

Local History in Atlantic Canada

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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the middle ages, our sociologists persistently seek the keys of the kingdom. It is presumably Mr. Campbell who abandons his light touch and interrupts some lively description with precepts from sociological texts that seem extraneous and unnecessary. As much as any other study that of the Nova Scotian Scots does not fall into easily defined blueprints and patterns.

The bibliography is impressive. Of all the regions of the Maritime Provinces it is perhaps eastern Nova Scotia that has been least served by literature. There is a surprisingly large number of minor printed works that have seldom, if ever been employed for the purposes of a book such as this.

W. S. MacNUTT

Local History in Atlantic Canada

In 1969 George Rawlyk predicted a new "Golden Age in Maritime Historiography"¹ and much of what he anticipated has appeared. *Acadiensis*, revived in the tradition of the first prolific period in Maritime historiography,² is in its fifth year of publication. Each year several doctoral dissertations on Atlantic Canada are read, popular magazines carry articles on the history of Atlantic Canada,³ and newspapers⁴ feature the history of the region. The impact of the renewed interest in the Atlantic Provinces by scholars and journalists has had manifestations throughout the region.

The outburst of energy exhibited by Canadians in 1967, when wedded with this renewed interest in history, prompted the creation of numerous local museums and the restoration of several historic sites. Most of these museums have not faltered; moreover, many are firmly established institutions that cannot begin to adequately display the artifacts donated by local residents.⁵ In urban areas where museums existed for years other organizations are active in the promotion of an awareness of local history. Heritage Trust organizations in Saint John, Fredericton, Halifax and St. John's carried out sophisticated campaigns to encourage preservation and restoration of buildings of architectural significance and have chastened developers and govern-

1 George Rawlyk "A New Golden Age of Maritime Historiography" *Queens Quarterly*, 76 (1969), pp. 55-65.

2 P. B. Buckner, editor, *Acadiensis*, Volume 1, No. 1 (1971), pp. 3-9.

3 *The Atlantic Advocate* has made the history of the region an integral part of its format.

4 The Saint John Evening *Times-Globe* and the *Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton) have each carried lengthy series and occasional features on local history.

5 The Queens Co. Museum, Kings Co. Museum, Musee Acadien, Keillor House and Penitentiary Museum are New Brunswick examples of this Canadian Trend.

ments alike for unimaginative urban planning.⁶ Perhaps the most banal manifestation of a rekindling of interest in heritage came from the city promotion offices and chambers of commerce, Loyalist Days, Natal Day, *Frolic Acadien* and Pioneer Days are all examples of a perverse and inverted homage paid to the past. In most cases, only inadvertently is anything of former traditions retained; the street dances, Bavarian beer gardens and hard rock bands bear little resemblance to the past in Atlantic Canada.

Frequently, educational systems are the last to respond to contemporary trends, but in this instance schools in Atlantic Canada were active early. For several decades some aspects of the history of Atlantic Canada had been taught in elementary and secondary schools. For the most part these courses were not prescribed in provincial curricula but were rather resulted from the initiative of individual teachers. More recently, however, the rise of two organizations have promoted the more orderly development of local studies in the Atlantic Region and have given rise to a plethora of local history courses. Early in 1970 the Atlantic Institute of Education established a local studies project which now involves nearly two hundred teachers.⁷ Using the resources of AIE these teachers have created an informal communications network for exchange ideas on methodology and materials. This network has led to conferences, student exchanges, and non-commercial publication of materials. The second of these organizations, the Canada Studies Foundations funded Project Atlantic Canada in 1972. CSF was organized in 1970 to rid Canadian classrooms of the "bland concensus story, told without controversy; . . . (the) too-nice, straight-forward, linear, dry-as-dust account of uninterrupted political and economic progress."⁸ Using "continuing Canadian concerns"⁹ as a framework, local social studies projects, many of which were historical in emphasis interpreted national issues important to the Atlantic region. Ironically, and somewhat to the chagrin of the CSF Director,¹⁰ many of the so-called national concerns identified in Atlantic Canada were not perceived as concerns at all in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, Project Atlantic Canada stimulated an unprecedented amount of activity in elementary and secondary schools in researching the history of Atlantic Canada.

