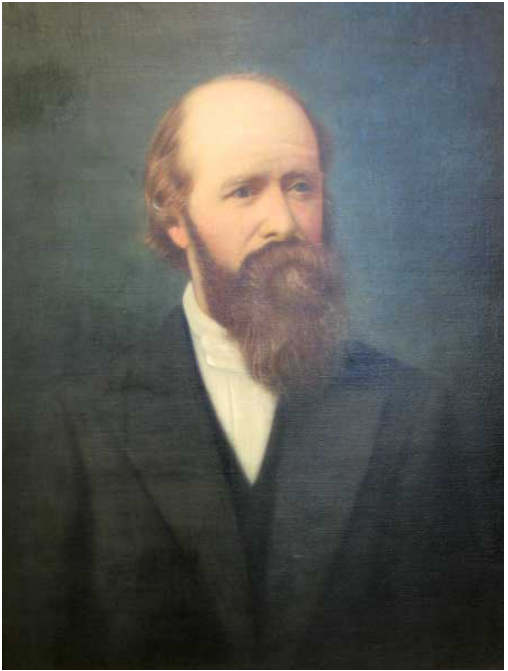

Biographies

Dr. John Crawford

The life and losses of a missionary pioneer

Aaron Dunlop



John Crawford (1819-1892)

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Prologue: Appraising the life of John Crawford

There are two men who loom large in the story of Baptist theological education in Canada. These men were born within forty miles of each other in the northwest of Ireland and emigrated to pre-confederation Canada. Although there is no extant direct communication, it is very likely that these men met and interacted in their lifetime. The point of contact however, between these two men was Dr. Robert Alexander Fyfe (1816-1878) a prominent Baptist pastor, educator and owner of the *Canadian Baptist* paper. Both these men were close to Fyfe, and under his influence were instrumental in realising Fyfe's dream for an institution of theological education in Canada. One man, who had no university education, and with "self-made" fortunes endowed huge sums of money to the denomination to establish a great and illustrious institution that to this day bears his name. This was Senator William McMaster (1811-1887).¹

McMaster was born in the market town of Omagh, Co. Tyrone of modest but comfortable heritage. He was converted to Christ in 1821, and it is believed he joined the Baptist church that was established in

¹ Peter Beck, William McMaster 1811-1887, in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America. The Canadians*, (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2019), 12:227-241.

Camowen, just outside the town of Omagh. McMaster was educated by a Mr. Halco, who received his training at the Education Society in Kildare Street, Dublin. Whether Halco was hired as a private tutor or was teaching in the town of Omagh is unclear, or perhaps McMaster attended school in the village of Seskinore, about seven miles south of Omagh, as we know Halco was teaching there in a small but well attended school in 1830. McMaster sailed for the New World from Londonderry on a ship called the *Hawksbury* and arrived in New York on August 9th, 1833. Within ten years he had relocated to Toronto and in 1844 opened a dry goods wholesale business and made his fortune. He would later be the founding president of the Canada Bank of Commerce and from 1867 until his death, he sat in the Senate of Canada. McMaster died in 1887 and was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto.

The other man, born in Castledawson, emigrated to Canada from Cork in 1857, in the wake of the Great Famine. After a series of successful pastorates and a twelve-year professorship in the Canadian Literary Institute in Woodstock, he took hold of Fyfe's vision for the developing North-West Territories, and with old money, although a modest amount, he invested his family fortune in a denominational institution in Manitoba, called

Prairie College—the first footprint of Baptist theological education in the West and the forerunner of what became Brandon University. The project failed however, and he lost everything, died a broken-hearted man five years after McMaster, and was buried in an unmarked grave in the same cemetery. His name—Dr. John Crawford (1819-1892)—is almost forgotten.

How do we appraise the life and losses of John Crawford?

Until his death, Crawford was convinced of the validity and value of his Prairie College venture and comforted himself in the truth that God's *"providences are often mysterious. 'His way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known.'"*² His youngest daughter Isabel however, who experienced the crushing losses along with her father, did not evaluate the situation in the same way. "Any man," she wrote,³

"taking a delicate wife and family into the wild, woolly and frozen new West after he is sixty years of age must be one of three

² David W. Remus, *The Canadian Baptist*, August 1st, 1967 (113, No. 14), 18.

³ C.C. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, (Calgary: Self-published, 1939), 293.

things; either he is money crazy or plain crazy or is under the guidance of God Almighty for some special purpose. If God did not call John Crawford to go into Manitoba and open Prairie College, then the man was as crazy as a loon, for he never cared for money! And I am his daughter! ... Sometimes the wisdom of man is put in the place of divine guidance and the work of the Kingdom is hindered."

Isabel seems to conflate *personal failure in the Christian's life* with *circumstantial failure in the life of a Christian* and conclude that the Kingdom of God was hindered by the collapse of Prairie College. Subsequent historiography, however, has attempted to recover Crawford's credibility, vindicate his vision, acknowledge his labours and understand his place in Irish and Canadian Baptist History.⁴ The following is my contribution.

⁴ Although no formal biography has been published on John Crawford, mention is made of him in several works. C.C. Laurin, in his *Pioneering in Western Canada*, dedicates a few pages to Crawford. David W. Remus, *Baptist Biographies*, The Canadian Baptist, August 1, 1967 (113, No. 14), 9, 18. Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *Prairie College, Rapid City, Manitoba: The Failed Dream of John Crawford*, in *Historical Papers 2013: Canadian Society of Church History*, 85-97. Tommy McCleod, "To Bestir Themselves:" Canadian Baptists and the Origins of Brandon College, Manitoba History, Number 56, (October 2007). http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56/brandoncollege.shtml.

The Early Years

John Crawford was born in December 1819, in the Northwest of Ireland. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, but according to the church records he was baptised on Friday, December 24, 1819, by Rev. Solomon Brown, of Castledawson Presbyterian Church. At the time of his birth the family was living in Rosegift, in the parish of Ballyscullion, just north of the village of Castledawson, about forty miles south-east of Derry (Londonderry).

Originating in Lanarkshire, Scotland, the name Crawford is first recorded in the latter half of the 12th century, coming from the Old English *crawe* meaning 'crow'. The Crawfords came to Ireland in the 17th century as part of the Plantation initiative under the reign of James I of England. It seems they settled first in the Ballymena area and later moved west, leasing land of another Plantation family, the Dawson's, who had settled close to the River Moyola and established what is now the village of Castledawson. By the early 18th century, the Crawford's were well established in the Castledawson area acquiring real estate and by the end of the century Samuel Crawford had established a flax mill and was a successful linen-merchant. His grandson Hugh was born in the townland of Moyola, Castledawson in 1788. The

Crawfords were loyal to the British crown, four Crawfords are recorded as defenders of Derry during the famous Siege of Derry in 1689. Later during the troubled years of the United Irishmen (1791-1804), Hugh served as a Second Lieutenant in a Corps of Yeomanry known as The Bellaghy Rangers, a local militia set up as peacekeepers to protect British interests in Ireland, under the command of his brother, Samuel David Crawford.

In June 1812, Hugh Crawford married Miss Frances Brown, the granddaughter of a respected Presbyterian minister, Rev. Thomas Brown. Hugh and Francis maintained their presbyterian heritage; the Westminster Shorter Catechism was memorised from beginning to end and Sabbaths were strictly observed. Of their seven children, two of which died in their youth, five daughters and one son, John, survived to adulthood. The Crawford's home was, it seems, a comfortable and happy home, and, as John recalled "I used to spend a good deal of my time in galloping after a pack of hounds."⁵ He was a willing and able student with an aptitude for learning and he was sent to board at the Belfast Academy (now Belfast Royal Academy),

⁵ Cited in Edmund Sheppard, Ed., *Debate on the Points of Difference in Faith and Practice Between the two religious Bodies Known as the Disciples of Christ and regular Baptists; Embracing the Subject of Calvinism and the Design of Baptism*, (Alymer: Disciples of Christ, 1875), 26.

where he sat under the tutelage of Rev. Dr. R.J. Bryce.

