Document generated on 09/27/2024 8:08 a.m.

**Acadiensis**
Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region
Revue d'histoire de la région Atlantique

ACADIENSIS

# The Fiddlehead Moment (and Acadiensis too)

David Frank

Volume 51, Number 1, Spring 2022

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1092970ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)
1712-7432 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this note

Frank, D. (2022). The Fiddlehead Moment (and Acadiensis too). *Acadiensis*, *51*(1), 103–116.

All Rights Reserved © David Frank, 2022

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

# The Fiddlehead Moment (and Acadiensis too)

"TWICE IN THE HISTORY OF THE MARITIME PROVINCES literary works have appeared that in retrospect can be seen to have marked the beginning of developments of high significance to Canada's cultural growth." These are the opening words of an address by Alfred G. Bailey, Professor of History and Dean of Arts at the University of New Brunswick, on "Creative Moments in the Culture of the Maritime Provinces."[1] He was thinking of Haliburton and Howe in the 1830s and Roberts and Carman in the 1880s, but at the time he wrote these words, in 1949, Bailey himself was also making history as a key protagonist in a contemporary "creative moment." That context is the subject of a forceful new study in regional cultural history by Tony Tremblay, who served as Canada Research Chair in New Brunswick Studies at St. Thomas University from 2007 to 2017. In *The Fiddlehead Moment: Pioneering an Alternative Canadian Modernism in New Brunswick*, Tremblay argues that beginning in the 1940s, and continuing into the 1960s, Bailey and his colleagues pursued an ambitious program of cultural activism to address the marginalization of their province within the local and national imagination. In their view, one that was shaped by their background, experience, and education, the image of the Maritimes as a defeated and dependent territory within Confederation could not be reversed by dwelling on the past authority of a Golden Age. What was needed was a vigorous engagement with contemporary culture that continually took into account the specificities of place and history. In their own creative work, Bailey and his associates were dedicated modernists, as accomplished as any in Canada, and in launching their agenda of what Tremblay calls a "rehabilitative modernism" they were seeking to restore the relevance of the region within the Canadian cultural discourse. As he points out, this was an undertaking of more than local significance, as in resisting the centralizing impulses of Confederation they were also calling for a more diverse reading of the Canadian identity as a whole.[2]

1 A.G. Bailey, *Culture and Nationality: Essays by A.G. Bailey* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 44-57, and originally published in *Dalhousie Review* XXIX (October 1949): 231-44.

2 Tony Tremblay, *The Fiddlehead Moment: Pioneering an Alternative Canadian Modernism in New Brunswick* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), xv-xvii.

David Frank, "The Fiddlehead Moment (and Acadiensis too)," *Acadiensis* 51, no. 1 (Spring/printemps 2022): 103-116.

Tremblay begins with the puzzle of a Canadian literary landscape that benefited enormously from the labours of a small group of scholars and writers in Fredericton but gave them too little recognition in the formal canon of the country's literary history. As he explains, the conventional wisdom seems to be that modernist poetry arrived in Canada by way of English-speaking Montréal, while places such as New Brunswick remained in the grip of a residual Victorian romanticism associated with the Confederation poets. "The non-Laurentian sites of modernism, including New Brunswick's Fiddlehead school, are never mentioned," Tremblay writes. "It is as if they never existed, the implication of which is that a rapidly maturing mid-century Canadian literary modernism was urban, central, and dominated by a handful of Montreal editors, poets, and academics."[3] To historians this is a familiar picture that confirms the pervasive influence of the Maritime stereotype and an accompanying compensatory culture of antimodernism.[4] In rescuing a regional site of cultural innovation from neglect, Tremblay is sharing in the general agenda of historians who have worked to insert regional experience and achievement into the Canadian narrative. Beyond this, he underlines the role of the Fiddlehead group in identifying the range and variety of the developing Canadian literary tradition. This was manifest in their training of graduate students and their critical writing, and should have been obvious from their disproportionate role in the *Literary History of Canada* – of the five editors of the first edition in 1965, two were based in New Brunswick and a third had grown up in the province. Besides his understanding of regionalism, Tremblay brings to the project a theoretical apparatus that, drawing on Raymond Williams and others, identifies cultural forms not solely as "extensions of artistic will" but also as "constitutive social processes"[5] that depend on the available conditions and opportunities of cultural production and operate in ways that shape the assumptions and expectations of their time.

