

SOLDIER & ANGLICAN PRIEST

Reverend Michael Harris (1795–1856)

Perth's first Anglican clergyman, Reverend Michael Harris, was born in 1795 at Dublin, Ireland, the son of Barrister Michael Harris (1749-1843) and his wife Lady Harriet Butler (b.c1770). His maternal grandfather was Humphrey Butler (c1700-1768), 2nd Viscount Lanesborough and 1st Earl of Lanesborough¹.

The Harris family was one of some prominence and wealth. Michael Harris Sr. was twice married, first to Mary Bryan, with whom he had one daughter, and then to Lady Harriet Butler, who bore him three sons² and three more daughters. Michael Harris Jr. was the youngest of these seven children. His brother, Robert became Rector at Clare Abby, Ireland, and his brother John became Rector at Sydenham, London, England. His sisters Margaret married Richard Handcock, 3rd Baron Castlemaine of Moydrum (Ireland), Mary married William Hume M.P., Elizabeth married a man named Kennedy and Harriet married a man named French. It was a common pattern in upper class British families for the eldest son to inherit, the second son to take holy orders and the third and subsequent sons to enter the Army (although in the Harris case both elder sons entered the Church).

On July 1, 1811 Michael Harris, aged 16 years, enrolled as a fee paying student at Trinity College Dublin, registering to study 'Pragmaticus'³, and at the spring convocation of 1816 he was granted a Bachelor of Arts degree.

On October 4, 1815 Trinity graduate Michael Harris was commissioned an Ensign⁴ in the British Army's 100th (Prince Regent's County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot, joining his regiment at its Chapelizod Barracks depot in Dublin. In the spring of 1816⁵ he sailed from Cork to join the body of his regiment which had already been serving in the Canadas for over a decade. By the time Ensign Harris left Ireland his regiment had been re-numbered. As the British Army reduced the strength of its armed forces following the Napoleonic Wars, disbanding some of the newer (higher numbered) regiments, the 100th was re-designated the 99th Foot in February 1816.

The 100th Foot had been raised in Ireland in 1804 and shipped directly to Canada the following year. Having inspected the regiment in 1807 while it served garrison duty at Quebec City, Colonel Isaac Brock reported that; *"The men were principally raised in the north of Ireland, and are nearly all Protestants; they are robust, active, and good looking"*.

¹ *The Peerage* - <http://www.thepeerage.com/p27444.htm#i274431>

² An entry in *Alumni Dublinenses* for a Thomas Harris, born Dublin 1793, son of Michael Harris, may be that of a third elder brother.

³ *Alumni Dublinenses* – edited by George D. Burtchaell & Thomas U. Sadleir (1924). 'Pragmaticus' (Greek, pragmatikos, Latin pragmaticus, skilled in business) may indicate studies in pre-law or business, but is defined in the *Dictionary of Theological Terms* as "Practical concern for the usefulness and effectiveness of, for example, Christian doctrines. In semiotics, the study of the relationships of signs and symbols and their uses".

⁴ An Ensign is the lowest Commissioned Officer rank, approximately the modern equivalent of a Second Lieutenant.

⁵ Probably in April



During the War of 1812 elements of the 100th Foot were present at the Battle of Sackett's Harbour (May 1813), the capture of American naval vessels USS *Growler* and *Eagle* near Ile aux Noix (June 1813) and the raid on Plattsburgh, New York (July 1813). The full regiment participated in the capture of Fort Niagara followed by raids on Buffalo and Black Rock (December 1813). The following year the regiment sustained heavy losses at the Battle of Chippawa (July) and then served at the siege of Fort Erie with the regiment's Light Company engaged in the ill-fated night assault of August 15th-16th.

When Ensign Michael Harris joined his regiment in June 1816 it was serving garrison duty in Lower Canada with headquarters at Montreal. Headquarters moved to Chambly in July and then the 99th Foot was ordered to Fort George (Niagara on the Lake) in September. Harris and the 99th Foot were posted at Fort George through May 1817 when they returned to Montreal. Effective January 1, 1818 the Commander of the Forces granted Ensign Michael Harris eight months leave to attend to "*private affairs*".⁶

In the summer of 1818 the 99th Foot sailed for England where the regiment was disbanded at Chatham. Many its men, however, had chosen to remain in Canada and accept land grants, primarily at the Richmond Military Settlement.

