

## J.B. Miller and Co: Pirate Publishing, Free Thought, and the Circulation of Ideas in 19th-Century Rural Nova Scotia

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James Barry (1819–1906) was a miller, fiddler, and printer in the tiny settlement of Six Mile Brook, Nova Scotia. Barry read widely, and in 1874, at the age of 55, he built a printing press, bought some type, and began printing. His extant library of 350 volumes at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia contains at least ten books that he typeset and printed –all of them illegally. The books ranged from a self-help guide for young Christian men to collections of free-thought essays and an edition of Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason*. Avoiding official copyright scrutiny –books published by “J.B. Miller, New York”–he then sold these locally, both at his mill and through an agent he employed who traipsed through the backroads of Pictou, Colchester and Antigonish Counties.

Most of these books were related to Barry’s mid-life reorientation from Free-Church Presbyterianism to secular Free Thought. Those books, combined with details gleaned from his diary, point to a rich sub-culture of print in rural Nova Scotia. The diary offers numerous clues as to a heretofore unexplored intellectual world of farmer and craft free thinkers in the area. Barry’s associates and book customers were “Infidels”: a small world of Free Thought advocates, secularists, and liberals, embracing critical enquiry, modern thinking, and sometimes even feminism and free love.

Provincial book buyers typically obtained books shipped from New York, Philadelphia or Edinburgh, but via Barry’s press we find a literary world that was shaped locally, and illegally, providing a vital counter-current to dominant local tastes. In the conservative Presbyterian world of rural Pictou County, his anti-state-church, anti-state publications offered local readers entry into a major trans-Atlantic current of radical thought.

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