

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND SECTARIANISM IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The settlers of northern New England were heirs to a complex religious tradition. Most came from Massachusetts and Connecticut towns which still maintained the Puritan ideal of a single church community, the Congregationalist Standing Order, in which a tax-supported, college-educated ministry propounded a complex Calvinist faith which faced no challengers. This Standing Order was embodied in the laws of all the New England colonies except Rhode Island and in its essentials survived the Revolution. Between the Revolution and the War of 1812, northern New England was the fastest growing region of the new Republic, and some of the first migrants to the frontier went there as homogeneous groups and organized Congregationalist churches with a settled ministry, which for a generation faced few rivals.

Congregationalist missionary societies based in southern New England made serious attempts to extend their faith in the north country, and new colleges and seminaries in the region improved the supply of educated ministers.¹ In spite of these efforts, Congregationalism lost ground in many areas of northern New England to other faiths more in tune with the traditions, needs and aspirations of the backcountry settlers. The overwhelming majority of these pioneers were farmer-artisans and lumberers struggling to make a living on poor soil in a region with a notoriously short growing season. Forced north by a growing farm population and lack of alternative employment in southern New England, frontier settlers struggled to pay off mortgages on a hundred or so acres, or squatted on land owned by absentee proprietors. In politics, they were Jeffersonian Republicans who favoured limited, democratic government, which stressed individual rights and religious freedom.²

Many settlers had long identified with the critics rather than the supporters of the Standing Order and had inherited a radical evange-

¹ Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 163–92; Paul Jeffrey Potash, 'Welfare of the Regions Beyond', *Vermont History*, 46 (1978), 109–28; Mary Ellen Chase, *Jonathan Fisher: Maine Parson, 1768–1847* (New York: MacMillan, 1948), 53–122.

² H.F. Wilson, *The Hill Country of Northern New England: Its Social and Economic History, 1790–1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 1–15; Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 25–39.

licalism which quickly grew and flourished on the northern frontier. Under the impact of the mid-eighteenth-century revivals, later known as the Great Awakening, new congregations of Separate Congregationalists and Baptists had appeared, who organized on a voluntary basis and refused to pay taxes for the support of Standing Order clergy. Local persecution and conflict occurred with many Separatists moving on to the frontier to avoid persecution. The most radical of the Separates created a popular folk-religion which stressed extempore preaching by itinerant lay preachers who valued spiritual gifts more than formal education. Indeed, this wing of the mid-century revival movement had a powerful anti-intellectual and anti-clerical tinge. It cultivated a highly emotional style of worship employing a new type of popular gospel song, and in their services, believers danced in the spirit and experienced trances, visions and miraculous healings. A fervent and volatile millenarianism marked the movement, and some radicals questioned the prevailing Calvinism or organized small perfectionist sects in which women and lower-class men played prominent roles. These groups were condemned by the leading Congregationalist promoters of evangelism like Jonathan Edwards; and major Baptist spokesmen, influenced by their better educated and organized co-religionists in England and the mid-Atlantic states, had disassociated themselves from the more emotional and ecstatic elements in radical evangelicalism by the Revolution. The radical tradition survived, however, especially among pioneers on the frontier, where the general absence of an educated clergy and settled parishes created a more favourable environment for the blossoming of enthusiastic religion.³

From the late 1770s, frontier New England was swept by a new wave of revivalism known as the New Light 'stir', which continued intermittently into the next century. Congregationalists were active in this movement, and the older Baptist Associations used it to make the Calvinist Baptist faith a powerful voice in the religious controversies which swept northern New England in the course of the awakenings. In the early years of the New Light 'stir', however, the dominant role was played by uneducated preachers and lay exhorters who drew upon earlier traditions of radical evangelicalism to produce a new emotional and egalitarian faith, which quickly mirrored the radical Republican values held by so many of the small farmers on the northern frontier. This faith broke with the dominant Calvinist tradition in New England theology and offered the hope of salvation to all, a message reinforced by the arrival on the frontier of the first Methodist preachers, who

³ C.C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 159-295; Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camerads to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 105-39; William E. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), i. 491-511.

gradually built up an important following in northern New England. Arminianism often tipped over into Universalism with key Universalist leaders like Hosea Ballou emerging from the ferment created by the New Light 'stir'.⁴

