

## **“Inviting Coworkers”: Linking Scholars of Atlantic Canada on the Twitter Backchannel**

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## “Inviting Coworkers”: Linking Scholars of Atlantic Canada on the Twitter Backchannel

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the biannual Atlantic Canada Studies (ACS) conference convened at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John. It combined many of the best characteristics of a conference: modest size; great variety of panel themes; a mix of junior and senior scholars, graduate students, and representatives from other sectors amongst presenters and attendees; and comfortable facilities and surroundings. In all about 110 scholars, from a range of disciplines, registered for the conference, representing institutions and organizations from around the region as well as other provinces and the United States. The presenters and attendees at the 19th ACS conference engaged with perennial themes while bringing innovative new methods and approaches to bear upon them. Modernization, technology, cultural survival, and the complex links among them were among the more popular themes. Despite an extraordinary vibrancy in the interdisciplinary literature of the region, efforts by Atlantic Canadians to combat distance and isolation, whether it be in moving resources to market, practicing traditions, promoting language survival, assuring political representation, crafting education programs, and managing health care remain at the fulcrum of efforts to refine definitions of Atlantic Canadianness. One of the wonderful features of an interdisciplinary conference such as ACS is its ability to bring together diverse voices and create a space for dialogue and exchange across disciplines and distance. This year, in addition to all of the traditional academic conference presentations, panels, and social events, there was an additional mode by which a few scholars in attendance engaged with presenters, presentations, and colleagues: use of a Twitter backchannel.

The ACS conference began with a keynote address by Richard Judd of the University of Maine, who explored relationships between environmental movements in New England and Atlantic Canada and emphasized that despite important differences in administration and approaches to activism the regions were united by a shared commitment to the protection of “second nature.” This idea animated much of the rest of the conference, as presenter after presenter referred back to Judd’s opening remarks in talking about land and resource management, struggles with modernity, social and cultural identity formation and survival, and constructions of memory and commemoration. Taking “second nature” or built and manipulated environments as his focus, Judd called for a greater emphasis on bioregional and cross-border studies that might help to challenge our existing ideas about the nature and parameters of regions as conventionally constructed. For *region* to remain a viable unit of analysis, scholars must engage in continual questioning of its boundaries, definitions, and influences. One of the challenges of life and history in Atlantic Canada is understanding relationships between local, often small, often isolated populations and the various levels of government that seek to manage their access to resources and services and inevitably shape their ability to sustain community and cultural identities in the face of changes, whether driven from within or imposed from without. One way to ensure the sharing of ideas

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and findings, through which a diverse group of scholars will continue to add to nuanced definitions of region in Atlantic Canada, is to adopt new and innovative channels of communication made possible by social media that allow for the greatest possible access to research and scholarship.

While the size and comfortable atmosphere of the ACS conference made it conducive to interaction amongst attendees, whether in panel sessions, coffee breaks, or less formal evening gatherings, the sustained Twitter backchannel of communication between and amongst presenters, audience members, and far-away spectators enabled conference discussions to transcend the limits of Saint John, Atlantic Canada, and even of time itself. The #2012ACS Twitter stream made conference materials, themes, and ideas available to those unable to make the trip. It also expanded the audience for the conference, as the public tweets of attendees were broadcast to their respective networks of followers. These networks often comprise extensive webs of academic and non-academic associates in public and private realms. While certainly no replacement for actual attendance and physical interaction, the Twitter backchannel provides an additional avenue for communication – one with great potential for connectivity.

Social media have infiltrated virtually every aspect of personal and professional life in the 21st century. One of the most profound influences of social media has been its expansion of the concept of community. Community used to refer to one's town, region, maybe one's province, but the various manifestations of social media have highlighted other types of communities: virtual networks in which scattered individuals interact based on interest. This interaction occurs via social media building upon the Web 2.0 concept.<sup>1</sup> While one might be tempted to dismiss social media, it is unwise to do so without first understanding the multitude of resources available to scholars and considering the potential for access to like-minded researchers and teachers around the world. Social media include well-known sites such as Facebook, a social networking platform; Wikipedia, a collaborative encyclopedia; YouTube, a video sharing site; and Twitter, a microblogging site. In addition, social media include sites such as Academia.edu, where academics can share research and follow the work of other scholars. There are numerous social media sites and more appear every day. Which platforms endure and which disappear remains to be seen. Frankly, it makes little difference as all of these types of platforms allow scholars options to augment their research, dialogue with experts, access new sources, and reach new audiences. Social media provide platforms for instantaneous sharing, discourse, and virtual community building.

