MARGARET ADDISON

A BIOGRAPHY

JEAN O'GRADY

Margaret Addison

Margaret Addison

Margaret Addison

A Biography

JEAN O'GRADY

McGill-Queen's University Press
Montreal & Kingston · London · Ithaca

ISBN 0-7735-2152-6

Legal deposit second quarter 2001
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper

This book has been published with the help of a grant from Victoria University.

McGill-Queen's University Press acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for its activities. It also acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts for its publishing program.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

O'Grady, Jean, 1943–
Margaret Addison: a biography
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7735-2152-6
1. Addison, Margaret, 1868–1940. 2. Deans of women – Ontario – Toronto – Biography. 3. Victoria College (Toronto, Ont.) – Biography. 4. Victoria College (Toronto, Ont.). Annesley Hall – History. I. Title.
LE3.T618A335 2001 378.1'94'092 C00-900975-2

Typeset in Palatino 10/12
by Caractéra inc., Quebec City

For my husband, Walter

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Illustrations

Credits for Illustrations

Addison family collection:
Frontispiece, pages 19, 27, 32, 40, 81, 82, 83, 152, 222, 223. Rephotographed in recent years by Ernest Lewis

United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives, Toronto:
page 29 91.161P/738N;
page 31 91.161P/353N;
page 85 87.240P/11N;
page 88 89.113P/2;
page 106 91.161P/413;
page 120 91.161P/419N;
page 129 76.002P/16;
page 151 89.147P/2;
page 153 91.161P/599

The principal and fellows of Newnham College, Cambridge:
page 76

The principals and fellows of St Anne's College, Oxford:
page 77

Victoria University: page 200

Acknowledgments

In preparing this biography I have been assisted greatly by the Addison family. The late Louise Lewis, Margaret Addison's eldest niece, gathered together many documents relating to Addison's life and the family history. She was unfailingly helpful and charming, and I wish she could have lived to see her Aunt Margaret's life receive the recognition she felt it deserved. For further details I am indebted to William Addison, Elizabeth McGregor, Edward Addison, Christine Dow, and Ann Lewis. Among those who shared their memories of early days were Julia, George, and Ottelyn Addison; Celia Corcoran; Kingsley Joblin; Laure Rièse; Helen Langford; Irene Rinch; Jean Cameron; Dorothy Carver Nicholson; and Dora Wattee. Other details have come through the kindness of Elizabeth McLeod, Judith Grant, Heather Murray, John Court, Jay Macpherson, Susan McDonald, and Ken Thompson. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers at Carleton University Press for their suggestions and comments.

The staff of the Victoria University / United Church Archives have been most patient and helpful, as have the staff of the Victoria University Library and the archivists at Trinity College (Toronto); the National Archives of Canada; the town of Whitby; Trafalgar Castle School; the University Women's Club; Havergal College (Toronto); Newnham College, Girton College, Homerton College, Hughes Hall, the Cambridgeshire County Record Office, and the Central Library in Cambridge; and St. Hugh's College, Lady Margaret Hall, St. Anne's College, and St. Hilda's College in Oxford. I thank the Massey family for permission to quote from several Massey letters.

At home, my mother has been a constant help, and my three daughters have been their usual selves – supportive in general, blissfully ignorant of details. This book is dedicated to my husband Walter, who has gone over every aspect of it with me. Without his encouragement I certainly could never have brought it to fruition.

This page intentionally left blank

Abbreviations

AA	Alumni Association Fonds
AHCOM	Annesley Hall Committee of Management
AO	Archives of Ontario
DCB	Dictionary of Canadian Biography
DOW	Dean of Women Fonds
MA	Margaret Addison
MAP	Margaret Addison Papers
NAC	National Archives of Canada
OISE	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
UCA	United Church Archives
UTA	University of Toronto Archives
VUA	Victoria University Archives
VUL	Victoria University Library
VWREA	Victoria Women's Residence and Educational Association

Note: References to documents in VUA generally give box and file number. The files of letters in MAP, box 1, are not numbered, but letters can easily be found by date.

