

# Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

## Forgotten Men of Canadian History

Alan Wilson

Volume 44, numéro 1, 1965

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300636ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300636ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Wilson, A. (1965). Forgotten Men of Canadian History. *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada*, 44(1), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300636ar>

## FORGOTTEN MEN OF CANADIAN HISTORY

ALAN WILSON

*Trent University*

I know of no more allusive study than history. History affords the key to literature, art, politics, and in many senses to the behavioural sciences. It has become and should be further developed as the basis of humane (that is, non-scientific) education. Consequently, it seems to me that the historian is under a great obligation to ask himself continually what is his purpose, and how that purpose may best be served.

In Canadian history, except for a few distinguished articles, until fairly recently we had examined neither the form nor the direction that our history has taken. Excellent histories had been written; schools and emphases in interpretation had emerged. But conscious experiment in form or interpretation were not generally marks of our Canadian historical scholarship. Like Canadian voters, most Canadian historians stuck to the same pattern over a generation or more. At the end of that time, like baying hounds rushing in a pack after the elusive fox, they swung in a body this way or that in the pursuit of some new and dominant interpretation. Within a single generation, broad differences of interpretation or sharp clashes over points of emphasis between historians within the same school were not until recently a mark of professional English-speaking Canadian history. The evidence of a decade of vigorous differences of thought among French-speaking Canadian historians may be having a stimulating effect upon us.

Perhaps the strongest earlier influence upon the writing of English-speaking Canadian history, investing it with a Whiggish tendency, was the work of the constitutionalists and particularly the political scientists. W. P. M. Kennedy, O. D. Skelton, J. A. Corry, R. M. Dawson, J. L. Morrison, Chester Martin — and to some extent A. R. M. Lower — gave a distinct institutional cast to the conception and explanation of Canadian development. Our growth was examined in the context of colony to nation and in the certainty that British parliamentary forms and customs moulded the product. These assumptions, as Professor Careless demonstrated,<sup>1</sup> came under fire later from the environmentalist Laurentian historians and have since been subjected to attack by younger political scientists, such as Professor Denis Smith<sup>2</sup> who argues for the Canadian West that British forms have not been universally respected — that, for example, the center

<sup>1</sup> J. M. S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History", *CHR*, xxxv, 1954, 1-21.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Smith, "Prairie Revolt, Federalism, and the Party System", in Hugh Thorburn, ed., *Politics: Canada*, Toronto, 1963.

of political debate has not lain in the legislatures — and by implication through the valuable administrative emphasis of Professor J. E. Hodgetts.<sup>3</sup> But the historical fraternity has in many cases remained true to much of the original institutionalist viewpoint, qualified but not abandoned after a generation or more of attention to two other very fruitful hypotheses.

It is only very recently that the Metropolitan and the Laurentian theses have been developed side by side, but no synthesis of these has yet been completed. Professor Kilbourn has pointed out that a third, more regional interpretation has been added by Professor Morton, but that even this explanation begins with the Laurentian hypothesis.<sup>4</sup> The sociologist, Professor S. D. Clark, came closest to attempting to apply Turnerite views to Canada in dealing with the Eastern Townships in the Lower Canadian protest movement of the early nineteenth century, but while no English-speaking Canadian historian has challenged this application in that setting, none has fully accepted Clark's ideas.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps it has been considered ungentlemanly in Canadian historians to disagree too openly. Perhaps we should each continue to write *ex cathedra*. But there is profit in exhilarating struggles such as that between Professors Tawney and Trevor-Roper, or in American history in Robert Brown's attack upon Charles Beard's view of the origins of the Constitution, or in the Hofstadter-Mowry-Goldman battle over the meaning of the Progressive movement. The explicit confrontation of opposing schools exposes the weaknesses and strengths of the original working hypotheses, while the new data may lead to unexpected and even more promising interpretations.

We can this year look back over a twenty year period to the emergence in 1944 of Donald Creighton's *Dominion of the North* and the subsequent publication of the three other most respected modern histories of Canada. In the same decade, Professor Careless made his important plea for recognition of the value of the Metropolitan approach. Metropolitanism, as he observed, derived from the Laurentian or Environmentalist approach, but it also arose out of conditions that were not purely economic or topographical or material. It derived from ideas of politics, of the relations of church and state, of British or American ideas of politics and society — and his own George Brown and Toronto were classic examples. I believe that Professor Careless was then and remains correct: Metropolitanism has become the most promising approach to our history. I am not proposing, then, that we add a third school of

<sup>3</sup> J. E. Hodgetts, *Pioneer Public Service . . .*, Toronto, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> William M. Kilbourn, "The Writing of Canadian History (since 1920)", in Carl F. Klinck, general editor, *Literary History of Canada . . .*, Toronto, 1965, 502.