It was in Belfast, as a teenager of fourteen or fifteen, that Crawford heard the preaching of Dr. Alexander Carson (c.1776-1849). Like Crawford, Carson was from Co. Tyrone and of Scottish Presbyterian ancestry. He had been ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1798 but in May of 1805, convinced of Baptist principles, he left the Presbyterian Church and planted a Baptist witness in Tobermore. Carson's departure from the Presbyterian Church was at a time when that Church was struggling with serious theological division, and, as one historian put it, "required the presence of an ecclesiastical reformer." The loss of Carson was lamented by many within the Presbyterian Church as the denomination "could ill afford to lose such an able and intrepid theologian."⁶ After some years of preaching in barns and in the open air, a small Baptist meeting house was built in 1814, where Carson laboured for the next thirty years, gathering around him a congregation of informed and zealous believers which was "an honourable testimony to the fruitfulness of his ministry."⁷

⁶ James S. Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1853), 3.527-528.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.527.

Carson was well known for his piety and scholarship and his influence extended far beyond Tobermore. By the mid-1800s three churches had come into being through his ministry; Tobermore (1804), Grange (1811), and Carndaisy (1814). A further eleven churches in Co. Tyrone, including the church that McMaster appears to have attended in Camowen, were established in the early 19th century—some of them “may have owed something to the influence of Carson.”⁸ Further south, in the capital, “it is a singular fact, that a large proportion of the Scripture-readers belonging to the Dublin City Mission were, at one period drawn from the congregation of Dr. Carson of Tobermore.”⁹

Carson’s influence would extend eventually to Canada, for it was under his ministry, that young John Crawford was converted to Christ, sometime in the early 1830s. The chronology of events is unclear, but he had heard Carson preach in Belfast, and the story goes that one evening, Crawford rode his donkey the seven miles from his home in Castledawson to the Baptist Church in Tobermore, where he was examined for membership, and

⁸ D. P. Kingdon, *Baptist Evangelism in 19th Century Ireland*, (Belfast: Baptist Union of Ireland, 1965), 17.

⁹ James S. Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1853), 3.527, footnote 77.

despite the lateness of the hour, the congregation filled the baptistry and Crawford went under the waters of baptism. It was a bold move for the teenager brought up in a Presbyterian home, and it came as a great disappointment to his father. When he returned home that evening with the news of his baptism, his father withdrew his promise of a university education, disinherited him, put him out of the home, and mockingly dubbed him "John the Baptist."¹⁰

Crawford fell back on the generosity of Baptist friends in Tobermore, and especially on Dr. Carson who took him into his home and tutored him for two years. It seems that he remained in Tobermore for some time working in a farm and in brick-making factory. But Carson's tutelage had prepared him well for further studies in Edinburgh University and later in Stepney College. A minute of the Stepney College Committee meeting on January 11th, 1848, confirms his private tutelage and his time in Edinburgh University. He had made application to Stepney College and was admitted in 1848 for a period twelve months in preparation

¹⁰ Doris Cline Ward, *Cline Family History Vol. 4: The Ancestry of Emily (Crawford) Cline*, 28. Unpublished material, Grimsby Historical Society, Grimsby Ontario, 43.

for the Baptist ministry in England. "Of the seventeen students," the college report read,¹¹

"with whom the session closed, one, Mr Crawford, leaves the college, his residence was but for a short time and under peculiar circumstances. The post he is about to occupy, is at Lea, near Blackheath, where there is a prospect of establishing a new church. [sic]"

Ministry England & Ireland

Crawford had spent some time in missionary work, possibly before Stepney College, on the streets of London and in a chapel at Clerkenwell, County Middlesex, street preaching and helping the needy. However, in 1849 he moved to Lee, in the south of London, where he planted a Baptist church on High Road, and in November of 1853, laid the cornerstone of a new Baptist Chapel. He continued his studies with the Society of Science, Literature and Art, and on August 11th, 1854, he received an award from the Society.

It was while in London that he met Miss Sarah Louisa Hackett. Sarah was born in Drogheda, Ireland on July 12th, 1821, the second of eighteen

¹¹ *The Report of the Committee of the Baptist College at Stepney for 1849*, 14–15. Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

children born to Thomas Hackett and Mary Anne Fogarty. The Hackett's were members of the episcopalian Church of Ireland, and their home boasted twenty-one servants. The children were educated by private tutors, and Sarah who spoke several languages, was able to quote extensively from Shakespeare and Milton, and was adept in fine needlework. Following the death of her parents, Sarah moved to England to live with her cousin, a physician in Islington. Crawford married Miss Hackett on June 15th, 1853, in Vernon Baptist Chapel, Kings Cross, London (now Kings Cross Baptist Church). The ceremony was conducted by Rev. William H. Murch (1784-1859), one-time president and the Theological Chair at Stepney College where Crawford had studied. It was there in London also, that their first daughter, Emily Augusta was born on April 9th, 1854.

In November 1854, Crawford declined the request from another Baptist Chapel, possibly in Wales.¹² He had been five years in Lee and had showed an interest also in the Baptist church in Cork. One report from 1852 records an address for him in Cork, Ireland. The interest in Cork had evidently been developed and on December 27th, 1854, the church at Lee met for a valedictory "social tea-

¹² *The Baptist Messenger*, No. 8, (November 1854), 127.

meeting," and gifted Crawford with a purse of fifty guineas, as he was leaving for Cork.¹³ The situation in the Cork Baptist Church in the 1850s was quite dire. First, the broader problem of mass emigration from Ireland in the aftermath of the Great Famine (1845-1852), which had diminished the Baptist cause across Ireland at a time. Between 1815 and 1845 half a million Irish immigrants landed on the shores of British North America, and thousands more would follow in the wake of the famine. A report in the Baptist Magazine in 1857 read,¹⁴

"It is well known that the congregations and churches gathered in Ireland have been greatly diminished and weakened by the emigration of many of the Irish people during the last years. In this respect the mission to Ireland has probably suffered more than any mission to *Heathen* lands [sic]."

A second difficulty related specifically to the situation in the Cork Baptist Church. In 1819 the congregation proposed to call an assistant for Mr. Richards had been pastoring in Cork for fifty-five years. Richards opposed the move because the man that the church had in mind was a Calvinist

¹³ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLVII, March 1855, 160.

¹⁴ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLIX, December 1857, 799.

and Richards was Arminian. Evidently Richards left soon after and between 1820 and 1852 the Church processed at least five pastors. One writer summarised the situation in the 1850s and 60s as "most difficult."¹⁵

There were financial, doctrinal, practical and personal problems. The long standing problem of 'open' or 'closed' communion was again thrashed out, also the frequency of observing the Lord's supper - each Lord's day or once a month. Services were suspended on a number of occasions ...

By the mid-1850s then, the church in Cork had been reduced to a few believers who were "thoroughly discouraged and the place of worship was shut up."¹⁶ Rev. C.T. Keen, who was pastoring in Lambeth, England at the time, appealed to the Committee to return to his native Cork as an evangelist and assist the struggling church there. As it happened however, Keen's health broke and he was forced to return to England. Crawford went for two months to assist Keen.

During his two months in Cork, Crawford enjoyed a fruitful ministry, with the conversion and baptism of

¹⁵ H. D. Gribbon, *The Cork Church Book 1653-1875*, Journal of the Irish Baptist Historical Society, Vol. 1 (1968-69), 16.