With this framework in mind, Tremblay constructs the book around three key individuals. Other participants are discussed, but none would deny that these three were the prime movers in the formative years of the Fiddlehead school. With a great-grandfather who was a professor of modern languages (Joseph Marshall

3 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 4.

4 See E.R. Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989), and Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

5 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 7.

d'Avray) and a grandfather a professor of science (Loring Woart Bailey), both at the University of New Brunswick, Alfred Bailey (1905-1997) had a family background that prepared him to enter the ranks of what Gramsci calls the traditional intellectuals. Ancestral connections to Carman and Roberts, among others, added to the pedigree. Bailey's father admired the family legacy in the humanities and sciences but was himself a banker and venture capitalist who, among other things, helped to bankroll the young Max Aitken before he became known as the first Lord Beaverbrook. Indeed, he was able to arrange for his son to meet Beaverbrook as early as 1926, when Bailey was still an undergraduate at the University of New Brunswick. Meanwhile, the young Bailey was not bashful about demonstrating cultural and intellectual leadership. He started publishing poetry in high school in Quebec City and, as a student at UNB, he was imagining a poetry magazine that might be named *The Fiddlehead* while also editing a "Poet's Corner" in the *Brunswickan* (the UNB student newspaper) and preparing his first book of poetry, which appeared in 1927. Besides literature there was history, and in his last year as an undergraduate Bailey and a fellow student went to see the university president about the possibility, before they graduated, of taking the only history course listed in the university calendar. As Bailey has told the story, nobody could remember when it was last taught. The president acceded, and English professor Leo Harvey was pressed into service. Bailey has recalled his fascination with the local elements in the course, including the occasion when the professor took students up on the roof of the Arts Building for a lecture on the Battle of the Nashwaak in 1696. No need for a map, as they had an excellent view of the setting on the St. John River where the capital of Acadia was under siege by New England forces. Experiences such as this, including summers at a family home at Tadoussac – an historic site in the fur trade at the mouth of the Saguenay – alerted Bailey to the significance of the history that was embedded in familiar locations.

As a graduate student in Toronto, Bailey worked with leading scholars such as Chester Martin (history), Harold Innis (economics), and Thomas McIlwraith (anthropology) – a unique program that produced a pioneering work in ethnohistory under the title *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization*. Necessarily written from a white-settler perspective, this was an attempt to document the disruption of an ages-old Indigenous civilization by the commercial, political, and cultural demands of European settler society.[6] At the same time, in Toronto Bailey

6 Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization* (Saint John: New Brunswick Museum, 1937); reprinted by University

discovered that modes of literary expression were undergoing changes under the influence of modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. This led him to set aside his earlier poetics, written in the style of Carman and Roberts, in favour of more direct use of common language, more arresting images, less predictable rhymes and rhythms – all in the service of considered thought and sharper statements that might address the underlying malaise and quest for certainties in those decades after the Great War. Like Earle Birney, Northrop Frye, Dorothy Livesay, and other contemporaries, Bailey was influenced by the social reform climate of the times. He took an interest in the League for Social Reconstruction that was taking shape under the leadership of intellectuals such as Frank Scott, a former schoolmate from Quebec City. He also did a stint as a reporter for a Toronto daily newspaper, which exposed him to some of the extreme conditions of urban life during the Great Depression. After completing his dissertation, in 1934 he married a fellow student, Jean Craig Hamilton, and they then left for a year in London where Bailey attended the London School of Economics and Political Science. Working with leading anthropologists and attending lectures by Harold Laski, he deepened his understanding of the processes of social change in ways that, as Tremblay puts it, "furthered his confidence that change could as easily result from collectivist movements as from autocratic structures."[7]

