

History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964

Ian McKay

Volume 22, Number 2, Spring 1993

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad22_2art06

[See table of contents](#)

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

McKay, I. (1993). History and the Tourist Gaze:: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964. *Acadiensis*, 22(2), 102–138.

IAN McKAY

History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964

IN JUNE 1961 WILL R. BIRD sounded like a man besieged. Never since becoming chairman of the Historic Sites Advisory Council in 1949 had he been busier. Every day brought phone calls, visits, meetings. Activists in Parrsboro wanted a plaque for the site of the first “air mail” flight; Bird was doubtful, and suggested they reconstruct a nearby blockhouse instead. In Joggins he conferred with “some of the leading citizens” about honouring “King” Seaman, a legendary entrepreneur; in Amherst, he promised the tourist committee of the board of trade that plaques would be coming in the next year; requests rolled in from Yarmouth and Shelburne, Baddeck and Milton, Sherbrooke and Port Wallis, Marble Mountain and the Ovens: he found it overwhelming. “It is little more than six weeks since our Annual Meeting”, he exclaimed in a letter to Premier Robert Stanfield, “and already I have half an agenda for May 1962. I have spoken at ten widely different meetings this spring and all want the same topic — historic Nova Scotia. History has become almost a mania in some communities, who feel they can attract tourists if their history is made known”.¹

Bird’s description has a contemporary ring. One aspect of our present condition of postmodernity — that is, the experience of a capitalist modernity transformed by globalization, cybernetics and the fragmentation of most traditional systems of meaning — is the “mode retro”. Images of the past are used to promote everything from political parties to breakfast cereals: this “flourishing” of the past appears as an immense catalogue of arresting images. Vivid simulacra — perfect copies of non-existent originals — call up times past; theme parks, historical reconstructions,

1 W.R. Bird to R.L. Stanfield, 30 June 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS]. My thanks go to my Queen’s University graduate seminar on the State and Civil Society in Twentieth Century Canada, to David Frank who commented on this paper when it was first presented to the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference in Orono in 1990, to Rosemary Ommer at Memorial, to George Rawlyk at Queen’s and Suzanne Morton at McGill University, and to the four anonymous readers at *Acadiensis*, for their criticisms and suggestions.

Ian McKay, “History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964”, *Acadiensis*, XXII, 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 102-138.

historically “themed” community events, surround us as never before. At the same time, this efflorescence of a kind of history is combined with the apparent decline of the past as an ethico-political inspiration and as a temporal domain known accurately and in detail. As Cornelius Castoriadis observes, “It is a matter of the co-existence of hyper-information with essential ignorance and indifference. The gathering of information and objects, never before practiced to this degree, goes hand in hand with the neutralization of the past: an object of knowledge for some, of tourist curiosity or a *hobby* for others, the past is a source and root for no one.... Neither ‘traditionalist’, nor creative and revolutionary (despite the stories it tells on this subject), the epoch lives its relation to the past in a manner which does, as such, represent a historical innovation: of the most perfect exteriority”.² A postmodern incredulity towards established “metanarratives” — secular and religious historical accounts of human origins, purposes, and destinies — is combined with a deep nostalgia for times past, as if in compensation for the chaotic depthlessness of contemporary life.³ “Where there was active historicity there is now decoration and display”, declares Patrick Wright in his brilliant *On Living In An Old Country*; “in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in historical fancy dress”.⁴ Capitalist postmodernity, with profit-making as its volatile nucleus, in eroding all the traditional sources of the self — family, religion, craft, community — also menaces any relationship (other than the casually exploitive) with the past. We are left only with the Upper Clements Theme Park, wherein the Halifax Explosion is an arcade oddity and the mines provide local colour for a roller-coaster.

- 2 Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Crisis of Western Societies”, *Telos*, no. 53 (Fall 1982), pp. 26-7.
- 3 J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester, 1984); for a predictable if useful critique, see Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (London, 1990).
- 4 Patrick Wright, *On Living In An Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1985). Other critical analyses of the “modern past” include Richard Johnson *et al.*, *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics* (London, 1982); David Horne, *The Great Museum: The Re-presentation of History* (London and Sydney, 1984); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1984); Susan Porter Benson *et al.*, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia, 1986); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987). For more sympathetic assessments of the phenomenon, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985); Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville, 1984). Both sides are well represented in Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, eds., *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester and New York, 1989). Important new work on “memory” and the reception of history points beyond the debate between “debunkers” and “apologists”: see Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, 1990); David Thelen, *Memory and American History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990); and Carolyn Steedman, “True Romances”, in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. I (London and New York, 1989), pp. 26-35. Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988) discusses the most wrenching of European debates over the ways in which states and historians present the past; Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Columbian Andes* (Cambridge, 1990) discusses the uses of the past by natives and colonizers in Latin America.

Perceptive as they may often be, however, such widely shared critiques of history-as-commodity and nostalgia-as-ideology suggest the need for more empirical exploration of how history-making proceeded before the time of post-modernity and the “mode retro”. Without such historical exploration, critics of post-modernity incur the risks of their own kind of nostalgia — nostalgia for a lost Golden Age of active historicity, perhaps — and of misdiagnosis, attributing to a recent “postmodernity” patterns which go back much further in time. This article focuses on the public commemoration of the Nova Scotia past and demonstrates that, from the 1930s on, such commemoration has been strongly influenced by tourism. In the interwar period, an official “mnemonics” — an art of prompting and constructing memories, including memories of events which may never in fact have occurred — has been part of the functioning of the state in Nova Scotia. From the outset this was designed in large measure for tourists. The “exteriority” of which Castoriadis complains, then, is no recent “postmodern” phenomenon; the idea of “cashing in on antiquity”, and a sense of the past as an “asset”, a “mine” and a “resource”, can be traced back to the 1930s. It was for the Tourist Gaze — that is, not just what actual tourists looked at, but what any *potential* tourist might find “camera-worthy” and interesting — that much of what came to be conceptualized as the Nova Scotia Heritage was constructed. The mnemonic apparatus was never *simply* the outcome of purely instrumental considerations on the part of the revenue-seeking state. Modern cognitive psychology and biology suggest that memory is “far more decisively an affair of construction than one of mere reproduction”⁵; in the Nova Scotia case, a carefully orchestrated promotion of the province based on an imagined Golden Age spoke (and still speaks) eloquently to a dependent society confronting the massive cultural changes incorporated in “modernity”. For individual Nova Scotians experiencing the wrench of 20th-century modernity, antimodernist commemorations of an imagined Golden Age were much more than attractions to be shrewdly marketed to tourists (although they were also clearly that). The need to understand one’s own life as a “coherent narrative” connected to the larger social story of “our people” is widely shared by individuals in the west: contrary to post-structuralist interpretations of history, human experience, at both an individual and social level, has a narrative character, and consequently so do most attempts to portray it.⁶ The story of Nova Scotia’s Golden Age, as constructed by bureaucrats and promoters in the 20th century, was a coherent narrative with a clear sense of beginning and ending, central characters and peripheral figures, heroes and villains. An elaborate mnemonic web of mansions and museums, plaques and forts, road signs and historical romances was woven by the provincial state and its organic intellectuals, partly to please tourists and partly in response to a public hungry for a reassuring “presence of the past”. Both motivations were conducive to a Golden Age narrative — a narrative which

5 Frederick C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, cited in David Thelen, “Introduction”, *Memory and American History*, p. ix.

6 I am following here the position of David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1986).

acquired the cumulative force of truth, as one generation's invented tradition became the next generation's commonsense reality. Bird's words in 1961 have a contemporary ring because what he was describing — the scramble for historical significance in the interests of tourism — already contains in nucleus that exterior, calculating and fragmented approach to the past we often mistakenly consider peculiar to our own postmodern moment.

"Nova Scotians", W.R. Bird remarked to Premier Robert Stanfield in 1958, "are becoming the most history-conscious people in Canada".⁷ He intensified that statement a year later: "Nova Scotia is almost feverish with desire to win attention to matters historical".⁸ This article will trace the gradual development of this fever for "matters historical" first by documenting the emergence of a new kind of public history since 1935, second by exploring demands for a new kind of history and how this was conceptualized by two key intellectuals, Bird and Thomas Raddall, and third by exploring the ways in which their romantic narrative of Nova Scotia was incorporated into the activities of the Historic Sites Advisory Council from 1949 to 1964.

The 1930s marked an important watershed in the state's transformation of history in the public sphere. From 1870 to 1917 there was minimal state involvement in the public past: "public" commemoration was generally "privately" organized within the realm of civil society (although there were episodic exceptions to the rule at Grand Pré and Fortress Louisbourg). There effectively was no state mnemonic apparatus: there were cemeteries and patriotic monuments, but no official network of words and things through which a consistent set of "memories" of the past could be constructed, preserved and popularized. A progressive narrative, which traced upward advance from the "pioneers" to today, was used to good effect in many local histories. The most impressive attempt to exploit history in the interests of tourism was the Dominion Atlantic Railway's "Evangeline" promotion, in which American tourists were enticed to the Annapolis Valley with images of Longfellow's imaginary heroine (commemorated in a park after 1917), and by the quintessentially antimodern appeal of an unspoiled region of romance. The most memorable attempts at federal official commemoration were those of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board and the Dominion Parks Branch respectively, the first creating a set of plaques developing a colony-to-nation public narrative and the second developing Fort Anne at Annapolis Royal. The provincial government's most important initiative was the opening of the Public Archives building in 1931. In the 1920s there were at least two significant anticipations of the later impact of the Tourist Gaze on public history. The 1923 Pictou County pageant to commemorate the *Hector's* 150th anniversary, partly funded by the provincial state, entailed extravagant re-creations and historical re-construction: the day of commemoration was even moved from 15 September (when the good vessel had actually landed) to 15 July for the tourists' convenience. Second, as early as 1930,

7 Bird to Stanfield, 3 September 1958, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

8 Bird to Stanfield, 22 April 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

and in the absence of authoritative evidence, the province had sought to make John Cabot a Nova Scotian hero by attaching his name to the new tourist trail in Cape Breton. What had earlier been *ad hoc* acts of official commemoration became, after 1935, a consistent policy at both levels of the state of developing “historical resources” in the interests of promoting tourism.⁹

In the 1930s the encouragement of tourism became a central consideration of state policy under Premier Angus L. Macdonald. The impact of the “tourism state” on history was startling. The “Order of the Good Time”, invented in 1935, provides the clearest instance of the invention of a new tradition in the interests of tourism. The Order “historicized” the tourist’s experience by associating the province with “L’ordre du bon temps” of 17th-century Port Royal. (Everyone kept calling it the “Order of Good Cheer”, because “Order of the Good Time” was hardly idiomatic — although “Cheer” was avoided by some because the word carried unwelcome alcoholic connotations).¹⁰ Visitors who stayed at least 10 days in the province were automatically qualified to join an Order supposedly designed to encourage “the maintenance of good fellowship amongst our summer visitors”.¹¹ In return for filling out a registration card, a tourist received a handsome certificate and a membership card. These served a practical purpose — if stopped by the police, the motoring tourist could avoid paying a fine by flourishing such proof of special status¹² — but the main point of the exercise was to give tourists something

9 This paragraph summarizes pre-1935 developments which merit more detailed treatment elsewhere. For commemoration, historic sites and tourism in this period consult: F.H.H. Williamson, “Report on Investigation of Historic Sites in Maritime Provinces”, Memorandum, n.d. (copy), D.C. Harvey Papers, PANS; see also A.J.B. Johnston, “Preserving History: The Commemoration of 18th Century Louisbourg, 1895-1940”, *Acadiensis*, XII, 2 (Spring 1983) pp. 53-80; M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto, 1989); for examples of “progressivism” in local history, consult especially Duncan Campbell, *Nova Scotia in its Historical, Mercantile and Industrial Relations* (Montreal, 1873); George Patterson, *A History of the County of Pictou, Nova Scotia* (Montreal, 1877); M.B. DesBrisay, *History of the County of Lunenburg* (Toronto, second edition, 1895); R.R. McLeod, *Markland or Nova Scotia: Its History, Natural Resources and Native Beauties* (n.p., 1903); on the Hector celebrations, see especially Michael Boudreau, “Ship of Dreams”, *New Maritimes*, XI, 1 (September-October 1992), pp. 6-15; on Cabot’s uncertain status as a Nova Scotian hero, see D.C. Harvey to A.S. MacMillan, 8 May 1935, Harvey Papers, MG1, Box 1783, f.1/3, PANS; *The Historical Atlas of Canada, I: From the Beginnings to 1800* (Toronto, 1987), Plate 19, as compared with R.A. Skelton, “Cabot, John”, in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, I (Toronto, 1967), p.150; for the Cabot Trail, consult A.S. MacMillan, “A Dream Come True: Story of the Development of the Tourist Industry in Northern Inverness and Victoria Counties”, n.d. [1952], in Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 967, f. 11-1, PANS. See also Ian McKay, *Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954*, *Acadiensis*, XXI, 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 5-47.

