Thomas Hill: The Fredericton Years

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One of the most intriguing literary figures to walk the streets of Woodstock, Saint John, and Fredericton during the mid-1800s was Thomas Hill. He was, according to his contemporaries, an entertaining musician, a gifted carver, and a poet. In religion, he was a protestant; in politics—in W.S. MacNutt's phrase—an "unrepentant conservative."[1] To his enemies—who were plentiful—he was a troublemaking drunk and a gambler; to his friends, his editorship of *The Loyalist* newspaper showed him to be the "most talented of New Brunswick editors"[2] and one of the most intelligent defenders of royalist principles sheltered within New Brunswick's still-uncertain borders. It was Hill who won "the final episode in the long battle for press freedom" in New Brunswick.[3] One of his short-lived newspapers, *The United Empire*, has been described as a paper "before its time."[4] He also published *The Aurora*, *The Wreath*, and *The Commercial Times*. W.G. MacFarlane, in his *New Brunswick Bibliography*, mentions two biographical contradictions: having founded the Orange Lodge in Fredericton, Hill married an Irish Catholic; an ardent royalist, he had probably served as a volunteer in the American army. MacFarlane's thumbnail sketch of Hill describes him succinctly: "appearing from a mysterious past [Hill] gave evidence of a nature of fire that flamed at times into vivid flashes of genius and again into the consuming fires of debauchery, and at length blew suddenly out under the most degrading of circumstances."[5]

A study of the positions which Hill unwaveringly enunciated and defended in his editorial pages is central to any understanding of the literary, social, and political history of New Brunswick—the development of Responsible Government, the Orange Lodge and its part in the province's long-standing

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[1] W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick A History: 1784-1867* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963) 295.

[2] MacNutt 254.

[3] J.R. Harper, *Historical Dictionary of New Brunswick Newspapers and Periodicals* (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1961) xvi.

[4] W.G. MacFarlane, *Fredericton History* (1893; Woodstock, N.B.: Non-Entity, 1981) 94.

[5] W.G. MacFarlane, *New Brunswick Bibliography* (Saint John: Sun Printing, 1895) 42-43.

religious antipathies, the evolution of the party system, and freedom of the press. The pages of the *Loyalist*, with their poetry, short stories, and reviews, provide a cultural snapshot of the period. In sum, Hill's causes and interests were the causes and interests of New Brunswick at mid-century. Yet he remains slightly served by provincial historians. A biographical study of Hill's Fredericton years recreates the context in which his values developed and the perspective from which Hill viewed those elements of provincial life he labored so consistently to conserve or improve.

I

Despite his literary bent, Hill wrote little about his own background. Not until 1858, when forced to do so by the circumstances of a libel case which he initiated against the *New Brunswick Reporter*, was he explicit about his past.[6] Born in Cornwall, England, in 1807, as Hill told the Judge, he had sailed from Plymouth in 1831 and arrived in Quebec City later that spring. He left Quebec four years later for Grand Falls, New Brunswick. He worked there for a summer, hired as a carpenter by Sir John Caldwell. At the end of the summer, he said, he "came down to Woodstock, and went directly to Bangor; worked there until June following, and then went to Orono and resided there." He worked around Bangor for some years as a house joiner, and he "was in Orono, Maine, from June 1836 until December 1839," when he returned to Woodstock.

Hill crossed the border on Christmas Eve, 1839, and came into Woodstock the following day. He worked there for about a year and a half, and then moved down river to Saint John where, presumably, he started out as a carpenter. In the summer of 1842, he decided to begin a new penny paper, *The Aurora*, which would be published three times a week. The first issue appeared on September 12, 1842 and, according to *The New Brunswick Courier*'s editor Henry Chubb, "[it is] neatly printed, and is altogether respectably got up, and will doubtless come in for a fair share of public patronage."[7] The paper, of which no copies seem to have survived, was to be an unprejudiced and literary paper. Despite these high ideals, it lasted less than a

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[6] There are three main accounts of Hill's 1858 suit against the *New Brunswick Reporter* for publishing a libel: *The New Brunswick Reporter*, March 5, 12, and 19; the *Carleton Sentinel*, March 6 and April 10; and *Head Quarters*, March 17 and 24. While newspapers should provide unbiased accounts of events, it is difficult to ignore the fact that in this case the *Reporter*'s editor, James Hogg, was the defendant and the *Head Quarters*' editor, Thomas Hill, was the plaintiff. Hill wrote the *Head Quarters* account himself.

