

Newfoundland's Historical Revival and the Legacy of David Alexander*

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Reviews/Revues

Newfoundland's Historical Revival and the Legacy of David Alexander*

Newfoundland's historians began writing long ago, even before the island was formally established as a colony, and they have always found eager readers among a people deeply conscious of their past.¹ For the people of Newfoundland history has served as a consolation of the defeated, as a battle-cry of the aggrieved, and as a nation's proud vindication of its existence. Historical myths are a vital part of popular culture. Professional historians have been part of that culture, or powerfully attracted by it. The result has often been a nationalist bias, an ahistorical orientation towards present concerns, and an emphasis upon the island's peculiarities, its unique colonial and constitutional development, and its separate cultural identity. The best historical writing of the 1970s may contain the seeds of new myths, but the perspective has broadened. The island's particular identity is not denied, but still less is it romanticized. We must now see Newfoundland not as a peripheral curiosity but as part of wider developments: the island was an important focus of early European expansion and later migrations; it was a particular type of frontier development and cultural transfer from a metropolitan core; it was one example of staple dependence; it shared the North American industrializing ethos of the later nineteenth century; eventually the island became a part of the Canadian mosaic and a model of Canadian regional under-development; finally, in the writings of David Alexander, the island became a mirror reflecting Canada's post-war economic developments, and so Newfoundland took its place in the history and the historiography of the Canadian Confederation.

It is a measure of the growth and quality of recent research on Newfoundland that none of these claims could have been made ten years ago and few of the trends discerned. The current revival of Newfoundland's historical writing began in British universities, where most of Newfoundland's historians have received their training. For a long time the British training drew scholars toward political history and imperial relations, and away from American model-building and social theorizing; but that same training, demanding inductive reasoning from new empirical foundations, enabled Keith Matthews to demolish the myths of illegal settlement, eighteenth-century anarchy, and ruthless fishing admirals.² S.J.R. Noel turned from constitutional history and imperial relations to the indigenous political culture and uncovered a world of mediocrity and

* For their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article I am indebted to Stuart Pierson, Lewis Fischer and Rosemary Ommer.

1 John Reeves, *History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland* (London, 1793).

2 Keith Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery" (D Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1968); "Historical Fence Building: A Critique of Newfoundland Historiography", *Newfoundland Quarterly*, LXXIV (1978), pp. 21-30.

recidivism.³ British doctoral theses continued to appear in the 1970s, but already other academic influences had converged upon Memorial University. The Institute of Social and Economic Research led the application of social science approaches to Newfoundland's economy and society; North American anthropologists delved into the island's prehistory and ethnology; folklorists and geographers observed the outport culture in its physical setting; the Maritime History Group began work on the maritime industries of the Atlantic region.⁴ This was a fertile environment and the scholarly harvest was plentiful.

A central concern of recent historical writing is the transition from a maritime-based society to the mixed maritime and landward resource-based society of the mid-twentieth century. This is one of the major themes pursued in the essays which James Hiller and Peter Neary have included in *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980). When the traditional economy reached an apparent limit to extensive expansion in the late nineteenth century, efforts began to expand the resource base and to modernize the structure of production and the composition of output. Those efforts ended in failure, and the failure led eventually to union with Canada. The price for economic diversification, and for union with Canada, was the neglect of Newfoundland's oldest staple trade. While Shannon Ryan provides an excellent survey of the saltfish trade in the nineteenth century, David Alexander's two essays set the rise and decline of that trade in a global perspective: the modern expansion of Europe, the growth of the international economy, the decline of the British Empire, and the continental orientation of Canada's trade since the Second World War.⁵

These broad themes recur in the essays on political history, for Newfoundland's political issues were rooted in the attempt at economic diversification, in the problems of adjustment to the weakening of the British imperial presence, and in the gradual merging of the island into a continental financial, economic and political framework. Newfoundland's "national policy" of the late nineteenth century provoked the great railway debates, and the development of mineral and agricultural resources in the western hinterland demanded a solution to the French Shore problem.⁶ The "national policy" provoked a populist

3 S.J.R. Noel, *Politics in Newfoundland* (Toronto, 1971).

4 The latest list of ISER publications mentions thirty-six titles, of which twenty-seven deal with Newfoundland or Labrador, in whole or in part. Of particular interest to Newfoundland historians, apart from the works of Alexander and Mannion, are the anthropological and sociological studies of fishermen and fishing communities.