This page intentionally left blank

Margaret Addison

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

As dean of residence at Victoria University, Margaret Addison had the habit of welcoming the incoming class of first-year women with a speech that began, "Women of the university." For new students such as Gertrude Rutherford in 1917 and Esther Trewartha in 1920, it was an awesome moment – a gesture emphasizing their entry into a splendid intellectual community with all its challenges, privileges, and responsibilities. They and many of their classmates retained throughout their lives something of the vision of the socially committed and fruitful life of the educated woman that Addison had tried to impart. As Rutherford wrote years later, "With unwearying zeal, Miss Addison worked with us and for us – but mostly with us – to help us achieve the full stature of maturity."[1]

Addison thus holds an important place in the history of the higher education of Canadian women. She was herself one of the small first wave of university-educated women in Ontario. As well, she presided over the living arrangements of a second wave of women who were being integrated in increasing numbers into college life. In 1903 she was named dean of residence, in charge of the newly erected Annesley Hall; thus she became the first, and until 1919 the only, female staff member at Victoria. In 1920 she was made dean of women, responsible for commuters as well as residents. Until she retired in 1931 – for a period of twenty-eight years – her policies set the tone and defined the expectations for female students at Victoria.

Addison remains, however, little more than a name to most people, even at her own university. And that name is current only because the second women's residence, erected in 1959, was called Margaret Addison Hall – now popularly known, with a familiarity that would have startled the dean, as "Marg. Add." Part of the reason for the lack of knowledge may be that her papers did not make their way to the Victoria University Archives until 1984 and access was restricted until 1989. But also, as a figure from the recent past, she had a mindset that is not very congenial to most people in the early

twenty-first century. Although far enough removed to have embraced some "old fashioned" views that many are still reacting against, she remains too close to have acquired an aura of quaint historicity.

In three particular areas relevant to her educational work, Addison's beliefs show a theistic and moralistic orientation that has gone completely out of favour. First, though she dedicated her energies to expanding the social role of women, she never ceased to maintain that women were endowed by the Creator with a distinctive "womanliness" that precluded their simply mimicking the activities of men. Secondly, she held the unfashionable notion that education should form the character and improve morality, as well as train the intellect. And lastly, she was a Christian who prayed daily for the spread of righteousness and peace, who tried to ascertain God's design for her life, and who believed that God was calling individuals to work to improve the world. Unlike her contemporaries such as Nellie McClung, Addison did not have the populist touch that could make such beliefs palatable to a modern sensibility.

It is not easy, then, to enter sympathetically into Addison's point of view. The effort to do so, however, brings rich rewards. She was an articulate woman, and the thoughts expressed in her many letters and reports offer insight into the matrix of ideas and expectations governing the lives of women in the early twentieth century – both her own and those of her students. Her beliefs were held not as rigid doctrines but as nuanced and constantly evolving positions. Moreover, although she appears to be that unpopular figure – a member of the establishment – she was actually a visionary who worked for change from within the existing social and intellectual framework. Her position as a woman within a male-dominated institution turns out to be a subtle and fascinating balancing act – an instructive story of tact and compromise, struggle and repositioning. Early in her career as dean she wrote to one of her close friends about the need for a diplomatic approach:

> Probably people in every age think they are living in critical times, but it would seem as if now we are in a transition stage of the woman question, waging war against the very old notions, yet with a certain conservatism in our hearts, and finding it difficult not to be aggressive and still to be aggressive enough, not to offend, and also to be brave enough to step out of the beaten track because it is to the interest of the world we should.[2]

Because she respected popular opinion and held many of the values shared by her society, she could do more to free women from traditional bonds than could many of her more flamboyant sisters.

