

# **The Politics of Selection: The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and the Imperial Commemoration of Canadian History, 1919-1950**

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[See table of contents](#)

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## Article abstract

This article is a preliminary inquiry into the selection process used by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) in making its recommendations for the national historic significance of sites, events and individuals between 1919 and 1950. It argues that, while the HSMBC was composed of dedicated and leading figures in the field of Canadian history, Board members operated for its first 30 years almost exclusively as a Victorian gentlemen's club, without a system of checks and balances. The ideological dominance of the British imperial mindset influenced Board members' field of historical interests as well as their recommendation for national historic designations of sites, events or individuals. These points will be illustrated by examining the origins and the operations of the HSMBC between 1919 and 1950, and the recommendations for national historic designation presented to the HSMBC by two prominent Board members: Brigadier General Ernest Cruikshank and Dr. John Clarence Webster.

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YVES YVON J. PELLETTIER

## *Abstract*

*This article is a preliminary inquiry into the selection process used by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) in making its recommendations for the national historic significance of sites, events and individuals between 1919 and 1950. It argues that, while the HSMBC was composed of dedicated and leading figures in the field of Canadian history, Board members operated for its first 30 years almost exclusively as a Victorian gentlemen's club, without a system of checks and balances. The ideological dominance of the British imperial mindset influenced Board members' field of historical interests as well as their recommendation for national historic designations of sites, events or individuals. These points will be illustrated by examining the origins and the operations of the HSMBC between 1919 and 1950, and the recommendations for national historic designation presented to the HSMBC by two prominent Board members: Brigadier General Ernest Cruikshank and Dr. John Clarence Webster.*

## *Résumé*

*Cet article est un premier questionnement quant au processus de sélection utilisé par la Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du Canada (CLMHC) pour faire ses recommandations relativement aux lieux, aux événements et aux personnages d'importance historique nationale entre les années 1919 et 1950. Il soutient que quoique des personnes dévouées et importantes du domaine de l'histoire canadienne fassent partie de la CLMHC, cette dernière fonctionne presque exclusivement tel un club privé victorien réservé aux hommes, c'est-à-dire sans système de contrôle, au cours des trente premières années de son existence. La dominance idéologique de la mentalité impériale britannique influence les champs d'intérêt historiques des membres de la Commission ainsi que leurs recommandations quant à la désignation des lieux, des événements et des personnages d'importance historique nationale.*

*Ces points seront illustrés par l'étude des origines et du fonctionnement de la CLMHC entre les années 1919 et 1950, et des recommandations relatives aux désignations d'importance historique nationale présentées à la CLMHC par deux de ses membres éminents, soit le brigadier général Ernest Cruikshank et le Dr John Clarence Webster.*

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), despite almost a century of shaping the federal government's commemoration efforts, remains an understudied contributor to the historical identities of Canadians. Since the HSMBC's creation by the Borden government in 1919, thousands of sites, events, and individuals in all regions of the country have been recognized with a national historic designation. Determining national historic significance became the purview of members of the HSMBC, individuals with an interest in Canadian history appointed by Order-in-Council to represent both regional and national interests. Each year, at its annual meeting, Board members determine the merits of each other's submissions; they also consider oral and written submissions from local community leaders pleading their case for a specific event, site, or individual. Some years, more than 100 recommendations were considered.<sup>1</sup> In compiling the minutes of each meeting, the Board Secretary recorded the name of the item, the names of the member who moved and seconded the recommendation, and the final decision without reference to discussions or diverging opinions. As such, the process by which recommendations were accepted and sometimes refused remains shrouded in some mystery.

This paper is a preliminary inquiry into the selection process used by the HSMBC in making its recommendations for national historic designation between 1919 and 1950, when Brigadier General Ernest Cruikshank, and, subsequently, Justice Frederic William Howay and Dr. John Clarence Webster, chaired the Board's activities. During this period, the Board operated as a Victorian's gentleman's club, a gathering of like-minded White males appointed by the federal government, arguably due to their social and economic status, their ethnic origins and their reputation within the historical community. Due to a possible false sense of having earned their position, the Board developed a sense of entitlement and elitism, determining the merits of national historic designations without the need for external validation or additional historical investigation beyond their own scholarship. The Board undertook

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1 Minutes of the HSMBC can be accessed in Word format for each Annual Meeting since the first meeting, held in October 1919. A search engine has also been developed which allows a query by date or key word for all Board minutes. Access was granted through the executive secretary of the HSMBC <hsmbc-clmhc@pc.gc.ca>. During the 1925 Annual Meeting, more than 125 separate items are listed as discussion items. See HSMBC, Minutes, 15-16 May 1925.

its work with a high level of seriousness, and through its designations, shaped the historical identities and the collective memories of Canadians during this paper's period of study and well beyond the 1950s. The historical identity promoted by the HSMBC between 1919 and 1950 was largely the result of the common belief in the British imperial tradition, a popular element in the collective memory of Canadians during the late nineteenth century, when the first wave of Board members — largely self-taught historians — were schooled. This shared interpretation and understanding of Canadian history played an important role in building consensus among Board members, and in shaping the way Canadians viewed themselves. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci calls this consensus-building process the “common sense” approach, where the Board's commemoration of Canadian history was “accepted by subordinate classes partly unconsciously and without criticism.”<sup>2</sup> Despite achieving cultural hegemony through a shared ideological leadership, hegemony is “never a once-and-for-all achievement of some (unverifiable) majority consensus,” writes Ian McKay.<sup>3</sup> As the original members of the HSMBC were replaced in the 1940s by professional historians with advanced degrees, the British imperial mindset's dominance in the selection process progressively weakened as a second wave of members embarked on its own and distinctive efforts to shape the collective memories of Canadians.

The establishment of a British imperial mindset as the dominant axis for the Board's national historic designation process will be illustrated by examining the origins and the operations of the HSMBC between 1919 and 1950, and the recommendations for national historic designation presented to the HSMBC by two prominent Board members: Cruikshank and Webster. This paper will also focus on Webster's recommendation in 1939 of a national historic person designation for Sir Brook Watson, an eighteenth-century British merchant employed to transport and supply New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Loyalists. This case study — the only example of a member's submission being put to a recorded vote during this paper's period of study — will provide insights as to the place of ideology and the role of internal Board dynamics in the decision-making process.

The only systematic examination of the Board's history is C.J. Taylor's *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's Historic Parks and Sites*, published in 1990.<sup>4</sup> An important contribution to the historiography of Canada's heritage movement, Taylor's largely institutional monograph profiled the

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2 Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991[1982]), 22-45.

3 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Perspective for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 3 (September, 2000): 638.

4 C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

HSMBC's administrative structure, its members, their personalities, and their recommendations without attempting to determine the motives, hidden or otherwise, behind the selection process of national historic designations. Not dealt with to any significant extent were potentially controversial issues, such as the overall selection process of historic sites, events, and individuals or the role of the HSMBC in commemorating Canada's First Nations communities, women, and cultural minority groups during this period. More incisive and interesting is Taylor's *Canadian Historical Review* article focusing on the public controversy which emerged from the Board's inscription depicting the battles of Cut Knife and Batoche as imperial military victories rather than defeats, inscriptions which irked Aboriginal and Métis groups.<sup>5</sup> Since the publication of *Negotiating the Past*, other historians have published articles on the Board's operations. Alan McCullough examined how the growth of regionalism, the rise of the Aboriginal rights movement, and the changes in Canadian historiography led the HSMBC to amend several of its earlier inscriptions, especially those dealing with Aboriginal and Métis events in Western Canada.<sup>6</sup> For her part, Dianne Dodd focused on the role of the HSMBC in commemorating women in Canadian history, as well as the linkages between Parks Canada historians and university-based historians in HSMBC activities.<sup>7</sup>

Some individual HSMBC Board members have also recently been the subject of historical studies. Patrice Groulx analyzed the impact of Benjamin Sulte, the first Quebec member of the HSMBC, on the institutionalization of the historical sciences and the use of history as commemoration.<sup>8</sup> In turn, Webster's contribution to historical commemoration has been the focus of two recent M.A. theses. The first, completed by Gerald Arthur Thomas, examines Webster's transition from a successful medical doctor to one of Canada's eminent Maritime historians. The second, by Roger Marsters, studied Webster's

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5 C. J. Taylor, "Some Early Problems of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 64, 1 (1983): 3-24. The original HSMBC plaque for Cut Knife Battlefield indicated: "After an engagement of six hours, the troops retreated to Battleford." This interpretation of history puts the focus on the British version of history while ignoring that this Battle was clearly a victory by Aboriginal soldiers. The unveiling of the HSMBC Batoche Battlefield plaque led to a similar controversy. In this case, Francophone Métis won the support of French-Canadians in Quebec and elsewhere, and this interpretation of history was discussed in the press.

