Document generated on 04/18/2024 11:36 p.m.

Report of the Annual Meeting
Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

Geographical and Cultural Aspects of the Five Canadas

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Volume 16, Number 1, 1937

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/290003ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/290003ar

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (print)
1712-9095 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Sage, W. N. (1937). Geographical and Cultural Aspects of the Five Canadas. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, *16*(1), 28–34. https://doi.org/10.7202/290003ar

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GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE FIVE CANADAS

By W. N. SAGE

I. GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL AREAS OF CANADA

The geographical interpretation of Canadian history is receiving more and more attention from historians, but there still remains as an almost unworked field, the interrelation of the geographical and the cultural. As research progresses more stress is laid on Canadian economic and social development, and the political and constitutional is being placed in its natural framework.

Professor André Siegfried in his most recent book[1] has shown the conflict in Canada between the north-south and east-west axes. On the whole, the geographic regions of North America run north and south. Some of our recent economic historians have claimed that Eastern Canada has a certain geographic unity, and a case may be made out for the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes region with its great flattened V shape extending from Lake Superior to the Lower Lakes and the St. Lawrence River below Quebec City. The Acadian province might be shown to be part of this region, although many geologists would not agree. But on the whole, it cannot be denied that all the geographical regions of Canada, except the Laurentian Shield which touches the United States only in the northern peninsula of Michigan, are northern extensions of similar regions in the United States. Politically, and to a large extent economically, we have built up the Dominion of Canada from east to west and we are now busily engaged in extending it to the north, but the fact remains that each of the settled regions of Canada is more closely in touch with the adjoining portion of the United States than with the next region of Canada.

The geographical and cultural areas of Canada do not entirely correspond. Our settlements still fringe the southern boundary and it is only on the prairie that any important city is more than 100 miles from the American line. To be sure, the prairie settlements are moving north and it is possible that Palliser's famous "triangle" may some day prove to be "the great Canadian desert". The Kootenay and Boundary countries in British Columbia are still more closely connected with Spokane than with Vancouver. Prince Rupert is close to Alaska, but the whole "north line" of the Canadian National Railway in British Columbia is tributary to Edmonton. Geographically the "five Canadas" are, of course, the Maritime Provinces, the St. Lawrence Valley and the Lower Lakes, the Canadian Shield, the Prairies including the parklands and woodlands and the Mackenzie-Athabaska basin, and, last of all, the Pacific slope. The five so-called cultural areas may be distinguished as, the Maritime Provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia.

It has become recognized that what is now the Dominion of Canada originated not in one but in five or six localities. The theme of this paper is that each of these settlements, separated for the most part by miles of forest, lakes, and mountains, has made and is making a special and characteristic contribution to the building up of the Dominion.

[1] A. Siegfried, *Canada*, (London, 1937), 20-5, 43-7, 274-306.

II. The Maritime Provinces—Three Political Units—One Culture—Canada's New England

The Maritime Provinces have made a definite and well-known contribution to Canadian culture. It is not necessary to tell once more the story of the Acadians or to weep over Evangeline, but the Acadian element has never departed completely from the life of the Maritime Provinces. Professor Whitelaw has pointed out the difference between the Acadians and the *Québeçois* and further reference is not needed, but from recent events it is evident that the French-speaking influence is strong, especially in New Brunswick. The pre-Loyalists from New England, the Germans, the Scots, the United Empire Loyalists, the Irish, have all had their part in the building up of the Maritimes, but the background of Maritime culture has been geographic.

The Nova Scotian Peninsula, Cape Breton, and Prince Edward Island are essentially maritime. New Brunswick, on the other hand, is not entirely so, but the long river valleys lead down to the sea and the lumber industry was in its early stages most closely connected with shipbuilding. The ship on the New Brunswick coat of arms has as real historical meaning as the buffalo on the arms of Manitoba.

The cultural tradition of the Maritimes, if three so distinct political units may be said to have a common cultural tradition, is an amalgam of many influences. The Acadian background is common to all three, but Nova Scotia received more settlers from pre-Revolutionary New England than did the other two provinces. As a result the pre-Loyalist New England element has been more noticeable in Nova Scotia than in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. It should not be forgotten that these pre-Loyalist traditions go back three centuries to the *Mayflower*.

New Brunswick is the "Loyalist province *par excellence*". It owes its separate existence to the Loyalist settlers and its United Empire Loyalist background is so well known as to need no more than a mention. In Nova Scotia the Loyalists do not seem to have secured such an overwhelming influence. There were in that province, in addition to the New Englanders, the Germans of Lunenburg and the Scots of Pictou, not forgetting the Irish. Halifax was a military and naval station and British traditions were rigorously maintained. Even to-day a native of Cape Breton may not class himself as a Haligonian although he may have lived for forty years in the capital of his province! The Family Compact in Nova Scotia was by no means all composed of Loyalists. Joseph Howe, the son of a Loyalist, was the great "tribune of the people", but Judge Haliburton, the champion of the Family Compact, was descended from the pre-Revolutionary New Englanders. Similarly in Prince Edward Island the United Empire Loyalists played only a minor rôle. The "Island" is *sui generis* and possesses a rich culture, a blend of French, Scottish, pre-Loyalist, Loyalist, and later ingredients.

