

In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900 -1967

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In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900 - 1967

This paper began as a critical review from a Maritime perspective of Professor Carl Berger's *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900 - 1970* (Toronto, 1976). I had initially envisioned it as a contribution to a kind of Carl Berger "roast".¹ The approach had its appeal for had not this work received the highest award to which a Canadian historian might aspire? And had not the author supped with the gods, or at least the governor-general? Obviously some good-natured raillery and honest criticism would be in order to help restore the author's status as a fallible human being. To this end one could point out that in *The Writing of Canadian History*, Professor Berger did not mention a single major historical work on the Maritimes for the period after Confederation. Surely this was a shocking display of regional bias! But upon reflection, this author too was unable to name any books dealing primarily with aspects of post-Confederation Maritime history written in English by a professional historian in the first century after Confederation. Thus the paper turned into an examination of the deficiencies of Maritime post-Confederation historiography. In fact, this is a story of two failures: the failure of mainstream Canadian historians to pursue themes which readily included the Maritimes, or to include the Maritimes in the themes which they did pursue, and the failure of academics residing in the region to respond effectively to the Maritimers' own obvious, and sometimes desperate, search for an historical perspective which would help them to understand their plight in a modern world. Neglect and stereotyping left the Maritime student with a version of Canadian history to which he was unable to relate and seriously distorted the national picture.

The emphases in Canadian historical writing, at least until the 1950s, tended to enrich Maritime historiography in the pre-Confederation period while diverting attention away from it thereafter. The focus on French-English

1 The paper was originally presented at a session on Maritime historiography at the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference ("The Great Chautauqua", Fredericton, April, 1978). Professor Berger acted as Chairman/Commentator at the session. For an earlier discussion of Maritime historiography see G. A. Rawlyk, "A New Golden Age of Maritime Historiography?", *Queen's Quarterly*, LXXVI (Spring, 1969), pp. 56 - 65. Especially useful on the work of the last decade is a CBC radio production of five programmes on the "New History of Atlantic Canada" in the series "This is Ideas" with David Frank as historical advisor.

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relations encouraged a host of amateur and professional historians such as Francis Parkman, James Hannay, D. C. Harvey, and Archibald MacMechan to examine the Acadians, their conflict with the English, and their ultimate expulsion. Naomi Griffiths has noted over two hundred works on the expulsion alone.² But English Canadian historians appeared to lose all interest in the Acadians after the deportation; those concerned with the problems of Francophone minorities directed their attention almost exclusively to Ontario and the West. Similarly the theme of Canada's step-by-step growth from colony to nation — the other primary preoccupation of Canadian historians at the beginning of this century³ — encouraged Imperialist and liberal-nationalist scholars alike, such as James Hannay, D. C. Harvey, Chester Martin, W. R. Livingston and J. A. Roy, to explore a variety of Maritime topics relating to constitutional development, including the "struggle" for responsible government and the "achievement" of Confederation, and to develop a cult of Joseph Howe, hero of the fight for responsible government and anti-hero in the conflict over Confederation. But after Confederation the road to nation and commonwealth by-passed the Maritimes entirely in a focus on trade policy, imperial conferences and external affairs. For constitutional historians the Maritimes had virtually ceased to exist.⁴ This was in conspicuous contrast to the Prairies whose historians, led by the ubiquitous Chester Martin, found a parallel to Canada's struggle for autonomy in their own evolution to "full" provincial status. This approach served to express sectional grievances and even suggested a rationale for securing increased subsidies from federal governments.⁵

The shift in interest from British-Canadian to Canadian-American relations after the World War helped the student of the modern Maritimes only a little. Boundary disputes in the region were settled in an earlier era. J. B. Brebner confined his thesis of Nova Scotia as an extension of New England to the Acadian and Revolutionary periods. Even the voluminous Carnegie series yielded but scattered bits of information, largely confined to population

- 2 Naomi Griffiths, "The Acadian Deportation: A Study in Historiography and Nationalism" (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1957), p. 3.
- 3 Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, p. 17. See also J. M. S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History", *CHR*, XXXV (1954), pp. 1 - 21.
- 4 In Chester Martin, *Foundations of Canadian Nationhood* (Toronto, 1955), the Maritimes receive no mention in the last 117 pages except for the usual brief note on the entry of Prince Edward Island into Confederation.
- 5 Chester Martin, *The Natural Resources Question: The Historical Basis of Provincial Claims* (Winnipeg, 1920); C. C. Lingard, *Territorial Government in Canada: The Autonomy Question in the Old North-West Territories* (Toronto, 1949); L. H. Thomas, *The Struggle for Responsible Government in the North-West Territories* (Toronto, 1959).

movement, fisheries disputes, and the timber industry.⁶ The view of Canada's history as the story of the development of a series of staples for export, which also became fashionable in the inter-war period, contributed only slightly more. Accounts of the fur trade touched on the Maritimes only in the earliest period; those of the timber trade largely petered out with Confederation.⁷ Harold Innis' *Cod Fisheries* devoted but two chapters of fifteen to the Atlantic fishery after 1867, and studies of the wheat economy ignored the Maritimes entirely.⁸

The frontier approach, which also diverted attention away from the Maritimes in the modern era, paradoxically contributed substantially to the image of the region which did emerge. Frederick Jackson Turner's essay of 1893 set out the hypothesis of a frontier moving in stages westward through the United States with the availability of free land. This frontier provided a "crucible" in which "immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race". The ideas of social stratification were sloughed off with other cultural baggage and from this process came a dynamic for social and material progress, democracy, and nationalism.⁹ It was a thesis, which with a few adjustments for differences in westward development, could readily be applied to Canada.¹⁰ The thesis had tremendous appeal to those who could still see themselves or their region as close to the frontier stage. After all, it implied that they were progressive, democratic, and represented the true essence of the nation. But it was difficult for Maritimers to perceive themselves as part of a frontier society. The Maritimes were the only provinces lacking huge territories in the process of settlement or other forms of primitive development. And even a cursory examination suggested that here the process of cultural fusion was neither rapid nor complete. In short, the

6 M. L. Hansen and J. B. Brebner. *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New Haven and Toronto, 1969); L. B. Shippee. *Canadian-American Relations 1848 - 1874* (Toronto and New Haven, 1939); C. Tansill. *Canadian-American Relations, 1875 - 1911* (Toronto and New Haven, 1939).