5 Shannon Ryan, "The Newfoundland Salt Cod Trade in the Nineteenth Century"; David Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy and Development to 1934", first published in *Acadiensis*, V (Spring 1976); "The Collapse of the Saltfish Trade and Newfoundland's Integration into the North American Economy", first published in Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1976).

6 James Hiller, "Confederation Defeated: The Newfoundland Election of 1869" and "The Rail-

response among primary producers in the fishery, but the late Ian McDonald's important studies of William Coaker show how easily Coaker's "vital third force in Newfoundland politics" was co-opted by the dominant political elite.⁷ R.M. Elliott's essay introduces the 1920s and the degeneration of the political process under the weight of economic failure. The undignified battles over that perennial red herring, political corruption, contributed to the conviction within and beyond the island that Newfoundlanders were morally and intellectually incapable of self-government, and political demoralization compounded the economic failure by discouraging a realistic analysis of the island's economic problems and potential.⁸ Neary's essay on party politics since 1949, read in this context, reminds us that Smallwood's era was marked by continuity with the past as well as by new departures. The pursuit of a landward strategy of development was not new; nor was the stifling of political debate, the habit of seeking external scapegoats for present ills, and the eager pursuit of chimerical riches promised by foreign developers and continental soothsayers.⁹

This collection of essays is more than the sum of its parts. When read together, the essays cast into sharp relief themes and continuities which might otherwise be missed, and reveal gaps in the historical fabric which must be filled before a synthesis will be possible. We know far too little about the political and economic developments of the early nineteenth century. We must know more about the great seal fishery of the nineteenth century, about the economics of the railway, and about the forest and mining sectors.¹⁰ Complete studies of the First World War and Commission Government periods remain to be written. Above all, we need a more comprehensive study of the fisheries, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for it was in these decades that Newfoundland lost its place as the world's largest exporter of salt cod.

way and Local Politics in Newfoundland, 1870-1901"; Peter Neary, "The French and American Shore Questions as Factors in Newfoundland History".

- 7 Ian McDonald, "W.F. Coaker and the Balance of Power Strategy: The Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics". See also McDonald's "W.F. Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics, 1908-1925" (PhD thesis, University of London, 1971); and Robert J. Brym and Barbara Neis, "Regional Factors in the Formation of the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland", in Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman, eds., *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada* (Toronto, 1979).
- 8 R.M. Elliott, "Newfoundland Politics in the 1920s: The Genesis and Significance of the Hollis Walker Enquiry".
- 9 Peter Neary, "Party Politics in Newfoundland, 1949-71: A Survey and Analysis", first published in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, VI (1971) and VII (1972).
- 10 On the seal fishery see Chesley W. Sanger, "Technological and Spatial Adaptation in the Newfoundland Seal Fishery during the Nineteenth Century" (MA thesis, Memorial University, 1973). Works relating to the nineteenth-century fisheries include Shannon Ryan, "The Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Nineteenth Century" (MA thesis, Memorial University, 1971); and Steven D. Antler, "Colonial Exploitation and Economic Stagnation in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland" (PhD thesis, University of Connecticut, 1975).

While historians began rewriting Newfoundland's history, in adjacent corridors at Memorial University new approaches were being applied to the history of settlement in Newfoundland. The Geography Department attracted a number of historical geographers and a small but talented group of graduate students. John Mannion has included some of their work in *The Peopling of Newfoundland; Essays in Historical Geography* (St. John's ISER, 1977). Mannion admits that the historical geography of Newfoundland is in its infancy. His collection is preceded only by C. Grant Head's *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1976). Head's study is valuable less for interpretative originality than for its presentation of a mass of previously unpublished statistical data on Newfoundland's population, trade and fisheries output in the eighteenth century. His account is solidly based on colonial office records, customs records, and contemporary accounts of Newfoundland's settlement and economic development, and his book quickly became the standard introduction to Newfoundland's early history. Mannion and his colleagues seek the broad interpretative framework which Head cautiously avoided, and their close collaboration prevents the volume from becoming an unwieldy assembly of unfinished graduate essays.