Academics, across disciplines, have also begun to harness the potential of tools, including Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Scoop.it, Reddit, LinkedIn, and others. Depending on individual need, these sites can be utilized to accelerate the process of production, dissemination, and review of research. In addition, academics have also begun to work with microblogging platforms, specifically Twitter, as a means

1 The concept of Web 2.0 refers in large part to the notion of "user-generated content," manifested most often in social media platforms, sharing websites, blogs, etc. The concept is distinct from traditional websites where users passively absorb information. The concept of Web 2.0 entered the mainstream in 2003 after O'Reilly Media hosted the first Web 2.0 conference.

of networking and also communicating via backchannel. As Claire Ross and colleagues describe it, “Microblogging is a variant of . . . blogging which allows users to quickly post short updates, providing an innovative communication method that can be seen as a hybrid of blogging, instant messaging, social networking, and status notifications.”<sup>2</sup> Founded in 2006 and currently used by about half a billion people worldwide,<sup>3</sup> including about 15 per cent of adults in the United States,<sup>4</sup> Twitter is the best-known microblogging platform. Over the past few years academics have begun to study various aspects of Twitter and its possibilities as a tool to connect conference participants with larger networks.<sup>5</sup>

Twitter messages, or tweets, are comprised of 140 characters or less and sent by users with unique handles – for example, @katherineofl or @robgee18.<sup>6</sup> Users can send tweets from computers, mobile applications, and via text message as long as they have set up a free Twitter account. Twitter users choose to “follow” other entities, or handles, representing individuals, organizations, and institutions. For example, a Twitter user might follow the Network for Canadian History & Environment by following its handle – @NiCHE\_Canada – or follow Dan Cohen, director of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George

2 Claire Ross, Melissa Terras, Claire Warwick, and Anne Welsh, “Enabled Backchannel: Conference Twitter Use by Digital Humanists,” *Journal of Documentation* 67, no. 2 (3 August 2011): 217.

3 Joann Pan, “Will You be Twitter’s 500 Millionth User,” <http://mashable.com/2012/02/22/twitters-500-million-user/>.

4 Aaron Smith and Joanna Brenner, “Twitter Use 2012,” Pew Internet and American Life Project, Pew Research Center, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Twitter-Use-2012.aspx>.

5 The literature on Twitter is still emerging. A number of articles addressing Twitter use in the classroom have been published recently, but only a few studies have attempted to assess the potential merits of Twitter as a tool in academic and scholarly communication at conferences. Those studies that have examined Twitter in an academic conference setting have largely been in the fields of science and social science. Some notable additions to this literature include Bodong Chen, “Is the Backchannel Enabled? Using Twitter at Academic Conferences,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 2011; Aafia Chaudhry, Michael L. Glodé, Matt Gillman, and Robert S. Miller, “Trends in Twitter Use by Physicians at the American Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting, 2010 and 2011,” *Journal of Oncology Practice* (17 April 2012): 173-9, <http://jop.ascopubs.org/content/early/2012/04/17/JOP.2011.000483>; Wolfgang Reinhardt, Martin Ebner, Günter Beham, and Cristina Costa, “How People Are Using Twitter During Conferences,” in *Creativity and Innovation Competencies on the Web*, ed. Veronika Hornung-Prähauser and Michaela Luckmann (Salzburg: EduMedia, 2009), 145-56; Martin Ebner, Herbert Mülbürger, Sandra Schaffert, Mandy Schiefner, Wolfgang Reinhardt, and Steve Wheeler, “Getting Granular on Twitter: Tweets from a Conference and Their Limited Usefulness for Non-Participants,” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30838691/Getting-Granular-on-Twitter-Tweets-from-a-Conference-and-their-Limited-Usefulness-for-Non-Participants>; Kristina DeVoe, “‘You’ll Never Guess Who I Talked To!’: Tweeting at Conferences,” *The Reference Librarian* 51, no. 2 (March 2010): 167-70; Ross, Terras, Warwick, and Welsh, “Enabled Backchannel,” 214-37; Neil Savage, “Twitter as Medium and Message,” *Communications of the ACM* 54, no. 3 (March 2011): 18-20; and Jose Van Dijck, “Tracing Twitter: The Rise of a Microblogging Platform,” *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 7, no. 3 (2011): 333-48.