[7] *The Courier* 17 Sept. 1842.

year. George Fenety, never a friend to Hill, summed up the *Aurora*'s history succinctly: Hill "had not brains enough to keep it afloat, and so it went down."[8] This failure did not extinguish Hill's interest in publishing. Almost immediately, he accepted a post as editor of James Doak's new Saint John paper, the *Loyalist.* In 1843 Hill and Doak moved their paper to Fredericton, the centre of political action, and continued to publish there until 1846. In July of 1846, Hill and Doak moved their paper back to Saint John, claiming that they needed to be closer to the commercial interests of the province.[9] They dissolved their partnership in 1847, and Hill continued as sole editor of the paper until at least 1848. From 1848 until 1851, Hill disappears from public view, but he probably spent these three years writing for other Saint John papers. In 1852, for about six months, Hill "revived" the *Loyalist* in Fredericton. In 1854 he began the short-lived *United Empire*, and then he spent his remaining six years as an editorial writer for the Fredericton *Head Quarters.* It was during those first Fredericton years, however, from 1843 to 1846, that Hill, working from the editorial chair of the *Loyalist*, strove most visibly to mold New Brunswick into the shape he felt it should have.

When Hill and Doak moved the *Loyalist* to Fredericton in 1843, they changed its name to the *Loyalist and Conservative Advocate*, and Hill's name joined Doak's as co-publisher. The paper's literary content increased, as the editors began using its front page to serialize stories and novels written anonymously "for the *Loyalist.*" It would be difficult to imagine that this fiction, with its New Brunswick settings, its narrative blended with original poetry and songs, and its strongly loyalist plots and themes, was written by anyone other than Hill.

While Hill modestly hid his creative writing, he made no effort to disguise his feelings toward politicians and other editors. Within weeks, he had singled out for abuse the Assemblyman for York, the honorable L.A. Wilmot, and Edmund Ward, editor of the *Sentinel.* The most significant of Hill's editorial battles during this three-year period was his 1844 confrontation with the forces of liberalism and Responsible Government as personified by Assemblyman Wilmot. This collision involved the question of press freedom, the privileges of the Assembly, the shaping of party politics, and the movement toward Responsible Government.

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[8] *The Morning News* 31 May 1843.

[9] *The Loyalist* 18 June 1846.

The question of freedom of the press had first arisen in the province before the turn of the century. In 1784, two editors had been indicted before a Maugerville Grand Jury for attacking the government's methods of granting land and relief to the Loyalists. A year later, an unfortunate individual named George Handyside was heard uttering strong criticism of the government. He "was summoned before the bar of the House of Assembly, found guilty, and forced to kneel and apologize without having had recourse to the courts."[10] A more famous example of this practice occurred in 1837 when the editor of the Miramichi *Gleaner*, John A. Pierce, characterized accusations against him on the floor of the Assembly by the youthful L.A. Wilmot as having been made with that member's "usual effrontery and disregard for truth."[11] Editor Pierce was brought before the bar and, upon orders of the Assembly, he was silenced by being held in jail until the end of the session.

The case involving the *Loyalist* was remarkably similar. In the session of 1844, a resolution was passed supporting the Governor General of Canada, Sir Charles Metcalfe, "a person," according to James Hannay, "who is said to have much ability, but was certainly most unfit for the position he occupied."[12] The resolution, of which Hill approved, supported Sir Charles in maintaining the prerogatives of the Crown in matters of provincial Royal appointments—a right without which, from the perspective of Hill and many others in New Brunswick, monarchical institutions in Canada would most surely be weakened. Opposition to this resolution meant opposition to strong Loyalist ties with England, and even though the notion of Responsible Government received little acceptance in the New Brunswick Assembly of 1844, Hill was ready to attack any elected representative who publicly proclaimed such an anti-royalist sentiment. Nowhere did the *Loyalist* editor find the spirit of British loyalty more lacking than in the breast of L.A. Wilmot. Wilmot was only one of the eleven members who voted against the resolution, but Hill rightly saw him as a leader among those who approved of the Durham Report. In his editorial columns, Hill not only attacked Wilmot for his liberal political views but he also excoriated him for his lack of integrity.