7 See A. R. M. Lower's *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1936); *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest* (Toronto, 1938); and *Great Britain's Woodyard* (Toronto, 1973). *The North American Assault* did include a sketchy article-length survey of forest industries in the Maritimes after Confederation by S. A. Saunders.

8 H. Innis. *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* (New Haven, 1940); V. C. Fowke. *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto, 1957). That such a topic might have been extended to include a Maritime perspective is not as ridiculous as it might appear on the surface. Maritime development, especially that of its major cities, was fundamentally altered by an attempt to participate in both the national policy and the wheat economy as a soon-to-be completed study by Elizabeth McGahan will show.

9 *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner*. Essay Index Reprint Series (Freeport, N.Y., 1938), p. 211.

10 Chester Martin. *Foundations*, pp. 271 - 5.

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frontierest approach implied that for an understanding of the progressive dynamic animating Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one should look westward to Ontario, to the Prairies, to British Columbia and to the North. The Maritimes were of interest only as a foil against which to demonstrate the validity of the frontier approach; simple logic suggested that, if the frontier encouraged progressive, egalitarian and democratic attitudes, then that part of the country furthest removed from the frontier stage must be conservative, socially stratified and unprogressive.

It would be simplistic, however, to attribute the pervasive frontierist influence in Canadian writing merely to a conscious acceptance of the theories outlined by Turner. In 1970 Michael Cross commented that "an avowed 'frontierest' is hardly to be found in a day's walk. Yet evidence of the frontier approach is to be discovered in the writings of a great many historians, many of whom would take umbrage at having this fact drawn to their attention".¹¹ Perhaps the latter were unaware of any debt to Turner because they were influenced more by the popular ideas in which Turner's work had its roots. Often the "greatest" and certainly the most popular historians are those who express clearly ideas and emotions implicit in the local folk culture.¹² Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* suggested such a role for Turner. The principal ingredients of Turner's hypothesis — the focus on the west, pride in democracy, the provision for new opportunities and the emphasis on agricultural settlement — were already very much a part of the Americans' view of their country when Turner presented his paper. Canadians too developed a myth of the west similar in essence to that of the Americans. Professor Gerald Friesen has outlined the principal ingredients of that myth, which portrayed the West as a source of individualism, new opportunities, virility, co-operative ideals, democracy, cultural fusion, and material and social progress.¹³ Undoubtedly Turner's contribution to the formulation and articulation of this myth was

11 M. S. Cross, ed., *The Frontier Thesis and the Canadas* (Toronto, 1970), p. 1.

12 H. N. Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950), p. 293. In *Frederick Jackson Turner, Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York, 1973) Turner's biographer, R. A. Billington, stresses the "indelible impressions" made by Turner's boyhood experiences in a frontier community and outlines the conjunction of circumstances which made his work popular. Not the least of these was the revolt of the mid-west against the cultural domination of New England (pp. 17 and 112). To these factors Richard Hofstadter added the emotional needs of the progressives. "At last the democratic middle-class reformers, especially those rooted in the agrarian traditions of the Middle West, were beginning to find a historical basis for their politics". *The Progressive Historians* (New York, 1968), p. 86.

13 G. A. Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Regional Consciousness" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1973), p. 110.

significant: one suspects, however, in view of the all-pervasive expression of these ideas in popular culture and the emotional satisfaction which they provided for so many Canadians, that a similar myth would have evolved even had Turner remained a journalist.¹⁴

In any case, the "myth of the West", as Professor Friesen has noted, "captured" English Canada before the end of the First World War. The popular view that western development and the wheat economy were the keys to Canada's current and future prosperity suggests an underlying economic motive in the myth's triumph. In a bid for immigrants, government, railway, and board of trade propaganda portrayed Canada as a frontier community. The ideals of the western myth — democracy, cultural fusion, agrarianism, and progress — had become so firmly rooted in British, American, and Canadian traditions that most English-Canadians delighted in ascribing them to their country.¹⁵ The popular literature of the day, including the work of Canadians Ralph Connor and R. J. C. Stead, and Americans widely-read in Canada, such as Zane Grey, trumpeted the virtues of the frontier *ad nauseum*.¹⁶

In the western myth's capture of Canadian historians the key factor was probably personal contact with the Prairies. Westerners espoused their myth with a passion and commitment that was contagious. In the early decades of the twentieth century those who took their news from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, attended the sermons of a William Ivens, J. S. Woodsworth, or other Prairie social gospel preachers, and rubbed shoulders with the enthusiasts of the graingrower co-operatives could hardly have avoided a warm glow of satisfaction that they too were involved in a dynamic experiment which would lead the way to a prosperous and morally superior nation. One of the striking facts revealed in Berger's survey was the number of Canada's leading historians of the first half of the century who taught on the Prairies at formative stages of their careers. These included Chester Martin, Frank Underhill, A. R. M. Lower, W. A. MacIntosh, D. C. Masters and sociologist S. D. Clark. Not surprisingly, some of the leading Canadian exponents of frontierism came from this group. Both Frank Underhill, who lectured at the University of Saskatchewan from 1914 to 1926, with only a

14 In 1919, Turner conceded the same point regarding the United States. Quoted in Billington, p. 112.

15 Friesen, "Studies in the Development of Western Regional Consciousness", p. 109.

16 See for examples, Ralph Connor, *The Man From Glengarry* (London, 1901); R. J. C. Stead, *The Cowpuncher* (Toronto, 1918); Zane Grey, *The Light of the Western Stars* (New York, 1913); Zane Grey's more than two dozen novels, many of which explicitly developed the theme of the superiority and reforming influence of the western frontier, were available from T. Faton catalogues on into the 1950s.

