

Thomas Beamish Akins: British North America's Pioneer Archivist

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Volume 7, Number 1, Autumn 1977

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad7_1art05

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Publisher(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Cuthbertson, B. C. (1977). Thomas Beamish Akins:: British North America's Pioneer Archivist. *Acadiensis*, 7(1), 86-102.

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Thomas Beamish Akins: British North America's Pioneer Archivist

For over one hundred years historians have relied extensively upon the bound volumes of manuscripts of public records of Nova Scotia, today classified as Public Archives of Nova Scotia Record Group 1 [PANS RG 1] which were collected and arranged by Thomas Beamish Akins. Because Akins was something of a recluse and left virtually no personal correspondence, we know little about his private life. He was born on 1 February 1809 in Liverpool, Nova Scotia.¹ His father was a descendant of the original New England proprietors of the Falmouth Township settled in 1761; his mother was the daughter of Thomas Beamish, Port Warden and merchant of Halifax. Akins was an only child and his mother died ten days after his birth; he was brought up by his mother's family in Halifax. Akins studied law in the office of his cousin, the historian Beamish Murdoch, was admitted to the bar in 1831 and seems to have had a fairly lucrative practice.² He never married and lived a quiet life absorbed in his antiquarianism, respected by his contemporaries, but disinterested in any public or political activities. His winters he spent in Halifax, his summers in Falmouth, and never in his life went outside Nova Scotia.

Akins was early attracted to antiquarianism and assisted, as did Beamish Murdoch, T. C. Haliburton with the collection of material for the latter's two volume *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* published by Joseph Howe in 1829.³ In September 1838, the Halifax Mechanics' Institute offered a silver medal for the best essay submitted on the boundaries, defence, customs and incidents of early Halifax. There was only one submission, an "Essay on the Early History of Halifax" by Akins, which was awarded the silver medal in 1839.⁴ Akins' essay was published in 1847. Throughout his life he kept correcting and adding to the essay and in 1895 the Nova Scotia

1 Genealogical information on the Akins and Beamish families is in MG 1, vol. 5 and Beamish Family, vertical manuscript file, PANS.

2 C. Bruce Fergusson, "T. B. Akins: A Centennial Commemoration", *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* [hereafter *Collections*], vol. 31, p. 98. I assume his practice was lucrative because he died leaving \$50,000, although he did inherit some property.

3 Thomas C. Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1829), Preface, p. vii.

4 Journal of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute, 13 April 1839, MG 20, vol. 222A, PANS.

Historical Society published his amended version. Akins also produced in 1849 *A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Church of England in the British American Provinces* and in 1865 *A Brief Account of the Origin and Progress of the University of King's College, Windsor, Nova Scotia*. His one contribution to the *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* was "The First Council" in 1881. Although his historical writings were marked by a chronological approach with little attempt to provide more than a factual outline of events, he did rely almost entirely on primary sources and his *History of Halifax* is still useful. In 1882 he was made president of the Nova Scotia Historical Society and at his death he was one of the vice-presidents. He was also an honorary or corresponding member of the American, Massachusetts, Quebec, Maryland, and Texas historical societies.

Akins' major contribution was his dedication to ensuring the proper preservation of the public records of Nova Scotia. Before Akins began his work in 1857, there had been three attempts to bring some order to these records. James Gautier, who from 1785 to 1808 had been clerk to succeeding provincial secretaries and at times deputy clerk of council, from 1792 had attempted some arrangement of the records and had compiled a few catalogues, mostly of legal papers found in the Provincial Secretary's Office. Nonetheless, in 1811 Sir George Prevost informed the Assembly that the public records were "in a ruinous state" and the Assembly voted £150 for their binding and indexing.⁵ About 1820, the provincial secretary, Rupert George, began a register of dispatches from the Board of Trade and Secretaries of State dating back to 1750 and it was continued by him to 1834. None of these attempts did more than bring some order to a small part of the public records. In February 1841 Akins wrote to the Halifax Mechanics' Institute "proposing the foundation of [a] Depository of Colonial Records".⁶ His proposition was accepted, provided that the collection would form the basis for an institute library and would be its property, but a year later Akins requested the proposal be postponed, although he had made some progress in his collecting. In January 1845, a committee of the Institute again took up the matter, recommending that a small contribution be made by members to meet incidental expenses for the commencement of a depository; in March a committee, chaired by Joseph Howe and including Akins, was appointed to call on persons to obtain signatures to a records subscription list. Nothing was achieved, perhaps because Akins was unable to act.⁷

5 Nova Scotia, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* [hereafter *JLA*], 1811, p. 63. See also C. Bruce Fergusson, "T. B. Akins: A Centennial Commemoration", p. 99.

6 Journal of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute, 20 February 1841.

7 *Ibid.* The May 1846 annual report noted that Akins had been prevented from acting because of "some difficulty respecting health and opportunity".