6 Alan McCullough, "Parks Canada and the 1885 Rebellion/Uprising/Resistance," *Prairie Forum* 27, 2 (2002): 161-97.

7 Dianne Dodd, "L'histoire appliquée et l'histoire universitaire à Parcs Canada," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 57, 1 (2003): 91-100.

8 Patrice Groulx, "Benjamin Sulte, Père de la commémoration," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12 (2001): 49-72. Four years after his appointment to the HSMBC, Sulte died in 1923 at the age of 81.

bicultural nationalism and its impact on Maritime commemorations.<sup>9</sup> However, there are no studies of other leading HSMBC figures, including Cruikshank, Howay, Dr. James Henry Coyne, Dr. Daniel Cobb Harvey, and Justice Édouard Fabre-Surveyer, despite their important contributions in shaping Canada's heritage movement agenda over a long period of time. In this context, this paper hopes to advance our knowledge of how the HSMBC actually operated by looking into what motivated Board members to designate certain sites, events, and individuals as historically significant.

The importance of cultural hegemony in shaping historical identities has also been the focus of significant scholarship in Canada, and provides a conceptual framework for this analysis. In examining the collective memory of Loyalists in Ontario, Norman Knowles effectively argues that their traditions were constantly being re-invented by groups to reflect contemporary circumstances and concerns.<sup>10</sup> In another example, Ian McKay examined the work of Nova Scotia cultural promoters who infused the notion of 'Folk Innocence' throughout the province. McKay argues that cultural hegemony was achieved as these efforts lacked any opposition from the province's dominant class due to a 30-year economic crisis, beginning in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> As such, their scholarship — and those of other Canadian historians such as Jonathan Vance and Alan Gordon — support Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory which asserts that the collective memory of social groups is essentially a reconstruction of the past to achieve hegemony by adapting historical facts depending on society's circumstances at any given point in time.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, Pierre Nora, the editor of the extensive collection on France's *Lieux de mémoire*, defines memory as "life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived."<sup>13</sup> As such, the lived experience of HSMBC members, and

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9 Gerald Arthur Thomas, "John Clarence Webster: The Evolution and Motivation of an Historian, 1922-1950" (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1990); and Roger Marsters, "John Clarence Webster and Bicultural Nationalism: Language, Ethnicity and the Politics of Commemoration in Early Twentieth-Century Canada" (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 2004).

10 Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 3-13.

11 Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in 20th-century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

12 Maurice Halbwachs, "Social Frameworks of Memory," in Lewis A. Coser, ed., *Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 171-73.

13 Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de mémoires," *Representations* 26 (1989): 8-9.

their participation in imperialist-focused invented traditions, influenced their conceptions of Canada, conceptions that played an important role in the designation of sites, events, and individuals of national historic importance.

During this paper's period of study, when term limits were not yet introduced, seven members appointed to the HSMBC served 20 years or more: Cruikshank (Ontario); Howay (British Columbia); Webster (New Brunswick); Harvey (Nova Scotia); history professor Fred Landon (Ontario); Fabre-Surveyer (Quebec); and Father Antoine d'Eschambault (Manitoba).<sup>14</sup> Of these, Cruikshank, Howay, and Webster were appointed around the time of the Board's inception in 1919, with Harvey, Landon, Fabre-Surveyer joining them in the early 1930s, and d'Eschambault by the end of the decade. In addition, Coyne served for 13 years, from 1919 to 1932. Through their longevity, Board members were able to strengthen existing or forge new relationships with other Board members, departmental officials, and political actors, thus increasing their ability to influence and strengthen their ideological vision of what constituted a national historic site, event, or individual. Thus, the Board's established cultural and ideological hegemony benefited from the longevity of its members' mandate between 1919 and 1950.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to their appointment to the HSMBC, most members had established a certain reputation as authoritative historical scholars, reputations that undoubtedly contributed to their Order-in-Council appointments. Cruikshank (1853-1939) was born in Welland County, and he later became president of the Lundy's Lane Historical Society, an organization dedicated to commemorating two local and significant battles of the War of 1812 — the Battle of Lundy's Lane and the Battle of Chippawa. During his career, he served as Director of the Historical Section of the National Defence Headquarters. His publications list, which numbers over 40 articles, monographs, and published speeches, focuses primarily on events and sites relating to the War of 1812 in Upper and Lower Canada.<sup>16</sup> Coyne (1849-1942), born in Saint-Thomas, Ontario, was fascinated by Great Lake explorers, notably the Dollier-Galinée expedition (1669-1670),

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14 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 193-98. Brigadier General Ernest Cruikshank (Ontario) served from 1919-1939; Justice Frederic Howay (British Columbia), 1923-1944; Father Antoine d'Eschambault (Manitoba), 1937-1959; Dr. J. Clarence Webster (New Brunswick), 1923-1950; D.C Harvey (Nova Scotia), 1931-1954; Fred Landon (Ontario), 1932-1958; and Justice Édouard Fabre-Surveyer (Quebec), 1933-1955.

15 During this period, members of the HSMBC served until their resignation or death. Sulte, Cruikshank, Howay, Coyne, and Webster were still serving on the HSMBC at the time of their deaths.

16 Regarding the Loyalist presence in Upper Canada, Cruikshank examined the first session of the Executive Council of Upper Canada, held in July 1792. See E. A. Cruikshank, *First session of the Executive Council of Upper Canada, held in Kingston July 8 to July 21, 1792* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1924).



as well as Ontario's Loyalist history.<sup>17</sup> Coyne held the United Empire Loyalists (U.E.L.) in very high esteem, describing them in 1898 as "the very cream of the population of the Thirteen Colonies," who were given the providential task of "transplanting in this new soil British laws and British institutions, and to guard and transmit to their successors." He added that U.E.L. "represented ... the learning, the piety, the gentle birth, the wealth and good citizenship of the British race in America."<sup>18</sup> Webster (1862-1950) was born in Shediac, New Brunswick and would return to his parents' native country — Scotland — to pursue formal training as a doctor. After practising medicine in Montreal and Chicago, Webster retired from medicine at the age of 56 to pursue a second career as a historian, with particular interests in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially the French Regime, Loyalist history in the Maritime Provinces, and military forts and officers.<sup>19</sup> Howay (1867-1943), a London, Ontario, native who moved to British Columbia, co-published in 1914 one of the most important early histories of the province, *British Columbia: From the Earliest Times to the Present*. However, Howay's historical interests were quite varied, from David Thompson and Chief Crowfoot to Maritime fur trade and the Fraser River Mines.<sup>20</sup> The underlying tone of Howay's scholarship was the expansion of the British Empire around the world as well as technological progress. Thus, the brief biography of these four members, all appointed at the beginning of the Board's history, demonstrate a common theme in their scholarship: the British imperial tradition.

For many members of this group, working together as part of the HSMBC was not a first encounter. For example, Cruikshank, Coyne, Howay, and

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17 For example, James H. Coyne, *Exploration of the Great Lakes 1669-1670 by Dollier de Casson and De Bréhant de Galinée: Galinée's Narrative and Map* (Toronto: The Society, 1903); and J. H. Coyne, *David Ramsay and Long Point in Legend and History* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1919), 111-26.

18 James H. Coyne, "Memorial to the United Empire Loyalists: Address given by James H. Coyne on the second anniversary of the Niagara Historical Society, 17th September, 1897," *Niagara Historical Society*, booklet no. 4 (Niagara-on-the-Lake: [s.n.], 1898), 5-8.

19 John Clarence Webster, *Acadia at the end of the seventeenth century: letters, journals and memoirs of Joseph Robineau de Villebon, commandant in Acadia, 1690-1700, and other contemporary documents* (Saint John, N.B.: The New Brunswick Museum, 1934); J.C. Webster, *The building of Fort Lawrence in Chignecto: a journal recently found in the Gates collection* (Sackville, N.B.: Tribune Press, 1941); J.C. Webster, *The forts of Chignecto: a study of the eighteenth century conflict between France and Great Britain in Acadia* (Shediac, N.B.: J.C. Webster, 1930).

20 Frederic Howay and Ethelbert Scholefield, *British Columbia from the earliest times to the present* (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1914); F. Howay, *British Columbia: the making of a province* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1928); *Crowfoot: the great chief of the Blackfeet* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1930), 107-18; *David Thompson's account of his first attempt to cross the Rockies* (Kingston, ON: s.n., 1933); *The early history of the Fraser River mines* (Victoria, BC: C.F. Banfield, 1926).