<sup>5</sup> S. D. Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, Toronto, 1959.

Canadian history to the two dominant ones of Environmentalism and Metropolitanism; I do suggest an approach that can be more vigorously applied to both. But I find it very difficult to find a name for that approach; I want to avoid any word that ends with the suffix "ism", because my conviction is that the older politico-constitutionalist approach, Environmentalism, and Metropolitanism are all in a sense kinds of institutionalist approach. They are more abstract and less personal than what I have in mind. They are centered on hypotheses and ideas which I respect, but they are often not centered on men.

A more biographical approach, as in Professor Cook's brilliant study of Dafoe, linking the subject's individuality with public trends, offers the prospect of a flank attack after a long period of frontal assaults on institutional history. I am aware of the dangers of using biography as a peg on which to hang a study of the period, but individual or group biographies can be so constructed as to avoid these perils. By introducing a more personal and more psychological element, by enquiring into the intellectual assumptions — conscious or otherwise — of businessmen, clergymen, educators, editors, and people of a primarily non-political kind, we will discover nuances that make more complex and more credible the nature and application of interpretation such as the Laurentian or Metropolitan.

I would agree that urban history is probably the key to metropolitanism, and that metropolitanism is a substantial key to our regional and national development. If we come back, then, to urban history, we are in an area where biography is perhaps most feasible, because of the greater number and concentration of public and private records, newspapers, clubs and churches and their records by which to trace the affiliations and interests of individuals and groups of persons.

We have gone through a valuable archival period in Canadian history during the twentieth century, when new sources of a statistical, legislative and economic character have suggested the development of several national syntheses of our history. The period of syntheses has established landmarks by which to measure our further progress. We are now moving further from statistical and institutional materials into the discovery of the individual units — getting behind the formal structure of constitutions, studies of staple production, and national enterprises to the men who worked them in their own regions. In a happy phrase, Professor Wise has suggested that we are at a new "vineyard stage" in our history — the patient rediscovery of individual men. We may simply find that we will have more specific material to buttress our present interpretative assumptions born of the Environmentalist or Metropolitan theses; on the other hand it would be wrong if we felt ourselves bound only to these and thus stultified our imaginations from discovering other and fresh syntheses. An examination of the complexities of the lives and ideas

of more men, great and small, in Canadian history may open the door to such alternative explanations.

In 1952, with the publication of Professor Creighton's *John A. Macdonald, The Young Politician*, there began a great age in modern Canadian political biography. By the late 50's, after fifteen years of impressive professional development, Canadian historians began to consider more seriously new directions and forms of Canadian historical writing. In this debate I would advocate an even stronger commitment to the form of biography.

## II

After the appearance of Professor Creighton's distinguished first volume on Macdonald, we were presented with a half-dozen major political biographies by academic historians. Despite the professional breadth and excellence of the biographies by Professors Eccles, Careless, Stanley and McNaught, for example, there is still room for many more contributions in the field of political biography and for a marked increase in the field of non-political biography. We still leave the field of non-political biography to the non-academic historians. (In Mr. Gray's case this has been with happy results.)<sup>6</sup>

Professor Kilbourn has spoken of our important productions in specialized monographs.<sup>7</sup> We should not desert this field, but perhaps we have been too much preoccupied with major political figures and with institutions. Our examinations of the struggle for responsible government, for political stability during the late Union period, for useful trade relations with the United States, for the means to overcome the natural limits and obstacles of our geography, and for the way to exploit geography's apparent intentions have perhaps led us too much away from a recognition of the role of individual men. Canadian history like Canadian painting has often portrayed landscapes that do not seem to have been touched by men. We have dealt with collectivities or with abstract forces, with institutions, with topographical barriers or with political giants to the exclusion of less unique but significant men. But it is interesting that Professor Creighton, who has perhaps been the most eloquent spokesman for one of these schools of broad forces and environmental factors, has also been one of the earliest and most successful prophets of a new emphasis on the part played by individual men — albeit a giant.