10 Bird to A.A. Dunphy, 14 July 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS

11 Tourism Report, *Journals of the House of Assembly, Nova Scotia [JHA]* (1937), p. 23. In 1941, the period was shortened to seven days: *JHA* (1942), p. 30.

12 Members of the Order were to receive “Special Attention By Hotel Men”, “Special Attention By Service Stations and Garages”, “Special Attention By Local Information Bureaus”, “Extra Service At Shops”, “Travel Booklets” and “Official Courtesy” — “The Mounted Police and Motor Constables will be instructed to render any help requested by these members and to use the utmost courtesy in dealing with minor infractions by them of the Motor Vehicle Act”. *Nova Scotia, Canada’s Ocean Playground* (1935), insert between pages 20 and 21.

attractive and “historic” as a gesture of good will. “The new members definitely do not look upon this as a ‘gag’”, we read in the 1949 *Tourism Report*. “They appear to be appreciative of the opportunity to be associated with the oldest social club in America, and the certificates they carry home and display provide a good form of advertising for Nova Scotia”.¹³ By 1956 close to 200,000 “members” of an “Order” which never convened could be found on all the world’s continents.¹⁴ The Order deftly combined the themes of therapeutic summertime fun and uplifting educational experience. In contrast with the “grand tour” of the 19th century, the tourist pursuing this kind of history did not really need to work at acquiring culture. The promotion tied in beautifully with the “restoration” of the Port Royal Habitation, the first significant historical simulacrum created by the Canadian state, based on Champlain’s plans and some American archaeological work (although, as C.J. Taylor dryly observes, subsequent investigations “failed to confirm that the [“restored”] habitation was in fact on the original site”).¹⁵ “The tourist industry offers history its greatest market and its greatest opportunity”, wrote Ella K. Cork on behalf of the Canadian Tourism Association in 1950. “If the tourist can be encouraged to tarry, he will spend money for goods and services which will penetrate to every economic level in the community”. History would ultimately provide an excellent “return upon the investment”.¹⁶ It was an argument the Nova Scotia state had already endorsed 15 years earlier. By 1951, Uniacke House (acquired by the state in 1939) was drawing more than 27,000 visitors a year, which (according to Will R. Bird) “proved that the average tourist is greatly interested in things historic, and we are doing all we can to show him the historic features of the oldest part of Canada”.¹⁷

“Let’s Cash In On Antiquity”, urged the Liberal journalist Harold Connolly.¹⁸ He gave voice to a widespread sentiment. Nova Scotia had a comparative advantage in “things historical”, at the same time as many North Americans were striving to recapture the supposed vividness, romance, and energies of a distant time. The aroma of potential profits rose intriguingly from a romanticized past. Andrew Merkel, a leading figure in regional journalism and poetry, bought a 25-acre lot near the Port Royal Habitation, where he intended to erect a radio station, install a swimming pool and provide other tourist attractions. Merkel claimed that his land was the first place where the Nova Scotia flag had been flown,

13 *JHA* (1949), p. 60.

14 *JHA* (1956), p. 50.

15 C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 118. See also C.W. Jeffreys, “The Reconstruction of the Port Royal Habitation of 1605-13”, *Canadian Historical Review*, XX, 4 (December 1939) pp. 369-77.

16 Ella K. Cork, Memorandum to the Members of the Historical Committee of the Canadian Tourism Association, 21 June 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

17 Bird to Don Snowden, 13 December 1952, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

18 Harold Connolly to Angus L. Macdonald, 25 August 1952, Macdonald Papers, vol. 972, f. 40-1/12. Connolly was recalling an article he had written years before. Connolly, a tireless booster of Nova Scotia tourism, later became Minister of Industry and Publicity.

and the site of a Scottish fort. When the time came to sell the property, Merkel advertised its “unparalleled advantages as a tourist centre, located as it was next to the most impressive memorial in America”.¹⁹ That no Scottish fort had existed on Merkel’s land, and that no Nova Scotia flag had even been contemplated when the Scots were in the neighborhood, were minor details.²⁰

Many individual Nova Scotians wanted to profit from the new kind of history. They ranged from the members of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, who received about five dollars a day as guides on the Halifax Citadel in 1939, to the interior decorators of New York, who marketed rare prints to the premier and American antique furniture to Nova Scotian historic houses.²¹ They included contractors in Cape Breton, who attempted to stick the province with a preposterous bill of \$414.50 for putting up one post and attaching a plaque to it with four screws,²² and the owners of a coach, once used by the Prince of Wales, who wanted \$10,000 for an article experts considered to be worth about \$500.²³

The philosophy of “cashing in on antiquity” also worked on a more general level. The clearest case was that of Yarmouth’s “Runic Stone”, a rock weighing about 400 pounds and bearing enigmatic marks. Discovered about 1820, the stone attained a certain fame in 1880, when Henry Philips, Jr., the corresponding secretary of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, reported that after intensive study, he had translated the stone’s enigmatic marks: “like a kaleidoscope, word after word appeared in disjointed forms, and each was in turn rejected until at last an intelligible word came forth, followed by another and another, until a *real sentence* with a meaning stood forth to my astonished gaze: — ‘HARKUSSEN MEN VARU’ — ‘HARKO’S SON ADDRESSED THE MEN’”.²⁴ Although this was an encouragingly Viking message, the stone nonetheless languished in obscurity until the special climate of the 1930s. Then it was re-discovered with a vengeance. In 1934 the Stone was re-interpreted — this time by one Olaf Strandwold of Prosser, Washington — to read, “LAEIFR ERUKI RISR”, or “Leif to Eric Raises [this monument]”, words which established Nova Scotia’s rightful place within the Norse sagas.²⁵ Abandoned cellars at Tusket and Raynardton were reinterpreted as the remains of Norse settlement. In 1936, the “League of Norsemen of Canada” issued a “Leif Erikson Memorial Issue” of *Norge*

19 Merkel Papers, MS 2.326, J-1, Miscellaneous Notes, Dalhousie University Archives. Andrew Merkel was an important cultural figure on other respects: as a journalist, Canadian Press editor, poet and (with his wife) the centre of a literary circle in Halifax.

20 Bird to Macdonald, 5 September 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

21 *Mail* (Halifax), 12 May 1948, letter of “Interested Citizen”; Martha B. Brookfield to Macdonald, 12 August 1952 (copy), Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 972, PANS.

22 Bird to E.F.J. Flemming, 3 November 1953, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, Vol. 933, PANS.

23 Bird to J.W.G. Macdougall, 3 April 1951, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

24 J. Murray Lawson, *Description of the Runic Stones Found Near Yarmouth, Nova Scotia* (Yarmouth, 1898), pp. 2-3.

25 Olaf Strandwold, *The Yarmouth Stone* (Washington, n.d. [1934]).

Canada, which included plans for a “Canadian National Park” commemorating the Yarmouth Vikings.²⁶ Soon there were plans for the reconstruction of Leif’s “capital” and Leif’s “vessel”, for an annual “Leif Erikson” day, and for a large Leif Erikson National Park on the Tusket River. (The park’s administration building, to be built in “the old Norse Fashion”, was to be a replica of Leif Erikson’s chieftains’ hall). If the province would promote Erikson, enthusiasts urged, it would have a front-page news story for years to come.²⁷

The Runic Stone had attained legitimacy. By 1937, J.L. Johnston of the Yarmouth County Historical Society, could confidently begin his appeal for a national park with the words, “As the fact as [has] generally been conceded that Leif Eriksson [sic] visited the shores of Nova Scotia, and tradition very generally names Yarmouth County as one of the places where he landed”.²⁸ In 1938 Gordon T. Lewis, the president of the Yarmouth Historical Society, compiled *The Cruise of the Knorr: An Account of Early Norse Exploration in America* (Yarmouth, 1938), in which he flatly stated, “Leif Erikson and members of his family visited Yarmouth, left the Yarmouth Stone with his name on it, built a village at Tusket and explored the neighborhood for 12 years and we know not how much longer”.²⁹ Angus L. Macdonald, for one, believed that the evidence warranted serious investigation of the Leif Erikson tradition. Sensing what a *coup* for tourism an authentic Viking relic would represent, Macdonald urged the Nova Scotia Historical Society to investigate the matter.³⁰ The 1943 edition of the provincial guide to *Historic Nova Scotia* treated the Runic Stone as unequivocally genuine. Later its legitimacy was revoked: “the photograph was hastily removed from the book and the print destroyed”, as Will R. Bird later put it.³¹ In 1938 Professor A.D. Fraser, of the Division of Archaeology, School of Ancient Languages, University of Virginia, had informed D.C. Harvey that the stone showed the plain marks of saws, probably emery saws; and this suggested the stone was perhaps a discarded quarry block. There was nothing especially “Runic” about the oddly imprecise shapes inscribed on the stone, evidently a ballast rock worked on by a native. Fraser was no less unkind about the supposed remains of Leif Erikson’s capital: the “Viking” cellars were implausibly far from the shore, and were more likely the work of the local

26 *Norge Canada: A Magazine for Norsemen in Canada*, “Leif Erikson Memorial Issue”, 1936. D.C. Harvey Papers, MG 1, Box 1793, f. 10/19, PANS.

27 Gordon T. Lewis, *The Cruise of the Knorr: An Account of Early American History* (Yarmouth, 1938); Knute Haddeland to H. Leander d’Entremont, 13 January 1935 (copy for A.S. MacMillan), in Harvey Papers, MG 1, Box 1793, PANS.

28 J.L. Johnston to G. Wilfred Bryan, National Parks Branch, Department of the Interior, 14 May 1937 (copy), D.C. Harvey Papers, MG 1, Box 1793, f. 10/20, PANS.

29 Lewis, *The Cruise of the Knorr*.

30 Macdonald to Harvey, 3 August 1936, D.C. Harvey Papers, MG 1, vol. 1793, f. 10/10, PANS.

31 Bird to A.L. Kelsall, 24 November 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

bootlegger.³² Although the Stone's supporters refused to abandon their cause, plans for Leif Erikson National Park were quietly shelved.³³

Yarmouth was not alone in attempting to reap a dividend from one of antiquity's more speculative stocks. History became something every tourism-conscious town and village felt it deserved. Promoters of tourism in Parrsboro demanded recognition of the forced landing of a Handley-Page bomber in 1921; the town felt it needed "something as it feels out of the regular tourist path", W.R. Bird reported. Indeed, representatives of various communities from Springvale to Marble Mountain believed "the erection of something historical or the arranging of some yearly celebration will bring the visitors to their door".³⁴ Mrs. K.G.T. Webster, trying to persuade the Council that the Ross-Thomson House in Shelburne deserved to be saved, wrote that the "house would make a wonderful setting" and then asked, "Is it an unopened mine?"³⁵ The idealistic Margaret Pugsley, who championed the restoration of Amos "King" Seaman's mansion at Minudie, Cumberland County, believed so firmly in the power of historical reconstruction that she predicted the neighbourhood farmers would paint their houses and clean up their farms, if only the mansion were restored.³⁶

As her case suggests, any attempt to reduce the demand for a new kind of history to the selfish pursuit of profits would give us, at best, a partial picture. The idealism of preservationists — middle class,³⁷ often expatriate — needs to be taken as seriously as the lure of profits. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the state faced an increasingly history-conscious middle class which was both alarmed by the threat

32 A.D. Fraser to Harvey, 7 September 1938, MG 1, Box 1793, f. 12/21, PANS. If indeed Fraser's critique was decisive, it seems somewhat incongruous that five years after his exposé, *Historic Nova Scotia* was still tempted by the story.

33 As late as 1960 visitors to Yarmouth were advised by a local publication on *Historic Sites, Yarmouth Town and County*, to visit Leif Erikson's Headquarters at Tusket Falls, the cellars of Leif's Great House, and the haunting ruins of the Norse capital of America, which had "lasted for some centuries": *Historic Sites Yarmouth Town and County Nova Scotia, with Road Maps, 1960* (Yarmouth, 1960). Joan Payzant, "Nova Scotia: Home of the Bluenose", in Boyde Beck *et al.*, *Atlantic Canada: At the Dawn of a New Nation* (Burlington, 1990) carries an illustration of the Stone, which she identifies with the words, "Thought to be a possible relic of a Viking landfall near Yarmouth", p.46. For a parallel case in the United States, see David Lowenthal, "Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation", in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford, 1979), p. 109.