The question of the public records remained dormant until on the 30 April 1857, the day before prorogation, a resolution was passed unanimously by the Assembly, directing the governor "to cause the ancient records and documents illustrative of the history and progress of society in this province to be examined, preserved and arranged".⁸ Joseph Howe, then in opposition, moved the resolution and pointed out that the public records were in a state of chaos and were rapidly decomposing. On the government side, the Attorney General, J. W. Johnston, in seconding Howe's resolution, remarked on the pains taken in the United States to preserve historical records.⁹ On 29 May 1857 Akins became Commissioner of Public Records. The creation of the Nova Scotia archives preceded that of the Dominion archives by fifteen years and another provincial archivist was not to be appointed until Ontario did so in 1903.¹⁰ By Confederation Nova Scotia had made proper arrangements for the custody and public accessibility of its public records, whereas the other provinces would not do so until this century. The result is that few public records of Nova Scotia for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appear to be missing.

Akins was to hold the appointment until his death 34 years later. As Record Commissioner, he reported through the Provincial Secretary to the Legislative Assembly which set up committees to examine his reports and make recommendations. He submitted 13 reports and was granted \$18,800 of which he received \$10,938 in salary.¹¹ He continued to practice law and acted as the unpaid Legislative Librarian from 1859 to 1862, procuring for the Library in 1859 alone 1750 volumes by exchanges, presents and the expenditure of £17. While he did much of the work of the Archives himself, he always had assistants. The principal one was his cousin, Francis Beamish. Another was J. T. Bulmer, the first secretary of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, whom D. C. Harvey described as the "greatest collector the [legislative] library has ever had".¹²

Between June 1857 and January 1858, Akins employed six assistants arranging and cataloguing the records to 1780 for treasury papers and official dispatches. He first selected those papers having any reference to the early history of the province, those connected with the granting of land and those

- 8 *JLA*, 1857, p. 377. The holograph of Joseph Howe's resolution is on display in the PANS.
- 9 Nova Scotia, *Debates*, 1857, p. 219 and *Nova Scotian* (Halifax), 18 May 1857.
- 10 See John Hill Archer, "A Study of Archival Institutions in Canada" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1965), p. 43.
- 11 D. C. Harvey, "The Contribution of the Nova Scotia Historical Society to the Legislative Library", *Collections*, vol. 26, p. 122.
- 12 Harry Piers, using the allocations given in the *JLA*, calculated these figures, MG 1, vol. 1051A, folder 1, PANS.

with reference to the financial affairs of the province.¹³ He could find very few papers of the government at Annapolis Royal from 1710-49, but the dispatches of the Board of Trade to the governors from 1749 to 1799 were almost complete and, using Gautier's and George's catalogues, he was able to determine in many instances which documents were missing. His plan was to arrange the documents "according to dates and carefully set up in Books or bound up when the condition of the papers permitted and catalogues prepared of the contents of each volume referring to the number of each article; following as closely as possible the method pursued in the Harleyan Collection of Manuscripts in the British Museum".¹⁴ Akins did not consider it necessary to prepare indexes as had been done for the Harleyan Collection. Although the primary arrangement was by dates, papers connected with any particular subject were generally bound in separate volumes and the records were divided into subject groups. In 1859 Akins published a *Descriptive Catalogue of Books in the Iron Safe of the Provincial Secretary's Office, Nova Scotia*, a reprint of his catalogue in Appendix 54 of the 1859 *Journals of the Legislative Assembly*. By adapting the cataloguing method used for the Harleyan Collection and by arranging documents by date, Akins ensured much easier reference to the records. However, when he later gave each volume a number, as had been done for the Harleyan Collection, the placement and numbering of additions was to prove troublesome.

In his 1858 report, Akins referred to the 1856 publication of *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York Procured in Holland, England and France*, by H. John Romyn Brodhead, and recommended that the Nova Scotian records of the greatest interest and value should be similarly selected and arranged for publication. Akins soon realized that a number of records of official correspondence were missing and could probably be found in the State Paper Office, London. Brodhead, as agent from New York State to procure and transcribe documents in European repositories, had provided in the first volume of *Documents . . .* a brief description of the records in the State Paper Office and the British Museum with the arrangements for procuring transcripts. Akins recommended that "copies of a few of the most important missing despatches of the last and the commencement of the present century from the State Paper Office in London" be obtained.¹⁵ In April 1858, this was approved by the Assembly, but no action was taken until January 1859 when the Lieutenant-Governor, the Earl of Mulgrave, sent a request for copies to the Colonial Secretary, Sir Edward Lytton. Akins specified the required documents with the greatest

13 Report of the Commissioner of Public Records, *JLA*, 1858, app. 29, p. 234.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

care, requesting official correspondence between the Board of Trade, Secretaries of State and Governors for particular periods. His objective was to have copied only those records of official correspondence “required to complete our files”. Brodhead had described his difficulties in gaining access to the State Paper Office but by making his request an official one, Akins was able to avoid Brodhead’s difficulties. The Colonial Secretary directed that the papers be made available for copying by clerks in the State Paper Office as required by the “local government”.¹⁶

Brodhead’s report seems to have been the only source of information Akins had on the colonial records before the 1860 publication of the first volume of *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1574-1600*, edited by Noel Sainsbury.¹⁷ By 1891 Sainsbury had edited three volumes of the Calendars of America and West Indies Series, bringing the Calendar up to 1676. Akins used these calendars to determine what records were required to complete his files for the seventeenth century. A major problem that arose early and was to continue, was that his copyists would copy only the actual dispatch and not the enclosures. When Akins became aware of the enclosures after noting their mention in the transcript of a dispatch, he began to order the enclosures separately.¹⁸ But many enclosures are missing from the transcribed dispatches in RG 1.

