

The Irish Connection

William M. Baker

Volume 12, numéro 2, spring 1983

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad12_2rv02

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Baker, W. M. (1983). The Irish Connection. *Acadiensis*, 12(2), 124–131.

The volume originated in a series of lectures given during 1977 and 1978 at St. Mary's College of Maryland. What often results, as editors of similar collections know, is one of those half-books in which the excellence of occasional papers remains unintegrated. This book is an exception: judicious selection of speakers and topics, and the guiding hand of a veteran scholar-editor make *Maryland in a Wider World* a valuable contribution to the study of the rise of the first British empire, and "History with a Habitation".

G.M. STORY

The Irish Connection

TWO RECENT WORKS concerned with Ireland and Canada differ greatly in subject matter and approach, yet there are certain connecting links between Edmund A. Aunger, *In Search of Political Stability: A Comparative Study of New Brunswick and Northern Ireland* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981) and Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980). Both have much to say about religion, ethnicity and politics; both were written by academics outside the discipline of history and were published by university presses; both contain numerous charts and diagrams or maps based on statistical analysis. For the historian these volumes raise several questions: how do our academic colleagues in the social sciences use historical material and the work of historians? are these volumes valuable to historians for the information which they provide? do these works present theoretical models or methodological techniques which might usefully be adopted by historians?

In Search of Political Stability is tightly organized, logically sequenced and plainly stated. While this does not make for exciting reading, it does mean that Aunger's argument is easy to follow. The introductory chapter, for instance, informs the reader that the book is a theoretical case study: theoretical in that certain theories of what contributes to political stability/instability in fragmented communities are applied and tested; a case study in that two comparable fragmented communities, New Brunswick and Northern Ireland, but with quite different records of stability, are examined. The author's hypothesis is that New Brunswick "is both socially fragmented and politically stable . . . [and] will be characterized by both crosscutting cleavages and cooperative elites" (p. 14). (A cleavage is "a division along which there is socio-political opposition" (p. 7); "crosscutting" means that cleavages do not coincide or are not "congruent" with the fundamental fragmentation of the community). Conversely, Northern Ireland "is both socially fragmented and politically unstable . . . [and] will be characterized by either congruent cleavages or confrontative elites, or both" (p.

14).

In the rest of the book Auger, attempts to validate the hypothesis. First, in chapter 2, he tries to demonstrate that New Brunswick and Northern Ireland are indeed comparable fragmented communities by claiming that both have two ethnic subcultures, one approximately double the size of the other, each of which has a distinctive and separate history, outlook and network of social organizations. For New Brunswick the division is British origin (English) and French origin; for Northern Ireland it is British origin (Protestants) and Irish origin (Catholics). The argument is not entirely convincing but it is sufficiently plausible to proceed to chapter 3 which proves that New Brunswick is politically stable whereas Northern Ireland is unstable — hardly a surprising finding but, because the various components of stability/instability are examined, useful nonetheless.

Two chapters on cleavages — ethnic, religious and “class” — in the two communities demonstrate that there is significantly more crosscutting in New Brunswick. Within the “English” group in New Brunswick, for example, a substantial minority have been Catholic. In regard to unequal distribution of scarce resources Auger finds that the Acadian subculture has an elite wielding economic and political influence unmatched by the Catholic minority of Northern Ireland.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the behaviour of the political elites within the framework of the theoretical considerations and categories of contemporary political scientists. This detailed examination puts flesh on the skeleton but the corpus remains simple: elites in Northern Ireland are competitive and confrontationalist; those in New Brunswick are coalescent (i.e. government includes political representatives of the two segments of the fragmented community) and cooperative. But why, Auger quite rightly asks in chapter 8, do elites in New Brunswick and Northern Ireland act so differently? According to the author the answer is the greater amount of elite dominance, the greater geographic and linguistic separation of the two subcultures, and the much greater degree of shared national feeling in New Brunswick compared to Northern Ireland.

The concluding chapter summarizes the argument and then examines the probable future, pointing out some clouds on New Brunswick's horizon which may threaten its political stability and a few threads of hope that might be woven into a more stable political fabric for Northern Ireland, but doubting that much is likely to change in either community for some time.

