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*A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842.* By Francis M. Carroll. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 480 p. ISBN 0-8020-4829-3 \$75 hb. ISBN 0-8020-8358-7 \$29.95 pb.)

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*A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783–1842.* By Francis M. Carroll. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 480 p. ISBN 0-8020-4829-3 \$75 hb. ISBN 0-8020-8358-7 \$29.95 pb.)

In 1827, the American settler John Baker was arrested and imprisoned by New Brunswick authorities for the seditious act of flying an American flag on his property on the upper Saint John River, in disputed territory between New Brunswick and Maine. The whole affair, which lasted over a year, caused considerable ill-feeling in diplomatic and populist quarters on both sides of the boundary.

In *A Good and Wise Measure*, Francis Carroll uses such episodes to illustrate the social and political context of the border dispute between the United States and British North America in the early nineteenth century. By the late 1830s, after further incidents like the British destruction of the American ship *Caroline* (suspected of carrying Canadian rebels), the outbreak of yet another war between Britain and America seemed likely. According to Carroll, who is sympathetic to both sides, peace could only come with a resolution of the boundary problem that had lingered since the end of the American Revolution. The trouble was that the 1783 Treaty of Paris defined the boundary in words only, without showing it on a map. Half a century later, the ambiguity inherent in this verbal description of physical terrain was a serious liability for both parties.

One of the main things Carroll's book makes evident is that a boundary is simultaneously two different things: a political agreement and a physical line traced out on the land. It takes a lot of work to construct each one, and even more to make them agree. *A Good and Wise Measure* is devoted to the many frustrated attempts that were made to clarify the boundary after 1783, providing the backdrop to its surprisingly rapid and decisive resolution in the Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842 (to which the book's title refers). Each chapter reconstructs in great detail the slow progress—cycles of diplomatic negotiation, legal arguments, physically-arduous boundary surveying, further legal arguments, and further diplomatic negotiation—made at various points along the disputed border, from the Bay of Fundy to the Lake of the Woods.

Carroll describes the work of boundary-making as a search, for good reason. Everyone believed that the treaty of 1783 had established a valid international boundary; but no one knew where it actually lay. The treaty referred to place names, like the St Croix River, Long Lake, and Isle Philippeaux, obtained from John Mitchell's 1755 map of North America. Unfortunately, some of these places simply

did not exist. The “search” for the boundary was thus two-fold: it was the collection and analysis of historical documents to determine which natural features the treaty-framers had intended the boundary to follow, and it was a survey of the physical terrain itself, to identify existing features that could meet the historical definitions.

The first problem after 1783 was the placement of the boundary in the northeast, between present-day Maine and New Brunswick, since the area was rapidly filling with Loyalists. In the absence of any local river named the St Croix (shown on Mitchell’s map emptying into Passamaquoddy Bay), which the treaty stipulated as the border, a joint commission was established to provide for independent British and American surveys, and to arbitrate between them should they differ. For Carroll, this “method” (employed more extensively as a result of the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war of 1812–14) was an important novelty in modern diplomacy, and one that had a lasting impact on Canadian-American relations.

Naturally, the British claimed that a western stream was the true St Croix, while the Americans chose from those to the east. The question was finally decided not by topographical surveying, but by the fortunate discovery of remains of Champlain and de Mont’s 1604 fortifications on an island in the mouth of the Schoodiac river. Since the name St Croix derived from this French settlement, the Schoodiac had to be the right river: it was simply renamed the St Croix, thus solving the problem. The boundary, as defined by the treaty, did not conform to the landscape so much as the landscape was made to conform with the treaty. The place of surveying in all this was decidedly secondary.

Carroll’s chapters contain many other examples of cartography following rather than setting the political agenda. In 1825, the German scientist J. L. Tiarks aided the British cause by shifting the north-western corner of the Lake of the Woods to a more beneficial point, although not nearly the correct one (which he and renowned explorer David Thompson seem to have missed). In 1839, the English-American geologist G. W. Featherstonhaugh entered the very problematic area above the St Croix, in the highlands between the watersheds of the St Lawrence River, the Gulf of St Lawrence, the Bay of Fundy, and the Atlantic Ocean, proposing an entirely new boundary that discarded all previous surveys (British and American) under the Treaty of Ghent, as well as the failed compromise delivered in 1831 by the international arbitrator, the King of the Netherlands. Featherstonhaugh’s stunningly pro-British survey seemed to flout the principles of geography and only polarized attitudes further, raising

the hopes of hardliners like Lord Palmerston and dashing those of Americans who hoped for a peaceful outcome.

Ultimately, no amount of surveying, historical research, and legal analysis could be sufficient: the boundary in this region was simply underdetermined by the language of the treaty and the shape of the land. The only way out of the deadlock was for Britain and America to endow special negotiators with the power to make a deal, and for Lord Ashburton and Daniel Webster to realize that the way forward was not more surveying, but more coercion. Accordingly, secret service funds were expended on propaganda, and mysterious "red-line" maps portraying different versions of the 1783 border were covertly deployed on each side, in a risky move that had the desired effect. This is the real story of the making of the Canada-U.S. boundary, and though it makes interesting reading, it does tend to undermine Carroll's claim for the importance of international boundary commissions: much of the progress seems to have occurred outside such structures.

This is a book about historical facts, not theories. The bibliography of "later works" locates Carroll's approach in the political biographies and diplomatic histories of the early to mid-twentieth century, not in contemporary studies of, say, cartography, environment, and empire. Nevertheless, Carroll's exhaustive archival research and wide reading in original texts (reference matter makes up a full third of the book) are not likely to be repeated soon, and historians interested in the relationship between geography, science, and the state in British North America are fortunate to have the fruits of his long labours.

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*Biographical Note:* Brian Shipley is currently working on William E. Logan and the Geological Survey of Canada. With Richard White, he has an article on "Surveying" forthcoming in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History*. Address: History Department, Dalhousie University, Halifax (Nova Scotia) B3H 4R2, Canada.