Webster all had served as members of the Historic Landmarks Association (HLA), which was later renamed and reconstituted as the Canadian Historical Association (CHA).<sup>21</sup> In fact, five HSMBC members held the CHA presidency during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>22</sup> In addition, many of them were also, or would become, fellows of the Royal Society of Canada and interacted with each other at the Society's annual meetings.<sup>23</sup> Through such activities, the foundations for a significant number of friendships were laid, friendships that would ensure frequent support for each other's recommendations. For example, Cruikshank and Coyne were lifelong friends and thus were more likely to support each other's recommendations. In his introductory remarks to the 1939 Annual Meeting, Cruikshank referred to his friend as "an outstanding and most efficient colleague for seventeen years," and in a more personal way stating, "It is painful to know that he has been disabled and practically confined to bed for the last nine months by a most distressing accident."<sup>24</sup> In addition, Howay's personal friendship with Cruikshank allowed both men to discuss the Board's agenda, and Taylor implies that they reached a mutual consensus before the Board's formal discussion.<sup>25</sup> Although some tensions always existed between some members, these bonds of friendship were especially important as the number of HSMBC members remained limited during the Board's first 30 years. For most of the 1920s and 1930s, the Board membership averaged between six or seven members. In the 1940s, the membership of the Board increased to nine individuals.

In its first annual report, in 1922, the CHA applauded the work of its predecessor organization — the HLA — whose members "laboured quietly yet persistently for the promotion of a public sentiment that would not permit the historic landmarks of Canada to remain neglected and forgotten. It may also claim at least some of the credit for the establishment of the Quebec Battlefields Commission, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and the new Quebec Historic Monuments Commission."<sup>26</sup> For his part, HSMBC member

21 Canadian Historical Association [*Annual*] *Report*, 1922 (Ottawa, 1923), 3-9.

22 Five members of the HSMBC, appointed between 1919 and 1950, held the presidency of the Canadian Historical Association. They are: F.W. Howay (1931-1932); J.C. Webster (1932-1933); D.C. Harvey (1938-1939); Gustave Lanctôt (1940-1941); and W.N. Sage (1944-1945). Father A. D'Eschambault became president of the CHA in 1958-1959. See the website of the Canadian Historical Association, <[http://www.cha-shc.ca/english/past\\_pres.html](http://www.cha-shc.ca/english/past_pres.html)>, (viewed 21 January 2006).

23 Cruikshank, Sulte, Howay, Webster, Landon, d'Eschambault, Harvey, and Coyne were all fellows of the Royal Society of Canada. See: Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 193-98. In addition, Sulte and Coyne would become president of the Society, in 1904-1905 and 1926-1927, respectively. See, website of the Royal Society of Canada, List of past presidents, <[http://www.rsc.ca/index.php?page=past\\_presidents&lang\\_id=1&page\\_id=75](http://www.rsc.ca/index.php?page=past_presidents&lang_id=1&page_id=75)>, (viewed 25 January 2006).

24 HSMBC, Minutes, 29 May 1939, 1-2.

25 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 88.

26 Canadian Historical Association, [*Annual*] *Report*, 1922 (Ottawa, 1923), 7.

Morden Heaton Long, himself a future CHA president, recognized that the growing public pressure impelled the federal government to create organizations such as the HSMBC. He observed, "The Canadian people had been growingly conscious of their splendid past and during the dozen years between the Quebec Tercentenary of 1908 and the creation of the [Historic Sites and Monuments] Board representations had multiplied to the Dominion Government to support, or itself to carry out, action to preserve and suitably mark various features of our historic heritage."<sup>27</sup> As such, most HSMBC members appointed between 1919 and 1950 were respected, self-taught historians, as well as being influential members within the CHA and other national organizations. In addition, through the Board's creation, the federal government was able to remove itself almost completely from determining the national historic significance of sites, events, and individuals, a decision that strengthened the Board's importance. As a result, the federal government forwarded to the Board requests from local historical associations and members of Parliament, who presented their views on the national historic significance of local sites, events, and individuals.<sup>28</sup>

As long-standing members of the HSMBC, Cruikshank, Coyne, Howay, and Webster played a key role in shaping the commemoration of Canadian history. Born in the 1850s and 1860s, these men were schooled at a time when the Loyalist cult began to develop, a cult that would reach its summit in the 1880s and 1890s. Accompanying this renewed focus on history was the creation of imperial-specific invented traditions, such as Empire Day, which began in 1899.<sup>29</sup> Such commemorations of history, of Canada's Loyalist traditions, took place at a time when these men were adolescents or young adults, the period of one's life that sociologists of collective memory argue "ha[s] the maximum impact in terms of memorableness [*sic*]."<sup>30</sup> In writing about the role of history in the Loyalist cult, Carl Berger argued: "History was the chief vehicle in which the Loyalist tradition was expressed and that tradition depended for its credibility upon the assumption that the past contained principles to which the present must adhere if the continuity of national life was to be preserved."<sup>31</sup> Through the HSMBC's designations of historic events, sites, and individuals, the Board

27 M.H. Long, "The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada," 1954 presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association. See <<http://www.cha-shc.ca/bilingue/addresses/1954.htm>>, (viewed 22 January 2006).

28 For example, Mr. Ross Wilfrid Gray, MP for Lambton West, requested in 1931 that the Board designate as a national historic person Tecumseh, Shawnee leader who fought with the British forces during the War of 1812. The Board approved the designation during the same meeting, but the plaque was not unveiled until 1963. See Minutes of the HSMBC, 28 May 1931, 14.

29 Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 105.

30 Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, "Generations and Collective Memory," *American Sociological Review* 54 (June 1989): 359-81.

31 Berger, *The Sense of Power*, 89-90.

became another vehicle to commemorate Canada's Loyalist and Imperialist past. Geography could have pitted members against each other, but a common, shared belief in the British imperial tradition ensured hegemony and coherence in the selection process. Even D.C. Harvey, born in 1886, the first professional historian and the youngest member yet appointed to the Board in 1931, would be favourable to the commemoration of Canada's imperial past.<sup>32</sup>

Due to its members' credibility as historic authorities in Canada, the Board as a whole operated as a Victorian gentlemen's club where decisions were made based on the recommendations of Board members alone. The absence of a Board secretariat to further investigate HSMBC members' recommendations gave more weight to relationship building between members and shared ideologies than simply historic merit. In addition, ministerial influence in the Board's decision-making process was limited during its first 30 years.<sup>33</sup> The lack of checks and balances in the selection process helped to establish this gentlemen's club mentality. It was not until the early 1950s that the Minutes of the HSMBC recorded that the minister responsible for the HSMBC may have become increasingly reluctant to approve all Board recommendations. In the Board's Minutes for its 1953 Annual Meeting, an entry by the Board Secretary observes, "not all of [the Board's] advice to the Minister has been followed without question," as some historic designations could "add to the Minister's vulnerability."<sup>34</sup> Only a few times before this entry had the Board been in the situation of retroactively approving the national historic designation of sites already conferred by the federal government through an Order-in-Council.<sup>35</sup> There is also no recorded reference in the Board's pre-1950 Minutes to a challenge from a minister of the Crown to a HSMBC designation. Until 1953,

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32 C.J. Taylor writes: "Harvey's imperialist views also found favour with Cruikshank, and the General strove to defend his younger colleague from some of Webster's more tyrannical gestures." See Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 93-4.

33 There is only one recorded incident where a minister (T.A. Crerar) requested that the Board approve a historic designation for a site selection (gravesite of Sir John A. Macdonald) made by the Prime Minister (W.L. Mackenzie King). See HSMBC, Minutes, 21 May 1938, 24.

34 HSMBC, Minutes, 29 May 1956, 2.

35 The national historic designation of the gravesite of Sir John A. Macdonald was formally put to the Board at its May 1938 meeting, five months after the Order-in-Council was approved by the federal cabinet. In its minutes, the Board noted its approval of this motion with a slightly different wording: "that the action already taken (regarding Macdonald's grave) be approved." An Order-in-Council was also passed authorizing the government to spend \$3,000 to purchase Laurier's childhood house in St. Lin as, "the members of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada have all signified this approval that the acquisition of this property for historical site reasons is desirable and of national importance." Yet again, the HSMBC reference in the text of the Order-in-Council is inaccurate, as the Board only officially approved the action "already taken" by the government six months later. See HSMBC, Minutes, 21 May 1938, 18-24, and Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Order-in-Council, no. PC 1937-3000.

