

The background is a stained glass window with a central diamond-shaped leaded glass pane. The diamond is filled with a light blue and white pattern. The surrounding panes are white with black leaded glass lines. The overall color palette is light and airy.

The Story of Howland  
House:

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**B**eing the Church  
on the Margins

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Betsy Anderson, 2008  
McGeachy Scholar

**The Story of Howland House: Being the Church on the Margins**  
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**September, 2013**

**Introduction**

In his 1951 book, *The Household of Faith*, T. Ralph Morton proclaimed that “It is the duty of Christians today to make experiments in cooperative social living which will point the way to this new living society.”<sup>1</sup> Howland House, begun in 1953 as an intentional Christian community connected to the Student Christian Movement of Canada (SCM) and located at 105 Howland Ave in downtown Toronto, was such an experiment. Initially, largely made up of those who had participated in SCM Industrial Work Camps, Howland House existed through a variety of forms, for over twenty years (1953-1975).

As a 2008 McGeachy Senior Scholar, I have interviewed most of the living residents of Howland House and done extensive background research in order to tell “The Story of Howland House”. The people who were part of this experiment in Christian living were connected to many streams of the social movement in the Protestant Churches from the post-war period to the early 70’s, including the founding of the United Church’s Lay Educational Training Centres, the continuing leadership of the SCM on campuses across the country, the Religion Labour Foundation in Toronto and the Work and Life movement of the World Council of Churches (WCC). These many connections temptingly lead one down paths that, while not directly the focus of my Howland House project, hold promise for future research and writing about this period in Canadian church history.

In the research to date it is evident that the background and influences that led to the creation of Howland House were national and international. They form the backdrop of this study. But the creation of Howland House was also a reflection of the interests and opportunities of individuals who found themselves in certain places at certain times in their lives and made choices that in retrospect can seem intentional but were often serendipitous, and sometimes connected to burgeoning romances. Thus, history is a mixture of linear and intentional actions and unplanned and relational opportunities.

**Growing out of Work Camps**

My 2011 Paper at the CSCH meeting in Fredericton, “The place where ‘men’ earn their bread is to be the place of holiness,”<sup>2</sup> outlined the history of the SCM Work Camps in Canada, a necessary background to “The Story of Howland House” which grew out of the 1953 SCM Student-in-Industry Work Camp at Bathurst St. United Church in Toronto, directed by Bob Miller.

However the impulse to establish Howland House went back at least to the 1949 Work Camp in Montreal and the Montreal COOP which followed it. For a number of years, those who attended SCM Student-in-Industry work camps had been questioning whether a summer experience was enough to build a sustained engagement with Canadian workers as Church. In response, some Senior or Graduate Student-in-Industry work camps were organized which allowed those with previous work camp

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<sup>1</sup> T. Ralph Morton, *The Household of Faith: The Changing Pattern of the Church’s Life*, p. 115

<sup>2</sup> Published in the *2011 Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Church History*

experience to deepen and evolve in their response as young Christians to the realities of Canadian industrial workers.

The 1949 Montreal Work Camp at Chalmers United in Verdun, Quebec was directed once again by Lex Miller, who had directed the pioneering 1945 Student-in-Industry Work Camp in Welland, Ontario. Many participants<sup>3</sup> had attended previous SCM Work Camps, although not all in industry. It was a highly formative event on many levels<sup>4</sup>. Muriel Anderson remembers that “Many of the study groups were fairly advanced. People had been talking about this theology and economics and unions and industry for quite a long time. Many of the Anglicans in the group who were studying theology were connected to the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth – Father Smyth – Marxism and theology. That theology was running through the study groups and the worship at that work camp and was quite a challenge.”<sup>5</sup> Audrey Tobias remembers that Lex Miller was “caught between the social democratic faction and the Marxist faction at the work camp. I was in the Marxist faction....we had very deep discussions and we read – *Christian Faith and My Job*, the *Communist Manifesto*...one learned a lot during those discussions.... It was our view, and the SCMs too I think, that the future was in the hands of the workers and the proletariat .... and we had to be there”<sup>6</sup>

Following this formative work camp, many members went on to make a year-round commitment to working in industry. Audrey Tobias lived with other SCMs in Toronto at the corner of Bathurst and Bloor, including Dick Allen who was at the 1949 Montreal Work Camp. She began work as a looper at the Harvey Woods textile factory at Queen and Ossington, where she continued for seven years.

