

Integrating Regional Patterns into a National Canadian History

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Review Essays/Notes critiques

Integrating Regional Patterns into a National Canadian History*

THE CANADIAN CENTENARY SERIES, a “new co-operative history of Canada”, was conceived in the mid-1950s by W.L. Morton and Donald Creighton and delivered into the world by publisher Jack McClelland.¹ Described by its editors as the successor to *Canada and its Provinces* (1913-1917), re-written “in the light of modern knowledge”, the Centenary Series is in fact more like a Canadian answer to the New American Nation series on the United States, although Morton and Creighton might shudder at that comparison. It is a group of individually-authored monographs which summarize existing secondary literature, and fill in the gaps in the historiography with as much original research as each author is able to perform.

As does all written history, the series bears the unmistakable stamp of the historians who created it. Margaret Prang, who studied with those historians, explains their preconceptions:

There can be few countries in which scholars...have been so preoccupied with ‘nationhood’, ‘national identity’, and ‘national unity’.... [As a result] the series has, perhaps inevitably, an overall centralist and national bias...which sometimes distorts historical significance in an understandable desire to impose intellectual and literary unity on a many-faceted story of continental dimensions....[T]he Centenary series has severe limitations as a history of the ‘regional communities which have...made up the Canadian nation’.²

The architects of the *Canadian Centenary Series* did not deny the reality of region. Prang drew the last phrase in the quotation above from Morton and Creighton’s introduction, which defined the general theme of the series as “the development of those regional communities which have for the past century made up the Canadian nation”. Morton had impeccable credentials as a regional historian, and his early writings expressed a strong sense of western separateness.³ In a widely-cited article written in 1946, he rejected the homogenizing implications

*The original version of this paper was prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Association of Historians held at the University of Maine at Orono, October 1987. My assignment was to discuss the difficulties of relating regional to national history in writing *Canada 1922-39: Decades of Discord* (Toronto, 1985), volume 15 of the Canadian Centenary Series.

1 This and the other quotations in this paragraph are from W.L. Morton and D.G. Creighton, “The Canadian Centenary Series”, printed as the editors’ introduction to each of the 19 volumes of the series.

2 Margaret Prang, “National Unity and the Uses of History”, *CHA Historical Papers* (1977), pp. 3, 6.

of 'Laurentian imperialism' in stirring words that two decades later called me to action as a regional historian: "Confederation was brought about to increase the wealth of Central Canada, and until that original purpose is altered, and the concentration of wealth and power by national policy in Central Canada ceases, Confederation must remain an instrument of injustice".⁴ By the mid-fifties, however, what Carl Berger has called Morton's "delicate balance of region and nation" had tipped in the direction of nationalism, as his collaboration with Creighton was to demonstrate.⁵

Like Arthur Lower, another keeper of the national flame, Morton and Creighton understood that "the history of British North America *before* 1867 must resolve itself into the histories of various regions".⁶ Accordingly, ten of the eleven volumes of the *Centenary Series* which deal with the pre-Confederation period are regional studies.⁷ Gerald Craig's *Upper Canada, 1784-1841* (Toronto, 1963), Fernand Ouellet's *Lower Canada, 1792-1840* (Toronto, 1979), and W.S. MacNutt's *The Atlantic Provinces, 1712-1857* (Toronto, 1965) are good examples. There was an obvious centralist bias in the proportion of the series allotted to each region,⁸ but at least a regional model was adopted as the organizing principle. After 1867 this regional model was set aside. The editorial assumption was that Confederation created a political nationality strong enough to obviate the need for regional volumes to describe the post-Confederation period. Only two of the eight post-Confederation volumes have a regional focus, Morris Zaslow's books on the North.⁹ The others are national surveys, with their periodization based upon federal political history: 1873-1896, 1896-1921, 1922-1939, 1939-1957, and 1957-1967, concluding symbolically with Canada's hundredth birthday. Mar-

3 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (2nd ed., Toronto, 1986), pp. 241-2.

4 W.L. Morton, "Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XV, 3 (1946), p. 232.

5 This phrase is the title of the chapter on Morton in *The Writing of Canadian History*, pp. 238-58.

6 A.R.M. Lower, *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest* (Toronto, 1938), p. 64, my italics.

7 The exception is Tryggvi Oleson's *Early Voyages and Northern Approaches* (Toronto, 1963).

8 Six volumes were assigned to New France/Quebec/Lower Canada, 1534-1840; one to Upper Canada, 1791-1841; one to the United Canadas, 1841-1857; one to the Northwest to 1857; and, absurdly, only one to the entire Atlantic area, 1712-1857!