The dispatches did not begin arriving until September 1859, and in the meantime Akins continued collecting and arranging the public records available in Halifax. Akins had arranged and bound 69 folio volumes of records for the period 1800-1834. About 11,000 marriage bonds for the period 1752-1855 were also arranged and catalogued, although Akins estimated that only one fourth of the bonds had been returned from ministers authorized to marry by licence.¹⁹ Discovering that the Catalogue of the Canadian Parliamentary Library published in 1858 contained references to documents transcribed in Paris relating to Acadia, Akins had the relevant ones copied during 1860-62. When writing to the Parliamentary Librarian,

16 Earl of Mulgrave to Sir E. B. Lytton, 13 January 1859, RG 1, vol. 125, doc. 6, PANS. Akins’ letter to Tupper is in enclosure no. 1 in Herman Merivale to Sir Francis Palgrave, 31 January 1857, Public Record Office 2 (correspondence files of the Public Record Office, London).

17 Sir R. B. Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominion Office*, Public Record Office Handbooks, no. 3 (London, 1964), p. 54.

18 The early correspondence for obtaining transcripts from the State Paper Office in London is in RG 1, vols. 103, 104, 106 and 125, PANS. In the front of the bound volumes of transcripts, Akins generally put the date when they were received. For example, some papers relating to Annapolis Royal and the Acadians were not located and transcribed until the 1870s and 1880s even though Akins began requesting dispatches of this period in 1859.

19 Report of the Record Commissioner, *JLA*, 1864, app. 25, p. 3.

S. G. Lajoie, Akins declared that he was “desirous of collecting everything possible connected with the history of our province while under French rule. We know nothing beyond the leading outlines of the History which appear in books published at the time and from which [T. C.] Halliburton [sic] obtained all his information”.²⁰ During 1859 Akins also worked on the arrangement of papers relating to the granting of land, including those for the early townships around the Minas Basin. The most time consuming task was the arranging of the roads and bridges papers in chronological order. These may be found today in PANS RG 16. Thirty-two volumes were also added to the collection of bound volumes. The Assembly Committee on the Record Commission recommended that the work be suspended for April-December 1860 to await the arrival of the ordered transcripts.²¹ Activity resumed again in January 1861 and continued, with one major interruption (May 1862 to January 1863), until February 1864. Akins then reported that he considered the work of the Record Commission complete; 211 volumes of documents had been bound and 37 boxes of documents had been sorted and arranged in bundles.²²

The growing awareness of the importance of the public records resulted in the 1861 Act which vested in the Crown “the books, papers and records of all public offices, Provincial and County.”²³ The object of the bill, proposed in the Legislative Council by Jonathan McCully and passed in the Assembly without debate, was to enable the government to possess all records of a public character and thus to ensure that the documents of deceased officials, such as Registrars of Deeds, remained in the custody of government. The Act may have been motivated in part by Akins’ 1858 report, which had noted that a number of important public records had disappeared from the public offices. He was directed by the Assembly to advertise for the missing records and some were recovered.²⁴

In the summer of 1871, about fifty boxes of British military papers were sent from Quebec to Halifax for later removal to England. Akins found that they consisted of documents from the Military Secretary’s Office extending from 1785 and contained valuable information particularly about the Loyalists and the Indians. Because it would cost too much to make transcripts of all the documents wanted, Akins suggested that the papers relating to colonial history be handed over to the Nova Scotia government for safe-

20 Akins to Lajoie, 12 January 1860, MG 1, vol. 8, folder 1, PANS.

21 Report of Committee on Record Commission, *JLA*, 1860, app., p. 213.

22 Report of Committee on Record Commission, *JLA*, 1864, app. 40, p. 1.

23 Nova Scotia, *Acts*, 1861, 24 Vict., c. 24.

24 Report of the Committee on Public Printing, *JLA*, 1858, app. 29, p. 255.

keeping.²⁵ Douglas Brymner, who was collecting for the nascent Public Archives of Canada, negotiated for their transfer to Ottawa when he was in London in 1873.²⁶ While in Halifax, he made a list of those documents not published by Akins and when he went to the Public Record Office in London, he marked for transcription only those papers relating to Nova Scotian history not yet procured by Akins. In Brymner's 1873 report and subsequent ones, he gave accounts of papers available in various repositories. Akins considered Brymner "one of the most skillful archivists in America" and in a letter to him remarked that "my labours are nearly to a close . . . but you have a great work before you".²⁷ A near continuous stream of transcripts from the Public Record Office and the British Museum began flowing across the Atlantic to Halifax. Mr. W. Kingston, who was in charge of the American department at the Public Record Office, arranged for the necessary copying at the Public Record Office from 1874 onwards.²⁸ A Mr. W. B. Tobin, formerly of Halifax, made copies at the British Museum and at the Royal Institution.²⁹ Transcripts were also made from the Massachusetts public records, from correspondence in the Library of the Seminary at Quebec, and from papers in Ottawa.

