilities of the Maritime Provinces was conducted in the fall of 1921 by two representatives of the Carnegie Corporation, New York. They were Dr. Sills, the President of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, and Dr. William S. Learned, the Assistant to the President of the Corporation. On returning to New York, Dr. Learned wrote a rather lengthy letter to Dr. Tompkins outlining his opinion on the subject and asking for the attitude of St. Francis Xavier towards a plan like his. He writes:

I am inclined to think that the proper policy for the Corporation to pursue would consist in building up some strong central institution... Apparently Dalhousie is the natural point at which to begin such a development and the main question is as to the possibility of attempting to bring the other Nova Scotia colleges into some form of affiliation or combination.

...I wish you would tell me what you think of a plan whereby the organization of Dalhousie is to be remodelled, and whereby under a new name each of the six institutions, including Dalhousie and Pine Hill, is to be given equal participation in a new board of management. It would then be proposed that with the assistance of the Carnegie Corporation each of these colleges remove either all, or at least the advanced portion, of its work to Halifax; that it erect appropriate buildings in the immediate neighborhood of the present Dalhousie University in which it could house as many students as possible of its own religious faith, and in which classes could be conducted in such subjects as might be agreed upon to

⁵⁴ Actual letters are contained in the correspondence of Dr. Tompkins.

⁵⁵ Archives, Vol. 29, Minutes of meeting of Board of Governors, December 17, 1920.

⁵⁶ This correspondence is contained in Volume 29 of the University Archives.

be the peculiar field of independent collegiate instruction. At the University of Toronto these subjects are all the languages (with the exception of Spanish and Italian), and ethics, and in the case of St. Michael's College philosophy and a portion of history.⁵⁷

This is the first faint outline of the federation plan, entirely tentative and leaving a great deal to be worked out in the way of organization on the part of the constituent colleges themselves.

Dr. Tompkins brought this letter up at a faculty meeting on January 30, 1922. A great deal of discussion followed (Dr. D. J. MacDonald, the Secretary to the Faculty, says about an hour and a half), and finally the following resolution was moved by Dr. Hugh MacPherson, seconded by Dr. M. M. Coady and passed unanimously:

Be it resolved by the assembled Faculty that it highly appreciates the generous and public spirited attitude of the Carnegie Corporation and Carnegie Foundation toward the cause of higher education in the Maritime Provinces, and that if details can be worked out satisfactorily it will heartily co-operate with the Board of Governors in making these proposals a concrete reality.⁵⁸

This resolution would seem to augur well for Dr. Learned's proposals.

On April 13, 1922, a meeting of Maritime representatives was held in New York with Dr. Pritchett, President of the Carnegie Corporation, and Dr. Learned, his assistant. At this meeting there were present Presidents MacKenzie of Dalhousie, Cutten of Acadia, Boyle of King's, MacKinnon of Pine Hill, Borden of Mount Allison and MacPherson of St. Francis Xavier. They were all eager to find out at first hand just what the Carnegie proposals were to be and what financial assistance they might expect. On his return home Dr. MacPherson made a complete report in writing to Bishop Morrison. The Carnegie people were hesitant about quoting any figures, wishing agreement on federation among the universities themselves. The one final decision of the meeting was that the full seventy-five page report of Dr. Learned and President Sills should be published and widely distributed. After some time had been allowed for discussion, there was to be a general meeting in Nova Scotia to discuss possible steps to be taken towards federation.⁵⁹

Reports of the New York meeting were soon published in the Nova Scotian papers, and at least one, the Halifax *Herald*, made favorable reference to the whole scheme. Late in April the Halifax *Chronicle* carried a report of a speech made by Msgr. Foley, Rector of St. Mary's Cathedral, Halifax, before the Progressive Club of Halifax. Foley from the beginning was one of the most outspoken advocates of the merger and continued to be so even though a member of the St. Francis Xavier Board of Governors. The *Chronicle* reported him as saying in this particular

⁵⁷ The complete letter is contained in the faculty minutes of January 20, 1922.

