

# THE RISE OF MICHAEL FRANCKLIN<sup>1</sup>

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MICHAEL FRANCKLIN, who was to be the Lieutenant-Governor and to possess the most powerful single influence in Nova Scotia during the critical years of the American revolutionary period, was a native of Poole in Dorset, born Dec. 6th, 1733. His father, the elder Michael Francklin, had come from Litchet Minster, a village about two and a half miles from Poole. He had settled in the town, married Edith Nicholson and attained a reputation among his fellow-citizens which eventually secured his election as mayor for three years, 1736-8. Accordingly we may suppose the family to have been flourishing in a moderate station of life. The younger Michael, being fourth child and second son, doubtless felt impelled to shift for himself. In his first experiments with the world he may have received some guidance from the well-known Joshua Mauger, son of a London Jew, who had engaged in trade in the West Indies and had become the premier merchant of Halifax by combining legal and illegal commercial operations under the protection of influential personages in London. The relation between Mauger and Francklin may have been due to some sort of family tie, possibly through Mrs. Mauger; it became an enduring friendship which survived the strain even of financial difficulties. At any rate, according to the received account, the young Michael essayed business with relatives in London, visited Jamaica twice, and took the London ship *Norfolk* to Halifax in 1752. It is to be noted, however, that at a later date he with three others claimed to have been in the province from the first settlement of Halifax. Whether here he permitted himself a liberty with the facts or not, he cast in his lot early with the infant British colony of Nova Scotia.

Having some capital at his command, he opened a dram shop in George Street, and by judicious advertisement in the form of free samples he made headway from the beginning. Presently he opened a second shop opposite the Dock Yard Gate; took as partner Thomas Gray, son of Captain Gray, the former secretary to Cornwallis, and extended his "lines" to include provisions and wines. His tact and ability soon brought him personal favour with the

1. The writer is indebted to H. P. Smith, Esq., of Poole, for information about the Francklin family in England, and to Mrs. N. C. Mitchell of Halifax for details about Francklin's private life.

prominent men of the town. He did not, however, confine his attention to the formation of business and social connections, but, stimulated doubtless by his knowledge of the French language, took much interest in the local Acadians and Indians. He made friends with some of the Micmacs of the vicinity, and went out hunting with them. One such expedition, in 1754, led to serious consequences; he and his two companions were seized by hostile Indians and taken to Gaspé. His kindness toward the natives now stood him in good stead, and soon gained him an opportunity for release. Moved by the spirit of adventure, however, he remained for three months among the Micmacs, until he had learned more of their ways and their language. In October of that year he returned to Halifax, having acquired an understanding of the point of view of the Indians which proved of considerable value to him during his days of political power. The affair was probably for him a lesson in the art of managing men, at which he soon became proficient, to his great advantage. He resumed his business, concentrating on provisions and wines rather than rum, and attained such success that he was able to visit England in the autumn of 1755 and to induce a number of his friends to try their fortunes in the new colony.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime he had made an essay in land speculation. In March of 1754, twenty prominent men of Halifax, including Joshua Mauger who was doubtless responsible for the presence in such distinguished company of his young friend Michael Francklin, petitioned the Council for the grant of a township to be called Lawrencetown. The Council found on consideration that the petitioners had applied for more land than the law allowed in such cases, and offered to grant the legal number of acres on certain conditions of settlement. In reply eleven of the petitioners, among whom were Mauger and Francklin, refused the conditions and asked for separate grants of 1,000 acres each. The council thereupon dismissed the application. Soon fresh proposals were made with success by a group including eight of the former applicants, but not Mauger or Francklin. After this affair, the young merchant abandoned land speculation for the time and devoted himself again to trade. He found his chief competitors in the Scots group, men, as he wrote later, anxious "to engross the colony trade... to possess themselves of every office of power and profit," in whose number may be included the three Grants (John, Robert, Alexander) and perhaps Nesbitt. Accordingly he turned to the New England merchants for aid in his operations, and in alliance

1. The above paragraph is based on the received account by Mr. J. S. Macdonald in *Collections of the N. S. Historical Society*, vol. XVI, pp. 7-40.

