

***Voices of Nova Scotia Community: A Written Democracy.* By Scott Milsom. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2003. Pp. 192, ISBN 1 55266 113 X)**

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Voices of Nova Scotia Community: A Written Democracy. By Scott Milsom. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2003. Pp. 192, ISBN 1 55266 113 X)

Voices of Nova Scotia Community is a laudable endeavour, bringing together articles from *Coastal Community News*, the journal of the Coastal Communities Network (see www.coastalcommunities.ns.ca). Its basic theme is expressed by Dianne Hankinson-LeGard of the Falcourt Inn: "It's all about people working together for the good of all" (30).

While Milsom focusses on how purpose-specific interactions (for economic, learning and artistic reasons) create communities, I was reminded of the remarks of the turn of the twentieth century theoretician Georg Simmel:

The fact that people... have lunch together... have sympathetic or antipathetic contacts, quite removed from any tangible interests... all the thousands of relations from person to person, momentary or enduring, conscious or unconscious... continually bind us together (1997: 100).

Such repeated contacts, no doubt, inform the co-operation that Milsom profiles, including Neily Holdright's account of how Blair Douglas, who owns the Caledonia Mill, assisted the Holdright mill, when it was gutted by fire: "Blair offered to help us with the clean-up and rebuilding... He put a 'Giving Tree'...to encourage local people to buy Christmas presents for the children of the workers... I don't think I could live in a better community. The way everybody responded was amazing" (65).

Local initiatives are treated in detail, from youth projects, like the HeartWood Institute (71-73) which foster good citizenship, to literacy and computer-access programmes, and thoughtful tourist developments. Alice Thomas of Terence Bay comments, for instance, "It's great to have a bit of tourism development, but we just don't want it to get like Peggy's Cove" (81). Additional issues include rights of access to public land, sometimes blocked by developers as in the case of the Terence Bay lighthouse. There, a "sympathetic contractor" (80) removed boulders which unlawfully prevented access. Writing from Scotland, where we recently passed an Act allowing Access to the land, I fully sympathise.

Milsom highlights relationships between incomers and residents of long standing, suggesting their rapprochement. Ariella Pahlke remarks: "I'm from the Ottawa area, and when I came here about eleven years ago to rent a little rustic house, my mind was really focussed on life in Halifax... I soon got involved with my neighbours and others in the community" (78). Mary DesRoches, originally from Harbourville, notes less positive outcomes: "They come here because of the beauty the community offers... most of them are great additions... But it's made land prices go through the roof. I'd love to move back here, but it's just too expensive now" (36). Again, this is a resonant point for rural communities in Scotland. Unfortunately, Milsom does little more than quote such remarks, without adding suggestions for addressing the needs of DesRoches.

I found myself comparing Milsom's work with Ronald Caplan's selections from *Cape Breton's Magazine* (Caplan 1980). Like Caplan, Milsom establishes real rapport with the people he interviews, and respects their points of view. Milsom's collecting and editing, too, is ethically sound and sensitive:

I tell every person... that I'm going to take notes as they speak... that I'm going to misunderstand some of what they tell me, and that I'll make some mistakes... But I also tell them that I'm going to rely on their wisdom to save me from publically embarrassing myself... all the people I spoke with... were given my rough draft and asked to correct my mistakes... the people being written about and the writer agreed on the final text (12).

Emphasising this collaborative approach, Milsom intersperses the text with attractive, unposed photographs of the people involved. Where Caplan uses long interview extracts, Milsom adopts a conversational style, interspersing observations with quotations. He juxtaposes people's remarks, and leaves readers to draw conclusions. Here, for instance, he describes Port Mouton, emphasising his theme of community, and quoting the late Bud McLeod:

The community of Port Mouton, like its fishery, has changed much over the years. "This used to be a poor community," Bud says, "but today, it's better than it's ever been. Lobster fishing has done pretty well in recent years, and there's a great sense of community here." The West Queens Recreation Association, formed in the late '80s, runs a community hall that hosts local activities almost every night (61).

Milsom sets this upbeat comment alongside the probing remarks of Charlotte Callahan, who runs Charlotte 'N Aye Boat Tours with her husband Howie:

Says Charlotte of the downturn in the ground fishery: "People who say that 'there were too many fishermen chasing too few fish' have it wrong. Hand-lining was never going to destroy that fishery. It was the new technologies that did it... it was 'too much technology chasing too few fish'" (62).

I found this particularly poignant, as Callahan echoes similar comments I've heard in Scotland, and discussed elsewhere (Bold 1999).

One of the best ideas in the book is that of the "community spark plug" (28). Milsom offers multiple examples of this type: Arcade Comeau, a key player in the West Nova Scotia Investment Co-Op and Eagle Timber (defunct since 2002); Rubin Millard, President of the Oxford and Area Merchants' Association, Trustee of Oxford's Trinity United Church and, with his librarian wife Debra, owner of the Homestyle Bakery; Bob and Mavis Murray from Antigonish who are profiled in terms of their artistic endeavours but who are also (I can add from having had the pleasure of interviewing Bob Murray), very active in Scottish-related activities.

While the material is fascinating, slightly more in the way of analysis and contextualising would have enriched Milsom's endeavour. For example, he does not consider community-fostering precedents, such as the Antigonish movement (see Alexander). In some respects — and I feel mean saying this, given his level of commitment — Milsom echoes the mythologising of Nova Scotia as a pre-modern, rural idyll, as eloquently discussed in *The Quest of the Folk* (MacKay). He does, however, wholly avoid *highlandisation*, and covers neglected histories such as those celebrated by the Black Loyalist Heritage Society of Birchtown (50-54).

I do, as I say, feel mean-spirited about indicating negatives in what is, overall, a hugely positive book. The dedication is Milsom's most telling remark: "To all those Nova Scotians who, over the years, have been forced into economic exile. These communities miss you." Milsom succeeds in communicating his evangelical desire to encourage community-based developments. Because of this, the *Voices of Nova Scotia Community* should be required reading for anyone interested in

the unique cultural makeup of Nova Scotia and, in particular, for those working in municipal or federal government.

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Once Upon a Virus: Aids Legends and Vernacular Risk Perception. By Diane Goldstein (Logan, Utah State University Press, 2004. Pp. ix + 177, notes, index, ISBN 0-87421-587-0 paper; 0-87421-586-2 cloth)

Folklorist Diane Goldstein dedicates her book to "the people of Conception Bay North and people everywhere who have been stigmatized by illness." This dedication reveals much about her subject matter. Operating from the foundation that "meaning is situated and emergent" (35) she confronts the issue of stigma beginning with its distinct local ramifications. Yet as the dedication also states, Goldstein takes her subject well beyond the local. In a unique collaboration of issues ranging from public health, scientific speculation, risk, and law, she weaves together a cross-cultural perspective on urban legends surrounding HIV/AIDS. Her contention that we "tend not to repeat stories that are lacking in personal and cultural meaning" (35) propels her analysis of these culturally prevalent and significant narratives. Thus she explores the political character of story creation as it pertains to the AIDS epidemic, the ways that AIDS legends enlighten us concerning commonly held views about this disease while simultaneously