34 Bird to Stanfield, 8 February 1963, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

35 Mrs. K.G.T. (Deborah) Webster to Bird, 26 July 1949, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

36 Margaret Pugsley to W.R. Bird, 1 February 1963, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

37 There is admittedly no way of confirming this impression quantitatively, because there was no one central body to which preservationists belonged. However, I have not found any prominent individual arguing on behalf of historical reconstruction and preservation in the period 1935-64 who was not from the *petite bourgeoisie* — small businessmen, professionals (especially journalists), local politicians, and women who identified with this class by marriage or who enjoyed independent means. These were, after all, the people who had the leisure time for such things. The question of social class and community memory merits further exploration in local case studies.

to buildings that seemed to stand for a Golden Age of elegance and meaning, and highly susceptible to the appeal of antimodernist romanticism as an approach to the past. There was a growing alarm about the impact of modernity and the fate of old buildings in Halifax. William Coates Borrett, who had a regular history broadcast on radio station CHNS, and writing as “one interested in the preservation of historic sites, especially items of tremendous tourist value”, struck an apocalyptic tone in his unsuccessful appeal on behalf of Prince’s Lodge, the bandstand from the Duke of Kent’s Lodge in Rockingham, a suburb of Halifax. “This building is one of the few historic sites left, and I am sorry to say that it is gradually falling to pieces”, he warned. “The round ball, which was mounted on the top, has now fallen off, and the roof, which was shingled at one time, is now covered with red tarpaper. I understand it is rented to a man who lives in it and uses a hall stove to heat it in the winter time....I would like to suggest to your Committee that before it is too late or before something happens, that negotiations should be entered into either to buy or expropriate the property”.³⁸ For James D. How of Annapolis Royal, the horror to be averted was the demolition of a house that had once been home to Thomas Chandler Haliburton, but which was slated for demolition to make way for an automobile dealership. “The town of Annapolis Royal — historic Annapolis Royal — former cultural centre — and capital of Nova Scotia — birthplace of Canada — is in my opinion no longer historic”, he lamented. “It is in fact neither distinctive nor different in appearance than sister Valley towns — whereas it could be a second Williamsburg Va....It is not enough, I feel, to erect a brass plaque in after years marking a site of historical significance, when in this case, the structure itself can be saved! Visitors to Annapolis say they feel gypted [sic] — expected to see some old houses open to the public — like the efforts of the Antiquarian Societies or the Colonial Dames of the adjacent N. England States....I appeal to you — give it your consideration because if and when it ‘gets the axe’ — perhaps in after years, a brass tablet marks its grave, I can say — ‘I tried to save you!’”³⁹

Preservationists were no less worried about the impending dissolution of local, privately-owned museums. The closing down of the Pioneers’ Museum at Green Hill, Pictou County in 1959 caused widespread alarm in preservationist circles. Among the 600-odd exhibits was the stage coach used by King Edward VII when, as Prince of Wales, he visited Pictou in 1860.⁴⁰ The museum’s closure brought the bureaucrats concerned “a deluge of phone calls and protests”.⁴¹ Similarly, a rare collection of maritime artifacts in Lockeport — “what may possibly be the finest collection of old ships blocks in existence” was Will R. Bird’s impression —

38 William Coates Borrett to Bird, 22 July 1949, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS. Major William Coates Borrett, the managing director of the radio station CHNS, presented many talks on Halifax history over the air, and published such collections as *Tales Told Under The Old Town Clock* (Toronto, 1948).

39 James D. How to Bird and members of the Historic Sites Advisory Council of Nova Scotia, n.d., Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

40 Province of Nova Scotia, *Nova Scotia, Canada's Ocean Playground* (n.p. [Halifax], n.d. [1935]), p. 36

41 Bird to Stanfield, 18 August 1959, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

seemed equally imperilled, if not by storms sweeping away the ramshackle old building sitting on posts over the water, then by American tourists, making off with the treasure in exchange for a few dollars.⁴² Such museum closures gave middle-class preservationists a vivid sense of the Golden Age in danger.

Preservationism before the 1960s was a sentiment more than a movement. It was often fuelled by a passionate anti-modernism, a fervent rejection of a modernity that seemed on the brink of destroying not just historic houses, but the very memory of Golden Age elegance and refinement. Miss Laura Lawson of Yarmouth struggled tenaciously but unsuccessfully to persuade the government to buy “a beautiful home in our town built in the early years of the days of wooden ships”, which had belonged to a Miss Clara Caie. The house and its contents were to be placed on the auction block in March 1956, and Miss Lawson’s campaign on behalf of the house persuaded even the premier and the attorney-general to examine it. “The house is a treasure trove”, wrote Miss Lawson, using a characteristic metaphor of the preservationists: “Full of beautiful furniture, rugs, china, silver, etc. Much of it brought from Europe. Miss Caie herself had three collections of interest — miniatures, boxes and china. There is a crystal chandelier and a lovely white marble mantel. Too many things to enumerate”. Although such valuable estates had been settled for more than 200 years in Nova Scotia, it was suddenly urgent to avert the loss of this “treasure”. “Very soon”, Miss Lawson warned, “there will be little left to show coming generations how people lived graciously in their homes, not in hotels and box-like apartments”. Such middle-class preservationism was often more focused on saving the memory of better, premodern times than it was concerned to commemorate specific events. From this point of view, a house without any apparent claims to fame could merit serious consideration for restoration on the basis of its elegance alone. Yarmouth’s Rock Cottage, for example, an American millionaire’s 19th-century hideaway, had no historical importance in a conventional sense; but its furnishings were extraordinary: “The main set of furniture is of heart of ebony, carved in delicate pattern [wrote Will R. Bird]. The chair backs are five feet high. There are cabinets made in Italy, busts of Italian marble, a great fan-shaped display of weapons, lances and swords, all sorts of figures. A cabinet in the dining room reaches from floor to ceiling and is filled with the very best cut glass and china”.⁴³ Alas, this gentility was soon to fall into the clutches of time and perhaps into “the hands that are seeking to grasp it for other purposes”, as Lawson put it.⁴⁴

Beneath these swift and sure aesthetic judgements was an entire outlook on history. The scandal of history, from this middle-class perspective, was that it suggested the relativity of all human achievements: time passes, people die, systems change, values are transformed. The magic of restoration was that it magically repealed time, it rescued properties from its grip, it essentialized a past

42 Bird to Stanfield, 18 January 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

43 Bird to Stanfield, 2 October 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

44 Cited in Bird to Members of the Historic Sites Advisory Council, August 1956, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

Golden Age by retrieving the houses of the elite, to be restored in isolation from the surrounding 20th-century context of poverty and unemployment. The preservationists' emphasis on the mansions of the wealthy as signifiers of the Nova Scotia past was a revealing one. At a time when traditional gender roles and the familial/reproductive matrix sustaining them were being transformed, the middle-class preservationists struggled to preserve the gracious homes and happy memories of domestic life therein. What was implicit in such a move was the identification of the history of the province with its governing class and with a misleading sense of the domestic tranquillity of past times. Through such preservationism, the past stopped being the river into which one could never step twice, and became instead a vast attic, stuffed with treasures, into which one could retreat whenever the 20th century became too difficult.

The new kind of history was thus an applied romantic antimodernism. It offered a vivid intensification of experience and the magical suspension of time. It promised to re-enchant daily existence by providing an innocent and familiar past, knowable in all its intimate domestic detail, which still existed within the uncertain 20th century. The new kind of history was, paradoxically, profoundly anti-historical, in that it sought not to study change through time but continuity preserved by timelessness. This new kind of history returned Nova Scotians to a sort of innocence, not merely in the obvious sense of serving up the past as an improbably harmonious Golden Age, but in the more powerful sense of naturalizing a naively direct way of seeing, in which "things historical" were presences which could be immediately felt and intuitively understood. Mrs. K.G.T. Webster caught such a moment of enchantment within the walls of Ross-Thomson house in Shelburne, which she opened as an unofficial museum in 1949. She described boys captured by the aura of the "authentic" historical object: "As they turned the old treasures over, gently turning cranks and trying the works, they taught me how much history is learned by what you handle; and how vivid the past becomes as you finger the things people used. Perhaps that's all there is to it — an enriching sense of the past".⁴⁵

Local enthusiasts for historical preservation often relied upon foreign example. In their eyes, the Americans had already demonstrated the tourism potential of historical reconstruction. As early as 1908, J.S. McLennan, the historian of Fortress Louisburg, had looked to the American example of Fort Ticonderoga when he proposed "that the site of the ruins be acquired by the Canadian government and restored as a national monument".⁴⁶ Ross-Thomson House was saved because Professor K.G.T. Webster, a Yarmouth native teaching at Harvard, saw something that looked like the various New England houses he had tried to restore.⁴⁷ American soldiers visiting Citadel Hill in Halifax in 1951 were quoted by a local newspaper reporter as remarking, "Why doesn't somebody get a franchise to use this

45 Mrs. Webster to Bird, 26 July 1949, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

46 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 20.

47 Mrs. Webster to Bird, 26 July 1949, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS. Mrs. Webster lived in Milton, Mass.

place?...This is a gold mine....Don't you value old things in Canada? Our Government grabs everything even 50 years old and polishes it up. It's good for everybody; tells us what we are and what we sprang from; children should know those things....Gosh, we'd sure like to have this in my home town. Would we ever fix it up fast".⁴⁸ When C.H. Wright wrote to W.R. Bird about marking the sites of three blockhouses ("I know tourists are interested. The city should be a Mecca for such"), he enclosed a note on "What Massachusetts Has Done For History". The state, with its 116 historical societies, restored vessels, the Bourne Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Old Sturbridge Village, and an annual take from tourists said to be \$250 million, was doing rather more for (or to) history than had been dreamt of in Nova Scotia.⁴⁹ Those who envisaged a much improved provincial museum drew inspiration from the Mariners' Museum at Newport News, which had single-handedly created "a new tourist locality".⁵⁰ John D. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg, the "exquisite little 18th-century town, clean, tidy, and tasteful" that commemorated Virginia's planter elite, inspired many Nova Scotian preservationists.⁵¹ When Mrs. K.L. Dawson appealed to the Council on behalf of her old Halifax dwelling, "Acacia Cottage", she referred to Williamsburg; Margaret Pugsley, who wanted to save the Seaman Mansion, lamented: "If only a Rockefeller could become interested in it and restore it to its past glories, as Williamsburg in Virginia was restored".⁵² Not only Minudie, but also Annapolis Royal could be a second Williamsburg, another preservationist argued.⁵³ Although Katherine McLennan, a prominent Louisburg preservationist, pointed out the implausibility of the Williamsburg comparison — Nova Scotia lacked the plenitude of philanthropical Rockefellers, sunny days and densely-packed nearby cities which were all vital ingredients of Williamsburg's success — her skepticism was not widely shared.⁵⁴

48 *Evening News* (New Glasgow), 23 August 1951.

49 C.H. Wright to Bird, with enclosure, 9 March 1951, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

50 Crowdis and R. Macgregor Dawson, "Memorandum on Provincial Museum", 1944, in Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 904, f. 28 f.6/3, PANS.

51 Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States", in Susan Porter Benson, et al., eds., *Presenting The Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 137-61, citation at pp. 147-8.

52 Mrs. K.L. Dawson to Bird, 30 October 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS; Pugsley to Bird, 1 February 1963, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

53 How to Bird and members of the Historic Sites Advisory Council of Nova Scotia, n.d., Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

54 Miss K. McLennan to Bird, 19 January 1954, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS. Katharine McLennan was the daughter of J.S. McLennan, the historian and executive of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, and an artist in her own right. See A.J.B. Johnston, "A Vanished Era: The Petersfield Estate of J.S. McLennan, 1900-1942", in Kenneth Donovan, ed., *Cape Breton at 200: Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial 1785-1985* (Sydney, 1985), pp. 85-105.

Such preservationists worked most effectively in local history societies, sometimes organized on a town and sometimes on a county basis. The most energetic local historical society — Bird called it the “one active Society in Nova Scotia” — was the Yarmouth County Historical Society, established in 1935, revived in 1956, and incorporated in 1958.⁵⁵ This society erected plaques on memorials marking the Landing Place of the first settlers, commemorated Sir James Pearl, a Yarmouthian who achieved renown in Newfoundland, and erected further memorials to the county’s seamen and shipbuilders. The society made innovative efforts to disseminate local history, through signage on main streets, and through quizzes for Yarmouthians. (“Where, in the County, is the grave of the famous ‘Petrified Woman?’” asked the Quiz in 1959. “What is the possible explanation for the fact that the common fish called by the English, alewives, and by the French, gaspereaux, are, in this County, known as kiacks?”)⁵⁶ Outside Cape Breton, whose society mounted a strong campaign on behalf of Cabot as a local hero, most successful societies were concentrated along the southwestern coast of the province, from Digby to Liverpool.⁵⁷ An effective historical society could make the difference between demolition and restoration: King Seaman’s Minudie mansion crumbled, despite Margaret Pugsley’s sincerity, while Perkins House — championed by the Queens County Historical Society and by its most prominent member, the novelist Thomas Raddall — underwent a major restoration. Even the Halifax Citadel, intermittently a restoration project of the federal state, and the largest single restoration project in the region in the 1950s, was rescued from the clutches of modernizers partly through the efforts of the “Committee on Citadel Restoration of the Halifax Civic Improvement League”, which included many politically prominent people, including two provincial cabinet ministers.⁵⁸ A community without a strong local historical society still might be able to “cash in on antiquity” if it had a strong Board of Trade or Chamber of Commerce, or an active Kiwanis or Rotary Club.⁵⁹ Communities without a sufficiently large class of

55 One of the society’s leading figures, Robert B. Blauveltdt, U.E., LL.B., described his activities on his 1960 letterhead as involving “Blauveltdt Publicity. Publishers, Historical Research, Radio & Newspaper Service; Campaigns, Public Relations, Promotional Advertising”. RB [Robert Blauveltdt] to Bird, 20 May 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

56 Yarmouth County Historical Society, Quiz, 6 March 1959, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS. Tourists on the Main Street of Yarmouth are still informed in great detail by signs placed by the society alerting them to the site of “First brick mercantile building in western Nova Scotia, opened October 11, 1856”, “First plank sidewalk in the town” (commemorated twice over, once by a stone set into the sidewalk, and again in a sign on the Young and Baker brick building), the site of the “Royal Department Store opened ... on April 2, 1927 [which] served as the retail and social heart of the downtown”, etc.

