

Introduction

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Introduction

JAMES K. HILLER

THE ENTRY OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR into the Canadian confederation in 1949 remains a controversial and emotional subject. Not surprisingly, it has attracted considerable attention from scholars, especially once archival documentation began to become available in the late 1970s, in Ottawa and London. Until that time, the story of confederation had been dominated by the victors. Certainly, J.R. Smallwood, who liked to be called the “Only Living Father of Confederation”, created a version of events in which he was the central and most important actor, 1949 was Year One, and confederation itself a great “gift” and an unqualified success.¹

The first academic critique was presented by W.P. McCann in a lecture to the Newfoundland Historical Society in January 1983, and published for the first time in this volume. McCann had been at work in the Public Record Office in London, and demonstrated that Smallwood’s campaigns had to be seen within the context of British policy and planning. Smallwood called the paper a “cockeyed story, this silly, stupid story ... the last word in idiocy”,² but subsequent work, mainly by Peter Neary,³ showed that McCann had been on the right track. The British perspective on the “Newfoundland problem” is further illuminated by Robert Holland’s 1999 David Alexander lecture, also in this volume, which provides an imperial context.

A central question for debate has been whether Newfoundland’s entry into confederation was the result of conspiracy, sharp practice and possible fraud. Like Neary, Jeff Webb thinks that the process was fair, democratic and above-board, and in his contribution he criticises latter-day writers who would question this view. There has also been considerable interest in the role played by the churches, and the use of sectarianism in the referendum campaigns. In his article, John FitzGerald analyses the role of Archbishop E.P. Roche and the Roman Catholic Church, showing how centrally important and sensitive was the issue of denominational education, and how religious sensibilities were exploited by the confederates.

Denominational education was enshrined in the Terms of Union, whose negotiation is discussed by David MacKenzie.⁴ Constrained by the provisions of the British North America Act, and also by the prior referendum decision that confederation would take place, the Newfoundland negotiators did not get all they would have liked. In particular, there was concern over the transfer of the country's major industry — the fishery — to federal control. Miriam Wright places this development in the historical context of long-term changes in the industry. Adrian Tanner discusses why there was no mention of the Native peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador in the terms of union, and why they were to be treated differently from Native peoples elsewhere in Canada. Becoming Canadian was not easy for many Newfoundlanders, and the shift raised questions about identity and cultural definition. Ronald Rompkey surveys arts and cultural policy since 1949, and shows that in spite of a remarkable creative flowering, this is a sector that has not, on the whole, received the attention and support that it deserved.

The essays in this volume address only some of the issues surrounding Newfoundland, Labrador and confederation. In particular, it is regrettable that social and economic developments are not more adequately represented. However, if this edition of *Newfoundland Studies* stimulates further work, especially on the Smallwood years, it will have served its purpose.

Notes

¹J.R. Smallwood, "The Story of Confederation", in Smallwood (ed.), *The Book of Newfoundland*, volume 3 (St. John's 1967), 4-34; Smallwood, *I Chose Canada. The Memoirs of the Honourable Joseph R. "Joey" Smallwood* (Toronto 1973). See also James K. Hiller, "Twentieth Century Newfoundland Politics: Some Recent Literature", *Acadiensis* XIX:1, 1989, 181-92.

²*Evening Telegram* (St. John's), 14 January 1983.

³Most importantly in *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Kingston and Montreal, 1988).

⁴MacKenzie's book, *Inside the North Atlantic Triangle. Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto 1986), is a very useful analysis of Canadian policy.