

Organizing Historical Memory in the Maritimes: A Reconnaissance

D. A. Muise

Volume 30, numéro 1, autumn 2000

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad30_1for08

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Muise, D. A. (2000). Organizing Historical Memory in the Maritimes:: A Reconnaissance. *Acadiensis*, 30(1), 50-60.

Organizing Historical Memory in the Maritimes: A Reconnaissance

INTROSPECTION REGARDING CONNECTIONS between the personal and political has not occurred very much among the generation of Atlantic Canadian scholars that emerged from the educational revolution of the 1960s. We yearned to explore the roots of the predicaments of our various communities while attempting to come to grips with our comparatively low profile in Canada's emerging historical preoccupation with nation-making. As a result, even if that first large wave of regional scholars came from quite diverse areas and backgrounds, we first looked to define the region's place within emerging ideas about the origin of Canada. How that process worked itself out in three ensuing decades of scholarship has been sometimes rather tortuous, but the result has been a vital, diverse and broadly coherent body of scholarship which has revolutionized perspectives on the regional experience. I will consider, briefly, the beginnings and some findings of that first wave of regional historiography from three perspectives: first, a view from the inside coloured by my experience teaching and researching the region for the past four decades, mostly spent in Ottawa; second, a very selective look at how this historiographical revolution has trickled down in recent popular publications; and finally, a consideration of the impact of that historiography on interpretations in museums and historic sites of the region.

The 30-year historiographical revolution referred to, sometimes rather derisively in Upper Canada, as the *Acadiensis* School began with a rather naive expectation that a regional challenge to the master narratives of post-Second World War Canadian scholarship, which had marginalized the region so effectively, might gain attention in the public sphere as well as within the academy. We felt the Laurentian School and its variants needed amending by a pro-active, sympathetic regional voice focusing on the post-Confederation era.¹ Encounters with like-minded scholars from across the country at so many Canadian and imperial universities, many of them much like us in background and intention, produced a heady brew of historical inquiry that was leavened by the euphoria of the Centennial celebrations surrounding 1967. While hardly countenancing an anti-nationalist perspective, it became commonplace to demand at least inclusion in the emerging national narrative. Our initial objective was to compensate for the virtual absence of the Maritimes from national narratives — particularly for the post-Confederation era. Frank Underhill's rather casual remark that nothing much of consequence had happened here since 1867 stung a great many of us. Virtually all my generation of regional scholars had to pursue their advanced graduate training outside the region, which might explain some of our strong reactions toward Upper Canadian hegemony.² Many of us were the first of our families or

1 Doug Owram, "Narrow Circles: The Historiography of Recent Canadian Historiography", *National History*, I, 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 5-21. On regional absences and stereotyping in national approaches see E.R. Forbes, "In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900-1967", *Acadiensis*, VIII, 1 (Autumn 1978), pp. 3-21.

2 Underhill's statement, made somewhat disingenuously about the 1920s in his 1963 Massey Lectures on CBC, was subsequently published as *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto, 1964), p. 63. The Centenary Series on Canadian history, published by McClelland and Stewart, was the culmination for

communities to encounter advanced scholarship. As demographic surfers, we were positioned to take advantage of the enormous wave of baby boomers coming behind us and demanding some sort of accommodation within the burgeoning universities.³ For the first time, large numbers of professional regionally-based historians had the chance to explore their own histories. That we mostly chose to address regional issues from a geopolitical perspective had a certain number of consequences in the first instance. One was suppression, for a time at least, of a great deal of ethnic or community-based agency that might have flourished earlier if we were not so preoccupied with the larger issues of region and nation.

The outcome was an historiography that established that Maritimers had confronted the industrial age much like other parts of North America. The next stage was to delineate how the region's experience diverged from national norms and to explain why. The vague Marxian thrust of much of that analysis privileged the politics of regionalism, the emergence of working-class consciousness and, sometimes, the careers of significant regional spokespeople. An early focus on specific political events, such as pivotal elections, gave way to a political economy of disparity. While occasional disagreement occurred about its contours, there was little doubt regarding the social devastation that accompanied the region's so-called national experience. Attempting to explain and justify a regional approach, historians of the first wave had to imagine one and invest it with some sort of coherence. The 1950s and 1960s political rebellion that came to focus so much analysis of the region's fate in Confederation led to renewed hope that national policies could become inclusive rather than continue excluding the region from so many nation-building developmental policies of the post-Second World War Liberal era. Debates surrounding contemporary strategies for renewal came to find parallels within the scholarly community as well. As the politicians and bureaucrats set out to invoke a sense of regional entitlement, we scholars fell into line with the development of some sense of the roots of those ideas. But we can hardly be said to have created any sense of Atlantic Canada for residents of the region. It remains questionable that we will ever do so. Instead, we pursued a series of inquiries into specific experiences and communities, mostly ignoring the problems of statelessness within Confederation that continue to confound any sort of regional consensus.⁴