I suspect that Professor Creighton and the successful academic biographers of Canada in recent years may hold serious reservations about that field of behavioural science, psychology, which Stephen Leacock once

<sup>6</sup> John M. Gray, *Lord Selkirk of Red River*, Toronto, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Kilbourn, 504.

called "the Black Art of the colleges". None the less, while preserving the canons of professional academic scholarship, most of them have taken psychology seriously and their portraits not only of the lives but also of the times of their subjects have been greatly enriched. Mackenzie King left even the most insensitive historians a ready means of access to his mind. Governor Frontenac and Louis Riel have been definitively examined by scholars who obviously consider biography as exacting and searching a discipline as most types of history, and who were not afraid to decide in the light of their own understanding on aspects of their subjects' psychology.<sup>8</sup>

History is chiefly concerned with the unique, with the single or decisive actions that have changed the course of events in the past. Institutional histories offer the broad patterns of change, but in the examination of the lives and thoughts of individual men we may come even closer to the special considerations and motives that have produced action and alteration of some earlier state of things. There are dangers in the biographical approach. But individuals are ultimately the agents or collective participants in history; to ignore their own account of their participation, even when the evidence may be somewhat tentative, may be to deny ourselves useful insights. To look at history largely through the eyes and movements of the actors who occupy the stage at front and center, moreover, is appropriate, but there may also be new perspectives and evaluations if we put ourselves in the position of those who were at sidestage, or in the wings, or who were in effect only a part of the audience. In this way we may gain a subtler understanding of historical processes, and we may come to accept with Renan that "The truth lies in the nuances". So far, then, I am arguing three points: that we have already come to reconsider the order of priorities in Canadian history by which institutional and environmentalist history have often eclipsed our examination of individuals, that we need now to discover earlier Canadians of second and third-ranking significance, and that we need biographical studies in fields beyond the largely political.

Our individual political biography has come of age. Through new psychological and intellectual enquiries it is now doing for Canadian history what had earlier been done for literary criticism. If we can now distinguish some of the middle and lesser constellations of Romantic poets, or some of the Bloomsbury school, we are also perhaps now in Canadian history moving away from the formal lives of what Professor Creighton called "Robert Responsible-Government and Francis Responsible-Government and Wilfrid Responsible-Government". What we need to do now is to begin to examine more of the men who were not in the front ranks. The lives of the heroes form only a part of history. We must have the lives

<sup>8</sup> William Eccles, *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor*, Toronto, 1959; George F. G. Stanley, *Louis Riel*, Toronto, 1963.

of the great men; we can also profit from the re-creation of the lives of those who were less the pilots than the symbols of their times. These were the men who were neither so big as to be popular figures nor so small as to be mere social statistics. Neither plutocrats nor solid yeomanry, they were the firm foundation of a steadily expansive middle-class, continental society. In their usually undramatic way, they were as much the "Makers of Canada" as the classic heroes. Our social, economic and cultural history will be better understood when we know them better.

I have a suspicion that Canadian historians and their graduate students have been less wary of entering the field of biography per se; perhaps they have been convinced that unless there existed a substantial body of official papers of their subject, the task was not possible. Professor Beck is proving that one can reproduce much of the life of a man like Joseph Howe despite the loss of most of Howe's private library. There is no great body of Sandfield Macdonald papers, but Professor Hodgins<sup>9</sup> has found ample references to Macdonald's thoughts in the letters and accounts of others. And we may unearth more of the principal figure's papers. Even for a man as removed from public life as John Northway, I found a useful cache of letters dating back to 1872 in an attic in Devon. The most dramatic story in that connection is certainly Professor Careless's peerless discovery of the new George Brown papers.

The achievements of interpretation in recent monographs suggest the dictum that every age should write its own biographies. But there is a further possibility: lacking a considerable body of the subject's papers and by going for our information and opinions to the men who knew or watched his life, we are compelled to evaluate our witnesses' credibility and positions. The by-product is an extension of the biographical into the social, political or economic scene. If the play's the thing, we re-discover the bit-players, the props men, the persons in the pit, and we achieve a broader evaluation of the scene in which the play or the production of the play is set.

The influence of men outside politics has been of great importance in Canadian history. Canadian academic historians have not, however, developed the field of non-political biography. There are many men of first and second rank whose lives deserve fuller treatment than they will receive in the forthcoming *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

### III

Opportunities in the field of major and minor non-political biography are, however, only two of three types of biography which we can emphasize in Canadian historical writing. We must face some of the

<sup>9</sup> D. G. Creighton, Presidential Address, *CHA Report*, 1957, 1-12.

economic problems of publishing in Canada, but we can create a thirst for more Canadian history and biography and satisfy scholarly purposes as well. Curiosity leads from the account of the men of second rank to the other ranks of society. It is imperative that we have a life of John Strachan, but it might illuminate even more effectively the measure of those social and political values we associate with Strachan if we were to have a life of his chief lieutenants, the Reverends A. N. Bethune and William Macaulay. In the same period we would gain an immense insight into the nature of the Family Compact if we had brief lives of the Queen's Printer, Robert Stanton, of that early baron, William Allan, of Colonel Wells, the Bursar of King's College, of Stephen Heward, Auditor-General of Land Patents and Secretary of the Upper Canada Clergy Corporation, of John Small, Clerk of the Upper Canada Executive Council, of Joseph Spragge, headmaster of York's Central School. But we need not confine ourselves to these figures at York. There are men like Ralph Clench, J.P. and M.L.A., who carried his prestige from the Butler's Rangers into the establishment of a sub-empire in the Niagara District that was substantially less centralized than is suggested in the concept of the Compact as "Tory and Toronto". John Macaulay, George Markland and Christopher Hagerman of Kingston are other obvious subjects.