6 @katherineofl and @robgee18 are the handles of this essay’s authors, both of whom were tweeting at the ACS conference in Saint John.

Mason University by following his handle – @dancohen. Users can follow as many handles as they choose. Twitter users post tweets at will. A user's personal Twitter stream is populated by the chronologically ordered tweets of those followed. If one has ten followers, then ten Twitter users will see one's posted messages. Twitter messages are generally comprised of status updates often attached to website links, photographs, video clips, and other media. Academics can use such messages to share with members of their network ideas, opinions, and links to pertinent literature and research materials. Twitter users will frequently rebroadcast one another's tweets. Referred to as a "retweet" (and designated with an "RT"), this practice allows users to recontextualize messages, add commentary, and move them towards broader audiences. Twitter users can organize and group their tweets by use of a hashtag (#). For example, at the recent ACS conference Twitter users discussing the conference included the designation "#2012ACS" in individual tweets. This convention imposes a degree of order upon a seemingly chaotic virtual community, enabling users to group and search for tweets containing hashtags (much as one would keyword search a database). Thus it is possible to search for, group, and read all tweets designated with #2012ACS as a single stream.<sup>7</sup> Hashtags often develop organically and cover topics from #cooking to #digitalhumanities to #canada. At an academic conference hashtags can serve as a way to connect messages from participants tweeting at various sessions. This grouping of tweets by use of a hashtag creates a backchannel, an aggregated stream of posts all containing a common, searchable designator (in this case #2012ACS). This backchannel, developing in real time, provides a new method for conference attendees to exchange information with presenters, other attendees, and the wider Twitter community. The backchannel serves several functions. It is a repository of links and information about panels and papers. The backchannel is an additional space for discussion and reflection. At a more basic level, it serves as a collaborative note-taking tool to which a group of participants contributes in real time. Perhaps most importantly, the ACS Twitter backchannel has the potential to connect scholars across Atlantic Canada and those outside the region. Twitter, and the resulting backchannel, is not meant to be a replacement or a substitute for other forms of communication and information dissemination. Instead, Twitter provides a new way for conversation to transcend the limitations of time and geography. It enables ideas, debates, and discussions to penetrate the spatial and temporal boundaries of the conference itself, where they can be enriched by outside perspectives and refined through collective reflection and continued discourse.

7 Currently a Twitter user is limited in how far back he or she can search tweets. There are some third-party applications that allow users to harvest older tweets, but by and large tweets are not accessible after a few weeks. Recognizing that tweets currently have a short shelf life, Katherine O'Flaherty archived all tweets that contained the designator #2012ACS using Twitter Archiving Google Spreadsheet (TAGS) v. 3.0. The spreadsheet continues to update, collecting any tweet containing the conference hashtag (#2012ACS). In addition, this process allows the complete Google spreadsheet, containing a record of the conference tweets and some basic statistical information, to be located in Google Documents and thus be public. The archive can be accessed at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/ccc?key=0AihTwqZdAndhdEV1Sk9STkNWUFJGVnRTdTvcmsxY0E#gid=36>.