The dismal course of political economy we set ourselves may, in the end, have reinforced the process of disempowerment and marginalization identified during the so-called Atlantic Revolution. This was precisely the opposite of what we had intended. Accommodation to modernity has been found so wanting, at least by

much of this early preoccupation with the making of the nation through national achievement. It cut off the Maritimes in 1858 when it truncated W.S. MacNutt's *The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857* (Toronto, 1965). The region's post-Confederation era was to be fitted into the crevasses of the emerging master narrative. In the end, the region was hardly even mentioned in volumes dealing with the post-Confederation era.

3 On the baby boom generation's impact on education see Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto, 1996).

4 Margaret Conrad, "The Atlantic Revolution of the 1950s", in Berkeley Fleming, ed., *Beyond Anger and Longing: Community and Development in Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton, 1988), pp. 55-96. On the appropriateness of region as a basis for scholarship see Ian McKay, "A Note on 'Region' in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 89-101.

comparison with most North American norms, that it proved problematic for us to get beyond it and look to the real experience of Maritimers who had chosen to stay. For the post-First World War period particularly, we provided a relentlessly depressing picture when a comparative frame of reference was used to calculate the region's achievements, one that sinks progressively with searching for causes of the Depression that never seems to find any end. It did not start out that way. After post-Confederation scholarship had started up in earnest, a sense of optimism was replaced by analysis of economic and political decline in terms of the ineluctable trend of capitalist concentration, the inherent weakness of regional leadership and the limitations of geographical position or endowment. That historiographical tendency is far from dead; but our take on the region has undergone substantial revision in the intervening quarter-century.⁵

Central Canadian scholars tend to simplify and truncate this complex historiographical tradition. But, for all our concerns for the subtlety of various approaches and the inevitable fragmentation of regional as well as national studies, a certain amount of hegemony has been exercised by scholars closely associated with the founding of *Acadiensis*, particularly as synthesized in the two collaboratively conceived and written volumes dealing with the region before and after Confederation. Along with a number of other examples, these two volumes were commissioned in response to a broadly felt demand, by the early 1980s, for deeper understanding of new trends in regional history throughout Canada.⁶ Well-reviewed in and outside the region, they have been praised for consolidating a vast array of original research much too specialized for average non-participants in the regional research enterprise. The surprise with which reviewers appraised the richness underlying these two volumes spoke to our failure to make much of a mark on general approaches to Canadian history, though in some important respects more recent

5 Paralleling and sometimes intersecting with the scholar-driven endeavors surrounding *Acadiensis*, a more pro-active applied research initiative was housed in a group of institutes that addressed regional problems head on. The oldest and most active of these is Newfoundland's Institute of Social and Economic Research, established in 1961. The Gorsebrook Institute at Saint Mary's and the Island Studies Institute at the University of Prince Edward Island emerged somewhat later. One of the most active is the Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development based at the Université de Moncton, which has published several volumes and has actively participated in various policy-making endeavors. All these university-based institutes have engaged in mission-oriented research inquiring into the region's social and economic woes over the past three decades, but the day-to-day work and policy implications of these institutes deserves more attention from scholars. See Melvin Baker, "The Establishment of Memorial University's Institute of Social and Economic Research in 1961", *Newfoundland Quarterly*, XCII, 3 (Winter 1999), pp. 21-5. A successful mobilization of scholarly and community action in the interests of social change was *New Maritimes*, published for almost two decades. It presented a coherent leftist perspective on problems associated with regional development. Samples from that very creative endeavour are published in Scott Milsom and Ian McKay, eds., *Toward a New Maritimes* (Charlottetown, 1992). Almost coincidental with its demise has been the emergence of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies based in Halifax, which has provided a right-wing critique of various developmental policies by the federal government particularly. It pursues its ends through active propagandizing in the daily press and through a very active web-presence at: <<http://www.aims.ca>>.

