Mark Young Stark: Pioneer Missionary Statesman

The compilation of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography is a most valuable undertaking. Not only will it provide an enduring record of the activities and achievements of great Canadians, but it has and will provide inducements to scholars to recover from historical obscurity the lives of many who otherwise would be consigned to oblivion. A few months ago the Rev. Mark Young Stark was only a name to me which I had noticed in Synod records. I had no great inclination to find out more about him. Then I was asked to do the necessary research for a biography entry in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography and I discovered not only an interesting man but a great deal about the social and ecclesiastical conditions under which these early ministers of Upper Canada worked. I was fortunate in my research to make the acquaintance of Stark's great granddaughter who has many family artifacts and a considerable wealth of oral accounts of her illustrious forbear. Also the United Church Archives recently acquired several hundred letters to and from Mark Young Stark which were invaluable in piecing his life story together.

Mark Young Stark was born Nov. 9th, 1799 in Dunfermline, Scotland. His father was a linen merchant and his mother was Elizabeth Young of Cleish Castle. His mother died in his infancy and young Mark was raised by his stepmother, the former Mary Bannatyne of Glasgow. (Many of the letters which are extant were written to, and received from his stepmother for whom he had a very high regard. His next most frequent correspondent was his mother's sister, Miss Grace Young of Cleish Castle.)

Since Stark's father died when he was but fourteen years of age he was largely raised in the warm, cultural context of the Bannatyne family. The family was intelligent, wealthy and socially prominent. They operated the Glasgow to Sterling Railway, and were involved in the building of a railway down the West Coast from Glasgow to London. (Dugald Bannatyne, Mark's stepmother's father had published learned works in the area of political economy and related subjects.)

Stark was privately educated in Essex, England under the tutelage of an Anglican clergyman, a certain Rev. Mr. Jay. Returning to Scotland he took an M.A. in Classics at the University of Glasgow, graduating with high honours in 1821. Since he had decided to enter the ministry of the Church of Scotland he continued his studies in the theological faculty of the same institution. Completing the required studies he was licensed to preach the gospel by the Presbytery of Glasgow in 1824. But alas he was not to hold a pastoral charge until he was settled in 1834 in Dundas in Upper Canada. Stark was a "stickit minister".
To understand his difficulty I must explain two practices that were then current in the Church of Scotland:

1) To be licensed gave the candidate only the right to preach for a call. Until a call was issued by a congregation no ordination was possible.

2) In the Church of Scotland at that time the patron, a landed proprietor, the Town Councillor, a representative of the Crown, had the right to present the names of suitable candidates to the congregation. Unfortunately according to a strict interpretation of the law of patronage passed in 1712 the congregation could not refuse to call such nominees. This system was open to serious abuses, and often the favourites of wealthy landlords were intruded upon unwilling congregations. Although General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sought to relieve this intolerable situation by passing the Veto Act, which gave to congregations the right of veto, yet this enactment was declared null and void by the Civil Courts because it contravened the law of patronage. This was to lead inevitably to the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland.

Now Stark in spite of illustrious friends could not get a patron to nominate him to a vacant charge. Without such nomination his coveted ordination was denied him. Prof. Dugald Stewart, the ranking philosopher of Scotland and whose wife was a Bannatyne, worked tirelessly on Stark’s behalf. In a letter dated Dec. 2nd, 1824, to the Rev. Dr. Taylor, minister of St. Enoch’s Church, Glasgow he wrote:

“I understand that my young friend Mr. Mark Stark is desirous of being your assistant, having known him from childhood I can with truth assure you that he is one of the most worthy and amiable young men I have ever known. You must have seen the high testimonies he has received from those best fitted to judge his qualifications for the duties of his profession. I can add, that he is a good scholar, and remarkable for his steadiness of character and sweetness of temper. Above all I can venture to say, that young as he is, you may safely rely on his conscientious discharge of every duty confided to him.”

No success!

Sir George Napier, a very prominent friend and also relative of the Bannatynes wrote the following to Mark Stark on May 19, 1831:

“I have this day received yours of the 6th instant from Clifton and have written off to the Duke of Richmond to beg he will confer a great obligation upon me. I have recalled his gracious recollection that he had formerly got the Duke of Argyle to place your name on his list of candidates for a Lowland Church, and I referred him to Lord Lansdowne to tell him how hardly you have been used about Maybole. In short my dear Mark it shall not be my fault if you are unsuccessful in this.”