57 There were other smaller, more specialized societies, such as the Association of VanCortlandt Grantees, a group organized by Robert Blauveltdt to commemorate the descendants of 40 Loyalist officers who accompanied Major Philip VanCortlandt to Tusket in 1788.

58 Alfred E. Jamieson, Secretary Halifax Civic Improvement League to Harvey, 12 July 1938, MG 1, Box 1789, f. 1/31, PANS.

59 A revealing tribute to the service-club constituency of local history can be found in the Dominion Atlantic Railway’s *High Lights of Nova Scotia History* in which Champlain’s “Order of Good Cheer”

small businessmen and professionals to sustain a functioning historical society or a service-club voluntary sector were disadvantaged by the state's continuing liberal emphasis on helping volunteers and communities help themselves. The absence of a local historical society might even be explicitly invoked as a reason for turning down one appeal for a restoration project.⁶⁰

The state's preferred strategy was to allow service clubs, historical societies or informally organized "leading citizens" to carry the burden of creating historical attractions, which the state would then promote. Not all communities took warmly to this model. Barrington viewed outside interference with hostility when approached by the state's emissary to repair the Old Meeting House. ("It was as if I were appearing before a session of Presbyterian elders and reporting some moral lapse", Will R. Bird remarked.⁶¹) Elsewhere — at Morden, Baddeck, Bridgeville, for example — factionalism, intensified by religious division or based on "small jealousies regarding prestige", prevailed.⁶²

So diffuse a sentiment as preservationism required leaders who could distill from many competing claims and particular interests the clear elements of a new general narrative of Nova Scotian history, attractive for tourists and residents alike. If preservationism can be said to have had such "organic intellectuals", they were Thomas H. Raddall and Will R. Bird. Raddall, born in Hythe, England, in 1903, raised in Halifax, and a resident of Liverpool, wrote a series of novels set in Nova Scotia which trace the province's history from the mid-18th century to the 1950s (with, Barry Moody has noted, a significant hiatus in the 19th century).⁶³ Through his many short stories and in such novels as *His Majesty's Yankees* (1942), *Roger Sudden* (1944), *Pride's Fancy* (1946), *The Nymph and the Lamp* (1950), *Tidefall* (1953), *The Wings of Night* (1956), *The Governor's Lady* (1960) and *Hangman's Beach* (1966), Raddall constructed a powerful and widely-disseminated version of Nova Scotian history. Some sense of his influence may be gleaned from his own account of his book sales to the end of 1972: Raddall estimated he had sold 2,434,710 books, including 686,036 copies of *The Nymph and the Lamp*, 471,858 copies of *The Governor's Lady*, 348,286 copies of *Roger Sudden*, 323,612 copies of *Tidefall*, 188,189 copies of *The Wings of Night* and 114,169 copies of *His Majesty's Yankees*. Although his various non-fictional historical works were not as widely sold or read, both *The Path of Destiny* (a general Canadian history which sold 88,075 copies) and *Halifax, Warden of the North* (21,583 copies) were highly

is called "North America's oldest service club", which had started "just three centuries before Rotary...strangely anticipating many of its characteristics". Dominion Atlantic Railway, *High Lights of Nova Scotia History*, entry under "Membertou."

- 60 Bird to Members of the Historic Sites Advisory Council of Nova Scotia, 18 November 1955, PANS, MG 20, vol. 934.
- 61 Bird to Stanfield, 12 January 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.
- 62 Bird to Stanfield, 6 November 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.
- 63 Barry Moody, "The Novelist as Historian: The Nova Scotia Identity in the Novels of Thomas H. Raddall", in Alan R. Young, ed., *Time and Place: The Life and Works of Thomas H. Raddall* (Fredericton, 1991), pp. 150-3.

successful in Canadian terms.⁶⁴ Most of his book sales were accounted for by American, British and Central Canadian buyers, but Raddall's works were (and are) also extremely influential in Nova Scotia itself. Will R. Bird, who was born in East Mapleton, Cumberland County in 1891 and who died in Sackville, New Brunswick in 1984,⁶⁵ was Raddall's sole rival as a popular narrator of the Nova Scotia story. Bird was the author of 27 major books of fiction and non-fiction; among his novels, *Here Stays Good Yorkshire* (1945), *Sunrise For Peter* (1946), *Judgement Glen* (1947), *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1949), *So Much To Record* (1951), *The Shy Yorkshireman* (1955) and *An Earl Must Have A Wife* (1969) are noteworthy, although his bestselling and most influential books were his travelogues: *This is Nova Scotia* (1950) — which Bird estimated had sold a half million copies by 1972 — *Off Trail in Nova Scotia* (1956) and *These Are the Maritimes* (1959). Like Raddall, Bird also wrote non-fictional histories, although his were generally pitched at more local audiences.

Raddall was a painstaking writer, who took elaborate pains to describe his settings and to develop his characters. Many of Bird's novels, on the other hand, were hastily written formula romances — though one would like to exempt *So Much To Record*, which traces the rise of tourism — in which persons without depth pursued adventures without end. By his own admission, his historical fiction was not in Raddall's class.⁶⁶ In the period of their peak creativity, Raddall was the independent artist, living off his wits in Liverpool; Bird was a bureaucrat with the provincial Bureau of Information. Despite such differences, both men had much in common. Both wrote romances based, to varying degrees, on archival research and striving after a sense of realism. Donna Smyth observes that Raddall developed “a kind of archeological- topographical method, fitting together material gathered from many sources, including his own tours of the various sites he embodied in the text. Through historical accuracy, he felt he could ‘authorize’ his version of historical reality, ground it in a kind of objective truth”.⁶⁷ Bird and Raddall also shared a positivist view of historical facts as objective givens, independent of theoretical frameworks and ideologies. As popular, hard-working “grassroots” historians they believed themselves to be well-placed to dig up truths missed by others. Historical truth lay in factual, detailed knowledge and could be ascertained without any *a priori* theory. Both men also viewed their digging after facts and the narratives they were able to weave from such details as meeting important social and economic goals. Both also wanted their work to be taken seriously as historical research, although both were uneasily aware that as self-taught historians they were not “professionals” in the strict sense. Bird cherished his honorary doctorates,

64 Correspondence File “Raddall”, Dal MS 2-202, Thomas Raddall Papers, Dalhousie University Archives.

65 For his obituary, see *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, 30 January 1984.

66 Note Thomas Raddall to Bird, 28 November 1950; Bird to Martha Miner, 25 April 1950, both in Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

67 Donna E. Smyth, “Raddall’s Desiring Machine: Narrative Strategies in the Historical Fiction”, in Young, ed., *Time and Place*, p. 62.

fretted that his pamphlet *Historic Nova Scotia* might not be taken seriously as a work of history but regarded as “tourist propaganda”⁶⁸ and was left to plead his own case for an Order of Canada citation for his “contribution to the field of literature”.⁶⁹ Although Raddall was much more the freelancer than Bird, both men were in the precarious financial position of untenured and underfunded cultural producers who had to heed market signals if they hoped to prosper in the world. They brought an inner certainty of their hold on truth to their work as the pre-eminent advocates of an alliance between local history and tourism.

Raddall set forth his views on the history/ tourism alliance in a 1943 brief on behalf of the town of Liverpool to the provincial Commission on Post-war Development and Rehabilitation. “The great tourist trade of the Annapolis Valley was built on Fort Anne and the legend of Evangeline”, he argued:

The South Shore, with its historic towns of Shelburne, Liverpool and Lunenburg, could be equally famous with some intelligent advertising and what we might call a ‘sense of showmanship’. The tourist is willing to be diverted with bathing, sailing, fishing and golfing, but as the primary object of his trips he wants to ‘see something historic’....And since he demands to be ‘shown’ we must provide him with things to see. The cannon of the privateers which now repose muzzle-down on our street corners should be dug up and mounted at the Fort, and a replica of the old blockhouse should be built on the site of Fort Morris like the one which now attracts so many visitors to Fort Edward at Windsor, N.S.

The American visitor was sure to be intrigued by tales of the exploits of privateersmen in three wars, the response of Liverpool to the American Revolution, and the romance of the square riggers which sailed out of the port to the seven seas. Some day, he or she might also be intrigued by the Simeon Perkins House, owned by Queens County Historical Society, which should become a museum exhibiting relics of natives, pioneer Yankees, Loyalists, and others. “These and various other matters should be taken in hand at once, and a definite program of work drawn up *and followed through*”, Raddall insisted. “By good planning and a cooperative effort on the part of our citizens, Liverpool could in ten years become one of the show places of the continent”.⁷⁰

Two years later, Raddall gave similar counsel to the Commercial Club in Halifax. What did any tourist expect to find in Nova Scotia? he asked rhetorically. He answered: “There is one answer; he expects to find a country different from his own, with a story of its own, and someone who can tell him all about it”. Haligonians would be well advised to do more with the “fascinating and historic

68 Bird to T.J. Courtney, 16 November 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

69 See Bird to Robert Coates, 4 September 1977, Bird Scrapbooks, Dalhousie University Archives.

70 Brief Submitted to the Royal Commission on Post-war Development and Rehabilitation, on behalf of the Town of Liverpool, N.S., 27 July 1943, Thomas Raddall Papers, Dal MS 2-202, File Addresses, 27 July 1943 [written by Thomas Raddall and delivered by him before the Commission in 1943].

scene” surrounding them.⁷¹ It was advice one influential member of the audience passed directly on to the premier.⁷² After the Queens County Historical Society purchased Perkins House in Liverpool in September 1936 for \$2,500, Raddall became the key figure in the repair and restoration of the house, acting as an unofficial architectural conservator.⁷³

Bird went much further than Raddall as an advocate of cashing in on antiquity. He worked for the new Nova Scotia Bureau of Information for three years in the 1920s and rejoined the provincial civil service in 1933 after seven years' absence. From 1933 to 1965, Bird was a semi-official “Mr. Nova Scotia”, whose appearances and publications were made possible by the state. In 1972 he estimated that he had given 1,552 speeches at dinners, luncheons and graduations over the course of his career.⁷⁴ An untitled and undated note lists some of his speaking engagements in 1949 and 1959; he spoke to the Halifax Rotary Club, Bank of Nova Scotia, Gyros and Gyrettes of Windsor, the Musquodoboit Board of Trade, the Wolfville Lions Club and the Rotary Convention in Yarmouth; to the Chemical Institute of Canada, the Regina Gyros, the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Y's Men's Club of Yarmouth, the Commercial Club Ladies' Night, among many other groups.⁷⁵ As Assistant Director of Publicity in the Bureau of Information, Bird churned out one article after another. “Would you care for an article on Oak Island, our ‘buried treasure’ mystery?” he asked a publisher. “Or on our ‘ship railway’ which was planned for 1895...Or a story of Peggy's Cove? Of our quaint old churches? Of our annual Gaelic Mod? Of the founding of Halifax?”⁷⁶ In 1955, after he had left the Bureau, he was brought back in as a writer, because he had such an excellent record in getting stories printed by various publications. His reputation was confirmed in the following two years. In 1957 Bird informed Premier Robert Stanfield that he had had stories either published or accepted for publication in 20 publications, ranging from the *Canadian Geographic Magazine* to the *Springfield Republican*. He proudly told Stanfield that it would have cost the province more than \$9,000 to purchase as advertising space the coverage Bird had obtained for free.⁷⁷ Few Nova Scotians would have not come into contact with W.R. Bird's work in one form or another: if they did not read his novels or travel guides, they might well receive one of Bird's “folksy yarns” with their monthly telephone bill, or read a “little squib” from Bird in a local magazine.⁷⁸ Raddall's promotion of the

71 “An Address by Thomas Raddall to the Commercial Club, Halifax, N.S., on the subject ‘Halifax and the Tourist Trade’, November 15th, 1945”, Raddall Papers.

72 Harold Ball to Macdonald, 24 November 1945, in Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 907, f. 37B/8, PANS.

73 Allen Penney, “Thomas R. Raddall in the Role of Conservator of Historic Buildings”, in Young, ed., *Time and Place*, pp. 98-108.