The notion of the innate differences between men and women was embedded deeply in Addison's culture and religion. The Methodist Church in which she was raised looked upon the two sexes almost as distinct species, with complementary interests and abilities. Man was held to be practical and active by nature, while woman was thought to be spiritual and reflective. He was rational and dominated by interest and ambition; she was intuitive and led by her affections. It followed that women were credited with the unique ability to build a family home to which a man could retreat, as into a sanctuary, after the toil and struggles of business life.[3] This ascription of specific abilities to the sexes was not confined to religious circles; it permeated society. As late as 1891, for instance, one finds in an Ontario school inspector's report discussing whether women should be teachers the assertion that "woman is essentially more a religious being than man, and is therefore possessed of more love, goodness and kindness. She approximates very closely to the divine ..."[4]

Fortunately, although women were believed to have a special competency in human relations and in the moral sphere when Addison was growing up, it did not automatically follow that they must remain intellectually impoverished. There existed, of course, a fear of educated women that has been studied extensively and become the stuff of legend – a fear that was partly doctrinal and partly attributable to a fear of change, and that has made every advance of women in the educational sphere an adventure and a challenge. Many Methodists nevertheless held that Christian education entailed the drawing out of all faculties and that women's high calling as wives and mothers demanded no less. As one enlightened writer in an Episcopal Methodist newspaper put it in 1876,

> A proper education aids to give man the full use of all the powers that God has given him, not only that he may act well his part in this state of probation, but that he may be prepared for the full enjoyment of eternal life beyond. Woman, too, has a physical nature to be cared for, intellectual powers to be developed, moral faculties to be directed and trained, and a spiritual nature to be cultured and adorned. She is as capable of a liberal education in all the arts and sciences as man. Why should she be debarred? ... One day, equally with man, she will be called upon to account for the use of the talents committed to her. Why should she make answer, "My father, my husband and my brother forced me to bury them under the dull routine of kitchen drudgery, and never afforded me the opportunity to put them to usury, or make them shine as the day."[5]

This was the attitude of Margaret Addison's family, who encouraged her to go to university, and of Addison herself. Their God was vitally

involved in human history, orchestrating the gradual development of a just society peopled by a higher type of humanity.

Margaret Addison was quite within her religious tradition, then, in maintaining that women had the potential to be more than homemakers – that, given training and experience, they could play a valuable role in national life. One of her strengths was that she kept an open mind about the form their contribution might take. "If only one could foresee what a woman will do in the future," she mused with regard to the women's movement, "whether she will be in a home of her own, or whether she will follow a profession."[6] She encouraged her residents to explore the new careers opening up in such fields as nursing, librarianship, business, and journalism. But more importantly, she sought to awaken in them an ability to respond to whatever the future might bring, by developing their talents and by learning to situate themselves in reference to history and to God.

Addison's second seminal notion – that education must involve the whole character – had its roots both in Canadian Methodist practice and in the English tradition, especially as elaborated by nineteenth-century thinkers such as Jowett and the two Arnolds. Newman's *Idea of a University*, which assigned to the university the role of forming intelligent and capable members of society, was a favourite of hers. This ideal was by no means universally held even then; for example, some contemporary women's educators championed a purely intellectual education. Following the example of Emily Davies in England, they believed that any attempt to take women's characters into account would result in a gendered – and probably inferior – curriculum for women. On these grounds, Mary Woolley, president of Mount Holyoke in the United States from 1901 to 1937, resisted the introduction of a course in domestic science, since it suggested special vocations for women.[7] Addison championed domestic science on educational and vocational grounds, but not in a discriminatory spirit: her ideals of education for life extended to both sexes. Curriculum, though, was not her main concern. The residents of Annesley Hall already took classes with the men and, in general, followed the same courses of study. The responsiblity for character development was the chief burden resting on her shoulders, and she was always conscious of its great weight.