Hill's most venomous editorial provoked the Assembly into a course of action which would change forever the relationship between the Assembly and the press. He accused Wilmot of

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[10] Harper xv.

[11] MacNutt 251.

[12] James Hannay, *History of New Brunswick* (Saint John: John A. Bowes, 1909) 2:88.

being "hostile alike to British supremacy, British laws, and those in whose veins runs the warm current of British blood." The editorial, which went on to denounce Wilmot as a liar and a hypocrite, might have been thought a little excessive by the Assembly, but, from the standpoint of the party, many Assemblymen would have agreed with Hill's sentiments. However, this baiting abuse did not stop within such acceptable limits, but built toward an image of Wilmot as a "hound" who had crept into the confidence of the voters of York "and then bit the hand which fed him." Hill ended his diatribe with the hope that these electors would tell Wilmot "they have no further need of his services—that being loyal themselves they will no longer be represented by a rebel and a coward, and drive him back to the kennel, from which he emerged to poison with his fetid breath the atmosphere of New Brunswick."[13]

Since Hill had had copies of the editorial delivered to every Assemblyman's desk, even Wilmot's enemies could not ignore the violence of Hill's rhetoric. All parties agreed that the *Loyalist* must be silenced. Hill and Doak were, in the tradition of Handyside and Pierce before them, called before the bar of the House of Assembly for Breach of Privilege. They admitted responsibility for the editorial and were committed to jail, "there to remain during pleasure."[14] The press was free, the Assembly had concluded, but not as free as all that. Whereas other editors had accepted their fate without a legal battle, Hill and Doak appealed to Judge Carter for release on a writ of *habeas corpus.* Their argument that the Legislature had acted "in direct contradiction to the Home Government, whose instructions were before them in the words 'The power of arrest does not extend to Colonial Legislation'"[15] was accepted by the judge. The freed editor and publisher went immediately to the House to flaunt their freedom, and then they hurried back to their paper and brought forth an unrepentant issue of the *Loyalist.* Adding a final insult, they sued the Speaker and the Sergeant-at-Arms for false arrest and were awarded roughly two hundred and fifty pounds. Hill and Doak had brought to an end forever the Assembly's custom of jailing its editorial critics at whim.

While the battle had been one of principle, it had also been one of party. Hill was a tory "of an extreme type,"[16] and L.A. Wilmot, who "had been charged with radicalism, republicanism,

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[13] *The Loyalist* 23 Feb. 1844.

[14] *Journal of the House of Assembly of New Brunswick 1844* 110.

[15] *Journal* 231-40.

[16] Hannay 2:97.

and rebellion, for advocating the views propounded in the Durham Report,"[17] was one of only a few liberals raising the cry of Responsible Government in the provincial Assembly. The House was not willing to spring further to the defense of a member with such radical ideas, but the party newspapers were, and Hill found himself berated by the same fourth estate whose freedoms he had so successfully defended. Ward, in his Fredericton *Sentinel*, characterized the incident as a "vulgar and virulent attack upon a gentleman . . . originating in the basest of motives—a desire to pander to the depraved tastes, and to gratify the malevolent designs of others."[18] The liberals' journalistic voice in Saint John, the *Morning News*, recognizing the *Loyalist* as the voice of the conservative or Old Tory party, added a religious level to the situation by pointing out that those who would support Hill must do so quietly for fear of offending their Catholic neighbors.[19]

Even a battle as significant as this was not enough to consume Hill's total attention in 1844. Within months of his arrival in Fredericton the previous summer, Hill had accused Ned Ward, editor of the *Sentinel*, of having been driven out of Bermuda for his chicanery. Ward had demanded that Hill back up his accusation, and Hill—to Ward's surprise and embarrassment—had complied. Ward responded in the accepted editorial fashion of the period by attempting to assassinate Hill's character. Returning from an investigatory trip to Woodstock, Ward reported that the general opinion there held that not only was Hill a deserter from the American army, but that he had left in the States "his wife and destitute family" to be maintained at public expense.[20] Hill brushed off the accusation, but it did not go away. *Head Quarters*, another Fredericton paper, echoed it with the insinuation that not only had Hill betrayed his British values but that, in deserting from the American army at Houlton, he had also betrayed his newly-acquired loyalties:

O who'd a thought when Tommy Gill
  Listed a Yankee sodger,
And walked his tracks on Houlton hill
  A blue and yellow codger,
That in a British province he
  His uniform would barter,

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[17] MacNutt 287.