As Michael Staveley points out, there are two reasons why the process of settling a country is interesting and important: the process of settlement may be basic to the iconography and culture of the nation, and it may influence subsequent patterns of social and economic development.¹¹ Mannion's colleagues seldom address themselves directly to the connections between settlement and subsequent developments, and perhaps it would have been premature to do so. At times the technical problem of analyzing population flows simultaneously in both spatial and temporal dimensions becomes the major preoccupation. Some of the models of population theorists will mean little to non-specialists, and occasionally one wonders whether the data are being used merely to validate a favourite model. Nevertheless, this work provides a new empirical base for our understanding of the development of a staple-producing frontier society. Mannion's collection also reveals, to an often bemused historian, the difficulty of establishing that empirical base. Mannion's colleagues question some of Grant Head's assumptions about settlement, for instance. The equation of wintering population with settled population is unacceptable, they believe, but Gordon Handcock's alternative, which estimates the level of permanent settlement by reference to the number of women and children on the island, is challen-

11 Staveley, "Population Dynamics in Newfoundland: The Regional Patterns". Recent articles relating to the peopling of Newfoundland appear in the *Newfoundland Quarterly*, which remains essential reading for Newfoundland historians. Related articles on eighteenth-century developments by William H. Whiteley and others are mentioned in the bibliographies in Hiller and Neary, *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* and Frederick Rowe, *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Toronto, 1980).

ged in this volume by Alan Macpherson, and a fascinating dispute remains unresolved.¹²

We have come a long way since nineteenth-century nationalist historians fostered the myth that scattered settlement was caused by West Country merchants and the king's navy expelling planters from the island or forcing them to scatter to the bays for safety. There was instead a long struggle for access to or control of a common property resource. If Newfoundland was distinctive it was not because of the degree of oppression suffered, but because access to its staple required little or no settlement (and even in this Newfoundland was not unique). It followed that trading patterns preceded permanent settlement, and that settlement occurred in answer to the needs of an existing pattern of trade and staple extraction (pp. 5-12, 234). Elsewhere Mannion has examined the sources of Irish migration; in *The Peopling of Newfoundland* Handcock defines the source area for English migration within the Plymouth-Bristol-Portsmouth triangle.¹³ Both source areas were determined in large part by the trading activities of West Country and Jersey merchants and their vessels and were therefore highly localized. Indeed, it is unlikely that any other province or state in North America drew such a large proportion of its population from such limited source areas. Since trade preceded settlement, access to both export markets and supply sources was controlled from the beginning by merchants, and links between primary producers and markets were never established. In the nineteenth century mercantile control remained intact (although passing to St. John's-based merchants) in part because the truck system served to guarantee mercantile control of supply and mercantile access to output from the common property resource.

There are important implications here for the long-term cultural, social and economic development of Newfoundland. Out of this staple trade and this pattern of settlement grew a social structure of considerable rigidity, a culture characterized not so much by homogeneity as by strong local identities and a clinging to familiar ways, and a traditional economy of remarkable internal stability. Even when Newfoundlanders themselves migrated around the island they clung together, and new settlers in west coast communities had formerly been neighbours in Conception Bay. We are left with the impression of a people moving with their families and neighbours, retaining (as Frank Remiggi argues)

12 Gordon Handcock, "English Migration to Newfoundland" and Alan G. Macpherson, "A Modal Sequence in the Peopling of Central Bonavista Bay, 1676-1857". See also W. Gordon Handcock, "An Historical Geography of English Settlement in Newfoundland: A Study of the Migration Process" (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1979); Patricia A. Thornton, "Dynamic Equilibrium: Settlement, Population and Ecology in the Strait of Belle Isle, Newfoundland, 1840-1940" (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1979).

13 John Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation* (Toronto, 1974).

ethnic and cultural divisions even at the limits of the frontier, carrying with them their cultural baggage and, in the case of Rosemary Ommer's Scottish migrants, carrying even their clan affiliations as a means of adapting to the frontier.¹⁴ We are left with the impression of a people living not a painfully marginal existence, but living in a carefully adapted harmony with a range of seasonally exploitable resources. The diversification of the resource base in the 1880s was not a totally unprecedented departure, although it did lead to new economic and social structures; it was in keeping with the practice, already established within the traditional economy, of supplementing an otherwise marginal fishery with such winter activities as sealing, furring and lumbering. The beginning of continuous migration to Boston and elsewhere in the economic crisis of the 1880s was another characteristic adaptation, since Newfoundlanders had always engaged in coastal migration in order to preserve a balance between population and resources. The stability of the traditional economy was badly shaken in the 1880s, however, and it is hard to imagine that declining fertility and sharply rising mortality in Conception Bay had nothing to do with the economic collapse (it is surprising that Staveley assigns no priority to economic conditions in explaining these trends in fertility and mortality). But we have only begun to unravel the varied and sometimes painful responses of Newfoundland's settlers to their environment, although Mannion and his colleagues have taken us a few steps further along this difficult path.