Board members were free to select sites, events, and individuals for national historic designation, without public consultation or political influence. Almost as important, the plaque inscription remained the exclusive purview of HSMBC members, a responsibility that allowed them to influence how such sites, people, or events were commemorated. As we will see, the imperial mindset remained the single most important factor that provided coherence to the Board's recommendations during its first 30 years of operations.

When the members of the HSMBC met for the first time in October 1919, following the confirmation of their appointment by the Minister of the Interior Arthur Meighen, their first order of business was to elect a chairman. Of its initial members — Coyne, Cruikshank, James B. Harkin (the Commissioner of Dominion Parks), W.C. Milner of Nova Scotia (a journalist for the *Chignecto Post*), and Sulte — Cruikshank seemed to be the natural choice.<sup>36</sup> He resided in Ottawa and was already familiar with many of the city's leading public servants, including Harkin.<sup>37</sup> Cruikshank's tenure as chairman lasted for 20 years, and his dominance on the Board greatly influenced the choice of HSMBC designations beyond simply stacking the deck in favour of more national historic designations in Ontario. In fact, the subjects of his historical investigation are reflected in many of the HSMBC's earliest national historic designations.

For example, at its 1920 Annual Meeting, the HSMBC discussed and approved 25 recommendations for historic designations, 14 of which were located in Ontario. Nine of the Ontario sites related to events of the War of 1812.<sup>38</sup> The other four Ontario sites selected were: the Battle of the Windmill, which foiled an American invasion in 1838; the wintering place of the Sulpicians in 1660-1670 at Port Dover; the early Jesuit mission to Huron Indians in St. Ignace, near Midland; and the First Sault Ste. Marie Canal.<sup>39</sup> The Old Simcoe House, which housed the first meeting of the Executive Council of Upper Canada in 1792, was also chosen. By 1924, the HSMBC had recommended no less than 23 sites relating to the War of 1812. The recommendations included the Battle of Frenchman's Creek (28 November 1812), the Battle of Beaver Dams (24 June 1813), the Defence of Châteauguay Ford (25 October 1813), the Battle of Chrysler's Farm (11 November 1813), and the Battle of Chippewa

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36 Milner was a member for only four years, and had poor relations with all the other members. He was removed in the reorganization of the HSMBC in 1923. See Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 42-6.

37 *Ibid.*, 39-40.

38 These sites are: Battle of Chippewa, near Niagara; Frenchman's Creek, Fort Erie; Vrooman's Battery, Queenston; Battle of Cook's Mills, near Welland; Glengarry House (home of Lieutenant-Colonel John Macdonell), Cornwall; Defence of the Châteauguay Ford, Howick; Fort Wellington, Prescott; and the Battle of Chrysler's Farm, Morrisburg. See HSMBC, Minutes, 18 May 1920, 7-25.

39 *Ibid.*

(5 July 1814). In these five battles, British forces repulsed or defeated United States invasion attempts, and a historic designation thus helped to give the impression of one-sided victories. After the 1930 HSMBC Annual Meeting, the number of War of 1812 sites had risen to 38, and this number would grow to 51 by the time Cruikshank passed away in 1939, at the age of 86.

As of February 2005, 63 sites relating to the War of 1812 had been designated as historic sites by the HSMBC, making this war the most commemorated event in Canadian history.<sup>40</sup> Of these, 81 percent were approved by the Board during Cruikshank's tenure as chairman. This number is even more striking when cross-referencing national historic designations with Cruikshank's scholarship. For example, the histories of Fort George and the Battle of Fort George, which Cruikshank published in 1896 and 1898, were designated by the HSMBC in 1921.<sup>41</sup> The same is true of the following sites, events, or individuals: the Battle of Beechwoods (or Beaver Dams), in 1921;<sup>42</sup> the Forts of Iles-aux-noix and Châteauguay, in 1923 and 1924, respectively;<sup>43</sup> the capture of Detroit, in 1925;<sup>44</sup> Sir Gordon Drummond's 1813 winter campaign, in 1928;<sup>45</sup> the siege of Fort Erie, commemorated in 1931;<sup>46</sup> the contribution of Indian Chief Tecumseh, also in 1931;<sup>47</sup> and the Battle of Lundy's Lane, in 1937.<sup>48</sup>

40 Parks Canada's list of Designations of National Historic Significance of Canada using keyword search "War of 1812," <[http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/lhn-nhs/index\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/lhn-nhs/index_e.asp)>, (viewed on 28 January 2006).

41 E. A. Cruikshank, *The battle of Fort George*, 2nd ed. [with additions and corrections] (Welland, ON: Tribune Print, 1904); E.A. Cruikshank, *Battle of Fort George* (Niagara, ON: Pickwell, 1896); and E.A. Cruikshank, *Blockade of Fort George, 1813* (Welland, ON: Niagara Historical Society, 1898).

42 E. A. Cruikshank, *The fight in the Beechwoods: a study in Canadian history* (Welland, ON: W. Sawle, 1889); and E.A. Cruikshank, *The fight in the Beechwoods: a study in Canadian history* (Welland, ON: Lundy's Lane Historical Society, 1895).

43 E.A. Cruikshank, *From Isle aux Noix to Chateauguay: a study of military operations on the frontier of Lower Canada in 1812 and 1813* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1914), 25-102; E.A. Cruikshank, *From Isle aux Noix to Chateauguay: a study of the military operations on the frontier of Lower Canada in 1812 and 1813* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1913), 129-73.

44 E.A. Cruikshank, ed. *Documents relating to the invasion of Canada and the surrender of Detroit, 1812* (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1912).

45 E.A. Cruikshank, *Drummond's winter campaign, 1813* (Welland, ON: Lundy's Lane Historical Society, 1900).

46 E.A. Cruikshank, *The siege of Fort Erie, August 1st-September 23rd, 1814* (Welland, ON: Lundy's Lane Historical Society, 1905).

47 E.A. Cruikshank, *The employment of Indians in the War of 1812* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896).

48 E.A. Cruikshank, *The Battle of Lundy's Lane, 1814: an address delivered before the Lundy's Lane Historical Society, October 16th, 1888* (Welland, ON: W.T. Sawle, Printer, 1888); E.A. Cruikshank, *The Battle of Lundy's Lane, 1814: an address delivered before the Lundy's Lane Historical Society, October 16th, 1888*, 2nd edition (Welland, ON: Tribune, 1891); and E.A. Cruikshank, *The battle of Lundy's Lane, 25th July 1814: a historical study*, 3rd edition (Welland, ON: Tribune, 1893).

Cruikshank's nominations of national historic sites thus followed closely the subjects of his own historical research.

The War of 1812, a significant event in Canada, would have received considerable attention from any national historic agency. However, Cruikshank's scholarship on and familiarity with the topic certainly helped secure HSMBC designations. In addition, Cruikshank could count on the support of his fellow Board members who shared a similar fondness for the British imperial tradition. After all, Carl Berger explained that the War of 1812 became one of the symbols of British imperialism in Canada. For Thomas D'Arcy McGee, the Irish-born Father of Confederation assassinated in 1868, the promotion of the War of 1812 was important because its reminders would nourish inherited traditions and instil a sense of national unity, for "[p]atriotism will increase in Canada as its history is read."<sup>49</sup> The strong British imperial tradition helps explain why the HSMBC agreed, unconsciously or not, to the repetitive commemorations of this imperial story, which was extended to individual battles and forts, and even to the capture of four warships and a British schooner destroyed by American forces.<sup>50</sup> The HSMBC was thus simply doing its part in promoting this story, ensuring that the imperialist victories during the War of 1812 were not forgotten by subsequent generations of Canadians.

Similar to Cruikshank's efforts to highlight War of 1812 imperialist victories, Webster may have seen his appointment to the HSMBC as providing him with a pulpit to pursue the recognition and the celebration of New Brunswick as a pivotal region in the country and the empire. When the Board was created in 1919, Meighen invited William Odler Raymond (1853-1923), archdeacon of Saint John, to serve on the Board as the New Brunswick representative. However, ill health greatly limited Raymond's participation in Board activities, and shortly before Raymond's death, Secretary of State Copp wrote to Webster to discuss his willingness to serve on the HSMBC. For Webster, the decision was not an easy one as he viewed pessimistically the Board's relevance since its inception in 1919. Webster believed it to be "a mistake of the Borden Government to establish a general Dominion Commission. A Dominion-wide body is not practical. How many are there in the East who are competent to pass judgement on the historical features of British Columbia and the West?"<sup>51</sup> Rather than indicating his interest in serving on this national advisory board,

49 Berger, *The Sense of Power*, 90-3.

50 The history of *H.M.S. Nancy*, the British Schooner that was destroyed during the War of 1812, was designated a national historic site in 1923. See HSMBC, Minutes, 30 May 1923, 21. The capture of the *Ohio* and *Somers*, American warships, near Fort Erie, were commemorated in 1929. See HSMBC, Minutes, 28 May 1929, 16. The capture of *Tigress* and *Scorpion* war ships, near Penetanguishene, was commemorated in 1935. See HSMBC, Minutes, 30 May 1935, 21.