[18] *The Sentinel* 8 Mar. 1844.

[19] *The Morning News* 8 Mar. 1844.

[20] *The Sentinel* 26 Jan. 1844.

> And that his Sally'd live to see
> Him git a Magna Charter.[21]

This parody took on an added bite because Hill was known for both his musical ability with the fiddle and his ability to adapt his own poems to existing tunes.

Ward threatened to expose even more of Hill's life in future columns, but the angry editor was sidetracked by a fire in the *Sentinel*'s office, which Hill hinted that Ward himself had set. Ward responded by saying that Hill was therefore accusing him of arson and that the defamation would soon land Hill before the Courts. Hill and Doak's breach of privilege battle against the Assembly intervened, but, by March, Ward was once more on the offensive. He contended that Hill had not only left his wife and family to be supported "by the precarious bounty of strangers," but had been himself for months "the inmate of a house of ill-fame, and formed part of its *materiel.*"[22] Rumours of Hill's past would undoubtedly have continued to find their way into the *Sentinel*'s columns if Ward's paper had not gone out of business that spring. Hill's obituary for the *Sentinel* castigated it as an "ultra-radical abortion of a foul brain and a jaundiced heart" and its editor as the "hired tool of Sir John Harvey."[23]

II

Hill had made his conservative ideology and his party affiliation plain in the tumultuous battle against Wilmot and the Assembly; elements of his biography were finding their way into print as he defended himself against this or that personal attack; and his profile was further limned by the values he promulgated and the stands he took in his editorial columns. These columns had always extolled the values of Protestantism and the Orange Order, for Hill believed that both fostered loyalty to the Sovereign, reverence towards the word of God, orderliness, and tolerance in religious matters. Within the decade—unfortunately for the people of Woodstock, Fredericton, and Saint John—such ideal qualities became heavily infused with political, patriotic, and personal animosities, and the peaceful celebrations of July 12 gave way to riot and disorder as Catholics and Protestants clashed in the streets. But, in the early 1840s, Hill had attended Orange Lodge meetings in Saint John. Impressed with the values

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[21] Quoted in *The Reporter* 12 Mar. 1858.

[22] *The Sentinel* 22 Mar. 1844.

[23] *The Loyalist* 25 Apr. 1844.

and civil spirit he saw as inherent in the organization, he founded, on July 5, 1844, the Graham Chapter of the Orange Lodge in Fredericton. The Orange Lodge figures centrally in the political development of the province, but Hill's editorials suggest that he saw it less as a political institution than as an embodiment of British values. Hill was later characterized as a man whose life was spent in "utter inconsistency with himself"[24] because he married a Catholic girl. However, if his Orangeism is seen in terms, not of anti-Catholicism, but of more positive beliefs in Queen, Country, and a reverence for God's word, then his marriage was not inconsistent with his own beliefs. He could well have been wrong in his interpretation of Orange values, but his marriage does not necessarily show that he was untrue to his own values.

The Graham chapter of the Orange Lodge that Hill founded conformed to the widespread practice of Total Abstinence, and in the editorial pages of the *Loyalist* Hill defended the mores of the provincial Total Abstinence societies. Yet it was widely known that the *Loyalist* editor walked hand in hand with the demon rum. In a sense, Hill's recognizing the abstinence ideal while drinking to excess is no more hypocritical than his acceptance of Orange values of Loyalty, reverence, and tolerance while marrying a Catholic. No one would be more able to recognize the value of abstinence than a person unable to practise it, and the tavern owned by Hill's mother-in-law must surely have provided him with opportunity to meditate on the potentially salubrious effects of sobriety.