6 See Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec* (Toronto, 1982), Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto, 1984) and Hugh J.M. Johnston, ed., *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1996).

editions of new texts have included steadier regional reference than they had previously, particularly for the post-Confederation period. There also appears to be a much fairer representation of regional scholarship in the proliferation of collections of readings, giving the region a presence in national texts that eclipses earlier lacunae.⁷

Teaching regional studies in Upper Canada over the past 30 years has presented its own challenges.⁸ When quizzed about prior knowledge or experience of the region, third year undergraduate students mostly profess as their prime reason for enrolling in a regional history course various degrees of unawareness, though there is considerable evidence that publicizing the region as a tourist destination has had some impact on their decisions. I am not convinced they do it from any sense of national guilt, though responses to a questionnaire often justify taking regional history courses as a way of knowing their country better. Notions about there being “lots of history down there” focused on the peculiarities of the region’s “unique way of life” — whatever they think that means given the omnipresent regional poverty and impending environmental crises of one sort or another that are constantly before them in the Central Canadian media. Students descended from migrants forced to more densely populated parts of the country for economic opportunity tend to be rather sentimental about the region as a place of particular significance. Often they have personal stories of being drawn back to experience fragments of their family history first hand, and they also often have a rather distinctive perspective on the capacity of the regional economy. Such roots-centred students are often disillusioned when they encounter the subject matter of the course and texts, where the personal and political fail to intersect very much, and there is a palpable sigh when we come to the issue of out-migration. The problem of assigning causation or blame for disparity, an issue central to our analysis of the relationship with the rest of the country, is sometimes problematic. Assuming I have been able to keep their attention to that stage, there is likely to be incredible surprise at the level of development in the region during the later 19th century, so much a part of my own research and writing. But the invention of the region as Canada’s social and economic problem area, combined with a continuing characterization of the region as a political backwater is a blemish hard to dispel.

Assessing causes of regional underdevelopment forces students to confront the tangle of renewed federalism/regional development and inevitably leads to

7 E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton, 1993) and Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History* (Toronto and Fredericton, 1994). *Acadiensis* has also produced several editions of comprehensive readers for the pre- and post-Confederation eras. As well one might consult such specialized collections such as David Frank and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Labour and Working-Class History in Atlantic Canada: A Reader* (St. John’s, 1995). Several other more specialized collections of articles have appeared as well. See as well Janet Guildford and Michael Earle, “On Choosing a Textbook: Recent Canadian History Surveys and Readers”, *Acadiensis*, XXVII, 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 133-44 and Jacques Paul Couturier, “L’Acadie, c’est un détail”: Les représentations de l’Acadie dans le récit national canadien”, *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 2 (printemps 2000), pp. 102-19.

8 One challenge was not finding a space for regional history at Carleton University, where colleagues Carman Bickerton and Naomi Griffiths have also offered courses on aspects of the region, along with my own surveys and seminars. Carleton is somewhat unique in Central Canada in that for the past three decades its history department has offered courses dealing with all regions of Canada, including the North.

comparisons with other parts of the country. Ever present-minded, my classes become sensitive to treatments of the region in the national media; after all, we are located in Ottawa. While a concern with underdevelopment continues to be central, new paradigms associated with “national unity” and “globalization” become more central as have the tax reforms and down-sizing associated with the new right agenda of the 1990s. Concern for Canada’s fate within a larger economic system tends to overcome easy definitions of a regional experience which were more central to our way of looking at the region only a decade or so ago.

But a strict political economy approach does not intersect much with popular versions of the region available to Upper Canadian students. We have had a long run at the centre of Canada’s national consciousness over past decades, though the implications of globalizing tendencies to homogenize everything remain a bit uncertain. Much of the region’s cultural production reaching mass audiences — music, art and our stories told in various media — is lodged within the particularities of communities in recession or focus on a nostalgic past or a migratory present. This expressive culture — peculiar for the hegemony exercised over so much of it by Cape Bretoners, arguably the most dispossessed of Maritimers — has had a profound impact on Canadian visions of the region. Most of my students readily identify authors, musicians, television shows or movies from the region, displaying a fair amount of cultural awareness.⁹