The last regimental return⁷ is dated September 25, 1818 and, even though his leave had officially expired three weeks earlier, Ensign Michael Harris was still listed as "*absent with leave*". Whether Harris had returned to England with, or a few months before, his regiment, or whether he remained in Canada is unclear.

Harris was placed on the half-pay list, at the rank of Ensign, effective November 25, 1818⁸ and may, while on leave, have returned to his studies as Trinity College conferred a Master Degree on him at the spring commencement of 1819.⁹ That honor does not, however, necessarily indicate that in 1818-1819 he was back in Ireland or anywhere near Trinity College. It was (and is) the practice of Trinity College¹⁰ to confer, for the payment of a fee, Masters Degrees upon its graduates seven years after their original enrollment in the college. No

⁶ The author acknowledges with appreciation research drawn by Eamonn O'Keefe from pay lists and other records of the 100th / 99th Foot; WO 17/296 1815, WO 17/310 1816, WO 17/322 1817, WO 17/330 1818.

⁷ WO 17/330 1818

⁸ War office Army List – January 1, 1821 -

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=dgUcAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA602&lpg=PA602&dq=Ensign+Michael+Harris+100th+Foot&source=bl&ots=YEMlkx8u7O&sig=8AHEeuyRtsQikG3AXXZDCbGYErI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CDAQ6AEwB2oVChMldPX7oy-yAIVRScECh0QhAlp#v=onepage&q=Ensign%20Michael%20Harris%20100th%20Foot&f=false>

⁹ *Alumni Dublinenses* – edited by George D. Burtchaell & Thomas U. Sadleir (1924).

¹⁰ A practice also followed by Oxford and Cambridge.

additional study is required. It is not likely coincidental that Harris had enrolled at Trinity in 1811, seven years prior to conferment of the MA.

That Michael Harris re-appears in Canada in the summer of 1819 as a missionary on the payroll of the 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts' (SPG) may suggest a trip to England and/or Ireland during his 1818 leave from the Army, but it is equally possible that arrangements for his appointment as a missionary were made from Canada. On August 24, 1819 Harris was ordained a Deacon at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Montreal, by Bishop Jacob Mountain (1749-1825)¹¹. Deacons are the lowest order of clergy. Although they are full members of the clergy, and wear clerical collars and are titled 'Reverend', they are not permitted to preside at the Eucharist, bless people or absolve sins. Most deacons served as assistant curates in parish churches or, as in the case of Michael Harris, as missionaries.

Multiple sources record that Harris served as a Private in the War of 1812, subsequently achieved the rank of Major¹² and some report he was an Army Chaplain¹³. None of this is true. He arrived in the Canadas a year and a half after the war ended, served 18 months garrison duty, went on half-pay at the rank of Ensign in 1818 and sold his commission at that rank on April 8, 1826.¹⁴

Less than a month after his ordination at Quebec City Reverend Michael Harris was at Grimsby, Upper Canada, where he married Mary Elizabeth Fanning of Chippawa on September 21, 1819. Mary was the daughter of U.E Loyalists John Fanning (1781-1813) and Sarah Wilson (1765-1801)¹⁵. We may surmise that Harris had met Mary Fanning while he served with the 99th Foot at Fort George in 1816-1817 and that she represented a major part of his motivation to remain in, or return to, Canada. The newlyweds promptly set out for the Perth Military Settlement and arrived in October 1819.

Like the clergymen who had preceded him to the new settlement, Roman Catholic Abbé Pierre-Jacques de La Mothe (1762-1847) and Presbyterian William Bell (1780-1857), Harris held his first services in the upper room of John Adamson's Inn. On his first Sunday, as he clambered up the ladder from the ground floor tavern, the inn's serving girl cried out, "*Ooh the mon's gay'n to preach in his nich-shirt*"¹⁶; the vestment of an Anglican minister apparently a new and novel sight for the Scots lass.