Nor need we be restricted to Canadian Tories. A very rich vein of demagoguery on the liberal side exists in Canada, and a comparison of its varied manifestation in different regions would be illuminating. To remain in the pre-Confederation period, for example, there are Robert Thorpe and Robert Gourlay in Upper Canada, James Glennie of New Brunswick, Phillip Stearns and William Cottingham Tonge in Nova Scotia. All of these men played important parts in the economic and political awakening of large groups within their colonies; all employed similar methods; none has been made the subject of full-scale biographies.

It may be argued that there are neither sufficient resources nor justification for full-term biographies of some of these men; but there is great purpose in thematic groupings of such men in volumes of corporate biography. This third type of biographical writing would then combine the value of achieving an insight into individual figures with a broader synthesizing analysis. The right common questions asked about each of the figures in volumes of this sort would reveal broad trends and individual departures from these patterns.

What this suggestion amounts to, then, is that we adopt some of the techniques already employed by scholars such as J. E. Neale, A. F. Pollard, Sir Lewis Namier and Charles Beard, and that we do not confine their use to political history. In examining the parochial clientage system of rural Nova Scotia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or of Upper Canada outside York in the period after the War of 1812, we could learn

much from Professor Neale's techniques of discovering clientage and interest in Elizabethan England.<sup>10</sup>

One of the justifications offered by Professor Namier for his group biographical approach to eighteenth-century politics lay in the character of that society and its politics. It was argued — and substantially revealed by Professor Namier — that to a large degree English party politics in that period was essentially a story of factionalism. There was no great clarity of party groupings, only a constant shifting of the leadership and the rank and file from one allegiance to another. This idea of politics and this group biographical approach to its understanding has a relevance for Canadian historians.

During the French period, of course, we had no party politics whatever. All was personal or factional, although colonial interest groups might be discerned as distinct from imperial officials and imperial policies. After the Conquest, while an obvious political activity began, it was still many years before politics rose above the factional and became partisan in any formal way. While we try to rationalize the politics of Upper Canada or of Nova Scotia in the 1820's and 1830's, faction remains the dominant theme. New Brunswick's political life was then — and for a long time — notorious for the absence of principle. Professor Cornell and others have done much to reveal the electoral pattern of the voters and legislators of the Union era, but the continued presence of numbers of "loose fish" and the continued shufflings of combinations of leaders attest that this was not an age of party politics in the sense that we now recognize.<sup>11</sup> In the post-Confederation coalition period, in the splits within Reform ranks in Ontario and at the federal level, in the early failures to bring the Maritime Liberals into the cabinet and front benches of the federal Liberal opposition, and in the splits in Tory ranks that have been so effectively analyzed by Professor Clark,<sup>12</sup> we continue to see the element of factionalism and of individual conviction at both the provincial and federal levels of Canadian politics until the end of the nineteenth century. Many persons, of course, would argue that provincial politics have not yet often risen above the personal and the factional, that continuing principles are not the hallmark of provincial politics.

To the degree that all of these propositions about Canadian political history are correct, then, I would argue that as long as personal leadership and factionalism have eclipsed or substantially determined party organization and coherence, by so much institutional history alone will

<sup>10</sup> J. E. Neale, "The Biographical Approach to History" in *History*, xxxvi, No. 128, October 1951, 193-203. Professor Wise is working on the application to Upper Canada.

<sup>11</sup> P. G. Cornell, *The Alignment of Political Groups in Canada, 1841-1867*, Toronto, 1962.

<sup>12</sup> Lovell A. Clark, "The Conservative Party in the 1890's", *CHA Report*, 1961, 58-74.

not answer all of the questions that we should be asking about our past, not even the purely political questions. But because personality and faction have been significant elements in our politics for a large part of our history, the approach to our history through individual and collective biographies has a considerable value.

In what remains of my time, therefore, I propose to suggest specific examples of studies of both kinds — individual and group biographies — which I would regard as potentially useful in a few arbitrarily chosen fields. Moreover, I would also argue that *political* biographies, even with these two kinds of biographical purpose, are not sufficient to provide us with the answers we seek.