At one time Addison spoke of the tremendous consequences any fault on her part might have: "With how much levity we look upon life, and how little we seem to think about the stray words and the stray acts, which are indelibly stamped upon some soul. It is useless to think about one's influence – that belongs very much to youth; but one does feel how much each one of us who has to deal with young

people should keep a pure and deeply Christian life."[8] Like a small-town minister, she was conscious that all eyes were upon her. Fortunately, she was also aware of the tremendous potential for good that her position entailed. She once defined her vocation in terms that combine the widest social influence with personal and individual concern: "To have a vision of the possibilities of the higher education of women, and to seek to make it more than a vision, yet not to neglect the personal contact of Dean and student, to be interested in great and earnest things, but to be sympathetic toward all that concerns the woman undergraduate in play, work, or in spirit – this is the high mission of the Head of a woman's college residence."[9]

Finally, Addison's beliefs as a practising Christian offer insights into the assumptions that shaped our society. Christianity gave Addison her ultimate perspective, providing a context in which she could see her work as dean as part of a wider civilizing movement, destined to transform the world. She was perhaps deficient from a multicultural point of view, in that she hoped for the spread of Christianity throughout the world, but she was no narrow sectarian and took a lively interest in other cultures and societies. What she revered most in the life of Christ was altruism, the quality that enabled people to work together for the common good. In this she was typical of her generation – a generation that gave birth to progressive and co-operative political parties and to the League of Nations.

Addison's Christianity also has a significant consequence for her biography, or at least for her biographer. Though never loath to talk about religion – she had a parable for every occasion – she said and wrote very little about the private dimension of her religious life. Probably, her life for her had a very different shape and meaning from the one developed here. She thought of it, one suspects, as a story of spiritual crises – as a record of temptations and occasional victories, of alienations from God, and of moments of vision and communion. All this, though, is a closed book to others. The only possible biography is a public one, detailing her relationships with other people, her acts, and her innovations and ideas. This focus has its compensations, of course, for it means that her story is, to some extent, the story of the women of Victoria College during her tenure there as dean.

Even in relation to her own time, Margaret Addison could not be labelled with any precision as a feminist. She did not talk much about "women's rights" in the abstract. Like the "maternal feminists" of her time, who believed that women should contribute to the public sphere specifically because of their genius for family life,[10] she believed that women had something to contribute to society as women, not as

imitation men. She differed from the maternal feminists, however, in that she emphasized women's intellectual abilities as much as their nurturing and caring qualities. She resembled even less most modern feminists, in that she had very little sense of oppression by the patriarchy. Of course, the articulation of this oppression is a recent phenomenon, but even during Addison's time women such as Virginia Woolf were starting to resent a male-dominated society. Addison's perspective was quite different, and more traditionally Christian. To blame the imperfections of the social system on one sex would have seemed to her unfair, and in any case she was not inclined to view the shortcomings of people's lives chiefly in terms of the social system. For her, men and women were equally struggling pilgrims in an imperfect world.

There is a psychological dimension, as well, to Addison's ability to live with the patriarchal symbols of her religion and the existing constitution of society. Whereas Virginia Woolf's memories of her demanding father, Leslie Stephen, must have contributed to her increasing resentment of the male hegemony, Margaret Addison, as far as I have been able to determine, had a good relationship with her father – a man who expected much but was basically very proud of her. Her reflections when he died suggest a shadowy crossover in her mind between his image and that of God the father, and help to explain why she was not in overt rebellion. "It was not merely losing him [she wrote to her sister], but it seems as if unconsciously I had depended so much upon him to keep things straight that I have had to go in a new way back to that source of power which made his life so strong, so beautiful and so good."[11]

But if Addison was not against the patriarchy, she was nevertheless very much for the women's movement. Like many of the deans and professional women of the time, she never married; she was of the generation that set out to show that women could have a career, rather than of the subsequent generation that tried to show that a career could be combined with marriage.[12] A great deal of her time was devoted to women's institutions, clubs, and societies, which were just being formed or were breaking new ground. Having a sense that her generation was making history and suspecting that at some time her experience might be of interest to future historians of the women's movement, she kept a number of her papers, which are now available in the Victoria University Archives. She also collected material on the early experience of women in universities for an article, and once she even contemplated writing a history of Annesley Hall (at that time all of seventeen years old). Finding that no one was in charge of keeping memorabilia regarding women in higher education,

she assumed that responsibility herself, "for some day, these items will be of interest."[13] It is thanks to her, then, that it is to some degree possible to piece together the experience of women as reflected in her life.