Auger's use of history is sympathetic but naive. He recognizes the importance of historical developments in explaining the differences between New Brunswick and Northern Ireland. He devotes more than eight pages, for example, to relating the evolution of the tradition of cooperation in New Brunswick during the last century and the continuation of the pattern of confrontation in Northern Ireland during the same time. His instinct is correct, but the application is less praiseworthy. In the first place, he is excessively deferential to

the work of historians. Perhaps because of that excessive reliance on historians, Aunger does little of his own historical research. It may be too much to expect a political scientist to do the sort of work we'd expect of an historian, although S.D. Clark warned sociologists that they'd have to get their hands dirty in the sources,¹ but we ought to be able to expect more judicious statements of historically-based interpretation. For instance, the point of Table 16 (pp. 56-7) is to show the much higher and more serious level of civil disturbance in Northern Ireland since 1800. Fair enough, but it is quite another thing to have the table, developed from the available secondary sources, presented as a complete list of civil disturbances resulting in death.

A more serious problem is the insistent emphasis Aunger places on the Caraquet riots of 1875 and their aftermath in establishing an era of cooperation in New Brunswick. This is an important part of the author's analysis:

The development of a tradition of cooperation in New Brunswick political life dates from the Caraquet riots in 1875. Until that time, election campaigns appealed directly to sectarian feeling . . . Moreover, the deaths resulting from the unexpected clash between French Catholics and English Protestants at Caraquet led the political leaders to adopt a new tack. Henceforth the government — rather than appealing to the religious prejudices of the majority — would attempt to achieve accommodation by negotiating with the leaders of each subculture (p. 136).

One can hardly accept such an assertion even when it is backed up with references to the late W.S. MacNutt and George Stanley. The interpretation overestimates the level of confrontationist politics prior to 1875, especially when the comparative community is Northern Ireland. Conversely, it underestimates the cooperative politics seen, for example, in many of the Tilley governments of the 1850s and 1860s. In this specific case it overlooks such things as the Carleton school compromise of 1873 and the meeting of Bishop Sweeny with members of the provincial government in the same year.² Moreover, the schools question in New Brunswick, with which the Caraquet incident was connected, was not a conflict between what Aunger claims are the two fundamental subcultures of New Brunswick — English and French — but between Protestant and Catholic. Even if Caraquet was a major turning point it is not clear that it established cooperative politics between French and English. That, of course, raises the question of whether ethnicity was the fundamental social division in 19th-century New Brunswick. But the most surprising thing about the interpretation is that a social scientist who is at pains to show elsewhere in the book that broad forces

1 S.D. Clark, *The Developing Canadian Community* (2nd. ed., Toronto, 1968), p. 294.

2 William M. Baker, *Timothy Warren Anglin 1822-96: Irish Catholic Canadian* (Toronto, 1977), p. 175.

are more important causative ingredients than particulars, places so much emphasis on a single incident. Why should the death of two men in New Brunswick in 1875 have brought about something that the killing of thousands in Northern Ireland has not? Clearly, responses were conditioned by elements existing in one community but not in the other.

Because Auger is reliant upon historians there is little new information they can glean from *In Search of Political Stability* about the history of either community. On the other hand, the material on the contemporary period from 1968 is both interesting and valuable. Auger makes extensive use, for example, of data from the National Election Study (Canada — 1974) for New Brunswick, and the Northern Ireland Loyalty Study (1968). Both sources are quite rich and worthy of note by historians.³

I It is in the area of theoretical models and methodological techniques that the volume promises to be of greatest value. Auger's book is laudable in that every step of the approach, argument and, for the most part, method, is very clearly outlined. And Canadian historians in particular surely are interested in a book which not only attempts to define and measure political stability but also endeavours to discover what ingredients contribute to stability in a socially divided community. Moreover, the statistical analysis involved in the study is integral to the argument and is methodologically intriguing — at least to one unversed in quantitative techniques. While this reviewer appreciated and intends to apply aspects of the model and methodology employed in the book, there are substantial questions that must be raised. One might wonder, for example, whether "stability" ought to be the most prized goal in a political system if stability can coexist with significant levels of inequality and elite control. A less ideological concern is that Auger's explanation is political and social — but what about economic differences? We are used to thinking of New Brunswick as being economically stagnant since Confederation. However, if one uses population growth as a simple index of economic health, then it is interesting to note that New Brunswick's rate of growth has been double that of Northern Ireland over the last century. Surely it would have been worthwhile for Auger to examine the proposition, in the comparative context, that the nature and severity of economic problems will have an impact on social and political stability/instability.