III

Hill's creative side adds still another facet to his personal complexity. It is unusual enough that such a violent man wrote poetry of any kind; it is even more surprising to find, tucked away in various corners of the *Loyalist*, peaceful, escapist poems and songs modestly signed "T. Hill." His Christmas poem for 1844, "The Emigrant's Christmas Song," manages to blend his British sensibility innocently with the festive season. It ends:

A rebel band some years ago,
  By traitors led astray,
Our social order would o'erthrow
  And mar Britannia's sway;
But some were slain, and some are fled,

[24] MacFarlane 43.

Some suffering for their crimes.
And may we keep , from all dread,
Our good old Christmas times.

Then cheerly sound each festive hall,
And social be your cheer,—
A merry Christmas unto all,
And a prosperous New Year!
And may it be the happy fate,
Of all who read these rhymes,
For many a year to celebrate
The good old Christmas times.[25]

The most striking aspect of this simplistic versifying is that it came from the same man who had been thrown in jail for his stinging and forceful prose. Hill obviously possessed an uncommon ability to stand back from the noxious fumes of the political world in order to refresh himself in a world of childlike innocence. In this sense, his lyrics are a window into the world of simple truths for which he was daily fighting.

MacNutt writes of "public dinners and convivial gatherings [which] rang to the verses of Thomas Hill."[26] Some of these were collected in an 1845 volume, published by the *Loyalist*, entitled *The Constitutional Lyrist.* Others found their way into Hill's 1850 compilation, *A Book of Orange Songs.* The longest of his *Loyalist* poems, written in July 1844, filled the entire first page of his paper and part of the second.[27] Entitled "What is Life?" it asks, in Hill's unexpectedly naive and innocent fashion, that eternal question throughout various states of life from early childhood to full maturity. The poet asks it finally of an ancient, dying man:

He gazed—words came to his relief—
His voice was thick, his answer brief:
"'Tis, when with age and sorrows bent,
To look back on a life well-spent—
'Tis, when afflicted by his rod,
To joy to meet a pard'ning God!
To draw o'er other's faults a blot,
And be contented with your lot.
To part from all below in love,
And hope for happiness above!"
He paused—I gazed upon the clay;
But as the spirit passed away,
Methought I heard a voice from Heaven
Sing—*"This is life—to be forgiven!"*

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[25] *The Loyalist* 26 Dec. 1844.

[26] MacNutt 316.

[27] *The Loyalist* 26 July 1844.

The simple idealism of his poems and songs, most of which are lost and all of which are forgotten, reflects the uncomplicated manner in which Hill viewed the world around him. No Assembly had the right to enforce laws. Every right-thinking politician should be against Responsible Government. Orangeism was a good thing. To Hill, these simple truths were *basic.* The contrast between his sentimental verses and his slashing editorials shows not inconsistency, but breadth.

During the winter of 1844-45, Hill integrated his political and his creative writing in a dramatic satire entitled *The Provincial Association*, which he gave to Henry Preston, a wandering actor-manager who had first appeared in Fredericton the previous December. Hill and Preston must have recognized in each other a kindred spirit. Both were immigrants. Both were totally committed to their professions. Both had separated from their wives. Both were literary men. Both had experienced failure as often as success. Such affinities, along with their common love of drinking, would have brought them together to while away the long nights of the Fredericton winter. Preston produced Hill's play at least twice in February 1845, just before he fled town one step ahead of the bailiff.

Preston retreated to Saint John where, within a month of his arrival, he presented Hill's play. The first performance made the Saint John community aware that some of their chief citizens were being satirized. By the second performance, on April 2, they were waiting. "War was declared after the sounding of the tocsin; then all bedlam broke loose—the first attack was upon the stove-pipe," gloated editor Fenety. "This was demolished in a twinkle, while the hissing, yelling, hooting, whistling and stamping, we are told, was awfully terrific." The villain of the evening—from Fenety's liberal viewpoint—was Hill, "a miserable wretch, only remarkable for his scurrility . . . nothing better could be expected of him, for such a *mercenary dog* could be hired to do anything—for a shilling he would hang his mother."[28]

Hill's own response to his play's difficulties was to dismiss the "lick-trencher publisher of the *Morning News*" as a base, ignorant, insolent, and foolish fellow who wrote about a play he had neither read nor seen.[29] Before *The Provincial Association*, Hill's sole theatrical experience had taken place in Saint John where he had been, in his own phrase, "ill-advised" to take part

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[28] *The Morning News* 4 Apr. 1845.