Student visions reflect a region dominated by concerns for economic under-performance, mirroring public discussions in the national press and the inevitable questions of political culture associated with a politics of entitlement. This clearly reflects broad and unrelenting negativism by Upper Canadian media with a sense that the drain of tax dollars east drags the Canadian economy down and should be reversed. On the other hand, a powerful, if unsophisticated, identification of the region’s cultural and physical beauty reflects the success of the regional propagandists’ projection of an area desirable for potential enjoyment as a consumer product. All that tourism promotion does have an impact. When cultural producers link their performances outside the region directly to a sense of community, we witness the success of a tourist-centred model of regional identity. The implications of that for an earlier period have been explored, but imagined communities are constantly being reinvented and celebrated in ways that go far beyond the imagining of those earlier evangelists of tourism.¹⁰

Paralleling the emergence of an academy-based resurgence in regional studies has been a deeply based roots and commemoration revival of family and community

9 How musicians, novelists and television reflect the regional experience for a national consciousness is beyond the scope of this paper. When someone takes up the making of those imagined communities, they will see a vibrant history of interest in the region’s cultural producers that reflects our disproportional impact on many aspects of cultural production. Output of film and fiction based on historical experience presents another category altogether. Much of the best fiction in Canada in recent years is set in the region. It often proceeds from a powerful sense of place among regional cultural producers. In this area as in others, entry of outside producers anxious to exploit commercial advantage or the exotic nature of the regional experience has produced some genuinely terrible commodities as well.

10 D.A. Muise, “Who Owns History Anyway? Reinventing Atlantic Canada for Pleasure and Profit”, *Acadiensis*, XXVII, 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 124-34.

historical inquiry. Hardly absent before the 1960s, the intersection of the Confederation centennial and links between public commemoration and tourism became palpable in the years following 1967. In Nova Scotia it had started out with Halifax's bicentennial in 1949, the bicentennial of Acadian expulsion in 1955, then that of representative government in 1958. By 1967 the trend toward commemoration of important historical events with large-scale institutional celebrations or through the renaming of older institutions — or new highways in the case of Halifax — was firmly fixed.¹¹ Whatever the varied circumstances from province to province, the process has become protean until today the “decimalization” of our history has become commonplace and shows every sign of becoming more significant as tourism is increasingly linked to such celebrations. Already the run-up to the quadri-centennial of the 1604-5 founding of Acadia is being promoted as the biggest event yet, destined to feature massive and unprecedented family reunions.

Community and family-based historical production for public and private consumption makes these areas of public history absolutely central to regional consciousness in ways that a political economy approach never seems to approach. So, while history is everywhere in the public gaze, it remains amazingly absent from policy-making sectors where it should be providing a context for continuing attempts to deal with radical changes in the regional economy. Why there is so little intersection between a natural curiosity for roots and a scholarly oriented political economy is likely a function of the search for different meanings — but also has a great deal to do with the differing agendas of the various seekers into the past.

Popular publications on the region fill increasing rows of shelves in bookstores, their output increasing dramatically during the great millennial clambake of the past few years, in itself partly a function of the fact that so many communities were celebrating centennials of their own incorporations around the same time. The re-emergence of active regional publishing houses and community-based historical societies has propelled this development onto a new plane. Discovery that history and nostalgia, when associated with community and family histories, lead to tourist activity, have resulted in public support for much previously private pursuit.

In spite of all this activity at the community level, overarching popular interpretations of the provinces and region have been slow in coming. Two recent attempts to capture Nova Scotia's past by Lesley Choyce and Harry Bruce present interesting case studies. Both volumes nod toward *Acadiensis*, but neither does much with the broad range of materials produced for the journal nor the two syntheses that emerged from it, or for other journals on the region for that matter.¹² Choyce's book, produced for a series planned to deal with each of the provinces, was commissioned to provide a distinctly personal perspective. Choyce is a well-regarded poet, essayist and novelist dealing mostly with his adopted community along Nova Scotia's Eastern Shore, but he appears to have only a passing acquaintance with the history of the

11 Ian McKay, “History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964”, *Acadiensis*, XXII, 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 102-38.

