

**The Right Reverend William Dollard, D.D.,
First Bishop of New Brunswick**

BY
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As we turn the pages of Canadian History, we are reminded of the fact that a full century has elapsed since His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI announced the erection of the Diocese of New Brunswick and named Very Rev. William Dollard, V.G., as its first bishop. The date of this event of so much interest in the history of the Catholic Church in New Brunswick was September 30th, 1842.

In this the centenary year it seems quite fitting to me to draw the attention of the members of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association to the career of that great man of God, that valiant missionary, the Rt. Rev. William Dollard.

Before we actually touch the life of this good bishop, it would be well to note that years previous to this prelate's day, intrepid missionaries from Quebec had been sent to various parts of Acadia, of which New Brunswick then formed a part. As we read historical documents referring to the labors of these zealous men, we are filled with admiration. Many are the tales of privations and hardships these noble missionary Fathers endured. Going from place to place, they carried with them everything required for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It was surely for no earthly reward that the Fathers condemned themselves to spend their days exposed to discomfort, to disease, to hunger and sometimes even to starvation. Yes, it is unquestionably true that the zeal which carried these priests so far in the path of duty, without complaining, came from their love of God, in whose service they labored. All honor, then, is due the Recollects, the Jesuits, the Sulpicians and the priests of the Seminary of Quebec, who, through their heroic efforts, admirably seconded by the early colonists, sowed the Divine Word and created an atmosphere of faith. Quite aptly does the American historian, Bancroft, point out that the dominant purpose of the early missionaries was spiritual, "neither commercialism nor royal ambition; the motive was religion." We owe a great debt of gratitude, indeed, to these missionaries. His Excellency the Most Rev. P. A. Bray, C.J.M., in a recent Circular Letter emphasizes this fact in these words: "The heroic deeds of the early missionary Fathers – Jesuits, Recollects and others, who first ministered to the Indian tribes scattered through the territory now known as New Brunswick, are forever inscribed in the annals of our history and in the hearts of our people. Afterwards, for a period of one hundred and fifty years, the Bishops of Quebec, and, subsequently, for a period of thirteen years, the Bishop of Charlottetown, sent missionaries into our territory, who continued the work of converting the Indians and provided for the spiritual needs of the Acadians who found their way back from their cruel exile and settled in. New Brunswick, and likewise of the immigrants from England, Ireland, Scotland and France, who made their homes in our district. To them goes, the honor and merit of laying down the foundations of our future diocese."

Now, we turn our attention to the Rt. Rev. William Dollard, first Bishop of the diocese of New Brunswick. He was born at Ballytarina, County Kilkenny, Ireland, November 29th, 1789, the son of Michael Dollard and Anastasia Duffey. All his early schooling was received

in his native land. An appeal for ecclesiastical students having been made by the Rt. Rev. J. O. Plessis, Bishop of Quebec, the young Mr. Dollard responded and came from Ireland to Quebec in the year 1816. As he had already begun theological studies before coming to Canada, he was able to complete his course in the Grand Seminary of Quebec. The records tell us that William Dollard received Minor Orders, December 8th, 1816, Sub-deaconship March 22nd, 1817, Deaconship May 31st, 1817, and was raised to the Holy Priesthood October 12th, 1817. It may be remarked that all these orders were conferred by Bishop Plessis, who was chief pastor of the only diocese in British North America at that period in history.

Exactly one month after his ordination, Father Dollard began the active work of the ministry in Arichat, Cape Breton, in the province of Nova Scotia, where he acted as assistant to the Rev. Father Lejamel. He carried out his duties in this mission until the following spring, when he was requested by Bishop Plessis to minister to the English and Scotch people who had settled along the east coast of Cape Breton. That the young priest might accomplish as much good for the Scotch settlers as possible, he studied the Gaelic language. His efforts were indeed fortunate and he had the satisfaction of bringing the Word of God to the Scottish people in a new land.

After laboring in this part of the Lord's Vineyard for a period by long journeys and arduous tasks, Father Dollard, greatly desiring rest, was compelled to resign his missions September 16th, 1822, and return to Quebec.