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Still no success!

His cousin, John Miller Bannatyne wrote to Stark Jan. 20, 1833 regarding his failure to be considered for a vacant congregation at Kilpatrick:

"To change the subject from myself to yourself, I'm sorry to find your prospects for success in getting the Church at Kilpatrick are not improving — really those patrons of churches are the most slippery dogs under the sun. They certainly have much need of reform!"

I have purposely laboured this point because it is significant in assessing his later decision to throw in his lot with the Free Church in Canada. By suffering the indignities of the iniquitous patronage system he was prepared for his role of reformer.

Unable to secure a call under the oppressive patronage system young Stark acted for a time as a private tutor to the children of Sir James Halkett (I would conjecture from correspondence, a high ranking executive in the Hudson's Bay Co.) Thereafter he spent several years studying on the Continent where he became proficient in French, German and Italian. He studied Art in Rome for several months and some of his excellent drawings and water colours are still extant from this period of his life. He also found time to study botany and became so proficient in this science that he developed a close friendship with Sir William Hooker a leading botanist in Britain. After his arrival in Canada he frequently hunted out rare botanical specimens for Hooker's collection in the University of Glasgow.

At last despairing of an ecclesiastical settlement in Scotland Stark offered his services to the Glasgow Colonial Society which was concerned with sending missionaries to various parts of British North America. On Feb. 19, 1833 he was appointed to Canada West but without the usual guarantee of financial support.

"This late gentleman" records the minutes of the Society, "has gone out entirely on his resources, but with the recommendation of the society, and a promise of future encouragement."

Prior to leaving for Canada however, he was offered a living in the Church of England but refused the offer expressing his preference for service within the Church of Scotland. William Erskine, another prominent Scottish friend, who, I would gather, had himself made the pilgrimage into the Church of England, wrote to him urging him to accept the living in England not to go to Canada where he would be throwing away his not inconsiderable gifts:

"let me get you to do nothing hurriedly, to consult your impartial friends and not be led away by your first hurried impulses. I would much rather see you in the west of England than in the wilds of Canada. Your talents and acquirements are suited to the one and would be thrown away on the other."
Stark arrived in Canada with letters of introduction from his prominent friends to the Governor General Sir John Colborne with whom he was to establish a close friendship. He also carried permission from Sir James Halkett to use the Hudson’s Bay Company private mail service from Lachine to the London office. He was soon called to the recently established and struggling two-point charge of Dundas and Ancaster — a parish area he describes in a letter to his step-mother “covering a rectangle of 10 miles by 20 miles”. Here he received his long coveted ordination on September 26th, 1833.

Writing to Miss Grace Young (Aunt Grace) at Cleish Castle a few weeks later in a letter dated Nov. 8, 1833, he tells her:

“If I manage to make myself popular here there is no doubt that my prospects will improve as this is, and is likely to continue, a very flourishing place. It is situated in a beautiful country about three miles from the head of Burlington Bay and the head of Lake Ontario, and it is connected with it by a canal which is in process of being constructed, when it (Dundas) will become the great point of communication between the Lower Provinces and all the fine country to the Westward in the Gore and London district. My income this year I don’t expect to be above 170 or 180 pounds, including the government allowance which from being a fixed grant divided among all the clergymen, has from the increases of their numbers greatly diminished from what it was before — But I should hope that the subscription would increase by another year.”

He goes on to tell Aunt Grace that he and a certain Mr. Racey are going to keep house together. He is described as a very excellent man who has bought a house on the high ground above the town.

“Last Thursday,” the letter continues, “I rode to Guelph, 26 miles through the bush, it being the fast day. To my surprise altho’ it is only six years since the first tree was cut I found a large nice looking village with two churches and the foundations of a third and there was a congregation of at least 300 people.”

Stark’s stipend which he referred to was derived from two sources: the government grant shared among Church of Scotland Ministers, and the subscriptions of the members of his two congregations. This income was augmented in Stark’s case by the revenues and produce from his farm and the interest from some private investments.

In another letter to “Aunt Grace” dated April 8, 1834, he tells of building a house on a newly purchased farm.

“even as it is I do not expect to finish my house and office for less than 200 pounds - 250 pounds currency, but I found I could not make anything comfortable for less – bye the bye I am building on a property of 50 acres, the Ewart Estate, as my friend Racey calls it, which I purchased lately from
Mr. Ewart for 250 pounds. It is a mile and a quarter from the village so will be very convenient and it is on the road to Ancaster.”