9 It is a delicious irony that the region which has the least historical claim to existence received such historiographical recognition. In the original outline, Zaslow was allotted one volume to cover "The North, 1870-1967". Before his first draft reached 1914, however, he had exceeded the 125,000 words theoretically permitted each author. Morton, Creighton and publisher Jack McClelland reluctantly allowed him a second volume.

garet Prang explains the limitations of this approach from a Pacific perspective:

The reader of the [Canadian Centenary] series gets only the foggiest impression of British Columbia. When the Pacific province comes into view at all it is a sea of mountains through which the CPR must be driven for the realization of the national dream[,] or as the mysterious domain of obstreperous politicians out to thwart the omniscient designs of Ottawa.¹⁰

That Prang, scarcely a radical regionalist, made these remarks in her 1977 presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association, illustrates the abrupt end of the nationalist consensus which had once shaped the writing of Canadian history. No one has come up with an entirely satisfactory explanation for this change which took place during the 1960s, nor will I. Phillip Buckner perceptively points to the example provided by the attacks on the “consensus approach” in the United States.¹¹ Carl Berger attributes the change to the “virtually uncontrolled expansion of university systems”, as the first waves of the baby boom rolled out of high school and broke upon the academy. As a result, the ranks of the “small gentlemanly community of historians” were swelled by what Berger delicately describes as “people of more varied ethnic and cultural attainments, with a diversity of experiences [and] perspectives”.¹² Their inspiration to study the “limited identities” of region, ethnicity, class, and gender is usually traced to J.M.S. Careless’s article of that title, which appeared in the March 1969 issue of the *Canadian Historical Review*.¹³ Careless modestly eschews credit. In the article he attributes the term to Ramsay Cook and places the words “limited identities” within quotation marks throughout.¹⁴ As E.R. Forbes has suggested in an end-note perhaps typical of this less ‘gentlemanly’ generation, all that Careless did was to give “a kind of pontifical sanction to a process already underway”.¹⁵

It was not the fact of writing about regions that was innovative, but the attitude that the new historians took towards them. To quote Prang again,

10 Prang, “National Unity and the Uses of History”, p. 6.

11 Phillip A. Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ and Canadian Historical Scholarship: An Atlantic Provinces Perspective”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23, 1 & 2 (1988), pp. 177-8.

12 Berger, “Writing of Canadian History”, pp. 262-5.

13 J.M.S. Careless, “‘Limited Identities’ in Canada”, *Canadian Historical Review*, L,1 (1969), pp. 1-10.

14 Cook first used the phrase in “Canadian Centennial Celebrations”, *International Journal* (1967), p. 663.

15 E.R. Forbes, “In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography”, *Acadiensis*, VIII, 2 (1978), p. 21n.

“what is new is the increasing disposition to see merit in trying to understand this diversity from the perspectives provided by the study of the regions...themselves rather than from the centre only”.¹⁶ Evidence of these new perspectives quickly mounted in tens of doctoral dissertations, scores of masters’ theses, in regional history conferences, and in the pages of three new journals: *B.C. Studies* (1967), *Acadiensis* (1971), and *Prairie Forum* (1976). The symbolic high water mark of the new regional history came with *Canada and the Burden of Unity* (Toronto, 1977), a collection of essays edited by David Bercuson, and the next year with the ‘Joint Atlantic Canada/Western Canadian Studies Conference’, a regional studies perigrination from Calgary to Fredericton.¹⁷ By that time the question had become, to borrow John G. Reid’s words “not so much why a regional approach is needed, but rather what other kind of approach could possibly be valid”.¹⁸

How did two members of this “limited identities” generation, one a prairie regional historian and the other a historian of the working class, come to contribute to a series drawn up by the icons of the political nationalist tradition? At the time Morton and Creighton were assigning individual volumes among their colleagues, John Herd Thompson (b. 1946) was reading comic books, and Allen Seager (b. 1953) was struggling to learn the alphabet. McClelland & Stewart’s marketing plan was to have the series in print by 1967, so that dutiful Canadians would purchase a set to line their bookshelves during the centennial celebrations. All but two of the eleven pre-Confederation authors met this deadline, but of the post-Confederation authors only Morton himself did so. We might mistake correlation for cause and conclude from this that historians of post-Confederation Canada are lazier and less reliable than their colleagues who work in the colonial period. I would suggest that the real problem was the differing magnitudes of the tasks each group had been assigned. Goldwyn Smith had a point when he argued that writing a national history of Canada was almost impossible because of “the difficulty of running the histories of several provinces abreast and imparting anything like unity to the whole”. Whatever the excuse, the post-Confederation volumes were so long in coming that the series seemed in danger of being renamed the Canadian *Bi*-centenary series.