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brief interruption, and A. R. M. Lower, who taught at Wesley College in Winnipeg until his call to Queen's in 1947, proclaimed a version of Canadian history in which the ideas of Turner and the western myth were prominently featured, and a version of Canadian history in which the Maritimes virtually ceased to exist after the union. As Underhill succinctly put it, "As for the Maritime provinces, nothing, of course, ever happens down there".¹⁷ A. R. M. Lower, who had enthusiastically espoused the Turner thesis from the beginning of the 1930s, made the same point more subtly by entirely ignoring this period of Maritime history in his *Canadians in the Making*. Although Lower was already showing interest in the role of the metropolis when this text appeared in 1958, the following excerpt reveals his continued commitment to the myth of the west and his disdain for the Maritimes:

There is an ocean of difference between the relatively mature localism of a secondary urban community and the air that blows through the national capital, Ottawa. This air begins to blow at Montreal, where the meeting of the two cultures makes for unwilling breath. It strengthens in Ottawa, whose major reason for existence is the duty of seeing in all directions. A current from it runs down to Toronto and the western peninsula of Ontario (only three chapters ago this was 'western Canada'), both of which are rescued from parochialism by the scope of their economic activities. But it is at the head of the lakes that the air begins to blow strong, for with Port Arthur the traveller is in another world, the West. From Lakehead to the Pacific coast, the same air blows. The same kind of observation could be made as one goes northward, for here too there is another world. The atmosphere is similar to that of the West. It has the geographical emancipation, the hope, energy, lack of convention, readiness to accept all comers and on equal terms, that mark new societies wherein, the old moulds having been broken, the pieces are set loose and shaken up into new patterns.¹⁸

As the Western myth grew in popularity Maritimers became increasingly conscious of the need to assert a regional perspective of their own. This was

17 F. H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto, 1964), p. 63; also cited in Rawlyk, "A New Golden Age", p. 55.

18 A. R. M. Lower, *Canadians in the Making* (Toronto, 1958), p. 358. In his autobiography Lower was more explicit. The Maritimes were "the most conservative parts of English Canada It is in the less restless, less dynamic nature of their society that Maritimers differ from other parts of English Canada". *My First Seventy-Five Years* (Toronto, 1967), p. 226.

the goal of the semi-scholarly historical and literary journal. *Acadiensis*, established in 1901 and the popular *Busy East of Canada* founded in 1910.¹⁹ Writing in the latter, R. V. Sharp of Sydney most clearly articulated the Maritime dilemma. If the Western myth were allowed to define the nation — a myth which set such un-Maritime criteria for nationalism as rapid cultural fusion and unrelieved agrarianism — how then could Maritimers identify themselves as Canadians? They would, Sharp argued, have to assert their own version of Canadianism — a Maritime Canadianism.

A country such as these Maritimes, a race of Canadians such as these eastern men of pioneer breed have no need to turn to the provinces of the melting pot for their conceptions of Canada and Canadians. It is time the east came out from behind the skirts of the west and made it clear to the world that there is more to Canada than gigantic farms, more than great sweeps of prairie, more than Rocky Mountains and mushroom cities and immigrant citizens — that there is a Canada, distinct and individual from this, a Canada with a definite past as old as any in America, a Canada with a definite future which is not at all the future of the country of golden grain. Canada cannot be served by bending the old to the new. Each must go its way; and the east must realize itself, even as the west has done.²⁰

In the 1920s the leaders of the Maritime Rights Movement became aware of the deficiencies of Canadian historiography regarding national commitments allegedly made to their region at Confederation and in subsequent decades. Sporadically they published pamphlets and magazine and newspaper articles to show the historical background of their grievances. A. P. Patterson, wholesale grocer from Saint John, turned out a lengthy pamphlet entitled *The True Story of Confederation*, a second edition of which was circulated by the New Brunswick King's Printer in 1926. Dartmouth journalist, H. S. Congdon, produced a spate of articles on the historical basis of the Maritimes' claims to Canada's winter trade. F. C. Cornell, the freight rate expert employed by the Maritime Transportation Committee, dug up considerable information on the history of transportation policy in the region. Constant appeals to Dominion statistician R. H. Coates for data led to the publication

19 P. A. Buckner, "Acadiensis II", *Acadiensis*, I (Autumn, 1971), pp. 3 - 9. *The Busy East* later became the *Atlantic Advocate*.

20 R. V. Sharp, "Do You Know Who We Are". *The Busy East of Canada* (December, 1919), pp. 9 - 13.

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of historical profiles on the Maritimes in 1927, 1934, and 1948.²¹ Literally dozens of studies commissioned for or prepared as submissions to a proliferating number of provincial and federal royal commissions attempted to show the historical background of Maritime problems. None of these, with the exception of S. A. Saunders' *Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Ottawa, 1939), merits serious attention as historical literature on the Maritimes.²² But their accumulation, along with the other material mentioned above, revealed a pressing desire by Maritimers to understand their recent past, the nature of their industries and society, and their role in the Canadian nation. In meeting this need they were poorly served by the Canadian historical community.

