

Introductory Note to Bibliography of Atlantic Canadian Environmental History

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Introductory Note to Bibliography of Atlantic Canadian Environmental History

THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY is still relatively young in Canada, where scholarship explicitly focused on the mutual relations of humans and the rest of nature only became firmly established in the 21st century.¹ Yet Canadian historical geographers and historians had already established traditions of inquiry into the relations between people and natural environments. For example, scholars analysed the development of modern Canada in the context of staple trades and the role of hinterland and metropolis in the distribution of resources, population, and finance.² This bibliography recognizes a lineage of “environmental (or environmentally aware) history in Atlantic Canada” in its tracing of three generations of scholarship, starting with texts by William Francis Ganong, Harold Innis, Arthur Lower, and Andrew Hill Clark.³ Early works tended to treat nature deterministically, as a backdrop or obstacle presenting limits to human will and action, or as primarily a source of staples such as codfish and lumber, rather than as dynamic partner in the making of human communities, industries, and daily life.⁴

The next generation of scholarship represented in this bibliography emerged in the 1970s. Researchers sought to understand the transformation of particular spaces (geographical), places (cultural), and structures (economic and political) in Atlantic Canada while engaging earlier work and exploring the larger implications of close, bounded studies.⁵ Some practitioners, including historical geographer Graeme Wynn, described the transformations that humans wrought to the

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- 1 Liza Piper, “Knowing Nature through History,” *History Compass* 11, no. 12 (December 2013): 1139, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12113>.
 - 2 Graeme Wynn, “Thinking about Mountains, Valleys, and Solitudes: Historical Geography and the New Atlantic History,” *Acadiensis* 31, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 129–45. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/Acadiensis/article/view/10737/11468>.
 - 3 Claire Campbell and Robert Summerby-Murray, eds., *Land and Sea: Environmental Histories of Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2013), 4–5.
 - 4 Matthew Evenden and Graeme Wynn, “54,40 or Fight: Writing Within and Across Borders in North American Environmental History,” in *Nature’s End: History and the Environment*, edited by Paul Warde and Sverker Sorlin (London: Palgrave, 2009), 217–19.
 - 5 For example, Wynn, “Thinking About Mountains, Valleys, and Solitudes,” 141–2.

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landscapes that sustained them. But environmental history was not a significant area of exploration for historical geographers or other scholars of the region.⁶

This bibliography is, primarily, a testament to the fluorescence of environmental history within regional scholarship over the past two decades. Scholars continue to build on the themes and approaches in previous writings while drawing on new intellectual frameworks, and responding to contemporary ecological, scientific, cultural, social, economic, and political developments. These texts reflect theoretical work, including American historian Donald Worster's tripartite explanation of the field as focusing on "nature, socioeconomic relations with nature, and intellectual and cultural relations with nature."⁷ The latter two categories are especially well-represented in the historiography, much of which focuses on fishing, agriculture, and forestry. Most of the French-language Acadian history titles in the pages that follow centre on these three areas of study. Yet regional scholars have also made significant contributions to topics in environmental history, including national parks and heritage sites, environmental movements, natural history, the ecological knowledge of Indigenous and settler inhabitants, transportation, cultural representation, and climate history.⁸

This predominantly English-language bibliography represents a preliminary survey of over 100 years of inquiry into nature-society dynamics in the region's past. The author's choice to cast a wide net in the search for titles reflects a desire to represent the living environmental history of the region's inhabitants, many of whom have a deep lived experience of interdependence with nature. The inclusion of titles in popular history, Indigenous history, and natural history demonstrates approaches and topics that can effectively foreground our mutual interrelatedness.⁹ A broad conceptualization of the field thus offers practitioners

6 See, for example, Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). See also Wynn, "Thinking about Mountains, Valleys, and Solitudes," 136, 145.

7 Piper, "Knowing Nature through History," 1140.

8 Readers are also directed toward a series of posts on environmental history in Atlantic Canada cross-listed on the blogs of *Acadiensis* and the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE); see Claire Campbell, "Six Thoughts in Search of an Epilogue (Soundings)," *The Otter/Le Loure*, 18 April 2018, <https://niche-canada.org/2018/04/18/six-thoughts-in-search-of-an-epilogue-soundings/>.

9 See, for example, Lesley Choyce, *Nova Scotia: Shaped by the Sea: A Living History* (East Lawrencetown, NS: Pottersfield Press, 2007); Tshaukuesh Elizabeth Penashue, *Nitinikiau Innusi: I Keep the Land Alive* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019); David Christian Palmer, Tracy Glynn, and Arielle DeMerchant, *The Great Trees of New Brunswick*, 2nd ed. (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions and Conservation Council of New Brunswick, 2019).

innovative strategies and insights.¹⁰ Furthermore, the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission require that scholars of the regional past recognize and seek to repair the silences perpetuated within our disciplines. For those of us of settler ancestry, this includes creating opportunities for Indigenous people to speak – within and beyond the academy.

The 2020s mark a social-ecological conjuncture of epic proportions. The architects of the United Nations Paris Agreement on climate change inform us that human actions in this decade will be decisive in setting a course for the future of life on Earth.¹¹ Researchers in social and natural sciences refer to the current era as the Anthropocene to demarcate the high degree of human influence on the composition of the Earth and atmosphere.¹² Students of the emerging field of planetary health argue that environmental degradation creates the context for novel pandemics such as COVID-19.¹³ Research into past relationships between people and the rest of nature, and the broad dissemination of subsequent understanding about a partnership approach to the rest of life, has never been so salient. Innovative interdisciplinary events such as the 2013 “Sustainable Energy in the North Atlantic: Historical Lessons to Support Long-Term Energy Solutions” underline the need for future collaborations. As Claire Campbell, one of the facilitators of the Halifax-based workshop, reflected: “If policymakers and others are willing to hear about 1850 or 1950, then perhaps we should think about bridging past to future, and hazarding some predictions for 2050.”¹⁴ May we also continue to ask ourselves about the roles we can play in realizing the future we yearn to predict.

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- 10 In “Knowing Nature through History,” Canadian environmental historian Liza Piper observed that many practitioners of environmental history do not foreground nature to the extent that the field’s theoretical underpinnings promote; see pp. 1139 and 1145.
- 11 Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, *The Future We Choose: Surviving the Climate Crisis* (New York: Knopf, 2020), xxii-xxiii.
- 12 See, for example, Meera Subramanian, “Anthropocene Now: Influential Panel Votes to Recognize Earth’s New Epoch,” *Nature*, 21 May 2019, <http://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-01641-5>; Alan MacEachern, Josh MacFadyen, Ashlee Cunsolo, and Pamela Banting, “Canada’s Anthropocene: A Roundtable,” *The Otter/Le Loutre*, January 15-24, 2018, <http://niche-canada.org/tag/canadas-anthropocene/>.
- 13 John Vidal, “Tip of the Iceberg: Is Our Destruction of Nature Responsible for Covid-19?” *Guardian*, 18 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe>.
- 14 Claire Campbell, “Flipping the Switch: Energy and History in Atlantic Canada,” *The Otter/Le Loutre*, 20 August 2013, <https://niche-canada.org/2013/08/20/flipping-the-switch-energy-and-history-in-atlantic-canada/>.