Even within the parameters defined by Auger's model difficulties remain. He argues that Northern Ireland and New Brunswick are comparable because both communities have two subcultures. The problem is that Auger places the substantial Irish Catholic group in New Brunswick into the English majority subculture. This is a highly questionable procedure, certainly from an historical

3 Professor Auger reports (p. 195) that the National Election Survey material was made available by the Canadian Consortium for Social Research and that the Northern Ireland Loyalty Survey was made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

perspective. Indeed, the peculiar significance of the New Brunswick Irish Catholics is that they formed a separate subculture. They contributed to political and social stability by having something in common with both the English Protestant and French Catholic subcultures and were therefore capable of mediating between the other two. They certainly had a crosscutting effect but because of the doubtful appropriateness of including them in the majority group Auger's argument is considerably weakened.⁴

The study is buttressed by a wealth of statistical information. For the most part these are valuable additions to the written commentary but like any other source they do require scrutiny. For example, Auger compares housing conditions in Northern Ireland and New Brunswick and concludes that apparently 53 per cent of Catholics in Northern Ireland lived in "unfit" housing, whereas 21 per cent of French-speaking New Brunswickers lived in houses needing "major repairs".⁵ But the conclusion is based on a technique called the least square line where, presumably, percentages of unfit housing units and minority bloc are matched for a number of specific localities. The reader has no idea of how many locations were included, nor their situation about the least square line. A scatter diagram would have been enlightening here. Furthermore, the figure of 53 per cent Catholics living in unfit housing comes from extrapolation to the hypothetical case of a local district consisting of 100 per cent Catholics. But in such a case, the reason that Auger gives for overrepresentation of Catholics in unfit housing — Protestant control of local governments — would not apply! On occasion some statistics even undermine rather than verify Auger's argument. Throughout the volume he maintains that Catholics in Northern Ireland desire a united, autonomous Ireland. Yet a 1974 poll shows that less than one-quarter of Catholics see this as the preferred political alternative (p. 133).

One important topic, the role of the Canadian compared to the British political system, does not fit easily into Auger's research design. Most Canadian historians would maintain that the nature of the federal system and the operation of the party system has had considerable impact on provincial politics, mostly in the direction of moderation on religious and cultural issues, particularly when provincial and national political parties have been connected. In the New Brunswick schools question, for instance, activity in Ottawa was an

- 4 For 19th-century New Brunswick it would be more appropriate to put Irish Catholics and French Catholics together into a religious subgroup. Religion was in fact the primary division at the time. The fact that this has changed might in itself be considered an historical crosscutting cleavage.
- 5 The figures provide a good argument for claiming that the difference in economic conditions in the two communities must be an important ingredient in the explanatory framework. The *relative cleavage* between the two communities is not nearly so striking as *comparative levels* of unfit housing. A Catholic in Northern Ireland, was, evidently, 4.4 times more likely to live in unfit housing than a Protestant; the French-speaking New Brunswicker 3.5 times as likely to live in a house needing major repairs as the English.

important, probably crucial, factor in the ultimate "solution". The British system does not seem to have provided a similar influence. Such a difference might explain a good deal, but Auger's model really does not provide much room for discussion of this sort of "external" influence.

Similarly, the issue of class divisions is approached from an unusual and not especially productive angle. In the early chapters Auger argues that the primary division in both communities is ethnic, not class. The chapter on class cleavage, therefore, demonstrates that the minority in each community is relatively disadvantaged in terms of the distribution of scarce resources, including authority; that Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland are the more seriously handicapped minority; and that unlike within the Irish Catholic subculture there is a strong elite within the French-speaking population of New Brunswick. This approach gives us much useful information but it does not tell us much about the class cleavage *per se*. Most importantly, he does not tell us what the line is separating those who are advantaged or disadvantaged in the various sectors (political, economic, religious and cultural). For example, while readers are given income statistics, no poverty line is established. Nor are the income statistics really comparable; the lowest category of \$0 — \$1000 in New Brunswick in 1971 is hardly the same as £0 — £806 for Northern Ireland in 1968. In short, one gains an impression of the distribution of scarce resources but learns little about the size and composition of the classes, including the elite. This is most unfortunate given Auger's emphasis on the significance of the elite and given his general argument that ethnicity is the crucial division in each community. A more direct approach to the class question would have given the reader a better basis for comprehending how class divisions are undercut by ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages. Such an examination inevitably would grapple with such important questions as "why do disadvantaged Protestants in Northern Ireland not unite along class lines with disadvantaged Catholics?" But such an analysis would also demand that much greater attention be given to the economic structure and circumstances of the two communities.

While the primary interest of *In Search of Political Stability* lies in the systematic application and development of theoretical models, the most significant value of *The Sash Canada Wore* is the detailed information it imparts. As Houston and Smyth suggest, "Today Orangeism [in Canada] . . . is a peripheral movement . . . incomprehensible to most observers" (p. 160). Readers of this volume will gain a basic comprehension of the Order's significance in Canada's past. Throughout the volume the authors demonstrate a knowledge of Orange historiography and are able to contribute useful refinements and additions to historical interpretations of the Order in Canada. Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, the authors' knowledge of the changing social and political environment in which Canadian Orangeism operated is less substantial.

