

Preface to E.R. Forbes's Bibliography

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Preface to E.R. Forbes's Bibliography

IN 1989 ACADIENSIS PRESS PUBLISHED E.R. (Ernie) Forbes's *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes*.¹ This collection of his scholarship – published and unpublished – from the previous two decades emphasizes Forbes's remarkable contribution to the historiography of Atlantic Canada. Perhaps more than any other historian, Ernie Forbes consistently and persuasively overturned entrenched ideas about the Atlantic region: he challenged the regional stereotype. Throughout his 31-year university teaching career, first at the University of Victoria and then at the University of New Brunswick, he revised our understanding of the underdevelopment of Atlantic Canada and the ways that political decisions made at the centre can have a longstanding and detrimental impact on the periphery.

Ernie Forbes's first publication – “Prohibition and the Social Gospel” – was the lead article in the 1971 debut issue of this journal. This article displays all the hallmarks of Forbes's scholarship: clear and concise prose, a mastery of the empirical evidence, and a willingness to upend the established historical interpretation. The movement for prohibition in Nova Scotia was not, Forbes argued, an outgrowth of “puritanical zealots bent on suppressing the pleasures of others.” Rather, it was an outgrowth of a church-led progressive reform movement – the Social Gospel – that strove to “create a new society in which crime, disease and social injustice would be virtually eliminated.”²

Although Forbes soon shifted his focus from progressive reform to politics, his work never lost sight of the importance of social justice, the relationship between good history and good policy, or the necessity of challenging historical convention. Indeed, throughout his work on such interrelated topics as the Maritime Rights Movement, regional transportation policy, Depression-era relief initiatives, or the wartime consolidation of power and manufacturing capacity in central Canada Forbes displayed a willingness to counter the claims of such “orthodox” scholars of the 1940s and 1950s as S.A. Saunders, Harold Innis, and B.S. Kierstead; all of these scholars had argued that the Maritimes Provinces were doomed to a fate of economic marginalization because of their distance from the central Canadian market, their lack of entrepreneurial spirit, their over-reliance on staples, and their inability to make the transition from a “wood, wind, and sail” economy to one based upon “iron, coal, and rail.”³ In sharp contrast, Forbes, along with other “liberal revisionist”

1 E.R. Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989).

2 E.R. Forbes, “Prohibition and the Social Gospel,” *Acadiensis* I, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 11.

3 See S.A. Saunders, *The Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1984); Harold Innis, “An Introduction to the Economic History of the Maritimes, Including Newfoundland and New England,” in Harold Innis, *Essays in Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), 27-42; and B.S. Kierstead, *The Economic Effects of*

scholars, suggested that the region's unenviable economic position was the result of harmful national policies designed to serve the politically powerful central provinces.⁴ Implicit in this analysis was the notion that if politics was part of the problem then perhaps it could also be part of the solution.⁵ If, for example, the wartime actions of Minister of Munitions and Supply C.D. Howe served to "accentuate and consolidate" regional disparities, then perhaps concerted effort by contemporary Maritime politicians at the federal and provincial levels might help alleviate regional underdevelopment.⁶

Forbes was also an early regional proponent and practitioner of women's history. As Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton acknowledge, he was one of a number of male historians "caught up in the energy and excitement of women's history . . . [that acknowledged] the role of women and the importance of gender as a category of analysis."⁷ Yet his publications on women's history still display that hallmark of Forbes work on regional politics: a willingness to challenge the historical orthodoxy. To this end, his essay on Edith Archibald and the Halifax feminist movement insightfully critiqued the accepted interpretation of Maritime women as inherently conservative – a theme that emerged in full bloom in his spirited and critical review of Carol Bacchi's *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*.⁸

While Forbes's own research helped to bring Maritime issues to the scholarly forefront, he was also instrumental, through his edited works, in bringing the Atlantic region to the attention of a generation of Canadian undergraduates, this author included. His *Four Years with the Demon Rum: The Autobiography and Diary of Temperance Inspector Clifford Rose* has proven to be an enduring source for students and teachers of the temperance era in Atlantic Canada, while his *New Brunswick Schools: A Guide to Archival Sources* remains an indispensable source for members of history departments and education faculties alike.⁹ Yet his primary

the War on the Maritime Provinces of Canada (Halifax: Dalhousie Institute of Public Affairs, 1943). Please note that Saunders's book was originally prepared as part of the 1940 Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations.

- 4 These historiographical schools were described by sociologist Michael Clow. See Michael Clow, "Politics and Uneven Capitalist Development: The Maritime Challenge to the Study of Canadian Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy, A Socialist Review* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1984): 117-40, and Michael Clow, "Situating a Classic: Saunders Revisited," *Acadiensis* XV, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 142-52.
- 5 A contention put forth by Forbes's MA student James Kenny in his "Politics and Persistence: Hugh John Flemming and the Atlantic Revolution, 1952-1960" (MA thesis, History, University of New Brunswick, 1988), 3.
- 6 E.R. Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity: The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada during the Second World War," *Acadiensis* XV, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 27.
- 7 Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, "Introduction," *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes*, ed. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 14.
- 8 See E.R. Forbes, "The Ideas of Carol Bacchi and the Suffragists of Halifax: A Review Essay," *Atlantis* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 119-26, and E.R. Forbes, "Battles in Another War: Edith Archibald and the Halifax Feminist Movement," in Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype*, 67-89. See also Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).
- 9 See E.R. Forbes and A.A. Mackenzie, *Four Years with the Demon Rum: The Autobiography and Diary of Temperance Inspector Clifford Rose* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1980) and E.R.

contribution to introducing Atlantic Canadian history to Canadians was through *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, co-edited with long-time colleague and cribbage partner D.A. Muise. This richly detailed, multi-authored survey of Atlantic Canada from Confederation until the 1970s performs the difficult task of reconciling regional underdevelopment with national history by suggesting that the long tradition of Maritime political grievances, such as the Maritime Rights Movement on which Forbes had extensively published, were best viewed as “expressions of frustration at the perceived exclusion of the region from the full benefits of national union. Most protesters wanted more fully in, rather than out of, Confederation.”¹⁰ Now almost 25 years old, this book can still be found on the shelves of almost all serious scholars of Atlantic Canada.

Despite the prolific publication record shown in this bibliography, Forbes's impact on the history and historiography of Atlantic Canada was not confined to the written word. What this bibliography fails to reveal is the personal impact Forbes had on students of Atlantic Canadian history. As Judith Fingard suggests, Forbes “produced several generations of students who understood the regional dilemma of sharing a rich heritage with a marginalized present.” In the process he supervised over 30 graduate students, giving them “the opportunity to explore their roots through an amazing array of graduate thesis topics.”¹¹ Their work is but one more example of Ernie Forbes's enduring impact on Atlantic Canadian history.

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Forbes, Diana Moore, and Andrea Schwenke, *New Brunswick Schools: A Guide to Archival Sources* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1992).

10 E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, “Preface,” in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Fredericton and Toronto: Acadiensis Press and University of Toronto Press, 1993), x.

11 Judith Fingard, “Focusing on Their Roots: University of New Brunswick Historians and Regional History,” *Acadiensis* XXX, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 43-4.