In August 1881, the Executive Council directed the Attorney General to provide for the "arrangement, indexing and preservation of the early records of the Supreme and Vice Admiralty Courts".³⁰ Akins employed two barristers to examine the papers of the General Court 1749-54, the Supreme Court 1754-1827, and the Halifax County Court and Inferior Court of Common Pleas 1750-1800.³¹ Although a large part of the papers of the General Court was found to be missing, the remaining papers were arranged chronologically. Much trouble was expended in collecting the papers of the Partition of the Old Townships to 1785. Thus the early court records were preserved before decomposition and are available today in PANS RG 1 and other record groups under the names of the respective courts.

25 Report of the Record Commissioner, *JLA*, 1872, app. 23, pp. 1-2.

26 Report of Douglas Brymner on Archives in Report of Minister of Agriculture, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1974, vol. VII, no. 6, app. 24, p. 170.

27 Akins to Brymner, 4 June 1883, RG 37, vol. 106, no. 425, Public Archives of Canada [hereafter PAC].

28 Akins to *Morning Herald* (Halifax), 12 April 1890. Mr. Kingston performed the same services for Brymner. See correspondence between Akins and Brymner in RG 37, vol. 106, PAC.

29 The accounts for Tobin and also Kingston are in the "Statement of Proceedings, Memoranda of Work . . . etc., 1857-1891" of the Record Commission maintained by Akins [hereafter Record Commission Book]. The pages are not numbered. MG 1, vol. 8, PANS.

30 Nova Scotia, Minutes of Executive Council, 5 August 1881, RG 1, vol. 203E, PANS.

31 Commissioners Report on the Papers of the Court of Law, 17 March 1882, Record Commission Book.

In his 1878 report, Akins submitted a "Catalogue or List of Manuscript Documents arranged, bound and catalogued under the direction of the Commissioner of Public Records . . . from the year 1710 to year 1867",³² which followed his original plan of arranging the bound volumes chronologically, but not numbered, under various general subject headings. The copious transcripts made after the publication of this catalogue increased the collection of bound volumes to 473 from 367 and a new catalogue was published in 1886 and distributed more widely than its predecessor.³³ Aside from the numerous additions, the 1886 catalogue gave a number to each volume, thus freezing the collection and making additions under various subject headings impossible without disrupting the numbering of the collection. Thus there have been only very minor additions since then, and Akins' catalogue of 1886 remained in use until 1976 when a new catalogue was prepared. In his last report in 1887, Akins had nine pages of lists of documents that he wanted copied. The lists mainly derived from the synopsis of papers in the Public Record Office and in the State Department, Paris, given in the Report of the Canadian Archives for 1883. In the *Fifth Report of the Royal Commission of Historical Manuscripts 1876*, Akins had found a list of documents belonging to the Marquis of Lansdowne and he wrote to the lieutenant governor requesting that copies of some of the documents be obtained "to complete our files, particularly those relating to the Refugee Loyalists Emigration on which subject our Archives are very deficient".³⁴ As the transcripts arrived from overseas, they were bound and added to the collection.

In his reports Akins consistently recommended the publication of selected documents as was the custom in certain American states. His primary motivation was to make accessible to the general public documents of the "greatest interest and value" and in particular those relating to the

removal of the Acadian French from this country in 1755, — a subject which has of late occupied the attention of writers both in England and America, and on which much has lately appeared in condemnation of the course pursued by the government of the day. The papers . . . throw some additional light on this interesting subject, which has now become a matter of American history, and for the credit of the province, all papers that may in any way discover the motives, views and conduct of those engaged at the period in the settlement of the country, and which

32 The catalogue was published in *JLA* 1879, app. 20, pp. 2-23.

33 *The Catalogue or List of Manuscript Documents Arranged, Bound and Catalogued under the Direction of the Commissioner of Public Records . . . from the year 1710-Year 1867* was published as appendix 21 of the 1886 *JLA* and by the Queen's Printer.

34 Akins to Lieutenant Governor, 13 February 1888, Record Commission Book.

may tend to contradict or explain partial statements, or put in a new light, transactions hitherto considered harsh and cruel, should be given to the public.³⁵

Although the Assembly Committee on the Record Commission supported the recommendation, not until 1865 did the Assembly agree “that one thousand copies of . . . a volume of five hundred octavo pages may be published, at an expense not exceeding the sum of \$1,800”.³⁶ The *Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia*, edited by Thomas B. Akins and published in 1869, was divided into five parts. The first two parts were papers relating to the Acadian French and their forcible removal. In his preface, Akins said that he had selected all documents in possession of the government that “could in any way throw light on the history and conduct of the French inhabitants of Nova Scotia” because “the necessity for their removal has not been clearly perceived and the motives which led to its enforcement have been often misunderstood”. The third part contained papers relating to the French Encroachments in Nova Scotia 1749-1754 and the War in North American 1754-1761. Papers relating to the First Settlement of Halifax 1749-1756 and the First Establishment of a Representative Assembly in Nova Scotia 1755-1761 made up the last two parts. Francis Beamish compiled the index to the 742 pages of documents. The *Selections* was given a wide distribution, with copies going to Libraries in the Maritimes, Oxford, Cambridge, the United States and the British Museum.³⁷

