

Canadian History Textbooks and the Maritimes

W. G. Godfrey

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Reviews/Revue

Canadian History Textbooks and the Maritimes

As anyone attempting to publish a book realizes, specialized studies today are risky and difficult to sell while textbooks, in search of that lucrative introductory Canadian survey market, continue to emerge or re-emerge. Amidst a barrage of publicity and publisher solicitation the latest entry joins the list: J.L. Finlay and D.N. Sprague's *The Structure of Canadian History* (Scarborough, Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1979). It comes at an appropriate time since over the last few years publishers have largely contented themselves with only slightly revised editions of old favourites or the faithful flogging of traditional textbooks. What appears to be badly needed is a truly fresh synthesis of the substantial research of the past decade. Historical students of the Maritimes naturally hope their recent work will not pass unnoticed, that what has been described as "a real revival of Atlantic culture" and growth of self-confidence will be noted,¹ and that the frequent "Neglect and stereotyping" of the region might be balanced or at least questioned.²

A recent study of textbooks in use at the elementary and high school levels argued that "non-Atlantic writers", typically Ontarian, decide "which aspects of Atlantic life merit inclusion in the study of Canada". Hence, the "image that Atlantic students get of themselves becomes a part of the self-fulfilling prophecy — the region and its inhabitants are the down-at-the-heels relatives of an affluent family resident in Upper Canada or 'out west'".³ Most university level textbooks appear guilty of the same shortcomings. Although the Charlottetown birthplace of Edgar McInnis should have equipped him with the special insight allegedly lacking in the outsiders, his *Canada: A Political and Social History* (Toronto and Montreal, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969 ed.) is typical of the traditional approach. McInnis quickly established the geographic and population limitations of the region and then proceeded to comment, consistently and briefly, on its constant lag or backwardness. Immigration after 1815 was "only a trickle" (p. 232) compared to the St. Lawrence tide; political life in the 1830s "ranged from dull to disorderly" (p. 248); in crucial federal elections, such as 1891, the region was held "by pressure and patronage" (p. 426); while the rest of the country expanded under Laurier, the Maritimes "remained almost stationary" (p. 450). In the 1930s the region could at least be thankful that "having soared less high than the other sections in prosperity, [it] had less far to fall in adversity" (p. 527). More recently, in *The Pelican History of Canada* (London, Penguin Books, 1976 ed.) Kenneth McNaught, perhaps aware of McInnis' journey down the road, continued in the same vein, remarking that "men, in fact, . . .

1 A.B. Hodgetts and Paul Gallagher, *Teaching Canada for the '80s* (Toronto, 1978), p. vi.

2 See E.R. Forbes, "In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900-1967", *Acadiensis*, VIII (Autumn 1978), p. 8.

3 Paul Robinson, *Where Our Survival Lies: Students and Textbooks in Atlantic Canada* (Halifax, 1979), pp. 57, 71.

were the most significant exports of a region whose own economic development was to be erratic in the extreme" (p. 59). With the stage set in this way, we are not surprised to read about the depression ravaged Maritimes of the 1880s, and the region's failure to develop industries other than Cape Breton steel in the Laurier era while "practically none of the immigrants tarried in the Maritimes" (pp. 181, 198-9). Atlantic Canada remained in its "economic trough" (p. 245) in the 1920s, totally unprepared for the depression, and "few benefits from the prosperity of the fifties were felt in the Maritimes" (p. 293).

Now there are certainly elements of truth in all this but the apparent problems, and more importantly the passive, dare I say innately conservative, Maritime response deserves closer scrutiny and explanation. Thus it is disconcerting to turn to a recently written textbook such as J.L. Finlay's *Canada in the North Atlantic Triangle: Two Centuries of Social Change* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1975) and to discover that the 1920s, a decade which has now been subjected to considerable study and reinterpretation, reveal yet again a Maritimes "conservatism that still remains true today" (p. 294). This same writer links up with D.N. Sprague in *The Structure of Canadian History* where they treat the Maritime Rights movement, Ernie Forbes *au contraire*, under the heading "Nostalgia in the Maritimes", passing quickly to the Prairies where "by contrast, the reform spirit was forward looking" (pp. 252-4).