Because Twitter is a relatively new tool at academic conferences, and because it appears this was the first time sustained Twitter use occurred at ACS, it is not possible to generalize far beyond the data generated in Saint John. Instead, this data provides a glimpse of conference conversation and can potentially serve as a point of comparison for analysis of tweeting at future ACS meetings. To contextualize the Twitter stream at ACS, a brief, broader examination is needed of the scope of Twitter use and the volume of information produced.

In 2010 the United States Library of Congress and Twitter signed an agreement that ensured that all tweets, regardless of sender or subject matter, would be archived in the library's repository as historical documents.<sup>8</sup> This gargantuan data set stretches back to March 21, 2006, when co-founder Jack Dorsey (@jack) sent the first public tweet: "inviting coworkers." At the time of the agreement, an estimated 50 million tweets were being generated across the globe each day, and by 2011 that number grew to an astounding 140 million tweets daily.<sup>9</sup> By early 2012 Twitter was second only to Facebook (900 million users) and Qzone (a Chinese social networking site with 536 million users) in worldwide popularity, with an estimated 500 million active users.<sup>10</sup> At these rates of use the Twitter archive provides a unique, albeit imperfect, global chronicle. Certainly access to technology is not universal and large swaths of the human population are excluded from participation; but the size of the torrent of information and potential for historical research are sobering. The degree to which historians will use Twitter data as source material is uncertain as yet but, like all sources, if rigorously analyzed and contextualized, tweets are another important addition to the historical record.

Tweets provide a record of one form of scholarly communication, the conference backchannel. Because ACS conference participants appended the #2012ACS hashtag to each of their tweets, they have enabled some preliminary analysis of the ACS Twitter stream. The following analysis of a single Twitter stream is cause to appreciate the scope of research opportunities presented by the prospect of a complete, searchable Twitter archive. Because this set of tweets is small, we are limited to measured analyses and guarded generalizations; but, nevertheless, this stream is likely the first that captures a section of the ACS conference conversation in real time.

The Twitter stream from ACS, admittedly, represents a small fraction of the conference and was created by a limited subset of participants, so its utility is not in gauging responses to the event generally. Of the 110 participants at ACS only 8 were tweeting, and of that group 5 tweeters sent the overwhelming majority of tweets. In total, 312 tweets included the #2012ACS hashtag.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, ACS participants who were tweeting at the conference were all experienced tweeters who were networked together. Most had tweeted prior conferences and most of them, perhaps not coincidentally, were also environmental historians and thus plugged into many of the same larger conversations. The ACS Twitter stream, though limited, provides

8 "Tweet Preservation," <http://blog.twitter.com/2010/04/tweet-preservation.html>.

9 "#numbers," <http://blog.twitter.com/2011/03/numbers.html>.

10 "List of Virtual Communities with More than 100 Million Users," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_virtual\\_communities\\_with\\_more\\_than\\_100\\_million\\_users](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_virtual_communities_with_more_than_100_million_users).

11 Of these tweets generated, 31 contained links and 13 were retweets.

a set of information to conference participants, organizers, and those interested in the region but unable to attend the conference in Saint John. Perhaps at future meetings more attendees might contribute to the Twitter backchannel and thus generate a richer archive. Finally, collective tweeting of a conference allows users to read other's tweets and introduces scholars who might not be aware of one another. Conferences are wonderful places to meet new colleagues, but even at moderately sized events it is impossible to meet everyone. Additionally, not everyone with an interest in Atlantic Canada was able to make the trip to Saint John. Twitter provides a partial solution to both problems.

The #2012ACS Twitter hashtag developed organically and was in use even before the conference began. Establishment of a hashtag involves nothing more than some tweeting, and the tweeters at ACS were active, networked users who quickly recognized the establishment of a conference stream. Once this was recognized, participants sent seven tweets to the new stream in the days prior to the conference alerting each other and members of their extended networks that they would be attending ACS. For example, one participant tweeted "Looking forward to #2012ACS. Just arrived in town. Paper ready to go." These preliminary tweets are almost entirely social and serve to alert others of attendance. These pre-conference tweets also alerted others that a conference-designated hashtag had been created. Because of the organic nature of this process, there was no official conference announcement about the hashtag, and indeed it did not appear in the program or other documentation. As such, the ACS hashtag emerged out of an existing virtual community prior to the conference start.