12 Lesley Choyce, *Nova Scotia: Shaped by the Sea (A Living History)* (Toronto, 1996) and Harry Bruce, *An Illustrated History of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1997). In 2001, Oxford University Press will be publishing an illustrated history of Atlantic Canada by Margaret Conrad and James Hiller.

province or region. After he cools the earth, Choyce takes a strictly chronological approach, highlighting a series of important transitional moments: the Acadian Deportation, the American Revolution, Confederation and so on. His is an event and personality driven narrative, preoccupied with oceanic aspects of the regional experience. This is never more clear than in the odium with which he deals briefly with the industrial transformation of the later 19th century and the reverberations that come down to us today from those events. Scholars will be encouraged when he plagiarizes some of their work, but they will find he has mostly mined them for quotable quotes or dramatic incidents. There is little attempt to engage the scholarly questions raised, no chapter is much more than seven or eight pages, and no references appear in the text, apparently an editorial consideration. All in all, this is a disappointing exercise, though a strong personal flavour to the narrative allows it to range across a wide variety of anecdotes selected for their relevance to the seascape orientation of his narrative.¹³

Harry Bruce, assisted by Marjorie Whitelaw, was commissioned by Communications Nova Scotia to produce the second popular history of the province published within a two-year period. One assumes it was to provide the government with a handy gift for distinguished visitors. It actually closes with a photograph of the G-7 leaders meeting in Halifax in 1995 with *Bluenose II* in the background, a powerful marriage of public imagery and the new policy of luring tourists to consume the province's heritage. Anyone who has lived in the region during the past decade — or who has managed to spend much of the summers in Cape Breton as I have — is closely aware of the attention paid to tourism. The policies of all governments at all levels are continually directed toward promoting tourist potential. When combined with the attempt to lure retirees to the area, it is clear that the strategy is to sell the natural and cultural diversity of the region. In the form of cultural festivals, community celebrations and school and family reunions, the “festivalization” of Nova Scotia is particularly significant. The essentialization of the historical experience provides a heritage environment for the returnees in the hope that their accumulated wealth will find its way to the region.

Profusely illustrated throughout, this book follows much the same narrative line and format as Choyce's book. Short, choppy chapters march relentlessly toward the present, stopping with a screech at the end of the Second World War, before concluding with a brief closing chapter of less than ten pages entitled “The Post-War Bust: Weathering a Crisis”. For all that, Bruce's *Illustrated History* is better than Choyce's book in terms of its coverage of the post-Confederation era. Scholars will recognize their work in a significant dependence on the two *Acadiensis*-inspired surveys and even the occasional reference to specific monographs or journals. Unfortunately, the final editing shows little acquaintance with the normal conventions of citation, or proofreading, particularly in the few footnotes. The illustrations add to the attractiveness of the manuscript but contribute little to understanding the history of the province. There are no useful maps or any other form of original graphic material in either volume.¹⁴

13 A perceptive review of recent popular history in Canada, including Choyce, is Naomi Griffiths, “Closing the Great Divide in History”, *The Literary Review of Canada*, 6, 5 (1997), pp. 15-17.

14 An example of successful translation of scholarship with a popular approach are two books associated

Consciousness of the region's deep historical roots is everywhere apparent. These two books are but the tip of a mass of new popular material detailing the history of the region, or more precisely of communities within the region. Choyce and Bruce are professional writers, who make their living by producing this sort of thing; others do it for pleasure or as part of their community-building. A wide range of new illustrated community histories are being released by publishers throughout the region. That they seldom conform to scholarly norms, or even pay much attention to existing scholarship most of the time, might not bother us too much. Their prominent occupation of bookshelves in regional bookstores though, should cause us to pause, however briefly. In addition, ever more family history appears in various guises than ever before.

The public face of that celebration hardly reflects the tremendous revolution in regional scholarship that has occurred over the past three decades. The reason for this may be that our work on the fate of the region at the hands of Confederation and the public history zones do not intersect in many meaningful fashions. Clearly, the dark story historians and political economists tell is not one the public appears to want to hear; or at least that is how publishers and their audiences seem to be reacting and how community-based historians seem to define their interests. Books proliferate on the death of communities or on long-past industrial practices, but few display even a nodding acquaintance with the ongoing interests of scholars in the field. And most often scholars appear prepared to go on without even acquainting ourselves with the communities we study. There is a problem with our single-minded lack of interest in anybody but the scholarly audience to whom virtually all of our work is directed.¹⁵