The volume dedicated to the inter-war period was the most difficult of Morton and Creighton’s family of problem children. F.W. Gibson had been their original

16 Prang, “National Unity and the Uses of History”, pp. 5-6.

17 A selection of these papers is published in David Jay Bercuson and Phillip A. Buckner, eds., *Eastern and Western Perspectives* (Toronto, 1981).

18 John G. Reid, “Writing About Regions,” in John A. Schultz, ed., *Writing About Canada: A Handbook for Modern Canadian History* (Scarborough, 1990), p. 79.

choice to prepare the manuscript; when he failed to deliver, Roger Graham, my doctoral supervisor, was set to the task. In 1976, 20 years after the series was begun, Roger Graham invited me to become his co-author. A coronary forced Roger to surrender a year later, and as a measure of W.L. Morton's desperation he asked me to take on the book by myself. Donald Creighton was on his deathbed and thus unable to challenge Morton's judgment, and Morton himself died before he could wield a red pencil over a finished manuscript. If *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* is a hinterland weed in a centralist garden, Morton bears responsibility only for his original impetuous decision to choose me.

And Morton repented that decision as soon as he read my outline. Its explicit emphasis on "limited identities" led him to warn me that "by emphasizing things that divided Canadians", I ran "the risk of losing sight of those things that united them".¹⁹ He disliked the alliterative title, *Decades of Discord*, for it implied that problems of class, ethnicity, and region were not simply the product of the hard times of the 1930s, but a permanent feature of Canadian national life.²⁰ On chapter one, a national demographic profile drawn from the 1921 Census, Morton made only one editorial comment. A neat red question mark appeared in the margin next to the final sentence: "The census returns...demonstrated that there was not one but several Canadas, each determined to shape the nation in its own image and guide it in different directions".

Morton did not live to read the rest of the book. After his death in December 1980, I had no official editor. Instead, chapters crawled from my typewriter to kindly colleagues, all of them from the "limited identities" generation: Ernest R. Forbes, Bernard L. Vigod, and Allen Seager were the kindest. Allen was so kind that I asked him to join me as junior author in February 1983, exactly one week before Jack McClelland appointed Ramsay Cook — coiner of the phrase "limited identities" — as Executive Editor of the Centenary Series. Ramsay has recanted his early enthusiasm for regionalism,²¹ but he was gentle with the chapters I dumped on his desk.

Decades of Discord has for the most part received similar gentle treatment from scholarly and popular reviewers. I was delighted to read in the circular letter which accompanied the program for this Annual Meeting that our book had been "widely-acclaimed". It has not been "*universally* acclaimed", but it was not criticized, as the other volumes in the series have been, for failing to make

19 Morton to the author, 15 November 1977.

20 He suggested as an alternative *The Janus Land*, which implied that Canadians looked backwards in the 1920s and the 1930s, yearning for an allegedly simpler time before the Great War.

21 Ramsay Cook, "The Burden of Regionalism", *Acadiensis*, VII, 1 (1978), pp. 110-15; "Regionalism Unmasked", *ibid.*, XIII, 1 (1983), pp. 137-41.

regional realities an integral part of a national narrative. If I may be permitted two short toots on our own horn, one Maritime historian wrote that *Decades* “demonstrates that...a firm grasp of regional issues is inseparable from convincing national interpretation”, while another called it “a superb synthesis...[which] proves that it is possible to retain a national focus while incorporating regional variation”.²²

One of the reasons we were praised was because we had little competition. Other historians who published national surveys at about the same time did a dismal job at this. *Canada 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1987), by Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, is the best (or should it be the worst?) example of this failure to take regions into account, or of the tendency to treat them contemptuously. Bothwell *et al.* largely ignore the Maritimes, and make only cursory forays into prairie history — a dated paragraph on Social Credit in Alberta, a discussion of Manitoba’s depression financial crisis from John Kendle’s *Bracken* — before darting back to Ottawa. Regions and provinces throughout are a nuisance; the most vibrant chapters of *Canada 1900-1945* are those on the two World Wars, when politicians and “dollar-a-year” businessmen were able, “thanks to the war emergency”, to ignore such inconveniences as “ordinary provincial power over natural resources”.²³ Bothwell *et al.* advise student-readers to seek out the “regional literature” which is “embedded” in the pages of “the specialized regional journal, *Acadiensis*”, but there is no evidence in the text that the authors have taken their own advice.²⁴ With competition like *Canada 1900-1945*, being the best historians in Canada at integrating regional history into national history is a little like being the best ice-hockey player in Zimbabwe!