A year passed and Father Dollard, having regained his health, set out to take charge of the missions along the Miramichi, in New Brunswick. Although the conditions were somewhat similar to those which prevailed in the mission of his first assignment, his former experience stood him well. To appreciate the difficulties, we must realize that the territory in which this missionary travelled was extensive. Churches were so few that the priest offered Mass quite regularly in private houses under rather discouraging conditions. It was a consolation, however, to Father Dollard to see the people of the various districts under his care give evidence of strong Catholic Faith. Poor though these Catholics were in worldly goods, they were rich, indeed, in the blessing of firm confidence in God and in their attachment to Holy Church. With help of these faithful ones, a church was built in the vicinity of the present town of Nelson, the Cornerstone being laid in the year 1825, and one year later the edifice completed and ready for Divine Worship.

About this time, Bishop Panet, the successor of the renowned Archbishop Plessis, showed a willingness to promote Rev. William Dollard. But the good priest, true to his character, could not bear to leave his flock, sorely afflicted in consequence of a great forest fire. In consoling and administering to the homeless and the destitute, Father Dollard earned the benediction of a grateful people.

After spending ten years in the missions along the Miramachi, the ever zealous Father Dollard was called away by his new superior, the Rt. Rev. Bernard MacEachern, Bishop of Charlottetown. Historical data is meagre as to the precise district to which he was appointed at this time. However, it seems that he was called to Prince Edward Island, if one may judge by a letter found in the parochial archives of St. Dunstan's Church, Fredericton, N. B. This letter bears the address – "Very Rev. W. Dollard, V. G., St. Andrews, P. E. I." The date given is February 10th, 1834, and it is signed by the Rev. Michael Egan, who succeeded Father Dollard on the Miramachi missions.

The records tell us that the Rev. Father Dollard was appointed the successor of the Rev. Michael McSweeney, who resided at Fredericton and who was in charge of a very extensive missionary territory. It was while engaged in carrying out his duties in this missionary

district that his Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Bernard McDonald, named him Vicar-General, December 7th, 1837. Five years later, New Brunswick was made a separate diocese from Charlottetown and the Very Rev. William Dollard was called to take the responsibilities of this episcopacy.

It may well be mentioned that the Bulls of appointment in reality have the name of the Very Rev. William Dollard, V. G., as the Bishop of Charlottetown and Bishop Bernard McDonald is named to the new diocese of New Brunswick. However, Bishop McDonald has the privilege of remaining in his own diocese of Charlottetown, if he should prefer it, which actually proved to be his wish. So, Father Dollard became Bishop of New Brunswick.

As we recall the fact that Father Dollard had received all his Holy Orders at Quebec, we are not surprised to read that it was to Quebec he turned for his episcopal consecration. On Trinity Sunday, June 11, 1843, the Very Rev. William Dollard, V. G., was consecrated by the Bishop of Sidyma, Mgr. Turgeon, assisted by the Rt. Rev. Joseph Signay, Bishop of Quebec, and the Rt. Rev. Ignatius Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, as co-consecrators. This imposing ceremony was carried out in the historically grandest of the churches in British America, the Basilica of Quebec.

Shortly afterwards, Bishop Dollard, with crosier in hand and mitre on his brow, returned to rule his diocese. Among the first letters he received on his return to Fredericton, N. B., was that of the Bishop of Charlottetown, which reads as follows:

Rustics, 10th July, 1843.

"My Lord

I am just in receipt of your favor of the 26th ult., and feel no small degree of pleasure to hear of your safe return home. I regret that I allowed the consideration that my attendance at your Lordship's consecration would be quite superfluous, deterred me from following you to Quebec. Nevertheless, had I received your letter in time to make me sure that I could have overtaken you at Fredericton previous to your departure, I would have accompanied you. Sincerely wishing to shortly have the honor and pleasure of seeing Your Lordship,

I Remain, My Lord,
Your Lordship's Most Obt. Servt.,
B. D. McDonald,
Bishop of Charlottetown".

One of the first duties that engaged the new Ordinary's attention was that of seeking an Act of Incorporation authorizing the Roman Catholic Bishop of New Brunswick to hold lands, etc., for himself and his successors. A bill to this effect was introduced in the House of Assembly February 2nd, 1844, and passed March 11th, 1844. The Legislative Council held up the Bill. Another attempt was made and, as had happened previously, it was passed by the Assembly and defeated in the Council. Finally, after much discussion, the Bill passed the Assembly March 14th, 1846, and the Council April 11th, 1846. This Act was confirmed and ratified by an Order of Her Majesty in Council under date of July 6th, 1846, and publication made in the Province of New Brunswick August 12th, 1846.