The New Light 'stir' did not settle down into a clearly defined sectarian pattern until well after the War of 1812. The whole emphasis of the movement was against formal confessions or creeds, and all were encouraged to cultivate their spiritual gifts. Individual conscience was exalted over congregation or church organization. Many questioned the need for a separate or paid clergy, and women found new roles as popular preachers and church organizers. Seeking the restoration of the primitive church cleansed of clerical excrescences, New Lights believed that they were creating a new faith for a new republic which heralded the dawn of the millennium. Traditional denominational differences and practices were considered unimportant. Formal organizational structures were criticized by some, while others mixed Quaker, Congregationalist and Methodist procedures in their early attempts at church government. The method of baptizing converts was often seen as a matter of individual preference or convenience. Caught up in the quest for the restoration of the primitive church, many New Lights debated the legitimacy of foot-washing and the holy kiss as religious ordinances.⁵

New Lights preached among struggling farmers, lumberers and fishermen, who suffered much from the climate, disease and economic hardships. Northern New England was a world where elements of old folk beliefs survived and people had a vivid sense of the miraculous and the supernatural. The travelling preachers cultivated a noisy style of extempore, repetitive preaching in their open air meetings. Their language was colloquial and often shocking in its imagery, especially when directed at scoffers or critics from among the Standing Order clergy: 'letter-learned and world-applauded rabbies' [*sic*].⁶ Occasionally New Lights employed shock tactics, disrupting the worship of their opponents by appearing naked in their midst to symbolize the spiritual nakedness of the people. Less sensational but equally effective publicity methods were more widely used.⁷

⁴ Marini, *Radical Sects*, 40–59; Minton Thrift, *Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee* (New York: N. Bangs, 1823), 189–220; Ernest Cassara, *Hosea Ballou: The Challenge to Orthodoxy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982), 1–105.

⁵ Marini, *Radical Sects*, 105–35; L. Billington, "'Female Laborers in the Church": Women Preachers in the Northeastern United States, 1790–1840', *Journal of American Studies*, 19 (1985), 369–94; Nathan O. Hatch, 'The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People', *Journal of American History*, 67 (1980–81), 545–57.

⁶ This is based on numerous contemporary reports and preachers' journals. The quotation is from Peter Young, *A Brief Account of the Life and Experiences* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Beck and Foster, 1817), 8.

⁷ Mark Fernald, *Life of Mark Fernald Written by Himself* (Newburyport: Payne and Pike, 1852), 91. Edward E. Bourne, *History of Wells and Kennebunk* (Portland, Me.: B. Thurston, 1875), 632–3.

At the heart of New Light preaching, whether in the open air or in cabins and barns, was the familiar call to repentance and the need for conversion. Freed from the control of better educated ministers who had questioned many facets of radical evangelicalism during the Great Awakening, the north country preachers developed an experimental style of conversionist religion which often verged on the mystical. During the 'new birth' of conversion, young and old felt 'ravished by the Spirit', and the note of mystical rapture in the writings of at least one of the key New Light leaders, Henry Alline, alarmed even the veteran of popular evangelism, John Wesley, who warned his north American followers against men who dabbled in mystical writers far above their comprehension.⁸ At New Light meetings, preachers and converts went into 'vision' and in a trance-like state revealed the wonders of heaven and hell, and foretold the coming of the millennium. Many of the preachers were already experienced herbalists and botanic 'doctors', but in the power of the spirit, extraordinary cures were obtained. Spokesmen for the established clergy condemned these visionaries and healers and sought to regulate their activities, but on the northern frontier the task proved impossible.⁹

The 'new songs' employed by the most radical evangelicals during the Great Awakening were very different in their language and music from Puritan sung psalms. Ecstatically Christ-centred and other-worldly, these 'new songs' were used in street processions and revival services to heighten emotionalism and promote a sense of solidarity. Enthusiasts breaking into song on any and every occasion outraged the Standing Order clergy, but, in spite of opposition, radical evangelicals continued to write and use emotional hymns sung to popular songs with choruses.¹⁰ The New Light 'stir' and succeeding revivals on the northern frontier allowed this tradition of popular gospel music to come into its own, and between 1795 and 1815 New England experienced a 'Golden Age' of country religious music. Self-taught rural singing teachers developed an indigenous style based on folk and popular tunes and simple choral effects. The words continued the tradition of the earlier 'new songs', intensifying the militancy and sense of millennial expectation, and uniting it with a highly emotional identification with Christ. Hymns were a primary vehicle for making 'freewill' theology available at a popular level, and

⁸ G.A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists and Henry Alline* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1984), 3–69; Maurice W. Armstrong, *The Great Awakening in Nova Scotia, 1776–1809* (Hartford, Conn.: American Society of Church History, 1948), 104.