74 Bird to Ruth Fraser, 4 February 1972, Bird Scrapbooks, Dalhousie University Archives.

75 Bird, untitled note, Bird Scrapbooks, Dalhousie University Archives.

76 Bird to E.A. Batchelor, 20 October 1948, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

77 Bird to Stanfield, 25 April 1957, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

78 Bird to Raddall, 28 November 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

marriage of history and tourism was a sideline; for Bird, his entire career as a public relations man, writer and bureaucrat centred on the construction of a new kind of history in the interests of tourism.

His travel books may have worked as powerfully as any other single force to link tourism and a new way of seeing and using the past. Bird wrote *This is Nova Scotia* (1950) by trying to imagine how someone completely new to the province would be seeing what the author thinks he himself is seeing. What he attempts, in other words, is a kind of complete defamiliarization or “bracketing” of his own province; the effect is curiously postmodern. (This strategy becomes strange indeed when Bird-as-fictionalized-narrator expresses his delight and surprise in “discovering” plaques that Bird-as-actual-bureaucrat had placed himself.) Written by a *faux naïf* trying to internalize as fully as possible the Tourist Gaze, *This is Nova Scotia* constructs an imagined 19th-century realm of primitive, colourful, story-telling folk, salty old characters spending their lives on wharves, waiting for Bird to collect their stories of Romance, and remarkably similar — in the ways they talk and look — to characters in Bird’s novels. Although Bird did not inform his readers that the Habitation at Port Royal was a replica and not the original,⁷⁹ for the most Bird’s imagined Nova Scotia was more invention than outright misrepresentation. Its status as reportage, however, must be regarded as somewhat ambiguous. Bird told one after-dinner audience, in a speech that exemplified his commitment to commodification and his inventive way with statistics, that 1,100 visitors had come to the province in direct response to the story of shy Willie Anderson, who built a house with four trees as corner posts which was lifted off the ground as the trees grew in size. This quaint story, derived from the published work of the author Dawn Fraser, was an example, Bird told his after-dinner audience, of the “importance of romance” in the promotion of tourism. Yet in *This is Nova Scotia*, precisely this same tale is told by a archotypically colourful old salt with a “stubble chin” and a stalk of timothy in his mouth. One concludes that if Bird got the story from his quaint timothy-chewing peasant, he got it second-hand. One rather wonders if this peasant — and many of the other colourful quaint Folk of the book — ever existed.⁸⁰

For all that it oddly anticipates a postmodern mixture of fact and fiction, *This is Nova Scotia* is very much an antimodernist portrait of the province. Skilled editing removes the scars of the 20th century. Even in the industrial heart of “colourful Cape Breton”, Bird’s Sydney folk share anecdotes about J.F.W. DesBarres and the 18th century in their quaint general stores, while outside the steel plant paints the skies a lovely crimson.⁸¹ *This is Nova Scotia* distilled a romantic, eternal essence of Nova Scotia, thereby re-constructing and reifying for actual tourists that Gaze of which it was itself the anticipation. Bird became an intellectual of a new type, whose services were bought and paid for by the state, yet whose public persona was

79 Bird, *This is Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1972 [reprint of 1950 edition], p. 91.

80 Note “Stories and Legends are Big Tourist Attraction”, an undated clipping in the Bird Scrapbooks, Dalhousie University Archives; *This is Nova Scotia*, pp. 269-70.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 255-8.

that of an eternal romantic innocent. His books were tremendous successful. "Mr. Bird has reproduced for a harried age the timeless beauty and colour of Canada's most storied province", the perceptive reviewer for the *Winnipeg Tribune* exclaimed. "The near-sacred legends, the characters and picturesque villages of Nova Scotia are adequately prepared for the arm-chair traveller".⁸² Bird felt that his travel books accomplished as much for Nova Scotia as his more conventional promotional activity. "It is my hope that you and your cabinet will appreciate the fact that I am doing more than getting our historical assets on array in the shop window for our visitors", he wrote to Robert Stanfield in 1960, using a metaphor that captured precisely the commodification of history within the Tourist Gaze. "My books have a wide circulation in New England and the New York area, and play no small part in bringing tourist business to this province".⁸³

Following somewhat different paths and often working in different media, Bird and Raddall nonetheless constructed a common "master narrative" in Nova Scotia. In both cases, the implied subject-position — that is, the position implied by a text from which it can be read unproblematically — was that of a Nova Scotian man of English descent, who identified with individualism and profitmaking. "Men were really men in those days", remarked Will R. Bird of the 1780s in Nova Scotia; readers of Raddall's *Roger Sudden*, in which a swashbuckling hero finds his way in a dog-eat-dog world, would be inclined to agree.⁸⁴ One of their purposes in reconstructing the "memories" evoked by the past was to regain the masculine certainties and virile dynamism that modernity had placed in question. Against the "sentimentalists" who wept over the fate of Evangeline, Bird and Raddall wanted the reader to identify with the British patriarchs, tough men making a tough decision. They continually projected onto history the entrepreneurial drive and self-centredness they took to be an element of an essentialized male human nature.

Constructing a narrative entails making ideological choices, one of the most important of which is determining the beginning and ending of the story. For both Raddall and Bird, the "beginning" of the Nova Scotia story was marked by the mid-18th century arrival of English-speaking settlers. The middle of the story was the period which extended from the American Revolution to the late-19th century. The end of the story (which Raddall explored to a far greater extent than Bird) lay in the 20th century, by and large seen as a tragedy. For both writers, the heroic narratives that most urgently needed commemoration were those associated with the triumph of English-speaking Nova Scotians over their adversaries: Americans, Frenchmen, natives.

82 *Tribune* (Winnipeg), 10 June 1950. Indeed, so "timeless" was Bird's pastoral vision that McGraw-Hill Ryerson decided that it could put the book through its eighth (and first paperback) printing as late as 1972, blithely disregarding such developments as the completion of the Canso Causeway and the Trans-Canada Highway, the collapse of a tuna festival, and the disappearance of some of the hotels praised in the book. Robin Brass to Bird, 17 January 1972; Bird to Brass, 20 January 1972, Bird Scrapbooks, Dalhousie University Archives.

83 Bird to Stanfield, 16 December 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 10, vol. 934, PANS.

84 Bird, *This is Nova Scotia*, p. 273.

Raddall's archetypal Nova Scotians, Barry Moody observes, are the New Englanders who settled parts of the province in the 1760s; even as various elements are added to Raddall's narrative, "it becomes increasingly clear that, for Raddall, these New England settlers and their descendants, and a select few of the other English immigrants and Loyalists, really *are* Nova Scotia, or at least constitute the parts that count".⁸⁵ With the significant addition of the Yorkshire settlers of Chignecto, who figure as the "pioneers" of his narrative, Will R. Bird's Nova Scotians were just as narrowly conceived. Acadians and natives in particular appear as hostile Others, outside history and largely outside rationality. Raddall in *Roger Sudden* uses the word "crazy" to describe an Acadian barn and impresses upon the reader the Acadians' supposed physical abnormalities (small, lean and sharp of feature).⁸⁶ For his part, W.R. Bird in *This is Nova Scotia*, blamed the Expulsion on Quebec agents and Acadian priests⁸⁷ and in *Done at Grand Pré* (published in 1955 to coincide with the bicentennial of the Expulsion) argued that the Acadians had brought the expulsion down upon themselves by failing to behave "as British citizens" in 1747.⁸⁸ Bird thus deftly transformed Longfellow's image of the Acadian as victim into that of Acadian as outlaw. Whatever responsibility did not fall on the shoulders of the Acadians and French seemed to rest with the "New Englanders", whose "expanding ambitions...produced the situation".⁸⁹ Despite assuming an air of strict objectivity, Bird's study was unmistakably a brief for the British defence, popularizing an interpretation of 1755 developed earlier by T.B. Akins, R.G. Haliburton and Beamish Murdoch, and shared by Thomas Raddall.⁹⁰ On the one hand, there was Bird's "objective truth" ("based on *all* records available") and, on the other, the "biased diatribes" of "bigots" and "extremists".⁹¹

Natives were similarly marginalized by both Bird and Raddall. In Bird's fiction the native exists mainly as the red-skinned wielder of the scalping knife.⁹² "Romantic writers have given the redskin a prestige to which he is not entitled", he argued in an article on "The Original Nova Scotians" in 1925. After disparaging the unappetizing 20th-century appearance of these specimens — "lank, black hair, brown or copper-colored skin, dull eyes till they are aroused, full, compressed lips, dilated nostrils and high cheek bones" — Bird contrasted them with their ancestors:

Today we glance carelessly at the ragged, smoky-tinted family that comes off the blueberry plains at dusk and never think of the grim history of our

85 Barry Moody, "The Novelist as Historian: The Nova Scotia Identity in the Novels of Thomas H. Raddall", Young, ed., *Time and Place*, p. 140.

86 Raddall, *Roger Sudden* (Toronto, 1972 [1944]), p. 223.

87 Bird, *This Is Nova Scotia*, p. 157.

88 Bird, *Done at Grand Pré* (Toronto, 1955), p. vii.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

90 See M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 188-208. See also: W.C. Milner, "Chief Justice Belcher and the Acadian Expulsion", *Halifax Herald*, 2 July 1915.

91 *Done at Grand Pré*, pp. 2, 172.

92 See, for example, Bird, *The Passionate Pilgrim* (Toronto 1949).

forefathers, of the red terrors that haunted the trails of those hardy pioneers, of isolated families awakened in the night by fearsome yells and the smell of burning torches.

The dull-eyed basket and handle maker of today was yesterday arrayed in bright paint and feathers, was harassing the out-lying settlements till hundreds of our first home-seekers [sic] were driven to New York and the squaws who sell Mayflowers in the springtime yesterday took a keen delight in assisting in the torture of captives. In fact the folk of the present would forget the Nova Scotians entirely were it not for his contention that he has a right to cut down or bark a tree in any unfenced or uncultivated wilderness. And he also maintains that he has inherited the right to hunt, fowl or fish in any season on any territory, if he needs food. As he is frequently in want of provisions, owing to a decided aversion to manual labor, he frequently trespasses on private property and has little or no regard for our fishing and hunting regulations.⁹³

According to Bird, far from having *hurt* the local natives by stealing their land, whites had *rescued* the Micmac (and many other tribes east of the Mississippi) from the bloodthirsty Iroquois. For Bird, apart from their episodic brutalization of helpless whites, natives had no significance in history. Bird's pageant to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of Halifax, "The Birth of a City", noted that until the arrival of the whites, the area had known only "the footprints of passing Indians", and he included the obligatory references to the red terror lurking outside the settlement's frontiers.⁹⁴ "The Indians were pitiful cowards, as always...", Bird wrote to one correspondent who wanted information on events in Nova Scotia and at Fort Cumberland in 1775-6.⁹⁵

Raddall's handling of the natives was more nuanced. He used the native name "Ogomkegea" to add an exotic allure to his history of Liverpool, speculated on possible connections between Norse and Micmac beliefs, and described Micmac funeral customs without much editorial comment in *The Wings of Night*.⁹⁶ However, when Raddall imagines the possibilities of white/native intermarriage, in a context of native power and white dependence, he comes close to denying native peoples membership in a common humanity. *Roger Sudden* famously concludes with the hero's meditation on the superiority of the English over the French, whose *coureurs de bois* "had mated with savage women and spilled their seed in the wilderness"; "ugh! Darkness! Darkness!" is our hero's response to the idea of "mating with this

93 Bird, "The Original Nova Scotians", *Halifax Sunday Leader*, 19, 26 July 1925.

94 Bird, "The Birth of a City: A Pageant", Presented during the July Celebrations of the 200th Anniversary of the City of Halifax, 1949. Bird Scrapbooks, Dalhousie University Archives.

95 Bird to Joseph A. Hamelin, 27 November 1956, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

96 Clary Croft, "The Use of Folklore in Selected Works of Thomas Raddall", in Young, ed., *Time and Place*, pp. 109-19.

wild thing [i.e., a native woman], to produce hybrid things, half beast and half himself".⁹⁷ Perhaps Raddall was exploring the roots of British racism without committing himself to the views of his protagonist; or perhaps he had absorbed more than is commonly supposed from doctrines of racial essence which were freely circulating in the 1940s.⁹⁸ In disparaging natives, both authors were probably not that unusual in a province which advertised itself to the world as the "oldest settlement by the white race north of the Gulf of Mexico".⁹⁹ One correspondent of Archivist D.C. Harvey's, learning of a proposal to bestow a native name on the new national park on Cape Breton, exclaimed, "It is a profanation....We must not immortalize the tomahawk and scalping knife".¹⁰⁰

Bird and Raddall presented 20th-century Nova Scotians with clear, romantic and profoundly reactionary ideas about their history and their true identity. They did so at a particularly favourable time, when the progressive paradigm no longer seemed persuasive, when growing numbers of modern tourists clamoured for a therapeutic holiday from modernity, when many middle-class Nova Scotians worried about the presence of the past, and when the state, for the first time, was beginning to assume responsibility for systematic historical reconstruction. These elements combined to transform Bird's and Raddall's individual interpretations into something like an officially ordained and reproduced story of Nova Scotia.