Why did Thompson and Seager do a better job than Bothwell, Drummond and English? We certainly are not any more intelligent; we simply began our work with different attitudes. I am one of the few historians of Canada to have lived in five of the country’s broadly-defined regions: I was raised in the Prairies, did military service in the Maritimes and British Columbia, received my graduate education in Ontario, and I have been teaching Prairie history in Quebec since 1971. I can only speculate as to what role my undergraduate and graduate education played in my receptiveness to “limited identities”. I studied with Cornelius Jaenen at United College (now the University of Winnipeg), but he left

22 John G. Reid, “Towards the Elusive Synthesis: The Atlantic Provinces in Recent General Treatments of Canadian History”, *Acadiensis*, XVI, 2 (1987), p. 116; Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ and Canadian Historical Scholarship”, p. 183.

23 Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1987), pp. 358-9.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 409-10.

for l' Université d'Ottawa after my second year. Once Jaenen departed, I was not encouraged to study Canadian history, let alone the history of the Prairie West. As I contemplated graduate studies, a senior member of the history department tried to persuade me to go to the Pontifical Institute at the University of Toronto, on the ground that "the money [was] in Medieval [history]!" J.E. Rea, an unsung evangelist of regional history, persuaded me that I belonged at the University of Manitoba, but even after I arrived there, two of his colleagues tried to persuade me not to waste my time on an M.A. thesis about "The Prohibition Question in Manitoba, 1892-1928". I went to Queen's for my doctorate because Roger Graham had just moved there after many years at the University of Saskatchewan. I cannot comment as to the critical moments in Allen Seager's *formation*, except to say that he studied with me as a McGill undergraduate and did his M.A. thesis under my (loose) supervision.

How did we accomplish the (apparently miraculous) feat of integrating region and nation? To be colloquial, it wasn't exactly rocket science. The tallest obstacle we surmounted in *Decades of Discord* was the period we were assigned. Our starting point, 1922, was drawn from national political history and our concluding date was Canada's entry into the Second World War. These years adapted awkwardly to regional history. To use examples from regional politics, both the Maritime Rights and Progressive movements had their origins before 1922, while concluding our narrative in 1939 meant that we left the stories of the Saskatchewan CCF, Social Credit, and the *Union nationale* scarcely begun. We dealt with the first problem by ignoring it, tracing things back as we needed to. The second remains a problem, however, and because Donald Creighton's *Canada 1939-1957: The Forked Road* (Toronto, 1976) succeeds *Decades of Discord*, it is a problem which will never be corrected until a new series of national surveys is written.

The other requirements for integrating regional history into a national survey are good relationships with historians across the country, and a willingness to work hard. To paraphrase civil service jargon, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* represents eleven 'historian-years' of effort, without considering the time of the dozen or so colleagues who criticized various drafts. Beginning with the assumption that everything we needed to know was not in the National Archives in Ottawa or in the pages of the *Canadian Historical Review* (no offense meant to a wonderful institution or to an admirable journal), we visited provincial archives, and read the available thesis literature. There is lots of the latter to be read: we found over a hundred theses on regional topics, most written since 1965. Ironically, given the praise we received for our coverage of the Maritimes, we did little primary research in New Brunswick or Nova Scotia and none in Prince Edward Island. We built up our files of Maritime note cards by reading microform theses and with the help of graduate school buddies teaching at the University of New Brunswick. Some of the ground covered in *Decades of Discord* had already been planted and awaited only a synthesizer to harvest the

crop. I found seven M.A. theses which discussed prohibition in seven different provinces, and another seven M.A. theses on municipal relief in seven different cities, representing five regions. Seager and I were able to use only theses completed in 1982 or earlier, but many more have been completed since. Any would-be national historian who argues that the regional scholarship on which to build a national survey is unavailable is an historian standing on thin intellectual ice.