Actual conference tweeting began during Bill Parenteau's introduction of Richard Judd, the Friday morning keynote speaker. The 33 tweets sent during the introduction and keynote covered a range of Judd's points. For example, one attendee tweeted: "Judd: First Nations, Europeans, Parks Canada-all have managed "natural" landscapes #2012acs." Read in isolation this tweet provides only one short segment of Judd's presentation, but read within the stream of 33 tweets delivered in real time by four attendees it provides a narrative, albeit somewhat disjointed. Moreover, some of those tweets contain considerable data: "Judd: PEI #nationalpark paradox between protecting and modifying/selling nature #2012acs #ACS2012 <http://t.co/Nd9Ce3Rx>."<sup>12</sup> In this example the author incorporates #nationalpark into the tweet, making it visible to anyone who follows the #nationalpark hashtag (regardless of whether or not the user was at ACS). In addition the author included a hyperlink that connected viewers to an image of Anne Shirley, the main character

12 Further underscoring the organic nature of the establishment of hashtags, this tweet captures confusion amongst tweeters in the audience as to which designator (#) to use to create the conference stream. While the conference acronyms followed by the year are standard conference hashtag formats, some tweeters at ACS discovered that #ACS2012 was already an active hashtag. Thus, to ensure an unused, unique hashtag for the conference, Rob Gee and Mark McLaughlin who, through networking, began the discussion of an ACS Twitter backchannel, agreed to flip the convention and put the date first. As the keynote address began, some tweeters adhered to the convention while others used the reversed hashtag that ultimately prevailed. Because the tweeters already comprised a network of followers, they were able to quickly correct the hashtag and begin using the common designator. Due to that momentary confusion, however, some early tweets sent to #ACS2012 (as opposed to #2012ACS) were not included in this analysis.

in *Anne of Green Gables*. This inserted image was the same image Judd showed during his keynote. Some tweeters are highly skilled and can convey a prodigious amount of information in 140 characters. Additionally, those who are well versed in the literature and conventions of a particular academic discipline, and in the use of online tools, can search for information, links, and audiovisual content at high speed. Thus, using subject expertise to add context to tweets, proficient users can utilize their understanding of the platform to link streams and broaden knowledge networks using multiple hashtags.

Conference tweets, like all tweets, are broadcast to the entire Twitter universe, but steered particularly towards members of pre-existing networks and followers of established and well-publicized streams. For example, during Judd's keynote a colleague not attending the conference was able to submit the following question to tweeters in the audience because he was following the stream: "@joshmacfadyen @MarkJMcLaughlin @LooTina @katherineofl Judd talk sounds really interesting. Did he talk about marine #envhist too? #2012acs." The question is preceded by the handles of four participants tweeting from the ACS audience, indicating that the question is addressed to them. The author also incorporates the #envhist hashtag as shorthand for environmental history, which in effect broadcasts his question to all the followers of the #envhist stream, the centerpiece of a vibrant community of environmental historians from around the globe, many of whom have an interest in Atlantic Canada. While the volume of tweets here is small, one can appreciate from only a few examples the enormous potential reach of the ACS tweeters and the potential ripples their broadcasts create both amongst conference participants and throughout their intricate webs of networks and communities.

Tweeting continued throughout the first two days of the conference. Because there were so few people tweeting, the stream does not include references to all ACS panels and indeed not all presentations on a single panel were covered. The tweets, then, are spotty and because the tweeters are so few in number what is captured likely says as much about the tweeters as about the conference content. Because the most active tweeters shared a common subdiscipline, they also displayed a tendency to gravitate to the same panels – meaning some panels, and thus certain themes, are overrepresented in the stream while others escape attention entirely. On a larger scale, with more tweeters, more comprehensive conclusions could be drawn about which themes resonated with audience members or whether common questions arose at different panels.