Some of the inner workings of this process of "naturalization" can be assessed through the records of the Historic Sites Advisory Council. When the government of Angus L. Macdonald established this Council in October 1947, it was fulfilling one of the proposals outlined in the R.M. Dawson's *Report* of the Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation of 1944. As the Dawson *Report* noted, the province had done much to induce the tourist to come, but "she has not exerted herself enough to ensure that when the tourist arrives he will find what he really wants, and therefore make a lengthy stay and perhaps return the following year".¹⁰¹ The *Report* went on to consider the Department of Industry and Publicity's suggestion of "the initiation of a number of restoration projects designed to interest the tourists".¹⁰² It judged that the rebuilding of some of the structures of the fort at Louisbourg and the stockade and fort of La Tour would be the most interesting for tourists; it also approved of the suggestion "to build a few Acadian cottages at Grand Pré", for the cost "would not be great, and there is every reason to believe that the tourists would go there by the thousands".¹⁰³ Dawson's intent was to link the Public Archives with the envisaged Historic Sites and Monuments Board, but in such a manner as to shield the Archives from direct

97 Raddall, *Roger Sudden*, pp. 357, 166.

98 Note the discussion of this issue in Smyth, "Raddall's Desiring Machine", p. 72.

99 Report of the Department of Industry and Publicity, *JHA*, 1944, p. 10.

100 M.H. Nickerson to Harvey, 10 August 1936, Harvey Papers, MG 1, Box 1798, f. 10.19.

101 Nova Scotia, Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation, *Report*, Section XII, Report on the Tourist Industry (Halifax, 1944), p. 13.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

103 *Ibid.*

involvement in tourism promotion, which might jeopardize the “austere detachment so essential to conscientious historical scholarship”.¹⁰⁴ The implementation of Dawson’s scheme was planned by D.C. Harvey, the provincial archivist, who on 10 October 1947 reported to Angus L. Macdonald. He cautioned Macdonald that, after 15 years on the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board, he knew that a great deal of time and energy would have to be invested in “getting one tablet prepared and erected”.¹⁰⁵ Harvey recommended that the Historic Sites Advisory Council be set up under order-in-council rather than by statute, and that the appointment “should be for a limited period subject to renewal at the end of that period”.¹⁰⁶

The resulting order-in-council noted an “increasing interest in the long and eventful history of Nova Scotia, much of which is unfamiliar to ourselves but could be made better known by marking the sites of historical events, commemorating the names and activities of prominent men and women, and preserving some of the more typical residences or structures associated with personages or events”. Since “the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada commemorates only what it deems of national importance and therefore of necessity neglects many other subjects of great interest to each Province”, the new body, the Historic Sites Advisory Council of Nova Scotia, would devote itself to marking such places after investigation, and also to the care and preservation of historic buildings. Members of the Council were to be appointed for three years, but be eligible for reappointment from time to time. The Council was to meet annually, before the sitting of the legislature in Halifax, and also from time to time as circumstances warranted; between meetings, the work was to be carried on by correspondence with the Chairman. Members were entitled to claim for travel expenses, secretarial assistance and other expenses.¹⁰⁷ By placing Bird and Raddall on the Council, with Bird in the strategic chairman’s position, the Macdonald government was true to its pattern of placing tourism interests first. The Council was really Bird’s instrument; Raddall was his trusted advisor and archivist D.C. Harvey the occasionally resented resident professional. Most of the Council’s decisions were reached by consensus, and accorded with Bird’s own views; on occasion, Bird would simply reverse a decision of Council if he found it ill-advised.¹⁰⁸

The work of the Historic Sites Advisory Council can be analyzed as a set of distinct cases. Bird enumerated the major requests for commemoration for each annual meeting of the Council. By defining as one case each individual request as it made its way through the Council’s decision-making, and by then summarizing the

104 *Ibid.*, p. 15. Bird must have been stung by the *Report’s* harsh words condemning existing guide books and similar tourist literature as inaccurate, pp. 16-17.

105 Harvey to Macdonald, 10 October 1947, Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 933, PANS.

106 Harvey to Macdonald, 9 September 1947, Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 933, PANS.

107 Certified Copy of Order-in-Council, Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, vol. 933, f. 24-6/7, PANS.

108 See, for example, the Minutes of the Historic Sites Advisory Council, 13 September 1957, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS. Other members of the Council included R.S. Longley, Acadia University; Katharine McLennan, Cape Breton; W.J. Belliveau, Collège Sainte-Anne, the one Acadian; Thomas Raddall; and C. Bruce Fergusson from the Public Archives. Archivist D.C. Harvey was an ex-officio member, and Bird was the chairman.

results, we can develop an overview of the Council's work. Although there are limitations to these data — Bird did not write down all of his decisions, but recorded for the premier or his council only the most important — the numbers do provide us with some useful clues to the way the Council presented the past. The Council ruled on 152 such cases from 1948 to 1964. Looking first at the kinds of commemorative acts requested in each case, we find that more than half of these cases (86) were requests for plaques and monuments; more than a quarter (45) were requests to restore various houses or other historic structures. The remainder were concerned with the preservation of private collections, financial aid for existing historical facilities, and for a combination of plaques and restoration. This body of "cases" can be used for two purposes: first to obtain a fuller portrait of the demand for the new history, and second to see how the master narrative associated with Bird and Raddall shaped the process of commemoration.

The demand for historical recognition came from across the province, but was particularly intense in areas where the tourist traffic was most heavy. The leading centres of demand were Cumberland (18 cases), Annapolis (14), the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan area (13), Hants (13), Lunenburg (12), Yarmouth (11) and Digby (10). We find less demand for public history from Cape Breton County (9 cases), Pictou (8), Kings (8), Shelburne (7), Halifax County (5), Guysborough (3), Colchester (7), Antigonish (2), Inverness (3), Victoria (6), Queens (2) and Richmond (1). If we look at the successful cases, we find that no fewer than 25 (66 per cent) of the successful cases were found in the counties of the Annapolis Valley and South Shore; Yarmouth led all other counties with six successes. Only Cumberland County with five successes and Victoria County with three approached the totals of the southern counties. Looking at the provincial level, we find the data confirm the importance of local historical societies: nine out of 38 successful cases (24 per cent) were overtly supported by historical societies (as compared with 15 out of 152 [10 per cent] of all the cases). Out of a doubtless complex social logic whereby small-town notabilities organized a historical society in their own image emerges a fairly straightforward pattern of "historical" and "non-historical" areas, the latter far from the major tourist routes and often lacking a preservationist middle class. (Mining towns such as Springhill, Sydney Mines, Inverness and Joggins, for example, made no claims for public recognition, perhaps because they lacked an historically-conscious middle class which could identify wholeheartedly with the community).

Generally, before a case reached the Council, it had already achieved support from small businessmen and professionals. Of the 135 cases in which we know something about the originator, the largest number (61) were raised by private individuals living in the same county as the site they wanted commemorated. A further 13 cases were brought forward by individuals who indicated their links with historical societies and women's institutes. No fewer than 15 cases were initiated by historical societies acting in their own right. Business groups — often local boards of trade, sometimes with their own "tourist committees" — generated a further nine

cases. The remainder came from many different quarters: women's institutes, municipal governments, service clubs, provincial politicians and the Council itself.

What kinds of historical events were considered by the Council? No fewer than 103 (68 per cent) of the cases represented attempts to commemorate pre-Confederation history, which was surely a tribute to the tenacious hold of the "Golden Age"; 20 (13 per cent) represented post-Confederation history, with the remainder not fitting into either category. (Historic houses, for example, typically spanned both eras). Looking more specifically at century, we find four cases referred to events pre-dating 1600, 17 to events in the 17th century, 44 to events in the 18th century, 58 to events in the 19th century, and only nine to events in the 20th century (20 cases could not be classified in this way). Finally, an attempt was made to be yet more specific and associate the pattern of cases with standard historical periods. A total of 123 cases could be classified in this way. Only four cases referred to the period before 1604; a further 22 referred to the epoch of Acadia and French colonialism (1604-1755). The new kind of history concentrated heavily on the period 1755-1867: no fewer than 76 cases, 62 per cent of the 123 which can be classified in this way, are found here. (Breaking this figure down

Table One
Historic Sites Advisory Council Cases by Topic

Native History	1
Acadians (1604-1755)	19
French/English Rivalry	7
Immigration	20
Social Institutions	12
Politics (1800s)	4
Economic growth (1800s)	18
Politics (1900s)	1
Economic growth (1900s)	3
Labour	3

Source: Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, PANS.

further, we find 12 from the Expulsion to the American Revolution; 24 for the period 1783-1800; 29 for 1801-1848; and 11 for 1849-1866). Only 14 cases pertained to 1867-1924 and only seven pertained to 1925-1964. The demand for commemoration was clearly focused on the years from 1755 to 1867 — where one finds 76 of the cases, or 62 per cent of those which can be so classified. Further information on the empirical pattern of the cases was elicited by categorizing the cases by topic (Only 88 cases could be analyzed in this manner).

The Council's records demonstrate that Harold Connolly was not alone in believing that the time had come to "cash in on antiquity". People who had taken care of private collections of historical artifacts now learned from tourists that their

things were worth a great deal more money. When the Green Hill Museum in Pictou County went out of business, its proprietors had been persuaded that the collection was worth \$10,000; Bird's own estimate of the value of the 30 items (out of 400) that had any historical value was \$1,500.¹⁰⁹ Negotiating with the Quinlans of Lunenburg County was difficult, Bird complained, because they were "afraid to state a sum lest they might learn later that they might have had more".¹¹⁰ Visitors who called on L.B. Firth's private marine museum (which boasted of ships' blocks, a brass sun dial, cavalry swords, muskets, pepper-box pistols, muzzle-loading Colts, greased cartridges from the Indian Mutiny, a spoon horn from Iceland, an Italian hair iron, a boarding pike, sea shells and a high-wheeled bicycle, among other things) had told him, "you have a small fortune here". He fully believed them.¹¹¹ Tourists acted as the vanguard of market relations: they spread the word to those possessing "things historic" that the market for such commodities had never been better.

"Firsts" — what came to be known as "primary occurrences" — commanded top dollar in the marketplace of significance. "The first civilized settlement on the North American Continent was made in Nova Scotia", we learn from *High Lights of Nova Scotia History*, a publication of the Dominion Atlantic Railway: "From this early starting point Nova Scotia has been first in many things which it is a duty to recall, and a pleasure to read....Here was milled the first wheat and planted the first apple orchards in America, orchards still sending their golden fruitage down the years. Here the first fraternal society was established, the first church erected, the first parliament in any British dominion brought into being, the first public gardens planted and the first wireless installation made."¹¹²

In 1936 J.W. Regan, writing under the pen name "John Quinpool", dramatically extended this list in *First Things In Acadia: "The Birthplace Of A Continent"*. This book contained 100 chapters and upwards of 250 "primary occurrences". Nova Scotia claimed the honour of having the first mass celebrated in the air because the dirigible *Hindenburg* was passing over the "Sable Island Zone" when the first airborne mass was celebrated on it. Nova Scotia could also claim the first government lottery in Canada, the first American missionary (Leif Erikson), the first Portuguese colonies on the mainland of the Western hemisphere, possibly the first North American Swedenborgians...and so on, for 304 pages.¹¹³

109 Bird to Mary P. Webster, 7 August 1959, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

110 Bird to Macdonald, 14 June 1951, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

111 L.B. Firth to Bird, 12 January 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS. Bird fretted that the wives of the brothers who owned the museum may have sold invaluable old ships' blocks for a couple of dollars to canny tourists who knew the value of the collection: Bird to Stanfield, 18 January 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

112 Dominion Atlantic Railway, *High Lights of Nova Scotia History* (n.p. [Kentville], n.d. [1930s]).

113 John Quinpool [J.W. Regan], *First Things in Acadia, "The Birthplace of a Continent"* (Halifax, First Things Publishers, 1936). Regan began his career as a journalist and later became Associated Press correspondent for the Maritimes; he devoted the years of his retirement in the 1930s to his death in

In the spirit of J.W. Regan, communities in search of historical recognition from the Council presented their cases in terms of “uniqueness” and “originality”. The Nova Scotia past came to be reified as a series of disembodied “first” things and unique articles, reminiscent, perhaps, of a massive *Ripley’s Believe-It-Or-Not* museum: an attic full of curiosities.¹¹⁴ Bird considered recognizing “‘firsts’ of some rank or other” as a fundamental part of the Council’s operation, and checking such claims certain entailed vast amounts of archival labour.¹¹⁵ W. Kaye Lamb, the Dominion Archivist, considered such requests for rulings on “firsts” to be the “bane of an archivist’s existence”, because anachronistic definitions were always involved.¹¹⁶ Such nominalist scruple was wholly foreign to the applied essentialism of Nova Scotia’s tourism-oriented history, which virtually compelled a community in pursuit of a profitable history to document a “primary occurrence”. Any skepticism was certainly not to be voiced too loudly in Annapolis Royal, whose welcoming sign for tourists was: “Annapolis Royal welcomes you to a town of First Things”.¹¹⁷

This evidence on the demand for historical recognition suggests that state intervention was *not* decisive in originating the drive to cash in on antiquity. Within civil society itself, perhaps tutored to some extent by novelists such as Bird and Raddall, or impressed by American historical reconstructions, the “commodification of history” and the “cult of the Golden Age” were well underway before systematic state intervention began. Moreover, the Council was far too marginal a body to have exercised much direct influence over Nova Scotians’ assessment of their past. From 1947 to 1955, when the Council struggled ineffectually both to commemorate through plaques and to mount pressure for the preservation of houses, its existence within the bureaucracy was uncertain. During the first three years of its existence, the chairman had little time to devote to it.¹¹⁸ Typically, the Macdonald government had brought a new cultural agency into being, but left it stranded, without a clear connection to a government department to respond to its recommendations. Without appropriations in the government’s estimates, it eked out a shadowy existence as part of the Department of Industry and Publicity.¹¹⁹ For its part, the Department of Industry and Publicity sent the

1945 to historical books and pamphlets on Halifax and Nova Scotia. He was formerly alderman and deputy mayor of Halifax, first president of the city’s Waegwoltic Club, and managing director of Canadian Investors Limited.