Even historians within the Maritimes tended to pursue other interests. At Dalhousie University, George Wilson, a progressive in his youth who turned to history for an understanding of society and a guide for future reform, found Canadian history dull, and having contributed a dull book of his own on Robert Baldwin and responsible government, escaped to the more exhilarating clime of the French Revolution.²³ At Acadia R. S. Longley produced a biography of Francis Hincks and at Mount Allison D. G. G. Kerr laboured on the biography of a colonial governor. Nova Scotia's provincial archivist, D. C. Harvey, was prolific and varied in his choice of topics on

- 21 [H. S. Congdon], *The Maritime Provinces Claim Their Rights Under the Act of Confederation: The Right of Maritime Ports to the Transatlantic Trade of Canada* [Dartmouth, 1923]; "Proceedings of the Board of Railway Commissioners for Canada", 1926, vol. 262, Public Archives of Canada (Cornell's findings received their widest distribution in Nova Scotia's published submission to the Duncan Commission); *The Maritime Provinces Since Confederation* (Ottawa, 1927); *The Maritime Provinces in Their Relation to the National Economy of Canada* (Ottawa, 1934 and 1948).
- 22 Sixteen major federal and provincial royal commissions investigated Maritime problems between 1925 and 1967. Each received up to several dozen submissions.
- 23 G. E. Wilson, *Robert Baldwin, A Study in the Struggle for Responsible Government* (Toronto, 1933). The comments on Wilson are based largely on recollections of his statements in lectures, which this author attended in 1965, and in his informal discussions with graduate students. Wilson loved his students but had little interest in the region in which they resided. "Never did I think that my life would be spent in the Maritime Provinces", he wrote in his autobiography (G. E. Wilson, *All for Nothing* [Halifax], 1973), pp. 39 - 40). "That was a part of the Dominion about which I knew little and cared less. All my life I had looked westward. Canada extended to the Pacific and all movement was towards the sunset. The three Atlantic Provinces were a curious enclave that history had made part of the country but which were of little importance. It was the last place a boy raised in Ontario expected to go." That he remained in the region more than half a century he attributed to "lack of initiative" and the freedom from supervision or pressure to publish which he enjoyed at Dalhousie University. See also G. E. Wilson, "Have I anything to Declare?", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, vol. LVI, series III (1962), pp. 81 - 92.

Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and the region as a whole, but steadfastly adhered to the earlier period, at least until the twilight of his career.²⁴

New Brunswick was the scene of the most promising attempt to develop an indigenous historiography of the modern Maritime period. In 1927 J. C. Webster of Shediac produced a pamphlet entitled *The Distressed Maritimes* in which he castigated the country in general and the Maritimes in particular for their neglect of culture and education and identified this neglect as the most critical of Maritime problems.²⁵ Webster was in a strong position to criticize. A gentleman and scholar in the British liberal tradition, Webster wrote history on the Acadian period, invested his personal fortune in the collection of books and manuscripts which would otherwise have been lost, at least to New Brunswick, and served as patron to the New Brunswick Museum.²⁶ In 1934, acting on his own initiative, he attracted to the museum a most promising scholar in A. G. Bailey, and managed to secure grants for his sustenance from the Carnegie Foundation. Meanwhile, A. P. Patterson, now Minister of Education in the Dysart government, still sought to carve out a Maritime perspective in Canadian historiography and establish once and for all the "true" story of Confederation. Distrusting the traditional "ivory tower" concept of the University, and influenced by theories of adult education then current, Patterson proposed to establish Bailey in a chair of Maritime history directly responsible to the Minister of Education. From this position the incumbent might be expected to produce a suitable version of Canadian history which he would then disseminate at the University and in lectures and study groups throughout the province. As an independent scholar, Bailey was less than enthused. Aided by Webster's influence with other cabinet ministers, he secured instead an appointment to a new chair in history at the University of New Brunswick, a chair supported but not controlled by the provincial government.²⁷

- 24 R. S. Longley, *Sir Francis Hincks, A Study of Canadian Politics, Railways and Finance in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto, 1943); D. G. G. Kerr, *Sir Edmund Head, a Scholarly Governor* (Toronto, 1954). Harvey began the project of a biography of W. S. Fielding which was later taken over by his successor at the PANS, C. B. Ferguson. See Carman Miller's review of the first volume of this work in *Acadiensis*, I (Spring, 1972), pp. 91 - 8. Harvey's papers at the PANS provide an extensive, although incomplete bibliography of his published works.
- 25 J. C. Webster, *The Distressed Maritimes: a Study of Educational and Cultural Conditions in Canada* (Toronto, Ryerson Essay No. 35, 1926).
- 26 G. F. G. Stanley, "John Clarence Webster: The Laird of Shediac", *Acadiensis*, III (Autumn, 1973), pp. 59 - 60.
- 27 A. G. Bailey, "Origins of the Study of History at the University of New Brunswick" (manuscript at UNB Department of History), pp. 3 and 23, supplemented by an interview with the author, April, 1978. See also Alfred G. Bailey, "Retrospective Thoughts of an Ethno-historian", *Historical Papers*, 1977, pp. 15 - 29.