Then he goes on to hint at a previous land deal in which he was involved:

“It is not so great a bargain as my last but it is worth the money — the Green estate, my former purchase is a mile farther from town. I may probably sell it if I get a good offer and ready money — and purchase wild land more remote” (From another source I discovered that he bought the Green farm for 75 pounds and sold it for 125 pounds.)

“With regard to my income from my living”, he tells Aunt Grace, “I have drawn one quarter’s pay from the government - 16 pounds 10 — I shall draw 33 pounds in July from Ancaster. I have received 6 pounds 2 - 6 here (Dundas) in payment for the last half year and have 10 pounds-17-6 to receive.”

Then he inserts a cheery note.

“My elders are in the practice of collecting and say that they look for an increase rather than a falling off as some have increased — one or two have doubled their subscriptions and several have added their names to the list.”

Then he returns to a description of his newly purchased farm:

“On my farm there are about 25 acres cleared and nearly free of stumps — at least I shall get most of them out this season. The situation is high with a fine view, well watered in all parts of it and a stream running through it — a considerable part of it fenced — and a great deal of good timber which will more than serve me for fire wood all my life.”

In June of 1835 Stark married Agatha Georgiana Street, daughter of Col. Street of Ancaster. The Streets were Anglican, and prominent in financial affairs in Upper Canada. Five children were born of this joyful union: Robert, who became a pharmacist in Woodstock, who married the Anglican rector’s daughter at Ingersoll and became an Anglican; Mary Ann who never married; Elizabeth Mary who married Andrew Middlemiss; William Geddes, who settled in Hamilton, and Mark Dugald who became a highly education medical practitioner in England. It is interesting to note that the Stark children played with the children of Canon Osler, rector of the Anglican Church.

Later Canon Osler’s son William (Sir William Osler) and Mark Dugald Stark interned together and were close friends, although the fathers were never on such cordial terms.

During these early years involving preaching, pastoral visitation, presbytery work and farming, Stark also gave leadership in a building program
for his tiny flock at Dundas, at first numbering only twenty members. The building of St. Andrew's Church was begun in 1835 but the building was not opened for worship until 1837. It is not difficult to guess the reason for this. Money was scarce and the new settlers were busy with the hard task of establishing themselves in a rugged and primitive community. The fact that Stark had to depend in part for a living on the produce of his farm plus some private investments tells an eloquent tale about the economic situation at that time.

Dundas, in the early part of Stark's ministry, was the weaker of the two congregations numerically speaking, but Ancaster seemed to be always encountering serious financial difficulties. Stark's correspondence makes frequent reference to the pecuniary problems of Ancaster. Economic deprivation was partly responsible but internal dissension within the congregation was even more responsible for the difficulties. The trustees of the congregation had lost the confidence of the members so the members would not give. The trustees on the other hand, stubbornly resisted the conditions laid down by the congregation for support. At one point the trustees were the object of a civil suit and the congregation would not let them off the hook. Stark tried his best to play the role of the peacemaker but finally gave up remarking warily to his step-mother "They would just have to fight out their own battles."

In a letter to his step-mother dated Dec. 14, 1840, he complains that:

"All the ostensible members of my congregation at Ancaster are in a state of bankruptcy at present, and my income from that quarter has been entirely cut off this year."

However far from publicy complaining he subscribed 5 pounds to help Ancaster out of its difficulties. Privately however, he confides to his step-mother he would like to be relieved of the responsibilities of the Ancaster congregation -- but that he "will not leave them destitute of leadership."

But other deeper problems faced Stark and he was soon to be thrust out of the local parish life and on to the broader stage of church life in the Canada's.

Back in Scotland meanwhile, the patronage issue had become intolerable. In spite of numerous appeals to the government in London and one appeal to Queen Victoria herself, nothing was done, on one hand, to remove the iniquities of the patronage system within the church in Scotland, and on the other hand, to give to the congregations the right to call their own ministers. So on May 18, 1843, almost half of the ministers, elders, and members withdrew from the Church of Scotland to form the Free Church of Scotland -- free of government interference, free to determine its own destiny -- with congregations free to call their own ministers. It is important to note that the Free Church did not disavow the establishment principle, that is, the recognition by the state of a national religion and the granting of state support to maintain religious ordinances. They did not believe in the voluntary position, as did the Secessionist branch of Presbyterianism, which held for a complete separation of Church and State; they simply denied the right of the State to intrude ministers on unwilling congregations, and affirmed that in the area of doctrine, polity and practice they were under obligation to obey the "Crown rights of the Redeemer."
Here in Canada the Disruption created a great furore. Church of Scotland ministers expressed support for one side or the other and Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland to which Stark belonged, was threatened with disruption following the Scottish pattern even though patronage was no real problem in this country.