¹⁶ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLVII, May 1855, 305.

a young Englishmen. The congregation showed signs of increase and Crawford was asked to continue his ministry there. Initial reports reveal growth and a consolidation of the work that had been diminishing. He wrote for the Baptist Magazine.¹⁷

"I am happy to say, that although I cannot speak of rapid progress, we are gaining ground, and acquiring the confidence of the people, so that I have just been informed that some Baptists, who have hitherto stood aloof, are talking of returning to Marlborough Street. I may add that nothing has ever occurred to hinder the harmony and Christian love which has from the first characterized our union.

In order that you may be able to form an idea of our attendance, I may say that the congregation on last Sabbath morning numbered thirty-six, and that in the evening thirty-two ... Now, although these numbers are small, they are, I believe, about double what they were at the commencement of the year, Besides, the congregations are now of a more

¹⁷ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLVII, October 1855, 638.

permanent character. At first, they were mainly composed of persons who came through mere curiosity to hear the new preacher; whereas now, the majority are persons who are in regular attendance."

In the fall of 1855, four candidates came forward for baptism and fellowship, one of them was Crawford's own wife Sarah, who had to this point not been convinced of believer's baptism. He reported also that Mrs Crawford had been conducting classes in their home, but these classes would be transferred to the church for the establishment of a Sunday School. A library also, although small, was established for the benefit of the congregation, to which friends from his former church in Lee contributed.

Under Crawford's leadership, the church in Cork experienced growth and it seemed that brighter days were ahead. Miss Crosbie was sent as a missionary to assist Crawford, teaching in the public schools and visiting parents and children. In addition to the weekly prayer meeting on Wednesday night, Crawford conducted a Bible class on Monday evening, followed by a lecture or exposition, which was in turn followed by a gathering of the young people to practice hymn singing. Crawford took considerable interest in the

congregational singing and was assisted by a young man from England, meeting after the Sunday evening service also. One report stated that "in no place of worship in Ireland have I ever heard better voices or more correct singing than in our chapel here. I have likewise been cheered and comforted by the manner in which members of the church, pious, devoted men, assist and take part in the various meetings for prayer."¹⁸

Other meetings were also arranged in a private house outside the city at which people from all denominations gathered, including some Roman Catholics. Initially this was held every two weeks, but the success of it demanded a weekly meeting. A monthly meeting in the Church was also arranged for a social tea-meeting. Miss. Crosbie reported, the "steady improvement of our various undertakings," and the "affectionate and efficient co-operation of Mr. Crawford in every work of usefulness attempted here."¹⁹

A report in the February 1857 issue of *The Baptist Magazine*, indicated that Crawford was intending to reach out beyond the city. Indeed, he had already begun a substation in James Square, to the

¹⁸ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLVIII, February 1856, 114.

¹⁹ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLVIII, October 1856, 630.

south of the city. However, just a few months later, in May 1857 he had informed the Committee of his intent to move from Cork—his labours in Cork would “close by Midsummer next [sic]”²⁰ What occasioned this move is unclear. His mother had died the previous year, and he was living in a context in which mass emigration was a permanent way of life, especially in the wake of the Great Famine (1849-1854). Post-famine emigration continued for the remainder of the nineteenth century as the last waves of Irish men and women escaped the economic difficulties of Ireland and sought fresh opportunities in the New World.²¹ At any rate, this was the context in which the Crawfords made the decision to emigrate to Canada. They had sold their wedding gifts to finance their passage, and no-doubt sailed from Londonderry, for it was there that their second daughter Frances Louise was born in July 1857.

Ministry in Ontario

On arriving in Canada, Crawford left his wife and two daughters in Halifax in the care of friends from the First Baptist Church. He travelled further to

²⁰ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLXIX, May 1857, 327.

²¹ In the post-famine migration, between 1856 and 1921, when the south of Ireland broke with Britain and became the Irish Free State, 3.6 million emigrants left the shores of Ireland. Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and Irish Exodus to North America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 346.

Toronto where he preached in Bond Street Baptist Church for Dr. Fyfe. For few months he preached around Ontario in search of a church that had the means to pay a salary, which he found in Cheltenham, a few miles north of Toronto. The Cheltenham Baptist Church began as a Sunday School in 1837 and was officially organised in 1844 in a local schoolhouse. The building was constructed in 1851 when services were offered in Gaelic and in English. On June 1st, 1858, Crawford accepted the call to the joint pastorate of Cheltenham and Georgetown Baptist Churches and proved himself an able and acceptable preacher.

The arrangement of a joint pastorate proved unsatisfactory from the beginning, as it meant a change of service times for the Cheltenham congregation. In May 1859 Crawford announced that he had been invited to take charge of a congregation in Hamilton and would be moving there in June. His pastorate there lasted only a short time, however, and hearing that Crawford had resigned his Hamilton charge, the membership at Cheltenham called a special meeting on September 5th, 1860, and voted to invite him back to be their pastor. He returned to Cheltenham then, in December 1860, with a grant

of \$100 for one year from the "Regular Baptist Missionary Convention."²²

In 1859 Sarah gave birth to a baby boy, Hugh Frederick, and a year later a little girl, Edith, who died in infancy. Details of Crawford's time in Cheltenham are scanty, but the church was growing and one report states that with the help of the Church he built a log house for his family. Crawford was well liked, enthusiastic, with a large degree of humour and optimism. Life, however, was more difficult for his cultured wife, who had not grown-up learning domestic skills, like washing clothes and housekeeping. She had to learn also to be thrifty, especially so in 1863 when the congregation was struggling to pay the pastor's salary, and her husband released his congregation from the burden and decided rather to "trust to providence" the welfare of his family.²³

The Move to Theological Education

Crawford was, by all accounts an able and popular pastor in Upper Canada in the 1850s and 60s. In 1867 he was sought out by Dr. Fyfe to teach in the Canadian Literary Institute (CLI). Fyfe had

²² Bert Radford, *Cheltenham Baptist Church 1844-2019: 175 Years in his Service*, (Cheltenham Baptist Church, 2004), 10.

²³ *Ibid.*

established the CLI in Woodstock, in 1860, and his position as principal, his teaching duties and the burden of fundraising proved too heavy for one man, and Fyfe was given permission by the trustees to seek out John Crawford as professor of Old and New Testament and Hebrew, at a suggested salary of \$650 a year.

Crawford had met Fyfe when he first arrived in Canada. "He was my first friend in Canada," Crawford said, "I preached my second sermon in Canada in his pulpit in this city," Bond Street Baptist Church, Toronto (now Jarvis Street Baptist).²⁴ Since that first meeting, through eleven years as co-labourers in CLI, Crawford had a close relationship and could say at his funeral, "he has been my best friend."²⁵

Crawford's passion, however, was for preaching and not education, and Fyfe's attempts to secure him for the college were repelled at first. It took three trips to Cheltenham before Crawford could be convinced that by joining the faculty at the CLI he would be preaching through every graduate from the college—which was no small influence. Fyfe said, "already from Montreal to Sarnia, and

²⁴ James Edward Wells, *Life and Labours of Robert Alexander Fyfe*, (Toronto: W. J. Gage, n.d), 443.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

from Owen Sound to Long Point, we do not think a speaker could address a considerable congregation of Baptists, without addressing at least one who had been a pupil of the Institute, and who is its warm friend."²⁶ In the end, Crawford accepted the Chair of Church History and Biblical Interpretation and in September 1867, resigned his charge in Cheltenham and moved to Woodstock, ON. On October 28th, 1868, he was received into membership of the First Baptist Church, Woodstock, along with his wife. He would remain at the CLI for twelve years working, as Fyfe's biographer put it "assiduously and harmoniously with Dr. Fyfe until the latter's death."²⁷

The Crawfords time at Woodstock was their most settled and perhaps their happiest. His father had died in 1872, and in the end he reneged on shutting his son out of his inheritance. In 1866 he rewrote his will naming John as the executor and the beneficiary of his entire estate, with a life lease given to his third wife and widow Jane. At some point in the early 1870s Crawford made his final trip to Ireland to settle his father's estate, and on his returned settled comfortably in Woodstock in a