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Professor Bailey took seriously the responsibility of helping to develop the history of the constituency which his university served. He prepared a series of essays on New Brunswick and Confederation, but much to A. P. Patterson's disgust, instead of serving as a basis for regional propaganda as had Chester Martin's early work on the west, they proved a model of scholarly detachment.²⁸ Bailey also launched what was intended to be a wholesale attack on the lamentable lack of historical literature on his province. Drawing up a list of some thirty thesis topics which stressed economic, social and cultural history, he eventually secured a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to fund graduate students and the publication, under his editorship, of expanded versions of their theses. The first of these studies, a solid examination of the development of the New Brunswick school system by Katherine MacNaughton, broke the Confederation barrier by carrying its analysis forward to 1900.²⁹ Unfortunately, the first study published was also the last, as Bailey was sucked into the maw of academic administration. In 1946 he passed on his mantle as regional historian to W. S. MacNutt. But MacNutt decided that the pre-Confederation period would have to be re-worked before one could hope to understand the later period.

When major academic studies of the post-Confederation Maritime provinces finally did materialize in the 1950s and 1960s they came not from historians but political scientists. The "Government of Canada" series edited by Nova Scotia-born R. MacGregor Dawson yielded studies of political institutions in each of the three provinces.³⁰ Frank MacKinnon's *The Government of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto, 1951), J. Murray Beck's *The Government of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1957), and Hugh Thorburn's *Politics of New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1961) contained sufficient historical perspective to make them the most important contributions to the modern historiography of each province up to that time. Although concentrating on the contemporary politics of New Brunswick in the 1950s, Thorburn examined the traditional, regional and ethnic divisions in the province and provided a brief synthesis of the chiefly French-language literature on the Acadian renaissance. MacKinnon's work on the Island was a study of governmental institutions from their colonial origins through the modern era. Beck's study

28 A. G. Bailey, *Culture and Nationality* (Toronto, 1972), chs. 5, 6 and 7.

29 K. F. C. MacNaughton, *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick 1784 - 1900* (Fredericton, 1947).

30 Dawson was born and attended high-school in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. He studied and later taught at Dalhousie University — one of several university appointments before entering the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto in 1938. Lunenburg *Progress-Enterprise*, 23 July 1958 (Citation courtesy of Dr. Ron Macdonald, who has investigated Dawson's career for the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board).

followed a similar format, but with much richer historical detail and analysis, especially for the later period. Indeed, although not technically fitting the scope of Berger's study, this is one work which perhaps should have been included for its monumental contribution to a neglected field of Canadian history.

Yet from the historian's viewpoint all three works had their limitations. They were narrowly political; they were written before much private political correspondence was available; and they relied to a significant degree on each author's personal acquaintance with his province and on confidential interviews with unnamed politicians and other prominent citizens. Writing after a period of more than two decades of Liberal ascendancy in provincial and federal politics, Beck frequently repeated the Liberal mythology, although not necessarily endorsing it as factual.³¹ His scholarship appeared to be tinged also with a barely suppressed indignation at what he considered the conservatism of his province's leaders in failing to develop innovative legislation and to protect provincial and regional interests at the federal level. He so stressed, for example, the "omnipresent caution" of Premier Murray's long regime (1896 - 1923) that the province's participation in reforms of North America's "progressive era" — including its pioneering role in technical education — went quite unnoticed.³² His claim that "Nova Scotian members of Parliament have followed a thoroughly conservative course, never resorting to the radical procedure of threatening to break up a government or even deviating from the party line to strengthen their bargaining position" has not

31 See, for example, his treatment of Maritime attitudes on the tariff and the role of the 1926 Duncan Commission. Beck, *The Government of Nova Scotia*, pp. 340 - 1.

32 According to Beck, under Murray "the Ontario statute book became the utmost limits to which Nova Scotia might hope to aspire in many matters" (Beck, p. 201; see also on Murray's caution pp. 161 - 2, 166 - 7, 189 - 90, 202, 203, 204, 209, 257). The Murray government's programme of technical vocational education introduced in 1907 was reputed to be the first in Canada. *Canadian Annual Review*, 1907, pp. 620 - 1 and *Halifax Daily Echo*, 24 May 1913. While Murray's "progressive" reforms were far from radical and were probably dictated more by the interests of capital than labour, in this, as the works of Gabriel Kolko, James Weinstein, and H. V. Nelles suggest, they conformed to a pattern which appears to have had few exceptions on the North American continent. See Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* (New York, 1963); James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900 - 1918* (Boston, 1968); H. V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario 1849 - 1914* (Toronto, 1974).

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been sustained by subsequent investigation.³³ Nevertheless, his general picture of over-riding political conservatism has gone unquestioned by Canadian historians, for it fitted perfectly the ultraconservative stereotype already firmly established for the region.

Logically deducible from the frontier thesis, the popular stereotype had received a strong boost from the Prairie's disappointment at the Maritime's rejection of their leadership in the Progressive movement. Refusing to admit that Maritime interests differed in any way from their own, Prairie Progressives ascribed their failure in the region to one factor — the innate conservatism and traditional partisanship of the people.³⁴ Residents of the Central Canadian metropolises were also happy to attribute the destruction of the Maritime economy to the generally unprogressive nature of the Maritime character — a cause for which they could in no way be held responsible. According to R. L. Calder, a Montreal barrister, instead of trying to help themselves, Maritimers preferred "to sit on the country store steps . . . chew apples and talk politics". Or, as Harold Cunningham put it in an article in *McLean's Magazine*, the Maritime Provinces were like a housewife who having married for money which failed to materialize "neglected her housework, went down to the seashore . . . watched the ships go by and pouted".³⁵

While it is not surprising in view of the paucity of research, that contemporary stereotypes should provide historians with explanations for Maritime behaviour, it is ironic that one of those who relied on the stereotype was W. L. Morton who had stressed distinct regional perspectives in his 1946 critique of the Laurentian school of Canadian historians. In 1950 Morton himself gave an effective affirmation of the Prairie regional perspective in his *Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1950). But in this and in his later

33 Beck, p. 170. While it is difficult to prove what threats may or may not have been made in the secrecy of cabinet and caucus, Maritime MPs did "bargain tough" on several occasions. For example, in 1876 they appeared to have blocked the rising surge of protectionist sentiment in the national Liberal Party and in 1884, after several separate caucuses and Macdonald's complaints of "blackmailing", secured a commitment to a CPR "Short Line". Naturally as their percentage of seats declined, the number of opportunities for them to exert such pressure declined accordingly. D. C. Thompson, *Alexander Mackenzie: Clear Grit* (Toronto, 1960), p. 260; M. E. Angus, "The Politics of the Short Line" (M.A. thesis, U.N.B., 1958), pp. 62 and 67; and D. G. Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto, 1968), p. 416.