The tendency to pass over quickly to the real or aspiring heartland is all too apparent, even in an earlier time period when the Atlantic colonies were considerably more important. To be sure, a number of the older textbooks do provide some detail concerning early Acadian society and the problems leading up to the deportation. But because Acadia was "A Neglected Outpost" and "the stepchild of French colonial policy",⁴ a region with a "peculiar and checkered history" settled by only "a handful of French peasants",⁵ its treatment is usually truncated. Finlay made it quite clear in *Canada and the North Atlantic Triangle* that Acadia "was never important in the eyes of the administrators in France" and consequently is "passed over in this survey" (p. 46). In *The Structure of Canadian History* the region is given more attention but certainly it does not match the authors' perceptive and interesting handling of New France (pp. 56, 63). After the deportation the Acadians vanish from almost all textbooks, although Paul Cornell, no doubt reflecting his Acadia University teaching years, provided (pp. 334-5) at least a brief summary of the Acadian renaissance in *Canada: Unity in Diversity* (Toronto and Montreal, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967). Given the comments of McNaught on the Acadians perhaps it is better to be neglected. In *The Pelican History of Canada* he has 10,000 of them crowded into the Annapolis Valley prior to the deportation, and some of them returning to the valley "to become a permanent French-

4 McInnis, *Canada*, p. 61.

5 W.L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1963), pp. 29, 40.

speaking enclave in Nova Scotia". Today, Acadians in New Brunswick might be surprised to learn, they along with their cousins in Nova Scotia "are one of the principal supports of a movement to unite the Canadian Atlantic provinces politically" (pp. 38-9).

Greater progress has been made in treating the Loyalist influence. While McNaught credited them with a "definitive" impact throughout the region (p. 59) and W.L. Morton in *The Kingdom of Canada* argued that they "changed the social character as well as the political views of the Province [of Nova Scotia]" (p. 178), there have been some doubters. Brebner maintained that even in colonies where they were a minority they had a substantial influence, but his discussions of the "loyalist tradition" in *Canada: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1970 ed.) concentrated on New Brunswick (pp. 107, 197). With predictable bluntness, Arthur Lower pointed out in *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1977 ed.) that "Nova Scotia cannot be put down as a Loyalist province" in the face of a Loyalist exodus from the colony and emphasized New Brunswick's position as "the most conspicuously Loyalist province in Canada" (pp. 108-9, 120). In a deft handling of the "Situational and Personal" nature of Loyalism, Finlay and Sprague place the discussion in a broader and potentially more illuminating context. To them, the significance of the Loyalist migrations can only be understood by greater precision in our definition of Loyalism: "Loyalist is not sufficient, by itself; it only denotes the position chosen, not the reasons for taking it". In the final analysis traditional labels such as liberal and conservative are not all that helpful: "It may be that the opposing sides are more comprehensible from the perspective of temperament rather than from the standpoint of ideology" (pp. 74-8).

"Golden Ages" are always tempting targets and that of the Maritimes has come under increasing fire. McInnis reasoned that while by the 1850s "A balance had been struck between lumbering and fishing and shipping, which admirably suited the position and resources of the eastern provinces", there were already economic changes occurring which "raised serious questions about the future prospects of the provinces" (pp. 301-2). To Brebner, in an all too cryptic comment, there was an awareness of an emerging economic vulnerability but only, by way of response, a psychological compensation. "Maritime moral superiority towards 'Canadien' and Canadian alike", he suggested, "grew in proportion to Maritime material inferiority, a cover for uneasiness" (p. 282). Finlay and Sprague have gone much further. Although unwilling to categorize one of the pillars of New Brunswick prosperity — the timber trade — as an "unmitigated disaster", they came very close to this position. Carefully balancing the usual emphasis on central Canadian lumbering development, they demonstrated, particularly in New Brunswick, its "ephemeral" benefits, its retardation of agricultural growth, and the drain off of profits by "firms of foreigners". This situation persisted into the 1850s and 1860s as too many Maritimers

assumed the age of wooden sailing ships would continue and too many of the talented, Samuel Cunard and Abraham Gesner for example, were drawn elsewhere. "In the heyday of the schooner, as in the happy time of timber, there was too little willingness to diversify" (pp. 88-91, 142-4). T.W. Acheson's recent examination of Saint John has revealed the frustration of those willing to diversify and provides a useful amplification of the basic point made by Sprague and Finlay.⁶ Indirectly his findings confirm the sensitivity and insight with which they have handled this particular period.