51 New Brunswick Museum (hereafter NBM), John Clarence Webster Fonds, S193, F139, Letter from Dr. Webster to Hon. A.B. Copp, 1 June 1922.

Webster's reply to Copp expounded upon the benefits of a Maritime historic commission, which "understand[s] local conditions, who [is] able to respect the traditions and memories of both races, using [its] influence tactfully to develop a common interest and pride in our historic landmarks and traditions."<sup>52</sup> Despite his initial reluctance, Webster finally agreed to serve on the HSMBC as the lone New Brunswick voice, a position he held for more than 27 years, the last five as chairman.

Prior to accepting this position, Webster had indicated to Copp that priority needed to be given to military sites in the Maritimes, including Fort Beauséjour in New Brunswick and Fort Edwards in Nova Scotia.<sup>53</sup> Not surprisingly, during the 1920s, seven New Brunswick forts were designated as historic sites: Forts Beauséjour, Monckton, Charnisay, Meductic, Nashwaak, Jemseg, and Nerepis.<sup>54</sup> Many of these forts had previously been the focus of historical research by Webster and his long-time friend, Dr. William Francis Ganong.<sup>55</sup> Although Fort Beauséjour had been listed as a site of national historic importance since 1923, Webster pursued his lobbying efforts to ensure the full preservation of this fort. By 1926, Webster had been able to secure a National Park designation for this property, and the Department of the Interior sought his "views as to what improvement or development work should be carried out immediately, consistent of course with the funds which will be available."<sup>56</sup> In addition to the plaque to commemorate Fort Beauséjour, Webster judged it important to recognize, with a national historic designation, other events and individuals related to the Fort's history. For this reason, at the 1925 Annual Meeting of the HSMBC, Webster proposed the addition of two other plaques to Fort Beauséjour. The first, Tonge's Island, describes the history of the first capital of Acadia from 1678 to 1684. The second, Yorkshire

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52 Ibid.

53 Ibid. Webster refers to Forts Beauséjour and Edward by their previous names, Cumberland and Piziquid, respectively.

54 Forts Beauséjour and Monckton were designated in 1921; Fort Charnisay in 1923; Fort Meductic in 1924; Fort Nashwaak in 1925; Fort Jemseg in 1927; and Fort Nerepis in 1930. See HSMBC, Minutes, 1920-1930.

55 William Francis Ganong, "A Monograph of Historic Sites in the Province of New Brunswick," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 5 (1899): 213-357; John Clarence Webster, *A Historical Guide to New Brunswick* (New Brunswick Government Bureau of Information and Tourist Travel, 1928); John Clarence Webster, *The Forts of Chignecto: A Study of the Eighteenth Century Conflict between France and Great Britain in Acadia* (Shediac, NB: Privately printed, 1930).

56 NBM, J.C. Webster Fonds, S193, F120, Letter from Harkin to Webster, 21 June 1926. The designation "National Historic Park" was approved by Order-in-Council in the fall of 1940, thus making the distinction between vast wilderness areas such as Banff and Jasper National Parks and sites of historic interests. Therefore, Fort Beauséjour officially became the Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park in 1941. See NBM, J.C. Webster Fonds, S193, F121, Williamson to Webster, 27 November 1940.



Settlement, portrays the arrival of New England Loyalists to the Isthmus of Chignecto from 1772 to 1776.<sup>57</sup> In 1938, Webster successfully proposed another plaque for Fort Beauséjour in honour of British naval officer Major Thomas Dixson, as eighteenth-century Royal Navy Officers were a popular category for HSMBC designations.<sup>58</sup> In 1776, Dixson helped to bring an end to the siege of the fort by non-commissioned American soldiers, led by Jonathan Eddy, who wished to “liberate Nova Scotia” from British rule as part of the American War of Independence.<sup>59</sup> The following year, Webster introduced a similar motion to the Board to honour at Fort Beauséjour the contributions of Sir Brook Watson, a request that was refused by the Board and which will be described at greater length below. Despite this refusal, Webster’s efforts to strengthen Fort Beauséjour as a National Historic Park did not cease. In early 1940, Webster inquired about enlarging the grounds of Fort Beauséjour to include the British advance trenches and the British blockhouse in its vicinity.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Webster purchased available land in the area, which he donated to the Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park in 1947, a gesture recognized by James Allison Glen, Minister of National Mines and Resources, and several Maritime MPs.<sup>61</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that when a new wing of the Fort Beauséjour Museum was opened in 1949, the new Minister of Mines and Resources, James Angus MacKinnon, recommended that the wing be named for Webster: “The work that you have done in connection with the HSMB [*sic*] and in other ways to foster a knowledge and love of Canada and Canadian history deserves some recognition, and I am very happy to have had an opportunity in bringing it about.”<sup>62</sup> Fort Beauséjour was at the heart of Webster’s commemorative agenda within New Brunswick, an agenda strongly linked to the British imperial tradition.

Another region of great interest to Webster was the Loyalist stronghold of Saint John, New Brunswick. After the American Revolution in 1783, New England Loyalists arrived in the area, and settled on both sides of the Saint John River. Two years later, the two settlements were incorporated by Royal Charter

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57 HSMBC, Minutes, 4 June 1924, 9, and 19 May 1925, 28.

58 *Ibid.*, 20 May 1938, 16. There are lots of examples of eighteenth-century Royal Navy Officers, such as Admiral Phillips Cosby and Sir William Parry Wallis, being designated as a national historic person during the 1930s and 1940s.

59 G.A. Rawlyk, “Eddy Jonathan,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=36513&query>>, (viewed 16 January 2006).

60 NBM, J.C. Webster Fonds, S193, F121, Williamson to Webster, 20 September 1940.

61 *Ibid.*, F138, Letter from Minister of Mines and Resources James Allison Glen to Dr. Webster, 16 August 1947.

62 *Ibid.*, Letter from Minister of Mines and Resources James Angus MacKinnon to Dr. Webster, 12 February 1949. The Webster Fonds at the NBM has a large collection of documents which profile Dr. Webster’s role in advancing Fort Beauséjour as a National Historic Park. See NBM, J.C. Webster Fonds, S194, F155-161; F162-179; F195-F205a.

into the City of Saint John, Canada's first city. Throughout Webster's tenure on the HSMBC, 20 sites, events, or individuals in Saint John received national historic designation, making Saint John one of the most HSMBC-commemorated cities in Canada by 1950.<sup>63</sup> Many of Saint John's HSMBC designated landmarks revolved around its Loyalist past: the landing of United Empire Loyalists in 1783 was marked in 1923; the first Legislature of the Province convened on 3 January 1786 at Mallard House, in 1929; and the Carleton Martello Tower, which helped defend the city during the War of 1812, in 1930.<sup>64</sup> In addition to Loyalist sites, Webster also championed the commemoration of technological processes achieved in New Brunswick, but invaluable across the Empire, notably the invention of the first steam fog horn, commemorated in 1925, and the first marine compound engine, in 1926. Material progress was also an imperial theme that surfaced prominently in the Board's recommendations, from the first printing press in Halifax to the first steamship on Lake Ontario to the first railroad in Canada.<sup>65</sup>

Webster also promoted the careers of many prominent men with a connection to Saint John for national historic designations. The HSMBC deemed all Fathers of Confederation, including John Gray and William Steeves of Saint John, persons of national historic importance.<sup>66</sup> Webster's 1938 recommendation of George McCall Theal, seems more doubtful, at least in Canada and outside of the imperial mindset of HSMBC members. Born in Saint John in 1837, Theal moved to South Africa at the age of 24, where he became Archivist of the Union of South Africa and one of that country's most influential historians.<sup>67</sup> Historian René Ferdinand Malan Immelman argues that Theal "was not only the first Colonial Historiographer, but also such a prolific pioneer of South African historical writing that even yet we cannot afford to overlook or ignore him."<sup>68</sup> Thus, Theal exemplified the commemoration of a relatively unknown individual, born in Canada, who distinguished himself in another region of the Empire, and based solely on the recommendation of one of the HSMBC's members. Despite its positive treatment of Theal who died in Cape Town in

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63 LAC, RG 37, vol. 396, file 1962, List of HSMBC designations, 1919-1960. Halifax, N.S., had received 23 HSMBC designations; Saint John, N.B., 21; Kingston, ON, 13; Quebec City, 12; Montreal, 10; and Toronto, 8.