114 In its 1959 Quiz, the Yarmouth Historical Society asked “what Yarmouthian built Canada’s first Mortuary Chapel?” Historical Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

115 Bird to N.J.P. Melnick, 26 October 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

116 W. Kaye Lamb to C. Bruce Fergusson, 4 August 1964, C. Bruce Fergusson Papers, MG 1, vol. 1911, f. 11, no.7, PANS.

117 Bird, *This is Nova Scotia*, p. 77.

118 Bird to D.R. Oliver, 5 July 1950, Minutes of the 3rd Meeting, Historic Sites Advisory Council, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

119 Minutes of the 3rd Meeting, Historic Sites Advisory Council, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

Council conflicting signals about how it should evaluate proposals for commemoration: on one occasion, it recommended the Council's recommendations should be governed by considerations of costs, and on another that the Council make its recommendations on "purely historical grounds".¹²⁰ By 1954 discontent with this cloudy arrangement was such that a motion was passed by the Council demanding some clarification of its place in the bureaucracy and the policies it was expected to implement.¹²¹ After Angus L. Macdonald died in office on 13 April 1954, until January 1955 the Council's chairman was "quite adrift and had no one to whom I could refer matters for advice".¹²² The three-year term of the Council lapsed in 1955, and Bird had to appeal to the new premier for an order-in-council for another term.¹²³ Under the edict of the parsimonious Robert Stanfield, the Council cut costs by supplying only the plaque (leaving the community to supply the cairn or platform and to install the plaque itself). Although the Council could advise the government on matters historical, its main activity was turning down requests and issuing three plaques per year, which, Bird remarked to Premier Stanfield, "pretty well uses up the money set aside for it".¹²⁴ The all-weather bronze plaques could be made in three weeks by a Halifax firm, at a price per plaque ranging from \$130 to \$220 in 1960, depending on its size and the number of words.¹²⁵

At the same time, it is likely that the Council's activities strengthened and confirmed pre-existing patterns within civil society. The plaques were keenly sought after and this competition must have taught many lessons about what was significant and what was not. Entering the system of signs through which the province made itself known to tourists, overt historical "markers" such as houses and plaques bestowed state approval upon highly debatable assumptions about history. Of the 152 cases, only 38 succeeded (defined narrowly for our purposes as a favourable decision by this particular body), 77 failed outright, and 21 were passed to another body (frequently, the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board). The result in 16 cases is unclear. The difference between the successful cases and the general pattern of all cases tells us something about the bias and impact of this particular Council.

Unsurprisingly for a Council so influenced by Bird and Raddall, the impact of the Council's decisions was to focus attention narrowly on the post-1755, pre-Confederation, "Raddallian" period. Thirty of the 38 successful cases (79 per cent) referred to pre-Confederation events, as compared to a general average of 68 per

120 Minutes of the 3rd Meeting, Historic Sites Advisory Council, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

121 Minutes of the 3rd Meeting, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

122 Bird to Raddall, 14 January 1955, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

123 Bird to Henry D. Hicks, 22 August 1954, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

124 Bird to Stanfield, 21 January 1958, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

125 Bird to Arthur Kelsall, 9 August 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS. Halifax Pattern Works to Historic Sites Advisory Council, Invoice, 30 July 1963, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

cent, while post-Confederation events accounted for only 13 per cent. (The remainder were unclassifiable). Further evidence on the “concentrating” impact of the Council can be found in the chronological pattern: 12 (32 per cent) and 18 (48 per cent) of the successful cases pertained to the 18th and 19th centuries respectively, as opposed to 29 per cent and 38 per cent respectively for all cases. Finally, when we move to consider more specific historical periods, we find that the Council had an impact in preferring those events that fell between 1783 and 1866 (55 per cent of the successful cases, as opposed to 42 per cent of all cases), whereas it tended to filter out numerous cases from the period 1604-1755 (which constituted only 11 per cent of the successful cases compared to 18 per cent of all cases). The most significant moments of the new public narrative were to be found, clearly, where the major historical novels of Raddall and Bird had already located them.

What rules produced these patterns? At first glance, the Council’s decisions seem purely capricious, refusing commemoration here and granting it there, invoking in one case a rule blithely overlooked in another.¹²⁶ On closer inspection, one can reconstruct a certain logic to the Council’s decision, a two-tiered system of triage by which “non-historical” events, persons and buildings were eliminated from the running. The first and fundamental grid through which a case had to pass was that of political economy. History was expected to pay for itself; its truth and value resided in the revenues it generated. It was a commodity, something to set in the shop-window of the province, primarily for the eyes of tourists. Ironically, then, the Council was often a body that discouraged preservation and hastened commercialization. Against the claims of local sentimentalists, and against those traditionalists who merely wished to control the rate at which the landscapes of daily life were changed, the pragmatic council would always demand: What is the cash value of this past? As Bird so clearly put it, in a 1953 letter to Macdonald, he had “talked Nova Scotia history to sixty eight...meetings last year. In the beginning all had the idea that they could dream up a project for their district and present it to our Council as a definite task. No group thought of doing any work thereafter; our Council would see to everything. Now, after two years of preaching self-support, I have been able to make them understand that if they want things they must do them, and not confine their efforts to begging for handouts”.¹²⁷ Bird could say, with Bishop Berkeley: “We have first raised a dust and then complain we cannot see”.

126 The most glaring case of this capriciousness involved Ross-Thomson House in Shelburne. Bird judged the house to be in a “dreadful state of disrepair and decay” and lacking in any strong claim to historical commemoration. “If it were simply old houses we needed”, he wrote to Mrs. K.G.T. Webster, “we would have six or seven on our hands at Annapolis Royal and three at Granville Ferry, all in first-class condition, being lived in, with old beams and ironware and ovens and fireplaces in excellent condition. But there must be more than simple age for recommendation when funds for restoration are so limited”. After steadfastly disputing the originality or significance of the Ross-Thomson House (at its second meeting, the Council unequivocally ruled that “the Thomson House, Shelburne, is not a typical house of the Loyalist period and has no recorded history to recommend it”), Bird changed his verdict after the house had been certified as an appropriate project for restoration. Suddenly he was impressed by the house’s historical importance as an early town post office and school. Bird to Mrs. K.G.T. Webster, 29 July 1949, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

127 Bird to Macdonald, 11 February 1953, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

He inspired historical societies and service clubs with dreams of the new history as a wonderful cash cow, and then complained when he was besieged by those who had most keenly appreciated his message. It all made a certain sense only within a liberal framework, within which the state's function was to maximize opportunities for profitable activities without itself directing them. Describing his work to one correspondent, Bird noted his many visits to "Historical Societies, Boards of Trade, etc., that are working to mark or restore some particular place of historic interest", and then added, bluntly, "The job is to get such work done without offering too much aid from the government".¹²⁸

Cemeteries were, within this pragmatic paradigm, contentious sites of memory. Cemeteries failed the test of political economy because they could hardly "pay for themselves". The Council, "aware of the large number of such cemeteries, and the expenditure that would be involved in their maintenance, does not feel justified in recommending that the Government of Nova Scotia undertake their restoration and perpetual care", Bird wrote to Stanfield.¹²⁹ Restoring one cemetery would lead inevitably to demands that many others be restored, and to rivalry among the various denominations.¹³⁰ Heartfelt appeals from expatriate Nova Scotians disturbed by the weeds on their ancestors' graves were to no avail. Bird reported more than 50 requests to restore graveyards in an 11-year period, which, if accurate, suggests that many Nova Scotians felt cemeteries were still specially important places of memory and an entirely appropriate focus of the Council's activity.¹³¹

On the same commercial grounds, the Council was against assisting bicentennial celebrations. From 1955 on, the province was swept up in bicentennial celebrations for many communities: "All are plaguing me for some sort of assistance, and I cannot agree", Bird complained. "There will be no end if government funds were extended for such celebrations as from now on there will [be], every year, some place celebrating a 200th birthday".¹³² The Council ruled that no town or community would be encouraged to apply for financial help in staging such events.¹³³

The rule of economy worked positively as well as negatively. Bird's succinct description of his role — "getting our historical assets on array in the shop window for our visitors"¹³⁴ — is useful if we remember that the astute shop owner places in the window only those items which might potentially please the customers. The content of the window display should, in Bird's mind, coincide with the

128 Bird to Douglas R. Oliver, 5 July 1950, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

129 Bird to Stanfield, 19 September 1957, Historic Sites Advisory Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

130 Historic Sites Advisory Council, Minutes, 26 October 1951, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

131 Bird to Arthur B. Merry, 29 September 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

132 Bird to Stanfield, 21 January 1958, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

133 *Ibid.*

134 Bird to Stanfield, 16 December 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 10, vol. 934, PANS.

expectations, values, judgements and prejudices of those middle-class travellers, both American and Canadian, at whom these historical attractions were primarily aimed. The sites/sights became meaningful as they impressed the Tourist Gaze — meaning not just what the tourists actually looked at, but what a hypothetical “average tourist” *might* look at. Just as he researched his travel books by pretending to be a tourist, Bird often assessed historical projects with a hypothetical tourist’s eye. His Council’s first decision, in fact, was to write to town governments throughout Nova Scotia to urge them to put up large signs at their borders advertising “any historical details of its founding, the identity of the first settlers, data regarding any interesting feature of the locality, its recreational facilities, and leading industries”; photographs of such signs would be taken by visitors “and shown far and wide, and such pictures can be used to advantage in publicity advertising”, according to Bird.¹³⁵ Eleven years later, when Bird was trying to come up with something that could give the town of Bedford a sliver of historical significance, he hit upon the idea of restoring the town’s toll bridge: “It might be that if old-looking gates were erected near the bridge at Bedford with appropriate signs, headed by such lettering as ‘FREE ENTRY’, it might rouse the curiosity of tourists and cause many pictures to be taken”.¹³⁶ And if only Port Mouton would put up a sign explaining that its name derived from the sheep which had jumped from De Monts’ ship — “Think of the numbers who would stop to take a picture”, said a sailor, whose comments were reported by Bird. “Port Mouton would be talked about and written about in hundreds of American books”.¹³⁷

The new kind of history was constructed within an Empire of the Gaze, within this consciousness of being watched: within the same logic of surveillance that had structured *This is Nova Scotia*. We can watch Bird doing this when he visualizes the Digby Gap: “You can see”, he wrote to Stanfield, “that if the two block houses were restored and the cannon put back in place, what a thrill the scene would give all visitors entering Nova Scotia on board the Princess Helene”.¹³⁸ Requests from various communities for markers commemorating the Planters met Bird’s strong opposition, on the sole grounds that “it will make the tourist confused to see two or three [plaques] telling the same story”.¹³⁹ Cairns, both Bird and many of his correspondents agreed, should *not* be on the actual sites they commemorated, if this meant placing them out of sight of the tourists. A marker seen only by local residents was hardly worth putting up.¹⁴⁰ Monuments that visitors could not easily understand — such as the “French Cross” at Morden, an old monument, heavily

135 Bird to F.G. Fuller, Town Clerk, Amherst, 3 March 1948, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

136 Bird to Stanfield, 18 August 1959, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

137 Report of the Historic Sites Advisory Council for the Period ending 31 March 1960, *JHA* (1961), p. 26.

138 Bird to Stanfield, 19 October 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

139 Bird to Stanfield, 21 February 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

140 Bird to Stanfield, 14 May 1959, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS. The same argument prevailed in the case of commemorating King Seaman.

damaged by frost and souvenir-hunters, identified only by its name and the date “1755” — drew sharp rebukes from Bird: “This means absolutely nothing to a visitor. Three cars from the U.S. drove in while I was there. They had no idea what the cross meant”.¹⁴¹