Stark was a peacemaker and counselled moderation. Although he personally had suffered much at the hands of the iniquitous patronage system and consequently was sympathetic to the protest of the Free Church of Scotland, yet his soul abhorred schism. Furthermore his sense of missionary obligation made him anxious about the future mission of the Presbyterians in Canada if the Synod was divided. He was also wise enough to realize that Government grants in support of religious ordinances would be jeopardized by such disunion.

In a letter to his step-mother dated Fed. 11, 1844, he writes:

"My principles and my feelings are I must say, all engaged in favour of the Free Church. If the residuary church and the government at home leave us as we are, we are quite satisfied with the principles we enjoy; if they force us to a declaration of our principles – to an adherence to the one party or the other, as a condition of our retaining these privileges, I believe that there are few – much as we should regret the disruption here – who will not take the part of the Free Church and I believe that our people will earnestly do their best to prevent us from sustaining pecuniary loss by change. But I still trust that the wisdom of our government and of the residuary church at home will avert this calamity from us. The position which we wish to maintain is that of entire independence and equality to receive members and missionaries and ministers from both sections of the church who will submit themselves to our order and discipline here. We have no cause here to mix ourselves in the question farther than that. We wish to preserve our church from the possibility of such evil accruing to her in future, and to maintain the principles of the endowment from public funds to the clergy of various denominations as perfectly consistent with their spiritual independence and the spiritual independence of their people."

Meanwhile his work at Dundas was growing. He was able to report that his mid-week meeting at which he was lecturing on Matthew’s Gospel was well attended. But increasing congregational demands on his time made the work on the farm more difficult. On Sept. 7, 1840, he wrote to his half-brother, Dugald Stark:

"We have got some interesting books lately but I have so very little time for reading and get on but slowly and it would be one great inducement for me to leave the farm that I might have time to study."
Small wonder he had little time to read! Listen to this description of his farm responsibilities from a letter to Aunt Grace dated Dec. 14, 1840:

“I shall be obliged to go to the expense of getting another horse soon for my present one is nearly worn off his legs. He is not fit for the saddle which is very inconvenient so I shall try to trade him off as the people here say to another. I have kept on my man and I have got a good deal of work done this Autumn. We have increased our stock this year having got 10 sheep. We have besides another yoke of oxen, 3 cows - a heifer - 3 calves and 5 pigs - besides 13 which we have killed. I sold 9 but produce is so low I got little for them - not quite 10 pounds although they weight 124 cwt. And now having given account of the other livestock I must say something of Agath and the children who are well and thriving.”

Although times were hard in the early 1840’s Stark felt that some of the problem was injudicious financial management. In a letter (to his step-mother) dated Sept. 8, 1842, he writes:

“This country is a country for the poor. The labourer will do well and the small capitalist will do well and get a good return for his money and can live upon it. The storekeeper may do well but as often does ill - lawyers thrive upon the necessities of others - ministers generally have food and raiment - but the farmer who depends on hired labour cannot succeed - the storekeepers have too easy credit and give too easy credit and often struggle on through a miserable existence of debt and difficulty principally however, through a bad system and through extravagance - I forgot to get ink in Dundas today and am labouring to get along with black porridge!”

How well a small capitalist could do in those difficult times can be seen from Stark’s own investments. He reports that he received 8 per cent per annum on his money netting 20 pounds from the Gore Bank and 53 pounds from the Upper Canada Bank. (If my arithmetic is correct, he had invested 584 pounds).

The hardships of his farm life were increased by the propensity of his driveway to fill in with snow, he complains to his step-mother in a letter dated April 11th, 1843:

“We have had four or five times to cut our road out to the main road this season for its depth of snow drifted in many placed 5 or 6 feet. The Millenialists are prophesying that it will be 10 feet deep over the land and these (sic) would be converted into pitch and brimstone which would put an end to the world by fire.”