64 HSMBC, Minutes, 25 May 1923, 9; 26 May 1929, 16; and 16 May 1930, 5.

65 The first printing press in Halifax and the first steamship on Lake Ontario were commemorated in 1924; the first railroad in Canada, 1928. The HSMBC commemorated many things as "firsts."

66 HSMBC, Minutes, 20 May 1939, 20.

67 Christopher Saunders, "George McCall Theal and Loverdale," *History in Africa* 8 (1981): 155-64.

68 René Ferdinand Malan Immelman, *George McCall Theal: A biographical sketch* (Cape Town: Cape Town Publishers, 1964), 30.

1919 without ever returning to his native country, the HSMBC deferred in the mid-1930s the commemoration of many individuals — Sir Isaac Brook, George Brown, Samuel de Champlain, Count Frontenac, and Lord Strathcona, for example — on the grounds that they were not born in Canada, regardless of their contributions to their adoptive land.<sup>69</sup> As such, the Board weighted more favourably the birthplace of leading figures in Canadian history, a reflection that Canada was able to produce its own native-born heroes. Sir John A. Macdonald may have been an exception to this rule, albeit only briefly. The Board had previously accepted to commemorate two homes associated with Sir John A. Macdonald, a summer home in St. Patrick, Quebec, and a boyhood home in Adolphustown, Ontario. Macdonald's gravesite in Catarauqui Cemetery in Kingston, Ontario, was also designated following political influence from Prime Minister Mackenzie King.<sup>70</sup> However, in 1938, the Board passed a motion, indicating that the services of Sir John A. Macdonald had already been suitably commemorated, and recommended that his name be struck from the list of distinguished Canadians.<sup>71</sup> Regardless of this 1938 motion, the second wave of HSMBC members commemorated additional sites related to Canada's first prime minister.

Many of the Board's friends and collaborators also seem to have been fast-tracked in the national historic designation process. A case in point is Webster's close friend and New Brunswick Museum collaborator, the renowned botanist William Francis Ganong, who died in September 1942. The close friendship and collaboration between the two men is also reflected in the William Francis Ganong memorial booklet published by Webster.<sup>72</sup> In 1945, Webster, who assumed the chairmanship of the HSMBC the previous year, recommended a HSMBC plaque honouring Ganong be placed in the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, a museum they helped shape together. This fast-track process was also applied to deceased HSMBC members. Benjamin Sulte, who died in 1923, was designated as a national historic person in 1928. For all other members who died during this paper's period of study, the designation happened much more quickly, with only a four-year wait for Cruikshank, three-year for Coyne, one-year for Howay, and a few months for Webster. In light of Webster's effort to bring more historic recognition to Saint John, it is perhaps a fitting tribute that the plaque to commemorate Webster's career was added to an already long list of historic designations in Saint John, rather than his native community

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69 See NMB, J.C. Webster Fonds, S193, F120, Letter from G. Wilford Bryan of the National Parks Branch to members of the HSMBC, 18 September 1935.

70 HSMBC, Minutes, 25 May 1926, 29; 22 May 1937, 18; and 21 May 1938, 24.

71 Ibid., 21 May 1938, 26.

72 J. C. Webster, ed., *William Francis Ganong Memorial* (Saint John, N.B.: New Brunswick Museum, 1942).

of Shediac.<sup>73</sup> As such, HSMBC members who served during the Victorian gentlemen's club era all received a nod from their colleagues as to their national historic importance, without any written HSMBC debate about the unseemly immodesty of such proceedings. As professional historians slowly replaced the original members of the Victorian gentlemen's club, the tradition of designating HSMBC members as national historic persons ceased following Webster's death.

There are other historic events, sites, and individuals that did not become the focus on HSMBC considerations between 1919 and 1950, especially recommendations that could have raised English/French tensions or dealt with conflicts in Canadian history. While Montgomery's Tavern, William Lyon Mackenzie's headquarters during the Rebellions, was marked by a HSMBC plaque in 1925, the Board chose to focus briefly on the sources of the tension — "serious grievances against the dominant Family Compact" — but the bulk of the text describes the impact of these tensions, notably the legislative union of Upper and Lower Canada, in 1841, and the "permanent establishment in Canada of responsible government, a principle then first extended to a British Colony."<sup>74</sup> It took until 1949 for Mackenzie to be designated a national historic person. As for Louis-Joseph Papineau, his designation as a national historic person took until 1968. Other French-Canadian patriots, such as Jean-Olivier Chénier and Ludger Duvernay, have not yet been marked with a HSMBC plaque; nor have, for example, the events in St. Eustache in December 1837. For his part, Métis leader Louis Riel, despite being hanged for treason in 1885, and unsuccessful pleas from several MPs over the years to "reverse the conviction of Louis Riel for high treason," was designated as a national historic person in 1956; but it took until 1980 before a HSMBC plaque in his honour was erected in Winnipeg.<sup>75</sup> By avoiding discussions of historic events that continue to stir historical debates — the Rebellions of 1837-1838 and the historical legacy of Louis Riel, for example — the Board avoided a possible rupture in its cultural hegemony. Even once some designations were approved, it sometimes took decades before a plaque was unveiled.

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73 Sulte was designated a national historic person by the HSMBC in 1928; Cruikshank (1859-1939) in 1943 (the Board did not meet between 1939 and 1943 because of the war); Coyne (1849-1942) in 1945; Howay (1867-1943) in 1944; and Webster (1862-1950) in 1950. See HSMCB, Minutes 17 May 1928, 32; 21 May 1943, 58; 26 May 1944, 36; 18 May 1945, 34; and 2 June 1950, 35.

74 *Ibid.*, 15 May 1925, 4.

75 Parks Canada's list of Designations of National Historic Significance of Canada using keyword search "Louis Riel," <[http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/lhn-nhs/index\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/lhn-nhs/index_e.asp)>, (viewed 28 January 2006). The quotation is taken from the summary of Bill C-258, tabled in the House of Commons by NDP Winnipeg-area MP Pat Martin entitled *An Act Respecting Louis Riel*. See <[http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/chambus/house/bills/private/C-258/C-258\\_1/C-258\\_cover-E.html](http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/chambus/house/bills/private/C-258/C-258_1/C-258_cover-E.html)>, (viewed 6 May 2006).

## THE POLITICS OF SELECTION

Despite largely harmonious relations and a relatively coherent vision of Canadian history, the HSMBC was not devoid of intra-regional and inter-regional divisions, internal politics, and personality conflicts — elements found in all national boards and organizations. One clear example of such struggles revolved around Webster's recommendation that the HSMBC approve a national historic designation for Sir Brook Watson. Watson's birth in Plymouth, England, in 1735 did not prevent Webster from championing his nomination for a national historic designation, despite an unspoken bias against individuals born outside of Canada. After the death of his parents, Watson was sent to live with relatives in Boston, Massachusetts. A shark attack in Havana Harbour at the age of 14, which severed his right leg below the knee, did not prevent him from launching a prominent career in both business and politics. Through his employment with Andrew Hutson, a Boston-based merchant mariner, Watson became familiar with Nova Scotia and began a business venture that made him one of the most significant traders in Canada during the second half of the eighteenth century, a business venture that involved transporting fish, fur, lumber, and ironworks from Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Labrador to Britain and Spain. Employed as an agent of colonial administrators, Watson was sent in 1755 to supervise the deportation of Acadians in Baie Verte, and he later served in administrative roles at Forts Lawrence and Cumberland. Later in his career, he returned to North America as Commissary General to Sir Guy Carleton, who was dispatched to New England to prevent the political separation of the thirteen colonies from the British Empire. Ultimately unsuccessful, Carleton ordered Watson to oversee the transportation of New England Loyalists to the shores of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, an act that exemplified Watson as a loyal friend and advocate for Loyalist representation to the British government. Watson also became the Lord Mayor of London, an MP in the British House of Commons, Chairman of Lloyd's of London, and the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. The most famous painting of Sir Brook Watson, a work by John Singleton Copley, hangs in Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art. Webster purchased an engraving of the original painting for his own Canadiana collection, which was later donated to the New Brunswick Museum.<sup>76</sup>

Webster's familiarity with the history of Sir Brook Watson had been long-standing. In 1924, after his appointment to the HSMBC, Webster made a presentation at Mount Allison University, his *alma mater*, later published in *Argosy*, entitled, "Sir Brook Watson: friend of the Loyalists, first agent of New Brunswick in London."<sup>77</sup> In it, Webster described his biographical work

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76 L.S.F. Upton, "Sir Brook Watson," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=36828&query=watson%20AND%20brook>>, (viewed 17 January 2006).