⁹ Fernald, *Life*, 156; A.D. Jones, *Memoir of Elder Abner Jones* (Boston, Mass.: W. Crosby, 1842), 38–101. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Liverpool: S.W. Richards, 1853), 52–3.

¹⁰ Henry Wilder Foote, *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940), 34–187; Harry S. Stout and Peter Onif, 'James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London', *Journal of American History*, 70 (1983), 567–8.

proponents of Universalism used their spiritual songs for the same purpose.

Perhaps the most widely influential of the many collections was *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, written by Henry Alline and published posthumously in Boston in 1786. His hymns continued to appear in many later Freewill and Christian hymnbooks, but he was only the most popular and prolific of the writers of gospel songs who, through words and music, offered a history of redemption. Many New Lights wrote hymns and compiled collections of spiritual songs which were published by local presses across northern New England. Hymn singing was second only to preaching as a means of spreading the gospel, and was perhaps more important in clarifying and reinforcing elements of popular evangelicalism.¹¹ Hymns were sung alone and in family worship as well as at public services, and, although the great majority of the settlers in northern New England were functionally literate, gospel songs became part of a predominantly oral, rural culture. Later in the nineteenth century changing taste and pressure to conform to dominant cultural values resulted in the removal of the old spiritual songs from denominational hymn books, but many retained a place in the affections of country people. The hymns of Henry Alline are still sung among the Free Christian Baptists on the Maine-New Brunswick border although they have not appeared in printed collections for more than a hundred years.¹²

The Great Awakening produced the first religious magazines in Britain and America, but the Boston-published *Christian History* was controlled by the respectable pro-revival party among the Standing Order clergy. It publicized and promoted awakenings but also defined what were the legitimate means of promoting the gospel and condemned the fanaticism of radical evangelicals. The early phases of the New Light 'stir' saw the press used only for the publication of hymn books and polemical pamphlets. From the early nineteenth century, however, as they entered a more organized phase, the New Lights commenced the publication of a new type of magazine which reflected the religious culture of so many small farmers in northern New England. The first of these newspapers appeared in 1808 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and was edited for ten years by Elias Smith, the best known and most polemical of the early Christian leaders. Smith's paper appeared at a time of intense political controversy between Jeffersonian Republicans and Federalists, and it offered a theology of the people combined with the demand for equal rights.¹³ The next paper in this tradition to appear was John Buzzell's

¹¹ Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit*, 55–68; G.A. Rawlyk (ed.), *New Light Letters and Songs* (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1983), 1–67, 81–237; Marini, *Radical Sects*, 156–71.

¹² Rawlyk, *New Light Letters and Songs*, 22, 318.

¹³ Susan Durden, 'A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740–1748', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), 255–75; Hatch, 'The Christian Movement', 548–52; Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion . . . Written by Himself* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Beck and Foster, 1816), 353–74.

Religious Magazine issued in Portland, Maine, in 1811. It took Buzzell and the emerging Freewill Baptists more than a decade to establish a regular paper. Surviving issues provide an inside view of a popular movement little understood by some contemporary Congregationalist frontier missionaries.¹⁴ Journals and biographies of New Light pioneers were published in many editions by local printers with growing frequency after 1800. These works familiarized second-generation New Lights with the early history and struggles of radical evangelicism, and also charted the emergence of a more formal sectarian phase of the quest for primitive Christianity in northern New England.¹⁵