## The Montreal COOP

Seven of the Montreal-based work campers<sup>7</sup> decided to live together in a co-op, eventually known as the ‘COOP’ and they became a hub for others from the 1949 Work Camp and SCMs in Montreal at the time who wished to be part of on-going discussions about Christian vocation and daily life. For three years, from 1949-1952, more than twenty folks met regularly in Montreal to study, worship, pray, debate and decide together how they would invest their lives as Christians, whether lay or ordained, in the transformation of the church and the world.

With discussion and debate and varied experiences, these graduate SCMs chose a variety of routes in the years that followed: work in the trade union and peace movement; participation in the

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Adam, Dick Allen, Ted Baxter, Alice Boomhour, Anne Campbell, Aileen Cobban, Muriel Fullerton, Vince Goring, Helen Hall, Doug Hawkins, Don Heap, Bob Johnston, Abe Kabayama, Lawrence Lee, Suki Maharaj, Alan McLachlin, Jean and Lex Miller and Davy, Myrtle Morrison, Bill Parsons, Percy Powles, Marg Ritchie, Barb Smardon, Bob Wild, Laurel Tavenner, Audrey Tobias, Nancy Tyrell, Alison Young, Jackie Munro, Marg Trotter, Marg Peddie, Bruce Mutch, John Anderson, Ralph Persad

<sup>4</sup> Not the least was the fact that 5 couples emerged from those attending the work camp: Dick Allen and Marg Ritchie, Bruce Mutch and Anne Campbell, Don Heap and Alice Boomhour, Muriel Fullerton and John Anderson, Alison Young and Lawrence Lee.

<sup>5</sup> February 6, 2009 interview with Muriel Anderson

<sup>6</sup> May 1, 2009 Interview with Audrey Tobias

<sup>7</sup> Muriel Fullerton, Kathy Powles, Helen Hall, Alice Boomhour, Tom Walden, Larry Lee, Bruce Mutch were original members of the Montreal COOP.

political realm through the Labour Progressive Party (Communist Party) or CCF, continued engagement in the mainstream church and congregational life as one's primary insertion, or membership in the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth (SCC) as a place to ground and continue one's SCM formation. The COOP came to an end in 1952 when its members, having finished school, married and started families, found themselves dispersed across the country. But many remained close friends with a common theology and politics formed by their SCM and particularly work camp experiences.

### **Society of the Catholic Commonwealth**

Frederic Hastings Smyth, founder of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth (SCC) in 1939 was an anglo-Catholic strongly influenced by Conrad Noel and the Thaxted parish in London. In an October 29, 2010 interview, John Rowe, one of the first SCMs to join the SCC relates the inspiration Smyth offered in his liturgical theology. "The bread and wine contains in its substance, the life and blood of the people who created it. When taken and trans-substantiated, those are the Body of Christ, the history is the Body of Christ. This was how to integrate our Christian faith with political faith, working people's work was returned to feed you to go out into the world and make the making of bread more just."<sup>8</sup>

In 1947 Smyth was a speaker at one of the summer Arundel conferences, sponsored by the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action (AFSA), at which a few SCMs were present. This is likely the contact that changed the lives of a number of SCMs in this period, some of whom left the United Church and became Anglicans and then joined the SCC. Terry Brown's 1987 Thesis on the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, "*Metacosmesis: The Christian Marxism of Frederic Hastings Smyth and the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth*", tells the story of this fascinating organization. In recent conversation, Terry Brown concurred that the Canadian SCMs, grounded in concrete experience with working class realities through the SCM work camps, brought shape, authenticity and longevity to this organization which was immense. For the SCMs who joined the SCC in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it offered a vocational and theological framework for their desire to connect faith, politics and daily living in the Canadian post-WWII context. The SCC came to an end in 1967, seven years after Smyth's death.

The commitment of six of them, John and Isabel Rowe, Tom and Sherry Waldon (in London, England) and Don and Alice Heap (in Toronto) to invest themselves in this form of Christian witness for the rest of their lives rooted the SCC's political and theological thinking in an incarnational practice. Inspired by the worker priests of France and encouraged by their SCM formation, they lived as the church on the margins, but always with a foot firmly planted in the church of the establishment, through membership in local parishes and participation in church conferences etc.