77 J. C. Webster, "Sir Brook Watson: friend of the Loyalists, first agent of New Brunswick in London," *Argosy* 3 (1924-1925): 3-25

as an attempt “to rescue from oblivion the memory of one who began his career as a friendless cripple in Nova Scotia in the mid-eighteenth century ... [and became] a faithful friend to the unhappy Loyalists who were endeavouring to establish themselves in the underdeveloped land. I trust that now, as the story of his life is made known, his name may not be considered as unworthy of honourable remembrance by our people.”<sup>78</sup> Webster’s biography of Watson conveniently overlooked his role in overseeing the deportation of Acadian settlers, recounting instead, and rather curiously, an incident during this same year in which Watson recovered a herd of cattle that had crossed into French territory. Webster also attempted to dispel what he perceived to be three biographical inaccuracies made by American artist Samuel Isham: Watson as a slave-trader, a British spy, and a not altogether admirable character.<sup>79</sup> Without presenting strong counter-factual evidence, Webster quickly dismissed Isham’s claims and concluded his biography of Watson by stating: “Would it not be fitting that the city of St. John, whose early inhabitants owed so much to this man, should place on the walls of old Mortlake Parish Church a tablet in grateful remembrance of his good deeds?”<sup>80</sup> Shortly after this presentation, Webster wrote to Cruikshank to suggest a possible HSMBC designation for Watson. Cruikshank’s response was brief and not particularly encouraging: “Many years ago, when I was a boy, I remember reading some account of Watson’s career and the incident of the loss of a leg in a miscellany or magazine, of which I cannot recall the name.”<sup>81</sup> After this initial reference to Sir Brook Watson, Webster waited until 1938 before bringing this nomination before the full Board.

In finalizing the 1938 submission to his fellow HSMBC colleagues, Webster requested that the Board Secretary, Frank Williamson, forward his rationale for the national historic significance of Sir Brook Watson to the full Board by mail, to expedite the approval process. Cruikshank acknowledged that Webster’s memo contained all that could be said on Sir Brook Watson, but some members of the HSMBC were not swayed by the case put forward by Webster. His Maritime colleague, D.C. Harvey, a man who most likely owed his job at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia to Webster,<sup>82</sup> wrote:

78 *Ibid.*, 2.

79 *Ibid.*, 24.

80 *Ibid.*

81 NBM, J. Clarence Webster Fonds, S193, File 138, Letter from Cruikshank to Webster, 6 January 1925.

82 The Board of Directors of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia was headed by Webster. Gerard A. Thomas indicates that the position of archivist was offered to D.C. Harvey, a decision, which would have necessitated Webster’s approval. See Thomas, “John Clarence Webster: The Evolution and Motivation of an Historian, 1922-1950,” 48. Ian McKay, who is currently completing a monograph on the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, examines the relationship between Webster and Harvey, and describes to the author in conversation how Harvey became alienated from Webster because of internal politics at Dalhousie University, regarding the termination of the university president’s mandate.

## THE POLITICS OF SELECTION

I am not sure that we should create a precedent by erecting such a memorial. So far as his services to the Maritime Provinces are concerned, he seems to me to have been a paid agent who took his money and gave a reasonable return but I cannot see that we have any particular reason to commemorate him in preference to a number of other imperial officers, officials or business men. I do know that he was very harsh in enforcing imprisonment for debt upon an unfortunate debtor in Halifax.<sup>83</sup>

It is interesting that Harvey's reason for refusing Watson's national historic designation relied as much on practical reasons, such as why Watson deserved commemoration more than other imperial officials, as it did on moral reasons. Despite Harvey's unsubstantiated allegation regarding Watson's treatment of a debtor in Halifax, his response may have influenced some HSMBC members, wishing to avoid a potential controversy, to vote against this recommendation. Harvey's comments also made clear to HSMBC members that no common Maritime view existed as to Watson's national historic significance, another factor that could have swayed others to vote against this nomination. For his part, Cruikshank also remained unconvinced as to the national historic significance of Watson: "I fail to see that Sir Brook Watson's service in respect to the transportation and supply of the loyalists [*sic*] in the ordinary course of his duties as commissary general to the army at New York were of such outstanding importance as to deserve recognition in the manner recommended."<sup>84</sup>

Three other Board members — Professor Fred Landon of the University of Western Ontario, Father Antoine d'Eschambault of Saint-Boniface, and Justice Édouard Fabre-Surveyer of Montréal — were supportive of Webster's recommendation, albeit with reservation, and, even more interestingly, with conditions. While Landon simply wrote "approved," Fabre-Surveyer made use of his endorsement to underline the fact that if New Brunswick's first Agent in London was to be commemorated, "it might be advisable to commemorate (the services) of Honourable (Hector) Fabre, first High Commissioner of Canada in London," and Fabre-Surveyer's uncle.<sup>85</sup> It being d'Eschambault's first few months on the Board, he may have been prompted to agree to all requests put before him. During this same period, d'Eschambault wrote in regards to commemorating the first Iclander in Manitoba: "I am new on the Board and cannot

83 NBM, John Clarence Webster Fonds, S193, F121, Letter from F.H.H. Williamson to Dr. J.C. Webster, 5 April 1939.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid. Justice Fabre-Surveyer was a member of a dominant political and religious family in Quebec. Two of his maternal uncles were Bishop Édouard-Charles Fabre of Montreal and Hector, a trained lawyer who would be named to the Senate of Canada and later appointed as a Canadian diplomat in Europe. The latter is the subject of Fabre-Surveyer's comment. His aunt, Hortense, married Sir George-Étienne Cartier. See website of the Archdiocese of Montreal, biography of Bishop Fabre, <[http://diocesemontreal.org/histoire/eveques/fabre/1\\_famille.htm](http://diocesemontreal.org/histoire/eveques/fabre/1_famille.htm)>, (viewed 10 January 2006).



be guided by precedents but it does seem to me that this is probably a thing of local interest. Not that I would begrudge them their share if the Board feels otherwise.”<sup>86</sup> At this early stage of his HSMBC mandate, d’Eschambault also indicated the same level of flexibility in his response to Watson’s nomination. In fact, d’Eschambault argued that a designation for Watson seemed doubtful from his vantage point, but he acknowledged that this plaque would add to the historic interest of Fort Beauséjour.<sup>87</sup> In light of such mixed reactions, Williamson added this recommendation for discussion at the Board’s next Annual Meeting.

On 29 May 1939, the HSMBC gathered in the Norlite Building just across from the West Block of the Parliament Buildings for their Annual Meeting. Joining Cruikshank, Howay, Fabre-Surveyer, Harvey, Landon and Webster for their first HSMBC meeting were d’Eschambault and John Albert Gregory of Saskatchewan. The appointment of Gregory raised concerns of political influence in the Board’s independent decision-making process. A former president of the Prince Albert Historical Association, Gregory was also a Liberal member of the Saskatchewan Legislature since June 1938, and a close friend of the then minister responsible for the HSMBC, T.A. Crerar.<sup>88</sup> Before adjourning for lunch on the first day of the meeting, Cruikshank called upon Webster to read his two-part motion regarding the national historic designation for Sir Brook Watson. It reads: “That the services of Sir Brook Watson be declared of national importance and that a suitable tablet be placed on the Fort Beauséjour Museum.”<sup>89</sup> No longer was Webster asking that this plaque be erected on the walls of the old Mortlake Parish Church, or even in Saint John, as he had suggested in his speech at Mount Allison University in 1924. Webster’s proposal now recommended that this plaque be affixed to the Fort Beauséjour Museum — where Webster was the honorary curator — alongside other HSMBC plaques.

Based on Williamson’s 5 April 1939 letter outlining HSMBC members’ comments regarding the Watson designation, Webster knew that the final vote would be a close finish. Cruikshank and Harvey had signalled their opposition, while Landon, d’Eschambault, and Fabre-Surveyer would possibly support Watson’s designation. If members who had already expressed their opinion in writing were not swayed, the result of the vote rested in the hands of Gregory

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86 Société historique de Saint-Boniface Archives, Father Antoine d’Eschambault Fonds, Letter from Father d’Eschambault to F.H.H. Williamson, 4 January 1939.

87 Ibid.

88 J.A. Gregory was elected to the Saskatchewan legislature for the riding of The Battlefords on 8 June 1938. See <[www.saskarchives.com/web/seld/2-10.pdf](http://www.saskarchives.com/web/seld/2-10.pdf)>, (viewed 8 January 2006). Gregory ran successfully in the March 1940 federal general election, and served as an MP until 1946. He served on the HSMBC from 1937 to 1950.