This sectarian pattern had become apparent by the decade following the War of 1812. Much local conflict continued as enthusiasts resisted any attempts at restricting individual religious freedom and the working of the spirit, in the interests of order and stability. Congregationalists and Particular Baptists also made radical evangelicals defensive about their more uncouth and enthusiastic preachers and their tolerance of the many 'irregular' roles allowed to women in the New Light tradition. However, by the 1830s some sect leaders were beginning to style themselves 'reverend' and to distance themselves from the more sensational aspects of the New Light 'stir' which was increasingly identified with the frontier phase of northern New England's development.¹⁶ Of the emerging sects, the most important were the Freewill Baptists, the Universalists and the Christian Connection, with some hundreds of congregations scattered from Maine to Vermont. Many of these churches were located in poorer districts and on the backlots of prosperous towns, but the sects gradually acquired a growing legitimacy and, along with the Methodists, took their place in the community life of rural New England. This process was aided by a number of factors. The separation of church and state, completed even in Massachusetts by the early 1830s, removed a key source of political and religious conflict. The sects also linked up with like-minded groups across the United States and were spread far afield by the Yankee diaspora of the early nineteenth century. In some cases, such as the Universalists, the sect's centre of gravity in terms of numerical support and leadership shifted away from northern New England to more urban centres. Finally, all Yankees developed a consciousness of a common Protestant heritage when New England faced the challenge of an 'alien' immigrant Catholicism.¹⁷

¹⁴ John Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (Portland and Kennebunk, Me., 1811–12, 1820–22). The classic Congregationalist report is Nathan Perkin, *Narrative of a Tour through the State of Vermont from April 27 to June 12, 1789* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1964).

¹⁵ See, for example, biographies and autobiographies cited throughout these notes. Perhaps the most popular of the genre was John Colby, *The Life, Experience and Travels* (Portland, Me.: A. & J. Shirley, 1815) and numerous other editions before 1840.

¹⁶ Marini, *Radical Sects*, 116–35; Billington, "Female Laborers in the Church", 371, 390–3.

¹⁷ In addition to sources already cited see Ruth O. Bordin, 'The Sect to Denomination Process in America: The Freewill Baptist Experience', *Church History*, 34 (1964), 77–94; Norman A. Baxter, *History of the Freewill Baptists* (Rochester, N.Y.: American Baptist Historical Society,

The familiar pattern of development from rapturous revivalism, through sect, to the beginnings of denominational respectability was by no means a smooth or uninterrupted process. Many north-country farmers and artisans lived precarious, 'hardscrabble' lives in a harsh region undergoing major economic changes caused by competition with the more productive farms of the Mid-West, the beginnings of industrialization and out migration.¹⁸ These northern New Englanders remained close to the spirit of the New Light 'stir' and deeply resented the shift towards order and formalism. There was repeated opposition to the innovations of better educated clergy from the 'minister factory' who were embarrassed by noisy meetings or who frowned on women preachers.¹⁹ Reports of visions and miraculous healings continued to circulate, and thousands were quickly swept up into the millennial expectations of the Millerite Adventists who recruited heavily among the Freewill Baptists, Christians and other heirs to radical evangelicalism.²⁰ Millerism also had a marked impact on the Shakers, who themselves had earlier drawn heavily upon the New Light tradition.²¹

While recent work on Ann Lee and the Shakers has enlarged our understanding of late eighteenth-century New Light culture, much less attention has been paid to three later prophetic leaders who emerged as radical evangelicalism took on a more clearly defined sectarian form.²² The first of these leaders appeared around 1817 in the Compton District of Quebec, thirty miles above the Vermont line, a neighbourhood heavily settled by northward moving Yankee farmers since the 1790s. The Yankees brought with them a fervent New Light faith which sustained them in the harsh and dangerous work of lumbering and making farms. Denominational lines were blurred, and some of the most devout settlers resisted pressure to join 'a sect'. Religion to these people was not dry speculation or a matter of theory but a rich field of experience, and the area was to sustain a succession of radical evangelical and millenarian movements down to the Millerite Adventists of the 1840s. American settlers faced difficulties as aliens in Canada during the War of 1812, and there was widespread suffering in 1816 when the north country experienced frosts during

1957); Russell E. Miller, *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770-1879* (Boston, Mass.: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 157-283.

¹⁸ Wilson, *Hill Country*, 29-97; Lewis D. Stilwell, *Migration From Vermont*, second edition (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 1983), 124-96.