Cultural responses have absorbed the attention of many scholars in Newfoundland, but solid analyses of cultural traditions have been slow to appear. There exists a wealth of primary material, some valuable studies in the Atlantic Folklore and Folklife Series, and a preliminary survey of education and culture by Frederick Rowe.¹⁵ Delving furthest into the complexities of Newfoundland's culture is Patrick O'Flaherty, surely the prickliest of the many polemicists residing on the island. In *The Rock Observed; Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979)

- 14 Patricia Thornton, "The Demographic and Mercantile Bases of Initial Permanent Settlement in the Strait of Belle Isle"; Frank W. Remiggi, "Ethnic Diversity and Settler Location on the Eastern Lower North Shore of Quebec"; Rosemary E. Ommer, "Highland Scots Migration to Southwestern Newfoundland: A Study of Kinship"; David S. Mills, "The Development of Folk Architecture in Trinity Bay"; John Mannion, "Settlers and Traders in Western Newfoundland".
- 15 The Folklore-Folklife Series includes Hilda C. Murray, *More Than 50%: Woman's Life in a Newfoundland Outport 1900-1950* (St. John's, Breakwater Books, 1979); Victor Butler, *The Little Nord Easter: Reminiscences of a Placentia Bayman* (St. John's, 1980); and a number of other titles. Also important are Frederick W. Rowe, *Education and Culture in Newfoundland* (Toronto, 1976); Peter Neary and Patrick O'Flaherty, *By Great Waters: A Newfoundland and Labrador Anthology* (Toronto, 1974); Herbert Halpert and G.M. Story, *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* (Toronto, 1970); Gerald M. Sider, "Christmas Mumming and the New Year in Outport Newfoundland", *Past & Present*, LXXI (1976); Joseph R. Smallwood, ed., *The Book of Newfoundland*, 6 volumes (St. John's, 1937-75). See also the bibliographies mentioned in note 11.

O'Flaherty attempts to survey literary responses to Newfoundland, by both outsiders and residents, from 1497 to the recent past. The result might have been a thoroughly disjointed collage, since literary responses could be as varied as the motives and perceptions of the writers themselves. But there is an explicit theme in O'Flaherty's work, even if some of his subjects do not fit neatly within it: the theme is the accretion of myth, sentimentality and condescension in all but a few of the many literary responses to the island and its people. The "triumph of sentiment" took many forms, including the nationalist demonology of Newfoundland's nineteenth-century historians, the patronizing commentary of British and other moralists, and the muddled posturing of modern romantics from Harold Horwood to Farley Mowat. Whatever its form, sentimentality distorted the image of Newfoundlanders, and their own self-image, and so worked to prevent a realistic understanding of the island and its people.

O'Flaherty is not tilting at windmills. It is high time that Norman Duncan, Percy Janes and Franklin Russell received wider critical attention, and the rural romantics must make room for others in Newfoundland's literary pantheon. If there is a weakness here, it lies in the failure to make more explicit some of the assumptions which guide O'Flaherty's literary and historical judgments. If the sentimental tradition offers various distortions of Newfoundland and its people, it follows that clear and undistorted perceptions of a particular way of life must be possible. There is such a thing, O'Flaherty believes, as "the Newfoundlander's distinctiveness", "the Newfoundland character", or "Newfoundland life as it is lived, rather than fancied" (pp. 176, 187). O'Flaherty is writing not only about literary responses to Newfoundland, but also about Newfoundland's culture in the broadest sense, and implicit in his analysis is a definition of that culture. At the heart of Newfoundland are the qualities depicted in Norman Duncan's allegories of outpost life, and in his character Solomon Stride: the enormous capacity to endure hardship, the refusal to despair when faced with an unyielding ocean, the failure to become brutalized even when hunting and killing to live, the rejection of "dumb fatalism" when surrounded by overwhelming natural forces, and the dogged persistence which ensures survival.