[29] *The Loyalist* 10 Apr. 1845.

in a production mounted by amateurs there. On production night the gallery was packed by most of his "personal and political enemies," who hissed him throughout his whole performance.[30] With *The Provincial Association*, Hill's theatrical career ended where it had begun, on the stage boards of Saint John.[31]

IV

While there is much in Hill's personality which seems contrary, if not contradictory, the most inexplicable side of his nature to become visible during his Fredericton years was his anger and violence. In the intellectual jousting of his editorial columns, Hill was the equal of anyone. As a defender of Tory ideals, he was the model of logical consistency. As a proponent of Orangeism, he was free from the anti-Catholic fanaticism found elsewhere. One of the most obvious qualities of his poetry is its gentleness. But, as politicians besides Wilmot were quick to discover, Hill could quickly replace intellectual jousting with vicious, emotional, personal attacks. This anger can be explained in part by his hatred of hypocrisy as he saw it practised by politicians. But Hill's drinking and the violence to which it led are not explained by his Fredericton years. Perhaps Hill's main anger was directed at himself. His marriage had broken up when his wife remained in Maine; his first newspaper had failed; his financial state, as far as it is possible to tell, was always precarious; his political opinions were winning him more enemies than friends; and all this was happening as he was fighting for values which he believed, in his heart, to be right.

Alcohol and violence may have provided refuge against frustration and a sense of personal failure, but they almost ended his association with the *Loyalist.* On February 17, 1846, while he was boarding in Doak's home, Hill attacked his partner and various members of his family. Hill characterized the exchange as an "angry altercation . . . which soon led to blows, and in a short time the craven [Doak] was induced to kneel in the most abject manner, and beg for pardon."[32] Doak's account of the event reveals, in almost clinical detail, how violent Hill could be.

> Hill . . . with all the ferocity of a savage, attacked Mr. Doak in the most treacherous manner, (having first bolted the door to prevent inter-

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[30] *The Loyalist* 5 Dec. 1844.

[31] For a fuller account of the Saint John riot, see Edward Mullaly, "The Saint John Theatre Riot of 1845," *Theatre History in Canada* 6 (1985) 44-58.

[32] Hill's account of this incident is recorded in the *New Brunswick Reporter* 6 Mar. 1846.

> ference) and after having beat him until exhausted with his own exertions Mr. Doak, in a gore of blood, fell, or rather rose to his knees and begged, not Hill's pardon, but his own life. His sisters, who had previously retired for the night, hearing the struggle below, came rushing into the room, the door having been previously forced open, and openly attempting to remonstrate with Hill, the cowardly villain with a blow of his fist felled one of them to the floor, and while lying insensible at his feet, the vile wretch kicked her several times with his boot.[33]

An altercation such as this, had it been between Hill and Wilmot, might have been understandable. However, in 1842, it had been Doak who "took Hill out of Gaol in Saint John in a state of utter destitution and wretchedness, paid the debt for which he had been incarcerated, clothed him in decent garments—(a luxury perhaps never before enjoyed by him) and placed him in a respectable situation of editor of [the *Loyalist*]." The partnership had experienced some rough moments during its short life, and the dissolution occasioned by Hill's attack was the fourth break-up Doak attributed to those "vicious habits" which Hill "had imbibed during a lifetime of dissipation, passed strolling from one part of the world to another, [which] had become too deeply rooted, to be easily eradicated."[34] Hill menaced both Doak and the staff of his former paper, and, for some days after, he wandered around town with a brace of loaded pistols. Not satisfied with threatening their lives, he sued his fellow editor for slander, assault and battery, and ejectment. Hill, in return, was sued for personal debts—debts which Doak characterized as Hill's "gambling score."[35]

This quarrel, in which Hill considered himself the injured party, displays Hill's inner self more than any other event of his Fredericton years. His violence, his drinking, his gambling, and his lack of respect not only for others but even for himself all come together in this incident. The *Loyalist* was Hill's right arm in the war against Responsible Government, and his willingness to risk even his journalistic career by breaking with Doak suggests that the devils haunting him were more deeply embedded in his psyche than mere political values. His loaded pistols hint of an inclination toward self-destruction for which nothing known about his life provides sufficient motivation.