Construction of an Anglican Church at Perth, St. James, began the following spring. Located on land appropriated for the purpose in the original village plan, it was placed on the highest piece of ground (known as 'Sand Hill' or 'Mount Myers'), next to the Court House, thus symbolizing the prominence and unity of the Crown and the Church of England. Built on the same site where St. James the Apostle Anglican Church stands today¹⁷, the original church was a plain wooden structure about 50 feet long and 40 feet wide. Among the donors financing the

¹¹ First Anglican Bishop of Quebec serving 1793-1825.

¹² *Canada's Historic Places* (Inge-Va) - <http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=8178>; *St. James the Apostle Anglican Church* - <http://www.stjamesperth.ca/index.php/about-us/our-history>; *1812 Veteran Graveside Project* - <http://www.1812veterans.ca/?p=880>; *Anglicanism in the Ottawa Valley* – Edited by Frank A. Peake (1997)

¹³ *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark* – Jean S. McGill (1968)

¹⁴ 'Edinburgh Gazette' - <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/Edinburgh/issue/3429/page/101/data.pdf>

¹⁵ John Fanning was probably born in Virginia. Sarah Wilson may have been born in Virginia as well or perhaps in Michigan.

project were Governor General George Ramsay, Earl of Dalhousie (1770-1838), the Bishop of Quebec Reverend Jacob Mountain, Upper Canada Lieutenant Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland (1777-1854) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. As the new church neared completion, Reverend Michael Harris was ordained a Priest on January 14, 1821 at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Quebec City, by Bishop Mountain. On November 16, 1822, St. James Anglican Church, Perth, opened for divine service.

During their first five years at Perth Michael and Mary Harris lived in a one storey log cabin on Gore Street. In 1824 however they completed construction of a stone home on Craig Street.¹⁸ By 1842 the growing Harris family had constructed and moved into an even more substantial stone house on a large property on Drummond Street at the northern edge of the village¹⁹. They leased, and then sold (in 1839), the Craig Street house to Thomas Mabon Radenhurst (1803-1854) one of Perth's early lawyers.



Harris' Craig Street House

In addition to properties within the village, like other clergymen among the early settlers at the Military Settlement, Reverend Harris also received land grants in Bathurst and Coulbourne Townships and in the village of Richmond. In January 1836, when Upper Canada Lieutenant Governor Sir John Colborne (1778-1863) established 57 Anglican Rectories, Harris' Perth Rectory was granted 400 acres of land.²⁰



When Reverend Michael Harris arrived at Perth in October 1819 he had in his pocket a letter from Deputy Quartermaster General Colonel Francis Cockburn (1780-1868) of the British Army Settling Department sanctioning him to assume the role of teacher and full responsibility for operation of the Perth school. The school in question had been established, with government and Army

856 and 1861.

¹⁸ 60 Craig Street. Named inge-va by subsequent owners. Now owned by the Ontario Heritage Foundation.

¹⁹ 61 Drummond Street West, now Nevis Estate Bed & Breakfast

²⁰ When Colborne established the Rectories from resources of the Clergy Reserves he did so in defiance of the Home Government's express wish that no such endowments should be made "... until [His Majesty] should obtain the advice of the representatives of the Canadian people for His guidance". The 'Canadian people' were so opposed to the Clergy Reserves and endowment of the Church of England that Colborne's decision was the spark that set off William Lyon Mackenzie's Upper Canada Rebellion of 1836-1837.

sanction and support, only a year earlier by Reverend William Bell. The Presbyterian pastor was not pleased;

Harris' Drummond Street House

Several months of this summer passed over in peace and comfort. But perfect happiness is not to be found in this world. We may have sunshine for a while, but storms will come. In the month of October, Rev. Mr. Harris, a Missionary from the Church of England, came to Perth.²¹

In addition to the school, Bell's annual £50 salary²² as teacher was soon transferred to Harris by the Army authorities and Bell raised strenuous objection to being supplanted. Many Perth inhabitants signed a petitioned against the change, but Cockburn's only response was that he found;