#### IV

In group biographies there exists an opportunity to broaden our knowledge of regional history — surely still one of the least developed areas of our past. A number of examples will occur to any concerned Canadian historian: the St. John River and Ottawa Valley timber barons, the Peace River sodbusters, the Nova Scotia anti-Confederates beyond the League's executive, the principal Overlanders in B.C., Huron and Bruce County emigrants who carried the recognized cultural and religious assumptions of South West Ontario to the West, and regional figures in the development of Canadian art.

A few excellent business histories — a form of corporate biography — have been produced. Professor Kilbourn is one of a tiny band of academic historians labouring in this vineyard, yet he has himself proved how comprehensive and rewarding a task it is.<sup>13</sup> Whether we regard business histories as the biographies of self-styled "corporate citizens" or confine our attentions to the lives of the founders or the leading executive officers of Canadian businesses (such, for example, as Vaughan's life of Sir William Van Horne), our path is bound to carry us through most of the major fields of the professional historian's interest. A business or a businessman can be traced to something more than abstract economic considerations. They have roots in regional, provincial, national, or even international ambitions. Their development and the community's response to them may illuminate our social, economic, aesthetic or practical interests at all levels. A list is not hard to compile. "Bear" Ellice, Edward Watkin, Frederick Widder of the Canada Company, Mackenzie & Mann, K.C. Irving, Revillon Frères all demand studies.

One of the surprises in my examination of the life of John Northway, the Toronto industrialist and merchant, was to discover the reasons for his decision to implement employee benefit plans at a very early stage in our national progress toward such programmes. I had assumed that he was

<sup>13</sup> William M. Kilbourn, *The Elements Combined*, Toronto, 1961.

perhaps following a widespread contemporary Canadian business tendency, or that it was an immediate consequence of the Winnipeg General Strike. I discovered, instead, that it was largely the result of his private religious and intellectual experience based on a slowly maturing acceptance of ideas (chiefly American) of the Social Gospel and Reform Darwinism — a kind of latter-day application in a special sphere of Professor Craig's thesis on the influence of American ideas on the growth of Ontario. When Northway subsequently carried these ideas into the preparation for a faculty pension plan at McMaster University, it offered an interesting extension of the implications of a single business career for the development of an important Canadian institution of higher learning.

Properly undertaken, biographies of business figures can avoid the risks of eclecticism and of the chronicling of the merely personal traits of successful tycoons. They may be made to contribute, for example, to our understanding of the development of Canadian economic attitudes, party backing, urban power structures, and even matters of middle-class taste in domestic architecture and furnishings.

We need also to explore the influence of some of our outstanding ecclesiastical leaders — and in Canadian history such men have often been the leaders of opinion and action in wide-ranging fields. While we have a distinguished study of Egerton Ryerson, it is incredible that we still have no satisfactory study of Laval or any of Strachan. We need a modern and objective portrait of that towering Western giant Archbishop Robert Machray, the first Primate of the Anglican Church in Canada and creator of the ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land. Another Aberdonian mathematician and convert, as much associated with the cause of higher education in Manitoba as was Strachan in Ontario, Machray was an idiosyncratic and autocratic Western empire builder whose life helped to mould the Canadian West in the Riel era and after. There is also Bishop Bompas, the man who knew the North and the Eskimo better than any other — but whose life has never been examined. Where is the life of Bishop James Carmichael of Montreal — a man whose dedication to Anglican participation in a Church Union movement was a forerunner to a whole chapter in our modern religious life? Recent monographs have also made necessary a more professional examination of the many facets of the life of the first Roman Catholic bishop of Kingston, Alexander Macdonell. Our military, educational and immigration history would be the richer for such a study. Professor Ullman has also suggested the value in an examination of the lives and loyalties of the Catholic bishops of Quebec who played a determining role at the time of Confederation.<sup>14</sup>

For the non-episcopal denominations, the opportunities are even more promising. Where is a professionally written life of Pictou Academy and

<sup>14</sup> Walter Ullman, "Quebec Bishops and Confederation", *CHR*, lxiv, 1963, 213-34.

Dalhousie's Dr. Thomas McCullough? or of the Rev. James MacGregor, the great pioneering Presbyterian for the Maritimes? Happily we are on the threshold of a doctoral dissertation on the life of Principal Grant of Queen's, but too many studies of this sort have remained sealed in the tombs of history departments in our universities. The Rev. John McCaul, first President of the University of Toronto, brought to Canada an emphasis on classical secular education that was derivative of Trinity College, Dublin and subsequently set the early pattern for University College, Toronto. McCaul's life has not been written, but the development of his career and of his ideas of Canadian education as he advanced from the headship of Upper Canada College, to that of King's College and later of the University of Toronto is a progress worthy of a most searching examination. At the more pastoral and denominational level, we have yet to produce lives of the founder of Maritime Methodism, the Rev. William Black, or of the Baptist counterpart of James MacGregor, the peripatetic Rev. Harris Harding who laboured throughout the Maritimes to awaken and unite the Baptist community.