The Maritime Provinces are naturally drawn into the orbit of New England. Boston is their cultural home: family ties connect the Maritimers with the New Englanders and the export of "brains" from the Maritimes to the colleges and universities of the north-eastern states still continues. Between the provinces of the Atlantic seaboard and the rest of English-speaking Canada is interposed not only a geographical "divide", but also the speech and culture of French Canada.

III. Quebec—The Two Races

On leaving the Maritimes and proceeding westward to the next great cultural region, Quebec, we enter upon a riverine civilization. To be sure, the Gulf of St. Lawrence has played its part in the building up of French Canada, but that part has been always secondary to that of the river. "Une ferme sur la rivière" has been the goal of the majority of the inhabitants.

French-speaking Canada is obviously a distinct cultural area. Although our French-speaking brethren have spread south into New England, they have not to any extent succeeded in impressing their culture upon that region. Boston is more Nova Scotian than French-Canadian. M. Siegfried has pointed out the danger to the French Canadians of Americanization[2] and he seems certain that the *Québeçois* who go to New England do not preserve their traditions so well as those who go out to colonize the clay belt.

The cultural contributions of French Canada may be summarized as follows: an intense local patriotism or "nationalisme"; devotion to language, law, and religion; colonization; and a determination to resist both Anglicization and Americanization. During the last year or so French Canada seems to have developed a "new nationalism" which is restless under the economic domination of the English-speaking minority who hold the chief seats of the mighty upon St. James Street. This "new nationalism" is based, as the "nationalisme" of 1911 was also based, on intense devotion to language, law, and Church. French Canadians are as tenacious of their unique institutions as are the Scots or as the Old South was before the war between the states. French-Canadian culture dates back three centuries. Originally transplanted from France it has struck deep root in Canadian soil. M. Siegfried pays tribute to the rôle of the Church in this preservation of French culture, but he claims that "if French Canadian civilization is to be complete, it must build up a culture of its own, and not rely solely on a Catholic culture" and adds "the nuance is important".[3]

The French-speaking Canadian is thus extremely tenacious of his "nationalisme". It is his great weapon against absorption into English-speaking North America. His resistance to Anglicization has existed ever since the British conquest. There is now no question of attempting to force Anglicization upon him. But the French Canadian often finds it necessary to learn English if he is to do business or to succeed professionally. American influences surround him as they do the English-speaking Canadian, but in his case the danger is even greater. The English-speaking Canadian is a North American who is economically and culturally, but not politically and historically, closely tied to the United States. As a rule he is not much worried over Americanization. But to the French Canadian, Americanization would seem to spell the total destruction of all those elements in his culture which he has striven for over a century and a half to maintain.

But Quebec is not entirely French-speaking. There is the English-speaking minority. The Eastern Townships, it is true, are becoming

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[2]Siegfried, *op. cit.*, 77-9, 253.
[3]Siegfried, *op. cit.*, 75-6.

steadily French, but Montreal is still a citadel of an English-speaking "garrison". The predominance of the English minority in finance and commerce is giving the "new nationalists" of Quebec plenty of food for thought. The political institutions of the province have been formed after the British model and a long line of French-Canadian statesmen has been trained to uphold British political traditions. It can thus be seen that English-speaking and French-speaking Quebec have made a most significant contribution to the up-building of the Dominion.

IV. Ontario—The First Melting Pot—British Traditions

Upper Canada was the child of the American Revolution. Before the immigration of the United Empire Loyalists, what is now Ontario was merely the south-western extension of the old Province of Quebec, the link with the Ohio Valley. But the American "frontier of settlement" moved north into Upper Canada, with this difference, however, that the backbone of the new settlement was made up of British North Americans who were monarchists and utterly opposed to republican institutions. The preservation of the British connection became a matter of vital concern to Upper Canada. The non-Loyalist Americans who came in in large numbers before the War of 1812 brought the upper province under the influence of the United States, and economic ties bound her to the republic, but that "Upper Canadian Epic", the War of 1812, eliminated American political ideas for the time. To be sure, William Lyon Mackenzie in 1837 headed a rebellion which, had it succeeded, might easily have resulted in annexation, but Mackenzie "frequently lamented later that he had attempted to bring the colony into the union".[4] The Reformers of Upper Canada from the Baldwins to George Brown and the "clear Grits" were devoted to the British connection.