²⁶ J. Stephen Yuille, *Robert A. Fyfe 1816-1878*, in *A Noble Company: The Canadians*, (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2019), 12.253

²⁷ James Edward Wells, *Life and Labours of Robert Alexander Fyfe*, (Toronto: W. J. Gage, n.d), 343.

beautiful suburban bungalow boasting a large porch stretched along the front and secluded behind a well-manicured garden, and an annual salary of \$600.00. He had time to study, and as a keen bibliophile had built a respectable private library. On one occasion, when Dr. Fyfe was travelling in England, he wrote to the offices at CLI, and remarking how his colleagues would react when they see the books he had bought for the college. He mentioned Crawford particularly. "As for Dr. Crawford ... I fear he will forget even his meals when he gets among them."²⁸

His abilities as a debater were also recognised in September 1874, when he was requested to take up a challenge by the Disciples of Christ, or "Campbellites." The controversy arose between pastor George Holmes of Alymer, ON, and Mr. Shepperd of the Disciples of Christ on the "spiritual influences in conversion."²⁹ Shepperd threw down the challenge and Holmes accepted. Holmes, however, solicited the help of Professor Crawford, and they moved quickly, set the date and location and took control of the whole affair—according to his opponent, Elder John S. Sweeney, "rather

²⁸ Ibid, 430.

²⁹ Edmund Sheppard, Ed., *Debate on the Points of Difference in Faith and Practice Between the two religious Bodies Known as the Disciples of Christ and regular Baptists; Embracing the Subject of Calvinism and the Design of Baptism*, (Alymer: Disciples of Christ, 1875), 23.

arbitrarily, not to say arrogantly, extending but the courtesy of ten days previous notice to my brethren."³⁰ In a letter from Woodstock, dated, August 29th, 1874, Crawford laid out the position he would be defending in five points.³¹ During the debate he spoke clearly and unequivocally but respectably and cordially over the course of three days—Thursday, 10th to Saturday 13th, September 1874, in the village of Springfield, Elgin County, ON. Crawford gave fourteen addresses and his opponent, John S. Sweeny, of Paris, Kentucky, gave corresponding replies. The entire debate was recorded by a stenographer and later published by the Disciples of Christ, under the title of "Calvinism and the Design of Baptism," with a preface by Prof. Crawford.³² This is the only extant material we have, and it shows his abilities not just as a debater, and communicator, but his alacrity with the text of Scripture as he interacted with the nuances of theological thought, biblical exegesis and linguistics. It is no wonder that the following year, the University of Acadia conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *causa honoris*.

³⁰ Ibid, 26.

³¹ See Appendix 2: Prof. Crawford's Debate with the Disciples of Christ.

³² Ibid, 11.

A Vision for the Prairies

When Crawford began his work with the CLI in September 1867, Canada had, just two months previously, become the Dominion of Canada (July 1st, 1867). Less than one hundred years earlier, explorers like Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser and David Thompson had opened the west followed first by fur traders and then by waves of European settlers. By the mid-1800s pockets of settlers had developed in the North-West Territories and a period of explosive expansion was about to dawn. In 1870, the area around what was known as the Red River Settlement entered Confederation and became the Province of Manitoba.

By the 1880s then, Manitoba and the North-West Territories, and indeed the Provinces further west were wide-open mission fields. Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists and the Roman Catholic Church had all made gains on the prairies and were well established, but Baptist movement into this vast region, was noticeably and regretfully sluggish. One man however, had a vision for the Prairies, and no one was more influential in the development of both Baptist missions and theological education in than Robert A. Fyfe. He was known as "a man of action, of indomitable

courage, not lightly diverted from any purpose on which he had set his heart.”³³

On December 1st, 1855, a letter appeared in *The Christian Messenger* signed simply by “F.” The letter, titled “A Proposal,” flew in the face of the prevailing sentiments of the Baptist leadership at that time, addressed the need for a denominational institute of higher education. This letter was later discovered to have been written by Dr. Fyfe himself and it was the seed of what would later become the CLI, which opened in September 1860. But Fyfe’s vision was bigger than Upper Canada. He had in his mind also the North-West Territories. At a meeting of the Home Mission Convention of Ontario, held in Aylmer in April 1869, Fyfe proposed that a delegation of two men be sent to the North-West to survey the possibilities of a mission there. Two months later, on June 12th, 1869, Revs. Thomas Baldwin of Ingersoll and Thomas Davidson of Aylmer were sent out to the Red River Settlement. On their return they reported to the Baptist Missionary Convention meeting held in Woodstock. The report was lengthy and detailed, including an account of the soil, climate,

³³ “Sketch of the Educational Work of the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec During the last Half Century,” *Baptist Year Book*, 1900, 252. Cited in Tommy McCleod, “To Bestir Themselves:” Canadian Baptists and the Origins of Brandon College, in the *Gazette*, October 2007, No. 56, 24.

politics and religion, and concluded with an account of their own labours and their recommendations. "We would not recommend to the Convention," they said, "to send a missionary for the sake of the present inhabitants." According to their recommendations, a missionary would be sent on the provision that "a colony of Baptist families would unite, move and settle together, in the great North-West."³⁴

Fyfe would not be deterred by the Baldwin-Davidson report and two years later, at the October 1872 Convention, Fyfe made another appeal for a mission to Manitoba. This time he came prepared with a man willing to offer himself for the mission—Alexander McDonald, an alumnus of the CLI. McDonald, who would become known as *Pioneer McDonald*, was subsequently sent out as the first missionary to the North-West Territories in 1873, "cordially approved," but not officially commissioned by the Convention.³⁵ Within the next few months *Pioneer McDonald* would discover how difficult it was not just to secure funding for the mission, but also to convince missionary personal to join him. Although there is no indication that he was directly involved, Crawford's position in

³⁴ C. C. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, (Calgary: Self-published, 1939), 38.

³⁵ Harry A. Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story in Canada*, (Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988), 172.

Woodstock at the CLI and his membership with the First Baptist Church there, would no doubt have brought him into close connection with the ongoing discussion around the mission to Manitoba and the North-West.

Simultaneous to the developing vision for the North-West, throughout the 1870s, discussion had been ongoing concerning the school in Woodstock and the desire to centralise Baptist theological education in Toronto, the political and economic capital of the province. Fyfe had resisted this move and pleaded that any transfer to Toronto be put in abeyance until after his death. When Fyfe died in 1878 then, the way was open to raise the discussion again and ultimately for the transition of the theological department from Woodstock to Toronto. Among those in favour of the transition were some of the most influential among the Baptists at that time, William McMaster, the chief benefactor and his pastor Rev. John Castles. Influenced by such powerful luminaries in the denomination, and the promise of a very generous endowment from McMaster, Baptist leaders were convinced. On July 17th, 1879, after a lengthy meeting held in the First Baptist Church in Guelph, the leadership of the denomination voted to move the theological department of CLI to Toronto and to establish Toronto Baptist College (TBC), which

would later become McMaster University and move to Hamilton.

The change of circumstances, however, did not fit Crawford's vision, and on July 28th, 1879, eleven days after the Guelph meeting, Crawford submitted his resignation. He wrote:³⁶

According to the resolution passed at the meeting lately held in Guelph, it will be necessary for one of the present staff of professors in the theological department to retire, in order to make room for the forthcoming president.

After mature & prayerful deliberation, it is my desire to vacate the position I have occupied for the last twelve years. I beg, therefore, to be released from the duties of my office at the close of the first quarter in the coming collegiate year. If, however it may be thought necessary to make such arrangements as will supply my place from the commencement of the year, I will, nevertheless, expect to receive one quarter's salary. This latter arrangement

³⁶ Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *Prairie College, Rapid City, Manitoba: The Failed Dream of John Crawford*, Historical Papers 2013: Canadian Society of Church History, 88.

would, of course, suit me best, as I could, under such circumstances, proceed at once to seek other employment.