6 See Fredericton *Daily Gleaner* (1974-75) for details on Fredericton Bridge controversy, Halifax *Chronicle Herald* (1973) for details on bridge and riverfront drive controversy and St. John's *Evening Telegram and Daily News* (1973) for information on the restoration of Quidi Vidi Village.

7 G. M. Anderson, Editor, *Time Five*, AIE (June, 1975), pp. 25-29.

8 A. B. Hodgetts, ed. *What Culture? What Heritage?: A Study of Civic Education in Canada*, OISE (1968), p. 24.

9 A. B. Hodgetts in *O.T.F. Occasional Papers* 74-11 (1974), pp. 1-5.

10 A. B. Hodgetts, Speech Given to Delegates, CSF-OTF London Conference on Canada Studies, May 8, 1975.

In the midst of this intense activity in local studies William Hamilton wrote *Local History in Atlantic Canada* (MacMillan, Toronto, 1974). After a decade of teaching in Nova Scotia secondary schools, Professor Hamilton perceived a need for an adequate teaching aid¹¹ and undoubtedly his ongoing contact with teachers in Atlantic Canada confirmed that belief. *Local History in Atlantic Canada* is not a history of Atlantic Canada; there is nothing new in the book for professional historians or teachers. Rather the book is designed for use by students in secondary schools. As such, it should have been a timely book welcomed by teachers who were, as Hoffer defines it, "true believers" in the value of local history. Unfortunately, in many respects it falls short of its intended mark;¹² in attempting to provide a flexible resource book that could meet the requirements of students from Bonavista, Newfoundland to Hartland, New Brunswick, Professor Hamilton often succumbs to the weaknesses of traditional textbook writers.

One of the most serious of these faults is that the author has failed to define the place of local history in the curriculum. In side-stepping academic discussion on the objectives of local history and pedagogical reasons for its study,¹³ the author sells his subject short. Instead he suggests that local history fulfils a strong "emotional urge in all of us to know more about our origin."¹⁴ This doubtful assertion is reiterated in various motifs from the sirenic "charm and meaning"¹⁵ of little places to the tenuous ties of ancestry extolled by Alden Nowlan who learned that ship captains were "in some enigmatic yet indisputable way"¹⁶ connected to him.

Apart from this emotional appeal, Hamilton points out that local history "provides one of the essential keys to an understanding of our national history."¹⁷ But, disappointingly, the case for such a statement is not made clear. In actuality local and regional histories that are well researched and written challenge, modify or confirm our understanding of national history¹⁸ and Professor Hamilton would have served his readers well by emphasizing this fact. The single example he employs in this connection, regional dispar-

11 W. B. Hamilton, *Local History in Atlantic Canada*, p. viii.

12 *Ibid.*, xi.

13 One of the best discussions of this subject is found in H. P. R. Finbert and V. H. T. Skipp, *Local History: Objective and Pursuit* (1967), pp. 10-15.

14 Hamilton, p. 1.

15 Stephen Leacock "The Place of History in Canadian Education, *CHAR* (1925), in Hamilton, p. 2.

16 Alden Nowlan, "A Poets View of Canada," *MacLeans*, June 1971 in Hamilton, p. 4.

17 Hamilton, p. 2.

18 For example see T. W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910. *Acadiensis*, Vol. 1, No. 2. The interpretations of the N.P. by Careless, Morton and Creighton are all seriously questioned by this probing essay.

ity, does not come to grips with the problem and while he suggests that patterns of settlement, religions and politics are stepping stones to national understandings he never elaborates on the subject.

Hamilton suggests to his student audience that the study of local history offers the pleasure of mystery solving. At this point he comes close to dealing with one of the most important elements of the historians craft, the problem of evidence evaluation. Regretably, he disposes of the problem in one short paragraph and leaves the student to find his own way through Robin Winks' *The Historian as Detective*. Some excellent examples of manuscript evaluation are provided later in the book but their impact would be greater had sufficient groundwork been done in the introduction.