Culturally Upper Canada was never entirely "English". It was, on the whole, British, but there were many elements within it which did not come direct from the British Isles. Along the Detroit and Ottawa Rivers were French Canadians and from Quebec in later years came in many thousands more. The County of Russell is to-day 79 per cent. French-speaking. Ottawa is a bilingual city, but Toronto, Hamilton, London, Windsor, and Kingston are not. The United Empire Loyalists who came to Upper Canada included New York Dutch, Gaelic-speaking Highlanders, and Iroquois Indians. Germans or "Pennsylvania Dutch" settled in North York, Wentworth, and Waterloo Counties.

Later immigrants, Scots, Irish, English, and Welsh have helped to settle Ontario. The Scottish settlements are too well known to need comment. The Irish who came to Upper Canada, unlike the Irish-Americans, were never a strong anti-British element in the population. They accepted the British connection whole-heartedly. This was partly due to the influence of the Orange Order, but the Irish Roman Catholics soon realized that their rights were respected. The efforts of D'Arcy McGee in moulding the Irish into the Canadian community should not be forgotten. Large numbers of English came in after the Napoleonic wars, and during the middle years of the century. They were on the whole easily absorbed.

Geography played its part in the evolution of Ontarian culture. The

[4]R. A. MacKay, "The Political Ideas of William Lyon Mackenzie" (*Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Feb., 1937, 20).

first settlements were along the St. Lawrence and the lakes. When roads pierced the south-western peninsula some of the best lands were cleared for settlement. Agriculture triumphed over lumbering, except in the Ottawa Valley. English writers from the days of Mrs. Jameson and Mrs. Moody have lamented the "Americanization" of Ontario. To some extent it is true. Ontario is the keystone of the Canadian arch, but it is also the southernmost portion of Canada and in close touch with the American middle-west. The cultural background of the United Empire Loyalists, and of the "late Loyalists" and non-Loyalist Americans who succeeded them, was North American of the eighteenth century. The "barn-raisings", "quilting-bees", and even the "hard liquor" of Old Ontario had their counterpart in the neighbouring United States.

But Ontario is also the bulwark of British tradition and has strongly upheld the British connection. It is conscious of American influences and reacts to them. Into its melting pot it has received not only the original settlers but also Scandinavians, Germans, Slavs, and other Eastern Europeans, but its fundamental principles, both political and cultural, have been and are British.

New Ontario, the Canadian Shield, is rapidly developing. At first it was merely the hinterland for Old Ontario but now it seems to be acquiring a "complex" of its own—a sectional feeling towards Old Ontario. Although not suitable for large-scale agriculture—except in the clay belt where Jean Baptiste is carving out new territories for French Canada—it is a treasure-house of minerals and it has always been the home of fur-bearing animals.

V. The Prairies—The Wheat Belt and the Parklands

The Prairies are different. From the Atlantic coast to near Winnipeg the forest prevails. Even where the forests have been cleared it is impossible to forget that the settler had to hew every yard of the way. Pine stump fences and rail fences still remain as mute memorials of the industry of the pioneers. But the Prairies are a new world. There the trees are the exception and not the rule. They exist in the river valleys or on the so-called "bluffs" in the parkland.[5] North of the parklands is a forest belt which stretches to the Arctic tundra. But the prairie proper is almost treeless and the pioneers have had to plant poplars and Manitoba maples to provide wind-breaks. The rivers cut deep channels through the prairie soil and erosion is terribly prevalent. The ploughing under of the prairie grass and the methods employed by the wheat farmers have resulted in the "dust bowl" areas of southern Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The first settlement on the Canadian prairie was, of course, Lord Selkirk's colony. Red River was the backbone of Manitoba and the influence of the old settlement has never completely disappeared, but the men of Kildonan and the Portage plains were almost swamped in the incoming tide of immigrants. Winnipeg is polyglot. One has only to walk north on Main Street from the Canadian Pacific Railway station to realize how many nationalities have combined in the building up of the prairie capital. But Winnipeg is also Canadian. Some of the older residential streets have the look of Toronto, though Portage Avenue and

[5]*Cf.* W. A. Mackintosh, *Prairie Settlement, The Geographical Setting* (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, I, Toronto, 1934), 19.

Main Street are more akin to Michigan Boulevard than to Yonge Street.

The English-speaking element in the Prairie Provinces is made up of three groups, Eastern Canadians, immigrants from the British Isles, and settlers from the United States. To them may be added certain of the second generation continental Europeans who have become Canadianized. Some Europeans have tended to settle in groups and to dominate large rural areas. Much attention is being paid to the study of these group settlements,[6] and their contribution to the culture of the Prairie Provinces, though the English-speaking influence has predominated in the cities.