Sensitivity, insight and indeed any interest in the Maritimes vanish when Sprague and Finlay, along with other historians, move into the period after 1900. As already indicated, the laggard, the poor cousin, the out-of-step imagery is used again and again, usually in a brief one-liner but sometimes, if more comic relief from the central Canadian drama is needed, in an entire paragraph. To be sure, *The Structure of Canadian History* devotes more space than this to the Maritime Rights movement, but there is no scholarly balance or assessment of differing interpretations. George Rawlyk's imaginative "paranoid style" argument is embraced and applied, and the movement portrayed as lacking a program or remedy for basic problems and achieving little (pp. 252-3). This might very well be correct but surely some attention should be paid to the quite different portrayal offered by Forbes in several articles and a recent book.⁷ This shortcoming underlines the basic problem with Finlay and Sprague's work, at least from the Maritimes vantage point. While older textbook treatments might be forgiven their handling of the Atlantic region, given the availability of only a limited number of worthwhile articles and studies, modern textbook writers have considerably more material to draw on. In *Acadiensis* alone, by my rough count, during its short history 33 pre-Confederation articles, 28 post-Confederation, and 10 straddlers have appeared. Yet this and other recent work on the region rarely surfaces in, or shapes, their study. Although well-written and at times imaginative and perceptive, Finlay and Sprague's textbook fails to offer the thoughtful synthesis of recent research on the Maritimes which is overdue. Style and insight can carry a work only so far; they must be balanced by a knowledgeable awareness and consideration of significant reinterpretations.

In short, the great Canadian textbook for the eighties has not yet arrived, but will it ever? Given recent comments on the "fragmentation" of the profession, the "narrowing of horizons and limiting of identities", perhaps as has been suggested "academic historians" are now content "to leave grand syntheses to jour-

6 T.W. Acheson, "The Great Merchant and Economic Development in St. John 1820-1850", *Acadiensis*, VIII (Spring 1979), pp. 3-27.

7 Admittedly E.R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal, 1978) might have appeared too late for them to profit from it. But several of Forbes' articles were available; for example, "In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography" and "The Origins of the Maritime Rights Movement", *Acadiensis*, V (Autumn 1975), pp. 55-66.

nalists or old age”.⁸ Despite the limitations of Finlay and Sprague’s venture, possibly they should be applauded for attempting what fewer and fewer would risk. The grouping and subgrouping of urban, ethnic, minority, majority, social, intellectual, labour, business, and regional historians is already producing calls for greater integration in the face of disintegration, and mention of the “common Canadian experience”.⁹ As a first step a textbook treatment of the Maritimes, incorporating recent work, might provide an opportunity to examine Atlantic regionalism and yet contribute to the comparative integration of all regions and groups now required. Realistically, synthesis at a restricted level, if carried out with an awareness of the broader contexts, may be the most direct route to the national synthesis.

W.G. GODFREY

No Longer Neglected: A Decade of Writing Concerning the Native Peoples of the Maritimes

Until recently the public and the scholarly community had to rely for information concerning the native peoples of the Maritimes on the works of two ethnohistorians, an ethnographer, and a social anthropologist. Unfortunately, the most popular of these works was in many respects the least accurate. Wilson D. Wallis and Ruth S. Wallis combined information from three centuries in their *Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1955) to present a distorted image of a people. The inability to know the social fabric of Micmac life at any point in history contributed to the impression that native people are unchanging and have non-adaptive cultures. A better introduction to the native people of the region is A.G. Bailey’s *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures 1604-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization* (1937; reprinted Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969), although it deals with a restricted problem and time period and until its reissue in 1969 it was generally unavailable. Even less accessible was Bernard G. Hoffman’s “Historical Ethnography of the Micmac of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” (PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1955), which has become the standard starting point for reconstructions of the

8 See Robert Bothwell and David J. Bercuson, “The *Canadian Historical Review* and the State of the Profession: a View on our Sixtieth Birthday”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LXI (1980), pp. 1-2; Desmond Morton, “History and Nationality in Canada: Variations on an Old Theme”, *Historical Papers* (1979), p. 7.

9 Morton, “History and Nationality”, pp. 8-9.