... no fault whatever with Mr. Bell's management of the school, which had been most prosperous, but that he thought it right that a clergyman of the Church of England ought to have situation under Government in preference to one of any other denomination.²³

Deprived of both school house and salary, Bell had no choice but to capitulate;

After being subjected to other "petty acts of tyranny resorted to at headquarters, for the Settlement was still a military one", he surrendered to the situation and gave up his school to Reverend Harris, while commenting: "But these were the days when the Church of England considered itself the first established church, and as a corollary to that, to have full charge of education".²⁴

Reverend Michael Harris either proved to be no school teacher or was too pre-occupied with his other duties to give the school the attention it demanded.

... the school soon deteriorated, as he knew nothing of teaching, and at the end of the first quarter he found himself without a scholar, or, as Reverend Bell observed, "The school under my Reverend successor soon after died of consumption, and the schoolhouse has for some time been empty".²⁵

In 1821 Harris gave up as a schoolmaster. Bell continued to teach his own children and some others in his own home and Benjamin Tett operated a school in his own house from 1822²⁶ until a Common School, administered by a District Board of Education, was opened at Perth in 1824. In the same year Reverend Michael Harris was appointed among the first trustees of the Perth Grammar School.²⁷

²¹ *The Condensed Diaries of Rev. William Bell* – Edited by Robert Bell Douglas.

²² Bell was also being paid a government salary of £100 for his services as minister.

²³ 'Early Days of the Perth Settlement' – Mary A. B. Campbell (1896)

²⁴ *Yearning for Learning* – Lloyd C. Sutherland (1979)

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Wilson, later survivor of the 'Last Fatal Duel' re-opened Tett's school and kept it going until 1832 when he went to study law under James Boulton.

²⁷ Together with James Hamilton Powell, George Thew Burke, William Marshall, William Morris and Henry Graham.

In addition to serving his congregation at St. James in Perth, Michael Harris ministered to Anglicans over a large area, serving ten preaching stations in the adjoining townships and visited settlers as far away as Pakenham and Fitzroy. He helped to establish the churches of St. James,



Reverend Michael Harris (1795-1856)

Franktown, St. John the Evangelist, Balderson's Corners, and St. Paul's, Lanark from which developed St. James, Carleton Place; St. Paul's, Almonte; and St. John's, Smiths Falls.²⁸ Active missionary that he was, Harris apparently was not a confident and compelling preacher;

Reverend Mr. Harris read his sermons, a shocking thing to Reverend Mr. Bell who greatly enjoyed the fact that his brother clergyman frequently forgot to take his sermons with him. One Sunday Mr. Harris went out to preach at the home of Captain Balderson²⁹ at Balderson's Corners but forgot his sermon. He had to send his driver back to Perth to get the copy. The sleighing being good the man made the trip in one hour and twenty minutes. During this time Mr. Harris read prayers without interruption. The people wondered at the devotional spirit of their pastor wrote Mr. Bell.³⁰

In 1826 Harris gave up his army half-pay of about £30 annually when he sold his commission. He may have done so to generate funds to cover construction of his house (completed in 1824) or because he feared the value of the commission might soon disappear. In 1825 the Army changed regulations surrounding the sale of half-pay commissions, imposing a rule whereby one-third of the sale price had to be returned to the Crown. His Ensign's Commission in a defunct and unprestigious regiment³¹ would have commanded a total price of about £450 but even the balance of £300 was still a respectable sum of money in mid-1820s Perth.

One of his critics remarked that Harris "... never forgot that he had been an officer and was somewhat brusque in manner."³² Others, however, recalled that Harris was "known far and wide as a very kindly and charitable man, greatly beloved by not only his own people, but by all who knew him".³³ Harris would seem to have been an outgoing and social man, although we only see this aspect through the jaundiced, Calvinist eyes of Presbyterian Reverend William Bell. In March 1828 Bell wrote in his diary;

²⁸ *Anglicanism in the Ottawa Valley: Essays for the Centenary of the Diocese of Ottawa* – Edited by Frank A. Peake (1997)

²⁹ John Balderson (1784-1852), Captain of Militia and former Sergeant of the 76th Foot.