At a later and more sophisticated stage of our history, I would suggest as examples the lives of four ministers who illumine several strains in our religious and social life. The work of the Rev. Herbert Symonds as Professor of Divinity at Trinity College, Toronto, but more especially in his eighteen years as vicar at Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal, offers a brilliant picture of the development of more liberal religious principles and of the encouragement of a keener social conscience among his parishioners of Montreal and the academic community at McGill.<sup>15</sup> There would be value in a full-scale life of this man and of similar advocates of the Higher Criticism and the Social Gospel in other denominations. One can think, for example, of Dr. Howard Whidden in the Baptist tradition with his important contributions to McMaster University; Father M. M. Coady of St. Francis Xavier's co-operative movement with his intellectual roots reaching back to his college days and to the tradition of Father Ryan and Cardinal Gibbon of the Catholic University of America; or of Dr. R. J. Wilson of the Presbyterian Church, whose training at the liberal Chicago Theological Seminary prepared him for an important role in the founding of Westminster Hall in Vancouver and for the post of Secretary of the Joint Church Union Committee in 1923, and subsequently as one of the most prolific writers in Canada as first Secretary of the United Church Bureau of Literature and Information, in influence an early Dr. Mutchmor.<sup>16</sup>

These are a few examples of men whose lives, both in their formation and effect, are worthy of serious study as a part of our social history.

<sup>15</sup> See the brief "A Biographical Sketch" by the Rev. J. A. Elliott in *Herbert Symonds, A Memoir Compiled by Friends*, Montreal, 1921.

<sup>16</sup> See various references in my *John Northway, A Blue Serge Canadian*, Toronto, 1965.

The valuable introductions to a synthesis of our Christian and denominational life provided by Professors Clark and Walsh would be greatly strengthened — and perhaps re-shaped — after the preparation of the lives of church leaders such as these.<sup>17</sup>

In the field of group biography of ecclesiastical figures there should be no dearth of likely studies. In Upper Canada before Confederation the crystallization of opinion on issues of church and state makes useful any group portrait of the denominational representatives of those opinions. In the Canadian West we have seen the sociological approach to Prairie protest movements, but there would be great value in more specific and individual examples of the identification of representative prairie preachers with these movements — men such as Salem Bland and R. C. Henders. Professor S. F. Wise has recently demonstrated another promising area of our cultural history: his argument that we should examine the lives and particularly the sermons of the recognized preachers of each age and region offers an enormous and largely untapped source of material.<sup>18</sup> His own enquiries in this branch of literature for the eighteenth century in the Maritimes have revealed how substantial are the extant caches of early manuscript and published sermons.

The biographical approach to our church history could be the richest vein we can work in discovering the past climate of opinion and the development of our intellectual history at all levels. The fashionable urban preacher should offer an insight into metropolitan values.

In the field of military history certain outstanding figures, of course, have not yet been examined at all. The reticence of Canadian military men to produce memoirs makes the biographer's task even more necessary. Sir Arthur Currie has been undertaken by Professor Hyatt; General Crerar and General McNaughton are obvious subjects for important studies. From an earlier age, General Simcoe will, I fervently hope, be given full-scale treatment soon by Professor Mealing who has produced such stimulating sketches. We are still chiefly dependent for our portrait of Brock on Tupper's biography of 1845 — an explanation that seems now oddly simple in dealing with that complex and highly opinionated man. Indeed, in Tupper's hands he was no man at all but a stuffed hero of the early Victorians. A later figure who was a Canadian by birth and enjoyed a distinguished career in the Imperial army before returning to Canada to play an important role in the Confederation movement was Sir Fenwick Williams. Yet no one — not even from Williams' intensely patriotic province of Nova Scotia — has yet produced a life of so gallant a soldier, the hero of Kars. To the degree that considerations of defence

<sup>17</sup> H. H. Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada*, Toronto, 1956; S. D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada*, Toronto, 1948.

<sup>18</sup> S. F. Wise, "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History", *United Church of Canada, Archives Bulletin*, XVII, 1965.

and of Maritime disquiet were vital factors in bringing about the achievement of Confederation, and that Williams understood and affected both, an analysis of his life is potentially useful. Finally, in this category of individuals who have played a part in our military development there might be named men from the other services, but I suspect that the selection becomes more difficult in the case of the navy and air force. Groups of men, perhaps, were the more significant elements in the growth of the senior and junior services.