Crawford had caught Fyfe's vision for the Prairies and the needs of the settlers without pastors, scattered across western Canada. The needs of these settlements had been much on Crawford's mind, and he said, "called forth my Christian sympathies."³⁷ Later that year, at his own expense, Crawford traveled to Manitoba where he met *Pioneer McDonald* who helped him survey the situation. Having covered over 3000 miles, he returned enthused at the possibility of opening a college in Rapid City, on the survey of the transcontinental railroad that was then under construction. Crawford believed that the spiritual needs of the settlers on the frontiers could not be met or sustained by a missionary society from a distance—those who would administer the "ordinances of the gospel in this new country must be men able and willing to support themselves pretty much by their own labour, with a little assistance from their churches."³⁸ He was convinced also that he could establish a literary and theological school on a model of "collective

³⁷ John Crawford, *The Canadian Baptist*, October 9th, 1879.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

homesteading" in which the students would contribute to build the college, cultivate the land, and provide for the continued support of the college as payment in kind for their tuition, and he knew of four other schools in America that had developed on the same model.³⁹ Indeed, he said, "some are of opinion that it can be made more than self-sustaining."⁴⁰

At the October meeting of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, held in St. Catherines, Crawford gave an impassioned plea for the "pre-occupation of the Province [of Manitoba]."⁴¹ Like McDonald before him, his proposal was rejected but he was given leave to raise support among the churches. A Prairie College Missionary Society was formed with the following objectives.⁴²

(1) To educate young men of piety and ability, as pioneer ministers of the gospel in the Regular Baptist denomination, and to assist them in first settling. (2) To give a secular education adapted to the wants of the country, to young persons of both sexes. (3). To supply books to graduating students

³⁹ Walter E. Ellis, "Baptist Missions Adaptation to the Western Frontier" in *Canadian Baptist History and Polity*, ed. Murray J. S. Ford (McMaster Divinity College, 1982), 173.

⁴⁰ John Crawford, *The Canadian Baptist*, October 9th, 1879.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, October 23rd, 1879.

⁴² Cited in David W. Remus, *Baptist Biographies*, *The Canadian Baptist*, August 1st, 1967 (113th year, No. 14), 9.

and also Bibles and religious tracts for gratuitous distribution.

That same month, October 9th, 1879, his plan for the college was laid out on the front page of *The Canadian Baptist*, covering more than half the page. The piece was titled, *Manitoba and the North-West Territory: their spiritual wants and how they are to be supplied*.⁴³

I propose then to procure a section of land about six hundred and forty acres or one mile square in the neighbourhood of Rapid City, in the North-West Territory, about 150 miles west of Winnipeg. On this farm I would establish a college for training young men for the ministry, who, in the busy season would work about two thirds of their time on the farm and devote the other third to study, and, in the winter, most of their time would be given to study when there would be little to do on the farm, and when the weather would be most conducive to mental application. For the labour of the theological students each would receive his board and education free, also a moderate allowance for clothes. On this farm most of the provisions consumed in the college would be raised and a considerable surplus for sale.

⁴³ John Crawford, *The Canadian Baptist*, October 9th, 1879.

There would be no regular vacation for the whole school, but provision would be made for allowing single students and teachers and single classes occasional holidays, so that neither the regular business of the farm or college would at any time be interrupted.

Rapid City was chosen for several reasons. First, for part of the year a steamboat ran within 17 miles of Rapid City and the new railroad was surveyed to pass through there. Furthermore, it is a dry and healthy location, with good farming soil, clay for bricks, gravel for the foundation, stone of the roads and for the proposed cladding for the building. It was also a well-watered region with ponds, lakes, natural springs and rivers, and a good supply of timber. It was also closer to the coal beds than Winnipeg, with a constant supply of coal for the winter.

Among the first students, Crawford insisted that there must be one who has experience in building and who can oversee the construction of the building; the students must be men of genuine piety and good physical constitution, men accustomed to physical labour and not afraid to work with head or hands. Crawford himself had experience, both in agriculture and construction.

He said, *"when a mere lad, I had the sole management of a considerable sized farm and a brickyard for over two years, and I have taken a good deal of interest in agricultural matters ever since."*⁴⁴

The first building would be no larger than the school requires, and they would be constructed in such a way as to be able to add to them without interrupting or demolishing the original buildings. With this plan in mind, Crawford had secured the help of a former CLI student, Rev. George B. Davis, and together they set out across the Province seeking to raise the funds for the new venture. C.C. McLaurin tells of the two men visiting his church in Kemptville, when he drove them around the farms gratefully receiving what money they could secure. When they had raised \$2000 they launched the project. The goal was to be at Rapid City in time to plant the crops for the first year and set about the construction of the college building. In the spring of 1880, then, Davis accompanied the first group, leaving in March for the Prairies when the roads were still firm with frost. The first group consisted of nine students, among them Crawford's son, Hugh, and John E. Davis, George Davis's younger brother. On April 28th, they began to break

⁴⁴ Ibid.

ground and planted 60 acres of oats. Another 100 acres was broken before August. By day they cleared the land, hauled boulders for the building and burnt lime at night. On July 9th, the second party arrived, some by river bringing eleven tons of freight, and some driving the 150 miles from Winnipeg with three horse teams and nine head of cattle.

With two masons and a first-class carpenter in the group of twelve workers, by mid-summer the construction was well underway. On October 1st, the stonework was completed and the three-storey building 28 feet by 34 feet was closed in. The basement would accommodate the large dining room and kitchen. The first level would have three classrooms and living quarters for Crawford and his family, and the second level would have twelve rooms for student accommodation. In early October, a few days after the building was closed in, Crawford arrived with his daughter Emily and two other ladies, one a cook and the other a student. They slept that night in the partially finished building. "It was a cold night," wrote one of the students,⁴⁵

⁴⁵ John E. Davis, *The Life Story of a Leper*, (self-published, 1917), 28.

"and as we lay on the floor, I felt very sorry for the poor old man [Dr. Crawford], for I knew he had always had every comfort and knew nothing of the rough life in the West. The other women went to bed, but Miss Crawford sat in the rocking-chair and cried most of the night."

The college opened that fall with fifteen theological students. Applications were so numerous that many prospective students had to be rejected. Crawford was the principal, Davis the vice-principal, Mr. William Craig was treasurer, and Crawford's two daughters, Emily and Francis (Fanny) also had teaching positions without a salary. The theological program would be a three-year course. Preparatory study was available if students required it, and theological courses were thorough, suited to pioneer work and would provide a foundation if students desired further study in the Toronto Baptist College being established in Ontario. At the beginning of 1881, with classes already underway in Rapid City, Crawford was in Ontario and the Maritimes raising more funds, selling his house and preparing to move his family out. The sale of the house fetched \$4000.00, and with the \$2000.00 raised from the churches, Crawford set out for the Prairies again

early in September with his wife and the two younger daughters.

Writing in *The Canadian Baptist*, Emily had given a positive description of the situation in Rapid City, but it was a harsh existence into which Crawford had brought his family, and the difficulties experienced were immeasurable. Mrs. Crawford, a lady of culture and finesse, and the girls had left their comfortable home in Woodstock and for the first time were "introduced to hard work and 'roughing it.'"⁴⁶ When Mrs. Crawford and the two younger girls arrived in October 1881, and found Emily "in a dirty old dress & a scrubbing pail & mop in her hands," they were shocked and immediately began to cry.⁴⁷ The floor of the college dining room was dirt, and the table was made by driving stakes into the ground and nailing boards to them. During the winter frost would form on the inside of the stone walls.

Despite the difficulties, in that first year, life passed "profitably and cheerfully," and there was an air of optimism.⁴⁸ The college was set on a hill sloping down to the Saskatchewan River with the town of

⁴⁶ Isabel Crawford, *The Heroine of Saddle Mountain*, (Chicago: Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society, 1917), 5.