with them he made oversea ventures. In July, 1757, he, John Anderson, Binney, and Codman of Boston hired the schooner *Apollo*, insured her with Boston under-writers against capture by the enemy, and sent her to Fayal with a light cargo of fish and lumber to be exchanged for wines. The vessel, however, fell into the hands of a French privateer. The master, Outterbridge, without waiting for orders, arranged for ransom and delivered a certain Richard Gordon to the Frenchmen as hostage. He then proceeded to Fayal, secured his wines and set out again for Halifax; but by a series of accidents or, as the owners believed, by malice aforethought, arrived instead at Bermuda where dwelt an uncle of his, by name, Wilkinson. The two informed the local customs collector, who seized the vessel on the ground that Fayal was not a legal destination. The master wrote to the owners about his successive misfortunes, but omitted to tell with whom the ransom was to be discharged or where the hostage had been sent. They therefore despatched Richard Codman at once to Bermuda, armed with official certificates to prove that Fayal was within bounds; and after having deposited a heavy bond, secured leave to send the schooner on to Halifax in June of 1758. The fact that part of her cargo had "leaked out" in the meantime they connected with the refusal of Outterbridge to leave Bermuda on his own vessel and also with the interest of Wilkinson in the affair. In the middle of July, 1758, the owners finally learned the names of the ransom brokers, and induced Joshua Mauger to settle on their behalf. Having done so, Mauger became suspicious and threatened to seize the vessel, but refrained at the instance of his young friend who persuaded him to await the arrival of the insurance. Michael wrote immediately to Richard Codman in Boston to approach the underwriters. These made difficulties, but in January, 1759, they paid and enabled Anderson and Francklin to settle with Mauger. For reasons not known, however, the hostage remained in Bordeaux; and in February, 1760, Wilkinson contributed to the Boston *Evening Post* an account, of Gordon's supposed ill-treatment and a reflection on the reputation of Codman and the other owners. The editor, however, published some letters on Codman's behalf, and Binney and Francklin wrote at length to defend their conduct. They cleared themselves of responsibility for the fate of Gordon, but they can hardly have derived financial profit from the affair.

In the year 1758 an exceptional opportunity for business occurred in Halifax. The army and fleet assembling for the siege of Louisbourg required supplies on a scale new to the city's ex-

perience, and prices rose high. The merchants furnished those supplies to the best of their ability at prevalent rates; and Francklin, who was far from the hindmost, made gains estimated by rumor, probably with exaggeration, at £50,000. The increase of his fortune is attested by the fact that at the end of the year the new Assembly included him in a list of twelve men financially qualified to farm the impost and excise taxes. He did not secure the contract, which went to John Newton and Malachi Salter; but in that year, 1758, he had certainly established himself among the leading merchants of Halifax. Another oversea venture brought him again into the Assembly's purview. In 1759 he imported seven hogsheads and fifty-five quarter casks of port in the ship *Andalusia* from London, and arranged payment of the import duties there, with the result that he was obliged to lodge a bond with the Halifax collectors and to petition the Assembly successfully in August, 1759, for release of the bond. It will be seen that Michael's dealings abroad concerned chiefly liquid goods, which were no doubt sufficiently profitable in spite of the hazards of war. So successful was he that in 1760-1 he contemplated a return to England with the fortune he had won. That he did not carry out his intention was due at least in part to a development of interest in the political field.

The young Michael had taken no part in the struggle of the New England merchants of Halifax, led by Salter, to obtain an Assembly. Like his friend Mauger, he had supported the Governor, Charles Lawrence, even against the desires of his business associates like Binney. He had also lent his sympathy to Lawrence in the latter's difficulty with the Scots group led by Robert Grant. Lawrence was not unmindful of this assistance. When he dissolved the first Assembly as a body too much given to vain constitutional imaginings, he sought candidates who would give more attention to the practical aspects of government, and made grants of land to certain men to enable them to qualify for seats. In this way Michael secured a grant of 1000 acres, and in the election of 1759 he became member for Halifax County beside William Nesbitt. The question of how he would stand with his fellow-members was soon answered. At the opening of the session in December, he was promptly placed with Nesbitt, Hinshelwood, Henry Newton, and Salter on the committee to prepare a reply to the Governor's opening address. The reply, composed speedily, congratulated Lawrence on the recent military successes, expressed a grateful sense of his Excellency's paternal care, promised to take his recommendations into consideration, and undertook to pay

the highest regard to his wishes. Another duty fell at once to Michael's lot. On Dec. 6th he was chosen with Deschamps, and Newton as chairman, to bring in a bill for an additional duty on liquor. This committee incurred some criticism before it secured acceptance of its work, but the others on which the young merchant served had better fortune. On Dec. 10th he was assigned to a committee which assisted the council in preparing an address to parliament on the question of financial aid to the new settlements. On Dec. 18th he and two others asked the Governor for the accounts of the impost and excise, to be laid before the Assembly, and obtained Lawrence's consent. On Dec. 20th Binney, John Newton and he were deputed to interview the Governor about the light-house estimates, also successfully. A committee to find means of preventing the unlicensed distillation of grain included the rising purveyor of wet goods, and saw its recommendations promptly accepted. On Dec. 27th he was elected to a committee of four to prepare an address to the Governor concerning a petition from Lunenburg. On Jan. 5th, 1760, he entered a committee to revise the laws, under Henry Newton's chairmanship. On March 17th he, Scott and Ben Gerrish were added to a committee to interview the Governor about Indian affairs. He was not on every committee, but he was on the majority of committees and on all the important ones. This record is surprising for a young man of twenty-six. The confidence of his fellow-members, won at once in this first session of the second Assembly, is a remarkable tribute to Michael's ability in the management and leadership of men. The position thus attained he consolidated in the next few years.