¹⁹ Hiram Munger, *The Life and Religious Experience of Hiram Munger*, third edition (Boston, Mass.: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1885) gives a good picture of the life of a travelling artisan and anti-clerical preacher.

²⁰ The Freewill Baptist and Christian press for the early 1840s indicate the impact of Millerism. See also David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerite and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

²¹ Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), 150-3.

²² *Ibid.*, 1-43; Garrett, *Spirit Possession*, 160-241; Marini, *Radical Sects*, 75-114.

every month of the year and there was general crop failure.²³

It was in the aftermath of 1816 that Isaac Bullard attracted a following. Bullard was a visionary who believed in immediate inspiration and revelation rather than formal creeds. He declared that the millennium was imminent and that the practices of the primitive church were about to be restored. Denouncing the growing denominationalism of the times, Bullard launched ferocious attacks against the clergy, including not only the Congregationalists but the Particular Baptists whose missionaries were attempting to impose religious order and decency on the frontier. Missionary reports provide a valuable, if hostile, source on Bullard's movement, which left very few records of its own. In the summer of 1817 Bullard and a few followers moved to the Woodstock area of Vermont, which had long been an important centre for the emerging Christian Connection. Bullard found support among dissident Christians in the 'back and retired part' of South Woodstock, where he established a small community which aimed to live in apostolic simplicity. According to his critics this simplicity involved a nauseating indifference to washing and included the practice of some form of 'spiritual wifery' which 'decency and chastity' prevented contemporaries describing in detail. Convinced that the purity of the primitive church was being restored in the Last Days, Bullard and his followers claimed the gift of speaking in tongues, a phenomenon which sounded to their enemies like a babble of meaningless words, the most important of which was 'mummyjum', later used as a derisory title for the group. Bullard's community claimed the restoration of other spiritual gifts and attracted the support of groups of 'gospel dancers' who no longer found a welcome in Freewill Baptist and Christian churches. Within a few months, Bullard had exhausted the patience of local townspeople, and he transformed this growing opposition into a visionary call to seek the millennium in the West. En route, he and his followers visited the Shakers, many of whose early teachings and practices were similar to Bullard's, but by 1817 the Shakers were seeking perfection through celibacy not 'spiritual wifery', and their version of apostolic simplicity stressed cleanliness and industry, not Bullard's sanctified filth. The Shakers did reinforce Bullard's belief in the nearness of the millennial kingdom which he hoped to see proclaimed in the West.²⁴

Jacob Cochran came from a New Hampshire farming family and saw service in the War of 1812. Converted by Harriet Livermore, a well-known preacher, he became active in a revival which swept

²³ E.G. Holland, *Memoir of Rev. Joseph Badger* (New York: C.S. Francis, 1854), 22-136. Badger, a Christian preacher, grew up in Compton District from 1801. See also Jane Vansittart (ed.), *Lifelines: The Stacey Letters, 1836-1858* (London: Peter Davies, 1976), 41.

²⁴ F. Gerald Ham, 'The Prophet and the Mummyjums: Isaac Bullard and the Vermont Pilgrims of 1817', *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 56 (1973), 210-9; Henry Swan Dana, *History of Woodstock, Vermont* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton, Mifflin, 1889), 384-96.

southern Maine towards the close of 1816. Cochran worked with Freewill Baptists and Christians and became popular as an exhorter and preacher. In typical radical fashion he worked to restore 'apostolic religion and the lost miraculous powers' known to the primitive church. His greatest successes were in the back parts of towns neglected by the Congregationalists and inhabited by Republican farmers who were pressing for a separate state of Maine, free from the 'aristocratic' dominance and established church of Massachusetts.²⁵ As one local historian perceptively noted, Cochran found his greatest following among respectable, hardworking people who had long shown a 'crankiness' in religion:

With them regularly-ordained ministers were hirelings, members of regularly-organized societies were 'starved-up hypocrites', regular services were cold and valueless; a method of worship was preferred by which feelings were excited, where there was 'freedom of speech' and action, where ejaculations and groans were evidences of faith and the reliance for salvation . . .²⁶