An example of the sort of thing possible, at one level at least, was the television series and its predecessor the made-for-TV movie *Pit Pony*. The themes addressed in that series, Cape Breton's answer to the Anne of Green Gables phenomenon, were central to the issues being debated by labour historians and others interested in the history of coal mining. Whatever we might say about the insipidness of some of the plot lines, there was an attempt to portray the experience of working and living in industrial Cape Breton during the boom times at the turn of the 19th century, and there was occasional reference to issues of the day such as union organization and new technologies. Historians vetted scripts, and the show's web site contains useful material including the transcript of an extended interview with Bob McIntosh, whose

with the 250th anniversary history of Halifax. In *Halifax: The First 250 Years* (Halifax, 1999) David Sutherland, Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford have produced a sensitive treatment of their community, much of it synthesizing their own work. It has both a fine set of illustrations and a valuable text. Complementing this volume is a virtual exhibit of more than 150 photographs, *Halifax and its People*, mounted by the Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, introduced by Brian Cuthbertson: <<http://www.nsarm.ednet.ns.ca/virtualx/halifax>>. A paper version, edited by Cuthbertson, has appeared as *Halifax and its People, 1749-1999: Images from Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management* (Halifax, 1999). Less of a narrative than the jointly authored volume, it nonetheless has a very well-informed selection of illustrations grouped around a series of themes.

15 A successful bridging of the gap between academy and community has been the work of the Planter Studies Committee at Acadia University, whose biennial meetings and three books of proceedings have proven a wonderful blend of scholarly and community/family based approaches. The Yorkshire 2000 program of celebrations and conference for this year promises to try to match that sort of involvement on the part of Mount Allison.

work on boy miners is seminal in that field. The show was canceled following its second season.¹⁶

Institutionally based public history, as distinct from popular publications and media productions, are often informed by a more critical perspective, at least in those larger institutions that reflect a broader societal/governmental set of objectives. They frequently employ trained scholars in curatorial or managerial positions and pay a premium to “get it right” for fear that getting it wrong might lead to public criticism. Each museum and historical site or park approaches the region differently, a function of particular mandates and circumstances. While it is very difficult to generalize, standing traditions of curatorship driven by intellectual rigor serve museum and historic site communities better, but the need to respond directly to community pressures can often have an important bearing on the direction of interpretation. The linking of historical and expressive culture in these institutions can lead to innovative representations of the past. But the level of entitlement that most communities are now bringing to their communal pasts has given a new imperative to local bodies. Virtually every community has some sort of centre that constantly wavers back and forth between serving the needs of its residents and providing a source of employment and perhaps a tourist draw.¹⁷

The constraints placed on larger museums by their various mandates and the condition of their artifact collections is an obvious limitation on their capacity to represent the past effectively. Dependence on public funding can affect choices of subject matter as well, but within these constraints a considerable achievement has been made to which university-based historians would do well to pay more attention. Specialized museums in Nova Scotia have a somewhat mixed record of presenting the past; larger ones such as the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, the Fisheries Museum or the Miners’ Museum in Glace Bay have benefited from large infusions of federal money. Mostly, they have based their exhibits and activities on careful scholarship that includes direct involvement by stakeholders at the community level. They show every indication of continuing to do so, though the constraints of finances are always a challenge. Fortress Louisbourg sets a standard for interaction that is exemplary, even if bureaucratic constraints have sometimes impeded the process of interpreting the past.¹⁸

The proliferation of history museums and interpretation centres throughout the region grows all the time. In June 2000 the Nova Scotia government announced support for interpretation centers dealing with the historic swordfish fishery and the 19th century gold mining industries, both partial satellites of larger nearby sites. And historic houses and obsolete industries seem to appear daily in the local press. These

16 The website continues to be maintained at: <<http://www.pitpony.com/>>.

17 Peter Rider, ed., *The History of Atlantic Canada: Museum Interpretations* (Ottawa, 1981). Twenty years ago Peter Rider surveyed a number of regional museums for their content, but no recent survey has attempted to examine what has happened since, though there has been a revolution in museum practice parallel to that of academic-based scholarly communities. Also see D.A. Muise, “Material Culture and the Teaching of Maritime Studies”, in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Teaching Maritime Studies* (Fredericton, 1986), pp. 241-7.