Bailey, returning to New Brunswick, accepted a position funded by the Carnegie Corporation at the New Brunswick Museum, where he worked in tandem with one of the museum's founders and patrons John Clarence Webster. Organizing museum collections and giving lectures on Canadian history, Bailey had his hands full; but he also had time to observe the activities of the Saint John group of artists and writers around Ted Campbell's studio, which again reminded him of the virtues of sharing a sense of purpose with like-minded cultural producers.[8] In a vivid demonstration of the relevance of character and circumstance, Bailey decided to lobby the province for the creation of a Department of History at the provincial university, which he believed should serve to educate citizens to their own history and that of the world. His family

---

of Toronto Press, 1969. See also Bailey, "Social Revolution in Early Eastern Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* XIX (1938): 264-76. For a discussion of his significance, see Bruce G. Trigger, "Alfred G. Bailey – Ethnohistorian," *Acadiensis* XVIII, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 3-21.

7 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 62.

8 For this "creative moment" in regional history, see Kirk Niergarth, *The Dignity of Every Human Being: New Brunswick Artists and Canadian Culture between the Great Depression and the Cold War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

background and connections were highly relevant here, and Bailey enlisted the help of not only the university president C.C. Jones but also the Attorney-General (later premier) John B. McNair – a family friend, UNB graduate, and Rhodes Scholar. While still at the museum, Bailey agreed to travel to Fredericton to give lectures, for which his transportation costs were reimbursed. Once the province had increased their financial allocation in 1938, the university authorized a chair of history. Not surprisingly, Bailey was appointed.

Teaching alone, and in multiple areas, including Canadian, American, European, Latin American, and Chinese history as well as anthropology, he established the foundations for the larger department that followed. Bailey went on to project a program of graduate theses on local themes (the first was published in book form in 1947) and hustled to assemble library and archival resources as well as funding for these initiatives. He remained head of the department until his retirement in 1969, as well as serving as honorary librarian and dean of arts, and later as vice-president (academic). In short, Bailey was instrumental in guiding the progress of the arts and humanities at UNB for some three decades. While maintaining his reputation as a poet and historian, he devoted much of his time to the administrative responsibilities that created the conditions for others to flourish. The legacy in history was enormous, and when Bailey looked back on the department's evolution in 1972, he could list with pride a complement of 19 faculty members (plus others at Saint John) assembled as a result of his original mission. He could also point, "as evidence of the vitality of the interest in the region stemming from the earliest days of the Department," to the establishment in 1971 of the regional history journal *Acadiensis*.[9] This is not the place to review the role of the journal, except to point out that under the energetic leadership of Phillip Buckner it became possible within a few years to speak of an Acadiensis school and its far-reaching influence within the region and on Canadian historiography more generally.[10]

---

9 Bailey, "Origins of the Study of History in the University of New Brunswick," fn. 9, Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey fonds, UA RG80, 3:100, file 9, Archives and Special Collections, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick. Tremblay, in *Fiddlehead Moment*, 83, refers to a group of undergraduate students from Bailey's seminars who were later hired as professors and "became the core of the department in later years, each pursuing research interests in Atlantic Canadian or New Brunswick history." A minor correction should be noted: the present writer (who did not arrive at UNB until the 1980s) was not one of this group. The others mentioned were hired to work principally in American, British, and European history but, like most members of the department over time, they also made contributions to regional history as writers or graduate supervisors or both.

10 P.A. Buckner, "Acadiensis II," *Acadiensis* I, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 3–9, and my later discussion, "Acadiensis, 1901 and 1999," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, no. 3 (2000): 365–80.