In terms of group studies in military affairs, however, a number of possibilities come to mind. One of the earliest of these is the regiment of the Carignan-Salieres. An examination of their individual roots in France, of their disposition by families along the Richelieu frontier, of their contribution to the development of farming, society and defences in the Richelieu area, of the reasons for their decisions to remain in New France or to return to Europe, and of the subsequent history of their families — like Sir Wilfrid Laurier's forebears — would offer a well-controlled social and economic study. We have, of course, two earlier works upon which to found this more ambitious examination.<sup>19</sup> Studies of Loyalist regiments in New Brunswick would offer similar insights into the peculiar development of the institutions of government and the prominence of certain families in the early history of New Brunswick. Similar studies of disbanded regiments and of post-1815 military settlers in the Canadas would also be fruitful.

A more recent group of military figures brings us closer to individual biography, but in each case while the justification of a single volume is questionable, a group study could enrich half a century of our history. I have in mind a series of portraits of our British military advisers and G.O.C.'s, including Lieutenant Colonel William Jervois, Lord Wolseley, General Hutton, Lord Dundonald, Sir Percy Lake and Willoughby Gwatkin. Gwatkin alone, as the man chiefly responsible for the Canadian War Book, for mobilization procedures after 1911, and as Chief of the General Staff, 1913-19, was one of the most important figures in a period only now being effectively approached by the professional historians; yet there has appeared no investigation of his influence. This group of men, of whom Gwatkin was the last, had a great effect upon our militia arrangements, our regional and national economy, and our social development at times of significant crisis in our history.

But Willoughby Gwatkin's career in Canada had another chapter — one that suggests another aspect of our defensive and transportation history. In 1920 Gwatkin recognized the significant role that airmen had played in Canada's war effort and would play in her peacetime development. Acting as the first Air Vice Marshal and Inspector General, he

<sup>19</sup> B. Sulte, *Le Régiment de Carignan*, Montreal, 1922; G. Malchelosse and R. Roy, *Le Régiment de Carignan*, Montreal, 1925.

organized the Canadian Air Force and brought together the team of men who would give it life as the Royal Canadian Air Force after 1922. Gwatkin's role here is of great importance to Canada, yet he was also a supporter of the development of civil aviation in Canada. The appearance of wildcat flying companies, free lance pilots and the lack of early records make the historian's task more difficult, but many of the pioneers of this period are still alive and filled with useful recollections. The biographical approach is most appropriate in reconstructing the annals of the great days of the Canadian bush pilot. C. H. "Punch" Dickins, W. R. "Wop" May, H. A. "Doc" Oaks, W. E. Gilbert, and, of course, Grant McConachie, now President of C.P.A., are only a few of the remarkable individuals who gave modern Canada its northern dimension in new terms and an achievement in building up the concept of airline communication that came to Southern Canada only later.

If the subsequent careers of some of these men do not warrant full-term biographies — although those of Dickins and McConachie certainly do — their years in the North, the exploration of why and from what background they turned to northern flying, of their contributions to resource development, to Indian and Eskimo cultural disruption and adjustment, and to mining and white settlement methods in the North are a proper subject for the professional historian through the medium of their individual careers in group studies. In the same period and often in the same enterprises were the men of the Civil Government Air Operations branch of the R.C.A.F. after 1927 — men like B. D. Hobbes who pioneered in large-scale aerial survey, T. A. Lawrence who was associated with the Hudson Strait expedition, R. S. Grandy who helped initiate the Belle Strait aerial mail service at the time of the Ottawa Conference in 1932, and, of course, C. R. Slemon whose subsequent career in the R.C.A.F. is well known. Studies of the formation of their careers could be a part of a group project whose values would surpass the sum of its parts. The appropriations and parliamentary debates alone concerning the C.G.A.O. vis-à-vis the R.C.A.F. offer a valuable index of the strength of Canadian pacifism at the time of the Kellogg Peace Pact.

The senior service would furnish further examples, but I want only to suggest the wide scope of biographically oriented projects that could be undertaken in terms of our defensive history.

Finally, some of the most interesting but neglected figures in our history have been the resource surveyors and co-ordinators. Great individuals and important groups have been almost equally significant here. We know almost nothing, for example, of the work of the most ambitious early hydrographer on the St. Lawrence, Jean Des Hayes, who later became Professeur d'Hydrographie at Quebec until 1706. Of Admiral Henry Wolsey Bayfield, whose hydrographic work covered the entire St. Lawrence, Great Lakes and Maritime coast lines — together with useful surveys for

the Canada Company — we have only the barest of sketches; yet Bayfield remained in this country from 1814 until he died at his home in Charlottetown in 1835. Bayfield's associate, Captain William Owen, remains one of the greatest surveyors of the Great Lakes and of the New Brunswick coast line. His career after 1835 as the Colonel Talbot of Campobello is a valuable part of our social history, but in neither connection has he yet been treated. Professor Cornell will leave us all in his debt when he gives us the fruit of his enquiries about Owen.