I have spent a disproportionate length of time perhaps, dealing with a pioneer missionary trying to make ends meet in Dundas and Ancaster. It's a
side, however, of the life of early missionaries that you don’t hear too much about. It is indicative of the character of Stark, who although nourished in comfort, wealth, and high culture, was nevertheless capable of surviving the culture shock of immigration, and of adapting himself to the rigours and stringent demands of the life of an early Presbyterian missionary.

Writing to his step-mother on Mar. 13, 1844, he displayed his irenic spirit,

"It is truly lamentable the bad feeling which has been generated of late between the different parties and which I fear is not likely to subside. I feel very anxious about our position here and have been doing all in my power to keep down the excitement. The conduct both of the establishment and the Free Church towards us has been very inconsiderate — they are both manifestly anxious by any means to hook us on to their respective parties, and have been tampering with individuals rather than corresponding through official channels — with us a Church — apparently unconcerned about us farther than that they may attach us as adherents to their own side of the question."

It can be seen from correspondence from this period that Stark was urging his fellow ministers not to break fellowship with one another over Scotland’s quarrel. It was sufficient for the Synod to require a disavowal of State interference in the affairs of the Church. Ministers who were prepared to make such a disavowal would, whether they came from the Auld Kirk or the Free Kirk, be welcome.

Two problems confronted the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland as it convened in Kingston in July, 1844.

1) Did retaining cordial relations with Church of Scotland involve the Canadian Synod in a tacit approval of patronage, or State interference in its affairs of the Church? Some said yes, others said No!

2) Would a disavowal of a connection with the Church of Scotland mean the loss of government grants which had been negotiated for the Church of Scotland ministers in Canada? Again there was a division of opinion.

When the Synod opened a valiant attempt was made to bring peace and to overcome the discord which had been largely roused by delegates who had crossed the stormy Atlantic to carry support for either the Auld Kirk or Free Church. Mark Young Stark was elected moderator without a dissenting vote. The hopes for an undivided Church rested on his statesmanship. But alas the division could not be averted. Too many men had already committed themselves to a policy of separation. Led by men like the irascible Dr. John Bayne of Galt and fiery George Brown of the Globe, a group broke off from the parent body renaming themselves simply The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

Stark, once the division became inevitable, sided with the Free Church. He
knew too well from experience the ills of State intrusion in the affairs of the Church.

Writing from the Synod to his step-mother on July 23, 1844, he tells her:

"I was certainly in great hopes before I went (that is to Synod) that a disruption would have been avoided, but every day of my stay diminished the hopes of uniting the extreme parties in any common ground. I went prepared to make great concessions, but after the necessity for disruption was evident, I felt it to be a relief to my conscience that I was no longer called upon to do so, but could give full expression not only in words, but practically, to the principles I maintained. The disruption was certainly a most painful event. I am thankful to say that it has been effected, insofar as I know, without any breach of friendly feelings, nor will it generally interfere even with ministerial communion. There were some who I expected would have gone along with us, with whose decision I was disappointed, but I still expect that they will come over to us. Your views in regard to these matters, I believe, are different from mine. Here we have been away from the turmoil and strife of the contest and have formed our views I think with perhaps less reference to parties than could be done at home. We have taken the part which we conceived to be right and I trust to God that all will be overruled by Him for good. What the consequences to our endowments or our property may be, I do not as yet know, or can we probably for some time."

Stark, interestingly enough was elected moderator of the newly constituted Synod of the Presbyterian Church, popularly known as the Free Church. The reasons for this are perhaps obvious!

1) He had already won the respect and affection of his fellow ministers.

2) Some cherished the hope that the disruption in Canada would be short lived. Stark, in playing the role of the peacemaker retained the confidence of both parties.

3) Stark had solid connections with the leaders of government in Canada, and influential friends in Britian who could perhaps exercise influence on the Colonial office; and the Free Church, hoped to retain the same government grants that had previously been paid to their ministers.

Upon his return from Kingston Stark recommended to his own congregation that they throw in their lot with the Free Church. Although the majority of his congregation were prepared to follow him, his support was not unanimous. At Dundas, for example, 4 of his 6 elders refused to follow him and he and his followers were eventually forced to leave church buildings both at Dundas and Ancaster. Knox Church was built at Dundas and accommodation arranged at Ancaster for the Free Church sympathizers. Stark showed that he was prepared to put his pocketbook where his mouth was and gave sacrificially
towards defraying the costs of the new building. (I have for example, used a spoon at the home of Miss Helda Simister, great granddaughter of Stark, which is all that remains of the expensive flatware belonging to Rev. and Mrs Mark Y. Stark. The rest was sold and the proceeds given to the building fund of Knox Church.)