This discussion may seem a digression from the narrative of a literary movement, but Tremblay appreciates that, as the former UNB Dean of Arts Peter Kent has said, the two initiatives had a shared parentage and grew up together.[11] While regional history advanced along institutional lines, the Fiddlehead school took shape less formally through the ongoing extracurricular sessions that the Baileys sponsored at their home beginning in 1940. In workshop style, participants in the Bliss Carman Society, including students such as Elizabeth Brewster and Robert Gibbs, handed out assignments, circulated poems, discussed responses. Bailey collected the so-called "minutes" of these meetings and, in 1945, the group began issuing mimeographed bulletins of their work – a few dozen copies for private circulation. Newer members included Desmond Pacey, who was appointed head of the Department of English in 1944, as well as Fred Cogswell, who was recruited not long after his arrival as a student in 1945. The transition to a professionally printed and publicly circulated periodical began in 1952. The pages soon opened to outside contributors, and notable early names included Dorothy Livesay and Al Purdy. With editor Cogswell's steady hand and sustained promotional efforts (and the failure of other literary magazines in Montréal and Vancouver), the *Fiddlehead* was situated to become, as Tremblay puts it, "the most important poetry magazine in the country."[12] It also expanded to include short stories. By the early 1960s a new generation of Canadian writers, including Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje, were happy to publish there. Those who were present at his late comeback concert at the Fredericton Playhouse in 2008 will remember Leonard Cohen mentioning Bliss Carman, Desmond Pacey, and Fred Cogswell and recalling the wonderful work he was reading in the *Fiddlehead* in his early days as a hopeful poet in Montréal.

Bailey has a large presence in this story, but it was essential to his vision of excellence and authority to build a critical mass of creative and scholarly talent. The recruitment of his chief literary lieutenants, Desmond Pacey (1917-1975) and Fred Cogswell (1917-2004), was central to this end. Neither had the family connections and advantages that had served Bailey so well, and their prominence in the Fiddlehead story underlines the changes in social and class

In its title, the new journal echoed an earlier "creative moment" at the beginning of the 20th century. Both discussions are available on the Acadiensis website, as are all back issues of the journal. Note also the theme issue, "Back to the Future: The New History of Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* XXX, no. 1 (Autumn 2000).

11 My thanks to Peter Kent for sharing this observation and other comments.

12 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 188.

background that were gradually taking place within the university. Pacey had possibly never heard of New Brunswick until he came to Canada with his widowed mother at the age of fourteen, when she married an Ontario farmer. They had started in New Zealand, where Pacey was born only a few months before his father was killed on the Western front in Europe. When he was seven, his mother removed to England, where she trained and worked as a nurse and was often employed in different locations as the labour market required. Once settled in the farm country outside Hamilton, Pacey completed high school and was admitted on scholarships to Victoria College at the University of Toronto. In that intense academic environment, also known to contemporaries as a home of the social gospel, he was introduced to modernist writing and Canadian literature by some of the same people who had known Bailey before his departure for London. Just as Cogswell would be passed over for a Rhodes Scholarship, Pacey also missed the mark; but he was rescued by a Massey Travelling Fellowship and thus able to proceed overseas for the PhD. By the time he reached Cambridge, he had already written a declaratory article, "At Last – A Canadian Literature," in which he praised the work of E.J. Pratt and Morley Callaghan as evidence that Canada was taking its place in the world of English-language literature. Pacey's Cambridge dissertation focused on the influence of French realist authors on English novels, a good preparation for discerning the social and historical elements in literary work. His appreciation of regionalism deepened during his several years teaching at Brandon College, in Manitoba, where he came to admire the local realism of Sinclair Ross, and of Frederick Philip Grove, who was the subject of his first major book.

Pacey was also by this time writing his own short fiction, spare naturalist prose that captured some of the emotional realities of rural life and class distinctions that formed much of his own background.[13] In the search for a head for the Department of English in 1944, Pacey was an obvious candidate to advance Bailey's general project of bringing UNB to the forefront as a place of importance in Canadian studies. Apart from their common connections in Toronto, Bailey found in Pacey a kindred spirit who was sympathetic to the cultivation of local capacity within larger traditions. No longer a colonial boy, as a "new Canadian" Pacey had no trouble accepting New Brunswick as a legitimate variation on the Canadian experience. With access to the growing resources in the university library collections, Pacey was soon demonstrating

13 See Desmond Pacey, *Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay: Selected Stories of Desmond Pacey*, ed. Frank M. Tierney (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1974).