As further examples we can cite Sir William Logan, the organizer of the Geological Survey of Canada, or any of the three great Canadian resource surveyors who bore the same name: Sir William Dawson, whose name is associated like Egerton Ryerson's with the development of the school system in his native province of Nova Scotia, but who was also one of our most distinguished geologists and most notably the creator of the great reputation of McGill University; his son, George Mercer Dawson, a boundary commissioner, a founder of the Royal Society, Director of the Geological Survey, and a Bering Sea Enquiry Commissioner; finally, Simon James Dawson of the Red River route, the Wolseley expedition, the prophet of the Saskatchewan country and subsequently M.P. for Algoma where his record and interests illustrate the tension between metropolitan Toronto and the north, even in Ontario. The lives of none of these men have been written; yet, together with men like Hamilton Killaly, their roles in planning the development of this country across several regions have been of paramount importance. For the professional historian and for the informed citizen their stories demand investigation.

But group studies are also possible in this field. I include here the early and late military and naval figures who doubled in engineering and survey work; some of them, by the way, were also very competent water colourists and sketchers whose place in our artistic growth could bear useful examination. But their chief and most obvious contribution was in the definition of our boundaries, the discovery of our economic potential, and in the inspiration of some of those treasured myths about new territories that have fed our morale.

The work of the Royal Engineers in the Canadas during the second half of the eighteenth century has received very little attention. Until the birth of the corps of Royal Engineers in 1781, these men included officers of the foot regiments, such as the Sixtieth or Royal Americans, who operated south of Lake Erie in the 1760's. Correspondence in the "C" Series at Ottawa deals, for example, with Lt. Alexander Bryce's commissions for defensive surveys, for the development of the establishment at Niagara, for the improvement of navigation at the Straits of St. Mary, and in the completion of roads to facilitate the passage of goods under a semi-private contract with Forsyth Richardson & Co. along the fur trade route. The later work of Gother Mann during the 1780's pre-dated Owen's

achievement by nearly thirty years, yet neither has received any biographical treatment. Moreover, it is the isolation of their achievements that makes the biographical treatment the most appropriate. Their collective activities suggest a measure of preparation and interest by Great Britain in the whole water system to the Mississippi continental outlet that lay beyond the still limited purposes of the trade; they suggest an imperial dimension and purpose that is perhaps unexpected in the pre-Loyalist period.

Another group of resource surveyors active in the eighteenth century along the Atlantic would include Samuel Holland, Charles Morris, J. F. W. Des Barres, and Thomas and Phillip Durell. Professors Fergusson and Evans have recently given us very promising sketches of the work of the Durells and Des Barres, but the earlier accounts of all of these men are unsatisfactory.<sup>20</sup> More emphasis on their technical, geographic, economic and regional significance would be a major contribution to our understanding of imperial development plans and patterns of settlement and economic enterprise along the Atlantic coast line. Similar group studies of the pathfinders of the Rockies would offer rich rewards.

## V

I said that I would choose my examples arbitrarily. One could pick from politics such third and fourth-ranking men as Herbert Huntington of Nova Scotia, Malcolm "Coon" Cameron or Christopher Dunkin in Canada, William Irvine in the West, Premier "Bill" Bowser in B.C. There are many important national and regional educators whom I have not mentioned. There are scientists, agricultural experts, architects, editors, civil servants, industrialists — all of whom have made the non-political fabric of Canadian life. If Canadians generally grope still toward a more conscious sense of their identity, perhaps it is because the historians have not told them in individual and concrete terms who they have been. But no narrow nationalistic purpose should govern the scholar's search for an understanding of our past. We seek universal traits as well as national character — and we will find them in seeking out more of the forgotten men of Canadian history.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Fergusson, "The Durells in Eighteenth Century Canadian History", *Dalhousie Review*, XXXV, 1955, 16-30; Geraint N. D. Evans, "J. F. W. Des Barres, First Governor of Cape Breton, 1784-1787", unpublished paper delivered to C.H.A., Charlottetown, June 12, 1964.

<sup>21</sup> My debt for useful suggestions should be expressed to my colleagues at the University of Western Ontario, Professors F. H. Armstrong, J. L. H. Henderson, F. H. Hitchins, B. W. Hodgins, A. M. J. Hyatt, and to my graduate student, Mr. James Pritchard. Professor S. F. Wise, Queen's University, has been particularly stimulating in suggestions for group studies of Maritime figures and in reinforcing the emphasis on regional studies. His appreciation of the possibilities of clientage studies holds great promise.