In February 1959, they and several other couples who were following a similar vocation, created a document titled "Statement of a Group of Churchmen Priests and Lay who have chosen to be wage-

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<sup>8</sup> October 29, 2010 interview with John Rowe

workers in industry as an expression of their Faith”. The Statement<sup>9</sup> argues that this is an incarnational imperative and “For our part, this means that we must express our faith by sharing fully the life of the wage-earning class. In our opinion, only on the basis of such a life is the preaching of the Word likely to carry much conviction in modern industrial society.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Bob Miller and Howland House**

With the example of the Montreal COOP and other influences, Senior Work Campers in Toronto in 1953, agreed to establish a co-op SCM House in Toronto to continue the SCM work camp experience in cooperative Christian community and working in industry on a year-round, permanent basis. Bob Miller was essential to the initiation and practical execution of this intention. He was Study Secretary for the National SCM at the time, working with Ted Nichols who was General Secretary. Bob had returned from graduate theological studies in Scotland and Basel, Switzerland in 1951, with many exciting theological ideas and books to offer SCMerS. In his memoir of Bob Miller, *The Messenger*, Doug Hall observes that “Bob Miller was among the first intellectuals in Canada to have read the works of scholars who, during the remainder of the century and beyond, would dominate the Protestant theological scene in the West.”<sup>11</sup> In a letter to Doug Hall, prior to his return to Canada, Bob asserts:

There have to be much more radical experiments in the life of the church than there have yet been. Some of us have to get onto the frontier, where there are no beaten paths of how or what to do....The ‘other’ world of the working man that has grown up here in Europe is completely isolated from the church...God will have us where the people are, with them in their life and work...<sup>12</sup>

For Bob, the decision to establish a permanent “industrial mission” after the 1953 Bathurst work camp was a start. Roy de Marsh, University of Toronto SCM General Secretary, wrote of it in the SCM’s journal, “The Canadian Student”:

This early realization of the need for involvement in the total life of working-class people, if the church is to share the evangel with them, has developed in more recent camps to the recognition that the answer to the industrial problem can be given only in terms of life-time vocation<sup>13</sup>... From the priest-workmen in Europe we are learning something of what this requires of us. Some of our students are discovering this answer by entering a permanent industrial job, either before or after graduation, in order to make it their Christian vocation. In Toronto, this summer, a group of these students are making plans to move into a house in the industrial neighbourhood this fall to continue their life and work as members of the working-class.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The full Statement can be found on the website related to The Story of Howland House, [www.hhstory.wordpress.com](http://www.hhstory.wordpress.com). It argues that clergy and lay members of the church need to live and work with industrial workers in order to learn their reality and testify to the commitment of the church to their lives.

<sup>10</sup> Statement of a Group of Churchmen Priests and Lay who have chosen to be wage-workers in industry as an expression of their Faith”, Betsy Anderson’s papers

<sup>11</sup> Doug Hall, *The Messenger*, p.77

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 38

<sup>13</sup> Roy DeMarsh, “Canadian SCM Student-in-industry Projects”, p.5 “The Canadian Student”, 1953

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 6

Dick Allen, who later wrote *The Social Passion*, a seminal book on the social gospel in Canada, remembers the plan he and his wife Marg had made to move into this “industrial mission”, in a February 24, 2009 interview.

In 1952-53, after the 1952 work camp there was a lot of discussion about expanding the work camp experience that a number of us were having into a cooperative residence and to work in industry and respond to the issues and problems of industrial life and industrial society as a community in ways that we found appropriate to our Christian beliefs and our Christian understanding of the nature of society and of human beings. So a number of us went into the 1953 work camp at Bathurst with that in mind.<sup>15</sup>

John and Muriel Anderson, who were participants in the 1949 Montreal Work Camp, and the Montreal COOP (1949-52), were also present at the 1953 Bathurst St. Work Camp. They anticipated joining a year-round work camp community once John had completed his settlement assignment for the United Church’s Home Mission Board. Muriel and other work campers joined Bob Miller in seeking out an appropriate house and settled on 105 Howland Ave. Close to Bathurst St. United Church and the many industries along the railway line just north of them at Dupont Ave, this was an ideal location for the launch of an “industrial mission”. The large homes of the Annex, reflecting a grander time when it had been a northerly suburb of Toronto, were now largely rooming houses, home to many displaced people from Europe following World War Two.