his ability to select and synthesize with the publication of an anthology of Canadian short stories in 1947 and his survey *Creative Writing in Canada* (1952).[14] Both went through more than one edition and influenced generations of teachers of Canadian literature at all levels. As a critic, Pacey addressed himself more to the readers than to the writers, an approach consistent with the perceived need to develop an informed reading public for Canadian writing. Meanwhile, by 1960, he had supervised more than a score of MA theses (one of them by Cogswell) and the department had launched a PhD in the field. Later, there would be a formal creative writing program as well as the scholarly journal *Studies in Canadian Literature*. In his multiple roles as a critic, editor, and teacher, Pacey brought what he himself called "a classical calm" to the promotion of Canadian literature – qualities that added to the stature of the university and recognition of the field of study he helped to pioneer.[15]

To reach UNB, Cogswell had a shorter distance to travel than had Pacey, but also a more difficult one. The same age as Pacey, Cogswell was born in Carleton County, in a farm family of straitened circumstances and limited expectations. He excelled in his studies, graduating high school in 1934 among the top students in the province. He appealed directly to the UNB president, but there was no funding for a student of his background and talent to go to university. Instead, Cogswell opted first for a teaching certificate and then for a commercial diploma. Moreover, he was not the only rural New Brunswicker to find that the Second World War opened opportunities. There is a legend that in 1940 Cogswell walked the full distance to Fredericton in order to enlist. After five years with the Canadian Forestry Corps, mainly in northern Scotland, he returned with veterans' benefits that enabled him to attend university. As a student of both Bailey and Pacey, Cogswell was soon on the way to becoming their partner in creative writing and scholarship. Some of his early poetry portrayed the people of his home region in stark, unsentimental verses that described the New Brunswick personality as he knew it at the time: "We have not gained to any breadth or length, And all our beauty is our stubborn strength." Cogswell, like other veterans, also took up political causes, supporting history student (later history professor) Murray Young when he ran for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in a by-election against the university president. And when the student council launched a boycott against

14 Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952).

15 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 97, 139–40.

barber shops that would not accept Black students, Cogswell wrote a searing indictment of local hypocrisy: "O snow-washed city of cold, white Christians, So white you will not cut a black man's hair."[16] These were the years when the CCF reached its short peak of popularity in the province (and Cogswell served as provincial secretary). The chill of the Cold War was evident by the time he interviewed, unsuccessfully, for the Rhodes Scholarship. He was nonetheless able to attend Edinburgh University for the PhD, and Cogswell was welcomed back into the English department as an assistant professor in 1952. There he became the mainstay of the *Fiddlehead*, serving as editor until 1967 and mentor to a generation of writers. In a related initiative, Fiddlehead Poetry Books brought out some 300 chapbooks and small collections and later evolved into Goose Lane Editions. In addition, although he had grown up in the ever so non-Acadian Carleton County, Cogswell had Acadian roots on his mother's side – in later years Cogswell took on a unique role as a cultural intermediary by translating and publishing several collections of Québécois and Acadian poets. In them he discerned what Tremblay describes as "the same place-based modernism that had fired the Fiddlehead school."[17]

The *Fiddlehead Moment* is best understood as an origins story, and Tremblay fully sustains his argument that by the 1950s Bailey, Pacey, and Cogswell had established the logistical and reputational conditions for a local site of cultural production and creativity. Institutional support depended in turn on access to resources, especially in the era before agencies such as the Canada Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. One of the key players in this was Lord Beaverbrook, by this time newspaper baron and political operator par excellence as well as a great patron of the university. Before leaving to take up his cabinet position in Ottawa in 1947, UNB president Milton Gregg asked Bailey to serve as the university liaison with Beaverbrook. As Tremblay notes: "Bailey's genius in working with Beaverbrook was to don the persona of a manservant while steering Beaverbrook in the directions that UNB and the province needed him to go."[18] There is a good example of this in Bailey coaching Beaverbrook to include "usefulness to the New Brunswick community" as one

16 "New Brunswick" and "Ode to Fredericton" in Fred Cogswell, *A Long Apprenticeship: Collected Poems* (Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1980), 12, 35. For this episode, see *Fiddlehead Moment*, 162–3. Tremblay has written about Cogswell at greater length in a handsome digital book: *Fred Cogswell: The Many-Dimensioned Self* (Fredericton: New Brunswick Studies Centre, St. Thomas University and Electronic Text Centre, University of New Brunswick, 2012), which is readily accessible at https://cogswell.lib.unb.ca.