Because of the reach possible through Twitter networking, ACS participants were able to connect Atlantic Canada to a national discussion. For example, one participant created the following tweet: "#2012ACS Kitchen parties and Acadian Identity on PEI: KPs as a memory, marketing strategy, and a contemporary, hybrid form #cdnhist." By virtue of the added hashtag the author entered the tweet into a larger stream of Canadian history on Twitter. Similarly, the author of another tweet – "Bu[r]ton and Walker show us a #prezi on Henry Johnson: Seafarer #2012acs" – incorporates the Prezi (cloud-based presentation software) hashtag. While this tweet alone would not provide much information to someone in the larger Twitter audience, it is an example of a sort of note taking, or recording of information in which the author makes note of the presentation software and in turn alerts the Prezi stream to the software's use in Saint John.

Finally, it is worth noting that about 30 of the conference tweets contained hyperlinks to additional information (e.g., “Paper/project of broad interest: <http://t.co/3OwNZ0Z2> #envhist #dhist #twitterstorians #2012ACS”). This tweet contained a link to the Maritime History Archive (<http://www.mun.ca/mha/>), a site mentioned during a panel on 19th-century society. The tweet author felt it important enough to share, and selected which networks this site would appeal to most: #envhist, an active environmental history hashtag; #dhist, a digital humanities hashtag; and #twitterstorians, the major history hashtag on Twitter and one frequented by historians from around the world. The inclusion of links is helpful to anyone monitoring the stream and serves as an effective way to direct users to pertinent sites. In this instance, Memorial University’s Online Maritime History Archive potentially received a great deal more visibility and traffic from a much wider audience of interested scholars than just those in the room.

The possibilities abound when it comes to technology, but minor glitches can derail entire conversations. During the final morning of the conference the wireless Internet connection at UNB Saint John went down. Some conference participants had left by this point, prompting one to tweet: “#2012ACS @MarkJMcLaughlin @robgee18 @joshmacfadyen where are the tweets This AM? I’m on the ferry looking for enlightenment!” Twitter, of course, is accessible on multiple types of devices as long as the user has access to the Internet or cellular phone service. In this case the participant who was already on the ferry could access her Twitter account, but the participants still at the conference, lacking Internet service, were unable to continue contributing to the stream.

Barring glitches such as this, Twitter is a powerful tool and, even though only a fraction of participants at ACS were tweeting, a review of the conference Twitter stream indicates that those who tweeted shared a commitment to not only recording the highlights of the conference but also to sharing bits and pieces of the conference with colleagues in other Twitter networks. While the #2012ACS Twitter stream cannot be taken as representative of participant responses to the conference generally, it is nonetheless a valuable record of the reactions and responses of a small subset. The nature of Twitter is such that it is “streaming,” and currently the stream is only accessible for a short amount of time. Until the Library of Congress database makes past Twitter hashtag streams universally searchable, participants will have to create archives and find ways to share them. The TAGS 3.0 archive created after #2012ACS has the potential to serve as a point of comparison of ACS conference tweets over several meetings. Organizers could also gauge member participation and potentially isolate networks and individuals that would be instrumental in attracting additional participants or locating venues to hold the ACS meeting. One could even see the possibility of comparing Twitter engagement across Atlantic Canada and potentially identifying new themes or ideas emerging in the re-imagined virtual communities that link Atlantic Canadians to numerous others. Perhaps these re-imagined communities and virtual networks of Atlantic Canadian scholars will serve as points at which to challenge the boundaries and definitions of Atlantic Canadianness – or at least the methods by which scholars undertake their own unique role within it.

Given the opportunities for networking, discourse, and collaborative meaning-making evident by this tiny sample of ACS conference tweeting, a few small

adjustments to the conference organization and execution could serve to enhance the conference Twitter experience for those who wish to use the tool. These recommendations would also increase the utility of the resulting stream and promote the benefits that flow from the marriage of social media to more traditional conference formats. First, the conference organizers should create the conference stream by designating the hashtag, perhaps #ACS2014 (if it is not found to be already in use). Early institutional establishment will offer several opportunities. Organizers can use the platform, and a variety of other existing hashtags (#cdnhist, #envhist, etc.) to create a broader circulation for calls for papers and promotional announcements. The hashtag can then provide an additional forum for prospective presenters to network, interact, and form themselves into panels, debate questions, and submit proposals. Twitter can also be a means of attracting the public to attend conference events or participate in virtual conversations, bringing the ACS community a broader audience and enriching it with a wider range of perspectives.