Akins, with many of his contemporaries, was sensitive to criticism of the Acadian deportation. One of his principal objectives in publishing the 1869 *Selections* was to correct misunderstandings about the deportation. In 1880-81, he obtained transcripts of Colonel John Winslow’s Journal from the Massachusetts Historical Society and those from Rev. Andrew Brown collection in the British Museum relating to the Acadians. The former was published in the *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* in 1883 and 1884. These acquisitions increased interest in a debate which, by the late 1880s, was to result in Akins being accused of suppression and partiality in the selection of documents relating to Acadians in his *Selections*.

The literary debate in Nova Scotia began with publication of an extract from Abbé Raynal’s *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlement and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* in a newspaper.³⁸

35 Report of the Record Commissioner, *JLA*, 1859, app. 8, p. 67.

36 Report of Committee on Record Commission, *JLA*, 1865, app. 49, p. 1.

37 Distribution list is in Record Commission Book.

38 The newspaper had not been located. The Rev. Andrew Brown has a note on the incident, and the reactions of Bulkeley and Deschamps given later are from his papers. See RG 1, vol. 363, doc. 37, PANS.

Abbé Raynal portrayed the Acadians as living in perfect harmony with nature and themselves and he blamed the French priests and the “Jealousies of nations” as much as the English for the deportation. Although, supposedly, the extracts were inserted “for the information and entertainment of the inhabitants”, two official participants in the deportation, Richard Bulkeley and Isaac Deschamps, took alarm and replied in the newspaper “with great ostentation”. In the February 1790 issue of the *Nova Scotia Magazine*, the same (presumably) extract from Abbé Raynal’s book was published. Bulkeley and Deschamps were as “displeased as if it had been a personal attack”, and composed a reply which was printed in the April issue of the *Nova Scotia Magazine*. They argued that by 1755 “self preservation was necessarily to be consulted” and accused Abbé Raynal of obtaining his information from a “French Acadian, who complains that he had been treated as a rebellious subject, and with such lenity as is not known under the government of France”.³⁹

In his *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, Haliburton used what sources he could locate in Halifax to give an account of the “removal of the neutrals” from Nova Scotia. He found it “very remarkable that there [were] no traces of this important event, to be found among the records in the Secretary’s office at Halifax”. He could not discover whether the correspondence, orders, returns and memorials relating to the removal had been preserved, but he was able to obtain from Boston portions of Colonel Winslow’s Journal. By suggesting that the “particulars of this affair seem to have been carefully concealed, although it is not now easy to assign the reason, unless the parties were, as in truth they might be, ashamed of the transaction”,⁴⁰ he gave credence to later charges of suppression of evidence. Nonetheless, although Haliburton was sympathetic to the Acadians, he argued that if the Acadians

had to lament that they were condemned unheard, that their accusers were also their judges, and that their sentence was disproportioned to their offence; they had also much reason to attribute their misfortunes to the intrigues of their countrymen in Canada, who seduced them from their allegiance to a Government which was disposed to extend to them its protection and regard, and instigated them to a rebellion, which it was easy to foresee would end in their ruin.⁴¹

Haliburton’s account became the mainstay for future accounts and in par-

39 *Nova Scotia Magazine*, April 1790, pp. 288-9.

40 Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, vol. 1, p. 196.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

particular for Longfellow's poem *Evangeline*, published in 1847,⁴² and E. Rameau's *La France Aux Colonies: Etudes Sur Le Développement de la Race Française en Amérique: Acadiens et Canadiens*, published in Paris in 1859. Rameau, who had access to the Paris Archives, considered the conduct of Louis XV's government towards the Acadians perfidious and was little concerned with English conduct.⁴³ Akins, in his copy of Rameau's book, noted carefully his bibliography, presumably for ordering additions to his collection.⁴⁴ Beamish Murdoch in his *History of Nova Scotia or Acadie*, relied primarily on the documents collected by Akins and made few judgements other than "While we see plainly that England could never really control this province while they [the Acadians] remained in it, all our feelings of humanity are affected by the removal itself, and still more by the severity of attendant circumstances".⁴⁵ In contrast, Duncan Campbell, who also relied on the documents collected by Akins, for his *Nova Scotia in its Historical, Mercantile and Industrial Relations*, was prepared to debate the issue. He quoted Abbé Raynal extensively and believed, incorrectly, that Longfellow's *Evangeline* was based upon his book. After disputing the romantic 'state of nature' view of the Acadians, he accepted that the removal was necessary for reasons of state but that they should have been sent to France.⁴⁶

It was during the 1880s that the literary debate became a public issue and Nova Scotians felt compelled to defend the removal. The renewed debate gained its initial impetus from the publication in 1884 of Francis Parkman's *Montcalm and Wolfe*, with a chapter on the "Removal of the Acadians". Parkman consulted a large amount of unpublished material, but for this chapter he relied extensively on Akins' *Selections* and Winslow's Journal.⁴⁷ Parkman took the position that "New England humanitarianism, melting into sentimentality at a tale of woe, has been unjust to its own". He concluded that the agents of the French court had made "some act of force necessary"

42 See Father Alfred Landry. "The Historical Origin of the Poem *Evangeline*", *La Société Historique Acadienne*. vol. III, no. 3 (avril - juin, 1969), pp. 112-7.