### **Early Years of Howland House**

John and Muriel had returned to Montreal by the time this three-story semi-detached house across from St. Alban’s Anglican Church was purchased for \$18,700. The purchase of the house for this experiment in industrial mission had been made possible through six personal loans<sup>16</sup> which covered the \$6,500 down payment<sup>17</sup> and a mortgage of \$12,200<sup>18</sup>. Gwen Hasselfield, June Eames, Marg and Helen Steenson, Gus Trip, Clarke Deller, David Slater and Doug Brown were part of the original group of residents. Gus Trip had been at the Bathurst St., 1953 Work Camp, and Gwen Hasselfield at the Mental Health Work Camp housed at Queen St. United Church in Toronto. Clarke Deller, Doug Browne and David Slater had been at the Noranda Work Camp in northern Quebec. In that first year, some, like Marg Steenson worked in industry while others attended university.

John Anderson had attempted to convince the United Church’s Montreal and Ottawa Conference to allow him to take up this experimental ministry in 1954 but they urged him to complete his settlement commitments in a congregational setting. Ministering in the six-point Valcartier-Portneuf pastoral charge along the north shore of the St. Lawrence in Quebec, John and Muriel corresponded with Bob Miller in Toronto and fellow COOP participants, Dan and Alice Heap, who were serving an Anglican rural pastoral charge in Kazabazua, Quebec. They discussed options for following a vocation in

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Dick Allen, February 24, 2009

<sup>16</sup> Gerd Arnborg lent \$1,000, Doug Browne, \$400, Margaret Saunders, \$1,000, Marg Steenson, \$1,000, Gus Trip, \$100, Gladys Miller, \$3,000. Four of the six lenders, Doug Browne, Marg Steenson, Gus Trip and Gladys Miller, were among the first residents in the house in the Fall of 1953. Muriel Anderson Personal Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Muriel Anderson remembers that all but Gladys Miller’s were paid off as a priority, Gladys Millers was repaid by about 1966 at \$50/month. Muriel Anderson interview February 6, 2009

<sup>18</sup> Bob Miller letter to Muriel Anderson, April 20, 1954

industrial evangelism. The Heaps and Andersons explored moving into Howland House together, sharing another house together or living each in their own household but sharing a communal approach to their intention to live out their vocation as “worker priests”, but for various reasons chose different paths. Parallel correspondence with Bob Miller explored the circumstances at Howland House at the time, Bob’s plans and the possibility for John and Muriel to join the Howland House experiment as soon as John’s obligations to the Home Mission Board had been met.

Bob’s letters reflect a fluid approach to the future of Howland House and reveal that the original vision was having a challenging time coalescing and the dramas that were an inevitable aspect of young adults living in close proximity, were requiring more of Bob’s presence and supervision, than were realistic given his responsibilities as SCM Study Secretary.<sup>19</sup> One can deduce from the letters that for a while he considered resigning as SCM Study Secretary but then agreed to continue in that role for three more years after which he became full-time Book Steward for the SCM Book Room.

Bob’s tentativeness about the direction of Howland House<sup>20</sup> and his own future are evident in an April 6, 1954 letter where he warns that the Andersons cannot expect to “come into a house full of people who are working in factories. There is not going to be any readymade group. It is going to have to be built up over time ....the house is here for any nucleus that wants to move in and take over.”<sup>21</sup> In a follow-up April 20 letter, Bob describes the financial arrangements for the house and suggests he and his mother may move out if John and Muriel want to take over the experiment. “The house is in my name, but I shall be happy to change that as soon as anyone else is ready to take it over.”<sup>22</sup> However, things settle down and in a March 1955 letter John confirms the Andersons’ decision to join the community in the summer of 1955 and to work with the existing residents, including Bob and his mother, toward the vision of being an intentional Christian community of those working in industry. John writes:

I would like to start with Howland House as it is...and strive gradually to evolve something worthwhile. I feel that Howland has to be tied in more closely with the SCM work camp program and, possibly, with the Religion and Labour Foundation....to be recognized by the SCM as an experiment in full-time industrial missions. If the SCM can recognize it as such, perhaps the Churches will also eventually give it support.<sup>23</sup>