It is worthy of note that Bishop Dollard and the faithful of his Diocese gave a striking example of their generosity by subscribing to a fund for the relief of the distress prevailing in Ireland caused by the famine. The following letter attests to the fact:

"Ns. 77

Downing Street,
17th May, 1847.

Sir:

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your dispatch Ns. 22, of 27th March, transmitting the first of a further set of Bills for the sum of £ 330 -10.10 - Sterling, being £ 250, the remainder of the Assembly of New Brunswick towards the relief of the distress in Ireland and Scotland, together with the sum of £ 80 -10.11 Sterling, which Dr. Dollard, the Roman Catholic Bishop in the Province, had requested you to remit as the amount of collections from the congregation in his Church at Fredericton.

My Dispatch Ns. 60 of the 26th March will have apprised you that I had forwarded the first portion of the Grant to the relief Committee of the British Association in London. I have adopted a similar course in respect to the sum you now remit and I enclose herewith the copy of a letter which the Chairman of the Committee has addressed to me in consequence.

You will express to Dr. Dollard the satisfaction which Her Majesty's Government have experienced in receiving this proof of the sympathy evidenced by the Roman Catholics of New Brunswick for the distress of their fellow subjects in this Kingdom.

Lt. Governor,
Sir W. Colebrooks

I am,
Sir,
Your Most Obedient Servant,
[Signed] Grey"

The official Blue Book for the year 1848 shows the state of the Diocese as: –

1	Bishop
24	Priests
60	Churches
37000	Extent of Church Accommodation
32000	Number Generally Attending
28	Parish Houses

Towards the end of the year 1848, Bishop Dollard moved from Fredericton to the City of Saint John where he intended to reside.

The question arises did the Bishop really intend by his moving to Saint John to have the See transferred from Fredericton. On this point, we have no accurate information. We are certain, however, the transfer of the See was not accomplished, although the residence was changed, as already noted.

The career of the good Bishop in his new residence was of fairly short duration. While still actively engaged in the exacting duties of his episcopal office, he was suddenly stricken during a visit to Fredericton and died in his old home on August 29th, 1851. A great pioneer Bishop, with a long missionary career in Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Cape Breton and New Brunswick, had been called to his eternal reward. That his death brought keen regret, not only to his own Catholic people, but also to those of other religions beliefs, is borne out

by a newspaper tribute dated Sept. 2nd, 1851. It refers to the death of Bishop Dollard in these words: "It has suddenly and unexpectedly become our painful duty to announce the death of the Right Reverend the Roman Catholic Bishop of this province. His Lordship left the city for Fredericton towards the close of last week apparently in the enjoyment of the usual good health – so the news of his death could not be credited. His unaffected piety and unostentatious discharge of the many arduous and trying duties of his high station won for Dr. Dollard a degree of respect often denied to men of more brilliant qualities and to men of all classes and denominations, as well as to the members of the Catholic Church in this province. His death will be a source of sincere sorrow and regret."

The remains of this illustrious prelate, New Brunswick's first bishop, were interred under the sanctuary of St. Dunstan's Church, Fredericton, which he was instrumental in building during the early years of his episcopate. His successor, the Rt. Rev. Thomas L. Connolly, D. D., caused a tablet to be erected in St. Dunstan's Church to remind the parishioners and visitors of the great work accomplished by his predecessor. Translated from the Latin, the inscription reads as follows:

"Sacred to the memory of the Rt. Rev. William Dollard, the first Bishop of Fredericton, a native of Ireland, who, after twenty-five years of indefatigable labors as a priest and eight years as a bishop, died, fortified with the sacraments, the 29th day of August, A. D. 1851, in his sixty-third year:"

"This tablet was erected by the faithful of this city under the patronage of the Rt. Rev. Thomas Louis Connolly, his successor in the episcopal office, on the 15th day of March 1853. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant him rest. Amen."

This prayer, we read on the memorial tablet, will be uttered by the people of generations yet unborn, as often as their attention may be drawn to the career of the virtuous pioneer Bishop of New Brunswick, the Rt. Rev. William Dollard.

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