34 E. R. Forbes, "Never the Twain Did Meet: Prairie-Maritime Relations", *CHR*, LIX (1978), p. 28. The terms "conservative" and "conservatism" as employed by contemporaries and later historians, are negative and critical epithets equivalent to "backward", "cynical", "timid" or "unprogressive"; any resemblance to any political or social philosophy living or dead is probably coincidental.

35 *Quebec Telegraph*, 12 October 1926; *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 October 1926.

works he appeared to draw his interpretations of Maritime behaviour from the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Having established the Progressive Party as the product of a unique economic base — the “political expression of the monolithic wheat economy” — he then explained its failure in the far east by a wholly gratuitous invocation of Maritime conservatism.³⁶ His oft-cited article, “The Bias of Prairie Politics”, minimized the effectiveness of separate political movements by exaggerating Maritime gains from working within the traditional party framework — an exaggeration which was a standard ploy by the Prairie press and politicians in demanding more for their region.³⁷ The shaky foundations of Morton’s generalizations about the modern Maritimes are most clearly revealed, however, in a highly misleading statement in the *Kingdom of Canada*, where he informs the reader that in the 1920s “Maritimers refrained from protest or talk of secession as in the past. They generally put their faith in the Liberal party and followed the veteran Fielding and the young J. L. Ralston in seeking relief by pressure on that party. In 1926 they were rewarded by the appointment of a royal commission on Maritime claims”.³⁸ This, of course, was the period of the Maritime Rights Movement, the secession resolution of H. W. Corning, and the overwhelming Conservative victories in the region in three provincial and two federal elections.

Similar distortions can be found in other monographic literature. In 1950 Catherine Cleverdon’s *Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* provided a more balanced regional study of a nation-wide movement. Each of the traditional regions received a separate chapter. But despite the regional approach, the traditional myth of the frontier and the Maritime stereotype continued to dominate. The over-riding thesis was apparent in the chapter sub-headings. Ontario was the “Pioneer” which “bore the brunt of pioneering for women’s rights”. Then the Prairies, which represented “Democracy’s ‘Grass Roots’”, took the lead in giving full political privileges to women, an action “typical of western progressiveness”. The Maritimes, “Stronghold of Conservatism”, afflicted by a “weight of indifference” and an “atmosphere of conservatism” brought up the rear, at least for English Canada.³⁹ Cleverdon’s

36 W. L. Morton, “Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History” in Carl Berger, ed., *Approaches to Canadian History* (Toronto, 1967).

37 W. L. Morton, “The Bias of Prairie Politics” in Donald Swainson, ed., *Historical Essays on the Prairie Provinces* (reprinted Toronto, 1970), p. 296.

38 W. L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, 1963), p. 445.

39 C. L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (reprinted Toronto, 1974). See especially pp. 24, 44, 49 and Chapter 6. In his introduction, Professor Ramsay Cook did not help to correct the stereotype when he disenfranchised the women of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia until the “early 1920s” and then sought new reasons to account for their conservatism. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Maritime chapter is a classic example of begging the question and using emotive language to support a weak thesis. The suffrage movement in Canada, as Cleverdon portrays it, was a narrow middle class crusade involving no more than a tiny minority of women in each province. This fact is mentioned as a neutral piece of information in the chapters on each of the other regions, but in the Maritimes the non-involvement of the majority of women becomes a critical factor in demonstrating regional conservatism. In her discussions of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia women, Cleverdon manages to use the words "indifference" or "indifferent" nine times, "conservative" or "conservatism" eight times, and adds, perhaps for stylistic variation, the terms "disinterest", "apathy", "hostility", "contempt" and "ultraconservative".

What evidence is there to justify the thesis of a greater Maritime conservatism in women's rights? For New Brunswick and Nova Scotia before 1912 there seems to be none at all. Indeed, Maritime women appear to have led the agitation for admission to universities. In 1846 a pamphlet by a Halifax lady scathingly asked: "Who gave you men the right to establish Colleges, and Universities, at which to educate your sons, in all the substantial sciences . . . while woman, hedged about on every hand by the guardianship of a governess, is taught . . . the whole science of composing and scrawling billet-doux after the most approved method . . . ?"⁴⁰ A later pamphlet berated Joseph Howe for his failure to take up the cause and in 1859 Mount Allison University admitted its first women students to a degree programme. Most other Maritime universities soon followed. Cleverdon portrayed E. H. Stowe of Toronto as the heroic pioneer of the Canadian feminist movement, citing particularly her influence in securing the admission of women to the University of Toronto in 1886. This "triumph" came eleven years after Mount Allison had granted the first Bachelor of Science degree awarded to a woman in the British Empire.⁴¹ For Halifax, at least, the suffrage movement of the 1880s and 1890s marked the culmination of nearly half a century of vigorous debate on woman's place in society.⁴² And for those two decades

40 *Essays on the Future Destiny of Nova Scotia, Improvement of Female Education and on Peace* (Halifax, 1846). A subsequent essay ascribed to "An Anonymous Lady" had written immediately thereunder with a quill pen the inscription "by an insane female". Unfortunately this pamphlet, which this author read in the open stacks of the Dalhousie University Library in 1965, can no longer be located.