John had outlined his sense of call into this form of ministry in an April 26, 1954 letter to Rev. J.R. Leng of the Home Mission Board: “I am still convinced that God’s will for me is to go back to work in a factory, to share the life of workers in our society, and to try to be a good worker and a Christian minister. I am aware the present situation of the Priest-Workers in France<sup>24</sup> has heightened the problematic nature of the step. But where Catholicism has failed, Protestantism may succeed.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> October 6, 1954 letter from Bob Miller to John and Muriel Anderson. John Anderson Personal Papers

<sup>20</sup> John Anderson Personal Papers, In his March 11, 1954 letter to John and Muriel Anderson, John Rowe, Jill Stitchberry and Dot Wing, Bob outlines many possible developments for Howland House including talking to John Rowe “about having a more senior group, mostly working, living in the house, and had proposed that he be one of them. He has been planning on this, and hopes to move in at the end of May. He would be the one I would like to have do the Bible Study.”

<sup>21</sup> April 6, 1954 letter to Muriel Anderson from Bob Miller. John Anderson Personal Papers.

<sup>22</sup> April 20, 1954 letter to Muriel Anderson from Bob Miller. John Anderson Personal Papers

<sup>23</sup> March 9, 1955 letter from John Anderson to Bob Miller, John Anderson Personal Papers.

<sup>24</sup> In the midst of the Cold War and following simmering conflict between some Bishops and the worker priests in France, on November 4, 1953, Pope Pius XII laid out terms under which worker priests would be allowed to continue their vocation

## Howland House Community Life

After an exploratory visit at Easter in 1955, John and Muriel moved into Howland House in July with their three-year old daughter Elizabeth (Betsy). Muriel was expecting their second child and it was agreed she would earn room and board (\$12/week) for herself and the children through her work as cook for the community. John had asked Montreal and Ottawa Presbytery to retain him on the role, and requested that his call to mission in industry be recognized as an experiment within the United Church. He had hoped that the resolution adopted by Montreal and Ottawa Conference in June 1954 urging the Board of Home Mission to “study the advisability of starting a ministry by ordained men as workers in factories and other fields of industry and under the direction of the Board of Home Mission”<sup>26</sup> might have bolstered his request. While not recognizing his vocational choice in a formal way, the Conference agreed to retain him on the role and in the United Church pension fund if he paid his own premiums.

When John and Muriel joined the Howland House Co-op in July 1955, other household members were Bob Miller and his mother Gladys, Sheila Scott, Fred Heidrich, Marg and Helen Steenson, Dorothy Wing, Bob Van Alstyne and John Lee, a young and recent recruit from the 1955 Student in-Industry Work Camp at Bathurst St. John Lee describes his transition from a foster family to Howland House as “the watershed between my orphan childhood and the family of choice which would endure into my old age.”<sup>27</sup> John Lee became a Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto and a long-time gay activist. His autobiography, *Love’s Gay Fool*, which includes much information about his experience in the SCM and at Howland House, can be read on line.

The seven bedroom house had a full capacity of 15<sup>28</sup>: Bob’s mother, Gladys Miller, known as Mrs. Miller or Mrs. M by her housemates had been widowed not long after Bob’s return to Canada, and had agreed to give up her Windermere Ave. home and join Bob in this experiment for which she also made a \$3,000 loan toward the down payment. She was remarkably adept at living in this rather unorthodox community of young people while maintaining her own life and connections to friends in the Swansea neighbourhood of Toronto. Mrs. Miller occupied a large and pleasant second-floor bed-sitting room at the front of the house. She had two luxuries that she shared with others, a television and a car. With the arrival of the Anderson family, Howland House became a truly intergenerational community that offered an experience of family for all who lived and visited there.

Muriel Anderson observes in a February 6, 2009 interview:

Mrs. M performed an elder’s role in a person to person way. She was very affectionate and liked young people. She always helped with the dishes and interwove herself around the cooking and cleaning up. She helped with the shopping because she had a car. Eventually she was feeling firm enough about the community that she could have her Bridge Club over. Keeping the

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within factories and working class communities. March 1, 1954 was the deadline to comply or be removed from the priesthood. Of the 100 or so worker priests serving at the time, approximately one third complied while the majority refused.