In a final effort to motivate the disinterested student Professor Hamilton describes the interests which might be fostered through the study of local history. Investigating folklore, antique restoration and stamp-collecting are nominated as likely hobbies and visiting historical sites are offered as alternatives. A classroom teacher that resorted to this reasoning would be accused of grasping at straws for surely, if students are to acquire such interests, they will be ancillary learning outcomes, hardly central to the course of study. Professor Hamilton even alludes to the possibility that local history may be a useful form of vocational training where students, he implies, might man "enclaves of the past — whole communities in which turnover, novelty and choice are deliberately limited."¹⁹ One might facetiously say that Toffler's prescription for those unable to cope with change already exists quite unintentionally in innumerable communities in Atlantic Canada. But quite apart from that notion, the search for a utilitarian value for local history is an unnecessary adherence to the pedant of relevancy that characterized educational theory in the 1960's.

Perhaps, because Professor Hamilton conceives of his book as a flexible resource for secondary students, he sees little need to carefully describe the place of local history in the school curriculum. In so doing he over-estimates the students' ability to comprehend academic debates and over-estimates their research resources by referring them to additional sources. The majority of secondary schools in Atlantic Canada are bereft of such materials and would have little opportunity to further explore the subject of local history.

If the book fails to adequately examine the scope of local history, it also fails as a resource book for students. The second chapter traces the political development and the patterns of settlement from the Norseman to Newfoundland's Confederation, a careful narrowing of the parameters for one who rejects the Plato to NATO sweep of history, but a constriction that, nonetheless, leaves a lengthy history to be outlined in a single chapter. The narrative is, by intent, very generalized and no controversial stances are assumed.

19 Hamilton, p. 3.

Indeed, a student might be lulled into believing there were few controversial issues in local history, where only the “expulsion of the Acadians”²⁰ allows for the infusion of historical questioning and hence interpretation. Unhappily, Hamilton’s overview does not take into account much of the recent writing on the history of Atlantic Canada. No real attempt is made to go beyond Confederation and the works of W. S. MacNutt²¹ and P. B. Waite,²² although the bibliography includes references that would have done so. While it was clearly beyond the scope of the work to include any original research into the twentieth century history, surely some secondary sources could have been used to assist students required to work backwards into history from the present. A brief mention of the Duncan Commission and Newfoundland’s Confederation provides little for the student in terms of identifying significant themes in the twentieth century experience.

The second section of the book examines the sources available to the student of local history and is by far the most useful part of the work. Helpful hints are provided to aid students in determining the validity of evidence and in seeking additional information. Place names, folksongs, folklore, art, architecture, biographies, the Amerindian heritage, economic development, archaeological evidence and the legacy of the land, the sea and its people are the topics which are well covered. Here the craft of the historian is emphasized and the student is required to compile and weigh the wealth of evidence available and learns to begin to distinguish valuable information from information overload. Professor Hamilton shows some skill in weaving a narrative with pointed examples of pitfalls to avoid in examining sources. Moreover, unlike the introduction, some of the examples are drawn from more recent history, like the sinking of the rumrunner *I’m Alone* during the prohibition era. Hamilton suggests, “Try to discover the details of this incident and how it was eventually settled,”²³ an approach which would interest many students. Each of the chapters devoted to sources of evidence is filled with examples like this and Hamilton assumes a chatty tone with his reader, although he sometimes drops this approach and reverts to a more traditional lecture form. One example is his instructions on the use of topographical maps: “Examine the appearance of prominent physical features and note how these are identified on the maps. A profitable exercise is to develop a detailed street or road map for a portion of your neighborhood. Using the symbols to be found on topographic maps, indicate the physical as well as the man made features.”²⁴

20 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

21 W. S. MacNutt, *The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of a Colonial Society*, (Toronto, 1965).

22 P. B. Waite, *The Life and Times of Confederation* (Toronto, 1862).

23 Hamilton, p. 49.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

As this illustrates, Professor Hamilton fluctuates between the stance of the inductive teacher who prefers to ask questions and the prescriptive teacher who prefers to provide solutions. Hamilton could never reply, "Why not?" to a student's query "Why do you ask so many questions?" For pedagogical purposes, a rereading of *Thinking About Inquiry*²⁵ and *Teaching the New Social Studies*²⁶ could have proven profitable in writing this book. While prescriptions are often necessary, it is important that the student perceive the depth of the problem before the solutions are neatly provided.