By the summer of 1817, Cochran had broken with the Freewill Baptist and Christian preachers, who became his fiercest critics, and had formed his own Society of Free Brethren and Sisters, whose activities during the next eighteen months shocked the region and eventually brought Cochran to trial and prison. A report was published of Cochran's trial for 'open and gross lewdness, lascivious behaviour and adultery', and, although the report and numerous other sources are hostile, they enable us to build up a much fuller picture of Cochranite beliefs and practices than those of the 'Mummyjums' and earlier perfectionist movements. Cochranism attracted particular attention and was thought to be especially shocking because it occurred, not in the western wilderness, but less than a hundred miles from the Boston Statehouse and Harvard Yard.²⁷

Cochran, an energetic man in his mid-thirties, was an effective folk preacher in the New Light tradition, and he attracted thousands of hearers to meetings in farmhouses, barns and the open air. About 700 converts were baptized and became identified with the movement, although the inner core of Brothers and Sisters close to Cochran was much smaller. A high percentage were women, in a region where many men were away at sea and women ran farms and businesses. Interestingly, male critics claimed that one of the attractions of

²⁵ Anon, 'The Cochran Fanaticism in York County', *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*, 20 (1980), 20-39. This account was compiled in 1867. See also D.M. Graham, *The Life of Clement Phinney* (Dover, N.H.: William Burr, 1851), 78-92. Phinney was a Freewill Baptist preacher who worked with Cochran in the 1816 revival.

²⁶ Daniel Remich, *History of Kennebunk* (Portland, Me.: Lakeside Press, 1911), 272.

²⁷ In addition to titles cited above the key sources are Ephraim Stinchfield, *Cochranism Delineated; or, A Description of, and Specific For, Religious Hydrophobia*. (Boston, Mass.: N. Coverly, 1819) and Gamaliel E. Smith, *Report of the Trial of Jacob Cochran* [sic] (Kennebunk: J.K. Remich, 1819).

Cochranism was the desire of women members of Christian and Freewill Baptist congregations to become leaders.²⁸ Cochranite worship reflected followers' conviction that they were living in the latter days and enjoyed the restoration of apostolic powers. Worship included singing and dancing, directed by Cochran, during which visions and trances provided direct access to supernatural revelations and some experienced the gift of speaking in tongues. One feature, reminiscent of the Shakers, was a mime in which worshippers enacted the farming round of sowing, reaping and winnowing the chaff from the grain. This ritual was known as harvesting the sinners. Cochran claimed extraordinary gifts as a healer, and at his trial many of the most sensational charges resulted from the prosecution's attempt to put sexual connotations on what the Cochranites claimed were healing rituals involving anointing with oil.²⁹ Cochran's women followers loyally claimed that he treated them with more skill, care and modesty than any regular physician who had attended them.³⁰ According to his critics, Cochran also attempted to raise the dead, and stories of such 'raising' passed into Maine folklore.³¹ Like Bullard and earlier New Light perfectionists, Cochran was accused of leading an inner core of his followers, who were sworn to secrecy, into the practice of 'spiritual wifery'. Followers married to unbelievers were advised to break off their conventional relationships which were proclaimed to be of 'the Pharisees, not Christ' and to enter into 'spiritual ties' with fellow members of the sanctified inner group. The Cochranites probably did adopt such antinomian practices, though there is much evidence that Cochran counselled many followers to adopt a Shaker-like celibacy in anticipation of the millennium, rather than a complex system of spiritual marriage.³²

By the spring of 1819 Cochran faced widespread opposition. Wild rumours circulated of sensational worship, bizarre healing rituals and deviant sexual practices. Local farmers were also alarmed by family disruptions and by the attempts of some Cochranites to transfer family property to their leader. Cochran was brought to trial, convicted and sentenced to four years imprisonment. His defending counsel, John Holmes, was an ardent Democratic-Republican who claimed that the witnesses against Cochran were disillusioned members of Cochran's congregation who had rejoined major churches and been primed to portray their former leader in the worst possible light. Holmes stressed that the case infringed on Cochran's right to freedom of religion. The prosecuting counsel was a Federalist, long nervous of the mob, who saw Cochran as bringing disgrace on teachers of morality and piety

²⁸ Smith, *Trial of Cochran*, 11–29; Fernald, *Life*, 125.