⁴⁷ Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *More Than I Asked For: The Life of Isabel Crawford*, (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 23.

⁴⁸ E. A. Crawford, *The Canadian Baptist*, March 17th, 1881.

Rapid City on the further banks. At that time Rapid City consisted of 500 inhabitants with 75 houses and 8 stores. In the context, the three-storey stone structure of Prairie College was a rather imposing edifice set among common settler homes of one-room log houses with a garret and a fire. At first there was something "delightfully romantic" about the whole experience, with the old Indian trail worn by the tread of moccasined feet, the long lines of carts and wagons, surveying parties, mounted police and campfires. All of this, Emily wrote, "combined to make the scene one of life and interest."⁴⁹

Crawford's vision was beginning to be realised, the prospect also of a day school, and as he said at the beginning, "my idea is to make the college a *religious centre*" with the intention of planting a church in the area and preaching stations in the neighbourhood.⁵⁰ The students worked the 1,100-acre farm, and were active evangelizing and holding prayer meetings in homes in the outlying areas. A church was organized in Rapid City and five other churches also were being planted through the efforts of the students, who went out two by two each Lord's Day to their preaching

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ John Crawford, *The Canadian Baptist*, October 9th, 1879.

stations and Sunday schools in log cabins around the countryside. Sunday evenings were particularly special, as they returned after their ten, sometimes twenty miles walks, and gathered to pray God's blessing on the day's work.

In that first year it seemed the college would begin to make profits. Crawford's daughter wrote, "that it will be a financial success is not questioned for a moment by the people out here."⁵¹ Baptists in Manitoba and the North-West were beginning to catch the optimism and to take ownership of the project. In 1880, in Crawford's absence they had formed the Red River Association of Regular Baptist Churches. On March 1st, 1882, the name was changed to The Missionary Convention of Manitoba, with seven churches; Winnipeg, Emerson, Stonewall, Portage la Prairie, High Bluff, Glad stone and Rapid City. Crawford and his entire family had invested themselves in the work and in December 1882, he received letters of dismissal from the Frist Baptist Church in Woodstock so that they could officially unite with the Rapid City church. At the March 1882 meeting of the Missionary Convention of Manitoba the Convention resolved:⁵²

⁵¹ E. A. Crawford, *The Canadian Baptist*, March 17th, 1881.

⁵² David W. Remus, *Baptist Biographies, The Canadian Baptist*, August 1st, 1967 (113th year, No. 14), 9.

Having listened with great interest to the able and encouraging report by Dr. Crawford on Prairie College, also to the discussion on the same, resolved that this Convention express its confidence in Dr. Crawford's policy in regard to its management, and that the pastors and officers of this Convention be requested to present the claims of this institution before our various churches so as to secure their sympathy and aid in its support in the shape of an annual collection and subscription, and that the first Lord's Day In November be set apart for this purpose.

By 1883, ten churches had been organised in Manitoba with a membership of over five hundred. But all was not going well at the college. Cracks had appeared as early as May 1881, when Crawford was in the East raising funds. Davis had written to let him know of his intentions of resigning as vice-president, with the plan of establish a secondary school in Rapid City, with his brother-in-law S.J. McKee. In October 1881 then, Crawford returned, hoping to salvage the situation with Davis, but in the end he was forced to accept Davis' resignation, discovering that Davis had made unauthorized sale of college property to gather money for land speculation. In July 1882, the church at Rapid City announced that all

differences had been "amicably settled" between the two men, to the satisfaction of both parties; that the actions of the two men had in no way stained their moral character; that they both wished "to bury the matter forever"; and that they wished "others to do the same."⁵³

However, financial recriminations were not the only issue to rock the project. The harsh climate, crop failure and life on the Prairies brought its own hardships. In the first year, a mink killed all the hens and geese. Half their harvest, also 30 acres of grain were lost by an early frost on September 12th, and for two weeks all hands, women included were forced to work in the fields in an attempt to save the potato harvest. In the winter of 1883 Manitoba endured "perhaps the longest season of incessantly cold weather we have had for at least ten years"—for a whole month the thermometer sat in the -30s and -40s and at one point in Brandon it was recorded a -50.⁵⁴

The most devastating blow to the project in Rapid City was the change of survey for the Canadian Pacific Railroad. The initial survey proposed a route through Rapid City and Crawford had chosen that

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ A. McDonald, *The Canadian Baptist*, February 15th, 1883.

location in part for this reason. As a result of the change of survey, land prices, which had been running high, slumped and the Prairie College property was unsellable. No doubt these natural difficulties and the changing economics could have been overcome. However, underlying the whole project from the beginning was that "Dr. Crawford was receiving very little help from Ontario Baptists."⁵⁵ In the Spring of 1883, he was making plans to travel to England to solicit support. But other forces were at play which would summon the end of the college. Mr. Malchcolm MacVicar of the TBC had arrived in Portage la Prairie to persuade the Manitoba brethren that all theological education should be centralised in Toronto at the TBC. In the end the college had to close, and the Manitoba Missionary Convention issued a resolution declaring their appreciation to Crawford.⁵⁶

We fully recognize and appreciate Dr. Crawford's earnest, faithful, and self-sacrificing labors in connection with this institution, and his singleness of aim, seeking the promotion of God's glory by means of the school of which he was the

⁵⁵ John E. Davis, *The Life Story of a Leper*, (self-published, 1917), 33.

⁵⁶ Cited in David W. Remus, *Baptist Biographies*, *The Canadian Baptist*, August 1st, 1967 (113th year, No. 14), 9, 18

esteemed head: and we would therefore kindly suggest some remuneration from the lands held in the interest of the institution. We also regret to learn from his communication that his health has been greatly impaired through overwork and anxiety and trust he may have such a season of recreation as will fully restore him to his wonted vigor.

Crawford was left with nothing. He and his family had given everything to the college and were now left destitute. His personal library was seized to clear the debt. To add further to his sorrow, his youngest daughter's health had broken, and in the last six month of their time at Prairie College, Isabella was diagnosed with galloping consumption and lay at times in the balances between life and death. The treatment of quinine which saved her life, irreparably damaged her hearing and left her deaf.

The Final Years

The closure of Prairie College was a real test of faith for Crawford, his family, and for the Baptist cause in Manitoba. The American Baptist Home Mission Board came to the aid, giving employment to both *Pioneer McDonald* and Crawford, who

moved to the Dakota Territories. George Davis, also, was supported by the Americans to go Moose Jaw and organized a church there. Crawford received a call from the Baptist church in St. Thomas, in the Dakota Territory, where he enjoyed some success in building up the congregation. He preached in St. Thomas and to a small congregation meeting in a schoolhouse in Glasston, a village six miles north. During the first year especially, life in St. Thomas was difficult. Sarah struggled emotionally and it appears spiritually, "to hold on to her faith in God."⁵⁷ Crawford and his daughter Isabel maintained the house, doing the laundry and cooking. At one point Crawford received word that his salary would be reduced by fifty dollars. This reduced salary was another hard blow, but their pride was further dented when the North Dakota General Missionary wrote "we'll try & make it up to you by sending you a good barrel."⁵⁸ Local churches like the St. Thomas Baptist Church had often collected goods to put in these missionary barrels, to distribute to the poor, and especially among the first Nations—now the Crawford's were the recipients of this charity.