As a definition of a culture this remains intuitive and personal; it threatens to become a form of native idealism in itself. To judge the literary value of works by their success in perceiving a culture so loosely defined is a risky exercise; to the extent that the culture is being defined by those same works the exercise is also illogical. Of course O'Flaherty has his own perception of "Newfoundland life as it is lived", but to the historian his assumption of clear-sighted objectivity sounds rather like von Ranke's command that we see the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. Further, the notion that "the Newfoundland character" is a single identity is inherently implausible, given Newfoundland's religious and ethnic divisions and its bifurcated social structure. O'Flaherty is, in fact, a latter-day liberal and nativist who believes that "no real social grievances among the mass of the people were apparent" in William Carson's time, and that by 1979 "the

people of Newfoundland have at long last found a way out of economic uncertainty and hardship" (pp. 51, 186). This naivety about economic and social conditions is accompanied by a refusal to admit that poverty may indeed be brutalizing, however resilient outport Newfoundlanders might be. The brutalization of Percy Janes' character Saul is surely not "an incautious reading of the Newfoundland character" but a mature recognition that poverty may lead to "endless humiliation", to "emotional constriction", and even to a debilitating habit of social deference and a profound conservatism throughout the lower levels of the social structure (p. 176). An unsentimental analysis of Newfoundland's culture must not dismiss the sombre vision of Janes, nor the historical record of poverty and its debasing effects. These are not ungrateful quibbles but a plea that O'Flaherty examine his assumptions and dig further into his stubborn rock, for this book is a magnificent beginning and our most valuable study of Newfoundland's culture.

Cultural developments have long been of interest to Frederick Rowe, and they receive further treatment in *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980). This is the first survey of Newfoundland's history since Prowse's work of the 1890s. Rowe has also written a fine study of the Beothucks and performed a valuable service in popularizing new interpretations of Newfoundland's history.¹⁶ His new history reveals many of the strengths and some of the lacunae in recent research. He offers thorough accounts of early discoveries and exploration, of the Beothucks, of early settlements, and of political developments from the late nineteenth century. On some subjects he is less informative, often through no fault of his own (we lack adequate research on the early nineteenth century, on the seal fishery, and on the changing social structure, for instance). More surprising perhaps is the abbreviated account of the long-term decline of the fisheries, but economic history is not Rowe's specialty. This is a useful compendium by a rather traditional historian, although one misses the vital spark of polemic or passion which Newfoundland has so often inspired in her chroniclers.

The 1970s has yielded many valuable beginnings, as Rowe's *History* reveals. Among these beginnings only one may prove definitive, not only because of its quality, but because its author did not survive to complete what he had begun. David Alexander never imagined that *The Decay of Trade* (St. John's, ISER, 1977) was a finished work; it was a preliminary essay in the task of a life-time. However preliminary the book may have seemed, it took the defence of Newfoundland and its major industry into the heart of Canadian economic history. This remains true even if the writers of Canadian economic histories could still ignore the work (and Newfoundland) in 1980.¹⁷ Alexander's

16 Frederick Rowe, *Extinction: The Beothucks of Newfoundland* (Toronto, 1977).

17 William Marr and Donald Paterson, *Canada: An Economic History* (Toronto, 1980); note the Bibliography, p. 526.

conclusions remain intact, even if Toronto Whigs may dismiss them in 1981.¹⁸ The victims of regional myopia and Central Canadian complacency are with us still, but so is *The Decay of Trade*.

David Alexander's book is best understood as part of a wider body of work appearing between 1974 and 1980.¹⁹ His active life as a Canadian historian was tragically short, spanning less than ten years. Two of those years he spent indexing the British imperial "Crew Lists and Agreements", and another full year was required for the coding of Yarmouth Crew List data.²⁰ The final year saw his last courageous battle, but in that year he still attended conferences and wrote two papers, including his valedictory statement on Newfoundland, the first W.S. MacNutt Memorial Lecture. In the few intervening years he concentrated a rare talent and a stern compassion upon the economic history of Atlantic Canada. Few Canadian historians in his generation possessed a training in several disciplines, as he did, and few possessed comparable intellectual ability, although he would have dismissed such claims or found in them a cause for anguish over the state of his profession. Above all, David Alexander was a man driven by an overwhelming sense of the ills and injustices afflicting his island home and its people. And he understood, as few outsiders have done, the Solomon Stride of Duncan's Newfoundland, the fisherman who returned to the sea every spring, never despairing yet always conscious of the magnitude of his task. Given his commitment to remedial action on several fronts, it is perhaps surprising that Alexander became and remained a historian. But he believed that history was remedial action in itself: it was an assault upon the forces which had shaped present evils; it was an assault upon the fallacy that what has happened must have happened; it was a specific for the Canadian disease, that culturally endemic habit of passive capitulation to outside forces as an alternative to collective action. Once, when accused of being ahistorical, he agreed that he was.²¹ But for him the past was always a weapon used in defence of particular values, and too often in defence of the *status quo*, and those who would deny this were guilty of distorting history.