Towards the end of her life especially, she felt a solidarity with women that contains the germs of a feminist perspective. Part of the maturing of women, she felt, involved their taking control of their own lives and, thus, resisting the interference of men. After a prolonged struggle with the administration in 1920–21, for instance, she protested in her diary against "the autocracy of men in the affairs of women"; she maintained that "Victoria College should lead in the idea that women know better how to manage women's education than men."[14] When she first thought of retiring, in 1926, she recommended setting up a separate women's department in the college, with a dean to direct it. She argued that women should "develop their own particular gifts, that life may be enriched by variety, not hampered by uniformity. This is the reason why we desire that women shall be responsible in the largest measure for the education of their own sex, that they may have freedom to work out their own genius."[15]

Addison's increasingly separatist attitude is much easier to understand in the 2000s than it would have been in the 1960s and 1970s, during the most strident equality-seeking phase of the women's movement. The work of recent feminist essentialists has shown, though in a radically different key from Addison's, that to cherish an essential difference in the sexes is not necessarily to sell out to the patriarchy. With today's renewed interest in such questions as separate schools for girls, her views take on a new cogency.

Many biographers of women besides myself have been perplexed about how to refer to their central character – using her surname alone seems curt, yet using only her first name could possibly be judged as patronizing. In any case, Margaret Eleanor Theodora Addison had many names. She was "Maggie" as a child (in her father's brogue it sounded more like "Muggie"). As she grew up she became "Margaret" to many, although for a while she signed her letters to her brother "Marguerite." Later, around the college, she was known as "Miss Addison," though behind her back the students referred to her as META (from her initials), and this was the name she used to sign some youthful essays. Finally, much to her satisfaction, she metamorphosed into "Dr. Addison." Although I have opted generally for "Addison," I have varied the name according to circumstances.

The other women of the time are almost invariably referred to as "Mrs So-and-so," or even "Mrs George So-and-so" in such documents as the minutes of the committee of management; Addison,

herself, did the same, though she knew them well. I have frequently followed this practice, although the index gives their full names when it was possible to ascertain them. The index also contains the life dates of the principal characters. I frequently use the commonly used term "Victoria College," though after 1884 it was officially known as "Victoria University," not becoming a separate college again until 1928. As well, as in the usual Toronto fashion, I identify the University of Toronto students by their graduating year; for example, "2T1" refers to the class of 1921. As for the Annesley residents, Addison was careful to refer to them as "young women," but because they often called themselves "girls," I have sometimes done so, meaning no disrespect.

CHAPTER ONE

Growing Up

Margaret Addison was not born into the urban and intellectual milieu she later inhabited. On the contrary, like many Canadians in the newly formed Dominion of Canada, she was a pioneer's child: her birth on 21 October 1868 took place at Horning's Mills, Ontario, a mere clearing in the woods. Her first impression was perhaps the sunlight filtered through the rustling boughs. Her mother was a warm presence, nurturing and soft, crooning hymns to her first-born. Her father was out on the trail when she was born, and he came and went, perceptible as the sudden wind in the trees, smelling faintly of sweat, his leather travelling clothes stiffened by the rain. Their first home was a miserable wooden hovel, her father said later, with two main rooms – one serving as kitchen, living and dining rooms; the other as a bedroom – and three tiny rooms upstairs, under the eaves.[1] Water was pumped from a well; the surrounding forest hid a rustic privy, where clouds of mosquitoes hovered.