Notwithstanding, the complaint of Maritime reviewers that most “national” histories have failed to take work by historians of the regions into account is undoubtedly valid. Without seeming to blame the victims of central Canadian crime, may I suggest that there are some intermediate steps which historians of regions could take to make regional history more accessible so that the writers of national surveys would have better generalizations to plagiarize?

Prairie and Atlantic historians must provide more monographs like Ernest R. Forbes’s *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal, 1979), and more regional syntheses like Gerald Friesen’s *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto, 1984), the best two examples of the very few books which venture beyond provincial boundaries to consider a region in the broader sense. I will accept Phillip Buckner’s warning that we must not “fall into the trap of creating...artificial regional identit[ies]”,²⁵ and that it is an oversimplification to compress Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI into ‘Maritime’, and Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta into ‘Prairie’. It is equally artificial to pretend that the one-province regions, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, are internally homogeneous. But if we are to integrate regional history into the national account, there must be an agreed-upon acceptable level of generalization.

We must also take care not to make exaggerated claims for region as a “limited identity”. An Ontarian reviewer of my first book, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West 1914-1918* (Toronto, 1978), compared my assertions of Western uniqueness to the Madwoman of Chaillot’s costume pearls: “little by little as one wears pearls, [she said] they become real’. So it is [said the reviewer] with some western particularisms”.²⁶ Regions are not static or permanent categories, and regions exist not only in geographical space but in historical time. Regional identity or consciousness can be transformed over time. Roger Gibbins has argued, for example, that the Prairie West is much less a region today — economically, demographically, and politically — than it was during the first half

25 Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ and Canadian Historical Scholarship”, p. 192.

26 William R. Young in *The Canadian Historical Review*, LX, 2 (1979), p. 231.

of this century.²⁷ With the Maritimes, one might argue that the reverse could be true.

Another great want is explicitly comparative studies which look at similar problems in different regions. By 'explicitly comparative', I mean that we must go beyond the parallel papers which characterized the 1978 Joint Atlantic Canada/Western Canadian Studies Conference, or which appear in Bercuson's *Canada and the Burden of Unity*. David Alexander lamented the absence of "efforts to bridge the Cabot Strait" over a decade ago, but there has been disappointingly little work comparing the Maritimes and Newfoundland.²⁸ I have already mentioned seven M.A. theses on prohibition, and another seven on municipal relief. I found little evidence that the authors were aware of each other's work and virtually no serious attempt at *intra*-regional, let alone *inter*-regional, comparison. But why bash graduate students? In *The Harvests of War*, I asserted the uniqueness of the West's wartime experience without bothering to examine other regions to provide evidence!

Canada's regions are perhaps not as distinct from one another as we sometimes assume. Quebec historians do not see themselves as regional historians of Canada, but as national historians of Quebec. Some of them pounced on *Decades of Discord* when Allen and I had the temerity to copy Bernard L. Vigod and argue that the government of L.-A. Taschereau was interchangeable with that of any other provincial government in terms of its resource policy and its intimate links with capital.²⁹ Quebec is clearly not a province or a region *comme les autres*, but it is more like the rest than many historians have been prepared to admit, and the other regions of so-called 'English-speaking' Canada are not simply pale carbon copies of Ontario.

"Limited identities" are neither mutually exclusive nor hermetically sealed categories. Class, ethnicity, and gender transcend and intersect with region. There is considerable justice in Barry Ferguson's complaint that "regional historians [are] prone to ignore ethnic and class conflict *within* regions even as they pursue regional identities and currently prominent regional conflict".³⁰ On

27 Roger Gibbins, *Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline* (Toronto, 1980).

28 David Alexander, "Economic Growth in the Atlantic Region, 1880 to 1940", *Acadiensis*, 8, 1 (1978), p. 47. Earlier this year John Reid was able to repeat this suggestion that "more attention...be given to the potential for studies of the Maritimes and Newfoundland to complement one another even while stopping short of treating Atlantic Canada as a homogeneous region". John G. Reid, "Canadian Studies in Atlantic Canada: Some Reflections," *ACS Newsletter*, 11, 1 (1989), pp. 5-6.