Professor Hamilton's intent is to guide students through the available sources with the expectation that in the process they will acquire the tools of the historian. The culmination of the year's work is to be an individual research paper on the local history of the student's community which will require the student to utilize the skills which he has acquired. Exercises like compiling "a list of place names that are to be found in more than one Atlantic Province"²⁷ or compiling "a directory of the most famous ships built in local shipyards"²⁸ or compiling "a list of physical characteristics that have some bearing on its evolution"²⁹ will infuse students with the "spirit of inquiry"³⁰ and prepare them for the ultimate pleasure-writing the history of the local area. However, with such exercises Hamilton indicates a most traditional approach to teaching history. It is in keeping with the old university-second school syndrome where the professors suggest "you teach 'em the facts, we'll teach 'em the interpretations." While the intent is to move the student towards interpretation, the preparation will leave him ill equipped to interpret anything.

The author presents a view of the historian as a collector of evidence and in the case of local history the evidence surrounds the researcher. It conjures up visions of this bedraggled individual surrounded by a morass of paper, tapes and artifacts overseen by a benevolent taskmaster who benignly instructs "In compiling your local history you may find it helpful to review the diagrams, approaches and techniques suggested earlier in the book"³¹ . . . "After your research is complete you are ready to put pen to paper and write the history of your home community. The first step is to develop a detailed outline. Not only will this help you organize your material, it will reveal any gaps left in your research."³²

25 Betty Boyd, *Thinking About Inquiry* (Toronto, 1972).

26 Edwin Fenton, *Teaching the New Social Studies in Secondary Schools* (Toronto, 1966).

27 Hamilton, p. 34.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

31 Hamilton, p. 223.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Professor Hamilton has inadvertently excluded the real starting point for the writing of history: a question or problem which must be perceived. If students compile, list and categorize data *ad infinitum* with no question in mind, how will they distinguish relevant from irrelevant? Only with some specific objectives can historical data take on meaning and that meaning must be tied to the answer to the question raised. If students were to follow Professor Hamilton's instructions they would learn the tools of the chronicler but not the historian. For this reason alone, *Local History in Atlantic Canada* should not be placed in students' hands. The saving graces of the book are the exercises found at the conclusion of each chapter but these would be of more value for a teacher who could adopt them to local circumstances, than to a student whose vision could easily be confined to the completion of a cataloging exercise.

Since Professor Hamilton intended his book as a resource for students of local history, he should have attended further to the pedagogical devices he suggested. No attention is paid to learning theory nor to the theorists of teaching history so there is no discernible hierarchy of historical skills developed throughout the text. The wealth of methodological information available would have provided a useful framework to organize the materials.³³ In the end *Local History in Atlantic Canada* is an admirable annotative bibliography but certainly not a useful focal point for a course in local history. For these reasons the Secondary History Subcommittee of New Brunswick recommended that the text be used only by teachers rather than for general use by students.

ROD CAMPBELL

The Atlantic Provinces in Recent Studies in Canadian Historical Geography

During the past ten or fifteen years, there has been an upsurge of interest in the historical geography of Canada. This has been reflected in an increasing number of works devoted to that field. Among the most recent of these are: *Canada Before Confederation: A Study in Historical Geography* by R. Cole Harris and John Warkentin (New York, Oxford University Press, 1974),

33 See Edmund Short and George D. Marconnit, *Contemporary Thought on Public School Curriculum* (Dubuque, 1968) and B. S. Bloom et Al, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives Handbook I – The Cognitive Domain* (Chicago, 1956) and *Handbook II – The Affective Domain* (Chicago, 1964) for basic information on skill hierarchy.