⁵⁸ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁹ Archives, Vol. 29, report to Bishop Morrison, April 27, 1922.

speech: "The movement was due in great measure to the efforts of Reverend Father Tompkins of St. Francis Xavier's, who had been talking about it for the past two years, and Dr. A. Stanley MacKenzie of Dalhousie University."⁶⁰

The first general meeting of Maritime representatives was held in Halifax on July 7. St. Francis Xavier at first refused to be represented at this meeting because 1) its Board of Governors hadn't had an opportunity to consider the full report and so had come to no decision as to the merits of the federation scheme, and 2) it could not act as the representative of all Catholics in the Maritimes. Under some pressure Dr. MacPherson finally telephoned on the night of July 6 to Mr. John A. Walker, a St. Francis Xavier graduate in Halifax, asking him to be the informal representative of the college at the meeting. Nothing definite came out of this meeting, of course, except the appointment of committees to examine in detail the questions of finance and constitution, and the decision to hold another plenary session on August 27 (later changed to October 24).⁶¹

For the rest of the summer there was no official activity on the question, but there was a great deal of private discussion. Dr. Tompkins and certain faculty members in Antigonish were ardent adherents of the idea of federation; the Bishop and the Rector were at first undecided and then completely against the whole idea. The Board of Governors had appointed Dr. D. J. MacDonald as a committee of one to investigate the whole proposal. His lengthy report was unqualifiedly against the scheme. Dr. MacPherson's final decision was that it was simply a question as to whether St. Francis Xavier could survive alone as an independent and satisfactory institution. Having decided that it could, he preferred independence, regardless of the advantages that could come of federation. Bishop Morrison was insistent that it was a question for the hierarchy to settle as far as Catholics were concerned. In a letter of October 17 to the editor of the *Casket*, Dr. MacPherson stated: "Our bishop forbade us to engage in propaganda. The matter is one for the hierarchy and not for private individuals to determine, and it should be handled right to avoid harm."⁶² The controversy, nevertheless, continued between the two factions during the fall of 1922.

A meeting of the hierarchy of the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland was held on October 19 at the Archbishop's Residence in Halifax. There were contradictory reports in the press as to the attitudes of the various Catholic bishops,⁶³ but Bishop Morrison reported to a meeting of the St. Francis Xavier Board of Governors in Antigonish the next day that the bishops were generally suspicious of and against the proposed federation. In view of Dr. MacDonald's report and the known attitudes of the Chancellor and President on the subject, the Board of Governors unanimously decided not to enter the federation and not to

⁶⁰ *Casket*, April 27, 1922, p. 8.

⁶¹ The rather lengthy correspondence is all contained in Volume 29 of the University Archives.

⁶² Archives, Vol. 24, letter of Dr. MacPherson to R. Phalen, October 17, 1922.

⁶³ Cf. reports in the *Catholic Registrar* of November 9, 1922, quoted in a later *Casket*.

send delegates to the meetings in Halifax on October 23 and 24.⁶⁴ This action, of course, ended all hopes of St. Francis Xavier's becoming the Catholic college in the federation.

Although the official attitude of St. Francis Xavier University was now clear, Dr. Tompkins found it hard to accept the defeat of the scheme for which he had labored so long. The situation at the college now became intolerable with almost open rebellion on the part of one or two men against the administration. Under these circumstances it was necessary for the Bishop to act. The *Casket* of December 21, 1922, carried the notice that Dr. Tompkins had been appointed parish priest at Canso, replacing the man whom he himself had replaced at the college in 1906, Father J- W. MacIsaac. Thus ended the greatest period to date in the history of St. Francis Xavier. The two men, Dr. MacPherson and Dr. Tompkins, had done all the work it was possible for them to do together and Dr. MacPherson was left to carry on alone. A final word to be said about Dr. Tompkins is that, like the great man he was, he bore his disappointment valiantly, put behind him the twenty years of life in academic circles, and by the next spring was bringing pressure to bear in various quarters to alleviate the condition of the fishermen of Canso.

This paper has completely omitted all reference to the work of Father Miles Tompkins and Dr. Hugh MacPherson (not to be confused with Dr. H. P.) in agriculture, or to their work with Dr. Tompkins in spreading the ideas of adult education and co-operative techniques. There is no reference either to their attempts to bring the university to the people through the People's Schools of 1921 and succeeding years. The reason is obvious: a paper of this length could not hope to deal adequately with these topics; rather than do less than justice to such an important topic, I have left the whole question to another paper at another time. The material here is so important and so interesting that it deserves special treatment at some length.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The two main sources of material for this article have been the files of the Antigonish *Casket* (a weekly) kept in the library of St. Francis Xavier University and the College Archives which contain correspondence and other pertinent matter. A few items of interest have been gleaned from sections of the correspondence of Dr. J. J. Tompkins which have been loaned me by Mr. George Boyle of Antigonish. Any statements in the article which are not documented in the footnotes have been carefully checked with various contemporaries of the period under review.

⁶⁴ Archives, Vol. 29, Minutes of meeting of Board of Governors, October 20, 1922.