<sup>25</sup> April 26, 1954 letter from John Anderson to J.R. Leng. John Anderson Personal Papers

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in a paper found in John Anderson’s personal papers

<sup>27</sup> [www.johnalanlee.ca](http://www.johnalanlee.ca), *Love’s Gay Fool*, Chapter Six, p. 1

<sup>28</sup> 4 men in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor back bedroom, 4 women in the front 3<sup>rd</sup> floor bedroom, Bob in the small 3<sup>rd</sup> floor bedroom, the children in the back second floor bedroom, John and Muriel in the middle bedroom and a small second floor bedroom for a male or female single, with Mrs. M in the spacious second floor front room.



environment home- like was partly because Muriel was there full time and Mrs. M was there as a stalwart part and there were three generations. People felt not only that they were in an industrial mission, but that it was a home with like-minded purpose although different histories. It was kind of an anchor.<sup>29</sup>

The details of the early period are sparse and those interviewed remember the details with different emphases. The house was established as a co-op and inhabitants paid room and board. The day-to-day pattern when John and Muriel arrived in July 1955 included morning and evening worship, bi-weekly house meetings, a “Fag List”<sup>30</sup> of daily and weekly chores and periodic speakers and study sessions. In a 2009 interview Muriel Anderson recalls:

Yes at the beginning it was quite highly structured. We had worship every night after dinner for about half an hour in the front room. We took turns leading with Bible readings and discussion, prayers and singing from the SCM Hymn Book. We would reflect on the bible reading; what it meant and how it fit into what we were doing and thinking.

House meetings were every two weeks in the evening and the worship schedule and other plans were set there. We took turns chairing. Anything and everything could be put on the agenda..... We discussed things about the food, adjustments on the rent, financial reports from the treasurer.

We also had study sessions... A lot of visitors came through, often through Bob and the SCM and there was the Workers Educational Association. We had C. Wright Mills one evening.<sup>31</sup>

John Lee’s on-line autobiography *Love’s Gay Fool*, reports regular house meetings which among other things “address the inevitable frictions between disparate people living two or three to a room.”<sup>32</sup> He provides further detail from a September 7, 1955 Journal entry: “In a strange vote of confidence, if not affection, I have been elected House Treasurer. This is a responsible job, involving rents, bills, banking, keeping accounts and reporting regularly on our financial situation.”<sup>33</sup> Room and board was \$12 a week, which covered food and the cook’s salary of \$19 a week and the mortgage repayment, interest, repairs and upkeep.

## 1956 Work Camp

A number of the initial residents left the co-op between 1955 and 1956. Having received a number of inquiries from new folks interested in joining the household, in the winter of 1956, Howland House Co-ops decided that it would be helpful to host a summer student-in-industry work camp at Howland House to help focus and confirm their industrial mission purpose and share their experience and commitments with others. Six work campers<sup>34</sup> joined five already engaged in the Howland House

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Muriel Anderson, February 6, 2009

<sup>30</sup> An army term, short for “fatigues”

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Muriel Anderson, February 6, 2009

<sup>32</sup> *Love’s Gay Fool*, Chapter 6, p. 2

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1

<sup>34</sup> Imogene Walker, Alan Baker, Margaret Steenson, Maqbul Caleb, Robert Wright, and Milt Bierman

community. John Lee had opted to attend the 1956 work camp at Columba House in Montreal, led by Vince Goring, then General Secretary at the Saskatoon SCM. John Anderson was the Work Camp Director in Toronto and Muriel the cook.

Preparation for the work camp began in the spring as a letter of March 24, 1956 outlines both practical details like the cost of room and board and proposes an exchange of responses to materials prepared by John and Muriel Anderson as a means of doing “preliminary preparation so as to get maximum value for the summer”. In the process of preparing and sharing the summer experience, there was much discussion and exploration of why participants were engaged in working in industry as Christians. The notes and outlines for the study life<sup>35</sup> of the Work Camp reflect a continued grappling with purpose and points of connections with industrial workers for Christians. A book list includes a number of Lex Miller’s books including *Christian Faith and My Job* and *Christian Vocation in the Contemporary World* as well as *Christians at Work*, a publication of the British Council of Churches and *The Meaning of Work*, a publication of the World Council of Churches.