⁵⁷ Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *More Than I Asked For: The Life of Isabel Crawford*, (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

They were able to rent a little two-room shoe-shop with a lean-to for basic accommodation. After a time, they rented something a little more commodious, and Crawford was able to have a dedicated room for his study. Isabel, the youngest relocated to Dakota with her parents. Fanny married a businessman from Toronto. They married in Rapid City before the closure of the College. Hugh had purchased a homestead in Rapid City, and it is unclear if he remained there. In October 1884 the oldest daughter Emily, married William Henry Cline in Toronto. Cline, a Baptist pastor was sympathetic to his father-in-law in the loss of his library, and he paid the seventy-five dollars due to recover it. Back in Dakota, another hardship weighing on the family was their inability to provide a proper education for her as they had for the older children. Around 1885 Isabel was sent to Toronto for schooling, but this proved unsuitable, and she returned in early March 1886. Isabel's return to the home at St. Thomas shines a welcomed ray of light into an otherwise dismal situation. "For six years," she wrote,⁵⁹

night after night, in our simple home, full of books, mother instructed me in the best literature of the ages, had me commit the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

most famous passages of it. At 9. o'clock father came from the study and Bible topics were discussed till bed time ... I never realised till long after they were dead & gone that those wonderful 'home evenings' were more for my special benefit than for their personal pleasure."

In the fall of 1890, with his health beginning to break, Crawford made an extended trip east to Convention meetings in the US and planned to go on to Ontario to visit family. On December 12th, a letter appeared in the *St. Thomas Times*, informing his congregation of his intention to relocate to Ontario—effectively his resignation letter. He wrote,⁶⁰

I would have written to you before this, but my mind has been considerably exercised for some weeks past whether it was not my duty to remain in Ontario. My friends here and my children, are anxious for me to settle in this Province, where I have laboured for some thirty years; and where a large proportion of the Baptist ministers are my old students. Here also my children reside; and it is proper, they say, that my

⁶⁰ Ibid, 36.

*old age should be spent among them.
These and other arguments have been
employed to persuade me to remain here.*

He explained further that lack of funds forbid him returning to St. Thomas to take a more formal leave. Isabel and her mother were left to wind up affairs, but Sarah had to return earlier as her husband had taken more seriously ill. The following year, Crawford accepted a call to Wingham Baptist Church, 100 miles west of Toronto. He was in poor health and Isabel remembers the first meeting, when,⁶¹

*"a deacon gave the right hand of
fellowship to the new pastor, who walked
slowly over ... poor father! I think he knew.
I had never seen him sick in a day in his life
... but at last the cast-iron constitution
collapsed and preaching days were over."*

His pastorate in Wingham lasted only eight months when ill-health forced his resignation. His second daughter, Francis had married a businessman, John Firstbrook, and was living comfortably in Toronto. Crawford's last days were spent in Toronto in the Firstbrook home. His daughter

⁶¹ Ibid, 38.

Isabel was studying in training school in Chicago, at that time a seedbed of theological liberalism. In letters home to her father Isabel kept him up to date with the problems being discussed in the school, and fearing she would lose her faith, his replies were lengthy and designed to bolster her in the faith. Towards the end of May in 1892, Isabel wrote her father, asking him to write out John 3:16 in all the languages he knew. Crawford retired to his room, laid his books out along with the letter in preparation, and lay down to rest before writing. When his wife came up a few minutes later, he had taken ill, did not recognise her and passed on to his reward.

John Crawford died in poverty on June 2, 1892, "a broken-hearted man."⁶² He is buried in an unmarked grave in the Firstbrook lot at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto, Plot V, Section FANCY, Lot 8. His wife died on October 25th, 1897, and was buried with him.

Epilogue: Appraising the legacy of John Crawford

Prairie College was not the only experiment in Canadian Baptist education. In the early-mid

⁶² C. C. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, (Calgary: Self-published, 1939), 293.

nineteenth century, Baptist theological education in Upper and Lower Canada went through a series of failed ventures, like Canada Baptist College in Montreal (1849), and the Maclay College planned for Toronto which was stillborn in 1852. Prairie College would also fail despite pleas for help from the denomination in Ontario and Quebec. Just five months after classes had commenced, in the January 1881 issue of *The Canadian Baptist*, Davis wrote; "financially there hangs over us at present a dark threatening cloud."⁶³ He appealed to the denomination, arguing that the evangelism and missionary work of the students who at the same time were building a college, was "as much missionary work as the Baptist Denomination ever had done in the same time for the same amount of money."⁶⁴

The editor of *The Canadian Baptist* added his own appeal; "we heartily commend the above, from the Vice-President of Prairie College to the sympathy and liberality to all our readers, but especially to our wealthy brethren. If they can read Bro. Davis' statement and appeal without responding, then they had better read a portion of the epistle of James until they do respond."⁶⁵ By the spring of

⁶³ G.B. Davis, *The Canadian Baptist*, January 20th, 1881.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

that year the financial crisis was critical, threatening the closure of the college. A "widow's fund" had been established by a benevolent widow and according to reports this fund was increasing. Then a farmer, responding to the generosity of the widows, came with a proposal to be "one of twenty to give \$50 each to this object [\$1000]."⁶⁶ The editor of the Canadian Baptist wrote, "if farmers think as well of Prairie College as widows do, the outlook for Dr. Crawford's work is promising indeed."⁶⁷ But there was no little amount of frustration at the lack of help from Ontario. One farmer wrote to commend the editor of *The Canadian Baptist* for taking up the interest of Prairie College. The tone of the letter was urgent and aggrieved and indicates some hesitancy if not opposition on the part some in the East. He thanked the editor for his "manly courage" in publishing on the college and stated that Dr. Crawford,⁶⁸

"has not received the sympathy and material support from our Christian denomination he has well merited. He has been left alone to encounter the difficulties

⁶⁶ Ibid, February 15th, 1883.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

which must necessarily be associated with a work such as he has taken in hand."

He went further, and lamented how the Crawfords were forced to make "slaves of themselves to do a work on behalf of the denomination."⁶⁹ He continued,⁷⁰

"Slaves did I say? I will not soften the term. I speak from personal knowledge. It is a most humiliating fact that the doctor and his family have had to toil and work, and deny themselves of much that we enjoy, because they are endeavoring to meet a want of, and plant a cause for the denomination."

Pioneer McDonald, writing in the same issue, appealed to the readers, suggested that if groceries were used more sparingly, and the old coat be worn a little longer "Prairie College, the light and hope of our Western Mission, must not be neglected."⁷¹ He appealed to the Baptists to look at the support that the Presbyterians had given to their work in the North-West, and asked that Baptist "bestir" themselves for this great and crying

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

work.⁷² He gave an impassioned and rather direct plea to the churches in Eastern Canada.⁷³

"Brethren, patience in this case is no virtue, while thousands are perishing for lack of gospel truth—while opportunities are rapidly passing, that will not recur again; while one dollar can effect more when properly used, than ten or a hundred will ten years after this. Oh, that I could write something that could break the spell, the deadly spell in reference to this work of untold importance. Oh, Brethren and sisters in Christ, whose judgments approve of the work we are trying to do here, will not your hearts and hands take firmer hold of it. You have not, you know you have not, taken hold of this work as you should! You have been "holding the ropes" too loosely and listlessly altogether. O repent of this, and henceforth do works worthy of repentance, and ere long, the wilderness shall blossom as the rose, heaven shall be repeatedly thrilled with joy, and you and we shall rejoice together [sic]."

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Crawford, like *Pioneer McDonald* before him, went out on his own charge so-to-speak without the official support of the denomination. By humoring Crawford, and allowing him to raise funds throughout the churches, the denomination gave him a false hope that his project was achievable, and at the same time they gave him no hope that they would ever stand by him. In the end, preoccupied with their own Toronto Baptist College, the denomination actively lobbied against Prairie College and campaigned to centralise all Baptist theological education—"a step that also harmed Acadia at the time."⁷⁴

Perhaps Crawford could be faulted for going without the official sanction of the denomination, or for not adequately providing for his family.⁷⁵ However, Crawford's analysis of the needs on the Prairies were correct and his vision was vindicated when in less than twenty years later a college was established for ministerial education in Brandon. Perhaps he was not "as crazy as a loon," as his daughter suggests, but was endowed with the spirit of the early Church, an absolute disinterest in

⁷⁴ Harry A. Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story in Canada*, (Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988), 178.