It has been computed that nearly 73 per cent. of the continental European immigrants live on the land and that only 52 per cent. of the English-speaking immigrants may be classed as rural.[7] Since approximately 60 per cent. of the population of the Prairie Provinces is rural, the importance of the ethnic groups may be easily realized. These groups, especially Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Ukrainians, are deeply rooted. They cling to their traditions and to the faith of their ancestors. Only slowly are they becoming Canadianized. They constitute a problem with which Canadians must wrestle for many years to come. There have been vigorous attempts at Canadianization and some authorities are convinced that these groups are a source of strength, a bulwark against the evils of the standardization of the capitalistic system.[8] But others point out that "Education for citizenship has not kept pace with economic expansion, and there is grave danger that that part of our Dominion will become Balkanized".[9]

European immigrants have brought much to the Prairies. One has only to attend a folk-song and handicraft festival to realize that. But the prairie has added its contribution, something intangible but none the less real. It may be the sense of vastness; it may be a deeper note of tragedy when crop failure succeeds crop failure; or it may be the reckless optimism of oil booms and dollar and a half wheat. The prairie sets its mark on all who come to it. It is not easy to analyse its effects but no one has lived there and remained the same as he was before he came to that land of vast distances.

VI. British Columbia—The West beyond the West—Facing the Orient

British Columbia, with the exception of the Peace River block, lies to the west of the Great Divide. Geographically there are six or seven British Columbias and the isolation of the province from the rest of Canada is an essential fact. British Columbians are Canadians with a difference. The Pacific province joined Canada in 1871 on the promise of the construction of a transcontinental railway across the Dominion. That railway, completed on November 7, 1885, finally joined the Province of British Columbia and the rest of Canada.

The early history of British Columbia begins at the coast with the maritime fur trade; and a few years later the overland fur traders produced a link with Eastern British North America. The gold rush of 1858

[6]C. A. Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada* (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, VII, Toronto, 1936); Robert England, *Colonization of Western Canada* (London, 1936).

[7]R. England, *op. cit.*, 147.

[8]This is Professor England's view (*op. cit.*, 246, 296).

[9]D. C. Harvey, *Colonization of Canada* (Toronto, 1936), 143.

started at the coast and the Cariboo Road linked up the coast and the mining camps of the interior. The natural movement is mainly eastward and northward inland from the coast. The centres of population are on the coast and many portions of the vast interior are exceedingly sparsely settled. The division of the province into coast and interior is vital. The older division of island versus mainland still exists and is kept in the foreground by certain separatist leaders on Vancouver Island, but on the whole it is losing most of its significance. None the less the lower mainland, and the southern and eastern portions of Vancouver Island, contain the bulk of the population of the province.

British Columbia is very "English". There are certain settlements on Vancouver Island and in the Okanagan which might have come from a late Victorian, some might say a mid-Victorian novel. But local geographical conditions have played a great part. Victoria has been described as a "Bath or Cheltenham set down amid the Italian Alps". As a matter of fact it claims to be "a bit of Old England" set down on the Straits of Juan de Fuca. "English" influences have been strong and in some districts attempts have been made to draw a line of distinction between the "English" and the "Canadians".

The background of Victoria is fur trade and gold rush. The old families connected with the Hudson's Bay Company were often Scottish in origin, but the atmosphere of the town was English. On the mainland New Westminster was founded by the Royal Engineers, that special detachment sent out by Sir E. B. Lytton, most of whom were English. Vancouver is the child of the Canadian Pacific Railway and is, therefore, much more Canadian, or North American. The gold seekers who came to Fraser River in 1858 and to the Cariboo in the early 1860's came from California, although they were drawn indirectly from all over the world. Mining has played a great part in the development of British Columbia, and the Pacific province possesses somewhat of the mining-camp psychology.

The constant pressure of the United States should be mentioned. The Kootenays and the Boundary country were, and still are in some measure, tributary to Spokane, and for a long time the American railroads reaped a rich harvest. But the Canadian Pacific and its subsidiary the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company have won out, and Canadian financial and industrial supremacy in the Kootenays has been achieved. American capital is none the less heavily invested in British Columbian industries and the "closed" or company town flourishes.

British Columbia is, however, distinctly British. Except for the Oriental population which, apparently, cannot be easily assimilated, the people of the province are mainly of British and Canadian birth. All the eastern provinces of Canada have made their contribution but the Pacific province is rapidly working out a culture of its own. It is Canadian, but not Eastern Canadian nor prairie. The Pacific is at her door and the Orient just beyond.

Canada is therefore a federation of five cultural areas, each distinct, each possessing its own traditions and each making its own contribution to the common whole. If Canadian historians are to present in the future a more balanced picture it is essential that they should keep the whole development of the nation and of the five cultural regions more constantly before them.