During the summer, Toronto Work Camp members proposed a weekend conference in Montreal with members of the Montreal Work Camp. The topic was “Ways and Means of Evangelizing the Proletariat”. John Lee summarized the discussions in the Montreal Work Camp Log.

Actually what happened was a discussion of specific projects: the Evangelical Academies of Germany, the worker priests in France, the Sheffield Mission in England, the Iona Community in Scotland and the East Harlem Project in New York. We never did get to the ways and means for Canada.

One of the best discussions arose out of the question: After we have gone into industry and convinced some of the workers of Christianity, what do we do with them? Take them into the bourgeois church? Start a new church? The answers led to Marxism. Clearly our effort must be directed not only at evangelizing the workers so they will join the Church, but changing the social organization so that working class church will replace bourgeois church.<sup>36</sup>

After the summer, some of the work campers continued to live at Howland House while others returned to university elsewhere. John Anderson reports that an effort was made to conduct study sessions in the following winter and to involve a larger circle in regular books discussions, but the focus and energy of community members “shifted outside the House into politics, fellow-worker relationships, peace, church, SCM Work Camp Committee etc.”<sup>37</sup> Through the next period of its life, the Howland House community was made up of a mixture of students, those working in industry and others, who needed a supportive community as new arrivals to Toronto. Like the Montreal COOP before it, Howland House was always challenged by the tension between being a community of those working in industry with a mission, and those who were students.

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<sup>35</sup> 1956 Work Camp file. John Anderson Personal Papers.

<sup>36</sup> “The Howland House Visit to Montreal Camp” by John Lee. Montreal Work Camp Log, SCM Box 121 1986.076C, United Church of Canada Archives

<sup>37</sup> April 1959 Review of “Ministry-in-Industry”, written by John Anderson, in John Anderson’s personal papers

## Middle Years at Howland House

As the 1950's unfolded, and especially during the 1958 depression, it became harder to hold jobs in industry. Muriel Anderson remembers that "SCMers were spotted for being different and offered jobs as foreman or in the office and if you said no, then you would come under suspicion."<sup>38</sup> In 1963, following a series of lay-offs and temporary work, John Anderson, one of the last Howland House members working in industry, took over the theology section of the SCM Book Room, ending his sojourn as a worker in industry and immersing himself in another love; theological books. The Millers and Andersons continued as the core residents of Howland House.

Many Howland House members were active in the anti-nuclear "Ban the Bomb" movement in the 1950's through the Canadian Peace Congress and in the 1960's the CCND – Canadian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Members of the house became active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and in the late 1960's Howland House was a refuge for Draft Dodgers or resisters, some of whom became friends and long-term residents of the community. They also housed some who came for the famous Teach-Ins at the University of Toronto in the late 60's.

Howland House's roots in the SCM also remained essential. In 1968 Don Wilson, returning from several years as General Secretary of the Chilean SCM, lived at Howland House as he worked to rebuild the Canadian SCM from the institutional diminishment it had experienced during the 1960s when it was engaged with and helped spawn many radical New Left movements on Canadian campuses.

From the beginning, the Howland House community was strongly connected to Bathurst St. United Church. Many Howland House folks, joined in that congregation's ministry to the immigrant and working class community which surrounded it, led first by Rev. Gordon Domm and then Rev. Glynn Firth, an SCMer himself.<sup>39</sup>

Howland House residents worked with marginalized youth through the Bathurst St. United Hi-C, which was often challenging and sometimes hazardous as rival gangs interrupted normal teenager activities. Bill Sanders from the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York was hired to be a Youth Worker at Bathurst and he along with many former SCMers worked with the immigrant youth seeking to find their way. There were often international students, connected to the Ecumenical Institute on Madison Ave., or the United Church Training School or friends of friends, living at Howland House for shorter and longer stays. Bob Miller's development of the SCM Book Room ensured it grew to be an important Toronto resource for theological and other books. His friendship with Emil Fackenheim brought Christian-Jewish dialogue into the living room and many political and social issues were the hot topic of supper table conversation.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Muriel Anderson, February 6, 2009

<sup>39</sup> A paper on Bathurst St. United Church's history and connection to Howland House can be found at [www.hhstory.wordpress.com](http://www.hhstory.wordpress.com)

Residents of Howland House along with SCM friends and neighbours, many of whom were members at Bathurst St. United Church were also part of the urban renewal movement in Toronto at this time, coalescing around the campaign to stop the Spadina Expressway. Jane Jacobs had moved in around the corner to her home on Albany Ave. Recently arrived from a successful battle in New York City to stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway, she brought experience and flare to an already established struggle to stop the continued building of the expressway which achieved success in 1971.