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[33] *The Loyalist* 12 Mar. 1846.

[34] *The Loyalist* 12 Mar. 1846,

[35] *The Loyalist* 30 Apr. 1846.

Thomas Hill's past returned not only to haunt him but to destroy his public career, and this destruction involved at its centre some of the events of these Fredericton years. In June, 1846, Hill and Doak once more resumed their partnership, Hill took over his old position as editor of the *Loyalist*, and the paper moved back to Saint John. There the partnership lasted until 1847 when, by means of an amicable agreement, Hill purchased Doak's share of the paper and carried on as sole editor of the newly-titled *Loyalist and Protestant Vindicator*.[36] Hill moved the paper once again to Fredericton in January 1852, but it survived only to the summer of that year. Evidence suggests that Hill remained in Fredericton even after the demise of his paper[37] and, in 1855, he began to work for John Graham's *Head Quarters*. It was as a result of an editorial he wrote for this paper in 1856 that Hill suffered his final public humiliation.

This last battle began when Hill questioned the patriotism of a man named Alexander Thompson, of Douglas, for flying a banner which was interpreted as being an American flag. Thompson retorted, either on his own or with the help of the *New Brunswick Reporter* editor James Hogg, that "it ill becomes an Englishman, like Hill, who must have forsworn his allegiance to his own country when he enlisted in the American service, and who first came to this country a Yankee deserter, to prate about loyalty."[38] When the accusation had been thrown at him from various editorial pages in the mid-40s, Hill had always treated it as the sort of unsubstantiated name-calling to be expected in the heat of editorial exchanges. Now, ten years later, left with little more than his own sense of self-respect, Hill rose to this attack on the integrity of his loyalist principles. He sued both Thompson and Hogg for libel, and his last tilt with the windmills of folly began.

Thompson was an insignificant figure on this battlefield. The war was really between the ardent Toryism of Hill and the more liberal politics of Hogg. In this battle of party and ideology, the issue was not justice but revenge. One of the strongest and most bitter memories of Hill's enemies was the editorial thrashing Hill had given the proponents of Responsible Government in 1844. In the particular editorial that had roused the Assembly to call Hill and Doak before the bar—that same action which had

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[36] Harper 68. I have not seen any of these later issues of the paper. They are not included on the *Loyalist* microfilm provided by Mount Allison University.

[37] The Fredericton Magistrates Court records for March 25, 1853, (Archives, Harriet Irving Library, MGH46) show that Hill paid the debt of William McKnight. Harper 25 indicates that Hill published *The United Empire* from May to August 1854 in Fredericton.

[38] *The New Brunswick Reporter* 11 July 1856.

ended with the Assembly's ignominious defeat—Hill had excoriated L.A. Wilmot for betraying the conservative principles that had got him elected, and called him a hound who would poison New Brunswick with his fetid breath. Presenting himself at court fourteen years after writing those intemperate words, Hill must have felt the foretaste of defeat when he looked to the judicial bench and saw there, presiding, Judge Lemuel Allan Wilmot.

The trial was, in effect, a trying of Hill's character. Judge Wilmot allowed the question of Hill's probable bigamy to be aired before telling the jury to disregard it; Hill's personal habits—his gambling and his drinking—were discussed; and in his charge to the jury Wilmot focused their deliberations on the very area of the case that justice demanded they ignore: party politics. "I regret," Wilmot declared, "that the attempt should be made, has been made, by the trumpet voice of counsel, to arouse party animosities—which I have buried years ago."[39] Fortunate indeed for Hill that Wilmot had buried such animosities—for Lemuel Allan Wilmot, years before, in a speech on the Keswick, had himself pronounced Hill an American deserter.[40]

Hill, as expected, lost the case, resigned his position with *Head Quarters*, and removed himself from the editorial and political spotlight of New Brunswick. "I have had many difficulties to contend with—many cowardly, sneaking, and unprincipled enemies," Hill wrote with quiet intensity in his valediction, "but I have found some warm friends, whose kindness to me I can never forget. To each and every one of the latter I now bid a kind farewell."[41] The Woodstock *Journal*, in publishing one of the few assessments of Hill's career to be made by his contemporaries, declared after the trial that while Hill was not without his flaws,

> He had rare independence of spirit, a truly British heart, downrightness of speech, and consistency, and hearty detestation of meanness and sycophancy. During his long career as a journalist he has preserved a general consistency which is as admirable as it is singular. He commenced a Conservative, he continued a Conservative, and he ends a Conservative.[42]

Hill's own publisher acknowledged that, while his former editor was not without flaw, Hill had been "during the storm as well as

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[39] *The Carleton Sentinel* 6 Mar. 1858.