David Alexander began in the early 1970s by confronting the dilemma which all his subsequent works attempted to resolve. In the modern world small cultures and economies must, for economic and military protection, attach themselves to larger societies; otherwise they may become, like Mauritius,

18 Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism* (Toronto, 1981), p. 149.

19 A complete list of Alexander's published work appears in the "Maritime History Group Newsletter" (December 1980), edited by Lewis Fischer.

20 David Alexander and Keith Matthews, "A Computer Index to the Crew Lists and Agreements of the British Empire" (8 vols., St. John's, 1974).

21 See the closing exchange in Lewis R. Fischer and Eric W. Sager, eds., *The Enterprising Canadians: Entrepreneurs and Economic Development in Eastern Canada, 1820-1914* (St. John's, 1979), pp. 312-3.

“island barracoons”. But how in this world of great economic blocs and homogenized cultures may the smaller society survive the smothering embrace of the larger? How may it preserve dignity, creativity, and the integrity of its economic base, upon which dignity, creativity and even survival depend? The first step was an economist’s rebuttal of theories of economic development which defined innovation and entrepreneurship in terms of successful replication of structures and material accomplishments in advanced capitalist countries. Here, as in all subsequent work, the interaction of cultural and economic forces is assumed, for as a student of literature and culture as well as economics he saw that cultural dependence could have economic costs in the stifling of local creativity and native entrepreneurship. He turned then to the Canadian Confederation and to Newfoundland, where this modern historical dilemma remained unresolved, and allowed Billie Holiday to point the moral which Newfoundlanders, like their fellow Canadians, had too often forgotten: “Everyone’s got to be different. You can’t copy anybody and end up with anything. If you copy, it means you’re working without any real feeling. And without feeling, whatever you do amounts to nothing”.²²

The Decay of Trade followed logically as part of his continuing effort to understand the deterioration of Newfoundland’s economic base. The original dilemma is repeated: “Since the nineteenth century it had become increasingly difficult for small countries to survive because. . .the world had become increasingly organized and regulated in respect to output, trade, payments, and exchange” (p. 162). Newfoundland failed to manage her marine resources properly from the late nineteenth century, and then confronted marketing problems which no small fishing country in a dollar economy could solve by herself. At this critical juncture Newfoundland joined Canada. By 1949 the total collapse of the saltfish industry was not inevitable, given world demand and the ability of much smaller countries to overcome locational disadvantages to meet that demand. In assigning causal priorities to the collapse which followed, the author shows a pragmatist’s judgment. He would allow no vengeful search for Canadian scapegoats for Newfoundland’s own failures. He acknowledges the serious production and marketing problems which accumulated before the Second World War, and establishes the priority of exchange difficulties through a detailed analysis of the post-war marketing arrangements of the Newfoundland Associated Fish Exporters Limited (NAFEL). The latter analysis was necessary if the next stage of the argument was to follow logically. The collapse of the industry was not rendered inevitable by accumulated pre-war weaknesses in management and marketing. The industry had indeed been in trouble since the First World War, but the death of the industry was caused by decisions taken after 1949, and by the trading orientation of the Confederation of which

22 David Alexander, “Development and Dependence in Newfoundland, 1880-1970”, *Acadiensis*, IV (Autumn 1974), pp. 3-31.

Newfoundland was part. Thus the potential benefits of attachment to a larger economic bloc were lost. The problem lay not in federal indifference, but in the model of economic development which both Newfoundlanders and Canadians had applied: "industrialization", elimination of "cottage style" production, private enterprise control of production and marketing (in spite of the example of the Canadian Wheat Board), and the adjusting of output to meet easily accessible markets.