After a given case had passed through the grid of political economy, there were still other hurdles — of attractiveness, uniqueness, ideological correctness — it had to cross on the way to significance. Looks mattered. This new kind of history did not like structures which looked their age or emphasized the province’s underdevelopment. Chapman House in Cumberland County, a giant 18th-century house built of marsh brick, was of special significance for Bird as the author of *Here Stays Good Yorkshire*, because it was supposedly the only original home left of the 18th-century Yorkshire immigrants celebrated in that novel. Having fallen into the wrong hands, however, the house could not be considered for a plaque: “the present owner is a widower and lives with a grown-up son in the kitchen and keeps the place like a pig sty. And he has a large flock of geese which foul the ground. I have told the people repeatedly that until this situation changes we will not recommend a plaque.”¹⁴² It was intolerable that history should be in the hands of a “dirty-lazy widower...who sleeps on an iron cot in the kitchen to save climbing the stairs” and who was largely maintained by his flock of geese.¹⁴³

Considerations of attractiveness influenced even the way the Council’s plaques were presented. In contrast with the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board, the Council did not impose a uniform style of display, because it thought it more likely that tourists would photograph the monuments if each one were distinctive.¹⁴⁴ The rule of attractiveness was also applied to the individuals chosen for commemoration. Over the winter of 1958-59, controversy in Halifax raged over plans by St. Mary’s University to demolish Gorsebrook, a mansion that once belonged to Enos Collins, one of British North America’s most successful and important capitalists. St. Mary’s estimated it would cost \$65,000 to repair the building, and preferred simply to raze it. Bird strongly endorsed their position, and so did other members of the Council. The principal argument they advanced for condemning Gorsebrook was the personal unattractiveness of Enos Collins. Bird was persuaded by the conclusive verdict of Thomas Raddall: “Collins made a huge fortune but never contributed anything to the city or province, historically or in any other way, [he] was a cold, hard, grasping man”. Bird added his own evaluation of Collins: “He never raised a hand to help anyone or any cause. His sole claim to notice is that he was one of Nova Scotia’s first millionaires”.¹⁴⁵

A case could also be rejected on the grounds that it was neither unique nor original. Many a beloved historical landmark was dismissed because, being neither

141 Bird to R.S. Longley, 10 July 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

142 Bird to Stanfield, 21 February 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

143 Bird to Stanfield, 1 November 1962, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

144 Bird to Stephen McLellan, Spencer’s Island, N.S., 15 June 1963, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

145 Bird to Stanfield, 29 December 1958, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

“the first” nor “the only”, it had no scarcity value in the significance sweepstakes. Ten Mile House near Halifax was one of seven or eight old stage coach inns still in existence; if it were marked, the others would have to be, too. Similarly, the first grist mill at Earltown was dismissed as a site of history, because there were dozens of first grist mill sites, complete with original millstones.¹⁴⁶ Claimants who sensed the centrality of these criteria resorted to truly desperate arguments on behalf of their cases: the owner of Acacia Cottage in Halifax initially claimed that it had been the first house in Halifax to have a Christmas Tree; failing this, she relied on the back-up argument that in the past month the house had also “made history” by being the first Halifax house moved by trailer.¹⁴⁷ Much of Bird’s time was apparently spent on finding ways of combatting such claims to significance: “I have this summer dealt effectively with no fewer than fourteen requests that had no foundation in fact”, he advised Premier Stanfield in 1962, with something like grim satisfaction.¹⁴⁷

Finally, a claim to public memory could be refused on ideological grounds. The male hero dominated the world of public commemoration as thoroughly as he did the novels of Raddall and Bird. Of the 38 successful cases, no fewer than 17 (45 per cent) were commemorations of individual men, as compared with 44 (29 per cent) of all cases. Only one woman, Flora Macdonald, invaded this all-male world of historical significance — and her fame was not derived from anything she did during her (hitherto unremarked) stay in Windsor, but from her romantic devotion to her bonnie prince. Other heroes hailed to the skies were vintage Raddallian men (such as two brothers who won Congressional Medals in the Spanish-American War). The inclusion of others (for example, Sidney E. Smith, John Diefenbaker’s Minister of External Affairs, who was commemorated shortly after his death in 1961, even though he had long resided out of the province) seemed motivated by political and economic considerations.¹⁴⁹ It was not even necessary that the “hero” be dead: Bird drafted the wording of a plaque for C. Sydney Frost while he was still alive, hailing him as a “NATIVE SON WHO THROUGH DILIGENCE AND ABILITY BECAME PRESIDENT OF THE BANK OF NOVA SCOTIA, AND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CREATION OF AN OUTSTANDING BANK BUILDING IN HIS HOME TOWN”.¹⁵⁰

Blacks were not within the pale of historical significance according to these ideological criteria. They were “historical” to the extent that slaves provided a certain *Gone with the Wind* atmosphere to stately homes. But apart from William Hall, who had won the Victoria Cross in the 19th century and had been commemorated before the Council was formed, blacks clearly had no claim to

146 Bird to Stanfield, 16 December 1960, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

147 Mrs. Dawson to Bird, 30 October 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

148 Bird to Stanfield, 6 November 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

149 Bird to Stanfield, 18 August 1959, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

150 Bird to Willard F. Allen, 15 August 1956, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS. This was not, however, an official Council plaque.

significance within this official framework. When Bird informed Premier Stanfield that Birchtown, near Shelburne, a black settlement dating back to the 18th century, had asked for recognition of its history, he lumped it in with the other communities “with very little in the way of historic importance” that wanted things done for them. “There is simply no foundation to their stories”, he remarked to Stanfield, “but I am being as tactful as possible with them”.¹⁵¹

Bird was rather less tactful in responding to the idea that workers’ organizations might be entitled to commemoration. Apart from one small mining museum in Stellarton (and that a museum controlled by Dosco officials)¹⁵² there was no public recognition of labour’s part in developing Nova Scotia. Trade unions — even those which could be regarded as being “firsts” — were by definition non-historical. J.M. Murphy of the Truro Board of Trade asked the Council to recognize the little-known fact that Truro had had the first railroad labour organization in Nova Scotia, “Granite Rock” Division No. 149, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, formed on 22 August 1882. Bird found the very idea of recognizing such an event rather funny. He wrote sardonically to Stanfield of Murphy’s request “that the Council provide plaques to go up inside the railway station at Truro and tell the world that the first Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers [sic] was formed there in 1822 [sic]”, and reported the Council’s belief that “railway unions should provide their own plaques as the formation of a union was not an outstanding event”. In rejecting this *outré* request, Bird allowed himself a rare degree of candour when corresponding with a client. He told Murphy that the Council had refused the request and “felt there were many items of greater historic significance needing attention”.¹⁵³ Co-operatives were dealt with more gently, but no less firmly: even the earliest Nova Scotian co-operatives were not historical.¹⁵⁴

The history of French colonization and subsequent Acadian life and culture posed a more difficult problem for the Council. One could hardly make the Acadians disappear entirely from the “Land of Evangeline” — certainly not in 1955, the bicentennial of the Expulsion, which was marked with an outburst of pride in Acadian areas — and many “firsts” were obviously French. Although some of Acadia’s history had been covered by the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board, there were many good cases for commemoration left over. Nonetheless, the Council weeded out a disproportionate number of French and Acadian cases; only eight per cent of the successful cases were of this type (as opposed to 18 per cent of the total number of cases considered).

151 Bird to Stanfield, 8 February 1963, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

152 This museum was started in 1941. It was ahead of its time in attempting to simulate 19th-century mining conditions in a replica of an 1887 working face at the Albion Colliery at Stellarton. Sydney *Weekly Cape Bretoner*, 12 July 1958.

153 Bird to Stanfield, 16 May 1962; J.M. Murphy to Bird, 5 June 1961; Bird to Murphy, 23 May 1962, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

154 On this occasion, Bird blocked the co-operatives’ entry into history by going to Tignish, P.E.I. and getting “positive proof that operations at Tignish...were commenced three years before such an effort in Nova Scotia”. Bird to Stanfield, 11 July 1958, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

The Acadian legacy was not something to which a Council chaired by Bird and influenced by Raddall felt committed. The Council felt so little attachment to Acadian commemorations that on three occasions it allowed local communities to convert plaques awarded for Acadian themes over to British events. (Evidently, once a community received permission to have a plaque on one topic, it was able to convert it to another). At Bible Hill commemoration of a “Holy Well” attributed to the Acadians was switched to the commemoration of the landing of the first English-speaking settlers. At Mira, commemoration of a monastery connected with Louisbourg was changed to commemoration of Mira’s “pre-Loyalist, Loyalist and Scottish pioneers”.¹⁵⁵ Commemoration of the spot where the Acadians had gathered previous to their deportation was switched to a site celebrating the arrival of the Planters.¹⁵⁶

Natives also posed a difficult issue. Once again, on grounds of economy, there was a case to be made for commemorating native themes: “prehistoric” relics had long been considered tourist attractions.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, as late as 1949 one note for tourists (unsigned, but most likely written by Bird) recommended that visitors bring a shovel, for a “little digging” would turn up “crumbled pieces of pottery, barely discernible as remains of cooking utensils”, the crude remains of a people who “did not do much with clay beyond biscuit firing”.¹⁵⁸ On Arthur B. Merry’s Kejimikujik property, petroglyphs — old native designs carved on rock — were defaced by tourists carving their names over them, and a native cemetery was also imperilled.¹⁵⁹ Despite the urgency of this case, it was not likely that a council of this type would do much about it. Bird advised Merry that it was the fixed policy of the Council not to restore cemeteries. As for the petroglyphs, the Council decided that it “would not recommend any action to preserve the rock markings”.¹⁶⁰ The Council *did* commemorate the site of a large native encampment at Shubenacadie, which Thomas Raddall in particular considered historically significant as the site of “the largest Micmac encampment when Le Loutre arrived in Nova Scotia”,¹⁶¹ but this exception to the rule of whiteness in fact proved that very rule: the plan for the unveiling ceremony emphasized the ethnic hierarchies at play; the keynote speakers were to be the Indian Agent and Thomas Raddall, the “best qualified person in the province”, according to Bird, to speak on natives. Native people were not to be totally absent in this plan: a choir of native boys from the nearby residential school were to sing a song or two, thus providing a little “something to add to the occasion”.¹⁶²

155 Bird to the Historic Sites Advisory Council, 24 April 1963, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS; Historic Sites Advisory Council, Minutes, 20 May 1960, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

156 Historic Sites Advisory Council, 13 September 1957, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

157 See, for example, Edward Williams, *Nova Scotia From Yarmouth to Halifax* (Yarmouth, 1901), p. 19.

158 Untitled note on Shubenacadie, 8 August 1949, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

159 Merry to Bird, 23 September 1961, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 934, PANS.

161 Raddall to “Edwin” [E.K. Ford], 25 January 1949; Macdonald to Ford, 3 February 1949, Bird to James P. Richards, 5 July 1950, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

162 Bird to Raddall, 26 May 1951, Historic Sites Advisory Council Papers, MG 20, vol. 933, PANS.

“The most perfect exteriority”, Castoriadis said of the way the present postmodern epoch lives its relationship with the past. What better description, however, could one apply to the new kind of history fashioned in modern Nova Scotia between 1935 and 1964? The commodification of the past is not a recent, “postmodern”, phenomenon; rather, it was of a piece with the antimodernist moment (lasting roughly from the 1920s to the 1950s) in Nova Scotia culture. Compared to the massive projects, spectacles and entertainments which lay in Nova Scotia’s future after the Council’s demise in 1964 — Louisbourg, Historic Properties, the Parade of Sail, the Upper Clements Theme Park — the commemorative efforts of Bird and Raddall seem minor and dated. The medium of commemorative plaques itself has come to a point of exhaustion, for it assumes too many common memories, too much of a unifying narrative (such as the triumph of British Civilization), too coherent an historical identity. In contrast, the postmodern social organization of things historical assumes only a capacity for sensual response. Today’s most eloquent reconstructions are wordless, conveying their “truth” sensually, and are as easily and swiftly digested as a television commercial. We are tempted to pay them the compliment of cultural innovation, yet they are merely logical extensions of the objectifying approach of Raddall and Bird. Both strategies require the state and its practices of surveillance; both make tangible through physical objects an anti-modernist ideology of the “Golden Age”, using the technologies and means of persuasion appropriate to their time.

Today the new mnemonic “theme-park” technologies merely build upon the conceptual breakthrough registered in the 1930s: that is, they naturalize a way of doing history *for others*, within and for the Tourist Gaze, and they are profoundly anti-historical, speaking not about time but about timelessness, about commemorating that which has somehow escaped from time’s flow. In this view, the true essence of the past can be grasped and saved by salvaging things, by setting up cairns and plaques, elaborate fortresses and towering tall ships. There they stand as heavy weights against time’s flow, to defy with their sheer materiality the tragic transience of all things. Any incredulity towards this official mnemonics calls into question a narrative which has been a powerful force in the constitution of individual and group identities for three generations. In such a questioning, however, lies the only possibility of a more generous future narrative through which those who have suffered the most will claim from future generations the honour that is their due.