[40] *Head Quarters* 24 Mar. 1858.

[41] *Head Quarters* 3 Mar. 1858.

[42] Quoted in *Head Quarters* 17 Mar. 1858.

sunshine, the unflinching and consistent advocate of truly British and Conservative principles."[43] John Graham hinted, in this same editorial, that Hill's trial had been unfair, and he concluded with the hope that, should fairness reassert itself, Hill would rise once more.

But this was the battle from which Hill did not rise. Perhaps he felt that fairness could not be found in New Brunswick. Perhaps he was too tired. Perhaps the effects of personal excesses had taken too great a toll on his body. (One witness at the trial said he had seen Hill a few years back, but that Hill had changed so much since that he would not have recognized him.) Or perhaps Hill did rise, quietly. The *Carleton Sentinel* and the Fredericton *Reporter* would, two years later in their obituaries, say that Hill was until recently on the *Head Quarters* staff. If this is so, Hill merely became less visible as he continued to wage the long and wearying battles that had engaged his whole being for two very stormy decades.

When Tom Hill died in October 1860, his devolution into the footnotes of New Brunswick history was already beginning. Graham spoke of Hill's writing and printing his own prose, poetry, novels, romances, and "serious and comic exhibitions of his views on all the questions of the passing day."[44] The one other man close to Hill in his final years, a fellow editor named Richard Phillips, wrote of Hill that "during his life he proved himself to be one of the most extraordinary men of the age, possessing a giant intellect, independent spirit and a daring and firmness of will that neither neglect, misfortune, privation, nor persecution could subvert."[45] These two were the only contemporary writers to try to set Hill's life into the larger context of his times. Hill had been on the losing side of the main issue of his day, the issue of Responsible Government, and history, dealing unkindly with losers, has left whatever role Hill's criticism had in shaping even his opponent's positions on this and other issues unexplored. One of the very few writers who would later attempt to sustain Hill's memory was W.G. MacFarlane. In 1895, assessing the place of the nearly-forgotten Hill in the context of the mid-1850s, MacFarlane wrote that Hill "distinguished himself as a writer of genius . . . as an ardent tory, Orangeman and Imperial Federationist . . . as a man of power in politics and journalism, and

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[43] *Head Quarters* 17 Mar. 1858.

[44] *Head Quarters* 24 Oct. 1860.

[45] Quoted in MacFarlane, *New Brunswick Bibliography* 44.

as a poet of considerable ability."[46] Nothing of any substance has been written of Hill since.

For Thomas Hill, principle was infinitely more important than the political game. In 1858, reporting on his own trial, he said of himself (in the editorial third person) that "if he had one ruling passion stronger than another it was his love for his country, veneration for her laws and institutions, and pride in the glory of the Empire."[47] This declaration might have furnished his epitaph. Unfortunately, as he died penniless and almost friendless, there was no tombstone on which to record either such sentiments or even the simple fact that he had lived. His body was laid in an unmarked grave in John Graham's family plot.[48] Richard Phillips was the only mourner. Little notice was taken of Hill's sudden passing. However, as he lay on his deathbed, ignored by the province for which he had waged such mighty battles, an earthquake shook New Brunswick and Maine with such force that his death was marked by the slow tolling of steeple bells over the many churches in which he had never set foot. It was the sort of irony that Tom Hill would have been quick to appreciate.

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[46] MacFarlane, *New Brunswick Bibliography* 44.

[47] *Head Quarters* 4 Mar. 1858.

[48] Cf. Louise Hill, *The Old Burying Ground Fredericton N.B.*(Fredericton: distributed by Fredericton Heritage Trust, 1981) 1:38-39.