The community at Howland House contributed to a progressive counter-culture presence in downtown Toronto which, together with hippies, university students, young professionals and the energy and investments of successive immigrant communities, created a progressive city politics in the early 1970s which saved Toronto from the depression and disintegration of the downtown core endured by many American cities at the time.

### **The End of Howland House**

Howland House as a co-op and home of the Andersons in Toronto for 20 years came to an end in 1975 when the Andersons moved out at the request of Bob Miller. When conflict broke out at the SCM Book Room regarding the role of the Book Room Board vis a vis Bob's role as Book Room Manager, it quickly escalated when Bob decided to distribute "bonus" cash payments to himself and all the employees from the surplus which had built up over the years of the Book Room's operation under the non-profit status of the SCM. Some employees, including John Anderson, refused to accept the "bonus" and found themselves in opposition to Bob's interpretation of the Board's intentions and his actions.

Loyalties were tested and in 1975, the tension and stress became intolerable for Bob and he asked the Andersons to leave Howland House. Although the house had been bought with the shared room and board payments of all those who had lived there over the 22 years, it was legally held in Bob's name and he retained ownership, while the Andersons moved to buy their own home for the first time since their 1951 marriage.

### **Conclusion**

The "Story of Howland House" and the SCM work camps which led to its creation is one of those stories whose recovery and uncovering reminds us of the rich and varied tributaries which have irrigated the field of Christian social engagement in Canada. Howland House occupied an edge and called the church to stay on and connect to this edge. While an earlier generation of students responded to the call of the Student Volunteer Movement "to evangelize the world in this generation", many students in the post war period felt called to take the radical message of the Bible into working class communities. Anne Campbell, member of the 1949 Montreal Work Camp wrote in the March 1950 *Canadian Student* that "The frontier of the Church today is not necessarily on far-flung wildernesses, but in an industrial plant....How can the Church and its message have relevance to people whose daily working situation denies everything creative and human in them?..(the church) must do all in its power radically to change the situation so that men can again become creative human beings, with through the power of the Spirit, the possibility of living abundantly."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The Canadian Student, March, 1950

The 1940's, 50's and 60's were a unique time in Canadian church history. The creation of the World Council of Churches, the Second Vatican Council, the radical leadership of The Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada, the rise of Communism in Europe and many newly independent or liberated former European colonies around the world, the Worker Priest Movement, Industrial Missions, Christian Marxist dialogue, the Cold War, McCarthyism and the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., the formation of the NDP and the creation of Medicare in Canada, the rise of liberation theology in Latin America, Disarmament and the Peace movement, the War in Vietnam, all created a heady and complex context for Christians committed to social and economic transformation.

While it never fully found its footing as an “industrial mission”, Howland House was for many years a hub for those working in industry with a Christian vocation and an inter-generational cooperative home for students and others coming to Toronto for the first time. Through visitors and on-going personal relationships Howland House was connected with and influenced by the Iona Community in Scotland, the Evangelical Academies in Germany, the East Harlem Protestant Parish in the U.S., the Sheffield Industrial Mission in England and former SCM members of the Society of a Catholic Commonwealth.

The many personal stories recorded through this project and deposited in the United Church Archives, round out the story of the churches' engagement in social change that can be found in the formal records of denominations such as the United Church. “The Story of Howland House” is a story of the edges of Christianity which intersects with the stories of ministers, lay people and priests committed to serving in Industrial and City Missions, those who worked in the Settlement Houses in Canada, and the Worker Priest movement in France and England, the Catholic Worker Movement in the United States, the Fellowship for A Christian Social Order and the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action in Canada, among others. They were part of a stream in the Christian Church that sought to engage the economic and political structures of society with a vision of Christian faith lived in daily life.