41 R. S. Harris, *A History of Higher Education in Canada, 1663 - 1960* (Toronto, 1976), p. 11; V. J. Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada 1893 - 1929* (Ottawa, 1976), pp. 12 - 3.

42 Robert Sedgewick, *The Proper Sphere and Influence of Women in Christian Society* (Halifax, 1856); John Munro, *The Place and Work of Women in the Church* (Halifax, 1877); J. S. David, *A Reply to the "The Place and Work of Women in the Church"* [Halifax, n.d.]; *Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia*, 1886, p. 506.

the agitation in the two larger Maritime provinces followed a pattern similar to that of the other provinces — a pattern characterized by a plethora of bills, supported by a comparable number of petitions and meeting an identical lack of success. Defeated in every province by the end of the 1890s, the movement entered what Cleverdon called a “breathing period” from which it would not emerge until 1912. The tardiness by two of three years of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick women in actually securing the vote hardly justifies the image of an all-pervasive indifference or hostility to the feminist movement arising from an innate regional conservatism.

Morton and Cleverdon were but the first of many historians to invoke the stereotype as the explanation of supposedly deviant behaviour by Maritimers. Sometimes the evolution of the stereotype involved a co-operative effort by several historians. This seems to be the case in the field of labour history. A multi-volume series on Social Credit included D. C. Masters' study of the Winnipeg General Strike which suggested a greater militancy and radicalism among labour in western Canada. S. D. Clark's “forward” took the process a step further by setting the One Big Union in “the tradition of American frontier radicalism”.⁴³ With the west more radical than Ontario all that was needed was a conservative Maritimes to round out the familiar frontier model. In his survey of labour unrest in Canada S. M. Jamieson initially shied away from the western myth by stressing the importance of the industries involved rather than the regions in which they were located. But when he came to the Maritimes he reverted to the traditional pattern. Since there was no research to indicate radical labour activity in the Maritimes outside of the coal-mining areas, he readily concluded that there was none. Maritime labour was “exceedingly conservative in political and other orientations”.⁴⁴ Certainly if he knew anything about Amherst's version of the One Big Union or the T.L.C.'s expulsion of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour in the reaction against industrial unionism, he made no mention of them.⁴⁵ British Columbia's Martin Robin took the final step and excluded even the coal miners on the assumption that nothing radical of a political nature involving labour had ever developed in the conservative Maritimes. Thus his *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour* omitted all mention of the protracted struggles between “radicals” and “progressives” for control of District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America, the largest geographically-cohesive block of organized

43 D. C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto, 1950), p. viii.

44 S. M. Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900 - 66* (Ottawa, 1968), pp. 25 and 100.

45 Nolan Reilly, “The Origins of the Amherst General Strike, 1890 - 1919” (paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, 1977).

labour in the country. In 1922 the radicals endorsed a programme which included the statement that "we proclaim openly to all the world that we are out for the complete overthrow of the capitalist system and capitalist state. peaceable if we may, forceable if we must" and elected their slate of candidates to the executive by majorities of approximately four to one.⁴⁶ That the radicals did not succeed in their goal of linking up with the Red International and ultimately succumbed to a concerted effort of repression from the U.M.W. International, the British Empire Steel Corporation, and the local government does not erase the significance of their victory. Labour in the Maritimes did not achieve a revolution, or even come close, but then where in North America did they do so?

Accumulated ignorance also contributed to the stereotype of religious conservatism in the Maritimes. First, the author of a University of Toronto M.A. thesis on the social gospel in the Methodist church suggested, without any reference to Maritime sources, that the social gospel had little impact on the church there. Stewart Crysdale and E. A. Christie noted the hostile response by the Halifax Presbyterian *Witness* to labour's tactics in the Winnipeg General Strike. Apparently guided by such comments, the western myth, and the over-riding stereotype of Maritime conservatism, Richard Allen rashly concluded that the Maritimes was "a part of the nation where the social gospel had made virtually no impact whatsoever".⁴⁷ Not only was this conclusion inconsistent with Allen's own thesis that the movement in Canada was a product of broad intellectual currents, but it ignored the fact that all of the major Protestant denominations in the Maritimes formally endorsed social gospel principles and that clergymen from the Maritimes were active in the movement at the national level.⁴⁸

Practical considerations, closely related to the theoretical, also inhibited the development of modern Maritime historiography. By their judgements and interests historians influenced what archivists collected and the availability of source material in turn influenced historians' interests and the

46 Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour* (Kingston, 1968); *The Workers Weekly* (Stellarton), 30 June and 25 August 1922.

47 M. V. Royce, "The Contribution of the Methodist Church to Social Welfare in Canada" (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1940), p. 238; E. A. Christie, "The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its Official Attitude Towards Public Affairs and Social Problems" (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1955); Stewart Crysdale, *The Industrial Struggle and the Protestant Ethic in Canada* (Toronto, 1961), p. 83.