²⁹ Smith, *Trial of Cochran*, 13–25; Stinchfield, *Cochranism Delineated*, 9–11.

³⁰ Smith, *Trial of Cochran*, 28.

³¹ Remich, *History of Kennebunk*, 273.

³² The fullest information is in Smith, *Trial of Cochran*.

and deliberately establishing a society for the promotion of debauchery and prostitution.³³ In spite of Cochran's imprisonment, some followers remained loyal, and small Cochranite congregations of farmers and handicraft workers survived in southern Maine and New Hampshire into the 1840s. Some were quick to welcome early Mormon missionaries and other millenarians.³⁴ The Cochranite 'delusion', like the 'Mummyjums', did much to push Freewill Baptists and Christians along the road to respectability. Within a generation, women preachers and many other 'erratic' features of the New Light inheritance disappeared, and the Freewill Baptist press, for example, mirrored a religious world little different from that of Yankee Congregationalists or Particular Baptists, with the same range of denominational agencies and activities.³⁵

A few small northern New England congregations continued to embody many of the most radical elements of the New Light tradition down to the Civil War. The best documented are probably the followers of Jacob Osgood, a contemporary and acquaintance of Cochran. Osgood, a New Hampshire farmer, emerged out of the same ethos as Cochran and in the aftermath of the War of 1812 gradually cut loose from the Freewill Baptists and Christians to establish his own small group of churches which met in farmhouses and barns. Osgood, who died in 1844, left an autobiography containing his experiences and teachings, and his followers produced a collection of hymns which give crude and vigorous expression to their views. Small farmers and artisans, located in central New Hampshire, the Osgoodites were millenarian pacifists who opposed all doctors, lawyers, paid clergy and the denominations which employed them. They healed by the laying on of hands and claimed many miraculous cures. Hardworking people, they lived in apostolic simplicity, wearing clothes of homespun, undyed material and unchanging style. Convinced of their spiritual gifts, the Osgoodites had the unnerving habit of calling down divine retribution on all who persecuted them for their pacifism or ridiculed their views. Fiercely egalitarian and partisan Democrats, they used their hymns to attack not only lawyers, doctors and paid clergy but colleges, railroads and internal improvements which raised taxes and did little to benefit small farmers. The temperance movement was denounced as unscriptural, and they made moderate use of homemade cider. The Osgoodites survived beyond the Civil War by which time they were seen as a quaint anachronism embodying in their views and life-style New Light religious radicalism,

³³ In addition to sources already cited, Ronald F. Banks, *Maine Becomes a State: The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785-1820* (Somerset: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1973), 19-27, 71-3 examines the political careers of Cochran's counsel and prosecutor.

³⁴ Remick, *History of Kennebunk*, 275-8.

³⁵ Billington, "Female Laborers in the Church", 392-4.

Democratic egalitarianism and a subsistence farming that was rapidly fading from the New England scene.³⁶

The religious history of New England in the century following the Great Awakening has largely focused on Jonathan Edwards and the rise of an ordered and intellectually well-founded evangelicalism. Scholars have also examined the anti-revival tradition, the rise of Unitarianism and the struggle for the separation of church and state. Emotional revivalism, ecstatic religion and the quest for the restoration of primitive Christianity have tended to be identified with the more 'backward' areas of the South and West. Yet post-revolutionary New England witnessed the flowering of a radical evangelicalism which broke with the dominant Calvinist tradition of the region to create a popular religious culture offering salvation to all. It was an egalitarian culture with its own style of emotional worship, preaching and music. Women, as well as men, were offered new and wider roles, and all were encouraged to delight in spiritual gifts. Often perfectionist and fervently millenarian, radical evangelicals permanently altered the religious life of communities across northern New England. The early New Lights were often an embarrassment to their more respectable denominational successors, but the New England folk-tradition preserved affectionate memories of the pioneer preachers of righteousness.

³⁶ The most useful sources for the Osgoodites are Kenneth Scott, 'The Osgoodites of New Hampshire', *New England Quarterly*, 16 (1943), 20–40 and two editions of Osgood's autobiography and the hymns, *The Life and Christian Experience of Jacob Osgood with Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Warner, W.H.: 1867 and 1873). Fernald, *Life*, 125–6 indicates the links with Cochran.