43 For example, on p. 55 he declares that "la culpabilité de gouvernement français fut plus grande que celle des Anglais".

44 As with many books in his Library, now in the PANS, Akins checked off the Nova Scotian documents mentioned for the later ordering of transcripts.

45 Beamish Murdoch. *A History of Nova Scotia or Acadie* (Halifax, 1865), vol. II, p. 298.

46 Duncan Campbell. *Nova Scotia in its Historical, Mercantile and Industrial Relations* (Montreal, 1873), p. 131.

47 Mason Wade. *The Journals of Francis Parkman* (New York and London, 1947), vol. II, pp. 547-8. Wade says the "modern view is that Parkman was led astray by insufficient and altered evidence", p. 548 and this accepts Abbé H. R. Casgrain's charges, which I argue in the following paragraphs are baseless..

and “The Government of Louis XV began with making the Acadians its tools and ended with making them its victims”.⁴⁸ Then in 1886, Sir Adams Archibald, president of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, gave two papers on the deportation, with Akins present. He had no reservations as to where the blame should lie. The expulsion was a “painful necessity” consistent with the “maintenance of British power” and the “protection of the British inhabitants”. The “true authors of the tragic event were the French Governors at Quebec and Louisbourg and their agents, lay and clerical, in the Province”.⁴⁹ There followed a letter to the editor debate in the *Morning Herald*, between Archbishop Cornelius O’Brien and Archibald over the moral issue in this “eminently the age of apologies”.⁵⁰ The *Presbyterian Witness*, of course, had to answer the Archbishop, which it did by supporting Archibald and taking the opportunity to accuse the Archbishop of “white washing” Vatican history in his *After Weary Hours*, published the previous year and completely unrelated to the deportation.⁵¹

In 1887, Abbé H. R. Casgrain, a professor at Laval University, published his *Un Pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline*, in part a travel journal, but also a history of the Acadians. After spending the winter of 1887-88 in London examining the material at the Public Record Office and the British Museum, Casgrain had come to the conclusion that

Les Choix des Documents publiés à Halifax a été évidemment fait en vue de justifier le gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Ecosse de la déportation des Acadiens. Pour cela on a éliminé systématiquement et laissé dans l'ombre les pièces les plus compromettantes, celles qui pouvaient le mieux établir les droits des Acadiens. Qu'on remarque bien que le compilateur [Akins] de ce volume n'a pas le droit de plaider ignorance, car il indique lui-même en plusieurs endroits qu'il a étudié les pièces officielles du *Public Record Office*, afin de les confronter avec celles d'Halifax.⁵²

Casgrain made his charges in a paper given at the Royal Society of Canada in May 1888. He argued that the British, and particularly Halifax officialdom, had been perfidious and that Francis Parkman had attempted to wash away

48 Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (Boston, 1897 ed.), p. 284.

49 Sir Adams G. Archibald, “The Expulsion of the Acadians, Part II”, *Collections*, vol. V, pp. 94-5.

50 C. O'Brien, Archbishop of Halifax to *Morning Herald*, 6 November 1886.

51 *Presbyterian Witness* (Halifax), 13 November 1886.

52 L'Abbé H. R. Casgrain, “Eclairissements sur la question acadienne”, *Proceedings and Transactions of Royal Society of Canada for the year 1888*, vol. VI, section 1, p. 24.

the sin (La tache) history had inflicted on his compatriots. “Il n’est pas de pire faute que celle de vouloir excuser ce qui n’est pas excusable”. He further charged that the Nova Scotia Historical Society, in printing “Judge Morris’ Remarks Concerning the Removal of the Acadians” in Volume II of its *Collections*, had garbled (a tronquée) it and without a shadow of a doubt (dans l’ombre) had left out all that was compromising.⁵³ Casgrain’s charges were immediately replied to by the *Nova Scotian* in good newspaper style: “Of course the aspersions on the historical integrity of the venerable Dr. Akins can only amuse the people of the province where his unblemished character is so well known”.⁵⁴

The year following the publication of Murdoch’s *History*, Rameau arrived in Halifax, where Murdoch had obtained permission for him to consult the government archives. Whether Akins was following the very restrictive policy of the old State Paper Office as described by Brodhead, or was just being difficult, he would not allow Rameau to copy any documents nor even to sit down and he had him watched by clerks.⁵⁵ Akins apparently did not meet Rameau and Murdoch acted as the intermediary. Rameau’s aim in coming to Halifax was to obtain information for his *Une Colonie Féodale en Amérique*. The first volume covering the period 1604-1710 appeared in 1877 and in 1889 he published a two volume edition for the period 1604-1881. This was a scholarly and comprehensive study of the Acadians. He had consulted and made extensive reference to a wide range of published and unpublished documentation and Casgrain had provided him with transcripts he had made in London. Rameau considered the deportation a crime and condemned Lawrence and “ses satellites”.⁵⁶ Akins in his *Selections* had put in an editorial note on the question of the oath of allegiance and had concluded that “no qualified oath of allegiance” had ever been given by a governor or authorized by the British government.⁵⁷ Although Rameau challenged this interpretation, nowhere did he charge Akins with the suppression of evidence as Casgrain had done. He quoted Haliburton on the “Mystère des Archives d’Halifax” and argued that the absence of documentation from the end of August to the end of October 1755 was the result of Lawrence and others covering their speculation in Acadian cattle.⁵⁸

53 *Ibid.*, p. 50 and fn. 1, p. 48.