The heart of the volume is the description of the spatial distribution and extension of Orange lodges in Canada. But Houston and Smyth extend their

analysis beyond settlement geography to an assessment of the social and ideological/political dimensions of the order. Indeed, perhaps the most valuable chapter in the book describes in detail the conviviality, ritual, colour and various other aspects of local lodges and thereby shows the appeal of the order to many Protestant males in frontier districts (whether rural or urban). Be that as it may, the volume provides a wealth of statistics on the numerical growth (and ultimate contraction) of Orange lodges and of the occupational, religious, ethnic and age characteristics of their membership. This material is valuable for it demonstrates that the Orange Order spread throughout much of rural and urban English Canada, that it became more than simply a Protestant Irish immigrant institution, and that it included a significant representation from the various segments of the middle ranks (i.e. all but the elite and the destitute). Yet the authors' presentation of factual information is not comprehensive. Those interested in the history of the Atlantic Provinces, for example, will be disappointed in the coverage of this region (two pages devoted to New Brunswick, until recent times the second most important Orange province!).

On an interpretative level the analysis does not delve very deeply. Too frequently the authors resort to rather facile statements. Orangeism, the reader is told, was only a symptom of religious discord, not its cause. (By the same token Nazism was only a symptom of racism, not its cause — any number of examples would apply). It's fine to have a rehabilitation of the historical image of the Order but to view it as "an *essential* bulwark to *encircled* protestants" (p. 156 — reviewer's italics) is hyperbole. Moreover, the interpretation that Orangeism was an integral part of Protestant English Canadian society and reflected its social make-up and colonial mentality leaves the authors rather at sea when they attempt to assess its impact. This is particularly evident in the superficial discussion of ideology and politics.

Compared to Aunger's work, *The Sash Canada Wore* contains little by way of theoretical models. As far as methodological techniques are concerned *The Sash Canada Wore* presents few surprises. Maps showing the location of Orange Lodges and statistical information providing material on age and occupational characteristics of members are certainly useful. Yet one frequently desires more information, such as whether the relatively large number of young men who joined the organization in its heyday were single or married. One also wishes to question the heavy emphasis the authors place on warrants issued to local lodges by the Order, particularly when they attempt to refute the traditional view that Orangeism grew in response to political/religious crises. Warrants are a useful index and should not be ignored, but their issuance or cancellation was, after all, an organizational or bureaucratic matter and did not necessarily represent the true strength or weakness of the body at any given time. There is, in fact, a narrowness to the primary sources used by the authors. The Orange records are very useful but especially because they contain little political discussion and virtually no correspondence it would have been desirable

to broaden the scope of the research.

Taken together these volumes tell us something about the significance of the Irish in Canada. *The Sash Canada Wore* suggests that Orangeism grew and spread because its tenets were shared by the bulk of the Protestant population. Might it be, however, that non-Irish Protestants became increasingly Orange Irish in perspective and outlook? In the case of New Brunswick, *In Search of Political Stability* shows, indirectly, the importance of the Green as an intermediary between English-speaking Protestants and French-speaking Catholics. The Canadian Irish require further examination by historians, for both Orange and Green played crucial roles in the evolution of Canada.

WILLIAM M. BAKER

Town, Port, and Country: Speculations on the Capitalist Transformation of Canada

IT IS ONE OF THE IRONIES of Canada's intellectual history that while we have produced and sustained a political economy tradition renowned for its perspective on *aspects* of the material development of a staples-dominated social formation, we nevertheless know little about the character of the great transformation of 19th century economic life. In town, port, and country, and across a diverse but interconnected set of regions and sub-regions, capital worked its magic in ways that were as uneven and as unequal as they were ubiquitous. The result was that social relationships in such settings were restructured, revamped as the means and methods of appropriation and accumulation changed with a never-ending parade of technological refinements, alterations in the colonies' standings vis-à-vis England and world markets, shifting demands for particular products, and rising and falling class and geographical fortunes that expressed themselves in the essential disorder of political experience.

This is what lies at the very foundation of the last decade's research into the specifically Canadian "limited identities" of region and class. We now know so much more about such experiences (and about other "limited identities" rooted in gender, age, and ethnicity) that it may appear uncharitable to argue, as I will here, that our understanding of social development and regional essence is based on an inadequate appreciation of the connectedness of experience — social, economic, political — that were moulded into and forged a totality over the course of the 19th century. However different and divergent such settings and processes appear, they were not entirely hived off from one another. In the large transformation affecting them all, drawing out unique but parallel forms of resistance, resides a history encompassing the regional and the social but extending beyond them, into the political economy of Canada as a whole, and its