But this was no ordinary family of settlers, content to eke out a subsistence from the bush. The cabin was a centre of spiritual activity. Margaret's father, Rev. Peter Addison, was a Methodist preacher, her mother a former school-teacher. Both were on a pilgrimage, guided by the Word of God, and they were convinced it was God's will that they should labour in this corner of his vineyard and play their part in his evolving plan. For God had a plan, they believed, whereby, in the fullness of time, this sinful world would be transformed into the Kingdom of God and loving kindness would replace strife. The Addisons believed deeply in the responsibility of each individual to contribute to this hoped-for consummation – by prayers, exhortation, and selfless labour. Literally from her cradle, Margaret was surrounded by this religious atmosphere; it was to colour all she did.

Margaret's parents provided a formidable example of strength and piety. Although they were the products of different strains in the evolution of Methodist life, the stories collected about them in the family history binder suggest that they both constructed the narrative

of their lives in terms of service to a larger whole.[2] The Rev. Peter Addison came to Methodism in his young manhood and, after a dramatic conversion, directed all his immense natural energy and physical stamina to the one end of serving God. He was some six feet tall, with a bush of hair, piercing blue eyes, and a stern face that could crinkle into a smile of amazing warmth. Born in England on 20 December 1831, he lived in the village of Beathwaite Green (now the town of Levens), not far from Kendal, Westmorland. His father, Thomas Addison, worked partly as a farm labourer and partly at home as a basket weaver. He had six children, of whom Peter was the fifth. They had little formal education but much native intelligence, and the local rector constantly lent them books of a sober and thoughtful cast. In the evenings, while the whole family wove baskets by the light of a peat fire, one member would lie on the floor with a book catching the light of the fire, and read aloud. Afterwards, their father commented on what had been read and answered questions before family prayers and bed.

Respect for learning, one of the chief traits preserved in family lore, was thus to become an important inheritance for Margaret. According to tradition, the Westmorland Addison family included a number of parsons and doctors. Joseph Addison, of the *Spectator*, was said to be a distant relation, although the distance may have been considerable. Joseph's father Lancelot was born in the village of Maulds Meaburn, Westmorland (near Shap), but his relation to the Levens branch is not clear – there were a number of Addisons in the county. More closely related was Robert Addison (1754–1829), Peter's great-uncle, a graduate of Cambridge; after emigrating to Canada in 1791, Robert had a distinguished career as founding minister of St. Mark's in Niagara-on-the-Lake, chaplain of the Province of Upper Canada, and confidant of Bishop Strachan.

Peter's uncle Robert, who had also emigrated to Upper Canada the year Peter was born, settled in South Norwich township, Oxford county. In 1848, when he was sixteen, Peter was allowed to follow him, accompanied by his older brother James, now about twenty-five. They were strong and hard-working young men who had little trouble finding work in the lumber mills and farms of what was then Canada West. Eventually they saved up $1200 and bought a 200-acre farm from a Quaker near Avon, a village south of London in South Dorchester Township, Elgin County, some twenty-five miles from the Norwich Addisons.

Though Peter had worked hard before, it was nothing compared to the labour of clearing and farming the land. In Peter and James's onslaught on the virgin forest, they brought mighty oaks, walnuts,

maples, and hickory crashing down and piled up huge branches, which they burned at night in an inferno that would make a modern ecologist weep. Then the stumps had to be pulled, crops planted, and the farm stocked. Sometimes Peter found the work heartbreaking: "We had 19 acres of fall wheat and some spring wheat and the midge came and destroyed it so that we did not get even our bread and had nothing to sell for two years, and we had not a hundred dollars for our work, two men. These were the hardest times that I ever saw."[3]