89 HSMBC, Minutes, 29 May 1939, 7.

and the Board Secretary, Frank Williamson, a voting member, both of whom had not previously recorded their views on Watson's designation. Despite Webster's endorsement, Sir Brook Watson's national historic recognition was ultimately defeated by a vote of five to four.<sup>90</sup> For the first time in the Board's history, its minutes record the exact vote, rather than simply indicating that a motion was carried, defeated, or deferred. The results of the vote seem to have pitted Cruikshank against Webster, a factor that could have influenced the newest member, J.A. Gregory, and the Board Secretary to support the Chairman. The fact that Webster wished to affix this plaque at the Fort Beauséjour Museum, as had been previously done for the plaques commemorating Tonge's Island, the Yorkshire Settlement, and Major Thomas Dixon, may have played against Webster's personal interest for securing additional national historic designations at Fort Beauséjour, more than Sir Brook Watson. Sir Brook Watson's name was never reintroduced for an HSMBC historic person designation, not even when Webster assumed the chairmanship of the Board, from 1945 to 1950. In the end, Watson was another illustration of the continued repetitive commemoration of the British imperial tradition, a recommendation that normally would have seen the support of Cruikshank. However, Harvey's opposition to this motion may have encouraged Cruikshank to support Harvey rather than basing his negative vote on merit alone. Watson may also provide an indication of the beginning of a turning point in the Board's imperial interpretation of Canada's history.

Sir Brook Watson's nomination by Webster gives us unique and interesting insights into the decision-making process of the Board. Webster's interest in Sir Brook Watson seems two-fold. On the one hand, by nominating Watson, Webster expressed his desire to continue marking the Loyalist history of the Maritime provinces. On the other hand, Webster intended to bring more historic recognition to Fort Beauséjour, where he had played a crucial role since the Fort was designated a National Historic Site in 1920. For his part, Harvey may have been frustrated by the randomness of some nominations presented to the Board. Being a member of this Victorian gentlemen's club, classically trained in the social sciences and a history professor at Dalhousie University, Harvey may have voted against other HSMBC designations without HSMBC minutes recording his dissent. However, there is no evidence supporting Harvey's moral allegations against Watson, which begs the questions about his motives for voting against Watson as a national historic person. It must also be noted that Hector Fabre's national historic person designation never materialized, despite his nephew's effort.

Throughout his mandate on the HSMBC, it does seem that Webster was able to secure a national historic designation for most of the recommendations

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

he championed, despite the single documented failed attempt with regard to Sir Brook Watson. Thus, his pre-HSMBC membership assertion that the Maritime Provinces would have been better served by their own historic commission did not seem to have materialized. It is rather unlikely that Cruikshank and Webster, as representatives of the HSMBC's first wave of decision-makers, would have succeeded in securing a national historic designation for their recommendations without a gentlemen's club environment populated by men who shared a common British imperial tradition and whose decision-making process was not influenced by political actors or civil society. Webster's death in 1950 symbolized in many ways the end of the first era of the HSMBC's history. He was the last true surviving member of the original Victorian gentlemen's club, and his vacant seat was offered to Alfred G. Bailey, Professor of History and Dean of Arts at the University of New Brunswick. Landon's election to the chair also broke with HSMBC tradition, where the most senior member, in this case D.C. Harvey, normally would have assumed the position. By the early 1950s, the Board was composed of a new generation of members — the so-called second wave of members — men who held advanced university degrees in the social sciences and humanities, and who more closely resembled D.C. Harvey's background as a professional historian. In fact, by 1950, half of HSMBC members held professorships in history at Canadian universities, and this percentage would continue to increase during the subsequent decades.<sup>91</sup> This second wave of HSMBC members were also more numerous as each province and territory received its own Board representative.

The end to the mandate of the first-wave of HSMBC members allowed new members to question some of the previous designations. For this reason, in 1956, Professor Landon, as Chairman, and despite his membership in the first-wave of Board members, requested that the Board's list of approved but not yet commemorated sites, events, and individuals be "scrutinize[d] ... carefully [to] determine whether there are not some which, for one reason or another, might be written off."<sup>92</sup> As such, Landon may have been attempting to revise history by modifying the list of designations previously approved. However, Landon was not alone in his efforts. Nova Scotia Provincial Archivist Bruce Fergusson, who assumed the chairmanship of the HSMBC in 1960, acknowledged that the Board's work could be improved through a more systematic approach. Fergusson came to the realization that "many Board decisions have

91 For example, by 1950, the Board was made up of Fred Landon, Professor of History, University of Western Ontario; Walter Sage, Professor of History, University of British Columbia; Alfred Bailey, Professor of History, University of New Brunswick; Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist; M.H. Long, Professor of History, University of Alberta; and D.C. Harvey, Nova Scotia Provincial Archivist and Professor of History, Dalhousie University. See HSMBC, Minutes, 31 May 1950, 1.

92 Ibid., 29 May 1956, 2.

been made on an ad hoc basis, and that any system of logic in selection seems to be well hidden.”<sup>93</sup> Outside of the British imperial tradition, it would indeed seem that the Board’s selection process for national historic designations led to a non-coherent commemoration of Canadian history. The days of approving ideologically-based recommendations without additional research and examining pertinent sources were clearly over as well. The Board enlarged its secretariat, surrounding itself with young scholars — technocrats — who carried out extensive research and generated reports and recommendations for decisions for Board members. In addition, Fergusson cautioned the Board on the number of recommendations put before it. “Consideration of up to sixty new items in four or five days,” wrote Fergusson “has not tended to contribute to sound judgments either, for sheer volume has reduced both the quality of research papers and the time in which to evaluate them.”<sup>94</sup> Thus the decision-making pendulum was clearly swinging away from a subjective selection process, marked by ideology, personal connections or personal historical interests, used by the HSMBC’s first wave of appointees. Nevertheless, ideology and personal connections (and in the case of the HSMBC, personal historical interests) have always been important factors in the operations and the decision-making process of any organization’s management team, and the HSMBC can still remain subject to the agenda of individual members.

Although this paper has attempted to remove some of the mystery that surrounded the designation of national historic sites, events, and individuals from 1919 to 1950, there are other aspects of the selection process of national historic designations which merit further investigation. For example, it is clear that a strong camaraderie existed between Cruikshank and Coyne, while Cruikshank supported Harvey when dealing with Webster, as illustrated in the Sir Brook Watson example. Such factors may have also have played a role in the selection process since, at times, these four men constituted roughly three quarters of the HSMBC membership. Additional analysis would also be required to examine national, provincial, and local commemorative efforts, the role of tourism in influencing HSMBC decision-making and the changes to the selection process by the second wave of HSMBC members.

Despite the need to further investigate the selection process of national historic designations by the HSMBC throughout almost a century of shaping the commemoration of Canada’s past, this paper has shed some light on the Board’s selection process for national historic designation between 1919 and 1950. The Board’s work, due to its members’ credibility as historic authorities and the absence of a strong secretariat or political influence, evolved into a Victorian

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93 LAC, RG 37, vol. 396, File 1962, Memorandum from HSMBC Chairman Bruce Fergusson to HSMBC members, year 1962, no date.

94 *Ibid.*

gentlemen's club. Decisions were made based on the opinion of a minor group and, through their designations, attempted to influence the way Canadians understood this past, well beyond the end of the first wave of members' mandate. C.J. Taylor has himself argued that Board members viewed themselves as an "educated élite whose duty it was to impart proper values of patriotism, duty, self-sacrifice and spiritual devotion to young and new Canadians," and to use the past to "provid[e] examples which served to instruct the present."<sup>95</sup> Members of the HSMBC, consciously or subconsciously, used their position within the Board to strengthen their vision of Canada's historical origins, one firmly anchored in the British imperial tradition. As such, Cruikshank, Coyne, Howay, and Webster differed little in their ideological viewpoint from Stephen Leacock, George Munro Grant, Sir George Parkin, or Colonel George Denison, men who are central to Carl Berger's analysis of imperialist ideas in Canada.<sup>96</sup> Berger argued that these men believed that "the United Empire Loyalists had planted and protected the ideal of imperial unity in Canada when the British people had questioned and deserted it."<sup>97</sup> Through their national historic designations, Cruikshank, Webster, and other HSMBC members, like the imperialists Berger studied, "believe[d] that their country would become the future centre and dominating portion of the British Empire."<sup>98</sup> Their recommendations aimed to strengthen the British imperial tradition in the collective memory of Canadians through the repetitive commemoration of the imperial story. And the Board, operating as a Victorian's gentleman's club, successfully achieved this goal during its first three decades of operation.

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