

Foreword

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Foreword

IN MARCH 2008 ATLANTIC CANADIAN HISTORIANS LOST a distinguished colleague. A frequent contributor to *Acadiensis* from its earliest days, William G. Godfrey was a profound and yet versatile scholar who brought to his studies an unswerving commitment to historiographical fairness and balance. His work was always informed by breadth of vision, whether interpreting 18th-century developments in imperial and transatlantic contexts or portraying the emergence of the Moncton Hospital in both pan-Canadian and international settings. Conversely, he insisted on the enduring ability of Maritime themes to offer “a valid prism to view and understand . . . historic realities” (*The Struggle to Serve*, 2004, 11).

Bill Godfrey might well never have embarked on either 18th-century or Atlantic Canadian studies. His early interest was in the history of the CCF, particularly the adoption of the Regina Manifesto. At Queen’s University, however, his doctoral supervisor George A. Rawlyk convinced him of the merits of studying the career of Major-General John Bradstreet and urged him subsequently to accept an appointment at Mount Allison University. Bill became one of a number of Rawlyk’s students who have taken leading roles in the *Acadiensis* generation of historians, and the direct scholarly result was his subtle and cogent biography, *Pursuit of Profit and Preferment in Colonial North America: John Bradstreet’s Quest* (1982). Based on his dissertation, this is a book that succeeds notably at a number of levels. As a pure biography, it reveals and explains Bradstreet’s characteristics as an aggressive opportunist who was also rootless and insecure. Thus we come to understand how Bradstreet rose so far in rank, and played an important role in the North American campaigns of the Seven Years’ War, without ever properly satisfying his restless ambitions. As a study of the role of patronage in the army and the empire of the 18th century, it is as indispensable a work today as it was when first published. And for those who seek to understand the cultural fusions that could emerge from the distinctive coexistences in the Acadia/Nova Scotia of the pre-Halifax era, the book’s portrait of the personal origins of a high-ranking British officer, whose baptismal name of “Jean Baptiste Bradstreet” reflected his Acadian as well as his New England heritage, is rich and finely drawn.

At the same time as Bill was writing and revising the Bradstreet biography, he was also at work on entries for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (DCB). Anyone who has written for the DCB knows just how exacting even the shortest of these biographies can be and the rigorous historical and editorial standards they have to meet. The incentive, of course, is to be part of a scholarly enterprise that has gone far beyond just being an essential work of reference to become an influential forum for far-reaching historical reappraisals. Bill wrote 15 entries in all (including one co-authored), the majority on 18th-century individuals who had a Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, or Louisbourg connection. Pride of place among them goes to his interlinked biographies in the DCB’s fifth volume of Governor Thomas Carleton of New Brunswick and the reformer James Glenie. “Carleton-Glenie,” to use the term by

which Bill sometimes referred to these two articles that really made up one piece of work, is a model of what makes the DCB what it is. At the same time as being two cameo gems of the biographer's art, the articles present a compelling interpretive portrait of the New Brunswick politics of the era when the first flush of the Loyalist migration was giving way to the ongoing grind of factional dispute and competition for patronage. Both Carleton, the "crusty old soldier" ("Thomas Carleton," 1983, 162) who worked with the Loyalist elite but was never its servant, and Glenie, the "erratically brilliant" Scot ("James Glenie," 1983, 357) who was a tireless opponent of the governor though far from a thoroughgoing political radical, receive their due in nuanced, judicious, and not unsympathetic appraisals.

As years went on, and administrative responsibilities proliferated, Bill continued to write for the DCB, with his final entry appearing in 2005 (on the Sackville, New Brunswick, merchant and politician Josiah Wood). Increasingly, however, his interests turned towards what became a major project on the history of the Moncton Hospital. The historiography of hospitals in Canada, with some distinguished exceptions, had tended too often towards an uncritical celebration of progress and "a rather rose-tinted picture of enlightened public and private acceptance and generosity." It was no surprise that Bill, while very much aware of the sensibilities involved in writing the history of a living institution, took a more trenchant approach. Among other things, his analysis highlighted the multiple influences of women in the founding and development of the hospital, the societal roots of the institution, and what its history as a relatively small hospital in a relatively small city signifies for the broader history of health care in Canada. "The urban-hinterland relationship," he pointed out, "and the need to understand its impact on health services, was a drama played out in every part of this northern nation" (*The Struggle to Serve*, 2004, 5, 185).

Bill Godfrey also wrote many reviews and a number of major review essays. The most substantial of all appeared in *Queen's Quarterly* in 1984, a review essay in which he assessed the degree to which 15 years of new scholarship had fulfilled the prediction made by Rawlyk in 1969 of a new "Golden Age" of Maritime history. At the close of a magisterial and far from uncritical survey of the recent work, Bill was sceptical of the notion of a Golden Age. "Better perhaps," he wrote, "to claim simply that one can be at the cutting edge of Canadian historical work if one works on the Maritimes, and the past fifteen years provide clear and conclusive evidence of that reality" ("A New Golden Age," 1984, 372). It was a distinctively temperate conclusion. In his reviewing, Bill was critical when warranted and occasionally severe – usually when exposing the failures of Canadianists outside of Atlantic Canada to pay due attention to the new, *Acadiensis*-related scholarship. But he was always magnanimous and open-minded. This combination of stringency with a fundamental courtesy and personal modesty was what gave Bill the scholarly integrity that was his hallmark. It also made him an exceptionally successful supervisor of honours theses at Mount Allison. No fewer than 49 students completed theses under his guidance, primarily on Atlantic Canadian themes. Although in his writing he was more a historian of the Maritimes – and, of course, of comparative colonial societies – than of all Atlantic Canada, it was in supervising theses and in teaching his courses that his interests extended explicitly to Newfoundland and Labrador.

His students were fortunate to have such a mentor. I was fortunate as well. If

I can be permitted a brief reminiscence, Bill was the commentator when I presented my first-ever conference paper at the second Atlantic Canada Studies conference in Fredericton in 1976. At that time, it was not unheard of for commentators to give rough treatment to those whose papers they assayed, even if – perhaps especially if – the author was as callow as I then was. I was quite nervous about the whole thing, and even now I remember very little about delivering my paper except that I was happy to get to the end of it. What I do remember very clearly is Bill's commentary. He did not give me a free ride. Bill was too good and conscientious a historian for that. His remarks were searching, thought-provoking, and yet at the same time characteristically gracious, constructive, and encouraging. Bill Godfrey's extensive bibliography reflects his impressive scholarly range, and it reminds us too of the humane approach to intellectual life that was the measure of the man.

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