The conclusion of *The Decay of Trade* is a concentrated historical polemic, a careful reminder of policy options rejected in error, and a broadside attack upon the supposed inevitability of this Canadian failure. It is also a painful reminder of the costs of our errors, our regional myopia, and our habit of pursuing strategies inappropriate to our native skills and resources. Canada's weakness as a trading power is rooted in the national policy of a closed and protected regime, which brings some material benefits to central Canada but leaves even that region with a weaker economic environment. Ultimately the cost of policies conceived in error was another policy, both expensive and cruel — the elimination of the fisherman.

The Decay of Trade would be read and admired, but its author had only begun. He wanted a more complete analysis of fisheries production and marketing before the Second World War, and a better understanding of the production and marketing systems of other fishing nations. But the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project intervened, and then suddenly there was no more time. *The Decay of Trade* led, however, to his study of the impact of Confederation upon the Maritimes, and thence to the problem of regionalism in contemporary Canada.²³ He found no satisfying answer to the problem of the small culture and economy, but he advocated solutions in the Canadian context, solutions which pleased neither federalists nor regionalists. It followed from *The Decay of Trade*, and from his other work, that a Canadian Confederation must persist, because no other country will accept responsibility for us, and because it would be folly to throw away the advantages of a large and diversified trading partnership. The problem of the Canadian Confederation was "weakness at the centre", the failure of federal institutions to provide economic support and protection for their constituent parts. The logical solution was not decentralization and capitulation to "regional xenophobia", but central institutions of state with "more political power". By this he meant institutions with greater power to enforce the will of provincial partners, including a Commons and a Senate which better represented all partners in Confederation. There was no other

23 David Alexander, "Economic Growth in the Atlantic Region, 1880 to 1940", *Acadiensis*, VIII (Autumn 1978), pp. 47-76; "New Notions of Happiness: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Atlantic Canada", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XV (Summer, 1980), pp. 29-42; "Output and Productivity in the Yarmouth Ocean Fleet, 1863-1901", in David Alexander and Rosemary Ommer, eds., *Volumes Not Values: Canadian Sailing Ships and World Trades* (St. John's, 1979); "Old and New Money", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XV (Autumn 1980), pp. 109-11.

means to combine local creativity and local control of productive resources with the benefits of unity.²⁴

David Alexander knew only too well that grave warnings and fervent pleas did not resolve the profound historical dilemma which preoccupied him for almost ten years. But he was fortunate, as he well knew, to be one member of a thriving fraternity of scholars who will answer many of the questions raised in his time. In the end he returned to Newfoundland, to the weakening of the island's economic base and its dependent culture. His last essay is a bold advance in his thinking about Newfoundland, and it poses questions relevant to Canada as a whole: a strong economic base was essential to a viable society and culture, but is it possible that influences within that culture operated as independent variables, limiting growth and diversification of the economy.²⁵ The influences of culture, education and social structure now become central questions in the economic labyrinth of Newfoundland's history, and the art of this modest Daedalus has made it so. His legacy is the beginning of a new economic history for this region of Canada, and a challenge to those who survive him.

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24 "Convocation Address" (Memorial University, May 1978), published in *MUN Gazette*, X (June 1978), pp. 6, 13.

25 "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland", *Acadiensis*, X (Autumn 1980), pp. 3-34.

Transcending the Bounds of Nationalism: Contemporary Quebec Historiography

Prior to the Second World War Quebec historiography reflected the concerns, values and aspirations of lay and clerical nationalists who concentrated on depicting the long struggle for survival of the conquered and beleaguered French-Canadian nation. As Serge Gagnon has demonstrated recently, the bulk of Quebec historiography from Garneau to Groulx focused on the history of New France which was portrayed in romantic and idealist terms as the crucible and golden age of the French-Canadian nation.¹ Since the War there has occurred a significant and continuing metamorphosis in Quebec historiography. While nationalism, in its modern secular and liberal clothing, remains an important element in much of Quebec's recent historiography, it must now compete with other ideologies, methodologies and perspectives.²

1 Serge Gagnon, *Le Québec et ses historiens de 1840 à 1920* (Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1978).

2 Fernand Ouellet makes this point quite eloquently in his "Historiographie canadienne et nationalisme", *Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada*, Série IV, XIII (1975), pp. 25-39.