Francklin's achievement of important influence in the official class of Halifax was not without lasting results. He probably had much to do with a change in parliamentary conduct between 1759 and 1760. The first Assembly had loudly asserted its supposed rights and privileges. On March 26th, 1759, the members had declared "the unquestionable right of this House to order all civil officers to lay before them an account of fees and perquisites demanded and received by them"; and on April 2nd of that year they claimed it "not only as their undoubted right but as their indispensable duty to take notice of every grievance complained of by the people they represent". Their attitude provoked Governor Lawrence to denounce "the idle jealousies they entertain of the council about particular rights and privileges, which if they could be better supported are of no consequences to themselves or advantage to those they represent." In assuming such a high

pose, the members had of course taken their cue from the Assemblies in New England, out of which most of them had come. In the lower House of Massachusetts and in the province at large a habit was growing of regarding political questions less on their merits than on their supposed bearing on provincial dignities. Appeals were constantly made to abstract rights and privileges in the decision of matters small in themselves, and the attitude of Massachusetts men toward the Governor was becoming one of watchful suspicion. In May of 1761 Governor Barnard adjured the Bostonians to "give no attention to declamations tending to promote a suspicion of the civil rights of the people being in danger." "Such harangues might suit well in the reigns of Charles and James, but in the time of the Georges they are groundless and unjust". The plea was in vain; the lower House of Massachusetts, under the leadership of Otis, was soon to furnish a conspicuous example of the conduct so complained of by the Governor. Such was the political model of the New Englanders in the Nova Scotian Assembly of 1758-9.

Michael Francklin, cold to the rising nationalism of New England, probably looked on this procedure with amusement and some contempt. In political matters he was first of all an Englishman of the conservative type, assuming the unity of the Empire as the primary article of his creed; at the same time he possessed an adroitness and ability to persuade others not always found in Englishmen of that type. He took it for granted that all parties in the Empire had interests in common which outweighed differences; and that when they differed, they did so from a variance of light rather than of motive. In consequence, if he did not see eye to eye with a Governor, he put away suspicion as long as he could, and made no appeal to supposed rights. He would try reason and personal influence; if he failed, he would take the case to superior authorities; if still unsuccessful, he would endure the rebuff as gracefully as possible, trusting that the future would prove him right. Such were the principles on which he was to conduct his struggles with Belcher and Legge; but they were too chilly to have lasting influence on the popular imagination of New England in the critical decade 1760-70. In addition, Francklin took a very practical view of government, regarding an Assembly as an instrument for the accomplishment of certain work, rather than a platform for the enunciation of constitutional theories. Hence he eschewed the New England practice of his time. He, of course, taught no lessons in political philosophy; he preferred to find solutions for immediate difficulties by conferences and committees in which his ready wit and his powers of persuasion might operate

to full advantage. Here he derived great benefit from the confidence he had won in business among the very New Englanders who might be most inclined to split constitutional hairs. By these thoroughly practical methods he contributed much toward the harmony of Governor, Council and House during the sittings of the second Assembly. It is not unreasonable to assume that he used his constantly increasing influence with the members of succeeding Assemblies to discourage abstract claims and to direct discussions toward the purely practical. During his period of power the tone of high constitutional claim, becoming more strident in the New England Assemblies, disappeared from that of Nova Scotia. It would, of course, be incorrect to attribute such a change entirely to one man. The dependence of the official class on parliamentary grants and their expectation or enjoyment of government positions and contracts were powerful factors. But the difference, shortly to appear, between the conduct of the official class in Georgia, equally dependent financially, equally interested in positions and contracts, and that of their compeers in Nova Scotia may well be due to the influence with the last of the practical and able young man of Dorset.

Francklin's political and financial positions were now assured. In the meantime he had found in Boston interests other than those of business. In February, 1762, he married Susanna Boutineau, daughter of a prominent merchant of Huguenot descent and grand-daughter of the well-known Peter Faneuil. Thereafter he lived in a house he had built on Buckingham Street, Halifax, which is described as "not grand but well arranged, having two reception rooms tastefully decorated in colours by New York artists". His first child, born in 1763, he named after the mother's family, James Boutineau Francklin. In this interval of good fortune in his private affairs, he had become involved in his first political difficulty.