17 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 206.

18 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 87.

of the selection criteria for the Beaverbrook Overseas Scholarships.[19] Bailey also captured Beaverbrook's attention for the collection of books, and in the space of a few years library holdings increased fivefold as a result of hunting expeditions funded and directed by Beaverbrook. An expanded library building made room for both the art and historical documents that Beaverbrook collected, which subsequently became the staging ground for both the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

Still, there were things Bailey could not achieve. Even as the university was reinventing itself as a more progressive provincial institution, Bailey's patrician social-democratic tendencies were held in check. For one, he was not able to recruit Malcolm Ross – "UNB's most distinguished living graduate," he later called him – into the Department of English. As an undergraduate in 1933, Ross had embarrassed university authorities by ignoring the military training course required for graduation; his English professor, Malcolm MacPherson (later a Labour MP in the British Parliament), defended him late into the night at a Senate meeting before he was able to graduate. Ross was also active in the League Against War and Fascism in the late 1930s, which did nothing to allay misgivings about his "perceived political radicalism."[20] As noted, Bailey was successful in securing the appointment of Cogswell, but not before warning him that his outspoken politics would hold him back; Cogswell reached the conclusion that he must remain, in Tremblay's phrase, a "private leftist" in the future.[21] Nor was there much possibility of launching Elizabeth Brewster, one of Bailey's assistants and among the most talented of the early Fiddlehead poets, on the road to an academic career in which women were rarely if ever hired into the professoriate; she was encouraged to pursue work as a professional librarian and was employed at several institutions in Canada and the United States before she was hired as a professor at the University of Saskatchewan in 1972. For the

19 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 87–8.

20 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 104, 252n30. The author seems to have been misled in suggesting that Ross was opposed to the war effort. Returning from graduate studies in the United States, Ross was turned down on medical grounds when he tried to enlist in the Canadian forces. He then spent three years working for the National Film Board, supervising distribution networks for the board's popular wartime documentaries.

21 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 166. Meanwhile, Bailey remained on good terms with a pre-war friend, Frank Park, a direct descendant of the Loyalist founding father Edward Winslow, and who was, by the end of the war, active in the Labor-Progressive Party. Bailey once described Park as "the Loyalist Communist." During his time as a young lawyer in Fredericton, Park wrote satirical newspaper columns on provincial affairs, under the name Sam Slick, Jr., a reference that must have amused Bailey.

time being, the university remained largely a male preserve, and there was still much to be achieved in the recruitment of a greater diversity of faculty.[22]

There was nothing unusual about such limits in the university world of the 1940s and 1950s, and in return Beaverbrook accepted Bailey's authority on many matters – twice asking him to assume the university presidency. Bailey demurred, aware that he already had sufficient influence and knowing he did not want to abandon his chances of creative work.[23] In 1953, Beaverbrook's choice for president fell on one of Bailey's former students, by then a veteran of the Royal Canadian Navy who was a lawyer and occasional lecturer in the law school in Saint John. At 32 years of age, Colin B. Mackay had no background as an academic or administrator; but he did have credentials as a member of the provincial establishment through his father, a prominent lumber merchant, and his uncle, a stockbroker who had also led the provincial Progressive Conservative party during the 1940s. Mackay's loyalties to UNB were strengthened by his mother's background, as she was the daughter of classics professor H.S. Bridges. There was little support for Mackay's candidacy at the university, but Beaverbrook played his trump card by resigning as UNB chancellor and insisting Premier Hugh John Flemming make the appointment. After this, Beaverbrook returned as honorary life chancellor, and the largesse continued to flow. With the support of Bailey and Pacey and other senior faculty, Mackay settled into the job. He made his mark on the campus as the builder of resources and facilities during the years of rapid expansion in the 1950s and 1960s, only to end his tenure as a defender of outdated standards of academic freedom and university governance.[24]

The "strategic localism" of the Fiddlehead school always worked from within the dominant culture, and their modernism was consciously built on the authority of past tradition. If their critical judgements were sometimes resisted, some reproachful critics also worried that the magazine was insufficiently Canadian – in danger of becoming. as Northrop Frye opined, "a dumping

22 The early Fiddlehead group was far from exclusively male. In addition to Brewster, participants in the Bliss Carman Society included Eleanor Belyea, Margaret Cunningham, Frances Firth, and Dorothy Howe; see *Fiddlehead Moment*, 73–4.