29 Bernard L. Vigod, *Quebec Before Duplessis: The Political Career of L.-A. Taschereau* (Montreal, 1984).

30 Barry Ferguson, "Limited Identities Without Pain", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23, 1 & 2 (1988), p. 232.

the other hand, historians of ethnicity and class sometimes seem hostile to region.³¹ The tendency among working-class historians is to interpret regional identity as a form of false consciousness, and regionalism as a weapon of the dominant classes to divert workers from their real struggle with capital. There is no doubt that it has served and can serve this purpose, nor that radicals of eastern, central and western Canada shared a similar critique of industrial capitalism. But surely workers in each region had economic demands which were incompatible. In the 1921 federal election, for example, Quebec workers voted for anti-conscriptionist Liberals, Ontario workers voted for high-tariff Tories, and western workers voted for Progressive or Labour candidates pledged to smash the national policy, not the nation-state. To use another class as an example, Canadian farmers may all have been "independent commodity producers" during the 1920s, but as Ernest R. Forbes and others have shown, the regional rifts within the National Progressive Party were real, not imaginary.³²

The attacks from historians of the working class are but one small part of the criticism that recently has been heaped on the regional paradigm. As might have been expected, not everyone is comfortable with the view from the hinterlands. The putative fathers of "limited identities", frightened by a regionalist child grown beyond their control, have of late demanded a paternity test. J.M.S. Careless claims that the field is now so inundated with regional history that he feels like a "farmer in a flood: 'Lord, I know I prayed for rain, but this is ridiculous'".³³ Ramsay Cook states flatly that "as a tool of analysis, 'regionalism' is a concept whose time has gone".³⁴ One outraged traditionalist maintained that regional historians were betraying their country "at a time when Canada is facing the threat of separation in Quebec,...[by] adding to the forces of disunity".³⁵ This equation of regionalism and separatism establishes an absurd and non-existent dichotomy between region and nation. Phillip Buckner has argued persuasively that historians of the Maritimes "are not heirs of the anti-Confederate movement", and that "regionalism frequently arises out of a desire to be included within the larger political and cultural community".³⁶ W.L. Morton pointed out the same

31 Greg Kealey, for example, dismisses the argument of western historians that class conflict in the West following the Great War was "rooted in any unique regional fermentation". Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt", *Labour/le travail*, 13 (1984), pp. 11-44; quotation from p. 15.

32 Ernest R. Forbes, "Never the Twain Did Meet: Prairie-Maritime Relations, 1910-1927", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX, 1 (1978), pp. 18-37.

33 J.M.S. Careless, "'Limited Identities' — Ten Years Later", *Manitoba History*, 1 (1980), pp. 3, 5-6.

34 Cook, "Regionalism Unmasked", p. 141.

35 Lovell Clark, "Regionalism? or Irrationalism?", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13, 2 (1978-9), p. 199.

36 Buckner, "'Limited Identities' and Canadian Historical Scholarship", p. 194.

“Bias of Prairie Politics” almost 40 years ago.³⁷ There are regional experiences, and there is a national experience; they are not (or at least not yet) mutually exclusive. Historians who would write ‘national’ histories of Canada must come to terms with both.

Papers like this one always conclude with platitudes, so let me reach new heights of scholarship by quoting someone else’s platitude. The historian I am about to cite, Walter N. Sage, has disappeared down the historiographical memory hole; he is so obscure today that his name doesn’t even appear in the index to Carl Berger’s *The Writing of Canadian History*. In 1937, as the chair of the UBC history department, he unsuccessfully urged the members of the Canadian Historical Association to consider a regional approach. His message, scorned a half-century ago, bears repetition:

Canada is...a federation of five cultural areas, each distinct, each possessing its own traditions, and each making its own contribution to the common whole. If Canadian historians are to present in the future a more balanced picture it is essential that they should keep the whole development of the nation and of the five cultural regions more constantly before them.³⁸

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37 This is the title of the last chapter of Morton’s *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1950).

38 W.N. Sage, “Geographical and Cultural Aspects of the Five Canadas”, Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1937), p. 34. I discovered a reference to this paper in the notes to Reid, “Writing About Regions”.

Canadian Women’s History: A View From Atlantic Canada

DURING THE PAST TWO DECADES, researchers have produced an impressive body of writing on the history of Atlantic Canada, with the result that the authors of our national histories can no longer ignore the Atlantic region.¹ Yet not all topics have received equal attention from regional historians. Writing as

1 See, for example, John Reid’s recent review in this journal. John G. Reid, “Towards the Elusive Synthesis: The Atlantic Provinces in Recent General Treatments of Canadian History”, *Acadiensis*, 16, 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 107-21.