54 *Nova Scotian*, 22 June 1889.

55 For letters relating to Rameau’s visit, see MG 1, vol. 436, folder 5, PANS. It may be unwise to read too much into the difficulties Rameau had. Akins was away and the clerks may have been over zealous.

56 Rameau de Saint-Père, *Une Colonie Féodale en Amérique: L’Acadie (1604-1881)* (Paris, 1889), vol. II, p. 175.

57 *Selections*, fn., pp. 263-6.

58 Rameau de Saint-Père, *Une Colonie Féodale en Amérique*, vol. II, pp. 163-6.

The first literary reply to Casgrain's charges came from Professor H. Y. Hind in a paper to the Nova Scotia Historical Society on 10 December 1889. He considered these accusations a "matter of the highest importance in connection with the honour and credit of Nova Scotia and the Record Commissioner" and until the matter was cleared up "it was useless to talk of the history of this country as derived from Nova Scotian records".⁵⁹ Hind disposed of the charge against the Society by correctly pointing out that the last paragraph of "Judge Morris' Remarks on Removal of the Acadians" belonged to another document and had been inserted by mistake.⁶⁰ Hind also attacked Casgrain's use of evidence and challenged the thesis that the Acadians and their priests had been neutral. After his paper, the Society passed a resolution that it had "entire confidence in the integrity of Dr. Akins our excellent record commissioner. We know him to be incapable of suppressing or mutilating any public document, and we hereby declare the charges against him to be utterly unfounded".⁶¹

Casgrain's rejoinder came in a letter to the *Morning Herald* in April 1890, where, after renewing his charges against Akins, he affirmed that "the compiler himself makes so secret of the fact that he not only enjoyed the facilities for studying the official documents in London, but took advantage of them? [sic]" to omit the most compromising documents.⁶² Casgrain assumed that Akins had been in London from a mistaken reading of the preface to the *Selections*, and because the volume of the *Selections* had been published under the authority of the Nova Scotia government, he suggested that there should be a "judicial enquiry into the subject". Akins replied in a letter a few days later.⁶³ He pointed out that he had never been to London and therefore had been at the mercy of his copyists. A greater part of the documents that Casgrain claimed were deliberately omitted were "enclosures in despatches from the governors at Annapolis to England, which were never sent from Annapolis to Halifax" at the time the government was transferred in 1749. Akins simply did not know of their existence in 1869. Because of financial restraints on the size of the volume, he had made abstracts of a number of documents, but he pointed out that there were documents in his *Selections* that were favourable to the Acadians. In fact, the charges levelled

59 Report of Meeting in the *Morning Herald*, 11 December 1889.

60 What most likely happened is that Tobin, when transcribing for Akins in the British Museum, had gotten mixed up in his copying, as the incorrect paragraphs are the last paragraphs of the next paper in the series, also by Morris and entitled "Causes of the War in 1755". Casgrain should have noted this when using the originals in the British Museum and so should the Society before publishing an obvious non-sequence in text.

61 Minutes, Nova Scotia Historical Society, 10 December 1889, MG 20, vol. 211, PANS.

62 *Morning Herald*, 4 April 1890.

63 *Ibid.*, 12 April 1890.

at Akins were completely baseless, as Akins had published, mostly in their entirety, all the documents relating to the Acadians in his possession in 1869.⁶⁴ As he located new sources of documents after 1869, he made arrangements for transcripts as his finances would allow.

Akins' explanation should have ended this rather heated debate over the *Selections*. However, writers after his death continued to charge Akins, if not with outright suppression of evidence, at least with partiality, in his selection of the documents. Edouard Richard in his *Acadia: Missing Links of a Lost Chapter in American History*, published in 1895, did not "hesitate to affirm that the documents have been selected with the greatest partiality, and with the purpose, poorly disguised in the very preface, of getting together such papers as might justify the deportation of the Acadians".⁶⁵ Arthur Doughty in his *The Acadian Exiles* published in 1916 considered the *Selections* "the most valuable" collection of relative documents but the "editor has taken many liberties with his texts".⁶⁶ Doughty did not specify what liberties Akins had taken but presumably he was writing euphemistically of suppression of evidence. The latest writer to question the integrity of Akins has been Naomi Griffiths in her "The Acadian Deportation: A Study in Historiography and Nationalism". She charges that "It is quite certain this selection of documents by Akins is a most arbitrary one". But she provides no evidence other than Doughty's statement quoted above.⁶⁷