During the event itself, organizers can use Twitter to broadcast updates, venue changes, and scheduling adjustments while participants can use the stream for arranging carpools, social engagements, and promoting their presentations. As Twitter and other digital tools become mainstream, they inevitably change the nature of conference presentations. When presenter and audience are linked through a backchannel, the nature of their relationship transcends the 15 minutes the presenter is allotted to speak. The presenter can supply supporting materials, background, and context through tweeted links, while audience members can pose questions and engage in ongoing discussion with the presenter and other followers.

In the aftermath of the conference, the hashtag can be used for follow-up questions and for participants to engage in conversations about panels they were unable to attend but were able to interact with by reading through the live tweets from the session. It can also be used to publicize reflective and synthetic blog posts<sup>13</sup> and organize new projects and shape new research questions based on what has been seen and heard. The conference stream provides a collaborative note pad of real-time reactions, reflections, and responses to conference events – and the more tweeters there are, the more of the conference that can be effectively captured and broadcast to wider and more numerous networks of followers.

Twitter being just one of the digital tools becoming more widespread and more integral to the conference experience, a consistent, reliable, wireless high-speed Internet connection must be a certainty in future conferences. Organizers must be aware, particularly with campus-based events, that any weekend network updates or maintenance should not be allowed to threaten technologically rich presentations or interrupt valuable communication and informational channels such as Twitter.

Additionally, other regions and subdisciplines have established robust and active Twitter streams with followers that are cross-pollinated across academic, public, and private spheres. While the focus here is upon the benefits Twitter can offer to a conference, the analysis of some of the tweets provided above indicates the value of establishing a stream dedicated to the study of the region. No such hashtag yet

13 This article began as a post-conference reflection piece and is available at <http://stillwaterhistorians.com/2012/05/09/navigating-atlantic-canada-by-second-nature/>.

exists. Again, a degree of institutional endorsement can lend credibility and promote use while also encouraging continued transparency and professionalism. Perhaps our flagship journal might lend its name to a hashtag and create a Twitter stream to assist scholars of the 21st century in their efforts to understand the region and to overcome the challenges of distance and isolation that can encumber us all. Perhaps scholars of Atlantic Canada can begin tweeting to #acadiensis?

Much like the subjects and actors they study, scholars are forever seeking the most appropriate marriage of tradition and technology – wanting very much to be cutting edge but fervently resisting what can seem like a relentless rush of technology, like an incoming Fundy tide leaving them awash in ill-fitting apps and tools that threaten to erode the conventions of the academic sphere that have imbued it with credibility and prestige. Academics tread cautiously and critically, and indeed quite conservatively in matters of technology and modernity.

As scholars, we too are part of the region and we shape it both through our participation within it and our studies of it. In both capacities we also grapple with distance and isolation, and inevitably seek technological solutions to these problems. How do we answer our obligation to provide quality education to those in the most remote corners of our region? And how do we combat our isolation from one another in fields that thrive upon ongoing discourse, debate, and collaboration?

Richard Judd's keynote address cast an insightful lens upon a key theme in Atlantic Canada – and one that is, as he argues, germane to New England as well: how do New Englanders and Atlantic Canadians handle change in landscapes that have been subjected to long-term occupation, resource extraction, and industrial presence? How do places that have shaped their collective identities through the traditional values of work on land and sea incorporate modern technologies and harness them for modernization and social betterment without sacrificing an inherent sense of self and place? It seems only fitting that a group of scholars should convene at a modern university using modern tools of transport and communication, and then reflect on what was said and done through networks of blogging and tweeting!

KATHERINE O'FLAHERTY AND ROBERT GEE