Stark's outside responsibilities were multiplied because of the Disruption. He wrote the lengthy lead article in the first edition of the new Free Church magazine called The Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record, justifying the steps he and his colleagues had taken at Kingston. He sat on the Board of Knox College and helped lay the foundations and form the curriculum of that institution. He made frequent visits to Toronto to try to persuade the government to continue its grants to the Free Church. But he was unsuccessful. He continued to function as clerk of Hamilton Presbytery, a post he had held in the undivided church, and was first convener and later co-convener of the Home Mission Committee charged with the responsibilities of outreach and the processing and settlement of ministers in new charges.

Meanwhile he continued to minister to a steadily enlarging congregation at Dundas. With its growth, however, the problems multiplied. At Kirkhill Cottage, as he called his farm house on Governor's Road and later at the Manse beside the Church he and his session wrestled with serious moral and spiritual problems. They believed that life profession and lip profession must correspond, and where they didn't they felt it incumbent on themselves to persuade the offenders to mend their ways, or failing that, they assessed penalties which were calculated to underline the gravity of the fault, and perhaps even win the miscreant back to the paths of faith, sobriety and righteousness.

The range of misdemeanors that were dealt with included:

Ante Nuptial fornication; Adultery; Drunkenness; Unethical business practices; Marital discord (unseemly variance with each other).

Theological and ecclesiastical problems which were debated in session included:

Non attendance at worship service, Sunday schools or prayer meetings; Baptism of children of parents whose lives were a disgrace to the gospel; Baptism of the child of a man who had married his wife's sister (In this case the session was for it, the law of the church was against it); Desecration of the Sabbath. (They were concerned with the running of trains on the Great West Railway on Sunday; Failure of the minister to make sufficient pastoral calls.

I have read the session records of many congregations which cover this period. Usually the treatment of offenders was arbitrary, harsh and vengeful. Judging by the session records of Knox Church, Dundas, all of which are extant, the kirk session there was an exception. They went to extraordinary lengths to get at the truth. They visited the guilty time and time again seeking to win them back to
the paths of righteousness. They seemed to be genuinely sorry when severe measures had to be taken. Stark’s gentleness, sympathy, graciousness and unfailing respect for a human being no matter how sinful, and his uncommon appreciation of the forgiveness of God, obviously coloured the decisions of session.

The Knox, Dundas congregation separated amicably from the Ancaster congregation in 1854 with the permission of Presbytery and Stark elected to stay with the congregation of Knox, Dundas.

Now besides the Auld Kirk and Free Church branches of Presbyterianism in Upper Canada there was a third branch, the United Presbyterian Church. It was also a Scottish import which had originally been formed out of two secessionist churches which had separated from the Church of Scotland over the patronage issue in 1733 and 1751. The centre of this branch of Presbyterians was in London, Ontario with enclaves into the Hamilton region. There was a tiny United Presbyterian congregation in Dundas. Since both the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church had separated from the Church of Scotland over its patronage issue it soon became apparent to all concerned that they had much in common. Thus a plan of Union was worked out between the two churches which was consummated at Montreal in 1861. At first Stark was apprehensive over possible sectarian emphases in the United Presbyterian Church due to their firm insistence on a complete separation of Church and State. (Recall Stark’s broad cultural training and his belief that the state had the responsibility to give financial support to religious ordinances without interfering with the doctrine, polity or practice of the church and you will appreciate his uneasiness.) But having satisfied himself that his fears were probably groundless, and motivated by a sincere appreciation for the necessity of a concerted and united missionary outreach he worked diligently to make the union work at large and to facilitate the reception of members of the United Presbyterian Church in Dundas into the congregation of Knox Church.

In failing health he resigned his charge in 1863. His name was kept on the roll of Synod by special resolution and he continued to provide ministerial assistance in Dundas until his successor was inducted. He died January 24, 1866 and is buried in the Grove Cemetery in Dundas. The inscription on his tombstone reads: “In memory of the Rev. Mark Young Stark A.M., for 31 years minister of the Presbyterian Church in Dundas. He was a faithful pastor and earnest preacher, much beloved by his flock, highly esteemed by his brethren in the Ministry, respected by all who knew him, and especially endeared to his family.”

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