Peter and James were still Anglicans at this time, but most of their neighbours attended the Methodist church nearby and sometimes invited the Addisons along. According to one anecdote, the brothers once went to pass an evening at the local tavern, after which the following exchange took place: "Not our kind, James." "No, not our kind, Peter." Later they spent an evening at a Methodist revival meeting, and the ensuing homeward-bound conversation went: "Not our kind, James." "No, not our kind, Peter." "More our kind than the other lot, James." As it happened, the Methodists did become Peter's kind, but not without a struggle. "The opposition he put up was real, intelligent and whole-hearted," wrote his son Arthur in his memoir. "He was impatient and violent in his likes and dislikes. And his conversion was a violent affair." Indeed, it followed the classic pattern laid down by Wesley for those trying to flee from the wrath to come. One night, crossing his own fields after a revival meeting, Peter was overwhelmed with a sense of his sin and worthlessness and fell to his knees on the spot, praying and mentally wrestling in the darkness until he came to a sense that his sins were forgiven.

From then on Peter was a man under discipline, who tried to lose his self-will in the will of God. It was not easy to tame his headstrong nature – to exchange turbulence of spirit for meekness, impetuosity for patience, and stubbornness for quiet persistence. According to those who knew him later as a minister, "There was something fierce in his labor; he tolerated nothing that interfered with his work and by his will he was driven into strange places, and made great demands on the powers of a body that was willing and very strong. He had it in him to be intemperate and fanatic almost were it not that he was kept gentle in all things by his persistent habits of prayer."[4]

Peter's induction into the Methodist ministry was involuntary. He and his brother continued to attend the Anglican church until the minister objected to their going to Methodist meetings, at which point they left and joined the local Methodist Society. Here Peter revealed unexpected powers of exhortation and preaching in class meetings – the early Methodist version of support groups, in which a dozen or so members met to discuss their spiritual life and to buck

up those who were backsliding. Peter became a class leader, but, conscious of his lack of education and his thick North-of-England accent, resisted suggestions that he consider the ministry. He did agree to become a lay local preacher, however, giving sermons in outlying churches when the minister could not be present. So successful was he that in 1859, at the age of twenty-seven, he accepted his fate and became a candidate for the ministry.

Then came the difficult task of getting educated for the position. At that time spiritual gifts were esteemed more highly than formal education in a Methodist preacher, and there was no requirement for a theological degree or, indeed, any means of obtaining one in Canada. Nevertheless, applicants for a probationary position had to demonstrate a reasonable general education on a high-school level, as well as some knowledge of biblical and ancient history and Methodist doctrine. Once accepted as a probationer, they were assigned to a circuit where, for several years, they trained under the supervision of an experienced minister and studied the theology, biblical work, church history, moral philosophy, languages, and literature on which they would be examined by their conference before being ordained.[5] At first, Peter continued to farm while studying English grammar and Latin and preaching; eventually, he spent two academic years at the Wesleyan Methodist Victoria College in Cobourg (1862–64). The college, not wishing to risk its government grants by any appearance of sectarianism, was still innocent of a theological faculty or even of courses in theology.[6] Nonetheless, it did give Peter a grounding in metaphysics, morals, logic, chemistry, Latin, and Greek[7] and instilled in him a love of books that he passed on to his daughter; in fact, in later years, his theological collection was superb. In 1864, Peter was received into full communion and ordained.

This was the time of the Methodist itinerancy, when ministers spent a maximum of three years in one place and then were moved on; their ministerial year began on 1 July and ran to the following 30 June. As a probationer, Peter served for a year each at Belmont (near his home at Avon), and at the even less settled outposts of Durham (a village in Grey County with only sixty Methodists) and St. Vincent (a township on Georgian Bay). After ordination he went to the larger and more settled Bradford (1864–65). Methodist ministers in the early days were also itinerant in the sense that they travelled widely in the course of their duties. Assigned to a "circuit" that consisted of up to fifteen scattered appointments or preaching places – some of which were staffed by local preachers in the minister's absence – they were expected to visit them all in regular rotation. Often a minister would spend two weeks away from home covering