23 For a selection of his work, see Bailey, *Miramichi Lightning: Collected Poems* (Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1981). When the book was shortlisted for a Governor-General's Literary Award, Bailey modestly assured people that the prize would go to F.R. Scott, as it did.

24 Peter C. Kent, *Inventing Academic Freedom: The 1968 Strax Affair at the University of New Brunswick* (Halifax: Formac, 2012), 31–43.

ground for otherwise unpublishable American stuff."[25] By one account, by the 1960s more than 40 per cent of the magazine's contents were non-Canadian.[26] Andrew Moore has shrewdly observed that the *Fiddlehead* was charged with being "both unCanadian and too provincial: its international content called the magazine's Canadian identity into question, and as a New Brunswick publication, its capacity for literary discernment could not be trusted."[27] Cogswell, however, stood firm on the principles of competitive excellence and catholic inclusiveness, though it also seems clear that place-based realism was one of the favoured criteria in his editorial judgement. His strongest defence perhaps, had he chosen to make it, was that the *Fiddlehead* was identifying and championing voices such as Milton Acorn and Alden Nowlan. Both were authentic carriers of a changing regional culture and were celebrated in the 1960s with special issues dedicated to their work. Cogswell became a particular mentor to Nowlan, who, with support from the province, became a permanent writer-in-residence at UNB; he, in turn, was a mentor to novelist David Adams Richards. Later, Alistair MacLeod would recall that the *Fiddlehead* was the first magazine to accept one of his short stories (as was also the case for Rudy Wiebe, writing from a different regional context). As Tremblay concludes, Cogswell was satisfied to live with the "embedded contradiction" of "seeding the local by showcasing the international."[28] Even with the promotional rebranding (in 1989) of the *Fiddlehead* as "Atlantic Canada's International Literary Journal," the magazine's respect for tradition remained visible in the quotation from Bailey that continues to appear on the title page of every issue: ". . . a fiddlehead, that small plant that grows in the Saint John River valley in the spring, and which is said to be symbolic of the sun."[29] The shifting priorities pursued by Cogswell's successors, who reasserted both regionalism and eclecticism as editorial principles, may be a project for another scholar attempting

---

25 Quoted by Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 192.

26 Robert Gibbs, "Portents and Promises," *Fiddlehead Gold: 50 Years of The Fiddlehead Magazine*, ed. Sabine Campbell, Roger Ploude and Demetres Tryphonopoulos (Fredericton: The Fiddlehead and Goose Lane Editions, 1995), 12.

27 Quoted by Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 192–93, from Moore's entry on the *Fiddlehead* in the online *New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia*.

28 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 193–4.

29 The metaphor, of course, was inspired by references in the Indigenous culture of the Wolastoq River. The encounter between the Fiddlehead movement and indigeneity is among themes that require further exploration. As Rachel Bryant has brilliantly argued in a recent literary study, the white-settler cultural appropriation of place-identity in the Atlantic northeast took place under conditions of internal colonialism that cannot be easily resolved by the construction of new collective identities. See Rachel Bryant, *The Homing Place: Indigenous and Settler Literary Legacies of the Atlantic* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017).

to take a fuller measure of the legacy. The *Fiddlehead*'s continuing durability, diversity, and distinction would no doubt have impressed Bailey, Pacey, and Cogswell. Building on strength was always central to their strategy, however, and they might well have been dismayed by the apparent decline within their university of support for teaching the literature – as well as the history – of their home region and country.