48 Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914 - 28*, p. 110; see my extended review of the above in *Acadiensis*, II (Autumn, 1972), pp. 94 - 9 and E. R. Forbes, "Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia", *Acadiensis*, I (Autumn, 1971), pp. 15 - 9.

direction of their research. Since historians were primarily concerned with the early Maritimes, this was the period for which papers were collected, catalogued and even published by the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, the New Brunswick Museum and the Public Archives of Canada. Materials of a later period languished in private attics or government offices, forgotten or destroyed as fate might decree. In the late 1960s when this author sought the proceedings of the 1926 federal royal commission on Maritime claims, the archivists at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia and Public Archives of Canada had no idea where they were located. The former turned up a copy a few years later; the latter, according to a recent note in the *Canadian Historical Review*, located a set last year.⁴⁹ The attitudes of historians found echo even in the archival finding aids. One such aid on the R. B. Hanson papers at the PAC informed the reader that only papers of national significance were microfilmed; Hanson's legal papers and Maritime correspondence had been returned uncopied! It was particularly ironic that when two successive Nova Scotia archivists finally turned to a post-Confederation topic, a biography of W. S. Fielding, it should be the cause of blocking rather than facilitating the research of others; the Fielding papers, one of that archives' most important political collections, remained closed until the biography was completed. Thus, it is understandable that a historian undertaking the study of a national movement should gratefully seize upon the stereotype rather than attempt the difficult, expensive and probably frustrating task of trying to locate the materials necessary to develop a genuine appreciation of the region.

It is not the purpose of this paper to develop a new myth of a dynamic and progressive Maritimes. What the paper is trying to show is that we really know very little about the Maritimes in the post-Confederation period. Much of the so-called "knowledge" we do have is highly suspect, having in many cases been deduced from the frontier myth supported by contemporary attitudes, or a repetition of the stereotype seized upon as a convenience by the researcher, who boggled at the task of having to open a neglected field as only a small part of a major study. With repetition in so many books on so many topics, the stereotype has become an accepted historical "fact". It should not be necessary to point out the danger of dealing in stereotypes, be they regional, racial or national. It is not that the stereotype is entirely false, although, on occasion, that may be the case. The danger lies in an acceptance of a point of view in which fact and fiction are jumbled together without critical analysis. The term "conservative" is particularly unfortunate since it is a comparative term which has little meaning unless the point of comparison

49 *CHR*, LVIII (March, 1977), p. 109.

is clearly indicated. In many cases “conservative” was used by Maritimers themselves to compare the Maritimes, less to some other region, than to their own ideal of what their region should be. In this sense, the term becomes a statement of social criticism. That appears to be the way it was used in the various comments of Maritimers employed as evidence by Cleverdon. One suspects that there was also an element of social criticism in Beck’s ringing indictment of Nova Scotia’s leaders for their excessive caution in domestic legislation and their failure to protect regional interests at the federal level.

Another danger of the stereotype, towards which historians in particular should be alert, is its static image which does not allow for chronological variation. Perhaps there were periods in the Maritimes’ history when a careful and specific comparison with other regions would show them to be more conservative in certain respects. By the end of the 1930s, for example, the Maritimes had endured two decades of depression — one more than the rest of the country. Successive attempts at political and social protest had failed.⁵⁰ Their people had reason to be pragmatic, cautious, and sceptical — especially of the ready solutions to their problems offered by outsiders. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that some Maritimers who lived through this period have been quick to brand people of their region as conservative and have found it difficult to imagine the optimism of an earlier age. Perhaps too it explains the comments of some visitors to the region in this period. Although here one has to be careful that “conservative” does not merely mean “different” — something the outsider may in his arrogance not fully understand.

The criticism given above is directed at the “bad old days” of Canadian historiography. Canadian graduate studies are no longer under the control of a few “great” men in one or two central Canadian universities and no single journal can now pose as the arbiter of what constitutes “national” significance in historical writing. In the 1960s student militancy and pre-occupation with “relevance” and the universities’ concern for numbers swept many cobwebs out of the system, making universities more responsive to student demands regarding curriculum. This has contributed to expanding enrolments in Canadian courses, which tend to be offered earlier in the students’ programme and to focus more intensively on the modern period. Student interest has thus re-inforced a focus on “limited identities”.⁵¹ In the Maritimes,

50 E. R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal & London, 1978).

51 J. M. S. Careless’ “Limited Identities in Canada”, *CHR*, L (1969), pp. 1 - 10 gave a kind of pontifical sanction to the process already underway. See also Michael Cross, “Canadian History” in C. F. Klinck, *The Literary History of Canada* (Toronto & Buffalo, 1976), III, pp. 63 - 4.

students reflect the continued desire by Maritimers to understand the society with which they most closely relate — a desire also suggested by the success of popular history on the region.⁵² During the expansion of Maritime universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, almost all hired regional specialists, nearly half of whom were working on the modern period. Archives have proliferated and benefitted from the competition. A regionalized national museum lent encouragement to work in the modern period. Both the articles and the review articles of a revived *Acadiensis* reflect a wide variety of approaches by regional scholars — approaches and ideas drawn from a broad international community. Any future study of Canadian or Maritime historiography will find much greater problems of organization than those encountered by Berger.

But although the outlook of modern Maritime studies is promising, the effects of the long period of neglect and stereotyping will continue to be felt for years to come. Many scholars working both within and outside the region now ignore the old stereotypes, basing their analysis on a rigorous assessment of evidence. But analyzing the Maritimes is still no easy task, especially for those for whom that complex region is not a primary focus. It is still much easier to make a token reference to the stereotype, toss in a few anecdotes about quaint Maritime customs, and then shift the discussion back to the “important” regions. More serious, however, than such simple failings of human nature is the extent to which the stereotype of Maritime conservatism is embedded in the classics of Canadian historical literature. How can the student be expected to read these without unconsciously absorbing the false picture of the Maritimes which they tend to convey? Obviously he or she cannot. Thus it becomes the duty of authors and teachers of Canadian history to force a critical assessment of the Maritime stereotype wherever it may be encountered.

52 Arthur Doyle's *Front Benches and Back Rooms* (Toronto, 1976) sold more than 7,000 copies in its first year of publication.