18 Fortress Louisbourg’s early years are dealt with in Terry MacLean, *Louisbourg Heritage: From Ruins to Reconstruction* (Sydney, 1995).

community-based museums are often quite good at interpreting their specific communities, but they face constraints quite different from academic-based scholars or the larger better-funded provincial and federal institutions in the region. They are mostly the work of informed and energetic community volunteers, anxious to be a part of the broad historical enterprise that aims to inform themselves of their varied pasts and participate in a broader heritage movement. Increasingly they have become enmeshed within community development schemes that attempt to actualize the strength of community experience. As engines for growth, such institutions are frequently seen primarily for their attractiveness to tourists, but they can also be effective agents for identifying community aims. Their work can and often is influenced by broader scholarship wherever effective partnerships are encouraged, though it tends to be most frequently undertaken by students employed in summer projects rather than by full-scale collaborations. Unfortunately, scholars are not as cognizant of this good work as they sometimes are of ours.

CD-ROMs, the world wide web and new media generally represent an as yet largely unmet opportunity for regional scholars, while family and community-based historians have embraced them with great enthusiasm. We have just begun to open up to their capacity for developing a new understanding of the region. The richness every day appearing on the web in the heritage field is astounding.¹⁹ Newfoundland Heritage's site, where Jim Hiller of Memorial University has played a crucial role, is an exception to the absence of the university-based scholars and an example of what is possible. It is clearly the best gateway site available at the moment, hosting a wide variety of community-based approaches to historical presentation as well as many of its own materials. Done with considerable public support in association with the Montreal-based CRB Foundation, it has substance and diversity. The previously developed School-Net productions that were largely community-based and limited in scope have been eclipsed by this rich presentation of the provincial community, and it is expanding daily.²⁰

Various provincial museum and archive sites are coming forward every day as they explore the possibilities of virtual exhibits dealing with their various communities. The genealogists are well on the way to connecting various associations with gateway sites that can lead the informed user to other resources, including family-based sites that include a wealth of information. More specialized sites, such as the documentary collection being prepared by Jacques Paul Couturier and his team at Edmundston dealing with aspects of the Acadian experience, are a sign of things to come.²¹ Anyone interested in studying the region will now have to take the internet

19 *Balancing the Scales: Canada's East Coast Fisheries/Un équilibre délicat: Les Pêches de la côte est du Canada*, edited by Peter Rider and produced by IDON EAST for the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Parks Canada, is a promising development in this regard. A collaborative project of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Parks Canada, the Newfoundland Museum, the Prince Edward Island Heritage Centre and the New Brunswick Museum, it is centred on a physical exhibit which will circulate for the next several years and an interactive CD-ROM that has a series of print and illustrative materials providing a comprehensive approach to fisheries in the region. It pays specific attention to both the historical experience and to the various crises that face the industry today.

20 The Newfoundland site is at: <<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/home.html>>.

21 Jacques Paul Couturier's site is at: <<http://www.cuslm.ca/~clio/f netre>>.

seriously as a regular part of their activities. More than just a tool for presenting specific documents, it can be a vehicle for exchange of ideas and an ongoing medium for discussion. That has already happened at the national level with H-Canada and a number of other discussion lists. The attempt at the same type of exchange from the Gorsebrook Institute a few years ago failed to ignite much discussion, but the time may be ripe for another attempt.

Regional scholarship has passed through three phases over the past three decades. First we had to define the region as an intellectual terrain and establish institutional frameworks for the production and exchange of new knowledge. That was established from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s and centred on the founding of *Acadiensis* and the spread of teaching regional themes in Maritime universities and elsewhere. Central to this first phase was the recovery of the post-Confederation era as a period of significant development for study. Second came the recovery of community histories, including class, gender and ethnic aspects centred on study of communities. The third phase, which we are just entering, must feature discovery of communities of interest between academic scholarly communities and the mainstream of society. This dichotomy between academic scholarship and community research has been pronounced, but there are real possibilities for broadening the scope for collaboration. The gulf between popular preoccupations with lived experiences of communities and the political economy of deprivation that is so central to the *Acadiensis* School of historical inquiry has yet to be bridged, but the new media and new technologies of communication provide the possibility for a broadening of our understanding of the interaction between the lives of people and the larger forces acting upon the region. The new media promise to break down barriers, and this in turn offers a role for scholars who wish to make connections between an understanding of the lived past and the construction of a better present.

D.A. MUISE