³⁰ 'Perth Courier' - August 1, 1863

³¹ In addition to the official army regulated 'list price' of commissions, those attached to prestigious regiments like the Foot Guards or Rifle Brigade could command a premium of an additional 50% or more above the army value. A high-numbered (i.e. young) regiment like the 100th (later 99th) Foot, whose total history spanned only 14 years, did not fall in this category.

³² *Anglicanism in the Ottawa Valley: Essays for the Centenary of the Diocese of Ottawa* – Edited by Frank A. Peake (1997)

³³ 'Early History of Balderson's Corners' – Perth Courier, June 20, 1905.

Being invited to an evening party by Mr. [Alexander] Fraser³⁴, a half pay officer, we agreed to go, not knowing what occasioned it. After we got there we found that it was a christening. The family belonged to the Episcopal Church. The christening was followed by a ball, a sequel we thought not the most suitable. Dancing was kept up with great spirit by the younger part, while the older, among them the Episcopal clergyman [Reverend Michael Harris], were diligently employed at the card table.

In October 1829 Bell's diary again mentions Reverend Harris in the context of a party, this one given by lawyer Thomas Mabon Radenhurst (1803-1854). Bell thought that;

To see ... the Rev. Mr. Harris, an honest Hibernian Episcopal clergyman ... of his age³⁵ and dimensions, for he was neither young nor slender, cutting his capers in the gayest company, afforded amusement even among those who cared nothing for religion.

Scion of a family with deep roots in the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland, Michael Harris brought with him to Canada a connection to, and sympathy with, the Orange Lodge³⁶, one strong enough, if Reverend William Bell is to be believed, to defy the orders of his Anglican Church superiors;

... in July, we are disturbed by the Orangemen who not only disturbed the peace in Ireland, but of every place where they have come. Mr. Gowan³⁷ has come from Brockville for electioneering purposes and has infused much of his mischievous spirit into the rest. In the morning a flag was displayed from the tower of the Episcopalian Church and Mr. Harris, though forbidden by his superiors, preached a sermon.

If Harris was in breach of the Bishop's instructions, it did his career no harm. He was appointed Rector at Perth in 1836, the same year he preached to the Orangemen, and in 1850 was named Rural Dean of Bathurst.

After serving the settlement for 33 years Harris retired in 1852 and was succeeded by Reverend Alexander Pyne.

Reverend Michael Harris died at Perth on September 25, 1856 and was buried in the Craig Street Cemetery. His wife, Mary Fanning, died at Brockville in 1864.

Michael and Mary Harris were the parents of 11 children, all born at Perth: Margaret Sarah (b.1821); Mary Elizabeth (1822-1874) married (1845) William Oscar Buell; Clifton Wilton (b.1823); Caroline Susan (1824-1902) married (1857) James Crawford; Harriet (1826-1885) married (1847) James Stephenson; Jane Olivia (b.1831); Emma Hannah (b.1832); John Henry Brooks (1833-1879); Robert Fanning (1835-1882) married (1859) Sarah Maria Longley; Dora Augusta (b.1837); Michael (1838-1917) married (1874) Helen Reid Clark.

³⁴ Lieutenant Alexander Fraser (1789-1872). See 'Forgotten Hero' by Ron W. Shaw & M.E. Irene Spence (2012).

³⁵ Harris was only 34 years of age.

³⁶ When the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland was formed in 1723 Michael Harris' grandfather, Humphrey Butler (c1700-1768), was its first Deputy Grand Master.

³⁷ Ogle Robert Gowan (1803-1876). Born in County Wexford Ireland, Gowan was the illegitimate son of Hunter Gowan, leader of the Wexford (Protestant) 'Black Mob' during the 1798 rebellion, and godson of George Gowan, grandmaster of the Irish Orange Order. Ogle Gowan founded the Grand Orange Lodge of British North America at Brockville in 1829.

- *Ron W. Shaw with research assistance by Eamonn O'Keefe & Karen Prytula (2015)*