Past and contemporary accusers of Akins have seemed unable to accept that Akins did select in 1869, as he stated in his preface, "all documents in possession of the government of this province that could in any way throw light on the history and conduct of the French inhabitants of Nova Scotia, from their first coming under British rule, until their final removal from the country". Akins was the first to realize that his selection was incomplete and made strenuous efforts to obtain transcripts of relevant documents as he became aware of them. It was Akins who provided the transcripts from the Andrew Brown collection of manuscripts for publication in 1881 by the Nova

64 I have not checked all the documents in the *Selections* with the originals, but of those checked there are no mistakes nor has anyone else since their publication found any mistakes. When Akins did not include the whole document, he so noted and none of the deletions checked seem to me to substantiate the charges. The deletions are mostly of wordy instructions. The main charge against Akins was one of omission which has been interpreted by later writers without investigation as "partiality", "suppression of evidence", etc.

65 Edouard Richard, *Acadia: Missing Links of a Lost Chapter in American History* (Montreal, 1895), p. 13.

66 Arthur Doughty, *The Acadian Exiles* (Toronto, 1916), p. 167.

67 Naomi E. J. Griffiths, "The Acadian Deportation: A Study in Historiography and Nationalism" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1957), p. 129.

Scotia Historical Society. These included an annotation by Brown that he knew of “no act equally reprehensible as the Acadian removal, that can be laid to the charge of the French nation. In their colonies nothing was ever done that approaches it in cruelty and atrociousness”.⁶⁸ If Akins had wished to suppress these remarks, he could have done so, but he ensured their publication. As he made quite clear in his preface, Akins did consider that the deportation was justified, but he did not deliberately suppress any evidence in his possession, then or later.

When Akins died on 6 May 1891, he left an estate of \$50,000 and two major collections of rare books. In 1872, Akins had presented 152 volumes of his collection of 15th and 16th century books to King’s College, Windsor and he bequeathed another 250 volumes. It was one of the rarest collections of incunabula (books printed earlier than 1501) in North America.⁶⁹ The collection of books, pamphlets and manuscripts, kept separately at his house in Halifax and relating to British North America, was left to Sir A. G. Archibald, Dr. David Allison and J. J. Stewart, in trust for the use and benefit of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, so long as that Society should continue to exist and provide proper accommodation. This rare, and at the time, unique, collection was made accessible to the public through the Librarian of the Legislative Library until 1931, when custody of the collection was transferred to the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. *A Catalogue of the Akins Collection of Books and Pamphlets* was compiled as the first publication of the Public Archives in 1933. The rarity and extent of Atkins’ bequests ensure that he must rank as by far the foremost bibliophile of his generation in British North America. At the time of his death, a number of his acquisitions were probably not available anywhere else in North America.

Akins maintained a close association with King’s College at Windsor. He was awarded DCL *honoris causa* by the college in 1865. In the previous year, he had established the King’s College Historical Prize fund to be devoted annually to the best history of some one or more counties of Nova Scotia. His intention was to encourage the writing of local history before “the local traditions among the people relating to the commencement and progress of settlements” were lost in posterity.⁷⁰ He believed that if stimulated by a small prize of \$30, many young Nova Scotians would devote time to “collecting material for local history and biography thus forming valuable groundwork for the more general historian of a future day”. Before his death, prizes

68 *Collections*, vol. II, p. 150.

69 See Harry Piers’ Historical Introduction to his *Catalogue of the Library of King’s College, Windsor, Nova Scotia with Occasional Annotations* (Halifax, N.S., 1893), p. xiii.

70 As quoted in F. W. Vroom, “The Akins Historical Prize Essay, King’s College”, *Collections*, vol. 21, p. 38.

had been awarded for the histories of 14 counties.⁷¹ These were the works of local historians who laboured under many disadvantages. It took Isaiah W. Wilson twenty-six years to write his history of Digby County and he had to travel hundreds of miles on foot, including two walks to Halifax to obtain information.⁷²

Akins believed that “the public documents of a country are its true history and nothing else”.⁷³ Although he did not achieve his ambition of establishing a “public records office”,⁷⁴ during his 34 year tenure as Record Commissioner he saved some thousands of documents of the public records of Nova Scotia from almost certain destruction and decomposition. He also obtained transcripts of many hundreds, and even with the availability of microfilm copies of the originals, these transcripts are in constant use and are a tribute to his efforts in arranging and cataloguing. The most important documents he bound and catalogued in 544 volumes. Others such as marriage licences, road and bridge papers, court records and land grant papers he sorted and put in boxes for safekeeping and use by government departments. Akins was truly a contributor to what D. C. Harvey called the intellectual awakening of Nova Scotia. What Haliburton gave to literature and Howe to politics, Akins gave to antiquarianism and bequeathed to Nova Scotians a collection of historical records and books unrivalled in British North America.

71 For the list of essays before and after Akins' death see Marion Gilroy, “The County Histories of Nova Scotia”, *Public Affairs*, vol. II, no. 1 (August, 1933), pp. 31-3.

72 Isaiah W. Wilson, *A Geography and History of the County of Digby, Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1900), Preface, p. v.

73 Akins to Brymner, 4 June 1883, *op. cit.*

74 *Ibid.*