⁷⁵ When C.T. Studd gave away his fortune of over £29,000, in January 1887, he gave the woman he was about to marry a sum of £3,400. See Norman P. Grubb, *C.T. Studd, Cricketer & Pioneer*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1933), 66.

material gain, a clear missionary vision and a self-sacrificing faith.

Whatever criticism may be leveled against him, Crawford was no flake. Prairie College was evidently before its time, but what Crawford envisaged was not his own reckless notion but was endorsed by many of his friends and colleagues, and, although non-committal, it was encouraged by the denomination. He was trusted and respected among the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, as a man with a "most heroic self-denial."⁷⁶ He was a man of strong convictions, who delighted in a good argument, "especially with Paedo-Baptists and Roman Catholics, without making an enemy," as C.C. McLaurin put it.⁷⁷ He often told the story of how he was forced to walk 20 miles because he missed his train trying to convince a Presbyterian minister of the inadequacies of infant-sprinkling.⁷⁸ As an educator, he "will always be remembered by his old students as a strong, inspiring and helpful teacher."⁷⁹ The editor of *The Canadian Baptist* wrote "there are few men of Dr. Crawford's age who would have

⁷⁶ E.R. Fitch, ed., *The Baptists of Canada: A History of their Progress and Achievements*, (Toronto, The Standard Publishing Company, 1911), 280.

⁷⁷ C. C. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, (Calgary: Self-published, 1939), 288.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ E.R. Fitch, ed., *The Baptists of Canada: A History of their Progress and Achievements*, (Toronto, The Standard Publishing Company, 1911), 162.

gone forth with such indomitable courage, to face the difficulties and gain the goals."⁸⁰ C.C. McLaurin, concluded, "No one made a greater sacrifice for Baptist education [in Western Canada] than Rev. John Crawford, D.D. His name is loved and honored by many, despite his apparent failure."⁸¹

Although, an impoverished and broken man in the end, Crawford never doubted the purposes of God in the failure of Prairie College.⁸²

I am as much convinced to-day as I was at the first, that my Heavenly Father put it into my heart to engage in this Work. It is true it has taken a different turn from what I expected. In some respects, I have been disappointed; but my Heavenly Father knew it all from the beginning. His providences are often mysterious. 'His way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known,'

One biographer wrote, that through Crawford's efforts, "a great evangelical influence was felt over that section of the country, and many churches

⁸⁰ G.B. Davis, *The Canadian Baptist*, January 20th, 1881, 1.

⁸¹ C. C. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, (Calgary: Self-published, 1939), 293.

⁸² David W. Remus, *Baptist Biographies, The Canadian Baptist*, August 1st, 1967 (113th year, No. 14), 18.

were organized through the efforts of the young men."⁸³ It offered training for fifteen men who furthered their theological education at McMaster Hall in Toronto, and elsewhere. Both its teachers and students were influential in organizing six of the eleven Baptist churches founded in the North-West during the years of its existence: also, in the establishing of six new Sunday schools. Another historian points out that "the positive results [of Prairie College] were considerable. Student pastors spent their summers serving many churches in the area around the college and beyond, unlike those who were trained elsewhere, most Prairie-trained ministers remained to work where they had studied—in the West."⁸⁴

Yet another writer reports.⁸⁵

*During its short history of three years,
some fifty conversions and the
organization of eight churches could be
traced to the missionary efforts of its
teachers and students; Rev. John E. Davis
had been started upon his missionary*

⁸³ E.R. Fitch, ed., *The Baptists of Canada: A History of their Progress and Achievements*, (Toronto, The Standard Publishing Company, 1911), 280.

⁸⁴ Harry A. Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story in Canada*, (Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988), 178.

⁸⁵ *Western Baptist Jubilee 1873—1923: Fifty Years of Baptist Work in Western Canada*, (The Baptist Union of Western Canada, nd), 78.

course and most of the other men referred to above became preachers.

In 1999, when the Brandon University celebrated its centennial year, it officially recognised the work of Crawford and Prairie College as the first post-secondary educational institution on the Canadian Prairies. To mark the occasion, Brandon University unveiled a stone cairn, constructed in part of stones from the original Prairie College building. The plaque on the cairn reads, in part,

"Prairie college owed its provenance to the inspiration and vision of Reverend John Crawford, formerly a member of the theology department at the Canadian Literary Institute in Woodstock, Ontario. Crawford was assisted in this very personal venture by Reverend G.B. Davis, a graduate of the Canadian Literary Institute. The creation of Prairie College was an initiative taken with the unofficial endorsement and support of the Baptist Union of Ontario and Quebec. The same Baptist idealism and educational traditions that shaped the brief life of Prairie College in the early 1880's provided the inspiration for the creation of Brandon College in 1899."

In short, *"The Baptists of Canada would be sadly remiss, should they read the record of this self-sacrificing effort on the part of Dr. Crawford and his coadjutors, without feelings of grateful appreciation and reverence."*⁸⁶

⁸⁶ E.R. Fitch, ed., *The Baptists of Canada: A History of their Progress and Achievements*, (Toronto, The Standard Publishing Company, 1911), 280.

Appendix 1: Timeline of John Crawford's Life

DATE	EVENT
December 24, 1819	Birth (date of baptism)
June 15, 1853	Marriage to Miss Sarah Hackett in Vernon Baptist Chapel, London
April 9, 1854	Emily Augusta was born
December 27, 1854	Valedictory service at Lee Chapel, Kent.
January 1855	Cork pastorate
May 1857	Informed the Committee of his intent from remove from Cork
July 1857	Frances Louise was born in Co. Londonderry
June 1, 1858	Accepted a call to Cheltenham & Georgetown

September 1867	Began his work at Canadian Literary Institute (Woodstock, ON)
October 28, 1868	Received into membership of First Baptist Church Woodstock, ON.
September 10-13, 1874	Debate with Disciples of Christ ("Campbellites").
July 28, 1879	Resigned from the Canadian Literary Institute
September 1880	Began as Principal of Prairie College, MB.
October 1883	Pastorate in Dakota began
1891	Pastorate in Winham began and ended
June 2, 1892	Died in Toronto (aged 72)

Appendix 2: Prof. Crawford's Debate with the Disciples of Christ

Crawford's letter, August 29th, 1874, to the Disciples of Christ laying out the position he would be defending in the debate.

I undertake to prove, and defend, in public debate, the following positions.

1. That the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, by his actual personal agency, on the human soul; opening the heart to the cordial reception of Divine Truth, and enlightening the mind, through the instrumentality of that Truth, is indispensably necessary, in the conversion of a sinner to God. And therefore, That the Word of Truth alone, or mere moral suasion without direct spiritual agency, cannot effect the renewal or conversion of a soul, dead in trespasses and sins; and also That the teaching of the late Mr. Alexander Campbell, President of Bethany College, Virginia, and his followers, is, upon this vital doctrine of the Christian religion, unsound, evasive, and contradictory.

2. That no person is a fit and proper subject of Christian Baptism who has not previously become the subject of converting and regenerating grace,

by the operation of. the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of Divine Truth; and that, therefore, baptism is not conversion, nor regeneration, although this ordinance represents this spiritual change in a figure; nor do we receive the remission of sins in and through baptism, only in a figure.

3. That the teaching of Mr. Campbell and his followers, on the import and use of Christian baptism, is unsound, evasive, and contradictory.

4. That the basis of Christian faith and hope, as set forth by Mr. Campbell and his associates, is, as such, in the highest degree defective and delusive.

5. That the tendency of the so-called "Reformation," originated by Mr. Campbell, and carried on by him and his associates, is to substitute a heartless, formal religion, for true spiritual piety; and to sow the seeds of many pernicious errors.