How long is a "moment"? Tremblay does not address this question directly, but the unifying theme in his book is the common project that Bailey, Pacey, and Cogswell launched in the 1940s and brought to maturity by the 1960s. In the *Fiddlehead Moment*, he has given us a model of engaged scholarship that appreciates the scale and scope of their ambition. As Tremblay puts it, "Theirs was an identity project that had historical, political, social, and economic dimensions," and he suggests that their modernism had radical implications for a post-colonial reimagining of Canada as a country of "regions, voices, ethnicities, and locales, not a manorial Canada of centres and margins."[30] Consequently, the *Fiddlehead Moment* is a reminder of the role that a provincial university may play within the community that it serves. This remains the case despite the insularities and dependencies that divide the social and human landscape, a theme that was already implicit in Tremblay's earlier study of David Adams Richards.[31] The potential for cultural leadership was not lost on the founders of the Université de Moncton, established in 1963, who knew that a renaissance in Acadian New Brunswick would depend on the creation of programs and institutions to serve their aims in achieving recognition within provincial society.

It is true that culture is generally understood not as a means but an end in itself, and there is everything to be gained by deepening public understanding

30 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, 211, 220.

31 As Tremblay points out, Richards's concerns about the disparities between academic and popular culture made him skeptical of "academic certainty, prejudiced dismissal, and credentialed high-mindedness." As an emerging writer, he did not draw on the legacy of the 19th-century Fredericton poets but on the vernacular culture of the woods and the docks, represented on the Miramichi by songsters and poets such as Michael Whelan and John Wallace. And as he matured, the empathetic social and psychological realism of his novels owed less to a regional tradition than to international literature, beginning with Dickens and Balzac and expanding to Faulkner, Hardy, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. Nonetheless, Richards clearly benefited from the vindication of regional voices championed by the Fiddlehead school. He also learned directly from writers and mentors in Fredericton who welcomed and nurtured his talent. Cogswell and Nowlan in particular understood his essential project of recognizing the reserves of humanity and dignity among the marginalized and disempowered underclasses of the region. See Tremblay, *David Adams Richards of the Miramichi: A Biographical Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 65 et passim.

of what it means to be human within a given time and place. But cultural enrichment is not the only end, for it also prepares us to look beyond existing conditions and insufficiencies to recognize sources of shared experience and social solidarity. This in turn has the potential to summon up the resources and strategies to imagine alternative futures. As he pondered the earlier "creative moments" in regional history, Bailey was convinced there was a connection between cultural activism and social change. In a very specific sense, as Herb Wyile has shown in his incisive analysis of regional literature, cultural producers may lead the way by interrogating the dominant political economy and social relations in meaningful and accessible human terms.[32] From this perspective, the Fiddlehead moment remains an unfinished project, as the tendency to pathologize the province, and the Atlantic Region, has not evaporated, even at the highest levels of leadership in civil society. Tremblay is well aware of this, and his study, which he describes as "part renovation, part rescue, part reminder," speaks to present as well as past discontents.[33] From what we know of his own cultural activism, notably as founding editor of the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies/Revue des études sur le Nouveau-Brunswick* and of the *New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia*, Tremblay has been doing his part to carry on the mission that he has so diligently researched and vigorously articulated in the *Fiddlehead Moment*.

DAVID FRANK

**DAVID FRANK** est professeur émérite d'histoire canadienne à l'Université du Nouveau-Brunswick. Il a été directeur d'*Acadiensis* (1981-1986, 1991-1994, 1998-2001) et directeur de la rédaction à Acadiensis Press (1991-2016). Ces dernières années, il a publié des articles dans *Canada's History*, *CNQ: Canadian Notes & Queries*, *Labour/Le Travail* et *Left History*, ainsi que dans *Acadiensis*. Parmi ses ouvrages antérieurs, soulignons *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto, Lorimer, 1999) et *Solidarités provinciales : histoire de la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Nouveau-Brunswick* (Edmonton, Athabasca University Press, 2013).

**DAVID FRANK** is a professor emeritus in Canadian history at the University of New Brunswick. He is a former editor of *Acadiensis* (1981-86, 1991-94, 1998-2001) and was also managing editor for Acadiensis Press (1991-2016). In recent years he has published articles in *Canada's History*, *CNQ: Canadian Notes & Queries*, *Labour/Le Travail*, and *Left History*, as well as *Acadiensis.* Earlier work includes *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1999) and *Provincial Solidarities: A History of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour* (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2013).

---

32 Herb Wyile, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011).

33 Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment*, xiv.